

Where is Labour going?

By John Nicholson

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

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

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

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

managed more "nicely."

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

"Immense progress"?

By Rob Kent

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

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

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

The facts belie the so-called settlement "freeze": 40,000 acres of land

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

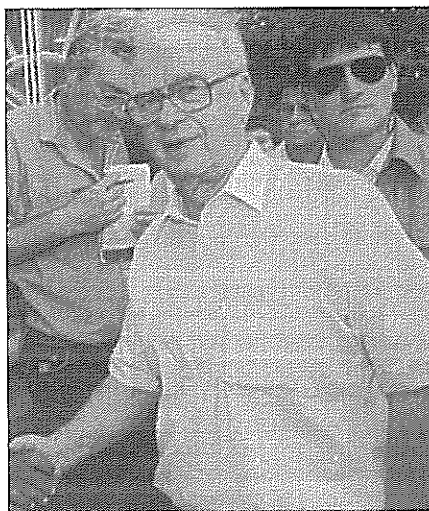
The settlement policy co-existed with Rabin's enthusiasm for "separation". This enthusiasm was hopefully interpreted by many on the left as implying an independent Palestinian state in the long run. Yet in reality it meant little more than the "separate development" seen for decades in South Africa.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

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

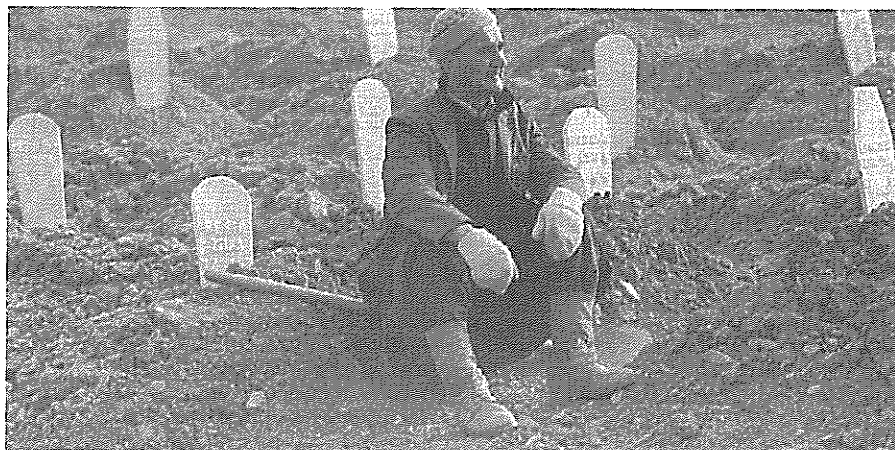
The autonomous areas will be little more than homelands dominated and controlled by the Israelis who will continue to occupy about two-thirds of the West Bank and almost half of the Gaza Strip. Autonomy represents a key element in the combination of settlements-repression-autonomy that amounts to a strategy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

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

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



Yitzhak Rabin



Bosnia: not a German plot

By Colin Foster

I'M surprised that Ernie Haberkern (Forum, WL26) reckons that our coverage of Bosnia in WL24 did not address "the question that should be obvious to a Marxist... do the Bosnian Serbs have the right to self-determination?"

In a discussion with Branka Magas (WL24, p.12) Martin Thomas contended that "peace is only going to be possible... if the Bosnian Serbs feel that they have a guarantee that they are not going to be forced into a state in which they are a minority", and he disputed Branka Magas's reply: "To speak of self-determination... is absurd". In WL23 I had written: "Reconciliation and reknitting of links has to start by recognising self-determination for each block — Serb, Croat, and Bosnian-Muslim, or Bosniac... Support for the Bosniacs, as the victims of imperialism, has to be in that framework".

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

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

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

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

Germany, and soon the Americans too, then decided to bank on Croatia as the most viable fragment of ex-Yugoslavia. And, piecemeal, reluctantly, all the big powers were pulled into military involvement in ex-Yugoslavia, in a blundering, botched, cynical effort to tranquilise the region somehow for renewed trade and investment. To suggest that they used "the same overwhelming firepower [as] in the Gulf War" against the Serbs is to lose all sense of proportion: when the Americans finally bombed the Serbs to the conference table, it was to a conference where they were granted the bulk

of their imperialistic aims. The idea that this makes the Serbs the main aggrieved party in the whole business reminds me of the probably apocryphal story about Marie Antoinette apologising to the executioner for treading on his toe as she stepped up to the guillotine.

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

Too rosy a picture

By Conrad Russell and
Petra Peters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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people's needs.

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

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

"The Jacobins were realists, and not abstract dreamers. They were convinced of the absolute truth of their slogans

about equality, fraternity and liberty, and what is more important, the great popular masses whom the Jacobins stirred up and drew into the struggle were also convinced of their truth."

Shachtman and the US military

By Ernie Haberkern

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

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

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

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

What that meant a few short years

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. The arbitrary and unappealable decisions of the attorney general,
2. and the use of the list to intimidate dissent from any quarter, not just defenders of Stalinism.

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

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

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

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

Loyalist right, not socialist!

By John McNulty*

I WISH to express my astonishment and anger at the recent exchanges in the columns of *Workers' Liberty* (WI22, 24 and 25)

To briefly recapitulate; the ICMP protested the decision of Militant Labour to give a platform to Billy Hutchinson of the PUP. Annie O'Keefe, apparently a supporter of *Workers' Liberty*, attacked me and I replied. Now I find myself facing a new opponent in the columns of *Work-*

ers' Liberty — none other than Billy himself! *Workers' Liberty* without comment asks me to debate with someone who, in the accepted phrase, is "close to the thinking" of the UVF death squads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editor's note:

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

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



Does Loyalism have an eternal taint?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours fraternally, Sean Matgamna

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