

# Workers' Liberty

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



## So why do we say vote Labour?

**Europe: the workers' revolt • The films of Ken Loach • Larkin: apostle of labour solidarity • Labour's future and the fight for a workers' government**

# IN WORKERS' LIBERTY THIS MONTH

## 3 Commentary

Now is the time to fight for free trade unions!

So why do we say vote Labour?

We need a workers' government!

Hong Kong on the auction block

## 8 Diary

Student women in conference

## 9 Survey

Albania; the *Sun* rises for Blair; Glasgow council cuts; Blair and

union law; Letter from an Indonesian prisoner; Anti-abortion

campaign; Debate: holocaust denial; Iranian oil workers;

Obituary: Colin Coyle; Jimmy Airlie; the Left and the election

## 19 International

Destruction and hope in ex-Yugoslavia, by Branka Magas

## 21 Clones

Good Golly, Miss Dolly! by Les Hearn

## 22 Europe

"Europe without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no!"

by Colin Foster

There is only one socialist answer on Europe: workers unite!

by Annie O'Keeffe

## 26 Another Day

Confessing the socialist faith

## 27 China

The moderniser as executioner, by Chen Ying

## 29 The Cultural Front

Art versus propaganda? by Clive Bradley

## 33 Our History

Jim Larkin: the apostle of labour solidarity,

by John O'Mahony

## 37 Forum

The Workers' Government debate: against defeatism,

by Richard Grasse

Socialist Re-action, by Bill Davies

State capitalism in the USSR? by Martin Thomas

Keep drugs illegal, by Sue Hamilton

What drugs do to you, by John Bryn Jones

The US Labour Party

I. We should stand in elections, by Jane Slaughter

II. Break with the Democrats, by Jack Heyman

## 42 Against the Tide

Bob Pennington and the Trotskyist archipelago,

by Patrick Avaakum

## 45 Reviews

Hysteria and control, by Alison Brown

The first mass workers' movement, by Helen Rate

## 47 Ideas for freedom

A dialogue with the future, by Martin Thomas

## 48 As we were seeing

Walter Crane's 1887 drawing to commemorate the Paris

Commune of 1871

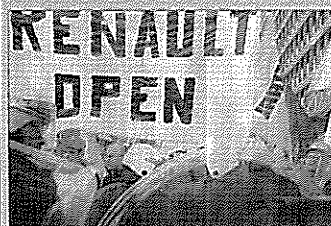
Subscription information, page 15



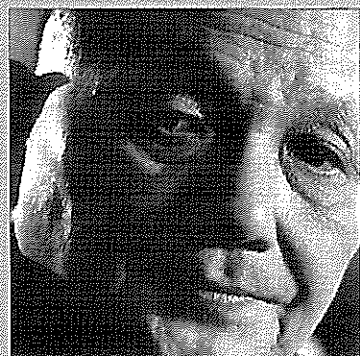
Lessons from  
Albania  
page 9



What should socialists say about  
cloning? page 21



How to save jobs in  
Europe  
pages 22-25



The legacy of Deng page 27



Larkin and the  
Dublin Labour War  
page 33



# Now is the time to fight for free trade unions!

**I**N Britain now almost everything that gives power and punch to trade unionism is illegal. No matter what the issue is, no matter where justice in a dispute lies, the law does not recognise the right of one group of workers to take solidarity strike action in support of other workers standing up to an entrenched employer. Such action is illegal. *Effective trade unionism is illegal!* So it has been for the last 16 years. So, if Tony Blair has his way, it will remain.

Blair has pledged that a Labour Government will not cut the web of Tory anti-union legislation which enmeshes and immobilises the British trade unions\*.

Most of what the Tories have done against millions of working-class people simply could not have been done unless they had first disabled effective trade unionism. Anti-union legislation was the prerequisite for most of the things the Tories have done. The welfare state and the NHS could not have been cut down as they have unless trade union rights had first been cut down.

For 18 years the unions have been demonised and stigmatised. Tory and right-wing Labour propaganda about the alleged faults of the trade unions before Thatcher tied them down became part of the official folklore of Tory Britain in the '80s and is still being peddled today. It is scarcely contradicted any more. Yet, you need only to look at the way things have gone a decade and a half in a relatively prosperous Britain without effective trade unionism to understand that this is a case of the victors writing partisan propaganda into "history". This is a case of the murderers telling you what a terrible creature their victim was. The truth is the opposite of the Thatcherite and Blairite myth.

The trade unions, and the labour movement gathered around the trade unions, have, in Britain as elsewhere, been one of the great civilising forces in society. Effective trade unions stand as a bulwark against ruling class drives to grind down workers. Their removal as an effective force promotes and unleashes ruling class barbarism. If you doubt it, look around you at what so many years of unchecked Tory rule have done!

The unions banded together the downtrodden and the oppressed and made them into a force capable of defending themselves and asserting themselves against the powerful and the wealthy. They forced callous rulers who never faltered until their victims combined to challenge them to concede basic human rights, civil rights and employment rights to those who, atomised and disunited, had seemed to them a mere rabble, unworthy or recognition as full human beings — as people with

needs and rights that a civilised society should take account of, no matter what that meant for profit margins and for capitalist tax liabilities.

The trade unions did this and much more, despite being led by a layer of officials who were often more akin to a section of the middle class than to the working class.

Today, when almost two decades of Tory anti-union legislation, has much reduced their prestige and political influence, that layer of union officialdom is cowed and house-broken. They have so little fight in them that they do not kick up a stink either against the Tory anti-union laws or a protest against Blair's pledge to the bosses that a Labour government will not repeal any of the key items in the armoury of anti-union legislation which the Tories will bequeath to a New Labour government.

When anti-union legislation has existed in the past it has been repealed by incoming progressive governments. Even the Liberals in 1906 honoured their party's pledge to undo the legal effects of the infamous Taff Vale judgement. (For five years it had made trade unions legally liable for any damage done to an employer during a strike.) When in 1927 the Tories banned solidarity strikes in revenge for the 1926 General Strike, which was called in solidarity with the miners, the Labour Party pledged itself to repeal that legislation, once it gained a Parliamentary majority.

In 1945 it did.

Blair's New Labour will do less for the trade unions than the Liberals did in 1906! Indeed, some New Labour leaders have said that a New Labour government might on coming to power legislate to ban public sector strikes!

It is one way of measuring what they are and who they intend to serve in

government. But it is not cause for surprise. Blair and his friends are, in their own way, Thatcher's children. They model themselves on the Tories they are trying, gang against gang, to displace. It is, however, cause for surprise and shame, and cause for anger, that the trade union leaders do not insistently campaign for trade union rights in Britain. That they do not make their support for Blair conditional on New Labour being at least as progressive on the question of trade union rights as the Liberals were back in 1906!

Campaign for free trade unions? TUC General Secretary John Monks, official leader of the entire trade union movement, is currently campaigning *against* trade union rights: he says he is for compulsory arbitration in the public sector, and for confining the use of the strike weapon to very extreme circumstances! That is his response to New Labour's threat to make public sector strikes illegal.

Monks is even backing a formula that requires 50% support from the workforce before a union can be recognised. In some sectors that would make it easier for anti-union bosses to dere-

\* See the briefing in the survey section

cognise existing unions! The only thing that the union leaders are demanding from a Blair government is legislation to make it easier for them to collect union dues.

Trade union action such as that which has recently shaken France, Germany and Belgium would be illegal in Britain! Britain, where the working class built the world's first mass working-class organisation 160 years ago, now has the least liberal trade union laws in Western and Central Europe. Trade union leaders with even a tincture of self-respect, or of respect for their members, would campaign for trade union rights equal to, say, those which French workers enjoy.

Why don't they? There is no mystery about that either.

Many of the trade union leaders are comfortable in a situation where the rank and file is legally pinned down; where they have the excuse of "legal impossibility" to justify their own well-heeled and luxuriously provided for inactivity.

Without the active compliance of trade union officialdom the anti-union laws would anyway not have so tight a grip. Bickerstaff, Morris and Edmonds police the anti-union laws for the Tories. They are nearly always the first to argue against action and solidarity. That was the role envisaged for them by the peo-

ple who drafted those laws.

What can be done?

Despite the official trade union leaders and, where necessary, against them and in defiance of them, now is the time to make a renewed effort to break the legal shackles on effective trade unionism. Labour, even New Labour, is likely to be more vulnerable to working-class pressure than the Tories ever could be. If the rank and file of the trade unions set up a sufficiently strong demand for it, some of the trade union leaders can be forced to move on this question.

The fight to win back free trade unions in Britain now is nothing less than the fight to restore to the working class the legal right to defend itself and the right to act in its own interests where it is strongest, at the point of production, that is where it can choose to act at will without waiting for some self-serving politician to call an election.

Now is the time to make a new push against the Tory anti-union laws which, after May, if Blair becomes Prime Minister will become New Labour's anti-union laws. **The labour movement must tell a New Labour government in the loudest voice possible: restore free trade unionism in Britain!**

## So why do we say vote Labour?

**T**ONY Blair and his friends in the so-called "Millbank Tendency" intend to radically alter or destroy the ties of the Labour Party to the trade unions and the working class. Already they represent policies that constitute a radical break with any recognisable version of old-style reformism. In the discourse of these jumped-up New Labour politicians the unemployed are to blame for unemployment and the poor for poverty.

Blair has said it openly. They want to make the Labour Party into an out-and-out bourgeois party — into a straight bosses' party like the Democratic Party in the USA, or the British Liberal Democrats. The lesser, half-way-house, versions of the Blair project would, while keeping some formal ties, make the unions junior lobbyists rather than the decisive core of the party. The hardline version would completely cut off and jettison the trade unions.

This is the greatest threat British working-class politics has faced for decades. So we have argued in previous issues of *Workers' Liberty*, attempting to rouse the British labour movement against the Blairites, believing that in this situation the first responsibility of socialists is to raise the alarm against all variants of the Blair project.

How, then, should socialists vote in the general election on 1 May? If, as we have argued, an election victory is likely to empower Blair's Millbank grouping for a major push and perhaps the last push against what is left of the working-class character of the Labour Party, should we not simply refuse to vote Labour in the May general election?

No, we should not: no, we can not. There is no alternative, short of abstaining from politics and asking the working class to do the same, but to vote Labour in every constituency on 1 May. Simultaneously we must oppose Blair inside the labour movement and prepare to fight a Blair government from day one.

The "Millbank Tendency" have not yet succeeded in fully breaking the class character of the Labour Party: in this General Election, New Labour will have the organised backing of the trade unions. The Labour Party remains the working-class movement in politics — a working-class movement that has had its

horizons and perspectives brutally cramped and cropped by 18 years of naked bourgeois rule, and its self-confidence so far undermined that a middle-class nonentity like Tony Blair can rise up within it to the position of saviour and dictator and, it seems, should he chose, liquidator. Lenin long ago accurately defined the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers party": it is still a bourgeois workers' party, but now with the dialectical balance massively tilted towards the bourgeois pole in an entity that was always highly contradictory.

Labour is the only conceivable governmental alternative to the Tory government, and on 1 May most members of the labour movement will act accordingly. Anti-Toryism is not enough, but getting the Tories out and breaking the icy Tory grip of 18 years is the only way to begin to open British politics up again. It is the only way to begin to open working-class politics up again. It is the only way for the labour movement to begin to move forward again.

It is true that this campaign will be a competition of media-judged political beauty, and of soundbites. Nuances at best divide the parties on policy. Much of New Labour's concern is to com-

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pete on Tory ground with the Tory Party for last-time Tory voters. The Blair grouping is politically a mere satellite, the moon to the Thatcherite sun — its light is reflected light; its strength a reflection of the strength of the Tories and of what they have achieved for the bourgeoisie in 18 years of government. Its purpose is to realise the Thatcher-Major programme in the labour movement and continue their politics, with a change here and there, in the country as a whole. It has grown to its present dominance during the long years of working-class defeat in which the labour movement has grown stagnant, waiting passively for a change of government.

Yes, but Labour's defeat in the general election would only perpetuate those conditions of all-powerful Tory dominance that have driven the labour movement into its present political mood of self-effacement and the decrepitude which has generated that mood. Probably, that would strengthen Blair's grip. If the formation of a Labour government will empower the Millbank Tendency against the labour movement — for example, giving them a chance they do not have in opposition to provide themselves with direct state funding — it will also begin to bring the labour movement up against the reality of what Blair represents. Sooner or later it will impel the labour movement to fight back.

Large numbers of workers will vote Labour despite Blair, or out of an ingrained traditional Labour loyalty that has not deigned to take account of what the Blairites are saying and doing. Quite a few still hope that Blair is only playing a clever game to outflank the Tories with middle-class voters. Millions have expectations that Labour will serve their interests. Disappointed, they will react against New Labour. These are the elements of a future revolt. That potential can only be made real by a Labour election victory. A Tory victory will only perpetuate the conditions that have bred Blairism. The point is that a Labour victory will also *begin* — it will not happen in a week — to empower the working-class movement with the realisation of its own strength and an awareness that it can rely only on its own strength.

The essential work of socialists in the labour movement now is to help it to such a self-realisation and such a new self-empowerment.

For socialists not to advocate a Labour vote is to stand aside from mass working-class politics now: a few socialist parliamentary candidacies in a constituency here and there, hopeless candidacies in the circumstances, do not and can not offer working class voters a governmental alternative to the Tories. For socialists to stand aside is for socialists to cut themselves off from the processes of labour movement political self-renewal.

Trade union conferences this summer will debate what the unions will demand from a Labour government — at present, they are demanding almost nothing, except simply that a Labour government, any Labour government, should exist — and whether, and how, the unions should fight Blair's moves to expel them from any central role in the Labour Party.

Even if it is entirely and mechanically predetermined that Blair will come out on top — and nothing in politics is ever that cut-and-dried — we should be inside, not outside, these political processes. A serious revival of working-class politics must come from inside the unions now affiliated to the Labour Party. The campaign for a new Labour Representation Committee, endorsed by Tony Benn in the latest issue of the Welfare State Network paper *Action*, must be built *inside* the affiliated unions and, insofar as that is possible, inside the Labour Party.

But: even though it's true, as we have argued, that a Labour victory will begin to rouse the working class to a realisation of its own strength, is it not also true — and is it not decisive? — that it will give the Blair group the last element of strength (state funding) to enable it to cut or choke the unions' channels into Labour politics? On all the evidence, yes it will. And therefore? Therefore socialists should anticipate events, and break now with the organised labour movement in politics? That would make no sense.

There is nothing we — all the revolutionary socialists of all the tendencies together — can do now to rearrange the circumstances, events and trends that may come together in the general election and after to produce an outright Blairite victory over the old political labour movement. To advocate that workers abstain or vote for only a socialist candidate here or there, which is the same thing

— that is a stop-the-world-I-want-to-get-off policy. The "world" will not stop; neither will the "process" in the labour movement. Again: the place for socialists to be is within this process, within the mass politics of the working class movement. It is only there that the Blair group can be fought. To jump ahead and abstain from the general election and the ongoing struggle against Blairism in the labour movement is only another form of defeatism.

We know what the Blair group intends, we know the weakness of the presently mobilised opposition to what they intend, but it is not serious working-class politics to substitute calculations about what might happen after a Labour victory for the reality of politics now when the labour movement is raising its forces to

**"To advocate that workers abstain or vote for only a socialist candidate here or there, which is the same thing — that is a stop-the-world-I-want-to-get-off policy."**

## Song of the Elections\*

By James Connolly

Sing us of elections  
Full of fight and fun;  
All the hosts of Labour  
By capitalists outdone.  
Tell us of the Death Rate  
High in Dublin Town;  
Lanagan the funeral man  
Said he'd put it down.

Sing of workers' children  
Dying in the slums;  
Parents chance of  
vengeance  
With the voting comes.  
Tell how the slum voters  
On Election Day,  
For a pint of porter  
Sell that chance away.

Sing how Tory capitalist  
In the North Cite\*\*  
Outmanouvered socialists  
By his charity:  
Tell how shoals of voters,  
Degraded, mean of soul  
Sold their hopes of freedom,  
For a bag of coal.

Sing how Labour candidate  
For the Lord Mayor's chair,  
Crawled to ask the capitalist  
Vote to put him there.  
Tell us how Tim  
Harrington —  
Lawyer sleek and bold —  
Dished the Labour  
Candidate,  
Left him in the cold.

Sing us how the publican,  
The landlord, the employer  
Strive to press the  
workingman  
Deeper in the mire.  
Tell how socialist voters,  
Yet, with righteous wrath,  
Will sweep those slimy  
vermin  
Out of Labour's path.

\* Written in 1903 after a bad recent experience as a candidate for municipal office in Dublin, where the Home Rule Nationalist Party was notorious for running especially dirty and corrupt election campaigns.

\*\* Belfast

settle overdue accounts with the Tory party.

For socialists to act in the general election as if the Millbank Tendency's threat to the working class character of the Labour Party has already destroyed the party's class character could only help the Blair group do its work after the election more smoothly and easily. It is, in a sense, to hysterically anticipate and act out what we fear and to accept in advance what must be contested for as long and as far as it is possible to contest it.

We repeat: the fight goes on — in this year's trade union conferences, at the Labour Party conference in October and beyond. Much will depend on what socialists are in a position to do after the election. The Blair group have the commanding positions in the labour movement, but they have not clinched their victory yet.

For all these reasons, we say vote Labour on 1 May, and simultaneously work to rouse the labour movement to fight the New Labour government's policies and the Blair project. Otherwise we abandon mass working-class politics. We also abandon all real perspectives for creating a new workers' party based on the unions in the event of outright victory for the Blair project.

What, given the realities of the labour movement, can socialists say to workers when they ask them to vote Labour? We tell the labour movement the whole complex truth. We tell them what Blair represents: new Blair is but old Thatcher writ large. We tell them we think they should vote Labour, but also fight, with mobilisations, protests, strikes, and by way of activity within the labour movement — in the trade unions and, so long as this remains possible, in the Labour Party.

In the election the trade unions are funding a Labour Party that promises the nothing and goes out of its way to emphasise that fact. They are mounting a poster campaign that implicitly backs Labour. And they demand from Labour... nothing! We urge workers to tell their union leaders that the unions should not be mindless milch-cows for the New Labour Party. They should insistently demand from the Labour Party and of every Labour MP specific pledges — pledges to take the legal shackles off the trade unions, restore the right of workers to take solidarity strike action, to restore the NHS on the principle of providing state-of-the-art health care on demand, free at the point of consumption, and to restore the welfare state.

## We need a workers' government!

**T**HE mass working-class political movement has, with Blair and his gang, reached the end of a long political road. It is time to ask ourselves, where did we go wrong? Where did we take the wrong turning?

The short answer is: when the movement began to lose sight of the original working-class goals for the realisation of which the labour movement first turned to independent politics. It is high time the labour movement — and in the first place its left wing — remembered where we have come from and where generations of labour movement activists have been trying to go.

That is the only way we will understand how we come to find ourselves in this Blairite blind alley. Only by taking stock can we find a way out of it.

To do that we need to rearm the labour movement with the basic socialist ideas and goals, now half forgotten, which inspired and guided the pioneers who built the great labour movement which the Blairites are working to subvert.

We need once more to raise up before the eyes of the labour movement and argue for a vision not only of the working-class goal of socialism, but of the sort of labour movement needed to achieve that goal.

Voting for Blair with gritted teeth, the labour movement should remind itself that we did not create the Labour Party almost a century ago in order that careerist politicians could participate in the politics of the swing of the party pendulum at Westminster, *but to win a working class government that would serve our interests* as the Tories and Liberals served bourgeois interests.

A workers' government worthy of the name would be a radical socialist government driving to create socialism in the only way it ever can be created — by expropriating the bourgeoisie, by destroying their state power and by abolishing wage slavery.

We propose to those in the labour movement who want a government loyal to the interests of the working class, but do not agree with us about the need for a socialist transformation of society as defined here — that is, for a socialist revolution — but who are principled reform socialists, *that we can at least*

*agree on the centrality of mounting independent working class and labour movement political action.*

We propose to them that they fight to stop the Blairites and, in the event that, after the election, the Blair project is successful, join with us to prepare a revival of mass trade union based working class politics.

We propose to them that they form with us a common front to fight for key immediate demands:

- The liberation of the trade unions from the shackles rivetted on them by Tory laws which outlaw such essential trade union action as solidarity strikes;
- The restoration of the National Health Service;
- The restoration of the welfare state;
- A decent minimum wage at half male median earnings;
- Equality in education opportunities and free education for all;
- The return to public ownership of the industries pillaged by the Tories, this time under proper democratic control.

While continuing the day-to-day fight at every level of the trade unions and the Labour Party, socialists need insistently and repeatedly to spell out the historical and political context of current politics. Why do we want to keep the link between the unions and the Labour Party? 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 question of government is central to working-class politics. If the labour movement does not have a socialist notion of government, then it will have a bourgeois (right now, Blairite) one. That is the lesson of Labour's 15-year drift to the right in a pursuit of government which has now turned into a scramble

for office, even if it means doing a deal with Rupert Murdoch and making the Labour Party hard to distinguish from the Tories.

To fight for this perspective here and now Marxists need to group themselves in a coherent political organisation. That is what those who publish *Workers' Liberty* have done.

Today, the ability of the British parliament to control what happens in Britain is weak and inadequate, and getting weaker. The power that does not reside in the boards of giant international corporations, outside of all proper democratic control, lies in the European banks and in the institutions of the European Union — which are still not effectively democratic\*. Even a reforming working-class based government confined to Britain

could still do a great deal. However, an effective workers' government, a government with the scope and power to submit European capitalism to its control will have to be a Europe-wide government. *The idea of a workers' government points directly to the idea of a workers' united Europe.*

The objective of a workers' government in Britain and in Europe — that is the only thing that gives focus, drive and sense to mass working-class politics. Only the reinstatement at the centre of working-class politics of the objective of a workers' government, defined and measured by our class interests, can give coherence to the fight we will have to wage against a New Labour government.

\* (see pages 24-5)

# Hong Kong on the auction block

**A** CENTURY and a half ago Britain was the great world power, the pioneer and bearer of a new type of production by steam-driven machinery; her navy ruled the world's seas. By contrast, China was an ancient civilisation, grown decrepit and spiralling into decay and disintegration.

Britain fought a series of wars to force China to open its borders to opium from British-ruled India — the "opium wars". Britain forced the Chinese imperial state to hand over the territories that are now Hong Kong. This was shameful, brutal imperialism.

In the middle of 1997, the forced "unequal treaty" that gave Hong Kong to Britain expires. Hong Kong goes back under Beijing rule.

The end of British rule in Hong Kong will be no less shameful than its beginning. In fact, it will be worse.

150 years ago, a thinly populated barren territory was taken from a corrupt autocratic government with no democratic mandate. On 1 July 1997 4 million people who have a distinct identity and a long history separate from that of China will be handed over to the totalitarian neo-Stalinist government of mainland China.

Nobody asked the people of Hong Kong what they want, for the good reason that it is already known. The handover to Bei-

jing takes place against the will of the big majority of the Hong Kong people. Mrs Thatcher made the treacherous agreement with Beijing's neo-Stalinists under which Hong Kong will be handed over; the British Tory government has done all it can in the last 15 years to ensure a smooth handover, acting as the trustee and agent in Hong Kong of the totalitarian government of Beijing.

In order not to embarrass Beijing or make the transition difficult, they have made sure that there would be no democratically elected Hong Kong legislature that could act as a focus for resistance and prove difficult for the neo-Stalinists to suppress.

British Tories have acted as enforcers and advance trouble shooters for Chinese Stalinism! Now they are about to deliver the people of Hong Kong to them, politically bound hand and foot.

The only half-way serious political argument for handing over Hong Kong like this is that the territory and the people are a natural part of "China" and that the 'nationality principle' overrides everything else.

Nobody but a mystical Chinese nationalist would think that consideration decisive. There are higher things than the nationality principle — the right of the people of Hong Kong to enjoy what they have of liberty; their right not to be forced under neo-Stalinist rule; their right to democratic government; their right to self-determination. Compared to China, Hong Kong's liberties are considerable. Despite its lack of democratic self-government, compared with neo-Stalinist China, Hong Kong is an oasis of human freedom.

Hong Kong is separated from the state which on 1 July takes it over by an entire progressive epoch of human history.

Not principle, but the relationship of forces in the area — where China is now strong and Britain comparatively weak — and British commercial calculations, determine what is going to happen on 1 July. This "handing back" of *this* Hong Kong now will be more shameful and brutal than was Britain's land grab 150 years ago.

Even at the eleventh hour it is worthwhile saying what the British government would have said if Thatcher were a consistent democrat and not a Tory: Hong Kong *should not* "go back" to Chinese control unless the majority of its people want that; Hong Kong *should* be allowed to elect a democratic parliament to look out for its interests.

Self-determination is an essential element of democracy. Those who are not for self-determination for distinct entities, are not democrats.

We say: self-determination for Hong Kong!

## What is Workers' Liberty?



The key Marxist idea is that the class struggle takes place on the three levels of trade union and social struggle, political struggle and the combat of ideas guides the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty exists to fight and co-ordinate the class struggle on every front: our supporters work in the trade unions, the Labour Party, in single issue campaigns, in the students' union.

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

If you want to know more about the Alliance for Workers' Liberty write to PO Box, 823, London SE15 4NA.





# Student women in conference

**Saturday p.m.:** compositing of motions for the National Union of Student's Women's Conference in the Claremont Hotel Blackpool. Already the left faced attempts at stalling from Labour Students. In the composite on Women and Education, Labour Student women refused to composite with Left Unity supporter Kate Buckell because the text from the colleges she represented contains the word 'debt'.

I took myself off to say hello to several people who had arrived that night but are not involved in the wrangling downstairs.

**Monday, first day of conference:** I woke up fresh as a daisy and raring to go. But first things first — breakfast, and then balloon-blowing, banner hanging, boxes to be unpacked, stalls to be set up — and a quick game of balloon football with my housemate Ben, aged 5: (he won!) Shortly after, people began arriving. It was all very hectic and exciting, meeting new women from all around the country.

Eventually, things settled down and the first policy debate, "Women and Work", began. Labour Student women got up to speak time and again to argue against scrapping the JSA, and for reforming it instead. The facts of the JSA, such as pushing people into low-paid, crap jobs or off their college courses didn't rate much in their arguments.

This line of non-reasoning was continued in a debate on the minimum wage. Although they wanted one they argued vehemently against setting any figure, using the arguments commonly paraded by Tories against having a minimum wage at all. Again, the vast majority of conference saw through the rhetoric to the logic and necessity of setting a figure. A decent minimum wage can only help women workers secure their other demands around harassment, childcare, and so on.

At the end of the session a meeting was called advertised as being open to all women who wanted the Women's Campaign to be an open, democratic body. Well, that's me — although I think it *is* open. So, off I trotted to the meeting, only to find it was really a meeting open to everyone *except* me, and run by — yes, you've guessed it — Labour Students, who then proceeded to denounce me as spawn of the devil. Realising they had never intended to make any constructive links or even to let me defend myself against their shrill denouncements, I left.

Finally, it was Informal Hustings — an

hour and a half of questioning during which I had to answer questions on everything from how to make the Women's Campaign broader, the Labour Party (ha,ha), free education and increasing the involvement of Black and Asian LGB women. Finally, after a stirring rendition of 'I Will Survive' by yours truly and telling of an appalling joke, it was over.

**Tuesday.** Again, up at the crack of dawn. The morning of the election day was highly amusing. Labour Students did everything they could to undermine the democratic process, stalling the debates to prevent discussion of education funding by arguing that we discuss a budget that none of us had had a chance to read. Even more amusing was the attempt to discredit myself before the election by asking a question about my Committee Report — along the lines of why, as Lesbian Rep, only

**"Silly me! I thought that building for a picket against the immigration and asylum laws did directly affect lesbian women. After all, thousands of lesbians spend their lives living under persecution and terror due to their sexual orientation. Many are killed."**

three of the things I had done in the last year related specifically to lesbian women.

Silly me! I thought that building for and taking part in a picket against the immigration and asylum laws did directly affect lesbian women. After all, thousands of lesbians spend their lives living under persecution and terror due to their sexual orientation. Many are killed. These women, like others suffering for their beliefs, politics, lifestyles, etc. deserve our support. Furthermore, what about equal partnership rights, what about linking with others in the fight for equality? Perhaps they ought to try telling Stonewall that immigration laws don't affect lesbian women.

Anyway, despite all the silliness, everyone I spoke to was in buoyant mood. It was good for me to find that so many women

from Further Education colleges, many of whom I had not met before the conference, were on the left. This, and the hard work and support of my comrades, and others in the Women's Campaign who were supporting me, put me in a good frame of mind for the election.

20 minutes later it was all over, and it was into the next debate and another outrageous statement from the right wing. Apparently we should not repeal or scrap all immigration and asylum laws, because this would let Nazi war criminals amongst others into the country. Now we all know that Nazi war criminals (amongst others) have been harboured by this country for decades, and that the real victims of Britain's racist immigration laws are the 5 million black people who are detained in appalling conditions, refused entry and sent 'back'. To hear such arguments used to continue this oppression made myself and others sick.

Next came the election results and the relief at winning — in the first round on first preferences, with 96 votes and by a margin of 42 votes (out of a total of 167) — was fantastic. I couldn't thank everyone enough for their help and support.

Back at the hotel we held a Left Unity fringe meeting on 'What Women want from the General Election'. It was really well attended and good contributions were made.

Then, at last, a beer and a chance to relax and catch up with a friend I haven't seen since June. But, alas, no — every time I sat down, someone would come and drag me off to meet a group of women who wanted to know if I would visit their college, help get a Women's Officer, etc. I was so tired I could hardly see, but I enjoyed it — especially a concerted grilling from Maite from Lambeth and Violet from Kingsway: it's good to know that so many women want to work hard in the campaign next year.

**Wednesday.** Final day of conference and the Education Funding debate. Yet again, Women's Conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of free education. I think the highlight of the conference for me was meeting so many women and getting a clearer picture of what is going on around the country. Best of all was when Lesley, a mature student from Salford College and first-time delegate, told me she had, "had the time of her life." Just wait for next year!

Anita Goldsmith,  
NUS Women's Officer elect



# The political vacuum in Albania

**F**REE-MARKET capitalism is bringing pauperism and brutality, not prosperity and democracy, to Eastern Europe: that is one of the lessons of the disorder in Albania. The other lesson is that no opposition yet exists there capable of offering a coherent alternative.

The remorseless suppression of political debate by the Stalinist regimes — especially fierce in Albania — stopped ideas developing. Official propaganda discredited all the language of socialism. The weakness in the 1980s of the Western left completed the inhibitions on working-class politics.

Until very recently, Sali Berisha's government in Albania was the West's favourite post-Stalinist regime in Eastern Europe. It was praised by the IMF. It got more Western aid than any other East European regime. It was a particular favourite of Britain's Tories, who sent Malcolm Rifkind to visit Tirana last year. Berisha's Democratic Party became a member of the European Democratic Union, alongside the Tories.

The Tories and the bankers were pleased to find a government openly committed to Thatcherite ideas and speedy privatisation, uninhibited by the shapeless yet significant working-class pressure which has slowed regimes elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Having acquired control over the main forces of the old Stalinist state, and supplemented them by his own chosen thugs, Berisha could impose market policies on Albania's people as ruthlessly as the old

dictator Enver Hoxha imposed his 'Marxism-Leninism'.

National income figures showed respectable growth. Yet industry — which accounted for over 50% of total output under the old regime — had collapsed. Andrew Gumbel, in the *Independent* (14 February), describes Berisha's capitalism as "a largely gangster-based economy. Drug barons operate with impunity, and much of the transportation of heroin and other drugs across Albania, from Macedonia and Greece en route to Italy, is believed to be organised by Shik, the state security police... the chain of command in the rackets goes all the way to the top..."

"If around one million people sank hard-won foreign currency into the pyramid schemes, it was partly on a calculated assumption that the government was underwriting the operations with dirty money."

Apparently because of a hitch in the drug trade, early this year the pyramid schemes had to raise their promised interest rates to ridiculous levels to try to draw in enough new punters to see them through. They failed, they collapsed, people lost their savings and their income.

The people rebelled, demanding their money back and the resignation of the government. Large sections of the state forces, staffed by people who put their money in the pyramid schemes too, have collapsed.

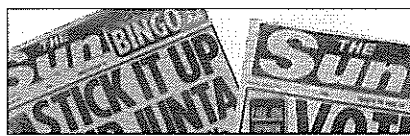
Yet there are no reports of any clear-cut demands for economic and social

reconstruction. Instead of proposing such demands, the opposition parties — in the first place, the Socialist Party, the reconstructed ex-Stalinist party — have joined a new coalition government under Berisha. On 17 March, the *Financial Times* reported: "In Tirana, President Sali Berisha and his new coalition government appeared to have restored order to the streets by arming militia members and sending armoured personnel carriers around the capital. A dusk-to-dawn, shoot-on-sight curfew remained in force." The report may well be premature, but unless and until some new political force emerges in the rebellion, the odds must be that the core of the state machine will eventually, after much destruction, reassert its authority.

It seems unlikely, then, that the movement in Albania will spark similar but more coherent movements elsewhere in Eastern Europe. On its effects in the Albanian-populated province of Kosovo, which is under Serbian military rule, the Kosovo-based journalist Fehim Rexhepi writes: "Developments in Albania will postpone consideration of the question of Kosovo, and petrify the long-lasting blockade even more firmly. It seems that Kosovo Albanians have lost a powerful psychological point of support and that the Serbs, that is the regime in Belgrade, have gained at least that much."

In Albania — as in Britain, though much more dramatically — anti-Toryism is not enough.

Colin Foster



## PRESS GANG

# Blair wins a place in the Sun



**B**y their friends shall ye know them: the decision of the *Sun* (or, rather, Mr Rupert Murdoch) to back Tony Blair at the general election should come as no great surprise. The *Sun* and its proprietor fell out of love with the Tories when Thatcher was dumped (or “betrayed” as the *Sun* still says) and Black Wednesday confirmed their disappointment with John Major. They have been flirting with Blair ever since.

And, of course, Murdoch likes to back winners — especially winners who will be making decisions that might affect, say, whose little decoding boxes are allowed onto our TV sets. In Australia the Murdoch press has been quite happy to support the Labor Party who, in turn, have generally done their best to ensure that no obstacles are placed in the path of Murdoch business interests.

No, the surprise hasn't been Murdoch's willingness to throw the *Sun* (and, very likely, at least one other of his British titles) behind Blair, but the lack of embarrassment on the part of any section of the official movement. Blair, of course, has been abasing himself before Murdoch since at least 1995, when he (Blair) flew halfway round the world to grovel before the assembled New Corporation executives at Hayman Island. After that, Blair's by-line began appearing with remarkable frequency in the *Sun* and *News of the World*. Co-incidentally, Labour's longstanding parliamentary support for limits on cross-media ownership

disappeared overnight.

But you would think someone in the Labour leadership would perhaps remember the Wapping dispute, or the “Gotcha!” headline, or the Press Council's ruling that a cartoon was “an ugly piece of racism”, or “Up Yours Delors”, or the description of Clare Short as “too ugly to be raped.” But no, not a squeak out of any of them — not even the middle-class “feminists” of the Harriet Harman variety, who might have been expected to have something to say.

Instead, Mandelson and Campbell gloat over their ‘coup’, while Blair assures his friends at the *Sun* that he will veto any move to use the Social Chapter “to import German social security costs” and that “it is no part of a Labour government to start putting unions into any workplace.”

Meanwhile the *Sun* makes no secret of its continuing Thatcherite politics. It is just that “the Tories have all the right policies but all the wrong faces.” Blair, it seems, is now the right face for Tory policies.

None of this is likely to have any significant impact on the election result (the short-term effect of newspapers' political line is greatly exaggerated by media pundits) but it might possibly wake some Labour people up to the truth about Blair and his project to destroy the Labour Party. If it does that, some good may yet come of Mr Murdoch's opportunist move.

Jim Denham

## Levers for the lovers of power

By Joan Trevor

**T**HE current Labour Students leadership of the National Union of Students are tomorrow's New Labour leaders. Many of the recent Labour student leaders will have positions of power behind the scenes as advisers and “assistants” to the great and powerful of New Labour. They are horrible careerists! All of them!

They do everything the easy way. Like the toads who fawn on great tyrants they go to the functions, eat the food, drink the fine wines. Politics run this way is fine by them.

They learned and used every carving, lying trick in the book to get where they are. If, like me, you have seen them at work in the student movement you already know that they have absolutely no scruples.

Some of these people will soon have their hands on the state machine! I find that idea nightmarish.

Any incoming government has a hard job mastering the civil servants and the state institutions and subordinating them to its will. But the establishment is pliant enough when it agrees with your politics and I predict that the British establishment will happily go along with New Labour.

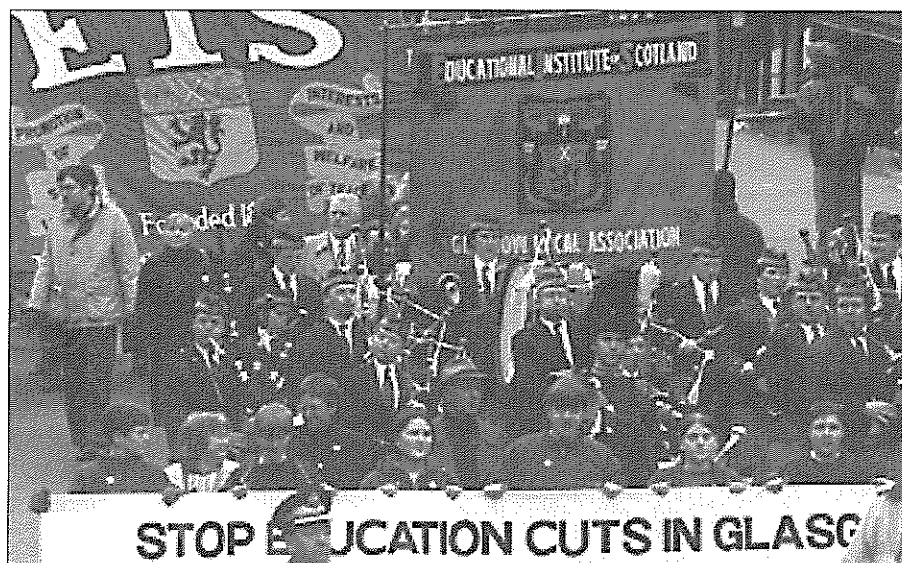
So the Blairites will soon have their hands on the files, computers and surveillance equipment and potential of MI5 and MI6, the police and the armed forces. Am I paranoid to find this prospect alarming?

With the New Labour careerists on hand to tell what they know and point educated fingers, the state bully boys will go straight to the right people.

We have no room for complacency. The FBI in America did a good job on the black liberation movement in the 1970s, planting spies and agents-provocateurs. They isolated it and smashed it up. They're still framing and locking up its rump now, men like Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The people who ran the student movement and now prop up New Labour would do that. If they get the chance. Nobody who ever saw them in action in student politics will doubt it. Watch out!





# Glasgow councillors abandon election pledges

**O**VER 1,500 local authority trade unionists laid siege to the City Chambers in Glasgow on 10 March in an attempt to prevent the city council meeting to vote through a budget for the 1996/97 financial year which include: £81 million worth of cuts, 1,500 job losses, and a council tax increase of 22%. Opposition to the cutbacks has been massive.

Over 30,000 people marched on a demonstration in Glasgow in January organised by the teachers' union EIS. UNISON library staff were on strike in February. 2,000 people lobbied a meeting of the City Council the same month.

On 1 March 10,000 people marched through Edinburgh on a Scottish TUC demonstration. On 5 March all schools in Glasgow were shut down by an EIS strike and the following day the City Council was shut down by a UNISON strike.

On the eve of the 10 March budget meeting, however, members of the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) occupied the main council chamber.

With the main chamber occupied on the inside, and entrances blocked off by protesters on the outside, only 24 Labour councillors — three more than a quorum for a council meeting — managed to get into the City Chambers and vote through the budget.

The Scottish media ("mob rule erupts in the battle of George Square") and Glasgow Labour councillors ("The

police did nothing, they allowed the mob to rule") are now trying to whip up a backlash against the protest of 10 March.

The press has likened the events of 10 March to "Black Friday" of 1919, when police baton-charged demonstrators outside the City Chambers and tanks were stationed in Glasgow to quell possible unrest — a rather far-fetched comparison.

In 1919 Labour was sympathetic (at least in public) to "direct action". It had supported the Glasgow rent strikes of 1916 and also supported the general strike of 1919. In 1997, however, Labour councillors condemn direct action in the name of "democracy".

But the democratic credentials of the Labour group on Glasgow City Council are hardly impressive — they stood for election on the basis of defending jobs and services, not axing jobs and cutting services to the bone. On 10 March democracy was being defended not by those Labour councillors who ignored the mandate which they had been given by the electorate, but by those trade unionists and community activists who took action to defend jobs and services.

If the backlash which the media and the Labour establishment are trying to whip up after the events of 10 March should take off properly, then socialists must defend the SSA, who will be the prime targets of the witch-hunt.

*Stan Crooke*

## Briefing

# Tony Blair and the union laws

**T**ONY Blair has made clear his commitment to keeping "the essential core of the Conservative trade union legislation." This position is then usually "spun" to appear "even-handed", as meaning that a Labour government will keep elections for union executives and strike ballots, but will be open to persuasion on a wide range of other issues.

Nothing could be further from the truth. All New Labour offers is a few cosmetic changes in existing Tory union law, changed designed essentially to make life easier for union bureaucrats, such as restoring the check-off.

Blair is determined to keep on the statute book the following legislation:

### *1980 Employment Act*

This law introduced the extremely narrow notion of a "trade dispute" which ruled out any form of solidarity action or the use of industrial action to pursue political goals.

The act also gave the green light to employers who wish to split up a workforce by creating different bogus "companies", thus making it illegal for people who work for the same boss to stick together! This act also severely restricted the closed shop which had to be approved by an 85% majority of the workforce.

### *1982 Employment Act*

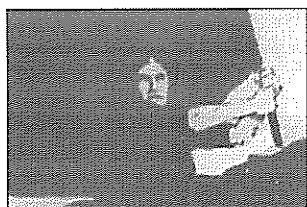
This reversed the situation established in 1906 by making trade unions liable for crippling damages arising from strikes. If fines of up to £250,000 are not paid then the union's entire funds could be seized ("sequestered").

### *1984 Trade Union Act*

Made it illegal to strike without first holding a ballot and instructs unions to tell members they can be sacked for striking! This opened the door for later laws against "wildcat" strikes. It also required ballots for executives.

### *1988 Employment Act*

Outlawed the closed shop. Insists that



## WOMEN'S EYE

# Letter from prison

By Dita Sari\*

**W**RITE this letter in a narrow and miserable cell in a gaol in Surabaya.

Exactly two years ago I was with you at the International Women's Day rally in Perth. Since then, time has flown by and so many important things have happened in the struggle for freedom in my country.

This regime has chosen me as the lone woman among fifteen people on trial for subversion. The People's Democratic Party (PRD) has many women activists, especially from among the workers. One of the measures of the progress of the movement here is the participation of women activists. As a president of a trade union I personally cannot separate myself from a special solidarity with the women worker activists, even though I am aware too that every activist is tested in the end via their commitment and loyalty and not other criteria.

The regime has struck out at us with full force so that our Party and its mass organisations are covered with bleeding wounds. Everywhere the regime spreads the word that we are the same as the old Indonesian Communist Party; tries to create mass hysteria and to legitimise its repressive action against us. They needed an appropriate scapegoat and they chose the PRD. This is not a government that stands firm to defend the sovereignty of the people and their economic and political rights. It is a government built on authoritarian foundations in order to defend special economic interests and capital.

In the midst of this disaster, we survive. We have survived well the early period of big disruption to our organisation. Our women cadre from the students and workers have stepped forward to take leading positions in organisation. The terrorised workers have freed themselves from fear. And the peasants swallowed up by the repression have begun to rise up again.

And in the prison, the flame still burns bright among the cadre. Belief in the justice of our struggle and our deep love for the mass of workers are the two

things which keep me going. Of course, there are moments when I experience the bitter pain of losing everything, of a sense of failure, of loneliness. There are times that I must struggle with myself and accept that I will lose the productive years of my youth. And I think: can I handle all this?

Yet, the next morning, I always awake warmed by sweet memories of struggling together with the workers, the people. There are women in the prison here who were workers too, and each time I look at them, I feel their hands reach out to me to make sure I do not fall.

The emergence of Megawati Sukarnoputri, a woman, as a figure supported by tens of millions of people is a sign of the progress and qualitative advance made by the pro-democracy movement and of the movement to end capitalism's use of patriarchy to manipulate us. Now we wait for the right moment, and prepare our forces, so that we will have an era of democracy where all will have the same rights, where women will have the opportunity to emerge as leaders in all fields.

I hope one day to be able to be with you again, as I was two years ago, and to discuss with you the economic and political issues affecting women. Your solidarity and international support from countries, where workers are also treated unfairly and women continue to be exploited, is something which strengthens our resolve here in the midst of the great losses and oppression of the Indonesian people.

Sisters, I miss you all. I long to be there among you.

\* Dita Sari, a leader of the People's Democratic Party of Indonesia, was a guest speaker in Perth in 1995. She wrote the letter above to her friends in Perth, Australia, to mark International Women's Day, 8 March 1997.

Dita was arrested in July while she was leading a peaceful demonstration of 20,000 young women workers demanding wage rises and other improvements and is on trial for "subversion", which in Indonesia carries the death penalty.

election for union executives be postal, despite the fact that workplace ballots get higher turnouts.

### 1990 Act

Trade unions can be held financially responsible for walk-outs and unofficial action.

### 1993 Act

This introduced a long and complicated balloting process under which a minimum six-week delay is built into any dispute between the decision to ballot and the first possible start day of any industrial action.

One way to judge just how Thatcherite Blair is on the anti-union laws is to ask what would have been different in some of the major industrial disputes over the last 15 years if Blair's cosmetic changes and "reforms" had been in place.

The answer is not a lot. In 1983 the POEU were prevented from taking industrial action in opposition to BT privatisation and against Mercury. With Blair's proposed changes they would still be unable to act.

In 1983 the NGA print union would still have faced fines and sequestration for picketing Eddie Shah's scab printing plant in Warrington. In 1986 the Wapping printers could still have been locked out and sacked. In 1988 the seafarers union, NUS, would still have been barred from even balloting its members in other ferry companies for solidarity strikes alongside the P&O strikers. In 1991 four RMT reps at Manchester Piccadilly were sacked for supposedly organising what was in fact spontaneous action. When their union organised a ballot for a legal strike to win their jobs back, the judge ruled the ballot itself illegal!

These Tory laws work. They have made it easier for the capitalist class to increase the level of exploitation in Britain and more difficult to unionise new sectors. They have helped create what Blair laughingly calls "a dynamic market economy." It is Blair's commitment to this framework which has made him oppose such elementary civil rights as equal legal rights for all workers, and a legal right to reinstatement if unfairly dismissed. It is this commitment to blocking all reform that could well provoke conflict between Blair and even the most right-wing union leaders — who will need laws on things like equal rights for all workers if they are to succeed in organising in the non-unionised sector. And if they don't recruit, their bureaucratic empires will wither.

Tom Righy



Cardinal Winning wants "bribe" women to continue with their pregnancies

## Anti-abortion campaign

# A winning scheme?

**U**NDER the banner of the "Pro-Life Alliance", anti-abortionists will stand up to 50 candidates in the general election. Now top Catholic cleric, Cardinal Winning, wants to launch an initiative in support of the anti-abortionists' campaign. He says his church should offer money to women who continue with their pregnancy rather than opt for a termination. This is a sign that the anti-abortionists are getting desperate.

Thirty years after the introduction of legal abortion in Britain most people — around 80% according to polls — have come to accept, albeit some more reluctantly than others, the arguments for choice. The so-called spiritual and moral arguments have a declining impact. The Catholic church's notion of "bribing" pregnant women in this way is the measure of its increasing impotence.

But will the Cardinal's scheme work? Many women do feel unable to continue with unplanned pregnancies because they are poor. The offer of, say, £1,000 may persuade some women to change their minds about a termination. Pro-life groups already make "donations" of clothing and equipment to pregnant women. Women who feel ambivalent about pregnancy can be persuaded by offers of "counselling" to "keep the baby" by the loving-kindness-we'll-support-you routine.

There is a huge list of disincentives for people considering having children: lack of access to public housing, cuts in maternity grants, lack of maternity rights,

cuts in benefit, lack of affordable child-care... Given that child-rearing equals sure impoverishment for many, one would expect the abortion rate to have rocketed over the last decade or so. In fact it has remained more or less stable — at around 200,000 a year.

I believe the Cardinal's scheme is doomed to failure. The choice of termination is made not for one single reason. Fear of poverty is only one factor and it doesn't seem to be as big a factor as we might assume. That must be a good thing. Women are making decisions on their own terms, for what some perhaps would see as "selfish" reasons — the desire to simply get on with a life.

The whole notion of giving a woman money or any other material or emotional bribe for continuing with an unplanned pregnancy is absolutely contemptible. It is made more contemptible by the disingenuous way in which the money is offered. Pro-life activists are never honest about their intentions. They will not say: "I am an hysterical religious dogmatist. I believe you will burn in hell if you have a termination. I don't care how confused and vulnerable you feel. Every little embryo is sacred and that is why I will give you a thousand quid to save it."

A woman should be free to make up her own mind. However, this cannot happen when there are so many external pressures facing women when they have to make this choice. Women who feel extremely ambivalent about being pregnant may take the Cardinal's money. On

one level I want to say to these women: "Take the money and run, help bankrupt the Catholic church!" But really such forms of "persuasion" should be outlawed. At the same time we have to campaign for a genuine free choice. That means campaigning to rebuild the welfare state — not least defending the provision of NHS abortions — and defending abortion rights.

● The National Abortion Campaign are asking for donations to fight the anti-abortionists in the election. For details of their campaign and to send donations write to: NAC, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL.

*Helen Rate*

## More Years For The Locust

by Jim Higgins

Illustrated by Phil Evans

Detailing the founding of the Socialist Review Group in 1950, its development into the International Socialists and concluding with the formation of the Socialist Workers Party in 1977.

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# Should Holocaust denial be a crime?

**M**IKE Gapes, Labour MP for Ilford, East London, wants legislation to outlaw denial that the Holocaust in which 6,000,000 Jewish people were murdered ever happened. This is a main theme of far-right propaganda.

Mark Osborn discussed the issues with him.

**Mike Gapes:** I believe there is a loophole in the existing incitement to racial hatred legislation. The legislation must be strengthened to make Holocaust Denial a crime. I have brought forward a Bill to make this possible. There are now many European countries which have such Holocaust Denial laws including Germany, Switzerland, France, Austria and Lithuania. Other countries are considering such legislation.

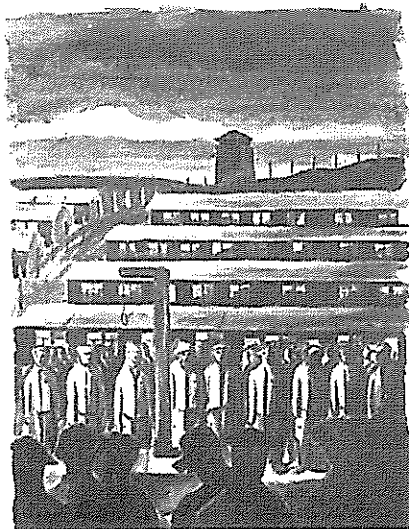
In the modern world, material can be easily produced in one country and distributed and disseminated in others. I am concerned that Britain may become a "safe haven" for neo-nazi groups peddling anti-semitic propaganda.

**Mark Osborn:** I am, obviously, profoundly sympathetic to your aim of dealing with anti-semites and nazi groups. However there are some problems with your proposed legislation.

Take the case of the fascist "historian" David Irving who was fined in a German court for claiming Auschwitz was faked by the Polish state after the war had ended. He has defended himself in the British press, cloaking anti-semitism in appeals for support in defending his right to free speech.

**Gapes:** My view is that there is no absolute right to free speech. We already have restraints on free speech: the Public Order Act (1986), the Race Relations Act. We have slander and libel laws.

Free speech exists within certain bounds and constraints. And I believe that the balance that exists at the



Mike Gapes

moment needs shifting slightly, strengthening the law to deal with the problem of Holocaust Denial.

**Osborn:** If we present ourselves as people who are prepared to restrict free speech we divert attention from the real issue — fascism and anti-semitism — to something else, free speech.

This has been amply illustrated in Irving's case. People who are not nazis have run to his defence, supporting his right to speak his mind.

**Gapes:** I do not want to comment about particular individuals. However, what is the point of having laws against racial hatred if Holocaust Denial is never prosecuted?

**Osborn:** But the left should promote anti-fascist policies that are effective. Your Bill may well be counterproductive, causing confusion and creating a backlash against the anti-fascists.

**Gapes:** The issue is this: democracy must defend itself against nazi and neo-nazi groups. We need strong laws to protect *all* minorities in our society.

The groups that deny the Holocaust are doing so for very clear reasons. They are trying to foster and promote anti-semitism. As we get fur-

ther and further away from these events there is always a danger that young people do not know the real facts.

**Osborn:** I have been involved in organising anti-fascist campaigns and marches. These campaigns are always organised in defence of our rights to speak, to organise; in defence of the rights of Black and Jewish people. It is more effective to present ourselves as the defenders of democratic rights, rather than campaigning to restrict the rights of others.

**Gapes:** Society should not rely on a minority of activists to defend itself from the activities of nazi and neo-nazi groups. Society must use every avenue which is open to it in order to defend itself from these people, including the law.

**Osborn:** But how effective is the law — the courts, judiciary and the police — in dealing with the fascists? Often the role of the state is to *protect* the fascists from the anti-fascists. That is certainly the role of the police on many anti-fascist marches.

**Gapes:** That is a gross insult to many people within the police force who *do* want to prosecute the neo-nazis, who have referred Holocaust Denial material to the Crown Prosecution Service, but who find, under existing legislation, that the perpetrators are not prosecuted.

My experience is that my local police are very keen to stamp out this type of material and to foster good relations between groups.

**Osborn:** However, presumably, the police could use existing laws if they wanted to, to arrest most of the BNP. They don't want to.

**Gapes:** They are restricted by the existing laws. We need to extend and improve the legislation. My Bill has cross-party support and backing from Labour's front bench. I am confident that such laws will reach the statute books.

*Editors note: we invite readers to comment on this important issue.*

Iranian revolution 1979: the workers' movement was crushed. Now it is beginning to revive



# Iranian oil workers dare to fight

ON 16 February, oil workers and their elected representatives from the oil refineries of Shiraz, Isfahan, Tabriz and Tehran, together with workers from oil pipelines and the national gas company, staged a demonstration in front of the Oil Ministry in Tehran.

The government sent Islamic Guards to disperse the demonstrators and hundreds were arrested. The government declared all oil workers' organisations illegal, banned the formation of a national organisation, and rejected the demand for collective bargaining.

Two oil workers who were among the demonstrators outside the Oil Ministry on the 16 February died from the injuries they received that day. There are reports that two other oil workers died under torture in prison. A number of those arrested were released in late February but the government then arrested oil workers in Shiraz and Abadan.

Oil workers were protesting against their working conditions and the level of wages and for the right to form a workers' organisation have been involved in a direct confrontation with the Iranian regime for the last few months. The oil

workers had previously threatened to go on all-out, national, unlimited strike if their legitimate demands were not met.

As negotiations failed in early February, the oil workers tried to co-ordinate their protest on a national level thus the demonstration of 16 February.

According to the latest information the government has now accepted most of the economic demands of the oil workers, and in many refineries workers returned to work on 8 March. The government negotiators have accepted an increase in travel payments, improved rate of overtime pay, and improved pay scales.

However many of the political demands, such as the right to form workers' organisations, have not been met. The oil workers are continuing their protest for the unconditional release of imprisoned demonstrators and recognition of their national workers' organisation.

*Committee for the Defence of Iranian Oil Workers comprising Communist Party of Iran, Workers Left Unity, Organisation of Migrant and Refugee Iranian workers.*

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## Colin Coyle

COLIN Coyle drowned on 6 March 1997 in a Lancaster canal. He was 26 years old.

Colin joined Workers' Liberty in early 1994. He had been a labour movement and Labour Party activist and a socialist all of his adult life. Colin was widely respected throughout the Lancaster labour movement for his continued involvement in and commitment to workers' struggles, both locally and nationally. Colin a born and bred Lancastrian, had been unemployed for a number of years.

An avid reader who explored ideas with relish, Colin decided to join the AWL after reading and being convinced by Lenin's State and Revolution. He had, and worked to develop, a keen knowledge of working-class history.

Colin could often be shy about expressing his ideas, but he was an independent and sharp thinker. He took the publications of his organisation very seriously and was conscientious about using them to spread our ideas. Although initially nervous he took immense pleasure in his first successful public sale. For Colin, the greatest insult anyone ever threw at him was when he was jokingly called a dilettante. He wasn't.

Colin's other great joys in life were walking and music, at least when he wasn't in the pub! He spent a lot of time walking in the Lake District and in the countryside around Lancaster.

Colin had varied music tastes from Teardrop Explodes to Scott Walker and The Smiths. His evangelising failed to entirely convince the branch to share his preferences.

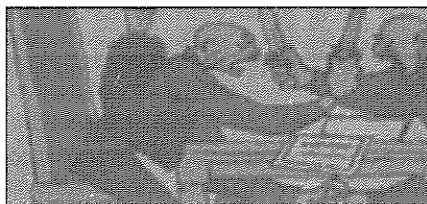
Colin was involved in the minibus accident in the summer of 1995 in which two of his Lancaster comrades, Jo Walker and David Hague, were killed. He had been depressed for a while and it is likely that he took his own life. For his friends and comrades this is a particularly hard fact to come to terms with.

Colin earned enormous respect and affection from his comrades. His dry sense of humour was always appreciated even when we were the butt of it.

He was much loved and will be much missed.

*Members of the Lancaster Alliance for Workers' Liberty 1994-97*





## Jimmy Airlie – decline and fall of a militant

**S**URVEYING the miserable collection of careerists, time-servers and jumped-up office boys comprising the current “leadership” of the British trade union movement, it is difficult not to think of Jimmy Airlie (who died on 10 March, aged 60) without a degree of warmth.

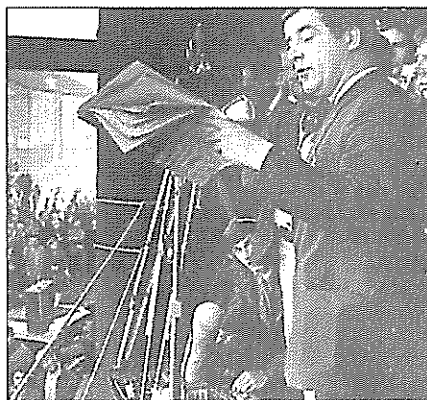
Unlike most of the Gadarene herd, presently lumbering towards the precipice that is New Labour, Airlie started out as a shop-floor activist and — for a significant portion of his life — appears to have been motivated by genuine principles.

As a young militant in the Fairfield's (later Govan) shipyard on the Clyde in the late '50s, he joined the Communist Party. For Airlie, like many of his background and generation, CP membership was more a badge of militancy and a reaction against the vacillation and corruption of the Labour Party than an intellectually worked out political choice. He remained a CP member until it collapsed in the early 1990s; by then he was firmly on the social-democratic 'Euro' wing of the party.

The loss-making Clyde shipyards were nationalised by the Labour government in 1968, by which time Airlie had progressed from AEU shop steward to convenor of Govan. The new Upper Clyde Shipyards (UCS) continued to lose money and when, in 1970, the Tories came to power on a manifesto of no more support for “lame duck” industries, financial backing was withdrawn. The liquidators were sent in to UCS in June '71, threatening 8,000 jobs and many more in the support industries.

This was Airlie's finest hour. With fellow CPer Jimmy Reid and Sammy Gilmore of the Boilermakers, he organised a “work-in” to demand state investment to save the yards. The workers reported in as usual every day but refused to work on the 10 ships under construction, holding up £30 million worth of orders. They were paid out of a shop stewards' fund which raised £485,000 from street collections, shopfloor levies and donations from the labour movement throughout Britain and abroad. It was an outstanding example of workers' control and working class solidarity.

The Chief Constable of Glasgow, David “Hammer” McNee, advised Prime



Minister Heath that the occupation could not be forcibly ended without at least an extra 5,000 police. Pressure on the Tories was increased by a miners' overtime ban (in pursuit of a pay claim) and Heath finally capitulated with a £35 million state subsidy to keep three of the four UCS yards open and a commitment to actively encourage an American takeover of the fourth. But the Clydeside workers achieved more than that. They forced Heath to abandon his “lame duck” policy and rush through an interventionist Industry Act that (temporarily at least) saved thousands of jobs throughout all industries.

The publicity-hungry Jimmy Reid has spent the rest of his life promoting himself as the ‘hero’ of the UCS sit-in. In reality, Airlie was the central organiser and the real ‘heroes’ were the mass of the UCS workforce. While Reid pursued his career as a media ‘personality’, Airlie stayed on at UCS as an AEU full-timer and not much more was heard of him until, in 1983, he became the first CP member to be elected to the union's national executive. From then on it was mostly downhill for Jimmy Airlie.

The right-wing Catholic mafia controlling the AEU attempted to move Airlie away from his Scottish power base by giving him responsibility for Ford. For a while it looked as though this move had backfired. Airlie organised a successful pay strike that crippled Ford's European operations for two weeks in 1985. But the Ford bosses soon realised that Airlie was a ‘Communist’ they could do business with: when negotiations broke down and industrial action seemed likely, Airlie was the man they would seek out for a quiet chat and a ‘corridor’ settlement.

In 1987 he negotiated a treacherous single-union deal in order to persuade Ford to open a plant at Dundee: when the TGWU and MSF, quite understandably, threatened to “black” the proposed plant and even the TUC condemned the deal, Ford withdrew. Airlie's wrath at the loss of 1,500 potential jobs in an area of high unemployment was directed not at Ford but at the rest of the trade union movement. He repeated this sort of treachery a few years later when he connived with Hoover bosses to close down a plant in France and transfer the work to Scotland.

By the late '80s Airlie's role was plainly that of a useful and willing ‘left wing’ front man for the AEU leadership's attacks on rank and file militants. He used his position as chair of the *Engineering Gazette* (the AEU Broad Left) to abuse and intimidate anyone who dared criticise him. When, at one meeting, a few brave souls proposed a discussion on “the role of the chair” (i.e. Airlie's behaviour) he threatened to close the meeting.

During the Timex dispute of 1993, against 343 sackings, a wage freeze and a 10% cut in fringe benefits, he repeatedly attempted to get the workforce to accept wage cuts, and publicly condemned the Timex stewards who opposed his deals.

But it was as chief negotiator for the unions in the North Sea oil fields that Airlie hit rock bottom, policing a classic “sweetheart” deal with the employers. When rank and file offshore rig workers reluctantly concluded that the official unions were not representing their interests over pay, health and safety, leave entitlement and a host of other issues they formed a new union, OILC.

Airlie launched a public campaign of vilification against OILC and its leaders, urging the employers to deny it recognition even though it represented more offshore workers than the TUC unions. OILC took great pleasure in publishing a verbatim transcript of Airlie's drunken, incoherent and at times surreal ‘justification’ of his actions. It was a sad twilight to a career in the workers' movement and a bitter irony also: Airlie ended up a tool of the right, attacking rank and file militants who must surely have reminded him of himself twenty or thirty years earlier.

*Sleeper*

# The left and the election

**T**HE urge to reject and spurn the New Labour Party is understandable. The socialist who does not feel that now has some vital part missing. It is an impulse we profoundly share. But people who call themselves Marxists should *think* as well as *emote*.

A refusal to vote Labour in this election amounts to a premature abandonment of mass working-class politics. It implies, or may imply, an abandonment of the perspective of restoring mass working-class politics if in the end the Thatcher-Blair project is triumphant.

That, it seems to us, is what Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party and the renamed Militant — now called the Socialist Party — are doing: they are prematurely admitting defeat; they are anticipating that which threatens but has not yet happened and against which it is the duty of socialists to fight for as long as possible *if only to rally the labour movement forces to build a new mass trade-union-based political labour movement*.

Anything else is sectarianism. Despite all the differences it has in its nature and in its concerns, sectarianism produces the same result as Blairism — it divorces the socialists from the working class in politics. It cuts them off from or at least erects barriers against, the fundamental work that needs to be done should the Blairites clinch their victory: patient propaganda for a new mass trade-union based working class political party, this time with better politics. The minus-



cule electoral activity of small self-isolating groups can neither substitute for, nor help, this work.

Militant/the Socialist Party, which is standing 19 candidates, and is part of the Scottish Socialist Alliance which has a slate of 16, is here simply ridiculous. It will refuse to call for a Labour vote even where there is no socialist candidate standing! For many decades this group immersed itself in the Labour Party, confining itself mostly to making abstract dried-out propaganda for "nationalisation" — indeed, Fabian-socialist propaganda, that was not in any sense Marxist propaganda: Marxists are concerned with class rule and see "nationalisation" as but a means to an

end, not as an end in itself.

They were mesmerised for decades by a strange vulgar-evolutionist scenario which pictured the Labour Party as slowly and organically evolving towards a point where the right wing would hive off, the "broad left" take over and, soon, "the Marxists" — Militant — would become the Labour Party. They were passive citizens of the Labour Party, like the man who gets on a train and believes all that has to be done is stay on the train long enough for it to reach its destination, chatting to the other passengers about the pleasant place they are trundling to.

When they found themselves in the leadership of the Labour-controlled Liverpool council, at a crucial point in recent labour movement history — the great miners' strike of 1984-5 — they made much noise and great boastings, but *behaved* like any other social democrats would: ignoring the great regulator of what Marxists do, the class struggle and the logic of the class struggle, they avoided confrontation with the government. They did a deal with the Tories instead of joining the miners — then on strike — in a confrontation with the government *for which tens of thousands of Liverpool workers were ready and eager*. They could have taken a large part of the Labour Party with them into battle and discredited Labour leaders such as Neil Kinnock, who refused to back the miners or fight the Tories. If the Labour

## What the Socialist Party say

"WE are standing 19 Socialist Party candidates in England and Wales and we have a number of comrades standing as part of the Socialist Alliance in Scotland (which is standing 16).

We are standing to put the case for a socialist alternative to Labour. The issues our candidates are concentrating on are: health cuts, opposition to the Job Seekers Allowance and Council cuts and for a minimum wage.

We are not expecting particularly high votes because we understand that this election will be very polarised. Our candidates are making a marker for the future.

We expect that big struggles will begin after the election because of the attacks a Labour government will make

on the working class. We think these struggles will give rise to new, interesting political formations — both single issue campaigns and more general movements. We have changed our name [from Militant Labour] to the Socialist Party to prepare for this period.

We understand why people will vote Labour. In many places workers will have no alternative. But our printed material does not call for a Labour vote in constituencies where we are not standing.

We now categorise the Labour Party as a capitalist — not a bourgeois-workers — party. There are still, obviously, differences between the US Democrats and Labour — the union link still exists. However Blair's model is clearly the Democratic Party. We believe that Labour has crossed the line from being a bourgeois-workers party to becoming a straightforward capitalist party."



Party had then split, as it might, it would have been a big left-wing split with serious backing in the trade unions. It would have been, or maybe have become, a viable governmental alternative to the right-wing Labour Party; especially if the miners had won, as, with solidarity, they might.

Instead of that, they bottled out, leaving the miners in the lurch. Then with the miners defeated, the Tories and the Labour leaders cut Liverpool Militant to ribbons and isolated them. They finally left the Labour Party, a defeated rump with their tail between their legs. Now they sulk, giving up prematurely on the mass political labour movement, shouting "it's all over", when it is not all over — when, in any case, the work of socialists is to fight to preserve or restore mass working class politics. If the Labour Party is "over" then we must build a new Labour Representation Committee to prepare and build a new mass party. That will not be done by those who prematurely abandon the trade unions in politics.

## What the Socialist Labour Party say

**THE Wirral South by-election result was predictable. Tony Blair's New Labour is almost identical to Ted Heath's Old Tories, and Blair was able to convince Tory voters to switch on the basis that New Labour's policies (on taxation, accepting privatisation, cuts in the NHS and education services) signal virtually 'no change' if New Labour wins the General Election.**

**Whatever the outcome of the 1997 General Election, the next government will be committed to capitalism and the free market, which means there will be no fundamental changes in our ravaged, battered society.**

**We must contest elections wherever finances and resources allow; it is fundamental to show our fellow citizens that there is an alternative to the free market capitalism now espoused by New Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Tories — the alternative is embodied in the SLP, whose policies can create the conditions necessary for establishing a Socialist Britain based on common ownership.**

**The SLP was born because of New Labour's irreversible constitutional and policy changes. It is clear that New Labour is no longer a party that socialists can be members of or support.**

*Arthur Scargill, SLP General Secretary in the SLP paper, Socialist News, March 1997*

Militant/the Socialist Party is as unbalanced, mechanical and undialectical now as it was in the days of its delusion-fixated, placid citizenship in the Labour Party.

Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, which is running 50 candidates is merely a small, a very small, leftish, socialist-in-a-general-way version of the Labour Party as it was around 1980. A sizeable part of its membership of 1,000 or 2,000 seem to be "Marxists" doing one or other sort of "entry" work — but they won't change anything! The SLP might have been expected in some one-time mining areas to be able to mobilise a symbolic old-style Labour-socialist working class protest against New Labour. That would not have offered the working class a governmental alternative to either the Tories or New Labour, but it would have been something worthwhile nonetheless. Despite his political limitations and his shameful long-time links with the anti-working class police state regimes of the now defunct USSR and Stalinist Eastern Europe, Arthur Scargill did lead the greatest single post World War 2 working class battle, the miners' strike of 1984-5. But the SLP's by-election showings have been extremely poor; their general election results will almost certainly be much worse. Although some SLP members differ, Scargill's line on Labour is the same as the Socialist Party's: no backing for Labour even where the SLP is not standing.

Neither the Militant/Socialist Party nor the SLP candidates will be socialist candidates in general, but candidates of particular, narrow sects, standing essentially in order to help build those sects. Instead of making an agreement to share out target seats and support each other, the Socialist Party and the SLP are competing in some seats and make no call to support each other elsewhere. They will certainly attract socialist protest voters; but thinking socialists will back them only if they want to build those organisations. *None* of this is *serious* electoral activity.

Both the SLP and the Militant/Socialist Party are more respectable than the SWP, which claims to be the biggest socialist organisation in Britain. Between elections, the SWP pours scorn on the Labour Party and, indeed, on Parliament. For three decades they have pretended that the Labour Party was irrelevant to the working class — except at elections! Then in stark defiance of both the emotional and common-sensical logic of what they have said for the previous five years, they back Labour. This time round, they do it shame-facedly, calling for an anti-

## What the SWP say

**TONY Blair has spend his energies sucking up to the rich few who have gained the most from the past 20 years, instead of offering real hope to the millions who have lost out.**

**The Liberal Democrats present no alternative to those seeking change, as those who have to live under Liberal-run councils will testify.**

**In a handful of constituencies voters will be able to support candidates who are offering a genuine left-wing alternative to New Labour, such as Arthur Scargill's SLP.**

**Socialist Worker will be urging a vote for those candidates.**

**But what really counts at the end of the day is not a cross on a piece of paper. What is decisive is whether people engage in the kind of struggles that fundamentally challenge the system.**

Tory vote.

Why? Because they are canny enough to know that if they were consistent and advocated abstention, that would cut them off from the labour movement. If they stood candidates they would not only perform disastrously but worse than, for example, the Militant/Socialist Party.

The between-elections hostility to politics preached by the SWP does not prepare their supporters to be good vote-gatherers. They discovered that painfully in the late '70s, when they stood a few candidates, and have steered clear of such activities ever since.

On the level of political ideas, though they sport a certain academic pretentiousness, the SWP is simply not serious.

If the Blair group succeeds in destroying the working-class character of the Labour Party and (possibly, or) some variant of PR exists in the next general election, then socialists will be faced with the task of mounting a serious independent election campaign. That could only be done by the sort of united socialist activity that has sometimes been mounted by the groups of the so-called far-left in France. But no serious person will determine what to do now, in this election, by what may be appropriate or possible in an election five years hence. Now, together with the vast majority of the politically conscious workers, we say *vote Labour!*



# Destruction and hope in ex-Yugoslavia

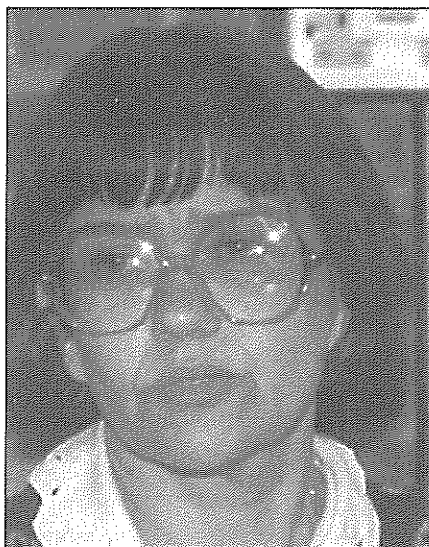
By Branka Magas

**T**HE main reasons for continuing tensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the non-implementation of the civilian side of the Dayton Accords. Its military side — stopping the war — has been accomplished, but that is clearly not enough.

The civilian provisions of Dayton contain several important elements whose implementation is necessary if the country is to be reunited:

1. creating common Bosnian institutions;
2. return of the refugees to their homes;
3. arrest of war criminals and their delivery to the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague;
4. ensuring freedom of movement throughout the country;
5. economic reconstruction.

In these five crucial areas, implementation has been at best partial, at worst non-existent. War criminals, especially Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and Dario Kordic, have not been apprehended. Economic reconstruction is proceeding very slowly, which means that unemployment remains very high (over 80%) and the country cannot even begin to produce for itself. Freedom of movement is highly restricted and unsafe in all areas under the control of the so-called Republika Srpska or the Croat Military Council (HVO), so much so, the country



remains divided into three parts.

Even in some areas controlled by the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is intolerance towards the non-Muslim population. Not only can refugees (i.e. half of Bosnia's population) not go home, but more refugees are being created daily. It is estimated that some 150,000 extra people have been expelled from their homes since the signing of the Dayton agreement.

Finally, the central institutions exist only

on paper and are being sabotaged by the nationalist Serb and Croat leaders. These people have no interest in a functioning Bosnia-Herzegovina and will do anything they can to keep it partitioned.

The main culprits for the non-implementation of the civilian side of Dayton are Great Britain, France and the United States. They have lots of troops with great firepower on the ground, but pretend that creating a secure environment for the return of refugees or arresting war criminals are nothing to do with them.

More generally, the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina forged in Dayton has reduced all politics to ethnicity and this is keeping the country divided. Thus in the entity called "Serb", Croats and Muslims have limited rights even in theory (in practice they have none) while in the other, called Croat-Muslim, the same holds true for Serbs. Given that, in addition, the central government is very weak (having no army, police or tax-raising powers of its own), it is difficult to see how Dayton Bosnia can ever work.

The British troops in Bosnia are centred on Banja Luka, which is an area where genocide has occurred in all its horror. Many of the people who organised concentration camps, mass rapes and systematic expulsion of the non-Serb population (including the destruc-

tion of all mosques and many Catholic churches) are now running municipal administrations. And the trouble is that the British troops, rather than arresting these criminals and sending them to The Hague, are co-operating with them and providing considerable economic assistance unconditionally. For example, in the town of Prijedor north-west of Banja Luka which is run by some of the most vicious war criminals, the British are helping to repair the infrastructure without obliging the local authorities to implement the civilian parts of Dayton. It is in principle very good, of course, to build hospitals and power stations, but it is not very good when these hospitals work on the principle of apartheid, and normalisation is used to cement the power of war criminals.

What socialists in this country should do is submit the actions of the British government in Bosnia-Herzegovina to very detailed scrutiny, in order to judge to what extent it is fulfilling the obligations towards Bosnia-Herzegovina into which (as one of the Contact Group countries) it entered at Dayton, as well as the obligations that flow from Britain's signature on such international treaties as the convention on genocide.

**T**HE Serbian opposition has formed a coalition — Zajedno [Together]. Its strength was shown by the November 1996 municipal elections when it won most of the larger towns in Serbia, including Belgrade. Milosevic has tried to negate these victories, but this produced something that no one, least of all the Zajedno leaders, had predicted: a true popular revolt. This revolt was visible in the huge demonstrations held in Belgrade and other cities. As a result, and under Western pressure, Milosevic has been forced to concede defeat. Elections for the Serbian parliament and presidency are due to take place later on in the year and it is possible that control of the local administration will provide the Zajedno leaders with the kind of base necessary to defeat the ruling party and its president Slobodan Milosevic. The demonstrations have also convinced Western governments — including even the British, which up to now has been very supportive of the Serbian regime — that Milosevic should go.

As for the Croatian opposition, it has already proved itself as a real threat to the regime. It won in most of the towns at the last elections. Indeed, the ruling HDZ party is highly unpopular and unlikely to win the next elections.

But the opposition has not been able to capitalise on these successes and the government's general unpopularity (visible in a whole series of strikes). It has not been able as a result to provide a unified and effective political alternative. The large demonstration that followed the regime's attempt to silence

the popular Zagreb local Radio 101 came as a surprise to the opposition as well: in Croatia as in Serbia the mood of the masses is far more contestational than that of the opposition parties.

It is possible that the reintegration of the last part of the formerly occupied area still under UN control will create a better situation, from the point of view of anti-Tudjman forces. Tudjman is in any case mortally ill, so that the end of his regime is now in sight.

In my view the end of the current regimes in Serbia and Croatia will have a direct beneficial effect upon Bosnia's

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**“Former Yugoslavia can be stable, prosperous, peaceful, only if the borders of the former republics and provinces are respected, and if Kosovo is given the right of self-determination.”**

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prospects. But there is a difference here between the two. Whereas the opposition in Croatia is not predominantly nationalistic and — like the Catholic Church — favours Bosnia's integration, this is not true for the Serbian Church and opposition.

Nevertheless, whoever comes after Milosevic will not be able to wield the same aggressive and concentrated power. Milosevic's regime has been based on complete control of the state and economy, and that will have to change if Serbia is to re-enter international financial institutions, which it needs to do in order to get the necessary credits. Serbia's economy is in a very bad state and facing collapse. Serbia, in addition, will soon have to tackle such difficult problems as what to do about the Albanian province of Kosovo, how to relate to its federal partner Montenegro, how to deal with the growing demand for autonomy coming from Vojvodina, and how to satisfy the national and human rights of the Bosniak population in Sandjak.

The area of former Yugoslavia can be stable, prosperous, peaceful and mutually co-operative only if the borders of the former republics and provinces are respected, and if Kosovo is given the right of self-determination. The extent of democracy, economic prosperity, social stability and international standing of both Serbia and Croatia have suffered greatly as a result of their aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina. As for Kosovo, it is possible to imagine that in the first instance its autonomy will be restored, with it becoming a republic on a par with Serbia and Montenegro; and that then, after a fixed

period of time, the people in that republic will be allowed to decide their future through an internationally supervised referendum — very much like what happened in the case of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I wish to stress here that it is of the utmost importance that Macedonia's integrity be fully respected by all its neighbours.

Progress in Bosnia depends also on the emergence of political movements offering programmes which propose guarantees to every community that it will not be forcibly overwhelmed. It should be recalled, however, that the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war was precisely of that type: it ensured internal coherence of the country and harmonisation of the different communities' interests. War came to Bosnia not from within but from outside. All Bosnians of whatever ethnicity share the same interest: the right to return to their homes, to live safely, to be able to rebuild their villages, cities, their society and economy, so that they and their families have a normal future. This means that the internal borders created by war and genocide will have to be erased. There are already parties and political movements working to re-build Bosnia-Herzegovina in this way, and as time goes by their task will become easier, particularly if the neighbouring countries undergo this kind of democratic change of which I spoke earlier.

**T**RADER union activity in a country like Bosnia-Herzegovina — in which the economy is working at something like one-tenth of its pre-war capacity and unemployment is around 80% — is difficult and specific. At the same time, given the arrested development of political parties, trade unions will have to do something of their work as well. In Serbia itself, the unemployment is huge and growing: now that the war is over the regime is massively sacking workers, while those who continue in their jobs have lost all their previous (albeit nominal) legal rights. Serbia as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina will soon be undergoing the process known as “privatisation” and it is important that the workers join together in order to be part of the solution.

As Bosnia heals and its neighbours democratise, i.e. the situation becomes more stable and normal (so that, for example you can travel without fear of arrest or loss of life), it will be trade unions in the first instance that will articulate workers' needs, of which international solidarity is one. The whole of the former Yugoslav area (with the partial exception of Slovenia) is devastated and impoverished. It will be impossible to change this situation qualitatively for the better unless workers throughout the area establish firm links of mutual solidarity.

# Good Golly, Miss Dolly!

Les Hearn looks at the realities of cloning

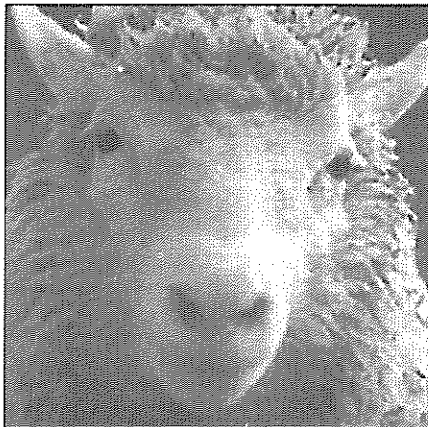
**T**HE recently announced cloning of the sheep "Dolly", using DNA from a cell from the body of another sheep, is an important breakthrough. It suggests that the specialisation of cells as an animal develops may not be irreversible, as previously thought.

All the cells in an organism, be it animal, plant or fungus, carry the complete instructions in the form of DNA for making that organism. Nevertheless, after quite a short time in the life of an embryo, each cell develops in a special way, with its own function. This process is called differentiation.

In some organisms this process can be reversed; one of these cells can be induced to develop into a new individual. This will be genetically identical to the old one, in other words, a clone. In many plants a single cell or group of cells from one part may grow into a complete new plant which is a clone of the original. This may occur naturally or artificially. However, in animals, this can usually only occur in the very young embryo, with very few cells. This is how identical twins arise. Later, the cells seem to become fixed in their destiny to become part of a tissue or organ. They still contain all the DNA but it seems to have been partially deactivated. Only the genes needed for that organ or tissue are "switched on".

The problem of how differentiation occurs has been one of the major themes of developmental biology. Cloning from mature body cells represents a reversal of that process and the knowledge gained could be invaluable in understanding such problems of development as cancer or regeneration of damaged spinal cords. In agriculture, valuable animals or plants, perhaps developed by genetic engineering, could be cloned.

Over 20 years ago, frog cells from gut and skin were successfully cloned. This did not represent such a great breakthrough, though, as differentiation in amphibians was known to be less permanent. Even whole limbs can regenerate if lost by accident. Unfortunately, mammals cannot regenerate even a lost toe, while the inability of severed spinal nerves to regenerate is the cause of much paralysis among human accident victims. This makes the cloning of Dolly all the more impressive.



The process involved the following steps:

- An udder cell was removed and kept in a salt solution with minimal nourishment. This put the cell in a state of hibernation, with its genes shut down.
- An egg cell from another sheep had its DNA removed.
- The two cells were placed together and induced to fuse with a small electric current.
- The egg cell somehow reprogrammed the DNA from the udder cell and allowed it to direct the development of a complete individual. (The mechanism of this will be the subject of intensive research for years to come.)

Dolly the sheep is genetically the identical twin of the owner of the udder. Her genetic parents are the parents of the "udder" sheep; her birth parent is the sheep that carried her foetus to term. This situation parallels that of human identical twins born to different women at different times, through the mediation of In Vitro Fertilisation techniques.

The presentation of Dolly to the world has unleashed a torrent of ill-informed and alarmist speculation. The prospect of human cloning was immediately raised and Ian Wilmut, a member of the cloning team, gave his view that this could be possible within two years. This is undoubtedly true since the most technically difficult part has already been done. However, he also pointed out that human cloning would be illegal in Britain and in his opinion unethical.

Some of the speculation has been truly bizarre. *Die Welt* thought that cloning humans would fit into a Nazi world view and asked how long it would be before "a new Einstein, Lollobrigida

or even Hitler populates the brave new world". This ignores the fact that identical twins are not the same people. Even in the womb, they do not experience exactly the same environment; nor do the same genes work in exactly the same way all the time.

The director of a fertility clinic in Britain thought that it might be possible to clone embryonic stem cells, that give rise to blood-forming tissues, immune cells, skin or gut cells. These could be used to replace tissues in people who had perhaps lost their own through cancer treatment. But he then speculated on the production of a matching human body with its brain removed from which spare parts could be taken. This would and surely should be illegal in every society. A cloned human is a human with the rights of a human. It is no more the property of the donor of the DNA than a child is the property of its parents.

The moral arguments over cloning humans will be debated for some time. Whatever the outcome, I believe there is a very good practical argument against. There is good reason to believe that a clone would live less long than the DNA donor. The explanation for this lies with things called telomeres.

When a chromosome is duplicated during cell division, an enzyme called DNA polymerase has to attach to the end and then copy the chromosome. But the bit it attaches to is not copied. If this was part of a gene the cell would soon develop faults and die. Instead, there are several repeated segments called telomeres. These are lost over time as the cell divides. Finally, there are none left and the cell stops dividing and eventually dies. The fertilised egg has the normal number of telomeres but a cell from an adult has less. The egg of a clone would therefore start off with less than normal and should die younger, on average at the same time as the donor.

At the moment, cloning is a very hit and miss affair. Dolly was the only success out of 277 attempts. Given the telomere problem, it is difficult to see why anyone would want to go to all the trouble when they could get half their genes into a child in the normal way (and have more fun). In the meantime, natural human clones will continue to be born in their thousands, in the form of twins.



# Renault workers say: “Europe without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no”

By Colin Foster

“EUROPE without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no”, was among the slogans on a 70,000 strong march in Brussels on 16 March, where workers from the threatened Renault car factory at Vilvoorde, Belgium, were joined by delegations from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece and Austria.

In the 1970s and 1980s steelworkers fought closures and job cuts all across Europe. But they fought separately. French workers fought to save French steelworks, Italian workers to save Italian steelworks. Within Britain there were rival campaigns to save “Scottish steel” and “Welsh steel”. Militant French steelworkers seized truckloads of German steel and tipped them on

to the railway tracks.

The Renault struggle shows a major step forward from that tragic and counterproductive division. Renault workers in Belgium and France staged a “Euro-strike” on 7 March, and a “Euro-demonstration” on 11 March, singing the *Internationale* outside Renault’s company HQ in Paris. Despite Renault bosses saying that they plan to expand production in Spain when they close Vilvoorde, the strike and the demonstration were supported by Spanish Renault workers.

When Renault announced the closure of the Vilvoorde factory in late February, together with 2,700 job cuts across their French factories, the Vilvoorde workers responded by occupying their factory but also by reaching out to other workers and holding their first demonstration in Brussels on 3 March.

There are special reasons why the Vilvoorde workers should shun the idea that workers in each factory, or country, should secure their future at the expense of others by proving themselves more “competitive”. For some years now the Vilvoorde factory has been held up to workers in other Renault plants as a model of productivity.

The plant was almost totally reconstructed and automated three years ago. The workers gave up their eight-hour shifts and five-day week to accept “flexible” working. Their work rate is electronically monitored, and they have only four minutes’ break each hour. Their quality of production is the best in the combine — or so workers at other Renault factories have been told.

Probably that flexibility is why the Renault bosses thought they could shut Vilvoorde with little protest. But they were wrong.

## The left, and Europe

THE British left is still infected by nationalism. There are a number of reasons for this. Britain did not join the European Community — despite two abortive attempts to do so — until 1972, 14 years after the Treaty of Rome came into operation. Initially there was strong ruling-class opposition, and that was reflected inside the labour movement. The USSR opposed Europe, and the Stalinist party in Britain — which had much influence in the trade unions — took this line ready-made, hypocritically purveying British nationalism, the better to serve Russian foreign policy, that is, Russian nationalism. The British trade union bureaucracy was comfortable then in the close links it had with the British national state, and did not want to risk losing them. It all added up to a powerful many-streamed current in the British labour movement against Europe.

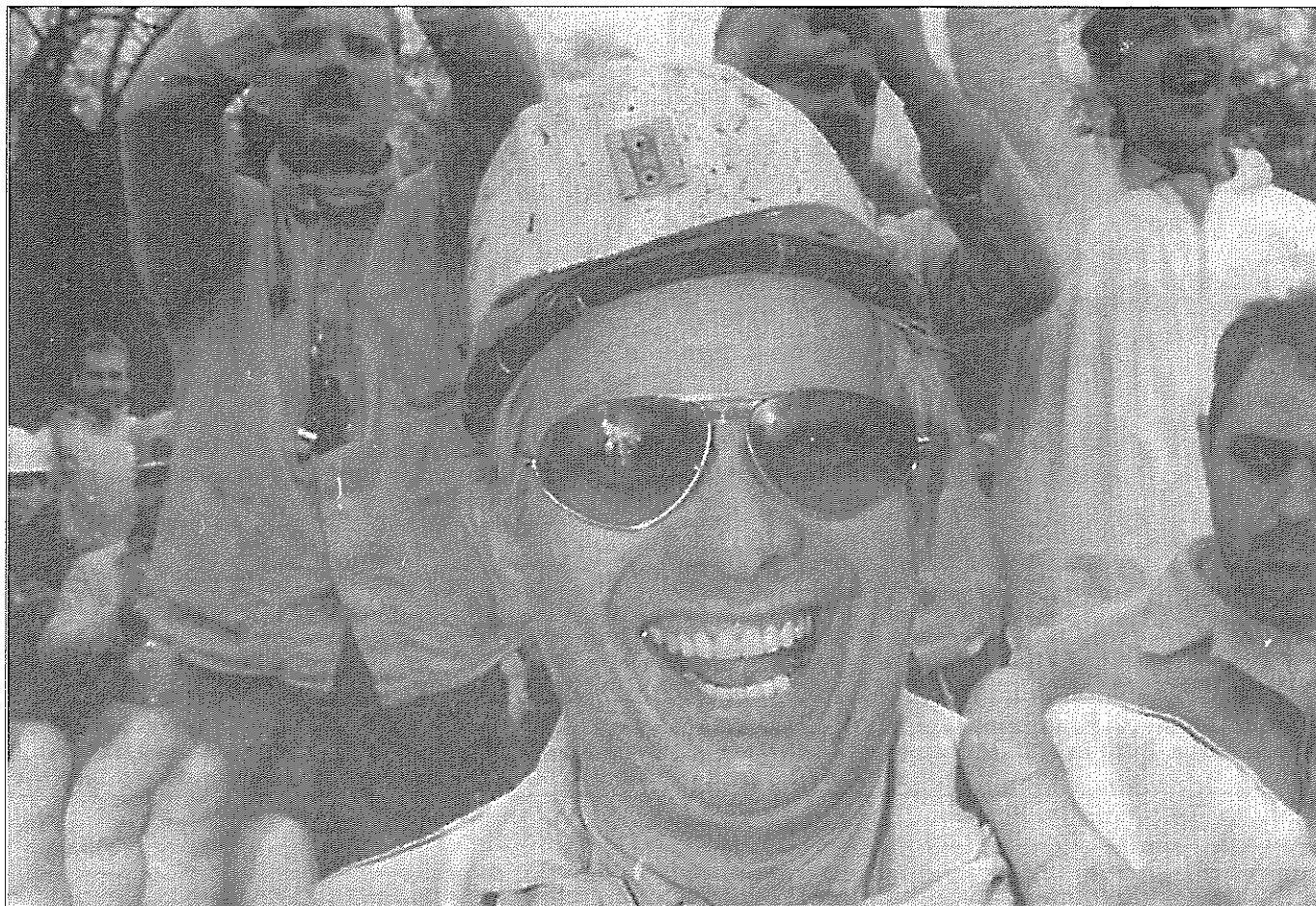
The revolutionary left was swamped by this current. Initially refusing to be tainted by the “little Englandism in the service of the USSR” of the CP or by the other more sincere little Englanders, most of the revolutionary left eventually allowed itself to join the anti-Europe chorus for fear of antagonising working-class militants influenced by the chauvinists. Throwing overboard the Marxist responsibility to orient on the basic issues according to real

working-class interests, the left became wildly demagogic, denouncing the European Union as “capitalist Europe” as if the alternative were not “capitalist Britain”, and a Britain that has become the despised cheap-labour slum of capitalist Europe.

The left let itself be smashed by Harold Wilson in 1975 when it staked everything on a chauvinist victory in the referendum on Europe held that year. It then gradually subsided into silence on the question of Europe. No left group now campaigns for “Britain out!”

Yet much of the left has now reconstructed a cut-price version of that nationalist agitation round the slogan “Down with Maastricht!” Working-class socialists have no brief for Maastricht, any more than we have for the capitalist structure of the European Union generally. Yet to identify Maastricht as the main enemy, or a main enemy, is to ignore the fact that the anti-Maastricht sections of the bourgeoisie — Thatcher and Tebbit in Britain, Le Pen and Pasqua in France, sections of German finance-capital — are as intent on cuts and union-bashing as any Maastrichter.

The Europe-wide workers’ unity shown by the Renault workers is the way to deal with European capitalist integration — not demagogic agitation against a shadowy outside force called “Maastricht” or “Brussels”.



# The revolt of the German miners

**H**ALIL Senturk is a miner in Germany's Ruhr coalfield. He told the *Financial Times* (10 March) why he and his workmates have been fighting job cuts in their industry.

"I was in England a few times, in Durham and Yorkshire, and saw what happened to the mining community there. We're trying to stop that happening here."

On 7 March the German government announced that it would drastically cut state subsidies and force the closure of most of the country's pits. Miners struck the same day, occupied their pits, invaded town halls, blocked motorways, and sent thousands of delegates to the capital, Bonn, where they set up a protest camp opposite the chancellery.

They besieged the Bonn headquarters of the FDP, the "liberal" or

"free-market" party which is the junior partner in Germany's governing coalition. A hundred miners dramatised their message that government policies would take the shirts off their backs by stripping to their underpants and marching through the capital. They demanded not only that the pit closures be stopped, but that [chancellor] "Kohl must go."

By 13 March the government had been forced to back down, at least partially. Its revised plan will still shut pits, but much more slowly, and the miners' union has accepted it.

Germany's unemployment, at 4.7 million, is now higher than it ever went in the 1930s, before Hitler came to power. It has increased by a million since 1995. That fact must have added urgency to the miners' action.

Their exuberant militancy, much

brasher than is usual from Germany's ponderous trade-union movement, must also have been encouraged by last year's metalworkers' strikes. In 1996 the unions organised months of big protests against the government's £30 billion budget cuts. Strikes in October, in the metal industries, forced employers to back down on plans to cut sick pay in line with new legislation.

As significant as the militancy of the miners' action is Halil Senturk's emphasis on learning from the struggles of workers in other countries, rather than upholding "German jobs" and "German industry" against them. Another miner put the same idea to the *Financial Times*: "Here we stick together. The thing that counts is that you're a miner. Whether you're Ali or Fritz doesn't matter."

**I**NCREASINGLY, "Europe" determines what happens within the member states of the European Union. More and more, what "Europe" decides happens, especially where a second rate power like the UK is concerned. National parliaments are overshadowed. Democratic rights which in countries like Holland, Britain and France took centuries of popular struggle to win have in this way been increasingly nullified.

Now, socialists are for European unity, even under the bourgeoisie. The call for a United States of Europe was for long the cry of the left, not of the right. Undesirable things such as Maastricht notwithstanding, European unity is much better than the older Europe of competing and sometimes warring nations. The basis exists now as never before for working-class unity all across Europe and the basis too for a working-class struggle to create a socialist United States of Europe.

Europe today is under bureaucratic rule because it was united by the bourgeoisie and not by the working class. The development of Europe-wide democratic institutions lags far behind the development of European unity. To put this in perspective and know what needs to be done, we must cast a glance back over the history that shaped the European Union.

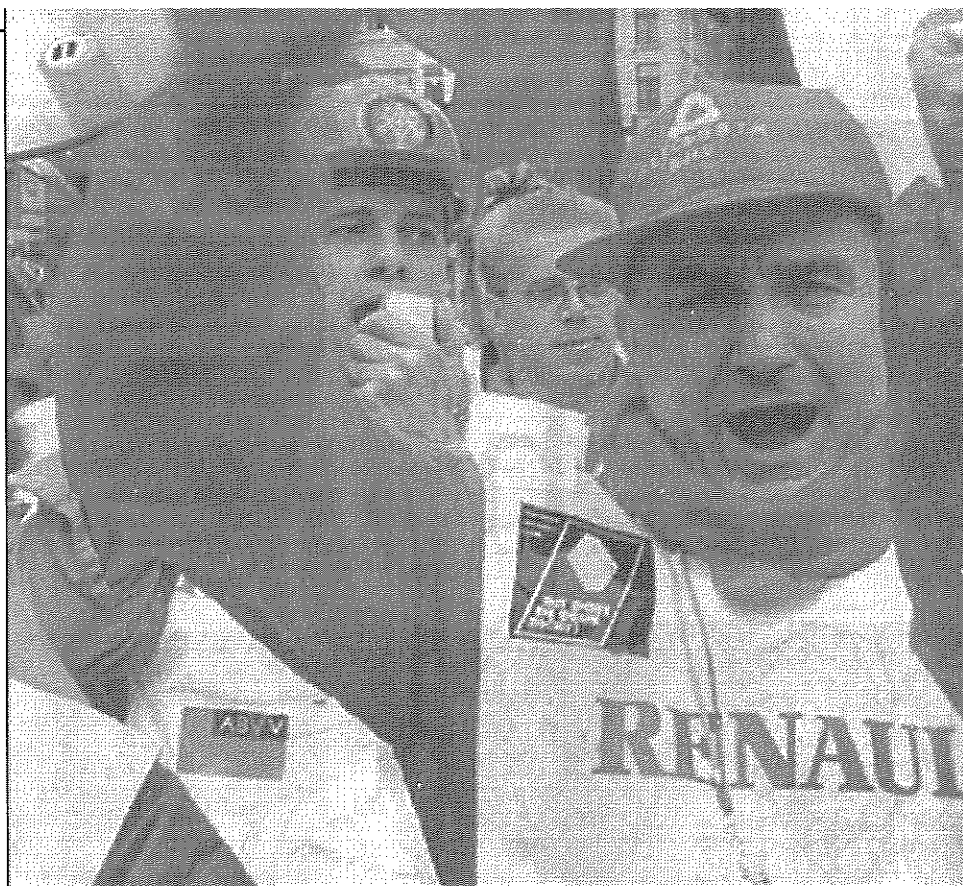
**F**ROM the Pyrenees, on the borders of the Iberian peninsula, north to the borders of Sweden and east as far as Poland, with Switzerland as an island in the middle, Hitler had united most of Europe by 1940.

It was a Europe of peoples united by chains rather than bands of international solidarity, a Europe of enslaved peoples forced together in the maw of German imperialism, by way of conquest, not a Europe of free nations that had voluntarily come together in a United States of Europe.

Yet — and fifty years later there can be no doubt of it — that European unification, even under Hitler, was a distorted expression of a long-felt historical necessity. Europe needed unity because the existing big nation states were too small for the enormous economic dynamic which had developed within them. In the leading place was Germany.

The Anglo-American invaders of Europe in 1944-5 came to break German hegemony and to break down the walls of the Nazi prison-house of nations which Europe had become. All across Europe the invaders were supported by uprisings of peoples seeking national self-determination — French, Belgians, Italians, Poles, Czechs. After Germany was beaten and overrun, the peoples of Europe — outside of Stalin's new East and Central European empire — reverted to independent nation-states.

Indeed, one consequence of Hitler's brutal German-imperialist attempt to over-



# There is only one on Europe: wor.

ride the peoples was a new upsurge of nationalism and chauvinism all across Europe, especially in the East, where ethnic Germans were its main victims. Germans to the number of perhaps thirteen million were driven out of East Prussia and Czechoslovakia and other areas where Germans had lived for many hundreds of years.

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**"Socialists are for European unity, even under the bourgeoisie. The call for a United States of Europe was for long the cry of the left."**

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And yet, though much of Europe was economically in ruins. European unity was still economically, politically and militarily necessary. Political and military unity was made very urgent because it was likely that soon there would be war with Russia, whose vast army could in the mid '40s have advanced quickly from the centre to the

Western end of Europe.

Politically, however, formal unity was impossible, less possible than even before Hitler's "unification". An attempt in the late 1940s to create a single West European army proved still-born.

Yet unity could not be postponed. Now the European bourgeoisie drew on the experience of German history, where the dozens of big and little German states had been drawn together inside a customs union, the Zollverein, from 1833, and the basis laid for the unification of most of Germany under Prussian predominance in 1871.

**F**IRST, they created the Iron and Steel Community (1951), and then the Common Market (Treaty of Rome, 1957-8). This was movement towards union by way of bypassing insoluble political questions such as the recently re-won and therefore sacrosanct sovereignties of the various states and concentrating on economic knitting-together of the independent states. It was a bit like knocking down the internal walls in





# e socialist answer workers unite!

By Annie O'Keeffe

a row of houses, making them into one entity while preserving the facade.

Over time the economic barriers came down, and the original six countries of the Common Market achieved, despite the separate sovereign statehoods dividing them, a level of economic integration in some ways more intense than that achieved within the USA.

And, over time, a ramshackle growth of Europe-wide political and economic institutions grew up alongside and on top of the institutions of the nation-states. These institutions bear all the marks of their origins.

This Europe, which is at its core economically united, still resembles a political shanty-town. It is something thrown together higgledy-piggledy. It is neither rational nor properly and directly democratic.

There is now a European Parliament, which, though it increased its powers not so long ago, remains a feeble shadow of what a sovereign parliament should be. It does not yet effectively control the civil servants or the Council of Ministers. Relations between

the component states and the EU are disabably ill-defined.

In short, much that the nationalist and other critics of the EU say against it is true. That is why *Workers' Liberty*, which believes in European unity, backed the call for a referendum on Maastricht: support for European unity does not have to imply back-

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**"Campaigning for a constitutional Parliament, the left across Europe could undercut the rightists and the chauvinists."**

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ing what the dominant capitalists and their servants do, or the way that they do it.

European unity is as necessary now as it was in 1914 when Germany launched its first ill-fated attempt to unite Europe under its heel — and socialists such as Leon Trotsky raised the call for a United States of Europe. The anti-EU nationalists and chau-

vinists, even when they raise valid criticisms of the EU, have nothing to offer instead of "Europe", this imperfect, capitalist, and not yet democratic, West European unity. The alternative? Wars of the sort that two times in the first half of the 20th century brought Europe to ruin and devastation and turned it into a vast abattoir.

The only progressive way ahead lies in democratising Europe, not in a vain and reactionary attempt to scramble it back into its national components. That is why socialists must advocate the creation of a fully democratic European parliament, with full powers, and why British socialists must unite with European socialists to win it.

But how will such a parliament be achieved? By piecemeal evolution? That is how the European Union has developed and develops. It is simply not adequate. It is slow, it is uncertain; where the mass of the people are concerned, it is blind. It leaves both power and initiative in the hands of bureaucrats.

When great democratic states — and that is now what the European Union is — have been in the making, a Constituent Assembly or Parliament has been called to work out constitutional arrangements for the new state. That is what the USA did over 200 years ago; what revolutionary France did 200 years ago; what England did at the dawn of Parliamentary sovereignty, 300 years ago.

It is what Europe should do now. The European Union needs a Constituent Assembly.

A European Parliament should be elected to work out a constitutional framework for the United States of Europe. In that way the boundaries between the present national parliaments and the future sovereign European parliament, and similar perplexing questions, can be democratically worked out.

Campaigning for such a "constitutional Parliament", the labour movement and left across Europe could undercut the rightists and the chauvinists who make legitimate criticisms of the presently chaotic European political structures the basis for a reactionary attack on European unity.

Unfortunately it is not only the chauvinist right who oppose European unity. People on the left, too, oppose European unity under cover of just criticism of what exists now. The serious pro-European left must both take on board their legitimate criticisms, and disarm them.

European unity is better than any other capitalist alternative; and European unity is a prerequisite for European socialism. By campaigning for a Constituent Assembly we can point the way forwards towards a democratic Europe, and towards the Socialist United States of Europe.

Europe needs a European Constituent Assembly!



**An East London Jewish credo**

# **The Thirteen Articles of Faith**

1. I believe with a perfect faith that all men, whether sons of the covenant or not sons of the covenant\*, are born free, and that freedom is their portion throughout life.
2. I believe with a perfect faith that the man who derives wealth from the labour of others, himself not working, is an impudent plunderer.
3. I believe with a perfect faith that poverty will never cease from the earth until communal labour be organised — until every man be compelled to work according to his strength, and receive of his labour according to his needs.
4. I believe with a perfect faith that man will be a "slave of slaves" so long as one individual is suffered to rule over others, and a few are allowed to legislate and make laws for the many.
5. I believe with a perfect faith that stupidity will prevail over knowledge and darkness over light, so long as men cannot acquire education and train themselves according to their several capacities.
6. I believe with a perfect faith that men of religion will persecute those of other religions so long as poverty and distress exist and that the majority of mankind will be, as now, smitten with blindness.
7. I believe with a perfect faith that war will exist and thousands will be slaughtered upon the battle-field as long as "force" prevails and one country derives profit from the ruin of another.
8. I believe with a perfect faith that women will be but the slaves and playthings (Shashuim) of men so long as they are dependent upon them and do not enjoy the fruits of their own labour.
9. I believe with a perfect faith that labour — which supplies all the needs of man — will be despised in the eyes of all so long as the working men toil to fill the pockets of those who sit still and idle.
10. I believe with a perfect faith that murderers, thieves, adulterers, and all kinds of criminals will not cease so long as poverty remains to give birth to them.
11. I believe with a perfect faith that men will devour each other alive, unless a new light soon dawn upon humanity and the working men rise as one to throw off the yoke of capital, and put under foot those who oppress them.
12. I believe with a perfect faith that the upright intellect can achieve all: that the rule of reason is at hand, when men will live as a band of brothers and all nations form one united family.
13. I believe with a perfect faith that the end will come speedily and in our days.

\* Adherents of the Jewish religion.

# **Confessing the socialist faith**

**T**HE working-class socialist movement always has to begin by asserting its own ideas in terms of the prevailing ideas in bourgeois society. It has sometimes seized on the forms in which antagonistic bourgeois ideas are expressed and used them for its own purposes. It has adapted existing forms and rituals to new ends. Thus the Chartists sang "God Save the People" where others sang "God Save the Queen."

Thus in the period before the First World War, socialist Sunday schools existed all over Britain, paralleling the official church Sunday schools for children.

This "Socialist Ten Commandments", paralleling the Ten Commandments of Moses and the Christian churches, was used in some of them.

Jewish socialists too sometimes paralleled religious forms in their way of propagandising for their socialist ideas. This credo — confession of faith — expressing secularist and socialist ideas in



religious style, appeared in an East London Yiddish language paper in 1887. It was translated and printed in *Justice*, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation, to which the East London Jewish socialists were affiliated.

## **The Socialist 10 Commandments**

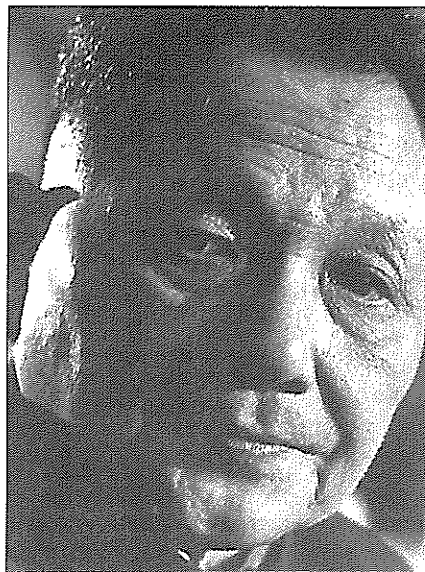
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Love your school-fellows, who will be your fellow-workmen in life.</li> <li>2. Love learning, which is the food of the mind; be as grateful to your teacher as to your parents.</li> <li>3. Make every day holy by good and useful deeds and kindly actions.</li> <li>4. Honour good men, be courteous to all men, bow down to none.</li> <li>5. Do not hate or speak evil of anyone; do not be revengeful, but stand up for your rights, and resist oppression.</li> <li>6. Do not be cowardly, be a friend to the weak, and love justice.</li> <li>7. Remember that all the good things of the earth are produced by labour, whoever</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers.</li> <li>8. Observe and think in order to discover the truth; do not believe what is contrary to reason, and never deceive yourself or others.</li> <li>9. Do not think that he who loves his own country must hate other nations, or wish for war, which is a remnant of barbarism.</li> <li>10. Look forward to the day when all men will be free citizens of one fatherland, and live together as brothers in peace and righteousness.</li> </ol> |
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# The moderniser as executioner

Chen Ying looks at the politics of Deng Xiao-ping

**D**ENG Xiao-ping, the second paramount leader of the People's Republic of China, died on 19 February at the age of 92. He had reached an advanced stage of Parkinson's Disease and eventually suffered respiratory and circulation failure.

His last published photograph, in a wheelchair, was in October 1994. For at least the past two years he has been too ill to assert his political power as the regime's final arbiter. All the various political factions and tendencies within the Chinese Communist Party had long been jockeying for position in preparation for this eventuality. At this time of writing two weeks after his death, there have been no coups, strikes, demonstrations, stock market crashes. China and the world seem to have taken his passing away very calmly.



Deng was born in 1904 into a landlord family. He left home aged 15 for further study and never returned. Instead he was drawn, like most students of his generation, into China's genuine cultural revolution, the May 4th movement of 1919. The 1911 republican revolution led by Dr Sun Yat Sen overthrew the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, but the new republic was hijacked by army generals who fought each other but did little to break the stranglehold of imperialist powers over various regions of China. China's students and intellectuals protested against the outcomes of the 1st world war, particularly the annexing of territories to Japan. They demanded that the country must embrace new political ideas, science and technology from outside China in order to become strong and truly independent. They insisted on replacing Confucian feudalism and classical literature with a contemporary living literature empathetic and accessible to the masses. Chinese workers in the concession areas under imperialist control began to take sustained and political strike action. This revolutionary wave of intellectuals and worker militants eventually became the nucleus of the newborn Chinese Communist Party, led by its first secretary general Chen Du-xiu.

Deng went in 1920 to study in Paris. The radicalisation begun by the May 4th movement spread to overseas Chinese students. He went to work in a French car factory. He and a whole group of Chinese students in France joined the new Chinese Communist movement. In 1926, the Party called its members home and Deng went, via Moscow. The Chinese communists in the Soviet Union had been uniquely exposed to the sharp faction fight between the Stalinists and the Left Opposition around Trotsky, and a great many had become Left Oppositionists. (For a detailed witness account of this period in the USSR, read *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary* by Wang Fan Hsi, Columbia University Press, New York — ISBN 0-231-07453-0.) Somehow Deng did not become a Trotskyist and he returned to China in 1927. He was sent to work in Shanghai by the Communist Party in 1928. By this time, the back of the second Chinese revolution had already been broken as a result of the Communist Party's adherence to the Stalin faction's line of uncritically supporting the Kuomintang. This politically impotent stance enabled Kuomintang general Chiang Kai Shek to break the alliance with the communists and unleash a massacre of worker militants in Shanghai and Canton in 1927, thus decimating the communists' base in China's new industrial working class. The communists soon lost the remnants of their influence in the cities through further political misadventures dictated by the ultra left turn of Stalin's faction. Deng and the surviving communists were forced into political retreat in the countryside.

In the 30s and 40s Deng was a political commissar to the Red Army, and was part of the Mao-led Long March. After the Communist victory in 1949, Deng continued to progress quickly up the party and

state apparatus, becoming vice-premier in 1952 and minister of finance in 1953. By 1956 he was party general secretary, one of a handful of party leaders second only to Mao, including Zhou En-lai, Liu Shao Qi, and Marshall Peng De-hua.

Deng has often been characterised by bourgeois commentators as a political conservative and a pragmatic economist. His record would seem to confirm this. He had no disagreement with Mao over supporting Stalin's suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, or with Mao's purge of intellectuals and party dissidents during Mao's "Hundred Flowers" campaign in 1957. His first known major clash with Mao was over the Great Leap Forward of 1957/8, Mao's voluntarist attempt to catapult China into catching up with the industrialised West. This had led to massive waste of industrial and natural resources in futile efforts to make steel in backyard furnaces, resulting in massive neglect of agriculture and subsequent starvation of millions in 1959-62. Deng's pragmatic economic policies of limited free market reforms within an orthodox framework of Stalinist-style state planning helped to slowly drag China back from the brink of collapse (although Deng was not alone in this rescue operation — almost certainly Zhou En-lai and Liu Shao-qi were involved as well). "A donkey is certainly slow, but it rarely has an accident", said Deng at the time.

However, Deng's success had angered the marginalised and discredited Mao, who counter-attacked three years later when he launched the Cultural Revolution. Mao's ultra-left impatience led him to a faction fight with those who tried to develop China along orthodox Stalinist state planning lines, as in Eastern Europe.

Deng was labelled as a capitalist roader, and was one of the two principal targets of the Maoists (the other was President Liu Shao-qi, labelled as China's Krushchev). He was paraded in public and humiliated by red guards, made to sign a confession, held in solitary confinement for two years and sent to work in a tractor factory where he was not allowed any political freedoms. Deng's son was forced off the balcony of a building and ended up paralysed from the waist down. Deng's life was spared, possibly through the intervention of premier Zhou En-lai. Liu Shao-qi suffered a worse fate and was eventually persecuted to death.

In 1973, one year after China ended its political isolation by inviting US President Nixon to play ping-pong and to meet Mao in Beijing, Deng was rehabilitated on Zhou En-lai's recommendation, later re-entering the Politburo and delivering China's foreign policy address at the UN. Deng was in a hurry to rebuild a powerbase against the ultra-left Maoists but was not secure enough to fend off a second purge when Zhou En-lai died in January 1976. Mourning for Zhou turned into a riot against the Maoists, who blamed Deng for orchestrating the protests and stripped him of all his posts. However, Mao died in September that year, and during a period of political faction fighting, Deng made his second comeback, eventually winning through against the Maoists and imposing his brand of reforms decisively on China whilst kicking the dead Mao upstairs as a icon of the 1949 revolution.

Deng's reforms in 1977/8 included a new constitution and legal code, formal separation of the state apparatus from the party apparatus, cutting back on the size of the bureaucracy swollen with Cultural Revolution careerists, rehabilitated technical experts, academics and party cadres purged by the Maoists, and starting off free enterprise in agriculture and light industry — replacing the commune system with family-sized plots, permitting the growth of cash crops. He reached out to the West for support, and in December 1978 China established full diplomatic relations with the USA. Deng visited the USA amidst great fanfare and being named Man of the Year by *Time* magazine. A year or so later in 1979/80, he clamped down heavily on the Chinese Spring — the dissident movement of 1976 — once their campaigns had helped him to mobilise sufficient forces to finally defeat his factional opponents, the Maoists. Dozens of dissidents were imprisoned, including Wei Jing-shen, who was given a show trial under the new criminal code and a 15 year sentence. (Wei was released a few months before his full sentence was up, in China's bid to win the contest for the 2004 Olympics — he has since been re-imprisoned.)

The economic reforms were later extended to the cities around 1983/4. Rigid central planning was loosened — autonomy was given to industrial managers, private enterprise encouraged, and price controls on thousands of commodities were relaxed. Special economic zones were created in several southern coastal areas, the largest being in Shenzhen, across the border from Hong Kong, which held incentives for overseas investment. A Joint Declaration was struck with Margaret Thatcher's government to take back Hong Kong but with a guarantee of "50 years of no changes" under the slogan of "one country, two systems".

This set the climate for the rapid transfer of Hong Kong's manufacturing base across the border. "Patriotic" Hong Kong Chinese-capitalists were financing new factories in a new round of super-exploitation of their fellow countrymen and women, paying wages a fraction of a fraction of what can be earned in Hong Kong. (Today a typical unskilled factory job in this area would earn 16\$ a day for a 12 hour day and 28 day month — \$12 to one pound sterling). The rush of multinational companies into China had begun, and Deng was for the second time named as *Time Magazine's* Man of the Year in 1986.

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**"Deng leaves the regime with essentially the same problem it has had for decades — how to achieve industrial strength and keep itself in power without the support of the masses."**

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However true to type, during this period Deng simultaneously allowed periodic campaigns against "decadent Western influences", "spiritual pollution" etc, to enforce the party's stranglehold on the political front.

By the late 80's, the breakneck pace of changes had created an overheated economy, with peasants unsettled by price rises for commodities wiping out their recent increases of income from cash crops, while industrial wages were failing to keep up with inflation, especially in state-run enterprises which have in effect become bankrupt. Deng's key protégés spearheading the economic reforms, Hu Yao-bang and Zhao Ziyang (party secretary and prime minister respectively) encountered increasing resistance from conservative state planners and Maoist remnants. Just as the reformers were losing ground inside the faction fight inside the party, students and democracy activists mobilised to demand political reforms, rallying from all over the country to Beijing and gathering around Tiananmen Square. The world's media was there to report on Gorbachev's visit in spring '89, and stayed on to report on the astounding growth of the democracy movement in Tiananmen, whilst the party and state apparatus appeared to be rendered impotent by factional deadlock up to the highest level.

Deng's true colours were revealed, as he ditched his protégé Zhao Ziyang along with the economic reforms, in order to make peace with the state planners to ensure the regime's survival.

The People's Liberation Army was sent

in to crush the unarmed democracy activists on June 3/4, killing thousands in and around Tiananmen Square. There can be no doubt that Deng, as the regime's supreme decision maker, gave the orders to shoot.

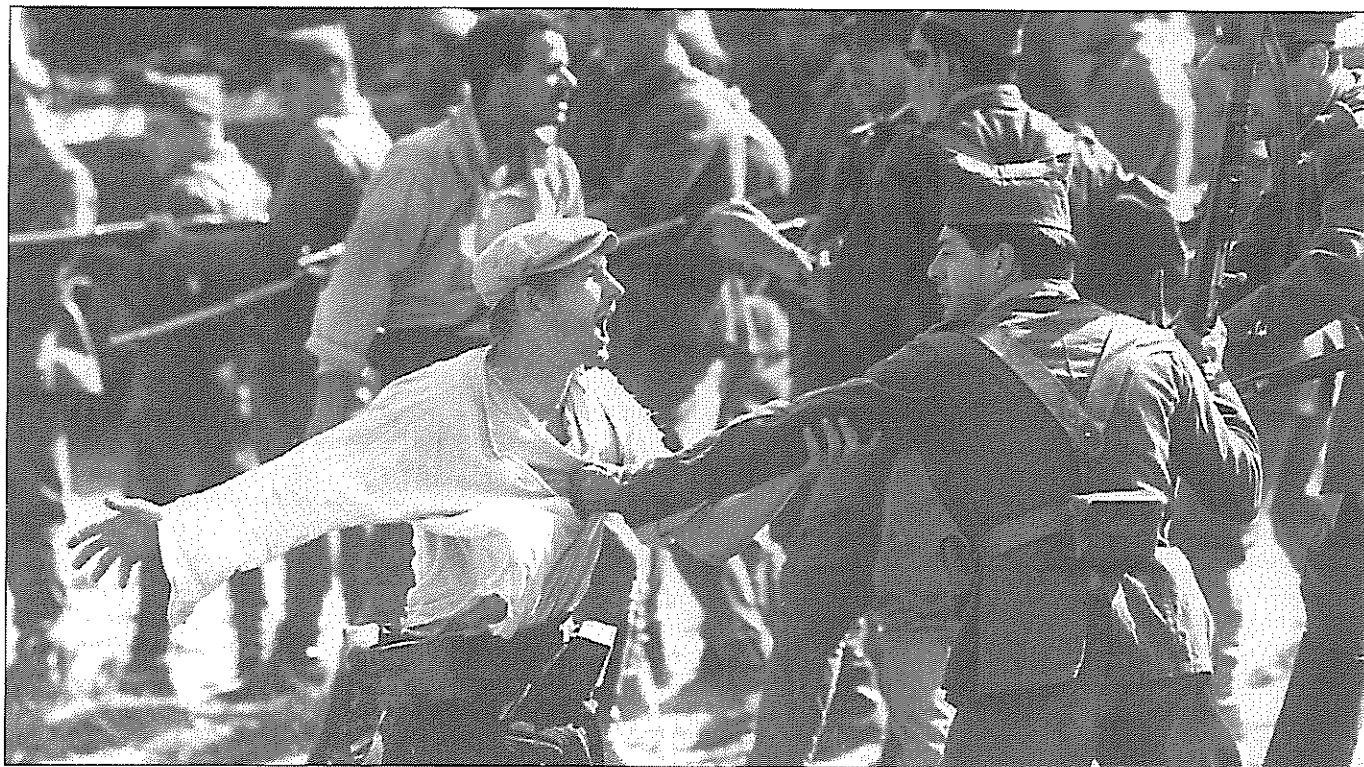
Aware of the rebellious mood in Beijing against those directly involved in the massacre decision, Deng brought in Jiang Zemin, party boss in Shanghai, to fill the party leadership void. Those in favour of central planning, like Li Peng, were authorised to rein in the runaway economy to kill off inflation. A nationwide campaign netted hundreds of political dissidents, while hundreds more fled overseas, mainly via Hong Kong.

After a couple of years Deng began to become impatient for rapid economic changes once more. He launched his last campaign for reforms in his tour of the southern coastal provinces in 1992. This had put his nominated successor Jiang onto the defensive. However, old age and disease finally caught up, and Deng passed away without fulfilling his last publicly stated ambition, to visit Hong Kong after July 1st 1997. Only a handful who have lived through these same decades of turbulent Chinese revolution are alive today, and two of them are veterans of Chinese Trotskyism.

Deng leaves the regime with essentially the same problem it has had for decades — how to achieve industrial strength and keep itself in power without the support of the masses. Mao's voluntarist brainwashing experiment had failed, and so has orthodox Stalinist central planning. Deng's project of economic reforms has bought more time for a dying monster of a system dedicated to enslaving its citizens in the mother of all labour camps. However, this wonder drug leaves his successors with the problem of how to survive without killing off the unproductive state-owned enterprises, through which the Party exercises its political control of workers, and without allowing a new exploiting class to grow to the point of challenging the Party's monopoly on power. Also, their problem is how to make use of the technology and investment of the multinational companies without letting these wolves right through the front door.

One thing is sure. Any remaining will to survive as a political system is being sapped by the corruption which is eating its way like a cancer through the body of party cadres, accelerated by each phase of economic opening which presents ever increasing opportunities for cadres to enrich themselves.

The various factions — economic reformers, Maoists, Stalinist state planners — coexist in the aftermath of Deng's death for the sake of the regime's immediate survival, but for how long?



One of Ken Loach's most strongly political films — *Land and Freedom*

# Art versus propaganda?

Clive Bradley looks at the films of Ken Loach

**W**HAT does it mean to make socialist films in contemporary Britain? What is the relationship between art and propaganda in modern cinema? The work of Ken Loach, one of Britain's leading film-makers, hinges around these questions. The tension between art and propaganda, drama and politics, runs through his films.\*

Loach is unusual not so much in that he is a socialist — indeed a Marxist, indeed some kind of Trotskyist — who makes films; there have been a fair number of film-makers who are or were Marxists of some description. He is unusual because he frequently attempts to make films about politics with a capital 'P', to put the class struggle on the screen. His politics inform his choice of subject matter to a degree which is, as far as I am aware, unique in contemporary film.

Loach made his name in the 1960s with a seminal TV drama, *Cathy Come Home*, about homelessness. *Days of Hope*, a TV series written by Jim Allen, traced the British class struggle from the First World War to the General Strike. *Fatherland* is about an East German who moves to the West and discovers capitalism is as bad as Stalinism, *Hidden Agenda* about the shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland, *Land and Freedom* the Spanish Civil War, and the recently-released *Carla's Song* is about Nicaragua.

Even his films which deal with less 'big' political issues have political themes. *Riff Raff* is about a group of building workers. *Raining Stones* about two unemployed men in the north of Eng-

land struggling to survive; one of them needs the money to buy his daughter a communion dress, and gets into trouble with a loan shark. *Ladybird, Ladybird* is about a woman's fight against social services to keep custody of her children.

Added to this are a number of documentaries, for example on the often treacherous role of the trade union leadership, and the current Liverpool dockers' strike.

There are very few films in recent years which deal with such issues, and no film-makers who try to do so with such consistency. There can be no doubt, therefore, that Loach is a vitally important director for socialists. We should be glad someone is making such films: the world would be a poorer place without them.

The question remains whether Loach has successfully resolved the tension between art and propaganda, and what his work might tell us more generally about it. I want to argue that he has not, and that this raises an interesting question for any project of socialist film-making. Put bluntly: is such a thing possible?

This article looks at the question by focusing on just three of Loach's films — *Land and Freedom* and *Carla's Song*, his two most recent, which are among his most strongly political, and *Kes* — an early film which is probably the least political in his career.

**L**AND and Freedom, written by Jim Allen, is set in the Spanish revolution. A young Communist Party member, David, played by Ian Hart, goes from Liverpool to fight in Spain against Franco, is assigned to a POUM (an independent Marxist) militia, and witnesses at first hand the betrayal of the revolution by Stalinism. The story is framed with the discovery by his grand-

\* Throughout this article, I am using the word "propaganda" in its neutral sense, to mean politically educative material.



daughter, after his death, of letters he wrote to his fiancée.

It is a powerful film, often — especially at its climax, where the Communist-led official army disarms the POUM militia by force and murders the film's heroine — very moving. There are three distinct levels at which the film has a political, or propagandist, meaning. First — and most important for the general audience — it is an assertion of the possibility of socialist struggle in a time when such things are considered old hat. Second, I think less forcefully, there is a resonance to do with the resurgence of fascism. Third — and clearest to many readers of *Workers' Liberty* — it is an account of the treacherous role of Stalinism in the Spanish Civil War.

There is no doubt that the film moved and affected many people, including those who knew nothing about the Spanish Civil War — and apparently many Spanish people, too. Moreover, it was denounced by the Communist Party, so it obviously got something right. Does it work, though, as art or as propaganda? I would argue that it doesn't entirely succeed as either.

As a film with a political message, *Land and Freedom* is ultimately confusing. The framing device with the grand-daughter was apparently an after-thought, added when the rest of the film had been shot, and it shows, I think. You could find the historical account convincing but still feel that such struggles are a thing of the past. Similarly, it's not clear what lessons we should draw in how to fight to fight fascism now.

As a polemic against Stalinism it's not clear, either. A crucial moment in the film takes place in Barcelona, where anarchist and Communist Party militias are shooting at each other from opposite rooftops. An old woman walking between them shouts up, waving her fists, that they should be fighting fascism not each other. It would be easy, I think, to conclude that Loach's criticism is of the general fractiousness of the left, rather than the role of Stalinism in particular.

In part this is a result of the limitations imposed by money. The decisive moment in the Spanish revolution was May 1937 in Barcelona, when the mainly anarchist workers were massacred by Stalinists. It would be fantastically expensive to recreate these events, so a small incident is used to represent the whole conflict. The entire film is like that, choosing to locate the bulk of the action in the hills rather than in the city where workers were occupying factories, and highlighting the discussion among peasants about collectivisation of the land, rather than a more "proletarian" debate.

But it is also an incoherence at the heart of the film's politics. The Communist Party is given an articulate spokesperson in the shape of the American, Gene, who emerges as tragic villain in the film's climax; the revolutionaries rarely construct a coherent argument. The overall effect seems to be that there were great, socialist ideals in the revolution which Stalinism crushed, but that this is what happens in a world of realpolitik; the POUM, the anarchists, etc. were the good guys, but doomed to failure in a nasty world. I don't think this is what Loach intends us to conclude.

It is a political incoherence which affects the drama — the art, or a central part of it — of the film. Loach tends in all his films to treat the class struggle only as a kind of elemental revolt against oppression, which rarely — I will not say never, but rarely — transforms into a coherent, still less intellectual, vision. This is especially clear if we look at his central characters. David in *Land and Freedom* is typical.

The film chooses to take us through the Spanish Civil War from the point of view of an English worker who knows next to nothing about Spain, who has never heard of the POUM, and who apparently knows very little of the politics of his own party. On

one level this is an understandable dramatic decision — most of the audience will also know nothing about Spain and thirties communism, and it is a film made in the first place for an English-speaking public.

But it is, nevertheless, a fundamentally lazy decision, which weakens the dramatic energy of the film. David remains an essentially passive character, an observer, to whom things happen, who witnesses things — but who is not an active agent. He is the typical Loach image of a working-class hero: salt-of-the-earth, heart-in-the-right-place, but naive, ignorant, and ultimately a bit thick. Rarely — again, I will not say never — in a Loach film is there a working class character with a coherent, politically educated world-view — and when there are, they tend to speak in clichés, like the POUM characters in *Land and Freedom*, none of whom is given a real argument to make in the way the Stalinist character is.

The whole dramatic form of *Land and Freedom* exacerbates this problem. Because Loach is trying to tell the story of the whole Spanish revolution, and David's personal story is in effect just a hook to hang the big story on, the personal story lacks force.

This is true even — or perhaps especially — of David's journey from Communist to ex-Communist. The key moment dramatically is where he tears up his Party card. Yet because he arrives in Spain so naive, this lacks the dramatic power it might have had. We are never inside the "mind set" of a loyal CP member, so

the discovery that the Communist Party is betraying the revolution is simply that — finding out something we (and he) didn't know. If we had been first asked seriously to believe, with David, in the Communist Party, his emotional journey would have been a lot more profound.

This is especially important since most of the audience presumably don't think much of the Communist Party to begin with. Of course, getting an audience today to care

about the CP in the thirties, and so share David's disillusionment, would not be easy; but the film barely tries. Even a short argument between David and, say, a Labour Party member before he leaves for Spain, in which he is allowed to develop a train of thought, express himself politically, would have helped. Yet this story would presuppose a character with some political sophistication, a militant for a certain ideology which he learns is false. Because David has only joined the CP because he is a good bloke, but doesn't know much about them, his decision to leave them is dramatically far weaker than it might have been.

David's relationship with the POUM militant, Blanca, thus feels like an artificial attempt to give the story some more personal dynamic, a love story around which to hang the politics. It is also undermined, I think, by the fact the story is being told via letters to his fiancée in Liverpool. Elements have been shoved together, rather than flowing from each other organically.

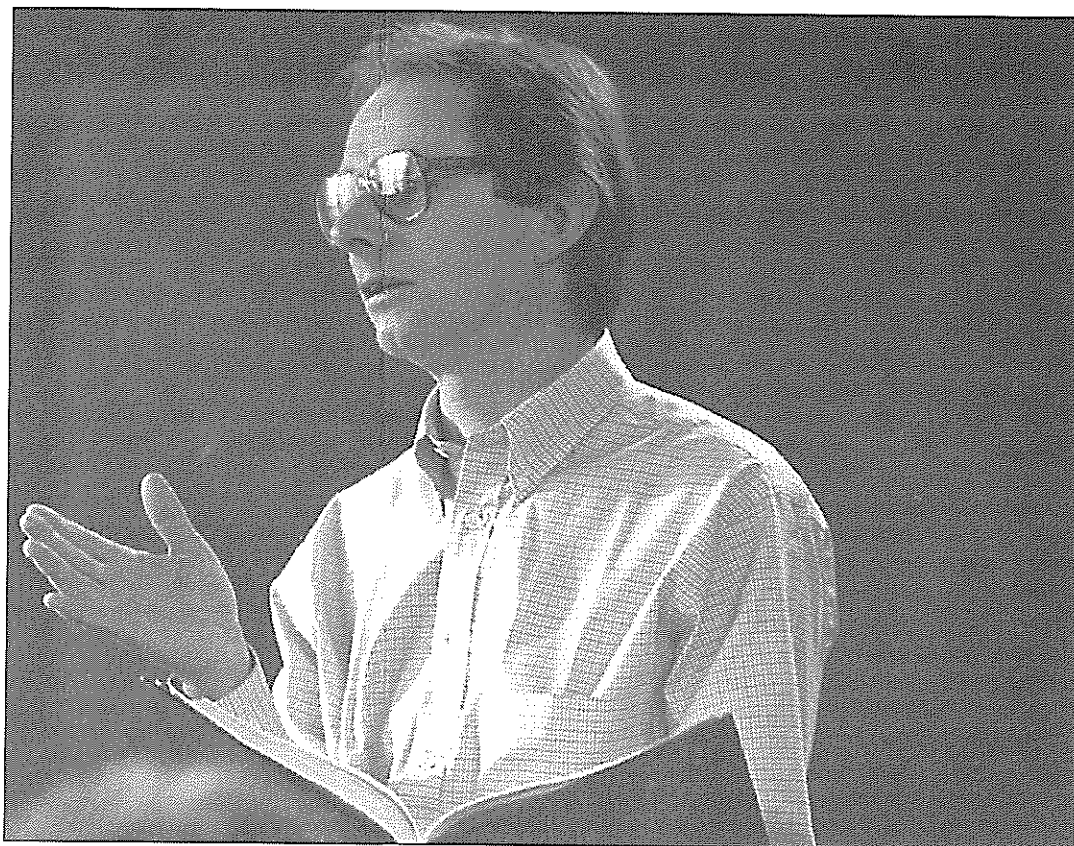
**K**ES, made in 1969, stands at the opposite pole in Loach's work. It is a very small story, about a young boy in a mining village who doesn't want to work down the pit when he finishes school. He is an outsider, bullied by his brother, who doesn't get on well with other kids, doesn't like football (and often forgets his PE kit) — but has found a kestrel, which he trains — you can't tame them, he tells his teacher at one point. The bird represents the boy's striving for freedom and self-worth. In a marvellous scene, in a class where he isn't paying attention, one of the other kids tells the teacher, played by Collin Welland, about 'the hawk', and the boy is told to come to the front of the class and explain about his kestrel. As he describes how he trained it, he comes alive.

The kestrel is eventually killed: it's not so easy to escape from

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**"David is the typical Loach image of a working-class hero: salt-of-the-earth, heart-in-the-right-place, but naive, ignorant, and ultimately a bit thick."**

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the pit village and his future, which seems preordained. Yet he has the potential to do so.

It is a powerful, beautiful film, which has politics in it — about the crushing of working-class hope and creative energy — but here the politics are subsumed in the personal story. Unlike David in *Land and Freedom*, this character is a real protagonist — the drama flows from his actions, he isn't merely reacting to the world around him. It's simple, clear, but profound and moving.

It is true, of course, that the politics are far more general than in *Land and Freedom*, far less polemical; and there is a limit to how far socialist films can be limited to making these general, anti-capitalist, points. There comes a time when art perhaps needs to say something more 'programmatic'. Loach couldn't spend his whole life making versions of *Kes*, and if he did, he would be slagged off for it by socialist critics. But this points towards an agenda for socialist filmmaking: can the emotional depth of a *Kes* be integrated into the political or historical sweep of a *Land and Freedom*?

**"Kes is a powerful, beautiful film, about the crushing of working-class creative energy, but here the politics are subsumed in the personal story."**

**M**OST of this article is based on a talk I gave at a *Workers Liberty* public meeting in London, before which, unfortunately, I hadn't been able to see Loach's new film, *Carla's Song*. Watching *Carla's Song*, it seemed almost as if the film had been made simply to prove this article's argument. It reveals every weakness in Loach's work, writ large — all the problems of *Land and Freedom* magnified enormously. Where *Land and Freedom* was a good film with flaws, *Carla's Song* is a pretty awful film with a couple of redeeming features. It is by a large margin Loach's worst film.

George, played by Robert Carlyle, is a feisty Glaswegian bus driver who falls in love with a mysterious, suicidal woman, Carla, who turns out to be from Nicaragua. To help her come to terms with whatever is screwing her up, which is something to do with her ex-lover Antonio, he takes her back to Nicaragua. They search

for Antonio, eventually find him, and discover why nobody will tell her where he is. Finally, Carla must choose between the two men. In the meantime, George is caught up in the war between the Sandinistas, whom Carla supports, and the contras, and discovers the contras are backed by the CIA. This is a film which doesn't know what the hell it is about, except that it's got something to do with Nicaragua. Apparently, the original script was set entirely in Glasgow, so God knows why they chose to spend so much money on an incoherent location shoot. It's a classic case of a film which aims to be "political", but never sorts out what its politics are, and ends up being about virtually nothing.

George has all the problems of Loach characters I have described, only more so. He apparently doesn't even know where Nicaragua is, never mind anything about it, and the sum total of his knowledge before his journey is delivered to him by his kid sister, who has fortuitously managed to remember the facts accurately from a modern history class. George couldn't, it seems, go to a library and read a book.

Once he gets to Nicaragua, like David in *Land and Freedom* — only worse — he is a completely passive character who has things explained to him, watches dancing, smiling campesinos with wide joyful eyes, and eventually is told, for no apparent reason, that the real villain is American imperialism. Then he goes back to Glasgow, although what he, or the audience, have learned —

except that American imperialism backed the Contras, which is hardly shock-horror news — is difficult to say. What does this story tell us? It might have told us that there are battles to be fought in Glasgow which George should go home and fight. But there are no battles in Glasgow of which we are ever made aware. It might have told us that human beings have marvellous, heroic capacities for struggle. But this is all warped by our discovery

that the big secret about Antonio is that he has been horribly mutilated, which leaves us dreading the prospect that Carla will turn out to be an insensitive monster and leave Antonio to his fate while she goes back to Scotland (and utterly bemused as to why nobody just tells her this to begin with — although apparently she witnessed it anyway, so how can it be a secret?) People mutter profoundly about the need to face the past. But what past are they on about? Carla didn't do anything wrong or bad or harmful in the past: she was traumatised by her lover's near murder. None of it holds together.

The cast for the most part struggle through this with good performances, especially Robert Carlyle. But there is no dramatic tension. Little of it is believable. The story is a mess. Almost every



*Raining Stones*: here, as in other Loach films, the characters are likeable rogues rather than intelligent, fully rounded characters.

turning point in the plot is confusing: what's he doing following her to her hotel? Why are George and the ex-CIA man ambushed by (strangely inefficient) Contras on their way to the ex-CIA man's village? Why is everyone pretending they don't know where Antonio is? Where did Carla's daughter come from, and why hadn't she mentioned her before?

There are dramas you can detect lurking beneath the surface. It could be the story of a working class man dissatisfied with his life who learns in Nicaragua that it's worth fighting for freedom rather than just crashing his bus into passing taxis and picking fights with inspectors. Or the story of a man who falls in love with a woman who, he finds, has a far deeper love than she could ever feel for him with a man who has lost his physical beauty, so that he learns something about the nature of love (perhaps that a common experience counts for something, so he goes back to his former fiancée). Or even of a man who thought the CIA were great, but discovers they are murdering bastards. *Carla's Song* ends up empty, a series of pretty (but stereotypical and largely patronising) pictures.

If *Land and Freedom* is not entirely successful either as art or propaganda, *Carla's Song* fails badly as both. Clearly there is a propagandist aim — but the only plain message is the banal one about the CIA which leaps out of nowhere and has zero effect on

the plot. The pro-Sandinista politics barely get off the ground, because everyone knows that the Sandinistas have been out of power for a decade. There is a general sense that revolution can be wonderful, and the people who try to crush revolutions are evil, but you would expect the man who made *Days of Hope* to do better than this. If the Nicaraguan revolution is relevant to the British, or any other, working class, we need to be told why. Otherwise there is the strong danger, I would think, that audiences will leave the cinema concluding that revolution is a dangerous business which the CIA is likely to drown in blood, so best stick to driving buses. This is leaving aside more specific questions about the Sandinistas and the nature of the Nicaraguan revolution.

*Carla's Song* is strong evidence, in other words, that overtly political stories are hard to tell. Everything that is wonderful about *Kes* is missing.

Does this mean that films like *Kes* are generally more successful as art than films dealing in bigger politics? There are modern films with overtly political — socialist — themes, which work better than Loach's. Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosa Luxemburg*, for example, manages not only to tell the story of the great Polish-German revolutionary, but to convey a sense of the period, and a pretty good idea of Luxemburg's politics, digestible even by an audience which knows nothing of Marxism. It is hard to imagine Loach doing a film like this — in which the central character is immensely clever, and never for a moment comes across as a naive idealist who hasn't really got a clue.

One of the central characters in John Sayles's *Matewan* (I don't seem to be able to write an article for this magazine without mentioning *Matewan* — but it is a great film) is very simply and economically shown to have wide experience in the class struggle. He is quizzed about American labour history by the striking miners he is sent to organise; and then — most effectively — he has to argue with them why they should not be racist towards the scabs, who are Black or Italian, but should win them over. They do win them over (in a glorious scene where the Italian scabs refuse to cross a night-time picket line and march off singing *Bandera Rossa*). This is a character, we know, who has some education in the labour movement.

He is not, in other words, a Loach character. At the heart of the problem with Loach's more political or propagandist movies is an attitude towards the working class itself, or rather, the relationship between the film-maker and the working class. It is as if Loach thinks the working class "out there" are all like David or George, or the heroes of *Raining Stones* or *Riff Raff* — charming but simple folk in need of enlightenment. He as film-maker is

there to do the enlightening. It is rather like the pseudo-Leninist theory of the revolutionary party as a group of intellectuals who bring socialism "from the outside", with the film-maker as a substitute for the party. It would be wrong to overstate this; but it is, I think, an underlying thought.

Films such as *Rosa Luxemburg* and *Matewan* are very rare. The most effective political dramas are those in which the politics are implied rather than stated

baldly — do not attempt to be propaganda. This is not to say that socialist film-making is impossible, only that the best films will be informed by socialist politics in a more subtle way — as in *Kes*. Art and propaganda seem to be uncomfortable bed-fellows. It is good that a film-maker like Ken Loach continues to look for ways to resolve the tension between the two, and normally he is interesting and original, and certainly preferable to most mainstream American cinema. But so far, he hasn't found an answer to the problem. The less 'political' he aims to be, the higher the artistic achievement.

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**"Carla's Song is strong evidence that overtly political stories are hard to tell. Everything that is wonderful about Kes is missing."**

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# The apostle of labour solidarity

## Jim Larkin and his message for workers today

By John O'Mahony

**I**N Dublin, 50 years ago, March 1947, an immense crowd of people, 200,000 of them, many of the men bare-headed in freakishly Arctic weather, marched behind the coffin of Jim Larkin. Larkin was the founder of the modern Irish labour movement. He is the greatest figure in Irish labour history. James Connolly, Larkin's partner between 1910 and 1914, was far more clever and far better educated, but it was Larkin who touched the workers of the slums with the holy fire of righteous indignation, and ignited them in revolt.

Larkin was a union organiser in Liverpool, Belfast, Dublin and in the USA — where he was jailed in the aftermath of World War One. He was a founder of the US Communist Party and a — none too competent — leader of an Irish communist party in the '20s. A man of contradictions, he was both a practising Catholic and a member of the Executive of the Communist International! He never abandoned revolutionary socialism. Dublin's workers elected him to the Dail in 1944.

The magnificent quality of Larkin and of Larkin's work is best seen in the heroism which the workers he inspired and organised displayed in such abundance during Dublin's Labour War of 1913-14. Let us look at Larkin — and Connolly, and the workers they led — in action. We will see in them what working-class solidarity is and what it can achieve. Larkin's great message of labour solidarity has as much meaning — and urgency — for British workers today as it had in Dublin before the First World War.

**I**N the beginning of 1916, when the British army began to grow desperate for recruits for the imperialist slaughter-house in France, it plastered Dublin with posters conveying the following encouragement: "The trenches in France are healthier than the slums of Dublin"!

The posters were right. Dublin had the highest general death rate of any city in Europe, including Russia. Moscow: 26.3 per 1,000, Calcutta: 27 per 1,000, Dublin: 27.6 per 1,000. The death rate for working class children was 27.7 per 1,000.

The mass of the Dublin working class, the general labourers, dockers, transport workers, etc. lived from the miserable pittance which the city's small-scale, under-developed and backward capitalist industry allowed them. Living in this festering degraded condition, they died like flies. The trade union movement in



Southern Ireland, paralleling industry, was craft-centred, puny, confined to the dozen or so large towns, and to the upper stratum of relatively well-off artisans. This movement was strong enough to organise an Irish TUC only in 1894, nearly 30 years after the British TUC was founded.

When the Irish TUC was being organised the British movement was already past the craft union stage, and, from 1889 onwards fighting heroic battles, like the great fight for the "docker's tanner". This "New Unionism" of the masses of the "unskilled" workers was less an organisation of a secure, relatively respectable section of society such as craft unionism

was, and more a fighting organisation of the general working class.

The especially crushed masses of the class in Ireland remained unorganised until Larkin came, in 1907. In that year the National Union of Dock Labourers sent Jim Larkin, a Liverpool-Irish militant, to organise the Belfast docks. Larkin had been a foreman on the Liverpool docks, and was sacked for siding with his gang when they went on strike. He was a member of the Independent Labour Party. Larkin roused the Belfast workers, appealing to them successfully along class lines, and for a time swept aside the capitalist-fostered "religious" and national hatreds that divided the workers by showing them the real common enemy.

When the "infection" spread to the Belfast police, troops were brought in and set upon the Catholic areas of the city in order to smash the unity Larkin had welded between the hitherto interwarring sections of the working class. Without success. What finally smashed the great dock strike and the promising unity of the Belfast working class was the action of the union bureaucrats in Liverpool. Union leader James Sexton repudiated Larkin, stopped strike pay, and treacherously accepted conditions that made a mockery of the great fight of the Belfast workers. Thus betrayed and confused, their class organisation in disarray, the Belfast workers were again easy prey to the splitting tactics of the bosses.

But the torch lit in the North was seen all over Ireland by workers living in conditions like those of Belfast, and worse. From all over Ireland, workers appealed to Larkin as to some sort of a champion to come and help them break their chains. From this beginning grew a union of the unskilled workers in Ireland, the ITGWU (now merged in SIPTU). By 1920 it would embrace



50% of the organised workers of Ireland — 100,000 people.

These were the years of the great "labour unrest" in Britain. Wave after wave of strikes — dockers, railway-men, miners — erupted in the centre of the British Empire. These strikes were mainly unofficial because the new unions of the 1890s had immediately come under the pressures of the capitalist system and quickly been bureaucratised.

In 1910 James Connolly returned from America where he had been an organiser for the IWW and took on the job of overcoming the demoralisation in Belfast and building up the union. Connolly's understanding of the class struggle together with his experience in America, Larkin's flaming personification of the workers' drive to win that struggle, and the determination of thousands of workers to rise up — these elements now came together and made the ITGWU a terrific and hitherto unheard of power in Dublin.

The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) grew, put down roots gathered into itself the unskilled and unorganised including the thrice enslaved women workers of Dublin. It put into practice the new methods of class as opposed to sectional and craft struggle developed by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in America and used by the great rank and file movement in Britain. In particular they used the sympathetic strike.

The sympathetic strike in practice meant that when a small group of workers had a dispute with their employers they spoke not with the voice of their own puny dozen or few dozen against the entrenched wealth and consequent staying power of the capitalist organisation, but with the voice of their class. After a few test cases the bosses came to know it.

Connolly: "The ITGWU found the labourers of Ireland on their knees, and has striven to raise them to the erect position of manhood. It found them with no other weapons of defence than the arts of the liar, the lickspittle and the toady, and it combined them and taught them to abhor those arts and rely proudly on the defensive power of combination..."

For example, in 1911 the Dublin dockers held up all the ships entering the harbour until the sailors joined the seamen's union and were given union rates of pay and conditions!

When the Dublin coachmakers went on strike, the transport workers' union paid the labourers in that industry strike-pay and continued to do so until the coachmakers won.

The ITGWU struck in demand of the recognition by the bosses of the Mill-Sawers Union, winning recognition and a pay increase. Connolly: "The ITGWU up and down the docks preached most energetically the doctrine of the sympathetic strike, and the doctrine was readily assimilated by the dockers and carters. It

**"The sympathetic strike meant that when a small group of workers had a dispute they spoke not with the voice of their own dozen or few dozen, but with the voice of their class."**

brought the union into a long and bitter struggle along the quays, a struggle which cost it thousands of pounds, imperilled its very existence, and earned for it the bitterest hatred of every employer and sweeter in the city, every one of whom swore they would wait their chance to 'get even with Larkin and his crew'."

The standard of living of Dublin workers began to be pushed slowly upwards. Their militancy, self-confidence and consciousness of their power as a class rose correspondingly.

Thus the roused workers of Dublin "took the fierce beast of capital by the throat all over Dublin and loosened its hold on the vitals of thousands of our class" (Connolly). But the fierce beast has its police and its army and, so long as it controls industry and the banks, vast reserves of strength. It rallied its forces for a determined effort to hurl the workers back to where they had been before the coming of the union.

Four hundred Dublin capitalists banded together around a man named William Martin Murphy, owner of the tramways of Dublin, a national newspaper still in existence, the *Irish Independent*, and many other concerns, and declared war to the death on the ITGWU.

Each of the gallant four hundred deposited a sum of money, in proportion to the size of his concern, in a common pool, and signed a document forfeiting the sum if he made peace with the union before all the other four hundred did so. One day soon, after the Easter Rising of 1916, the Dublin Chamber of Commerce would denounce the Rising as "Larkinism run amok". Murphy would demand through his paper that the British authorities

shoot James Connolly; now he contented himself with lining up these authorities for the coming struggle.

In August 1913 Murphy presented an ultimatum to the tramway workers of Dublin: the union or their jobs. The tramway-men struck.

All over Dublin, wherever the union had members, dockers, carters, gas workers, factory hands are presented with the demand of the four hundred masters of the wealth of Dublin: sign a declaration repudiating the ITGWU, or get out.

But the workers have felt their strength. They know what is at stake.

All over Dublin they refuse to sign the repudiation document and are locked out. So much has the idea of solidarity taken hold of all sections of the workers of Dublin that even those who might avoid the long, hard struggle, the half a year of starvation and the murderous clashes with the police, choose to join their comrades in the street. Thus it is with the members of the Women Workers Union of Ireland. It is only affiliated to the ITGWU and "the document" demands only repudiation by name of the General Workers Union. But, "the second part pledges them to refuse to help the ITGWU — in every shop, factory and sweating hell-hole in Dublin, as the agreement is presented they march out with pinched faces, threadbare clothes and miserable footgear, but with high hopes, undaunted spirit, and glorious resolve shining out of their eyes" (Connolly).

Other unions too are presented by the arrogant and determined bosses with the demand that their members will neither become members of the ITGWU nor give it help. Nearly all of them refuse to sign the document. All over Dublin "...each trade that is served by general labourers, walks out along with the ITGWU boys; refuses to even promise to work with anyone who signs the employer's agreement, and, cheering, lines up with their class." Even old established craft unions, caught up in the general class movement of the past period, join their class in the streets. Thirty seven other unions support the ITGWU. The line-up has begun;



Miners strike for the health workers, 1982. We must rebuild the tradition of solidarity.



**Larkin under arrest. In disguise, he had been speaking to striking workers when the police pounced.**

the rumbling skirmishing class struggles of the past years are on the brink of becoming open class war.

As the bosses organise themselves, thrashing out their policies, making their deposits in the bank, giving their instructions to their police and the rest of their bourgeois-serving class state machine, so too the ITGWU prepares. The revolutionary leaders of the union and the roused workers are well aware that they have won what they have only by struggle and that they will keep it now only by prevailing in a bitter conflict. They set about mobilising the class for battle. Connolly is brought back from Belfast. Meetings are organised all over Dublin to rally the class for the coming battles.

The workers are confident of their strength, with the desperate confidence of people who have learned the hard lesson that existence is class struggle and yet again class struggle. In the *Irish Worker*, Connolly asks: "Shall we crawl back into our slums, abase our hearts, bow our knees, and crawl once more to lick the hand that would smite us? Shall we, who have been carving out for our children a brighter future, a cleaner city, a freer life, consent to betray them instead into the grasp of the blood-suckers from whom we have dreamt of escaping? No, no and yet again, no! Let them declare their lock-out: it will only hasten the day when the working class will lock-out the capitalist class for good and all." (30 August 1913)

A mass meeting is announced for Sunday 31 August as the culminating point of the lesser meetings of support for the tramway strikers used all over Dublin to mobilise support for the coming life or death battle.

But now the state moves into action. Larkin and four other leaders of the union are arrested. Why? Larkin has said that if force is used against the workers they will retaliate. He and his companions are charged with arousing discontent between the workers of Dublin and the police and soldiers of the crown, with disturbing the public peace and with incitement to murder. A proclamation is issued forbidding the mass meeting in O'Connell Street. Connolly points out that freedom of speech and assembly are only scraps of paper and can be torn up when the interests of the masters require it. When that happens only the determi-

nation and activity of the workers can maintain these freedoms.

Larkin is sent for trial. Released on bail, he pledges that the mass meeting will take place as arranged despite having been "proclaimed" by the government and that nothing but death will stop him from speaking there.

On Saturday 30 August, the morning before the mass meeting, Connolly is arrested. The evening before he has openly talked of the need for the workers to arm in self-defence. He is charged with incitement to riot and disorderly conduct. Sentenced to 3 months in jail, he goes on hunger strike. In a week he is free. The workers of Dublin have leaders fit for the job!

Terror reigns in Dublin. In the tense atmosphere there are clashes between the police and workers. That same Saturday night the first casualties of the labour war die. Two men, Nolan and Byrne, have their skulls smashed in by drunken policemen. Witnesses will testify that they were deliberately beaten to death — beaten down, followed, beaten

down again, and then again until they stopped moving.

The scene is set for Dublin's Bloody Sunday. From early morning dense masses of police are concentrated in O'Connell Street and the surrounding area to make sure the meeting is not held. Equally determined, tens of thousands of workers gather in O'Connell Street. Larkin, who is pledged to speak, will be arrested on sight.

Larkin arrives, disguised as an old invalid and dressed like a bourgeois. Accompanied by his "niece" — who is Constance Markiewicz — the old man makes his way to the Imperial hotel — owned by none other than Murphy — and out onto a balcony overlooking the crowded O'Connell Street. Suddenly the invalid straightens his back, whips off his beard, is recognised by the crowd, and a roar of triumph goes up from the thousands of workers as he begins to speak.

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**"The good Catholic employers, the nationalist men who 'love Ireland' and would 'win its freedom' — to them starvation is a fitting weapon to use against Irish workers."**

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Now the class hatred of the Dublin blood suckers, all their fierce resentment at the revolt and the gains of the working class, takes a physical form — that of flying, flailing police truncheons. The hundreds of police hurl themselves on the crowd, lashing out indiscriminately. When the day is over more than 500 people will have been treated in hospital.

With this bloody day the long months of slow starvation have begun for the workers of Dublin. The months of battling with the police and armed scabs imported by the bosses. The long months of acute starvation for the children of the Dublin workers. Already the death rate amongst working-class children in this city is frightfully high.

The good Catholic employers, the nationalist men who "love Ireland" and would "win its freedom" — to them starvation is a fitting weapon to use against Irish workers. Their patriotism allows them to accept help and protection from the British Imperial state machine. But later, when the strike has dragged on for months and desperate plans are made to evacuate the starving working-class children from the embattled city to be housed by English workers — then the patriotic and religious feelings of these nationalist capitalists will revolt. They will create a big outcry against a diabolical plot to steal away these "Catholic children" and expose them to the contaminating contact of English Protes-

tants. Their priests and their press will whip up mob-violence against those trying to save the children from slow starvation.

In this battle all the advantage is with the employers: they have wealth which gives them staying power, and the ability to starve out the workers. They have a mass army of thugs in police uniform at their command to intimidate and beat up pickets, break-up union meetings, jail militant strikers and protect scabs — who hardly need protection for they have guns and impunity in using them. When a drunken scab shoots trade unionist Alice Brady dead, he is arrested and then immediately released. One more worker is beaten to death by the police.

Now the leaders of the union show their quality. Released from jail by his hunger strike, Connolly joins Larkin in organising workers' defence squads. Bands of workers up and down the city are drilled and armed with hockey-stick-like hurleys. In future they will march with union demonstrations to protect meetings and pickets from the police. After a few clashes the police will learn to be a little easier on the strikers, learn to let union demonstrations alone, to refrain from attacking pickets. In their own way, they accept Connolly's truth: freedom for the workers securely exists when the workers are able and willing to defend it.

These defence squads will grow into a union army, the Irish Citizen Army, acquire uniforms and later guns. In 1916 they will be led by Connolly — Larkin is in the USA — to form part of the Republican forces that rise to strike a blow at the British empire, one of the bloody warring empires then bleeding Europe to death.

In Britain the Dublin strike/lock-out and the police atrocities call forth immediate solidarity action.

British rail workers strike, refusing to handle "black" goods. The best sections of the working class, the conscious militants in this Britain of the great pre-war "labour unrest" and unofficial strikes, link up the battle of the Dublin workers with their own struggles.

In South Wales two drivers, James and Reynolds, refuse to handle black goods, link up the feeling of solidarity with the Dubliners with the fight for the eight-hour day, and bring all the locomotives in South Wales out.

This strike is sabotaged and demobilised by the trade union leader J H Thomas.

The Co-op sends food ships up the Liffey.

This is the first time that the idea of a general strike in Britain is seriously proposed since the days of the Chartists.

The advanced layers of the class all over the British Isles is striving to link up, to use its strength against its enemies. All the sectional interests and struggles are seen as part of a whole. The idea of class solidarity is the predominant one. Desperately the conservative union bureaucrats hold on, they manoeuvre, they make promises. They make pretences of militancy while sabotaging the movement for class action.

Because there is no adequate revolutionary party that understands what needs to be done and has the militants in place to get it done throughout industry, linking up and co-ordinating this movement, the trade union leaders manage to contain it.

They denounce the "erratic activities" of Larkin in the same breath as they condemn the Dublin sweaters and the murdering Dublin police. They sabotage the activities of their own rank-and-file in support of Dublin. They won't hear of strike action to support the locked-out Dubliners, but they offer money. Where the workers can be absolute, in industry, where they can cripple the boss by stopping him from going about his business, there they are opposed to all activity. Where the capitalists are absolute, in cash, here they are willing to "help" Dublin. They make donations!

They send a delegation to Dublin to try and restore peace.

Larkin goes on a speaking tour around Britain to rouse support for Dublin. Demands for a general strike become clamorous. To head off the movement the union leaders call a special TUC conference in December 1913 to consider the question. Here the anger of the bureaucrats at the "trouble making" movement of the class is turned on the representatives of Dublin's workers, Larkin and Connolly. Their special hatred is reserved for Larkin, who taunts them with bitter irony calling them "human beings", to imply they were a great deal less. He is denounced as disrupter, the call for a general strike is defeated.

But the idea of the general strike, once disinterred from the Chartist period is not forgotten.

**T**HE strike/lock-out continued for eight months, becoming a war of attrition in which the workers were at a massive disadvantage. Once the British union bureaucrats succeed in containing and stopping the movement in Britain for action in solidarity with Dublin, confining solidarity to the sending of food, money and similar aid, then the chance of outright victory for Dublin's workers was over.

This general strike limited to one city became a prolonged test of the heroism of the workers and of the resoluteness and seriousness of their leaders. Because the workers were determined and heroic they stopped the bosses' drive to exterminate the union. Because the workers' leaders were serious, because they were not afraid to take on the state machine, because they answered force with force, organising a workers' army to defend the workers against the police, the ITGWU was preserved.

By the spring of 1914 most Dublin workers had drifted back to work. They signed no document repudiating the union. There was victimisation, but the union still existed and could fight it. The gains in wages and conditions

could still be protected. The workers were not demoralised, although the doctrine of the sympathetic strike had received some severe blows.

Working-class solidarity was the source of the great strength shown by Dublin's workers; the lack of adequate UK-wide solidarity was the reason why they did not crush the boss class of Dublin. Let James Connolly have the last word:

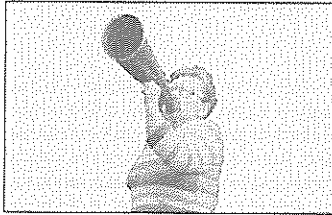
It was the isolation of Dublin that saved the Dublin blood-suckers. "The Dublin fighters received their defeat, met their Waterloo, at the London Conference... At the conference the representatives of organised labour declared that they would not counsel the use of any kind of economic force or industrial action in support of the Dublin workers, and immediately this was known the fight was lost. At the next peace conference in Dublin the employer would not even look at the joint proposals unanimously agreed to by the representatives of the British and Irish trade unions. They knew that they had nothing to fear, as their opponents in the labour camp had solemnly sworn not to hurt them" (*Forward*, Glasgow, 14 March 1914).

Jim Larkin has been dead 50 years. In Ireland he is a respected, mythic figure even to the descendants of those who were his life-long enemies. "Larkinite" is no longer the term of abuse for militant working-class fighters it once was. There is today a statue of Larkin in O'Connell Street, where the police batoned workers on 31 August 1913. Larkin is dead, but as the song about Larkin's early contemporary, Joe Hill says: He never died. Where working men — and women — defend their rights, there you'll find Jim Larkin. Every serious working-class militant, even those who have never heard of Jim Larkin, is a Larkinite. It is an affinity we should be proud of!

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**"This is the first time that the idea of a general strike in Britain is seriously proposed since the days of the Chartists."**

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## The debate on the workers' government

### Against defeatism!

LOOKING at the contributions last month on the question of calling for a workers' government as part of the agitation around the coming General Election, I found that in general, I can see the relevance and usefulness of such a slogan, but some aspects of the debate were worrying.

The arguments against the slogan appear to fall into two main categories:

Firstly, that it is "too advanced" for the current situation. This implies that we cannot ask people to think about what government is for, because it will confuse them about why we call for a Labour vote. It betrays a lack of confidence in the working class being able to follow through the logic of our position.

It also suggests that we can only call for a government accountable to the working class when we are in a strong position inside the Labour Party. But it is precisely our weakness in the LP which makes it necessary to spell out the difference between the Blairites ("Vote Labour"), the soft left / ultra left ("Vote Labour and ..." or "Vote Labour but ..."), the extra-Labour left ("Don't vote Labour") and ourselves. It crystallises our position far more definitively.

Secondly, that it implies we've already lost on the nature of the Labour Party. On the contrary, the slogan actually enables us to link together the task of electing a Labour government with the task of seeking to transform the Labour movement in a concrete way. If we compare "Vote Labour and fight for ..." slogans, they do not play this role, as they fail to make clear how the fight should be organised, or on what terms. The SWP are quite comfortable saying "vote Labour & fight" and to them it means "fight outside the Labour Party".

Where revolutionaries have any input into the Labour campaign in their area, they have a particular reason for needing a slogan which poses the General Election in a specific way. We are not just saying, vote Labour. We are saying, "This Labour campaign is different. The candidate proposes to make herself accountable to the Labour movement." The campaign is a positive one, about the needs of working class people. We need to be able to say to people, this campaign is a model for how the Labour Party ought to function — join it and help make that possible. We say that our candidate would be a "workers' MP" — logically, we are therefore agitating for the principle of a "workers' government" on a local scale.

The suggestion has been made that workers' government ideas are useful as part of our general propaganda, but not as a slogan. On the contrary, "For a government accountable to working people" or similar, is a useful way to pose the issues about the nature of the state and the nature of the Labour Party without presenting it as an ultra-left discussion. It flows naturally out of the work we have been doing around the welfare campaign, and in those areas of the country where supporters of the AWL have been able to have a significant input into the Labour Party campaigns, we have fought to present the coming general election in

these terms.

If comrades believe the work we have done in the Labour Party recently is correct, then the logical progression is to use the election to address the issue of how we organise to get what we have set out as the aims of the campaign — that means addressing the issue of what government is for. Here the workers' government slogan is going to be very useful.

There are, however, some problems with the way the workers' government idea has been presented in *Workers' Liberty*, and in some discussions. These need to be clarified. It has been suggested that a workers' government in the current situation is a defensive proposition; that we are calling for a Labour government without Blair. Some comrades have taken that to mean that we want a return to Labour governments a la Wilson or Callaghan. But that is not on offer. The reality is that the very act of purging the Blairite tendency from the Labour Party would transform it: to succeed, the rank-and-file would need to be mobilised and militant, the unions active and political participants. The removing of Blair would take the Labour Party forward, not backwards, and it is on this basis that we should work.

It has been suggested that we call in words for a Labour government without Blair, or for a Labour government without Tory policies. But these slogans are both fantastical and ultra-left. They have no grip on reality and offer no scope for discussion with the working class electorate, who will either smile and shrug their shoulders, or laugh at us. We can expect many working class voters to need no lectures about Blair, but they do need a constructive approach to their ideas. They are, after all, going to be voting Labour in many cases despite Blair, but they recognise that he is a reality, and can only be removed with a struggle. The struggle will happen around the link, which is the practical test of the slogans for a workers', not bosses', government.

Likewise, it is true that using slogans around a workers' government makes possible (far more easily than if we say straightforwardly, "Vote Labour") a shift to a new position if we lose the fight inside the Labour Party. From this has been deduced a certain defeatism among those who argue for a workers' government. Whether it is true or not that those who initiated the debate believe the battle is unwinnable, we in Leicester do not. We do not see the workers' government slogans as defeatist. Just as the slogan makes possible a shift to a new position with a defeat in the movement, so it makes possible a shift to a more offensive position should we win the struggle inside the Labour Party. Those comrades who say, "I believe we can win, therefore I am against the use of the workers' government slogan" should instead say, "I am against the defeatism, not the slogan". The idea of the workers' government is a flexible one — transitional in the sense that it applies to a point of transition inside the Labour movement, when the issue of the nature of the movement itself is open to debate: what is the Labour Party for?

Some comrades have suggested that the purpose in voting Labour is to "break the logjam in British politics." This is true, but potentially misleading. Where is the logjam? It can be interpreted that the logjam is in Parliament, and hence we vote Labour to "kick out the Tories." But that is not the case. We don't say, "Vote tactically", after all. The logjam is in the working class, and the point of wanting a Labour government is the

effect an election victory will have among the politically conscious elements of the class. So kicking out the Tories is not enough — mobilising the workers for political victory is all.

I am worried that several contributions appear to misjudge the severity of the situation inside the Labour Party, and that this is not consistent across the debate. That is, not all those who underestimate the significance of Blair are opposed to the slogan, and not all those who are resigned to defeat support it. There appears to be confusion around the slogans because, I think, there is confusion about our relationship to the Labour Party at the moment. This is a fluid phase — things could go very rapidly against us, or against Blair. We cannot rely on old formulas or wait to see what happens. We have to use the general election in order to intervene not only into the working class but also into the workings of the Labour movement, and challenge the politically active workers to think, "What is the Labour government to be for? To serve the bosses or the workers?"

This is not accepting defeat within the Labour Party, it is the only rational basis on which to oppose the Blairites.

Richard Grasse

## Socialist re-Action

THE AGM of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, 8 March, was a good place to witness the destructive influence of Socialist Action on both the Labour left and the wider struggle to fend off the Blair leadership's offensive against the union link and collective, participatory democracy in the party. Socialist Action is an obscure sect on the left of the Labour Party which specialises in sycophancy towards certain strategically chosen bigwigs and (more usually) smallwigs, combined with petty factional hostility towards rival socialist organisations active in the labour movement. Its members were on top form in the CLPD's AGM.

Mark Seddon, Editor of *Tribune*, introduced the discussion on strategy to defeat the latest offensive from the Labour leadership against the rank and file. He urged comrades to think through all the issues involved and question some of the Labour left's old certainties as we face an attempt by the Blairites to silence the working class in politics. In particular, Seddon raised the idea of refounding a Labour Representation Committee. This would be a co-ordinated and logical extension of the decision by a number of trade union bodies to redirect some of their political funding away from central Labour Party coffers and towards Labour MPs and labour movement campaigns which reflect their own policies, to deepen and renew labour representation in the face of Blair's attempt to destroy it.

Socialist Action's topsy-turvy analysis of the battle to defend the Labour-union link was epitomised by the extremely silly Carol Turner who said that any decision by trade unions to divert political funding away from central Labour Party funds would be a weakening of the link between Labour and the unions. This is to take a passive approach towards the link in which determination by the unions to stay with Labour means that they allow themselves to be pushed around as much as the Labour leadership wishes. Let us be clear about this. Trade unions should pay enough money



into central Labour Party funds to ensure their rights as affiliated organisations, but why voluntarily pay more money than necessary to a Blair leadership determined to see the trade unions shackled in industry and silenced in politics? Presumably Carol Turner believes she was wrong in the past to support trade unions making donations to the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf, Labour CND, the Anti-Racist Alliance and the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State.

Turner also explained Socialist Action's view that the CLPD should be hostile to the Keep the Link campaign because KTL was providing left cover for trade union bureaucrats, didn't oppose the NEC's proposals and anyway the Labour-union link was not under threat.

These allegations are either slanderous, stupid or both. Firstly, KTL has always opposed any attempt to reduce union influence in decision making so, of course, they oppose the NEC's proposals. Secondly, despite what Socialist Action may say, both the Blairites and the bosses' press clearly understand the NEC proposals as an attack on the link. The *Financial Times* reported the proposals under the heading "Labour cuts union influence over policy", while in private Blairites boasted that they have worked out the "clever" way of effectively breaking the trade union link.

Interestingly, it is only "left faking" trade union bureaucrats who share Socialist Action's analysis: so who's covering from whom?

Now Socialist Action know all about providing left cover for trade union bureaucrats and, for that matter, fake left MPs, as anyone who has come across their "campaigning" in defence of the welfare state can testify. In the case of the Keep the Link campaign this charge is made regardless of the facts which are that both the Keep the Link campaign and the Keep the Party Labour campaign (whose support includes Socialist Action and CLPD) are campaigning against *all* the attacks on the rights of the affiliated organisations, the CLPs, annual conference, women in the party, and in defence of democracy generally, and that substantial unity and co-operation exists between the two campaigns on the ground.

What Socialist Action don't understand is that if Blair is to be defeated on this issue then it is necessary to reach out to sections of the labour movement rank and file beyond the traditional hard left and win the political argument about what the Labour Party is for. If at the union conferences we get up and repeat Carol Turner's assertion that "the union link is not under threat" not only would we be spreading rubbish, we would be actively helping the right-wing union leaders who don't want their unions to oppose Blair.

The current edition of the Keep the Link newsletter contains statements and articles by various trade union leaders who may or may not end up opposing the constitutional changes. I think there are good reasons for including them. Alliances need to be made between the existing hard left and activists who have voted for and look to trade union leaders who have pledged to defend the link between Labour and the unions. Central to the campaign must be to convince these activists that fighting to defend the link in the here and now means opposing the raft of constitutional changes due to be put by the NEC to Party Conference this autumn. The Keep the Link newsletter does this very effectively.

Acknowledgement that the existing hard left is not strong enough by itself to defeat the attacks on democracy was reflected at the CLPD AGM when most of those present, including Socialist Action, argued that it was important to push resolutions calling for any decision to be deferred until the 1998 conference. Now there are good reasons for trying to win a delay as well as building as much opposition as possible, not least the fact

that the timetable for consultation on the NEC proposals is extremely tight and includes the general election period when all local meetings are cancelled. But we need a strategy beyond one of delay, wait and hope. It will take more than the passing of another year (assuming deferment can be won, which is not going to be easy) to build up enough opposition to Blair to see off the attacks on the link and party democracy. It will require the kind of approach adopted by Keep the Link in reaching out to a much wider layer of activists. Moreover, it is vital that this work is done now and not put on the back-burner for after this autumn's conference when it may all be too late.

So what is Socialist Action's problem? Basically, they believe they are entitled to a monopoly on the leadership of the labour left and the resistance to the Blair offensive. They see Keep the Link as a competitor rather than an ally because they had nothing to do with setting it up and have no chance of taking it over. Serious socialists will not allow this sort of small-minded attitude to prevent an effective alliance of Keep the Link and Keep the Party Labour.

Bill Davies

## 1917: a bureaucratic revolution

**I**F a bureaucratic class can exist in Russia as a ruling class, can one exist without being the ruling class (or, more particularly, what is their relation to the means of production)?

Imperial Russia had a Tsar who made all decisions and had ultimate power. Decisions were carried out by bureaucrats who were not part of the aristocracy or the church. These people were paid functionaries. The system was known as bureaucratic-feudalism. Bureaucrats administered the means of production so had much control of it. They routinely diverted portions of the means of production for their own ends in various forms.

How is this different from a worker stealing from her boss or getting freebies? When bureaucrats divert capital (or property capable of reproducing itself) there is a qualitative difference upon which a class is formed, gradually accumulating influence.

Why did a bureaucratic class arise? Due to Russia's vastness and sparseness of resources, administrative ability was at a premium, so that during crisis they would be safeguarded. It was a desirable profession.

Technical skill was less important than the ability to provide materials, etc. The aristocracy would encourage this to be separate from the church to avoid the church becoming too powerful.

It is this system of bureaucratic privilege which has been perpetuated by the Russian revolution. It is my contention that the bureaucratic class were revolutionary and class conscious and that the Russian revolution was a bureaucratic revolution. Only the extraordinary efforts of the Bolshevik Party allowed the working class to have so much influence.

Jim Noble

## State capitalism in the USSR?

**B**ARRY Finger (WZ37) and Roger Clarke (WZ36) dispute my claim (WZ34) that the USSR and the other Stalinist states were state-capitalist. Central to the argument, both on their side and on mine, is the question whether the USSR was based

on wage-labour.

Wage-labour presupposes an owner or owners of the means of production with amassed wealth, counterposed to the workers, from which they pay wages; that is, it presupposes capital. The relation between wage-labour and capital shapes the basic classes, the struggles between them, and the development of the productive forces. It is the central defining relation of capitalism. The relations between capitals — whether there is free competition, whether prices move freely, whether profits are equalised, whether crises occur in such-and-such a form — are less central.

Instead of being handed rations or possessing their own means of production, the workers in the Stalinist states worked for wages and bought their subsistence in shops. They were wage-workers. Yes, extreme state control modified wage labour. As Bukharin wrote, "State-capitalist structure of society makes the workers formally bonded to the imperialist state"; or, as the Algerian Marxist Benhouria put it, "State capitalism, for the worker, is wage-labour plus control and surveillance". The question is whether the modifications made Stalinism an exceptional, "deformed" capitalism, or whether they made the elements of wage-labour secondary and formal, and created an altogether different mode of production, with different social classes and a different development of the productive forces.

Wage-labour exists fairly widely in pre-capitalist systems, but they depend centrally on other forms of exploitation, slavery, tribute-paying, and so on, thus are not capitalist. Wage-labour will continue to exist in a workers' state, but it will be systematically eroded in favour of "free and associated labour", and so a workers' state is in transition from capitalism to socialism. The Stalinist societies showed no similar logic of development away from wage-labour.

In the early '30s Stalin talked about replacing wages by state rations. He did not succeed. "In the autumn of 1930 the attitude temporarily came to prevail that... labour as well as the means of production must be directly planned by the state... Legislation, discussion and economic practice... all reflected a rapid movement towards the training and allocation of Soviet citizens in accordance with the needs of the central plan..."

"These far-reaching measures failed to establish a coherent system for direct planning and allocation of labour in any way comparable to the system of planning and allocating industrial production... In practice, outside the growing forced-labour sector, workers normally remained free to change their jobs and were not subject to compulsory direction... a labour market, though an imperfect one, continued to exist" [1]. From the 1950s to the 1980s, that labour market moved closer to capitalist norms.

Workers in the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries moved from job to job, seeking the best bargain. In some countries and periods they did so freely, elsewhere and at other times in defiance of unenforceable laws, but always they moved. Employers bid for the best workers with bonuses and perks, and squeezed productivity out of their workers with piece-rates [2].

When the workers mobilised, wage rises were among their first demands. Often the mobilisation was sparked by price rises, sometimes by uncontrolled inflation. Class struggles — both the workers' struggle for better wages, and the bosses' struggle to increase production by piece-rates and bonuses — show that the wage-relation was real. The workers in the Stalinist states showed in mobilisations like those of Hungary 1956 and Poland 1980-1 that they shared the essential characteristics and potential of the wage-working class under capitalism.

A system in transition from capitalism to a

hypothetical "bureaucratic collectivism" might, I suppose, still have wage-labour, gradually eroding it in favour of state-slavery. However, in the Stalinist systems the "state-slavery" elements were generally strongest in the first years. Those systems had no internal logic which took them further and further away from wage-labour; rather, the contrary. As the totalitarian, or semi-totalitarian, wrench-grip on the societies of Eastern Europe has been released, since 1989, the spontaneous economic trends of the substructure have been revealed: not collectivist but capitalist.

Yes, the State regulated the Stalinist economies. How — according to what class interests and norms — did it regulate them? The despotic regime gave huge scope to whims and blunders, but there were underlying regularities.

As well as the legal state-regulated markets in labour power and consumer goods, black and "grey" free markets in those commodities and in producer goods, and the surrounding world market, encircled and limited the State plans. Those State plans introduced no new economic logic, taking the systems increasing outside the ambit of capitalism, but, on the contrary, sought shortcuts within the logic of capitalism.

The Stalinist regimes fixed prices mostly according to planners' estimates of what prices should be in a market. Wages were set at social subsistence level, as under capitalism; bourgeois norms of distribution prevailed. Profits were grabbed and controlled by a small minority, who enjoyed vast privileges over the majority. The organisation of production, the choice of technology, the lack of consideration given to the environment and to other social costs and benefits which cannot be reckoned on the market, all conformed to capitalist standards.

The State regulation systematically twisted the economy away from free-market patterns in three major ways: towards cheap basic consumer goods and, often, fairly full employment, to secure totalitarian control; towards greater investment in heavy industry; and towards autarky (trying to construct a national economy independent of the rest of the world).

Those torsions were nationalist, not anti-capitalist. In the mid 20th century, all across the underdeveloped capitalist countries, petty bourgeois formations rebelled against the parasitism, corruption and dependence of the old oligarchies or colonial administrations. They wanted national development. They made bourgeois revolutions or semi-revolutions against the bourgeois oligarchies and their allies, feudalistic landowners and colonial rulers. Depending how tightly-knit and ideologically coherent their organisation was, they pushed the old oligarchies aside, reduced them to second rank, or crushed them.

The petty bourgeois revolutionaries or reformers did not want bourgeois democracy and free enterprise, which would allow the old oligarchs and imperialists still to hold considerable sway. In all cases they created powerful interventionist states; where they were vigorous, fervent, mass-mobilising revolutionaries (revolutionary Stalinists) they created totalitarian regimes, austere dedicated to national industrial development, protected by military discipline against disruption by individual profiteers or by the working class.

In such cases the liberated peasants were re-enslaved, this time to the profit of the State rather than private landowners. Not merely the larger part, but the whole of surplus value was ruthlessly concentrated in the hands of the State and channelled into crash industrialisation. The Stalinist states had many special features, but their state sectors developed large-scale national capitalism, not anti-capitalism.

Barry is right to point out that Engels' sketch of state-capitalism is an extrapolation from advanced

capitalism, not a model for industrially-backward states. In *Capital* Marx indicated that state power and force played a large role in the early stages of capitalism, too. "The organisation of capitalist production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance... The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist. Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally... It is otherwise during the historic genesis of capitalist production. The bourgeoisie, at its rise, wants and uses the power of the state..." (Capital volume 1, p.737). In 20th century conditions, unanticipated by Marx, the role of direct force in capitalist industrialisation reached a scale and took forms unanticipated by Marx.

That framework can help us to see Stalinism in perspective — it was not an abortive attempt to supersede capitalism — and facilitate analysis of its specificities (like, for example, the French writer Jacques Sapir's meticulous "state-capitalist" account of "Economic Fluctuations in the USSR, 1941-1985").

The "bureaucratic-collectivist" label appeals because it seems to highlight the specificity of Stalinism: "Call a whale a mammal? Nonsense! A whale is nothing like a sheep!" In fact Barry's assumption that capitalism is defined by "spontaneous self-regulation" leads him to characterise state and other bureaucracies in the West as "bureaucratic-collectivist" too. Every system is then a bit capitalist, a bit bureaucratic-collectivist. The bureaucratic-collectivist bit is large even in, say, Tory Britain, where 40% of national income passes through the state budget, and there are many more countries than those of Stalinism where it is overwhelmingly dominant. And so, in fact, the "bureaucratic-collectivist" label blurs the specificity and our historical overview.

1. R W Davies in David Lane (ed), *Labour and Employment in the USSR*, p.31-32.

2. "Differing wages for similar jobs across branches even within single towns persist" (Silvana Malle, *ibid*, p.132). "55 per cent of workers are still [1983] on the piece-work system" (p.133). Cf Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, chapter 4.4.

Martin Thomas

## Keep drugs illegal!

ANDY Robinson's "Drugs: serious solutions, not vigilante repression", (WZ38), is a mix-up of soggy liberal social-psychology — arguing that calling someone a smack-head makes them one — and a strange belief that legalising drugs would reduce drug-related crime.

Legalising all drugs — as Andy prefers — would not break the link between drugs and street crime. Instead, it would make easier the life of the drug barons.

No doubt, once legalised, the drug industry would be governed by a less harsh regime than the current regulation by a bouncer-enforced 'under-state'. But I don't care to legitimate this dirty money nor to promote the men who run the drugs world into the body-politic of British society.

Andy is also wrong to think that drug related street crime would vanish. It is probably true that dealers would no longer hang around street corners making a threatening nuisance of themselves to people living nearby and that would be positive. But young people would still have to thief to get the money to buy the drugs, whether over the counter or on the streets. Legalisation would make no difference to his sort of drug related crime — and it is precisely this problem which engenders misery and undermines communal identity and solidarity.

However, Andy is right to call for programmes

of alternative activities for young people. The expectation is that through these activities people will explore new ideas, opportunities and form the relationships which will help them to make sense of themselves and their social position.

Regardless of these arguments, there is another very good reason why drugs should not be legalised. They are very bad for you. If tobacco and alcohol were not legal, I doubt socialists would campaign for the right of multinationals to peddle these killer drugs.

Andy is right to think that decriminalisation of cannabis for personal use (and maybe 'E' too, but that drug is too young for me to know much about) is an appropriate demand — but it's a very long way from that liberal demand to the position of the old hard-right libertarian Tories (which Andy endorses) who think that getting the state out of a potentially healthy, money-making market is more important than protecting people from this kind of exploitation.

Finally, Andy may well be right to say I am naïve about the IRA's anti-drugs campaign. It might indeed be a mask for ensuring their control of the streets. But I do prefer to see working class action to clear up their streets and protect their young, to seeing the same people campaigning for legalising, legitimising and easing the passage of killer drugs into the hands of bored, alienated and abused youth.

Sue Hamilton

## What drugs do to you

I AM acquainted with the view expressed by Andy Robinson (WZ38) that 'hard' drugs should be made legal. The underlying notion that an appeal to reasonable behaviour is sufficient to prevent dependence and that people have a right to do with their bodies as they will seems irrefutable. However, very few of us are free of emotional content. We might have one drink too many or curse a close family member in a weak moment, and then feel sorry for our behaviour! At a time when the availability of automatic guns is questioned; and regulations governing car safety are regularly tightened, it seems to court disaster to make powerful drugs available to all. Variants of cocaine and heroin are used medically to prevent serious pain; and within the medical profession are governed by strict regulations.

Psychotropic drugs also can have hidden dangers. The garish stories emanating from the USA in the '60s regarding the behaviour of people under the influence of LSD, e.g. attempting to fly from the upper stories of buildings, or staring at the sun until eye damage occurred, may have been fabricated. My experience tells me that psychomimetic drugs can induce irrational — if momentarily uplifting — feelings and activity. However, I agree social conditions can induce drug-taking e.g. personal isolation, the traumatic end of a relationship, or simply the process of growing up.

When I was living in Liverpool in the '70s there was an outbreak of 'joy-riding'. My initial response was amazement at the daring of these kids, that is until a woman and daughter were run down by a speeding youngster. Many people can take drugs and 'get off' them, but some people need a tectonic shift in their lives to return to 'normality'.

Those that insist on their right to experiment with 'harder drugs' must expect to risk addiction with its attendant problems such as severe mood swings, sleep disturbance, physical ill-health, psychiatric disorders and an association with the criminal fraternity.

John Bryn Jones

# US Labor Party

**L**AST year big steps were taken towards the creation of a mass trade union based Labor Party in the USA (see *Workers' Liberty* July 1996). But what sort of Labor Party? How can the cause of a US Labor Party best be advanced? Discussion of this question is intense amongst US socialists. Here we print the first two contributions in what we hope will be an extended discussion on the question of the US Labor Party.

## I. We should stand in elections

**T**HE founding of a Labor Party in the United States is a big opportunity for the labor movement. This is the first time that working people have moved toward having our own independent voice in politics since 1948 — rather than trailing after the Democrats, hoping for crumbs.

So it's a shame that some union members are so critical of this new-born Labor Party, just because it doesn't correspond to the full-fledged and ideal labor party we'd like it to be. When they focus on the many problems the Labor Party faces, they tend not to see the forest for the trees. Let's try to look at it with a little historical perspective! Today a labor party is practically in the mainstream of labor debate — which is way ahead of where we were five years ago.

One of the hot debates at the convention last June was whether the party should run candidates, and that debate is still raging. I'd like to weigh in on the yes side — though we were quite right not to try it this year.

Labor Party founder Tony Mazzocchi says we should stay away from elections because the only result is either defeat followed by demoralisation, or victory followed by sell-out followed by demoralisation. Therefore we should model ourselves after the civil rights movement, doing grass roots agitation that forces politicians to change the laws whether they want to or not.

But I would argue that it's unlikely that the Labor Party can start from where we are

now and grow in a straight line till we have "hundreds of thousands of members," as one resolution put it. We need to take part in elections because:

1. Running candidates says something that no other type of grass roots work does. It says, "Working people should take power." When the Labor Party (in the future) runs candidates for Congress and President on our far-reaching platform, it is saying, in effect, "We don't buy corporate competitiveness as the organising principle of society; working people should take the wealth from the fat cats." We get to talk about the big picture.

Merely trying to influence existing politicians and candidates doesn't say that. It says, "We're just another pressure group on the professional politicians, who will always be in charge."

2. Candidates get publicity; running them says you're putting your money where your mouth is.

3. Many people will get involved in electoral politics who won't in other kinds of grass roots activities. Like it or not, when you say "party" to just about anybody, they say, "Who are you running?" If all we're doing is non-electoral work, why should people join us, to do work that they can do just as well wearing another hat?

Jobs with Justice, for instance, is an already-existing national organisation with chapters in many cities, a labor-community coalition that takes on various kinds of campaigns. Why would anyone join the Labor Party to do non-electoral work, rather than Jobs with Justice, which has a track record?

Of course, in the best of all possible labor parties, the more top-down activity of an election campaign would interact with action in the streets. And we'd have to look out for the constant tendency to have illusions in individual candidates, and also in what it is possible for a few souls in office to do.

We do need to "go beyond the electoral process," as our resolution put it, but we also need to get into elections if we're to make a name for the Labor Party and attract "hundreds of thousands" of members.

Labor Party leaders ought to be doing some serious research and sounding out. They should investigate where the endorsing unions, both local and international, might have the combined capacity to run credible local campaigns. This could be for school board, city council, county executive, maybe even Congressperson. The 1998 Labor Party convention could adopt such campaigns and prepare to go all out to win them.

Given that many chapters are not yet very strong, this would be a sounder approach than throwing open the doors to any chapter anywhere that wanted to jump into the electoral arena.

In addition, of course, local Labor Parties are already free to launch or work on ballot initiatives. The Patient Protection Act on the November ballot in California, introduced by the California Nurses Association, is one example. In many cities and states "living wage" campaigns are already under way, to get the city council or state legislature to set a minimum wage in the \$6.50-8 range for certain workers, or to get a living wage initiative on the ballot. These fit in perfectly with our party platform.

Some members have said that the current Labor Party leaders are opposed to running candidates because they don't really

want a new party at all; their true plan is to act only as a pressure group, prodding the Democrats in Congress. They don't want to put up Labor Party candidates because that would annoy their Democratic friends.

I believe this appraisal is dead wrong. Party leaders' reason for not running candidates is tied to a recruitment strategy.

For the time being, at least, this strategy is to make it easy for international and local union presidents to endorse (and commit funds). Joining the Labor Party should be a minimal, non-scary kind of commitment. And that means you have to reassure them that they can keep on doing their thing with local and national Democrats.

For many, many Labor Party members who are local union officials, raising money for and asking favours of Democratic politicians is part of their way of life, part of the way they see themselves and their unions as having influence. They are not inclined to risk changing it, especially when the Labor Party is so new and weak. This is particularly true for public sector unions and in cities and states where a union is large enough to have some influence in internal party workings, such as the UAW in Michigan.

The Political Director of the American Federation of Government Employees, for example, says he sees no contradiction in AFGE's president's being on the Democratic National Committee and also endorsing the Labor Party. "The point where I'll see a contradiction," he says, "is if they decide to run candidates."

The party's new recruitment brochure lists "Is the Labor Party running candidates? No." as point #2 in its self-description.

So, under this approach, the Labor Party is to be a holding tank of progressive political sentiment. The strategy is to recruit unions into a larger and larger holding tank, based on the notion that you can be in the Labor Party and still do your regular COPE work, until there's critical mass enough that you *can* start acting like a party — that is, run candidates.

Party leaders may well be looking toward AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka's becoming president of the federation in not too many years, with the aim of recruiting as many locals, intermediate bodies, and internationals as they can to pressure Trumka, once he takes office, to lead a labor party.

Stripped to its basics, the argument is that you don't run candidates until the holding tank has grown full enough. And the only way to fill the tank is to keep a low profile.

Now, it's hard to argue with the notion that you don't take bold action until you're strong enough. The question is, how does the party get strong enough?

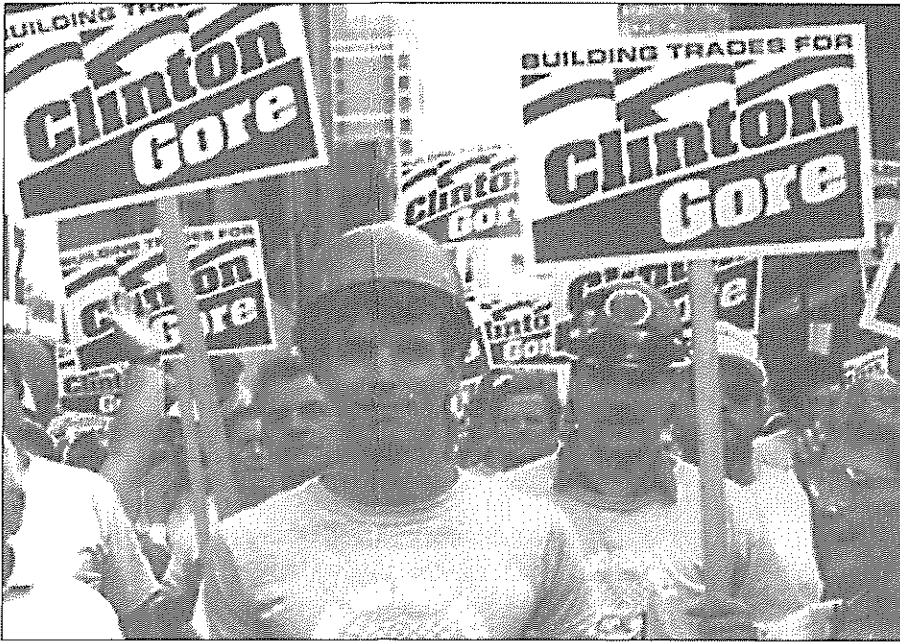
Under the holding tank strategy, the rank and file of the endorsing unions are likely to be pretty passive. They're not supposed to do anything much; you hope they'll know that their local or international union has endorsed; the best will be individual members as well. Then all of a sudden someone opens the floodgates of the holding tank and they're supposed to rush out and work their tails off for the Labor Party?

Union members over the last decade have been markedly resistant to union leaders' recommendations about how to vote. Without a lot of groundwork — and action — they won't be automatic converts

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to the Labor Party either.

There are other problems with the holding tank strategy:

1. If we're not running candidates, what will we be doing that will make union leaders or members want to join?

2. The holding tank is not a conception that can hold well. Already, Labor Party Advocates leaders were pushed by restive members who weren't satisfied with the early conception of LPA as a mailing list/club. They were prodded into allowing the formation of chapters and then into encouraging the formation of chapters.

Mazzocchi noted, "It's difficult to recruit people, as many of our activists have pointed out, when there's really nothing for them to do," and LPA called a founding convention of a Labor Party even though its conception was still pretty similar to LPA. But members' expectations were raised. Now that we're a party, the pressure is on to act like one.

Labor Party leaders may be able to maintain the holding tank strategy for a while (but it should be noted that both the United Electrical Workers and the Longshoremen have said they want to run candidates in the relatively near future). In any case, there will be more pressure and more fractiousness than ever within the party. Many, many Labor Party members, including members of the endorsing unions, will want the party to shit or get off the pot at some intermediate stage, before others have decided the holding tank is full enough.

So the debate will go on. There are acres of terrain to contest in the party's self-definition and in what it does on the ground. Those who want to write off the new party because it isn't the electoral equivalent of the CIO are wrong. If we didn't take part in organisations just because they're beset with conflicting impulses, we wouldn't be involved in our unions either.

One final point: many of us have been active in the labor movement for decades, pushing and prodding it to reform, to become more militant, to shape up. We shouldn't forget that this Labor Party has the potential to help change the labor movement too.

*Jane Slaughter*

## II. Break with the Democrats!

**L**AST summer, when Bill Clinton played to the tune of conservatives and signed the bi-partisan welfare reform bill, he inexorably antagonised two of the Democratic Party's key pillars, unions and blacks. This bill will condemn society's most defenceless — women, children, the elderly and documented immigrant workers — to poverty and homelessness by cutting them off welfare after two years. It will build a vast reserve army of the unemployed, desperate to work at starvation wages, cross a picket line to take a striking union member's job or beg in the streets. Clinton's signing of the welfare reform bill was a calculated measure: "Poor people don't vote and working people have no choice but to vote Democrat." Workers, who usually vote for "friends of labor" Democrats, are becoming increasingly fed up with the bi-partisan anti-labor legislation like NAFTA, the Team Act, deregulation schemes and the draconian Crime Bill.

Democratic Party arrogance that takes working people for granted was the impetus behind the founding of the Labor Party in June. 1,400 delegates mostly from unions reportedly embracing 1,000,000 workers travelled to Cleveland to build a labor party that will ostensibly change America's political landscape. In every industrialised country, except here, there's a party that claims to speak for the working class. In the U.S. there have been labor parties, but not always independent and, like San Francisco's anti-Chinese immigrant Labor Party of 1901, not always progressive. With the trade union movement down to a mere 12% of the workforce labor must rethink its political strategy. So far only nine international and national unions have endorsed the Labor Party. Most

union tops remain Democrat-loyal. John Sweeney, new AFL-CIO chief, who was in Cleveland during the Labor Party convention, was conspicuously absent. Only a militant rank and file upsurge will break the labor aristocracy's slavish attachment to the Democrats.

Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) official Tony Mazzocchi and President Bob Wages started organising the Labor Party ten years ago. The Labor Party's reformist program challenges corporate America with demands like full employment, a 32-hour workweek, labor's unfettered right to organise, universal health care, and a \$10 an hour minimum wage. However, the leadership's abstentionist position — that it's premature to run Labor Party candidates in the upcoming elections — prevailed at the convention... not without a bitter fight. When Chairman Wages initially refused to recognise a motion from the ILWU permitting party organisations to run candidates at the state and local levels it nearly provoked a walkout by the longshoremen. Thus, left unanswered was the convention's slogan: "If not here, where? If not us, who? If not now, when?"

A debate over abortion ensued when the nurses tried to amend the proposed program's limited call for "reproductive services" (which places it to the right of the Democratic Party) with an amendment guaranteeing the right to "a safe and legal abortion". It too was defeated.

Indeed, the leadership tried to avoid controversy at all cost. Yet, the creation of a workers' party is itself controversial. Any labor party worth its salt wouldn't be afraid to raise the call for nationalisation of basic industry in the face of massive job losses due to the global onslaught of privatisation; or to demand an end to the U.S. imperialist blockade of Cuba; or the release of framed black freedom fighters Geronimo Pratt and Mumia Abu-Jamal languishing in jail.

Explosive contradictions exist for the Labor Party. If it is to be truly independent its union affiliates can not support or participate in the Democratic Party. Yet, American Federation of Government Employees' president John Sturdivant sits on both the Labor Party Interim National Council and the Democratic National Committee. And if this Labor Party is for real why didn't its head Bob Wages vote against the early endorsement of Clinton at the March AFL-CIO Convention?

More significantly, a real labor party isn't just an electoral machine. It is actively engaged in the class struggle, leading workers on strike and organising against racist repression. Convention delegates voted unanimously for a massive "March on Detroit" to defend the embattled newspaper workers on strike for a year. If this Labor Party is for real, then it will rally the labor movement behind these strikers. The future of both may hang in the balance.

*Jack Heyman*

*Jack Heyman, an ILWU Convention delegate, attended the founding convention of the Labor Party in Cleveland in June.*



# Bob Pennington and the Trotskyist archipelago

## Part 2 of The Life and Times of Bob Pennington by Patrick Avaakum

**I**N the late '60s everything was changing on the left. Mass demonstrations against the Vietnam war, mass student radicalisation, the great French general strike of May-June 1968, and, in Britain, against a background of disappointment with Labour in office, sustained rank-and-file workers' industrial militancy — all combined to generate euphoria and semi-anarchist ultra-leftism among wide layers of mainly middle-class youth.

At the beginning of this radicalisation, the IMG, to which Bob Pennington, though excluded from membership, felt he owed allegiance because of its connection with the "Fourth International" (United Secretariat of the Fourth International), was small and lacked anything like an educated cadre. Some of its members — Pat Jordan, Tariq Ali — became central to the big anti-Vietnam war movement. Reflecting every middle-class ultra-left fashion and behaving like a tendency with no political baggage to guide or inhibit what it said or did, the group began to recruit newly radicalised youth. Soon it split, shedding a large and disparate "right-wing" element of its older membership, people who wanted the old primary orientation to the labour movement.

It is difficult today to conjure up the world of the IMG at the turn of the most momentous decade in British labour history since the 1920s. It has vanished like an animal species subjected to catastrophic climatic change. Most of the tendency's surviving members, chastened and largely doing routine labour movement work, are probably supporters of *Socialist Outlook*; its leadership after 1972 and some of the members are now in *Socialist Action*.

Feeling itself exuberantly in the flood-tide of a world revolution which included Mao Zedong, the Stalinist Vietnamese, the Black Panthers, the IRA, Che Guevara, Korea's dynastic Stalinist dictator Kim Il Sung, and comrade Tom Cobby and all, the group was wildly ultra-left.

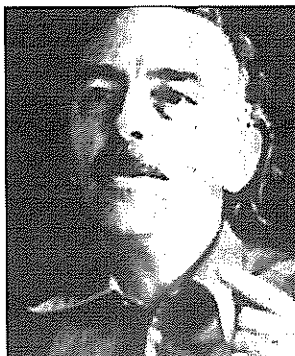
The IMG had the backing and the emotional appeal of "The International" — the USFI — and the reflected intellectual and academic prestige of Ernest Mandel. It grew very quickly. The speculations and fantasies were heady, the chanting on demos exhilarating and the 'highs' were just great, man. With any luck you could even do an academic thesis on some aspect of revolutionary politics. Noisy and pretentious and very revolutionary it was, and good fun for a while before you "settled down"; but serious politics it was not, still less working-class politics.

They were for the working class, but their first concerns were often narrowly and foolishly studentist. The IMG was "in" with the world revolution, they *were* the "Fourth International", and so they did not have to bother too much about the lesser teams in the world league, like the working class in Britain, where they happened to live and could hope to influence events!\*

The IMG used the idea of the "Fourth International" to fortify their current, and frequently changing, politics and as a stabilising baseline outside of politics — a fetish. Essentially it was a substitute for politics. Never mind the politics, we are the International! "Internationalism" is the central question, comrade! The same approach in the 1930s would have made a principle of being in the Stalinist Communist International, because — never mind the politics! — it was the "real international".

This was sub-political, but it did give the IMG some organisational stability. The idea that this weak international tendency (the USFI), which specialised in mimicry of and chameleon adaptation to alien political currents, was in any real sense "The Fourth International" expressed wishes

\* We, the fore-runners of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, expelled from the IS-SWP in December 1971, and sharing (though rapidly losing) some illusions that the USFI could meaningfully be considered the continuation of Trotsky's Fourth International, agreed to their proposal that we fuse with them — on condition that the new group would immediately start to produce a worker-oriented weekly paper. This was seven months before July 1972, when Britain came to the verge of a general strike. The class struggle was bubbling up around us. They dismissed our concerns! One of the negotiators, a young middle-class man with a couple of years in politics and the manners of the boss's son talking to dim proles about high finance, gave us a smugly proprietorial little lecture on the "world revolution" and "internationalism", emphasising the relative unimportance of Britain in "the world revolution". He placed it sixth or seventh in a list at the top of which was Bolivia (or was it Argentina?). Britain and the British working class our first concern? How small-minded and parochial could people who called themselves Trotskyist get?



rather than the reality, but for Pennington, by the late 1960s, this half-imaginary 'international' above-politics had become the central part of his political outlook; it was a lodestar that led him into some strange political places.

### II

**B**UT Pennington was still kept outside their door. Grand-master of factional gambits, he now applied an old expelled-entrust policy to the IMG: he set to influence people to join who would then fight to get him in.<sup>†</sup> Eventually Pennington got back into the IMG. Because the IMG lacked an educated cadre, it soon sagged into a discussion group for self-consciously intellectual but, unfortunately, clueless, middle-class youth. The sensible part of that generation of revolutionary-minded students went to the IS-SWP, which had a serious working-class (though economic) orientation and some sense of reality.

Soon an IMG opposition group emerged, led by Pennington and his protégé, John Ross. Initially the Ross-Pennington grouping argued for necessary things, like a working-class orientation. Here Pennington's persona as an experienced militant of the working class and of the older revolutionary movement was an irreplaceable part of the faction's political capital.

But this faction — temporarily deprived of Pennington's collaboration as we shall see — developed absurd ideas. They argued that a Marxist organisation should never make "calls to action" on the working class. Instead socialists should just explain "a rounded conception" of the overall struggle — that is, confine themselves to outside-the-struggle general propaganda. Graphically expressing the psychology of a small middle-class group with no presence in the labour movement, they thus theorised, magnified and helped perpetuate their own impotence.

In a grown-up organisation, people cutting their teeth with such notions would be given a booklist and maybe a tutor, and told to go learn the ABCs. Here they soon rallied a majority of the organisation against the lacklustre old leadership — never more than a USFI "branch manager" leadership — around Pat Jordan and Bob Purdie. Just as Britain went towards the biggest political crisis in decades, the IMG went seriously daffy.

The Tory government admitted British passport-holding Asians expelled from Uganda, and there was a vicious racist backlash. Militant workers struck and marched in protest, alongside fascists. Stark tragedy? No problem, said the IMG: this was a "big chance for the left" to put the argument against racism on a *fully socialist* rather than merely liberal basis<sup>††</sup>. When a general strike against anti-union laws became a real possibility, the IMG said that calling for a general strike was merely "administrative", not political, not worthy of Marxists... And so on. This was "the Fourth International" in Britain at the highest point of class struggle since the 1926 General Strike!

### III

**W**HEN the IMG was at its most bizarre, someone wrote on the lavatory wall of the pub in Pentonville Road most used by the group: "Come back Pennington, they've all gone mad!" Where was Pennington? He was in jail, for embezzlement. He had what he called a working-class attitude to things that "fell off the backs of lorries" — fiddles, extras, baksheesh. How far back in his life that went, I don't know. But such attitudes were endemic in the docks, up to and including serious gang-

<sup>†</sup> His most notable success was a perennially confused young man, John Ross by name, who had been sent into Oxford IS (SWP) to do exploratory entry work for a Maoist group (the CPBML) and decided to stay.

<sup>††</sup> The fortnightly paper *Workers' Fight* applied "the IMG method" to other situations in history: "Asians: big chance for left". That is how they greet the wave of racialism and the biggest mobilisation of fascism for ages! For devotees of this kind of thinking, however, we offer the following quiz: In the first section below are a number of catastrophes and misfortunes; in the second are a number of 'big chances'. Your job is to match them up. 1. the ten plagues; the purge of the Bolshevik old guard by Stalin; the black death; Hitler comes to power; the fall of the Roman Empire; fascism victorious in Germany. 2. "Our turn next; big chance for budding historians of imperial history; big chance for critics of Thaelmann; big chance for new leadership; big chance for young doctors; big chance for rat-catchers. In case you're not sure how to play the game, we'll start you off with a real one (actually the slogan of the ultra-left German Communist Party at one time): 'Hitler comes to power — our turn next!'"

sterism. For enterprising dockers, the choice was normally posed, to be a militant or to fight a secret, possibly lucrative, war of private redistribution. Some did both. Pennington — who had been the subject of strong criticism in the Liverpool SLL for his docks associations — did both. As a result he was out of it at the crucial turning-point for his organisation, and the working class.

Timeless Ten-Commandments moralism is, I think, not in place here. It is natural for robbed and exploited workers to take back what they can. Why not? Such wild forms of working class resistance to exploitation are inseparable from class society. In the files of the first British Marxist journal, *Justice*, are to be found discussions between pioneers like Jim Connell — who wrote 'The Red Flag' — and Theodore Rothstein on the attitude Marxists should take to such things, and to petty casual sabotage: there was even a name for it: 'ca' canny'. The issue is a political, not mainly a moral one: socialists propose collective action for general working class betterment, not private guerrilla war on the exploiters; and pilfering renders militants liable — as Pennington discovered at the most awkward political moment — to repression by the bourgeois state.

In July 1972, a quarter of a million workers struck spontaneously against the jailing of five dock workers' pickets, and the TUC felt obliged to set a date for a one-day general strike. After five days of vast crowds besieging Pentonville jail, where the five were held, the Tories capitulated and let the dockers out. During this great working-class revolt the no-calls-to-action-IMG was all at sea. They wound up suggesting a bewildering menu of slogans and demands. Afterwards, the old no-calls-to-action nonsense was badly discredited and soon abandoned, and they went into sharp crisis. The group dissolved into unprincipled gang warfare that would — the sub-groups held together by the Fourth International — last a dozen years, until the organisation finally splintered.

The Rossites, the enemies of all "calls to action", now made "calls to action" with the gabbled speed of a pattering race course bookie. They unceremoniously took over the central slogan of the old leading group — Jordan-Purdie, now in opposition — "General Strike to Kick the Tories Out", and went characteristically mad with it. General Strike was the answer to everything. When the Tories called a General Election in February 1974, the IMG called on workers not to vote separately but to strike and march to the polls as a class. When the Tories lost the February 1974 election and Prime Minister Heath spent a few hours trying to form a coalition with the Liberals, the IMG rushed out a special issue of their paper with the headline "General Strike to finish them off!" And so on, and so on: noisy, silly, childish...

Pennington, out of jail, was again part of the leadership of the Ross group. They would keep control of the organisation through a long and bewildering series of political quick-changes, contortions and volte-faces. I like to think he was a voice for balance and sanity in their councils.

The IMG's zigzags included one of the most bizarre episodes in their history — "Socialist Unity", a conglomerate of the IMG, smaller groups like Big Flame, and unaffiliated individuals. Socialist Unity put up ten candidates, standing against Labour, in the 1979 election. In principle there was nothing wrong in that, but in the circumstances — the Thatcherite Tories were on the offensive that led to a radical reshaping of British politics and society and of the British labour movement too — it was as sectarian as it was shortsighted. Pennington was the National Organiser of Socialist Unity.\*\*

They did ignominiously at the polls. The IMG had to radically correct and reorient themselves when the Labour Left went on the offensive after June 1979. Big things like that were, in any case, always only little things to the IMG.

The IMG's ultra-left euphoria was now long gone. In its place, in the '80s, was depression and organisational haemorrhaging. The ever-warring factions had stayed in one organisation only because they could jointly make a common religion of "the International": the family that prays together stays together, so to speak. When "The International" split, the IMG began to scatter into a number of organisations. Pennington's erstwhile faction became *Socialist Action*, which today is a small group whose members work at burrowing into positions of borrowed "power" and influence as factotums for MPs and the like. Its politics are now more kitsch-Stalinist than kitsch-Trotskyist. Pennington, at the end, sided with the section of the IMG that became *Socialist Outlook*, but, old, tired, and probably sickened, he dropped out at about the time of the group's fragmenting in 1985.

Not long after that, the collapse of the Stalinist USSR brought to a bru-

tal end the illusions of those who had mistaken Stalinism for a "deformed" but viable and improvable first elaboration of socialism. Pennington's political life had spanned the whole period of a neo-Trotskyism that was always an epiphenomenon of Stalinism

## IV

**I**n all the years of Bob Pennington's activity, the working class had been through a great cycle of industrial militancy. In February 1974 it had brought down a Tory government and installed one more to its liking.

Large numbers had embraced varieties of 'Trotskyism'. Sizeable organisations were built — but each one reproduced and parodied some previous bad working-class experience, as if to mock Trotsky's charge to such groups to be "the memory of the class"†. The result is an archipelago of sects.

What, objectively, might have been achieved by revolutionary socialists in mass working-class politics during Pennington's political lifetime? In 25 years and more of working-class confidence, combativity, and sometimes spectacular industrial militancy, a stable, united organisation of Marxists could have been built — an organisation capable of providing the broad labour movement with basic socialist and Marxist education, of propagating a socialist working-class interpretation of current events, and of organising militants in day-to-day struggle. It could have oriented to and integrated into the existing political and industrial labour movement, learning from the CP of the mid-'20s, which gained large labour movement influence despite right-wing hostility. It could have grown steadily to become a force in day-to-day working-class affairs. Building a rank-and-file movement in the unions, it could have offset the time-serving and treachery of the trade union bureaucrats who have brought the labour movement to its present pass.

What if such a sane, stable, internally democratic revolutionary organisation of some tens of thousands had existed in the struggles of the early 1970s? Then everything might have been different. The alternative to the Tories we drove from office in 1974 would probably still have been Harold Wilson's Labour Party, but it would not have been able after 1974 to demobilise the working class as it did. Subjected to the criticism of the Marxists and the opposition of a Marxist influenced labour movement it might possibly have been Britain's Kerensky government — the bridge to socialist revolution. The working class could conceivably have taken power. But if not that, then, at the very least, objective conditions existed for a large Marxist organisation to become a stable force in British politics.

Why did we not achieve that? The main Trotskyist groups — the SLL/WRP, Militant, IS/SWP and the IMG — were politically incoherent and often self-isolating. They proved simply unfit to use the opportunities which opened up before them. Most of them wrapped their basic revolutionary socialist ideas in dogmas that too often defied reason and sense. Key ideas — about Stalinism and the "unfolding world revolution" for example — were or became articles of unthinking faith that could not be reasoned about, questioned or more than cursorily discussed. An orthodoxy that often depended on special meanings for words like imperialism — the Russian Empire, even after its immense post-1944 expansion, was not an Empire, but the World Revolution, for now — and whose tenets frequently flew in the face of observed reality, could only be maintained on the basis of Authority. That fact, aside from all accidental things like Gerry Healy's personality — or, for that matter, the personality of Tony Cliff, who rejected many of the dogmas of official Trotskyism†† — bred in most of the Trotskyist groups brutal authoritarian regimes of crisis, modelled essentially on early Stalinism; and as western Stalinist parties loosened up after the '50s, these regimes were often worse than the regimes in contemporary Stalinist organisations, being truly "machines for maiming militants". All questions of politics aside, this alone made them organically incapable of integrating into the broad real labour movement. The typical neo-Trotskyist press was monofunctional, "homogenised", and usually sterile.

The ideological systems were synthetic and arbitrary, and forever

† Militant, for example, re-lived the Second International experience of making an all-regulating, self-sufficient purpose out of the building up, maintenance and preservation of a party apparatus. During the dozen years they controlled the Labour Party Young Socialists, they were financially subsidised by the Labour Party! When eventually they came to control the council in Liverpool, they evaded a conflict with the Tories that could have brought serious and maybe decisive aid to the striking miners in 1984/5 because of the risks it entailed to their machine, only — like their German Social-Democratic prototype — to have that apparatus smashed later, after the miners had been defeated.

†† Of course the "workers' state" dogma and the culture that grew up around it does not explain the "state-capitalist" SWP, which long ago broke with it, but the neo-Trotskyist culture does — the culture which the Cliff group systematically embraced when, after '68, it decided to "build a party". Ever afterwards it acted as if deliberately copying the once "successful" Healyites, and as if it did not know the end of that political story.

\* In fact, on a tepid left-reformist programme.

\*\* The essential drive of Socialist Unity came from factional competition with the IS-SWP. The overall contours of class politics were lost sight of.

threatening to disintegrate into their components. For example, Militant could glory in the achievements of the USSR's "socialism in one country", consider it a matter of principle in all circumstances to back Stalinism against capitalist forces, believe Stalinist expansion was a triumph for The Revolution, and at one and the same time denounce the system as totalitarian, and advocate a new "political" revolution in the Stalinist states. This was "dialectics", comrade!

Such a radically incoherent mixture could not long survive open discussion, and therefore, since discussion tended to dissolve organisations conceived as revealed-truth one-faction "parties", discussion even of issues that, rationally assessed, did not threaten basic socialist commitment and conviction, became intolerable. Such sects could *only* hold together on the basis of Authority. And thus a system grew up in which popes, cardinals, archbishops and high priests ruled sects that were as sealed off from each other and, in some cases, from the world around them, as islands are by the ocean.

Today there is almost no intra-left discussion, and often members of one group will believe that the inhabitants of the nearest atoll indulge in diabolical practices, or believe the political equivalent of the idea that they wear their heads tucked under their arms.

V

IT WAS not simply that wrong views about the class nature of the USSR inevitably led to Gerry Healy's regime and its horrors — they did not — but that the culture, including the organisational culture, that grew up around the self-contradictory dogmas and the love-hate ambivalence of the relationship to Stalinism was, ultimately, all-embracing and all-infecting. Wrong views and self-contradictory dogmas and the frantic work to protect them combined with authoritarian papal regimes to create a self-corrupting and self-corroding culture. The "official Trotskyist" movement became hag-ridden with fear and religiosity. Because this culture was not conducive to rational politics, it worked murderously against Marxism itself in the politics of the "Marxist" groups.\*

Solving political and ideological problems by erecting a Papal authority for the leaders involved for the groups a relapse to a pre-bourgeois outlook on the world. It required the abandonment by the individual members of many of the progressive mental habits of post-Renaissance bourgeois civilisation — reasoning about the world from facts, for example — whose products include Marxism itself. But there could be no stable view of a world for which the dogmas had again and again to be squared with an unaccommodating reality and where real discussion tended to dissolve the groups artificial certainties — and the groups. The cadres were trained not so much on Marxist basics as on Jesuitical interpretations and reinterpretations of the world.\* The organisational example of "successful" Stalinism acted to make all this more intractable.

Yet, the rational and open discussion which was inimical to the entire mode of existence of these groups was irreplaceable if they were to be able to rectify their own policies and analyses and learn from their own collective experience. That is, if they were to be healthy organisations, interacting fruitfully with the world around them and with the working class. Without that they were also incapable of avoiding disruption and splits at each point of divergent opinion — and divergence of opinion in response to events is unavoidable in any living movement. So, the groups multiplied. Enlightenment did not.

The result was, instead of the steady growth of a healthy revolutionary organisation, oriented to and linked with the labour movement, the creation of an archipelago of authoritarian and therefore endlessly fissiparous sects, incapable of long-term balanced integration with the broad labour movement.

In Bob Pennington's political life, the key organisation here was the Healy group, which was able to organise the beginnings of a promising rank and file movement as early as 1958. Its "regime" and its intellectual sterility destroyed it. By the 1970s it was spiralling deep into lunacy on its way to rendering mercenary political services to Arab dictators.

The two other "big" organisations only grew when the SLL faltered, close to the peak of the class movement in the early 1970s. The IS-SWP was a group, initially loose and "liberal", around an extended political family (Gluckstein—Rosenberg—Kidron); acquiring an authoritarian "Leninist" regime to serve the "thinkers", it soon reproduced all the faults of the other

groups, variations of dogma notwithstanding.

There was never any possibility that the IMG could play the role that needed to be played. Because the IMG lacked an authoritative centre there was a deluge, indeed, a debauch of discussion there, but that did not allow the group to escape the sectarian trap: the permanent sub-groups were internally ultra-centralised for the conduct of factional war and each political item immediately assuming a gang-war significance, identity and rigidity. That made real discussion very difficult. This was not an alternative to the neo-Trotskyist sectarian culture but a variant of it. And fundamental they shared the in-built basic neo-Trotskyist political culture, with its double-talk and double-think; not infrequently they had an intensity of fantasy and compulsory optimism about 'the new rise in the world revolution', or whatever, that was all their own and not elsewhere to be attained without the aid of chemicals. Ourselves — the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and its predecessors — we were a very small group, created in response to the crisis of the older movement, but stifled by their predominance. Nor were we always free of all the faults of the bigger neo-Trotskyist groups.

Thus, it was Bob Pennington's tragic fate to live a long political life in a cluster of revolutionary movements still politically, intellectually, morally and organisationally disoriented by Trotskyism's historic defeat at the hands of Stalinism. In Trotsky's time Stalinism had marginalised Trotskyism, and, after Trotsky's death, finally, in the sense described above, politically hegemonised the "official Trotskyists". In Britain during Pennington's political life, neo-Trotskyism failed the test of the class struggle as much because of its own decrepitude as for any reason of overwhelming objective difficulty.

VI

AND what of Pennington, the man? Early in life Bob Pennington learned to understand the class nature of our society, and the place of his own class as the slave class within it. He spent the rest of his life at war with that system. To the end on the park bench in Brighton, he never made peace with it.

I last saw Pennington in the mid-'80s in an Islington pub where we met at lunchtime to discuss some aspect of the libel case the Healyites had brought against *Socialist Organisation*. He was very helpful.

Still, at 60, a slim, elegant, well-groomed figure of a man — though one side of his moustache was white and from a distance invisible — he would at mid-day only drink slimline tonic, patting his stomach and grinning, ruefully determined: those days, at his age... He had to watch his weight... His priorities, so I understand, would change.

Pennington was one of those people with an undisturbable self-respect and an ingrained roguish self-regard whom it was impossible to dislike for long, even when you detested what he was doing or were convinced that he was talking out of the wrong orifice. One of his attractive qualities was that, despite the occasional spivving, which had a great deal to do with pride and wild "resistance" to capitalism, he was not conventionally self-regarding at all. Had he concerned himself with it, he could probably have secured an altogether more prosperous old age than that of the "spike" and the park bench.

Pennington had good gut class instincts but that is rarely enough. He tended to work with partners, and took much of his politics from his successive partners, himself, I guess, perplexed by the difficulties and problems of a movement in protracted political crisis. He had an air of workaday scepticism balanced by a "but let's get on with it" practical-man posture and concerns. This attitude begged questions he worked hard to avoid. Latterly he held on to "the FI" — which was in reality not Trotsky's "Fourth" and not much of an International either — as to a political St. Christopher medal. Yet Bob Pennington was a determined basic cadre of the movement that kept disrupting around him. He was unable to help reshape it for the better. That was his personal tragedy.

He went from one group to another, tried one thing after another. Again and again he got up on his feet and worked once more to find the right road. He never did; but he never gave up, until overwhelmed by old age and decrepitude and, I guess, disgust and revulsion. That is the side of Pennington we can respect and admire.

He was a good man to have a drink with or exchange badinage with — and formidable in a polemical rough-house!

If by understanding why "Trotskyism" failed in Pennington's time, and what to do about it, we can learn how to rebuild a healthy movement to fight for the things Pennington spent his life fighting for, then his effort will not have been wasted. Serious socialists have a great deal to learn from Bob Pennington's stubborn, persevering loyalty to his class and its greatest achievement *so far*, the aspiration to win socialism — that is, to liberate humankind from the age-old shackles of class society.

\* For example, solve the following conundrum: nationalised and collectivised property makes China a workers' state. The Chinese Stalinist party which created it was essentially peasant in composition. How can it be shown — as it must be, because only a workers' party could do what has been done — to have "really" been a workers' party?



## Film: Hysteria and control

**T**HE *Crucible* is based on the true story of the witch trials, which took place in Salem, New England among a highly religious rural community in the 1690s.

When the town priest finds local girls dancing around a fire in the woods they accuse a maid of drawing them into witchcraft. The girls are led by the priest's niece, Abigail. Scared and anxious to prove their innocence they tell tales of visits from the devil. Accusations of witchcraft are made against other townsfolk. Those who deny walking with devil are condemned to death. Those who confess, in an attempt to save themselves, are further accused. Hysteria builds.

The priest is weak, conceited and unpopular in the community. He uses the atmosphere of hysteria as an opportunity to bolster his position. When the devil walks in the town, loyalty to the church is essential.

The priest calls in High Court officials to authorise the witch hunt. Believing the hysterical cries of the frightened, over those who question authority, the court sanctions mass hangings.

*The Crucible* is a story of the state using popular hysteria to maintain control.

Arthur Miller wrote the play, on which the film is based, during the period of the anti-Communist Cold War witch hunts in the 1950s. The hysterical finger-pointing, the coercive pressure put on people to confess, repent and accuse others, are direct references to the McCarthy trials conducted by the state in the USA at that time.

The witch hunts which affected many labour movement activists, radicals in the film industry and intellectuals such as Miller himself, were intended to bolster the all-American-god-fearing-red-hating state.

The play and film address a more general theme of guilt and innocence. The innocent, yet all-knowing, children, of the town wrongly accuse townfolk of witch-



cry. Abigail, guilty of an affair with a local man, John Proctor, is held up as a person of unquestionable virtue. She is self-possessed and calculating yet at the same time she is a frightened child out of her depth. In the end, all are used by the Church leaders in their attempts to hold on to the support of the town.

Witch hunts, common throughout America and England in the 17th century, were used particularly to punish women who did not conform. The film doesn't draw out this history. The women characters are in the main shown as old hags, evil scoundrels or saintly figures.

In usual Hollywood style Daniel Day Lewis, who plays John Proctor, is isolated as the agonised male star. His search for virtue is made the central plot and his relationship with Abigail is emphasised. Abigail's vengeance against John Proctor's wife is shown as the over-riding motivation for her role in the witch hunts.

Alison Brown

## Books: The first mass workers' movement

**J**OHN Charlton has written a very useful short summary of the Chartist

movement of the 1830s and '40s, the world's first national working-class political mass movement. He succeeded in demonstrating that Chartism was largely a *working-class led* movement where *working-class demands* were at the forefront. He contends that, with some exceptions, other general accounts of the Chartists have concentrated on the more "bourgeois" inspired elements — the Charter — and leaders — William Lovett, Feargus O'Connor.

The background against which the movement took shape is analysed: the periodic economic crises which shaped fledgling working-class struggles during these early years of capitalist development; working-class disappointment with the 1832 parliamentary reform legislation; the widespread hatred of the 1834 Poor Law.

The basis for regional differentiation in the movement is described. In Lancashire where large-scale factory organisation existed the demands of the movement were strongly class-based. And in Bradford, where rapid urbanisation and the destruction of old means of production had led to working-class subsistence being very precarious, the movement took on an insurrectionary character.

The 1842 mass strike is at the heart of Charlton's account. The idea of a "national holi-

day" and "sacred month" was first proposed by the Chartist leader William Benbow, a Lancashire worker and veteran of the Peterloo massacre. Benbow's notion of a national strike was influenced by the French Revolution: it was to be a political demonstration of the "people" against oppressive powers. In 1842 the strike was built on the basis of locally-determined economic demands and it never generated a coherent political character. Nonetheless it was a powerful demonstration of working-class power.

The epicentre of the strike was industrialised Lancashire. Charlton introduces us to the local working-class leaders. They were not inexperienced people. One of the leaders, powerloom weaver Richard Pilling, had been present at Peterloo, active on Reform Bill agitation, involved in the Ten Hours Movement and the campaign to free the Glasgow Cotton Spinners. He was a seasoned militant. Pilling's description of capitalist society is quoted by Charlton:

"...competition and the beating down of wages; unemployment and poverty in the midst of plenty... the reification of human beings under commodity production..."

All of this is apt, but does not amount to, as Charlton points out, "a 'working' alternative system of ideas beyond active trade unionism."

A socialist group, the Fraternal Democrats, were centrally involved in the Chartist movement — Bronterre O'Brien, Julian Harney, and Ernest Jones. They worked with Marx and Engels towards the end of the 1840s and during 1850s. Charlton gives some attention to their influence. He also briefly discusses in an appendix how Marx and Engels' revolutionary socialism were inspired by the movement and the society which sired it. This part of the story is, again, dealt with all too briefly and the influence of the socialists is underestimated.

After much detailed careful analysis Charlton fluffs his



conclusions a bit: they seem perfunctory and lack focus. He doesn't adequately assess the contribution of Chartism to later periods of working-class politics; he deals with the question of working-class revolution too briefly. Charlton's overall framework is fine, however: Chartism did have a militant, highly class-conscious, working-class leadership with a mass working-class base; it was a raw, spontaneous, response to capitalist society taking shape, marvellously creative and, although largely built on the radical tradition of the French revolution, was very politically advanced.

A very useful, enjoyable, perceptive book, and an excellent introduction to this subject.

Helen Rate

*The Chartists, the first national workers' movement*  
by John Charlton, Pluto Press

## Is it class or nation in Scotland?

IN the aftermath of the 1987 general election the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) raised the slogan "Yes to a Scottish Assembly, no to the Poll Tax". In more recent times, however, the SWP's ardour for a Scottish Assembly has cooled considerably.

But if anyone expects to find an explanation for this about-turn in the SWP's new pamphlet, *Scotland — the socialist answer*, they are in for a disappointment.

Bearing all the hallmarks of a pamphlet scribbled down in a hurry, and lacking anything in the manner of rational political argument, the pamphlet is one of the most incoherent political tracts ever to see the light of day.

The essence of the SWP's argument is perfectly correct: Scotland has a right to self-determination. But the current demand for a Scottish Assembly (or Scottish independence) is rooted in a series of illusions. And, more often

than not, it is counterposed to the idea of a fightback in the here and now.

What distinguishes the pamphlet, however, is that its author (Chris Bambery) puts forward a series of incoherent, irrelevant and sectarian arguments in order to 'justify' the basic case which he is advocating.

"The people of Scotland have a democratic right to decide on how they wish to be governed, and whether or not they wish Scotland to be independent", writes Bambery. But, he continues, "Scotland is not united." The real division is "by class, not nation."

But the fact that class divisions exist within Scotland as much as within any other country in the world does not necessarily mean that the people of Scotland should refrain from exercising their right to self-determination, nor that their right to self-determination is in some way weaker because of those class divisions.

Even at the height of late early twentieth century imperialism, for example, oppressed nations were divided by class contradictions. As Lenin himself noted at one of the early congresses of the Third International:

"A certain understanding has emerged between the bourgeoisie of the exploiting countries and that of the colonies, so that very often, even perhaps in most cases, the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries... fight against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes with a certain degree of agreement with the imperialist bourgeoisie."

But no socialist, not even Rosa Luxemburg (whose real views on the national question were, in any case, quite different from those popularly attributed to her), argued that the existence of class divisions within an oppressed nation undermined the right of that nation to self-determination.

Scotland is certainly not an oppressed nation. But that is not the question here. Bambery's basic position boils down to the argument that class divisions render the question of self-determination irrelevant. Funnily enough, the SWP does not apply such an approach in its Green-nationalist writings on Ireland.

Bambery argues that "a devolved Scottish parliament will have no real powers over the key decisions which affect our lives... Power does not lie in parliament. Real power lies with the unelected

officials who control the Bank of England, the civil service, the police, the army, the secret service, and so on... If Westminster is toothless, the Scottish parliament on Calton Hill will be a pale imitation."

This is crude anti-parliamentarism masquerading as a critique of calls for a Scottish Assembly. Instead of attempting to relate to the arguments about a Scottish Assembly, Bambery offers only empty and not very accurate abstractions.

Yes, real power does not lie in parliament. But it does not follow from this that socialists can simply ignore parliament. The Bolsheviks did not believe in a parliamentary road to socialism. But that did not prevent them from standing in rigged elections to the Tsarist Duma (a pale imitation of a bourgeois parliament if ever there was one).

The Bolsheviks' advice to those socialists who claimed that revolutionaries could not exploit parliament was straightforward: "Try it first; have a few scandals; get yourselves arrested; have a political trial in the grand style... If you have a really Communist Party, then you need not be afraid of sending one of your people into the bourgeois parliament, for he will act as a revolutionary must act."

But instead of discussing how socialists should relate to, and seek to intervene in, an eventual Scottish Assembly, Bambery offers only anti-parliamentarian prejudices.

The same anti-parliamentarianism is exhibited again when Bambery criticises the statement by Scottish Militant Labour's Tommy Sheridan, "I hope a Scottish parliament will legislate immediately for a minimum wage of £6 an hour, and a working week of 35 hours without loss of pay." Bambery sneeringly replies: "Neither would the bosses of multinationals based in Scotland be rushing to increase wages."

Bosses would not rush to increase wages because of legislation by a Scottish parliament. But the adoption of such legislation would certainly be a major boost to campaigning for the achievement of a £6 an hour minimum wage and a shorter working week.

If the 'logic' of Bambery's argument were consistently applied, then socialists would completely ignore all legislation passed by a bourgeois parliament, including, presumably, the banning of child labour and slavery: "Neither will chimney-sweeps and

slaveowners be rushing to free children and slaves..." (Bambery's argument is also at odds with the SWP's criticisms of the Labour Party's proposals for a national minimum wage. The SWP (quite rightly) criticises the Labour leadership for failing to set a figure. But it does not condemn in principle the idea of a national minimum wage legislated for by Westminster).

A further argument advanced by Bambery for dismissing a Scottish Assembly as a tiresome irrelevance from the "real issues" (as defined by the SWP) is that "a Scottish parliament would be dominated by the equivalents of Gordon Brown, Donald Dewar and George Robertson — names which are hardly linked to a promise of radical change!"

If a Scottish Assembly were to be dominated by the likes of Brown, Dewar and Robertson — which is, in any case, far from guaranteed: the Assembly is likely to be elected on the basis of proportional representation — it would be because a majority of the electorate voted for them.

To argue against an Assembly on the grounds that you do not like who would win the elections to it is sheer stupidity. By that 'logic', revolutionaries would oppose the creation of soviets! Wherever soviets have been set up, revolutionaries have always initially been in a minority in them.

Bambery's pamphlet fails to relate even semi-intelligently to the current groundswell of support for Scottish self-government. Instead, in true sectarian fashion, he counterposes the slogan of "Build the SWP":

"All roads seem to lead us back to Blair, Mandelson, Brown and crew. The creation of a Scottish parliament would *not* [emphasis added] avoid a confrontation with Blair. The real question is whether we can create a fighting socialist alternative to Blair's New Labour."

Tucked away in Bambery's incoherent ramblings is an essentially valid argument against the pervasive fetishisation of a Scottish Assembly both within and outwith the labour movement in Scotland.

But Bambery's arguments are so fifth-rate (when they are not entirely irrelevant) that any undecided reader of the pamphlet will draw the conclusion: if this is the "socialist answer" to the demand for a Scottish Assembly, then hand me the SNP membership form!

Stan Crooke

# A dialogue with the future

By Martin Thomas

**N**ORTH American Indians and Australian aborigines were flummoxed when they saw European settlers buying and selling land. When the Russian revolutionary Victor Serge came to the West in 1936, he found it hard to explain to his 16 year old son, born and brought up in the Soviet Union, how big factories could be privately owned.

"This big building then... does it belong to one man, who can do just what he likes with it? Does this shop, with enough shoes for the whole of Orenburg, belong to just one owner?"

"Yes, son: his name is written there in lights. The gentleman probably owns a factory, a country house, several cars..."

"All for him? ... But what does he live for, this man? What is his aim in life?"

"His aim", I replied, 'is, broadly speaking, to make himself and his children rich...'

"But he's already rich! Why does he want to get any richer? In the first place it's unjust..." [*Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p.324-5].

Imagine how it would be if someone from the socialist future arrived in Britain today. I'll call her Avrio, from the Greek word for tomorrow. The food, the clothes and the furniture in the shops — all this she understands, even if some things look old-fashioned; but one thing is incomprehensible. "What do they mean, these numbers stuck on things in the shops? What does it mean, bananas 40p per pound, broccoli 80p per pound, cheese £4 per pound?" Today's person, Seemera, replies: "They are prices."

A: "What are prices?"

S: "The amount of money you have to pay for things."

A: "What do you mean, money?"

Seemera shows Avrio a five-pound note. "That's money. For example, you could buy a pound of cheese, or five pounds of broccoli, or ten pounds of bananas with that."

A: "With that funny bit of paper? But it hasn't even got anything interesting to read on it. I can understand giving someone food because they're hungry, but what would you want this paper for?"

S: "All right, forget about money for now. The prices represent the exchange-values of these different things — the proportions in which they exchange. One pound of cheese is equivalent in exchange to five pounds of broccoli or ten pounds of bananas."

A: "But I don't like broccoli at all. And anyway, what's the point of all this exchanging? If I had ten pounds of bananas, I'd keep a few for myself and put the rest into the

common store."

S: "These prices aren't a matter of what you want or I want. They're an objective measure of what these different things cost."

A: "What do you mean cost?"

S: "Well, the cost of cheese is the price of the milk it is made from, plus a part of the price of the machinery it is made with, plus profit..."

A: "So the price is the cost, and the cost is a lot of prices! Very clear, thank you very much! What a complicated system!" A long silence follows, and then Avrio has a thought. "I know! We work out how much of different sorts of food and clothing and things will be wanted, and how much labour will be needed for them, and some things cost more labour than others. We don't put labels with numbers on them, but we could, I suppose. Do you mean that these prices express the social cost of these things in terms of the amount of labour they take to produce?"

S: "I suppose so..."

A: "It must be! You must have some way of deciding how much labour is allocated to different things. If these numbers are about the cost of the goods, they must be about that."

S: "Yes, I suppose so. I suppose the only way all these different things can represent just more or less of some single social quantity is more or less of social labour time..."

A: "But you don't seem sure. Maybe I'm not sure, either. Why do these labels say 40 pence or £4 rather than, say, two minutes or twenty minutes?"

S: "Well, you see in our society nobody really does plan how much labour is spent on different things. It is all regulated by exchange on the market."

A: "Maybe that's better. Our planners often make silly mistakes, and you find we've worked at producing something that no-one really wants. Maybe your system is better. How does it work?"

S: "You exchange things in the market. One person has thousands of pounds of bananas, another has heaps of broccoli, a third has lorry-loads of clothes. These are all exchanged in the market, and everyone goes away with the selection they want, a bit of this, a bit of that. If too much cheese has been produced, it can be exchanged only below the usual rate, so the cheese factories will cut back and less labour will be used on making cheese. If too little has been produced, then it can be exchanged above the usual rate, and the cheese factories will take on more labour to produce more. In this way, the amount of labour used in each line is adjusted all the time to fit with demand."

A: "I can imagine a few things going wrong with that."

S: "They do. But it works after a fashion."

A: "So the labour-cost of your products is represented only by the rate at which they exchange with other products?"

S: "That's right. The exchange-value represents the labour-cost, but in a funny way, with all sorts of ups and downs due to supply and demand."

A: "What if cheese is produced by two different methods, one taking more labour-time than another?"

S: "The exchange-value reflects social labour-time, the part of the total labour-time of society, used in production, so you have to measure according to average labour-time on average technology."

A: "You say all this is regulated by supply and demand, without anyone planning. So people are pushed out of jobs, and pulled into jobs, without having any control over it?"

S: "Yes. Mind you, you don't mind so much losing one job if you can find another with similar conditions. You don't really care what you produce. What matters to you is you sell your labour-power for forty hours."

A: "That's weird. Isn't the whole point of work to produce something definite?"

S: "Yes and no. You have to produce something that someone will buy. But exchange-value represents abstract labour, that is, labour you can measure as just so many hours, or as just the using-up of so much average labour-power."

A: "You don't have much of a life. It's the products of your labour that have a life, showing off their prices, exchanging to and fro, throwing you in and out of jobs with their exchange relations. You let yourselves be ruled by those funny bits of paper you call money."

S: "Yes. Shakespeare put it like this:  
*'Thus much of this will make black  
white, foul fair  
Wrong right, base noble, old young,  
coward valiant...'*

*Why this  
Will lug your priests and servants  
from your sides,  
Pluck stout men's pillows from below  
their heads:  
This yellow slave  
Will knit and break religions, bless the  
accursed;  
Make the hoar leprosy adored, place  
thieves  
And give them title, knee and appro-  
bation  
With senators on the bench..."*



