

April 1995  
ISSN 0960-8753

No. 20

Price £1.20/60p (UK)  
(\$2.50 US, \$2.50 Australia, IR£1.40 Ireland,  
FF15 France, DM4 Germany)

# Workers' Liberty

i  
n  
t  
h  
i  
s  
i  
s  
s  
u  
e

**Fight the  
education cuts!**

**Atrocities against  
women! by  
Taslima Nasrin**

**John McIlroy  
surveys the state  
of the unions**

**Diary of a striker**

**From the Gay  
Liberation Front  
to Queer Politics**

**Talking to  
Paul Gilroy**

**Experiences of  
the left: the  
International  
Socialists/Socialist  
Worker**

**Max Shachtman  
and his left**



# Who put the "new" in New Labour?



## Contents



### Editorial

Who put the "new" in New Labour? . . . . . page 3

### The cover story

We can beat Blair! *By Roland Tetchet* . . . . . page 4

Eclipse of the soft left *By Anne Mack* . . . . . page 6

### The monthly survey

Build a national campaign against the cuts *By Martin Thomas* . . . . . page 8

Baring's crash reveals corrupt system *By Colin Foster* . . . . . page 8

Sinn Fein goes respectable *By Thomas Dubh Carolan* . . . . . page 9

To out or not to out? *By Janine Booth* . . . . . page 9

Solidarity with Nigerian workers *By Mark Sandell* . . . . . page 9

### Fighting fundamentalism

Atrocities against women! *By Taslima Nasrin* . . . . . page 11

### The class struggle

Diary of a striker *By a NATFHE member* . . . . . page 12

### The labour movement

Trade unions: is the tide turning? *By John McIlroy* . . . . . page 14

### Another Day

Dropping in on comrade Einstein . . . . . page 17

### Lesbian and gay liberation

From the Gay Liberation Front to Queer Politics  
*By Clive Bradley* . . . . . page 18

### Those who do not learn from history

A child survivor draws a scene from life in a Nazi concentration camp *By Irving Howe* . . . . . page 22

### Workers' Liberty Briefing

Bad lessons from Japan *By Sean MacGiollaria* . . . . . page 23

### Against the stream

Headbang with a Blairite *By Sean Matgamna* . . . . . page 24

### The Workers' Liberty interview

The meaning of "black" *By Paul Gilroy* . . . . . page 25

### The Workers' Liberty symposium

On the IS/SWP tradition  
*Contributors: Vic Collard, James D Young* . . . . . page 26

### As we were saying

Break with police state "unions" *By John O'Mahony* . . . . . page 30

### Review

Max Shachtman and his left *By Barry Finger* . . . . . page 31

### Forum

History was not made by one authoritarian man *By Al Richardson* . . . . . page 34

Class Struggle rises in South Africa *By Bobby Navarro* . . . . . page 36

Editor: Sean Matgamna

Published by WL Publications, PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA, and printed by Upstream Ltd (TU), London SE15.

Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Workers' Liberty.

## Workers' Liberty

### A letter to our readers

THREE IDEAS were at the core of British reform socialism in its heyday after the second World War.

(1) Though the class struggle between workers and bosses was, they said, a fact of life, it was not something the labour movement needed to fight to win;

(2) The state was not an organ of class rule, it was neutral;

(3) Even under capitalism, working-class life could be gradually improved, inch by inch, year by year: the strength of the labour movement was the guarantee of it.

These ideas stopped the labour movement in the days of its great strength from wiping out the Tories and their class. And today? The Welfare State is half wrecked, battered out of shape by 16 years of naked bourgeois class rule by the Tories.

Today, reform-socialism's root ideas seem like the debilitating fantasies they always were. The class struggle has been shown to be central to social life. In pursuit of it the Tories have destroyed whole industries — in the first place coal — where the workers were militant. And they have relentlessly used the state as a brutal instrument to bludgeon and shackle the working-class movement. The unions have declined and lost much of their effectiveness because almost everything that made them effective — quick strike action and solidarity strikes, for example — have long been outlawed.

The strength of the Blairites and of the leaders of the new "business unionism" is a product of the defeats reform socialism led the working class into. Their strength is a by-product of ruling-class victories. The tide has been flowing in their favour but the tide will turn. Is it, as some are beginning to argue, turning already?

As we move up to the 16th anniversary of the Tory 1979 election victory, John McIlroy surveys the state of the unions. The tide has not yet begun to turn, he concludes, and probably won't until after the general election. For good or ill, the Labour Party is now centre stage.

Anne Mack and Roland Tetchet survey the state of the struggle over Clause Four. Blair has a lot going for him on 29 April, but, even so, he may lose. The soft left, as Anne Mack explains, have already lost.

25 years ago, many lesbian and gay activists thought they saw a radical promise in the movement for gay liberation that started then in Britain. They have been disappointed. Clive Bradley surveys the politics of gay liberation now.

We have another instalment in the symposium about the IS-SWP tradition, and a very important one. Vic Collard was the leading IS working-class militant back in the far-off days when that organisation had an important working-class base. He recounts his experience here.

Finally, we print an important speech by the heroine, Taslima Nasrin. 450 people attended our meeting for her at Conway Hall on 15 March.

This is the third monthly edition of Workers' Liberty. The circulation is beginning to get into its stride, but there is still a long way to go. Subscribe; sell a sub; send us some money! ☛



Photo: John Harris

## Editorial

WHO PUT the "new" in New Labour? The answer is not Peter Mandelson or Tony Blair but Margaret Thatcher, representing the forces of savage, unbridled, decaying British capitalism. It was Thatcher who drew up the agenda which the Blairites pursue in the British labour movement now.

When Thatcher took office in 1979, she announced that it was her intention to wipe socialism off the face of British politics. As Arthur Scargill likes to tell pro-Clause Four rallies, she has not yet succeeded. Tony Blair takes up Thatcher's cause within the labour movement. He hopes to finish the job Thatcher started.

Democratically controlled and administered common ownership is the necessary basis of socialism. It is central to the meaning of the word. Blair's new "Clause Four" is an anti-socialist document. Its purpose: to remove any mention of common ownership, or of social wealth from the stated aims of the Labour Party.

As foolishly arrogant as his Thatcherite mentors, Blair's new clause implicitly embraces the triumphalist bourgeois notion of the "end of history". It defines as outside the realm of possibility any form of social production that is not based on private minority ownership of the means of production! Capitalism is here to stay. There will never be anything else. This wretched system, at the root and heart of which is human exploitation, is the highest humankind can hope to attain. This is the real meaning of Blair's philosophically, politically and socially illiterate appeal to *timeless* values. For all his hollow talk of change, little Mr. Blair wants to stop the movement of history.

The existing Clause Four sketches out a future, even if it is in Fabian and rather bureaucratic terms. Blair's new clause does not. It worships the present, uncritically — not the real present, but the neo-liberal ideological fabrication of an ideal, imaginary present world of capitalist civilisation — a world, in fact, which nobody alive today actually inhabits. It bears as much relationship to capitalist reality as the imaginary socialism of Stalinist propaganda did to the condition of those who inhabited the bureaucratically collectivised hell-holes of Stalinism. Just read these words:

*"Blair's new clause  
embraces the  
triumphalist  
bourgeois notion of  
the 'end of history'."*

"We work for a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition... produce the wealth the nation needs."

That phrase would fit well in a textbook of bourgeois economics, but, as a description of reality, it is a joke. The revealing thing is how limited are the modifications Blair feels we need to make of his school textbook model of capitalism. The market and competition need only to be "joined" — whatever that means — to "the forces of partnership and co-operation" — what are they exactly? — in order to produce "the opportunity for all to work and prosper." This, as Tony has told us, does not mean anything in particular, at any rate, it emphatically does not mean full employment.

Blair's empty waffle represents the lowest common denominator of the post-Thatcher consensus. It could be endorsed by mainstream Christian-Democrats, never mind social-democrats, in any advanced capitalist country. As the head of the Institute of Directors put it: "There is nothing in this document that wouldn't have been supported by any Tory in the last five years."

Yet Blair's new clause *is* a radical document — radical right.

Blair believes in only a minuscule role for public ownership. This is what the new clause says: "High quality public services, where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to

*them.*" [Emphasis added.]

As Blair is not proposing the abolition of the monarchy and the public utilities are already in private hands, the real purpose of this phraseology may be to clear the way for the extension of private ownership and compulsory competitive tendering even further than the Tories have extended it into what remains of the public sector.

Apart from the market, Blair's other main buzzword is community — and its attendant language of "rights and responsibilities."

Many commentators have misunderstood the import of those words of Blair-speak.

For him, "community" is not even a countervailing power to be deployed against the excesses of individualism and its market. No, on the contrary, Blair's rhetoric of "rights and responsibilities" ♦



represents an attempt by him to invest the workings of the blind laws of political economy with some moral force. It is not only a question of how things actually happen under capitalism but of how things *should* happen in a moral universe.

Try an experiment. Put Blair's phrase "the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe" into the context of his commitment to "get people off welfare." Place that alongside his belief that all young people should do voluntary work. We already have New Labour's case for welfare!

Blair's new clause is not simply an exercise to bring the Labour Party's aims and objects into line with its actual pro-capitalist behaviour when in government.

This attack on Clause Four is an integral part of what the "modernisers" call "the project." Their aim is nothing less than to remove organised labour as an active force in Parliamentary politics and to reinvent the Labour Party as the main party of a "modernised" capitalism.

New Labour really means ex-Labour. New Labour means a rebirth of the Liberal Party Labour displaced in the first two decades of this century.

Yet there is a puzzle here.

How come large sections of the Labour Party membership — never mind the overwhelming majority of its apparatus (including its trade union apparatus) — are reconciled to the party's self negation?

The question cannot be answered if we see Blair's hegemony simply as the product of an accidental combination of circumstances. Such things may have accelerated his rise to power but they do not explain it. To understand Blair's attempt to create New Labour we need to see what he has in common with *old* Labour.

Blair is an anti-socialist who wants to break the link with the trade unions; so, on the face of it, he has not got anything to do with Old Labour. Yet, at the same time, he remains deeply and firmly in the mainstream of traditionally parliamentary Labour politics. So, of course, were his failed predecessors, the SDP.

The reason Blair can embody such contradictory tendencies — being part of Labourism while aspiring to abolish it — is that Labourism itself always contained the seed of its own destruction.

Defined statically, the Labour Party is a bourgeois workers' party. That means that the party is based on the trade unions, the bedrock organisation of the working class, and that it counts for its electoral support on the working class. Yet, at the same time, the party is a bourgeois party. Its leaders carry out pro-capitalist policies in office and are integrated into the extended ruling class networks of the state and business establishments.

As a party, it simultaneously embodies the first steps of the working class down

the road to political independence and the continued dominance of bourgeois ideas over that same exploited class.

If we look at the Labour Party in the past, we can cast the illuminating light of history on the paradoxical phenomenon of Blair. Looked at from the point of view of its evolution, only two developments were theoretically possible for Labour. Either Labour would collapse back into Liberalism pure and simple or it would be reconstructed as an effective instrument of the working class.

The great anomaly of Labourism is that — for decades — it did neither. One reason for this is that the serious socialists failed to win a large enough part of the working class to revolutionary politics away from Labourism.

Another is that for a large part of the twentieth century British capitalism rested on the trade union bureaucracy which controlled the working-class movement as one of its main pillars of support.

That support is no longer necessary to a capitalism that has — under Thatcher — shackled the labour movement.

Blair's mission is therefore to carry the Thatcher social counter-revolution into the working class movement. Blair is not unique. Labour leaders have always tagged along behind bourgeois intellectual developments. Blair follows Thatcher just as Attlee followed Beveridge and Keynes. The difference is that Beveridge, the far-sighted reforming Liberal, could see the benefits of a relatively civilised welfare state and full employment as prerequisites for social stability in the post-war boom. Thatcher looked at the cash register and told her class it was too expensive.

Blair's only difference with previous Labour leaders is that he works at a time when the Thatcher project has not yet been carried through in its entirety. In particular, it will fall to him to complete Thatcher's main unfinished task: the destruction of what remains of the Welfare State.

Yet the unions still remain a force in the Labour Party, should they want to be a force. There is a long way for the Blairites still to go before they have pushed the Labour Party back into the womb of Liberalism.

With a Labour victory at the next election looking almost inevitable, and with the prospect looming of that government unleashing massive attacks on its own supporters, the central fault lines in British politics will run through the Labour Party. The way forward from the Labourism that has generated a Blair will have to be found still within the contradictory currents of Labour politics.

That is why Marxists must stay inside Labour, that is, inside the fight that will not, even if Blair wins, end with the Special Conference on 29 April. Win, lose or draw on 29 April, the decisive battle for the Labour Party will continue. ■

# We c

By Roland Tretchet

TONY BLAIR'S victory at the Scottish Labour Party conference has been presented by the media as the end of the battle over Clause Four.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is still possible to beat Blair at the special Labour Party conference on 29 April.

Let's look first at the evidence from the NEC's own "consultation" process. Blair has not made the gains in the constituencies that his supporters claim. Just 1.5% of individual party members have come out in support — not of Blair's new statement — but of a "clear and concise statement of aims." They were backed by less than 20% of CLPs. This is not exactly a ringing endorsement especially if we keep in mind that, whatever else Blair's statement may be, clear and concise it is not.

These facts also underline a reality ignored by the media: most individual party members are, if anything, to the left of the activists who attend GC meetings.

Just because a CLP has voted to ballot its members, it does not necessarily follow that Blair will win the poll.

If the left ensures that members are presented with material reflecting both sides of the argument and with a ballot paper that gives them the option of voting to keep the existing Clause Four, then Blair could be in for a few surprises.

Remember, an academic study, commissioned by the party itself, found that 63% of party members disagree that "the production of goods and services is best left to the free market."

We can hope to mobilise these people to vote for Clause Four.

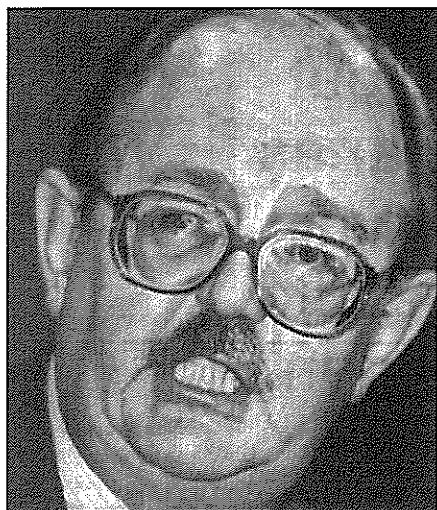
The other hidden aspect of the NEC's "Consultation Report" is this: most of those supporting a rewrite want to see a precise commitment to "redistributing wealth" and "common ownership" in the new clause. They have not got it. This sheds light on the regional conferences.

The vote in Scotland was not a vote for Blair's new clause. What the conference actually backed was a vague commitment to the idea of a new statement, and a specific commitment to the extension of "public ownership where justified on the basis of efficiency and equity."

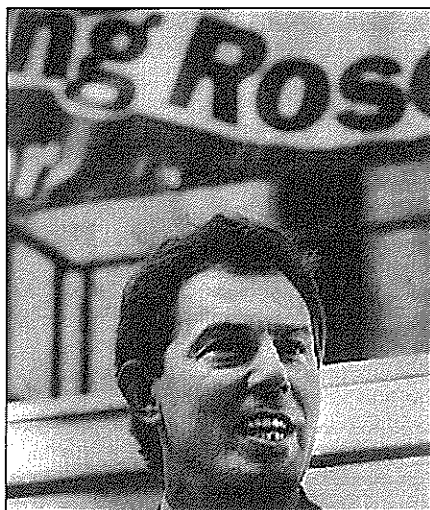
As Blair's new clause does not even mention public or common ownership, never mind the possibility of extending it, his decisive victory in Inverness doesn't look so decisive. It was a victory for the arts of the bamboozlers. On the level of ideas it was no victory at all. The Scottish conference went on to vote for the renationalisation of the utilities.

The London and South West confer-

# an beat Blair!



Edmonds is coming to Blair's rescue, with no guarantee of anything in return



ences both voted to retain Clause Four. The North West conference voted to support "all forms of common ownership."

The picture that emerges from the real consultation on Clause Four — the delegate-based regional conferences — is that there is a narrow majority in the CLPs for retention of the existing wording.

Blair will have to pull out all the stops — using his control over the party apparatus and his contacts with the media — if he is going to win on 29 April.

The unions also are still wide open. Blair only won at Inverness by counting on the votes of RMT and NUM — even though both unions back the existing wording — and, decisively, the votes of UNISON's giant Scottish region, as well as the Communication Workers' Union. The CWU is set to be the area for a major battle over Clause Four.

Despite the fact that the 1994 conferences of both the UCW and the NCU (the two components of the CWU merger) voted to support Clause Four, Alan Johnson, the joint general secretary from the postal side, jumped up to give his backing to Blair at this year's annual conference.

As Johnson is a particularly inane and unconvincing speaker this helped swing the vote our way. The old UCW and the old NCU clerical section both backed Blair while NCU (engineering) — the left's traditional base in BT — backed Clause Four.

This split inside the union caused big problems for the right wing. They have ignored existing policy; instead, the first meeting of the CWU executive voted to back Blair and hold a consultative ballot. In the meantime delegates from the CWU were instructed to vote against both NCU and UCW conference policy.

Interestingly, the CWU leadership have not said that they will be bound by the out-

come of the postal ballot. Both sides of the bureaucracy know that the left is strong in the branches and could well pull off a surprise. For instance, the 1993 Royal Mail productivity deal was rejected in a postal ballot after a rank and file campaign from the UCW branches, even though the UCW leaders had combined with management to run a joint campaign for acceptance.

The outcome of this battle will shape the relationship between right and left in the new union for some time to come.

UNISON, which is the second largest affiliate, was expected by the media to fall full square behind Blair. This has not yet happened. Despite a lot of arm-twisting from former NUPE boss and present Labour Party general secretary, Tom Sawyer, the UNISON consultation process ended with a contradictory result. Though supporting a new Clause Four in principle, UNISON has specified that "There is strong support for a continued role for public or common ownership. Some regions feel that the current Clause Four, part four, best states our commitment. Other regions want a new form of words... this includes the need for public ownership of utilities."

The wording of the new clause is still to go to a special UNISON Affiliated Political Fund Forum (delegate conference) later this month. Given that the Blair statement gives nothing to UNISON members, the result is still wide open.

In the technical and service union MSF there is still a chance of defeating the right wing. The General Secretary is Roger Lyons. His main problem is that the union is losing millions; not all right wingers see their future in the union as necessarily tied to his. After all, it isn't good for your leader to be associated with financial mismanagement on the scale of millions of

pounds.

So, it is still just possible that a pro-Clause Four majority will emerge in the MSF delegation. The union president, John MacIntyre, has already argued that the MSF delegation should vote on the basis of the '94 conference decision to support Clause Four and the '93 decision to oppose any attempt at abolition.

In USDAW, right-wing leader Garfield Davies has invited Blair to address the AAD (conference) a week before Labour's special conference. In the meantime he has instructed USDAW delegations to back the leadership, even though a version of Clause Four is contained in the union's constitution.

Nevertheless, the union's Broad Left still think that they can win conference to retention of Clause Four as it stands.

The GMB leadership have so far managed to avoid any major internal battle over Clause Four. This is no doubt a reflection of the lack of democracy in this highly centralised and top-down organisation. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that John Edmonds — who has made such a noise about full employment — is willing to go along with Blair's new statement even after the leader has made it clear that "the opportunity for all to work and prosper" did not mean full employment. Clause Four is in the constitution of Edmonds' union.

Edmonds — who is reported to believe that the days of the union-Labour Party link are numbered — should, even from his own bureaucratic point of view, try to squeeze concessions out of Blair. Instead, all he has done is come to Blair's rescue without a guarantee of anything in return.

Perhaps Edmonds is trying to "get in" with the parliamentary establishment. If so, he is a remarkably tame bureaucrat even by "new realist" standards.

But that's the problem.

The professional university-graduate trade union civil service who now run the bulk of Britain's unions are so decayed politically, spiritually and morally that they would not dare even think of putting the screws on Blair in the way that an earlier generation of bureaucrats did to Gaitskell. But then, in the '59-60 conflict over Clause Four, most top union officials had worked their way up from the shop floor. They knew how to win concessions.

And even today, it's surely no coincidence that it is in unions with a stronger commitment to lay control, like the RMT, FBU and TGWU, that opposition to Blair is at its strongest.

It is one more proof that the battle for trade union and Labour Party democracy are one and indivisible. ■

# Eclipse of the soft left

By Anne Mack

TONY BLAIR has described his new Clause Four as a "defining moment" in the history of the Labour Party. It may be so, if — and only if — he follows it through with a decisive assault on the union link.

But one thing is for certain.

Blair's new Clause certainly is a defining moment for Labour's parliamentary "soft left."

For them, it marks the end of a road.

Far from being a left-wing voice in the inner sanctums of the Labour Party, they no longer even provide "left cover" for the leadership. Their role has changed. They now polemicise against positions they themselves held only weeks, days or even hours, previously. Like prominent but tame dissidents inside a fully blown Stalinist party, they are brought out to defend positions that everyone in the Party knows they oppose.

Blair's regular and systematic humiliation of the soft left and their willingness to subject themselves to such strictures, is intended to discipline the whole party and to narrow down the openings for socialist dissent.

Let us take the most prominent case: John Prescott — would-be working-class hero turned "moderniser" and... lickspittle.

Prescott claims that he started off in the working-class movement as a steward on the Cunard passenger line and as a rank and file activist in the seamen's union NUS. He has even hinted that he was one of the "politically motivated men" who were denounced by Harold Wilson for leading the 1966 seamen's strike and clearing out the corrupt right-wing NUS leadership.

However, no evidence written or oral exists to support Prescott's claim to fame as an industrial insurgent. We can either

take him at his word or trust the verdict of people who really were involved in the battles of '66 and the events leading up to it. One old sea dog who was a member of the central strike committee in '66 described Prescott as "a nonentity. If he played a role none of the actual organisers knew anything about it. He's just a wind boy."

Prescott certainly does seem to possess more wind than brain, tactical sense or socialist principle. But that's not all there is to the man. If we study his evolution over the last decade we can tell a lot about the parliamentary "soft left." Prescott was a key sponsor of "left realignment" — i.e. kow-towing to Kinnock — after the defeat of the miners in 1985.

As front-bench employment spokesman he had kept quiet throughout the bitter twelve preceding months of the pit strike. He rose to prominence in 1987 with a package designed to create "one million jobs in two years." This was the first time that "Johnny" tied himself closely to the demand for "full employment." Kinnock didn't like this, and after the '87 election defeat Prescott found himself demoted to energy. Promises to create jobs were replaced in the Party's public message with Beckett and Brown's refrain: "Only as resources allow."

Prescott re-emerged to prominence as transport spokesman before the '92 general election, during which he went in for quite a bit of old-fashioned socialist rhetoric. He talked about "public services based on need not greed" and the obscenity of an economy that combines homelessness, unemployed building workers and huge stockpiles of bricks.

Fuelled by this performance, Prescott entered the final stage of the campaign to become deputy leader which he had started in 1988.

The decisive moment in all this came with his incoherent but effective "back

John Smith — our leader" speech against the union link at the 1993 Party conference.

Prescott yet again found himself with a front bench job. With Smith committed to full employment — at least verbally — Prescott was free to mouth on about it as much as he wanted.

Then came Blair.

Despite having "full employment" all over his manifesto for the leadership elections, "Johnny" has remained strangely silent on the issue ever since Blair took over the leadership and he became his deputy.

In the months since then Prescott has been stitched up, marginalised and forced to eat his own words.

First there was Clause Four. According to various media sources, fed, we can presume, by the Blair camp, Prescott was never keen on abolition. In fact, he never actually agreed to it, but then he never said no either!

Nevertheless, undaunted by his manifest irrelevance in the Leader's eyes, he was only too keen to jump on Blair's bandwagon. After Blair's resounding defeat on Clause Four on the Thursday of last year's conference, next day Prescott was up there promising not just full employment but that "public ownership will be there" in the new Clause Four.

Well it isn't. Not a word. The "enterprise of the market" and the "rigour of competition" both get a mention but public ownership or full employment don't.

But that did not silence Johnny. He got on the phone and told his friends in the press that the phrase "the opportunity to work and prosper" really meant "full employment — and no slave wages!"

Unfortunately for Prescott, he does not lead the Labour Party. He is not responsible for the Clause Four re-write. As soon as Blair's office got a whiff of Johnny's re-interpretation of the gospel, Blair was on the Dimbleby programme spelling it out. No, he was not committed to full employment:

"We do not think you can wave a magic wand and secure full employment", explained the next Prime Minister. "It would be dishonest to tell people that after so many years of a Labour government full employment would come back." Blair added: "We are not going to set targets saying there will be so many jobs in a certain time... or say to people that we guarantee you jobs."

This allows us to make sense of the *New Statesman's* description of the press launch of the new Clause Four.

"Sitting next to the leader, his deputy, John Prescott, looked glum. When he endorsed the new clause, claiming that the process of revising Labour's constitution 'has given the party new strength and new confidence in its core beliefs', he seemed

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

## Subscribe to Workers' Liberty!

**36 pages of socialist news and commentary**  
**Subscription: £12 for 10 issues from WL Publications,**  
**PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.**  
Cheques to "WL Publications."

**Australian subscription: \$35 incl. postage from PO Box 313, Leichhardt**  
**204. Cheques to "Workers' Liberty."**

**US subscription: £35 incl. postage from Barry Finger, 152 Henderson**  
**Place, East Windsor, NJ 08520. Cheques to "Barry Finger."**



Prescott finds himself sidelined by his leader

strangely lacking in conviction."

If that wasn't enough, within four days Prescott had suddenly found himself removed from all campaign responsibility in the run-up to the general election. Instead, the man who set himself the task of remoulding the post of deputy leader into a campaigning role has found himself in charge of — regions.

But it doesn't end there. Just as the media started the job of interrogating Prescott about his new role he launched another slogan. The Labour Party — he told Radio 4 listeners — was now committed to — not one million jobs in two years, not full employment but — reducing the level of unemployment.

Well. At least Prescott still has a job!

But John Prescott isn't the only "soft left" to find himself publicly humiliated by Blair.

Robin Cook has gone one better: he volunteered to humiliate himself.

Cook has consistently spoken and voted for Blair's abolition of Clause Four. Yet he was prepared to go through the bizarre pretence of being a converted dissident publicly renouncing his past sins. He allowed the Blair press machine to present an otherwise unremarkable speech supporting abolition as proof that Blair had "won over the left."

This brings us to the strange story of David Blunkett who, since Blair sent his kid to an "opt out" school, has had a very bad time indeed.

First there was his idea that maybe a Labour government just might put VAT on private school fees. This idea was immediately disowned by Blair's office. They put up John Prescott to lyingly tell the media that VAT was an option that had already been ruled out in "Party discussions." In fact, no discussion on the issue had taken place on any Party body.

If that isn't bad enough, Blunkett is no longer able to comment on the issue of opt-out schools because this is now "under

discussion" — even though the Party has a clear conference policy for abolition and many local activists are deeply involved in local campaigns against opt-outs. Blunkett is being set up by Blair to play the role of the ex-leftie who backs public schools, in other words, to be a symbol of how much New Labour has changed. His alternative is parliamentary oblivion.

If the spectacle is disgusting, it is put into perspective by the sight of poor old Claire Short, Labour's first career feminist, having to give her blessing to a new Clause Four which doesn't mention either women or black people. She had recommended change precisely because it would allow the concerns of "the oppressed" to be raised in Labour's new statement of aims. It hasn't, but Short is still backing Blair. Short, who likes to think of herself as a Machiavellian, now looks like a victim of the smarter Machiavellians around Blair. A fitting fate for the NEC's token tokenist.

Finally, there is the strange story of the "left of the soft left" — people like Peter Hain, Derek Fatchett and Angela Eagle who put their names to the *New Statesman/Tribune* draft new Clause Four.

This draft was a comprehensive failure. At its House of Commons launch only two out of thirty speakers endorsed it. *New Statesman* editor and ex-"Euro-Communist" Steve Platt sat on the top table looking sick as speaker after speaker ripped into his incoherent prose.

The result is that the *New Statesman* now keeps pro-Clause Four articles out of its pages. Platt says: "We're bored with Clause Four." Instead, it functions as the mouthpiece for the cynicisms of Eagle, Hain and Fatchett.

Eagle, who a few months ago was going on and on about the need for "a critique of capitalism" in the new Clause, has managed to reconcile herself to the "enterprise of the market" and the "rigour of competition." Hain has commented that though

the new Clause "gives too much priority to the market and there's no commitment to spreading ownership", he still thinks "it's not worth going to the barricades over." Readers may find it strange that someone who has based his career on solidarity with the South African struggle should consider voting against something he disagrees with to be the equivalent of "going to the barricades." But an explanation can be had from the *New Statesman's* Paul Anderson.

"It (the soft left) knows it will be utterly marginalised if it does not toe the leadership line... Blair has said that the purpose of trying to change Clause Four was not to humiliate the hard left — but there's no doubt whatsoever that the main effect of the exercise on the Party has been to do just that. The soft left knows this, and doesn't want to share the humiliation". But there is humiliation and... humiliation.

What characterises the so-called "left of the soft left" now is that Blair has already succeeded in getting them to jump through hoops for him. They have, as we saw, won nothing in return, not even on full employment. Instead, people who under John Smith appeared to be putting out feelers towards the constituency left and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, have now been pulled back into line by the parliamentary patronage machine.

In short, forced to choose between their careers and socialist principle they went for what is at the centre of their beings — their careers.

The extent of soft-left self-delusion and depression is merely proof that the strategy pursued by Blair over Clause Four — and not just Clause Four — has been primarily designed to neuter them as a political force. He has succeeded. The soft left are now politically invisible. They have abandoned all their distinctive theses on "full employment", "empowerment" etc.

The left inside the Party and the unions has been decisively re-aligned by the Clause Four battle. While large parts of the old soft left have been annexed by the right wing, other forces, like those around *Tribune* newspaper, have come out of this conflict as serious, principled and honest reform socialists who refuse to abandon deeply held beliefs.

It is now vital to focus the forces that have rallied to Clause Four around a socialist agenda for the next Labour Government.

We need to construct an alliance inside the Party and the unions that can fight for a Labour vote at the next election while continuing to fight within the labour movement — Labour Party and trade unions alike — over issues like the minimum wage, jobs, and the anti-union laws — linking these questions to the case for democratic common ownership. The first priority of such a left will not be to chase after the likes of Peter Hain.

If Blair wins on 29 April, the hard left will still be there snapping at his heels — and later at his throat! — while Peter Hain, and all the other so-called soft left, will roll over, kick their legs in the air, and whimper with gratitude every time the Great One condescends playfully to kick one of them. ■

# Build the national campaign against cuts!

By Martin Thomas

TWENTY THOUSAND people marched in London on 25 March against cuts in the budgets of Britain's 29,000 state schools.

At over 20 schools in Warwickshire alone, the governing bodies — committees of unpaid volunteers, nominated from various quarters — have set illegal "needs" budgets. They have refused to balance the books by sacking teachers or helpers. Other governing bodies elsewhere are considering the same option, and yet others have resigned in protest.

A wave of local protest action by the teachers' unions continues, with further strikes planned for 5 April.

But the leaders of the teachers' unions and the TUC are giving the Tory government great chances to dissipate and fragment this anti-cuts movement. The 25 March demonstration was called by "Fight Against Cuts in Education", a new group, formed only weeks ago out of local protests in Warwickshire. If the National Union of Teachers and the TUC had swung in behind the demonstration, with all their resources, organisation, and means of publicity, then it would have been 200,000 rather than 20,000.

But the NUT leaders denounced the grassroots "FACE" campaign as ultra-left, and instead had their own protest, 1,500 strong, on 21 March.

Where are the Labour Party leaders? They have opposed "needs" budgets. A good measure of where the one-time "soft leftists" like Tony Blair and education spokesperson David Blunkett stand is that Roy Hattersley, the old leader of Labour's right-wing, is now an angry critic of them — from the left! He told BBC TV on 26 March: "I think that the litmus test of the next Labour government's socialism is the way that it organises education. Were it to go back on the comprehensive principle, then it would cease to be a socialist party... The hopes of millions of people would be shattered".

Hopes are being shattered every day as the Tories run down the state education system. The recent Rowntree Report on Income and Wealth showed that inequality is increasing in Britain especially fast for young people. The minority who get into high-status higher education and then go straight into well-paid jobs are better off than ever before. Those who get low-paid work, or no job at all, have a smaller chance of progressing to better-paid work than any previous generation since the 1920s. For huge numbers of working-class children, education is being reduced to a process of training them to think of themselves as, and to be, failures.

This should indeed be a life-and-death

issue for the labour movement. A campaign for the labour leaders nationally to take up the fight should be coupled with battles to mobilise the Labour Party and Trades Council in each area. Even a few areas taking a die-hard stand against the Tories could turn the tide on this issue. There were very few local Labour Party banners on the 25 March demonstration: a lot of work still needs to be done.

The underpinning of any solid campaign must be organisation at school level, with regular meetings of parents, teachers, governors, and (in secondary schools) students.

The next few weeks, as the new financial year starts, will be crucial — but not the end of the story. The countdown has already

begun towards next year's cuts, in the central government Budget this coming November. Contacts made now can provide the basis for a powerful campaign to change that Budget — whereas now we are fighting to counter the local effects of a central Budget already signed, sealed and delivered.

Newcastle UNISON, together with a number of other groups, has called a conference for 13 May 1995 in Leeds "to coordinate a Day of Action in November 1995 in the run-up to the government setting their budget". Contact: Newcastle UNISON, Newcastle Civic Centre, 091-232 8520 x 6980; Fight Against Cuts in Education, c/o Bob Jelley, St Giles Middle School, Exhall, Warwickshire, on 2023 453832. ■

## Baring's crash reveals corrupt system

By Colin Foster

FOR MOST of us, whether trader Nick Leeson is to blame for bankrupting Barings Bank, or someone else, and whether it was fraud or just incompetence, is about as important as the question whether the roulette wheels in Monte Carlo's luxury casinos are crooked or straight.

The interesting fact about the Leeson case is elsewhere: in the hugeness of the sums that were gambled by one adventurous wide-boy, working for what was, by the 1990s, a fairly small bank.

Leeson had gambled £17 billion on the movements of the Japanese share and bond markets, and the losses will probably be about £1 billion. £17 billion is half the total Health Service budget. It is almost twice the amount of the Glaxo-Wellcome deal which created the world's biggest drugs company.

The amounts of money moving round in the casino economies of the City, Wall Street, Tokyo, and Frankfurt are enormous not just in comparison to working-class budgets but also to the budgets of productive capital. The "financial derivatives" market in which Leeson came to grief is estimated at \$16,000 billion.

As capitalist production has become increasingly concentrated in big companies financed by issuing shares, and the credit system has become slicker and faster, the financial spin-offs have

dwarfed production itself. Karl Marx showed in volume 3 of *Capital* that capitalist incomes do not come directly from the labour of the individual capitalist's own workforce, but through the distribution among the capitalist class, by rules bearing no relation to labour inputs, of the surplus value produced by the whole working class. Some capitalists, money-capitalists, can thus coin profits without organising any productive labour at all: their capital seems to produce extra wealth simply by virtue of being capital, and not because of any relation to labour.

By the 1980s and '90s — as shown by books like *Barbarians at the Gate*, *Liar's Poker*, and *Maxwell* — the way to get rich was not to organise production, but to be clever, or lucky, in financial wheeling and dealing.

The trading profits of British companies — their profits from producing and selling goods and services — are now less important than their various non-trading financial gains. Over the four years 1990-3 trading profits averaged £64 billion out of total net income of £149 billion.

And of that income, in turn, the bulk goes not go into investment, but back into the casino economy, in the form of dividend and interest payments, an average of £77 billion a year.

No way to afford the Health Service? No spare cash for education? There are vast amounts of money; but they are being swirled round, and siphoned off, by a parasitic financial machine.



# Sinn Fein goes respectable

By Thomas Dubh Carolan

AMERICAN politics is, heavily, ethnic politics. Poles, Italians, Germans, Jews, Irish constitute major distinct constituencies. Americans of the third or fifth generation may still bracket themselves as Poles, Germans or Irish. Politicians court them for votes and respectfully go through their ethnic festivals and rituals with them. Some of these "national" groups have powerful lobbying organisations. In this American jumble of ethnic building blocks the Irish are very important.

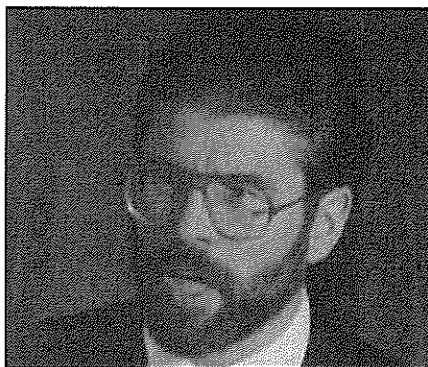
Five million people live in Ireland now, but nearly ten (ten!) times as many Americans claim, in the US fashion, to be Irish. St Patrick's Day is therefore a very big ethno-political festival in the USA — a far more important festival there than it is in Ireland itself. This year on 17 March President Clinton celebrated St Patrick's Day at the White House in the company of the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), John Bruton and Gerry Adams, President of Provisional Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Provisional IRA. Not only was Adams allowed into the USA and — despite public protests by the British Government — into the White House to be honoured in this way, but Sinn Fein is also being licensed to openly raise money in the USA.

According to one estimate, Sinn Fein, which represents perhaps five per cent of the total Irish electorate (about 12% of the Northern Irish electorate and perhaps 40% of the Northern Irish Catholic voters) stands to become the richest political party in the European Union as a result of this decision.

Bruton and Adams in the White House dramatises the underlying truth about what is happening in Northern Ireland: to a considerable extent, control of the framework of events is no longer in the hands of the British government. The so-called "Pan Nationalist Alliance" and its allies are setting the pace. This is a block of parties stretching from Provisional Sinn Fein/Provisional IRA at one pole to the Dublin Government at the other, with the constitutional nationalist SDLP and others holding them together. The great strength of this alliance lies in its alliances with US politicians. One far-reaching result of the 31 August ceasefire has been that this grouping has now made Sinn Fein part of the 'respectable' bourgeois political world.

In order to placate Northern Irish Protestant opinion, which is acutely sensitive to all this, Major has put up a show of demanding that the IRA disarm — "decommission" weapons — before official Britain-Sinn Fein negotiations start. Britain will probably settle for gestures without a great deal of substance from the Provisional IRA.

Everything is now coming together to press the Protestant politicians into talking



Gerry Adams

seriously about the "Framework for Peace" published by London and Dublin on 22 February. The Framework proposes a Catholic-Protestant powersharing Northern Irish government which would then combine with Dublin to form a powerful

Council of Ireland to administer common Northern Ireland-26 Counties affairs, including all Irish relations with the European Union. Protestant responses so far have not been as explosive as was to be feared, but there is no substantial movement either. If the Protestant politicians do not move then, backed by Washington, Dublin will have much greater clout in Northern Irish affairs from then on. Under the 1985 Agreement, Dublin already shares with 'London' in political decision-making for the Six Counties.

Sinn Fein is naturally triumphant about all this. They have the political initiative. They campaign now for "lasting peace", and have already mounted a broad international campaign — "Saoirse" (freedom) — for the release of all Provisional IRA prisoners.

The junketings of Gerry Adams with Clinton and Britain are, of course, seen by the Northern Ireland Catholics as their victory, and as a recognition of their **page 10**

## To out or not to out?

By Janine Booth

THE MEDIA'S reaction to Outrage's so-called 'outing' campaign has been quite hysterical. Tabloid editorial writers and columnists have written bigoted diatribes. The BBC barred any Outrage representative from speaking live on their broadcasts. The *Daily Mail* used the term 'homosexual terrorism'; the *Daily Express* preferred 'homosexual fascism.'

Peter Tatchell and Outrage have been portrayed by the media as bitter, hateful, bitchy queens, the unacceptable face of the campaign for sexual equality.

"We don't mind people being gay", they claim (probably some of their best friends are a bit that way inclined), "but this 'outing' business is entirely reprehensible". The press's attitude is that if these homos must demand equality, they should do it in a nice, polite, non-offensive way. Indeed, we should crawl, beg and generally debase ourselves in the hope of catching a few crumbs of rights.

The hypocrisy of the media is astounding. The most vitriolic have been those tabloid papers who routinely snoop and pry into the private lives of anyone whose story they think will sell newspapers. Peter Tatchell knows this — they did it to him in 1983 when he was the Labour candidate in the Bermondsey by-election.

What has Outrage done? It has written to some Church types — priests, bishops and so on — and MPs suggesting that they 'come out' openly and declare their homosexuality. Some — including Tory MP Michael Brown and Church of England bishop Derek Rawcliffe — responded and

came out. That's it. That's what the media have got so upset about.

They are a sorry assortment of liars, hypocrites and bigots.

But what of 'outing' itself? My opinion is that in general, it's wrong; but that, when targeted at those closets who attack lesbian, gay and bisexual rights, it is not so much wrong as a tactical mistake.

One problem is that outing implies that a person's sexuality matters, and that it matters who is gay. As socialists, we fight for full equality and liberation for all lesbian, gay and bisexual people. I am yet to be convinced that having 'out' Tory MPs or bishops makes any positive difference at all to that fight.

A second problem is that outing implies that a homophobe who has secret homosexual tendencies is worse than a homophobe who is heterosexual. While there is of course the element of hypocrisy, I worry that outing lets straight bigots off the hook. They have no need to be frightened or pressured by the threat of outing.

The actions and attitudes of homophobes need to be challenged politically — the problem is their bigotry, not the contents of their closet.

Finally, outing is a stunt. It creates a big media splash — but a splash about the rights and wrongs of outing, not about the need for full sexual equality. It is not a serious attempt to build a mass movement for sexual liberation.

Such a movement should take up the fight against the laws, institutions and homophobes who oppress us — it can not be built by peering into people's closets nor by finding and 'outing' gay priests.

# Solidarity with Nigerian workers!

By Mark Sandell

NIGERIA'S military regime has stepped up its crackdown on the democratic opposition and the labour movement. Their most recent move is to conduct "fresh" elections in Nigeria's trade union federation, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers' Union (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAM). All three trade union organisations are currently run by an administrator imposed on them by the military junta.

These elections will only be open to candidates who pass a "security check" which will be used to screen out any decent trade unionist who opposes the military dictatorship.

NUPENG and PENGASSAM launched a national strike last year to demand an end to military rule. The strike stopped the flow of oil — Nigeria's most important export — and brought the Nigerian economy to a grinding halt. The strike called for the acceptance by the military of Chief Abiola

who won the 12 June 1993 Presidential elections but remains unrecognised by the military.

The leadership of the Nigerian Labour Congress was pushed by its members into staging several general strikes in support of the oil workers. At this point the military junta stepped in, arrested the union leadership and other political opponents, closed down the national newspapers which oppose military rule and, finally, introduced stricter martial law. A national administrator was appointed to run the union. Elected executives were sacked.

The military take-over of recalcitrant unions is not a new departure for the Nigerian bosses. It happened in 1974. Moreover, for many years, the leadership of the NLC has been little more than a bunch of well-paid flunkies for successive military governments. Yet, even this leadership was pushed into fighting military rule by the trade union rank and file. These workers — over a million are organised in trade unions — have faced not only political repression but also increasing poverty, as a result of the IMF-dictated austerity-drive economic policies of the government.

The multinational oil companies and the western governments all colluded in the crack-down on the workers' organisations. First and foremost we have a duty to our Nigerian comrades to do all we can to organise solidarity in the European labour movement. But we also need to say what is needed in Nigeria.

Nigerian workers need more than a pro-democracy campaign. The labour movement must break the government's stranglehold on the unions, but it also needs to end alliances with the bosses' political organisations. It is understandable that Nigerian workers are outraged at the military over-turning of the 1993 elections, but these elections were not free or fair in the first place. Only two candidates were allowed and both of these were hand-picked by the then military ruler, General Babangida. Between 30-50 political parties that applied to take part in the election were banned! The victor — Abiola — is a millionaire capitalist and until recently a close friend of the military. He is not to be trusted.

The most powerful force for change in Nigeria is the workers' movement. It will not serve the long-term interests of the Nigerian workers to hitch their hopes to Abiola's bandwagon.

Nigerian workers need an independent workers' party based on the unions. This way the economic demands of the workers can be united with immediate political demands. This would not include a demand for Abiola to be made President but would include demands for an immediate end to military rule, and free and fair elections to a constituent assembly with the power to write a new constitution.

These are the demands of the Campaign for Independent Unionism (CIU).

"Only the labour movement has the greatest potential to unite the Nigerian working people in their struggle for democracy. With a well co-ordinated campaign of mass union actions and international solidarity the clampdown can be defeated to achieve victory."

- The immediate restoration of the dissolved executives of NUPENG, PENGASSAM and NLC.

- Industrial unions and union branches to adopt a policy of non-recognition and non co-operation towards the sole administrators.

- Labour movement solidarity actions and material support for NUPENG, PENGASSAM and other workers fighting for democracy.

- NLC and independent unions to adopt a clear fighting programme to defend the economic/political rights of workers and other oppressed strata.

- Democratisation of the structures of NLC and individual unions for rank and file participation in decision making and delegate conferences etc.

- Trade union officials to be accountable to rank and file members and subject to immediate recall by members if found wanting.

- An end to Structural Adjustment Programmes [IMF programmes], privatisation, retrenchment, commercialisation and other anti-poor policies.

- The release of all political detainees.

- An immediate end to all political trials and witch hunts, and withdrawal of troops from oil production.

- An immediate end to military rule, hand-over of power to the winner of the 12 June 1993 Presidential elections, a multi-party democracy and an independent mass workers' political party. ■

## Sinn Fein goes respectable

rights. But them will also see these junketings for what they signify on a deeper political level: the emergence of Provisional Sinn Fein on the high road already mapped out by other former "physical force" Republican politicians in the past — most notably Fianna Fail in the south.

Those who took the radical 'left-wing' talk of Sinn Fein seriously will be grievously disappointed.

So will those on the left in Britain who — forgetting alike Irish facts, Marxist criteria and class considerations — took the Provisional IRA — essentially because it had guns — for an irreconcilable revolutionary movement. That it never was.

Some on the left who backed the IRA, accepting, and exaggerating, its 'revolutionary' credentials right up until 31 August, now support the ceasefire — *Socialist Outlook* for example. They are caught in a massive contradiction.

If they were right to support the IRA's war in the past, then they should denounce Gerry Adams as a traitor now.

The point about Adams, of course, is that he follows, and always has followed, a long tradition of petit bourgeois nationalism in Ireland — the Fianna Fail tradition. When they have ceased to brandish guns then the romantic British left will, perhaps, be able to finally identify them for what they are and always were.

For ourselves, we are glad the Provisional IRA has stopped the war. Nothing good could ever come of it. The labour movement should demand that the British Government starts talking to Sinn Fein — now. ■

## Workers' Liberty '95

Three days of socialist discussion hosted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

**Friday 30 June — Sunday 2 July at Caxton House, Archway, North London**

Tickets before the end of April are cheaper

**Three day tickets bought in April cost:**

- £6 (unwaged, FE and school students)

- £10 (low-waged and students with grants)

- £14 (waged)

From WL95, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques to "WL Publications"

For more details about WL95 write to the above address or phone 0171-639 7965.

## Women in Bangladesh

# Atrocities against women!



By Taslima Nasrin

RECENTLY THE 17 year old daughter of a poor village labourer was subjected to 110 lashes. Her crime was to give birth to a child whose parenthood her husband refused to accept.

The mullahs and village elders tried her and condemned her to this flogging. Actually she was betrayed by her boyfriend. He promised to marry her, but later left her. She was given in marriage to another person.

After she delivered her child, her husband then accused her of unfaithfulness!

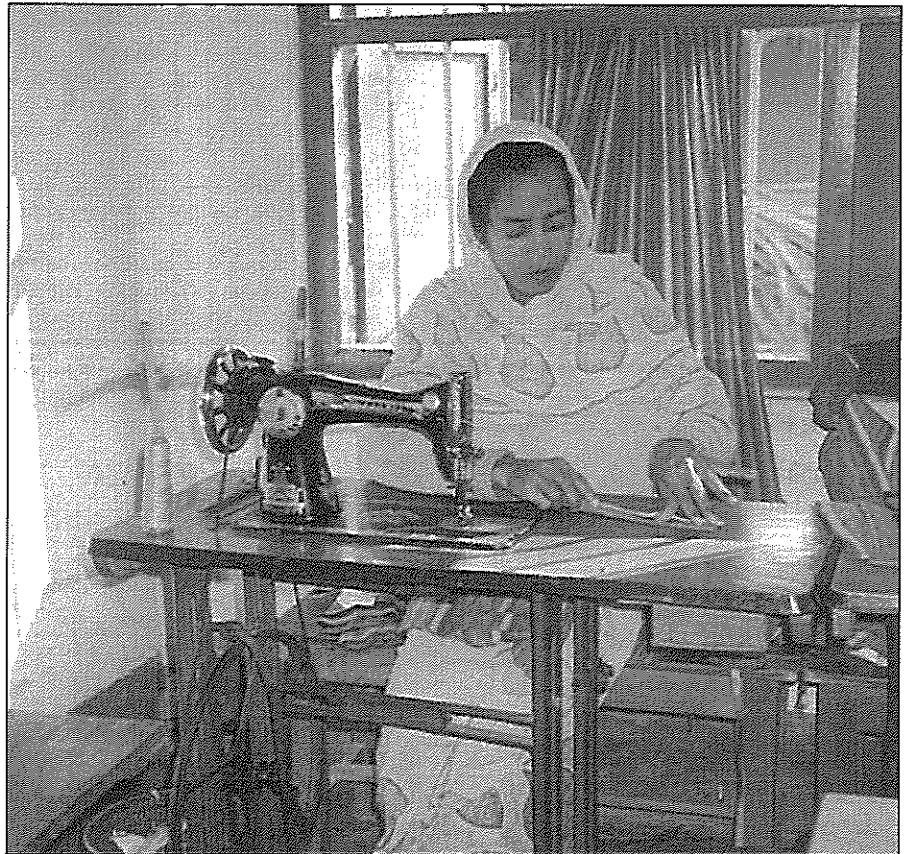
The mullahs tried her and meted out their verdict. They not only assaulted her but forced her husband to divorce her, and extracted an assurance that she would not go to any court of law. This incident is the latest in the long list of acts of aggression and humiliation against women in my country, Bangladesh.

The mullahs tried this poor girl in the second week of February 1995. In June 1993 another young woman of 22 was buried waist-deep in a pit, then stoned 101 times, just because the village mullahs decided that her second marriage was not legal.

It was reported in the newspaper that this particular mullah was eyeing the young woman and was infuriated when she married another villager. The poor woman committed suicide the same night by consuming insecticide.

I cried for her in one of my poems. I felt the mullahs were torturing *me*, and stoning *me* to death.

In the preceding month — May 1993 — a woman was tied up to bamboo posts and then burned to death by the mullahs and some villagers. Her crime? She left her hus-



**Many Bangladeshi women have benefited from development programmes. They have been able to earn a living. The mullahs don't like the degree of independence this gives them.**

band and eloped.

In the September of the same year, another woman got 101 strokes of a broom after the religious head of a local mosque issued a fatwah [death sentence] against her. She was condemned as a shameless woman because she did not stay within domestic confinement and earned her living by selling fiddles. She committed suicide also.

In the same month a young girl was buried waist-deep in the courtyard of a house by the local mullahs for having an affair with a neighbour. The clerics blissfully forgot to note the fact that this poor girl had been deserted by her husband.

Another girl was caned 101 times by the mullahs because she was found to be pregnant immediately after her marriage.

These stories are nothing but the tips of icebergs.

Every year numerous incidents of the torture and humiliation of women by the mullahs are reported in our country.

There must be many more cases which go unreported.

In 1990 it was reported in the newspapers that 6,000 Bangladeshi women killed themselves.

"Husband killed wife", "Bloodstained

clothes seized", "Teenage wife killed for dowry", "Acid thrown on schoolgirl." These headlines regularly appear in newspapers. But many events remain unreported.

In 1989 there were 453 such cases, of which 156 were cases of murder of women by their own husbands.

The Muslim fundamentalists have declared war against women. They have started a movement against Non-Governmental Organisations in Bangladesh who are doing significant work in the fields of education, health and self-employment.

The mullahs consider that most of these services are "non-Islamic." So they are trying to stop the NGOs' work by pronouncing fatwahs. As most of the beneficiaries of the development projects are women so, again, the women are the worst sufferers.

There are about 20,000 NGOs in Bangladesh. Of these, about 8,000 are founded by western donors. Among the most active NGOs are the Bangladeshi Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Grameen Bank.

Both these organisations have become targets of the fundamentalists' offensive. Some years back, the mullahs ordered the parents to boycott the 26,000 BRAC-run schools. Attendance dropped immediately. ♦

But these fundamentalists were not satisfied by the result. So, to get the desired effect, they burnt down 110 BRAC-run schools. Recently, they have increased their activity against the NGOs because these institutions are conducting secular education among the village children, encouraging women to come out from behind the veil and even to earn their own living by working outside their own homes.

It should be noted that 70% of the students at the BRAC-run schools are girls.

Grameen Bank at one time had 1,000 branches covering 34,000 villages. In 1993, it dispensed \$1.5 billion of credit to help the deprived rural women to earn their livelihood. Some 94% of 2,000,000 recipients of Grameen loans are village women.

If the mullahs succeed and NGOs are forced to suspend their services, the impact on women in rural Bangladesh would be disastrous. I hope that the people of Bangladesh will not yield.

We hear of resistance from the villagers from time to time. But much depends on what the government and political parties do to counter the wave of fundamentalism in our country.

Though declared Islamic by successive military rulers Bangladesh is not like many other Islamic countries. The people are entitled to certain fundamental rights, irrespective of religion and sex.

Bangladesh has its own modern legal system. From the lowest to the highest court, people are entitled to get justice according to modern laws. There is no room for religious courts or judgements by village elders or clerics. Fatwabs are obviously illegal.

As far as I know, in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Indonesia and Pakistan there are Sharia [religious] boards appointed by governments to give decisions on laws passed by the governments — whether those laws are in conformity with the Koran. Even there, the government-appointed Sharia boards have no right to render justice by themselves. They implement their orders through government agencies. In Bangladesh there are no Sharia boards, no grand muftis, but in the villages, the mullahs act as grand muftis.

They issue fatwabs, and execute the fatwabs by themselves, ignoring the authority of the state.

A fatwah was issued against me. The mullahs were courageous enough to deliver a verdict of capital punishment against me. To encourage the killer, they also offered a handsome prize for my head. The amount is quite high, for a poor country like Bangladesh. But the government remained a silent spectator.

Instead of taking action against the mullahs the government issued a warrant to arrest me, brought charges of blasphemy against me, and initiated a criminal case in the law courts. The trial is still on. I do not know what awaits me in the future.

This is the basic question that faces the liberals and humanists in my country. It seems that after a long phase of military rule Bangladesh has a democratically-elected government. The mullahs, armed with medieval ideas and fundamentalist

arrogance, appear as the real rulers of Bangladesh — particularly in the countryside.

They have already made a dent in public administration and have spread their tentacles of bigotry and hatred in all directions. The government and the political parties are either unwilling or unable to meet the challenge of the fundamentalists, for short-term political expediency.

Since Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country the government and political organisations apprehend that intervention against fundamentalism will lead to a loss of popular support. The ruling party has already compromised with the fundamentalists by accepting them as partners in the government.

The opposition has also joined hands with fundamentalists — trying to dislodge the government. It is true that they have not yet made a united front against the government.

In this process, it is the fundamentalists

*"I believe in equal rights for women — not legal or constitutional equality when they remain ignored in practice."*

who have benefited most. They have gained a sort of legitimacy and respectability.

As I have already said, it is the women who are suffering most. Bangladesh is a poor country. In 1992 the population of Bangladesh was 110,000,000. The average annual per capita income was just \$220.

Statistically there is little difference between male and female average life expectancy. For men it is 55 years, and for women 56 years.

But other related figures are quite alarming. For instance, in 1988, in every 100,000 would-be mothers, mortality was 600. In China the corresponding figure was 150 and in Sri Lanka, 80.

In 1992 it was reported that in Bangladesh 40% of women of reproductive age were using family planning methods. In 1970 the average number of children of a mother was 7. In 1992 this figure has come down to 4.

But my impression, as a qualified gynaecologist, does not correspond to these figures. They should be accepted with a grain of salt.

Most of the women would like to have smaller families. But in my society it is the men-folk who decide. Patriarchy does not give women the right to control her own uterus.

The believers in religious orthodoxy believe that a woman's body is just for the pleasure of her husband. Scriptures say that a woman should offer her body whenever the husband decides.

Generally speaking, the fundamentalists

do not believe in family planning, nor is the average man willing to use family planning devices, as he considers that it diminishes his pleasure.

It has been reported by social workers that village kids have been playing with freely distributed condoms — as if they were balloons.

Some people believe that marriages are made in heaven. In my country marriages are made by the elders of two families. Neither the bridegroom nor the bride has any choice. Generally the bride is given away in marriage after prolonged bargaining about dowry.

Early marriage and early motherhood are the fate of average girls in Bangladesh. Few girls and boys marry for love — and these marriages are confined to urban, middle-class, educated people.

A dowry is a must for a bride, in almost all cases. Poor families become poorer in the process. Often the happiness or physical security of the married girl depends on the amount of the dowry she brings to the in-laws' family.

A girl child is not desirable, so they remain comparatively neglected in the family. They get less nutrition and less education and less medical care. In Bangladesh in 1990, 65% of adult males were illiterate. The figure for illiterate women was 78%.

In the secondary stage of schooling there are only 49 girl students for every 100 boy students. At college and university levels the gap has grown much wider.

The traditional social norm is that educated women cannot be good wives. They may develop an independent spirit; education may give them a personality of their own.

According to convention, women are made for the pleasure of men and for procreation. So they should be kept confined and taught the precepts of religion which asserts that women's heaven is to be found under the feet of their husbands.

With the emergence of an urban middle class, the hold of religion is slackening. Young Muslim girls are attending colleges and universities. But even at university level, students are discriminated against on the basis of sex. Recently, at Dhaka University, there was a rebellion against this discrimination.

The rules say that girl students must return to the hostels at sunset. But the male students have more liberal rules.

At one time I wrote against this discrimination. Now, however, girl students have won some concessions from the authorities.

I believe in equal rights for women. I do not think this simply means legal or constitutional equality when they remain ignored in practice. That is why I write against the oppression of women. Naturally, I had to write against the powerful patriarchs and against the mullahs. This is the simple reason that led me to flee my country. I never think of making compromises with people who believe women are lesser creatures than men.

They say that women are created from the ribs of man. Nonsense! ☹



# Diary of a striker

NATFHE members at Southwark College, south London, began an all-out strike against compulsory redundancies on Tuesday 14 March. This is the diary of one striker.

## Week 1

AFTER 12 MONTHS of escalating action — one-day, two-day, and three-day strikes against the imposition of new contracts — we have been on all-out strike for two weeks. Management demanded 38 compulsory redundancies out of a total teaching staff of about 600 — the equivalent of 350 full-time teachers, as many are part-time workers.

Some areas were solid, but at other sites, like my workplace at Surrey Docks in Bermondsey, union members have crossed picket lines.

We won the latest ballot for all-out action by nine votes. We were pleased but somewhat nervous with such a small majority.

During the whole dispute management have behaved like utter prats.

At first they would give us nothing; when they heard the ballot result they offered a much improved *voluntary* redundancy (VR) package.

Surrey Docks is a weak link in the union. During past disputes there have been only one or two pickets. But on the first strike day there were 13 of us.

Despite rain and the snow during the first week, all the lines have been strong.

There are two stints on the picket rota: from 7.30 to midday and then, an easier one, from 12.00 to 3.00 in the afternoon.

No-one crossed the picket line on Day 1; the scabs had all sneaked in at 6.30am, before we got there. Normally these people would get to work at 8.45.

They all stay in the building at lunch time and do not dare leave until 4.00, after the pickets have gone home.

Some of these scabs are ex-radicals who used to make speeches about what a crime it is that south London workers are offered such poor education! When it came to it, they were not prepared to put themselves on the line. I hope they feel shit.

Our strongest site is on The Cut, near Waterloo station. 100 of the 107 union members were out on Day 1. Of the seven who scabbed some were management spine who had kept on their union membership after they had been promoted.

We asked non-teaching staff to wear stickers at work, to show solidarity and to wind

up management.

We said we understood why they had to work — because they'd be sacked if they didn't.

On Wednesday a young admin worker refused a sticker. He put his hand up and just said "No way." Why?

"I'm not going to wear one of those stickers — because I'm not crossing that picket line!"

He has not been on strike before, but he understood solidarity. He took two days off on unpaid leave and then some on paid leave. In the end we had to persuade him to go to work, or he'd be sacked!

There is one member of management — "Rambo" — who is a very ambitious man; the Hard Face of management, he specialises in bullying people. "Rambo" started as a part-timer and is now a Head of Faculty, picking on the most vulnerable. Recently he screamed at a heavily pregnant woman in a corridor.

When "Rambo" caught a security guard helping us — they are mostly black workers on around £2.00 per hour, with very few rights — he threw the man off the site and phoned his bosses, getting him relocated.

*"He has not been on  
strike before, but  
understood solidarity.  
He took two days off on  
unpaid leave and some  
on paid leave. In the  
end we had to persuade  
him to go to work, or  
he'd be sacked!"*

## Week 2

THE LOCAL postal workers have been great, delivering mail to the strikers on the picket line and then leaving the rest on the pavement or taking it back to the depot.

At the Cut site, building workers chopped up a big oil drum and gave us a load of wood to build a fire in it.

On Tuesday 21 there was a mass lobby outside the governors' meeting and everyone was there — strikers, students and delegations from local unions.

The staff governor was excluded from the section of the meeting about the strike because we had a "pecuniary interest" in the dispute. However, the Principle — representing the other "pecuniary interest" — was allowed to stay and put his case. The strike was item 26 on their agenda!

We still do not know exactly what was said in the meeting.

The next day, Wednesday, Day 7, the management began playing a bit of cat-and-mouse. They told our chief negotiator, Stephen Rose, to ring them at 11.00 and they would have a positive offer which they could reveal after taking legal advice. Stephen rang back regularly, with no results.

The next day, Day 8, our negotiators met management. No, they had nothing new to offer!

The joint-sites union meeting on Friday, Day 9, was told that management had offered nothing; people were angry. The cat and mouse games strengthened the strikers' resolve. The meeting voted — overwhelmingly — to continue indefinite all-out action.

There will be a big picket for Monday morning, Day 10, when another meeting with management is set, to let them know how strong we are.

Friday's meeting decided that there will be no mass meeting before the end of week 3, unless management come up with something substantial and new. This also is a sign of strength — we are not going to turn up to meetings in the hope that an offer has come from the managers.

Of course we have worries about money. Rent, mortgages, food and other bills are causing quite a bit of stress.

We've had our February pay, but no one is sure about how much we will get in March. Management will try to get away with ripping us off for as much as they can.

No one has yet got any strike pay from the national fund. The national union's hardship fund has £100,000 but us getting cash depends on the discretion of the national hardship committee. There are forms to fill out and you have to provide receipts and bills. It is a long business, and no money is given out until there have been deductions from pay packets.

So far we have collected £16,000 for the local hardship fund. Our local hardship committee will be allocating the money very soon.

A delegation went up to Sheffield and collected £1,260 in a day — £100 in front of the Town Hall in an hour. I think other public sector workers can see the importance of this dispute. I hope we help to stimulate others to take strike action against attacks.

No matter what happens now, Southwark College is not going to be the same again. A lot of the divisions between sites have been broken down.

And quite a lot of strikers have become more political and active in the union. For months now staff have been saying: I could run this place better than that shower. Now they really do believe it.

No, things will not be the same again. ■

# Trade unions: is the tide turning?

By John McIlroy

IS THE long retreat of the trade unions over? Is the 20 year *downturn* in working-class struggle giving way to a new period of *transition to generalised struggle*? Some on the left think so. 'Slow recuperation' is, they think, heralded by the recent signal workers' strikes, by a series of unofficial disputes in the Post Office and by the unofficial and unlawful action around the 'Sefton 2.' Taken together with a number of favourable wage settlements, such as the above-inflation two-year deal at Rover, these disputes, they say, are simply the most obvious manifestation of a growing 'hidden struggle' in the workplace. The *transition* is driven by 'bubbling anger' under the surface: an explosion of industrial militancy is possible.

Some support for the view that change is occurring and that a process of 'union renewal' at the grassroots is emerging does come from a number of industrial relations academics who examine — and in some detail — examples of workplace organisation. An obvious problem here is that we are dealing with a small number of case studies at a particular point in time. It is legitimate to ask how typical they are. How far can we generalise from them?

We are told in very vague terms that 'renewal' is 'possible', 'is always on the agenda', 'may be unfolding in the current period'. Renewal is usually posed in terms of more participative, democratic, workplace organisation. According to some accounts the stimulus is coming from state attacks, such as privatisation. These accounts have little to say about the relationship of the workplace to the wider union and, in common with the 'transition to an upturn' argument, largely eschew any integration of their thesis in an analysis of the general trajectory of trade unionism in the 1990s.

But such analysis has to be the starting point for any evaluation of where we are and where we are going. An examination of the evidence available suggests that the claims that we are entering into a period of transition to a more generalised militancy or witnessing any significant renewal of workplace trade unionism have to be treated cautiously. They are at best premature, at worst whistling in the dark.

The specific weight of the unions is continuing to decline. After an unprecedented period of retreat, there are few signs of the downward spiral being arrested. The membership of TUC affiliated unions fell by 6% in 1993-4, a year in which the economy was

moving out of recession. The longest, most significant decline of trade union membership in British history, sustaining itself since 1979 through recession and economic upturn has, in fact, gathered pace since 1990 after slowing in the late 1980s. Today only 6.8 million trade unionists, well under 30% of the labour force, are in TUC affiliated unions — compared with more than 12 million, well over 50% of the labour force, in 1979. The TGWU has fewer than 850,000 members in 1995, compared with 2.2 million in 1979. The implications of this in terms of representativeness, legitimacy, mobilisation and *power* need little underlining.

In Britain, periods of generalised militancy have gone hand-in-hand with periods of union *growth*, or occurred, as in the early 1920s, when unions were being pushed back from a highpoint of growth. If we are witnessing a transition to an upturn we might expect *some* reflection of this in membership figures.

What is also important is that continuing decline is increasingly driven not simply by its initial engine, unemployment and closure of unionised enterprises, but by:

- changes in the composition of industry and the labour force;
- failure to recruit sufficiently in new areas;
- derecognition of unions by formerly supportive employers;
- the decline of the smoke-stack industries;
- the rise of the service sector;
- the contraction of the public sector;
- the increase in part-time employment;
- the move towards smaller workplaces.

These and a host of other not easily

reversible factors make for a union-hostile environment.

Trade unionists have not been able to get into new industries, new sites, new jobs to recruit members and build the workplace organisation that moves anger and resentment bubbling below the surface into militant action. Simultaneously, they have been under attack in their traditional strongholds.

The closed shop, which covered 4 million workers in 1979, covers only between a third and half a million today. The most authoritative evidence from the government's *Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* demonstrates an increase in derecognition in the late 1980s and recent studies show that the trend has continued. A 1993 survey of 98 employers found that 25 had derecognised unions in the previous 12 months. Another survey found that nearly 60% of employers opening up new sites decided not to recognise a trade union.<sup>2</sup>

In these conditions the decline in the coverage of collective bargaining has been "stark, substantial and incontrovertible." The proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining arrangements fell from 71% of employees in 1984 to 54% in 1990 and the downward trend continues. With only 1 in 3 workers in a union and 1 in 2 covered by collective bargaining the drop in the number of shop stewards since the mid 1980s has been "substantial" and "widespread affecting workplaces of all types."<sup>3</sup> We have no specific figures on numbers of stewards but the proportion of establishments with any shop stewards dropped from 54% in 1984 to 38% in 1990. Not only are there fewer stewards but they

## Unions failing to attract youth

WHILE THE TGWU is the worst example of a major union in serious decline, others have been hit hard by membership loss. UCATT, for example, has been afflicted by both membership haemorrhage and financial crisis. It is literally collapsing into the TGWU. Like other unions MSF lost around 5% of its members, whose dues are deducted at source, as part of the 'sign-up' exercise required by Tory legislation. This has prompted cutbacks and a freeze on staff pay. Some of the retrenchment measures — a ban on foreign trips, stricter con-

trol of officials' expenses, a moratorium on employment of consultants — may appeal more to the membership.

What is of particular concern is the 'massive' drop in the numbers of young members noted in a recent TUC report. Between 1990 and 1993 the number of members under 25 years of age declined by nearly 40% from 1.83million to 657,000. The number of members under 20 fell by 63%. According to the report only 1 in 10 workers under 20 were in trade unions at the end of 1992.



Does the signal workers' dispute indicate the return to generalised struggle?  
Photo: John Harris

bargain over a narrower agenda: "Fewer issues were subject to joint regulation in 1990 than in 1980... the reduction in bargaining activity overall has been substantial."<sup>1</sup>

Stewards today are far less likely to negotiate over recruitment, working conditions, deployment of labour and staffing levels. Restriction of the scope of bargaining and the restoration of management prerogative underlines important changes in workplace organisation. Where it still exists it often looks very much like it did in the mid 1970s, with facilities, offices and time off for stewards, and regular meetings with management. In fact, its impetus has often changed.

What the left emphasised in the past was the drive of workplace organisation not only to increase wages but also to achieve 'mutuality' and *control over the organisation of work*. What was seen as distinctive in key industries was the *independence* of shop stewards not from management alone but from the union bureaucracy too. Today, weakened workplace organisations are on the defensive and more dependent. Management has regained a measure of control and "in many workplaces such an enhancement of managerial prerogatives in redirecting labour has been accompanied by more direct labour intensification."<sup>2</sup>

Evidence and experience demonstrate that workers are working harder. Stewards often still participate in discussions over change at work, reorganisation of production or the introduction of new technology. But their involvement increasingly smacks of consultation over management decisions rather than negotiation, and not at all of a developing workers' control such as characterised some workplaces before 1979<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, full-time officers are more involved than in the earlier period, have closer control of stewards and directly represent members to a greater extent<sup>4</sup>.

Collective bargaining has become more decentralised with national agreements replaced by formal local agreements and greater emphasis on individual contracts

and performance-related pay. There is more management control than in the steward-driven local bargaining of the pre-1970s period.

Often this has come hand-in-hand with privatisation, CCT and LMS. It has sometimes been part of the deployment of Human Resource Management (HRM). In HRM employers take a more strategic approach and try to integrate the exploitation of labour with other corporate functions. They emphasise the business as a common enterprise and seek to capture the commitment and creativity of the workforce for management goals, by way of employee involvement, greater flexibility, team working, quality circles, and new communications and production techniques. While shop stewards have often had to confront this aspect of the employers' offensive, it has been in a partial, fragmented way. In most cases employers have not sought to *co-opt* shop stewards but have tended to *marginalise* them. The HRM approach overall has been less prevalent than a retreat from traditional collective industrial relations to individualised management and the reassertion of management prerogative<sup>5</sup>.

In these circumstances, average earnings, perhaps surprisingly, have remained buoyant, staying ahead of inflation for most of the last decade and constituting a continuing problem for state and employers. Even in 1994, as the underlying increase in average weekly earnings declined, it remained a point above the inflation rate. But, of course, that is a token margin, particularly when related to increases in tax and national insurance. Moreover, wage increases have been financed by intensification of labour and concession bargaining, and by increases in productivity. Profit has remained buoyant. Overall, the working class has paid through sustained high levels of unemployment, continuous insecurity and periodic job loss. Averages hide the fact that while some have won others have lost.

Certainly, the strike statistics give little support to those who theorise the

## Unions buckling to business unionism

PARTNERSHIP WITH the union leaders and with shop stewards is one possible response available to the state and capital. It is usually related to specific economic and political conjunctions and, broadly, to the situation where the working class is strongly organised and militant. This approach characterised the period from 1940 — particularly the period from 1961. Since 1979 the state — and slowly but surely the employers, have deployed an alternative policy: using state power and unemployment to weaken the unions, delegitimise and divide them and progressively undermine both the necessity and the material basis for collaboration. The union leaders in the 1990s are not wanted on board by Major and only very much below decks by Blair. There is no big job for them to do, no concessions available for them. A weaker more fragmented movement means their policing function is less necessarily effective. Even in their own party, the Labour Party, their role is being qualitatively transformed.

Yet, even now, after a decade and a half of attrition, their response is not to seek, in no matter how small a way, to turn the tide, organise action against the Tories, begin to build a new unionism. Instead they seek a variety of new bases for more limited collaboration — such as works councils. And they are willing to pay the price of partnership. The left TGWU, RMT and ASLEF have recently piled in with the GMB, taking a stake with Costain and German multinationals in a bid to build part of the channel tunnel rail link. GMB boss John Edmonds declared: "We have been invited to participate and to contribute money because the companies recognise that working together is better for business and employees."

As the *Guardian* [20 February] observed: "There is a political dimension to the proposal, since it shows that the unions in transport are willing to embrace privatisation at a time when Labour is renewing its railway strategy and is under pressure to support nationalisation."

Who needs Clause Four when business unionism is available!

'cumulative recuperation' of the rank and file. For what we are again seeing is continuing significant *decline*. The underlying decline in the number of strikes, working days lost and workers involved, from the mid 1980s accelerated in the 1990s. By the turn of the decade the number of strikes was running at 25% of the 1970s average and by 1993, with just 211 stoppages — the lowest number since records began — at 10% of the average of the 1970s. Moreover the strike had become a phenomenon largely restricted to the public sector.

As with other areas of union activity industrial action has been increasingly moulded by the 'success' of the Conservatives' "employment legislation" as one part of an unfavourable economic and political environment. A *Labour Research* survey published in September 1994, for example, showed "a sudden and significant change in employer tactics with renewed interest in using the law." More injunctions were being targetted against individual union representatives. Injunctions and threats of injunctions continued to influence union policy and constrain effective workplace organisation. The recent campaign over the check-off and the energy and

resources shop stewards had to devote to this issue demonstrates the continuing problem.

No snapshot of the state of the industrial struggle can conclude — as *ersatz* syndicalists do — without some estimation of the position of the union leadership and the wider political position which, the semi-syndicalists forget, *interacts with rank and file militancy*.

The 1994 reorganisation of the TUC has produced an erosion of democracy and confirmed the weakening and balkanisation of the labour movement. The relaunched TUC has now moved decisively against independent struggle-based, *class* trade unionism. It has firmly adopted a European-influenced business unionism. It seeks to appropriate HRM for its own purposes of collaboration and to turn independent workplace organisation into an adjunct of personnel management in supervising the workforce. It aspires to obliterate the conflict between capital and labour in a new social partnership. This is reflected in TUC attempts to link up with the employers' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry, and yet again to impress upon the government the useful

role the union leaders could play in facilitating Conservative objectives. They have presented Tony Blair with a blank cheque in relation to the General Election. It is expressed in a variety of smaller ways too — through the spending of £20,000 on the design of a new logo, the appointment of consultants such as Liberal Democrat Des Wilson, and the licensing of shop stewards by the state and employers through the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications into shop steward training.

The new, explicit, collaborative pitch — Conservative ministers now address TUC conferences! — has produced some resistance in left unions such as the TGWU and UNISON. Yet, while there has been increased factionalism in the unions, the credentials of many of the Broad Lefts bear little scrutiny — except as broadly based "jobs for the boys coalitions." The TGWU is a good example: the practical policies of the BL reflect a spectrum from the soft left rightwards, with a dash of Stalinism. With its bureaucratic approach, it is focused almost entirely on internal elections.

Across the movement, the new business unionism is making important gains. A clear reflection of this is the attempted reorganisation of internal union relations. The model is managerial: full-time officers increasingly recast as managers diagnose the 'wants' of members conceived as individual, passive *customers* rather than as active participants in a collectivity.

The 'modernisation' of the Labour Party has downsized the formal and informal role of the union leaders. There is little doubt that if Blair wins at the special Labour Party conference at the end of April they will, after the dust has settled, accept the revision of Clause Four just as they accepted the 1993 changes. For them, the coming period will be one of 'heads down, don't rock the boat', 'anything for a Labour government'. All of this is not irrelevant to the grassroots struggle. It is intensely bound up with it: it reflects and reinforces its present weaknesses.

## The present period and the future

SET IN a proper framework of analysis, the argument that we are in a new period lacks substance: the cases it points to are encouraging, but, carefully weighed, only straws in the wind. There are still significant strikes, still successful strikes, still examples of strong, democratic, workplace organisation. But workers have suffered years of reverses, mass unemployment, a hostile environment, poor leadership. This has taken its full toll. In terms of any *general political assessment*, we are still on the retreat, still fighting a defensive battle. A turning of the tide will in all probability require a changed political situation. It will take time. The tendencies of decades cannot be transformed in a few months. And it is a little incongruous to find those who held that the big battles of the early 1980s and the Miners' Strike occurred in a down-

## The TUC way forward

THE TUC response to the crisis of trade unionism is to urge that membership and strength can be acquired by convincing employers that unions can play a managerial role in increasing efficiency, productivity and profitability. EU legislation can force management to make the unions their partners. Unions should positively embrace human resource management, flexibility, quality circles, team working and the rest rather than taking a strategic critical approach which recognises that under the civilised veneer these are techniques to increase exploitation and marginalise unions, not support them.

Works councils is the name of the TUC's latest flame. Under EU directives companies employing more than 1,000 workers and over 150 in two member states must establish a works council. These bodies will involve all employees. Union and non-union. Their powers are purely consultative. In some cases in the current perilous situation something might be made of these bodies. It is certainly correct to try to exploit and maximise the impact of EU initiatives. But the TUC's approach is uncritical, far from the method of tactical probing of these institutions from an independent base. The TUC miseducates by advertising works councils as an important channel for providing workers with a voice in decision making, in the context of 'partnership with enterprise.' This is something employers have no intention of con-

ceding and something works councils have no power to make them concede.

## Our way forward

WE START from the reassertion of gritty unpalatable realities: conflict not co-operation; antagonism of interest not partnership; militancy not modernism; the movement not simply the workplace; class collectivism not individual self interest; the continued reality since the 1984-5 miners' strike of a period of working class retreat and union decline. We are not part of a team with employers and managers the workers we are part of a team opposed to the employers whose interest are ultimately irreconcilable with ours.

The realisation of this philosophy in practice requires the construction in the workplace of a consciousness of collectivity incarnated in independent steward committees. Starting from militant pursuit of every grievance and injustice in the workplace the new shop stewards will weir their ultimate correction in organisation across the enterprise and industry and up the union beyond the workplace. They will see progress as ultimately bound up with wider structures of power whose confrontation requires political action.

We see the need to penetrate and transform the existing labour movement, not work councils. We do not perceive new 'upturns' doing the job for us. We have to do it; patiently rebuilding workplace organisation on a new basis, as an organic part of reconstructing socialist policies in the workplace and in the unions and revitalising the Labour Party. It is only in this light that recent industrial conflicts provide opportunities.



turn now telling us the downturn is over.

The evidence simply does not support this judgement — indeed, the 1988-9 period appeared in many ways more favourable. Yet ultimately it produced only an intensification of our difficulties. Yet, of course, and it should be kept in mind continuously, the whole upturn-downturn periodisation is schematic and misleading.

Examples of strong workplace organisation should be utilised for emulation. To fail to anchor them in the general picture where the tide is still running against workplace organisation, or to deduce from them any *general renewal of trade unionism* is to exaggerate present prospects. Simply observing general tendencies may produce pessimism and paralysis. But we cannot substitute the specific for the general. Two swallows don't make a summer.

Privatisation, fragmentation of the enterprise, decentralisation, may provoke new engagement, self-reliance, participatory workplace organisation. Or, through cutting smaller units off from wider sources of solidarity and power, these changes may produce weaker or non-existent organisation. Sectionalism is far from a source of strength, as we can see from examining the progress of shop stewards in the 1950s. It is impossible for workers to escape from the wider 'bureaucratic' union by building democratic workplace organisation that does not eventually *relate to the wider union* and try to change it. And that, often, is where the problems begin.

The bright side, if we can call it that, is: the necessary conditions for strong workplace trade unionism persist and intensify:

- insecurity;
- casualisation;
- arbitrary management;
- intensification of labour;
- growing inequalities of reward;
- exclusion from any voice in decision-making.

All are on the increase. These conditions are proving *insufficient* because changes in the economic and industrial structure and changes in the class structure create barriers.



TUC General Secretary John Monks: his services are no longer required to police the working class. Photo: John Harris

ers. One big barrier is weak, uninspiring trade union leadership. But though the remaking of economy and class creates barriers, they are far from unsurmountable. Workers themselves emphasise the continuing relevance to them of trade union organisation as an independent collective means of promoting their interests.

Certainly such organisations will have to break from their past models. If they are to be more successful than their predecessors of the 1950s and 1960s, whose virtues have been exaggerated. Shop stewards will have to reach far more beyond the sectional, beyond the workplace, beyond the economic. They will have to develop positive programmes of policy and strategy for transforming and democratising both the enterprise and the wider union.

Links across industry will have to be broader and deeper. Workplace organisation will have to be built on a more explicit political basis involving initially the reclaiming, democratisation and radicalisation of the political wing of the labour movement.

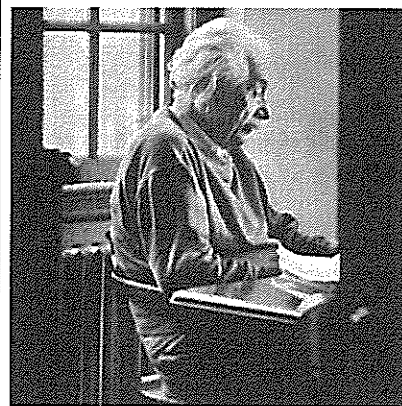
At the moment, this appears Utopian. There is a mood of resentment and anger against the Tories and against the speed-up and the deterioration of working life. It is reflected in a number of disputes which must be supported, encouraged, *built upon*. It is not reflected in any *general increase in militant action*. Weakness and a low level of struggle continue to characterise the situation. The right has strengthened its hold on the TUC and the Labour Party.

While important struggles will continue, any qualitative change is unlikely this side of a general election. The hope of a Labour victory will increasingly structure the industrial situation, and a "waiting for Labour" mood reinforced by the leadership will quite probably limit militancy. It is only with a Labour government in place that we are likely to see any radical change in the current conjuncture. ■

#### Notes

1. P. Fosh, 'Membership participation in workplace unionism: the possibility of union renewal', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, November 1993; P. Fairbrother, J. Waddington, 'The politics of trade unionism', *Capital and Class*, 41, 1990.
2. Cited in D. Guest, 'Human Resource Management, Trade Unions and Industrial Relations' in J. Storey, ed. *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text*, Routledge, 1994.
3. N. Millward et al, *Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition*, Dartmouth, 1992, p.352.
4. N. Millward, p.353.
5. T. Elger, 'Technological innovation and work reorganisation in British manufacturing in the 1980s', *Work, Employment and Society*, Special Issue, 1990, p.57.
6. J. McLroy, *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, Manchester University Press, 1995, pp.127-8.
7. N. Millward, pp.129-30.
8. D. Guest, *op.cit.*
9. C. Whitston, J. Waddington, 'Why sign up? New trade union members' reasons for joining', University of Warwick, 1992.

## Another Day



## Dropping in on comrade Einstein

RECENTLY WHILE driving through Princetown, New Jersey we stopped briefly to talk with Professor Einstein. During the short conversation we quickly came to the point i.e. his opinions on certain Marxist teachings, and asked whether or not the Professor recognized the class struggle. After that, part of the conversation went about as follows;

*Einstein:* Yes, of course. The German and English and American capitalists have also caused this war. And fascism everywhere is very possible... very possible.

*We:* In America also?

*Einstein:* Yes, in America.

*We:* And when do you think the working people will realize this?

*Einstein:* The workers in America will not understand soon. They still have the best conditions in the world, among the working peoples. The French workers understand... the British... but the American workers will be the last to wake up.

*We:* What do you think of Marx's principles?

*Einstein:* His main thesis is right. I agree with Marx but not with his teacher, Hegel.

*We:* Then what is your opinion of dialectics?

*Einstein:* Well, I haven't found the dialectic approach too useful, but still the only answer is socialism.

Jeanne and Pete Morgan

*The Militant*, New York

16 June 1945

• Albert Einstein born 14 March 1879, died 18 April 1955.

# From the Gay Liberation Front to Queer Politics

**How far has lesbian and gay liberation been won? How far can Outrage claim to be the heirs of groups like the Gay Liberation Front, which kicked off the lesbian and gay liberation movement in Britain 25 years ago? How far can capitalism countenance lesbian and gay liberation? Most important of all, what connections can socialists make with the fight for a freer sexuality.**

**Clive Bradley reviews the 25 year experience of lesbian and gay activists in Britain, the fight against Clause 28, the growth of Pride, the horror of AIDS. He examines the ways in which lesbian and gay life style has shaped wider society, and asks what happened to the earlier lesbian and gay radicalism.**

I CAME out in 1979, fifteen years ago. I remember, shortly before that, attending a conference of *Socialist Organiser* or one of its predecessors, where a 'gay caucus' had been organised (the prefix 'lesbian and...' did not become common until a few years later). It consisted of three people, and I did not go. The meeting was being held in one corner of a large hall, and I didn't want to be seen at it.

This was not because SO was homophobic. It was because I did not feel confident.

About a year later, now a confessed homosexual, I helped organise a demonstration in Manchester 'for the rights of lesbian and gay people.' 1,000 marched through the city centre, and we considered it an enormous success. I remember feeling uncomfortable with how weird the demonstrators were, mincing along on stilts and donning eye shadow especially for the occasion.

Things have changed a great deal. The annual Pride march in London is certainly less political than that little demo in Manchester. But in 1994 a quarter of a million people hit Brockwell Park to celebrate it. In 1980 we might have been able to get Tom Robinson (who had a hit single in 1978, "Glad to be Gay", which was never performed on *Top of the Pops*) to say a few words. Now, it's a career move to "do Pride."

In those fifteen years, [we have seen] the images of lesbian and gay characters in major soaps (except *The Street*, bless them) and an Oscar has been awarded to an actor playing a gay character with AIDS. Youth culture to a significant extent takes its cue, at least in dress sense, from gay men. With dishonourable exceptions, today we would expect pop stars, actors and celebs in general to be pro-gay, even if they still generally keep their own indiscretions a secret, or sometimes sue magazines for suggesting they are not regular jocks.

Local authorities and the voluntary sector usually have equal opportunities policies which are assumed to include sexuality even if it is not specifically named.

In London, the commercial gay scene has mushroomed. Part of Soho is working on being Christopher Street or the Castro, and doing pretty well at it. Lesbians and — more so — gay men are visible in a way they were not fifteen years ago, apart from special times of the day. This gay scene is predominantly male, but much of it has an openness and "mixed" quality which was rare until very recently. It also seems to me on average rather prettier.

Outside London and one or two other big cities, particularly Manchester, things have changed a lot less. But the general climate is radically different. I doubt if nineteen year old supporters of *Socialist Organiser* would feel as inhibited now as I did in 1979 about attending a caucus. Indeed, one of the most striking things about the huge numbers of lesbians and gay men to be seen about town is that their average age is pretty young. At 23 in Manchester I was still considered a chicken.

Some lesbian and gay activists express disappointment at the way things have turned out. The early gay movement wanted fundamental change in the way society thought about sexuality and sexual relations. What we've got is discos with lasers and bars that sell cappuccino. The vast majority of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are not very militant. Pride is a largely apolitical event. Gay men tend to be more interested in clothes and toning their pectoral



Demonstrating for an equal age of consent

muscles than in challenging "state power" and young lesbians seem to have little interest in feminism and more in doing stuff like their gay "brothers" — like dropping tabs of E and partying all night.

The dominant image, and indeed self-image, of the commercial lesbian and gay scene is fixated with style and beauty (and youth). It tends to be, in fact, rather affluent. There are more designer labels per square foot in Soho's Old Compton Street than is good for people's health.

This isn't what the Gay Liberation Front intended.

Recently, the "sex war" between lesbians and gay men has even reached the attention of the national press. An article in the London freebie *MX* (now called *QX*, although I'm not sure why), denounced lesbians for being intimidating, fighting too much and having moustaches — and for having "women only" tents at Pride, which in 1995 will be led by a lesbian contingent. The Lesbian Avengers pulped (recyclably) as many copies of the mag as they could lay their hands on. A lot of publicity went to the discovery that a woman in Manchester running an HIV service for lesbians was not, as she claimed, HIV positive. Gay men attacked lesbians for jumping on the bandwagon. Lesbians said gay men squeezed them out of HIV/AIDS issues, and deceit was the only way to get a hearing.

In fact very little of this is really new. Rifts between lesbians and gay men are as

old as the modern gay movement. The general conservatism of the lesbian and gay community has always been a problem for activists. The commercialism of "the scene" versus the sexual radicalism of the activists has been a theme running right through campaigns over sexual politics.

The lack of interest in politics among lesbian and gay youth is parallel to the lack of interest in politics among youth in general, at least politics in the sense it was understood fifteen or twenty years ago.

And the sexual radicals are still there. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (gay activists who dress as nuns), who originated many years ago in the States, are not so far removed from the "gender fucking" of some early gay activists. "Queer politics" in many of its themes echoes the GLF of the early '70s.

What has changed is that these radical groups are in competition, more set against much more established mainstream campaigns and attitudes.

In the past there was the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, of which Stonewall is perhaps the descendant — mainstream, looking for friends in the corridors of power. But Stonewall has a much higher profile, and exists in a society where its concerns are much more widely accepted. *GLF* were pioneers. *Outrage*, which would like to see itself as the inheritor of that tradition, is a very different beast in a very different social and historical context.

What brought about the changes of the last two decades?

First — today's scene queens of both genders would do well to remember it — was the explosion of militancy that began with the Stonewall riot of 1969. Fired by the Civil Rights movement in the States, the early women's movement and national liberation struggles, especially the Vietnamese, "gay liberation" swept across the Atlantic. The concrete results of this early movement are intangible. But there can be no doubt that its militancy played a vital role in putting lesbian and gay issues on a wider agenda and, in a broad sense, influencing a change in social attitudes. Their emphasis on "coming out" continues to be a theme in sexual politics, and an issue of controversy (with the forced "outing" of, for example, bishops).

It is important to stress here the impact that the early movement had on innumerable individuals who bravely championed lesbian and gay rights when it was hard to do so and, among other things, won equal opportunities policies, committed trade unions to defend lesbian and gay members, and affected the policy of the Labour Party. These individuals may not have been activists in the GLF or other early organisations, or even have had much sympathy with their overall politics: but without the pioneers, there would have been no individuals fighting their corners so effectively.

The exemplary experiment of Lesbians ♦



and Gays Support the Miners in 1984-85 owed its inspiration to these pioneers.

Different attitudes began to permeate through society, so that TV producers began to think it safe — or, to be less cynical, worthwhile — to raise the issue. Later, advertising executives realised there was a market they might be missing.

Two things in the 1980s helped accelerate the trend. The first was the Tories' infamous Clause 28, which banned local councils from "promoting homosexuality" or presenting it as a "pretended family relationship." This was intended as a vote-winning response to the efforts of some local authorities to set up lesbian and gay services (centre, switchboards, etc.), which the Tories thought could be hooked into as a prime example of the "loony left" in action.

They were right that the national Labour Party was terrified of the issue. The front bench failed to vote against Clause 28 on its first reading, and a little later a letter was leaked by one of Neil Kinnock's advisors suggesting they steer clear of lesbian and gay issues for fear of losing support.

But Clause 28 galvanised a movement among lesbians and gay men far greater than anything this country had ever seen. It was not simply the size of the movement, but its broadness, which proved so powerful. Not just perennial activists got involved in the campaigns across the country. All sorts of previously apolitical men and women were outraged by the proposed law and mobilised to stop it.

It is since then that Pride has become such a big event. In 1987 there were several demonstrations against Clause 28 which were all far larger than any gay rights march before, including an astonishing parade through the centre of Manchester.

The campaign was not successful in stopping the law. And the law has barely been used; certainly, much of what was predicted at the time seems alarmist in retrospect. But it was the strength of the movement against it which has made Clause 28 a virtually dead

law, even though it reached the statute books. Had there been no campaign, the law would have been much easier to use.

Inadvertently, therefore, the Tories helped promote homosexuality. Following the Clause 28 campaign and the subsequent growth of the Pride event, at least in London, the growth of the commercial scene accelerated apace: newspapers, bars, the lot. Here was a community which had discovered the power of visibility and it wasn't going to disappear again.

Even more contradictory was the second phenomenon strengthening this visibility: AIDS. When AIDS was first discovered by the tabloids, around 1984, it promised to be a disaster ideologically as well as physically for gay men and also for lesbians, the tabloids tending not to care too much who they are making trouble for. AIDS was the "gay plague." To the old pressures of being gay were added new ones: workmates were afraid of catching a terminal illness. Fire fighters refused to give the kiss of life etc., etc.

The government's initial overkill on AIDS is not the subject of this article. Suffice to say here that one of the slogans of the official information campaign was "AIDS is not prejudiced." It could affect anyone. Whatever the long-term implications of this line of argument (which are touched on below), it sums up a theme running through the history of AIDS awareness in Britain. AIDS is not prejudiced — even if you are. One effect of the publicity about HIV and AIDS, once the "gay plague" hype had died down, was to put open discussion about homosexuality on the public agenda in a way it had not been before.

One of the reasons celebrities tend to be pro-gay these days is that within the entertainment industry energetic work was done around the issue of AIDS. A lot of celebrities backed AIDS awareness projects, even if only the odd benefit concert. It is quite difficult to be concerned about AIDS and not concerned about most of the people affected by it, who remain — outside the Third World — gay men.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the importance of this, but it would be wrong to underestimate it.

The other effect of HIV and AIDS was on gay men. In the United States, thousands of gay men were dead before anyone even knew what was killing them. It was different in Britain. From almost the beginning, there were organisations like the Terrence Higgins Trust, leaflets put out to gay venues dealing with safer sex. It may well be that young gay men in 1995 have grown complacent or reckless about HIV, but it is certainly true that the extent of the epidemic in this country has been substantially reduced by the speed with which the gay community responded to the danger (a fact which makes it all the more galling when government, tabloids and assorted homophobes then complain that they were conned, and a lot fewer people have died than they were originally promised).

AIDS awareness had a further galvanising effect on the gay community. Not very directly: it didn't result in big demonstrations

demanding more money on research, and the most militant organisation dealing with AIDS — ACTUP — remains a pale shadow of its huge American counterpart. But indirectly, the threat of AIDS had a big effect.

One example of this is in the development of something like *Boyz* magazine. *Boyz* is a free newspaper which is totally scene-queen oriented (i.e. young male-oriented) and talks about little except clothes, gymnasia, pop music, clubs and sex. No doubt it's a pretty dubious gain (excluded from this hedonistic lifestyle). But it does represent a significant layer of young gay men which did not exist in the same way or to the same extent a decade or more ago.

The sexual openness of *Boyz* is a product of the "AIDS generation." The need for safer sex education has created a window for much greater openness about homosexuality as a positive sexual experience. In a very different way, Julian Clary represents the same trend: he's not the first openly gay comic, but he is the first gay comic who openly talks about sex.

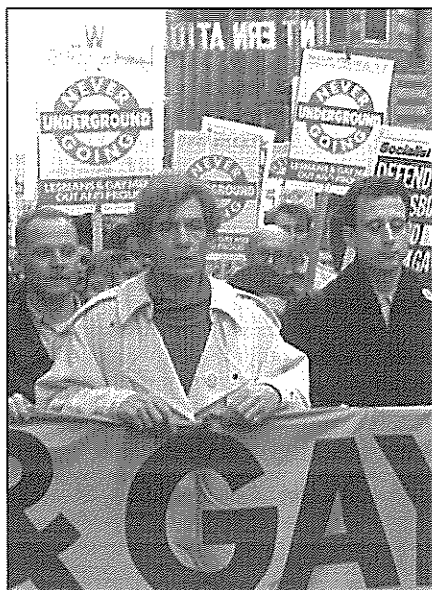
London is very much the gay capital of Britain. Much of what happens and is debated in London must seem obscure and irrelevant to a lesbian living in Carlisle. But it's necessary to comment on some of the issues which divide the lesbian and gay movement as they are seen in London.

There is, of course, no lesbian and gay movement, nor has there ever been one. There are campaigns, organisation, newspapers, bars, clubs, self-help groups, switchboards, 0898 numbers, but no coherent movement. The division between men and women has always been a feature of lesbian and gay politics. Is there anything new about that division today?

Probably more than any other issue, this is a London neurosis. Gay men in Carlisle have much less opportunity to trash their lesbian sister, I imagine. And to me, at least, the London scene seems substantially more mixed than it did ten years ago. Sure, a lot of the women at gay clubs are heterosexual. But a lot of them are not. Bisexuality, also, seems to be considered more of an option among youth than it used to be, unless that's just a fashionable pose, as it was always alleged to be.

What is different is that the debate, for example as expressed in *MX* magazine referred to above, is at a very, very low political level. The author of *MX*'s editorial felt no inhibitions in speaking like a dyed-in-the-wool misogynist (he actually asked why lesbians want to look like men). But this is hardly surprising. The left has virtually no influence over lesbian and gay youth, and the women's movement does not exist. The political level of the left itself is terrifyingly low in 1995; lesbians and gay men are reflecting the same trend. With a change in the general political climate once the Tories have been removed from office, and a resurgence in interest in politics, this will change.

A more important, concrete, division is that which has arisen around the issue of HIV and AIDS. Lesbians have alleged that they are excluded from organisations, their concerns are not expressed in literature. Gay men have responded by accusing les-



Clause 28 galvanised a powerful movement



bians of just feeling "left out."

An organisation, Gay Men Fighting AIDS (GMFA) has set about trying to "regay" AIDS. They argue that despite all the predictions to the contrary, the overwhelming majority of people affected by HIV and AIDS in Britain are gay men, followed by intravenous drug users. The mainstream HIV/AIDS organisations do not target gay men properly. Moreover, the stress generally given to the threat faced by "everyone" is counterproductive: once it became clear that most people were not as affected as gay men, the way was clear for the tabloid offensive saying that AIDS was a lot of fuss about nothing as only a few faggots were dying of it anyway.

GMFA are particularly hostile to the lesbian claim that they have been ignored. It is absurd, they argue, to compare the effect AIDS has had on gay men to its effect on lesbians, and worse, it is insulting to the often tragic experience of gay men.

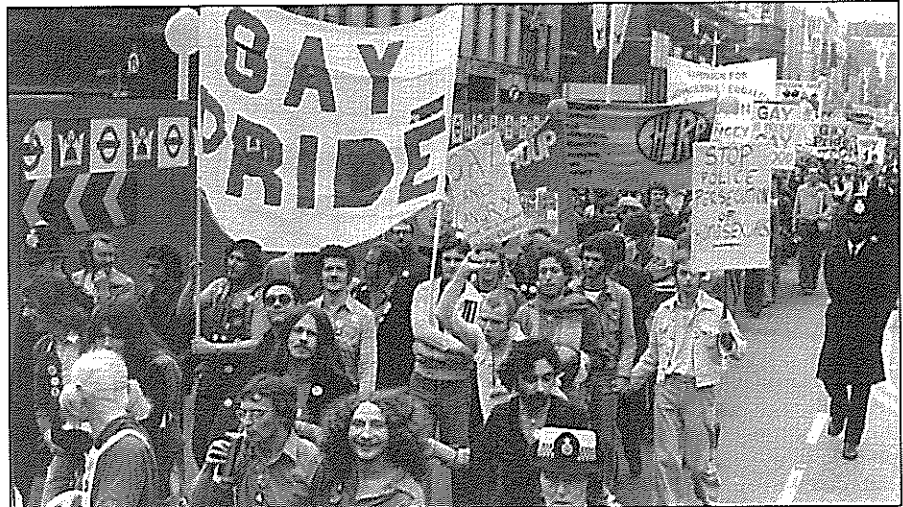
GMFA are right to stress the facts about who has been most affected. If the people most affected suffer because of a diffuse campaign, it can be, literally, fatal. But this needs to be done in a way which is not divisive — not "I am more oppressed than you." Moreover, it is surely the case that much AIDS-awareness education is impossible without posing to heterosexuals the threat to themselves and the need to take responsibility for their own lives. Scars about "revenge infections", for example, can best be combated by general safer sex campaigns.

Another division which has always been there is between the radical and conservative activists, represented today by Outrage and Stonewall respectively. Outrage is a direct-action organisation, which claims to stand for "queer politics": Peter Tatchell is its best-known member. Stonewall is a traditional lobbying organisation: names associated with it include two actors, Ian McKellen and Michael Cashman. In 1994 it organised a concert fronted by Elton John. On the campaigning front, it was central to the campaign to lower the age of consent.

Their differences are best summed up by Outrage's recent "outing" of several bishops. Stonewall disapproves of outing. The action was typical of Outrage's "in-your-face" militancy, and like much of what is called "queer politics", a tactic borrowed from America. Stonewall's style is best shown by the age of consent campaign, which was carried out in traditional lobbying fashion, co-ordinated with Edwina Currie and eschewed a national demonstration.

"Queer politics" is a rather nebulous notion which is essentially to do with frustration with the lesbian and gay "establishment" and a search for a more radical alternative. As expressed by its American proponents, the alternative is a type of pseudo-nationalism (the American organisation is called Queer Nation). Its basic concept is quite similar to the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the 1970s and '80s.

"BC" was an attempt to put forward a nationalism not based on the African/Asian/Coloured distinction set up



Gay Pride

by apartheid. Instead it advocated a new sense of nationhood, of being "black." The concept "queer" is intended to replace terms like "lesbian", "gay", "bisexual" and indeed to incorporate anyone outside society's mainstream in whatever respect, sexual or otherwise. This new sense of identity is then advocated in a "separatist" way: the "queer nation" does not seek to integrate.

Like BC, it's an attempt to find a new identity based on thinking of new words, only with less purchase on reality. If there

*"The early gay movement believed that the change they wanted in attitudes to sexuality would involve a change in general social relations... ultimately socialist revolution."*

are divisions, they cannot be overcome by finding a new word to describe a community unless the community really exists as a community — but in that case the divisions are harder to explain.

For Outrage, "queer politics" seems to have a rather softer meaning and sounds a lot like an attempt to reclaim the kind of politics first advocated by the GLF in the early '70s: stressing, for example, that liberating sexuality will benefit heterosexuals, who are also oppressed and screwed up by this society.

Outrage's activities tend to be very media-oriented — just as media-oriented, in fact, as Stonewall's. The difference is the kind of coverage they try to get. Stonewall functions much like any other lobbying organisation; Outrage li stunts which will get them onto the *Six O'Clock News*.

It is difficult to see how these activities are necessarily counterposed. The difference seems often to be one of style. Outrage sometimes confuses an "in-your-face" style with political radicalism. Some of its stunts are a bit daft (like a line of men dropping their trousers in front of parliament, or fake weddings in Trafalgar Square, one partner in full drag — which is also rather dubious politically). Others are very good.

Similarly, Stonewall's love-affair with Edwina Curry was a bit hard to stomach (and rather amnesiac; she didn't as far as I know, vote against Clause 28). But other work Stonewall does is effective and impressive.

Radicalism and conservatism do not lie in the style of the action; they lie in its political goals. The question arises, therefore, whether it is possible for lesbian and gay politics into the next century to have genuinely radical political goals.

The early gay movement believed that the change they wanted in attitudes to sexuality would involve a change in general social relations. Gay liberation ultimately meant socialist revolution. If, as I have argued, there have been substantial changes in the last two decades, does this mean that sexual liberation is possible without socialist revolution? Is the struggle for lesbian and gay rights in essence no more than a struggle for reform? Worse, was the growth of the commercial gay scene (and we can assume, its continued growth, barring an enormous reactionary backlash), the inevitable outcome of the struggle for sexual liberation?

We need to take stock of what has not been achieved. In 1994 Parliament failed to grant equality in the age of consent to young gay men, which was an affront to the principle of democracy (it affected lesbians politically, if not technically). Only a tiny handful of MPs voted against 18 on the grounds that it was still inequality. Britain is far behind some other countries (Denmark, Holland and even macho Australia) in recognising lesbian and gay rights.

Homosexuality is still considered vile and repulsive by large numbers of people: according to some polls, by more people than in the past. A disturbing phenomenon, although a disputed one, is the alleged

growth of homophobia — or at least of queer bashing — in the black community.

Violent attacks on, and even murders of homosexuals continue. Thousands of gay men are arrested each year for "sex crimes" in which there is no victim.

Increasing numbers of lesbians and gay men are coming forward to fight for the right of foreign lovers to stay in this country, a right not granted by the immigration laws.

London gives a warped picture. Outside the capital and one or two other cities, conditions for lesbians and gay men have barely changed (which is one of the reasons why the scene is so big in London; people leave their home towns in search of a freer atmosphere).

Because the changes which have occurred are rather difficult to define, they are more fragile than they appear. They would be hard to erase: recriminalisation is very difficult to imagine without major resistance. But we need to remember the fragility.

For hundreds and thousands of lesbians and gay men, daily life is still a constant battle with the comments of family and workmates, the fear of discovery, the potential violence of the streets.

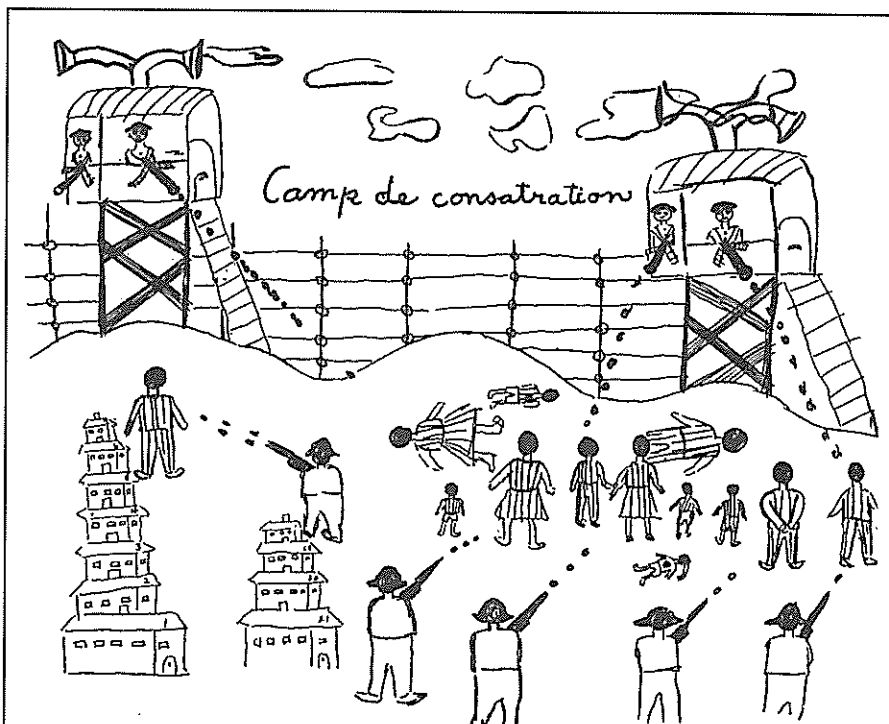
There is a long way to go.

But it is not clear that legal equality and general social acceptability would not be possible within capitalist society. The standard "Marxist" explanation for why this is not so — that the centrality of the family to capitalism is too great to allow it — is not convincing. Capitalism is very flexible. It is reminiscent of the argument that capitalism could not survive the end of apartheid in South Africa. That was more convincing to begin with, but it turned out to be false.

Sexual liberation is not simply about legal equality and social acceptability. It is about transforming the ways in which human beings relate to each other, sexually, and as men and women. It is about far more radical changes to what is considered "normal" than we can presently imagine. It is about removing, as far as humanly possible, every trace of violence and cruelty, oppressiveness and emotional brutality from our lives, and establishing at the heart of society the belief, in fact as well as theory, that everybody is equally human.

The struggle for lesbian and gay rights in the wider sense can and should be integrated into a struggle to change society root and branch. Even if the fight for equality is only for reform, like any other fight for reform, it can either be seen in isolation, or seen as part of a larger picture. It may be that the hope for a "socialist lesbian and gay movement" or something of that kind is not realistic. But lesbians and gay men can integrate their own struggles into a wider one, with a profoundly radical goal.

This is not to downplay the need to fight for our rights as militantly and effectively as possible. It is to say that, while it is increasingly unconvincing to argue that the struggle for those rights requires a struggle for socialism, like any other struggle this one can be a springboard for a broader look at what is wrong with the world we live in. ■



## A child survivor draws a scene from life in a Nazi concentration camp

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

By Irving Howe

THE HUMAN imagination has obvious limitations. It is a platitude that the sight of a child with a cut finger moves us more than a report that millions of people are hungry in some distant nation. Our sensitivities are calloused by the age in which we live; suffering, death, horror and cruelty have become such commonplace things that we take them for granted, as if familiar parts of a landscape. And we deliberately harden ourselves to our world; it is almost necessary to do so if we are to survive the mad society in which we live.

As I would read through an issue of *Labor Action* after it had been put "to bed" at the printshop, I would wonder to myself: here is an article written about hunger in India, which says that 20,000,000 people face starvation in that country. Does it, can it really convey the emotional impact which it should?

Can these abstract, general words really describe what has happened to this world?

Take a glance at the drawing accompanying this article. It is done by a boy of 13 who was in one of Hitler's concentration camps and who survived death by a miracle. His

parents were shot. He himself was led one day with 150 children to be shot. The bullets hit him on the left arm. He fell down, and with the blood of his arm colored his face and remained the only survivor among the 149 dead children. He then escaped in the darkness.

The drawing which this child made represents the execution.

Perhaps in this remarkable drawing we can understand the fate of society under capitalism; perhaps if we try to imagine what horror this child went through as we look at this drawing we learn something which no words can suggest.

I myself was moved by a small detail even more than by the little figures falling under the fire of the SS guards. Notice the row of prisoners' huts drawn on the side with numbers on each of them. That this child should have been so impregnated with the regimented orderliness of a totalitarian society — the meaning of his meticulous numbering of the huts — seemed to me the final, ultimate condemnation of the world which had already brought so much suffering to him. For capitalism means not only starvation and war and insecurity; it is the debasement of a man to the point where he is a mere robot-slave.

And then the robot-slave numbers the huts of his concentration camp.

From *Labor Action*,  
New York,  
1945

# Bad lessons from Japan

By Sean MacGiollaria

JUST WHAT IS Human Resource Management?

In a recent report the TUC tells us that championing HRM can be the saving of the trade unions.

The phrase seems to trip off every management tongue and to stud every book and journal on management and industrial relations. There is already not only a *Journal of Human Resource Management*, but an *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. It seems only a matter of time before the issue attracts the attention of Ernest Mandel and *New Left Review*. The subject, the TUC informs us, is a complex one. It isn't. It is quite simple really — if we start at the beginning.

As propounded by management theorists HRM provides an ideology and a strategy for capital to maximise the benefits of more intensive competition in the new globalised economy and the new political and industrial conditions engendered by the working-class defeats of the 1980s. Its purpose is to increase the rate of exploitation.

HRM seeks to replace conflict between capital and labour, trade unionism and collective bargaining with a philosophy, a practice, a set of techniques which reform life and reform the enterprise as an organic unity in which the human resource, labour is a crucial perhaps *the* crucial factor of production. The neglect of labour by capital has been the source of conflict, division, class consciousness, trade unionism. The management of labour, newly defined, must now be integrated with all other aspects of corporate planning at the highest levels of the enterprise. Its day to day deployment must be made an intrinsic concern of all levels of line management rather than, as in the past, shunted into the siding of personnel management.

Driven by competition, the idea of commitment lies at the heart of HRM. All workers must be made to understand that they have a stake in the prosperity and management of the enterprise, that the enterprise is a unity in which there are no divisions. Their hearts and minds must be authentically engaged in the goals of the enterprise so that, imbued with enthusiasm, self-motivated employees go beyond regulated compliance, beyond contract, beyond "I'm only here for the money", "roll on Friday", or "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work." Instead, they strain every sinew of mental and physical muscle they never knew they possessed in a spiral of continuous self-improvement. They strain to meet the needs of their enterprise, their market and their customer, whose needs they have internalised as their own most deeply cherished personal goals.

HRM is about creating new Stakhanovites for capital. About making every worker proud to be a rule buster, because there are no longer any rules. Management can achieve this dream by developing an enterprise culture, a common set of goals and rules. This culture is created by dissolving existing worker collectives and reassembling the resultant atomised, self-interested individuals into a new team whose values of loyalty, flexibility and consensus are geared to increased quality, productivity and profitability. These goals are augmented by an integrated armoury of techniques: scientific selection; continuous appraisal; mission statements; new communications systems; flexible working; performance-related pay; employee involvement; customer care policies; training and retraining.

*"HRM is the latest souped up sophisticated version of "we are all in this together", speed-up, productivity swindles, blue eyes management, "sell your soul to the company store"."*

What is involved is a move from control to commitment. The barriers between you and your company, you and your market dissolve. You don't have to be managed, you manage yourself. You are empowered. You take the autonomy to meet the imperatives of the market and every desire of your customers. "The quality challenge", "the learning society", "the intelligent enterprise", "human development" are integrated with market utilitarianism. Your whole personality is captured for the enterprise. The new work ethic contemptuously eschews anything but market-related leisure or cultural development. The capitalist dream is realised at last as the once recalcitrant working class fully internalises entrepreneurial values.

That's the hot gospel from the business schools, the trainers, the gurus, the charlatans. A brave new world in which greed and exploitation are identified with personal growth. The practice is somewhat different.

Most employers are not even beginning to strategically implement the full HRM

programme, dispensing with trade unions and industrial relations in favour of engineering new organisational cultures in a holistic fashion. Instead, many employers seem to be treating HRM as a rhetoric which often masks inaction, or as an agenda to be drawn on piecemeal and pragmatically. Certain elements of HRM have been introduced on a relatively significant scale and workers in a wide range of industries are now familiar with the partial advance of the enterprise culture at the level of language and specific initiatives.

The most widely used report is John Storey's "Developments in the Management of Human Resources". Storey found extensive implementation of HRM approaches in 15 mainstream British organisations and a harder approach by management on trade unions. There was, nonetheless, no frontal attack on collective bargaining and union recognition. New initiatives such as individual contracts, performance-related pay, teamworking and flexibility were introduced in an *ad hoc* opportunistic way alongside conventional industrial relations, although there was a tendency to sideline shop stewards.

Other studies confirm an approach in which specific techniques are introduced rarely bound together in an integrated strategically sustained attempt to restructure workplace relations — outside a small number of greenfield sites of foreign-owned multinationals. There seems to have been little attempt to entrench HRM at boardroom level. The most detailed surveys written up in Neil Millward's *Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition* and *The New Industrial Relations* conclude that even the pragmatic *ad hoc* use of HRM techniques is rarer than is often assumed. Even the introduction of team briefings, quality circles and so on was far from a majority phenomenon. The most important tendency was a drift towards the avoidance of both industrial relations and HRM and the emergence of the new low-cost sweatshop based on weak or non-existent trade unionism and the naked and undisguised reimposition of management prerogatives.

This is not to say that HRM is not a threat. It is. We must take it into measure. We could be faced with a balkanisation of the labour force into HRM style enterprises and sweatshop-style non-union organisations.

There seems to be little place for the unions in HRM. It seeks to discourage any alternative focus of loyalty and any organisers of the inherent conflict between capital and labour which, of course, remains in the workplace. Class-conscious trade unionists instinctively perceive a conflict between trade unionism and HRM and intuitively recognise the latter for what it is: the latest souped up sophisticated version of "we are all in this together", speed-up,

productivity swindles, blue eyes management, "sell your soul to the company store". Even millions of miles away from the faintest echoes of class struggle, the bureaucratic "suits" in the corridors of Congress House recognise that in practice HRM for many is about nothing more than implementing redundancies, casualising the workforce, reducing wages and re-asserting management's right to manage. It is often associated with an intensification of work, and a deliberate strategy to derecognise off limits the influence of trade unions (TUC, *Human Resource Management — a Trade Union Response*, p3).

But, the TUC claim, this is bad HRM, counterfeit HRM, far from the full shilling. It represents a betrayal of real HRM of which the TUC bureaucrats, not management theorists or management practitioners, are the true custodians. Really true HRM is about an integrated strategic offensive to rip up workers' controls, introduce a new "enterprise culture" and establish "the world class workplace". In this, the TUC believes HRM theorists are right. Where they go wrong is in failing to see that this project is doomed unless it involves the unions in a new deeper collaboration with management:

"For too long our industrial relations system has focused on conflict resolution rather than the quest for common ground... a renewed emphasis on competitiveness and quality services (requires) a genuine attempt to build social partnership between trade unions and employers" (*ibid* p20).

Unions should no longer act as fire-fighters resolving problems for management at arms length — the role the TUC prescribed in the past. They must now act on "the common ground" as more direct agents of management in implementing the full programme of HRM. In return, employers will eschew the low-cost, cheap labour, non-union, sweatshop model in favour of a "European model where unions disseminate market values in return for high wages, quality welfare measures, a civilised working environment, a pride in product and an intermeshing with management. British capital must compete with Germany not with Taiwan."

The problem with this is that it flies in the face of the current state-employer consensus. This is masked by an intensifying hostility to unions and a developing offensive against them in the workplace as well as in the corridors of power. A partnership with the unions is far from the mind of Major or even Blair. Employers by and large do not want the unions as partners. As yet, EU legislation is far from strong enough to change this. If employers wish to introduce HRM they do not generally want the unions' help in doing so. They want rather to marginalise workplace organisation. The TUC's approval is thus essentially utopian. It also helps to disarm resistance.

HRM and social partnership must be rejected and the struggle for independent trade unionism firmly counterposed to what is, for all the funny verbiage an attempt to forge a new business unionism. ■

## Headbang with a Blairite

### Against the stream

By Sean Matgamna

MANCHESTER UNITED and Tony Blair, these are John's gods. When you rubbish Tony Blair in John's presence, the decibels soon rise and the neighbours get to know about it.

John would shoot himself before he'd vote Tory, but he hates trade unions almost as much as he hates the Tories.

For a long time John used to work on the roads, stripping and laying down tarmac, but, 50 now, he has been crippled for the better part of a decade with back trouble and hardened arteries in his legs. Years waiting for an operation, he could still joke with me about it.

"Wasn't I going along a footpath to the hospital and I saw this feeble old lady out of the corner of my eye coming up behind me. And then she sped past me!"

His wife is typical of a whole layer of the working class now, holding down three low-paying, part-time jobs.

Bearing his afflictions with stoicism and bravery, John has spent years stiffly propped up on a special chair, watching sport and current affairs on TV — one of his prize possessions is a Sky TV satellite dish. He is very well informed. Passive in front of the TV, he is saturated with the wisdom if not of the ages then of the TV pundits. He knows. He knows that Labour can't win without Blair and Blair's policies.

John, a relative of mine by marriage, is a good hearted man who is not always consistent. He backed the miners, for example — maybe on George Orwell's principle when he sided with the anarchists in Barcelona in 1937, though he had no time for them politically: "When I see the workers fighting their natural enemy, the police, I don't have to ask myself which side I'm on".

John's hostility to unions comes from both his background and work experience. The son of a small farmer from the Irish midlands — one of the surplus younger sons who, like the daughters, get nothing because the farm must be passed intact to the oldest son — he came to this country at 16 and worked for many years for non-union firms on "the lump".

John likes an argument. He argues blusteringly, in an old-fashioned and highly dramatic Irish country style, voice rising frequently in indignation and histrionic outrage. He'll loudly and aggressively mark off a stance, maintain his front and then retreat with a laugh and a grin that expresses human-being-to-human-being concern, but still challengingly, giving nothing important away, waiting for your counter 'punch'. He makes up for his immobility in vocal vehemence!

I don't like a headbanging argument but I like John, and, staying with them for a few days in February, I wrangled with him, evening after evening. Courtesy!

I gave him the February *Workers' Liberty* and he hated it. That evening when I came in he said, voice rising in the good old style "Labour? You don't support Lab-our! It's the Tor-ies you support. Ye might as well, any-

way!"

You don't criticise the party you support. And you don't disagree with the leader. John, like a lot of people in the labour movement and Labour voters outside it, is strong for loyalty. If you back a party, you back it; you praise its leaders — as John's family would praise Fianna Fail and its leaders. As John would praise and defend Manchester United. Politics and football have a lot in common.

I couldn't, it seemed, budge him. I'd say: "What about policies; what is the point of a Labour Party if it is indistinguishable from the Tories?" He would reply "That's the only way they'll win! They've got to, now! People won't vote for them otherwise." He thought it a good thing that the curbs on the unions would, if Blair can keep them, continue. "Sure, they were *ruining* the country!"

After three or four evenings of friendly and sometimes not so friendly headbanging like this I tried a sneak attack. I led him into talking about what he wanted, what he would like to see done — about the National Health Service, unemployment and so on. Naturally, he, who knows from bitter experience what has happened to the health service, wants the NHS fully restored. He wants people to have jobs, young people — his daughter is 17 — to have a proper education. In fact he wants a lot of the immediate things *Workers' Liberty* wants.

Now I said: "But John, how can you square this with your support for Blair and the other Labour Tories?" I was surprised by the answer.

"Of *course* I can! Labour will restore the health service!"

"No they won't — unless the left forces them to."

"Of *course* they will! This is Labour — the *Lab-our* Party. Blair knows what he is doing. That's what Labour is *for*!"

Blairism is all just a game, a manoeuvre, to down the Tories!

After that it was just a bit of 'hard pounding' and a mopping up operation.

Finally forced to discuss issues, he said — and this is important though I won't pursue it here — that if Labour in office proved to be like I said the Blairites want it to be, then he would have to start voting "independent".

John, of course, with his ardent desire to down the Tories, his reflexes of blind loyalty to the Labour Party as it is, whatever it is, his inattention to policy detail, and his saturation-level diet of media propaganda is not, despite his background, untypical of many Labour voters and even of some Labour Party members. Like him, vast numbers of such people have an inner vision of 'Labour', and ignore the "details".

I was reminded of my arguments with John when last week I saw an opinion poll in the *Times* reporting that 51% of those asked expect Labour to improve Welfare State services and, despite Blair's frantic signalling to the contrary, that 11% expect Labour to reduce unemployment. They have, and — despite what Blair says — will continue to have, high expectations of Labour.

Just as a very large percentage of Labour voters in a recent *Telegraph* poll backed Clause Four when the pollsters explained to them what it was, many such people can be got to back the left now, if we make them think about the issues. They will oppose and can be got to fight a 'pink Tory' Blair government.

It is out of such contradictions and the struggles they will generate that the labour movement will renew itself. ■



# The meaning of "black"

Paul Gilroy discusses the politics of anti-racism, the meaning of "black" and the black British experience\*

IT IS CRAZY that there is not one single, organised voice for anti-racism. Why is this not possible? Why can people not reach the sort of minimal agreement which is necessary?

I hope that younger people with a little bit more clarity will come forward, as they did in the past, and a new activism will emerge, rooted in local communities.

Most of all, the political language of anti-racism must be regenerated. And that is not the same thing as wheeling out the bogey of the Nazis again. We need to be able to discuss racial violence without continually reducing it to a group of young, white men who shout Sieg Heil one minute and demand the return of Winston Churchill the next.

I am not trying to say that what the Nazis do is irrelevant. If you are on the wrong end of their abuse it is *very* relevant. The thing is not to look at the issue of racism only through the Isle of Dogs.

I do not feel that white supremacy has to be defeated only by black leaders. I would be perfectly happy to see white people play leading roles in defeating white supremacy. I would not want anyone to be intimidated away from taking responsibility in that fight. This can lead to all sorts of cynicism and tokenism.

If we take up the issue in this way racism becomes our issue — just the property of black people. That would be a disaster. Racism is not our issue, any more than economics is just an issue for an idealised version of the white working class.

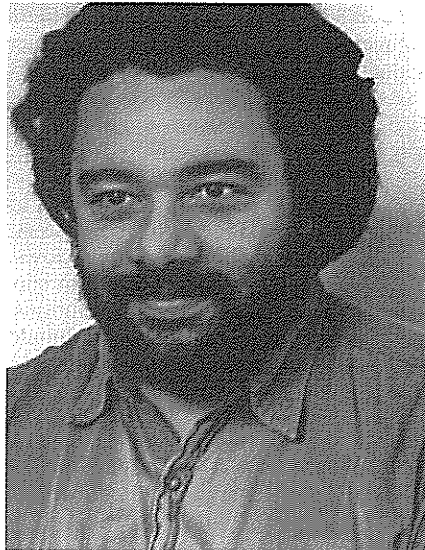
The real issues in the struggle are: what strategies do people propose? what do people do?

We have seen a "black leadership" parachute into bits of South London. The next week they turn up somewhere else — the dog barks, the caravan moves on.

These are simple matters to solve — the only strange thing is how enduring these issues are.

I WOULD not want to let the ideologues of a certain type of anti-racism off the hook. Anti-racism was made into a political ideology of a narrow type — good in all situations, for all people. During the 1980s this narrow ideology migrated into the local state — into the boroughs. There it was further shrunk and truncated and we were left with a very bureaucratic anti-racism.

That was a tragedy. And it was also a



peculiar thing to happen — given the amount of energy that existed at the time, outside the local state structures.

Activists went to the local state for funding, but by doing so they sacrificed a certain measure of their independence and political creativity. A client relationship was formed and the activists became brokers who had to deliver for the local state.

Nevertheless, I would not explain the breakdown of fragile coalitions and the rise of ethnicity just by the effect of local government. Partly it was anti-racism as an ideology that precipitated this disastrous outcome — the attempt to go back to a very economic Marxism generated and shaped the hunger for a pure truth that only ethnicity can provide. If the desire for a kind of belonging is just dismissed in favour of the dry categories of economic Marxism, people may well react and look for a more comfortable place to be.

I THINK THE idea of a commonality of black experience does work. But it only works to explain a small number of communities. It may well explain past events in Handsworth. It may help us understand how a rap singer like Apache Indian emerged. Or the situation in parts of West London.

It is in the attempt to generalise the idea that problems arise. It is not a universal recipe.

Black? What relevance does it have? Yet, if we do not find a way of addressing people in a way that notes their response to the categories in which they experience subordination, we will simply not be able to talk to them.

There has certainly been a specific black community in the past. I do not see why there can not be again.

The term "black" can be used and developed. What I am against is the idea that the black community exists in advance of our efforts to create it.

I like the notion of "black" because it is

not ethnically coded and does not have a specific cultural content. It is certainly better than these clumsy, long-winded phrases like "people of African descent."

"Black" is a transitional term which we can use with care, pending its abolition. One day all that colour-coding and symbolism will be seen to be redundant.

In order to avoid mystification we also have to be able to give weight to the differences within the category "black". So, yes, "black" is shorthand. And I am not talking about an undifferentiated sameness. I am talking about a coalition and about the power of racism to shape people. I am not suggesting that there is some sort of essence of blackness that people can plug into.

PEOPLE MIGRATE to the actually existing structures. So people join the Labour Party. Then the next thing that happens is that they say — right, let's organise as black people. It is not that I disagree with their right to do this. But it is an attempt at a short cut. The actual issue is: how do we develop a political presence which is respected? This means facing some very hard questions — to do with the way that class and economic divisions stop and fragment the possibilities of community.

The central issue is this: where the divisions of history, experience and ideology exist within the community, we have to actually admit their existence. Beyond that we should examine why some people go into a form of denial about the significance of those divisions.

In the *Guardian* in the past few days their series on the state of black Britain has continually shown how the class question filters through.

There are those who say there is no black middle class. And spokespeople for that black middle class try to mystify and confuse their relationship to the black poor. The poor are counted — at best — as clients. At worst they are objects of middle-class power.

Some of the issues being raised in black politics are surfacing in response to the dilemma of the black middle class. It is parasitic on the black poor. In effect it is employed as translators, brokers to deliver the black poor for whatever institution they work for.

Of course it would be an advance to discuss poverty *as such*. Then to discuss the way poverty disproportionately affects black people. If we do this the whole way we view the issue of racism will be changed.

In addition to all other factors racism is an issue. But both matters must be considered. Just discussing racism will not address or solve the other issues. ■

\* Paul Gilroy talked to Mark Osborn. He lectures in sociology at Goldsmith's College, south London. His most recent books include *Small Acts* and the *Black Atlantic*.

# The "IS-SWP tradition" 3

## The experience of the left

THE SWP is, despite everything, the biggest self-styled revolutionary Marxist organisation in Britain today. More than that: there are a lot of ex-members of the SWP (called IS before 1977) around.

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. 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.

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.

To help traumatised ex-members of the IS-SWP get their political bearings and to establish before younger readers its history, we publish the symposium that follows. There will be other contributions in subsequent issues. We invite contributions. The discussion is completely free. Should representatives of the SWP wish to participate, they will be welcome.

Some of those who participate in this symposium 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.

## When IS turned to the workers

By Vic Collard\*

I WAS a member of IS between about 1969 or '70 and 1975. Before and during that period, I was an active member of the AEU, a shop steward at Lucas and on the Birmingham East (AEU) District Committee. So when I joined the organisation I came from a background of some experience within the trade union movement.

Prior to joining IS my political sympathies lay with the Labour Party, but I had also come into contact with the Communist Party through the AEU Broad Left — which was dominated by the CP. I'd been to some CP meetings and worked with them quite closely within the union. The reason why I never joined them may seem frivolous but bear in mind that I was in my twenties at the time: they struck me as an utterly humourless bunch of people. Some of them were great people but the party itself was repressive and sectarian and utterly humourless. And, of course, I had some difficulty with their slavish support for the Soviet Union and the East European states and things like their openly chauvinist line on the Common Market. But, to be honest, those weren't the things that stopped me joining: the main reason was their lack of any humour — or, indeed, humanity.

At this time, also, the CP were turning

their backs on factory branches and jettisoning a working-class-based strategy in favour of an electoral strategy — a disastrous mistake, in my view.

That experience of the CP is important in understanding why the IS was so attractive to people like me. IS was the only other left group that seemed to be taking the trade union struggle seriously but they were in stark contrast to the CP in almost every respect.

I came across IS because of productivity bargaining. A work colleague of mine, Jeff Johnson, was very concerned about productivity bargaining and its impact on shop-floor power and organisation. Jeff and I saw productivity bargaining as a fundamental shift of power from the shop-floor to management. But we didn't know how to fight it. So we did a bit of digging — asking everyone, making enquiries everywhere. As a result we went to a meeting at which Bert Ramelson [the CP's industrial organiser] was speaking. One of us asked a question about productivity bargaining and Ramelson had no answer. We got nowhere. Immediately after the meeting, we happened to bump into Arthur Harper, the convenor of Leyland Tractors and Transmissions plant, and with him was Roger Rosewell, who I knew by reputation as a trade union negotiator. So we retired to a pub and had a chat. I said how disappointed we'd been with Ramelson, and Rosewell said: "I've done some work on productivity bargain-

ing." That's how it all started for me.

Jeff and I joined IS — we were the only shop stewards in the organisation in Birmingham at that time. One result was that IS produced the book *The Employers' Offensive: Productivity Deals and How to Fight Them*. That was very successful. We were flogging it round the union branches and the factories and people snapped it up. The left in general had no strategy for dealing with productivity deals: there was the simplistic approach of having nothing to do with them, which wasn't a viable option, or — more dangerously — trying to price them out. Once you started talking about the price, you were on a slippery slope. So this was a book that outlined a real strategy: how to negotiate, how to withdraw the teeth, etc. It provided practical advice. So that's how I initially became involved with IS.

But, also, I wanted more general political debate and discussion — something that had been noticeably absent in the CP as far as I had observed. In this respect as well IS was very, very impressive. For the first time I met people I could actually talk to about ideas. As a result I began to articulate and rationalise my thoughts. I'd been groping towards an alternative vision of how society should operate — trying to envisage something different from capitalism that would be workable. I'd read Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man: Ideology of an Industrial Society* which gave me an inkling of a way forward. But I was half-baked. In IS I began to see things much more clearly. It was a fantastic experience, I learned an enormous amount. It keeps me sane today.

After two or three years the organisation began to attract a significant number of workers. In one year in the early '70s IS doubled its membership and I would say that the calibre of people we were attracting was pretty high: it wasn't just young workers but also experienced shop stewards and people with deep roots in the trade union movement. These people had a lot to offer and in that respect the class character of the organisation began to change. It was all very exciting.

Then, around 1973, things began to go off the rails. I got the distinct impression that the leadership became impatient. I remember thinking: what Cliff and Co. don't seem to understand is that the reason we're doing so well is because of the very long, hard and patient work we're doing. All of a sudden, things had to move fast. I thought: for God's sake, the leadership are going to destroy all the work that we've put in. If you want the honest truth, I think the reason was that the revolutionary left in Britain was (and is) dominated by vanguardists (like *Workers' Liberty*, for example). I'd really believed that IS was something different. For instance, Cliff's book [*The Employers' Offensive*] was written after he'd travelled around the country talking and listening to shop stewards. Cliff was listening then: but he

stopped. The reason, in the view of people like me at the time, was that the leadership were flushed with success but they couldn't face the long haul.

Previously, Cliff had criticised other revolutionary organisations for their incautious approach. He was particularly scathing about demands for a general strike tomorrow, if not today. When the Socialist Labour League became the Workers' Revolutionary Party, he said at a meeting: "They call themselves a party. I tell you something: I can walk into a tailor's shop and buy myself a field marshal's uniform, but it doesn't give me an army!" And yet, within a couple of years, what had you got? The SWP!

Now, the old caution — modesty, in a sense — had impressed me. These people had seemed serious and level-headed, in contrast to the pretentiousness and posturing of most of the rest of the "revolutionary" left. Of course, we didn't *want* to have to move slowly, but we recognised that, for all the industrial militancy, conditions in Britain at that time were not revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary, in the Trotskyist sense of the term. It was a serious, coldly realistic approach.

A crucial episode in the degeneration of IS was the crisis within the engineering fraction in 1974. We had quite a strong group of engineers in IS by then and Birmingham was the strongest branch. We worked through the CP-dominated Broad Left in the AEU, both locally and nationally. That was agreed IS policy. What happened was that the national Broad Left put forward a candidate for the position of National Organiser: Phil Higgs, the convenor of Rolls-Royce. Higgs was a hard-line Stalinist, but that wasn't the issue. The AEU was then in the process of a bitter left versus right battle and Higgs was clearly the most credible "left" candidate on offer. All the IS members of the Birmingham Broad Left put our names on his election address. Then we discovered that the IS leadership wanted us to put forward our own candidate — *after* we'd committed ourselves to supporting Higgs! They thought they could make the Great Leap Forward by splitting the left vote in the AEU!

There was enormous opposition to this move and the leadership organised a conference at the Holdsworth Hall in Manchester to which all members of the engineering fraction were invited. We hired a coach to go up there and the hall was packed. I moved the motion opposing standing a candidate and a leadership speaker put the other point of view. We won by an overwhelming majority so we thought the matter was settled once and for all. But was it, hell!

At the IS National Conference a special meeting of those delegates who were also members of the engineering fraction was held and the leadership got them to reverse the decision. We were outraged. This was Cliff's version of democratic centralism in action: the democracy bit is OK as long as the leadership gets its way but if not, then the centralism comes into play. So when the rank and file membership voted against standing a candidate, then Cliff organised a

vastly smaller number of engineers who were delegates to the National Conference to reverse the decision — using the thoroughly spurious argument that "National Conference is the supreme decision-making body of the organisation"! To this day, I'm not sure about the formal, constitutional correctness or otherwise of this ploy: but what I do know is that it was a thoroughly cynical manoeuvre that made a mockery of IS's pretences of "listening to the workers."

What happened next was that the vast majority of the engineering fraction made it quite clear that we would not be bound by that decision. So we had a crisis centred upon the most important area of the organisation's industrial work, the engineering fraction. The leadership sent Steve Jeffries to visit us and he made some very threatening noises about what would happen if we didn't fall into line. To this day it both amuses me and angers me when *Socialist Worker* goes on about lack of democracy within the Labour Party: Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair are mere amateurs at the game of dealing with dissidents when you've had experience of the likes of Cliff and Jeffries!

Jeffries' first port of call was Mick Rice, then a Lucas shop steward and regarded as the IS's leading figure in the Birmingham

*"People who were not members of the engineering fraction resigned because the issue came to symbolise the whole new dictatorial, centralised method of operating."*

AEU Broad Left. We understood that after visiting Rice, Jeffries was intending to call at all our factories and expel us on the spot. So we had a meeting and I moved a resolution that any disciplinary action taken against Rice or any one of us would be regarded as applying to all of us: the "I am Spartacus" principle. It was passed unanimously.

So Steve Jeffries went round to people's homes and factories. I'm told he expelled someone in a pub! Eventually, we were all either expelled or resigned in protest. This didn't just happen in Birmingham, but nationally. I'm not sure whether such dramatic methods were used elsewhere, but, certainly, people who were not members of the engineering fraction resigned because the issue had come to symbolise the whole new dictatorial, centralised method of operating. We were never really an organised national opposition, but people like John Palmer, Jim Higgins and Roger Protz identified with us, and because they were national IS leaders, that gave our opposition a national resonance. We became the focus of a general feeling of discontent with Cliff's increasingly bureaucratic *modus operandi*.

Jim Higgins, the editor of *Socialist*

*Worker*, was sacked on the spot for no real reason. I went to the National Committee, although I wasn't a member, to protest. Roger Rosewell and Roger Protz were also up for expulsion because they had both applied for full-time positions within the NUJ without consulting the organisation. But Higgins had done no such thing. What Higgins and Protz (not so much Rosewell — and I say that, although I lay myself open to accusations of wanting to disown Rosewell with the benefit of hindsight) represented was the democratic, cautious, working-class tradition of the "old" IS.

We were not "anything goes" democrats or "pure" rank and filists or anarchists. We understood the need for constitutional norms and discipline. The Left Opposition (around Jo Quigley and Dave Hughes, influenced by *Workers' Fight* [the former Trotskyist Tendency of IS, expelled in December 1971]) was destructive. Something had to be done about them, although I wouldn't necessarily support the precise way they were booted out. But, in IS by 1975, the general mood (of the leadership and their supporters) had turned against anyone who didn't fall into line. The engineers were the focal point, but a lot of other people expressed similar views and were crucified.

We never had a formal faction. Palmer, Higgins, Duncan Hallas and myself had a meeting in London. Hallas claimed to be very sympathetic to us but he stayed with the leadership — he had his own personal reasons which were very sad and I don't want to go into them here.

After the expulsions and resignations, a fairly loose organisation emerged, calling itself the "Workers' League." I didn't join, although I wrote for their paper. By now I was very demoralised and I'd come to the conclusion that the traditions of Trotskyism were based on defeat and were going to be continually defeated. The prospect of success was too terrifying for someone like Cliff. Don't get me wrong: of course, Cliff wanted "success" in the sense of building a relatively large group and I've no doubt that, in the abstract, he still wants "success" in the sense of a workers' revolution. But people like him and Healy and Grant preferred a highly centralised, small group to the risks of a large influence in the class that might be difficult to control. The Trotskyist tradition is, I repeat, one of defeat. Possibly that's not fair to Leon Trotsky himself (Marx once said: "I am not a Marxist" when faced with the arid sectarians who used his name) but it's certainly true of the mainstream Healy/Grant/Cliff tradition of British "Trotskyism."

I'll give an example: when I was re-elected as a shop steward on to the District Committee, I was selling *Socialist Worker* openly, and widely known to be an IS member. And yet, by 1975, IS leadership supporters would ask "on what platform did he stand?", as though there must be something suspect about an open revolutionary winning a vote of the general working-class membership of a union. It was the same thing when the IS launched a genuine rank and file paper in response

to a dock strike — I can't now remember where — in conjunction with the shop stewards, and it was a resounding success. Both the left faction and the Cliffites complained that the paper didn't carry any explanation of the nature of the state in capitalist society! I mean, what that says to me is that "revolutionaries" don't believe, fundamentally, that their ideas can win mass working-class support. And anything that seems to suggest the contrary is to be viewed with suspicion if not alarm.

Central to IS's success in the early '70s was the perception that the leadership *listened* to workers and their concerns. I don't doubt that at local level this was true and I've already described how stimulating that experience was for me as a new recruit in 1970 or thereabouts. But, with the benefit of hindsight, I now realise that a lot of that "listening to the workers" was highly sophisticated manipulation. In 1969 and '70 Cliff was going round listening to workers — he had no choice! But once we'd recruited a small but significant working-class base, Cliff saw no need to listen any more. He felt confident enough to show his true colours. Another example: Steve Jeffries said to me: "You've got to realise, we may not always operate through the trade unions." I thought at the time: A) What an absurd idea in a modern, industrialised society. Does he seriously believe that trade unions will become outmoded before the creation of socialism — *or even afterwards?* B) How cynical! People like me take trade unionism seriously and the IS claims to agree. Now, privately, you're telling me that the organisation is only playing with struggle in the unions: if so, why not say so openly, and see how that affects industrial recruitment!

Anyway, the engineering fraction and the people we'd gathered around us were all expelled or driven to resigning. The leadership predicted that we'd all disappear into trade union routinism or join the CP. But I'm proud to say that for long afterwards (in fact, until their own demise) the CP continued to treat us with the utmost suspicion. We may have broken with Cliff's version of "Trotskyism" but the CP still regarded us as "Trots", which is fine by me: I'm very proud of that, actually.

What are the lessons to be drawn from this experience of IS in the early '70s? Firstly, that here was a far-left organisation that appeared to be serious about building in the working class — which means, first and foremost, in the unions. As part of this process, the organisation said "we'll listen to rank and file militants, as well as preaching at them", which clearly set IS apart from the SLL and the IMG, for instance. In fact, that approach represented a fundamental break with the "Trotskyist" tradition of Healy and Grant. What wasn't apparent at the time was that Cliff was very much a part of that same tradition, but shrewd enough to conceal it for the time being. When they needed a working-class base Cliff and the leadership put on their "libertarian" facade (sometimes dressed up as "Luxemburgism") but, when the chips were down, they reverted to form, and a crude version of

*What Is To Be Done?* Leninism emerged. We were conned, in other words.

But there was, at one point, some real democracy imposed from below. Cliff couldn't stop that entirely. For instance, there was a disastrous experience during a strike at Chrysler when all the IS stewards were victimised, including Roger Kline. There was a big IS meeting in Manchester to discuss the lessons of this disaster and Cliff was destroyed in front of us all by a rank and file member, Roger Griffiths [an AEU shop steward at Lucas]. Cliff was arguing that IS members shouldn't be on District Committees of the AEU because that would inevitably draw them into being party to sell-out deals, as at Chrysler. Later on, of course, this ultra-left line developed into the SWP orthodoxy that members shouldn't even be shop stewards — the "pure" rank and file position! Roger came back at Cliff and said: "Do you realise that our rank and file industrial members need a safety net? They can't operate in isolation from the structures of the union as a whole. Our fault at Chrysler wasn't that we had a few members on the District Committee, but that we didn't *control* it. Left wingers — IS members — can *prevent* sell-outs by being on District Committees!" Cliff had no answer.

Jumping forward to the SWP of today: I've walked down the ramp in New Street [Birmingham] and noticed that the people selling *Socialist Worker* are getting younger and younger. There's nothing wrong with that in itself. Of course, you need a balance between youth and experience. I've already said that when I first joined IS the bulk of the members were young, white-collar workers or students — and none the worse for that. They were prepared to listen and debate ideas. Above all, they were prepared to get involved in the industrial struggle. The students flogged their guts out getting to grips with what must have been the utterly boring detail of things like productivity deals so that they could talk to workers on the factory gates as they sold the paper. You've got to admire people who were prepared to commit themselves like that, even if they were young and middle-class.

But these days the SWP doesn't seem to be part of the labour movement at all, and their young people don't seem to even know what the labour movement is. After we'd left, I was reliably informed that their members were instructed not to even speak to any of us. The people who were left weren't up to debating or arguing with us, and their new members had to be kept in ignorance of our existence — as though we'd never existed: true Stalinism.

The SWP, I understand, claim 8 or 9 thousand members now, but that's another lie. They never told the truth about membership in my day and their present claims are sheer lies. What you have now is a reversion to Healy/Grant style "party-building" with no regard to real influence in the class or the credibility you have amongst serious trade union militants. The SWP "tradition", in short, has fallen into the trap of all previous British "Trotskyist" sects. An example: after the invasion of Hungary, many CPers (the

best) moved towards the SLL. People like Peter Fryer and Brian Behan joined the SLL. They thought it represented a way forward — non-Stalinist but still left-wing. A more democratic, rank and file-orientated version of Leninism. The SLL proved to be a dead-end, and so did IS. It's the age-old struggle between the worker-militants who value democracy and practical experience, against the "professional revolutionaries" like Healy and Cliff who think they know best for the class. For a brief period, in the early '70s, IS seemed to be breaking away from that. But Cliff was determined to keep the old guard in control: when the workers threatened to take over, he re-asserted the control of the elite. I was, personally, tremendously bitter about this. I'd believed that IS was something different and I felt betrayed.

Partly it was due to Trotskyism's lack of roots in the working-class movement.

We were sometimes accused of "work-erism" and "economism" but I would emphatically deny those charges. For instance, we (the working-class members) had an extremely tough time on the Irish question, especially after the Birmingham pub bombings of 1974. I told the IS National Conference that *Socialist Worker* was considered in the factories to be an "IRA paper" and it was. But our working-class members in the factories stood their ground, and paid a considerable price in terms of loss of recruits, general unpopularity and, sometimes, physical assaults. Our lives would have been a lot easier if we *had* been soft on such issues. It was the same with other "difficult" issues. On women's rights: in one Birmingham factory the stewards had tried to stop a woman becoming a tool-setter, and we mobilised around that. We argued and fought around immigration controls. It's an absolute lie that we weren't interested in these questions, or that we deliberately avoided them. Sometimes a raw worker would come along to an IS meeting and he'd say: "I hate Dick Etheridge [the CP convenor at British Leyland, Longbridge]" and the IS leadership people would say: "He must be a great bloke, he hates Dick Etheridge." But it would turn out that this rank and file worker was a complete racist, and it would be us who'd point this out, and we'd say "no way can this guy be a member of IS." If anything, it was Cliff and the leadership who took an uncritical attitude towards the backwardness of raw workers prior to 1975.

State capitalism and the permanent arms economy theories were obviously important to us, but I have to be honest and say that very few — if any — workers joined IS at that time *because* of those theories. Most of us were broadly anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist and the state-capitalist theory of the USSR and Eastern Europe seemed to fit the bill, putting the working class at the centre of the struggle for socialism. The CP's view that Russia and Eastern Europe were "socialist" was plainly nonsense. And the orthodox "Trotskyist" analysis of these states as "deformed" or "degenerated workers' states" was scarcely any better. We'd never heard of Shachtman's theory of bureaucratic collectivism, although I now understand



that Cliff's theory is largely based upon that. If we'd heard about it, we'd certainly have been very interested. We were keen on that sort of thing — theory — despite all the sneers you hear now about us having been a bunch of "workerists."

In summary, I believe that in the years between 1970 and 1975 there was a real attempt to build a new, unique type of revolutionary organisation, based upon the working class. Cliff's background and knowledge obviously helped us up to a point but,

in the end, his commitment to an orthodox "Trotskyist" conception of the party scuppered our efforts. I truly believe that Cliff had the chance to break out of the far-left ghetto, and he blew it: he blew it because of his background and training. I still believe that the working class can make the revolution in Britain, but they'll need a very different sort of organisation from that envisaged by Cliff. Serious revolutionaries need to study the history of IS in the early '70s and draw the necessary conclusions. ■

## Comrades were "history's instruments"

By James D Young\*

IN YOUR editorial introduction to the contributions by Jim Higgins, Mike McGrath and James D. Young, you stress that "some of those who participate in this symposium have moved a long way from the politics they had in IS/SWP."

To set the record straight, I want to stress that I did not belong to IS or the SWP (as distinct from the older Socialist Review Group). Furthermore, I do not recall Jim Higgins attending any meetings before 1960 by which time I was on my way out with my friends David Prynn, Donna and Seymour Pappert and Mike Maddison. In 1957 I had a blazing row with Cliff, who, in his anxiety to keep a Group intact at any price, expressed his determination to tolerate Sidney Bidwell's 'racism.' Moreover, I, for one, have not at all 'moved a long way' from my socialist politics of the 1940s and 1950s. However, I am willing to admit that, having steeped myself in the history of the Second International, I feel myself spiritually closer to the ultra-Left of the admirable Second than to the Third International.

For a spell, I was a part of the close family group of Cliff and Kidron. I therefore remember my sense of moral revulsion when Cliff told me in 1957 or 1958 that he was lecturing to civil servants and army officers on 'communism in Eastern Europe' at the establishment's Foreign Office in his 'Neither Washington nor Moscow' guise as Yagel Gluckstein. He even showed me the letter of invitation. Moreover, he always boasted of his contacts in Israel and the money he got from South Africa. What was from my viewpoint fundamentally anti-socialist was that he used his money to bully and control the members of the Socialist Review Group. But because I knew too much, he made sure in later years that my books would be ignored in the publications of the IS/SWP. But I still feel a sense of moral outrage against Cliff and Kidron who shamelessly used comrades as 'history's instruments' without concern for the human consequences. I also recall Cliff and his wife visiting me in my home town

of Grangemouth in 1955. Although my father was in his last phase of work as a docker, Cliff sat at my father's table for three or four days without expressing a word of thanks for the hospitality he had been given. And he most certainly was not interested in my father's experiences as a docker and dignified, if militant, trade unionist. He did not exchange a word with him.

Comrades who remember me from the old Socialist Review Group days say that I was 'an angry young man'. As I had come out of a working-class family with deep roots in the Scottish labour movement, I had much to be angry about. My anger at what contemporary capitalism is doing to ordinary folk is now much colder and more calculating. My anger is, however, no less strong than it was in my youth; and it is better informed and I hope more dangerous to the status quo.

The real tragedy of the 1990s is that there is no recognition on the Marxist Left of what was lost after 1917 — for example, the noble libertarian and democratic traditions of the First and Second Internationals culminating in, I suppose, the murder of Leon Trotsky in 1940. As a historian of socialist and working-class movements, it seems to me that there are many parallels between 1940 and today. When Victor Serge paid his tribute to 'the Old Man', he identified problems that have re-emerged since the collapse of 'communism' in Russia and Eastern Europe: "As I write these lines, as names and faces crowd in on me, it occurs to me that this kind of man had to be extirpated, his whole tradition and generation, before the level of our time could be sufficiently lowered. Men like Trotsky suggest much too uncomfortably the human possibilities of the future to be allowed to survive in a time of sloth and reaction."

This takes us back into the world of Tony Cliff and Gerry Healy — for they, too, share a heavy responsibility for the weakness of the democratic militant Left at a time when we should be taking *giant* steps forward. By regarding working people — and their own cadres — as 'history's instruments' to be manipulated and cast aside by all-powerful leaders, Cliff, Healy and Grant have made a formidable contribution to allowing the right-

wing Labour 'leaders' to get away with blue murder under an increasingly blue rhetoric.

Therefore I am at one with Sean Matgamna and *Workers' Liberty* in their efforts to get socialism back on the agenda. But I have great reservations and objections to Sean's ideas in his article 'The class struggle is the decisive thing.' Of course, the defence of the Welfare State is crucial and critical; but Sean's critique of *Critique*, *Red Pepper* and (why not the pseudo-Marxist) *New Statesman* ignores the fact that they fulfil a human need. Moreover, in a more radical period of history than our own, all of these Marxist and non-Marxist magazines could play a vital role in reflecting the coming of what William Morris called 'the great change.' As Trotsky argued in the preface to his *History of the Russian Revolution*: "For decades the oppositional criticism is nothing more than a safety valve for mass dissatisfaction, a condition of the stability of the social structure. Such in principle, for example, was the significance of the Social-Democratic criticism." Our dilemma is that we are living through a gigantic counter-revolution in which the folk around magazines like *Critique* and *Workers' Liberty* do not even grasp the distinction between bourgeois nationalism and the need to defend the nationality of small oppressed nations. Hence your quite disgraceful, ignorant and witch-hunting 'review' of my biography of *John Maclean: Clydeside Socialist* (Clydeside Press, 1992).

Furthermore, what really worries me about Sean's article is the apparent anti-intellectualism. Was Marx's *Capital* a piece of academic work in the pejorative sense of that word? Or Peter Fryer's ongoing work on the origins of the racism of Marx and Engels? The major political criticism to be levelled at groups like the counterfeit 'academic' *Critique* and the University Institutes for the study of Marxism and Socialism is (1) that they encourage 'Marxist' careerism at the same time as (2) they create illusions about isolated and little communities of 'socialism' being able to survive in imperialist *Brit* universities increasingly devoted to the anti-humanist philosophy of 'free market forces.'

But there is still an urgent need for a socialist counter-culture rooted in working-class communities. There must also be the supportive space in which individuals can contribute to the battle of ideas by undertaking teaching, research and writing. At the moment the Brits' universities are suspect as centres of objective studies of capitalism in decline; and the real criticism of magazines like *Critique* is that they provide our 'free' educational institutions with a 'liberal' mask.

The tragedy of the moment is that the forces of sloth and reaction have reduced the still declining constituency of the Left to impotence. Despite the Cliffs, Healys and Grants, socialism will always depend on learning, imagination and intellect, not brute force. By despising and rubbishising the limited democracy of the past, the 'Left' have played a major role in allowing the counter-revolution that threatens to gobble up democratic education and the humanistic Welfare State. ■

\*James D Young, member of the Socialist Review Group in the 1950s, is a writer active in Scottish socialist politics

# Break with police state "unions"!

THE OFFICIAL British labour movement does not seem to want to know about or concern itself with the conditions of the working class in the Stalinist states, or with their struggles for basic liberties and the right to form trade unions for self-defence against the bureaucratic state. From Bill Sirs [Iron and Steel Confederation leader] on the right, who openly defended his 'colleagues', the strike-breaking Polish 'trade union' leaders, during the strikes, [of Aug 1980] to Alex Kitson [TGWU] and Mick McGahey [NUM] on the left, large sections of the British labour movement indulge in the pretence that the official 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states are real working-class organisations — when in fact they are part of a police-state 'Labour Front' apparatus for controlling and policing the working class and for preventing real trade unions and an independent working-class movement developing.

It is not just that many bureaucrats of our trade unions feel an impulse of solidarity for and have a real feeling of fellowship with the ruling Stalinist bureaucrats — though they obviously do. Nor just that many left wing officials are of a generally Stalinist persuasion — as are Kitson and McGahey.

Most importantly, the reason why they get away with it is that many rank and file militants, too, don't want to come out against the 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states and against the British trade union leaders who aid those police-state 'unions'. Many who consider themselves anti-Stalinist revolutionaries take the same view.

They would feel uncomfortable at having to say on this question something like what Margaret Thatcher and [ultra-right elect EPTU leader] Frank Chapple say. This is understandable, but it is a really trivial consideration in a situation where the workers of the Stalinist states need our moral and practical support. We have a duty as basic as not crossing a picket line to give it to them.

As people who believe, with Marx and Engels, that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself, we would be obliged to support *any* independent workers' movement against the police state even if we considered its politics to be seriously mistaken and wrong.

That a real labour movement should exist is much more important than any social transformations achieved apart from or against the working class.

Some in the labour movement believe that contact with the 'institutions' of the states in the Stalinist bloc is a force for peace ('peaceful coexistence') and against war. If that view encourages the pretence (and the facts are too well known today to make such an attitude other than a pretence) that the Stalinist states are not savagely oppressive; if it leads to ignoring the fact that the 'trade unions' there (and most other social institutions as well) have nothing in common with things of the same name in Britain; if it blinds us to the fact that they are 'anti-unions' and

'counter-unions' rather than working-class organisations — then it amounts to a *craven siding with the oppressors against the oppressed in those states*.

Yet other militants believe that socialists should refrain from stark condemnation and denunciation of the Stalinist regimes because they are relatively progressive and/or because socialists should defend the system of state-owned property in those states against any attempts by NATO to restore private ownership of the means of production.

Many who do know about Stalinism, who are influenced by Trotsky, and who even commit themselves vaguely and abstractly to the working-class struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy recoil from the demand that the British workers' movement should have no dealings with the Stalinist labour fronts. For example, *Socialist Challenge*\*, which, in general, favours self-governing trade unions in the Stalinist states. Something fundamental [is] involved: the attitude we try to get our own labour movement to take to the struggle of our class in the Stalinist states, and to their oppressors. To fudge that class issue *is to do the opposite of the work of Trotskyists* — which is to fight for international working-class solidarity with the real labour movements in the Stalinist states, or with their pioneers, like Klebanov\*\*.

*"The choice is not confined to either Thatcher and Reagan or Brezhnev and Honecker: there is also the possibility of a working-class socialist democracy."*

To fear to call the Stalinists what they are for fear of chiming in with the reactionaries, and to thus endorse the links our own scabbing bureaucrats maintain with the Stalinist 'unions', is to adopt the stance of those 'Friends of the Soviet Union' who called Trotsky a reactionary for speaking out in the '30s.

This amounts to playing Pontius Pilate with the affairs of our own class in the Stalinist states.

Trotsky would turn in his grave at the notion that attitudes such as those of *Socialist Challenge* have anything to do with the politics he fought and died for. Trotsky argued that the USSR was a 'degenerated workers' state' which should be defended against the military onslaughts of imperialism. So does *Workers' Action*. But that does not mean that we regard the USSR (or the other Stalinist states) under the bureaucracy as 'better'. Far from it. The bureaucratic USSR is only to be defended insofar as it is a

product of the struggle against capitalism, and *against* being conquered by imperialism — not 'for itself'. In most respects it is the opposite of the ideal socialists strive for.

Its collectivism has more in common with the caricature evoked by enemies of socialism like Von Hayek than with what socialists want to achieve.

Trotsky took sides — and tried to get the international labour movement, whatever its given political coloration at that moment, to take sides — squarely with the workers of the USSR (and with the oppressed nations within the USSR, like the Ukrainians) against the totalitarian regime.

He never allowed the need to distance himself from the imperialist and pro-imperialist critics of the USSR to determine what he said. *The Russian reality and the duty to tell the truth to the labour movement did that*.

A major psychological reason why there is reluctance to call things like the Russian 'trade unions' by their proper names is probably the fear of thereby praising by implication the regime which our movement exists to fight — that of 'liberal' capitalism.

*But the choice is not confined to either Thatcher and Reagan or Brezhnev and Honecker: there is also the possibility of a working-class socialist democracy.*

In fact, irreconcilable working-class and socialist opposition to our main enemy at home cannot be stable or politically serious if it is based on anything other than a clear and independent working-class view of the world, and on the experience of all the struggles of the working class throughout the world.

Therefore we must not block out of our consciousness a real awareness of what our class faces under the Stalinist regimes. We must not mollify or console ourselves with half-conscious assumptions that the totalitarian Stalinist regimes are really not so bad, are really rather benevolent and paternalistic to those they deprive of civil rights and personal and group autonomy, and are not really dripping with the blood of workers who have dared to stand out against them.

They do really drip with workers' blood.

We must actively support the workers in Russia and the other Stalinist states, and that means opposing their oppressors in every way we can.

It means rousing the anger, the hatred and the active hostility of the labour movement against them.

It is, to repeat, as basic as not crossing a picket line. And as basic as the attitude one takes to those who do.

**By John O'Mahony. Extracts from *Workers' Action* 182, March 1981**

\* *Socialist Challenge* was a predecessor of *Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Action*; *Workers' Action* was a predecessor of *Workers' Liberty*.

\*\* Klebanov organised an independent miners' union in the Ukraine. For this he was locked up in an asylum by the authorities for many years.

# Max Shachtman and his left

Barry Finger reviews "Max Shachtman and his left: a socialist's odyssey through the 'American Century'", Peter Drucker, Humanities Press, 1994.

IN THE LATE 1960s, the New York branch of the International Socialists, the direct political descendant and heir apparent to the Third Camp traditions of the Workers' Party (1940-49) and Independent Socialist League (1949-58), whose main leader had been Max Shachtman, issued an indignant denial to the "crude distortions and outright misrepresentations" of the Cannonite Young Socialist Alliance. Foremost among the misconceptions which the IS was at pains to dispel was the characterisation of the IS as "Shachtmanite":

"A class line is drawn," they charged, "between us and the Shachtmanites. A few concrete examples: unlike the Shachtmanites, our tendency (a) opposed the Bay of Pigs invasion (or Cuba, by the US-backed rightwingers, 1961); (b) calls for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam and has done so for at least five years; (c) supported the black community in the New York City teachers' strike; (d) supports rank-and-file struggles in the trade unions; (e) defends the new movements against the repression. If our paper claimed that Jim Cannon was a Stalinist because he was once in the same Comintern as Stalin, you would be torn between outrage and amusement. To link our tendency politically to the Shachtmanites is to make the same kind of amalgam, and we are not amused."

Ironically, while repudiating Shachtman, without whose previous 30 year legacy there would quite simply have been no IS, the organisation's common revolutionary ancestry with the Cannonites — an ancestry long stripped of any operative significance or meaningful contemporary political reference — was emphatically, even enthusiastically, reaffirmed.

Yet, in a very real sense this, paradox speaks volumes to the tragic renegacy of Shachtman in the final phase of his life, from the late 1950s — when he successfully agitated to dissolve his organisation into the long moribund Socialist Party — to his death in 1972. Of the inner political life of this later Shachtman, we know — paradoxically — virtually nothing. His thought processes were no longer committed to paper; his opinions were confined only to an inner-circle. Writer's block was the psychological price the later Shachtman paid for the repudiation of a lifetime of revolutionary commitment. Yet it is precisely this commitment, a contribu-

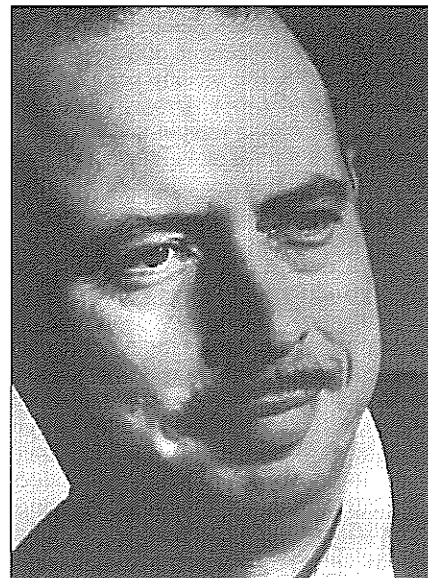
tion virtually without parallel within his generation, that merits this long overdue evaluation of this singular personality and the extraordinary movement which he nourished.

It is the political significance of this other Shachtman which Peter Drucker recognises and to whom he pays a critical, yet well-deserved tribute.

Shachtman entered the socialist movement in 1921 at the age of 17, his formative experiences decisively shaped by the Russian Revolution, whose ramified course and fate virtually engulfed all political events for the ensuing half-century and more. In the mid-20s he became an editor of the *Young Worker*, a frequent contributor to the *Daily Worker* and the *Liberator*, was an alternate to the Central Committee of the CP and one of its delegates to the 1925 and '27 Conferences of the Third International. Seven years after entering the ranks of the movement, Shachtman was expelled — branded a Trotskyist for having circulated Trotsky's suppressed, *The Third International After Lenin*, smuggled out of Russia by Cannon. Within the next 15 years, Shachtman was to play a central role in affiliating over twenty-five national sections to the Fourth International and was to forge its theoretical journal, *The New Internationalist*, into a powerful weapon of political analysis and agitation. He tirelessly translated, edited and inscribed forewords to dozens of Trotsky's works and was ultimately to remain literary executor of the Old Man's estate, despite having broken from the Cannonites.

What earned Shachtman his place in the history of revolutionary ideas? To defend the 1917 socialist experiment in revolutionary democracy, (without either deifying its leaders or justifying its every deed) and to salvage its heritage and inspiration from the corruption of Stalinism, Shachtman and his comrades were driven to continuously extend their analysis beyond the rapidly ossifying confines of "orthodox" Trotskyism. Stalinism, they argued, was not merely a corrupt outgrowth of an otherwise intact workers' state, but a constitutive component of a new counter-revolutionary social system built over the gravesite of the Russian revolution. This "bureaucratic collectivism" was the result of the autonomisation of state power, the transformation of the state bureaucracy into an independent and uncontrolled class formation. They, like the classical ruling classes of Oriental Despotism, exercised control over the means of production not by right of private property, but collectively through their amassing of an unchallengeable state monopoly over the levers of economic, political and social power.

The Workers' Party was guided by



Max Shachtman

Lenin's dictum that "whoever wants to approach socialism by any means other than political democracy will inevitably arrive at absurd and reactionary conclusions." The inseparability of socialism and democracy was the distinctive hallmark of independent socialism. The WP-ISL viewed the world of their day as a three cornered struggle between two ruling classes — capitalist and bureaucratic collectivist — which continuously threatened humanity with extinction, and a third camp, consisting of the working class and the oppressed masses who are its natural allies. The power of this latent revolutionary-democratic movement from below lies as yet dormant until, roused by the defence of its own vital interests, it is driven into irreconcilable opposition to the two ruling classes.

Whatever their self-conception, either as a mass party in formation or as a ginger-group at the left wing of the labour, civil rights and peace movements, the Shachtmanites not only refused to extend an "unconditional defence of the Soviet Union", but sharpened and honed their analysis in revolutionary opposition to all sides during World War II; they were the only socialist grouping in America to have done so. They mercilessly exposed the war against fascism as a vehicle that would advance totalitarianism on a world scale, leaving the world to be policed by the new victors on an imperialist basis while enfeebling and corrupting the workers' organisations in the bourgeois democracies through their intensified self-negation as tools useful to any social purpose beyond the pursuit of victory.

While the SWPers were hunkering down to "preserve the cadre" by keeping quiet in the unions and elsewhere, the WP used

its opposition to both war camps to break into heavy industry, now numbering in its ranks virtually 80% of the WP's membership. Unencumbered by loyalties, residual or otherwise, to any ruling class, the WP fought to revoke the wartime no-strike pledge, to remove labour from the War Labor Board, to push for equal pay and equal work against Jim Crow racism, both in industry and in the military, and for the immediate establishment of a US Labour Party. By 1943, the weekly paper of the Shachtmanites, *Labor Action*, carried its message with press runs of up to 40,000. Its consistent pursuit of working-class interests, including black and white unity, brought the WP into consistent loggerheads with the Stalinists and their supporters. The CP was distinguished among the labour movement factions by the virulent consistency of their support for the war. They supported the forcible confinement of Japanese-Americans, sabotaged the Double V campaign to end segregation and deployed police-like tenacity in persecuting worker-militants who threatened wartime production. These experiences stimulated a more profound understanding of Stalinism, and culminated in a unique form of anti-Stalinism theoretically consistent with the theory of bureaucratic collectivism.

The WP's anti-Stalinism represented a marked departure from Trotskyism, which held social-democratic reformism and Stalinism to be essentially symmetrical phenomena: the social-democrats were agents of their respective ruling classes and the Stalinists agents first of Russia and later of the various "workers' state 'oligarchies'." To Shachtman and his movement "none of the old designations of 'right', 'left', 'centrist' — applie[d] to Stalinism." This conclusion was an outgrowth of its developing appraisal of Stalinism as a distinct anti-working class society. In its reformism and its pro-Western defencism, social democracy reflects the conservative policies of the labour leadership, which for all its class collaborationism, is nevertheless still organically tied to the working class. Trade union bureaucracies and the labour party leaderships which rest on them can only secure and advance their bureaucratic privileges under those conditions in which bourgeois democracy is itself preserved, for these are the only circumstances conducive to the maintenance of an independent labour movement. That the social-democrats struggle to maintain an independent labour movement in an ineffectual and inconsistent manner, attempting to preserve democracy by stifling both totalitarian forces and revolution, was well understood and did not in the least detract from the general proposition.

The Stalinist parties, on the other hand, are the ideological agents, not of a conservative section of a working class movement, but of a social force whose interests are diametrically opposed to an independent workers' movement and whose triumph would be unattainable without the complete annihilation of the labour movement in all its forms. "Stalinism

is a reactionary, totalitarian, anti-bourgeois and anti-proletarian current in the labour movement but not of the labour movement..." These remain the standards against which any historical evaluation of the various national CPs must be measured.

*"The expected  
working-class  
radicalisation failed  
to materialise at the  
termination of World  
War II. Indeed, the  
party failed to keep  
the workers recruited  
during the war."*

From this perspective, the WP oriented its day to day trade union work towards combining with progressive anti-Stalinists as well as conservative elements against the CP.

This by no means led it to endorse the government's anti-Communist witch hunts or loyalty oaths within the union movement. On the contrary, Shachtman held McCarthyism to be not only a threat to democracy but a potential harbinger of a more sweeping assault against the left. A labour movement able to oust Stalinism from its own ranks would be one fortified in struggle by a heightened democratic and class consciousness; imported from above

by the capitalist state and imposed out of fear for suppression of trade union rights, such anti-Communism would constitute a working-class debacle. The WP, to its abiding credit, exposed the vacillations of weak-kneed ex-radicals and liberals — the spiritual ancestors of today's neo-conservatives — in defence of the democratic rights of the Stalinists, despite having been on the receiving end of not a few CP frame-ups and violence in the CIO and elsewhere. Thus the Shachtmanites protested the conviction of the Stalinist Harry Bridges, protested the McCarran Act of 1950 under which Communists were sentenced, and defended university teachers being harassed and fired as subversives.

The expected working-class radicalisation failed to materialise at the termination of World War II. Indeed, the party failed to keep the workers recruited during the war, losing many in the course of just a few months after they succumbed to the grueling routines of party life. An attempted reunification with the SWP failed, having been scuttled by Cannon's concept of a monolithic party. In 1948 the WP cut its last links with the Fourth International over the Second World Congress's criminally inept position that the countries of Eastern Europe overtaken by Stalinism remained capitalist states; but that if the CPs proved capable of overturning capitalism, then Stalinism would have to be seen as revolutionary. This Shachtman argued would logically amount to saying that the International was unnecessary.

By 1949 the WP was half the size it had been coming out of the war. The revolutionary party perspective was abandoned and the WP, now renamed the Independent Socialist League identified itself as a more limited propaganda group, with its main task that of bringing the ideas of

## Take Action!

### Affiliate to the Welfare State Network!

The Welfare State Network was launched in September 1994 by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs. It aims to build a national movement to defend services, benefits, and public sector jobs. It publishes the newspaper *Action for Health and Welfare*.

- Affiliation is £25 for unions and Labour Parties and £10 for unemployed/pensioners groups
- Individual subscriptions £5 or £3 (unwaged)
- Affiliates receive 10 copies of *Action*

**Write to WSN, c/o Southwark TUSU,  
42 Braganza Street, London SE17.**



socialism to the working class and the oppressed. The ISL asserted that the main task of the labour movement in the US is its political self-organisation — the development of a labour party — and that the development of a political programme is indispensable not only once such a party is formed, but also for the purpose of breathing life into its formative process. The programme it put forward was not for the socialist reorganisation of society, but one consistent with the struggle to preserve and extend democracy and to protect the working class and its allies from the reactionary war economy, which the ISL claimed capitalism to be in the grip of, and from the looming third world war itself. The fight to protect democratic rights would increasingly become the means of fighting for socialism. The ISL declared its complete non-confidence in any capitalist government, no matter how liberal, to consistently champion the elementary democratic needs of the people or break with the imperialist traditions and reactionary policies of the past, needed to combat Stalinism in a progressive fashion.

It is in this period, the late 1940s and 1950s, that Drucker is at his weakest. Left unexamined is the notable relationship between the Shachtmanites and leading intellectuals who passed through the ISL or its youth movements. His treatment of the turn of the Shachtmanites towards the Communist Party in the trade unions appears to dispute the basic WP-ISL formulation of the alien character of Stalinism to the labour movement without offering an alternative evaluation. It is evident in Drucker's misguided characterisation of the 1948 Wallace campaign and his pained failure to accept that the Wallace movement had become a tool of the Stalinists. Inkings are detected in the late 1940s and early 1950s of Shachtman's later right-wing trajectory, but they are based on misinterpretation or an impressionistic forcing of the facts. Some of Drucker's comments on the Shachtmanite orientation during the Cold War understate the complicity of Stalinism in poisoning the atmosphere of world politics. These errors are unavoidable in writing partisan political history, when the political sources of the author's commitment remain unelaborated or sketchy and piecemeal at best as do Drucker's.

Yet it is in the final chapters of Shachtman's life, a period of — there is no way of putting it charitably — socialist renege, for which Drucker draws on a remarkably poignant reserve of sympathy. The reasons behind Shachtman's moral collapse cannot be chalked up to mere Stalinophobia, an all-consuming hatred for Stalinism which subordinates all other political considerations and values to its defeat. The explanation is rather found in conjunction with anti-Stalinism, the belief that the conscious cadres of socialism had been destroyed by fascism and Stalinism, and compounded by the continuously demoralising framework of operating in the absence of a politically organised working class, that — in short — there no longer existed the objective political forces from

which a socialist movement could arise and build a viable alternative. The ISL was rejected as a holding action in favour of bureaucratic substitutes which could create a simulacrum of momentum. "He convinced himself that the AFL-CIO was almost a mass socialist movement, that the Democratic Party was almost a labour party, that Johnson's Great Society had almost made African Americans equal, that the United States had almost saved Vietnam for democracy."

The enduring contributions and theoretical breakthroughs of the WP-ISL have enormous resonance for socialists today. Their spirited celebration of the Bolshevik revolution, not only against its detractors, but also against its authoritarian would-be defenders such as Isaac Deutscher, are electrifying in their originality, instructive in their depth and forever relevant as a subterranean entrance to one of the most movingly liberating and tragic events of the century. The movement was without compare in charting the degeneration of the Revolution, chronicling the Moscow trials and charting the evolution of bureaucratic collectivism. From their application and development of Lenin's anti-war analyses to the Second World War and then the Korean war, to their expositions on the national question; from their elaborations of radical trade union tactics, to their writings on Palestine and Zionism; from the tactics of the Popular Front, to their examination of socialist politics during the Cold War; from their fight against McCarthyism in defence of civil liberties, to their manifold investigations into the history of revolutionary parties and movements — the WP-ISL brought an unparalleled range of revolutionary experience and reflection to bear as a guide to socialist action. Drucker adds immensely to our appreciation of this remarkable movement through his panoramic review centred on the career of Max Shachtman. For this he merits the gratitude of every thinking socialist. He fills a void in the history not only of American socialism, but in the breadth and sweep of revolutionary Marxism itself. That Shachtman and his movement conquered a place in the history of revolutionary politics is incontestable, but not as, say, George Novack would have it, because he "ably expounded the criticisms of Stalinism and Social Democracy developed by the Russian Left Opposition" and thus helped lay the foundations of the Trotskyist Fourth International. It is in no small measure that Drucker too deserves our respect for this refreshing recognition, all the more remarkable for his adherence to the Cannonite tradition which militates so forcefully against such an appreciation.

For all that, the fundamental gap to this work is its failure to recognise the formidable contributions of those comrades who continued standing fast in full commitment to the formative revolutionary politics of the third camp. It is to the efforts above all of Julius and Phyllis Jacobson, of Hal Draper, of *New Politics* magazine, which allows for an unbroken, generational memory extending to the New Left and beyond. ■

## Workers' Liberty publications

How to save the Welfare State .....	95p
New problems, new struggles: a handbook for trade unionists .....	90p
We stand for Workers' Liberty .....	£1.50
A workers' guide to Ireland .....	95p
The lies against socialism answered .....	50p
How to beat the racists .....	95p
Socialism and democracy .....	£1.95
1917: how the workers made a revolution .....	60p
Israel/Palestine: two nations, two states! .....	30p
Magnificent miners: the 1984-5 strike .....	75p
The case for socialist feminism .....	£1.50
Socialists answer the New Right .....	£1.50

### Issues for socialists

Socialists and the Labour Party: the case of the Walton by-election .....	£1
Why Labour lost .....	80p
Arabs, Jews and socialism .....	£3
Ireland: the socialist answer .....	£2
Why Yugoslavia collapsed .....	75p
East Europe: towards capitalism or workers' liberty? .....	60p
Solidarity with the South .....	
African socialists .....	£1

### The AWL and the left

Is the SWP an alternative? .....	75p
Open letter to a supporter of <i>Militant</i> .....	20p
Why the SWP beats up its socialist critics .....	80p
A tragedy of the left: <i>Socialist Worker</i> and its splits .....	£2
Seedbed of the left: the origins of today's far-left groups .....	£1.50
Their polemics and ours: excerpts from <i>Socialist Organiser</i> and <i>Socialist Outlook</i> .....	90p

### Education bulletins

Marxism and black nationalism .....	£1.50
Study notes on <i>Capital</i> .....	£2.50

Cheques payable to "WL Publications" to:  
Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London  
SE15 4NA. Please add 20% to cover  
postage and packing. Orders over £10  
post free.

Overseas prices on request, or in Australia,  
from WL, PO Box 313, Leichhardt 2040; in USA,  
from Barry Finger, 153 Henderson Place, East  
Windsor, NJ 08520.

# History was not made by one authoritarian man

By Al Richardson\*

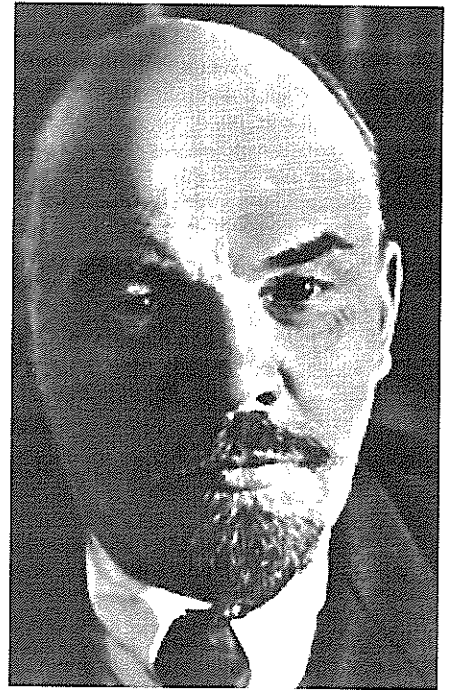
I WAS SURPRISED by Robin Blick's reply to my argument (See *Workers' Liberty* no 18, February 1995). My original review in *Socialist Organiser* dealt mainly with Blick's methodology: tearing small quotations from Lenin out of context in order to make an entirely new thought-construct out of them; creating a sort of guilt-by-association by way of quoting right-wing and even fascist statements supposedly akin to Lenin's; creating a counter-construct made up of all sorts of other people's opinions of Bolshevism, which is then mistakenly fathered upon Martov. It is the old technique of erecting your own straw man, and then demolishing him. Nowhere did Blick's reply take up this purely methodological criticism: instead, he shifted to the wider political questions. I will try to do the same here. But, if I now leave methodological considerations aside, that does not mean I find his way of arguing at all convincing.

The main problem of Blick's book is that it is ahistorical. *Seeds of Evil* shoot up into monstrous growths irrespective of the nature of the soil in which they are rooted. Lenin's words and actions are not placed in the wider context of world history in general, or even of Russian history in particular. Everything takes place against a blank canvas. Moreover, there seems to be no awareness of the development of Lenin's own thought, of the changes he made to what he saw as Marxism's historic tasks at any given time. Blick's view of Lenin is that he was unchanging in his aims, views and

motives throughout, a caricature shared with most bourgeois commentators, and all too many Stalinist, and unfortunately Trotskyist, ones as well.

Much emphasis is placed upon the elitist, authoritarian and conspiratorial aspects of Bolshevism before 1917, with no realisation that Czarism was an autocracy, and its ban on political parties of every kind before 1905 made any opposition by its nature conspiratorial. Lenin's views are attacked on page after page for being Jacobin, Blanquist or "Jacobin-Populist" rather than Marxist. Yet until the First World War we all know that Lenin's opinion was that the next stage in Russian history would be a bourgeois revolution against the autocracy — not a workers' revolution at all — for which the appropriate form of organisation is indeed a Jacobin one. Obviously, if you think that the historic necessity for Russia is a French-style revolution against absolutism, Jacobinism is the appropriate form of organisation for it. If you then change your views about the class character of the coming revolution, then logically you change the forms of your organisation for it as well, which Lenin duly did in 1917.

Comrade Blick also does not seem to be aware that the basic argument in his book that Lenin was aiming at centralised autocratic power from the beginning flatly contradicts the quotation he produces in his reply to me showing that Lenin was willing in 1905 to share a coalition government with other parties — even the liberal Cadets. Here again, the historic context provides the answer. Since Lenin then



Lenin

believed that the coming revolution was to be bourgeois, there is nothing illogical about sharing power in a brief revolutionary dictatorship with the bourgeoisie. The Menshevik appeal to the resolution of the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International against socialist entering bourgeois cabinets had nothing to do with revolutionary intransigence in this context, since on the basic nature of the revolution they shared Lenin's perspectives. All it showed is that they were not serious about taking the necessary steps to bring about any revolution at all, even a bourgeois one.

Similarly ahistorical is the argument about the internal organisation of the RSDLP as reflected in *What is to be Done?* The pamphlet — and, indeed, all Lenin's subsequent arguments for some years afterwards — shows that he regarded himself as an orthodox Kautskyan up to 1914, and if you read it carefully enough you will see that he believed that he was trying to apply what he thought were the organisational principles of the German SDP to Russian conditions. Whether his view of German Social Democracy was correct is another question, but unless we realise this it is impossible to understand why Lenin was so amazed when he saw the pro-war policies of the German Party organ, *Vorwärts*, in 1914, and thought it was a forgery of the German high command.

But the most ahistorical assumption of all is that during the Russian Revolution Lenin's "elitist and coercive 'blood and iron' state socialism" triumphed over Martov's "vision of a society that was both collectivist and democratic" (p5), as if the latter really were on offer in 1917.

Let us remind ourselves of the world context at the time, as well as the Russian one. The Czarist empire was not the only old-style absolutism to crash early in this

## Trotskyist International 16 out now!

Trotskyist International is the English language magazine of the IRCI (British section, Workers Power). Issue 16, available now and selling fast, comes with a new-look format and a wider range of analysis and Marxist theory than ever before, including:

- The ugly face of Eurofascism: analysing the "fascist front" phenomenon in Italy and France, drawing on sources not available in English.
- Keith Harvey surveys the economic transition in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, outlining a new theoretical framework for understanding the process of capitalist restoration.
- The failure of third world nationalism: Dave Stockton charts the rise and demise of anti-imperialist movements in the 20th century.
- Plus: polemic with Socialist Action USA, case study of New Zealand, Labour's neo-liberal experiment, and reviews of books on the Jewish Question, Darwinism, South Korea and Tim Wohlforth autobiography.

All this for only £1.50 (£2.20 inc p&p). Subscriptions (3 issues) £8. Cheques to Trotskyist International BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX.

\* Al Richardson is editor of *Revolutionary History*

century. The Chinese empire fell in 1911, and the German and Austro-Hungarian empires in 1918. The fall of the Manchus in China produced first of all Yuan Shih-kai and the warlords, and then Chiang Kai-Shek — military dictators. The fall of the Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs produced unstable republics followed by Nazi and clerical dictatorships in Germany and Austria, and royal or military dictatorships in all the successor states except Czechoslovakia. Russia, as Trotsky never ceased to repeat, lay between Europe and Asia, not only geographically, but socially, economically and politically as well. Its most 'European' western areas bordered on Poland, where by 1926 Pilsudski's military dictatorship held sway, and its more backward 'Asiatic' eastern ones on China, where a far nastier military dictator ruled in the person of Chiang Kai Shek. History made it clear that unless the Bolsheviks had taken power in 1917, the alternative to them was not bourgeois democracy, still less Martov's "collectivist and democratic" European style social-democracy, but a military dictator who would approximate in type to the mean average between those of Poland and China". And such figures did indeed arise, both during the revolution and after it, in the shape of Kornilov, Wrangel, Kolchak and Denikin.

Let us also not forget Russia's real position in history, which is curiously absent from Blick's book. As a society, it was more Asiatic than feudal. It took a failed workers' revolution in 1905 for the autocracy even to grant a medieval estates system. Over 90% of the population was peasant, and nearly that per centage of the people illiterate. Due to the breakdown of industry during the war, Russia in 1917 was more rural and backward than it had been in 1913. Does comrade Blick really believe that it was even possible on this basis to erect a bourgeois liberal democracy, let alone the ideal state Martov had in mind? The fact that the Cadets and substantial sections of the SRs supported Kornilov's coup shows that even the bourgeoisie did not support a bourgeois democracy. In these conditions, the choices were a military dictatorship, or the Bolsheviks. When power lay so obviously in the gutter, as it did in Russian in 1917, were they so wrong to pick it up? It was not impossible for the world revolution of the working class to come to their aid. But Martov's "vision" was of the stuff of all too many visions — a utopian dream. That does not make it an ignoble one, but it does explain why it failed — and why it was bound to fail.

In so arguing that much of what Lenin said and did only makes sense in Russian conditions, obviously I am implicitly criticising all those would-be Bolsheviks today who are incapable of abstracting the universal lessons of the Russian Revolution from its peculiar Russian matrix. But although this could begin a fascinating new discussion, it is a topic far removed from this polemic, limited as it is by the assumption that major world-historical changes can be produced by the authoritarian inclinations of a particular individual. ■

# Class struggle rises in South Africa

from back page

been brought against him.

"The employers agreed to come and negotiate the next day, but when they arrived they would not speak to the drivers' representatives and wanted to talk to union officials. The drivers' demands were presented to them but they were obstructive. The next day the Minister of Labour arrived. By this time nearly all major routes in the country were blockaded by trucks as the action spread.

"By this time some agreement had been reached, and negotiations were started in Johannesburg. The blockade was lifted after some concessions were made. However, progress was slow at these negotiations. The T&G officials were angry that they were not controlling the negotiations, and tried to undermine the agreements. Eventually we had to call another blockade.

"On 10 September 1994 the workers agreed to register the Turning Wheel as a union. This had not been our original intention. That was to try and push demands for rank and file control forward in the T&G. But, by this time, most workers felt that the Turning Wheel should break from the T&G, which had failed its members.

"The TWWU is now a registered union, and is collecting subs from 5,000 members. This should rise to 7,000 by the end of April 1995. Most of these members are former T&G members (the T&G had 19,000 members late last year, but this has declined to probably 14,000 now).

"Obviously COSATU and the T&G have been highly critical of TWWU. It was, after all, started because of dissatisfaction with their leadership. They have issued slanderous press statements and threatened to do everything they can to drive TWWU out of the industry. They have used their media contacts to starve TWWU of publicity and news coverage. They have even linked up with employers. Employers have been saying that they are in favour of unions as long as workers are T&G members. This is the first time in the history of our industry that employers have been pro-union!

"Rumours have been spread that TWWU is 'anti-ANC' and 'led by the Workers' List Party.' We have grown, despite these attempts to disrupt our activities, because workers support our programme and our stance. Our priority

at the moment is to gain financial stability and secure our organisation.

"We do not see ourselves affiliating to COSATU. It is felt that COSATU is affiliated to the government, and it is now also linked through NEDLAC to the employers as well. We will seek to make solidarity with workers in other unions and work together with them in this way. Numerous other rank and file led unions are developing at the present time, for example, ECAWUSA and SEGWEU, with similar aims and programmes to our union."

We asked Richard whether he thought a campaign from within COSATU for democracy and a break from the GNU might strengthen TWWU and have the effect of winning over wider sections of the movement. To this he replied:

"COSATU is no longer serving the interests of the working class. It has become a liberal federation and is blocking workers' struggles, in the interest of the GNU. COSATU organised workers to put the ANC in power, saying that they could push workers' interests in the GNU. The ANC have blundered by making promises they are unable to keep and never intended to keep. They could have won the election without doing this, but now they are alienating workers who supported them by attacking strikers and supporting the bosses.

"The COSATU-ANC alliance has failed workers. We feel that a mass workers' party is needed as an alternative to this COSATU alliance with the ANC, and this is the direction we are taking. South African workers feel betrayed. Their votes have not empowered them, but enriched their leaders who are now on the gravy train and have forgotten all about their roots. The emergence of a black middle class and bourgeoisie has meant that workers have been left to rot by this government. South Africa has changed colour, but not its class character."

Finally, we asked: what can activists in Britain best do to help your struggle?

"The government, COSATU and the SACP have joined forces with a red-tape campaign of bureaucratic obstruction against us, and a media blackout of our activists. Our plea is for comrades in other countries to highlight our situation. Tell workers of the real struggles that are now happening in South Africa! We also need practical support." ■

# Class struggle rises in South Africa

By Bobby Navarro

SINCE THE election of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa last year there has been a heightened level of class struggle. Workers are fighting for economic change to match the new political situation. This demonstration of working-class strength has shocked the ruling class. The ANC-led government has unleashed troops with guns and dogs against strikers, denouncing them in the press as "anarchist conspirators" who want to "impose chaos on society."

The reality is that the Government of National Unity (GNU) has done nothing to improve living standards for the vast majority of black working-class people. Unemployment is around 50%. Housing conditions remain appalling and have changed little despite the pledge to build one million homes this year alone. Revelations about corruption in high places and about the so-called "gravy train" have fuelled frustration and anger in workers asked by the government to tighten their belts once more. Inflation is biting into wages. To help them out of the economic slump employers seek sackings and drive to worsen the conditions of those in work.

The GNU strategy for delivering the industrial peace and stability capitalism needs was to draw the once militant and still powerful COSATU Federation into the government. COSATU is closely aligned to the ANC and supported it in last year's elections. In return, the ANC has given former union leaders ministerial positions and made promises of social improvements for workers. A tri-partite



commission, "NEDLAC" was formed to involve unions, bosses' representatives and politicians in the economic decision-making process.

Then the cosy relationships at the top were challenged by an explosion of militancy, as black workers responded to the GNU attacks.

The Turning Wheel Workers' Union (TWWU) is one of a new wave of militant unions which are developing in South Africa in response to the failure of the leaders of the COSATU federation to stand up for the working class against the Government of National Unity. TWWU, which organises transport workers, principally in the trucking industry, was born out of the widely publicised blockades of the highways in August and September last year. Richard Madime, General Secretary of TWWU spoke to *Workers' Liberty*.

"TWWU came into being because of the lax attitudes of the unions in South

Africa to winning disputes. They were becoming conservative under the GNU, and abandoning workers to increasing exploitation. Originally, nine shop stew-

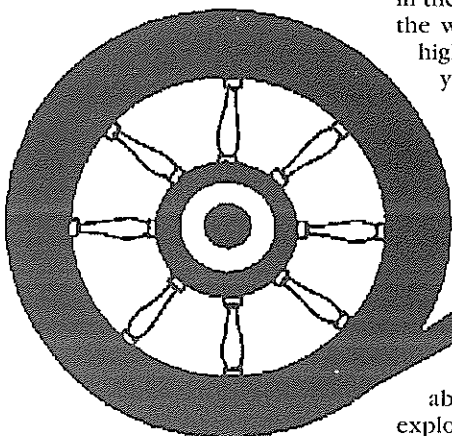
ards from different transport companies agreed the need to co-ordinate and to reinforce the strength of our union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&GWU), pressing the demands of the rank and file.

"We agreed to hold a national meeting of truck drivers at Mooi River at midnight on Monday 8 August 1994. This was the best venue as it is central to many transport routes in the country. Trucks were arriving and stopping from 10pm onwards. Once 500 had arrived we started the meeting. By that time it was proving impossible to stop drivers spreading the meeting into a blockade of the highway.

"We called the Minister of Labour and the employers' representatives and told them the workers wanted to meet them to air grievances. The TGWU leadership refused to come and help us negotiate. They said the blockade was illegal and we should go through the union structures — the same structures that had failed us and forced us to take this action!

"When representatives returned from the phones and fax machine, a driver had been killed by a scab trying to breach the blockade with police encouragement. This caused a great deal of tension as the scab driver was white. To this day no case has

Turning Wheel Workers' Union (TWWU) logo



continued on page 35