

Workers' Liberty

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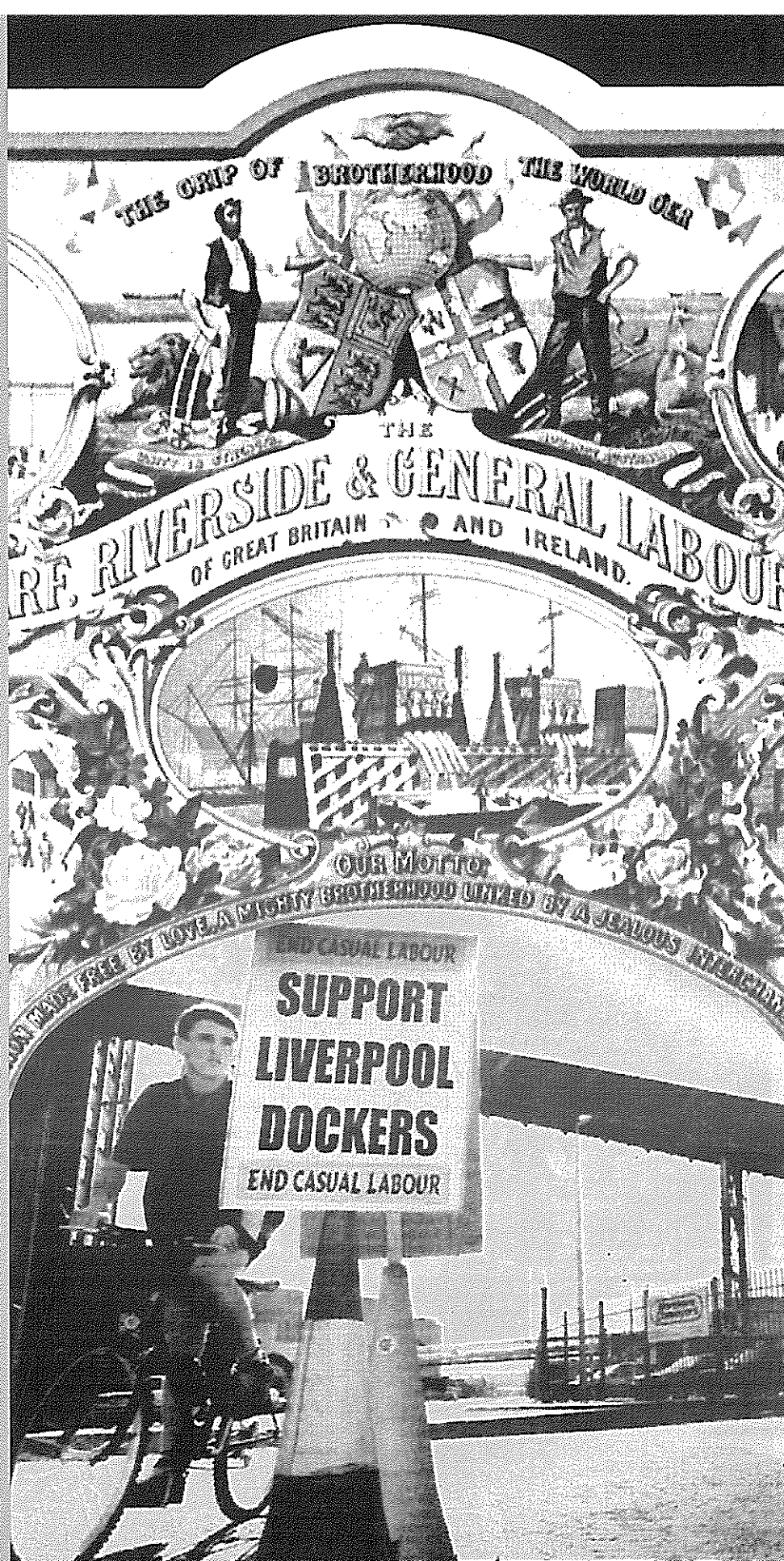
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A letter to readers from the Business Manager

WHILE MANY readers liked our extended coverage of the strike movement in France in the last issue of *Workers' Liberty*, some also were annoyed by our sharp criticism of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party — a "stillborn Stalinist sect", as our headline put it.

The result of the Hemsworth by-election rather confirms us in our opinion, but in this issue we endeavour to put the argument into a wider context, with an overview of the interaction of Marxists with the Labour Party over its whole history.

This feature, we hope, will be of particular interest in the various debates and meetings about Scargill's enterprise and the idea of a new party, as well as to left-wingers feeling stymied by the Blair ascendancy in the Labour Party and looking for a broader perspective.

This month, trade-unionist members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will be approaching workmates and friends to invite them to our Industrial School, in Manchester on 24 February. This issue carries a major survey of the state of the trade-union struggle and the case for a rank-and-file movement.

AWL students will be preparing for the National Union of Students conference, at which the Campaign for Free Education will fight to oust the NUS's present leaders, right-wing Labourites who make no secret of their desire to scrap the free education policy which last year's special NUS conference at Derby adopted against their will. This *Workers' Liberty* carries Tony Benn's speech at a Campaign for Free Education rally, and a survey of the Tories' assault on working-class schooling, official Labour's cowardly retreat, and the potential for a broad campaign on the issue.

The number of subscriptions to our magazine is creeping up, but slowly, all too slowly. Most readers still rely on getting their copy through casual sales. We need the subscriptions to give *Workers' Liberty* a solid base.

Help us: if you find the journal useful, subscribe, and encourage your friends and comrades to do the same.

Do you know you are being pissed on?

Editorial

ROBERT Maxwell died falling into the sea from his yacht, the *Lady Ghislaine*, in November 1991, and was buried at the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. His was a life lived to the full as a gruesome satire on the human condition under capitalism.

The story is summed up in one masterful incident. Feeling as powerful as God because he had so much money, Maxwell stood on top of the *Daily Mirror* building in Holborn pissing on the crowd far below. Turning to a minion he said: Look at them! They don't even know they're being pissed on. Any of them who knew would not have dared accuse him for fear of a bankrupting libel writ!

Maxwell pillaged and robbed, mostly legally, on a gigantic scale, like some modern chequebook-wielding Tamburlaine or Genghis Khan. He was, it seems, set up in the publishing business by the British secret service. He was to gather and publish publicly available scientific information on their behalf, first from Germany and then from Russia.

Over time he grew very rich and became very powerful. In 1964 he became a Labour MP, but he was defeated in 1970. Soon after he was publicly branded as unfit to run a public company by the Department of Trade and Industry. But Maxwell had divine, or at any rate MI6, protection.

Evidence suggests that he also had KGB protection and possibly was, or was regarded by the KGB as, their agent. He was the public friend of Stalinist East-European dictators, from East Germany's Honecker to Ceausescu of Romania, and publisher of fawning, sycophantic biographies of them. A consistent union-buster in his own enterprises, Maxwell backed General Jaruzelski when he banned the Polish labour movement, Solidarnosc, in 1981.

In 1984 he acquired the once respectable tabloid *Daily Mirror* and turned it into something like a family photo album.

It would be wrong, however, to see Maxwell only as a grubby little man, as the demented or even psychopathic creature he must have been to treat people the way he did, casually stealing the pension



Maxwell "negotiating" with Mirror-Group workers. "Maxwell turned the lives of workers on three continents upside down at will. To him they were "like flies to wanton boys", to be crushed, or pissed on, for sport."

funds of many thousands when he needed cash. In his last period Maxwell reached a Wagnerian grandeur of capitalist lunacy.

With the boldness and daring of a steppes bandit, he grabbed every chance to make money, crushing all who got in his way. He turned the lives of workers on three continents upside down at will. To him they were "like flies to wanton boys", to be crushed, or pissed on, for sport.

Yet he thrived because he was rich — or passed himself off as rich — and got richer and richer. No-one could touch him. No-one could say a rude word about him in print, or he would have them for libel. Everybody in the newspaper business, it seems, knew something, at least, but no-one dared say anything seriously disparaging about the fat bandit.

He set himself up as a universal international go-between. And all the time he swindled and robbed and sacked workers — and pissed down on to the street from the roof of his office building.

Maxwell's career shows us what absurdities and monstrosities the power of money can generate, and how grotesque is our world in which the business of

everyone is to rob his neighbour of the fruits of his labour, if he can. In which the greatest robbers are the most respected and the most influential, the most immune from criticism. Until they die.

That is the capitalist norm. It goes on all the time, everywhere, in the pores of society. In all areas of your life, someone you don't see and don't know is pulling strings that shape and control your life. People you don't see are pissing down on you.

The good thing about Maxwell is that, though it is small comfort to the people whose pension money he stole, he was a visible, gargantuan, grotesque, monstrous caricature of the system which spawned and nurtured him and which now, continuing to do what he did in a smaller, greyer, way, righteously disowns him.

In Oscar Wilde's well-known story, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a portrait of a debauchee ages and becomes gruesomely ugly while the man whose crimes and self-indulgence register on the painted face remains young and fresh. Maxwell is to modern capitalism what that painting was to Wilde's deceptively young and fresh debauchee. ■

Labour must rebuild the Welfare State!

AFTER 17 years of the Tories' drive to destroy the Welfare State, the labour movement must once more fight for the recognition of the priority of life over the inhuman priorities of profit, against the Tory party which champions those priorities, and against Tony Blair's Labour leadership which defers to the Tories.

How can we best do that?

We must demand that Labour commits itself to rebuilding the Welfare State and to making good all the cuts imposed by the Tories since 1979. Decent public services can and should be paid for by taxing the rich.

Life before property!

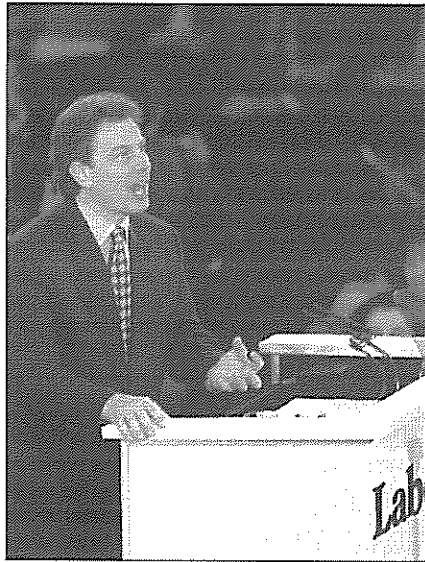
The right of all to a decent life above the right of the rich to indulge in squanderlust and obscene luxury!

Good health care, education and housing, and a decent job or upkeep when unable to work, must be made fundamental human rights for everyone. For that, public ownership and control of the utilities and of the suppliers and ancillary activities of the public services is essential — for example, nationalisation of the drug companies which draw such huge profits from the Health Service.

Public services should be run under democratic workers' and community control, not by unelected and unaccountable quangos and managers. We believe that such democratic control would bring changes in the substance as well as the organisation of services like health and education — shifts, for example, towards positive and preventive health policies and towards continuing lifetime education.

About £30 billion is currently paid out to the rich in dividends and interest, another £30 billion in over-the-top salaries and perks, and about £70 billion in undistributed profits. As Kenneth Clarke explained:

"Profits of industrial and commercial companies have increased by one third over the past three years. Their share in



Blair: short on passion, politics, commitments...

GDP [national income] has risen from 12.5% in 1992 to 14.5% in the first three months of 1995, and the real rate of return on capital is approaching levels last seen in the late 1980s."

It is wrong for this vast flow of loot to go to a rich few while social spending is as starved as the homeless youths sleeping rough on pavements and in doorways in the centre of London.

Moreover, military spending could be cut by half at least by simply scrapping nuclear weapons and changing from a standing army to citizens' defence. That would save £11 billion a year.

A Labour government determined to rebuild the Welfare State could gather at least £120 billion a year for that purpose, so that it could spend at least £40 billion on welfare while still having plenty of cash for public investment in industry to introduce new technology and shift resources to the most socially-useful areas.

£40 billion is about five per cent of national income, or one-third of current gross industrial and commercial profits. A system which cannot afford that amount to restore security, hope, life and joy to millions of people, but can afford much bigger sums for the luxuries of the rich, for the waste of the advertising business and fruitless competition, and in lost production through millions being kept unemployed — that system is sick and corrupt and morally indefensible.

All the private hospitals and health facilities should be nationalised. That would increase the National Health Service's count of hospital beds by one-third, and its staff also by one-third. Another £10 billion a year would restore the health service so that everyone would have the right to proper health care, provided promptly and free without charge.

£10 billion put into a building programme would allow local authorities to take over the 900,000 houses and flats lying empty, and offices standing idle, and renovate and convert them to make new homes.

Others of the hundreds of thousands of building workers now jobless should be employed to build new houses where necessary, to do the long-postponed repairs needed for school and hospital buildings, and to build new nurseries for under-fives.

£2 billion on running costs would fund an extra 400,000 under-five nursery places. An extra £4 billion on schools and further education would allow decent staffing and class sizes. Another £4 billion on higher education would pay for restoring student grants without parental means-tests.

New jobs in public services and a reduced working week would enable the Labour government to guarantee everyone's right to a decent job. That would cut at least £20 billion off the social security budget, which could be put straight back into increasing pensions and benefits. A full, free, happy life for all, or for none! ■

Socialist Labour Party crashes in Yorkshire

THE RESULTS of the Hemsworth by-election was not good news for Arthur Scargill and the Socialist Labour Party.

Brenda Nixon's vote of just 1,193 put the SLP in fourth place behind Tories, Liberals, and Labour which secured over 70% of the poll.

Put in proper perspective the vote looks even worse than the headlines. Scargill's party got less than half of the Militant (Real) Labour's candidate Lesley Mahmood's vote in the Walton by-election and less than a third of her disastrous vote relative to the local Labour vote.

And this was a constituency in the heart of what was the Yorkshire coalfields, once Arthur Scargill's stronghold. The Monster Raving Looney Party was a mere 500 or so votes behind the SLP!

The Hemsworth result should make people looking to the SLP think again. It may not mean political oblivion however, for Scargill.

The Communist Party of Great Britain survived for decades as a small but significant current in the labour movement, rarely polling more than the SLP's Hemsworth vote. That would be a great waste.



Brenda Nixon

European workers' unity is still vital

PROBABLY THERE will not be a single European Union currency in 1999, as the Maastricht treaty of December 1991 prescribed.

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and other European leaders have been talking up their determination to press ahead, but probably only because that is the only way to avoid immediate collapse of the project. In general and in the medium term, European capitalists want a single currency: it will cut their transaction costs and enable them to plan cross-European operations with greater confidence. But it is certainly not make-or-break for them to do it in 1999, and a lot of breakages could be caused by a rush for the deadline.

Only Luxemburg currently meets the economic conditions laid down in the Maastricht treaty for the single currency. The finances of France, Italy and Belgium are very shaky. Substantial sections of the German ruling class — and the German

population at large — are dubious about scrapping the stable Deutschmark for a Euro-currency whose stability could be jeopardised by heavy spending and borrowing by other European Union governments. The balance is heavily weighted towards delay.

If European capitalists, in their majority, are groaning or wincing, should European workers cheer? No. A sizeable minority of European capitalist opinion is anti-Maastricht, for various different reasons, and the example of the Thatcherites in Britain proves that they are no less reactionary than the pro-Maastrichters. The Maastricht criteria involve cuts in social spending, but no alien force imposed those cuts on the various European Union governments. They wrote those cuts into a treaty because they all already wanted to impose them.

Single currency or no single currency, the capitalist economic integration of Europe will progress, slowly, crabwise,

fumblingly — short of a catastrophic collapse back into warring nationalisms. The job of the working-class movement is not to obstruct the integration of Europe, or defend barriers between nations, but to counterpose Europe-wide workers' unity to the Euro-plans of the capitalists.

Current cuts in social spending, and the moves to "marketise" sectors like telecommunications, all across Europe should be the first targets for a united European workers' fightback. In the 1970s and '80s, the steelworkers and dockers of Europe fought separately, country by country, against a coordinated European capitalist offensive, and were defeated separately. In the 1990s, it is possible and necessary for public-service workers, telecom workers, rail workers and others to unite round demands for a European 35 hour week and for Europe-wide public services, run as public services, and levelled up to the best standards across Europe.

Tories use government to sell death

THE SCOTT report on arms sales to Iraq is due to be published about a week after we go to press. Unlike the Tory government ministers sent pre-publication extracts months ago so that they could prepare their counter-attack, we do not know what it will say. But five things are clear.

Firstly, between 1985 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Britain exported a vast range of military supplies to Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, including materials for chemical and

nuclear weapons. This trade continued unhindered while Saddam's terror against Iraq's Kurds was exposed.

Secondly, the Tory government claimed all along that it had banned arms sales to Iraq. Ministers were advised by civil servants that the exports broke the government's own rules, but they continued to claim in public that the rules were in force.

Thirdly, when bosses of the Matrix Churchill machine-tools company were brought to court for selling mili-

tary supplies to Iraq, ministers signed certificates to try to prevent them proving that they had acted with government approval. Only the collapse of that cover-up saved the Matrix Churchill bosses from jail and led to the Scott inquiry.

Fourthly, it looks very much as if the government will try to deflect the Scott report by scapegoating ex-minister Alan Clark, now no longer active in politics.

And fifthly — the Tories still pursue the same policy of promoting arms sales wherever they are profitable, whatever the cost. Their current attempt to deport Saudi dissident Mohammed al Mass'ari, on the explicitly stated grounds that his criticisms of the Saudi regime may disrupt arms deals, is proof.

Once again, the arms merchant rules — OK?

France: a second wave?

PRIME MINISTER Alain Juppe promised to deflect the French workers' anger expressed in the great strikes of November-December 1995 by decisive action on jobs.

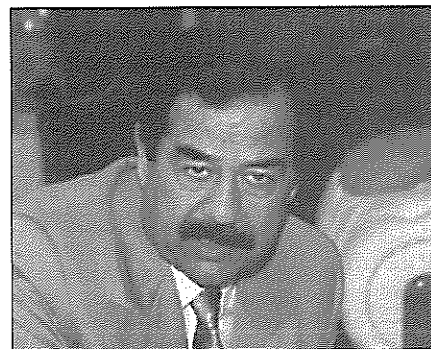
In fact he has done little more than offer new tax breaks to the bosses — this time supposedly to help the depressed working-class suburbs of the big cities. Unemployment has climbed above three million.

Juppe has also retreated on some minor aspects of his plan for cutting social security, but most of it remains, including the proposed amendment to the French constitution which will allow Parliament to override the administration of the social security budget by employers' and trade-union representatives and impose curbs on spending.

The trade unions have called a new round of days of action in early February, and a number of small disputes have shown how the movement of November and December increased workers' self-confidence.

As the French weekly *Lutte Ouvrière* puts it: "It remains for the whole working class to impose, for the immediate reduction of unemployment, the channelling of the State's money into the creation of genuine jobs, useful to society, by requisitioning businesses and hiring new workers for the public services useful to the population. There is no shortage of needs."

"The job is to prepare the second wave of struggles. They are impoverishing us more and more, and the sooner the workers react, the better."



Hussein, armed by Britain

Lessons of the Liverpool docks strike

"Workers of the world unite!"

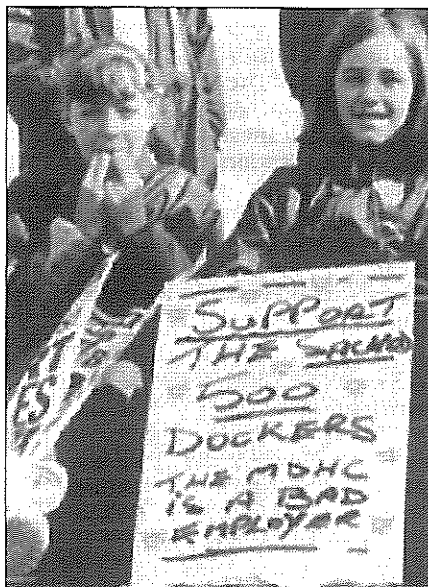
IN THESE modern times of "global capitalism", "global communication" and "global culture" the one thing that's supposed to have disappeared forever is the idea of international working class solidarity.

It might not be fashionable enough for the world-wide Net but it's making a comeback nonetheless. The occasion: the Liverpool dockers strike.

Unable to spread their dispute in this country because of the Tories' viciously restrictive anti-union laws, which rule out all forms of solidarity action, the Liverpool portworkers have had to appeal for solidarity action from dockers world-wide.

The support that they have received has played a major part in sustaining their action for nearly five bitter months.

But more than that. The international solidarity that has poured in has underlined just how up to date and thoroughly modern that old slogan is.



Workers of the world unite! Or, as a US docker's leader put it, "Capital organises internationally. So should labour."

Stop the return to casual labour

THE Liverpool docks strike is all about stopping the port bosses' drive to return to the bad old days of casual labour, argues Jimmy Nolan from the Port Shop Steward Committee.

The use of casual labour in the port since 1989 has increased dramatically. In September, Torside — an agency working for MDHC — wanted to sack 20 young, full-time dockworkers and replace them with casuals. An official ballot was organised by the TGWU. Torside then threatened to sack the whole workforce of 80 people. Before the deadline for industrial action, they rescinded their decision, and accepted that 80 full-time jobs could still be found in the Port.

Within days, Torside engineered an industrial dispute by instantly dismissing five dockworkers, and the rest of the workforce walked out in solidarity. They began picketing the main docks, although without an official ballot. Dockworkers, many of whom have sons among the pickets, refused to cross picket lines until all 80 Torside workers were reinstated.

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company then sacked all 500 workers in the Port. The Port of Liverpool has profits of over £38 million. Turnover and tonnages are now the highest ever recorded in its history.

The majority of dockworkers in the Port have, on average, thirty to forty years' continuous service in the industry. They have now all been dismissed. The situation is the culmination of years of bad management, in which the dockworkers have been treated in an appalling manner. They now find themselves without work in a city already beleaguered by unemployment.

● Send messages of support and money to Jim Davies, Dockworkers Strike, c/o TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool L2.

A "living-death" offer

Mick Carden from Merseyside Dock Workers' Strike Committee spoke to *Workers' Liberty* about the strike, the international solidarity and the employer's latest "offer".

THE Mersey Dock Company has made an offer to 329 of their former employees.

But the offer also applies to the 80 Torside dockworkers and also 12 workers who were employed by a satellite company, Nelson Stevedoring.

That leaves out a number of other dockworkers who are in dispute. But the company is ignoring them.

The offer is £25,000 to the 329 dockworkers. £1,000 each to Torside dockworkers and Nelson stevedores.

They will offer us 40 jobs in what is known as the general cargo area of the port. In our opinion, that's a living death.

They'll offer Torside — a company which supposedly went into liquidation — 30 jobs. Again, this is derisory.

The contract they had with the company which organises strike-breakers will end. The dock company will take on 150 or 160 of the strike-breakers that were recruited by Drake.

This offer is being dealt with by postal ballot, which the union has agreed to, as it wants to settle with the employer. We are

not happy with the way the ballot is being run — dockers in the different companies are being dealt with separately. Nevertheless, we are confident that there will be a rejection of the jobs offer. There should be a result by Wednesday 7 February.

Pickets are continuing and a demonstration was held in Liverpool on Saturday 3 February.

The international dimension to this dispute has been very important. We've had delegates who have gone to New York, Australia, Canada, Spain, Italy, Holland, Sweden, Israel. We've had practical solidarity. For example the US dock workers in New York put pressure on the bosses at ATL — which is one of the biggest lines which ship out to New York — to use another UK dock if the dispute was not sorted out. There was a 24 hour strike in New York in solidarity. We put up a picket of Liverpool dockers there and the dock workers exercised their constitutional right not to cross it!

In Australia on the major container line, ABC, which uses Liverpool dock, there were various boycotts and delays organised. Of course there has also been substantial financial help from all over the world as well. There's an international conference on 17 February in Liverpool. We want a rank-and-file-international organisation to come out of this.

Breaking the pattern of defeat

Tom Willis takes a look at who's fighting back in the unions and who's standing in their way

TODAY THE postal workers are, the strongest and best organised obstacle in the way of the employers' offensive. One third of all strikes now take place in Royal Mail, Parcelforce and Post Office Counters. The background to this is a relentless drive by management to exploit changes in sorting technology in order to increase their control over a much reduced and less secure workforce. The immediate burning issue is the future of the second delivery: the bosses want to scrap it and make more workers part-time.

The recent Scottish postal strike, for example, wasn't just a magnificent display of inspiring trade union solidarity in which tens of thousands of postal workers across the whole of Scotland came out in defence of just five of their number. Nor was it just the largest illegal and unofficial strike since World War Two (when all strikes were banned).

It was also a strike which spiralled out of the control of the national CWU union leadership to an extent that General Secretary Alan Johnson had to perform some impressive acrobatics to get back in the driving seat.

And it was a strike that broke out of the pattern of the recent period. It was a strike which, by the logic of the struggle itself, was transformed from a defensive into an offensive battle.

What started off as a local dispute became, by the forces it set in motion, a full-scale confrontation. If it had been spread to England it could have put a halt to management's offensive and secured the second delivery on a permanent basis, perhaps even a reduction in the working week.

This view is held by a significant minority of the militants involved in the strike, and received a sympathetic hearing when put to the Edinburgh mass meeting which eventually called off the strike after all management attempts at victimisation and demotion to part-time status had been abandoned.

Another important element in the Scottish strike was the role played by younger militants and activists. Nearly all the key organisers, apart from the very top, were under 35. The significant thing here is that people under 30 have not been shaped and traumatised by the defeats of the '80s in the same way that older generations have been. It is a sign that the movement is beginning to replenish itself out of the ranks of the youth. The tragedy is that there is no drive at all by

the official apparatus to organise the great bulk of the youth stuck in dead-end "McJobs."

The Scottish postal strike of 1995 does give us reason to believe that the movement is climbing out of the trough dug by the defeat of the miners in 1984-5. It is important, however, to keep things in context and perspective.

The dominant pattern remains one of isolated and often defeated sectional battles in which the official leadership suffocates enthusiasm and prevents generalisation.

The train drivers' dispute last year was a prime example. RMT which organises the majority of railworkers but a minority of drivers, started a "campaign" for a yes vote for action over pay. ASLEF, the drivers' craft union, then followed suit.

Unfortunately, the majority of the RMT Council of Executives were not able to get past the obstruction of general secretary Knapp and his apparatus. The strike ballot lost. The left on the RMT Council of Executives failed to take on the entrenched bureaucracy. They seemed to believe that because they were the majority on the executive they were really in the saddle.

"An important element in the Scottish strike was the role played by younger activists not traumatised by the defeats of the '80s"

This weakness was described by a WL railworkers' leaflet for a meeting of the loose RMT left caucus, CFDU:

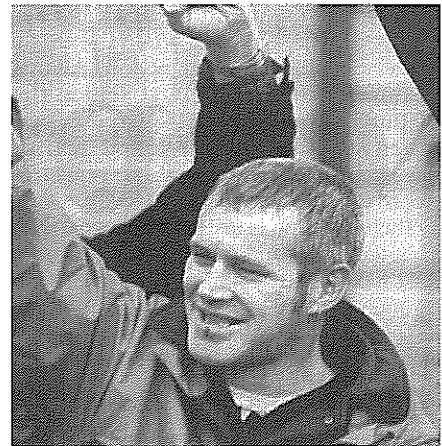
"We all know the stories about how last year's pay ballot was lost. The sabotage from full timers. The lack of information. The leaflets hidden in cupboards at Unity House [union HQ].

ES strike at the crossroads

By a CPSA Employment Service Executive member

AS WL goes to press 20,000 civil servants in the Employment Service are balloting for a series of regional strikes and for all-out indefinite action.

The dispute is over pay but most ES workers see it as about more than that. They are angry about staffing levels and the threat to jobs represented by the introduction of the Job Seekers' Allowance. The JSA will also force ES workers into direct conflict with claimants, who they will be expected to



"What we have to face up to is that this kind of sabotage by Knapp and his friends is inevitable. What's more, the defeat of the pay ballot paved the way for the right's victory in the Presidential election.

"The only solution is for the CFDU to build accountable, democratic, campaigning structures which can act independently of the HQ campaign. In other words, we need to build a serious rank and file movement."

While the RMT ballot went down, the ASLEF membership voted for action. Two absolutely solid one-day drivers' strikes followed. They shut down the rail network completely.

With the tube workers in both RMT and ASLEF due to open up a second front, things were looking good. But that wouldn't last.

An AWL tube driver takes up the story: "On the eve of the first co-ordinated BR and tube strike for years, ASLEF's Lew Adams stuck the boot in — on the workers.

First, the BR dispute was called off without any gains and with the action absolutely solid. Not surprisingly, this deal was thrown out by the ASLEF membership. But Lew was not to be stopped. He took the ballot mandate and went straight into new talks with BR where he managed to scrape together a new deal, at least as bad as the old one. This time the members did not get the chance to ballot. The executive had already accepted the deal for them.

"At the same time the ASLEF head office messed up the technicalities of the London Underground ballot. The courts ruled against the union. The

police to an even greater extent.

The ballot is a real opportunity to escalate the action, even though it was originally called by the national CPSA leadership in order to scupper the dispute. They had hoped to force the pace of the dispute in an artificial way and stop proper preparation.

Members are now faced with two alternatives on the ballot paper — both of which they can vote for. This means there is a chance of rescuing the situation.

If the ES workers do vote yes to action it will be a clear sign that, despite their rotten national leadership, CPSA members still have the will to fight.

dispute then went on the back burner while ASLEF re-balloted. When the ASLEF drivers again voted for action, Adams did the obvious thing and settled the dispute without any gains whatsoever. When ASLEF members rejected this in a ballot, Adam signed up a three-year productivity deal instead!"

There was still reason to hope that, with a left-wing local and national leadership, the RMT tubeworkers could make a major breakthrough.

The tube dispute flared back to life with the announcement of the third 2:1 ballot victory from the RMT. It was a tragedy that the RMT leadership eventually called off the action with only limited gains — an hour off the working week, and postponement of the "make or buy" [contracting out] review on

all lines apart from the Central and Jubilee for two years.

A recent successful victimisation dispute on the Northern Line shows revived confidence among tubeworkers, and the ASLEF betrayal has not taken all the fight out of the BR drivers.

Last month saw a magnificent display of direct action from drivers on South Eastern Trains (Charing Cross, Cannon Street, London Bridge), who simply refused to take out stock with serious safety problems — several carriages had already de-coupled from one train in transit. They used part of the Tories' own anti-union laws, the 1993 TURER Act, which allows workers to stop unsafe jobs.

The establishment of this principle opens the door to similar stoppages if management breach safety regulations in their attempts to

defeat sectional strikes by railworkers, for instance, guards and senior conductors.

The SE Trains action also vindicates the line argued by WL railworkers during the 1994 signal workers' strike, when we called on traincrew and track workers to stop the job over safety. It shows that even laws designed to shackle the unions can — in certain circumstances — be used against the employers.

Outside the post and the Tube, the most promising signs are among the most Fordist of Fordist workers: the Ford Motor Company and General Motors.

Both great corporations have seen British workers regaining muscle and bargaining strength as a result of global changes. The result is, that with offers rejected in postal ballots and short sharp walkouts to underline the point, a major battle is possible at either.

The crisis in Britain's biggest union

By a UNISON health activist

THE turn-out in the election for UNISON's General Secretary last November was not unusually low for union elections, with some 25% of the union's members taking part.

Though Rodney Bickerstaffe, the candidate from the union machinery won, he did very badly against a challenge from the right. With some 150,000 members backing him, Bickerstaffe won less than half the votes, while Peter Hunter, a former Tory and prominent anti-abortion campaigner in the old NALGO, got over 90,000, almost 30% of those cast.

Given that there was almost no obvious campaign for Hunter, where did these votes come from, and why? The reason doesn't lie with Hunter's views — either those expressed vigorously in the past, or the slightly milder version put out in the General Secretary campaign.

It lies with the way UNISON was formed, and members' dissatisfaction with what it has become — a bureaucratic leviathan incapable of providing the basics that trade unionists expect from their organisation and inaccessible to ordinary members.

UNISON appears to be a "left union" over Clause Four in the Labour Party, the national minimum wage, and other issues, but the union's own structures have fallen into decay. Many branches are not functioning, the new structures have handed control of disputes to full-timers who seem incapable of organising, and opportunities to defend wages and conditions have been squandered — as in the health service — because the machinery does not respond to the

members.

In last year's NHS pay dispute, after six months of campaigning against local deals, the union leadership recommended accepting local pay. In the absence of a well-organised rank and file campaign for the full claim this offer was accepted by a huge majority.

A WL health worker explained: "The deal institutionalises local pay bargaining, with the sweetener of any 'losers' in bargaining getting their pay topped up at the end of the year to a 'going rate'. It was offered by NHS bosses only on condition that the staff side recommend acceptance — which they have done.

"The basic effect of the deal will be to formalise the drawn-out bargaining structure that appeared accidentally this year; unions submit claims to national machinery, which then produces an offer that requires union members to go to their local employer for a local offer... and so on, and so on. There will be an extra round a year later, as unions and management decide what the "going rate" for the past year was."

Meanwhile the potential for a serious fight-back in local government in 1995 never developed. Despite a serious drive by the powerful Newcastle UNISON branch, the biggest and most effective merged branch in the country, to group together activists in UNISON and the other public sector unions behind the idea of a day of action coinciding with the Budget, not enough momentum was built up.

The RMT ballot for national action on pay went down: manoeuvring by the UNISON leadership ensured that no clear policy for national action got through the union's annual conference.

What the drive from Newcastle did produce, however, was a moderately well-attended UNI-

SON national demonstration — proof that despite bureaucratic inertia and passivity a real desire for a national fightback exists amongst broad layers of the rank and file.

Despite the lack of a national lead, important local battles can still be successful. The last six months have seen partial victories by Sheffield and Southwark library workers and Liverpool residential social workers.

But the ineffectiveness of UNISON's national machine has been illustrated by their failure to build a high-profile national campaign against the spiv contractors Pall Mall, who are in a bitter and protracted wages and recognition fight with a group of mainly Asian women cleaners and catering staff at Hillingdon Hospital West London. Even the cumbersome and ultra-bureaucratic GMB managed to do more for the Burnall strikers than UNISON have done for the Hillingdon women.

Bickerstaffe is blamed, quite rightly, for his part in letting all that happen. The lessons the official left, in the leadership of the union, will draw are likely to be the wrong ones — to "tone down the politics" but tighten up control of the already creaky machine. The rest of the left, at the rank and file level, may draw the wrong conclusions too — bluster about small sections of the far left being "the alternative".

In the election, Militant Labour member, Roger Bannister polled some 55,000 votes, just under 20% on the Campaign for a Fighting, Democratic UNISON (CFDU) platform, and the SWP managed to get over 10,000 votes (4.5%) for a candidate standing — at least for a while — under their own name.

These votes — while a substantial minority — are part of the "protest vote", representing the other half of the ex-NALGO backlash against the machine in UNISON. In terms of solid rank and file support for a real alternative to the way the union is run they don't add up to as much as their backers would claim.

If the left in UNISON is serious about taking stock of what has happened, then we need to build a united front to defeat the threat from the right in the union by rebuilding its structures and democratising them. A genuine broad left needs to bring together the activists and branches who backed Bickerstaffe the embryonic UNISON Labour left and the CFDU, around defence of public sector jobs and services against any government, including through national industrial action. Bring activists and branches together to organise and rebuild a union which shows every sign of falling down around our ears!

Firefighters move towards national action

Mick Shaw (London regional chair FBU)

THE London Fire Authority are setting a budget on 22 February and they are considering a proposal to axe 645 London firefighting jobs.

This would involve closing four fire stations — Barbican, Downham, Shooters Hill and Manchester Square — and taking a fire engine away from 22 other stations. The fire authority comprises of one rep from each of the 32 London

boroughs plus the City of London. Labour has 24 of those so this is an overwhelmingly Labour controlled authority. The Labour Party's attitude: "Our hands are tied, we've got to do it."

The FBU is looking to get the authority's spending limits increased. That's the main focus at the moment: to come up with additional spending.

If they go ahead with cuts on this scale we're going ahead with ballots for a series of nine hour strikes across our four different shifts.

Liverpool have currently suspended their dispute. I think they're looking to co-ordinate with other groups elsewhere. Surrey, Essex and Tyne and Wear have asked our FBU executive for permission to ballot on action against cuts.

There is broad support for taking action.

The fruits of New Realism

THE fruits of the TUC leadership strategy since the miners' strike of 1984-5, of "new realism" i.e. avoiding a struggle at all costs, include:

- A fall in union membership from over 50 to under 30% of the workforce.
- The lowest number of strikes this century.
- Loss of workplace trade union power with the increased marginalisation of shop stewards in relation to both management and full time officials.
- A trade union movement increasingly centred on an "aristocracy" of relatively well-paid, better-educated and more secure public-sector white-collar workers.
- The failure of the unions to organise new sectors and to recruit youth and part-timers.

The experience of rank and file activists and the results of academic surveys all point to the same conclusion: the power and presence of trade unionism has declined.

The number of workplace reps increased, despite the decline in total members in the late '80s, but it is now on the wane. The percentage of workplaces with shop stewards has dropped from 54% in 1984 to 38% in 1990 and continues to fall.

The power and scope of workplace trade unionism is also in decline. Across every sector, management are on the offensive against the rights and bargaining powers of stewards. This offensive has been particularly sharp in those areas where privatisation and contracting-out has been used to smash up "mutuality" (the joint control over the organisation of work) amongst groups of ex-public sector blue collar workers — the bins, direct works, cleaning and portering, the gas, water and electricity utilities and the buses. The war against union reps is now at its most vicious in the railways.

The flip-side of the attack on stewards has been an increase in the powers of full-time officers relative to the rank and file, and in particular closer control over stewards in local negotiations. This control has been reinforced by the workings of the Tory anti-union laws, which are designed to make the officials police the rank and file.

Acquiescence to the laws by the trade union apparatus has now been followed by acquiescence to the neo-liberal "modernising" tendency in the Labour Party. Apart from general statements assuring the bosses that there will be "no return to the '70s", the Labour Front Bench has not been keen to spell out what they will do about the legal shackles imposed on the unions by the Tories. Nor have the union leaders been keen to put them on the spot.

Communication Workers' Union (CWU) activists got a glimpse last summer of the kind of deal that is likely to emerge from a document written for the most self-consciously Blairite union baron, Alan Johnson. It starts by denouncing CWU conference pol-

The anti-union laws

DECISIVE in generating the shift in the balance of power in the workplace have been the Tories' anti-union laws.

Laws against strikes and picketing in Britain are now harsher than anywhere else in Europe. A strike is now legal only if:

- It follows a postal ballot
- The employers are given seven days notice of any action and an accurate and up to date list of everyone balloted.
- It is not in support of any other group of workers, even including people who work side by side with you but are technically employed by another company.
- It is not for a "political" purpose.
- It is not to re-instate someone sacked for engaging in an unofficial or illegal strike.

icy of support for solidarity action and repeal of the anti-union laws as "dangerous and wishful thinking". "No Labour government will reinstate the closed shop, mass picketing or unballoted industrial action, and the movement must not ask them to do so."

Instead the CWU leaders propose keeping 95% of Thatcher's anti-union laws, and the great bulk of Major's laws as well. They want only:

- abolition of the 3 yearly re-recruitment sections of the 1993 Act;
- repeal of the repudiation sections of the

1990 Act;

- repeal of the ban on union disciplinary powers of the 1988 Act;
- creating a right to strike without fear of dismissal (but only after a postal ballot);
- replacing the legislation which requires seven days' notice of ballots and a further seven days' notice of taking subsequent action which may be authorised, with fair procedures which do not preclude properly conducted workplace ballots;
- removing the discriminatory powers which allow employers to pay trade union members less than non union employees for work of equal value.

All forms of secondary and solidarity action would remain illegal. Basic solidarity, such as the highly popular CWU practice of refusing to handle diverted mail during strikes, would remain illegal. And any local union rep who organised such action would still be open to legal attacks and the threat of the sack.

Such a deal could well form one component of a broader framework of class collaboration that Labour Party modernisers could offer the trade union leadership.

Tony Blair's waffle about the "stakeholder economy" offers the bureaucracy the prospect of some level of involvement in tripartite (unions-employers-government) structures including the Low Pay Commission, which will set the level of a minimum wage. This approach could also be extended to employers' contributions to compulsory second private pensions, in exchange for a wage freeze and a no-strike pledge.

JJ Food: organising the unorganised

THE JJ Food dispute in Tottenham, North London, recently ended with the workers winning their case at an industrial tribunal.

Warehouse workers and drivers had been locked out by their employer — who supplies food to burger bars, schools, etc. — for joining the TGWU. Union density and organisation in this sector is extremely low, but it was a particularly militant, conscious and determined bunch of strikers. How many disputes see the strikers singing the Internationale?

The union activists and many of the rank and file strikers in the JJ Food dispute come from the more politically conscious sectors of the Turkish and Kurdish migrant communities. They have a sense of trade unionism and working-class politics which you tend to find in Britain today only in certain sections of industry — the mines, docks, railways, parts of engineering.

These traditions didn't fall from the sky; they were consciously created through struggle. In the docks, for instance, and in the rise of the new unionism at the end of the 19th century, a big role was played by small groups of socialists.

Today it is difficult to see how the form of trade unionism preached by a John Edmonds or a Garfield Davies is going to provide the intellectual and moral dyna-

mite needed to break open some of the non-unionised sectors. No one is going to take to the picket lines — never mind the barricades — because they've got fire in their bellies after hearing a speech by Roger Lyons on how the unions can re-invent themselves for the 21st century by taking on the functions of a building society and a YTS scheme.

It's a bleak reality, but it has to be faced. The key to breaking into new sectors lies with the revolutionary left, defined in a very broad sense. We can hope for, at best, encouragement from some bureaucrats who've got an eye on increased membership income, and protection from a limited right to union recognition that may be granted by a Blair government. But today's bureaucracy is about as likely to take the lead and the initiative in organising the unorganised as the old craft unionists of the 1880s were.

The other issue the JJ Food dispute highlights is the organic link between trade unionism and the Labour Party.

The most effective form of solidarity the strikers received — apart from donations to keep them going — was political campaigning to get Labour (and Tory) controlled councils to scrap contracts with the company.

Organising the rank and file

THE Alliance for Workers' Liberty and our predecessors have always argued for an open, democratic and genuinely broad based, rank and file movement in the trade unions and across the unions.

Such a movement would put a self-liberating instrument into the hands of ordinary workers: with such a rank and file movement we could force the union leaders to fight and where they refuse, replace them. If you want to see why a rank and file movement is necessary you just need to look at what happened to the miners during the great strike of 1984-85. Again, in October 1992, hundreds of thousands of people came out on to the streets of central London to support the miners. The ranks of the labour movement started to muster in support. But all that energy, hope and solidarity was wasted!

The TUC did not call any serious solidarity action for the miners — not even the most legal, orderly protest — and the Labour leaders accepted the essence of the Tory case for pit closures. Dislodging from power the people who did that and empowering the rank and file of the mass organisations of the working class — that is one of the central tasks facing socialists today.

In order to deal with the bureaucracy we need to understand them. The working class does not develop power and wealth organically, as part of society it is destined to supplant and outgrow. Its nearest organic equivalent to the intellectual and political representatives which the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie threw up is the trade union bureaucrat.

But these bureaucrats (like all workers who have not made a conscious break to socialist politics) are dominated, more or less, by bourgeois ideas: indeed they are a major channel for the consolidation of bourgeois ideas in the working class. In addition, the officials normally earn considerably more than the average in the trade they represent. They adopt a different petty-bourgeois mode of life and grow away from working-class life. Over time the bureaucracy has developed into a distinct stratum of the workers' movement, though not a separate class. It is an unstable social layer which develops out of the working class and then finds itself as a negotiator between the working class and capital.

The bureaucracy and the capitalists work together to maintain the system. The bureaucrats' relationship to the working class is parasitic. The bureaucracy needs the working class, the working class does not need the bureaucracy.

As the trade union bureaucracy develops, trade union democracy declines. This inevitably generates movements of the rank and file against the bureaucracy, but not necessarily a rank and file movement. A sustained, co-ordinated and organised movement generally requires a political backbone.

In a workplace we may find one in a hundred (at present) who will accept the need for a socialist revolution and be prepared to devote a large part of his or her life to working for it. There will be many more who are not fully convinced socialists, but will agree to work with us on immediate issues like militant struggle over wages and conditions and to join us in a fight for union democracy and against racism and sexism. We need to organise these militants.

This is the stuff of everyday local work for every socialist in the trade unions. But it needs to be more than local. Otherwise the national union leadership always has the advantages over the local groups of activists. We need a national organisation pulling together the militants across industry.

The best example so far in Britain such an organisation was the Minority Movement of the 1920s, which at its peak led one million workers. It was formed in a period similar to today, after a series of setbacks for the working class.

The engineering workers had been heavily defeated in a lock-out in 1921-2. Trade

"We will need to do more than go back to old-fashioned workplace industrial militancy though that must be the beginning of all wisdom for us."

union membership was falling. But the then-revolutionary Communist Party did not give up — they went out to organise the rank and file. They went out to prepare the future.

The same sort of thing could be done today. Already the conditions exist for starting to unite the rank and file across the unions. Several key unions already have fully formed and influential Broad Lefts and rank and file groups: CWU, NUT, USDAW, RMT, GPMU, CPSA, PTC, and UCATT. Other unions — TGWU, AEEU and even GMB — have loose groups and UNISON has a potentially strong but divided left. All these groups should be linked together through a single co-ordinating centre.

The Socialist Teachers' Alliance are trying to call together representatives from different broad lefts and rank and file groups. Such meeting could at least set itself the modest task of setting up a cross-union co-ordinating committee. It would help knit together the activists, share the experience and pool the resources of different left forces in the unions.

Such a body could take industrial disputes seriously in a way that the TUC does not and by its bureaucratic nature can not. It could

provide information and organise collections and speaking tours for workers in struggle. It could provide a framework for organising solidarity strike action. Right now, its central unifying initiative would be a campaign for a one-day public-sector strike against the Tory attacks. It could intervene into the policy debate inside the TUC and Labour Party.

A cross-union co-ordinating centre could not, of course, avoid difficult political questions. It would have to provide answers to the burning political questions of the movement like, for instance, how to fight racism and fascism. But it would debate out these questions in a tolerant manner and give space to minority opinions.

It would not try to "inject" politics from the "outside" but would try to draw out the political logic of the class struggle.

For instance the fight for jobs implies all kinds of questions: who pays for the shorter working week? How do we plan a recovery and direct resources to social needs? How do we break capitalist resistance to measures which seriously challenge their power?

Such a political agenda would require a willingness on the part of union activists — particularly in the public sector unions — to work with and build a campaign like the Welfare State Network which draws together the users and providers of services.

We will need to do more than go back to old-fashioned workplace industrial militancy though that must be the beginning of all wisdom for us. Take the anti-union laws, for instance. Some groups of workers, like the Scottish postal strikers, can hope to defy the law and win isolated victories but to hope to wipe away the anti-union laws through unofficial action and mass defiance without having to bother with politics is foolish. We are faced with an established and solid framework of law, policed by the trade union bureaucracy. For the root and branch removal of the anti-union laws we will need to fight for the election of a Labour government and the enactment of a charter of workers' rights, to establish the right to join the union, to strike, to take solidarity action, and to picket effectively.

Such a fight will involve a battle to democratise the Labour Party and the trade unions on which it rests. It will require protracted struggle and political determination. Exactly the same applies to any attempt to reverse CCT and privatisation.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty will do everything it can do to turn this perspective into action. If you want to find out more about our activities across industry and the unions, then come to our Industrial School in Manchester on 24 February.

● AWL Trade Union School: Manchester Town Hall, Saturday 24 February, 11am-5pm, creche available. Speakers from post, rail and many other disputes plus eye-witness from France. Phone: 0171-639 7965.

Labour and education: left can win

By Patrick Murphy

THE HARRIET Harman incident demonstrated that Labour has lost the ability to mount any sort of defence of comprehensive education.

It isn't just that Labour's attitude is fairly right-wing, though it is. Labour's policy is also in a mess.

The drift towards more selection means that inner-city schools lose pupils and therefore money — under Tory reforms, school funding is based on pupil numbers — and they also lose the brightest, they lose the mix of abilities that makes a comprehensive. They get worse results in national tests, and as a consequence they lose still more pupils.

Labour's answer? First make sure that your kids are not in these schools, then attack the schools and their teachers as incompetent and inadequate!

Perhaps the ugliest recent manifestation of New Labour's drive to appeal to the aspiring middle classes has been its *Daily Mail*-style campaign to scapegoat teachers. Blunkett and Blair have both publicly threatened to sack "the thousands of incompetent teachers." No commitment to redress the shift of funds towards wealthier areas, to increase the level of funding overall, to end the destructive internal market in education. No. Labour are weak and indecisive about those things. About one thing, however, they are fearless and talk tough — bad teachers will be weeded out!

All of this is tragic and unnecessary. The conditions are actually very favourable to anyone who has the determination to challenge the Tories' record in education. Public anger and frustration is widespread — the emergence of the pressure group, Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) is only one aspect of that. The government's revamped education system is visibly failing the majority of children and producing simmering resentment among teachers.

The Thatcher government's plans for education were radical from the start. The 1988 Education Reform Act initiated a revolution in state education and Major has pursued the cause without demur.

The ERA is a huge and complex piece of legislation but the three central pillars are the funding of schools according to pupil numbers, the introduction of national tests and published league tables of results, and the abolition of catchment areas so that parents have, in theory, absolute right of choice.

Together these pillars support an "internal market" which, the Tories argue, will drive up standards by forcing schools to compete. To survive in this market, schools must attract pupils (otherwise they lose money). To attract pupils they must demonstrate to their prospective customers (parents) that they are good schools by achieving good results and a high league table place.

This internal market is "up and running" and



There is widespread public anger over education

a few schools are certainly enjoying the benefits of the new system. In general, however, it is in chaos. It has resulted in the vast majority of schools being grossly underfunded. As a result, schools have been shedding teachers to save money in circumstances where they desperately need them to deliver the curriculum. Class sizes have increased every year since the ERA was introduced.

It is also in the nature of such a system to pull resources away from poorer inner-city schools towards affluent suburban schools. It therefore takes from schools whose need is greatest and gives to those who are already "successful." It then publicly identifies and stigmatises further the "failure" of inner-city schools so that parents can avoid them and choose others.

In short, the Tories' internal market, by its very nature, cannot serve the needs of the vast majority of schools and children. It imposes a culture on state education which is entirely at odds with the comprehensive system. The Tories hope that this contradiction, of which they are aware, will resolve itself gradually through a move towards a selective system, a return to grammar schools by degree.

Is there an alternative to the Thatcherite project? What the Harriet Harman affair exposed more than anything was that Labour is not sure.

Rolling back the internal market would mean challenging the middle class privileges gained from it, attacking the myth of parental choice, reversing the years of underfunding, especially in working-class areas, and funding schools on the basis of need. These are the sort of commitments New Labour doesn't want to make!

Tony Blair chooses the cheap option — talk about "raising standards", scapegoat teachers and failing schools, talk tough, threaten sackings and occasionally produce hare-brained schemes like fast-track learning to appeal to middle England.

And yet Blair isn't Labour. There was another side to the fuss created around the case of Harman's son. Support for comprehensive education continues to have a powerful resonance in the labour and trade union movement. Together with free health care it is the touchstone of the whole egalitarian ideal. This movement is full of people scarred by the old selective system, or people who came through it but left able, talented friends behind. Sometimes it can appear to have had a similar effect on the post-war generation's consciousness as the First World War had on that of a previous generation. We survived it, maybe tougher and wiser, but we know thousands who didn't and we don't want anyone to have to go through it again.

Make no mistake, there will be a fight in the Labour Party if a Blair government abandons comprehensive education or leaves the Tory revolution essentially in place. It will be reinforced by parental campaigns against cuts like FACE. It will sharpen already clear divisions in the main teaching union, the NUT, where a leadership under siege from a united and powerful left has been leaning heavily on the prospect of a Blair government.

The defence and improvement of state comprehensive education is going to be one of the first serious tests for New Labour, and the prospects for the left throughout the trade union and labour movement are good. We, at least, know that there is an alternative to the market. ■

Red or right-wing?

By Hillel Ticktin

THE Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) has won 158 seats in the new Russian Duma and with its allies in the Agrarian Party and other parties it can come close to mustering the half plus one of the 450 votes necessary to win resolutions of the Duma. In any case, before the 16 December election it had won majorities in a series of towns and districts over Russia. It might therefore appear as if there is a resurgence of either Stalinism or Marxism in Russia.

In fact there is no resurgence of either. Kagarlitskii's interview in *Workers' Liberty* 27 is naive at best and disastrous at worst. The KPRF does include a series of traditional workers' demands in its programme but these are little more than window dressing given its other statements and the pronouncements of its leader, Zuganov. Given the chauvinist, expansionist, anti-semitic nature of the party, the closest analogue in this country is the National Front.

The nationalist nature of the KPRF

ZUGANOV, the KPRF leader, has made it clear in a recent interview that the situation of 25 million Russians outside Russia was unacceptable. He said in an interview with *Moskovskii Komsomolets* of 29 November 1995 that "the programme (of the KPRF) unites the ideals of justice and national state development" and that the Russian people are divided with "25 million of our countrymen thrown abroad." The KPRF is clearly expansionist if not worse... Yavlinsky, who conducted the interview, pointed out that the KPRF has two or three factions. Of that there can be no doubt. There is certainly an internationalist faction, with people like Boris Slavin, who writes for *Pravda*, but it is in a minority, probably a small minority. Kagarlitskii must now be counted as an external member sympathetic to this faction. Yavlinsky also declares that Zuganov himself will be sacrificed the day that the KPRF comes to power, seeing him as a relative moderate. Indeed, the KPRF was formed in 1990 as a nationalist faction within the old CPSU and the more militant nationalists may well bay for blood, if they come to power in any way.

Zuganov traces his philosophy and that of his party to conservative monarchist philosophers, KN Leontiev and NY Danilevsky, in Imperial Russia. In that interview there was not one reference to Marx or Lenin.

Alexander Tsipko, a well known Russian right-wing intellectual, has called the KPRF a right-wing party with a red exterior. He is correct, because it supports the market, as Zuganov made clear to foreign businessmen whose investment he courted, and because Zuganov traces his philosophy to Russian nationalist and Tsarist philosophers at the turn of the 19th century. He supports Stolypin, the Tsarist minister who presided over the

white terror after 1905 in Russia, and the imperial Russian generals such as Kutuzov and Suvorov. He constantly quotes the Russian Orthodox Church.

The KPRF and the working class

SOME might say that he has declared that he supports collectivism. Indeed he has said that it is in the Russian soul. It has been instilled there for a thousand years through the Russian love of the commune. Such collectivism is closer to a mystical authoritarianism than to anything that the genuine left might propose. "With a claimed membership of 600,000 and cells in almost every town and village of Russia, the KPRF includes large numbers of people involved directly in production and anxious to defend workers' rights and interest. The party leadership responds to pressures from these layers with pronouncements reflecting various long-time positions of Russian Marxism," says Renfrey Clarke in a report made before the election itself. These positions are reconciled with the nationalist ideology through the emphasis on the inherent Russian love of the commune. The statements are not left-wing, however. Opposition to privatisation, the imposition of price controls and protection and restoration of the previous forms of the health service and education are completely compatible with the needs of the Russian industrial elite.

Renfrey Clarke, Alexander Tsipko and other commentators who have noted the apparently strange right-wing tendencies of the KPRF do not deal with its fundamental nature. On the other hand, the KPRF appears to claim to be inheriting the mantle of the leaders of Communism, who either paid lip service to Marxism or were Marxists while, on the other hand, its pronouncements, its allies and a large part of its membership are on the far right.

The political *apparatchiki* and assorted other bureaucrats who have lost out in the transition will support a party that promises to restore their former positions. These people are essentially elitist. They are angry at their own failure and the consequent success of other persons and groups. Hence the need for Russian nationalism, in order to stress the role of protection both economic and political for Russia and Russians. Competition within the elite and intelligentsia was very much part of the old system, let alone in the period of the transition from Stalinism.

Anti-semitism and anti-Westernism

ANTI-SEMITISM is, therefore, critical in that it both attacks Jews who have risen within the semi-market system and the West, which is seen as controlled by Jews. Anti-semitism plays the role of establishing a scapegoat, of attacking and possibly removing real competitors and of nominally opposing the market without directly attacking it. Russian nationalism or chauvinism is then directly championed by the KPRF, with an indirect anti-semitic message, which can be made more explicit on

the doorstep.

Zuganov is too clever to come out with directly anti-semitic statements but he was instrumental in setting up the National Salvation Front with its newspaper, *Den* (Day) and its successor *Zavtra*. It is doubtful whether such a newspaper would be tolerated in this country. It carried an interview between the editors and Le Pen in which they asked him if the problem with the world was not that of the cosmopolitans. He concurred. Whatever Le Pen thought, the word cosmopolitan in Russian means only one thing: Jews.

If there is an internationalist faction, there is an extreme nationalist faction, with Zuganov appearing to be a relative moderate. Yavlinsky may be correct that Zuganov could easily be replaced by a less diplomatic nationalist. The KPRF in power may well be tempted, when under duress, to go for foreign adventures.

The KPRF in a broader context

WHY is there no genuine Marxist party with any appeal? How is that Anpilov's party, Working Russia, got over 4% of the vote in the elections when Anpilov has often appeared to be more wild than Zuganov? Indeed he may be called a distilled Stalinist Zuganov. His party is supporting Zuganov for President. At the same time this party declared that it wanted genuine socialism.

The answer is that the Russian working class remains atomised and confused and the KPRF and Working Russia appear to be calling for a return to the better days of the past without its worst aspects. The elite has taken the opportunity once again to bamboozle the working class by projecting forward a party which claims to support workers' interests. Even if the Russian parliamentary system does not have the tweedledum and tweedledee of the British one, it has evolved a parallel form. On the one side there are those who stand for the free market of the West while on the other there are those who claim to be against it, in the name of Russian nationalism. In Russia they tend to confuse things even further by talking of Westernisers and Slavophiles. It is, however, no accident that the KPRF has had a good press in the West. It is not difficult for right-wing journalists to see the essentially right-wing nature of Zuganov. They may not like his nationalism but they recognise that he will keep the lid on the working class for a few more years if he should ever come to power.

Both sides, however, are part of the elite and both sides support the market. Neither side supports the working class. In this respect, Kagarlitskii's position in *Workers' Liberty* is reprehensible. Even if there are a number of people in the KPRF who are on the left, as he asserts, they can only be there because they are utterly confused. He argues that people see it as the party of Lenin but there are many other Communist Parties in Russia which they could have joined if they were looking for the party of Lenin. His party, the Party of Labour, has died, to all intents and purposes, and it may be that he finds it useful to ally himself with elements in the KPRF. No intelligent person can look at Zuganov's statements and say that he has even the slightest trace of Lenin in him. Hitler is a much closer comparison. ■

The Labour Party in perspective

By John O'Mahony

"The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement... The Communists are, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*

"To say that ideologists (conscious leaders) cannot divert from its path the movement created by the interaction of the environment and the (material) elements is to ignore the elementary truth that consciousness participates in this interaction and creation. Catholic labour unions are also the inevitable result of the interaction of the environment and the material elements. The difference, however, is that it was the consciousness of priests... and not that of socialists that participated in this interaction."

Lenin

"It is not enough to be a revolutionary and an advocate of socialism in general. It is necessary to know at every moment how to find the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength in order to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move on resolutely to the next link."

Lenin

THE Labour Party is now led by open enemies of socialism. That is nothing new. But the present Labour leaders are open enemies of trade-union involvement in running the party too, that is, of the very character of the Labour Party as it has been for nearly a century. This is new. The unions, bureaucratically controlled, have always been the bulwark of the right wing in the Labour Party.

If Tony Blair has his way, Labour-union links will eventually be severed. The Labour Party will become something like the Liberal Party was before the First World War, and Labour will have been pushed back into the womb of Liberalism, from whence it emerged in the first two decades of this century.

Labour's separation from Liberalism was at first no more than organisational. Where before 1900, for three decades, the unions



Leader of post-war Labour: Clement Attlee

got a handful of "Lib-Lab" MPs into Parliament under the Liberal banner, after 1900 the trade unions backed their own open candidates. Even then, the Lib-Lab MPs from the tightly-knit mining communities did not join the Labour Party until 1910.

Winning 30 seats in the 1906 election, the trade-union MPs formed the Labour Party. It was at first a party without individual members, a conglomeration of trade unions and affiliated societies like the Independent Labour Party, the Fabians, and, from 1916, the British Socialist Party, formerly the Social-Democratic Federation, the main precursor of the Communist Party of Great Britain (1920).

Despite the socialist societies involved, this party was still politically Liberal, and it was not fully independent even electorally. In every election before 1918, Labour operated an election pact with the Liberals.

Labour became a modern party only in 1918, when it created constituency parties with individual members, adopted a general socialist (though not Marxist) objective, the famous Clause Four ("to secure for the workers by hand and brain the full fruits of their labour"), and abandoned its electoral pact with the Liberals.

The "New Labour" Party of 1918 was both a maturation of the labour movement towards revolutionary socialist politics, and a powerful block to its further development on that road. "Each progress in organic evolution is at the same time a regress, by fixing a one-sided development and barring the possibility of development in a number of other directions" (Engels). What happened both before and after 1918 depended not only on the "natural" and "organic" evolution of the British labour movement, but also, as we will see, on the battle of ideas within it, Fabianism against Marxism, revolutionary socialism against reformism, militancy against moderation, democracy against elitism, and on what the revolutionary socialists did or failed to do.

Here I make not a detailed summary of Labour Party history, but an attempt to analyse how and why the British labour movement evolved the way it did, and how, for good and bad, Marxists have interacted with the processes that shaped the political labour movement the Blairites are now trying to destroy. I am concerned with drawing conclusions for Marxist work now.

What were the forces that went into the making of the new Labour Party of 1918? What had changed?

The trade unions had evolved politically. In the 1880s the unions had been Liberal in politics. Reflecting the dominant ideas of late Victorian bourgeois society, they were unable to conceive of ameliorative state action, and looked to "self-help" and their own benefit systems where later generations would look to the welfare state. The new unions of the dockers and other "unskilled" workers, after 1888-9, did not have high dues and good "welfare" benefits like the old craft unions, and naturally they began to look at "socialism" and the reforming state for welfare. By 1918 state action was widely accepted in bourgeois society and (in part as a consequence of that) demanded by the trade unions.

From the 1890s, "constructive" Liberalism and Tory self-serving paternalism had progressively embraced the idea that the state had to take direct responsibility for social engineering and social welfare in the ultimate interests of the ruling class. In Germany, the pressure of the powerful Marxian socialist movement had induced Bismarck to bring in social insurance as a means of undermining the socialists and guaranteeing healthy, educated workers and soldiers.

The discovery of the extent of malnourishment among British soldiers in the Boer War (1899-1902), where at first they did very badly, alarmed the ruling class. The example of their German imperialist rivals helped convince both Tories and Liberals of the need for state action.

After 1906 the Liberals laid down the first foundations of a welfare state. Old age pensions — which gave large numbers of old workers an alternative to the workhouse prisons for the indigent — had been discussed for decades. In 1908 Lloyd George brought in old age pensions, then in 1911 National Insurance.

On a certain level, this bourgeois approach, which in part reflected working-class (including international working-class) pressure, was in principle indistinguishable from reform socialism, the difference at most being one of degree and extent. Constructive Liberalism, the calculated paternalism of imperialist Toryism, and Fabian reform socialism were all of a family by the First World War. This helped transform the labour movement — and also to confuse it about what socialism was and was not.

The other great shaping force was organised socialist propaganda, sustained over

decades. Socialism revived, after decades of eclipse, in the early 1880s, when both the (Marxist) Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society were founded. These bodies, and after 1893 Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party, plugged away with criticisms of capitalism and socialist propaganda for a different society. Against the others, the Marxists explained the class difference between socialism and bourgeois welfare-ism.

By 1918, a powerful if undefined socialist collectivism held sway over much of the labour movement. The National Council of Labour Colleges, an independent working-class educational body, had been set up as the "Plebs League" in 1909 by students at Ruskin College, the trade-union education centre in Oxford. Demanding Marxist education, they seceded and organised a big network of socialist lectures in basic non-denominational Marxism. This was a great force for working-class enlightenment.

And then came the Russian Revolution. The first revolution in February 1917 had a tremendous impact in Britain. In July 1917 the Leeds Convention, at which large numbers of workers were represented, issued an appeal for soviets in Britain. Future Labour prime minister and future renegade Ramsay MacDonald backed the call! When in October 1917 the Bolsheviks demonstrated what soviets could mean, Russia remained tremendously popular.

In 1920 the trade union leader Ernest Bevin and others organised a powerful network of "Councils of Action" across Britain to mobilise the working class to stop the British government helping the Poles in the Russian-Polish war. In London dockers struck work to prevent the loading of a munitions ship, the "Jolly George", for Poland.

Labour had had ministers in the wartime government, Henderson and Barnes. During the war the trade unions had greatly increased in numbers. By the beginning of 1918 the Labour Party leaders, encouraged by the mid-war split in the Liberal Party, spurred by working-class militancy, and frightened of being outflanked from the left, reorganised the party.

This was, explicitly, a reformist, non-Marxist party. The Marxists, whose organisation was the oldest socialist group, had been defeated by Fabians, Christian Socialists, pacifists, and "constructive Liberal" refugees from the breakdown of their party. Why?

We must go back again, briefly, to the beginning. The historic reputation of the early British Marxists has been given to them by their Fabian and ILP enemies and by their Marxist successors, who had revolted against their inadequacies. They have, I think, received more abuse than they deserve.

For the one-third of a century before World War I they educated workers in basic Marxism, such as the mechanics of the exploitation of wage-labour (the labour theory of value) and the need for a working-class socialism. They fought for a hard, distinct, durable class outlook. They helped organise the burgeoning labour movement, and trained generations of leaders of the labour movement — of trade unions and of the

Labour Party, too. Those today who find it discouraging to have to explain to young people not only what socialism is, but also basic trade unionism, should note that Eleanor Marx had to teach the gasworkers' organiser and future MP Will Thorne how to read and write.

Even Clement Attlee, and the future Labour right-winger Herbert Morrison, passed through the SDF/BSP.

Yet as Frederick Engels, who was in general too hostile to them, rightly said: they tended to see Marxism as a salvationist dogma, a shibboleth, to be brandished aloft before the labour movement, which was asked to accept it as cure-all, whole and at once. They did not use it as a guide to Marxist action that would help the workers' movement develop. They disregarded the guidelines of the *Communist Manifesto*: "The Communists have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole".

It disparaged trade-union action, seeing the making of propaganda about its real inadequacy as the specifically Marxist task. In the great upsurge of semi-syndicalist militancy in the years before the World War, the SDF, as an organisation, tended to stand aside, sup-

"The SDF disparaged trade-union action, seeing the making of propaganda about its real inadequacy as the specifically Marxist task."

porting the workers but disparaging the action, instead of throwing itself into what was a tremendous revolt of raw working-class militancy. In other words, where the job of Marxists is to fight the class struggle on the three fronts of industry, politics, and ideas, and of the Marxist organisation to link and integrate those fronts into one coherent strategy, the SDF overemphasised the "propagandist" side of things. As a consequence, the beneficial effects of SDF propaganda and of the influence they gained for basic Marxist notions was diffuse and not organised in a revolutionary movement. The Marxists were unable to shape the growing labour movement into a coherent socialist force. Tasks neglected by the SDF/BSP for "purist" sectarian reasons became the province of the reformists. The Fabians and the Christian Socialists gained a dominant influence.

The decisive weakness of the SDF was probably its attitude to trade unionism and trade-union militancy — disdainful support combined with the fostering of trade union officials who gave their own increasingly bureaucratic caste meaning to the SDF/BSP's "Marxist"-sectarian incomprehension of raw militancy.

The SDF's approach to the Labour Party was also a prize example of sectarianism.

When in 1900, the trade unions, still essentially Liberal in politics, responded to a court ruling which removed their immunity from employers' claims to make good losses inflicted during a strike by setting up the Labour Representation Committee, the SDF promoted it. At the second LRC conference in 1901, the SDF moved a motion committing the Liberal or Tory trade unionists to recognition of the class struggle; when the motion was voted down, they just walked out, leaving the political movement of the trade unions and of the organised working class to the ILP, the Fabians, and the Christian Socialists!

Instead of working to develop the Labour Representation Committee towards their ideas, they denounced from outside what was in fact the movement of the organised working class into politics. It was the beginning of a tradition.

After 1906 sections of the SDF, including H M Hyndman, wanted to affiliate to the Labour Party, but it would be a decade before the majority agreed to do so. That was 1916, in the middle of the World War, as the BSP split — both sides would be in the Labour Party. Even after the shake-up of ideas following the war and the Russian Revolution, and the transformation of the BSP into the CP (1920), the sectarian approach continued, though often repudiated in words.

After considerable discussion and at Lenin's urging, the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920) came out for CP affiliation to the Labour Party.

"The Second Congress of the Third International should express itself in favour of Communist groups, or groups and organisations sympathising with Communism in England, affiliating to the Labour Party... For as long as this party permits the organisations affiliated to it to enjoy their present freedom of criticism and freedom of propaganda, agitational and organisational activity for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet form of government, as long as that party preserves its character as a federation of all the trade union organisations of the working class, the Communists should without fail take all measures and agree to certain compromises in order to have the opportunity of influencing the broadest masses of the workers, of exposing the opportunist leaders from a platform that is higher and more visible to the masses and of accelerating the transition of political power from the direct representatives of the bourgeoisie to the 'labour lieutenants of the capitalist class' [the Labour Party] in order that the masses may be more quickly weaned from their last illusions on this score..."

Of course, the CP view of the Labour Party was true. In 1922 the CP anatomised the Labour Party thus:

"A Labour Party which was ruled and organised primarily by officials of independent and often warring unions inevitably became entirely divorced from the socialist or revolutionary idea. Its leaders, in their overwhelming majority, were financially and otherwise no longer members of the working class, but of the middle class. They were often Liberals, and might be conservatives,

in all else but defence of their own unions, finances and privileges. (This was particularly noticeable, again, in the Parliamentary group).

"Thus, even before the war, the Labour Party had become quite distinctly a class organisation of the proletariat which was dominated by that section of the middle class whose profession it was to organise trade unions".

Nevertheless, this was the actually existing labour movement in politics — the highest level the mass of workers had so far achieved, and along the right road.

In fact Labour was as yet no closed-off, tightly-controlled party. The ultra-left communist Sylvia Pankhurst was a delegate to its 1918 conference. The major component of the new CP, the BSP, was affiliated to it. The CP could simply have informed the Labour Party that the BSP had changed its name. Concerned to raise a clear, visible banner of communism and to take their proper place within the ranks of the new Communist International, the CP leaders emphasised their separateness and sought affiliation as if going through a ritual. Leaders of the party like J T Murphy — who came from the small De Leonite Socialist Labour Party, a break-away from the SDF in 1903 which, though it had merits of its own, exaggerated and systematised the sectarian faults of the parent body — made speeches that were not designed with diplomacy in mind. "We take them by the hand today the better to take them by the throat tomorrow", said Murphy. They were refused affiliation.

Yet there was, in 1922-24, even a London Communist Labour MP, Saklatvala. He was no ordinary MP. The best description, telling us much about the Labour Party then, is that of the communist and Trotskyist veteran Harry Wicks:

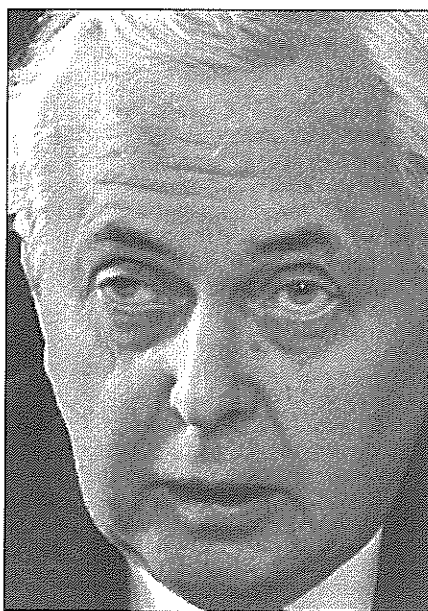
"In the twenties, to the consternation of the Liberal-minded Labour leadership of Henderson and MacDonald, Battersea North elected as their member of parliament the Indian Saklatvala. Not only was he an Indian but a Communist, and he was sponsored by the united Battersea labour movement.

"The link that Saklatvala established with his worker constituents was not that of the proverbial surgery: 'Can I help you?', 'Have you any problems?' At that time the entire working class had a problem, that of survival against the employers' lock-outs, widespread unemployment and the downward slide of the sliding scale of wages agreements.

"Saklatvala spoke at factory gate meetings and introduced the monthly report-back from Westminster. There were great meetings. Long before the doors of the town hall opened, queues formed just like they used to at Stamford Bridge.

"The platform was always crowded. Sak, as he was affectionately known, was flanked by the entire executive of the Trades and Labour Council and numerous representatives of Indian and colonial organisations. He was short in stature, broad-shouldered, with flashing eyes, and was a magnificent orator.

"Those monthly report-back meetings on



Wilson

the doings in Parliament stirred hundreds into activity. The Battersea labour movement pulsed with life and was united. Marxist classes held by the old Plebs League flourished. Trade union branches were crowded".

Despite refusals, the question of Communist Party affiliation remained open for years. Until the Liverpool conference of 1925, Communists could be trade union delegates to Labour constituency committees and to Labour Party conference. After 1925, three dozen Constituency Labour Parties let themselves be disaffiliated rather than expel Communists, and formed an organisation of the disaffiliated Labour Parties, the National Left Wing Movement, which also embraced left-wing groups in other constituencies.

In the unions, the CP, working from the low point of trade-union defeat and depression in 1922, built the rank-and-file "Minority Movement" into a force claiming as its affiliates trade union bodies enclosing a quarter of the organised trade unionists, then numbering about four million.

In retrospect the experience in Britain fits into this summary of the historical experience: wherever mass reformist organisations of the working class existed at the time of the formation of the Communist International, if the CI failed to win over the majority or a big minority of the old organisations then the CI failed to become the main force in the working-class movement.

That is a true general summary, but it obscures the processes that shaped the events in Britain. Up to the middle 1920s it was still possible for communists to have superseded the reformists as the dominant force in the British labour movement. The small CP, pursuing an orientation to the mass labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party alike, was, despite, sometimes, a sectarian style and manner, essentially not sectarian. It put forward perspectives for the labour movement and the objective needs of the working class, and fought for them throughout the labour movement, engaging in united-front work with the

reformists.

It had great and growing influence in the trade unions, organising the rank and file, building on rank and file militancy where the SDF had not known what to do with it. It had influence and supporters in the Labour Party. Above all, the class struggle was moving to the biggest confrontation in British history: the battle between reformist and revolutionary perspectives was far from settled.

Even after the nine months of minority Labour government in 1924, the Labour Party had not yet hardened definitively into the reformist mould. It was the subsequent policies of the Marxists, as much as the desires of the reformist leaders, that gave to the political labour movement the shape it was to have for the rest of the twentieth century, just as the SDF's deficiencies had let reformist leaders call the tune in the development before 1918.

It was the rise of Stalinism that destroyed the CP's prospects. From far away Stalin shaped the history of the British labour movement.

In Russia a new bureaucratic ruling class moved towards displacing the working class from power by first producing its own world outlook. The Bolsheviks had made a revolution in backward Russia believing that socialism was impossible there: the October revolution was but a first step of the world revolution. Civil war and wars of intervention followed. The revolution survived, maimed and isolated. As the bureaucrats infesting the state that the workers had erected in self-defence moved to take to themselves material privileges and to seize power for themselves, their leader Stalin proclaimed that backward Russia could build "socialism in one country", despite the domination of the world by capitalism.

The CPs outside Russia might as well act as political border guards for the Soviet Union.

This was not said clearly, but the logic unfolded very quickly. In Britain it meant that since the CP was small, Stalin looked for more powerful local support for Russia. While being anything but revolutionary at home, many trade-union leaders were friendly to the Russian Revolution. The Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee linked Russian trade unionists with British trade union bureaucrats, some of whom had been in the BSP. It gave them prestige with the left and made control of the rank and file easier.

That is how it was when in May 1926 the TUC called a general strike to defend the miners. Britain was now in a revolutionary situation. For nine days the strike developed and grew in strength and confidence. On the ninth day workers were still coming out. And then the TUC called it off, leaving the miners to fight on alone for six months to ultimate defeat.

It was a classic betrayal of the workers' interests by trade union bureaucrats. Here was a tremendous opportunity for the CP at least to settle accounts with the reformists and compromisers, if not yet with the bourgeoisie. In fact the CP was hamstrung as a revolutionary organisation, fighting the

incumbent leaders, by the involvement of some of those leaders in the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee.

The CP raised the slogan "All Power to the TUC General Council" — the TUC General Council that was selling out the strikers! Despite its sincere intentions, it helped the traitors. Even though the CP grew in the aftermath of defeat, the attrition of working-class morale and combativity was tremendous. This was the working class that would be hit soon by the great slump and pushed down further.

Worse was to come. In 1928, reflecting Stalin's final cataclysmic seizure of power in the USSR and the beginning of forced industrialisation and collectivisation, the Communist International proclaimed that the world had entered the "Third Period". The first period after the World War had seen working-class upsurge and defeat; the second, capitalist consolidation. The Third Period was the period of revolution everywhere.

Everything that happened could be and was construed according to that scenario. A religious pogrom in Palestine could be transmuted into an anti-imperialist struggle; fascists in Germany seen as misguided fighters against the Versailles Treaty; nationalist leaders toggled out as incipient communists — everything in fact which a later generation would come to know as post-Trotsky "Trotskyism" was pioneered here.

The dogma explained delays in the world revolution in terms of the Social Democrats, and concluded that they were the main enemy, the "Social Fascists", to be smashed at all costs. It made sense to ally with Hitler's Nazis in Germany against the Social Democrats, "the murderers of Liebknecht and Luxemburg", and suicidally, the German Communist Party did that.

In Britain the Third Period made the CP regard the left-wing movement of disaffiliated Labour Parties as a roadblock to CP growth rather than a bridge to the Labour Party, and the trade-union Minority Movement as a buttress of the bureaucrats rather than the agency for their eventual removal. The National Left-Wing Movement in the Labour Party was liquidated, the Minority Movement turned into an attempt to create new trade unions. It was a great self-liquidation by the Communist Party. A couple of tiny "red" trade unions, among miners in East Fife and clothing workers in East London and Leeds, were the only result.

This marked the end of any large-scale challenge to the dominance of Labourism. When the CP pulled out of its bureaucratic ultra-left craze in the mid-1930s, it was only a tool of Russian foreign policy, a source of totalitarian pollution in the labour movement and politically a force pulling Labour to the right — into a "popular front" with Liberals and "progressive" Tories. The Trotskyist groups which tried to maintain the politics and perspectives of original communism were tiny and of no account in mass working-class politics.

Thus a history which might have gone differently actually saw the consolidation of a reformist labour movement. The trade

union bureaucracy was strengthened by the defeat of the General Strike and then by the dampening of spirits in the great depression. Trade union leaders became more and more enmeshed in collaboration with the state.

In the late 1920s and '30s collectivist ideas were dominant in the unions. But it was a reformist socialism, at best, without any conception of struggling for working-class power." In practice, for the Labour Party leaders, "socialism" was a political artefact, camouflage, not a guide to action. Then as now, their operational ideas were strictly in line with the bourgeois consensus.

In October 1929 Labour formed its second minority government under Ramsay MacDonald, and it proved feeble and helpless in face of the catastrophic world slump. Even a left-winger with some serious credentials, George Lansbury, concerned himself with potty pre-World-War-I vintage schemes of organised emigration to Australia as a solution to unemployment. When Labour minister Oswald Mosley advocated Keynesian solutions — that the state should organise the capitalist economy, boosting consumption and thus production and employment — he was isolated in the government... and went off to found the British Union of Fascists.

Faced with the crisis, the Labour prime minister, MacDonald, the Chancellor, Philip Snowden, and the former railworkers' leader Jimmy Thomas, opted in July 1931 to cut the miserably inadequate dole of the unemployed workers in the interests of a balanced budget. They split from Labour and coalesced with Tories and Liberals to form the National Government, with MacDonald continuing as Prime Minister.

The number of Labour MPs fell from 288 in 1929 to 52 after the 1931 election, fewer than the 63 elected in 1918. But now there was no competition from the left, except from the vacillating Independent Labour Party, which split from Labour in 1932 with about 15,000 members.

Labour swung left, electing Lansbury, the Michael Foot of the 1930s, as leader for a while. But in fact no real balance-sheet of what had led to the collapse of the Labour government was drawn. Those who had

shared responsibility for the government up to the final split blamed everything on MacDonald's villainy, not on the politics and approach they shared with him. Soon the trade-union bureaucracy, in the person of Ernest Bevin, boss of the TGWU, reasserted a brutal control. Clement Attlee replaced Lansbury as leader in 1935.

Labour recovered some of its electoral fortunes in the 1935 election, which the Tory-controlled National Government again won. It formed a coalition government, with Attlee as deputy prime minister under Churchill, in 1940, and remained in it until Hitler was defeated. Old-style Toryism had been heavily discredited even among the intelligentsia in the 1930s, and ended in the catastrophe of war. 1945 was the reckoning. Labour won by a landslide.

What was the Labour Party of 1945? It was, as before, an extension of trade-union bargaining into Parliament. It was wretchedly non-militant, judged by the needs of the working class. But it was a party of genuine reformists. They wanted change in the interests of the working class, an end to things like the means test for unemployment relief.

It was a movement led and staffed on the trade-union level and even, though less so, on the parliamentary level, by men and a few women of genuine conviction, tempered in the struggles that had shaped the labour movement.

The honest communists of that period — the Trotskyists and, to some extent, the ILP — rightly denounced them for their inadequacies and there is no reason to gainsay any of that. But their inadequacies were those of a reformist labour movement.

If they could be justly denounced in the last analysis as Liberals, they were on the whole sincere liberals who believed in human equality and wanted to extend it.

They saw the labour movement of which they were organically part or to which they had attached themselves as the essential force for progress. In their own way they were loyal to that movement.

The scope of the Labour victory and what followed should not be misconstrued. It was immense. Vast masses of workers wanted a socialist revolution in 1945 and voted Labour to get it. They had seen what the state could



Campaign for Labour Party Democracy lobby



Most of the Tribune MPs of the early '80s ended up helping Kinnock steer the party rightwards

do in the organisation of society during the war: they wanted the same scope of action in peacetime, for peacetime objectives — for life rather than death. They were determined not to return to the 1930s. They had no use for the Tories, even though Tory leader Churchill was popular as the war leader who spat hate and defiance at Hitler.

Lenin once summed up the three cardinal conditions for a revolution thus: the rulers cannot rule in the old way; the ruled are not willing to go on being ruled in the old way; and there is an available, mobilised alternative to the old order. In 1945 the ruling class could not go on in the old way because the working class (and others) were not prepared to tolerate it. Even the Army was massively anti-Establishment and pro-Labour.

And there was an alternative — Labour. A Labour Party armed with a programme of nationalisation which had been imposed on the leaders at the 1944 conference (one of them, Herbert Morrison, told a left-wing delegate: you have just lost us the election!).

Certainly, Labour after 1945 merely continued the tradition of capitalist state amelioration that stretched back to World War 1 and earlier. Certainly, blueprints for a welfare state were drawn up at the behest of the wartime coalition by Lord Beveridge, a Liberal. Even so, political victory for the labour movement in 1945 was decisive for realisation of the welfare state. It happened the way it did only because Labour was available to carry through a revolution.

It was, of course, a limited revolution. All Labour's revolution did was establish a welfare state and a certain level of economic activity by the capitalist state. The commanding heights of the economy were left in the hands of the capitalist class, as was state power, which the Labour leaders considered a neutral force.

Thus was the apogee of the reformist labour movement. It imposed the welfare state and a "left" consensus on the Tories for 40 years. In the boom years the Tories maintained the Labour-established status quo, working with the unions. They vied with Labour in this regard. For example, in 1951 they promised if elected to build 300,000 houses within a year — and did.

Even after the Tories took back control of government in 1951, the impact of the 1945 revolution continued, amidst the long post-war capitalist boom. Trade unions had great

weight, with Tories no less than Labour.

Reformism had shot its bolt with the creation of the welfare state. The socialist goal of the suppression of capitalism and true social democracy free from wage slavery was never their goal. All the reformist-led movement could do was mark time, work at narrow trade union concerns, and see its structures rot inwardly. After 1945 the reformist leaders had succeeded far more than they had dreamed they might, and had nowhere to go but down.

In retrospect you can see the ravages of decay within the imposing outward forms of the labour movement from the 1950s to the 1970s. Political impotence and prosperity had killed off Chartism in the 1850s. A century later, "power" without control amidst prosperity sapped the strength of the labour movement. Over time the union bureaucracy became more and more middle-class and university-educated, at the top the MPs less working-class. Now they lacked not only ideological independence from the middle class, but even the basic sociological identification with the working class which had given life to the old reformism.

The official structures of the labour movement decayed — while the rank-and-file working-class movement was, uncomfortably for the Labour and trade union leaders as well as for the ruling class, and Labour governments in the 1960s and '70s, very much alive.

For 25 years, up to the mid and late 1970s, a great simmering — essentially unofficial — strike movement, rising and falling, was a stable feature of life in Britain. The working class reacted to prosperity and full employment with steady assertiveness, pushing up wages, expanding areas of working-class control within the wage-slave economy. Because Labour, the political wing of the labour movement, was at a loss to say what it stood for — except the administration of capitalism, in fact more ineptly than its natural party of government, the Tories — the working class was thrown back on assertive trade unionism.

They reacted to the tepid and conservative official labour movement by sloughing it off like dead, drying skin, burrowing down to grassroots militancy: the political dimension of the labour movement began to atrophy and this would have great consequences for the working class, because the reliance on

rank and file militancy was only possible in a full-employment economy. Militancy alone, small-scale wage "reformism", was no answer to the basic problems of the working class at the level of the general administration of society.

Yet it was a tremendous thing in itself, this stropy bloody-mindedness and determination not to give an inch. It was the basic substance of all working-class socialist perspectives. But without politics it could not develop.

Thus the working class marked time through the years of boom, building unstable islands of prosperity, control and dignity within capitalism. Through those decades, the militant working-class rank and file, in defiance of Labour and trade-union leaders, time and again prevented the ruling class from running its own system as they thought they needed to run it. It was impasse. Even Labour governments, faced with the rank and file, could not impose the ruling class's preferences.

The Wilson government [1964-70] was defeated when it tried to bring in anti-union legislation in 1969. All that government could do was grapple with the problem of Britain's expiring dog-end of empire and an ailing economy. It brought in a "National Plan" which was an abject failure. Its major reforms were all (valuable) liberal adjustments: abortion rights, gay rights. The working class was disappointed but, relying on industrial muscle, faced the Tory government returned in 1970 with confidence.

The Tories came back to power determined to sort out the labour movement, to put the working class in its place, to restore the untrammelled right to rule as it liked to the ruling class after 25 years; to boost profit. Labour's attempt to legally shackle the trade unions had failed because Labour was entwined with the unions, whose leaders then did not think they could police the rank and file as Labour's abortive 1969 legislation would have required them to. The Tories put laws on the statute books — but they could not make them stick. In July 1972 a quarter of a million workers struck and forced the Tories to release five dockers jailed for picketing. The anti-union laws were immobilised.

In the 1970s, as in the '40s, the ruling class could not go on ruling in the old way; masses of workers did not want to go on being ruled in the old way. But there was revolutionary force ready to take over. Nor was there any equivalent of what the Labour Party had been in 1945.

Reformism had been bankrupted by its own seemingly durable successes of the '40s. It had no place to go. The increasing purposelessness of the reformists, together with the decay of the reformist officialdom, at Labour Party and trade union level, and the ineptitude of the Marxist left, left rank-and-file militancy headless — divorced from any politics that expressed its own drive even on a minimal political level. That is what shaped the 1974-9 Labour government.

In 1974 industrial militancy derailed the Tory government, which called an election to get a mandate against the unions and lost

it. Largely ignoring the Labour Party, the masses of industrial militants had taken on the Tories and beaten them. *But when it came to government, they could turn only to Wilson.*

The contradictions of the reformist labour movement as it had evolved since 1945 were exposed self-destructively in the aftermath of Labour's February 1974 election victory.

The Wilson-Callaghan government of 1974-9, for part of its life a minority government, inherited a major social crisis of working-class bedrock revolt.

At first it bowed to the tremendous militancy. Tony Benn, an important Labour minister, received large numbers of requests from shop stewards' committees to nationalise their industries. They wanted socialism, and thought "nationalisation" was the way to it.

The trade union leaders were an essential prop of the shaky Labour government, and of the state. At no other time in the century was Trotsky's diagnosis of the role of the trade union bureaucracy as a pillar of the British state more visibly true than then:

"From the example of England one sees very clearly how absurd it is to counterpose, as if it were a question of two different principles, the trade union organisation and the state organisation. In England more than anywhere else the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, through the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy..."

"The Labour Party... in England, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the same trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in the ministries.

"The Labour Party and the trade unions — these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour. Together they are the fundamental support of the domination of the English bourgeoisie. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy. And that cannot be attained by counterposing the trade union as such to the state as such, but only by the active opposition of the Communist Party to the Labourite bureaucracy in all fields of social life: in the trade unions, in strikes, in the electoral campaign, in parliament, and in power."

In 1974-5, an opinion poll reported a majority believing that TGWU leader Jack Jones was more powerful than prime minister Harold Wilson. Sections of the army talked seriously of organising a military coup, as the then chief of staff would later publicly admit.

The government and the trade union leaders turned their energies to dampening down militancy, trying to run the capitalist system as best they could. And, because the rank and file militancy was politically headless, they succeeded in their negative task. They could do nothing positive. It started to unwind

the film of reformist progress even on the level of welfare, initiating cutbacks in 1976. It prepared the way for the Thatcherite counter-revolution.

Symbolically, the so-called winter of discontent of 1978-9 heralded the end of Labour government and sent it out of office with the noises of disgruntled trade union militancy ringing in its ears.

The failure of the Tory "get tough" policy initiated by Edward Heath in 1970, ending in Tory defeat in 1974, revolutionised the Tory party. The Thatcherites who came to power in June 1979 embodied the embitterment of the ruling class and its thirst for revenge and counter-revolution against the achievements of 1945.

Aided by slump and mass unemployment, which they deliberately encouraged, they wreaked havoc on the disoriented labour movement, inflicting the worst anti-union laws in western Europe on what had been one of the most militant working classes in Europe. Trade union leaders were driven out of the corridors of power and scapegoated for the past.

The final turn on the road that led to Blairism was made here. Thatcher had not defeated the working class; no-one had. If the working class had mobilised in all-out resistance to anti-union laws, to the cuts and to the naked class rule unleashed by Thatcher, then the Thatcherites could have been beaten. Even if they had beaten us in a fight, we would be in a better shape to prepare a new round. That was not done, not attempted, before, belatedly, the miners made a stand in 1984-5.

Out of office, Labour went through a tremendous crisis in which the contradictions of decades exploded in confusion and bitterness. A mass revolt of the rank and file for democracy — that is, for the next Labour government to be accountable to the movement — was incongruously aided by leaders of far-from-democratic unions. The focus was on the structures of the movement, rather than the politics. The big events, like Tony Benn's candidacy for deputy Labour leader, were symbolic contests rather than contests for real power. Here was the point at which a real new turn might have been made: if the local government left had fought; if most Marxists had not held aloof from the struggle in the Labour Party. Tony Benn talked about the need to "refound the Labour Representation Committee". It was not to be. There was no sufficiently big effort to organise a fight for rank-and-file control and militant policies in the trade unions parallel to the battle in the Labour Party. Where the trade union militancy of the 1970s had finally run aground for lack of a political dimension, the political revolt of 1979-81 failed for lack of a trade union dimension and of political clarity.

The Labour and trade union leaders did not fight back against the Tories; the "left" leader, the George Lansbury of his age, Michael Foot, launched a crusade against "extremists" and "anti-democrats" — in the labour movement! By the late 1980s the Tories rode around like victorious horsemen on a battlefield, targetting anything

wearing labour movement colours that still twitched.

That is where Blairism came from, the victory of Thatcherism. If Labour after 1945 imposed a "left" welfare-state consensus on the Tories, which they did not break for three decades, the Tories have now imposed a "marketist" consensus on the Labour Party. Hungry for political office on any terms, backed by a rank and file wanting the Tories out on any terms, the Labour leaders have moved inexorably to reflect Tory politics.

They accept the Tory media's approval or disapproval as the highest court of judgement on what they say or do. In a country where most of the things that make trade unionism effective — solidarity strikes, for example — are illegal, the "party of the trade unions" does not now propose to scrap the anti-union laws.

They accept the Tory argument that "society" cannot afford to give the poor state-of-the-art health care free at the point of consumption. They will not, unless they are forced to, restore the Health Service.

Now, the Labour leaders have *always* more or less accepted the going wisdom of the bourgeoisie. They did not become Keynesians until the bourgeoisie did in world war two; and they did not sit long at Keynes's feet after the bourgeoisie moved on. What is new is the extreme distance the Blairites have travelled from the key notions of reform and old-style liberal democracy. In their ideas these people have little in common with even such an old-style labour movement right-winger as Roy Hattersley.

These middle-class "Labour" politicians are eager to emancipate themselves from the trade unions. They want Labour to be a modern "mass" party of late-bourgeois passive pseudo-democracy, in which the politicians relate to a passive membership through the bourgeois-owned mass media, probably with state funding of political parties. Blair and Brown have already set up a large personal staff, largely funded by donations from big business, separate and independent from the official Labour Party machine.

The trade union leaders, increasingly university-educated middle-class men and women, with no real background in working-class struggle, or any sort of struggle of the sort that shaped even the old reformists, have bowed under pressure of Tory blows to the de-politicisation processes. The working-class movement is being pushed out of the direct access to politics it won when it established the Labour Party. Large dimensions even of the bourgeois democracy of the past are thus being cut away.

Of course, it does not follow that the union leaders will go on letting them push the unions out of politics. When the Tories have been kicked out and Prime Minister Blair is in no.10 Downing Street, the demands and expectations of the labour movement, at all levels, will escalate.

Among the sectarian left, it has become an "established fact" that the 150,000 new members who have joined the Labour Party over the last two years are all middle-class and right-wing; yet the facts are that a big pro-

portion joined on the cheap rate as members of affiliated trade unions, and a recent opinion survey showed that most wanted unions to be more active in the Labour Party and wanted a figure set for a legal minimum wage before the General Election.

Even so, the trade unions may well let the Blairites push ahead to a complete rupturing of Labour-union links or be unable to stop them. This would create a situation at the end of the 20th century not unlike that which the labour movement faced at its beginning. In that way, Blair is the legatee of Margaret Thatcher, who set out to destroy socialism in the labour movement.

If this happens, it will be a historic defeat for the British working class.

Now Marxists of all people did not expect steady progress, ever upwards, under capitalism. There is no stable victory for the proletariat, no long-term historic resting place, until it has crushed the bourgeoisie.

Nor did we expect the steady improvement of the Labour Party, its evolution towards a better and better approximation to working-class socialist adequacy. The first political statement by the first forerunner of *Workers' Liberty* summed up the perspective like this:

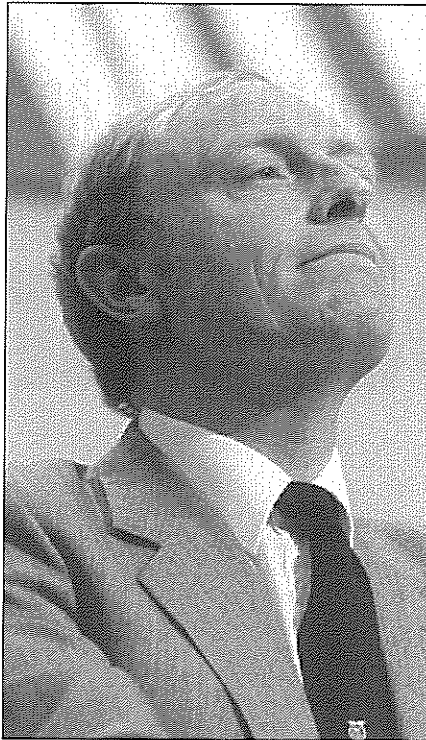
"The idea of an automatic adjustment by the existing movement in response to changing events stands in the way of our serious striving to influence events in a Leninist spirit. The views of the leading comrades [of Militant] on such things as Clause IV show that they see the movement as slowly maturing and Clause IV as an organically evolved first fruit of this process. The dialectical view is abandoned, the need to see the future sharp breaks, leaps, etc. (and the need to prepare for these, rather than wait passively).

"There will be no automatic upwards spiral here: because of the abortive nature of the present movement, events far from elevating it automatically to a higher stage could plunge the class downwards and backwards in a sharp crisis. More — it must be said that in view of all the past this is inevitable."

And what of the Marxists during the decline and possibly the fall of old reformism? The communist "old believers", the followers of Trotsky, were a marginal force, for decades, sometimes working in, sometimes outside the Labour Party.

In the late 1960s and '70s, "Trotskyists" became quite numerous. But they proved utterly inadequate. Instead of relating to the real working class and the only labour movement we have, many Marxists lost themselves in fantasies about third world Stalinist socialism, or anarchist sloganising about "revolution now." Where one Marxist organisation, the Revolutionary Socialist League (Militant) gained real influence, it subordinated the interests of the class struggle to its supposed private interests as an organisation; doing a cop-out while the miners were fighting the decisive battle of the Thatcher years.

If it had used the needs and logic of the class struggle as a compass, Militant would have deliberately looked for a link up with the miners and if necessary let the logic of the struggle lead to a break between the Liv-



erpool Labour Party and the Labour leadership. Instead, they ducked out of the struggle and, picked off by the Tories once the miners were defeated, soon scuttled off in a private adventure out of the political labour movement.

The SWP first followed the drift of rank and file militant work away from active political reformism into reliance on industrial militancy, evolving an ideologically impure but functional syndicalist "politics" and perspective around it. When the strike and election of 1974 proved the continuing importance of the Labour Party, when workers needed a governmental alternative, they went on a brief mad period of ultra-militant "steering left" which wrecked their trade union base, then flipped back to take refuge in caricature sectarianism. The solution to the problems of the working class was to "build a revolutionary party", completely separate from it — a party with the implicit perspective of rebuilding the labour movement from the ground up. They became utterly defeatist for the foreseeable future, until "the party" has been sufficiently "built." They continue the British "Marxist" tradition.

Yet the case for real Marxist politics could scarcely be better made than in the history I have analysed and outlined above.

Things have gone as they have because the early Marxists did not build an organisation able simultaneously to make socialist propaganda, educate Marxist cadres, link up with bedrock working class militancy, and use a combination of reformist, transitional and revolutionary demands to gain the leadership of the British labour movement. They did not know in practice how to link up and knit together the three main fronts of the class struggle — trade unionism, politics and ideas — into a coherent strategy.

We can not go back and relive that history to produce a better result. We can learn from it and bring those lessons to bear on the

class struggle and the struggle inside the labour movement. We can build an organisation that knows both how to relate to the existing mass movement and how to act as an independent Marxist force in all the facets of the class struggle. Through all this history, the failures and weaknesses of the Marxists have played, again and again, a deadly *anti-Marxist* role.

The Blairites have not yet destroyed the Labour Party. To accept it as given that they will is premature, unnecessary. They must still be fought every inch of the way in the Labour Party and in the trade unions as the "Keep the Link" campaign fought John Smith in 1993 and the Clause Four campaign fought Blair in 1994-5.

We will best fight them by rousing the bedrock of the labour movement in defence of things long taken for granted by working class people like the welfare state.

Speculation about what may happen in the Labour Party is useful only if it leads us to a clear idea of our own socialist identity and the tasks socialists face now. Whatever happens with the Labour Party these tasks essentially remain the same, though circumstances and therefore details vary.

If the Blairites destroy the political mass labour movement, then we will agitate in the trade unions for a political party of the unions, this time with better politics. The immediate task is to build our own socialist movement now. That way we will be better able to handle whatever comes. Antonio Gramsci put it well, long ago, writing in an Italian fascist prison:

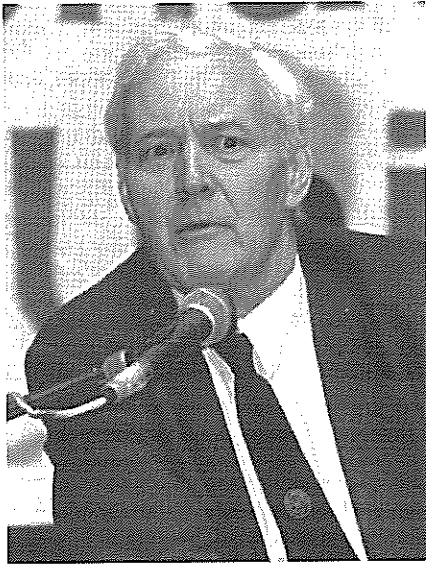
"The most important observation to be made about every concrete analysis of forces is this: that such analyses cannot and must not be ends in themselves (unless one is writing a chapter of past history) and they only acquire significance if they serve to justify practical activity, an initiative of will. They show what are the points of least resistance, where the force of will can be applied most fruitfully; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political action can best be presented, what language will be best understood by the multitudes, etc. The decisive element in every situation is the force, permanently organised and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent to which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour); therefore the essential task is that of paying systematic and patient attention to forming and developing this force, rendering it even more homogeneous, compact, conscious of itself." From *The Modern Prince*.

Confronting a worse catastrophe than any we face, the possible victory of fascism in France, Trotsky put the same idea more directly in 1934.

"Under the least favourable hypothesis, the building of a revolutionary party would mean to speed the hour of revenge. The wisecracks who duck away from this urgent task by claiming that 'conditions are not ripe' only show that they themselves are not ripe for these conditions'." ■

Tories threaten graduate tax. Campaign for Free Education

"Campaigning for th



By Tony Benn MP

I BRING support from the Campaign Group of MPs and I congratulate the people who have set up the Campaign for Free Education. It is clear that the present leadership of the National Union of Students have a great reluctance to support the policy agreed at the Derby NUS conference, and something independent of them needed to be set up.

I can't believe that the NUS leadership can go on for much longer following a policy that has been rejected by their members. There is a broad democratic issue here to be raised.

I do believe that the argument for free education is an enormously powerful one and it is one that we will need to redeploy because people haven't heard it for such a long time. We are starting to have this argument now.

Next week, the Conservatives announce plans to impose a graduate tax. There are people in the Labour Party who support that proposal!

People say to you, well, why should you have free education? I say, well I'm also a member of the campaign for a free health service, a free fire service; if you have a fire they don't expect your parents to come along and make a contribution. Some

things have to be provided because you need them. You need an educated community if you are going to survive.

This attempt to raise higher the financial obstacles to be surmounted before people can go into higher education will, if they succeed, throw us back to the period when only wealthy people's sons and daughters went into higher education. That is what it is really about.

Somebody said to me this week: "Some parents can afford to pay for their children's higher education." But if they can afford to do that, they can afford to pay taxes, and make sure everybody's children can go to college!

These are very powerful arguments indeed. And therefore I think your campaign, in addition to being about protecting opportunities for young people to go on to college, must be seen as part of the argument for a whole range of other services.

They will say: "If you give grants to students instead of loans or graduate tax, that money has to come off financing nurses or schools." Utter rubbish! *There is tons of money about, it's just been spent on the wrong things.*

Can you imagine anything more absurd than a graduate tax? If you're educated then you've got to pay a higher sum of money. Next they'll be introducing an operation tax for everyone who's had an operation in hospital! It won't be long before they'll be talking about loans for operations!

When we move towards the "tiger economies" of Asia and get gobbled up

by the most powerful animals in the jungle, then all these things will happen.

You have to tackle the argument about where the money's coming from. *Think for a moment where the money is going to now.*

Perhaps I could get the House of Commons to divide up the national budget per head of the population? Think about the

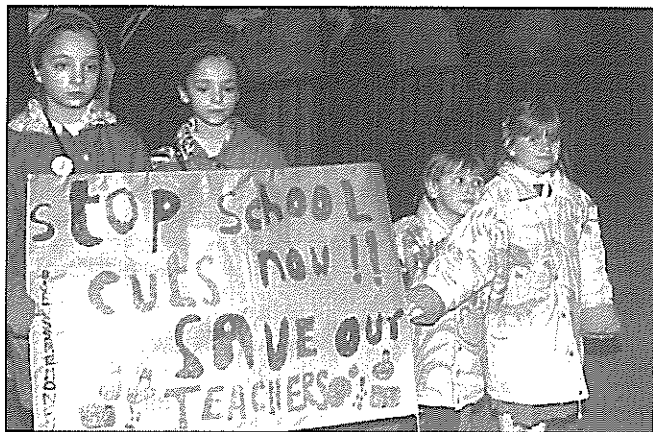
"They say the government is uncaring. I don't agree with that. They just don't care for our people. Certainly they care for their people."



NUS-organised demonstration against loans, November 1994. Labour Students have since reneged on commitments to free education. Photo: John Harris.

on fights back.

the enrichment of life"



Free education needed across all sectors of education

"national budget" in terms of family budgets, and you will see how absurd it is. I might go and knock on a door in Chesterfield and say "How are you getting on?" and they would reply "It's a bit hard".

"It's the money, Tony."

"Well, aren't you spending a bit too much on weapons in this household?"

"What do you mean? There isn't an air pistol in the house."

No, but every family of four is taxed

- £40 a week for weapons,

- £40 a week to pay the benefit for people out of work,

- £40 a week for law and order, much of it caused by unemployment, and

- £20 for the Common Agriculture policy.

Every family of four is paying £140 a week before they've paid the rent, mortgage, whatever. That is wrong!

How can they say there's no money? They've given £50 billion to the richest 10% in tax cuts!

They say the government is an uncaring government. I don't agree with that. They care all right, they just don't happen to care for our people. They care for their people. Don't accept the argument that the money isn't there! It is.

The truth is that the government don't really want an educated working class. It's bad enough for the government to have a lot of kids roaming around without jobs. But if those kids had a PhD in economics that would be really threatening, because they would know *why* they

haven't got jobs.

It is very important that this campaign is got across to the widest possible audience.

We will have a job putting this argument across to the Labour Party. The Party will have to think very seriously — even if its only motive is to win the election — about the extent to which you can go on alienating huge chunks of opinion whose support you need.

For example, there is no Labour Party pledge to pensioners who have lost out so much since 1979. There is no support for trade unionists now — they will have to wait for a minimum wage.

If the teachers and the student population are alienated, the Labour Party is going to find it much harder to get its case across.

This campaign should not be focussed on attacking the Labour Party, or anybody else, but concentrating positively on what we want. *We want educational opportunity for everybody, for the whole duration of your life.*

In campaigning for education, we are campaigning for the enrichment of life, for opportunities that have been denied to earlier generations of working people.

This is a campaign for a decent civilised society. I have a very strong feeling that this campaign is going to catch on.

There are a lot of parents who are worried about loans and taxes and entry fees, worried that

their youngsters will not be about to go on to college. And there will be those who remember the time when there were better grants systems, who will feel a sense of injustice. *So we are addressing a very wide and sympathetic audience.*

I think people now want to see simple demands like full employment, more and better housing, decent education, and so on, implemented. And don't try and persuade me that it can't be done!

Take full employment. They say you can't have full employment with a globalised economy and so on. When I was sixteen, I had a lovely letter from the government. Dear Mr Benn, it said, will you turn up on your seventeenth birthday, and we'll give you free food, free accommodation, free training, 10p a day, all you have to do is kill Germans. It was a youth training scheme!

If you can have full employment to do that, why in God's name can't you have full employment to build houses to recruit teachers and nurses? Because it isn't profitable.

We need to tackle this absolutely vicious philosophy, that everything has to be profitable before you can even think about it. *If we do that then an awful lot of other things will go down the pan in addition to the Tory Party.*

- Tony Benn was speaking at the Campaign for Free Education rally held in London on 3 February. The Campaign can be contacted c/o Huddersfield University Student Union, Huddersfield.



The corruption goes deeper

Jane Ashworth reviews

"Our Friends in the North", BBC2, 9pm, Mondays

THE SERIAL is less than half way through, and although it's got faults, I'm gripped. I used to live in Newcastle's West End, not far from Mary and Toska, two of the central characters. Thirty years on from the start of the serial, their tower block is still there.

It is one of ten, rising up off the slopes of the Tyne bank, monuments as good as any to the corrupt civic life of Newcastle in the 1960s, which is the main theme of the programme. Those flats were built as the first phase of slum clearance in a dirty deal between Austin Donaghue (the T Dan Smith figure) and Edwards System Building (the fictionalised Poulson company). The building faults which made Mary's and Toska's life a misery have been corrected, and these days the flats are probably better places than many in the West End, with 24 hour security and CCTV to deter the casual or apprentice house-breakers who torment the area.

Down the hill from the blocks, just a short walk away, is the river. Toska used to work there for a shipping company until Mary's former best mate Nikki (who is the serial's active young socialist) shopped the firm for sanction-busting by sending goods to Rhodesia. Toska is now self-employed, and it looks like he is going to be dragged into a gang, probably one involved in the pornography racket, via the market stall a gang leader has bought him. Toska's future is bleak.

The Tyne's heavy engineering base declined very rapidly in the late 1960s and early '70s, and there wasn't much alternative work for men like Toska. It wasn't until the 1990s that the Newcastle Business Park was built on the riverside to replace the dead industries. The Park is a state-subsidised office development intended to entice firms to relocate to the West End. A lot of these new offices are half-empty, and most of the staff do not live in flats like Mary's and Toska's. These days, anyone in the West End with a job moves north, maybe to the new towns like Cramlington and Killingworth, on the fringes of Newcastle, leaving the area to those who cannot afford to

leave.

I hope Mary and Toska have a chance to follow the trend and go north. It would be awful for them if they are relocated from their unhealthy flat to a house in another part of the West End. They don't know it yet — it is only 1968 — but the whole West End went down together, both the corruptly built flats and the honestly built post-war stock.

If Mary and Toska do stay in the West End, it is probably better that they stay as council tenants. The estates are grim, but life is certainly no worse than for the West End home-owners who are trapped by up to £20,000 negative equity or for the private-sector tenants, prey to landlords who police their run-down properties with gangs of heavies.

It is not only the quality of the housing, and the crime rate, which makes the West End as bad today as it was thirty years ago. Mary's and Toska's kids will have a dangerous playground, uncannily similar to backstreet Middlesbrough, where a little boy recently froze to death, trapped by the yard wall, too high to climb, of a derelict house. Some West End kids expect so little from adults that if trapped they might not even cry out.

Austin Donaghue justifies his corruption to Nikki, now a young, decent mainstream socialist who is about to rebound in disgust and join an English Red Brigade, by saying that he was frustrated by the lack of will and vision in both Newcastle's labour movement and its ruling class. To "get things done", to "rebuild the city", he brought together the council and the builders. His personal gain is the small change of this historic project, and even if he gets caught he will be looked back on as a force for positive change.

Thirty years on, the Newcastle Labour group is not corrupt, but once again the builders are the ones most likely to benefit from a new round of slum clearance — urban regeneration, as it's now called. "Partnerships" between the council and the private sector are now positively demanded by the central government.

As industry, and then the working class, leaves the West End, the council, City Challenge, and the Urban Development Corporation create parcels of land to sell off for "development." For example, Chas Chancellor, who made his name playing with *The Animals*, has been subsidised to build a multi-million

pound sports and music arena on the riverside. I doubt the makers of *Our Friends* saw the joke when *The Animals*' tracks were laid down as the setting for much of the programme.

West End land is derelict, and it's cheap, but the north bank of the Tyne faces the sun. It could become very desirable, and maybe one day posh flats with sunny riverside views will be built there for the senior staff from the Business Park.

The last time I saw the tower blocks on TV, they formed the background for the opening credits of *The Likely Lads*. Upwardly mobile Bob was on his way to Cramlington, or some place similar, and even likeable, dissolute, under-achiever Terry could get a job when he really tried. It's ironic that while the comforting (if a little kitsch) "Away the Toon" Geordies Terry and Bob were the public face of Newcastle in the 1960s, Mary was desperately re-papering walls to deny the running damp in her two year old system-built flat.

It has taken thirty years for that scandal to be made safe enough to dramatise. Justice had been seen to be done when T Dan Smith died a few years, his last home being a flat in one of the tower blocks, just next to Mary's and Toska's.

I will be very surprised if the plot veers off the likely track and examines the social policy of the City Council as well as the housing and planning issues. That would really cut to the quick, in both 1968 and 1996. The TV prefers to show Newcastle as a tale of civic corruption, which in truth is not the most significant factor in the making of today's North East.

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Marxism and imperialism

By Martin Thomas

"By the end of the '60s, what had once been 'the pride' of Marxism — the theory of imperialism — had become a 'Tower of Babel', in which not even Marxists knew any longer how to find their way."

Giovanni Arrighi [1]

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how Social-Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes power. A 'negative' slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not sharpen, but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, meaningless declamation."

Lenin [2]

WAS SERBIA the imperialist in Bosnia's war? Or the UN and NATO forces? Or Croatia? Or German finance and industry?

In Northern Ireland, according to a long history, Britain is the imperialist, and the Catholic community anti-imperialist. But now the political representatives of that Catholic community, the SDLP and the Provisionals, are looking to an alliance of the biggest imperialist power, the USA, with the European Union and Dublin, to push Britain into pushing the Protestants into a united Ireland. Who is anti-imperialist now?

The division between imperialism and anti-imperialism was never clear-cut even in the heyday of the British, French, Dutch, Russian, Turkish and other empires. Turkey was both imperialist and a semi-colony; Tsarist Russia, though not as trammelled as Turkey, was economically subordinate to European finance capital.

Plainly, however, the question is much more complicated now, so complicated that "anti-imperialism" can be used to justify a vast range of policies — pro-Serbian or pro-Bosnian in Bosnia, for example.

The short answer to the bewildering complexity is that Marxist policy should always be based not merely on anti-imperialism or anti-capitalism, but on our positive programme: working-class self-liberation, working-class struggle, working-class unity, consistent democracy, the right of nations to self-determination, local autonomy for minorities, equal rights for all. That positive programme, before any complicated calculation of who or what is imperialist and to what degree, is the compass that keeps us from getting lost.

To say that, however, already assumes some conclusions about imperialism: that the division between imperialist and anti-imperialist is not absolute, and that it does not override class divisions.[3] To assess and orient ourselves in the world requires some understanding of imperialism. And behind the political questions lie analytical ones.

If the colony-grabbing drive of the late 19th and early 20th century was a product of imperialism, then what have the colonial liberation movements winning independence after 1945 done? Have they been illusory? Is independence a mere empty formality behind which the imperial powers still grip their vitals? Or, on the contrary, have they destroyed imperialism? Did they emerge only because imperialism was already collapsing? Did they reflect, or shape, a modified form of imperialism?

If European capitalism needed colonies in the first half of this century, why has it not collapsed without them in the second half? If early 20th century imperialism marked "the highest stage of capitalism", the "epoch of capitalist decay" — as revolutionary Marxists wrote at the time — what is the late 20th century?

To answer these questions we must first clear away much confused "Marxist orthodoxy." Through a review of the classical Marxist literature on imperialism, from the 1890s to World War 2, I will argue:

● That the usual thumbnail "Marxist" definitions of imperialism — "finance capital", "export of capital", "monopoly capital" — represent only grabbing at strands in the classical revolutionary-Marxist literature. Despite its richness, that literature contained many loose ends and false tracks: it never produced a "finished" theory.

● That the capitalist world economy generates drives both to the world-wide expansion of capitalism and to the domination and plundering of underdeveloped areas by the stronger, richer states. Over the last 200 years these different drives have combined under a number of successive different regimes — a number of different "epochs of imperialism."

Imperialism and high finance: Kautsky builds on Engels to answer Bernstein

Maybe the first big classical-Marxist statement on imperialism was by Karl Kautsky, in 1899, replying to Eduard Bernstein's call for a "Revision" of the perspective of Marx and Engels.

In the 1890s Engels had identified *monopolies, cartels, credit and high finance* as expressions that classic individual capitalism was decaying and becoming "socialistic", but in an upside-down way which sharpened plunder, swindling, and crises. *Colonialism* was a profit-making venture of the new financial



Pro-Bosnian demonstrators in Manchester, August 1992. The positive Marxist programme of the right of nations to self-determination indicated support for the Bosniacs against Serbian aggression. But many left-wingers, believing that any blow against a big power must be supported irrespective of its relation to socialist and democratic objectives, sided with Serbia because it came into conflict with the USA, the UN and NATO. Photo: Paul Herrmann.

aristocracy.[4]

Bernstein argued, on the contrary, that the new trends made capitalism more open to peaceful and piecemeal progress. *Credit* gave the system more flexibility. Industrial *cartels* (associations of companies bound together by agreements on production levels, prices and sales) gave the capitalists more conscious control. They could avoid overproduction by mutual agreement. The growth of the *world market*, and improvements in communications and transport, also made the system more flexible. Capitalism could probably postpone "general commercial crises" for a long time.

Bernstein criticised the *way* the German government pursued its imperialist policy, but argued that the trend was towards peace and harmony between nations. "The workman who has equal rights as a voter... who... is a fellow owner of the common property of the nation, whose children the community educates, whose health it protects, whom it secures against injury, *has a fatherland...*", and so should oppose Germany being "repressed in the council of the nations." Moreover: "Only a conditional right of savages to the land occupied by them can be recognised. The higher civilisation ultimately can claim a higher right." [5]

Bernstein's scenario of peace and free trade was an illusion, replied Kautsky. "Protective tariffs are easier introduced than abolished, especially in a period of such raging competition on the world market... Free trade! For the capitalists that is an ideal of the past." Bernstein claimed that speculation was a disease of capitalism's infancy. But infant capitalism was being promoted across the world by the "overflowing capitals of the older countries... Argentinian and Transvaal speculation holds its 'wildest orgies' not only in Buenos Aires and Johannesburg, but equally in the venerable City of London."

And colonialism, Kautsky insisted, was

inseparable from militarism and the despoiling of colonial peoples for the benefit of "the modern kings of finance [who] dominate nations directly through cartels and trusts and subject all production to their power." [6]

"The financier", Kautsky went on to argue, "finds militarism and a strong active governmental policy, both external and internal, very agreeable. The kings of finance need not fear a strong governmental power, independent of people and Parliament, because they can rule such a power directly either as bondholders [i.e. as people who lend money to the government], or else through personal and social influences. In militarism, war and public debts they have a direct interest, not only as creditors, but also as government contractors..."

"It is wholly different with industrial capital. Militarism, war and public debts signify high taxes... War signifies besides this... a break in trade... A strong governmental power arouses anxiety in [the industrial manager] because he cannot directly control it... he inclines rather to liberalism... [But] The opposition between finance and industry continually decreases... finance ever more and more dominates industry." [7]

Much of Kautsky's argument was a Marxist conversion of ideas which were to be summed up with great verve by the English radical liberal, J A Hobson, in a book motivated by the Boer War (*Imperialism*, 1902).

"The Imperialism of the last three decades", wrote Hobson, "is clearly condemned as a business policy, in that at enormous expense it has procured a small, bad, unsafe increase of markets, and has jeopardised the entire wealth of the nation in rousing the strong resentment of other nations." But imperialism continued because "the business interests of the nation as a whole are subordinated to those of certain sectional interests."

Arms contractors, some exporters, the shipping trade, the military, and those who wanted jobs for their sons in the Indian Civil Service, all had an interest in imperialism. But "the governor of the imperial engine" was "the great financial houses", which were investing abroad at such a rate.

"The economic taproot of Imperialism" was overproduction and glut of capital. "Messrs Rockefeller, Pierpoint Morgan [etc.] need Imperialism because they desire to use the public resources of their country to find profitable employment for the capital which would otherwise be superfluous."

Imperialism was also *parasitic*. "To a larger extent every year Great Britain is becoming a nation living upon tribute from abroad, and the classes who enjoy this tribute have an ever-increasing incentive to employ the public policy, the public purse and the public force to extend the field of their private investments, and to safeguard and improve their existing investments. This is, perhaps, the most important fact in modern politics." [8]

The overproduction and glut were due to inequality of income. The workers could not consume much because of low wages; the capitalists could not possibly use all of their huge incomes on luxuries, and thus had vast amounts left seeking investment. Balance should be restored through *social reform*, higher wages, more spending on public services. This would lead to more balanced national economies and less searching for markets abroad.

Kautsky saw a similar permanent glut. "If the capitalist mode of production raises the mass production of goods to the utmost, it also limits to a minimum the mass consumption of the workers who produce these goods, and therefore produces an ever greater surplus of goods for personal consumption..." [9]. He differed from Hobson in arguing that this glut would be resolved by the collapse of capitalism and the socialist revolution, rather than by "social reform", and in contending that finance-capital *dominated*, rather than being only a "sectional interest" counterposed to "the business interests of the nation as a whole."

Another difference was that Hobson used the word "imperialism", where the German Marxists at this stage would use a term like "world policy." "Imperialism" was not special Marxist jargon: on the contrary. The Marxists took over the term from the common usage of British bourgeois politics — where some, like Rosebery, called themselves "Liberal Imperialists", others, like Hobson, anti-imperialists. They used it in the same sense as common usage — the new aggressive colonial and world-economic policy of the big powers — and sought to uncover its economic roots in the rise of high finance.

Many of the core ideas of the whole literature were already expressed by 1902: militarism, colony-grabbing, conflict and an authoritarian state as the political trends; high finance, economic decadence and glut, and export of capital, as the economic underpinnings.



Bosniac and Croat prisoners in a Serbian concentration camp



Forty thousand march against the war by the USA and the UN against Iraq, February 1991. This "war for oil" had its complexities, too. Socialists denouncing the UN/US war also had to stand up for the rights of the Kurds and of the inhabitants of Kuwait, brutally trampled on by Iraq's "sub-imperialist" regime. Photo: John Harris.

But what exactly was finance capital? This question was never properly resolved. And the recurrent idea of metropolitan capitalism having become "glutted" would also cause confusion.

Effective demand depends not only on consumption but also on investment; and in fact fluctuations in demand for *investment* goods are generally the prime movers in crises. Demand for those investment goods can soar while final consumption stagnates — and, vice versa, the run-up to a crisis is generally a period of unusually *high* working-class consumption but sagging investment.

"Overproduction" is not a permanent condition; capitalism constantly *sheds* overproduction through crises and then builds it up again. The relation between supply and demand for money-capital is determined by the tempo of self-expansion of capital. It is a relation between profits accumulated from *past* capitalist exploitation, and profits available from *present* capitalist exploitation. The spasmodic nature of capitalist development means that this supply-and-demand relation is constantly falling out of balance and generating "surpluses" of money-capital. But those surpluses are a function of the cycle of boom and slump, not of any absolute level at which an economy becomes "full up" of capital.

The notion of an absolute level after which a capitalist economy will become permanently "glutted" and awash with surplus capital is a recurrent theme in mainstream economics, from Adam Smith to Keynes. It has been attractive to socialists because it seems to show that capitalism must inevitably break down. It is misleading.

The crisis of 1907. Imperialism from the point of view of the colonies.

EVENTS in 1907 sharpened the socialist debate on imperialism. The whole philosophy of German Social-Democracy had become increasingly based on a steady growth of Party membership, trade union membership, and votes. As capitalism developed, so the socialist movement would grow, until finally the accumulated strength of that movement would overcome capitalism, weakened by its (also growing) internal contradictions.

Then in the election of January 1907 the ruling Conservative/National Liberal bloc made imperialism the central issue. They denounced the Social Democrats, who had been criticising the German state's brutality in its South West African colony, as unpatriotic — and reduced them from 81 parliamentary seats to 43.

For a party so convinced that the laws of social development guaranteed it steady growth, this result was a catastrophe. What had gone wrong? Too much radical agitation, said the right wing. It was no use fighting against necessary historical development, and imperialism was a necessary historical development. The Social Democrats should vow allegiance to "the defence of our fatherland." [10]

The Left protested. Imperialism had attracted the middle classes, and undercut liberalism; but it would lead capitalism into convulsions, and eventually alienate the middle classes. The socialists must prepare for revolutionary upheavals by militant *anti-imperialism* and by distancing themselves from liberal illusions.

In August 1907 the Socialist International met in Stuttgart. The Revisionists tried to shift the movement into a more accommodating attitude towards militarism and colonialism. The full congress voted down the Revisionist draft, and condemned colonialism on principle, but only by 127 votes to 108.

In the three weeks between the Stuttgart international congress and the German party's congress at Essen, Kautsky wrote a pamphlet on *Socialism and Colonial Policy* to defend the views of the left. This was the most comprehensive statement of classical Marxism on imperialism *as it affected the colonies*, and provides more of lasting interest than the other pamphlet (*The Road to Power*, 1909) in which Kautsky restated his views on imperialism as a stage of capitalist decay and convulsions.

Kautsky distinguishes between three sorts of colonies.

In settler colonies, or, as Kautsky calls them, "work colonies", like the US, Canada, Argentina, Australia, etc., where European settlers became a new working class rather than exploiting the local workforce, colonialism undoubtedly has brought capitalist progress. There, socialist policy should be for an accommodation, to safeguard the rights and interests of the local peoples. Colonisation has in fact "led everywhere to the repression, and often to the complete destruction of the natives, but that was not an unavoidable result" given the vast size

and resources of the countries concerned.

But the Revisionists proclaim a policy of reforming colonialism, in practice, for *quite different* colonies — for colonies where the metropolis exploits local labour, with the aid of only a small band of privileged colonial settlers.

From "old-style exploitation colonies" — notably Latin America under Spanish and Portuguese rule, and India in the earlier stages of colonial rule there — the colonial powers drew profit through crude plunder. To "new-style exploitation colonies", capital is exported. That brings some economic development. But the countries are kept under colonial rule, to safeguard investments and also to supply the force necessary to open the way for capitalist development: colonialism, despite all the Revisionists' argument, is inseparable from brutal force. With the export of capital, therefore, comes heavy taxation to pay for the military establishment and to pay the interest on the loans raised for building railways and so on. The taxes pauperise the peasantry and disrupt agriculture — and so, in India for example, there is "continual increase in famine and misery, in spite of heavy flow of English capital to India with a consequent improvement of the Indian

Ballade for Mr MacLeish

You say, who read, that we who write
Have failed to do our duty by
The blind and bogged who needed
light,
The prisoners who needed sky,
The puzzled masses doomed to die,
The stunted youth that could not
grow.
Yes, we failed and we know why:
You need not tell us what we know.

Easy to nigger and indict
Charges none of us deny:
We have not made the negro white
Nor taught the wombat how to fly.
We neither caught the Future's eye
Nor yet preserved the status quo.
The world we found we left awry:
You need not tell us what we know.

We have not set the epoch right,
We would not if we had to lie;
Writers by trade we have tried to
write
By evidence of mind and eye;
The day for that is perhaps gone by,
Truth is unfashionably slow
And shuns the opportune reply:
You need not tell us what we know.

Envoi

Gentry, you ask us to deny
The only right the arts bestow.
We know our failure to comply;
You need not tell us what we know.

Louis MacNeice

productive forces in places."

The export of capital produces malign results even in formally independent states, for example Turkey. "Oriental despotism becomes horrifyingly oppressive wherever it masters the instruments of power of European civilisation, but at the same time becomes the debtor of Europe... [The resulting regime] brings to a peak the oppressive and degrading effects of capitalism, without developing any of its progressive qualities, and in the same way it develops only the oppressive characteristics of oriental despotism while destroying those aspects of it which soften its rule. It pairs despotism and capitalism in an abominable union." [11]

Kautsky emphasises what would later be called "the development of underdevelopment" in the colonies more than other classical Marxist writers. *He does not deny that colonial rule can promote capitalist development, or suggest that shutting underdeveloped countries off from the outside world is better than exposing them to capitalist economic influence:* but he insists that the limited and painful promotion of capitalist development by imperialism is no sufficient reason for socialists to support political oppression.

"We can and must place no obstacle in the way of competition where the capitalist mode of production comes into free competition with backward modes of production. But the situation changes if we are asked to help the state power to fight for the interest of the capitalist class against the backward nations, and to subdue these for them with armed might, as happens in colonial policy. We must resist this with determination."

Kautsky's bottom line is that: "If the ethic of capitalism says that it is in the interests of culture and society for lower classes and nations to be ruled, the ethic of the proletariat says that precisely in the interests of culture and society the oppressed and those under tutelage must throw off all domination." This remains the bottom line for revolutionary Marxists to this day.

Luxemburg and Hilferding

THIS analysis of capitalist development in the colonies was taken further by Rosa Luxemburg in her book of 1913, *The Accumulation of Capital*. She too described how the development of capitalist relations in the underdeveloped countries, and the clawing-in of their pre-capitalist economies to the capitalist world market, led the big powers to use *force*, seizing colonies or using the local state as "a political machinery for exploiting peasant economy for capitalist purposes — the real function, this, of all Oriental states in the period of capitalist imperialism." It created "the most peculiar combinations between the modern wage system and primitive authority in the colonial countries." [12]

Capitalism in the colonies and semi-colonies, however, occupied only the last quarter of Luxemburg's book. She gave pride of place to a new statement of the the-

sis that a permanent "glut" within the advanced capitalist economies was the motor force of imperialism.

Where, Luxemburg asked, did the money come from to enable the capitalists to sell the goods in which surplus-value was embodied? Or, rather, where did the "effective demand" come from?

The answer, in fact, is that credit supplies the money and the effective demand is generated — erratically, with ups and downs of crisis — by the capitalists' drive to accumulate. But Luxemburg insisted that within a pure capitalist economy there was *no* answer. To survive, capitalism needed non-capitalist consumers. But, as capitalism expanded across the world, the number of non-capitalist consumers decreased. Capitalism would run into bigger and bigger problems, and eventually *collapse*.

As the Russian Marxist Nikolai Bukharin soon pointed out, this argument is untenable. Non-capitalist consumers do not help the problem. Where do *they* get the money from? Non-capitalist consumers do not supply liquidity for capitalism; capitalism supplies liquidity for them.

Much more solid as an extended analysis of the mechanics of imperialism was Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital*, published in 1910 but mostly written in 1905.

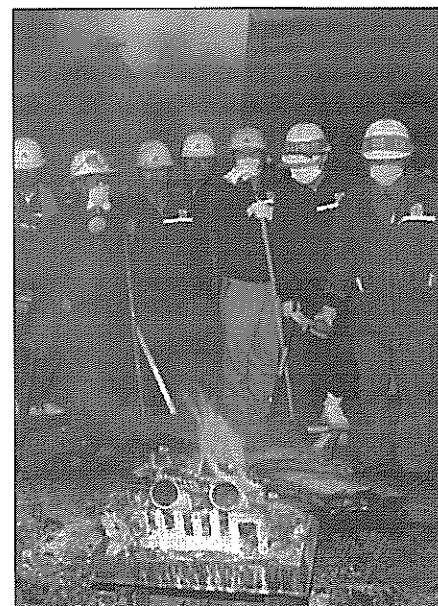
The book starts with a long and intricate discussion on the theory of money, credit, interest and the stock exchange, aiming to show that "there is a growing tendency... to concentrate all capital in the form of money capital, and to make it available to producers only through the banks... Even today, taking possession of six large Berlin banks would mean taking possession of the most important spheres of large-scale industry."

Hilferding defines finance capital as "capital in money form which is... transformed... into industrial capital." He adds a qualification. "This does not mean that the magnates of industry also become dependent on banking magnates"; rather, bank capitalists and industrial capitalists "unite in close association."

Cartels are generated because otherwise the rates of profit would be *lower* for giant enterprises. With modern credit it is easy to get into large-scale production; given the huge amounts of fixed capital involved it is difficult to get out. So the giant enterprises form cartels to keep their profits up. The banks help them.

Kautsky and Luxemburg, in polemic against Bernstein, had stressed the instability and fragility of cartels, but Hilferding shifts the emphasis: "There is a constant tendency for cartelisation to be extended." Cartels generate high profits, but they also restrict investment, both inside the cartel (because it restricts production) and outside (because profits are low). Cartelisation therefore gives an extra push to the export of capital.

Cartels cannot prevent crises; but they (and banks) can withstand them better than non-cartelised industries, and so crises accelerate the concentration of capital. The "monopolistic combines" turn against lais-



South Korean workers on strike, 1991. The rapid growth of capitalist industry in South Korea and many other "Third World" countries has produced new armies of grave-diggers for capitalism

sez-faire. They make governments introduce tariffs, not to protect infant industries, but to secure the home market for the cartels. Those tariffs, in turn, further boost cartelisation, and give another push to the export of capital.

Since they export capital, the big powers need to clear the way for capitalism in underdeveloped countries. They *force* peasants to become wage-workers. "These violent methods are the essence of colonial policy, without which it would lose its capitalist rationale." But "capitalism itself gradually provides the subjected people with the ways and means for their own liberation" through national independence movements. The competitive drive for economic territory will lead to war between the big capitalist states. "The response of the proletariat to the economic policy of finance capital — imperialism — cannot be free trade, but only socialism."

The book was a formidable work, but not quite the definitive summing-up which Hilferding intended. Rather than developing a whole new theory, it pulled together ideas from writings such as Kautsky's into a tidier structure — and often through very dubious logical deductions. For example: Hilferding argues that banks *must* come to dominate because the rate of interest remains stable (so he observes empirically) while the rate of profit declines (so he believes from Marx's theory). [13] No-one seems to have taken this argument further, not even Hilferding in the later parts of the book. The argument about the hegemony of "six large banks", propped up by such dubious logic, is grossly exaggerated.

The analysis moves too directly from abstract economic reasoning to current German realities and back again, so that we get a picture of finance-capital in general, and of Germany in 1905-09, but not

much of the general development of imperialism in a variety of countries in the whole first part of the 20th century.

World War 1: Lenin and Bukharin against Kautsky

ABOUT 1912 Kautsky shifted to views on militarism and inter-capitalist conflict (though not on colonialism) very similar to those of Bernstein which he had criticised 13 years earlier. In 1914 world war erupted. Kautsky said that socialists should press the capitalist governments to make peace — for that was a better policy in the long run even from a capitalist point of view — and in the meantime each group of socialists should defend their “own” country. The next phase in the classical Marxist argument was a polemic against Kautsky from the revolutionary anti-war left, by the Russian Marxists Bukharin and Lenin.

Bukharin's book *Imperialism and World Economy* was written in 1915, and read by Lenin, who wrote a preface for it in December 1915. The manuscript was lost, and recovered for publication only late in 1917. Bukharin rewrote missing sections and added material from Lenin's pamphlet. Lenin's pamphlet *Imperialism* was written in January-June 1916, and published in April 1917. Each work was therefore influenced by the other.

Lenin drew on the same concepts as Kautsky in his radical days, but crafted a sharper and tighter argument, and with militant conclusions, organised around the concept of *monopoly capitalism*. He honed the argument down to the fundamental trend identified by Marx and Engels: the concentration and centralisation of capital, its conversion of competition into monopoly. He used the terms “finance capital” and “export of capital” a lot, but they were, essentially, borrowings from the younger Kautsky and others, not central ideas in Lenin's distinctive argument.

The immediate cause that Lenin cited for “the conquest policy of modern capitalist states” was the competition between the great monopoly capitalists for raw material sources. “The principal feature of the latest stage of capitalism is the domination of monopolist associations of big employers. These monopolies are most firmly established when *all* the sources of raw materials are captured by one group... Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee... in the struggle against competitors... The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies.” He cited other factors, but as secondary: a struggle to seize *potential* sources of raw materials as well as actual ones, arenas for other monopoly business, ideological reasons, territory for emigration.

This argument obviously raises the question: could not the monopolies obtain their raw materials more cheaply through free trade? Couldn't they settle their conflicts

peacefully, without war? In replying, Lenin puts the competition for raw material sources into context as only an expression of what he considers *fundamental* to imperialism: the growth of *monopoly* capital and its inherent striving for “violence and reaction.”

“Economically, the main thing in this process [of imperialism emerging] is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly.” “If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism.” “In its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism.” “Domination, and the violence that is associated with it, such as the relationships that are typical of the ‘latest phase of capitalist development’; this is what inevitably had to result, and has resulted, from the formation of all-powerful economic monopolies.” “Politically, imperialism is, in general, a striving towards violence and reaction.” “The political superstructure of this new economy, of monopoly capitalism (imperialism is monopoly capitalism) is the change *from* democracy to political reaction. Democracy corresponds to free competition. Political reaction corresponds to monopoly.” “The capitalists divide the world, not out of any particular malice, but because the degree of concentration which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to obtain profits.” [14]

Where Lenin honed down the stock ideas of the pre-1914 left, Bukharin expanded them, taking up an idea hinted at by Rosa Luxemburg in 1899 when she wrote about “the contradiction between the international character of the capitalist world economy and the national character of the capitalist state...” [15]. Technical progress, improved communications, larger-scale industry, and the expansionist drive of capitalism, led capitalists to make more links (trade, finance, etc. etc.) across national borders. “The course of economic development creates, parallel to this process [of internationalisation of capitalist interests], a reverse tendency towards the nationalisation of capitalist interests.” “The process of the internationalisation of economic life can and does sharpen, to a high degree, the conflict of interests among the various ‘national’ groups of the bourgeoisie....”

Businesses were also becoming more closely linked to banks, cartels, and the state in their home market. They were tied to their nation-states especially by the rise of *tariffs* since the 1870s. Far from just protecting infant industries, the capitalist states were now protecting their most advanced (and highly monopolised) industries. The monopolies, thus assured of a safe and highly profitable home market, could then seek to conquer foreign markets by *dumping* (selling below cost of production).

Conflict between the two contradictory tendencies, to internationalisation and to closer ties with the nation-state, produced “the conquest policies of modern capitalist states.” Capitalist interests wanted to expand their operations internationally.

They found difficulty. They looked to their nation-states for help. “The policy of finance capital pursues a threefold aim: first, the creation of the largest possible economic territory which, secondly, must be protected against foreign competition by tariff walls, and thus, thirdly, must become an area of exploitation for the national monopoly companies.” [16]

Abstractly, an international agreement on trade was possible, on the lines suggested by Bernstein and Kautsky after 1912. In practice it was difficult. A stable international cartel presupposed a stable balance of economic forces and a stable balance of military forces and confidence that the stable balances would continue. So any actual progress towards a “world trust” would be through wars. The “nationalist” tendencies in capitalism would prevent harmonious internationalism; the “internationalist” tendencies would rule out a retreat by different capitalist classes each into their own territory.

Bukharin *sums up* his definition of imperialism in the term *finance capital*, but his overall argument does not square with this summary. After repeating Hilferding's definition of finance capital and giving a few examples, he says little more about it. In his main argument, this integration of banks and industry is only one *aspect* of the ‘nationalisation’ of capital; the international operations of bankers and financiers are only one *aspect* of the ‘internationalisation’ of capital. With Lenin, likewise, finance capital and export of capital figure as *aspects* of the basic development, which for him is the rise of *monopoly* capital. [17]

It is true that “high imperialism” was based on, depended on, arose from, the development of *large* concentrations of *highly mobile* capital, ready for bold foreign ventures. *In the world as it was in 1916*, those large concentrations of highly mobile capital were the vectors of imperialism. Recent research also indicates that Hobson and Kautsky were probably right about Empire bringing net gains only to some *sections* of the capitalist class — in Britain, lords, landowners, bankers and London merchants [18] — while for the class as a whole the extra taxes cancelled any extra gain.

But large concentrations of highly mobile capital can operate under different regimes, as since the mid-1980s. The structure of the world economy, rather than just the growth of big capitalist money-fortunes in a few countries, was the *fundamental* basis of “high imperialism.”

The sharpness of the wartime political struggle gave Bukharin's and Lenin's pamphlets greater vividness and focus than the pre-1914 literature. As polemics they were devastating; as sharpened summaries of the Marxist literature, they stand up very well to later bourgeois-academic criticisms. [19] Their adequacy as textbooks for the study of imperialism across the whole of the twentieth century — which is not the purpose for which they were written — is another matter.

Bukharin created a rich and flexible ◊

theoretical framework, in which he could integrate many of the ideas of the previous Marxist literature, while rejecting the false starts like the notion of the permanent glut of capital. Kautsky's, Luxemburg's and Hilferding's ideas about the roots of colonial conquest in the logic of capitalist "primitive accumulation" *in the colonies* (rather than just impulses from the metropolis) — ideas which indicated that colonial rule would be difficult and maybe even too expensive to retain once capitalist development in the colonies had gone a certain distance — could also have been integrated into the framework; Bukharin, however, marred his argument by schematic and mechanical deductions from his basic framework, a schematism which led him astray on important political questions.

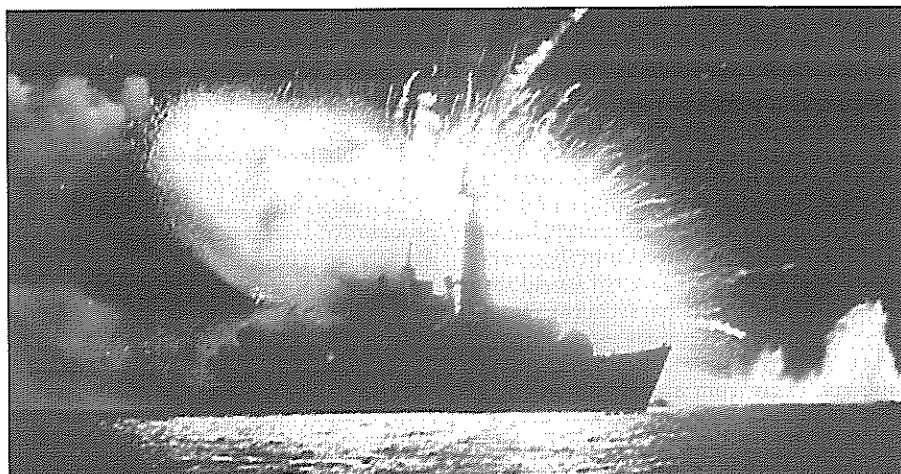
"Leninism" made dogma: finance capital, parasitism and decay

AFTER Lenin's death, the Stalinists constructed a chopped-up orthodoxy of "Leninism", which, by sheer weight of literature and resources, shaped left-wing thinking way outside the Stalinist parties.

That chopped-up orthodoxy has deformed understanding in several ways. First: for most readers, *only* Lenin's pamphlet was available as a summary of the classic Marxist theory of imperialism. Bukharin's, Hilferding's, Kautsky's, and Luxemburg's writings were little published and little read. [20] Secondly: Lenin's pamphlet *did not cover* what became the hottest question about imperialism, its relation to economic development in the Third World. To fill the gap in "Leninist" theory, phrases from the pamphlet which *looked as if* they might be about that were taken as the "Leninist" line! Thirdly, the Stalinists simply *distorted* Lenin sometimes. Fourthly, the theory got distorted "honestly" by statements about *tendencies* being taken as a comprehensive account, without regard to counter-tendencies. And fifthly, or so I shall argue, some *real weaknesses* in Lenin's account provided fertile ground for confusion.

Imperialism, wrote Lenin, was "parasitic", "decaying", and "moribund" capitalism. He was restating Kautsky's ideas of 1899-1909. In so far as he was just doing that, he was trapped by the mechanical alternatives of pre-1914 "Marxist orthodoxy" — either capitalism was progressing, and its new developments, like imperialism, should therefore be supported; or it was plunging to collapse — and within those false alternatives he was plainly wrong. 80 years later, capitalism has grown, not collapsed.

Many passages in Lenin's pamphlet suggest that imperialism meant *stagnation*. Yet even in *Imperialism* Lenin indicated that he had a more dialectical, less mechanical, view. "It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency to decay precludes the rapid growth of capitalism. It does not... On the whole, *capitalism is growing far more rapidly than before*; but this growth is not only becoming more and more uneven in general, its unevenness also manifests itself, in particular, in the decay of the countries



An Argentine shell destroys a British warship in the South Atlantic war of 1982, fought over control of the Falklands/Malvinas islands. Many left-wingers argued we should side with Argentina's military dictatorship because it was fighting imperialism, even though its conquest of islands two thousand miles from Argentina's main cities, with a non-Argentine population, could serve no democratic or socialist objective. *Socialist Organiser* (forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) opposed both British imperialism and Argentine sub-imperialism.

which are richest in capital (Britain)."[21]

Elsewhere Lenin noted: "History does not stand still even in times of counter-revolution." [22] The productive forces were sufficiently developed for the European capitalist classes to be overthrown in 1917-23; poor working-class political leadership saved them. Capitalism went through twenty years of catastrophes, and survived again. History did not stand still. Capitalism reorganised. It *progressed*, in its own way. It created new working classes, allowed workers to raise their standards of living and education, developed new technologies. There was a new "golden age of capitalism" — golden for the capitalists, though, as always, muck and bronze for the workers.

To recognise that is not to slacken our fight against capitalism. As Lenin put it: "Can anyone in his senses deny that Bismarckian Germany and her social laws are 'better' than Germany before 1848? ... Did the German Social-Democrats... vote for Bismarck's reforms on these grounds?" [22] To discard mechanical notions of the "epoch of decay" is, however, essential if we are to understand realistically the adversities and the prospects of the socialist movement, prospects which may be changing much for the better as we enter a new, stormier era.

What must also be discarded is Lenin's confused link, following Kautsky, between "decay" and "finance capital."

In his analysis, Lenin has two completely different concepts of finance capital, incoherently combined. He writes of "the several hundred kings of finance who reign over modern capitalist society." Elsewhere, however, it is a matter of "the extraordinary growth of a class, or rather, of a stratum of rentiers, i.e., people who live by 'clipping coupons', who take no part in any enterprise whatever, whose profession is idleness." [23] So which is it? Are the finance capitalists the masters of large-scale industry, the directors of the economy — or people like the rentier who "if he speaks of

work at all means the 'work' of picking flowers or calling for a ticket at the box office of the opera." [24]

The same trends in capitalism can generate both close connections between the banks and industry (finance capital in Hilferding's sense), and a growing mass of rentiers. They can generate both sorts of "finance capitalists." But they are different groups. In Lenin's derivation of the parasitic character of imperialist capitalism he mixed them up. "Capitalism has now singled out a *handful*... of exceptionally rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world simply by 'clipping coupons'." "More and more prominently there emerges, as one of the tendencies of imperialism, the creation of the 'rentier state', the usurers' state, in which the bourgeoisie to an ever-increasing degree lives on the proceeds of capital exports and by 'clipping coupons'." "The export of capital, one of the most essential economic bases of imperialism, still more completely isolates the rentiers from production and sets the seal of parasitism on the whole country..." [25].

Rentier income was indeed a major feature of the great capitalist states before the First World War. In Britain nearly a half of all property income in 1913 was rentier income from abroad, and nearly half of that from the Empire. [26] But Lenin's argument was warped by a slippage from one sense of "finance capital" to another: imperialism was first characterised as the dominion of the "kings of finance" who ran industry and the state, and then identified with the dominion of the rentiers who concerned themselves with flowers and the opera. And the dominion of the rentiers meant stagnation and decay. [27]

"Capitalism, which began its development with petty usury capital, is ending its development with gigantic usury capital... With a stationary population, and stagnant industry, the 'country' can grow rich by usury." [28] Lenin was referring to France; but he also endorsed Hobson's vision: "The

greater part of Western Europe might then assume the appearance and character already exhibited by tracts of country in the South of England... little clusters of wealthy aristocrats drawing dividends and pensions from the Far East, with... professional retainers and tradesmen... personal servants and workers in the transport trade and in the final stages of production of the more perishable goods; all the main arterial industries would have disappeared, the staple foods and manufactures flowing in as tribute from Asia and Africa." [29]

This perspective was in truth more speculative and fantastic even than Kautsky's peaceful "ultra-imperialism." If the centre of productive industry should shift to Asia and Africa, which it has not to this day, by what power would effete Europe prevent the Asian and African capitalists from taking possession and denying Europe its "dividends and pensions"?

Lenin was highlighting a *tendency* and painting it in bright colours for polemical effect; we need not imagine that he had forgotten about the counter-tendencies. Nonetheless, the chain of argument from imperialism to the kings of finance, to the rentiers, to parasitism, had grievous effects. It enabled later writers to stamp "Leninist" authority on arguments about the permanent "glut of capital" and about the capitalist development of poorer countries being impossible under imperialism. It became the means of ascribing "Leninist" authority to modern "dependency" theory — since that is about rich nations plundering poor nations — and suppressing the gist of the classical Marxist view on capitalist development in the Third World.

"Dependency" theory dates back to Paul Baran's book *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York, 1957). Third World countries were underdeveloped, argued Baran, mainly because of parasitism within the Third World countries and a *drain of surplus* to the advanced countries. The answer was for those forces seeking development in Third World countries to follow the model provided by the USSR — expropriate the parasitic old property-owning classes, centralise resources in the hands of the state, cut down economic relations with the rest of the world to a minimum.

Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein and others built on Baran's analysis, developing the idea that imperialism created distorted, stunting, dependent *structures* in Third World countries. Though heavily discredited by recent facts, such as the capitalist development of Asia's Pacific Rim, this "dependency theory" remains very influential on the left, especially in pseudo-Trotskyist restatements. [30]

It was always on a completely different tack from Lenin! Class struggle, not battle between rich and poor nations, was central for Lenin.

All the classical Marxists believed that capitalism tended to *spread* capitalist development across the world: arguments such as Kautsky's of 1907 about imperialism sustaining pre-capitalist structures were within

that framework. Lenin even gave credence to Hobson's far-fetched speculation about *all* industrial development shifting to Asia and Africa, though, following Kautsky, he stressed the importance of the colonies winning *political independence* to enable them to develop capitalistically. "In Asia... the conditions for the most complete development of commodity production, for the freest, widest and most rapid growth of capitalism, have been created only in Japan, i.e. only in an independent national state." [31]

In *Imperialism* Lenin specifically argued *against* the notion of a fixed division between industrialised and non-industrialised regions (a notion which, by a logic which we need not bother to go into here, was part of Kautsky's new view on imperialism). Imperialism was about seizing not only agrarian regions, but economic territory in general. Kautsky's mistake was not innocent: German imperialism, the imperialism that it was his special duty to fight, had among its prime targets for conquest the industrialised areas of Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine. Also, imperialism was not *only* "a striving for annexations." Germany's immediate aim was not so much more colonies, but economic domination in Central Europe and in the Middle East.

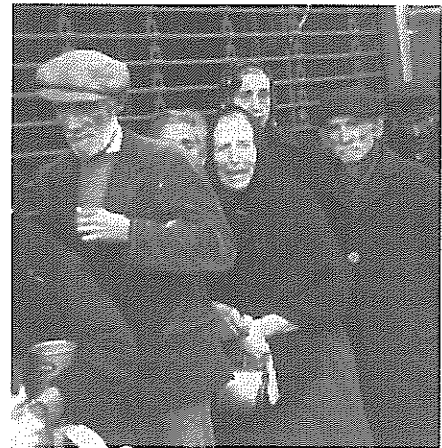
And Lenin stressed how the relative economic rank of nations was *changing*. "Capitalism is growing with the greatest rapidity in the colonies and the overseas countries. Among the latter, *new* imperialist powers are emerging (e.g. Japan)." Bukharin agreed. "The industrialisation of the agrarian and semi-agrarian countries proceeds at an unbelievably quick tempo." [32]

Crucial to the "dependency" framework is the notion that the *essence* of world capitalism is the relation between two relatively homogeneous blocs, centre and periphery. The focus of study is on factors keeping the hierarchy of capitalist economies *fixed*, keeping centres central and peripheries peripheral. The classical Marxists, on the contrary, focussed on the *fluidity* and *changeability* of the hierarchical relations between capitalist economies.

The "glut of capital" and the expected collapse of capitalism

"THE need to export capital", wrote Lenin, "arises from the fact that in a few countries capitalism has become 'overripe' and (owing to the backward state of agriculture and the poverty of the masses) capital cannot find a field for 'profitable' investment." "A prodigious increase of capital, which, as it were, overflows the brim, flows abroad, etc." [33]

This is an "underconsumptionist" argument. It is strange to find it in Lenin's writings: in the debates on capitalist development in Russia he had been the most vehement anti-"underconsumptionist." And Bukharin explicitly rejected the "glut" theory. "Not the impossibility of doing business at home, but the race for higher rates of profit is the motive power of world capitalism. Even present-day 'capitalist plethora' ♦



Red Envoy

I bring no song of rolling drums,
Of pennons flying gaily,
I sing of filth and dirty slums,
Gaunt men, with hunger crazy,
Canticles, not of virtue bright, nor
holy austere lives.

I chronicle consumption's blight
And the haggard face of wives
Who gaze on children pale and wan,
Who see no flowers, nor hear birds'
song.

I see no beauty, save in dreams of
justice unto those
Who keep the wheels of old earth
moving,
And oil them with their woes,
Of burning towns and brimstone red.
A phoenix from the ashes dead,
Our city truth and justice will arise.

I see this old bad order die
In a great swift blaze of fire,
A structure, clear and mighty high
Born in its funeral pyre.
Worker, know the world's for thee,
Were thou to raise the servile knee
From off the ground.

Brendan Behan

Behan, who became well-known as a playwright in the '50s, published these verses in the Irish Stalinist paper *The Workers' Republic* in March 1938. He was 16 and had been born into a layer of the Dublin working class where Stalinism and Republicanism overlapped. Less than two years later, Behan would be in "active service" with the IRA in England, planting bombs. He was captured and sent to Borstal. He tells of this in the book *Borstal Boy* (1960).

is no absolute limit." [34]

But there it is, maybe adapted from the younger Kautsky, and gaining impact because of its connection with the picture of a "decaying" capitalism run by a gang of parasitic financiers. And in some hands this error, or careless piece of writing, became the core of "the Leninist theory" of imperialism.

It was the basis for the argument used to prove the "end of imperialism" after the Second World War, by Michael Kidron and John Strachey for example. [35] Since arms spending (Kidron) or welfare spending (Strachey) was draining away the glut of capital, the basic economic mechanism of imperialism no longer operated.

In more revolutionary circles, the idea of the "glut of capital" led to the conclusion that decolonisation would mean metropolitan capitalism choking to death on its uninvestible riches. Thus the Second World Congress of the Fourth International argued that the loss of colonies for Europe removed all chance of regaining "even the pre-war [i.e. 1930s!] economic equilibrium." Michel Pablo noted that "the colonial base of the capitalist system is in the process of being broken up." The colonial revolution had "already, for a start, brought European capitalism to its knees." "Thus American imperialism, which is now glutted with productive forces, is obliged to direct its surplus into *artificial* markets: arms spending, and 'overseas aid'." James P Cannon put it this way: "the world market... no longer offers an adequate outlet for America's glut of capital and surplus goods." [36]

Economics and the state, imperialism and democracy

LENIN took up the argument pioneered by Kautsky and Luxemburg against Bernstein, about advanced capitalism destroying rather than boosting bourgeois liberalism. He argued that an economic trend (the growth of monopolies) was mirrored in politics ("violence and reaction").

The Marxists documented the political facts of the day. But Lenin, Bukharin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, Kautsky — they all

largely assumed the connection between those political facts and the economic trends, rather than proving it. Lenin barely mentions the economic role of the state in *Imperialism*; conversely, he mentions imperialism only in passing (though frequently) in his pamphlet *The State and Revolution*, written the following year.

The argument was so sketchy, no doubt, because the Marxists saw it as less a big theoretical statement than a matter-of-fact summary from everyday observation of bourgeois politics in the period before the First World War. 19th-century free-trade individualism was being challenged in the name of Empire, Nation, State and Race. The new Imperialists might propose bureaucratic welfare measures, or they might be bleakly conservative; but for sure they stood for a stronger state than the old liberals, whether flint-faced free-traders or generous-spirited reformers. Kautsky and Luxemburg, Bukharin and Lenin, were first and foremost concerned to analyse immediate events and refute bourgeois liberal optimism, not to write textbooks for the whole evolution of state forms in the 20th century.

In fact the forms of bourgeois parliamentary democracy were somewhat *extended*, not cut back, in the period leading up to the First World War. The whole history of the century indicates that monopolistic (dictatorial) political regimes and colonial empires do not necessarily develop in parallel with the concentration of capital into larger units, at least, not short of the full concentration of capital in the hands of the state as in the USSR.

Lenin — despite summary statements implying otherwise — did allow for much more complexity in the relation between economics and politics than the other classical Marxists. "At the same time", he emphasised, "capitalism engenders democratic aspirations in the masses, creates democratic institutions, aggravates the antagonism between imperialism's denial of democracy and the mass striving for democracy." "Imperialism does not halt the development of capitalism and the growth of democratic tendencies among the mass of the population. On the contrary, it *accentuates* the antagonism between their democratic aspirations and the anti-democratic tendency of the trusts."

Even while arguing against Kautsky's scenario of a peaceful deal between the big powers for joint exploitation of the underdeveloped countries, Lenin defined colony-grabbing as only one, auxiliary, method of imperialism — with the implication that in different circumstances different methods could predominate.

In polemic against Bukharin's co-thinker Pyatakov, Lenin *ridiculed* Bukharin's crude argument that "imperialist annexation is only a case of the general capitalist tendency towards centralisation of capital." "Everyone would laugh... if, parallel with the law that small-scale production is ousted by large-scale production, there were presented another 'law'... of small states being ousted by big ones... It would be the great-

est mistake... to believe that the trusts cannot establish their monopoly by purely economic methods." [37]

There was a problem, however, I think, with the *grid* within which even Lenin saw the question of bourgeois state forms.

At one pole there was Jacksonian democracy — something like the early 19th century USA, minus slavery and the Indian wars — a parliamentary republic based on small proprietors, with a minimal permanent state machine, no standing army, wide civil rights, etc. At the other pole was Prussian absolutism — a big military machine and state bureaucracy, topped by a monarchy, with restricted civil rights and the most limited forms of parliamentarism. All other state forms (so the implicit assumption ran) were to be found somewhere on the scale between those two poles. Monopoly capitalism required a sizeable state machine, and the big capitalist interests would often bypass Parliament to deal with state officials directly. It meant a move away from Jacksonian democracy — and therefore necessarily towards Prussian absolutism.

The modern bourgeois democratic state machine makes the Prussian state of Lenin's time look a very skimpy amateur outfit. Yet it has parliamentary democracy (hollowed-out but still not meaningless) and relatively wide civil rights. It is not somewhere on a spectrum between Jacksonian democracy and Prussian absolutism; it represents movement in a different direction. So does the modern fascist state. [38]

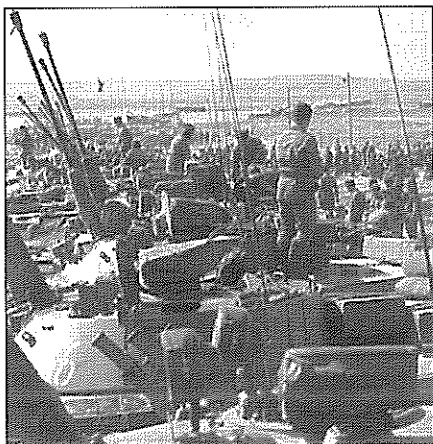
The shape of capitalism

THE structures of imperialism *cannot* be deduced solely from the "shape" of capital in the advanced countries — monopolistic, dominated by finance capital, or whatever. Flexible, dialectical deduction like Lenin's is better than abstract, mechanical deduction like Bukharin's, but both miss out a necessary dimension of analysis. The difference between the modern epoch of finance capital, since the mid-1980s, and the earlier one before the First World War is proof enough of that.

The capitalist world economy has its own laws, its own mutually contradictory tendencies. *Competition between nations*: the nation-state was the first framework for capitalist development. As capitalism develops, it *both* outgrows the nation-states and becomes more closely tied up with them. The world economy is therefore an arena not only of competition between capitalists, but also of competition between capitalist states.

Uneven development: capitalist development in a given country creates a spiral of new markets, improved infrastructure, better qualified workers, and attracts new investment there; underdevelopment means small markets, poor infrastructure, under-nourished and ill-trained workers; capitalism therefore has an inbuilt tendency to increase inequality of development between countries.

Expansion: capital has an inbuilt drive to expand, to spread out, and to spread out *world-wide*.



Russian tanks assemble after withdrawing from Afghanistan in 1989. Their ten-year war against the people of Afghanistan was as imperialist as America's Vietnam war

Combined development: as capitalism expands, it takes the most advanced technology to backward areas. But it also *seizes on*, uses, and combines itself with, *pre-capitalist* modes of production where it finds them.

The history of the modern capitalist world economy can be traced through a number of *regimes* within which those mutually contradictory tendencies have been reconciled for different periods.

For the first part of the 19th century: the "imperialism of free trade" under British domination. Britain was by far the greatest industrial power, with 35 per cent of world industrial production in 1800 and 30 per cent in 1840. By both colonial and commercial expansion, it helped create the conditions for large-scale capitalist industry elsewhere. Then it lost its hegemony. There is a general law here. A dominant position such as that held by Britain in the 19th century or the US since 1945 tends to generate parasitism — high military expenditure; "imperial overstretch"; a slackening of the drive to expand capitalism at home because the capitalists of the dominant nation get comfortable profits from enterprises abroad or from financial operations.

From the 1870s to 1945: competitive colony-grabbing, "high imperialism." Germany, the US, and other countries outstripped or challenged Britain, but no one could replace it as the dominant power. There followed a competitive scramble, in which no one country could renounce tariff barriers, competitive colony-grabbing, or, when it came to it, war — uneconomic though they might be for the whole capitalist order — because it knew its competitors would not renounce them.

The intervention of the older capitalist countries in the Third World *both* promoted capitalist development there *and* built obstacles to and difficulties for that development.

The imperial powers allied with princes and pashas and sustained the pre-capitalist structures on which those exploiters rested. They destroyed local handicraft industries. They taxed the peasants and channelled the proceeds into maintaining the imperial administration and military machine, or into rentier consumption and easier investments at home. They stopped the colonial peoples having their *own* capitalist states, which would establish tariffs, public works, etc. favourable to their own capitalist development. They divided and ruled, creating usually *small* and often artificial political units, ill-designed for economic development.

In fact, some colonies — the settler colonies, the US, Canada, Australia, Argentina, etc. — had a particularly *fast* capitalist development. Their capitalist classes often *gained* from imperial connections; they gained secure markets in the metropolis, easy credit from it, and military protection cheap.

From 1945, a new "imperialism of free trade" developed, under US domination, in most of the world. The colonial peoples became strong enough to win freedom;

and the US encouraged the break-up of the old colonial empires in the interests of constructing a new free-trade world under its domination (and not giving political openings to the USSR).

Independent Third World capitalist regimes still have to deal with the legacies of colonialism; and they have to contend with the general unevenness of capitalist development. They are generally weak states in a capitalist world where the strong squeeze the weak.

Nevertheless, capitalism develops in the Third World, and in many countries very fast. Imperialism does not create a fixed, but rather a fluid, hierarchy of nations.

Counterposed to and competing with the US-dominated "imperialism of free trade" was the ultra-monopolist imperialism of the USSR. This Stalinist imperialism corresponded more closely to Lenin's theoretical model (monopoly in economics, violence and reaction in politics) than anything that existed in 1916, even though it was ruled over by people who hypocritically called themselves "Leninists", and it was not "the highest stage of capitalism", but — in the long view — a dead-end episode within the capitalist epoch.

Today, the USSR has disintegrated. US domination is crumbling. A new world disorder is emerging. There is strong pressure towards the recreation of trade blocs and trade barriers. It is on these trends that a Marxist account of modern imperialism and its coming crises can be built — one that learns from the classical Marxist literature without treating it as dogma. ■

Notes

1. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Geometry of Imperialism*, London 1983, p.17.
2. "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism", *Collected Works* vol.23 p.71.
3. This is a whole debate in itself. See *Workers' Liberty* no.4 and *Workers' Socialist Review* no.2.
4. Karl Marx, *Capital volume 3*, London 1959, p.441 (Marx on credit), 438 (Marx on financial aristocracy), 437-8 (Engels on cartels, etc.), 441 (Marx on crises), 910 (Engels on colonisation), and 489 (Engels on crises). See also Karl Marx, *Capital volume 1*, London 1976, chapter 32; Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, chapter III/2, and *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, part 3.
5. Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, New York 1961, p.80 (crises) and p.170,178 (imperialism).
6. Karl Kautsky, *Bernstein und das sozialdemokratische Programm*, Stuttgart 1899, p.148 (tariffs), 149 (speculation), 79 (finance).
7. Karl Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*, Chicago 1902, p.56-58.
8. J A Hobson, *Imperialism*, London 1902, p.51 (business interests), 56-66 (financial houses), 76, 83 (taproot), 60 (tribute).
9. Karl Kautsky, *Socialism and Colonial Policy*, translated by Angela Clifford, p.25. Kautsky's line of thought went back as far as 1884, when he argued that "commodity production yielded a surplus that neither the worker nor the capitalist could consume... Consequently, colonial territories were important for the industrial nations as a market for surplus production" [Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky*, Manchester 1987, p.48].
10. Carl Schorske, *German Social-Democracy 1905-1917*, p.77.
11. Kautsky, *op.cit.*, p.18 (work colonies), 29 (India), 53 (Turkey), 45 (resist with determination), 14 (ethics).
12. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London 1951, p.370-1.
13. Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, London 1981, p.180, 368 (six banks), 225, 301 (banks and industry unite), 183ff (exit costs), 234 (cartels and capital export), 288-298 (crises), 300-309 (tariffs), 319, 322 (colonial independence), 331, 366 (war), 366 (socialism), 103-4 (interest and profits).

14. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, pp. 78 (competition for control of raw materials), 80 (secondary factors), 83, 84, 115, 27, 86 (monopoly and violence); *Caricature*, *op.cit.*, p.22 (economy and superstructure); *Imperialism*, p.71 (concentration), 79 (monopolies again). See also p.87-8 (monopoly incompatible with peaceful methods).

15. Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution*, in Dick Howard, ed., *Selected Political Writings*, New York 1971, p.111.

16. Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, London 1972, p.62 (reverse tendency), 61 (sharper conflicts), 107 (economic territory).

17. This idea of capitalism outgrowing the nation-state framework does not appear in Lenin's *Imperialism*, and for definite political reasons. Pyatakov and Bukharin were arguing that in the new epoch of imperialism the Bolsheviks should drop the democratic demand for the right of nations to self-determination.

Too sweeping, replied Lenin, in an article written shortly after *Imperialism*. "What do we mean when we say the national states have become fetters [on the productive forces]? We have in mind the advanced capitalist countries, above all Germany, France, England... But what of other nations?" (*Caricature*, p.17). In Asia, in Africa, even in Eastern Europe, the creation of nation-states would still represent progress. Lenin did not altogether reject the idea that the productive forces had outgrown the nation-state framework. But he remained wary of it, referred to it rarely, and did not weave it into his basic analysis of imperialism.

18. Lance E Davis and Robert A Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire*, Cambridge 1986. It does not follow that Kautsky was right in his plaintive speculations about a little pressure, and no extreme class struggle, soon pushing the rival capitalist states into a realisation that they would be best off with unity and peace.

19. D K Fieldhouse, for example, writes that Marxist theory as he understands it "... alleges that partition [of the world] was due to economic necessity. The industrialisation of continental Europe and the revived protectionism of the last quarter of the century made tropical colonies necessary as never before to provide markets for manufactures, fields for the investment of surplus capital, and an assured source of raw materials. Colonies were deliberately acquired to fill those needs." But in fact "remarkably few colonies were annexed as the result of a deliberate assessment of their economic potential by an imperial power... In short, the modern empires lacked rationality and purpose: they were the chance products of complex historical circumstances." [*The Colonial Empires*, London 1966, p.207, 239].

But *everything* is a "product of complex historical circumstances"! Kautsky, Luxemburg and Hilferding had demonstrated the roots of colonial conquest in the logic of capitalist exploitation *in the colonies*, not just in a "rationality" of metropolitan-capitalist deliberations. And Lenin pointed to politically or ideologically motivated colony-grabbing and "the conquest of territories", not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary... [ibid, p.79, 80, 86]. The bourgeois criticism is simply beside the point.

20. Tom Kemp's *Theories of Imperialism*, London 1967, made some of the ideas of Hobson and Luxemburg available. But it was academic hackwork, gave no idea of the development of the classical Marxist debate, and missed out the central figure in that debate, Kautsky.

21. Lenin, *Imperialism*, p.117 (emphasis added): see pp.52, 60, 94, 95-6 etc. on stagnation.

22. *A Turn in World Politics*, January 1917.

23. Lenin, *Imperialism*, p.41, 94; see also p.57.

24. Nikolai Bukharin, *The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York 1972, p.26.

25. Lenin, *Imperialism*, p.13, 117, 94.

26. Calculated from figures in Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism*, London 1970, p.xv, 110.

27. Lenin also adduced another argument as to why imperialism should tend towards stagnation and decay: monopoly stifled competition and enabled cartels to suppress technical innovations which would disturb their business. This argument, however, he qualified heavily: see *Imperialism*, p.94. It is dubious, anyway: monopoly is rarely complete enough to lock out innovations, but often creates units large enough to afford to spend a lot on research and on trying out new products.

28. Lenin, *Imperialism*, p.52.

29. Ibid. p.97.

30. See articles in *Workers' Liberty* no.4 and no.6.

31. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Selected Works*, Moscow 1975, volume 1 p.571.

32. Lenin, *Imperialism*, p.92; Bukharin, *Imperialism*, p.39. See also p.159.

33. Lenin, *Imperialism*, p.60, 28.

34. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, first published 1899, *Collected Works* volume 3, Moscow 1960. Bukharin, *Imperialism*, p.84. See also p.96, where Bukharin quotes Marx on this question.

35. Michael Kidron, "Imperialism, highest stage but one", *International Socialism* no.9 (1962) and (reprinted) no.61 (1973); *Western Capitalism Since the War*, London 1968. John Strachey, *The End of Empire*, London 1959. A more recent argument for the "end of imperialism" is that, with the growth of multinational banks and corporations, the actions of capitalist states have become uncoupled with those of particular capitalist businesses (see David Lockwood in the Australian Marxist journal *Reconstruction*, 1994). But (1) the uncoupling is exaggerated — see David M Gordon, "The Global Economy", in *New Left Review* no.168, 1988; (2) most imperialist state actions in the heyday of "high imperialism" were not directly linked with the interests of a particular business, either — see note 19; (3) the limited uncoupling that has taken place is a factor in the new "regime" which since the mid-1980s has combined great accumulations of highly mobile capital with more-or-less free trade — but why call this the end of imperialism rather than a new regime of imperialism? Why be so finicky as to claim that the Gulf War, or the actions of the IMF, are not imperialist? It makes sense only if "imperialism" must be narrowly defined as what Lenin portrayed (or rather, is mistakenly supposed to have portrayed) in his 1916 pamphlet. This is not precision, but insane dogmatism.

36. Michel Pablo, *The Coming War*, Paris 1952; James P Cannon, *America's Road to Socialism*, New York 1953. A later document of the neo-Trotskyist movement tried to "save the theory" as follows. "Contrary to the general revolutionary Marxist assumption... the collapse of the colonial system did not lead to an immediate economic crisis... Among the multiple causes of this apparent paradox, one is of outstanding importance. So long as the newly independent states, emerging through the colonial revolution, are held by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaderships within the limits of the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist world market, the real power of imperialism is not broken in these countries. Its rule merely shifts from a direct to an indirect form. As foreseen long ago by revolutionary Marxists, the basic strategy of imperialism, confronted with the colonial revolution, has been to modify its form of rule while seeking to maintain its essential content" [*Dynamics of World Revolution Today*, New York 1974, p.31 (written in 1963)].

This "saves the theory" by making it empty. No intricate economic analysis is needed to see that socialist revolutions throughout the ex-colonial world would have left metropolitan capitalism hard-pressed! The argument which had been current in the revolutionary Marxist movement was that *even bourgeois independence* in the colonies would disrupt metropolitan capitalism by restricting a vital area of profitable investment (as it indeed did restrict it, through nationalisations and protectionist measures) and thus making the metropolis choke to death on its glut. That is the argument which needs to be reviewed.

37. Lenin, *Collected Works*, op.cit., vol.23, p.25 ("at the same time..."); *Caricature*, p.30 ("... accentuates..."); Bukharin, *Imperialism*, p.120; Lenin, *Caricature*, p.23 (see also p.30, and article *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*).

38. Trotsky's writings on fascism imply a different "grid."

More generally: states like the Latin American "liberal-oligarchic", early 19th-century England, or Prussian absolutism, arm a corporate interest with coercive force, more or less systematic and concentrated, varying from the liberal to the absolutist end of the spectrum. The ruling corporate interest simply confronts the working classes, and constructs alliances only with the middle class. A vigorous middle class can force a liberal variant of "corporatist" rule.

The modern bourgeois-democratic state, by contrast, has a highly-developed "hegemonic" structure, co-opting the working class through a thousand threads. The fascist state (or the Stalinist state, with differences) organises a sort of "negative hegemonic" structure. It replaces trade unions with state labour fronts, and so on through the whole range of mass organisations. It uses great force, but also detailed, all-embracing control, such as an ordinary "corporatist" dictatorship does not have. For that it needs not only police, but thousands of more-or-less fanatical political organisers, who emerge from crisis or revolution.

As we were saying...

What's in the coffin at the funeral of socialism?

BOURGEOIS propagandists and ex-Stalinists alike tell us that we are witnessing the end of socialism.

Socialism is dying of shame, failure and self-disgust before our eyes in Eastern Europe. Socialism has been tried and is now deservedly rejected as an all-round social and historical failure.

It is rejected most explicitly by the working class who, for example, gave the right the bulk of its vote in last month's East German election.

The workers want capitalism, and socialism, "history's great dream" — so bourgeois and ex-socialist propagandists alike say — goes the way of other ignorant yearnings and strivings, taking its place in the museum of quackery alongside such relics of barbarism as alchemy.

For sixty and more years, "socialism", in common discourse, has been what existed in the USSR. The ideas conveyed by the words socialism and communism before Stalin established his system sixty years ago faded into the mists of pre-history, and "socialism" came to be the theory and practice of Stalinism — what became known in the '70s as "actually existing socialism".

That was "socialism". There has been no other socialism (unless some fool wants to cite Western "democratic socialism", Sweden for example).

And yes, it is this "actually existing socialism" that is ceasing to exist, melting like islands of ice in the warm seas of international capitalism. And yes, its enemies are the very working class in whose name the "socialist" states claimed their historic legitimacy.

So much for "socialism", "actually existing socialism". But for the socialism of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci, it is a good thing that millions of people in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union have risen in revolt against "socialism" and "communism". In fact it is the best thing that has happened for socialists in fully half a century.

The face that those millions hate and despise "socialism" is the best pledge we could have that socialism has a future, that socialism is indeed the "wave of the future."

This becomes clear when you ask yourself the question: what have the workers revolted against when they revolted against "socialism"? What has been proved or disproved by the indisputable failure of the Stalinist system?

The workers and others have revolted against:

- National oppression by the USSR and within the USSR.

- Subordination of individuals, social groups, and nations to an all-powerful regulating state through which a bureaucratic ruling class exercised its dictatorship.

- The denial of free speech, free press, free assembly, free organisations.

- Exploitation and poverty, combined with outrageous privilege.

They want instead:

- National and individual freedom.

- Democracy.

- Prosperity and equality — an end, at least, to the peculiarly glaring sort of inequality imposed on the Eastern Bloc by bureaucratic privilege.

That the workers think they can get these things, or get more of them, under a market system, is very important, and determines what happens now, but it is not the whole story. It is not even the gist of the story. And it is not the end but the beginning of the chapter that

opened in the East last autumn.

And what has the failure of Stalinist "socialism" proved? That rigidly bureaucratic systems, where all power, decision, initiative and resources are concentrated in the hands of the state, cannot plan their economies effectively. No Marxist ever believed they could.

That the workers become alienated when a supposed "workers' state" actually means rule over them by privileged bureaucrats.

That socialism is impossible without freedom and democracy, without free initiative and comprehensive self-rule.

That socialism is impossible when the socialists set out to develop backward national economies, rather than the working class seizing power on the basis of the technology created by advanced capitalism and *beginning* with equality and freedom.

Eastern Europe proves all these things. But then its evidence vindicates, rather than disproves, the idea of Karl Marx.

Marx argued that socialism would grow out of advanced capitalism, which had developed the means of production far enough that want could be abolished almost immediately; that socialism would be the creation of the mass of the people, led by the working class, and, by definition, therefore, democratic; and that socialism would immediately destroy the bureaucratic state machine, substituting an accountable system of working-class administration.

What came to be known as "socialism", and in fact was "actually existing socialism", was never socialism. Lenin and Trotsky did not believe that socialism was possible in the backward Tsarist empire. What they believed was that the workers could take power there, and make the first in a chain of revolutions that would reach the advanced countries where socialism was possible.

The revolutions in Western Europe were betrayed and defeated. In isolation, the Stalinist mutation, a new form of class society with collective property, emerged by way of a bloody one-sided civil war against the workers of the USSR, led by the genuine Marxists, Trotsky and his comrades. After World War 2 it spread.

Stalinism was never socialism. But the revolt against it is socialism in embryo — the mass self-assertion and revolt of millions of people is the raw material of socialism.

It would be a true miracle if the workers in the Stalinist countries had political clarity after years in darkness. It would be remarkable if they were not confused by the official "socialism" which meant tyranny and poverty, and by the capitalism of Western Europe which means comparative prosperity and liberty.

What they are gaining now is the freedom to think, to organise, the freedom to struggle and to learn from their struggle. Out of this, the first steps towards socialism — independent workers' organisations, parties and trade unions — will emerge again in countries in which History did indeed seem to have ended in hell forty or more years ago. In the East, working-class history has begun again.

Working classes which fail to shape their own history sometimes get a second chance — in the first place the chance to learn from and not repeat that history.

"Socialism" is dead.

Long live socialism!

S.M., *Socialist Organiser*, March 1990

Rediscovering Marx

Alan Johnson reviews
 "The Adventures of the
 Communist Manifesto" by
 Hal Draper, 1994, Center
 for Socialist History

FROM its inception, whether as political movement or political theory, socialism has been dominated by various strains of elitist, bureaucratic and statist 'socialisms from above.' However, since Marx there has also existed a minority tradition of theory and practice which has defined socialism as the 'self-emancipation of the working class' — socialism from below — and in so doing has sought to fuse the democratic idea and the socialist idea.

The American Marxist Hal Draper (1914-1990) produced "as sustained an articulation of socialism from below as exists in English."

His achievement was two-fold. First, the rediscovery in Marx himself, by rigorous textual and historical analysis, of a theory and practice of socialism from below, set out in the four volume work *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* [KMTR] and in other writings. Second, he sought with others, most importantly Max Shachtman, until Shachtman became a right-wing social democrat, to develop this theoretical legacy, in the face of Stalinism and imperialism, into a "revolutionary democratic socialism for our time" known as "third camp" socialism.

The book is a spin off from KMTR, and contains a publishing history, a new translation, and detailed annotation of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The publishing history

THE *Manifesto* is without doubt the most important political pamphlet in human history. Marx wrote it as a militant in a socialist organisation (the Communist League). His political ideas had been decisively influenced by his practical experience with socialist workers in Paris. As Draper puts it: "Page for page, no other publication in our time has rivalled the historical impact of the *Manifesto*." Draper traces the way the *Manifesto*'s fortunes followed the ups and downs of the class struggle over the next half century. It appeared at the same time, 1848, as the first international revolution in world history. Engels wrote:

"The *Manifesto* has had a history of its own... it was soon forced into the background that began with the reaction that began with the defeat of the Paris workers in June 1848, and was finally excommunicated 'according to law' by



the conviction of the Cologne Communists in November 1852. With the disappearance from the public scene of the workers' movement that had begun with the February Revolution, the *Manifesto* passed into the background."

But with the growth of social democracy in Germany and the founding in 1864 of the First International the *Manifesto* revived with new publications. In the late 1860s the beginnings of reformist tendencies were reflected in demands — Draper cites Liebknecht in Germany — that Marx revise the *Manifesto* to cut the revolutionary content. After the Paris Commune of 1871, "The *Manifesto* started gaining its status as a necessary part of any cultured person's stock of knowledge on sociopolitical matters."

There are times when the sheer weight of detail overwhelms the reader. Few will feel they need to know the size of paper of the original manuscript (215x134, apparently) or the significance of the comma after Marx's name but before Engels' name in the 1888 Translation, and so on. Did Draper really need to discuss whether the manuscript arrived in London in late January 1848 or early February? But various myths and legends are dealt with, such as Bernstein's attack on the *Manifesto* as 'Blanquist' i.e. putschist, and the many glaring errors of Harold Laski's much reprinted introduction.

The annotations

THE annotations stretch across over one hundred pages and are "intended solely to explain what the *Manifesto* said... [not] to provide an exposition or commentary." This is probably the most useful section of the book, invaluable for anyone engaged in using the *Manifesto* with other socialists in educational work. Words, phrases, names, historical allusions are all explained, line by line, sometimes word by word, in great detail.

The new translation

SINCE 1888 the translation overseen by Engels has been authoritative, so why a new one? Draper's translation is offered as a supplement to the Engels translation not a replacement. Engels was in a hurry in 1888, devoting only one week to the job. More importantly, Draper tells us, Engels engaged in "a kind of limited revision or updating of the language, telling himself that it was all in aid of better communicating the 1848 document to contemporary Anglo-Saxon noggins." These revisions have been hardened "as if they had been engraved on the brazen tablets in 1848." It is time, says Draper, to "provide a way of getting behind" the Engels translation. Draper's qualifications for the job can not be doubted. Not only was he a revolutionary socialist, and one of the most meticulous Marx scholars of the post war world, but he was also an acclaimed translator from German to English. His *Collected Poems of Heinrich Heine* (1982) was praised as "one of the century's great translation achievements", in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

One example of the great value of Draper's 'New English version': the *Manifesto* talks, famously, of "the idiocy of rural life." Draper reveals this is a mistranslation. The two versions (as well as the Macfarlane version of 1850 which appeared in the left-Chartist *Red Republican* of George Harney, and the original German text) can be read alongside each other:

"The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life."

Engels 1888

"The bourgeoisie has subjected the countryside to the rule of the town. It has created enormous cities; it has increased the size of the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a significant part of the population from the privatised isolation of rural life."

Draper, 1994

Draper goes on in the annotations to prove that: "The German word *idiotismus* did not and does not mean 'idiocy'... What the rural population had to be saved from, then, was the privatised apartness of a life-style isolated from the larger society: the classic stasis of peasant life. To inject the English 'idiocy' into this thought is to muddle everything."

This is a valuable book which all libraries should possess. It can be ordered from The Center For Socialist History, 1250 Addison Street, Suite 101, Berkeley, CA 94702, United States of America. ☐

Prejudice and IQ-testing

By Sheila Lahr

I WAS surprised to note that Dan Katz in reviewing *The Race Gallery, the Return of Racial Science* (WL27) appears to accept that intelligence can be measured objectively and without regard to the values, or demands of bourgeois society.

Surely, IQ testing has long been exposed as being class and gender based. Even open-ended testing to provide opportunities for the more creative had no effect upon the main purposes of IQ testing. As we know, in the 1920s, the American authorities presented newly arrived immigrants with IQ tests for completion, based on the English language and American middle-class culture. Failure resulted in the immigrants being dubbed "simple-minded" and many underwent sterilisation. As did many black people.

"Researches into human intelligence have generally been skewed to arrive at an end result to fit, or form, prejudice."

In fact, even in Canada this took place as witness a report in *The Daily Telegraph* (27.1.96) which reveals that the Alberta Eugenics Board, which operated from 1928 to 1972, sterilised 2,844 people, Native Indians making up 25% of these although they were only 2.5% of the population.

If racial "science" is again becoming popular, it is in response to depression, unemployment and advancing technology which makes human beings redundant. Under capitalism, the onus for poverty must be placed upon the poor whose own "stupidity" leads them to live in deprived inner cities, or take up crime and drugs. Certainly, I would have expected socialists to understand this.

Dan Katz and your readers must know that researches into human intelligence have generally been skewed — such as in the case of Cyril Burt — to arrive at an end result to fit, or form, prejudices.

In Katz's final remark, he posits the question of attitudes to be taken should black people be shown to be less intelligent than white. Does he mean *all* black people, against *all* white people? The difficulty in this is that research material can cover only a small and selective sample of

the population and generally aims to arrive at a certain answer!

I would put the following question to Dan Katz. If he were dropped into what remains of the rain forests, in which Indians have survived for generations, would he be "intelligent" enough to survive?

When Shachtman moved right

By Laurens Otter

COMRADE Haberkern [WL27] is being disingenuous in trying to claim that Shachtman did not move to the right until the 1960s. In 1956, for instance, there was a revolt in the Young People's Socialist League. (Yes, they had been reformed. The earlier lot that had become the YSL was neither the first nor the last generation of the YPSLs that revolted.) This led Doddington and Hoopes (in defiance of Socialist Party of America leader Norman Thomas, who wished to endorse the Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson) to seek presidential nomination.

The revolt was only ended by Thomas reversing his position. (Though this was short-lived; in 1958, the SPA united with the Social Democratic Federation and immediately began moves to liquidate into the Democrats.) Both in 1956 and '58 Shachtman voted with Thomas (as did the majority of the ISL).

Comrade Haberkern is right that I conflated the Attorney General's list hearing with an HUAC one; but it would be very funny if he was also right that there was no HUAC hearing, since the ISL circulated to world Third Camp groups a duplicated document entitled "Max Shachtman's evidence before HUAC" discussing the subject. As secretary of the skeletal group trying to form an Irish section, I received a copy. There was no question in this that the leaflet was especially written during the Korean War.

Prior to that of course I had seen an article in *Militant* (or perhaps enclosed as an insert) written by resigning members of the ISL youth group, who had turned to the SWP, forming the Young Socialist Alliance. Then John Banks, Allen Skinner and others of the international committee received a statement on the subject from AJ Muste. (The Irish committee did not rate a copy of that, but I was asked to translate it into French for francophone interna-

tional committee members.) It became a matter for discussion for all the non-ISL groups of the American Third Camp.

1950 was not 1959

By Ernie Haberkern

I DON'T want to drag out this matter of Max Shachtman and the House Un-American Activities Committee, but I do think it important to nail this particular rumour down. It is an example of a particularly nasty form of polemic which uses Shachtman's personal slide to the right to discredit the Third Camp position and avoid discussing the political issues. The technique involves attributing to Shachtman statements he did not make and actions he didn't take and then attributing these imaginary statements and actions to the full Independent Socialist League as a whole. It all seems plausible because later, after the ISL had dissolved, Shachtman did do and say things similar to things he was falsely accused of doing and saying earlier.

As usual, Otter when confronted with documentary evidence shifts his ground. The original charge is not that Shachtman "moved to the right" but that he "had written pamphlets for use by the American forces for dropping on Korea." And that the ISL had endorsed this. Since the documentary evidence I cited refute this, the narrator of this fairy tale resorts to a garbled account based on hearsay of Shachtman's move in the late fifties to dissolve the ISL into the Socialist Party and (what is not the same thing) to turn the SP into a ginger group within the Democratic Party.

With the exception of Hal Draper and Gordon Haskell everyone was for going into the SP. There was great excitement over what seemed to be the bright prospects for the American socialist movement following the collapse of the CP. But the majority of the ISL did not support Shachtman on his "entrism" perspective on the Democratic Party. And neither did the majority of SPers. I mention this because Otter's account is so garbled and the history here is important for understanding the current state of the American left.

But what does it have to do with his original charge? To be for working in the Democratic Party is not necessarily to be pro-west in the Cold War. In fact, the left liberals, ex-CPers and Stalinoids in and around the SP gravitated towards the "realignment faction" and it was the left-wing YPSLs who embarrassed people by the anti-Stalinism. In any case, the one leaflet (not the imaginary pamphlets) had been written in 1950 (before the Korean war) and the Shachtman passport case and the ISL campaign around that case took

place in 1953. What is the relevance of Shachtman's behaviour in 1958 and 1959, on other issues, after the dissolution of the ISL, to the original charge?

For that matter, if Otter was a subscriber to *LA* then he had to have read the original coverage of this whole issue. The ISL didn't keep it a secret. What happened in 1959 to shock him that he didn't know about in 1953?

According to Otter it was three things:

1. The startling revelations in the *Militant* by YSL dissidents who had left to help form the Young Socialist Alliance. It would, of course, be an *ad hominem* argument were I to casually mention that these sterling comrades were Jim Robertson and Tim Wohlforth. But you must agree that it would be a strong *ad hominem* argument.

2. A leaflet which Otter saw at the time but which he no longer apparently has.

3. A statement by AJ Muste which he never saw and whose content he doesn't really know.

I suspect that comrade Otter and the other members of the international third camp tendency (which I had never heard of before) were embarrassed by Shachtman's embrace of the Norman Thomas types in 1957-8 and shamefacedly admitted that they had been taken in by "the Shachtmanites." When comrade Otter states that he and his friends "refused adamantly to consider entrism" I can understand why any ISLer, regardless of his or her other views, would have (rightly or wrongly) written them off as sectarians.

Otter's remarks in his November letter [WL26] indicate that his general information on the ISL is based on hearsay. It is just nonsense to speak of a Burnham-MacDonald faction in the WP. Burnham resigned formally one week after the organisation was formed and had dropped out in effect before the organisation was formed. Burnham and Joseph Carter had collaborated in the debate over the "Russian question" but they were not a faction and MacDonald wasn't involved with them in that endeavour. MacDonald and Burnham's articles on Russia were reprinted in the same issue of *Partisan Review* in 1941, by which time both were out of the WP. Their articles have little in common except that they agree Stalin's bureaucracy (and Hitler's) were a new class. You can only imagine that to be a faction if you imagine that the whole world is divided into factions.

That is why I suspect Dunayevskaya (Forest) is the source of this disinformation. The only formal faction that existed in the WP was the Johnson-Forest group. Nobody else functioned in that way. Differences were debated openly with a view to persuading the other comrades and the idea of an ideological grouping trying to seize organisational control was foreign to the comrades outside of the Johnson-Forest people.

By the way, further evidence that Otter is really talking about the Shachtman passport case, not HUAC, is his mention of

MacDonald and Burnham as witnesses. This was in the passport case in the mid '50s.

I do not wish to accuse comrade Otter of bad faith. I don't think he is acting in bad faith. Most of us fit what we hear as gossip or read casually into some sort of framework and after a while we have a nice little story. Why quibble if HUAC and the Attorney General are confused with one another? China, Korea? 1950 or 1959? Who cares? I know I have done this kind of thing before myself. It is only when I go back and check the facts that it becomes apparent how I inadvertently distorted them. Unfortunately, in this case, comrade Otter didn't check, or was unable to check, his facts.

For what it is worth, I suspect that this mysterious ISL leaflet if it is ever found will turn out to be a reply by the ISL to the charges made against it in the *Militant* and will contain essentially the same information as is in the *LA* article. I can find no mention of this document in the *Mimeographia* and by 1970 Hal Draper would have been only too happy to document Shachtman's lapse if it had occurred. I can't imagine him letting it go by unchallenged in 1950 and, for that matter, I can't imagine Shachtman doing that sort of thing in 1950. By 1960 or 1965 I would be surprised to hear he passed up such a chance.

Editor's note: unless someone contributes additional "hard" information, this discussion is now over.

Three fronts to the class struggle

By Mike Fenwick

THE ARTICLE by Karl Kautsky (WL27) casts light on how the British Labour Party was seen by European Marxists at the time of its formation.

It is with the second part of the article that I would like to take issue. Not as some form of polemic against some long dead opponent but to point out the continuance today of some of his misconceptions.

Part II of the article deals in some detail with the relationship between the Marxists (specifically the Social Democratic Party (SDP)) and the Labour Party. I want to examine Kautsky's concept of the party he considers the ideal. Fundamentally his mistake seems to be to accept the technical division of labour inside the British labour movement.

He outlines the three areas of class struggle as per Engels, ideology, economics and politics. He then checks them off against the various elements

that make up the movement.

Trade unions = industrial, check.

Labour Party = politics, check.

SDP = ideology, check.

Admittedly he thinks it would be better if they were all contained in one organisation, but at least they are all there. In Kautsky's concept of the party the different elements will keep their different functions even inside a united organisation. The SDP will control the ideology and propaganda, the politicians go to parliament and the trade unionists be good trade unionists, albeit with a bit of socialist rhetoric to hand.

Is it unfair to accuse the most respected Marxist of his time, Lenin's teacher of being so crude and mechanistic? No, his own party, the SPD, had exactly this sort of structure. Kautsky, "the Pope of Marxism", was the head of the SPD's ideological priesthood who put the formal Marxist gloss on the activities of the practicals — the politicians and the trade unionists. The reality of their formal Marxist orthodoxy was finally exposed in 1914, when the SPD supported the Kaiser in the First World War.

The point is that the three elements of the struggle mustn't just be represented, but integrated root and branch throughout the party. At the level of individuals, the revolutionary party can't just accept comrades as trade unionists etc. It wants Marxist trade unionists who increase the prestige of the party, not just through exemplary routinism but through their ability to argue and fight for the party's ideas and politics. Each member should be capable of intervening into and on behalf of the party in all three areas of the class struggle. A 'class-conscious' party is going to require fully rounded, class-conscious members, rather than rely on a bureaucracy or elite to pull the elements together. Or, worse, a group of ideologues who "are the compass and rudder" of the "tremendous ship", the mass party, as Kautsky describes the relationship between the SDP and Labour Party.

If we restricted ourselves to fighting inside the Labour Party on the level of ideas alone, "spreading socialist comprehension among the mass movement", we'd reduce ourselves to passive propaganda, failing to challenge the leadership in politics and industrial struggle. Unable to make the connections between the leadership and the trade union bureaucracy's ideology and their privileges and position, we would always be 'right' but we'd always lose. If socialism was designed to make socialists feel better about themselves this would be fine. If its purpose is to change society, you must stretch yourself to take up the

other areas of struggle. Unlike *Briefing* — to take a good current example — you will not try to exist on moral outrage alone, safe in the knowledge that you at least are “unrepentant.”

Some SWPers would say: “well, two out of three fronts of the class struggle ain’t bad.” The SWP attitude of “leave the elections to Labour, and the strikes to us”, combined with being oh-so ideologically pure is enough for now. By elections, however, they mean politics in general, and that is not an optional extra. At some stage the Labour Party leadership will have to be challenged politically — when? — for control of our movement. Ritual denunciations won’t suffice, but that is all you get from these “two cheers for the class struggle but leave working-class politics to the reformists” Marxists.

Finally, these three fronts of the class struggle can’t be seen as some mystical trinity; they are the sum of our day-to-day existence under capitalism. At work, watching the news at home, talking to people on the bus, doing an estate sale, these different elements are inseparable in the daily life not only of a socialist organisation but of every individual socialist.

Sectarianism is not over

By Gerry Downing

IN your reply to John McNulty in *WL27* you are ignoring the fact that Billy Hutchinson is a central leader of an organisation which has merely taken a break from sectarian killings. This group has close links with British and European fascists who see them as soul brothers. Hutchinson has not renounced his past actions as a sectarian killer and makes it quite clear that he would kill again if he saw the need for it. Just a few months ago, leaders of the PUP, who have been engaged in the “peace process”, were convicted of sectarian killings.

“Loyalists who call themselves socialists should be talked to”, should they? It suited the Strasser brothers in Germany in the 20s to call themselves socialists. They also sounded very anti-capitalist at times, and even proposed a pact with Stalin. Some foolish leftists wanted to discuss with them but the German revolutionaries correctly said that this was the “socialism of idiots.”

John O’Brien has already enlightened us earlier in the same issue to what the real problems in “Northern Ireland” are. Honest John Major is doing his best, Sinn Féin are shouting even more loudly than the British (with all the mass media behind them, no doubt) and they are ignoring the real problem. Nobody is seriously listen-

ing to the fears of the Loyalists! Reaction is not getting a fair crack of the whip, O’Brien complains bitterly. When will these bourgeois nationalists realise that the key to the problem is to unite the working class even if the “difficult, truculent, suspicious leadership (of the Loyalists)... are being obstructive”? I doubt if any socialist (if we leave aside the idea of a fascist-socialist as a sick joke) has ever described the Orange Order, which must rank as one of the most reactionary ruling classes on the planet, in these oh so polite terms before.

Do you think it odd that no fascist grouping has mistaken the “PIRA” (British Army speak, that one) or even the INLA as one of their own? Because the struggle against British imperialism is still a progressive one and those who wage it, however politically confused or in the grip of reactionary nationalism they are, represent a progressive force which it is the duty of all socialists to support, particularly those socialists in the imperialist country. But comrade Matgamna once knew this very well when he waged that struggle within the IS in 1969 against their support for sending in the troops. Well, it seems it was OK to oppose sending them in, but not OK to fight for their withdrawal!

So how do we break loyalist workers from the grip of their reactionary ideology and in the process break nationalist workers from relying on Sinn Féin to lead the struggle? This does mean the correct application of the theory of Permanent Revolution, not as some type of objective process, with Gerry Adams fulfilling the role of national liberation leader assigned to him by history. It does involve recognising that whilst there may be no revolutionary nationalist solution to Ireland’s problems it is the duty of revolutionary socialists to form united fronts of struggle with revolutionary nationalists who wish to continue the struggle (it is clear that the Gerry Adams leadership has abandoned it) on the basis that we must construct a revolutionary working-class leadership to win.

This must recognise that the border, symbolising the Northern Ireland state, is not capable of reform and that the all-Ireland unity of the working class can only be formed when that state is smashed in the course of a socialist revolution. There can be no workers’ unity without workers’ equality and that is impossible in the Northern Ireland state whose mode of existence, the very mechanism of the cross-class alliance that is Loyalism, is built on discrimination. Loyalists must be stopped from carrying out this discrimination, and this will surely entail force against its more fascist and more reactionary wing. Billy Hutchinson can be a socialist when he renounces his past and begins to fight for a united Ireland on that basis, as many people from the Loyalist community have in the past. No Catholic has ever crossed in the opposition direction and joined the UVF or UDA because,

despite your protestations, the Nationalist community basically fights for a non-sectarian society. Mixed marriages have to live in west Belfast, never in east Belfast. You too could be a revolutionary socialist, comrade Matgamna, when you fight for a united Ireland on this basis.

PS. What you mainly criticise in the rest of your letter is the politics of the former People’s Democracy and not the ICMF, which is a new formation.

Cliff’s head revisited

By Jim Higgins

IF there is a thread running through the articles in *Workers’ Liberty* on the IS/SWP tradition, it is that an organisation with some potential lost its bearings in the early 1970s, adopting forms of party organisation and party life that would have been considered extreme by such luminaries as Harry Pollitt and R Palme Dutt.

It is, for example, a matter of some interest to note that quite recently a number of IS comrades were under threat of expulsion, and one was actually expelled, for the heinous crime of wishing to publish a cultural magazine.

Presumably, every time the Central Committee hears the word “culture” they reach for their pistol.

It was not always thus. In July 1972 the National Committee made it clear that “It [IS] does not have, and cannot have, as an organisation, positions or a line on scientific or quasi-scientific problems... the NC is not competent to commit the organisation to particular conceptions of relativity, genetics or psychology...” [IS Bulletin August 1972].

Of course, that was over 20 years ago. Nowadays, that renaissance man Chris Harman can, without even going into a telephone kiosk, be transformed into a cut-price Zhdanov and happily lay down a party line on such matters as anthropology.

For the all-seeing, all-knowing Central Committee, nothing is too obscure, arcane or difficult to have a definitive line about it.

As the guardians of the ark of the Marxist covenant, the leadership must be ever vigilant to ensure that there is no new thinking that might detract from the prestige of the Central Committee.

Under this sort of regime, democratic centralism confers infallibility on the leadership. It is a role that in the medieval church was performed by God. It must be quite nice for the likes of Cliff and Harman to shout at

people from burning bushes, keep Moses out of the Promised Land and occasionally send down a few commandments incised on tablets.

In 1968 a discussion was started on the organisational form the organisation was to take: whether it was to retain its old federal structure or move on to a democratic centralist structure. The document that initiated the move to democratic centralism in IS was a single sheet of A4 produced by Cliff in June 1968.

It has to be said it was grossly inadequate, but it did say, *inter alia*, "If a branch has 50 members who divide on a central issue 26 to 24 what is democratic about one person casting the votes of 50?"

Not a bad question, and one that he would be very hard pressed to answer today. Back in 1968, he goes on, "If [under a federal system — JH] a minority of the whole organisation — let us say 20% — has one set of policies separating it from the majority, it will not be represented at all — or at most by a derisory number of people on the executive."

You will see from this that Cliff clearly envisaged, and was also promising, representation on leading bodies for minorities. I do not recommend anyone to bring this matter up in the SWP now, unless, of course, they wish to join that other majority, the ex-members of IS/SWP.

The move to democratic centralism, however, was not just another example of Cliff deciding to set the group on its head, or in his own immortal phrase, "to bend the stick." The change of emphasis was directly related to a perception that the group might be able to move from propaganda to agitation.

Work in CND and the LPYS, together with limited activity in the trade unions, had produced a membership of several hundreds with some capacity for activity in a working-class milieu. The background was of the May events in France and of increasing shopfloor militancy in Britain.

The post-war long boom, rested on the shaky prop of arms economy, Labour reformism resorted to legislative control over wages and conditions and at the same time the trade union bureaucracy sought accommodation with the employers and a government-initiated "social contract." The real focus of reform was on the shop floor, at rank and file level.

As the result of a great deal of discussion with trade union militants, the *Incomes Policy, Legislation and the Shop Stewards* pamphlet was written by Cliff to help arm the shop floor militants. Later on the pamphlet on productivity deals was written in the same way and for the same pur-

pose. All of this was clearly in line with the development of IS ideas on the experience of the Minority Movement in the 1920s and the chances of building such a movement in the 1970s.

For the first time, the organisation started to recruit workers with some industrial and trade union experience. I recall quite vividly Cliff and I attending regular weekly meetings with workers at the ENV factory in Acton. This was a factory where Geoff Carlsson had been working for some years and as the result of exceptionally good and patient work on his part, coupled to the general political situation, and the then line of IS, produced a branch at the factory, with an IS majority on the shop stewards' committee, including the convenor and the chairman.

An organisation that wanted to build on this work could not operate as a loose federal structure. It needed to be organised in such a way as to maximise the opportunities that clearly existed in the workers' movement.

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The cadre, whatever its social origins, needed to be firmly oriented on the organised working class. That IS was working far more effectively at that time can be gauged by the Industrial Report to the 1974 conference (I believe that this document was written by Steve Jeffreys), a 48 page printed document that outlines the work and the perspective.

It reports 36 factory branches, a rise in membership among manual workers from 746 to 1,155 out of a total of 3,300. It details 16 rank and file papers and magazines with a total circulation of 70,000 (not 30,000 as I mistakenly reported in *WL19?*).

There were 275 AUEW members, 90 EETPU members, 70 NUM members and 130 health workers. Now, all of this is modest enough if it is measured against the size of the task to be performed. What is tragic is that, over 20 years later, the SWP would be hard pressed to produce a 48 line report on serious industrial work.

It was against this background that Cliff's faction's sharp change of

course, an exercise in stick-bending that required the destruction of at least ten years of concentrated activity, should be seen.

The organisation was now to be wrenched into pursuit of the young, traditionless workers, because the shop stewards and other rank and file leaders were "rotted by 30 years of reformism."

There is a always a problem for members of a revolutionary group who feel that there is something wrong with the political line, or the regime or the behaviour of leading comrades. One is committed to the organisation, contributed to its growth and well-being, in consequence, loath to attack it. One's social life is encompassed within the group, there are friendships and the commitments of solidarity and the debts owed to comradeship in past struggles.

This complex of relationships tends to disarm the oppositionist, making him mitigate and mute his criticism. Unfortunately, while one is nursing one's scruples Cliff and his minions are spreading the poison around the group. The Centre's loyalists often become over-excited. On several occasions, after a heavy night on the beer, they felt the need to give me a late night call to explain the error of my "counter-revolutionary" ways in slurred four-letter words. Such calls can swiftly eradicate any vestiges of sentimental attachment.

The notion that Cliff's faction behaved in the way they did because they were caught in the toils of Leninism and democratic centralism seems to me to be mistaken. In a very real sense, the reason why Cliff flipped his lid was because the EC of the day presumed to tell him democratic centralism meant majority decisions actually trumped his latest intuition, no matter how inspired he thought it was. In small organisations, people like Cliff, Healy and Cannon have a kind of feudal attitude to the group, as if they can exercise their *droit de seigneur* whenever the fancy takes them.

His truly awful three-volume biography of Lenin is basically the justification for Cliff's own actions, sanctified by reference to holy writ.

Democratic centralism is any form of organisation that does not get in the way of Cliff doing what he fancies. It may be recalled that one of Lenin's little tags that Cliff found mouthwateringly delicious went as follows: "On s'engage et puis on voit." This according to Cliff was deeply and profoundly dialectical. When one considers that the closest you can get to Lenin's aphorism in English is "suck it and see", you begin to understand why Cliff thinks he is a Leninist and the rest of us think he is not.

Think like a Marxist!

THERE was a time when basic Marxism was taught throughout the labour movement by the Labour College Movement. This was a non-denominational enterprise in Marxist education which had its origin in a pre-World War One revolt by working-class students against the curriculum at Ruskin College, Oxford, the school for trade unionists. They seceded and organised the "Plebs League" and created a network of organising tutors to teach basic Marxism to trade unionists. For over 50 years it published a small monthly magazine "Plebs" — until the movement merged with the TUC education department around 1960.

Famous labour movement names like, for example, Noah Ablett — the South Wales miner who wrote the important militant pamphlet, "The Miner's Next Step", which helped to generate the great "labour unrest" of the years before 1914 — were amongst its organising tutors. We need such a movement again!

We print here the first excerpt from one of their pamphlets on Marxism published in the 1930s. The author, Dr Edward Conze, was a German, ex-Communist, an anti-Stalinist, living in Britain. This text is, in part, a polemic against the Stalinist teaching of Marxism — the way they treated Marxism as dogma and sacred texts. This text is very relevant today as an antidote to the Stalinised versions of Marxism taught to "sociology" and "politics" students in colleges and universities.

Marxism is first of all a method of analysing and understanding the world, as part of the work of coming to grips with it, in order to change it.

This and succeeding excerpts will give the reader a basic grounding in how to think like a Marxist.

DIALECTICAL materialism is surrounded by the glamour of being something specially strange, mysterious and startling. To the extent to which this new method of thinking becomes better known, the charm of the unknown will vanish. It will be seen that it is not a nice piece of decoration, but a very prosaic and practical tool. It has more the functions of an axe than of a Chinese vase.

Some persons have used dialectical materialism to build a castle in the clouds, ensconced in which they remain superior to a world which now and then they honour by occasional oracular statements. They will complain that my exposition of the laws of scientific method cannot be

correct because it is too simple. They obviously look upon scientific method as something like the sanctuary which was hidden in the temple of Jerusalem and to which only the high priests had access. When the Roman soldiers drew back the curtain of the sanctuary, they saw nothing more mysterious behind it than a loaf of bread and jug of water! Similarly, if the veil of cumbersome terms, ponderous phrases and philosophical disquisitions, which has covered the dialectical method, is once torn, we see that it is nothing but a codification of common-sense.

Perhaps the main bulwark of the mystery-mongers is the very term "dialectical materialism." The spread of Marxism among the workers has sometimes suffered from the fact that the Marxist theories were originated by a German doctor of philosophy with all his enthusiasm for long and learned Greek and Latin terms. Nowhere has this passion for clumsy and far-fetched terms done more harm than in Marxist philosophy. When ordinary students or average workers hear of "dialectical materialism" — for this is the name of the Marxist philosophy — they are apt to decide that this thing can have nothing to do with the difficulties of life. The name has all the disadvantages that a name can possibly have. It is cumbersome and unwieldy, unintelligible to the average person and extremely vague for the expert.

A long experience of teaching and discussing Marxist philosophy has convinced me that these and similar terms are useless for the understanding of what is really of importance for the working class. They also often prevent people from getting a really living knowledge of the "dialectical" method. In this booklet I shall, therefore, avoid these terms. Since the Marxist scientific method is the correct and the only scientific one and since it is, as we shall see, not restricted to Marxists, we will simply speak of "scientific method" instead of "dialectical materialism."

What we all know

THERE is at least one thing everybody knows about Marxist philosophy. Nobody can fail to see that it is often the cause of considerable bewilderment, confusion and uneasiness. Before we deal with the scientific approach itself, we must therefore first clear away some of the current misconceptions about it.

The Communists honestly believe that the scientific method in the Marxist sense can be clearly understood only by such persons as prove to be clear-minded enough to join the Communist Parties — if only temporarily. In actual fact, however, according to the classics of Marxist philosophy, the scientific or "dialectical" way of thinking is no special privilege of the Communist Parties. The classics of

Marxism always insisted that everybody uses the scientific or "dialectical" method who is able to control things and events on the basis of his insight into their laws. Some people use the method more: these are those who are more capable of controlling things. Some use it less; these are those who are less capable of control. The use of scientific method is as old as is mankind. It grew with the control of mankind over nature and society. Modern science and the success of technique extended considerable its application to nature, and Marx, Engels and Lenin perfected it as an instrument for the study and control of society.

The real purpose

NOT the mere understanding, but an increased control of the world, is the ultimate purpose of scientific method. We study it in order to master the practical problems that confront the working-class movement. People who have obviously lost all touch with reality and who are, therefore, regularly defeated in their actions, like the Communist Parties outside Russia, have little understanding of scientific method, although they may proudly call themselves "dialectical materialists." Capacity for control and for scientific method always go together. The bourgeois science of nature has led to many successes in the control of nature and, correspondingly, it employs the scientific method fairly correctly. It applies it most in mathematics, physics and chemistry. For its correct understanding of the laws of inorganic matter bourgeois science is rewarded by machines which run smoothly and by poison gas which kills effectively. Practical success is the consequence and the test of correct theoretical results. Traditional science is less successful in its study of organic matter or of living things. Biology and medicine have been unable to reach the perfection of mathematics, physics and chemistry. In these fields, the gaps of scientific knowledge are still filled with mythical and religious speculations. The prediction and cure of diseases have not reached the accuracy and efficiency which we associate with the building of a bridge or of a cotton loom. People, struck by the inadequacy of traditional medicine, still attempt to heal diseases by faith. Nobody would any longer dream of building an aeroplane by faith or prayer.

It is, however, most of all in its attitude to society and the problems of social life that the governing class combines practical impotence with theoretical bewilderment. The fact that the capitalists are unable to control and master their own economic system and that they are unable to find a permanent solution for its difficulties, is reflected in the unscientific

futilities which are offered as orthodox economic science. At the present time, the social sciences have come into the foreground of interest. Conditions are compelling us to see that we must learn to control through society the instruments by which we have learned to control nature.

The only way

THERE exists also much confusion as to the way in which scientific method should be taught. A Christian or a Mohammedan may perhaps show you by quotations how to find the salvation of your soul. The explanation of scientific method can, however, never consist in the mere interpretation of quotations from texts which are treated by some "Marxists" in very much the same fashion as Saint Ambrose and Saint Chrysostom treated the Bible. The Marxist classics are a great help as guides. Most of the ideas in this pamphlet are drawn from them. But ultimately, by interpreting passages from Marx and Engels, we can see only that we are orthodox and not that we are right. The analysis of facts is the only way to expound scientific method and to grasp its meaning and significance.

To apply a method of approach and to be conscious of it are, of course, two different things. You can digest your food without any knowledge. But this does not mean that the medical and physiological study of the digestive track is without importance. You can control your own mental activities and those of others to a certain degree without psychology; but that does not mean that the science of psychology is useless. Human beings can understand and control the world to a certain degree without being aware of the method which gave them the necessary understanding and control. But a knowledge of the scientific method is of great use if the workers want to think for themselves and it makes understanding and control easier. The emancipation of the workers has been considerably delayed by their ingrained habit of letting others do their thinking.

Not ready-made

SCIENTIFIC method is not a body of ready-made statements which can be learned by heart. It gives us no mystical formulae from which we can easily deduce reality without the trouble of examining the fact. Scientific method is a way of looking at things. This habit can be acquired only by continual practice and not by a reverential pondering over quotations.

Scientific method is not like a heap of tins of food which you can store up in your larder in the belief that you've got all you need. It is rather like a tin-opener, the tins being the things of the world in which we live. It is a method of discovery and as such it was used by Marx, Engels and Lenin. We betray their spirit when we merely repeat their findings. Scientific method is an instrument which enables the ordinary worker to think better for himself than he did before. In this respect



Dialectical materialism can be a tool for the workers in their battles against the bosses

it is one of the most useful weapons of the working class in its struggle for emancipation. It is especially useful at the present time. Many old ideas have now collapsed in the face of the new reality of fascism. Socialism is no longer a distant utopia but has become an immediate, a practical issue. Only the conscious effort of all workers can save the world from fascism and war by bringing about socialism.

Among the many brilliant observations which Karl Marx has uttered, there is none more profound than the sentence in which he lays down that the emancipation of the working class can be the work only of the working class itself. The International — that famous workers' song — expresses the same idea by reminding us that the workers cannot expect to be dragged out of their misery by some divine being, but by some king or by some popular leader. The workers can trust only in their own conscious effort to supersede the chaos, insecurity and injustice of capitalism by the more rational and just system of society which we call socialism. It is, however, difficult to fight for one's own interests if one is not used to thinking for oneself about the circumstances in which the fight takes place. The study of scientific method will give to the worker some of the tools with which to gain the knowledge of the world which he needs for his conquest of that world.

Scientific method has the task of opening our eyes. It draws our attention to certain aspects of reality which we might overlook and which frequently furnish us with the key to its control. Scientific method can be summed up in four very general statements or laws. These laws, or rules, meaningless at first sight, will be a great help to those who wish to under-

stand the puzzling world in which we live.

What are these laws?

THEY are:

1. *Study things and events in their interrelation with other things and events, past and present, and in relation to the purpose you have in view when studying them.*

2. *Everything is to be studied in its movement and development; for everything is in continual movement.*

3. *Wherever we find opposites, we must look for their unity, for opposites are always in a unity.*

Many important problems are problems of opposites. Opposites are, for instance, body and mind, truth and error, competition and monopoly, chance and necessity, class struggle and class harmony, progress and regress, quantity and quality, egoism and altruism, theory and practice, masses and leaders. Scientific method states that wherever one of two opposites is found, there also the other opposite is present. In other words, there is no mind without a body and no (living) body without some mental behaviour; no truth without error and no error without truth; events in nature and society are governed by chance and by necessity¹; society exhibits features both of class struggle and of class harmony²; each progress involves some regress³; quantitative changes are often accompanied by qualitative changes, as when water changes also from water into steam (quality)⁴; both egoism and altruism, both self-love and regard for others are parts of the make-up of our minds⁵; no theory can be called correct without being tested in practice and no practice can be regularly successful without being guided by theory; masses depend on leaders and leaders depend on masses. These are some of the innumerable instances of a "unity of opposites."

4. *We must look for the contradictions in the processes of nature and society; for everything is set into movement by contradictions.*

The best-known application of this law is the Marxian theory of the contradictions which move capitalist society and which produced imperialist expansion, depressions, wars and the other beauties of capitalist civilisation. We shall see [in a future excerpt] how a discussion of scientific method throws light on this cardinal theory of modern socialism.■

Notes

1. Engels, *Feuerbach* 54, 55, 58
2. See Chapter III
3. "The main thing is that each progress in organic evolution is at the same time a regress, by fixing a one-sided development and barring the possibility of development in a number of other directions. This is a fundamental law." Engels, *Naturdialektik*, 1925, p.218
4. Engels, *Anti Duhring*, Part I, chapter 12
5. See Chapter II

Northern Ireland

Back into the bearpit?



RUC clash with mourners at the funeral of reputed INLA chief, Gino Gallagher

THE CRISIS provoked by Britain's plan for elections for a new assembly in Northern Ireland is the most serious since the Provisionals announced their ceasefire on 31 August 1994. It may destroy the ceasefire and lead to the resumption of the IRA war.

The Provisionals called their ceasefire because they were finally forced to face the fact that they could not win the war — essentially a war against the Protestant majority of Northern Ireland's people — and the strategy of the "pan-nationalist alliance", worked out by John Hume of the SDLP, seemed to offer them an alternative. They hoped that the influence of Dublin and of the USA, levered into action by the Irish diaspora, a powerful force in US politics, could be used to force Britain to "sort out" the Protestants and to force the NI Protestants into some variant of an all-Ireland framework.

The "pan-nationalist bloc" — Provisional IRA-Sinn Féin/the constitutional nationalist SDLP/the parties in the 26 counties — does have some weight, but most of its components do not want to, and in fact almost certainly could not, push Britain into trying to force the Protestants into a united Ireland.

It would require full-scale repression.

The strategy of Britain and the Irish Republic is essentially to build on the model of the European Community (gradually weaving links while leaving formal borders untouched) and the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which on the political level gives Dublin a voice on what happens in Northern Ireland.

This is not what the Provisionals want, and there is probably a hard core willing to take up arms again to fight against it.

On the other side, the British government wants and needs to bring the Protestants along with it, and has thus gone along with Unionist "spoiling" demands for the Provisionals to give up their weapons before talks can start.

There is much political manoeuvring, with Britain striking stances to keep the Unionists on board and Dublin doing the same for the Provisionals, but there is a real gulf under the manoeuvres.

The Mitchell Commission proposals were designed to smooth over the issue of IRA weapons, but Britain cannot go along with Mitchell and start "all-party talks" without losing the Unionists.

And now, to try to draw in the Unionists, Britain has acted unilaterally, proposing elections for a new Northern Ireland assembly — flouting Dublin's legal right to be consulted, and throwing the political process back out of the Anglo-Irish framework into the Northern Ireland framework which has again and again proved unviable.

This tack has been proved unworkable before. The Provos called a ceasefire in 1975. Britain set up a Constitutional Convention in Northern Ireland to design a new framework. They hoped for some power-sharing deal. But the Unionists would not cooperate. When William Craig, a former Unionist hard-line leader, came out for power-sharing, he was instantly and devastatingly repudiated. The Convention achieved nothing, and Britain eventually prorogued it. The ceasefire collapsed.

John Hume has denounced the British government's initiative, and Dublin too has responded angrily, probably in part to help Gerry Adams keep the Provos in line. But a major split in the Provisionals, and the breakdown of the whole framework developed since the ceasefire, is now a real and tragic possibility.