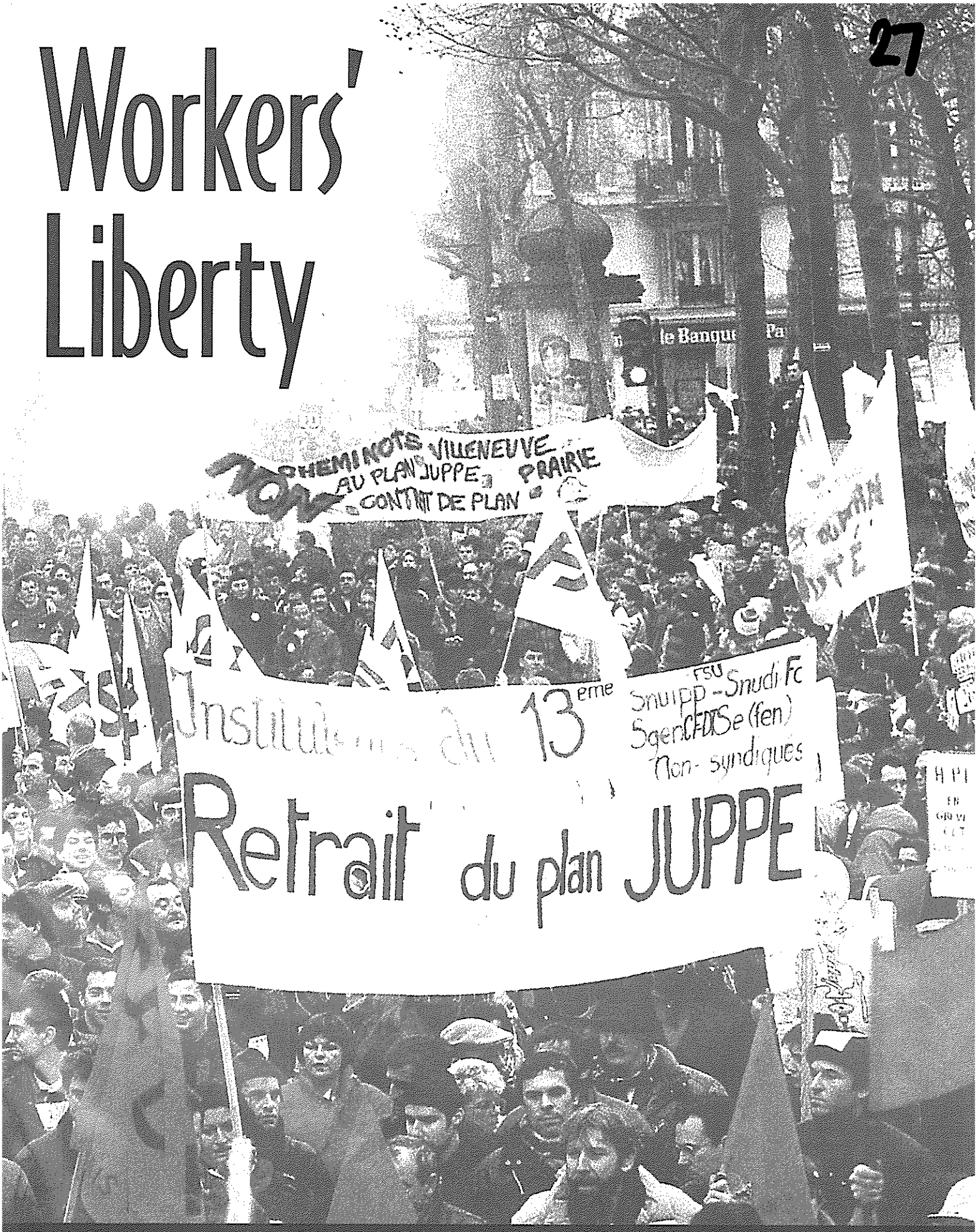
Workers' Liberty



France: revolt for welfare

Workers' Liberty

"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

Contents

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From the business manager

THE best sales of the November/December issue of *Workers' Liberty* were to cinemagoers at Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom*, who were interested in our nineteen-page special feature on the Spanish Civil War.

We sold in central London, and at showings throughout the country. Our local sales organiser in Cardiff sold over 50 copies at showings of Loach's film. In Bradford, the management of the Independent cinema took a bundle which quickly sold out. Readers as far afield as Germany and America wrote to say they liked the feature.

It contributed, we hope, to the comprehensive rethinking and reconstruction of our own history which the left needs if it is not to slide into demoralised despair after the collapse of the USSR and many of the traditional left's traditional reference points. For most people of left-wing leanings, the Spanish Civil War was simply a story of Democracy against Fascism. We hope our magazine has helped them learn about the bitter battle between workers' revolution and Stalinist-led counter-revolution which unfolded under the catch-all banners, Democracy, People, Republic.

The magazine also sold surprisingly well, considering the language barrier, on the big workers' demonstrations in France in December. Small delegations of AWL members sold 12 copies on the 7 December demonstration, and 20 on 16 December. We produced a special advertising poster, based on the front cover of the magazine, which helped to get it more widely-known, and we'll be doing the same with this and future issues.

This issue contains a lot of material about the French workers' struggle, and we expect it will sell well in a number of areas.

- To welfare-state campaigners, who have been shown how central mass working-class action can be to their cause.
- To railworkers, anxious to find out how their French counterparts have stalled plans to chop up and privatise France's rail network.
- To people convinced of our argument about a democratically-planned socialist economic system being better than capitalist savagery, but unconvinced that the working class can ever mobilise the solidarity, the confidence, and the power to create such a system.
- To students who have left-wing sympathies but who — because of the state of the British class struggle in recent years — have never seen a big, confident picket-line, and for whom the great miners' strike is a vague memory from primary-school days.

We are asking local branches of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to hold public forums to promote further discussion on the lessons of this inspiring revival of class solidarity.

Can you afford to rely on a chance meeting or a visit to a bookshop for your copy of *Workers' Liberty*? This month we are launching a new subscription drive for our magazine, at rates which make subscribing an excellent bargain. If you would like to join our network of Workers' Liberty sellers or would like more information about our organisation, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, please phone us on 0171-639 7965 or 0171-277 7217.

The business manager

Scottish postal workers' strike

A victory for solidarity

Editorial

THE end of last year witnessed the very first signs of what could turn into a new revival of industrial militancy.

In a magnificent and truly inspiring display of solidarity rank and file postal workers shut down the whole of Scotland. The dispute started over the demotion from full to part-time status of just five workers in one office, but, through flying pickets, solidarity strikes and walkouts against the victimisation of workers who refused to handle "re-directed" (i.e. scab) mail it became an all-out strike across most of Scotland.

Despite threats of victimisations, court proceedings against union activists and instructions to return to work from the CWU union leadership, the rank and file held out and won an important victory.

Management reinstated all full-time jobs that had been downgraded and agreed to no victimisation. The only negative element was the fact that the dispute was called off without management backing down on its underlying cause — their attempt to abolish the second delivery. They want to convert vast numbers of postal workers from full to part-time status, thus saving on wages, and use improved sorting technology not to benefit the workers, through reduced hours, and the public, through an improved service, but to boost their profits.

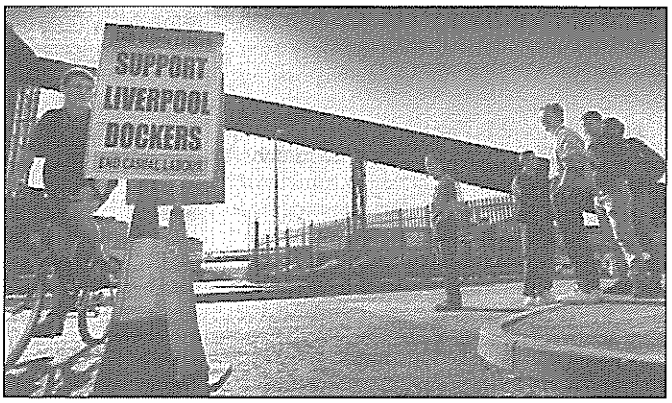
The Scottish strike could have been turned into an all-out fight to defend the second delivery in the weeks before Christmas (the best conceivable time for a postal strike) and in future the issue will be raised again in circumstances not necessarily as favourable to the union. But, nevertheless this was an important victory.

It was followed by unofficial walk-outs at Ford and Vauxhall where workers are gearing up for a fight over pay and conditions. Despite the strings, the latest rejected offer at Vauxhall already amounts to a wage increase and a cut in the working week — a sign of improved bargaining power.

These come together with a series of defensive battles — the Liverpool docks, Hillingdon hospital cleaners and porters, JJ Foods workers, Merseyside FBU — and we could just be on the verge of a real revival. However, a cold assessment has to say that we are not there yet, even though a few more victories like we saw in Scotland would have a huge psychological effect far greater than the boost they would make to the strike statistics.

Nevertheless the overall situation still remains unfavourable.

We are in the midst of a long and deep ebb in the industrial struggle. Strikes are at their lowest level this century. Union membership and density continues to decline. The TUC affiliated unions have lost a full third of their membership since 1979. National or cross industry disputes are becoming rarer, though they have not disappeared entirely (as they did in the period after the defeat of the General Strike in 1926 — not to reappear until the early '50s). The anti-union laws and the pressure of unemployment provide a major obstacle to any revival of militancy.



Mersey docks: the return of solidarity

In turn, the overall political situation and the stranglehold of the bureaucracy over the movement magnify the effects of the objective situation. This could be seen most clearly last year in the way the ASLEF and UNISON health leaderships squandered a real mood for struggle over pay in their respective sectors. Sell-out is the only way to describe the outcome, as it was in the Tate and Lyle dispute, which was called off by the GMB and AEEU leaders without any gains.

Underpinning the sell-outs is not only bureaucratic timidity but the general perspective of waiting for the election of a Labour government, which is shared by all sections of the bureaucracy, from the AEEU's hard right [and its newly elected "soft left" President Davey Hall] to the official TGWU left. This does not mean that it is impossible to draw the official leadership into supporting action, but it does make it exceedingly difficult to develop the kind of co-ordinated national fightback demanded by the objective situation, particularly in the public sector.

Despite all this important battles will continue to break out as we saw in Scotland and will continue to be won by our side.

Short of waiting for the election of a Labour government to improve the situation the decisive factor is the extent to which the rank and file of the unions can organise to seize control and fight back. The Scottish postal strike gives us a glimpse of the possibilities.

For a Labour government in '96!

THE LABOUR Party is the political wing of the multi-million strong trade union movement. It is very far from being a socialist party. In and out of office, it has always preserved the capitalist system, never challenged it or replaced it. Labour governments have turned on their working-class supporters when the interests of capitalism have demanded it.

The Labour Party is thus a bourgeois workers' party. But it is the only governmental alternative available to the working class movement now.

Therefore, despite Blair and the new right and their authoritarian agenda, the election of a Labour government is the central immediate task facing the labour movement.

With the election of a Blair government the log-jam in British politics will begin to break up. Blair will immediately be faced with expectations and demands. A Blair government will be expected to do something about the devastation the Tories have wreaked over the last 17 or 18 years. The inhibitions against working-class action that have grown up in the labour movement over the last decade and a half of setbacks and defeats will begin to dissolve after the Tory defeat.

Blair's "New Labour" ideology is still, in part, a form of Labourism. It represents a fusion of elements of authoritarian Christian-Democratic social market philosophy with the right-wing business unionism of the mainstream of the trade union bureaucracy. It is merely a particularly degenerate form of the classical Labourite fusion of trade unionism and elements of the bourgeois intellectual consensus.

In the long view of history, only two developments were theoretically possible for old Labour.

Either, it would collapse back into Liberalism pure and simple, or, it would be reconstructed as an effective instrument of the working class. The great anomaly of Labourism is that for decades it did neither.

There are two reasons for this. The revolutionary left failed to win significant sections of the working class away from Labourism. For much of the present century the bourgeoisie rested on the trade union bureaucracy as the main pillar of its rule.

Today, capital does not require (and cannot afford the price of) the kind of succour previously given to it by the Labour and trade union apparatus. The fundamental achievement of Thatcherism from this perspective was to shackle the trade unions.

It is this that makes Blair so much more dangerous for the labour movement. He has a clear conception of the historic possibility of abolishing Labour in its old form and has a favourable objective environment in which to go about it. Nonetheless, Blair has not yet succeeded in severing the trade union link.

The reality now is subordination of the trade union apparatuses to a "Liberal" party which is ideologically much closer to Asquith than to Attlee. Blair even uses the same rhetoric of opposition to "vested interests" (amongst which he includes the unions) that the "New Liberals" of the turn of the century employed.

Blair has taken the European Social Democratic strategy of "reformism without reforms" and developed it into a viciously anti-working class project for the regeneration of capital. Blair can offer no significant reforms to Labour's working class base: his task is to demolish what remains of the welfare state and to replace it with a US-style system of private health insurance and workfare.

Rock solid Labour supporters continue to give Blair "critical support" despite the fact that many of them understand the meaning of Blair's programme. There is no other way to break Tory power. Frustration with Blair is palpable.

There is reason to expect that out of that will come major battles in the Labour Party, and between the parliamentary elite and their working class supporters, under a Blair government.

This is not just an optimistic scenario as ideological comfort for socialists who remain inside the Labour Party, but recognition of the basic realities of working-class politics.

There is nothing the Blairites fear more than opposition inside the Labour Party and the affiliated unions and the linking of that opposition to mass struggles outside of parliament in defence of the welfare state and free trade unions.

A glimpse of the extent of their fear was provided recently by Clare Short's article in *New Statesman:* "Get the Trots out of my Party!"

Ms Short called on the "democratic left" to "draw a line between itself and the Trotskyist entrists" and warned:

"We have members whose first loyalty is or was to Militant, Socialist Organiser or the IMG... who have an organised political project... thus we have motions and composites that talk about the things we care about most — the welfare state, the minimum wage, public services etc — that use our language of passionate commitment, but make demands that they know cannot be realised. This is the classical "transitional demand" that wins support because it aspires to what we want but is designed to expose the limits of reformism and thus to win us all to a revolutionary perspective. The problem with this... is that the left, well beyond the Trotskyist entrists, keeps lining up behind impossible demands."

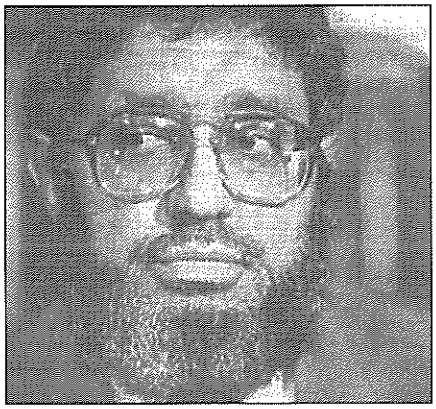
Labour's post-1945 welfare state was once considered impossible, Ms Short!

The Trotskyists will continue to gain support for the rebuilding of the welfare state, free trade unions and full employment from well beyond our ranks. This will happen, not because our demands are "impossible", but because our demands correspond to the immediate burning needs of very broad layers of the working class. That's why serious Marxists like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty are not going to follow Scargill's lead and abandon our work in the Labour Party on the verge of the first Labour government in nearly two decades.

The arms merchant rules — OK?

MOHAMMED al Mas'ari is going to court to challenge the British Government's decision to deport him to the Caribbean island of Dominica.

Al Mas'ari is a Saudi Arabian political refugee (of Islamic-fundamentalist, not democratic, stripe), and Tory minister Ann Widdecombe has spelled it out: "We have close trade relations with a friendly state who have been the subject of very consistent criticism from Mr al Mas'ari." She can say that again!



Mohammed al Mas'ari

And that worries the Tory government because it is hand-in-glove with, or rather glove-over-hand for, the arms merchants.

Andrew Green, just appointed British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, is a director of Vickers. Vickers boss Colin Chandler was head of the government's Defence Exports office when Margaret Thatcher personally secured the huge al Yamamah arms deal in 1985.

The Government is unashamedly and openly acting as a conscience-free instrument of commercial policy. Never mind what is right: what pays best? Remember that, when they talk about democratic principles! Those principles count for nothing against the arms bosses' desire to get a slice from the wealth of Saudi Arabia's rulers, who run one of the world's most vile regimes. It suppresses all trade-union or political rights, in the manner of a Stalinist state, and also suppresses many of the personal liberties which even Stalinist states allowed. Women have to cover their faces and generally do not leave their homes. There is no cinema, theatre or music. The only public entertainments are football and public executions. Much of the labour is done by migrant workers with virtually no legal rights.

Mohammed al Mas'ari and his friends might make things worse, but they are not in power. If they were, the Tories would deal with them too, and defer to them: that is what they did with Khomeini, the fundamentalist bigot who wreaked havoc in Iran.

Yet Labour is in effect backing the government. It has not attempted to uphold the democratic principle of the right to political asylum. Labour spokesperson David Clark said: "It worries me if the arms industry becomes a whipping horse." Davey Hall, recently elected president of the AEEU as the left candidate, was "concerned that contracts should not be held ransom by some civil rights dissident."

"Peace, jobs, freedom" — as Labour's banners used to read in the early 1980s — should be our aim, not jobs at the expense of preparing for war and suppressing freedom. The skills and technology of Britain's huge arms industry should be turned to social use, under public ownership and a workers' reconversion plan.

Arthur Scargill's "Socialist Labour Party"

A stillborn Stalinist sect

EVEN BEFORE it has been officially launched, Arthur Scargill's proposed Socialist Labour Party already looks more like a stillborn Stalinist sect than a serious challenge to Tony Blair's domination of the Labour Party and labour-movement politics.

The SLP project reflects not the good side of Scargill, the class fighter who led the great miners' strike of 1984-85, but his bad side, the socialist who never emancipated himself from Stalinism.

For a start, the basic idea on which the party is founded is wrong. Scargill's priority is for the left to stand parliamentary candidates against Labour in every seat (or at least in every seat where there is not a sitting Socialist Campaign Group MP). But this will just be a stunt, a counter-productive diversion. By creating a (small) split in the Labour vote it will help the Tories. It sets the SLP at odds with the vast majority of class-conscious workers who desperately want to remove the Tories and elect a Labour government.

While Scargill expresses the frustration and disgust that many workers feel with the Labour leadership, he does not address the fact that most frustrated Labour supporters remain Labour supporters. Come the general election, they will vote Labour because Labour is the only available working class-based alternative to the Tories.

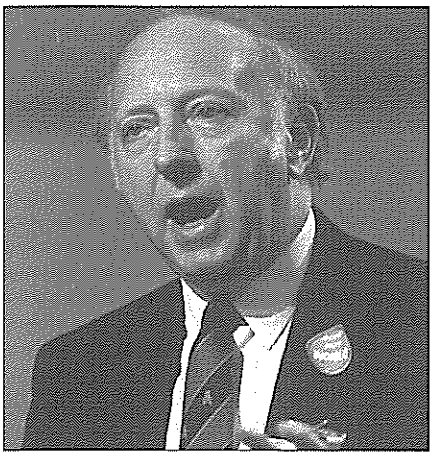
Scargill's mistake here flows naturally from his bureaucratic and elitist conception of socialist politics, which is well expressed in his draft constitution for the SLP. The draft reads like an unintentional parody of the worst elements of the Labour Party constitution mixed up with the rule-book of the old Brezhnev-era Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Alongside all the paraphernalia of imagined affiliated trade unions, district committees, women's, black and youth sections, it includes:

- **The automatic expulsion of any individual or organisation "engaged in the promotion of policies in opposition to those of the party."** This rules out any form of activity to change party policy. It excludes anyone who expresses disagreement with the party line. It is a dictator's dream.
- **A bi-annual Party Congress, with resolutions only from regions or affiliated organisations.** This beats Brezhnev, but is worse than the situation in the Labour Party, which still has annual conferences with resolutions from Constituency Labour Parties.

The authoritarian nature of the SLP's proposed constitution reflects Scargill's own concept of socialism.

For Scargill, socialism is not the self-liberating drive of the working class, rooted in the class struggles of capitalism and aiming for a society democratically controlled by the freely associated producers. The draft constitution mentions the working class nowhere, and in its reprise of Labour's old Clause Four it substitutes "the people" for "the workers by hand or brain". Who expresses the will of "the people"? Presumably a leadership like that of the SLP. Its rule will be defined as "socialist" only by state ownership of the means of production. For Scargill, socialism existed in the USSR until it was betrayed by Gorbachev.

The draft constitution indicates a focus on electoral activity alone, and not a drive on all fronts of the class struggle, ideological, political, and industrial. Although Scargill pretends that the SLP will include affiliated trade unions, his draft makes no provision for the organisation of SLP supporters in particular unions or industries. In other words, his is a concept of a political party that accepts the artificial division between the political and industrial struggles, between electoral politics and workplace struggle. He wishes to win a majority in Parliament and nationalise everything, but he does not want to have SLP fractions in unions and industries developing their own ideas and troubling the union bureaucrats whom he (vainly) hopes to get to affiliate to the SLP.



For Scargill socialism existed in the USSR

Public ownership of the means of production is just one element of socialism. Without democratic working-class control, public ownership is not common ownership, but simply state ownership. State ownership can serve the capitalist system, as the nationalisations of the 1945 Labour government did, or, on a wider scale, become the economic basis for bureaucratic class rule such as we saw under Stalinism. Either way, the reduction of socialism to state ownership, and the shelving of the revolutionary-democratic notion of working-class self-liberation, amounts to the greatest intellectual victory for the bourgeoisie in the whole of the 20th century. Yet it is also the ideological base and core of Scargill's SLP.

If Scargill proceeds with his plan to launch the SLP, then he will discredit not only himself — thus wasting the authority he commands from his role in the great miners' strike — but also every organisation and individual that he pulls in. This may look like a farce, but in reality it is a tragedy.

● *On the SLP see also page 9.*

After the Alliance for Workers' Liberty Conference

Organising the socialists

We asked Elaine Jones, one of the youth organisers of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, to report on the recent AWL conference.

WHAT sort of party do workers need to change society? Arthur Scargill has one answer. His projected "Socialist Labour Party" sets itself to the left of Labour — and rigidly outside Labour, supplementing Labour's ban on dual membership with one of its own. And it has a constitution which requires all members to agree with all the party's policies (or at least pretend to), or else be expelled.

At the fourth AWL conference in London on 25-26 November, we had a different answer.

As we met, the French workers' great mass-strike movement was just beginning. That movement reinforced our will to continue campaigning for the defence and rebuilding of the welfare state, as one of our key tasks in the next few years.

It is clear that the next Labour government, instead of restoring the cuts made by the Tories, will dismantle welfare services still further. Peter Mandelson has said New Labour should abolish universal child benefit, introduce workfare programmes for the unemployed and single mothers, insist on no-strike deals in the public sector, and promote private pensions.

But people expect more from Labour.

Anger which now remains underground will break through under a Labour government. Even those who were prepared to keep quiet and not rock the boat because they wanted a Labour government will protest when they see what a Blair government intends.

The AWL and its campaigning will be focused inside the existing labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party, not outside. We fight to transform the labour movement, not to build "our own" movement in parallel.

Putting demands on Labour and organising within the labour movement around those demands will be a central activity in the next few years.

We adopted a new constitution which must be unique on the revolutionary left in its guarantees for open debate. We took a contrary attitude to Scargill on our party structure as well as on our attitude to the Labour Party.

"All activists are obliged to support the majority decisions of the relevant AWL bodies in action. They also have the right to express dissenting opinions, to gain a fair hearing for those opinions, and to organise inside the AWL to change AWL policy.

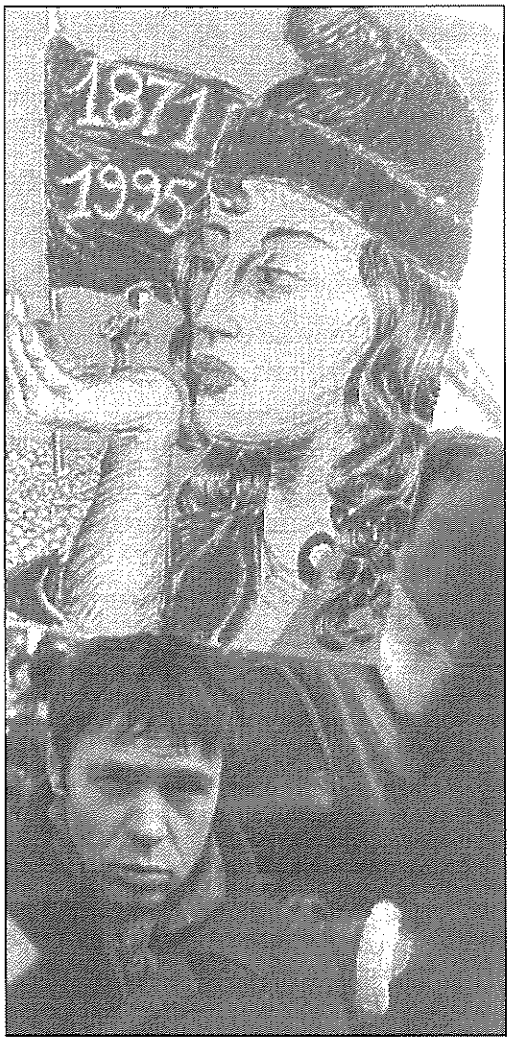
"Activists should not pretend to hold beliefs contrary to their real ones. Minority comrades have a right to state [publicly, outside the AWL] that they hold a minority position, and to give a brief explanation...

"AWL 'custom and practice' will be that minority views can be expressed, and majority opinion challenged, in our public press."

For us to put Marxism into practice, all our members need to be educated politically otherwise, as in many other groups on the left, knowledge becomes the property of an elite, a priestly caste sitting above the rest of the organisation's membership.

If we are all educated, then the organisation as a whole understands what is going on and can make informed decisions. The conference therefore voted to develop new structures for education for all members of the organisation.

We started a debate which will clarify the AWL's traditions. Over the years we have developed a political tradition of our own, starting where we had to start — in "official" post-Trotsky Trotskyism — but evolving into a different, and we think more authentic, Trotskyism. Instead of looking for never-changing blueprints to achieve socialism, we have tried to use the methods of Marxism, learn lessons, and reassess.



Workers' banner of the recent French strikes recalls the working class takeover of Paris — the Commune — in 1871

On the USSR, we have been forced to conclude that while Trotsky's concrete descriptions of the Stalinist degeneration of the USSR were largely accurate, and his programme for the working class to carry out a new revolution correct, his analytical framework ("degenerated workers' state") was inadequate.

After 1945 the majority of post-Trotsky Trotskyists followed Pablo, Mandel and Cannon in describing a vast new range of Stalinist states as degenerated or deformed workers' states, post-capitalist and in transition from capitalism to socialism.

Stalinism had destroyed labour movements and imposed totalitarian regimes on the working classes of eastern Europe, regimes like that in the USSR which Trotsky in 1938 rightly described as differing from Hitler's regime "only in its more unbridled savagery." Still, for Pablo and Mandel, this was the workers' socialist revolution, only "deformed".

Thus the self-organisation and activity of the working class was no longer so central or essential. Progress could come instead from Stalinist statified property or petty-bourgeois nationalist revolutions.

We concluded that the Stalinist systems were new forms of class exploitation, a limited, dead-end episode within the epoch of capitalism rather than anything post-capitalist.

We have looked at other Trotskyist traditions besides those of Cannon and Mandel, such as that of Shachtman's Workers' Party, which developed one theory of Stalinism as a new form of class society. In relation to the Soviet Union and on organisational issues, we learn from both the Shachtmanite and the Cannonite tradition, and continue to develop our ideas.

Where Scargill's SLP is dominated by nostalgia for the old USSR, we aim show why Stalinism was not socialism — and what it was. We restate Marx's idea: "The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race and sex."

We are Leninists, but not Stalinoid kitsch-Leninists of the sort now dominant on the would-be Trotskyist left. We believe the October revolution in 1917 was one of the great liberating events in human history. All socialists should learn the lessons of that revolution — and one especially relevant now is that without the slow preparatory work of Lenin and a small group of comrades, in the most difficult years of working-class defeat, there would have been no working-class revolution in 1917. As Zinoviev put it in his history of the Bolshevik party, there were many years of "hopeless breakdown, demoralisation and decline... Lenin's enormous stature as a leader most clearly emerged in just this difficult time... when [he] had alone, or almost alone, to defend the idea of the party with his pen, his spoken word, and his organisational work."

Russia after the elections

Boris Kagarlitsky, a long-standing socialist activist and author who was jailed under the Brezhnev regime for his work on an oppositional journal, spoke to *Workers' Liberty* about the current situation in Russia. He is a leader of the Russian Party of Labour. Boris Kagarlitsky's books include *The Thinking Reed* and *Dialectics of Change*.

Kagarlitsky

COULD you explain the situation in Russia in the aftermath of the recent Duma elections?

The elections in Russia mark the beginning of a new period in Russian politics.

Firstly there is a new parliament which will be dominated by the Communist Party, as the largest party. Together with the Agrarians [their satellite], the Communists are about a dozen seats short of an absolute majority.

This grouping, together with people who are clearly leftists, has about 217 seats to the right's 200. In addition there are a number of newcomers whose politics are unclear. There is a possibility of the Duma moving slowly to the left.

Second: if the issue of constitutional reform is considered the pro-reform forces have a two-thirds majority. That means that there is some real possibility of democratisation of Russian politics — at the moment politics is controlled by the Executive, by the president.

Thirdly, Russian politics can no longer be seen as being totally fragmented. There are now four big political formations which dominate — we will probably end up with five of six — rather than several dozen.

Finally the presidential campaign has already begun and with it the real struggle for power.

Why do you consider the "Communist" Party part of the left?

Of course they are very different from the non-Stalinist left. The Communist party is not only conservative and traditional but it is also corporatist, placing their hopes not in the self-organisation of the working class but in the vertical, corporatist organisations.

Nevertheless they should be considered part of the left for a number of reasons.

They represent some of the authentic left-wing traditions in our country.

Secondly, although there is little independent organisation of the working class in Russia today, within the corporatist structures the Communists represent some sort of labour-orientated corporatism against the state-orientated corporatism of Victor Chernomyrdin and the right.

Third they represent the traditional concerns of the left — defence of the poor and of the wage workers.

The Communist Party is a very strange animal, very much like your Labour Party. It includes all sorts of elements. There are traditional Stalinist groups. There are pragmatists who are at best — right-wing Social Democrats. And there are nationalists and populists. There are also people who are very close to us, the new left.

But the British Labour Party was created by the British trade union movement. The Russian "Communist" Party is a creation of Stalin — although a creation now warped by the defeat of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the pressure of capitalism. It is the party of the old ruling class.

It was created by Lenin, actually.

No it wasn't. Stalin murdered and destroyed Lenin's Party, creating something new and fundamentally anti-working-class — which was just called the Communist Party.

But people see it as a Party created by Lenin. And the character of a party is very much to do with the sort of people it attracts.

For example, if Blair leads the Labour Party for ten years you will see the creation of a yuppie party.

What about the Party of Labour? What are your perspectives now?

You must understand that the leadership of the Russian trade unions is politically bankrupt. The traditional trade unions have declined, becoming a strange mixture of US-style business unionism with Soviet-style state unionism.

What is lacking is class unionism.

The unions launched their own list in the elections, together with the industrialists. This list failed completely.

The left was asked to participate but no-one of any profile agreed to run on this list. Even the Social Democrats could see the betrayal.

So the original idea of our Party of Labour, developed between 1991 and 1993 — to develop with the unions — will not now work. In fact the period since 1993 can be characterised as a period of the defeat of the non-Stalinist, class-based left. We have been through a very hard time indeed because the class movement itself failed to develop.

We are now ghettoised in three or four major cities where the left has a base.

Despite these problems we got one of our members elected to the Duma.

What were the main elements of your programme?

We concentrated on three main issues: healthcare, education and the need for self-organisation.

We also spoke of renationalisation of certain key industries. But it is clear that we alone can not do this, so we focused on issues that we can organise around now — things on which we can achieve immediate concrete results.

And we said to people: don't just vote, organise permanent local organisations which can act as the basis for future struggles.

What do the Party of Labour say on the national question?

The dominant trend in the Party of Labour is neo-Luxemburgism. We are very suspicious of the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination. On the other hand we are opposed to any imperialism. Our main emphasis is on social policy.

Take the case of Chechnia. We are in agreement with the Communist Party on this issue. In fact they picked up our resolution and used it as their own position.

We opposed the actions of the Russian government, but not because we back Dudayev. And we are neither for nor against Chechnian independence, as half the population are for it and half against.

We say: remove the Russian troops and let the people decide in free elections. In such elections we would back union with ▸

Communists are enjoying a revival

Russia, but only on the basis of free choice. Without free choice we have to defend the Chechnian fighters.

We also can see that a defeat for the Russian government in Chechnia is also a victory for us — not because we particularly support their cause, but because it weaken the Russian government.

What will the Party of Labour say during the run-up to the presidential elections?

There is a real chance of a pro-Yeltsin, right-wing coup to stop the presidential elections and a Yeltsin defeat. If that happens it will simplify political decisions — we just oppose the coup!

The elite must either stop the elections or domesticate the Communist Party. This is possible given some of the existing tendencies inside the Communist Party.

However, for us life becomes more complex if the elections go ahead. It is not yet clear who we will vote for.

In the first round we will either support an independent left-wing candidate or back the candidate put forward by the Communists. The decision will rest on what programme the Communists put forward.

In the second round the choice is obviously not yet clear. If the option is either [the Communist leader] Zyuganov or [the far-right] Zhirinovsky we will have to back Zyuganov.

If Zyuganov faces someone like Chernomyrdin [Our Home Is Russia] we will again probably back Zyuganov.

The issue in this instance is what type of conditions we will put forward on the Communist candidate. The issue for the future is would the Communist Party deliver on pre-election promises. But during the campaign the question is what will they promise. If they fail to commit themselves to anything substantial we will have to abstain.

You seem to have abandoned the attempt at independent working-class politics and are now looking towards a backward-looking "lesser evil", the Communist Party.

No. There is a misconception about the Communist Party held not only in the West but in our country too: the problem with the Communist Party is precisely not that it is backward-looking. It looks forwards, but towards becoming like the Hungarian Socialist Party or the Polish Social Democrats.

They can get moral inspiration from the past, but that's it.

The other big issue is that they are corporatist. And we are totally on the side of those in the Communist Party who are trying to put forward a class perspective inside the Party. These people are not even necessarily a minority of the rank and file. The question is: can they dominate the decision-making process?

This is the big question and it is the reason that we are not trying "entryism" in the Russian Communist Party. ■

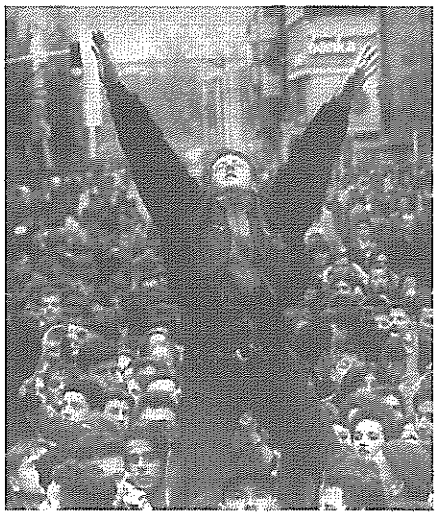
Hopes and fears in Bosnia

By Chris Reynolds

"THE occupiers of a country are never popular, either those who want to stay forever or those who are dying to get back home". Janet Flanner was writing about the American occupation of France in 1945, which, having helped free the country from Nazi terror, had a better chance of popularity than most. The occupation of Bosnia by 60,000 NATO troops, mostly US, French and British, has fewer advantages.

Probably for most people in Bosnia *any* peace that gives them and their community some secure territory is preferable to continuation of the atrocious four-year war, unleashed by Serbian imperialism, which turned over half the country's people into refugees and killed maybe one in ten. But all the communities are likely to clash with the occupation troops.

"NATO officials" have already let the press know that they "privately" agree with the US colonel who was publicly ticked off for calling the Bosnian Croats "racist motherfuckers" and making it clear he thought no better of the Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) and Serbs. The arrogance built into imperialist military machines will be one cause of conflict. Hundreds of thousands of refugees on all sides, uprooted, traumatised, and bitter, will be another.



Sarajevans celebrate the reuniting of their city

The Croat-Muslim federation, set up in March 1994, is a foundation-stone of the new order in Bosnia, but over the two years since 1994 the Bosnian-Croat leaders have made it clear that they prefer to grab as much territory as they can rather than operate this federation loyally. In the Bosnian-Serb territories, it is not clear that NATO will be able to find any effective and cooperative local agency of government with which to work. And some newspapers have suggested that the first clash will be with the Bosniacs, as the NATO troops move to suppress the freelance Muslim militias.

A classic historical study, Robinson and Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians*, showed that Britain's 19th-century colony-grabbing in Africa was as much pull — Britain being dragged in directly when the local ruling groups on which it had preferred to rely for informal domination crumbled — as push. Some of the chief factors operating then do not operate now in Bosnia, notably the contradiction between trying to rely on pre-capitalistic elites while simultaneously extending capitalist economic relations. But the NATO troops look likely to be in Bosnia much longer than the year they have scheduled.

Progress depends on socialists in the Bosniac, Croat and Serb communities establishing links and uniting workers round social demands (public works at trade-union rates of pay and under trade-union control, for example) and a consistently democratic programme (free federation; full individual rights for all residents, regardless of nationality and religion, everywhere). Their hope must be that disgust at the bloody fiasco of the last five years will soon lead to the Milosevic tyranny falling in Serbia and new working-class politics being able to emerge there. Their fear must be that the huge military machine occupying their country will stamp hard on any working-class or democratic organisation. ■

Oppose the Asylum Bill!

By Dale Street

ONLY a month after Social Security Minister Peter Lilly announced proposals to deprive most asylum-seekers of the right to claim welfare benefits, the Tories published their new Immigration and Asylum Bill (IAB) last November.

The IAB marks a new stage in the Tories' attacks on asylum-seekers in particular and Black people in general.

The Bill gives the Home Secretary the powers to create a so-called "white list" of "safe countries". Asylum-seekers from those countries will automatically be assumed to be bogus, and will be dealt with under an accelerated application procedure.

Most asylum-seekers — not just those on the "white list" — will also be subject to a special "fast-track" appeals system, leaving them with insufficient time to prepare their case.

In addition, most asylum-seekers will also lose the right to a second appeal which they enjoy under the current appeals system.

One category of asylum-seekers — those who travel to this country through a safe country (such as any member-state of the European Union) — will lose their right to appeal in this country completely.

Instead, they will be deported to the country through which they travelled and will have to appeal from there — even though the IAB makes no mention of any mechanism to make this possible.

The IAB also introduces a series of new criminal offences.

Obtaining, or seeking to obtain, leave to enter this country by deception becomes a criminal offence. But, almost by definition, asylum-seekers are unable to approach their own authorities for correct documentation and are therefore obliged to travel illegally.

Assisting anyone to enter, or to attempt to enter, this country by deception also becomes a criminal offence. This is aimed at the network of agents who, for whatever reason, assist asylum-seekers to flee their country.

Employing someone who has no immigration entitlement to work in this country likewise becomes a criminal offence. The employer's only defence is that they took "adequate steps" to check up on the immigration status of their employees. In other words, employers are transformed into immigration officers.

In order to enforce these new laws, the police and immigration officers are given new powers of search and arrest by the IAB.

They will have the right to arrest, without a warrant, anyone they suspect of illegal entry or breaching the conditions of their visa. They will also have the right to search the homes of suspected illegal immigrants and remove them by force.

(As the killing of Joyce Gardiner showed, the police already do this anyway. But now the IAB allows them to do it legally.)

Finally, the IAB complements Lilley's new social security regulation. It scraps the eligibility of asylum-seekers for public housing, and also removes their right to claim Child Benefit.

The Tories have been forced to postpone the introduction of the new social security regulations, largely because of a backlash from local authorities, including Tory-controlled ones.

The regulations scrap the right of asylum-seekers to Housing Benefit. But local authorities would be left to pick up the bill: until the IAB becomes law, they would still have a legal obligation to give accommodation to asylum-seekers with families.

Tory-controlled Westminster Council — no friend of asylum-seekers — is therefore taking the government to court over the new regulations.

But the Tories have not yet encountered any such problems in pushing the IAB through Parliament.

Although Labour imposed a three-line whip when the Bill received its second reading in December, the Party leadership is still pleading with the Tories to make legislation "a genuine consensus exercise".

Instead of offering to co-operate with the Tories in attacking the rights of asylum-seekers and black people, Labour should be opposing the IAB without qualification, and should link up with the campaigns which have sprung up across the country in opposition to the Tories' racist legislation.

Who backs Scargill's SLP?

By Tom Willis

THE main grouping involved in the preliminary discussions to form Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party [see page 5] is a loose alliance of former members of the International Marxist Group (now Socialist Outlook), individuals in and around the left wing of the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*), and assorted minor labour movement dignitaries, including some radical lawyers and journalists.

This loose alliance operates under the name of the "Corresponding Society". The driving force in it is a small group of ex-IMG friends led by Brian Heron, Patrick Sikorski, and Carolyn Sikorski.

The day-to-day work of Heron/Sikorski from the late 1980s onwards, focussed on two things — justifying the record of Patrick Sikorski as a trade union leader on the London Underground (he has voted to call off more strikes than he has led) and preventing the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (of which Carolyn Sikorski was secretary) from doing anything of substance.

In particular, Sikorski/Heron opposed and sabotaged all attempts to get the SMTUC to act as a coordinating centre that could link together all the forces of the trade union left and make steps towards a cross-industry rank-and-file movement. Believe it or not, they even sabotaged an attempt to organise a solidarity conference for the ambulance workers' strike of 1989-90. Against such efforts, they counterposed the idea of "developing the politics of trade unionism", whatever that meant.

Now we can expect the new SLP to be as big a success as the last SLP, the Scottish Labour Party of the late 1970s. Led by two Labour MPs and the journalist Neal Ascherson, this was a Scottish nationalist breakaway from the Labour Party. The IMG in Scotland got stuck in.

They were soon expelled, if not en masse then en gaggle, but the SLP, a premature birth, was already dying. The leader of the IMG raiding party was... Brian Heron, who has now bestowed himself and his friends on the new SLP.

Heron and his friends soon went on to even more glorious deeds. For the 1979 election — the one in which Thatcher won power for the first time — the IMG cobbled together an alliance of odds and sods to stand candidates against Labour. This was "Socialist Unity". They stood a few candidates, did very badly, and collapsed into the Labour Party soon after. Some of Socialist Unity's best-known people became Kinnockites and Blairites — Paul Thompson for example, then a soft Maoist, now chair of the witchhunting Labour Co-ordinating Committee. Heron and his friends remain what they were.

With friends like this, Arthur Scargill does not need any enemies.

Stalemate in N. Ireland: why?

By John O'Brien

WHAT is the significance of the logjam in the Northern Ireland peace process? The British government insists it is the failure of the Provisional IRA to give up their weapons which is the main block to talks. Sinn Fein insist even more loudly that the British are being obstructive, that they are demanding an IRA surrender and reneging on commitments given before the ceasefire. Socialists should examine these claims with an independent and critical eye because both are superficial explanations of the real situation.

Superficial, because there is partial truth in both versions. The IRA will not give up their arms in advance of talks and it should not be impossible for anyone, even the most pro-republican socialist, to see why that might the entire Protestant community anxious and suspicious and, more to the point, unwilling to sit down to talks with them. But the Catholic community is anxious too, and in terms of population figures and numbers of armed, trained killers (RUC, RIR), they have more reason to be fearful. No-one is talking of decommissioning RUC arms because, once again, the British government's position takes no account of the relationship most Catholics have to the Northern Ireland state.

Equally, the British government appears to be reneging on an understanding that talks involving all parties including Sinn Fein would follow a ceasefire which proved to be durable. The demand for decommissioning, in advance, given the delicate situation inside the Provisionals and given most examples of similar peace processes, seems almost calculated to offend republicans.

To see only this in the British position, however, is to miss the point. The British government has no inherent interest in delaying or sabotaging the Irish peace process. Quite the opposite. John Major has to fight a general election within the next eighteen months, with very little in the way of policy successes to boost his chances. Northern Ireland will never be a key issue in a British election, but the Tories exploited to the limit Major's role in the ceasefire and will be keen to play the same tune again in the general election. A failed peace process would be a disaster for them.

The Tories' failure to call all-party talks stems from one basic reality. They could not get the representatives of the Protestant/Unionist community to attend. They would not be all-party talks and so nothing could be resolved.

The Sinn Fein reaction to this reality, for they recognise it even if they avoid talking about it, is bizarre when you think about it. The trouble is that most of the left refuse to think about it.

Sinn Fein demand that the British government convene the talks anyway and let the Unionists decide whether to turn up. If they don't the talks should go ahead with full UK and Irish government participation and presumably any agreement should be presented as a new agreed settlement of the Irish questions. This is a policy which, for all its superficial reasonableness, is deeply anti-republican and anti-democratic.

Republicanism in Ireland is, in essence, the project of uniting the people of the island across the religious/communal divide to win political democracy, of which independence from Britain was only one part. It was born out of the events surrounding the French and American revolutions as a modernist, rational movement. Understandably bitter at the undemocratic partition of the island in 1921, modern-day "republicans" have long since abandoned that tradition. Righting the wrongs done to the Catholics and getting the Brits out have been the central ideas driving the republicans for the last 30 years.

The real problem, of which even partition is only a symptom, is the chronic communal division within the island; the real republican programme should be to undercut and destroy that division. Since at least 1921 that had to mean communal compromise on the national question; above all, a programme which recognised fully the rights of majority and minority populations in any political settlement. The Provisionals have, however, evolved into a narrow communal organisation completely incapable of grasping the real nature of the problem.

Hence they organise activist campaigns and lobby the great and good in Dublin and America with demands which are entirely beside the point. The British should talk; the British should release all of *our* prisoners (not loyalists); the British should pull out of *our* country. The people republicans really need to talk to are represented by a difficult, truculent, suspicious leadership, a leadership who are being obstructive. But these people, the Protestant/Unionist Irish, are not even being seriously addressed by the modern followers of Wolfe Tone.

Nearly every new act by Sinn Fein seems calculated to drive them into the hands of Paisley and Trimble. This happens not because Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness act in bad faith, but because they are politicians shaped entirely by their environment, bourgeois nationalists who believe that uniting the island of Ireland is somehow separate from and more important than uniting the people of Ireland. They can sustain this fantasy only because they believe that the key to uniting Ireland lies not with the Irish working class, Protestant and Catholic, but with the British government.

The present logjam reflects the depth of division and mistrust after 25 years of sectarian conflict and a pointless military campaign. The Republican movement have decided to pursue the same political objectives with a different strategy. Socialists should reject the strategy of Sinn Fein and refuse to give it credence. We look to the Irish working class to develop a democratic settlement of the national question. We judge any other settlement by the standards of full democracy, including minority rights; and we place no confidence in Major, Clinton and Bruton.

Defend Nigeria's workers!

By Mark Sandell

THE killing by the Nigerian state of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists from the Ogoni people's movement was a savage act by a paranoid military regime.

Abacha, the military ruler of Nigeria, needed to act against the entire leadership of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People to crush the direct action and mass protest movement of the Ogoni people against the environmental destruction and economic exploitation carried out by the oil companies. Oil is the life-blood of the Nigerian state and the military; over 70% of state income comes from oil.

Oil companies like Shell had asked for state "protection" from Ogoni campaigners. The state responded with a killing spree. Over 1,000 Ogonis were killed and 30,000 driven from their homes. The Ogoni people are a small and isolated group: it is vital that the labour movement supports them against Abacha's terror, but the real power to bring down the military junta lies in the hands of the Nigerian workers who have faced Abacha's repression without the international outcry over Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution.

Frank Kakori, the General Secretary of the Nigerian oil workers' union NUPENG, has been in jail since the 1994 oil workers' strike that shook the Nigerian military regime to its roots. The oil workers were joined by other workers in their strike and even the government-friendly leadership of the Nigerian Labour Congress (like our TUC) were forced to call a general strike, which they later, shamefully, called off.

The strike's central demand was recognition of the 1993 elections and democratic rights. The military regime of Abacha, facing its most serious threat, arrested the leadership of both major oil unions, shut down all Nigerian trade unions and imposed an administrator to run the unions and the Nigerian Labour Congress.

In response to these attacks the Campaign for Independent Unionism (CIU) was set up and now has an office in London. It is vital that the British labour movement helps the CIU to build solidarity with Nigerian workers. Invite a speaker to your union, Labour Party or campaign. Raise money or donate equipment. Contact the CIU c/o PO Box 256, London SE11 5TH. Telephone: 0181 202 6292.

Blackboard jungles: why school violence?

By Robert Booth

Philip Lawrence died because the school system fails students

"WALK away from any situation in which you are threatened. Walk away — you are not paid to deal with that, you're not responsible. I am."

So said my headteacher at the Monday morning briefing just days after the tragic stabbing of Philip Lawrence. Half consolation to a shell-shocked staff, half bravado which characterises the man, it nevertheless gave the lie to the immediate issue behind this terrible death: teachers — not just headteachers — are now held responsible for, and expected to deal with, all kinds of social ills, crime and violence included, even at the risk of their own lives.

Tory education policy blames parents and teachers for the conduct of young people, bemoans the lack of discipline of youth, their absence of morality, their unfitness for work. Whole schools are "failing" — and child behaviour is now a key part of official inspections — and teachers are "incompetent" or plain "bad" if they do not "keep order" or "control the class."

One of the results is a daily ritual at the end of school when heads, deputies and other teachers stand on duty to police the evacuation of the site. Walkie talkies crackle as incidents are reported in and detachments of staff rush to the scene. The end of term presents its own problems, and the whole teaching body are usually roped in — standing on street corners, by subways and near shops to deter the flour, eggs and sprays which sometimes make an appearance.

That a whole range of activities from high-spirited play to fighting go on at school or involve children of school age is not new, indeed it has been a feature of British life for decades. Rather, it is the saddling of teachers with responsibility for dealing with it by the government which is novel. And when a brave and committed teacher like Philip Lawrence is killed trying to protect one of "his" children from the violence of another youth, the usual response is framed in policing terms — more security, more cameras, special passes and so on.

But this is no solution — it fails to address the root causes of the problem and we should not be tempted by knee-jerk reactions. Beneath the Tory response lies an essentially child-hating mentality, a fear of youth which goes beyond an incident like this and takes us away from the complex issues of violence in schools and society in general. Such an attitude is reminiscent of instructions to Methodist school teachers in the 1790s, an attitude to which many a Tory (and increasingly Labour Party) Education Spokesperson would subscribe:

"Tame the ferocity of their unsubdued passions — to repress the excess rudeness of their manners — to chasten the disgusting and demoralising obscenity of their language — to subdue the stubborn rebellion of their wills — to render them honest, obedient, courteous, industrious, submissive and orderly..." (from E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*).

Of course, there is a strong element of free will and individual responsibility in any act of violence, and this is important for day to day relations of any kind. But the causes of Philip Lawrence's death do not lie simply on this level but also with the very society we live in today. To try to explain why violence occurs is not the same as justifying it.

Rather, we should begin from the actual reality around us. Aggression and violence are always with us, from the brutal savagery of armed conflicts beamed into our living rooms — like the Gulf War coverage which trivialised the murder of ordinary Iraqis into virtually a video game — to the domestic situation of millions of women and children who suffer abuse on a daily basis. With "competition" the supreme virtue of the age, what is more violent than the simple struggle for existence — unemployment and low benefits and poor housing for some and overwork, low pay and indebtedness for others?

The Tories want us to forget issues like jobs, housing and making ends meet because they underpin any explanation of social activity, both virtuous and deplorable, and because their policies aggravate and worsen them. It is their system that gives workers ultimately only their own labour power to sell on the market and which demands an education system which prepares young people for their allotted role, physically, technically and morally, as wage slaves until their deaths.

Many youth rightly ask, "What is the point?" Regimented by uniforms and strict routines, by attendance and punctuality figures, by tests and exams and league tables they are judged fit for certain kinds of work that probably won't be there when they're deemed old enough to get it. And what can teachers offer without even the basic resources like books to teach with, crammed into overcrowded classrooms with little hope of attending to individual needs, worn out by paperwork and harassed by inspectors?

These are just some of the issues which should be addressed in the light of yet more violence in and around schools. Both the very purpose of education, and the actual conditions in schools, which should preoccupy us in drawing lessons from this death. And these are issues on which teachers and students have a common cause — to make the whole process worthwhile for all involved — and which raise the possibility of campaigning to change the existing situation. Fighting for a better education system would also be a fitting tribute to teachers like Philip Lawrence.

The Candidate

We knew him once, when his soul was young,
And candour flowed from his eager tongue;
His brow was lofty, his spirit high,
And courage danced in his glowing eye,
Like forks of lightning his sallies flashed,
And snob and sweater and priest he lashed,
And deep the feeling his efforts woke
For heart touched heart in the words he spoke.

We knew him later, when youth had waned,
With hope abated and ardour chained:
He talked of "ethics" in sermons dry,
And waxed sublime on the marriage tie.
"The plan to cling to is this," said he,
"Historical continuity."
And lest his projects should all get wrecked,
His bearing was fiercely circumspect.

And now we know him, so soon grown grey,
He wears a beak like a bird of prey;
His young ideals abandoned long,
He hastens always to help the strong.
A dewdrop putrid, a perfume stunk;
A bridal robe to a dishcloth sunk;
A quick-change artist of countless coats,
The creature cringes and craves our votes.

Jim Connell

I love Paris in the winter!

By Joan Trevor

WE wanted to go to Paris during the strikes.

We could fly if there was a lull in airport workers' runway battles with riot police. We reckoned three hours then to walk to the centre of Paris. It was freezing cold.

When we landed at Charles de Gaulle airport we found an Air France shuttle bus operating so tonight there would be no need of heroics.

We climbed on board the bus and sped to Paris. It was evening and the traffic was all one-way, *out* of the city. The vast ring road, the *périphérique,* that separates Paris from the first ring of suburbs was choked with cars. "*Regardez le périphe,*" our fellow passengers exclaimed excitedly as they were borne rapidly in the opposite direction.

The bus reached Place de l'Etoile and everyone got out. "Where are you going?" someone asked me. With my scant knowledge of Paris geography I answered confidently: "Montparnasse."

"That's a long way to walk."

"Montmartre," I countered.

"That's a long way to walk as well."

"Well, I have come to see things. I can walk and look," I insisted.

"Paris is a big city."

At Place de l'Etoile we saw two policemen guarding a public building and carrying automatic machine guns. Even traffic police have sidearms. It is very odd seeing police uniformly armed. Most British children have never seen a real live gun.

We walked not to Montmartre, nor yet to Montparnasse, but to the Gare de Nord where we had arranged to meet another comrade. The walk took two hours, so we were late and he had left.

We booked in to a crummy hotel near the station and ate in a restaurant which normally would cater to the Francophile British tourist trade.

"Monsieur, you have no customers," I exclaimed with some panache.

"These shitty strikes," he replied, and more rude words which I could not catch.

France is damned expensive for us Britishers. Is it the *franc fort,* the weak pound and a crummy exchange rate? Or is it the high cost of French living? Whatever the explanation, this single European currency lark begins to look quite appealing.

When we had paid a lot of money for our dinner we went to our hotel and slept what seemed a very short time until next day.

IN THE morning we made some phone calls from the echoing empty concourse of the Gare de Nord but failed to locate our lost comrade. Comrades in the LCR office told us that today's big demo would leave the Odéon near the Jardin du Luxembourg at 1pm and go to the National Assembly.

We were early for the march and sat nursing cups of tea in a café near the Odéon.

The streets outside began to fill with floats and people carrying banners. At half past twelve. There aren't so many people.

Where does the march start? We walked up a side street to the Odéon. Some public sector workers on a picket sent us back to where we had come from. One o'clock.

There were more people around now. We ran about taking photos.

When the TUC in Britain organises a march they spend a fortune conveying a corporate image with banners and badges and balloons and other merchandise.

Here, where at least three mini-TUCs are in action, the march is similarly festooned.

Every organisation mass-produces big rectangular stickers with a slogan. People are papered with these. "Seize private schools", "don't privatise the post," etc. Half past one.

Today's march is organised by the high-school teachers' unions, but others will probably join it, including school pupils and students. The students are voting now in their general assembly.

Groups of young people feed into the march from side streets. They line up behind banners they have made which read "Teachers and pupils together."

The desire to make a mark on the proceedings seizes us. The desire to *sell magazines* seizes us! We get out *Workers' Liberty,* devise some lurid slogans and set to advertising our wares.

As we get our tongues round the foreign words our French accents get more outrageous. Selling in Britain was never this much fun.

We cut odd figures and sell remarkably well. People are impressed by the thought that some British socialists would get into the unreachable city to sell on this demonstration. They are very friendly to us. We do ourselves some good, keeping alive the lost but essential art of international working-class solidarity.

It was freezing cold. The march had set off and we hadn't noticed, so big was it. At half past two the snake had uncoiled and we in its tail finally moved.

Running, ambling, singing, shouting, waving things, snapping wildly away with our cameras and picking up any leaflet we could get hold of — what it is to rediscover a thirst for knowledge! — we never got to the National Assembly. The front of the march had reached it, held a rally and begun to disperse before we were near.

As we marched, people from the front of the demonstration had furled up their banners and were heading back past us in the late afternoon.

We had been privileged with a glimpse of the great workers' movement rocking France. One group of workers had marched today. Tomorrow it would be another group. Next week it would be all the workers, in every big city and town across the country, as the main union federations had called a joint demonstration.

Though this was a teachers' demonstration, at the front of this march had been railworkers, the vanguard of the current action. Railworkers and metro workers, whose strike had paralysed transport in the capital and provinces.

Mindful of the effect of their action, and the long walk back to our hostel, we regretfully called it a day and peeled off down a side street. A line of burly marchers stretched from pavement to pavement. Twenty yards behind them, a line of burly riot police stretched from pavement to pavement.

"Where do you live?" asked the burly marchers. "We live in a youth hostel. We are English," we said in little voices. They laughed sardonically and let us through to "meet our French police."

Burly riot police in France means built like the proverbial brick shit-house, toting great teargas canisters and pistols. Riot police chic is a handlebar moustache. These men fancy themselves. They like for you to stand there and point with your mouth hanging open in disbelief. We were like people from two unacquainted tribes confronting each other. They let us through.

We walked. To the youth hostel where we would spend the night and where we hoped to meet our lost comrade. We passed traffic jams all along the route but saw none of that road-rage it is so fashionable to talk about in Britain now.

Our comrade had been at the youth hostel, gone on the march, left. He had meant to come for a day to convey greetings to his international counterparts, the French railworkers. He had done it and now he had departed.

We were frozen to the marrow and our faces burned from exposure. We wanted new skeletons. But if such be the price of international solidarity...

THE next day we went a-calling. Four hours walking out, and four hours back in.

On our way home to our hostel we followed the eastern section of the *périphérique.*

Paris is so built that out on the edge you still feel part of one big — anonymous — whole. Long boulevards lined with flats fan out from the centre. Long *wide* boulevards, hard for the Parisian mobs to erect barricades across. Straight too, so that in future class conflicts government troops standing at one end can enjoy a direct line of fire.

The town planners have managed inadvertently to create an alienating environment. I begin to see why class conflict here often includes a philosophising aspect.

Passing one of the "Portes" — inhospitable intersections where the boulevards cross the *périphe* and head for the suburbs — we espied a mêlée. A street market of mainly Arabs, lined up with their second-hand cars. Just as in London's Petticoat Lane some of the vendors had only one item — a blanket, a pair of sunglasses — to sell.

All together now!

By Shelley Grainger

WHEN Jacques Chirac won the presidential election in May 1995 and his RPR/French Tory party colleagues already had an 80% majority in the French parliament, they could not have imagined, six months on, through October to December, hundreds of demonstrations across France; students striking for 8 weeks; rail, underground and bus workers on all-out strike since 23 November, paralysing transport; 40% of workers in electricity and gas on strike since 29 November; 22% of workers in the post office on strike, mostly in the sorting offices — deliveries virtually ceased; a third of telecoms workers on strike; up to 63% of workers in education on strike; strikes in banks, at the Renault factories, in health.

They were striking and demonstrating against Prime Minister Juppé's plan to "reform" social security.

Because the railworkers are the backbone of the strike movement the government agreed to shelve its plans to cut their pension rights and start chopping up and privatising the railways. It was a big victory, though other aspects of Juppé's plan are going ahead.

The situation in France has obvious parallels with Britain. There are lots of differences too.

Up to 2.2 million people took to the streets against Juppé

What made possible the initial explosion of anger and the slow but steady growth in numbers involved, are the considerable rights to organise and to be consulted of unions and workers in France. French bosses have to negotiate with workers' representatives elected in workplaces. To strike, workers' reps need only give a few hours' or days' notice that they intend voting on action, by a simple show of hands.

The contrast with the situation in Britain, where many unions have big strike funds, and still many members, but virtually no right to organise action, emphasises the need for us to fight the anti-trade union laws. Anyone in the British labour movement who has been impressed or inspired or moved by the French example must be recruited to the fight in the labour movement, especially the Labour Party, for a positive charter of workers' rights.

Given this potential for explosion, how did the politicians miscalculate so badly? Why the gap between what the politicians think "the country" needs and what "the people" want?

In France the bourgeois papers were quite sympathetic to the strike movements and popular demonstrations. That many people who read their newspapers couldn't be wrong. But their commentators mainly carped on about style and presentation. Implicitly they all accepted Thatcher-style monetarist politics and cuts in public services, but complained about arrogance in the politicians' manner of presenting and imposing these policies. What all failed to say, was that the economics are wrong, that economics should be for people, that what these changes mean is a change in a capitalist framework. A system where a few, the bourgeoisie, rule.

The people marched and struck against the changes, not against the way they were imposed. Implicitly ▸

The events

Early Oct:	Start of student protests for more money for universities.
10 Oct:	Strike against public sector wage freeze.
15 Nov:	Prime minister Alain Juppe pushes through Parliament his plan to balance social-security budget.
24 Nov:	Railworkers strike. Mass demonstrations across the country.
27 Nov on:	Strike spreads to postal workers, bus and metro workers, power workers, teachers. Many other groups will join days of action.
28 Nov:	SNCF (French Railways) presents a new company plan. Unions denounce it.
3 Dec:	Government announces third and biggest release of extra funds for higher education. Student movement condemns this as inadequate, but starts to dwindle. Strikes continue to spread.
10 Dec:	Juppe concedes on all railworkers' specific demands and shelves plans to cut public-sector pension rights.
12 Dec:	Biggest round of demonstrations across the country — unions claim 2.2 million on the streets.
15 Dec:	Return to work begins (and will continue gradually up to Christmas).
16 Dec:	Another two million on the streets.
21 Dec:	Juppe holds a "social summit" with the unions and bosses — promises further talks.
January:	First stages of Juppe's plan due to come in.

Mass meetings every day voted on the strike action

Juppe's plan

ALAIN Juppe wanted to cut pension rights and levy new social security contributions. Potentially the worst part of his plan to fix the social security budget deficit is "fiscalisation."

France's social security budget is separate from the state budget. It is controlled not (or not entirely) by the government, but by employers' and trade-union representatives, and financed not by taxes but by social-security contributions.

Juppe wants to amend the constitution so that Parliament will have power over the social security budget — in other words, it can put arbitrary ceilings on benefits, or health spending, in order to finance nuclear tests or whatever its other priorities are.

The move is also a threat to trade-union bureaucracies, especially Force Ouvriere's, which rely on the jobs administering the social security budget to sustain them.

France's social security system is not ideal. It reimburses only about 60% of non-hospital health spending — and leaves some people without any health cover at all — but gives great scope to doctors and drug companies to line their pockets. It leaves unemployed young people, who have built up no record of social security contributions, in the lurch. Juppe, however, wants not to improve it but to worsen it.

How far he can do this still remains to be seen. He has promised six months of negotiations on the "details" of his plan; the unions have said they will continue the battle against it, not excluding further industrial action.

they were marching against the system.

We have to put forward a workers' response, so that workers will not pay the price for European integration. We want to reap the rewards. We want the best of welfare provision across Europe for workers in all European countries.

French trade unionists warn the workers, for example, that what Juppé intends for the French health service will mean waiting lists for operations. Waiting lists! In Britain we fight over the length of the waiting list. In France it is still shocking that anyone should wait for an operation. We want that in Britain too. Supporting French workers against Juppé will help us to get it.

Across Europe we need to ask "what is society for? What is economic activity for?" If it is not to guarantee people homes, a decent standard of living, jobs, education for the children, pensions and benefits for those who cannot work, health care, and improved social and cultural life, what is it for? If it cannot guarantee those things, shouldn't the system change?

That is what we ask in Britain, and we should look for ways to link with others across Europe, including the French strikers and demonstrators who are increasingly asking this question.

One commentator described what is happening now as 1968 in a minor key. If you go on the marches, see the crowds, and their imaginative and colourful placards, you would not feel so pessimistic. In a way though, perhaps, people do feel more up against it than they did in 1968. A lot of the strikers on the rail have spoken of how they feel if they do not win this time, they despair of any future for their children. These are people who remember 1968, and were optimistic that time around.

Young people – higher and further education and school students – who do not remember 1968 need little prompting to repeat its slogans. "Une solution, revolution." Talk along these lines extends far wider than the small numbers of the revolutionary left.

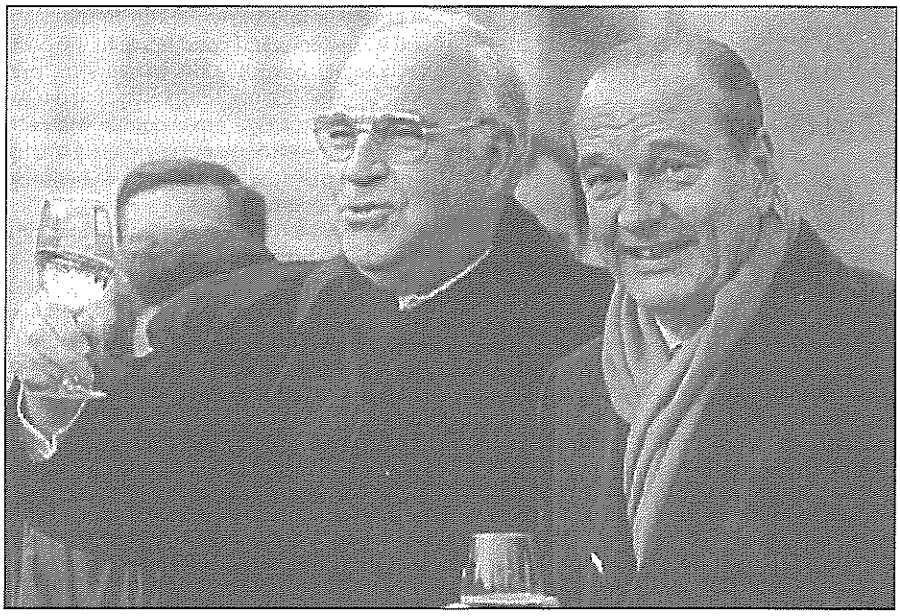
We are a way off that in Britain. But we have the same political vacuum to fill.

People don't shout "revolution is the only solution" in Britain. They shout "Major, Major, Major, out! out! out!" and look forward to a Labour government. They mean, elect a Labour government and most of this will end.

In France that is not an option. People vote for politicians they do not like, who enact policies they have to resist. After the experience of a Blair government many more people will feel like that in Britain. Young people shout less and less for Labour, but they don't yet shout for revolution either. After a few years of a Blair government, they might.

Solidarity regained

By Martin Thomas



Germany's Chancellor Kohl gave outspoken support to Chirac's cuts

"OUAIS, OUAIS, tous ensemble, tous ensemble." The Paris demonstrators on 16 December, at the end of France's great strike wave, chanted "All together, all together" — celebrating the rediscovery of working-class solidarity.

The much-divided trade unions had found a new unity in action. "Never since 1968 had there been so many strikers' banners carrying all the trade union titles"[1]. Fighting to save the welfare system, against the budget-balancing "plan" of prime minister Alain Juppé, they had drawn in and taken up the cause of all the outcasts of French capitalism. A delegation of homeless people joined the march with their own banner. As the demonstration went past the Sante prison, prisoners cheered and waved improvised flags, and the marchers applauded the prisoners.

The next Monday, Michel Renault, CGT railworkers' union secretary at the Gare de Lyon told me, "We have had support from the rail-users, contrary to the last big rail strike, in 1986, when there were rail-users' demonstrations against the strike.

"We have won on all the main issues concerning railworkers, including the plans to privatise the railways, and we have beaten the Juppé plan on public-sector pensions. We have also won wage negotiations at the start of 1996, when previously the government said it would freeze public-sector pay."

The strikes had also forced the government to drop plans to increase income tax, to take some temporary and fixed-term contract workers in the public sector into permanent jobs, and to hold a "social summit" with the unions.

"But", Michel Renault continued, "we have not won on the proposed supplementary social-security contributions, nor on fiscalisation [nor on private-sector pensions]. So we carry on. Our strike has finished, but we will continue the action. We will take part in all the demonstrations and work stoppages."

Patrice Pajol, secretary of the CGT Union Locale, added: "Behind the Juppé plan are the issues of wages and jobs. The movement has been as strong as in 1968. Now we need to have big struggles Europe-wide — not just messages of support. The best support is struggle. We have had action all together in France — now we need action all together at the level of the different countries."

CGT trade-unionists at the Gare de Lyon postal sorting office had a similar message.

Is "Europe" to blame?

MARSEILLE, the big city where the Front National is strongest, was one of those which saw its biggest demonstrations ever, breaking the records set in 1968. In Toulon, the only sizeable city with a FN council, the 20,000 marchers on 12 December went to the town hall to join anti-FN chants to those against the Juppé plan.

Le Pen denounced the strikes, demanded a ban on strikes in the public sector, and advocated individuals buying their own insurance rather than social provision. But most FN voters backed the strikes. Le Pen tried to hold their support by scapegoating the Maastricht treaty as the cause of the trouble.

The Communist Party, too, had denounced Maastricht as an incursion of foreign capitalist principles on French traditions[1]. Yet during the strikes the CP kept Maastricht strictly in its small print, and the CP-led union federation, the CGT, mentioned it not at all. The CP and CGT leaders must have seen this restraint as part of their effort not to "politicise" the strikes, an effort so strenuous that no CP member of Parliament explicitly called for the withdrawal of the Juppé plan until 12 December, two and a half weeks into the movement.[3]

If so, a bad reason but a good result. And, encouragingly, anti-Maastricht demagogy was absent not only from CGT placards, but also from all the other placards, banners, posters, stickers, and leaflets, with the exception of a couple of leaflets from very marginal groups. Implicitly, at least, the demonstrators accepted the arguments of the Trotskyist weekly *Lutte Ouvrière:*

"Once we have said that the Maastricht treaty is not a good thing for the working class, should we then conclude that the French bosses and government have had it imposed on them? Not at all. They have no need of the Maastricht directives to attack the social gains of the workers... And if Maastricht were the absolute weapon against workers' rights, how could we explain that its opponents include [right-wing] politicians like Séguin, Pasqua, De Villiers, and Le Pen?...

"To incriminate Maastricht, or Bonn and the Bundesbank, is only a way of letting the French bosses and political leaders off the hook, as if they were only applying external directives for which they were only complicit, not responsible".

Leaflets collected from the 7 December demonstration show no anti-Maastricht content. Anti-Maastricht leaflets on 16 December came from the Mouvement des Citoyens, a small splinter from the Socialist Party, and Solidarité et Progrès, the oddball populist grouping of Jacques Cheminade.

Those in Britain who present Maastricht as an attack by an *alien Europe* on the *British* welfare state should note that the Cheminade leaflet denounced Maastricht as a foul foreign imposition on France by a financial oligarchy operating from... *London* — just as some Belgian unions protesting on 13 December targeted "the Europe of the *English*."

Why strikes did not reach the private sector

DESPITE the fact that much of the Juppé plan affects private-sector workers as much as public-sector, and despite the strikers and demonstrators constantly raising the demand for private-sector pension rights to be levelled up to public-sector conditions (rather than public-sector pensions being levelled down), the private sector went no further than one-day strikes to join the big demonstrations.

The railworkers, the spearhead of the strike movement, had voted to stay out even after Juppé had conceded all their particular demands on 10 December. But by the end of that week (15 December) it was plain that the private sector was not going to budge, certainly not before Christmas. The railworkers started to return to work, and Juppé escaped with two key elements of his plan intact: increased social-security contributions, and "fiscalisation."

On Monday 18 December I listened to a discussion on why the private sector had not made it a general strike at a Paris aggregate meeting of one of the main Trotskyist groups, the LCR. Had the trade union leaders deliberately held back? Or were the private-sector workers not confident enough, whatever the union leaders might have done?

Opinions differed; but one comrade described events at his factory, Thomson Gennevilliers. The CGT and the CFDT (influenced here by Lutte Ouvrière) had called a mass meeting and argued for strike action — and the workers had voted it down. The threat of closures, redundancies, unemployment weighed too heavily.

Lutte Ouvrière summed it up like this: "In the private sector... the strike appeared for a long time as a railworkers' strike... then as a public-sector strike, not specially concerning the workers of the private sector.

"The strike took a week to reach a part of the public sector, almost two weeks to reach the teachers. To involve the whole private sector would have taken much more time again...

"Neither the railworkers nor anyone else could hold out for the necessary time. The strike came up against the buffers with the approach of Christmas — the teachers going on holiday, the big industrial enterprises shutting down partially or totally for a week or more...".*

* *Lutte Ouvrière*, 22 December, p.5.

"There is a link between the Juppé plan, and wages, jobs and conditions. In the post, we already have 80,000 workers in 'precarious' jobs [casual, temporary, fixed-term contract, etc.] The government wants to introduce private-sector type management, and even privatisation. It plans to privatise France-Telecom.

"We have fought for a different financing of social-security — trying to coalesce all the forces and push as far as we can."

Many workers felt the same. A housewife: "With their action, the railworkers have shown that people still have the courage to believe that life could be different"[2].

A railworker: "This movement was something other than a simple industrial conflict. It had become a critique of the elites, of the liberalism [i.e. free-market regime] imposed by bludgeoning and sackings, of wealth not shared, of a society no longer made for humanity. At the point it had reached, it needed to be political. It had aroused lots of new awareness, and we did not have the right to betray that"[3].

A bank worker: "Everyone can start with rejecting the government's plans for their own section, but the issue today is what society we choose. Either the law of the jungle and skimming people off, or a different policy which places humanity at the centre of its concerns"[4].

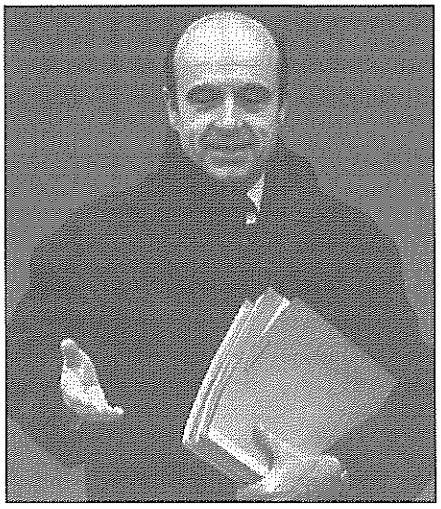
Another railworker: "This strike has something wonderful about it. Warmth, fraternity: all those disillusioned after 1986 [when there were big railworkers' and student struggles] have come together again. The best present for our children would be to stay out until Christmas"[5].

New links were made, and new confidence gained, in the effort to extend the strike across the public sector — and to private-sector enterprises, too, for stoppages on the days of the big demonstrations, 24 and 30 November, 5, 7, 12, and 16 December. (There were countless smaller demonstrations: the city of Bordeaux, for example, had over thirty demonstrations in all). A report in the weekly *Lutte Ouvrière* from Angers, western France, gives the flavour.

"The first operation was a massive distribution of leaflets at the crossroads of the biggest industrial estate in the town, from 4.30am to 8am. There were 120 to 150 participants... railworkers... metalworkers... firefighters... teachers... There were many discussions in the workplaces covered, and some demonstrators said that they decided to come after this appeal from the strikers. It was a success, also, for the participants who, despite the snow and the early hour, had many discussions among themselves.

"Other interventions of this type have taken place in two other industrial estates. And other little groups have been formed to go and convince other sectors... railworkers and firefighters to a mass meeting of busworkers... teachers to the hospital... local government workers to the administrative offices...

"These operations are decided and organised in a meeting of the CGT Union Locale,



Juppé: strikes wiped the smile away

opened out to all the CGT members active in the movement and convinced of the necessity to extend it. Militants of the Communist Party, of Lutte Ouvrière, and of the trade unions work side by side...

"30 to 60 activists now meet every day to decide and organise activities. The local committees of the CGT had been almost deserted for years: now they are filling up anew..."[6].

Is this the same France where the right wing holds 80% of the seats in Parliament; where Jacques Chirac won the presidential election this May; where his official "left" opponent, Lionel Jospin, emphasised, throughout the strikes, that he did not oppose the Juppé plan on principle, but only the way it was done; where Jean-Marie Le Pen's fascist *Front National* has won a steady ten to fifteen per cent of the vote ever since 1984? Yes and no.

The working-class demoralisation and despair reflected in the right-wing drift of official politics have not been banished at a single blow. But the strikes and demonstrations showed that the despair is only one side of the picture. They pushed it aside for a while and let another side emerge — anger and determination to fight for "the political economy of the working class." For the months and years ahead, they strengthened the active counter-forces within the working class, against the despair.

Even as the strikes were winding down, on 14-15 December, 36% of the general public told pollsters that "they should continue inasmuch as the strikers have not obtained satisfaction." 34% thought the strikes were justified but it was time to end, and only 28% opposed them[7].

Parents' groups joined the demonstrations along with striking school teachers. Chirac's party, the RPR, called for transport-users to demonstrate against the rail, bus, and metro strikes, but the great majority of users supported the strikes. In Paris, a system grew up of drivers giving lifts to as many people as they could get in their cars. People were helping each other, talking, joking — often they enjoyed it more, despite the huge delays, than the ordinary process of elbowing each other aside to sit

in sullen silence on the bus or metro. One African worker, reflecting on his experience of hitch-hiking to work each day in Paris, commented: "Since the beginning of the strike, I have not met a single racist"[8].

On the 16 December demonstration, one home-made banner read, in all the languages of the European Union, "Where is social Europe? On strike against the Juppé plan." The small solidarity delegations from Britain, Belgium and Germany were applauded and much commented on in the days following: one comrade on our delegation from Britain sold 55 copies of the Welfare State Network paper *Action*.

Luxemburg public-sector workers have struck for one day on 15 December; Belgian workers have demonstrated on 13 December, shut down the railways on 19 December, and set a cross-public-sector strike for 26 January, all on similar grievances to those in France.

In the 1970s and '80s steel workers and dockers faced a concerted European bosses' offensive, fought back country by country without any international coordination, and were defeated. Now rail workers, telecom workers, postal workers, utility workers, and public service workers are all facing, or will soon face, very similar attacks all across Europe. They need a Europe-wide counter-offensive. The 16 December demonstration showed that French workers are open to that idea. It is up us now to overcome the difficulties of language, culture, and trade-union bureaucracy, and make the necessary links.

There were no slogans sharply cutting against the trade union leaders on the 16 December demonstration — a remarkable fact, considering its militancy and liveliness, and the large number of "home-made" placards and banners on it. Some workers were angry that the CGT had called for an end to the rail strike as early as 15 December[9], but that was the extent of it. The main slogans were variants of the union leaders' demands: "Retrait, retrait, retrait du plan Juppé" [withdrawal of the Juppé plan], and "Ai oup, Juppé, ton plan il va sauter" [Juppé, your plan is going to blow up — this chanted with a skip and a jump at the "Ai oup".].

The workers had not yet come sharply into conflict with the union leaders; but that did not mean that they were happy with the timid passivity of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. A leader of the LCR told me that they had sold some 1,200 copies of their paper *Rouge* on the Paris demonstration — eight to ten times as many, he estimated, as they would normally shift on a big demonstration. All the revolutionary left groups were finding a much-expanded audience for their ideas.

And on the demonstrators' placards, on leaflets and posters — sometimes from the left-wing trade union SUD-PTT, sometimes from Greens or the various campaigns for the jobless and homeless — were slogans pointing beyond rejection of the Juppé plan to positive alternatives, transitional demands: cut the working week without loss of pay; "travaillons moins, travaillons tous" [let's work less, let's all work]; rebuild social provision by taxing financial revenues and taxing the rich. The day before, a group of striking teachers had demonstrated at the Stock Exchange, with the slogan: "The Stock Exchange or life: we have chosen!"[10].

As the railworkers' slogan at the Gare du Nord put it: "The Commune is not dead." ■

Notes

1. *Rouge*, 14 December, p.2.
2. Denise, a housewife in the rail town of Tergnier, northern France, *Libération*, 18 December, p.4.
3. CGT trade-unionist at the Gare du Nord, *Le Monde*, 17 December, p.6.
4. A striker from the Bank of France, at a mass meeting of railworkers at the Gare d'Austerlitz. *Le Monde*, 21 December, p.V.
5. Sylvain Briere, Rouen train driver, *Le Monde*, 14 December, p.10.
6. *Lutte Ouvrière*, 15 December, p.7.
7. *Le Monde*, 17 December, p.8.
8. *Le Monde*, 21 December, p.VI.
9. *Lutte Ouvrière*, 22 December, p.6.
10. *L'Humanité*, 16 December, p.3.

CGT leadership under pressure

LOUIS Viannet, leader of the CGT, had the bad luck to have his confederation's congress meet in the middle of the strike, from 3 to 7 December. He faced demands for the CGT to call for a general strike, and could deflect them only by arguing that in the new, post-Stalinist, CGT: "It is not our role to decree the general strike from on high. The general strike must come from the mass meetings." The phrase "generalisation of the struggle" was agreed, though then in "the current resolutions, read out at speed by the platform... the words 'generalisation of the struggle' were absent and each time reintroduced after demands from the floor".*

The CGT congress also ratified the deletion of "socialisation of the means of production and exchange" from its statutes, on the argument that "socialisation does not mean disappearance of exploitation" and that the CGT should instead commit itself to "combat capitalist exploitation and all forms of exploitation of wage-labour". The collapse of the USSR has convinced the CGT that what they previously saw as "socialisation" is no answer, and that there are other forms of exploitation of wage-labour than the capitalist one they know in France — but they have no positive answer.

* *L'hebdo d'actualité sociale VO*, 8 December, p.25; *Rouge*, 14 December, p.6.

Strikes revive the trade unions

THE structure and culture of French trade unionism is very different from British. The unions are much more divided. They have fewer members, smaller funds, therefore less ability to give strike pay. On the other hand, they have much stronger legal rights.

Unions have a legal right to represent workers, strong legal guarantees against sacking for union representatives, and legal immunity for their funds. Workers have a legal right to strike (the right belongs to individual workers, not to the unions, so there can be no question of a law demanding ballots), and legal protection against being sacked while on strike or replaced by scabs[1].

Consequently French strikes tend to be short, often small, often minority action, often spectacularly militant. Often they end without a settlement, or at least without all the unions (or all the workers) agreeing a settlement.

The legal framework was set after World War 2, when the French ruling class was very shaky and anxious to use reforms to stave off the danger of revolutionary upheaval. Each factory or office must hold elections for delegates (roughly equivalent to shop-stewards), with all the workers (unionised or not) voting, but the candidates nominated by the unions[2].

Union membership then was relatively strong. But it has declined steadily since — with a recovery after 1968, and a particularly sharp fall under the Mitterrand presidency, since 1981. Today it is only five to ten per cent of the workforce.

This figure exaggerates the weakness of the unions. Since a worker can be represented by a union, and express adherence to it by voting for it in delegate elections, without joining, on the whole only activists join unions. And 50 to 100 union activists would not be bad going for a workplace of 1000 in Britain.

The strikes in November and December — as generally in France — took two forms: stoppages (débrayages) for the days of ▸

action, or continuous strikes (grèves reconductibles). On the railways, for example, a mass meeting would be held each day at each depot, where, after hearing speakers from the unions, the workers would vote to continue (reconduire) the strike. The level of union cooperation in calling the mass meetings, and union activity in sending delegations from one mass meeting to another, was exceptionally high.

Workers supplemented their strikes by occupations and other militant actions. Electricity workers stormed the power-station control rooms and set the electricity supply at cheap rates, or free for some users. Railworkers at the Gare du Nord regularly lay down on the lines to block the Eurostar service to London (operated by British drivers).

In Tours, railworkers went to the bus depot; after the bus workers had given strike notice, they demanded that in the meantime the buses should carry the message "Withdraw The Juppé Plan" on their electronic displays. The bosses said no. The railworkers said that the buses might then end up stuck in the city centre with flat tyres. The message went up[3].

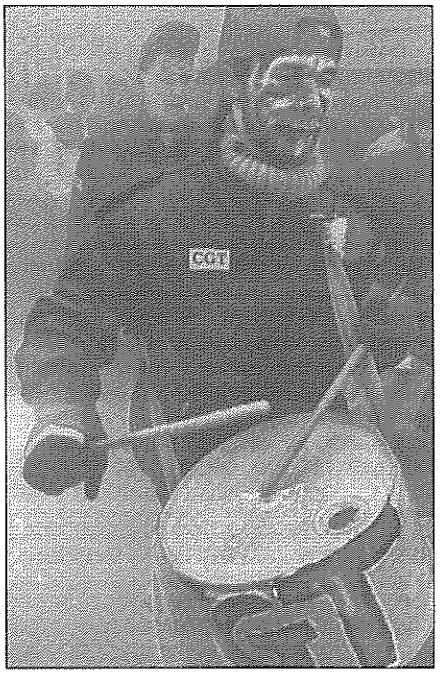
With the union machines playing a militant role, there were, however, few elected strike committees. The most advanced rank-and-file organisation was in Rouen.

There, the train drivers, after voting to strike, went first to the rail workshops, then to the postal sorting centre, and so "ended up that afternoon with a united mass meeting in a crazy atmosphere. Drums, trumpets, whistles. Nothing had been organised... We tried to regularise the situation by setting up a strike organising committee... with five or six delegates from each sectoral mass meeting, plus ex officio representatives of the unions".

This organising committee then set up sectoral mass meetings every morning, and a cross-sector mass meeting every afternoon, drawing up to 1000 workers. "The atmosphere there is spectacular. It is not a strike meeting in the strict sense. It is difficult to discuss there as you do in the local meetings. It is more like a rally. But it is the heart of the strike, of workers' democracy".

The committee produced a leaflet: "All out on continuous strike! ... We will win the withdrawal of the Juppé plan. This victory will be a formidable springboard... to win on wages, the reduction of working time without loss of pay, and the abolition of unemployment... All out on continuous cross-sector general strike until victory..." It set up roadblocks on every route into Rouen and distributed it on the morning of 11 December, getting a favourable response[4].

The CGT confederation (which is close to the Communist Party) and Force Ouvriere (generally business-unionist in orientation) actively promoted the strikes and demonstrations; so did the FSU (a federation



Unions actively boosted the strikes

As we were saying

The power next time!

The rising of the French workers in May 1968

SUDDENLY, like an enormous explosion, the revolt of the French working class has burst on a startled bourgeois Europe. Already it has changed the political climate of Europe as sharply as the rising of the sun after a long Arctic night.

Sparked by the militant actions of Trotskyist, anarchist and Maoist students, and fanned by the viciousness of police brutality, the flames of revolt soon spread to the working class. It led to a great conflagration prepared by the long-accumulated, bottled-up discontent and frustration of the workers.

The working class had seemed drugged and demoralised by years of relative prosperity. It had remained confused and quiescent, under the control of conservative labour leaders, through the many crises that have rocked French post-war capitalism.

Now, with little warning, it rose to its feet, pulling its trade union leaders — "Communist", "Catholic" and "Socialist" — and political leaders helplessly behind it. Effortlessly it brought the country to a standstill. By instinct, without any real leadership — and initially against the 'leadership' — it seized and held the productive forces of society, wrenched from out of the powerless hands of the capitalists. It proceeded to enact what will surely go down in history as the dress rehearsal for the French workers' revolution.

Factories, mines, docks, ships at sea and in port, theatres, offices — all were swiftly occupied and placed under the control of workers' committees.

Grave-diggers and chorus girls, bank clerks and taxi drivers, petit-bourgeois as well as proletariat, trade unionists and non-unionists, the whole of the French working masses were in action. Journalists refused to lie to order, and printers censored their employers' press. Journalists and technicians at the ORTF (television network) revolted against the role assigned to them by the system. Even the farmers joined in. So did school children, who took over the schools, following the action of students who had seized universities. And they were joined by the teachers!

Everywhere the Red Flag was hoisted. Everywhere enthusiasm, marches, demonstrations of strength. The *Internationale*, sung too often discordantly by Stalinist functionaries, now thundered its command vigorously in its real tune in millions of voices, in every street of every city, and across the borders: "Arise, ye starvelings..." And not only the 'starvelings' arose: the vanguard were and remain the best paid of all — the workers of the giant state-owned Renault plants.

The rulers of the rest of Europe and the world have looked in horror at this stupendous demonstration of the power and revolutionary instinct of the working class. Their journals are still not sure whether or not to believe it.

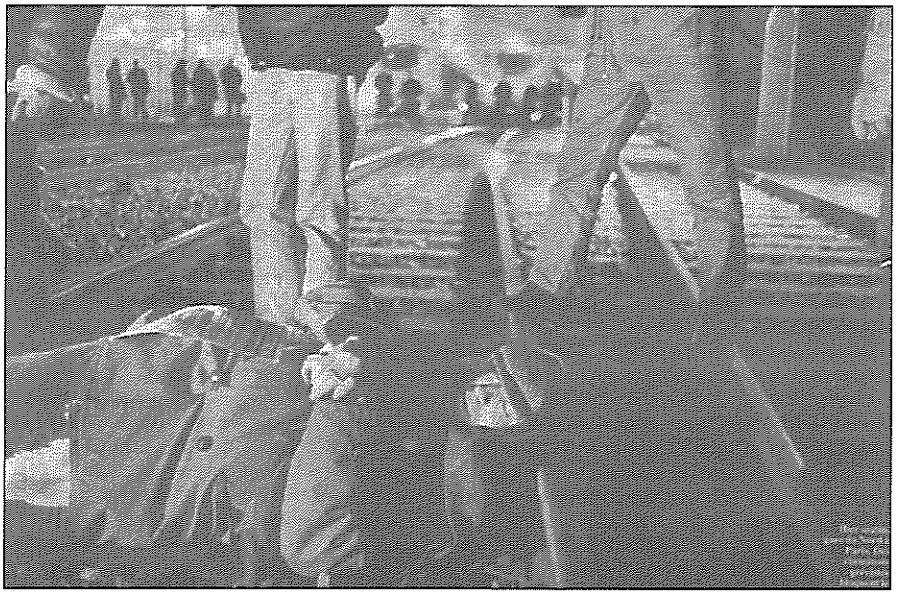
For decades now, have they not preached, have their 'thinkers' and hacks not proclaimed — and proved, no less! — that the industrial working class is dead as a revolutionary force? Had they not, as late as 12-13 May, carried articles celebrating the 10th anniversary of the army coup that raised De Gaulle to power and gave France 'stability'? Is not this western Europe, in the year 1968; is not the number of cars and TV sets growing?

Are not the capitalists in possession of a vast bureaucratic army of efficient lieutenants within the labour movement to police it and keep the working class within the banks of bourgeois society? Are not Lenin and Trotsky long since dead and buried?

Thus it seemed. And then, before their fearful eyes, the working class rose suddenly from off its knees — and gripped French capitalism by the throat!

Given the entrenched power of pro-capitalist bureaucrats (some misnaming themselves as 'Communists') in the French labour movement, the full victory which was objectively possible was not to be expected. To achieve this goal the class will have to shake off the shackles of the labour bureaucracies and prepare a revolutionary organisation equal to its drive for control of its own life.

In France and in Britain the struggle continues!



Rail strikers block the Eurostar trains

of teachers' unions, also close to the CP) and SUD-PTT (a left-wing union of telecom and post workers).

The CFDT — the third of the big confederations, with the CGT and FO — supported the government at leadership level, but its organisations on the railways and in many other areas actively backed the strikes. The strike movement has led to ructions both in the CFDT — with militants denouncing the leadership — and in Force Ouvriere, where a right-winger, Jacques Mairé, has set out to challenge Marc Blondel for his position as general secretary, claiming that Blondel is in the pocket of the "Trotskyists" of the Workers' Party, who hold many full-time posts in FO.

All across those unions which promoted the strike, however, the movement has generated new members and new activism.

Notes

1. Bill Wedderburn, Employment Rights in Britain and Europe, pp.226ff. There are loopholes in these legal rights, but they are strong enough to give workers confidence.
2. Again, there are loopholes. Some hard-line employers, notably Citroen, have nullified the law by promoting fascistic company unions.
3. *Lutte Ouvriere*, 15 December, p.7.
4. *Rouge*, 14 December, p.8; see also reports in *Lutte Ouvriere*, 8 Dec, p.9; 15 Dec, p.8; 22 Dec., p.7.

Workers and students unite

STUDENT unions organise fewer than one per cent of France's 2.2 million university students, and even that small number is divided between two rival organisations, UNEF (close to the CP) and UNEF-ID (led by the Socialist [not-very] Left faction of the Socialist Party), claiming about 10,000 members each.

The weakness of the unions did, however, open the way for the student movement to establish a national coordination made up of delegates elected from mass meetings at all the universities on strike.

French universities have expanded even faster than British ones since the 1980s, and are now immensely overcrowded and under-resourced, with a huge drop-out rate.

The extra money granted by the government to universities was seen by students as an inadequate sop, not a major victory, so the students ended their strike without the same satisfaction as the workers.

There were few university students on the 16 December march in Paris: one student comrade, a member of the LCR, told me that the student movement in Paris had, paradoxically, been "smashed" by the public transport strike there, which made it impossible to get large numbers of students together.

However, student revolt, which has been bubbling ever since 1986, will certainly erupt again soon.

And the prospects for worker-student unity are better than ever, with many more students coming from working-class families.

A man's a man for a' that

Robert Burns, Scotland's great radical poet, died 200 years ago

Is there for honest poverty
That hings [hangs] his head, and a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by —
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an a' that,
Our toils obscure, an a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd [gold] for a' that.

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin [coarse woollen cloth] grey, an a' that?
Gie fools their skills, and knaves their wine —
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that, an a' that,
Their tinsel show, an a' that,
The honest man, tho e'er sae poor,
Is king o men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie [fellow] ca'd 'a lord,'
Wha struts, an stares, an a' that?
Tho hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a cuif [fool] for a' that.
For a' that, an a' that,
His ribband, star, an a' that,
The man o independent mind,
He looks an laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an a' that!
But an honest man's aboon [above] his might —
Guid faith, he mauna [must not] fa' that!
For a' that, an a' that,
Their dignities, and a' that,
The pith o sense an pride o worth,
Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may
(As come it will for a' that),
That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree [have priority] an a' that.
For a' that, an a' that,
It's comin yet for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that.

Separate or equal

EVEN WHEN they are not being harassed by police in the streets or beaten to death in police stations, black people in Britain live under tremendous racist pressure — psychological, emotional and economic.

They live in a world which both openly and shamefacedly defines them as inferior, or ugly, or natural-born muggers, or work-shy ne'er-do-wells.

They live in a British state whose basic law defines black immigrants as an evil to be fought against, even to the extent of tying and gagging a young woman "illegal immigrant" so that she chokes to death in front of her child. They wrap it up in weasel words, but 'black' is what they mean and what the police and immigration officials who administer the law take it to mean.

All black people live with the knowledge that people like them were for centuries chained and enslaved and used as beasts of burden with no more rights than animals and sometimes treated worse then animals. It is no wonder that some black people react against this predominantly white, still heavily racist society, by wanting to have as little to do with it as possible.

They become one or other variant of "black nationalist." They spurn and reject this oppressive, maiming society. They proclaim that black people can be self-sufficient, that they can, if they network properly, lead an essentially isolated black life, even in a predominantly white society. Some black people adopt attitudes to whites which mechanically invert and mirror white racism. Others are seduced by Louis Farrakhan's Black Muslim religion with its all-embracing message of black exclusiveness and the goal of black self-sufficiency.

We repeat: none of this is surprising. Indeed the surprising thing is that there is not much more of it, that young black people do not go berserk against a society that forces them to carry an intolerable social, economic and psychological burden.

The truth, however, is that such reactions cannot serve the interests of black people. United States and British black people do live in a white society. For the foreseeable future they and their children, and their children after them will live in a predominantly white society. It is simply not possible for black people to organise as separately as Louis Farrakhan and his disciples, and others, want them to. If it were possible, it would be one more variant of black-white 'apartheid', or its old America equivalent, "Jim Crow". That could not free black people from oppression. It would only formalise and institutionalise one variant of oppression and inequality.

There is no benign apartheid! The white racist slogan: separate but equal was always a naked self-serving lie. Separate did not mean equal: it meant subordination for black people.

If black people in Britain were to confine themselves to black nationalist ghettos now they would be separate but they would not be equal. They would inevitably be subordinate.

"It is not possible for black people to organise as separately as Louis Farrakhan wants them to. It would only formalise and institutionalise oppression and inequality."

In plain truth, it is not possible for black people wounded by the racist society around them and economically oppressed by poverty, poor educational opportunities and mass unemployment, to find general social solutions "on their own."

They will never be equal until they are truly equal citizens in the actual multi-racial society in which they live. Therefore: no other possibility is open to black people who want equality and a decent life than to fight as part of the labour movement for the status of human beings amongst equal human beings, black and white — that is for justice and equality for all.

Most of the right-wing black programmes for creating a layer of black capitalists — Louis Farrakhan's, for example — offer nothing to most black people. In the very long term the existence of a serious black component of the capitalist class might help raise the status of black people generally. Generations from now!

Even then, it would not necessarily affect the reality of life for millions of poor black people. Their lives are cramped and shaped by the lack of work to which capitalism condemns them. In work, they are exploited by capitalists, black and white. The whole capitalist system needs to be overturned. We need a socialist revolution. Black people alone can not achieve that.

The emotional response that leads some black people to spurn this society and try to kick it away from them with a curse cannot free them from its clutches, from either racism or capitalism, but only perpetuate their condition as an oppressed and exploited minority. Under a system of black separation within white capitalist society, most black people would probably be more oppressed, not less.

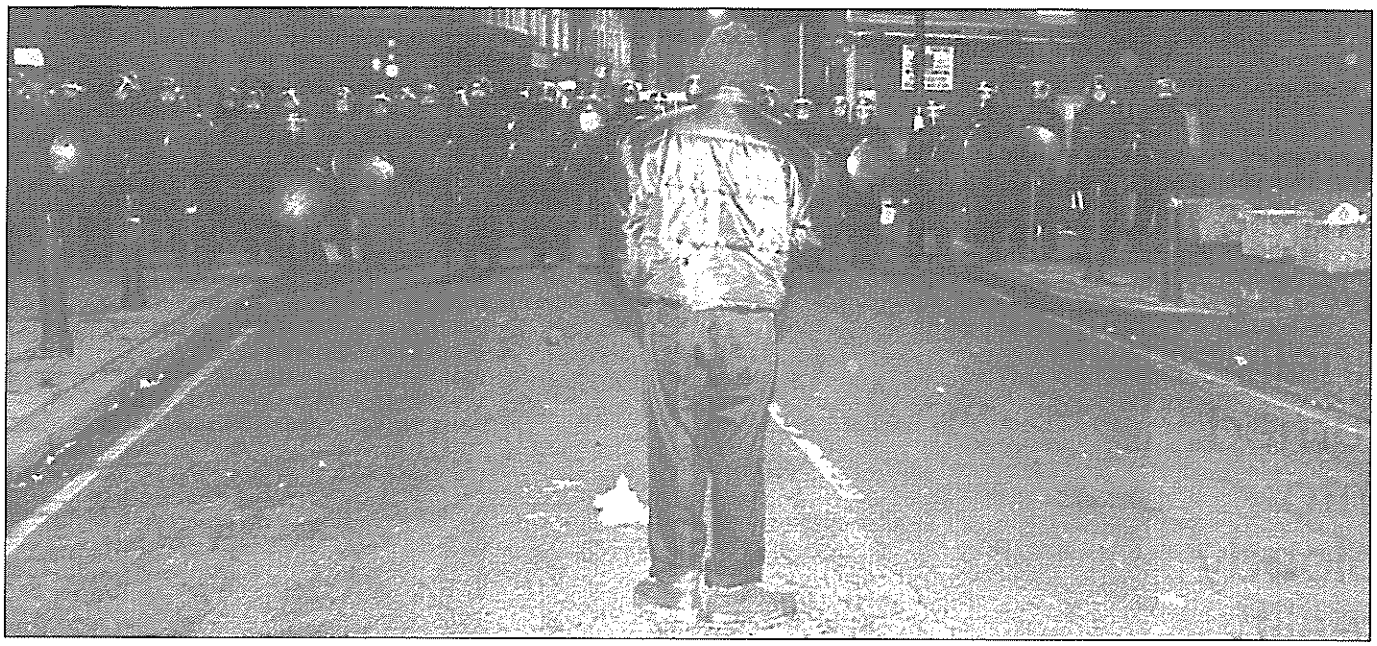
Black separatism is therefore a sham and a delusion.

Black people — far less than 1 in 20 of Britain's population — have no option but to fight for equality within this society. In the fight to get rid of the hateful features of this society, black people have no other major ally capable of radically changing society than the labour movement.

The labour movement itself is not free of racism, far from it. But it is in alliance with that movement, and as an organic part of it, fighting to purge it of racism, that black people — the overwhelming majority of whom in Britain are workers — have made the substantial, though massively inadequate, advances they have made since the late '40s, and early '50s, when large groups of West Indian workers started to settle in Britain.

Bernie Grant MP, who for long has been a respected figure on the left, has recently joined those who reject the ideas outlined above. He wants black people, including those born in Britain, to remove themselves from Britain altogether.

Battered by the racist society he has lived in for decades Bernie Grant flirts



Protester faces armed riot police in Brixton

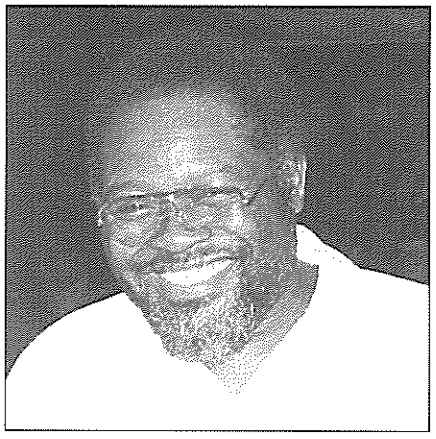
with black separatism and — logically — advocates the politics long associated with the extreme right of British politics. He wants to "repatriate" black people. Integration has failed, he says.

The erstwhile left MP recently met our racist, reactionary disgrace of a Home Secretary, Michael Howard, to discuss funding a voluntary "repatriation" scheme which would allow black people in Britain to "return home." In October 1995, Grant shared a platform in north London with British representatives of Louis Farrakhan's ultra right-wing and anti-semitic black nationalist "Nation of Islam", at a meeting organised by the Nation of Islam.

In his expressed views, in his activities and in his associates — Michael Howard *or* Louis Farrakhan! — Bernie Grant is now a force for confusion and *reaction* in British working-class, especially working-class black, politics.

In the article which follows Mark Osborn examines Bernie Grant's views and recalls some of his ideological forebears.

Segregate and repatriate?



Bernie Grant

By Mark Osborn

AT the 1993 Labour Party conference, speaking at a meeting to mark the 25th anniversary of Enoch Powell's notorious "Rivers of Blood" speech — in which Powell predicted a race war unless black people left Britain — Bernie Grant MP conceded: "There is something in what Powell said." He added: "I suspect his words will come true unless some strong action is taken."

Grant believes that the government should fund a repatriation scheme and send British black people "home." The answer to racism, Grant in effect says, is what the Powellite Tories, the National Front and British National Party fascists have been saying all along: black people, get out of Britain! — or, "take the money and run", as the black weekly, *The Voice*, derisively put it.

Embarrassingly for Grant, the only prominent political figure to back him in 1993 was Winston Churchill, perhaps the most openly racist — and incontestably the most stupid — of all the Tory MPs. Embarrassing, yes, but an illustration of a political symbiosis with a long history — of far-right racism, and disorientated black anti-racism which winds up apeing its oppressor.

Just how demoralised Grant had become was shown clearly in December 1993. Speaking at a private meeting of his "African Reparations Movement," Bernie Grant declared "I'm not talking to you about Indians, Bangladeshis or Pakistanis... I'm ▸

talking about black people of African origin. We fought the blackshirts, the brownshirts, the teddy boys, the skinheads of the National Front... and for a while things got better. Now they are back again and calling themselves the BNP and black people are saying 'take your country, we don't want it.'"

Grant questions the whole idea that it is possible to be black and British, urging black people in Britain to realise that they are actually "black African people."

The message was clear: the fight against racism can not be won; it is time to get out. Bernie Grant, who once called himself a Trotskyist, had given in to the BNP and the Tory right and given up on the white workers.

In fact, of course, black people are saying nothing of the sort; born here, most of them have nowhere else to go, and nothing to do about racism except join with non-black anti-racists to extirpate it.

THE strange relationship between black nationalists and white racism has a long past in American, if not in British, history.

The irony is that the idea of black and white incompatibility and emigration as a solution to the "race question" began in the US as a "benevolent" white dream. Thomas Jefferson, himself a slaveowner, but someone with no great sympathy for the institution, proposed a plan to the Virginia Assembly for the freeing of all adult slaves, who would then be obliged to leave the country: "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people [the black slaves] are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, can not live in the same government."

Jefferson's views were common among anti-slavery whites at the end of the 18th century.

Abraham Lincoln, the president who freed the slaves during the American civil war (1861-5), admitted in 1854 that "his first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, to their own native land" — a small patch of land, Liberia, had been bought for $300 in 1821 by representatives of the Colonisation Society, an organisation which had been set up by do-gooders and backed by the establishment in order to send ex-slaves "back to Africa."

Marcus Garvey

Thus the white establishment tried to force an African identity on to black slaves, although this identity and the colonisation scheme were rejected by the big majority of black Americans.

The roots of thought-out American black nationalism go back to the 1850s and to Martin Delaney, who considered that the black people in the US were "a nation within a nation" and advocated founding a black state outside America. However — as Theodore Draper points out in a very important article for *Commentary* ("The Fantasy of Black Nationalism", September 1969) — Delaney did so out of "unrequited love" because of "rejection by the whites". Delaney referred to black people in America as a "broken people". Draper quotes Delaney: "We love our country, dearly love her, but she don't love us — she despises us, and bids us begone, driving us from her embrace."

"The strange relationship between black nationalists and white racism has a long past in American, if not in British, history."

Delaney's nationalism was the *product of despair*. A better tradition was represented by the most prominent of the black abolitionists, Frederick Douglass, who believed "all this native land talk is nonsense," adding that "the native land of the American Negro is America." Douglass was for a struggle for black equality in a common society.

During this century Marcus Garvey, leader of the mass nationalist movement built after World War 1, exhibited another aspect of black nationalist sentiment which paralleled white racism.

Garvey's nationalism blended into racism. He believed "in a pure black race, just as all self-respecting whites believe in a pure white race." Garvey met the Imperial Giant of the Klu Klux Klan, Edward Young Clarke, and said "I regard the Klan, the Anglo-Saxon Clubs and White American societies, as far as the Negro is concerned, as better friends of the race than all the other groups of hypocritical whites put together."

1960s. Leading American Nazi Lincoln Rockwell (right) sits in a Black Muslim meeting

More recently, in 1962, the Nation of Islam (NoI) put the leader of the American Nazi Party, George Lincoln Rockwell, on their platform. Rockwell said "Elijah Muhammad [NoI leader] is to the so-called Negro what Adolf Hitler was to the German people. Heil Hitler." Later he added "I was amazed to find out how much they agree on things... The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and I have worked out an agreement of mutual assistance."

First time as tragedy, second as farce: Garvey meets the Klan; Bernie Grant meets Michael Howard.

Black Americans have faced slavery followed by lynch law, and Jim Crow segregation followed by the decimation of the black inner city. They have much better reasons than Bernie Grant to try to find a way out — in a society where the labour movement has been battered down, and mass, long-term black and white workers' unity can seem a long way off.

But in the Britain which Grant wants black people to leave there is not only a strong tradition of white racism, but there *is also* a long history of militant white *anti-racism* — going back to the abolitionists and white working-class solidarity with the North during the American civil war (despite great hardship in the towns of the North West where factories were starved of cotton by the Northern blockade of the Confederacy).

Nevertheless, like the pre-civil war American white establishment, Grant tries to force an artificial identity on black people in Britain. It is the ideological gloss on a profound disorientation.

Should we give up now? Make a pact with the Tory right to "solve" the question of racism? Whatever the poor, demoralised, inverted-*racist* Bernie Grant MP — battered into foolishness by his experience as a black man in Britain — says, the overwhelming majority of black people will give him the answer black and white anti-racists have shouted at racists and fascists for the last three decades:

Black people — here to stay, here to fight!

The Australian Labor Party and the Australian left

By Roger Clarke

THE AUSTRALIAN Labor Party (ALP) celebrated its centenary in 1991, in its fourth consecutive term of national office — it went on to win a fifth term. Measured by the criterion of years in office, the ALP has been remarkably successful; yet it has always disappointed those of its supporters who expected an ALP government to bring about a more equal society. In the preface to his history of the ALP, Ross McMullin writes: "A recurring theme is the tension between what the ALP's prominent politicians were doing or not doing, and what the rank-and-file activists wanted them to be doing."[1]

The ALP is a product of the trade union movement, yet Labor governments have repeatedly clashed with trade unionists. For example, in 1910 south Australian railway navvies went on strike; the Labor premier (Verran) declared: "The Labor Party of today cannot be dictated to by the revolutionary socialists of this state." That same year, in a separate dispute with Adelaide tarpavers, strikebreaking labor was brought in from Melbourne. In the resulting clashes with strikers, police used their batons freely. Verran endorsed the conduct of the police, stating: "The police will do their duty in regard to the protection of persons and property."[2]

Federal Labor governments and Labor governments in other states have similarly used the police or the army against strikers, many of whom would have been members of the ALP or of an affiliated union. Why then has the ALP survived for so long, without being deserted by its rank-and-file?

The ALP

THE ALP was formed in order to put representatives of the trade unions into parliament. Trade unions had sponsored parliamentary candidates well before the national maritime strike of 1890 and the Queensland shearers' strike of 1891.[3] The results were not encouraging: some endorsed Labor candidates, once elected, quickly disowned any Labor affiliation. In 1902, the second federal conference resolved to require candidates for endorsement to sign a pledge to withdraw if not preselected, to do their utmost to implement the platform, and to vote with the caucus majority on all platform questions. Similar provisions still apply today. A spectacular example of the party disowning a "representative" was the expulsion of right-winger Vince Gair in 1957, while he was the ALP premier of Queensland.

As well as many of the individual members of the ALP being trade unionists, affiliated unions are represented (usually by full time officials) at state conferences. Despite (or possibly because of) the influence of the trade unions within the ALP, the party "pragmatically" assumes that any prospect of the abolition of capitalism is an impractical dream, and attempts to represent the interests of labor within this framework.

Labor's 1902 platform: a White Australia

The first plank of the 1902 platform was: "the maintenance of White Australia", which falls short even of equality of opportunity within the capitalist system. The second plank was the introduction of compulsory arbitration. "White Australia" has been replaced in the ALP platform by sentiments in favour of multiculturalism, but the ALP still appeals to "the independent umpire" to conciliate class conflict. The "accord" between the Hawke and Keating governments and the ACTU is rightly opposed by socialists and union militants, but it is not a departure from the ALP tradition.

The ALP today is still a party based on the trade unions, but a party whose aims are still limited to "a fair go" for workers. Some capitalists see no danger in a Labor government, preferring conciliation with unions to conflict. Others are not convinced: Liberal Party leader John Howard spoke for the latter when he criticised Paul Keating for negotiating leave and superannuation provisions with the ACTU. Howard said: "I think there is something very demeaning and very humiliating about the elected prime minister of Australia going cap-in-hand to the ACTU, grovelling for permission to introduced budget measures. It indicates very clearly that this government is still very much the serf of the ACTU and of the trade union movement."[4]

Howard was grandstanding of course. Nevertheless the complaint does suggest why trade union members might prefer the ALP to some new party. They may want a government that is the "serf" of the trade union movement. They may feel that political influence should not be the prerogative of employers. Why then should trade unionists sympathise with calls for them to break their links with the ALP?

Alternatives to the ALP

A NUMBER of socialist groups were formed in the years between federation (1901) and the first world war. One of these groups, the Australian Socialist Party (ASP), stated its objection to the ALP.

"The Labor Party does not clearly and unambiguously avow socialism, nor does it teach it: it is unlike any other working-class creation in the world in that it builds no socialist movement, issues no socialist books, debates no socialist problems. It is not international, it is not Marxian. In politics and practice it is liberalism under a new name; in utterance and ideal it is bourgeois."[5]

The conclusion drawn from these premises was that the ASP should have nothing to do with the Labor Party. Yet, on the ASP's own testimony, the ALP was a (non-socialist) working-class creation. This suggested to some other socialists that their strategy towards Labor should be "boring from within." Tom Mann, a former secretary of the British ILP, argued that socialists must involved themselves in this mass party of the Australian working class, and seek to win it to consistent socialist polices. The socialist movement must be built "not in hostility to the Labor Party, but untrammelled by its restrictions."

Tom Mann was active in the Victorian Socialist Party. The aim of the VSP was not to oppose Labor but to act "as a ginger group for socialism."[6] Socialists were active in both the VSP and the ALP simultaneously. By 1907 it had nearly 2,000 members.

The Third International and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA)

THE MOST significant of all the attempts to form a revolutionary workers' party was the Communist Party. The CPA was formed from the ASP, elements from the International Workers of the World and Jock Garden's group of "Trades Hall Reds." Garden's group was active in the Labor Party, whereas the others were opposed in principle to participation in the ALP. As a result there were two groups, both claiming to be the Australian Communist Party. The Comintern demanded a unity conference; when the ASP refused, Garden was recognised as the official representative of the Communist movement.[7] However the Comintern's intervention was not confined to banging sectarian heads together. The CPA needed a coherent strategy; one that synthesised militant opposition to capitalism with recognition of the continued mass support for the Labor Party. The Comintern hammered out a united front tactic as a general method of approach to mass reformist parties. The implications for Australia were spelt out in a letter sent to the CPA in 1922.

"The Australian Labor Party is even more outspokenly a trade union party than its British counterpart, with an equally petty bourgeois, reformist set of leaders. Nonetheless, the masses in their bulk continue to cling to the Labor Party. Does this mean to say that if the working masses are to be won for communism, we should work within ▸

this mass party? The Communist International answers this question in the affirmative."[8]

Accordingly, the CPA was advised "to join the State Labor Party as well as the Federal Labor Party."[9] The application to affiliate was not to be a once-only gesture.

"But should the Labor Party leaders refuse to admit us into their organisation, this is no reason for abandoning the United Front. It must never be said that the Communists divided the workers. That must be left to the leaders of the Labor Party. Our duty as Communists and as the Party of the working class is to bring our class to victory. This can only be done by pointing the way and working with the masses and show[ing] them that we are the real leaders and that our place is inside the workers' organisations."[10]

The CPA did succeed in affiliating to the Labor Party in June 1923. But at a 1924 federal conference, Theodore (the Queensland premier) argued that Communist Party members should be ineligible to join the ALP. "You cannot mix oil and water" he said, and a large majority supported him.[11] The CPA tried standing candidates against the ALP in elections for the New South Wales State Parliament, but received only a few hundred votes. Garden subsequently resigned from the CPA and rejoined the ALP.

The Third Period

AFTER GARDEN'S departure, the CPA did not immediately repudiate the united front. They concentrated on trying to build militant rank and file groups in the trade unions, which was the main point of the united front. The leadership came under increasing criticism from the Miles and Sharkey faction, which with Comintern support, won control of the party with a perspective of super-optimism. They declared: "It is a definite lie to say we can do nothing because we are only a small propaganda sect, we are a party."[12] They had maybe 400 members.

The CPA's achievements in the early 1930s are yet to be emulated. The CPA did exemplary work in building the Minority Movement, assisting rank and file activism in the trade unions and organising the unemployed. The downside was the crazy sectarianism implied by the (Comintern) theory that the ALP was 'social fascist'. To quote Tom O'Lincoln: "Wild-eyed rhetoric and ultra-left confrontations might successfully regroup a thousand activists but as the party grew the task was to win broader layers of people, and for this a marginally more sane approach was advised."[13]

If the CPA had taken a "marginally more sane" approach all along, they might have convinced more rank and file Labor activists that the CP's place "is inside the workers' organisations." In other words, the "Third Period" was an opportunity for the CPA to grow by keeping to the original United Front perspective. If the stick had been straight in the first place, bending it in the direction of the Popular Front would not have seemed necessary.

The Fourth International

THE FOURTH International attempted to revive the original perspectives of the Comintern. In 1944 the Australian section of the Fourth International issued a manifesto which said:

"Within the labour movement as a whole, the Labor Party as well as the unions, the revolutionist should not cease in his activity, but should always attempt to stem the rising tide of reaction, calling for resistance to the growing subordination of officialdom within the capitalist state. He should also cooperate with any section of the movement that adopts a sound working class policy on some particular issue. The aim must be always to steer these limited demands towards the wider goal, the attainment of state power by the workers."[14]

The Trotskyist movement dwindled, then revived in the late 1960s and early '70s. In 1985 the Socialist Workers' Party [SWP, linked to the American rather than the British SWP] disavowed Trotskyism[15]. It renamed itself the Democratic Socialist Party and became Gorbachevite, then Castroite.

These changes in the SWP's attitude towards Trotskyism were accompanied by a change in their orientation to the Labor Party.[16] As the SWP had been in the Labor Party they could hardly say that it was a matter of principle to be outside. Instead it was argued that the move to the right under Hawke made the entry tactic inappropriate in the current period. This argument misunderstands the point of the United Front tactic, namely to *oppose* the politics of the ALP leadership from within the party.

A more "theoretical" argument was that the traditional analysis of the ALP (and the British Labour Party) as a "bourgeois workers' party" was incorrect — Lenin said (in 1913!) that the ALP was a "liberal-bourgeois party." This scriptural argument was made ten years earlier by Ted Hill[17], leader of the CPA (M-L). Hill's conclusion, opposition in principle to joining the Labor Party, is far more consistent than the SWP's. But the argument itself is an example of the scholastic "Leninism" that was created (literally) over Lenin's dead body.

Australia's biggest would-be Trotskyist group is now the ISO, linked to the British SWP. Its opposition to "entryism" goes back a lot further than the DSP's. To the extent that the ISO still discusses its policies, it still accepts the "bourgeois workers' party" analysis of the ALP. Thus it cops a lot of flak from the DSP for being "soft on Labor." The ISO is soft on Labor, but not for the reasons that the DSP claim.

The ISO is soft on Labor because of its superstitious fear of "reformism." Opposing reformism from within the mass reformist party is shunned for fear of ideological contamination. Therefore instead of effectively fighting Laborism at its base, the ISO settles for general propaganda against reformism.

Today, there are a host of "reforms", higher wages, full employment, shorter working week, working class access to education and health care, that are crying out to be raised in the whole labour movement. Raising these demands within the ALP is not outrageous; many members genuinely want all of these things. Of course the right will say that these things are no longer possible, but isn't this precisely the debate we want to have? If the alternative is coining "revolutionary" slogans that are designed to be rejected by the broad movement, which activity should serious socialists prefer?

Workers' Liberty in Australia can be contacted at PO Box 313, Leichhardt, New South Wales 2040, Australia.

Conclusions

IF THIS somewhat polemical survey of the past and present is to serve any constructive purpose, it should suggest what we should do in the future. I think the perspective of waiting for the ALP to become an outright bourgeois party is politically mistaken; if we are to lose the ALP as any sort of workers' organisation, we will be better placed to regroup if we have fought against this loss from inside the Labor Party.

However, the problems on the Australian left are not merely tactical, and joining the Labor Party is no miracle cure for these problems. In the past it has been demonstrated all too clearly that it is possible to join the Labor Party and still be a narrow sect. The wider problem is to rescue the Marxist conception of socialism as the self-liberation of the working class.

A subset of this wider problem is the need to restate the original Marxist attitude to democracy. The denunciation of parliamentary democracy as "bourgeois", without having workers' councils in existence (even as a popular idea) suggests that the "proletarian" alternative is no democracy at all. (For the Stalinists, this suggestion was the truth.) The decline of the Communist Parties was not solely due to their lack of radicalism. At times they *were* radical, but radically anti-democratic.[18] They lost the ideological battle with "bourgeois" democrats, dragging the reputation of Marxism down with them. ■

Notes

1. Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991*, Oxford University Press, 1992
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4. *The Courier Mail*, 3 May 1995
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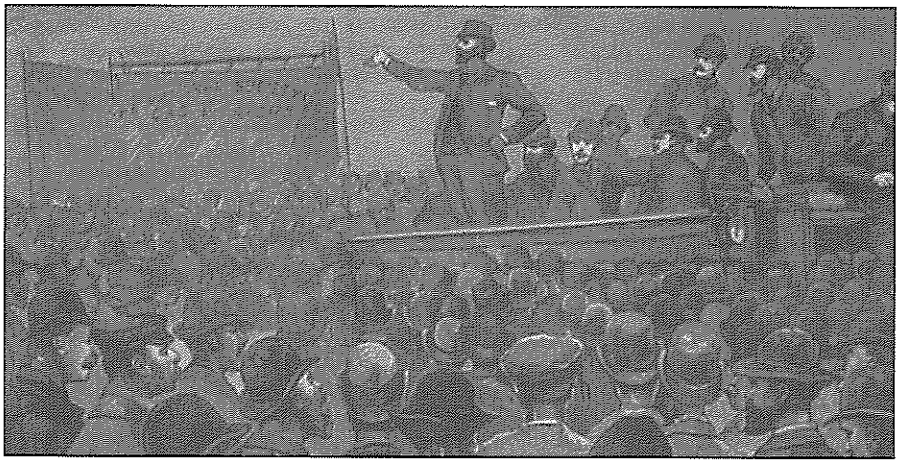
Marxists and mass workers' parties by Karl Kautsky

EVOLVING out of the trade unions, adopting a formal commitment to socialism only in 1918, two decades after its formation, the Labour Party puzzled and perplexed European Marxists. It was accepted into membership of the Socialist International in 1908 on the grounds that it fought the class struggle even though it did not "recognise" it and was independent. Karl Kautsky, the leading Marxist of the time, wrote a resolution to that effect. Lenin, while agreeing with Kautsky on the main point, criticised his resolution: Labour was *not* fully independent of bourgeois parties — electoral pacts with the Liberals did not end until 1918, it was only a "first step".

The second part of this article examines the relationship of the British Marxists of the Socalist Democratic Federation to the Labour Party in its first decade. Founded in the early 1880s, the SDF, later called the British Socialist Party, was to be the main component of the Communist Party of Great Britain, founded in 1920. Kautsky's article is of particular interest in that it discusses the relationship of small Marxist organisations to mass trade union-based Labour type organisations. In Holland the Marxists — Anton Pannokoek and Co — were then already an expelled faction of the Labour Party.



A rally of the gasworkers' union. The development of "new unionism" was an important landmark in a drive towards working-class political representation

I. Marx and the political problems of the trade unions

I HAVE no intention of solving the problem as to which is the more important, the organisation of the proletariat into one independent class party without any definite programme or the formation of a special, though indeed smaller, working-class party, but having a definite socialist programme. I do not think there is any such problem at all. There is just as little sense in such a problem as there is in asking which is the more important — the final aim or the movement. The organisation of the proletariat into an independent class party is as inseparable from the necessity of converting them to socialism as is the movement from its aim. In the long run, the one is quite inefficient without the other. Both must go hand in hand.

The problem is not which is the more important, organisation or enlightenment, but how best they can both be united. This question, however, can by no means be answered identically for all countries, the various answers depending upon the given political and social conditions, and corresponding, to some extent, with the answers to the question regarding the relations existing between the parties and the trade unions. In general, however, one can distinguish two principal types of movements for the attainment of an all-embracing Socialist class party. The European continental type, which is best illustrated at present in the German Social Democracy, and the Anglo-Saxon type, which can best be studied in England, but which is also strongly developed in North America and in Australia.

The great difference between the Anglo-Saxon world and the European continent consists, in the first place, in that the political development of the latter took place under the flag of the French revolution which commenced in 1789, whereas the bourgeois revolution in England was completed in 1688, a whole century in advance, that is. The bourgeois revolution in England was thus accomplished under less highly developed conditions, and thus could bring in its train no such tremendous upheaval in the material and spiritual life of society as did the French revolution. The subsequent political advances made by the rising classes in England since 1688 until the present time always took the form of isolated struggles for one particular object. The revolutionary classes themselves held aloof from revolutionary ideas. They were far more violent than the continentals in their action, but their ideas concerned not society as a whole, but only single occurrences.

The revolutionary classes of the European continent, whose ideas were influenced by the great revolution were, on the contrary, far more prone to consider society as a whole and thus to strive to change it as a whole; they were thus revolutionary in their ideas. Consequently they were more ready than the English to look upon the winning of political rights as a means of attaining the social revolution. Besides this difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the European continental conditions there is also this to be added: When the modern working-class movement commenced in the sixties of the nineteenth century the trade union movement on the continent found greater obstruction than the political movement: politics were everywhere forbidden to the trade union as such. At the same time the European continent was still living through a revolutionary epoch which only came to an end in 1871, an epoch in which the interests of the proletariat were entirely absorbed in political struggles and organisations. Thus, in continental Europe the political organisation of the proletariat developed before their trade union organisation; they have, therefore, the sooner formed a mass party under the socialist flag. For the propagation of socialism in general, but definite Marxian socialism, the theory of the proletarian class struggle as deduced from the study of capitalist society.

Things in England did not develop so simply. Thanks to its earlier industrial development an energetic working-class party, the Chartists were to be found there before anywhere else; but this party had no revolutionary programme. Very good socialists did, indeed, belong to it, but as a party it only fought for the universal suffrage and the ten hours' day. Its political centre of gravity lay in the industrial north of England, far from London, whereas that of socialism and of the revolutionary working-class movement in France lay in Paris, at the seat of central government. In London itself the Chartists were weak and irresolute. While the Parisian workers in February and June, 1848, show the whole of Europe by their bravery at the barricades, the Chartists could find no better weapon than a gigantic petition to Parliament, which under the circumstances gave but the impression of timidity rather than of power. During the decline of Chartism, which followed the year 1848, the trade unions, on the contrary, developed rapidly. Already in 1824 and 1825 the trade unions had won for themselves legal recognition, and during the economic development of the new Free Trade era, after 1847, they grew rapidly in strength and influence. The whole interest of the working masses was centred in the trade union movement, and a separate political party seemed quite superfluous since no obstacle hindered their political activity in England.

Under these conditions it was only possible to for a separate working-class party by amalgamating the trade unions into a common political organisation and to permeate ▸

it with the socialist spirit.

This was also the opinion of Karl Marx, who was so influenced by the English conditions that he propagated a similar development in continental Europe.

Already in his *Poverty of Philosophy*, in 1847, Marx indicated the political character of the trade union movement — "To form a coalition, is that not pursuing political ends?... In this fight (the coalition regarding wages) — a veritable civil war — all the different elements unite and prepare for the coming struggle. Once this point is reached the coalition assumes a political character" (pp. 160, 162). Still more decidedly did Marx insist upon the political significance of the trade unions in the resolution he proposed, and which was accepted by the Geneva International Congress in 1866. Among other things this resolution says: "Indispensable as are the trade unions in the guerrilla warfare between capital and labour, of still greater importance are they as an organised means of promoting the abolition of the wage system itself.

"The trade unions have so far laid too much stress upon their local and immediate struggles against capital. They have not yet fully understood their power of attacking the whole system of wage slavery and present forms of production... On that account they hold themselves too much aloof from general, social and political movements. Lately, however, they seem to have awakened to some extent to the consciousness of the great historical problem confronting them... Apart from their original aims, the trade unions must now learn to focus the organisation of the working classes for the great purpose of attaining their complete emancipation. They must therefore support every social and political movement which has this for its aim," and so on. We see, then, that what we demand from the Social Democracy, Marx pointed out as the functions of the trade unions.

Interesting also is an interview between Hamann, the secretary of the German Metal Workers' trade union, and Karl Marx, at Hanover, an account of which was given by Hamann in the Volkstaat, 1869, No. 17. (This account has been printed by Bringmann, The History of the German Carpenters' Movement, 1903, vol. i., p. 364.)

Marx said: "The trade unions should never be affiliated with or made dependent upon a political society if they are to fulfil the object for which they are formed. If this happens it means their death blow. The trade unions are the schools for socialism, the workers are there educated up to socialism by means of the incessant struggle against capitalism which is being carried on before their eyes. All political parties, be they what they may, can hold sway over the mass of the workers for only a time; the trade union, on the other hand, capture them permanently; only the trade unions are thus able to represent a real working-class party, and to form a bulwark against the power of capital. The greater mass of the workers conceive the necessity of bettering their material position whatever political party they may belong to. Once the material position of the worker has improved he can then devote himself to the better education of his children; his wife and children need not go to the factory, and he himself can pay some attention to his own mental education, he can better see to his physique. He becomes a socialist without knowing it." This quotation is only an interview, not a signed article by Marx, consequently it is possible that it does not altogether accurately represent Marx's meaning. However, it is probable that Marx saw it in print, for it appeared in the Volkstaat, and, if so, he would have corrected it had he found it to be erroneous. Thus, although we cannot vouch for its absolute accuracy, it is yet worthy of attention, and although such an attitude seems very strange to us now, it is yet readily explained by the position of affairs at that time.

Only in England and in France was there then a fairly wide working-class movement of some duration, and it was only from the experience of these movements that Marx could develop his ideas on the subject. In France he found, indeed, much socialism, but only in the form of sectarian societies. There were many socialist "schools," each swearing to the genuineness of its patent pill for the cure of all the ills of society, and each trying to rally the workers round itself. The various schools were at war with one another, and were thus instrumental in splitting the working masses rather than uniting them.

None of them had chosen as their basis the class struggle, which alone could unite the whole class. And the same was true of the political movements which appealed to the working classes. When Lassalle's movement first came into being, it also appeared to Marx as a new sect. The ignoring of the trade unions, the prominence given to the panacea of co-operative production, seemed to him entirely sectarian, and no less sectarian also was the appeal to state help. When, after Lassalle's death, the new working-class party split, he was still further confirmed in his conclusions that such a party was only the means whereby to divide, not unite, the proletariat. It thus seemed to him that to save the trade unions they must hold aloof from political organisations.

"Marx was by no means of opinion that the trade unions should be as neutral towards the Liberals and clericals as toward socialists."

There has been an attempt to conclude from this interview that Marx was in favour of the political neutrality of the trade unions, but this is quite unjustified. Marx was by no means of opinion that the trade unions should be as neutral towards the Liberals and clericals as toward socialists. He says expressly: "The trade unions are the schools for socialism... only they are about to form a real working-class party." That means, the trade unions should not be neutral toward bourgeois political parties, but should keep away from all political parties because it is they themselves who are to form the socialist working-class party, and as such they must declare war on all bourgeois parties. Thus, explicable though this attitude may be under those circumstances, further developments have shown that it is now not altogether tenable. In the first place, the German Social Democracy lost more and more of its sectarian character. It was now no longer an organisation for the attainment of state credit for co-operative production, but it was the organisation of the proletarian class struggle, which was for a long time far in advance of the trade unions. It was the "real working-class party", whose functions the trade unions, as they grew stronger, had neither the opportunity, reasons nor even legal rights to take over. On the other hand, the English trade unions have shown that their existence alone is insufficient to convert the worker to socialism "without him knowing it"; that they do not necessarily bring socialist convictions home to the worker because of "the incessant struggle against capitalism which is being carried on before their eyes." Only a scrap of this struggle is really being pursued daily, and this scrap is not even always sufficient to indicate the real meaning of the whole struggle. And under certain circumstances the trade unions might even seek to evade this struggle altogether when their benefit arrangements are endangered thereby.

While in Germany the political party has become a real working-class party, the trade unions in England have more and more lost the ability to become such a party. They have ever more separated themselves from the mass of the proletariat, thus forming an aristocracy of labour and becoming means of splitting rather than of uniting the masses. Moreover, they have always shown a tendency to political dependence on the bourgeois parties, by whom the unions and, to even a greater extent, their leaders, have been bought and duped by concessions.

So it appeared that the development of events in England proved Marx wrong. His theory of the class struggle and its practical results were mainly deduced from English conditions, and it was just in England that they seemed to be brought to an ad absurdum. But, finally, Marx is seen to be right after all.

II. The Social-Democracy and the Labour Party in England

At first, indeed, Marxism made its appearance in England in opposition to Marx, when Hyndman, Bax and the other followers of Marx's teachings founded, in 1881, the Democratic Federation, later on the Social Democratic Federation, at present the Social Democratic Party. According to the intention of its founders it was to become a workingmen's party, similar to the German Social Democratic Party. It was a product of the great crisis which began in the seventies and which introduced the cessation of England's industrial supremacy. The conditions

which gave to English capital a position of monopoly and allowed it to cede a share of its fruits to the trade unions were coming to an end. Unemployment was raging and the trade unions were declining. At the same time the antagonism between capital and labour was growing; as a consequence, the English workingmen became again susceptible to the ideas of socialism, and the Social Democratic Federation was enabled to achieve considerable success.

But strange to say, beyond a certain point it could never go in its achievements. The Social Democratic Federation thought it necessary to point out to the workingmen the insufficiency of trade unionism in order to make them realise the necessity for socialism. But this provoked the opposition of the trade unionists — that element, to wit, which constitutes a portion of the working class, and which is best capable of being organised. It was this, no doubt, which made it impossible for Engels to adopt a friendly attitude toward the Social Democratic Federation. As is known from his letters to Sorge, he judged it and its sectarian character rather severely. It is true that Marx and Engels fought against the corruption and narrow-mindedness of the majority of the English trade union officials in a similar manner, and with no less energy than the Social Democratic Federation itself, but nothing could shake their conviction that, in spite of it all, the only way to create in England a strong Social Democratic working-class party was to propagate socialism in the trade unions, to loosen the bonds between them and the bourgeois parties, and to unite them into one separate party. Finally, however, Engels did not expect much from the old trade unionists. The new unionism in England, the Knights of Labour in America, seemed to him a much better soil from which a Labour Party could spring. Experience has shown that Marx has been right after all. The English workingman, insofar as he is at all capable of being organised and of fighting, is very strongly attached to his trade union, which has become an indispensable life element to him. Whoever attacks it, or even belittles it, is his enemy. And, in fact, there is no need at all for either setting the trade unions aside or lessening their importance.

The new economic and political situation dates from the eighties, and having improved for a time during the nineties, renders the class antagonism in the new century all the more pronounced and violent. This situation can no longer be met adequately by the trade unionist methods hitherto in vogue. The methods, then, certainly should be changed, by widening the sphere of action of the trade unions, and by expanding their forms of organisations, which, at the same time, will occasion a widening of the mental horizon of their members, and morally also of their leaders. But this implies that the trade unions, so far from losing, will, on the contrary, gain in importance.

The English workingman is very strongly attached to his trade union. It is for him to such an extent the all engrossing organ of all his social and political struggles, that he requires no other, and considers any other organ superfluous. A Labour Party in England, outside the trade unions, can therefore never become a party embracing the masses. It is doomed always to be confined to a small circle, and to remain in this sense a sect.

In consequence of all this, the SDF, as well as the other socialist organisations, namely, the Fabians (1883) and the Independent Labour Party (1893), formed side by side with it, did not grow, in spite of the fact that the new situation made it an imperative necessity to create an independent workingmen's party.

If smallness and an incapability to get a hold on the masses are the essential characteristics of a sect, then these other organisations were no less sects than the SDF.

When, however, the majority of the trade unions at last made up their minds to form a common political organisation, at once a mass-party arose to which the existing socialist organisations affiliated. Thus the Labour Representation Committee was formed (1900), out of which grew the Labour Party now in existence.

"By creating this Labour Party, the path was at last entered upon... leading to the organisation of the proletariat as a class."

By creating this Labour Party, the path was at last entered upon, which Marx so long ago designated as the right one, and which proved for England at the present time the only path leading to the organisation of the proletariat as a class. And yet we need by no means declare the judgement passed by Engels on the SDF as justified in all points. The SDF committed indeed mistakes enough. Its Marxism was often enough a dogma rather than a method, and mixed up with additions quite foreign to the spirit of true Marxism. But, notwithstanding all this, the SDF has accomplished a good deal, and its mistakes can be partly explained by the difficulties it had to contend against.

The SDF desired to become a party like the German SDF; for this, however, the condition in England was not ripe. Failure was bound to attend these endeavours in spite of the most self-sacrificing work. It only blocked the way to the formation of a real mass party.

But this by no means implies a condemnation of the SDF; it only means that the tasks and functions of this organisation lay elsewhere than in the direction in which the SDF itself sought them.

It is, for instance, a mistake to think that the principal thing is to organise an independent working-class party, and that once such a party is in existence the logic of events will force it to adopt socialism. One is apt to forget that socialism, which is alone capable of keeping the proletariat permanently together, and which alone can lead them to victory — namely, the socialism of the class struggle — is not a thing which lies on the surface. No doubt their very class position enables the proletarians to grasp socialism more readily than the bourgeois elements can do; true, also, that an independent class party furnishes them with the best basis for it. But for all that, a good deal of theoretical knowledge is indispensable in order to attain a deeper comprehension of the capitalist mode of production, and of the nature of the class relations begotten by that mode of production as well as of the historical tasks imposed upon these classes. Without such a comprehension it is simply impossible to create a really independent permanent class party of the proletariat, independent not only in the essence that the workers are organised separately, but that their mode of thinking is distinct from that of the bourgeoisie.

We are present rather inclined to undervalue the importance of spreading socialist comprehension among the mass movement, because it rests upon propositions which have now become familiar to us for a generation — and are now, by means of a widely-spread press, the common property of wide circles, so that they appear to us true enough. In a country, however, where you just start teaching these propositions, they are by no means so readily grasped. The logic of events will not of itself bring them into the brains of the proletariat, although it will make their brains susceptible to them.

The striving, therefore, for the organisation of an independent mass and class party is not sufficient. No less important is the socialist enlightenment. If the SDF failed in the former task, it achieved all the more in the domain of the latter. By its socialist agitation it prepared the soil upon which the Labour Party could arise, and the socialist criticism and propaganda which it still pursues is indispensable even now, when the Labour Party already exists, in order to imbue that Party with a socialist spirit and to bring its actions for occasional and partial ends into accord with the lasting aims of the struggle of the proletariat for its complete emancipation. Looked at in this light, the SDF acquires an importance very different from what it seems to possess when merely compared to the continental social-democratic parties, which being mass parties are the political representatives of the whole proletariat engaged in its class struggle.

The task of the SDF is aptly stated in what the *Communist Manifesto* says in 1847 of the Communist League: "They are practically the most resolute and active portion of the working-class party; theoretically they are in advance of the rest of the proletariat, inasmuch as they possess a clear insight into the conditions, the progress, and the general results of the proletarian movement."

It is the endeavour of the Marxists of all countries to be worthy of this position. The peculiarity of England consists in the fact that the conditions there render it necessary for the Marxists to form a separate, solid organisation, which in countries where mass parties, with a social democratic i.e., Marxist — programme exist, would be

superfluous — nay, detrimental — inasmuch as it would only split up the party.

It is unavoidable, however, in a country where the trade unions form the Labour Party, at least so long as this Party does not accept a social democratic programme, and has not yet developed a permanent social democratic policy.

We must be very much on our guard not to look at the English conditions through continental spectacles, and not to think that the Labour Party and the SDP are two parties competing with one another, the one excluding the other. Rather are they to be considered as two organs with different functions to which one is the complement of the other, and of which one can function but imperfectly without the other.

One should not imagine that the relation of the Labour Party to the SDP in England is similar to that existing at the present moment between the Marxists and the Social Democratic Labour Party in Holland. The formation of the Labour Party was cordially welcomed in England by the social democrats. For a certain time the SDP formed a constituent part of the Labour Party, and afterward left it, not because it wanted the Labour Party to cease to exist, but because it did not agree with the policy of the latter.*

Where two independent organisations exist side by side conflicts between them are always possible, however much the attainment of their common ends makes it desirable for them to work in cordial agreement.

But it is still possible for the SDP to join the Labour Party, and resolutions to that effect, backed by considerable minorities, are again and again proposed at the SDP conferences. The British Labour Party has always desired this union. Unlike the Labour Party in Holland, it does not exclude Marxists, and yet it is contended that it is unworthy of being represented in the International Socialist Bureau side by side with the SDP.

Although the antagonism between the social democracy and the Labour Party is so great at present, the SDP itself has altogether given up the hope of becoming a mass party after the style of the German Social Democracy, recognising as it does that in England the political organisation of the proletariat, as a class, can only be attained by the inclusion the trade unions.

Since, under the given conditions in England, the functions of the SDP, just as those of the other socialist parties, are entirely different from those of the continental socialist organisations, injustice is done to it when one compares it to these organisations, and depreciates it on account of its small membership, and splits. The importance of the SDP does not consist in its electoral activity, the number of its voters, its parliamentary representation — these are the spheres dominated by the Labour Party — but in its propaganda work. The Labour Party has no press, has no literature, and its propagandist activist in the form of public meetings is also practically nil.

What is done at all in this sphere in England, is done only by the socialist parties. The Labour Party represents a tremendous ship, but the socialist organisations are the compass and rudder of this ship — without these it would be tossed hither and thither by the waves.

What the relationship between the SDP and Labour Party should be depends upon various conditions. The Labour Party is far from being an ideal party, and I have no such liking for its politics as has Comrade Beer.

The criticisms of the SDP may, in many points, be rather overdrawn; still, the Labour Party in its present stage can easily sink into confusion and impotence when the socialism of the trade union masses consists rather in the form of a merely vague desire than in that of a clear understanding of its principles; when the Parliamentary and trade union leaders of the Labour Party, still largely influenced by the deeply-rooted traditions of co-operation with the Liberals, are by no means independent, all their ideas being saturated with bourgeois conceptions of philanthropy, of ethics, of economics and of democracy.

Only by means of the most energetic Marxist propaganda among the masses and the most determined criticism of the errors and entanglements of the leaders can the Party be made into a powerful and trustworthy organ, in the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.

It is, of course, open to doubt as to which is the best from of carrying on this propaganda and criticism; particularly as to whether it would be more effective were the Social Democratic Party inside or outside the Labour Party. In general, the former is to be preferred, for when one criticises an organisation from the outside the critic too often appears as an enemy who would gladly wreck it. When, however, it is criticised by a member, the very membership shows that the critic has an interest in its existence, and only opposes its immediate actions in order to make it all the more powerful.

The English worker now considers the entrance of the trade unions into the Labour Party as essential, as he formerly considered the trade unions themselves, and as formerly the agitation of the Social Democratic Party among the English workers was the more difficult because they carried it on outside the unions, so it is to be feared that it is now committing the same mistake in attempting to criticise the Labour Party from without.

Nothing benefited the Social Democratic Party more than that so many of its members could propagate socialism as trade unionists among the trade unions. Now too, many of its members are also members of the Labour Party in virtue of their trade unions, and as such they take part in the congresses of the Labour Party. Why, therefore, awaken the idea that the Social Democratic Party sees a rival in the Labour Party, which it has to destroy, instead of trying to make it better and more effective? It will be said, on the other hand, that the Labour Party refuses to have a programme to which its candidates must adhere. This is certainly a great mistake, but it is no reason for keeping away from the Labour Party. Were the Labour Party so far advanced as to adopt a socialist programme, the question as to the affiliation of the Social Democratic Party as a party would no longer arise: the question would rather be as to whether the Social Democratic Party had not attained its purpose, and should not sink its identity in that of the Labour Party.

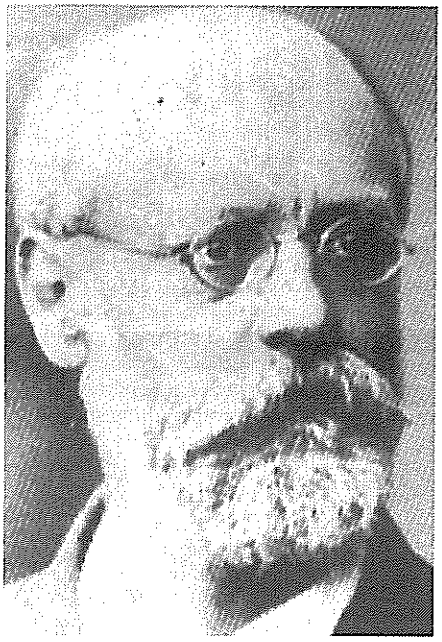
Unfortunately, we have not yet reached this stage; the social democracy as a separate body is still indispensable for the education of the Labour Party, but this could best be done as a member of the Labour Party. So long as this work of education is not made impossible to the Social Democratic Party, so long ought it not to stand outside the Labour Party. Whether this is just now impossible it is difficult for the stranger to decide. A very important role is played by the "imponderables," the importance of which can only be more or less accurately estimated by one who lives in the country and works among the people. Within the different socialist parties there is at present a movement aiming at their unification in one form or other. Whatever form the socialist organisation may take it will still remain for a long time the fact that the socialist organisations and the Labour Party have different functions, each being incomplete without the other: that under present conditions both are indispensable in the struggle for the emancipation of the English proletariat, that one can very well defend both. The Socialist International itself has very reason to use every opportunity of drawing the Labour Party into closer contact with international socialism, thus subjecting it more and more to socialist influence. There is no alternative here. It is not a question as to whether we prefer a small, resolute Social Democratic Party to a big class party with no definite programme, indeed, but still independent of all bourgeois parties: the fact is that both form one whole under the given conditions in England. A socialist organisation of the Social Democratic Party type is an insufficient by itself as the Labour Party. We must encourage both. We must further the spread and growth of the social democracy as much as the propagation of socialism in the Labour Party.

In North America things are somewhat different from those obtaining in England. Still, there is some similarity and it is possible that there, too, the long-wished-for mass party of the proletariat may be formed into an independent political party in the very near future by the constitution of the American Federation of Labour. Probably this new party will not be a definitely socialist one at first, and the Socialist Party will, therefore, have to exist side by side with it until the trade union party has been fully won for social democracy. As in England, so in the United States. The chief sphere of the Labour Party will be parliamentary and electoral, while that of the social democracy will be theoretical and propagandist.

Attempts have been made in this direction, and we must be prepared one fine day to see the rise of such a Labour Party side by side with the Socialist Party in the United States, and demanding admission to the International.

And here I am of opinion that what holds for the British will also hold for the American Labour Party.

It would, however, be quite a different



Karl Kautsky

question if such a party were formed on the European continent.

Here the new Labour Party would no longer be supplementary to the present socialist parties, but it would be antagonistic. It could only exist and thrive by the suppression of the other. It would not be, as in the Anglo-Saxon world, the only form in which the mass of the proletariat could unite into an independent party. The Social Democratic Parties are already such mass parties, and the new Labour Party would consequently enter the field as a wedge in order to disperse the mass organisation and to split the proletariat.

Finally, the present form of the English Labour Party is only a transition stage which will sooner or later develop into a class conscious Social Democratic Labour Party, with a definite socialist programme. With us this object lesson has been attained, and, consequently, the formation of a purely Labour Party is merely an attempt to crush out an already existing higher form, by a more reactionary party.

In short, although superficially similar in organisation, such a Labour Party on the continent is just the opposite to what it is in England under the given historical conditions. He who judges both these Labour Parties, isolated from their surroundings, may think we ought to repudiate the Anglo-Saxon, because the European continental parties must be fought with all the means at our disposal. In their historical connection, however, the Labour Parties assume quite different characters. What we attack here we must recognise there, indeed, we must joyously welcome it, not, of course, as an ideal organisation, but merely as the previous step to it.

The ideal organisation is the unification of all proletarian parties, the political societies, the trade unions, the co-operatives, as equal members, not of a Labour Party without a programme, as is at the present the case in England, but of a class conscious, all-embracing social democracy.

A new racial "science"?

Dan Katz reviews *The Race Gallery — The Return Of Racial Science* by Marek Kohn, Jonathan Cape, £17.99

THE MID-70S: a feature of my third-year O-level Geography course was the idea of "race". Mr Shortland-Ball said that there were three races — Mongoloid, Caucasoid and Negroid. He said that he was glad there were no black people in the class as he found it embarrassing to discuss the issue in front of them. Given what he then said, I'm not surprised.

The general picture of the last 20 years is that this sort of rubbish has gone the same way as racist strikes against black workers and the explicitly racist "humour" of the '70s sit-com variety.

Marek Kohn's book discusses the effect of the concept of "race" within the various branches of contemporary science. He holds his book together with a view of why "racial science" has been squeezed out. He aims to explain why, for example, GCSE Geography teachers in 1995 do not tell kids that a large part of humanity are characterised by "frizzy hair and thick lips."

Kohn's "big idea" is worth considering: "The point of departure for the *Race Gallery* is the fact that scientific anti-racism is an element of the post-war order." The recent message has been that, "in scientific terms, race is of minimal importance, if not a delusion altogether... Over the last 20 years, the line has hardened: the concept of race has largely vanished from textbooks, except to be labelled obsolete. A century ago, equivalent books would have spoken of little else."

So Mr S-B, stuffed and propped up in a display case, could well be an exhibit in Marek Kohn's Race Gallery — hopefully the last of a backward species.

Kohn's worry, however, is this — if scientific anti-racism is the product of a disgust with the Nazis scientifically-justified genocide, the stability brought by the post-war boom and social-democratic Welfare Statism, then what does the future hold? Will the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, Eastern European economic chaos, the destruction of the American inner city and the ripping to pieces of welfare provision create a climate which could lead to a return of scientifically justified racism?

For example, "if the urban crisis in America continues to worsen, white American suspicions that blacks are inherently criminal or uneducable will grow. Such ideas will increasingly obtrude into mainstream political discourse. As they do, racial science will return as an ideology to legitimate these prejudices, and to justify the proposition that money spent on African-Americans is money wasted."

This is the context for the publication last year of Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's notorious book, *The Bell Curve*, in which the authors argue that America is increasingly stratified by intellectual ability, that "success and failure in the American economy are increasingly a matter of the genes that people inherit" and that black people as a group are intellectually inferior to whites. Murray's political conclusions are to abolish welfare, build orphanages and end affirmative action.

Kohn believes that *The Bell Curve* could be the beginning of a new wave of racial science. And he states: "One of the most important messages of this book is that a revival of racial science remains possible despite the rejection of traditional scientific concepts of race. The old racial categories were just the suitcases, not the whole of the baggage. What mattered were the contents, and these may find new niches within any of the scientific fields associated with the division of humankind into groups."

And yet Kohn — quite rightly — backs off from rejecting discussion about human difference: "Race is a fallacy, but human uniformity is a non sequitur." He argues for open debate, and confrontation with the new theories of racial science, as the way for anti-racist science to renew itself.

And he goes further — quite bluntly — "Historians have argued convincingly that scientific racism arose under particular historical conditions, reflecting the world-view of Northern Europeans who enjoyed political and economic dominance over the darker skinned peoples of the world. It was self-serving, self-centred, and used to justify great cruelty and oppression — but that does not necessarily mean it was wrong. If a scientific argument is shown to be rooted in a racist tradition, it should be regarded as dubious, but can not be deemed to be disproven. Refutation can only take place according to science's internal procedures." In other words, we have to be able to argue our case. Shouting "racist" at theories which we find politically offensive — like Herrnstein and Murray's — is not enough.

I've no doubt this is also right. A couple of years after Mr Shortland-Ball's Geography — and now a committed anti-racist — I got into the following argument: "If it could be shown conclusively that black people were less intelligent than whites, I would not accept it, for political reasons." The reply that utterly destroyed me was: "Well, you're an idiot then." Fine — rationality must rule. It is with reason that we must defeat the racists.

The "IS-SWP tradition" 8

The experience of the left

TO help traumatised ex-members of the IS-SWP get their political bearings and to establish before younger readers its real history, we continue our symposium on the "IS/SWP tradition".

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

Beyond international socialism

By Martin Shaw*

THE INTERNATIONAL Socialism group (IS) was the most important independent socialist current in Britain in the 1960s and early 1970s, and it could just conceivably have contributed to the formation of a serious left-wing alternative to the Labour Party, instead of leading to the formation of a small party-sect operating on the fringes of the labour movement and the new social movements.

I provided in *The Socialist Register* 1978 a detailed critique of the development of IS between 1965 and 1975, which covered what I still regard as the period in which it had the greatest significance. This critique was based on the assumption that an open, non-sectarian Marxist alternative could have been created in this period. I argued that IS squandered this potential for what amounted to three main sets of reasons.

Politically, IS was too workerist and failed to engage constructively with movements like the students' and women's movements which were not organised on a specifically class basis, or with specifically political issues like parliament, democracy and nationality.

Organisationally, its leadership handled the transition from small group to mini-party badly, with illusions of grandeur as well as paranoia about threats, and an increasingly cavalier attitude to internal democracy.

Theoretically, IS had both the strengths and weaknesses of a Marxist fundamentalism which emphasised economy and class: its rejection of the contortions of orthodox Trotskyism (the nonsense of "degenerated workers' state") provided an insufficient foundation for a contemporary politics, and its leaders' re-embrace of Leninism in the late 1960s provided unfortunate cover for their anti-democratic tendencies.

I left IS over these differences amidst the usual internal conflicts, in early 1977 (just after it proclaimed itself the Socialist Workers' Party). Many others had left the organisation, sharing much of the above cause, in the previous two years, including a large body, the IS Opposition, who formed a new group called the Workers' League. I kept my distance from this group, as did a number of other critics; in my case it was because I felt that it shared the workerism which I saw as a major fault of IS. I tried shortly afterwards to regroup the ex-IS forces in a loosely-based International Socialist Alliance, and to ally them in a wider grouping of the 'open' revolutionary left called Socialist Unity, centred on the then International Marxist Group (in its Socialist Challenge phase under Tariq Ali) and also incorporating *Big Flame*. Socialist Unity mounted a weak electoral challenge in 1979, underestimating the Thatcherite threat, and disintegrated rapidly in the aftermath of the election. I had foreseen the problem, opting out of my Hull candidacy for Socialist Unity, and rejoined the Labour Party, individually, later in 1979.

The critique of IS outlined above seems to me still valid, but I would now cast it in a broader frame. There was a huge disillusion with Labourism in the depths of Wilson's government, which, allied to the winds of cultural change blowing through the mid and late sixties, might have made it possible for a small 'new left' party to emerge, occupying some of the space briefly represented by the Green Party in the later 1980s and occupied in other countries by leftist parties ranging from the Parti Socialist Unifié in the early 1970s to the German Greens from the 1980s and the various left socialist parties in Scandinavia and the Netherlands.

Such a party, if it had existed, would have had to be what Leninists call a 'centrist' party; it would have had to be open, broad, loose, embracing the spirit of the times, and not centred on Marxism in general or a particular sort of Marxism. Marxism would inevitably have been a part of it, but not the sole or main contributing strand. IS, with the modest, 'non-sectarian' ethos it had in the early and mid-sixties, might have been an important part of it; IS as it increasingly became after 1968, with the cult of 'the party' could not. The mistake of IS's big turn in 1968 was not to raise the idea of a party independent of Labour, but to mistake itself for it and especially to think that such a party could be built on essentially Leninist lines.

Clearly, given the political ferment of the late 1960s, it is not easy to see how an open 'new left' party could have been put together in practice. It would probably have collapsed in confusion and disagreement. Still more, it may well have been sidelined, as IS began to be, by the reinvigoration of the Labour left during the Heath government of the 1970s, and still more in the years after Thatcher's election in 1979. It would have needed a broader agenda to recruit, for example, those who turned to the Communist Party in its final Euro-communist phase and to Bennism and the politics of the GLC, if it was to have survived the politically changed times.

Any party to the left of Labour faces, of course, the huge obstacle of the unreconstructed British electoral system, which condemns even a party with wide appeal beyond the left, like the Greens, to non-representation and marginality. In the face of this obstacle, it is unlikely that a 'new left' party would have survived and grown through to the 1990s.

The SWP, of course, has survived, like Militant with its more devious undercover course: but only at the price of a different sort of irrelevance. The only party political space for the serious left since the 1970s has been with Labour (although of course there are many movements and campaigning organisations which offer important political outlets).

The conclusion I draw from the IS experience is, however, that serious politics cannot start either from its (or the SWP's) version of Marxism, or any other Marxism which attempts to correct that doctrine. The whole idea of basing politics on a theoretical tradition is arid and there is now enormous experience, of which the IS/SWP case is only a small part, of how wasteful and disorienting this is. The challenges of the post-Cold War world cannot be answered with the theoretical categories of the opposition to the Cold War, still less with those of the world of 1917.

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The left and Max Shachtman, part 2

Post-Trotsky Trotskyism

Two distinct currents emerged after 1940 from the Trotskyism of Trotsky. One was the "official", "orthodox" Trotskyism of James Cannon, Ernest 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. This is the second part of Ernest Haberkern's examination of Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century' by Peter Drucker. (Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1994 £14.95).

Shachtman and his comrades were outspoken opponents of the Korean War

James P Cannon as theoretician of bureaucratic collectivism

WITHOUT doubt, the politically critical issue for Drucker, the issue around which the book is organised, is Shachtman's treatment of the Stalinist movement outside Russia. The last chapter of the first part, titled "The Third Camp", and the whole of the second part constitute a debate between Drucker and Shachtman over the question. Drucker never quite states in so many words his belief that it was Shachtman's mistake on this matter that provided the ideological bridge to a pro-west position. He lets the story tell itself — by carefully editing it.

In these sections of the book, Drucker's tendency to describe as Shachtman's original contribution what was in reality first proposed by others (in this case again beginning with Joseph Carter) and initially opposed by Shachtman, leads him outside the boundaries of historical truth. It is not that he fails to mention the facts which contradict his portrait. He mentions (although sometimes only in reference notes) the debates and articles in which Carter, Draper and Geltman criticised Shachtman when he treated the Stalinist parties in France, Yugoslavia, China and Indochina as if they were basically reformist working-class parties or national liberation movements. It is just that in his extensive commentary and analysis, Drucker ignores this evidence and consistently describes Shachtman as generating the basic politics of the Third Camp unaided out of his own head.

To anticipate the concluding section of this review, the only explanation is that Drucker agrees with Shachtman's original analysis. Shachtman's capitulation to the "theoreticians of bureaucratic collectivism" is his fall from grace. But how do you square that hypothesis with the fact that the real originators of the Third Camp view did not follow Shachtman into the abyss? Joseph Carter simply dropped out of politics for personal reasons (nothing mysterious, no gossip, he just pooped out); Emanuel Geltman, although he left the Trotskyist movement before Shachtman did, devolved like the rest of the *Dissent* editorial board into a garden variety, semi-socialist, left-liberal who, of course, opposed the Vietnam War (and the Bay of Pigs invasion); Hal Draper, who in the late '40s and early '50s wrote most of the theoretical articles for the Independent Socialist League, the major body of work on bureaucratic collectivism and the Third Camp, was Shachtman's major adversary up until the time when Shachtman's views were no longer of any interest to anyone on the left. If Third Camp politics tended to lead one to support American imperialist democracy against Stalinist totalitarianism then it should have been Draper, not Shachtman, who fell. The facts just don't fit the script Drucker wants to write.

What was the fight all about? Drucker at one point accuses Shachtman of fearing "a Stalinist victory in the United States and the consequent destruction of working-class organisations, freedoms and living standards." Again, there is no reference given and I know of no place where Shachtman or anyone else made such a claim. This is a straw man. The position Shachtman was argued into by Carter, Draper and Geltman was that the Stalinist parties represented an anti-working class, anti-democratic movement which was also anti-capitalist. It was the politics of the Stalinist parties, not their prospects in any given country, that made it necessary to treat them as political opponents rather than as somewhat unreliable comrades in the struggle for human freedom.

What really disturbed the opponents of the Third Camp, and disturbs Peter Drucker today, was the practical conclusion they drew from their theory. Inside the labour movement political collaboration with the Communist Party or its sympathisers was impossible. Unlike even the most conservative or bureaucratic union leader they were not fundamentally loyal to the movement.

The "Shachtmanites", however, were not the first to make this point inside the Trotskyist movement. One of the clearest expositions of this basic conclusion from the "theory of bureaucratic collectivism" was given in 1940 by James P Cannon. Drucker reports the incident but not in connection with his exposition of the "Shachtmanites" union politics.[1] ▶

* 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 Haberkern and Arthur Lipow. Currently, comrade Haberkern is completing the fifth volume of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*.

In 1940, Trotsky urged his American followers organised as the Socialist Workers' Party to propose an alliance with the Stalinists on the basis of their common opposition to "imperialism." This was a serious question. The SWP in 1940 had significant support in the Teamsters (they ran its most important section), in the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and elsewhere; they were not an isolated sect whose views were of no interest to anyone but themselves.

The difficulty was that the Communist Party's "anti-imperialist" rhetoric in 1940-41 was an all too transparent cover for its pro-war position. If Lenin had been confused about his "defeat" slogan in 1914 and Shachtman was unravelling politically when he picked it up in 1951, the Communists in 1940 were clear about what they were doing. They had no problem with fomenting strikes in crucial industries, such as aircraft, because in 1940 they were actively supporting the other side just as Lenin had been for supporting Japan in 1904.

And the best trade unionists were horrified. They instinctively supported Roosevelt's tentative steps towards war and his aid to beleaguered Britain. To explain to the good people in the unions that civil liberties and trade union gains could not be sacrificed to the "war effort", that neither British nor American imperialism were fighting for anything but their own imperial ends, was an uphill battle. It required skill, tact, and above all honesty. It would be suicide to ally yourself in any way with people who were using "anti-imperialist" rhetoric demagogically in aid of the despised Berlin-Moscow axis.

Cannon defended his refusal to support Trotsky's foolish proposal with essentially the same arguments Carter, Draper, Geltman and, eventually, Shachtman were to use in the Cold War. He argued that "even the conservative labor fakers" were to be supported against the Stalinists. Why? Because they, from self-interest, were loyal to the unions. Cannon was not questioning the personal loyalty of the CPers — anymore than the "Shachtmanites" did later. Their self-sacrifice and devotion were well known. The question was "to what were they loyal, in what cause were they sacrificing themselves?"

Trotsky backed down. He shifted his ground and criticised the American Trotskyists for their failure to confront the prejudices of the pro-New Deal unionists. It was, of course, these left-leaning activists and officials that really concerned SWPers in the union movement, not the "conservative fakers." The discussion then turned to a practical discussion of how to accomplish the difficult task of explaining anti-war and anti-Roosevelt politics to left and liberal unionists.

Exaggerations about "conservative labor fakers" aside, Cannon had come to the same conclusion as the "theoreticians of bureaucratic collectivism" not by theorising but by following the instincts of a serious, honest, loyal trade unionist of long standing. Those instincts served him, in this instance, better than Trotsky's theorising.

To the right?

IN his penultimate chapter, which he titles "To the Right", Drucker paints a portrait of Max Shachtman in the 1950s as a man demoralised, used up, and drifting to the right. He implies, although he does not say openly, that Shachtman's acceptance of the proposition that the Stalinist parties represented a social and political force at once reactionary and anti-capitalist was responsible for his political and personal collapse. And Shachtman, given Drucker's organisational views, was the ISL. Drucker, therefore, simply ignores the ISL in this period. The history is reduced to a silly tale of how Shachtman won over a new generation of young civil rights activists by his personal charm. Politics had nothing to do with it.

"However confused Shachtman's theoretical position may have become in the early '50s it did not prevent him from touring the country as an articulate and passionate defender of civil liberties and opponent of American imperialism."

But Shachtman was not the ISL. And its activities in this period were not confined to the civil rights movement whose activists did have a special relationship with Shachtman — for political not personal reasons.[2] The ISL and its youth affiliates were also the most influential political tendency in the civil rights and peace movements at this time as well.

Drucker acknowledges that in World War II the WP filled a political vacuum. He fails to recognise that the same was true in the Cold War period too. And for the same reason. Their politics addressed issues that others could only hope to avoid. In the trade unions and in liberal political circles, the ISL provided the only significant opposition to McCarthyism, the arms race, and, especially, the Korean War.

Of course, the Communist Party and its supporters also protested the politics of the Cold War. And, at least up until 1956, they were the largest tendency on the left by far. But they were also obviously partisans of the other side. Given what they were apologising for they suffered the same degree of isolation among honest trade unionists and left-liberals as they had during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact. And for the same good reasons. People who could have been expected to leap to their defence held back not only out of fear of persecution but out of an inability to defend their politics. By opposing American imperialism while remaining silent on the crimes of the other side the Stalinists and the Fourth Internationalists who trailed along after them simply took themselves out of the game. I suspect that Peter Drucker, as a member of the Fourth International, finds this fact hard to face up to. But as an historian he cannot avoid dealing with it.

The ISLers, and the pacifists and left socialists who increasingly looked to them for political ideas, became the centre around which radicals gathered. It was because they filled this political vacuum that a new generation of radical activists in the civil rights movements and the peace and civil liberties movements were attracted to them.

In the early 1950s, the entire youth movement of the Socialist Party (regularly called by itself and others the Socialist Party of Norman Thomas) joined the ISL. They joined because it alone on the anti-Stalinist left stood up against the Korean War. Today that sounds easy. After the fiasco in Indochina, cold-war liberalism went into decline. In the 1950s, however, the best elements in the trade union movement and in American liberalism supported the war even as they denounced the "excesses" of McCarthyism.

And Max Shachtman was one of the most prominent spokesmen of the ISL in this period. Whatever political doubts he may have entertained, however confused his theoretical position may have become, neither prevented him from touring the country, speaking to unionists, civil libertarians, liberals, and students as an articulate and passionate defender of civil liberties and opponent of American imperialism. The shock which, as Drucker reports, greeted Shachtman's open break with his past, his support of the Bay of Pigs invasion, would not be understandable if he had not been up until then one of the most indefatigable and brilliant expounders of Third Camp politics.

Drucker implies that Shachtman adopted his new line on the nature of the Communist Parties in 1949 because he wished to accommodate himself to the McCarthyite purge of the Communists in the CIO. In particular, Drucker implies that Shachtman did this because he feared defence of the Communists' rights would jeopardise the ISL activists in the UAW who supported the Reuther Caucus. But he does not mention that those ISLers who did not want to support Reuther shared the same view of the Communist Party and its role. And, in fact, the ISL newspaper, which was widely circulated among UAW members, continued to denounce the witch-hunt in the unions and Reuther's part in it. Just because the ISL thought that the Reuther caucus was the better choice on trade union issues and the Communists disloyal to the working class and the unions did not mean that its members concealed their views. In fact, they argued that the expulsion of the Communists from the union and their removal

Max Shachtman

from office by bureaucratic means would weaken the union and the Reuther caucus itself.

Drucker does not quite come out and say that Shachtman and the ISL after 1949 changed their line and supported the expulsion of Communists. He does not say that because as Richard Nixon once said "that would be a lie." But he does suppress the whole history of the ISL's leading role in the fight against McCarthyism long after they adopted their 1949 position on the nature of the Stalinist movement.

Reactionary anti-capitalism

THE examples I have given here could be multiplied. Without going into detail (which would take a book twice as long as the one being reviewed) I can only mention a few more. Drucker's treatment of the "Shachtmanites" on "Leninism", for example, which raises an extremely important question of contemporary relevance, is also largely unsubstantiated. He has Shachtman and "other Independent Socialist leaders" abandoning the Leninist touchstone "that revolution was necessary even in post-war capitalist democracies like the United States."[3] The "other leaders" are unnamed and no reference is given. This comes pretty close to slander.

Lenin himself has grounds for legal action. At one point, Drucker repeats the standard bourgeois academic caricature of "Leninism" as the doctrine that socialism has to be brought to the workers by an elite "vanguard" of intellectuals.[4] Lenin denounced this tendentious distortion of his use of a quote by Karl Kautsky almost as soon as it was made. It's true that this particular canard is so ingrained in the popular consciousness that it will take a major intellectual campaign involving several hundred volumes of research by socialists to eradicate it. But do socialists have to reinforce this kind of disinformation?

The basic problem with this political biography, however, is more fundamental. What the Trotskyist movement in the '40s and '50s faced was the rise of a mass, popular, anti-capitalist movement that was also reactionary. A movement hostile to democracy, the legacy of the bourgeois revolution and bourgeois liberalism, and, above all, hostile to the organised working class. Stalinism forced the Trotskyist movement, and finally everybody else, to face this phenomenon. But Stalinism was only one manifestation of the phenomenon and its collapse, or partial collapse, does not eliminate the phenomenon itself.

In 1968, Hal Draper published a pamphlet, *The Two Souls of Socialism*, that looked at the origins of the socialist movement from this perspective. Far from being unique or unusual or peculiar to Stalinism, the concept of socialism as an autocratic utopia brought from above to a more or less grateful people was the dominant concept in the movement. From this point of view Stalinism, especially in its Asian varieties, has turned out to be the greatest utopian experiment in history.

Marx and Engels were peculiar in their notion of socialism as a movement by the people organised to win freedom for themselves. They were the ones who were out of step. That their socialism was widely, if superficially, adopted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a tribute to the inherent attractiveness of the idea and the growing self-confidence of the organised working class.

The widespread repudiation of Marxism either openly or through reinterpretation is, in turn, a function of the demoralisation and disorganisation of the working class brought about by two world wars and the economic, political and social disasters that accompanied and followed them. It is this relative weakness of the working class combined with the continuing hatred of the overwhelming majority of the world's people for capitalism that has given a new lease on life to the reactionary anti-capitalism that permeates the history of the socialist movement.

It was just this spectre of a reactionary anti-capitalist movement that haunted Shachtman, as it haunted Trotsky, and continues, apparently, to haunt Drucker. For all three the fear is that the existence of such a social alternative means that the working class has no political future. Whatever the logic behind such a view, it is clear that the fear is accentuated when the working class is weakened or temporarily defeated. The choice then seems to be: support "democracy" even in its attenuated form under modern capitalism or throw in your lot with the bureaucracy in the hopes that the "progressive" dynamic behind collectivised property will eventually transform the system.

In both cases the great danger is that the working class, which you have now decided is not capable of a really independent politics, will in its blind struggle for "more" weaken the side which you have determined is the only hope. And you will be the one who has to oppose the people fighting the system you have chosen as the lesser evil.

The history of the Trotskyist movement since 1940 is the history of people who have tried first one of these choices and then the other.

Trotsky, and Shachtman for a long time, tried to avoid this dilemma by insisting that Stalinism was a peculiarly Russian system. It was an historical accident. It would have to disappear.

Drucker would like to persuade himself that they were right. That is why he defends the Shachtman of 1940 and tries to fix the blame for Shachtman's lamentable end on his opponents who did not end up as apologists for imperialism. It isn't logical, it doesn't fit the facts and that's why the book ultimately fails. But frightened people aren't logical. They grasp at straws.

The left today would like to forget about Stalinism. It was a bad dream. Or, as we Americans say, "that's history!" Why waste your breath arguing with the surprisingly large number of people who see hope in the Red-Brown coalition in Russia, or Fidel's Cuba, or even the "hard-liners" in China who resist the spread of wage-slavery by defending slavery without unnecessary modifiers? Stalinism, for good or ill, has been defeated by triumphant capitalism. Let's concentrate on the real enemy.

For a very short period after the collapse of the Soviet Union such arguments had some force. But the predictions of a stable, prosperous, liberal, eternal, capitalist, New World Order have proved as reliable as the economic projections of Stalinist central planners. The social forces that created Stalinism and fascism haven't stopped operating even if neither Stalinism nor fascism are likely to return in the same form. The left cannot pretend that the world has reverted to 1900.

As Trotsky and Shachtman at their best realised and argued, so long as the working class does not provide an independent political choice we face a bleak future. That can be taken either as a counsel of despair or a call to action. ■

Notes

1. It is interesting to note here that Drucker completely passes over a very important episode in this development; Shachtman's advocacy of American military intervention in Hungary in 1956. It was an important turning point in the debate. It is another instance of Drucker's curious "softness" when it comes to Shachtman's renegacy. But is there also a political problem?

It is easy enough to decry Shachtman's support of American imperialism when it intervened on the side of the bad guys. As it did in Vietnam or Cuba. But how do you deal with the problem when American imperialism has the opportunity to intervene on behalf of the good guys?

I suspect Drucker isn't sure himself how to answer that question.

2. MSAHL, p.272

3. The political relationship was based on Shachtman's belief that the Democratic Party could be re-aligned through the Civil Rights movement. The idea was attractive to civil rights activists but not to people in the peace movement. In my opinion as a participant in the Socialist Party in the early '60s, this was the bridge to the right not simply for Shachtman but for a whole wing of the socialist and, more importantly, civil rights activists. The conflict over Vietnam threatened to split the Democratic Party not realign it. And that prospect frightened civil rights activists who had never heard of Trotsky or the "theory of bureaucratic collectivism." To pursue this question further would lead to a book-length digression of "What happened to the Civil Rights movement and the New Left?"

4. Ibid., p.118.

Where is Labour going?

By John Nicholson

OVER a number of years the Labour Party has moved steadily to the right, following the Tories in every aspect of policy. Over the last 12 months this process has accelerated. The Labour Party has abandoned all commitment to common ownership and has effectively removed all methods of challenging this new direction, by structural changes within the Party, removing membership rights and reducing the whole Party to a leadership support group. The prospect has been openly raised of a Lib-Lab pact, before the next general election, in order to keep any parliamentary left Labour presence securely marginalised. Both Liberal Democrat and Labour Parliamentary Parties are competing to gain Tory defectors, in an attempt to raise their respective negotiating stakes before the deal is done.

These developments take place in a context of relentlessly increasing attacks by the Tories on the NHS and Welfare State, as well as cuts in benefits and education, scapegoating of black people and single mothers, continued anti-trade union laws and practices. An opposition party is needed which tackles the Tories' overall system, not simply "following" it into "power", and which campaigns more widely than single issue by issue, important though that is in its own right.

Several suggestions have been put forward. For example, Arthur Scargill has written a contribution to this debate, which has received wide coverage. Local discussions are already taking place, notably where industrial struggles are to the fore. It is important that this debate embraces as many people as possible who have a serious commitment to promoting socialist policies and to putting them into practice through all means possible.

People in this country are desperate to kick the Tories out of office. Hopefully 1996 will see this happen. However, people want this because they are desperate to restore public services, in the interests of the whole community not just of the overpaid Chief Executives of privatised utilities. This requires a shift, in wealth and power, from those who have done well out of the Tories, towards those who haven't. And this requires a commitment to reverse the damage done by the Tories, not an acceptance of their system and an assurance that it will somehow be managed more "nicely."

In short, we need to develop socialist policies, socialist campaigns and socialist political representation as an alternative to the new Labour Party and its prospective Liberal Democrat coalition. To end the 17 years of Tory misrule we need to say: "There is an alternative." Then 1996 will see a real victory for the people of this country.

"Immense progress"?

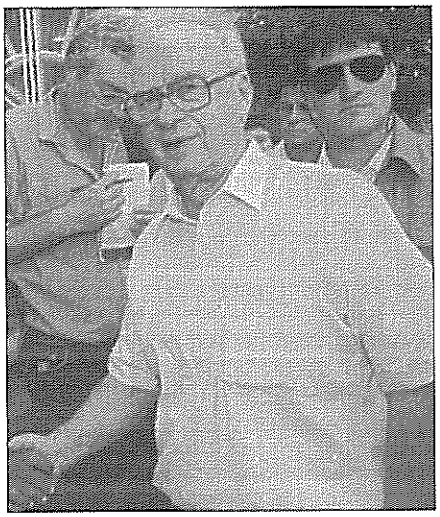
By Rob Kent

IN your contribution to the developing myth of Yitzhak Rabin as "the peacemaker" ("The life and death of Yitzhak Rabin", *WL* November 1995), you merely re-perform the superficial analysis seen in the mainstream media since the assassination. With a naively benign view of the Zionist state, you fail to appreciate the nature and direction of the "peace process".

The editorial concedes that the Oslo accords are "miserable, grudging, inadequate", yet reassures the millions of sceptical Palestinians that there has been "immense progress".

The main feature of developments in the occupied Palestinian Territories since September 1993 has been the relentless colonisation rather than "immense progress". Not a single settlement has been dismantled or evacuated, even after the Hebron massacre of February 1995. In fact some commentators claim that the rate of settlement activity has accelerated to three times faster than that seen under the previous "right-wing" government.

The facts belie the so-called settlement "freeze": 40,000 acres of land have been confiscated, about 5,000 acres of land bulldozed by settlers, and a programme of building 250 miles of "settler roads" begun in the last two years. This activity has been part of an effort to reinforce the Jewish presence in and around East Jerusalem, obliterate the 1967 borders and divide concentrations of Palestinian population.



Yitzhak Rabin

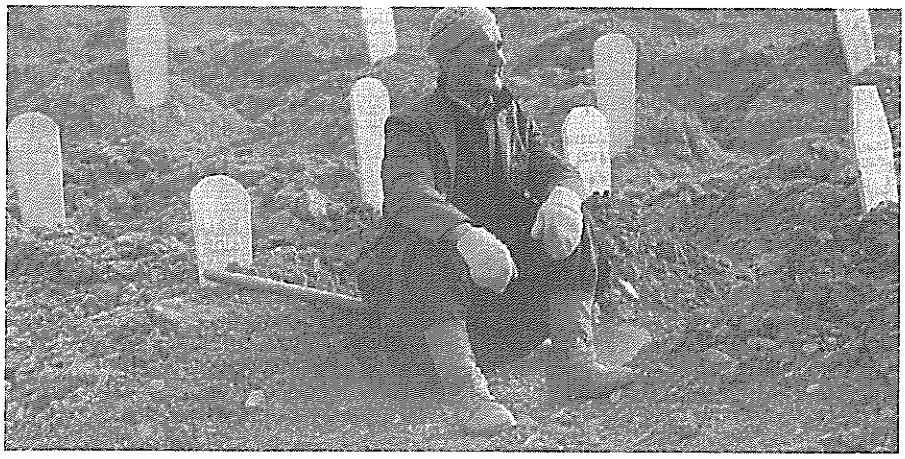
The settlement policy co-existed with Rabin's enthusiasm for "separation". This enthusiasm was hopefully interpreted by many on the left as implying an independent Palestinian state in the long run. Yet in reality it meant little more than the "separate development" seen for decades in South Africa. Indeed the word used by Rabin for "separation" was the Hebrew for "apartheid".

Freedom of movement and other human rights remain curtailed for the Palestinians. Access to East Jerusalem is restricted hindering not only the social, economic and political life of the city but also its surrounding hinterland as travel between the north and south of the West Bank naturally passes through the city. The repeated closure of the Gaza Strip has worsened living conditions in the autonomous areas with over 50% unemployment. With the latest agreement on extending autonomy, more passes will be required and more roadblocks set up.

The autonomous areas will be little more than homelands dominated and controlled by the Israelis who will continue to occupy about two-thirds of the West Bank and almost half of the Gaza Strip. Autonomy represents a key element in the combination of settlements-repression-autonomy that amounts to a strategy of cantonising Palestine.

In this context the autonomous areas are unlikely to develop into oases of Palestinian freedom. The Israeli "peacemakers" are looking for a Chief Buthelezi to run these bantustans. Arafat looks set to comply. In both the autonomous areas and the occupied territories he has moved to subordinate civil society to his autocratic rule that is in turn subordinate to Israeli control. Arbitrary arrest and torture continue as a brutal, corrupt and incompetent autonomy replaces occupation.

In the future *Workers' Liberty* should carefully analyse the situation in Israel and Palestine avoiding the temptation of wishful thinking. Now is the time to appraise the progress of the Rabin-Arafat deal in the light of events on the ground rather than our hopes at the time of the Washington handshake. After analysis the left should think about how to support the Palestinians in their continuing struggle for their land and freedom.



Bosnia: not a German plot

By Colin Foster

I'M surprised that Ernie Haberkern (Forum, *WL*26) reckons that our coverage of Bosnia in *WL*24 did not address "the question that should be obvious to a Marxist... do the Bosnian Serbs have the right to self-determination?"

In a discussion with Branka Magas (*WL*24, p.12) Martin Thomas contended that "peace is only going to be possible... if the Bosnian Serbs feel that they have a guarantee that they are not going to be forced into a state in which they are a minority", and he disputed Branka Magas's reply: "To speak of self-determination... is absurd". In *WL*23 I had written: "Reconciliation and reknitting of links has to start by recognising self-determination for each block — Serb, Croat, and Bosnian-Muslim, or Bosniac... Support for the Bosniacs, as the victims of imperialism, has to be in that framework".

That Bosnia has been carved up to the point that territorial self-determination for its diverse nationalities is feasible and necessary is, however, the end-product, not the starting-point, of its four-year war. That war was not generated by the Bosnian Serbs rising up against unjust impositions by the Bosniac and Croat majority of the republic. It was generated by the imperialistic Belgrade government constructing a military machine in Bosnia, disarming the Bosnian republic, establishing its military and political hold over Serb-majority rural areas of Bosnia, and then sending its army and militias across the border to conquer and "ethnically cleanse" large Bosniac-populated areas. The central issue was the defence of the Bosniac people, and of the multi-ethnic cities, against Serbian imperialism.

Ernie Haberkern sees it differently. "The German foreign office, with the support of the more hawkish wing of the American foreign policy establishment, deliberately provoked this crisis... The German government knew its action would lead to civil war, and that is what it wanted. The German government and its American friends wanted a pretext for NATO military intervention". The "German-American alliance" wanted to "advance its aggressive... designs in what used to be the Russian sphere of influence".

This is "anti-imperialist" paranoia, not Marxism. Germany has got a dominant economic position, and much political influence, all across central and eastern Europe, by sheer economic weight, without needing expensive and difficult wars. A quiet transition to Western-type capitalism in Yugoslavia (which had been *less* Russian-dominated than the rest of central Europe) would have suited Germany very well. And if it didn't — if Germany feared that France, or Britain, or America, would elbow it out — why ever would the American, French, and British military be so altruistic as to help German imperialism rather than their own?

In fact, Germany, like all the big Western powers, supported attempts to hold Yugoslavia together until well after Serbia seceded from the federal framework in March 1991. It did not recognise Croatian independence until December 1991, by which time Serbia had already conquered and "ethnically cleansed" a third of Croatia.

Germany, and soon the Americans too, then decided to bank on Croatia as the most viable fragment of ex-Yugoslavia. And, piecemeal, reluctantly, all the big powers were pulled into military involvement in ex-Yugoslavia, in a blundering, botched, cynical effort to tranquilise the region somehow for renewed trade and investment. To suggest that they used "the same overwhelming firepower [as] in the Gulf War" against the Serbs is to lose all sense of proportion: when the Americans finally bombed the Serbs to the conference table, it was to a conference where they were granted the bulk of their imperialistic aims. The idea that this makes the Serbs the main aggrieved party in the whole business reminds me of the probably apocryphal story about Marie Antoinette apologising to the executioner for treading on his toe as she stepped up to the guillotine.

None of this means we should endorse the big powers' action. It does mean that in Bosnia we should not just say yes wherever Germany or America says no, and thus end up failing to support the Bosniacs and the multi-ethnic cities in their fight against genocide and "ethnic cleansing".

Too rosy a picture

By Conrad Russell and Petra Peters

THE editorial entitled "The Workers' Liberty Conference" in the last issue of the magazine was not as well rounded as one expects from *Workers' Liberty*. It is as though a number of connections are still waiting to be made. On the other hand, arguments and assertions appear which produce too rosy a picture of the present conjuncture, and are just plain wrong. To move onto specifics.

1. Contrary to the text, we cannot necessarily assume that "the revival of a mass socialist movement is therefore inevitable". Such a revival is entirely *contingent*. For sure, the workers' movement is likely to assert itself upon a Blair victory, and it will always look for society-wide answers. However, from Poland to Argentina there are examples of workers choosing routes other than ours.

2. Many of the post-Trotsky Trotskyists have indeed "stood aloof from the struggles of the left". Is it not however now fair to ask whether we ever really wanted them on board? Now that the USSR has collapsed, so has the political 'great divide' to which Trotskyism was a response. We are no longer bound together against a shared structural antagonist. As a result, the true extent of the (longstanding) divergence of *Workers' Liberty* and the rest of the left is beginning to unravel. Over time, given the present trajectories of these other tendencies, the divisions may well erase the remaining 'family resemblances'. To look towards engaging these currents in *programmatic debate* is to continue as though the old realities still shape the landscape.

These other organisations have become so corrupted — mainly as a result of the 'Cold War' (that began with the USSR's creation) that it is doubtful that their ▸

body politic will form a part of a yet-to-be-built culture of democratic collectivism, rooted in the libertarianism which only such collectivism can bring.

3. It is in relation to this issue of democracy and socialism, where the document perhaps misses the main connection. Noting that the 'renegades' from Stalinism have now adopted their own version of the neo-liberal agenda alongside Labour's New Right (p4) could perhaps have formed the starting point for such an assessment of this question. The collapse of Stalinism, and its knock-on effect for other forms of statist collectivism, including the British Welfare State, has thrown the workers' movement into a state of confusion. There are very few voicing alternatives to the market precisely because collectivism as previously experienced failed to meet

"What is 'democracy', if not the sovereign association of individuals as equals, common to both Rousseau and Marx?"

people's needs.

Furthermore, the language of the new right belongs to our tradition, not theirs. After all, what is 'democracy', if not the sovereign association of individuals as equals, common to both Rousseau and Marx, and what is 'freedom to choose' but the 'freedom to think otherwise', for which we lost not only Rosa Luxemburg, but many more of the best fighters of our class? Indeed to go further, what is 'free enterprise', but co-operative production, free both from the tradition and mysticism swept away by the revolutionary bourgeoisie, and free from the alienated commodity production they brought in their wake?

If there is only one thing more disgusting than watching the decaying bourgeois class erect a grotesque of 'freedom' out of ideals stolen from their revolutionary forbears, it is that we let them. Surely, our task now is to reclaim those ideals and forge them into the socialist theory that shall be needed if there is indeed to be a revival of a mass socialist movement. The AWL is the tendency most willing to break from 'kitsch Trotskyism' and those left orthodoxies which deny our real traditions. These traditions are appositely summed up in Gramsci's judgement of our direct revolutionary ancestors, the French Jacobins.

"The Jacobins were realists, and not abstract dreamers. They were convinced of the absolute truth of their slogans about equality, fraternity and liberty, and what is more important, the great popular masses whom the Jacobins stirred up and drew into the struggle were also convinced of their truth."

Shachtman and the US military

By Ernie Haberkern

TWO comrades, Mark Osborn and Laurens Otter, raised objections to my review of Peter Drucker's book on Max Shachtman that deserve a reply.

Mark Osborn's letter raises by far the most important question. That question is: how do revolutionaries, be they working-class revolutionaries or revolutionaries rejecting a more privileged background, relate to the broad class movement?

Trotsky's answer to this question was ambiguous and misleading. His writings and speeches on the united front in the period of the early Comintern, his analysis of the Popular Front in France and, most especially, his writings on the crisis that faced the German working class in the early thirties, are among the clearest and best treatments of this difficult subject.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that he only partly assimilated Lenin's approach to this problem. In the Russian party he was, in the immediate prewar period, the main organiser of the unprincipled coalition of right-wingers and ultra-lefts against Lenin. Both of the former agreed that real left-wing socialists should steer clear of "reformist" legal unions and parliamentary politics. The ultra-lefts would remain uncontaminated by contact with the great unwashed and their "reformist" struggles and the right-wingers could pursue their policy of accommodation to the liberals. Both agreed that their main opponent was the "splitter" Lenin. Both were also quite content to allow the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party to remain a talking shop: the ultra-lefts because ultra-leftism has always been an excuse for abstention from the class struggle and the right because an aggressive socialist party would jeopardise their projected parliamentary alliance with the liberals. It was Trotsky who provided the "Marxist" rhetoric to conceal the fact that all the emigré factions wanted to put the party on the shelf.

What that meant a few short years later when he faced Zinoviev's attack was that Trotsky was unsure of himself. He was not in a position to oppose the ultra-left politics that were endemic in the early Comintern and, therefore, in the various left-wing tendencies that became the base of the anti-Stalinist left including the Fourth International.

Trotsky was no Zinoviev. Agreed. But he didn't provide a clear alternative on this issue either. That is why, as I pointed out in my article, someone like James Cannon could, on occasion, be right by class instinct where Trotsky was wrong.

Laurens Otter is right that my article is inadequate in its treatment of the international Third Camp tendency. That wasn't the subject of the book under review, however. There is a book waiting to be written on that subject. More than one probably.

One question raised by Otter needs to be discussed simply because it repeats one of those slanderous rumours that, if not scotched, goes on to become one of those things that "everybody knows." I am talking about Otter's charge that Shachtman boasted before HUAC that the ISL collaborated with the US military in the Korean war. Otter gives us no source for this rumour. I would like to know what his source is.

Here are the facts. Shachtman was never called before HUAC. What happened was that Shachtman was denied a passport because the ISL was on the attorney general's list of "subversive organisations." Shachtman appealed this decision. This was not, of course, a personal matter. The ISL made a public campaign out of it and received the support of prominent civil libertarians.

The ISL had been trying to gain a hearing ever since the Truman administration placed the organisation on the list without prior notice. The attorney general's office refused even to state what the grounds for its decision that the ISL was "subversive" were. That would threaten "national security", i.e. force the government to reveal its informants.

The ISL, including Shachtman, were vociferous opponents of the Truman-McCarthy witch-hunt against Stalinists. The Shachtman passport case, however, concentrated on two other points:

1. The arbitrary and unappealable decisions of the attorney general,

2. and the use of the list to intimidate dissent from any quarter, not just defenders of Stalinism.

***Labor Action* summarised the issues involved in the case in some detail in its September 28, 1953 issue. Using the government's own documents, the ISL proved that its "subversive" activity consisted of propaganda directed against capital-**

ism as a social system and its opposition to the foreign policy of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. At one point, as one small piece of evidence for this argument, the ISL introduced a leaflet cosigned by the Socialist Party titled "Stalinism is not Socialism" which the State Department later dropped from the air over China in May of 1950. (This was before the Korean War broke out.) The relevance of this evidence was that it helped prove that the government clearly knew that the ISL was not sympathetic to Stalinism. The Attorney General's only basis for action, therefore, was the ISL's opposition to the Western alliance and capitalism.

The slanderous charge that the ISL, or Max Shachtman prior to 1960, collaborated with the US military is without foundation. They publicly opposed the American invasion and occupation of Korea (see NI July-August 1950) at a time when labour movement and liberal collaboration with American militarism was at its height. There is no reason to believe the ISL even knew about the military's use of their literature until after the event. This accusation is less credible than those made against Lenin when he negotiated with the Kaiser's government for passage to revolutionary Russia in a sealed train. Not only were Shachtman and the ISL not on the train, they didn't even know there was one until after it had left the station!

It is also true that Shachtman personally by this time, mid-'50s, was reconsidering his Third Camp politics. But he was most emphatically not supported in this by the ISL and, as I pointed out in my review of Drucker, he dropped the matter when challenged.

Loyalist right, not socialist!

By John McAnulty*

I WISH to express my astonishment and anger at the recent exchanges in the columns of *Workers' Liberty* (*WL*22, 24 and 25)

To briefly recapitulate; the ICMP protested the decision of Militant Labour to give a platform to Billy Hutchinson of the PUP. Annie O'Keefe, apparently a supporter of *Workers' Liberty*, attacked me and I replied. Now I find myself facing a new opponent in the columns of *Workers' Liberty* — none other than Billy himself! *Workers' Liberty* without comment asks me to debate with someone who, in the accepted phrase, is "close to the thinking" of the UVF death squads.

The editors of *Workers' Liberty* are in London. I am in Belfast. They appear to be friends of Billy's. I am his enemy.

Mr Hutchinson may of course write to whomever he likes. For *Workers' Liberty* to print his claims — especially without any kind of comment or explanation — is nothing short of criminal.

If I wanted to debate socialism with Mr Hutchinson I could do so in Belfast. I don't wish to have that debate. I hold a very straightforward view that before Billy can join the socialists he has to leave the ranks of the Loyalist far right.

The claptrap that you published isn't new — there is a long history of loyalist workerism that goes hand in hand with a practice of brutal sectarian violence and the suppression of trade unionists and socialists within the Protestant community. In fact Billy Hutchinson has held these views for some time — he held them at the time of the Loughinsland massacre by the UVF. So what do we base our opinion on? The fact that he has a photocopy of the old Labour Party manifesto? Or his own convictions for involvement in sectarian murder and his present-day connections with Loyalist paramilitaries?

The debate I want to have is with *Workers' Liberty*. Where do you stand over the socialist credentials of the Loyalist paramilitaries? If so what new tools of Marxist analysis have you found to justify your claim? Who else has socialism mistakenly overlooked? The BNP?

If you have reasons for thinking that the Loyalist far right is socialist say what they are. Simply hoisting Billy onto the platform of socialism, as you have done, is irresponsible, dishonest and criminal. It can only damage the interests of the working class.

Does Loyalism have an eternal taint?

Editor's note:
Dear John,
WHEN you are a guest you do not always set the menu, or decide where you sit! "Astonishment" and "anger" expressed in tones like those you use would normally indicate that the guest was overtired. We think that Loyalists who call themselves socialists should be talked to no less than Catholic Nationalists who call themselves socialists. The seriousness of their socialism will be determined in discussion and by judgement on what they do. Plainly active sectarian killers in either Northern Irish community are not socialists, whatever they say they are.

It is, of course, possible to argue that past or present connections with para-military organisations should carry an eternal taint and that such people are forever beyond the pale.

But you can't if you want to be taken seriously do that selectively, for one side only.

You admit, all too cryptically, that the PIRA has committed "atrocities". But you would talk to them and to their political wing; indeed you think they are the vanguard of "the Irish revolution". "Left-wing" "Republicans" — who are not left wing in any sense beyond words emptied of meaning, and not Republican either, not people who pursue Wolfe Tone's goal "to unite the people of Ireland, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter" — attacked a Protestant church, spraying the congregation with bullets in Dalkley in 1987. Yet you would talk to and work with the so-called INLA/IRSP and its spin-offs.

Your *a priori* condemnation of the para-militaries or ex-para-militaries on the Loyalist side is an aspect of your partisanship with the other side. You find what the Provisional IRA/Provisional Sinn Fein do — not to speak of the "left-wing" "Republicans" — forgivable if not defensible. They are on the right side: you agree with their goals, the forcible unification of Ireland against the will of the compact majority in North East Ulster.

When you get down to it, it is not the Loyalists' para-militarism or even their atrocities that you find unforgivable, but their communal identity and the politics that express it. They can, whatever they say, be nothing other than right wingers in your eyes so long as they retain that identity.

Just as *An Phoblacht*, the PIRA paper, foments sectarianism by way of virtuous denounciation of sectarianism — on the other side — you defend militarism on one side by self-righteousness about militarists on the other side.

The way forward in Northern Ireland is to stop all military activities and disband all para-military organisations. For socialists, whatever side of the divide they come from, the key thing is to unite the working class, in Northern Ireland, in all of Ireland and beyond. That requires mutual recognition of rights by socialists in both communities. It requires recognition by the Irish majority that the Unionist community has the right to separation if it wants it — though it has no right to oppress Catholics within the predominately Protestant areas.

For revolutionary socialists it requires recognition *that there simply is no revolutionary nationalist solution* to Ireland's problems.

Mentally dressing up the Provo war in ideological garb and seeing it as "Permanent Revolution" affects reality only in so far as it turns socialists like you into helpless political satellites of Northern Ireland's "Fianna Failers with guns", whose real politics are expressed now in Gerry Adams junketing with Clinton, Major and Bruton.

Serious discussion of these questions is long overdue. Write us a sober contribution and we will be glad to publish it.

Yours fraternally, Sean Matgamna

*John McAnulty is a member of the Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme

Heroes

John Maclean: accuser of capitalism

By Mike Fenwick

AT THE outbreak of World War One, a huge wave of nationalism swamped the socialist movement of Europe. Previously committed to oppose the war through strikes and agitation, most of socialism's leaders soon converted to jingoism.

They came to support the wholesale slaughter of millions in terms of the national interest. As its members literally took up arms against each other, the Second International's promises crumbled into dust. To speak of the class war became a crime across Europe. Only tiny handfuls of socialists remained true to the idea of internationalism.

Amongst those who resisted the pressure of opinion and threat of imprisonment were Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks and Liebknecht and Luxemburg in Germany.

Karl Liebknecht had challenged the German war machine from the heart of the German parliament. For having the audacity to speak the truth he was jailed. In Britain if there was one voice comparable to these it was John Maclean.

Repeatedly sent to jail for sedition, Maclean gained an international reputation for his outspokenness and bravery. Jail eventually broke the man, but his martyrdom at the hands of capitalism is no less real than that of Liebknecht, save that a bullet was a swifter and cleaner ending.

This courageous stand and the reputation he gained from it are the central reasons why he should be honoured and respected. But his legacy and authority inside the British labour movement, sometimes presented at the level of myth, must be something we seriously and critically assess. In recent issues of *Workers' Liberty* Bob Pitt has detailed the decline of the man into paranoia and finally isolation from the class and movement he at one time inspired.

By what route did he become such a force that his mental stability or otherwise is an important question worthy of such discussion?

Maclean had been born in Pollokshaws, outside Glasgow in 1879, the son of dispossessed highlanders. Like the majority of Clydeside's growing population his parents had moved south after the Highland Clearances, in which huge tracts of land were seized for large scale agriculture and the native clans and crofters driven off. It was this great flood of Scottish and in time Irish workers, providing a steady supply of cheap labour, into the Clyde valley that contributed to its rapid industrialisation. It became a huge workshop for the British Empire in the same way that the Ruhr valley developed as the furnace of German capitalism.

In great part these origins also contributed to the making of a powerful and disciplined working class movement which, as Red Clydeside, would prove such a powerful opponent to the British ruling class in the war years and beyond.

Able to gain a university education through the sacrifice of his mother and family, Maclean never forgot where he came from. Much of his early activity was dedicated to educating the workers of his home town. Formally qualified as a teacher, his gift for explaining the iniquities of capitalism and the hopes that socialism held out for ordinary people would remain his enduring strength.

Reputedly rather humourless, he made up for this by his passion and commitment. This was enough to stir in the hearts of his listeners the desires and zeal for socialism that his actions would epitomise.

Contemporary cartoon depicting Red Clydeside's struggle against capitalism

He joined the "Marxist" Social Democratic Federation in 1903, and for the remaining twenty years of his short life he was completely dedicated to the socialist movement.

From 1908 to 1915, when he was first imprisoned, he taught a weekly evening class on labour movement and industrial history for which the main text book was Marx's *Capital*. Occasionally he was assisted by another young teacher, James Maxton, who would go on to be an MP and the most famous of the Red Clydesiders.

Through their classrooms came some of those militants who in a few short years would be the backbone of the revolutionary shop-stewards' movement that brought Britain to the brink of revolution after World War 1.

The importance and breadth of such classes cannot be easily understood today. The idea of hundreds of ordinary workers attending weekly classes on Marxism seems fantastic. But for Maclean and his comrades it was a central task of socialists to educate their class. "Rise with your class, not out of your class", was a popular slogan of the day that reflected the egalitarian ethic of the socialist educational movement.

Maclean, a Marxist, saw such education as not just a case of creating intelligent workers. It was a central part of the ideological struggle against capitalism. Where the capitalists have state education, the churches and the mass media, the need for independent working-class education is paramount.

In time Maclean would help form a Scottish Labour College to help contribute to this task.

After each bout of the imprisonments that were to follow, Maclean always returned to his classes. Eventually this movement died out, but it remains a central and important legacy of these early British socialists.

Education, street meetings and propaganda were the main activities of socialists in this period.

But the real test of the man was the outbreak of war. In his defiance Maclean stepped above his peers who slipped away into nationalism or pacifism. He became a leader of the left opposition in the British Socialist Party (the successor to the SDF), as its leader Hyndman steered the party towards jingoism.

The first big political battle of the war was over conscription in 1914, and in this fight Maclean and his comrades in Glasgow took the lead. The penalty for Maclean was prison, the cost to capitalism the truth. Maclean preached the class war from the dock and thousands of workers came to hear it.

"The only enemy to Kaiserism and Prussian militarism was and is German social democracy. Our first business is to hate the British capitalist system," was how he summed up his attitude.

The capitalists replied with their own

class hatred and vilification. Maclean was "a representative of a poisonous set of parasites who talk treason instead of working", said the press.

But his uncompromising stand and defiance of state victimisation won support not just for his cause but his release. Thousands of workers on Clydeside struck to welcome him back to Glasgow. Although weak and disorientated following a hunger strike, Maclean rose to the occasion. A contemporary paper describes the scene.

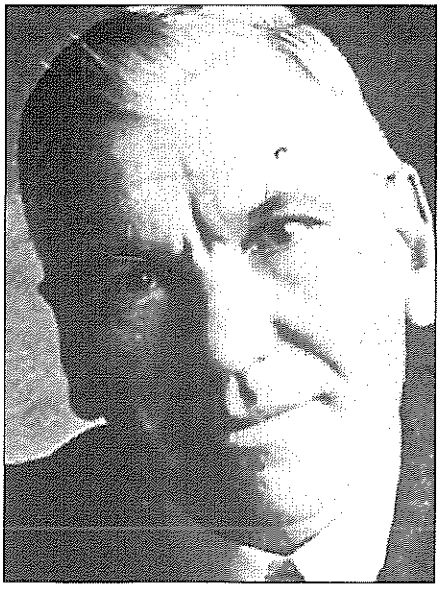
"The slowly moving carriage being dragged through the thronged streets by a score of muscular workers who had taken the place of the horses, the surging exultant mass of people, the incessant cheering and singing... and standing upright in the carriage, the challenging figure of John Maclean waving a red flag with an air of defiance and triumph."

Internationally he was recognised by his peers. Elected alongside Lenin, Trotsky and Liebknecht, he became an Honorary President of the first Congress of Soviets in revolutionary Russia. He returned this gesture of solidarity with outright support for the Bolsheviks.

Becoming the Bolshevik Consul for Scotland, he again put himself in the firing line of reaction and bigotry. In total he was arrested six times and imprisoned five. Three years of imprisonment, most with hard labour, was the sum of capitalism's punishment for one of its most outspoken critics.

Whether prison broke him has been discussed elsewhere. It certainly weakened him, leading to his early death.

In later years he refused to join the British Communist Party, but he never broke from his commitment to internationalism. "I stand before the Gorbals and before the world as a Bolshevik, alias a Communist, alias a Marxian. My symbol is the Red Flag, and I shall always keep it floating on high." If this great socialist educator had this lesson to teach, it was not just for the workers of Glasgow, or for his time, but for workers of all time and everywhere.



John Maclean

This is the real Lenin

IN LIFE Lenin led the Russian working class to the greatest act of human liberation in history, the October Revolution of 1917. In death "Lenin" became the patron saint of the Stalinist ruling class which overthrew all his work and slaughtered his surviving comrades, including Trotsky.

After Trotsky's death most of the Trotskyist groups claiming to base themselves on "Lenin" adopted authoritarian models of organisation more akin to Stalinism than to Leninism, models in which the only word was that of the dominant faction and minorities were suppressed. It is one of the reasons for the proliferation of "Trotskyist" groups.

In the history of Bolshevism there was no single organisational formula; there were continual changes according to changing circumstances. *Constant* was the drive to mobilise and consolidate the Marxists so that they could fight in varying circumstances the class-struggle on the levels of ideas, trade unionism and politics. The following article by Lenin outlines his real conception of the unity of centralism in action with *continuing*, ongoing freedom of criticism. The sectarian groups organised around prophets and popes and colleges of cardinals are a long way from Leninism: they are *pre*-bourgeois; they point backwards to the past, not fowards to the liberation of humankind from class society.

THE EDITORS have received the following communication signed by the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

"In view of the fact that several Party organisations have raised the question *of the limits within which the decisions of Party congresses may be criticised*, the Central Committee, bearing in mind that the interests of the Russian proletariat have always demanded the greatest possible unity in the tactics of the RSDLP, and that *this unity in the political activities* of the various sections of our Party is now more necessary than ever, is of the opinion:

"(1) that in the Party press and at Party meetings, everybody must be allowed *full freedom* to express his personal opinions and to advocate his personal views;

"(2) that at public political meetings members of the Party should refrain from conducting *agitation* that runs counter to congress decisions;

"(3) that no Party member should at *such* meetings *call for action that runs counter to congress decisions*, or propose resolutions that are out of harmony with congress decisions". (All italics ours).

In examining the substance of this resolution, we see a number of queer points. The resolution says that "at Party meetings" "full freedom" is to be allowed for the expression of personal opinions and for criticism (§1), but at "public meetings" (§2) "no Party member should call for action that runs counter to congress decisions". But see what comes of this: at Party meetings, members of the Party *have the right* to call for action that runs counter to congress decisions; but at public meetings they are *not* "allowed" full freedom to "express personal opinions"!

Those who drafted the resolution have a totally wrong conception of the relationship between *freedom to criticise* within the Party and the Party's *unity of action*. Criticism within the limits of the *principles* of the Party Programme must be quite free (we remind the reader of what Plekhanov said on this subject at the Second Congress of the RSDLP), not only at Party meetings, but also at public meetings. Such criticism, or such "agitation" (for criticism is inseparable from agitation) cannot be prohibited. The Party's political action must be united. No "calls" that violate the unity of definite actions can be tolerated either at public meetings, or at Party members, or in the Party press.

Obviously, the Central Committee has defined freedom to criticise inaccurately and too narrowly, and unity of action inaccurately and too broadly.

Let us take an example. The Congress decided that the Party should take part in the Duma elections. Taking part in elections is a very definite action. During the elections (as in Baku today, for example), no member of the Party *anywhere* has any right whatever to call upon the people to *abstain from voting*; nor can "criticism" of the decision to take part in the elections be tolerated during this period, for it would in fact jeopardise success in the election campaign. *Before* elections have been announced, however, Party members *everywhere* have a perfect right to *criticise* the decision to take part in elections. Of course, the application of this principle will sometimes give rise to disputes and misunderstandings; but *only* on the basis of *this* principle can *all* disputes and all misunderstandings be settled honourably for the Party. The resolution of the Central Committee, however, creates an impossible situation.

The Central Committee's resolution is essentially wrong and *runs counter to the Party rules*. The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full *freedom to criticise*, so long as this does not disturb the unity *of a definite action*; it rules out *all* criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the *unity* of an action decided on by the Party.

We think that the Central Committee has made a big mistake by publishing a resolution on this important question without first having it discussed in the Party press and by Party organisations; such discussion would have helped it to avoid the mistakes we have indicated.

We call upon all Party organisations to discuss this resolution of the Central Committee now, and to express a definite opinion on it.

The text, "Freedom to Criticise and Unity of Action", can be found in the *Collected Works*, Vol.10. p.442

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