

# Workers' Liberty

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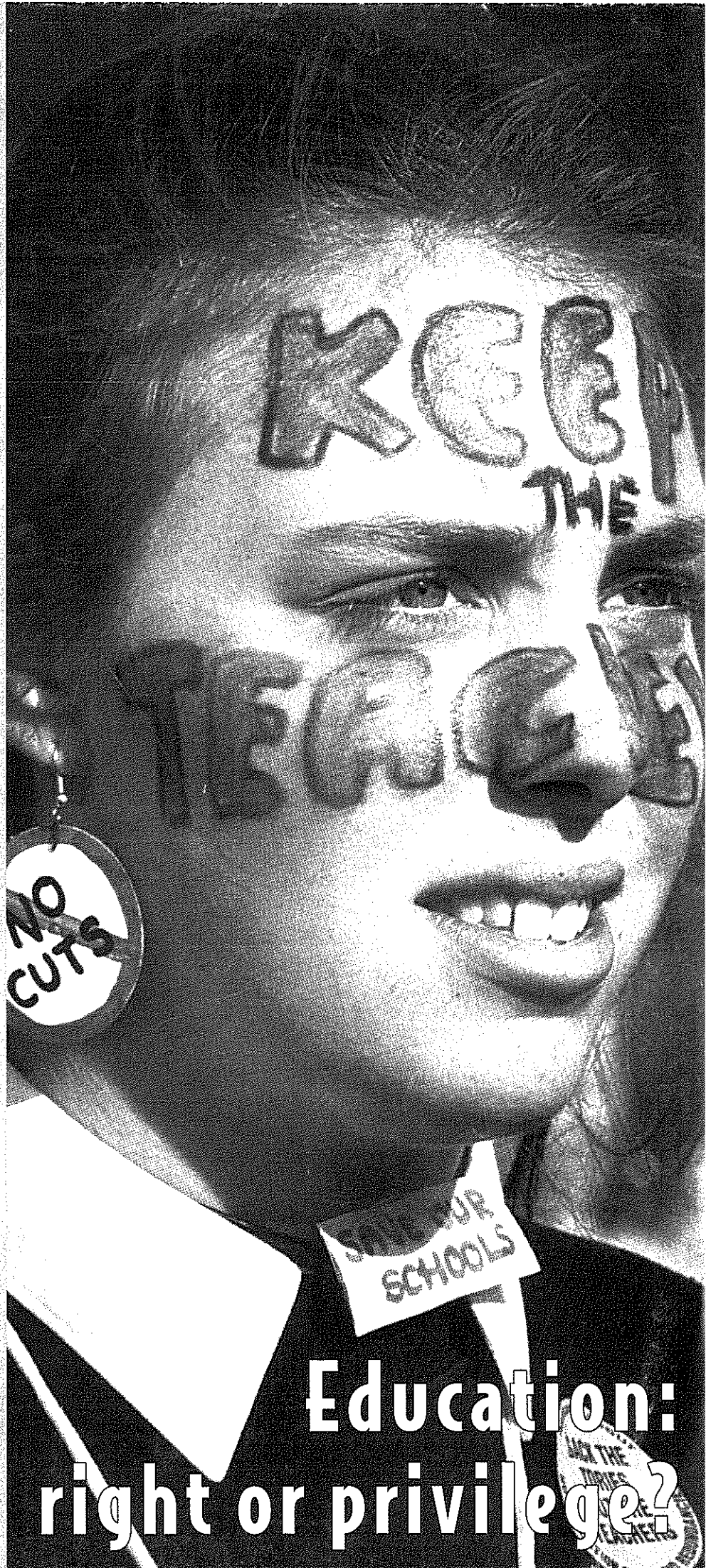
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"The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself."  
"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex"  
Karl Marx

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## Workers' Liberty

# A letter to our readers

IT LOOKS like the Blairites will win on 29 April, but the moral victory goes to the left, which had everything from the Labour Party machine through most union machines to the mass media against it.

And not only the moral victory: the forces who rallied to defend Clause Four may not vanish overnight, as the Blairites would like. One consequence of the Blairite campaign has been to rouse an army of activists, draw them into debate and give the left a chance to organise them. That army must remain in the field after 29 April!

Governments are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. For us it brings to mind the great tragedy that led directly to the war, the defeat and destruction of the German labour movement by Hitler. We present in this issue of Workers' Liberty some very little known documents of the German Trotskyist movement.

This tiny force of perhaps 200 people presented the essential policies that would have allowed the working class to avert catastrophe. But it could not shape events. The powerful Social-Democratic and Stalinist parties were led into mass suicide.

History is important, but for us this is not only history. Fascism is a more powerful force in Europe today than at any time since the death of Hitler. These documents and the story they tell have lessons to teach those who may well have to face a new life-or-death challenge from Hitler's modern successors.

Muslim fundamentalism is a burgeoning force in the world and, inevitably, there are lily-livered liberals eager to kiss its often bloody boots — in the *Guardian* and the *Economist*, for example. Mark Osborn tells them why they are wrong.

Peter Tatchell replies to Janine Booth on "outing" closet Establishment gays. We have more reminiscences of the IS/SWP.

Our sales are increasing. To give us a solid base, we now need more subscriptions. Have you sold a Workers' Liberty subscription to a friend or workmate yet?



We worried them. The scale of the opposition against them was magnificent

# Clause Four: the dress rehearsal

## Editorial

WE GO TO PRESS just before Labour's special conference vote on Clause Four.

Our supporters will do everything they can to maximise the vote in support of common ownership on April 29, and win, lose or draw the serious left will keep up the fight for socialist policies *inside* the Labour Party.

It is worth spelling out why.

Marxists worked in the Labour Party before it adopted Clause Four. We will continue to work inside Labour if Clause Four is abandoned.

We do so because of what Labour *is*.

Labour is the political wing of the multi-millioned trade union movement. Despite all its many limitations it represent the first faltering steps of the working class movement on the road to political independence.

Though all Labour governments have — fundamentally — served the interest of capital the party remains rooted in the bedrock organisations of the working class.

It provides the *only* actually existing governmental alternative available to the working class movement here and now.

If our politics are centred on the working class and the fight for its self-liberation then they, necessarily, relate to the working class, and to its organisations as they actually exist. Therefore serious socialists have to relate to the Labour Party. If Blair is successful in winning the abolition of Clause Four none of this will change.

The fact that the party had written into its constitution a formal commitment to common ownership, which is one pre-requisite of socialism, did not make the Labour Party socialist. On the contrary, the party's overall contradictory nature is defined on the one side by its actions in government and by policies and on the other side by its social base.

It is thus a "bourgeois workers party". [The definition is Lenin's].

Labour reformism has always been a reflection of trade unionism. Labourism is merely the extension of the trade unionist

principle of bargaining *within* the existing capitalist system into the bourgeoisie's own parliament. Whereas unions bargain with individual employers or across particular industries, Labourism has represented "trade unionist" bargaining at the level of society and the overall running of society.

The abolition of Clause Four in itself will in itself do *nothing* to change this basic nature.

Much of Blair's "New Labour" Labourism is still, in part, a form of trade unionism in politics — the particularly degenerate, decayed and uninspiring variant of the Christian democratic social market philosophy of the professional civil-service opportunists who run some of Britain's bigger unions.

If Blair wins over Clause Four it will be precisely because he has relied on classic old Labour methods and techniques. The dirty politicking of Blair's campaign shows how little "new" Labour has really changed and how far Blair still has to go to achieve his goal of cutting Labour's roots.

It is worth detailing what has happened so far step by step:

● June '94: Blair stands for election as leader. His manifesto talks reassuringly of "re-affirming traditional socialist values". When asked point blank, he denies that he has any intention of getting rid of Clause Four.

● October '94: Blair slips a coded reference to the abolition of Clause Four into his maiden speech as leader.

Two days later, conference votes to re-affirm Clause Four.

● November '94: Undaunted by the conference vote for common ownership, Blair presses for the NEC to call a special party conference on the issue, though the NEC has no constitutional right to call special conferences. Only Conference itself can do that.

The April special conference has been timed to take place before most unions can hold their own annual conference, thus making it easier for the bureaucrats in unions like GMB, AEEU, MSF and CWU to short-circuit a discussion in their unions. New Labour? Old chicanery!

● December '94. a *Tribune* poll shows the tide turning in

favour of Clause Four in the constituencies. The NEC launch its bogus "consultation", which doesn't even ask members if they want to retain Clause Four! The NEC's document specifically directs people to discuss the themes chosen by Blair: "social justice", "a dynamic economy", "equality of opportunity". Because the document is sent out at the end of December most party branches have just one meeting to discuss it (if that). New Labour? Old chicanery!

● January '95: Blair starts his Clause Four roadshow in Gateshead. This is a media event tightly policed by Walworth Road officials. Most local leftwingers are denied access. Those who get in have pro-Clause Four material confiscated. No pro-Clause Four speakers are allowed any time to explain conference policy.

Tens of thousands of pounds of party funds are being spent unconstitutionally in order to put over the case of one faction!

● February '95: Blair's roadshow runs out of steam. Meetings in Wales, Bristol and Birmingham are dwarfed by pro-Clause Four rallies. The press latches on to a rigged pro-Blair vote at Young Labour conference to boost the campaign for abolition.

● March '95: the media dirty tricks campaign continues. London and South West regions vote for Clause Four, but receive no press coverage. The pro-Blair vote in Scotland is heralded as proof of certain victory for the abolitionists.

As the consultation ends, the papers are not examined by NEC members, who simply allow Blair and Prescott to produce their own draft for the new clause. Less than 1.5% of party members have responded to the consultation. Of those who did, most want to see "common ownership" and "redistribution of wealth" in the new clause. Blair's draft mentions neither, but instead praises the "enterprise of the market" and the "rigour of competition".

The TGWU executive decide to oppose the draft. Bill Morris is denounced by the Blair camp. The media campaign goes into overdrive. A Blair victory is declared "inevitable".

The NEC sends out ballot papers which *do not* include the words of the old clause or any statement in its defence. Instead, there is a letter from Tom Sawyer, Labour Party general secretary, advocating abolition. This NEC is so frightened of opposition that it did not put the question: "Do you want to keep Clause Four?" on the ballot paper.

● April '95: UNISON votes to keep Clause Four. Despite appeals from John Prescott and Clare Short, the low paid public sector workers won't buy "the rigour of competition". Frank Field, Gordon Brown and other "modernisers" start to talk about launching new attacks on the union link. Blairite UNISON officials tell Clause Four loyalists not to expect any seats on quangos from the next Labour government! New Labour? Old chicanery!

Consider the forces that Blair has had on his side! The entire bourgeois establishment and the media, as well as the whole Labour Party machine and the great bulk of the trade union bureaucracy have been behind him.

He has the shackled, no-choice goodwill of many party members and trade unionists who desperately want the Labour government which they believe — even under Blair, even after all Blair has said and done — will rebuild the welfare state and create jobs.

Taking all this into consideration, the real surprise is the massive scale of the opposition that has been generated in defence of Clause Four.

It is now vital to focus that opposition on a series of immediate demands around which we can mobilise and organise in the Labour Party and the unions:

- Defend and democratise the Labour/union link.
- A minimum wage of at least £4.15 per hour.
- Renationalisation of the utilities and of British Rail without compensation, and under democratic workers' and consumers' control.
- For the repeal of the anti-union laws and a charter of positive rights for workers, including the legal right to picket effectively and organise solidarity action.
- An immediate cut in the working week to 35 hours and a massive expansion plan for the public services and housing to provide jobs and homes for all. Rebuild the Welfare State!

If the left fails to pull together in a broad based alliance around

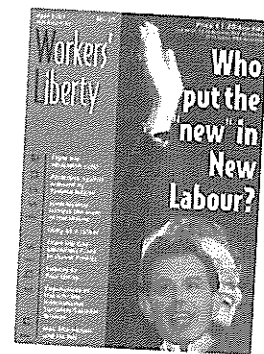
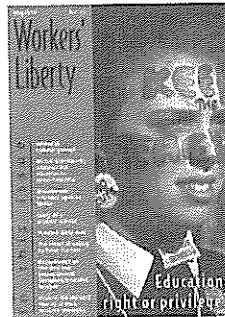
such demands, all initiative will be in Blair's hands. It makes more likely an attempt to take up the really serious task facing the "modernisers" — to break the link with the unions — at a time and in conditions of their choosing.

We cannot allow that to happen!

The battle over Clause Four has not just been a dress rehearsal for what the next Blair government is going to do, when promises on jobs, the minimum wage and trade union rights are likely to be broken and to provoke labour movement opposition. It has also been a dress rehearsal for the decisive battle to come — the battle over whether or not a *political* labour movement continues to exist: whether or not Blair and his yuppie friends will succeed in wiping from the face of the earth all the gains that remain from 100 years of independent working-class action.

Blair and his friends *know* that the policies of their government are going to provoke large scale opposition inside the labour movement. Crucially, they fear that this will be reflected inside the union delegations in the Labour Party. As a result they want to break the union link and switch over to state financing of political parties. But they can only abolish the union link with the co-operation of a significant section of the union apparatus. The fact that a large section of the working class's bedrock composition — UNISON, TGWU, RMT, GPMU, FBU, ASLEF etc — have rallied against Blair on Clause Four promises that they will have no easy passage here, but a battle royal. ■

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



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# Education: right or privilege?



By Liam Conway, Central Notts NUT

THE BIG news from the conference of the 230,000-strong National Union of Teachers (NUT) at Easter was a decision to ballot for a day of strike action against excessive class size. It follows several weeks of high-profile campaigning by FACE (Fight Against Cuts in Education), a grassroots organisation of parents and school governors. Won against hard-fought opposition by the NUT Executive, the vote on class-size action also linked the NUT at a national level to the FACE activity, for the first time.

FACE has grown out of protests in areas with big cuts in education spending into a national organisation. Successful one-day strikes by teachers campaigning alongside FACE have been organised in Oxfordshire, Leicester, my own area (Notts), and elsewhere. The national FACE demonstration at the end of March attracted some 20,000.

When I moved the amendment calling for a strike ballot I presented the Notts, Oxfordshire and Leicester actions as a model to be replicated on a national level.

The move for industrial action by teachers linked to demonstrations and campaigning by parents and governors represents a new departure. It also has a powerful mobilising potential:

- The issue — oversize classes — is about the *quality* of education children receive in schools.

- FACE has the potential to draw a wide range of groups into activity.

- Many more NUT members will be willing to vote for national action than for local action, as it points the finger at those responsible for the crisis: the Government.

But NUT members are going to have to fight hard against the Executive to make sure that the strike ballot takes place and then that members vote for a 'yes' vote. Nevertheless, the chance of a strong campaign in

defence of public-sector education is greater now than it has been for a number of years. The fight is on!

## The Tories' agenda for education

THE TORIES' new regime, making schools compete for students and money, is pushing education further towards a two-tier structure, where an increasing number will go into higher education but many children get little more than institutional childminding.

In 1991, it was estimated that one in five of those aged 21 (nine years old when the Tories came in) was innumerate, and one in seven was illiterate. Schools now have a financial incentive to exclude students who cause difficulty, and more and more are excluded: some 10,000 last year. Money for adult education has been cut. Fewer than ten per cent of people aged over 25 do any study.

The logic is to scrap any idea of education as a basic right for every child and every adult to equip them to understand the world and develop their talents. Instead some children will get minimal childminding, to prepare them for life on the dole; some will get basic rote learning and a dose of discipline, to prepare them for low-wage jobs; a minority will get cheap-and-quick higher training, to prepare for more skilled jobs; and a smaller minority will be trained to rule in the elite universities.

The proportion of students from clerical or manual worker families at the old universities is actually lower than it was before the expansion of the 1980s (at just one-third).

For millions of children in schools in the poorer working-class areas the Tories are turning education into what Patrick Pearse called "the Murder Machine". For a large part of their school years, what they are taught, essentially, is that they are failures. With the number of decently paid and secure "unskilled" jobs declining and the chances of progress from those jobs to better ones ever smaller, their future is bleak.

Further Education, an educational "second chance" for working-class youth, is being battered by market forces. Colleges have been taken out of local authority control and turned into units competing in a marketplace. Lecturers have been sacked or had their work conditions drastically worsened. College bosses plan to get rid of 250,000 part-time lecturers and replace them by agency staff with no job security.

Straightforward spending cuts compound the damage.

Local authority nursery places have declined while private-sector under-fives places have increased fourfold since 1979.

In mainstream schooling real spending per

pupil fell by an average of 1.8 per cent per year between 1980 and 1988. Education spending as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product fell from 5.5 per cent in 1979 to 4.8 per cent in 1992.

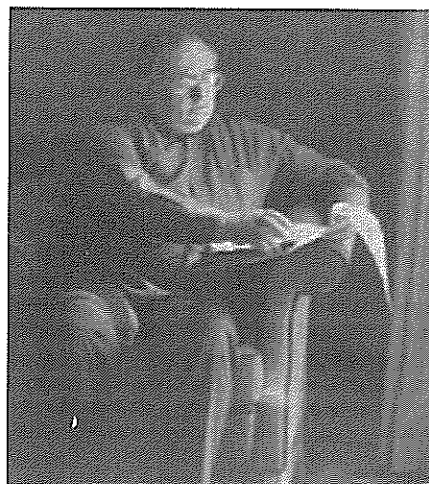
Over the same period, the number of teachers in UK schools dropped by 30,000. In 1994 alone, 5,500 teachers were made redundant or pushed into early retirement. In 1989 the government estimated that 30,000 primary schools were without a qualified maths teacher, and only one in seven had a qualified science teacher.

Classes over 30 are one-quarter of the primary school total and include over 1.1 million pupils.

In contrast, the Tories have boosted private provision. For example in 1980 they brought in the Assisted Places Scheme by which public money was used to send middle-class children to private schools. The private schools have kept the tax exemptions they enjoy by being "charities" and gained from changes in the way school property is assessed for rates. The number of pupils in private schools has grown to total 8% of all 11-15 year olds.

Other aspects of Tory education policy interconnect.

A National Curriculum was introduced to provide a syllabus to be tested. The tests (SATs) provide results to be entered into the League Tables. The League Tables, in turn provide the framework for funding for schools. The Tory theory was that parents would choose schools on the basis of positions in the League Tables. The act of choice would create an "internal market" for schools. Rising or falling pupil rolls would determine the amount of funding a school would receive. Good education would be produced.♦



Doug McAvoy prepares to defy his members

according to Tory dogma, because the necessity of competition would impel schools to improve their "product". The theory does not work, of course. Schools in middle-class areas get more and schools in working-class areas lose out. We see the return of the Secondary Modern and 'sink' schools.

Labour has talked about scrapping or rejigging some of the Tories' measures, e.g. improving the League Table. That is not good enough. The basic minimum we must demand from the next Labour government is:

- Reaffirm the principle of comprehensive schooling for all and education as a right, not a privilege or a financial "investment".
- Restore all schools and Further Education colleges to elected local control.
- Local authority nursery places for all under-fives whose parents want them.
- The right of all children to classes under 30 and properly-qualified teachers.
- Expand adult education.
- Find the money by taxing the rich and cutting military spending.

### The fight for action

THERE IS A real chance the NUT Executive will sabotage the strike ballot. Even if it takes place they may not recommend a 'yes' vote. In his closing speech to NUT conference, General Secretary Doug McAvoy declared war on the pro-strike delegates, condemning them as 'unrepresentative'.

Refusing to act on conference motions is nothing new for NUT Executives. So we will need to fight hard to make this ballot happen. We need to use every opportunity to campaign for action: campaigns for left candidates in the National Officer elections at the end of the year and in next year's National Executive elections need to be connected to the demand for action. The left needs only five more executive places to take control out of the hands of McAvoy and his supporters. Continuing the local action around class size and building FACE will add to the pressure too.

### NUT left more united than ever

THE SITUATION in the NUT — where a delegate conference can vote for action then the Executive ignores it — shows the need for a rank and file organisation.

A permanent rank and file organisation can make sure there is a fight for motions to be passed and implemented, the leaders are held to account, to replace poor leaders and — where necessary — organise action independently of the union leadership. The organised left should be fighting to build that rank and file organisation. How does the NUT left measure up?

There are two main left campaigns inside the NUT: the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA) and the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union (CFDU). The STA and CFDU have co-operated more closely in recent years, but only after a far longer period of bad relations.

The STA came out of a split in the Socialist Workers' Party's *Rank and File Teacher* organisation. The split, in which the International Marxist Group played a large part, was explained as a need to get away from a

perceived 'syndicalism' in *Rank and File* and towards a more 'political' organisation. The STA has linked together most of the far left groups in the NUT, including, from the mid-'80s on, the SWP, who had given up on *Rank and File*.

The CFDU emerged in the mid-'80s out of a fight against the NUT leaders' betrayal of the pay dispute. And it was partly a reaction to perceived STA failures to group together union activists broadly enough to do the necessary work. The CFDU was joined by the non-SWP elements that had remained with *Rank and File* and — with some success in Hackney, Oldham and some other areas — tried to keep it going after the SWP had tried to close it down.

The STA and CFDU represent different traditions on the left of the union. The STA is a political organisation of socialists. The CFDU wants to organise a broader pressure group based on trade union issues.

The STA's magazine, *Socialist Teacher*, carries articles of the sort you would expect

*"The Executive have tried to exclude from policy demands that exceed what a future Labour Government would be willing to concede."*

in the journal of a left group. It operates almost like a political party inside the union. The STA has been a pole of attraction for new and young members of the NUT, perhaps already identifying with socialist politics. These are the people at the sharp end of the Tory reforms.

The CFDU — the core of which is no less socialist than the STA — has been highly effective, providing detailed and useful material for organising local officers of the union. It has waged a serious fight to win the leadership of the NUT.

Disunity between the two groups has often been caused by the SWP. The SWP were at one time the main force in the STA and have been vocal against the CFDU — often to the point of slander. For example, when Ian Murch (the elected treasurer of the NUT, leading member of the CFDU, but also member of the STA) was witch-hunted by the union's right wing in 1992, the SWP abstained on the fight to defend him. At the 1993 conference they joined the right wing in opposing moves to prevent such witch-hunts taking place.

The effect on the STA has been plain to see but as more STA members have become unwilling to tolerate the SWP's behaviour inside the STA on other issues — around candidates for executive elections for example — the SWP have become increasingly marginalised.

At this year's conference the SWP operated largely outside the STA and hinted at their intention to leave. The STA have written to them saying such a decision would be a cor-

rect one, and proposing joint work with the SWP as an external group.

There is undoubtedly much to be proud of in the record of both the STA and CFDU. Ultimately, we need a merger of the two organisations in order to build on the strengths of both. Relations between the two groups may improve still further as a result of the SWP's decision. However, a merger is still some distance away.

*Workers' Liberty* NUT members have been involved in both organisations and have consistently argued for unity. A more possible approach now appears to be one of unity in action, rather than the dissolution of the two groups into one. Certainly we will need the maximum co-operation in the fight to implement the strike policy.

### The NUT and the Labour Party

THE TEACHERS' fight for action faces not only the resistance of the NUT leadership and the Tories' hysterical attacks, but the Labour Party leadership. Both Blair and Blunkett have participated in a media campaign against the idea of teachers' action.

Only days before the NUT conference, David Blunkett put the blame for poor education on teachers rather than underfunding, when he introduced a scheme to close 'bad' schools and reopen them with changed staff. This provocative statement was just one more in a series of policy pronouncements from Labour that have accepted the Tory agenda for education.

There is a close relationship between the Labour Party and the NUT Executive. The Executive have tried to exclude from NUT policy any demands that exceed what a future Labour Government would be willing to concede. For instance, an Executive amendment to conference unsuccessfully tried to remove calls in a motion from Birmingham for the abolition of Grant Maintained Status, the return of opted-out schools to local democratic control, the abolition of Local Management of Schools and the ending of the charitable status of private schools as a first step towards their abolition.

This relationship — which will become increasingly important as we get closer to a General Election — was the focus for a well-publicised stunt organised by the SWP at NUT conference, when they cornered David Blunkett on his arrival at the conference. Ironically, the SWP are the people who have most frequently lectured others on the left about how the struggle is more important than what Labour politicians say!

Whilst we defend the SWP against witch-hunts, we also have to say that stunts like this are of little use. This particular one was a gift to the NUT right wing as well as for the Tories. We need a properly organised campaign to make the both the Labour Party and our bureaucracy accountable.

The NUT is not affiliated to the Labour Party, so no formal structures exist to regulate their links with the Labour bureaucracy. In coming year, however, there will be a ballot of NUT members over the setting up of a political fund. It is now increasingly important for the left to raise the issue of affiliation to the Labour Party. ■

# The best results for revolutionaries in decades

By Gerry Bates

AS WE GO TO press, Arlette Laguiller, candidate of the Trotskyist group Lutte Ouvriere (LO), looks like getting maybe five per cent of the poll, or one and a half million votes, in the first round of the French presidential election on 23 April.

If this happens, it will be probably the best score that revolutionary candidates have ever achieved in a modern European election — better than the two per cent (600,000-odd) which LO has usually got since Laguiller first stood for president in 1974, and much better than the 236,000 which Alain Krivine got in the 1969 presidential poll, soon after the great general strike of May-June 1968.

It will be a tremendous demonstration that grinding mass unemployment and the collapse of Stalinism have not extinguished revolutionary socialism: on the contrary, they have made it even more clearly the only way forward.

France's trade unions, and its big left-wing parties, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, have decayed terribly over the 1980s and '90s. In the working class and among youth — as in Britain — there is a lot of anger, disgust, and alienation from official politics.

Laguiller's campaign has evidently succeeded in giving shape and direction to some of that anger. It has been organised round a few simple bread-and-butter slogans: a general wage rise; open the books of the bosses; expropriate profitable firms which cut jobs; end state subsidies to the bosses, and instead build new hospitals, schools, etc.

## 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 a 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

A big revolutionary vote on 23 April will be encouraging, but its real value depends on using it to boost organisation. Unfortunately, the revolutionary left organisations are in a poor state.

The Workers' Party ("Lambertists") is abstaining in the presidential election. It denounces Laguiller as being just the same as the right-wing candidates, Chirac and Balladur — "nine candidates, only one policy", says their headline. Despite the crazy sectarianism, this is a big group, with a paper membership similar to the SWP's in Britain.

The other sizeable avowedly-Trotskyist group, the LCR, the leading force in the international network of which Ernest Mandel is the best-known figure, is in great disarray. It has been unable to recommend an electoral choice because its central committee had no majority for any option. The largest minority wanted to vote for



Arlette Laguiller

Laguiller, but others backed Dominique Voynet of the Greens, Robert Hue of the Communist Party, or Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party. This is particularly dismaying because the whole political life of the LCR for some time had been focussed on fruitless politicking with various CP, SP, and Green splinter groups to get a joint presidential candidate. ■

## Who are Lutte Ouvriere?

**LUTTE OUVRIERE** itself, Laguiller's organisation, is probably in real terms the strongest avowedly-Trotskyist organisation in the world, thanks to a solid and stable routine. They run 400 regular workplace bulletins. On a series of international questions, from Europe to Afghanistan, they and we have shared views differing from almost all the other would-be Trotskyist groups in the world.

However, they tend to reduce politics to bread-and-butter industrial militancy plus socialist propaganda. They have little interest in, for example, specific mobilisation against France's large fascist movement, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front. Since the early 1980s they have refused any sort of critical support to the big parties based on the working class, the CP and SP, against the right wing, instead denouncing the official "left" as no different from the right.

LO's sectarian limits are, paradoxically, very closely linked with its strengths, both coming from a political culture which is, thanks to a curious history, quite different from any other modern Trotskyist group. In that culture, all decisive political questions are translated into *moral* questions, and also into

questions of social class.

In debate on the Stalinist states, for example — where they had the curious view that the old USSR was a "degenerated workers' state", while China, Eastern Europe, etc. were all "bourgeois", despite (so they freely admitted) a similar social and economic structure — their backstop argument would always be: "It's a moral choice". To describe the USSR as a degenerated workers' state was a choice for loyalty to the 1917 workers' revolution; to describe China, Eastern Europe, etc. as bourgeois was a choice for loyalty to the workers oppressed by the Stalinist takeovers there. Other views were morally weak and — what was, in this framework, saying the same thing in different words — petty-bourgeois.

This is a terribly limited and limiting culture — ultimately, I think, crippling. Nevertheless, the possible one and a half million votes on 23 April will not be for LO's sectarian limits, but for the general working-class revolutionary ideas which its campaign has managed to popularise. They will signal a revival of working-class radicalism which can be the basis for a revival of the French revolutionary left.

# A new approach to fighting cuts

A CONFERENCE in Leeds on 13 May will launch a new approach to the fight against public service cuts.

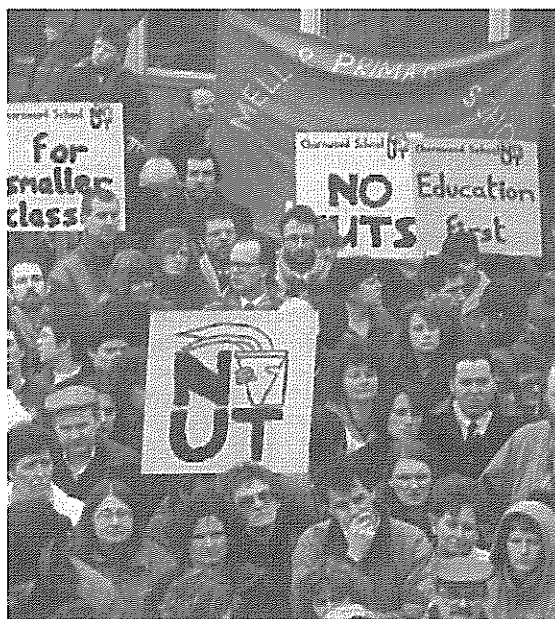
Trade union delegates, and observers from community groups and Labour Parties, have been invited to the conference by Newcastle and Strathclyde branches of the public-services

union UNISON and by Tyne and Wear Fire Brigades Union.

Their proposal is that instead of waiting until central government Budget decisions filter through into local cuts, and then fighting those local cuts piecemeal, we should first fight to change the Budget decisions. We should go for a one-day strike and demonstration shortly before Budget Day (probably 28 November). Called by the TUC if possible, and individual unions if not, this action should demand that the government reverses the cuts in spending on health, education, and other public services.

The leadership of Newcastle UNISON, the prime movers in this initiative, stand outside the main left blocs in that union, the Socialist Workers' Party and the Militant/Socialist Outlook alliance in the CDFU. Yet they showed, through an impressive local one-day strike and demonstration against cuts in 1 February, that they have organised a solid branch. While almost all the high-profile left in UNISON is ex-NALGO, Newcastle UNISON is a merged ex-NALGO/ex-NUPE branch. They have good links with the local Labour Party.

The call for public services to be restored, by taxing the rich, is very popular. The latest poll shows it supported by a 60%-26% majority, even when the choice was put as a general increase in taxes for everyone. But an across-the-board working-class mobilisation for the demand has a powerful socialist logic: it means social control over wealth, and social need com-



Teachers campaign against the cuts in Leicester. Photo: Mark Salmon

ing before private profit. And the mobilisation for Budget Day can be across-the-board. It can unite trade unionists across different sectors. It can bring together the worst-off sections of the working class and the better-off. It can draw in groups like the parents currently active in large numbers over education cuts. It can rally sections of the Labour Party. The potential impact in the Labour Party is especially important. General political debate over cuts in the Labour Party has been pretty dead for years. Supporters of Workers' Liberty and others have continued to put the case for Labour councils to refuse to administer the cuts, and instead to mobilise, with "unbalanced" budgets, for central government to restore the cash. We have got little support, even from those who are willing to campaign hard over individual schools, libraries, nurseries and so on. To push the timid and broken-spirited Labour councils into battle over central government Budget decisions which have already been ratified with no uproar simply seems far-fetched.

If the question is posed differently - for or against a serious fight to change the Budget decisions — the answer can be very different.

A one-day strike in November will be only a gesture — though a useful one — unless it is tied into ongoing action. It can be. Once Labour Parties and trade unions have been won to fighting the Budget decision, it will be easier to win them to fighting the implications of the Budget decision. And the ground will be laid for forcing the next Labour government to restore public services.

● Delegates' and observers' credentials for the 13 May conference: send £5 to Newcastle UNISON, Room 145, Civic Centre, Newcastle NE1 8QH. Phone: 0191-232 8520 x 6980. ■

## Monthly shorts

MORE THAN 1,000 trade unionists and other activists have been arrested in a clampdown in Bolivia. The government declared a "state of siege" on 19 April — after a six weeks' teachers' strike, backed up by a three weeks' general strike — and then police and troops raided a conference called by the COB, Bolivia's TUC.

● Fax the Bolivian Embassy on 0171-235 1286 demanding the release of those detained. ● Contact "Bolivian Union Solidarity Committee", 0171-613 2426.

THE GAP between the richest ten per cent and the poorest in Russia has increased from 5.4-to-1 to 14-to-1 over just the last three years. Thirty to forty per cent of the population are below the poverty line on official figures, though some ease their plight through the black economy.

60% of Russia's economy is now privatised, and about \$4 billion of foreign direct investment has come in since 1990. That is still a small amount compared to Hungary, and even smaller compared to China, which took in \$34 billion in 1994 alone.

IN PARIS, campaigners have occupied a conspicuous office building to highlight homelessness. London could do with the same sort of action. According to private developers interested in the idea, much of the empty office space in the City is "ideal for conversion", and could provide homes for many thousands.

LATEST ON the Great Economic Recovery: unemployment among 18 to 24 year olds increased from 9.7% in spring 1990 to 18.1% in autumn 1994.

DO YOU wonder why teachers' leader Doug McAvoy is so alienated from his union members? He is the highest-paid general secretary of a TUC union, at £85,000 a year. The lowest-paid of the leaders of the big unions is Garfield Davies of the shop workers, on £34,000. Gavin Laird of the AEEU gets £49,000, John Edmonds of the GMB £52,000, and Bill Morris of the TGWU £58,000.

12,300 COUNCIL seats across England and Wales will come up for election on 4 May. If the trend set by Scotland's local elections on 6 April continues, the Tories will be slaughtered.

But one group of people is not responding to the growing anger against Tory cuts — the Labour Party leadership. Education spokesperson David Blunkett has ruled out any big increase in cash for education, in a speech on 9 April, and the Labour leadership has let it be known that it is considering new legal restrictions to stop Labour councils spending too much under a Labour government.



# Russia: the return of the army

By Dale Street

WIDESPREAD disillusionment with the results of market reforms and privatisation is now rife throughout the Russian Federation. This has combined with conflicts between different sections of the old Soviet elite to lay the groundwork for a resurgence of Russian nationalism.

Despite Yeltsin's incessant claims that the Russian economy is on the road to recovery, the country remains in the grip of deep economic crisis. Inflation and unemployment are rising, while the value of the ruble and living standards are falling.

Industries often cannot afford to pay their own workforces. At the close of 1994 Russian miners were owed 900 billion rubles in unpaid wages!

The disastrous consequences of market reforms have generated popular hostility towards the West for two reasons.

Firstly, the "shock therapy" reforms are seen, not incorrectly, as the creation of Western institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the Group of Seven industrial countries.

Secondly, the economic aid promised by the West to ease the transition to a market economy has never materialised. Western "aid packages" to Russia have been little more than insurance for Western firms exporting to Russia, plus loans to the Russian government adding to the country's spiralling debt burden.

In the absence of a powerful socialist movement, which could have given the disillusionment with market reforms an anti-capitalist direction, the economic crisis has generated an inward-looking anti-Western Russian nationalism.

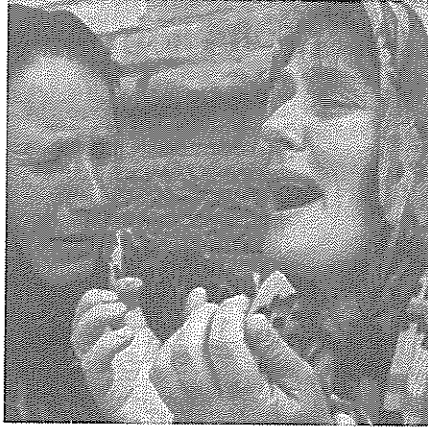
The resurgence of Russian nationalism has also been driven on by conflicts between those sections of the old Soviet elite who have benefited from the pro-market economic reforms.

In the former Soviet Union, the economy was in a state of ongoing decline. In spite of this, and in spite of the lack of any real planning, the economy *was* held together by the centre.

But the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the collapse of the central bureaucracy in the different ex-Soviet republics, left the door wide open for get-rich-quick entrepreneurs (many of whom had been members of the old Soviet elite) to plunder potentially profitable parts of the disintegrating economy.

Raising the banner of Russian nationalism and masquerading as defenders of the Russian fatherland provided a cover under which sections of the former elite of Russia could pursue their own economic goals.

Thus, for example, last year's invasion of Chechnia was portrayed as an attempt to defend the integrity of the Russian state. At



**Chechnia indicates the return of the military's fortunes**

root, however, it was triggered by a conflict between the Chechen elite and the oil elite in Russia for control of Chechnia's petrochemical industry.

Similar issues are at stake in last month's upsurge of fighting in Tajikstan, where Russian forces clashed with rebel Tajik forces opposed to the country's government.

On the surface the conflict seems to be an attempt by the Russian government to prevent the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Whilst this is a factor in the conflict, on a more basic level control over oil resources is again a driving force behind the fighting.

Collapse of the government in Tajikstan could be the start of a domino effect, leading to the collapse of governments in the neighbouring republics. But the Russian oil elite wants to prop up the government in Kazakhstan at all costs, so that oil from the country's Tenghiz oilfield is pumped through pipelines into Russia for export, rather than into Turkey.

Yeltsin has encouraged the upsurge of Russian nationalism in an attempt to win back the popular support which he has lost as a result of the economic reforms over which he has presided.

He has even revived 23 February (the anniversary of the founding of the Red Army) as a national holiday in Russia. But the ideological content of the holiday is nationalist rather than socialist. 23 February has been declared "Day of the Defenders of the Motherland".

But the biggest gainers from the upsurge of Russian nationalism have been the Russian military elite. For years they have presided over an army in decline. Until recently, successive cutbacks on military spending have been imposed by a cash-strapped Russian government. Russian forces have been withdrawn from Eastern European states, and also from the ex-Soviet republics.

42% of military families are dependent on a single wage. 42% of army officers see no future for themselves in the military. Major

social divisions have opened up in the army between officer-entrepreneurs (who sell off army equipment on the black market) and poorly trained conscripts.

As the military forces declined in terms of both quantity and quality, so the position of the army elite declined correspondingly. They ceased to be the commanders of the forces of a world superpower and became the custodians of an army in retreat.

But the collapse of illusions in the West and the consequent resurgence of Russian nationalism have restored the fortunes of the military elite. The military interventions in Chechnia and Tajikstan are the clearest, but not the only, examples of this.

Following on from last year's agreement between the Tajik and Russian governments which led to 16,000 Russian troops being stationed on Tajikstan's border with Afghanistan, a second agreement in January of this year between the Kazakh and Russian governments created an effective merger of the armies of the two countries and allowed Russian troops to be stationed on the Kazakh-Chinese border.

Then, in February of this year, a further agreement between the governments of Belarus and Russia permitted Russian troops to patrol Belarus's borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

But these agreements have not been enough for the Russian military elite and the Russian politicians who have jumped onto the Russian-nationalist bandwagon.

Russian Defence Minister Grachev is now calling for Russia to pull out of the "Conventional Forces in Europe" agreement of 1990, on the grounds that it commits the country to an unrealistically low limit on the size of its armed forces.

Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev has threatened ex-Soviet republics, especially the Asian and Baltic states, with military intervention in order to protect the rights of Russian speakers in those countries.

Other Russian politicians, including former Finance Minister Fyodorov and leader of the re-founded Communist Party Zuganov, have demanded a crackdown on separatist tendencies within the Russian Federation itself (home to 150 different peoples) and the re-establishment of a strong centralised state.

The growing significance of the military in Russian politics is unlikely to lead to the recreation of a USSR on the basis of a capitalist economy. A more likely scenario is for many of the ex-Soviet republics to end up as satellite states of Russia (just as the Stalinist Eastern European states were satellite states of the USSR).

Even so, the resurgence of Russian nationalism and the growing influence of the Russian military are further evidence of the failure of the pro-market reforms and the impossibility of the creation of a form of bourgeois-democratic capitalism in Russia. ■

# Fabianism, Stalinism and Blair's new Clause Four

## From state bureaucracy to market bureaucracy

By Roland Tretchet

THIS MAGAZINE makes no apology for repeating certain basic truths.

One truth that certainly bears repetition is that the idea that Stalinism equals socialism is pereposturous, the great lie of the twentieth century. This lie, more than anything else, has provided the ideological underpinning for Blair's assault on Clause Four. It is the one thing that all liberal politicians, police dictators and media pundits can agree upon.

Yet, if we take a step back and survey the full course of the evolution of the socialist and labour movement over the last 150 years, then we can see that the "great lie" is merely the modern form of an even older idea.

It is simply an intellectually acceptable way of telling the working class — the great bulk of humanity — that it must remain an exploited class forever. It's a less direct and "provocative" way of saying that if any improvement is to come in the lot of the working class, this will not be through its own self-liberating activity but by the endeavour of a civilised and educated elite. Once we grasp this, then it throws a great amount of light on Blair's campaign against Clause Four.

There is a direct line of intellectual continuity from the Webbs and Bernard Shaw and other leading Fabians, through high Stalinism — which Fabians like Shaw and the Webbs supported — to the bogus "New Times" of *Marxism Today* and Tony Blair's "New" Clause Four. This is simply a warmed over re-hash of ex-Eurocommunist twaddle.

Though Sidney Webb wanted to nationalise everything and Blair nothing, for both men politics is and was about bringing "change" from above. Both are bureaucrats. But whereas Webb was a bureaucrat of state planning, Blair is a bureaucrat of the market. As Jack Straw likes to point out, if he'd lived long enough Webb would have supported Blair's abolition of Clause Four. Straw and others have failed to point out that if young Blair had only been born early enough, he would no doubt have shared Webb's high opinion of Stalin.

Fabians — and Blair is a Fabian (a Thatcherite Fabian but a Fabian none the less) if he is anything — must be understood not only from the point of view of what they are *for* but what they are *against*.

They are against the two central ideas of revolutionary Marxism that a) the working class can liberate itself and overthrow the old order and b) in doing so it can reshape

both politics and economics, laying the basis for a real democracy of the producers and consumers.

Apart from these two negative dogmas Fabianism and all other forms of elitist "socialism from above" can be moulded into a multitude of political forms in response to the prevailing bourgeois intellectual consensus.

That is why Blair described his new clause as an attempt to "free Labour from the influence of Marxist intellectual analysis".

This is a classically Fabian theme. As Hal Draper explained:

"The Fabians (more accurately, the Webbs) are, in the history of the socialist idea, that modern socialist current which

*"Though Sidney Webb  
wanted to nationalise  
everything and Blair  
nothing, for both men  
politics is and was  
about bringing  
change" from above."*

developed in most complete divorcement from Marxism, the one most alien to Marxism. It was almost chemically-pure social-democratic reformism unalloyed, particularly before the rise of the mass Labour and socialist movement in Britain, which it did not want and did not help to build (despite a common myth to the contrary).

"The Fabians, deliberately middle-class in composition and appeal, were not for building any mass movement at all, least of all a Fabian one. They thought of themselves as a small elite of brain-trusters who would permeate the existing institutions of society, influence the real leaders in all spheres Tory or Liberal, and guide social development toward its collectivist goal with the "inevitability of gradualness." Since their conception of socialism was purely in terms of state intervention (national or municipal), and their theory told them that capitalism itself was being collectivised apace every day and had to move in this direction, their function was simply to hasten the process. The Fabian Society was designed in 1884 to be pilot-fish to a shark: at first the shark was the Liberal Party; but

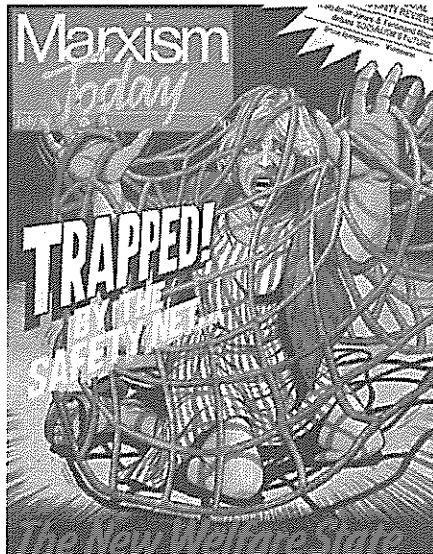
when the permeation of Liberalism failed miserably, and labour finally organised its own class party despite the Fabians, the pilot-fish simply reattached itself.

"There is perhaps no other socialist tendency which so systematically and even consciously worked out its theory as a Socialism-from-Above. The nature of this movement was early recognised, though it was later obscured by the merging of Fabianism into the body of Labour reformism. The leading Christian Socialist inside the Fabian Society once attacked Webb as a "a bureaucratic Collectivist" (perhaps the first use of that term). Hilaire Belloc's once-famous book of 1912 on *The Servile State* was largely triggered by the Webb type whose "collectivist ideal" was basically bureaucratic. GDH Cole reminisced: "The Webbs, in those days, used to be fond of saying that everyone who was active in politics was either an 'A' or a 'B' — an anarchist or bureaucrat — and that they were 'B's'..."

"These characterisations scarcely convey the full flavour of the Webbian collectivism that was Fabianism. It was through-and-through managerial, technocratic, elitist, authoritarian, "plannist". Webb was fond of the term "wire-pulling", using it almost as a synonym for politics. A Fabian publication wrote that they wished to be "the Jesuits of Socialism." Their gospel was Order and Efficiency. The people, who should be treated kindly, were fit to be run only by competent experts. Class struggle, revolution and popular turbulence were insanity. In *Fabianism and the Empire* imperialism was praised and embraced. If ever the socialist movement developed its own bureaucratic collectivism, this was it.

"It may be thought that Socialism is essentially a movement from below, a class movement," wrote a Fabian spokesman, Sidney Ball, to disabuse the reader of this idea; but now socialists "approach the problem from the scientific rather than the popular view; they are middle-class theorists," he boasted, going on to explain that there is "a distinct rupture between the Socialism of the street and the Socialism of the chair."

"The sequel is also known, though often glossed over. While Fabianism as a special tendency petered out into the larger stream of Labour Party reformism by 1918, the leading Fabians themselves went in another direction. Both Sidney and Beatrice Webb as well as Bernard Shaw — the top trio — became principled supporters of Stalinist totalitarianism in the 1930s. Even earlier, Shaw, who thought socialism needed a Superman, had found more than one. In



Marxism Today 1985. Ten year's later Blair repeats such "wisdom"

turn he embraced Mussolini and Hitler as benevolent despots to hand "socialism" down to the Yahoos, and he was disappointed only that they did not actually abolish capitalism. In 1931 Shaw disclosed, after a visit to Russia, that the Stalin regime was really Fabianism in practice. The Webbs followed Shaw to Moscow, and found God. In their *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, they proved (right out of Moscow's own documents and Stalin's own claims, industriously researched) that Russia is the greatest democracy in the world; Stalin is no dictator; equality reigns for all; the one-party dictatorship is needed; the Communist Party is a thoroughly democratic elite bringing civilisation to the Slavs and Mongols (but not Englishmen); political democracy has failed in the West anyway, and there is no reason why political parties should survive in our age...

"They staunchly supported Stalin through the Moscow purge trials and the Hitler-Stalin Pact without a visible qualm, and died more uncritical pro-Stalinists than can now be found on the Politburo. As Shaw has explained, the Webbs had nothing but scorn for the Russian Revolution itself, but "The Webbs waited until the wreckage and ruin of the change was ended, it mistakes remedied, and the Communist State fairly launched." That is, they waited until the revolutionary masses had been straight jacketed, the leaders of the revolution cashiered, the efficient tranquillity of dictatorship had settled on the scene, the counter-revolution firmly established; and then they came along to pronounce it the Ideal.

"Was this really a gigantic misunderstanding, some incomprehensible blunder? Or were they not right in thinking that this indeed was the "socialism" that matched their ideology, give or take a little blood? The swing of Fabianism from middle-class permeation to Stalinism was the swing of a door that was hinged on Socialism-from-Above." (*Two Souls of Socialism*, 1965)

That door has swung back with the collapse of Stalinism for socialists from above.

The reasoning is simple:

- 1) Democratic working class self rule is impossible.
- 2) The old style state planning has failed. Therefore
- 3) The capitalist market system is the only alternative.

The future of "socialism" for today's Webb's consists in making the market work in a more efficient, dynamic and rigorous way.

What is interesting here is the symbiotic relationship between the decay of Stalinism and the emergence of "new" Labour. All the key themes of Blairism can be found in that odious journal of disillusioned ex-Stalinists, *Marxism Today*.

In 1991 they produced a manifesto for the public sector which not only outlined ways in which BR could be sold off and road tolls imposed, but worshipped CCT and the internal market as ways of making the NHS and local government efficient.

"Competitive tendering, tighter regulation and innovative approaches to financing, may help the public sector to become more efficient at delivering value for money. However they will do little to foster innovation, creativity and improvements in the quality of services. Funding should be clearly earmarked for research and development. There needs to be a new deal for workers in the public sector. The dedication and professionalism of nurses and teachers needs to be recognised in their pay, status and training. They must be able to concentrate on what they are good at — teaching and nursing rather than managing. This new deal has to be matched by a determination to break down the aspects of trade union culture which still persist in parts of the public sector — especially in local government and particularly the defence of out-dated restrictive practices and industrial relations procedures."

Sounds familiar?

Little Mr. Blair gets all his ideas from these folk.

They're very clever.

Martin Jacques former editor of *Marxism Today* and now deputy editor of the *Independent* sets the tone with editorials against striking teachers "Please sir, stop whinging", and his decision to popularise the banalities of Amatai Etzioni's "communitarianism".

He is backed up by others like ex-YCLer Martin Kettle, the *Guardian* columnist and effective political editor — who comes from an old CP family.

The *Guardian's* coverage of the Clause Four debate has been reminiscent of Pravda at its worst, while his own personal column has advocated a return to "New Liberalism" by Blair. As "New Liberalism's" heyday was in the first decade of the 20th century, this reveals precisely how modern the modernisers really are. Back to the future!

And Blair's worship of the bureaucratized market in the NHS, local government, the public utilities and elsewhere tells us just how "dynamic" this market really is if it has to march forward on the crutches of bureaucracy. ■

## In the aftermath of the Turin factory occupations

Another Day

By Antonio Gramsci

THE PROLETARIAN vanguard, which today is disillusioned and threatened with dissolution, must ask itself whether it is not itself responsible for this situation. It is a fact that in the General Confederation of Labour there is no organised revolutionary opposition, centralised enough to exercise control over the leading offices and capable not only of replacing one man by another, but one method by another, one aim by another and one will by another. This is the real situation, which lamentations, curses and oaths will not change, only tenacious and patient organisation and preparation. It is thus essential that the groups of workers which have been at the head of the masses accept reality as it is, in order to alter it effectively. They must keep the masses firm and united behind their programmes and slogans; they must become capable of producing from among themselves an energetic general staff, which is able to conduct a broad mass action with intelligence and daring. Today, we have the referendum; its result must not be the occasion for dismay and dissolution, but rather a warning of the need for tighter, more disciplined and better organised action. The emancipation of the proletariat is not a labour of small account and of little men; only he who can keep his heart strong and his will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as a fighter for the working class or called a revolutionary.

From *Avanti*, Piedmont edition, 24 September 1920.



# "Half echo of the past, half menace of the future"

By Mark Osborn

THE *Economist* believes that the Algerian government is likely to fall to fundamentalism. If it does, the repercussions will be felt right across the Muslim world and far beyond. The *Economist* concludes that "we" must "live with Islam," which is "not like communism, something to be resisted tooth and nail."

They think "Islam is a force for good, offering a moral underpinning for a world that surely needs one."

The *Economist* wants the bourgeoisie to learn from the worst experiences of the "Islamic Revolution" in Iran (1979). The ruling class must not "overreact", but to trust to the economic weight of the advanced capitalist countries to bring the Islamic radicals into line.

FOR SOCIALISTS an Islamic fundamentalist government would be a disaster. An Islamic regime would go beyond even the repressive measures that Algeria's bourgeois military dictatorship takes.

In Iran, clerical power under Khomeini meant the destruction of working-class organisations, political parties and trade unions, and complete denial of the right to organise, to speak or to publish.

The Khomeini regime also rolled back gains made by women. It forced its way into every sphere of life.

Muslim fundamentalism is a genuinely reactionary — backward-looking — political movement. These are the modern "feudal socialists" Marx described in the Communist Manifesto: "half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to its very heart core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through its total incapacity to understand the march of modern history." They are trying to turn the clock back, to medieval times, rather than looking forward to the socialist future.

WHY ARE the Islamic fundamentalists growing? and why now?

In parts of the Muslim world, modernising bourgeois nationalists came to power in Algeria, Iraq and Egypt in the '50s and '60s as in Turkey after World War 1, in Bangladesh after 1971, and most recently in Gaza. More-or-less secular governments autocratically presided over extreme poverty and corruption, thereby discrediting modern, "Western values" — rights for women, democratic rights, secularism — in the eyes of millions of the world's poorest people.

The alternative, Stalinist "Communism"



Algerian schoolgirl shot by Islamic fundamentalists for not wearing the veil. She later died

— strong in Bengal, Turkey and some Arab countries — collapsed as a credible force with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Desperate people looking for self-respect, solidarity and a reason for living turn back to religion. The fundamentalists offer the uncorrupted certainty of the Koran in an uncertain world. And that is why people are turning to them and reviving the traditions of the past.

In the Algerian slums, the Muslim fundamentalist FIS appeals even to women. They offer a trade — accept the veil in return for running water, stay in the home if your husband gets a job.

The parallel with Hitler's National Socialism is quite striking — offering an improved standard of living and life by way of utterly reactionary solutions. And similarity with the Nazis does not stop at their programme. These people are building mass movements of thousands, who are willing to fight and die for their ideas.

THE fundamentalist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir, currently active in Britain, believe that "the unlimited and omniscient Creator can lay down absolutely what is good and bad. The Koran contains a complete blueprint for life from the level of the individual to the level of the state."

It is not just the separation of church and state that is under threat, but all the historical gains made by the modern individual — including, even, the right to a private life, free will, choice and individual identity.

If they could, they would shackle thought to religious dogma, taking us back centuries, before modern science and the bourgeoisie shattered those chains.

While it is perfectly true that these abilities to think and choose are limited under

capitalism, they do exist. They are important, and they are the irreplaceable starting point for a struggle for something better.

Hizb ut-Tahrir would even try to rigidly regulate sex life. One of their leaflets explains that sexual freedom leads to rape and child abuse, and means advocating necrophilia, incest, sodomy, and sado-masochism. Missing is any idea that consent — choice — should govern sexual relations, and that, for this reason, rape is wrong and sado-masochism is not a problem between consenting adults.

The meaning of the fusion they want — of state, politics and religion in pursuit of the domination of all areas of life — can be understood only if we grasp the pre-bourgeois nature of fundamentalism.

In England "side by side with the expansion of trade and the rise of new classes to political power.. was the contraction of territory within which the spirit of religion was conceived to run. By the Restoration [1660], religion has been converted from the keystone which holds together the social edifice into one department in it."

The Church "was shouldered aside.. [by] the 18th century... the very conception of the church as an independent moral authority, whose standards may be in sharp antithesis to social conventions, has been abandoned" (RH Tawney).

The development of a strong capitalist class in England broke the power of religion and abolished the religious courts.

The point about the Muslim world is that capitalism came late. Modernisation has been partial and weak. It has not carried the people nor completely uprooted the past.

So Sharia [religious] law and religious courts, and gangs of state-sponsored religious enforcers, still continue to exist in

capitalist Saudi Arabia.

The weakness of capitalist development means that despite the existence of Islamic liberals there has not been or an Islamic Reformation. There was no equivalent of the English revolution — Egypt had Nasser's military regime.

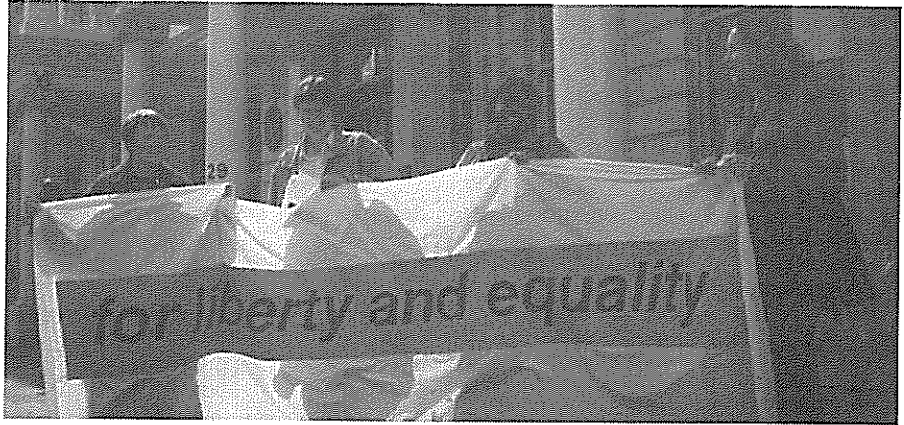
And so religion continues to intrude on politics, economics and social matters in a way that would be inconceivable in Britain.

IT IS NOT only the High Bourgeois *Economist* which bends down before rising Muslim fundamentalism.

On the left, *Socialist Worker* celebrate Muslim resistance to Mubarak because the fundamentalists are militant and opposed to the Egyptian regime. At their Marxism '94 event their spokesperson celebrated the Muslim opposition to Arafat which screams "Arafat, you pimp, we will stamp on your head," without bothering that it is Hamas which are doing the shouting. It is rather like a socialist going on a march against the Tories, chiming in with "Down with Major," without noticing that it is a BNP demonstration.

And the liberal left do their own supple spineless crawling, too. Martin Woollacott's *Guardian* article (8 March '95) is worth summarising, because some of his views are widely held:

1. "The positive messages in the Koran" must be reclaimed to "devise some kind of Muslim feminism." Because
2. "it is hard to envisage success for women's rights [under Islam] without a buttressing from religion." But this is not so bad because
3. There are "virtues [in] traditional Muslim households" and "attractions of Islam for some educated and sophisticated women." And change from within is possible
4. Women are "active in religious movements from which position they can challenge and infuriate the authorities."



**Wednesday 19 April. Picket of Bangladeshi embassy in protest against that government putting on trial — in her absence — feminist author Taslima Nasrin. Taslima Nasrin has argued in favour of secularism and against women's oppression. This has resulted in death threats and a charge of blasphemy being directed against her.**

And do not rock the boat because

5. "In Saudi Arabia Western forms of protest [i.e. visible protest] have proved highly counterproductive." Other methods are preferable

6. "In Syria, good looking young women go off to the Mosque as a form of adolescent liberation.. their parents can't refuse, as they could refuse them a visit to a restaurant or disco." This is "rebellion from strength," presumably just masquerading as rebellion from weakness.

It is hard to imagine a more wretched capitulation to encroaching Muslim mediocrity! When, a hundred years ago, Booker T Washington accepted second class citizenship on behalf of African Americans he was, at least, a Black American, living in the South. Martin Woollacott accepts second class citizenship for millions of women living thousands of miles away, from the convenience of an office on Farringdon Road.

These 'liberals' hold the absurd idea that

vigorous protest movements are "Western," and to be discouraged. It almost defies belief, but they seem to believe that the ideas of the French revolution — liberty and equality — have, for large parts of humanity at the end of the 20th century, to be abandoned in favour of a ridiculous rumaging around in the past.

Equality and the fight for it is not to be given up anywhere!

As Taslima Nasrin, the Bengali feminist, said in *Workers' Liberty* 19 "Women continue to be persecuted in the name of tradition. One thing that feminists in Western countries should learn is to be critical about the traditions of Africa and Asia. I have heard Western women saying we should follow our traditions. Well, I like my food and I like my dress. But why should I accept the tradition of oppression, too? Why should I accept a society that puts women in veils and allows men to dominate them?... Freedom is not just for you, it is for me too." ■

# Ideas for freedom

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struggle during World War 2.

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right wing of the student movement on education policy

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# Fight for free education!

By Rosie Woods, Left Unity supporter and recently elected member of the National Executive of the National Union of Students

I'VE BEEN TO the conference of the National Union of Students' — held every Easter — twice before. This is the only time of the year when students — some 1,500 delegated from their colleges — have a chance to get together to discuss and vote on issues relevant to them. I hoped campaigning on student financial support would be top of the agenda. The appalling level of student poverty certainly means it deserves to be. However, this was not to be...

Labour Students dominates the leadership of NUS and consequently can do a lot to set the tone and agenda of conference. It never ceases to amaze me just how right-wing, passive, and elitist they are!

Before conference started, delegates who had motions to propose were invited to compositing meetings (a process where motions are put together to make them shorter and the amendments are organised in a logical order). It can be an opportunity for political factions to stitch each other up. And so during compositing the SWP and Labour Students did deals with each other to stop a Left Unity motion on free education, calling for NUS to commit itself to decent grants for all students over 16 being prioritised. This motion was pushed down the running order.

One of the features of NUS conference, like many trade union conferences I'm sure, is that a lot of time is spent discussing and voting on "bureaucratic" motions. Very often delegates get bored and disappear to the cafe or bar while this is going on. But it is always an opportunity for the right-wing to slip something anti-democratic in. We were asked to vote on two motions that did precisely this.

First was a proposal to cut the size of conference (on the grounds of saving money). Second was a motion to abolish the Central Areas Development Fund (a means of "topping up" the affiliation money received by the local Area organisations of NUS). Both motions would have adversely affected the less developed student unions in the Further Education sector.

In fact overlooking and trying to silence further education students within NUS is a familiar story. Why? Because Labour Stu-



**Education should be a right not a privilege**

dents has its base in the universities. Because developing and involving further education students, and working-class students, would mean Labour Students potentially losing control of NUS.

The FE sector was given just one hour of conference time in which elections to the FE National Committee were held and all motions were discussed without discussion or amendments.

Meanwhile in the FE sector, courses are being cut, colleges face bankruptcy, lecturers are being sacked, students studying part-time on the dole are being told they can study for less and less hours...

There were two items on the conference agenda which referred to 'no confidence' in our President Jim Murphy. Murphy is a member of Labour Students.

The no-confidence motions had arisen from anger at Murphy from many students involved in the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Campaign and the Women's Campaign. These campaigns are supposed to set and decide their own policies and priorities. Murphy has shown little respect for this over the last year. For instance when the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals produced a report about safety on campuses Jim Murphy, without consulting with the Women's Officer, spoke to the press, saying NUS supported and agreed with the report. The report said that in certain cases rapes would be reported to the police, with or without the permission of the victim. *Not* NUS

Women's Campaign policy!

Any chance to hold Murphy to account through a no-confidence motion was lost, however, as Labour Students managed to wangle it so that it was not discussed before the election for President. And Jim Murphy was elected for another term as President!

But the main debate for me has to be on student financial support. Labour Students campaigned hard and narrowly won support for their motion calling for a "review" of student financial support. This was merely cover for their real intention — that is, to ditch the policy of decent grants for all students and free tuition and adopt some form of graduate tax or extensive loan system. This is in line with New Labour: Blair has clearly decided that a future Labour government "cannot afford" to properly fund further and higher education. Labour has completely accepted the Tories' agenda. Murphy et al are doing Blair's dirty work and trying to batter NUS into submitting to a two-tier, cut price, education system.

To add insult to injury the review — in the form of a questionnaire — has been conducted over the Easter holidays, i.e. where no students, except sabbatical Student Union Officers in the big universities, are there to be consulted! This consultation will be followed by a special conference of NUS in May at which only the biggest Universities — with the most right-wing delegates — will be able to easily afford to send delegates. At that conference, we predict, students will be asked to ditch NUS's long-held, and bitterly fought for, policy in favour of free education.

It is a travesty of democracy. But also nothing could be more inimical to the real interests of students.

As a member of the Labour Party and a socialist I shall be campaigning for Labour to win the next election. But in the meantime I shall also be fighting within the Labour Party for a policy in favour of free education as a right for all. As a newly elected member of NUS National Executive I want to take up the fight in the student movement too.

There are many thousands of students — working-class students studying on the dole, mature students looking for a second chance at education, women struggling to look after children whilst studying, black students facing discrimination and oppression — who need and deserve a free education system. I will do my best to fight on their behalf, for their interests, which are, in fact, the interests of all students. ■

● The Campaign for Free Education can be contacted c/o NUS London, ULU, Malet St, London WC1E 7HY (0171-637 1181).

# The return of the labour aristocracy

By Martin Thomas

THE RECENT Joseph Rowntree Foundation Inquiry into Income and Wealth shows widening gaps both between social classes and within social classes.

At first sight, indeed, the figures suggest that the big divide in British society is not a Marxist class conflict, but one between a mass of poverty and a "privileged" layer, "privileged" only by having stable and moderately-paid jobs.

Closer examination of the data reveals the class categories: capitalist class, middle class, working class, "underclass". It also shows that differences within the working class have increased enormously.

Those differences raise political issues. The left, and, to a lesser extent the whole organised labour movement, are based primarily in the better-off sections of the working class. Should we accept this limitation complacently, or fight against it? And how can we fight against it?

Rowntree shows a huge growth of poverty. Between 1979 and 1991-2, the top tenth of the population raised its income by 63 per cent (after housing costs), and the poorest tenth's income went *down* 17 per cent.

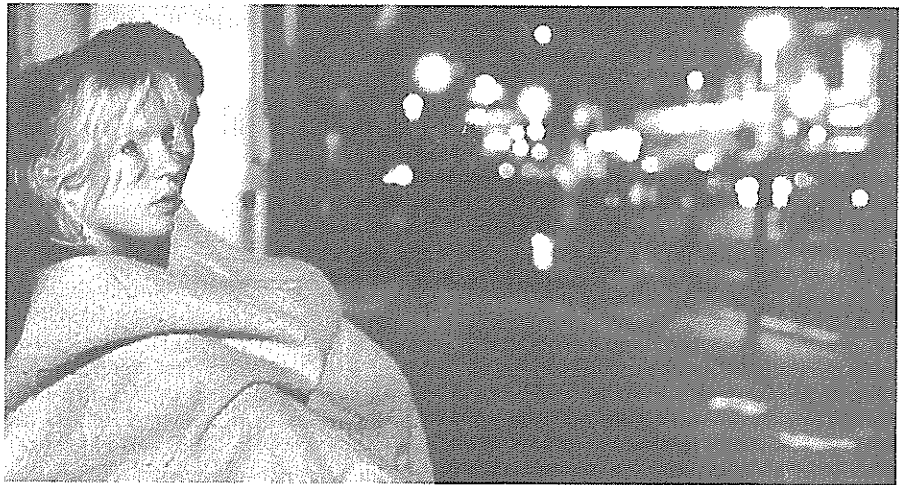
"In 1979, 1.7 million individuals had incomes below 40 per cent of that year's average (allowing for family circumstances and after housing costs). By 1991-2, 7.9 million people had incomes below 40 per cent of the average for those two years; of these, 3.2 million had incomes below 40 per cent of 1979 average income".

Behind this inequality stands the *class war* waged by the Tories against the labour movement. Mass unemployment depresses wages and allows bigger profits, thus bigger investment income for the rich.

It also tends to depress low wages more than high wages. Wages for jobs which require little training, or for which replacements can easily be hired, can be pushed down to the minimum. Workers who cannot so readily be replaced, or whom the bosses want to keep anyway, for continuity and teamwork, can hold their own.

Average real full-time wages for cleaners, or for bricklayers, went up only 3 per cent between 1976 and 1994, while better-paid workers gained 50 per cent (Social Trends 1995).

If trade unions are weaker, bosses are less restrained by wage rates negotiated across the whole workforce, and can open the wage-gap wider.



How can organised labour fight poverty?

Across the public services, low-paid jobs have become even lower-paid as they are contracted out, while ever-higher-paid managers have been recruited to dragoon workers into keeping the service going despite continual cuts.

There are now more employees in Britain classified as "managers" than as "production workers". Fifteen per cent of all employees, and nearly one in five of male employees, are "managers", though no doubt many of them are in fact just low-grade supervisors and administrators.

WILL HUTTON, the Lib-Lab economics editor of the *Guardian*, in his best-selling new book *The State We're In* (p.105-9) sees modern Britain as a "30-30-40" society. Thirty per cent depend on pensions, benefits, government job schemes, or "scraps of part-time work"; 30% have "marginalised and insecure jobs". The forty per cent who have stable full-time jobs or good part-time jobs he calls "the privileged".

Labour Party leader Tony Blair has talked about extending Labour's appeal from the "underclass" to the "middle class". The working class? For Blair it has disappeared.

Some figures make such pictures look plausible. The top twenty per cent have increased their cut of total income (after housing costs) from 35% to 43%. The top forty per cent get 66% of total income. The top one per cent does own 18 per cent of marketable wealth, but gets less than 5% of total income — and is even 18% so much? To include the bulk (72%) of marketable wealth, we have to widen the range to the top 25%. It looks as if the position of the top one per cent is a minor question, and the

important divide is between the relatively comfortable top twenty or forty per cent, and the rest. *And quite a few "averagely-paid" or "low-paid" people come into the top twenty per cent.*

A single person on *average* male adult full-time earnings of about £17,000 a year (all the figures are for the early 1990s) would be *well within the top twenty per cent*. Two workers living together, both on *below-average* wages of £12,000 a year, are also in the top twenty per cent.

"Average earnings" figures can be deceptive. If one person gets £1 million a year, and ninety-nine get £7,070 each, then the "average" is £17,000 a year, but 99 per cent get less than that average. In Britain today, about two-thirds get less than the average.

The lower 80 per cent of the distribution is dominated by unemployed people, pensioners, people on very low or insecure wages, and people supporting children or the elderly on moderate wages. Official figures even understate the case. The adjustment they make to crude income figures for children is very small — much smaller, for example, than the proportional allowance for children made in Income Support rates. A more realistic adjustment would put even more households with children into the lower ranges of the income distribution, and more medium-paid childless households into the top.

THE TOP ONE per cent is, however, more significant than the crude figures suggest. Their total marketable wealth is £306 billion, or an average of nearly £1 million each.

Compared to the merely well-off, they ↓

have not only more wealth, but a different sort of wealth. The wealth of the other 99 per cent of us is almost entirely made up of houses, life insurance policies, and the like. "The top one per cent", as Rowntree puts it, "are very different": they, and they alone, own sizeable amounts of land and shares — the wealth that brings economic power.

Only 24% of shares are now owned by individuals or through unit trusts; but the top one per cent also *control* the social wealth represented by the means of production, even when it is owned by anonymous bodies like pension funds, insurance companies, and the state. They are the bosses of such bodies.

Moreover, the wealth and income of the top one per cent must be understated in the official figures, because we know that, to evade tax, the rich systematically disperse the formal ownership of their wealth to their relatives and to family trusts, take many of their luxuries under the guise of "business expenses", etc.

THE DECISIVELY privileged class is much smaller than 40 per cent. And, at the other end, the "underclass" is much smaller than 30 per cent.

The basic figures for income distribution are a snapshot. Nearly 40 per cent of those in the bottom 20 per cent in 1991 were out of it in 1992. Many people are poor: not nearly so many suffer the permanent, hopeless poverty of the "underclass".

The crucial breakpoint here is between the low-wage working-class household which can and does still live from labour, and the "underclass" which has come to look to crime, begging, or dole, supplemented by scraps of work, rather than labour or property, for an income. According to the Social Trends report, one-third of the bottom 20% are in work. Of those in work one-half are *skilled* manual workers. A bricklayer on average wages falls into the bottom 20 per cent if he is supporting a wife and two young children. Another one-third are retired: though poor, they are mostly not part of the "underclass".

Even including the one per cent (Rowntree's estimate) who are not counted anywhere in the income distribution figures, not even in the bottom 20%, the "underclass" is probably at most four per cent of the population.

WHAT OF THE 95% or so, standing between the upper class and the "underclass"? How do they divide into social classes?

Some ten per cent are self-employed. Rowntree figures show them concentrated in the top ten per cent and bottom ten per cent of the income distribution. At the bottom they are probably, in truth, insecure wage-workers, such as building workers hired as "labour-only subcontractors", or mini-cab drivers. At the top they will be lawyers, doctors, dentists, business consultants, accountants, and the like.

Some people who are formally wage-workers come close to the economic position of these well-off self-employed professionals. The Rowntree Report remarks

soberly that the media often cite £30,000 a year as "middle-income". In fact it is very much upper-income. It seems "middle-income" to national newspaper and TV journalists, 65 per cent of whom get over £30,000 a year ("Journalist" supplement, March 1995)! On a similar level to those national journalists are many managers, senior civil servants, stockbrokers and other financial traders, university lecturers, etc.

These "professional and managerial" people have high incomes, but not only that. They do not do routine work, under the control of a boss, producing definite goods and services at a socially-imposed level of productivity. Karl Marx contrasted these "higher-grade" workers with ordinary labour. "With given conditions of production, it is known exactly how many labourers are needed to make a table... With many 'immaterial products' this is not the case. The quantity of labour required to achieve a particular result is as conjectural as the result itself. Twenty priests together perhaps bring about the conversion that one fails to make; six physicians consulting together perhaps discover the remedy that one alone cannot find... The number of soldiers required to protect a country, of police to establish order in it, of officials 'to govern it' well, etc. — all these things are problematical..." ("Theories of Surplus Value" part 1, p.174, 268).

In other words, the numbers and incomes of these people carrying out "the professional activities of the ruling class" (ibid p.285) expand to soak up the capitalist revenue available. Marx argues that when

*"Wage differentials  
have increased. The  
manual pay gap is the  
biggest since records  
began in 1886."*

the bourgeoisie "has given recognition to the ideological professions as flesh of its flesh and everywhere transformed them into its functionaries..."; "when it want[s] also to consume 'in an enlightened way'..."; then the revenue of these "ideological professions" will swell (TSV 1, p.301). He criticises the economist David Ricardo:

"What [Ricardo] forgets to emphasise is the constantly growing numbers of the middle classes, those who stand between the workman on the one hand and the capitalist and landlord on the other. The middle classes maintain themselves to an ever increasing extent directly out of revenue, they are a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand." (TSV 2, p573)

£30,000 a year, the benchmark salary for members of this middle class well-established in their professions, is the minimum income necessary to maintain a "top 20 per cent" standard with two small children

and an unwaged spouse. It is a sizeable class, commanding a large part of the comforts produced by modern industry. Over the last 15 years it has certainly increased its relative income, and probably also its size.

No socialist should hesitate to demand immediate taxes which tap not only the maybe £50 billion income of the super-rich, but also the £150 billion of the well-off.

Historical figures included in the Rowntree report show that between 1938 and 1949 the slice of income after tax taken by the top 10% of "tax units" (couples or single people) went down from 34% to 27%. The Tories have worked a shift of similar size in the opposite direction: the top 10 per cent of individuals have increased their slice from 21% to 27%. A reversal would shift over £30 billion from those living in luxury or great comfort to the poor and to social welfare. This would be enough to restore the Welfare State and pay £40 a week extra to five million low-paid workers.

EACH INDIVIDUAL area of middle-class comfort is enjoyed by a wider layer than the middle class alone. The divisions are:

- Between the comfortable house with a garden, and the grim council flat or worse. By 1991, three-quarters of remaining council tenants were in the lowest-income 40% of the population, while fewer than three per cent of the top-income 40% were council or housing association tenants.
  - Those on or near the level of the "professional" households who spent an average of £77 a week on leisure, and those on or below the level of the average single parent, who could spend an average £7 a week on meals out, drinks, cinema, and sport.
  - The 25 per cent who had two or more holidays in 1993, and the 40 per cent who had none.
  - The 25 per cent who have financial assets over £3500; 50 per cent who have assets below £500; and 12 per cent who have at least one crippling "problem" debt.
  - The 30-odd per cent with credit cards, and the 60-odd per cent without.
  - The 58% of those in work who can look forward to occupational pensions (or, more narrowly, those, maybe half of that 58%, who can expect substantial pensions from their jobs), and those who will have to rely on the ever-more-miserable state pension.
  - The eight per cent who go to fee-paying schools at age 11 to 15, the one-third who get into higher education at 18, and the rest who don't. (Another ten per cent or so will get to university full-time later in life).
- No research is available on exactly how much these different measures of comfort overlap. Some people well-off on one count are of course badly-off on another. There cannot be more than 15 or 20 per cent who are consistently well-off on most counts. There must be another 20 per cent or so comfortable on several counts, at least.

The 75 per cent or so standing between the upper and middle classes, at the top, and the "underclass", at the bottom, are united by the fact that they live by selling



their labour-power (or, more precisely, are in households which live by selling labour-power or on pensions from previous sales of labour-power); they do routine work, producing definite goods or services, under the control of a boss; they own no substantial wealth beyond maybe a home and a life insurance policy.

They are the working class. The division between this working class and the upper class is fundamental because it is the pivot of the struggles that shape the movement of society: wages against profits, welfare against the rule of the predator, everyday democracy against privilege. The differences within the working class are, by contrast, relative and shifting. What is secure and well-paid now may be insecure and lower-paid next year. Moreover, between layers of workers there are *differences*, not clashes of interest, whereas the social positions of capitalists and workers are not only different but also *opposed*.

Yet the Rowntree figures certainly show that differences of living standard within the working class have become much wider. It says a lot about the limits of Establishment social thinking that Will Hutton can describe having a stable job at a moderate wage as a "privilege", no matter what the alienation, exploitation, and inequality between worker and boss. It also says a lot about life in Britain today.

WHILE THE gap between the middle class and the "underclass" widens, many workers are close to middle-class comfort, and many others close to "underclass" misery.

Wage differentials have increased. The well-paid manual male worker ("upper decile") who got about twice as much as the lower-paid (bottom decile) in 1978 now gets two-and-a-half times as much. The larger inequality among non-manual workers has increased; so has the gap between non-manual and manual workers. The median adult male full-time non-manual worker got 41% more than the median manual worker in 1992, as against only 30% more in 1981, and 23% more in 1971. By 1992 the well-paid ("upper quartile") male non-manual worker got 3.3 times as much as the low-paid manual worker. The manual pay gap is *the biggest since records began in 1886*.

Household structures are another cause of inequality. If three workers, A, B, and C, do the same job in the same factory or office at the same wage — say £12,000 a year — but A and B live together without dependants while C has three small children and a spouse at home looking after them full time, then A and B are in the top 20% of the income distribution, and C in the bottom 20%.

Differences of this sort are becoming a bigger factor, for several reasons. People are having children later, and so there are more "dinky" (double-income-no-kids) households. Looking after children, or elderly dependants, has become more costly because the Welfare State has been run down, extended-family networks of aid have diminished, children have stayed longer at school, and frail elderly people

have lived longer.

Large economic differences within the working class are, however, not at all new. Some of Karl Marx's summary statements in the Communist Manifesto, for example, seem to envisage capitalist society splitting into two classes, with no middle class, and the whole working class on a uniform level of absolute poverty.

*"Marxists must turn  
out towards the  
worse-off working  
class, especially the  
youth."*

The picture he found and analysed after serious economic studies was different. When, in chapter 25 of Capital volume 1, he came to describe "the influence of the growth of capital on the fate of the working class" his conclusion was not simply that workers would get poorer. He recognised real wages could rise, but he predicted "the misery of *constantly expanding strata* of the active army of labour" (p.798, emphasis added). He differentiated between the "badly-paid strata" of the class (ch.25 section 5b) and the "best-paid section of the working class... its aristocracy" (section 5d). That aristocracy suffered cruel economic insecurity, like the whole working class, but in good times could reach lower middle-class standards. Meanwhile the section "with extremely irregular employment", the "foundation for special branches of capitalist exploitation" outside up-to-date large-scale industry, the section who could not even command normal minimum wages, would expand as a proportion of the working class (p796).

Mass trade unionism, the Welfare State, and prolonged prosperity stifled these semi-pauperising, differentiating tendencies for a long while. Now we are back to Marx. And today's labour aristocracy is mostly white-collar, with cleaner, more comfortable, quieter and safer work conditions than manual workers.

LIKE IT OR not, the permanent, stable organisations of the working class must depend — at least in quiet times — mostly on the workers with more education and leisure, that is, on younger, childless, and better-paid workers, members of the "aristocracy."

Marxists like Leon Trotsky used to argue that trade unions under capitalism could not escape being limited mostly to "the more skilled and better-paid layers" (Transitional Programme). For some decades after World War Two, it seemed that trade unions in Britain and some other countries had driven beyond those limits. Now we are back near them. Trade unionists today (30% of the workforce) are more likely to have credit cards or own their own home than non-unionists.

The organised, more politically aware,

workers are also largely those who have living conditions, as Lenin once put it, "tolerable in the petty-bourgeois sense". Those conditions breed complacency, moderation, conciliation, a tolerant attitude to capitalism. Witness the Labour Party today, with the increasing weight of better-off white collar workers or middle class people in many constituencies. Plainly socialists have to organise among the active layers but also against this conciliatory bias.

Since youth play a large part in left politics, it is noteworthy that inequality has increased especially for young people. Many young graduates jump straight into the top ranges of the income distribution. The 16 year old school leaver has only the dole or a string of dead-end, very low-paid jobs. Over recent years low-paid young workers have had less chance of progressing to higher-paid jobs than any previous generation for which the report presents figures, back to those born in 1920. No wonder that many university students have drifted to the right, while the mass of young people have become bitter and alienated, if not yet political. Socialists must still try to recruit university students, as we try to recruit better-off workers, but we must be aware of the social and economic factors pulling them away from us.

Another lesson, as relevant but less obvious, is that "labour aristocratic" complacency has an "ultra-left" variant as well as the dominant right-wing one. Left-wing organisations based on better-off workers may escape reformism only to fall into sterility and arrogance. The revolutionary labour aristocrats disdain the petty pleadings of the conventional labour aristocrats, but also disdain the "not very political" concerns of the mass of the working class. Talk of "the working class" or "the trade unions" in general can cover up neglect of the majority.

The orientation of the Socialist Workers' Party, for example, towards often-token militancy on whatever catches "the mood", rather than sustained effort on basic working-class concerns, is not just a reflection of their base among university students, teachers, white-collar local government workers, etc. The whole philosophy of a very top-down leadership shapes this orientation. Yet it also "fits" the narrowness of their social base and their smug unconcern about it.

A Marxist left such as we have in Britain today — heavily concentrated in the unionised sectors of white-collar work — has a duty both to organise among that layer of the working class which is already active, in the trade unions and the Labour Party, and to turn a section of that "aristocratic" layer out towards the worse-off working class, especially the youth. "Colonisation" of ex-students into manual work, campaigns such as the Welfare State Network and efforts to build a working class youth movement are all part of this. The "labour-aristocratic" mentality helps hold most of the Marxist groups back from such work, and leaves them complacent about their lack of roots in the bulk of the working class. ■

# The German workers against Hitler

AS THE establishment commemorates the 50th anniversary of the end of "Hitler's war" in Europe, we take the opportunity to examine the question: how did it happen that Hitler, the crazy war-lord of German imperialism, was allowed to come to power?

How did it happen that the German labour movement let Hitler smash it, without a fight? It was the most powerful labour movement in the world. Its majority party, the Socialist Party, was the mainstay of the Weimar Republic set up after Germany's defeat in the 1914-18 war, commanding eight million votes and its own powerful organisations.

The CP, though smaller than the socialists, was also a mass party, sometimes getting over five million votes. Neither party acted to stop Hitler when he could still have been easily crushed. Why?

The Socialist Party, whose leaders had allied with the Right in 1919 to crush the Communist workers — and kill Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht — was a conservative party thereafter. The Communist Party was in the grip of Stalinism. In the crucial years when the Nazis moved towards power, the Communist Party pursued ultra-left sectarian politics at the same time as it tried to compete with the Nazis as German nationalists, calling for a "people's revolution." They refused on principle to collaborate with the Social-Democrats even for self-defence against fascism. Despite the Italian experience, where the fascists in power had crushed the labour movement, the German Stalinists talked deliriously about Hitler in power opening the door to a Communist revolution — "after Hitler, our turn next."

Against the suicidal leaders of both mass workers' parties stood Trotsky. From the elections of September 1930 to Hitler becoming Chancellor on 30th January 1933, Trotsky incessantly sounded the alarm, urging the German labour movement to create a united front to crush Hitler. In Germany, Trotsky's supporters,

organised as an expelled faction of the CP, the Left Opposition of the CPG, urged policies that would have allowed the German labour movement to destroy Hitler and prevent the resurgence of that German imperialism whose immensely costly defeat is now being celebrated by the heirs of the imperialist victors.

In the following pages we present a

selection of documents of the German Trotskyists as they fought against crushing odds for the life of the German labour movement. The German labour movement was the first victim of Hitler as an account below of the celebration of May Day at Buchenwald concentration camp a week after it was liberated in 1945, makes movingly clear.

The end 1945:

## How workers celebrated May Day at Buchenwald

WHILE THE Allied press does its utmost to whip up a poisonous lynch spirit against the entire German people, the prisoners of all nationalities released from the Nazi concentration camps express warmest solidarity with their German comrades who were the first victims to feel the barbaric whip of the Nazi oppressor.

At Buchenwald, one of the worst camps, the 15,000 prisoners organised an inspiring celebration of May Day, demonstrating the brotherhood of the world working class on this traditional holiday. Here is how *PM's* correspondent [2 May] described it:

"Many of these men... have been in Fascist jails or camps for 10 years or more. Their brothers have been murdered, their wives and children lost somewhere on this continent. Their faces are grey, their shoulders droop as under great weight.

"They are the proletariat of many nations and they are magnificent. This

is their day and it is fitting that they should have celebrated it here. On the walls of their own barracks and the barracks of the SS who were once their guards, great signs in German, English, Russian, Polish, Czech and Serbian read: 'This is the Day of the Fight against Fascism'...

"Between these signs and beneath the flags of many nations, the survivors marched — a Polish group, a Russian group, a Yugoslav group, a Czechoslovakian group, an Italian group, a Spanish group, and many others. And then came a large German unit and they began singing the Internationale. Other groups picked up the song, each in its own language.

"Yet the melody was not lost in this babylon of languages. It rose up in a mighty torrent into thin air which but one month ago still stank of Nazi massacres."

From *P.M.*, an American newspaper 12 May 1945

# Workers

## Beginning of February 1933: Trotskyists call for resistance It is still not too late to crush Hitler!

### Smash Hitler. German Left Opposition Appeals for United Proletarian Resistance

Hitler is Chancellor!

Workers, do you know what that means? It means complete starvation and loss of all rights, it means the destruction of all the active elements of the proletariat! After the speeches of the Nazi leader, there can be no doubt of this. Hitler's program is the complete smashing of all the political and trade union organizations of the working class, to clear the way for a still more monstrous impoverishment of the working class. The aim of his foreign policy is war with Soviet Russia. If Hitler succeeds in carrying through his aims this would mean an unprecedented defeat for the international proletariat, "for Germany is not only Germany, but the heart of Europe." Do not console yourselves with the nonsense that Hitler will soon be played out. No, understand this clearly — now is the time to tackle him!

Either Hitler will now establish his power, or the proletariat will overthrow him and clear the road for the dictatorship of the working class.

At this time, to wait any longer, as the Social Democratic Party proposes, is lunacy. It is a crime. It means to let Hitler establish himself in his new official positions. It means to play the very last cards into his hand, and with that, to lead directly to the defeat of the working class.

Hitler must be overthrown, Fascism must be struck down. The Fascist government of civil war can be overthrown, however, not by parliamentary votes of "no confidence", but only by the extra-parliamentary mass struggle.

#### The General Strike

But how can we achieve this action? We must create the prerequisites — the closing of the ranks. It is not enough to call for the general strike, as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany has done up to now. The situation demands today of the Communist Party an open offer to the leaders of the Social Democratic Party and the General German Trade Union Federation. A **concrete program of struggle** must be proposed, the leadership of the Social Democratic Party and the General German Trade Union Federation must be called upon to negotiate in the open before the workers, in order — maintaining the political independence of the participating organisations — without delay to create common organs of struggle on a national and local scale and throw

into the fight the concentrated forces of the proletariat.

**The goal of the struggle is:**

**Overthrow the Hitler Government!**

**Disarm the brown murder bands!**

**Defend all working-class organizations and their property!**

**Defend the democratic rights of the proletariat!**

The means of struggle is the general strike, but this can lead to victory only if the leadership of the struggle and the proletariat are fully aware that the fight against the brown murder bands must be carried with even "harder weapons."

**We must not wait, we must hit out!**

Comrades of the Social Democratic Party! Protest, compel the immediate acceptance of the struggle, break the sabotage of your leaders! Comrades of the Communist Party: For two and a half years we "Trotskyists" have been proposing a Leninist united front policy to smash Fascism, whose perspectives we have correctly drawn. Through the fault of the Stalinist leadership, the Central Committee, much time has been lost. Even now, reformism has the determining influence on the decisive party of the German working class. It is still possible, at the eleventh hour, to organize resistance through a Leninist united front policy and lead the proletariat to victory. The proletariat still has its organizations! In its hands are the levers of economic life. The others have only bayonets. The Bolsheviks, too, defeated Kornilov at the last minute!

**All forces together! No weariness, no hesitation!**

**A solid front of all workers' organizations for the united front organs of the working class!**

**A general strike till the overthrow of the dictatorship of hunger, of war, of the murder of workers!**

**For the defense of the political rights of the working class!**

**For the defense of party and trade union buildings and of the workers' press!**

**For the defense of the Communist Party of Germany!**

**Against wasting of the people's substance on the corrupt barons of the Eastern Relief and the bosses of heavy industry!**

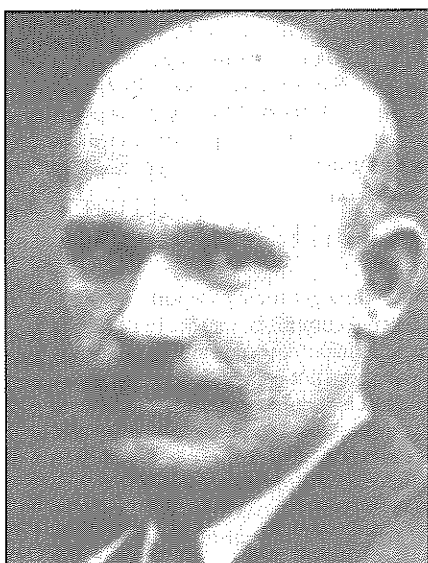
**For workers' control of production!**

**For a decent wage!**

*The Left Opposition of the Communist Party of Germany*



Hitler



Communist Party leader, Thälmann

# Don't let yourselves be reduced to slaves!

## The Left Opposition appeals for working class unity

The Appeal of the Pre-Conference of the International Left Opposition to all the members of the Communist Party of Germany, to the Social Democratic workers, to the entire proletariat of Germany!

COMRADES, MORE than ever at the present moment are the eyes of the world proletariat turned to Germany.

With ever increasing uneasiness and tension of the nerves it is following the struggle you are conducting against the stranglers of your liberties, of your life. It is well aware that the extreme tension, the forces of the reaction imposing its base and black dictatorship upon you, will have enormous consequences for the destiny of the working masses of the entire world.

After having passed through various stages the Fascist reaction has succeeded in establishing itself in power. You all know under what conditions this could take place. For this to happen the treason of the social democracy and the pernicious policy of Stalinism was necessary, that the enormous mass of the German proletariat be maintained for years and years in a state of division and inaction.

Comrades, it is in order to crush us, in order to find a way out, that the German bourgeoisie, the great potentates of banking and industry, the landowners and the domestic cliques have raised the Brown Shirts to power. To snatch away the conquests attained by you and by your fathers in a heroic struggle of three quarters of a century; to destroy your political and trade union organisations; to reduce you to complete servitude: that is the task of the fascist dictatorship. The fascist dictatorship is the inferno of the proletariat.

No, comrades, the world proletariat cannot believe that its brothers in Germany will let themselves be reduced to the state of slave. The Fascist enemy who is determined to attain his goal by blood and death, will encounter on his path the determined and invincible resistance of millions of German workers. The German proletariat will know how to stand up in the harsh struggle, the bloody struggle, the civil war, to defend itself and to defeat its mortal foes.

We the Bolshevik-Leninists, after having for years drawn the attention of the German and world proletariat to the danger of Fascism in Germany; after having shown the road towards defeating and triumphing over it; after having denounced the treachery of the leaders of the social-democrats

and flayed the criminal tactic of the Stalinist faction which has the leadership of the Communist International and the Communist Party of Germany in its hands, we now address ourselves to you at the moment of the greatest and most tragic danger, to you, members of the German Communist Party, to you, social-democratic workers, to all the proletarians of Germany and we say to you: *there is still time!*

The victory over Fascism is still possible. Whoever tells you that all is lost, that the

*"The world proletariat cannot believe that its brothers in Germany will let themselves be reduced to the state of slavery. The fascist enemy... will encounter on his path the determined and invincible resistance of German workers."*

struggle is now in vain — is betraying you. You can still conquer. But in order to gain the victory, to avoid the defeat, the whole working class must unite in the struggle against the reaction.

This is possible upon one condition; that all the organisations of the German proletariat, the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the trade union organisations, the factory councils, etc. undertake the joint struggle against fascism.

To realise the united front of organisation with organisation, to establish in every fac-

tory, in every locality, in every quarter, everywhere, your organs of defence, here is the road: through the partial struggles, to pass from general action to the fighting general strike against Fascism, a strike which will lead by means of the popular fighting organisations, by means of the Soviets, to the crushing of the reaction and to the conquest of power.

Members of the German Communist Party: Demand that the leadership of your party propose from the bottom to the top the united front to the Social Democratic Party, to the Federation of Trade Unions, and to all the organisations of the German proletariat, for the joint struggle of all against Fascism.

Socialist workers, impose upon your leaders the realisation of the united front, the sole weapon by which you and your class brothers can defend your lives.

To act immediately means not to allow the enemy the choice of the attack, means to engage in the battle under conditions which allow us to conquer.

The German revolution is passing through a historic moment in which the fate of the proletarian Germany, the fate of the USSR is at stake.

History will condemn to shame those who, in this critical moment, will desert the field of battle.

Demand the joint action of the proletarian front:

- Form your organisations of struggle;
  - Fight to the death for the salvation of the German proletariat;
  - You hold in your hands the fate of the world proletariat and of the Russian revolution;
  - Arise ye millions of proletarians of Germany!
  - Smash Fascism!
  - Long live the joint action of the proletarian front!
  - Long live the victory of the proletariat.
- The International Communist Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists)

**The Pre-Conference of the International Left Opposition took place in Paris early in February 1933 with delegates from Germany, France, Belgium, Russia, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, England and America who addressed the above appeal to the German proletariat.**

## Make haste, worker-Communists!

By LD Trotsky

THERE ARE AMONG the Communist officials not a few cowardly careerists and fakers whose little posts, whose incomes, and more than that, whose hides, are dear to them. These creatures are very much inclined to spout ultra-radical phrases beneath which is concealed a wretched and contemptible fatalism. "Without a victory over the Social Democracy, we cannot battle against fascism!" say such terrible revolutionists, and for this

reason... they get their passports ready.

Worker-Communists, you are hundreds of thousands, millions; you cannot leave for any place; there are not enough passports for you. Should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank. Your salvation lies in merciless struggle. And only a fighting unity with the Social Democratic workers can bring victory. Make haste, worker-Communists, you have very little time left!

*From For a Workers' United Front Against Fascism, December 1931*

1932: Oskar Seipold speaks from the tribune of the Prussian Diet (Parliament)

# For the United Front against Hitler

Oskar Seipold was a member of the Prussian Diet, elected on the official Communist Party ticket, who later defected to the Left Opposition. He delivered this speech in March 1932. It has been abridged slightly.



Hitler in 1933

THE NATIONS OF THE entire world and especially we in Germany are living under such conditions that every serious conversation turns directly to the questions of high politics — to that of the revolution.

Thirteen years ago, after the overthrow of the Hohenzollerns, the working class was factually master in the German household. The state based itself on the workers' and soldiers' councils. The bourgeoisie was forced to recognize the workers' and soldiers' councils, for better or worse, as the fundament of the state. But the working class was lulled to sleep by the leaders of the Socialist Party of Germany and the key to the house was stolen away from underneath its rest cushion. In this manner the proletariat was again sold out to the bourgeois and betrayed. The social democracy promised to bring about prosperity and socialism democratically, to open the road to the golden mean, Germany and the world were to flourish under the protection of the League of Nations. Today, in the Far East, we already hear the thunder of cannon, despite this "protection", despite this "League of Nations". How many other illusions this party has spread, this party which believes in Wilson and Briand, which can have confidence in Bruening and hope in a Wilson but cannot trust to the power of the proletariat and remains hostile to the only revolutionary workers' state in the world, the Soviet Union!

In 1918, the social democrats renounced the path of revolutionary force in the name of "pure democracy". And after that! They have in the name of all this prepared and abetted the path of Fascist reaction, of counter-revolutionary force. They rejected Lenin and sowed the soil for that hireling of capital, for Hitler. While the Fascist bandit is sharpening his knife to cut off the head of the German working class, the social democratic leaders insist emphatically that everything will be in order. For they have raised all in the spirit of democracy, including Hitler. The Heidelberg Program expresses itself in a similar vein: that democracy is humanizing the enemies of the working class. Now, you can rest assured:

when Hitler lets your head roll, then you can assume with certainty, your political integrity will have very little left to lose by this operation. Hitler's announcements are calculated for blockheads and have the interests of scoundrels and fakers at heart. The growth of the Hitler party unfortunately proves that stupidity in the German nation is not yet rare. But Hitler is miscalculating when he believes that he will be able to deceive the German working class as Wels, Hilferding and company have.

In 1918 Herr Hilferding attempted to coordinate the Weimar constitution with the workers' councils. In 1932 he is no doubt racking his brain over how it is possible to conciliate the tailend of the Weimar constitution with the Fascist armories. But Herr Hilferding may have to conclude this theme in emigration, if the outcome of events is to depend upon the leadership of the social democracy. His fate would be that of the Italian social democrats, who also fought against the methods of Bolshevism so long until they played the Italian proletariat and the Italian people into the hands of the hangman Mussolini.

A Communist deputy said in the Reichstag: "We do not fear the Nazis. For when they come to power, they will very soon exhaust themselves". Comrades, Communists, that is a fundamentally wrong point of view. For we must not wait. We must not consider the seizure of power by the Nazis as a simple test for Hitler. That may be the point of view of the bourgeois democrats. But it is in no case a Communist point of view. Power in the hands of the Nazis would mean jail for the working class, the

gallows for its vanguard, Golgotha for the producing people, (Rep. Kasper — C.P.G.: But who said that?) — Remmele did, on October 15, I believe, but we can look that up — We must gather the working class for struggle before Hitler's dream of a Third Empire has become a reality. We must unite the working class in a single united front.

(Intervention from the Communist benches: And that is why you swiped the mandate from us!)

I am utilizing my mandate in the interests of the proletarian revolution — But this united front cannot be decreed in advance, by saying to the non-Communist workers: Come to us, recognize us as your leaders, then we will create the united front with you! You can only get the leadership by gaining the confidence of the German proletariat in the dynamics of the struggle. Lenin said: Without confidence, there can be no hegemony and the Communist party should and must become the hegemon (leader) of the working class. But whoever says: We do not fear the Nazis, let them come to power — is already today frightened to death by them, is scared to the marrow of his bones; his heart is in his boots; he draws the conclusion that it is no longer possible to prevent the Nazis from seizing power and is consequently ready for a capitulation before Hitler without a struggle.

(Shouts from the Communist benches)

We shall discuss elsewhere as to how far you have got with your policy of the Red Trade Union Opposition, the "Red" United Front, the "national and social liberation". Just to what extent you have already

proved sufficiently and will prove even more clearly in the future.

But this capitulation, this belief that the victory of Fascism can no longer be avoided, is concealed under false optimism, on the grounds of an inevitable and self-understood bankruptcy of the Nazis. Naturally, everything on earth ends at some time. Even the domination of the hangman Mussolini will have to come to an end and the end of the Czarist power could be foreseen many years ahead of the time. But that does not change the fact that two revolutions were necessary to defeat Czarism and that in the meantime Czarism succeeded in plunging the entire Russian people into an imperialist war. We say to the false optimists who console us with the coming bankruptcy of the "Third Reich": Do not dare lull the German proletariat to sleep! Do not chloroform it with sweet prophecies, do not dare undermine its will to power — now, when the will to struggle is the first and foremost condition of victory!

(Laughter among the Communists)

We are not for "national and social liberation" as you are. We revolutionary Marxists know that as long as the people are divided into classes, every conception has a class content. When social democratic workers often say: Yes, we are for democracy, but for pure democracy, then they also forget that in a class society, democracy can only be a class 'concept'. We Bolshevik-Leninists have no illusions and will not allow anyone to put any illusions over on us. What a horrible historical catastrophe it would be for the world proletariat if the Nazis were to come into power in Germany! Once come into power, Hitler could only become the executioner of the German proletariat and the agent of French, British and American capitalism. And the war for "social and national liberation" which Hitler would conduct could only be turned against the East and not against the West. That does not mean at all, against Poland. For Hitler and Pilsudski can very easily find common ground against the Soviet Union. To allow Hitler to get into power would mean betrayal against the first workers' state in the world, against the Soviet Union. And that means to betray ourselves doubly.

No, the working class of Germany does not want Hitler to study his state surgery on its neck, nor on its body. We must not wait until Hitler's power falls into bankruptcy. We must throw Hitler overboard before his dream has become a reality.

(Very true! from the benches of the Social Democratic Party — Intervention from among the Communists: "who is "we"?") — We, the Left Opposition of the C.P.G., even though we are not for the "national and social liberation of the German people" as you are, but for the proletarian revolution.

(Hear, Hear! — from the Communists) Because we know in the capitalist world the "people" is divided into classes. Friedrich Engels said: After the working class has conquered power, it will dictate the laws itself and in such a manner, that the capitalist class will disappear and become alike to the others. To that extent to which the



The results of the German workers' defeat: inhumanity, Holocaust

capitalist class will disappear, the proletariat also will dissolve itself because it will have no more classes against itself and the intervention of the proletarian state will become ever more superfluous, first in one sphere and then in another, until the state will wither away of itself.

Now, the *Vorwaerts* of March 15 writes in an editorial that hails from Paul Loche:

**"The first blow:** "Onward, Iron Front! The Iron Front has stood its first political test splendidly. It has done its share to spoil the "day of certain victory" for the knights of the swastika".

It is ridiculous to believe that the fate of the German people can be decided by parliamentary elections, or that the decision will be arrived at according to the parliamentary calendar. The fate of the German people will be decided by steel and lead. Only blind men or people who purposely close their eyes can believe that the problem of the fate of the German people can be decided by some sort of parliamentary elections — be they Presidential, Reichstag or Landtag elections. Hitler's assurances of legality are nothing more than a thin veil of cunning with which he means to cover his plans. Bruening's speeches against Fascism are not worth a Pfennig more than Hitler's oath of legality. All are gliding along the ether of neutrality. But statesmen have never lied so much as they have since the time that the radio was put at their disposal. The fate of the German people will not be decided by speeches, but as I have already said, by the open struggle of the classes with steel and lead. For it is toward this road that the Fascists are advancing and the working class must know this. The working class must fight mercilessly against all lies that attempt to soothe, against all illusions that attempt to lull them to sleep, no matter from what source. In order to be able to fight against Fascism effectively, it is necessary to unite the factories, the shops, the working class quarters, the millions of unemployed within a single front, with the aim of throwing back the watchdog of capitalism, the Fascists. For when the watch-dogs are beaten down, the master is in danger. The workers have no time to lose, they must organize themselves for

defence, for struggle, for attack and for victory. Hitler intends to militarize Germany in the interests of capital. The German proletariat will show him that it is only willing to be militarized in the interests of the proletarian revolution. Against Fascism, which we consider the last stake of capitalism, we revolutionary workers, we Leninist-Bolsheviks will fight in the foremost front with our brother workers as the vanguard of the revolution. The Fascist wave will and must smash up on the granite of the proletarian forces. When the capitalist class of Germany, which has become involved in its own contradictions and crimes, will push Hitler on the road to the overthrow, we shall take up the challenge in full preparedness. We shall say: Capitalism has wanted this: very well, we will raise our hand to its throat, our knee to its breast!

(Intervention by Rep. Paul Hoffman)

Yes, you are good "theoreticians", we have seen that repeatedly from your tactics, from your "United Front" only "under our leadership". You demand leadership a priori, because you are not sure whether you can win it. This is what Piatnitsky also said at the XI Plenum of the E.C.C.I.: "The German Communists have committed a mistake by issuing the slogan 'No Social Fascists in the Strike Leadership' during the metal workers' strike. That was not quite correct."

(Rep. Paul Hoffman: Quite correct!)

That was not quite correct, says Piatnitsky.

(Rep. Paul Hoffman: That was quite correct!)

In our opinion it was altogether wrong, in yours it was quite correct. In Piatnitsky's opinion it was "not quite" correct. And why was it wrong in our opinion? If there are 50 Communists and 150 or 250 social democrats in a factory, then you can of course, manage to build some sort of "strike leadership" in which the Communists will have a "majority". But this strike leadership has no real basis, it is a fictitious structure and can never reflect the actual desire for struggle in the factory. In this manner, you remain up in the air with your centrist tactics... in this manner you have isolated the party of the proletariat.

(Laughter among the Communists)

And all this at a time in which all the objective premises are favorable for the Communist party.

Who can offer resistance to Fascism?

(Shouts from the Communists: You!)

These are worth as much as the shouters. Neither the police nor the Reich's army, but only and solely — the working class. Therefore we must aid in this aim, to organize and to arm it. Only in this manner can the question of a serious struggle against National Socialism be posed. Among the workers there are many who have served as soldiers, but the youth which has not yet learned to handle weapons is the most numerous section. The opportunity must be created to train the young workers in handling weapons. It must be decreed: In the factories, one hour a day is to be devoted to military training. One day in the week street training and field maneuvers are to be held.

(Rep. Kasper — C.P.G.: Who is to decree this?)

Patience, I will also speak about that.

The unemployed are to train with the workers in the factories, in which they have formerly been employed; special supplementary training can also be provided for the unemployed. For this purpose a sufficient amount of weapons must be put at the disposal of the workers. The costs of the weapons and the training must be borne by the state. The government of the Social Democrat Braun will not by far attempt to do anything of the sort for it would be a misdemeanour from the point of view of the high art of the state or that of proper parliamentary etiquette, and against the obedient devotion to the bourgeoisie. No, that cannot be demanded from the great men of the S.P.G. whose aim in life is to ape the bourgeois statesmen and to betray the interest of the proletariat.

(Disorder in the House)

But only in this way can it be proved by documents that the speeches of the ministers are a hollow sham.

## Trotskyists at Buchenwald

**IS IT TRUE WHAT they say about Nazi tortures? Were you tortured yourself? What do you think of these methods?**

I was beaten and tortured continually for ten days after my arrest by the Gestapo. Only complete exhaustion halted their curiosity about *La Verité* and the Fourth International. If I had dropped a single unwarranted word, it meant death. Tortures of all kinds were common in the camp, from marches in the snow to typhus injections.

At Buchenwald there were about three to four thousand German politicals who had been interned for 12 years! Buchenwald, like Dachau, had originally been built for them and tens of thousands passed through.

Old German communist militants sought out our Trotskyist comrades and told them: "The time has come for you to make a public appearance." They asked for political discussions with our leaders at the camp. We accepted on condition that those who failed to maintain their dignity as political prisoners be excluded. A declaration of our German comrades which called for a German Soviet republic found a profound echo among the mass of the German Communists in the camp and a great many among them made arrangements to keep in touch with the Trotskyists upon their return home.

We Trotskyists organised ourselves into cells of several different nationalities and spearheaded the struggle for internationalism at the camp. As a whole, the French showed an increasingly disheartening chauvinist

trend. But an important section of CPF militants reacted vigorously against this trend and fought for an internationalist policy... I am sure that many of these militants will break with treacherous Stalinism soon and will aid us in building a powerful revolutionary proletarian party.

Comrade Beaufrère concludes with the hope that, in returning, the many admirable CP militants will not forget their experiences

and allow themselves to be swayed by the jingoism of Thorez and Duclos. He recalls to them how they worked day and night to produce a remarkable mimeographed issue of *L'Humanité* in protest against the chauvinist outpouring of a certain Simonin, a bourgeois journalist who had previously returned to France. The *L'Humanité*

of Buchenwald, he recalls, said:

"There are two Germanies: the Germany of Hitler which must be exterminated. The anti-Fascist Germany which must be helped."

General Foch, comrade Beaufrère concludes, once said that he was much closer to the Prussian Junkers than to the French communists. We, comrades, must make our choice too, at the side of the German communist, against the French bourgeois, even if he calls himself a "resistant."

**Extracts from an interview with Marcel Beaufrère after he spent two years in Hitler's jails. Published in *La Verité*, 11 May 1945.**

*"I was beaten  
and tortured  
continually for  
ten days after my  
arrest by the  
Gestapo."*

## Chronology of a disaster

**1930:** Slump hits Germany. Unemployment rises to three million. Heinrich Brüning of the Centre Party becomes Chancellor and takes emergency powers to rule by decree. Nazis get 18% of the vote in September 1930 elections (they had got only 2.8% in 1928).

**1932:** *April:* the Nazi militias, the SA and SS, are banned. *May:* Franz von Papen becomes Chancellor. *June:* he repeals the ban on the SA. Hundreds

are killed or injured in street battles. *July:* he sacks the Social-Democratic state government in Prussia.

**1933:** *January:* President Hindenburg appoints Hitler as Chancellor. *February:* on pretext of Reichstag fire, constitutional freedoms suspended, thousands of Communists and Social-Democrats arrested. *March:* new elections, with CP and SPD banned from campaigning. Nazis get 44%. New parliament votes dictatorial powers to Hitler. *April:* "Day of Boycott" against Jews. *May:* despite offers by Social-Democrat trade unions to cooperate, Hitler takes over the unions, turns them into a state "Labour Front", and sends union leaders to concentration camps.

**1935:** *September:* Nuremberg laws deprive Jews of civil rights.

**1936:** *March:* Hitler occupies the Rhineland zone demilitarised under the Treaty of Versailles after World War 1.

**1938:** *March:* Hitler annexes Austria. *September:* Hitler grabs the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia. *November:* "Kristallnacht", organised pogroms against Jews throughout Germany.

**1939:** *March:* Hitler seizes rest of Czechoslovakia. *August:* Hitler-Stalin pact. *September:* Germany and USSR invade Poland. World war breaks out.

**1942:** Wannsee conference fixes details of mass slaughter of Jews. Up to six million killed.

# Ripping open the doors of the establishment

By Peter Tatchell

THE "OUTING" of 10 Bishops by OutRage! during the Church of England General Synod last November was arguably the biggest and most successful "outing" accomplished anywhere in the world. Previous "outings" by gay activists (mainly in the US) have been generally confined to naming lone individuals. None have ripped open the closet doors of an establishment institution quite so decisively as the OutRage! revelations in front of Church House, the London headquarters of the Anglican Church.

The naming of the Bishops by OutRage! has already produced some startlingly positive results. For the first time ever, the Church of England has established high-level links with the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. The Bishop of Wakefield, Nigel McCulloch, has had private discussions with the secretary of the LGCM, Richard Kirker, and has asked LGCM to submit proposals for a review of Church policy.

In January, the Bishops held a previously unscheduled private discussion to re-exam-



Peter Tatchell

ine the Church's stance on lesbian and gay issues. Even more surprisingly, an approach by OutRage! resulted in the group being invited to forward a dossier on violations of lesbian and gay human rights, with a view to the Bishops considering Church support

for the repeal of homophobic laws.

Anglican officials have privately admitted that none of these initiatives would have occurred if OutRage! had not provoked "a crisis within the Church".

Richard Kirker of LGCM confirms that it

## What are the ethics of outing?

By Peter Tatchell

OVER THE LAST 10 years, only two MPs (out of 650) have come out — Chris Smith in 1984 and Michael Brown in 1994. At this rate we will have to wait 300 years for all 60 or so closeted MPs to pluck up the guts to be open about their homosexuality.

Fed up with this procrastination and cowardice, In January OutRage! wrote to 20 MPs calling on them to "make the morally responsible choice to come out voluntarily". A collective coming out by several parliamentarians would, the letter suggested, establish lesbian and gay MPs as a fact of life and ease the way for open homosexuals to routinely stand for elected office.

Not content with moral persuasion alone, OutRage! is now considering whether to "out" queer MPs who voted against an equal age of consent for gay men.

What makes "outing" these MPs ethically justified is their hypocrisy and homophobia — they are gay in private but anti-gay in public. By supporting a dis-

criminatory age of consent, these MPs are criminalising 16 and 17 year old gay men (and their partners). They cannot expect other gay people to collude with the infliction of suffering by saying nothing.

Most lesbians and gay men would agree that we should do whatever we can to protect members of our community. If "outing" can help destroy the power and credibility of gay homophobes who harm other lesbians and gay men, then it is arguably the morally right thing to do. By not "outing" gay public figures who are homophobic, we are effectively allowing them to continue to hurt other gay people. Our silence and inaction make us accomplices by default.

However, the ethical justification for "outing" amounts to more than queer self-defence against gay homophobes. Naming names is also the honourable refusal to be part of the squalid, deceitful conspiracy of silence which keeps homosexuality hidden and invisible.

Invariably, the critics of "outing" plead that people have a right to be invisible if they wish. Nevertheless, while some queers may choose to hide their homo-

sexuality, they do not have the right to demand that other lesbians and gay men collude with their deception.

Honesty is a social virtue and "outing" is telling the truth. If we really believe there is nothing wrong with being gay, why is it wrong to mention a person's homosexuality?

The "anti-outers" say it's an invasion of privacy. Well, it might be an unjustifiable intrusion if very intimate details about a person's sex life were revealed, but OutRage! has never done that. Merely saying that someone is gay is no more an invasion of privacy than saying they are Welsh, left-handed or straight. Public figures are constantly "outed" as heterosexual by coded reference to them being "married" or "having children". No one bats an eyelid. Why is it legitimate to name those who are straight but not those who are gay?

We all have to make a choice. Are we going to be part of the web of lies and hypocrisy which sustains the view that homosexuality is a shameful secret? Or will we tell the truth and help break open the closet doors which are the single greatest cause of lesbian and gay oppression?



was "outing" the Bishops which spurred the Church to action.

Just two weeks before OutRage! named the 10 Bishops, Anglican leaders turned down requests to discuss the sacking of gay clergy and other Church-endorsed anti-gay discrimination.

"The OutRage! action was a turning point", says Richard Kirker. "It has compelled the Church to reopen an issue which it was previously refusing to consider".

The train of events leading up to these new Anglican initiatives began last October when the *News of the World* revealed that the new Bishop of Durham, Michael Turnbull, had a conviction for gay sex in a public toilet in 1968. This led to charges of hypocrisy by OutRage! activists who were infuriated by Turnbull's condemnation of gay clergy in loving homosexual relationships.

The night before Turnbull's enthronement in Durham Cathedral, Sebastian Sandys, an ex-Anglican Franciscan friar, named three closeted gay Bishops during a debate at Durham University. His motive was to highlight the Church's double standards in protecting and promoting deceitful gay Bishops while dismissing parish priests in honest and committed gay relationships.

Although only three newspapers printed the names, the Church was shaken by the public exposure of homosexuality within its top ranks.

Revealing the Church was vulnerable, and that vulnerable institutions are the most amenable to change, OutRage! decided to name closeted gay Bishops who were hypocritically endorsing the Church's condemnation of homosexual acts and colluding with its sacking of gay clergy. OutRage! targeted clergy who were gay in private while supporting anti-gay policies in public. The aim was to force a crisis within the Church, which would compel it to reconsider its homophobic policies.

As delegates, including Bishops, arrived

to attend the Church of England General Synod, they were greeted by 10 OutRage! supporters, each holding a placard bearing the name of a Bishop and calling on him to "Tell the Truth!"

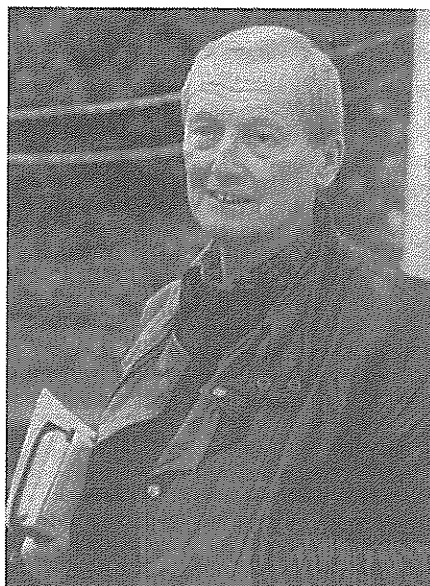
Despite misleading reports in the press which suggested that OutRage! was unsure of its facts, the list of Bishops was not based on gossip or rumour.

Indeed, since being named, none of the 10 Bishops has publicly denied being gay.

The full ramifications of "outing" the Bishops will take a while to unfold. What is already clear is that the Church's ban on gay clergy is now effectively destroyed. Having had some of its top clerics revealed as homosexual and having taken no action against them, in future the Church is going to find it very difficult ethically to dismiss gay priests.

Since the OutRage! "outing" everyone now knows there are gay Bishops. This is bound to make Anglican leaders much more circumspect in their homophobia. They realise that any hint of anti-gay policy will, given their apparent acceptance of gay senior clergy, be instantly ridiculed as hypocrisy and double-standards. This will almost certainly act as a significant constraint on overt Church homophobia.

The effect of naming the Bishops goes way beyond the Church. The whole homophobic establishment is now aware that "outing" is not just an idle threat. OutRage! has succeeded in unmasking top clerics. We can, if we decide to, also expose hypocritical and homophobic closet gays in politics, business, the military, judiciary and the police. These people now understand that all those who abuse their power to harm other lesbian and gay people are potential targets. Maybe this will persuade some of them to think twice about being homophobic in the future. Even if it convinces only a few of them to cease supporting anti-gay policies, then that achievement alone will have made "outing" the Bishops morally justified and worthwhile. ■



Bishop Derek Rawcliffe was outed by Outrage

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# The "IS-SWP tradition" 4

## 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-IS-SWP people 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 real 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.

paper had still existed in 1984 the SWP would have had an entrance into a great number of lodges.

Looked at objectively this period has some very peculiar aspects. The problem was that comrades did not look at the situation objectively.

After the miners' strike the branch committees developed to such a point that they replaced the branch meeting as the body that directed the work. From this point branch meetings were turned into public meetings, with a few announcements at the end, when you learnt what you would be doing in the next week. There ceased to be any discussion about aims or objectives. The branch was effectively disenfranchised, and the real control rested with the committees.

Behind the committees stood the organisers appointed by the centre. The committee members then formed an inner layer and this is the basis of the current slide toward a two-tier membership structure in the SWP.

At the same time a layer of young people were developed — "Young Turks" — people like Andy Wilson and Phil Taylor. They were given instructions on how to behave, and they were very ruthless inside the branches.

The only moderating force against the excesses of these young people was a layer of older, middle cadre. Where this layer has been strong the straight line to the centre has been disrupted. Where the middle cadre is weak — like Merseyside — we have had some appalling switches and turns, with no moderation whatsoever.

There are an awful lot of Micawber-types in the SWP — just waiting around to see if something happens. Some have been waiting ten years. Nothing has turned up yet!

Inside the organisation there are people who bend the knee. However this is in contradiction to every other aspect of their lives. As in the Communist Parties of the 1930s there is a certain "disjunction" — weird and wonderful reasoning about why what happens internally should be different to what happens outside the organisation.

The thing which is at the back of this is that the SWP is built on the principle that someone — Cliff, Harman, Rees — is right, and the rest should shut up and listen to them. This culture is in absolute contradiction to what is necessary to build a revolutionary cadre, and what worries me is that there will be the same sort of wastage of revolutionaries that we saw with the WRP and, more recently, with the *Militant*.

My expulsion began with the refusal to publish an article I had written to *Socialist Review*. One of the issues which the expulsion brought to light was that this was not the first time that articles had been refused. There are a lot of issues that SWP members discuss that never appear in their press. In this case the article not only landed in the editor's bin, it led to a disciplinary investi-

## Left must tell SWP: "This is not on!"

By Chris Jones\*

I JOINED THE International Socialists in 1973 and was finally expelled at the 1994 SWP conference.

When I first came into contact with IS, in the late 1960s, I was still in the Labour Club at Lancaster University. The thing that impressed me was their engagement with current issues.

That fed into the theoretical issues. I read the magazine *International Socialism*. What struck me was their refusal to get involved in "crisis mongering" — in contrast to the *Militant* and, in particular, Healy's organisation.

The IS seemed to look at the issues in terms of long-term development, rather than immediate short-term results.

Their attitude to the Labour Party had begun to change. In the early 1970s I was selling the *Socialist Worker*, while not yet actually being a member of IS, and still being a member of the Labour Party. There was still a blurred edge to the Labour Party issue. And, in fact, that helped me to make the transition from Labour to IS.

The orientation to the working class has stood IS-SWP in good stead. It allowed for the development which took place in the workers' movement during the 1970s, and

led to the influence they had by the mid-70s.

The orientation to the class also helped to counterbalance some of the worst excesses which took place in the 1980s. For example, by the early '80s people like Roger Cox were actually arguing that just to hold a steward's card would pull comrades to the right!

The most crass excesses of this period — around 1983 — were, in part, dealt with after the SWP found itself unable to deal with the miners' strike.

During this "downturn" period I wrote material opposing the new orientation. The argument went that as the Labour left disintegrated, the SWP had to break many of the links with the other organisations which had been made during the Anti-Nazi League period, or through the shop stewards' movement.

The external orientation was replaced with a turn inwards. Work in broad organisations was abandoned with the reasoning that as the environment was hostile only "ones and twos could be recruited."

By 1983 the rank and file organisations had been shut down. The hospital workers' organisation was closed just before the health strike of 1982. Then they closed *The Collier* down. Although, by that stage, *The Collier* was a rump organisation in terms of members, it had some organisational capacity. It had been delivered to lodges up and down the country for some years. If the

gation.

The first I heard of the disciplinary action that was being planned was from an ex-member who phoned up to tell me to "watch your back." Then I got an invitation to attend the District Committee. The invitation was odd because the District Committee are appointed and this had been justified on the grounds that they were simply "functional" rather than political committees. The District Committee tried to patch together a number of allegations about my local work and behaviour. These charges would not stand up and, in fact, were never formally used to justify my expulsion. I requested confirmation of what was happening in writing. This was refused but I was referred to Pat Stack who was in Liverpool for these meetings and agreed to meet me. I thought this was more appropriate as the centre had initiated this and the District Committee was just a smokescreen.

It was put to me that I was hostile to the monarchy and that I supported the Party having a programme. Quite true! I had never hidden these views. They were expressed properly in the internal bulletins. I was thrown out on political grounds, not for disciplinary reasons, for holding views incompatible with membership. Most noticeably since my expulsion *Socialist Worker* has carried articles on most of the issues I raised, the monarchy, the national question and now the trade union conference.

I got thrown out. I had very limited support inside the SWP. Part of the reason for this is that the organisation is so atomised it is difficult to get across Branch and District boundaries.

The process of expulsion casts the SWP in a very bad light. The Control Commission is unbelievable. The Central Committee rep makes accusations in private. To this day I do not know what he said. The CC witness from the District had only just returned from a three-month stint as a south London organiser. She also gave evidence in secret. I have never been given the charges against me in writing. This has allowed my accusers to vary the charges according to circumstances. The accusations about my local activity didn't form part of the formal expulsion and fell locally because people knew better. They were used nationally as a smear. The procedure would be unacceptable in a bourgeois court or a trade union. In a revolutionary party it is a disgrace.

Now I am expelled I have to start from the premise that the SWP is not just going to disappear. It must have an income of £3 million from subs alone. That gives it an organisational capacity. It has a self-perpetuating centre.

Nevertheless, the SWP has to exist on the left and one thing that will make a difference will be what passes for political life in the SWP being rejected by the broader left.

That means much more than *Workers' Liberty* taking up the issue. It means people like Tony Benn and other Labour Left MPs, who currently accept SWP platforms uncritically, turning round and saying "this is not on." ■

# The perspective of the long haul

By Ray Challinor\*

I WAS involved with the organisation from the first meeting. If I remember correctly that was October 1950.

There were 34 members. But that really exaggerates the size of the organisation. A number of the members had been in the Open Party faction of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) — that is, they did not want the RCP to fold up — and were really burnt-out. These people quickly dropped out.

Our biggest branch was Birmingham with six members.

I lived in Crewe and was associated with the Manchester branch.

I had been convinced for some time that Russia was not socialist and not, as the Trotskyists said, a workers' state. I accepted the theory of state capitalism and had put the idea forward in an article which appeared in *Left*, a socialist discussion journal, in June 1948.

There were articles produced before then putting the state capitalist point of view. The first I have seen is in Peter Petrov's book *The secrets of Hitler's victory*, produced in 1934. Petrov was a veteran revolutionary, wounded in the 1905 revolution and subsequently a leading official in the Soviet government. When he fell out with Stalin in the 1920s he went to live in Germany, where he experienced the betrayal of Stalinism and reformism first hand. He developed his theory of state capitalism on the basis of his close knowledge of both the Russian state and the Comintern.

Dr R D Worrell, a pioneer of British Trotskyism, wrote an article in *Left* in 1940 on the same theme.

Cliff's book on state capitalism appeared

in its original form in the RCP's internal bulletin in 1948. So these ideas were being discussed.

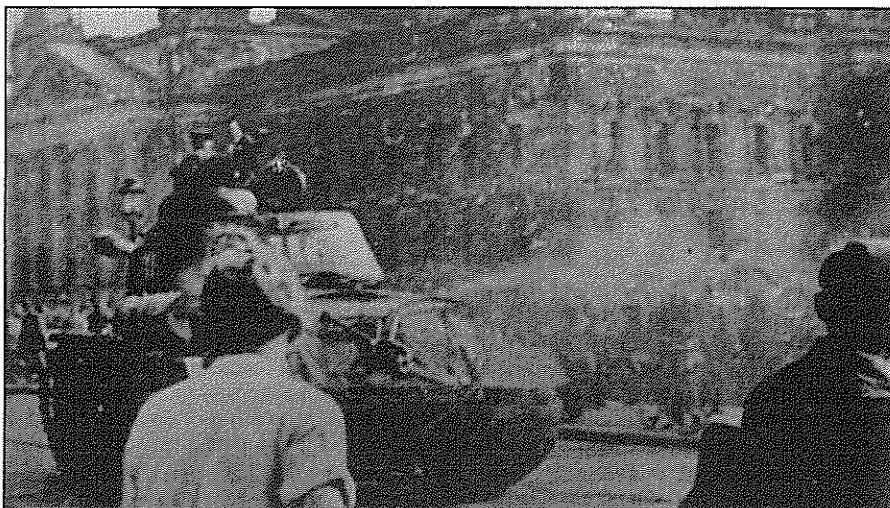
I first met Cliff in December 1947 at a meeting of the Thames Valley RCP. We basically agreed on the theory of state capitalism. Our difference was that Cliff believed it was important to argue the case inside the Trotskyist movement. He believed it would be possible to convince them of the theory — and, in fact, at the time people like Jock Haston were toying with the idea.

I disagreed with Cliff because the Trotskyists were so dogmatic. Their workers' state theory was the Arc of the Covenant and they were not about to abandon it. I thought that a new generation, with new ideas, would have to emerge from outside Trotskyism.

I think Cliff's theory emerged in response to what he saw as the failure of Trotskyism. Remember that Trotsky had predicted that the Second World War would lead to either workers' revolution or the degeneration of the working class. And that had led James P Cannon, in 1945, to claim the war had not ended. The orthodox Trotskyists, with their rigid dogma, could not accept that the great man's predictions had been wrong.

In the US the Johnson-Forest tendency — CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya — grappled with the lunacies of the Trotskyists' position. They produced a lot of material developing the theory of state capitalism. I had a letter from Raya saying she met Cliff in 1946 at the Fourth World Congress. They agreed she would devote her time to study of the philosophical implications and that Cliff would look at the economic issues.

When the Red Army went into Eastern Europe and murdered large numbers of



East German uprising, 1953, crushed by a state backed by Soviet Stalinist troops. East Germany was, according to mainstream Trotskyism, a workers' state

socialists and smashed their organisations the Communist Party said that socialism was being built and the Trotskyists said that workers' states had been formed. This is all very difficult to come to terms with if you believe that the workers can only come to power when the working class is consciously in favour of socialism and fighting for it.

The theory of state capitalism was central to understanding what was happening in the world.

Cliff was absolutely correct in his economic assessment of post-war Britain. The Fourth International believed that there would be a slump. Cliff, backed by the RCP majority faction, advanced the theory of the permanent war economy. In a semi-Keynesian way, through vast military expenditure, capitalism could avoid crises of over production — at least in the short run. This was denied by individuals like Mandel and Grant. Healy compounded the error by back-breaking activism.

Cliff played a useful role in standing up to a problem Trotskyist organisations — particularly those associated with Gerry Healy — have always had: the idea that the revolution was just around the corner. The Trotskyists did not have the perspective of the long haul. They wore people out. It was like trying to run a marathon as if it was a 100 meters race.

And the problem with the Trotskyists was not just a capitulation to Stalinism — they capitulated to reformism too. Just before the breakup of the RCP Jock Haston came to stay with me in Crewe. He argued that the Labour government, which had nationalised 20% of the economy, was transforming Britain towards a socialist society. I thought this was nonsense. The same relations at the point of production still existed in the nationalised industries.

Haston went over to reformism and subsequently became Education Officer for the right-wing union, the ETU.

But even Healy made concessions. His paper *Socialist Outlook* claimed that the Bevanites "gave the lead the workers want." Healy even said that the only thing wrong with Labour was its foreign policy.

We had no illusions in people like Bevan.

Tony Cliff has made a very useful contribution over many years to the socialist tradition. If I have any criticism of Cliff is that in factional fighting there are no holds barred. For example in the late 1960s Cliff brought into IS a group called *Workers' Fight* around Sean Matgamna. He did this to deal with the libertarian wing of the organisation which people like Peter Sedgewick and myself were associated.

There were a whole series of events like this. And it stems from his view of the Bolshevik model of the party as the be-all and end-all for socialist organisation. But the problems which face us in Britain are not the same as those which confronted Lenin in Russia in 1917. Capitalism has changed since 1917 and Lenin's old formula can not be applied mechanically.

# When IS couldn't say "Troops Out"

Rachel Lever\*

IN AUGUST 1969 the major group on the far left in Britain, panicked by the pogroms in Belfast and Derry, were so relieved to see the British troops go into action that for nearly a whole year they dropped the slogan "British Troops Out."

For months before August, when the British troops had no role in Northern Ireland affairs, they had made Troops Out one of their main slogans. It was a front page headline in *Socialist Worker* in April 1969. In August, when the troops moved centre stage, it was eloquently dropped!

On 17 August 1969, a hastily convened special meeting of members of the two leading committees of the International Socialists voted by 9 to 3 to drop the Troops Out slogan "as a headline", while the text of articles and editorials would make clear that IS wasn't really siding with the British Army.

But the IS leaders were facing both ways. The decision to approve what the troops were doing had to be defended against the IS leadership's critics from the left, notably the *Workers' Fight* faction within its ranks.

Already in the very first editorial, which was supposed to put to rights the absence of Troops Out "in the headline" by warning about the army's "long term role", *Socialist Worker* readers were told that though the troops were "not angels" they will not behave with the same viciousness as the RUC and B-Specials "because they do not have the same ingrained hatreds." (A resolution at the Executive Committee to insert a statement that the troops' presence was "in the long term interests of British imperialism" had in fact been voted down by Tony Cliff, John Palmer and Paul Foot.)

The warning seemed to consist of the mildly critical thought that "It should not be thought that the British troops can begin to solve the problems (of the Catholic workers). The role of the British troops is not to bring any real [!] solution to the problems of the people of Northern Ireland..."

Within a couple of weeks, the main fire was directed at the leadership's critics. (Meanwhile, a Troops Out emergency motion at IS's conference was defeated after the leaders had pulled out a good many demagogic stops to create an atmosphere of hysteria in which those who argued for Troops Out were accused of

being "fascists" who "wanted a bloodbath".)

There were constant attacks in *Socialist Worker* on "those who call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops", accompanied by warnings about the horrors of life in Catholic Belfast without British troops. "When the Catholics are armed they can tell the troops to go", a front page caption in *SW* generously conceded. But the idea of these armed Catholics using their bullets to tell the troops to go was just unthinkable: "...They would merely add their bullets to those of the Paisleyites and provoke an immediate clash in a situation which would lead to massacre."

And "when the Catholics are armed" they would tell the troops to go because, the assumption went, they wouldn't need them any more — not because they were and would be the enemy.

The paper had at first presented the issue as a purely internal Northern Ireland one, as if the British ruling class had no interest in the matter. The troops were passive and neutral: "Behind the lines of British troops the repressive apparatus of Stormont remains" — as if the troops were not themselves repressive.

Continuing this line of thought: "The Special Powers Act, which permits imprisonment without trial, has not been revoked" — presumably, if the troops were really doing a proper job, they might have gone on to revoke the Act. "And when the troops leave..." it will all still be there. It didn't occur to them that the troops might not leave but stay on and themselves imprison people without trial.

The IS leaders concocted an elaborate and convoluted theory of lesser and greater contradictions to justify their position.

The greatest "contradiction" was between the troops and the Paisleyites, who were thwarting British designs for a bourgeois united Ireland. Meanwhile the 'contradiction' between the troops and the Catholics' barricades, and the Catholic workers' arming and self defence, would only become acute "at some future turn." A centre page article by Stephen Marks presented the case for British troops to stay under the headline: "Fine slogans and grim reality — the contradictory role of British troops gives Catholic workers time to arm against further Orange attacks."

The benefits of the British army in Belfast and Derry were they were "freezing" the conflict, "buying time" and providing "a breathing space" in which Catholics could prepare to fight the Orange mobs. They

\* Ray Challinor is a well-known labour historian and was a founder member of the Socialist Review Group.

\* Rachel Lever was a member of International Socialists from 1968 to 1971.

could also, apparently, "re-arm politically" in the course of opposing the moderates' calls for reliance on the army — though no thanks to *Socialist Worker*, which stood four-square with the moderates with its apologetics for the British Army.

The 'contradiction' between the Army and the Catholics' barricades and guns was in fact acute from the first day. The army's aim was to prevent such self-defence — by substituting for it, and by repressing it.

In the very week when the troops were taking down the barricades this same article talked of a "future turn in the situation when the demolition of the barricades may [...] be needed in the interests of British capital itself and not merely of its local retainers."

IS made a big thing of the barricades. Defence of the barricades had been its militant call, substituted for Troops Out as soon as the troops were on the streets. The special issue of *SW* on Ireland following the change of line had declared in banner headlines: "The barricades must stay until: • B-Specials disbanded • RUC disarmed • Special Powers Act abolished • Political prisoners released." And on 11 September the main headline was "Defend the Barricades — no peace until Stormont goes."

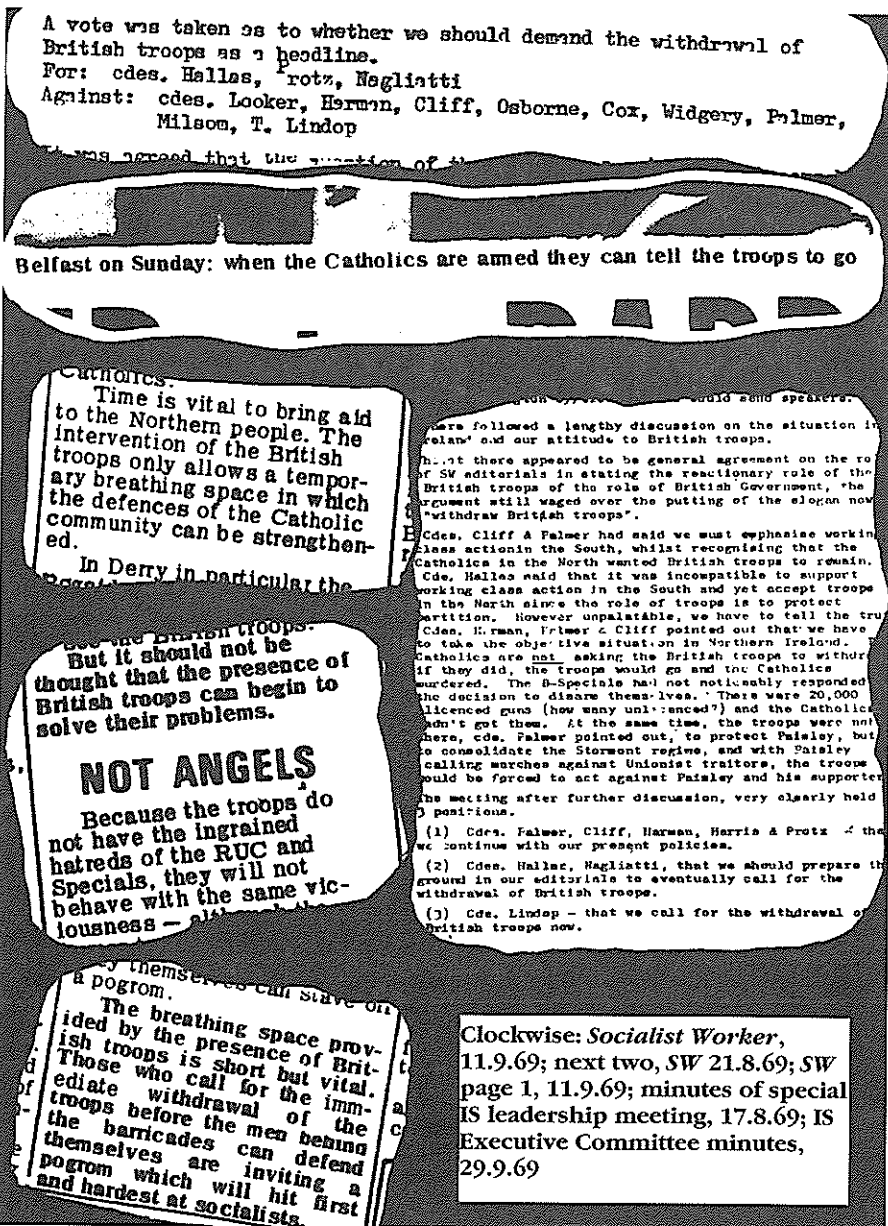
But the week the barricades were taken down in Belfast found *SW* with its main centre page policy article defending *SW*'s failure to call for the troops to go (and in so doing defending the troops themselves); and the week the barricades were brought down in Derry, as a prelude to the liquidation of 'Free Derry', found *SW* utterly silent on the question.

To continue the call for the defence of the barricades would have meant to call the Catholics into conflict with the troops — which really would have exposed 'the main contradiction' in IS's line.

When IS finally re-adopted Troops Out in May or June of 1970 on a National Committee resolution from Sean Matgamna of *Workers' Fight* (they had fought tooth and nail to avoid defeat on the question at the Easter conference two months earlier) the IS leaders said they had been right all along, and of course they were right now to change. One took one's position "in response to changes in the immediate role of the troops." It all depended on just what the Army was doing at any particular time, though in fact the decisive change in the relationship of the Catholics to the British soldiers didn't come until later, when the switch from a Labour to a Tory government (June) led to a clumsy 'get tough' attitude to the Catholics, and then to the curfew on the Lower Falls in July 1970.

The IS leaders didn't for long hold to that line that they had been right all along. For many years they have denied they ever argued for the troops to stay.

In true Stalinist fashion they go through the old papers, picking out a quote here and there out of context to support their claim that "week after week after week" they opposed the troops. But there are two simple words that they can never quote after the August of that critical year, and they are: troops out. ■



**Editor's Note**  
A WORD about why we publish this article, which first appeared in *Workers' Action* in 1979.

Ireland is one of the most fraught areas of dispute on the British left. The IS/SWP account of history on Ireland contains much lies and big evasion — see for example, Ian Birchill's official history. For — rightly or wrongly — the group did, with a bit of camouflage here and there, support British troops in Northern Ireland and make propaganda directly justifying their immediate role there. (See *Socialist Worker* for September and October 1969).

I was one of the members of IS who opposed and fought what seemed to be a panic scuttling away from the politics of consistent anti-imperialism.

Eventually, in May or June 1970, after fighting it through two conferences (September 1969 and Easter 1970) we won the organisation to our position.

Today, and for many years, the tendency that publishes *Workers'*

*Liberty/Socialist Organiser* approach the issue in Ireland as not fundamentally a matter of British imperialism but of intra-Irish divide made worse by Britain. Troops Out should be advocated as part of a general political settlement, and without that can only lead to sectarian civil war and repartition. A proper discussion of what was right and what wrong in 1969, and the nuances of the subject, would require a big article. (There is an account of our thinking in the pamphlet, *Ireland, the Socialist Answer*). Nevertheless, the facts about the IS/SWP record on the question are worth establishing if only to get SWPers to think about the issue. That is why we republish this piece, written on the tenth anniversary of the deployment of British troops, by someone who took part in these debates — Rachel Lever, who though not a member of the National Committee, took part in the October 1969 IS National Committee discussion on the issue. She did not — as far as I know — ever rethink the issue.

# How the dockers forged solidarity, and how they lost it

Sean Matgamna reviews

"They knew why they fought: unofficial struggles and leadership on the docks 1945-1989". By Bill Hunter.

Index Books

NOTHING WILL EVER EFFACE for me the memory of my first real strike — on the Salford docks — the first time I saw my class acting as a surging, uncontrolled force breaking the banks of routine capitalist industrial life and, for a while, pitting itself against those who control our lives.

Docks strikes were quick and frequent then, in the mid-'60s. Dockers fought back; they stood together. Lord Devlin's Commission of Enquiry into conditions in the ports reported that to get a strike going in Liverpool often all that was needed was somebody running down the quays shouting "everybody out." Dockers would stop, to see who was in dispute, who needed support,

what it was all about. That was essentially a true picture. It was not only true of Liverpool. And there was nothing senseless or mindless about it.

Imagine the scene on Salford docks. The Manchester Ship Canal, a wide, wide, man-made waterway; ships tied up along the quays as far as the eye can see; towering cranes forming an endlessly stretching picket, lining the edge of the water. Just behind the cranes, railway tracks and wagons being loaded or unloaded; behind the rail lines, a roadway with lorries moving and parked, loading and unloading; at the far side of the road, multi-storied warehouses stretching as far as the eye can see in a parallel line to the ships. Cranes dip delicately into the hatch-uncovered ships, lifting, or depositing heavy loads, moving from ship to warehouse and back again, high above the road and the rail line. Plying wrought steel hooks formed like question marks crossed at right angles on the base by a wooden handle, dockers move bags and crates, direct the movement on slings of long bars of steel, or motor cars, load and unload railway wagons; a barge here and there is being loaded in the water on the other side of a ship.

Into this hive of hard alienated work the call for a stoppage comes and explodes like a slow-motion bomb, changing everything.

First there is the news that there is a strike, that some men have stopped work. Word spreads. Nobody knows exactly why, or what the issue is. What *is* known is that *those dockers who do know*, the men involved, think action is necessary, and that they have stopped work. This is done often, but everybody knows, despite idiotic witch-hunt stories in the press, it is not done lightly. The men who have come out know why and they need support. They are entitled to support! You know they would support you. The place to find out what it is about and whether they deserve support is at the mass meeting on "the croft" — waste ground — outside one of the dock gates. Let's go there!

I no longer remember the issue, but I will never forget the sight of it, the first time I saw it and took part in it. Word spreads; dockers see others stopping, suddenly, in the middle of the working day; they too stop and come out on to the roadway. Men in battered, ragged old clothes and headgear, stained by age and chemical dust. A few men wearing company-issue blue overalls: they have been on some especially dirty cargo — blacking or asbestos — which saturates your clothes, skin and hair because bags always burst. Dock-hooks are slung over the curve of shoulders or hooked in belts or lapels. Men trickle out from the warehouses; others who have climbed up out of deep ships' holds far below the water line, come down the gangplank in indian file out of the ships. Crane drivers climb stiffly down the tall iron ladders from their cabins in the sky. Some men in the throng are far better dressed than dockers — checkers/tally clerks. Before long there is a great teeming, wide, growing stream of men on the roadway — 2,000 dockers work in this port — talking, laughing, gesticulating, cheerful at the excitement, the break in the monotony, the respite. Eisenstein in bright sunlight, and no fear of Cossacks, or of the mounted police Prime Minister Thatcher would send against miners in the 80s.

That first time, it reminded me of the great crowds of people coming out from 12 o'clock Mass in our west of Ireland town. Quite a few other Salford dockers had also been in such processions in such towns. Here solidarity was God!

Walking in that great mass of workers asserting themselves, you got an inkling of the human strength that powered the port,



Striking dockers ask questions of Jack Jones during 1967 strike

and the whole economy. You felt the reality and the potential of these minds and hands without which nothing moved — the muscles and the brains of thinking, reflecting human beings trapped in wage slavery who had come to know — most of them only partly to know — their collective power, and who already felt and acted according to the high ethic of solidarity which socialists who work to cultivate it know to be the seed of a new and better civilisation. When action becomes necessary, solidarity effaces personal rivalries and conflicts, job-jealousies, old pub brawls, race — in Manchester, unlike London, there were black dockers — politics and religion. Class predominates.

When the human trickles and rivers had emptied themselves out of warehouses and ships, bringing the whole enormous port complex, whose life blood they were, to a dead stop, and assembled on the croft, the meeting would begin. The issue would be carefully and didactically spelled out to upwards of 1,500 men by Joe Barry or Joe Hackett, the unpaid officials of the minority union in the port, the NASD (the so-called Blue Union: their union card was blue, that of the TGWU, the big union, white). The Blue Union Committee doubled as an unofficial rank and file committee. Both checkers, Barry and Hackett were the real leaders in the port, not the despised full-time officials of the T&G to which most dockers belonged. These two, who would stand as spectators at the back of the croft, were known contemptuously as "Houdini" (after the American escapologist) and "The Gas Man" because they would come from negotiating the price for unloading a difficult cargo — to take a terrible example, though we did not then know how terrible, asbestos when a lot of bags had burst in a ship's hold — and shout down the hatch to men covered in chemicals, or whatever, either that they could do nothing — "Me-Hands-Are-Tied", thus Houdini — or had got a measly shilling extra, a bob for the gas meter — "The Gas Man."

Officially, they were the only people empowered to negotiate, but the Blue leaders had tacit recognition and went, as they would boast, *sotto voce* — and with a pride that told you what they were — "up the back stairs", where the White union officials went in the front door. Compared to the T&G full-time officials, who were the dregs of humanity, the Blue leaders were real trade unionists; but they were time-servers, Barry at least was a Catholic Action man, and by the '60s they too were part of the port establishment, albeit unofficially.

On the croft, after Barry or Hackett had explained what it was about, anybody who had anything to say would then have a chance to say it. You could get up and disagree, and argue your case. Sometimes things would get rowdy — on one occasion, very rowdy, just short of violence, when Barry launched a savage witch-hunt to protect himself and his friends from criticism and the danger of being outflanked by denouncing young Trotskyist militants as "politically motivated" "home wreckers", men intent on "smashing the port and the industry"; but it was taken for granted by everybody that

our group had the right to reply and Barry vacated his little step ladder so I could get up on it to speak. (Not very well as I recall it; but we got a third of the votes — even though Barry and Hackett had threatened to resign — for a motion to add two Trotskyists to the Committee.) This was rough and volatile, communication was often bad and things sometimes got confused, but it was nevertheless real democracy. Everything was put to the vote, or could be after a fight. If satisfaction for the grievance was not forthcoming we would usually vote to stay out. But satisfaction was as a rule quickly to be had.

In serious disputes we would normally use the tactic of the rotating one-day strike.

*"In a six-week strike for the right to negotiate — the employers backed the T&G's monopoly — they were defeated, primarily, perhaps, because CP influence in London led to the isolation of the northern ports. The hopes so many dockers placed in "The Blue" were crushed and destroyed."*

One week the dockers would strike for a day and the cranemen and checkers would turn up for work that was not there, thus qualifying for payment before going home again; the next week the crane drivers would strike, the week after that, the checkers, then again the dockers; and so on until the Ship Canal Company crumpled.

Despite two unions in the port, some non-unionists and three distinct classes of workers, our efforts were easily co-ordinated.

When you consider where dockers "came from", a few decades earlier, the culture of militancy and solidarity they developed, a small vignette of which I have tried to sketch here, is all the more remarkable.

## II

FOR CENTURIES docking was casual, irregular work because ships came and went. There was little continuity. Men would be hired and fired as needed. Anybody could go on the docks. It was a buyers' market in

labour, and those who did the hiring were all-powerful. Gangs of often hungry men, with hungry families, would crowd around them jostling — and sometimes fighting — each other for their favour, and a few hours' work. Docker was murderously pitted against docker. Then the dockers began to organise.

In 1889, led by Marxist socialists such as Tom Mann and John Burns, both of them skilled engineers, not dockers, and with Karl Marx's daughter Eleanor helping out, London dockers struck and organised themselves in a union — then a new sort of union — for the "unskilled." The union was thrown up out of a volcanic eruption of revolt and militancy. It survived to civilise and educate the dockers to the ideal of working-class solidarity. They had to fight early struggles on such questions as stopping the then prevalent practice of paying dockers their wages in pubs, where they would be tempted to drink their wages, to the detriment of their children and the benefit of the publican (and the foreman, who'd get a cut from the landlord). Over decades the working-class weapon of solidarity — serving as both ideal, socialism its developed form, and weapon of struggle — allowed workers to win serious improvements. Dockers began to exert a little bit of control over their own working lives. In the days when great armies of men laboured to hump and haul cargoes in and out of Britain, dockers had perhaps the greatest power of any group of workers. Organised, they learned to use it.

After World War 2, the Labour government, rejecting demands for nationalisation, nevertheless created the National Dock Labour Scheme and its "Board", the NDLB — an agency which would employ registered dockers and hire them out to employers.

The NDLB paid a (very low) guaranteed fall-back wage, which dockers would get if they failed to find work after turning up twice a day, morning and dinner time. The NDLB was staffed 50% by employers' representatives and 50% by the TGWU. The NDLB embodied big gains for dockers, but it also meant putting officials of a very bureaucratised union, which should have represented the men, in charge of them as both employer and disciplinarian. It led to union officials organising strike breaking and to threats from union leaders to sack dockers "making trouble" in the union. (The whole Manchester Branch Committee was hauled up before TGWU Secretary Arthur Deakin, who threatened to have all of them sacked if they didn't do what he, their union's General Secretary, told them to!) All differences kept in mind, this system was a little bit of Stalinism rooted inside the British capitalist system. Ultimately it led in 1954 to the breaking away from the union of 16,000 dockers of the northern ports.

Nevertheless, there was a wonderful flowering of working-class self-assertiveness and self-control within the NDLB system. It was a time of full employment, and by way of countless short local strikes dockers gained a great deal of real control of their — still very hard, underpaid and dangerous — working lives. Dockers not prone to ☐



The release of Vic Turner, one of the "Pentonville Five"

idealising their lot would talk about "the freedom of the docks." To take perhaps the most 'extreme' example, there was a "custom and practice" system known in Liverpool as the welt and in Glasgow as spelling under which only half a gang would work at any time. It meant working half a shift! In Manchester, where we had no welt, they would when it suited them 'shanghai' temporarily redundant dockers and bus us for night work to Liverpool — where we worked four hours and spent the other four reading or playing cards, yarning or napping, or whatever, while the second half of the gang did their stint!

But you cannot have socialism — or even what dockers had — indefinitely in one industry. The technical basis of docking was changing. A system was growing up of moving goods through ports in giant containers packed in one factory, rolled on and off ships, and unpacked in another. Everything had to change in the docks. Who would gain the benefit of the new technology, dockers or employers? For example, would work, on the basis of the new technology, be divided up, or would tens of thousands of docking jobs be destroyed? These questions were decided in the struggle around the reorganisation of the ports — "decasualisation" — in 1967, and in subsidiary battles in the 70s. Because of wretched leadership, the dockers, once the most powerful and militant group of workers in Britain, lost. The NDLB was abolished in 1989.

### III

BILL HUNTER'S book retells the story of the early struggle of the dockers, with great feeling and conviction. He also retells the story of how dockers in Liverpool, Manchester and Hull walked out of the savagely bureaucratic T&G in 1954 and attempted by way of joining the little, London-based NASD, the Blue Union, to create a responsive and democratic national union for dockers. Some dockers wryly called this "The Greatest Prison Break in History."

In a six-week strike for the right to negotiate — the employers backed the T&G's monopoly — they were defeated, primarily, perhaps, because CP influence in London led to the isolation of the northern ports. The hopes so many dockers placed in "The Blue" were crushed and destroyed.

This episode is still a matter of controversy. Most 'Trotskyists' today condemn this great movement of workers, echoing the CP line of the time, and denounce the main Trotskyist organisation of the '50s — whose leaders were Gerry Healy and Bill Hunter — for its vigorous complicity in the breakaway. Here Hunter shows convincingly that this was a genuine movement of workers, not anybody's stage-managed sectarian stunt. I emphatically agree with Hunter, but it is too big a subject to pursue in detail here.<sup>1</sup>

About half way through, Bill Hunter's book changes character and his account of what happened on the docks in the mid-'60s becomes thin, unconvincing and sometimes downright misleading. The explanation for this lies in the evolution of the organisation of which Hunter was part until the mid-'80s, known successively as the Club, the SLL and the WRP. Essentially his book is a resumé of the politics, activities and perceptions of that organisation in the ports. There is no evidence here that Hunter has rethought any of it.

In fact, the story of the SLL in the two decades before it broke up is the history of a sect which did great harm to the working-class movement, and to Trotskyism. On the docks, during the defining struggles of the late '60s, it was a major part of the crisis of leadership, nearer to third period sectarian Stalinism than to Trotskyism.

It began as a serious organisation — politically inadequate and always sick with a stiflingly bureaucratic internal regime, but a serious organisation nevertheless, the British affiliate of James P Cannon's SWP. That was the organisation that led the fight for the Blue Union. But it degenerated into a brutal and crazy sect which, by the mid-'70s, was an affair mainly of actors and vicarious, petro-dollar Arab chauvinism. Before it reached that terrible end — it exploded into a dozen fragments in 1985-6 — the organisation went through a long period of sectarian degeneration, which inevitably affected its trade union work. It affects Bill Hunter's book too. This is shown most

plainly in his account of the struggle over decasualisation in 1967. This is narrow factional 'history', not history.

Sweetened by desirable things like regular employment, decasualisation was fundamentally about the employers clawing back all the elements of workers' control dockers had won, so that they would be able to carry through the revolution in port technology — containerisation — under their control, in their own way and for their own benefit. Dockers resisted, but in a confused and disorganised way. Dockers had no unofficial national structures; they did not then even have shop stewards. The leaders of both White and Blue docks unions backed 'Devlin.' So the bosses succeeded in ramming the changes through amidst confusion and resentment, though not without long strikes in London and Liverpool and a week long strike in Manchester.

By that stage the SLL, whose version of 1967 Hunter half-heartedly presents in this book, was very sectarian and politically bizarre — for example, throughout most of 1967, when these events were taking place on the docks, they were avid supporters of Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution — the politics belatedly catching up with Healy's indescribably brutal internal regime! At the same time they joined the capitalist press in denouncing the big anti-Vietnam War movement demonstrations as 'middle-class'. Openly crazy they also claimed that the demonstrations were part of a press conspiracy to sideline the SLL!

From 1964 — when the Devlin Commission was set up — they had conducted a vigorous literary propaganda campaign against Devlin, but instead of building rank and file unity on the ground with everybody prepared to fight, they concentrated on journalistic exposures of the CP, refusing even to try to link up with CPers working to organise the fight against Devlin, people such as Terry Barnett, Secretary of the London Dockers' Committee (whose best-known member was Jack Dash — by that stage a gutless media-star non-entity.)

By then the CP — outside of Broad Left union machines — had little control of its members in industry. The CPers on the Salford docks were dormant, with the exception of Harold Youd, who soon ceased to be a CPer.

Without linking up and co-ordinating key militants in at least the main ports, and without presenting an alternative programme to that of Devlin — for work-sharing, workers' control and so on — and organising dockers to fight for it, we had no chance of winning. For the SLL it was a matter not of building a united front of militants in action but of "exposing" "Stalinism" — the CP leaders — for the literary education of SLL youth. The class struggle, outside of local

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Liberty* republished Bill Hunter's 1958 article "Democracy in the docks" in issue no. 11, January 1989. In this book Bill Hunter states that his 1958 article is the only such study. Not so. There is in *International Socialism* for Autumn 1960 an article on the NASD experience by Bob Pennington. A member of the Healy organisation, he worked full-time as a NASD official in Liverpool for two or three years in the mid '50s, and then

became London organiser for the SLL. Pennington's article is politically gamey, in my opinion. He would be a central leader of the IMG in the '70s and of one of its offshoots in the '80s, but when he wrote that article Pennington was, briefly, a semi-anarchist (*Socialisme ou barbarie/Solidarity*). It is, nevertheless, valuable. Strangely, the very name of Pennington is absent from Bill Hunter's book.



work in Liverpool, was replaced by newspaper commentary! It was all deeply sectarian and irresponsible — third period Stalinist stuff without the political catchphrases specific to it, but, like third period Stalinism, having also a soft opportunist underbelly. While being very “revolutionary” the SLL, incongruously, kept links of friendship with the Blue Union, whose progressive potential was long spent, whose leaders were supporting Devlin, and in Manchester [and maybe Hull, but I don't know] fighting for Devlin behind a bit of faking and demagoguery combined with the witch-hunting I described above.

Under pressure, in Manchester they went through the motions of leading an inadequate one-week strike to let off steam and — fundamentally — to stop themselves being outflanked by the left.<sup>2</sup>

Bill Hunter's account of this period — the book's nadir, though it picks up a bit later — consists in the main of large chunk of “oral history” from Larry Cavanagh, a member of the Blue Union in Liverpool. But oral history is an organically tainted way of compiling history: with people who have been passionately involved in politics, all oral history is likely to tell you about is the person's and the organisation's perceptions and constructions on events. Here, SLLer Bill Hunter establishes what happened mainly by way of an unexamined oral-history account of it from Larry Cavanagh, who was not an industrial militant but an SLL revolutionary, someone recruited in the Young Socialists by the Healyites and sent into the docks. Normally to say someone is a revolutionary, not just an industrial militant is to say that this person has a broader outlook, deeper understanding, keeps a more rigorous political account book, and so on. Here it means the opposite. As a dyed-in-the-printer's-ink SLL sectarian Cavanagh had — as well as their crazy general politics — a narrow, blindly factional outlook on his industrial work. Cavanagh — who, like Hunter, evidently has not reconsidered any of it — can provide no proper overall account of what happened in 1967. Neither does Hunter. Without corroboration, I'd not accept Cavanagh's account of what happened even in Liverpool: and, although three ports struck over decasualisation, Hunter's account of 1967 here is, except for a few sentences about London, only the SLL's version of what happened in Liverpool.

Hunter has nothing at all to say about the effort in the months before the deadline for Devlin (September 1967) to organise a national linking up of the ports for a concerted fightback — for the co-ordinated national fight that could have let us win. The prime mover in these efforts was the late Terry Barrett, with the backing of IS, which

had no dockers, as far as I recall, and the collaboration of *Workers' Fight*, which had two (40% of our group!).

IS — 500 or 600 strong, perhaps — affected a pecksniffian modesty in those days, and, politically speaking, was completely self-effacing. They just gave Barrett a devoted young comrade named Nigel Coward as assistant and chauffeur so he could travel around the country.

On the initiative of Barrett — he was, I think, still nominally in the CP, and Secretary of “Jack Dash's” Committee; he would join IS — we held two national gatherings of militants from different ports in the Summer of 1967, the first in London in July and the second in Hull in September. Not Jack Dash,

*“The proper answer to such nonsense lies not alone in hope for the future, in discerning the seeds of that future in working-class activities in the present, but in remembering the past.”*

but some other leading CPers — Danny Lyons, a member of the CP EC, was one — came to advocate accepting Devlin for the best price we could get. One, or two, issues of a small, four-page newspaper were produced by Barrett in London — not a very good paper, technically or politically.

It was all too late, the difficulties to be overcome and the odds against us too great. The opportunism of the most important left-wing force in the ports, the CP, and the sectarianism of the second most important left-wing force, the SLL, were among the difficulties we could not surmount. The strikes that did occur were only about the *price* for accepting reorganisation.

The SLL played no part in this work to build a national and politically adequate response to Devlin.<sup>3</sup>

I made an attempt on the eve of the strike to see if, at the last minute, some co-ordination could be achieved between the Trotskyist militants in Manchester and the SLL militants in Liverpool — I rang Bill Hunter — but it was hopeless. No love was lost between our group, *Workers' Fight*, and the SLL; and while *Workers' Fight*

thought the exigences of the class struggle might be allowed to moderate that, they did not.

Though they still had a presence in Liverpool, they were so far gone that they *could not* function as a serious Trotskyist force in that situation. Bill Hunter is, even in retrospect, incapable of understanding it

#### IV

TO BECOME a committed socialist in times like these, when the working class is disoriented and cowed, you have to make an imaginative leap from the working class around you to the working class as it will be when it fulfils the hopes and expectations of Marxist socialists. Today, it is difficult to resist the commonsensical cynical view that workers will never rise up and remake society, that we are by nature incapable of it, that Marxist socialists are chasing a will o' the wisp.

The proper answer to such pernicious nonsense lies not alone in hope for the future, in discerning the seeds of that future in working-class activities in the present, but in remembering the past — and learning from it: for there was nothing inevitable about the defeat of Britain's dockers, or of what, at their best, they stood for.

There are important lessons for the labour movement today in the story of how some of the most degraded, atomised, exploited and initially backward workers pulled themselves up out of misery and degradation to create a splendid culture of class and human solidarity. Certain material conditions — insecurity and so on — allowed that solidarity to develop. But it would not have developed *without* the example, the leadership and the patient propaganda of socialists. Left to themselves conditions in the ports for a very long time bred savage individualistic competition, not solidarity amongst dockers. The socialists made the difference.

Just as the degraded dockers in their time rose up, so the victims of today's dog-eat-dog anti-solidarist culture will rise up. Those who keep alive the memory of the past and spread it will speed that day.

It is in the nature of the class struggle to ebb and flow; of the working class to be repeatedly made and remade by the never-ceasing changes in capitalist production and technology. The working class, as the story of the dockers shows, pays dearly for missed chances and for defeats.

Until it takes control of society, the working class movement — aided by socialists who try to be its memory — is forced again and again to resurrect, remake and redefine itself. The job of socialists is to help it do that, and, learning from the past, help avoid defeat in the next round.

Despite grave faults, Bill Hunter's book is useful because it does convey the author's strong sense — based on over 50 years' experience — of the great things workers have achieved and will achieve. An adequate history it is not, but it does convey a vivid sense of what the dockers did, and for that reason, it should be read by young people who want a glimpse of the British working class in the future we work now to prepare. ■

<sup>2</sup> I do not know, but I suspect that by the time of the fight over Devlin the Blue Union in Liverpool *in part* played the classic sectarian role, of walling militants off in a ghetto away from the main body of workers in the main trade union. In Manchester, the Trotskyists worked in the main union, the White, even though we had at first to campaign to get the branch to meet!

<sup>3</sup>

Indeed their — by now fetishistic — link with the Blue

Union led to a little article in their weekly *Newsletter* reporting on the meeting in Hull in an ignorantly hostile way that, though they probably did not know it, reflected the views of the witch hunters in Manchester! In Manchester the ultra-revolutionary and in general deeply sectarian — and at that date still semi-Maoist — SLL, because of their links with the Blue Union Network, looked with friendly eyes on the witch hunters, Catholic Action Joe Barry and his side-kick Joe Hackett! [who was later disgraced for fiddling Blue Union funds.]

# Turning round in the unions

By Martin Thomas

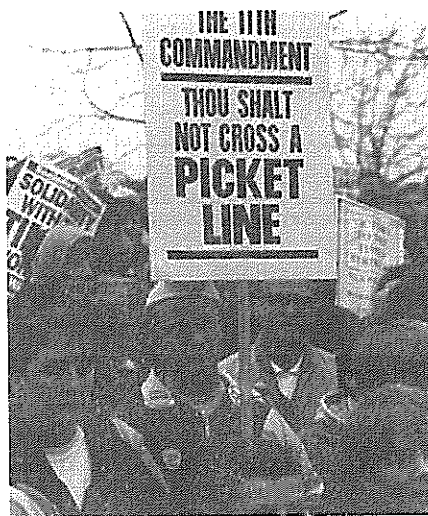
I THINK John McIlroy is right about many things ("Trade unions: is the tide turning?", *WL* 20). Union membership and strike figures tell us that we are "still on the retreat". "Qualitative change is unlikely this side of a general election".

Unlikely, not impossible. In hard fact, *Socialist Worker's* description of the present period as "volatile", a "transition to generalised struggle", tells us no more than the obvious: big struggles are not impossible, and at some future point will spread and burgeon. Politically, the description functions as an ideological construct to justify a "line": "it is all right for us to call for 'General Strike Now!' or 'March on Parliament, bring down the government!', even though all the statistics show working-class confidence is low, because, don't you know, the situation is *volatile*". "Or, even more to the point, "it is all right for us to call for 'General Strike Now', and at the same time organise only token one-day protests where we have union leadership responsibility, as in Sheffield UNISON, because, after all, things are *uneven* and *transitional*."

John McIlroy refers to the importance of "the wider political position" in an assessment, but leaves out, I think, a large part of that wider political position. Since the European Exchange Rate Mechanism crisis of September 1992, the Tories have been deeply discredited. Anger and disgust at the Tories — measured in local election, by-election, and opinion-poll results — is not the same as the confidence to take industrial action or become politically active. But it is important.

And to note this development is not just a matter of finding bits of cheer to exchange among ourselves: we can draw some conclusions for socialist activity now. Campaigns like the Welfare State Network can pick up on the new anger and disgust, shape it, and find forms of collective action which mobilise it. They can move without first having to budge the whole official labour-movement machine — which is still depressed, even in its activist layer — and help new activists to find a way into the labour movement.

The big recent struggles in Italy and France are also part of the situation. In those countries, the general problems blighting working-class struggle in Britain — long-term mass unemployment, domination of politics by the right-wing, weakening of trade-union organisation — are as bad as,



We need to struggle for positive rights for trade unionists

and in some respects worse than, in Britain.

This suggests that big upsurges in Britain are not impossible. It also, once again, gives some indications for what to do now. A major, possibly crucial, difference between Italy and France and Britain is trade-union laws. Their laws are still relatively liberal; ours outlaw all but a very narrow range of industrial action. A campaign for a Workers' Charter of positive trade-union rights is therefore a vital part of opening the way for an upsurge of struggle — which upsurge, we should remember, will certainly not come *automatically* on the election of a Labour government.

## Filling the gap in Fife

By John P Mathieson

COMING FROM what could be called the autonomous republic of 'industrial Fife' I am out of touch with what the rest of the left (revolutionary and radical) is doing and *Workers' Liberty* looks as if it will fill that gap.

Fife's autonomy — of what does it consist?

Trotskyism in whatever form has not been able to take root. Militant came and went. The SWP have a few dedicated supporters but cannot muster enough persons to form a branch. The Socialist Party of Great Britain have a couple of supporters and they have a meeting every two or three years, spending quite a few pounds every time but making no converts.

You already know that we had a Communist Party MP, Willie Gallacher, still a name to be revered in the ex-mining areas.

And what of the CP or ex-CP now? In the Scottish local elections in Cowdenbeath, Alex Maxwell beat his Labour Party opponent who was the out-going education convenor. Alex is Democratic-Left.

In Lochar Ballingy, Willie Clark got well over a thousand votes to absolutely swamp his Labour Party opponent. Willie stands on

the Scottish Communist Party ticket.

Where else in the UK will you find a situation like that?

Your article on the SWP and Clause Four in the March issue of *Workers' Liberty* was very good and I am looking forward to even better issues.

## Unfair to Revolutionary History

By Alan Johnson

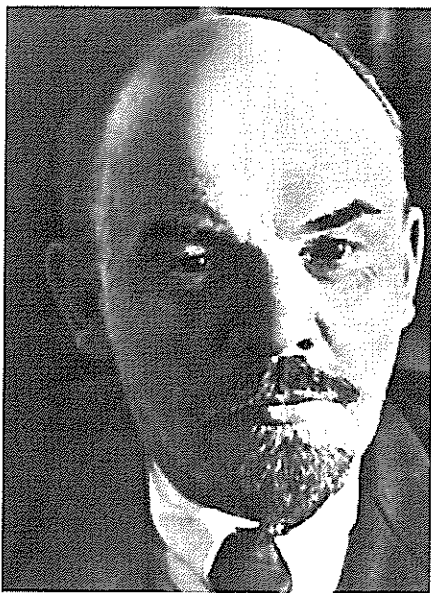
Sean Matgamna (*Workers' Liberty* No.19) is unfair to the *Journal Revolutionary History*. Sean lumps *Revolutionary History* together with various "Dead Trots Society" groups, alleging that: "All of them are more or less cut adrift from the disciplines, rhythms and concerns of the class struggle: their business is prattle and word processing, not practice." It is a shame no-one pointed this out to the comrades of *Revolutionary History* before they supplied bookstalls to our conferences, militants to run courses at our summer Ideas for Freedom event, on the history of our tradition, archives which a number of *Workers' Liberty* supporters have drawn on, (including you, Sean!) and a regular journal which I reviewed in *Socialist Organiser*, with no challenge, as "performing a great service to all Trotskyists".

Take the last issue of *Revolutionary History* — a series of hitherto unavailable writings of the revolutionary Marxist, Victor Serge, an appreciation of FA Ridley a pioneer British Trotskyist who died in 1994, and lengthy review sections covering books, conferences and archives. For supporters of *Workers' Liberty* the task in the period ahead is indeed, as Sean says, "to go to the working class and into the working-class movement to organise and reorganise it, and to plant the seeds of unfalsified socialism once more, especially amongst the youth". But in this work the resources provided by the militants of *Revolutionary History* are priceless, not some pseudo-academic distraction.

Another point. For someone thrown out of [Gerry Healy's] Socialist Labour League after a show trial, forced to quit Militant after Grant and Taaffe refused to circulate his views, and effectively expelled from the SWP for being a political threat to Cliff, it's surprising that Sean thinks that the members of groups like *Revolutionary History* leave Trotskyist organisations because they lack "a commitment, selflessness, discipline" etc.

Sean's basic argument is correct and

important: Marxism unattached to fighting the class struggle is arid. But to charge *Revolutionary History* with this is wrong.



Lenin tried to fight against bureaucratism

## Democracy was possible in 1917

By Colin Foster

AL RICHARDSON overdoes it a bit in his response to Robin Blick (*WL* 20). To Blick's claim "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'," he replies that the option "both collectivist and democratic" was impossible in 1917 because of the harsh world context and the great backwardness of Russia. He does not, or seems not to, dispute Blick's description of the Bolshevik revolutionary regime as "elitist and coercive state socialism".

Maybe Al intended only to argue that gentle, piecemeal, moderate parliamentary progress was impossible in Russia in 1917, and "the choices were a military dictatorship or the Bolsheviks". If so, I agree.

But a regime "both collectivist and democratic", if not quite as Martov wished, was possible in 1917. It existed! The revolution created it. The Soviets of 1917-18 — councils of workers' and peasants' elected delegates, subject to recall — were a more responsive and flexible form of democracy than any parliament.

The Bolshevik regime was "coercive", of course. But it was not "state socialism" in the style of Fabian and other schemes for

## Iranian socialists propose unity

REPRESENTATIVES OF nine political and regional groups who attended a meeting of 'Etehad Chap Kargari' (Workers' Left Unity) passed the following resolution on the 12 February 1995 in Germany:

The crisis engulfing the Iranian communist movement with its specific characteristics within the framework of an international crisis, has halted the formation and organisation of a genuinely radical socialist alternative in Iran. The objective in forming Workers' Left Unity (WLU) is to create the conditions that will help the formation and development of such a tendency and to pave the way for our joint efforts in the creation of a revolutionary party and to facilitate our future participation in any mobilisation of the working class. This political alliance believes in:

- the necessity for the overthrow of the capitalist Islamic Republic in Iran and the formation of a workers' state relying on the self-governing organs of workers and toilers.

- socialism as a force capable of expanding democracy in all political, social and economic spheres, abolition of exploitation, establishment of social ownership relying on the self-rule of producers and abolition of social classes.

- the inseparable characteristic of democracy and socialism and defence of all unconditional political freedoms, defending the right to universal voting, defending pluralism for all social strata.

- the struggle to organise workers on the basis of their class interests and on the basis of the confrontation between capital and labour. To help the independent mobilisation of the working class in economic, social, political and cultural issues.

- the struggle against patriarchy and male chauvinism, racial discrimination

"socialism from above". It made widespread nationalisations only from the autumn of 1918, and under pressure from below. After the emergency regime of the civil war (1918-21) had been unwound, as late as 1927 the platform of the Left Opposition noted that the state budget took a smaller proportion of national income than under Tsarism.

The Soviets were the very opposite of elitism. Then, during the civil war and after, the working class was dispersed, and soviet rule was replaced by Bolshevik party rule. For the Bolsheviks, this was an expedient to hold on until workers' revolutions in Europe came to their aid. But to the extent that the regime became elitist, it, so to speak, "negated itself", and at a certain point the "self-negation" turned into out-

and the battle to eradicate cultural, national, religious, sexual bias is an integral part of the struggle for socialism.

- in internationalism and adherence to its principles.

Although the above are sufficient to distinguish this alliance from other opposition forces claiming to support socialism, on their own they are inadequate for unification within a single political party. This alliance will follow a process of development and following a period of debate, discussion and practical co-operation, encouraging other ideological tendencies it will be able to clarify its positions further and pave the way for the formation of a single party within which the right to form factions and tendencies will be respected. Those participating in this alliance do not consider themselves as the only forces of this alliance and invite all groups and individuals who agree with the above points to join them maintaining their organisational/political independence. Such forces can form local independent, permanent branches which will form the base of this alliance. Such branches will expand the discussion on issues concerning the way out of the present crisis, tactical programmes and strategic issues necessary for creating the revolutionary party capable of leading the workers' socialist revolution, seeking further alliances in the democratic and socialist arena.

- Etehad Kargarn Enghelabi Iran (Rahe Kargar) — Revolutionary Workers' Alliance Iran (Workers Path) ● Hezb Ranjbaran — Toilers' Party of Iran ● Daftarhaye Kargari — Workers' Socialist Bulletin ● Sazman Kargaran Enghelabi Iran (Rahe Kargar) — Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Workers Path) ● Hasten Agahaliat — Minority Group ● Faalan Sazman Cherikhaye Fedayii Khalgh Iran — Activists of the Organisation of Iranian Peoples' Fedayin Guerrillas (abroad) Hamkaran Projeh Ijad Bulletin Bahshe socialisthayeh Enghelabi — The project for revolutionary socialist debate ● Some of the cadres from Fedayin Minority ● Independent activists of the left

right counter-revolution, under Stalin.

Al Richardson's presentation, perhaps inadvertently, fades out all the *political choices* which shaped the Bolshevik regime. And choices did shape it. It was not all mechanically determined by the material background.

What of Lenin's successful battles to unwind the coercive civil war economic regime, and to save the independence of the trade unions? Or his unsuccessful battle, jointly with Trotsky, in his last months of activity, against growing bureaucratism? Or the Left Opposition's later struggle against Stalin? Or the mistakes the Bolsheviks made? We should not use the benefit of hindsight to condemn the Bolsheviks for what they did in the maelstrom, but we should use it.

# Israel and the Palestinians

An interview with Michel  
Warshawsky

**WHAT IS RABIN doing? What does he hope to get out of the current situation?**

The only thing Prime Minister Rabin is interested in is to get the Israeli army out of the day-to-day life of the Palestinians, but not out of its duty to protect the settlements. He believes the settlements must remain. This is his aim.

He plans some sort of autonomous areas inside territory controlled by the Israelis, some Palestinian enclaves, within which the Palestinians will administer their internal affairs, under an Israeli veto.

**Doesn't Rabin have a real problem? Having made this agreement, which looked as though it was running towards a Palestinian state, all he is achieving is to discredit the secular nationalist leadership of the Palestinians?**

This is totally true, but Rabin has never been able to think one step ahead.

**Even if Rabin is just a simple military man, the big Israeli capitalists also backed the deal.**

The big capitalists had another dream. This dream motivated the people who elaborated the Oslo Agreement. It is to put all their energies into a normalisation with the Arab world, and into doing business in the Arab world. For that they need a rapid solution to the Palestinian question, including some kind of statehood in most of the Occupied Territories.

But this was not the way the Israeli gov-

ernment interpreted the agreement and tries to apply it.

**With Israel's actions helping the growth of the Muslim traditionalist movement is there not a chance of a civil war? How can the Israeli government gain from this?**

Civil war among the Palestinians is part of the Israeli agenda. They are pushing Arafat towards a civil war. They think by doing this the whole Palestinian cause will be weakened.

Secondly, the loosening of the authority of the PLO leadership and the strengthening of the Islamic opposition is a fact, and

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a fact which will remain.

The Israeli bourgeoisie's more intelligent representatives have made some warnings about the Islamic growth, but this is not the way the military junta which is leading the country — Rabin and the general staff — see the matter. They see it in military terms: we will smash Hamas and demand that Arafat smashes Hamas, and everything will be in order.

**Surely the whole lesson of Algeria from 1992 onwards is that it is very hard to deal with these people by bureaucratic-military methods.**

You have Algeria in mind, they have Syria as a model. The Assad regime smashed the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982. 20,000 died, but it worked.

**Assad had a much more powerful state machine, fully under his control.**

That is true. But Rabin believes that the Israeli army, together with the Palestinian police will be able to crush Hamas by way of a bloodbath in which they will kill tens of thousands. But this is not a problem for Rabin: on the contrary, it is his objective.

**Are the police fully under Arafat's control?**

At one point or another there will be a split in the Palestinian administration and armed forces. One part will be a type of Southern Lebanese Army in Palestine, that is, a direct puppet of Israel.

**In Gaza it is Hamas. What sort of pace are things moving at in the West Bank? Don't be mistaken. The radicalisation on the West Bank is also an Islamic radicalisation. It has not yet reached the dimensions of Gaza, but the process is the same.**

**There is a layer of middle class, educated, secular Palestinians. What are they saying? Surely they will be appalled at the prospects of an Islamic government.**

Though many of them are genuinely terrified about the future, there is an open admiration too. The Islamic groups are the resistance to Israeli occupation today and they are totally against any attempt to smash, or even disarm Hamas. In the eyes of the huge mass of the people they are the legitimate — and only — opposition to Israeli occupation.

**What is the PLO's strategy now? In order to get out of the mess they need lots of money from abroad and political progress.**

Yes. And they hope that at some point there will be international pressure on Israel to force it to abide by its signature on the agreement. They say it openly, that they have no other choice but to go on with the process which they still believe will lead to a Palestinian state. That is something which, today, I doubt. ■

● Michel Warshawsky of the Israeli Trotskyist organisation, Matzpen, was talking to Mark Osborn.

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