

Workers' Liberty

DARCUS HOWE

From the Panthers to Farrakhan

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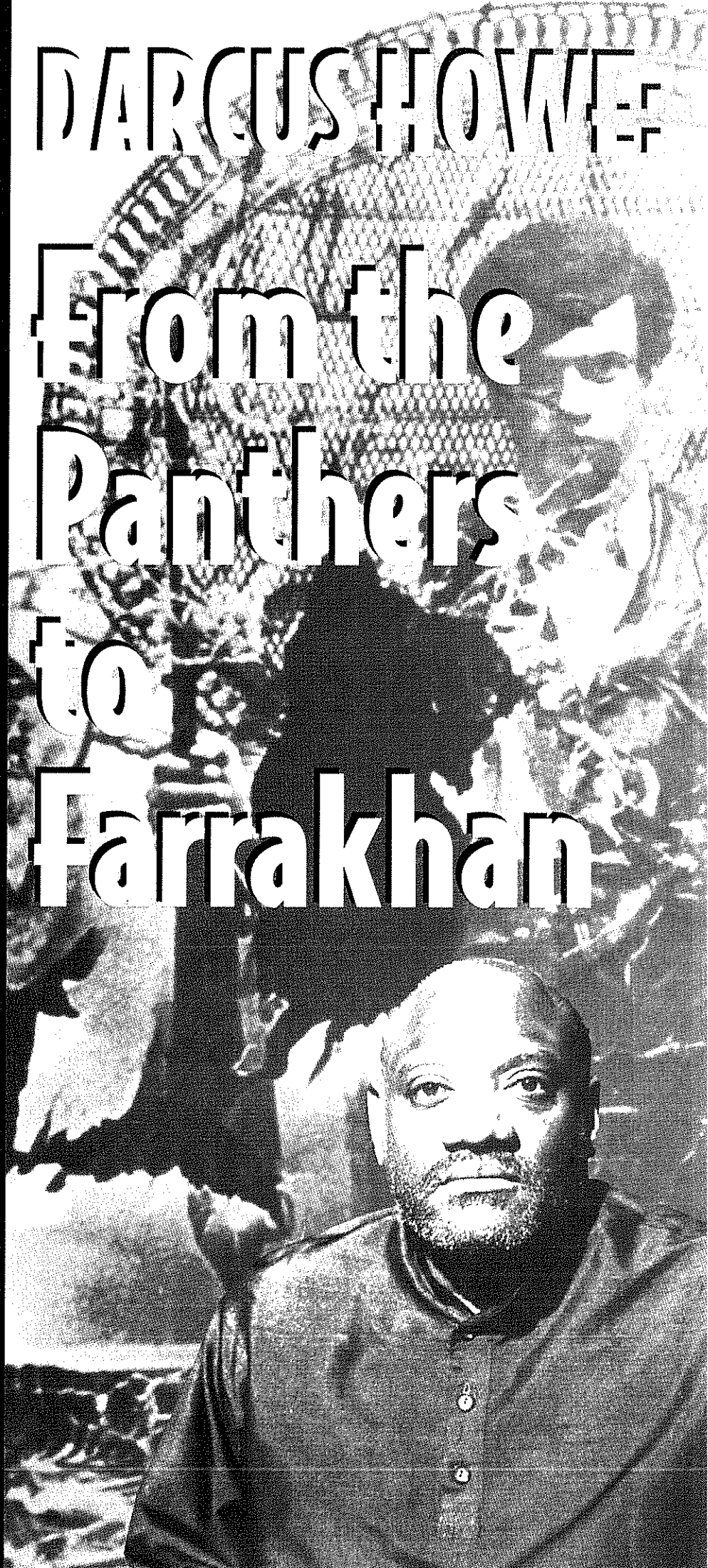
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"The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself."

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex"

Karl Marx

Letter to readers

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IN THE late '60s, the Black Panthers captured the imagination of American black people, and of those all over the world who felt with them. Some of the USA's long down-trodden blacks "picked up the gun" and confronted America's armed, racist, trigger-happy, apartheid-minded cops. The sight of them on TV news reels and in newspaper photographs walking tall in their berets and uniform jackets was exhilarating, an image full of hope for an end to the second class citizenship in the USA.

Generations of lynching and burnings, of racist stigmatising and the grinding down of black people, seemed to be falling away as those militants stood up, looked the murderous cops straight in the eyes and said: enough!

Mark Osborn talks to Darcus Howe about the Panthers and their legacy.

The war in ex-Yugoslavia continues to divide the left. Chris Reynolds reports on the latest shifts on the war fronts. Tony Benn puts the pro-Serbian case; Dan Katz and Chris Reynolds respond to Benn.

Avoidable famine is commonplace in our world of immense wealth. 150 years ago a terrible and prolonged famine began in Ireland, which was then a part of the United Kingdom. It would embitter and reshape Irish politics and its memory would contribute greatly to the ultimate secession of most of Ireland from the United Kingdom. Clairen Ennis retells the doleful tale of how 1 million Irish people were sacrificed to private property.

Some on the left console themselves into believing that the threat from Muslim fundamentalism is not real, but a figment of cold-war-addicted minds seeking a replacement for the old bogey of Stalinism. We look at Algeria, whose Muslim fundamentalists are attempting to seize control of society.

The Shachtman tendency emerged from a conflict with Trotsky over Stalinism in 1940, just before he was killed by a Stalinist assassin. In the '40s and '50s it elaborated a radical anti-Stalinist socialism. Then most of it sunk, not inevitably, into a sort of terror-stricken, half-despairing social-democracy. Its literary legacy is an important part of the heritage of revolutionary socialists like ourselves who today work to re-elaborate socialist policies for the post-Stalinist world. Ernie Haberkern represents one strand of that movement — he is a follower of Hal Draper — and in this and the next Workers' Liberty he accesses the history of the "Shachtmanite" current from their point of view.

With the issue we start a new drive to increase the circulation of Workers' Liberty. If you would like to help ring: 0171-639 7965.

A conspiracy of the rich

Editorial

WHAT IS government?

'Government is nothing but a conspiracy of the rich against the poor'.

Sir Thomas More said that, nearly 500 years ago. More had occasion to know about such things, having been the king's chief minister, Lord Chancellor of England. He knew that the root function of government is to look after the rich and keep the poor from laying rough hands on them or their property.

The idea that government is a conspiracy takes on a special meaning in Italy now, where the trial of Giulio Andreotti for mafia activities opens at the end of September.

Who is Andreotti? He has been at the centre of Italy's political life for the last 50 years. He is the single most important post-war Italian politician.

Serving in 24 of Italy's post-war governments, Andreotti was Prime Minister of Italy no less than 7 times, and was 6 times Foreign Minister. Now he is accused of working, during his years in government, to protect the mafia and serve its purposes!

Evidence which has been made public adds up to a plausible case that this much-sworn-in ex-Prime Minister of Italy, a devout Catholic, is himself a member of the great criminal conspiracy whose tentacles are spread through Italy and across the world. In other words, the mafia at various times has controlled the government of Italy!

"It is when there is nothing illegal that you get the purest form of the conspiracy of the rich against all the others."

Key sections of Italian politics, finance and industry have converged and become inextricably entwined with the mafia in a common conspiracy against the Italian people.

This melodramatic, and scarcely believable, conspiracy underlines once again what government is everywhere in class society, the underlying reality that Lord Chancellor More uncovered 500 years ago: whether they operate outside their own law or within the law or, as in Italy, on both sides of the law, everywhere *government*



Italian political posters depict the mafia-Andreotti connection.

is a conspiracy of the rich against the rest of society, in the first place now against the working class and the poor.

It is when there is nothing illegal that you get the purest forms of the eternal conspiracy of the rich against all the others. They do not normally have to resort to illegality. They *make* the laws, after all. Italy is an exception, an aberration. Take Britain.

For 15 years in Britain everything the government dared do has been done to serve the rich and the well off. There has been a government-orchestrated debauch of guzzling and spoiling by the well off at the expense of the rest of society.

Public assets, utilities like water, electricity, rail etc, have been systematically plundered to further enrich the rich at the expense of society.

Their "greed-rules, okay?" self-righteousness has reached astonishing levels and become the dominant philosophy in our society. Though it means running down the NHS and depriving some of those who can not pay for medical care of a healthy life and sometimes of life itself, the well-off must have tax cuts!

The conspirators made plans years in advance to beat down resistance to the bourgeois plunderers. All the pieces were co-ordinated and orchestrated, public opinion shaped and manipulated to their purposes.

For years they schemed and organised the resources of the state to destroy the miners' union because it was considered a dangerous centre of opposition to the interests of the bourgeois class.

The law officers, the courts and the police have been used like mafia thugs to cripple, shackle and beat down the only instrument workers have for self-defence,

the trade unions.

Government of the rich, by the rich, for the rich! Government by the property owners to keep the poor, the propertyless and the owners of petty property in "their place".

In Sir Thomas More's time they did that by mutilating and hanging homeless vagabonds who had been driven off the land and out of productive labour. They cut down rebellious peasants at the same time as the venal nobility stole vast tracts of public land.

In our time which has seen the greatest plunder by the rich of public assets since the common land was stolen from the people between the 16th and 19th centuries, they have worked it by shackling and disabling the unions, by driving people out of effective health care and millions out of productive labour, by harrying the homeless and unemployed, by whipping up middle-class lynch mob moods against the victims of oppression.

It has all been done legally, give or take a bit of ostentatious corruption, such as that of the Thatcher family.

In Britain and throughout the capitalist world, the open conspiracy of the rich against the people goes on and is everywhere successful. It is accepted even by most of its victims as "normal". It is "normal".

Unlike Andreotti, they will never under this system be brought to book for it. It will go on being "normal" until the labour movement and its allies decide it should go on no longer. Until the working class and the other victims of the conspiracies of the rich, organise a powerful, educated and determined movement for socialist democracy to put an end to it. ■

Socialists must support Scottish self-determination

By Dale Street

DELEGATES to last month's conference of the Scottish National Party (SNP) met in a mood of optimism about their increasing electoral success — in last year's Euro-elections, this year's elections for the new Scottish unitary authorities and successive parliamentary by-elections.

With support for Scottish independence at about 40%, the SNP stands second to Labour in opinion polls with 25% of the vote. They have closed the gap by 8% in recent months.

Insofar as there was conflict at the conference it centred on attitudes towards devolution — does it represent a step towards full independence, or a meaningless sop — but the conflict was more apparent than real.

Party leader Alex Salmond aims to

"There is no reason why socialists should oppose the creation of a Scottish assembly. But equally there is no reason for socialists to engage in nit-picking debates about how many seats it should have."

exploit devolution as a means of gaining full independence. A more fundamentalist wing, led by Paisley councillor Jim Mitchell, denounces devolution but does not advocate voting against it, nor boycott of a future Scottish Assembly.

Other policy debates re-affirmed the SNP's character as a traditional social-democratic party. There is no question of transforming capitalism but solid support for policies such as full employment, restoring student grants and the welfare state, and a national minimum wage.

Clearly, the SNP has changed a lot in recent decades. It used to be predominantly a Protestant rural-based party, lacking an economic policy beyond the slogan "It's Scotland's oil", and seeking to portray Scotland as the last colony of English imperialism.

In the past, support for the SNP was

spasmodic and localised. Now, there is a solid body of SNP voters with a basic loyalty to the party. And a solid body of support for an independent Scotland, even if they do not all vote SNP.

Consolidation of support for the SNP and independence is partly a reaction against the failure of Labour to effectively resist the Tories. Labour is the party of the "establishment" in Scotland. It dominates local authorities in the crucial "Central Belt". Two-thirds of Scottish MPs are Labour. But in 16 years Labour has never attempted a serious fightback against the Tories.

More fundamentally, support for the SNP and independence is rooted in the idea of a separate Scottish identity and a different "Scottish political agenda."

All parties in Scotland are attempting to relate to this identity. Labour and the Liberal-Democrats pledge support for a Scottish Assembly, and so, even, do some Tories now. The SNP calls for independence.

Debate on the Scottish "constitutional question" looms large in political life in Scotland. This confronts socialists with a dilemma.

Scotland clearly has a right to self-determination. In terms of what people in Scotland want now, that means devolution within the framework of the British state.

On the other hand, debates about devolution and independence are largely speculative and focus on fine points of detail — how many seats there should be in a future Scottish assembly, for example.

Support for devolution rarely goes beyond the level of speculation. The attempt to launch a "Scotland United" campaign after the last General Election proved a fiasco and bit the dust.

There is no reason why socialists should oppose the creation of a Scottish assembly. But equally there is no reason for socialists to engage in nit-picking debates about how many seats it should have.

The worst option of all is for socialists to put a radical-socialist gloss on the debates about devolution and independence, and portray them as a necessary stepping stone to a socialist Scotland.



Labour's Maundy money

By Martin Thomas

AT LAST Labour's Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown, proposes some action against the rich — a windfall profits tax on the privatised utilities.

Has Labour's Treasury team plucked up some courage since the time when they rushed to volunteer support for a government bail-out of the wealthy Lloyds "Names", only to hear the Tories say that these fat-cats must take the rough of the market with the smooth?

Not at all. Brown can propose his tax safe in the knowledge that Tory back-bench leader Marcus Fox makes the same proposal, and Chancellor Kenneth Clarke is considering it. Clarke can still say truly that he is the only Chancellor in recent history to

face no opposition from the other side of Parliament.

City experts reckon that the utilities could afford to pay £10 billion in windfall tax, and still be very nice earners. Brown talks of only £3 billion, and emphasises that it would be a one-off payment. It would be the privatised bosses' equivalent of a medieval king's Maundy money — a few pence occasionally scattered to the poor to fob them off.

Labour should be campaigning for public ownership of the utilities, coupled with expropriation of the big financial institutions which own most of the utilities' shares, modest compensation for the small shareholders, workers' control in the utilities, and democratic public regulation of the services they provide.

The fragile Middle East peace

By Mike Fenwick

THE MIDDLE EAST interim peace deal signed by Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, expands substantially the areas under Palestinian self-rule. This is a long way short of an independent state wherever Palestinians are a majority. But it is substantial progress towards Palestinian autonomy. At the same time it guarantees the rights of the Jewish settlers and leaves authority for security in the region with Israel.

In the case of water rights — a major economic and political issue — the Israelis have recognised Palestinian ownership of sources located in the West Bank. However this recognition is in such vague terms, and nothing will be firmly decided until the final settlement, that it counts for little. The Israelis have only gone this far under pressure from the US, who will have a representative at all future meetings on the issue.

The situation in Hebron is volatile. This is the only major city in the West Bank from which the Israelis have not agreed to withdraw. Partly this is for religious reasons. The city is an important site for both Jews and Muslims. Jewish settlers live in the Old City and the centre of the New City, which they have helped to develop. In order to protect these few hundred settlers Israel claims it must retain responsibility for security over the whole of this Palestinian city.

Yasser Arafat is under intense pressure from local Palestinian groups to get the Israelis out of Hebron, including a threat to boycott the forthcoming elections for the Autonomous Council.

An electoral boycott in Hebron, the largest electoral district in the Occupied Territories, would mean that elections could not take place. Arafat desperately needs these elections in order to keep the money rolling in from the West, and to prove to the Israelis and the world that he still has popular support.

Arafat has proposed that Israeli soldiers remain only in the Old City. This would then be given "special status" to guard the security of the settlers in the whole city.

This compromise, which may not be accepted locally, could bring down the fledgling Palestinian Authority's legitimacy.

The fragility of Palestinian self-rule was shown in Jericho at the end of August when Israel closed the city for a week. No food, medicine or fuel were allowed to enter the city, and Palestinians who normally work in Jerusalem were banned from travelling. The cause of this siege was the failure of the Pales-



tinian Authority to extradite two suspected Hamas bombers to Israel. Israel can whenever it wishes eliminate all traces of "autonomy" by severing any Palestinian town from the outside world.

From the Israeli point of view the guarantees of overall control in the region should help win over most of the settler communities, the most vociferous opponents of the deal so far. Already the right wing are failing to mobilise the mass of support they had hoped for in demonstrations against the deal.

The Israeli elections next year will show just how successful Shamir and Rabin have been in terms of maintaining support from those who welcomed the deal as the basis of a democratic settlement between the two peoples.

Build the Campaign for Free Education!

STUDENT ACTIVISTS involved with the "Campaign for Free Education", this spring defeated an attempt by the right wing National Executive of the National Union of Students to dump a policy of support for free education. The right-wing Labourites in the Executive wanted to support a system of comprehensive student loans.

This academic year the Campaign for Free Education will intensify its efforts to defend the ideal of a free education system, funded through progressive taxation — the only way, we believe, to guarantee access to higher education for the majority of working class people.

We must organise for is the NUS national demonstration in London on 23 November. The NUS executive shows every sign of ignoring NUS's continued policy for free education, so we have to make this a demonstration for free education, grants not loans.

Another events we are preparing for are a demonstration outside Tory Party conference on 12 October in Blackpool.

● Campaign for Free Education conference, 24 October, Birmingham. For more information contact Alison Brown, NUS Women's Officer on 0171-272 8900.

TUC leaders bow down to Blair

THIS YEAR'S TUC Conference will be remembered for one thing: the timidity of the leaders of some of Britain's biggest unions, the TGWU, GMB and UNISON, in the face of Tony Blair's intransigence.

There is an overwhelming majority in the trade union movement for a legal minimum wage of at least £4.15 per hour, and a massive majority for it amongst the electorate as a whole. Yet, rather than championing the interests of that majority, the union leaders — shepherded by the TUC's John Monks — chose to submit to Tony Blair's vocal advocacy of the rights of Britain's tiny minority, the capitalist class, who wish to maintain poverty pay and workplace insecurity.

So the TUC voted for a formula — half male median earnings — that some say means £4.15 per hour, but Harriet Harman — Labour's employment spokesperson — claims could be as little as £3.33. A



Demonstrating for a minimum wage. Photo John Harris

minimum wage of 17p per hour less than Labour fought the last election on.

But, despite the fact that the union leaders did everything they could to avoid conflict with Blair, they couldn't prevent rank and file delegates giving him the most muted reception a Labour leader has received in many years.

Tories come clean on the Welfare State

By Jill Mountford

RODNEY WALKER, retiring Chair of the NHS Trust Federation, has let the Tory cat out of the bag. He has publicly argued that we need a two-tier health system because the NHS has a diminishing capacity.

Superior healthcare for those who can afford additional private cover, and a run-down, on-the-cheap NHS for the rest of us!

Healthcare rationing is now set to be the next big debate in the NHS crisis.

The Tories tried to dismiss Walker's frank picture of what they are doing to the NHS. Then the findings of *Healthcare 2000*, an "independent" inquiry into the future of healthcare in Britain, hit them.

The *Healthcare 2000* inquiry was funded to the tune of £100,000 with money from big companies, and headed by Sir Duncan Nichol, former NHS Chief Executive.

The inquiry believes that the NHS can no longer offer free comprehensive provision for all. It argues that, even with tax increases there has to be rationing, and payment for some treatments and services.

"Superior healthcare for those who can afford additional private cover, and a run-down, on-the-cheap NHS for the rest of us!"

Despite all of this, the inquiry comes out strongly in favour of the principle of a national health service funded through

taxes.

Stephen Dorrell, Minister for Health, dismissed the inquiry as being nothing new and far too gloomy. He would.

If all this wasn't irritating enough for the government, another NHS bigwig has stoked the fire further by calling for a debate on the rationing of treatment.

Sir Leslie Turnberg, President of the Royal College of Physicians, has called for a national committee to be set up to advise the government on rationing.

The "Child B" case, the young girl with leukaemia in Cambridge, is a lesson for those resigned to the coming of the NHS rationing treatment.

"Child B" was refused treatment by Cambridge Health Authority on the basis that the £75,000 needed for the next phase of her treatment was not a rational use of funds. After an anonymous donor put up the money Child B's progress has been slow but positive. She's had another birthday and is back at school.

Can you spare £500 a month?

RELAX! Chill out! You're OK! If you have a surplus income of around £500 per month, that is, after you've paid for the roof over your head, the food bill, all the utilities, childcare, travel and anything you regard as being necessary — then you don't need a welfare state. Who says? The government!

Newsnight (28 September) took a couple with two children on national average earnings and sent them off to a major insurance company for quotes for cover on healthcare, unemployment, accidents and pensions for old age.

They were told that they needed to spend approximately £500 on private insurance and savings to cover themselves for what the welfare state was set up to provide.

The insurance company could offer no policy to cover against unemployment and calculated that they would need to save £65 per month and presumably keep their fingers and toes crossed.

So, what if you don't have a surplus income? Most of us don't. The vast majority of us scrimp and save to make ends meet. For the rest of us it looks like welfare US-style.

The government and, indeed, the Labour leadership are spending a lot of time and effort asserting that the welfare state, particularly healthcare and pensions, are no longer affordable. Starting from the premise that the welfare state is necessary, we have to find a way of making it possible. Taxing the rich, renationalising the utilities and investing in jobs will do for a start.

Northern Ireland: Still in stalemate

By Jack Cleary

THE "HARDLINE" Official Unionist David Trimble won the election to succeed James Molyneux as leader of his party, and newspapers commented that this was a set-back for a the "peace process". The choice of Trimble over "liberals" John Taylor and Ken Maginnis was seen to express grass roots Official Unionist desire for an assertive militant leadership, with the mettle to confront the enemies of Unionism.

Only weeks earlier, Trimble had been on the streets demonstrating in support of the right of Orange marchers to parade their tribal triumphalism through Catholic areas.

The never-strong hope that the Official Unionists would agree to sit down around a table with Sinn Fein/Provisional IRA and the SDLP seemed to be about to die. Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein did not think so. Adams thought that only a man like Trimble, from the militant wing of his party, could ever "deliver" a deal with the Nationalists.

That was wishful thinking, of course. Yet, only weeks after his election as leader, Trimble has gone to Dublin to meet the 26 County Taoiseach, Bruton.

This is the first time in three decades that a Unionist Party leader and a 26 County Prime Minister have officially met. The last time, when Unionist Leader and

Northern Irish Prime Minister Terence O'Neill met Sean Lemus, it was a matter of great offence to many Unionists in Northern Ireland. It undermined O'Neill.

Times have changed. But not that much.

The political stalemate continues with the British and Unionists on one side demanding decommissioning of IRA guns before there can even be *any question of* all-party talks, and on the other side Sinn Fein, demanding that all-Party talks start first and discuss, amongst other things general "demilitarisation". Taoiseach Bruton has publicly supported Sinn Fein's refusal to talk about "decommissioning" guns before "all-party talks".

Sinn Fein/PIRA people are now warning that the ceasefire may break down. Sinn Fein's late September special conference may indicate growing tensions within the organisation because so little political progress has been made.

Britain is probably content with the no-talks stalemate: the alternative is to go ahead with talks which — even if the Unionists were to participate, and they are unlikely to — could only establish once more that both Unionist and Nationalist demands *can not* be satisfied.

Adams and his friends have not yet given up the most important hope that produced the ceasefire: the belief that the USA will press Britain into siding with Sinn Fein against the Unionists and force Britain to twist Unionist arms, until they break if necessary.

Bosnia still needs solidarity

By Chris Reynolds

I AM writing this article on 26 September: it is best to specify the day, so quickly and dramatically have been the reversals in ex-Yugoslavia over the last two months. At the end of July, Serbia and its Bosnian-Serb understudies were on the offensive. On 11 and 25 July they overran the Muslim enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa in eastern Bosnia, massacring thousands. On 19 July they launched a big offensive against the north-western Muslim enclave of Bihac. It looked likely to fall. A Bosnian government drive to break the siege of Sarajevo, in June, had failed. Western leaders muttered about cutting their losses and withdrawing the UN troops.

Croatia had reconquered Western Slavonia on 1-2 May, but Serb armed forces still held about a quarter of Croatia, including key communication links.

Then, on 4-6 August, Croatia reconquered the Krajina. The Serb armed forces did not fight, but instead led tens of thousands in flight to Bosnian-Serb territory and to Serbia. The Croatian authorities, declaring blandly and hypocritically that the Krajina Serbs could stay or leave as they wished, followed up by razing Serb villages and killing Serbs who had stayed behind.

On 30 August NATO started a major bombardment of Bosnian-Serb armed positions. The Bosnian and Croatian armies followed up with a big offensive in western Bosnia, taking about 20 per cent of the country's whole land area and breaking the isolation of Bihac. On 20 September the Serbs lifted the siege of Sarajevo. The Americans are pushing hard for a ceasefire and a diplomatic settlement.

All assessments of the war must be checked against the new events. In the first place, Croatia's role has changed. In June 1991 Croatia declared independence and started improvising an army. By September, the Serbian-controlled ex-Yugoslav army and Serb militias had conquered one-third of the country, driving out Croats. Croatia was the oppressed nation, Serbia the oppressor.

Now, however, Croatia has consolidated and reinforced its army, with US aid. In 1993 it seized a large chunk of Bosnia. Today, it stands against war-ravaged Serbia as a rival proto-imperialism.

As for the UN/NATO intervention — some people on the left are crying "UN/NATO out!" because, they say, the UN and NATO are waging imperialist war against the Serbs. Others raise the same cry with the opposite argument: that NATO is gaining leverage to impose a settlement which legalises the bulk of the Serbs' gains from conquest and 'ethnic cleansing'.

The second assessment is more accurate. The Bosnian-Serb chauvinists are to have 49 per cent of Bosnia under the current American plan, and no-one has threatened Serbia itself. The US in Bosnia, like the other big powers, wants to restore the quiet necessary for profitable trade and investment. Should any socialist

or even radical-democratic political force emerge, they will stamp on it ruthlessly.

The US has been, in patches, more aggressive against Serbian imperialism than the European powers only because it is more concerned than them about its relations with Muslim countries. The difference has been very limited. Even if the US has provided a little covert military assistance to the Bosnian government, it has maintained the embargo which prevents the Bosnian government getting heavy weapons: the vote by the US Congress to lift the embargo was so hedged around as to have no short-term practical import.

Socialists therefore cannot endorse, support, or encourage the UN/NATO intervention. If we are to make ourselves clear, however, we cannot cry "UN/NATO out" without explaining the alternative in the name of which we oppose the UN and NATO. Sarajevo relieved by a NATO offensive designed as a lever for an imperialist carve-up is bad; Sarajevo still besieged is worse.

"The dividing lines will be arbitrary, with hundreds of thousands of embittered refugees on all sides."

Given the forces in play, what are the possibilities now? Already the US has forced the Bosnian government into a subordinate relationship with the Croatian government which seized and "ethnically cleansed" a large chunk of its territory, through the Croat-Muslim Federation. The American plan now is to slot that federation into another federation, with a Bosnian-Serb statelet.

This carve-up will be unstable. The dividing lines will be arbitrary, with hundreds of thousands of embittered refugees on all sides. A solid peace requires a multi-ethnic democracy in Bosnia, and a democratic federation of nations in the whole region, with full rights for minorities. But how can that be achieved?

According to *Socialist Outlook and Workers' Press* the current Croatian/Bosnian offensive is the "liberation" of Bosnia. If pushed far enough, it is the road to the restoration of multi-ethnic Bosnia; it is the progressive alternative to UN/NATO intervention.

To break the isolation of Bihac, and enable people to return to their homes in towns like Jajce, is good. Military defeats for Mladic are welcome because they increase the chance of peace: in fact, no peace offering the Bosnian Muslims any real national life would be possible without such defeats. But most of the gains have been made not by the Bosnian but by the Croatian army, and some in areas which have been Serb-populated for centuries. The Croatian army has as grisly a record of 'ethnic cleansing' as the Serbian; its aim is not to restore multi-ethnic democracy in Bosnia, but to carve out territory for itself.

Both in the Croatian Krajina and in western Bosnia, the Serbian forces have fled without fighting. This must be a calculated decision by Belgrade — and the fact that such a decision could lead to such a rapid collapse shows that the Croatian-Serb and Bosnian-Serb statelets were primarily artefacts of Belgrade, rather than of the local people. Conquests with the whole Serb population fleeing are, however, an adjustment of the likely partition of Bosnia, not an advance towards restoring an integrated multi-ethnic Bosnia.

For socialists, our prime concern is Muslim-Croat-Serb working-class unity, on a programme of consistent democracy — self-determination for all nations, autonomy for all local minorities, equal individual rights for all residents everywhere regardless of nationality. Until a sizeable contingent of Muslim, Croat, and Serb workers has been united on that programme, all talk of restoring multi-ethnic Bosnia is empty. Indeed, even if tomorrow the workers should take power in Sarajevo, in Zagreb, and in Belgrade, they would still have huge problems dealing with the millions of disoriented and embittered refugees, and they would be foolish to try to reimpose multi-ethnic integration by decree. Tuzla, dominated politically by the Social-Democrats (ex-CP), retains the strongest elements of multi-ethnic democracy in Bosnia; but even there, the floods of "ethnically cleansed" refugees from the countryside have created great difficulties in Muslim-Serb relations.

A Bosnian army general, Arif Pasefjic, summarised the military issues soberly in late 1993, and the two years since then confirm his assessment. "At the beginning... we insisted that we were fighting for a unified, multi-ethnic Bosnia, because we were fighting in alliance with the Croats and there was the possibility of victory together against the aggressor. Then it became clear that the Croats were pursuing other aims... Now we are fighting for the basic survival and existence of the Muslim people. We would now accept a just settlement of divided territory for all the three warring peoples, and with access to the sea... The substance of the war is now to secure a fair territory for the Muslim people, and for any other nationalities who want to live with us and are welcome to do so..." (Quoted in Ed Vulliamy, "Seasons in Hell", pp.339-40).

The effective partition of southern and western Bosnia into a Croat statelet and a mainly-Muslim one, loosely united in the Croat-Muslim Federation, is an evil. Socialists and democrats would fight for common institutions, for free movement of people, for the reintegration of the town of Mostar, which has been divided by Croatian force so that one side of the river is Croat, the other Muslim. But for the Bosnian army to go to war to reconquer the Croat statelet would be militarily suicidal and politically unable to achieve anything except moving the partition line. The same principle applies with the likely Bosnian-Serb statelet. The path to reunification must be primarily political, not military. ■

Tony Benn: "the main enemy is NATO"

WHATEVER the deficiencies of the former Yugoslavia, it was held together without bloodshed.

Then Yugoslavia tried to reform its economy. The IMF came in and demanded cuts. They squeezed the economy.

The federal government pushed the responsibility for making the cuts down onto the republics. They decided that it would be best not to be part of the Belgrade set-up.

The Germans came in and recognised Croatia. That is how it seems to have begun. A new, strong, unified Germany wants to assert its role inside Europe.

Then, of course, the war began. The policy was to establish a dominant Croatia.

The ultimate carve up of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia is probably what stands behind the American peace plan.

President Clinton wanted to show how strong he was. But— after Vietnam— he did not want to commit any American ground troops. So he brought in the ultimate US weapon, the air strike.

The British government has given endless assurances that they had no intention of becoming participants in the war. Now we see not just an air strike but a war against the Bosnian Serbs, launched by the most powerful military machine in the world, NATO.

I must confess to you that I am not even sure about the "Sarajevo massacre".

There is a simple rule in politics - you ask who benefits from what happens. And those that benefited from the Sarajevo massacre were the Bosnian government, who got NATO help for their war against the Serbs.

It appears that the NATO airstrikes destroyed a hospital. But they said that this was not deliberate, it was an "accident of war"!

What about the Sarajevo market massacre? Perhaps that was also an "accident of war".

Now America has taken the side of NATO and the Germans have gone along with it. The Germans can not participate very easily because people remember that they were there before. But the Germans are supporting the Americans, and they are a part of it too.

Now the UN is an agent of war. It has handed over power to NATO. NATO has replaced the UN and is used to enforce Western interests on any country that is intransigent

The propaganda in the media is unprecedented. The BBC has been a disgrace. The

silence of political leaders of all parties has been a disgrace. The impression is that everyone in Britain supported the Cruise missile attacks.

The UN should withdraw the authority it has given NATO. The arms embargo should be strictly enforced: the Americans have been arming the Croats to act as their agents against the Serbs.

Negotiations should continue without military threats.

It is a civil war — it is not as if Bosnia had existed for years and then was attacked by Serbia. It is a civil war. And in a civil war you can only provide a table.

Tony Benn MP was speaking at the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" rally on 18th September.

An open letter to Tony Benn

"The main problem is Serb imperialism"

Dear Tony Benn,

THE PROBLEMS with the rally of the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" on 18 September began with the title: "Stop the NATO bombing".

It's like "Oppose the Maastricht Treaty". "Oppose Maastricht" covers very different attitudes to Europe, and "Stop the NATO bombing" covers very different attitudes to Serbia.

You, we, and Norman Tebbit can all agree to "oppose Maastricht"— but with very different positive alternatives to the Euro-capitalist plan we all oppose.

On 18 September you were applauded by the most foul Serb nationalists- people who ripped up copies of *Workers' Liberty* outside the meeting and howled at us inside it, people who believe the Albanians of Kosovo are "illegal immigrants" who should "get back to their own country". They cheered loudly when you told them that the Sarajevo market-place massacre on 28 August could well have been staged by the Bosnian government to provide an excuse for NATO intervention- as if anyone needs one more bloody atrocity as an excuse for anything in the ex-Yugoslavia.

Why did the Serb chauvinists cheer you, Tony Benn? Because you challenged none of their prejudices. Because you want the strict enforcement of a one-sided arms embargo which keeps the Bosnian Muslims weak. Because you criticise the Western imperialists when they turn against Serbia, without fingering the major aggressor in the region: Milosevic's Serb

imperialism.

During the 1980s the old Yugoslav ruling class split along national lines. The bureaucratic and military machines, based in Belgrade, were transformed into instruments for Milosevic's Serbian chauvinist policy. He moved first against the Albanians of Kosovo (perhaps you remember the slogan "Kill the Albanian leadership"?) and the Hungarians of Vojvodina. Then he launched wars against Slovenia and Croatia, and in 1992 he spread the war to Bosnia. Do not be mistaken: war was Milosevic's policy and it was carried out against the majority of all the peoples in Bosnia. They did not ask for war. They retreated into "ethnic" camps only when the guns started firing. The Bosnian Serbs are fighting, but as part of a campaign whose main directing centre is in Belgrade.

Mladic is a general in the Yugoslav army. He is in the pay of Belgrade. You cover up for Milosevic if you talk about Bosnia's problem being "civil war".

"The main enemy is at home", a supporter of Socialist Action said, using a good old slogan to obscure the issue. But the main problem in ex-Yugoslavia is Serb imperialism. Yes, the Western powers are hypocrites. No one should trust them, no one should believe they are going to bring a democratic peace to the area. Yes, we should oppose the bombing, and yes the Labour Party should vote against the government's policy in the Balkans— Labour should act like a real opposition. In parliament we would vote for British troop withdrawal.



Bosnian Serb retreat

We would go further. We have no illusions in the UN. We do not trust any of the individual governments, and so we do not trust them when they get together and call themselves the United Nations. But to reckon that NATO's bombardment of Mladic's siege guns calls for protest meetings, and Milosevic's atrocities do not, is to condone Serbian imperialism.

You talk of the one-sided view of the British media and their uncritical support for NATO. Fine. But what about your own one-sidedness. You see the NATO bombs which fall on Bosnian Serb hospitals. But what about the other side of the West's policy? What about the disarming of Bosnian Muslim enclaves? What about the Western arms embargo which has left the Bosnian army facing a vastly better-armed Serb military?

The explanation of both sides of the big powers' policy is that they want the war to end as quickly as possible. They want the region stable for trade and investment. Their policy is not to "bomb the Serbs into the stone age" but to force the Serbs into negotiations. To say that this is full-scale war is to lose all sense of proportion.

Alice Mahon said at the rally— quite reasonably, on a certain level — that there is no difference between a Muslim, a Serb or a Croat who has been "ethnically cleansed" or raped or killed. Nevertheless, let's not lose sight of the wood by staring too closely at the trees: the war has not affected each nationality equally. The Muslims have been at risk of having their nation overrun and ripped to pieces.

We demand the lifting of the arms embargo not because we believe that the Muslims are a "better" people than the

Serbs, but because we accept that they have rights, including the right of self defence.

You told us that the war began with Germany recognising Croatia. That was on 15 January 1992. By January 1992 Serbia had conquered and "ethnically cleansed" one-third of Croatia. How could the recognition of Croatia be the cause of events which happened much earlier? Three years earlier, in 1988-9, Serbia had forcibly suppressed the autonomy of Kosovo, as the Serbian state progressively drew the control of federal Yugoslavia's army into its hands. Seven months earlier, in June 1991, Serbia had gone to war against Slovenia (briefly) and against Croatia.

"The Bosnian Muslims have been at risk of having their nation overrun and ripped to pieces"

And the Croats are a nation: we would have voted against independence if we had had votes in Croatia, and opposed the Croatian regime, but by what right should outside governments refuse to recognise an independence freely voted for by 90% of the population?

Your account of German policy makes no sense. If Germany's aim were to provoke the break-up of Yugoslavia and have "a dominant Croatia" under its thumb, why provoke a war which led to one-third

of Croatia being overrun? In fact, Germany, like all the big capitalist powers, supported the last ditch efforts to save Yugoslav unity.

You view the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia through the spectacles of old Cold War bloc politics— on one side, the imperialist West, and on the other, "socialist" Yugoslavia, or at least the Serb-dominated rump which claims to continue it. But the spectacles were always distorting. The old Soviet Union was just as imperialist as the West— in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in Afghanistan, in the Baltic States. Yugoslavia was never socialist, or post-capitalist. At best it kept the national conflicts stifled under the lid of a liberal-Stalinist autocratic state: it did not cure them. Milosevic's state machine, which has waged genocidal war in Bosnia, is essentially the old Stalinist state machine of Yugoslavia, only slightly reshaped: how could such a force be "socialist"?

And in any case, the spectacles belong to an epoch now ended. There is no "socialist bloc". There is no "anti-imperialist camp". The nationalists and Pan-Slavists in Russia back Serbia: but you can no longer believe that those Russian nationalists are less vicious than German or British nationalists or imperialists.

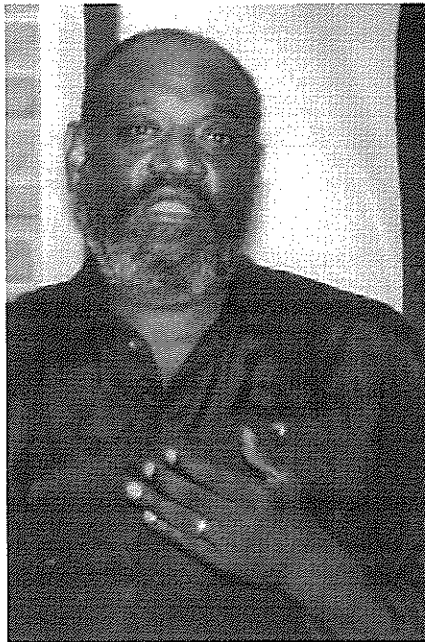
See events as they really are: a small nation, the Bosniac's, almost completely unarmed at the start, set upon by a heavily militarised neighbouring state. Support the principles of national self-determination and consistent democracy! Support Bosnia!

Yours for socialism, Dan Katz and Chris Reynolds

Darcus Howe on

"The inevitable revolt"

Darcus Howe is an activist, one-time British Black Panther and presenter of the *Devil's Advocate* series on television. He spoke to Mark Osborn about the Panthers' legacy and black politics in America.



DH: THE Panthers have been grossly misrepresented in political circles. The Black Panther Party was an intensely revolutionary organisation. They were the largest non-establishment political party ever to exist in America — larger than the Communist Party or any left-wing group. There were thousands of them all over the United States.

The members put themselves on the line. They staked their lives in order to get change in the United States.

For me the three great figures of the twentieth century are Lenin, Mao and Malcolm X. With each of these leaders a new class moved forward: Lenin led the workers, Mao led the peasants and the modern unemployed came on to the historical stage led by Malcolm X.

The first time we saw it was when Malcolm X surrounded the police station in Harlem. Then we could see the unemployed: who are these people? what do they want?

Lenin was not a worker and Mao was not a peasant. But one of the most important things about Malcolm, Huey P Newton and George Jackson was that they were from the urban unemployed. For the first time in history the class produced its own leaders. That to me is another strength. The Panthers were deeply rooted in the black, urban unemployed.

People learned to read and write in jail. Stokely Carmichael and James Forman were perhaps some of the few who were educated people. A lot were just street guys and the only discipline came from the *Little Red Book*. They were Maoists.

MO: I can't be expected to like Mao — given that he killed and jailed people like

me. But Mao did have the big political picture. The Panthers didn't.

DH: Oh, but they did! They had a great conception of international revolution.

They had no power other than that of the gun. They could not go out on strike. Their moral code and behaviour cut them off from the bible-toting mass of black workers.

In some places there were wonderful alliances. In Detroit, where the black working class was strong in the factories, they had links with the workers. In California they aligned with hippy students. The state came down on all of them.

They did some remarkable things. They challenged the Democratic Party at their Chicago convention. They terrified the establishment.

MO: Lenin developed a sophisticated world view. Huey Newton did not. The Panthers were tremendously brave and heroic but I'm not going to pretend they were very political. They had a 10 point Programme, but how would it be carried out?

DH: No, that's not right at all. Huey quoted Lenin a great deal. Their problem was this: they thought that the unemployed youth were the class to lead the revolution. And that was an enormous mistake. They substituted a section of the class for the whole class.

The unemployed are not only just a part of the working class but are also a very vulnerable section of the class. They are not disciplined by production, and live from

day-to-day making a living in any way they can.

Ten guys would be hustling in a syndicate. The police hold one, give him thousands of dollars and the rest go to jail. Or he sets them up to get killed. That's how they live. And the Panthers could never transcend that.

MO: When Lenin was alive there was no cult of Lenin. But when Huey Newton was the Panthers leader there was a cult of Huey. There was also a cult of the gun and the cult of violence.

DH: The cult of the gun is easily explainable. If you were shot at every day, what would you do? The Panthers had no other alternative.

MO: Lenin and the Bolsheviks faced White armies and armies of intervention

DH: Not day-to-day. They faced it as a political struggle.

MO: For Lenin the use of violence was subordinate to political ends: human liberation. The Panthers glorified violence. It was part of their political character.

DH: Lenin as an individual did not face the police shooting at him every day.

Police brutality was part of the Panthers' cultural life. I can easily understand how they felt. You have to understand that! They were faced with a military struggle.

MO: But such a struggle could not win.

DH: It didn't win. That's a fact. Hoover and the FBI destroyed them with the Cointelpro programme.

MO: I understand why they reacted like this. But take the question of violence. The Bolsheviks settled their disputes by argument. The Panthers regularly solved arguments amongst themselves with violence.

DH: I'm not picking an argument with you. I just think it is ahistorical and facile to look back with hindsight and say that. That's just how they were!

The Panthers were central to the period following the break up of feudalism in the Southern States of America. And for me it remains one of the most important historical landmarks in American politics.

Theirs seems to be a tradition that has died forever. I don't think it has. It is a tradition which has gone to sleep for a while, but will emerge again. It will be wiser and stronger as a result of the Panther experience.



Working-class Afro-Americans can expect little but trouble in their lives

The Panthers in Britain

MO: When you interviewed Leonard Jeffries on *The Devil's Advocate* you seemed to use criticisms that Huey Newton used against the cultural nationalists: that if black people are good and white people are bad then that lets Papa Doc and African dictators off the hook. Is this where you got that from?

DH: I was part of forming that conception. I was one of the most listened to leaders amongst black people in Britain at the time — especially young blacks.

I was an overseas member of the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC), which I joined in the late 1960s.

The Panthers were set up in London in the early '70s. We took their name. We took their dress. We had a 10 Point pro-

gramme. But we were not Maoists.

We expelled and suspended people for being Maoists. We thought they were divisive. We did not have cultural nationalists. And we were not with the Labour Party either! We had some relations with the IMG.

In the Panthers there were various currents. But there was a very powerful leadership. Members could not just go around doing what they wanted — unless you were George Jackson, perhaps the brightest of them all.

I spoke on platforms alongside Stokely Carmichael, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver as the UK representative. So I knew the organisation pretty well.

MO: Did you have links with Elridge Cleaver in Algeria?

DH: No. We did not go with Elridge. We were with Huey. Elridge had become very erratic by then. I've a great place in my heart for Huey. The failure of a great organisation like the Panthers left its mark. The pressure he was under as a result of the defeat broke him.

He was such a nice young fellow. The drugs he took was a long time after the Panthers had collapsed.

MO: What were the London Panthers like?

DH: We had about 250 members. But there was no question about seizing power — as they put it in the US.

The slogan was: Come what may we're here to stay! That was the battle as we defined it. We wanted an end to the police harassing us: very specific demands. It was not a national struggle.

We wanted a bit more space and more democratic rights within the country.

This was not just an organisation of Africans and people from the Caribbean. Farukh Dhondy was on the central committee. We had quite a number of Asians and strong relations with the Indian Work-

ers Association.

The struggle in America

MO: What about the limitations of this type of organisation? The Panthers were based on a minority — the lumpen youth — of a minority community.

DH: Using the term minority is very dangerous. Until 1959 the South existed on serfdom and the cotton economy. Then they discovered synthetic fibres. The cotton plantation owners had to intensify pressure on the serfs.

And when I say "serf" I mean it accu-

"There have been many slogans in world history. Of them all I think Black Power is one of the best."

rately. The serfs worked for the landowner. And the landowner was helped by the local power structure.

We could not vote. We were not allowed to, because in many areas we were in the majority: during the Reconstruction period after the Civil War we had had our own representatives elected to Congress.

That is how millions lived in the South.

Then black people simply started walking off the land, helped by black and white students from the North.

Everyone says it was just Martin Luther-King. Not so! There were mass revolts from below — mass desertions directed against the landowners. Tent cities were set up — people would rather live in tents than accept any more from the landowners.

The whole system was broken up by 1959 — this system which had been destroyed elsewhere a long time before had lasted in the United States for 14 years after World War 2 had ended! ↓

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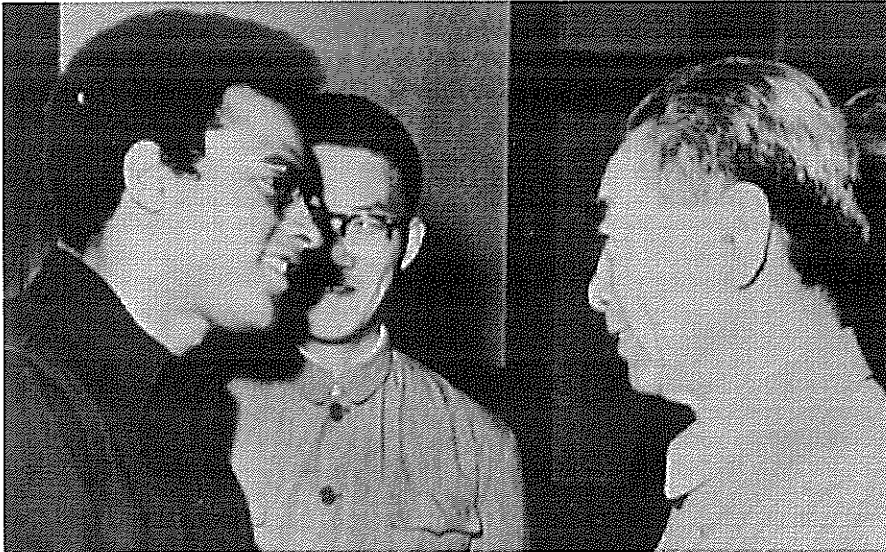
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Louis Farrakhan



Huey Newton meets Chou En-Lai

MO: But the whole drive of the mass movement was towards the demand for full rights as Americans — Fredrick Douglass's demand.

DH: I would not even go back to Fredrick Douglass. The landowner says you owe a thousand dollars after you have been picking cotton. Revolt was inevitable. The slogan was Black Power.

MO: But the Black Power slogan only came in '66. But what did it mean? I understand the demand for the right to vote. But Stokely Carmichael meant more by Black Power than that. But the demand was so unclear that anyone could be for Black Power — Nixon was for Black Power in 1968 — he meant black capitalism.

DH: There have been many slogans in world history. Of them all I think Black Power is one of the best. You had to be there to experience Black Power. It was



Stokely Carmichael was one of the few educated leaders of the "Black Power" movement in the USA.

simply a nationalist struggle — the same as the struggle in Ghana or in India — it was just a demand for control over your own life.

MO: The French were a privileged minority in Algeria — someone else's country — and the British were the same in India. But the Black Americans were firstly — basically — Americans and secondly a minority.

DH: The French ruled in Algeria, the blacks did not rule anywhere.

MO: The struggles were not the same. The question in Algeria was self-government for the Algerians. The matter was not self-government for Black Americans.

DH: Oh yes it was! Alabama, Mississippi and Atlanta are now ruled by Blacks. Now the whole situation is exposed: black people are divided into classes.

MO: Atlanta's government is now elected by the people, not by blacks or whites, but by people.

DH: The people who rule now in Atlanta are the black middle class. So they build an airport in Atlanta and give their friends big kick-backs.

So, now working class blacks are in a position to see that "Black" is not an all-embracing definition. That could not be seen if all that existed was a black barbers or corner shop. Now there are black multi-millionaires.

MO: So your argument is that this nationalist struggle was necessary in order to clear the way for class politics.

DH: Absolutely correct!

Looking forward

MO: THE important thing now is what the next stage will lead to. Farrakhan is due to lead a march on Washington in October. He is looking to repeat the 1963 March on Washington which took place in the middle of the Civil Rights struggle.

But the situation today does not com-

pare. In 1963 there was such a fervour in America.

Isn't the tragedy that Martin Luther-King and the Civil Rights movement have been replaced by Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam (NOI). King was a great man, a leader of a mass movement for equality. The NOI are awful, right-wing bigots.

DH: You never know what goes on in an organisation though.

I am an atheist and I can't deal with some of his views.

Nevertheless he can fill stadiums in the US...

MO: Yes, but with what politics!

DH: It indicates that people want to move. And that is positive. Be certain that Black people in America will transcend Farrakhan.

MO: It is a bizarre situation: here is a man that was — almost certainly — directly involved in the assassination of Malcolm X, leading thousands of young black people whose main hero is Malcolm X!

DH: Almost certainly? Certainly!

But things will work themselves out. The leaders are not the mass.

Farrakhan is in one sense moderate.

MO: Kballid Muhammad is a terrible, demagogic anti-semitic man!

DH: Yes, he's a fascist. And more than that their whole programme is right wing.

But they've been challenged before. Malcolm X challenged them. They kicked him out and killed him.

So, don't despair of black people in the United States! The Panthers, Martin Luther-King and Malcolm X transformed America in a way that Eisenhower, Nixon and Reagan never did.

Martin Luther-King, under pressure of the mass, moved to the left. At the end of his life he was supporting workers' struggles — and that is when they killed him.

A lot of people living in the United States are not American in the way that blacks are. There are three real sets of Americans: the Native Americans, the blacks and the white descendants of the people who came over in the Mayflower.

Black people built the US and they have a sense that they did.

The OJ Simpson trial has focused on the US as nothing else. It is a focus because he is black. The impact of the case is electric. That indicates that black people are still at the centre of American life.

MO: But the striking thing about that trial is the way people are lining up on race lines about whether they believe OJ Simpson is guilty or not. It seems clear that the policemen — Fuhrman — is a racist. It also seems very likely that OJ Simpson is guilty...

DH: I don't know that at all. You will never get me to say that.

But lining up on race lines is just the way in the United States. What do you expect me to do about that!

It is worth making the point that blacks are constantly fighting that. It faces them every day.

MO: *The good thing about Martin Luther-King is that he stood out against this. He wanted people to be treated as human beings — as distinct to some of the more radical nationalist currents who wanted to stress and cultivate existing black-white divisions.*

In between Martin Luther-King and the other end of the spectrum of black politics — the cultural nationalists — you have the Panthers and Malcolm X after '64.

DH: And Darcus Howe. I am irredeemably black. I do not exploit it for political ends. But I am aware of black struggle. If I was not aware of it I would die.

The people who work for me on my television series *The Devil's Advocate* are black and white. But they are aware I am aware of race.

"I am irredeemably black. I do not exploit it for political ends. But I am aware of black struggle. If I was not aware of it I would die."

MO: *I did an interview with you before and what you said was: I'm black, I'm comfortable, and don't give me any trouble because I'm black. It seems a good way of saying it.*

DH: But in America blacks are always being given trouble. Have you lived there? You talk about the States with a British sensibility, which is a serious problem.

There are millions of blacks in the United States who do not meet whites at all, except the police. They have no relations with whites, they have no white friends, they do not live in the same areas.

When you say "black community" in the US, you mean exactly that.

I go to Bed-Stuy a few times each year and don't see a white person in Brooklyn, except for a cop passing in a car. None.

If you walk down the street in Manhattan, at night, and a white woman sees you walking towards you, she bolts!

In Harlem you may see one or two whites, because there is a cultural space there — but not after 5 o'clock.

There are myths on both sides. But when one side has the power, the myths can be established for real.

MO: *It's a mess*

DH: Yes, an enormous mess.

And the result is that America has lost out. A lot of the enormous creative power of black people has been lost to America. ■

The trial of the Mangrove Nine

As we were saying...

By Constance Lever

THE OLD Bailey trial of the Mangrove Nine in 1971 took the fight of Notting Hill's black community against police harassment right into the nerve-centre of the British legal system.

With the unexpected help of a mainly white, working class jury, the Nine won a partial victory: they were cleared of 25 out of 31 charges — including the serious ones of riot, and causing grievous bodily harm. 5 were acquitted and 4 got suspended sentences.

In June and July 1970 the Mangrove Restaurant was raided nine times by the police, supposedly looking for drugs, which they never found. Its licence to stay open after 11pm was revoked when the police lodged an objection. Thereafter, those who ran it were repeatedly dragged into court accused of serving food after hours.

On 9 August 1970 local black people marched in protest at this police harassment. Without "provocation" police baton-charged the march. Naturally the marchers fought back. The charges — which were later insisted upon by higher police authorities —

arose from this battle. The harassment by the police bully boys is not accidental. The police must protect the private property system of the wealthy against its victims. To forestall trouble they tend to pick most on those who stand out, who have the rawest deal, and try to terrorise them into submission.

The Mangrove was a community restaurant, one of a network of community organisations. The restaurant its clientele were harassed so as to stamp out a centre of black consciousness.

The trial itself was not quite what the police had bargained for. The accused turned the trial into an indictment of the police and the system. Three of them, Darcus

Howe, Rhodan Gordon and Althea Lecointe, conducted their own defence. They all refused to shut up when told to and rejected the judge's rulings that statements about police brutality in Notting Hill were irrelevant.

The Mangrove Nine refused to behave as individuals charged with crimes, unsure and apologetic but acted instead as representatives of a militant black community challenging police and court intimidations. And their community back them up: every day of the 49-day trial they packed the public gallery to give solidarity.

With these tactics they broke through the hidebound ritual of court procedure and managed to actually talk about their lives and experiences and about their conflict with the police, to the ordinary men and women of the jury.

A majority of the Mangrove jury were workers, and only two of the 11 were black. It is known that the jury divided along class lines, with the middle class members inclined to believe the police and favouring conviction. It seems that some of the workers knew better and simply decided the police were liars. Eventually they compromised on the basis of agreement on acquittal on the most serious charges.

And when the trial ended, 7 jurors joined the Nine to spend 3 hours chatting and drinking like old friends, long kept apart. But only partial victories can be won in the courts. The police and the state retaliate.

Within 24 hours of his acquittal, Rhodan Gordon was rearrested on charges of obstructing and assaulting the police.

What is needed is a drive to mobilise the active support of the labour movement for the struggles of black people. It would be pointless and stupid to deny the widespread racist attitudes in the labour movement. It is the job of socialists to fight to break this down — not to pretend working class racialism doesn't exist.

Workers' Fight (a forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) No1 January 1972

Where is Russia going?

Kiril Buketov is a deputy editor of the main trade union newspaper *Solidarnost* [Solidarity], one of the founders of the independent Labour Information Centre "KAS-KOR" and editor-in-chief of its main publication *Rabochaya Politika* (Workers' Politics). The interview, by Bob Arnot, took place in Moscow on 16 September 1995.

BA: *There has been a significant attempt in the west to portray the economic transition in Russia as something of a success. To what extent do you think that the position of ordinary working people has changed in the last year?*

KB: There have been many changes over the last period, but the nature of the change depends on the perspective you take. A few months ago there was an article in the Toronto newspaper *The Globe and Mail* by a well known Polish economist. He argued that you should not believe the lies about daily life in Russia, it was not getting worse and worse. He pointed out that during a one week visit to Moscow he saw a large number of expensive and luxurious cars, he stayed in an expensive and comfortable hotel, on the streets he saw many fashionable people, in the crowded shops he saw clothes and luxury goods that were more expensive than those in the west, in the evening he went to a night-club and had a long conversation with a prostitute who told him that she was glad to be a prostitute because the work was less arduous than factory or office work and the rewards much better. He argued that statistical data showing declining living standards in Russia was misleading — real life was improving!

This perspective is obviously misleading. If the economist had gone to the train stations and spoken with the huge army of homeless people, if he had gone to the factories and talked to the workers who have not been paid for two or three months, if he had gone to a mineworkers district, like Vorkuta or Kemerovo, or if he had met the widows of the 25 miners who were killed as a result of an accident 10 days ago, he would have got a different perspective on the economic transformation. There would be no talk of improvement. Even using recent official statistics we can see the changes. For example, food consumption has declined. Even the consumption of bread has declined and milk and bread is the food that most poor people rely upon. Two days ago on Moscow Television pensioners were interviewed about what they had to eat and how they celebrated — they answered tea and bread, very rarely anything more. They said that even during Soviet times it had been pos-

sible for pensioners to survive on their pensions but now it was impossible even to exist.

BA: *Clearly, daily life is bleak for many people in Russian society but do you think this experience is being transformed into extreme pessimism about the future or do people see any possibilities for improvement?*

KB: If you listen to government ministers like Chernomyrdin and Chubais, you will hear extremely optimistic statements. They say the economic benefits will be delivered next month or next year! We have heard such talk since 1991 when Yeltsin took power when he said that after one very difficult year in our life there would be improvement. Now we hear exactly the same speech every year!

BA: *What is the level of criminal activity in the economy and society? People in the west read about the impact of the mafia in Russia and although they may have some idea about the American mafia or the Italian mafia, from movies and books, it seems to me that in the Russian context the idea of the mafia is quite different. In the west, criminal activity may be important for capitalism and in particular sectors (like drugs, prostitution, gambling etc) may dominate, but here the penetration of the mafia into the economy seems to be more all-pervasive.*

KB: This completely true. All Russian economic life is touched by the mafia. The food that people buy in local markets is traded at prices determined by local mafias that control access to the markets. The street traders that you can see all over Moscow pay money to the mafia (or to the police, because it amounts to the same thing) for their right to sell on the street. Small business ventures, supposedly the symbol of the new capitalism, are dominated by the mafia.

An individual I know of set up a small co-operative in the Gorbachev period and was involved in buying and selling computers. He prospered at this and accumulated both money and possessions. He then attempted to diversify his operation by getting into the flour wholesaling business. Shortly after his home, office and dacha were burgled and all his computers were stolen. He was told by the police that they would not be investigating the events and he should count himself lucky to be alive. He had to go into hiding for almost two years. This is not an uncommon experience for those who started businesses under perestroika. They either left or they were killed.

Because of the absurdity of our developing economic system everyone is forced into criminalised activity. Enterprise directors will operate illegally to avoid paying punitive taxes to government. They will operate parallel production which gives them cash to pay their workforce and sup-

pliers. Because of the delays in wage payments workers are forced to steal finished products or raw materials in order to survive.

BA: *What is happening in those enterprises where there are still people working? I've read that strike activity has increased dramatically in the last 12 months. What significance do you see in this?*

KB: It is no surprise that the level of strikes is increasing. Workers are not paid for months on end, many work on short-time or are on indefinite holiday with only the minimum wage. Enterprises have given up on the regulation of health and safety and many enterprises are removing the old social provisions that they used to provide.

There are two main types of strikes.

First, there are strikes that are organised by what are described as the "red directors". These are the old enterprise management who organise strikes to put pressure on the government, either to pay their bills or to provide the enterprise with subsidies, essential inputs or orders. These strikes are quite well organised and strong.

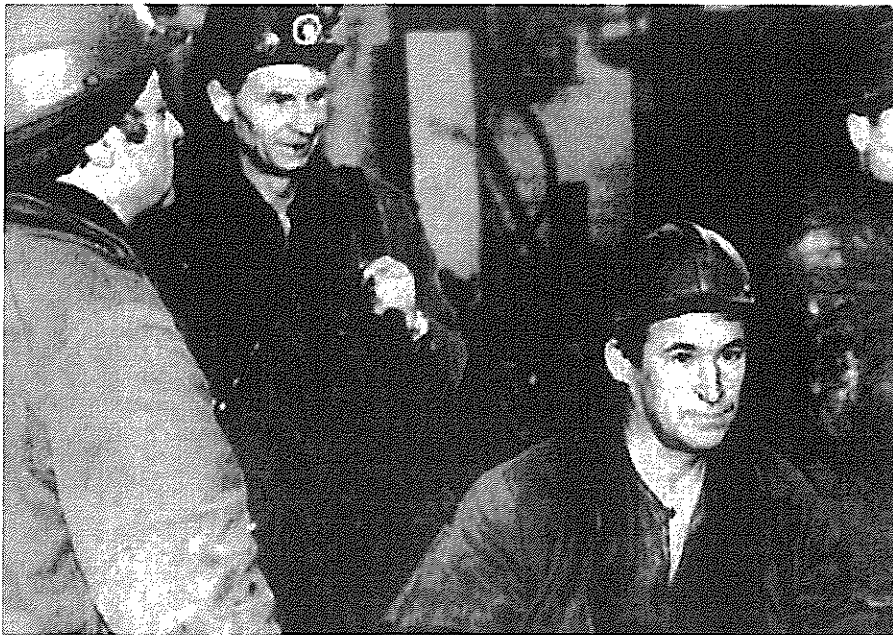
The second type occur in enterprises where management are made up of the "New Russians" — the old management who have become capitalists, in enterprises where the majority of shares have ended up in the hands of the directors or those close to them. These enterprises don't operate under old-style paternalistic management. They have a new capitalist boss, with all the expected traits. They try to cut wages, introduce, speed ups and so on.

These bosses have established new security forces, almost like small private armies whose numbers are growing. In a factory of 5,000 workers that I know, the security force is in excess of 100. These security forces have an unchecked power over the workforce. They can stop and search workers on the streets and they can go to their homes to search them. At Tulachermet, an engineering factory at Tula about 120 miles from Moscow, an engineer was killed by security forces in the grounds of the factory. They claimed the engineer was drunk but the medical report showed he was not.

Such extreme conditions have given rise to a huge wave of strikes of a new kind. These are strikes similar to those in the west where workers use the strike weapon as the only thing available to them to put pressure on enterprise directors.

BA: *You mention the phrase, "New Russians". Recently there were attacks on a building site in Bryansk where new homes were being built for "New Russians". Would you explain what "New Russians" means?*

KB: The term originally came from the United States and was used to identify a new layer in the Russian population. These are the people who are doing well from the transformation process, who are building



Miners are one group of workers organising strikes in Russia

new private homes, driving BMW's, consuming western goods. However, the left in Russia do not like the expression because the real "New Russians" have not yet arrived. We think the transformation will take one or two generations to complete. What we have now is "old Soviets" who have transferred their Soviet power into money power.

BA: What is happening to the trade union movement within the enterprises? Are they able to maintain their membership and defend their interests?

KB: The trade unions are losing members because of the collapse of industry. Within the new sectors — like trade and finance — there is no evidence of trade unions being created. Workers are so relieved to have jobs that forming trade unions are not an issue for them.

The traditional trade unions, established under the Soviet system, represent the traditional state sector of the economy. The FNPR [the old Stalinist-sponsored trade union federation now renamed the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia] has about 50 million members but membership is declining. But changes are occurring inside the FNPR-affiliated unions and within the FNPR itself. There is a radicalisation taking place, and they have become independent from the state. I would argue that the current leadership of the FNPR are honest and are attempting to build new structures. Many of these leaders came to prominence during the strike movement of the early 1990's, so they are a new generation.

The trade union newspaper *Solidarnost*, which is only 5 years old, is staffed by people who are under 30. They have seen the paper's circulation increase sevenfold in this period and grow from a Moscow local paper to an all-Russian paper.

BA: An important challenge for the trade union and labour movement is the forthcoming Duma [Parliament] elections,

scheduled for 16 December. How do you see this developing?

KB: If free and fair elections take place then the Yeltsin regime would win absolutely nothing because they are massively unpopular. Against this backdrop of unpopularity the government's initial strategy was to create two pro-Yeltsin blocs. One was slightly to the right, and led by Chernomyrdin. One was slightly to the left and headed by Rybkin — the speaker in the Duma. The Chernomyrdin bloc's slogan was "Our home is Russia". But this is known popularly as "Our Home is Gazprom" — the huge gas industry power bloc that Chernomyrdin once ran!

The leaders of the two blocs were ordered to create them and then political groupings and parties were told which bloc to join. The FNPR was told to join the Rybkin bloc. But the FNPR's leader Shmakov refused. He simply could not deliver his organisation to the government in that way.

The "bloc strategy" failed because it was discredited from the outset. Yeltsin's group thought they were setting up something akin to the US system, were the differences between the two parties are minimal. The popular view at the time was that Russia was moving towards a two-party system — one party was *pro-Yeltsin* the other party was *for Yeltsin!*

Yeltsin's group now want to see one strong bloc, headed by Chernomyrdin, complemented by a myriad of smaller oppositional groupings. They have organised a campaign to split the opposition which has succeeded. There are now more than 200 opposition parties which will create 60 oppositional blocs! The ballot paper in the election will be enormous! Only Chernomyrdin's bloc can benefit from this fragmentation.

This strategy of fostering splits has been bolstered by powerful financial interests. The social-democratic parties were told they would be given money if they formed their own bloc and did not join another.

At the same time sections of the media

have been bought up by the presidential bloc. The paper *Rabochaya Tribuna* which was in a critical financial position had their debts paid. Now they will be able to operate through the election period.

BA: Who has been attracted into political activity, who is filling all these new blocs and parties?

KB: In all the blocs there are famous writers, actors, singers, cosmonauts etc. These people are used to attract the attention of the populace. The new Duma will be more like a circus than a parliament! The president will be quite happy with this! The Duma is currently very weak but in the future it will be potentially even weaker.

BA: Is it likely that we will see an independent working class party emerge from this economic and political chaos?

KB: There is a real need for the emergence of an independent workers' movement based upon democratic socialism. It is the only hope for Russian workers. But there is the legacy of the past to clear away first. The old Stalinist words, phrases and parties have to be swept away. For example, any illusions about the nature of Zyuganov's Communist Party — which will potentially do quite well in the forthcoming elections — have to be dispelled. The Communist Party stands for nothing to do with either communism or socialism. Its programme is nationalist, chauvinist, patriotic and pro-market. An independent workers' party can only emerge once this is clearly understood by the mass of workers. The economic crisis will provide the objective background for this process.

BA: What about the presidential elections of June 1996? Do you think that Yavlinsky is correct when he suggests that Yeltsin may create a state of emergency and cancel the presidential elections, in order to cling onto power?

KB: It is likely that if the elections do take place Chernomyrdin will emerge with real power. Chernomyrdin, has money and the support of the new capitalists and what he doesn't control he can buy. Yeltsin, already is a lame duck from the point of view of the capitalists. His inability to resolve the Chechen crisis is an example of his lack of power.

BA: What about the Chechen war, I get the strong feeling talking to people in Moscow that there is very little hostility to the Chechens?

KB: That is correct. In general people blame the governments — both Yeltsin's and Dudayev's — for the conflict. This is a conflict between the old élites, Yeltsin and Dudayev were good friends for many years. Yeltsin supported Dudayev at the outset and allowed him to seize arms on Chechen territory. It is really a quarrel between two thieves and the people are paying the price — even though there was no money in the state budget for wages or pensions or rebuilding industry, the money could be found for the war. ☐



Ian Hart plays David in *Land and Freedom*

Land and freedom

Clive Bradley reviews

Land and Freedom, the new film by Ken Loach

LAND and Freedom could not have been made by any other film maker. It is a film about the Spanish civil war which is unmistakably socialist, which shows the Spanish revolution as a great movement of the workers and peasants that was stifled and crushed not only by Franco's fascists but by the Spanish Communist Party. Its powerful emotional effect comes not only from the tragedy that engulfs individuals, but from the tragedy of masses of people — "the masses"; the tragedy of a squandered and defeated revolution. It is an uncompromising socialist film which gives nothing to fashionable post-modernist post-Marxist pessimism. It boldly asserts that working-class socialism is possible. And this in itself is an extraordinary achievement.

The film follows David, a young Communist Party member from Liverpool who goes to Spain to fight for the Republic against the fascist uprising. In Spain, he is sent to fight with a detachment of the militia of the POUM (the Party of Marxist Workers Unity), a quasi-Trotskyist organisation. The film shows how the Spanish Stalinists gradually whittled down the spontaneous revolutionary energy of the workers and peasants, starved the POUM and the anarchists of weapons, and eventually drowned them in blood.

In Barcelona to convalesce after an injury in May 1937 David witnesses the Communist Party's decisive military turn against the POUM and the anarchists. He tears up his

Party card. Returning to the front, he is there when the Stalinist-run official army arrives to force the militia to disarm, branding the POUM Trotskyist and therefore "counter-revolutionary". Bewildered, the militia are shot at, and David's lover is killed.

The story is told through letters that David's granddaughter finds after his death in present-day Liverpool. We are reminded of the contemporary relevance of the fight against the Spanish fascists. More than that, the cutting between past and present gives a powerful sense of the war as "lived history". That these were real people rather

"An uncompromising socialist film which gives nothing to fashionable post-modernist post-Marxist pessimism."

than creatures of a historian's imagination, and that this real past has something vital to teach us, something which must not be lost.

In this it is like Loach's other work with the screenwriter, Jim Allen, in particular the marvellous 1970s TV serial, *Days of Hope*, about the British General Strike of 1926.

Loach is a completely distinctive director. It is hard to think of any living filmmaker who tackles such directly political subject matter, never mind one whose outlook is so coherently socialist. Technically too, Loach makes his mark. He films in sequence. The different sections of the film which take

place at the front were not filmed all at the same time — the normal film-making method — but in their dramatic order. Loach only gave the actors that part of the script which they were filming that day. Through this, and by partial improvisation, he achieves an almost-documentary realism.

In one scene, the foreign militia participate in a discussion about whether to collectivise the land in a village they have liberated from the fascists. To an extraordinary extent, we feel we are watching a real debate, not a scripted propaganda piece.

The film's subject would be familiar territory to anyone who has read George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. The big question is to what extent it makes sense to someone who knows absolutely nothing about the Spanish civil war.

The weakest section is the middle part, in Barcelona, where David's disillusionment with the Communist Party reaches its climax. This must have been the hardest part to stage. It's one thing to reconstruct the front in the middle of deserted countryside, quite another fighting in the streets of a major city. The result is a little confusing suggesting more an effect of typical left-wing fractiousness than of Stalinist agents of the Russian totalitarian state shooting workers in Spanish streets in defence of the Spanish bourgeoisie.

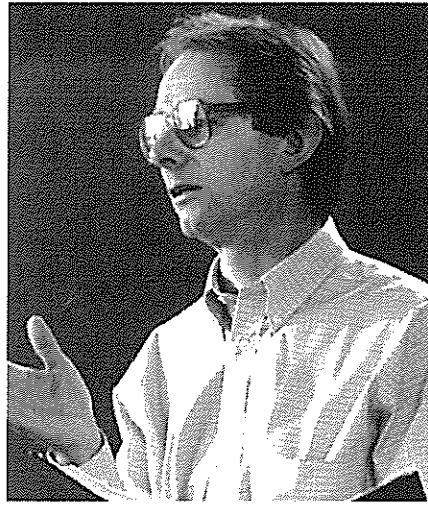
The anti-Stalinists never have the ideological coherence of the main Stalinist character, the American, Lawrence. Where he speaks persuasively and articulately, the POUM people tend to speak in general revolutionary slogans. No doubt it reflects some truth about the POUM, although the film understandably doesn't try to examine the POUM critically (an almost impossible task to achieve without making the plot utterly

confusing). Nevertheless, the film leaves itself open to attack from its ideological enemies: "Okay, what would they have done?" It allows room for an interpretation that revolutionary socialism is a splendid idea, but doomed to failure in the face of hard-nosed real-politik. Was this meant by Loach and Allen to be so, or is it an unintended reflection of their own political condition?

But this is a drama, not a pamphlet. It brings to life an important episode in working-class history, and rescues it from the mythology of the Popular Front. The Spanish actors involved have said that they themselves didn't know this history. If it makes anyone want to find out more about the Spanish revolution and its betrayal, it has performed a great service.

As drama, it has its moments of weakness. The love story is too thin to have much impact, and one wonders what David was doing writing to his fiancée about it. Sometimes it feels that too great an expanse of time is forced into too short a length of film, and events seem episodic and slightly disconnected.

But who else is making films like this, if indeed anyone has ever made them apart



Ken Loach

from Russian film makers in the 1920s? The only comparable recent film I can think of (apart from Loach's own) is John Sayles' *Matewan*, about a strike in America in the 1920s. *Land and Freedom* is an important, excellent film, which deserves as wide an audience as possible. ■

Mel Christ, superstar

Paddy Dollard reviews

Braveheart

THE Scottish National Party is mounting a recruitment campaign around *Braveheart*, and well they might. This is an odd concoction, a cultural hybrid which has a raw note of sincerity to it and is therefore strangely moving.

Its hero is William Wallace who in the 13th century led a popular movement for Scotland's independence from the English, until, betrayed to the English king by the high Scottish nobility, he was hanged in London, disembowelled alive and then chopped in pieces. This is the Wallace of one of the best political songs ever written, Robert Burns' "Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled..." [Scots who have with Wallace bled].

As history it is risible in parts. Wallace has an affair with Isabella, the French wife of the future King Edward II — the homosexual king who was dethroned by Isabella and her lover Mortimer and then murdered by having a red hot poker thrust up his anus into his bowels — and leaves her pregnant with the future Edward III...

Nevertheless, it works. It is a tale of how a people, scorning its own traitorous nobility, rise up, and start a stubborn struggle to win their independence — their "freedom". Their leader, Wallace, is Robin Hood, William Tell, Davy Crockett and Jesus Christ all in one.

Mel Gibson, the American-Australian star

and director of *Braveheart* is a fundamentalist Catholic and this film is full of the Christian symbols of sacrifice, martyrdom and popular redemption through the shedding of the martyr's blood. Gibson's images merge his version of the story of William Wallace, Scotland's saviour, into the gospel story of Jesus Christ, the saviour of human kind. The symbols become fused and interchangeable. Even the table on which Wallace is made to lie down to be butchered is shaped like a cross.

This film tries to do for Wallace and Scottish nationalism what Patrick Pearse did for Irish nationalism. Pearse's mystical Catholic nationalist poetry and his all too real martyrdom after the 1916 Easter Rising fused Irish nationalism with Christian mythology. Pearse died, and Gibson is raking in the big bucks, but the emotional power of such things should not be underestimated, even in an era like ours when Christianity is not what it used to be.

A mythology bestowed on the SNP as an unexpected gift from Hollywood could not have the power of the real "blood sacrifice" of Pearse. It can have a cumulative effect. The SNP's use of this film must inevitably strengthen the raw, racial, right wing element in its own political physiognomy.

At some point Nationalism such as it is in Scotland now, fermenting and bubbling, must if continuously frustrated, undergo a sea change into something far more malignant.

The sooner a Scottish assembly convenes, the better! ■

New Year in Spain

The road ran downhill into Spain,
The wind blew fresh on bamboo grasses,
The white plane trees were bone naked
and the issues plain:

We have come to a place in space where
shortly

All of us may be forced to camp in time:
The slender searchlights climb,
Our sins will find us out, even our sins of
omission.

When I reached the town it was dark,
No lights in the streets but two and a half
millions of people
Of people in circulation
Condemned like the beasts in the ark
With nothing but water around them:
Will there ever be a green tree or a rock that
is dry?

The shops are empty and in Barceloneta the
eye

Sockets of the houses are empty.
But still they manage to laugh
Though they have no eggs, no milk, no fish,
no fruit, no tobacco, no butter
Though they live upon lentils and sleep in the
Metro,

Though the old order is gone and the
golden calf

Of Catalan industry shattered;
The human values remain purged in the fire
And it appears that every man's desire
Is life rather than victuals.

Life being more, it seems, than merely the
bare

Permission to keep alive and receive orders,
Humanity being more than a mechanism
To be oiled and greased and for ever unaware
Of the work it is turning out, of why the
wheels keep turning;
Here at last the soul has found its voice
Though not indeed by choice;
The cost was heavy.

They breathe the air of war and yet the
tension

Admits, beside the slogans it evokes,
An interest in philately or pelota
Or private jokes.
And the sirens cry in the dark morning
And the lights go out and the town is still
And the sky is pregnant with ill will
And the bombs come foxing the fated victim.
As pretty as a Guy Fawkes show
Silver sprays and tracer bullets
And in the pauses of destruction
The cocks in the centre of the town crow.
The cocks crow in Barcelona
Where clocks are few to strike the hour:
Is it heart's reveille or the sour
Reproach of Simon Peter?

The year has come to an end,
Time for resolutions, for stock taking;
Felice Nuevo Año!

May God, if there is one, send
As much courage again and greater vision
And resolve the antinomies in which we live
Where a man must be either safe because he
is negative
Or free on the edge of a razor.
Give those who are gentle strength,
Give those who are strong a generous
imagination,
And make their halftruth true and let the
crooked
Footpath find its parent road at length.

Louis MacNeice, 1938

Sanhaja Akrouf describes the terror facing women in Algeria

“The Islamic fundamentalists are not anti-imperialists”

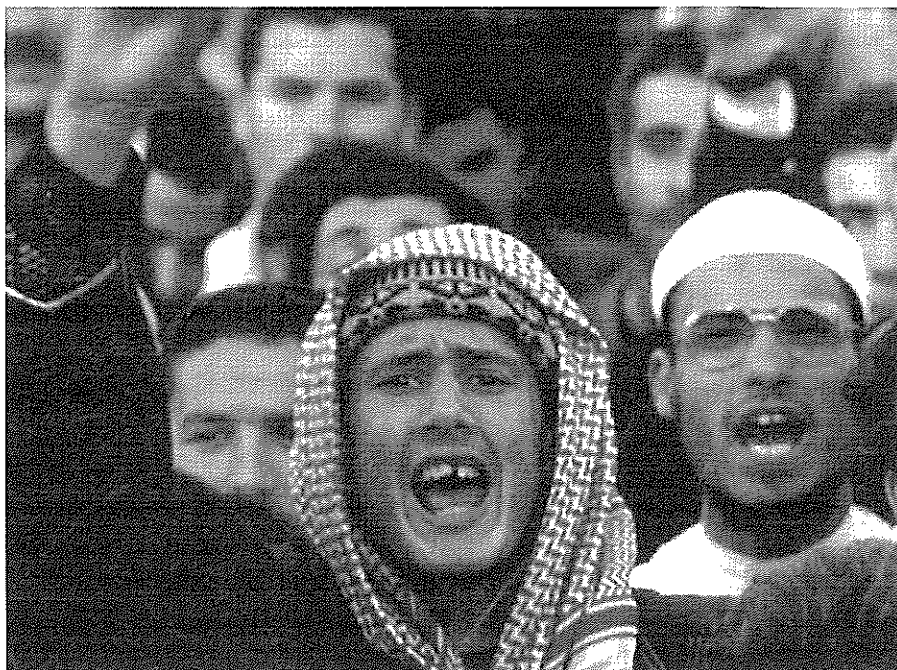
For some people on the left in Britain, Islamic fundamentalism in Asia and Africa is a revolutionary or semi-revolutionary movement, wrong-headed but basically anti-imperialist. To socialists and trade unionists in the countries where fundamentalism is a big force, it looks different.

Sanhaja Akrouf is an Algerian Trotskyist, a member of the PST (Socialist Workers' Party — no relation to the British SWP). She has been living in France for two years, but before that was active in Algerian politics for over ten years, firstly around the Communist Party and then as a Trotskyist. She came to speak at the Workers' Liberty 95 summer school, and while here told us about politics in Algeria.

Elections in December 1991 looked certain to give power to the fundamentalists of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). Before the second round of the two-stage elections could take place, the army staged a coup d'état (in January 1992). It pushed aside the discredited regime of the National Liberation Front (FLN), which had ruled since leading Algeria's struggle for independence in 1954-62, and set about trying to defeat the fundamentalists by military terror.

Since then socialists have faced both repression by the military regime and — even worse — a terror campaign by the fundamentalists. According to figures collected by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, there were more political murders of trade unionists in Algeria last year (three hundred) than in all the rest of the world added together.

Sanhaja explained how both the left and the fundamentalists grew in the 1980s.



Fundamentalism can be the cry of oppressed, but it offers no answers.

After independence in 1962, all parties outside the FLN were banned. The Communist Party had a semi-legal existence, and was very influential among workers and students; but it subordinated the demands of the workers and students to support for the government.

This meant that there was no visible left-wing alternative to the government, which called itself socialist. That created an opening for the fundamentalists, starting from the 1970s.

The regime went for crash industrialisation in the 1960s and '70s. It would have been good if they had really had the means to carry it through, but in fact it was a sham: they just wanted to pose as a great power.

Social policy was sacrificed. More and more people lived in terrible conditions and had nothing to lose.

The Berber movement in the early '80s opened up the situation for the left. The PST was set up. In the student movement of 1985-6 the PST grew further, to about 600 members in 1989. The PST has always been very much based on students.

The “Lambertist” PT also grew from the student movement. They have always been smaller than the PST, though since they became legal their leader Louiza Hanoune has become very well-known, and popular with rank-and-file FIS supporters.

Today the PST and the PT are very much weakened by the polarisation of politics between the army and the fundamentalists.

The PT is for a coalition government of the fundamentalists, the FLN, and the FFS. They went to Rome for the meeting of opposition parties with the FIS, the FFS, and the FLN.

The PST is on principle against such discussions with the fundamentalists. Today they will discuss with you in Rome, but only in order to kill you tomorrow. They say, black-on-white, that no other party should exist.

We can, for example, demand the release of all political prisoners including the fundamentalists, but we should not work with them. We should denounce them.

The fundamentalists mainly target the people who backed the coup d'état — the Stalinists, the military, the police, left-wing trade unionists, journalists. Over 100 Stalinists have been killed. In some villages the fundamentalists impose a reign of terror. There is a climate of fear.

The government, for their part, have razed whole villages suspected of fundamentalism. Last summer seventy per cent of the forest in eastern Algeria was destroyed because it might be a shelter for the fundamentalists. Fundamentalists

are ruthlessly tortured in jail.

There is a mysterious organisation called the OJL, Organisation of Free Youth, which is probably a creation of the State. It threatens that every time a woman is killed for not wearing a veil, it will kill a veiled woman. And it does kill.

Some leftists, I think, have been killed by the government in order both to get rid of them and to discredit the fundamentalists, who get blamed for the murders.

The PT's politics obviously make life easier for them. Members of the PST have been killed because they are against the FIS. Others can no longer go to work because of the danger of being killed. They live in terrible conditions, conditions hard to appreciate for us in England or France who take it for granted that we have our cup of coffee and our glass of wine.

The PT say that the FIS represents the people — and you cannot be against the people — and that it is "anti-imperialist".

The fundamentalists are not really anti-imperialist. They are anti-West, anti-Christian, anti-semitic. For them, the West is Satan. They are in favour of a deal with the IMF, in favour of cooperation with the capitalist multinationals. They support free-market economics on the grounds that "God gives to whom he wishes". Fundamentalist Saudi Arabia has close ties with the USA. But for the fundamentalists, socialists and democrats are simply enemies of God.

As everywhere, the leaders of the fundamentalists are middle class. The fundamentalists have been strong in the colleges since the 1970s. They are also very strong in the poorest areas, where they get most of their votes.

But they are not a force in the trade unions. It would be wrong to say that the workers are consciously anti-fundamentalist, but the UGTA, which is anti-fundamentalist, got ninety per cent support for a strike it called in March 1990, while the separate Islamic trade union could get fewer than five per cent of the workforce out.

Attitudes to the fundamentalists, Sanhaja explained, are now the major difference between the two groups of the Algerian revolutionary left, the PST and the PT.

In Palestine, our view is that there is now an Israeli Jewish nation in Palestine, and the territory has to be shared between them and the Palestinian Arabs. This used to be the main dividing line between the PST and the PT: they were for the destruction of Israel and we were for two states. Their representative Louiza Hanoune would appear on television and explain the differences in those terms.

Where can the revolutionary left look for alliances and support? Sanhaja explained:

The Stalinists, the RCD — a mainly Berber-based organisation which is close to the Gaullist RPR in France — and the trade union organisation, the UGTA, support the military government, with various criticisms.

The UGTA used to be part of the FLN machine, becoming independent only

since the late '80s. But it does really represent workers. Its ability to bring workers out on strike proves it.

It is a bureaucratic organisation. But it has clearly opposed fundamentalism, and it is the only force which represents the workers in any way.

Recently it has been publishing a newspaper which is more radical than the revolutionary left, demanding, for example, a minimum wage of 2000 dinars.

The UGTA leadership will not take the struggle forward. And at present neither the revolutionary left groups, the PST and the PT, nor those Stalinists who remain on the left and are the only real political force in the trade unions, have the strength to give a lead. Yet the trade unions remain the only hope for the working class.

The PST majority, Sanhaja explained, says we must build a workers' party to lead the revolution. A minority, including me, says that at this stage we should build a broad front against the fundamentalists and the regime.

But, we said, don't socialists in Algeria

"London is an important base for the fundamentalists. Many of the... leaders were educated in England."

have to offer the workers and the unemployed an alternative social programme? And doesn't that imply a workers' party?

We need an electoral front. It would not include the anti-fundamentalist right, for example the RCD, who are for the IMF. To beat the fundamentalists it is not enough to say that we are for democracy. To the masses, that means nothing. The front has to include demands for the right to housing and the right to work.

The main forces should be the UGTA and the FFS. The FFS — Socialist Forces Front — is a party based mainly in Algeria's Berber minority (thirty per cent of the population) and led by a former FLN leader, Ait Ahmed. The FFS has a real base among the poor. In some big cities, like Algiers — which is fifty per cent Berber — it has a social base similar to that of the FIS. And it is the main political force among Algerian workers in France.

If that's so, shouldn't the revolutionaries work as a faction inside the FFS?

It should be considered.

The Berber question has been very important for the left in Algeria. Ever since independence the Berber population centred in Kabylie (in western Algeria) has demanded the right to its own identity, which was suppressed by the government. Today Kabylie is the most militant area against the fundamentalists. In some places they have village militias against the fundamentalists.

Sanhaja herself grew up in eastern Algeria, with a Berber father and an Arab mother. She explains that she did not speak Berber until the rise of the Berber movement in the 1980s — like millions of others, she had had it drummed into her that Berber was inferior to Arabic. It was a tremendous liberation, to want to speak Berber, to be proud of being Berber.

But the fundamentalists grew faster than the left. In the 1970s the fundamentalists hardly existed. They started doing systematic work in the schools and colleges, and it bore fruit. Some of the first fundamentalist leaders were people from Egypt expelled by Nasser.

The fundamentalists began to grow fast in the 1980s. It is not just because I am a Marxist that I say that the material situation determined this growth — the rise of unemployment, poverty, poor housing, and despair among young people.

As late as 1988 the fundamentalists were still a minority in the opposition to the regime. But to jobless young men they said that Islam would bring them a job, marriage, and a good life. More and more young men believed them.

Of course, Islam is like all religions. Everyone interprets it in their own way. I was frightened when I first stopped my Muslim religious observances. But then nothing happened, and I am sure now that I was right to reject Islam.

I know there are people who can see positive things in the Koran. My sister is a Muslim, though she does not wear a veil, she goes dancing, she enjoys herself. If some people think the Koran is positive for them, all right. I know that it is negative for me as a woman.

But the fundamentalists derive all truth, about politics or about details of everyday life, from the Koran. There is no room for discussion.

We have taken part in student strikes alongside the fundamentalists, and in workers' strikes too. We went on demonstrations against the Gulf War with the fundamentalists, although they insisted on having separate men's and women's marches. But there is no basis for debate.

In France, I disagree with the government policy of banning the veil in schools. But we should not work with the fundamentalists on such issues. They pretend to be democrats only because it suits their purposes. They are still anti-semitic, anti-democratic, and anti-women.

London is an important base for the fundamentalists. Many of the Algerian fundamentalist leaders were educated in England. One of the fundamentalists' demands in Algeria is that English should be the second language in place of French. They even say that England is a more Muslim country than Algeria, because in England girls can go to school with veils.

The role of the fundamentalists in Algeria is similar to that of the fascist far right in France, England, or Germany. But while for the fascists the enemy is Arabs, or Asians, or Turks, for the fundamentalists it is women. ■

Irish farmers sacrificed on t

Exactly 150 years ago the Irish famine began. At least a million people died. Clairen Ennis tells the story after reading "This Great Calamity" by Christine Kinealy (Gill and Macmillan)

"GOD MADE the (potato) blight, but England made the famine." That idea has been etched into the minds of Irish people and people of Irish descent for six generations since Ireland's "Great Hunger" began with a partial failure of the potato crop late in the summer of 1845, exactly one hundred and fifty years ago. The potato crop would fail, completely or in part, for four terrible successive years — '45, '46, '47 and '48 — during which, over a million people — citizens of the UK, then the richest state on earth — starved to death or died of cholera.

The potato crop failed all over Europe and in England too. Everywhere it caused distress to the very poor. But nowhere except in Ireland did that failure result in mass starvation.

Why? Nowhere else but Ireland did so many people depend on the potato for their staple diet and as the sole barrier between themselves and starvation.

Ireland was a land ruled by the descendants of conquering landlords and

populated mainly by those whose ancestors they had conquered and forced for centuries into something like serfdom.

The landlords were often absentees who lived in London on the proceeds of robbing those who worked their land. Their vast estates were run by agents.

They were sub-let in large expanses to men who would sub-let them in smaller parcels. These in turn were sub-let, and so on down to hundreds of thousands of families who leased an acre, half an acre, or a quarter acre of land on which to grow potatoes. They would add to their resources by seasonal work in England or Scotland and by begging. They had no reserves, no prospects. Outside of north east Ulster, there was little industry to employ those who could not live off the land.

From 1800 to the famine, the population doubled, from 4 to 8 million. Then in 1845 "God" sent the blight, and famine came because of the way society was organised.

People were allowed to starve to death because all the puny institutions of charity and succour could not cope with the great sea of uprooted, starving people. Only the resources of the UK government could have saved that mass of people from starvation. But the mid-19th century British government was slow to recognise any responsibility and slower still to act on it.

Some relief was given in return for work digging roads — or digging for no useful purpose — by starved and sometimes dying people. The viable areas of Irish society — those who held sizeable amounts of land — shut out the starving and the dying. Diminishing charity excepted, they could not have what they could not pay for, even to save their lives. Famine prices were charged. The starving, as a rule, could pay for nothing.

Government was in the grip of the dogma that nothing should be done to relieve the starving that would interfere with the normal workings of markets, or undercut "normal trade", or encourage the poor to "expect something for nothing." Better that people should starve to death!

The British official in charge, Trevelyan,

"Government was in the grip of the dogma that nothing should be done to relieve the starving that would interfere with the normal workings of markets."



While immense numbers of people were going out of the country!

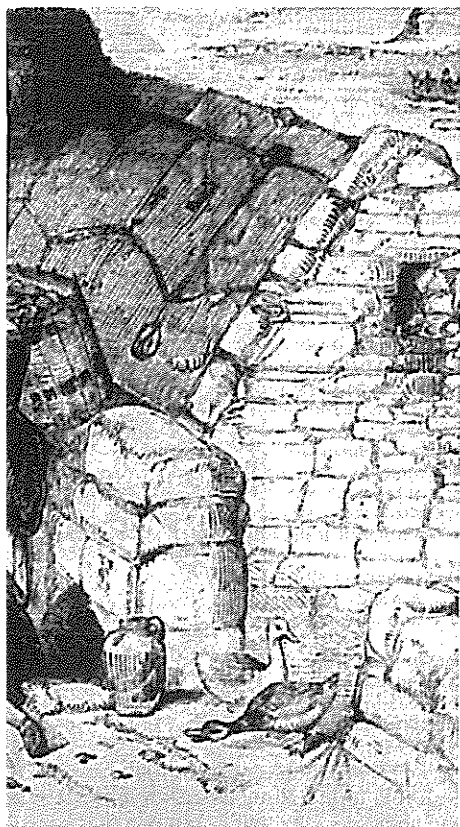
— one of the most hated names in Irish history — later expressed the view that he had *done too much* to relieve the famine-stricken people.

While immense numbers of people were starving, food they could not pay for was going out of the country!

Priests preached submission to the will of God to bewildered, hungry people for whom their accustomed world had turned into a place as murderously hostile, as bare of nourishment as the Sahara Desert or the icy wastes of the North Pole. They submitted — a submission that would to subsequent Irish generations be as hard to understand, and as hard to come to terms with emotionally, as is for Israeli today, the docility with which the trapped Jews of Hitler's Europe submitted to their fate a century later.

Whole villages starved to death. Travellers would come upon the bodies of starved children and adults with mouths stained green from eating grass in a country that was exporting corn and cattle.

the altar of private property



starving, food they could not pay for

In the wake of famine came fever — cholera. And that was not confined to the very poor.

And there was then a panic-stricken exodus from the fertile country made into a desert for so many of its inhabitants by those who monopolised the means of life and used soldiers and armed policemen to keep "the thin hands of the poor" off the means of life. Those who could raise the fare fled to England, or the US, or Canada.

Packed as tight as possible by profiteering shipowners, they brought cholera with them, infecting the uninfected so that the ships hurrying across the Atlantic would turn in weeks from ships full of those who had survived and thought they had escaped with their lives, into coffin-ships full of belated victims of the famine. Unknowingly, they had carried their fate on board ship with them.

Then came mass evictions. In its callous bourgeois sluggishness and its dogmatic worship of a free market which could not be interfered with, no matter what the

human cost, the government had committed sins of omission. It had failed to act humanely. Now it became an active force that deliberately worsened the awful situation in Ireland.

The government decided to make landlords responsible for the taxes (rates) their starving or half-starving tenants could not pay. So far some landlords had tried to live by the ideal of *noblesse oblige*. Some had responded as human beings and put themselves out of pocket to help their tenants. Now the government faced them with ruinous taxes if they did not evict impetunious tenants.

To avoid ruin, they began to evict tenants who might otherwise have kept a roof over their heads. Now the roofs and the walls were put in by crow-bar wielding bailiffs guarded by armed policemen, and starving men, women and children added their abused bodies to the throngs on the roads or congregating outside the workhouses.

Thus it went on through '45, '46, '47 and '48 until edible potatoes grew in 1949. Abandoned cabins (homes) dotted the countryside. Old Irish slums swelled and grew in towns like Liverpool and Manchester; new Irish slums dotted the cities on the eastern seaboard of the USA.

In the next generation and the ones after that they would work their way up in American society to become a great power in American politics. They would make Irish nationalism in the USA a force. They would always be a force "against England."

The idea that "God made the blight, but England made the famine" was given that formulation by John Mitchell, an emigré Irish journalist living in the USA. It is true. Yet it is only part of the truth.

The bourgeois British government was callous and brutal; it did not scruple to use the famine to bankrupt and clear out moribund debt-ridden Irish landlords. But in most of what it did it was governed not by national feeling against the Irish, but by the dominant bourgeois ideas and economic superstitions of the day.

They sincerely believed that ruin would come from too much government interference with the economy. There is evidence that at the time the British government administered the workhouse system in Ireland more liberally and humanely than in Britain.

Maybe, a native Irish government would have done better for its own people. But



Modern famines are also made by the defenders of private property

maybe it would not. The Irish bourgeoisie too shared in the then common superstitions, the *phishorogues*, of the bourgeois economists. Many of those who exploited the famine and those stricken by it, and who benefited from it, were the Irish Catholic Gombeenmen.

At best, the explanation of it in nationalist, nation against nation, terms was a tendentious part-truth. James Connolly, the Irish socialist leader shot by the British in 1916, expressed the main truth.

He said that *only those who rejected the profit system, only those who rejected capitalism, only those who condemned the system of private property that allowed the haves in Irish society to exclude the have nots, assigning a million of them to death, only they had a right to condemn the British who so callously presided over and administered that system during the famine.*

The generations of Irish people driven out since independence, could testify from their own less terrible experience that Connolly understood the heart of the question.

"God" made the blight, but private property and those who put the rights and prerogatives of the owners of property above the right to life of their starving fellow citizens, made the famine. ■

Should socialists back Labour?

THE QUESTION of the Labour Party is the question of our attitude to mass working-class politics as it actually exists, and insofar as it exists. It is one of the great lines that bisects the left now. For almost a century the Labour Party has been the party of the trade unions. At its best it has been trade union-style bargaining generalised to society as a whole, and extended into the parliamentary arena. The modern welfare state was a product of this work.

The Labour Party is not, of course, a passive and pure reflection of trade unionism. It is a political formation which has harnessed working-class drives and concerns and shaped them into accommodation with the existing capitalist system. The drive of the working class in 1945 for radical change was condensed into major reforms which left the bosses still in control of the commanding heights of the economy and the state.

Here too, Labourism parallels what trade unions do in their specific areas. Trade unions operate within market categories. Normally they bargain within an acceptance of the employers' right to make profit, that is, to exploit the workers. The Labour Party, "the party of the trade unions" — that is, a workers' party — is, also, a bourgeois party. Lenin rightly called it a "bourgeois workers' party."

It is a contradictory and ultimately unstable thing. At its peak so far, in the middle decades of the 20th century — say 1940 to 1980 — it embodied a "historic compromise" between a partially aroused working class and the bourgeoisie working through the pre-Thatcher "one-nation" Tory Party. That consensus broke down at the end of the '70s. Ultimately, it had to. Tragically it was the bourgeoisie and not the working class that went on the offensive to tilt the old balance in its own favour. The dominant position of the Labour Party in working-class politics helped ensure that. The Labour Party has suffered the consequences of the general working-class defeats it had itself engineered or aided the Tories in inflicting.

From working-class strength, Labour after 1945 imposed a welfare state on the Tories; from working-class defeat after 1979 the Tories have imposed a mad worship of the market on Labour. Blair expresses the political hegemony established by the Thatcher Tories over the Labour Party.

To think that the current *politics* of the Labour Party disqualify it as any sort of working-class party is not to know its history.

The Labour Party at the top has always accepted the going wisdom of the bour-

geoisie. They were not full-employment Keynesians before the thinking segments of the bourgeoisie was; and they did not long remain Keynesians after bourgeois opinion shifted.

Clause Four was adopted by the leadership in 1918 at the same time as constituency parties with individual membership were first organised: both changes were means to the end of heading off the development of a mass communist movement.

Clause Four embodied the socialist hopes of many workers and of some labour movement bodies, but it snared those hopes: for there was never a living connection between Clause Four "revolutionary socialism" and the day-to-day work of the labour movement, or the practices of Labour governments.

Workers' Liberty defended Clause Four against Blair. Yet the Blairites had a point when they said that — with the exception of Ted Grant of *Militant* and *Socialist Appeal* — no one believed Labour in office intended to be guided by Clause Four.

Labour-trade union links are weaker now than they were during the decades when the leaders of the organised trade unions were the great bulwark of the right; these links are under fierce attack. But insofar as the working class and the trade unions, with even a vestige of self-organisation engages in mass politics, it is through the Labour Party. Despite the Blairites, the Labour Party remains the party of the working class; a Labour government is the next step towards a general revival of the labour movement.

On the other side of the spectrum from ourselves are those who deny this. Rightly loathing the Labour establishment because it accepts and promulgates Thatcherite politics; repelled by the almost Stalinist

regime the Labour Party uses against dissenters; sickened by the cult of little Mister Blair, they reject the idea that the Labour Party is any sort of working-class party. Serious people who make such a judgement on the Labour Party will not vote Labour. Others oscillate incoherently.

The SWP on a day-to-day basis talks and acts as if the Labour Party has no connection with the working class, and as if the labour movement's concern with Parliament were a positive waste of time — and then shout "vote Labour" in elections, falling on their knees before the dominant right wing, suspending criticism!

Those individual socialists who submerge themselves in the Labour Party, bobbing on the surface like planks on the waves after a shipwreck, atomised individuals content to be mere passen-

gers, have just as little chance of shaping events in the political labour movement as the stand-aside sectarians. To be effective, socialists must band together and organise.

The following excerpt from a 1932 article by Leon Trotsky discusses whether or not socialists in the United States should try to build a Labor Party it sheds a flood of lights on these questions.

Of course, only an idiot would go to a 63-year old text of Trotsky's for answers to current problems. What we can get from such texts is help in learning how to think through our own politics, and in defining ourselves and our tasks clearly.

In fact Trotsky in this article comes out emphatically against raising the call for a labour party in the USA. He is still a critical supporter of the Communist International (and will continue so until mid-1933, after the Communist International's peaceful surrender to Hitler in Germany). The great mass labour unions of the US workers (the CIO) have not yet arisen.

Trotsky will change his position on the Labor Party in America. In the late '30s Trotsky and his comrades in the USA will call on the great new unions born in semi-revolutionary sit-in strikes, to go on from creating industrial trade unions to build a labour party structurally modelled on the British Labour Party.

The Trotskyists advocating the labour party in the trade unions would, had the unions created such a party, have kept their own organisation intact and fought within the broad trade union-based labour party for consistently socialist and class struggle politics. In this, Trotsky readopted the approach Frederick Engels had had to the first attempt to build a broad trade union-based party in Britain — Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party of 1893. Engels urged members of the Marxist organisation, the Social Democratic Federation, which he considered sectarian and religious, as opposed to creative, rational and evolution-minded, to leave that organisation and join the ILP, despite its political woolliness.

It is not entirely clear to us that Trotsky was right in his conclusion in 1932. Precisely for the reason that his 1932 article rejects involvement in campaigning for a broad Labour Party, it forces us to think about the issues. Trotsky's article is an immensely valuable example of *the approach Marxists must adopt*, whatever tactics they embrace for now — and of the ideas that govern and inform their work inside as well as outside parties like the Labour Party.

A Labor Party in the USA?

By Leon Trotsky

1. WHAT was my idea on the labour party in that statement? I stated that American politics will be Europeanized in the sense that the inevitable and imminent development of a party of the working class will totally change the political face of the United States. This is a commonplace for a Marxist. The question was not of a labor party in the specific British sense of that word but in the general European sense, without designating what form such a party would take or what phases it would go through. There was not the slightest necessity in that interview to enter into the internal tactical differences within the Communist ranks.

2. One can declare that even the general term "party of the working class" does not exclude a labour party in the British sense. Be that as it may. However, such an eventuality has nothing to do with a precise tactical question. We can admit hypothetically that the American trade-union bureaucracy will be forced, under certain historical conditions, to imitate the British trade-union bureaucracy in creating a kind of party based upon the trade unions. But that eventuality, which appears to me to be very problematical, does not constitute an aim for which the Communists must strive and on which one must concentrate the attention of the proletarian vanguard.

3. A long period of confusion in the Comintern led many people to forget a very simple but absolutely irrevocable principle: that a Marxist, a proletarian revolutionist, cannot present himself before the working class with two banners. He cannot say at a workers' meeting: "I have a ticket for a first-class party and another, cheaper ticket for the backward workers." If I am a Communist, I must fight for the Communist party.

4. One can say that under the American conditions a labor party in the British sense would be a progressive step, and by recognizing this and stating so, we ourselves, even though indirectly, help to establish such a party. But that is precisely the reason I will never assume the responsibility to affirm abstractly and dogmatically that the creation of a labor party would be a "progressive step" even in the United States, because I do not know under what circumstances, under what guidance, and for what purposes that party would be created. It seems to me more probable that especially in America, which does not possess any important traditions of independent political action by the working class (like Chartism in England, for example) and where the trade-union bureaucracy is more reactionary and corrupted than it was at the height of the British empire, the creation of a labour party could be provoked only by mighty revolutionary pressure from the working masses and by the growing threat of communism. It is absolutely clear that under these conditions the labor party would signify not a progressive step but a hindrance to the progressive evolution of the working class.

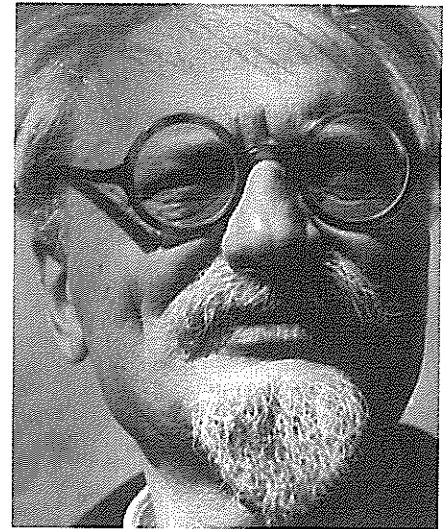
5. In what form the party of the working class will become a genuine mass party in the United

States in the immediate future we cannot prophesy, because the socialist and labor parties differ greatly in the various countries, even in Europe. In Belgium, for example, we see an intermediate sort of party arise. Certainly the phases of development of the proletarian party in America will be *sui generis*. We can only affirm with the greatest assurance: Especially since the United States, in the period from 1921 to 1924, has already had an important rehearsal in the creation of a labor or farmer-labor party, a resurrection of a similar movement cannot be a simple repetition of that experience, but a far more pregnant and more crystallized movement, either under the guidance of a revolutionary Communist party or under the guidance of reformist elements against a growing Communist party. And if even in 1921-24 the Communist Party did not find great possibilities for independent action inside the organization of an inchoate labor party, it would have less possibility in the new phase of an analogous movement.

6. One can imagine that the trade-union bureaucracy and its socialist and left-democratic advisers may show themselves to be more perspicacious and begin the formation of a labour party before the revolutionary movement becomes too threatening. In view of the groping empiricism and provincial narrowness of the American labor bureaucracy and the aristocracy of labor, such perspicacity seems very improbable. The failure of such an attempt in the past shows us that the bureaucracy, so tenacious in its immediate aims, is absolutely incapable of systematic political action on a great scale even in the interests of capitalist society. The bureaucracy must receive a blow on the skull before taking such a "radical" initiative. However, if the creation of a labor party would prevent, in a certain period, great successes of communism, our elementary duty must be, not to proclaim the progressiveness of the labor party, but its insufficiency, ambiguity, and limitedness, and its historical role as a hindrance to the proletarian revolution.

7. Must we join that labour party or remain outside? This is not a question of principle but of circumstances and possibilities. The question itself has arisen from the experience of the British Communists with the Labour Party, and that experience has served far more the Labour Party than the Communists. It is evident that the possibility of participating in a labor-party movement and of utilizing it would be greater in the period of its inception, that is, in the period when the party is not a party but an amorphous political mass movement. That we must participate in it at that time and with the greatest energy is without question; not to help form a labour party which will exclude us and fight against us, but to push the progressive elements of the movement more and more to the left by our activity and propaganda. I know this seems too simple for the great new school which searches everywhere for some method to jump over its feeble head.

8. To consider a labor party as an integrated series of united fronts signifies a misunderstanding of the notions both of the united front and of the party. The united front is deter-



mined by concrete circumstances, for concrete aims. The party is permanent. In a united front we leave our hands free to break with our temporary allies. In a common party with these allies we are bound by discipline and even by the fact of the party itself. The experience of the Kuomintang and of the Anglo-Russian Committee must be well understood. The strategic line dictated by the lack of a spirit of independence of the Communist party and by the desire to enter into the "big" party (Kuomintang, Labour Party) inevitably produced all the consequences of the opportunistic adaptation to the will of the allies and, through them, to that of the enemy. We must educate our cadres to believe in the invincibility of the Communist idea and in the future of the Communist party. The parallel struggle for another party inevitably produces in their minds a duality and turns them onto the road of opportunism.

9. The policy of the united front has not only its great advantages but its limits and its dangers as well. The united front, even in the form of temporary blocs, often impels one to opportunist deviations which are frequently fatal, as, for example, with Brandler in 1923. That danger becomes absolutely predominant in a situation in which the so-called Communist party becomes a part of a labor party created by the grace of the propaganda and action of the Communist party itself.

10. That the labour party can become an arena of successful struggle for us, and that the labor party, created as a barrier to communism, can under certain circumstances strengthen the Communist party, is true, but only under the condition that we consider the labour party not as "our" party but as an arena in which we are acting as an absolutely independent Communist party.

11. All the resolutions about the British Labour Party must be evaluated not as they were written before the experiences of the Comintern and the British Communist Party in that regard, but in the light of that experience. The attempt to apply them mechanically now, in 1932, to American conditions, is characteristic of the mind of the epigones and has nothing to do with Marxism and Leninism.

12. It is not necessary to say that the idea of a farmer-labor party is a treacherous mockery of Marxism.

19 May 1932

Election for UNISON General Secretary Should socialists back Bickerstaffe?

No, says Declan Tudor

UNISON, Britain's biggest union, will be voting in October for a replacement for its retiring General Secretary, Alan Jinkinson. There are four candidates — Rodney Bickerstaffe, Militant Labour's Roger Banister, who is standing on the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON (CDFU) platform, the SWP's Yunus Bakhsh and Peter Hunter, a Catholic anti-abortionist. The result is not in doubt. Rodney Bickerstaffe will walk it.

How should socialists vote? If there had been a Blairite candidate running against Bickerstaffe, fulfilling the same role as Jack Dromey did when Bill Morris was seeking re-election in the TGWU earlier this year, then it would be easy and clear cut — Rodney Bickerstaffe would have to receive the support of all serious socialists in the union. Rodney Bickerstaffe, along with Bill Morris, opposes (some of) the sweeping changes Blair is making and planning in the Labour Party.

There is no such challenge. Shall we, nonetheless, support him? I say no.

Rodney Bickerstaffe has been an Associate General Secretary since UNISON was established. He is as responsible as anyone for the unacceptable role that the leadership has played on all the key issues.

Bickerstaffe represents some of the worse characteristics of the UNISON leadership — for example centralising power in the hands of unelected full timers, and undermining the power of branches.

Despite this, supporters of Workers' Liberty have been at the forefront of arguing that, in the absence of any credible, non-aligned left candidate, it would be a mistake to stand a candidate against Rodney Bickerstaffe:

- It could only divert attention from the essential battles within the union over cuts and pay.

- Many ex-NUPE members will not understand why the predominately ex-NALGO left is standing against him.

We argued that branches should not nominate either the SWP or the Militant Labour candidate; or Bickerstaffe.

Yunus Bakhsh, a Newcastle health branch secretary, is standing only as an SWP member. The SWP are not even pretending that his candidature is part of any broader project in the union — it is purely a party-building exercise. The several hundred SWP members in the union will no doubt ensure that he receive a vote that is not completely derisory.

Yunus Bakhsh may receive more votes than NEC member Roger Banister, the



Rodney Bickerstaffe

Militant candidate will receive. Militant Labour is a declining and relatively weak force in the union. But the CDFU, although it is not a massive force, is by far the biggest broad left type grouping in the union and carries weight with many activists. Because of the weakness of Militant they have fought for him to be a candidate of the CDFU — a depleted Militant is forced to speak to and try to work with the rest of the left.

The CDFU was seriously split over the decision to stand Roger Banister, and it has left a very bitter taste in the mouths of many supporters of the CDFU. Yet CDFU remains the main left grouping within UNISON. A very positive development is the formation of a UNISON Labour Party left group which is to have its first meeting at the UNISON Health Conference in late September.

A UNISON Labour left will be a step in the right direction. The existing left, in the form of the CDFU, so far has failed to reach beyond the ex-NALGO left. However we should not turn our backs on the existing left in the belief that a new, better, broader left already exists.

This election is not just about Rodney Bickerstaffe. It will also be a contest on the left between the SWP and the CDFU. For all his, many, faults, Roger Banister is the candidate of the only group in the union resembling a broad left. Roger Banister getting a respectable vote against a smaller vote of the SWP would be a good thing for the left. The left has made a serious mistake by contesting this election but even so I believe that socialists should say "vote for Roger Banister".

Yes, says Will Rogers

A VOTE for Roger Banister in the elections would be disastrous. Socialists should say "vote for Bickerstaffe, but fight for socialist policies."

Those who would recoil from voting Bickerstaffe are mainly people from the weak, divided, and confused left, mostly coming from ex-NALGO, and people already in or close to "revolutionary" groups of one sort or another.

What we should be looking at is the potentially much wider group of left leaning people from ex-NUPE who are mainly Labour Party members or supporters. We should also offer a broad labour movement perspective to other trade union activists from ex-NALGO who are fed up with the way UNISON is going. They want to see a more campaigning and active UNISON. They are ready and willing to fight on issues like compulsory competitive tendering, cuts and redundancies, the Welfare State and the health service, terms and conditions on the job, pay.

Many of these will support Bickerstaffe because they see him willing to stand up against Blair on issues like the minimum wage, and public ownership of the utilities. They won't support Banister because they know he represents only Militant, an organisation which stands candidates against Labour in elections, and has increasingly less relevance to the movement as a whole.

They won't support the SWP because of the SWP's hostile and parasitic attitude to the Labour Party.

At the same time, these people will be unhappy that the merger appears to be a mess, that UNISON has failed to organise against cuts in the health service, on pay and conditions of service, on CCT, on market testing.

Socialists can influence them by saying: "vote Bickerstaffe but fight for democracy in the union and for socialist politics." This way we can hope to build a genuine broad-based left, capable of putting up a better fight at next year's conference.

The danger is that many people "on the left" who are against the idea of a Blair-dominated Labour Party and in favour of a more active union, will be repelled by the sectarians, Militant and SWP alike, and so back a "stop the trots" offensive by the NEC and some of their supporters.

The real John Maclean 2

John Maclean was one of the greatest revolutionaries which the British labour movement has ever produced. Yet at the end of his life he refused to join — and indeed denounced — the early Communist Party, then inspired by Lenin, not Stalin. His stance has been taken by some as evidence for the idea that outside intervention from Moscow ruined a British revolutionary movement which would have developed better left on its own, by others as authority for the project of developing a separate Scottish revolutionary movement. Bob Pitt argues against such views.

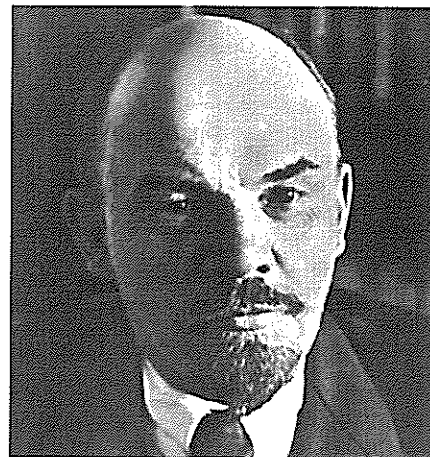
Part one of this article, covering Maclean's politics from 1918 to late 1920, appeared in *WL24*; this concluding section deals with the last three years of Maclean's life, in which he joined and then left the "De Leonite" Socialist Labour Party (SLP), and then set up his own tiny "Scottish Workers" Republican Party."

IT WAS in November 1920 that Maclean for the first time criticised Moscow's intervention in the revolutionary movement in Britain. Given the fact that Gallacher and the Bolsheviks were in agreement on the disputed issues of a single British Communist Party and the political honesty of the CPGB leadership, Maclean could do little else. "I for one", he wrote, "will not follow a policy dictated by Lenin until Lenin knows the situation more clearly". And he asserted: "The less Russians interfere in the internal affairs of other countries at this juncture the better for the cause of Revolution in those countries". Even at this point, though, there is no basis for Graham Bain's assertion that

Maclean "saw only disaster in foreign interference". The key phrase was "at this juncture". Maclean's view was that, due to the isolation of the Russian workers' republic, the Moscow-based Comintern leaders' attempts to direct the British revolutionary movement were undermined by their lack of accurate information concerning the actual political situation in Britain. He was far from opposing in principle the right of the International to intervene in political developments in other countries.

Indeed, the pamphlet *Moscow's Reply to the ILP*, with its heavy emphasis on the importance of a centralised revolutionary International, had been acclaimed by Maclean as a work which would have an even greater political impact than the Communist Manifesto. And his call for a Scottish Communist Party was addressed to those revolutionaries who supported the Comintern's 21 conditions for membership, adopted at the Second Congress, which were equally uncompromising in insisting on a centralised international leadership. In the aftermath of the Second International's capitulation in August 1914, when the overwhelming majority of its constituent sections refused to implement the agreed anti-war policy and rallied to the support of their own bourgeoisies, it is hardly surprising that Maclean should support the Bolshevik conception of international organisation. The idea that his writings provide any support for Kendall's view that "the attempt to build the Communist International as a single world party... was doomed to failure from the start" is frankly ludicrous.

Maclean might have been expected to jump at the chance to put his case for a Scottish section of the Comintern to the International's leadership in Moscow. He had failed to attend the Second Congress in July, after making it an issue of principle to demand that the Home Office grant him a passport — a demand which was not unexpectedly refused. On returning from Russia, to which he himself had travelled illegally, Gallacher tried to convince Maclean that he should go and discuss with the Comintern leaders. Gallacher states that he had told Lenin "about the difficulty with John Maclean, of John's obsession with spies and his utter lack of faith in all who had participated in the unity negotiations, and in



Maclean rejected the Lenin-inspired British Communist Party

particular his 'exposure' of Theodore Rothstein as a representative of the Bolsheviks in London under the belief that he was an agent of the British Government. This was unfortunate, said Lenin, but I must persuade Maclean to visit Moscow". Maclean was at first quite agreeable to this, but then changed his mind and responded angrily to Gallacher's attempts at persuasion, accusing Gallacher of trying to remove him from the political scene in Glasgow. Gallacher blamed James Clunie, at that time a leading member of the SLP, for encouraging Maclean's paranoia, and wrote a letter to the SLP executive complaining about Clunie's behaviour, in the course of which he told them that Maclean was suffering from 'hallucinations'. Gallacher proposed that both he and Maclean should meet with the SLP leadership to try and resolve the matter. Instead his letter was passed on to Maclean himself, with predictable consequences for the already fraught relationship between Maclean and Gallacher.

All this took place in the run-up to Maclean's conference to launch a Scottish Communist Party, which was held at the SLP's Glasgow headquarters on 25 December 1920. The events that occurred there are well-documented, both in Gallacher's and McShane's memoirs and in detailed contemporary reports published by the *Scottish Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail*, who evidently had a reporter planted in the audience. Maclean denounced Gallacher as "no better than a government agent" and at one point the confrontation between the two men looked as if it might end in blows. The conference ended, not with the formation of an independent Scots revolutionary party, but with Maclean appealing to the audience to join the SLP. The fact that Maclean should become a member of this party, which explicitly condemned the idea of "a Scottish Communist Party for 'pure' Scotsmen", itself puts into perspective the role which Maclean's

John Maclean and the CPGB

Bob Pitt's full account of Maclean's political evolution between 1918 and 1921. This pamphlet also reprints contemporary material bearing on these events, including Maclean's *Open Letter to Lenin* of 1921.

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new-found nationalism played in his opposition to the CPGB. "Neither Maclean nor the SLP rejected their respective positions", Ripley and McHugh point out, "and the former occasionally argued his case in the columns of *The Socialist*. It was simply not of sufficient importance to inhibit their cooperation...".

If the SLP rejected Maclean's position on the Scottish national question they were, as Gallacher had alleged in the disputed letter, apparently happy to encourage him in his delusions about his political opponents. Immediately after the December conference, an article in the SLP's paper *The Socialist* commented that if Gallacher was not ashamed of his actions there he was "only worthy of being what some believe him to be". This slur, Gallacher replied angrily in *The Worker*, was "merely a reference to the fact that the latest recruit to the ranks of the SLP has publicly accused me of being a Government Agent". If they really believed Maclean's accusation against him, Gallacher told the SLP, then they should come right out and say so. "Only remember this", he advised, "if you accept the statement of the 'latest recruit', you've got to accuse every active man in the movement of being in the same position. When you make up your mind that I'm a traitor to the cause, I'll supply you with the names of two or three dozens of others against whom you'll have to accept the same charge or else repudiate the man who makes them. Let us get this matter settled. We can't have a man going around trading on his past and accusing everyone who disagrees with him of being a Government Agent. That sort of thing can't go on". But it could. In the very next issue of *The Socialist*, Maclean repeated his charge against Gallacher. "I have insisted in public", he wrote, "that you never hit the governing class but they hit you back in reply. Gallacher obviously was their instrument this time. His letter to the SLP proves that".

Terry Brotherstone's assertion that "for a revolutionary socialist who had been Bolshevik consul in Glasgow to be alert to state surveillance at this period is, of itself, evidence of nothing else but political realism" begins to look a little foolish. That there were state agents operating throughout the organised working class goes without saying. During the immediate post-war years, with the Bolsheviks taking power in Russia and with Britain itself in a state of industrial and political unrest, the ruling class perceived the threat of revolution as a real one, and Basil Thomson had an extensive apparatus of spies in and around the labour movement. The very detailed information about Maclean himself contained in Thomson's reports to the Cabinet bears witness to this fact. But it is ridiculous to argue that this somehow legitimises Maclean's quite specific accusations against individual members of the movement with whom he had come into political conflict. The vast majority of them, we have no reason to doubt, were entirely innocent of involvement with the state, and Maclean never offered the slightest

proof that they were anything else. While we can find excuses for Maclean's behaviour, it is less easy to be charitable about supposedly serious historians who retrospectively associate themselves with Maclean's campaign of denigration against honest socialists.

It was in the SLP's paper that Maclean also published his *Open Letter to Lenin*, written to coincide with the second Communist unity conference of January 1921, in which he outlined his objections to the Comintern's official British section. It is significant that in this letter Maclean made no appeal to Lenin to support the formation of a separate Scottish section of the Communist International, nor did he raise the question of an independent workers' republic in Scotland. He did mention the issue of Russian gold, in the context of a denunciation of Francis Meynell, the editor of the CPGB weekly *The Communist*, who had earlier been exposed for smuggling Russian diamonds into Britain to subsidise the *Daily Herald*. But Maclean did not take the opportunity to challenge Lenin on the Bolshevik government's right to subsidise the Comintern's sections. Far from questioning the legitimacy of the International, the whole purpose of the *Open Letter* was to convince Lenin that Maclean and his comrades were the true revolutionaries from whom a section of the Comintern should be built.

The *Open Letter* is mainly notable for an explicit statement of Maclean's thesis, which he had been developing since the meeting with Lieutenant-Colonel Malone in November 1919, that the establishment of the CPGB was the result of a state conspiracy and that the party itself was led by government agents. In the course of the letter, Maclean returned to this point again and again. First of all, he asserted that some of the delegates to the Comintern's Second Congress (he obviously had Gallacher in mind) travelled to Russia "secretly" whilst the authorities were winking the other eye", and he later made the direct accusation that such individuals were "conscious... agents of Lloyd George and the property-owning class". Maclean cited what he claimed were distorted accounts by these delegates concerning the political situation in Britain, and he explained to Lenin that the reason for this misinformation was that "it is the business of the British government to deceive you and get you to make false calculations". He went on to argue that a Labour government would be brought to office, behind which the bourgeoisie would continue to rule. "This expedient of itself would not deceive you", Maclean told Lenin, "since you and your comrades have the exact measure of the leaders of Labour and the ILP, and that Lloyd George well knows. He must, therefore, make way for a Communist Party whose 'leaders' are controlled by him".

It can be seen that from late 1919 onwards Maclean's attitude to the construction of a united British section of the Third International underwent several shifts. But the central and consistent theme to his objections is quite clear. And this

was not that the formation of the CPGB was the product of Russian interference and Moscow gold, but that it was engineered by the Lloyd George government through spies and agents in the leadership of the revolutionary movement and that the whole operation was funded by the British state! Here two possible explanations suggest themselves. Either Maclean knew that these accusations were nonsense and simply employed them in order to discredit his political opponents, or the evidence of Gallacher and others is accurate and Maclean was psychologically disturbed. The first explanation is untenable; whatever failings John Maclean had, he was a man of unshakeable political integrity who would never have used such methods against his opponents in the labour movement. So we are left with the second alternative: that Maclean's hostile response to the formation of the CPGB was indeed in large part the product of an unbalanced mind.

Maclean was sentenced to two further terms of imprisonment in 1921, and was not released until October 1922. While in prison he had resigned from the SLP, apparently because of a dispute over the party's constitution, and he now began to organise his own political group. This was formally launched in February 1923 as the Scottish Workers Republican Party. While some of its members were won from the SLP, most of its recruits seem to have been politically raw individuals drawn into the organisation through Maclean's work with the unemployed. Harry McShane, who broke from Maclean to join the CPGB, recalls that the SWRP "had some queer people that I didn't like — they had never been to John's economics classes, they knew nothing about socialism or revolutionary work. Even if I had not joined the Communist Party I could never have joined with that crowd". The final period of Maclean's life was dedicated to building his new organisation, whose activities were restricted not merely to Scotland but almost entirely to Glasgow.

These closing years of Maclean's political career coincided with the CPGB's own, not unsuccessful efforts to establish itself as a force in the British labour movement. During the early 1920s the party to a large extent overcame its own rather chaotic origins and developed a degree of political intelligence, tactical flexibility and agitational sharpness which marked a considerable advance over the earlier practices of its various component groupings. As a consequence, the CPGB was able to exercise an influence in the labour movement, and especially in the trade unions, quite out of proportion to its small size. The formation of a British section of the Comintern, able to participate in the crucial debates on tactics, strategy and programme which took place in the International during this period, represented a qualitative leap in the politics of the revolutionary movement in Britain. As Brotherstone points out, Maclean's rejection of the CPGB shut him off from these important international developments, and this was an error

which had disastrous consequences for Maclean's political evolution. Not only did he remain trapped in the old propagandist conception of Marxism of the pre-October period but his politics underwent a distinct degeneration, lapsing into a sectarianism which makes nonsense of Ripley and McHugh's statement that 'Maclean needed no lessons from Lenin on ultra-leftism or infantile disorders'.

In November 1922, when Maclean again stood as a parliamentary candidate for the Gorbals (receiving 4,027 votes as against 16,479 for the successful Labour candidate), his campaign literature was almost entirely devoid of agitational demands. His election address, which consisted of a summary of his political career, a general analysis of economic and political developments and propaganda for world socialism, concluded with the assurance that "no detailed programme is necessary". He also announced that he would refuse to take his seat in the Commons if elected, in imitation of the policy earlier implemented by the Irish nationalists. But Maclean's position as the sole Scottish republican candidate bore no resemblance to that of Sinn Fein, which had won 73 seats in the 1918 general election and then established its own national assembly in opposition to the British parliament. Maclean's stand on this issue amounted in practice to a form of anti-parliamentarism which allied him with the ultra-left. Significantly, it was the Glasgow anarchist Guy Aldred who had first urged Maclean to adopt the Sinn Fein tactic.

A major challenge for Clydeside revolutionaries during this period was that the Labour Party, headed by the ILP, was establishing a mass electoral base in the Glasgow working class. Though hampered by its initial blunder in provoking its own exclusion from the Labour Party, the CPGB was able to avoid isolation from this process through its use of the united front tactic, adopted by the Communist International in recognition of the reality that reformist organisations and leaderships still held the political allegiance of millions of workers. Maclean's solution, by contrast, was to denounce the betrayals of the Labour leaders and appeal to workers to break from the Labour Party ('the Pinks', in his terminology) and rally to a minuscule revolutionary sect. Maclean's letters of the period are filled with ultra-left attacks on the united front. It is in this context that we must evaluate his denunciation of the Communist Party for having sold itself to Moscow and his call for "a real fighting party independent of outside dictation and finance".

In a vain attempt to establish itself as such a party, the SWRP engaged in electoral interventions which the CPGB rightly condemned as sectarian and divisive. In June 1923 Maclean stood for the SWRP in a council by-election against a Labour candidate who was supported by the ILP, the Communist Party, Glasgow Trades Council, the Co-operative Party and the local Unemployed Committee, with the result that the working class vote was split and victory



The Russian revolution

was handed to the bourgeois candidate. The SWRP played a similarly destructive role in the Glasgow municipal elections of November 1923 when they stood 12 candidates, all in wards contested by Labour. Their action was condemned by the CPGB as showing "a complete ignorance of working class political tactics. This deplorable exhibition of vanity is taking place at a time when the baby-starvers are contemplating the reduction of the parish dole. Every vote they take away from the Labour candidates is strengthening the Moderates. Every Labour defeat they cause will hearten the baby-starvers". In one ward, where the Labour candidate polled 5048, 155 less than the successful Moderate candidate, the 228 votes won by Alan Hannah of the SWRP did indeed ensure Labour's defeat.

More generally, in circumstances where only a tiny minority of the working class was ready to back a revolutionary alternative, the SWRP's vitriolic attacks on the Labour Party had the effect of simply dissuading potential Labour supporters from voting. When the SWRP contested a council by-election in July 1923 the Labour vote fell drastically as a result of large-scale abstentions, and Maclean convinced himself that this display of political passivity represented a shift to the left. "Many people were staggered by our work into not voting at all", he told James Clunie. "Next time they'll come down right on our side for ever after". The absurdity of this prediction was demonstrated in November, when the SWRP again succeeded in persuading many workers that there was no point in voting Labour but received only a derisory number of votes for its own candidates. Even Maclean himself, who had polled over 4000 in Kinning Park a year earlier, was now reduced to a humiliating 623 votes in the same ward, where the Labour candidate received 3440.

Maclean's industrial policy was another example of his failure to engage with developments in the labour movement. In the early 1920s trade union membership and militancy was in decline as a result of mass

unemployment and the demoralisation which had followed the miners' betrayal on Black Friday, 1921, and the AEU's defeat in the engineering lockout the following year. Under the slogans 'Stop the Retreat' and 'Back to the Unions', the CPGB fought to revitalise the trade unions and by 1923 was laying the foundations of the Minority Movement, in which CPers joined forces with non-party militants to build a rank-and-file opposition to both the employers and the union bureaucracy. Maclean's own response was to set up an Industrial Unity Committee which propagated a version of industrial unionism that marked no advance over the sort of thing that could be found in a work like James Connolly's *Socialism Made Easy* a decade and a half earlier. In a May Day manifesto Maclean set out his committee's plan for the abolition of capitalism:

"Every worker in a workshop should be in the same union, no matter what his or her job, and no matter the amount of training and skill required. Every worker in the same industry should be in *One Industrial Union*. Every Industrial Union ought to be joined up into *One Big Industrial Organisation embracing the whole working class*... Thus organised, the workers would be in a position to destroy the power of the capitalists over the agencies of wealth production, and to take over and work these agencies for the benefit of the workers. In other words, the industrial unity of the workers is the fundamental preparation for the establishment of the World Workers' Industrial Republic".

The reconstruction of the trade unions along industrial unionist lines was a policy supported by the Communist Party. In the meantime, however, the CP fought to overcome sectional divisions by building workplace committees. And while the party was committed to the transformation of the unions into instruments of revolution, it saw this as a long-term objective to be achieved through systematic work inside the existing movement. For Maclean, revolutionary industrial unionism was an ideal

schema, to which trade unionists were to be won by propaganda appeals from outside. His Industrial Unity Committee proved stillborn. Apart from the SWRP and the now virtually moribund SLP, the only body to back Maclean's initiative was TL Smith's Workers International Industrial Union, whose policy was to call on workers to abandon their reformist-led organisations and join a pure revolutionary union. Although Smith's group was unenthusiastic about Maclean's committee and broke from it almost immediately, this sterile conception of industrial unionism seems to have had some support within the SWRP itself. When Willie Gallacher asked one of Maclean's lieutenants, Robert Carlton, to describe the SWRP's programme, he was told that the party's aim was "political independence from England, and to achieve that the workers of Scotland would have to leave their unions and form up One Big Union for Scotland".

Maclean's work with the unemployed, which was his main sphere of activity during his final years, was vitiated by his refusal to link up with the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement, which was led by CP members like Wal Hannington. When Hannington spoke at a public meeting on unemployment in October 1923, organised by the ILP-dominated Glasgow Trades Council, Maclean's supporters shouted him down and the meeting had to be abandoned. Even the CP's provision of stewards for this event was condemned by Maclean as "acting as scavengers for the Pinks". In an earlier exchange of letters with the NUWCM, who had protested at his public declarations of hostility towards their organisation, Maclean insisted that only the SWRP could organise the unemployed. His 'unemployed committee' was thus reduced to nothing more than an SWRP front. He remained immune to the idea that a revolutionary tendency should demonstrate the superiority of its political leadership in the course of joint work with reformists and other political opponents in the movement.

None of this, it should be emphasised, is intended to detract from Maclean's heroic stature in the history of the labour movement in Scotland, in Britain and internationally. His resistance to imperialist war remains an inspiration, and the responsibility for his later psychological problems lies squarely with the capitalist state which persecuted him for his internationalist stand. But Maclean's self-isolation from the political process which led to the creation of the CPGB was quite clearly rooted in what can only be regarded as paranoid delusions, and the fact that this explanation was put forward by Willie Gallacher and Tom Bell, who played prominent roles in the CPGB's formation and later became hardened Stalinists, does not make it any less true. His subsequent politics not only remained affected by the familiar spy mania but degenerated into a combination of nationalism and sectarian ultra-leftism which represented no coherent alternative to the CPGB. Though he was always able

to draw large crowds to his meetings, by the time of his death in November 1923. Maclean had been marginalised, even in terms of local politics.

It is necessary to set the record straight on these matters, particularly in a situation where the collapse of the Soviet Union and the other 'socialist' regimes in Eastern Europe has led to a spate of bourgeois propaganda to the effect that the Bolshevik Revolution and all its consequences were rotten from the start. This is a view which finds an echo in the labour movement, even among those who would claim to be Marxists, and John Maclean's antagonism towards the early CPGB can serve as a hook on which to hang such anti-Bolshevism. There can be no doubt how Maclean himself would have treated attempts to use his political record as the basis for an ideological assault on the October Revolution. He would have rejected them with anger and contempt. ■

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The left and Max Shachtman

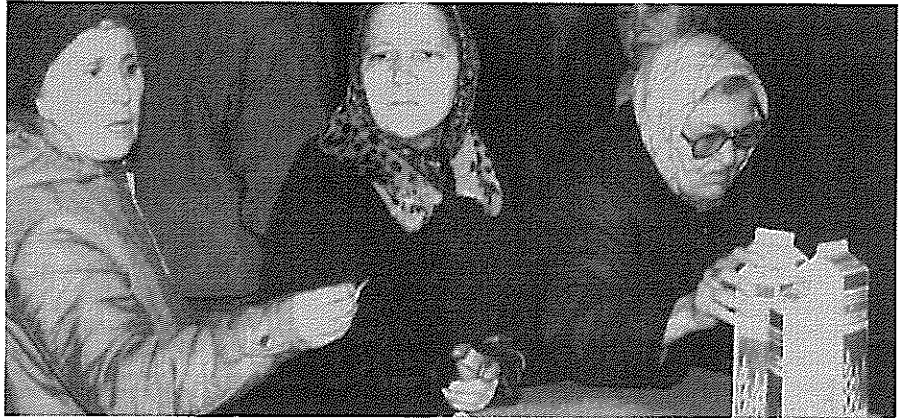
Two distinct currents emerged after 1940 from the Trotskyism of Trotsky. One was the "official", "orthodox" Trotskyism of James P Cannon, E Mandel, Michel Pablo, Gerry Healy, Ted Grant, etc. The other was mainly associated with the name of Max Shachtman. (The British SWP is a hybrid, owing more to the former than the latter). The Shachtman current mutated into a number of tendencies — Shachtman himself ended his days as a sort of American Fabian — but its history remains a matter of great importance for those engaged in the work of renewing Trotskyism in the post Stalinist world. Ernest Haberkern* examines *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the American Century* by Peter Drucker. (Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1994 £14.95). The second part will appear in our November issue.

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BIOGRAPHIES are hard to do well.

On the one hand, like a novelist, you are telling a story. There is a beginning, a middle and an end. You have to get the reader interested in the drama.

On the other hand, unfortunately, real lives, unlike fictional ones, aren't usually well-plotted. There are subplots that just fizzle out; loose ends that are never wound up; and odd twists and turns that don't seem consistent with what led up to them. And a biography, unlike a work of fiction, is also a reference work. The reader expects, and has a right to expect, that the important details are all there and are accurately reported. Accuracy in the details is as vital in a biography as it is in a dictionary or a telephone book.

In the first task, this biography succeeds. The book is a good read. The reader's attention is caught and held by the intrinsic interest of this history. It is the history of the resistance of a section of the American left during World War II and the early Cold War — the period when the foundations of the modern security state were laid and the American Republic



The horrible realities of Stalinism — queuing to survive.

radically transformed in order to defend "the Free World." First from the threat of Nazism and then from the threat of Stalinism. Peter Drucker's portrait of this band of American dissidents is as dramatic and compelling as the subject itself.

It is the author's failure to measure up to the second task that undermines the book. Details are wrong or out of focus. Difficulties and contradictions are glossed over. If the story seems to hang together, it is also a little glib. It seems to hang together just because the details have been slighted. The reader is left with the uneasy feeling that while the experience has, like the carnival, been enjoyable, not all the acts were what they seemed to be.

Max Shachtman's private property?

THE TITLE of the book itself is a distortion. Neither the Workers' Party (WP) nor the Independent Socialist League (ISL) could be rightly called "Max Shachtman's Left." No political tendency on the American left, and few internationally, were as free of, as hostile to, the politics of the leadership cult as the Third Camp tendency. In America you would have to go back to the pre-World War I Socialist Party to find an equivalent in this respect.

The "cult of personality" became, especially after Trotsky's death, a characteristic trait of all the other groups that claimed his legacy. Norman Thomas, to take an example from the opposite wing of the American anti-Stalinist left, never felt bound by the decisions or debates of his movement. He was Mr Socialism and, as its Presidential-Candidate-For-Life, determined what the party's real position was. This was not a personal failing. It should not be taken as any special criticism of Thomas whose positive role in the '30s, '40s and '50s has been underestimated in my opinion. The concept of the socialist sect as the emanation of its leader was all-pervasive. You didn't have to make any effort to fall into this pattern; you just had to do what came naturally in the era of fascism and Stalinism.

The WP and the ISL never referred to themselves as "Shachtmanites." That was an insult, a belittling term of contempt, used by their opponents. And this insistence on democratic procedure, on a refusal to grant any

member privileged status was inextricably tied to the tendency's politics. It followed directly from their rethinking of the tradition of the Comintern and the Trotskyist movement that derived from it. And no one was clearer or wrote and spoke more eloquently on this question than Shachtman.

Drucker, following the regrettable practice of academic historians, never makes explicit his own political hostility to the politics of the Third Camp and especially its rejection of the ersatz "Leninism" of the Third International.¹ It may even be that in describing this tendency as "Shachtman's Left" he doesn't understand how wrong he is. It is probable that he is incapable of conceiving of an organisation that is democratic and revolutionary. At one point he pretty much says that as long as the "Shachtmanites" were revolutionary, they were "Leninists" and when they stopped being "Leninists" they stopped being revolutionaries.² In reality, the rejection of ersatz "Leninism" was part of the tendency's politics from the beginning. I do not think this is conscious falsification by Drucker. I think he is genuinely confused. As confused as Trotsky was on this point.

This excuse will not suffice to explain the other main distortion in Drucker's presentation. In describing the political tendency that defined itself by its adherence to the political position of the Third Camp as "Max Shachtman's Left" Peter Drucker glosses over the fact that the major decisions and theoretical documents of the tendency were not only not authored by Shachtman but were opposed by him. Some he later accepted with more or less grace. Others he simply ignored.

In his conclusion, to take the most serious example of this obfuscation, Drucker refers, somewhat offhandedly, to the theory of bureaucratic collectivism which "Shachtman developed in 1940 and 1941" as "only one highlight" illustrating the original contributions he made to Marxist theory and politics in the early 1940s.³

Now, in fact, the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" and the Third Camp politics that lay behind it are the main reasons why anyone is at all interested in this particular branch of the American Trotskyist movement. They are

* Ernest Haberkern is the Director of the Center for Socialist History. He has edited a collection of essays by Hal Draper which was published by Humanities Press under the title of *Socialism from Below*. Humanities Press will shortly publish a second collection called *Neither Socialism nor Capitalism: Theories of Bureaucratic Collectivism* jointly edited by E. Haberkern and Arthur Lipow. Currently, comrade Haberkern is completing the fifth volume of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*.

also the main reasons why people are interested in Max Shachtman. The Workers' Party, the Independent Socialist League and the Independent Socialist Clubs of the 1960s were never large organisations and where they exercised serious influence on larger and more influential movements — in the trade unions, especially the UAW, in the 1940s; in the civil rights and peace movements in the 1950s; and in the New Left of the 1960s — it was because of their distinctive political ideas on the nature of socialism and the practical political conclusions those ideas led to. Certainly, this tendency's intellectual influence, which was considerable, stemmed from its critique of the Soviet Union. In both respects it continued the tradition of Leon Trotsky more successfully than that of other tendencies that claimed his mantle.

To take the most prominent example: Drucker and other historians rightly recognise the role played by the Workers' Party in the trade unions during World War II as its most significant practical achievement. This small group filled the vacuum created when every other political tendency on the left abandoned the fight not only for trade union rights but for democratic rights in general. No, abandoned is the wrong word. The left during the war meant the Communist Party and its supporters. They were the drill sergeants who disciplined the troops in the assault against those "subversives" whose whingeing threatened the war effort.⁴

Even the majority Trotskyists who began with more trade union influence were sidelined. In part, this was a result of government persecution but it was also a function of their politics. If, as the "orthodox Trotskyists" of the Socialist Workers' Party believed, the future of socialism was at stake when the Nazi invaders threatened the collectivised property won by the October Revolution, how could they vigorously pursue the class struggle against the Soviet Union's most important military ally? They could do it in theory but not in practice.

The theory of bureaucratic collectivism was not one contribution of the Third Camp tendency, it was the theoretical basis of the politics that defined that tendency. And Max Shachtman spent most of his political life attacking that position; first from a pro-Soviet point of view similar to that of Trotsky's and then from a pro-west, anti-communist point of view. The man who was responsible for the theory was, as Drucker's own research documents, Joseph Carter.

There are all kinds of secondary and personal reasons why Carter's contribution has been denigrated and Shachtman's inflated. There usually are when you are dealing with real life rather than fiction. For one thing, Carter was a serious thinker who as far as one can tell suffered from a writer's block and had very little charisma. Max Shachtman, on the other hand, was a prolific and facile writer and by all accounts (I never met him myself) had far more charisma than was good for him.

More important was the fact that Shachtman was already a person of some standing in the Trotskyist movement. His book on the Moscow trials, which is still worth reading today, was not just a sectarian pamphlet of no interest to those outside a charmed circle.

The left, and the American intelligentsia in the 1930s was on the left, followed the debate over the trials with passionate concern. That Shachtman was chosen to write this major public account said something about his importance in the movement; as did the fact that in the first debate over "The Russian Question" it was Shachtman who wrote the brief for the Trotskyist majority against the dissidents like Yvan Craipeau, James Burnham and Joseph Carter.

When, in 1940, Carter first proposed the heretical notion that Stalinism was a new class society neither capitalist nor socialist his supporters, people like Hal Draper and Emanuel Geltman, were young, new recruits. Valued comrades, of course, but not on the same level as Shachtman. George Novack, a supporter of the Fourth International who spoke as a critic of Shachtman, was not too far off the mark when he wrote in his introduction to the 1973 edition of Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism* that the theoreticians of bureaucratic collectivism had, in 1940, "captured" Max Shachtman.

The fact that Shachtman could be challenged on this question, that a heated debate could take place on the issue, and that the organisation could eventually overturn Shachtman's position without the debate degenerating into the abusive brawl and split that were typical of the Trotskyist movement, is itself a symptom of how radical the break had been with the past practice of the Comintern.

The truth is that the "theoreticians of bureaucratic collectivism" didn't quite capture Shachtman. Drucker's treatment of this episode is very confusing. It deserves quoting in full as an example of how the author's plausible story falls apart under scrutiny.

Shachtman's conclusions, laid out in the December 1940 *New Internationalist*, were that the Soviet Union was not a workers' state — there could be no workers' state without workers' political power. It was not capitalist. It has a new bureaucratic ruling class that had to be overthrown in order to create workers' democracy or move to socialism. Even though every vestige of working-class political power had disappeared in the USSR, the collectivised property created by the revolution survived. Shachtman therefore called the USSR "bureaucratic collectivist": the economy and the state were the collective property of the bureaucracy. Though bureaucratic mismanagement undermined this new form of property, it was showing its superiority for economic and human progress over the anarchy of capitalism. It enabled Shachtman to characterise the USSR as a transitional society, a peculiar product of the epoch in which the world was moving from capitalism to socialism. Marxists therefore had to defend it against any attempt to restore private property.

While the book under review is liberally peppered with footnotes, this crucial semi-quote is not referenced. It couldn't be. It doesn't exist. It is an amalgam of two different and opposed statements. But, to be fair, this isn't entirely Drucker's fault.

What happened was this. In December of 1940, Shachtman wrote an article attacking Carter's position because Carter argued that

the working class had nothing to defend in the collectivised property of the Soviet Union. As long as the working class was deprived of all power in the state, and even of such means of self-defence as the independent trade unions it had been able to build in capitalist societies, collectivised property was for the working class simply an instrument of its exploitation.

Shachtman did not in this article use the term bureaucratic collectivism. He called the new system bureaucratic state socialism. This was not an exercise in sectarian hair-splitting. Shachtman used a different term because he was openly defending a different position. However, he soon began to adopt the new coinage without reservation. As Carter pointed out this only concealed the fact that Shachtman was defending as much of Trotsky's old theory as could be defended. Trotsky's old slogan "defend the workers' state" became "defend historically progressive collectivised property."

Twenty years later, in 1962, Shachtman printed a collection of his articles. The first article was titled "Is Russia a Workers' State?" It purported to be a reprint of his 1940 article. But it was a bowdlerisation of that article. The term "bureaucratic collectivism" replaced "bureaucratic state socialism" and the passage extolling the historical achievement of collectivised property even under bureaucratic mismanagement was excised. By 1962 Shachtman was already far along the way to becoming just another "socialist" defender of American foreign policy. He certainly wasn't about to emphasise his earlier views. (Although I know of no passage where he repudiated his defence of the historically progressive role of collectivised property.) He couldn't reprint Carter's articles not only because they weren't his but because he no longer agreed with their hostility to capitalist imperialism.

In his book, Shachtman stole Carter's term and buried his politics. Doesn't Drucker realise what happened? The passage above amalgamates the 1940 article with its bowdlerised 1962 reprint. Drucker must have read both. Didn't he see the contradiction? In his mock quote, the term bureaucratic collectivism and the defence of collectivised property appear together. That combination doesn't occur in either of Shachtman's versions.

There are other examples of serious confusion.

"Defeatism" and "Defencism"

THROUGHOUT the debate over "the defence of the workers' state" from 1937 up to 1949 when Shachtman finally abandoned his position — while still refusing to vote for Carter's alternative — the ghost of Lenin's anti-war polemics of 1914-1916 lurked in the corridors. In 1951 Shachtman summoned up this ghost in order to defend his turn toward the right. Drucker makes a muddle of this whole episode.

Shachtman began with a modest proposal to support "a labor government" even if it "should not yet be a socialist government." Since the Labour Party was at the time in power in Britain and militarily aiding the corrupt and brutal dictatorship of Syngman Rhee

in Korea as part of the United Nations (read American imperialist) force, Shachtman was proposing to abandon the Third Camp position in favour of support to the imperialist camp led by America. Everyone who recognised this immediately and according to Hal Draper, who was present, everyone was shocked. Draper said out loud what the rest were thinking. He added language which confined support to a government "which takes over the nation and defends the interest of the working people on the basis of a genuinely democratic course in foreign and domestic policy which is not in fact subordinated to the interests of capitalism and imperialism."

What does Drucker make of this discussion? He claims Shachtman began by proposing to "support in war any government that adopted a democratic foreign policy." But this is exactly the condition Shachtman didn't make! Draper proposed it in opposition to his motion and Shachtman voted against it. Drucker concludes there wasn't much difference between Draper and Shachtman. That is certainly true in Drucker's book because he has eliminated the difference!

Now this is not a debate over a trivial or irrelevant issue. Today the overwhelming majority of the left, prominent veterans of the movement against the Vietnam War, are urging NATO (i.e. US) intervention in Haiti and Bosnia using essentially Shachtman's 1951 arguments. What was involved in this debate was the basic anti-imperialist position of the socialist movement. Drucker not only misreports the facts. He doesn't appear to be cognisant of what the debate is about.

Shachtman was not a man to take defeat lying down. He counter-attacked in an article entitled "Socialism and War." In this article Shachtman argued that the old World War I position no longer held. To "wish defeat" as Lenin had in that war where both sides were equal evils made sense. In a struggle between Stalinist Russia and capitalist democracy it didn't.

In a four part article Draper outlined what Lenin's slogan had meant in World War I, why it was mistaken then, and why it was leading Shachtman astray in 1951. How does Drucker deal with this material?

Draper tried to clarify the issues at stake with a series of articles on "revolutionary defeatism", the old principle that communists should fight against war and capitalism even by means (e.g. strikes in vital industries) that might risk their own country's defeat. Draper suggested that the idea of "defeatism" had always been confusing and that Shachtman was turning its ambiguities upside down in a way that undermined opposition to US wars. The idea was controversial when Lenin first put it forward during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Trotsky and Luxemburg opposed it during the First World War on the grounds that socialists should prefer the war to end without victory or defeat for any of the capitalist powers.⁸

Now Drucker is under no obligation to agree with Hal Draper's historical account. On the contrary, he has an obligation to consider with a jaundiced eye all the participants in a heated debate. But, there is also an obligation on the part of the historian to make

clear what the parties are saying. And this Drucker doesn't do. His account slanders not only Hal Draper but Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. And he doesn't do justice to Lenin or Shachtman either. Fortunately, Humanities Press will shortly be publishing Draper's series of articles in book form so I need only give a short account here.

What Draper demonstrates is that Lenin initially meant by "defeatism" support for the other side in the war. That is what it meant in 1904 when Lenin and other leading figures of the Second International (not all) openly supported the Japanese as a "progressive" force against "reactionary" Czarism. At the start of World War I, Lenin, in a rage over the betrayal of the patriotic socialists, called for the defeat of Czarism. It sounded about as "hard" as you could get. Unfortunately, as both friends and enemies were quick to point out, the worst of the German socialists were saying the same thing. They thought the defeat of the Russian Czar was a blow for freedom too. Lenin responded by qualifying the term out of existence until he finally dropped it in 1916. The version of the "defeat" slogan Drucker describes as the old communist position was neither. It was the weakest of Lenin's reformulations of the "old position of the communist movement" that Lenin had just invented and that was his and his alone.

Shachtman, of course, was interested in reviving this confused slogan in its original version. Lenin's original "lesser evil" slogan

*"By 1957 Shachtman
was looking for
'revolutionary'
arguments to support
the US government"*

seemed to justify Shachtman's move towards the defence of democracy. Which was only the mirror image of his defence of collectivised property in 1940.

Trotsky in 1916 pointed out exactly what was wrong with Lenin's slogan. The pity is that a self-confessed adherent of the Fourth International should slander Trotsky, whose position was the clearest in 1914-1917. When Lenin charged Trotsky, in the heat of the battle, with defending the "neither victory nor defeat" slogan, it was a low blow. Drucker does not have Lenin's excuse. The slogan "neither victory nor defeat" was raised by pacifists and Mensheviks. Trotsky and Luxemburg both opposed it. "Neither victory nor defeat" meant return to the status quo. Neither side should benefit. It meant in practice, as Trotsky argued eloquently, appeasing the great powers in the interests of peace. It was the exact analogue of Chamberlain's appeasement policy in 1938 or "peaceful coexistence" in the 1950s and 1960s. Trotsky was not for appeasing either imperialist camp; neither was he for the victory of either imperialist camp; he was for the victory of the working class over both.

Drucker concludes by accusing Draper and

Shachtman's other opponents of basically agreeing with Shachtman. "Everything Shachtman said about not helping the other side to victory was 'absolutely correct', Draper said, and 'should have held good in 1914...'"⁹

What should have held good in 1914? Drucker doesn't explain this truncated quote. The implication is that Draper like Shachtman was for backing away from Lenin's "hard" anti-war stand. In fact, Draper, like Luxemburg and Trotsky, rejected the choice of supporting either side in an imperialist war.

That was where Lenin's slogan led even if Lenin didn't want to follow the thought out to its conclusion. Indeed, Lenin tended to blow up when his opponents accused him of meaning by "defeatism" support for the rival imperialist power even though that was what it had meant in 1904. Shachtman by this time did want to move in that direction. Revolutionary socialists, however, were for strikes, demonstrations, what have you, in 1951 as in 1914, not because they were for the victory of the other side but because they were for the victory of the working class.

Lenin was honestly confused. Shachtman, as his subsequent career indicated, was not confused. He was looking for "revolutionary" arguments to support his own government.¹⁰ In 1951 his evolution was just beginning. People were right to give an old comrade the benefit of the doubt. Why not call a spade a spade in 1994? Why amalgamate the anti-imperialist Draper with the social-patriotic Shachtman?

● The second part of this review will deal with the respective attitudes of Shachtman, the "bureaucratic-collectivists" and the Trotskyists to the Stalinist movement; Drucker's account of Shachtman's drift to the right in his later years; and Drucker's interpretation of socialism and the choices faced by Shachtman and his contemporaries. ■

Notes

1. It would be a digression here to describe in any detail the origin and meaning of "ersatz Leninism." I would only point out here the irony of it all. This "Leninism", which Lenin never heard of and which had nothing to do with his political career or thought, was invented by G. Zinoviev for the specific purpose of dishing Trotsky. Since Trotsky had never understood what Lenin was trying to do organisationally, he could only throw up his hands, admit that Lenin had been right on this point while he had been mistaken, and pass on to his own followers Zinoviev's proto-Stalinist ideas on party organisation.

2. Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left*, Humanities Press, New Jersey (1994), p.272. (Hereafter shortened to MSAHL.) Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left*

3. *Ibid.*, p.316

4. It is to the eternal shame of the American historical profession that no one, left or right, has written up this story. The imprisonment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps, the witch-hunting of even the mildest dissent, the vicious race campaign that softened up the American people to the point that they could blandly accept the mass murder of civilian populations in Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki — to name a few — all remain confined to monographs. And the complicity of the left is almost unmentioned. It is as if "de-Nazification" in Germany had been confined to a couple of small books on one or two incidents published by small presses.

5. Leon Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, New York (1973)

6. MSAHL, p.132

7. Hal Draper, letter to Peter Drucker of July 10, 1989

8. MSAHL, p.248

9. *Ibid.*

10. MSAHL, p.155

Yes, I am a socialist!

Billy Hutchinson from the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) responds to John McAnulty (WL 22 and 24)

JOHN MCANULTY has been active in the socialist movement for a long time as a supporter of a fascist organisation, the IRA. It does not seem like he has much ground from which to sling mud.

There are all sorts of crazy accusations that I have links with groups like the National Front. I am a socialist; I would never have anything to do with such an organisation.

People like McAnulty can not see how people who describe themselves as British can be a socialist at the same time! They believe that if you are not a Republican, in the Irish sense, then you are not a socialist. That is nonsense.

If this was any other part of Britain I would be working for the British Labour Party as an active member.

I am a socialist from a working class background. The area where I come from used to return Northern Irish Labour Party local government candidates.

The PUP are firmly rooted in working-class areas. We are concerned with socio-economic matters.

We are to the left of the British Labour Party: our constitution is based on the Labour Party's, but it also includes Clause Four. We are for common ownership.

We believe that if we are to move forward in Northern Ireland there has to be a fundamental political shift.

We are a Unionist party. We will attract people from the Unionist community. Our Unionism means that we want to retain the link with the UK.

We believe that Unionism needs redefining. We believe that power should be decentralised — here and in Scotland and Wales. We believe that we are an important part of the Union as anyone in England, Scotland or Wales.

We are trying to attract people who are Unionists but not necessarily Protestant.

Remember that the 26 counties withdrew from the Union. Six wanted to stay.

We need an agreed solution. And that means dialogue.

And that means a solution which allows people in Northern Ireland who feel their Irish identity to feel safe as part of the United Kingdom.

We argue for a Bill of Rights to help. We argue for some cooperation with the South.

If the majority of people decided to go

into a federal Ireland we would have to accept that, as democrats.

We want to redefine Unionism in such a way as to allow class politics to emerge. If the ceasefire holds for a couple of years we would like to see class alliances grow up and nationalists and Unionists vote along class lines. So, at City Hall, we would begin to see community politics being replaced by class politics.

At the moment we are talking to the Workers' Party to see if the beginnings of a left alliance is possible.

David Trimble [new OUP leader] would not have been the PUP's choice. He is on the right and we are on the left. We have in common that we want to retain the link with Britain. But on social issues we are miles apart.

Yet David Trimble has met Pronnais DeRossa — leader of the Left Alliance, which split from the Workers' Party and is now part of the government coalition in Dublin — and he will meet Taoiseach John Bruton. Those moves have been positive.

Victor Serge was a revolutionary, but...

By Cathy Nugent

TONY DALE objects to me calling Victor Serge a centrist (WL23). Tony prefers to see Serge as a "revolutionary who made serious mistakes". What's the difference?

Serge had his heart in the right place. He was implacably opposed to bourgeois and Stalinist rule. In that sense Serge was a revolutionary until the end of his life. But Serge's day-to-day politics, his responses to contemporary events — revolutionary events sometimes, like those in Spain — *from 1936 onwards* were shaped too much by impressionistic responses and by personal associations. Having his heart in the right place was no help here!

I would neither diminish Serge's achievements as a writer, nor question his fortitude. But where I think we should tell the *complete truth* about Serge, Tony tries to diminish and soften his mistakes. This is sometimes done indirectly, by inference. For instance Tony says Serge and Trotsky had disagreements in which Trotsky was not always 100% right, but does not clearly say where Trotsky was wrong and where Serge was right. That is not how to draw up an honest balance sheet!

Four points.

1. Kronstadt. I agree with a lot of what Serge says about the repression there, particularly his point that more could

have been done to negotiate with the insurgents. I also believe Trotsky was, in terms of the substance of the argument, too defensive. However the context of this debate is very important and Tony ignores this.

In 1937/38 "Kronstadt" had been raised slanderously against Trotsky as part of an attack "from the left" aimed at undermining Trotsky's efforts to build support for himself and the others accused in the Moscow trials. "Trotsky is as bad as Stalin" was the message. Trotsky, who freely accepted political responsibility for the repression, was falsely accused of playing a leading personal role in it. Serge's contribution to the debate gives more space to criticising than to defending the Bolsheviks at Kronstadt. His defence when it comes is

"The overall affect of Serge's later writings on Kronstadt, in the context of the smear campaign, is to bolster up unreasonable doubt about the record of the Bolsheviks."

tacked on at the end. This is the most critical piece he had ever written on the subject: he wrote nothing like this at the time of the events. Yet Serge too, as a functionary for the Communist International, bore at least *some* political and moral responsibility for "Kronstadt". The overall affect of Serge's later writings on this subject, in the context of the smear campaign, is to bolster up *unreasonable* doubt about the record of the Bolsheviks. Either Serge was being naive about the effect of his words or he deliberately wanted to present a mealy-mouthed defence of the Bolsheviks. I never said Serge was wrong about Kronstadt. I would say his contribution was unhelpful, subjective, and his intentions were possibly not honourable.

2. The Fourth International. Tony says Serge's objections to its foundation were not so unreasonable although they were misguided. The weakness of the movement after the Second World War did reflect an *a priori* weakness. But Serge was opposed to the founding of the Fourth International for entirely different reasons.

Foremost in Serge's mind, shaping his objections, were political differences with the Trotskyists. Serge denounced and deeply resented what he saw as the "sectarianism" of the Trotskyists when they criticised the Popular Front errors of

the POUM.

Serge wanted an international that would be a "loose" association that would include organisations such as the POUM and the POUM's sister parties like the ILP and German Socialist Workers Party. The parties of such a loose association would, of course, cover for and not polemicise against each other. And "foreigners" would not be free to criticise the work of other sections. Serge shows what he thinks on that score when he ridiculously repeats some of POUM leader Nin's prejudices against "foreign" Oppositionists coming over to Spain to assist and guide the Spanish Opposition!

Serge's position, although confused and vague, was not internationalist. At one point he says Trotsky should never have "interfered" in the work of the "tiny" national groups but stuck to his "intellectual work". Every revolutionary group no matter how tiny has to start somewhere. Every national grouping of the Opposition was important. Every national group can learn from the experiences and the mistakes of others. Trotsky was right to "interfere", to try to educate and organise all these "tiny" groups of people opposed to Stalinism, however weak their base among the working class, however imperfect their resolve.

It boils down to this: Serge did not want to build a revolutionary party where sharp, "polemical", rational debate was central. He was rejecting Lenin's model of such a party.

3. Tony says the differences between Serge and Trotsky were deliberately exacerbated by the GPU and by the antics of some factionalists. This point is continually made in the *Serge-Trotsky Papers* and is typical of the book. What the authors say can never be taken at face value yet Tony seems to have done precisely this.

For the most part, the differences between Trotsky and Serge arose from *written* debate and well-established facts, not rumour. They were about substantive

political points. "Whispering campaigns" can not have been decisive here. And Tony, I think you have to assume that Trotsky knew about the antics of the GPU, and made allowances!

In his letters to Serge, Trotsky displays nothing but "broad-mindedness" about "factionalism" in the international opposition. He tells Serge to acquaint himself with the facts, to make up his own mind about political differences. He displays great patience and judiciousness in these matters — a point not brought out in *The Papers*.

Serge played the factional game too! Serge chose to associate himself with some of the people who instigated the — largely apolitical — factional battles of the early years of the international Left Opposition. Whether he did it because of an "I'll work with anyone" attitude or for some other reason, we cannot know because he never explains why he associated with the people he did. And that, empty of political accounting as it is, is the worst kind of factionalism.

4. Spain. Despite Serge's solidarity with the POUM, no doubt he had his own differences with its leaders. Tony cites Serge's criticisms of POUM sectarianism towards the anarchists. But the fact is that Serge does not re-examine his adherence to the POUM. The defeat of the POUM was in no small part brought about by its own weaknesses: illusions in the Popular Front government, membership of the Popular Front government in Catalonia and Valencia and — as Trotsky who knew about such things insists — by an abject, criminal, failure of revolutionary will. One of the worst examples of such abdication was when the POUM leaders deliberately disarmed POUM workers in May 1937 after the barricades went up in Barcelona, leaving them vulnerable to murder and repression at the hands of the Stalinists.

It is true, as Tony says, that Serge admits to being wrong about the Popular Front. Not in Spain, but in France! And not at the time when *mattered!* Furthermore Serge says this in passing, in a single sentence, in a chapter in the *Memoirs* which contains no other self-reflection. That one sentence *condemns* Serge! It is not worth much, because a serious Marxist would find more than a single sentence to write about the world of lessons that are there, written in blood, in the experience of the Spanish revolution and the Popular Front in Europe.

The leaders of the POUM, Nin, Maurin et al, were centrists — their courage cannot change the reality of that. Serge's "solidarity" nearly amounted to *uncritical loyalty* and that too was the act of a centrist. He did not associate with the POUM in order to influence it as the Trotskyists tried to do, (even after they were expelled!). He was in it because he thought it was influential (or perhaps the word "big" might be more appropriate). Like a shopper, like a consumer, he

thought it was the best thing on offer! But the POUM was not good enough to lead the Spanish workers. The Trotskyists, as small as they were, attempted to build a movement that *would be* good enough. They were builders and rebuilders not passive, fatalistic consumers.

Serge is rather like — it would be unfair to say exactly like — some of the "intellectuals" or "personalities" who have mixed it with the SWP or the Militant because they can't stand to be in the political wilderness and would sacrifice all or some of their critical faculties in order to save themselves that fate. It is a sad reflection on a man of Serge's calibre and sadder still that all we can say about *why* Serge went this way after 1936 is what the Americans sometimes say: "shit happens".

What's the difference between a centrist and a revolutionary who made a lot of mistakes? What Trotsky wrote about Sneevliet, a former Dutch Oppositionist, much admired once by Trotsky as a great militant, then during the Spanish Revolution an associate of the POUM leaders, could equally have been written about Serge. Sneevliet too was subjectively a revolutionary. He stayed at his post in Nazi-occupied Holland and died before a firing squad in 1942.

"Contrary to its own intentions the POUM proved to be, in the final analysis, the chief obstacle on the road to a revolutionary party. The platonic or diplomatic partisans of the Fourth International like Sneevliet, the leader of the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, who demonstratively supported the POUM in its halfway measures, its indecisiveness and evasiveness, in short, in its centrism, took upon themselves the greatest responsibility. Revolution abhors centrism. Revolution exposes and annihilates centrism. In passing, the revolution discredits the friends and attorneys of centrism. That is one of the most important lessons of the Spanish revolution."

Jail food is poison!

By Laurens Otter

IF SPECULATING that prison food is drugged (Bob Pitt: "The real John Maclean") is evidence of insanity then the majority of people in prison, (at least the majority who were there when NVDA took me there 9 times in the late '50s and early '60s) screws (prison officers) as well as cons (inmates) are insane.

It may well be that the food, (particularly the porridge and the cocoa) is of such poor quality — the sacks for the porridge, in Stafford, in the summer of '60, were labelled "Third

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Grade pig meal — Not for human consumption” — that it just tastes funny, but nearly all cons I met believed it was drugged, and the screws openly joked about it.

Indeed two prison doctors have told me that it's not unknown; the second, the doctor at Oxford, in the winter of 1961/2, talked about the matter quite seriously. There had just been an official (government-minister) denial and I mentioned a prison doctor had told me that it was done occasionally. He replied (obviously I don't remember the exact words, but these are not far out:)

“Of course, the nature of prison is that prisoners lead an unhealthy and unnatural life. It would be grossly irresponsible if prison doctors never took measures to counter to this. We are not allowed to admit it, and I try to keep it to an absolute minimum, but — off the record — I have, on occasions, prescribed drugs all round.”

PS, When you are forcibly fed, they first hold your nose, so you have to open your mouth a little to breathe. Then they insert something looking like a large pair of scissors, but flattened the other way, with which they lever your teeth apart. It locks into place so you can't shut your mouth. They then push a pipe down your throat, with a funnel attached, into which they pour liquid feed.

They are more likely than not to cut your mouth/gums in the process of opening the mouth, and so the feed is mixed with the taste of one's own blood.

Generally speaking people who are being forcibly fed are solitarily confined so that the only time in the 24 hour day that you see anyone at all is when the screw comes over to take you over to be fed. When this was happening to us, (in Norwich, spring 1959) Phil Cooke commented: “You get to the point when you look forward to them coming to torture you with the feed.”

Prison life is degrading, pointless

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and incredibly boring; anyone, who experiences it, is going to have trouble when they come out reconciling themselves to the fact that they have allowed people to do things to them (make them do things themselves) that demeaned them. It would be more abnormal not to be put under mental strain by this, than to show signs of strain.

But what is to be done about Bosnia?

By Amanda Sebestyen

I MET *Workers' Liberty* outside the meeting of the grotesque ‘Committee for Peace in the Balkans’. I find your article on the left and Bosnia mostly excellent, but I must put you right on a point of misinformation.

The young men who shouted when a message from Serbian opposition groups was read at the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign Rally were not Bosniacs. They were Albanians from Kosova/Kosovor possibly the most oppressed nation in the Balkans — and they were protesting for the not irrelevant reason that the statement was signed not just by “left wing groups in Serbia” and anti war organisations, but also the nationalist opposition such as Vuc Draskovic's Serb Renewal Party.

The ‘double eagle’ Albanian flag was quite visible in the hands of these angry young refugees from Kosova. They were asked to be quiet by Iza Zymkese of the Kosova Information Centre, who was then invited to speak to the meeting. (The meeting broke up before his turn came).

It would be an excellent thing if *Workers' Liberty* were to interview Isaf Besisha and other intellectuals from Kosova in exile here.

Overall, I have one query on *Workers' Liberty*'s attitude to the Bosnian question. Are you overwhelmingly concerned to be right — or do you want to do something?

Engels' “reflective materialism”

By Carl Rennert

AGAINST criticisms of Engels's “reflective materialism, according to which knowledge is simply a reflection of matter in motion”, Tom Willis (*Workers' Liberty*

23) quoted Engels's comment on “philosophical crotchets” about the difficulties of “reflection of reality” being refuted by “practice, namely experiment and industry”.

According to Willis, this shows that Engels (and Marx too) “had no problem fusing the two aspects”, of reflection and of reality being shaped by human activity.

Yet Georg Lukacs showed that Engels's “deepest misunderstanding” here “consists in his belief that the behaviour of industry and scientific experiment constitute praxis in the dialectical, philosophical sense. In fact, scientific experiment is contemplation at its purest... And... inasmuch as industry sets itself ‘objectives’ — it is in the decisive, i.e. historical, dialectical meaning of the word, only the object, not the subject of the natural laws governing society” (*History and Class-Consciousness*, p.132-3).

George Lichtheim made a similar point. “For the early Marx — and in a measure for the mature Marx too — nature and man are complex realities whose interaction is studied in society. This is precisely the reverse of Engels's habit of deducing historical ‘laws’ from the operation of a nature conceived of as an independent reality external to man” (*Marxism*, p.251).

*“The ‘reflection’
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I do not endorse Lukacs's Stalinism, any more than I endorse Lichtheim's social-democratic politics, by drawing attention to these apt formulations of these authors.

The “reflection” concept has nothing to do with materialism, but is a mystical realism, such as propagated by many writers right back to the medieval Church. For instance, Carlus Bovillus (1470-1553): “Man is the centre of the hierarchical universe, as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm”.

And GW Leibnitz (1646-1716): “A perpetual living mirror of the whole universe”; “every monad is a mirror of the universe in its own way”; “the soul, that mirror of an indestructible universe”; “souls in general are living mirrors or images of the universe of created beings” (*Monadology*, section 56, 63, 77, 83).

“Materialism and Empirio-Criticism”, in which Lenin gave his authority to the “reflection” concept, is his worst book — much praised by Stalin and by scholastics like Gerry Healy.

Keep to your course!

Alan Johnson reviews *The Place of Marxism in History*, by Ernest Mandel. Humanities Press

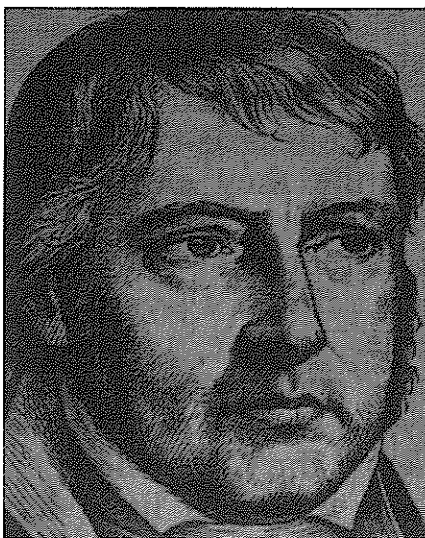
'He who cannot draw on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth', Goethe. DOES Marxism have a future? One way to answer this question is, paradoxically, to look to its past. In this excellent little book, Ernest Mandel's aim was to "apply the materialist interpretation of history to Marxism itself; not consider its appearance as a matter of course, but understand that it requires an explanation, and to provide one". It is a very useful book for young comrades eager to discover the origins and development of Marxism from its inception in the 1840s to its diffusion in the 1870s and 1880s.

Marxism was "the product of the appearance of the capitalist mode of production" in 16th century Europe. It was the product of the intellectual effort — developed in close relation to the emerging workers movement — to understand the dynamics, or 'laws of motion', of this revolutionary new society, its place in history and its future prospects. Marxism did not appear fully formed from the heads of Marx and Engels as a series of revealed truths but matured via a process of critique, involving, as Mandel puts it, the "critical appropriation of the data produced by the most advanced academic and scientific research combined with a critical analysis of the emancipation movement, including its various attempts to build revolutionary organisations, its various attempted solutions of the 'social question', and the elementary self-emancipation efforts of the working class."

Mandel organises his book around this idea. He sets out each critical appropriation and transformation, whether of pre-existing social science or of the political practice of the workers movement, until what we call Marxism emerges clearly as the end product of this process of critique. It builds creatively upon all previous theories and all previous emancipation movements:

The transformation of German idealist philosophy

Hegel, was the most advanced thinker of the bourgeois epoch, who produced dialectical materialism. Marx appropriated Hegel's conceptions of social reality as being in continual change, as a totality, possessed of laws of development, and driven on by internal contradictions. But Marx also transformed Hegel's dialectic, "setting it back on its feet" by insisting on the existence of a knowable objective reality and by finding the source of change in real people and their material existence and struggles, not in the metaphysical movement of ideas.



Hegel

The transformation of French sociological historiography

This had, in analysing the great bourgeois revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries, developed the concepts of *class and class struggle*. Mandel argues this was a "genuine revolution in the social sciences" and as influential on Marx as the philosophy of Hegel. Marx linked the concepts of class and class struggle to the concepts of social labour and social product.

The result was the broad theory of history and social change called "historical materialism" which stressed:

a) The primacy of production: tracing the roots of social classes and social conflict to the realm of production, arguing that the extent of material production and the character of the social labour which guarantees it has primacy in understanding any society. The concepts of productive forces, relations of production and modes of production were developed by Marx to reveal classes not as eternal and natural but as rooted in the development of production and as historically transient phenomena, capable of supersession altogether.

b) Base and superstructure: showing that a society's 'base' — that is its capacity to produce ('productive forces') combined with the way it has organised itself to produce ('relations of production') — broadly conditions social consciousness (ideas and conceptions of the world) politics and the state. The capitalist class's ownership and control of the productive potential of the society gives it dominance (always contested but never overcome short of social revolution) in both realms.

c) Structure and agency. "Human beings make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing" said Marx. In other words history is not pre-ordained, but is made by real men and women as they struggle. But this struggle takes place in a particular time and place, and the constraining structures of the forces and relations of production

limit what that struggle can achieve. Socialism was not possible before capitalism created the possibility of material abundance and a social class with the interest and capacity to create a classless society. But equally, this classless society will not fall from the sky just because it is now possible. It will be created, in the teeth of opposition from the capitalists, by the self activity of the vast majority or it will not be. There are no historical guarantees.

The transformation of English political economy

Once social class was traced to production then the precise character of economic life in capitalism — the "laws of motion" of capitalist production — becomes the heart of the matter. This preoccupied Marx for the rest of his life and culminated in the three volumes of *Capital*. Adam Smith and David Ricardo had argued that goods exchange on the basis of the quantities of labour they contain: the labour theory of value. Marx agreed but noticed that Smith and Ricardo could not explain the value of labour itself, and that they defended capitalism as natural. Marx established that labour was not just the measure of value, but that it *was* value or "more precisely a fraction of the labour potential (the total mass of workdays or work hours) available in a given society during a given period".

Moreover, Marx established that in capitalist society labour is itself a commodity, bought and sold in the market place. But it is a unique commodity because it produced added or 'surplus value' for the capitalist. For Mandel, "the discovery of surplus value as a fundamental category of bourgeois society and its mode of production, along with the explanation of its nature (a result of surplus labour, of the unpaid, unremunerated labor supplied by the wage-earner) and of its origins (the economic compulsion forcing the proletarian to sell her or his labour power to the capitalist as a commodity) represents Marx's main contribution to economics and social science in general".

With this concept Marx traced social conflict to the exploitation rooted not in the circulation of goods as Ricardo thought, but in production itself, the heart of the system. In other words conflict is systemic or 'built-in'. There is a perennial clash between the diametrically opposed interests of labour and capital.

The transformation of utopian socialism

One of the great strengths of Mandel's book is his approach to utopian socialist thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries who reject capitalism but can see no future role for the working class in rebuilding society. Mandel refuses to sneer at the dreams of figures such as Robert Owen (1771-1858) and Flora Tristan (1803-1844) but argues that, "they were lucid critics of bourgeois society who grasped the main features of its long term evolution and contradictions, and were far sighted anticipators of the transformations that would be required to establish a classless society. Marx and Engels... learned much from them". ♦

And yet Marxism might be summed up as the movement from utopian to scientific socialism. Marx located the very possibility of socialism in the maturing social relations and productive capacity of the present, rather than in a moral rejection of that present. For Marx and Engels this meant:

1. Capitalism is the source of both the productive capacity ('abundance') and the social agency (the working class) which alone make socialism a realistic hope. Capitalism cannot be bypassed.

2. Capitalism cannot be gradually superseded by one incursion of the utopian future after another. Utopian experiments such as model factories, communes etc. were doomed to failure because they were isolated in a hostile capitalist environment. As Rosa Luxemburg said, it is impossible to make the sea sweet by pouring into it thimblefuls of lemonade. But Mandel also notes that Marx and Engels saw great "demonstrative value" in these experiments, giving them support without forgetting the impossibility of their permanent success. Such a stance is relevant to some of today's experiments in "popular economy" such as LETS schemes.

3. The driving force for socialism will not be the gradual spread of sweet reason (socialism-as-good-idea) as the utopians hoped, but reason allied to the material interests of the working class, *the first class in history* which because it needs neither a class above it to rule over it, nor a class below it to be the basic productive class has the capacity and the interest to create a society without any classes.

4. Most importantly, the utopian socialists saw socialism as being delivered from above by experts, even dictators. The most authoritarian methods were often envisaged as the means to deliver and sustain the utopian society. Here lies the most important and defining break Marxism made with all previous socialist thought. As Mandel puts it:

"Marx and Engels to the contrary, conceived the advent of classless society as the result of the real movement of self-organisation and self-emancipation of the great masses... This concept, in a nutshell, was what was newest and most revolutionary in Marxism's contribution to human thought and history; it represented the most radical break with all other doctrines."

The fusion of the workers movement and scientific socialism

The three key figures in the transition from 'pre-proletarian philanthropy and propagandism to proletarian action properly speaking' were Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871) in Germany, and Proudhon (1809-1865) and Blanqui (1805-1881) in France. Each, according to Mandel, realised two things the earlier utopians had not: the need for political action 'of a new proletarian revolutionary type' and for a 'revolutionary vanguard organisation'.

The failings, however, were equally significant. Their ideas were putschist, elitist, harbouring authoritarian conceptions of the post-revolutionary state, and so vague on economics they represented a regression from the earlier utopian socialists. Political they may have been, but they remained locked into the assumptions of "socialism from above". Marx

and Engels drew a line underneath all these conspiracies. Engels, in terms which speak powerfully to British revolutionary socialists today, saw the relation between socialists and the working class thus:

"The masses must have time and opportunity to develop, and they can have the opportunity only when they have a movement of their own — no matter in what form so long as it is their movement — in which they are driven further by their mistakes and learn to profit by them... [What the Marxists ought to do is] go in for any real general working class movement, accept its actual starting point as such, and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical views in the original programme'.

The understanding of political action developed by Marx and Engels was built around these pillars: the fight for power was to be the product of the broad mass of wage earners not a few conspirators, legal organisation as a political party was essential, the priority was the self-organisation of the working class, and political emancipation was inseparable to economic and social emancipation. On this basis Marx and Engels fought to reorientate the fledgling European workers movements and were partially successful.

However Marxism was often received and diffused in Europe in a crude form. The popularisations of followers such as Bebel in Germany, De Leon in America, Labriola in Italy and so on, were "far more widely read than were the works of Marx and Engels themselves". The ostensibly 'Marxist' mass social-democratic parties imbibed what Mandel delicately calls "a rather summary version of Marxism boiled down to a few central ideas" the main weakness of which was a "narrow determinism, verging on fatalism that saw the supercession of capitalism by socialism in a more or less inevitable fashion... downplaying, or even disparaging, direct mass action".

It was not until Luxemburg, Lenin and the Bolsheviks after the 1905 revolution rediscovered the revolutionary edge of Marxism and its stress on self-emancipation as the essence of socialism that "the Marxist tradition of direct mass action" was reclaimed within social democracy. After the Russian Revolution of 1917 this tradition was briefly embodied in the Third Communist International before being transformed by the Stalinist counter-revolution inside the Soviet Union into an ideology to legitimise the bureaucratic power of the new ruling class. Social-democracy shed its Marxist past and embraced reformism in theory as well as practice. A small minority, foremost the Trotskyists, but also other dissident Communists, preserved the tradition of revolutionary socialism from below, but, again often in a "summary form, boiled down to a few central ideas".

If Marxism does have a future it will be as a moral realism: at once an ethical theory and a materialist science. This Marxism will be developed by those in intimate contact with the real movements of resistance, who see in those struggles the agency of socialism, and who are able — really able — to learn from as well as offer leadership to those struggles, in the

spirit and method of critique developed by Marx and Engels. In their lives they embodied this combination of ethical commitment and scientific analysis, while refusing both facile anti-intellectualism and armchair detachment. Mandel again:

"Not only their scientific but also their moral motivation sprang precisely from such encounters with social situations — with workers' poverty, workers' revolts, political struggles — that occurred before their very eyes and influenced them profoundly... Marx and Engels quickly decided to act, to bring their activity in line with their beliefs, to tend toward that unity of theory and practice that became at once an epistemological criterion (in the last analysis, only practice can verify the truthfulness of a theory) and a moral obligation. In fact their commitment to and involvement in the labour movement became the precondition for their ability to complete their most important contribution to history: the progressive fusion of the real emancipation movement of the workers with the main advances of scientific socialism". (p64)

More than ever the Marxist must understand the origins and character of her tradition to survive. Marxism was turned into an ideology of repression by the ruling classes of the former Stalinist states, while, in the West, it exists today mainly as an unintelligible scholasticism in academia. Its influence in the workers movement is negligible. To stand out 'against the stream' of bourgeois public opinion and labour movement hostility for the ideas of Marxism, if that commitment is to outlast the first flush of activism, requires both a moral commitment to social justice and a deepgoing understanding of Marx's critique of capitalism and his theory of socialism as the self-emancipation of the working class.

Only on the basis of these twin foundations can today's Marxist reasonably argue that Stalinism was not the product of Marxism but of the defeat of Marxism by a counter-revolution inside the Soviet Union, forge connections to other perspectives such as feminism without losing all that is specific to Marxism itself, and on that basis seek to develop Marxism as a democratic revolutionary socialism, a tradition of critical social analysis and a guide to political action in today's very different conditions. Without such an intellectual and ethical bedrock for their activity many thousands of socialists frequently do not last beyond the first depressing realisation that the revolution is not round the next or any other corner. Armed with such an understanding of "the place of Marxism in history" however, one's perspective on the current isolation of Marxism is very different. In the words of the Communist poet Randall Swingler: ■

Those who come after,
Who are riding the wave when it breaks at last
and the foam
Dazzles with rainbow colours of the days of
hope,
They will not remember who you were, far
back
In the broil of ocean and out of sight of the
shore
Who kept your course though the tide ran
against you.

Of cults and cul-de-sacs

Mike Fenwick reviews

The Prophet's Children: Travels on the American Left by Tim Wohlforth
(Humanities, £12.95)

TIM WOHLFORTH was a leading American Trotskyist in the '60s and '70s. His major "contribution" was to build the American Healyite organisation, the Workers' League. Nowadays he is a proselytising anti-Leninist.

He first joined the Trotskyist movement in the mid 50s, in the form of Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League. He could have saved himself and the reader a lot of trouble by sticking with Shachtman and embracing social democracy in the early '60s. Instead, it took him 30 years and another couple of organisations to get there.

After the ISL Wohlforth, together with a small group of youth (including Jim Robertson, now leader of the Spartacist Tendency) joined Cannon's SWP. The splitting issue was Shachtman's approach to political regroupment. He looked to the right wing of the Auto Workers' Union and Socialist Party, while the SWP concentrated on the CP and the Progressive Party. On joining in 1957 he found the SWP to be a moribund and routinist organisation still dominated by the veterans of the 1930s. In discussing the SWP, he develops the idea that revolutionary groups all have an individual character, usually that of its political leader. It is in such terms that he describes all the groups he encounters. He seems to see this organisational personality as something over and above politics.

In discussing his faction fight in the SWP he says "By rights we were also entitled to a National Committee alternate, a position we did not get. I protested to Jim Cannon who bluntly said: 'You are not entitled to anything. We give you what we want to give you...' Oh well, it was his party, so I guessed he ought to know." [p104]

If this was just a one-off, throwaway line, he might be excused of glib cynicism. However, this attitude seems to determine his judgement. So the first thing we are told about Healy and the Socialist Labour League is Healy's energy and activism. That Healy was always very busy and "travelled some 1,200 miles a week" on political business must have been quite exciting compared to the slow-moving SWP. The political issues Healy was factionalising around also corresponded with those of Wohlforth's minority. A negative assessment of the Cuban revolution, and a critique of Pablo-

ism (the record of the European-based International Secretariat of the Fourth International) provided the basis for opposition to the SWP majority. Pabloism was the political myth which Cannon, Healy and Co. in the ICFI had used to justify their split from the IS in the early '50s. Its contention that Pablo wanted to liquidate the Trotskyists into the Stalinist or social democratic mass parties, and adopt an almost uncritical support for Stalinist expansion and nationalist revolutions. If these charges were applied evenly each side of the dispute, both would have been found guilty. At the time, however, Healy and his French collaborator Pierre Lambert could cover their own records through bluster and demagoguery about the need for an independent revolutionary party and their own frantic attempts at party building.

After being expelled from the SWP Wohlforth set out to build a new organisation based on Healy's SLL. Combining hyperactivity and a rigid and vindictive regime with a set of catastrophist perspective he built quickly from the anti-war and civil rights movements. But it was the frenzied urge of activity that built the group, the Workers' League.

"As we increased the pace of our activities, we stepped up the internal struggle within the organization. Each branch meeting was dominated by attacks against comrades who failed to sell sufficient tickets to an event or to sell papers or subscriptions, or who failed in some other fashion. The comrades were forced to confess their own middle-class weaknesses, even their purported hostility to the working class and to the party. A physically exhausted membership found itself under continuous attack. Believing in the party and our ideals as we all did, each of us became preoccupied with our own internal demons. These kept most of us, at least for a while, from questioning the party's perspective. It was, as I can now see clearly, a highly effective method of brainwashing and thought control. We held on to and inspired a hardworking membership at the cost of becoming — a political cult!" [p225]

He was not ignorant of the effects of such methods. During visits to England he had seen Healy humiliate members of his Central Committee, such as Cliff Slaughter. He knew of the physical intimidation. Yet he saw fit to duplicate all this in America. Unlike people in Britain like Alan Thornett, he chose not to fight Healy politically. When the machine he helped create turned on him, he just accepted it and deferred once more to Healy. At first he accepted demotion to staff writer, rather than leader, and then he just resigned.

After leaving Healy Wohlforth rejoined the SWP. He found it a party of a different

character, in his terms, a new leader. Jack Barnes had succeeded Farrell Dobbs and Tom Kerry and had built, on the basis of quite rapid growth in the early '70s a party machine of full-timers. Wohlforth seems to have soon tired of fighting within another monolithic party, and gradually gave up on his own position, dropping out of the SWP altogether by 1979. He has spent much time since picking.

As I said above, he seems to have been unable to distinguish between political and personalities and so has developed a critique of Leninism, or more specifically democratic centralism, on the basis of what happened to him. That the organisational question is at the root of the evil, but he has also rejected the political content. So Marxism is a European import. What is needed in America is "a radical, democratic, socialist movement that would go beyond the Russian experience, beyond Trotskyism, communism and Leninism."

Despite such grand ambitions, he has been unable to go beyond either Healyism or its Stalinist-coloured caricature of Leninism. Not only has he failed to make any thoroughgoing criticism of his own actions, so failing to take responsibility for anything he has done, he relies on his critique of Leninism to explain it all away. He also uses it to excuse Healy. "The blame," he says, "goes beyond Healy to the traditions and institutions that permitted it to happen."

The argument for Leninism as a democratic form that emphasises politics over organisation and demands critical thinking from its members need not be gone into here. What is clear here is that Wohlforth is and was a political cultist. Not only must he attempt to absolve himself from any blame but also his cult leader. The easiest way is to go back in history to find the source of this evil, a time far enough past to remove any personal responsibility he may have had.

So the cultist remains intact. Yet it's obvious that he had the ability and opportunity to make things different, to have fought against Healy and his methods. But in his formula Leninism = vanguardism = Stalinism = Trotskyism = root of all evil. He raises issues which were in his hands to change and influence through conscious activity to the level of something mystical. It is this detachment and the accompanying self-indulgences that make this book one of the most irritating I have ever read. You get fed up of saying to him "Why didn't you fight?"

As such, it's not a useful guide for our practice today. Along the way there are a few interesting insights, pieces of Trotskyist tittle-tattle etc. But in terms of his story being an example for us, it can only be a bad one. ■

Marxism and the Irish revolution

Sean Matgamna reviews
*The Communists and the
 Irish Revolution: the
 Russian revolutionaries on
 the Irish National
 Question, 1895-1924*
 edited by Rayner Lysaght.
 Literaire publishers,
 Dublin.

THE STRIKING thing about this collection is that one of the key documents reproduced here "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", 1915 — one of Lenin's most important texts on the national question — has been bowdlerised so that the meaning of what Lenin wrote is transformed into its very opposite. The words in square brackets below have been excised from Lysaght's text:

Socialists of "the oppressing nations must demand the freedom of the oppressed nations to secede, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working-class solidarity would in fact be merely empty phrase-mongering, sheer hypocrisy. On the other hand, the Social-Democrats of the oppressed nations must place in the forefront the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations [with those of the oppressing nations] for otherwise these Social-Democrats will involuntarily become the allies of this or that national bourgeoisie, which *always* betrays the interest of the people and of democracy, and is *always* ready in its turn to annex and to oppress other nations." [Emphasis, Lenin's].

Whereas the real Lenin proposes unity of workers of oppressed and oppressing nations to fight not only oppression but also chauvinism on the part of the workers of the oppressed nation, "Lenin" here explicitly tells workers in oppressed nations to unite with workers in other oppressed nations, and implicitly not with the workers of the oppressor nation.

The common struggle against national oppression, not the struggle for socialism, is

the central thing for these workers.

What might be the implications of this doctored "Lenin" for Ireland? Where the plain meaning of what Lenin actually wrote is that communists should work for the unity of the Irish and British working classes, and within Ireland for Protestant-Catholic — that is essentially British and Irish — working class unity, the bowdlerised text here divides the working class into oppressing and oppressed segments for the duration of "the struggle".

Irish workers should aspire to unite with the workers of say, Zimbabwe, but not with the workers of Belfast or Manchester? Not "Workers of the World Unite" but "Workers of the Third World Unite"?

The most narrow Catholic-nationalist or Catholic chauvinist "Republican" self-satisfaction is thus in the Irish context seemingly endorsed by Lenin.

Everything here is stood on its head.

I am reluctant to believe that the editor of the collection, Rayner Lysaght, could have done this deliberately. To believe that it was not done deliberately but by typesetter's mishap you have to believe that serendipity has conspired to chop and edit Lenin's text, neatly and precisely, so that Lenin is made to disagree with his own real world outlook and to agree with the romantic Third-Worldist wing of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, and with its severed brethren of the American SWP... And with the Catholic-nationalist-politics-with-a-socialist-veneer adhered to by the editor of this collection.

The change from the real Lenin here in mid-text is as stark as a baritone changing to falsetto in mid-sentence. Did nobody involved in producing this book notice that a Third World populist Lenin had been substituted for the real, Communist, Lenin? Did no one read the proof? Was an erratum slip impossible to produce? As far as I know, not one of the learned comrades who reviewed this book in the press of Lysaght's international organisation noticed the change. Is Leninism so much of a foreign language to them that they do not notice when he is made to lapse into gibberish?

This book essays to bring together every single reference to Ireland in the writings of Lenin and Trotsky. There are also epilogues and appendices. One of these contains a letter of June 1936 from Trotsky to James Connolly's daughter, Nora, written in English. It has previously appeared only in a small "Lambertist" journal.

"... I always have been greatly interested in Ireland, but unfortunately my interest remained only platonical. I never had the opportunity to study more in detail Irish history and politics. Since my early years I have got, through Marx and Engels, the greatest sympathy and esteem for the heroic struggle of the Irish for their independence. The tragic fate of your courageous father met

me in Paris during the war. I bear him faithfully in my remembrance. I made up my mind to read your book about your father in the very next time.

The revolutionary tradition of the national struggle is a precious good. Would it be possible to imbue the Irish proletariat with it for its socialist class-struggle, the working class of your country could, in spite of the numerical weakness of your population, play an important historical role and give a mighty impulse to the British working class now paralysed by the senile bureaucracy."

Trotsky's comment on James Connolly in that brief letter is, as far as I know, the sole direct reference to Connolly by either Lenin or Trotsky.

The main body of the book consists of 67 extracts and articles, organised in seven sections, amounting to just over 80 pages in all. The sections have these titles:

1. Lenin on the Irish land question (six extracts in three and a half pages).
2. Lenin on the Irish class war, 1913 (three items, two of them complete articles in six pages, one a short stray item).
3. Lenin: For the right to self-determination (11 items in 23 pages).
4. Trotsky, "Early scraps on Ireland" (sic: two items, two pages).
5. Polemics on the Easter Rising (seven items in 12 pages, one of them an article by Karl Radek against which Lenin polemicalised).
6. From Easter 1916 to October 1917.
7. The Soviet power and the Irish revolution (28 items in 21 pages).

The most important selection from Lenin here is that entitled "For the right of self-determination, 1914-16". If Lenin's writings on Ireland itself are thin, flimsy and false (See WL 22 and 23) his writings on self-determination are great and profound works of Marxism. Lysaght gives us a selection of 25 pages from this seed bed of Marxist science, including the two pieces on the 1914 Home Rule crisis examined in *Workers' Liberty* 23 (about a quarter of the whole).

This anatomy of the collection tells the story: far too many of the items here are indeed mere "scraps". Some of the scraps — that is, bits culled by the editor in which Ireland is mentioned, almost always in passing — are ripped out of works which are in themselves of immense importance; but scraps even of good things are... scraps.

Anything written on Ireland by Lenin and Trotsky would be worth collecting, with more or less critical commentary. Editor Lysaght's difficulty is that they wrote next to nothing on Ireland. He is reduced to trawling works on other subjects for glancing references to Ireland. Instead of providing full texts on things like the National Question, Lysaght chops most of them up to extract direct references to Ireland.

"Lenin on Ireland" does not exist as the

**Memorial Meeting for
 Ken Tarbuck
 Saturday 14 October
 3-6pm
 Brockway Hall, Conway
 Hall, Red Lion Square,
 Holborn London**

editor of this work thinks he exists. Had he set his mind to analysing Irish problems directly and concretely, we would probably, even after 70 or 80 years, have before us reliable keys to what has happened since. He did not. Because of the paucity of his concerns with Ireland, and the great space of time between him and us, all "Lenin" can tell us now about Ireland is what we can take from what he told us about national questions in general. Lenin's serious work can teach us how to analyse Ireland for ourselves — as Leninists, not as text-chewing epigones.

Filleting these works in order to chop out and collect all the bare references to Ireland in them is too much like the man in the fable who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs to get imaginary nuggets of gold.

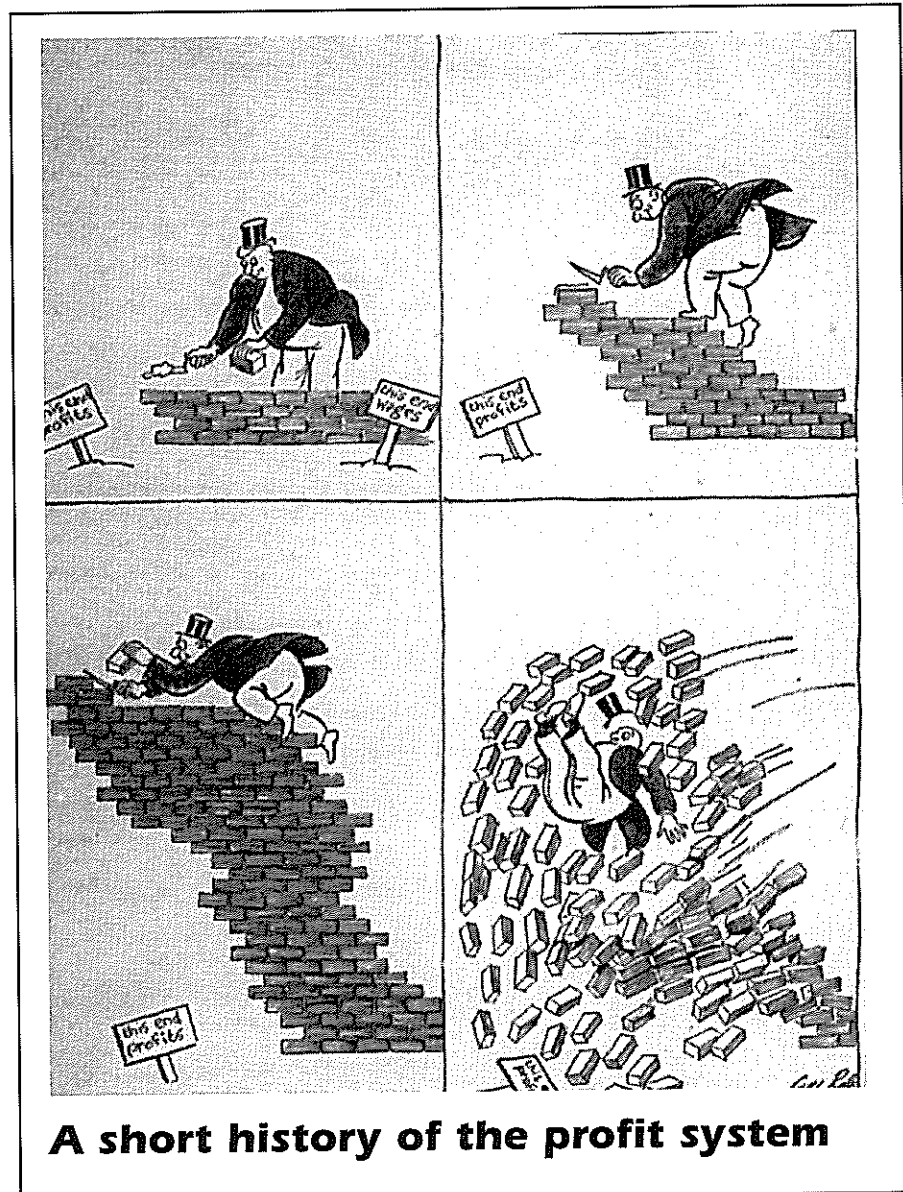
Text worship is the opposite of living Marxism and much of what Lysaght does here is ridiculous. Nothing could be more senseless than to chop and fillet key texts of Lenin's like this. For example, a whole page, out of 80 that make the main body of the book, is occupied by a list of parties invited to the founding conference of the Communist International in 1919, just to establish that the Irish Communists were invited too! Such a key text of Lenin's as the Communist International's "Theses on the National and Colonial Question", 1920, is represented by a little snippet consisting in the main of a list in which Ireland is included. And so on.

To give so much space to "scraps" of little or no importance — except that they go to make a "full" collection of all references to Ireland in Lenin's and Trotsky's works — is to substitute the concerns of a matchbox or bottle-top collector for those of a Marxist!

Revolutionary Marxism is a way of looking at the world, analysing it and changing it. It embodies certain key basic ideas (the ultimate priority of the mode of production in shaping society, including its ideas; the class struggle; the centrality of the working class in modern history). Marxism deals with an ever-changing reality. There is no rest, no finality. Reality moves, permutes, is transformed. The best texts of Marxism "age" and become progressively divorced from the evolved reality whose ancestor, so to speak, they captured.

There can be no "sacred texts" To treat any of the texts of Marxism, the past judgements of Marxists, as embodying supra-historical truth, is to break with the heart of Marxism and to transform attempted works of science into quasi-religious objects of veneration. To the degree that such texts are worshipped instead of being critically reviewed, used, worked over, they lose whatever power they had to illuminate reality and thus help us in the work of changing it. We kill or fail to develop the capacity in ourselves to use the tools of Marxism.

The Marxists whose work is now venerated worked differently. Marxism was a method of analysing concrete reality. Previous Marxist attempts to analyse the same or antecedent reality offered guides, models, ideas, comparisons for the working, thinking, living Marxists. In truth, of course,



A short history of the profit system

everyone thinks about the world, even the religious text-worshippers, except that their cogitations do not go further than the thought that Marx or Lenin or Trotsky — or Stalin or Mao — was infallible and could tell you about your world, though it may have come into existence after they were dead. Of course, what the dogmatist usually does in practice is pragmatically and impressionistically take an attitude on current events and then find the 'right quotes' to dress it up. Marxism as a method of analysing reality atrophies.

Ireland shows at its worst this process of atrophying — and of dead "Marxism" being filled with alien content. Marx and Engels analysed Ireland. They died; Ireland changed. Partial analyses of aspects of Ireland's evolution were made by later Marxists influenced by Marx and Engels. Ireland evolved into two bourgeois states. And there, frozen at the point when the Communist International died as a Marxist, working-class organisation, "Marxism" on Ireland stopped. Comments and analyses of Marx and Lenin (Lenin's radically wrong at the start) became timeless truths of the Stalinist church and gained wide influence by merging with left-wing petit-bourgeois Republicanism.

"Trotskyists" who thought they had done their duty as Marxists if they re-labelled what the Stalinists called "completing the bourgeois revolution" and straight Republicans called "reunifying Ireland", calling it "Permanent Revolution" instead, have been a part, and not the least influential part, of this process. Nobody who knows both Irish reality and Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution" could believe "Permanent Revolution" has any bearing on Irish politics! I have never in 30 years found anyone able to argue for its seriously. But they "believe" it. It is the common dogma, functioning as a licence for playing the chameleon to petit bourgeois nationalism.

Marxists, if they are Marxists, draw from life, not from the dead or half-dead reflection of ever-changing life in old analyses.

All Lenin's articles included or excerpted in this collection have been available in English for 6 or 7 decades, and apart from the letter to Nora Connolly, those of Trotsky for 20 or 30 years. The importance of this book lies not so much in what it tells us about "the Communists and the Irish revolution" but in what its appearance now tells us about the decadence of parts of the Irish and international kitsch-"Trotskyist" left. ■

Intolerance born of fear

THE DECISION of Labour's NEC to refuse to endorse the candidature of Liz Davies represents a new stage in the Blairites' drive to create an ultra-centralised one-faction party.

Davies has effectively rebutted all the charges against her. She has even managed to extract a confession from the NEC's Disputes Committee that they don't know which specific charges she has been found guilty of! It has been effectively demonstrated that Liz has been blocked as a parliamentary candidate for one reason only — her socialist ideas.

Liz Davies is, in fact, the victim of an embittered group of political nonentities — led by Margaret Hodge — who have carried out a personal vendetta against an old opponent. The NEC have acted as "enforcers" for this clique.

The union representatives on the NEC and the Disputes Committee have displayed a level of spinelessness unusual for even the most dimwitted timeserver. They have endorsed a set of allegations which they know to be false, their only motive not to have to go against the Leader who has identified himself with the purge.

The ban on Liz Davies sets a new measure for how far along the road towards an almost Stalinist party the Blairites have taken Labour. It goes together with the obscene cult of Blair, and with the downgrading of Party conference as the policy-making body.

Who decides what Labour policy is these days?

The Leader and his court do.

Who decides who can be an MP? The Leader and whoever amongst his courtiers can catch his ear — in this case, Margaret Hodge.

Labour is now a massively depoliticised party, concerned only with winning governmental power for its leaders — office at any cost. The right policy is

"Without Liz we would never have been able to get our arguments represented in the Labour Group. She was a great help to us. As for Phil Kelly, as Chair of Education, he was the one trying to close our nurseries."

Janet Owolabi,
active in the campaign to
keep Islington's Springfield
Nursery open

whatever will help win the next election.

Increasingly, anything goes. Jack Straw, one of the least impressive members of a lacklustre Labour Front Bench, recently made a spluttering speech promising to use the police to clear the homeless off the streets. That was a Tory speech, worthy of a benighted right-wing backbench bigot spiritually smothering in his own middle-class complacency.

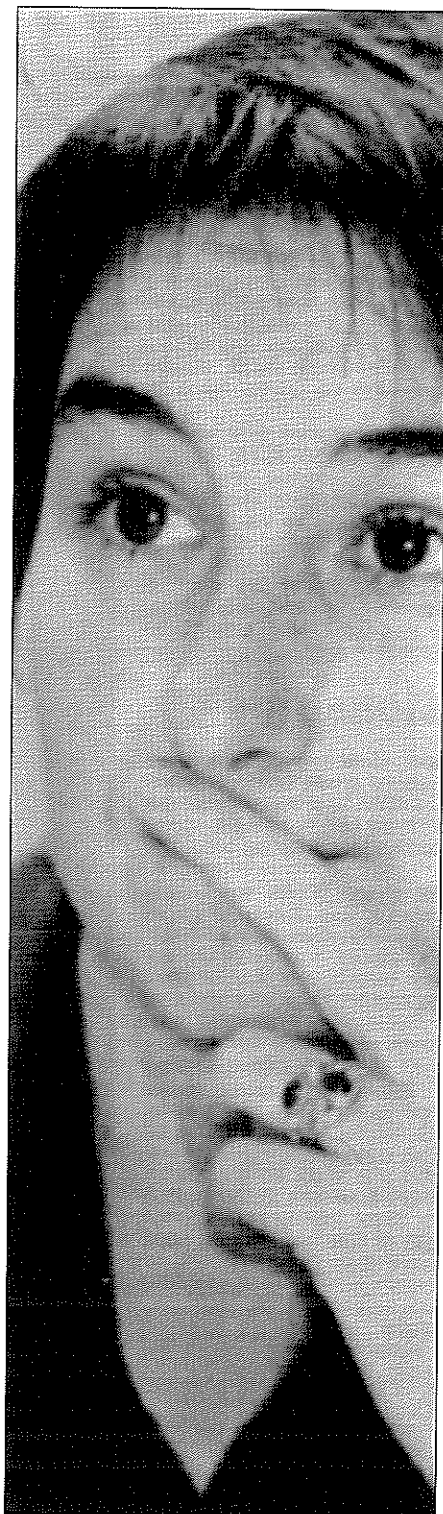
By implication Straw was criticising the Tories for not driving the homeless off the streets now.

Anything goes! Yet things are not quite what they seem.

The Blairites have the arrogance of a middle-class clique completely out of touch with the traditions of the labour movement. But their arrogance hides a deep fear of the future: fear of the labour movement.

The Liz Davies affair shows the underlying lack of confidence behind the arrogance. They moved against Liz Davies because they feared the presence in Parliament of a gifted and effective organiser amongst the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

This in turn reflects the deep unease with which the misnamed "modernisers" view the prospects of a Labour left revival after the next election. All their actions are geared to preventing such a development.



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