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Workers' Liberty

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Editor: Sean Matgamna; Assistant Editor: Cathy Nugent

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A letter to our readers

THE VICTORY of Bill Morris over the Blairite yes man, Jack Dromey, is heartening news for those who believe the labour movement exists to achieve goals higher than electing jumped up nonentities to lucrative positions!

Slowly the atmosphere in British politics is changing for the better. The Tory government seems to be tottering unstoppably towards a well-earned grave. Labour, *Blair's* Labour Party, but also still, despite Blair, the Labour Party of the trade unions, looks on course towards certain victory in the next election.

These days, the Tories seem more interested in taking each other by the throats than in grappling with the Blairites, milk and water though their opposition to Major continues to be.

Things on the left are beginning to move and stir too. It is a little easier than it has been to get people to take an interest in politics, a little less difficult to convince them that they themselves can do something against things they dislike.

Just goes to show what six months of the monthly *Workers' Liberty* can do, eh?

Whatever about that, the openings for a journal of the thinking left are greater now than they have been for years.

The ideas of *Workers' Liberty* have an irreplaceable role to play in the reviving movement. But we must expand the magazine's circulation if we are to expand its influence.

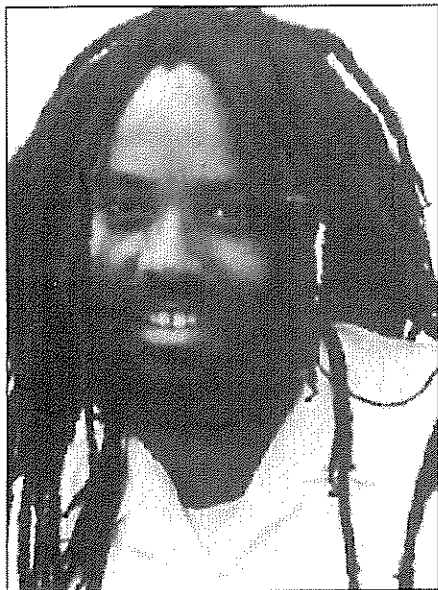
We must get more readers to become subscribers, if the magazine is to be financially secure and before we can even begin to think of expanding its size and coverage. Please do your bit!

If you haven't subscribed to *Workers' Liberty* yet, consider doing it now! There are details of a special subscription offer on page 9.

Frederick Engels, who died exactly 100 years ago, is one of the great thinkers of socialism. Tom Willis takes issue with those who try to belittle him. Sean Matgamna reappraises Lenin's very influential articles on the 1914 Home Rule crisis, and tries to explain why Lenin got it all so disastrously wrong. In the current atmosphere on the left it is worth stating here once again that those who publish *Workers' Liberty* consider themselves followers of Lenin, of Lenin the Marxist who reassessed Marx in the light of subsequent experience.

If the state of Pennsylvania sticks to its plans, then Mumia Abu-Jamal's life has little longer left to run than the ephemeral life of the magazine you are now reading. Time is short, but there is time for you to protest by letter to the Governor of Pennsylvania (see page 4) or to organise a picket of some US building — consulate, airline office, — in your town. Time is very short!

Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!



Editorial

PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR Tom Ridge has now signed Mumia Abu-Jamal's death warrant. They plan to kill him on 17 August and thus barbarously to satisfy the racist cops who continue to campaign for his death, and the blood lust of those who elected Tom Ridge as governor. Time is running out for Mumia Abu-Jamal. Time is short in which to lodge the protests and mount the pickets that may make the difference between life for Mumia-Abu Jamal and a horrible death at the hands of the hired killers of the state of Pennsylvania.

Ridge is a man in a hurry, keen to deliver on at least one of his election promises. He pledged to the electorate that he, as Governor, would kill everyone on Death Row! It is indecent haste because Ridge knows that Mumia's lawyers recently lodged the case for a new trial, and that they must now win a stay of execution before they can even begin to put Mumia's case for justice. This politician is racing ahead in an attempt to cheat justice and deliver Mumia Abu-Jamal's lifeless body to the baying right wing mob.

This is no more than we should expect. This case has been a frame-up from start to finish.

"Mumia Abu-Jamal never had a trial". That is how Mumia's lawyers justly described the legal farce which in 1982 convicted Mumia of the murder of a policeman, and sentenced him to death. He has languished in solitary confinement for 13 years, awaiting premature death at some undisclosed future date chosen by the state of Pennsyl-

vania.

Mumia never had a fair trial because he challenged the oppression which poor people, and especially poor black people, suffer in the United States. Those who do that take on the cops, the politicians, the courts and the whole establishment.

Before he was captured and taken away to be killed by the state, Mumia had been challenging oppression for twenty years. He was a member of the Black Panthers in the 1960s, when the FBI was infiltrating and smashing up the Panthers. As a journalist and broadcaster championing the oppressed, he earned the name "voice of the voiceless."

He joined MOVE, a black quasi-religious and political organisation in 1978.

In 1985 Philadelphia police would bomb MOVE's headquarters killing 11 people, 5 of them children.

Mumia was, by now, a respected journalist, one of *Philadelphia Magazine's* "people to watch in 1981."

Certainly the Philadelphia Police Department thought him a man to watch. They had been watching Mumia for twenty years, waiting their chance to get him.

Their chance came in 1981 when Mumia intervened to help his brother, who was being beaten in the street by police officers. Someone shot one of the police. Mumia came round to find he too had been shot, in the stomach. And he was in the hands of the racist police.

The police beat him up in the street and again later in the hospital.

Then they accused Mumia of murdering the policeman. Witnesses identified the killer of the cop as a heavily built man; they saw him running away from where the unconscious Mumia lay on the ground beside the dead policemen. That made no difference: the cops wanted Mumia.

Mumia had a gun at the scene of the crime. But it was not the sort of gun that killed the policeman! Never mind: Mumia would do!

For his trial Mumia was denied his choice of lawyer. He faced a biased judge and a rigged jury, which included avowed racists.

The grotesque unfairness of the trial was implicitly admitted by the judge himself. In his summing up this gentleman told the jury to convict Mumia because he had been a member of the Black Panthers and they had been guided by the principle that power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Of course he was guilty!

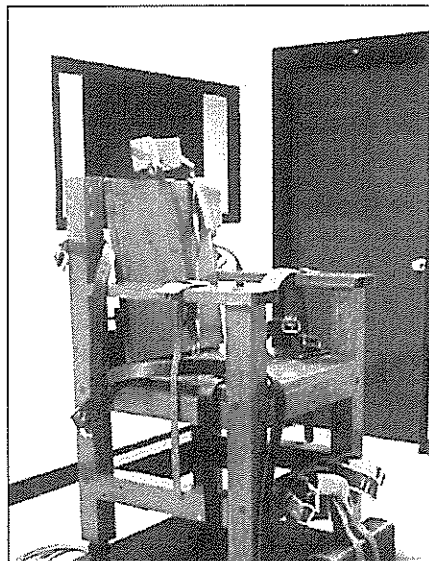
That instruction alone would have been grounds for a mis-trial had Mumia had decent legal representation.

No one knows better than the American

ruling class that power grows out of the barrel of a gun! They put guns in the fists of hired thugs in uniform who point them at the head of anyone who tries to organise people against their system.

*"Time is short in which
to lodge the protests
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difference between life
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and a horrible death at
the hands of the hired
killers of the state of
Pennsylvania."*

Why, people like Mumia's judge ask, indignantly, should people oppose a system which keeps the rich insulated in air-conditioned suburbs while the working class and the rest of the poor rot in the inner-cities, or moulder in rural backwaters? They have created a vast layer which they contemptuously call the underclass and condemn to live in Third World slums in the margins of the richest country on earth:†



They need the death penalty to terrorise their victims

they *need* the death penalty to terrorise their victims.

They need to "make examples" of critics who challenge this system. They need to silence eloquent voices of protest like Mumia's and make sure that the "voiceless" remain dumb and unorganised.

Mumia was an ideal candidate for a conspicuous, legal killing. When Philadelphia's racist police and politicians got him in their power they determined that he would not get out alive.

In spite of Mumia's strong case for a new trial, police are piling pressure on Governor Ridge to go through with the scheduled killing. Governor Ridge does not need that much persuading!

But pressure is also building in Mumia's favour. The campaign to save his life has built meetings, pickets and demonstrations around the world. It has won the support of many trade unions, including in this country the NUJ, GPMU and T&G. Now that the day of death approaches the campaign has to go on to a new and more urgent footing. Time is short!

Tom Ridge is determined to kill Mumia, but we can still build a campaign strong enough to force a stay of execution, a new trial, and eventually win Mumia's release and restoration to a normal, active, healthy political and personal life.

Mumia is not wealthy. He is not a sport-

ing hero or a star-spangled banner-waving star of stage and screen, like another black American, currently on trial in the United States. Mumia now has good lawyers, but they are not an OJ Simpson army, they are no legal "dream team".

Mumia's recently published book of memoirs — *Live from Death Row* — has aroused interest, but media interest in his case has not been anywhere near what he needs.

They would like to put this thorn in the side of the American ruling class out of the way as quietly as possible, exciting as little opposition as possible — to do him to death as quietly as possible except for their own final reactionary "yell" of triumphant hatred against the poor and against black people.

Whether they can do it depends on how loudly and effectively socialists and others yell back at them.

What can you do?

● Let the racist Governor drown in paper! Send protest faxes and letters to Governor Tom Ridge, Main Capitol Building, Room 225, Harrisburg, PA 17120; fax (717) 772-3155; phone (717) 787-2500.

People sent so many protest messages to the Philadelphia Governor they had to change the fax number. Keep it up.

● Let Mumia Abu-Jamal know you care. Write to Mumia Abu-Jamal, AM8335, SCI

Greene, 1040 E. Roy Furman Highway, Waynesburg, PA 15370-8090.

● Pass motions in your trade union, Labour Party or student union committing them to protest to Governor Ridge.

● Contribute to Mumia's legal defence, in Britain send cheques payable to "Partisan Defence Committee" and with "Jamal Legal Defence" written on the back to: Partisan Defence Committee, BCM Box 4986, London WC1N 3XX.

● Picket some "US" building — Consulate, airplane office — in your town.

● Read Mumia's book, *Live from Death Row*. Order it through the Partisan Defence Committee. They are trying to get it published in Britain. The Partisan Defence Committee phone number in London is: 0171-485 1396, fax 0171-267 3867; in New York, telephone (212) 406 4252. ■

Freedom is such a holy thing

To make a people brave,

**Fashion a wise man from a
churl**

A hero from a slave

I can abide, for love of it,

In prison or the grave

Dorothy Macardle

Judicial slaughter in the United States

PRESIDENT CLINTON'S crime bill legalised the death penalty for a further 58 crimes including some which involve no killing, such as attempted assassination of the President, treason, espionage and major drug-trafficking.

Since 1991 seven states have resumed executions, and there is a growing queue for the slaughter. There are now some 3,000 death row inmates in 37 states. The average wait for execution is seven years.

Clinton's body-count has not quenched the blood-lust of the American right. The Republicans who swept the board in the November elections campaigned for speeding up the killing. Republican candidates for state governor promised to sign more death warrants if elected. In January, Jesse Dewayne Jacobs was executed in Texas even after the public prosecutor admitted he had not killed anyone, but was only an accomplice.

The victory of Republican George E

Pataki as governor of New York looks set to bring the executioner back to New York's jails for the first time since 1965.

40.3% of those on death row are black, though black people only make up 12.6% of the USA's population. 84.5% of those executed since 1977 were convicted of killing white victims, although blacks are killed in almost equal numbers.

Many black people on death row were tried by white juries, purged of all black people by prosecutors in jury-vetting procedures.

The poor are far more likely to end up on death row because many states have arbitrary, underfunded and ineffective legal representation for the poor.

The mentally ill or retarded are often unable to defend themselves. In 1994 John Thanos was executed in Maryland after waiving his right to appeal; he was suffering from severe mental disorder and was not fit to make such a decision.

Roy Stewart was executed on the basis

of a confession bullied out of him. He had serious mental problems. The confession did not fit the facts.

Maroi Marquez, executed in Texas was so retarded that he put aside the dessert from his last meal "to eat later".

The USA is one of the few countries in the world that executes juvenile offenders. In 1993 the USA executed four juvenile offenders.

Despite all this, many people claim that the death penalty works. Clinton's Attorney General Janet Reno welcomed the 1994 Crime Bill claiming it "will mean fewer victims, fewer tragedies, few lost lives."

However, there is no clear evidence that the death penalty reduces crime. It is social conditions, material and cultural, that determine the level and type of crime in a society, not punishment.

For example, the murder rate has dropped by 27% in Canada since abolition of the death penalty in 1993. No one commits a crime like murder thinking about punishment. Either they don't think about it or they do not think they will get caught.

The death row philosophy of social control is an integral part of the right wing's social theory of the war of all against all, or an individualistic and greedy human nature curbed by fear and force. Its solutions have always failed, but then the failure is used by the right to justify more of the same, not a new analysis of society.

Fight for a Labour government!

JOHN MAJOR'S decision to resign as Tory leader and stand for re-election, challenging his critics to "sack me or back me", is desperate rather than brave. Major probably faced a leadership election in the autumn anyway: this way he goes out to meet his enemies in an aura of resolution and leader-like purposefulness.

Major is gambling and he may lose. If Major is re-elected, he will be strengthened and the party will look more effective. If he loses, then some Clarke, or, maybe, Heseltine, will replace him, and the Tory party will have changed its mask. It will then perhaps have a better chance in the next General Election.

Not much better, probably. The Tory party is still likely to lose the next general election. And the ruling class?

Whoever wins, they will not lose the general election!

Through their press and their TV and their academic pundits, they have spent the last 15 years pummelling and chiselling and remoulding the Labour Party so that it fills the ruling class need for a safe replacement for the Tories. They have provided for everything, foreseen everything, cinched everything up. Everything they can tie up or tie down has been seen to.

Yet they know that there are still things they cannot tie down. They know that the morale and combativity of the working class — what it will endure patiently or with gritted teeth, and what it will fight against as it fought so often in the past — is a complex thing made and remade by circum-

stances and events. They know that a Labour victory, even under this Labour leadership, will begin, perhaps slowly at first after the initial elation, to change the state of working class morale and combativity.

When Labour wins, workers will feel encouraged. They will begin to press for concessions from "their" Labour Party. If they do not get them, they will begin to fight for them.

That is why, with John Major or without him, and no matter what Understudy Blair says or does, the ruling class will go on backing the Tory party.

It is why workers should continue, despite Blair and the rest of them, to fight to return a Labour government at the next general election. ■

The lessons of "1945 socialism"

FIFTY YEARS ago the Labour Party won an overwhelming victory in the general election that followed the defeat of Hitler. Labour had been governing Britain since 1940 in a coalition with the Tories and Liberals. Now it had supreme governmental power.

It used it to create the Welfare State. Draining some of the jungles and swamps of capitalism, the labour movement raised workers to a level of security and frugal well-being such as millions of our class had not known before. This was "reform socialism" at the height of its success.

When Labour MPs got up and sang the Red Flag in the House of Commons, millions of workers felt that "reform socialism" had not only triumphed over the Tories and the capitalists, but also won the old debate with the other sort of socialism — class-struggle, revolutionary, socialism. Reformists would do the job. Reformists were doing it. The "commanding heights" of the capitalist economy could be seized and used for the common good without expropriating, that is, without destroying, the capitalist class, and without abolishing wage-slavery.

This was never a logical or satisfying argument. There were too many gaps in it for that. You did not have to look very far to see that the capitalists were still in control. It was not the *arguments* of reform socialism that thinking workers accepted and put their faith in, but its substantial achievements.

Fifty years on, the achievements of reform socialism are in ruins. A capitalism savage in mien and manner rules our lives. The wild beasts of capitalism which the reformists



Clement Attlee

thought to have tamed now roam our society, predators as powerful today as the bourgeois robber-barons were in the 19th century.

In 1945 Labour had vast support throughout society and even in the armed forces, many of whose members had come out of fighting German imperialist fascism determined to settle accounts with the capitalist "old gang" back here. If a peaceful revolution against capitalism will ever be possible, it was possible in Britain then. Labour in 1945 could have eradicated the ruling class,

ended wage-slavery, and helped the working class bring into being real — social as well as political — democracy. It did not. It chose to tinker with capitalism instead.

In fact there was no way other than the suppression of capitalism to make secure even the limited reforms, humanising capitalism which Labour achieved in 1945. Left in being, the ruling class eventually reclaimed what they thought of as their own — the untrammelled right to run society for their purposes.

If, today, the era of "1945 socialism" seems like a golden age in comparison to now, it was a golden time which was slowly hatching the seeds of Thatcherism and of its own obliteration. The other socialism, revolutionary socialism, has been vindicated to anyone prepared to think about it, but that is cold comfort in a labour movement devastated by Thatcherism. We, the socialists of the working class, can not rise higher than our class; that we were right against the reform socialists does not protect us from the consequences of the defeats produced by the failings of the reform socialists.

Today it sometimes seems an academic argument, reform socialism or revolutionary socialism. It is not. It is fundamental to our work of preparing the future that socialists learn the lessons of the past.

Here and now, the way forward for socialists is the struggle for reforms and for the defence and rebuilding of what remains of the Welfare State. That is what we, alongside others, do in campaigns like the Welfare State Network.

By once more spelling out the lessons of the old debates between reform and revolutionary socialism on this 50th anniversary of the great triumph of reform socialism, we try to ensure that the next time round the working class will not stop at reforms. Let the Blairites and their Tory mentors say what they like, there will be a next time! ■

Joy Gardner, Brian Douglas Bring the police to justice!

By Mark Sandell

LINDA EVANS and Colin Whitby, the two police officers on trial for the death of Joy Gardner, were acquitted on Tuesday 13 June. These were the facts given in court. They were not contested.

At 7.30am on 28 July 1993, together with two others, they broke into Joy Gardner's flat, cutting the security chain. In front of Joy's five year old son they wrestled the half-naked woman to the floor, strapped her legs together at the thighs and ankles with leather belts, and handcuffed her to a waist belt. They then jammed a lump of sponge in her mouth and wrapped 13 foot of two inch-wide tape around her head and face. Within five minutes Joy's pulse stopped. She never recovered consciousness. She died five days later in hospital.

Had any four thugs done this to Joy they would surely have been sent down. But these were police officers 'doing their job'. The judge was crystal clear to the jury: "If you are not sure that either of the defendants knew that the use of the gag was dangerous, then you must acquit both defendants".

One neuropathologist and one pathologist — who were prosecution witnesses — thought that Joy had died of a head injury, though other experts thought it was due to the gag. The police thugs are clearly guilty of killing Joy Gardner in a violent attack, but the guilt does not rest on them alone. The two were part of the Aliens Deportation Group at Scotland Yard. Suspended since Joy's death, this racist gang's job was to do exactly what they did to Joy, forcibly deport immigrants and their children.

Britain's immigration laws kill because they dehumanise immigrants — in practice black immigrants. It is only one short, brutal step from the British Parliament's racist immigration laws to the assault on Joy Gardner.

It was all done legally. Things like it are done routinely. Gaggling those who make a fuss while being deported was, it seems, commonplace. If they had not taken it "too far" and killed her, no-one would have known about it — nor care about it now.

In 1990 Joy applied to the Home Office for permission to stay in Britain, where her family have lived for over 30 years. The Home Office response was to start proceedings to deport her and her five year old son.

This child was born in Britain but he does not have the right to British citizenship! He faced expulsion together with his mother. Why? Because he is black!

They killed this woman because she got



Joy Gardner's family carry on fighting for justice

angry and maybe abusive at being hunted down for expulsion as if she and her child — her British-born child — were not human beings at all, but vermin to be cleared out, or livestock the farmer did not want.

That does not happen every day, but the brutal hounding of decent working people which led to it goes on all the time.

All across Europe, just as in Britain, the walls against foreigners and immigrants are being raised higher and higher.

When politicians denounce immigrants — meaning black immigrants, people like Joy Gardner and her son — they point the finger at all black people in Britain.

When they pass immigration laws such as the Asylum Bill they are making racist laws which whip up racism.

When they resort to savagery, like that unleashed against Joy Gardner and her son, to throw two of them out, then they set the tone and the example for the unlicensed thugs who attack and sometimes kill black people on our streets.

With the rise of racism and fascism across Europe political leaders of the capitalist mainstream are being pulled deeper and deeper into the bloodstained mud of outright racist ideas.

The labour movement must stand up to the racists and make it clear that it is the bosses who are our enemy, not immigrants. Their capitalist system is falling to bits around us. Our only defence is working class unity across all countries and colours.

The Labour Party should take a stand against immigration laws. But instead they offer the Tories their support to pass racist legislation like the Asylum Bill! They criticised the Tories, not for introducing the deadly new batons, but for delay in introducing them! Shame is the first casualty.

Just before the court decision in the Joy Gardner case another black person was beaten to death by police in London. Brian Douglas was the first person killed by the British police using their new two foot long

American style baton.

Stopped for a minor motoring offence, Brian was involved in a scuffle with the police. They battered him on the back of the head with their new two foot clubs and then locked him in the cells at Kennington police station for 15 hours before finally he was taken to hospital, where he died five days later from his injuries.

Brian Douglas joins Joy Gardner and 48 other black people who have died in suspicious circumstances involving the British police since 1969. Yet the Joy Gardner trial was only the second time police officers have faced legal prosecution.

The British police are the biggest and most numerous racist gang on our streets, but they are not going unchallenged.

The Joy Gardner Memorial Campaign are continuing to fight for a public enquiry into Joy's case and deportations.

The Justice for Brian Douglas Campaign are demanding that PC Harrison and PC Tuffey, who assaulted Brian, be charged and that a public enquiry be held into Brian's death.

The British ruling class need scapegoats for the failure of their system. The racism embedded in British society has made black people an easy target for scapegoating. While the media and politicians are the mouthpieces of this filth, the police are more often than not its weapons.

The labour movement has a long and painful experience of the police as a weapon against strikes, protests and our movement. Socialists must do all we can to win the labour movement to the campaigns to bring the police thugs to justice. We must support any moves to fence in the police and reduce the unaccountable power they wield.

● Justice for Brian Douglas, 77a Atlantic Road, London, SW9 8PU, tel: 0171 733 7790

● Joy Gardner Memorial Campaign, c/o PACE, The Selby Centre, Selby Rd, Tottenham, N17 8JN. ☎

Healthworkers set to strike

By Brian Roberts

IT NOW seems certain that the long-running NHS pay dispute will come to a head this autumn. UNISON is set to ballot for strike action during August, over the government's "1% plus local bargaining" pay offer. A host of smaller staff organisations are likely to fall in line behind them.

The dispute is over two issues: the break-up of national pay and conditions by the introduction of local pay bargaining, and the limit of 3% effectively set by the government over any total rise. 800,000 NHS workers are facing a pay cut and the loss of national bargaining in one pay round!

The fact that all staff groups, barring doctors and senior managers, have been offered the same deal has led to a rare degree of unanimity amongst NHS unions in resisting the deal. So far, not one local pay deal has been accepted by staff across the whole country. As the time for talking has now long been passed, and the need for action is there for all to see, that unanimity is beginning to break up. The Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives — or, rather, their leaders — have both approached the Tories for separate talks on pay, and now seem

unlikely to put up any opposition to local pay on principle. The RCN have campaigned under the slogan "3% for all nurses", effectively accepting the government's award.

UNISON have made two decisions during the campaign that may yet rebound on them, firstly dropping their 8.4% pay claim, and then tailing the RCN for the first months of the campaign, rather than preparing for action. The second has been disastrous in demobilising the campaign, leading to the union offering the government six weeks' "grace" to come up with a better offer, after a 9-to-1 consultation result for a strike ballot, because its membership records weren't in place to run a ballot!

The near-silence of UNISON officials over what their pay target actually is points towards the likelihood of them being willing to accept a consolidated national 3% award as a victory. Ironically, this could open the way towards the acceptance of local deals, as UNISON branches realise that they could win more by local industrial action. Activists should ensure that 3% is not regarded as a target anywhere.

There has not been national action in the NHS for 13 years, and the majority of those taking action will be doing so for the first time, if the strike ballot is won.

unelected bureaucracy who have refused to really fight for a big yes vote, despite the decisions of the union's elected Executive, or the feelings of activists on the ground.

If the ballots do show majorities for action then we need action co-ordinated across both the unions and on British Rail and London Underground.

All active trade unionists and socialists should get set to build railworkers' support groups as a focus for solidarity.

part of being "responsible" is disposing cheaply. Partly they were right. But what they never said was that it only really matters to them how much they spend disposing of Brent Spar because they have to pay dividends to their shareholders.

Dividends, and the waste involved in capitalist competition, represent money we could take to spend on safe disposal of all environmental hazards. Environmental responsibility costs a lot. But we can and have to afford it.

If oil companies were nationalised, if the public owned the oil companies and did not have to pay out in wasteful dividends, we would have a lot more choices. We might actually decide to dump at sea and then to spend the money we had saved on other environmental projects.

In strictly scientific terms, few people have the knowledge to say which of Greenpeace

Sheffield library workers strike

350 LIBRARY workers in Sheffield have been on all-out indefinite strike since 5 June over the council's threat to remove enhanced pay for weekend work, breaking national conditions of service. All workers in the Council's leisure department face the same threat, resulting in a pay cut of up to 7% for some of the lowest paid workers.

The strike is solid. Clare Renshaw, a libraries shop steward and striker, spoke to *Workers' Liberty*:

"This strike is about national conditions of service. We're not striking for more pay but to keep hold of our pay. We are low paid, and women workers. We can't afford to take a pay cut. If Sheffield council gets away with this, it will open up the floodgates for the rest of the country. Two years ago when council workers in Sheffield took a 2¼% pay cut, it gave the green light to other councils across the country.

"The support for our strike has been tremendous: both from the public and from other trade unions. 15,000 people have signed our petition. Morale is very high — we voted 4 to 1 to take the action, and support for the strike remains strong. Library workers have not been militant in the past but this strike has changed peoples' attitudes."

The Sheffield library workers urgently need donations to their Fighting Fund. All cheques should be made payable to "Sheffield UNISON 2" with "Fighting Fund" written on the back. Messages of support and requests for speakers should be directed to Sheffield UNISON 2, 175 Arundel Gate Court, Sheffield S1 2LQ (Tel: 0114-273 6307).

Railworkers ballot for action

As we go to press, RMT and ASLEF members on British Rail and London underground are balloting for a series of one day strikes over pay.

The RMT wants a 6% rise. ASLEF — the train drivers' union — want "a substantial increase."

If the RMT ballot is lost the responsibility lies entirely with the union's

Brent Spar victory for Greenpeace

By Joan Trevor

GREENPEACE scored a big victory over international giant Shell in the Brent Spar affair. Shell had got government permission to abandon a 20 year old oil installation at sea, despite many scientists saying it would cause terrible environmental damage. But they had to abandon the plan after bad publicity, and a boycott by drivers of Shell petrol stations.

Shell wanted to dump in the sea because it is cheaper than disposal on land. They said that they were being "responsible" when considering this disposal option, because

or Shell is right about whether disposal at sea or on land is safer, and really that is not the main question in this affair.

The main question is how we get more control over what the oil companies do.

It makes more sense to believe Greenpeace. You don't sail a boat out to the North Sea, 118 miles north of Shetland, skirmish with oil company ships, scale 28 metres of rusting and polluted iron, and camp there for weeks unless you know something. Do you believe the people who do that, or the half-a-million-a-year men who run Shell, whose only concern is to have an easy ride at the annual shareholders' meeting? Who do you trust most to fight for a healthy environment?

Greenpeace's action made and won the argument that public opinion should count in environmental decisions, not just the "responsibility" of oil company directors to their shareholders.

Blair's plans for union law revealed

By a BT engineer

APART FROM general statements assuring the bosses that there will be "no return to the '70s", the Labour Frontbench has not been keen to spell out what, if anything, they will do to remove the legal shackles imposed on the unions by the Tories.

But a glimpse of the kind of deal that is likely to emerge from top level TUC/Labour Party "consultations" was revealed to Communication Workers' Union (CWU) activists last month when their union leadership outlined a "radical agenda" for the reform of employment law.

The CWU document was written for the most self consciously Blairite union baron, Alan Johnson, and starts off by denouncing CWU conference policy of support for solidarity action and repeal of the anti-union laws as "dangerous and wishful thinking".

It goes on to assert that "No Labour government will reinstate the closed shop, mass picketing or unballoted industrial action, and the movement must not ask them to do so."

Instead they propose keeping 95% of Thatcher's anti-union laws and the great bulk of Major's laws as well.

What do they propose by way of change? "... abolition of the 3 yearly re-recruitment sections of the 1993 Act; repeal of the repudiation sections of the 1990 Act; repeal of the ban on union disciplinary powers of

the 1988 Act; lifting of the ban on solidarity action of the 1993 Act; creating a right to strike without fear of dismissal; replacing the legislation which requires seven days notice of ballots and a further seven days notice of taking subsequent action which may be authorised, with fair procedures which does not preclude properly conducted workplace ballots; removing the discriminatory powers which allow employers to pay trade union members less than non union employees for work of equal value."

This agenda fits in well with what the front bench desire. It allows New Labour spokespersons to sound radical — they can highlight easy targets like 7 days notice for ballots and discrimination on pay — yet it offers nothing significant to the rank and file on solidarity action and unofficial strikes.

All forms of secondary and solidarity action would remain illegal. Basic solidarity, such as refusing to handle diverted mail during strikes would remain illegal.

And any local union rep who organised such action would still be open to legal attacks and the threat of the sack. Repealing the repudiation section of the 1990 Act would free trade union leaders from the threat of fines or sequestration for unofficial action but it would not make such action legal.

The "radical agenda" becomes even less radical when we look at the CWU executive's proposed new labour laws:

"To remove Britain's opt-out from the EU Social Chapter." This sounds nice but means next to nothing. Article 2.6 of the Maastricht Treaty, of which the Social Chapter is but a part, explicitly rules out of EU legislation anything that concerns "pay, the right to association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs." The Brussels bureaucracy are not the seventh cavalry.

"To regulate the abuse of temporary, fixed and casual contracts." We need a commitment to full-time rights for part-time, casual and contract workers. We need a set of *universal* rights for all, enforceable from day one.

"Creating a right to strike without fear of dismissal." This is a great idea. But a right to strike must *mean* a right to strike, not a right to strike if you hold a ballot and the dispute is official. A right to strike has to include the right to urgent defensive action such as a walk-out to stop victimisations.

Other NEC proposals are pure waffle. For example, support for *"a statutory minimum wage"* without saying what level it will be set at makes a mockery of the very idea of a minimum wage.

We want to create a bulwark against extreme exploitation. That can't be done, if we allow the employers a say in what level it will be set at.

All this adds up to a neo-Thatcherite framework of employment law, exactly the kind of thing demanded by Blair and Brown's neo-Thatcherite economics.

Should the left back Bickerstaffe?

By Tony Dale

THE CONFERENCE of the public sector workers union, Unison, held in June, was a mixed affair. Important left resolutions supporting the minimum wage and full employment were passed.

However, most of what the right-wing leadership wanted was voted for by conference. The left was defeated on the anti-union laws. There was a rallying behind the leadership, under fire from the Labour leadership after supporting Clause Four.

The left was pre-occupied with the question of whether or not we should stand a candidate in elections for General Secretary in which former NUPE leader, Rodney Bickerstaffe, is standing. With no credible candidate, any left challenge will be a diversion from essential battles inside the union.

Bickerstaffe may represent an opposition to unfettered Blairism in the labour movement but he also has the worst

characteristics of the UNISON leadership: supporting centralised power in the union and more say for unelected full timers.

The election is a matter of tactics, not about who hates Bickerstaffe more, but what will benefit the rank and file of the union.

The Socialist Workers Party are seeking nominations for one of their hacks, Yunus Bakhsh, posing as an ordinary health worker, angry about his pay packet, in an attempt to whip up some publicity for the SWP. Militant Labour are seeking nominations for Roger Bannister as a Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU) candidate.

A substantial minority of the CFDU — including ex-NUPE left wingers, AWL members and Socialist Appeal supporters — did not want to make a challenge to Bickerstaffe if a more credible candidate could not be found.

Militant Labour won their position by 17 votes to 8 at a CFDU branch delegates meeting.

The Militant Labour campaign deserves more consideration than that of the SWP but should still be opposed. Roger Bannister is a Militant member, supports candidates against Labour and is ex-NALGO.

Many of the divisions in the union derive from the union affiliations of members prior to the merger of NUPE, COHSE and NALGO, and the formation of Unison. Fol-

lowing merger an ex-NALGO official, Alan Jinkinson, became General Secretary. Many ex-NUPE members see Bickerstaffe's candidature as their turn to have one of "their people" as General Secretary. The left, if it wants to see these divisions healed, has to take such feelings on board.

The ex-NUPE rank and file are likely to see the CFDU campaign as an attack by ex-NALGO sectarians on "their" leader, who is under siege from the Blair Labour leadership. The campaign could flair up into a nasty red baiting episode.

The most important thing the left needs to get to grips with is how to unite the *whole* of Unison's rank and file to take control of and transform our union. In this context campaigns against Bickerstaffe are counter-productive and we should stop them by arguing branches do not nominate either the SWP or the Militant Labour candidates.

A far more useful project now and in the run-up to a General Election will be organising Unison's Labour left. The decisions of the Affiliated Political Fund Conference (backing minimum wage, rebuilding of the welfare state etc) show the potential. Many of the most serious Unison militants are also Labour Party members. This vital organisational work needs to go hand in hand with attempting to revive the existing organisations of the Unison left.



Sarajevo

Bosnia: how to get reconciliation

By Colin Foster

ACCORDING TO Alexander Ivanko, a UN spokesperson in Sarajevo, "the Bosnian Serbs are calling most of the shots. I'm sure there are some shots they are not calling. I just can't think of them at the moment".

Since the Bosnian Serbs seized 370 UN soldiers as hostages in late May (they released the last of them on 18 June), UN troops have moved out of Serb-held areas. They have given up any pretence of protecting the so-called "safe areas". The Bosnian Serbs may have been given some promise of no more air strikes against them. And the big powers are talking about pulling out the UN troops altogether.

Ever since the eruption of Serb imperialism in the late 1980s started to trigger the break-up of Yugoslavia, the big powers have wanted quiet restored as quickly as possible for trade and investment, and not cared about democracy or the rights of

small nations.

The Bosnian Serbs are not in fact calling all the shots. Despite the UN arms embargo, which operates one-sidedly against the official Bosnian army and should be lifted, that Bosnian army has mustered will and fire-power for a counter-offensive. And in the Bosnian Serb stronghold of Banja Luka, according to Maggie O'Kane of the *Guardian*, "People are tired of the war... We know that we have too much territory, and we know we have to give some of it back".

From war-weariness can be built democratic reconciliation and working-class unity against the warlords on all sides.

On what basis should socialists seek to end the war? There may have been a time when the restoration of independent multi-ethnic Bosnia was an operable programme, but now who would restore it? The official Bosnian army, now almost all Muslim, by overrunning the 70% of Bosnia which has been conquered by Serb forces?

Pieties about "aggression not being rewarded" have no grip on the situation. Although Sarajevo and Tuzla are reported still to be multi-ethnic to some degree, the three and a half years of war have pulled apart Bosnia's three nationalities, which before were closely interlaced, into separate blocks. Reconciliation and reknitting of links has to start by recognising self-determination for each block — Serb, Croat, and Bosnian-Muslim, or Bosniac — while we also argue for full rights for all residents, regardless of nationality and religion, under all regimes. Support for the Bosniacs, as the victims of imperialism, has to be in that framework: they need to secure some minimally viable area in any settlement, and they deserve aid and reparations from the big powers and from Serbia to rebuild their economic life.

Park Bench

I live on a park bench
You, Park Avenue.
Hell of a distance
Between the two.

I beg a dime for dinner —
You got a butler and maid.
But I'm waking up!
Say, ain't you afraid

That I might, just maybe,
In a year or two,
Move on over
To Park Avenue?

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New Labour and New NUT

By Liam Conway

ON THURSDAY 22 June the Labour Party unveiled its policy document on education: *Diversity and Excellence*. The report recommends the preservation of grant maintained schools (renaming them "foundation" schools), thus perpetuating the two tier-system of education the Tories introduced with their education reforms. The same document does not recommend any increase in funds for education. This is, as one old-style Labourite, Roy Hattersley, has said, nothing short of a "repudiation of the principle of comprehensive education".

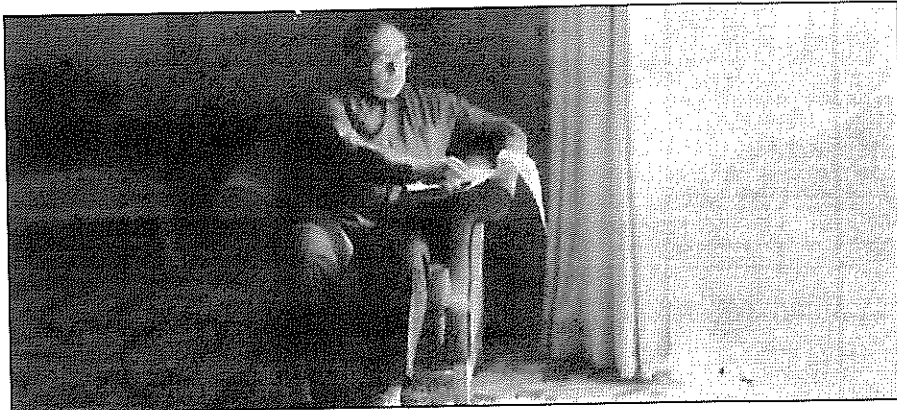
More cause for dismay in the education fightback was the four to one vote against strike action in the recent National Union of Teachers ballot over excessive class sizes.

The decision to hold the ballot was won at the Easter conference of the union despite the opposition of the Executive. In the weeks preceding the conference there had been successful one-day strikes in the areas worst affected by the cuts — strikes that had the overwhelming support of local parents. A broad campaign of parents, governors and teachers — Fight Against Cuts in Education — had been set up. What has happened to the fightback, and what can we do about the retreat by Labour and the NUT leadership?

First, it is worth looking a little closer at a breakdown of the ballot figures. There were majorities for strike action in only six NUT branches — all of them in Inner London, where cuts have not been on the same scale as the rest of the country. Even areas such as Notts and Oxfordshire, which face drastic job cuts and have held successful local strikes and rallies this year, did not vote yes in this ballot. An immediate threat to jobs and conditions does not guarantee a fightback. This underlines the need for a clear and honest assessment of the causes of this setback and a broad political response to McAvoy and Co.

An incredible degree of effort was needed by activists in Notts, Oxford and elsewhere to get support for the strikes which took place last term. Teachers along with other workers are not bursting at the seams to tear into the Tories with industrial action: the basic political situation is unfavourable. Since Easter we have also had a barrage of media and right-wing NUT and Labour propaganda against strike action. And this is why, for example, there was a 73% majority amongst Notts members for strike action in April and a majority of over 60% against strike action in June. In more buoyant times, it might not have been so easy for Doug McAvoy and the right wing to scuttle conference decisions.

The result highlights the importance of leadership, of wresting it away from McAvoy, who without even consulting the rest of the Executive, spent something like £200,000 sending materials to NUT mem-



Doug McAvoy learning his lines, sent from Walworth Road

bers' homes, warning of the dire consequences of strike action. Even the best organised left NUT branch leaders cannot compete with this scale of propaganda. In the recent election for General Secretary the left stood against McAvoy. As Bernard Regan of the Socialist Teachers Alliance wrote: "The defeat of Doug McAvoy... would have had an impact on... the recent strike ballot." But the left lost that election by 38,000 votes to 37,000. Some on the left — very irresponsibly given the closeness of the vote — abstained. So where do we go from here?

We should not get disheartened by the result. This year's strike action was no more an indication that NUT members would follow socialists onto the barricades of revolution, than June's national ballot result is a reflection that they have faith in McAvoy's strategy on the cuts. The result reflects mostly a lack of confidence among teachers and a hopeful expectation that Labour will both win the next election and deliver them from the impact of Tory education policy. Of course that hope has now been dashed with the publication of *Diversity and Excellence*.

The left must address the implications of the ever-closer relationship between Blair, Blunkett and the NUT leadership, particularly Doug McAvoy. Whilst Blair and Blunkett were preparing their sell-out on education policy, McAvoy announced he too was in favour of a change to the union's policy on grant maintained status. McAvoy is determined to ensure that the main teacher's union does not oppose the policies of the next Labour government. McAvoy assumes he can determine what the union wants out of a Labour Government. This is particularly undemocratic as the NUT is not affiliated to the Labour Party and the structures do not exist for rank and file members to decide on these issues. Above all the left must stop ignoring the Labour Party — because it is too right wing, or "irrelevant". McAvoy and Blair represent two faces of "New Labour". We have to fight on both fronts.

The NUT ballot result should be seen as a snapshot of the mood of the members. The

issues around which the left united and campaigned so successfully at conference will not go away. McAvoy and his co-thinkers have no strategy to defeat the cuts beyond waiting for Labour.

Both Blair and McAvoy think they can get away with anything and use Machiavellian methods to do so, as did Blair over Clause Four and McAvoy over the conduct of the strike ballot. But both will come unstuck over the issue of grant maintained schools. McAvoy has already been forced to climb down over the issue by NUT members. There is a great potential inside the Labour Party to organise a campaign to defend comprehensive education and for increased funding.

With the publication of *Diversity and Excellence*, in the run-up to the General Election and after the election of a Labour Government there is going to be a fierce battle over Labour's education policy. We need to get teachers, parents, FACE activists and governors into the Labour Party to participate in the debate.

Part of the fight in the Labour Party should be about winning support for the fight against immediate cuts. This too can be a "popular" issue in the Labour Party — for instance in Notts many local branches are affiliating to FACE.

There are countless opportunities for the left in NUT (organised in the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting Union and the Socialist Teachers' Alliance) to unite and organise joint campaigns: over elections for national officers positions; over a Special Conference to discuss pay next term; over the FACE demonstration on 30 September; over the campaign for public sector action in the run-up to the government's November budget.

All our campaigns should relate to Labour Party policy and putting the pressure on Labour in the run-up to the General Election. Now may even be the right time to start a debate about NUT affiliation to the Labour Party. Certainly the left needs to intervene directly into battles inside the Labour Party. We may find that there is as little substance to McAvoy's "New NUT" as there is to Blair's "New Labour".

Prospects dim for new workers' party

By Martin Thomas

IN FRANCE'S municipal elections, on 11 and 18 June, the fascist National Front won control of its first big city, Toulon, in southern France.

It also won two smaller cities, Orange and Marignane, and generally scored well though patchily.

The mainstream right did not do as well as it must have hoped after Jacques Chirac won the presidency. The Socialist Party did a bit better than expected, the Communist Party worse.

A scattering of "alternative left" lists, including splinters from the Socialist Party, Communist Party, and Greens, and the Trotskyists of the LCR, did respectably: the LCR got six councillors under France's complicated system of semi-proportional representation in local government.

For readers of *Workers' Liberty*, the most interesting results were probably those of Lutte Ouvrière, the Trotskyist group which won an extraordinary 1.6 million votes in the presidential election. LO ran 52 lists, with 2,330 candidates, and got seven elected. Its score, 2.8 per cent of the votes in the areas where it ran, was around its average in elections over the last twenty years, and only one third of the votes won by its presidential candidate, Arlette Laguiller, in those same areas. Three local lists which LO ran jointly with the Communist Party scored an average of nine per cent.

Abstentions were very numerous, and it looks as if they included many of the people alienated from official politics who were attracted by Laguiller's straightforward socialist platform.

Lutte Ouvrière concluded: "We are thus still far from being able to build the party which is terribly lacking to defend the political interests of the workers, the unemployed, and the youth". Rather than being able to launch a sizeable new workers' party from its tremendous presidential campaign, it looks as if LO will only be able to enlarge its political periphery — as François Rouleau of LO put it at a recent AWL London forum, to restore its periphery to the size it was in the late 1970s.

Even that is no small achievement. At Lutte Ouvrière's annual fete on 3-5 June, 35,000 attended — an increase on the usual 25,000-to-30,000, despite constant rain at this open-air event.

In forums and debates at the fete, LO speakers were resolutely sober and even pessimistic in their assessment of prospects. LO has recently published a document, adopted at their last conference, in late 1994, which sketches an overview of the

ups and downs of the revolutionary workers' movement over the whole of the 20th century. It shows strikingly how LO combines downbeat perspectives — utterly different from the frantic babble about "the rise of the world revolution" used by so many Trotskyist groups — with unbroken, undulled energy.

"No-one", declares LO, "is in a position to say today when the retreat of the proletarian movement, ongoing for *three quarters of a century*, will stop" (emphasis added). Its story of the first third of the century follows the standard Trotskyist account, more or less — revolutionary opportunities betrayed by social-democracy and Stalinism.

After 1945, however, LO argues that the workers' movement "declined as its leaderships discredited themselves politically... The militants, disgusted by the policy of their party, abandoned activity..." The great workers' upsurges of 1956 (Hungary), 1968 (France), 1975 (Portugal), 1980-1 (Poland), etc. are not mentioned at all. Against its picture of steady decay, LO's document sets the facts that the working class remains numerous and that the general theoretical arguments cited by Marx remain valid as to why the working class can revolutionise society. Then comes the twist in the tail!

"In reality", declares LO, "the social category which has failed its task in the course of the past decades is much more that of the intellectuals than the proletariat... It is essentially the intelligentsia which has not played, in recent decades, the role which

should be its own..." The degeneration of the Communist Parties was "largely imputable to the fact that there were not, among the intellectuals of these CPs, people capable of seeing the bureaucracy's move away from communist principles, and worse still, there was none with the courage to oppose it". Since 1945, most rebel intellectuals have chosen politics which offered them careers, and "even the most devoted have tailed fashionable nationalist currents, made the fortunes of Maoism, and turned aside from the Trotskyist movement or diverted it..."

Several things are incoherent in this account, not least the exaggerated role allowed to "intellectuals"! Crucially, however, a critical examination of the role of "intellectuals" (of worker or petty-bourgeois origin) in giving political direction to revolutionary minorities, and enabling those minorities to seize or bungle opportunities, has been replaced by a moral denunciation of the slackness of intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin. Theoretical investigation, beyond the basic business of recalling what Marx wrote about the working class, has been replaced by moral strictures.

The moral strictures have some value: they did, after all, help to generate the energy and seriousness which enabled LO to reach out to 1.6 million with basic socialist ideas. Without proper theoretical and political rethinking, however, we will not be able to build an adequate movement out of those millions. ■

The French left sums up

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS loom much larger in French politics than local-government polls do in other countries, partly because all the major political leaders take part in them as well as in national politics: prime minister Alain Juppé stood this time for mayor of Bordeaux, Jacques Chirac was mayor of Paris before becoming president, and over half the MPs in France's Chamber of Deputies are also mayors.

Lutte Ouvrière summed up the results like this: "The left, socialist and communist, held its own overall, but is far from reconquering the positions it has lost over recent years. On the other hand, the most striking result was the confirmed or even strengthened implantation of the National Front... If these are really working-class voters who are letting themselves be misused... that introduces the worst of divisions into the ranks of the workers... Racist or anti-foreigner preju-

dices are truly the vermin of thought..."

Rouge noted the effects of the "discredit" of the whole "political class": "Traditionally, the municipals were the elections with the best turnout. It was not like that on the first round, abstention reaching the record figure of 35 per cent... [and higher] in the big cities."

"The far right", it continued, "appears as the great victor of these municipals. Its local implantation is spectacularly confirmed. Its network of bigwigs has now gained sufficient weight that it can rake in a vote clearly superior to that of the caudillo at a national election."

Rouge protested, however, at the "Republican Front" policy followed in a few areas where the National Front did well in the first round, like Dreux, with the Socialist and Communist Parties withdrawing from the second round to back the mainstream right against the NF. "The 'united left' is retreating, disappearing, resigning, giving it out that the RPR right-wing [Chirac's party] would be the final rampart against the NF".

Corruption is corroding Chinese Stalinism

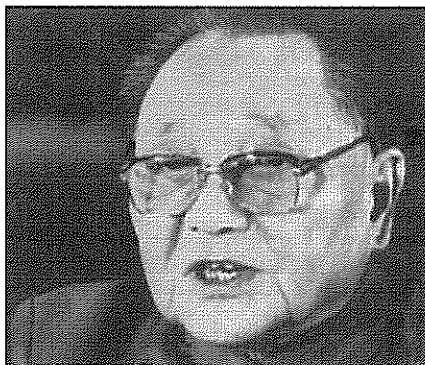
Chan Ying reports from Hong Kong on the eve of the sixth anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre (4 June 1989).

THE CHINESE authorities are once again harassing and arresting journalists, intellectuals and dissidents. Wang Dan, the student leader of the 1989 events, has been arrested again. He has gone into a hunger strike. Wang had already served his prison sentence, although he has been under constant surveillance ever since his release. This time he is one of 27 signatories to a letter petitioning the government to launch a full inquiry into the '89 events. Another signatory, Ding Zilin, assistant professor of philosophy of Beijing's Chinese People's University and mother of a June 4th victim, has been kept under surveillance since March 1994, after publishing an article about her work in compiling June 4th victims. She has recently been threatened by the authorities even though she has not been involved in any form of illegal or underground activity. More than 40 activists have been detained in the last two weeks.

Although the regime has behaved similarly at each anniversary, the overall situation this year is quite different in many ways.

Firstly, the year started with rumours about Deng Xiaoping's health. Although he holds no official posts, he is still the final decision-maker at the apex of the Chinese regime. He has turned ninety; his most stubborn veteran rival, Chen Yun, who patronises the conservative faction in the Chinese Party, has just died. The regime became very nervous and made special efforts to rein in Deng's children from making any more public utterances and to curtail their overseas travelling. This spring it was wrongfooted by dissidents adopting a new tactic — bombarding the National People's Congress meeting in March with very well publicised petitions on a whole range of issues. This perfectly legal petitioning is hard for the regime to label as "counter-revolutionary."

Secondly, the country's economy is once again overheating dangerously. After a brief period after Tiananmen when central control, was reasserted and western capital was hesitant to invest, free market reforms and the opening up of the country to foreign capital continued¹. Economic growth and inflation were both in double figures,



Deng Xiaoping

and Premier Li Peng's target of 15% inflation for next year was greeted with open disbelief in the National People's Congress meeting in March as the "deputies rattle their rubber stamps" (*Far East Economic Review* 25 March). The regime seems undecided about both the pace and control of economic changes, particularly about how to run the state-controlled industrial enterprises².

Thirdly, a major faction fight appears to have started even before Deng has gone. Ever since the Tiananmen events, the market-reform faction led by ousted premier Zhao Ziyang has been edged out of power, and the regime has been in the control of an uneasy alliance between the Beijing faction favouring traditional Stalinist central planning, headed by Li Peng, and the Shanghai faction, headed by General Secretary Jiang Zemin, brought into power by Deng Xiaoping as a counter to his conservative critics. The Shanghai faction, holding the centre ground, appears not to have its own programme; objectively it represents the interests of technocrats and party careerists whose fortunes have been linked to the economic growth of the past few years and to the Communist Party's repressive stranglehold over China.

Jiang has been furiously consolidating his hold over the army and the party apparatus while securing control over access to Deng and promoting the Deng personality cult. Last month he appeared to have successfully launched a preemptive strike against the Beijing faction. Beijing Party Secretary and Politburo member Chen Xitong "resigned" on 26 April. He is the highest ranked cadre to be removed since premier Zhao Ziyang was ousted directly after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989.

The charge against Chen is corruption. Since 4 April, when Beijing vice-major Wang Bao-sen committed suicide, allegedly over corruption, there had been a number of cadres from the Beijing party apparatus detained. *Beijing Daily* commented on "the seriousness of the threat posed to the party

by rotten bourgeois ideologies." Since Chen played a key hardline role in repressing the democracy movement in Beijing (he might even have exaggerated the influence and size of the 1989 democracy movement in order to persuade waverers in the central leadership) the communiqué was quick to point out Chen's contribution in 1989, just in case anyone in the CCP or in the country thought that this was the beginning of a reversal of the party's verdict. There is now a countrywide campaign against corruption, particularly in the coastal provinces and in the Special Economic Zones such as Shenzhen, where regulations for foreign investment are considerably relaxed.

To what extent is this anti-corruption campaign solely motivated by factional considerations? There has after all been a significant increase of officials losing office, even committing suicide, before this latest bombshell, according to Chinese language journals based in Hong Kong (*The Trend* and *Cheng Ming*, May 1995). According to the *Far East Economic Review* (23 March), for example, the 77 year old Zhou Guanwu resigned as chairman and party secretary of Shougang Corporation after his son was arrested on corruption charges.

Shougang, also known as Capital Iron and Steel, is a showcase state-run enterprise which has enjoyed the personal endorsement of Deng Xiaoping. It promoted a "contract responsibility" system to free state firms from the rigidities of state planning. The debacle here, with refineries standing idle and finances in a mess, is a serious blow to Deng's prestige and further highlights the difficulties the regime is having over state-run firms.

Yet another prestige institution, China International Trust & Investment Corp (CITIC) was in the news because of losses of \$40 million in futures trading. It could be that the new technocrats are trying to impose a more regulated business environment.

The anti-corruption campaign has continued to gather momentum after collecting the scalp of Chen Xitong, and the latest Reuter dispatch from Beijing reported on tough rules issued to ban state enterprise officials from setting up private businesses, helping relatives or using their firms' assets for themselves. The dispatch commented that "the regulations are the latest salvo in the Communist Party's struggle to curb the spread of the type of corruption it blamed for the collapse of Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang government."

Observers however point out that no one of any significance has been purged in Shanghai, Jiang's powerbase, even though it has had its fair share of financial scandals.

The truth is probably somewhere in

between.³

The opening up of the economy to the West in the past decade has increasingly meant that material privileges based on party rank are now less significant than the opportunities to get rich quick in the privatised sector. For cadres wanting to get a slice of the new action, there is an uneven distribution of such opportunities which depends on regional factors and factional connections. In turn, the party centre now has a harder job of keeping the regions under control, compared to former days when the country was more isolated from the outside world and the terror of violent purges during the Cultural Revolution was still fresh in many cadres' minds.

The party hierarchy recoiled from the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, and thereafter did not readily pursue factional struggle to the point of physically exterminating opponents on a large scale. Defeated opponents who played the game and confessed usually suffered a fate no worse than retirement or detention in relatively comfortable conditions. Regional party bosses and army commanders built up their power bases somewhat like the medieval barons of Europe, and the party's central control is no longer as absolute as it used to be. Party elders sponsored their own factions, exercising powers of patronage to promote and protect their protégés. The repeated exhortations from the centre on fighting inflation indicate, if anything, that cadres in the regions have been paying lip service to central directives to curb credit or to scrutinise the viability of large scale economic projects, but effectively continuing with whatever brings in the slush.

The free market reformer Zhao Ziyang, sacked as premier, has steadfastly refused to confess any wrongdoing during and after the Tiananmen events. He has not been tried, executive or imprisoned. The Jiang/Li centre repeatedly urge regional cadres to treat Zhao as "an ordinary party member." Zhao has been reported to be travelling around, busily renewing networks.

The free market reformers as a faction are biding their time to regain control of the party once the ruling Jiang/Li coalition either run into economic difficulties or break out into a faction fight. Both seem to be happening now, although a temporary truce seems to be in place so that the regime can concentrate on eliminating the threat of any uprisings during the June 4th anniversary period.

Jiang is correctly sensing that corruption has gone too far and is corroding the party's ability to survive, but he is opportunistically using the anti-corruption drive to eliminate some factional opponents and to assert new authority over the regions. He is however unlikely to reopen the "counter-revolutionary" verdict on the Tiananmen events. That, as Gorbachev discovered with glasnost, may open Pandora's box irreversibly and cause the party to disintegrate. Yet any faction that aspires to long-term power and at least securing the passive acceptance of the population, knows that

it needs to carry out precisely such an action, and perhaps Zhao's faction is ready to offer itself as the party's final saviour.

So much for the party's troubles. What about the opposition? The dominant ideology among the overseas dissidents is for a multi-party democracy modelled on the West, and an implicit acceptance of capitalism. Leading individuals were either part of the Zhao faction or academics. There is a small working class-based opposition but its influence is weak. Inside China, there are many undercurrents opposing the regime. For example, recently the regime announced the smashing of a well-armed network pledged to terrorist action to overthrow it. The network was to have launched explosions in Beijing during the National People's Congress in March. The central group consisted of cadres in the party and the armed forces, as well as entrepreneurs with considerable economic clout. Amongst the dissidents inside China, under arrest or surveillance, there is inevitably a spectrum of political views but these are not easily accessible.

The critical factor in any future scenario is what happens in the large scale state enterprises, which still dominate half of

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the economy. In the absence of a system of state benefits, these enterprises have served to offer workers not only jobs, but housing, schools, doctors and other welfare benefits. When such enterprises are declared bankrupt, the workers lose their jobs and everything else. The regime is however having to preside over them whilst the newly established private sector is recreating the classic sweatshops that used to be commonplace in Hong Kong. The relocation of factories from Hong Kong to the mainland is now creating rising unemployment in Hong Kong.

Whether the state enterprises are privatised, or remain under state control with injection of new investment, the continued changes to the economy along free-market lines will lead to an intensification of confrontation between industrial workers and their managements. Any political opposition against the regime must be based on these concentrated centres of industrial workers, or else can do no more than act as cheerleaders for the Zhao faction currently out of power. ■

Footnotes

1. In the period leading up to the 1989 events, the Chinese Communist Party line was determined by Deng's strategy of economic

reforms combined with political control. Free market experimenters Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang who were Deng's protégés, held the key positions of party general secretary and prime minister respectively. However, the infrastructural dislocations caused by the reforms, manifested mainly through inflation, caused the programme to falter. This allowed conservative critics headed by Chen Yun, who favoured a return to central planning along orthodox Stalinist lines, to gain the upper hand. The democracy movement of '89 caught the regime at a vulnerable period of intense internal disagreement. The brutal suppression of the democracy movement was accompanied by the purge of free market reformists headed by Zhao. Deng decided to ditch his own programme, but instead of endorsing the conservative hardliners like Li Peng and the "Beijing faction" who carried out the repression, Deng promoted the Shanghai party leadership around Jiang Zemin, who was not involved in the party centre's decision at Tiananmen, as the new party secretary. Jiang, coming from the country's largest industrial city, represented the wider interests of the party machine in those regions which have benefited most from free market reforms. This compromise enabled Deng to keep a less ambitious programme of economic reform going, without caving in totally to the central planners.

2. No major decisions have been taken to grasp the nettle of ailing large-scale industrial enterprises, although the powers to declare them bankrupt and to privatise them already existed. The benefits to farmers of agricultural reform a decade ago have been eroded away by high prices for consumer goods and fertilisers, combined by on-off pricing controls over main produce such as cotton and grain. The iron discipline which controlled the drift of population from countryside into the cities has weakened probably irreversibly, and a growing population of ex-landless peasants are raw recruits to newly established industrial concerns often backed by overseas or joint venture capital. Industrial unrest among these as well as established workers in state industries has been increasing.
3. Corruption is almost a way of life within the CCP. Chinese Communist cadres have always enjoyed privileges — food, medical care, servants, housing and other perks depend strictly on a cadre's rank within the party hierarchy. This was how the party was organised during its guerrilla resistance days, even before it took power in 1949. Few cadres could cope with their privileges and rank without succumbing to corruption and abuse of their power. The passing on of such privileges to children is systematically done through giving them the best education, then accelerated career promotion once in the party/government machine. A graphic account of how this operates is in the novel *Wild Swans*, where the author describes how her parents, both senior cadres, struggled hard at not bringing her up as a spoilt child in the '50s and '60s. A number of anti-corruption campaigns have been launched over the last five decades, but usually the top level cadres do not fall victim to such purges unless there is some factional struggle going on inside the party. The most extreme instance was during the Cultural Revolution in the late '60s, when Mao Zedong resorted to desperate measures to regain power. Red Guards were used as storm troopers of anti-corruption and anti-rightist campaigns on a horrendous scale to purge hundreds of thousands of cadres, in Mao's efforts to topple his factional opponents Liu Shao-qi and Deng Xiaoping.

Ban the fundamentalists?

Many socialists believe that we should deal with the Islamic fundamentalists now recruiting among Asian youth in Britain — notably Hizb-ut Tahrir — by a policy of “no platform” for such bigots. We reprint an excerpt from Dave Landau’s argument in *Jewish Socialist* no.33 and a response by Mark Osborn

THE LEFT, specifically the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP), the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and *Socialist Organiser*, have campaigned against bans on Hizb-ut Tahrir, declaring themselves in support of their right to free speech.

What should we do about Hizb-ut Tahrir? I believe that organisations that incite racist violence, advocate genocide against Jews, and promote violence against women, lesbians and gays, should not be allowed a platform any more than fascist organisations like the British National Party. This is not an abstract question about where the line would be drawn regarding free speech. Jewish, Hindu, lesbian and gay and Muslim women students who are not prepared to conform to rules of “modesty” genuinely feel under threat. In colleges of further education in areas like Tower Hamlets the threat to Asian women is very real. This is a question of self-defence.

Does this mean that we should campaign for bans by the state or college authorities? There is a grave danger in this approach. We would, in effect, be forming, or trying to form, a block with the racist state, part of the same European machine which is launching a massive repression against Algerians in France in the name of anti-fundamentalism. I believe this plays into the hands of Hizb-ut Tahrir, confirming their propaganda lie that Jews, lesbians and gays, feminists and other “degenerates” are lined up with imperialism against them. It polarises the issue in the way they want it — fundamentalism v imperialism — rather than the way we want to expose it — the oppressed v racism and fundamentalism.

Organise, campaign, debate, educate!

1. IT IS PERFECTLY true that *Socialist Organiser-Workers’ Liberty* stands for free speech. For us this is a basic matter of political health.

2. It is also true that the SWP, the RCP and ourselves are all opposed to state, student union or college imposed bans on Hizb-ut Tahrir.

Nevertheless we have a different assessment of the fundamentalists than the SWP and RCP. We are quite clear that these groups and movements are utterly reactionary. And we say so, as loudly as we can.

3. The mere fact of Hizb-ut Tahrir being utterly reactionary is not a sufficient justification for the suppression of their right to free speech. Because, as Rosa Luxemburg rightly wrote: “Freedom is always freedom for those who think differently. Not because of any ‘fanaticism’ about ‘justice’, but because all that is wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and ‘freedom’ effectively loses all meaning once it becomes a privilege.”

4. One difference between Hizb-ut Tahrir and the BNP is that it is perfectly possible for socialists to leaflet Hizb-ut Tahrir meetings and talk to their members.

The problem with the fascists is not so much that they hold filthy views — which they do — but that they are on a “war footing” against the left and Black and Jewish people.

If it was just a matter of discussion, surely we believe we could win the arguments.

5. Do Hizb-ut Tahrir say bigoted things? Yes, of course! They are bigots, what do you expect? The point is that they do not — now, in Britain — have the same policy as the nazis, of physical attacks.

So, in these conditions, what should our response be? Why not argue with Hizb-ut Tahrir? Sure, we may not convince the hardcore of their membership, but we can aim to offer a socialist alternative to the alienated youth that turn up to hear their message.

6. We are debating Hizb-ut Tahrir at our *Workers’ Liberty* summer school in July. Are you intending to break up this meeting? If not, why not?

Why are we bothering to discuss with them? Because Muslim fundamentalism is a real issue in the colleges and elsewhere, and we want our members and the left to be well acquainted with their ideas, in order to be able to tackle them adequately.

7. What is the problem with banning groups?

a. Limited “gains” from denial of free speech are often, in the end, counterproductive — even in their own terms.

The actual issue — the politics of the fundamentalists — becomes muddled up with another issue — the question of free speech.

The offended party is offered the opportunity to organise a backlash, under the very powerful, emotive banner of defence of free speech.

b. We have no interest in creating a precedent for the banning of “extremists.” Generally these bans are used against the left.

c. Most importantly there is an issue of political principle: we should not — especially after the experience of Stalinism — educate the left in the spirit of stopping people speaking if we do not like them.

There is a lot of this degeneracy about already (go to an SWP meeting and try to sell *Socialist Organiser*, then try to speak in the “discussion”). It is deeply unhealthy. After all, what sort of socialism are we actually fighting for? Another gulag?

8. Student unions run or influenced by members of *Workers’ Liberty* certainly do demand that colleges refuse fascists meeting rooms.

However there are two points that should be made about this:

a. It is subordinate to a policy of mass mobilisation against the fascists.

b. It is not done in the name of denial of the fascists’ right to free speech. It is demanded in the name of our right to defend ourselves from the immediate threat of physical attack.

9. What if lesbian and gay, Muslim or other students are ‘intimidated’?

Well, it depends what we are talking about. *Physical* attacks or *saying* things that are unpleasant? My attitude depends on what you mean by ‘intimidated.’

And what next? Do I try to stop students who favour immigration controls (the vast majority, outside a small group of left activists), from speaking in union meetings? Someone might say something offensive. Someone’s feelings might be hurt. Yes, that might happen. And what’s the answer? Organising, campaigning, educating. That’s the answer, not banning.

10. How to tackle Hizb-ut Tahrir?

In March our members organised a large meeting with Bengali feminist Taslima Nasrin as part of a political campaign against the fundamentalists inside the student movement. We wanted to show the modern, secular alternative to fundamentalism.

We leaflet and lobby the fundamentalists’ meetings.

We must not give up the socialist struggle for free speech by making free speech conditional!

Algerian women rally for equality

.....
Baya Benyahia from the new Algerian women's group FAUED spoke to Workers' Liberty
.....

THE SITUATION of women has not changed on the legal level. Since 1984 there has been a Family Code which means that a woman does not have the same rights as a man, for example she is not the legal guardian of her children after a divorce even if she has custody of them. The legal guardian is always a man. The woman cannot keep the family home.

Fundamentalist ideology has had increasing influence since the 1970s. It has recruited from people's dissatisfaction with the government.

Now the threats are becoming more physical. Many women have to wear the veil at work or in the streets. The fundamentalists demand the abolition of mixed workplaces and mixed schools. Fewer young girls go to school; fewer women go out to work. According to the ILO, only 4.2 per cent of women now go out to work.

In the universities, groups of fundamentalist students threaten women. Some women continue to study, veiled; others have quit.

It is still possible to go on the streets without a veil. In Algiers, you find young women wearing mini-skirts and shorts as a reaction against the fundamentalists.

The fundamentalists are stronger in the big cities than in the countryside, because of the economic difficulties. They recruit especially among young men who feel obliged to support their families but cannot find work.

Some women support the fundamentalists, too, and often these are educated women who think they will get a say in the future if they go along with the fundamentalists, and refuse to believe that the fundamentalists will use violence.

A lot of poorer women wear the veil for reasons of prudence, without necessarily being fundamentalists. Housewives will go to the mosque so that their family will behave better towards them. And lots of young people go to the mosque because of the housing crisis. They live with their whole family in one or two rooms, and they do not want to be at home all the time. They go to the mosque because it is cheap and warm and there are people to talk to. And then the political activists latch



Attacked by the fundamentalists for not wearing the veil, this woman student dies later in hospital

on to them.

Algeria has an economic crisis, and a very large proportion of young people in the population. Those are the root problems.

The opposition includes two branches of the Algerian Communist Party, who are oriented to the old official "socialist" policies. Ben Bella's party, the MDA, wants to be simultaneously Islamicist and liberal, and to some extent it reproduces the old ideology of the FLN [the old ruling party]. The RCD stands for a specific Berber cultural identity [against oppression by Algeria's Arab majority], and has also rallied some non-Berber intellectuals. The FFS [Socialist Forces Front], also "Berberist", does not, I think, have much of an activist base left in Algeria: a lot of its activists are in exile.

It has been difficult to unite democrats both against the fundamentalists and against a regime which people no longer want. There were women's demonstrations against the Family Code, but then all attempts at unity would fall under the domination of one party or another.

Our movement comes from the idea of bringing together women from different parties and associations on the principle of equal rights. The founding meeting was on 8 March 1995. Ten per cent of the women there were in veils.

What about Algerian immigrants in France? A lot of them reckon that they have more than enough problems to deal with in France. They are very frightened of being contaminated by what is going on in Algeria. Some feel troubled by what is going in Algeria, but do not know what to do about it. In the meantime, they have to struggle in France against the fascists.

In the short term, I can see no perspec-

tive in Algeria. Only an economic and social perspective for the young people who cannot find jobs and livelihoods can offer a way forward. The IMF will do nothing but make the situation worse.

An economic programme should demand that the corrupt and predatory state ceases to have a monopoly over all activity. It should call for equal rights. But I think jobs for all are not possible with the current set-up in industry. Small businesses must be allowed to develop, under control, but not control for the profit of a tiny handful of people. We must get rid of the old nomenklatura and have an economic programme.

World capitalism is offering no alternatives. It is not possible to go on like this. In Europe, too, social exclusion and unemployment are being created. We can only deal with these problems together.

Fascism recruits from people's hatred of outsiders, and so does fundamentalism. But the USA has a position which is not against the fundamentalist movements. The fundamentalists are heavily supported by Saudi Arabia, which is the USA's ally. These are groups which do not close the door on capitalism.

I do not think the fundamentalists can take power yet, but if the situation continues, certainly repression will not deal with the problem. More and more young people are growing up socially excluded and need to believe that one day things will be different. But no opposition party proposes a clear economic programme. ■

● FAUED — Algerian Women United for Equality of Rights — c/o MFAD, B35, 19 rue Augustin Thierry, 75019 Paris.

Campaigning for civil rights

By Les Dean

I'VE BEEN campaigning around civil rights for disabled people, mainly through my union, Unison, which has a very good disabled members section. Through that I was campaigning on basic trade union issues, but the issue that has galvanised us all over the last year, and made the disabled people's movement a national force, has been civil rights.

That campaign has grabbed public attention, largely because of the direct action of disabled people. We have chained ourselves to trains and buses, crawled up the steps of the House of Commons, stopped traffic in the centre of London.

Another important factor in building the movement was the Government's crass mishandling of the civil rights issue. Roger Berry, a Labour MP, brought a Private Member's Bill calling for civil rights, which the government opposed. Instead of submitting it to a vote they filibustered, and the Bill ran out of debating time.

The furore which followed that episode forced the government to realise disabled people wanted rights. To be seen to be doing something they introduced their own bill — the Disability Discrimination Bill. This is a good name for the bill, people think, because, for the first time ever, it *legalises* discrimination against the disabled. In its original form, it lays down "circumstances in which less favourable treatment is justified."

Employers can discriminate against disabled applicants for jobs if they are "unsuitable" or "less suitable" than other applicants, or if their disability "impedes or would impede the performance of any duties." Together with the scrapping of the 3% disabled employee quota this is tantamount to saying disabled people should not be able to work for a living, but should rely on inadequate benefits, (also under attack through the Incapacity Benefit legislation!) stay at home, out of society's sight.

Shops etc. can refuse service to disabled people "in order not to endanger the health and safety of any person."

The only criterion for making those judgements need be "reasonable opinion", that is, nothing more than the prejudices against disabled people already held by society, with no regard to what disabled people need or want.

Now the bill is in the Lords, and there are big debates about our attitude to it. Jack Ashley helped to amend the bill in the House of Lords. He's saying: "We've put in all these amendments, we've really improved the bill, the government isn't going to be able to take these amendments out, we're making some progress here. Let's win what we can."

That's one end of the spectrum of the argument. At the other end people say that the legislation legalises discrimination

against disabled people. Unison takes this position and opposes the bill.

DISABLED PEOPLE are not organised in an adequately coherent way, but they are becoming more so around the civil rights issue. The great thing about the last two or three years has been the flowering of grass-roots organisations right across the country. People are doing things they would never have done before: demonstrating, organising pickets, putting pressure on politicians.

It's exciting, because you're challenging the assumptions about disabled people. What's expected of us is that we sit at home, do nothing (*can't* do anything), and wait for someone to come round and make us a cup of tea. We are not *supposed* to be active in society. We're passive victims, people feel sorry for. Now we are taking positive action!

It is like we've broken out of a prison — the real prison of our own homes, and also the prison of other people's expectations.

There is an umbrella campaign linking the different groups fighting for civil rights — from the charities like RADAR and disabled people's organisations like the British Council for Disabled People, to grass-roots organisations.

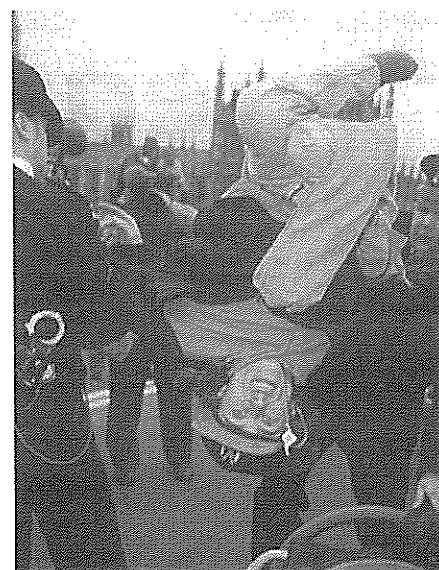
The problem with the campaign is that it is dominated by organisations which started off as charitable trusts of one sort or another and had a very Victorian, philanthropic style; organisations whose purpose was to give things to poor disabled people, people who needed to be looked after and cared for. Of course, this is the whole ideology that we are trying to change.

Such organisations have solidarity with disabled people, but they are staffed by paid workers who don't usually have direct experience of disability. Their ideas are not necessarily the same as those of people at the grass roots of the campaign.

Such organisations have changed over the years. For example, the Spastics Society changed its name to Scope, because they wanted a name that wasn't so obviously, excruciatingly, awful! But these changes have largely come about in response to grass-roots pressure. Individual activists working at the grass roots of the disabled movement have altered people's thinking, and the way people relate to disability.

WHAT DO we mean by full civil rights? Put simply: we want to take part in all aspects of society in the same way that anyone else can. At the moment we can't, not because we are disabled but because society isn't geared up to deal with our difference.

In terms of the separate issues that make up civil rights, there is a reluctance to prioritise one particular issue over another. There is a very important reason for that. The disabled people's movement is very diverse. We need to include everybody's concerns and find demands that unite us.



The slogan "civil rights now" unifies everything, and has given something for all of us to struggle around.

People who are not disabled are getting interested in these issues. The debates we have had — what do we mean by civil rights? what is a "disabled person"? — are slowly becoming issues for the wider labour movement. At the first Unison conference, some people were pretty hostile to the demands of the disabled members section, particularly when we complained about access. But this year the attitude was very different. The conference discussed and passed *all* our motions.

ONE OF our motions said a Labour government should enact full civil rights for disabled people in its first term. This is a very basic question of equality. If Labour won't do this, it is sanctioning discrimination against disabled people. This attitude wouldn't do for black people or for women, and it won't do for us.

Although civil rights legislation can't do away with prejudice and discrimination it sets down civilised standards society should aspire to. It gives individual disabled people a standard against which to judge employers and service providers, a framework of legally enforceable rights.

Any Labour government led by Blair will no doubt argue that it would cost employers, industry, public services etc. too much to put full civil rights into practice straight away — the same kind of argument Blair makes against setting a minimum wage.

We have to win the argument that a Labour government can fund equality through cuts in military spending, and taxing people the Tories made rich or richer while, at the same time, they were impoverishing and ignoring disabled people.

The action of disabled people themselves has forced the labour movement to take up our campaigns. We have to keep up pressure inside the unions and on the Labour Party to give us our human rights. Nothing less will do. ■

On 14 July 1789 a motley crew of ordinary Parisians and part-time soldiers stormed the most hated symbol of despotic rule in France, the Bastille prison in Paris. It was the first decisive act of the great French Revolution that was to transform the face of Europe, through revolutionary war, mobilising people in a way never seen before and in creating the roots of modern politics and socialism. Mark Sandell looks at the events.



14 July 1789: start of the French Revolution

The storming of the Bastille

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION was the classic example of a bourgeois revolution. As historian Albert Soboul put it "The French Revolution constitutes the crowning achievement of a long economic and social evolution that made the bourgeoisie the master of the world."

Understanding the French Revolution — and how a revolution built on mass support for the ideas of 'liberty, fraternity, and equality' could usher in the dictatorship of capital — can teach us a great deal about the modern world.

In 1789 France, like much of Europe, was ruled by a powerful centralised monarchy. It had evolved out of the feudal system of the Middle Ages. Feudalism was a system based on warlords taking tribute from peasants who held patches of land in their domain. The lord was not only the economic boss but also the political ruler and military leader over the peasants — serfs — who were tied to a small piece of land that they had to live off as well as providing the lord with a part of their crop or work on his lands.

Feudalism had been mutating for centuries before 1789. Class struggles had shaken it. A series of peasant revolts in the 14th century forced the aristocracy to abolish or reform full-blown serfdom in western (though not in eastern) Europe. In 18th century France the aristocracy (the lords) were still the ruling class, and the peasants owed them various feudal dues and obligations, yet only about 10% of peasants were serfs.

80% of people still worked the land, but the cities were growing stronger and richer. Production for sale was well-established, and a class of merchants well-developed. In Paris half the adult population were wage workers, though they did not yet form a class clearly distinct from the large numbers of self-employed "working petty bourgeoisie". Small workshops employed only one or two assistants alongside the master. Many workers depended on casual tasks as messengers, carriers, servants, gardeners, builders.

Politically things had changed too. The old feudal system of local warlords, in shifting alliances, ♦

had been replaced after a series of long wars by powerful centralising "absolutist" monarchies. The French kings were a outstanding example. The kings of France had huge power and wealth. They built vast palaces and demanded the attendance of huge numbers of aristocrats at their courts. They tended to balance between the aristocratic landlords and the increasingly wealthy capitalists and merchants.

The state still rested on bastardised feudal forms. Tax collectors and magistrates were not employed as in a capitalist state, but were aristocrats who bought their positions and creamed off money into their own pockets. This cut against the monarchy's drive to centralise power and left local anomalies in taxes, law and regulations. This was a brake on trade, and capitalist development.

Alongside the monarchist state were the hierarchy of the Catholic church who extracted their own tax from peasants and who were exempt from states taxes. The church and the state did sometimes clash but the clergy gave money gifts to the state in place of tax and many of the church leaders were big landlords too, i.e. part of the aristocracy.

Taxes were heavy on working people. For the peasant they added to the burden of the share of the crop the lord took. For the craft worker they cut into the little they made. The aristocracy paid relatively less tax, although the less well-off aristocracy, squeezed by inflation and stagnating agriculture, deeply resented taxation.

The corrupt old ruling classes based on the land were in conflict with new classes based in the cities, but at the time this was not obvious to either side. It took a conflict within the aristocratic ruling class to open the way for the decisive class conflict to be ignited.

From the mid 18th century the French state had faced economic crisis. The monarchy needed more money, and so from 1751 the King's ministers had tried to reform taxes. The financial crisis was made deeper when the French joined the USA in its War of Independence. Ironically, the Americans were fighting against the British crown, and with the slogan 'no taxation without representation'. The ideas of the American revolution had an effect on some young French officers who fought in America. The Marquis de Lafayette was but one example.

The aristocracy opposed tax reforms that would cut even further into their power and their pockets. Using the local councils of aristocrats and clergy, the "Parlements", and tapping into the modern ideas of the "Enlightenment", they challenged the King's right to levy new taxes without consent.

The new ideas they used to support their opposition to "despotic" royal rule were the ideas of thinkers who challenged the old theology of the divine right of kings — thinkers like Rousseau who were

humanists stressing individual rights and freedom.

In their battle against the king, the aristocrats were most definitely playing with fire, but neither the monarchy nor the lords realised what they had started.

The tax reform planned for 1787 brought things to a head. The King wanted to force the aristocracy to pay more tax. The Parlements raged against this 'despotism'. Precisely because of the feudal nature of the state the aristocracy were able to refuse to carry out reforms. The Assembly of Notables called to agree new taxes threw out the proposals.

Frustrated by the blocking of the reforms the ministers tried a crackdown exiling the Paris Parlement and suspending all the Parlements. This led to an explosion of opposition.

Over 500 different pamphlets were published in only four months. The capitalist middle class and 'lower orders' joined the Parlements' cry against despotism on

"The corrupt old ruling classes based on the land were in conflict with new classes based in the cities, but at the time this was not obvious to either side."

behalf of 'the nation'. Riots broke out in Bordeaux, Dijon, Grenoble, Pau, Rennes and Toulouse. In many places the army proved unreliable, with soldiers and young officers refusing to fire on the crowds.

The King's ministers decided to call the States General in May 1789. The States General, a sort of parliament, had not met since 1614. It consisted of three houses, one of the aristocracy, one of the clergy and one of the 'commoners' — the 'Third Estate'.

The Third Estate, which was meant to represent France's 24 million commoners, had previously sat separately to the other two houses, representing the 200,000 privileged classes. Each house had equal voting power, so the Third Estate could always be out-voted by the other two houses. The demand was raised that the Third Estate be "doubled" and that all the houses should meet together. This was opposed by the vast majority of the aristocracy. In September 1788 the Paris Parlement, leaders of the aristocratic revolt, insisted that the States General stick to the old 1614 model. The King doubled the size of the Third Estate but ordered it to meet separately.

A "patriot" party emerged, demanding a national assembly of all three houses. Most of its supporters were the urban bourgeoisie who dominated the Third Estate, but some radical aristocrats like the Marquis de Lafayette were also "patriots".

The States General met at the King's palace at Versailles, near Paris, on 5 May 1789. Bread in Paris was twice its normal price and riots and peasant revolt.

On 17 June the Third Estate met, joined by a few parish priests, and declared themselves the National Assembly. On 20 June, locked out of their usual meeting place, the Assembly took a solemn oath in an adjoining tennis court not to disperse until a new constitution had been established for France.

The King's attempt to force the Third Estate to meet separately was met by a mass protest. Soldiers refused to fire on the crowd of thousands of Parisians. The King backed down. On 27 June he ordered all the estates to join the National Assembly.

In Paris the revolution was growing. Pamphleteers and journalists established a permanent headquarters at the Palais Royal. Every night thousands of people met to discuss and learn the slogans and directives. The 407 'electors' of the Paris Third Estate (the elections for the Third Estate went through stages) began to meet regularly in the City Hall.

Agitation was carried out in the soldiers' barracks. By the end of June soldiers were marching in Paris shouting "Long live the Third Estate! We are the soldiers of the nation!"

The King began bringing loyal Swiss and German regiments to Versailles. On 11 July he exiled Necker, a minister who proposed acceptance of a National Assembly, and replaced him with a nominee of the Queen, the Baron de Breteuil.

In Paris four days' rioting burnt down the hated customs posts that collected tax on goods entering or leaving Paris.

All night on 12 and 13 of July the Palais Royal directed a search for arms in Paris. The whole population was arming itself, not just the middle classes but also the poor and the unemployed.

Worried by the 'dangerous classes', the Paris electors set about organising a militia. They specifically excluded all homeless people and even most wage-workers, but this did not stop such people arming themselves, and the City Hall was surrounded by crowds who forced the electors to give out weapons and powder.

As dawn broke on 14 July the search for arms found spectacular success in the Hotel des Invalides, with 30,000 muskets being taken by 8,000 citizens. The cry went up 'to the Bastille' — a hated prison of the old regime but also a likely place for arms to be found.

At the Bastille the crowd were able to force down the drawbridge. The Governor ordered his troops to fire, killing 98 besiegers. At 1.30 pm some soldiers



The Great Revolution's symbol of liberty

arrived with cannons. They threatened to fire, and the Governor surrendered. The anger of the crowd could not be contained, and the Governor and six of his troops were killed in the storming of the hated prison castle.

Over the following weeks, in every major French city or town, events echoed the storming of the Bastille, with militias being established and bourgeois city councils taking over.

The peasants' rumbling revolt, which had been sporadic since 1788, driven by poverty, flared up in 'the Great Fear' (late July and early August), as the belief spreading amongst peasants that the aristocracy had a secret plot to kill them all but the King and the National Assembly had abolished feudal dues.

The storming of the Bastille was of world historic importance. It was the first decisive act of the masses in the French Revolution. Drawn into a battle with the old ruling class, the bourgeois had mobilised the urban poor, especially in Paris.

The storming of the Bastille also shows up the tensions within the revolutionary forces. The bourgeois needed the masses, but the masses had their own wills and

their own needs. The attempt by the Paris electors and the bourgeois in other towns and cities to create a exclusive Garde Nationale, a bourgeois militia, was the first sign of how most of the emerging new ruling class feared the masses.

The storming of the Bastille was only the first act of the revolution. As the revolution unfolded, crises led to increasing radicalisation, driven by the logic of class struggle and the continual revolutionary fervour of the Paris masses. Less revolutionary leaders were pushed aside for more committed revolutionaries. The counter-revolutionary aristocracy fled or were guillotined. The church's land and power were broken up. The bourgeois even had to "suffer" price controls and punitive raids for food and goods. Only after the bulk of the feudal system had been destroyed did the bourgeois fully reassert its domination in a bloody counter revolution against its own revolutionary allies, the working people of Paris.

For the first time in history on such a scale the mass of ordinary people had been drawn into political debate and action. At the height of the Revolution hundreds of discussions clubs existed in Paris. They would meet several times a

week, Paris was covered in wall newspapers. Speakers spread the latest revolutionary demands. The ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality drove millions of French people to fight for a better world.

Tragically there was never a chance of the bourgeois French Revolution creating real liberty, equality and fraternity. Even the most radical party, the Jacobins, were committed to private property and capitalism. Only a small group of utopian

"Despite continual resistance by the poor and the masses, the Revolution was to pave the way for capitalism in France."

communists, the Conspiracy of Equals led by Gracchus Babeuf, wanted to end material inequality, but they aimed to do it through an enlightened dictatorship.

Given France still had famine and shortage there was little material basis for social equality, and as the revolution showed the vital element for socialism was missing. Even in Paris there was no cohesive wage-working class. The political ideas of the Paris poor were confused: a republic of small traders with controls on big business and prices was as far as their experience could take them. The diversity and conflicting interests of the Paris masses denied them the unity of a mass working class forced to unite in unions to defend wages and conditions.

Despite continual resistance by the poor and the masses, the Revolution was to pave the way for capitalism in France, driving the citizens of the revolutionary nation into the hell holes of capitalist exploitation. Yet in the process the vast majority of the citizens of France have become part of a working class that produces, along with the world's working class, a plentiful supply of goods upon which a truly equal society, a socialist society, can be built. Another revolution will be needed to create that new society, but the modern world and the ideas of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' would not have been possible without the smashing of the old feudal order. In the roll of honour of those who smashed fetters on humanity, the citizens who stormed the Bastille will always come first.

Vive la révolution! 🇫🇷

Not Marx — Marx and Engels!

To mark the Engels centenary, Tom Willis takes a look at the theoretical revolution carried through by both Marx and Engels in 1844-5.

IT WAS THE new understanding of labour as the *diffentia specifica* of human beings, jointly worked out by both men, that paved the way for Marx's devastating critique of capitalism. If we are to honour Engels' contribution to Marxism then this is where we must start.

Frederick Engels died 100 years ago this month. For nearly four decades he was Marx's closest collaborator, playing a pivotal role in the development of that fusion of French socialism, English political economy and classical German philosophy that became Marxism: the theory and practice of working class revolution.

Marx and Engels worked together continuously from the beginning of their intellectual partnership in 1844-5 until Marx's death in 1883, corresponding almost daily. It was Engels who prepared *Capital Volumes II and III* for publication.

Though Marx was undoubtedly the greater talent, at every stage in their collaboration there was interaction and mutual development and not a simple pupil-teacher relationship. Yet Engels has not received the credit he deserves.

In place of a rounded assessment of his real input in the formation of the new world view, Engels has become a convenient target for bourgeois critics and academic Marxists alike, who would seek to divorce elements of Marx's critique of capitalism from his overall materialist and dialectical outlook, and instead, incorporate a sanitised Marxism into one or other stand of radical or not so radical sociology. Given this situation, it is necessary to restate Engels' real legacy.

In doing so it will become perfectly clear that the traditional academic cliché about the supposed division between the subtle, humanist-inclined "young Marx" and the crass positivist and vulgar evolutionist older Engels is simply so much pseudo-intellectual gibberish.

Let us pose the issues as sharply as possible. There is a direct intellectual continuity between the collaborative work of Marx and Engels, such as *The German Ideology* and Engels' last writings like *Ludwig Feuerbach* and *Dialectics of Nature*. There is a much greater distance between the really early Marx of 1843-4 and the first clear expressions of Marx and Engels' new outlook, one year later, in *The German Ideology* and Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.

In 1843 Marx expresses the revolutionary role of the working class for the first time. In his *Introduction to a critique of Hegel's Phi-*

losophy of Right Marx identifies the proletariat as a class with "radical chains... which can only redeem itself by a total redemption of humanity."

But at this stage the struggle of the working class and Marx's critique of the state and civil society are not systematically linked together.

Marx has discovered that the situation of the working class is so desperate that it requires a revolution against the old order. Thus the working class will "realise philosophy". Yet the link between the two — between theory and practice — can only be developed by an analysis of capitalism and a study of political economy. It is only at this point that Marx becomes interested in Engels' critique of society in which people produce as "dispersed atoms without consciousness of your species", in an "unconscious, thoughtless manner" (*Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, 1844).

Marx takes up the story: "Frederick Engels, with whom... I maintained a constant exchange of ideas by correspondence, had by another road (compare his 'Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844') arrived at the same result as I, and when in the spring of 1845 he also settled in Brussels, we resolved to work out in common the opposition of our view to the ideological view of German philosophy, in fact, to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience. The resolve was carried out in the form of a criticism of post-Hegelian philosophy."

"The manuscript... had long reached its place of publication in Westphalia when we received the news that circumstances did not allow of it being printed. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticisms of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose — self clarification." (*The German Ideology*).

Marxism, according to Marx himself, came into being as a result of intellectual convergence and collaboration between Marx and Engels.

What was the new world view? It was no pre-conceived philosophical schema to which reality had to be made to fit, in the style of a Hegel. Marx and Engels defined it very clearly in the *German Ideology*:

"The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way."

"The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the

rest of nature...

"Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life..."

"As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce."

To summarise: history is made by real individuals in definite circumstances, not by some independent power outside of or above us. Society is a natural product, the outcome of social labour which is the defining characteristic of humanity in relation to the rest of nature. People must distinguish between the labour process "what they produce" and its social form "how they produce".

It is this understanding of the natural necessity of the labour process as distinguished from the precise social form through which it is carried out at a given time that provides the philosophic basis for three crucial elements in Marxism:

- (i) the critique of political economy
- (ii) the materialistic theory of knowledge
- (iii) Engels' theory of human origins, developed in *The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*.

First, the origin of political economy. In *Capital* Marx says this about the labour process:

"Labour is in the first place a process in which both man and Nature participate and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature..."

"We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi and to which he must subordinate his will."

In *The Grundrisse* — the rough draft for

Capital — Marx also used the notion of social labour to underpin his critique of the unreal, abstract, individualism of bourgeois economics — a critique of individualism that reminds us of Engels' comments on production as "dispersed atoms" some 15 years earlier.

"To begin with the question under discussion is material production. Individuals producing in a society, and hence the socially determined production of individuals is of course the point of departure. The solitary and isolated hunter or fisherman, who serves Adam Smith and Ricardo as a starting point, is one of the unimaginative fantasies of eighteenth-century romances à la Robinson Crusoe... It is the anticipation of "bourgeois society" which began to evolve in the sixteenth century and in the eighteenth century made giant strides towards maturity. The individual in this society of free competition seems to be rid of the natural ties etc, which made him an appendage of a particular, limited aggregation of human beings in previous historical epochs. The prophets of the eighteenth century... envisaged this individual — a product of the dissolution of feudal society on the one hand and of the productive forces evolved since the sixteenth century on the other — as an ideal whose existence belongs to the past. They saw this individual not as an historical result, but as the starting-point of history; not as something evolving in the course of history, but posited by nature, because for them this individual was in conformity with nature, in keeping with their idea of human nature..."

"The farther back we trace the course of history, the more does the individual, and accordingly also the producing individual, appear to be dependent and to belong to a large whole. At first, the individual in a still quite natural manner is part of the family and of the tribe which evolves from the family; later he is part of a community of one of the different forms of the community which arise from the conflict and the merging of the tribes. It is not until the eighteenth century that in the bourgeois society the various forms of the social texture confront the individual as merely means towards his private ends, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, namely that of the isolated individuals, is precisely the epoch of the (as yet) most highly developed social (according to this standpoint, general) relations. Man is a social animal in the most literal sense: he is not only a social animal, but an animal that can individualise himself only within society. Production by an isolated individual outside society — a rare event, which might occur when a civilised person who has already absorbed the dynamic social forces is accidentally cast into the wilderness — is just as preposterous as the development of speech without individuals who live together and talk to one another..."

It is precisely Marx's understanding that human beings are social animals that can "individualise themselves only within society" that powers the denunciation of capitalism as an inhuman system.

When Marx came to deal with the superficial critics of the labour theory of value he

once more returned to the notion of social labour he had jointly worked out with Engels over two decades earlier. He put the issues like this in a letter to his friend Kugelmann:

"All the gossip about the necessity of proving the concept of value is based on the most complete ignorance, as much of the problem under discussion as of the scientific method. Every child knows that any nation which stopped work — I will not say for one year — but just for a couple of weeks, would die. And every child knows that the volume of products corresponding to the various needs calls for various and quantitatively determined amounts of total social labour. It is self-evident that this necessity of the division of social labour in certain proportions is not at all negated by the specific form of social production but can only alter its mode of appearance. Natural laws can never be negated. Only the form in which those laws are applied can be altered in historically different situations."

The fundamental difference between Marxism and post-Marxist bourgeois "neo-classical" economics lies in the basic concepts on which the two theories are built up.

"In place of a rounded assessment of his real input in the formation of the new world view, Engels has become a convenient target for bourgeois critics and academic Marxists alike"

Marx's theory starts from an analysis of human labour in society, and the specific social form that the products of labour take under capitalism: the commodity form, things to be bought or sold on the market.

Bourgeois "neo-classical" economics turns the real world on its head. Its starting point is an absurd, contentless abstraction: the idea that all goods possess "general utility" in a market made up of atomised individuals who ideally possess perfect knowledge of all commodities.

Of course, the idea of any specific really existing thing being useful in general is ridiculous. Buckets and ladders are not interchangeable. Your CD player will not work as a washing machine.

On the other hand, Marx's basic notion of social labour is something real. It provides the only non-tautological explanation of money.

If there is one Marx quote that the anti-Engels lumpen-intelligentsia love it is his first thesis on Feuerbach.

"The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is con-

ceived only in the form of the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism — which of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. Hence, in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judicial manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity."

The above lines are supposed to prove that Marx would have been no party to Engels' "crude" reflective materialism according to which knowledge is simply a reflection of matter in motion.

Unfortunately for the anti-Engels brigade, Marx and Engels were both perfectly capable of combining the two aspects in a coherent whole. For instance at the same time as the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx observed "When reality is depicted philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence." Now if depicting reality isn't a "reflection" theory of knowledge, what is?

Engels — who rather inconveniently for his academic critics is the man responsible for publishing the *Theses on Feuerbach* ("the brilliant germ of the new world outlook") — had no problem fusing the two aspects either, as he wrote in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*:

"But the question of the relations of thinking and being has yet another side: in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of the cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality? In philosophical language this question is called the question of the identity of thinking and being..."

"There is yet a set of different philosophers — those who question the possibility of any cognition, or at least of an exhaustive cognition of the world. To them, among the more modern ones, belong Hume and Kant, and they have played a very important role in philosophic development. What is decisive in the refutation of this view has already been said by Hegel, in so far as this was possible from an idealist standpoint. The materialistic additions made by Feuerbach are more ingenious than profound. The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical crotchets is practice, namely, experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable "thing-in-itself." The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained just such "things-in-themselves" until organic chemistry began to produce them one after another, whereupon the "thing-in-itself" became a "thing for us."

Saving our history from academics and sects

John McIlroy interviews
Al Richardson, editor of
the magazine
Revolutionary History

JOHN MCILROY: Over the last decade or so the history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain has made significant strides. The three long interlinked studies written by you and the late Sam Bornstein in *Two Steps Back* (1983), *Against the Stream* (1986) and *War and the International* (1986) have been important in this. This work provides us with the most detailed address thus far available of the movement in Britain, based on extended scrutiny of the archive as well as important oral testimony. Harry Wicks' *Keeping My Head: the Memoirs of a British Bolshevik* (1992) is a welcome addition to our understanding of Stalinism and the early years of Trotskyism in Britain and, thanks to the work of Logie Barrow, an important experiment in oral history. Harry Ratner's *Reluctant Revolutionary* (1994) has also attracted wide interest and is notable for its detailed documentation of the life of a militant in the 1940s and 50s and its criticism of the Trotskyist tradition.

And then of course there are from 1988 the 20 issues of *Revolutionary History* emphasising the international experience and the recovery of neglected aspects of Trotskyism and providing a focus for those interested in developing the history of the movement. I am not forgetting the archive the Socialist Platform comrades have assembled as a resource for future research.

This has to be seen in its context: the depressing paucity of historical material available in the 1960s and 70s. Apart from self-serving myths peddled by Healy and others there were one or two valuable contributors such as Reg Groves *The Balham Group* (1974) and often incomplete bits and pieces by comrades such as Harry Wicks, Pat Jordan, Jim Higgins and so on¹. The ice was broken in the late 1970s by the scholarly contributions of John Archer and Martin Upham². But these remain

unpublished and not easily accessible whilst John Callaghan's *British Trotskyism* (1984) was marred by its limited use of the sources and, often, a failure to understand its subject.

Perhaps we could begin by talking about how your books came to be written.

AL RICHARDSON: For some years Sam had been collecting archives. He had a dream of setting up a working-class library where people could come and freely consult them. As we confirmed when we were doing the research for the books, unless you're involved in academe they won't give you access to a lot of the documents and archives in the universities. This is a method by which academics are making their reputations, and they want to hog the documents themselves.

What Sam tried to do first of all was contact bodies like the old ILP and Militant and get them to set up a committee to set aside a room somewhere as a beginning. The ILP was not mad keen — they have their own history and archives — and Ted Grant's attitude was "we are the proper heirs of the movement and it's all ours anyway!" So that never came about.

I was introduced to Sam by Walter Kendall at an Institute of Workers' Control meeting in the East End in the late 1960s, and later on I met him at the Greek café at the back of Charlotte Street where Sam Levy and the people around *Socialist Current* used to meet on Saturday nights³. I don't know whether I'd drunk too much or what, but Sam asked me if I was willing to work with him on the history of the movement. I was stupid enough to say "yes", little knowing the amount of work it would involve. Thirteen years later I found out — that's how long it took gathering the materials together, doing the interviews, writing it all up. The two main books came out in 1986, strangely enough, coinciding with the explosion of the WRP — a poetic link. So it would have been around 1973 we began the work.

A special note of urgency was sounded at that time by some very bad books that were coming out which made reference to the history of the Trotskyist movement in a very inaccurate way. There was a book by Tariq Ali which said silly things like that the RSL was bigger than the WIL in 1944⁴. It was obvious Tariq wasn't telling deliberate lies; he'd heard this sort of nonsense

through the grapevine, and had no way of checking it. There was so much tripe coming out, either factionally slanted or from pure ignorance, and we thought we had a duty to set this right.

The first book, *Two Steps Back* was accidental. We never intended to write that. There were plenty of histories of Stalinism around then, even more now. But we found during the research on the history of Trotskyism that in writing it up we'd have to stop every so often and write a chapter on what was happening in the wider labour movement and the Stalinist movement. In the end we decided to get this out first as a separate little book.

As for the work involved, I don't know how we managed it, really. Neither Sam nor I were well off. I had a very taxing job. Sam was then still working, but not in the best of health. He worked in the distribution trade; later had a job in the Civil Service. We wanted to talk to as many people who had been involved as was practical, but also fully explore the documents. Travelling around was difficult. Fortunately, Sam had such good repute in the movement that the people he'd not spoken to in years and had factional disagreement with when last he'd spoken to them seemed to have such a high regard for him, that when we went to see them they invariably looked after us, gave us interviews, treated us in a very courteous way. Even some people I contacted out of the blue that Sammy had never known, like John Robinson, were very courteous⁵. Only rarely did we get a refusal from anybody.

JM: How did you go about getting the books published? What difficulties did you encounter there?

AR: We got a bit narked with the way things went once we'd actually written the books, having done that work which we knew nobody else had done. Nobody else had gone into that detail, nobody else had the contacts anyway. We knew that the groups that produced little potted histories about their past, like Healy's *Problems of the Fourth International*, had no intention whatsoever of publishing anything that told the truth. So we realised we couldn't expect the left-wing groups to finance and publish our work, particularly as the organisations which were most open and interested in the past were the smaller groups anyway. They gave our work a good reception, but

they often had small resources.

An amusing process started when we took the books around different publishers. Interlinks were still going — they weren't interested. *New Left Review* and Merlin Press didn't even deign to reply to our letters. When we took *War and the International* to Pluto Press we got an outrageous reception. They kept the manuscript for all of three days. When we went to collect it, it was put contemptuously across the table by Kuper who said: "It's not something I'd like to put into the hands of young people joining the movement." That was the attitude of the publishers who could have published and wouldn't, and we realised left-wing publishing was a mafia. So we did it ourselves. And they sold out. Obviously we didn't print enough.

JM: What kind of reception did the books receive on the left? Tell us a little about the reaction in the socialist press.

AR: I know from people in Militant that they denounced the books. They let Ted denounce them in their internal bulletin, they daren't attack them openly. And yet within a week of *War and the International* coming out, all their full-timers were walking around with it. There was a two-faced reception. But I would emphasise that we got a favourable response and a platform from some of the smaller groups.

An amusing example was the WRP. It slammed the book in one of its publications and praised it in another! Even more amusing was the behaviour of my own ex-organisation, the IMG. In its newspaper of the time they were discussing the experience of the Popular Front. A friend of Sam's, Rhona Badham, wrote in and pointed out that this was fully discussed in *Two Steps Back*. They published the letter, but eliminated the reference to the book! I'm afraid our faith in the honesty of the left press was not increased.

JM: *Socialist Platform* has gone on to publish other works by Frank Ridley, pamphlets on CLR James and Harry Wicks, as well as the books by Ratner and Wicks mentioned earlier. What prompted this?

AR: Well, we had to finance our books ourselves. Sam had just retired from the Civil Service and all he got was a lump sum of around £5,000. That's what financed the books. And there's an irony there in itself. Dave Hyland from one of the ex-Healy groups was speaking in Bristol and on one point he was challenged from the floor by two friends of ours: "What about what Bornstein and Richardson wrote about this?" His reply was (and he didn't know a thing about us): "Those two are living quite well, off the proceeds of those books paid for by the bourgeoisie." And it was all on poor Sam's retirement money!

But the main point of the story is that because people bought the books, at the

end of the exercise we had the same amount of money we started with. And as Sam had given the money to the movement, and his own needs were few, he said: "Let's put it to good use. There are other people like us not being published." So we decided to start publishing other people whom we felt ought to be read.

We started off with Frank Ridley's *The Assassins* and Baghavan's book on philosophy. But we felt our real forte was revolutionary history. And we'd met so many people of high calibre when we did the interviewing for our own books. With people like Harry Wicks and Harry Ratner we realised we were only using them as a resource, but if they were able to express themselves at length they could write just as good if not better books than we could.

With the Wicks book, Logie Barrow had been working on it for years taping Harry. Harry was very modest about his achievements and used to struggle over every word. I don't know how Logie kept his reason. He was transcribing the stuff from interviews, and Harry was checking it a thousand times... and Logie was working in Germany, which can't have helped, and then Harry and his wife had health problems. So the book was never finished to either Harry's or Logie's satisfaction. But it was a gem, as I think most people recognise. And it sold very well. After that Harry Ratner, who'd helped us in our work, became interested and we encouraged him to write his memoirs.

None of it was planned... it was a knock-on effect. People who have been involved politically all their lives don't forget their experiences and their sense of analysis. Wicks and Ratner played prominent parts in the movement, and proved capable of producing superb books themselves.

JM: A very important focus for the continuation of this work and a strong influence on stimulating interest in it has been the journal, *Revolutionary History*, in which you are also involved. Can you say a word or two about its origins, the thinking behind it, how it was established.

AR: John Archer had been attempting to start on a smaller scale — because he'd realised we are a lot more philistine than the French — a journal very much like the *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* or the *Cermtri*⁶. And he'd organised one or two conferences up at the Central London Poly where short papers had been produced, but the thing never got off the ground. Again he ran into the problem that the bigger groups didn't want to know and the smaller groups didn't regard this as a priority — understandably, given their resources.

John himself put in a hell of a lot of work, particularly translating from the *Cahiers*, and we thought it was perhaps time to take up his ideas, and we contacted him and others who were interested. We didn't want to impose some sort of line, whether from the *Cahiers* or whatever — we didn't want to set up a movement separate from

the rest of the movement. So we contacted the groups we thought would be interested, and tried to build up the journal by having delegates from them. We didn't want to dictate to people from outside as to what their history might or might not be. Strangely, this took off.

Our first issue was done practically painlessly in a hurry consisting of all British material that was to hand. And the journal just grew and grew until now it is book size and coming out two or three times a year. It grew organically, not to any deep plan. Sammy had always dreamed of this, but the main preparatory work had been done by John Archer, and he deserves the credit for that.

JM: Let me put two inter-related points. *Revolutionary History* has provided an essential service by reprinting key texts for new audiences. Less frequently it has published analytical articles based on dissection and discussion of original sources. Is there not a need to move in the latter direction, publishing more critically interpretative work? Secondly, you have often advanced a critique of labour history pioneered by Stalinists which inflates and privileges certain interpretations of events. Is there not a need to bring in an alternative revolutionary history more into the mainstream through engaging more with different orthodox viewpoints to achieve legitimacy and avoid introversion and isolation? ▽

Stalin's legacy

Elegy for mechanical Marxism

Utopia plain science had become:
Blind capital itself prepared the
way,
Trained our army; happily was
dumb
— No chance they'd win sweet
History's delay
Or Nature's pardon! We would
gain sure sway,
Sweep gold aside; the workers
would assume
Control of social property, loom
Red Nemesis, avert bourgeois
decay.
And now? Old labour movements
fall apart
And socialism consists of sects,
some mad,
Most religious, inside barricade
Constricted minds, poor as at the
start.
From science to Utopia once
more?
Utopia lies bleeding on the floor.

Jackie Cleary

AR: One conflict of understanding and direction when the magazine and editorial board was set up — and it's interesting, because it's a political conflict as well — was that we were very concerned from our side that this should not just be a magazine that prints documents, that it should attempt to get working-class historians writing their own history. We were also determined it should not just deal with the history of the Trotskyist movement, although the material given our own backgrounds was bound to be weighted in that direction.

So we were concerned about two things. First of all, *Revolutionary History* should not just be a bloody archive of documents for archivologists and sectarians to pore over and pick out what they liked. Secondly, it shouldn't abandon looking at history from a revolutionary viewpoint to the university mafia, the labour historians, the Stalinists and all the rest. Because we felt we have a duty, however small, to look at history as a whole and work out an attitude towards it, and not leave it as the personal property of academics.

And in fact it's very interesting that the first conflict with the groups took place because the Spartacists had a very sectarian attitude to everything, they faxed everything to New York and got replies back, even faxed documents in the same day to block publication of other documents... very silly. But the main thing is that they wanted the magazine to be just archival — if you kept it archival you could use it as a factional club to bang your enemies on the head. The idea that, instead, people should be allowed to think, speak and write about the past, they didn't like so much. But, fortunately, we kept these options open, and it was a battle we won.

We'd like to have more original articles and more people writing for us. We'd like to do two things. One is to encourage people to do their own work, go out, do their own research and write it up. And the other thing is we'd like the organisations which have delegates on our board to commission us, to tell us what their concerns are, to tell us how to get material out on the past that will help us all sort out some of the difficult political problems now facing us. So, in fact, it's a two-way process. We try to make a priority of narrative history, but we want the groups through their delegates on the board to place their own concerns and needs in front of us.

JM: How would you respond to the criticism that the present project of developing *Revolutionary History* is a distraction from political activism today? It privileges the past against the present. It provides a comfortable retreat and weakens the prosecution of the class struggle now.

AR: There are a couple of points I'd make. I accept that the amount of good we can do as revolutionary historians is limited, and it's conditioned by the times we live in. There has been a massive onslaught against the

working class and its institutions, and consequently massive depoliticisation. Blair would not have been able to win his campaign against Clause Four if the entire political level of the movement, owing to the walloping it's received, was not as low as it is, with deep demoralisation.

Therefore we think this is, to a certain degree, a time for doing a bit of rethinking, for examining the lessons of the past to make our movement more effective, particularly in the realm of ideas, for the future. Now let's not give ourselves any delusions that work in revolutionary history is more important than it is. The fact is this: as soon as the working class rises to its feet — and history teaches us it will — when things begin to develop on a massive class basis a project such as ours, chewing over the bones of the past, could become quite a reactionary practice. So we think it is only because of the nature of the present period that, up to a certain point — and I accept it's not the main concern of the class — we are able to do some good in reclaiming the past. Once the period changes our tasks will change.

But there is the other broader question. I'm always interested in the link between so-called left wing theorists and scholars and the wider movement. Kinnock at one meeting put his arm around Eric Hobsbawm and introduced him as "his theoretician." Now to me that's quite right: inasmuch as Kinnock has any ideas, Hobsbawm, in his writings about class, articulated them. In my opinion the role of your left Stalinist academic is a most dangerous, one now and in the future.

For if we leave control of our past in the hands of these people it will be used for their purposes for attacking the working class. It's therefore important in a very small way — we're a very small journal with no resources apart from the left groups — to try to erect a counter-culture to all this. It's very dangerous for the working class to leave its cultural formation, particularly ideas about what it's done, what it's thought, what it's achieved, in the hands of people who have proven themselves its enemies, whether they be Stalinists or mainstream bourgeois academics.

JM: How do you see the future?

AR: As far as *Revolutionary History* is concerned, the board is functioning more effectively, with commissions to go off and research particular topics rather than everything flowing through the editor. We've had an Italian commission which is producing the next issue, and Polish and Sri Lankan commissions working on future issues. They are not limited to people on the editorial board, and they are autonomous. This is the way we'd like to move, commissioning people to go out and find the stuff themselves and write it up.

More generally, I'd like to see a broadening of socialist publishing. I've talked about the hurdles we encountered in getting our books published. The hurdle we met once they were published was distri-

bution networks. It's not just the bad period we're in with left book shops closing down — the distribution networks are very few, and if they don't like you politically you don't get your stuff distributed. The distribution mafia is a problem, and they take such high cuts, something like 50% plus. We've tried umpteen distributors.

It's very important to support new left-wing publishing concerns and new bookshops. Without Housemans and Porcupine Press we'd be quite frankly in a mess, and they should be encouraged. It's very brave in the present climate for Porcupine to set up as a publisher, and I hope and believe others will join in. The best way would be for the smaller left-wing groups, the ones who are serious about the history of the movement, to combine together to set up a publisher without a sectarian notion of what should come out. A counter-culture to Verso, *New Left Review* and the Stalinist outlets remains a crying need. And we are now seeing Manchester University Press publishing books that in the past would have been published by Lawrence and Wishart. ■

Notes

- 1 For example: Jim Higgins 'Ten years for the locust — British Trotskyism 1938-48', *International Socialism* 1964; Pat Jordan, 'Aspects of the history of the International Marxist Group', *IMG Internal Bulletin*, 1972; Richard Kuper, ed., *The Fourth International, Stalinism and the Origins of the International Socialists — Some Documents* (Pluto Press) 1971; John Walters (Ken Tarbuck) 'Some notes on British Trotskyist history', *Marxist Studies*, 2, 1, 1969; Harry Wicks 'British Trotskyism in the 1930s', *International*, 1, 4, 1971.
- 2 John Archer, *Trotskyism in Britain 1931-37*, Ph.D Thesis, Polytechnic of Central London, 1977; Martin Upham, *The history of British Trotskyism to 1949*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Hull, 1980.
- 3 *Socialist Current* was established as a small breakaway from Ted Grant's Revolutionary Socialist League in 1957. See 'Frank Rowe 1928-1994', *Revolutionary History*, 5, 3, 1994.
- 4 Tariq Ali, *The Coming British Revolution* (Cape 1972). The reference is to p.121. The Workers' International League, a split away from the Militant Group, refused to join the fused Revolutionary Socialist League which in 1938 became the official section of the Fourth International. The WIL quickly outgrew the RSL and when the two organisations fused in the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1994 it provided the majority of members. See Bornstein and Richardson *War and the International*.
- 5 John Robinson, a Trotskyist from the 1930s, is best known as a leader of the Left Fraction of the RSL and the RCP in the 1940s.
- 6 The *Cabiers* was developed by a group of intellectuals associated with the OCI. For Cermtrii see Al Richardson, 'Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Mouvement Trotskyiste et Révolutionnaires Internationaux, Paris', *Revolutionary History*, 3, 4, Autumn, 1991.

Why Lenin got Ireland wrong

For decades Lenin's small body of work on Ireland, filtered through a number of Stalinist pamphlets purporting to expound the ideas of "Marx, Engels and Lenin" on Ireland, has helped shape socialists' views. In this, the second article in a series, Sean Matgamna argues that this "Marxist dogmatism" has meant, in fact, giving up on any serious attempt at Marxist analysis of Ireland.

"The attempt... to 'fix' for all time the point of view Marx held in a different epoch was an attempt to use the letter of Marxism against the spirit of Marxism."

Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*

AFTER HIS two short pieces on the 1913 strike, Lenin's comments on the Home Rule crisis of 1914 are his only other writings that can be construed as dealing concretely with Ireland, as distinct from using the relationship of "Ireland" to Britain, the British Empire, and the national question in general as an example of known value in a discussion of other questions.

These writings on the Home Rule crisis have had a great influence on Irish political life. "Communists" — that is, Stalinists dressed up as left-wing Catholic nationalists, working through various segments of the Republican movement — have had more influence on Irish politics, over more than 60 years, than their numbers would suggest, and more than the mass Irish identification of "communism" with the Devil would seem to allow.

Part of the reason for this is that the writings of Marx and Engels on Ireland and the record of their activity on Ireland's behalf recommended "communism" to free-minded and perplexed Republicans; so

did the record of the Communist International during Ireland's war with Britain [1919-21]; so did Lenin's theoretical work in defence of the right to self-determination for oppressed nations, which frequently cited Ireland's right to self-determination as a basic model. And the casual journalism of Lenin — primarily the two articles on the Home Rule crisis — seemed to give secular reasons for lining up "communism" with "Republicanism" on its own nationalist terms. Lenin's distant and essentially ignorant comments on Ireland's Orange-Unionist minority seemed even to license Catholic chauvinism, if it were decently disguised as anti-imperialism. The Orange Unionists could, in Lenin as in the least enlightened old-style Catholic nationalist, be seen as the bad people of Ireland, deserving as little respect and consideration for their concerns and for what they were as Russia's anti-Semitic pogromists with whom Lenin had identified them.

"Interpreted" to fit the politics of the Stalinist movement, Lenin's passing comments have helped tie generations of Irish Marxists, and the successive waves of Republicans influenced by them, to an attitude towards the minority that was — though disguised as "anti-imperialism" and opposition to Protestant sectarianism — little better than the worst Orange attitude to the Catholics — the same attitude as that of the once very powerful Catholic "Orange Order", the Ancient Order of Hibernians which had mobilised Catholic sectarianism against Larkin in 1913.

The Stalinists, and the "left" populist Republicans whom they influenced and, often, shaped, fell into a sort of hybrid Stalino-Hibernianism in which the casual words of Lenin in workaday articles were used against the key teachings on national and communal conflicts that Lenin had expounded in all his serious, scientific writings and embodied in the policies of the Bolshevik Party and of the revolutionary state established by the October revolution.

Lenin, the great and sincere enemy of all national narrowness and all chauvinism, thus had a malign effect on Irish working-class politics, contributing no small measure of poison to the bloodstream of modern Irish political life.

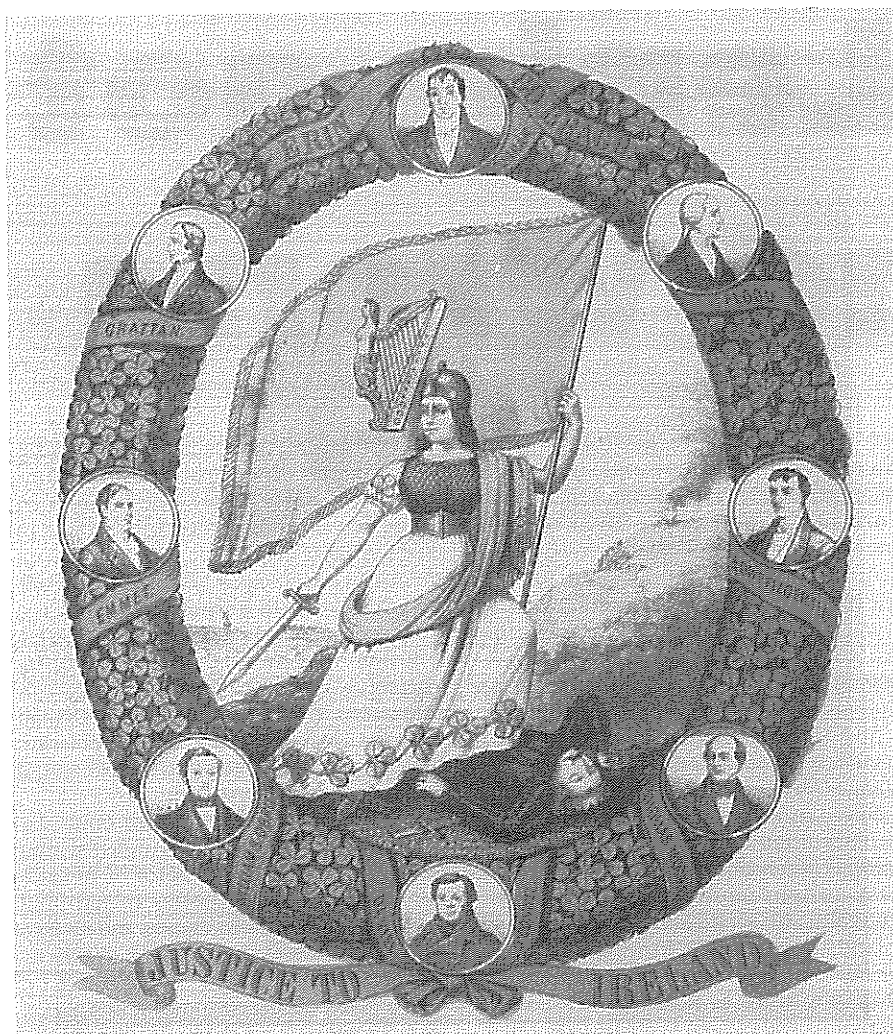
There is savage irony in this as in so much of the posthumous fate of Lenin's teachings. Fundamental to what happened

in 1914 was the existence of a compact, geographically concentrated, Irish minority, the Protestants of Ulster. The failure then of the two segments of the Irish people to establish viable democratic relations between themselves dominates Irish politics to this day. Both sides in Ireland were deflected from seeking such a democratic intra-Irish solution, and, in fact, demoralised, by alliances with British parties — the nationalists with the Liberals and the Orange with the Tories — and by the expectation that the strength of their British allies would win them an imposed solution.

Of all commentators, Lenin could be expected to anatomise the conflict within Ireland, between the peoples of Ireland. Lenin's writings on issues of national liberation in the Tsarist empire and eastern Europe are remarkable for their sensitivity and for the precision with which he separates the entangled and confused issues. He is for national self-determination, that is, "consistent democracy" for peoples who lack national independence and want it. Marxists, he insists, must regulate their attitudes according to the democratic national aspirations of the people living in any particular area, not according to existing state boundaries. But he is no champion of nationalism of any sort. He quarrels with Rosa Luxemburg because she wanted the Russians to refuse to support Poland's right to self-determination; he never tried to argue that Luxemburg and the Polish Marxists should themselves advocate Polish independence.

In eastern Europe and the Tsarist empire he deals with the complex interlacings in an intricate mosaic of peoples, nations and fragments of peoples and nations. He knows perfectly well that the oppressed of today can become the oppressors of tomorrow, and that within areas claimed by the oppressed there are often pockets of people for whom the oppressed are, immediately or potentially, oppressors. He called for "a struggle against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and no toleration of the striving for privilege on the part of the oppressed nation"; in a 1913 resolution the Bolshevik central committee made concrete proposals:

"In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system"



Fenian banner

of government... the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc."

Because of his background and his concern with the complexities of national and communal conflict in Russia and Eastern Europe, Lenin of all people should have understood the division in Ireland and pointed — as he did in all such matters when he focussed on them — to the need for a democratic solution. He did not. There is not a hint of it in what he wrote. He did not concern himself with relations within Ireland. He saw the mass popular Unionist movement, if he registered its real size and scope at all, as an appendage of "the landlords".

What Lenin wrote seems, measured against the facts of the case, to contradict the entire spirit of his theoretical work on the national question and the policies he advocated on national and communal conflicts in Russia. To understand why, we must look closely at what he wrote.

Remember that Lenin in 1914 could not have dreamed that Irish communists would be influenced and guided by his casual pieces. He wrote them without the chance to study Irish conditions, or from so general, distant and "abstract" a point of view that parts of reality decisive for intra-Irish working-class politics were simply faded out of his picture. He wrote not to guide Irish socialists but to explain surprising and perplexing events to Russian workers in Russian terms. Even so, he got much of it wrong, and the blind spots are surprising given his basic teachings on the national question and the policy he followed in Russia.

II

IN MARCH and April 1914 Lenin wrote two articles on the Home Rule crisis — "The British Liberals and Ireland" and "Constitutional Crisis in Britain" — both, it seems, for the legal press in Russia. The first thing that strikes you about these articles is that they contradict things he had said in the 1913 pieces. The contradictions — assuming the translations are reliable — are flat, stark, black-on-white. Where he had talked about the Tories as the party of the British "bourgeois" opponents of Home Rule, he now puts it all down to the landlords. Where in 1913 he wrote: "The Irish nationalists (i.e. the Irish bourgeoisie)

are the victors... buying up the land from the landlords..." he now writes as if this is against the will of the landlords and their party.

What — leaving Lenin aside for the moment — is happening in the "United Kingdom"? The Tory Party and the Northern Ireland Protestants are in open revolt, and building towards a triumphal ascendancy over the Liberal government, which will soon capitulate to them, betraying its nationalist Irish allies. Deprived of the Lords veto over House of Commons legislation, and with a solid Liberal/Home Rule majority in the Commons, the Tory Party and the Northern Ireland Unionists are openly preparing to launch an armed revolt by Protestant Ulster if the Liberal government insists on putting "Ulster" under a Dublin Catholic-majority government. They prepare an Ulster provisional government. They organise a powerful Protestant-Unionist militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force. With negligible exceptions all of Protestant Ulster, including the big majority of Ireland's industrial workers, are behind this threatened rebellion against Irish Catholic majority rule.

The "constitutional crisis" is this series of events, and the threat of civil war and defiance of Parliament expressed by the Tory leader Bonar Law in the well-known words: "There are things stronger than Parliamentary majorities."

In the first article, March 1914, following Karl Marx, Lenin begins his comments on the crisis by summarising the history of Britain's long ill-treatment of the Irish people — massacre, starvation, forced emigration, and depopulation. To Russian workers — who must, the Bolshevik party repeatedly tells them, break down the walls of the "prison house of nations" and free the captive peoples — he cites Ireland as an instructive example of what the landlords and Liberal bourgeoisie of a 'dominant' nation will do. Britain built its early capitalist prosperity on robbing Ireland. Lenin makes a broad crude summing-up of this history — Britain flourished; Ireland remained an "undeveloped, half-wild, purely agrarian country." And already here Lenin has lost his way.

This summary obscures a key fact for the crisis at hand: not all Ireland remained "undeveloped". It is industrial Ireland that is now at the heart of resistance to all-Irish Home Rule, having abandoned the Unionists of the rest of Ireland to their fate. The radical economic distinction between industrial Ulster and agrarian Catholic Ireland underpins and gives much of its substance to the conflict of identities felt by the people of Ireland.

Significantly, Lenin is vague on detail. He even gets the date of the formation of the Fenians wrong, putting 1861 for 1858. He comments on the slowness of the Liberal reforms that began in 1868 and remain unfinished 50 years later. This is a point for Russia: don't rely on liberal reforms.

Lenin now tells Russian workers of Karl Marx's ideas on Ireland and of his support for the Fenians, citing his letter of 2

November 1867 when he declared for Home Rule. "I have done my best to bring about this demonstration of the English workers in favour of Fenianism... I used to think the separation of Ireland from England impossible. Now I think it inevitable, although after the separation there may come *federation*." Home Rule, agrarian reform, tariffs, and afterwards, maybe, federation between Britain and Ireland — that was Karl Marx's programme for Ireland, Lenin explains. The British workers could never be free so long as they helped "or even" allowed their rulers to keep another nation in slavery.

When Lenin wrote this he was fighting against those liberals in Russia who advocated piecemeal reform of Tsarism. He was advocating a radical bourgeois revolution like that of France in 1789-93. [He will not come out for workers' power in Russia until April 1917.]

For his Russian working-class audience, who know the Bolshevik case against Russian Liberalism, Lenin focuses on the failure of the British workers to organise independently of the Liberals as the explanation of the slow progress of the programme — Home Rule, agrarian reform, tariffs to allow Irish industry to develop — which Karl Marx had thought objectively necessary for Ireland. The Liberals have dragged out the business of Home Rule and agrarian reform for over half a century. Only in the 20th century has the farmer begun to turn into a free owner of land. But, says Lenin, "the Liberals" have saddled him with the system of buying out the landlords at a "fair" price "as a reward for having plundered him for centuries and reduced him to permanent starvation". Lenin does not comment here on the bourgeois character of this land reform, creating many small landlords, or counterpose to it the socialist alternative of land nationalisation, though elsewhere he does, in passing.

More to the point here is that Lenin — whose whole article depends on the false idea that the Tories and the landlords resist Home Rule for purely old-style landlord reasons — attributes the land reform which he criticises to the *Liberals*, whereas the major land purchase initiative was organised by a Tory government, at the behest of the landlords, in 1903. While the Liberals initiated the first limited land purchases, the wholesale buying-out — "Wyndham Act" — after 1903 was a Tory measure.

Reporting that now a new Home Rule Bill is being considered, Lenin describes the opposition to it like this. "In Ireland there is a northern province called Ulster which is inhabited partly by people of English stock, Protestants as distinct from the Catholic Irishmen." Led by "that Black Hundred landlord" Carson, the British Conservatives have "raised a frightful howl" against Home Rule because it means "they say, subjecting Ulstermen to alien people of alien faith. Lord Carson has threatened rebellion and has organised armed Black Hundred gangs for the purpose." The Black Hundreds were Russia's proto-fascist, pogrom-making, anti-semitic gangs, which

were often organised by the police and had one of the Tsar's family as their official patron.

What does Lenin think will happen? "This is an empty threat of course. There can be no question of a rebellion by a handful of hooligans". In Russia certainly there could be no question of a rebellion by a handful of Black Hundred hooligans against the government which sponsored them.

III

ON THE LEVEL of facts, big and small, Lenin is badly ill-informed. Carson was a lawyer for landlords, but not a big landlord; and he was not a lord but a 'sir.' Is Lenin not aware of the scope and size of the Protestant-Irish movement against the British Liberal government? The description of Carson as "a Black Hundred landlord" is usually taken, not unreasonably, as a characterisation of the whole Unionist movement. This celebrated designation of the mass UVF, which involved large numbers of the Irish proletariat and had the backing of the majority of the industrial working class, as "Black Hundreds", is a rendering of it into Russian terms that seriously distorts Irish reality.

Protestant bigotry, the age-old chauvinism of a self-designated master people, the Scots-Irish, against the "inferior" Irish Catholics — that was part of it, as was pogromist communal violence. In the Home Rule crisis, however, those "Scots-Irish" were the minority, threatened with inclusion against their will in a state to be ruled by those whom they considered aliens and whose "priest-ridden" oppression they feared. There were at least a million of them in north-east Ulster, the compact majority there. To identify this entire social movement — which included the big majority of Ireland's sizeable industrial proletariat — with sectarian bigotry or with the bigoted hooligans who were part of it, by cramming it into inappropriate and false Russian analogies, is to so falsify reality that it makes what follows impossible to explain. When the Liberal government eventually backs down, Lenin will be unable to comprehend why, or what class forces were involved.

In 1913 Lenin had written that "national oppression and Catholic reaction have turned the [Irish] proletarians... into paupers, the peasants into... ignorant and dull slaves of the priesthood..." Might not a minority have reason to fear the rule of such a majority? No, says Lenin in 1914.

There "could [not] be any question of an Irish parliament, whose power is determined by British law, 'oppressing' the Protestants." Why not? Britain will not allow it! Their ultimate guarantee lies not in Ireland but in the British parliament, in the very limits of the Home Rule on offer to Ireland. What would Lenin have said had he lived to comment on the Free State which, within three years of independence, in 1925, suppressed the civil right of the minorities to divorce?

Just as in the 1913 article Lenin shrugs off mass Catholic-Irish nationalism, because



Carson

Home Rule will dissipate it — has, he seems to say, casting its shadow ahead, effectively dissolved it — here he shrugs off the mass north-east Ulster opposition to Home Rule. He reports it falsely; he minimises it; he dismisses it on the grounds that it is archaic, anachronistic, senseless. He sees it as a mere reflection of the British struggle. Even if Home Rule means, as he wrote in 1913, Irish bourgeois rule "together with their priests", he — without referring back to what he wrote in 1913 — reassures his Russian readers that their power will be "determined" and limited by British law.

One gets the feeling here, on the eve of the great descent into European barbarism that began in August 1914, that Lenin is rejecting out of hand the very idea that it is possible for a society to regress, to experience the sort of fall from civilised liberal bourgeois (19th century British!) standards which capitalist, priest and peasant rule in the South would actually bring about — just as Orange rule in the Northern Ireland state would force half a million Catholics into second-class citizenship for fifty years and more. Did Lenin know about the terrible role of the priests in the later stages of the 1913 strike? [see *Socialist Organiser* no.535, 23 September 1992].

But what is the Home Rule crisis about? Lenin presents the issue simply as one of the "Black Hundred" landlords trying to frighten the Liberals. But why, given that, as he notes elsewhere, the landlords are being bought out? Why do they object? From where does the force of their resistance, and its mass working-class base, derive? It is not clear; he does not try to explain it. But in the back of Lenin's mind may be Marx's scenario about Irish self-government leading to an agrarian revolution, which of course the landlords would fear. And the Liberals? They "are quaking, bowing to the Black

Hundreds, making concessions to them, offering to take a referendum in *Ulster* and to postpone the application of the referendum to *Ulster* for six years!" But why is *Ulster* the focus of the resistance by "the landlords" of all Ireland? These are the questions that erode Lenin's scenario; and he does not ask them.

Since it is admitted that the Northern Ireland Protestants are people different from the rest of the Irish, how considering his usual approach to such questions, can Lenin's dismissal of their concerns as mere "hooliganism", and his implied wish for the Liberals to deal more harshly and effectively with them, possibly square with his commitment to consistent democracy? It does not. He simply does not address this question.

He is focusing on the dynamics of the party struggle — on Liberal weakness and surrender. He sees the "Orange card" as it has been played since Randolph Churchill played it in 1886, as an argument against Home Rule for any part of Ireland; and that is all he sees. His lack of detailed knowledge about the Irish labour movement — seemingly not knowing about the Irish unions' decision to set up a Labour Party, for example — or about Tory and landlord responsibility for the great acceleration after 1903 in divesting the landlords of ownership, indicates that he might even not know about the Unionist split whereby the compact body of *Ulster* Unionists abandoned the thinly-spread Unionists of the rest of Ireland. When everything is said, the article represents a retreat from the consistent democracy which Lenin normally advocated in such matters when he knew what the issues were.

The Liberals and Black Hundreds haggle, Lenin says, while the Irish are made to wait: "After all, one must not offend the landlords!" Yet it is not only or mainly a matter of landlords, neither in Ireland, where the core of effective rebellion is industrial Ireland, nor in Britain. The Tory party is no longer the landlords' party Lenin here says it is. It is the central party of the bourgeoisie and of the long-bourgeoisified landlords.

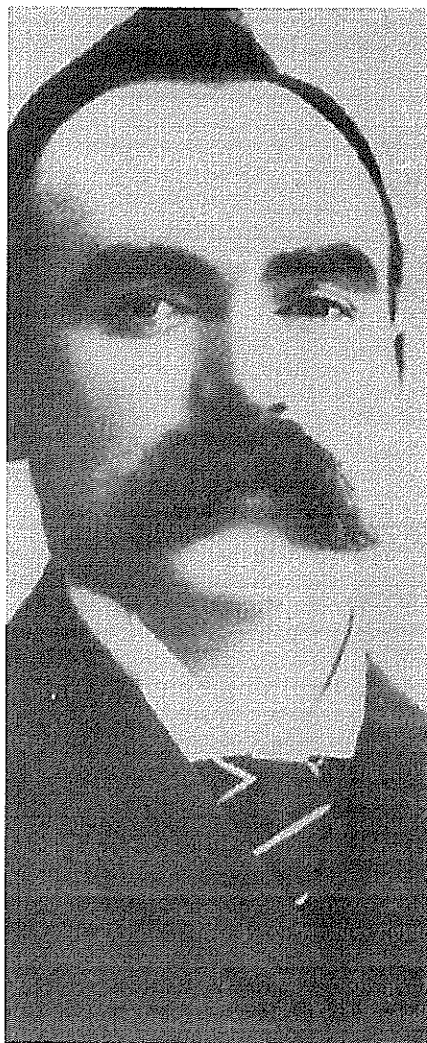
It may be that this was something left out as a confusing detraction from the sharp clear pictures that best served Lenin's purposes in *Russia*, as something Lenin did not need to deal with. But the "clarity" of the illustration for Russian politics confuses the picture of Ireland. It makes Lenin's picture of Ireland poisonous as a guide for Irish socialists or republicans.

Lenin studied the writings of Marx and Engels. He had not long before written a review of their collected letters when they were published in Germany. He treated what they wrote with the respect due to them (as, from us now to Lenin himself). Where he departed from them — because conditions have changed: rejecting the idea of a peaceful revolution in Britain, which Marx had believed possible in his day, for example — he noted it. Here he ignores what Engels had written in a letter 20 years before:

"The Tories are no longer the mere tail of the big landowners as they were until 1850; ... the big bourgeoisie... all went over to the Tory camp between 1855 and 1870... Since Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of 1886 the last remnants also of the Whigs and the old Liberals (bourgeois and intellectuals) have gone over to the Tory camp..." (Letter to Bebel, 5 July 1892).

What does Lenin suggest that the Liberals should do instead of haggling with the "Black Hundreds"? The Liberals should "appeal to the people of Britain, to the proletariat." If they did, "Carson's Black Hundred gangs would melt away immediately and disappear. The peaceful and full achievement of freedom by Ireland would be guaranteed." But the Liberal bourgeoisie will not turn for aid to the proletariat against the landlords. In Britain the Liberals "are lackeys of the moneybags, capable only of cringing to the Carsons."

In fact all Lenin's calculations here are implausible, premised as they are on the radically false notion that it is all a matter of landlord reactionaries against the people and against "Ireland", and not what it was, a Tory alliance with an important part of the living people of Ireland. All his comments are comments on a different situation. His solutions are solutions for a different situation.



Scots-Irish socialist: James Connolly

Though in Lenin's works there is simply no comment at all on the 1909-11 political crisis in Britain, this important event shaped and conditioned the "constitutional crisis" over Home Rule. The Home Rule crisis developed in the way it did, at the time it did, because of the struggle by the Liberal House of Commons majority in 1909-11 against the Lords — which had the backing of the Tories — to win sole rule by the House of Commons. Even though it was a blatant and clear-cut question of democracy, and had no nationalist complications involving England's old enemy, Ireland, the Liberal majority had been destroyed in the General Elections of 1910. The Irish Home Rule party now had the power to dictate the agenda of the minority Liberal government. That was what ignited the Home Rule crisis. The Tory demand in 1914 was for no Home Rule without a general election; their aim was to bring down the government.

Revolutionaries, in contrast with the Liberals, would have done things differently in the crisis of 1909-11, aiming for a thoroughgoing cleansing of Britain from the pseudo-feudal lumber of monarchy and Lords, but on the issue on which they fought — the sovereign rule of the elected parliamentary chamber — the Liberals did not surrender to the reactionaries and anti-democrats. They fought them and they defeated them. For the Tories, the Home Rule crisis was the second round of the contest. If the Liberals behaved differently in the second round, it can not be explained just by their nature as Liberals.

The most indicative thing about Lenin's article is what shapes it: it is always concerned to damn the Russian liberals by showing up the Liberals in Britain. The comments about the slowness of Liberal reform and Liberal submission to the landlords conveys a message to the Russian reader about Russia, not directly about Britain or Ireland. The result is that Lenin imposes Russian patterns which do not fit the Irish-British events on which he hangs his "lessons" for Russia.

That, in my opinion, is why this March 1914 article is so seriously inaccurate. Much of the inaccuracy in Lenin's picture derives directly from his drive to assimilate British-Irish reality to Russian conditions and to use it to teach lessons about Russian politics.

Though he mentions the agrarian reform, Lenin proceeds as if 1914 Ireland were the same landlords' paradise it was when Marx was writing. As we have seen, Lenin does not discuss, nor even explicitly register, the fact that though most Irish landlords opposed Home Rule, the strong base of opposition was industrial north-east *Ulster* — and had been since the first Home Rule Bill thirty years earlier.

While falsely and self-contradictorily depicting the Liberals as bourgeois and the Tory-Unionists as landlords, Lenin simply ignores the Irish industrial bourgeoisie — though it was precisely industrial Ireland, including its working class, that opposed Home Rule, seeing Catholic-majority Ire-

land as agrarian, priest-ridden, and hopelessly infested with corrupt politicians.

I repeat, you cannot make sense of this inaccuracy — by one who normally was so sharp and penetrating — without understanding that this is not really an article about Ireland. Lenin is writing not only *for* but also heavily *about* Russia. Lenin does not set himself to examine Irish reality in a scientific, historical, factual spirit: he constructs and writes a parable for Russia, about Russian liberalism, based on a very superficial reading of current events, culled from newspaper reports, grafted on to Karl Marx's analysis of a very different Ireland. He is not writing seriously about Irish reality, and not at all to guide Irish socialists.

He writes, ostensibly to explain the Home Rule crisis, about an Ireland in which the Dublin strike is grinding to a halt, after the workers have been starved, beaten, abused and subjected to sectarian witch-hunting by the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie — of whom Murphy was one of the most enlightened, in political terms — and the Catholic church. But he makes no reference at all to his own description of Home Rule as the rule of the Catholic bourgeois and the priests, and without reference even to the experience of the strike with rampant Catholic sectarianism! This actual Ireland does not enter Lenin's picture. His picture of the nature of Liberals in general and Russian liberals in particular has enough truth in it to serve his purpose and justify his comments, but he uses it falsely as a central explanation for the whole series of events.

In Lenin, the British and Irish actors are everywhere stamped with the values and dressed up in the garb of those he thinks of as their Russian equivalents — cowardly Liberals, reactionary landlords, Black Hundreds. Those who try to follow Lenin in understanding Ireland are really imposing Russian patterns on it. In the '20s, and for decades after, the Stalinists would take Lenin's comments, with their massive element of reading Russia onto Ireland, and, by way of the populist left Republicans, make this essentially fantastic misreading a factor in Irish politics and in the Catholic "Republican" mythology that helped shape events in the North after 1969.

Karl Marx once wrote that the historical past lies like a nightmare on the brains of the living. In Lenin's writings on Ireland Russia lies like a dark distorting shadow, and circumstances would ensure that the shadow then cast was projected down the decades.

IV

THE SECOND article, "Constitutional Crisis in Britain", was written a month later (23 April, 1914). Lenin begins by summarising the article above, which was, he says, concerned with "the policy of the British Liberals, who allowed themselves to be scared by the Conservatives." In a month, events "have transformed that particular conflict [between the Liberals and the Conservatives] over the question of Home Rule for Ireland into a general constitutional

crisis in Britain." In fact, the previous article had presented it as rather more than a party conflict.

The Conservatives threatened a "Protestant rebellion in Ulster". At the Curragh, "Generals and other British army officers mutinied", saying they would resign rather than fight Protestant Ulster. "The Liberal government was absolutely stunned by the 'revolt of the landlords' [my emphasis] who are at the head of the army.

"The Liberals are accustomed to console themselves with constitutional illusions and phrases about the rule of law, and close their eyes to the real relation of forces,

"While falsely and self-contradictorily depicting the Liberals as bourgeois and the Tory-Unionists as landlords, Lenin simply ignores the Irish industrial bourgeoisie — though it was precisely industrial Ireland, including its working class, that opposed Home Rule."

to the class struggle. And this real relation of forces has been and remains such that, owing to the cowardice of the bourgeoisie, a number of *pre-bourgeois* [Lenin's emphasis], medieval institutions and privileges of Messrs. the landlords have been preserved in Britain." In fact, of course, the British Liberals, far from closing their eyes to the class struggle, conduct the class struggle of the bourgeoisie against the workers. Large numbers of British workers, and not only the far left, would be very surprised at the notion that the Liberals — who, after the fashion in those days, often used troops against workers — "closed their eyes" to the class struggle.

Evidently Lenin here too has Russian Liberals in mind, and a Russian notion of "the (landlord) Establishment" and the opposition to it. For the actual British conditions his description is radically misleading; but, once again, it is not to British workers that Lenin addresses himself. Understand that, and everything falls into place.

What should the Liberals have done? "To suppress the revolt of the aristocratic officers the Liberals should have appealed

to the people, to the mass, to the proletariat." But Liberals feared them more than anything. Instead, Lenin says, of rousing the people in order (so Lenin implies but does not say) to complete the bourgeois revolution and cleanse the state of archaic landlord influences; instead of that, the government gave written assurances to mutinous officers that they would not be used "against Unionists". "The Liberals yielded to the landlords, who had torn up the constitution."

Lenin summarises Labour Party leader Ramsay MacDonald "that very moderate MP". "These people were always ready to howl against strikers; but when it was a matter of Ulster they refused to fulfil their duty because the Irish Home Rule Bill affected their class prejudices and interests." Lenin adds his own elucidation to MacDonald's words: "The landlords in Ireland are British, and Home Rule for Ireland would mean Home Rule for the Irish bourgeoisie and peasants, which would threaten to curtail somewhat the voracious appetites of the noble lords."

This is a basic explanation of what is happening and why — but, yet again, Lenin writes as if the landlords are not being voluntarily bought out (at the suggestion of a representative gathering of landlords and tenants' leaders), as if the mass opposition to Home Rule in industrial north-east Ireland does not exist, and as if an Irish bourgeoisie does not exist throughout the island, the people whom he wrote about in 1913, committed to bourgeois law and order and landlord property rights. Lenin continues his summary of Ramsay MacDonald's speech: "These people thought only of fighting the workers, but when it was a matter of compelling *the rich and the property-owners* [my emphasis] to respect the law they refused to do their duty."

Lenin now summarises the lesson of "the landlords' revolt against the British Parliament", assimilating a factually false account of what happened and why to basic Marxist ideas about the state and class struggle. Deservedly much quoted because it encapsulates an understanding of class society and class struggle in general, this has nevertheless little to do with understanding Ireland.

March 31 was the day the "noble landlords of Britain smashed the British constitution and British law to bits and gave an excellent lesson in class struggle." British workers would learn the lesson and "quickly shake off their philistine faith in the scrap of paper called the British law and constitution which *the British aristocrats* [my emphasis] have torn up before the eyes of the whole people. These aristocrats behaved like revolutionaries of the right and thereby shattered all conventions, all veneers, that prevented the people from seeing the unpleasant but undoubtedly real class struggle... Everybody saw that the conspiracy to break the will of Parliament had been prepared long ago. Real class rule lay and still lies *outside* [Lenin's emphasis] Parliament."

Indeed, but not with the landlords, who are anyway, in Britain, closely entangled

with the industrial bourgeoisie. The problem with taking these words as a true account of what has just happened in Ireland is that Lenin's picture of the crisis as a class struggle of bourgeois Liberals against landlord Tories is simply wrong. It is nearer the truth to say that it was the north-east Ulster "men of no property" who tore up the constitution. If they were dupes of their leaders, they were duped into fighting not for landlord concerns but for interests which they saw as their own, which were necessarily antagonistic to the rest of the Irish.

Hunting liberals, desiring to show up liberals in general — he will bring in Germany and Russia in the next paragraph — Lenin now presents a fantastic picture of Britain in 1914, wildly extrapolating and exaggerating from the very limited Curragh Mutiny. "The above-mentioned medieval institution [i.e. the army officer caste] which for long had been inactive (or rather seemed to be inactive), quickly came into action and proved to be *stronger* [Lenin's emphasis] than Parliament. And Britain's petty bourgeois Liberals, with their speeches about reforms and the might of Parliament that lull the workers, proved in fact to be frauds, straw men put up to bamboozle the people. They were quickly shut up by the aristocracy, the men in power."

What determined what the government did, in fact, was the realisation that, if they did not back down, they would have to use large-scale force in north-east Ulster, and to repress there, at the cost perhaps of major civil war, the principle of self-determination which was being granted to the rest of Ireland; and the fact the British MPs in the House of Commons were split down the middle on the issue. They were in what they saw as an untenable position.

Lenin now gets to what is plainly for him the main interest in the subject: the German and Russian liberals have written books for decades praising British and French liberalism as the ideal to strive for and preaching truth and justice, "above classes." Remember that at that time it was central to the propaganda of the Bolsheviks — who still saw the coming Russian revolution as a bourgeois revolution — to fight against "liberal" compromises and reforms of Tsarism on the Prussian model. In fact, Lenin insists, British law and social peace were "the result of the slavery of the British proletarians between the 1850s and 1900s". But now the workers are awakening. "The constitutional crisis of 1914 will be an important stage in the history of that awakening."

V

THESE TWO groups of articles on Bloody Sunday [*Workers' Liberty* 22] and on the Home Rule crisis constitute the nearest Lenin ever came to dealing with concrete internal Irish affairs. As I've already said, for the rest, Ireland is a cipher, a 'given' in discussions on self-determination or on agriculture.

Lenin's basic politics on Ireland he took from Marx and Kautsky: he never made

any analysis of Ireland; his most concrete writings deal with facets of Irish reality, with aspects — not rounded accounts — of events. He does not even correlate the facets he sketches in the different articles — for example, his comments on the Home Rule bourgeoisie and the priests in the 1913 articles, with the Protestant revolt in the north. Inter-Irish relations are not the facet that interests him — the sins of liberalism in general and in particular of Russian liberals are what concern him, with British/Irish affairs as "illustrations." Faced with the Home Rule crisis, and the startling depth and suddenness of that crisis — everyone from James Connolly through Patrick Pearse to Ramsay MacDonald had thought all-Ireland Home Rule a certainty — Lenin reverted from the more concrete sketch of features of Ireland which he drew in 1913 to the "Ireland" he found in Marx. He would also have been influenced by the politics which Marx, who died in 1883, emphasised as the way forward for the English workers, a resumption of the Chartist struggle for democracy. Marx's

*"If you read Lenin's
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ideas on Ireland were one facet of those politics.

For Lenin's purposes, taking Ireland as a ready-made "illustration" was perfectly legitimate. He had established his basic view of Russian liberalism by concrete analysis of Russian history and conditions, not by analogy with the British Liberals in 1914. The education of the Russian labour movement in a proper distrust and contempt for the Russian liberals — that was Lenin's central, and proper, concern. He was writing hurried journalism, not scientific analysis.

Writing in 1932 about how Lenin could have failed — as he did fail — to understand the struggle of Rosa Luxemburg against Karl Kautsky and the tokenistic "orthodox" Marxists of the German Social Democracy, Trotsky explained it in terms of Lenin's almost blinkered concentration on Russian affairs. "Lenin did not participate in the fight and did not support Rosa Luxemburg up to 1914. Passionately absorbed in Russian affairs, he preserved extreme caution in international matters" ("Hands off Rosa Luxemburg", Writings 1932, p.133).

Another possible explanation, or part of it, for the running together of Russia and Ireland in these writings of Lenin may be his desire to say as much as possible, even

obliquely, about *Russia* despite the pressure of Tsarist censorship. The exigencies of legality would exert a powerful distorting pressure in the direction of constructing Aesopian parables about Russia in guise of international commentary.

The fault for the subsequent malign effects of these workaday commentaries from afar lies not with Lenin, who in 1914 could have had no inkling that Irish revolutionaries would be taught to look to his didactic "Russian" articles for analysis of Irish reality, but with the later canonisation of such fleeting journalism by Lenin's epigones into something it was not, could not be, and was not intended by Lenin to be: a balanced, comprehensive, fully informed, scientific, rounded account of "Ireland." Lenin's articles were not that even for the particular events he covers.

His comments on '1913' were very far from being either an adequate account of the Dublin labour war as a whole, or "Leninist." So too with his handling of "Ulster." In both cases he never returned to make fuller and rounded assessments. He treated 'Ireland' essentially as a mere aspect of the British constitutional crisis; he ignored his own comments in 1913 on the priests and the Irish bourgeoisie, which would have shed some light on the intra-Irish aspect of the crisis he looks at in outline.

The proof and measure of the journalistic self-limits Lenin confined himself to here is seen unmistakably in his failure to make any overall balance sheet in the light of Karl Marx's expectation that Home Rule would trigger revolt against the landlords which would spread and trigger a cleansing democratic movement in Britain. If Lenin had seen his articles as "scientific" and programmatic, he would surely have worked through these issues.

Contrast the way that Lenin works through Karl Marx's ideas in his discussion with Rosa Luxemburg on self-determination, measuring, comparing, drawing a balance sheet, pointedly not considering the question closed by Marx's comments from decades before in support of the Polish national struggle. In that discussion too his prime concern was Russia; but in these pieces he dealt with 'theory'; in the articles considered above, he produced mere journalistic commentary worked up into 'parables' to illustrate Russian questions.

If you read Lenin's texts in a "Leninist" way, critically, measuring them against reality, there is no mystery. Leave aside the received wisdom of the left, including the "Trotskyist" left — which is in fact heavily under the sway of Stalinism and popular republicanism on the question — and it is perfectly plain what Lenin is doing and why.

There is however one great mystery about Lenin's treatment of the Irish question in 1914. One strange gap, a startling silence. It has remained almost entirely unnoticed by socialists because for decades it has been absent from socialist discourse on Ireland — in part *because* it is absent in Lenin. I will explore this mystery in the next issue of *Workers' Liberty*. ■

The "IS-SWP tradition" 6

The experience of the left

THE SWP is, despite everything, the biggest self-styled revolutionary Marxist organisation in Britain today. More than that: there are a lot of ex-members of the SWP (called IS before 1977) around.

It is now what the Healy organisation was in the late 50s and through the 60s — "a machine for maiming militants."

Politically, it has assumed the traditional role of anarchism. It is a movement of incoherent militant protest living politically from moment to moment, with no strategy and not much in the way of stable politics. It has one goal only — to "build the party": the party conceived as a fetish outside of politics and history, cut off from the real working class and its movement.

As an organisation it is a rigidly authoritarian variant of the Stalinist model of a party. It is organised around a pope, Tony Cliff, who has the power

to loose, bind and eject. In terms of the organisation of its intellectual life it is pre-bourgeois, in fact medieval.

Like the Healy organisation before it, the SWP leaves most of its ex-members politically bewildered and disoriented.

To help traumatised ex-members of the IS-SWP get their political bearings and to establish before younger readers its real history, we publish the symposium that follows. There will be other contributions in subsequent issues. We invite contributions. The discussion is completely free. Should representatives of the SWP wish to participate, they will be welcome.

Some of those who participate in this symposium have moved a long way from the politics they had in the IS/SWP, and from the politics of *Workers' Liberty* now. Nonetheless, at the end of this discussion we — and the thinking left in general — will be better equipped to formulate the lessons of the IS-SWP experience.

"A slow peeling away of illusions"

By Andy Wilson

I JOINED the SWP as a student in 1984. Before that I had been in the Royal Navy for seven years, where I recruited for the Anti-Nazi League and refused to serve in the Falklands War. In 1982, after an investigation by the RN security services, I was called in to see the captain of my station and told I had 24 hours to return my kit and leave the camp. He then shook my hand and told me "remember you are British".

My politics then were confused but basically libertarian anarchist. I hated parliamentary politics, the Labour Party and Stalinism — which I more or less confused with Marxism. Any illusions I had in the Communist Party disappeared when I applied to join them while still in the Navy. I got a rejection letter from the party secretary, Gordon McLennan on the grounds that membership would conflict with my loyalty to Britain as a serving sailor. Apparently, McLennan too wanted me to 'remember I was British'.

On leaving the Navy I went to the Co-operative Workers' College, and then to York University, where I was accepted as a mature student. I arrived in York a few months before the start of the miners strike. The behaviour of the Labour Party in the strike was shameful, but predictable. The behaviour of the anarchists I knew came as more of a shock. A few wanted to support the miners, but many abstained because of Scargill's Stalinism.

The campus miners support group was dominated by the SWP. As I worked with them I began to read Lenin and Trotsky for the first time. The big revelation for me was reading Marx. As an anarchist I thought of him as one of the architects of everything wrong with our century. Reading him now I discovered a passionate champion of human liberation. But still I couldn't square this with the reality of Stalinism and 'actually existing socialism'.

Reading Cliff's book on state capitalism explained to me the gulf separating Stalinism and all forms of authoritarianism from

authentic Marxism. I still think Cliff's theory offers the only explanation of Russia compatible with Marxism.

The York SWP branch I started to attend was remarkable. Its meetings involved real, informed debate which often would go on into the night. My understanding of Marxism today is shaped by what I learned then. At the same time the comrades were involved in every attempt to support the miners and were active in every campaign and strike both in town and on campus.

I still think that the York branch was exceptional in the SWP. When I began to see something of the other side of the SWP, it was my experience of the integrity and commitment of the York comrades which convinced me that the rest of the SWP could be like that too.

It was some time before this changed, but the signs had been there from the start. I remember the first SWP conference I attended in 1984. When Pete Clarke, the party secretary gave the membership figures I remember thinking they were inflated. I asked my branch secretary why the leadership would do this, and was told that if the members knew the real figures they would be 'demoralised'.

I am ashamed to say that I accepted this, though I now think of it as my first taste of how the party leadership thought of the members — not as the ultimate source of authority in the party, its soul, but as an inert mass to be prodded and cajoled into whatever course the leadership think best for them.

Shortly after this, perhaps just because I had accepted the leadership's way of looking at the members, I was sent to Liverpool as the party's full time organiser. Perhaps I was ruthless in Liverpool, as Chris Jones claimed in his article in the last *Worker's Liberty*, but in many cases I tried to moderate some of what was handed down from the CC — which in one case meant stopping a plan of one of the CC to have the same Chris Jones expelled.

For me, there was no great betrayal of the working class to turn me against the party leadership, only a slow peeling away of my illusions.

Sometimes this involved only theoretical questions. I remember arguing for several years at the party's 'Marxism' event for Engels' idea of the dialectics of nature. I also remember being followed from one philosophy meeting to the next by the party's second rank intellectuals to be denounced as a 'crude materialist' and even a 'Stalinist in philosophy'.

A few weeks before Marxism one year, however, something strange happened. Chris Harman wrote a short review supporting Engels. At that year's meetings the same people who had heckled before — John Rees in particular, with people like

Gareth Jenkins snapping along behind him — were expounding the glory of Engels' dialectic.

Now I have never had anything but contempt for John Rees as one of the worst kinds of preening careerist, but it came as a shock to see a whole layer of party 'cadre' twisting their opinions around to get them to echo Chris Harman's. I simply couldn't understand the gap between the party's formal politics (of 'socialism from below') and the top-down reality of its cadre and organisation — what a few of us began to call its 'actually existing socialism from below'. I still think that Cliff's analysis of Russia is quite brilliant, but find his party's idea of organisation repulsive.

The theory behind this idea of organisation was once explained to me by Sheila MacGregor, then a CC member. While I had argued in the party that Marxism is a science, and therefore subject to all the laws of logic, argument and debate that govern any science, she explained that Marxism in fact, is an *art*. And not only is it an art, but an art that can be mastered by only a select few — in the SWP, she said, this meant Cliff, herself and maybe a few others. Unfortunately, she was so drunk at this point that, as she got up to leave she walked straight into the wall, missing the door by a good five feet. So much for our infallible leadership.

A more serious event that helped change my attitude to the party happened while I was in Liverpool, when a member of the CC sexually assaulted one of the local comrades. This sort of behaviour is best dealt with not by moral outrage and finger waving but by taking firm, public action to make it clear what socialists think of it. But when I tried to raise the issue, I found the response even more shocking than the original attack.

When I approached one member of the CC he refused to have anything to do with the issue; another CC member told the assaulted comrade that nothing could be done about the matter because, under capitalism, women's oppression is inevitable.

I should add that this was all happening

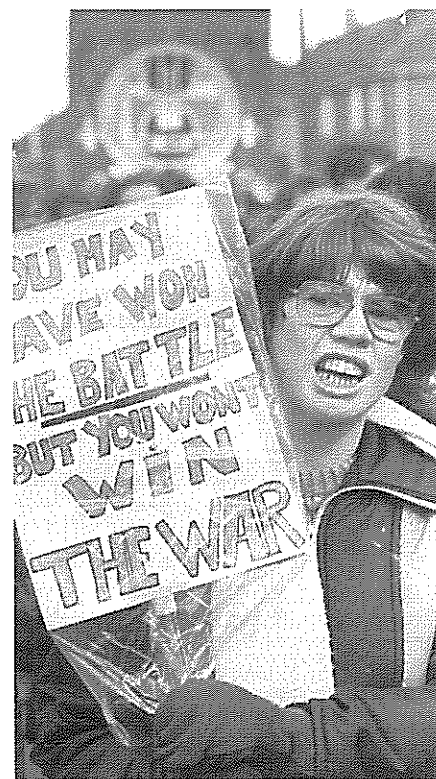
around the time of Gerry Healy's death. Duncan Hallas wrote an obituary arguing that when Healy assaulted WRP members, the real crime was that those who knew about it refused to act. I began to wonder whether there really was such a big difference between the SWP and WRP, whose methods I already knew to be more than just dubious.

For some years before leaving I argued that it was possible to work within the SWP to change it, but I believed this less and less even as I argued it. It was obvious that the leadership and their hangers on could simply dispose of anything that smacked of opposition, and that most members not only accepted this but welcomed it as proof of the party's unity and discipline.

I began to compare the SWP with the Navy. At least in the Navy there is a begrudging awareness of the real relations between officers and ratings, and some contempt for the officers as a result. But the class background of most SWP members means they confuse the spontaneous discipline of great workers' organisations — the result of real struggle, study and solidarity — with the mindless regimentation demanded by the middle classes when they become frantic and hopeless. SWP members are treated with barely disguised contempt by their leaders but, for the most part, are grateful because they see this acceptance of stifling authority as a token of their militancy and commitment to the 'cause'. This idea of discipline is actually a bureaucratic fantasy; inhuman and oppressive. I say this despite the fact that in my experience SWP members are in other respects perfectly sincere in their energetic opposition to anything unjust or oppressive.

The end for me came in 1993. I had already been warned that some of the CC would like to expel me, then a friend told me of a meeting he had been invited to hosted by Lyndsey German and John Rees, where they were sworn to secrecy and told to distance themselves from me as I was 'on my way out of the party'. This prediction turned out to be uncannily accurate; a few months later I was called to a meeting with Cliff and German and told that if I published any of my opinions about philosophy or culture it would be considered 'factional' and I would face expulsion.

Sure enough, I worked on trying to found a non-party cultural review along with other SWP members and some non-members, and in January 1994 I was at last expelled. The 15-20 comrades involved were also threatened with expulsion if they didn't drop the project. To their credit, ten of them wrote to the CC opposing my expulsion and insisting on their right to work on the magazine (one comrade even got up to speak against my expulsion at conference — an act of impetuous bravery almost unheard of among the otherwise fearless class warriors of the SWP). The CC didn't reply. At the control commission called to ratify my expulsion (because, naturally, the 'independent' control commission has never been known to overturn a CC expulsion) it was announced by Alex Callinicos



1984 miners' strike. The SWP's degeneration has speeded up since that great struggle

that no-one else was to be expelled. So much for the leadership's 'iron will' much admired by most of the members.

On leaving the SWP I joined with a few other ex-members to form the International Socialist Group, who argue that the SWP have failed to live up to the idea of liberation implicit in Cliff's theory of state capitalism. We have recently been in touch with a similar group of ex-members in Germany, and also with the rather larger group who were recently expelled from the South African IS group (ISSA) and have taken almost half of their membership to form a breakaway group.

To finish, I should say that unlike most of the contributors to this series, I do not blame Cliff alone for all this, as the pope and guru of the SWP. That would be too convenient for the rest of the left, who have their own popes and gurus to defend. The SWP's style of politics could only exist in a rotten political culture, and I believe that the same culture is common, in different degrees, to most of the rest of Britain's erstwhile revolutionary left, including the publishers of *Workers' Liberty*.

Despite this, my belief in the power of workers to transform their conditions and change society has not changed since the miners strike. It's just that I now believe, in achieving all this, the workers will also have to sweep aside most of the contemporary revolutionary left, with their sects and schisms, their plots, anathemas and demonologies. I do not think that represents a return to the woolly anarchism of my youth, just a belief that Marx would weep to see what is being done in his name. ■

Back issues of Workers' Liberty contain the following discussion on the IS/SWP tradition:

No.18. Contributors: Ken Coates MEP, Sheila Rowbotham, Stan Newens MEP.

No.19. Jim Higgins (IS National Secretary 1971-73), James D Young (Socialist Review Group 1950s), Mike McGrath (member 1966-82).

No.20 contains Vic Collard (IS steward early 1970s).

No.21: Chris Jones (1973 to 1994), Ray Challinor (member of the Socialist Review Group), Rachel Lever (member 1968-1971)

No.22: Steve Jeffreys (IS-SWP full timer from 1972-79)

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The politics of Victor Serge

Cathy Nugent reviews "The Serge-Trotsky Papers, Correspondence and other writings, between Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky". Edited and introduced by David Cotterill.

Published by Pluto Press.

AT THE beginning of 1919 Victor Serge — who had been an anarchist up to then and a participant in the syndicalist-inspired Barcelona workers' uprising of 1917 — arrived in Petrograd. The first phase of the Russian workers' revolution — a struggle which was infused with workers' democracy, full of hopes of a quick victory for the workers in the West — was over. Russia was in the grip of civil war. Petrograd, centre of the revolution, was under siege by the Whites, and could fall at any time. In his *Memoirs* Serge writes of a "siege mentality" in the city's administration, and inside the Cheka (the political police) where certain individuals conducted their duties against the counter-revolution with horrifying ruthlessness. The black market, officially condemned, its traders often sentenced to death, was rife, yet it was used regularly by the government's own workers, in order to eke out a meagre existence.

Once in Petrograd, Serge became friendly with some left Mensheviks and anarchists who had given critical support to the revolution but were now disillusioned with the Bolsheviks. They were refusing to work for the defence of the regime. Serge condemned this attitude:

"I moved among intellectuals who wept for their dream of an enlightened democracy, governed by an idealistic Press (their own of course). ...face to face with the ruthlessness of history, they were wrong... if the Bolshevik insurrection had not taken power the cabal of the old generals, supported by the officers' organisations, would have certainly done so instead. Russia would have avoided the Red Terror only to endure the White, and a proletarian dictatorship only to undergo a reactionary one. In consequence, the most outraged observations of the anti-Bolshevik intellectuals only revealed to me how necessary Bolshevism was." (*Memoirs*, p74).

Despite his critical reactions to perceived institutional weaknesses of the Bolshevik-led regime (Serge believed the formation of the Cheka was "one of the gravest and most impermissible errors that the Bolshevik leaders committed in 1918") he always believed the Bolsheviks represented the workers' interests. Serge's loyalty to the revolution was given wholeheartedly. He undertook many jobs including work for the Executive of the Third International. Later he joined the



Serge and his son Vlady

Left Opposition, was expelled from the Communist Party in 1928, was arrested, released, arrested again, refused to sign a false confession and finally deported to Orenburg in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, in 1933. Serge's family and the other exiles lived under terrible conditions — none of them in that windy, poverty-stricken place had any means of earning a living. Yet they clung to their ideals and hopes for the success of the workers' revolution in the world, though they heard little news from abroad or indeed from inside the Soviet Union.

After a campaign by Serge's literary friends in France he was released. Serge settled first in Belgium and then in France.

How Serge conducted the rest of his political life, about which *The Serge-Trotsky Papers* is a partial document, contrasts to his years "inside" the Russian revolution. In short, he lost his political bearings. Serge's doubts about the "Leninist" party, and reactions to the problems of Soviet power, began to dominate his political thinking. For instance, Serge became an Executive member of the centrist Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) during the Spanish civil war. The POUM tail-ended the Spanish Popular Front government, which tied the workers' organisations to bourgeois parties. As Trotsky predicted, the Stalinists, serving as lackeys for the bourgeoisie in the Front, were responsible for implementing the repression of the workers' struggle. The anarchists, the syndicalists and the POUM were crushed in 1937. The POUM, by their actions, disarmed the workers' movement and many of their members paid for it with their lives. Serge and Trotsky split on the issue. Irrevocably.

Trotsky could not understand how Serge, a historian of the Russian Revolution, could have such illusions in the Popular Front: "Everything you say about the Popular Front applies to the bloc of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries with the [Liberal bourgeois] Kadets... as well. We, however, waged an uncompromising struggle against that bloc, and won only thanks to that." (Letter from Trotsky to Serge, July 1936, *Papers* page 89).

Serge never admitted that his views had shifted, even in the *Memoirs*, looking back over his life. There is just one small, admission, right at the end of this book: "Trotsky wrote from Norway [in 1936] that the Popular Front was leading straight to disaster, and I disagreed, wrongly, for at that juncture he saw far and true."

In Victor Serge, there is a lack of political accountability and the dominance of subjectivity in his judgements. Serge's views changed after he settled in the West. It seems that this was because he succumbed to the pressures of the time. This is a centrally important fact about Serge's political career. So the first and most important criticism I would make about the *Papers* is there is no attempt by the editor or contributors to explain this fact.

THE COLLECTION is quite scrappy. For instance, why include Serge's writings from the 1920s about Bolshevism when this is a book about Serge's views in the 1930s? Introductions by different authors are given to each section. The opinions of these authors on "Trotskyism" vary from being reasonably balanced to uncritically accepting all of Serge's prejudices: e.g. the "shallow dogmatic and sectarian thinking [of the Trotskyist movement] was all very discouraging to Serge" (Susan Weismann). Some of their stuff reads like the thinly eked out stuff you get from ideas-starved academics, inadequately familiar with the subject on which they presume to write. Nonetheless, this is a fascinating collection, at times quite heartbreaking to read, as one gets a sense of how the Trotskyist movement was weak in numbers, and damaged by splits.

However, I would not trust the political agenda of most of the people who have translated and introduced Victor Serge's work. Peter Sedgwick was responsible for translating much of Serge's work. We should be grateful for this endeavour, of course — Serge is a writer of genius. However, Sedgwick, and others too, wanted to endorse Serge's political ideas and put him up as an alternative to Trotsky. Sedgwick was part of a "libertarian wing" of the International Socialists and remained a fellow traveller of that group right up to his death in the 1980s (i.e. after it had ditched its libertarian pretensions and degenerated into a proto-Stalinist sect). If it is unfortunate that Serge's published views are presented uncritically, it is equally unfortunate that Serge was put into circulation by people as unconscious of their own political hypocrisy as Sedgwick. Of course it is better that Serge is published than not at all, but *we must be critical*.

There are three further areas of criticism that can be raised in relation to this book.

1. Serge's views, contrary to the opinion given in the section introductions, were not derived from *objective* political assessments of reality at the time.

2. The correspondence and debate between Trotsky and Serge is in fact quite slim. The overall effect of the book is to exaggerate the importance of the debate.

3. Serge is politically wrong on virtually all of the substantive issues covered.

SERGE'S SHIFTS in opinion from 1936 were derived, in my view, from — understandably — subjective feelings about the politicians and class struggle of the time.

The state of revolutionary politics in 1936 was not good. August saw the first Moscow trial marking the beginning of the final liquidation of the Russian oppositionists. The only Trotskyist sections with any working-class base were the US, French and Belgian groups. The movement had been caught up in bitter internal disputes, not just petty squabbles, as Serge maintained, (although no doubt there were some), but arguments on matters of substance such as Trotsky's proposal, after the Communists collapsed before Hitler in 1933, that some Trotskyists should enter the mass Socialist Parties.

Over these years, many centrist groups — vacillators between revolution and reform — had been thrown up, such as the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAP) and the POUM, affiliated to the International Labour Community (IAG), which was a loose grouping of parties separate from the Second or Third Internationals but 'soft' on Stalinism and opposed to the formation of the Fourth International.

For whatever reason, Serge was sucked into this bog-like political milieu. Serge obviously treasured his friendships, particularly that with Andres Nin, the leader of the POUM. Serge was capable of breaking with personal friends — he had done so after the Russian Revolution. However, then, unlike now, there was a movement locked into a struggle for power. It was imperative for revolutionaries to make a clear choice: were you with the Bolsheviks or against them? With the Trotskyists weak and divided, no such obvious choices were present. 'Friendship' loomed largest.

But the Bolshevik Party was not only a party of *action*, it was also — and fundamentally — a party of critical *thought*. Lenin's so-called dogmatism — criticised much by Serge — was in fact a resolute determination to get to grips with reality: to apply historical and political understanding to present events in order to ensure that the workers' movement could be as prepared, as organised, as it possibly could. There would have been no October Revolution without the Bolsheviks' critical thought. For this reason Lenin did not tolerate fools, charlatans and ditherers. Neither did Trotsky. Serge could not understand this. He could not understand why Trotsky broke with Andres Nin for instance. Serge did not learn the most important lessons of the Russian Revolution.

THE DEBATE Serge had with Trotsky is very slim. Trotsky's main concern on Serge's arrival in Belgium is to hear news of the Russian opposition, not to win Serge to "Trotskyism". In fact Trotsky assumes Serge will

naturally fall in with the Belgian comrades. Further, he wants Serge to make up his own mind — what a libertarian!

The importance of Serge's relationship with Trotsky is exaggerated. The authors want, I think, to say "These two great men could have been better friends in different circumstances".

This is further implied by the importance attached to how agent provocateurs helped to sour relations. Undoubtedly this was a factor — the case is well made in the book. But still, the emphasis is wrong.

SERGE IS wrong on four substantial subjects covered by this book: I have already dealt with the first: the role of Popular Fronts. Other issues are: the Spanish Revolution, Serge's reassessment of the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik suppression of the 1921 rebellion at Kronstadt and the question of building a new, Fourth International and the revolutionary party.

On the Spanish Revolution, Serge justified the POUM's participation in the Catalan provisional (Popular Front) government on

"Serge did not, despite all the claims made about his concern for the freedom to criticise etc, know the true value of debate in the revolutionary party."

the grounds of the need to influence the government from within, thus facilitating the arming of the masses. This was wishful thinking. The main partners in the government were the enemies of the workers: bourgeois parties and Stalinists.

In the debate on Kronstadt, Serge seems very vexed and bruised by Trotsky's harsh criticisms — this was at the height of the debates over the Spanish Revolution and the Moscow Trials. Those hostile to Trotsky equated what Stalin was then doing with Leninism and Trotsky's conduct during the civil war. Serge argued that not enough was done to win over the Kronstadt rebels and avert the tragedy and they were too high-handedly dealt with. He admits, however, that the choice in the end was whether or not a renewed civil war could be nipped in the bud. Trotsky replied dismissively: "Advice like this is very easy to give after the event". Trotsky was irritated at having to have this debate, at a time when "Trotskyism" and Leninism were under attack. Although Serge was right to defend the principle of honest debate, hindsight was just not available to the Soviet government and the Petrograd soviet as it fought to stave off civil war. Second guessing the Bolsheviks in 1937, and in the company Serge was keeping on these questions, must have seemed to Trotsky to be shameful and reprehensible work.


In the end Serge thought that it was a mistake to set up the kind of Fourth International Trotsky wanted in 1937 (different to his 1933 proposal for a broad International, with the Trotskyists as only one current within it), as its sections were too weak and moreover thoroughly sectarian, and ultimately dependent on the personal intervention of "the Old Man". The solution he said, "lies in an alliance with all the left wing currents of the workers' movement". In other words Serge wanted a rag-bag international like the IAG, full of all kinds of sceptics and semi-Stalinists. But the workers' movement needed then a clear set of ideas to fight the Popular Front and exploit revolutionary situations. Serge's was not, and is not even with hindsight, a creditable position.

Serge fails to reply to many of Trotsky's criticisms. Over the last episode of dispute, Serge writes one reply, then does not publish it; inexplicably he gives up the fight, although it was a matter of his own integrity and, it seems, he was clearly in the right.

Serge did not, despite all the claims made about his concern for the freedom to criticise etc., know the true value of debate in the revolutionary party. Some subjects are so important, that clarity being vitally important, it is necessary to pursue the logic of the dispute down to the smallest detail and to put all personal considerations ruthlessly aside. This is what Trotsky did. Serge felt everything would somehow come right in the class struggle, all differences would melt away: "You must count on [forging] in the crucible a true party of revolution destined to assume all its responsibilities," he wrote to Nin in August 1936 (*Papers*, page 125). There is sometimes truth in this approach; after all Serge's differences were put to one side in the struggle of the Russian Revolution. But the Russian Revolution only succeeded because of the sharp debates in and around the Bolsheviks in the years prior to 1917.

SERGE WAS a centrist. He was always closer to revolution than reform only because there was not a careerist bone in his body: his politics were shaped by good-hearted naivety, not self-interest. But as Trotsky said "the revolution abhors centrism" and in these the success or defeat of a workers' revolution in Europe was at stake.

In the end, Serge's historical writing and novels will endure despite his political failings. They will endure precisely because of the wonderful *emotional* quality of his work. Serge is an attractive character and it is painful to be critical of him; nonetheless these documents do inspire criticism.

Serge was a true, good-willed, but unhelpful friend to Trotsky. The death of all the old Bolsheviks was, for Serge, a crushing defeat. For him, no one except the Old Man could match the Bolsheviks in ability. After Trotsky's death Serge wrote "There is nobody any more who knows what the Russian Revolution really was, and what the Bolsheviks were — and men judge without knowing, in elemental rancour and rigidity." But Serge knew what the Bolsheviks were and was able to communicate it. This is how we should remember Victor Serge. 

Parliaments, workers' and bourgeois

By Martin Thomas

I'M GLAD the gap has narrowed in my debate with Alan Johnson about Parliament (WL22,18; *Socialist Organiser* 616,617,619). I think I can narrow it still further.

In 1917 not only Russia, but also most European countries, lacked much experience with universal suffrage. Even a rough-and-ready workers' council system could clearly represent wider democracy.

After the last 50 years and more, however, "one person, one vote" has become an established minimum of politics.

Given the difficulties of compiling an accurate and comprehensive electoral register based on workplace, any workers' regime designing a new national assembly would probably have it elected by similar procedures, on similar electoral registers, to the old parliament, although with shorter, fixed terms; right of recall; workers' wages for MPs; abolition of monarchs, presidents, Upper Houses, etc; fusion of legislative and executive powers, so that the executive no longer stands above parliament; etc.

Since the working class cannot exert decisive class power within a system of formal equality in the same way as the capitalist class does through wealth, education, etc., the workers' regime would probably want to institutionalise workplace-based councils with powers to speak on industrial issues and call MPs to account. In constitutional law, the system might look pretty much like a combination of parliament and workers' councils.

To say that we should aim for a combination of parliament and workers' councils is still false because it glosses over the question: which parliament? whose parliament?

Alan's article makes revolution sound too much like a seminar in comparative constitutional law, a debate about whether "workers see their democratic rights... as best protected by the existing state institutions or by the new workers' councils". The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself, which means that a revolutionary workers' regime must be made by organisations of the working class itself which are flexible, responsive, widely representative, not bureaucratised, and not dominated by a privileged minority - in short, workers' councils, soviets, or some similar form.

Those workers' councils may establish a new workers' parliament, but only after

overthrowing the old bourgeois state, in which the old parliament is embedded.

The existing parliament, with all the checks and balances built into it and around it by ages of bourgeois rule, is a bourgeois parliament. Certainly revolutionaries should seek to work within it and to fight for democratic reforms of it. But a parliament so totally reformed within capitalism as to allow the working class real control? or one which elects a hard, solid, revolutionary majority? These are about as unlikely as a peaceful overthrow of capitalism. If the working class were revolutionary enough to go about imposing such things, it would already be strong enough to take power directly; and if when strong enough it did not seize the moment to take power, then it would be crushed.

A parliament with a left-labour majority radical enough to destabilise it as a bourgeois parliament is another matter. But then it is crucial that revolutionaries argue for no reliance at all on the leftist parliamentary leaders, not for "combining" with them.

Can socialists forgive sectarianism?

By Annie O'Keefe

JOHN McNULTY [Platform, WL22] raises serious and important questions: in its general form it is this: can socialists "forgive" people who have been sectarian paramilitaries; if they "convert" to socialism, can socialists work with them?

His answer for this is an emphatic "no" — it is, he says, a scandal that Militant has anything to do with them. What is his answer when the paramilitaries in question are Provisional IRA or INLA or IPLA? The opposite of what he says about the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). For John McNulty it depends on which side of the sectarian divide the paramilitaries were on.

The organisation of which he was secretary for many years in the '70s and '80s, PD, the predecessor of the ICMP, fellow travelled with the Provos and INLA and was not inaccurately described as a group which functioned as a specialist propaganda agency of the Provos. McNulty will reply: but they were anti-imperialist fighters. PUP are not, they are pro-imperialist killers of Catholics.

It is true that the Provisional IRA and the INLA spouted anti-imperialist rhetoric, and paid lip-service to the equality and unity of the Irish people, of the need — as the 1916 Declaration of the Irish Republic put it — "to treat all the children of the nation equally."

Some of them were even "socialists." The

point, however, is that much of what the Provisional IRA and, often more so, what the "revolutionary socialists" of INLA did, was also sectarian killing, of Protestants.

These organisations proceeded from a radically false definition of the situation in the Six Counties, defining the fundamental issue as one of "British occupied Ireland". In fact the central question is division in the Irish people, the fact that one million Irish people refuse to go into a United Ireland and want to remain British. The real logic of the situation led the Provisional IRA — despite its republican "ideology" and the sincere republicanism of its activists — to target the Irish minority. Towards the end they claimed — and exercised — the right to kill even carpenters and plumbers servicing RUC barracks.

Shooting down Protestants in any way connected with the state before the eyes of their own small children became routine. The "Marxist" INLA sometimes faced the brutal truth and openly justified attacks on Protestants as Protestants — in 1987 they attacked a Protestant church and sprayed the assembled Protestants with bullets.

Much of what these two organisations did can be separated from the work of Protestant paramilitaries only by the political and ideological gloss one puts on it.

That the Provisional IRA and INLA people who ordered and did these things paid lip-service to better ideals, higher goals and fine republican traditions, while the Protestant paramilitaries prattled on in the washed-out jargon of traditional master-race British imperialism does not, if you think about it, testify in the "republicans" favour: *they* should have known better!

To a considerable extent the "republicans" — and PD's too — denunciation of Protestant sectarianism served as no more than a justification for *the sectarianism of their own side*, their own pursuit of Catholic communalist goals.

When did the Provisional IRA weekly *An Phoblacht* ever indict, denounce or even report sectarianism on their own side? For that matter, when, after the early '70s, did PD?

What the Protestant paramilitaries did is to my mind indefensible. Some of them acted, or thought they acted, in the hideously mistaken belief that what they did — attacking Catholics — served to defend their own people.

If some of them now take a fresh look — I don't know enough about them to assess whether they really have or not — then socialists *should* talk to them and where appropriate, work with them. Just as we should work — and no doubt John McNulty thinks we should — with the Provisional IRA.

You could argue — I'm not sure I want to, but you could — that such people, if they learn about socialism and the real traditions of Tone-Connolly republicanism, will be a lot purer and more wholesome than the "socialists" and even "Marxists" — in INLA, for example — who functioned as sectarians *after* they had "become socialists."

T&G election

Trade unionists reject Blair's stooge

BILL MORRIS'S decisive victory in the T&G leadership election is a re-affirmation of the basic principles of strong, independent trade unionism — and a slap in the face for the Blairites who so arrogantly presume to speak always for the "ordinary members" of the labour movement.

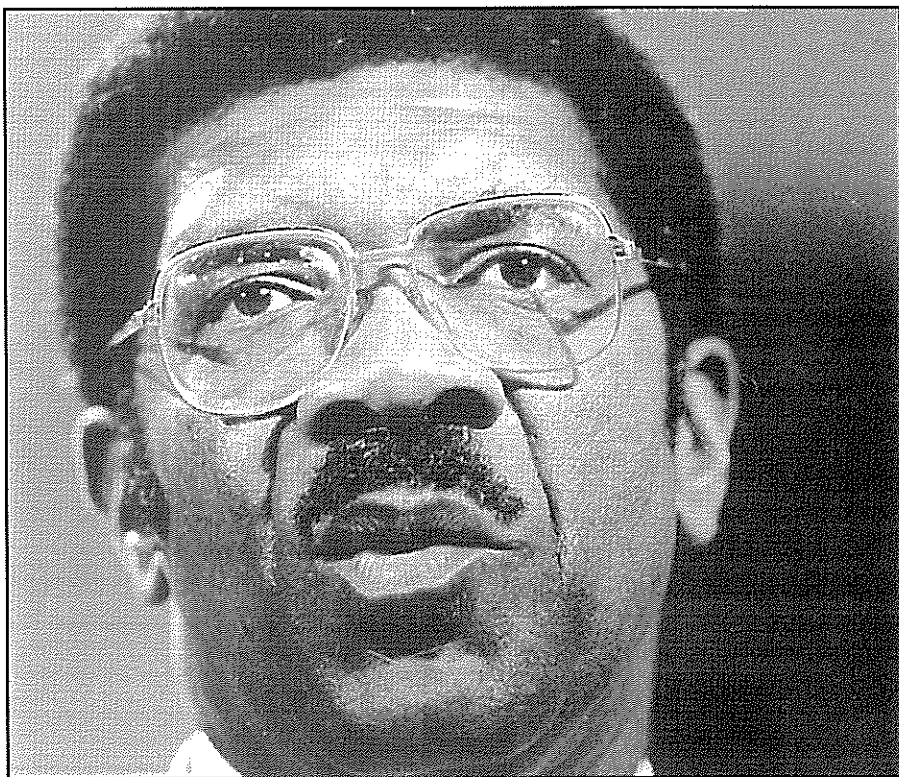
Had Blair's creature Jack Dromey succeeded in his bid to oust Morris, the New Labour "modernisers" could have claimed to be masters of all they surveyed, able to crush all opposition at will. A Blair government would have the leadership of the second-largest union in its pocket and official opposition over issues like the minimum wage and trade union legislation would crumble.

As it is, the rank and file of the T&G have begun to set the parameters of Blair's authority. The 33 per cent turnout was double the average for such postal ballot elections and Morris's vote (158,909 against 100,056 for Dromey) represents a bigger percentage of the T&G membership than the percentage of Labour Party members who voted to back Blair over Clause Four.

The relatively good turnout reflects the high level of media coverage which was, in turn, largely the result of the Dromey camp's tactics. Dromey and his advisors (including Peter Mandelson and the rest of the New Labour media slime-balls) reckoned that driving up the campaign's media profile was the way to appeal to the "ordinary members" (who, naturally, would back Blair's man) over the heads of the much despised "activists."

In the event, the tactic back-fired. Trade unionists proved less amenable to moral blackmail to do what the right wing said was necessary for a Labour victory than constituency Labour Party members in the Clause Four vote had been. And Dromey's dirty, disloyal attacks on Morris personally and the union in general almost certainly alienated a lot of rank and file members who otherwise wouldn't have bothered voting.

It is important to understand that the Morris victory is *not* a victory for a radical left-wing agenda. Morris is, personally, a decent and principled man (if somewhat



aloof) but he has never been particularly left-wing. What Morris represents is a style of leadership that bases itself upon the union's internal policy-making machinery, rather than a demagogic pretence to speak for the "ordinary members" regardless of union policy. Thus Morris abided by the lay executive's pro-Clause Four line despite opposing it within the union. And he continues to champion a minimum wage of at least £4 per hour, while the Blairites try to wriggle out of any commitment to a precise figure.

The ex-Stalinist Dromey, for all his "modernising" talk, would have run the union in the manner of an old-style union boss like Arthur Deakin, ignoring the lay executive and the Biennial Delegate Conference, surrounding himself with cronies and doing Blair's bidding in the name of the "ordinary members" (who, of course, he would never need to actually be consulted on anything).

Morris's victory does not in itself solve any of the problems facing the T&G: the continuing loss of members, the relative failure of the "Link Up" campaign (aimed at women, youth and part-timers), the inability to spread important disputes like the current Badger Line/Eastern National

lock-out and the outmoded, regionally-based structure of the union. But it does represent a victory for basic trade unionism over class collaboration.

The next step for socialists in the union is to build a united, open and democratic Broad Left: the forthcoming Biennial Delegate Conference gives us the opportunity to begin that task.

POSTSCRIPT. The one dirty trick that the Dromey camp *didn't* play during their disreputable campaign was the race card: New Labour is nothing if not Politically Correct. Bill Morris is still the only black union leader in Britain and a defeat for him would have been a bitter blow to many black union activists who (with some justice) regard the British union hierarchy as a white domain. Morris's victory is an encouraging sign that racism is on the retreat within the organised working class: in 1991, Morris's opponents used the unofficial slogan "don't let the coon call the tune." Nevertheless, Morris's colour was not a decisive consideration for socialists in his election. Morris himself was right to reject the advice of professional "anti-racists" who wanted to turn the election into a race issue. ■

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