

Workers' Liberty

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

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Teamster rebellion

US workers show solidarity wins

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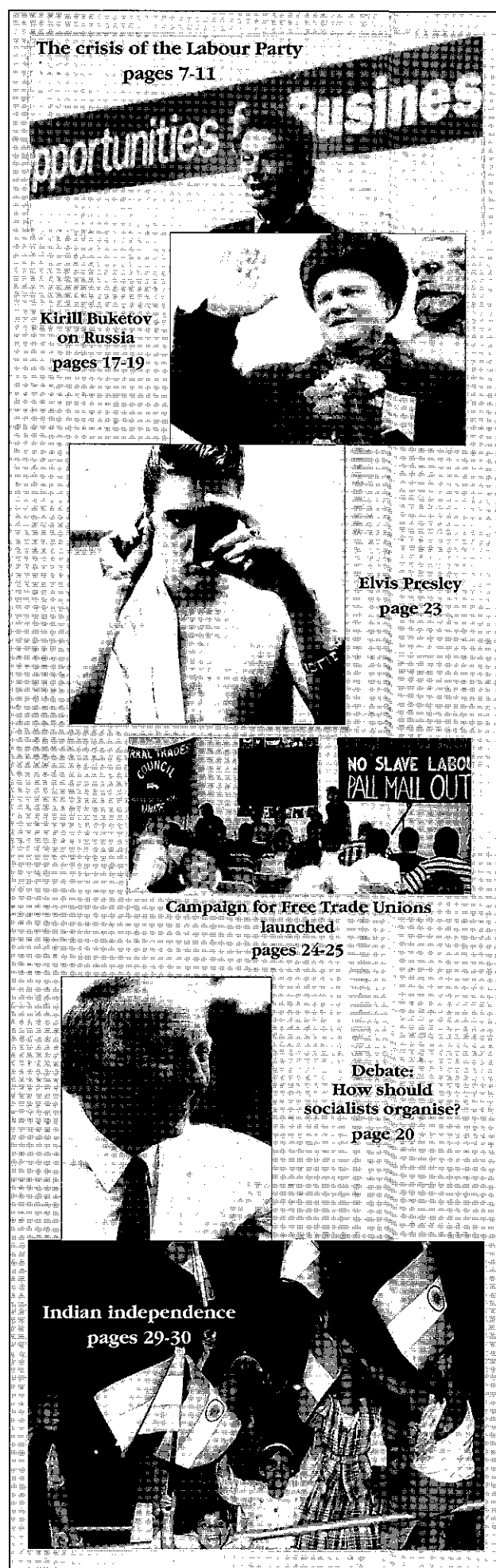
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The crisis of New Labour

The end of choice at the ballot box

TONY Benn MP has posed, with remarkable clarity, the issues involved in the current battle over Labour's future. In an article for the *Observer* entitled "The end of choice at the ballot box", Benn has accurately spelled out the disastrous consequences of a series of related developments, especially the NEC's proposals to change Labour's structure, and its decision to create a Lib-Lab cabinet committee on constitutional reform.

Benn puts it like this:

"The Prime Minister's decision to set up a Cabinet Consultative Committee under his chairmanship, with a wide remit, and made up of Labour Ministers and Liberal leaders marks another step in the move to create a new political party in Britain..."

"...The next major step is due to take place at the Labour conference in October, when a plan called 'Partnership in Power' is to be presented, under which members of the party, the constituencies and affiliated organisations may lose their right to submit motions to conference.

"All these plans, combined with the tough new disciplinary code under which any Labour MP who holds an alternative opinion on any issue may be expelled and all new candidates will be drawn from an approved panel, virtually hands over complete control to the leadership.

"By the end of this parliament, if not before, it is possible that this project will have been completed and this new party will closely resemble the American Democratic Party, backed by big business and with no meaningful links with the Labour Party or labour movement.

"The British establishment has gone along with this from the very beginning and it is not hard to see why. It hopes and believes that such a party would be stronger than the Tories in dismantling the welfare state... and cutting public expenditure and wages in the name of labour flexibility and globalisation."

This is exactly what is happening!

Benn's great merit is that he has spelt out with a clarity absent from the circumlocution and coding employed by most of the parliamentary Labour left the enormously high stakes involved in the current battles inside the Labour Party. He has elevated the discussion of the New Labour project above the trivia of spin-doctor gamesmanship and the degrading, "King Tony is badly advised" pap. Clearly, sharply and bluntly he has put the New Labour project in the proper context of class, and linked this to the paralysing bureaucratisation that is creeping like black ice over politics:

"But the price that may have to be paid (for the "Project") is the obliteration of any real policy choice through the ballot box, any real debate in the Commons, and a crisis of representation. We could see the complete disillusion with democracy and the appallingly low turnout there is in America. Clinton was elected

with only 20% of the electorate."

This is exactly the danger. *Workers' Liberty* has warned of it again and again. Back in 1980, at the high water mark of the Labour left, we argued that the outcome of the battles for Labour democracy would either be a transformed socialist labour movement, or the "Americanisation" of British politics and the destruction of the Labour Party as an entity based primarily on the labour movement. That logic is working itself quickly towards the moment of realisation. The key thing now is to know how socialists should relate to this, possibly terminal, crisis of labourism.

On this question of tactics Benn once again makes an important contribution:

"Those of us who remain committed to the trade union link and socialist objectives... must continue to campaign quietly and persistently from inside the party and not be tempted to break away. Such principled campaigns are likely to win a great deal of support from the electors who voted Labour on 1 May, since the sheer scale of that victory suggests that it was not only the Conservatives who were rejected but much of the market based philosophy which nearly destroyed our social fabric and which urgently requires real change, not just new management."

Benn is right to say: No, we should not walk away from the Labour Party if we lose at the Brighton conference. The issue Benn fails to develop, and it is fundamental, is how socialists can continue to raise the issue of working class representation if New Labour is transformed into a "pure bosses'

"Benn's great merit is that he clearly spells out the enormously high stakes involved in the current battle inside the Labour Party."

party". The trade unions are the key here.

Even the traditionally right wing AEEU, the engineering union, is talking of the need now to fight to get working class people into parliament. Its criticism of the class composition of the Parliamentary Labour Party — now mostly lawyers, journalists, academics and other jobbing political whores and loose ballast of that sort — is a great step forward.

It shows what effect socialists can hope to have with a serious and bold agitation against the Blairites, and for working class representation by working class MPs willing to fight for our people and for working class policies.

Trade unions can and should use their influence in the Labour Party to de-select existing Blairite MPs and replace them with people loyal to the labour movement and the working class.

That way we can hope to politically re-align the trade union movement on terms a lot more threatening to the Blair project than if we limit ourselves needlessly and artificially to single issue campaigning in a Labour Party increasingly bereft of an active proletarian core.

We are not yet in a position to launch a full scale Labour Representation Committee that could organise the unions to fight to

save Labour as a workers' party and, if we lose that fight definitively, put up trade union candidates in elections.

We are in a situation where we can attempt to pull together the key activists in the unions, CLPs and socialist groups who understand the centrality of mass labour movement politics. If we do that, we will be better able to give the Blairites the answer they

deserve, win or lose at Brighton.

The conference, Unite for Labour Democracy, on 13 September is therefore of enormous importance for serious working class socialists and labour movement activists.

We say: Unite the left to fight for working class representation!

Scotland: Vote "Yes" and prepare to fight

WITHIN limits, the creation of a Scottish parliament would constitute a partial democratisation of British society and its structures of government.

As proposed, it would be elected on the basis of proportional representation rather than the first-past-the-post system. It would transfer control of the Scottish Office's £14 billion budget from civil servants to an elected body.

To that extent, it is possible to make out a socialist case for the creation of a Scottish parliament.

It is virtually certain now that a majority of people in Scotland want Home Rule and will, therefore, vote for a Scottish Parliament on September 11th, ensuring that there will soon be a native government in Edinburgh for the first time in almost 300 years.

For socialists, if a majority of Scots want it, then they are entitled to have Home Rule — or full independence. For us the important question is not the mechanical union of states, but the building up, preservation and development of the unity of the

working class and its labour movement.

That unity must be maintained and strengthened after September 11th.

A Scottish parliament will be no panacea for Scotland's social and economic problems. Inevitably it will be an arena of political class struggle.

The working class in Scotland will benefit from the creation of a Scottish parliament only to the extent that it preserves its identity as a class, rebuilds its organisational strength, and forces its own demands on to a Scottish parliament — and, ultimately, creates a workers' government. For that a workers' party is essential.

Voting double "yes" on 11 September will mean nothing — apart from an irresponsible tail-ending of petty-bourgeois regional particularism — unless it is accompanied now by campaigning to defeat the Blairites' attempts to break union-Labour links. We need a class mobilisation to resist and defeat New Labour's attempt — from London or from Edinburgh — to run capitalism at the expense of the working class.

The IRA "restores its cessation"

THE Provisional IRA has "restored its cessation", and Northern Ireland once again has a ceasefire. Though the old ceasefire ended with the February 1996 IRA bomb in Canary Wharf, a full-scale war was never resumed. The "accidental" massacres that might, nonetheless, have happened as a result of IRA activity, mercifully, did not happen.

The baseline constitutional arrangements now on offer from London/Dublin to the Provisional IRA have been on offer for many years. They were spelled out in the joint Dublin-London proposals published in February 1995, during the old ceasefire: the creation of a Northern Ireland government in Belfast which has institutionalised Catholic-Protestant powersharing; creation of a Council of Ireland linking the Belfast and Dublin governments and taking responsibility for the island's relations with the EU.

Anything more than that in the direction the IRA wants to go, would provoke a certain Protestant Unionist rebellion. We can believe Prime Minister Blair when he said last May in Belfast that his government does not intend to scrap the union between Britain and Northern Ireland.

Can progress be made now towards a stable solution and permanent peace? That depends on the answer to another question: will the IRA settle, can the leaders settle, for a peace in which none of the central objectives it has fought for since 1971 have been realised?

Any arrangement acceptable to most people on both sides would be progress and should be welcome to socialists, whose

first concern is to see the working class in Northern Ireland, and in Ireland as a whole, unite across the murderous communal divide.

The revelation that Charles J Haughey, four times the Republic's Taoiseach, was, throughout his long political career, the recipient of massive sums of money from Ben Dunne, the owner of Ireland's equivalent of Marks & Spencer, is the latest urgent indication of how much overdue is the political unification of the Irish working class, so that it can intervene to sweep away the filth and corruption that is bourgeois rule in Ireland. An end to the futile war in the North would speed that day.

Workers' Liberty

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Teamsters rebel!

By Mick Duncan



THE biggest strike in the USA for a quarter of a century has ended in victory for the strikers and for their union, the Teamsters.

The strike at United Parcel Service, the government distribution agency, involved 185,000 workers. The union's main demand was for the conversion of 10,000 part-time jobs into full-time jobs over a period of five years. UPS bosses offered to convert 1,000 jobs but were forced to concede to the union's full demand.

The strike is tremendously significant in two respects. It was a fight against "flexible" working practices and the super-exploitation of part-time and temporary workers. American bosses have led the way in the creation of a divided workforce, using insecure jobs with poor pay and conditions to undermine the confidence and combativity of the labour movement. What was most remarkable about this strike was the way the mainly full-time workforce stayed out in support of the demands of the

less well-paid part-timers.

Victory for UPS could begin to reverse the pattern of defeats that started with Reagan's 1981 attack on air traffic controllers. Since that time US trade unions have been on the defensive. Like the defeat of the miners in 1985 in Britain, the defeat of the US air traffic controllers set the tone for the industrial class struggle for two decades.

The Teamsters' President, Ron Carey, elected in 1991 after the rank and file succeeded in kicking out the corrupt, Mafia-linked, old guard, has described the period since 1981 as one in which the employers have "stepped on workers' rights".

He believes this victory will send "a signal that American workers are on the move again. This strike marks a historic turning point for working people in this country".

The Teamsters enjoyed widespread support throughout the 15 day strike. A poll released on Friday 15 August showed that 55% of Americans were on the side of

the strikers. Only 27% sided with the UPS bosses.

Perhaps the Blairites, so keen to learn from Clinton, should take another look over the Atlantic. They continually tell us that strikes are unpopular and that a "modern" trade union movement cannot succeed by using the kind of tactics like for example flying pickets, adopted by the Teamsters. The UPS experience shows how wrong they are. It shows that solidarity wins.

Another lesson for the British labour movement is that even where the working class has been quiet for some time, it still has the power to rise, fight back and score significant victories. If in Britain the Labour government fails to address the issues which in the USA led the UPS workers to take action — low pay and job insecurity — then British workers will have to follow the example of those at UPS. The New Labour government will face an angry fight-back.

The full implications of this victory are still unfolding. The key question now is how the lessons of this magnificent Teamsters' rebellion are assimilated by the broadest layers of the US working class. The US Marxists have much to do in spreading the gospel of solidarity among what still remains the most important working class on the planet.

For us in Britain the lesson is this: we can do it too!

Key facts

The union gains:

- 10,000 extra full-time jobs to be created over five years. Five-sixths of these jobs go to existing UPS part-time workers.
- £1 an hour increase for part-timers' starting pay.
- An increase in allocation of full-time jobs to existing part-timers from four-fifths to five-sixths.
- £3.10 a hour increase in full-time pay.
- Teamsters keep control of pension funds.

Cost:

- The strike cost \$650 million.
- UPS volume reduced to 10%.
- Backlog of 8 million packages.

What is Workers' Liberty?

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty organises to fight the class struggle on all levels — trade union and social battles, politics and the combat of ideas. We are active in workplaces, in trade unions, in the Labour Party, in single-issue campaigns, in student unions, and in debates and discussions on the left, aiming to integrate all these activities into a coherent effort for socialism.

"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.





A test of strength

Saturday 19 July

IT'S 4am when I drag myself from bed and set off for the picket line at my sorting office. We are striking against management's use of the discipline procedure to intimidate our branch secretary into toeing their line in negotiations. He refused to be intimidated and, in a flagrant abuse of procedure, was sacked.

The dispute is a test of strength for the union. Initially our strike demands included the cases of other individuals unfairly sacked and changes to the 'attendance procedure' under which they were sacked. After the first day's strike management conceded all these demands but refused to move on the case of our ex-branch secretary.

At first the union's national negotiators believed, or wanted to believe, that our comrade would win an appeal. The appeal, heard by a Royal Mail manager, upheld the sacking — clearly management wanted a fight! They got one: we called a series of four Friday to Monday strikes.

Management went onto the offensive. "The union are defending one of their own who deserved the sack, they would not do the same for you", they told the workforce. "We will not talk to the union and he will never get his job back", they added.

Royal Mail spewed out lying propaganda about our sacked colleague in leaflets and in the compulsory shopfloor 'Team Briefings'. The union argued the case for solidarity with our colleague. Every day this week I have been arguing with the cynics at work about the need to strike.

Yesterday a manager stood between me and one big-mouthed cynic while we shouted across him. Management loved all this. They sent out a letter to everyone's home claiming that we had lied about the details of the case. That was a serious mistake.

The union's response was simple: we printed up and distributed the documents. The effect was fantastic. Exposing the managers as liars changed

the mood. One senior manager publicly apologised to staff on the night shift. I've been lied to as well, he bleated.

With these events buzzing round my head, I travelled up to the picket line. In arguments this week some of the cynics said they will cross the picket line. Will they?

Tuesday 22 July

THE strike was more solid than ever, one or two scabs from over a thousand in the office. I even turned around one temporary contract postman who having only been in the job for three weeks thought he should go in. He joined the union and went home.

We are all very up. Management thought they could split the union but we stuck together.

Wednesday 13 August

TOMORROW is the next strike day. We cancelled the weekend strikes because the union's national negotiator, Billy Hayes, told us management were close to accepting arbitration. Surprise, surprise, after messing about they turned down an independent review of the sacking.

The union gave management the seven days' notice legally required for a series of one-day strikes.

The law is a major obstacle. Lots of people think an immediate walk-out would have won all our demands. I wanted a walk-out too, but the national union would have faced huge fines unless it disowned the strike. To remain legal we have to give management seven days' notice... time for them to draft in managers from all over London to do some of our work on the strike day.

Management have been on the propaganda offensive again but with little effect. Their frustration is leading them to nasty tactics. Today one of the more aggressive managers came out with some classic divide and rule filth in a Team Briefing. Losing the argument with a black union rep, he turned to his mostly black staff and said: "I ask you West Indians, would they strike for you?"

The whole group took offence and several people argued with him after the Team Briefing. Realising the manager had gone too far, senior management told him to apologise, but no-one thinks that is enough.

Friday 15 August

THURSDAY'S strike was solid, but all the talk is about the racist governor.

The sorting floor in a delivery office is a noisy place to work and about as un-PC as you can get. People are constantly joking and slagging each other off. There are no holds barred.

The banter is treated as a joke and it is hard to get anyone to take objections seriously: "It's only a joke, mate."

There are hardened racists, but they keep their real views to themselves while on the floor, partly, no doubt, because it is a very mixed office. It is often hard to tell exactly what people think and how much the jokes about accents or culture and even colour veil real racism, but the reaction to the racist governor today was spot on.

It was not only black workers who were angry. White workers were furious too and, amid the inevitable jokes, they were determined that he should be sacked. "He's calling us racists, ain't he?" one white lad told me. "It's not on! An apology? He should never work for Royal Mail again."

Most of the union reps on our floor are black, and they were elected by a large majority of the white workers. Except for the few brooding hard racists, the workers in my office see each other, regardless of colour, as workmates, not enemies. They know we must stick together against the management or we are stuffed.

We work together, and a lot of us mix at work but what really holds black and white together is our fight as wage slaves against the governors. Managers don't seem to understand this basic fact. They miscalculate when they use divisive lies to split us.

By a London CWU member

The crisis of the Labour Party

"It's down to whether the unions dig their heels in"

Ken Coates MEP: Peter Mandelson's pronouncement on poverty is hardly a serious proposal. There may just be some benefit but, in general, it's pitched at a cosmetic level. He has been electioneering for the National Executive elections. We shall see whether Old Labour retain a strong enough position to stop him.



It's interesting that it's Roy Hattersley — a strange personification of the basic values of Old Labour — who has been among the most anguished by the shift to a

socially neutral stance, and among the first to speak out.

Not even the trade unions — who have been comprehensively stuffed by New Labour — have approached things with that kind of determined attitude. I can't predict which way the union leaders will jump on Partnership in Power. It depends on what they're offered. They're certainly fed up at the way they've been taken for granted. You can see that from the way the AEU — which hasn't been in the forefront of radical trade unionism for many years — deliberately withheld £250,000 from the Party.

Even if other unions also withhold money, the Party leaders will be able to borrow to tide themselves over until they institute state funding. They'll probably succeed in that, and in their constitutional changes. They'd have to be very slipshod in packing the conference not to! In the end, it's all down to whether the unions dig their heels in.

A measure of the Party machinery's drive to centralise things can be seen in their plans for Proportional Representation in the European elections, where they want a regional list system. You won't know the relationship between your vote and who gets elected. You vote for a particular party which then gets its corresponding proportion of the seats. The party machine decides who the actual MEPs will be, and which candidates will be deemed to have lost.

Within the Labour Party it is probable that One Person One Vote will select the pool of candidates, but the order of the candidates on the regional lists — i.e. the real decision about who is elected — will be done by Mandelson and his friends in the Regional Offices. The timescale is such that conference won't get to discuss this

"At this stage Labour Representation Committee sounds defeatist"

Glenroy Watson, tubeworker: I'm hopeful about the Labour conference. Maybe the Blairites have galvanised enough people with their efforts over the last couple of years — but I would hope that people can judge how far is far enough. The Uxbridge by-election was an indication that people won't take just anything from Labour. If they go too far — like kicking out the local candidate — people won't vote for them.

Mandelson's recent behaviour, and the leaked document that said private donations now outstrip money from the trade unions, suggest that they think they've won over enough people, but I don't think they have.

We have to argue that we created the link and the Party so why should we be pushed out? At this stage anything like a Labour Representation Committee sounds defeatist. I believe we can win the moral argument on the floor. I don't believe the trade unions will cut their own throat.

Labour's attitude to the Underground has been totally unacceptable. Nothing they've done so far has been

aimed at working people. I don't know how the people who do influence the Government, like the Bank of England, get them to do what they want — but the lessons are they can be bounced and we need more people bouncing them. We need to be clear about what we want.

The Underground needs some serious funding, for example. People working on the tube were rightly outraged that privatisation was being suggested by a Labour Government. A lot of us felt the plan was deliberately leaked to test the reaction. Hopefully now they'll recognise that it's unacceptable. I think London MPs will be too worried about their seats to let it go ahead. Tube privatisation was one of the reasons people wanted to get rid of the Tories.

I'm hopeful about people demanding some change from the Government. At the moment you see some people — like Hattersley — speaking out and getting a reaction. I would hate people to see that as the method to get the Government to do anything — we need real, mass campaigns — but people beginning to question whether the Government has any commitment to change is a start. The key thing is that we can't wait 18 years to start pushing back 18 years worth of damage. We need to start putting the pressure on now.

● *A driver on the Victoria Line, Glenroy Watson is Chair of the Finsbury Park branch of the RMT and a member of the TUC National Race Relations Committee.*

"We have to forcefully push the socialist agenda"

Mark Seddon: Having run a successful PR operation in opposition Labour are doing the same in Government. It's early days, but we need a real commitment to tackle the problems that people voted Labour to have addressed, like unemployment and the crisis in the welfare state. So far it's been very disappointing. Conversely, in certain areas — like foreign policy and overseas aid — things have been quite encouraging.

Labour Party members and trade unionists need to realise that we are in power now — not in opposition — and we only have a limited time to prove ourselves. We have to think coherently about what we want in terms of policies and forcefully push the socialist agenda.

The vacuity of the New Labour project has yet to feed through properly, but opposition has started to happen around the Partnership in Power proposals and other things. It's very significant that it's people like Hattersley who are kicking up a fuss. We need to offer practical policies about how you distribute power and wealth. Hattersley has started a very powerful argument about equality and the redistribution of power and wealth, and it goes to the heart of the socialist argument.

Without the trade unions the Labour Party would have died after the 1983 election. Their financial help and the help of thousands of trade unionists helped ensure the Labour victory. Now the unions have to realise that the Blair-Mandelson project is not inevitable. They can either mount a defence of their position or abandon it. The logic of the latter is giving up on a party they helped to form, and financed. This would signal to union members that the trade union movement is unable to maintain involvement in a political party it helped to form. What sort of message is that about how the trade unions can deal with big companies?

It is difficult to see what will happen at the Labour Party conference. For the first time in a long time there has been a coming together of trade union leaders to find a common approach. There has been a lot of lobbying behind the scenes for the maintenance of the

link and the number of union representatives on the NEC.

There is a very strong fear among constituency activists that the trade unions may wish to do a deal — although the unions and the constituencies are much closer on this issue than they have been for some time. All that seems to be on offer in return for supporting Blair is a White Paper on recognition — and that was a manifesto commitment anyway. Even so, Blair is only suggesting a working group between the unions and the CBI to produce some sort of voluntary code of practice — not necessarily even a White Paper. That's a very, very poor deal.

The first thing we need to do is get left-wingers elected to the NEC — and make sure Peter Mandelson isn't. Then we need to put pressure on trade union delegations at the TUC (many will also be delegates to the Labour Conference), to encourage their General Secretaries to make a stand for party democracy at the Labour Conference.

This is the first conference where the constituencies will have 50 percent of the vote. A lot of pressure will be put on delegates from the CLPs, but feelings are very strong. It wouldn't take that many unions to vote with the constituencies to hold off the leadership's plans. Much of the left have argued that we haven't had enough time to discuss these proposals. Hopefully we can get the decision on the proposals put off. If the decision is taken, and if it goes against us, to all intents and purposes the unions will have been frozen out and New Labour will be a top-down party. But I think if that happened the grassroots would demand that the relationship be reviewed again.

At the moment, it's quite a common thing in the unions to say we'll use our money for better things. At this stage that is a terrible mistake, but understandable. People have to realise that there's still everything to play for. The small, modernising tendency is not all-powerful. They are very frightened of the left and the trade unions, and if we stopped mousing about we could do something. The modernisers think they can do without socialists and the trade unions. But the Labour Party belongs to us; they shouldn't be allowed to walk off with the collateral. The marginalisation of the working class in its broadest sense from democratic politics would be extremely dangerous.

● *Mark Seddon is editor of Tribune.*

until 1998, by which time it will possibly have lost all its powers. If this is what happens, PR will have been used, not to open up democracy, but to shut it down.

We on the left need to deepen the links between one another and focus on our priorities. In my view, our priorities are full employment — there will be no recovery of trade union independence until there is a recovery of full employment — and resolute defence of the welfare state.

To the extent that the Labour Party isn't the chosen vehicle for such a defence we see how our political space is being moved sideways.

I think that there will be a realignment in British politics. I don't really envisage simply the re-establishment of Old Labour and the old left. We need to shift the social mode from one of dog-eat-dog competition. In order to do that, there are huge social forces that — if we can reach them — will help. We need to start the discussion about this now, without any institutional preconceptions. We want the unions to talk about this, but we want the NGOs to talk about it, too, and the professional organisations, and all the manifold groupings which are involved in defending the environment. Capitalism is a continental assault on the natural and social environments, and we need to group together if we are to stand a chance against it.

We are told that the trade unions are smaller than they were and traditional forms of smokestack employment have declined. I know all that, but there is a tremendous expansion of other forms of work and association — and they are not permanently in the keeping of Peter Mandelson. It's up to us to be as inventive as he has been, on a different base of principle.

● *Ken Coates is MEP for Nottinghamshire North and Chesterfield.*

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"I'd like to see Labour talk about socialism"

Bobby Morton, sacked Liverpool docker: As our dispute nears its second anniversary we're approaching the Labour Party through the official structures of the Transport and General Workers' Union and any other way we can.

The TGWU Conference in July passed policy to call on the Government to use its position as the largest single shareholder in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and get us reinstated. Whether Labour act will be down to the leadership. We've been getting the right noises from the MPs we speak to, but up until now the silence from Tony Blair has been deafening.

The Government's honeymoon is now over. The country voted on 1 May for a change of policies, not just a change of the name of the government from Conservative to Labour. With such a huge

majority Labour could legislate anything they wanted — like repealing the anti-trade union laws.

In opposition Labour were quite vociferous in their opposition to the anti-union laws. Now they're in power there are no plans to deal with these laws. That's a great disappointment — and will have a massive effect on party members and trade unionists.

Within the T&G, people at the grassroots are saying: "If the Labour Government does not meet the wishes of the people who fund the party, then why should we fund it?" We want to call the party to account and get something in return for our money. This mood began before the election and it's growing.

Every single one of the 900,000 members of the T&G pays a levy to the Labour Party. We all have a stake in this. By the time of the next delegate confer-

ence in two years time it will be a really serious issue — though Partnership in Power means the Labour leaders may get there first.

People will start to assert themselves against the Government sooner or later. The revolt on the floor at the T&G Conference in July has great significance, I think. People are not in the mood to be hoodwinked. We won't stand for another 5 or 10 years of Thatcherism.

I've been a Labour supporter all my life but I've let my Party membership lapse. Like a lot of people I'm in something of a political vacuum. I don't think the fight in the Labour Party is over, and I support the idea of a new Labour Representation Committee.

But the strike is a seven day-a-week, long hours job and that's my priority. We're organising an international day of solidarity action on 8 September, calling on dockworkers all around the world to take action. Indian dockworkers' leaders who visited us recently said that they will come out in every port in India. The response from around the globe is fantastic. It will send shockwaves through the shipping industry.

I'd like to see Labour talk about socialism — and, once they start talking about it, maybe they could institute some socialistic ideas instead of just copying the anti-social ideas the Conservative Party brought in over the last 18 years.

● *Bobby Morton is a member of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee. Send donations and messages of support for the dockers to Jimmy Davis, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6. Cheques payable to "Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee".*

"Discontent over social and economic issues could find expression in issues of democracy"

Hilary Wainwright: Don't over-estimate the intellectual coherence of New Labour's "project" of modernisation; but don't under-estimate the ruthless organisation with which the Millbank Tendency will seek to exert its control over the people and the Party alike.

Despite the "new dawn" rhetoric surrounding the first 100 days, New Labour's economic project is little more than a variant on Thatcher's neo-liberalism. Its distinctiveness is a more organised alliance with the business elite — witness their leading role in the most sensitive areas of government policy. Instead of introducing social regulations to ameliorate the failings of the free-market they are introducing a Japanese style corporatism — corporatism without the unions. The result could be a consolidation of the gross inequalities created by Thatcher.

But they face serious contradictions. The most explosive is the pent up pressure for change produced by 18 years of corrupt rule from Westminster. They have to reform the political system but popular pressure is such that they cannot control the process. Scottish devolution is the first example of this. It will gain an increasingly radical dynamic as the Scottish parliament becomes a focus of unrest over the government's failures to deliver on health, jobs, education and the environment. Proportional representation, local and regional government could be other issues on which discontent over social and economic issues could find expression in issues of democracy.

The radical left should be pushing a radical programme of democratic reforms, linking it all the time to resistance to the government's neo-liberal economics. It should also exploit the contradiction between the government's commitments (however reluctant) to democratising the state and its Thatcherite centralisation of the Labour Party.

● *Hilary Wainwright is editor of Red Pepper.*



"The stench of Kinnockism was enough for me"

Terry Burns, Socialist Labour Party general election candidate: I want to belong to an organisation that is building for socialism, and that may mean over the next few years the kind of changes and turns and amalgams of organisations that would have seemed impossible ten years ago. I think the people attracted to any kind of Labour Representation Committee should come out of the Labour Party and join the Socialist Labour Party.

The key thing is a forthright socialist programme, not structural links to the trade unions. If you're building a mass party of labour rather than a socialist party that's a different issue — but the trade unions are not vehicles for transforming society. That is the role of the party. The unions are vehicles for progressing some reforms and defending those reforms in the workplace.

I think we still have to relate to the Labour Party because there are still many



people in the party who are winnable to socialism. Its structure is still relevant, too. The fact it still has the union affiliation ties it to some class issues. The struggle that people are putting up inside the Labour Party to stop the link being broken — whether it's a worthwhile struggle or not, I'm not sure — is a battle that I have some sympathy with. But working people no longer see Labour as a party that will deliver socialism.

Within my own union I would still vote for the retention of the link, although I would want to democratise the union affiliations so that they could affiliate to other parties. If I was offered only Labour or nothing as a voting issue then I

would vote for the retention of the link — because it's important the unions continue their political activity. I would still campaign for affiliation to the SLP.

The SLP is not now an alternative to Labour — it's too small — but is an opportunity to build an alternative. I'd also stand for regroupment on the left, so we'd be a bigger alternative and a larger force to struggle against the Labour Party, capitalism and the class enemy. There is nothing that is an alternative to the SLP outside Labour — though there are obviously problems, in relation to the programme of the SLP and its method of work. It needs to build a democratic party and needs a programme more clearly linked to the needs of the working class in Britain. A lot of its formulations are still based in the 1930s and 1940s.

The election itself — though there were some very good votes, both for the SLP and the Socialist Party, in exceptional cases — saw the left vote being squeezed in the drive to get rid of the Tories. That votes were in general small is not the issue. There was an alternative for people to vote for, and that's important. The socialists who stood at the start of the century in Britain only had small votes. We could have stayed in the Liberal Party — as the argument was then — and not created the Labour Party. But the Labour Party had to be created.

Do I think Blair cutting the union link is going back to that situation of going cap-in-hand to the Liberals? Sometimes we create organisations and structures and think we have to bow down and worship them forever. There is a time to say those organisations have degenerated to such an extent the stench is too much and it's time to walk away and get rid of them. An example is when Trotsky finally broke with the Stalinist organisations in the '30s.

There are various arguments about whether Arthur chose the right time to split. Some say during the miners' strike — when you had the struggle by Liverpool Council and some other local authorities showing a little bit of backbone — was the right time. I think ten years ago was the right time, when I broke from Labour. The stench of Kinnockism was enough for me.

I'd like to think that by the time there is any split in Labour the SLP will have built sufficiently to be attractive to people now in the Labour Party. That depends to a certain extent on how the SLP operates. It also depends on what happens in the real world.

● *The Socialist Labour Party's candidate for Cardiff Central in the General Election, Terry Burns polled the second highest vote nationally for a non-Labour socialist candidate.*

"The least we should expect of Labour is neutrality"

Norman Candy, postal worker: If the Labour-union link ever meant anything it was a two-way thing. In the past the Labour Party got more out of it than the unions. We had all the "Don't rock the boat" arguments. I don't think we should stay in a marriage that's broken down — though if there is going to be a divorce it should be on our terms not theirs.

My feelings before the election were that it was essential to get rid of the Conservatives. Now Labour are in power they are operating more or less as I expected. I wasn't expecting much from them in terms of the trade union movement. Obviously there's still the hope that there will be some new legislation on trade union rights, as they said there would be — the right to strike and to join a union, that sort of thing. The general attitude towards

the unions is much as Blair promised when he said there would be no "special relationship."

In the post we have a problem over Quadrant. Royal Mail say they are going to partially privatise it. The London membership don't see why we should take that from a Labour Government when we wouldn't take it from the Conservatives. There's also the question of whether any more counters — local post offices — will be privatised. All sections of Royal Mail should be dealt with under one umbrella. We want a single, unified Post Office. That's the minimum.

The current disputes we have in the post in London developed before the election. People's attitudes haven't changed. The Government should carry out the promises they made before the election. They have argued in the past that they are interested in a state-controlled Post Office. In terms of industrial relations the least we should expect of them is to be neutral. We certainly wouldn't expect them to take a pro-employer position on these things.

● *Norman Candy is the London Divisional Representative for the Communication Workers' Union.*

"We need an organisation that can make coalitions"

John Ennis, car production worker:

If it's true that the unions are considering supporting Partnership in Power in return for recognition that's not on. It's not up for barter. Labour should legislate rights at work, simple as that.

The companies have had it all their own way for too long, taking advantage of things like "flexibility". In the car industry we've had lean production. It doesn't make a car better or easier to run, it just makes more profits for companies. They are taking advantage of people.

The union in Cowley is not as strong as it was in its heyday, but it's still relatively strong. We've just secured a fairly good pay deal. The key thing now is that people are fearful of taking action. That won't change very quickly. It will take more than three months to undo 18 years of damage. The organised working class — the people who campaigned for Labour and voted for Labour — will give Labour a long time. Confidence was smashed by the Tories.

For students and unemployed people it's a different matter. There's less leeway there. The ending of free education will mean there's no support for Labour at all

among students now, even though young people probably voted Labour in large numbers. Part of people giving Labour time will be that they may well be prepared to support the Partnership in Power changes.

If they do break the link it will be a major turning point in politics. Maybe they would join with bits of the Tory Party and the Liberals. Then the trade unions have got to look to forming a new working-class party. The worst thing would be a US-Democrats style situation where the unions are distanced from the party but still fund it.

I respect Arthur Scargill and Jimmy Nolan and many other people in the Socialist Labour Party, but I think they went too soon and the party isn't democratic. We need organisations that can make coalitions. The trade union movement is smaller now. We need to talk to people like the environmentalists, which the SLP is not doing. If Arthur was in the Labour Party now he could make some difference. I'm in the Labour Party because of the link. If there is a split from the unions we have to go somewhere else. We're independent unions. I like the idea of a Labour Representation Committee as we have to have a political voice. I want a link not just on paper — handing over money for the election — but where trade unionists and Labour Party members call the shots in the Party.

● *John Ennis is a worker at Austin Rover Cowley and a T&G national executive member.*

"The left can still stem New Labour's advance"

Vladimir Derer: The elements which make up the Labour Party are frequently pulling in opposite directions and the extent to which they use their potential strength in any given conflict is impossible to predict. Even if the rule changes proposed in Partnership in Power (PIP) are approved at this year's conference this will only make more clear the direction in which New Labour is steering the party. It will not resolve the underlying conflict.

In the short run the left can still do something to stem New Labour's advance. Resistance can still be organised. The large number of resolutions and amendments critical of the PIP proposals has provided a base for a fightback. Success

depends on whether dissatisfaction can be translated into simple composite resolutions, opposing the most important rule changes.

To survive in the longer term the left needs more than partial successes. Socialist politics can only be based on a scientific understanding of how society, workers and people act. Contrary to Marx's expectations socialists have so far failed to "deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts." The left's insistence on pursuing politics which repeatedly failed has psychological roots. A lasting reversal of its fortunes is therefore not possible until it shows willingness to examine the reasons for its unconscious refusal to learn from experience.

● *Vladimir Derer is Honorary Secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.*

"Blair says he wants to govern for all the people. But sometimes you have to take sides"

Shirley Winters, Magnet dispute supporter: Tony Blair and Alan Milburn, who's now a Health Minister, are our local MPs. I got a ten minute interview at one of Tony Blair's surgeries. After a few minutes he asked if I could clarify something for him: "What exactly do Magnet make?"

Before that I couldn't wait for Labour to get in. I've always voted Labour and, suddenly, here was my hero and he wasn't going to do anything. We asked Alan Milburn to table a motion in Parliament eight months ago. We're still waiting for that. He hasn't attended any of our rallies. His usual excuse is that he objects to someone on the platform.

I think it's time the unions got up off their knees and put our case. This is the only country in Europe where you can be sacked on an official dispute. The unions need to tell the Government that we expect them to do something about it. The workers at Magnet were decent, hard-working people. Some had worked there for over 40 years.

The bully-boy management who took over in 1993 — Beresford's — wanted to take £35 off my husband's take home pay of £189 a week — then attack his pension, guaranteed working week and entitlement to sick pay. In the same year the head of the company was on a thousand pounds a day, and one director got a £130,000 bonus.

If the Labour Government are going to stand by and let these people get away with this then there's something terribly wrong. Tony Blair says he wants to govern for all the people. But sometimes you have to take sides. You have to say: "These people are being wronged and I've got to stand on the side of justice" — not just side with somebody because they've got a few million in the bank.

We had to bow down to the bosses for 18 years and you think that when Labour come in it's going to be the happiest day of your life. Then you find you've got another Tory Government.

The trade union movement and the ordinary working people in this country have got to stand up and tell Tony Blair and this Government that we will not go away until something is done.

● *Shirley Winters is Secretary of the Magnet Women's Support Group. Donations and messages of support to: Magnet Families Hardship Fund, c/o Ian Crammond, 109 Jedburgh Drive, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 9UP.*

Scotrail drivers: Just say no!

By a Scotrail driver

SCOTRAIL drivers rejected a second restructuring deal on 6 August by 428 votes to 320 (57% to 43%). It was rejected in spite of its recommendation by the Scotrail divisional council and ASLEF executive committee, causing ASLEF officials much consternation and the local Edinburgh press to howl about greedy drivers "derailing the train's golden age".

This abortive deal followed one earlier in the year which was rejected by 89% of Scotrail drivers.

Petitions have been circulated, and branch motions of no confidence passed in all the officials concerned to no effect. Divisional council reps have not resigned. By the look of things, they have not, even now, started to listen to the activists.

The logical thing to do at various points would have been to ballot in order to get authority for action to force management to drop the worst features of the Driver Restructuring Initiative. But that would have upset

those in charge of the golden handshake. It would also have meant an end to trade union time off from driving every weekday, an end to having every weekend off, and to the daily early afternoon appointment with Denhom's bar next to Central Station (all on average earnings). Hence, there was no pressure from here on the executive to ballot.

The problem is, of course, that those irritating, awkward Scotrail drivers keep on messing up the cosy management/ASLEF officials' plans.

After all, what's so bad about 11-hour shifts (nine hours driving a train)? With contract turns (meaning you must come out to work at 24 hours' notice)? With 100 surplus drivers performing other grades' duties? With having only an allotment of 20 measly hours for report-writing per year at the end of a shift (included in basic pay)?

The reason for the refusal of the ASLEF 'leadership' to ballot is slightly different. After the two-day strike for a shorter working week in 1995, management threatened the abolition of

the automatic check-off of union dues. Adams, seeing the effect this had had on the RMT, was made more determined than ever to prevent any industrial action by ASLEF. He feared that cash collections would be devastating. He knows very well that many members feel they have been misrepresented for years and might not pay their dues.

The result has been restructuring deals which have devastated the driving grade. Conditions of service have been taken away. So have national and local agreements. There has been a lengthening of the working day, and a dramatic increase in "flexibility" — all on ASLEF recommendations. This in turn has had a snowball effect on workers covered by the more militant RMT. That is what management intended in the first place.

But where now on Scotrail? As ever there is a yawning gap between 'what the ASLEF leadership should do and what they will do'. A ballot over the management offer of 5% from September, back-dated only to 1 April, could force management to drop the worst features of the last deal. Talking has not achieved an acceptable deal and plainly talk alone will not. Management will almost certainly offer some small concession in an effort to win 51% before the winter timetable at the end of September, and before they face different divisional council reps after the December elections. Another recommendation for acceptance will follow the slight modification. They will try to grind us down by the usual double-act. ASLEF may have to pay a heavy price for what they have done and are doing.



A living monument to Sacco and Vanzetti

70 YEARS ago Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were burned to death in the electric chair for a murder they didn't commit. On 23 August this year in Boston the Mayor, Thomas Menino, formally accepted that they were innocent and dedicated a memorial.

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were arrested and tried at the height of the Red Scare in 1920. Thousands of foreign-born Communists, socialists and anarchists were arrested and deported by Attorney General Palmer. Sacco and Vanzetti were sentenced to die in the electric chair. Their only crime was that they had rebelled against capitalism. At the beginning of the case Sacco and Vanzetti were unknown, obscure working-class fighters. Their names now will forever be linked with the fight to overthrow capitalism.

In court, they refused to beg for mercy or renounce their cause. If they had, they would have had a better chance of survival and, eventually, of being freed. They remained in prison for 7 years with the threat of death hanging over them. For 7 years the bourgeoisie was too scared to kill them because an international labour movement campaign agitated, organised, petitioned and

demonstrated for their release.

Mass meetings were held in all major cities in the US. In New York 18,000 workers attended one meeting in Madison Square Gardens. Hundreds of resolutions were sent to the Governor of Massachusetts. Posters, articles for the press, and every means of publicity and agitation were used. In Europe support came from Germany, Italy and England. Demonstrations took place outside American Embassies in Paris, Lisbon, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Montevideo and Mexico. This level of support pushed back the hands of the executioner.

Eventually however American capitalists showed the protesting workers of the world that they were prepared to go to any length to beat down the labour movement and that legal murder was a weapon they dared use and relished using.

We must remember, honour and celebrate Sacco and Vanzetti. But our memorial to them must be more than a sepulchre. As the American Trotskyist James P Cannon said we must commemorate them by building "a movement which will incorporate in its work and achievements the spirit of Sacco and Vanzetti and thus become a living monument to their memory."

Elaine Jones

The referendum and the working class

ON 11 September voters in Scotland will vote for or against the creation of a Scottish parliament. They will also vote on whether or not such a parliament should have tax-levying powers.

Doing it by referendum marks a retreat from Labour's earlier commitment to set up a parliament simply on the basis of the mandate given to them by a general election victory. Yet the powers proposed for a Scottish parliament are wider than had been expected. It will have responsibility for education, health, local government, the legal system, economic development, transport and the protection of the environment.

The Westminster parliament will retain control over foreign policy, "defence and national security", border controls, employment legislation and social security.

The White Paper published on 24 July stresses that sovereignty remains with the Westminster parliament. In reality substantial areas of sovereignty will be transferred from Westminster to Edinburgh. Moreover nothing in the White Paper prevents the Scottish parliament from calling a referendum on independence.

Opposition to Scots Home Rule is headed by the "Think Twice" campaign, which is largely a front campaign for mainstream Scottish Toryism. (A substantial minority of Scottish Tories support the creation of a Scottish parliament.)



Support for a double "yes" vote in the referendum is being mobilised by the "Scotland Forward" (SFOR) campaign. This, and it prides itself on it, is "cross-party and non-party". It refrains from discussing the contents of Labour's White Paper.

SFOR likewise prides itself on the breadth of its celebrity supporters. These range from Educational Institute of Scotland President Ian McCalman, a one-time Trotskyist, to the Director of Magnum Power plc and the Earl of Mar and Kellie.

The tenor of SFOR's campaign is essentially technocratic: a Scottish parliament will be more modern and more

efficient than the Westminster parliament, it will be "a new parliament for a new millennium", replacing "confrontational Westminster politics with a more consensual, considered approach to government".

However, the different currents within SFOR are campaigning for a double "yes" vote for diametrically opposed reasons.

The Scottish National Party argues that the creation of a Scottish parliament will be a step towards independence; the Scottish Labour Party argues that creating a Scottish parliament will preserve the Union. In terms of its political outlook and class composition, the leadership and activist base of SFOR is essentially petty-bourgeois.

More specifically, it is a stratum of the petty bourgeoisie with a developed Scottish identity, drawn mainly from: Scottish media and culture, the Scottish churches, Scottish local government and the voluntary sector, the Scottish legal system, and the Scottish education system.

The petty-bourgeois class composition of SFOR does much to explain its hostility to sharp political debate, its apolitical and anodyne approach to campaigning, and aversion to the concept of class politics.

Nowhere in its campaigning material does SFOR even attempt to argue that the creation of a Scottish parliament would be a step forward for the working class in Scotland. For SFOR there is only "the Scottish people", rather than mutually antagonistic class forces.

SFOR is backed by the trade unions in Scotland. But even the publicity material produced by the unions themselves takes up the question of a Scottish parliament only in terms of Scottish populism, not in class terms. According to a TGWU leaflet, for example:

"Scotland wants change... important decisions affecting Scotland should be made by a Scottish parliament elected by the Scottish people, rather than hundreds of miles away in London... So make your mark for Scotland. Vote YES YES in the referendum."

The working class can benefit from a Scottish parliament only if it rejects SFOR's pious pleas for "a consensual, considered approach to government", and mobilises instead on the basis of "confrontational politics".

Dale Street

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The crisis of the Labour Party

Will the union leaders fight?

TONY Blair's post-election political honeymoon may be about to end. He has expected to be able to use the euphoria and loyalty generated by Labour's May Day landslide to push through the most far-reaching set of internal Labour Party counter-reforms so far contemplated by Labour's right. He wants to gut Labour Party Conference, kick the left off the NEC and reduce trade union representation in the new party structures from 50% to 25%.

His purpose is, first, to insulate the New Labour government from criticism when its policies fail to deliver real change for the people who elected it, and, then, to create an entirely new centre-party out of the old Labour shell. He aims to end New Labour's financial dependence on the trade unions by way of attracting political contributions from capitalists, and instituting state funding for political parties.

Yet Blair finds himself facing a level of opposition he did not expect. A record number of Constituency Labour Parties have criticised his "Partnership in Power" (PiP) proposals in resolutions to annual conference. The great bulk of the trade unions in principle also oppose PiP.

Judging by the scale of opposition so far, and the lack of any tide of support for PiP, Blair should be heading for defeat at this year's Brighton Party conference. The CLPs are running 9-1 against him, while in the unions over 60% of the vote should be cast in support of the old federal labour movement-based party structure.

Blair's unlikely saviours

THAT'S how things should go, except for one key factor in the situation: the trade union leaders. John Edmonds of the GMB, Bill Morris of the TGWU, Rodney Bickerstaffe of UNISON and Roger Lyons of MSF have no intention of seeing Blair defeated.

First they work fervently to pull their own unions into line with Blair.

The TGWU officials on Labour's NEC have voted for PiP despite TGWU conference opposition to it. GMB congress opposed key parts of PiP, but Edmonds hints that that is just a "negotiating position". GMB officials on the Labour NEC also vote with Blair. MSF conference opposed the principles behind PiP, but union leader Lyons is working on the job of nobbling the union's Labour conference delegation. In UNISON the pathetic Bickerstaffe allows a totally unrepresentative structure, the Affiliated Political Fund, to

take a decision in support of PiP that the bulk of the union would never have gone along with.

But Blair's main asset is the *political* weakness of his opponents. The union leaders know that the ridiculously mis-named "modernisers" seek to destroy the Party as a vehicle for trade unionist pro-working-class reform, but they do absolutely nothing to alert their members or the broader class movement to this threat. They are doing everything they can to disarm the opposition. In recent months only the AEEU engineering union — normally on the hard right of the trade union movement — has started to pose these issues.

The AEEU's increasingly aggressive stance reflects the greater independence enjoyed by a union with real industrial muscle. This is a union which has won the only offensive strike of recent times: the 1989-90 shorter working week fight. They also possess a genuine desire to secure trade union parliamentary representation and resent the new routine imposition of yuppie Parliamentary candidates, in defiance of the wishes of local union activists.

In contrast Morris, who won re-election on a trade union independence and anti-moderniser ticket, has gone all quiet. John Edmonds has reportedly reconciled himself to a complete break between New Labour and the unions. He argues that maybe such a new dispensation would make it easier for the unions to win legislation in their interests because the Blairites would no longer feel electorally compelled to show how tough they are on the unions. Dream on John...

Those of us who are loyal to the idea of working-class representation in politics must work urgently to build up a powerful current of rank-and-file opposition in both the unions and CLPs. We must attempt to force the union leaders to fight. There is still enough spirit left in the ranks of the unions to make this a real possibility.

But it is not just the job of Marxists to be the most militant fighters, we also have to help the working class and its movement reach adequate self-understanding. A political collapse on this scale, in which the trade union leaders go along with their own political self-liquidation — and in return for virtually nothing from the new government — requires explanation.

Mis-leadership born of defeat

TODAY'S trade union bureaucrats aren't

just the old set of double-dealing, sly and contemptible apparatchiks long known, described, despised and denounced by Marxists. They are something far worse, lacking even the raddled virtues of the old-time trade union leaders. They lack the spirit and drive of their predecessors who were in their own short-sighted way loyal to the labour movement. They had to fight to build up and protect their organisations. Someone like the TGWU's Ernest Bevin, the right-winger warrior who sustained the Labour Party during the 1930's when the group around Ramsey MacDonald, Blairites of the day, had tried to destroy the Labour Party and then gone over to the Tory-led National Government, would weep if he saw the abject surrender of Morris to the MacDonald of today.

Bevin saw the Labour Government of 1945 as a government to serve the working class and could rightly claim its accomplishments — limited as they were — as in part his own. What will today's leaders be remembered for? Lord Morris of Casual Labour? Viscount Edmonds of Workfare? Baron Bickerstaffe of NHS privatisation?

Today's union officials still live out all the contradictions that union officials have always lived out, balancing between the demands of their members and the needs of the ruling class. But their starting point is different. They have been thoroughly demoralised and intellectually self-defeated by the entire experience of Thatcherite Toryism and the Labour Party's headlong gallop to the right in response to Tory electoral success. Morris, Edmonds, Bickerstaffe and Lyons are products of defeat. They have been selected by our recent history to play the role future historians of the labour movement will justly brand as *the least capable, least talented, least loyal and least effective* representatives of the labour movement in this century.

None of them has an industrial record of any significance whatsoever. Only Morris has ever worked on the shopfloor. The other big three are in their muscles and bone, in their small minds and little hearts "professional" trade union functionaries. At every stage of the long ruling-class offensive they have sought to avoid conflict. They have run away from the Tories down two long and for the labour movement terrible and debilitating decades. By default they were the Tories' accomplices in the marginalisation and defeat of the labour movement after 1977 and now they are the



Blair at TUC conference: the unions are unlikely to get much more than a big smile

active accomplices of Blair and his Tory-hatched and Tory-programmed New Labour gang in attempting to drive the unions out of politics. Yet, despite their mis-leadership, we have a potentially very powerful trade union movement.

The main trade union leaders never saw the Thatcherisation of the Labour Party under Kinnock as what it really was — the political counterpart to the industrial defeats of the 1980s. They thought it would serve them by promoting a Labour electoral victory that would also be a victory for the unions. A benevolent Labour government, acting with the help of EC institutions, would usher in a new era of workplace reform. Union leaders would once again have a key role to play.

This was perhaps 70% fantasy in 1987 and '92. Today it is pure utopia. Plain nonsense. They are now having to sober up to the realisation that the orgy of rampant bourgeois prejudice that is Blairism is not some clever electoral stunt aimed at duping a hostile media, but the deep and all-defining ethos guiding the gang who hold the levers of control in the Labour Party and who now pose a mortal threat to the survival of the trade unions in politics. They now have to face the fact that what they for so long regarded as progress — the political eclipse of labour's left and the reduced level of industrial struggle that followed the miners' defeat — is not progress at all, but reaction and regression.

That is not easy for them. The trade union leaders have been telling themselves

for too many years already that Labour's drift to the right was politically necessary.

Bickerstaffe or Morris may not have liked such things as dumping unilateralism and keeping the anti-union laws, but they were prepared to trade them in in return for the possibility of a Labour election victory followed by a decent minimum wage, more jobs and increased public spending. Even Edmonds and Lyons who were enthusiastic for "modernisation" had a bottom line in terms of demands on a future Labour Government. They too expected more than Blair will willingly give them.

It is worth charting how this trade union agenda collapsed into out-and-out support for Blair.

From Smith to Blair

ALL the main union leaders were delighted when, to face down opposition to his plans for internal party change, John Smith's 1993 "Charter of worker's rights", promised full-time rights for part-time workers, automatic recognition of trade unions, a minimum wage of half male median earnings and the removal of some of the anti-union laws. He defined full employment as the touchstone of a civilised society.

When Smith died the union leaders continued to measure Labour politicians against their own set agenda. During the 1994 leadership contest Edmonds sketched out a series of key issues for candidates for Labour leadership to address — rights at work, the level of the minimum wage and policies for full employment.

But once Blair was crowned King of the Labour Party the "Edmonds strategy" started to look more and more unrealistic. The union leaders, by not vigorously campaigning against him, had handed control of the Labour Party to someone dedicated to its abolition.

First Blair went for Clause Four. Edmonds backed him publicly, while privately briefing journalists that Blair's initial conference defeat on the issue was a good thing: "It might teach young Icarus not to

fly too close to the sun". Edmonds didn't want to fight Blair over Clause Four, for the simple reason that he, as a thoroughly modern trade union leader, had no use for it. The test for the GMB, according to Edmonds, was going to be whether or not *full employment* was included in Labour's new statement of aims. It was not. The Blairites openly polemicised against full-employment on the grounds that it did not fit in well with the dynamics of market capitalism. Edmonds still backed the new statement of aims!

Tribunes of the people? Union leaders dump the low paid and pensioners

THEN came Blair's attack on the minimum wage. The level at which the minimum wage is set is absolutely crucial in determining whether or not the minimum wage is an instrument for driving up working class living standards or one for maintaining poverty wages. The half male median earnings formula (about £4.42 per hour, in today's terms) would do the former. So Blair dropped it. Edmonds did not protest. More, he did his best to keep the issue off the 1995 Labour Conference agenda.

Morris went one step better. He used a minor drafting error in the minimum wage motion to announce that the TGWU wouldn't be supporting its own policy in the Labour Party.

And so at the 1995 Labour Conference the union leaders paved the way for the abandonment of a policy which had been held up as the reason for going along with Labour's drift to the right! The eventual level of the minimum wage will probably be lower than the £3.60 per hour that Kinnock promised in 1992!

Blair's next target was the old. He was to find some strange accomplices. Bill Morris and Rodney Bickerstaffe may be weak in the face of opposition from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, or spiv contractors like Pall Mall, but they found reserves of boundless energy, nerve, strength and determination when it came to taking on the pensioners.

The 1996 Labour conference was marked by the most revolting political episode so far in the degeneration of what was once a robust — if fundamentally flawed — reformist tradition. Labour's commitment to restore the link between pensions and earnings, a reform of the 1974-9 Labour government, was one of the few progressive policies that had survived the great Kinnockite reaction. Previous Labour leaders had believed it politically impossible to dump this commitment and expected resistance from the unions.

What did they do when Blair dared to test them? Morris, speaking in direct opposition to his union's policy, described

Lobby of the Labour Party Conference

Monday 29 September, 12 noon
Brighton Conference Centre

For a minimum wage
In defence of public services

Called by the Welfare State Network
More details 0171-639 5068

Barbara Castle's defence of the earnings link as "a quick fix solution". He then cast the TGWU's vote for Blair. To their shame the TGWU delegation let him.

Bickerstaffe didn't just vote against UNISON's policy, he allowed the submission of a motion to Labour Conference in the name of UNISON that bore no resemblance whatsoever to UNISON's policy! This motion was never voted on by any elected committee of the union and opposed UNISON's policy for the restoration of the earnings link!

To his credit only Edmonds opposed this abandonment by the Labour Party of the older generation of "non-productive" "economically costly" workers for the sake of protecting the lifestyle of the middle class in Blair's "New Britain".

Backing Blair's plebiscite, the commitments that never were

BLAIR'S election Manifesto also won uncritical support from the union leaders and Morris yet again distinguished himself as the least inhibited groveller. The manifesto was completely in conflict with recent TGWU's policies, making no mention of key TGWU demands like trade union rights or full employment. It was positively recommended by Fearless Bill. Morris then went on to describe the laughable cross between a loyalty test and an election in a one party state — "the Road to the Manifesto consultation" — as the greatest exercise in democratic participation in the history of the Labour Party!

The private, behind-the-scenes justification for all this sycophancy was that the Manifesto did contain key trade union demands — such as union recognition. According to the great strategists who lead our movement, the key union concern had to be to ensure this policy was enacted as soon as possible by a Labour government.

As if urinating on them from a great height, Blair let it be known during the election period that union recognition would not be in the Queen's speech, because of other priorities. The millennium Dome or Royal Yacht? The union leaders did nothing apart from collaring the odd ex-soft left Minister-in-waiting.

David Blunkett has now announced that there will be legislation of some sort in the autumn. What will it contain? With his characteristic intolerance for anything that

involves the working class challenging the prerogatives of capital Blair has "let it be known" through "the usual sources" that there is not now to be "interventionist" legislation on union workplace recognition, and that his preferred approach is for the TUC and CBI to reach an agreed joint formula. The unions can have whatever they like from the government so long as the CBI agrees.

Where does this leave us today?

THE serious working class socialist left must do everything it can to force the union leaders to oppose Blair's destruction of the Labour Party. Immediately, that means a drive to put the leadership on the spot in front of as wide a working class audience as possible.

Union branches and shop stewards' committees should send in protests and demand that the union leaders defend their union's policy.

Every effort must be expended to build the Unite for Labour Democracy conference on 13 September amongst the affiliated unions, as well as in the Constituency Parties and the Labour left. Our immediate target is clear. We must ensure that the unions stick to union policy and oppose Partnership in Power at Brighton.

Beyond Labour conference, and irrespective of the outcome, we must galvanise the working-class base of the unions to fight for union policies, and for working-class candidates — inside the Labour Party where possible, but against it if necessary.

It is a big part of the job of Marxists today to intervene actively into the contradictory processes involved in the decomposition of Labourism, *by counterposing the working class mass organisations (the unions) to the Blairite machine along the axis of working class representation*. Our starting point should be the idea of electing working class MPs to fight for working class policies.

A battle along these lines would open up the possibility of a serious political realignment of the trade union and of the working class movement. It will be difficult, but the alternative is to accept as inevitable the death of mass trade union politics. That might be what the union leaders — and foolish socialist sectarians — have already reconciled themselves to. But for socialists who base themselves on the working-class movement acceptance of defeat while battle is still possible would be treason and apostasy.

The working-class needs mass labour movement politics. The greater we rouse up against the Blairites now, the easier will it be, in the worst eventuality, to rebuild — on better political foundations — what the neo-Thatcherites of New Labour destroy.

A Labour Government of a special type

ALL Labour Governments have been bosses' governments in the sense that, even when they bring in reforms, fundamentally they have administered capitalism in the interests of the ruling class. What is new about the Blair Government is not that it is a bosses' government. What is new about this "Labour" government is the fact that it has so many bosses in it!

These are the facts:

● **Lord Simon:** the former union-busting boss of BP, is Minister for Competitiveness in Europe. Translated into English, that means he is responsible for ensuring that the better terms, conditions, pensions and other welfare rights enjoyed by the majority of the European working class are not imported into Britain.

● **Martin Taylor:** chief executive of Barclay's Bank, where he sacked thousands of staff and shut hundreds of branches, is part-time head of a special taskforce charged with examining the tax and benefit system. We doubt that he will be working to end corporate tax evasion.

● **Former chief executive of Jaguar, Peter Robinson:** Paymaster General and Gordon Brown's main man in liaising with big capital.

● **Alan Sugar:** boss of Amstrad, is an unpaid "Ambassador for Business"; he is going to lecture inner-city youth on the importance of the enterprise culture.

● **Peter Davidson:** boss of Prudential Insurance, is the key business figure in the Welfare to Work team charged with introducing slave labour for the unemployed.

Put these developments in the context of Labour's plans for business agencies to perform the functions of local government — in the "New London" for instance under the Mayor — and New Labour's intention that all new hospital and school buildings will be privately financed and what do we get? We have a glimpse of a new kind of corporatism.

Emergency Conference:

Unite for Labour democracy

Saturday 13 September, 12-5pm
St Aloysius Social Club,
Phoenix Road, London NW1
Details: 0171-254 0241

Russian workers breathe life into unions

Bob Arnot interviews Kirill Buketov

Bob Arnot: The last twelve months in Russia have appeared to be particularly turbulent, even by Russian standards. The economic decline deepens but simultaneously the development of a deeply criminalised "wild west" capitalism has continued. For the Russian trade union and labour movement has the year seen significant change? Perhaps we could begin by considering the situation in the old official trade union federation, the FNPR (Federation of Independent Trade Unions).

Kirill Buketov: The changes in the FNPR have been more incremental than dramatic but they are beginning to cumulate and make a real difference. Firstly, you must remember that in the past the trade unions and management were in some respects staffed by an interchangeable personnel. A career in the trade unions, management and the party was the usual route for careerists of various kinds. However, one of the consequences of the reform process has been the separation of these functions. Those trade union leaders (either at the centre or at the enterprise level) who were "self interested" now saw that money, power, etc., resided elsewhere and began to abandon the trade unions. Furthermore, the older Stalinist cadre is subject to time — either death or retirement has begun to bring changes and the result is that there is a replacement of the cadre.

In what way does this manifest itself practically?

Within FNPR structures this is bringing about changes that at first sight may seem trivial but which are symbolically important and have underpinned much more significant practical change. For example, the old nomenklatura privileges relating to access to cars and drivers that were enjoyed by trade union leaders have been withdrawn and even the hierarchical structure of canteen facilities has been removed. This is symbolically important as it signifies the end

of the old confluence between the nomenklatura and the trade unions.

More significantly the new cadre has implemented changes in youth policy and is attempting positively to recruit young workers into the trade unions. From my own point of view the changes in the trade union

newspaper are also of significance. The editorial team of the newspaper is drawn from younger elements within the movement, often with a profoundly anti-Stalinist past. Furthermore, in the past the newspaper was simply distributed free to enterprise union committees and then freely to the membership. Now, however, the paper has to be paid for, but the number of copies produced grows constantly, both subscriptions and general distribution, because workers recognise both its independence and its usefulness.

Has this begun to have any real impact on the nature of trade union activity and interventions?

The policy orientation has been changing constantly but since the well-supported day of action on 5 November 1996 real change has begun to occur. Before this event the level of involvement reflected the Soviet tradition of a perfunctory turnout and participation. Now, however, involvement is much more active as the economic and social situation has deteriorated so markedly for ordinary workers throughout the country. This has led to heightened demands and trade unions, as they are increasingly seen to be genuinely independent, are the vehicle through which these are expressed.



There is a real difference between the workers' movement and Zyuganov's nationalistic, anti-semitic Stalinists

between the November 1996 and March 1997 days of action?

Certainly! By the time of the next big day of action on 27 March 1997 the main slogan had become explicitly political and was unambiguously anti-government. The state was extremely perturbed by the growth of popular discontent and the mobilisations throughout the early part of the year in many regions and many sectors of the economy. Yeltsin's response was to revamp the government, with the addition of Chubais (the Minister who had been responsible for the privatisation campaign under the Gaidar government) and Nemtsov (the regional governor who had introduced apparently successful reforms in Nizhny Novgorod). Their brief was to change the social and economic situation. As a consequence pensioners were at last paid the billions of roubles owed to them in pension arrears. This was completed by 1 July 1997.

Furthermore, a new programme has been introduced to pay wage arrears, which has been the prime reason for strikes and popular unrest. Priority has been given to the payment of the military services, for the obvious reason. Next, payments will be made to defence sector enterprises with the eventual aim being the removal of wage arrears by 1 January 1998.

Did this process accelerate

Given the enormous budgetary

* Kirill Buketov is Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the trade union newspaper *Solidarnost* and produces a trade union radio programme on Russian radio. Bob Arnot is a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Critique*. The interview was conducted in Moscow, July/August 1997.

problems the regime faces, as a result of enormous expenditures and the failure to collect tax, it raises the question of how the state can deal with these problems.

The government has attempted a variety of strategies. First, it tried to get money from Gazprom, Lukoil and the other major industrial groupings, headed by the ex-nomenklatura and the new capitalists, that have been the major beneficiaries of the reform process. The industrial groupings have been made to pay their tax debts. The second instrument utilised by government has been the attempt to strengthen tax policy. This has applied mainly to firms but also to individuals. It is not easy to get people to pay their taxes because people are reluctant to pay for the Chechen war and can see clearly that there is no democratic control over the state budget. For example, during the election campaign the state budget was effectively utilised as Yeltsin's campaign fund! The third instrument utilised has been the sequestration of funds from the public sector and this has resulted in reduced budgets for TV, education, etc. This is really no option at all and alarms the trade unions because it is an attempt to solve the problems at the expense of another group of workers and the trade-off is unsustainable. The fourth instrument utilised has been further privatisations. For example, the state has sold off shares in Svazinvest and intends to sell off Norilsk nickel. These privatisations are little more than the transfer of assets to the powerful industrial groupings close to the ruling circles under the pretext of raising funds to pay the wage arrears. Workers in the short term may receive their back pay but in the longer term the money to pay it has been stolen from them! Furthermore, even in the short term there is no democratic control over the funds raised. The communications workers' trade union has proposed that if the state sells assets, then no one controls money, but what they wanted was 30% of the revenue to be controlled by them and dedicated to the social sphere.

So you are arguing that under the pressure of popular discontent the ruling group is being forced to confront the issue of wage arrears, but has the discontent forced any other changes?

Another change worth identifying is the degree to which the trade unions have refused to be incorporated into the structures of the Yeltsin government. For example, in the Kuzbass under popular pressure Yeltsin replaced his criminal

friend Mikhail Kisluk (very unpopular and thought to be responsible for the collapse of the coal industry) with Aman Tulayev, a relatively popular, leftist politician, supported by the trade unions. It was also proposed that the chairman of the Kuzbass trade union federation should become the deputy governor of the region. In the past, as part of the nomenklatura, this would have been quite normal but the trade union chairman refused, reflecting the trade union's desire for independence and their reluctance to be incorporated or blamed for the absurdities of the Yeltsin government. Similarly, Mikhail Shmakov, the Chairman of the FNPR, was proposed for the post of Minister of Labour but refused.

Whatever its past and for all its present problems, the FNPR is the only trade union force and only it can mobilise millions of workers to take to the streets in protest. No political party can achieve this. The extravagant claims of the so-called independent trade unions need to be assessed. For example, much was made of Sotsprof which did play an important role in smaller enterprises and firms. In some instances it was the only way of organising where the FNPR was unreformed and for workers it was the only form of self-defence and organisation. Workers who tried to change their trade union committees and were unsuccessful turned to Sotsprof.

However, under pressure from the rank and file at enterprise level, FNPR unions have begun to change. For example, there is more democracy at enterprise level than ever before and this is particularly true outside of Moscow and Moscow region. Many of the wide range of strikes and actions that have occurred in recent times have been led by new radical and militant trade union committees. For example, in the Vladivostok area at the Bolshokamin ship building yard, 500 workers led by a woman chair of the trade union committee broke police lines and blockaded the Trans-Siberian railroad. It is possible that she will get 10 years in jail but a campaign has already begun and it is unlikely. Many new leaders are emerging in the course of struggle.

At the enterprise level many leadership changes have occurred: Stalinist bureaucrats jumped ship pretty quick, therefore the new people who filled their spaces had had nothing to do with old-style nomenklatura or management. These are generally a younger generation and this is the case also at the upper levels of the FNPR. At the middle levels there are still old bureaucrats, particularly at the regional levels and the centre, but they will eventually be voted out or they will

see this is not their old organisation.

What about the "free trade unions"?

The free trade unions officially supported the mass action of 27 March 1997 which shows the shift in their attitude towards the FNPR. Originally they distrusted its old bureaucracy but now they are unable to do this. Sotsprof leaders are criticised by their own membership particularly for their financial support to Yeltsin's election fund. This was a result of illegal money laundering to support the Yeltsin campaign. Large sums of money were given to Sotsprof who in turn sent 4 milliard roubles to Yeltsin's campaign fund, keeping perhaps 10%! Khramov, the leader of Sotsprof even boasted about his role in this prostitution of the union and it is little surprise that the membership have become disillusioned and as a result many officials from the free trade unions have gone into the FNPR.

From the outside the situation in the trade unions appears somewhat complex. Can you briefly outline the structures that now exist?

Broadly speaking there are three federations. The FNPR (Federation of Independent Trade Unions) which as we have been discussing is undergoing some qualitative changes. Second, the KTR (Confederation of Labour of Russia) which is comprised mainly of transport workers (in particular seamen and rail workers). Finally, there is the VKT (All-Russian Confederation of Labour) which was created by Sotsprof and the NPG (Independent Miners Union). Note that because of Sotsprof's problems some Sotsprof structures belong directly to the VKT.

The free trade unions really need to strengthen their organisational basis and create a joint federation to match the FNPR. This would have the beneficial effect that two or more powerful confederations might push each other into stronger organisational forms and more radical positions but the problem is that the government can play one off against the other.

Some western commentators have argued that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) is a progressive force and that they represent and articulate the interests of Russian workers. To me this seems bizarre in the extreme. Would you comment on this?

The KPRF's words are very radical but they have to be judged on their deeds.

The KPRF fraction is the largest in the Duma and initially there were hopes that they would exert pressure to change legislation and social policy. But this fraction will never support any law or proposal in order to help ordinary people. They have even failed to support basic trade union proposals. For example, the Duma has to set the minimum wage and to set it at a level below the poverty level is absurd. But when the issue was discussed even the liberals were more supportive than the KPRF! There are many similar examples from their actions in the Duma.

Furthermore, at demonstrations and actions the KPRF happily march under banners of Stalin and with anti-semitic slogans. The speeches of their representatives are always full of chauvinist and nationalist demagoguery. This after all is the party that has never recognised its responsibilities for the crimes of the past and actually boasts about its CPSU antecedents and tradition. In the past the FNPR has been criticised and blamed for being part of state structures but this is even more true of the KPRF at the present. Many regional governors have come from the Zyuganov party but they have done nothing to help people survive. They are responsible for the past and they share responsibility for the present with the Yeltsin regime.

What Zyuganov has tried to do is hijack workers' protests for his own party purposes. For example, the general council of trade unions organised a day of action for 27 March 1997 and one week after the decision was made on the date, Zyuganov's newspapers tried to claim they had organised the protest action! On the day itself FNPR insisted that if KPRF wanted to take part in the day of protest then it must call on all its members to go to the demonstrations in trade union and not KPRF groups. But as the majority of KPRF active members are pensioners they are not in trade unions, so columns of KPRF pensioners joined the demonstrations! Even then ordinary trade union members were appalled at their slogans and the portraits of Stalin that they carried. Clearly there is a real difference between the workers' movement and Zyuganov's nationalistic, anti-semitic, Stalinists.

What do you see as the next phase in the campaign against the government's disastrous economic and social policies?

The next day of action will be similar to a general strike and will probably take place in the autumn. Meanwhile, in addition to general day-to-day campaigning, a

special campaign on non-payment is underway. Its main task is to lay bare the responsibility for non-payments. The government argue that it is the fault of corrupt enterprise management but clearly it is deeper than this and is the responsibility of the government. The broader idea is to attract the attention of the international community, hence the participation of the ILO and ICFTU.

Superficial observers, particularly westerners passing through Moscow, could argue that even though non-payments remain a problem, the government policy of seeking monetary stability has worked. Economic activity seems to have increased, the availability of goods has improved, unemployment is very low and the superficial signs of prosperity seem to be expanding. Furthermore, there will undoubtedly be a propaganda campaign oriented towards the west connected to Moscow's 850th anniversary. Yet this picture is clearly misleading — would you comment on this?

"No present political party stands on a platform that is pro-worker. Each represents particular factions of the old ruling group and nomenklatura in the new circumstances. They all broadly have the same ultimate aim, the creation of some form of capitalism."

There are a number of elements to this. First, on a simple level the statistical system has more or less collapsed and the statistics are massively removed from reality. Second, Moscow's relative prosperity is clearly a result of its privileged position. For example, the majority of the foreign investment that comes into Russia goes to Moscow and even that which goes to the regions has an impact in Moscow. Third, there is the question of the mayor of Moscow, Luzhkov. Luzhkov is a real populist politician and is extremely popular in Moscow because he pays attention to social questions and social problems in Moscow. For example, he opposes social reforms suggested by the Chubais and Nemtsov govern-

ment. What they want to do is over the next 2-3 years make Russian citizens 100% responsible for their own electricity, housing and gas costs. They argue that the communal provision of utilities encourages wastefulness and overconsumption but of course the real reason is the privatisation of communal costs and the removal of these costs from the state budget. Luzhkov, however, opposes this and has proposed a special Moscow programme which will continue subsidies for the population. Luzhkov is a pragmatic populist who attempts through words and deeds to minimise the possibilities of popular discontent, keeping Moscow stable and allowing those who are benefiting from the reform process to enjoy their prosperity. The combination of social subsidies and the celebrations arranged for the 850th anniversary could be likened to the "bread and circuses" of Roman emperors! Meanwhile in the regions the situation is much different and real hardship, extreme poverty, high levels of unemployment, disease and even malnutrition, provide a stark contrast with the apparent affluence of Moscow.

We've already discussed the role of the KPRF but are there any other parties that might provide a focus for anti-government activity?

No present political party stands on a platform that is pro-worker. All the mainstream parties have their origins in the former ruling group and Zhironovsky, Lebed and Chubais in their own ways have sought to incorporate the workers and use their power for their own ends. None of them represent workers' interests. Each represents particular factions of the old ruling group and nomenklatura in the new circumstances. They all broadly have the same ultimate aim, the creation of some form of capitalism, even though their particular routes for the transition may be marginally different.

With regard to current left parties, it is very difficult to talk of a left that really exists. The grouplets are very small, unrepresentative and not connected to the wider labour movement. You can only call them parties if you believe that ten people with a party name constitute a party!

As a consequence trade unions can and must play a political role. They are the only social force that can represent and defend workers' interests. In the longer term a workers' party based on the trade unions is the only possibility for Russian workers to intervene and determine their future.

How should socialist parties organise?

How should socialists organise? That is one of the vexed questions on the left. Arthur Scargill recently expounded the views of the leadership of the recently formed Socialist Labour Party. Here we present his views and reply to them.

Agree, or leave!

BITTER experience has taught me that no political party of the Left can succeed on the basis of a federal structure — as an 'umbrella' for separate organisations or parties, each with its own agenda, each wanting to build its own grouping, based upon its policies or strategies, within the SLP.

I believe that Socialist Labour must be one organisation, with the central aim of abolishing capitalism and establishing a Socialist system of society.

The issue of 'federalism' was hammered out before the formation of our new Party, at meetings spanning a three-month period, because it was recognised as representing a fundamental principle that must be decided upon prior to actually forming the SLP.

No Left party can build the fight for, let alone achieve the aim of, Socialism if there are fundamental disagreements of principle over its Constitution and policies.

That is a lesson I've learned in a political career spanning 45 years. I know from first-hand experience the dangers that federalism presents. If we are to build on our achievements thus far and grow into a mass political party, we must tackle these dangers head-on; unless we do, they will interfere with the development of Socialist Labour, whose impact thus far has been remarkable.

Over the past few months, Constituency Socialist Labour Parties and individual members have been bombarded with correspondence from bodies naming themselves the 'Revolutionary Platform', 'Campaign for a Democratic SLP', etc., together with 'open letters' from people who describe themselves as SLP members even though they are not members of the Party.

Conferences and meetings have been convened by these bodies. Their over-riding aim is to challenge Socialist Labour's Constitution and demand that the SLP becomes a 'federal' party, allowing other political parties and organisations to join. The groupings and individuals involved seem to be more interested in building a fight within our Party than in developing a campaigning political organisation whose central aim is to fight the ruling class.

It's important to remember that when a person joins the SLP and signs an application form, she or he undertakes to accept and abide by the Constitution and rules of the Party. Those who join also agree to accept the programme, principles and policies of the Party.

Those who are involved in campaigns against the SLP Constitution and policies formulated by our members are not only wasting time and energy needed to build a mass political party, but are diverting attention away from the specific issues upon which the SLP should be campaigning.

Our fight — in direct action and electioneering — is against capitalism, not against each other. Anyone who cannot accept the Constitution and policies of our Party should not be a member. Those involved in convening conferences and meetings, or circulating correspondence to CSLPs and members attacking our Constitution and policies, are acting against the Constitution, and must realise that their actions will have to be dealt with accordingly.

Arthur Scargill

Abbreviated from the SLP paper, Socialist News

Democracy is better

THE Socialist Labour Party did not break with the Labour Party at the end of a struggle, still less at the end of a struggle that had rallied serious working class forces. It was created in response to a call by Arthur Scargill that was arbitrary and ill-timed. Its timing probably owed more to Scargill's subjective impulse to get out of Blair's Labour Party than to any reasoned policy or worked-out strategy.

The fight is still going on in the Labour Party, and in the unions, about the Labour Party. Arthur Scargill should have stayed in that fight until it was over. His account of himself, that he could not stay once Clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution — public ownership as a goal of the Labour Party — was removed is, to speak plainly, bizarre.

Clause 4 was a symbol worth defending — and we defended it — but no one who knows Labour's history can think the Labour government would now be other than it is, had Blair kept Clause 4 in the Party's lumber room. Or that Clause 4, as such, affected the policy of any of the previous eight Labour governments.

Because it was not born out of a serious struggle, the SLP is a rag tag and bobtail affair. As well as serious people, it has attracted an impressive collection of oddballs. The SLP is a Tower of Babel.

What is of interest to non-SLPers is the issue raised in the statement of Arthur Scargill, excerpts of which are printed here.

Proclaiming that he wants to regroup the left, Scargill proposes to create in the SLP a 'party' of a Stalinist type. That is not desirable, and it is probably not possible, except on a minuscule scale.

The SLP's policy and constitution is, he says, fixed. There can be no organised attempt by SLP members to change this. It is immutable. They can take it or leave it.

Scargill makes much of his 'experience'. His experience in the YCL, CP and Labour Party should have taught him that the only way to organise a healthy working class organisation is to do it democratically.

Who says, who can presume on the right to say, that party policy and party rules can't be revised? The leadership? To make it stick, they have to try — rather feebly, it seems — to run an iron dictatorship.

Such a regime will stifle and destroy any potential the SLP might have. It will certainly stop the SLP playing the role of organiser of a regrouped Labour left.

The idea that discussion and 'faction' necessarily destroy effectiveness in the class struggle is a hoary bureaucratic myth of Stalinists and, in their sphere, Blairites.

Haven't Scargill and his friends ever thought of the experience of Bolshevism in this regard? That party was so democratic that the ultra-left Bukharinites could in the middle of 1918, as civil war was breaking out, publish a daily factional paper. The Bolsheviks, Comrade Scargill, nonetheless managed to fight the class enemy.

If it is ever to prosper, the left must have done with one-faction — the 'leadership' faction — organisations, and build instead consistently democratic structures. Arthur Scargill has nothing to offer here. But then what can one expect?

The SLP believes — or pretends to believe — in the old Communist Party of Great Britain dogma that there can be a peaceful socialist revolution in Britain.

It is a sad testimonial to the human capacity for confusion, to find the leader of the 1984-5 miners' strike, which was defeated by state violence, much of it extra-legal violence, telling British workers now that they can hope to overthrow wage slavery and its bourgeois beneficiaries by exclusively legal and peaceful means!

Arthur Scargill, who had the courage to lead workers to take on the power of the bourgeois state, seemingly hasn't the sense to learn the most obvious lesson from his own bitter experience.

But then why should anyone expect him to have learned the lesson of the experience of generations of Stalinist and kitsch-Trotskyist would-be socialist parties, namely that socialists must, if we are to succeed, organise ourselves democratically?

If Arthur Scargill can't learn from the Bolsheviks, and their 1917 revolution, the need to smash the state, why should he be able to learn from them the closely linked lesson that democracy is irreplaceable, in our parties now and in the socialist society we fight for?

Jack Cleary

How Che Guevara should not be commemorated

By Helen Rate

IN October 1967 the Bolivian army captured and killed the Argentinian revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Guevara was a central leader of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. They killed Guevara because they feared him. He tried to undo US capitalism's domination of Latin America by starting a continent-wide guerrilla struggle in Bolivia. Guevara and his tiny rag-tag band of idealistic young men probably didn't have a hope in hell of organising a continental revolution. To the US and Latin American ruling classes, however, he represented their worst nightmare. The bullets which tore the life out of the wounded Guevara, quietened that nightmare.

Thirty years on Guevara is once again in vogue. Young people can be seen slouching around Camden Town with Che's image emblazoned on their khaki T-shirted chests. After his death the left, and people far from the left, transformed Guevara into an icon. He came to represent the eternal "youthful rebel" and even for some the twentieth century Communist Jesus Christ. Although it is easy to satirise the inspiration Guevara gave to youth of the Sixties — Wolfie Smith and his Tooting Popular Front is an endearing, if simplistic, depiction of "Guevarism" — Guevara did truly capture the aspirations and hopes of that generation. Socialists should take a serious look at his ideas. Unfortunately the left — Socialist Worker is the worst example — don't seem to be up to the job.

In the 26 July issue of *Socialist Worker* Sam Inman concocts a shallow and opportunistic potted biography of the "great man" by stringing together a series of points, to produce an article, that *misses* the main points.

In 1954 Guevara — then a middle-class rebel without a cause — was in Guatemala during a CIA-organised coup which overthrew the reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz. The government had redistributed land and expropriated the holdings of the US-owned United Fruit company. According to Inman "the main lesson of the coup [for Guevara] was the failure of the Arbenz government to distribute arms to the people."

Guevara *did* criticise Arbenz on this point, but it was a small point compared to the much bigger lesson Guevara learnt. This: if any Latin American government, hostile to American imperialist interests, wanted to stay in power, they would need to completely smash the old state machine and to replace it with a new centralised state apparatus; the state would then be able to mobilise a defence against imperialist powers and any internal friends of imperialism. This is what happened in the Cuban revolution.

Inman's assessment of post-revolutionary Cuban society is woeful — she does not even say whether *Socialist Worker* is in favour of Cuban workers overthrowing Castro's regime. Are they?

When Castro's government — in which



Guevara was in charge of economic planning — nationalised Cuba's economy and expropriated US sugar plantations and processing plants, relations with the US became increasingly hostile. The Cubans then moved closer to the USSR. Inman says "Guevara began to see that unless the Cuban Revolution was internationalised it would be stifled by its growing dependence on the USSR." However, Inman doesn't draw out what Cuba's "dependence", what it's "Sovietisation", would mean and what Guevara really thought of it.

- The Cuban's model of political "democracy" became very Soviet: in other words there was *no* democracy. At best the government conducted consultation exercises where decisions were conveyor-belted from the top (a political elite) to the bottom (the masses).

- By the mid-'60s the regime was a hardened Stalinist formation. Does the word "Stalinism" not form part of Inman's lexicon?

- There is no doubt Guevara believed in equality — he refused privileges for himself and objected to the privileges of the Soviet bureaucracy. He had some principles. However he never questioned the lack of political democracy in Cuba.

Inman's silence on these "deficiencies" of the Cuban revolution and Guevara is astounding. Who is she frightened of offending?

Guevara wanted to spread the fight against the US. Inman's comments on Che's internationalism are that his general principle of internationalism is right (we would agree) but his "method" was wrong. But everything implied by Che's use of the "method", the guerrilla tactic was also wrong! The key weakness in Guevara's politics was that he did not see the proletariat as the agent of revolutionary change. Inman does not make this explicit in her article. She only says that workers and socialists were "mistrusted" by Guevara.

A rounded assessment of Guevara's ideas must include a discussion about the importance of working-class struggle in Latin America

both during and after Che's life — from the tin mines of Bolivia to the formation of the Brazilian Workers' Party — and how workers' organisation will be the key to change in Latin America. Guevara did not understand this and Inman does not, apparently, see the significance of these issues.

But socialists do need a realistic assessment of guerrilla warfare as a tactic, as a *method*. It might be an effective form of struggle in some parts of Latin America, whatever the political content of the fight. Against a military dictatorship there may be a need for military operations including clandestine, "terrorist" operations.

Though Guevara's method may be right in certain circumstances, the arguments Guevara used to justify his method were certainly not compatible with working-class politics.

Inman's pitching for the Camden Town Guevarists of '97 ends with opportunistic glorification: "But if the US could murder Guevara, they could not kill the influence of revolutionary ideas." Yes, but there are all sorts of "revolutionary ideas". Marxists should want to know the class genealogy of "revolutionary ideas". Mao Tse Tung (with whom incidentally Guevara had a certain affinity) was a revolutionary; do we therefore endorse this Stalinist totalitarian's ideas?

The SWP are habitually vague on this point for their own catchpenny opportunistic reasons. In the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s they used the slogan, "one solution, revolution". This helped them to appear to be the most fanatic ANC supporters whilst being formally opposed to the ANC and South African Communist Party's concept of a two-stage revolution in South Africa.

Inman should have saved herself the trouble of bodging up this bit of opportunistic fluff and simply addressed her readers thus: "you've got the T-shirt and you think Che equals cool... why not join the Socialist Workers' Party?"

The mood of the times in which Che lived was formed by the real possibility of fighting back against the ruling class and its system of exploitation. One sad fact about the resurrection of Che as a demi-god is that this mood does not exist today. In recent months the SWP has suggested that a mass, confident movement for change can be built quite quickly (building on the expectations British workers have in Blair for instance). Perhaps in the SWP's falsely described political they don't need to say what they really think about symbolic rebels such as Che Guevara...

For me the most moving illustration of what Che Guevara stood for came during his doomed Bolivian expedition. Inspired by Guevara's daring and in disgust at government propaganda against him, Bolivian tin miners, trade unionists and students staged protests against the military dictatorship — the first since the military coup of 1964. In this way Guevara was a catalyst for change.

Che Guevara Shot in Bolivia October 1967, aged 39

By Alan Bold

"Wherever death may surprise us, it will be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry, reach some receptive ear, that another hand stretch out to take up weapons and that other men come forward to intone our funeral dirge with the staccato of machine guns and new cries of battle and victory."

I never knew the man
As a man, only as an image
Reflecting the stricken part of a continent,
As a spectre haunting Europe.
I never met him or had to face
The fervent fanatical eyes, the sure set
Mouth, the pride, strength and arrogance.
I know of him as self-styled custodian
Of a million broken lives.

The facts of his life are as obscure
As those that tell of his death.
We know that bullets were involved
In both, that there were ruthless choices
Between friends and enemies; both
Involving death. We know too
That a sense of helplessness engulfed
Many at his death; that elation
Gripped others. And so
The struggle was a real one, precipitated
By callous acts of lifelong murder, not
created
Gratuitously by a reckless man of action
bent
On fun and martyrdom. He saw
Unforgettable conditions of degradation
And drew certain conclusions.

Gone are the visions of lakes
Proliferating with golden perch
And a bright swan arching before a
palace
In Europe soaked in sunlight
And the richness of love
And the triumph of sex.
Silent is the accordion
Squeezing out maudlin songs composed
Of broken hearts and gone too the
amber drink
Lingered over at sunset. Instead
The present
Becomes a hammer to forge a future
Uncontaminated by the past,
Existence becomes an urgent act of war
The mind a tactic
The body a blast.

The earth monotonously orbiting the
sun
The insect dying underfoot
Are unavoidable phenomena and mean
There is sourness mixed up with the
sweet.

But the use of hard cash to reduce men
Constructs suffering of another kind

That is inevitable only when
You and I pretend we are blind.

With Che these eyes were wrenched
open
So their owners could use these eyes
And know that strength depends on
belief
And that guns are more potent than
cries.

Where were you on the day he died?

His life makes sense
Only as a refutation of a cosmic
indifference
From Argentina to Bolivia
From Cuba to the Valle Grande.

I know many would have advised him
To come off it, to forget it,
To live a happy life. (What
Do they know about happiness!)
To remain Doctor
Ernesto Guevara.
Yes, there would be
Somewhere
The fading record of a tidy time on earth
spent
Serving others. Instead I hear
The echo of a roar
And he lives on as a cause not a corpse
Inspiring people to demonstrate.
Revolt rebel
(Translate imitate emulate)
Retrieve retreat repeat
And reluctantly serving
As a synonym for courage.

But a body heavy with bullets,
A face frozen at the instant of
obliteration,
These alone are not credentials.
Saint John Fitzgerald Kennedy himself
was blessed
With the posthumous halo granted
The victim of assassination. In death
He was loved even by those who had
cursed
His own assassination attempt on Cuba
Two young men but one meaning
What he said.
The manner of that celebrated
presidential death
Was ghastly certainly: shattered flesh,
the moan
Of a baffled wife, the red blood dizzying
Into black.
But how do you think they die
In Vietnam Bolivia Detroit?
Alone, dreadfully, losing
The little their life gave. No flowers
In life, few in death, but dirt
And the occasional unmarked grave.
Death by presidential decree,
Such death is a cool presidential decision
And endorsed by almost all.

What were you doing on the day he
died?

Son of an architect from Buenos Aires
Who surpassed him at that
Whose forebears fled to California from
a dictator
Who destroyed one
Whose research was in tropical disease
allergies
Who developed one
And then on
To Guatemala and Mexico and Castro.

Argentine medico, doctor, major
"commander of all rebel units
of the 26th of July Revolutionary
Movement
that operate in the Province of Las Villas,
in both the rural and the urban zones"
Does it begin to add up?
In the Sierra Maestra
A shoe factory, a uniform factory,
A knapsack factory, ordnance plants,
Bakeries and butcher shops,
Hospitals: revolutionary odds
And ends.
A camp in Manzanillo,
A hurricane, swollen feet,
Food from coconut trees,
Movement in the sugar cane fields,
A railroad junction,
The fall of Sancti Spiritus

Castro's ride into Havana.
So much is history
Of a kind.

And Guevara — for him Cuba
Was only the beginning, the first
Glimpse of the focus, tentative
Evidence of achievement.
So it was on
Eventually
To death
And he thought it worth dying for.

And now
His face plastered on placards
His name reverently dripping from so
many lips
Mean what you make of them.
Every age needs a hero
And he is not a bad one
Or an empty idol.
I can see him now
Because the equipment,
The fine noble face and youthful body,
Is endurable stuff.
And I never knew the man
As a man.

Did you sleep well on the night he died?
Did you sleep well?
Where were you?
What were you doing?

Elvis Presley died twenty years ago The King is dead but the malady lingers on

By Jim Denham

ON Saturday 16 August you could, if you wished, have spent an entire night watching TV programmes devoted to Elvis Presley. For this was the 20th anniversary of the death of the King.

There are, of course, plenty of people who refuse to believe that their hero really perished, bloated and doped, on the John twenty years ago. Sightings of the King are more common (if somewhat less believable) than those of Lord Lucan, the Loch Ness monster and all the UFO's combined. There are folk who believe he was abducted by aliens, while others apparently believe he was (is?) the new Jesus — or that Jesus was but John the Baptist to Elvis's Christ. Then there are the people who claim to be Elvis...

There are also those who like to camp it up in silly clothes and perpetuate an interminable, straight-faced joke. But in this post-modern age, when cultural icons can assume a multiplicity of meanings, how are we to distinguish the true believers from the ironists? And does it matter anyway? This problem beset the TV coverage, which veered between the reverential and the tongue in cheek.

When the definitive history of truly preposterous 20th century cults is written, Elvis will surely top the list. When the roster of great popular singers of the century is finally drawn up, he most assuredly won't. Armstrong, Crosby Fitzgerald, Sinatra and dozens of other "pop" singers brought a dignity and artistry to material that often really didn't deserve it. Presley did the opposite: he took a rich musical tradition (R&B) and turned it into garbage. As a direct result, the entire globe is now saturated by phoney, over-hyped commercial pop whose intellectual and emotional depth is an insult even to the American adolescent market that originally spawned it. The additional twist is that this stuff has also virtually wiped out the black blues/R&B tradition that Presley started out emulating.

At the hands of Presley (or, more to the point, his lowlife manager, the repugnant "Colonel" Tom Parker) R&B degenerated into "Rock 'n' Roll", a form and a term now so debased as to be virtually meaningless. It is no coincidence

that the two most vacuous politicians on this earth — Bill Clinton and Tony Blair — both proclaim their "rock 'n' roll" credentials at every opportunity.

It would be unfair to blame Presley alone for what happened. He started out as a good R&B singer with the essential quality of being white. The "Colonel" and all the other sharks, gangsters and con-men who even in the 1950s controlled the music industry were looking for just that: a white boy who sang like a black. Big Joe Turner, Louis Jordan, Amos Milburn and a hundred others were making better music than Elvis, but they were the wrong colour. Bill Haley was white but he looked too

"Big Joe Turner, Louis Jordan, Amos Milburn and a hundred others were making better music than Elvis, but they were the wrong colour."

much like your favourite uncle. Young Elvis looked a little like Marlon Brando and exuded just enough danger and sex appeal to hit the spot in the new teenage market that the "Colonel" and the other money-men had identified.

Before completely sold out, joined the army and turned into a grinning all-American parody, Elvis made some decent records (*Heartbreak Hotel*, for instance) and even one film (*King Cre-*



ole) that can pass muster (though, unlike Sinatra, he couldn't act to save his life).

But it wasn't Presley's innate, though limited talent that the "Colonel" and the industry was interested in. It was the supposedly "sexy" gimmickry, the pouting and hip-swivelling, that became the trashy hall-mark of rock 'n' roll and remains a blight on pop music to this day.

The strange thing about all the contemporary Elvis clones (both serious and ironic) is that they almost invariably go for the gross, un-sexy, trailer-trash Las Vegas image rather than the young R&B Elvis. On second thoughts, maybe it isn't so strange: the trashy gimmicks are what can be cloned, which is why the industry concentrated on that side of the image.

I sometimes indulge in idle speculation what the world would be like if Louis Jordan or Big Joe Turner had hit the bit time in the 1950s instead of Elvis. It could never have happened, of course. The world would have had to have been a better place already for it to have happened.

Fight for free trade unions!

THE Campaign for Free Trade Unions [CFTU] was launched in Liverpool on 19 July. This was an event of immense importance for the future of the trade union movement in Britain.

For the first time, an open, democratic rank and file-based campaign has been set up to fight for the removal of the Tory anti-union legislation and the restoration of an unfettered legal right to strike, take solidarity action and picket effectively. In other words, it is rooted in the idea that now is the right time to begin the fight to restore free, effective trade unionism and to begin to re-assert the basic principles of working class solidarity.

The key idea here is this: the CFTU is to be a broad-based body rooted in the working class struggles that are taking place today.

Every serious trade union struggle in the period ahead will pose the issue of trade union rights.

The conference heard from representatives of all the key disputes taking place at the moment — Liverpool dockers, Hillingdon hospital, Critchley labels, Magnet kitchens, Project Aerospace, London post and British Airways. As well as dele-

gations from these strikes, some 220 people attended from 30 organisations in all, including 16 different unions, 10 trades councils, some local branches of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, and a few Labour Party wards.

This was unashamedly a rank and file conference. It was not a ceremonial affair studded with labour movement big wigs talking loud but prepared to do little or nothing. It was a gathering of working class fighters with one clear and audacious aim: to build up a campaign that can free our unions.

Nobody at the conference was under the illusion that our task is going to be an easy one. There are many obstacles in our way: the born-again Thatcherites of the New Labour administration who preside over the Tory anti-union laws that have become the Labour government's anti-union laws, and the official leaders of the unions like Morris and Edmonds who refuse to fight or even to plead for their abolition.

Recognising these obstacles, the conference adopted a strategy document that spells out a multi-pronged approach:

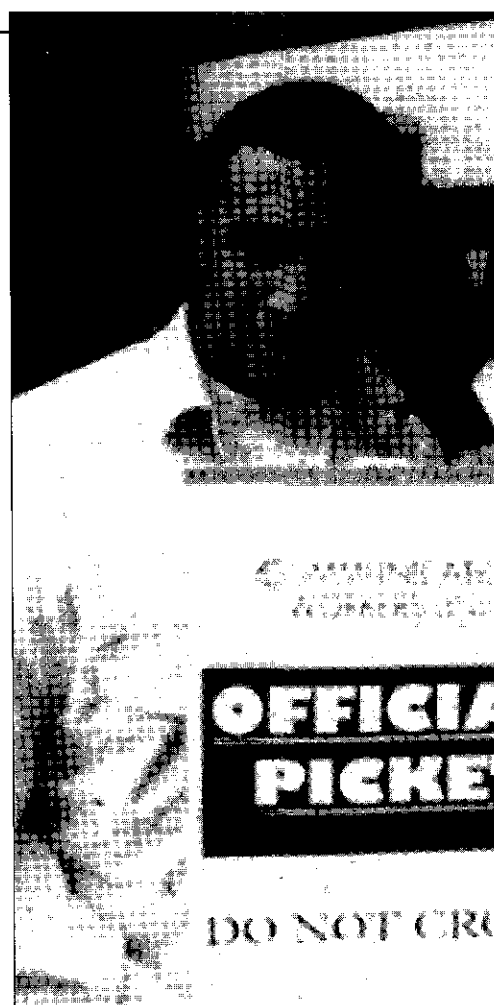
- physical support for workers in

struggle;

- a public campaign to highlight the injustices of the anti-union laws;
- a co-ordinated, cross-union campaign to win majority support at all levels of the union movement for the campaign's goals.

The anti-union laws are certain to become an explosive issue.

We have recently seen British Airways' threat to sack cabin crew for striking, even after a legal postal ballot, expose the anti-union laws for the naked class legislation they are. It helped strengthen public support for the strikers and their union. It has increased support for the



"Everyone's got to make a stand now and make this Labour government change the anti-trade union legislation."

● Doreen McNally, Women on the Waterfront



"The right to associate and be recognised is meaningless without the right to strike... level footing with management."

● Sue Hoskins, Critchley Labels



"We are the living symbol of what privatisation means — lost pension, wages and conditions. Our struggle is for the whole working class."

● Malkiat Bilku, Hillingdon



"Where is the solidarity of the trade union leadership? Is it with Thatcher, Murdoch? That's where Tony Blair's solidarity goes to."

● Ian Crammond, Magnet



"We went by the book they locked us out. Why there be restrictions on but none on employers?"

● Hugh Project A

"If the leaders won't fight then th



idea of a legally enshrined right to strike.

New battles are coming on the rail, in the tube and in the post office. Management may try to resort to the anti-union laws in order to block effective action. The issue of the laws will be posed sharply. Blair will back his big business friends, like train operator Richard Branson, using the laws against the rail union, RMT.

The Campaign for Free Trade Unions is a campaign that fits in with the necessary logic of the class struggle. It is not a question of a "bright idea" or a leftist fad or fetish. It is a question of the basic need of the working class for effective action in

its own self-defence.

It is for that reason that we can hope to increase the campaign's support rapidly in the coming months.

We will adopt the old watchword "If the leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must". We will fight to win the major unions to action over the anti-union laws, and over particular, limited questions like the right to recognition and the right to strike. At the same time, we are organising independently of the national union leaderships.

There is no reason why we should not hope to win the affiliation of several of the major national trade unions to the

campaign. As the campaign develops, it will mesh in more and more with the issue of working class representation, which lies at the heart of the conflicts between the unions and New Labour's "modernisers".

Immediately, the CFTU is focussing on:

- work around the TUC Congress to build support for key motions on the anti-union laws;
- the lobby of the Labour Party on Monday 29 September in Brighton in support of free trade unions and the rebuilding of the welfare state. That evening there will be a joint meeting organised by the dockers and the CFTU, where Tony Benn and key strikers will speak.

The CFTU's first national steering committee will be held on Saturday 18 October.

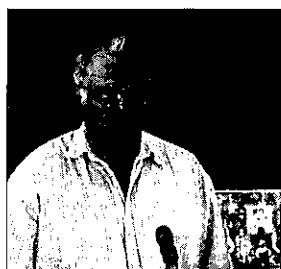
The CFTU will provide a rational framework for tying together the activities of the left across the labour movement.

For that reason, supporters of *Workers' Liberty* will be pressing all other organisations on the left to get properly involved in this initiative. The common basis for collaboration is a commitment to free our class from the shackles of the anti-union laws. Surely all serious socialists and trade union activists can agree to common work towards that goal?

The Liverpool conference passed the following motion, which was moved in the name of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty:

"A vigorous, unapologetic campaign for free trade unions can hope in a relatively short time by way of agitation, education and organisation on this question to rouse and rally large sections of the labour movement around the demand for British trade unions as free as unions are in France or Germany.

"Every serious industrial dispute in the coming period will pose this question sharply. Therefore the first conference for free trade unions calls on the left to unite and build a broad, united, democratically run Campaign for Free Trade Unions."



out
ould
orkers

"Anti-trade union laws are becoming globalised. We need international solidarity everywhere."

● Jimmy Nolan,
Liverpool dockers

"We need to revive the old slogan 'workers of the world unite'. We need a refounding of the labour movement on core principles."

● Mike Hindley MEP

"The sooner we stand together and fight together, the sooner the working class is going to be free."

● Jill Mountford,
Welfare State Network

"The rank and file must."

Affiliate!

£25 (large union organisations);

£10 (small organisations);

£3 (individuals)

Send cheques (payable to "Free Trade Unions Campaign") to Lol Duffy, Liverpool City UNISON, 8 Victoria Street, Liverpool, L2 6QJ.

Revolutionary socialists were never right

By Donald Sassoon*

WHEN social-democrats met in Paris on the 14th July in 1889 to found the Second International there was no difference between social-democrats, revolutionary socialists or whatever. The overwhelming majority of the members of the Socialist International in Paris considered themselves to be Marxists. When the famous debate between Bernstein and Kautsky and the others took place it was regarded as a debate among Marxists. Bernstein attacked Kautsky but he did not attack Marxism, although he offered his own view of what Marxism was.

Bernstein tried to base his revision of the established Social-Democratic position on an analysis of the changes in capitalist society. One might, and I certainly do, argue with Bernstein's analysis of capitalist society but the important thing is that he justified his proposed change in position in terms of the changes in capitalism. In deciding which policy to adopt we must always look at what the real options are. That is even true of the tradition later established by Lenin. He said "if there is no revolution in Germany we are doomed". There was a recognition that the revolution did not depend on the efforts of the Russian revolutionaries alone, it depended on an international system which is what capitalism had become.

What did the socialists who met in 1889 say? If you read the texts of that time or the documents of the German social-democracy in 1891 you find that the typical programme of social democrats was made up of two items.

First they said, as later revolutionary socialists would keep on saying, the final aim is a classless society. Secondly they had a minimum programme with a number of specific demands.

The first thing they advocated was the expansion of political democracy — universal suffrage for men and women, written constitutions and so on.

The second part of this minimum programme dealt with what we would now call the welfare state. They wanted a national health service, free education, pensions and insurance for everyone.

The third thing was the regulation of the labour market — above all the eight hour day. They said there should be a limit to capitalist exploitation.

The first two sets of demands — political democracy and welfare — were not addressed specifically to the working class. They did not ask for workers to have special treatment. They addressed themselves to the citizenry as a whole. The vote was for everyone. The national health service was for everyone. Only the third demand — the economic regulation — was a specifically working-class demand.

We can play all sorts of games with history but 100 years after 1889 in 1989, the year in which Soviet Communism collapses, that programme has been the basic programme of the vast majority of socialists in western Europe. In essence it has been extraordinarily successful. They got it right, they obtained all their demands, so much so that some of these things are now in danger of being attacked.

There is quite properly an outcry among all sort of people who want to defend these things. As we have seen in France it is extremely difficult to remove these gains, to reverse history that

much. We cannot say however if these gains will always be successfully defended, nothing is gained forever. For all I know we may have reached the end of that phase of socialist history and socialism may disappear altogether. I do not know, all I

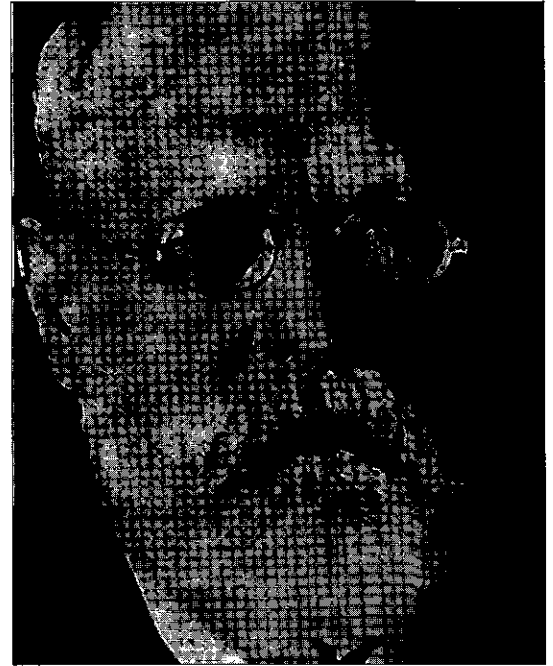
can say is that capitalism, as it is constituted now, does not need socialism. There are other capitalist countries outside western Europe which are doing very well without socialism. In the most successful capitalist country in the twentieth century, the USA, there was never a socialist party worth mentioning, one big enough to be voted into office, to implement reforms and so on. In another successful capitalist country, Japan, there is no challenge from any significant socialist party or even a powerful reformist liberal party.

Giving a verdict on this experience is rather complicated. In terms of the long-term aims of the social-democrats, of establishing a classless society, they totally failed. There has never been a socialist society which has emerged out of the successes of social democracy. Social democrats realised this, so much so that they dumped their final aim. They have not just done it now, it has not happened under Blair, it happened in the 1950s. All that Blair has done in dropping Clause Four is to conclude an itinerary which had started before. Clause Four was largely a symbol that had very little relevance.

The social democratic tradition is one which has reformed capitalism and has contributed a more or less determinant way to create in Western Europe a particular, or unique form of capitalism which is now under extraordinary pressure and could be destroyed.

At the UN Summit in Denver recently the Americans were saying if you want to be as successful as we are you have got to get rid of this nonsense — these strong trade unions, rigid labour markets and welfare state stuff. Be dynamic and flexible and forward looking, in other words they said, get rid of your kind of socialism. The real battle between the US and western Europe is over a model of capitalism not over whether to get rid of capitalism.

There is also the Soviet communist tradition to consider. Is there one thing to be saved out of this experiment? I will not play the game which says that the bad guys were in the right place at the right time and therefore it all went terribly wrong but if only



German social-democrat leader: Karl Kautsky

* Donald Sassoon teaches at Queen Mary College, East London and is the author of *100 years of socialism* £14.99 Fontana. He was speaking at Workers' Liberty '97.

the good guys had triumphed things would have been so much nicer. No I will take the whole lot together — Lenin and Stalin and Khrushchev — and ask: what did they achieve?

They took over what was not yet a capitalist country so they had to face a completely different problem from the social democrats in western Europe where they were facing a real capitalism, and where they did not have to build an industrial society. The social democrats could be reformists. They could try to use the surplus generated by capitalism for reforms. This option was not around in Russia. They had to build industry in a completely new way. And they were successful in doing that but the price was absolutely colossal and I am not prepared to defend it. The result was industrial society, but not a consumer society or the society of abundance that Marx said would replace capitalism.

The other achievement of Soviet communism is that they had their kind of welfare state, a health service, education, free higher education and so on. But the successes they had — the full employment and the welfare state — the social democrats had achieved too. But they managed to do it without killing millions of people, and without purges and the rest.

The only thing that the socialist movement has managed to do is the full implementation of the minimum programme devised 100 years ago. What were the conditions for the implementation of this programme?

The parties at the time called themselves "internationalist" but it was largely a rhetorical term and it did not mean "workers of the world unite" — the organisation of international strikes was out of the question. Internationalism meant one thing, pacifism, and that crumbled in 1914 when the majority of socialist parties took the side of their state. I would like to justify the SPD and the French socialists who took this line. It would very easy to defend the Russian social democracy, both the

Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, and others who opposed the war. Why did the German SPD support the war? I think you have to look at the evolution and the constraints facing these parties.

The SPD was successful. It was a state within a state. Even though it developed within the confines of imperialist Germany and had been persecuted and practically banned until 1890 it had a lot of votes, at one stage 32% in an electoral system that was against them, it had its own party schools and libraries and a phenomenal amount of support among the working-class. In other words it had become very German, it had become very proud of its anchorage within that particular state where it had been able to thrive.

They could not throw away such strength, go against what their base and what workers in Germany wanted. Workers in Germany in 1914 were in favour of the war. They were scared of the Russians. They felt they had to defend "our Germany" which has given them rights, pensions, national insurance. The German social democratic party defended itself, its own people and went to war.

This destroyed the international socialist movement which was always based on the nation state. Why was this? Because socialists can only go so far as capitalism can go and capitalism was based on the nation state and had not yet become international. The history of the socialist movement is incomprehensible unless you look at it from the point of view of the organisation of each capitalist state.

Now capitalism is truly becoming international but socialists are still stuck in the national state because the entire political structure was based on the nation. Socialists will be stuck in this position for a long time. Because they are organised as national par-

ties they acquire all the characteristics of their national politics.

The recent conference in Malmo shows this phenomenon very well. There was an unprecedented degree of convergence — the parties there were all pro-European, all reformist, all anti-Soviet communism. However they took different position. Blair called for a more flexible market as a secret recipe to bring down unemployment. Jospin took quite a different position.

One can say wouldn't it be nice to have Jospin's programme, it's not quite as bad as Blair. But in the point is in France you cannot win elections on a Blairite platform. And probably in Britain you cannot win elections on Jospin's programme. The mentality in France is based on a whole set of ideas related to Republicanism which are at least 100 years old. These ideas emphasise a state which will protect all the French people. The idea of being French is not a racial idea: it is based on Republican values. Other things are barely understandable from the British context, for example, 73% of the French population say when asked what they expect from the next government they expect the working week to be lowered to 35 hours. Even Chirac was promising this in 1995. Does this put Chirac to the left of Blair? You cannot stick everyone who is anyone in Europe along some kind of continuum and have a supra-national view of what is left and right.

Left and right are connected to distinctive, special social realities. Why are the Italians so Euro-enthusiastic and are ready to reduce pensions in order to meet the Maastricht criteria? Well this is because Italian pensions are extraordinary generous, are a large proportion of the state budget and are unfairly distributed. You can only understand the differences between policies of various countries if you also know the social and economic structures of these countries. No one in France or Italy goes on about single mothers, because there are not as many as in

Britain.

In real politics these are the kinds of issues that decision makers have got to face all the time. It is nice to take a critical position but the price for this is the understanding of what can and cannot be done.

You talk about three positions — the Stalinist, the reformist and then yours. I talk about two. This is because I can only talk about really existing positions, things that have occurred. I cannot argue about or challenge a tradition that has not been tested. There is nothing wrong with the revolutionary tradition because whenever socialists take over by revolutionary means something goes wrong and then people like you say that these revolutionaries were the bad ones. Whenever socialists come to power on a reformist programme you say of course they are just reformists. If your lot never win anything they can never do anything wrong. The result is that you are beyond criticism except in one sense. Why is it that after 100 years, after two world wars, the collapse of capitalism in 1929, the revival of capitalism after 1945, various social-democratic experiments, the collapse of dictatorship in three southern European countries, the collapse of communism, the one thing that never happened was that you won. A little bit of self-criticism at this stage would be welcome. Your revolutionary tradition has never become a party of a respectable size. It hasn't even managed to become as big as some of the small left reformist parties in Europe like the Greens in Germany. It took those Greens only ten years to become a source of radical left politics because they spoke the language of many people.

Until the revolutionary left tradition gets its act together it cannot have a significant role in modern society.

"You talk about three positions — the Stalinist, the reformist and then yours. I talk about two. This is because I can only talk about really existing positions, things that have occurred. I cannot argue about or challenge a tradition that has not been tested."

All that is fixed is the struggle itself

By Tom Rigby

DONALD Sassoon's argument against revolutionary socialism has one great merit. He states openly, explicitly and candidly what other social democrats would not say except in private.

His short speech at Worker's Liberty '97 was a chemically pure sample of reformist self-justification parading as "objective" history. His key idea is this: "reformism fought for the minimum programme, the minimum programme has been established, while the revolutionary tradition produced Stalinism, therefore reformism was right and anti-Stalinist revolutionary Marxism is the tradition that never did anything."

Implicit in what he says, but never stated, is the liberal belief that socialism, understood as a different system based on workers' self-rule, is impossible and all that we can hope for is a regulated capitalism. It seems that Sassoon has written a huge book, brim-full of historical detail only to confirm what every ignorant yuppie, journalist and spin-doctor already knows: socialism is dead. Sassoon's uncritical worship of the accomplished fact is seen most clearly in his declaration that "Capitalism as it is constituted now doesn't need socialism." As if capitalism ever needed socialism! Capitalism doesn't need socialism, it creates it, or more precisely, it creates the working class whose struggles against the inhumanity of capitalism can create socialism. But note here: Sassoon, this great historian of the socialist movement, ends up reducing socialism to a mechanism for capitalist self-regulation, rather than what it is even in its most primitive forms; an assertion of humanity over the dictates of capital.

Sassoon's history is a mutilated history. He tears out of the historical picture that which makes it history, as opposed to chronology. Sassoon's is a history without choice, potential, evolution, development, accident or alternatives. In short, history without human beings. Despite what Sassoon may argue, human history is not a succession of events following each other with mechanical regularity and revealing an eternal fixed truth, if so history really would be the preserve of the conservative. No, history is a story of titanic class conflict and struggle rooted in the conditions of the production of the social surplus. It has no pre-determined outcome. All that is fixed is the struggle itself. As Marx put it; "Human beings make their own history, but not in conditions of their own making."

Sassoon's dehumanisation of history is to be seen at its clearest in the way he deals with the defeats suffered by the revolutionary socialist tradition, and therefore by the working class and the whole of humanity in the twentieth century. At Workers' Liberty '97 he felt no need to even engage with the idea that things could have been different, and that there might have been a different outcome to, for instance, the post World War I revolutionary crisis, the struggle against fascism between the wars, or the fight against Stalinism in Russia.

What Sassoon found even more ridiculous to contemplate was the idea that if different political forces had won the leadership of these struggles then, perhaps, things might have worked out differently. Old Stalinist prejudice underpins his neo-liberal justification of Social Democracy. The actual historical record puts the argument under extreme strain. Instead of dealing with the facts of the class struggle in the twentieth century he evades the implications of the struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism with the assertion the "You can't play the game that the bad guys were in the right place at the right time." Well, as a matter of fact, yes they were and, unfortunately, the good guys were weak and disorganised.



Trotsky was very much a "practical politician". He built the Red Army, for instance.

Trotsky, whose contribution to the tradition that in Sassoon's view has never done anything practical included organising the October revolution, building the Red Army and leading the left opposition to Stalin, knew just how history turned on human action and consciousness. This is how he explained the isolation of the Russian revolution in the immediate post-World War I period.

"...the year 1919... Everywhere soviets were being organised... The bourgeoisie was at its wits' end... what were the premises for the proletarian revolution? The productive forces were fully mature, so were the class relations; the objective social role of the proletariat rendered the latter fully possible of conquering power and providing the necessary leadership. What was lacking? Lacking was the political premise: cognisance of the situation by the proletariat. Lacking was an organisation at the head of the proletariat, capable of utilising the situation for nothing else but the direct organisational and technical preparation of an uprising, of the overturn, the seizure of power and so forth — that is what was lacking."

(Leon Trotsky *The First Five Years of the Communist International* Vol II)

This is a proper historical explanation. It looks at struggle, potential and human powers and the conditions that may stop a potential being realised. It takes human consciousness itself as an objective factor that acts back on social being.

Trotsky's is also an explanation by reference to a defect, weakness or incapacity on the part of a class, a failure of self-understanding on the part of an historical actor which prevents that actor achieving what was possible. Sassoon's method is the exact opposite, it is uncritical in the extreme. It takes what is given for granted. It does not question it, it merely seeks to reveal the rationality of the status quo. All that is real is rational and all that is rational is real, as conservatives have said. Yet, despite the worshipping of the rationality and necessity of what is, the status quo is nevertheless repeatedly ruptured and superseded, revolutionised and overthrown. The difference between the two approaches was summed up by Marx long ago in his theses on Feuerbach; "The philosophers have interpreted the world, the point, however is to change it."

India: the legacy of imperialism

By Colin Foster

IN India today nearly five hundred million people live on the equivalent of less than one US dollar a day. More than one-third of all the people in the world at that extreme level of poverty — where they rarely get enough to eat — are in India. Over half India's people are illiterate; one child in eight dies before the age of five.

The big cities have millions of people living on the streets, begging, scratching a life from odd jobs. Most of the poorest are in the countryside, where over 70% of India's 970 million people live, though agriculture now produces only 30% of the country's total output. India has had more land reform laws than any other country in the world, but also less effective land reform than almost any other. Hundreds of millions of people still live in conditions not far from those of Europe's Middle Ages, even if there is now electricity and television in the villages.

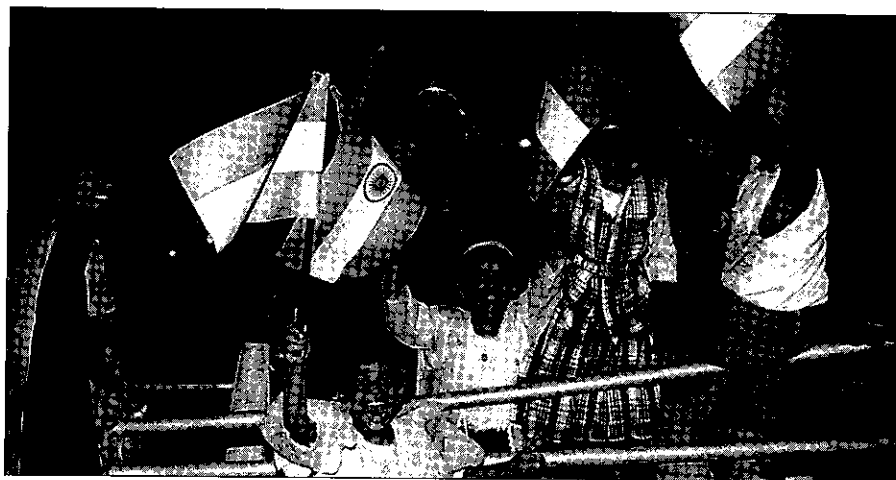
The right-wing upper-caste Hindu chauvinist BJP now vies with Congress as the strongest all-India party. Fifty years after the country was partitioned at independence to cut away a Muslim state, Pakistan, communalist violence against India's 120-million-strong Muslim minority is everyday.

Yet India has also had a "grey revolution". Industry has expanded fast. The country now has more trained scientists than any other in the world; and it has a huge, and often militant, industrial working class.

All these patterns have roots in the two centuries of British rule over India which ended in 1947. The ruling class of independent India has reshaped them in its own way since 1947.

The India which was conquered by Britain after 1757 was not an "underdeveloped" country by the standards of the day. Its administration (the Moghul empire) was in decay and collapse, and the mass of its people were poorer than in Europe, though by a much smaller margin than today. Its handicraft trades also made it the world's greatest industrial exporting centre. For the European imperialists, it was not barren territory to be developed, but a great treasure-house to be looted.

Much wealth was pumped out of India into Britain's country houses, board rooms, and government departments, and into the comfortable British homes of retired army officers, shareholders and bondholders. The cautious estimate of the economic historian



The ruling class in India has reshaped the India of British imperialist rule, which ended 50 years ago

Angus Maddison is that this flow took out of India one quarter of the resources otherwise available for industrial investment.

TO secure its hold over India cheaply, and thus with only a small British garrison there, Britain constructed an alliance with sections of India's wealthy classes, by reshaping the land system at the expense of the peasantry. Karl Marx commented: "In Bengal, we have a combination of English landlordism, of the Irish middlemen system, of the Austrian system, transforming the landlord into the tax-gatherer, and of the Asiatic system making the state the real landlord. In Madras and Bombay we have a French peasant proprietor who is at the same time a serf and a metayer [share-cropper] of the State. The drawbacks of all these various systems accumulate upon him without his enjoying any of their redeeming features... Eleven twelfths of the whole Indian population have been wretchedly pauperised..."

Agriculture stagnated. According to Angus Maddison, "From the beginning of British conquest in 1757 to independence... per capita income... probably did not increase at all. In the UK itself there was a tenfold increase in per capita income over these two centuries". Average life expectancy in India, poor enough today at 59 years, was only 30 years in 1947.

India's handicraft industries were destroyed by turning the country into a captive market for British factory production. As Marx commented: "The English cotton machinery produced an acute effect in India. The Governor-General reported in 1834-5:

"The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India."

The British also brought elements of the new system of capitalist factory production to India. In the middle of the 19th century, they built railways. Marx commented: "The ruling classes of Great Britain have had, till now, but an accidental, transitory and exceptional interest in the progress of India. The aristocracy wanted to conquer it, the moneyocracy to plunder it, and the millocracy to undersell it. But now the tables are turned..."

"You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing... industrial processes... The railway system will become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry..."

Marx warned that this industrial advance would not be straightforward. "All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both... The Indians will not reap the fruit of the new elements of society scattered among by the British bourgeoisie... 'til the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke..."

The warning was apt. Industry grew slowly. British capitalists, with India as a captive market, saw no need to move their factories there; Indian capitalists had no gov-

ernment of their own to give protection and aid to new enterprises; in fact the British regime positively discouraged Indian capitalists from developing as competitors to British business.

India had a spurt of industrial growth during World War 1, stagnated interwar, then another spurt in World War 2. By 1947, thanks to those spurts of growth and to the legacy of a more advanced starting-point, India had a bigger native bourgeoisie than, probably, any other "Third World" country. But it had been made "backward" and "underdeveloped" in a way it had not been in 1757.

To remain cheap, British rule in India had to educate and train a layer, small relative to the whole Indian people but big in absolute numbers, of Indian officials. The growth of the classes of bourgeois-educated and bourgeois-wealthy Indians produced a vigorous bourgeois-nationalist movement, Congress, founded as early as 1885. It was led after World War 1 by Mahatma Gandhi, and his campaign is still quoted as a model of how to win political change by non-violent methods of passive non-cooperation.

In fact the movement for independence — from the mass demonstration at Amritsar in 1919, which turned into a massacre when the British opened fire, to the naval mutinies, general strikes and peasant rebellions of 1946-7 — was driven forward by the militant action of workers and peasants. Gandhi's achievement was not to create the movement, but to damp it down and channel it (partially) into passive and inert forms of protest. He was quite clear about the class meaning of this: "In India we want no political strikes... We seek not to destroy capital or capitalists but to regulate the relations between capital and labour. We want to harness capital to our side. It would be folly to encourage sympathetic strikes". Or again: "I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey... If I taught them to disobey I should be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power... when I am in power I shall in all likelihood make use of those same officials and those same soldiers".

Though Gandhi himself died in 1948, the Congress governments of independent India after 1947 did indeed "use those same officials and those same soldiers". The independent Indian state was the old machinery of British rule, with all its bureaucracy and elitism, only with Indians in place of the thin top layer of British officials and commanders.

Britain had used "divide and rule" in India. After the first great Indian rebellion against British rule, the Mutiny of 1857, groups which had been less rebellious, like the Sikhs, were carefully favoured and selectively recruited into the army. Britain fostered Muslim support by posing as a protector

against the (real) forces of Hindu obscurantism and by setting up separate Muslim electoral rolls (from 1905), with a wider franchise than the Hindu rolls.

The climax of this "divide-and-rule" came when the British government, deciding to cut and run in 1947, partitioned India to give the Muslim League (built up as a British-sponsored rival to Congress) its own Muslim state, Pakistan. Communal violence at the time of partition killed a million people, made ten million refugees, and left a vicious legacy: three wars between India and Pakistan, bloody conflict continuing today in the disputed territory of Kashmir, communal strife in India, Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan.

Gandhi was horrified by the violence; Congress always proclaimed itself secular and opposed "divide-and-rule". Yet Gandhi's campaigns had always linked India's national cause with Hindu symbols and concepts, in a way that could not fail to help communal division.

The first prime minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, had been on the left of Congress. Under him, the same government machine that for so long had served Britain to siphon wealth from India and stifle Indian industry was turned to being an instrument of "socialist planning", loosely modelled on the Soviet Union but with neither Stalinist terror and dictatorship nor the urgent Stalinist tempo of forced-march industrialisation.

Industry grew, rapidly compared to its record under British rule though only moderately compared to some other "Third World" states. The spread of education and health care was far faster than under British rule, far slower than needed. The state steadily became more bloated and corrupt.

The Brezhnev of this regime was Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, who tried to save Congress's decaying power by declaring a state of emergency and suspending many democratic rights in 1975-7. She was ousted in 1977 by independent India's first-ever non-Congress government, regained power in 1980, then was murdered in 1984. Her son Rajiv tried to be the Gorbachev, reforming from above in a technocratic, market-oriented spirit. He too was murdered in May 1991. Congress has continued to lose ground. It won less than 30% of the vote at the last election, in May 1996, and the present government is a complex coalition of small parties.

The rule of the privileged and Anglicised Congress elite was always a shoddy business, and life-crushing for the Indian poor. Yet the way it is unravelling now points to no progress. While no-one should defend the old "licence raj" system of industrial development through government permits and subsidies, India's reorientation

to free-market economics, accelerated since 1991, has widened its already huge social inequalities and imposed on the poor huge price rises for fertilisers and food. As the political initiative shifts to a variety of middle-class, particularist, often populist parties, India's long-shaky but real civil liberties could be shattered, and its ramshackle federal unity transformed into bloody fragmentation on the model of ex-Yugoslavia or the ex-USSR.

Can the Indian working class, hundreds of millions strong, and with a history which includes many huge and protracted mass strikes, take the initiative, and construct under its own leadership a new federal unity, against communalism? Its main handicaps are the fragmentation of the trade union movement, and the rotten politics of its most significant party — the Communist Party (Marxist), ex-Stalinist but now effectively social-democratic and geared to the construction of "left" and "secular" blocs and alliances with bourgeois parties. A new workers' party is needed.

In Assissi

Midst the avarice and sanctity
In Assissi, white in sun and years,
Two flushed, pale bloused, young breasted
girls,
Their mouths half-open, smiling, watch
Two pigeons fucking in the sun.

Breath held in Francis-empathy,
Delighted, knowing hands entwined,
Unconsciously at one, they catch
Life fired by the pantheistic sun.

And then, their eyes cloud and drop,
As the shade-faced, fussing shepherd nun
Comes at a dry, stiff trot — cast down
Like the dead saint's communistic friends
Who broke the sacredotal line
To set life over property:

They burned, in priest-set fires, whose
minds
Too soon had seen a precious sight:
But they saw as true as the children see
These pigeons loving in the light.

SM

* St. Francis of Assissi, who might be described as a pantheistic primitive communist, preached poverty, the community of all life and the love of all living things. He divested himself of property, and aligned himself with the poor. Very soon after his death in the early 13th century, his friend Pope Bernard had him canonised as a saint, for the consolation and edification of the people. Franciscan friars are today a strong world-wide order. At about the same time as Francis was being canonised, those of his co-thinkers who refused to soften the ideas they had shared with Francis, ideas which might have been developed in the direction of revolutionary social conclusions, were, at the instigation of Pope Bernard, burned at the stake for heresy.

The new rules of Big Money

By Martin Thomas

NEVER in the history of industrial capitalism have the interest rates charged by banks and other financial centres on loans to business been so high and so erratic for so long.

British interest rates drifted mostly downwards from about 5 per cent to 4 per cent between 1800 and 1933, were rammed down to around 2 per cent between 1933 and 1946, rose steadily to about 8 per cent by 1970, rocketed to around 10 to 15 per cent in 1973-86, and have settled back only to 7 per cent or so. US interest rates show a broadly similar pattern¹.

Between the mid-'60s and about 1981, the rising interest rate raced against rapid price inflation. It only just won, and in the mid-1970s it lost. A bank lending \$100 at interest might get back \$115 a year later, but that \$115 would buy less than the \$100. After 1982, interest rates moved clearly ahead of dwindling inflation. Over the years 1980-95, the average rate for lending to big companies was 10.3% in the US, 10.7% in the UK. It outstripped inflation by 5.5% in the US, 5.1% in the UK (1985-95).

International flows of finance have grown fast, and short-term flows beyond precedent. International bond issues rose from \$38 billion in 1980 to \$461 billion in 1995; international loans from \$78 billion to \$372 billion²; the business of swapping large stashes of cash from one currency into another, to find the one which keeps its value best or offers the best interest rate, has grown in volume to maybe twenty times world trade.

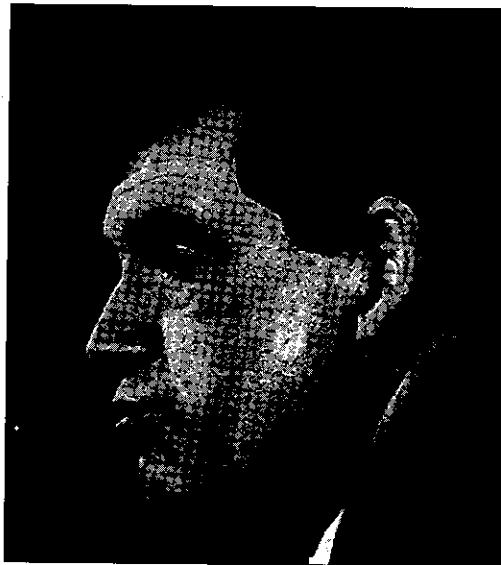
High finance is king in the capitalism of the 1980s and '90s, probably more so than even in the era before World War 1 which first prompted Marxists and radicals to talk of "finance capitalism".

That is the background to the decision by Gordon Brown, Chancellor in the new Labour government elected in Britain on 1 May, to give the Bank of England power over interest rates — that is, in practice, authority to keep interest rates high and money tight whatever Parliament or people want. Many other countries, from New Zealand to France, have given their central banks the same dictatorial power in recent years. The trend is fixed in the European Union's Maastricht Treaty of 1991, which calls for a European Central Bank, and central banks in all European Union countries, independent of elected control. Each government, anxious to keep the fickle favour of the international finance markets, tells the financiers: look, we're safe, we have hard-headed central bankers who can and will keep moneylenders' incomes high whatever the clamour from the jobless and homeless.

II

CAPITAL is value in constant movement from one form to another: from money to means of production and labour-power to products to money. ... It has to hurry. It cannot wait for cumbersome transfers of gold coins. It needs credit. Capitalist businesses buy from and sell to each other on credit, deposit their spare cash with and draw credit from the banks, and accept cheques to settle accounts.

Yet promises to pay are never as good as actual payment. Every



day cheques bounce, businesses fail and break their promises. Banks can fail too. The "thirty years after the end of the Second World War [was] a period of calm most unusual in the long sweep of banking history... But then came the great change with the ending of fixed [exchange] rates and the freeing of monetary policy and the banking system... Banking problems... have become larger in every business cycle since then".³ Many big banks looked very shaky after Mexico stopped payments on its foreign debt in 1982. Continental Illinois, the USA's 8th-largest bank, collapsed in May 1984. In the early 1990s, over 1,000 savings and loans companies collapsed in the USA, owing hundreds of billions of dollars. The Bank of Credit and Commerce International was shut down in

July 1991 as fraudulent and hopelessly insolvent. Japan's big banks have been technically insolvent in recent years because of huge losses on property deals.

Credit has limits. Suppliers reserve the right to demand cash payment; bank-account holders reserve the right to demand cash.

All debts can by law be cleared by payment in national bank notes and coin. Yet a national bank note is no more than a promise from the government. In Russia today, for example, roubles do not count as "hard cash" for many purposes.

In 19th century capitalism the last resort was to gold. Bank of England notes could, if you insisted, be exchanged for gold. Labour could be provisionally "validated" — recognised as social value-creating labour — by promises to pay from businesses or banks, but was finally validated by being equated with gold-producing labour.

Since World War 1, arguably, and certainly since 1971, when the US government dropped its promise to convert dollar notes to gold, the gold backstop no longer exists. There is no longer "hard cash" any harder than US dollars, the basic international reserve currency. Since the 1980s, central banks have been selling off their gold reserves, or using them for commercial operations.

Now labour is "pseudo-validated" by being equated with an approximate quantum of present and future average US labour. Thus "the diffuse form in which monetary constraints operate within credit money. In place of the opposition between the commodity and gold, there is a hierarchical structure of credits and debts..."⁴

This is a very flexible system, but also a delicate one. "The central bank", as Marx put it, "is the pivot of the credit system"⁵, so the vast expansion since the 1970s of the fluidity and speed of credit puts central banks to the front of the capitalist scene.

III

THE Bank of England, the oldest major central bank in the world, was set up in 1694, shortly after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 which consolidated a bourgeois, parliamentary-controlled state in England, in a break from the old semi-feudal state based on the personal power of the king and the great lords. Previously the state budget had merged into the per-

sonal budget of the king and his hangers-on. Now it became an impersonal, bureaucratic, affair, geared to the increasing public provision of communications, law and services necessary for capitalism.

At its start the Bank of England was a private company, owned and run for profit by a group of merchants who had given the government a loan in return for legal privileges which included the right to issue banknotes. In the 19th century, as the state machine grew in financial and bureaucratic weight, legislation turned the Bank into something more like a government department, and large commercial banks developed alongside it.

There was much fumbling. The Bank Act of 1844, which tied the sum of banknotes the Bank could issue closely to its gold reserves, was — as Marx showed, in a scornful dissection⁶ — based on great confusion of economic theory, and had to be suspended in the crises of 1847 and 1857. Yet the Bank became “the pivot” of an increasingly extensive system of credit, and a model for the central banks set up elsewhere — Spain 1782, France 1800, Netherlands 1814, Germany 1876, Japan 1882, Italy 1893, USA 1913.

The central banks would issue notes and coins. They would regulate the commercial banks’ creation of additional money in the form of bank-account balances, by inspecting their books and (usually) demanding that the banks keep some fraction of their deposits at the central bank. When banks failed, they would rescue them, or at least compensate depositors. They would set an interest rate for lending cash short-term to the commercial banks, and shape longer-term interest rates by buying and selling government bonds (pieces of paper carrying a promise by the government to pay a certain level of interest).

However, in the era when all important currencies were fixed to a gold standard, when the pound was the basic currency of world trade, and British industry was strong enough to carry that weight, central banks had a relatively quiet life. After two experiments in the early 19th century, the USA was able to do without one until 1913.

World War 1 disrupted the gold standard. In a world, after 1918, where British industrial and financial supremacy had been broken, and relationships and proportions were much less stable, it could not be restored. Central bankers held conferences, and set up the Bank for International Settlements in 1930. Montague Norman, Governor of the Bank of England from 1920 to 1944, campaigned for central banks to be independent from elected governments.

Central bankers did more, and blundered more. Germany saw the world’s first great hyperinflation, when between July and November 1923 prices went up by a factor of 850,000. Britain’s banker-driven policy of returning to the gold standard in 1925 caused great damage before it was abandoned in 1931. The USA’s central bank, the Federal Reserve, worsened the slump after 1929 by restricting credit. World trade collapsed.

Between 1945 and 1971 a sort of gold standard was restored, based on the dollar. The nationalisation of the Bank of England in 1946 was part of a trend. Before 1936, only five European central banks were state-owned. By 1994, all except nine of the world’s 170 central banks were state-owned. Central banks went back to being technical agencies of government, as they had been before 1914 but on a far bigger scale.

Now, with the system in flux, the bankers come forward again to say: Attention! Money is fundamental. It is too important to be dealt with by elected governments. Leave the decisions to us!

IV

THE dollar is “hard cash” today because it can buy the products of US labour, and that labour produces a vast range of goods and services at the highest levels of productivity. The increased

importance of the dollar, without help from gold, arises however not from a strengthening of its economic base in production but from a decline of the US relative to other big capitalist economies.

In the 1960s the USA pumped out dollars to pay for overseas purchases (especially for the Vietnam war) in excess of its income from exports. These “Eurodollars” piled up in bank accounts outside America. By using this pool, international financiers could operate largely free from control by any national government. Losing confidence in the US economy in 1968-71, they had sufficient clout to drive the US government to the conclusion that the official guarantee of the dollar (one ounce of gold for \$35) was a dangerous fiction which must be abandoned. The pool increased vastly after the big oil price increase of 1973-4, as extra dollars paid to the oil-exporting states were deposited in metropolitan banks.

Meanwhile, the giant multinational corporations had grown steadily in size and scope, moving ever-vaster sums of money across national borders. Successive, and cumulatively dramatic, cheapening and speeding-up of international communications and transport increased the need for and speed of international credit. National credit markets had also expanded with the rapid growth of government debt: Britain’s almost doubled between 1960 and 1975, a rate of increase never seen before except in war.

The newly fluid and free-floating international credit regime produced chaos in the 1970s, with rapid inflation, swings in exchange rates, and an alarming slump in the value of the dollar in 1978.

After 1979, as a new industrial recession bit, governments and bankers acted to harden up the regime. Their motto might have been Marx’s comment: “A depreciation of credit-money would unsettle all existing relations. Therefore, the value of commodities is sacrificed for the purpose of safeguarding the fantastic and independent existence of this value in money. As money-value, it is secure only as long as money is secure. For a few millions in money, many millions in commodities must be sacrificed. This is inevitable under capitalist production and constitutes one of its beauties”⁷.

They have evolved a regime which is stabilised, to a degree and at a miserable level, by the will (forged by fear) of each government and central bank to cut state spending and borrowing, and push up interest rates, enough to safeguard its currency.

Sweden in 1990 showed the brutality and the bias of this regime. “Under intense pressure from overseas financial opinion that forced up interest rates... and led to a huge outflow of capital from Sweden” — so the *Financial Times* reported (29.10.90) — “the Swedish government [had] to abandon a long-held... commitment to full employment and... the Welfare State. The international money markets have become the arbiters of Sweden’s future, not the Social Democratic ideologues...” Unemployment in Sweden rose rapidly from almost nil to around 10%.

The regime has only limited stability. The international spiral of free-floating promises of payment is now so large that its flows and surges could overwhelm even the most banker-friendly government’s attempts to ensure that its currency remains an effective means of payment. Hence the European Union’s anxious moves to create a single Euro-money; hence the US ruling class’s obsession with cutting the deficits on its government budget and its balance of payments.

In October 1979 the US Federal Reserve pushed a key interest rate to its highest-ever level, 12%, and kept it there, or higher, until 1982, despite record bankruptcies. Other major capitalist states followed suit. They had the nerve to do this because the working-class militancy of the 1970s had started to dissipate without decisive victories. They evolved their new regime fumblingly, without a clear scheme. In the first few years, up to about 1983, they were influenced by the soon-discredited dogma of “monetarism”, which brought many disasters.

Yet milder methods of control were being scrapped. Fixed exchange rates between currencies were too difficult to hold in the maelstrom, as the collapse of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992 illustrated. The exchange controls which limited movements of funds from one currency to another up to the late 1970s were increasingly overwhelmed by the new international financial markets. Once some states discarded those controls, others quickly followed suit, because no-one would hold any more wealth than they had to in a currency which they might have trouble getting out of.

The new regime was locked into place by the fast growth of international finance flows, and also by the international restructuring of capitalist industry. Industries once central in each major national economy — coal-mining, steel — became less central and saw their major production centres shift to new countries. The textiles, clothing and footwear industries shifted too, to different sites. Microelectronics and information technology became major industries, and transformed other industries. These developments were driven by the low profit rates of the 1970s and '80s, and made possible by previous defeats for the working class, which they then compounded. The accompanying waves of bankruptcies, industrial collapses, takeovers, mergers, new ventures, retooling and redevelopment, increased the capitalist appetite for heavy and expensive credit.

V

BANKS can thwart a capitalist government whatever its authority on paper. The 1945 Labour government had to retreat considerably on its intent to keep interest rates low, because otherwise it could not shift the government bonds it needed to sell to pay compensation to the old owners of the industries it nationalised. In his memoirs of the 1964-70 Labour government, Harold Wilson reports that as early as November 1964 "we had reached the situation where a newly-elected government with a mandate from the people was being told, not so much by the Governor of the Bank of England but by international speculators, that the policies on which we had fought the election could not be implemented; the Government was to be forced into the adoption of Tory policies... The Governor [of the Bank] confirmed that that was, in fact, the case... because of the sheer compulsion of the economic dictation of those who exercised decisive economic power... I recognised the force of his arguments."⁸

On the other hand, legal independence gives a bank only limited power to stand against broader forces in bourgeois politics. Germany's Bundesbank, famous for its independence and political clout, was able to defy its government and block a bail-out for the pound in 1992, but it was unable to prevent speedy reunification with East Germany or the conversion of old East German marks one-to-one into Deutschmarks.

The new legal independence of the Bank of England is more a symbol and a symptom of how capitalism operates today than a causative factor with its own weight. Yet is it an important symbol, which tells us much about the nature of the New Labour government.

According to Gordon Brown, the reshaped governing body of the Bank "will be representative of the whole of the United Kingdom". By this he means only that new members "will be drawn widely from industry, commerce and finance", that is, from diverse layers of the capitalist class. Nobody will elect them. Nobody outside a tiny circle of the Labour Party leadership was even consulted

— at the election, or through Labour Party channels — about handing over economic powers to the Bank.

When matters get serious — and, under capitalism, nothing is more serious than big money — capitalism cannot afford democracy! So say the bankers, and so says Brown too.

VI

IN the fundamental theory of orthodox ("neo-classical") economics, the interest rate is a pivotal variable, but one set by inescapable laws of human nature. It is human nature that \$100 now is worth more to us than \$100 in a year's time. It is worth \$105 in a year's time, or \$110, or whatever, depending on our average level of impatience.

Trying to pursue this theory consistently, the eminent orthodox economist (and critic of Marx) Eugen von Bohm-Bawerk concluded that: "The cultural level of a nation is mirrored by its rate of interest: the higher are a people's intelligence and moral strength, the lower will be the rate of interest"⁹.

This was logical — low interest rates should indicate a collective ability to see beyond the impulses of the moment — and even seemed to reflect facts. At the turn of the century, when Bohm-Bawerk wrote, interest rates had mostly been edging downwards for decades¹⁰.

The orthodox theory makes superficial sense in another way. For each individual capitalist — or for the worker seeking a loan, or with some small savings — the interest rate appears as a uniform, definite, published quantity, evidently fixed by general forces way outside their control. Rates of profit, on the contrary, vary a

lot from enterprise to enterprise, and depend on the skill and luck of the individual capitalist. In orthodox theory, pure industrial profit, over and above interest on capital, is an erratic product of temporary imbalances, and would not exist at all if an economy settled down into equilibrium.

It is little wonder, however, that this section of orthodox economic

theory appears only in academic lectures, and is left aside when the economists study actual interest-rate movements. If orthodox theory and Bohm-Bawerk are right, then capitalist society has been in great decline, moral and cultural, for the last half-century. And in fact the credibility of the orthodox theory is only superficial.

None of us wants to eat all our week's dinners on Monday and then starve for six days, nor to live in extravagant luxury when young then poverty in later life. "Time preference" (for resources now rather than next year) is no law of human nature: rather, it is a product of the capitalist social relations which mean that the person with \$10 million today can pocket the proceeds of labour and have \$12 million or \$15 million next year¹¹.

Marx's analysis turns upside-down the orthodox view of profit as an erratic addition, and interest as fundamental. According to Marx, interest is only a portion of the total surplus value generated by exploiting labour. A large enough stock of money, used to employ labour for a period, yields extra money (surplus value). The industrial capitalist pays a portion of that surplus value to the money-owner who lends him the money for that period.

The rate of surplus-value is determined by fundamentals of the relation between the capitalist class and the working class, expressed in the rate of exploitation. But "there is no law of division [between interest and industrial profit] except that enforced by competition... no such thing as a 'natural' rate of interest exists... The determination is accidental, purely empirical", wrote Marx. Or, as a modern Marxist writer puts it: "... the relationship of forces between debtor and creditor... determines how large that

portion [of interest] should be... The level of interest is a question of conjuncture, being influenced particularly by monetary policy"¹².

Thus the interest rate moves up and down, within the limits of total surplus value, depending on the general balance of forces within the wealthy classes, government policies, and the business cycle. Interest rates are high, for example, at the best of a boom, when industrialists will pay heavily to expand their profit-making faster, and at the worst of a slump, when the industrialists' credit has collapsed and they need hard cash to survive.

The factual evidence heavily favours Marx's view.

VII

WHAT does Marx's theory tell us about the economic and social significance of the high interest rates of the era since 1979? It suggests, first, that the rates reflect an increase in the weight of finance-capital relative to industrial capital (though the terms of division of surplus-value must have shifted back a bit in recent years, as profits have risen and interest rates moderated). Anyone watching British TV news, and used to seeing its cameras go to a City dealing room every time they want authoritative comment on economics, must agree.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude, simplistically, that labour can or should ally with industrial capital against finance capital to restore the old not-so-bad conditions.

Banks are different from bakeries or brick factories. Yet there is a large "grey area" where finance capital and industrial capital overlap. The idea developed by Rudolf Hilferding in his pioneering Marxist analysis of *Finance Capital*, of the "fusion" of finance capital and industrial capital, remains valid.

An increased role for finance capital does not mean that more of a fixed pool of capital is diverted to speculation rather than production¹³. When shares are issued or money is lent, capital seems to double itself. The company issuing the shares, for example, still has a capital of \$1 million, but its shareholders have \$1 million capital too. If its prospects improve and the share prices double, the shareholders' nominal wealth increases to \$2 million. The lender of \$1 million is still a millionaire, while the borrower has his new machine worth \$1 million. "All capital seems to double itself, or sometimes treble itself..."¹⁴

An increase in the superstructure of what Marx called "fictitious capital" does not mean that resources have been drained from a fixed pool of capital otherwise available for industrial production. In fact, more speculation may mean better conditions for industrial enterprises to grow (though it need not, and, conversely, a stock market crash does not necessarily bring a real destruction of wealth or a recession: witness 1987)¹⁵.

The boom in money-juggling does, of course, turn a sizeable chunk of revenue to buying houses, holidays, cars, air tickets, dinners and luxury offices for bankers, money-traders, stockbrokers, lawyers and the like. It means that many of the best-educated and most energetic of upper and middle-class youth use their talents on nothing better than respectable high-tech gambling. And financial crashes can and do destroy jobs, communities and lives. All this is obscene, but not the same as a crude idea of capital being siphoned off into speculation.

Secondly: the financial markets are not the superhuman forces described by orthodox journalism and politics ("you can't buck the market"). They are a set of interactions between a few tens of thousands of human beings pursuing very particular aims, those of maximum gain for themselves or their employers. No more. Humans made them, humans can un-make them.

Yet the financial markets are impersonal to a degree. We are not in the position Rudolf Hilferding saw (with only some exaggeration) before World War 1, where six big Berlin banks controlled the German economy; nor even in that described by Harold Wil-

son in the 1960s, of the rule of a few "gnomes of Zurich". Finance capital today is more miscellaneous. The banks have lost ground relative to other financial operators — pension funds, for example — and none of them has the same dominant role that several big industrial corporations have in their own sectors.

Those big industrial corporations are big financial operators in their own right. They may even draw almost as much profit from juggling in the stock and foreign-exchange markets as from selling products. They are not juniors. For example, when Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation nearly went bust in 1990-1, its \$2.3 billion of short-term debt was found to be spread round 146 financial institutions in ten currencies. News Corporation did have to sell or close newspapers on the banks' instructions, but outside that immediate crisis plainly no bank was in a position to control its ventures¹⁶.

Finally, as Marx wrote, "interest is a relationship between two capitalists, not between capitalist and labourer"¹⁷. Whatever the clashes between those capitalists, they are at one against the workers. Both banker and industrial boss are organic parts of the same class. In Marx's day many socialists, like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon for example, thought that the evils of capitalism could be fixed up, and fair exchange of the products of labour organised, by abolishing interest. Marx criticised their view scathingly and at length: they were going for one of the organic symptoms of capitalism, rather than its root causes.

There is no selective amputation of financial power that can reduce capitalism from today's era of free-flowing international finance, high unemployment, welfare cuts, and chopped-down democracy, back to the old relative tranquillity of the 1950s and '60s. We must take our enemy as we find it, and the way to fight it is, as always, the class struggle.

Footnotes

- 1 Sidney Homer, *A History of Interest Rates*, Rutgers UP, New Brunswick NJ 1977, pp. 207, 378, 410, 429. I oversimplify drastically. At any time there are many interest rates, depending on who is lending to whom for how long; and, for example, short-term interest rates and long-term interest rates do not always move in parallel.
- 2 OECD, *International Capital Market Statistics 1950-1995*, OECD, Paris 1996.
- 3 Marjorie Deane and Robert Pringle, *The Central Banks*, Hamish Hamilton, London 1994, p.189.
- 4 Alain Lipietz, *The Enchanted World: Inflation, Credit and the World Crisis*, Verso, London 1985, p.97.
- 5 Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, Progress, Moscow 1959, p.572.
- 6 *Capital* Volume 3, chapter 34 and elsewhere.
- 7 *ibid*, p.516.
- 8 Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-70*, p.37.
- 9 Quoted in Homer, *op.cit.* p.3-4.
- 10 Marx, too, saw interest rates generally drifting downwards, though he observed this as an empirical fact rather than a great historical law: *Capital* volume 3, p.359, 361. Rudolf Hilferding, in his book *Finance Capital* (p.264, 476), reckoned that interest rates stayed steady, thus increasing the banks' share of surplus value as the overall gross rate of profit tended downwards: in fact, German interest rates were pretty steady around 4.5% from about 1819 to the First World War.
- 11 Lending at interest to consumers, rather than producers (usury), existed long before capitalism; and probably a workers' government developing socialism, but still using money, would still use interest on loans. To recognise these facts is very different from believing in "time preference" — or "reward of abstinence", or "reward of waiting", as it has also been called — as the basic cause, rooted in human nature, for property income.
- 12 *Capital* volume 3 p.356, 363. Lipietz, *op.cit.*, p.47.
- 13 The French Marxist group Lutte Ouvrière makes this idea of a diversion of resources into speculation rather than production the basis of its whole account of "the crisis" since the 1970s.
- 14 *Capital* volume 3 p.470.
- 15 *Ibid* p.465.
- 16 William Shawcross, *Rupert Murdoch: ringmaster of the information circus*, Pan, London 1993, pp.8-18, 524-538.
- 17 *Capital* volume 3, p.382.

The July crisis 1972 part 2

General strike against the Tories?

By Alan McArthur

WORKERS' Liberty 41 carried an account of the events leading to the jailing of the Pentonville Five in July 1972, and of the working-class movement that freed them. In part two the lessons are drawn out for the left.

THE fight against the Industrial Relations Act which culminated in the jailing and then release of the Pentonville Five was the most significant political industrial battle which had faced the British working class since 1926.

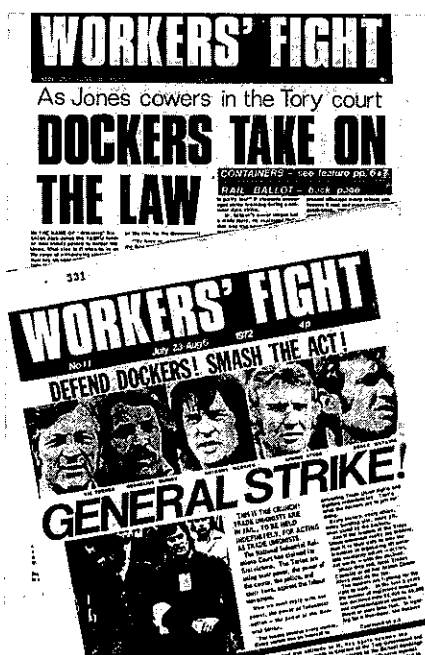
The Act and the National Industrial Relations Court staggered on after July '72 — as did Heath's government, waiting to be finished off by the miners — until 1974, when they were repealed by the incoming Labour Government. Had it not been for the miners' strike of 1973-4 and the narrow election victory of February 1974 — neither of which could be predicted in July 1972 — the Tories may well have been able to dig in and impose the Act over time.

But it could have been decisively beaten. A General Strike could have smashed the Act and opened up the possibility of much more.

It is the job of revolutionaries to understand the level and tempo of the workers' movement at all times, and to raise demands that push things forward, enable the movement and the class to raise itself up to the next link on the chain of development. That is what a General Strike with the specific aim of defeating the IRA, sufficiently propagandised and prepared for in the preceding months, could have done in July '72.

General Strike here is not to be understood, for example, in line with the classical Bolshevik model of the General Strike as led by revolutionaries and leading to an armed insurrection. General Strike is not a synonym for revolution. It is not to be understood just in terms of the British experience of 1926, either, but in terms of the less one-sided international experience of the General Strike, such as the French General Strikes of 1936 and 1968.

Neither is the General Strike to be seen as a panacea, a knee jerk catch-all solution to this (or any other) immediate situation — or as the only weapon or the only strat-

As *Workers' Fight* saw it

egy. The call for a General Strike was not counterposed to the fight for other forms of action, or calling on Labour to commit itself to repealing the Act, or raising the call to Kick out the Tories. On their own, however, those demands could be counterposed to immediate action. The call was the most powerful and effective weapon available, and came out of the logic of the struggle. As France '68 had proved, there is not necessarily any rigid or structured check-list of steps to the General Strike.

Workers' Fight (forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) argued for a General Strike as a weapon for an immediate goal: a General Strike to Smash the Act. This was a demand both on the leadership and for immediate rank and file action, for a General Strike from below. It did not put the ball in the bureaucrats' court. It was an immediately comprehensible agitational demand.

Clearly this agitation had to be coupled with clarifying the associated issues — such as the history of the General Strike and the political implications of full-scale industrial action. A General Strike is open-ended, with a multitude of possible conclusions and implications. Any such confrontation — even as a tactical weapon for a limited goal

— would raise the question of who rules in society. Revolutionaries had to talk about the role of the state and the law.

A General Strike can lead to all-out political confrontation with the ruling class, and at very least will counterpose new or "irregular" forms of working class organisation to the state. Revolutionaries needed to prepare the ground for our own intervention into the strike, to start to put the case for the possibility of consciously counterposing working class to bourgeois power, of making actual revolution a possibility.

The call for a General Strike was realistic. As soon as the IRB was announced — when it existed only on paper — the resistance was great, though not from the leaders of the TUC or the Labour Party. For their Day of Action on January 12 1971, the TUC advocated only public meetings on the Bill outside working hours. Yet, half a million workers took strike action anyway. In Coventry, 20,000 marched from the car factories and into the town; 10,000 struck in Liverpool, 6,000 in Luton, and so on right across Britain.

The TUC General Council never had a positive, active strategy to defeat the Act. Their policy was one only of non-cooperation. They refused to recognise or attend the NIRC (although that changed as soon as the T&G was fined) and expelled from the TUC unions that registered under the Act. Not forgetting, of course, that in March '71 they went so far as to release a record — General Secretary Vic Feather on one side, a song against the Industrial Relations Bill on the other!

The Labour Party committed itself to repealing the Act. Harold Wilson spoke alongside Vic Feather at an Albert Hall rally. Labour MPs disrupted parliament as Heath's Tories had the Bill bounced through the committees and the Commons with little chance to debate or amend it. However, like the TUC leaders, the Labour leaders condemned the unofficial strikes, and they made no attempt to build or join a real movement against the Bill.

Yet the pressure from below was constantly re-emerging. The TUC's token Sunday afternoon march against the Bill in February '71 became the biggest political

demonstration of the century, 140,000 people joining the seven mile long march as it went through London. On March 1 a one-day stoppage against the Bill by the the AUEW, the engineers' union, closed engineering and car plants, and shipyards. An incredible three million struck on March 18, the day of the TUC's Special Congress on the Bill...

And so on... The level of militancy against the Act was immense. Properly harnessed it could have undoubtedly smashed the Act. And the militancy only grew. 1972 saw major action by railway workers and in the building industry, as well as on the docks: the state-ordered,

bluff-calling June 1 strike ballot on the railways returned a five-to-one vote to strike, forcing the Tories to up their absolutely final pay offer once again. And, of course, it saw the miners' strike that smashed Heath's seven per cent pay norm, and left the government utterly and humiliatingly defeated at Saltley coke depot, Birmingham, in February.

The miners' strike greatly weakened the government. Much attention (and troops) were turned to Ireland. All that Heath had in his favour was the vacillation of the trade union leaders, who had all the while been enjoying chats with Heath and the CBI on what to do about the econ-

omy. The Tories played their trump card with the £55,000 fines on the T&G. The trade union leaders could try to ignore the NIRC; it wasn't going to ignore them. The Act no longer just existed on paper — and the bureaucrats were challenged by Heath to put up or shut up. They shut up, ended non-cooperation and turned up to the NIRC.

But rank and file workers would not accept this betrayal. They freed the Pentonville Five, dragging their "leaders" behind them. Given the choice of obeying the Tories' laws and hoping a future Labour Government would repeal the Act or fighting here and now, they chose to fight. Taken to its highest level — the General Strike — that direct action would have at the very least ripped up the Act and cripplingly defeated the government. The level of militancy made it not only possible but the logic of the actual on-going struggle.

The farce of the Official Solicitor's two entrances to the public stage had demystified the law, exposing the bosses' class interest that lies behind it. Local official and unofficial bodies that could call and organise action already existed in many places, albeit often in embryonic form or dominated to varying degrees by the Communist Party. There could have been a General Strike to Smash the Act.

The front page of the May 1 *Workers' Fight* called for a General Strike. The paper continued its propaganda for the strike in the lead-up to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of, the jailing of the Pentonville Five. But *Workers' Fight* was a very small organisation that could achieve very little immediately on its own.

How would the strike come about? By arguing in the union structures for an offensive against the Act, branches calling for an emergency TUC Congress, and calling on the TUC leaders actually to lead a fight. All the while militants and socialists could have linked up bodies like the stewards' committees to make a network of workers' committees and organisations to co-ordinate action from below.

Enough people at the start of that chain — all or most of the forces of the left, for example — and the impetus would have spread through the class and been multiplied very quickly. Being a small revolutionary organisation means that, even when right, you may be able to have little direct influence. Being much larger but consistently wrong is useless. If the revolutionaries had been building their organisations in, rather than on the fringes of, the labour movement, 1972 could have seen very much more than one of the greatest and most inspiring movements ever of the working class in Britain.

The failure of the left

By Martin Thomas

THE call for a General Strike was first raised in 1971 by the Socialist Labour League, which was then the biggest group on the revolutionary left, though very sectarian and well on the way to craziness. The way the SLL raised the call discredited it for many Marxists. The SLL was demagogically ultra-left, constantly claiming that capitalism was in its final crisis and that the workers were on the boil for revolutionary action.

Its call was for a General Strike to kick out the Tory Government and replace it with a Labour Government pledged to socialist policies, which made no sense. A General Strike is not a tool for winning elections. To tie a General Strike to such an aim was to assist in advance the ruling-class option of demobilising a full-scale or potentially revolutionary General Strike by calling an election.

The idea of a General Strike had been out of circulation in Britain for nearly half a century. The only classic Marxist text on the subject readily available in 1971 was a comment by Trotsky which seemed to imply that a call for a General Strike was irresponsible unless made by a strong revolutionary party ready and able to take matters forward from the General Strike straight to a revolution. The first big strikes under the Tory Government — by power workers and postal workers — had ended in defeat.

Yet the General Strike call struck a chord with many workers who were neither ultra-lefts nor demagogues.

Other left groups started to raise it, though without much clarity. The *Workers' Fight* group was thrown into a sharp internal debate on the issue, and in July 1971 a large minority split away because they opposed the majority's support for a General Strike call.

Other groups had problems with it too. In mid-1972 the SWP (then called IS) dithered, would not call for a General Strike until after the TUC had set a one-day General Strike and the dockers had been released, then explained that the General Strike call was "propaganda, not agitation", meaning that it was for general shouting, not action. The IMG (now *Socialist Outlook* and other splinters) held that all "calls to action", even general strikes, were "administrative" matters unworthy of Marxists, who should instead explain a rounded view of the general issues.

The Tories' Industrial Relations Act survived July 1972, and it need not have done. The Tory government and the shilly-shallying leadership of the trade unions and the Labour Party also survived. If the strikes of July 1972 had been escalated to a full general strike to smash the Industrial Relations Act, then those pillars of British bourgeois society would not have been swept away at one blow, but they would have come out weakened and facing a mass movement of workers full of new ideas of their own power and strengthened by links made in the strike. We could have seen that in 1972 — if the revolutionary left had been better prepared.

Union also to blame

IT seems to me that Paul Cooper [‘How not to lead a strike’, WZ41] in his haste to pin the blame for the defeat of the Southwark strike on the SWP completely fails to put the leadership of NATFHE in the frame.

Wasn't it they who pulled the plug on the dispute by refusing to pay sustentation, despite a vote at conference for £50 per day? Isn't it also the fact that their refusal to challenge the trade union laws and luke-warmness about strike action meant that the dispute wasn't spread to other inner London colleges? It would have been quite impossible for ELS to organise scabbing had that occurred.

Almost all the publicity I received came from the strike committee itself. NATFHE's leadership did not seriously mobilise people for the demonstration at Southwark or organise the fundraising effort which kept the strike going for so long.

As a small union in the ‘Cinderella’ sector of education, NATFHE has real problems at the moment. Management provocation is intense and branches such as Accrington were unable to respond with strike action even when their secretary, NEC member Pat Walsh, was sacked last Christmas.

Ideally, I would regard it as unwise tactics for branches to engage in local disputes in the current climate. But what exactly are you supposed to do if members are victimised, as happened to Chris Ryan at Southwark? Or if a college announces a section is closing, or agency staff are introduced on pay of £5 an hour less than established teachers?

Certainly you could make criticisms of the SWP's role in the union — despite being in a position to do so, they have failed to build a serious rank and file opposition. Their work in the union consists of sporadic forays rather than consistently building a network of activists. This is in line with the policy of the national organisation which is to project the party first and foremost, rather than build semi-permanent union oppositions which link party and non-party people.

Like a lot of current disputes, such as Liverpool dockers, Magnet and Hillingdon hospital, the Southwark strike was a local issue which attracted widespread support both inside and outside the union. People have demonstrated, donated and rallied in support of these disputes, but they have not been able to alter the balance of forces ranged against trade unions. In this respect I agree with Paul Cooper's final statement about the need for “broad campaigns which attempt to unite the labour movement”. Such campaigns will of course need a determined fight against the union bureaucrats like Monks, Bickerstaffe and Morris and their buddies in the leadership of NATFHE.

John Kreeger, Branch Secretary
Weald College and Outer London Region
Executive NATFHE [personal capacity]

New Australian Labour Party?

AS Bob Leach says, the ALP has always been liberal rather than socialist, and the recent Hawke/Keating governments delivered more pain than gain to the ALP's working class supporters. Yet, explicitly socialist groups in Australia have remained small and ineffective. Why?

Bob Leach's answer to this question appears to be that the socialist groups have based themselves on Leninist politics, instead of accepting the framework of parliamentary democracy. This answer cannot be easily dismissed. A large part of the problem with the

revolutionary groups is their interpretation of Leninism, which sees parliamentary democracy as nothing but a fraud.

Accordingly, the New Labour Party is a social democratic (not revolutionary socialist) group. However, we then have another problem: what is wrong with the ALP? Bob Hawke wanted nothing more than to be loved by everybody; he would have delivered more benefits to workers if he had thought this could be done. What little he did deliver was (in his opinion) the best that could be done, given the imperative to internationalise the economy.

The ALP Left was ineffective because they had no viable alternative to the Hawke/Keating strategy. They wanted to continue to shelter the Australian economy behind a tariff wall, and to bargain with the capitalists for a better slice of the national cake. They had no convincing answer to the argument that a sheltered economy would stagnate, and there would be a smaller cake to share. Bob Leach offers a “new protectionism”. He is quite right to oppose the provisions of GATT which disallow trade discrimination against environmentally damaging production methods, or against failure to meet minimum labour standards. However, these things should be opposed irrespective of whether Australian or overseas firms are the perpetrators. It is quite misleading to present the issue as “protectionism”.

Thus it is not clear if New Labour has any policies that could not be argued for within the ALP. Indeed, the issue of labour standards has been raised far more clearly by Gough Whitlam. In a recent speech, reported in *Labour Herald*, Whitlam said: “We must never accept the idea that the internationalisation of the economy forces us to accept lower industrial standards. On the contrary, the internationalisation of the economy is the strongest argument for the internationalisation of industrial standards. The instruments for such a course are already in our hands. The International Labour Organisation conventions provide us with the best possible method of ensuring that international best practice in industrial affairs is applied throughout Australia”.

This proposal to ratify and vigorously enforce ILO conventions will no doubt be met with a storm of objections on the grounds that “Australian jobs will be lost”. The labour movement needs a strategy to oppose a “strike” by capital. Public ownership is part of the answer, so is solidarity with actions to enforce ILO conventions in other countries. But it is difficult to see how protectionism helps. It simply isn't true that only nasty foreign capitalists will resist legislation to raise labour standards.

Instead of offering a clear alternative to “state liberalism”, Bob Leach's New Labour offers a variant of it. Then, perversely, he assumes that what he has to say is far too “advanced” for rank and file ALP members to comprehend, and gives up on the ALP. Perhaps something like the New Zealand New Labour Party might have been formed here in 1989. But if the opportunity was there, it has been well and truly missed. The only conclusion Bob Leach seems to have drawn from this experience is that New Labour should proscribe other left-wing groups — just like the ALP!

Roger Clarke

SWP thuggery

This letter was sent to the SWP's executive committee. I am still awaiting a reply.

I WRITE concerning an attempt by some of your members to break up a fringe meeting our comrades organised at your recent Marxism '97

event (5pm, Sunday 6 July) to promote the Free Trade Unions conference being hosted on 19 July by Liverpool City UNISON and the Welfare State Network.

I will not waste my time in complaining about things that are now traditional at your Marxism events: swearing, bureaucratic messing about (including threats to set the police on socialist staffing stalls outside), attempts to stop our people from selling papers or handing out leaflets, carving up the sessions in the most heavy-handed manner. I assume you not only condone this sort of thing, but actively encourage and organise it.

But Ian Mitchell and Yunis Baksh went beyond what has become “normal” for your organisation and had a good go at breaking up our fringe meeting. They behaved like nutters — Mitchell in particular appeared to have lost control of himself.

After the main speakers had ended their contributions, Mitchell and others stood up, started shouting and refused to accept the right of the chair to organise the discussion. They were either attempting to make the meeting so unpleasant that the SWP members there would leave, or to force us to close the meeting down. Eventually they left, having largely failed: the remaining SWP members, to their credit, then denounced their behaviour.

Their five minutes of ranting was captured on video, tending to suggest they are not only thugs, but that they are also more than a bit dim.

You may remember that these two idiots were responsible for one of the physical attacks on our comrades during Marxism '93. I understand they are quite senior in your organisation — if they are that says quite a lot about your “party”.

The point of this letter: given their lunatic behaviour I can quite imagine Mitchell and Baksh attacking our members again. Now, I guess you don't give a damn about any of this. You may however take notice of this: we are sending a copy of the video of these idiots in action to all the major UNISON branches.

So, why don't you sort them out and get them to calm down? Appeals like this have fallen on deaf ears in the past, so I will add: why don't you sort yourselves out?

Mark Osborn

Scots nationalism

The Mass in Latin?

AT the outset of his non-review of my most recent book *The Very Bastards of Creation: A Scottish-International Radicalism: A Biographical History 1707-1995*, a strange “reviewer” writing under the fictitious name of Patrick Avakuum (*Workers' Liberty* 40) introduces the spectre of the Israel-Arab Six Day War of 1967 in order to display his dubious polemical “ability” to rubbish both me and the Scottish national question. By consciously trying to raise the polemical temperature and by expressing his preference for Brit heat rather than socialist international light, he is not even aware of his own muddled-headedness. Defending Israel's right to exist as an imperialist State, Avakuum then denies Scotland's historical identity as a nation during the last 300 years without acknowledging the role of British/English imperialism in 1707.

To grasp the particular “socialist” mentality behind the fictitious review — or was it just the reviewer's name that was fictitious? — of my book *The Very Bastards of Creation*, I am forced to cast my mind back to Ignazio Silone's novel *Midnight in the Century*. In his superior capacity of what Silone called one of “the guardian angels of the new mythology and the guardian angels whose task is to lead the believers along the right path to orthodoxy and to protect them” from heresy — and too



Megan's Law no answer

THE demand for "Megan's Law" — named after the American girl murdered by a known sex offender who moved into her neighbourhood — is a call for the names and addresses of convicted child abusers to be circulated around the communities in which they live. Its motivation is entirely understandable, but I believe that this demand is mistaken.

It is certain that if the names of convicted child abusers were published, unacceptable vigilante action would follow. A released offender could easily be the target of violent attack once his/her name is known. Should a local child be attacked, it is highly likely that the "local abuser" will be blamed and persecuted, even if there is no evidence or indication that s/he attacked the child. If s/he were not responsible for the attack, the real attacker would have a big headstart in escaping justice, and there would be sure consequences for the accused person's safety and behaviour (*Prime Suspect* comes to mind).

The suggested law will be perceived by some as an invitation to "deal with" the named abuser. How long before some people decide to "deal with" perceived potential abusers who do not appear on any list? In a recent incident in Hackney, a man was attacked because someone had spread a rumour that he was a child abuser. There have been other similar incidents lately: it is no coincidence that this accompanies public discussion of naming child sex offenders.

But if someone living in the community is a threat to children, isn't the solution to name him/her publicly? No — they should not be living in the community, able to pose a threat to children.

There is a big problem with the judicial system and the nature of sentencing. A judge cannot possibly know at the time of passing sentence precisely how long it will be until an offender is ready for release. Although the parole system gives some flexibility, the sentencing set-up inevitably means that there are people in prison who no longer need to be there, and people released who are very likely to reoffend. This is the failing of a system geared to punishment rather than reform.

The judicial system should be able to deal with people who have abused children in a different way — using whatever treatment is possible and effective, and a release date decided at the appropriate time by the informed opinions of those who can best judge, not by the expiry of a pre-set time-span.

The probation service should monitor convicted abusers after their release and, if it is considered necessary, release should include conditions. These could include requirements that the person does not live or work within a certain radius of any school; cannot be employed in certain jobs; must not share accommodation with children; continues appropriate therapy.

If an offender would remain, with all this in place, a real threat to children, then it is in the interests of both the potential child victims and the potential abuser that s/he be kept in custody rather than released into the community wearing a label marked "lynch me".

There are many failings in our social and political conditions that point to other measures that can — and must — be taken. Social Services are starved of money, social workers overstretched and unable to properly look out for kids' well-being. Refuges for women and children fleeing abuse wage a continuous struggle to raise funds and

keep providing their vital service. Crowded classrooms make it impossible for teachers to give children the attention they need. More social care for youngsters — playschemes, nurseries, etc. — would help develop their confidence and bring them into contact both with other children and with adults other than their parents (who are, after all, their most likely potential abusers). More rights for children in many areas of their lives — and honest sex education with no parental opt out — could make children less vulnerable to abuse.

And although explaining the causes of child abuse is a complex task beyond the scope of this article, those causes must be tackled. What makes some people so horribly abuse the power they have over kids? How can we break the cycle of abuse that turns many victims into perpetrators? What prevents some adults being able to form meaningful, consensual relationships with other adults?

Ignoring social factors and blaming crime on individual psychopathology — defining every abusive act as the doing of a naturally, unchangeable 'evil' person — puts up a big obstacle to tackling the prevalence of abuse.

The killing of Jamie Bulger was a tragedy. A second tragedy is that the hurt, anger and outrage it caused has been focused into a crusade to keep Jon Venables and Robert Thompson locked up for life, instead of asking: how has our society become so brutalised that two 10 year olds kill a toddler?

Action is needed to protect children from abuse. In deciding what that action should be, it is important not to simply pick the "toughest" option to prove how strongly we feel about the deplorable crime of child abuse, but to work out what action will be effective. It is a deeply sad comment to have to make, but our children must be made aware of the potential threat to their safety not simply from one named individual, but from any stranger — since most children who are abused suffer at the hands of someone they know — from their own family and acquaintances. I do not believe that publishing the names and addresses of convicted child abusers after their release would be effective in protecting children. The proposal from the government has not conceded to demands to publish names of all such offenders. A register will be kept and individuals' details published in "exceptional circumstances". I cannot imagine what exceptional circumstances would make this measure more effective than other measures proposed in this article.

A postscript. Counted amongst convicted "sex offenders" are people who have abused no one. The 17 year old who slept with a 15 year old, the man who had sex with a 17 year old man, the 34 year old woman who eloped with a 14 year old youth. Consenting sex should not be a crime, because a crime should have a victim. Until such time as the law ceases to make criminals of such people, their names must never appear on lists alongside convicted abusers.

Janine Booth

Whose right to hunt?

BOB Yates [WL41] says that to ban fox hunting would be unjust as it would discriminate against one particular cruel sport. He goes on to say that while he would never go hunting himself he sees no reason why we should prevent others from doing so, as human beings have a 'right' to do things even if they are disapproved of by the majority in society.

There is some confusing logic at work here.



Those who support fox hunting often argue that the Labour Party's policy of support for a ban is based on class hatred. For one thing, if this were true it would make it unique among Labour's current policies. For another, there is a historical element missing from the pro-hunt lobby's arguments.

They are quite correct to say that the recreational cruelty of the aristocracy and that of the rural working class have been treated differently. However, the comparison should not be between hunting and fishing (both of which are, at least to some extent, bourgeois pastimes — think of salmon fishing), but between hunting and, say, badger-baiting. Country sports that were cheap to participate in, and therefore predominantly working class, were outlawed as part of the 'civilising' process which has gone on over the past two centuries: bear-baiting, cock-fighting, badger-baiting, dog-fighting — all are now against the law. Hunting is the odd one out, and has survived only because hunts are crowded with judges, politicians and the well-to-do. If Bob Yates really wants to defend the right of people to indulge in cruel sports, he should be campaigning for the legalisation of badger-baiting and dog-fighting.

This brings me to the idea that human beings have a "right" to hunt. It should not take much argument, in a Marxist magazine, to dispel the notion that human beings have any "rights" beyond the rights bestowed in the context of the society they live in. If workers in 20th century Britain do not even have the right to a job, or a decent home (which they clearly don't), then how on earth can they be said to have a right to go hunting? Where, for example, does an unemployed bricklayer get the horse from?

Bob Yates compares hunting to eating meat — and misses the point that eating is not something done purely for entertainment, as hunting is. The defence of hunting that it is good for the environment is now pretty much an exploded myth: a recent meeting of the NFU in Leicestershire — the hunting county — when pushed to come up with evidence to support this view could offer only the fact that hunt workers will remove dead livestock from farm land used by the hunt, as a "favour" to landowners who give the hunt access. Is this really the best they can do?

Meat-eating may well be uncivilised, and a future society may well decide not to do it. But to argue that because a majority in 1990s Britain eat meat, we cannot restrict other aspects of cruelty to animals is to advocate a religious rather than a materialist approach: "Let he who is without sin..."

Bob says that rather than supporting an end to fox-hunting, we should support the campaign for public access to the great private estates. But these are not contradictory goals. A civilised society would have neither the mindless cruelty nor private ownership of land. By all means campaign for the right to roam the countryside in peace, but let the foxes roam in peace too.

Nick Holden

cowardly to write under his own name — the fictitious Patrick Avakuum unwittingly helps to rubbish the *Hibertian* socialism that some of us have invested our lives in.

WHEN Silone published his review of Serge's novel in *Mass and Wert* at the beginning of 1940 under the title of "The Mass in Latin", Silone insisted on unpalatable truths and the need to highlight the fact that "Serge's dissidents" were reflecting "the image of that very society which they allegedly want to destroy". Furthermore, it strikes me as curious and interesting that no English or American socialist magazine has ever published a translation of Silone's review of Serge's novel. With an eternal wisdom that is particularly applicable to the Toy town British imperialist "Bolsheviks" like Avakuum, Silone criticised the practitioners of an amoral left-wing sectarianism: "But unfortunately, though they possess the spirit of sacrifice, they lack the daring and the creative intuition of the pioneers, which are necessary if one wants to lead the people into the future. They are nothing but Epigones, and only the initiated can understand the formulas of their secret liturgy."

It is probably futile to protest against Avakuum's irrational, vicious, nasty, opportunist, amoral and *ahistorical* caricature of the arguments in my book, and I am conscious of swimming against the dominant "socialist" current of our time. But in a time of reaction and sloth such as Silone faced in 1940, the practitioners of "The Mass in Latin" (as distinct from the *vernacular* of working people) have always been comparable to, in Silone's words, "the first Christians who believed that God's Kingdom on earth must come here and how". And in criticising the stultified "socialist" tradition now personified by Patrick Avakuum and all those opposed to real workers' liberty, Silone said: "It is always a sign of a great weakness of any system of ideas, if there is an obvious contradiction between it and the practical stance of its adherents, if it does not succeed in making their sacrifices, their doubts, their defeats comprehensible. Luckily human beings are often worth more than the phrases which they have been taught".

Avakuum is, of course, theoretically incapable of even beginning to explain nationalism from a socialist viewpoint, and he *has* to rubbish my contribution to historical scholarship and humane learning. Ignoring the vast literature on the historical relationship between capitalism, nationalism and the struggle for socialist internationalism, *Workers' Liberty's* chief ideological policeman is not even aware of classics such as *Nationalism and the Class Struggle* (1905) by Ber Borochov and *Confound the Wise* (1942) by Nicolas Calas. If Avakuum would make the effort to cast off his inherited authoritarian and elitist *certainty* of knowing everything without taking the trouble to do research, perhaps he might eventually grasp the significance of Borochov's comment that: "Nationalism, therefore, first became manifest not in the external politics of the ruling class, but in the internal struggle of the oppressed classes. Nationalism, in the present sense of the word, was carried over to the sphere of external politics only later, when the national question made its full appearance".

Besides, in his brilliant essay titled "Towards a Socialist Theory of Nationalism", Shlomo Avineri wrote: "It [the orthodox Marxist theory of nationalism] left a problematic heritage to the socialist movement, with a veritable 'black hole' where a confrontation with one of the most potent social and political forces of the 19th and 20th centuries should have been". Yet, in spite of the theoretical guidance provided by Borochov's insights into nationalism and socialism after the deaths of Marx and Engels, for much of his adult life Marx saw nationalism, in the words of Avineri, "as a modern superstructural expression of the bourgeois need

for larger markets and territorial consolidation".

I have been forced to make such general theoretical points simply because Avakuum has yet again treated his long-suffering readers to his version of "The Mass in Latin" — sorry, his exclusive "Marxist" theory of nationalism in the modern world — without once examining the careful arguments in *The Very Bastards of Creation*. However, when your readers are presented with Patrick Avakuum's theorised version of Scottish history, in which certain "Marxist" concepts become a substitute for a knowledge of the historical facts, I am almost rendered speechless. Ignoring my research and documentation to the contrary, he insists that "You would have to do great violence to history — or identify the 18th- and 19th-century Gaelic Highlands with mainstream Scotland, which is the same thing — to classify Scotland as an oppressed nation which needs separation to achieve liberation. Scotland has, on the contrary, been the partner in everything — including the crimes — the British Empire has done in the last 300 years". (Incidentally, though I have no desire to evoke the spirit or mentality of "The Mass in Latin", perhaps Avakuum should ponder what Leon Trotsky said about the Scottish national question in his book *Whither England?* (1925)! Besides, in his pamphlet on the Jewish question, the "Old Man" confessed that the experience of fascism had destroyed his earlier optimism and had convinced him that the Jews could not be assimilated into Western societies.)

JUST as I was reading Avakuum's *ahistorical* musings in which he displayed his very crude and insensitive indifference to the suppression of the two 18th- and 19th-century Scottish languages, Gaelic and "Lallans", I received a letter from Laurens Otter in which he mentioned Angus Calder's "thesis that English oppression of the Celts in these islands was a rehearsal for the wider imperialist atrocities". Of course, if I pushed Avakuum too far theoretically, I am sure that the Toy town "Bolshevik" who disapproves of the 1930s nationalist Pan-African advocacy of CLR James inside the English socialist movement would endorse the Duke of Cumberland's imperialist butchery at Culloden in 1746.

Though he is indeed one of Silone's Epigones — and one of those who substitute religious faith for rational debate — in his passionate denial of the reality of Scotland's historic oppression, our Patrick identifies with the very English imperialist tradition of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, GDH Cole, Raymond Postgate and the Brits' *Labourism*. (This was the same imperialist Left which condemned the revolts of Africans and African Americans.) Moreover, in the 1930s socialist classic *The Common People* (1938), GDH Cole and Raymond Postgate defended "Butcher" Cumberland's brutal atrocities at Culloden as a significant landmark in the development of British capitalism. Like the Black people in the 1930s West Indies who, in the words of Sylvia Winter, "represented the zero term of culture", so Cole and Postgate justified the mass slaughter of Highland peasants in 1746 because their "primitive" and "backward" society — a society they traced back to "the apes" — stood in the way of a *civilised* capitalist mode of production.

Moreover, in Avakuum's elitist, authoritarian and *totalitarian* thought-world, there is no room for him to acknowledge the introductory chapter of *The Very Bastards of Creation* in which the major conceptual problems at the heart of interpreting modern Scottish history from a socialist standpoint were identified and discussed. Unable to discuss the book in his studiously "clever" non-review for heresy-hunters — the book is only mentioned in his last paragraph — he cannot admit to the Scots' greater and more principled opposition to British imperialism from the advent of the Friends of the People, Thomas Muir of Huntershill and James

Thomson Callender in the 1790s right through to our own times.

Instead of celebrating the Radical Revolt — or *Scottish* Insurrection — of 1819-20, Avakuum *pretends* that it did not exist. And yet it was a time when significant numbers of Scottish working men and women struggled in solidarity with their counterparts in England and France and shed their blood to create a Scottish Republic. Indeed, as the gifted Scottish radical poet George Donald wrote in 1820:

"By royalty deserted, our Parliament defeated, // Our nation thus converted, to a province with decay // While Scotsmen a' disdainin', in their native place remainin' // To Lunon with their siller will hie them away."

Moreover, Avakuum will not face up to the reality around him, whether past or present, and he is of no use to a socialist movement weakened by New Labour's success in lowering democratic consciousness. But in the light of his *ahistorical* assertion that Scotland was not an oppressed nation in the last century, I challenge him to explain why, in the words of Thomas Johnston, author of *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, "Neilston musicians [were] arrested for playing 'Scots' Wha Hae' at a meeting at Meikleriggs" during "The Scottish Insurrection of 1820"?

When he was on the more familiar historiographic territory of the 19th and 20th centuries, I would have expected our ideological cop to have come up with more convincing arguments. However, for some inexplicable reason Avakuum cannot acknowledge the conflict in either the Social Democratic Federation in the 1890s or in the communist movement in Great Britain in the early 1920s over the Scottish national question. The former conflict played a role in persuading most of the Scottish Marxists in the SDF to break away to form the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party. Furthermore, even before John Maclean formed the Scottish Workers' Republican Party in 1923, a minority of Marxists in the early communist movement argued for national independence. For anyone struggling to build or rebuild a socialist movement in the Athens of the North in the late 20th century, an awareness of the real history of Scottish-International radicals and socialists who have grappled with the Scottish national question will eventually break through the imperialistic Brit Left's censorship and suppression.

THE struggle to interpret the world in a socialist way — and it is, as Silone understood, a *real* struggle — is a part of the process of changing it. Therefore, totalitarian modes of thought are as useless as learning by rote or by repeating "The Mass in Latin". And how else can one describe Avakuum's mentality when he offers his readers the superior "wisdom" that socialists in Scotland in 1997 should respond to the mass democratic agitation for Scottish self-government by saying "If they want it, let them have it". If Avakuum's portrait — really a caricature — of an implicitly *racist* Scottish nationalism is so obvious as he asserts without one iota of evidence, this is surely the equivalent of telling English workers that "If they want fascism, they [too] can have it".

What is really frightening is that only ruling classes have the power, and the imperialist mentality behind that power, to assume they are capable of granting freedom or self-government to those who demand it. How such attitudes can be reconciled with basic socialist or democratic principles is beyond my understanding! Fortunately, I belong to the admittedly dwindling and democratic — and militant — socialist tradition of Ignazio Silone, CLR James and those who devoted their fruitful lives to the assumption that the function of a critical socialist is to "turn answers into questions".

James D Young

The root idea of socialism

By Max Shachtman

MARXIAN socialism is distinguished from all the others, not in the fact that it holds to the so-called labour theory of value, and not even in the fact that it developed the ideas of dialectical materialism, and not even in the fact that it participates in and prosecutes the class struggle. Its fundamental and irreconcilable difference with all the others is this: Marxism is proletarian socialism.

When speaking of socialism and socialist revolution we seek "no condescending saviours", as our great battle hymn, the *International*, so ably says. We do not believe that well-wishing reformers — and there are well-wishing reformers — will solve the problems of society, let alone bring socialism.

The most profound, important and lasting thought in Marxism, the most pregnant thought in Marxism, is contained in Marx's phrase that the emancipation of the proletariat is the task of the proletariat itself. It is clearly the most revolutionary idea ever conceived, if you understand it in all of its great implications.

That is why we are in the tradition of the Paris Commune, for example, the first great attempt of the proletariat to emancipate itself. That is why we are in the tradition of the great revolution in Russia — the Bolshevik revolution — the second great attempt of the proletariat to emancipate itself. That's why we defend it from its detractors. That's why we are so passionate about it. That's why we are, if you will, so "dogmatic". We know what we are defending even if they do not always know what they are attacking.

And that is what we learn all over again from Trotskyism — what we have begun to forget, what we have begun to ignore, what we have begun to take for granted.

We learned from Trotskyism what we hold so firmly to now: There can be no socialism without the working class of the world, no socialism without the working class of Russia.

We are the living carriers and embodiment of the ideas to be learned from the Trotskyist struggle against Stalinism. We are its living teachers, for those whom we can get to listen in these days of darkness, confusion and cowardice.

We are optimistic because *that* will remain our hope in the greatest hours of adversity, while everywhere else lies pessimism. Our role is to teach Marxism, that Marxism which is proletarian socialism, Marxist politics, socialist politics. Our idea of politics boils down to this revolutionary idea — to teach the working class to rely upon itself, upon its own organisations, upon its own programme, upon its own leadership, upon its own ideas and need for democracy, and not to subordinate itself at any time to the interest, the needs, the leadership, the program, the movement, the organisation, or the ideas of any other class.

That's why we are Marxists; that's what we learned all over again in many intellectual and political battles under that peerless teacher and peerless revolutionary, Trotsky.

And we start by teaching socialists to rely upon themselves.

There is no socialism and no progress to socialism without the working class, without the working class revolution, without the working class in power, without the working class having been lifted to "political supremacy" (as Marx called it), to the "victory of democracy" (as Marx also calls it). No socialism and no advance to socialism without it! That is our rock. That is what we build the fight for the socialist future on. That is what we are unshakably committed to.

Look at what has happened — I hold them up as horrible examples — to all and sundry who have renounced this struggle after having known its meaning. They have no confidence in the social-revolutionary power of the proletariat — that is the alpha and omega of them all. One will embroider it with one colour thread and another with another, but at bottom that is it.

"We know with scientific sureness that no reaction can destroy that social force whose very conditions of existence force it into a revolutionary struggle against the conditions of its existence, the proletariat."

They have been corrupted by that most ancient of corrupt ideas: that as for the lower class, there must always be one; that the lower class must always be exploited and oppressed; that there is no other way. That's their real feeling and that's what caused their renunciation of the struggle.

They are the Stalinists in reverse. They have lost their faith in the socialist faith for that reason, and for that reason primarily and fundamentally.

They have lost their respect for the working class because for so long a period of time it can, and it has, and it does, lie dormant and stagnant and seems to be absolutely passive, immobilised in permanence. In other words, they have doomed it — this working class which has shown itself so capable of so many miracles in the past hundred and two hundred years of its struggle against the bourgeoisie and against oppression in general — doomed it to eternal servitude. That's why they are not Trotskyists; that's why they're not socialists; that's why they're not democrats; that's why they're not people with human integrity any longer.

In all of them the corrupt idea has taken sound and firm roots that the working class will always be oppressed and exploited by

someone or another — that whole theory, the whole snobbish bourgeois theory that goes back to feudalism and goes back to slavery before that: there have to be serfs, there have to be slaves, there have to be exploited workers, and the best they can hope for is that the rulers fight among themselves and that in the interstices of this fight they may be able to promote their own interests just a little bit without ever changing their exploited status.

What is this at bottom but a variety of that notorious philosophy which the Stalinoid intellectuals and apologists used to whisper to us in justification of their support of the Kremlin: "You don't mean to say that you really believe that the workers can emancipate themselves, can themselves take power?... They need a strong hand over them..."

We have nothing in common with such people and want nothing in common with such people, in all their 57 schools.

Although it is silent so often, and silent for so long, and although it is disorientated, this proletariat — today's or tomorrow's, like yesterday's — will outlast this trial as it will outlast its old leaders, and resume its iron march to socialist freedom. Our confidence in it, maintained these 25 years, is undiminished 25 years after we took up the banner of renewed faith in it and renewed willingness to learn from it, as well as to teach it what we know.

For the man who lives for himself, alone like a clod of mud in a ditch, like a solitary animal in a savage forest, 25 years of dedication to socialism is as incomprehensible as it is unendurable. But we are, thank god, not like the clods of mud, the careerists and the opportunists, the philistines of all sorts and varieties. We are people who have been intellectually and spiritually emancipated by the great philosophical and cultural revolution in thought that Marx began and Trotsky so richly expanded. We are not resigned, and know that we need not resign ourselves, to the inevitability of advancing barbarism, to the decay and disintegration of society.

We know with scientific sureness that no reaction — no matter how strong at the moment, no matter how prolonged — can destroy that social force whose very conditions of existence force it into a revolutionary struggle against the conditions of its existence, the proletariat.

We know with scientific sureness that no matter how dark and powerful reaction may be at any given time, it not only generates but regenerates its gravedigger — that same proletariat, the only social force which class society has endowed with infinite capacity for recuperation from temporary defeat.

Extracted from Max Shachtman's speech on the 25th anniversary of American Trotskyism (1953).

IS: Historiography and mythology¹

By Sean Matgamna

ERIC Hobsbawm somewhere discusses one of the oddest conundrums in labour historiography, one paralleled now in the historiography of IS/SWP: the 20th century reputation of the Fabian Society as far-sighted pioneers of independent labour representation — the gap between what was and what is afterwards widely accepted as having been. The facts flatly contradicted the Fabians' reputation. They *opposed* independent working-class politics for as long as they could, pursuing a policy of 'permeating' the Liberal Party with ideas about state and municipal enterprise. They 'come in' late to the movement for a Labour Party. Yet, by the time the Party was a force in national politics, their reputation as the vindicated pioneers was enormous. How come? Many Fabians were journalists and writers, and they "permeated" and shaped much of the subsequent historiography.

The gap between the *Socialist Review/International Socialists* [SR/IS] group's 'posthumous' reputation and the facts of their history is of the same magnitude. I think it owes much to the same sort of cause. Former ISers write, reminisce, rationalise, romanticise, retrospectively select and reconstruct. From Gus MacDonald, who edited the youth paper *Young Guard* in the '60s and is now head of Scotland's commercial TV network, downwards (or upwards), such people are extremely numerous in the media. Many who have moved on politically but remain 'left' tend to glorify IS — themselves when young — in retrospect, clinging to the self-image they once had, even when they feel obliged to add criticism of what it has become — that is, vindicate what they themselves now are.

The SWP itself has over decades worked at honing and polishing and refining, and bowdlerising, to create a heroic myth of its own origin and early glories. And why not? What, as the cynical Stalinist once asked, is history after all but current politics and current organisational needs read backwards?

But the revolutionary movement has to be the true and full memory of the class. If history is not recorded accurately, then we cannot learn the lessons of our own experience, and the experience of the movement. We cannot develop. Awareness, intelligence, capacity to integrate experience declines. The experience of the Healyites here is a grim warning for the SWP too. By falsifying, and then again falsifying, at every turn, the SLL rendered themselves incapable of learning from their own history. It was one of the causes of their utter political destruction.

Those who falsify history, or hone and pare the unruly truth into pretty stories, cultivating myth on the soil of induced amnesia, put out the retrospective eyes of the movement. They corrupt the consciousness of those who need to learn from history if they are not to repeat it.

In Ian Birchall's history², published by the SWP, there are many lies, mostly lies of omission. Birchall's is "history" reduced to a simple,

uncomplicated story, to the sort of thing that might in an earlier age have furnished believers with short texts for rendition in poker-work or fretwork for display on living room walls.

Socialist Review/IS was sane, rational, balanced, realistic, modest. They were, above all else, as they continuously boasted, "modest" — self-assertively, preeningly, proudly, arrogantly, Pecksniffianly, overweeningly modest. They had a full, authentic, free-flowing Marxism, with a membership, and an overall high political culture, to match. They had learned from Rosa Luxemburg. In contrast to all others, they got it right about Stalinism. The theory of state capitalism, their talisman and lodestone, kept the group uniquely on a steady, consistently working-class course. The story is usually told as if there is only one state capitalist theory, which emerged in 1948 from the inspired brain of Cliff. IS got it right about the revival of capitalism in the '60s. SR/IS stood out for these qualities against all other things Trotskyist or Trotskyisant. They were in a league of one and in a class of their own.

In reality SR/IS was a group whose relationship, in the '50s and early '60s, to the more enterprising Healy organisation which tried to organise broad activity in the labour movement, was that they would 'intervene' in their activities — Labour Party and trade union — to make propaganda. They would score points. Often ridiculous points. (Some of the incidental things they said were, I think, right against the Healyites, as on German rearmament, for example.)

In its much-romanticised great days of the '60s, IS was distinguished from other "Trotskyists" — and, probably, from the SR group of the '50s — by the middle-class and upper-bourgeois background of many of its members and by the, sometimes deliberately flaunted, and even camped-up, bourgeois ethos that saturated it. It was, indeed, in a *class* of its own!

It operated on the assumption that capitalism was stable and expanding and would remain so, not "forever", but for now and the foreseeable future.

IN a 'credo' published at the beginning of 1961 for an international audience³, the Editorial Board of IS presented its operational assumptions.

"Let us admit it: workers have lost some of the consciousness of class over the post-war years... They have lost some of the cohesion, some of the power of concerted collective action which alone can snatch mankind from the brink of disaster... the socialist movement presents a picture of lifeless orthodoxies... and sects feeding off each other... There is no point bemoaning these facts, or thinking that the socialist tradition is valueless simply because our lives happen to span a period of reaction. Capitalism is in a surge of expansion. We can do nothing about it and little in the short run to stop the setback to the socialist movement that stems from it... Our actions cannot be on a heroic scale only. A slogan, any slogan, is unlikely to catch the imagination of millions and crystallise mass action..."

This bit of middle-class despair-mongering was 'balanced' by grand but vague and unfocused conclusions about what in this world socialists could hope to do:

"Our job is simpler and more difficult: to help formulate and clarify the consciousness of class, the feeling of self-reliance, of constituting an alternative centre of power and government *the world over...* [their emphasis]."

The IS 'credo' was published just after the great December 1960-January 1961 general strike in Belgium. Cliff would use the May 1968 French general strike, which was spontaneous, but surely not qualitatively different, to signal a "return to Bolshevism". The only lesson they learned from Belgium was that '*Jeune Garde*', the name of the Belgian Young Socialists' paper, was a good name. Thus *Young Guard*.

On the ground in Britain the organisation drew far-reaching conclusions — mirroring the Croslandite Labour right wing then, just as after 1979 it would, with its 'theory' of "the downturn", mirror Eric Hobsbawm and *Marxism Today* — and — theories about Stalinism, aside — it was these, above all, that distinguished them from, for example, the Healyite SLL. In the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS), for example, they operated on a perspective of long-time boom and long-time coexistence with the Labour bureaucracy.

1 As in the previous article ["A funny tale agreed upon?", *Workers' Liberty* 41] I will, where appropriate, tell the story in terms of my own experience. The author was in IS and represented the Trotskyist Tendency on its National Committee from November 1968 to December 1971.

2 *The Smallest Mass Party in the World — The SWP 1951-79* (1980). Birchall repeats the IS leadership's equivalent for the Trotskyist Tendency (TT) of the policeman accusing his target of headbutting his truncheon, that the TT caused "a serious disruption of IS's work in a number of areas". No, we didn't! I will discuss the IS leaders' response to the TT, by way of the policy of splitting branches — what the TT called "ghettoisation". While Birchall's account is evasive and, in the last reduction untrue, he does not repeat the ridiculous — but very widespread — story — Higgins repeats it — that the TT wanted the repatriation of Ireland in 1969. This may be — unless my memory is badly at fault — because he himself was in or around the "Democratic Centralist" group — Constance Lever, Noel Tracey, Fred Lindop, etc. — which backed our IS conference resolution on Ireland offering only a few, no doubt sorely needed, drafting amendments.

3 In vol 3, no 1, 1961 of the *Review*, at the Imre Nagy Institute, Brussels.

An error of memory crept into "A funny tale agreed upon?" [WL41]. There had, as I wrote, been an IS conference majority against what in mid 1971 became the NC line of opposition to the European Community. But it was less 'overwhelming' than my recollections of it led me to write, and the anti-EC minority had been more substantial. Everything else was as I described it and the inexactitude does not invalidate any of the conclusions. There was an IS conference decision; the NC majority and the IS "machine" did what I described it as doing.

HEGEMONISED, like all the Marxist groups, only more so, by the success of reformism in the 1940s and 1950s, the group's "Luxemburgism" meant ideas such as this: as Luxemburg did not leave the social democrats until late — 1918 — so revolutionaries will not leave the Labour Party until the revolutionary workers are on the streets. For example, the 1959 edition of *Rosa Luxemburg*⁴:

"Rosa Luxemburg's reluctance to form an independent revolutionary party is quite often cited by Stalinists as a grave error and an important cause for the defeat of the German revolution of 1918. They argue that Lenin was opposed to the revolutionary lefts' adherence to the SPD and continuing association with Kautsky. There is no truth at all in this legend. [This passage was expurgated from the 1968 edition.]"

Not only Stalinists considered it a grave error! Lenin, July 1921: "We know the history of the Second International, its fall and bankruptcy. Do we not know that the great misfortune of the working class movement in Germany is that the break was not brought about before the war? This cost the lives of 20,000 workers..."

Luxemburg understood the German Kautskyite 'Centre' sooner than did Lenin. It was a question not of who said what first, but of a mature summing-up by Lenin and the Communist International of the defeat of the German revolution. When Cliff dismissed this he was dismissing not a Stalinist legend but the *Leninist theory of the party*, in its most finished — Communist International — form. The point, however, is that Cliff — in 1959! — refused to draw serious Marxist conclusions from the experience of the German left.

As late as the crisis in the LPYS on the eve of the Wilson government, a central leader of the group, John Palmer, could hold out these perspectives for the Labour youth movement, in which IS had the leadership of the non-SLL left, and firmly rejected the idea of head-on conflict with the bureaucratic political leaders of reformism:

"The onus is on the YS to find a relationship with our Party which will radically reduce those frictions and clashes which are leaving such a bitter heritage in the ranks of young people joining the YS. *One thing must be made clear above all*. There is no future for the YS outside the Labour Party; our only hope is to find a relationship even more close to it than at present, but one which will allow us essential freedom as a youth movement."⁵

A tall order if a fighting socialist youth movement is meant. The right-wing Labour leaders would soon be in government, carrying out vicious attacks on the working class. The point is that *Young Guard* had a rather cosy view of the future. At issue with the SLL — then — was not staying in or leaving the Labour Party, but whether or not Marxists should organise a small combat party.

Until they developed a perspective of rank and file industrial work, in the mid '60s, IS did not believe much could be done or attempted. Capitalism was stable, and would remain so for many years. In the mythology IS was being realistic, as against the SLL. In fact, they were no more realistic in their assessment than the SLL — different, erring on the other side, but not more realistic.

If the Healyites were scrap-happy and, like the SWP today, bent on needless self-isolation from the existing broad labour movement, IS was not a 'sane and sensible' revolutionary alternative to the SLL, but their rightist, quietist, middle-class mirror-image. This in the mythical histories is "the propaganda period", when nothing else was possible but propaganda. They neglect to point out that the governing ideas of the group were a large part of the reason why anything else was impossible.

Believing that capitalism was — for now — indefinitely expanding and stable, they were bitterly disappointed after 1964 that the Labour government did not deliver reforms to the working class. They drifted out of the Labour Party, where they had the leadership of the LPYS, more or less, after 1967 without a fight.

But, in fact, even if they had been right about the prospects for capitalism, for Marxists in Lenin's and Trotsky's school, their conclusion about what socialists should do and try to do, and about the nature of the organisation socialists should be building *within the mass labour movement*, simply would not follow. Marxists would build a serious organisation in the limited struggles, in preparation for when conditions broke.

⁴ Tony Cliff *Rosa Luxemburg* [dated 1959, actually published early 1960].

⁵ *Young Guard*

⁶ Tony Cliff, "On Substitutionism", *IS Journal* summer 1960; *Rosa Luxemburg*, 1959/'60.

⁷ Even, to take a well-documented example, when they found themselves in the leadership of a shop stewards committee at the crisis-ridden ENV engineering works in west London. *IS Journal*, summer 1967.

⁸ The evidence for what happened in '58/'59 is mostly to be found in *Socialist Leader*, the paper of the Independent Labour Party, then a small, sectarian group [in *SL* 29.9.59, for example].

The wild lurchings of Cliff in 1968, 'back' to Lenin and back to building a Leninist party; the scattering, in a tremendous convulsion of the group, of some of the "libertarian" forces IS had assembled; and the transparently contrived nature of the arguments and rationalisations that accompanied the lurch of '68 — these were the measure of the nonsense spun in IS's pseudo-Luxemburg period.

UNtil 1967/'68 the cadres were assembled on a vehement anti-Leninism. The operational idea of the organisation was that Leninism had bred Stalinism. Committed to being citizens of the existing labour movement, they were governed by the idea that any revolutionary initiative or leadership — in practice, almost any initiative by revolutionaries — risked or committed the sin of "substitutionism", and had to be avoided lest the bad example of Bolshevism — and, nearer home, the SLL — be succumbed to. Such ideas were deeply rooted in the group after '59/'60.

By hints and half-thoughts, Cliff's writings of this period⁶ postulated a serious connection between Bolshevism and Stalinism. For Cliff, like the mouse in the proverb, there is no animal bigger than the cat — the Healyite cat at that point. And what was said or hinted about Bolshevism and Stalinism was really designed to say something about the Healyites. It depends on hints and ambiguities, but the effect is clear. For example:

"However, if the state built by the Bolshevik Party reflected not only the will of the Party but of the total social reality in which the Bolsheviks had now found themselves, *one should not draw the conclusion that there was no causal connection at all between Bolshevik centralism, based on a hierarchy of professional revolutionaries, and the Stalinism of the future.*" [note: IS summer 1960] [emphasis added].

What was this causal connection? Cliff does not — can not — spell it out, merely connecting it *in general* with the phenomenon of 'unevenness':

"From this unevenness in the working class flows the great danger of an autonomous development of the party and its machine, till it becomes, instead of the servant of the class, its master. This unevenness is a main cause of the danger of substitutionism". "The history of Bolshevism prior to the revolution is eloquent with Lenin's struggle against this danger...". "*Bolshevism*" surrendered to it in the end? Centralism and a machine amount to an inherent tendency to substitutionism.

But neither the Bolshevik party nor *its* machine ever became the master. Stalinism did not flow evenly from organic changes in Bolshevism. It was its dialectical negation. It rose on the mass graves of Lenin's Bolsheviks, against resistance, to the death, by those who had led the October revolution, Trotsky and others.

None of it was seriously argued or intellectually weighty against Trotsky's refutations of such ideas, and it was not, in Cliff, developed into a bravely clear and unambivalent position. But, beyond the writings, in the group and on the ground, the half-hearted stuff in Cliff came crude and raw to mean — in the LPYS, for example — a bundling of Bolshevism into the same bag as Stalinism, its murderer.

IN reality, to a massive extent, the group's history is the history of incoherent zig zags and numerous "quick change" operations. These were always the result of Tony Cliff's brainstorming, perceived opportunities, or factional needs, or the pet ideas of others who had captured Cliff's support. They were made — and still are made — with solipsistic disregard for logic or consistency. Or for what was said yesterday.

To take a most startling example: Cliff broke with the SR's conventionally Trotskyist ideas on Leninism and became an anti-Lenin "Luxemburgist" — anti-Leninist "Luxemburgism" until then had had its British home in the ILP⁸ — in '58/'9 in a mechanical, albeit panicked, response to the growth and magnetic pull of Healy's supposedly "Leninist" organisation. The SR group had mimicked and echoed the Healy organisation, even to word for word repetition of its slogans, such as — against nuclear weapons and US bases — "Black the bomb, black the bases" [black meant workers should refrain from all work on such things]. All but two or three of the members of the Socialist Review group voted — the vote was soon reversed — to join the Healy organisation.

And Cliff "moved back to Lenin" in '68 almost certainly because of the "opportunities" for group aggrandisement that then existed, concerning which much depended on the Healyite SLL's effective political hara-kiri over a long and excruciating period of increasing craziness. In an exact and perfect parallel to his appropriation of the ILP's anti-Lenin "Luxemburgism", Cliff after '68 would begin to appropriate and

over years systematically adopt much of the "build the party" neo-Oehlerite culture of the '60s Healy group.

What is now "Cliffism" was then pre-crazy Healyism. The whole present SWP system — of substituting a fetish, "build the revolutionary party", for real politics; of subordinating all questions of working class politics, and all responses to the real class struggle, to the exigencies of organisation-building; of running the organisation as a tight, systematically sealed-off cult — all this was pioneered in Britain by the Healy group, to the early derision of IS, which foolishly then equated it with Leninism, Bolshevism and unfalsified Trotskyism.

In terms of the facts, SR/IS history such as this needs a lot of explaining. Birchall simply repeats Cliff's rationalisation and the "good", as distinct from the real, reasons, at each point in the story, with a feeble little bit of academic's pseudo-criticism here and there to show independence. If what was said on day two flatly contradicts what was said, done and polemicalised about on day one, that is fine. Conditions were "different", or not ripe, then, on day one; they were ripe on day two. Who should know about ripeness and unripeness, about the time to sow — and what — and the time to reap? The shaman knows. Cliff knows. On day one, it was necessary and right to "bend the stick" in whatever direction Cliff was facing that day. The same on day two, on day ten... and always. "Forever and ever. Amen."

Birchall's account is essentially history told, so to speak, in the first person. The name of the author is Ian Birchall, but the "I" is Tony Cliff. At every stage in the story, what was, just has to be so. Just so. Everything was always more or less for the best in the best of all tendencies. If this were pop music it would be a corseted, toupéed, heavily made-up, self-infatuated, middle-aged man singing "My Way"!

Birchall achieves his effects by selection and suppression, and by ignoring what does not fit the artistic needs of a mythmaking bard, spinning imaginary political genealogies. He gets maximum favourable contrast for IS by measuring it repeatedly against the habitually, though variably, silly IMG of the late '60s and early '70s, minimising the IS group's decades of interaction with the Healy group.

Typically, Birchall mythologises: IS's opposition in 1965 to a Labour government regulated Incomes Policy "left it almost completely isolated from the rest of the left", he says. Which left? Not, apart from the IMG-ingestion, any part of the *revolutionary* left! But the relevant — and implied — left for comparison here *is* the Marxist left. This is a representative example of the tricky play with definitions, on which so much depends. While making much of IS virtue in opposing Incomes Policy, Birchall is silent about Michael Kidron freakishly accepting that trade unions should be involved in the Tory National Economic Development Council [*Socialist Review*, December 1961; letter by Sheila Leslie, March 1962].

The SR group — which was, at the start, just a Trotskyist group with a particular analysis of the USSR — and IS *did* have virtues. It was an organisation in which real discussion was possible and in which differences of opinion coexisted, and where issues were discussed as often as dogmatised about, in marked contrast to the organisations of post-Trotsky "Trotskyism" and to the IS/SWP from the early '70s. It did do what it could to maintain a working class orientation; it did insist on the need for commitment to working class action in face of the soul-rotted "academic Marxism" of the late '60s and '70s.

Yet the 'virtues' were not always what you might be led to deduce from the SR/IS theoretical positions. Paradoxical though it is, the root-and-branch anti-Stalinist "state caps" in the '60s found it much easier to cosy up to the CP and the CP-influenced peace campaigners and Labour left than the Trotskyists who believed in "defending the Soviet Union" ever did. We were more combative and usually more vociferous against "Stalinism". It was IS that was able in 1965 to publish a book⁹ carrying a preface by a Stalinist trade union official, Reg Birch. The IS group in 1968 could contain people soft on varieties of Stalinism: the Manchester branch lost much-prized engineering workers — who resigned because the group condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia!

I CITE these examples only to establish broadly for the reader just how unreliable the "conventional history" of the Group is. I will return to some of these points...

But it isn't only Birchall — or Jim Higgins. You get essentially the same laudatory and, as I will show, in terms of history, fantastic, version of SR and '60s IS in the non-official accounts and in the work of 'critics', for example, in the useful account of SR/IS published by Martin Shaw, a one-time member turned hostile.¹⁰

Most fantastic of all — but in its way useful — in the realms of IS historiography is the long account of '60s IS published by Christopher

Hitchens as a review of two SWP publications under the title "In the Bright Autumn of My Senescence".¹¹

Hitchens left IS in the mid '70s, and now works the licensed-rebel side of the street in bourgeois journalism, as a columnist for *Vanity Fair* and on other publications. He dislikes the organisation after he left it, when his feelings about himself separated from his feelings about the organisation. But God, how he loved it before, when he was young and an indescribably wonderful part of an incomparable organisation!

"The essential [IS] precepts descended from Luxemburg rather than Lenin. They consisted of three or four central tenets. These were that, contrary to the babble of smart-asses like Crosland, Britain was still a class society in every sense of the term... That the capitalist system had only temporarily stabilised itself.

"While in a conflict like Korea the only principled policy was that of a plague on both houses, in the case of Vietnam one should openly declare for the Vietcong while regretfully bearing in mind... I found that I rather liked the pessoptimism of this, with its implication that one could with perfect honesty keep two sets of books. The best thing to do was to work, and think, without illusions. 'Without illusions', indeed, was a signature phrase of The Group. In the coming years, I was to do many things, and hold many positions, 'without illusions'. It was a good induction, and a good training.

"We gleefully joined battle with the hippies and flower-power jerks and all the Guevara pin-up factions. Want to talk *real* politics? Want to get in touch with authentic struggle? If you're serious, come along and talk to us.

"There was a fair bit of talent in and around The Group in those days. Aside from Cliff there was Paul Foot, a masterly orator who specialised in the ridiculing of Labourism and the exposure of crooks and fascists. Then Alasdair MacIntyre, who could tell Kautsky from Korsch. Michael Kidron, a sardonic sophisticate with a refined taste in political economy. John Palmer, a polymathic journalist capable of synthesising the latest news into crystalline agitational prose. Eamonn McCann, a street-fighter from Derry with amazing literary gifts and Nigel Harris, who knew about the Third World and could write about it without sentimentality. Peter Sedgwick, the conscience of us all and the satirist of the ideologues. Plus a network of self-taught trade-unionists who could talk about Spain, about the tricks of their craft, about the time they had produced socialist leaflets in Germany for the prisoners of war on forced labour, about the difference between Bordiga and Gramsci, about anything.

"And in debate with other clubs or other factions, we never had to worry that our speaker would come off second. We went looking for arguments, sensing that others were trying to sit them out, or avoid them altogether."

This is narcissism raised in intensity to the power of spontaneous multiple orgasm!

Yet Hitchens's piece is itself valuable documentation of IS's real history. Here you have an undiluted rendition of the extraordinary self-image of large parts of the IS middle-class cadre at the end of the '60s. In fact, much of it had as its real substance, politics the mere outlet, the effortless, inbred, alpha dog superiority and visceral self-approbation of the big bourgeoisie.

All this, and its *ideology*, is there in superabundance in Hitchens. What is not there is any remotely realistic account of the group and its politics and its role in socialist affairs and in the labour movement as they really were.

9 Cliff and Barker on Incomes Policy, 1965.

10 Shaw: "The 'SR group' came to represent the polar opposite to the SLI: realistic in economic perspectives, able to explain the failures of Labour bureaucrats as well as to condemn them... the SR group was the most coherent, open and Marxist alternative to the dominant 'orthodoxy' of the 'SLI'..." *Socialist Register*, 1978.

There is evidence in Shaw of some aspiration to truth-telling: he simply doesn't *understand* very much about the whys and wherefores of the things he chronicles. There is curious evasion in his treatment of the prolonged '69/'70 IS discussions on Ireland. He was in the organisation then, but he merely says that he 'accepts' Ian Birchall's account. There is probably a name for lying by citing an 'authority' you know to be untrustworthy: "Lying by proxy" perhaps.

11 *London Review of Books*. It is surely very strange to find Tony Cliff described thus by Christopher Hitchens in January 1994 — Cliff, who has turned IS/SWP into a rigid, quasi-religious sect which expelled people for even questioning the SWP's brief lurch into campaigning for a general strike in 1992 — from the lowest point of class struggle this century to a TUC-led general strike in one step! —

"He wanted people to reason on their own. He came back to me... when I read Irving Howe's memoirs of the New York *Trotskyist* milieu... his description of Max Shachtman..." "in the cramped quarter of the seat he seemed uneasy as ideologue and leader". And a lot more. Nothing is said about what IS/SWP has become *as an organisation*; what, in fact, it had become before Hitchens's mid '70s break with it... But why should anyone expect these people to be understanding now, in the Bright Autumn of Their Senescence, when they really did not understand all that much in Their Verdant Spring of Prime Alpha Dog Puppyhood?

THERE is one way, as easy as it is pertinent, to test whether the mythmakers' picture of IS is true on either the Hitchens/Birchall or Shaw level: if so, how then to explain what happened to the Manchester segment of this peerless organisation? Workers' Fight — what became the Trotskyist Tendency of IS — walked into Manchester IS in October/November 1968 and in a few weeks took over the biggest¹² IS branch in the country (one moreover with a four or five year history behind it)?

And we, be it remembered, and the mythmakers insist on it, were primitive sectarians talking gibberish on many things, and 'disruptive' too. How could such a thing happen?

Didn't all those much advertised and fondly remembered qualities of the IS, the "IS tradition", IS theory, IS practice, and the typical IS alpha dog member, count for anything against us? If not, why not? It is a plain matter of fact that they didn't; and, moreover, it is a well documented fact that the IS organisation had to take special, non-political emergency measures to curb the Trotskyist Tendency, culminating in 1969 in the creation of ghetto branches. In Manchester that was done against the recorded vote of over 75% of the branch, the majority not Trotskyist Tendency members, all of whom then chose to be ghettoised themselves rather than submit to the diktat of the Cliffite centre and the branch minority, and ghettoise the Trotskyist Tendency.

If the golden legend of SR/IS is true, that is surely remarkable. In fact, it becomes almost inexplicable.

I know that history offers precedents where barbarians from the steppes or the dark forests invaded and overwhelmed much higher civilisations. So, the massed ranks of Workers' Fight came out of the proletarian wilds of Manchester, like Pol Pot out of the jungle, and swamped the island of Marxist political civilisation that was Manchester IS?

There were only four of us in Manchester Workers' Fight, and 51 or 55¹³ in the IS branch! And the old IS branch was part of a national organisation 1,000 strong, and Workers' Fight of one with nine — possibly 10 — members.¹⁴

Does history have another example of such a catastrophe for civilisation in which so many of the civilised were overwhelmed by so few of the barbarians?

To mock the IS stalwarts' Malvolian conceit, and possibly giving expression to my own, I would recall that in one of his pamphlets Dan DeLeon had compared the disciplined revolutionary socialist party he was advocating to the Spanish soldiers of Francisco Pizarro, numbering about 150, who in the 1530s had invaded and conquered the vast Inca empire (covering present-day Peru and much of Chile). I would of course, conscientiously recall, and the parallel with IS in 1968 didn't need to be stated, that Pizarro's little army had horses, guns, the force of Inca superstition and the chaos of a recent Inca civil war working for them, and the luck and audacity to capture the Incas' king-god, Atahualpa. That joke, I fear, fell far below the then regulation IS "modesty". Was it that we were, indeed, a group such as DeLeon had in mind?

Not quite! When we fused with IS, Workers' Fight had been in existence two years, and as a public recruiting organisation for a year. Though our Trotskyist political tradition — and what we made of it — was greatly superior to the pauper's broth of eclecticism and middle-class faddism we confronted in IS, our resources, knowledge and confidence were narrow, limited by age and experience.

Well then, the explanation must be — 'like unto like'. IS had recently doubled in size, pulling in a lot of politically uneducated people. Workers' Fight must have taken advantage of the fact to recruit clueless youngsters, who had not had time to absorb the rich IS political culture. No: it was the cadre of the branch who came over to the Trotskyist Tendency. Within a couple of months we won over almost without

exception the entire cadre of IS's biggest branch. (And had Atahualpa lived in Manchester, we might have done even better, but, unfortunately, he lived in Stoke Newington.)

The sole, important exception was Colin Barker, and he was only a partial exception: in the first months, on every single question except the "class character" of the USSR and its "defence against imperialism", he agreed with us and, in his honest desire to come to terms with IS's past, in effect, though with increasing reluctance, made propaganda for what were — such was the logic of the situation in the branch — our politics.

Author's Doppelgänger: So, it was Workers' Fight Hitchens really had in mind when he described IS, above? Ye were wonderful?

A warming idea! But it will be healthy to remember and underline the not unimportant fact — though it can only deepen the mystery Manchester IS in '68 must pose to the devotees of the IS myth — that what we won them to was in part, because we were wrong in our theoretical understanding of Stalinism, a false alternative to IS's — false — theories.

THE basic explanation for what happened is that there had been a long, preceding, pre-'68, political convergence between post-Trotsky "Trotskyism" and IS, and between Workers' Fight, which on Stalinism was not quite typical of post-Trotsky Trotskyists, and IS. On its side, IS had already by 1968 — when everything was thrown into the melting pot by Cliff's sudden declaration "for Leninism" — made so many catch-penny shifts in the direction of post-Trotsky "Trotskyist" politics — it was a process that would go on, making them, still "state caps", into caricature "Pabloites", eventually into backers of even Saddam Hussein — that many of its people did not know whether they were coming or going. After many incoherent shifts, on Vietnam, for example, IS was in transition to becoming the organisation of "kitsch Trotskyism with doctrinal quirks" it was by the '70s. Travelling the other way — too slowly, far too slowly, but travelling — Workers' Fight intersected it.

Workers' Fight from the beginning always drew the sharpest — we said Trotsky-consistent — anti-Stalinist political conclusions within the degenerated and deformed workers' states schemas.¹⁵ The Trotskyist Tendency believed it was the duty of revolutionary socialists to work for a "political revolution" and for the liberation of the oppressed nations in the Stalinist states. We followed Trotsky — so we thought — and "Defended the Soviet Union against being overthrown by imperialism" — that was how we put it and all we meant by it — but we did not see it then, in the world of the 1960s, in which the USSR was one of the two great world powers, as being of any immediate, political consequence: it was, we insisted against the IS majority, "an important orientation issue".

If you do not know the political atmosphere of the time and the way IS related to the inchoate, populist revolutionary milieu, it will seem strange, but the Trotskyist Tendency was much harder, more consistent and more heartfelt in its hostility to all species of Stalinism than were large swathes of the "state capitalist" organisation with which we had fused.

In the three years of the fusion there was not one single practical, political issue concerning Stalinism in which differences arose between the Trotskyist Tendency and the IS majority. Where, arguably, we were "soft" — on Vietnam, letting "anti-imperialism" blunt our anti-Stalinism — so was IS, and, large parts of it, more so. It was a time when some of IS's leading 'libertarians' could be seen — I saw Peter Sedgwick — snake-dancing on Vietnam War demos chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh!/We shall fight and we shall win." The words would have choked me.

in which, as it happened, Tony Cliff had lined up his followers alongside Stalinists, Deutscherites and Guevarists:

"The Stalinist states and Cuba [are] deformed and degenerated workers' states. We insist sharply on a consistent Trotskyist understanding of what this degeneration means for the workers in these states: we are not liberal Stalinists, Deutscherites or 'Pabloites' — but Trotskyists. We stress the need for a deep-going workers' revolution in these states — as does the Preamble to the IWG Constitution. We declare that any interpretation of the deformed workers' states theory that denies the need for a "supplementary" workers' political revolution, one with very deep-going social reorganisation, which must accompany the smashing of the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy — any interpretation that denies this, or questions it, or leaves the question open, amounts to a capitulation to Stalinism, and therefore is a Deutscherite breach with all but the "letter" of Trotskyism. It entirely cuts away the revolutionary side of the workers' state designation. For us the essence of Trotskyism is first and foremost a reliance on the working class as the protagonist of history — and not on the bureaucracy and its hangers on or on the various nationalist petty-bourgeois formations which spring up. This for us is what divides revolutionary Marxists from the Left Stalinists and Deutscherites and the various brands of Deutscherism known as 'Pabloism'."

12 I have to rely on memory here. It is possible one of the London branches was marginally bigger.

13 Records vary.

14 Three of us, Rachel Lever, Phil Semp, myself, and an unstable youth, Graham Atkinson, left Militant in October 1966. In the subsequent year we produced the magazine *Workers' Republic* as part of the Irish Workers' Group, while doing local and industrial work — notably in the docks. *Workers' Fight* No.1 appeared in October 1967. For the first six months of its existence, *Workers' Fight* was blighted by our involvement in a fierce faction fight in the Irish Workers' Group (in which IS was also centrally involved, on the other side).

On the eve of fusion, we had nine members in Manchester. One, Trevor Fox, died in his mid-20s in an accident. Four left Workers' Fight rather than fuse with IS. Two of those who fused with IS, Linda and Harold Youd, had joined Workers' Fight in early 1968, after spending nearly a decade in the Young Communist League/CP. Harold founded the National Ports Shop Stewards Committee — which the CP immediately seized.

Leaving Trevor Fox and Rachel Lever aside, the whole pre-fusion Manchester group, those who did not fuse with IS, as well as Harold and Linda Youd, who did, had come out of the YCL/CP, and were people I'd known for nearly a decade from my days in the same organisation.

15 We had stated our basic position as follows in the Irish Workers' Group against a combination

More will be said about what our "workers' statism" amounted to.

If the mythmakers' picture of IS were ever true — and it wasn't — it was no longer true by the late '60s; and if it was true then of the group's publications, *International Socialist* and *Socialist Worker* — and that claim, though better founded than claims for the organisation, will not bear close examination either — then an enormous qualification has to be made: none of it was remotely true of IS as a whole. Theory, such as it was, and developed Marxist culture, such as it was, was the possession of a thin stratum of the group. The ranks had their own culture; demagogues mediated between the group and the mandarins, of which the first was Cliff, and after him John Palmer, Paul Foot and, after his resurrection in 1968, Duncan Hallas.¹⁶

The Trotskyist Tendency offered politics which I now think were wrong on key points of general theory but which — it is a statement that remains to be substantiated — on everything, from anti-Vietnam war work to industrial work to "building the revolutionary party", seemed to many in IS to be — and on the whole were — more coherent than IS's politics, because they *made more sense of the political activities and political attitudes which attracted people to IS, that is of what IS was doing*, than did the official group politics and the often desperate rationalisations for opportunist twists and turns that characterised Cliff.

For example: when, in 1968, Cliff decided to become a 'Leninist' again and advocated a "democratic centralist revolutionary party", it was a response to the unexpected, quick growth of IS and to the fact that the SLL, getting crazier and crazier, was ceasing to be a serious competitor. But he presented it as a conclusion he drew from the May '68 French general strike: yet he had drawn no such conclusions from the great Belgian strike seven years earlier... He issued a second edition of *Rosa Luxemburg* in which, without explanation, and changing only the summary paragraph, he came out for Lenin against Luxemburg where in the first edition he was for Luxemburg against Lenin!¹⁷

You can't be sure about such things, but probably the decisive, first stage in the Trotskyist Tendency's winning over Manchester IS was a branch meeting just after the fusion where I head-banged with Tony Cliff on this and other aspects of the revolutionary party question — which the Trotskyist Tendency thought was the decisive question. He refused to admit that he had been mistaken *at any point*, though he was flatly contradicting what he had been saying for a decade: his difficulty was in trying to satisfy both the old IS "libertarians" in the branch, who

accused him of betraying them and the IS tradition, *and* those who were inclined to agree with him now, but were bewildered by the past position, on which the group as it was in 1968 had been built. Such squirming could not but bring discredit in the eyes of self-respecting, thinking IS members. We — on the "party" question — offered them coherent answers and a tradition with sense and continuity in it.

To conclude: there is no evidence that the much advertised political and ideological lucidity was ever true of the group at any point in its real — as distinct from mythical — history. Far from the real picture of IS corresponding to the organisation's self-glorifying mythology and PR stuff, the picture fondly repeated by ex-members in varying degrees of political decrepitude and amnesia, by 1968 IS was organisationally and intellectually — first and foremost *intellectually* — a chaos.

I will substantiate this statement by examining how things stood in the area where IS/SWP claims to have been most right and where we were certainly theoretically wrong — the nature of the Stalinist states and the network of political questions growing out of that.

Doppelganger: Not the hard abstract stuff! Nobody will read it! At least I believe it up with a Jim Higgins-style funny story.

Nobody could make the theory of Russian state capitalism funny. Even those who think it a joke have never found it funny.

Doppelganger: Tell them the story about being witchhunted in the Irish Workers' Group as a "secret state cap" — by a faction in which Cliff's supporters were the weightiest group, but had been lined up by Cliff to support the Deutscherite, soft Stalinist, Guevarist, anti-state capitalist witch-hunters — on the — correct — calculation that they would afterwards have control of the organisation.

They'd never believe it! They'd think I was making it up. I'm not sure I believe it!

Doppelganger: Yes they would — use the documents! Lighten up! You were too close to it. I bet they'd laugh their heads off.

No. Without discussing "the hard, abstract stuff" — state capitalism, bureaucratic collectivism, degenerated workers' state — it is impossible to make sense of the story. All I can hope to do is try to make the issues as clear as possible. I will attempt to do that in the next *Workers' Liberty*.

16 The peculiar relationship of theory and practice, of prattle to praxis, in IS was described thus in a document of the Trotskyist Tendency in mid '71:

"IS has a pretty solid body of theory and is nearer than almost all the 'orthodox' Trotskyist groups to a 'party' in the sense of being a rounded 'whole' — however small and however far from being able to play the role of a revolutionary party in relation to the class. The 'orthodox' groups are all to a far greater extent than IS mere factions that have failed to become anything wider.

"Yet I agree with [your] statement that IS has contempt for theory. Why? Because the IS theory is the possession of a handful of mandarins, who function as both a group mandarin and as a segment of normal academic Britain. What theory there is, is *their* theory: they are quite snobbish about it. For the non-initiated popularisations will do.

"This, of course, is inseparable from a manipulationist conception of the organisation. The members don't *need* to know the theories — the leaders can be relied upon — and demagogy and word-spinning phrasemongers like Cliff and Palmer can bridge the gap. It is in this sense that IS has contempt for theory — *contempt for the Marxist conception of theory and its necessary relationship to the organisation as a leaven and tool of the whole group*. 'Contempt' is not the best expression for it, though, is it? The priestly caste most certainly have contempt — for the uninitiated — but their theory is their special treasure, their badge of rank, their test for membership of the inner elite. There *actually* is such open caste snobbery in IS — as you know... The second and real sense of IS's 'contempt for theory' is in their *use* of theory, the function of theory, the relationship of theory to practice: there is no connection between the two for IS. Do you know that in last week's debate [on the European Community] at the National Committee Cliff said *and repeated* that principles and tactics *contradict* each other in real life!

"This is *organically* connected, of course, with their mandarinism... It is an esoteric knowledge — for if principles contradict tactics and practice, if theory is not a practical and necessary tool, if theory and practice are related only in the sense that theory sums up (in one way or another) past practice, perhaps vivified with a coat of impressionistic paint distilled from what's going on around at the time — but not in the sense that theory is the source of precepts to guide practice, to aid in the practical exploration of reality — why then, where is the *incentive* to spread theoretical knowledge? What is to prevent the polarisation of the organisation into the mandarins and the subjects of the demagogic manipulation of the mandarins and their lieutenants? What is to prevent the esoteric knowledge of the mandarins from being just one intellectual 'in-group's' defining characteristic, to be played with, juggled with, and to do all sorts of wonderful tricks with: after all, it is very rarely tested since it doesn't relate to reality. Consider the state-capitalist theory... relating to China, Korea, and to Vietnam. Take those three *together*, look at the *history* of the group — *there is no possible consistency*. The theory is one thing — reactions to Korea in 1950 and Vietnam in 1967 entirely a matter of mood, impressions, pressures, etc., etc.

"...It is a question of the conscious method *versus* the clever juggling of people in the central IS leadership who are subjectively revolutionaries — but entirely bourgeois in their method of thinking and conception of politics. These people are very like the Lovestonites..."

[Excerpt from a document by the present writer given limited internal circulation in *Workers' Fight*, 1971.]

17 An internal IS issue of *Workers' Fight* carried a long article by the present writer on the whole question of IS and the revolutionary party:

"In *Luxemburg*, edition '68, Cliff is a changed man! Nowhere is the result more startling than in the final paragraph of the chapter on Luxemburg and Lenin.

"1959 edition: 'For Marxists in advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's, notwithstanding her overstatements on the question of spontaneity.'

"1968 edition: 'However, whatever the historical circumstances moulding Rosa's thoughts regarding organisation, these thoughts showed a great weakness in the German revolution of 1918-19.'

"Of course people change their minds. When Marxists do so it would be good to know why and how. The important thing here too is method. A Marxist's exposition is based on an analysis of the real world to which he brings certain conceptions: his conclusions are drawn from his analysis. Thus the train of thought is clear, the reasoning and considerations are designed to expound, to convince. In this case there is a mystery: one and the same exposition (without supplement) leads to opposite conclusions. Why? How does Comrade Cliff reach his conclusions? ...

"The IS attitude to the question of the Leninist Party has been... contempt for the idea of organising a small propaganda group as a fighting propaganda group.

"The current change — motivated allegedly on the May events in France but seemingly owing as much if not more to the happy coincidence that the Group had just too many members to make federalism comfortable: after all, what conclusions were drawn from the Belgian General Strike in 1961? — has resembled not so much a rectification of theory and practice by serious communists, as an exercise in the medieval art of palimpsestry.

"The leadership does not have a clear conception of the party that needs to be built. 'Whether the IS group will by simple arithmetic progression grow into a revolutionary party, or whether the party will grow from a yet unformed group is not important for us' (Political Committee document, October 1968). *On the contrary, it is vital. If the strategy is one which expects any big changes from the shift to come in the already organised labour movement* (all experience in the past suggests that this is the likely way a real mass revolutionary movement will develop in a country like Britain) rather than by arithmetical accretion, then this decrees the need for us to build a *cadre* movement to be able to intervene. The lack of a clear strategy on the relationship of IS to the class and the organised labour movement is obvious. Consequently IS is being built as a loose, all-in type of group. Lacking a strategy the leadership looks always for short cuts.

"IS's growth is largely the result of a series of unpredictable events — e.g. the suicide of the SLL — which have left IS as the only contender in the field and thereby transformed it from a discussion group without a future into a potentially serious revolutionary organisation. IS is thus going through a crisis of identity. It is not often that it is given to organisations to make a sharp turn, a second dedication. IS has this opportunity. It has still not decided definitively which way it will go." [Easter 1969]

It did not occur to us that IS could evolve, as it did, into a saner variant of the SLL...

An open letter to Enoch Powell

No room for racism!

FORMER Tory Cabinet Minister Enoch Powell became notorious in 1968 for high-profile agitation against black immigrants. Dockers and Covent Garden meat porters who agreed with what Powell said went on strike to protest against his dismissal from the Tory Shadow Cabinet.

In 1972, when British passport-holding Asians were expelled *en masse* from Uganda, their arrival in Britain allowed Powell and other racists to stoke up a great new wave of racist agitation.

This open letter to Powell was published on 9 August 1972*.

THE Tory Government and the bosses it serves now desperately need all the help you can give it. We have — so far — thwarted its plans, and defeated it again and again. We have spat on its laws. And we will drive it from office before long.

We? The working class. The men and women of all creeds and colours who do the work in Britain, who man the factories, drive the trains, clean the streets, erect the buildings, care for the sick, build the ships and load and unload them, stoke the furnaces and dig the coal. 'We', the real people of Britain, the "lower classes", on whose backs your class stands.

Millions upon millions of workers hate and despise this Tory Government. They recognise it as their most bitter enemy, and they demand its immediate resignation.

And that's where you crawl out of your rat hole.

You see the tragedy of the Uganda Asians as another chance to whip up racist hysteria in Britain. Wrapped in the cloak of a far-seeing "patriot", a man who speaks for "the People", your service to the bosses is to try to get the Tories off the hook by dividing worker against worker, white against black; to deflect the anger of the working class, to head off its discontent and to pit one part of our ranks against another, to our common injury and to the benefit of your class.

Your message is the sick message of hatred and division. In the name of averting a "national catastrophe", you want to promote a working class catastrophe — that of racial conflict. You harvest race hatred and you sow it. You have become the prophet of a race war which you do your best and

worst to set alight.

After your 1968 speeches, fascists organised anti-black demonstrations, and racist gangs took to assaulting black workers and youths — *in your name*.

That, Powell, is where you link arms with the Mosley fascists and the National Front, that sick and obscene gang of misfits and Hitler-lovers who get their kicks from hatred of blacks and Jews, and who want to destroy the trade unions and the labour movement.

That is why you are one of the most dangerous enemies of the British working class — black and white — right now. You are the carrier of a disease of racialism that could ravage the working class and cripple its ability to go on standing up to the attacks of Heath's Government.

YOU are also the biggest fraud and con-man in the whole Tory Party. You are a shameless, habitual, barefaced liar. *And we can prove it.*

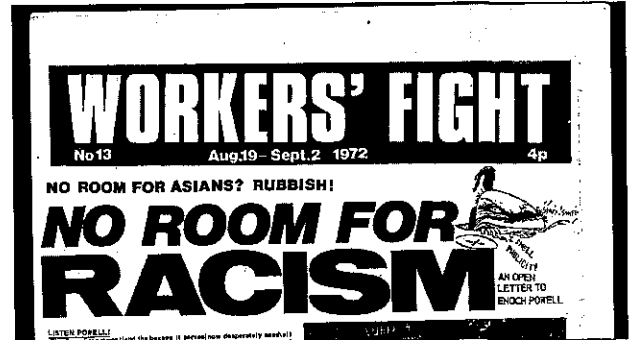
You say: immigration equals national catastrophe. Why? How? For whom? Immigrants to any healthy society are an asset

"You are not the exponent of a cure for our ills: you are an ulcerated carrier of the disease — capitalism — which afflicts British society."

and a 'bonus'. They are fully grown, educated (and they are educated) and capable of working, whereas additions to the population by natural increase need years of education, care and social benefits.

You play on the fears and the insecurity of workers under capitalism. But you, Powell, are a fanatical defender of capitalism and an enemy of socialism, which is the real solution to the problems of the working class.

You believe in the 'free market', even if it means 3 million unemployed. You care nothing for the working class, or for the effects of capitalism.



Workers' Fight, August 1972

You are against the trade unions. You were a minister in a Tory government whose every anti-working class act you supported.

You are no "friend of the ordinary man". No — you have nothing but a spiv's contempt for the working class.

You have one concern only — to divide our class on the idiotic basis of skin colour, so as to cripple us in the real fight. Keeping out immigrants will not solve unemployment or any other problem: if workers listen to you, they will be less able to fight unemployment. Instead of attacking its real cause they will start attacking each other.

You are not the exponent of a cure for our ills: you are an ulcerated carrier of the disease — capitalism — which afflicts British society.

You say Britain is overcrowded. But what about the thousands who *leave* every year?

You say that immigrants differ in culture and background. Yes, they do. (So do the Welsh, English, Scots and Irish, and the large numbers of European workers who came here after the war.) But not nearly so much as the culture, life-style and values of the British workers differ from those of "our" British boss class.

The breadth of understanding, the real culture, even the general knowledge, of the British working class is in fact all the better, is all the richer, for the mixing. Our understanding of a common interest with workers of other countries is sharper for the experience. Our grasp of the need for *international* working class solidarity is stronger for the contact.

In the Common Market the working class will only be able to defend itself by cutting across narrow nationalism and forging strong links with European trade unionists.

That's what worries you, Powell, and

* Published in *Workers' Fight*, a predecessor of *Workers' Liberty*, and republished in the industrial papers *Workers' Fight* published for dockers and steelworkers.

Home Rule all round?

your class — as does the sight of black and white and Asian workers united on flying pickets.

The working class maxim *unity is strength* applies outside the country, as well as in it.

You say the British people are denied the facts about what is happening in their country. But whose country is it, Powell?

Two or three per cent of the people — those you represent — own all the substantial wealth of the country. They contribute little or nothing to the wealth of the country, to the well-being of the majority of its people.

50,000 coloured immigrants who work for just so much as one year (and they do work) will contribute more to the common wealth of the British people than will the whole gaggle of spivs and parasites that make up the ruling class during all the natural lives of a whole useless generation of them.

Black workers have more right to live in the country than all the winter-in-the-Bahamas set, all the Reggie Maudlings, the Arnold Weinstocks, the Lord Vesteyes [rich capitalists] and the Enoch Powells — they have earned that right through hard work. And one day, quite soon perhaps, they will help 'us' make it really *our* country by taking it out of the hands of rats like you.

In 1968 some muddled workers joined with fascists in supporting you. Since then the working class has felt its own strength, it has got a clearer picture of its real enemy now than for a long time past. It has the experience of a series of victorious struggles in common with tens of thousands of black and Asian workers.

Militant workers must and will rally to protect our black brothers if the fascist gangs and backward workers of '68 once again try to use the 'respectable' cover you provide for those who want to attack blacks and Asians.

This time working class militants, black and white, can create defence groups to drive your fascist followers back into the sewers from which you encourage them to emerge.

If they don't, they are allowing you, Powell, and your class to inflict a wound on the working class which can turn septic.

With all our hearts we, working class militants from the port and steel industries, pledge ourselves to fight to root out, and to wipe out, the racist poison you represent for our class.

The black workers are our brothers in the struggle of the working class. You, Powell, contemptible gutter-rat that you are, are one of the most diseased representatives of everything we are struggling against.

Tony Duffy (editor, *Real Steel News*),
Harold Youd (editor, *The Hook*)

In the Gladstonian Liberal Party, which fell from power in 1895, there was much talk of giving each nationality in the United Kingdom — English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish — Home Rule. It came to nought. The Marxists of that time commented in an editorial in their paper:

ONE of the Tory opponents of the abstract resolution passed last week by the House of Commons in favour of "Home Rule all round" hit the nail on the head when he said that the discussion had about it an "ineffaceable air of absolute unreality". But Radicals [Liberals] are for ever grasping at shadows and letting the substance elude them. They are for ever pursuing shadowy political reforms while making no effort to secure substantial social reforms. When it emanates from Radical supporters of the capitalist system there is a flavour of insincerity about the proposal to make a large addition to existing political machinery, seeing that they are opposed themselves to the idea of the extension of the functions of the State. They still profess the most profound faith in "private enterprise" and strenuously oppose the Socialist contention that the community ought to organise its own industries, to take control of its own affairs, instead of leaving them longer at the mercy of that conflict of private interests from which, according to the Radical axiom, general well-being results. When we point out to them that ugly facts confront and confound their theory, "so much the worse for the facts", say they, "the theory is a sound one".

We do not mean to say that "Home Rule for Ireland and for all other parts of the United Kingdom", would be an unsubstantial reform. If we thought so it would not stand, as it does, on our programme. But there is something ludicrous in the notion that full recognition of the right of each country to manage its own affairs, a right shared by each city, town and village within their several borders, will be made by the mere multiplying of Parliaments.

An addition to our political machinery which would only increase the output of talk is most undesirable. We take it that it is true that politics mean no longer "the government of men", but "the administration of affairs". If so the time has come for the unmaking rather than the making of Parliaments, which were only devised as a check upon personal rule which in this country is no longer as great a menace to our political liberties as the Cabinets which exercise autocratic powers, confident of the support of the party-followers of the Ministry that happens to be in office. For the thorough administration of affairs we must appoint boards or committees of experts. It is no good establishing more Palaver Palaces like the one at Westminster.

We do not seriously entertain the opinion that the House of Commons is useless, dangerous, and ought to be abolished. Let it be democratised, and the institution may still serve a very useful purpose, provided it is made widely representative, not of something less than Great Britain but of Greater Britain, and provided its members are guided in their deliberations by a sense of communal instead of particular interests.

We shall take another step forward when we convene that Parliament of the Nations which will assemble as soon as — Capitalism and Class Rule overthrown — the solidarity of mankind receives recognition. But instead of being a step forward it seems to us that the proposal to establish four Parliaments within the British Isles is a retrogressive one. What useful purpose could they serve which Provincial or National Councils, composed of members of local administrative bodies, would not serve still better! Practical experience would indicate to such bodies what legislative reforms are necessary. They could initiate legislation, and Parliament would hesitate to reject measures emanating from such a source. But if the multiplication of Parliaments would serve no useful purpose they might do very real mischief by fostering national prejudices and national jealousies, by accentuating differences it is desirable to efface; and anything which might in this way check the growth of internationalism it is our duty as Social-Democrats, to oppose.

We advocated Home Rule for Ireland long before it was prosperous to avow oneself a Home Ruler, but we refused to endorse the claim of Radical converts that it had become a matter of paramount importance because, forsooth, they had tardily embraced it as an article of their political belief. We still believe in Home Rule for Ireland, in Home Rule for Sussex for that matter, but we know how hollow the phrase "Home Rule" must sound to every intelligent workman of Irish or any other extraction, who comprehends that as long as a class controls access to the means of livelihood that class rules him. You might as well quote the proverb which affirms that every Englishman's house is his castle, with the idea of comforting the man who tells you the bailiffs are in possession of his home, as endeavour to convince any thoughtful worker that his economic conditions will be changed for the better, by shifting the venue of parliamentary assemblies. To the extent that his class can gain representation in Parliament, he is interested in preserving, not restricting, its international character (if an assembly of English, Irish, Scottish, and Welshmen can be called international?) for the workers will be able to emancipate themselves only by uniting their forces. Divided they have always been defeated. Only by healing the division of nations will the workers be able to shake off class-rule. Home Rule, or no Home Rule, as long as the capitalist landlord class is in possession, the labour-force of the worker will be "sold-up" day by day, he will still be despoiled of the wealth he creates.

Every extension of the principle of local self-government increases the political power of the worker, which will be a valuable weapon in the struggle for social freedom, therefore we, as Social-Democrats, will do all we can to extend the application of the principle. But under its cover and cloak do not let us permit the reactionary nationalist spirit to be revived. Our hope lies, not in Home Rule, but in internationalism, and we must guard it jealously.

Editorial, Justice, 6 April 1895

Labour ends free higher education

By Cath Fletcher,
Campaign for Free
Education

THE New Labour government has done what the Tories wanted but did not dare do: they have abolished free university education.

On 23 July David Blunkett announced New Labour's intention to scrap student maintenance grants, and introduce tuition fees of up to £1,000 a year for undergraduates. As from 1998, each student must find at least £15,000 — that is, go into debt to get through a degree course.

This is anti-working class legislation of the worst sort. The abolition of grants and free tuition will inevitably deter working-class students from entering higher education. Many will simply not go to university. Many who do will be forced to stay on in their parents' homes. Legions of students will be forced to take up badly paid part-time jobs. Many will choose training courses that lead quickly to jobs, rather than the more rewarding academic courses they would choose if they had a choice. New Labour has deprived unknown thousands of poor students of such a chance.

The government has introduced



CFE pickets the Department of Education

these proposals under cover of the Dearing Report on the future of higher education. Ron Dearing was called in by the Tory government in May 1996 to "solve the crisis in higher education". Conveniently for both Labour and the Tories, that manoeuvre kept the issue off the General Election agenda. It says a great deal about the state of British democracy that a decision like this can be made three months after a General Election in which not a word was said about it!

Both parties are well aware that cutting higher education is a dangerous game — especially given its importance to their prized middle-class supporters in

"Middle England". Even the Tories have, opportunistically, criticised the decision.

The last time a government tried to introduce tuition fees — the Tories, when Keith Joseph was education secretary in 1984 — it was defeated by a huge public campaign led by the National Union of Students. Students, parents and the education unions were all involved. This time round, however, the situation is different.

This is a New Labour government, and NUS is led

by New Labour Students. The NUS leadership — who might have fought a Tory decision such as New Labour has taken — are in an untenable position. On one side, they are under pressure from their political paymasters in the government not to derail Blunkett's plans for tuition fees. On the other, they are under pressure from students and student unions to put up a fight. And they are aware that an active, democratic campaign against fees could bring into the NUS a whole new layer of activists who would pose a real threat to their control of the union.

The current situation is a major opportunity for the left in NUS to build a base of activists in colleges around the country — students who are prepared to take on the government over their scrapping of grants and to take on their own union bureaucracy at a local and national level.

The Campaign for Free Education is demanding that NUS holds a national demonstration. CFE has called a demonstration for 26 November. CFE is offering to make it an official NUS demonstration if the NUS will give its support. CFE is also organising local and regional action around the country. A major demonstration is being called with CFE backing by Newcastle University on 5 November for students in the north.

● Further details: Helen Graysham, Newcastle University Union Society, King's Walk, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 8QT or phone Cath on 0958 556756.

National demonstration, Wed 29 October, London

30 Years of a Woman's Right to Choose

By Anita Goldsmith,
NUS Women's Officer

THIS October marks the 30th anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act, which for the first time gave women in Britain access to safe, legal abortion.

It was a hard fought-for victory and gave millions of women more choice and control over their reproductive lives. But, in the last period,

we have seen increased activity by the anti-abortion lobby, and cuts in the Health Service which make it harder to exercise our right to choice.

The NUS Women's Campaign has called a national, torchlit demonstration in London, and rally at Conway Hall to mark the anniversary of the Act. Speakers include Audrey Wise MP.

● Details: Anita, 0171-561 6503.