

the electorate, sabotaged by the Labour Right who never wanted it.

As to his second reason, namely, the change in circumstances - what were the changes he refers to? Relative full employment; a fast growing militant and left-led trade union movement; stable production processes instead of the current rapid technological change which gives rise to changes in the composition of the working class, the service sector rapidly overtaking the industrial and manufacturing labour forces; and a narrower gap than now between the poverty of the unemployed and the living standards of those in work.

On this score too, Sam is doing less than justice to those of us, not only Communists, who played some part in developing the AES. We were not taken by surprise. We warned against illusions of crisis-free capitalism and argued that only the AES could arrest the already growing unemployment. These changes were not unheralded. The trends were already in evidence and taken on board by the shapers of the AES.

Having advised us to abandon the label 'AES', Sam later tells us what it is we are to abandon. Or does he? Sam's summary of the AES is reminiscent of Mrs Thatcher's summary of the events surrounding the Westland affair, delivered by her in parliament recently. Accurate so far as it went, but far from the whole truth. By certain crucial omissions we are presented with a caricature - a deguttled list of demands, devoid of the class and dynamic essence of the AES.

He omits for instance the essential warning '...that such an alternative strategy could do all that, but *only* if there is a government backed by the organised labour movement, which recognises that such a programme will meet with the resistance and sabotage of big business, and is ready to accept that challenge.'¹

The process of presenting a deguttled image of the AES as the real thing he wants to abandon, can be illustrated by his omission in the summary of the demand to take into public ownership (not necessarily via nationalisation), banking, insurance, pension funds and major financial institutions. This is crucial to the AES for two reasons. It would disarm the City in its undoubted attempts to sabotage a left Labour government and would provide the means for large-scale investments to restructure, modernise and revive especially the manufacturing sector - essential to tackle seriously the problem of unemployment and start the process of shifting

the balance of power in favour of working people.

No wonder, then, that Sam's flawed analysis and distorted conception of the AES, leads him to propose a 'new strategy' (no doubt reflecting the 'new realism' so popular in certain circles) which provides support, not an alternative, to those whose objective is manage capitalism more efficiently not challenge it.

What is Sam's 'new strategy'? His objectives - improved childcare, creating new jobs (2m in four years), modernised manufacture, education and training, and international co-operation - are neither new nor confined to Sam. These objectives are not only encompassed by the AES, but would not be objected to by the SDP-Liberal Alliance, the CBI or Lord Young himself.

The real test of a credible left alternative strategy is to indicate how these universally desirable aims are to be achieved, and in the course of their realisation move us nearer to the socialist objective.

The AES has done just that. But Sam urges us to abandon not only the 'label', but also the '...grandeur and ambition of the AES in its proposals for economic planning and large scale extension of public ownership'. In its place he proposes: stay in the Common Market; support incomes policy and restrict free collective bargaining (voluntary of course just as the social contract was); abandon Labour's commitment to full employment even in the longer term ('whatever the rhetoric, opinion is growing that full employment in the 50s sense is not attainable'. . . the new gospel according to Sam); redistribute wealth but not from the rich to the poor but within the working class (workers in jobs to pay the wages of those taken on in the service and construction sectors); cajole the multinationals to behave decently or risk being cut off from the British markets; and divest the state of some of its powers through decentralisation and devolution.

There is nothing in Sam's 'new strategy' to frighten the establishment, and no reason why he shouldn't receive the whole-hearted blessing of Owen, Steel, the Tory wets, and for that matter of the Hammonds, Granthams and Hattersleys of the labour movement. And if Kinnock maintains the speed of his flight from the AES he will no doubt add Sam to Eric Hobsbawm to whom to express his thanks for their boost to his dash to the centre.

¹ Bert Ramelson *Bury The Social Contract, The Case for An Alternative Strategy* CP pamphlet 1977 p21.

BERT RAMELSON Gospel according to Sam



Sam Aaronovitch urges us to 'abandon the label' alternative economic strategy (AES) and as he soon makes clear its essence too. And he justifies this advice on two grounds, namely it's outdated and was developed in different conditions.

The only implication of his first reason must be that in his view the AES was rejected by the electorate because it was undesirable and/or incredible. It would have been more correct to say that the electorate was hardly aware of its existence. The Labour leadership kept it from