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Workers' Liberty

New Labour, Old Capitalism

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The battle for Labour: Arthur Scargill, Ken Coates MEP and Tom Rigby

Mitchell McLaughlin: Sinn Fein and the ceasefire

Funding the Welfare State

Yeltsin's dirty war in Chechenia

Talking to Penelope Leach

Class war in the Blitz

Experiences of the left: the International Socialists/Socialist Worker

Workers' Liberty

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

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A letter to our readers

THIS IS the first issue of *Workers' Liberty* in the new monthly schedule of publication.

Our 'cover story', the struggle in the Labour Party over Clause Four part four of the Party constitution, focuses on one of the most important events in recent labour movement history. That the triumphant right should attempt to ditch Clause Four surprised nobody. What took everybody — especially Tony Blair — by surprise was a hostile rank and file response so vigorous that Blair now can only hope to win with the backing of the trade union leaders, the same trade union leaders whose connection with the Labour Party he spends so much of his time denouncing.

The amazement and shock in Blair's face on the Thursday of last year's Labour Party Conference when he lost the vote said it all. It will help sustain some of those fighting him for the duration of this campaign and far beyond!

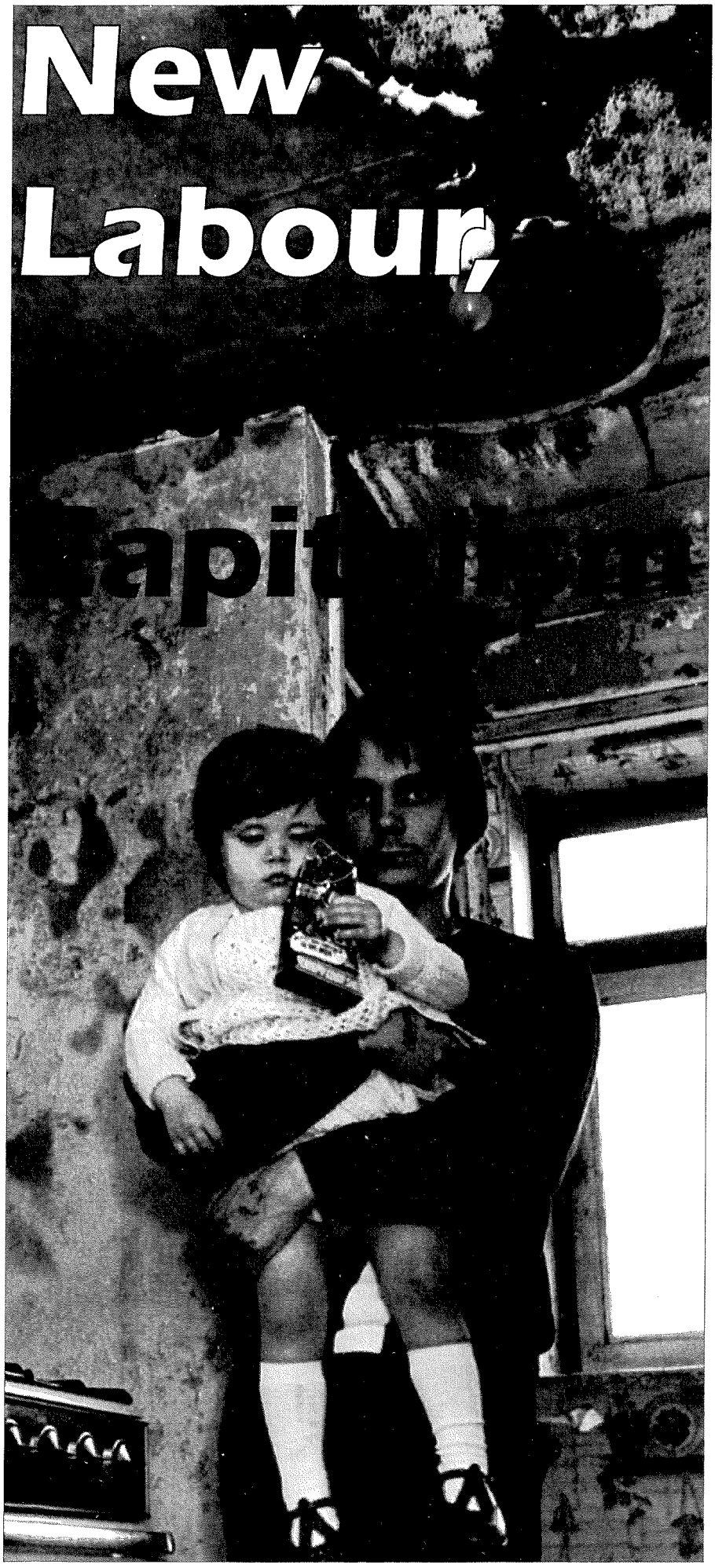
What has been done so far should not be exaggerated, or the difficulties and possible disappointments ahead ignored, but, whatever the outcome of the special Labour Party conference in April, a Labour left has begun to reform itself.

The Labour Party remains the mass party of the British trade unions and, therefore, of central concern to Marxist socialists. At the opposite pole stands the Socialist Workers' Party.

For decades, much of the energy of the would-be revolutionary left has gone into that organisation and its predecessor, the International Socialists. It is a sectarian dead end, crazily autocratic and increasingly bizarre in its internal affairs. (They have just expelled half — about 40 — of their South African organisation in a dispute about the structure of its branches!) Yet it remains the biggest ostensibly revolutionary organisation in Britain and the *alma mater* of thousands of ex-members, scattered around the labour movement. To help those and others record and come to terms with the IS/SWP experience, we publish the first instalment of a symposium on the much obfuscated history and "tradition" of that organisation. Other contributions are lined up for subsequent issues, at least two of them by former National Secretaries of the organisation. Keep reading.

The next issue will also include an article by Ken Coates MEP on the history of the fight to defend Clause Four against Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell.

It will take a great deal of effort in the months to come to sustain *Workers' Liberty* on a monthly schedule. Help us! Take out a subscription! Show *Workers' Liberty* to your friends. Sell them subscriptions. Put it in your local bookshops. In your local library. Send us reports and articles. Send us cash donations. To a great extent the future of the magazine rests with you. We hope you find the new *Workers' Liberty* worth making an effort for.



Editorial

THE GREATEST MEDIA con trick in late twentieth century British politics is surely the way a tiny fraction of right-wing Social-Democrats and Christian-Democrats have been able to portray as "modernisation" their drive to turn the clock of Labour politics back a full century.

Only in this Orwellian world of ours, in which a handful of billionaire tycoons control the mass media, could their antique and reactionary political project be described as 'radical' in any sense other than 'radical right'.

Blair would:

- re-introduce means testing,
- undermine state pensions,
- force the unemployed on to cheap labour schemes,
- protect selective education,
- place university education beyond the reach of many working class students,
- continue the run down and marketisation of the NHS,
- continue to outlaw effective trade union ism, and
- abolish direct labour movement representation in Parliament.

Radical? Welcome to the world of Blair-speak!

No one in the labour movement should underestimate how far Blair wants to go. His war against Clause Four is just the start. Hugh MacPherson, *Tribune*'s political commentator, an independent-minded reform socialist, has defined the issues clearly and sharply:

"Labour now faces one of the most significant periods in its history, with a re-definition of its beliefs being rushed through, and a leader who is surrounding himself with people who have little or no commitment to trade unions, or questions of redistribution, or a really modernised form of public ownership. There is nothing new about Tony Blair's views.

"He threatens not only the Labour Party and the unions but the Tory Party itself. For he seeks to replace it."

Blair's goal is not to reform the Labour Party but to abolish it as it has so far existed.

The attack on Clause Four is a symbolic first act, but the core of Blair's agenda is to break the union link by introducing state funding for political parties. Financed by the taxpayer, a gang of anti-working class political careerists would then have made themselves more or less completely independent of the working class and its movement.

Blair's end goal is to transform the Labour Party into a mainstream bourgeois party with a captive working class electoral base similar to that of the US Democrats. This fact is plain to see for anyone who bothers to look. Maverick right wing Labour MP Austin Mitchell put it like this when discussing the political philosophy of Peter Mandelson, Blair's closest advisor:

Continued on page 5

Beyond the Northern Ireland ceasefire

THE CEASEFIRE in Northern Ireland — the best thing in Ireland for a long time — is five months old.

The Provisional IRA war, ostensibly against the British state, was fought on an issue defined at root by the determined and bitter opposition of one million Irish people, the compact majority in North East Ulster, to resist what the Provisional IRA, and the Catholic Northern Irish minority, driven to revolt by decades of oppression, wanted: a united Ireland. Inevitably the violence of the PIRA came to be directed mainly not at "Brits" but at Irish Unionists.

It could not win and it did not deserve to win: substituting one million Protestants forced against their will into a united Ireland for half a million Catholics forced against their will to be part of the Six County State would not by any reckoning have been progress.

Progress lies in mutual accommodation by the two peoples who share the island of Ireland.

The hard underlying political reality is still that the desires and aspirations of the two peoples in Ireland, as they are now posed by the antagonists, are simply incompatible.

If a broadly acceptable compromise is not worked out the ceasefire may drag on for a while — maybe a long while — as a peace of exhaustion, which it is now in some degree, but war will then break out again. The Northern Irish working class will once more be the great loser.

For the left in Britain the end — for now — of the Provisional IRA campaign creates a new situation.

For many years, sections of the British left felt that it would be unprincipled to sharply criticise the PIRA so long as it was conducting a military struggle against — or ostensibly against — the British Government.

We, of course, came to disagree with that, though initially we shared the belief that the first duty of socialists in Britain was to support against 'our own' government even such a flawed and limited national revolutionary movement as the PIRA; we were the only organisation of the British left to suffer an armed police raid on our headquarters in connection with Ireland (in 1973). Belatedly, a decade ago, we came to the conclusion that what the working class needed from us was not cheerleading for the Provos, but, above all else, an honest attempt to understand Ireland in all its complexities.

We have acted on that conclusion, telling the truth as we saw it.

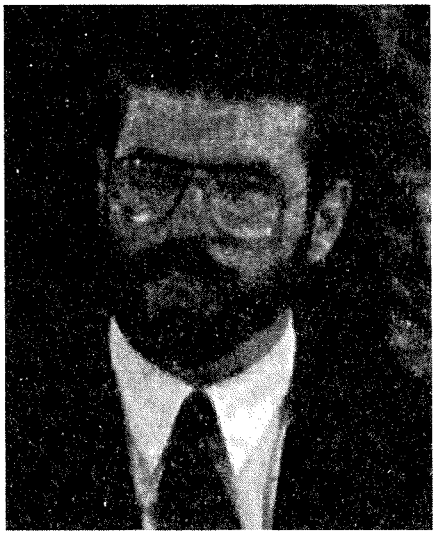
Ireland over the last 25 years constitutes one of the great failures of the British left. Because it has confined itself to shouting pseudo-Republican slogans such as "Troops Out", the left has played no independent political role. It has had no analysis of Ireland independent of the old British Liberal/Irish middle-class/Sinn Fein analysis.

Even discussion of Irish issues was ruled out: ours was not to reason about such things but to follow the lead of those "fighting British imperialism" in Ireland.

Where Ireland is concerned, for over twenty years the left has substituted self-hypnotising lies for both knowledge and policy. The result is now utter political confusion.

It is hard to believe, but most of those who call for Troops Out think that thereby they call for a United Ireland. In fact, unless preceded by a political settlement, it would certainly mean civil war and repartition, not any sort of united Ireland.

They talk about ending the "Protestant veto" when, for 22 years now, since the abolition of Stormont, Northern Ireland has been kept in balance by twin vetoes: the Catholic veto against majority rule in Northern Ireland has balanced the Protestant veto against any all-Ireland constitution. Both vetoes are backed by force and the threat of force. We could go on: the left is awash with such un-thought-out nonsense.



Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein. The Northern Irish working class needs its own, democratic solution to the "constitutional question"

Above all else, right now, the serious left needs to step out of the shadow of middle class Irish nationalism, to cease to walk in awe of Gerry Adams' "Fianna Failers with guns".

They need to ask themselves what they think about Ireland, about Sinn Fein's politics, about the Provisional IRA. It has practical importance.

For the British left has a great responsibility in Ireland. One million people in Ireland, probably a majority of them working-class, say they are British. The British labour movement can influence such people towards reconciliation in Ireland. But the left, by playing the chameleon to Catholic nationalism, has long rendered itself unable to even talk to those Irish workers within the British state.

All that can now change.

For ourselves, we are convinced that the working class needs to advocate its own democratic solution to the "constitutional question" that divides the people, and the workers, of Ireland. We advocate a federal united Ireland as a solution to the divisive constitutional issue: this idea can be a means of allowing the working class to unite and, ultimately, to create an Irish workers' republic.

The Northern Irish trade unions should once again create a Labour Party there. Unless such a party had a federalist policy on the "constitutional question" it would be foredoomed to shatter at the first crisis, as such parties have shattered in the past. But it does not have to be foredoomed.

For years we have found it impossible to even get our ideas discussed on the left. To discuss such things was to betray the "armed struggle". Now that Gerry Adams has "betrayed" it, the serious British left needs to take a fresh look at Ireland, and at itself too.

In every respect the British left has failed the Irish working class in the last twenty-five years. It is time we too made a new start! WL

The battle has just begun

By Tom Rigby

RIGHT-WING spin doctors and left-wing sectarians who claim that the Labour Party is an arena dead to socialists have been proved wrong by the battle that has erupted over Clause Four (which formally commits Labour to the common ownership of the means of production).

Suddenly the national media, Labour Party wards and union branches are full of discussion about what is socialism. That was not the effect Blair intended, but that, so far, is what he has got.

In just three months a mighty opposition movement has developed inside the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions. It has reared up, as if out of the ground, to stop Blair jettisoning Clause Four.

The fightback began immediately Blair announced his intentions from the platform of Labour Party Conference on the afternoon of Tuesday 4 October.

By the end of that session of conference activists from the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network were already out getting conference delegates to sign a petition in defence of Clause Four.

We quickly linked up with the National Union of Mineworkers and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and called an open planning meeting for the Thursday night. The meeting was packed. It marked the start of what has become the broadest, and most united, left-wing opposition movement to develop in the party since the high tide of Bennism some 14 years ago.

The achievements so far of the movement in defence of Clause Four are remarkable:

• In the face of a wide campaign of hysterical denunciation from the Party establishment we won a vital conference vote to re-affirm Clause Four less than 48 hours after Party leader Blair had announced his intention to abolish it.

• We have won majority support in the constituencies. A survey by the TUC of 10% of Labour constituencies found that 50% of Party members support the retention of Clause Four. Support for Clause Four is not just confined to the activist layer. The right wing are fully aware of the extent of this support. In fact it is this that explains why

"In just three months a mighty opposition movement has developed inside the Labour Party. It has reared up to stop Blair jettisoning Clause Four."

they have not attempted to seek the abolition of Clause Four by means of the postal ballot of all individual members. They are not at all sure they would win.

• We have taken the issue of Clause Four into the unions. We have a chance of winning more union support at Blair's hastily called special conference on 29 April than we won last October!

Proof of the way things are going in the unions was provided by the simple fact that Blair had to press the unions for a special Labour Party conference on this issue before the union conferences had had a chance to meet and pronounce on it. Blair and his coterie know that if they waited for the next annual conference in October there was every chance that key unions which backed him at Blackpool — UCW, MSF, GMB, USDAW — would have been won for retention of Clause Four.

Now everything is in the balance. The left has widespread support but the right has tight control over the party apparatus, and ready access to the media. There is no guarantee that we will win, but right now we have a fighting chance.

Why has this happened?

Because Blair and his coterie of Christian-Democratic teenage Machiavellians do not really understand the psychology of the Labour Party. Despite all the defeats and setbacks of recent years, most Labour activists do still believe in some variant of socialism,

Tom Rigby is a member of the National Steering Committee of the Defend Clause Four campaign

New Labour, Old Capitalism

From page 3

"He has nothing to say to our traditional constituency, the poor, the unions, the spending lobby, the public servants. They have to vote for us anyway. With nowhere else to go they can be taken for granted, their only task not to embarrass us. Labour's job now is to make the world safe for the readers of the Daily Telegraph. So don't associate with our traditional voters, give our new ones the fruits of their desires and protect their privilege.

"Above all, don't frighten them by asking them to pay the bill. Tough on Labour. Tough on the causes of Labour."

Blair is not only an enemy of socialism — most leaders of the Labour Party have been that — but also a scarcely disguised enemy of the labour movement.

Blair is far from invincible. He is being forced to turn to the leaders of the much-abused trade unions for a rescue.

All Blair and his allies can muster as an argument for their case is the Great Bourgeois-Stalinist Lie that Stalinism was socialism and its failure proves the impossibility of socialism.

No, Stalinism was not socialism! Neither was the state capitalism nationalisation developed in Britain after 1945!

Nine tenths of the battle for socialism in a country like Britain is the battle to remake the mass labour movement. That battle has once more been joined.

It is now up to the serious Marxist left to go onto the offensive.

The reconstructed left must fight for the only genuinely new — in the sense that it has so far never been realised — and progressive programme open to humanity — democratic common ownership. That is, socialism.

and do still aspire to an economic and social system different from capitalism and opposed to it — a system based on democratically run common ownership. In one recent poll 65% of party members said that they thought that "The key question in British politics is the class struggle between labour and capital."

Another reason for the force and extent of the opposition to Blair is the unprecedented unity of the left. We have built a campaign that unites a very wide range of left-wing opinion, linking it with figures on the centre and right of the party like David Winnick MP, and Gwyneth Dunwoody.

For the first time in many years the parliamentary "soft left" have been marginalised. Those like Peter Hain and Michael Meacher who floated the utopian idea of a left-wing re-write of Clause Four have been crushed between the willingness of grass roots activists to defend Clause Four and the necessity of backing Blair if you want to advance your parliamentary career. *Tribune* originally sponsored their re-write, but has now come out in favour of the retention of Clause Four.

The key to the advance of the Clause Four campaign has been that we have been prepared to combine a rigorous and principled defence of Clause Four and common ownership with wide-ranging technical flexibility about the best means to do this.

In particular, the initiative know as "Clause Four Plus," which came from the Euro-MPs Stan Newens, Ken Coates and Alec Falconer, has completely wrong-footed the Tory-oriented "modernisers".

The "Clause Four Plus" argument is simple. If Blair and Co. simply want to update and add to Clause Four then why not retain it and supplement it? Why abolish it?

This approach has smoked-out the "modernisers" and put them on the defensive wherever they have been faced with the argument.

Another reason for the success of the movement so far is that we have been able to draw out the practical consequences of Blair's desire to change the constitution. We have been able to link to the Clause Four issue a wide range of issues:

- rail privatisation;
- water renationalisation;
- Compulsory Competitive Tendering;
- the minimum wage
- union rights.

Many union activists can now see that they will get little from a Blair government without fighting it. That fight has already started.

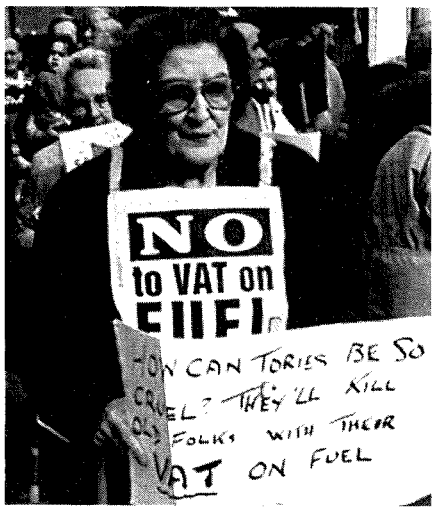
A battle over Clause Four is not exactly a strategic necessity for the modernisers. Victory would not change the nature of the Labour Party. In fact, by getting involved in this debate the "modernisers" have limited their own room for manoeuvre on other fronts.

In particular they have made themselves reliant on the block votes of the right-wing union bureaucrats, thus closing down, for the time being, the possibility of cutting the union link. What they have been attacking as an intolerable fetter on their political freedom has suddenly turned into a lifeline without which Blair will go down to defeat! Reliance on the trade union leaders is something the modernisers can ill afford because their agenda for the next Labour government (keeping CCT, privatisation) offers virtually nothing to the unions.

The left in the Labour Party is at the crossroads. We need to build on the inspiring unity that has been established over Clause Four. Our target now: victory on 29 April!

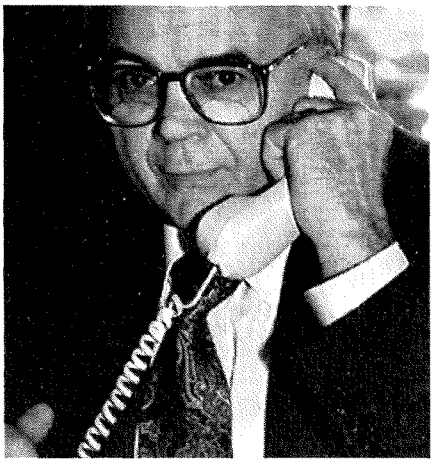
But, win or lose, what we need to see develop is an authoritative left-wing coordinating body inside the party, committed to resisting Blair's agenda every step of the way and linked up with grass roots campaigns on the welfare state, the minimum wage, trade union rights and re-nationalisation.

The 29 April conference will not be the end of the battle.



Blair has still not managed to commit the New Labour Party to abolishing VAT on fuel

"Our people have nowhere else to go"



Ken Coates MEP explains his arguments for retaining Clause Four

THE SIGNIFICANT thing about the Clause Four Campaign is how well it is doing. We've had a level of unity not seen for very many years.

The leadership expected people to cave in: they don't understand that our people have nowhere else to go.

They are at the end of a very long and painful period of evolution. We've had millions of people excluded from society. We've got huge sections of our people in dire misery. We've got problems of mass unemployment. We've got people who are scraping a living in the black economy. We've got a wide area in society where people don't have any hope.

We've got large numbers of our young men who can't get employment anywhere, and don't have any prospect of a normal social life.

"This is an absolutely Victorian project. It would wipe out all the gains that were made from the great unionising upsurge of 1889 and the mass trade unionism that followed."

If you live near that, you can feel it. If you live in real Britain, then you know that something has got to be done about that, and you see all of these other things as a form of equivocation. You don't see what the so-called modernisers have to say as being real.

That is why a lot of people inside the Labour Party are worried. And they are right

Defend Clause Four rally

to be worried. We've got to put our shoulder to the wheel and hope to persuade our colleagues in the unions and Labour Party that we can not only retain our traditions, but win back real rights and full employment.

It's necessary to look very carefully at the Blair project. In my view what is wrong with it is that he is seeking to create what Ben Pimlott calls "a popular front of the mind." The mind is the worst possible place to have a popular front in! You can see that with the attempt to align with SDPers in a common project.

If you are my age then you were born into a class that didn't know who its great-grandparents were. Unlike those who rule over us, who can trace their families back to 1066, we lost our families in the industrial revolution.

But what we did have is a sense of identity which was marked out in industry and in cultural institutions, including churches. And we had a history which is very strongly represented in the banners of the Labour Party and unions. The one thing working-class people have got that gives them a point of reference is the knowledge of their history.

If you try to melt that down, you are leaving people rootless and without a reference point.

This 'New Labour' project is almost Maoist. It is an attempt to smash everything up. It's an attempt to displace our people.

They attack our history and our socialist traditions. They attempt to change the constitution. They make very serious efforts to separate the political Labour Party in Parliament and the country from the trade unions. It is very disorienting indeed.

For instance, at a conference of the unions organised by *New Times* and the *New Statesman*, the leader of the Labour Party called for there to be an equidistance between the unions and all political parties.

That is a project that cannot benefit our people. It will weaken all the ties of solidarity and mutual concern that our people desperately need.

This is an absolutely Victorian project. It would wipe out all the gains that were made from the great trade unionising upsurge of 1889 and the development of mass trade unionism that followed.

The adoption of Clause Four marked the end of a thirty year process of development which saw the Labour Party separate itself out from the Liberals as an independent political force. Clause Four finally cut the ties between organised labour and the Liberal Party.

Once Clause Four is removed, then that situation is changed. What is happening is an attempt not only to change the nature of the Labour Party but also an attempt to undermine Labour's historic basis of support.

Rather than dissolving our traditions and our identity we should be attempting to appeal on the basis of our own politics to professional people and small and even medium business people.

We should be saying that democratic common ownership is a basis on which real economic strength can be built. For a long time it will coexist with private enterprises of various kinds, whose operators will be more secure than they are today under the domination of the multi-nationals.

When we run our own pension funds, working people will be more secure than they have been under people like Maxwell.

We shall never recover full employment without a vast increase in local and regional public enterprise and service. That is why democratic common ownership is one of the big ideas for the 21st century.

Blood is thicker than water!

LABOUR EURO-MP Ken Coates has been at the centre of a huge controversy because of his outspoken defence of Clause Four. The right wing have threatened him with "discipline" for remarks he was reported as making about Tony Blair. A majority of his Labour MEP colleagues have come out in support of the retention of Clause Four.

Attempts by Blair's office, *Guardian* journalists and the ex-Stalinists of the now defunct Communist Party, to launch a media witch hunt against Coates have badly backfired. He has received hundreds of messages of support backing his stand.

He says "I can tell you that out in the European Parliament it is really quite moving the way people have rallied — people you would never expect to identify themselves. Blood is thicker than water! It's just normal solidarity but it's very nice. We were led to believe all that had died out."

Defend socialism!

By Arthur Scargill

THE NEW Labour leader in his first conference speech says he wants to change the Party constitution. Then within minutes of a decision being taken by the Party conference against his proposal to scrap Clause Four he says that conference could adopt whatever resolution it wishes — the leadership will do something different. The leader will do what he likes!

History is littered with leaders and leaderships who ignored at their peril ordinary men and women seeking common justice and a better way of life.

In real terms now we have five million without a job. At the very least, ten million workers live on or below the poverty line. Hundreds of thousands are homeless, feeling helpless in a society that breeds hatred. Isn't it a terrible tragedy, indeed a sin, that we have a Party leader who wants to change the Party's entire outlook and the way it evolves its policies?

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the Clinton clones, want an American style Democratic Party. If anyone is naive enough to think that they would be satisfied with the removal of Clause Four, they are living in cloud cuckoo land. The next step would be: "We want a new name" — one that is more acceptable. One that doesn't jar. One that will be acceptable to the City of Lon-

don.

What an obscenity to witness on television — Labour's leaders greeting the captains of industry! Wining and dining them at £300 a head at the Labour Party conference! They should have been meeting the unemployed, those who are disenfranchised.

We've heard the right wing say that two middle-class Fabians devised Clause Four. I much prefer two old middle-class Fabians in 1918 to a group of out-of-touch spin-doctors now who are trying to ditch the very concept of the Party as a working-class party and make it indistinguishable from the Tories or the Liberal Democrats.

The Party has always won General Elections at a time of crisis or industrial struggle. I remember the same kind of foreboding that we now hear from people like Tony Blair about the "problems" of nationalisation, or industrial action, or trade union legislation being conveyed to me by Denis Healey in 1974. 1974 was the year that we had a miners' strike. Ted Heath decided that we would have a General Election to find out "who rules Britain."

At a time of industrial action, people were prepared to vote for a Labour Party that looked as though it was prepared to have revolutionary change. So it has been all over Europe, where people have suffered at the hands of regimes that have not ruled in the interests of ordinary men and women.

I do not simply want to see the Labour Party win a General Election. I don't want to see merely nationalised industries. I want to see the Labour Party win political change. I want to see them introduce the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

To see the Labour leadership embrace the market is not only to see them repudiate the basic socialist faith. It is to see them sow the seeds of defeat at the next election.

I didn't join this Party to ensure that it ran capitalism better than the Tories! I joined to change this rotten and corrupt system of capitalist society into a socialist society where men and women could control their own lives and their own destinies. That is why I believe that common ownership should be at the very forefront.

Blair's New Labour Party fails to face up to the rottenness of the capitalist system. Photo: John Harris

I say to people in the PLP like Peter Hain and Clare Short, who say that they are in favour of socialism, that the only way you can do something positive to defend socialism is to defend Clause Four. No fancy words. No dressing up of the arguments. Straight down the line defence of Clause Four — defend socialism!

I speak with the full support of the National Union of Mineworkers. We are committed to Clause Four of the Labour Party's constitution because it's also *our* constitution. The first leader of the Party was a miners' leader called James Keir Hardie. Another great outstanding miner leader of the Party, Aneurin Bevan, was wholeheartedly committed to Clause Four, part four.

I say to all those inside and outside Parliament, inside the Party and the trade union movement: "Remember the struggle waged ever since the Party was born." It has been on this basis that we are different from parties which support capitalism.

Clause Four marks this Party out from the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. It establishes a clear identity and one which has given us victory in eight General Elections.

We will fail in our duty if all we do is speak or preach. Until we translate words into action we shall not be remembering the basis on which this Party was founded: to bring about a fundamental and irreversible change in society.

We should fight to retain Clause Four in its entirety and demand that there are no changes. Not a dot, not a comma, not a word. We should say to Tony Blair and to the leadership that we not only want to retain Clause Four — we want you at the next election to show to our class the same loyalty and dedication that the Tories show to their class.

You should implement the kind of policies that will create an equal society — a society where helplessness, unemployment and indignity will be consigned to the dustbin of history.

All my life I've fought for a socialist society. I believe passionately that we can have in our lifetime socialism as it was envisaged by the Labour pioneers. We owe it to them to defend Clause Four. More importantly we owe it to ourselves.

We will not succeed unless we are united and determined. That means translating speeches into resolutions to defend our party and the faith which brought us into the party. WL

Arthur Scargill's was speaking to the 12 November 1994 Defend Clause Four conference

Thoroughly modern Johnnie

WHEN HE STOOD against Tony Blair for leader of the Labour Party, not so long ago, John Prescott, last of the Jaguar-driving working-class hero MPs, paraded himself as the keeper of Labour's best traditions. Now, as Blair's deputy, he rides in the Blair gang's neo-Tory crusade to extirpate the last traces of socialism in the Labour Party.

What is his catch cry now? The word today is "modern". Prescott appears in the 10 minute video which the Labour leadership has produced as propaganda for their "ditch Clause Four" campaign. Prescott is, naturally, in a supporting role. He is there to back his leader: he is as profound as you would expect from the man and the role he is playing.

Time after time he responds to the scripted questions by proclaiming the need for Labour to be a "modern" party, with a "modern" constitution, reflecting the "modern" world. He who was so lately a tradition man is now the most "modern" man in the party, second only to er... "Tony".

Thoroughly modern Johnny, in fact. And where is Margaret Beckett, the other Labour leadership contender who appealed to the left for votes? Nobody seems to know, for Margaret is uncharacteristically silent.

Yeltsin's dirty war in Chechenia

By Dale Street

IN MID-DECEMBER of last year — the 50th anniversary of Stalin's mass deportation of the Chechen nation to the Soviet far east for alleged "collaboration" with the Nazis — Russian troops invaded Chechenia.

They are now smashing through the capital, Grozny.

The Russian government claims that the purpose of the invasion is to restore "law and order" in Chechenia, which declared independence from Moscow in 1991.

Russia is in economic crisis.

Living standards continue to fall, as too does industrial output.

Last October the ruble went into free fall on the international currency markets, losing over a quarter of its value in a single day. Inflation has taken off again and now runs at over 10% a month. An estimated five million people are unemployed.

There is now profound disillusionment with Yeltsin throughout the Russian population.

In the past Yeltsin would scapegoat "Communists" and blame economic problems on the legacy of Stalinism. But in 1995 such excuses no longer have any credibility.

Yeltsin must have hoped that a war against Chechenia, envisaged as a brief blitzkrieg-style affair, would dampen discontent in the armed forces.

Oil also plays a part in the reasons for the invasion of Chechenia. Russia wants control of the oil pumped out of the Caspian Sea off the coast of Azerbaidjian. But the pipeline which would carry the oil across the Caucasus to the oil terminals in Novorossiysk on the Black Sea runs through Chechenia.

The invasion of Chechenia was also intended as a warning to other regions within Russia and to former republics of the Soviet Union with whom the Russian government is in dispute.

Estonia is demanding the return of the Pecharsky region, incorporated into Russia after Stalin's annexation of the Baltic states. Lithuania has cut off Russian military supplies to Kaliningrad, a Russian-controlled town on the Lithuanian coast. Azerbaidjian and Kazakhstan are in dispute with Russia over access to the Caspian Sea oil fields.

The ex-republics of the Soviet Union are also at odds with the Russian government over the expansion of NATO. The former want to join NATO, whereas Russia itself is against any expansion. At the summit conference held in Budapest last year these divisions came out into the open.

Within Russia itself a number of regions are also asserting the right to a greater degree of autonomy, both political and economic, in order to free themselves of control from the centre in Moscow.

All the signs are that Yeltsin's invasion has backfired politically. It has not rallied support around Yeltsin or created a wave of jingo patriotism. Yeltsin is more isolated than ever.

Victim of Yeltsin's dirty war

Virtually all major Russian parties and politicians, including those who have hitherto served as Yeltsin's closest allies, have condemned the invasion (even if only for pragmatic and opportunist reasons).

Only Zhirinovsky and his semi-fascist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia have backed the invasion. According to Zhirinovsky, the troops are "fulfilling a noble duty at a difficult hour for the motherland... whilst bandits, journalists and politicians shoot them in the back."

There is little popular support for Yeltsin's military adventure. Before the invasion, opinion polls showed 57% opposed to such military action. After the invasion opposition quickly rose to 70% and is still increasing.

Only 15% of the Russian population back the invasion. In other words, not even all of those who voted for Zhirinovsky in last year's elections support the attack on Chechenia.

Rather than diverting attention away from economic problems, the war has made those economic problems even worse.

The war is already costing Russia 28.5 million dollars a day. Once, as seems likely, Chechenia is finally fully occupied by Russian troops, the cost of maintaining those troops and rebuilding devastated towns and villages will be millions of rubles.

Rather than dampening discontent in the armed forces, the fiasco of the invasion has increased unrest at all levels of the military.

For the commanders, the humiliations suffered by Russian troops in the fighting are conclusive proof that Yeltsin has failed to allocate sufficient resources to the armed forces and has allowed them to degenerate into a raggle-taggle of unwilling and untrained squaddies.

The conscript soldiers thrown into Chechenia lacked enthusiasm from the outset and have been further demoralised by the bloody defeats inflicted on them by the Chechen irregulars. A recent report in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* provided an eye-witness account of the mood amongst the troops:

"They are cut off from all information. They do not know why and for what lofty goals they have to go on the offensive, shoot, and kill. The commanders do not explain anything to them. The lack of any goal or sense of purpose leads to drunkenness and drug-taking. We were witness of this."

Even if Russia succeeds in the military conquest of Chechenia, this will not guarantee the flow of oil through the pipeline which runs from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea.

Guerrilla resistance on the part of Chechen irregulars will continue. Russia will have neither sufficient troops nor money to protect every meter of the pipeline, thus leaving it exposed to guerrilla attacks.

Nor has the invasion served as a warning to other regions of Russia and ex-republics of the Soviet Union. Far from being a display of Russian military might, it has been a public exhibition of Russian military weakness and incompetence.

Similarly, the invasion has weakened still further Russian attempts to prevent the expansion of NATO.

Despite the disgraceful failure of Western governments to condemn the invasion — they have dismissed it as an internal Russian affair — they are now much more likely to support an expansion of NATO to include ex-republics of the Soviet Union, out of fear that Russia may unleash military action in other regions of the former Soviet Empire.

Yeltsin's government is weaker than ever before. The question now is whether the massive discontent in Russia can be rallied by the small socialist forces there, or whether the crisis will usher in an even more authoritarian, military-based regime.

Socialists in this country must redouble their efforts to assist the socialists in Russia. A failure to do so will leave Russian socialists exposed to be the first victims of a new Russian dictatorship.

80,000 new Labour Party members: who are they?

By Colin Foster

IN 1994, SOME 80,000 new members joined the Labour Party. Membership has risen from a low point of 261,000 in 1991 to 305,000 at the end of 1994. It is the first substantial rise in Labour's individual membership for a long time, perhaps since the early 1950s: quirks of the method of counting make it impossible to say how much membership increased in the big Labour Party democracy battles of 1979-81.

The wards and constituencies are still shrivelled. The latest total is still lower than the figure when the current method of counting was introduced in 1981, and very much lower than the peak figure (on a more generous tally) of 1,105,000 in 1953.

Yet the new influx is, or may be, important. What sort of people are the new members? The only academic study so far has been by Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley of Sheffield University, but they looked at new members recruited in 1991 and 1992. Their political questionnaires in 1990 and immediately after the 1992 election showed no great shift in attitudes.

Who are Labour's new members?

In 1990, 23 per cent agreed that "the production of goods and services is best left to the free market", and 60% disagreed; in 1992, 20% agreed and 63% disagreed. In 1990, 70% wanted more nationalisation; in 1992, 69%. (*New Statesman and Society*, 9 December 1994).

On the attitudes and social composition of the new members who have joined since Tony Blair became leader, we have only impressions to go by. Workers' Liberty collected some from organisers and activists around the country.

A comrade from Leicester reported: "Our branch membership has risen steadily, doubling over two years. People join because they are encouraged by the prospect of the Tories falling and Labour winning the next election. They tend to start off being pro-Blair, because they think Blair will beat the Tories, but they are very open to left-wing argument on the issues.

"Elsewhere in Leicester membership has risen, but less. Attendance at meetings has increased only fractionally."

At a different end of the range of responses, a comrade from Isleworth said: "If 80,000 people have joined the Labour Party, it certainly hasn't been in Isleworth. I went to my last ward meeting after missing several because of other meetings which clashed. There were five people there, and they gasped when I came into the room."

Some 30,000 of the new members have joined under the scheme whereby levy-paying members of affiliated unions can sign up for £3, rather than the full rate of £15.

From Manchester, the report was: "Most new members have joined as a result of parliamentary selection battles. There are also quite a lot coming in through the trade-union scheme. Some young people are joining, and they seem to be left-wing — or open to being made left-wing by the Clause Four dispute."

From Glasgow Shettleston constituency, too, the word is of "a steady trickle of new members, mainly through the cut-price trade-union scheme. In general, few new members seem to attend meetings."

A railworker from York added: "I don't know the general picture, but I have personally recruited four new members through the trade-union scheme recently, on the basis of disgust with the Tories and a feeling that Labour will renationalise the railways."

In Romford, east London, so a local activist reports: "Our last constituency meeting reported our biggest-ever monthly intake of new members, thirty in a CLP with a very low membership (about 270). The local Union of Communication Workers has recruited quite a few through the trade-union scheme and the campaign against the selling off of the Post Office.

"We have also recruited a fair number of youth across our Young Labour area — mostly working-class youth from Further Education colleges. The £1 membership for people under 18 is crucial to this."

From Nottingham, a comrade reports: "A Labour Club has been set up at Nottingham Trent University for the first time in many years. The main activists are left-wing or open to left-wing ideas. Most of the activists have gone on to join the Labour Party too."

Left Unity organiser Elaine Jones reports, however: "In general the active membership of college Labour Clubs is only about 10 to 30. It is only a slight increase over last year."

From Islington, north London, one comrade reports: "Membership in my ward — in a solidly working-class area — has nearly tripled in a few months, but only a couple of the new members are active so far. At first they were vaguely pro-Blair, but now they support Clause Four." A different ward in the same constituency, covering a more middle-class area, gave a different impression to a comrade who went to speak there on the Welfare State Network. "There were a lot of young people, but they were very right-wing." A ward member adds: "All the new members here are from the middle-class part of the ward, none from the council estates."

And from Peckham, south London, the report is: "The new members are mainly Christians, recruited through a concerted effort by God-squadders in the constituency, and they are mostly inactive."

Which impressions come closest to the overall reality? And what can socialists in the Labour Party do to mobilise and get across to the new members if many of them are trade unionists and youth open to our ideas? Please send your views and impressions to *Workers' Liberty*.

Who can't afford it?

Funding the Welfare State

Pensioners on the march to defend the NHS

By Martin Thomas

LABOUR'S NEW LEADERS, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, still refuse to commit themselves to even the minimal targets for spending on health and welfare that John Smith proposed in the 1992 election.

Labour's Social Justice Commission felt obliged to limit its proposals to the framework of an "Investor's Britain", where welfare provisions are a "good investment", improving competitivity and profits long-term, as opposed to a "Leveller's Britain".

Socialists who argue to rebuild the Welfare State have to cut through a mesmerising web of argument, from all quarters of official politics, about a full Welfare State no longer being "affordable".

The issue can be tackled three ways, all of them shedding light on the priorities and structure of British capitalism.

Firstly, overall productivity and output has increased. Almost a quarter of households now have two cars; fewer than five per cent did in 1961. Britain has 17 million video recorders; while the total number of holidays taken by British residents has fallen, the number of foreign holidays has ballooned to 22 million.

Who or what decides that the cars, the gadgets, and the foreign holidays are "affordable", whereas decent health care and education are not?

More pointedly: if Britain could no longer "afford" the 109,000 hospital beds cut from the Health Service between 1981 and 1991-2, why then could Britain "afford" the extra 115,000 beds added to private hospitals and nursing homes in that period?

If Britain cannot afford any more than the one million workers currently in the Health Service, why then can Britain "afford" another half-million health workers in the private sector?

Another way of calculating is from the National Accounts. It is difficult to get from them a picture of the division of income between classes, but a rough-and-ready adjustment (table on right) shows that the capitalist class, the top five or ten per cent, control about £250 billion in income, the same as the working class. A shift of just £16 billion would pay for employing 50% more workers in education and the health service and a programme to build or refurbish 500,000 new homes a year (employing another 450,000 workers in building). The extra employment, and its knock-on effects, would greatly reduce the dole queues, and thus allow for increasing benefit and pension levels without increasing the total Social Security budget.

Rebuilding the welfare state would be no strain on absolute resources. It would strain only class priorities.

The calculations can also be done in terms of real productive resources — available labour-power — rather than in capitalist money-accounting.

There are a little over one million workers in the Health Service (another half a million in private health care); 1.8 million in education (some 45,000 of the 508,000 school teachers are in private schools). The industries producing the essentials of life employ numbers such as 241,000 in agriculture, 383,000 in food processing, 219,000 in footwear and clothing, 804,000 in construction (of all sorts), and 350,000 in energy. Total: a bit less than five million, out of a potential workforce of nearly 30 million.

Doubtless some proportion of the 2.6 million people employed in banking, insurance, and the like, or the 1.2 million employed in hotels and catering, would be essential even in a rationally-ordered society. Some of the four million unemployed would be very unproductive even if they had jobs. But who can deny that capitalism wastes labour on a massive scale?

Michael Kidron analysed US capitalism in more detail, using input-output tables, and found that "three-fifths of the work actually undertaken in the US in 1970 was wasted from capital's own point of view. This excludes the work that might have been undertaken were it not for unemployment... [and] productive output lost through duplication, excessive... consumption, irrational... methods of work and so on... It is a measure, cautiously estimated, of the waste that goes on inside the system. It does not measure the waste of the system" ("Capitalism and Theory", p.56).

Plainly no absolute shortage stands in the way of putting more basic productive resources — labour-power — into securing the basics of life for all.

£ billion	*Working class*	*Self-employed*	*Capitalist class*
Personal sector			
Wages/salaries	283		70
Self-employment		61	
Rent			+7
Dividends, interest			+60
Ditto	-17	-10	-10
Income Tax	- 40	- 9	-10
National Insurance	- 32	-7	
Social security	+68	+13	+7
Poll tax	- 6	-1	-1
VAT etc.	-73	- 6	- 6
Corporate sector			
Profits			+77
Rent			+8
Dividends, interest			-13
Tax			-16
General government			
Education	+34		
Health	+36		
Military			+24
Police, courts			+15
Other			+37
Total	253		249

Notes: The top 20 per cent get 41 per cent of household income, so income to the capitalist class from directors' and managers' salaries is estimated at 20% of total wages and salaries. This does not include "expenses" received by the bosses.

Platform

The Northern Chair of Sinn Fein on the ceasefire

150 "days of peace" in Northern Ireland

IRA military activity ceased 150 days ago. Progress, however has been slow

By Mitchell McLaughlin

IT IS nearly 150 days since the IRA ceased all military activity. Generally speaking, within the community that Sinn Fein represents there is a sense of disappointment that more has not been achieved in that period. The significance of the IRA decision, while it is appreciated within the nationalist community, is not being acknowledged by the British Government. There is a clear nationalist view about where responsibility for the lack of progress lies, a view held by supporters of the SDLP, and by many within the Dublin political establishment as well as by Sinn Fein. It lies with Britain. Pressure must be put on the British Government to move the situation along at a greater pace.

Mr Major's dependence on Unionist MPs at Westminster is a factor in this, but not the only one. Another is the fact that John Major evidently intends to make the Labour Party's devolution policy (Scotland, Wales) a big issue in the next General Election campaign. And, of course, within the Conservative and Unionist Party there are many who share the views of hard-line Unionism about the Republican movement and the Nationalist community. The peace process will be in danger unless it develops its own dynamic and is able to survive the imponderables of the next British general election. The Reynolds government in Dublin, which was so pivotal in bringing about the ceasefire, has collapsed; the Clinton administration, which also played a role, has suffered badly in the mid-term elections; Major's government could collapse any day! There is a need in these circumstances to bed down the peace process so firmly that it will survive any changes in government or external political events.

All the issues that have to be dealt with in an evolving peace process are interdependent. It is difficult to identify a particular issue that is the make or break issue because so many of them could be. British refusal to move beyond exploratory dialogue — through civil servants — to formal recognition of Sinn Fein's electoral mandate is a dagger at the throat of the peace process. For the British to be insisting that they don't have any political prisoners is ridiculous. That question will have to be addressed. At this stage Sinn Fein is confident that it will be. We see the posturing and rhetoric of the British ministers, but we are confident at this stage that the issue of prisoners will be addressed. We welcome the decision of the Dublin Government to begin to release Irish Republican prisoners. In turn this will put pressure on the British Government.

The most critical issue now is bilateral discussion between all parties with an electoral mandate in Ireland. Both governments should facilitate that. We have the Dublin government so engaged, but not the British government. That is a short-term objective and one that republicans are pursuing with considerable energy.

Another major issue is the demilitarisation of society here. In town after town, we still have British militarisation — British Army camps, look-out towers, fortified check points. All of that has to be removed.

We are very encouraged by the emergence of what we see as new thinking within Unionism, but the combined electoral support of the "new thinking" UDP and PUP is less than one per cent of the Unionist community. These are fringe organisations: they don't reflect the attitudes of mainstream Unionism at this stage. But the courage and conviction of these people is opening up new ground. Other democratic options are being examined. They are providing a political alternative within the Unionist community that will eventually have its effect.

Sinn Fein's position on "consent" is that the consent of all shades of political opinion is necessary for the emergence of new political structures. The negotiations and discussions that would lead to the emergence of new political structures is a matter for the Irish parties alone. It is not something that can be imposed from outside. We say that the history of Northern Ireland since partition is irrefutable evidence that partition has failed us all, and that there is no Six-County solution. All attempts to reform or democratise partition have failed. We have to look to the wider context of the whole island of Ireland.

Sinn Fein's ideal solution is a United Ireland. We recognise that this ideal is not shared by everybody. We are prepared to present our analysis, and we are prepared to listen carefully to the analysis of others. We are prepared to enter into negotiations both on transition arrangements, and on an ultimate conclusion. These

There is some new thinking among Unionists but mainstream Unionism is still mistrustful of the peace process

would have to be submitted to the Irish people as a whole for ratification. That, we believe, would be the practical exercise of self determination by all the Irish people, whether they are from the Loyalist, unionist tradition or the republican, nationalist tradition.

Our demand that the British government should "join the ranks of the persuaders" of the Unionists does not mean we are asking the British Government to put their hands up and say: "We think Sinn Fein were right all along. We are now going to adopt their policies." It would be wonderful, but we don't expect that to happen! We want the British Government to adopt a pro-active policy — to be persuaders for agreement on political structures in Ireland. We want them to insist that all options be available, that there be no exclusion and no preconditions put on the attendance of anyone with an electoral mandate.

We know there will be difficulties getting the Unionist parties into dialogue with Sinn Fein. It won't be a pleasant experience for either side at first. But it has to happen, and Government can only make it happen when they say from the outset that parties can exercise their own judgement as to when they come through the door for inclusive dialogue. No one should be confronted by a door that is locked in their face because the Unionists said, "if you talk to Sinn Fein we won't talk to you", or because some parties view the electoral mandate of a section of the Irish people as less valid than that of other sections.

Sinn Fein have made it clear that we will consider all options, and that any party with an electoral mandate from the people has the right to put forward an analysis, whatever that analysis might be. If someone who achieves such a mandate comes to the negotiating table with a Federalist policy we are obliged to look at that and study it very carefully, and we will. Nothing is precluded. All we ask is the right to make our analysis, and for us all to make a comparison.

Sinn Fein have been involved since 1988 in negotiations leading to the present strategy. The points of agreement between the SDLP and ourselves in the talks of 1988 formed the basic agenda for the discussions between Gerry Adams and John Hulme. We have been talking to the British Government for five years now. It is two years since the Irish peace initiative emerged publicly. Sinn Fein as a party organisation has been consulted and has been involved. In my view political historians will examine the pre-ceasefire process that Sinn Fein went through and testify to its impeccable democratic credentials. Every single member of Sinn Fein has had the opportunity to be informed, briefed, and to express a view. There is no danger in my view of any fragmentation within Sinn Fein. Each phase of this process will be reviewed, assessed and decided on by the membership.

Prospects for socialism? Historically there have been divisions within the working class in Ireland, always around the "constitutional question." The resolution of the constitutional question will create enormous momentum. There will be first of all a realignment of political forces, and we will see emerging the kind of left versus right debate that has been absent from Ireland. Ireland is a very conservative, socially retarded country and working-class strength here has been dissipated by division, even within the trade union movement, North and South, over the constitutional issue. If that is resolved then I seen a renaissance of socialist debate. Out of that debate will come a new vibrant tendency. WL

Note: Mitchell McLaughlin is the Chair of Sinn Fein in the Six Counties. He was talking to Alan Johnson.

Reforms and the revolutionaries

"Can the (socialists) be against reform? Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the (socialists) the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal — the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labour. Between social reform and revolution there is then for the (socialists) an indissoluble tie."

Rosa Luxemburg

By John O'Mahony

THERE IS MASS HOSTILITY to what the Tories are doing to the NHS, and to the Welfare State in general. But the Labour leaders, though they seem to be willing to say and do anything they think will win them votes, make little attempt to harness this anti-government feeling to Labour's cause. Why? Because they themselves no longer believe in the underlying principle of the health service Labour established in the 1940s: universal state-of-the-art health care, free at the point of consumption. They accept the monstrous Tory argument that Britain can not afford the best health care for the sick poor. Labour's leaders have no intention of restoring the health service.

That is a fundamental part of the explanation for the weakness of the labour movement's response to the Tory offensive against the Welfare State. But there is more to it. What about the left, the "revolutionaries", of whom there are quite a few thousands in Britain still? They do not share the Tory belief that state-of-the-art health care is not for the poor. Unlike the present Labour leaders, they do believe in the NHS. Why has the left done so little in the way of organising a fightback?

"The demand for universal health care encapsulates a whole philosophy of class and human solidarity."

The pressure of a hostile political environment, and the collapse of much "old socialist" self-confidence, is only part of the explanation. Far more central is the ultra-leftism and ingrained contempt for "reformism" which is endemic to most of the revolutionary left in Britain now.

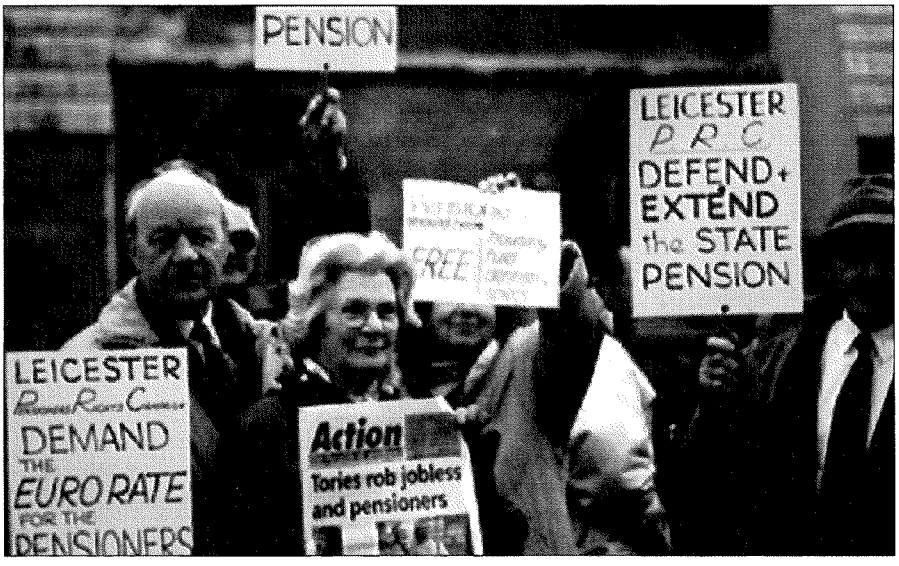
Of course, they will praise and "defend" old reforms, Labour's reforms of the 40s, but reluctantly. They do it disdainfully and perfunctorily and as an opening gambit to allow them to talk of the need for "revolution."

What is wrong is not that they try to convince people that only socialist revolution can guarantee the reforms we win: socialists who do not do that in their propaganda and basic educational work are foolish or simply not serious. What is wrong is that these "revolutionaries" are, in practice, indifferent or hostile to the fight for reform now.

The SWP, for example, the biggest ostensibly revolutionary organisation, denounces Tory counter-reforms, and denounces the Labour Party for not fighting the counter-reforms. But it does not concern itself with any positive fight for reforms now. That is not in keeping with its self-image. They are not "social workers"! To organise around the fight for reforms would be "not revolutionary."

The job of the revolutionaries is to "*make* the revolution", said the Latin American guerrillas of the 60s and 70s before launching brave kamikaze military actions. In Britain now the job of most "revolutionaries" is? To *call* for "revolution", *exhort* "revolution", *praise* "revolution" — in short, *talk* about it. "Revolution" — any revolution — wins praise from *Socialist Worker*. "Why we need a revolution in Britain" alternates with "Is revolution possible?" as perennial subjects for public meetings. It is a major part of their activity. Yet "mass activity" and public meetings on such topics now are worse than useless and may even be counterproductive.

For much of the "revolutionary left" an anarchoid culture in which phrasemongering, mock-heroic posturing and "calls" for the millennium has taken the place of the proper central concern of Marxist revolutionaries — to help the working class and its movement develop, by encouraging its most advanced layers to go forward in practical action. The fight for reforms has a central role here, especially in British conditions now when the working class is beaten down, hamstrung by anti-union laws, and mass socialism is at its lowest ebb for decades. That is how Marxists help the working class prepare itself for the revolution that the anarchoids can only chant and talk about. This culture, which is pseudo-revolutionary rather than revolutionary, helps divorce socialists from the working class as it is — from the class we must grapple with and win to our ideas if



Welfare State Network lobbies Parliament on Budget Day, November 1994

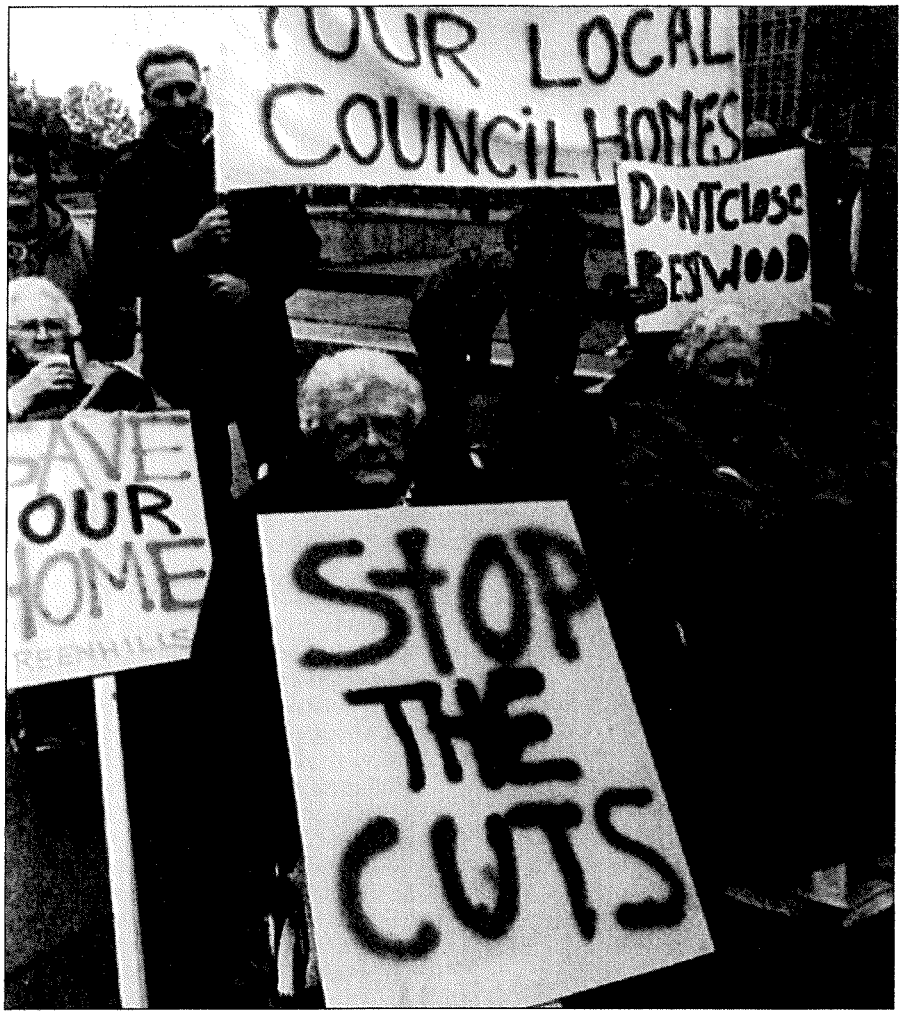
socialism is not to remain forever the mere dream of an ineffectual minority.

At its core, despite the hollow 'revolutionary' shouting, is a defeatist giving up on the working class and an implicit, unconscious, acceptance of what the right-wing propagandists say: the mass of the workers are lost to socialism.

In fact there is an astonishing parallel, an exact symmetry, between these "r...r...revolutionaries" and Labour's right-wingers. Both neglect, for their different reasons — middle-class fear and pseudo-revolutionary snobbery — the potent mass anger that exists against the Tory counter-reforms. Neither has any use for the mass support there is for maintaining and restoring a proper health service. There is an important difference between them though.

Given what they are politically, Blair and the other bob-a-job careerists who lead the Labour Party act rationally on this question. They do not want to raise a mass movement against the Tory demolition of the Welfare State because such a movement would then confront a Labour government with the demand to rebuild what the Tories destroy. At every turn Blair and the others rat on the working class, but what they do makes sense from *their* point of view. The behaviour of the "revolutionaries" makes no sense at all.

"The Welfare State Network corresponds to the real needs of workers and of the labour movement now."



Elderly people are falling victim to Tory welfare cuts. Photo: Mark Salmon

There will be no revolution without the working class. Very few workers can be won to abstract calls for "revolution." Those young workers so won will grow rapidly disillusioned with it unless they are set to sensible activity in the working class movement to convert it to socialism. If they stay in politics, they will go over to the right wing.

The struggle for *reforms* is now the indicated way the working class and the labour movement can revive; it is the tool socialists have for use in the work of reviving it.

Reforms — restoring the health service, for example — are not enough? No, but the focus on reforms does not, in logic or in reality, set prior limits to the march of the workers who fight for them. It does not rule out rapid and even explosive advances in that combativity which in turn can lead to the development of mass revolutionary consciousness.

Far from ruling it out, it can help it develop. In terms of things the revolutionaries can do at will, building a movement to fight for reforms — the health service is the best example — is the right thing to do for socialism now.

ALL THIS is ABC for Marxists who stand on the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky's Comintern. It is best expounded in Trotsky's 1938 work known as *The Transitional Programme*. Trotsky put the attitude of revolutionaries to reform like this in 1938:

"The Fourth International does not discard the programme of the old 'minimal' demands [reforms] to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. ... Insofar as the old, partial, 'minimal' demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism — and this occurs at each step — the Fourth International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime."

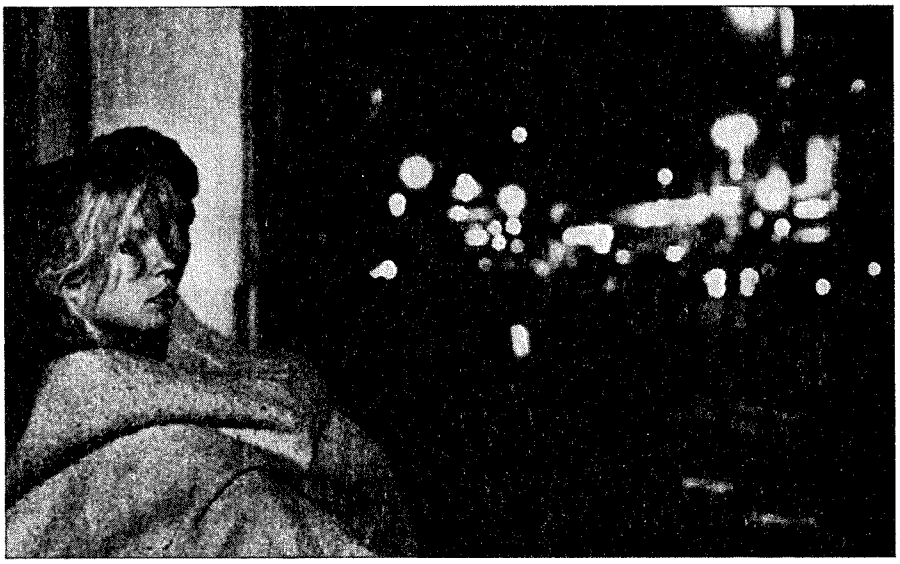
Take, once more, the Welfare State. Should they decide to fight, by occupying hospitals or by (illegal) protest strikes or by mass demonstrations, in the course of such a struggle the workers who began with their own and their neighbours' felt needs would have to think about all sorts of related issues — the nature of society, of bourgeois politics, of Labour leaders who won't fight for their members' interests, of the social and philosophical implications of such a reform demand as "state-of-the-art, universal, free health care for everyone." The arguments of the right would compel them to.

The demand for universal state-of-the-art health care, free at the point of consumption, encapsulates a whole philosophy of class and human solidarity. It is the opposite of the dominant Tory and right-wing Labour outlook on society and on life. It is in condensed form a demand that society be reorganised around our principles, around "the political economy of the working class", not as now around the profit-worshipping and human-being-devouring political economy of the bourgeoisie. It is what Trotsky means by a "transitional demand."

To convince workers and the labour movement to fight for this single demand is to convince them to embrace the rudiments, or at least one potent and fecund element, of the socialist — worker-solidarist outlook on the world. They would learn as the fight developed — helped by the propaganda and all-round explanations of the socialists, and be recruited, at first, in ones or small groups, to the ranks of organised socialists.

That is why the Welfare State Network is important. Its demands correspond to the real needs of workers and of the labour movement now. Its work is the most profoundly revolutionary activity possible in Britain today. It points, if we build it into the mass campaign it clearly can become, to a rebirth of a large-scale militant socialist consciousness in the labour movement.

It is, incidentally, the logical concrete



Attacks on the Welfare State are making thousands of young people homeless

expression of the concerns of those who have come back to labour movement activity in defence of Clause Four.

This method of work is entirely consistent with the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky on how to work in conditions like ours.

Yet most of the "Leninist" and "Trotskyist" "revolutionaries" boycott and disdain this work. Thus they display — without enough awareness to be ashamed of it — the awful symmetry that exists between the ultra left and the anarchoid "revolutionaries" on one side and the Labour right on the other. Their motives are, of course, different from Blair's. But the anarchoids too, brandishing their apolitical and ahistorical fetish of "revolution" (or "the party"), are a part of the reason why the Tories are getting away with murdering the Welfare State and the National Health Service. A big part of it.

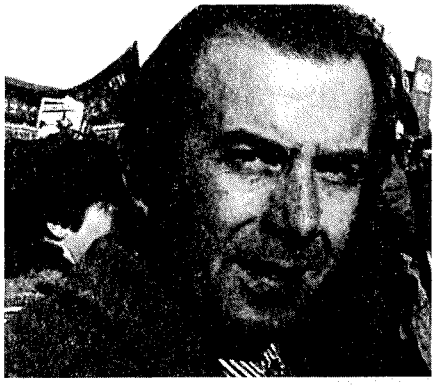
At issue here are questions Marxists first confronted nearly a century and a half ago: what is "revolutionary" and who are the revolutionaries? It isn't enough to shout for "revolution"; just wanting "a revolution" does not make you effectually a revolutionary in relation to the world around you. In history, the Marxists have more than once had to insist, against anarchists and socialist shouters for "revolution now", on the need to step back from talk about the "ultimate goal" so as to prepare for it in the only way it can consciously be prepared — by convincing workers to organise and struggle for their own interests on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis, and in the course of this teaching them to accept socialist goals.

A little after the *Communist Manifesto* was written, Marx and Engels were the minority in a bitter struggle within the Communist League against people who said it was either "revolution now", or all would be lost. The Marxists had to insist on the need to accept an evolutionary conception of social development towards socialist revolution — not vulgar evolution, real evolution, of which revolutionary breaks are an integral part. Famously, Marx told them, with not a little scorn, that they themselves needed 10 or 20 years to make them fit for revolution.

So also the experience of the Russian Marxists. Against the vaguely defined but very "revolutionary" terrorist populists — most of whom said that they were socialists — the Marxists were the "right" wing insisting on patient, unspectacular work to prepare the working class. It was not, as Trotsky later put it, those who started with bombs and guns, but those who started with the weighty books of Marx and Plekhanov, who buried Tsarism.

Right now in Britain the revolution-shouters are not in any real sense — other than the subjective one — revolutionaries. They need to step back; they need to "retreat" from their imaginary vanguard role — as shouters! — and learn the difference between Marxism and anarchism. WL

Master of the absurd



By Jim Denham

PETER COOK MADE his early reputation as a satirist with a remarkable impersonation of Tory Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (1957-63). He had the old poseur off to a tee: the patrician drawl, the mis-timed gestures and the mind-boggling complacency. Defending Britain's nuclear policy and the "four-minute warning" civilians would have once the missiles had been launched, Cook's Macmillan declared "I would remind them there are some people in this great country of ours who can run a mile in four minutes."

This was probably the first time a British prime minister had been held up for public ridicule by a comedian, and it gained Cook the 'political' reputation that stayed with him for the rest of his life. In fact, Cook was not especially political, either as a person or as a performer. His Macmillan was notable more for its characterisation than for any political content: an eccentric, over-confident buffoon straight out of an Ealing comedy.

Cook was the first to acknowledge the political limitations of satire. When, on the back of the success of *Beyond the Fringe*, he founded the 'Establishment Club' in 1961, he described it as "a satirical venue" to be modelled on "those wonderful Berlin cabarets which did so much to stop the rise of Hitler and prevent the outbreak of the Second World War." Cook was a surrealist, a connoisseur of the absurd. His Harold Macmillan was merely one of a series of bizarre characterisations like the police commissioner investigating the Great Train Robbery, proudly announcing his discovery that "This is the work of thieves — the telltale loss of property, the snatching away of money-substances: it all points to thieves."

His association with *Private Eye*, which he saved from bankruptcy in 1962, further bolstered the mistaken perception of Cook as "political." In fact, the Eye was (and remains) an essentially nihilist, apolitical, publication, despite the participation of token lefties like Paul Foot and (for a while) the right-wing eccentric Auberon Waugh. And, by all accounts, Cook's main contribution to the magazine was to suggest jokes — usually of a surreal and/or scatological nature.

The first editor, Richard Ingrams, considered Cook "too sex-orientated: he sees wage restraint in terms of masturbation." Nevertheless, Cook bankrolled the *Eye* through a series of expensive lawsuits and often found himself in court against such figures as James Goldsmith and Robert Maxwell. During Maxwell's attempt to bankrupt the magazine Cook led a drunken raiding-party on the *Mirror* offices and occupied the Cap'n's office, from where he taunted the monster over the phone.

What little political content there had been in Cook's own work virtually disappeared after Wilson's election in 1964, presumably because whatever was wrong with the Wilson regime, it didn't strike him as particularly absurd. And when Thatcherism gave rise to a new generation of political comedians, Cook was noticeably absent. Not because he liked Mrs T (he hated and despised her) but because she wasn't intrinsically funny. Cook couldn't summon up the appropriate moral indignation of a Ben Elton or a Steve Bell.

Rory Bremner: in the tradition of the best satire

By this time Cook's public appearances were limited to guest appearances (usually drunk but often very funny) on chat shows and *Whose Line It Anyway?* and an embarrassing attempt to break into American TV (if you missed his sad role as Joan Rivers' stooge, you're lucky). Some of his films — notably the Faustian *Bedazzled* (which he also wrote) — were reasonably good but did not fulfil the glorious promise of his early years. His funniest latter-day performances were on Clive Anderson's show, where politics was also notable for its absence.

Peter Cook

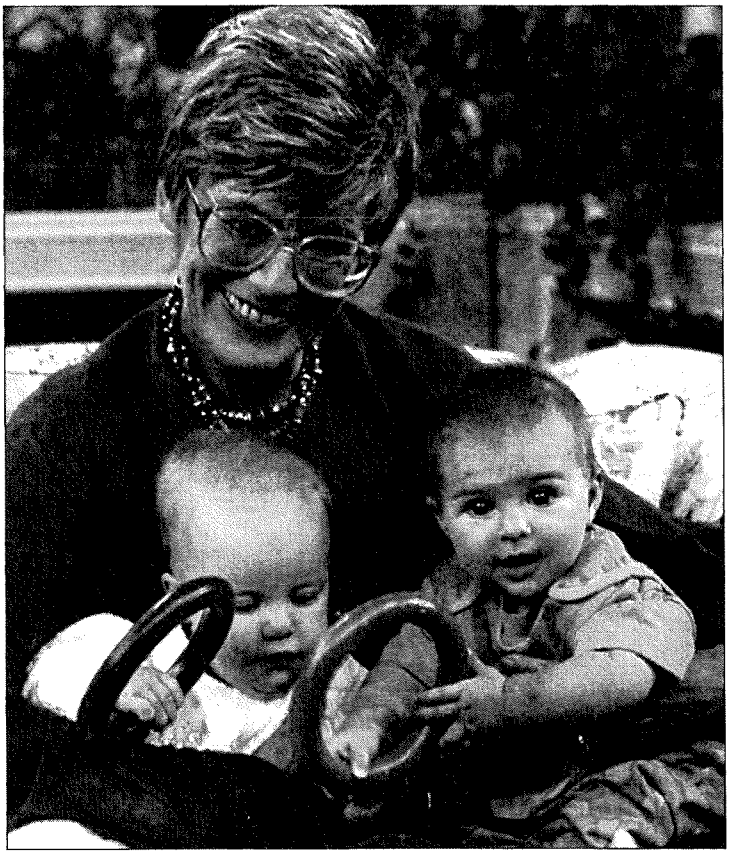
He was a hugely talented, lazy and by all accounts very likeable man. But a satirist? Not really, and certainly not by the end.

That baton has passed to the brilliant Rory Bremner, whose Channel Four series has now, sadly, ended. Here was the true satirist at its most perceptive and telling. Bremner's Tony Blair, capturing all the Boy Wonder's vacuous inanity ("tea for two.. or two for tea... or coffee if you prefer") is the result of close study at Labour Party Conference. Let's hope we see more of it after the next election. One of the best spots on Bremner's show was the regular John Bird/John Fortune dialogue lampooning the evasions and banality of (obviously) Tory politicians. Bird and Fortune are contemporaries of Cook who kept satire alive through the Wilson years. They are absurdists, but also fundamentally political (unlike Cook, Bird did see the funny side of Harold Wilson and specialised in a masterful Gannex-and-pipe impersonation, using the catch-phrase "to be quite frank, honest and reasonable". It caught Wilson's down-home phoniness perfectly).

Satire does not topple governments and probably doesn't change anything very much at all. But it keep us sane and, as Bremner has said, he sometimes feels as though he's a better leader of the opposition than Tony Blair. He's certainly more radical, though maybe not quite so funny.

"I say put the children first!"

Penelope Leach, author of best-selling parents' manuals like Baby and Child, has made a call for drastic social change to recognise children's rights. Janet Burstall and Belinda Weaver went to talk her.



Leach argues that we must "recognise each person in the family as an independent individual"

PENELOPE "LEACH HAS issued a call for a revolution that could be as profound a transformation of society as the women's movement, and in many ways is its natural sequel" (Gwen Kinkead, *New York Times Magazine*, 10 April 1994)

Leach is arguing that children's rights must be socially recognised and legally guaranteed. In her book *Children first* (1994; now out in paperback) she writes:

"The interests of children themselves will not be fully met... as long as they are regarded principally as objects of adult concern... No society can claim to do its best for children as children unless what it does is based on acceptance of children as people.

"Nobody would wish to remove the rights to have their 'childish' needs met that children have been given through laws concerning child maintenance, child labour and education, and through innumerable exemptions from the responsibilities borne by adult citizens. But societies originally gave those special privileges to children within 'the empire of the father' and by virtue of their incompetence to act outside it.

"Wives were once within that empire too, but the modern world that has recognised women as competent legal persons has not similarly recognised that 'children are people too', and as such are entitled to the same human rights as everybody else; rights that belong to them in their own right as individuals, rather than as appendages of parents or guardians who have a right to own them."(p.203)

When we talked to her recently, she added:

"The paternalist family — the assumption that families will, can, and should meet all the needs of children and do it privately, without being interfered with, and without public help — is what we've got to get rid of, because things have changed. I don't think it even ought to be an ideal any more. Almost everybody needs help."

WL: "Part of the problem of getting proper support for families is that the family is seen as an economic unit, so the family should provide the support for all members within it. It would take a big shift to recognise each person in the family as an independent individual."

PL: "I don't think families are the building blocks of society any more. Individuals will still form themselves into families, individuals still need families, but it is the individuals who are the building blocks.

"As long as we believe paternalist families are the units, children sink or swim with their families. Now the individual rights of children have to be validated by the state, as the individual rights of everybody else are, because families aren't there to do it. There isn't such a thing as *the* family anymore. There are lots of individual people grouping themselves in lots of different ways. One of the failings of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is that it did not say children should have the legal right to live with the people they deem to be parents. My point would be that parenting is something that you earn. We can't any longer say that this is the family, we have to say who does this child experience as family? And as far as I'm concerned, if that's two women, for example, that's how it should be."

Leach is no pre-feminist, putting moral pressure on individual mothers to sacrifice themselves for their children but, to her irritation, this is how she has been interpreted by many reviewers and readers.

PL: "On the whole the feminist reaction (to my ideas) has changed hugely in the last 10 years, to my pleasure. The right to do well by children is a right that has come very late to the women's movement, and that's what *Children first* has been seen as addressing. Indeed, the Penguin version of the book has entirely feminist quotes on the back."

WL: "A number of feminist journalists feel that you set a standard, in your book *Baby and Child*, for example, which cannot be lived up to, or is difficult to live up to at the same time as going to work."

PL: "I suggest that anyone who feels guilty pitch it into the nearest trash can... I occasionally meet somebody who says 'I had this book by my bed for 3 years and it made me feel so guilty.' I say 'What was it doing by your bed for more than a week?'

"My main concern is for the people who feel deprived of their children, who are blackmailed, either by career or by money, into having to leave them. There is this conviction, certainly in the male world, and to some extent in the feminist world, that all women want full-time day care, and it is totally contradicted by the data.

"Some women do, yes, and a lot of women with slightly older children do, but the vast majority of women with young children do not.

"Nor do they want to be stuck at home, thank you very much. They want to do both. That's the sort of circular message of

the book.

"What makes the difference to a young child is not whether you're with family or not, not whether you're at home with mum or grandparent, or in a child care centre, but the motivation and enthusiasm of the people you're with. And there is nothing magic about a mother, particularly a mother who wishes she were somewhere else. There's certainly nothing magic about a grandmother whose arm has been twisted.

"I'm not in the market for self-sacrifice from women. Kids need enthusiasm. If you are reluctantly stuck at home, you probably aren't doing a very good job by your child anyway. How could you be?"

Penelope Leach writes in her book:

"Attempts to prescribe home life for small children at the expense of women who are mothers — such as those made by the 'family values' lobbies in various countries — inevitably fail because home life (and 'mothering'), as such lobbyists perceive it, is a thing of the past."(CF, p.245)

We talked to her about how work could be reorganised to free parents 'to do well by children'.

WL: "It would be an enormous help trade unions genuinely fought for reduced working hours for everybody."

PL: "Sure, I agree 100%.

"Modern work is peculiarly hard to combine with any form of caring and that's one of the big changes in work. More traditional forms of work were much easier to combine and were combined."

WL: "You propose to bring work into local communities. How would that help? How can you effect that change?"

PL: "For a lot of people, to lose the commute is the most enormous help. I'm not suggesting that you could do work and child-care at once. It would be irresponsible even to try. Nobody's saying you can take these work phone calls at home. You've still got to have child care. But there are differences.

"It's a different kind of child care you need if you're still part of the child's world. You're coming much closer to a village situation where you're basically in charge, but there are a lot of other people keeping an eye too. Who you can trust your baby with if you're around and in and out is terribly different from who you can trust if you're going to be 70 miles away for 10 hours."

WL: "You suggest setting up computer centres where workers can get together to work near to home."

PL: "Those are a great deal more realistic than a lot of ideas of mine, because the motivation is the enormous saving to business on business centres. If you cost out the real estate charges for high street locations for offices, there really is quite a lot of money available while still presenting real economies.

"I know a couple of places where this has actually happened. One is an LA bookshop, of all the improbable things, and they're on the 8th child who has been raised in and through the bookshop. Just now they could have gone for a larger and more central location and made the whole thing more formal, or they could go for another building down the street and elaborate the informality. They've gone the latter way and it's been very much more economic.

WL: "What about agitation on the part of parents who are workers who start to demand that sort of change? Instead of being top down, bottom up?"

PL: "Well, you might get that, but, you see, somebody will turn round and say, ah but I don't want that, I like going into the high street office. I keep having to say these are ideas, choices, not laws.

I'm not saying this is the way it *should* be. I'm saying we've got a set of expectations about the way it has to be, and most of us if we're female are too busy and too stressed even to think. We're so desperately trying to get through the week without a disaster. I'm trying to say there are other ways it *could* be.

"I don't know which way it should be. How can I know? For me, for somebody else? But I have had the chance to take the time to look at a lot of different ways in different places. All I'm trying to do is put some of them together and say: take it from there.

"What about parent power? Firstly, we've got to have the men aboard. If you could get that, parents are practically everybody.

"I even had to argue with the Labour Party Social Justice Commission why it was so imperative that parental leave should be parental leave, not maternal leave. Some people don't realise that if you put up too many provisions for women, provisions for mothers, then you may put employers off against employing them. Make it parental. You're not going to employ any potential parents, then who can you employ?

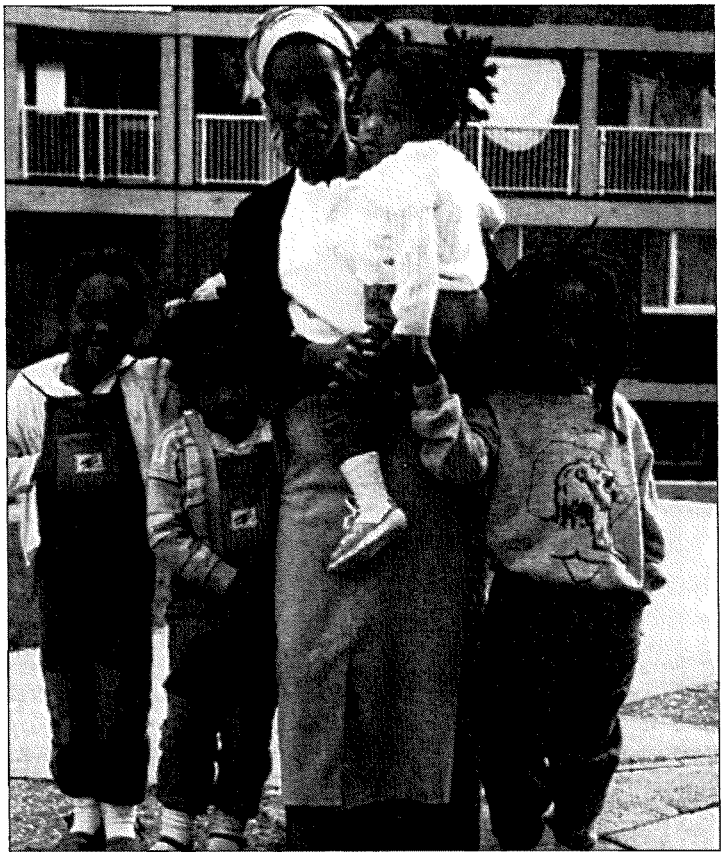
"On the other hand, quite apart from getting the men involved, we are bloody unsupportive to each other at the moment as mothers.

"I was in an office in the States the day that two young female lawyers had, after months, got it accepted they would leave early to pick their kids up from school. There was the most frightful backbiting — "They're their kids, they're not our kids, why should we cover for them?" — and it was mostly from women.

"You know, they weren't actually suffering. Nobody was having to work terribly hard. They just had to cover somebody's telephone for an hour at the end of the day."

WL: "It's hard for parents of young children to be active unionists in any case."

PL: "I think the unions in this country have soft-pedalled much more than they should have, and I'm very shocked by even the left's approach. I don't think we can afford to leave them to the extent that we have. And we have. For many of the younger people that I know, joining a union just isn't something they're thinking about at all in their 20s."



Penelope Leach: "I'm not in the market for self-sacrifice from women".

In *Children first* Penelope Leach argues that individual care, by childminders or parents, is generally better for under-3s than nurseries, while nurseries are better for over-3s. We suggested that she had been so critical of institutional day care for small infants, that she had failed to advocate some things which could improve it, rather as if she accepted that it can't be done.

PL: "That may well be true.

"What I'm asking for, or suggesting, is a similar commitment of resources and thinking to individual day care as there has been and is being for centre care. I'm not saying that all one-on-one care is good. It obviously isn't, but not all centre care is good either.

"What I'm saying is that the bias is towards centre care for reasons I go on about. Because excellent centre care is always going to be an expensive option, raising at least the risk that the best will not

be available to the poorest who need it most, I would like to see an equivalent dedication to alternative forms, and I include in that the whole package of things like parental leave, which has been much misunderstood.

"I'm not saying that every woman should stay at home for 18 months, but I'm saying that any woman who would prefer to should be able to. I'm saying that ought to be an option in a civilised society, but that doesn't mean I think all good mothers would. I don't think I would have.

"One thing I don't say strongly enough: the difference between having to leave the child every day from say 8 in the morning to say 6 at night, and leaving the child for half days, or 2-3 days a week — this is the point about the six-hour working day in Sweden, for instance, and most of the Scandinavian countries. Eight to 6, five days a week, is too long for a baby to be anywhere but at home."

Leach's book is first and foremost a proposal for social and political change. What is the significance of the changes she proposes?

Leach herself suggests:

"Policies that address the basic conflict between children's need for parents' presence and companionship, and parents' need to be elsewhere and with other people, for example, can transform the lifestyles not only of individual parents and children but also of whole communities and eventually societies." (p.244)

Stephanie Coontz, an American socialist, puts it similarly:

"There are serious dilemmas involved in reconciling individual liberty with interpersonal commitments. We must say clearly that the needs of adults for independence have to be balanced by the rights of children to dependence. Only then can the left construct a persuasive answer to the right wing on this question (of family values)."

A comparison with the women's movement is relevant. In the early 1970s we thought that the women's movement, or a sizeable chunk of it, was leading us to revolution. In fact it didn't. There have been enormous changes affecting women, but they have left some aspects of women's oppression virtually untouched. Often they have benefited only the better off. There has been no assault on the class society which underpins oppression.

It may be the same with Leach's proposals to improve the lives of children. They could become part of the socialist programme of a revived labour movement; or they could be partially accommodated by capitalism in the most well-off countries, for better-off workers.

If this is so, then we must include children's rights as a clear, unambiguous part of a socialist programme. We should campaign for the labour movement to champion the rights of children, and the right of parents "to do well by children". This in turn must include organising parents within trade unions and the Labour Party, and making it easier for parents, mothers in particular, to participate.

The Art of the Holocaust

Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it

FIFTY YEARS AGO in the spring of 1945 the advancing Allied armies liberated the people interned in the Nazi concentration camps. The camps were overcrowded, filthy and vermin-infested hell-holes in which people from every European nation waited to die — from starvation, disease or by gassing.

They were political opponents of the Third Reich, members of resistance movements, religious dissenters, gypsies, Russian POWs, criminals, homosexuals and, of course, Jews, the largest "category" of Nazi victims.

The work of artists, poets and writers who were prisoners in these same camps provides us with the most poignant testimony to the pain and anguish which filled up the lives of camp inmates. But they also show how human solidarity can survive even under conditions deliberately designed to bludgeon the least trace of spirit or kindred feeling out of the toughest human being.

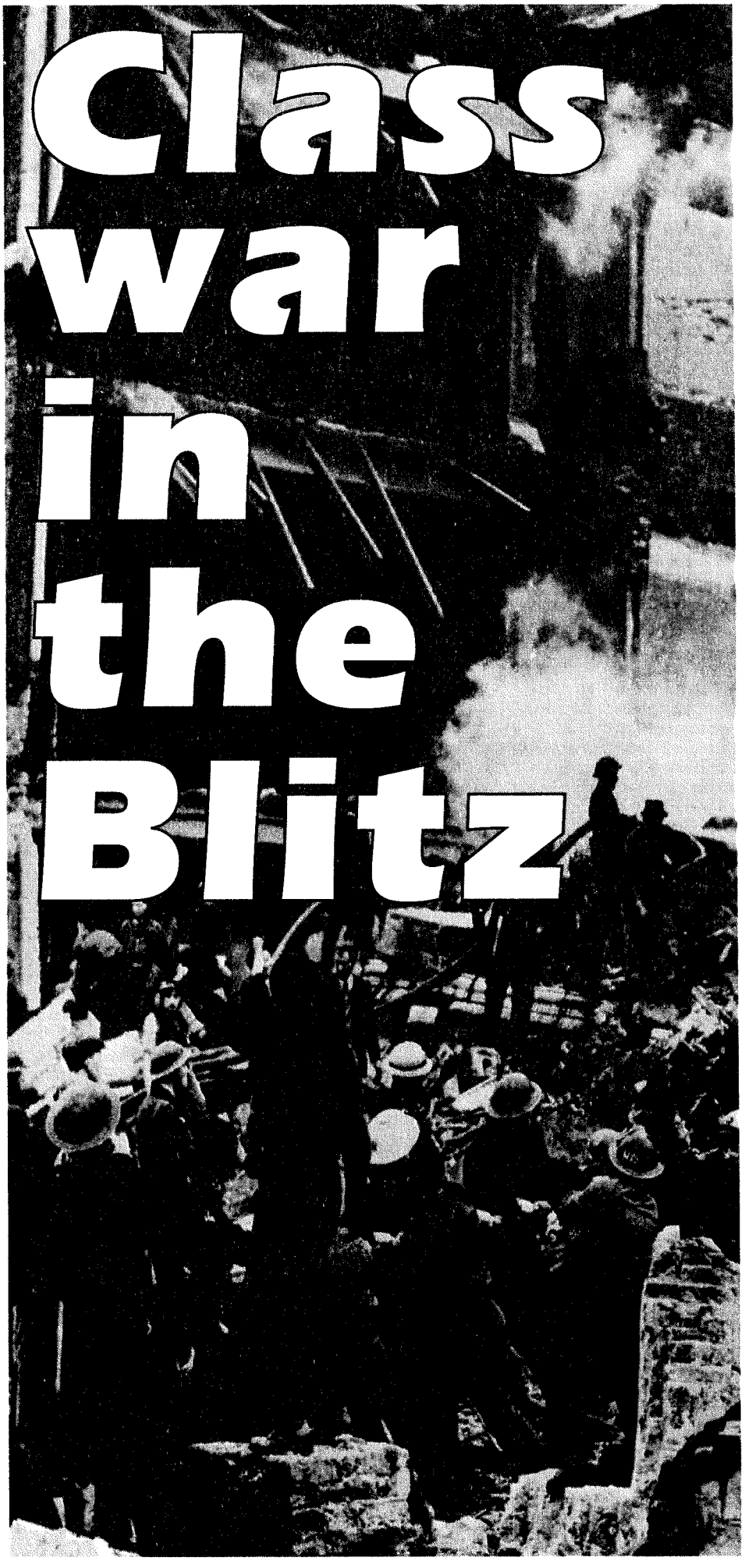
Many of these artists did not survive, but much of their art was smuggled out or hidden in the secret holes and corners of these camps and retrieved after the war.

The drawing we show above is entitled "The Transport". It is by Pierre Mania. Mania was a French artist interned in Buchenwald. He survived the war.

• *Art of the Holocaust* by Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton is published by Pan Books.

Cathy Nugent

Class war in the Blitz



50 years ago this year Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allied armies. The "great national effort" to defeat Hitler had never stopped working-class people fighting against their rulers. Here Ray Challinor describes war-time events the Establishment will ignore in their official commemorations.

ON SEPTEMBER 7 1940, the Conway Hall in London was packed. John McGovern MP had just started to speak. He told his audience that the war was not a struggle between Democracy and Dictatorship. It was a capitalist-imperialist war, a fight of have-empires against have-not-empires. At that moment, the air-raid sirens wailed. Then the anti-aircraft guns opened up. German bombs started dropping.

For fifty-three days, virtually continuously, day and night, the Luftwaffe pounded London.

Ordinary people's lives were suddenly disrupted. The normal difficulties experienced by working-class families became immeasurably greater. Food shops opened less; their queues grew longer. Getting to school could be both dangerous for children and stressful for the parents. Trying to go to work could be hazardous: it could involve long hours of standing in vain at a bus stop, exposed to bomb and bullet, waiting for a bus that may have been cancelled or re-routed because of enemy action. And, of course, after arriving at work, there was no guarantee of getting home again. Bomb craters, fires, streets cordoned off, no transport — these were a few of the possible obstacles to be surmounted.

Nor would home necessarily be a secure refuge. Many of the worst raids happened at night. Once the air-raid warning had sounded, families would scurry off to whatever shelter they could find. Public protection remained exceedingly inadequate. Despite many building workers being unemployed, few deep underground shelters had

been built. Admittedly, there were a greater number of brick-built shelters, situated above ground in the highway, that afforded a little protection from flying debris for persons trapped by a surprise attack. Most people, however, either had to make do within a flimsy Anderson shelter, which they dug themselves in the back garden, or crouch beneath kitchen tables. Popular pressure, an illegal campaign largely led by the left, forced the authorities to keep the tube stations permanently open. Thousands bedded each night on the platforms. Others, less fortunate, spent their nights sleeping under railway arches or in sunken warehouses. One of the most notorious of these was at Tilbury, where up to 14,000 people regularly dossed down, despite being disturbed by hawkers selling their wares and prostitutes plying their trade. On the Isle of Dogs, an American journalist found 3,000 people with only eight vile-smelling improvised toilets.[1]

But Britain was a class-divided society. Not everyone had to endure these hardships. The American journalist, already mentioned, went from the Isle of Dogs to the Dorchester Hotel. There he discovered the management had converted the cellars into expensive luxury shelters. Nine peers slept there each night. One of them was Lord Halifax, the foreign secretary. Throughout the night, he stayed well-supplied by a waiter with his favourite brand of whisky.[2] Their wives and lady friends tended to frequent part of the subterranean complex that had been turned into a games room. Other wealthy people arranged for their own private shelters to be built. The most expensive belonged to Mrs. E.M. Rawcroft, 31-year-old millionairess, the daughter of Sir Edward Wills of Imperial Tobacco. Built in the garden of her mansion at Torbay, Devon, it cost £24,000 and never needed to be used. Costing a small fraction of this, yet still a sign of gross extravagance, was the Soviet ambassador's refuge from aerial attack — a mere £1,600. It aroused the socialist wrath of the *New Leader*: undiplomatically the editor reminded readers of Maisky's counter-revolutionary past in Tsarist Russia as a member of the Black Hundreds, of the fact that he only joined the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution had been victorious, and he suggested Maisky's London shelter symbolised his privileged position that differentiated the Stalinist bureaucracy from the working class, both in Britain and the Soviet Union.[3]

Still greater safety than any shelter, however deep, however well protected, could provide, would be secured by adopting a simple expedient: sail away on a magic carpet of money to the peace and tranquility of the United States. In his diary, Chips Channon, the heir to the Guinness fortune, described the scene at Euston station where he, along with other affluent parents, bade farewell to their offspring, as they boarded the boat train and began the journey to the New World: "There were a queue of Rolls Royces and liveried servants and mountains of trunks. It seemed that everyone we knew was there." Clive Ponting, in his book on 1940, gives an impressive list of those leaving this emerald isle, set in a silver sea, for safer climes. All sections of high society were represented: Lord Mountbatten sent his wife and children, cabinet minister Duff Cooper his son. John Julius Norwich, city magnates like the four Rothschild families and Sir Charles Hambro dispatched their children. There were even individuals who gained political fame — or should it be notoriety? — in a time yet to come: Paul Channon, destined to be Mrs Thatcher's Minister of Transport; Jeremy Thorpe, to lead the Liberal Party; and Shirley Williams, to become a Labour cabinet minister. An estimated total of 17,000 children left this country. The intelligence services confidentially confided to the government that a million parents would have availed themselves of the opportunity to send their children abroad, given the opportunity — or, rather, they should have said, the money.[4]

The existence of two Britains could not be illustrated better than by the fact that canine lives were more valued than most children's. The *Scottish Daily Express* announced that the aristocrats of Scotland's dog kingdom had been evacuated to the United States and the colonies. Not wanting to run the risk of rare strains being wiped out in air raids, many famous prize winners

"On the Isle of Dogs, 3,000 people with only eight vile-smelling improvised toilets. In the Dorchester Hotel, expensive luxury shelters."

and most of the older pedigree stock left "for the duration of hostilities."[5]

Evacuees from working-class homes did not receive such cossetted treatment. Dispatched to country areas, they were often unwelcome visitors, interlopers overstraining already inadequate facilities. Not only did the influx aggravate existing education and housing problems, it brought in individuals not adjusted to their new habitat. Some of the new arrivals, of course, came from problem families. In his novel, *Put Out More Flags,* Evelyn Waugh has a cunning character who traipses some disreputable, dirty and delinquent evacuees from house to rural house, threatening to billet them on the unfortunate occupants unless he is given an inducement to do otherwise. It was a way, to put it in legal parlance, of gaining money by menaces. Yet, even well-behaved evacuees could constitute a threat: coming from unhealthy city slums, they might spread disease.

The tensions engendered quickly aroused conflict. In September 1939, a Tory MP complained about the verminous evacuees from Glasgow arriving in his constituency. This immediately evoked a furious outburst from George Buchanan, the Labour M.P. for the Gorbals: "You are taking the fathers to fight, yet you come here and make villainous, slanderous statements about their children." The ILP Member for Glasgow Camlachie, Campbell Stephens, then joined in, providing instances of the shabby treatment often meted out to evacuees. He cited the example of 150 mothers and children, dumped in a cold village hall and given straw or dirty mattresses to sleep on. Only two toilets were provided. Yet nearby was the Duke of Argyll's castle virtually empty.[6]

The authorities found themselves assailed from all sides. The rural recipients, clamorously complaining, demanded the evacuees' removal. Equally the evacuees themselves were often unhappy, not adjusted to their new environment and without the money for the train fares to visit their parents. The parents grumbled because they did not have the time or money to visit their offspring, as well as about their treatment. When in the first months of the war the massive air raids that were expected failed to materialise, the majority of evacuees started trickling home. As a result, most children had returned to the danger zones when, by the autumn of 1940, the German air raids began in earnest.

In some official quarters, the onset of the blitz in the autumn of 1940 occasioned signs of panic. Hurriedly, fresh evacuation plans were devised. One of these was to move children from London to Brighton. This was rather as if the British generals in the Crimean war had ordered the cavalry from their barracks and to gallop in the direction of Balaclava... for their own safety! Dr. R.D. Worrall, Brighton's Medical Officer of Health, on his own initiative, produced a leaflet denouncing this lunatic move. The leaflet stated that the evacuation only increased the danger to children since Brighton was "in the front line". For his troubles, Dr. Worrall — who, incidentally, was a pioneer of British Trotskyism — was fined £100 under a defence regulation and dismissed from his post as Medical Officer of Health. But then, for officialdom, two embarrassing things happened. First, Churchill, on a well-publicised visit to Brighton, used the same phrase as Worrall, boasting that he had come "to the front line". The other was that tragically a German bomb exploded in a cinema during a children's matinée, killing many of the evacuees. Dr. Worrall was reinstated and his fine reduced to £5.[7]

At another southern city — Portsmouth — morale seems to have plumbed the depths. Ordinary people's depression grew as they became accustomed to seeing the affluent leaving the city each night, not wanting to experience the dangers of the bombing. Their exit was made more conspicuous by the fact that only one road connected Portsmouth to the mainland. However, attacks did not happen simply at night. Often solitary German aircraft, largely for nuisance value, would fly over to disrupt the city's economic activity. In order to lessen the impact of these irritating intruders, the authorities refused to open the air raid shelters unless the threat was consid-

ered to be a serious risk. But their judgement could be flawed. On one occasion, a solitary aircraft appearance proved to be merely the prelude to a full-scale raid. In terror, people ran to the shelters. These remained closed. Crowds clamoured to break open the locks as the police, under orders to keep the shelters closed, baton-charged the anxious multitude. A riot ensued. As a consequence, many were injured and two men killed. Later, a protest meeting was held. A resolution was passed condemning police violence and calling for all shelters, both public and private, to be kept open. Captain R.E.B. Beaumont, Tory Member for Portsmouth Central, led a protest delegation to the Home Office.[8]

Sudden loud explosions, the result of anti-aircraft fire, caused people to rush to Bethnal Green underground station and resulted in the worst civilian disaster of the blitz. A woman with a baby, it seems, apparently slipped on the badly-lit winding staircase. Those following piled on top of her, within a minute creating a mass of dying humanity. All told, 173 lives were lost — 27 men, 84 women and 62 children. An official inquiry was held, but the Home Secretary kept its findings secret. A bland and unilluminating explanation was provided to Parliament: "The effective cause of the disaster was that a number of people lost their self control at a particularly unfortunate time and place." But survivors dispute that there had been any panic. They pointed to the narrow entrance to the stair-well, a hazard that local people had, months before, drawn to the attention of the Home Office. It may be that the authorities, opposed to the occupancy of underground shelters anyway, felt no compulsion to make entry easier. Even so, it left the local populace with a smouldering hatred. In 1993, a commemorative plaque was unveiled at the station's entrance. The Sunday *Observer,* giving many facts about the tragedy, headlined the article "Bitterness lingers at worst civilian disaster of the war". Until then, the Home Office had kept the cause and extent of the disaster secret. One of the survivors, Mrs Faull, recalled how the government sought to stifle protest: "My father went to 10 Downing Street with a petition. He was marched off by soldiers with bayonets."[9]

The bombing also served to draw attention to other grievances festering away in British society. Opposed to sexual discrimination, Campbell Stephens complained in Parliament about the big difference in compensation awarded to men and women. A man totally disabled by enemy action received 32 shillings and sixpence a week whereas a women worker only got 22 shillings and sixpence. Even worse, he argued, was the treatment of the totally disabled, housewives and old persons, who received nothing whatsoever. In official eyes, they made no economic contribution to society and hence their loss of limbs merited no compensation.[10]

The plight of old people in air raids was liable to be dire. They had never been included in any evacuation plans. Yet, in air raids their reduced mobility made it more difficult to reach the security of shelters. The blind, deaf and senile may easily be terrified, disorientated and unable to comprehend what is happening. Fortunately for many with these handicaps, they lived in working-class areas, where a strong community spirit and tradition of mutual help existed.

Working-class children were evacuated to often cold welcomes in Britain's rural areas. The children of the rich went to the USA.

A campaign led by the left forced the government to open Tube stations as shelters

The rich had their own luxury shelters

Working-class dwellings, situated close to factories and other military targets, were more likely to be bombed than middle-class estates, located in the leafy suburbs. Even so, sometimes the latter did receive the unwelcome attention of the Luftwaffe. Then the authorities tended to apply a discriminatory policy. Kingsley Martin, in the *New Statesman,* observed the differential treatment: "People dug out of their shelters in the West End are immediately taken off by taxis to hotels, given hot drinks and warm beds in an underground shelter — so they should be. Some of these people in East London wandered about for 13 hours, having lost all possessions in the world except what they stood up in, and were directed to a series of addresses which involved as much as eight miles walking before they were cared for."[11]

Newspapers carried headlines like "Homeless East Enders don't know where to go" and "Abandoned us — cry London's homeless". In the capital an estimated 80,000 people had been made homeless by the bombing. Some were forced to sleep at Epping Forest in the open air. Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, was exhorted to compile a register of empty dwellings. But he seemed more concerned to retain the men of property's goodwill, not the people's. Some landlords still expected tenants to pay rents — indeed some were even increased — when the houses were unfit for human habitation. In face of official inactivity, the Left called upon direct action: "Take over the shelters and houses of the rich" shouted the *New Leader* headlines.[12] Squatting, though rarely mentioned in the Press, became regarded by many as the answer to homelessness, even to just overcrowding. By 1942, an estimated 40 per cent of Britain's housing stock had been destroyed or damaged. The bad pre-war housing problem had become immeasurably worse.[13] The temptation to occupy unoccupied dwellings grew greater. Either because its slender resources did not stretch to it or because it did not wish to court the unpopularity that would inevitably accompany a policy of confrontation, the Home Office did not resort to evictions. Squatting was largely overlooked.

The government was worried about the growth of nests of sedition, bands of angry and disaffected individuals who challenged the basic tenets of capitalist society. In particular, the authorities feared what might happen in air raid shelters, where many huddled together, spending many hours when conversations take place unsupervised as well as uncensored. Long boring nights in subterranean blackness might drift along dangerous revolutionary lines. The fears were not entirely groundless. People started taking matters into their own hands. In some places those taking refuge pub-

lished their own magazines, such as the *Hampstead Shelterers' Bulletin*. Partly through these publications, but also through discussions with others elsewhere facing the same problems, a network of contacts throughout London grew up. In November 1940, a conference was held. A total of 79 delegates from 50 shelters decided to form the London Underground Station and Shelterers' Committee. They elected Harry Ratner, a Trotskyist, as chairman, and Alfie Bass, of the Communist Party (later to become well known on television) as secretary.[14]

The Committee's immediate task was to protect existing shelters from official incursions. Smarting from the fact that people, by direct action, had illegally occupied underground stations, the authorities wanted gradually to claw them back. They attempted to carry out evictions under the pretext of "clearing the passages and stairs." They also sought to re-establish their authority and regain the initiative by settling any disputes between inmates that might arise. Aware that once this outside interference had secured a foothold there was no saying where it would end, the London Committee set up self-governing local shelter committees where they did not already exist. The inmates themselves democratically formulated the rules. Marshals were elected to enforce them. Order came out of chaos. The squalid scene, already mentioned, that was witnessed by the American journalist at Tilbury had been completely transformed. Tom Harrisson, the pioneer of Mass Observation, reported that the community had become self-regulating. He found "laws enforced not by police and wardens (who at first proved helpless in the face of the multitudes), but generated by the shelterers themselves."[15]

As what had started out as a random assortment of individuals began to develop a feeling of collective identity and comradeship, they acquired a sense of their own power. People had to be listened to and their demands taken seriously. When they called for improvements to existing shelters, they struck a responsive chord throughout many parts of society. Even *The Times'* correspondent echoed their views: Guy Clutton-Brock said the shelters were "lacking dryness, warmth, satisfactory sanitation arrangements, adequate lighting and ventilation, washing facilities, bunks, canteens, health services, children's corners and, in fact, all those things which, it would appear, could easily have been provided during the last three months, while the greatest evil is overcrowding, which can only be relieved by the provision of additional small communal shelters for which there are plenty of sites available."

Bumbling incompetence appeared to lurk behind official attitudes. The failure to construct sufficient shelters seemed inexcusable: in July 1940 57,000 building workers remained unemployed. Government spokesmen then blamed shortages, bottlenecks that impeded progress. But the public's mood grew increasingly restive, unwilling to be fobbed off by governmental blarney. An angry audience at a Midlands civil defence conference heard a novel method of overcoming the shortage of cement. E.W. Barnes, the Bishop of Birmingham, bemoaned the fact that in this country the people did not possess the draconian powers Hitler did in Germany. Amid cheers, he told delegates that the Nazi authorities would not tolerate the cement shortage that existed here: they would simply shoot six manufacturers; those who remained alive would then quickly ensure abundant supplies of cement were always available in future.[17]

Poor quality bricks and shoddy construction also proved to be a problem. By a piece of skulduggery, the officials of Bradford City Council arranged meetings at times when the four ILP representatives could not attend. The four excluded councillors resolved to use the extra spare time by conducting their own survey of the city's street shelters. When they pronounced many of them sub-standard, the Lord Mayor dismissed it as just alarmist talk. So the ILPers enlisted the assistance of scientists from Bradford Technical College. Their investigation revealed 28 shelters with soft bricks, four with loose bricks, 46 with soft mortar and 13 with structural weaknesses. Two things then happened that underlined their findings. First, one of the shelters simply collapsed when there were no Luftwaffe aircraft within 100 miles of Bradford. Second, Professor J.B.S. Haldane, one of Britain's most eminent scientists, visited Yorkshire. He was pictured in the local press crushing a brick taken from a Bradford shelter in the palm of his hand. Bradford's embarrassed Lord Mayor then wrote to the four ILP councillors congratulating them "for substantiating the suggestion that certain shelters in Bradford have been jerry-built."[18]

"If a feeling of the 'great us' grew up among people, there was, secondly, the contrary feeling of 'them', waxing rich from the misfortunes of others."

Much worse than shoddy shelters was to have none at all. Regarded as beyond the range of the Luftwaffe, Plymouth's civil defence remained an extremely flimsy, half-hearted affair. Its citizens were quite unprepared when the heavy German raid occurred. Widespread confusion and panic was still gripping the city — the authorities, too shocked, had taken no steps to evacuate the population — as the Luftwaffe delivered four more heavy blows. Completely overwhelmed and under-resourced, the authorities feebly attempted to evacuate women and children in private cars, many of which ran out of petrol thereby clogging the exit roads. Slightly before the final raid, Whitehall officials arrived to survey the scene. They found many survivors, cold and dazed, sleeping out rough on the moors. Assessing the tragedy in the *Daily Herald*, an angry Richie Calder wrote: "Somebody should be impeached for the cruel chaos which followed the Plymouth blitzes." He suggested that Herbert Morrison and Ernest Bevin, two of the Labour ministers in the coalition government, were suitable candidates.[19]

Sleeping out, clad only in a nightie, or a few hastily snatched clothes, was a greater ordeal for the very young and the very old. This especially applied where deprivation and poverty had already undermined bodily well-being. In more northerly cities, accustomed to winter temperatures below freezing-point, a further dimension was added to the suffering. In Glasgow, for example, Dr. Nora I. Wattie, the child welfare officer, reported that infantile mortality had been 93.1 per 1,000 live births in 1938; from January to June 1941 the figure had shot up to a staggering 131.5.[20] Doubtless air raids like the one lasting nine hours one night, with one of five hours the following night, helped to push up the numbers of those who died as an indirect consequence of the bombing as well as the casualties of the bombing itself. Terrified families in the Gorbals, huddled in the squares, surrounded by the large tenements, could hear their world crashing down around them. Even the all-clear did not end anxiety: there remained unexploded bombs among the rubble.

To bolster civilian morale, government propaganda boasted that German cities were being bombed, too. In a recent raid on Hamburg, there had been what was termed "a bombers' moon": the full moon completely illuminated the city, allowing the pilots to pick out their targets easily while it kept them hidden, in the inky blackness above, from the enemy anti-aircraft batteries. But, as the Glasgow *Forward* pointed out, exactly the same weather conditions prevailed when Glasgow received its severe poundings. The paper thought it was sure the working men and women of both Glasgow and Hamburg could agree at least on one thing — a resolution to abolish the moon.[21]

In fact, the British people generally were far from wholeheartedly endorsing a vindictive let-the-German-bastards-have-it attitude. The areas that tended to be bloodthirsty were those that had not themselves experienced bombing. An opinion poll that appeared in the *New Chronicle*, of 17 May 1941, reported that 45 per cent of people in inner London wanted reprisal bombing of Germany, whereas 47 per cent did not. By a small majority, the "Noes" had it.

In the destruction of the blitz, three significant attitudes developed among working people.

First, there was the growing sense of community, the feeling of mutual dependence, a new realisation that one another's problems and aspirations were exceedingly similar. In air raid shelters, people's barriers broke down; strangers became friendly with persons they had never dreamt of even

speaking to under normal circumstances. In an emergency, a person you did not know may risk his (or her) life to save yours. No wonder a sense of solidarity, of common purpose, emerged from this baptism of fire.

If a feeling of the *great us* grew up among people of varying skills and status, there was, secondly, the contrary feeling of *them*, a hatred for those not making sacrifices — indeed, waxing rich — from the misfortunes of others, the black marketeers, the fat cats, those who had positions and influence. The ruling class, who were responsible for the present mess and whose bumbling ineptitude had led to the war, seemed to be largely immune to any of war's ill effects. This widely-held feeling may have been ill-defined. Nevertheless it was strongly held.

Third, through painful experience, people began to understand that they had to do things themselves. No Labour leader would back any agitation. If you occupied an underground station, then it was no use appealing to Labour leaders. A prominent Labour right winger, Herbert Morrison, as Home Secretary, remained responsible for the civil defence fiasco. He was assisted by the darling of the Labour left: Ellen Wilkinson was not merely Morrison's understudy, she also became his lover. No Labour leader ever backed the illegal occupation of underground stations. No Labour leader ever backed illegal squats. Yet they occurred. People were resorting to do-it-yourself politics.

These were the rebellious seeds — nay, revolutionary seeds — that henceforth plagued British capitalism. The impact is revealed in later industrial and political unrest. It also created an attitude of critical hostility which pervaded society, resulting, among other things, in the defeat of Churchill-backed candidates in by-elections held in what had been rock-solid Tory constituencies. WL

Notes

1 Andrew Sinclair, *War Like a Wasp: the Lost Decade of the Forties*, London (1989) p.55.
2 *Sunday Express*, 8 September 1940. Also, Andrew Sinclair, *ibid.*
3 *New Leader*, 7 November 1940 and 3 May 1941.
4 Clive Ponting, *1940: Myth and Reality*, London (1990), pp.140-1.
5 *Scottish Daily Express*, 4 July 1940.
6 *Forward*, 22 September 1939.
7 The Pied Piper, *Rats*, Left Book Club (1942), p.88. Also, interview with Dr. Worrall, of Seven Oaks, 12 July 1992. Pied Piper was the *nom-de-plume* of J.P.W. Mallalieu.
8 *New Leader*, 7 December 1940.
9 *Observer*, 20 February 1993.
10 House of Commons, 23 October 1939.
11 *New Statesman*, 5 October 1940.
12 *New Leader*, 19 September 1940.
13 *Plebs*, February 1945.
14 *New Leader*, 16, 30 November and 28 December 1940.
15 Tom Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz* (1978), pp.118-9.
16 *The Times*, 22 December 1940.
17 *New Leader*, 7 December 1940.
18 *Ibid*, 4 April 1941.
19 *Daily Herald*, 3 May 1941.
20 *New Leader*, 29 November 1941.
21 *Forward*, 18 March 1941.

What the British Marxists said about Beveridge

As we were saying...

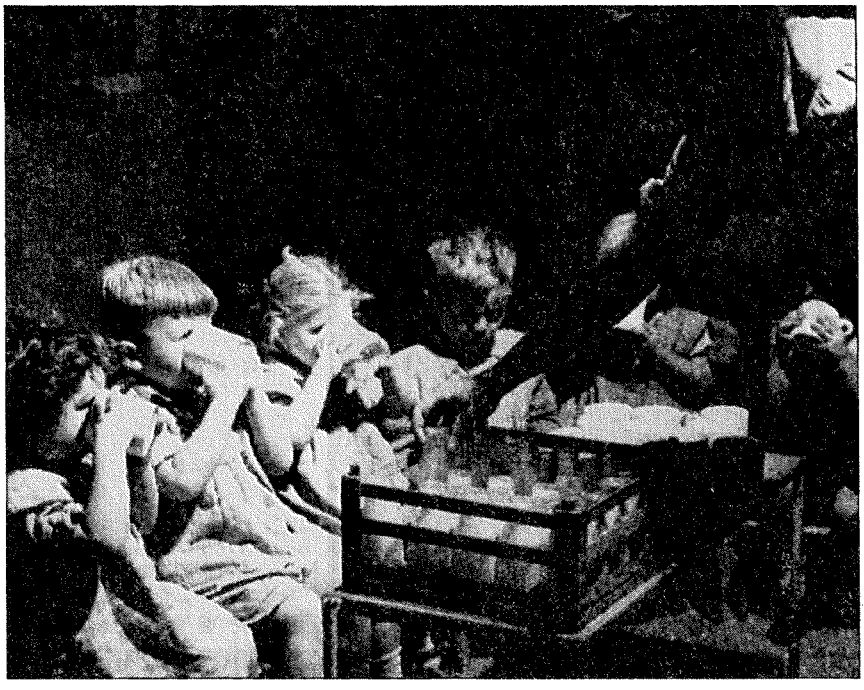
For fifteen years now, the Tories have been chopping away at the Welfare State constructed after 1945 on the basis of the 1942 Beveridge report. Back in 1942, the Marxists of the Workers' International League [WIL] were already pointing out that any capitalist Welfare State would be unviable, likely to break down with mass unemployment. A WIL circular of 31 December 1942 called on WIL members to put the following motion to their trade union branches.

This branch... condemns the National Council of Labour for its acceptance of the Beveridge plan. These proposals leave the whole root of the problem — the private ownership of the means of production — untouched; the scheme is unworkable in the event of mass unemployment; the scales of payment are totally inadequate; and the whole cost is to be borne by the workers.

Social Security, now and in the post-war era, can only be guaranteed under a socialist system of society, whereas the Beveridge proposals presuppose the continuance of the capitalist system, and it is clearly stated that the wealth and privilege of the ruling class are to remain untouched.

As a first step towards providing social security for the workers, we demand that the Labour Party and Trade Union leaders wage a campaign not for the Beveridge scheme, but for the following demands

1) A guaranteed minimum wage determined by the trade unions to provide an adequate standard of living
2) A sliding scale of wages to offset the cost of living
3) A sliding scale of hours to absorb the unemployed
4) Work or full maintenance
5) Adequate compensation for the sick and old-aged
6) The nationalisation of the basic industries without compensation and their operation under workers' control.



The experience of the left

The "IS-SWP" tradition

Introduction to the symposium

By Sean Matgamna*

THE OFFICIAL membership figures of the SWP — 9,000 — are very inflated. Moreover, "membership" is a loose category for the SWP, as a supporter of this magazine with a humorous bent proved on one of the big miners' demos two years ago when he managed to pick up no less than 6 SWP membership cards in under an hour! The SWP itself counts 300 branches and reckons on 5 to 6 active members per branch — a total of 1,500 to 2,000 active members.

Nevertheless, the SWP is, despite everything, the biggest self-styled revolutionary Marxist organisation in Britain today. More than that: like a wild combine harvester out of control, it has over the years left a large number of former members sprawling like trussed wheat on the ground over which it has zig-zagged. There are a lot of ex-IS-SWP people around.

In this respect it is now what the Healy organisation was in the late 50s and through the 60s — "a machine for maiming militants."

Politically, it has assumed the traditional role of anarchism. It is a movement of incoherent militant protest living politically from moment to moment, with no strategy and not much in the way of stable politics. Its highest value on paper is *militancy*. In fact much of its militancy and ultra-leftism are things of rhetoric only. In practice it is sometimes right-wing in the trade unions and even in the National Union of Students. It has one goal only — to "build the party": the party conceived as a fetish outside of politics and history, cut off from the real working class and its movement.

Everything it says and does politically seems to be calculated in exactly the same way — though for different goals — as the Labour Party leaders calculate what they say: "What will sell." As an organisation it is a rigidly authoritarian variant of the Stalinist model of a party. It is organised around a pope, Tony Cliff, who has the power to loose, bind and eject. In terms of the organisation of its intellectual life it is pre-bourgeois, in fact medieval.

Like the Healy organisation before it, the SWP leaves most of its ex-members politically bewildered and disoriented. Some seek in recoil to move back to the politics of an earlier, supposedly better, period of the group's history. Most (sometimes they are the same people) continue to see Cliff as Lenin, only now they denounce "Lenin".

One reason for this, and a big one, is that they understand neither the group's dynamic, nor its real history — that is, how it came to be the thing against which they recoil. The real history of the organisation is not accessible to them; at best they know the official histories produced by such as Ian Birchall — a mix of hagiography, mythology and lies of (at best) omission.

Such people have been taught to believe, for example, that the theory of state capitalism allowed the Cliff group uniquely to maintain an orientation to the working class in the '50s and '60s. In fact all the Trotskyist groups had such an orientation, with the exception after '68 of the IMG. What distinguished the Cliff group (certainly in the '60s) was its paucity of working-class members and its riches — in more senses than one — in the possession of upper middle-class people.

To help traumatised ex-members of the IS-SWP get their political bearings and to establish before younger readers the real history of what has, numerically, become the most important organisation on the revolutionary left, we publish the symposium that follows. There will be other contributions in subsequent issues. We invite contributions. We hope a broad dialogue develops. It should go without saying, but doesn't, so I will say it here, that the discussion is completely free. Should representatives of the SWP wish to participate, they will be welcome.

Those who would dismiss the concerns of this symposium as "sectarian" or "navel-gazing" radically miss the point, I think. We publish *Workers' Liberty* because we want to arm the working class in the class struggle and because we want to build a revolutionary socialist organisation — a movement that succeeds in being all that the SWP proclaims it is and fails resoundingly to be. The *experience* of the work of trying to build the Marxist movement is a great part of the capital we have for that work in the future. That experience needs to be honestly recorded, and assessed, in order that it can be learned from.

The notion that a magazine like *Workers' Liberty* should pretend to be above such concerns is really the idea that "magazines" deal with generalities, and with theory, but not with the practical experience of the revolutionaries. In contrast to the SWP our methods are open discussion, but the building of a Marxist movement is our *central* concern too — a healthy movement integrated with the working class and its organisations. Therefore the record of the practical experience of Marxists in attempting it is of fundamental concern to us.

Those who participate in this symposium hold not one but many standpoints. Some have moved a long way from the politics they had in the IS/SWP, and from the politics of *Workers' Liberty* now. Nonetheless, at the end of this discussion we — and the thinking left in general — will be better equipped to formulate the lessons of the IS-SWP experience. WL

* The author was a member of the National Committee of the IS from November 1968 to December 1971.

Tony Cliff: the central leader of the International Socialists, and today's SWP

For documentation about the day to day politics of the SWP in the trade unions and student movement, and on political issues like the call two years ago for a general strike see the pamphlets: *The Fake Ultra-Left, A Tragedy of the Left: Socialist Worker and its splits* and *Is the SWP an alternative?*.

How can you talk about a "tradition" or a "trend"?

By Ken Coates MEP*

I LEFT the Communist Party in 1953. John Christie was on trial for the Rillington Place murders and the Party's paper, the *Daily Worker*, was campaigning on the point that convictions should not be based solely on confessions. Timothy Evans had been previously hanged for these murders on the basis of a confession.

But at the show trials in Eastern Europe leading Communists had been executed on the basis of their own confessions. I think the trial at the time was Slansky in Czechoslovakia.

I looked into the matter and read the evidence of previous, similar trials — like the Rajk trial.

I thought that all this was quite wrong. I raised the issue and then left the Communist Party.

Khrushchev's reconciliation with Tito in 1955 was quite a blow to the story about the trials — which had been based on Tito being an agent of the Nazis and the Americans. Communist Party members who had known that I had raised questions about the trials began to visit me.

I knew something was badly wrong and I began to study in detail the evidence given in the show trials in Russia.

Anyway, by 1956 there was quite a circle of us in Nottingham. When Khrushchev made his secret speech, which was leaked in the *Observer,* I thought it was a very good thing. I thought that there was going to be a renewal. So I contacted the Communist Party's District Secretary — who was as miserable as sin about the speech! — and rejoined.

We then had a debate which very quickly led to my expulsion. The issue was an appeal for socialist unity, written by GDH Cole, which appeared in the *Daily Worker.* Cole's conditions for unity included the idea that those who had been vilified should receive their due honour. That would have meant the rehabilitation of a lot of executed people.

I got up a response from Nottingham Communists. The two people who signed the letter with me, representing quite a number of other people, were John Daniels and George Granger. Daniels was the senior among us.

The letter I drafted to the *Daily Worker* said that we agreed with Cole's proposals and that we planned to respond by establishing a group in the Communist Party called "Victory for Socialism by Democratising the Communist Party." They were ever so pleased with that!

We circulated the letter to the rest of the left press and to prominent socialists. There was an embargo on publication which was broken in a sensational manner. The *Daily Express* leaked the letter and splashed a story across the front page.

John Daniels found the whole of the press in his front garden. Being an irascible chap he shouted at them and threw water at them through a window. The whole event gave the Party an opportunity to hold an inquiry and expel us.

I attended the hearing. As it happened I was carrying the three volumes of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* which I had just got out of the library. That did not please the District Secretary either!

Then I wandered about looking for a home. I joined the Labour Party and I also talked to the various groups who were beginning to take an interest in Communists and ex-Communists.

I talked to Gerry Healy and was very unimpressed. John Daniels was more impressed with Healy and eventually threw in his lot with that group, becoming editor of Healy's *Labour Review*.

Healy came across as a very dishonest fellow. He sat down with a group of us in order to explain the show trials. Well, I'd read about the trials and knew that Healy did not know what he was talking about. That was fair enough — there is no reason

* Ken Coates was on the first editorial board of the *International Socialism* journal.

Some key dates

1944-9: Almost all British Trotskyists are united in one group, the RCP.

Among its main leaders is Ted Grant. Gerry Healy leads a minority who favour working in the Labour Party. Tony Cliff argues that the USSR is "state capitalist" (the others believe it is a "degenerated workers' state").

1949: The RCP, isolated and dwindling, disbands. Grant and Cliff join the Labour Party and have to submit to Healy's leadership. Healy soon expels them.

1950: Cliff and his co-thinkers — expelled by Healy for failing to side with North Korea in the Korean war — form the Socialist Review Group.

This group is at first "orthodox Trotskyist" except in its "state-capitalist" analysis of the USSR, but over time it becomes opposed to Leninist organisation and develops other distinctive views (e.g. that Trotskyist "transitional demands" are irrelevant, and that imperialism is ended).

Early 1960s: The Socialist Review Group (which now renames itself International Socialism) revives (after decline to about 20 members in the late 1950s) through work in Labour's youth movement and the nuclear disarmament campaign.

Healy's group (now called SLL) is still, however, much stronger.

Late 1960s: As thousands of students and youth are radicalised, the SLL spirals off into ultra-sectarian madness.

IS grows rapidly (to nearly 1,000 in 1968, maybe 2,000 in 1971-2, and 4,000 by 1974). It drifts out of the Labour Party; its paper, *Labour Worker*, is renamed *Socialist Worker* in 1968.

1968: Cliff pushes through a "return to Leninism" and centralised organisation.

1971: IS expels the *Workers' Fight* tendency with which it had fused in 1968 (a forerunner of the AWL), and tightens up its previously liberal regime.

1973: Another minority expelled: the "Right Opposition", which will develop into today's RCP and RCG.

1975: IS in crisis because its expectations of mass growth if it "steers to the left" in response to the Labour government fall flat.

Two more minorities expelled: the "Left Faction" (which joins with *Workers' Fight*; part of it then splits off again to form *Workers' Power*), and the "IS Opposition" (which includes a large part of IS's old leadership; it soon disintegrates, but some of its leaders are active today around *Red Pepper*).

1977: IS renames itself the "Socialist Workers Party." Around this time, too, it develops the thesis of the "downturn" in class struggle which serves to rationalise its sectarian tactics.

Glossary

Slansky: Rudolf Slansky, secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, was hanged in December 1952 after being convicted as a "Trotskyite, Titoite, Zionist traitor, in the service of American imperialism."

Rajk: Laszlo Rajk, a leader of the Hungarian CP, was hanged as a "Titoite" and "secret agent" in 1949.

Tito: leader of the Yugoslav CP. In conflict with the USSR, 1948-55.

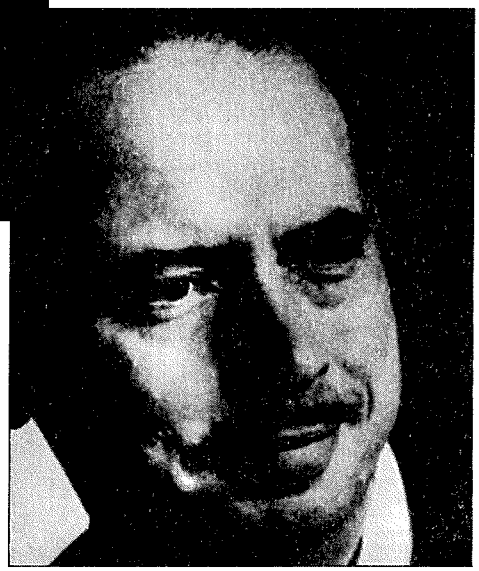
Healy: leader of what was the biggest Trotskyist group in Britain between 1949 and the early 1970s. It was called the Socialist Labour League (from 1959) and then Workers' Revolutionary Party (from 1973). From the late 1970s it became dependent on money from Libya, Iraq, etc; in 1985 it collapsed and scattered.

"Luxemburgism": Rosa Luxemburg, the founding leader of the German Communist Party in 1918, had criticised Lenin's views on organisation as over-centralist in 1904. In the 1960s Tony Cliff built on this criticism an allegedly "Luxemburgist" (as against "Leninist") idea of organisation.

Powell's speech: Enoch Powell, then a leading Tory, made a speech in 1968 denouncing black immigration and predicting "rivers of blood."

Ho Chi Minh: leader of the Vietnamese Stalinists from the 1940s to his death in 1969.

Roger Rosewell: one-time industrial organiser of IS, now a leading Tory propagandist.



"The Americans wrote Healy's polemics — at least those that were longer than two paragraphs. A lot of Cliff's ideas came from Shachtman."
Pictured top: James P Cannon; right: Max Shachtman

for him to have known all the detail. But what Healy did not know, he made up. Utterly mendacious!

Pat Jordan was around. He went down to London and met Ted Grant and Tony Cliff.

Cliff was busy being opportunist. He published a pamphlet — in 1957, I think — called *Why we left the Communist Party.* It was all Cliff's own work but Pat got a lot of signatures of ex-Party members from Nottingham for it.

We were not very impressed by the exercise and it was probably counterproductive. It addressed preconceptions we were supposed to have rather than looking at matters that actually concerned us.

There were 10,000 people in our shoes who were struggling with a wide range of dilemmas. It would have been much better to have interviewed us — but that was not how any of the groups operated, they all worked in a very didactic way. They were all really rather narrow and had less political experience than we did. It was necessary to be able to listen — something none of the groups were able to do.

Cliff was nicer and more scholarly than Healy and one of the attractive things about his organisation was its apparent openness. I think it was true, however, that at its core was an extended family group around Cliff.

At that time Cliff was obsessed with a dialogue with the rightward edge of what he considered possible — that meant Henry Collins, an Oxford tutor. For a long time Collins was the main non-inner circle person who contributed to Cliff's publications.

We set up a Socialist Forum and I became a leading light in the Labour student organisation, NALSO.

I organised a summer camp in 1958 and again in 1959. Everyone came along, together with *New Left Review,* and from these events the Cliff and Healy groups got student bases. People from Oxford and Cambridge were there in some numbers and all the organisations made some recruits. From Oxford and Cambridge the groups diffused outwards through the university system.

"Cliff found that Luxemburgism was convenient. It was something he could hold up to those being expelled elsewhere, which promised a comfortable home."

The culture was very arid. What the Cliff and Healy organisations brought to the British working-class movement was brought in from outside. They did not generate useful ideas themselves, but what they did do was import a culture from the American left — from Shachtman and Cannon. In this respect the British groups had a sort of technical function.

The Americans wrote Healy's polemics — at least those that were longer than two paragraphs. A lot of Cliff's ideas came from Shachtman. "Neither Washington nor Moscow" came from the Shachtman paper, *Labor Action,* which their group circulated.

Understand that both sets of Americans were very much better educated, very much more interested in ideas than the British. They had a political culture and intellectual rigour wholly lacking among the British.

Among all the groups Cliff, I suppose, was the only real original. He was very scholastic and never really impressed me. He stood out only because all the rest were so poor.

I ended up falling out with them after I had been asked to sit on the editorial board of the Socialist Review Group's journal. The publication began by declaring itself to be open to other views. It was agreed that the board would have common responsibility for editorial matters. They printed an editorial which I had not seen, so I withdrew very early on. I was not prepared to participate on that basis.

I was never a member of the Socialist Review Group — I did not agree with the idea of revolutionary transformation. I thought we were living in a different age.

They were all very pleasant people — certainly better than Healy's zombies — but if it is said they had an orientation to the working class, that is just nonsense! When I first met them there were fewer than 30 members and they did not have an orientation to anything. For them the working class was represented by Stan Newens. They could not relate to the concerns of the working class except in the most economistic way.

It is true that "Luxemburgism" on the question of organisation was bandied about for a while. Cliff went through a phase. Of course it was all rubbish and not a little bizarre. The other organisations were all being very "Leninist", meaning that they were being very unkind to each other. There were lots of expulsions and draconian internal regimes — and there was nothing Leninist about it, it was just plain, straightforwardly, thuggish.

Cliff found that Luxemburgism was convenient. It was something he could hold up to those being expelled elsewhere, which promised a comfortable home. So Cliff wrote a little book about Rosa Luxemburg. And, subsequently, when they had a "Leninist" revolution in International Socialists — fortunately for me a long time after I had gone — that was all forgotten.

Everything was a flag of convenience, everything was about managing the organisation. The credit which is due to them is for persistence. Yes, full marks for persistence!

I do not take seriously anything Cliff writes. While we are on the subject it is worth noting that Cliff is the world's greatest unrecognised plagiarist. He copies out loads of stuff!

I do not mind being plagiarised. In fact it is quite flattering. But I do object to being plagiarised and simultaneously being denounced as a class traitor.

One of Cliff's books — from the late 60s, about Incomes Policy — contains vast chunks taken from a small-circulation inter-

nal publication of the Institute for Workers' Control, which Tony Topham and I had written. These very large sections were taken out verbatim and unacknowledged. At the same time I was being denounced!

I thought that this was rather like wanting to have your cake and eat it, so I wrote what I thought was quite an amusing letter to Cliff. It certainly seemed to get under his skin and brought an abject Cliff up to Nottingham, grovelling, begging that we should not print it.

He said that the plagiarism was not his fault, and that a committee had written the book, and that the copying-out had been done by Colin Barker, an acolyte from Manchester.

Apparently it was all Barker's fault.

I do not mind my revisionism being denounced, that is splendid. It is the duplicity that bothers me. If I am good enough to copy out, I am good enough to acknowledge.

However, this was a small matter and I did withdraw the letter in deference to Cliff's non-existent reputation. However I think this event does tell a great deal about Cliff's scholarship.

Cliff did write one very carefully constructed clause in his next book to the effect that he had sometimes profited from the advice of people with whom he disagreed. It was as near as Cliff could ever get to a rectification.

How can you talk about a "tradition" or a "trend" in these circumstances? I would not dignify it by using these words. It is much narrower than that.

***Women's Voice,* women's magazine of the Socialist Workers' Party. The WV groups were shut down in December 1981, and the magazine soon after.**

Tony Cliff's socialism contained two potentials

By Sheila Rowbotham*

I JOINED International Socialists after Enoch Powell's speech in 1968. The Powell speech brought it home to me that I needed to be part of an organisation and Tony Cliff was appealing for people to join on a very broad basis, in opposition to the far right.

Although I never considered myself a Trotskyist I was a member of IS for 18 months.

I was always uneasy in IS and in the end I resigned — although I was about to be expelled. I publicly criticised a speech Chris Harman had made at the memorial meeting for Ho Chi Minh. I thought that IS should have put its criticisms of Ho Chi Minh more forcefully while he was still alive and said so as a signatory in a letter to the paper *Black Dwarf*.

IS was quite fluid when I joined and was in the process of tightening up by 1970. It was as if it had inherited the atmosphere of the more libertarian socialism of the Independent Labour Party and grafted Trotskyism on to this.

But it seems that Tony Cliff's socialism contained two potentials. There was a wing of the organisation which Peter Sedgwick represented, and which I gravitated to, which was libertarian. We were not anarchists — we knew the need for organisation and the importance of disciplined work.

But, then, at the centre the group was very much controlled personally through Tony Cliff and the people around him. It was almost run on a family basis, with Cliff as a father figure. That core group was where the power was.

The thing that made a lot of sense to me was the idea of emphasising what the workers were saying and actually listening to what people said at the level of grassroots organisation. IS understood that theory and ideas came from what the workers did — rather than simply what the Party said.

That balance is always difficult.

The emotional experience of Powell's speech must have had an effect on Tony Cliff and made him anxious to have a tighter structure to organise what were very green, raw young members.

What I did not understand was that if it was alright to listen to workers, why not women in the women's movement?

"Cliff had something against feminism. He was really, unnecessarily, hostile. It could have been incorporated quite naturally into the IS framework."

When we had the first Women's Liberation conference in 1970, I had just left IS. But lots of the women involved were either in IS, or had partners who were in IS.

These women often could not get to IS meetings because their husbands were going and they were babysitting.

There were lots of people in IS who were just broadly radical and who were not hostile to feminism. On the contrary, they thought it was quite good.

But there was a clash at the conference between the American feminist Barbara Winslow and Tony Cliff. He argued that the only issue was exploitation and she replied that not everything came down directly to economics.

Val Clarke, the secretary of IS in the days when that was just a simple secretarial position, was interested. She was accused by Roger Rosewell — always the villain — of being a whore, a sociologist and a middle-class woman. She denied the latter two charges.

Cliff had something against feminism — something against it which I never fully understood. He was really, unnecessarily, hostile. It certainly could have been incorporated quite naturally into the IS framework.

At the start a lot of IS women were involved. There was a North London IS Women's Group. Selma James was close to the organisation at that time and spoke at their meetings. There was an awareness of the issue of race and the American experience and the issue of autonomy.

There were a lot of women who remained very loyal to IS and struggled within the organisation. They worked on *Women's Voice*, which at certain times was really a very good paper. It really did contain the voice of working-class women in a way in which *Spare Rib* only did sporadically. It was a great pity when *Women's Voice* was closed down. By all accounts the centre of their organisation behaved abominably. The women who had been loyal, a long time after I had gone, were devastated.

All the extra non-Party, front organisations were shut down, including the rank-and-file trade union groups. *Women's Voice* was one of the casualties.

* Sheila Rowbotham was a member of the IS from 1968-70. She is an independent socialist-feminist, author of many books.

In defence of the International Socialist tradition

By the International Socialist Group*

IN ITS 15 September 1994 issue, *Socialist Organiser* published edited extracts from a discussion document written by a group of ex-members of the SWP — the International Socialist Group (ISG) — analysing the anti-democratic regime of the SWP. The ISG welcomes this opportunity to outline our interpretation of the International Socialist tradition. We will try to explain why we defend this tradition against more "orthodox" varieties of Trotskyism whilst opposing the bureaucratic centralist reading of Lenin which has distorted the political culture of the SWP to the extent we no longer feel the party adequately represents the IS tradition.

Trotsky's heritage

TROTSKY'S STRUGGLE against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR and his defence of the traditions of the 1917 revolution, were the single most important factor during the 1920s and '30s keeping alive the essence of Marxism as the theory and practice of working-class self-emancipation. Stalinism marks a complete break with the classical Marxist conception described by Hal Draper as "socialism from below". This conception insists that socialism can only be achieved through the revolutionary collective action of the working class, and that the working class can only exercise and maintain socialist control of society through democratic mass organisation — the workers' council. Further, this tradition recognises the international nature of the capitalist system and therefore maintains — against the Stalinist idea of "socialism in one country" — that the socialist revolution can only be completed when it becomes international.

Trotsky's writings of this period — *The Revolution Betrayed, The History of the Russian Revolution*, his works on the rise of fascism — are amongst the most important documents of Marxist analysis. They both defend a vision of socialism and also offer essential lessons in the strategy and tactics of revolutionary politics. In this sense, Trotsky's heritage is almost entirely positive. However, a combination of weaknesses in areas of Trotsky's analysis and the tendency of most of his followers to treat his works as Biblical texts, containing answers to all possible questions, has led to the degeneration of the orthodox Trotskyist tradition to the extent that it is largely incapable of understanding the contemporary world, and is thus utterly isolated from the working-class movement. It is for this reason that the ISG believes that the theoretical work of the International Socialist tradition — begun with Cliff's groundbreaking work on the theory of state capitalism and developed and extended by the Socialist Review Group, the International Socialists and then the SWP — is essential to continuing the task begun by Trotsky of developing classical Marxism in response to changing conditions.

The origins of the crisis of post-war Trotskyism can be found in Trotsky's depiction of Stalin's USSR as a "degenerated workers' state," in which the working class still exercised economic power through socialist property relations (the suppression of the internal market by the workings of the centralised plan), but had been expropriated politically by the bureaucracy. Trotsky's conclusion, at least after 1933, was that a new revolution was necessary — not a social revolution as 1917 had been but a political revolution against the bureaucratic "caste".

The theory of the degenerated workers' state was undoubtedly an advance on the various ultra-left and anarchist theories that had concluded that Stalinism was the inevitable result of Bolshevik politics. And it is easy to see why Trotsky was unwilling to draw the conclusion that all the gains of the 1917 revolution had been lost and that the bureaucracy — far from being what he called a "gendarme appearing in the process of distribution" — was in fact central to the process of production itself, in reality holding economic, as well as political, power. It is also important to recognise that Trotsky was analysing an entirely new set of circumstances — the degeneration of the world's first workers' state — and a set of circumstances that had not, unsurprisingly, been envisaged by any of the leaders of the October revolution.

However, the weakness of the theory became apparent after World War II when Stalinism reproduced itself across Eastern Europe in circumstances very different from 1917. The "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe exhibited all the economic and political structures of Stalin's USSR without ever going through the process of working-class revolution. The overwhelming majority of Trotskyists concluded that these regimes, too, were forms of workers' state, albeit deformed. The result of this was that the historic link between classical Marxism and the idea of socialism as working-class self-emancipation was broken. If forms of socialism could be brought to the working class by a combination of Russian tanks and local Stalinist parties, very little was left of the idea of "socialism from below."

The logic of this position became apparent in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua and other successful nationalist movements against imperialism. One by one, Trotskyists identified these regimes as deformed workers' states. Not only could Russian tanks bring socialism, but so, it appeared, could petit-bourgeois nationalist movements influenced by Stalinist and Maoist politics. Trotskyists could claim allegiance to Marx's insistence that the "emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself" but they no longer had a theory which held this to in fact be the case.

It is certainly true that correct theory does not automatically lead to correct practice; however, incorrect theories only produce correct practice by accident. It is impossible to have a consistent and principled orientation on working-class struggle without a theory which puts this struggle at the centre of its explanation of the world.

Tony Cliff began to recognise this dilemma in 1948, when he wrote the article that was later developed for his book *State Capitalism in Russia* (1955). Cliff takes from Trotsky three central notions: the centrality of the working class, opposition to the bureaucracy, and the impossibility of socialism in one country. He goes on to argue, however, that it is impossible to consistently maintain this revolutionary core of Trotskyism without rejecting Trotsky's theory of the degenerated workers' state. He concludes that the Soviet Union and the "people's democracies" are, in fact, examples of bureaucratic state capitalism.

There is insufficient space here to go into the detail of Cliff's theory and the arguments it has generated since. Central to the argument, however, is the denial of the orthodox Trotskyist identification of state ownership with socialism. As Cliff wrote in 1948: "From the form of property alone — whether private, institutional or state property — abstracted from the relations of production, it is impossible to define the class character of a social system." Or, as he put it much more directly in a 1967 speech on "Revolutionary Traditions": "...if it is true that the working class is the agent of socialist revolution then the form of property is a bloody stupid criterion

* The ISG is a group of people who were expelled from or left the SWP in 1994. Contact: 19 Sanford Terrace, London N16 7LH.

for deciding whether a state is a workers' state or not... we came to the conclusion that workers' control is the decisive thing in evaluating a workers' state... Once you abolish the element of workers' control you abolish the essence of the workers' state."

Cliff argues that the internal regime of the USSR could not be understood in isolation from its position in world capitalism. As Trotsky wrote in *The Permanent Revolution*, "Marxism takes its starting point from world economy, not as a sum of national parts but as a mighty and independent reality which has been created by the international division of labour and the world market..." Despite the suppression of the internal free market, the Soviet economy was forced to follow the logic of capitalism — competitive accumulation — through its need to compete militarily with the West. The rapid industrialisation this necessitated was achieved at the price of the separation of the working class from the organs which claimed to operate in their interests. Soviet "planning" was in fact an instance of the bureaucratic command economy measures that were a feature of the Western capitalist economies in, for example, the Second World War.

Cliff's analysis allowed him to predict — against the mainstream of Trotskyists argument at this time — that far from superseding the contradictions of capitalism, the USSR would eventually exhibit these contradictions in a sharp form — economic crisis, working class resistance, and nationalist revolt. Events since he wrote his book have confirmed this analysis in all its essentials.

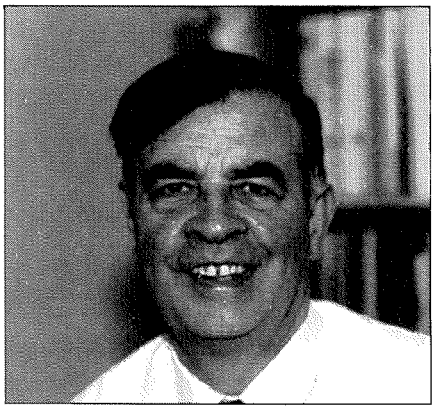
This analysis was later extended — through the theory of deflected permanent revolution — to explain the class character of regimes like those of China, Cuba and Vietnam. The strength of the theory was that it allowed Marxists to support nationalist revolutions against imperialism without collapsing into uncritical admiration of the various flavours of third world Stalinism.

It should be clear that this method puts the working class at the centre of its analysis as a matter of fact rather than incantation. This is why the IS tradition is, in the opinion of the ISG, the only tradition which has begun to develop the tools needed for understanding contemporary world economy and politics.

A few conclusions

THIS ARTICLE is no more than a sketch of some of the issues that the ISG sees as fundamental to Marxist politics. We would not want to claim that the IS tradition has answered all questions, and we certainly do not believe that the SWP's version of Leninism enables it to carry through its analysis with any consistency. In fact, we feel that the militarised political culture of the SWP stands in direct opposition to its proclaimed commitment to working class self-emancipation. We also recognise the need to re-establish a tradition of non-sectarian debate on the left and welcome contributions to that debate.

Cliff never really understood the British labour movement



By Stan Newens MEP*

I JOINED the Socialist Review Group in 1952 and drifted out about 1960.

I was a left-wing socialist who believed that social ownership and democratic control should be extended. I believed in international socialism.

I was utterly repelled by the Stalinist show trials in Eastern Europe. That put me off the Communist Party. When I was approached by an organisation which was left-wing and clearly opposed to Stalinism, I was attracted.

The other organisations in the Trotskyist movement believed that the Stalinist states were degenerated workers' states which should be defended against imperialism. I did not think their ideas held up — what existed in Russia was not any sort of workers' state.

I wanted to take a clear stand against this sort of thing, while continuing to oppose American imperialism. These issues were sharply posed during the Korean war. I concluded that neither side could be supported. The idea expressed in "Neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism" was quite correct and important.

I joined Cliff's organisation. I thought that his analysis was quite inspired. Although I would modify my ideas on a number of matters, I still think that the work Cliff did was very useful.

"Neither Washington nor Moscow" came from the Americans — from Shachtman's organisation. For a while I was even business manager for the Shachtman paper, *Labor Action*. We had a good relationship with Shachtman's people. For example, when Hal Draper came over I met him and was very impressed.

The Socialist Review Group was clearly orientated to the working class. In 1952, as a student, I went down to Fords in Dagenham which was out on strike, to do work around the dispute. SRG members like Geoff Carlson had important positions in industry — he was a steward and then convenor at the ENV factory at Willesden.

Nevertheless the SRG was a sectarian organisation — like *Socialist Organiser* and all similar organisations it was concerned to build itself around a single political line and placed this project above the general work in the labour movement.

The SRG was a Leninist, democratic centralist organisation. I do not accept this now, and I did not do so at the time. It is a method of organisation which is totally opposed to democracy. Within the SRG there were a number of people who shared this view. Bernard Dix, who became a leading member of NUPE, was one such person and we took a much more Labour-orientated approach. In my opinion Cliff never really understood the British labour movement — his background was working in conditions of semi-legality, completely different conditions to those which we faced.

I had joined the Labour Party in 1949. There I worked with all sorts of people and thought it was particularly important to unite with others in a non-sectarian way.

Cliff had a powerful personality and denounced my "revisionism."

I wanted to maximise our role in the Labour Party and draw people in the Labour left together.

Suddenly we got a letter from the Hendon branch of the SRG, which denounced me and others for our attitude to broader work. Bernstein was bandied about. The letter was signed by a couple of young bus conductors — and it was quite clear that Cliff was using them to attack us. They were nice young men, but they did not know who Bernstein was.

Cliff was always concerned with the internal organisation, rather than broader work, which was for other people.

I was friendly with Roy Tearse, the old industrial organiser for the RCP. He was contemptuous of Healy and Cliff. Tearse had got out of the RCP to go and work in the Labour Party, and Tearse influenced me. In 1959 I joined Victory for Socialism. It seemed to me that Victory for Socialism had the possibility of a much broader, non-sectarian alternative to the SRG, and from then I drifted away. In my view the SRG has developed and moved away from — and then out of — the Labour Party. This is utterly *not* what is required in Britain. It is based on ideas Lenin developed in Tsarist Russia in conditions of illegality.

* Stan Newens was a member of the Socialist Review Group for eight years before 1960. He is now a Labour MEP.

The Bolshevik Revolution

Seeds of hope?

Robin Blick, author of "The Seeds of Evil: Lenin and the Origins of Bolshevik Elitism" (Ferrington, 1993), replies to Al Richardson's review of his book in Socialist Organiser no. 615,

ALMOST INVARIABLY, so-called disputations amongst religious believers have been conducted according to the presumption that the faith, being true (and why else should it be believed?) is beyond criticism and therefore incapable of refutation. It has been my experience in politics (though surely not mine alone) that debates between followers of ostensibly secular sects frequently adopt a similar procedure, ensuring that the objections of doubters, dissenters, heretics and, like myself, apostates, are given less than a fair hearing. Generally accepted norms of discussion, such as evidence, logical argument and the accurate representation of the ideas of opponents, are dispensed with and replaced by methods more akin to casting out the devil.

That is why I am pleased to acknowledge that Al Richardson's review of my book (*Socialist Organiser*, 6 October) departs in some degree from this sad and sterile tradition. True, like so many devotees of the Lenin cult, Al can not (yet) quite bring himself to utter a single public criticism of its founder. But I have learned to be patient. The faith of a lifetime is not easily questioned, even less discarded. I suspect that, for reasons I will explain later, Al, in common with many of a like mind, has not said his last word on Leninism. To think otherwise would do less than justice to his intelligence and integrity.

Be that as it may, I would like, in the space kindly offered me (that too gives me cause for hope) to respond to at least some of the criticisms Al makes of my book.

1. Al objects that on page x of the Foreword, the longest of a series of quotations from Volume Five of Lenin's *Collected Works*, purporting to prove Lenin's elitism, amounts to eleven words, and that they are each separated by at least ten pages of Lenin's own text. But surely should he not also have mentioned that on pages 15 and 16 of the main body of my book, I reproduce not eleven words, but 16 lines of (small printed) text from the very same volume, for the purposes of making the very same point? As Al would say, he should not do such "violence" to what I have actually written.

2. I quote not only Lenin, but Stalin, vintage 1923 (page 3) on the virtues of "transmission belt" trade unionism. Al, predictably, defends Lenin's exposition of the policy. Does he defend Stalin's? If not, can he explain wherein they differ?

3. The argument that Lenin's conspiratorial methods arose purely as a response to the repressive policies of the Tsarist police state is not sustained either by Lenin's writings or actions. Even when, to quote Lenin, Russia became (fleetingly) the "freest country in the world" after the overthrow of the Autocracy, Lenin never for one moment abandoned these methods.

The reader will find an extensive treatment of this question in the greatly expanded Third Appendix to the second edition of my book, due out early 1995. But for now, let one instance suffice. During the attempted Kornilov coup, in the course of predicting (correctly) to his Central Committee colleagues that the struggle against Kornilov could "even tomorrow" "put power in our hands", he not only urged

The Tsar and Tsarina

that having won power, "we shall not relinquish it", but warned that of this policy and outcome "we must speak as little as possible in our propaganda". (*CW* Vol 25, p.289)

4. Al's attempt to construct a classic Leninist amalgam between Leiber's views on *What Is To Be Done?* in 1903, and what he advocated should be done to "disobedient workers" in 1917, I find totally irrelevant to a serious discussion of Lenin's theory of class consciousness. Either Lenin or Leiber could have been right in 1903, but for the life of me I cannot see how proposing the stationing of troops outside factories in 1917 constitutes proof either way. If it demonstrates anything, it is how Leiber, (like Lenin on freedom of the press, or the Constituent Assembly) failed to match his words with commensurate actions. In view of Al's evident outrage at Leiber's proposal, I would like to ask him; can I assume that we at least agree that we both find it repellent not merely to advocate the imposition of military discipline on the working class in 1917 under Kerensky, but to actually implement such a policy under the "War Communism" of Lenin and Trotsky, or the Five Year Plans of Stalin?

5. Re *Nachalo*. If Al reads the relevant passage again (page 6) he will see that I refer to its association with "left tendencies close to and within Menshevism" and that, so far as the later were concerned, they were represented by the journal's joint editor (with Trotsky), Martov. Nowhere do I say, as Al seems to be implying, that Martov's thinking reflected the dominant tendency with Menshevism in 1905, or that he shared Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. In fact, I say that in so far as *Nachalo* advocated "a direct transition to a workers' government" it did so "in accordance with the latter's [that is, Trotsky's] theory of "permanent revolution" (page 6).

But even if Al were correct on the points of detail, he does not address the substantive point. I asked in my book, and I ask Al again now, is it not strange that in 1920, Lenin could write that by no later than 1906, the Mensheviks had become "bourgeois agents in the working class" and were "clearly realised" as such "by the entire bourgeoisie", when in that very year, so far from realising this himself, Lenin advocated and actively participated in what proved to be a but temporary merger of the two factions at the 4th (Stockholm) Congress of the RSDLP?

6. On a related issue, Al's (correct) assertion that another of Lenin's critics in 1903, the former "economist" turned Menshevik (and then, after 1917, Leninist turned Stalinist), Martynov, advocated in 1905 a "multi-class bloc policy with the Cadets, SRs etc" could, if not placed in the broader historic context of that year, convey the false impression that firstly, Martynov's was the official Menshevik policy and, secondly, that Lenin's was at all times fundamentally different. To make the point more specific, I ask readers: Of the following two polices being advocated in 1905, which is Lenin's, and which the Menshevik?

A) "Representatives of the Party may participate in the provisional revolutionary government for the purpose of relentlessly combating, together with the revolutionary bourgeois democrats, all attempts at counter revolution, and of defending the independent interests of the proletariat, provided that the party maintain strict control over its representatives and firmly safeguard the independence of the Social-Democratic Party..."

B) "...the Social Democratic movement should endeavour to maintain, throughout the course of the revolution, whatever position will best enable it to advance the revolutionary cause, not tying its hands in the struggle with the inconsistent, self seeking policies of bourgeois parties and not allowing itself to become merged in bourgeois democracy. It follows that the party should not aim to seize power or share it with a provisional government, but should remain a party of the extreme revolutionary opposition."

7. Did Trotsky believe that only proletarian revolutions could establish "workers' states"? His writings on the "class nature" of the territories occupied (and then statified) by Stalin under the terms of his pact

with Hitler are ambiguous on this point, but I concede can be construed to imply that, however unfortunate their consequences, occupation and statification by the Kremlin constituted a kind of "deformed workers' revolution" capable of creating a no less deformed, but nevertheless defensible, "workers' state".

8. Al finds "most unpleasant" the suggestion that elements of Leninism contributed to the formation of Nazi and fascist doctrine and practice. And so he should! The point is, however, is the charge true? To refute it, Al invokes Ernst Nolte, an exponent, so we are told of "bourgeois scholarship" on the matter. Evidently then, when it suits the polemical purposes of Leninists, even the arguments of the ideologists of the class enemy can be pressed into service. But woe betide any non-Leninist who dares cite from the same sources!

But, unlike Al, I have no need no this occasion of "bourgeois scholarship". Had he read my book more closely, he would have noticed that, concerning the Bolshevik inspiration for fascism and Nazism, on page 46, I quote Trotsky as arguing (this was in his uncompleted biography of Stalin) that "Mussolini stole from the Bolsheviks", to which I could have added, instead of paraphrasing as I did, Trotsky's own words, that "Hitler imitated the Bolsheviks and Mussolini". Al will, I suppose, be upset by this judgement, but what can I do about that?

Neither am I to blame for the existence, but only for the reproduction, on page 40, of a quotation from a Soviet journal, dated 1923, which saw in fascism "a politically conscious imitation of Bolshevism", or on the same page the citations from both Lenin and Trotsky praising Mussolini the fascist as, respectively, "a strong man who could have led our party to victory" and "our best pupil"?

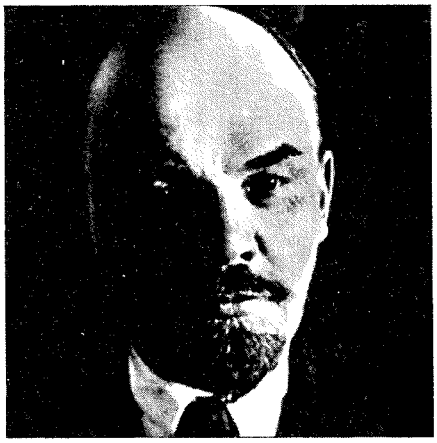
Also in 1923, at the 12th Congress of the Bolshevik Party, Bukharin spoke in the same vein. "More than any other party", the Fascists had in their "methods of combat" "adopted and applied in practice the experience of the Russian Revolution", undertaking a "complete application of Bolshevik tactics and especially of Russian Bolshevism", for example in the "rapid concentration of forces" and "energetic action of a tightly structured military organization..." (Cited in: R. Pipes: *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, p.253)

Like Al, the Stalinist editors of the 1968 edition of the Congress proceedings found Bukharin's analysis distressing, dismissing it as "ridiculous", "baseless" and "unscientific" (ibid). But at the time it was made, it was regarded by Bukharin's political peers as self-evidently true. After all, did not Trotsky enunciate the *Fuehrerprinzip* of all totalitarian movements when he insisted, contrary to the entire tradition of pre-Bolshevik Marxism, that the "rule of the proletariat" could be expressed not only "through an open struggle of parties" but "the monopoly of a single party" and even "the factual concentration of power in the hands of a single person" (*Writings 1937-38*, p.61). And, by this time, that "single person" was Stalin. If Al has a quarrel concerning the relationship between Bolshevism and fascism, it is not only with me, but the founders of his own political movement and doctrine. And in this dispute, I don't think that the "bourgeois scholarship" of Nolte will be of much avail.

I could go on, and demonstrate (as I did in my book) that leading Fascists and Nazis were no less aware of their debt to Bolshevism than the Bolsheviks themselves. On this subject too, the second edition will carry additional material, none of it by the way derived from the judgements of "bourgeois scholarship". For now, I will make do with an aphorism of Joseph Goebbels: "Lenin sacrificed Marx and in return gave Russia freedom".

9. Al concludes his review by ridiculing my contention that it takes courage for an orthodox Bolshevik to "consider the possibility" (not concede) that "Stalinism was the necessary outcome of Leninism" with the retort that the (chiefly bourgeois) enemies of Bolshevism have come to the very same conclusion long ago.

Let me answer Al by way of an analogy. A priest can warn a troubled but still essentially loyal Catholic that all Rome's enemies — Jews, Protestants, Moslems, pagans, Satanists and atheists — deny the infallibility of the Pope. This statement is not only undeniably true but also, for Catholics, probably very persuasive. But surely Al will also agree that its truth has no bearing whatsoever on whether the Pope is indeed infallible. And so it must also be with the claims of Leninism. They stand or fall, not



Lenin

by the real or supposed congruencies of its critics, but the facts of the case.

What makes it difficult for my book to receive a fair hearing (and Al's review is an example of this) is that the near unanimity of Bolshevism's critics, and the predominance amongst them of opponents of revolutionary socialism, render doubting Leninism as daunting an undertaking morally and psychologically as it is politically. Fear of betrayal, of "breaking ranks", "selling out", "moving to the right", and the ensuing inevitable public excommunication and condemnation by one's mentors, comrades and lifelong friends, paralyses the critical faculties and stifles reasoned judgement.

Precisely for that reason does it indeed require courage, on the part of Leninists that is, to question Leninism today, no less than it did in 1956 for Communist Party members to accept the judgement of political opponents (amongst them not only Trotskyists, but vehement foes of any kind of socialism) that Stalin was a tyrant, that Trotsky was not a Nazi agent, and the Hungarian Revolution was not a fascist putsch inspired by US imperialism.

I repeat: Whether Leninism is or is not a viable means for achieving proletarian emancipation rests entirely upon the facts of the case, and not on whether one's opinion concurs in any sense with this or that school of "bourgeois scholarship". After all, do we not have it on Al's authority that in one instance at least, the latter can be superior to the collective wisdom of Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin?

So much for Al's criticisms, and my responses. But that does not conclude the matter. I am no less interested in what Al does not criticise in my book. Whilst often focusing on secondary points of detail (and even in these he is sometimes wrong) he does not, for example, take issue with the way I treat one of its central themes, which is Lenin's deviation from the Marx-Engels view of the party/class question. This, interestingly, is an omission his review shares with two others that have appeared in Leninist publications. He is no less reticent where I take issue with Lenin's reneging on the democratic demands in his party's programme — for example freedom of the press and respecting the will of the Constituent Assembly — and Trotsky's justifications for the one party state.

Could it be that here, if nowhere else, Al finds my critique of Bolshevism better grounded? I sincerely hope so, I believe that on its approach to the democratic issues (and here I include the class/party question) depends the future of the revolutionary Left. I am also encouraged by Al's refusal to take upon himself the defend of Lenin's advocacy and use of terror, in particular the latter's proposal (cited on page 59) to award a bounty of 100,000 roubles per man for Polish "kulaks, priests and landowners" hung by the advancing forces of the Red Army in the summer of 1920.

Let us hope that Al, and other reflective Leninists like him, find the courage to go beyond silence to public repudiation of this and other policies which I am convinced they in their hearts now believe were injurious to the cause for which they are fighting. That would be progress indeed.

Marxists and Parliament

By Martin Thomas

ALAN JOHNSON'S REPLY ("Parliament and

revolutionaries", *SO* 619) to my comments (*SO* 617) on his book review (*SO* 616) raises many interesting issues. I shall try to respond as briefly as possible, point-by-point.

Was it wrong to set up the (then-revolutionary) Communist Party in 1920? I agree with Alan that "revolutionary Marxist parties of any size have never been built by tiny groups of Marxists setting up in direct organisational competition with mass reformist parties". It was necessary for the revolutionaries — the communists, to use a term which was not then debased by Stalinism — to organise in the Labour Party.

But neither Lenin nor anyone else could have managed to regroup the communists as a faction in the Labour Party in 1920. Most of the best revolutionaries were hostile to work in the Labour Party, and could be won over only by patient argument in a common organisation.

In "Left-Wing Communism" Lenin argues in detail *both* why communists should seek affiliation to the Labour Party *and* his case for initially regrouping all revolutionaries, "ultra-left" or otherwise. His argument still seems convincing to me.

There is a more general issue here, relevant to other points in Alan's argument and to revolutionary orientation today. Good tactics for winning the masses are essential for building a revolutionary organisation; but so are good tactics for initially winning a revolutionary minority, *who in many conditions will be "ultra-left"*. Both sides of the task must be kept in mind.

Should the general rule be "shutting down, in its organisationally separate form, the revolutionary party, thus allowing the Marxists to act as a lever..."? I agree it is best if Marxists can organise as a affiliated party within the Labour Party — as the early Communist Party sought to do — or as an open not-yet-banned organisation within the Party like the Socialist Organiser Alliance of the 1980s.

Usually, however, Labour's dominant right wing does not leave this possibility open to us. We then have to use a "combination of 'Labour Party legal' and 'Labour-illegal' work".

Resorting to such a combination is a retreat, and Alan is right to warn against making it a preference. When *Militant* was banned in 1983, some *Socialist Organiser* supporters felt hurt in their revolutionary credibility that we were not banned too, and wanted to find some way to provoke a ban. They were wrong.

But now we are banned. We do have to make the retreat.

Alan gives far too much credence, I think, to the arguments of the Communist Party leaders Palme Dutt and Harry Pollitt, who said in 1929 that the CP must shut down the National Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party because it would deflect workers from joining the CP.

By doing effective "illegal" work in the Labour Party, CP members could and did both build the NLWM and win other Labour Party members to join the CP "illegally". The shutting down of the NLWM was followed by a collapse, not a rise, in CP membership.

Parliament and workers' councils. I agree with Alan that we should "fight to defend and deepen Parliamentary democracy" and that "the most likely scenario for the development of workers' councils in Britain is the defence of Parliament". I do not propose that we campaign under the slogan "Soviets not Parliament"!

All that is very different, however, from arguing the workers' rule of the future must "merge the power of a transformed Parliament with the nascent power of popular local councils".

Take the scenario. A leftish Labour parliamentary government attempts serious reforms, and the ruling class tries to sack it, maybe in the fashion that the Governor-General, using the Queen's authority, sacked the Australian Labor government in 1975.

"The Independent Social Democrats did argue "to merge Parliament with popular local councils". That led to subordination to a bourgeois Parliament."

The working class reacts more militantly than the Australian workers in 1975. There are mass strikes. Local councils of action are set up and fight to enforce the Labour government's reforms against a new provisional government established under the Queen's authority.

There you have workers' councils developing in defence of Parliament. But that is not the end of the story.

If the workers' councils developed beyond a certain level, *the leftish Labour government which the ruling class initially wanted to sack would probably become its best defence*!

Its soft-left leaders would certainly be in anxious conclave with ruling-class strategists about how to "restore order". Quite likely they would produce a deal: the Labour government and some or even all of its reforms are restored, guarantees are given about future stability (for example by "broadening" the government to include Lib-Dems), and the workers are called on to demobilise.

Marxists would argue against demobilising. We would not make "Soviets not Parliament" a slogan; but we would say: defend, extend, and co-ordinate the power you have won locally. Demand that the Labour leaders go forward to new reforms, instead of giving guarantees to the ruling class.

We would be going on a path which counterposed a new workers' power, based on workers' councils, to the old parliamentary regime. To preach "merging" of Parliamentary power with workers'-council power would be disorienting.

What are the lessons of Germany 1918-19? Despite Alan, I believe that the cause of the workers' defeat then *was* the absence of a solid revolutionary party.

Rosa Luxemburg and her close comrades knew, and argued, that it was wrong for the communists to boycott the National Assembly elections; that a patient battle of ideas in the workers' councils was necessary; that any attempt at an uprising in Berlin in January 1919 was disastrous. They were unable to lead the workers on the basis of what they knew because they had operated for too long as a loose propaganda group inside the Social-Democrat and Independent Social-Democrat parties. The new Communist Party was formed only after the revolution had broken out. Its scanty, ill-organised cadres were overwhelmed by the mass of impatient youth new to revolutionary politics.

Had it not been for the special qualities of the Bolshevik party, the Russian revolution of 1917 would have ended in equally crushing defeat. The Bolshevik leaders would have continued the line of "pushing the Provisional Government to the left" which they had until Lenin's arrival in Russia from exile; the most militant workers would have broken away untidily, forming some new anarchistic or ultra-left party; that party would have attempted an uprising in the "July Days" and broken its neck.

Moreover, the lesson of 1918-19 is not just the failure of the Communist Party. It is also the failure of the Independent Social-Democrats, who did argue "to merge the power of Parliament with the power of popular local councils". That approach led to the workers' councils being subordinated to a bourgeois Parliament.

And it did not even save them from ultra-left foolishness: the initiators of the Berlin uprising of January 1919, who then managed to bring Karl Liebknecht (though *not* other CP leaders) in on their folly, were Independent Social-Democrats.

But what about differences of national conditions? Revolutionary strategy in Britain or Germany cannot be copied from the very different conditions of Russia. I agree that different national conditions are important. A discussion of what exactly their import is would take us much wider.

But it seems to me that relating to parliamentary politics is important *everywhere*, and not just in particular national conditions.

The Bolsheviks did not campaign for "Soviets not Parliament" in 1917. They campaigned for soviets, and at the same time for the convening of a Constituent Assembly (a parliament with full powers). After they had won power, they convened the Constituent Assembly. They dispersed it, not under some general slogan of "Soviets not Parliament", but on the specific grounds that it refused to recognise the authority of the Congress of Soviets, which was more democratic and accurately representative.

The Great Wen goes septic

Colin Foster reviews *London: a social history* by Roy Porter. Hamish Hamilton £20

Review

"INNER LONDON has become the nation's capital for poverty, family breakdown, school truancy, delinquency, crime, alcoholism, vandalism and violence... This amounts to more than a temporary social dislocation... a new urban order is emerging...

"In place of the employed, self-sufficient and respectable working classes who abounded from the time of the guilds to the 1960s... a new outcast London is coming into being... misery and waste, strife and demoralisation... decrepit infrastructure..."

Thatcherism — so Roy Porter shows — has revived many of the evils of Victorian or Georgian London. But it has also done worse.

In all of its previous history since the Middle Ages, London has been Britain's main manufacturing and trade centre — a place of relatively high employment (even in the 1930s), skills and wages. Its growth had been shaped and sustained by vast investment projects — in the Victorian era, the railways, the docks, the sewer system and the Embankment built above it, the Underground and so on.

Now London has suffered a greater decline of manufacturing even than Liverpool. The docks are finished. The only big investment projects are speculative office-building, and a bit for the tourist trade.

From being the centre of a burgeoning British capitalism, London has become a spot on the margins of a floundering world private-profit economy. And the Tories have left it to the mercies of the market.

Their only real hope of dynamism is the still-pivotal role of the City of London in world foreign exchange and other financial markets. Yet Porter's account shows, for London, the same logic which Robert Fitch has recently (*New Left Review* no. 207) discerned in New York:

"Can anyone imagine a poorer choice of industrial mix than Wall Street or speculative office building? For resident income? For stability? For the creation of wealth?"

And, in London as in New York, planners, sometimes well-meaning, have only made the havoc of the market worse — "destroyed economic diversity without being able to fill the new space..."

London's grip on a share of the proceeds of world capitalism is probably even shakier than New York's: a relatively small shift in the way international finance works could quickly take most of the business of the City of London to Frankfurt or elsewhere, and leave London a basket-case.

Labour youth organise

Continued from back page

LP leaders. Militant would not rock the boat.

From the late 60s Vietnam War demonstrations to the anti-Cruise missiles demos fifteen years later, every political issue that interested youth was ignored or dismissed with contempt by the Militant-led LPYS. Sterile, abstract propaganda was its staple. When it was closed down in 1987 the LPYS was an isolated and uninspiring organisation.

All this indicates that, whatever the intentions of Blair and the careerist youth around him, Young Labour is not certain to be the tame and lifeless organisation they would like. Experience already indicates that left-wing Young Labour branches can attract young working class people.

Experience also indicates that where YL branches and other Party members fight seriously to win rights and status for Young Labour within the local Party those things can be achieved — at least on a local level. YL branches are starting to establish their right to formulate policy and campaign on it. In some areas they are being granted delegate rights within Party structures.The felt need of many of those who run CLPs today to recruit and involve youth in the Party can generate support for YLactivists seeking democracy.

YL branches can provide campaigning opportunities to reconnect Labour to that generation of working-class youth cut off from it by mass unemployment and by lack of union rights.

Youth who get involved in YL quickly learn socialist lessons. Socialists can discuss *political answers* with working-class youth and organise them to fight for the regeneration and transformation of the movement.

The bureaucratic shackles on Young Labour undoubtedly hinder that work, but they cannot fully prevent it, any more than they prevented it in the past. Youth attracted to left-wing politics — no matter how vaguely to begin with — make uneasy bedfellows with the bureaucrats and careerists who run organisations like the Labour Party. That is the root explanation of the history I have outlined.

The comparative absence of right-wing shackles in the LPYS period [1965-87] is the exception, not the norm.

One of the two crucial lessons for today from the 60s is this: good relations with local Parties are vital for defending YL branches from the arbitrary powers of Regional Offices. The other is that to *build* YL branches means getting out of cosy discussion circles and into the places where working-class youth are.

Young Labour's future remains uncertain, but the Blairites are unlikely to have things easy for long.

Note: Douglas Vespa is a pseudonym. The author is active in Young Labour.

Labour youth organise

By Douglas Vespa

IN 1993 there were only 18 branches of Labour's youth movement still in existence. The national youth organisation had effectively been closed down in 1987. Three times as many Labour Party members were over the age of 66 as were under 25.

These facts, together with Labour's declining electoral support from young people, led Labour's 1993 Conference to decide to allow Young Labour groups to be formed. The intention was to create a tame body to provide Labour with a youthful image and footsoldiers for electioneering. Young Labour's objectives (as set out in its rules) place organising "social activities" above any form of politics or campaigning.

Young Labour groups have *no* rights of representation within the Party, no links with local CLPs. Thay have no right to control their own publications, raise funding through membership subscriptions, or receive grants from the Labour Party. They are responsible to unelected regional officials, not to local Party democracy.

Young Labour's "first birthday party", held at the 1994 Labour Annual Conference, attracted, in the main, activists from Labour's right-wing student organisation, the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS). Inevitably, Labour's youth magazine, *Regeneration*, is an insipidly right-wing affair.

None of this immediately spells advances for the left, but Labour has launched tame youth organisations four times in the past — and they have never remained what the Labour leaders designed them to be.

In 1924 the growth of the Communist Party's Young Communist League prompted Labour to allow local youth sections for the first time, and the formation in 1926 of a national Labour League of Youth (LLY). Originally it had no National Committee, regional committees or any form of self-government. Its work was to be "mainly recreational and educational." But a left wing grew up in the 30s, Stalinist dominated. The LLY was disbanded in 1939.

The League of Youth was revived after the Second World War. Its newspaper *Young Socialist* carried adverts for the RAF and campaigned against the right to vote at 18. Several League of Youth members were expelled for campaigning against conscription. Yet the left grew.

In 1955, once again, the Labour leadership disbanded Labour's youth organisation.

Third time was no luckier. Launched in 1960, the year after Labour's third successive election defeat, the Young Socialists was initially to have no elected national committee and no right to discuss general political issues at its conference.

Hardly an open invitation to the left — but despite all this, left-wing resolutions were passed on issues like NATO and unilateral nuclear disarmament (then an issue of dispute in the Labour Party of crisis proportions). The left in the newly formed Young Socialists fought the 1960 attempt by Party leader Hugh Gaitskell to ditch Clause Four.

A layer of Labour's youth drew conclusions from these disputes. Supporters of the Marxist paper *Keep Left* were able to get one of their number onto the National Committee in 1961, two more the following year (as part of a unilateralist majority), and the next year to win a majority. In the midst of a witch-hunt, their newspaper banned (1962), and despite the obstacles placed in their way by the right-wing careerists and the bureaucrats, *Keep Left* supporters won the leadership of what had been set up to be a tame right wing controlled youth organisation. They did it by persuading activists recruited from such places as university CND societies to take YS branches out to working-class youth. They agitated on council estates over issues like youth facilities. They organised socials. They made their meetings accessible to youth not yet political.

The Labour leadership fought back with expulsions and disbandments, but *Keep Left* — by then drunk on their own success — ducked out of the fight and opted instead for an independent sectarian existence outside the Labour Party.

The strength of the right within the fourth Labour youth organisation, the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS), had been boosted by the departure of *Keep Left*. But again the LPYS youth gained political rights. The LPYS declined in the latter half of the 60s. The Militant tendency took control — with the tacit agreement of the

Continued on page 35