

Workers' Liberty

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself

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unions in chains
Tory spending freeze
Education underfunded
**Slave labour for
jobless**

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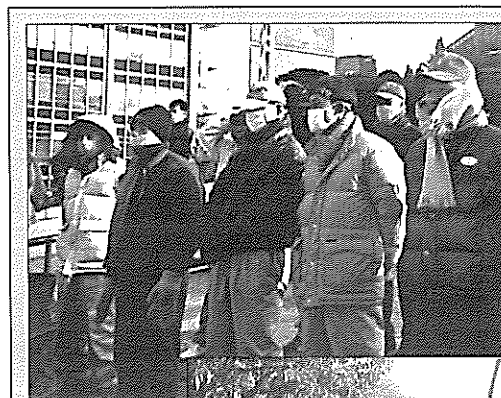
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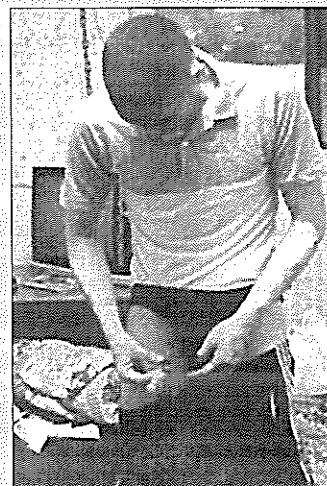
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New Labour is becoming No Labour

IN the looming General Election. Tony Blair may yet manage to repeat what Neil Kinnock did in 1992 and conjure Labour defeat out of seeming victory. Nonetheless, the Blairites continue their drive to destroy the Labour Party as a working-class party. There, at least, they are making progress.

What are they doing? They are carrying through, within the labour movement, a major part of the Thatcher programme to destroy working-class politics and socialism. Blair makes no secret about it. He says plainly what he is up to. He is working towards "a situation more like the Democrats and the Republicans in the US. People don't even question for a single moment that the Democrats are a pro-business party. They should not be asking that question about New Labour" (Financial Times, 16 January).

Blair is not just talking. He is acting. At Labour's National Executive Committee, meeting on 29 January, the New Right took the movement a big step further along the road to its own extinction as a labour party, by moving dramatically to "curb union influence on party policy" (as the Financial Times put it). The National Executive Committee decided that the annual conference should be cut down so that it cannot be "a 'shadow' or 'watchdog' of Labour in power". It should be reduced to two days of debate, with Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions no longer able to submit motions directly. The NEC itself should be downgraded to have little role in policy-making, with the constituency and trade-union element of it outweighed by Cabinet, MPs' and councillors' representatives.

The NEC put these proposals out for "consultation", reconsideration in June or July, and decision at the October party conference.

II

WHAT is new in this situation? Everything. All the old relations within the labour movement are now in flux. The main channels connecting Old Labour to the trade unions and the working class are being severed or bypassed. Those intent on turning Labour into a straightforward bourgeois party already have the commanding heights of the party. Those who might be expected to object powerfully, the trade union leaders, are letting them have their way. And, short of a massive rank-and-file revolt in the trade unions and the Labour Party, it is on the trade union leaders that the outcome immediately depends.

Not this or that policy is at stake, but the character of the Labour Party itself, and whether or not the labour movement will continue in politics. That is at stake even if, as now seems

likely, the Blair faction decides not to cut Labour's trade-union link completely, but to rearrange it so that they keep the advantages of trade-union support and finance while leaving no real chance for the unions and Labour's working-class base to assert themselves; while, in fact, turning the old Labour-union relationships into their opposite, into a trap rather than an empowerment for the labour movement.

The old labour movement and the left are caught in a pincer movement between the Blairites and the Tories, paralysed by the idea that because they want to get the Tories out they must not rock Blair's boat. Anti-Toryism is not enough, nothing like enough, but in the labour movement today anti-Toryism is everything. The paradox is that anti-Toryism is now one of the great props of Blair's drive to continue and consolidate the Tory programme of the last 18 years, with the New Labour party as his instrument. A Labour Government, once seen as a means, is now the self-sufficient end to which all other ends and goals are sacrificed. In the cause of beating the Tories and putting in a Labour Government, the reason why the trade unions entered politics and created the Labour Party is forgotten; those intent on destroying the Labour Party and making a

real Labour Government impossible are being allowed to have their way because "the Tories" must be defeated!

In the election we will say: Vote Labour and fight. But New Labour is increasingly No Labour, though the process is not complete. For decades, "vote Labour and fight" meant, vote for a government based on the trade unions, and fight, through strikes and demonstrations

where necessary, but also through labour movement channels. Those channels of accountability were what gave the Labour Party its unique character and what made it different from, say, the Democratic Party in the USA. The Blair faction is destroying them. By voting Labour the working class may break the 18-year logjam in British politics and move forward, but lodged within that victory will be looming defeat: the end of the 97-year-old ties of the Labour Party to the trade unions. In 1997, "vote Labour and fight" contains its own built-in negation. That is the tragic condition to which mass labour politics in Britain has come.

The crisis is not something for the future; it is upon us now. Time is short, because all indications suggest that the Blairites will act fast after the election, especially if they win. This is no routine battle in a more-or-less stable Labour Party, like so many in the past. If the broader labour movement does not quickly understand how urgent the issues are and begin to

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act; unless the labour movement and the left rediscover and reassert the basic ideas on which mass working-class politics in Britain was built; unless we urgently remember where we have come from and where generations of labour-movement activists have been trying to go — then the New Labourites will clinch their victory.

III

IT is because the old labour-movement basics have been almost buried by defeats and demoralisation that the New Right have had such a smooth passage. The battle of ideas is part of the class war, and a decisive part. Where the New Labourites, backed by the bourgeoisie and by layers of the trade union bureaucracy, have a clear, bold project, whose class purposes and outlines are clear to their hard-core supporters, we have no widely understood perspective or rallying cry for the labour movement.

Trotsky once observed that reformists “systematically implant in the minds of the workers the notion that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed”. Right now, in the battle of ideas and perspectives, the Blair faction and the bourgeoisie they represent are ideologically armed to the teeth, and the labour movement disarmed. The first job of socialists is to rearm the labour movement ideologically.

Too often we forget our broader perspectives, immerse ourselves in trade-union and Labour Party routine, and float to political destruction with the easy stream of shallow and treacherous anti-Toryism. We neglect the first and irreplaceable job of socialists — to propagate a vision not only of the socialist goal but also of the sort of labour movement needed to achieve that goal. Though the discussion continues, to many of us round Workers’ Liberty, that vision is summed up by the call for a workers’ government, and, immediately, for maintaining or rebuilding a mass workers’ party to attain it.

Why did the labour movement ever go into politics? To win a working-class government that would serve our interests as the Tories and Liberals served bourgeois interests. For Workers’ Liberty, a workers’ government worthy of the name would be a government that would create socialism by expropriating the bourgeoisie, destroying their state power, and abolishing wage-slavery. For the reform-socialists who controlled the labour movement, it became a government that could win reforms. Common to both, however, was the idea of the working class acting independently in politics to secure its interests, however minimally defined.

For us, the call for a workers’ government is another way of calling for the socialist transformation of society, but expressed as perspectives for a broad labour movement in which there will be many different notions of a workers’ government and how “far” it should go. It allows us to form a united front even with those who would understand a workers’ government as, say, 1945 Labour.

All the many issues of trade-union and political life, all the demands and protests of concern to workers and other oppressed people, fit in with the idea of a workers’ government — without in any way being damped down to waiting for such a government, now any more than in the past when workers struck, demonstrated and fought rent strikes while calling for and wishing for a government that would serve the working class as the Liberals and Tories served the bosses.

We ourselves are not prohibited by anything in the politics of Marxism from calling for a workers’ government that would, “even minimally”, “do for our class what the Tories for theirs” — that is, from expressing one of the wishes most common in the labour movement. Making that call, as we should, will not

confine us to its limitations; nor are those who would understand a workers’ government as “1945 Labour” predestined, once engaged in struggle and mobilisation to realise it, to stop at that level of ambition.

Today, when socialists talk of “keeping the link” between Labour and the unions, we suffer if we do not explain why we want that in terms of the old and irreplaceable ideas and goals. Too often we appear to trade unionists and New Labour Party members intent on kicking the Tories out as obstreperous and obstructive conservatives who senselessly oppose the “modernisation” of Labour. If kicking the Tories out and putting Labour in, on any terms, is a self-sufficient goal, then what the Millbank Tendency are doing, and the entire drift of the Labour Party under Kinnock and Smith, leading to Blair, makes a bleakly realistic — though no working-class or socialist — sense.

While continuing the day-to-day fight at every level of the Labour Party and trade unions, socialists need insistently and repeatedly to spell out the historical and political context of current politics. Why do we want to keep the link? Because we want to maintain and develop a working-class party! Why? Because we want a government that will serve our side as the Tories serve the bourgeoisie!

Class is the decisive test. To restore the idea of class politics to the centre of the labour movement’s concerns, we have to shake that movement out of its hypnosis with official politics, and win it back to an understanding that we need a workers’ party and a workers’ government, because working-class politics is more than the see-saw of the Westminster party game.

The objective of a workers’ government — and, immediately, of maintaining or rebuilding a working-class party to attain it — that is what gives focus, goal and sense to mass working-class politics. The strength of the feeling now that on any terms we must kick the Tories out, which the Blair faction exploit so shamelessly, is a grim and tragic proof of how central the question of government must be to working-class politics. If the labour movement does not have a socialist notion of the question, then it will have a bourgeois (right now, Blairite) one. That is the lesson of Labour’s 15-year drift to the right in pursuit of government, which has now turned into a soulless and possibly suicidal scramble for office.

It needs to be spelled out and repeated: only the reinstatement of the objective of a workers’ government, defined and measured by our class interests, at the centre of mass working-class politics, gives sense, logic and coherence to our immediate concern, the fight to preserve the working-class character of the Labour Party. Only the knowledge that Blair

Workers’ Liberty

Incorporating Socialist Organiser

THE WORKING CLASS WILL RISE AGAIN!

“The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex.” Karl Marx

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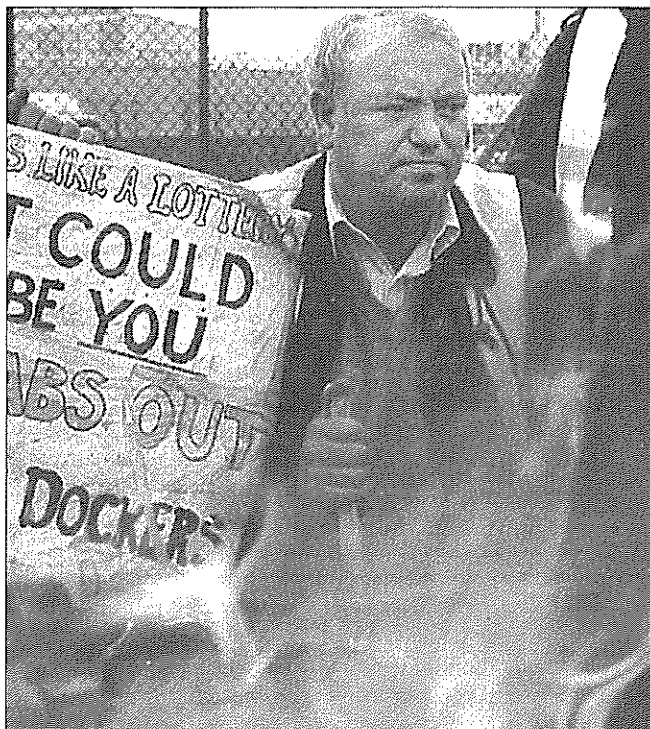
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will not lead a government even minimally committed to the working class, and the conviction that the labour movement can and must create such a workers' government, can generate the mass political energy that will either defeat Blair's New Labour project or begin to recreate a mass working-class party.

IV

TWO great moods on the left and in the labour movement play into the hands of the Blairites. The first is business-as-usual Labour loyalism — refusal to face up to what is new in the situation. Those who do not recognise how much things have already changed must become the political prisoners and dumb tools of the Blairites.

No socialists should accept defeat in advance of the hard fact, or give up on the chance to rally the left and make it into a force prepared to go on in any eventuality, including defeat. We will fight every inch of the way, and to the last possible moment, recognising that if the Blair faction succeeds, then the working class will have suffered a political defeat of historic proportions. But not to know and say plainly that Labour victory in the election will on all indications be the signal for a strong final offensive against the labour movement in politics — that can only help the Blairites and make their final success more likely.

The mirror-image of head-in-the-sand Labour loyalism is the sectarian "rejection" of mass working-class politics now very widespread on the left. Some of the sectarian groups are, not entirely secretly, pleased with what Millbank is doing. Nothing could be more foolish. The Blairites are pushing the working class back many decades; those socialist sectarians who experience this as a forward motion for socialism only reveal their disorientation and their utter lack of historical sense. A few recruits for the Socialist Workers' Party, the Socialist Labour Party, or the relaunched Militant, in exchange for the extinction of mass working-class politics, is a bad bargain, except in the Alice-in-Wonderland account books of the sectarians. Acceptance that the left should be happy as a small propaganda group — or "revolutionary party" — that is only a variant of defeatism.

How should socialists relate to the mass labour movement,

basically, the trade unions? Marxists argue for their ideas and organise disciplined, purposeful intervention on all the fronts of the class struggle. But, from Marx and Engels through to Trotsky, Marxists have insisted that we must help mass working-class politics develop; that we must begin on the level of the existing movement and educate it in action and propaganda towards class struggle and socialist politics. This is the concrete political meaning of the idea that the working class is central to Marxist politics. The socialist or Marxist group that does not propose and fight for such political perspectives for the broad labour movement is a sect, even if it has thousands of members.

The development of a mass workers' party is the precondition for effective mass socialist politics. That was the guiding idea for Frederick Engels in his attitude to the "first draft" of the Labour Party, Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party of the 1890s, and for Leon Trotsky in the late 1930s when he advocated that the powerful US trade unions should create a Labour Party structurally modelled on the British Labour Party.

Why did we ever advocate a Labour vote? Not because Labour might be a lesser evil than the Tories, though it was, nor because we might hope for a little bit of what Marx called "the political economy of the working class", though we could, but because the Labour Party was the organised working class in politics. Only on the basis of the experience of Labour in government could the mass labour movement go forward — helped by socialist propaganda and by the organising activity of Marxist revolutionaries in the class struggle — beyond the limited stage of political evolution represented by the Labour Party as it was. That was our central concern. The problem now is that the New Labour project fosters not the forward development of the labour movement, but its regression into the womb of Liberalism, from which the Labour Party emerged at the beginning of this century.

V

TO defend the working-class character of the Labour Party, and the idea of a working-class party able to win a working-class government, we must build the campaign to "Keep the Link", and campaign for working-class demands like union rights and restoration of the Welfare State.

We should explore the possibilities of creating a broad committee for working-class politics — that is, a new Labour Representation Committee, like the one which set up the Labour Party in 1900. Its immediate task would be to try to stop Blair destroying the Labour Party as a working-class party.

There is great anger in the depths of the working-class movement. Many workers do expect something better than what Blair says he will give. The situation after a Labour Government is elected may be more explosive than we can predict now. The Blair government may, for example by banning public service strikes when they come to office, as some of them say they will, stir up the movement against themselves.

The New Labourites say, even before it is formed, that their government will serve the bosses and not the workers — say, in fact, that a Blair government will be a Tory government of scarcely lighter blue hue than this one. The trade unions must be roused to fight for working-class interests against a Blair government. In the beginning is the class struggle! That is the great sure source of labour and socialist renewal.

As Leon Trotsky put it, every great action begins with the statement of what is. "To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right name; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be... these are the rules of the Fourth International"....

Sean Matgamna

The world without Stalinism

THE organisation that publishes this magazine celebrated 30 years of existence with a weekend school on February 8-9, at which we reviewed the events of those years. Viewed from today, some of that period — and especially the mid-1970s — looks like a vanished world, its political coordinates more distant from us than those of a hundred years ago.

At first sight, for socialists, the shift has been much for the worse. Yet, if we dig deep enough, in many ways the world today promises better for socialists than that of, say, 1975.

The obvious setbacks are real enough. In 1975, three decades of what socialists then called “the colonial revolution”, the struggles for national independence of the colonies and semi-colonies of Britain, France, the US, the Netherlands, etc., were reaching their final victories, with the expulsion of the Americans from Vietnam and the liberation of Angola and Mozambique from Portuguese rule. Those struggles showed that the wretched of the earth, with organisation, solidarity, determination and courage, could throw off the greatest military powers.

Ho Chi Minh, the Stalinist leader of Vietnam’s national struggle, famously told an Italian journalist that the way for sympathisers in the West to help the Vietnamese was to “make the revolution in your own country”. A great wave of working-class struggles, after the huge French general strike of May-June 1968, showed us how. In Britain, five dockers jailed under Tory anti-union laws were freed by a spontaneous mass strike movement in July 1972, and a miners’ strike in 1973-4 so crippled the Tory government that it called an early general election and lost it. Trade union membership rose (it would reach its peak, in Britain, in 1979). Rank-and-file and shop stewards’ organisation was powerful in many industries.

That governments could and should intervene in the market to secure full employment and a universal minimum of welfare was no radical heresy, but staid conventional wisdom. We could use that conventional wisdom as a springboard to demand that the drive for private profit be not merely counterbalanced, but replaced by production for need.

The area of self-proclaimed “socialist” states expanded to cover more than one-third of the world. By the mid-1970s, not many, even in the official Communist Parties, saw the USSR and

its clones as ideal models for a new society; indeed, one of our causes for hope was that those Communist Parties were fraying at the edges, less sure of themselves, and losing ground to the revolutionary left. In Portugal’s protracted revolutionary crisis, from April 1974 to November 1975, a Communist Party which until the 1960s had entirely dominated the underground resistance to the pre-1974 fascist regime was outflanked in many unions, factories, and workers’ and neighbourhood commissions by the revolutionary left.

Almost all of us, however, even those sharpest in their criticism of Stalinist tyranny, saw the Stalinist states as showing some elements of a better future in their state-owned and regulated economies, “deformed” though they might be by the bureaucracy. Almost all were confident that the next stage in the Stalinist states, whether through peaceful reform or workers’ revolution, would be the direct conversion of those state-owned economies to democratic, and therefore socialist, administration. Poland in 1980-1, where, in a few weeks of struggle, workers formed a trade union movement ten million strong and sketched a programme for a “self-managing society”, showed us how.

Poland also showed up the fatal element of illusion in the left of the 1970s. When Poland’s rulers declared martial law to suppress the workers’ movement in December 1981, our demonstrations of protest were only a few thousand strong, a small fraction of the tens of thousands who had come on to the streets against Chile’s military coup of 1973. Not many people on the left openly and confidently supported martial law, but the great majority were equivocal, torn between their attachment to the “deformed workers’ state” of Poland and their loyalty to the living Polish workers.

Portugal in 1974-5 went through maybe the most protracted revolutionary crisis of the post-1945 world, with the least unfavourable balance of forces between the revolutionary left and the traditional Stalinist and social-democratic parties. Yet most of the revolutionary groups were Maoist: to the official Stalinism of the Communist Party they counterposed only different Stalinisms, more militant but no less a blind alley for revolutionary-minded workers. There were anti-Stalinist groups, but at the peak of the crisis, in August-September 1975, they sank themselves into a “Revolutionary United Front” with the Communist Party and left-wing army officers who said they wanted a government of workers’ councils but insisted that the first step towards that was to create a “popular army”... commanded by them.

No widespread mood of hope is ever likely to be without exaggeration and illusion, and there was a great deal more than illusion in the optimism of the 1960s and ’70s. Yet the element of illusion was, in the end, large enough to disable the revolutionary left and dash our hopes. Ultra-left “vanguardism”, taking the guerrilla struggles of the Third World as a model for how a determined minority could make a revolution without the detours of patient work in the labour movement; wishful thinking about the revolutionary Stalinist regimes of Vietnam or China, which led to demoralised dismay when thousands of boat people fled Vietnam as the Stalinists consolidated their rule, and China turned towards the capitalist world market; and the taint of Stalinism in the revolutionaries’ idea of what a revolutionary party should be, which led to the various groups becoming walled-off, dogmatic sects — these were enough to ensure that no revolutionary

Capital & Class

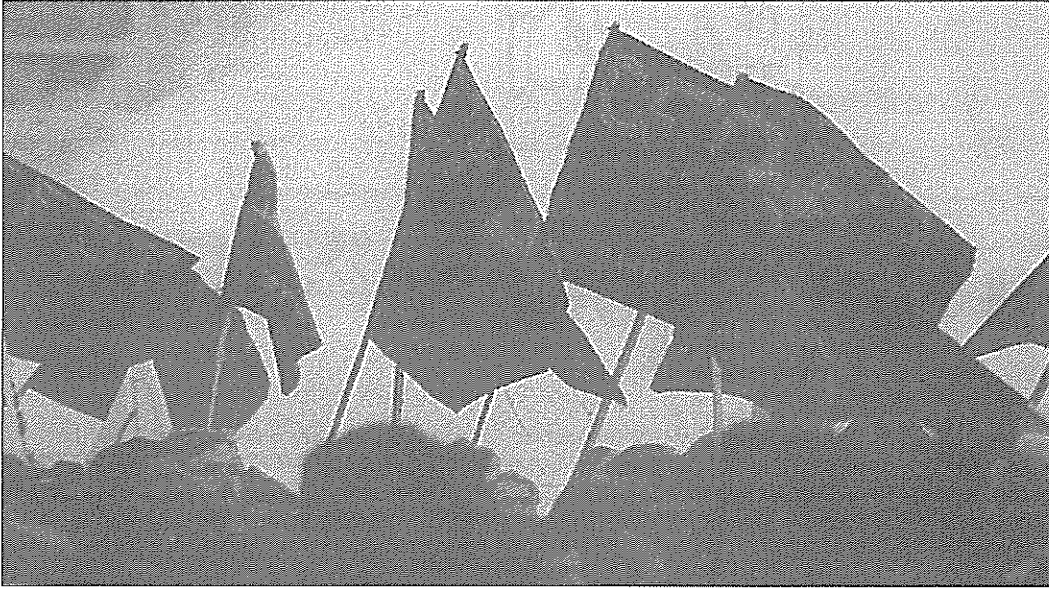
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COMMENTARY



CGT in France, subscribed to a rival international grouping. Nevertheless, they suggest that, taking the world as a whole, trade unionism is expanding. In 1976 the ICFTU had 53 million trade unionists affiliated, through 119 organisations in 88 countries; in 1986, 80 million, through 144 organisations in 99 countries; in 1996, 124 million, through 195 organisations in 137 countries.

No-one can remain a socialist without being disgusted by the bour-

geois individualism of the 1990s, the mean-spirited (and very conformist) culture which says: "Yes, the world is rotten, but I'd rather look after my family, my career, my job, my social life, than work to change it without immediate visible result". Yet in this shit there may be manure for a better future. The working class, as Trotsky once put it, suffers not from too much but from too little individualism. Once struggle warms up the individualism, it may be a powerful force against the revival of old social-democratic and Stalinist influences. It does at least cut against the huddled "miserabilism" — "us poor workers" — of the old parties. In the *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx wrote of "the great civilising influence of capital". "Each capitalist... searches for means to spur [workers] on to consumption... to inspire them with new needs... [Capital produces] a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere local developments of humanity... Capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionises it...

group got near to leading the great workers' struggles of the 1970s to victory. Because we failed to achieve victory, we got defeat. Because we got defeat, we got capitalism reorganising itself at the expense of the working class. During and after the recession of 1979-83, the capitalist governments restructured their world on the basis of free-flowing international finance capital. For national governments to secure jobs and welfare was declared impossible — "you can't buck the market" — and in fact became impossible, within the limits of mainstream politics. Workers were defeated and intimidated by mass unemployment. Trade unions have retreated, and in many countries more so than in Britain. The old Communist and social-democratic parties have withered, not by losing support to the revolutionary left, but by collapsing or moving to the right. The shipyards, docks, mines and car factories which were the bastions of left-wing militancy in the 1970s have been shut down or cut back.

That set the scene for the overthrow of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR, in 1989-91, to be a revolution of a curious conservative type, with the slogans: "No more experiments! No more utopias! No more grand political projects! Leave it to the market and the experts!" And that, in turn, increased the pressure against the left in the West.

The pressure is real. For the day-to-day work of socialists, the warm optimism of the 1970s, despite all its illusions, was much more favourable than is the cold pessimism of today.

Yet none of the setbacks really cut deep into the basic alignment of our perspectives. Despite increased unemployment in many countries, the working class has continued to grow. The capitalists will never find a way to produce ships and cars, or transport goods, or transmit information, without workers.

The biggest shipyard in the world is now in South Korea. There are more white-collar workers in the advanced countries, but they are still workers. New trade union movements have developed in countries like South Korea, Brazil and South Africa. In ex-Stalinist Eastern Europe, the old Stalinist labour fronts have been replaced by genuine (even if still weak) trade unions. Even in still-Stalinist China, where a working class hundreds of millions strong has developed over the last half-century, strikes have become common.

The membership figures of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions give an incomplete picture of the trends world-wide, because until the 1990s not only the Stalinist state "unions", but also many genuine trade union groups, like the

geous individualism of the 1990s, the mean-spirited (and very conformist) culture which says: "Yes, the world is rotten, but I'd rather look after my family, my career, my job, my social life, than work to change it without immediate visible result". Yet in this shit there may be manure for a better future. The working class, as Trotsky once put it, suffers not from too much but from too little individualism. Once struggle warms up the individualism, it may be a powerful force against the revival of old social-democratic and Stalinist influences. It does at least cut against the huddled "miserabilism" — "us poor workers" — of the old parties. In the *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx wrote of "the great civilising influence of capital". "Each capitalist... searches for means to spur [workers] on to consumption... to inspire them with new needs... [Capital produces] a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere local developments of humanity... Capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionises it...

"The universality towards which it irresistibly strives encounters barriers in its own nature, which will, at a certain stage of its development, allow it to be recognised as being itself the greatest barrier to this tendency."

Beyond that, nothing is guaranteed. Working-class struggle is inevitable; whether it is channelled politically, as Lenin once put it, by priests or by Marxists, depends on the work of the active minorities who prepare in advance. The drab and unattractive grind of socialist activity today yields slower results than our more exuberant ventures of the late 1960s or the 1970s. Yet, in the long view, both phases are equally important. Every move forward in working-class organisation always has to be combined with an effort to undo the mental and organisational hobbles imprinted by the ruling classes in the previous phases of the movement.

We have great opportunities. The revolutionary left today, despite all its weaknesses and splits, stands, on the whole, in a much better relation of forces to the Stalinists and reformists who once monopolised the workers' movement. This period of setbacks is not like the one in the late 1940s and the 1950s, when the revolutionary left declined much more than the Stalinists and reformists. The Maoists have vanished. If the political atmosphere is colder without Stalinist, or semi-Stalinist, or quarter-Stalinist illusions, it is also clearer and healthier.



Life in the “modern” office

Early May 1996: Began working for Emap, the large multi-media company. It derecognised the National Union of Journalists [NUJ] in 1991, and since then has established a system of individual contracts. I'm working in the consumer magazines division. Within a few days, I realise that most people I'm working with are proud of the magazine, and very loyal to it — at the expense of other titles, even if they are Emap stablemates. There isn't much sense of unity as fellow-employees of a big company.

Mid-May 1996: Everyone who works in the consumer division — several hundred of us — are taken to the Criterion Theatre, at Piccadilly, to be told Emap's results for the previous financial year. They've hired the whole place, and there's a free bar and buffet. Amid the gilt and velvet splendour of the theatre, the company's chief executive tells us that record profits have been made the previous year — the consumer division alone is £80 million in the black. After a gung-ho, onwards-and-upwards speech, he takes questions from the floor. On my row, we all surreptitiously discuss asking a question on why our wages are lower than all the other publishing companies. Our harassed-looking deputy editor says it would be professional suicide, and that those of us still in our probationary period wouldn't be kept on. So no-one asks.

October 1996: Another flashy corporate do. This time we're taken to a hotel in Mayfair to hear the results of an employees' opinion survey. A random selection of people were sent questionnaires on various aspects of working for Emap, which were to be answered anonymously. A personnel consultant has been hired to present the results. The resulting graphs and Venn diagrams agree that discontent over pay is the main issue at stake.

Our managing director then takes great pains, using a further blizzard of charts and figures, to explain that, in fact, we're not badly paid at all. The atmosphere in the room is derisive. What was the point of commissioning this survey if they don't want to take on board what people have to say?

November 1996: The NUJ, which has chosen to target recruitment at Emap this year, leaflets my building. The leaflets, given out in the morning as everyone goes in to work, are short and to the point, asking us if we are aware how much pay has decreased since Emap derecognised the union.

“We are taken to the Criterion Theatre, at Piccadilly, to be told Emap's results for the previous financial year. Amid the gilt and velvet splendour of the theatre, the company's chief executive tells us that record profits have been made the previous year.”

In my office, we discuss the leaflet. Some of the people who've worked for Emap for a while reminisce about how, two years ago, they were paid for overtime done during the week. Nowadays we have to work longer days — often until ten at night — but don't get paid for doing so. We all hate having to do this, but don't have much alternative. If we left on time each day, the magazine wouldn't get printed each week and we'd lose our jobs.

Two days later: Another morning of leafletting. There's only one entrance,

so it's very unlikely anyone in the building has not seen at least one leaflet. This time, we're invited to an informal meeting in a week's time to meet NUJ representatives to discuss what the union can offer and how contracts of employment have changed since derecognition. In my office, people discuss whether they will go to the meeting, but several people advise against it, saying that senior management will probably note who goes in.

A week later: From about 150 people, there are only three of us at the meeting, which is after work and in a pub not far from the office building. The two NUJ reps have done similar recruitment drives at various other Emap buildings this year, and they tell us that they have had a similarly disappointing result at each one.

December 1996: Emap regularly sends all full-time employees letters urging them to buy shares in the company — after a certain period of service you can get shares at a discounted price. Several people in my office are shareholders. This week, all the shareholders receive a letter asking them to vote on an issue which is dividing the board of directors. Two non-executive directors are opposing a proposal to change the way non-executive directors are selected which would place more power in the hands of the existing board.

The company's chief executive encloses a letter urging all shareholders to support his line. Various people in the office are heard to say: “Oh, I'd better vote the way they want. I have to put my name on the form, so they'll know who I am”. Nobody in my office is over thirty, and everyone is well aware that employment is a precarious thing these days.

Rebecca Webster



Are the police bugging you?

"MY god, I had no idea the police did that!" So said Lord [Jim] Callaghan during the House of Lords debate on the Police Bill, after being told there were 500 buggings a year when he was Prime Minister. Where has this pathetic right-wing Labour grandee been all these years? Up the arse of the bourgeoisie, trying to avoid hearing anything bad about them and their system.

As any lefty/CND/animal rights activist will tell you, the police have had our numbers for years. However, familiarity, and possibly a little paranoia, about funny whirring noises when we pick up the phone should not make us complacent about the growth of police powers. The immediate background to the introduction of this Police Bill is the "modernisation", the increasing sophistication and centralisation of police operations and "intelligence". We witnessed what this meant during the miners' strike, when police were deployed from all over Britain to beat up strikers picketing in Nottinghamshire. Powers, such as the bugging of citizens, which were in the past improvised by the police are now to be made statutory, to

be ratified by law made in Parliament. This is partly what the Police Bill is about. Its main proposals are:

- The National Criminal Intelligence Service, which has been going since 1992, will have its existence ratified by Parliament. A National Crime Squad to "prevent and detect serious crime which is of relevance to more than one police area in England and Wales" will support the work of the NCIS.

- The NCIS will have free rein to collect information about us. "Intelligence information" could include as much prejudicial and speculative material as they fancy, including information about a person's sexual orientation. The information doesn't have to be accurate. It only need be "useful in detecting crime." And who will be the best judge of that? The police!

- The use of bugs (which have been planted by the police after they have broken into your home or office) is to be legalised! The Tories wanted to give Chief Constables authority over the use of electronic surveillance, but Labour and the Liberals have passed amendments in the Lords which will get either the judiciary or special commissioners to give authority. Bugs will be authorised if they

are likely to be of "substantial value in the prevention or detection of serious crime." As the police define "serious crime" and the value of their detective work, they will get their way over whom they bug every time.

The new law has another, different, but equally nasty agenda.

All employers (not just agencies that deal with children) can now have access to criminal records not yet "unspent" under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Whilst it is not unreasonable to prevent convicted sex offenders from working with children, this should not be used as an excuse to give all employers access to criminal records. When you consider that 12% of men born in 1973 have an "unspent" conviction, the threat of a black list of people who are never-to-be-employed "criminals" looks serious.

Police Bill may well be just one of many "get-tough-on-crime" proposals from the Tories in what will probably be the last breaths of their government. It is another populist response to the problems of crime, an attempt to be seen to be dealing with the consequences of the inequality they have created. Despite Labour's last minute "reservations" about the Police Bill we know Labour will not really challenge any proposal that "deals with crime", no matter how half-baked, because they wannabe tough too.

However the Police Bill is another, significant, step towards the centralisation of creation of new powers for the police and the further undermining of the notion of accountability. The labour movement must campaign to force Labour to repeal this Bill if it becomes law, and, dismantle the new "intelligence" unit.

Helen Rate

Towards a Scottish Assembly?

THE question of the Scottish Assembly will dominate General Election campaigning in Scotland and remain high on the political agenda in Scotland after the election too.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats are both committed to a Scottish Assembly. After Blair's about-turn last year, Labour policy is now for holding a two-question referendum (for/against an Assembly; for/against an Assembly with tax-raising powers) prior to the establishment of an Assembly. The Liberal Democrats have gone along with the idea of a referendum.

The Scottish National Party has hitherto vacillated on the question of an Assembly, uncertain as to whether to regard it as a diversion from the goal of independence or a step towards it. In late January, however, the SNP finally came down in favour.

The Tories are against an Assembly. They too, however, are trying to present themselves as the real Scottish patriots — bringing back the Stone of Destiny to Scotland, and now claiming to be the true defenders of the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320.

The response of the left in Scotland to the question of a Scottish Assembly reveals more about the left than about the issues. The Scottish Socialist Alliance has made an Assembly its central political demand. It now argues that the real decision in Scottish politics is between those parties (Labour, Lib-Dems and SNP) who support an Assembly and those (the Tories) who do not.

For the SSA, therefore, the class basis of a party (i.e. Labour's continuing, albeit weakened, links with the unions) is of secondary importance to its policies on Scottish self-government.

Scottish Militant Labour, a component part of the SSA, likewise raises the Scottish Assembly as a central political demand but with a slightly more 'radical' gloss (see *Workers' Liberty* 37).

The Socialist Workers Party has vacillated but now directs its fire against the demand for an Assembly.

In part, this is a product of their normal syndicalist sectarianism. In part, it is probably also an attempt to sharpen their profile against the competing forces of the SSA and Scottish Militant Labour.

The Socialist Labour Party does not

bother with the question of an Assembly at all. Its political programme makes no mention of Scottish self-government.

The Campaign for Socialism is the organisation of the Scottish Labour left, except that it is not very organised and even less left-wing. It supports a Scottish Assembly with tax-raising powers.

Almost everywhere, there is a lack of clarity about what kind of Assembly is being demanded. For some an Assembly is a step towards independence; for others it is a way of preserving the unity of the United Kingdom. For some an Assembly would be little more than a glorified local council; for others it would virtually be a sovereign parliament. Also, much discussion about an Assembly is speculative. There is a demand for an Assembly, but not a living campaign. Discussion about an Assembly often therefore takes the form of drawing up blueprints for the future.

"Most of the Scottish left are grafting left-sounding phraseology and rhetoric onto essentially nationalistic arguments."

The debate is similar to that over UK membership of the Common Market in the early Seventies, and the left's attitude to Third Worldism in the same period.

The controversy about British membership of the Common Market was not a debate between socialists. The two sides in the debate were those in favour of British integration into a capitalist Europe, and those in favour of a more isolationist British capitalism. The bulk of the British left tagged along behind the latter, trying to put a left-sounding gloss on essentially nationalist arguments. The Little Englanders used nationalist arguments against the "Brussels bureaucracy". The left invented "good", "socialist" reasons to be anti-European, deluding themselves into believing that they were thereby demarcating themselves from the nationalists.

The debate about the Scottish Assem-

bly is certainly not a re-run of that debate. But most of the Scottish left is playing a comparable role: they are grafting left-sounding phraseology and rhetoric onto essentially nationalistic arguments. The product is a political incoherence which confuses rather than clarifies. The analogy with the left's admiration of Third Worldism is likewise limited, but nonetheless valid.

Many national liberation movements admired by the left paid at best only lip service to socialist ideas. For much of the left this was of secondary importance. What counted was that a victory for them would be a blow against the imperialist metropolis.

The same mentality is certainly implicit, and often explicit, in the Scottish left's advocacy of a Scottish Assembly. The creation of the latter would mean a weakening, if not the eventual collapse, of the existing United Kingdom state. It must therefore be a good thing.

What counts, and is seen as inherently progressive, is a transfer of powers from Westminster to Edinburgh. And the more powers that are transferred from the former to the latter, then the more "radical" is such an event.

But this method of (speculative) guesses about what is worst for the bosses is false. What should count is what is best for the working class — and not just in Scotland.

The Scottish people are not an oppressed nation. There are no laws banning Scots from speaking their historic language or flying their national flag. There is no persecution of those who demand Scottish independence — the SNP is a perfectly legal, mainstream, bourgeois political party.

If one were to go down this road of dividing the world into oppressor and oppressed nations, then Scotland would belong to the former category.

The demand for a Scottish Assembly is essentially the product of the emergence of a different voting pattern in Scotland and Britain as a whole (the former votes Labour, the latter votes Tory) combined with a declining confidence in Labour to achieve anything positive even if elected at an all-British level.

The fact that there is no real national question at stake in Scotland is no reason



for socialists to oppose the demand for an Assembly. There was no national question at stake when the Tories scrapped the Greater London Council. That did not prevent socialists from opposing its abolition.

But to recognise the legitimacy of the demand for an Assembly is not the same as making it the lynchpin of your political programme. Nor does it justify accommodating to Scottish populism by cloaking the nationalist demands in

“socialist” rhetoric.

The fact that the Scottish Socialist Alliance makes the issue of Scottish self-government the decisive criterion against which to judge other political organisations is a measure of the extent to which sections of the Scottish left have abandoned a class perspective in favour of Scottish populism.

The task confronting Scottish socialists in Scotland is to cut through the pseudo-socialist rhetoric which sur-

rounds the demand for an Assembly.

This may be a less attractive proposition than that of jumping on the Scottish Assembly bandwagon and proclaiming oneself the champion of a bigger, better and more powerful Scottish Assembly. But it is a proposition which remains rooted in class politics.

In that sense the key issues for socialists in Scotland is not the question of for/against a Scottish Assembly (although, on balance, socialists would probably call for a “yes” vote in a referendum) but that of defending the basic tenets of socialism in the face of an increasingly pervasive Scottish populism.

Such an approach can easily degenerate into sectarianism. The SWP’s attitude to a Scottish Assembly is an example of this. (In their case, however, their attitude to an Assembly is a product of their ingrained sectarianism, rather than vice versa.)

But to have to guard against such a danger is better than to embrace Scottish populism, and to delude oneself into believing that the more fervently one demands a Scottish Assembly, and the more powers which one demands for such an Assembly, then the more “left-wing” and “anti-capitalist” is one’s political programme.

Stan Crooke

Letter from Hong Kong

From boom to gloom

FOR over a decade, Hong Kong has effectively served as the expanding Chinese economy’s biggest port. It has emerged as the Pacific region’s biggest financial centre, a pivotal place like New York and London in other timezones. At the same time, manufacturing industry in Hong Kong has declined. Tax concessions, low labour costs, and the absence of even the minimal health-and-safety and labour-protection regulations which exist in Hong Kong, have pulled both global and Hong-Kong-based entrepreneurs into China’s “special economic zones”. At least half a million manufacturing jobs were lost in Hong Kong over the 1980s and ’90s, and the territory’s population is only six million.

Hong Kong managed to absorb this massive and rapid deindustrialisation without major labour or social unrest. Chinese trade boosted the

services sector; there was a long property/construction boom; and organised labour was relatively weak and working under greater legal constraints than in many other industrialised countries. The trade unions in the manufacturing sector have been traditionally pro-Beijing, and their “patriotic” stance inhibited them from seriously fighting against factory closures in Hong Kong.

The medium to long-term economic prospects of Hong Kong are not good. The financial sector, however successful in fighting off regional competition, is not going to be able to sustain the economy on its own. Sooner or later, China will develop cheaper and bigger container ports, and Hong Kong’s share of trade will decrease. The local manufacturing base will continue to shrink, and the lack of the government initiatives that encourage

research and development in Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea, will block the high-tech up-market route.

The territory has been importing cheaper labour from China, Thailand, etc., into the construction industry, and this has led the local trade unions, without exception, into campaigning for immigration controls. The cost of land is kept high by government policy of releasing land at a trickle and gaining huge revenue from it. Demographically, the proportion of elderly is increasing steadily, the flow of school-leavers on to a shrinking jobs market is still to peak, and it is not clear to me how the city can support seven or eight million people in the next decade or so. All these underlying problems are there, ready to be triggered off by any destabilising political event.

China has massive investments in Hong Kong, and will want to sustain its economy, but does not believe that political heavy-handedness will have any economic side-effects. I suppose we will find out after 30 June 1997.

Cheung Siu Ming

AS WE
WERE SAYING



Awakened by lightning

SOUTH Korea's recent strike movement is a clear condemnation of our own fainthearted trade union leaders. With serious leadership like the Koreans, the British working class could, by mass action, win the restoration of free trade unions. There are deeper lessons too. Mass strikes have a creative and rejuvenating effect on workers who take part in them. Transformations that in quiet times would seem miraculous can happen overnight once masses of workers rouse themselves for a contest with the state and the employers, as Rosa Luxemburg described in the following excerpt from "The Mass Strike", her pamphlet about the 1905 revolution in the Russian empire.

ON January 22, 200,000 workers, led by Father Gapon, marched to the czar's palace. The conflict of the two Putilov workers who had been subjected to disciplinary punishment had changed within a week into the prologue of the most violent revolution of modern times.

The blood-bath in St Petersburg [when troops fired on Gapon's march] called forth gigantic mass strikes and general strike in the months of January and February in all the industrial centres and towns in Russia, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Provinces, the Caucasus, Siberia, from north to south and east to west. Everywhere the social democratic organisations went before with appeals; everywhere was revolutionary solidarity with the St Petersburg proletariat expressly stated as the cause and aim of the general strike; everywhere, at the same time, there were demonstrations, speeches, conflicts with the military.

But even here there was no predetermined plan, no organised action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep pace with the spontaneous risings of the masses; the leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the onrushing crowd of the proletariat. Further, the earlier mass and general strikes had originated from individual coalescing wage struggles which, in the general temper of the revolutionary situation and under the influence of the

social democratic agitation, rapidly became political demonstrations; the economic factor and the scattered conditions of trade unionism were the starting point; all-embracing class action and political direction the result. The movement was now reversed.

This is a gigantic, many-coloured picture of a general arrangement of labour and capital which reflects all the complexity of social organisation and of the political consciousness of every section and of every district; and the whole long scale runs from the regular trade-union struggle of a picked and tested troop of the proletariat drawn from large-scale industry, to the formless protest of a handful or rural proletarians, and to the first slight stirrings of an agitated military garrison, from the well-educated and elegant revolt in cuffs and white collars in the counting house of a bank to the shy-bold murmurings of a clumsy meeting of dissatisfied policemen in a smoke-grimed dark and dirty guardroom.

The sudden general rising of the proletariat in January under the powerful impetus of the St Petersburg events was outwardly a political act of the revolutionary declaration of war on absolutism. But this first general direct action reacted inwardly all the more powerfully as it for the first time awoke class feeling and class consciousness in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock. And this awakening of class feeling expressed itself forthwith in the circumstances that the proletarian mass, counted by millions, quite suddenly and sharply came to realise how intolerable was that social and economic existence which they had patiently endured for decades in the chains of capitalism. Thereupon there began a spontaneous general shaking of and tugging at these chains. All the innumerable sufferings of the modern proletariat reminded them of the old bleeding wounds. Here was the eight-hour day fought for, there piecework was resisted, here were brutal foremen "driven off" in a sack on a handcart, at another place infamous systems of fines were fought against, everywhere better wages were striven for and there the abolition of homework. Backward degraded occupations in large towns, small provincial towns, which had hitherto dreamed in an idyllic sleep, the village with

its legacy from feudalism — all these, suddenly awakened by the January lightning, bethought themselves of their rights and now sought feverishly to make up for their previous neglect.

Only complete thoughtlessness could expect that absolutism could be destroyed at one blow by a single "long-drawn" general strike after the anarchist plan. Absolutism in Russia must be overthrown by the proletariat. But in order to be able to overthrow it, the proletariat requires a high degree of political education, of class consciousness and organisation. All these conditions cannot be fulfilled by pamphlets and leaflets, but only by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of the revolution.

In actual fact it is not merely a general raising of the standard of life, or of the cultural level of the working class that has taken place. The material standard of life as a permanent stage of well-being has no place in the revolution. Full of contradictions and contrasts it brings simultaneously surprising economic victories, and the most brutal acts of revenge on the part of the capitalists; today the eight-hour day, and tomorrow wholesale lockouts and actual starvation for the millions.

The most previous, because lasting, thing in this rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat, which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle. And not only that. Even the relations of the worker to the employer are turned round; since the January general strike and the strikes of 1905 which followed upon it, the principle of the capitalist "mastery of the house" is de facto abolished. In the larger factories of all important industrial centres the establishment of workers' committees has, as if by itself, taken place, with which alone the employer negotiates and which decides all disputes.

And finally another thing, the apparently "chaotic" strikes and the "disorganised" revolutionary action after the January general strike are becoming the starting point of a feverish *work of organisation*.

A workers' party in Korea?

Paul Field spoke to **Kwang Ho Lee**, chief editor of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions' weekly newspaper, at its offices in Seoul, on 17 January 1997. Myoung Joon Kim acted as translator.

YOU have succeeded in mobilising diverse groups of workers such as nurses, bank and insurance personnel, auto workers, shipbuilders and transport workers. How did you achieve such class unity?

The Government made it possible.

Of course, this kind of mass action is based on our organising ability, but the Government inadvertently strengthened our forces with such a wide, sweeping attack. There is scarcely an industry whose workers are not affected by at least one article in the new law.

For example, the inclusion of hospitals in the category of "essential services" subject to intervention and compulsory arbitration was an eleventh-hour decision by the government. Each industry sees the law as very much its own problem.

THE foreign press are saying that the strikes on 14 and 15 January [when the Federation of Korean Trade Unions called action] were a disappointment to the unions. They quote the Government's claim that the FKTU only succeeded in mobilising 50,000 of its 1.2 million members to join the 300,000 KCTU members who took strike action.

The numbers are accurate. The FKTU figure is very low because its leadership lacks the competence and experience to organise strike action on such a scale.

The FKTU have many internal problems. The telecommunications and railway workers' unions of the FKTU are very conservative. They even objected when the FKTU chairman was filmed shaking hands with KCTU leader Kwon Yong-gil. They continue to attack the FKTU leadership for cooperating with the KCTU in the strikes.

The FKTU has systematic problems relating to a conservative leadership that has no experience of struggle. Now the pressure for struggle is coming from the



grass roots, but their industrial leadership is very weak. Yesterday, the union at Korea Bank, the country's largest bank, left the FKTU's industrial-level federation because it had failed to organise effective struggle.

The FKTU's basic problem is that it has a long history of collaboration with the government, from which it still receives subsidies and maintains many institutional ties. It is compromised in the eyes of many workers by this institutional relationship with the government.

But the KCTU's standpoint now is not to focus on criticising the FKTU but to concentrate on organising effective solidarity action with any group or organisation of workers prepared to join the struggle against these pernicious laws.

One of the metal industry unions in the FKTU, after a debate and with the support of 90% of its factory-level membership, has decided to leave the FKTU and affiliate to the KCTU.

Many unions in the FKTU are moving towards struggle.

Action is also being taken by groups of unorganised workers. It is our job to

International conference Prepare the socialist alternative!

THREE revolutionary Marxist groups, the AWL, the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (South Africa), and Socialismo Rivoluzionario (Italy), are coming together to organise an International Conference: "On the eve of the year 2000: Stop capitalist barbarism! Prepare the socialist alternative!" The conference is scheduled for 4-8 December in Cape Town, South Africa.

The appeal for the conference declares: "The defenders of capitalism have been blowing their own trumpets about the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, calling it a victory for the market economy, and hailing it as the death of communism.

"The collapse of all these regimes does indeed mean that the historical context that we face is different today from what it has been for most of the 20th Century. In particular, for socialists it means that the international working class can now mount a proper challenge to the rule of international capital.

"Together with the collapse of Stalinism, we have seen the crumbling of the other major challenge to barbaric capitalism: social democracy. Pure, raw capitalism and savage liberalism have once again replaced the tentative attempts at democratising capitalism: Fabianism, the co-operative movement, the concept of universal social benefits, have all given way to rampant greed, to the profit motive, to a generalised submission of the state before the so-called free market, and to drastic border controls on workers' freedom of movement between different blocks.

"The welfare states that existed over much of the developed world and some of the rest of the world have seen private capital literally invade social services: from electricity to rubbish collection, from health care to pensions.

"We, socialists, need to co-ordinate, on a regional and on an international level, so that these daily struggles all over the world, can learn from one another, can

reinforce one another.

"It is certainly not a centralised international *party* that we are proposing. Especially not one with a centre in one or other European capital and small franchises in other countries. Such international parties run the risk of establishing predatory relationships with unaffiliated revolutionary groups.

"What working people in struggle need, what socialists the world over need, is mutual support. Shared political ideas. Exchanged documents. We need to plan regional campaigns. And sometimes to co-ordinate international campaigns. And we need to build close contacts with one another.

"We, the undersigned, are organisations that believe that socialism is not only viable today, but that more than ever before, it is necessary to build the will for socialism.

"We have come from different socialist traditions, we have divergent ideas left over from past struggles on many issues, and it is time now for us to overcome all those forms of sectarianism that characterised the immediate past: a time in history when we had to confront Stalinism and Maoism, represented by powerful nation states, as well as confront the capitalist system itself.

"Now we must move into the new era. Savage capitalism is very dangerous now. All the predictions about barbarism are on our doorstep now. We must unite our efforts to oppose capitalism in its present form, and to build the basis for a socialist future. The legacy of revolutionary socialist organisations attempting to co-operate with one another is a long and rich one. We need to learn all we can from all the work that has been done by socialists from the First International onwards.

"At the same time, much immediate practical work awaits us."

● More information from AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA; WOSA, PO Box 491, Salt River 7925, South Africa; or SR, via Gian Battista, Vico 12, Milano, Italy.

From page 13

foster the growth of unions among those workers who join the struggle.

Even though the KCTU was not formed until 1995, the individual democratic unions have displayed a strong bond of solidarity since the birth of the democratic labour movement in 1987. The blue-collar manual workers from Chunnohyup, together with Upjoeng Hoey's white-collar and public-sector workers, and the large democratic union federations inside the Hyundai and Daewoo chaebols [industrial conglomerates], always combined in a solidarity struggle around the issue of the labour laws.

Several years of organising joint solidarity action and protests meant that while some strategic and political differences existed between the leaderships of these organisations, they were brought into a close working relationship with each other. So, although the KCTU may seem new, it is not. The unions have a wealth of practical experience of solidarity.

In this respect the leaders merely respond to the desire for class unity from the rank and file of the workers in separate industries.

DO you see potential for a political movement or party to develop around the unions that would have the power to transform Korean society?

The KCTU does not have any specific proposal to organise a political party at this time. But the situation is such that workers are rapidly developing consciousness. Consequently the demand for a political movement organised by workers grows from the grass roots level as a result of this general strike. The union leaderships are also considering strategy and tactics for this kind of direction.

However, the broad coalition that has been assembled in support of the strikes represents the discontent that is felt against [president] Kim Yong Sam rather than a popular movement for the formation of a workers' party.

Moreover, many Korean people retain a traditionally conservative attitude towards the idea of an electoral or mass party of workers. So we must proceed carefully.

While we have no immediate plans to create any such party, it remains our medium- to long-term objective to move in that direction. This struggle is an excellent opportunity to advance towards that aim.

● The interview was originally done for Labour Left Briefing, and a shorter version has appeared there.

The new Eastern Europe Smiles for the IMF, scowls for the workers

FOR International Monetary Fund chief Michel Camdessus, speaking in December 1994, Albania was a model for the shift to private-profit economics in ex-Stalinist Eastern Europe.

"There are about ten countries — and I am pleased to say the number has been growing — where most of the work of freeing prices and the exchange and trade system has been done, where significant progress has been made toward macroeconomic stabilisation, and where substantial structural reforms have been implemented in a number of areas. I include here Albania — prodigious efforts and remarkable results have been seen in this small country, the poorest in Europe..."

In Albania, as in the other IMF favourite, the Czech Republic, a post-Stalinist middle-class grouping had won firm control, marginalising the now "social democratic" remnants of the old Stalinist party. In fact, Sali Berisha's Democratic Party has almost established a new one-party state in Albania. It got 90 per cent of the seats in Parliament in much-disputed elections last May.

According to Human Rights Watch: "The secret police of Berisha's government are omnipresent. Plainclothes policemen have provoked demonstrators in some cities and harassed independent journalists. Individuals are cautious to criticise the government on the telephone or in public; an atmosphere of fear has spread over the country, reminiscent of Albania's communist past."

Now, as Tirana journalist Remzi Lana reports, "the country has been flooded by a wave of protests of thousands of citizens who have lost their savings in pyramid systems. Almost all the cities in Albania have been transformed into scenes of conflict of demonstrators with police forces, while administration buildings have been set on fire and destroyed..."

"Estimates are that about a billion dollars were invested in companies which offered interest rates from 8 to 25 per cent a month". This was about half Albania's total national income! As the old state-controlled economy collapsed, almost the whole population turned to living off the new capitalistic scams.

The classic pyramid scheme can continue only as long as the flow of new



After the collapse of the new capitalist economy, Albanian's citizens fight government riot cops.

punters — from whose money the "interest" can be paid to existing investors — outpaces its ever-increasing promises to pay out. The complication in Albania, it seems, is that its murky regime encouraged international drug mafias to use the pyramid schemes to "launder" their money. Pay-outs sufficient to seem like riches to Albanian workers and peasants counted as minor petty-cash expenses for this operation.

The pyramid schemes could thus last longer and dominate the economy more than anywhere else. The "democratic" government was content with its private pay-offs and the illusion that it had brought prosperity. When the flow of drug money faltered, the pyramid schemes made their promises more and more extravagant — in order to keep ahead of the game at least until they got new funds from abroad — and now the whole rotten structure has collapsed.

However, Camdessus was not entirely wrong. Private-profit capitalism is up and running in most of Eastern Europe. Inequality and pauperism have increased. Unemployment, even on underestimated official figures, has bal-

looned to 10% in Hungary and Romania, 12% in Bulgaria, 13% in Slovakia, 14% in Slovenia, 16% in Poland, 17% in Croatia, and 20% in East Germany, while the old Stalinist social-welfare system, where hand-outs and benefits were distributed through the workplace, has been scrapped with only a sketchy replacement. In Hungary, for example, only one-third of the unemployed were getting unemployment benefit in 1996. There is a lot of "crony capitalism", dominated by the old Stalinist bureaucrats.

Nevertheless, this is capitalism. Some Marxists used to believe that the old regimes were "deformed workers' states", and therefore that capitalism could not be installed in Eastern Europe without a social counter-revolution against the working class. In fact these countries have been changed into more-or-less normal capitalist economies with much less than a social counter-revolution and with the support of the workers.

By early 1996, the Czech Republic had sold off or shut down 81% of its large state-owned enterprises, Hungary 75%, Slovakia 44%, Poland 32%, Romania 13% and Bulgaria 10%. In Poland, Hungary,

and other countries, new small private companies produce a growing share of output. By 1996 there were 3.4 million non-agricultural private businesses in Eastern Europe.

Industrial output fell between 1989 and 1994 by a third in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, and over a half in Bulgaria and Romania, but has risen again, except in Bulgaria, since 1994. Foreign direct investment, though still low by world standards, has increased from an average of \$1.4 billion a year in 1988-92 to \$12 billion in 1995. These countries have crises and contradictions, but not the chaos in Russia, where industrial output is half what it was in 1991 and still declining, where wages, taxes and suppliers' bills are rarely paid, and where real incomes are 40% below 1991 even on official figures.

According to a study by Robert Flanagan of Stanford University: "There are new union organisations oriented toward collective bargaining, but they appear to be weak in comparison to their Western counterparts. On the other hand, the expanding private sector is essentially non-union. Excess wage payments are taxed at punitive rates in the state sector, apparently on the theory that management is even weaker than the unions."

Part of the reason for union weakness is state repression. A 1996 report by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions found that: "Governments in Central and Eastern Europe showed increasing hostility to trade unions. They viewed them as threats to their attempts to deregulate economies."

In the Czech Republic, for example, a draft law restricts the trade union rights of some 60,000 state employees. It bans strikes, and limits trade union recognition for bargaining purposes to groups representing a minimum of 40 per cent of the workforce in a workplace. The unions fear that the limit on recognition could be extended to other sectors. "The trend towards union-free workplaces increased", reports the ICFTU.

In Romania, a law under which only 60 workers are required to set up a trade union confederation has led to the creation of 26 national confederations, so that employers pick and choose with whom to bargain. Numerous restrictions on the right to strike mean that organising a legal strike is almost impossible. Lengthy and cumbersome procedures must precede a strike, including the submission of grievances to government-sponsored conciliation. The authorities can also impose binding arbitration.

Employers can apply to the Supreme

Court for a 90-day strike suspension on grounds of the "interests of the national economy". The courts have declared illegal virtually every major strike brought before them. The law imposes a financial liability on strike organisers. In health care, teaching, energy, transport, telecommunications and broadcasting, the law says one third of normal activity must be maintained during a strike.

Part of the reason for the continuing instability in Bulgaria, where on 4 February continued mass demonstrations by supporters of the new bourgeois party, the UDF, finally forced the BSP (ex-Stalinist) government to call new elections for April, is that the trade unions — organised in two federations, the new Podkrepa and the ex-official CITUB — have somewhat more strength there than elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

"Although socialist politics are for now pushed to the margin and discredited in Eastern Europe, the widespread working-class assent to market economics is not uncritical."

Bulgaria's 1993 labour code provides wide scope for undermining collective bargaining; prohibits strikes in the public health, energy, communications, and water supply sectors; and prohibits trade unions from engaging in political activities.

The unions are weak in Eastern Europe, but they exist. Although socialist politics are for now pushed to the margin and discredited, the widespread working-class assent to market economics is not uncritical. Opinion surveys in Czechoslovakia and Hungary soon after the overthrow of Stalinism in 1989 showed most workers wanting some social-democratic system — but, unfortunately, willing to rely on "experts" to tell them how much social democracy was possible. The pro-capitalist experts, of course, told them that very little was possible. The dominant mood seems to be not so much enthusiastic pro-capitalism, but a soured reaction against Stalinist rhetoric — anti-utopianism, refusal to believe that political activity can or should much modify the "economic realism" of the market.

The East European revolutions of

1989 were made in large part for democracy, including the right to have free elections. Yet in Poland, in October 1991, just two years later, the turnout was only 43% for parliamentary elections. Electoral turnouts in Poland since then, and in other countries in Eastern Europe, have been better, but not specially high even by comparison with West European countries where elections are a tired, bureaucratised, and media-manipulated routine.

The new bourgeois parties in Eastern Europe are usually shaky and unstable. The old Stalinist political machines, having reshaped themselves into proper political parties and converted themselves into "social-democrats", have often defeated them. They campaign not for the restoration of Stalinism, but for a more cautious, less ruthless, transition to market capitalism. In other words, the old nomenklatura is the core of the new capitalist ruling class, and the new bourgeoisie, risen from the middle class, has been able only to secure a share of the spoils.

In Poland, the ex-Stalinists regained office in October 1993. In Hungary, the ex-Stalinists came back to government in 1994, in alliance with the more free-market but less nationalist of the two main new bourgeois parties. In Albania, the Socialist Party formed by former officials of one of the most hideous dictatorships in the Stalinist world now has its leaders beaten up by riot police as they join mass demonstrations against the corruption and undemocratic manipulation of the new rulers. In Romania, a "National Salvation Front" created by a fraction of the apparatus of the old dictatorship kept power, despite various schisms and coalitions, until November 1996. (That Romania's anti-union laws are the worst in Eastern Europe indicates that the ex-Stalinists are by no means necessarily more friendly to the workers than the new bourgeois parties.) In Bulgaria, the ex-Stalinists put through the first stages of dismantling the old Stalinist structures by themselves, without even a change of government. Not until October 1991 did the main new bourgeois party, the UDF, win office; it lost office, to a coalition government, in December 1992, and was heavily defeated by the ex-Stalinists in the December 1994 elections.

Nowhere, yet, has a real workers' party emerged in Eastern Europe; and the small socialist groups are still small, often smaller than in 1989. Yet the cruelty and contradictions of the new capitalism, as they develop, cannot fail to lay the basis for working-class socialism.

Martin Thomas

Hillingdon strikers fight on

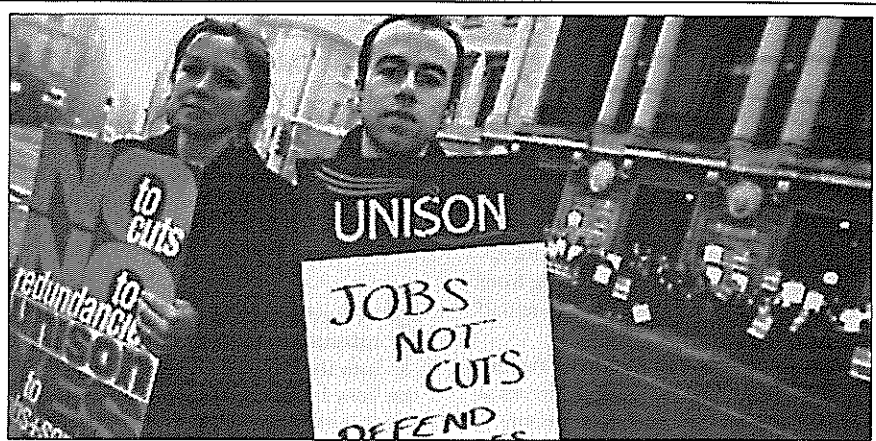
THE strike by 53 women workers at Hillingdon Hospital is continuing despite UNISON withdrawing official support. The UNISON decision was taken by a vote of 4-3 at the National Executive's Industrial Action Committee in January. The union 'tops' were recommending a deal that would have meant a paltry £4,000 per head but no reinstatement. The strikers were not balloted — even though they have made it quite clear that they reject the 'offer'. So much for a member-led union.

The members balloted for strike action in September 1995 in response to Pall Mall's proposal to change their contracts and impose a 20 per cent pay cut. After some shenanigans the dispute was made official in November 1995. The strikers have been on the picket line seven days a week since October 1995. Their determination has been an inspiration to all trade unionists. The strikers have suffered racist abuse, physical attack, arrest and imprisonment. Before the dispute Pall Mall had demanded to see the passports of the mainly Asian domestic workers.

The dispute could and should be used as a crusade against all the private spivs cashing in on public services. Yet the UNISON leadership have only had a half-hearted strategy to win the dispute. It makes a mockery of all the good policies we have on the minimum wage, the national health service and racism.

In the current climate it is hard to win solidarity action. Nevertheless, UNISON is the biggest union in the country, with over 1.4 million members. We must make an example of the likes of Pall Mall. Not only must we continue to support the strike through donations, collections etc., but the union must do all it can to spread action to the rest of Pall Mall and its subsidiaries.

At the same time UNISON activists must call on the NEC to overturn the Industrial Action Committee's vote,



Cuts round up

LAST month Labour announced its intention, if elected, to keep government budgets within the levels proposed by the Tories. This will mean continuation of the drastic cuts which have been made, year after year, by Labour councils unprepared to take on the Tories.

This year local councils face, on average, a 2.5% shortfall in the money they need to maintain the status quo on services. Councils will also face new costs for community care. Social services, on average, face a 4% cut.

The picture around the country is frightening: Glasgow faces a massive £78 million cut. 300 teaching jobs will go and education centres and library hours will be affected. £35 million are to go from Edinburgh council's budget. 100 home helps and 75 teachers are threatened

with redundancy.

Scotland as a whole faces a crisis in education — 1,500 teaching jobs are at risk. At the end of January 30,000 people marched through Glasgow to protest at the education cuts.

In Kent firefighters are fighting a 10% reduction in the fire service. If pressure on Kent County Council does not succeed in stopping job losses they will ballot on strike action.

Kent's £23.7 million cuts also include the privatisation of care for the elderly and disabled. The wholesale privatisation of all social services could become the norm if Labour continue present trends.

In Newcastle, where 400 jobs are at risk the UNISON branch is asking the council to delay agreeing a final budget until after the General Election. They want to put pressure on a Labour government to allow councils to spend more, to increase the level of government grant and to keep council tax rises down.

which goes against a National Conference decision. We must also firm up the promise made by Harriet Harman at the 1996 UNISON Health Conference to reinstate the women when Labour gain office.

! Messages of support/donations to: Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign (HSSC), c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 1TG. Make any cheques payable to HSSC.

Andre D'Souza

After the international dockers' strike...

HAVING turned down payouts of over £20,000 as part of a 'final offer' from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, the Liverpool dockers continue their fight — with an impressive show of international solidarity in January. In Liverpool, dockers and supporters face charges after occupying part of the port.

Meanwhile, dockers' leaders and Transport and General Workers' Union Deputy

General Secretary Jack Adams have drawn up a proposal whereby the dockers would set up a non-profit making co-operative to supply labour to all parts of the docks.

The dockers underline that any settlement must include acceptance of their key demands: jobs for the sacked dockworkers and removal of all non-union contract labour from the port.

The docks company have so far rejected

the plan — the finer details of which were not announced by the time we went to press — because part of it is the removal of scab labour supplied by Drake International from the port. They have called the scabs a "loyal workforce," providing an "excellent service."

Andy Dwyer, of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee, said: "We're still picketing every day and asking our supporters all round the world for ongoing action.

There's no turning back."

There are obvious dangers in the "co-op" plan. Dockers will put themselves under pressure to accept worse wages and conditions to make the co-op competitive with other suppliers of labour, and to get contracts with port employers renewed. However, no loyal supporter of the dockers can object to them trying alternative approaches — even questionable ones — after so many months of deadlock.

An appeal for solidarity action on or around 20 January led to action in 105 ports and cities in 27 countries. Dockers, seafarers and other workers took part in workplace meetings, public meetings, demonstrations at British Embassies and Consulates, work-to-rules, and full-scale stoppages ranging from 30 minutes to 24 hours, between 15 and 25 January.

In Liverpool, nine dockers and five supporters occupied the three gantry cranes at the Seaforth Grain Terminal for 27 hours — halting work on a ship loading at the terminal. All 15 were arrested and were due to go to court to face charges of aggravated trespass and breach of the peace on 12 February.

The action worldwide included a 24 hour stoppage in Sweden, a three-day strike in Greece, ports closed on the east and west coasts of the USA, and an occupation of the offices of the Rhine Shipping Company in Basel, Switzerland. Action affected ports from Sri Lanka to Zimbabwe that process freight bound to or from Liverpool.

● Messages of support and donations to: Bro. J. Davies, Secretary, Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool, L6 4AS. Cheques should be made payable to "Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Appeal Fund."

Alan McArthur

Tube faces sell-off

THE Tories are promising to put privatisation of London Underground into their election manifesto Using the Tory language of outright lies, they say this will "improve services" and "save public money". What it will really mean we can see from the fate of British Rail: bidding-down of wages, conditions and jobs in a drive for private profit and a worse service.

On the privatised railways trade union reps suffer victimisation. The RMT on Scotrail is currently taking strike action for the reinstatement of victimised trade unionists [see below].

Safety is also a key issue for workers and the public. Cutting costs on the railways has already cost lives. The same would be true of a privatised Tube, where safety standards urgently need improving rather than cutting.

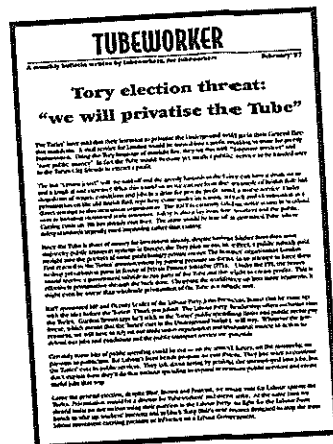
The Tube is already short of money for investment, despite having higher fares than most major-city public trans

port systems in Europe. The Tory plan means, in effect, a public subsidy paid straight into the pockets of profit-hungry private owners.

The bosses' organisation "London First" reacted to the Tories' announcement by attempting to force them to drop privatisation plans in favour of Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Under PFI, the bosses would receive a government subsidy to run parts of the Tube and the right to cream off any profits. This is privatisation by the back door.

Unfortunately, RMT-sponsored MP and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, John Prescott, boasts that he came up with the idea of PFI before the Tories! Thank you John! Gordon Brown says he'll stick to the Tories' public spending limits and public sector pay freeze, so cuts in the Underground budget will stay.

A tube worker



Scotrail strike: drivers must get on board!

THE RMT ballot of all grades on Scotrail over the victimisations at Queen Street has been lost, but the fight is continuing.

The Scottish Strike Committee is recommending escalation of the strike among traincrew, with 15 and 17 February as the next strike days. This follows a successful strike on 1 February. There are also plans to reballot all grades on a 37 hour week, with no strings attached.

There are added complications in the strike. Although a new owner for Scotrail is due to be announced, the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive is trying to hold up the sell-off until the general election — if Labour wins we will be the only part of the railway still in public owner-

ship. If the privatisation is stopped, the present management mob will remain in charge. A new management team might very well want to start with a clean slate. However, whoever it is in charge, they will get no respite from the union until the 17 disciplinary cases are dropped — at the very heart of the dispute is whether there is effective union organisation on the rails in Scotland.

ASLEF have so far not been involved in the dispute but it is in the interests of all rail workers, irrespective of whether they belong to RMT or ASLEF, to elect representatives through trade unions who can protect and defend them.

If the present strike is lost, are people who are prepared to stand up to manage-

ment going to take on LDC and other trade union positions? They will certainly think twice.

Union posts will be filled by people acceptable to management, because they do nothing for trade union members. Where will that leave the member facing discipline or pursuing a claim? That's how important the current strike is, and it is time all railworkers realised it.

Drivers have the power to end this strike with a victory for all trade unionists. They also have the power to break it. If the will is there, we can find ways around the anti-trade union laws. United we stand, divided we fall!

A Scotrail drivers' rep

Where is Labour going?

Vacuum on the left by Mark Seddon

If comrades want to see what direction the Labour Party is moving in, then I would refer them to the article written by John Biffen, the former Tory minister, in last week's *Tribune*. Biffen claims that the Labour Party has now embraced the entire Thatcherite agenda and will not change any of the things that we opposed over the last 18 years.

A form of free-market economics has been adopted without the leadership seeming to understand how real market economies actually function, their consequences, and their effects on ordinary people. We have the possibility of a Labour Government being elected on a platform not dissimilar to that being presented by the Conservatives, except on issues of constitutional law.

NEC backs far-reaching reforms to remove 'vested interests that personified backroom deals' Labour curbs union influence on party pol

potential threat of dissent party... Mr Blair's announcement of the joint committee of selected cabinet ministers and certain members of a transformed NEC... The document outlining the latest changes - Labour into power - will be put out for discussion by the party's annual conference in a month.

The Labour Party remains our only effective tool for bringing about change. Socialists and trade unionists should stick with it and start fighting their corner again. A culture of deference has been responsible for the leadership believing it can do anything.

There has been a crisis of confidence on the left, and a failure to start thinking. We had the surge in the early 1980s, and there was a lot of new thinking then, but there has not been much since. The basic ideas of equality, redistribution of power and wealth, and workers' control, have to be refashioned to appeal to people today.

The New Right in the Labour Party have been able to get away with a lot through their organisational prowess, but also because there has been something of a vacuum on the left. Their own agenda is vacuous in the extreme — you only have to read the Mandelson book to see that — but it is an acceptance of all that we have fought against in the last 18 years. That is the extent of the surrender.

Repeated defeats — the defeat of the miners' strike in 1984-5, and the smaller defeats after that — have sapped the confidence of the trade unions. That has been the basis of the

"We need a new Labour Representation Committee"

by Geoff Martin London Region Convenor UNISON

THE ditching of the commitments to basic workers' rights in Labour's *Road to the Manifesto* document was the final confirmation that the party's current leadership has no interest at all in standing up for working people. So where does all this leave the founders of the Labour Party, the trade unions?

I believe that the policy recently agreed by the Fire Brigades Union to support only Labour candidates who support the demands of the trade unions and oppose further cuts in public spending sets out the way forward. While it is crucial that we remain centrally affiliated to the party, and play a full part in the policy-making process on those rare occasions that we are given a chance, we should make it clear that there are no blank cheques.

Our members' political fund contributions should be used to fund only those MPs and constituencies who can be relied upon to support our political programme. A greater proportion of our money should be pumped into

campaigns and pressure groups within the party, such as *Tribune*, Alternatives to Maastricht and the Welfare State Network, which support our policies.

The unions pour vast sums into the central party machine with no idea where it goes. For example, the spin doctors who went around rubbishing Rodney Bickerstaffe and Bill Morris during the Clause Four debate could well have had their wages paid by UNISON and T&G members. That is a nonsense and it has got to stop.

We need to toughen up our response. There is now a solid case for reforming the Labour Representation Committee as a pressure group within the party. This was originally formed by trade unionists and socialists who realised that the old Liberal Party could not be relied upon to represent the interests of labour. More than 100 years later, a similar set of conditions have been created by the hijackers behind New Labour.

I am not for a moment suggesting

that we leave the party. Indeed, it is my view that if Arthur Scargill had opted for a Labour Representation Committee or a Campaign for Socialism after last year's conference, rather than walking out, he could have strengthened the left rather than weakening it.

Socialists and trade unionists within the Labour Party need to regroup before it is too late. We need to harden our campaigning around a clear programme for Labour in government which would actually make a difference to the people who represent, those who make a living selling their labour rather than deploying capital.

A reformed Labour Representation Committee makes great sense in the current political climate. To be successful, it would need to involve trade unions at a national level, along with a solid core of Labour MPs. All this might sound a bit old-fashioned and traditionalist, but no one should be put off by that. I hope some discussion about the idea gets going.

accommodation ever since. Their demands now are non-existent. When Peter Hain puts forward a modest, liberal, corporatist proposal for job security, they jump at it. That is the level of their political weakness. They have not stood up and said what they want from a Labour Government.

Most people are buttoned up because after 18 years we just don't want to lose again. That's why a lot of people are quiet. But there are pressures from the grass roots. They will come into play soon. There is going to

be a very tight public sector pay round, and a lot of trade union general secretaries are now looking over their shoulders. They are very concerned with the march of the left in the union branches, and they feel that if they are not careful they could be swept away.

With the "Party into Power" proposals, I think the ultimate intention is to do away with the right of constituency parties and affiliated organisations to have any serious input into policy. The drive is for the end of collective policy-making via trade

unions, and a supine role for Labour Party supporters — that's what they'll become, they'll no longer be members.

The big issue about the "Party into Power" project is the right of party members to put resolutions forward and debate real politics at an annual conference. If that is lost, it may look like a temporary victory for the Labour Party leadership, but you can't suppress great social movements, and people will take to doing other things. Other organisations will fill the gap.

Regrouping the labour movement by Ken Coates MEP

THESSE reform proposals from the National Executive Committee are the result of a long rearguard action which has been fought with vigour. They are nothing like as fierce as the proposals canvassed in all the newspapers by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee. This indicates there are serious divisions on the trade unions' role in the Labour Party, you could say about how much the unions would be willing to take. Or maybe there are divisions about what the Parliamentary leaders of New Labour actually want to do. Massive unease within the Party communicates itself all the time to the Parliamentary Labour Party. Personally, I have never known such alienation in the PLP. Of course this does not mean we should now roll over. We need to work out how to defend our democracy now.

This present Labour leadership is very different from previous ones. They have cut the umbilicus, they have formally repudiated the historical objectives of the Labour Party. I don't want to mistake the rhetoric, then or now, for reality, but I would say there are a whole range of quite fundamental differences between this and previous leaderships.

The left can provide a continuity

with what was best in Old Labour — the commitment to egalitarianism. Of course that didn't go far enough, but it was there. This is important when the present distribution of income in Britain is more unequal than it has been for half a century.

The present Labour leadership shows complete indifference to this and has announced tax policy to maintain the inequality. Contrast this with the right-wing Denis Healey telling Party Conference that he was going to squeeze the rich until the pips squeaked.

Where are we in the battle? One thing said on the left is "if we had some form of proportional representation there would be space for a left party". I don't think this is the right way to approach the question at all. It is true that the peculiarities of the Italian electoral system have made possible Rifondazione, they've also made possible a fairly lively green culture and so on. But I don't think it follows that there will be no developments on the left in Britain until we get electoral reform.

A lot of these arguments come from people connected with the old British Communist Party. But they were not getting 200 votes in elections because of the absence of PR. That's how many

people wanted to vote for them. In the 1930s and '40s the Communist Party could pull very sizeable votes indeed. Harry Pollit nearly won the Rhondda with 15,000 votes. In London in 1945 they polled well into five figures. This too was nothing to do with PR. In the end people have not voted for the Communist Party because of its association with autocracy.

The issue is, do people believe that the Labour Party in some broad way represents their aspirations, or don't they. If they don't efforts to replace the Labour Party become credible. If they do then the Labour Party should stay where it is.

A serious regroupment in the labour movement is necessary, around the question of full employment. Without full employment the seed bed of democracy is poisoned. Mass unemployment reduces the lives of millions of people to sheer misery, but it also frightens the life out of everybody else. Workers no longer feel free to stand up for their rights. And it increases the insecurities at home. The rise of petty and serious crime can terrorise people in their neighbourhoods. You then see the rise of xenophobia and racism. All of these things are corrosive of democracy.

This is why the left has got to fight for full employment. It is the acid test of everything.

Those at the top of the political establishment across Europe are of course hostile to this idea but equally a lot of people lower down in the labour bureaucracy and the government bureaucracy, and even the employers' representatives, understand that full employment is possible. They are scared about the social consequences of mass unemployment.

Get in touch with the Keep the Link Campaign

The campaign has just produced a newsletter with 16 pages of facts and arguments about the Labour-union link. Get copies of the newsletter, or details of the campaign from KTL c/o 138 Crampton St, London, SE17 3AE or 0171 708 0511

How the Labour Party began A party born of struggle

By Brian Pearce

DOWN to the 1880s there was no 'labour movement' here in the continental sense at all. There were strong trade unions (of the skilled workers), and these unions were politically-minded — but the only parties were the two ruling-class ones, the Tories and the Liberals. The trade unions expressed themselves politically by serving as the arms and legs of one or other of these parties — usually the Liberals, though in an area such as Lancashire and Cheshire where the employers were strongly Liberal the trade unions might retort to this by supporting the Tories! The political prospect of the trade unions was to get one or other of the ruling-class parties to pass laws favourable to the workers; and they tried to consolidate their 'poor-relation' influence with these parties by persuading the Liberals to accept a few trade union officials among their parliamentary candidates.

During the 1880s there occurred, in a very small way at first, the rebirth of socialism in Britain after an interval of forty years. Old Chartists, reinforced by immigrant workers from Germany, had kept the flame burning in obscure clubs, but now a certain expansion began, with the establishment of the Social-Democratic Federation. In part under the guidance of Frederick Engels, pioneer socialists began a twenty years' propaganda for the launching in Britain of an independent class party of the workers with socialism as its aim. The setting up of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 constituted the first break-through to success of a campaign which for long had seemed to many just the bee buzzing in the brains of a few cranks and fanatics, inspired by antiquated (Chartist) and foreign (German) notions. The workers learnt the hard way the need for a Labour Party.

The eventual success of the socialists' efforts was made possible by profound changes in the economic and social situation of the British workers. It is important to get clear just what these changes were. Was it that the workers were 'getting poorer' in this period between 1880 and 1900? On the contrary, these years saw a drop of about 50 per cent in the cost of living: even allowing for increased unemployment there was a big advance in real wages. In that important



aspect, the workers had never had it so good!

But there was more unemployment than there had been in the previous period, and this led to a new feeling of insecurity and doubt about the social system. There was also a big drive on for speed-up and stricter discipline in the factories — 'American methods' as the phrase was. Increased mechanisation was undermining the strong position of the craftsmen, the skilled workers, introducing on a large scale the category of the 'semi-skilled'. The growth of the scale of industrial ownership, the concentration of capital into ever-larger holdings, was reflected in greater remoteness of employer from worker and also in the appearance of an important new stratum of office workers who interposed themselves between the employers and the manual workers and came more and more to take the place of the old 'aristocracy of labour'.

All these changes unsettled sections of the working class which had been most uncritically loyal to the 'great Liberal party of Mr. Gladstone, the people's friend.' Other factors which came into play were a growth at the end of the nineteenth century in lavish, ostentatious spending by the ruling class, providing clear proof that whatever was happening to the poor the rich were certainly getting richer; and the rise of a generation of workers educated under the Act of 1870, who knew a lot more about the details of ruling-class life than their fathers had done.

The socialists sought out the most politically-minded rank-and-file workers in the

places where they were — especially in the Radical (left-wing Liberal) clubs in traditional working-class centres of that time like the East End of London. Besides their propaganda, the socialists carried on agitation around issues of interest to these workers and fights for which would help them to clear their minds of the confusions that kept them in the Liberal ranks. Struggle for trade-union organisation in trades and factories where the employers were well-known Liberals; struggle to defend and extend the right of free speech for street-corner orators and in places like Trafalgar Square, against police attempts to encroach on this right; above all the campaign for the eight-hour day. (At this time many workers worked a ten-hour day or more, and with the appearance of unemployment and the intensified strain of speed-up and so on the need for a shortening of hours was felt more and more keenly.) The battles fought around these issues made many questions clearer to the workers who were involved in them, and prepared their minds to understand a great deal in the socialist message which previously had seemed strange and unreal to them.

A factor of very considerable weight in helping the idea of an independent workers' party to take root was the example provided by the Irish nationalist party at this time. A small but well-disciplined group of members from Irish constituencies kept themselves independent of both of the British parties, concerned themselves exclusively with pushing Ireland's claims for 'Home Rule', and by their obstructive tactics compelled attention to their case. In-

* Brian Pearce is a translator and author of numerous articles on working-class history.

ingly, many politically-minded British workers came round to the view that British labour needed a party of its own that would act like this.

What made up the minds of a wide section, and in particular influenced a number of trade union leaders who had no wish to take any new step unless they were obliged to by unbearable pressure, was the employers' offensive which began in the 1890s. It was as much, or more, under the blows of the employers that these people came round as under the pull of their militant members. This was the time when the ending of Britain's former monopoly position in the world's markets, as 'workshop of the world', became apparent in a big way, with the rise of German and American competition.

To safeguard their developing industries the Americans even put up a tariff barrier against British goods. The reaction of British capital was twofold: on the one hand, the path of the export of capital to backward countries, with a shift from textiles to railway materials as typical goods exported, the path of 'imperialism' accompanied by political and military grab; on the other, an intense drive to force down the standards of the workers at home, to make them accept unrestricted speed-up, abolition of 'restrictive practices' and lower wages all round.

A WAVE of lockouts and provoked strikes swept the country in the 1890s. A body called the Free Labour Association was set up to organise mobile squads of assorted strikebreakers ('finks' is the American term), ready to go anywhere and do anything.

Not only police but also troops were used against strikers on a scale unprecedented since Chartist times. There were shootings and killings — one case, at Featherstone, became a bitter byword in the movement, especially as a Liberal Home Secretary was responsible.

In response to this sharp dose of basic political education, the idea of an independent workers' party began to catch on in areas where it had been resisted by traditional 'Radical' prejudices up to then — in particular in Yorkshire and Lancashire, key areas then for the working-class movement. 'Independent Labour Unions' arose in centres like Bradford and Manchester, and working-class papers like the *Workman's Times* organised to bring them together in a national association. In 1893 a big step towards the Labour Party as we know it today was taken when the Independent Labour Party came into existence as a national party aiming to win the labour movement for independent class politics.

Contrary to the legend which has been cultivated by the Right wing, while the small group of British Marxists did play a part in

the creation of the ILP, the Fabian Society had nothing to do with it. This latter group of reformists were still at that stage devoted to achieving socialism (or what they called socialism) through 'permeation' of the Liberal Party, and they regarded the ILP as 'wreckers'. Only as it became apparent that the cause of Independent Labour was going to succeed in spite of them did they change their line. The band-wagon was rolling along before they climbed on it!

At first the ruling class of this country, or its responsible representatives, did not realise the significance of what was happening. We have a very acute and very flexible ruling class, but they weren't born that way, they had to learn it by being taught some disagreeable lessons by the workers. They don't enjoy having to be so acute and flexible in their dealings with their workers, and would like to get rid of what forces them to act like that.

The Liberal Party, reflecting the hard-

"In 1900 the socialists of the Independent Labour Party and other groups made their first breakthrough into an organised relationship with the trade unions, with the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee."

ened attitude of the employers towards the workers, became colder than ever towards the attempts of trade unionists to get themselves adopted as 'Liberal-Labour' candidates. Some quite insulting rebuffs were handed out. This is what Ramsay MacDonald meant when he wrote explaining why such as he had taken the path of independent labour politics which they didn't feel at all enthusiastic about: 'We didn't leave the Liberals. They kicked us out, and slammed the door in our faces.'

The 1897 engineering lockout, the ruthless beating down of the engineering workers and imposing upon them humiliating terms of settlement, designed to make plain who was master in the works, left many of the most conservative section of the British workers in those days with little grounds for doubt that times had changed.

In 1900 the socialists of the Independent Labour Party and other groups made their historic first breakthrough into an organised relationship with the trade unions, with the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee. A limited number of trade unions at last agreed to associate with the socialist societies in promoting parliamentary candidates who should be independent of either of the ruling-class parties.

It was the ruling class which, still not grasping what was happening 'down below', gave several more still-hesitant trade unions the necessary final shove to bring them in behind the Labour Representation Committee. Following a series of articles in *The Times* which called into question the very existence of trade unionism, the House of Lords upheld against appeal a judge's decision which dealt a practical blow, in terms of hard cash, at the whole functioning of trade unions. This was the 'Taff Vale judgement', when the railwaymen's union found themselves forced to pay out enormous damages to a company which had incurred loss through a strike they had called. If this was the law, no strike could take place anywhere on any issues without the risk of financial ruin for the union concerned. At long last a number of trade union leaders saw the point — the working class must put itself in an independent political position from which it could compel changes in the law in its own interest, instead of relying on the sweet reasonableness of one or other group of the ruling class. In 1901 and 1902, after 'Taff Vale', the Labour Representation Committee received a big accession of strength — though still, it is worth recalling, the miners remained wedded to Liberalism and did not come in until eight years later, after a lot of 'unofficial' activity had been put in at lodge and district level. The decision to create and adhere to the Labour Party was not hastily or lightly taken by the British working class.

A S ALREADY mentioned, a lot of the leading men in the movement had to be pushed every inch of the way into their new political stand, and they wanted even now to separate from the Liberals to as small an extent as possible. Few had any idea of operating as more than a pressure group — though now at least nominally outside the Liberal Party instead of inside it. They did not in the least contemplate supplanting the Liberals as one of the two major parties in the country and of course there could be no question in their minds of becoming the government of the country. When, therefore, the Liberals, shocked at last into awareness of the working class getting out of hand politically, took steps through private negotiation to show themselves 'conciliatory', a man like MacDonald, secretary to the LRC, was only too pleased to meet them halfway.

MacDonald's correspondence with the Chief Liberal Whip had to be kept a secret from all but a few of MacDonald's colleagues, lest some crude-minded types might take exception to it. So early began the practice of talks between Labour leaders and the ruling class behind the backs of the movement as a whole. The outcome was a 'gentleman's agreement' for the LRC

to restrict its candidates to certain seats, in return for which the Liberals would not oppose them in some of these. Characteristic was MacDonald's reaction to the news of Arthur Henderson's victory as a Labour candidate at Barnard Castle, over both Liberal and Tory opponents: he welcome it as strengthening his bargaining power in dealings with the Liberals, but hoped it would not encourage the 'wild men' to demand openly that Labour should go it alone in every possible constituency. Just sufficient life in the working-class movement to give them something to use in horse-trading with the capitalists, and no more; that has always been the ideal of the Right wing.

When, therefore, a group of 50 Labour MPs were returned in the 1906 general election, which gave a Liberal majority, there was heavy dragging of feet to do no more than accord critical support to the new government, merely pressuring it a bit in the direction of social reform. The socialists in the Labour Party (as it was now formally called) faced the task of forcing the pace against this entrenched resistance. In 1907 the socialist Victor Grayson was run as candidate, against Liberal and Tory, in a

traditional Liberal seat, by local Labour organisations who defied the ban imposed by headquarters. His triumphant success encouraged the Left in the movement but infuriated the 'statesmen' of the Parliamentary Labour Party. A typical incident occurred in 1908 when Grayson tried to protest in the House against the welcome by the Liberal Government to a visit by the Tsar of Russia, but the official Labour spokesman at once got up to move the closure!

Nevertheless, the growth of socialist influence within the party compelled the leaders to apply for admission to the Second International, so associating the Labour Party with openly socialist parties in other countries. This was the occasion on which Lenin proposed that the Labour Party be accepted into membership of the International on the carefully-defined grounds that 'it represents the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of Britain towards a conscious class policy and towards a socialist workers' party.'

The fight to get the Labour Party to adopt socialism as its aim instead of merely tolerating socialists as members along with

others had to go on for another ten years. Among important landmarks in this struggle was the formation of the British Socialist Party, in which the old Social-Democratic Federation came together with significant breakaway groups of the ILP in a new organisation under at least nominally Marxist leadership, and this affiliated to the Labour Party in 1914. During the first world war the BSP followed, after 1916, a different line from that of the official one of support for the war, but was not disciplined for this, much less expelled; such was the freedom for working-class trends of all kinds allowed in the party in those days as a matter of course.

The BSP was allowed to carry on its propaganda for socialism, which was helped by the harsh experiences of the workers at the hands of the Liberal-Tory coalition government. And though the Labour Party leadership accepted a place in the coalition, an attempt by Arthur Henderson, 'Labour's minister', to keep in with the growing international anti-war feeling of the workers led to such rude treatment of him by his capitalist colleagues — the famous 'doormat' incident when Henderson was kept cooling his heels outside the Prime Minister's door till it was convenient to have him in — that life on these terms was made very hard for the Labour leaders concerned. The co-operative societies, too, which had held aloof until now, were forced during the war to align themselves with Labour by the discriminatory policy of the Government in its working of the rationing system and its application of excess profits duty.

The Russian Revolution gave the final jolt, and in 1918, at the conference of that year, the Labour Party formally adopted socialism as its aim, in the historic Clause Four of a new constitution. The Right wing tried to offset this concession by depriving the socialist societies of their reserved places on the party executive, in connection with the starting of individual members' sections, the future local Labour Parties. This ousting of the socialist societies from their place in the party was followed up in 1932 by driving the ILP right out of the party; in 1937 by banning the Socialist League, which had taken its place; and in 1946 by introducing a rule prohibiting the affiliation to or formation within the Labour Party of societies such as had initiated the very creation of the party.

The Labour Party became the chief opposition party in 1922 and the largest party in Parliament in the following year. The first Labour Government, 1924, marked a new phase both in the advance of the working-class movement and in the degeneration of its leadership...

Since then the party has had many ups and downs which it is not the purpose of this article to trace.

The Renegade

A portrait

Aye, yes 'tis old, scarce can we trace,
The lines of that once handsome face,
The face that comrades loved to scan
When all could say, "there is a man."
Aye, yes, 'tis old, all blurred and dim,
Fit emblem and the type of him
Who once and well swung Freedom's
blade
And yet became — a renegade.

Those compressed lips, that deep-set eye,
That yet would seem to give the lie
To later deeds that down would drag,
What once he fought for — Freedom's
flag.

By God, 'tis strange, this man could wield
This marshal-baton on the field,
When Labour holds its war-parade.
Yet think of him — a renegade.

While mind the sphere of thought must
range,

Till all is known; men well may change,
Or lose their way; and oft the best
Will feel the doubt rise in their breast
And leave the ranks. But foul attack,
To stab old comrades in the back,
Who still step forward undismayed,
That stamps a man — a renegade.

And he has done this. Time and oft,
He struck at those who held aloft
The blood-red symbol, once his pride,
The flag he bore when Linnell died,
The flag that still, 'gainst fearful odds,
Leads on the war with Mammon's gods.
He now, with jibe and sneer arrayed,
Makes jest of it — the renegade.

The mob's applause, the smiles of those
Who jeered the "man in working clothes,"
Had they not power to make him pause
And think how stood he to the Cause?
The fawning of the slimy brood
Might well have told him how he stood;
On shattered hopes and trust betrayed,
We know him now — the renegade.

'Tis pity, yes, but mourn him not,
Give him the meed for which he wrought;
A day will come when memory keen
Will show to him what might have been.
A name illustred — handed down
From sire to son — the laurel crown,
Might well have lift of fight repaid:
What gains he now — the renegade?

Go weigh it 'gainst a grain of dust;
From this side hate, from that distrust;
Such ever dogs, and, soon or late,
Will weary down, the apostate.
What tries the true man? Why, success,
'Twas it induced the foe's caress
And led him on the downward grade,
And turned him out — a renegade.

The portrait's old, a blurred and dim,
Fit emblem and the type of him,
Who once and well swung Freedom's
blade,
Ere he became — a renegade.

John Leslie,

* Most likely, the person portrayed here was John Burns, the former Marxist, a leader of the 1889 Dock Strike, who was elected an MP with Liberal support and thereafter moved steadily towards the Liberal Party. When miners were shot down at Featherstone in 1893, Burns defended Liberal Home Secretary Asquith in the Commons. Burns was a Liberal government minister after 1906.

By Joan Trevor

TWENTY-FIVE years ago British paratroopers fired on an unarmed demonstration in Derry, killing 14 Catholics who were marching in a protest against the internment of Catholics, that is, against the indefinite imprisonment of people who had been neither charged nor tried. Internment had been introduced in August 1971 in response to the bombing campaign of the Provisional IRA. A dozen more Catholics were that day.

In the early afternoon of 30 January 1972 a crowd of thousands of Nationalists leaves Derry's Creggan housing estate. They know that at some point the army will stop their march, and at William Street they come up against an army barricade. Youths in the crowd throw bottles and stones and the troops reply by shooting rubber bullets at them and canisters of CS gas. One soldier on a nearby rooftop shoots at and wounds two people.

The crowd, now 20,000 strong, diverts to "Free Derry Corner" on the fringe of the Catholic Bogside area for a rally. Suddenly, the army moves in from different directions and begins shooting. There is no clear evidence that anyone shot back. The paratroopers picked off people in the crowd as if they were in a shooting gallery.

The official enquiry into the bloody events in Derry that day — the Widgery Tribunal — did a whitewash job. Against all the evidence of other eyewitnesses it upheld the army's claim that British soldiers had come under fire from the crowd and shot back only in self-defence.

In the face of mass photographic and eyewitness evidence to the contrary, the army said they killed only those involved in attacking them. Lord Widgery, the supposedly neutral judge, asked the *Sunday Times* and *The Observer* not to publish reports by their own journalists which said otherwise; the editors obliged. Thus "exonerated", the soldiers got off scot-free. No one has ever been brought to book for the mass murder in Derry that day.

For certain, many of the marchers were sympathetic to the IRA's military campaign against the British army, and all marched illegally — the government had banned the march — but, for certain too, the British soldiers that day behaved like mad dogs, shooting at random, as the eyewitness accounts testify. They shot and killed even people who came to help the wounded.



Bloody Sunday, Derry J Fourteen dead, no

Now, twenty-five years later, some politicians — Labour, and Tories — are calling for a fresh enquiry to take account of all the evidence discounted or not known at the time. John Major admitted in the House of Commons that those shot on Bloody Sunday were "innocent" — which is to say that the army murdered them in cold blood. But even after a quarter of a century, there is no formal official recognition that mass murder was committed. Twenty-five years on, you would think, it might just be safe to dredge the dirty pond, but no.

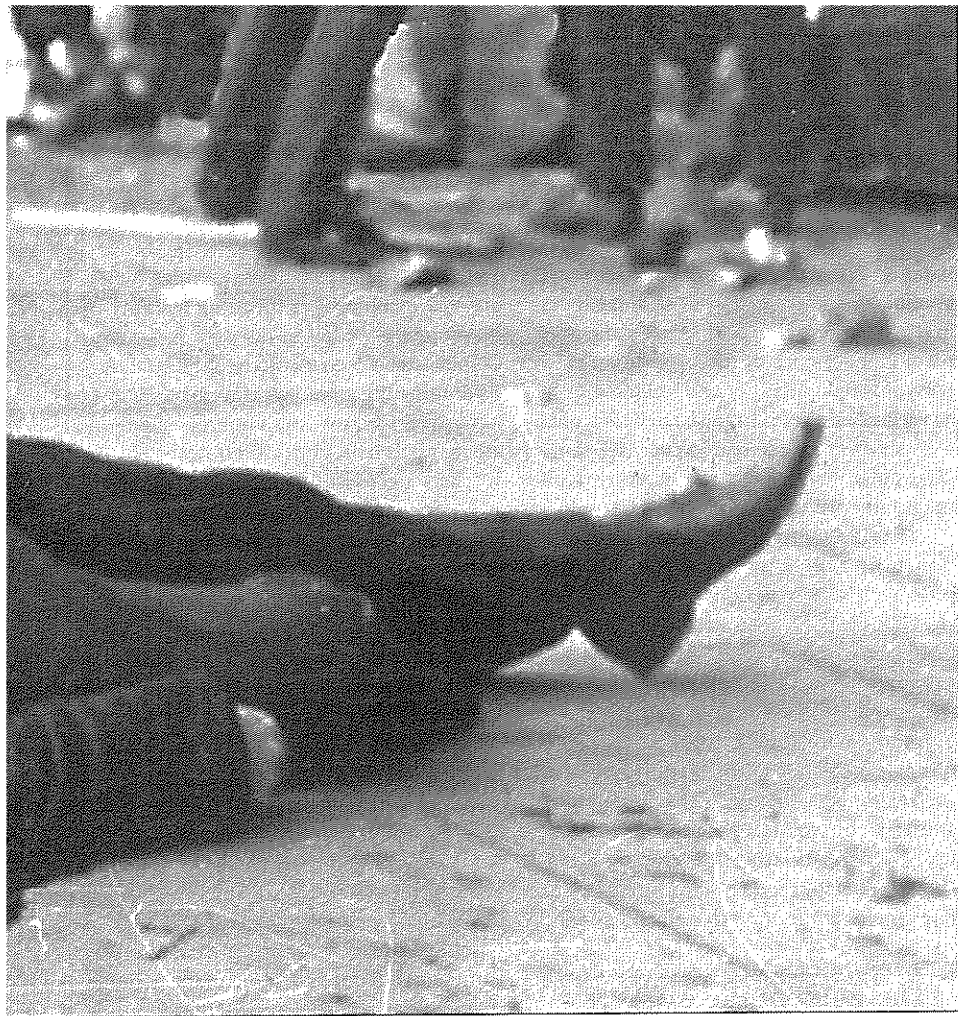
They still do not think it safe to lay

the blame for mass murder where it belongs — with the state, with the soldiers who pulled the triggers, and with their officers who allowed them off the leash, the soldiers had grown bitter with arrogant national hatred of Derry's Catholics: that is what made this senseless massacre possible.

The blame lies also with the soldiers' political masters — with the Heath government and its civil servants who, even if they did not want a massacre, decided on a show of strength against the Catholics.

Responsibility lies with the British

“The Establishment bluster about violence but will not do ju



FATHER Daly, a Derry parish priest, on three people shot down in Rossville Street: "Two of them have since died, one a young boy. I saw his father try to get to him but he was shot down, too. The father is still in hospital, injured. It was impossible to step out. They were lying behind the barricade. I could only get about 10 yards towards them but I administered the last rites from there."

"Then the paratroopers arrived — about 10 or 20 of them — and they pushed about 10 of us against the wall. We couldn't move one way or another. Bullets were ricocheting near us. The paratroopers pulled us away pretty roughly into a courtyard. There was a paratrooper beside me. People were fleeing away but he aimed at least eight shots indiscriminately at them. I grabbed him and shouted, 'For God's sake stop!' but he shrugged me off."

"What really frightened me was that some of the troops seemed to enjoy it — I heard men laughing and making crude jokes as I saw people falling."

“WE saw four wounded people lying at the end of a patch of waste ground.

"We put our hands in the air to show we were unarmed and waved white handkerchiefs. We managed to walk as far as where the people were lying. Then a soldier opened up with a machine-gun. One man was shot in the leg, and another had a scalp wound. We had to lie on top of the bodies of the wounded."

Tony Martin, a ship rigger

JOE Docherty of Derry describes the death of Barney McGuigan: "The passageway cleared and I saw two soldiers. This brought them into sight of the people huddling in the high flats. I saw a soldier taking aim at Barney McGuigan who was walking over to shelter. He fired and Barney fell... I came out and went over to Barney. He was lying in a pool of blood with his right eye and face shot away."

January 1972

Nothing said

establishment. Their response to Catholic discontent had been to ignore it, while they could — until the Provisional IRA appeared.

Even now, twenty-five years on, those who bluster about violence will not do posthumous justice to those killed on Bloody Sunday or give their families the satisfaction of hearing an open, formal admission of guilt from them.

Nothing is more certain than that the killers of those fourteen men and boys who went out on a peaceful protest on 30 January 25 years ago will not be brought to justice.

Justice to those killed. ”



A mural in Derry commemorates the Bloody Sunday massacre.

Why the IRA is not revolutionary

FOR 75 years now, successive waves of Irish republicans have revealed themselves as social conservatives once they lay down the gun defining them, to themselves, as revolutionaries. These extracts are from an article by the Irish Workers' Group¹ ("Where the Hillside Men Have Sown"², *Workers' Republic*, Feb 1967), written when the IRA was dominated by quasi-Stalinists — who have since evolved into the "Democratic Left", part of the present Dublin coalition government.

THERE is a further contradiction within Sinn Fein, and that is the discrepancy between its basically petit-bourgeois ideal and present day reality. Despite its recent adoption of a slight 'socialist' coloration, its ideal is an image of small capitalism as it was 150 years ago, of small-island self-sufficiency. But when they find themselves in power, reality dominates, and they quickly fall in with the prevailing forces of modern society; ... they very soon emerge without their ideal as common or garden bourgeois social conservatives, merging with the top layers of society and dominating, in their interests, the lower levels of the petit-bourgeoisie.

The absence of a serious social policy in Sinn Fein really amounts to acceptance of the status quo. In denying class conflict, it tends to disguise its own class character: its inability, through a lack of any proletarian policy, to heal the bourgeois/imperialist-fostered split in the working class. In fact, the implication of such gross IRA simplifications as "British-occupied Ireland" could lead to attempting to conquer by force the northern workers; a conception which is best calculated to perpetuate the division of the country. But what unity could there ever be on the basis of their mystical, utopian dreams of a return to small capitalism? The only unifying principle is the class one, [but] they resort to "wrap-the-green-flag-around-me" Republicanism, which alienates the northern workers.

The unity of the workers of all Ireland will never be achieved by people with even a vestige left in their heads of the traditional Sinn Fein conceptions, the one threadbare idea of a mythical/mystical nationalism — nor on the basis of a spurious 'national unity' — that is, class collaboration, tying the workers to the bourgeoisie. It will be accomplished by those who destroy the beloved 'national unity' of the bourgeoisie — and of Sinn Fein — in favour of a worker/small farmer alliance within Ireland, and above all of the international unity of all workers (against both Sinn Fein's 'little Ireland' and the bourgeoisie's economic and political alliances with other bourgeois

nations). It will take the form of a merciless, continuous campaign to split off and temper in all the fronts of the class struggle the truly revolutionary core of the proletarian class party, fusing it together and freeing it from all vacillators, all opportunists, all who would stop short of proletarian power. *Working class* unity will be won, not in 'unity' with the bourgeoisie — but *against* that 'unity'.

The IRA is just not revolutionary in relation to the objective needs of the only possible Irish Revolution.

[This will still be] true if 'left' slogans are grafted on to the old base, and a nominal 'For Connolly's Workers' Republic' pinned to the headmast. Such talk, of a socialist programme, a Bolshevik party, a workers' republic, demands a proper appreciation of the relationship between the [revolutionaries] and the working class, and the building up of this relationship, developing a Bolshevik skeletal structure in the broad labour movement, attempting to lead and co-ordi-

"The unity of the workers of all Ireland will never be achieved by people with even a vestige left in their heads of the traditional Sinn Fein conceptions."

nate struggles, making constant efforts to unite the Northern and Southern workers in their concrete class struggle. It demands a sharply critical approach to the traditional republican conceptions of revolutionary activity. Otherwise these slogans, combined with a largely military idea of the struggle against Imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, will produce not a revolutionary Marxist party, but an abortion similar to the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, against which the Bolsheviks fought bitterly.

There are those who fetishise 'physical force'; others who make of it a principle to oppose: those Fabians, social democrats and Stalinists who, in the words of the Fourth International's Transitional Programme "systematically implant in the minds of the workers the notion that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed".

Revolutionary Marxists, however, recognise that it is a practical question, a front of the class struggle which becomes more or less important according to the character and events of a given period. Direct action of this [military] sort is necessarily a function of the mass struggle, or it is impotent.

[In] the IRA, as in most armies, workers and small farmers form the majority of its members. What is decisive is — who dominates? Which ideology? Which tactics? Its dominating ideology, as we have seen, is a mystical, narrow, petit-bourgeois nationalism, which is entirely contrary to the workers' necessarily International interests.

People who play with Marxist phrases without reference to reality contend that the existence of the IRA has meant a state of dual power in Ireland, preventing 'stabilisation'. Actually, the only thing which has been prevented from reaching 'stability' is a genuine revolutionary movement; the 'hills' [IRA guerrillaism] have merely functioned as a twin safety valve, together with emigration, to prevent bourgeois Ireland from bursting at the seams.

Without a doubt a parliamentary break-off from Sinn Fein will be absorbed easily by the system. Many Sinn Feiners must fear parliament *as a temptation*. But those who turn to the working class can use parliament as a tactic, knowing that a genuine revolutionary remains so whether working within the bourgeois constitution or outside it. And in reverse, [the history of] Sinn Fein itself demonstrates that a party which is *socially* non-revolutionary is no more so for being unconstitutional. The Bolsheviks managed to utilise the most reactionary of parliaments without becoming less revolutionary — it gave them a platform which, because properly utilised, made them *more*, not less, effective. The only principle involved is the general one of being able to change one's forms of struggle as the struggle unfolds.

In Sinn Fein it is not *entry* into the Dail that should be the issue — but their politics *in* parliament.

Naturally, there are dangers for the best of organisations in each and every tactic: the danger of routinism, timeserving, accommodation, etc. There is no guarantee, except the level of consciousness of the revolutionary [organisation]; the degree of democracy within it, the contact with the masses of the working class — and above all the degree of seriousness with which it continuously clarifies for itself all the steps, possibilities and forces in each situation and at each sharp turn, in the fashion of the Bolsheviks.

In Ireland, it is necessary to rechannel the energy prematurely expended and wasted on the isolated guerrilla struggles towards the labour movement.

1. The IWG included several ex-Republicans who had come over to class-struggle socialism.

2. Published pseudonymously, the article was written by Sean Matgamna.



Eisenstein and revolution

By Clive Bradley

"The cinema is for us the most important of the arts." V.I. Lenin

IN the years following the October revolution there was an explosion of creativity in film-making. A few short years, from the mid to late twenties in particular, saw the making of some of the finest films in the history of cinema. The best known are the films of Sergei Eisenstein, especially *Battleship Potemkin*; but Eisenstein was only one of many cinema artists who developed *revolutionary* films, both politically and in the form and method of film-making itself. But like the rest of the arts, which thrived in the early years of the revolution, film was to be stifled and impoverished by the rise of Stalinism.

Before the revolution, there was very little film production in Russia, and most films shown in Russian cinemas were foreign. Film was still in its infancy: the first, it is usually agreed, was shown in Paris in 1895. Today's audiences are of course very used to film as a medium, and take an enormous amount for granted about the ways in which film conveys meaning. But before the 1920s, things were not so obvious. When Eisenstein and his contemporaries came on the scene, there were few if any of the established conventions which shape films today, and the contribution of the Russian directors to one particular area of film-making is hard to overstate. This area is *editing*, or as they called it 'montage'. It is hard to express

to modern audiences how novel it was to see the editing of the film as a vital (for the Russians, *the* vital) part of the process. Today, on the whole, editing is so basic to film that audiences are virtually unaware of it.

The earliest films — once it was realised they could tell stories — were basically attempts to recreate the experience of the theatre (and considered very much theatre's inferior cousin). The camera was static, as if from the point of view of a member of the audience, and single scenes in the drama were played out in front of it. There was no notion of moving the camera, changing camera angles, editing together different shots within the same scene, or cutting dynamically between scenes. Even such standard procedures as cutting together two people talking from separate shots over each actor's shoulder was a later development. There was no notion that the camera itself could convey meaning. This exchange between the seminal American director DW Griffith and his executives in 1908 gives a flavour of the unsophisticated attitude of the early years:

When Mr Griffith suggested a scene showing Annie Lee waiting for her husband's return to be followed by a scene of Enoch [her husband] cast away on a desert island, it was altogether too distracting.

"How can you tell a story jumping about like that? The people won't know what it's about."

"Well," said Mr Griffith, "doesn't Dickens write that way?"
 "Yes, but that's Dickens; that's novel writing; that's different."¹

To us, it is perfectly obvious that a shot of a woman waiting, combined with a shot of the person she is waiting for stuck on a desert island, means she is waiting in vain. We relate the two shots together. To the company executives in 1908, it was incomprehensible.

Griffith, more than any other early film-maker, transformed this understanding. His two great films, *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* developed a virtuoso apparatus of cinematic techniques. The assassination of Lincoln in *Birth of a Nation*, for example, consists of fifty-five shots, cutting between Lincoln, his assassin, the play Lincoln is watching, and members of the audience, the intercutting gradually speeding up. His predecessors would have shot the whole thing in one go (or very few shots), with none of the dramatic tension.

The Russian revolutionary film-makers were avowedly in Griffith's debt. In one sense this is odd, because Griffith was politically awful — *Birth of a Nation* is based on a book called *The Clansman*, and its hero is a member of the Ku Klux Klan fighting to defend the 'Aryan race' from freed black slaves after the American Civil War; it played a role in reviving the KKK in the early twentieth century. But it was Griffith's method which so influenced the Soviet film-makers of the twenties.

The Kuleshov Workshop, a radical group set up after the revolution, and which included all the great Soviet film-makers including Eisenstein, studied Griffith's films so much that their copies literally disintegrated.

Lev Kuleshov, the group's founder, was fascinated by the ways in which editing could create meaning beyond that of the shots in isolation. In a famous experiment, audiences were shown a short film which cut together the face of an actor — a pre-revolutionary matinee idol — and, in turn, a bowl of hot soup, a woman lying in a coffin, and a little girl playing with a teddy bear. The audiences raved about the skill of the actor in showing subtly varied emotions — hunger, sadness, joy — in relation to each image. But in fact, the actor's expression was identical in each case. The audience had drawn meaning from the relationship between the different images. To Kuleshov and his group, this was a revolutionary discovery; it became known as the 'Kuleshov effect'.

The Bolshevik government was no less excited by the potential of film. Lunacharsky, the Commissar for Education, who was himself a playwright, commented:

*There is no doubt that cinema art is a first-class and perhaps even incomparable instrument for the dissemination of all sorts of ideas... Its effects reach where even the book cannot reach, and it is, of course, more powerful than any narrow kind of propaganda. The Russian revolution... should long since have turned its attention to cinema as its natural instrument.*²

In fact, of course, it did 'turn its attention' to cinema, very early on. During the civil war, revolutionary propaganda films were used by the Red Army as a way of educating and entertaining troops — 'agit-trains' toured the fronts. It was here that Eisenstein cut his teeth.

There were three chief influences on the revolutionary film-makers. The first was DW Griffith, whose films were by far the most sophisticated yet made. The second was experimental, revolutionary theatre. And the third, often understated in accounts of the

period, was the revolution itself. All of them were committed to the revolution, and made films intended as a contribution to it — not merely as propaganda, although they saw a role for that — but as an attempt to develop a Marxist aesthetic; to this extent they identified with 'Proletkult', the effort to create a 'proletarian culture', about which both Lenin and Trotsky were sceptical if not dismissive. They are distinguished from all previous film-makers, therefore, by the politics of their films, and by their intensely *theoretical* approach — which is especially true of Eisenstein. They attempted to develop their films in terms of Marxist theory, not only regarding the subject matter, but the method of film-making itself.

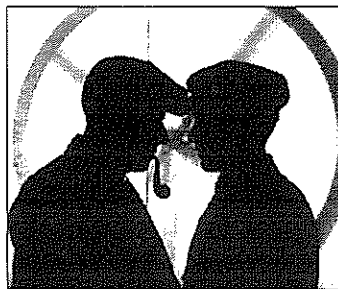
Eisenstein worked first in experimental theatre, before turning seriously to film. It is important to understand the tremendous ferment of creative ideas in Russia in this period; it is, indeed, one of the features which marks it out as a *revolution*, rather than a mere transfer of power. Moscow's Proletkult Theatre, which Eisenstein joined in 1920, was seething with debate and experimentalism. The world-famous director and actor Stanislavsky (founder of 'method' acting later popularised by James Dean, Marlon Brando, et al) gave daily lectures; Vsevolod Meyerhold, whose theories were the diametrical opposite, argued for his conceptions; the great poet Mayakovsky put out manifestos; there were debates and discussions on everything from Hindu philosophy to Freudianism and Pavlovian psychology (Pavlov was an academic in Moscow at the time).

Eisenstein was influenced by Meyerhold's experimental theatre. One of Eisenstein's productions turned the theatre into a circus with trapeze artists, tightropes and parallel bars. He staged an agitational play, *Gas Masks*, in the Moscow gas works, incorporating the actual workers arriving at work into the production. So it was through the theatre that Eisenstein first developed his theory of 'montage'. He concluded, however, that this theory could not be fulfilled in the theatre: "It is absurd to perfect a wooden plough; you must order a tractor."

The tractor was film, and in 1924, Eisenstein was commissioned by the Proletkult Theatre to make the film which became his first feature, *Strike*. It was to be one of eight films tracing the development of the Communist Party; although in the event, Eisenstein's was the only one which was finished.

Two features mark *Strike* out. One is the development of Eisenstein's theory of editing, discussed below. The other — which is a feature of all his early films, and distinguished him from many of his contemporaries — is that there is no single central character. Rather, the masses themselves — the striking workers — are the protagonist. These days, such a conception would be unlikely to receive funding, either in America or Europe. It was not a failure of dramatic imagination on Eisenstein's part, either: it was a deliberate attempt to abandon the concept of an individual 'hero', and instead present the working class masses as the subjective agent in the drama.

Eisenstein used early versions of his montage techniques to put across a dramatic message. In his theatre productions, he had worked out a system of 'the montage of attractions' — based on a theory of audience perception. Eisenstein believed that the emotional reactions of audiences could almost be calculated (the influence of Pavlov is obvious), and different images combined in ways to produce the right effect. This is not (see below) quite as manipulative as it sounds, although he was accused, then and later, of manipulative conceptions. In *Strike*, the idea — following the 'Kuleshov experiment' — is to produce an emotional result greater than the sum of its parts (the individual shots). He also described what he was doing as 'agit-Guignol' — Guignol being a Paris theatre specialising in the realistic depiction of violence.



Strike (1924): Police informers discuss possible troublemakers.



The Battleship Potemkin (1925): The Odessa Steps sequence — Tsarist troops fire on a crowd gathered to welcome the mutineers.

Strike was considered an impressive debut. In 1925 a 'Jubilee Committee' set up to organise celebrations of the defeated 1905 revolution commissioned Eisenstein to make a film of it. Originally intending a grand epic about the whole revolution, Eisenstein eventually paired his conception down to a drama centred around a single, representative moment from the revolution — the mutiny on the battleship *Potemkin* in the Black Sea.

Battleship Potemkin is widely regarded as Eisenstein's masterpiece (including by Eisenstein himself), and as one of the greatest films ever made, often compared to Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Charlie Chaplin, famously, considered it the best film of all time. And indeed it is an extraordinary achievement. It refines certain dramatic and formal techniques of *Strike* to create a powerful, explosive drama of the struggle against oppression.

Once again, there is no single central character: at different moments in the unfolding story, individuals hold centre stage, but there is no 'viewpoint' character for the whole film. In this story, from the rebellion of the sailors against the rotten meat they are forced to eat, through the 'Odessa steps' sequence — one of the most celebrated scenes in cinematic history — to the final confrontation between the mutinous sailors and the Tsarist fleet, it is the masses who propel the action forward. Eisenstein mixed trained actors with non-actors: he adhered to the popular theory of 'typage', which sought to find actors representative of particular 'types', and tended to favour non-actors — preferably, for example, real peasants to play peasants.

The most famous section of the film is where the people of Odessa are brutally massacred on the city's steps by soldiers and Cossacks. In intricate detail, Eisenstein cuts between the rhythmic



October (1927): The peacock, Kerensky

descent of the soldiers, and the chaotic flight of their victims, focusing on small pockets of the crowd, telling several moving stories purely through images.

A child is shot, and his mother picks up his body,

and climbs the steps to face the firing rifles. Eventually she stands alone before the line of troops, holding out the body of her murdered son; for a moment there is a pause. Then she is shot dead and the soldiers' advance continues.

Another mother, with a child in a pram, is shot dead. As she falls, she knocks the pram down the steps. With the baby inside it accelerates through the crowd, watched in helpless horror by an old woman and a revolutionary student. This sequence, the most famous of all, has been much imitated, for example in Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables*. It is a tour de force of the 'montage' technique — the frequency of the shots gradually accelerating as the drama intensifies.

The 'Odessa Steps' section finishes with the battleship *Potemkin* turning its guns on the Opera Theatre, the officers' headquarters, blasting it to bits.

Battleship Potemkin, does not, however, like many films of the period, end in the tragedy of successful counter-revolution. The ship goes on to confront the Tsarist fleet in the Black Sea. Once again with accelerating editing, the combatants draw closer, *Potemkin* blazing flags calling on the opposing sailors to 'join us' — which they do. The final scenes are of the sailors on the *Potemkin* and the other ships waving their caps at each other in solidarity.

Eisenstein's next film, *October*, commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, was beset by problems from the outset — precisely the problems which were to destroy the fledgling Soviet film industry. On the eve of the film's release, Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party. Since the film truthfully portrayed Trotsky's central role in the historical events of *October*, it fell foul of the censors. Scenes with Trotsky had to be deleted (and have now been lost). Eisenstein's film has never been seen in the version he intended.

October is generally regarded as less successful artistically than *Potemkin*. Eisenstein took his ideas about montage a step further, but audiences reportedly found it difficult to follow. Here Eisenstein pursued his conception of 'intellectual montage', for example in a sequence where Kerensky, head of the provisional government, is intercut with scenes of a strutting peacock, and his militia with tin soldiers. In other words, images are used which are not straightforwardly part of the action. Nevertheless, the film lacks the dramatic drive of his earlier feature.

There were different theories of montage among Soviet filmmakers. Eisenstein's notions of 'dialectical' and 'intellectual' montage are the most radical, not just because they are an attempt explicitly to theorise film editing in Marxist terms, but because they are most distinct from the methods of editing typical of mainstream film from Griffith onwards. Eisenstein felt that the emotional power of the images juxtaposed through montage came from the *conflict* between them. Rather than smoothly progress from one image to the next, the montage of images should *shock, jar*. An important aspect of the theory is that this forces audiences not to be merely passive spectators, but to be active participants, 'working' to derive meaning from what they see. The editing of Kerensky and the peacock seems to us didactic and a bit crude; and while it was certainly intended to have educational and propaganda value, Eisenstein's idea was that an audience couldn't passively absorb such images: they had to interpret them, which demanded a high level of involvement.

The strength of montage resides in this, that it includes in the creative process the emotions and the mind of the spectator... [T]he spectator is drawn into a creative act in which his individuality is not subordinated to the author's individuality... [E]very spectator, in correspondence with his individuality, and in his own way and out of his own experience — out of the womb of his fantasy, out of the warp and

*welt of his associations, all conditioned by the premises of his character, habits and social appurtenances, creates an image in accordance with the representational guidance suggested by the author, leading him to understanding and experience of the author's theme.*³

Eisenstein saw montage as characteristic of all art, not only film, because the artist selects information which, in juxtaposition, forms a dramatic image. In his book *The Film Sense*, published in 1943, he analyses everything from paintings (or plans for them) by Da Vinci to poems by Pushkin and Milton to show how they employed the basic principles of montage to create an emotional effect.

Eisenstein tried to imbue his films with what he saw as a dialectical conception of conflict at every level. In 1939, explaining *Potemkin*, he described the entire structure of the film as operating dialectically.⁴ The moment at which the mother ascends the steps with her dead son to confront the line of soldiers is a dialectical turning point (descent, violence, followed by ascent, a call for peace). He analysed the entire film in such terms — movement in one direction, producing movement in the opposite direction, synthesising into some greater meaning. It is a sophisticated theory of film aesthetics; indeed, it was not until after the Second World War that people began to write in such theoretical terms about film.⁵

Not all Eisenstein's contemporaries agreed with him. Vsevolod Pudovkin — an early collaborator of Kuleshov, who in the twenties was considered as great as Eisenstein, but whose name is now less familiar — made much more personal films, which are perhaps closer to the mainstream European tradition. *Mother*, based on a story by Gorky, is like *Potemkin* set during the 1905 revolution. But where Eisenstein's vision was huge and epic, Pudovkin's focused on a single family. The father, a drunk, joins the counter-revolutionary Black Hundreds, and is sent to attack a strike. But among the strikers is his son. The son is later arrested, and naively betrayed by his mother. She is politicised by her experience of Tsarist 'justice', and helps her son escape from prison. They meet again in a May Day demonstration, which is attacked by Cossacks.

Pudovkin rejected Eisenstein's theory of 'dialectical montage', arguing instead for what he called *linkage*.

Alexander Dovzhenko, a Ukrainian, also made more intimate films; the best known is *Earth*, the story of a peasant family, which centres on the themes of life and death — as political as Eisenstein, but on a much smaller scale.

At a slight tangent to all of these film dramatists was Dziga Vertov, maker of the powerful and influential *Man with a movie camera* (1928) and other documentaries. He was the leader of a group calling themselves the 'kinoki', or 'cinema eye'. (Eisenstein, characteristically, commented "I don't believe in the kino-eye, I believe in the kino-fist.") They rejected conventional narrative, in favour of the "organisation of camera recorded documentary material." The later school of 'cinéma verité' is named after Vertov's 'kino-pravda' collection of documentaries. (Vertov's brother, interestingly, was the cinematographer in Elia Kazan's Oscar-winning *On the Waterfront* in the 1950s.)

All these film-makers — there were others, of course⁶ — fell foul of the rise of Stalin. Eisenstein was to some extent protected by his international reputation. He was sent to Hollywood in 1930, where he worked on a number of projects, most notably *Que Viva Mexico!* with Upton Sinclair.⁷ None of these projects came

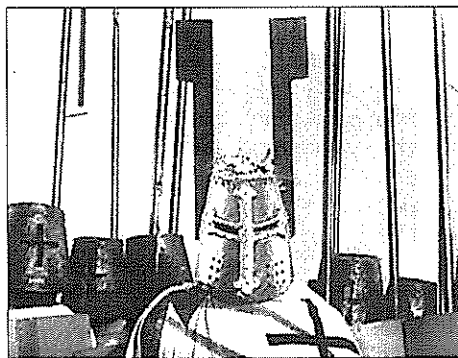
to fruition: Eisenstein didn't get on well with the Hollywood system.⁸

But Stalin, afraid of a high-profile defection, had him brought back to the USSR. Eisenstein was initially out of favour with the Kremlin in the 1930s, and several projects were abandoned, including what would have been his first sound film, based on a Turgenev short story. First he fell ill; then the bureaucracy demanded huge changes to force the film to accord with 'socialist realism'. In the end it was never made, and after a harsh attack on him for ideological errors in *Pravda*, Eisenstein was forced to recant the film.

However, when Shumiatsky, the Stalinist head of film production, was himself purged in the later thirties, Eisenstein was commissioned to make *Alexander Nevsky*. It was his first film with sound, made in 1938.

Unlike many of their American contemporaries, who had been horrified by the advent of sound, believing it would destroy cinematic art, the Russians were enthusiastic about it.⁹ Eisenstein commented:

*To remove the barriers between sight and sound, between the seen world and the heard world! To bring about a unit and a harmonious relationship between these two opposite spheres. What an absorbing task!*¹⁰



Alexander Nevsky (1938): Teuton knights

Alexander Nevsky is more like an opera (and deliberately so) than a normal narrative film, with an original score composed by Prokofiev which includes singing, mostly choral, that comments on the action. It describes the thirteenth century battle between the people of Novgorod and invading Germans. It was commissioned to be 'a film with a purpose', and it is an explicit propaganda piece, aiming to rouse the Russian people against the threat of Nazi invasion. After the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939, the film was withdrawn in Russia, because it was considered too anti-German, but

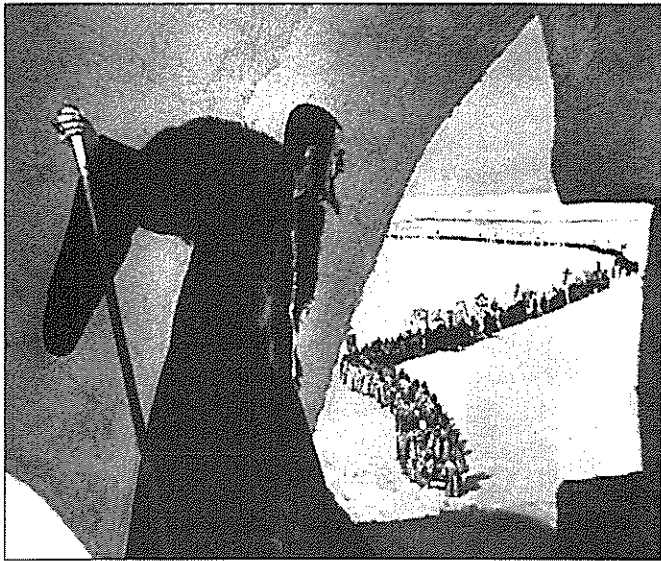
then revived when Hitler invaded the USSR.

The story, while it does concern the somewhat messianic exploits of Prince Alexander in fighting off the Teutons, poses the issues in quite clear *class* terms. Nevsky raises a peasant army, threatening the rich that if they fail to support the war, the peasants will turn on them. It is an army which includes, incidentally, one chain-mailed woman, who is recognised in the conclusion as the bravest fighter on the field. Nevertheless it is more a nationalistic film than a socialist one; Prokofiev's music, similarly, is stirring — but nationalistic — stuff.

Nevsky is not a sound film in the obvious sense. There is dialogue; but it is clear Eisenstein was not entirely comfortable with it. The blend of sound and image which excited him is largely between his visual images and Prokofiev's music. Some sections of the film have no sound at all, except for the music.

By far the longest section of *Alexander Nevsky* — in which there is very little dialogue — is the famous 'battle on the ice', an extraordinary sequence. Eisenstein has the Teutons dressed in white, with crosses (on their arms — reminiscent of swastikas), and helmets with narrow eye-slits evoking the Ku Klux Klan (again, the influence of Griffith). They move always in sharp geometric formations, while the Russians, with visible faces, are more chaotic, individual; woven into the epic drama is a more personal one of two warriors' rivalry for a beautiful woman.

After the invaders' rout, most of what's left of their army is swallowed up by the unforgiving ice. It is often noted that this serves as a prescient allegory for what was indeed to happen, more or less,



Ivan the Terrible Part 1 (1944): The people of Moscow bid Ivan return from exile to 'work for the future of the great state of Russia'.

to Hitler's army in the Second World War.

Eisenstein continued to have a fraught relationship with the Stalinist state.¹¹ *Ivan the Terrible Part One* was a huge success; Part Two was withdrawn for political reasons; and Part Three was destroyed. Reputedly as a result of the shock, Eisenstein had a heart attack and died, in 1948.

By the late twenties, the experimental arts which had exploded in the years following the revolution were being forced into the strait-jacket of 'socialist realism', which became official policy in 1933. 'Socialist Realism' demanded of art first that it present only uplifting images for the masses, and second that it adopt only the crudest pseudo-realist forms.

All the great film-makers were accused at one time or another of 'formalist errors'. They were, indeed, formalists. Formalism was an aesthetic theory which insisted that it was meaningless to separate a work of art's contents from its form. It is obvious that montage theory is intrinsically formalist, holding that the form (the editing and juxtaposition of images) determines the meaning. But all the Stalinist bureaucrats meant was that the film-makers were too experimental and intellectual. They wanted simple, crudely propagandist stuff.¹²

The result was that the great period of film-making ended in the 1930s.¹³

All this is highly instructive about the degeneration, or destruction, of the Russian revolution as a whole. The blossoming of path-breaking film-making — recognised as such throughout the world — is one index of the fact that a *revolution* had taken place. Great films were being made in the twenties and thirties elsewhere of course (in America, and Germany, for example), which strongly influenced Eisenstein and his contemporaries. But nowhere was there such a fever for invention and theory, for breaking new ground. That the Stalinist counter-revolution murdered this creativity may seem a small thing in comparison with labour camps, mass terror and millions of dead. But it is a measure of it.

How far is the Soviet cinema of the 1920s relevant to film-makers today? The conditions which created it cannot be recalled into being at will; and even if they were, seventy years have passed. A socialist revolution tomorrow would undertake its own artistic experiments, rather than merely try to recapture those of the early USSR. And much of what Eisenstein and the rest did simply could not be reproduced in contemporary film. For example, Eisenstein's attempts to tell stories without central characters is hard to copy. A Soviet audience watching *Potemkin* or *Strike* in the 1920s had lived through the revolution; some of them had lived through

1905, as well. They understood that 'the masses' were the hero, because it was their own experience. Today, when Ken Loach tells the story of the Spanish Civil War, he has to do it through the eyes of a worker from Liverpool, not just to get funding, but because a modern audience has not had the same experience. John Sayles in *Matewan* tries to establish the community of striking miners as the 'hero'; but even then, there are two characters in particular through whom we see the unfolding tragedy, with whom we identify.

The influence of the Russian revolutionary film-makers on subsequent film history is immense. If audiences today barely notice editing, it is to no small extent because of the vast breakthroughs in film-making technique perfected in Russia in the twenties. More than that, their films serve to remind us of what is possible when the working class seizes power, of the artistic and cultural revolution which will take place.

Footnotes

1. Quoted in David A Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* p67.
2. Quoted in Mark Joyce, *The Soviet Montage Cinema of the 1920s*, in Jill Nelmes (ed), *An Introduction to Film Studies*, p333.
3. Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, pp34-35.
4. See the *Introduction* to the screenplay of *Battleship Potemkin* (Faber edition).
5. In the 1950s, some film critics and directors began to develop a theory which rejected the primacy of montage in favour of 'mise-en-scène', i.e. what's in front of the camera and how the camera shoots it. This approach was initiated by André Bazin and the French *Cahiers du Cinéma* group, which included many of the directors who later formed the highly influential 'New Wave' — François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, etc. In place of the Griffith/Eisenstein tradition which placed all its emphasis on editing, they advocated an approach which had achieved its highest expression in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*; here, although there are montage sequences, the most important thing is how the individual shots are composed, and how drama takes place within each shot. With the advent of widescreen and new camera technology, according to this theory, it was possible to give the audience more democratic control over what they chose to see within the frame (for example, if it is possible to show two people speaking, both in close-up, the spectator can choose where to look; Eisenstein's montage is more manipulative). For the same reason, this school favoured 'deep focus', in which everything in front of the camera is equally in focus, rather than prioritising particular elements. The New Wave films, especially Godard's, are highly committed politically (on the Left), but in a very different way to early Soviet cinema.
6. Notably Esther Shub, whose *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927) was compiled from 60,000 metres of film, entirely taken from old newsreels.
7. Eisenstein completed one more film before going to the United States, *Old and New* — released in English under the title *The General Line* — a film about collectivisation of the land. Among those planned over the next few years which were never made was a film entitled *Capital*, which was intended to be a cinematic exposition of Marxist theory, and one about the Haitian revolution.
8. Some of *Que Viva Mexico!* was shot, and the footage used in a silent melodrama by Hugo Reisenfeld, *Thunder Over Mexico* (1933).
9. Objections to sound were by no means entirely stupid. Most early sound films are very static, because of the limitations in microphone technology, and have none of the fluidity and dynamism of the great silent films.
10. *The Film Sense*, p74.
11. Eisenstein's homosexuality was kept a secret from Stalin, who would have been horrified by it. There are no explicitly homoerotic references in Eisenstein's films, although some commentators have spotted subliminal ones.
12. Pudovkin, who made films into the sound era, had party hacks assigned to him to make sure he stuck to 'socialist realism' in his films (a fate endured by Eisenstein for *Alexander Nevsky*). All the revolutionary film-makers were hounded by the state to enforce artistic conformity.
13. Russian film revived after the Krushchev thaw in the fifties. The most notable post-war Soviet directors include Sergei Parajanov and Andrei Tarkovsky.

Neither Westminster nor Brussels but Auchtermuchty?

By Stan Crooke

THE Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) launched its general election campaign last month. It will be contesting some 15 seats in Scotland, including all 10 seats in Glasgow.

The SSA is a coming together of Scottish Militant Labour, ex-Labour Party and ex-SNP members, one of the factions of Scottish Stalinism, animal rights campaigners, environmental activists and various other left-leaning individuals.

The rational core of the SSA's election strategy (and of the SSA as a whole) is the need to relate, on the one hand, to the widespread revulsion in Scotland at the Labour Party's shift to the right, and, on the other hand, to the consistently high level of support for Scottish self-government.

Rather less rational, however, is the SSA's election platform.

"Drive out the Tories/Back the Glasgow Ten!" declares the SSA's Glasgow broadsheet. But voting for the SSA in Scotland won't drive out the Tories — the SSA is fielding only 15 candidates. And voting SSA in Glasgow won't drive out any Tories either — the Tories don't have a single MP in Glasgow.

For whom, then, should people vote in order to "drive out the Tories"? The SSA *does not say* — probably because some of its members would call for a vote for Labour, some would call for a vote for the SNP, and some would advocate abstention.

Indeed, it is difficult to see why the SSA wants to "drive out the Tories" anyway, given that the SSA's election broadsheet explains that "the alternative on offer from Labour, the Liberals and the SNP is more Toryism."

On the key question in the forthcoming general election — who should people vote for to form the next government? — the SSA is simply silent.

The lead demand in the SSA's election platform is for "a real parliament — controlled by the

Scottish people, for the Scottish people... a parliament prepared to transform Scotland into a modern socialist democracy."

This "real parliament" demanded by the SSA is not to be confused with "a tame assembly under the thumb of Westminster" (the Labour version) nor "a puppet parliament under the thumb of Brussels" (the SNP version).

But does the SSA advocate Scottish independence, or Scottish self-government within the framework of the United Kingdom? Again, the SSA is silent on the question — and it is easy to see why.

If the SSA were to come down on one side or the other, it would split more or less down the middle.

"On the key question in the forthcoming general election — who should people vote for to form the next government? — the SSA is simply silent."

Another notable omission in the platform of an organisation so concerned with the relationships between the national identities of the United Kingdom is the question of Ireland. The issue is avoided for the same reason.

The SSA can spell out its policies in favour of "the re-introduction of tram services, more pedestrian areas, and more traffic-calming measures and pedestrian crossings." But it cannot find anything to say about Ireland, despite (or because of?) the significance of Irish politics in Scotland!

The SSA does not advocate withdrawal from the European Union. It "rejects the Little Englander outlook of the Tory Eurosceptics" and advocates "co-operation with the rest of Europe on progressive policies."

At the same time (and probably

under the pressure of the Stalinist faction within it), however, it regurgitates the arguments of various Eurosceptic factions.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between its Europhile and Eurosceptic factions, the SSA uses the ambiguous formulation of "a Scottish parliament which will put the interests of the Scottish people before the rules of the Maastricht Treaty."

The bulk of the SSA's election platform is largely uncontentious — renationalisation of privatised industries, scrapping all anti-union legislation, rebuilding the welfare state, restoration of all cuts in council funding, no new motorways, and "more cycle tracks and cycle lanes." What is less clear, however, is how these demands are to be achieved.

By a Westminster parliament run by the Tories or by the Blairite Tories? Or by a "real Scottish parliament" which does not yet even exist?

The incoherence of the SSA's election platform is rooted in its failure to respond politically rather than (in the manner of the SWP) emotionally to Labour's shift to the right, and to support for Scottish self-government.

Instead of mobilising against Blair's attempts to destroy Labour-union links, the SSA behaves as if those links had already been broken and postures as the socialist alternative to New Labour.

Instead of challenging all the nonsense which often accompanies the demand for Scottish self-government, the SSA adopts the demand as the lynchpin of its election platform and thereby adds yet another layer of confusion to the demand.

The SSA does not (yet) suffer from the idiocies of the SWP. It does at least attempt to relate to events and political shifts in the real world. What it lacks, however, is an adequate political programme and an effective political strategy.

The life and times of Bob Pennington

By Patrick Avaakum

BOB Pennington's last home, I'm told, was a spike hostel; he died recently, alone in Brighton on a park bench. 70 years old, Bob Pennington had been an active revolutionary socialist for 40 years. In those years Pennington wrote many good articles and pamphlets. He recruited many people to class-struggle politics and helped educate them in politics. He took part in and sometimes organised working-class battles in industry, inside the labour movement, and on the streets against racists, fascists and police.

At one time or another he was a prominent figure in most of the larger organisations of Trotskyists.

His political life was in many ways an epitome of the post-Trotsky Trotskyist movement. Even the circumstance of his end, dying amidst outcasts and booze-solaced, socially-isolated people, was redolent of much of the recent fate of that movement.

The best way to commemorate Bob Pennington and to accord him the respect which is his due is critically to evaluate his political life. I knew Bob Pennington quite well at one time, brought into contact with him about 1970 by a busily ecumenical friend, Peter Graham*, with whom Pennington had much in common, not least waywardness and Lothario-ism.

The first three decades of Pennington's Trotskyism were years when, objectively, it was possible that the Trotskyists might have created a sizeable, stable, non-sectarian, intellectually self-regenerating movement; and, doing that, we might have ensured a better outcome from the protracted class struggles of the 1950s, '60s and '70s — the struggles which ended, in historic fact, with the victory of the Thatcherites. Instead we have a cluster of mainly sterile sects. What can Bob Pennington's life tell us about the reasons for that? What can his experience tell us about what we ourselves must do in the future?

II

BOB Pennington left the Communist Party and joined the British Trotskyist movement in 1951. That was the year of the so-called Third World Congress of the Fourth International. In reality this was the first congress of a new hybrid movement. It continued to call itself the Fourth International, but its governing ideas and postures were radically at variance with those of Trotsky and the Fourth International he had founded in the '30s. This Fourth International was politically more distant from Trotsky's Fourth International than Trotsky's had been from the first "Fourth International" — the one set up in 1921 by the sectarian "council



After Khrushchev's savage repression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution many CPers joined the Trotskyists

Communists", such as Herman Gorter, Anton Pannekoek and Sylvia Pankhurst.

The organisation, still claiming continuity with Trotsky, and religiously using Trotsky's words as a sacerdotal language — but with different meanings, values and perspectives attached to them — was reconstituted on a new political basis. Incorporated into this new "Trotskyism" was much that belonged properly to the political heritage of the so-called "Brandlerites", the soft-on-Stalinism Right-Communist opposition of the 1930s. Against Trotsky they denied

that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a distinct social formation, and rejected his call for a new — "political" — revolution to overthrow it. Trotsky had been their bitter critic and enemy and they his.

Maintaining Trotsky's programme for a new ('political') working class revolution in the Soviet Union, the New Trotskyists advocated mere reform for Stalinist China, Yugoslavia and, later, Vietnam and Cuba. Their politics were incoherent and inevitably produced chronic instability. 1951 was the year in which Trotsky's widow, Natalia, felt obliged, after a long internal struggle, to break publicly with the new "Fourth International" because of its "critical support" for the Soviet bloc. Tendencies which had agreed with Natalia on Stalinism had been forced out of the International. The "Fourth International" Pennington entered in 1951 was deep in a crisis of political identity and perspectives from which it would never emerge.

At the core of the positions of "New Trotskyism" codified at the 1951 congress was an acceptance of international Stalinism — which had recently taken control of new areas amounting to a sixth of the Earth, and containing hundreds of millions of people — as the motor-force, and first stage of a rapidly-unfolding progressive world revolution. The neo-Trotskyists did still criticise Stalinism, and propound a programme for working-class "political" revolution, or drastic reform, in the Stalinist states. But despite their faults those states were, they said, "in transition to socialism". Those "degenerated and deformed" societies were the actually-existing "first stage" of the socialist revolution. Despite everything, they were the progressive alternative to capitalism and imperialism.

Trotsky had defined the bureaucratically collectivised property of the USSR as only "potentially progressive" — it depended on whether or not the working class could overthrow the bureaucracy — but, to the New Trotskyists, nationalised property created by Stalin's armies or Mao Zedong's totalitarian state was both progressive and entirely working class.

The Stalinist regimes behaved like the most brutal imperialism; Trotsky had already in 1939 pointed out the elements of imperialism

* See *Workers' Liberty* 36.

in the USSR's foreign policy; but somehow to the neo-Trotskyists this was not imperialism. "Imperialism" gradually became not a term to describe policy or actions by states but a synonym for advanced capitalism. Over decades some of the New Trotskyists would come to embrace a millenarian "anti-imperialism" that was no more than a hopeless Third World utopian hostility to the modern world.

Thus Trotsky's old policy of defence of the Soviet Union, which he coupled with unsparing hostility to the Stalinist regime, and with a historical perspective in which USSR Stalinism was seen as a regime of degeneracy and decline that could not long survive, was turned into its opposite: "critical but unconditional" defence of Stalinist imperialism and "unconditional" support for its expansion. It was "the revolution", in all its unexpected complexities. The Stalinist states were defined in an opposite way to Trotsky's definition of the USSR, as a regime of crisis — and if it was not that, Trotsky had said, it was a new form of class society — they were societies "in transition to socialism". This gutted "Trotskyism", into which had been interpolated politics and perspectives that Trotsky had spurned with contempt as incompatible with elementary Marxism, became an ideology colouring up reality to sustain the pipe-dream that the world was moving rapidly towards socialism, and hysterical fantasies that the Stalinists "for now" were blazing humanity's trail to the classless society. The neo-Trotskyists, despite their best intentions, despite their sincere criticisms of Stalinism and active opposition to it, were on all major questions of world politics satellites of the Stalinist world system. Their entire conception of the world generated in them a compulsion to be such satellites and committed them to the view that to be anything else was to betray the socialist revolution.

They had come a very long way from Trotsky. The typical soul-searching debates of this current in the '50s concerned their own *raison d'être*: in face of the new Stalinist revolutions, like the Chinese and the Yugoslav, was there a role for Trotskyism, even their radically recast variant of it? Many said no, and either joined the Stalinists or left politics. (One of them is a respected left wing MP). The others were driven to ridiculous positions: for example, though China was socially and politically identical to the USSR, really, some of them said, it was not Stalinist: Mao Zedong was the legatee of Trotsky, not Stalin!

And yet, apart from the Shachtman group in the USA, which was 'bio-degrading' into social-democracy, and a few minuscule and as a rule passive groups such as *Socialist Review* in Britain, this was almost all that was left of the old revolutionary socialism and communism after the prolonged and multifarious depredations of Stalinism and fascism, followed by post-war capitalist prosperity. And in their own way the neo-Trotskyists propagated socialist ideas; they circulated Trotsky's books; they criticised Stalinism, albeit inadequately, from a democratic working-class point of view; and they prosecuted the working class struggle. They represented the old inextinguishable socialist hope for something better than capitalism and Stalinism.

In 1953 James P Cannon and his British co-thinkers, of whom Pennington was one, would recoil against some of "1951 Trotskyism". But these belatedly "orthodox-Trotskyist" Cannonites never abandoned the premises of the 1951 Congress and its basic conclusions about Stalinism. Rejecting too-blatant accommodation to the Stalinists, they continued to reason, not coherently, within that 1951 neo-Trotskyist framework. Apart

from a brief lurch, Pennington's political life would be spent within the current shaped by the ideas of 1951 and the partial and incoherent "orthodox Trotskyist" reactions against them.

The Trotskyist organisation Pennington joined in 1951 was led by Gerry Healy. It worked in the Labour Party, in the Labour League of Youth, and in the trade unions, around a newspaper called *Socialist Outlook*. It had a notoriously stifling and authoritarian Stalinist-type regime, but it was despite everything a serious organisation, able to build support in the working class for broadly revolutionary socialist ideas.

Pennington played an important part in one of the key episodes of the class struggle in which the Healy group was significant: the secession of 16,000 dockers in Hull, Liverpool and Manchester from the autocratic TGWU and the attempt to make the little London stevedores' union, the NASD, into a replacement democratic national dockers' union. For some years before 1957, Pennington worked as a full-time NASD organiser in Liverpool and was thus an organiser of major strikes.

III

IN February 1956 Nikita Khrushchev, the first reforming Stalinist Tsar, denounced his predecessor Stalin as a paranoid mass murderer. Then Khrushchev himself savagely repressed the Hungarian revolution. As a result the British Communist Party, which then had about 40,000 members, was thrown into turmoil. There was open and relatively free discussion for the first time in decades. Many CPers were emboldened to read the arch-heretic Trotsky; many left the CP; some hundreds joined the Trotskyists.

Very, very little of Trotsky was by this date in print. Decades of weeding-out by Catholic-Actionists and by Stalinists — numerous in the Labour Party, and thus on local councils too — had made books like Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* and *Revolution Betrayed* uncommon even in public libraries. So the

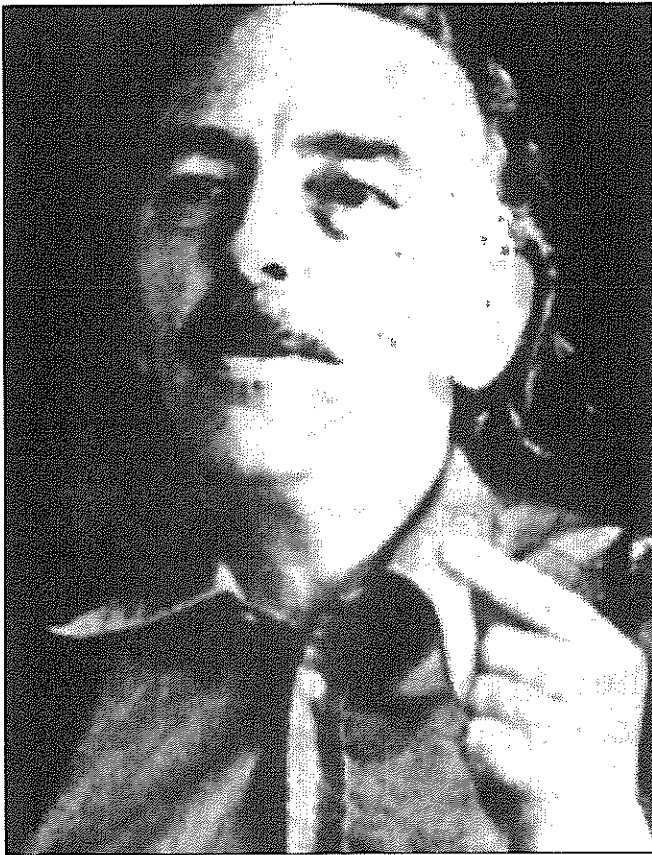
old books and pamphlets circulated from hand to hand until they fell apart. The Healy group did not have a publication worth speaking of when this crisis broke (their paper had been banned by the Labour Party in 1954). Accepting the ban in order to stay with the large left-wing Bevanite movement in the Labour Party, they sold *Tribune*, the Labour left paper. They were able to recruit ex-CPers because of their dedication and hard-nosed persistence and because they represented a force, however weak, in the labour movement. They

systematically visited or otherwise accosted every CP dissident they got to hear of. As one of them, Bill Hunter, later put it, didactically: when you got someone's address, you went to knock on the door even if all you said was "Balls!"

By January 1957 the group was able to start an impressive bimonthly journal, *Labour Review*, and by May a tiny weekly, *The Newsletter* — in size the equivalent of eight pages of *Workers' Liberty* and sometimes on a bad week, half that. Pennington, who had been an effective worker with dissident CPers in the north-west, was brought to London from Liverpool to help consolidate and expand the newly enlarged and better endowed organisation. Soon he was in the thick of activity against the Mosley fascists in Notting Hill, where in 1958 anti-West-Indian race riots had broken out.

An older comrade once gave me the following description of Pennington in action at Notting Hill. Up on the mobile "soap box" platform at a street meeting, Pennington, wearing a loud yellow

"Up on the mobile 'soap box' platform at a street meeting, Pennington, wearing a loud yellow rollneck jumper, wags a finger scornfully at a fascist-minded heckler in the crowd, and tells him, in practical, down-to-earth, North-of-England tones: 'Why don't you catch on to yourself? You'll never get anywhere in Britain with that rubbish!'"



Bob Pennington speaking at the meeting in the Conway Hall to protest at the police raid on *Workers' Fight* (a forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) in September 1973.

rollneck jumper, wags a finger scornfully at a fascist-minded heckler in the crowd, and tells him, in practical, down-to-earth, North-of-England tones: "Why don't you catch on to yourself? You'll never get anywhere in Britain with that rubbish!" What had impressed and at first startled my informant was Pennington's matter-of-fact, non-doctrinaire, mock-matey approach, the appeal to the common sense of even a fascist.

The Healy group then might have laid the basis for a mass Trotskyist movement. It was rooted in both the Labour Party and the trade unions — in 1958 it could get 500 working class militants to a rank and file national conference. It had a chance no subsequent group has had. It failed because it was seriously diseased, having neither a realistic assessment of the state of capitalism (then at the height of the long post-war boom) nor the internal democracy that would have allowed it to develop one by way of free discussion. They held out vastly unrealistic perspectives of imminent major capitalist crisis, big revolutionary struggles — and immediate large-scale growth for the organisation. In February 1959 the Healy group, privately known for a decade as "The Club", publicly relaunched itself as the Socialist Labour League, and was immediately proscribed by the Labour Party. From mid-1959 the disoriented, tightly 'bossed' group went into a protracted crisis. A series of prominent individuals — almost all the prominent ex-CPers — and small groups left, usually with acrimony, and more than once after violent confrontations with Healy or his supporters.

IV

THROUGHOUT this period of growth and then disintegration — though the group was not reduced to anything near its pre-'56 size and would soon begin to recruit large numbers of young people in the Labour Party Young Socialists — Pennington functioned as Healy's hatchet-man. Then, without much warning, a month or so after Brian Behan, the group Chairman, last of the

prominent ex-CPers, had been expelled, Healy-style, on the eve of the 1960 group conference, Pennington and a small group, led by the neuro-surgeon Christopher Pallas, suddenly broke with the organisation and came out as supporters of the politics of the French "ultra-state-capitalist" (as we used to say) current led by Cornelius Castoriades (who was variously known as Pierre Chaulieu or Paul Cardan). This tendency was virtually anarchist.

On the fringes of Healy's comparatively large neo-Trotskyist organisation there was then a cluster of small, hybrid groups and "independent" individuals, ultra-left and anti-Bolshevik in varying degrees. The *Socialist Review* group, forerunner of the SWP, was one. In autumn 1960 *International Socialism* was launched as a printed journal, controlled by *Socialist Review* though pretendedly separate and involving other groups, including the Pallas group, now called *Solidarity*. Pennington became joint editor, with Michael Kidron. Around this magazine the future SWP would group. It was at that stage — despite what some contributors to *Workers' Liberty* have said in these pages — explicitly anti-Leninist.

Pennington did not stay long. He said later that he found the way IS was run — as a Cliff-Kidron family concern — intolerable. He drifted away from *Solidarity* too. Drowning in a sour, carping, obsessive concern with their Trotskyist past, *Solidarity* had a quirky, sniping-from-the-sidelines, conception of politics. They were utterly sterile. Pennington soon realised it, and cut loose. This, as far as I know, was the only time Pennington radically re-examined the foundations of "post '51 Trotskyism". The experiment with *Solidarity* drove him back towards mainstream neo-Trotskyism, and he joined the Revolutionary Socialist League (Militant) in 1963 or '64. The RSL was then the British section of the international current led by Ernest Mandel, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. Long moribund, they began to recruit a smattering of disillusioned SLLers and youth from the Labour Party Young Socialists. They fused with a separate group of USFI supporters, the future IMG.

They were the object of a sustained campaign of bitter animosity from the Healyites, not all of it baseless or just factionalism. A grouping appeared in the Militant echoing the SLL denunciations of Militant. Though it made some just criticisms of Militant, it was effectively working for the SLL, which was now becoming increasingly bizarre, sectarian and destructive. The group's organisers were Ted Knight — who would play an important role on the left in the early '80s as "Red Ted", leader of Lambeth Council — and... Bob Pennington. Knight knowingly worked for Healy. Considering how blatant it all was, it is hard to believe that Pennington was a dupe, but the alternative, that he knowingly worked for Healy, is simply impossible.

Knight and Pennington and the Healyite press campaign succeeded in splitting the newly-fused Militant-IMG group apart. The future IMG had been reluctant participants anyway. Knight and Pennington went with the IMG. Pennington had found his last resting place in politics.

Knight — who had been immersed in the Healy cult from his teens and emotionally and intellectually was incapable of making a decisive break from it — continued to work for Healy. That was known, but proof was another matter. Knight and Pennington were eventually suspended by the IMG.*

Pennington — supporting the USFI but kept outside its ranks — was now in political limbo.

● The second part of this appreciation of Bob Pennington will appear in the next issue of *Workers' Liberty*.

* Knight seems then to have genuinely drifted away from the SLL orbit. He would return to it around 1980, having become leader of Lambeth's Labour council, and — in tandem with Ken Livingstone of the Greater London Council — play the role of an especially malignant and cynical 'fake left' in local government.

The arrogance of the long-distance Zionist*

By Jim Higgins

THIS will be the third time that I have ventured to disagree with Sean Matgamna on the vexed question of Zionism. I do so with some trepidation because, or so it seems, even when I am right I am in reality exposing myself as fundamentally wrong and mischievously so. In my first article I attempted to lighten the subject with a few mildly humorous quips. I was sternly rebuked for this failure of seriousness. Chastened, in part two I adopted a serious tone. Sean responded by regretting my humour had been replaced by "choler, rodomontade, unleavened abuse, some of it purely personal..." Did I really do all of that? I feel particularly cheered to hear that I was guilty of choler and rodomontade, rather like the man who discovered at an advanced age that he had been speaking prose all his life. Normally, of course, I only use unleavened abuse during Passover. Sorry about that.

Having reviewed Sean's articles I can see that they fit quite nicely into the Matgamna mode of polemic. First and foremost, his views are lumped together in such a way that they will sharply divide him from other socialists. This is what Al Richardson calls "consumer socialism" and Marx calls "sectarianism." In practice, this means that since Bernard Dix died, there have been no adherents of the Shachtmanite school of bureaucratic collectivism on these shores and if Sean were to occupy this vacant franchise he would acquire a whole slew of policies to differentiate himself from everybody else. All you need is a file of the *New International* (published monthly between 1936 and 1958) and you can start to kid yourself you are writing with all the style and eloquence of Max Shachtman. Along with all the clever nonsense about Russia you will also inherit the Workers' Party-International Socialist League line on Israel.

A comparison of Sean's article with a sampling of the WP-ISL texts shows that whatever Sean lacks in originality he has made up for in the diligence of his researches into the *New International*. In the September issue of *Workers' Liberty* we have Sean as follows: "Cliff's 1946 pamphlet does not deal at all with the political questions in the Middle East, having more to say about the price of oil than about the rights of national minorities. Where politics should have been there is a vacuum..." Now here is Al Gates in the *New International* in September 1947: "T Cliff's competent analytical work on Palestine, and here too we observed a fine study of the economic growth and problems of the Middle East and the place of Palestine in that situation. Yet the whole work was outstanding for its studied evasion of the political questions of the class and national struggle taking place there."

Gates is more polite than Sean, but that will probably surprise nobody.

Another standard feature of Sean's method is the one where he complains bitterly that he is being abused unfairly as a prelude to unleashing a little of his own venom into the argument. For example, I raised the case of Deir Yassin because it took place in April 1948 and set in motion the Arab refugees, countering Sean who had said that they only fled in May 1948 when the Arab armies started their offensive. In so doing I neglected to mention the killing of 60 Jews by Arabs in the bloody attacks of 1929. For this I was accused of hypocrisy. Perhaps now I should go on to apologise for failing to condemn the similar Arab outrages of 1920, 1921, 1929, 1936 and 1938. In the interests of balance perhaps I should also throw in the massacres of Sabra and Chatila, because I condemn them as well. In the same vein, Sean insists that he does not believe that I, or the SWP, are racist, but in virtually the same breath he repeats his accusation that we are anti-semitic. This does not come from the WP-ISL, I have nowhere in the pro-Israel polemics of Al Gates and the rest seen them accuse their socialist opponents of anti-semitism. For that we must look to official Zionist spokesmen and Sean Matgamna. It is, I suppose, always nice to have two sources of inspiration.

"Self-determination for the Zionists had nothing to do with democracy, because any democratic solution while the Jews remained a minority would have to come to terms with the Arab majority."

Let us now turn to Sean's predilection for discovering sinister and malign purposes in the work of others and constructing a sort of retrospective amalgam. About a quarter of his piece is devoted to a partial and not very informative trawl through Cliff's works on the Middle East. On the strength of his 1946 pamphlet *Middle East at the Crossroads*, this apparently made Cliff, along with Abram Leon, one of the Fourth International's two experts on the Jewish question. Unfortunately, Leon was killed by the Nazis, so after 1946 Cliff must have stood pre-eminent, although Sean assigns a subordinate role to Ernest Mandel. Thus we have the sinister Cliff leading the FI along the road of "anti-semitic anti-Zionism." Unfortunately, by the time Sean got round to this particular fan-

tasy he had forgotten what he had written on the previous page: "In 1967, after the Six Day War, Cliff wrote a pamphlet which is closer in its political conclusions and implied conclusions to what *Workers' Liberty* says than to what the SWP or Jim Higgins say now. The decisive shift came after 1967 and was brought to the present level of nonsense after the Yom Kippur war of 1973. The 'honour' of having established the post 1973 IS/SWP line belongs, I think, to none other than Jim Higgins (in an article in *IS Journal*)." There you have it, comrade readers, Cliff set the style for the FI and especially the American SWP, except that until 1973 his views were not much different from those of *Workers' Liberty*, which I assume are the same as Sean's. Far from Cliff being the *deus ex machina* of anti-Zionist anti-semitism, I am. In *International Socialism* No.64 in 1973, I wrote this seminal offending piece, "Background to the Middle East Crisis." At the same time, the ground-breaking significance of the article passed without a murmur. Nobody, including the author, was aware that it was any more than a very short explanation of the IS Group's attitude to the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, which I had reported for *Socialist Worker*. In the 23 years since it was written probably only Sean Matgamna has read it. Now that Sean, with Holmes-like skill, has unmasked me as the *eminence grise* of "non-racist anti-Semitic anti-Zionism" I too have read it, and regret that it has no claims, subliminal or otherwise, to trend-setting originality.

Delving further into the Matgamna polemical method we encounter that special form of arrogance that insists on setting all the terms of any debate and finding significance in a failure to follow him up any logical blind alley he may choose. Let us then consider his "serious and not entirely rhetorical question, why the Jewish minority, a third of the population in the 1940s, did not have national rights there." Let us leave aside the fact that rhetorical questions are precisely the ones that are not looking for answers, and think about this one. First, in those terms of realpolitik to which Sean is so addicted, who was to afford them national determination in the 1930s and 1940s? Was it the Arab majority? Not a bit of it, the very notion of any kind of accommodation with the Arab majority was totally anathema to the Zionist leadership. Should they have addressed themselves to the British? Actually they did and were turned down. The fact is that there were no rights for self-determination for anyone in Palestine. British policy had been to utilise Zionism as a force to divide and discipline the Arab masses. That is how the Jewish population rose from fewer than 100,000 in 1917 to over 400,000 in 1939 (a third of the total population). The plan was eventually for a Jewish homeland under strict British tutelage. The turning off of Jewish immigration in

* Jim Higgins' suggested title for this piece was "Sean Maxshachtmana".



Jewish cavalry ride through a village destroyed in the 1948 conflict

1939 was because the British were concerned to pacify the Arab majority to safeguard Palestine as a British controlled Middle Eastern hub, especially the oil pipeline, in the war.

The question of self-determination for the Zionists had nothing to do with democracy, because any solution, while the Jewish population remained a minority, would under democratic norms have to be cast in such a way that came to terms with the Arab majority. It is for this reason that the Zionist leadership fought so hard for unrestricted immigration and why the Arabs were against it. It is for the same reason that the Zionists while demanding Jewish immigration were opposed to Arab immigration. It is the same reason why Zionist policy was bitterly opposed to the idea of a constituent assembly. This vexed question of population arithmetic is what distorted the political agenda of Palestine.

With two thirds of the population the Arabs would seem to have a fairly safe majority. In fact, they had a plurality of only 400,000. For the Zionist leadership this was the magic number and to overhaul it took precedence over all other considerations. Such a number might just, with massive difficulty and at the expense mainly of the Arabs, be accommodated. This was the emphasis of Zionist propaganda, despite the fact that Palestine, assuming a complete disregard for the Arabs, could take only a small proportion of the Jews threatened and eventually murdered

by Hitler. The massive propaganda effort was expended on altering Palestine's population statistics, instead of demanding asylum from the US and Britain (who were infinitely better able to provide it) for these and many, many more Jews who were to be lost in Himmler's ovens. This was not a matter of emphasis, shouting louder about Jerusalem than New York, it was a positive opposition to Jews going anywhere other than Palestine. If the intention had been to save Jewish lives at all costs, the argument should have been: "If you will not let Jews into British-mandated Palestine, then you have an urgent and absolute moral responsibility to give them asylum elsewhere." No such campaign was mounted.

Nevertheless, comrades might ask, is not the hallmark of socialist internationalism the free, unfettered flow of all people throughout the world? Why should Palestine be different? The short answer is that immigration as part of a concerted plan that will take over the country, expropriating, expelling and exploiting the native masses, is less immigration and more a long drawn out and aggressive invasion. For socialists, the reactionary character of Zionism is defined by its racist ideology, imbued with the spirit of separation and exclusion, the very reverse of socialist solidarity. It was prepared to ally itself with every reactionary force that might help its purposes. It lobbied such figures as the Kaiser, the Sultan of Turkey, for twenty years it cosied up to British imperialism, finally snuggling into the

embrace of the biggest imperial power of all, the United States. In the process, it has treated the Arab population as a species of *untermensch* and has effectively driven a large portion of the Arab masses into the hands of Islamic obscurantists and bigots. It stands in the way of any socialist advance in the Arab world, operating as imperialism's gendarme in the region, a far more effective force for imperialism than, for example, the feeble Saudi royal family or the Hashemites. If Zionism has had one redeeming feature over the years, it is that it never bothered to conceal its intentions, but it is difficult to commend a man for his honesty in telling you that he is going to beat your brains out, especially if he then delivers the mortal blow.

As Sean indicates, the development of ideas on Zionism in the Trotskyist movement is quite interesting. As Sean says, Cliff, in his *New Internationalist* article of June 1939, was for Jewish immigration into Palestine and for the sale of Arab land to the Jewish population, both points vigorously opposed by the Palestine CP. His argument for this, and it is a thin one, is: "Yet from the negation of Zionism does not yet follow the negation of the right to existence and extension of the Jewish population in Palestine. This would only be justified if an objectively necessary identity existed between the population and Zionism, and if the Jewish population were necessarily an outpost of British imperialism and nothing more." Like a lot of Cliff, this takes a bit of time to get your head around. With perseverance one is, however, struck by how abstract it is as a serious formulation. Whether this is a reaction against the Arab chauvinism of the CPP I cannot say, but it clearly suggests that unless Zionism is 100 per cent in the pocket of British imperialism it is OK to augment its forces. But as we well know, nationalist movements are not wedded to any particular sponsor, and their interests are never seen as identical and often antithetical. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem could make overtures to Hitler, Jabotinsky, the founder of revisionist Zionism, was a great admirer of Mussolini, and, during the war, Chandra Bhowe, the leftist Indian nationalist, worked with the Japanese, building an Indian national army. In the same way, the Jewish population were not 100 per cent identified with Zionism, Cliff and the handful of Jewish Trotskyists were not and neither was the CPP, but in the absence of anything of consequence, Zionism certainly had at least the tacit support of an overwhelming majority of the Jews. After the war and the holocaust, that support became far more active.

I have a suspicion that it is from this 1939 article that Sean acquired his idea that the Comintern were not opposed to Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1920s. In truth Cliff, as is his wont, is being a bit economical with the *actualité* here. He says: "The members of the Comintern in Palestine... while absolutely opposed to Zionism (against the national boycott [of Arab goods and Arab labour — JH], against slogans like the Jewish majority and the Jewish state and the alliance with England, etc.), declared at the same time that the Jewish population is not to be identified with Zionism

and hence demanded the maximum freedom of movement for Jewish immigration into Palestine..." You will notice the odd usage of the "members of the Comintern in Palestine". He is trying not to refer to the CPP, which he excoriated earlier in his piece, and also neglects to say that the CPP was formed of resignees from the semi-Zionist Poale Zion in 1922. Whatever the CPP's policy may have been, up to 1926-7, it was not the Comintern's.

Cliff's article concludes by proclaiming that the only solution is socialism, but in the meanwhile calls for a secular, unitary state in a parliamentary democracy. The suggested programme included: compulsory education for all, a health service, pensions, minimum wage and all the other appurtenances of the welfare state. All of this seemed to have a familiar ring about it, especially when taken with the call for Jewish immigration. Then it struck me, Cliff's 1939 policy was the same as that of the WP-ISL, as set out in various resolutions of that party. Shachtman never acknowledged this fact, but then he always denied that the theory of bureaucratic collectivism came from Bruno Rizzi. We are now left with a terrible problem. We have it on no less an authority than Sean Matgamna that Cliff, in 1946, had set the political line of Palestine for the Fourth International, especially of the Cannonite SWP. Now I find that such is the dastardly cunning of T Cliff, he had previously masterminded the opposing Shachtmanite WP-ISL policy. With the brain reeling, one realises the full horror of it all. The Cliff-inspired Shachtman variant has now been taken up by Sean Matgamna. When one recalls that for some years there was no greater fan of the US-SWP and James P Cannon than Sean Matgamna (he endorsed their defencism, violent anti-Shachtmanism as well as their anti-Zionism), we might describe this phenomenon as "deviated apostolic succession."

In all this chopping and exchanging of opinions, we can confidently affirm that Sean's "two states for two peoples" formulation did

not come from Lenin, Trotsky, Cliff (pre- or post-1946), Shachtman, Cannon or any other international socialist source. In Sean's thesis it seems that if most Jews support a Zionist state, although the overwhelming majority of them do not and would not live there, then socialists must support them regardless of the democracy of numbers or the rights of others. By the same token, presumably, the rural Afrikaaners who want their own state must have it because they represent a significant minority.

"So long as Israel exists as a Zionist state, then Jews and Arabs will continue to die needlessly and to no good purpose, as they are dying while we conduct this argument."

It is possible to argue that after the war the people who suffered the ultimate barbarism of the holocaust deserved special treatment from the world that bore no little responsibility for that horror. It is a persuasive argument and one that struck the heartstrings of many in the aftermath of 1945. It was that public sympathy at the condition of Jews, who had endured so much, languishing in displaced persons camps, that put pressure on the Allied governments to solve this humanitarian problem. What none of them were going to do was open their own doors to a flood of immigrants. Not least of their calculations concerned the fact that there were also hundreds of thousands of displaced people and prisoners of war who might have claimed similar privileges. Their attitude was rather like that of Kaiser Wilhelm II who thought of a Jewish homeland

as "at least somewhere to get rid of our Yids." The people's conscience about the Jews was salved at little cost to the world but at the expense of the Palestinians. Many of the other refugees were herded callously to their deaths behind the Iron Curtain. In both instances, a cheap and easy solution for the Allies, but not one that readily commends itself to international socialists. It is ironic that the displaced persons camps in Europe emptied as the displaced persons camps in the Middle East were filling with Arabs. Why should the world's debts be paid by the poorest people?

Of a piece with this affection for the accomplished fact and his perverse inability to see the need for change and to fight for it, is his sneering response to the suggestion that the answer is revolutionary socialism. For Sean, the fight must be for the maintenance of Israel. The socialist Matgamna is the eager partisan of this robustly capitalist state, this proud possessor of an arsenal of atom bombs, this outpost of imperialism that enshrines the expropriation and exploitation of its Arab citizens and finds its justification in the notion of the exclusive and superior character of its Jewish people. Sean might condemn (but not too loud) the denial of human and democratic rights, the legal theft of property and land, the arbitrary arrests, the rigorous application of collective guilt, the deportations and curfews, but he draws no political conclusions other than to excuse this on the grounds of the right of Israel to be secure. For my part, I believe that so long as Israel exists as a Zionist state, then Jews and Arabs will continue to die needlessly and to no good purpose, as they are dying while we conduct this argument. There will be no peace. I further believe that only under socialism can the national question be solved for both peoples, because only then can there be any chance of fairness and equity. The history of the last 50 years is the negative affirmation of that fact.

Scattered throughout Sean's text are four footnotes. Footnote 3 is quite charming, because it bangs on at length abusing the leadership of IS, during Sean's recruiting raid within its ranks from 1968 to 1971. As part of the leadership during that time I was overjoyed to discover that, along with Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman and Nigel Harris, I had displayed "Malvolio-like snobbery, self-satisfaction, and brain-pickling conceit, built on small achievement..." As Malvolio said: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them." I have to say that, since he transferred his loyalty from Cannon to Shachtman, Sean has acquired an entirely better class of vituperation, although he still has some way to go before he is in the same street as Max Shachtman for his high-grade abuse. Probably better to get the politics right, Sean, especially the WP-ISL's opposition to Zionism and two nations theory.

The disconnected footnote 4 concerns an anecdote told to Sean by James D Young, concerning a discussion about Israel, in the late 1950s, between Cliff and Hal Draper, witnessed by James. According to Sean: "Suddenly Draper turns on Cliff in irritation and repudiation, and accuses him: 'You want to destroy

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Up on the Malvolian Heights

By Sean Matgamna

Israeli Jews! I don't!" Leaving aside the "irritation" and "repudiation" — this is just Sean spicing up the story — this little anecdote is actually more revealing of Sean's method than of Cliff's. We hear what Hal Draper said, as recalled by James, forty years after the event. But what did Cliff respond to this accusation of his wanting a pogrom of holocaust proportions? Did Sean ask James for this information and he could not remember? Or is that Sean, having acquired the evidence for the prosecution, did not want to confuse matters with any defence? Or did Cliff have no explanation and confess that he, along with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, wanted to drive all the Israeli Jews into the sea? If the answer to this last question is "yes", then he should have been scandalised out of the movement. Or is this just something that Sean has failed to check properly with James D Young? What we do know, however, is that Draper was against the Zionist state and wanted to replace it with an Arab-Jewish socialist state. And so say all of us, including Cliff, I think.

Throughout Sean's reply there runs an accusatory thread that I am conducting this argument as some way of making my apologies to Cliff. If I defend his line on Palestine in *Workers' Liberty* it is to cover my "social embarrassment before [my] SWP friends and former comrades." Which ones are those, pray? Paul Foot, Chris Harman, Jim Nichol? I think not. I do not defend Cliff's line on the permanent arms economy, because I no longer agree with it. I no longer defend his line on Russia, because I no longer agree with it. I defend his line on Zionism, because I agree with it. I defend the IS line on the Minority Movement that both of us held and he abandoned. It may come as a surprise to Sean but there are those of us who can disagree on fundamentals with Cliff without consigning everything he has said or done to the dustbin of history. At the same time, I do feel a degree of bitterness that what I saw as the best hope for the revolutionary movement in Britain since the 1920s, that I spent some time in helping to build, should have been diverted down various blind alleys at the behest of Cliff's impressionism and caprice. Most of all, my real complaint is not that Cliff has maintained his position on various matters, it is that he is capable of jettisoning almost any of those positions for at worst imaginary and at best transitory benefit. All of this and a great deal more, I have set out in a recently completed book on the IS Group². At the end of it I do not think anybody, including Cliff, will think that I am apologising, or wonder why I, and many others, are a touch bitter.

Finally, I would like to apologise to those *Workers' Liberty* readers who have got this far, for taking up so much of their time, but they really should blame Sean. He started it.

1. Current medical research suggests that Alzheimer's may be caused through eating from aluminium cooking utensils. If Sean still has such pots in his kitchen, I suggest he replaces them without delay.
2. *More Years for the Locust* by Jim Higgins, to be published by the International Socialist Group.

I FIND it difficult to accept that Jim Higgins intends his piece as a serious contribution to the discussion. He merely regurgitates and reformulates much that he said earlier, and which I refuted and corrected earlier — on Deir Yassin, for example. Higgins, I fear, confuses track-covering repetition with serious argument, just as he confuses oblique evasiveness with wit, and elephantine orotundity with a praiseworthy style. Up on the oxygen-starved Malvolian heights, Higgins has adopted the late Healy's idea of a powerful argument — saying things twice or, preferably, three times and four times, at increasing length, lacing the polemic with desperate abuse, direct and "stylish". Like the late Healy, the late Higgins fails to notice that this sort of thing harms no one so much as its author.

Higgins does try to give value for money — politician, literary critic, literary detective, style guru, Jim is all of these and more. Those who can, do, those who can't, try to teach? Jim — no fool he — has twigged that I've read the files of old Workers' Party USA publications. His conclusion that what I say about the Middle East is culled from this treasure house identifies him as someone who left politics in the late '70s, and has no idea of what happened after his demise. What we say about the Middle East and similar questions — and Northern Ireland is, in principle, almost the *same* question — is the result of long — public — discussion in the pages of *Socialist Organiser*. His idea that other people do what Tony Blair and bourgeois politicians do, and change policies in pursuit of "market openings", accurately describes Tony Cliff's approach — for example, it is what Cliff did when he became a "Luxemburgist" circa 1958 — but not that of the AWL. (By the way, the late Bernard Dix became a Welsh nationalist and joined Plaid Cymru, around 1980!)

The idea that the political identity of a tendency can be put on like clothes found in an attic is worthy of someone who, I understand, has written a book to prove that Jim Higgins is the living embodiment and custodian of "the IS tradition". It doesn't work that way, Jim. The politics of the AWL are the result of work to develop and clarify what we started with — the politics of the Cannon tendency — in the light of discussion and experience, and work in the class struggle too. As it happens, it is true that we probably are now the nearest approximation in politics to the Workers' Party of the 1940s — though we are not identical with it, and, for myself, though I criticise Cannon, I make no blanket repudiations of him and what he tried to do.

In brief: which is Higgins saying? That I haven't read Cliff's 1946 work? Or that I wouldn't notice without help, not unless Al Glotzer had already noticed it forty years earlier, that it simply has nothing to say about the political issues I spend much time debating? Or is Higgins simply short of something to say? He should have

read the footnote where I link the approach to the Middle East conflict he and Cliff share with a famous discussion in the Marxist movement between Lenin and Bukharin-Piatakov on the so-called "imperialist economism". He might then have avoided the method Lenin rightly castigates there and dealt seriously with my question: why, from a socialist and consistently democratic point of view, did the Jewish national minority not have national rights? He destructures this basic question in a welter of not always accurate detailed "practical" considerations. Who, he asks, was "to afford" national rights to the Jews? In fact, nobody did: they won the right of self-determination in war with the British, the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states. I repeat: why, in the world as it was and is, were they not entitled to do this?

Neither before, during, or after the war did "the world" protect the Jews: that is where the often very brutal psychology of the Israeli state, of the heirs of those who survived Hitler's slaughter, and those who died in it, comes from. It is the Palestinian Jews who have the irreducible right of self-determination. As for the rest of the world's Jews if we denounce as racist all those who do not agree to, or advocate, the destruction of Israel then we are comprehensively hostile to most Jews alive. We therefore fall into a form of anti-semitism. Higgins can't seem to take in the idea that to say this is not to say that "left-wing" anti-semites are *racists*. No, you are not racist; yes, you are for practical purposes an anti-semiter — comprehensively hostile to most Jews alive.

This comprehensive hostility does not on the left go back much more than a quarter of a century, though its roots can be traced far into the past, as I explained. Higgins puts the Arab propagandists' picture of European displaced persons' camps emptying of Jews as Middle Eastern displaced persons' camps filled up with Arabs: missing is the fact that almost as many Jews were then 'displaced' from Arab countries — to Israel — as Arabs from Palestine. Missing is the element in the situation of the deliberate maintenance for political purposes by Arab regimes of the refugees as refugees. Possibly Jim worked too long for an Arab bourgeois journal to be still able to see such things.

Unteachable, Higgins drops his idiotic — but very revealing — idea that it was "the Zionists" who stopped the benign F D Roosevelt opening the USA to Jewish refugees [WZ34], but he goes on blaming "the Zionists" for all the closed doors in "the planet without a visa" for Jewish refugees. I think the Trotskyists were right, in the USA for example, to demand of Zionist organisations that they join in our campaign for open doors. Like the blinkered sectarian he is, underneath the desperate mimicking of urbanity, Higgins still *blames* the Zionists for *everything* that followed. Our old political criticism of Jewish nationalism thus becomes the attribution of



An Orthodox youth fights for Haganah, 1948

moral responsibility to Jewish nationalists for all that was done to millions of Jews! Essentially the demand here is that the Zionists should have ceased to be nationalists, that is Zionists. Nationalists are nationalists, of course. But Jewish nationalists are worse than other nationalists — indeed, on them falls the guilt for what the nationalists, chauvinists and racists of other nations do to their people. In fact, they “bring it on themselves”, don’t they, Jim?

Higgins, like Cliff, confuses what could reasonably be said in a debate with a socialist Zionist in say 1930 with an attitude to the reborn Jewish nation in Palestine; except that the old Marxist criticism by words is replaced with Arab bourgeois and feudalism criticism by bomb, gun and poison gas. Israel will not cease to be “Zionist”, in Jim Higgins’ sense, unless it is militarily conquered and over-run. But Jim Higgins says that, though he wants Israel done away with, he would like to see it replaced by socialism. The problem is that Saddam Hussein, etc. will not make socialism, or even accord Jews equal citizenship.

At this point I find myself very impolitely thinking that Jim Higgins is incorrigibly stupid; and then, abundant evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, I remember that he isn’t; and thus I reach the truth: here stupidity, impenetrable, albeit would-be smart and “stylish” stupidity, serves the same purpose as hypocrisy; it is a variant of it. For nobody not born yesterday can think socialism is an immediate Middle Eastern option if only Israel is no more, or not

who is in fact an old-style socialist sectarian of the sort Lenin fought, winds up spouting fine socialist words that have no grip on life and in real politics he finds himself happily in tow to Arab bourgeois realpolitik. So does the SWP.

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I refuted Higgins’ tunnel vision account of things by putting the emergence of Israel in historical context. He repeats it now in terms of the politics of population arithmetic in ’30s Palestine. He sees the calculations of the Zionist demon as all-determining. As if the movements of the Jews to Palestine can be understood apart from Hitler and earlier smaller Hitlers! But I have already covered this in considerable detail.

In fact the Zionists would have accepted

know that Jim Higgins-style anti-Israeli propaganda, including his deceptive talk of socialism — socialism without an agency — serves those who in the world of realpolitik want to destroy Israel in the name of Arab and Muslim vindication and revenge.

Leninists are not vague socialist propaganda mongers: we are always concerned with “realpolitik”. Without realpolitik — as Lenin explained to those socialists, the so-called economists, who wanted to leave the struggle for democratic rights, a bourgeois republic and other non-socialist things to the Russian liberals — your enemies establish their version of realpolitik and use it against your socialist cause. Here Jim Higgins,

the partition proposed by the British Peel Commission in 1937 — and then, under Arab pressure, rejected by the British government. Higgins admits that Arab immigration was important in Palestine in the 20s and 30s; why was that legitimate, and Jewish immigration — the migration of people fleeing for their lives to their own community in Palestine — not?

It is of small consequence, but I never imagined that in Higgins’ 1973 piece he was being anything but Cliff’s hack, on the way out: the piece seemed to me to register a stage in the degeneration of SWP thought on this question.

I said that the Trotskyists in Trotsky’s time believed Jews had a right to go to Palestine. The exceptions to that I know of were the French POI, the group which published *Spark* in South Africa, and, I think, CLR James. Jim responds with speculation that I formed this opinion from Tony Cliff’s 1938-9 pieces in *New Internationalist*. I didn’t, though Cliff’s stuff then is evidence for my case. What I said was derived from the whole history, including Trotsky’s writings. [See the review of Trotsky on the Jewish question in *Workers’ Liberty* No31.]

Thus drooling over Cliff and speculating, Higgins evades the whole broader question! Is my account of the pre-war Trotskyist movement right or wrong?

Higgins is too busy being stylish to be loyal in the discussion: I am concerned for the “security” of Israel against those who advocate its destruction in the name of “anti-imperialism” and “socialism”; but I am for those Israeli socialists, Jewish and Arab, and for those in the Arab world, who want equality and democracy and a free Arab state alongside the Jewish state in Palestine. All nationalists — Irish nationalists for example — see their nation as ‘superior’ and ‘holy’ and ‘elect’ — it is the nature of the thing. [How do I know? Guess.] Calling it racism can sometimes make people think: but you can’t do it to only one nation in a national conflict without lining up on the side of the other no less “racist” nation. Jim Higgins does that, despite his repudiation of realpolitik and talk of socialism, because he is a sleepwalking “socialist” sectarian who has no notion of the Leninist way of combining socialism and *working class* realpolitik.

I like jokes and humour and “style”, Jim, and I’m not invariably unappreciative of an adroit, well filled double negative, in good season. But to tell it to you plain, in old-fashioned English: I don’t give a fuck for any of that if it is counterposed to politics, and I don’t see anything that is not simply pitiable in would-be funny polemic that evades the issues, and cleverisms that tie the author, not his opponent, in knots. The style appropriate to our business — mine anyway — is one that lets you say it truthfully, plainly, and as sharply as necessary for presenting things as they really are. The rest is trimming. If Shachtman is the measure here, Shachtman used humour to throw light on things: in the work that I know he never sacrificed political substance to style, still less to the vain pursuit of it — that way, Comrade Higgins, lies decadence, as you have here once more demonstrated.

Arabesques, he once turned in Cliff’s rodeo, Who not sits ad absurdum, reductio!

See him fret, see him fume,

Watch him preen and presume:

“God, I’m pleased I was me,” sighs Malvolio.



Drugs: serious solutions, not vigilante repression!

I AM surprised Sue Hamilton (WL37) has such a glorified view of the IRA policy of vigilante repression of low-level drug dealers and other criminals. The policy is an extension of their approach to internal dissent — the “control” of unwanted groups through shootings, kneecapping, beatings and other forms of brutality. Their actions have affected only the street-level dealers and not the organised crime lords, and fails completely to deal with the causes of drug abuse. In fact, there is some evidence the policy has been used to target political dissidents in IRA-controlled areas. This kind of repression by a sectarian paramilitary body is something which even the IRA’s friends on the left have failed to endorse, and which plays into the hands of the right wing and their “hang ‘em, flog ‘em” view of crime.

One of the main reasons drug abuse occurs, and cycles of abuse can be so hard to break, is the effect of social labelling of drug users as deviants and criminals. Jock Young’s study of marijuana use among young people demonstrated that users are often labelled due to their use of drugs; as a result, they are excluded from sections of society, and are encouraged to see their drug use as the primary shaping factor in their personality. They are forced to rely increasingly on other users for company and a sense of community in the face of ostracism; this can lead to the development of deviant subcultures and/or the use of “harder” drugs.

Sue Hamilton’s “solution” — persecution of drug subcultures by community organisations — will, according to this scientific analysis, make the problem worse, not better. By isolating and criminalising drug users, their sense of internal coherence as a subculture will be increased, and their hostility to the surrounding community will be increased. This will increase their drug use and their deviance, not reduce it.

Of course the working class cannot

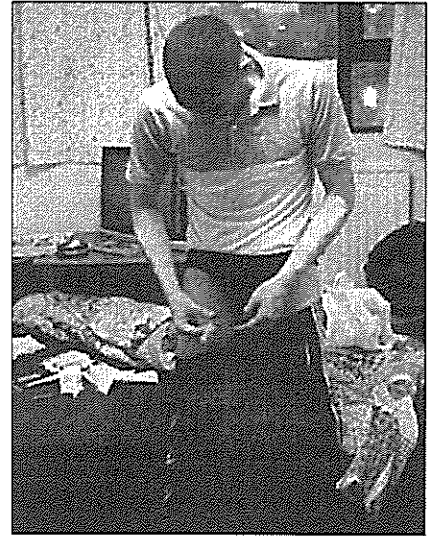
rely on the ruling class to deal with the problems associated with misuse of drugs. The ruling class has an interest in the illegal drugs trade. Research by Chambliss demonstrates that the “drug barons”, “crime lords”, “mafiosi”, whatever one calls them, are very close to the legal ruling class, sometimes being the same people, or having interests in legal companies. This is the main reason these bosses are so rarely arrested. The police exist to enforce ruling class interest, not to attack sections of the ruling class who happen to be breaking the law. The bourgeoisie also have an interest in the escapism of drug use, as an alternative to political action — and in the moral panics they can create on the back of drug-related crime.

But “do-it-yourself” action against street-level dealers will only have the same effect as police action against the same group. Individual dealers may be removed from circulation, but as long as the crime lords and users remain, new dealers will be found. There are enough desperately poor people in Britain, some of them also users, from which dealers can be recruited.

So what should socialists do? I believe the answer is to intensify our campaign for decent welfare services — both on specific issues, and overall in the Welfare State Network. Decent medical provision for users, including well-funded rehabilitation programmes, can reduce the number of abusers, as well as saving many lives. The provision of youth centres and entertainment for young people can provide alternatives to drug abuse. Decent welfare services would alleviate the suffering and alienation which cause drug abuse.

At the same time, I also believe we should campaign for the legalisation of drugs. This would not end the harmful effects of some drugs, but it would remove them from the hands of the crime lords, and break the link between drugs and crime. Drug users would no longer be forced into criminal subcultures; they would therefore be less likely to steal to fund their habit. Users would be more likely to seek out medical help, and rehabilitation and treatment would therefore be easier. The persecution and labelling of users, which pushes many into “harder” drug use, would be ended, and the nature of drugs as rebellion would be removed. It would also prevent the persecution of relatively harmless forms of drug use.

It may seem strange to propose legalisation as a means of preventing drug abuse, which can be very harmful. However, international comparisons suggest



this approach is more effective than punitive approaches. America has introduced harsher and harsher drug laws, and has imprisoned ever greater numbers of users and dealers. Its drug problem has consistently increased. Holland, in contrast, has legalised cannabis, and introduced “tolerance” policies for most “hard” drugs, including heroin and ecstasy. The result has been a reduction in drug-related crime. Marijuana use has increased, but this has had few harmful social effects. The level of heroin use has stayed around where it was, but the average age of users has increased, suggesting both that fewer young people are using heroin and that existing users are living longer (due to more easily available medical assistance). The link with organised crime has to some extent been broken.

In a class-divided capitalist society, it is probably impossible to solve completely the problem of abuse of drugs — both legal and illegal. Socialists must aim to make the best of a bad job by supporting measures which will break the link between drugs and crime and alleviate the harmful effects of drug abuse. We should support a programme of legalisation, combined with support for users trying to quit and provision of alternatives to drug use (which many psychiatrists agree is central to ending addiction), and encourage people to look to working class action, not escapism, to alleviate alienation. Such a programme would be based on real scientific evidence, not prejudice, and would offer a framework for effective action both against drug-related problems and against the capitalist system. This would produce far better results than random community-led repression.

Andy Robinson

The debate on the Workers' Government

I. How best to mobilise

THIS debate is essentially about the condition of the Labour Party and about how revolutionaries should relate to it in the current period.

What is the condition and direction of the Labour Party? The Blairites work to transform the Labour Party from a trade union based party into an open bosses' party. They are poised to enter government on an anti-working programme which accepts the legacy of the Thatcherites (Kenneth Clarke's public expenditure programme, the deeply regressive tax structure, and the anti-union laws). The Blairites plainly see their governmental programme as an integral part of the process of turning the Labour Party into a business party. It is a programme which sets them on a collision course with the unions. An election victory will augment the ability of the Blairites to transform the Labour Party and so push the working class out of politics.

What is at stake? Trade unionism in politics: the existence of the Labour Party as any sort of workers' party (and despite its political degeneracy, the Labour Party remains a type of workers' party). If they succeed — and that looks likely at the moment — then the Blairites will have thrown the working class movement back to the pre-1900 period, before the Labour Party was founded as the expression of trade unionism in politics. One may further say that what is at stake is a workers' government in the sense that the purpose of workers collectively participating in politics as a class is to impose its will on a society-wide or governmental level. In the here and now and for the period ahead, with a Blair-Labour government looming, the issue at stake is the nature of the Labour Party and the political life of the working class. This distinction is vitally important in determining our tactics and ability to relate to the movement as it exists.

The key question for serious socialists is this: either we defeat the Blairites' efforts to transform the Labour Party or we must win sufficient forces within the labour movement to refound a working class political party. There are of course no guarantees in life and so we must prepare for the latter in fighting for the former. The key question for serious socialists is thereby posed — how do we mobilise, educate and take forward the necessary mass opposition to the Blairite project? What, in Lenin's phrase, "*is the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move resolutely to the next link?*"

The whole line of march indicates a united front between the left and at least seri-

ous elements of the trade union bureaucracy and the "old" Labour rightwing. Given the current parlous political, organisational, and numerical state of the left there is no other way of seriously pushing the Blairites back. We will either succeed in moving such forces — at least partly against their will and certainly under pressure from the ranks — around those core demands which most urgently meet the needs of the working class (a minimum wage, the rebuilding of the welfare state, and so forth), campaigning for the union-Labour link on that basis, or we will not succeed at all. We have plenty of material to work with: all the unions have policies to the left of Labour which the union bureaucrats have sat on to avoid embarrassing the Blair leadership.

In this respect our message to the movement is clear: "While the Blairites retain their control of the Labour Party they will come back time and again, as often as it takes, to break the union-Labour link. In the meantime they will give us nothing voluntarily." The whole logic of the struggle points to agitation on the basis of "*enforce the union policies*", "*break with the Blairites*". Such slogans point to the immediate threat of the Blairites, their anti-working class programme, and the need for a "united front". They are slogans which can be used in the affiliated and non-affiliated unions, the broad lefts, the local Labour Parties, and broad campaigns.

Indeed they point up what is really and immediately at stake — the future of the Labour Party as trade unionism in politics. If "*the Labour Party remains the bourgeois workers' party it always was, but now with a radical shift towards the bourgeois pole of the dialectical, contradictory, formation*" (editorial, *Workers' Liberty* 35) then either we turn that radical shift around by breaking the grip of the Blairites or the Labour Party is dead as any sort of workers' party. This is the essential message we are seeking to give the movement. In this sense any call to "*fight for a workers' government*" leaps over what one comrade has called "*the missing link... the workers' party*". Only a workers' party will create a workers' government, but where is this party? It cannot in any sense be the Labour Party undergoing "a radical shift towards the bourgeois pole" *unless we convincingly beat the Blairites*.

We urgently need to explore the possibilities for some sort of Labour Representation Committee (or Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Representation) which goes beyond, but does not at this stage replace, the Keep the Link Campaign. If the Blairites keep the link while gutting it of all meaning then a specifically "keep the link" campaign could become a trap for the left. With a wider and more politically aggressive remit, a Labour Representation Committee could campaign on the need to renovate working class representation, and restate the purpose of working class politics while campaigning on basic class issues. Potentially it would tie welfare state campaigning to the necessary fight within the unions and the Labour Party. If it was able to take affiliations it would give the left the measure of its (hopefully) growing influence in the fight against the Blairites.

This whole line can easily be translated during the general election as "*enforce work-*

ing class representation and interests against Blair". It gives a practical meaning to the slogan unanimously adopted by the January AWL National Committee, "*vote Labour and fight, rebuild the welfare state, for a workers charter of union rights, for a minimum wage*" (despite the earlier claims that such a slogan is insufficient by itself, which it is, and illusory, which it is not).

The Blairites' political strength is derived in large measure from the weakness of the labour movement and the desperate fear of the Tories being reelected. The Blairites feed off this fear by blackmail — "do as we want, or split the party pre-election and endure the Tories for another five years" — that is the essence of Blair's "strong leadership". The flip side of an election victory for the Blairites is that it will break this paralysing fear.

With the election of a Blair-Labour Government we will — against our desires, if only the world was different, but then we are Marxists not daydreamers — be going through a necessary experience with the class. It is true that workers are more than ever cynical about the differences between the two parties, but some comrades underestimate the very real and contradictory extent to which workers still identify with Labour and see it as the only chance of respite from constant attack by the class enemy, the Tories.

Serious socialists will call for the return of a Blair-Labour Government on the basis "*that the roadblock can be broken and the working class begin to raise itself*" (editorial, *Workers' Liberty* 35). "Vote Labour and fight, enforce working class interests and representation against Blair" flows from the developing situation: the fight within the Labour Party is not yet over, the election of a Blair-Labour Government will "break the roadblock", freeing up the class struggle within as well as without the Labour Party, and the Blairites' governmental programme sets them on a collision course with the unions.

Plainly *against* Blair, this approach avoids unfortunate and utterly counter-productive formulations such as "let's make this Labour (ie Blair) government a workers' government".

We should therefore be unequivocal in calling for a Labour Government with the invocation, "fight!" (enforce working class interests and representation against Blair). We should reject the suggestions that "...if Blair wins the general election the result will not be a Labour Government in any meaningful sense (true) — and we will also have lost the Labour Party" (false); and that a Labour victory will at best be "*a kamikaze victory*", a victory achieved by a labour movement suicide attack on the Tories which leaves the Blairites as the sole survivors (editorial, *Workers' Liberty* 35, my emphasis).

Similarly we should reject the argument that the call for a fight against a Blair Government is essentially syndicalist (i.e. industrial) because the political channels within the party are blocked. The channels are badly gummed up (largely because that is what the trade union bureaucrats permit), and critically close to blockage, but they are not blocked. Witness the Blairite's frantic efforts to bring the union bureaucrats on board against Barbara Castle's pensions proposal at

the last Labour Party Conference. Bickerstaffe has been moved by rank and file pressure over Clause Four and the minimum wage. Serious socialists must seek to act as a lever on all the union bureaucrats.

In propagandising vote "Labour and fight!" our primary role is clearly not to be the election foot soldiers of Blair. I have never understood that to be the role of British Marxists who have called previously for a Labour vote. In the current condition it would be even less excusable to fall into simply being Labour Party canvassers. The whole emphasis of our propaganda and agitation must clearly be on fighting the (Blair) Labour Government and more so than in past general elections. But we are still for voting Labour.

This points up the difficulty of calling for a "fight for a workers' government" in any central way during the election, alongside the critical, qualified call to vote Blair-Labour. We will appear either as if we are simultaneously calling for a Blair-Labour Government and a different type of government not yet on the horizon; or as if we believe that a Blair-Labour Government can be turned in some meaningful sense into a workers' government. In the first instance we will look eccentric, in the latter, mad.

Yet one leading comrade has argued "let's make this Labour (ie Blair) government a workers' government." Such a slogan has absolutely no grip on the widespread hatred of Blair; it would cut us off from relating to those serious militants ready to give up on meaningful politics while not helping us to relate the broader masses. In the January edition of *Workers' Liberty* the same comrade argued that another way of saying "fight for a workers' government" would be "keep the link — and use it in workers interests". Yet it is nothing of the sort — if we keep the link then we will have kept Labour as some sort of workers' party against the Blairites; if we use it with any success in workers' interests then we will have enforced some working-class interests against the Blairite government. But this is not describing a workers' government but the united front struggles touched on earlier. We may help effect very large struggles through united front activity and these may result at some stage in a workers' government, but we cannot simply collapse such speculation into our understanding of the current and likely political situation.

To fit the call to "fight for a workers' government" into present realities, to make it rational to the labour movement (really only an issue if we are going to make the call central to our practical activity and agitation, really *fighting* for such a government in the immediate period) comrades necessarily pare its meaning down to a Labour government of the *normal kind*. Hence the editor tells us "*the 'workers' government' I'm advocating would not be socialist; it is based on specific limited class demands, welfare state, trade union rights... it is on the extreme right of the 'workers government' spectrum described by the Comintern.*"

But why do we need to advocate such a government? It doesn't help us to fight the Blairites in any meaningful way in the here and now. It simply reads like an eccentric way of saying "we're for a 'real' Labour government".

If we reject the notion that we can transform a Blair government into a workers' government — as we must — and that it will

only carry out serious reforms if it is forced to do so, and if we further say that the movement can only preserve its collective political voice against the Blairites, then we are pointing the way to tremendous class battles, both to defend and advance the working class's most urgent needs and to politically reorganise and reorientate the labour movement. In truth the Blairites have set themselves on course for a fight with the unions. In advance of such struggles it is unnecessary, miseducating and potentially self-defeating for us to advocate some minimalist (*ostensibly*) workers' government. It is a projection into the future of the current political level of the labour movement and can only serve to cut us off from more radical possibilities.

Effectively equating a workers' government with non-Blair Labour governments cuts across the sharp lessons which are necessary to prepare the future (and that is why in debate I have highlighted one leading comrade's claim that a 'workers government' is defined *by what it is, not by what it does*). The Blairites are not simply some product of the Thatcherite era but of the failure and decrepitude of British reformism, of trade unionism in politics (as illustrated by the last Labour government). We are for such trade unionism in politics against the Blairites, but we are for much more.

Used intelligently, propaganda for a workers' government is of use now. It can be used to draw out the lessons of past Labour history, the origins and rottenness of the Blair regime, and the fight for something more. But in the here and now the message we are taking to the movement is "defend class politics, defend the political representation of the working class — refund a workers' party if necessary, and fight for the fundamental needs of the working class." This points — in the midst of big struggles — to a transformation of the labour movement and to a government of a radically different kind to past Labour Governments.

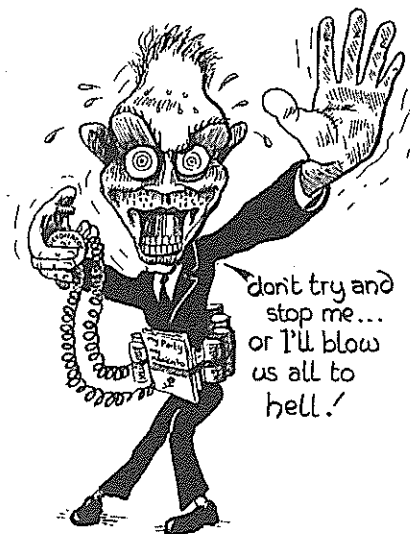
Frank Murray

II. The European dimension

I FEEL there are problems with both the workers' government slogan and the slogan "Vote Labour and fight".

The workers' government slogan is often used as a maximum demand, like demanding a socialist government. In the present political climate a workers' government seems a long way away.

"Vote Labour and fight" is like the slogan "build the revolutionary party": it begs questions like why? and how? In the past "Vote Labour and fight" would have meant for those involved in the Labour Party: "Vote Labour and fight to make it more democratic and the leadership accountable and to put pressure on the government to carry out socialist policies". For trade unionists, it meant: "Vote Labour but pre-



pare to take action against a government likely to carry out anti-working-class measures".

Now "vote Labour and fight" has little meaning for Labour Party activists as there is now little scope for socialists to work to transform the Labour Party. The slogan is now a syndicalist slogan.

Though some people feel the idea of a workers' government may not adequately relate to the situation facing the working class in Britain we can use the slogan for a workers' Europe to relate to the strike movements sweeping across continental Europe. The idea of a workers' Europe clearly poses the question of what kind of Europe we want, whether it's a workers' Europe or a bosses' Europe. It can provide a focus for working-class action throughout Europe and also counteract British chauvinism.

The application of the slogan fight for a workers' Europe shows how the *fight for a workers' government* can be used as a transitional demand. A workers' government, like a workers' Europe, is something that works in the workers' interests, that makes the bosses pay for the economic crisis.

The two slogans can be linked and a demoralised working class movement in Britain can derive inspiration from what is happening on the continent.

I live in a constituency (Easington) that is probably the safest seat for Labour in England. Recently, a television programme included an interview with a woman from Easington who said she would not be voting Labour because they are identical to the Tories. There are many more people like her in Easington and similar constituencies. These people represent the more advanced sections of the working class — much more advanced than those sections of the working class who have illusions in a Blair-led Labour government.

As well as relating to Labour Party members fighting Blair's proposals to transform the Labour Party into something indistinguishable from the Tories, we should be relating to the many working-class people who have no illusions in Blair and are looking for an alternative.

The workers' government slogan can provide them with a positive alternative to "New Labour".

Gary Scott

III. Confusion at election time

"The slogan of a workers' government (or a workers' and peasants' government) can be used practically everywhere as a general agitational slogan. However as a central political slogan, the workers' government is most important in countries where the position of bourgeois society is particularly unstable and where the balance of forces between the workers' parties and the bourgeoisie places the question of government on the order of the day as a practical problem requiring immediate solution."

(Theses on Comintern Tactics 1922)

THE current debate about the use of the workers' government slogan is in the first place a debate about the way we use the slogan. No one so far as I know is proposing its use as a central political slogan, and every one in the debate seems to accept it as a general agitational slogan. However its promotion now is a significant change in the AWL's literature and is hailed by its supporters.

Tom Willis tells us in WL37: "The very words 'workers' government' encapsulates the class issue of working-class representation versus a collapse back into liberalism raised by the current battles in the Labour Party."

Supporters of the increased use of the workers' government slogan attack as inadequate the long-standing AWL election slogan of "Vote Labour and Prepare to Fight". For its supporters, then, the workers' government slogan is needed in the run-up to the election and its promotion is to be on a much higher level than our timeless use of it in the past. Indeed Richard Kinnell tells us in WL37: "But the significance of slogans is what they mean to the average worker or student within earshot of us".

The sad truth is that the claimed magical powers of the workers' government slogan in the pre-election period are akin to Tommy Cooper's failing conjuring tricks. The promotion of the slogan now is far from useful, it is confusing to the very workers and students 'in earshot' we aim to reach.

At first the case for the increased use of the workers' government slogan is very appealing: we have to raise the alarm about Blair's project, we need to prepare for a fight to the death (of the party), we need to plan if necessary for the re-creation of a trade union-based party. But we are also in an election period, when all sides of the debate accept we have to call for a Labour vote. That is not just a vote for the neo-Tory policies and Blairite scum, it is a vote for a party dominated by Blair which will give him the power of the state office and finance to destroy the union link.

Yet there are good reasons for voting Labour. Firstly the Party still has the union link. Secondly, the history of the link and the hatred of the Tories means that even the most sceptical sections of the labour movement

want Labour to kick out the Tories. Thirdly, a Labour victory will open up the political situation. And, fourthly, we are not strong enough, and there is no working class force strong enough, to challenge Labour in the election.

The election, like it or not, is the main event in politics even for the left of the Labour movement, no slogan we can use will change that fact. The slogan workers' government appears to fit into the election framework, but its prominent use along with the call for a Labour vote is extremely confusing.

What workers' government is on offer in the election? The use of the workers' government slogan during the election can mean several things to those 'in earshot'.

Firstly, and most absurdly, it could mean that Blair's government will be a workers' government, a version of 'Labour to Power' i.e., for a Labourite, an election slogan in Trotsky speak, "Labour Taking Power".

Secondly, it could mean vote out the Tories, Labour are the best of a bad bunch, but also work towards a workers' government one day, giving up on Labour — 'Vote Labour but build a workers' government alternative.'

No slogan stands alone yet, once explained, the real meaning of the slogan appears to be: "Vote Labour — split Labour — build a new workers' party — fight for a workers' government!"

Proponents of the workers' government reply that they do not rule out beating Blair and keeping Labour a bourgeois workers' party or even transforming it into a workers' party, but their case for promoting the workers' government slogan is that the situation has changed since 'Vote Labour and Fight' encapsulated that perspective.

In labour movement politics we have to understand the current centrality of the general election: it weakens the left and greatly strengthens Blair, but a slogan will not change that.

In this situation a high profile use of "workers' government" aimed at those 'within earshot' is confusing, even when we know what we are talking about.

That is not to say that very soon such a slogan may be invaluable in helping to regroup the best elements of the workers' movement into a new trade union-based party, neither is it to suggest that nothing has changed in the Labour Party — the slogan "Vote Labour, Fight Blair" might better sum up our ideas in the election.

Immediately, we must build the biggest fight over the link possible. The fight should be as political as possible to attract militant workers, not just Labour hacks. Within the campaign and the movement in general the AWL must emphasise what is at stake and prepare for the worst by making sure that a Blair victory leads to the biggest split possible into a new party of labour.

The exaggerated use of the workers' government slogan in the election period is a confusing result of an attempt to sum up these tasks. Unfortunately our tuneless tin-whistle call for a workers' government when everyone is being deafened by the Wembley stadium Spice Girls concert of the election, results only in confusion for those within earshot, especially when we sold them tickets.

Mark Sandell

A wedge between the classes

FROM the united front flows the slogan of a workers' government. The Fourth Congress submitted it to a thorough discussion and once again confirmed it as the central political slogan for the next period. What does the struggle for a workers' government signify? We Communists of course know that a genuine workers' government in Europe will be established after the proletariat overthrows the bourgeoisie together with its democratic machinery and installs the proletarian dictatorship under the leadership of the Communist Party. But in order to bring this about it is necessary for the European proletariat in its majority to support the Communist Party.

But this does not obtain as yet and so our communist parties say on every appropriate occasion:

"Socialist workers, syndicalist workers, anarchists and non-party workers! Wages are being slashed; less and less remains of the 8-hour working day; the cost of living is soaring. Such things would not be if all the workers despite their differences were able to unite and install their own workers' government."

And the slogan of the workers' government thus becomes a wedge driven by the Communists between the working class and all other classes; and inasmuch as the top circles of the Social Democracy, the reformists, are tied up with the bourgeoisie, this wedge will act more and more to tear away, and it is already beginning to tear away the left wing of Social Democratic workers from their leaders. Under certain conditions the slogan of a workers' government can become a reality in Europe. That is to say, a moment may arrive when the Communists together with the left elements of the Social Democracy will set up a workers' government in a way similar to ours in Russia when we created a workers' and peasants' government together with the Left Social-revolutionaries. Such a phase would constitute a transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one. But right now the significance of the slogan of a workers' government lies not so much in the manner and conditions of its realisation as in the fact that at the present time this slogan opposes the working class as a whole politically to all other classes i.e. to all the groupings of the bourgeois political world.

Leon Trotsky



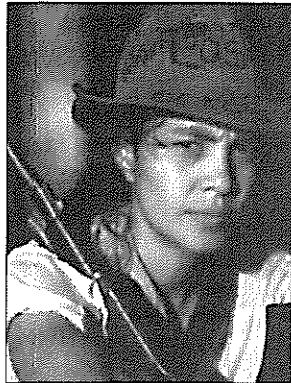
Film: Revolutionaries and victims

IN June 1979 a guerrilla band, the Sandinistas, sparked and led a mass uprising which overthrew the stifling and corrupt dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in the small Central American country of Nicaragua. In power, the Sandinistas strove for a sort of revolutionary social democracy. They launched literacy projects and built health centres. They nationalised the huge properties of Somoza and his cronies, and replaced Somoza's vicious National Guard with a new Sandinista army, but held off from nationalising more or creating a one-party state.

In that way they hoped to change Nicaragua without Stalinism — and without war from the USA. Stalinism they avoided; war from the USA they got regardless. Through an economic blockade, through mining Nicaraguan ports, and through the "Contra" force which the US assembled, trained and armed, the American superpower battered Nicaragua into ruins. The Sandinistas held their own militarily, but lost office in 1990 elections to middle-of-the-road politicians with whom the war-weary Nicaraguan people knew the US would make peace.

The Sandinistas are still a strong opposition party, and not all their revolution has been undone, but its brighter hopes have been dashed, and Nicaragua is still wrecked economically by the after-effects of the revolutionary war, the blockade, and the "Contra" war.

In Ken Loach's film *Carla's Song*, set in 1987, a Glasgow bus-driver falls in love with a Nicaraguan refugee shattered by her experiences in the "Contra" war, and goes to Nicaragua with



her to find out about those experiences. The film is vivid and well-made, but politically I found it disappointing.

To be told (and we are told, indeed lectured, by one of the characters, an ex-CIA man who has gone over to the Sandinistas) that the CIA is a faceless evil power would have had some political punch in the mid-1980s; in 1997 this message is dull and stale compared to the film's other, less overt, message, conveyed by the fact that the Sandinistas we see in it are mostly shattered victims.

Scenes designed to give a sense of the revolution have, to my eyes, a didactic and almost patronising tone, as if to say: "Look, here are some revolutionary peasants! Aren't they colourful, and happy about their land reform?" Colourful and sympathetic — but weak and naive when compared to the ruthless "Contras".

The people who overthrew Somoza in 1979 were not weak or naive.

Rhodri Evans

Books: Roots of violence

IN February 1993, in Walton, Merseyside, two ten-year old boys, Jon Ven-

ables and Robert Thompson, abducted two-year old James Bulger in the local shopping centre. They walked James around town. They had no idea what they were going to do with the boy, now they had got him. A few hours later they beat and kicked James to death.

After the trial of these child child-killers the judge said that the murder of James was an act of "unparalleled evil and barbarity".

These boys were shockingly stupid, ignorant, selfish and out of control. When they become adults they will have to take responsibility for the actions of their ten-year old selves and live with their remorse. But were they really "barbaric and evil"? The judge was responding to the mood of crowds outside the courtroom baying for blood; to a tabloid press screaming "vengeance must rain upon the heads of these most unnatural children"; and to John Major's tupenceworth of calloused moral guidance: "We must condemn a little more and understand a little less." In order to put society right we had, it seemed, to go back to the Dark Ages. A spot of witch-hunting would do our "morally sick" society good.

The murder of a child is always horrific. But murder of a child by another child appears to incomprehensible. How could it be anything else when not a scrap of reasonable explanation ever came to light in the "public debate" about the case — particularly as it was presented in the mass circulation press. In *As If* Blake Morrison sets out to get closer to the reasons why.

As If is part an examination of the Bulger case and part an exploration of the

nature of childhood, how adults feel about children, how society treats children. Along the way Morrison discusses his relationship with his own children. You might think this aspect of the book — mixing introspection about me and mine with an examination of a tragedy — would be egotistical if not ghoulish. In fact, the author's examination of his own attitudes to children adds to our understanding.

Though Morrison is furious — and so rightly so — about what happened to Robert and Jon his writing remains cool, lucid and rational. As a poet Morrison has the capacity to recall all the detail that makes up the meaning of things. He seems to believe that if you stare at something long enough, if you contemplate it, you will eventually find out the truth about it. I approve of this approach. It makes Morrison *empathetic* and it means that he can overcome his middle-class upbringing and talk sensibly about the lives of two working-class boys from Merseyside.

In other countries two ten-year olds, charged with murdering another child, would not have had to go to court, sit in a dock (specially raised to accommodate them) and listen to themselves lying and crying on hours of police tapes. The social workers and psychiatrists, for better or worse, would have assessed what happened, and would have made a stab at bringing out the Why of it.

In other countries, perhaps, the jury would have heard about the violence in Robert's family which originated with his father, who passed it on to his eldest son. The father got it from his father, and so on back

through the generations. But all this was ruled "inadmissible evidence". The fact that Jon's mother had tried to commit suicide was also ruled "inadmissible evidence."

There seems to be a particular hatefulness towards children in British culture. Maybe some malignant remnants of the attitudes to children of early capitalism survive: from when tiny children, of five or six, had to go up chimneys and down mines and amongst the unguarded machines in cotton mills. Rooted in working-class, but not only working-class, families it has been passed from generation to generation — a horribly malignant virus that can have no medical but only a social and cultural cure. Does the following statement shock you?

In this society it is still okay for parents, if they choose, to hit their children.

It isn't okay. But we are too familiar with what it represents. You see it done on the street and in shops. It was probably done to you, if not at home, then at school. You may do it yourself. But it *should* shock you!

Morrison says: "Perhaps there's still some idea that infants, because smaller than adults, are less than human. That, however hard you drop them, they always bounce back. It must be some persisting Calvinist prejudice, that children are mere lumps of flesh: if they're to become estimable (meaning adult) they need to be disciplined, beaten, knocked into shape."

The fact that violence was done to Robert all through his short life was thereby ruled "inadmissible" — even in a trial about violence against a child! How strange it is. And the strangest thing of all is this: *loving children is not seen to be incompatible with beating shaking and smacking them.*

The prosecution's case against Robert and Jon rested on whether or not they

understood what they were doing and whether they knew the difference between "right" and "wrong". The boys' teachers testified that their class had been instructed in the "wrongness" of pulling the wings off insects. But how could this balance the instructions they had taken from the violence that was normal in their own lives?

Morrison quotes Rousseau on this subject of children's understanding. Rousseau said — two centuries ago — instruction, lectures and abstract lessons in cruelty will not and cannot show children what is "right" and what is "wrong". Neither will hitting them. Even reasoned argument, which has its proper place, is not sufficient. *Learning must connect with lived experience.* A ten-year old may know abducting a smaller boy is "wrong" and will lie like hell to cover his tracks when questioned by the adults whose disapproval he wants to avoid. But a ten-year old may very well *not know* that kicking and beating a smaller boy until he is no longer breathing is irrevocable, will be something that he will live to regret for the rest of his life. A ten-year old mind cannot properly comprehend the meaning of "the rest of my life". Robert and Jon are children: they go to bed with teddy bears... Putting them on trial was barbaric and irrational. The people who did it lacked the excuse of being children, though their own experiences as children may have something to do with it.

This is the tabloid age. Public opinion is mediated by and sometimes, as in the James Bulger case, whipped to hysteria. It is an unaccountable machine which exists to make profits for the publishers and to bolster the profit-system. All the tabloids applauded when the pious and smug shyster, Michael Howard, decided to take on board what he perceived to

be "public concern" and promised to lock up the children and throw away the key. Howard's illegal sentence of fifteen years was quashed by the appeal court — and that is about the only good thing to come out of the due process allocated to Robert and Jon.

The public got only the facts that suited tabloid sensationalism, but never the salient facts, the *Why* about what happened to James Bulger. Blake Morrison's thoughtful and essentially decent account goes some way to putting this right.

Helen Rate

As If is published in hardback by Granta Books, £14.99

Screen and life

WORKERS' Liberty readers will be familiar with the debate about film violence. I'm reluctant to open old wounds here; but this threatens to become an increasingly important issue, as the furor over *Crash* and Virginia Bottomley's dark warnings about television violence testify. This book is an interesting collection, with contributors ranging from Mary Whitehouse and Michael Medved (author of *Hollywood vs America*, the best-known polemic against violence in Hollywood movies) to Camille Paglia and Oliver Stone.

Like the debate in general, Karl French's *Screen Violence* confuses two things: how far violence in film causes violence in society; and how far the graphic depiction of violence can be artistically justified. Thus we get Michael Medved and John Grisham (who approves of Oliver Stone getting sued for 'copycat murders' derived, allegedly, from *Natural Born Killers*) insisting that only an idiot could doubt the role film plays in real-life violence, and Camille Paglia insisting only an idiot could believe it plays one.

Along the way, there are some strong arguments. Alexan-

der Walker outlines the extent of censorship in Britain, and argues persuasively that 'protecting children' is used as ideological cover to interfere with the viewing rights of adults, on the basis of the flimsiest evidence that children are affected by the videos they may or may not see. Tom Dewe-Mathews tells the story of the British Board of Film Classification's banning of *Boy Meets Girl*, a film, he says, they were able to ban because nobody had heard of the director, but which is in fact a challenging piece.

Joan Smith compares opponents of screen violence today to critics of dramatic violence throughout history, amusingly quoting Saint Augustine.

There are also some terrible arguments. Poppy Z Brite's ode to the 'poetry of violence' came close to persuading me to switch to the opposite camp, and the revolting Tony Parsons' eulogy to *Clockwork Orange* is enough to put you off a great movie. On the anti-violence side, Michael Medved does a knockabout demolition of 'Hollywood's four lies' — the arguments the industry uses to defend itself against charges of irresponsibility. But he kills his case under the sheer weight of assertions.

Oddly, what the book nowhere attempts to do, even in the introduction, is define what 'screen violence' is. Up to a point, it is reasonable to assume we know what we are talking about. It would be disingenuous to dispute that *Reservoir Dogs* is more violent than, say, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (although, as Alexander Walker recounts, *The Lion King* led to one child's suicide).

Even so, it is difficult to categorise films just as 'more' or 'less' violent. Is *Total Recall* more or less violent than *Pulp Fiction*? Some account of the nature and context of the violence ('realist' or comic-strip, for example) is necessary to guide us through the discussion. Oliver Stone's strongest defence against John Grisham's outrage, it seems to me, is that however you 'read' *Natural Born Killers* (it doesn't glorify violence to my mind, but who can say how people inter-

The working class and capitalist democracy

By Mark Osborn

pret what they see?), it is a film at desperate pains to remind you it is fiction, not documentary.

But to pose the discussion, as pretty well all these writers do, only in the broadest terms (film does/doesn't cause violence), is far too abstract. The anti-violence lobby lumps together the 'violence' of the crappiest straight-to-video action movie with the 'violence' of serious films, and ignores non-explicit, but often more romanticised, violence altogether. Martin Scorsese cannot be discussed in the same breath as a Kung Fu flick, and it's not just snobbery to insist on this. The violence of *Rambo* is surely as obnoxious for its ideological content as its graphic depiction.

The claim, made repeatedly in this anthology by 'defenders' of violence, that film has no effect at all on its audiences, is plainly absurd, and the Michael Medveds don't take long to make mincemeat of it. What effect films have is harder to say. Many of us who are not psychopaths enjoy some extremely violent films. I'm sure I'm not alone in finding the incessant suggestion that I am therefore a sicko a bit irritating.

This is not a matter of pointing out the obvious, that people who commit copycat murders after watching an overblown and tedious Oliver Stone movie had a problem before they saw it. It is a matter of recognising that fantasy and entertainment are more complex than Medved et al suppose, and of being able to recognise where violence is 'cheap', mere spectacle, and where it is dramatically valid. It isn't only in arthouse movies that violence can be valid; it can be dramatically valid in a trashy action movie. To dispute that violence, including explicit SFX violence, can be valid is to condemn most dramatic art since, at least, Shakespeare.

So we need criteria by which to assess artistically what we see. *Screen Violence* doesn't really provide any.

A good read, but rarely very profound.

Clive Bradley

Screen Violence, ed. Karl French, Bloomsbury, £9.99

MAJOR and Blair describe Britain as a "democracy". It would be more accurate to say that Britain is a *bourgeois* democracy — a society where all the fundamental decisions are made by and in the interests of the capitalist class.

It is perfectly true that there is more freedom here than in Stalin's Russia or in Nazi Germany. Even limited rights should be defended.

Nevertheless, how "free" are we? How much control and power does the working class actually have in this society?

Consider life at work. There is virtually no democracy for workers. No one elects their boss. No one votes on how much their managers get paid. The rule at work is more or less: do this, do that... or you have the democratic right to leave.

The only constraints on the dictatorship of the capitalists in the workplace are those which the unions have managed to impose.

What about political life?

1. A "level playing field"?

There are certain democratic rights which we all possess in Britain today. However these rights are more real for some than for others. For example, we all have the right to free speech. However Rupert Murdoch can make more of this right because he owns a number of newspapers and Sky TV!

The right to strike has been eaten away by laws enforced by the judiciary — a well-paid elite — and by the police.

The French writer, Anatole France, summed up the situation: the laws forbids both millionaires and beggars to sleep under the bridges. The point, of course, is that millionaires never need to sleep under bridges.

And millionaires never need to strike. And millionaires can always buy their free speech.

In a world where some people have vast wealth and others have nothing, laws and democratic rights will give us only formal equality.

2. "We decide how the country is run".

It is true we have a vote in general and local elections. This right is impor-

tant and it took over a century of struggle to win it (ending in 1928 with full adult suffrage for women). But how much control does the vote give us over how the country is run? Not too much.

We have a vote in general elections once every five years or so. We have no right to mandate or recall our MP. And our parliament is often a very poor reflection of what British people really want — or the poll tax and NHS cuts would never have been allowed.

The "first past the post" voting system means that millions of votes do not count (Labour votes in Cornwall, Tory votes in Scotland, socialist votes in most places).

Moreover parliament is hemmed in by all sorts of undemocratic, unaccountable institutions — the monarchy and House of Lords, for example.

Socialists support fixed-term, annual parliaments (an old, as yet unfulfilled demand of the Chartists), and proportional representation in elections (so that parties receive seats in strict proportion to the number of votes they poll). We want the monarchy and House of Lords abolished.

However, *many* countries have no monarchy; some also have forms of proportional representation. There are further barriers which cut against working-class people really running the society in which they are the majority.

Many factors prevent most working-class people fully involving themselves in politics, in an informed way, under capitalism.

The circulation of information and the production of ideas in this society is dominated by the capitalists.

And the reality of life in capitalist society is also a serious handicap. Being utterly tired at the end of a long day, lacking money, lacking adequate schooling — all are barriers to full involvement in politics.

Unelected structures of rule aim to put the most basic decisions in the hands of the capitalist class: private ownership of industry (already discussed) and, behind parliament, a huge, largely unaccountable state machine.

How do we best fight fascism?

By Dan Katz

THE fascist British National Party (BNP) will stand up to 50 candidates in the forthcoming general election. They are setting out their stall for the next period of British politics, life under a Labour government.

The Nazis expect to gain recruits under a Labour government. They hope to repeat the experience of 1978-9, when some working-class people, disillusioned with Labour's cuts, turned to fascism, and they may well be right in their calculations. A lot of people are likely to be disappointed under a Blair government. The fascists may again become a sizeable force. How far they succeed depends to a great extent on what the left does to stop them.

How has the left responded so far to this renewed fascist activity? There have been calls for a ban on the BNP, demands to stop (or change the rules to prevent) a BNP party political broadcast, and a Bill from Labour MP Mike Gapes to prevent "Holocaust Denial" — denial that Hitler killed six million Jews — a favourite theme of far-right propaganda.

This type of anti-fascism focuses on the state, the police, the courts and government action to sort out fascists by banning them. It is bureaucratic anti-fascism. But the state is not a reliable ally. Its regular role in Britain is to *protect* the BNP from anti-fascists. It shows little interest in stopping racist violence.

Moreover, the left has no interest in supporting a precedent for banning "extremists". Such bans are



Can we rely on the state to protect us against fascists?

generally used against the labour movement and the left.

For example, the 1936 Public Order Act, brought in to deal with Mosley's British Union of Fascists and those who opposed them on the streets, was used for decades after that against the left. Even at the time it was aimed as much at the big unemployed marches organised by the Communist Party as at the Mosleyites.

Although some of the proposals for state action come from people who are serious about fighting fascism, there is also a lot of cant and hypocrisy from Labour politicians and student leaders. They are happy to denounce fascism, but will do nothing to solve the social problems which help the fascists to grow.

The New Labour MPs help create and perpetuate those social problems. Who should clear up after them? Who should sort the problem out? Who will protect us from the monster they are creating? Someone else, they say: in this case, the police.

These "bureaucratic anti-fascist" policies are likely to be counterproductive. They confront the BNP on

the wrong political ground. On past experience, bans and attempts to curtail free speech will bring the fascists free publicity and win them sympathy from non-fascists who dislike any infringement on democratic rights.

They allow the far right to present themselves as the victims of democratic hypocrites — of people who want democracy, but only for themselves and their preferred opposition.

A recent exchange in *The Guardian* underlines the point. Fascist "historian" David Irving has been fined DM 30,000 by a German court for a public lecture in Munich in 1990 during which he claimed that Auschwitz was invented by the Polish Communist Party in 1948.

Following an article calling for a similar law here Irving defended himself, wrapping up a lot of snide anti-semitism in the flag of liberty and defence of democratic rights. Sure enough, other letter-writers then took his side.

A much better method of confronting the fascists is for us to defend *our* rights — the rights of Jewish people, Black communities and the left to meet, discuss, organise and live our lives without fascist or racist interference. Using these slogans and ideas, our policy should be to mobilise the maximum number of workers and youth in active opposition to the fascists, rather than look to the state. Defence of *our* rights — rather than mobilising to restrict the rights of others — that is the way to win over the unconvinced and to draw the inactive into activity. It is a far better way to stifle the fascists.