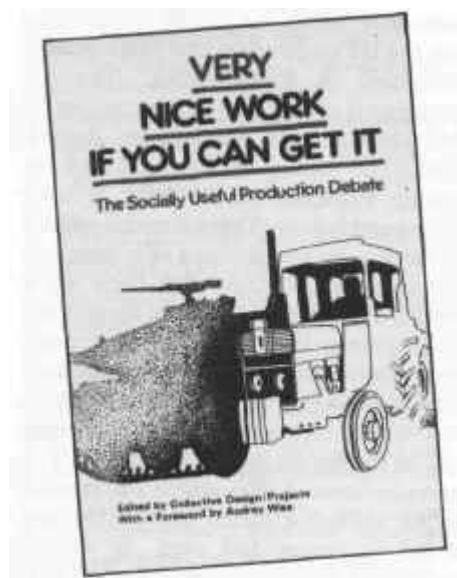


mediate problems, what socialist vision, what view of the economy of the future should guide our present strategy?

Very Nice Work contains 16 very varied papers around the theme of socially useful work. They reflect such things as the struggle for workers' corporate plans in Lucas Aerospace; attempts by local authorities to support alternative, socially useful employment in co-operatives and in the voluntary sector; the peace movement's concern with the conversion of arms production to civilian purposes.

Very Nice Work concentrates on local and company level initiatives. By contrast *Joint Action for Jobs* focuses more on national and international economic policy. The two longest and most developed articles, by Robin Murray and Richard Minns, are both based on work at the GLC which, besides its political and economic interventions, has made room for important socialist research and theoretical discussion.

Robin Murray's discussion of the London Industrial Strategy in fact goes much wider, to consider the dramatic mutations now taking place in the productive systems of Western economies, and to examine the scope for public intervention in these restructuring processes. He argues persuasively that 'there is currently little prospect of a return to full employment through the expansion of private sector jobs'. At the same time he recognises that public jobs will not be easy to finance - the days of self-financing Keynesian expansions are gone. Murray suggests that if new public jobs are provided 'both to expand



Economic Explorations

Very Nice Work If You Can Get It
 Collective Design (eds)
Spokesman £4.95
 Joint Action for Jobs
 Ken Coates (ed)
Spokesman £4.95

How, in very adverse circumstances, do we best deal with the crisis of unemployment? How can we rebuild the political unity needed for an effective programme of economic recovery? Beyond these im-

REVIEWS

services and to contribute to the productive restructuring of both private and public economies' then they would be easier to finance. This is true, although it should not stop us making the important argument for higher taxation.

Richard Minns, drawing from his work on the GLC's financial strategy, also advances arguments which bear on national policy. He suggests two policy objectives. The first is to close the widening gap between production and a financial sector increasingly given over to speculation (especially in the City of London). But the second aim is to assert social control over this closer relationship between finance and industry. Minns proposes a major series of controls, regulations and extensions of public ownership - very different from Roy Hattersley's call for an anodyne 'National Investment Bank'. At the same time Minns rejects simplistic demands for the suppression of financial markets or a state monopoly of international financial sanctions.

The other, shorter, pieces in *Joint Action for Jobs* (many of which first appeared in *New Socialist*) consider a range of topics including new technology, planning and the struggle throughout Europe for a shorter working week. The various pieces share a belief in the importance of Western European co-operation to all aspects of labour movement strategy. It is felt that many of the international economic forces which we confront can only be controlled at an international level. This does not lead any of the authors to an endorsement of the EEC (they are all careful to make clear their abhorrence of that institution). But the demand for British withdrawal is conspicuously absent. Most contributors share John Hughes' view of the matter. Stating the case for an extended public sector and for increased public control over the private sector he ends by saying 'the kinds of initiatives called for would be better sustained, better defended against the opposition (and strikes) of organised capital if it were not an isolated UK struggle. If half of Europe were on the same path, we would win through.'

The two books together present a wide and varied view of current socialist thinking on economic policy. But not all viewpoints are represented: in particular there is an implicit (and occasionally explicit) challenge to the kind of strategy advanced by Andrew Glyn in his recent pamphlet

Million Jobs a Year. This places all its emphasis on three moves at national government level which are regarded as decisive; a big extension of public ownership in industry, much greater state control over foreign trade and investment, and much higher levels of spending. There is frequent criticism of the movement's previous alternative economic strategy, which relied on the same three measures. Most contributions to both *Very Nice Work* and *Joint Action for Jobs* suggest that this kind of perspective simplifies too many intractable economic and political difficulties.

On the other hand nobody exaggerates the other possibilities - whether these are local initiatives or exercises in international labour movement co-operation. The writers look hard at the drawbacks of all strategies; most disturbing is Cynthia Cockburn's bleakly accurate forecast of the tactics about to be used by Rupert Murdoch at Wapping.

But there are also accounts of success - sometimes rather surprising success, as with the US trade union campaign against investment in South Africa. Also encouraging is the account of job creation by Sheffield Council's employment department. The books as a whole seek to develop strategies in the light of both success and failure. There is nothing like a synthesis - no presentation of a complete new economic strategy. But there are a number of interesting points of agreement: for instance on the kind of 'action at many levels' discussed by Stephen Boddington. There is also a very important insistence on the concrete experience of working people both as employees and as consumers. For example Sonia Liff's article on women factory workers explains why people may be led to accept and even, in a very constrained way, to choose, the new patterns of work and consumption which are being introduced by employers.

In Britain today the Left's economic policies have to face not only a uniquely decayed and regressive national economy, but also the dissolution, on an international scale, of the patterns of production which sustained western economic growth for 30 years. This double challenge requires a critical assessment of our past economic thinking together with a new view of socialist objectives and policies. These two books make an indispensable contribution to that debate.

John Grahl



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