Dossier:
The Spanish Revolution
Workers' control in Spain
How the Stalinists killed workers' control
The issues in Spain
Eye-witness in Barcelona
Anarchists massacred at Tarragona
With the International Brigade
Fate of the Spanish revolution

The life and death of Yitzhak Rabin

Manning Marable: the war on Black America

Bernie Grant and the Nation of Islam

End of Labour? Arthur Scargill and Roland Tretchet
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

A letter to readers

THE WORKERS of Paris held power for two months early in 1871, and then they were bloody suppressed by the bourgeoisie, with many thousands of casualties. Marx wrote: "do you want to know what the working-class revolution looks like? Then look at the Paris Commune." Look too at Russia in 1917, and in the years before the Stalinist counter-revolution. Do you still want to know what the working class can do? Then look at Spain. There, between July 1936 — when workers armed to defeat the revolt of the fascists generals — and May/June 1937, when Stalinist forces crushed them — workers held control in a sizeable part of the Spanish state.

Len Latch's film Land and Freedom has generated much interest in Spain and, on the left, renewed debate. Len, of Edington, London, climes, anger. Stalinists loud and muffled their indignation, appropriately in the dark "that's not right!" "that never happened!" and similar cries of pain in response to the film. In the Morning Star, ex-International Brigadier Bill Alexander has rehashed the various lies put out by Stalin and his organizations to justify murdering Spanish revolutionary workers.

Socialists need to seize on this new interest in the Spanish revolution to spread knowledge and information about a great event in working-class history, which was also a watershed event in 20th century history.

Aiming to provide basic educational material for use by socialists, Workers' Liberty devotes half of this issue to a dossier. "The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it." Everyone knows about the Spanish Civil War, but what happened in Spain between 1936 and 1937 is still the unknown working-class revolution. It does not deserve to be.

A large part of the battle socialists must wage against reaction now consists in overcoming skepticism and that paralyzing depression of the spirit and imagination that is so pervasive a part of the labour movement. Like most of late 20th century capitalism society, the labour movement is hag-ridden with anti-capitalism, more inclined to conceive of the future as a science fiction nightmare than as a world of human freedom and emancipation, that we can win if we fight for it. If we do not dare to conceive of it, then we will never win such a world! The memory of what the working-class has done provides the rational basis for our belief in what the working class will do in the future.

The Spanish working class did rise to a fascist takeover of Spain and they did stop that takeover. But — led by anarchists — they did not know how to consolidate the power they had in their hands. The Stalinists murdered the Spanish revolution, and then General Franco put a heavy fascist tombstone over it for 40 years. Those whose political ancestors destroyed the Spanish Revolution are foremost now in telling us that working-class revolution is impossible. The true history of the Spanish Revolution is one of the clearest answers we can make to them. We urge comrades to read, study and use this dossier. Organise discussions, meetings and classes around this material.

Bernie Grant, erstwhile left Labour MP has emerged as a black advocate of the voluntary "reintegration of black people. That puts him to the right of much of the Tory Party and in alignment with what the followers of Enoch Powell and fascist organisations have been saying for many years. Mark Osborn examines his views and tells the story of others who have held similar views. Manning Marable, a black US academic, reports on the social conditions that push black Americans towards Louis Farrakhan.

Arthur Scargill talked of leaving the Labour Party when the Blairites threw our Clause Four. We present Scargill's view here, and Roland Trencher argues that Scargill makes no sense.

A couple of venturesome swallowed do not a Summer make, nor a few strikes a general revival of working-class industrial militancy. Nevertheless, there are a number of important industrial struggles now — on the tubes, and on the the Mersey docks. We report.

Our subscription sales drive continues. Have you done anything to help yet?
The life and death of Yitzhak Rabin

BLESSED are the peacemakers? Doomed are the peacemakers! President Sadat of Egypt was shot dead by a Muslim fanatic in 1982 because, five years earlier, he signed a peace treaty with Israel. Now, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who has been the leader of the peace movement for years, has been assassinated by a pro-Palestinian terrorist.

Who, when the peace accords were signed, would have predicted that it would be Rabin, not Yasser Arafat, who would be cut down by someone on “his own side”? Yet there is logic and a perverse — albeit an inconvenient — justice in what has happened: Rabin, who has been killed for beginning to turn the West Bank over to its Arab inhabitants was, 28 years ago, commander of the Israeli armies that first occupied the West Bank.

The three decades of occupation poisoned Israel, turning it into a major exploiter of cheap Arab labour, pushing Israeli politics heavily to the right. The so-called peace process, the beginning of justice for the Palestinian Arabs, is, despite its limitations, evidence that Israel is not irreversibly poisoned.

True, what has been conceded to the Palestinian Arabs is only a miserable, grudging, inadequate start: limited control by the Arabs over their own affairs in part of the territory where they are the majority.

Overall control remains in the hands of the Israeli army. Armed Jewish settlers, crazily self-righteous religious bigots — the equivalent of Hamas on the Arab side — who would, if they could, wipe out or drive away all the Arabs in the occupied territories, maintain enclaves in massively Arab areas like Hebron.

The only just solution to the conflict between Palestinian Jews and Arabs is two states, self-determination for both Arabs and Jews in the areas where each is a clear majority.

The settlement that Yitzhak Rabin built is not a just settlement nor a full and final settlement between Jewish and Arab Palestinians. Nevertheless, it is progress, and, compared with what there was before, immense progress. It holds out the hope of continuing progress towards a fully independent Palestinian Arab state.

Will the peace process survive Rabin? The killing of Israel’s Prime Minister was — it seems — the work of one man, a religion-crazed chauvinist, but he was “primed” for it by the verbal violence of the Israeli right wing’s opposition to Rabin’s recognition that the Palestinian Arabs have a right to a territory of their own. At the heart of the opposition campaign is Likud. Likud is the alternative government. Likud and its allies might win the election due in one year’s time.

Israeli opposition to the “peace process” is massive, combining a number of strands.

Rabin: stirred up tension

There are ultra-religious nationalists who, in the name of God, claim the whole of Biblical Judea, even where the overwhelming majority of the people living there are Arab Muslims. Not all of those who oppose “peace” are religious, however. Others, for secular reasons, want to hold on to as much territory as possible and, over time, change the “population balance” in Israel’s favour.

Others, again, believe that Palestinian rule, however limited it is now, no matter how circumscribed by Israel it may be at the start, leads inexorably to the creation of a Palestinian Arab state — and in this we think they are right — and that any such state, behind which will stand big, rich Arab states with their hundreds of millions of people, will, sooner or later, pose a mortal threat to the existence of Israel. They point out that it was only in 1988 that the PLO abandoned its demand for the destruction of the Israeli state.

Against this powerful coalition of fears, hopes and mystical desires Rabin was an important and — maybe — irreplacable bulwark. He played the sort of role General de Gaulle played in France at a crucial moment in French history.

Raised to power in 1958 by the Army and the French settlers in Algeria as a man of the right standing for “Algérie Française” and against the insurgent Algerian people, De Gaulle was able to face down the right and the French Algerian settlers — 1 million of them — and ultimately to extricate France from an unwinnable colonial war, conceding independence to Algeria.

Rabin was able to be an effective “dove” because of his history as a military hawk. He was able to gain the confidence of people who would otherwise have sought safety with Likud. Rabin’s death now is as if one of the many ultra-right-wing conspiracies to kill De Gaulle in 1961 or ’62 had succeeded.

His death illustrates the immense difficulties in the situation. Israel is a democracy. What can be done depends on its popular acceptability. The Israeli state has survived for five decades in a great sea of Arab hostility: it is perfectly natural that Israelis should be loath to trust anything but as much strength as they can concentrate, and as much control of as much of the surrounding territory as they can exercise. They are entitled to seek security and to demand of any “peace process” that it brings them that.

General Rabin, conqueror of the West Bank, had strength to pursue a settlement with the Palestinian Arabs which his successor will not have. It is perhaps too much to hope, given the depth of the drives and fears behind the Likud campaign, that the mere death of a politician will generate a backlash against Likud sufficiently powerful to sustain the “peace process.” Yet, it may. Enough waverers may recoil from the lunatic logic bloodily displayed by Yigal Amir when he shot down Israel’s Prime Minister, and from the bigger lunacy of which it is part: a commitment to endless confrontation.

The Rabin policy of “land for peace” may thus gain support from the death of Rabin.

Those on the left who denounce the “peace process” because for now it gives less than they — and we — want for the Palestinian Arabs should stop and consider what this event says about their own politics. The alternative to the peace process is not full Palestinian self-determination but a return to what there was before — outright Israeli occupation and ragged war in the streets and hillsides of Palestinian Palestine.

Nor would such a regression “clear the way” for a “better” solution. Even the PLO has now abandoned the old chauvinist hope that the Arab states will destroy Israel; if it had done so earlier it might have opened the
The class struggle does not end.

From day one of a Labour government, the inevitable antagonism between that government and the working class, the trade unions, and the Labour Party, and the new Labour movement will begin to revive — perhaps more slowly than we would like, but it will revive. The left in the Labour Party will begin to revive around demands on the government and, most likely, resistance to the government.

THE TORIES have wreaked havoc with the achievements it took the reforming labour movement many decades of heroic effort to win.

Yet, there is not one major area in which Labour is now pledged to roll back the Thatcher-Major counter-revolution. On not one thing are the Labour leaders pledged to thoroughly undo and reverse the victories which Thatcher’s government won for the rich over the working-class movement and the poor.

Therefore, socialist sectarianism pronounces the political labour movement dead and — like a demented echo of the misguided nuclear Single European Movement — they find in that verdict grounds for optimism.

It is altogether more complicated. The labour movement has not ceased to be concerned with the welfare of its members just because most of its activists have been cowed by defeat and are hypnotised into political stillness by the hope that Blair’s Labour Party will manage this time round to break the elected dictatorship of the Tory Party after 17 or 18 years in office.

The labour movement has not ceased to hate and resent what the Tory pigs in office have done to the working people. The labour movement is not blind to the savagery unleashed and the degradation cultivated in our cities by the Thatcherites.

The defeat of the Tories will at the same time remove many of the defeated-bred inhibitions of the labour movement. The demands and expectations, and the desire to undo what the Tories have done, will affect and change — perhaps slowly at first — the attitude that the labour movement will take to the Labour government.

Working-class industrial militancy will begin to revive — perhaps slower, perhaps than we would like, but it will revive. The left in the Labour Party will begin to revive around demands on the government and, most likely, resistance to the government.
The state of socialism

The world in which we live is wracked by terrible crises — by protracted economic depressions, by local wars, by famines and starvation, and everywhere else, by ecological disasters and the inevitability of even more terrible ecological disasters to come. The list could be made much longer.

Capitalism, which dominates the world, and Stalinism which used to dominate a large part of it and still controls China, are the causes of these horrors. Socialism is the plain and obvious answer to the problems which the world faces.

By socialism we mean an end to exploitation of the working class, rational, democratic planning of our social and economic affairs — which here means also of our ecological affairs — and the application of consistent democracy instead of war to the solution of national and ethnic conflicts.

By socialism we mean an end to exploitation of the working class, rational, democratic planning of our social and economic affairs — which here means also of our ecological affairs — and the application of consistent democracy instead of war to the solution of national and ethnic conflicts.

Serious working-class socialism remains the only possible answer to the world's problems. But Stalinism, which Trotsky called "the sphyllus of the labour movement", has undermined, sapped, butcherced and discredited the old socialist movement.

Reform socialism, which built upon structures upon unstable foundations, has, ultimately, also worked to undermine the prestige and the mass credibility of socialism.

Socialism is in crisis.

In this decade, the world of conventional "socialism" has been turned upside down and inside out. Generations repelled by the horrors of capitalism — its exploitation and squallor in the metropolitan countries, its murderous cannibalism in the Third World, its ineradicable drive to reduce all life to pounds, dollars and cents, opted for socialism.

For decades most of those who rebelled against capitalism took as their model of an alternative to capitalism the "socialism" of the Stalinist states.

Many even of those socialists who aimed only to rub the rough edges off capitalism, to reform it, were influenced by Stalinist models.

Most of those — Trotskyists — who bitterly critiqued the Stalinist system and advocated working class revolution there believed that in the Stalinist states the "planned" collectivist foundations for socialism had been laid. History had gone further ahead in those Stalinist societies. They were "post-capitalist".

Even some of those who thought they were "state-capitalist" — notably Tony Cliff of the SWP — nevertheless believed that the Stalinist state-monopoly economies represented the fairest advance of capitalism. In this view, too, Stalinism was on the high road of history — if not "post-capitalist", then certainly "ultra-capitalist" — on the margin between capitalism and a higher system.

Now it has been shown beyond serious dispute, by the collapse of the USSR and of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, that the Stalinist social formations were historic cul-de-sacs — not the highway but enormously wasteful lost paths and byways of historic development.

Millions who believed themselves to live in a partially socialist world now wake up to the truth that a socialist world remains entirely to be won.

Yet from the point of view of Marx's ideas, in terms of the real traditions of Lenin and Trotsky, all this is old truth.

There was never good Marxist reason to believe that the Eastern Bloc represented either progress or socialism.

Lenin and Trotsky never believed that socialism could come from isolated, backward, statist societies, developing in the wake of the advanced capitalist world under the whip, the club and the gun of merciless slavedriving dictators. They held to the basic idea of Marxism that socialism comes out of and after advanced capitalism, which paves the way for it, creating the working class and preparing it — by way of the class struggle — to become the ruling class.

Socialism, Lenin and Trotsky knew and said, was impossible in the USSR. What was possible was that the workers could take power there, and act as international pioneers for revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, which were ripe for socialism.

The Russian workers took power, and fought off capitalist invasion and sabotage to hold it. The workers in France, Italy and Germany were defeated. The Russian workers' republic was isolated. The Stalinist bureaucracy emerged around the state machine and, through a bloody counter-revolution, displaced the working class as rulers.

Everywhere the Russian Stalinists and those in China and elsewhere, who followed their example, created slave states for the workers and farmers. That those societies represented workers' power, or socialism, or even real progress, was always a grotesque illusion. Now it is gone.

It is good that the poisonous illusions...
have gone. It is good for socialism — it is immense progress! — that those, impelled by the class struggle to rebel against capital-
ism should be forced to move in their minds from a world of delusions and pre-
tences into the real world.
Socialism has lost nothing real. We have gained the beginning of emancipation from the crippling myths and lies which for decades did as much as the force and strength of capitalism ever did to derail the socialist movement.
In fact the ground is being cleared for the rediscipline of a real socialist move-
ment based on the genuine ideas of Marx (and of Lenin and Trotsky too).
That does not make the collapse of the old “socialism” held to by so many for so long, any less painful and disorienting now. The
disorientation is made all the more
deep because the outright reformist cur-
cents of socialism in countries like Britain have also collapsed.
There is a common root to the collapse and crisis of both the Stalinists and of the reformists: the power of the bourgeois.
On a world scale, they kept the advanced areas of the world economy and have
cleared out the reformists. Mrs Thatcher relentlessly and even illegally used the state power —
the semi-militarised police deployed to beat down miners during their 1984-5 strike for example — to defeat the labour movement.
But there was never any good reason, either, to believe that the reformists had secured permanent reforms, or created the new working-class progress within capitalism which some of them claimed to have won. The Marxists knew, and said, differently.
The long period of dominance by reformism and by the grim Stalinist coun-
terfeit of socialism has seen the working-class experience a series of great
defects and missed chances. Structural
changes in the working-class itself has shaken
up the traditional labour movement. In turn those changes have led superficial and igno-
rant people to claim that the working class is disapp earing.
Capitalism cannot exist without a working
class to exploit! The working class has
dergone vast structural change and again in its history: the workers who built
history’s first mass working-class movement,
the British Chartist of the 1830s and 40s, were handloom weavers, cotton spinners, and similar people. Their descendants
moved to different occupations, few of them changed their class position of working
labourers, forced to sell their labour-power to a capitalist in order to live.
The collapse of Stalinism has cleared the
way for us to rebuild the genuine socialist
movement. But before the rebuilding, and
at its beginnings — that is, now — the unfa-
terling socialists must live with the
triumphalism of the bourgeoisie amidst the
ruins and the devastation, the discouragement
and the poisonous vapours produced by Stalinism, and the disappointments
produced by reformism.
Socialists must live under — and respond to — an incessant bombardment of propa-
ganda from the capitalists and their agents
and collaborators in the labour movement —
people like the Blairites — the burden of whose message is this: socialism has failed.
Socialism was just a dream. Their case rests entirely on lies and falsifications.
The leaders of the Stalinist counter-revo-
lution in the USSR rewrote history to suit
themselves, threading and weaving a mass of
totalitarian lies into its very fabric —
centrally the grotesque lie that Stalinism was the
natural, necessary and inescapable outcome of the Russian workers’ revolution of 1917.
The western capitalist victors over Stalin-
ism have taken over Stalinism’s lies as they
took over its bankrupt stock.
The bourgeois and people like Blair now repeat the great lie of the Stalinists. Stalin-
ism, they say, was socialism; Stalinism was
Bolshevism; the Stalinist states were Marx-
ism coming of age. That’s the lie and the
delusion. Bolshevism and Marxism are now
deservedly dead and rotten: socialism is
impossible.
This is, so to speak, the new Popular Front
of the Lies Against Socialism.
We know better: we know that the Stalinists killed more communists and workers than any reactionary regime in history, not
excluding Hitler’s. We know that Stalinism had nothing in common with either the aims or the methods of real communism. We
know that the lie that Stalinism and socialism were identical played an enormous part for decades in hypnotising would-be
communist workers throughout the world into accepting Stalinism.
We believe in Workers’ Liberty believe that only stubborn resistance to those lies and stub-
born retention of the truth about socialism, about Marxism and about the real Russian revolution can stop these lies from contin-
uing to poison the ground on which the
renewed working-class socialist movement
must be built, thereby rectifying the rebirth
of that movement. That is why we turn to
the youth, who are undismayed and uncor-
rupted.
That is why we publish Workers’ Liberty.
And that is also the reason why we fight, by reason and argument, against those in the
labour and socialist movement — Socialism
Worker and the SWP are a good example who, though sincerely want to renovate
Marxism and rebuild the labour movement are, tragically, themselves poisoned with the
toxins generated in the labour movement,
and even among the Marxists of the anti-Stalinist camp, during the long decades of Stalinist domination. They are poisoned:
• by demagogy;
• by immutability to principle;
• by rejection of consistent democracy as the only acceptable solution to national and
communal conflicts such as those of the
Middle East and Ireland;
• by sectarian hostility to the existing
labour movement;
• by a retreat from reason to an essentially
pre-Renaissance reliance on “authority” and
on the word of people who have the power. The
SWP will for an example here too.
• by the practice of self-organisation as
underdemocratic, cutlous sections in which the
“rank and file” have, in practice, no rights for most of the time, and not at any time
rights that the all powerful leaders do not
want them to have.
These are the common traits of the exist-
ing “revolutionary” and “Trotskyist” left.
They stand as an insuperable barrier between most of those calling themselves
Trotskyist and the future a regenerated Tro-
skyism must carve out for itself.
The working class and the socialist
movement will — certainly — renew and
reconstitute themselves, as they have before in history.
The job socialists must do today is to pre-
pare the future by fighting the class struggle
now, and by learning and transmitting the
lessons of the past. This activity is irre-
placeable. It can make the difference
between working-class victory and defeat in
the battles of the future.
In Western Europe and the states of the for-
mer USSR now we can see what the absence of Marxism can mean. In countries where
the genuine socialist tradition was extir-
pated by the Stalinists and where the opressors of the workers longed to act in the name of socialist, a working class
emerging from Stalinism grooves for answers, tossed along behind priests, bureaucrats and aspirant bourgeois,

Had it been possible under the old system to
develop genuine socialist parties, free to
discuss and debate the experience of stal-

inism, then the working class in Eastern
Europe and the USSR could now be spared much suffering and hardship. Working-class socialism, not capitalism, would replace Stalinism. But Stalinism sterilised the political terrain.

Around us, in Britain today, the ex-

reformists cease to aspire even to reform

capitalism. The ex-Stalinists go on to cap-

tialism, outdoing even the traditional Labour

Party right wing. Many socialists — or-

ganised round Militant and Socialist Worker

— run away from the real working-class move-

ment, which still, despite everything, includes the Labour Party, into sectarian

ghettos, organised on semi-Stalinist princi-

ples into so many ideological command

economies.” Real discussion is choked off.

Unity in action is very rare.

Socialism will require itself, hardened, sharpened, clarified and cleansed by the
bitter experience of working-class his-

tory so far this century. In spite of every-

thing, and in defiance of the fain-

hearts, we have no doubt that the future remains with socialism.

The serious socialists need to organise
themselves to fight the bourgeoisie, and to
fight the right wing of the Labour Party and
the unions. But we must do so in such a way
that the revolutionary left itself can learn from its experiences, and can think and grow.
That is what Workers’ Liberty stands for.
That is what the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty exists to achieve.
The Tube workers’ battle

AS WE go to press the long running dispute on the London Underground is set to enter a new stage.

Either the RMT union leadership will manage to extract enough face saving concessions to call off the action, or both sides will dig in for a very bitter war of attrition.

The RMT’s claim is not only for a 6% increase in pay but also for a reduction in hours, and job security guarantees for areas threatened with privatisation by management’s “make or buy” review.

The claim for a reduction in hours would do much to reduce the increasing stress and pressure we are put under. It would also create hundreds of jobs.

The dispute got off to an excellent start with unity between the all-grade RMT and the drivers’ craft union ASLEF producing big majorities for action in both unions’ ballots.

But that was too good to last. On the eve of the first co-ordinated BR and tube strike for years, ASLEF’s Lew Adams shook the boot in — on the workers.

First the BR dispute was called off without any gains and with the action absolutely solid. Adam’s reason for cancellation was that management had backed down on the shorter working week. What he was less willing to point out was that his much-vaunted hours reduction was not due to be introduced for a couple of years — exactly in line with the timetable that BR had already suggested.

Nor was Lew too keen to point out that his agreement was with BR and not with the new train operators who will actually be managing the trains when the new deal is comes into effect.

Lew also remained rather vague about the strengths that management wanted to tie to the hours cut.

Not surprisingly, this deal was thrown out by the ASLEF membership. But Lew was not to be stopped. He took the ballot mandate and went straight into new talks with BR, where he managed to scrape together a new deal. The only problem was that the new deal was as bad as the old one. Except that this time the members were not to get the chance to accept or reject it in a ballot. The executive had already accepted it for them.

At the same time Lew was stitching up his tube membership. Some genius in the ASLEF head office managed to mess up the technicalities of the ballot. The courts ruled against the union. The dispute then went on the back burner while ASLEF re-ballooted.

When the ASLEF drivers again voted for action Adams did the obvious thing and settled the dispute without any gains whatsoever. When ASLEF members rejected this in a ballot, Adams signed up to a three year productivity deal instead!

All this goes to confirm what many tube activists have believed for a long time: the ASLEF leadership have got a secret no-strike deal with LUL management.

The result of Adams’ behaviour has been to induce hundreds of ASLEF members to cross over to the RMT because they don’t want to cross picket lines and they want to be part of a fighting union.

The RMT has now had three successful one day strikes and is poised to resume the action on Tuesday November 7 after yet another legal row. It involves the rights of ASLEF members who have transferred over to RMT to support a strike that they didn’t vote for in a RMT ballot even though they did vote for it as ASLEF members and left ASLEF because it wasn’t striking!

It would be a tragedy if the RMT local or national leadership were now to call off the action without any substantial gains. But whatever happens in the next few days one thing is clear: the ASLEF leadership’s stranglehold over industrial action on the tube has been broken, as has the local RMT leadership’s fear of going it alone.

A witch-hunter witch-hunted

An open letter to Clare Short

Dear Clare,

They are a rotten, ungrateful lot of male pig swine, aren’t they? The media I mean. Just because, in your gabby, fetching fashion — “I’ve got a brain somewhere, if only I can get the room to stop spinning for long enough to gather my thoughts” — you let out on TV the half-baked thought that perhaps, maybe, one day, cannabis might be legalised, they turn on you!

How dare you, Clare! Journalists all over Wapping split their coke in uncontrollable anger — or was it laughter? — at such a scandalously daft idea as legalising cannabis. And then TONY had you in for a “dressing down” — or “a carpeting” according to some papers. That was not all.

The Daily Mail felt obliged to perform the painful duty of publicly examining your distant past, when, they told their shocked readers, you had black friends and lived with some of them in Birmingham. Did Clare Short, asked the Mail magisterially, did she — 15 or 20 years ago — then smoke pot?

Are you now or have you ever been a smoker of pot, Ms Short? That is the question of the moment!

And thus, Clare Short MP, one of the nastiest little witch hunters in the New Labour Party, the ex-socialist who, at the October Labour Party conference had worked off sour spite against Liz Davies because Briefing once truthfully reported that people like Blair regard Clare Short as a "useful idiot", found herself being witch hunted for mooting one of the tamest “radical” ideas it is possible to find still above ground in ’90s Britain.

Legalise dope? You’ll be talking about the socialist revolution before long, if this drift continues, Clare! Sober up, or your career will suffer!

This was, frankly, enjoyable. But there is a serious side to it. In the recent Littleborough and Saddleworth by-election the Labour Party raised a hue and cry against the Liberal can-

niticate because he openly favoured legalising cannabis.

Do you not see the connection between that and your own experience, Clare Short? You fall victim to the dogs you helped unchain. The same is true in the inner affairs of the Labour Party.

Labour is now a quasi-stalinist party with rigid structures and an increasingly ridiculous leadership style. It combines this with utter subservience to the media. Whoever in the Labour Party-offends the media offends the Leader.

Ex-scoffers like you have felt safe with these structures. But such structures and procedures rule out dissent. Even on a petty chieftainish matter like cannabis.

When a prominent member of the Labour Front Bench can no longer see even the vague notion that, maybe, cannabis will be legalised, without a media witch hunt, and a reprimand from the Great Leader for the offending MP, where is Labour going? Where is Britain going?

You can’t witch-hunt the Liberal Party on one issue one day and squeal when the Tory press does the same thing to you the day after.

You can’t support the stalinisation of the Labour Party for years and then feel indignant when the Great Leader himself tells you off for daring to express a stray half-thought of your own.

Freedom is indivisible. Freedom is always for the one who disagrees: the issue would not arise if no one dissented. It is delusion to think that it is possible to do what the Labour Establishment has done — with witch hunting Liberals, to stifling internal discussion in the Labour Party, to playing the well-trained, subservient toy dog to the media — and still allow a little bit of freedom and independence to people like yourself.

It is probably too late for you to learn from any of this, Clare Short. Others should.

Yours, Annie O’Keeffe
Bosnia: will the ceasefire hold?

By Martin Thomas

A CEASEFIRE has held, more or less, in Bosnia since 5 October. US sponsored talks for a settlement to end the war started on 1 November.

According to the chief US official involved, Richard Holbrooke, “What I’ve got is agreement on vague principles. That’s a long way from peace.” Within the parameters set by those vague principles, almost any deal will be better than renewed war — which, in those parameters, can only be about shifting the borders of ethnic partition. But any deal in those parameters will also be an atrocious carve-up, generating conflicts, probably, for decades to come by its treatment of millions of aggrieved refugees and its jagged, arbitrary borders.

“Probably areas of eastern Bosnia historically Muslim-dominated will become Serb territory, and areas of western Bosnia historically Serb will become Croat.”

The parameters, or principles, which the US has got all the parties to accept, are that Bosnia (in its pre-1992 borders) will become a loose confederation. A Bosnian Serb Republic will have 49% of the territory; it will enter into a confederation with the already existing (but uneasy) Muslim-Croat federation. The existing Bosnian government will be reduced to being the leadership of the “Muslim” element in “Muslim-Croat federation”, which in turn is only an element in the broader “confederation”. The “Croat” areas of the existing “Muslim-Croat federation” already use Croatian money, have the Croatian army operating in them, etc., so in effect the Bosnian Muslims and the people of the multi-ethnic cities like Sarajevo and Tuzla will be reduced to a couple of enclaves, squeezed between annexes of Croatian and Serbian states. Probably areas of eastern Bosnia historically Muslim-dominated will become Serb territory, and areas of western Bosnia historically Serb will become Croat, in line with the results of “ethnic cleansing”.

The whole arrangement, if it can be negotiated through, will be policed and secured by a huge 50,000 strong NATO, or NATO-Russian, occupation army.

The US approach here is a direct continuation, in different circumstances, of the common US-European Union line when ex-Yugoslavia started to collapse in 1991. As Laura Silver and Alan Little put it in The Death of Yugoslavia:

“International mediators behaved as though the war has no underlying structural causes at all. They came... to “hang heads together”, as though the conflict was caused by no more than some ill-defined... Balkan temperment, a south Slavic pre-disposition... towards fratricide.” In June 1991, they counselled everyone to stay still and leave Yugoslavia as it was; now, they counsel everyone to settle down and accept “ethnic cleansing” and conquest as they are. Anything will do, as long as it restores conditions for profitable trade and investment.

No force, however, can produce anything better unless it already embodies the principle of something better — of some element of Muslim-Croat unity across the war lines, of workers’ unity, of consistent democracy. No force embodying such alternatives to Holbrooke’s “vague principles” yet has anywhere near enough power to change the military and diplomatic map. We should do what we can, through solidarity, to help such a force emerge and grow.

Israel: the myth of Rabin and the prospects for peace

Adam Keller, editor of the Israeli peace journal, The Other Israel, reports from Tel Aviv

I WAS at the Tel Aviv rally attended by tens of thousands of people at which Rabin was killed. He was killed only 100 metres away from where we were standing, but we didn’t hear the news of his death until we got home as we were the other side of the municipal buildings. Yesterday I went to his funeral, which was also attended by thousands.

There has been a big change in the balance of forces on the ground. There has been the biggest mobilisation of the peace movement we have seen here for years.

Thousands of young people have been sitting at the place where Rabin was murdered, and outside his house in Jerusalem. Thousands of candles have been lit for him.

We are almost seeing a sort of myth created in front of our eyes — of Rabin, the man of peace and the martyr of peace. Politically this is a hopeful phenomenon. These youth are showing a real commitment to peace.

And although Rabin was quite a nasty character — even in the last week of his life he ordered the assassination of Yassir Arafat (leader of jihadi movement in Palestine). But it is also a fact that if he had not made an agreement with Yassir Arafat he would still be alive today.

It is not just nonsense to believe he was a martyr for peace.

The big question here is, will there be an election? I don’t expect it, and I’m not sure I’m in favour of it. An election would take months to organise and things could change a lot in a pre-election period. The right are now on the defensive, but that does not mean things could not swing back towards them.

I think it is vital that Labour stay in government until at least March 1996, when the army is finally due to pull out of most of Hebron. I want any future government to be left with a fait accompli which could only be reversed at the expense of a major war.

The Other Israel can be contacted at...
South Africa: Victors don’t commit war crimes

By Anne Mack

The former South African Defence Minister General Magnus Malan and ten other retired military officers are to face trial for murder.

The eleven appeared in court in Durban at the beginning of November on charges of organising under the old regime a “third force” hit squad responsible for a township massacre.

Theoretically, if Malan and his accomplices are found guilty and refuse to plea for clemency then they could die. But the idea that Malan will face the same fate that he and his underlings dish out to thousands of opponents of apartheid is absurd.

The General will walk free. He has to. The alternative is civil war. The African National Congress dare not allow the due process of law to operate because that would risk upsetting the delicate political compromise that ushered in the “New South Africa”, while keeping the old apartheid state machine. The state is, in the last instance, armed bodies of men. Its basic purpose is to preserve a given set of property relations on which it in turn rests.

The function of what was called the apartheid state was not, strictly speaking, to protect apartheid but to protect the most basic structures of racial capitalism of which Grand Apartheid was just one transient form.

The maintenance of a supply of cheap black labour for Anglo American and the other monopolies was thus a far more important goal for the apartheid state apparatus than the maintenance of the laws against mixed marriages, the pass laws or the Group Areas Act.

Malan was absolutely central to that brutal apparatus of repression. His units, both regular and irregular, ranged across the subcontinent from Angola to Mozambique as well as carrying out “special operations” in metropolitan capitals like London and Paris. But, as head of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), Malan’s main theatre of war was within South Africa itself.

This modern day barbarian took personal charge of apartheid’s dirty war. He is directly responsible for the development of the “Third Force” strategy in which the apartheid state deliberately recruited, trained and armed gangs of mercenaries whose purpose was to fan the flames of so-called “black on black” violence.

Starting from already existing and often violent conflicts between Inkatha and the ANC, Xhosa and Zulu speakers or township residents and hostel dwellers, Malan’s hit squads would set about fanning the flames of full-scale civil war. Their initial goal of building up Inkatha and other conservative black groups into a force that, in alliance with the National Party, could hope to inflict electoral defeat on the ANC was never realised. Nevertheless, the DMI’s basic strategy worked.

Malan and his associates succeeded in destroying any semblance of normal life in the townships. They intimidated and demoralised the majority of the black population; creating an overwhelming desire for “peace” at almost any cost though they failed in undermining the mass electoral support for the ANC.

The hit squads created a bloody backdrop against which increasing repression of the liberation movement, and the end of the Cold War made possible South Africa’s “historic compromise.” A compromise that was premised on the defeat of the semi-insurrectionary township rebellion of the mid-1980s.

When Mandela was released in 1990 it was the regime that was taking the initiative. A week later the ANC was drawn into a long process of negotiations leading to a “transfer of power” in which the ANC agreed to share power with the National Party until the next millennium while all the old apartheid generals and bureaucrats kept their jobs and their pensions.

Malan himself was made a sacrificial lamb by De Klerk in 1991, to help along the negotiations. This time his court appearance boosted the ANC’s showing in the local elections — the message was that, at last, or so it seemed, Mandela was getting tough. But in the end the ANC will find some device to ensure that the former Defence Minister is never convicted of anything. Mandela may be in office, but Malan won the war.

After Yeltsin, what?

BORIS Yeltsin’s days are numbered. After his second heart attack in a year the drunken dictator has been forced to hand over responsibility for Russia’s key ministries, Defence, Security, Foreign Affairs and Interior to Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin. It is unlikely that Yeltsin can ever recover sufficiently to regain the power he once held.

This poses two questions: what or who will fill his place? And will they be any more successful than Yeltsin in transforming the core of the old USSR into a fully blown capitalist society?

One possibility is the emergence in the wake of next month’s Duma elections of a Stalinist-Nationalist bloc dedicated to halting privatisation and cracking down on the mafia. Such a bloc could be led by either former general Alexander Lebed or the leader of the Russian Communists (Old Stalinists) Gennady Zyuganov.

The problem for such a formation would be the fact that they have no economic programme that could deliver the kind of improvements in working class living standards that they have promised in order to win electoral support.

The so-called “liberals” are in a worse state. Their main electoral bloc, Yabloko, supposedly the third biggest party in Russia has been banned on a technicality from participating in the Duma elections next month. It is difficult to see what the “liberals” can do in the medium term other than put their support behind Chernomyrdin who represents that sector of the old apparatus who have done best out of privatisation.

“The only way out of the impasse is the development of a political movement of the working class”

With the west economically incapable of providing the kind of “Marshall Aid” regeneration programme that is required and with few venture capitalists willing to sink their all in shares in the USSR inc the economic prognosis is bleak.

The only way out of the impasse is the development of a political movement of the working class, independent of all sections of the old monolithic bureaucracy, including the new capitalists.
Debate

Should socialists leave the Labour Party?

By Arthur Scargill

At this year’s Labour Party conference Tony Blair and the party leadership destroyed Labour’s socialist ‘birthright’ when they ditched the historic commitment to common ownership, and committed new Labour to the ‘free market’ and capitalism. Speaking at this year’s annual conference — to delegates so desperate to remove the Tory government that they were prepared to adopt any measure, accept any proposal — Blair was finally able to get rid of Clause Four.

Delegates who enthusiastically cheered Blair’s keynote conference speech may now be realising that the pledges and promises were not what they seemed.

What did Tony Blair really say on issues which fundamentally affect the lives of every adult and child in our society — privatisation, the national minimum wage, unemployment, pensions, anti-trade union laws and the party itself?

On privatisation he confirmed that Labour would not renationalise our key industries, but merely use the “excess” profits of those industries and utilities to help pay for its programme of work and education.

A Labour leader committed to public ownership would have said that Labour would renationalise water, electricity, coal, gas, British Telecom and all the public industries and services which have been privatised over the past 16 years — including restoration of our railways — that’s something which, according to the latest opinion polls, nearly 60 per cent of the public support.

On the national minimum wage, Blair undertook to introduce a statutory mini-

mum wage but refused to specify a formula of state a figure.

On unemployment, his statement that “no one pretends that we can solve unemployment overnight” is a warning that unemployment will continue under a Labour government.

The truth is that we can solve unemployment overnight by introducing a four day working week with no loss of pay, banning all non-essential overtime and bringing in voluntary retirement on full pay at age 55.

On pensions Tony Blair made it clear that the Labour Party is departing from the essential principle of “universal” pensions and said that Labour is looking at ways for people to “put together income from public and private sources.

In other words, workers are going to pay an additional “insurance policy” to guarantee a minimum standard of pension.

On anti-trade union laws, Tony Blair — although well aware that picketing, solidarity action and the right of unions to determine their own rule books without state interference are all regarded as human rights by the United Nations charter — has declared that Labour in government will retain the vicious laws which have been used over the last 16 years to boost unemployment and enforce low pay.

A number of trade union leaders and party activists have agreed that a serious discussion must take place over the next few months to determine which policy the left should pursue.

The new rules and constitution present socialists like myself with a profound dilemma:

Do I — and others who feel as I do — stay in the party which has been and is being politically cleansed and is now constitutionally indistinguishable from the Tories and the Liberal Democrats?

Or do we leave and start to build a socialist Labour Party that represents the principles, values, hopes and dreams which gave birth, nearly a century ago, to what has become, sadly, today’s New Labour?

Those who applauded Tony Blair’s address to party conference and voted for the constitutional changes may well rue the day they gave away the party’s socialist birthright.

* This article was first published in the October/November issue of The Miner.

Keeping a sense of proportion

By Roland Tretchet

ARTHUR SCARGILL is right to be outraged at the direction in which Blair is taking the party. The left does need to discuss its strategy. Scargill’s error is that he seems to have lost all sense of proportion. He has wildly exaggerated the significance of Blair’s victory on Clause Four. He seems to believe that the recent change in the formal constitution of the party actually represents a decisive change in its basic class nature.

No, it does not! This new pessimism of Scargill’s is based on the idea that Blair has betrayed something that has never existed: a socialist Labour Party.

Mistaking myth for reality, Scargill now seems to think that because Blair has altered the party’s mythology he has somehow fundamentally altered its reality. This is a very strange procedure for a Marxist to adopt.

Marxists — and Scargill considers himself a Marxist — base their assessments of individuals, parties and groups not on what they think about themselves, but on what they actually do; their social role, function and purpose in the unfolding class struggle.

Scargill is defining the Labour Party and its relationship to the struggle for socialism by what the party constitution says, not by analysing what the leadership actually does. This is to turn reality on its head.

To understand the Labour Party we need to analyse the dynamic and contradictory relationship between:

• the parliamentary and trade union apparatus,
• the Party rank and file,
• the wider layers of Labour’s bedrock working-class supporters.

In other words, between a bureaucratic political machine and its proletarian base.

The old Clause Four, part four, was never a very useful guide in this respect. The Labour Party is a highly contradictory entity. Its leaders are some of the most accomplished liars in politics. No formal definition of its aims and objectives, especially one written by its leaders, could ever really tell us much.

Unless, that is, it read something like this: “To secure for the bourgeoisie their continued rule in the land, and the full fruits of other people’s labour by channelling the first beginnings of working-class political consciousness into forms of action that prop up the existing private monopoly of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and to further discredit socialism by the unpopular bureaucratic mismanagement of each industry or service.”

The point here is that without adopting a healthy amount of scepticism about Labour’s traditions and mythology, it is impossible for Marxists to keep their bearings now.

Yes, it was right to defend Clause Four.

Yes, Marxists were duty bound to rally the broadest possible forces for that battle.

And yes, Marxists were right to point out how that fight was in fact a dress rehearsal for
future battles between the next Labour government and the working class. Workers' Liberty mobilised all the forces it could muster in the Labour Party and the affiliated unions for this task.

But to go from that position to suggesting that the battle in the Labour Party is all over because of the loss of Clause Four is to abandon dialectics for constitutional fetishism. The Labour Party is not in distinguishable from the Lib-Dems or the US Democrats. The union link is still basically intact. Labour is not yet a "pure" bourgeois party.

The alternative to a narrow focus on the rule book is to look at the Labour Party as it has developed historically, taking in all aspects of its contradictory reality.

This is how this magazine summed up that reality during the battle for Clause Four.

"Labour is the political wing of the multi-millioned trade union movement. Despite all its many limitations it represents 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 prerequisite 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's 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 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."

Nothing that has happened since Blair's special conference victory changes this assessment. In fact, the key events at this year's conference were the product of a classically Labourist backroom deal. Blair promised the union leaders that there would be no new attacks on the union link and in return he received support on the minimum wage and selective education.

The end result was the most stitched-up Labour conference since Harold Wilson's early days as leader.

It is strange for Scargill to claim that campaigning for socialism is no longer possible inside the Labour Party because of changes in the rulebook.

Of course, we should not confine ourselves to what can be done now inside the Labour Party, but the fact of the matter is that it is still possible to win significant support for socialist ideas inside the Party and to organise around them. The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs secured a full third of all the votes cast in the recent NEC elections, to quote just one significant fact.

The difficulties facing those of us who fight for socialism come from the witch hunters and the huge powers they have given to themselves to hound and persecute socialists. All those powers predate the New Clause Four. They are rather similar to those used by previous generations of witch hunters back in the "Good old days" of the old Clause Four, particularly in the 1930s.

In reality the last thing the Blairites are likely to try right now is to expel someone for speaking up for the old Clause Four. Their priorities lie elsewhere. They are preparing to carry through a series of major attacks on what remains of the welfare state, attacks that will be so viciously anti-working class that they are certain to stir up opposition within the Labour Party. It is the job of Marxists to remain within the Labour Party where the major fault lines in British politics will develop.

As we were saying…

Lenin on the Labour Party

It would be possible to compile a booklet of quotations on the Labour Party from Lenin, and some would appear to contradict each other. What we need then is some indication of how to judge the Labour Party, concretely, as it exists now. At the Second Comintern Congress, 1920, Lenin made a speech on the question of affiliation of the British Communist to the Labour Party.

"...indeed the concepts 'political organisation of the trade union movement' or 'political expression of this movement' are wrong ones. Of course the bulk of the members of the Labour Party are workers; however, whether a party is really a political party of the workers or not, depends not only on whether it consists of workers, but also upon who leads it, upon the content of its activities, and of its political tactics. Only the latter determines whether we have before us really a political party of the proletariat. From this point of view, the only correct one, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because although it consists of workers it is led by reactionaries, and the worst spirit reactionaries at that, who act fully in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie which exists, in order with the help of the British working class, to systematically recuperate their class interests."

The Labour Party must be seen dialectically — in its connections, in its actual role and significance in the relationship of the classes — not by what fig-leaves it adopts, what it says of itself, or what workers think it is.

To use the description of it — 'the party of the British workers' — is a means of avoiding a sharp Marxist class analysis of its role, its actual position in the relationship of forces, is not serious. Neither is it serious to say 'well, it is, and then again it isn't'. In its function, whatever the contradictions, it is a bourgeois party. It is true that if we ignore the contradictions we will not be able to gauge future developments.

The Leninist position is that the Labour Party, judged in its role and function, and despite its origins and special connection with the trade unions, is a capitalist, a bourgeoise workers' party. Judged politically it is not a workers' party with deformations, inadequacies (its inadequacies amount to a qualitative difference), but a bourgeois party with the special function of containing the workers — actually it is a special instrument of the bourgeois state political organisation. The Labour Party is the main instrument of capitalist control of the workers; the organisation formed out of an upsurge of the workers, but an upsurge in which the workers were defeated ideologically and thus in every other field, is now the means of integrating the drives and aspirations of the workers with the capitalist state machinery. It is not a pension fund but an active arm of the class — against itself, against the proletariat's own interest. It is against this background that Clause Four must be seen.

The approach and viewpoint is important here, and what we see will be seriously affected by how we begin. The initial statement, 'a workers' party' or 'a bourgeois workers' party', will affect everything else. For example, the bureaucracy is seen either as a crust formation, with certain deficiencies in relation to the needs of the class, or basically part of the class, which will respond (generally as opposed to treacherously) to pressures — or as much more serious opponent, a part of the political machinery of the ruling class (irrespective of how it originates) — and therefore our expectations from it will be quite different. We will not be quite so 'comfortable' in the Labour Party. The most obvious thing is that we will see their shifts to the left as also a danger and not as a triumph for the pressure of the class, as something which increased our responsibility, as a party, rather than absolves us of them, lessening our role, questioning the validity of the Fourth International. The unqualified definition of the Labour Party as a workers' party is a snare.

* From What We Are and What We Must Become, July 1966
Asylum seekers latest Tory scapegoats

By Stan Crooke

DESPERATE TO revive their fading hopes of winning the next General Election, the Tories have reverted to playing the race card. The targets selected for the Tories’ latest plunge into the sewers of racism and Union Jack jingoism are asylum seekers and refugees.

Speaking at this year’s Tory Party conference, Social Security Secretary of State Peter Lilley was greeted with rapturous applause when he announced plans to slash the right of asylum seekers to claim welfare benefits.

All asylum seekers, irrespective of whether they apply on arrival or in-country, will lose the right to claim benefits during the appeals procedure after rejection at the first stage of the asylum application process. These measures will come into effect on 8 January 1996 and will apply — retrospectively — to anyone applying for asylum after 12 October this year. As a result, 10,000 asylum seekers and their dependants will lose their entitlement to social security on 8 January.

Under the new measures announced by Lilley, asylum seekers will be able to claim welfare benefits only if the Home Secretary formally declares that their country of origin is undergoing a “significant upheaval” which could give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution.

But there will certainly be few, if any, occasions when Michael Howard will declare that a country is undergoing a “significant upheaval.” Such a declaration would trigger a spate of asylum applications by the nationals of that country — and the whole point of Lilley’s proposals is to slash the number of people who apply for asylum and claim welfare benefits.

Moreover, in the dirty world of capitalist diplomatic horse-trading, Michael Howard, or any other Tory minister, would be reluctant to declare that countries in which British capitalism had vested economic or political interests were undergoing a “significant upheaval” and were persecuting their citizens.

The amount of money which Lilley claims will be “saved” by driving asylum seekers into homelessness and complete destitution will be just £200 million — less than 0.2% of the annual social security budget.

Less than a fortnight after Lilley warned the hearts of the Tory faithful by promising to rid the country of “bogus” asylum seekers, Home Secretary Michael Howard took up the theme of “bash the scrounging foreigner” after the main planks of a new Asylum and Immigration Bill were leaked to the media.

Due to be announced when Parliament reassembles on 15 November (after publication of this issue of Workers’ Liberty), the Bill will:

- Give the Home Secretary the power to draw up a “white list” of supposedly safe countries; asylum applications lodged by nationals of those countries will be deemed to be “manifestly unfounded.”
- Abolish the right of an asylum seeker to an oral appeal in the event of their asylum application being deemed to be without foundation.
- Scrap the right of an asylum seeker to an in-country appeal if they have passed through a “safe country” on their way to the United Kingdom; instead, they will be deported to the “safe country” and may then lodge an appeal from there.
- Introduce a system of fines for employers who employ illegal immigrants, thus transforming employers into a second eleven for the Immigration and Nationality Department.

According to press reports, countries on the new “white list” would include Algeria, Nigeria and Sri Lanka — all of which are characterised by intense social conflict and a widespread and persistent abuse of human rights. Hardly coincidently, they are also the countries of origin of many asylum seekers in Britain.

Lilley and Howard both used the same arguments to “justify” their attacks on the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Pandering to the racist stereotype of the sponging foreigner, they claimed that most asylum seekers were merely economic migrants masquerading as victims of persecution.

As evidence in support of their claims they pointed to the ongoing increase in the number of people applying for asylum in Britain, and also to the high rate of rejection of asylum applications. On both counts their evidence does not stand up to scrutiny.

The increase in the number of asylum applications has been relatively modest — an increase of just 10,000 since 1992. The 40,000 or so asylum applications now lodged annually in Britain are insignificant compared with many other European countries (750,000 people applied for asylum in Germany in 1992 and 1993) and Third World countries (Zaire has a refugee population of 1.5 million).

The current high rate of rejection of asylum applications is not a reflection of their lack of merit but rather the product of government policy. Prior to the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration (Appeals) Act of 1993 only 16% of asylum seekers were not given leave to remain in this country. Now the rejection rate has jumped to 75%.

The anti-asylum legislation of 1993 made it more difficult to claim asylum by shifting
the goalposts. The impact of Lilley's and Howard's latest proposals will be to remove the goalposts from the pitch completely.

Their proposals are a crude attempt to discourage victims of persecution from looking to Britain as their country of asylum. They will confront the majority of asylum seekers in Britain with the "choice" of returning to the country where they have suffered persecution, or living in complete destitution.

Discrimination against black people, especially in the labour market, will increase dramatically. Falsely equating "foreigner" with "black", many employers will avoid employing black workers for fear that they might end up being fined for employing an illegal immigrant.

For the Tories, however, all this counts for nothing. Lagging way behind Labour in the opinion polls, they hope to make an electoral comeback by wrapping themselves in the Union Jack (the same one that Tony Blair is trying to steal from them).

The current onslaught against asylum seekers is in line with the philosophy of the infamous Maples Memorandum, written by a former Chairman of the Tory Party, in which it was argued that highlighting immigration issues (in plain English: encouraging racism) was one of the most effective ways of combating Labour and winning back defectors to voting Tory.

But the Tories' targeting of asylum seekers is more than just an election ploy. Dismantling the rights of refugees and trying to close the door on asylum seekers is a Europe-wide phenomenon dating from the mid-1980s or, in the case of some countries, from even earlier.

For the ruling classes of western Europe and America, paying lip service to the rights of refugees has served its purpose: the institution of asylum and the international conventions concerning refugees were essentially a product of the Cold War and the post-war economic boom.

For the capitalist states of western Europe and America, the institution of asylum was a useful weapon to wield during the years of the Cold War. Granting asylum to anyone who fled from the Stalinist states helped the West portray itself as a democratic haven for the victims of the tyranny of "socialism."

In 1954, for example, the US State Department argued for more money to be made available for the resettlement of refugees on the grounds that "the United States cannot afford to have refugees returning to communist countries because, in view of their experience as refugees, they come to believe that conditions of living behind the Iron Curtain are better than in the Free World."

Of the 233,436 refugees admitted to the United States between 1956 and 1968 all but 925 came from Stalinist states.

The readiness of western Europe and America to absorb large numbers of refugees during the Cold War was also further encouraged by the needs of those states to plug gaps in the labour force.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, for example, the millions of refugees and displaced persons thrown up by the war were predominantly resettled in industrialised countries suffering from labour shortages. 31% were resettled in America, 18% in Australia, 12% in Canada, and 13% in western Europe.

With the end of the Cold War and the re-emergence of mass unemployment in the aftermath of the end of the post-war boom, the principal driving forces behind the self-serving readiness of capitalist states to recognise the institution of asylum have evaporated.

At the same time, the size and nature of the world's refugee population has changed dramatically. Since 1976 the number of refugees in the world has leapt from three million to twenty million.

Labour Party spokespersons have responded to the Tories' latest anti-refugee laws by pledging to oppose them. Jack Straw has denounced the Tories for "playing a cynical racist card" — strong words indeed from the man who, only a few months ago, hit the headlines warning that Britain could not absorb an influx of people from eastern Europe and demanding "firm but fair" immigration controls.

Whilst opposing the Tories' proposals, the Party leadership has singularly failed to pledge that the next Labour government would restore the right of all asylum seekers to claim welfare benefit, and would also scrap all the Tories' anti-asylum legislation.

Moreover, as the time of the General Election draws nearer, the master strategists of John Smith House will doubtless want to tone down Labour's position, in the hope of pushing asylum and immigration off the election agenda.

The Labour Party leadership cannot be allowed to run for cover. A labour movement campaign needs to be set up which, in alliance with the organisations of the black and refugee communities in Britain, keeps up the pressure on the Party leadership and demands the repeal of all anti-asylum legislation by the next Labour government.
The war against black America

As Louis Farrakhan’s Million Man March converged on Washington on 16 October, the black American academic and author Manning Marable gave this lecture, in which he discusses the condition of black America, to a Race and Class conference in London. Marable is the author of “Race, Reform and Rebellion” and, most recently, “Beyond Black and White” (Verso, 1995).

THERE are five key issues that I would like to present to you.

First, one of the things which characterises this social and political conjuncture of black struggle is the escalation of attacks on people of colour within the political system. In the US, there are

- assaults on affirmative action;
- attacks on minority-majority legislative districts, which threaten to cut in half the number of black representatives in Congress.
- In 1994 Proposition 187 in California denied access to public health facilities to undocumented workers.
- The English-only movement aims to deny the vote to Asian-Americans and Latinos by changing arrangements for voting. Without Spanish ballots, as in California, millions of people could be disenfranchised.
- Refusal of support, in 1994 welfare legislation, to unmarried mothers under 18.

During the 1994 election, there was a massive racial polarisation. Huge sectors of the white electorate backlash against the black freedom struggle.

This, in part, characterises the period.

Second is the polarisation of class, the escalation of social inequality in the United States. This is driven by:

- the transformation of production;
- the creation and introduction of new technology;
- the information revolution;
- the concomitant decline in the industrial and manufacturing sectors of production;
- the transformation of the workplace and the reconfiguration of the working class. You can measure this in a variety of ways. I want to focus on just two.

There is a consolidation of wealth, power and privilege in society, the likes of which has never been seen in the US.

In short, a small minority of individuals is applied from two to 58.

This Bill also eliminates the statute which stops the execution of mentally incapacitated people.

The so-called ‘three strikes’ proposal mandates life sentence for anyone convicted of three violent felonies.

There is a section which allows for children as young as 13 years of age to be tried as adults. Special courts are being created to allow the deportation of non-citizens allegedly engaged in ‘terroristic activity’, on the basis of secret evidence.

This is the criminal justice system, an enormous, expanding apparatus of repression.

What does this mean for the life chances of blacks and Latinos in the US?

Today, about one half, or over 750,000 inmates of prisons and jails in the US are African-Americans. Statistically, out of every 100,000 black male residents in 1992, of black men between the ages of 30 and 34, about 6,300 are in prison.

For the age group 29 to 29 the figure is 7,200 for every 100,000.

In human terms what does that mean? About 30% of all young black men between the ages of 18 and 29 are either in jail, on probation, on parole, or awaiting trial. In a typical day in Washington DC in 1991, 15% of all black men were in prison, 21% were on probation or on parole, 6% were being sought by the police or on bond [bail] or in trial.

The criminal justice system in a city like Washington DC has 42% of all young black males between 18 and 34 within some aspect of it. The study which was done on Washington estimated that 70% of black men in the District of Columbia would be arrested at some point before the age of 25. 85% of black men would be arrested at some point in their lives.

Now you can grasp the reality of the role of the criminal justice system in regulating and dominating and controlling millions of black lives.

The fourth point which needs to be made is that there is systematic destruction of progressive black organisation, tradition and leadership. Over the last 30 years, the state has done everything it can to attack and divide progressive black leadership — beginning with the assassination of Malcolm X, the assassination of Martin Luther King — who in the last two years of his life moved from reformism towards a more internationalist perspective.

We saw the systematic attacks of the late 1960s and 1970s on the Black Panther Party and the destabilisation of black radicalism through the Counter Intelligence Programme, COINTELPRO.

In the 1980s we had a very contradictory project, which had both strengths and weaknesses — Jesse Jackson’s “Rainbow Coalition” presidential campaigns of 1984 and 1988. 7,000,000 people voted for Jackson in the presidential campaign, and only
3 million of those votes were from African-Americans.

The campaign registered hundreds of thousands of new voters. It created the potential for an independent politics to the left of the Democratic Party. But that did not happen. Part of the reason it did not happen was due to Jackson himself. He demobilised and destroyed his own movement in 1989, by insisting on his right to name his own representatives of state organisations and oppose the democratic election of the leadership of the Rainbow Coalition from the bottom up.

As a result the forces within the Rainbow became disorientated, disorganised and disillusioned and there was a fragmentation of the movement.

As a result of that the early to mid-1990s saw a massive political vacuum created within the black freedom struggle. In 1993-4 the potential existed for filling that vacuum, ironically enough — and much to everyone’s surprise — from within the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Ben Chavis, who was briefly the head of the NAACP, was a person with a very distinct political history. For five years during the 1970s he was a political prisoner. He related to the left in a positive way.

He defeated Jackson for the leadership of the NAACP in early 1993. He opened a dialogue with the urban youth gangs, the black nationalists and the left. He advocated a broad-based black united leadership, which would include Farrakhan. But as a result of reaching out for a broad, black united front, a variety of forces from the left, including the black nationalists, Angela Davis and many cultural nationalists joined the NAACP.

I believe that this was threatening to the power structure in the US. And after the middle of 1994 a massive ideological counteroffensive began against the trend represented by Chavis. I had one editor of a white, New York, liberal publication say to me “we would rather see a black leadership which goes nowhere than a black leader with the politics of Ben Chavis talking to Farrakhan.”

By the end of 1994, Chavis’s own mistakes — misappropriation of NAACP money to cover up allegations of sexual harassment — eroded the moral and political basis for his leadership. A compliant board of directors, some of whom had personally benefited from the corruption and patronage inside the NAACP hierarchy, summarily fired Chavis.

Farrakhan astutely recognised the opportunity to expand his own base with the assistance of Chavis. Ben Chavis still commanded substantial influence among key sections of the black middle classes and professional associations. By recruiting Chavis to become national spokesperson for the Million Man March, Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam were able to reach new constituencies, where they previously had marginal influence.

This was apparently based more on pragmatism than political philosophy. Chavis sought personal and political rehabilitation. Farrakhan sought to move his own organisation from the margins into the mainstream of black middle-class politics. Chavis was prepared to jettison much of his previous left-of-centre politics for a black nationalist programme centred on patriarchy, the theme of atonement and self-help conservative politics.

To grasp how conservative the programme of the Million Man March was, listen to the speech Clinton made during the march. The President of the US said that he had no problem with the agenda of the march. So what does this tell you about the content of this mobilisation?

This is not to say that the brothers — and some sisters — who were on the march are uniting with or represent the politics of Louis Farrakhan. We have to be very clear that there is a difference between the politics of the people on the platform and the politics motivating the mass of black people on the march.

Where do we go from here? There are models of resistance at global and community levels all across the US which cut across the narrow boundaries of race and ethnicity. This resistance does not have the level of media coverage of the Million Man March.

Our best moments of resistance have been when our politics are politically and morally justified, where we have a social vision which is not distorted, truncated or corrupted by the boundaries of race and racism, where we articulate a vision of emancipation and liberation that speaks not just narrowly to ourselves, but to all of humanity.

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Quebec nationalists’ near miss

By Martin Thomas

Quebec’s narrow vote on 31 October to reject breaking away from Canada by only 30.6% to 49.4% ensures that the issue will dominate Quebec’s politics for years to come. For thirty years it has loomed larger and larger. On current trends, independence is bound to come, sooner or later.

The people of Quebec have a right to independence if they want it. Quebec is a distinct nation, long suppressed. Every socialist and democrat in Canada should champion self-determination for Quebec.

Whether working-class activists in Quebec should wish for the nation to choose independence, or welcome the prospect of independence, is a different matter. Generally Marxists in Quebec have backed independence. I used to think they were right. Now I doubt it.

Over the last thirty years, since militant Quebecois nationalism emerged, the substantive content of the independence proposed has decreased. At the start of the 1960s, Quebec was a despoiled, neglected backyard of the Anglo-Canadian state.

The English-speaking business and professional classes of west Montreal ruled over it almost like a colonial-settler elite. I saw this myself when I lived in Montreal in 1966. Reforms of real substance had already been made by the Liberal Party, but the line between the well-off west and the dingy French-speaking districts to the east of Boulevard Saint-Laurent was still as sharp as that between Manhattan and Harlem. Wide layers of the English-speaking middle class were openly racist against the French speakers, calling them dirty, lazy, ignorant, a dangerous mob.

An independent Quebecois government then, even a safely capitalist one, could have made serious changes, and given real substance to its nationalist aspirations by a national-Keynesian programme of public works.

In fact, many of those changes have been implemented over the last thirty years—in a slow, halting fashion—by the federal Canadian government and the Canada-oriented sections of the French-Canadian bourgeoisie, represented by liberal politicians like Pierre Trudeau and the current prime minister, Jean Chrétien.

Canada is not the model of multicultural democracy it claims to be, but it is rich and flexible enough to be able to respond when a quarter of its population have nationalist discontent.

Because of resistance from the western provinces, Canada still has not formally recognised the Quebecois as a distinct nation, but it is now ostentatiously bilingual. The French-speaking bourgeoisie has got its share of the pie in Quebec.

Meanwhile, the increased world-wide interlinking of the advanced capitalist economies, and the increased domination over them all by the world financial markets, has wiped ambitious national-capitalist economic management off the agenda. The independent Quebec proposed by the Parti Quebecois on 31 October would remain within the North American Free Trade Agreement and closely tied to the US and Canada.

The diminished real import of Quebecois independence has probably increased its popularity. Independence is a safe as well as a satisfying radical-seeming option for discontented Quebecois—and why wouldn’t they be discontented, with mass unemployment and social decay? In the same way, the secure caprice of the European Union has made proposals for independence more popular in many regions in Europe. Besides, 30 years of Liberal reforms do not wipe out two centuries of resentment.

All nationalism has a dark underside. Exalting the national identity and solidarity of the aggrieved nation, it tends to deny to the minorities within its own area those rights it claims for its own majority.

The importance of this dark underside in Quebec was highlighted by the outburst from Jacques Parizeau, Quebec’s premier and leader of the Parti Quebecois, after he lost the referendum. “Let’s stop talking about the French speakers of Quebec, let’s talk about us. Sixty per cent of us voted in favour of separation. We have been beaten, but basically by what? By money and the ethnic vote, that’s all.”

Before 1968, pro-independence parties were heavily Catholic, traditionalist and socially right-wing.

Modern Quebecois nationalism was stirred up in the 1960s not only by the influence of the civil rights movements and the colonial revolutions, but also by French president Charles De Gaulle’s efforts to assert France as a world power (‘Vive le Quebec libre’—long live free Quebec—he declared in a speech in Quebec in 1967).

Quebecois nationalism was alienated from the Canadian labour movement because of the strong English-Canadian bias of Canada’s Labour party, the New Democratic Party, which originated in the western provinces.

When the Parti Quebecois was formed in 1968 (by a Liberal rebel), it seemed to be a step forward. The PQ was social democrats in colouring and established strong links with Quebec’s militant trade unions.

Yet the PQ’s main triumph since first winning a majority in Quebec in 1976 has been to make Quebec unilingual. French is the only official language for administration, education, etc., although 18% of Quebec’s people have a first language other than French.

That 18% includes not only the wealthy English-speakers of west Montreal, but English-speaking workers—especially in some towns to the east of the St Lawrence river where almost the whole population is English-speaking—and immigrants of neither English nor French backgrounds. Those immigrants have generally chosen to make English rather than French their second language, and they feel threatened by an aggressive emphasis on French “purity”. (The only exception, I think, is the 19th century Irish immigrants, who assimilated into the French community.)

Ninety per cent of this “ethnic” vote went against independence, and some of the Native-American communities in Quebec declared that they would refuse to recognise Quebecois independence and secede back into Canada.

Of course it is understandable why the PQ wanted “positive discrimination” for the French language. But their actions have been utterly counter-productive for working-class unity.

Quebec is a distinct nation, with an unbridgeable right to independence if it wants it. Whether workers and socialists should wish for it to become a separate state is another matter.

Lennon and other Marxists insisted on the right to self-determination of all nations, but in their arguments over the national question in central and eastern Europe they also, in general, favoured larger, multicultural states rather than fragmentation. Though they disputed with the Austrian Marxists, they never rejected the Austrian Marxists’ desire to keep as many of the nationalities of the old Austro-Hungarian empire together in a reformed democratic state.

A “Leninist” approach to Quebec’s national question would offer the best chance of redirecting the social discontent and militancy present long gone off into hopes for independence through the channel of the PQ’s populism.

Independence supporter clashes with police after the vote
Bernie Grant and the Nation of Islam

On Monday 16 October, as Farrakhan's Million Man March was assembled in Washington, the Labour MP, Bernie Grant, spoke on a Nation of Islam ( NOI) platform in London. Grant spoke as the representative of the "African Reparations Movement". Mark Osborn wrote to Grant before the meeting asking him to justify his support for the NOI meeting. Here is Grant's reply (dated 26 October):

THANK you for your letter of 3 October about my speaking at the Black Unity rally on 16 October.

You certainly seem to have very strong views about Louis Farrakhan, and these are views which are not entirely shared by over 1 million men in the USA. I feel that you are somewhat ill-informed. There is no evidence that he was involved in the murder of Malcolm X, and my speaking at the meeting was not aimed at helping build the NOI in Britain.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring together black people from all groups and religious persuasions in Britain to discuss our common problems. We have every right to meet in this way, and I deeply resent the pressure which has come from the media and elsewhere to prevent us from doing so.

I frequently attend functions and meetings where there are people with whom I have profound disagreements. In fact I go into the Commons every day and have to rub shoulders with people who are unashamedly racist and fascist. However there is seldom any comment. I find it intriguing that there is such an outcry when I attend a meeting which is made up of black people with a range of views. Perhaps it is the case that black people are seen as a threat when they meet together.

Mark Osborn replies:

1. I noticed you did not reply to the statement in my initial letter that Louis Farrakhan was a right-wing, anti-Semitic, anti-white bigot. He is, is he not?
2. So Farrakhan had nothing to do with Malcolm's death? Well, that is not what Malcolm's widow, Betty Shabazz, thinks. In 1994 she was asked on WNBC-TV if she thought that Farrakhan had anything to do with her husband's murder. She replied "Of course, yes... Nobody kept it a secret. It was a badge of honor. Everybody talked about it. Yes."

In December 1964, two months before the killing of Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, writing under the name Louis X, had written: "Malcolm shall not escape... Malcolm is worthy of death."

3. Most reports suggest that there were a lot less than a million men on Farrakhan's demonstration - around 400,000. Polls indicate that only 5% attended because they agreed with the NOI's policies. Still, 5% of 400,000 is a lot of people: I'm in favour of socialists doing all they can to stop Farrakhan's influence growing further.

4. The stewards at the London meeting were NOI men. The banners were NOI. The meeting coincided with the NOI march in Washington and it was - explicitly - organised in solidarity with the Million Man March.

You are helping to rally black people round the NOI in Britain. You are quoted in the Guardian as saying "Why shouldn't I speak to a meeting of black people in my own constituency? I didn't see anyone telling John Major he shouldn't share a platform with Michael Portillo who, with his own words, proved himself to be a racist and a fascist." Oh, well that's OK then: John Major can sit on a platform with a racist — and so you can too.

5. Yes, socialists should be present in parliament to take on the Tories. And I am not even saying that socialists should not debate the NOI. What I am saying that socialists should denounce the organisation as an utter, poisonous dead-end, and refuse to give it any type of credibility. The NOI are not an ordinary black community organisation.

6. According to the Guardian the loudest applause of the evening was for OJ Simpson and Winnie Mandela — a probable murderer and a murderer! Is this what we've come to? Doesn't this sum up the character of the meeting?

7. You are a Labour MP and supposed to represent the black and white workers of Tottenham. The black workers will find no answers from "black capitalism", or Farrakhan's bigotry.

White workers will not be impressed by being denounced as "devils".

Farrakhan's ideas are an obstical to workers' unity. We need unity, but not undiscriminating black unity — we need workers' unity in a struggle against racism and for socialism.

8. I think you have a right — in the abstract — to speak at any meeting you choose. The fact that you choose to exercise this right on the NOI's platform — on top of your discussions with Michael Howard about getting government money to help black people in Britain "return home" — also suggests that I exercise my right to say that you have joined the ranks of those who are not fit to be Labour MPs.

Controversy
The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

Dossier

THE Spanish civil war was not primarily a struggle of “democracy against fascism”. It was a class struggle of the Spanish workers and peasants against capitalists, landlords and priests in Spain.

This working class struggle was subverted by the Stalinists, who came to dominate the Republican areas from which the old ruling class had fled. The workers had effective power in society, but, led by anarchists who did not believe in class power, the Spanish workers did not consolidate that power. The Spanish Communist Party, under the military discipline of Stalin, defended in the Republican areas the interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie, even those who had fled to the area controlled by the fascists General Franco.

Why? Stalin wanted to show Britain and France, hoping for an alliance with them against Germany, that he could quell any threat from the working class in any part of Europe. Erecting a police state in the Republican areas, the Stalinists drove the peasants off the land they had seized from landlords and quelled the independent workers’ movement in Catalonia.

The carrying through of the social revolution in the Republican areas would have won workers and peasants from Franco; the granting of independence to Morocco would have won over Franco’s Moorish troops. By crushing the social revolution in the “anti-fascist” areas instead, and refusing to grant Moroccan independence the Stalinists strengthened Franco, and ultimately ensured his victory.

It was the Stalinists, not the fascists, who killed the Spanish revolution: the fascist scaven-gers then moved in for 40 years of fascist rule in Spain. That is the story in brief.

In the following pages we publish documents, eye-witness accounts and contemporary political analysis which amplify, demonstrate and prove these statements.

In June 1931 the second Spanish Republic is instituted. The government disestablishes the Catholic Church and makes some weak liberal reforms. It crushes the strike wave of July-August 1931.

In October 1933 the Spanish fascist movement, the Falange Española, is founded.

At the end of 1934 anarchist and socialist workers organise huge protests around the country, and in the Northern Asturias a miners’ insurrection is crushed by an army led by General Franco. 5,000 are killed, 30,000 arrested.

In September 1935 a new left party in Spain — the Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) — is formed by former followers of Trotsky such as Andrés Nin and the Workers’ and Peasants’ Bloc, a “Bukharinist” group originating in the Catalan Communist Party and led by Joaquín Maurín.

In February 1936 the “Popular Front”, an electoral alliance of the Socialist Party, left Republicans, Catalan nationalist and the tiny Communist Party wins the general election.

Trotsky bitterly denounces the Popular Front as an alliance tying the working-class parties to the bourgeoisie.

The Republicans, however, govern alone until September 1936, when the Socialist and Communist Parties join the government. Both anarchists and the POUM support the Popular Front’s election, but keep their distance.

Despite a gigantic wave of peasant land seizures in March 1936, the government equiv-oicates on agrarian reform, though Spain has the most unequal distribution of land in Europe. The vast majority of the rural population are landless labourers or small tenant farmers.

On 17 July 1936 the Spanish military rise in rebellion, supported by the Falange, the Catholic Church and anarchists. The government refuses to arm the workers, who arm themselves.

Those who had stayed with Trotsky’s Left Opposition after 1935 — the “Bolshevik-Leninists” — are very small in number but they are the only group consistently call for the establishment of soviets, the arming of the workers, for the replacement of the Republican/Popular Front government with a workers’ government.

With the Stalinists working ruthlessly behind the scenes, gradually the government, which after September 1936 has a Socialist Prime Minister, Largo Caballero, wrecks control away from the workers organisations.

The Stalinist slogan — behind which they organised a bloody counter-revolution — was “win the war against the fascists first, then make a workers’ revolution”. While the POUM and the much larger organisations of anarchist workers — the CNT (syndicalist union) and FAI (anarchist “party”) — support workers’ control, both adapt themselves to the Stalinist line. Both join the Popular Front government (the POUM in Catalonia and Valencia). Anarchist leaders such as García Oliver and Federica Monteseny remain in the government that was at war with the revolutionary anarchists.

In August 1936 — the months of the first of

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Chronology

January 1936: dictator Primo de Rivera resigns.
April: International Left Opposition organised in Paris.
June 1931: Republicans/Socialists win election.
October: Falange Española forms.
November: right wing win elections.
November 1934: Asturian uprising crushed.
August 1935: 7th Congress of Comintern adopts Popular Front policy.
September: POUM forms.
February 1936: Popular Front wins election.
March: mass land seizures.
May: mass strike in France. French Popular Front elected.
July: fascist rising begins in Morocco.
August: first Moscow trial. Zinoviev and Kamenev executed.
September: CNT and POUM join government.
October: Madrid under siege by fascists.
December: POUM expelled from government.
April 1937: bombing of Guernica.
May: government attempt to seize telephone exchange in Barcelona, leading to new uprising.
June: POUM outlawed and leaders arrested.
January 1938: bombardment of Barcelona begins.
April-June: Franco’s army reaches northern coast. Republican Spain now cut in half.
November 1938: International Brigade leaves Spain.
January 1939: Barcelona surrenders.
February 1939: France and Britain recognise Franco.
March: Madrid and Valencia surrender.
August: Stalin-Hitler Pact signed.
Seville. As the fascists took territory they brutally suppressed any opposition.

the Moscow Trials, in which the leaders of the Bolshevik Party in 1917 are tried as fascist agents and sentenced to be shot — the Stalinists begin a campaign of smears and attacks against both the POUM and the anarchists. In December 1936 the POUM is kicked out of the Catalan government.

Stalin sends “experts” from his secret police (GPU), and the Spanish Stalinists begin to organize a local GPU.

In May 1937 Assault Guards, at the behest of the Stalinists, attempt to seize the Barcelona telephone exchange which had been won by the anarchist workers in July 1936 from the army. Spontaneously, barricades go up around Barcelona. This was plainly an attempt to liquidate the most militant group of workers in Barcelona and strike a fatal blow at the workers’ revolution. The battle ends after the anarchists and POUM leaders “negotiate” a deal with the government. After 3 days the POUM orders their members to leave the barricades.

Extracts published here tell this story and its aftermath in some detail. George Orwell gives an eye-witness account and John McNair answers the lies the Stalinists told about the POUM and revolutionary workers after May 1937.

What did the Trotskyists propose? Our comrades argued for a general strike, for the arming of the working class, for unity of the POUM and the anarchists in defence of the revolution, for soviets and the working class to seize power. We reprint here the leaflet they distributed on the barricades — “Next time it will be too late”.

A document published here — “Anarchists massacred at Tarragona” — tells in the words of a survivor the tragic story of another counter-revolutionary attack elsewhere in Catalonia, at Tarragona, in May. Hundreds of anarchist workers are murdered. Things like this were repeated in many places.

By the middle of June the POUM is outlawed, its leaders arrested. Their foremost leader, Nin, is kidnapped, tortured and murdered.

The repression of the workers’ movement is pursued ruthless. The Stalinist Republican police state has much in common with Franco’s police state.

By strangling the workers’ movement the government weakens the fight against the fascists. The strength of the militias, the production of food and arm depends upon the real, lived, committed involvement of the workers in the struggle. And because the struggle for equality, which is absolutely central to it all, has become sidelined and crushed it no longer has the hearts and minds of the workers. Two of our extracts here demonstrate this most graphically: that of M Casanova who shows how the Stalinists killed workers’ control in the economic sphere, and the account by a young British socialist Robert Martin of his experiences, “With the International Brigade”. He tells how class differentiation and class rule had been introduced into the International Brigade and how demoralising this was to his comrades and himself.

As a traceable consequence of the counter-revolution in Republican Spain, from late in 1937 the tide of war turns in favour of the fascists. In January 1938 the fascists advance into Catalonia and Valencia and the bombardment of Barcelona begins. A year and two months later Madrid surrenders. The fighting ends.

The workers are defeated, and 40 years ofFrancoist rule begin.

1. Workers’ control in Spain

By John McNair*

I PROPOSE to give an account of what I saw while in Spain, and of the further developments since my return.

The work of economic reconstruction commenced immediately after the various barracks and buildings occupied by the fascists had been retaken by the armed workers, and it is being carried on parallel with the military activities against fascism. There was no question of patching up the capitalist framework — it was realised by the workers at the very outset that capitalism had failed in every respect and that a new social order would have to be established.

In order that the taking over of industry should be carried out on a scientific basis, the various working-class organisations decided to form an Economic Council which would function as the central advisory body on all questions of economic control, the decisions of this Council to be legalised by the Government. These Economic Councils have been set up in various parts of Spain which are under the control of the workers, but we shall deal with their development in Catalonia as, in this province, the whole of the territory has been freed and it is thus possible for them to function normally.

The Economic Council of Catalonia consists of 15 members, 10 elected by the various trades union, the CNT, the UGT, the FAI and the POUM and five by the purely political parties. Each member of the Council is called upon to deal with a particular branch of economic activity such as Metallurgy, Textiles, Banking, Food Supplies, etc. The particular job of each member is to apply the programme indicated below to the particular branch of industry under his control.

1. Reorganisation of production in accordance with the needs of the consumers, suppressing or modifying unnecessary industries and stimulating energetically the creation of new industries which it will
The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

be useful and necessary to develop in Spain following the change in the value of the peseta.

2. The establishment of a strict control on export and import trade to prevent foreign attacks on the new economic order.

3. The collectivisation of large estates and agricultural undertakings which will be worked by the Peasants Syndicate with the aid of the Government and the compulsory adhesion of agriculturists who exploit medium or small farms.

4. The partial devolution of urban property by means of rent reductions or the establishment of equivalent taxes where it is not deemed advisable to reduce the amount of the rent.

5. The collectivisation of all the principal industries, public services and all forms of transport.

6. The immediate taking over and collectivisation of all undertakings abandoned by their owners.

7. The intensification of the co-operative system in the distribution of all commodities

"High finance, which was sympathetic towards the reactionaries, has had to be subordinated to the interests of the people."

and especially the co-operative exploitation of all the important distributing undertakings.

8. The immediate workers' control of the banking system with the ultimate aim of the nationalisation of the banks.

9. The full control by the workers' syndicates of all small undertakings which remain in the form of private property.

10. The immediate absorption by agriculture and industry of the unemployed. To assist this process, agricultural products will be immediately distributed at controlled prices; the return to the land of those workers who can be absorbed by the new agricultural methods of work will be hastened and so will also the creation of important industries to produce manufactured articles which it may be difficult to import, and the complete electrification of the whole of Catalonia, including all the railways.

11. The rapid suppression of all forms of taxation in order to institute one unique tax on revenue.

It will be seen that the above programme provides for the taking over of almost all forms of industry, and the immediate measures adopted by the works during the transition period are as follows:

1. The election of a General Committee of Direction and Control, on which are represented delegates from each trade union.

2. Election of smaller committees at the head of each section of the undertaking.

3. Publication of the salaries paid to the high directors of the concern. Suppression of these salaries. Suppression of the office of director in all the concerns taken over. Levelling up of wages.

4. Suppression of the Board of Directors and the expropriation of the concern taken over. (NB to avoid diplomatic difficulties no foreign concerns have been taken over).

5. Preparations of the 36-hour week. The 40-hour week has already been decreed by the government.

6. Modernisation of all sanitary arrangements etc.

7. The publication of the financial situation of the concern, together with a complete list of the stock.

8. The fixing of a definite programme of work, especially in those industries working for the military defence of the workers.

9. The employment of the former experts and technicians who are in sympathy with the ideals of the workers, and they are numerous. Some of them indeed have been elected as members of the Workmen's Committee of Control.

The total result of the taking over of the industries by the workers has been that the rate of production of all essentials is even now greater than before the rising.

We shall now examine in detail the functioning of several branches of the new economy, commencing with what is in many respects the most important, namely, banking.

Banking, which came to a complete standstill with the military insurrection, has once more started to function by order of the legal government. Naturally finance has had to adapt itself to the new conditions created by the civil war. High finance, which was sympathetic towards the reactionaries and even gave them active support, has had to be subordinated to the interests of the people. The administration of the banks and other financial institutions has been taken over by committees of employees and a government representative.

Sums may be withdrawn from banking accounts only when intended for the payment of salaries and wages, to cover running costs and general works expenses. Private depositors, however, are permitted to withdraw a sufficient amount to cover their personal expenses within the limits imposed by the Committee of Control. The Stock Exchange is closed and speculation is prohibited. Exchange transactions are also prohibited and foreign currency may be obtained only for travelling expenses. The work of the Workers' Committees of Control has prevented any financial panic, any increase of prices or any hoarding of money.

“The results of this co-operative, collectivist control are that production has been increased enormously.”

The Barcelona Ritz was taken over and turned into a workers' cafe
The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

Workers took over the mansions and estates of the capitalists, expropriating their wealth.

As we have seen, all the large estates have been taken over by the people and the medium and small properties have been left in the hands of the peasants.

A law has been passed providing for the compulsory trade union organisation of the peasants. The reason for this law was the absence of a comprehensive agricultural organisation to regulate and control the necessary preparation and distribution of products intended for consumption.

The principal object of this new law is to ensure that all agricultural activities are governed by the general food requirements of the population, to stimulate the productivity to the point necessary to provide adequate food supplies, and to ensure the peasants against any risk or usurious exploitation.

The trades unions created by this law, together with those already in existence, will supervise work in the following sections:

A. The necessary preparation and sale of agricultural products.
B. The acquisition of supplies.
C. Mutual insurance.
D. Credit fund.

The trades unions controlling the exploitation of land which has been taken over have created sections for collective work. They are grouped into municipal federations which look after the distribution of food in the following manner:

1. Sales to local trade unions.
2. The creation of central offices for the preparation of the agricultural produce.
3. Establishment of distributing centres in all towns and villages.
4. Insurance fund against risks together with credit funds opened in the Agricultural and Co-operative Credit Bank under the control of the Peasants' Union and the Government.

The organisation of agricultural work on a co-operative and collectivist basis has been accepted by the people as the most effective way of deriving the fullest benefit from the agricultural exploitation of the land and the improvement in the standard of living.

The same principles which have been applied to banking and agriculture have also been successfully carried out in the workers' control of industry.

The following is a list of the industries which have been taken over and run under workers' control on a collectivist basis:

The railways companies; the omnibuses and trams; the underground; the petroleum, automobile and steamship companies; all public services, including electricity, gas, water, etc; all munition factories; the hospitals, theatres, cinemas, etc.

The results of this co-operative, collectivist control are that production has been increased enormously, in spite of the fact that large numbers of the workers are fighting on the various fronts, and, further, the increased production has been attained more economically on account of the fact that highly paid and often useless directors have been displaced and their places taken by experts and technicians who have proved their sympathy with the aims of the workers. In many cases these experts have been co-opted on to the committees of control and as a result there is a complete absence of friction between the office staffs and the workers, which naturally increases production and reduces costs.

Finally, behind all this is the fact that the workers realise now, for the first time in Spanish history, that they are working for themselves.

Barricades in Barcelona, July 1936.
2. How the Stalinists killed workers’ control

By M Casanova*

The workers took control of the factories. The revolution came from below. From above, in other words from the leadership of the workers’ parties, came only curbs. The decrees of the Taradellas government of the Generalitat on collectivisation, for example were only a tardy confirmation of an already established state of fact.

The economy of governmental Spain reflected the contradictory tendencies to tore the antifascist camp apart. On the one side there were the measures of nationalisation, in other words the state takeover of “abandoned” factories and enterprises, those factories where the workers had forced out the capitalists, and on the other the collectivisation, which reflected the desire of the workers to run the economy, and which were particularly inspired by the anarchists, who saw in them the start of the realisation of their theories of a union of free communes. These collectives quite often had features of petty-bourgeois socialism: the workers would seize an enterprise, and often even shared the proceeds. In spite of this false orientation these collectivisations could obviously have served as a starting point for a socialist economy in the event of revolutionary developments.

Despite the methods of the trade union bureaucracy that prevented them functioning democratically, the factory councils constituted a proletarian organisation arising from the movement of 19 July. Hence the government’s constant struggle against the factory council.

The Popular Front government was torn between capitalist concepts of the economy, the anarchist concept of free communes and the socialist conception.

The general orientation of the Popular Front obviously pointed down the road towards the suppression of the collectives. They did not fit inside the framework of the democratic republic, and formed an obstacle to winning Chamberlain’s frozen heart.

Despite this tender and persistent courtship of Chamberlain, the leaders of the Popular Front could not go all the way to the suppression of the collectives. They could not break with the workers, neither the CNTers in particular nor the workers of the UGT, who did not want the destruction of the collectives either.

* M Casanova was the pseudonym of Mieczysław Bortnstein (1907-42). Polish by birth he was a member of the Young Communists in Poland and the Communist Party later in France. He was expelled in 1934 and joined the French Trotskyist organisation, the Ligue Communiste Internationaliste. He left France for Spain in July 1936, served in the militias of the CNT, and then worked on the journal of, and became a leader of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists. He escaped to France in March 1938 only to be arrested by the Nazis. In August 1942 he, a Jew, was deported to Auschwitz, where he died. Taken from Revolutionary History Volume 4, nos 1/2.

Food production campaign

In a word, our democrats were placed between two fires. They wanted to reconcile the good God and the Devil. It was difficult. It was even impossible. But by their very class nature these petit bourgeois could not do other than attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable.

The economic policy of the Popular Front is an exact reflection of this contradiction. The Communists were naturally the supporters of the state taking over the whole war industry. This was the leitmotiv of their propaganda: “War industry and transport into the hands of the government.” But it was easier said than done.

The workers had no confidence in Negrín’s state, in other words the bourgeois state. The centralisation of the entire war industry, transport, and the economy in general was obviously necessary as far as we Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists were concerned as well, but it could be only realised under proletarian power, which is called the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Communists, however, were impatient: They pushed the government in the direction of energetic measures — new measures of nationalisation, in other words. For these heroes of gangsterism every thing came down to energetic and dictatorial measures. These “Marxists” imagined that everything could be resolved by administrative measures and the methods of a “strong government”. Thus they believed that strong and dictatorial measures would bring order into the war industry, that decrees would suppress flourishing speculation etc. And this, moreover, is easy to understand. Did they not, by police measures, “crush” Trotskyism and assassinate Andrés Nin, our Erwin Wolf, Moulin, etc. Only it is far easier to carry out an order to kill working-class militants than it is to solve an economic problem by decree.

We Trotskyists are opponents of the theory of “Socialism in One Country” and this is one of our cardinal sins, but even more so we understand the foolishness of the theories and practices of socialism in a single village, as well as in a single factory and on a single farm. In fact the collectives could only develop and prosper when centralised and generalised and with the continued help of a proletarian government. But yet again, this did not exist in Spain.

The economy of Republic Spain was therefore very diverse: nationalised industry, run by either the central government or the Generalitat, each waging war on the other, the collective competing with each other; and finally, private capitalism, which little by little rebuilt itself. Add to this a flourishing speculation, the influx of a number of foreign adventurers and traders against whom the policy of the Popular Front could do nothing, the almost complete breakdown of exchange between town and country, as the peasant shut himself up in his collective or on his little plot, not wishing to sell anything because he would only receive banknotes from the town whose value diminished by the day — and we get a return to a primitive economy etc.

Negrín’s economy was not and could not be an organised capitalist economy, any more than it was a ‘socialist’ economy either (that is to say, the economy of the transitional period and of the dictatorship of the proletariat). It was neither chalk nor cheese. It was a nonsense, erected into a system.
POUM demonstration in Barcelona

3. The issues in Spain

John McNair

LET us examine the real points at issue between the Communist International and the revolutionary workers of Spain, including the POUM. There are five points:
1. The attitude towards collectivisation.
2. The "Popular Army".
3. The May Days in Barcelona.
4. The fight for a democratic republic or the fight for workers' power.
5. The separation of the war from the revolution.

1. One of the stock arguments of the Communist International is that the POUM and the revolutionary workers forced collectivisation on the peasants. This is a plain mis-statement of what actually occurred. When the fascist revolt had been beaten by workers and peasants in August 1936, and cities as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao and Malaga saved from the fascist dictatorship, the workers and peasants continued their pressure on the retreating fascists, who were forced back to the mountains around Madrid, the hills of Navarre and the plains of Aragon. It was obviously immediately necessary at this moment to commence the re-organisation of the agricultural and industrial life of Spain.

The property holders both of land and capital had almost without exception gone with the fascists and therefore the workers and peasants simply took over the workshops, factories and land. These measures of collectivisation were not foisted on the unwilling peasants by the POUM, but were simply the inevitable result of the economic situation. It is to be borne in mind that workers' control was not an empty phrase during the first month of the revolution but a real state of things. Its effect was to ensure the functioning of the economic machine in Spain and to allow the workers to continue the fight against fascism. All this is well known: and the outstanding fact is that in spite of the withdrawal from industry and agriculture of a large number of workers and peasants between the ages of 18 and 45 and the lack of raw material from abroad, production was actually greater under workers' control than it had been under capitalism prior to the fascist revolt.

The vast majority of the peasants and all the landless labourers, had not only welcomed collectivisation but were beginning to take pride in it, as was demonstrated in the whole of Catalonia and even in the Valencia districts.

José Diez, General Secretary of the Party, on 4 February, 1937: "It is absolutely essential that all our democratic victories should be consolidated on the basis of respect for the small proprietors."

This is not a British Conservative speaking but a Spanish Communist. In these circumstances numbers of the small proprietors turned to the Communist Party in the hope that its efforts would result in the restoration of private property. Because the POUM opposed all this, they were naturally "fascist spies." The counter-revolutionary role of the Communist Party in Spain is clearly shown, and it is only necessary to quote one or two instances:

GANDESA: "A punitive expedition arrived in this town and arrested the most prominent members of the peasant collective and of the union. This expedition then requisitioned the buildings of the union. To complete its work of "pacification" it returned the collectivised land, which had been worked by the peasants to its former owners."

VINEBRE: "The peasant collective and the peasant union had been flourishing in the locality since August 1936. The town was invaded by forces of the Carabineros who, with the aid of the PSUC, sacked the headquarters and homes of the peasants and dissolved their collective. The right wing elements were naturally re-animated and proceeded to calumny the revolutionary workers. The work of the counter-revolution continued and was completed by the forced dissolution of the Town Council and the collective. The reactionary bourgeoisie are congratulating themselves in this town."

2. The constitution of the workers' military forces in Spain was the subject of endless controversy. The point of view of the Communist Party was to liquidate the armed workers' "rabble" and to replace...

Letter from Spain to a lover in England

Heart of the heartless world,
Dear heart, the thought of you Is the pain at my side,
The shadow that chills my view.
The wind rises in the evening,
Reminds that autumn is near.
I am afraid to lose you,
I am afraid of my fear.

On the last mile to Huesca,
The last fence for our pride,
Think so kindly, dear, that I Sense you at my side.

And if bad luck should lay my strength Into the shallow grave,
Remember all the good you can;
Don't forget my love.

1936, John Cornford
The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

Workers' Liberty

it with an organised Popular Army with a single command. The plausibility of this argument obscures its inherent falsity. Neither the POUM, nor any of the revolutionary workers desired a “rabble”. They did however realise the historic truth, that, in moments of crisis, unless the workers control the army the army will control the workers. At the beginning of the insurrection this so-called “rabble” was able to repulse Spanish fascism and would have saved Spain for the workers had not Italy, Germany and Portugal supplied men, munitions, aeroplanes, tanks, etc, to Franco. It was the workers’ militia, together with the International Brigade (which was also in those days a workers’ militia), which saved Madrid, which held off the fascist forces in the Basque provinces, and which defended Malaga (which was subsequently lost, but not by the Workers’ Militia). Both the POUM and all the revolutionary workers in Spain realised the necessity of strengthening and organising the workers’ military forces, and instituting a single command: the vital difference was that the POUM desired that the military forces should remain under the control of the organised workers and that the differences of pay and of class should not be re-instituted.

WE can understand the sneers of the Daily Mail and the Daily Express about a workers’ militia, but it is a strange tragedy when these are echoed by numbers of the Communist workers themselves.

What are the real differences between the Popular Army and the workers’ militia? The workers’ militia is based on equal pay for all fighters. The naming of the officers from among the workers on the basis of technical and military proficiency. The final control of the organised workers and the driving force of the army itself to be revolutionary discipline with the definite object of winning Spain for the workers. The Popular Army had abolished equal pay. The rates of pay are on the same scale as the French Republican army. The officer class is drawn largely from the middle classes. So-called “military” discipline replaces revolutionary discipline. The control of the army is now in the hands of the middle classes, the old military caste, and the Government. This is not the place to compare the military effectiveness of the two types of forces, but a careful examination of what has occurred in Spain since the outbreak of insurrection will prove that even on applying the acid test of military effectiveness the workers’ militia were to say the of it, not behind the Popular Army.

3. The May days in Barcelona. The street fighting was caused by the unprovoked aggression of the Government Assault Guards against the Telephone building in Barcelona which had been held by the workers since they defeated the fascists on 19 July 1936. This provocation followed a whole series of attempts to destroy collectivisation and workers’ control of the factories. The attack on the Telephone building was the last straw and the revolutionary workers of Barcelona resisted. This resistance took the form of a cessation of work on Monday evening. 3 May. This strike was not called either by the CNT or the UGT but was spontaneous on the part of the workers, of all the workers in Barcelona. Work ceased almost everywhere. Barricades were built in the centre of the city and all the political and trade union buildings were placed in a state of defence.

The workers instinctively took the streets to defend their revolutionary conquests. On one side of the barricades were the members of the CNT, many members of the UGT and the POUM; and on the other the Civil Guards, the Assault Guards, sections of the Esquerra (left Republicans), and the Communists. The crime of the POUM was therefore to be seen on the workers’ side of the barricades. “The workers were on the streets and our party had to be on the side of the workers. It is the obligation of each of us to fulfill his duty and his responsibility as he conceives them. We understand our duty and responsibility thus. We are a class party of the working class, and our place is by its side.” This is from the official statement of the POUM published on 11 May after the Barcelona events.

“Next time it will be too late”

THE formal seizure of Barcelona, the constitution of a revolutionary government, would have, overnight, led to working-class power. That this would have been the outcome is not seriously contested by the CNT leaders nor by the POUM.

That is why the left wingers in the CNT and POUM ranks, sections of the Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Duruti and the Bolshevik-Leninists called for the seizure of power by the workers through the development of democratic organs of defence (soviets). On 4 May, the Bolshevik-Leninists issued the following leaflet, distributed on the barricades:

“Long live the revolutionary offensive.”

No compromise. Disarmament of the National Republican Guard and the reactionary Assault Guards. This is the decisive moment. Next time it will be too late. General strike in all the industries excepting those connected with the prosecution of the war, until the resignation of the reactionary government. Only proletarian power can assure military victory.

Complete arming of the working class.

Long live the unity of action of CNT-FAI-POUM.

To live the revolutionary front of the proletariat.

Committees of revolutionary defence in the shops, factories, districts.

From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain by Felix Morrow
4. Eye witness in Barcelona

By George Orwell

IT HAS been asserted in the Communist press that the so-called uprising in Barcelona was a carefully prepared effort to overthrow the Government and even to hand Catalonia over to the fascists by provoking foreign intervention in Barcelona. The second part of this suggestion is almost too ridiculous to need refutation. If the POUM and the left-wing anarchists were really in league with the fascists, why did not the militias at the front walk out and leave a hole in the line? And why did the CNT transport-workers, in spite of the strike, continue sending supplies to the front? I cannot, however, say with certainty that a definite revolutionary intention was not in the minds of a few extremists, especially the Bolshevik Leninists (usually called Trotskyists) whose pamphlets were handed around the barricades. What I can say is that the ordinary rank and file behind the barricades never for an instant thought of themselves as taking part in a revolution. We thought, all of us, that we were simply defending ourselves against an attempted coup d’etat by the Civil Guards, who had forcibly seized the Telephone Exchange and might seize some of the workers’ buildings if we did not show ourselves willing to fight. My reading of the situation, derived from what people were actually doing and saying at the time, is this.

The workers came into the streets in a spontaneous defensive movement, and they only consciously wanted two things: Telephone Exchange and the disarming of the hated Civil Guards. In addition there was the resentment caused by the growing poverty in Barcelona and the luxurious life lived by the bourgeoisie. But it is probable that the opportunity to overthrow the Catalan Government existed if there had been a leader to take advantage of it. It seems to be widely agreed that on the third day the workers were in a position to take control of the city; certainly the Civil Guards were greatly demoralised and were surrendering in large numbers. And though the Valencia Government could send fresh troops to crush the workers (they did send 6,000 Assault Guards when the fighting was over), they could not maintain those troops in Barcelona if the transport workers chose not to supply them. But in fact no resolve revolutionary leadership existed. The Anarchist leaders disowned the whole thing and said “Go back to work.” and the POUM leaders took an uncertain line. The orders sent to us at the POUM barricades, direct from the POUM leadership, were to stand by the CNT, but not to fire unless we were fired on ourselves or our buildings attacked. (I personally was fired at a number of times, but never fired back.) Consequently, as food ran short, the workers began to trickle back to work; and, of course, once they were safely dispersed, the reprisals began.

The enormous majority of the people behind the barricades were ordinary CNT workers. And this point is of importance, for it was as a scapegoat for the May riots that the POUM was recently suppressed; the four hundred or more POUM supporters who are in the filthy verminous Barcelona jails at this moment, are there ostensibly for their share in the May riots. It is worth pointing, therefore, to two good reasons why the POUM were not and could not have been the prime movers. In the first place, the POUM was a very small party. If one throws in Party members, militiamen on leave, and helpers and sympathisers of all kinds, the number of POUM supporters on the streets could not have been anywhere near ten thousand—probably not five thousand; but the disturbances manifestly involved scores of thousands of people. Secondly, there was a general or nearly general strike for several days; but the POUM, as such, had no power to call a strike, and the strike could not

*George Orwell, a member of the I.L.P, served with the POUM militia. He wrote a book about it — Homage to Catalonia. This article has been abridged from Controversy, August 1937.
have happened if the rank and file of the CNT had not wanted it. As to those involved on the other side, the London Daily Worker had the impudence to suggest in one issue that the “rising” was suppressed by the Popular Army. Everyone in Barcelona knew, and the Daily Worker must have known as well, that the Popular Army remained neutral and the troops stayed in their barracks throughout the disturbances. A few soldiers, however, did take part as individuals; I saw a couple at one of the POUM barricades. 

Thirdly, as to the stores of arms which the POUM are supposed to have been hoarding in Barcelona. As a matter of fact the POUM possessed pitifully few weapons, either at the front or in the rear. During the street-fighting I was at all three of the principal strongholds of the POUM, the Executive Building, the Comité Local and the Hotel Falcon. It is worth recording in detail what armaments these buildings contained. There were in all about 80 rifles, some of them defective, besides a few obsolete guns of various patterns, all useless because there were no cartridges for them. Of rifle ammunition there was about 50 rounds for each weapon. There were no machine-guns, no pistols and no pistol ammunition. There were a few cases of hand-grenades, but these were sent to us by the CNT after the fighting started. A highly-placed militia officer afterwards gave me his opinion that in the whole of Barcelona the POUM possessed about a hundred and fifty rifles and one machine-gun. This, it will be seen, was barely sufficient for the armed guards which at the time all parties, FSUC, POUM and CNT-FAI alike, placed on their principal buildings.

In reality, by far the worst offenders in this matter of keeping weapons from the front, were the Government themselves. The infantry on the Aragon front were far worse armed than an English public school OTC; but the rear-line troops, the Civil Guards, Assault Guards and Carabineros, who were not intended for the front, but were used to “preserve order” (i.e., overawe the workers) in the rear, were armed to the teeth. The troops on the Aragon front had worn-out Mauser rifles, which usually jammed after five shots, approximately one machine-gun to fifty men, and one pistol or revolver to about thirty men. These weapons, so necessary in trench warfare, were not issued by the Government and could only be bought illegally and with the greatest difficulty. The Assault Guards were armed with brand-new Russian rifles; in addition, every man was issued with an automatic pistol, and there was one sub-machine-gun between ten or a dozen men. These facts speak for themselves. A Government which sends boys of fifteen to the front with rifles forty years old, and keeps its biggest men and newest weapons in the rear, is manifestly more afraid of the revolution than of the fascists. Hence the feeble war-policy of the past six months, and hence the compromise with which the war will almost certainly end.

II

WHEN the POUM, the Left Opposition (so-called Trotskyist) offshoot of Spanish Communism, was suppressed on 16-17 June, the fact in itself surprised nobody. Ever since May, or even since February, it had been obvious that the POUM would be “liquidated” if the Communists could bring it about.

On 16 June Andreu Nin, the leader of the party, was arrested in his office. The same night before any proclamation had been made, the police raided the Hotel Falcon, a sort of boarding-house maintained by POUM and used chiefly by militiamen on leave and arrested everybody in it on no particular charge. Next morning the POUM was declared illegal and all POUM buildings, not only offices, bookstalls, etc., but even libraries and sanatoriums for wounded men, were seized by the police. Within a few days all or almost all of the forty members of the Executive Committee were under arrest. One or two who succeeded in going into hiding were made to give themselves up by the device, borrowed from the Fascists, of seizing their wives as hostages. Nin was transferred to Valencia and thence to Madrid, and put on trial for selling military information to the enemy. Needless to say the usual “confessions”, mysterious letters written in invisible ink, and other “evidence” were forthcoming in such profusion as to make it reasonably likely that they had been prepared beforehand.

Meanwhile, the rank and file of the Party, not merely party members, but soldiers in the POUM militia and sympathisers and helpers of all kinds, were being thrown into prison as fast as the police could lay hands on them. Probably it would be impossible to get hold of accurate figures, but there is reason to think that during the first week there were 400 arrests in Barcelona alone; certainly the jails were so full that large numbers of prisoners had to be confined in shops and other temporary dumps. So far as I could discover, no discrimination was made in the arrests between those who had been concerned in the May riots and those who had not. In effect, the outlawry of the POUM was made retrospective; the POUM was now illegal, and therefore one was breaking the law by having ever belonged to it. The police even went to the length of arresting the wounded men in the sanatoriums. Among the prisoners in one of the jails I saw, for instance, two men of my acquaintance with amputated legs; also a child of not more than twelve years of age.

One has got to remember, too, just what imprisonment means in Spain at this moment. Apart from the frightful overcrowding of the temporary jails, the insanitary conditions, the lack of light and air and the filthy food, there is the complete absence of anything that we should regard as legality. There is, for instance, no nonsense about habeas corpus. According to the present law, or at any rate the present practice, you can be imprisoned for an indefinite time not merely without being tried but even without being charged; and until you have been charged the authorities can, if they choose, keep you “incommunicado” — that is, without even attempting to communicate with a lawyer or anyone else in the outside world. It is easy to see how much the “confessions” obtained in such circumstances are worth.

But perhaps the most odious feature of the whole business was the fact that all news of what had happened was deliberately concealed, certainly for five days, and I believe for longer, from the troops on the Aragon front. As it happened, I was at the front from 15 to 20 June. I had got to see a medical board and in doing so to visit various towns behind the front line, Sietamo,
Barbastro, Monzon, etc. In all these places the POUM militia headquarters, Red Aid centres and the like were functioning normally, and as far down the line as Lérida (only about 100 miles from Barcelona) and as late as June 20, not a soul had heard that the POUM had been suppressed. All word of it had been kept out of the Barcelona papers, although, of course, the Valencia papers (which do not get to the Aragon front) were flaring with the story of Nin's "treachery." Together with a number of others I had the disagreeable experience of getting back to Barcelona to find that the POUM had been suppressed in my absence. Luckily I was warned just in time and managed to make myself scarce, but other were not so fortunate. Every POUM militiaman who came down the line at this period had the choice of going straight into hiding or into jail — a really pleasant reception after three or four months in the front line.

The POUM was by far the smallest of the revolutionary parties, and its suppression affects comparatively few people. Nevertheless, its suppression is symptomatically important. To begin with it should make clear to the outside world what was already obvious to many observers in Spain, that the present Government has more points of resemblance to fascism than points of difference. (This does not mean that it is not worth fighting for as against the more naked fascism of Franco and Hitler. I myself had grasped by May the Fascist tendency of the Government, but I was willing to go back to the front and in fact did so.) Secondly, the elimination of the POUM gives warning of the impending attack upon the Anarchists. These are the real enemy whom the Communists fear as they never feared the numerically insignificant POUM. The anarchist leaders have now had a demonstration of methods likely to be used against them; the only hope for the revolution, and probably for victory in the war, is that they will profit by the lesson and get ready to defend themselves.

ON Wednesday 5 May at 8am, a large force of police suddenly appeared at the Central Telephone Exchange of Tarragona, plentifully armed with weapons and grenades for taking it by assault. They occupied it without encountering any resistance whatever from the workers. Once masters of the building, they took control of the urban and inter-urban communications, cutting the lines of the working-class and anarchist organisations.

Four hours later a conference took place at the general military headquarters between Comrade Casanovas, representing the telephone workers, and the lieutenant-colonel, chief of the coastal military forces, when a detailed account of the unexpected developments was given. As a result of the conference it was agreed that the police forces should be withdrawn from the first floor, where the apparatus was, and should keep watch in the vestibule.

But 15 minutes later the Chief of the Police announced that the Commissar for Public Order in Tarragona refused to carry out the agreement following very strict orders received from Barcelona.

While these conferences and telephone conversations were proceeding, our comrades discovered activity on a large scale in the local headquarters of the Republican IZQUIERDA, numerous individuals entering without arms and leaving with a gun. The same thing happened, but with less cynicism in the headquarters of the Socialist Party, and in the People's Club.

The following day, in the morning, a violent and open attack on our organisation began. Supported by an intense musketry fire and bomb throwing, an assault was launched against the quarters of the Libertarian Youth. This attack was repulsed. In face of the gravity of such aggression, we appointed a commission to get in touch with the Commissioner of the Catalonian Government with a view to demanding a general conference of all the anti-fascist forces in order to avoid a repetition of such lamentable episodes. He agreed to this request and called together the representatives of all the political and industrial organisations.

In order to acquaint themselves with what was happening at Tarragona, our comrades Castello and Rueda had set out for that town. On arriving, they heard a lively fusillade and realised that it had to do with a fresh assault on the headquarters of the Libertarian Youth led by part of the State forces collaborating with elements from different
6. With the International Brigade

By Robert Martin*

WHAT I heard over the wireless, read in the newspapers and saw on the films made me decide to go to Spain to fight for the workers. I joined the International Brigade. Before going I had to get recommendations from a member of the Communist Party. I was told by the Communist Party that the International Brigade was made up of volunteers to fight against fascism and for the workers' revolution but that the workers' revolution could not take place until the war was over. I thought this reasonable but I expected a socialist spirit and practice in the Brigade itself.

I will not give dates or describe in detail how we volunteers got to Barcelona. Despite my experiences, I do not want to give anything away to the British Government. But, in view of what happened afterwards, it is necessary to say that both in Paris and in Spain we were strongly warned against the anarchists. Indeed, we were led to the conclusion that the anarchists are as much the enemy of the Spanish workers as are the fascists.

“...The contrast between the conditions of the men and the officers was one of the first things to disturb me.”

We went by sea to Barcelona. We were told that we could not go by land because the anarchists were at the border and would shoot us. Our boat was sunk by a submarine — it was said to be an Italian submarine. When the torpedo hit the ship I went over the side and was picked up by a fishing boat after twenty-five minutes in the water. Thirty-five men went down with the ship. I was deeply stirred by the way in which the boys who were left on the boat sang the "Internationale" as the ship went down. Among them was my friend, Robert MacDonald, who enlisted me.

My first surprise was to find that the fishermen who rescued me in their boat were anarchists. I had been warned that the anarchists were our enemies as well as the fascists and that they would shoot us. Yet here they were rescuing me and the other comrades who were in the water. When I reached the shore I was treated by these anarchist fishermen with a sympathy and care which I shall never forget. After receiving treatment in hospital I was taken to the home of an anarchist and treated with the utmost kindness.

That night we went by train to Barcelona, arriving late at night. Again we were warned about the anarchists. We were told that we could not be taken into the city by the main streets because we would be shot by the anarchists. We were directed through the back streets and alleys and told to keep very quiet. We were taken to the Karl Marx Barracks and put up there for the night and warned that we must not leave the building. We stayed there for two days.

From Barcelona we went to Valencia, where Robert Minor, the American correspondent of the Daily Worker addressed us. He repeated the warning against the anarchists. I began to feel that this was being overdone.

Next we went to Albacete and then on to the Headquarters of the International Brigade at Madrigal. The conditions here were bad. I did not expect an easy time and would have put up with these without complaint if all of us had had to share them in a way which I expected in a Communist brigade. But, whilst the billeting and food provided for the privates were wretched, the officers were billeted in the best building in the town and had excellent food, including meat, butter and eggs. We could never get any English or American cigarettes, although the officers had plenty. We could not get sufficient food or any meat, while the officers had everything for their comfort. I myself went to their building and saw the contrast of treatment.

The contrast between the conditions of the men and the officers was one of the first things to disturb me. This did not seem to me to be a workers' army, with its differences between the privates and the officers. It was an army with maintained class differences. I had received an entirely different impression from the Communist Party in Glasgow. I had been told that we would be comrades together and equals.

When the boys were sent to the front I was not included. I was told that I was to go back to Albacete and to be sent to the front from there. When I reached Albacete I was taken before Commandant Lament. I asked when I was to go to the front. He said that I was not going to the front; I was going to garri. I asked the reason for this. He said he did not know, but he had orders to put me in prison.

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* Robert Martin was a politically unaffiliated socialist who went to fight in Spain. This article first appeared in the September 1937 issue of Controversy.
I was then placed in prison and found myself with seventy other comrades of the International Brigade. Amongst these were comrades who had been at the front for months. They had become disillusioned and had asked to be sent home. They had been placed in prison instead. One of them had been shot badly in the arm; seven others had been wounded.

I asked to see the Political Commissar to find out why I was in prison and why I should not be released. He came to see me eight days later and told me that he would do his best to get me out, but he could not do much. I was too dangerous a man to be sent to the front. He was a Welsh Communist.

That afternoon the guard came along and took me to the Commission of Justice, composed of Commandant Lamont and another officer who spoke French, but who, I was told afterwards, was a Russian. This was told me by another Russian, who had known the officer before being imprisoned.

I asked for the Political Commissar to be present with me, but this was not allowed. When I asked why I was in prison I was told that I was a provocateur and was suspected of belonging to Mosley's fascists in England. I was asked to what party I belonged. I told them I did not belong to any party but was an anti-fascist and a class-conscious worker. They then told me that I was a criminal wanted by the police and that I had come to Spain only because I was afraid that I would be put in gaol. When I dared to ask why members of the Communist Party had been put in prison and why the workers of Catalonia were being shot down I was told that this was provocation and proved to them that I was a fascist. They gave orders for me to be locked up.

We went on hunger-strike in the prison because we were not given enough food. Again let me say that we would not have complained of lack of food if there had been a shortage. The leaders of the hunger-strike were removed. I did not know what happened to them. The rest of us were distributed to different cells. Cells infected with venereal disease were not cleaned. We asked for water and disinfectant and brushes to clean the cells, but without result. The heat and the stench were terrible. There were about thirty-five men in one room with only two little windows. One night a comrade was brought in. He was very ill — had pains in his stomach and was in agony. He was in such a bad condition that we battered on the doors to attract the guards and to ask them to take the comrade to hospital. He was not attended to for three days. Then the doctor ordered that he should be removed to hospital. Owing to the bad food, the heat and the vermin, other men were sick all the time. They received no proper attention they were just given pills.

We were there for eighteen days. Some men had been there for months. After we had been there ten days some of the comrades were taken away by ambulance and told that they were being sent home. These included two Canadians, Fred Walker and James Bradley, and some French comrades. They were given a cordial farewell by the Communists, who shook their hands, cried "Sadie, camarades," and gave them the sign of the clenched fist. The boys were happy to know that they were going home and, of course, this gave us hope as well.

Eight days later the same thing happened to us. We were taken from the prison at night-time, our army gear was taken away from us, we were given civilian clothes, and our identification cards as members of the International Brigade were torn up. We were told that we had finished with the Brigade. We were going to Barcelona and from there to Marseilles.

Before we left, Commandant Lamont said, "Well, fellows, you are going home," and he gave us a kind of sarcastic salute which made me wonder. He told us not to get "tough" with the guard or we should have to walk from Barcelona to Perpignan (across the Frontier).

We were taken away in an ambulance very late at night so as not arouse interest. There were fifteen of us; one armed French officer went with us in the ambulance.

We went to Valencia and then to Barcelona. We were taken to the International Brigade Headquarters at the Karl Marx Barracks. We were told to wait there until our passports were put in order — they had been taken from us when we were imprisoned in Albacete. Finally we were told to get back into the ambulance so that we could be taken by road to Perpignan.

We were not taken to Perpignan. We were taken instead to the Calle Corsiga, which is the central police station in Barcelona. We asked what was happening and were again told that it was all right — we were being sent home. We were ordered to enter the police station. We noticed with some doubts that guards had been placed at the door. Our names were taken, our ages and the names of our relatives.

We were returned to the ambulance and driven to the Hotel Falcon with an armed escort. By now we all had reason to doubt the truth of the story that we were being sent home. The Hotel Falcon was originally one of the buildings of the POU. It had been converted into a prison.

It was full with prisoners — and we found there some of the comrades who had left Albacete eight days before we left and who, we thought, had been sent home. Among them were the two Canadians and the French comrades. We heard that in different prisons in Barcelona there were many members of the International Brigade.

When we asked the Captain why we were there, he said he did not know. We asked why he could not set us free. He said he had orders to keep us there. On the fourth day we were told to go down below, and that the police were going to take us to some other place. We were again taken to the Calle Corsiga, where we were asked many questions by the police. We had our photographs and fingerprints taken. Even now we hoped that this might be for passport purposes and that we were going to be set free.

At the Hotel Falcon we were treated like criminals. I was told by the guards that everybody there was a fascist or a suspected fascist — some undoubtedly were fascists. We continually asked the Captain when we were going to be released and he said he did not know. With me were a number of French comrades who belonged to the Communist Party and they refused to believe that their party could have been responsible for putting them in gaol. I wrote a letter to the Communist Party in Barcelona demanding...
our release. When no reply came even the most loyal Communists began to doubt.

Among the prisoners in the Hotel Falcon was a comrade who had come to Spain as the son of Ras Imru, the Abyssinian prince. He had been lashed to the skies by the Communists and had immediately been made a Commandant in the International Brigade. Photographs of him and interviews with him had appeared in the Communist papers, and here he was a prisoner!

The food ration at the Hotel Falcon meant semi-starvation. We only had two meals a day — the first at 3 p.m. and the second at 10.30 at night. They both consisted of one plate of soup — watery soup with a few potatoes — and a piece of dry bread. The boys were always hungry. Many of the other prisoners had friends in Barcelona who brought them food, but the members of the International Brigade were without friends. No one in Barcelona knew they were in prison. The Communist Party refused to help them and they were in a desperate condition.

I realised that it might be months before we would be freed. Many of the prisoners had been confined for weeks. There seemed no reason to expect liberty before the war ended. I, therefore, sought an opportune time to make my escape.

The Hotel Falcon was carefully guarded, but during heavy rain, when I noticed that the guards were taking shelter. I dropped from the veranda on the first floor to the street. Everyone was running because of the rain and I just ran with them and got away.

I obtained shelter from Spanish workers who were sympathetic to the anarchists. Once more it was these anarchists who were going to shoot me who helped me.

I knew I could not leave the country unless I got leave. I therefore decided to go to the Karl Marx Barracks and ask for my papers. When they knew I had no papers they called the police, so I “beat it”.

Under these conditions I was forced to go to the British Consulate to obtain an identifica-
But does the proletarian vanguard itself raise the slogan of secession of Catalonia? If it is the will of the majority, yes; but how can this will be expressed? Obviously, by means of a free plebiscite, or an assembly of Catalan representatives, or by the parties that are clearly supported by the Catalan masses, or even by a Catalan national revolt. Again we see, let us note in passing, what reactionary pedantry it would be for the proletariat to renounce democratic slogans. Meanwhile, as long as the national minority has not expressed its will, the proletariat itself will not adopt the slogan of separation, but it pledges openly, in advance, its complete and sincere support to this slogan in the event that it should express the will of Catalonia...

By supporting all really democratic and revolutionary movements of the popular masses, the communist vanguard will be leading an uncompromising struggle against the so-called republican bourgeoisie, unmasking its double-dealing, its treachery, and its reactionary character, and resisting its attempts to subject the toiling masses to its influence.

The communists never relinquish their freedom of political action under any conditions. It must not be forgotten that during a revolution tempations of this sort are very great: the tragic history of the Chinese revolution is irrefutable testimony to this. But while safeguarding the full independence of their organisation and their propaganda, the communists nonetheless practice, in the broadest fashion, the policy of the united front, for which the revolution offers a vast field.

21 November, 1930

SPAIN may go through the same cycle as Italy did, beginning with 1918-1919: ferment, strikes, a general strike, the seizure of the factories, the lack of leadership, the decline of the movement, the growth of fascism, and of a counter-revolutionary dictatorship!

24 January, 1931

THE appearance of the Spanish proletariat on the historic arena radically changes the situation and opens up new prospects. In order to grasp this properly, it must first be understood that the establishment of the economic dominance of the big bourgeoisie and the growth of the proletariat’s political significance definitely prevent the petty bourgeoisie from occupying a leading position in the political life of the country. The question of whether the present revolutionary convulsions can produce a genuine revolution, capable of reconstituting the very basis of national life, is consequently reduced to whether the Spanish proletariat is capable of taking the leadership of the national life into its hands. There is no other claimant to this role in the Spanish nation. Moreover, the historic experience of Russia succeeded in showing with sufficient clarity the specific gravity of the proletariat, united by big industry in a country with a backward agriculture and enmeshed in a net of semi-feudal relations...

To aim the weapon of the revolution against the remnants of the Spanish Middle Ages means to aim it against the very roots of bourgeois rule...

Only pedants can see contradictions in the combination of democratic slogans with transitional and purely socialist slogans. Such a combined program, reflecting the contradictory construction of historic society, flows inevitably from the diversity of problems inherited from the past. To reduce all the contradictions and all the tasks of one lowest common denominator — the dictatorship of the proletariat — is a necessary but altogether insufficient, operation. Even if one should run ahead and assume that the proletarian vanguard has grasped the idea that only the dictatorship of the proletariat can save Spain from further decay, the preparatory problem would nevertheless remain in full force: to weld around the vanguard the heterogeneous sections of the working class and the still more heterogeneous masses of village tillers. To contrast the bare slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat to the historically determined tasks that are now impelling the masses towards the road of insurrection would be to replace the Marxist conception of social revolution with a...
The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

Workers' Liberty

Balarrin's. This would be the surest way to ruin the revolution.

Needless to say, democratic slogans under no circumstances have as their object drawing the proletariat closer to the republican bourgeoisie. On the contrary, they create the basis for a victorious struggle against the leftist bourgeoisie, making it possible to disclose its anti-democratic character at every step. The more courageously, resolutely, and implacably the proletarian vanguard fights for democratic slogans, the sooner it will win over the masses and undermine the support for the bourgeois republicans and socialist reformists. The more quickly their best elements join us, the sooner the democratic republic will be identified in the mind of the masses with the workers' republic.

In reality, in spite of the mighty sweep of the struggle, the subjective factors of the revolution — the party, the mass organisations, the slogans — are extraordinarily behind the tasks of the movement, and it is this backwardness that constitutes the main danger today.

The semi-spontaneous spread of strikes, which have brought victims and defeats or have ended with no gains, is an absolutely unavoidable stage of the revolution, the stage of the awakening of the masses, the mobilisation, and their entry into struggle. For it is not the dreams of the workers who take part in the movement, but the masses as a whole. Not only do factory workers strike, but also artisans, chauffeurs, and bakers, construction, irrigation, and, finally, agricultural workers. The veterans stretch their limbs, the new recruits learn. Through the medium of these strikes, the class begins to feel itself a class.

However, the spontaneity — which at the present stage constitutes the strength of the movement — may in the future become the source of weakness. To assume that the movement can continue to be left without a clear programme, without its own leadership, would mean to assume a perspective of hopelessness. For the question involved is nothing less than the seizure of power. Even the stormiest strikes do not solve this problem — not to speak of the ones that are broken. If the proletariat were not to feel in the process of the struggle during the coming months that its tasks and methods are becoming clearer to itself, that its ranks are becoming consolidated and strengthened, then a decomposition would set in within its own ranks...

Anarcho-syndicalism disarms the proletariat by its lack of a revolutionary program and its failure to understand the role of the party. The anarchists 'deny' politics until it seizes them by the throat; then they prepare the ground for the politics of the enemy class...

Practical agreements with revolutionary syndicalists are inevitable in the course of the revolution. These agreements we will loyally fulfill. But it would by truly fatal to introduce into these agreements elements of duplicity, concealment, and deceit. Even in those days and hours when the communist workers have to fight side by side with the syndicalists and anarchists, there must be no destruction of the principled disagreements, no concealment of differences, nor any weakening of the criticism of the wrong principled position of the ally. Only under this condition will the progressive development of the revolution be secured...

For a successful solution of all these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once more a party; again a party!

July 1936

FOR the second time in five years, the coalition of the labour parties with the radical bourgeoisie has brought the revolution to the edge of the abyss, incapable of solving a single one of the tasks posed by the revolution, since all these tasks boil down to one, namely, the crushing of the bourgeoisie, the Popular Front renders the existence of the bourgeois regime impossible and thereby provokes the fascist coup d'état. By luring the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions, by paralysing their will to struggle, the Popular Front creates the favourable conditions for the victory of fascism. The policy of coalition with the bourgeoisie must be paid for by the proletariat with years of new torments and sacrifice, if not by decades of fascist terror.

27 July, 1936

The Popular Front government in Spain was not a government, but simply a ministry. The real government resided in the General Staff, in the banks, etc. The French Radicals were authorised to form an alliance with the workers on condition that they did not touch the officer corps. But as the workers continue to press their demands, the entire state machine will ultimately come down upon their heads. The SAPists consider the Popular Front an enrichment of proletarian tactics. If they cannot see its class character, that is because they are good for nothing. The Radicals are seen only as the right wing of the Popular Front; in reality they are there to represent the ruling class, and it is through them that finance capital maintains its rule, both within the Popular Front and over the proletariat....

Today we can also grasp more clearly the crime committed at the beginning of this year by the POUM leaders Maurin and Nin. Any thinking worker can and will ask these people: "Did you foresee nothing? How could you have signed the Popular Front program? Had we not put our confidence in Azana and his associates, instead of instilling in us the greatest distrust in the radical bourgeoisie? Now we must pay for your errors with our blood." The workers must feel particular anger towards Nin and his friends because they belonged to a tendency that a few years ago, had provided a precise analysis of Popular Front politics, concretising and clarifying it at each stage. And Nin cannot invoke ignorance as his excuse — a wicked excuse for any leader — because he ought to have at least read the documents he once signed.

30 July, 1936

SOME people (for example, Rossner) consider my sharp critique of Nin's policies to be sectarian. If it is sectarianism, then all of Marxism is only sectarianism, since it is the doctrine of the class struggle and not of class collaboration. The present events in Spain in particular show how criminal was Nin's approachment with Azana: the Spanish workers will now pay with thousands of lives for the reactionary cowardice of the Popular Front, which has continued to support with the people's money an army commanded by the executioners of the proletariat. Here it is a question, my dear Victor Serge, not of splitting hairs, but of the very essence of revolutionary socialism. If Nin today were to pull himself together and realise how discredited he is in the eyes of the workers, if he should draw all the necessary conclusions, then we would help him as a comrade; but we cannot permit the spirit of chumminess in politics.

30 July, 1936

EVEN now, in the midst of civil war, the Popular Front government does everything in its power to make victory doubly difficult. A civil war is waged, as everybody knows, not only with military but also with political weapons. From a purely military point of view, the Spanish revolution is much weaker than its enemy. Its strength lies in its ability to arouse the greater masses into action. It can even take the army away from its reactionary officers. To accomplish this, it is only necessary to seriously and courageously advance the program of the socialist revolution.

It is necessary to proclaim that, from now on, the land, factories, and shops will pass from the hands of the capitalists into the hands of the people. It is necessary to move at once toward the realisation of this program in those provinces where the workers are in power. The fascist army could not resist the influence of such a program for twenty-four hours; the soldiers would tie their officers hand and foot and turn them...
over to the nearest headquarters of the workers' militia. But the bourgeois ministers cannot accept such a programme. Curbing the socialist revolution, they compel the workers and peasants to spill ten times as much of their own blood in the civil war, and to crown everything, these gentlemen expect to disarm the workers after the victory and to force them to respect the sacred laws of private property. Such is the true essence of the policy of the Popular Front. Everything else is pure humbug, phrases and lies...

The workers' party that enters into a political alliance with the radical bourgeoisie by that fact alone renounces the struggle against capitalist militarism. Bourgeois domination, that is to say, the maintenance of private property in the means of production, is inconceivable without the support of the armed forces for the exploiters. The officers' corps represents the guard of capital. Without this guard, the bourgeoisie could not maintain itself for a single day. The selection of the individuals, their education and training, make the officers a distinctive group uncompromising enemies of socialism. Isolated exceptions change nothing. That is how things stand in all bourgeois countries. The danger lies not in the military braggarts and demagogues who openly appear as fascists; incomparably more menacing is the fact that at the approach of the proletarian revolution the officers' corps becomes the executioner of the proletariat.

To eliminate four or five hundred reactionary agitators from the army means to leave everything basically as it was before. The officers' corps, in which is concentrated the centuries-old tradition of enslaving the people, must be dissolved, broken, crushed in its entirety, root and branch. The troops in the barracks commanded by the officers' caste must be replaced by the people's militia, that is the democratic organisation of the armed workers and peasants. There is no other solution. But such an army is incompatible with the domination of exploiters big and small. Can the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois republicans agree to such a measure? Not at all. The Popular Front government, that is to say, the government of the coalition of the workers with the bourgeoisie, is in its very essence a government of capitulation to the bureaucracy and the officers. Such is the great lesson of the events in Spain, now being paid for with thousands of human lives.

But here we are interrupted by the exclamation, "How can one dissolve the officers' corps? Doesn't this mean destroying the army and leaving the country disarmed in the face of fascism? Hitler and Mussolini are only waiting for that!" All these arguments are old and familiar. That's how the Cadets, the Social Revolutionaries, and the Russian Mensheviks reasoned in 1917, and that's how the leaders of the Spanish Popular Front reasoned. The Spanish workers half-believed these rationalisations until they were convinced by experience that the nearest fascist enemy was to be found in the Spanish fascist army. Not for nothing did our old friend Karl Liebknecht teach: "The main enemy is in our own country!"

August 16, 1936
THE question most on my mind concerns relations between the POUM and the syndicalists. It seems to me it would be extremely dangerous to let oneself be guided exclusively or even primarily by doctrinal considerations. At all costs, it is necessary to improve relations with the syndicalists, despite all their prejudices. The common enemy must be defeated. The confidence of the best syndicalists must be won in the course of the struggle. Before October we made every effort to work together with the purest anarchists. The Kerensky government often tried to use the Bolsheviks against the anarchists. Lenin resolutely opposed this. In that situation, he said, one anarchist militant was worth more than a hundred hesitating Mensheviks. During the civil war the greatest danger is lack of decisiveness, a spirit of equivocation, in a word — Menshevism.

25 February, 1937
ONE does not demonstrate one's friendship for a revolutionary organisation in a difficult situation by closing one's eyes to its mistakes and the dangers arising from them. The situation in Spain can be saved only by an energetic, radical, and heroic comeback of the left wing of the proletariat; thus an immediate regroupment is necessary. It is necessary to open up an implacable campaign against the bloc with the bourgeoisie, and for a socialist program. It is necessary to denounce Stalinist, Socialist, and anarchist leaders precisely because of their bloc with the bourgeoisie. It is not a question of articles more or less confined to the columns of [the POUM journal] La Batalla. No. It is a question of marshalling the masses against their leaders, who are leading the revolution to complete destruction.

The policy of the POUM leadership is a policy of adaptation, expectation, hesitation, that is to say, the most dangerous of all policies during civil war, which is uncompromising. Better to have in the POUM 10,000 comrades ready to mobilise the masses against treason than 40,000 who suffer the policies of others instead of carrying out their own. The 40,000 members of the POUM (if the figure is accurate) cannot by themselves assure the victory of the proletariat if their policy remains hesitant. But 20,000, or even 10,000, with a clear, decisive, aggressive policy, can win the masses in a short time, just as the Bolsheviks won the mass in eight months.

20 March, 1937
THE different intermediate groups (between the Stalinist Communist International and Trotskyist), terrified by their own inconsistency, seek support at the last minute from the Spanish revolution. All the leaders of the ILP and SAP, in supporting Niceto, have done nothing they could do to hamper victory in Spain. They think now they can hide their definitive bankruptcy in the shadow of the heroic
Spanish and Catalan proletariat. In vain. Victory is possible only by the road that we have indicated time and again. Either Nia, Andrade, Gorkin must change their policy radically, that is to say, change from the path of Martov to that of Lenin, or they will lead the POUM to a split and perhaps even to a terrible defeat. Revolutionary words (editorials, solemn discourses, etc.) do not advance the revolution a step. The struggle of the POUMist workers is magnificent, but without resolute leadership it cannot bring victory. It is a question of rousing the masses with supreme courage against the traitorous leaders. There is the beginning of wisdom.

Break with the phantom bourgeoisie who stay in the Popular Front only to prevent the masses from making their own revolution. That is the first order of the day. Rouse the anarchists, Stalinists, and Socialists against their leaders, who do not want to break with the bourgeois ministers, those scarecrows protecting private property. That is the second step. Without that, everything else is verbiage, prattle and lies. They have wasted five years for Leninist policy. I am not sure that they still have five months or five weeks to try to correct the errors committed.

23 March, 1937

FOR six years, Nia has made nothing but mistakes. He has flirted with ideas and eluded difficulties. Instead of battle, he has substituted petty combinations. He has impeded the creation of a revolutionary party in Spain. All the leaders who have followed him share in the same responsibility. For six years they have done everything possible to subject this energetic and heroic proletariat of Spain to the most terrible defeats, and in spite of everything the ambiguity continues. They do not break the vicious circle. They do not rouse the masses against the bourgeois republic. They accommodate themselves to it and then, to make up for it, they write articles from time to time — on the proletarian revolution.

Do not tell me that the workers of the POUM fight heroically, etc. I know it as well as others do. But it is precisely their battle and their sacrifice that forces us to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Down with diplomacy, flattery, and equivocation. One must know how to tell the bitterest truth when the fate of a war and of a revolution depend on it. We have nothing in common with the policy of Nia, nor with any who protect, camouflage, or defend it.

23 April, 1937

THE longer the politics of the Popular Front keep their hold over the country and the revolution, the greater the danger of the exhaustion and disilusionment of the masses and of the military victory of fascism. The responsibility for this situation rests entirely upon the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and anarchists, more precisely, on their leader, who, on the model of Kerensky, Tseltelli, Ebert, Schiedemann, Otto Bauer, and the like, subordinated the revolution to the interests of the bourgeoisie...

"What kind of revolution do you have in mind," the philistines of the Popular Front demand of the "revolutionary" guard? The victory of Largo Caballero’s army over Franco would mean the victory of democracy over fascism, that is, the victory of progress over reaction.

One cannot listen to these arguments with a bitter smile. Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism.

However, we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy; does not enter into government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage.

Any other policy is a criminal and hopeless attempt to use the blood of the workers as cement to hold together a bourgeois democracy that is inevitably doomed to collapse regardless of the immediate outcome of the civil war.

"But you ignore the peasantry!" cries some muddlehead. The Spanish peasantry has shown well enough its eager desire to stand shoulder to shoulder with the proletarian. All that is necessary is for the proletariat to actually enter the road of expropriation of the landed exploiters and usurers. But it is precisely the Stalinists and their new pupils, the "Socialists" and the "anarchists", who have prevented the proletariat from putting forward a revolutionary agrarian program.

The government of Stalin-Caballero tries with all its might to imbue its army with the character of a "democratic" guard for the defence of private property. That is the essence of the Popular Front. All the rest is phrase mongering. Precisely for that reason, the Popular Front is preparing the triumph of fascism. Whoever has not understood this is deaf and blind.

Is a military victory of the democratic guardian of capital possible over its fascist guard? Is it possible? But since in the present epoch the fascist guard corresponds much more to the requirements of capital, the military victory of Stalin-Caballero could not be firm or lasting. Without the proletarian revolution the victory of "democracy" would only mean a round-about path to the very same fascism…

Nia says: "From the time that we were expelled from the Catalan government, reaction has intensified." In fact it would have been appropriate to say: "Our participation in the Catalan government more readily provided the bourgeoisie with the chance to strengthen itself, drive us out, and enter the Popular Front in its present composition." The POUM as a matter of fact even now partly remains in the Popular Front. The leaders of the POUM playfully try to persuade the government to take the road to socialist revolution. The POUM leaders respectfully try to make the CNT leaders understand at last the Marxist teaching about the state. The POUM leaders present themselves as "revolutionary" advisors to the leaders of the Popular Front. This position is lifeless and unworthy of revolutionaries.

It is necessary to openly and boldly mobilise the masses against the Popular Front government. It is necessary to expose, for the syndicalist and anarchist workers to see, the betrayals of those gentlemen who call themselves anarchists but in fact have turned out to be simple liberals. It is necessary to hammer away mercilessly at Stalinism as the worst agency of the bourgeoisie. It is necessary to feel yourselves leaders of the revolutionary masses, not advisors to the bourgeois government… A military victory of the workers would raise the self-consciousness and determination of the proletarian vanguard. In other words, the victory of the republican army of capital over the fascist army would inevitably mean the outbreak of civil war in the republican camp.

In this new civil war, the proletariat could conquer only if it has at its head a revolutionary party that knows how to win the confidence of the majority of the workers and the semi-proletarian peasants. If such a party is not present at the critical moment, the civil war with the republican camp threatens to lead to a victory of Bonapartist
Food shortages in Madrid after the fascists had taken over

dated very little in character from the dictatorship of General Franco. That is why the politics of the Popular Front are a round-about path to the very same fascism...

It is necessary to break sharply, decisively, boldly — the umbilical cord of bourgeois public opinion. It is necessary to break from the petty-bourgeois parties including the syndicalist leaders. It is necessary to think the situation through to the end. It is necessary to descend to the masses, to the lowest and most oppressed layers. It is necessary to stop lulled them with illusions of a future victory that will come by itself. It is necessary to tell them the truth, however bitter it may be. It is necessary to teach them to distrust the petty-bourgeois agencies of capital. It is necessary to teach them to trust in themselves. It is necessary to tie your fate to theirs inseparably. It is necessary to teach them to build their own combat organisation — soviets — in opposition to the bourgeoisie.

Can one hope that the present leadership of the POUM will carry out this turn? Alas, the experience of six years of revolution leaves no room for such hopes. The revolution inside the POUM, as well as outside, would be bankrupt if they limited their role to "persuading," "winning over" Nin, Andrade, Gorokin, the way the latter try to win over Largo, Caballero, Companys, etc. The revolutionists must turn to the workers, to the depths, against the vacillations and wavering of Nin. Unity of the proletarian front does not mean capitulation to the centrists. The interest of the revolution are higher than the formal unity of the party.

Fifty thousand members with a wavering and vacillating leadership are able only to disperse the proletariat and thereby to pave the way for catastrophe. Ten thousand, with a firm and perceptive leadership, can find the road to the masses, break them away from the influence of the Stalinists and Social Democrats, the charlatans and loudmouths, and assure them not just the episodic and uncertain victory of the republican troops over the fascist troops, but a total victory of the toilers over the exploiters. The Spanish proletariat has shown three times that it is able to carry out such a victory. The whole question is in the leadership!

May 12, 1937

It seems that the [Barcelona] insurrection was "spontaneous" in character, that is, it broke out unexpectedly for the leaders, including those of the POUM. This fact alone shows what an abyss had been dug between the anarchist and POUM leaders, on the one side, and the working masses, on the other. The conception propagated by Nin that "the proletariat can take power through peaceful means" has been proven absolutely false. We know nothing, or almost nothing, of the real position of the POUM at the time of the insurrection. But we do not believe in miracles. The position of the leaders of the POUM at the decisive moment must have been a simple continuation of their position during all the preceding period. More exactly, it is precisely in a decisive moment that the inconsistency of left centrism must be revealed in the most striking and tragic fashion. Such was, for example, the fate of Martov in the events of 1905 and 1917...

What is the meaning of the armistice in Barcelona that the dispatches mention: the defeat of the insurgents determined primarily by the inconsistency of the leaders, or the direct capitulation of the leaders, frightened by the pressure of the masses? We do not yet know. For the moment the struggle seems to be continuing outside Barcelona. Is a resumption of the offensive in Barcelona possible? Will not the repression on the part of the Stalinist-reformist scum give a new impetus to the action of the masses? We refrain from predicting here for lack of accurate information. Criticism of the leadership in any case retains its decisive importance, whatever the immediate course of events may be. In spite of the mistakes and weaknesses of the insurrection, we remain before the outside world indissolubly bound to the defeated workers. But this does not mean sparing the leadership, hiding its inconsistency, and keeping silent about its mistakes under the pretext of a purely sentimental solidarity.

8 August, 1937

WHEN Andres Nin, the leader of the POUM, was arrested in Barcelona, there could not be the slightest doubt that the agents of the GPU would not have been deterred by Stalin's intentions were revealed with exceptional clarity when the GPU, which holds the Spanish police in its clutches, published an announcement accusing Nin and the whole leadership of the POUM of being "agents" of Franco.

The absurdity of this accusation is clear to anyone who is acquainted with even the simplest facts about the Spanish revolution. The members of the POUM fought heroically against the fascists on all fronts in Spain. Nin is an old and incorruptible revolutionary. He defended the Interests of the Spanish and Catalan peoples against the agents of the Soviet bureaucracy. That was why the GPU got rid of him by means of a well-prepared "raid" on the Barcelona jail. What role in this matter was played by the official Spanish authorities remains a matter for speculation.

Quite apart from the differences of opinion that separate me from the POUM, I must acknowledge that in the struggle that Nin led against the bureaucracy, it was Nin who was right. He tried to defend the independence of the Spanish proletariat from the diplomatic machinations and intrigues of the clique that holds power in Moscow. He did not want the POUM to become a tool in the hands of Stalin. He refused to cooperate with the GPU against the interests of the Spanish people. This was his only crime. And for this crime he paid with his life.

24 August, 1937

The July days of 1936, when the Catalan proletariat with correct leadership could, without additional efforts or sacrifices, have seized power and opened the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat throughout Spain, ended, largely through the fault of the POUM, in a regime between the proletariat (committees) and the bourgeoisie, represented by its lackeys (Stalinist, anarchist, and Socialist leaders). The interest of the workers was to do away with the equivocal and dangerous situation as rapidly as possible, by handing over all power to the committees, that is, to the Spanish Soviets. The task of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was to do away with the committees in the name of "unity of power". The participation of Nin in the government was a corporate part of the plan of the bourgeoisies, directed against the proletariat... In Spain the May-July period passed. The after four months but after six years of revolution. The masses of the whole country have had a gigantic experience. A long time ago, they lost the illusions of 1931, as
The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

well as the warmed-over illusions of the Popular Front. Again and again they have shown to every part of the country that they were ready to go through to the end. If the Catalan proletariat had seized power in May 1937 — as it had really seized it in July 1936 — they would have found support throughout all of Spain. The bourgeoisie-Stalinist reaction would not have had two regiments with which to crush the Catalan workers. In the territory occupied by Franco not only the workers but also the peasants would have turned toward the Catalan proletariat, would have isolated the fascist army and brought about its irresistible disintegration. It is doubtful whether under these conditions any foreign government would have risked throwing its regiments onto the burning soil of Spain. Intervention would have become materially impossible, or at least extremely dangerous.

17 December, 1937

THE anarchists had no independent position of any kind in the Spanish revolution. All they did was wave between Bolshevism and Menshevism. More precisely, the anarchist workers instinctively yearned to enter the Bolshevik road (19 July 1936 and May days of 1937) while the leaders, on the contrary, with all their might drove the masses into the camp of the Popular Front, i.e. of the bourgeois regime.

The anarchists revealed a fatal lack of understanding of the laws of the revolution and its tasks by seeking to limit themselves to their own trade unions, that is, to organisations permeated with the routine of peaceful times, and by ignoring what went on outside the framework of the trade unions, among the masses, among the political parties and in the government apparatus. Had the anarchists been revolutionaries, they would first of all have called for the creation of soviets, which unite the representatives of all the toilers of city and country, including the most oppressed strata who never joined the trade unions. The revolutionary workers would have naturally occupied the dominant position in these soviets. The Stalinists would have remained an insignificant minority. The proletariat would have convinced itself of its own invincible strength. The apparatus of the bourgeois state would have hung suspended in the air. One strong blow would have sufficed to paralyse this apparatus. The social revolution would have received a powerful impetus.

Instead of this, the anarcho-syndicalists, seeking to hide from "politics" in the trade unions, turned out to be, to the great surprise of the whole world and themselves, a fifth wheel in the cart of bourgeois democracy. But not for long; a fifth wheel which is sure to be removed. The Alcudia Garcia Oliver and his henchmen helped Stalin and his henchmen to take power away from the workers, the anarchists themselves were driven out of the government of the Popular Front. Even then they found nothing better to do than jump on the victor's bandwagon and assure him of their devotion. The fear of the petty bourgeois before the big bourgeoisie, of the petty bureaucrat before the big bureaucrat, they covered up with lachrymose speeches about the sanctity of the united front (between the victim and the executioners) and about the inaccessibility of every kind of dictatorship, including their own. "After all, we could have taken power in July 1936..." "After all, we could have taken power in May 1937..." The anarchists begged Stalin-Negrín to recognise and reward their treachery to the revolution. A revolting picture!

The conditions for victory of the masses in a civil war against the army of exploiters are very simple in their essence.

1. The fighters of a revolutionary army must be clearly aware of the fact that they are fighting for their full social liberation and not for the re-establishment of the old ("democratic") forms of exploitation.

2. The workers and peasants in the rear of the revolutionary army as well as in the rear of the enemy must know and understand: "The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties that paralysed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses."

3. The propaganda on their own front as well as on the enemy front and in both rear must be completely permeated with the spirit of social revolution. The slogan "First victory, then reforms" is the slogan of the oppressors and exploiters from the Biblical kings down to Stalin.

4. Politics are determined by those class and strata that participate in the struggle. The revolutionary masses must have a state apparatus that directly and immediately expresses their will. Only the soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies can act as such an apparatus.

5. The revolutionists must not only proclaim but also immediately realise in life the more pressing measures of social revolution in the provinces won by them: the expropriation of provisions, manufactured articles, and other stores on hand and the transfer of these to the needy; the re-division of shelter and housing in the interests of the toilers and especially of the families of the fighters; the expropriation of the land and agricultural inventory in the interests of the peasants; the establishment of workers' control and state power in place of the former bureaucracy.

6. Enemies of the socialist revolution, that is, exploiting elements and their agents, even if masquerading as "democrats", "republicans", "socialists" and anarchists, must be mercilessly driven out of the army.

7. At the head of each military unit must be placed commissars possessing irreproachable authority as revolutionists and soldiers.

8. In every military unit there must be a firmly welded nucleus of the most self-sacrificing fighters, recommended by the workers' organisations. The members of the nucleus have but one privilege: to be the first under fire.

9. The commanding corps necessarily includes at first many alien and unreliable elements among the personnel. Their testing, retesting and sifting must be carried through on the basis of combat experience and recommendations of commissars and testimonial of rank-and-file fighters. Coincident with this must proceed an intense training of commanders drawn from the ranks of revolutionary workers.

10. The strategy of civil war must combine the roles of military art with the tasks of the social revolution. Not only in propaganda but also in military operations it is necessary to take into account the social composition of the various military units of the enemy (bourgeois volunteers, mobilised peasants, or as in Franco's case, colonial slaves); and in choosing lines of operation, it is necessary to rigorously take into consideration the social structure of the corresponding territories (industrial regions, peasant regions, revolutionary or reactionary, regions of oppressed nationalities, etc.). In brief, revolutionary policy dominates strategy.

11. Both the revolutionary government and executive committee of the workers and peasants must know how to win the complete confidence of the army and of the toiling population.

12. Foreign policy must have as its main objective the awakening of the revolutionary consciousness of the workers, the exploited peasants, and oppressed nationalities of the whole world.

20 August, 1940

THE extent to which the working class movement has been thrown backward may be gauged by the condition not only of the mass organisation, but also of the ideological groupings and those theoretical inquiries in which so many groups are engaged...
The Stalinists were responsible for Franco’s victory

What were the advantages of Bolshevism? A clear and thoroughly thought-out revolutionary conception at the beginning of the revolution was held only by Lenin. The Russian cadres of the party were scattered and to a considerable degree bewildered. But the party had a semblance of advanced workers. Lenin had great authority with the party cadres. Lenin’s political conception corresponded to the actual development of the revolution and was reinforced by each new event. These advantages worked wonders in a revolutionary situation, that is, in conditions of bitter class struggle. The party quickly aligned its policy to correspond with Lenin’s conception; to correspond, that is, with the actual course of the revolution. Thanks to this, it met with firm support among tens of thousands of advanced workers. Within a few months, by basking itself upon the development of the revolution, the party was able to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of its slogans. This majority, organised into soviets, was able in its turn to attract the soldiers and peasants.

How can this dynamic, dialectical process be exhausted by a formula of the maturity or immaturity of the proletariat? A colossal factor in the maturity of the Russian proletariat in February or March 1917 was Lenin. He did not fall from the skies. He personified the revolutionary tradition of the working class. For Lenin’s slogans to find their way to the masses, cadres had to exist, even though numerically small at the beginning; the cadres had to have confidence in the leadership, a confidence based on the entire experience of the past. To cancel these elements from one’s calculations is simply to ignore the living revolution, to substitute for it an abstraction, the “relationship of forces”; because the development of the revolution precisely consists of the incessant and rapid change in the relationship of forces under the impact of the changes in the consciousness of the proletariat. The movement of the backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength. The vital mainspring this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.

The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties that paralysed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses. The attorneys of the POUU simply deny the responsibility of the leaders, in order thus to escape shoulder their own responsibility. This imperialist philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programmes, parties, and personalities that were the organisers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action.
Trotsky was no Zinovievite

By Mark Osborn

WE should not let Ernie Haberkern’s (unjustified and unbacked-up) comment against Trotsky — tucked away in a footnote in “The Left and Max Shachtman”, (WL 25) — pass without comment. Haberkern says: “Since Trotsky had never understood what Lenin was trying to do organisationally, he could only throw up his hands, admit Lenin had been right on this point while he had been mistaken, and pass on to his own followers Zinoviev’s proto-Stalinist ideas on party organisation.”

“Trotsky tried as diplomatically as possible to induce Cannon to follow a democratic and reasonable course in a factional situation.”

Since the footnote refers to a paragraph in the main article which refers to the “Third Camp’s rejection of the ersatz ‘Leninism’ of the Third International”, it is appropriate to use Shachtman to defend Trotsky.

Max Shachtman’s article “25 years of American Trotskyism” (New International, Jan-Feb 1954) contrasts Cannon with Trotsky. “What Cannon learned about Lenin’s conceptions of the role of the party, of the party cadre, of the party leadership, of party democracy, he learned not from Lenin but, like virtually all the Communist Party leaders of the time, from Zinoviev, that is, from the ridiculous caricature of Lenin’s ideas and traditions that flowered in the disastrous days of Zinoviev’s ‘Bolshevisation’ campaign.”

And: “In the course of the very first factional struggle which Cannon precipitated in the Trotskyist organisation here, Trotsky found himself impelled to write to us that he could not fail to see in it the methods and traditions of Zinovievism. It was a gentle and restrained rebuke to Cannon but its meaning was unequivocal. Trotsky, aware of the Comintern school that had produced Cannon, tried as diplomatically and pedagogically as possible to induce Cannon to follow a democratic and reasonable course in a factional situation or in the organisation of the internal life of the party.”

Are the Serbs of Bosnia and Croatia just “ethnic groups”?

By Ernie Haberkern

I WAS disappointed to see three articles in no.24 of Workers’ Liberty on the Bosnian crisis each of which repeated the standard arguments in favour of military support to the Bosnian government and none of which addressed the question that should be obvious to a Marxist. Do the Bosnian Serbs have the right to self-determination? The immediate cause of this war, after all, was the decision of the Croats and Muslims, mistakenly or not, to demand their right to self-determination while denying the same right to their substantial Serbian majority.

WL has been one of the very few publications on the left to make this fundamental question of Marxism the basis of its analysis of the very similar conflicts in Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine. There, too, outside powers, both the superpowers and local players like Syria and Iraq, have cynically manipulated the grievances of the two peoples for their own imperialist purposes. But the root problem is the refusal of two peoples, each with legitimate claims to the land, to recognise the rights of the other. The only difference here is that there are three people involved.

To write, as Chris Reynolds does, that “the main engine of war in ex-Yugoslavia is Serb proto-imperialism” at a time when the American Air Force is intervening in this civil war with the overwhelming firepower that it used in the Gulf War, at a time when the CIA-trained Muslim-Croat alliance has seized the military initiative in obvious collaboration with this air assault, and at a time when Slobodan Milosevic is clearly allied with American imperialism and Croatian dictator Franjo Tudjman against the Serbs of Bosnia and Krajina, is to continue spreading a propaganda myth that even the most hawkish bourgeois commentators have dropped.

What is more important, this analysis dodges the main issue. If “the Bosnian government’s bourgeois [read imperialist — EH] alliances do not cancel out the Bosnian Muslims’ national rights”, as Chris Reynolds rightly argues, then, why should the Bosnian Serbs’ national rights be cancelled out by their erstwhile, and clearly foolish, alliance with Muslims? If the SWP is pandering to the arrogant chauvinism of large nations when it clenches to the Bosnian Muslims their rightful dignity as a nation, what is Chris Reynolds doing when he denounces the Bosnian Serbs their rightful dignity? I think the SWP position on the right of nations to self-determination is a mess. As far as I can tell, they have not abandoned the Marxists position; they apparently have never heard of it. But at least they are consistent. Chris Reynolds’s article is based on a methodology that is in flat contradiction to the one WL writers have used in their discussions of Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine.

In the U.S. today, former leaders of the movement against the war in Vietnam call on their government, and some of the most reactionary Arab governments which are its allies, to “arm the Bosnian Muslims.” While they have been making these public demands and denouncing the Clinton administration for its “cowardice”, the CIA has quietly turned the Croat-Muslim alliance (dominated by Croatia) into the dominant military force in the area.

Clearly, the German-American alliance has used this opportunity to advance its aggressive, interventionist designs in what used to be the Russian sphere of influence. In fact, it is clear that the German foreign office, with the support of the more hawkish wing of the American foreign policy establishment, deliberately provoked this crisis. Against the opposition of the more sober representatives of the EU, they recognised the Croat republic even though the Croatian government refused to make any concessions to its substantial Serb majority. (At that time, by the way, the representatives of the Krajina Serbs did not seek full independence.) The German government knew its action would lead to civil war and that is what it wanted. The German government and its American friends wanted a pretext for NATO military intervention.

The overwhelming majority of the left have acted as cheerleaders for this aggressive policy with the same enthusiasm they once showed for Stalinist imperialist adventures. Tony Benn and even (it has to be said) the SWP have behaved very well in standing up to this pressure however confused their general politics may be. To attack them in the manner Chris Reynolds does is a symptom of the sectarian spirit which is in general absent from WL literature.

I am for defending the national rights of the Croats, Serbs and Balkat Muslims (not all of whom live in Bosnia). WL has shown, in its treatment of the cases of Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine, how you can do this without apologising for the chauvinism and gangsterism of the nationalist leaders of these peoples. WL has also demonstrated, in these cases,
Forum: "Revolutionary History"... Max Shachtman

why a nationalist leadership that sup-presses its internal minority must turn the country into an armed camp allied with imperialist powers. And how, in doing so, such a leadership ends up betraying the aspiration of its own people. Israeli Jews, Palestinian Arabs and the Protestants of Northern Ireland may be learning this important lesson. Croatian and Muslim would-be progressives and democrats need to learn that lesson as well, just as much as the Bosnian Serbs do.

Room for debate

By Ted Crawford

I have been reluctant to write to you about a rather silly letter by Sam Levy on the subject of Revolutionary History as I hoped someone else would do so. I am fond of Sammy and owe him a lot in terms of my political education — more perhaps than he would be willing to acknowledge. But his letter is silly for he seems to think that the magazine is some kind of anti-Trotsky conspiracy. Let me deal with some of his points in turn.

Robin Blick has written letters to us which we published and he has done so in a review or two. We have also carried the most erudite and damming review by David Bruce of Robin's anti-Lenin booklet Seeds of Evil, more effective I believe than any review that has appeared elsewhere. Blick has never been a member of our EB. We have carried letters and reviews by Walter Kendall too who is on our EB. Walter is not a Trotskyist but he is a Marxist and his book Revolutionary Movements in Britain is a most useful source for militants. Sam would surely agree that Walter has made a real intellectual contribution to the movement. Should we not be glad at his participation in our publishing endeavour? The same is true of Mike Jones. True he is by no means a Trotskyist but has he not made a contribution to the left by translating the work of Thalheimer and Lev? Has not this enriched discussion? I think that the material he has translated and made available for us and for New Interventions has been of great value to everyone who wants to study the left in Germany after WWI and the key period in the twentieth century. What is extraordinary is that it was never available before. Mike has a deep knowledge of the German events from which no-one should be ashamed to learn. Whether his judgements are always correct are matters on which people will have to make up their own minds.

I think that Sam's problem is that he seems to think that RH is in some sense the property of a particular group or political line. I repeat for the nth time that it is not. In a broad sense we try to throw light on the non-Leninist Marxist and the revolutionaries movement which have been marginalised by academics of both Stalinist and Social Democratic persuasion. Unfortunately the opposition to Stalinism and Social Democracy, under the enormous pressure exerted by these movements and by bourgeois society, has often over reacted by becoming narrow and shrill and

"The groups, sectarian and deformed though they all inevitably are, have carried the revolutionary torch and trained, however inadequately, a new layer"

by seeking the answers in the Holy Books rather than trying to think for themselves. Sammy Levy is an example of this here though by God it was not always so in the past. But the groups, sectarian and deformed though they all inevitably are, have carried the revolutionary torch and trained, however inadequately, a new layer that is all we have as we face the challenges of the 21st century. That is ample justification for their existence. We wish them luck and hope to help them by providing material for education and discussion.

Early Third Camp

By Laurens Otter

HABERKORN'S "Platform" (WZ25) article is excellent (I have not read Drucker, so I do not know if it's fair as a review) but two objections, one minor quibble. In listing the factions of the Workers' Party thatanalysis the Soviet Union as a class society before or alongside Shachtman, there is no mention of the IRO (and the other "retrogressivists"), none of the Johnson-Forrest Group, none of Dwight MacDonald. More important, in treating Third Camp it takes the ISL out of context as a purely International Socialist League phenomenon.

The Third Camp was a world-wide attempt (not always fully formalised) to bring together dissident Marxists, GDH Cole-type socialists in the Labour Party, anarchists and Musette-type radical pacifists. The international committee was based in Britain and Holland (here the Common Wealth were the most fully committed groups) with John Banks (of CW) as international secretary. No doubt the ISL was the largest group that described itself as Trotskyist within Third Camp, but Third Camp international meetings were attended by Mme. Trotsky, by Rosmer, by Vredekend and by Joe Groves and Stuart Purks, representing the Socialist Christian League. Some of us (possibly most) had previously passed through Trotskyism.

I can only remember Shachtman attending one international meeting: there were generally two or three delegates from the ISL (at British meetings, Ray Challinor, Mike Kidron and Ken Tarbuck were at different times delegates/observers from the Socialist Review Group). By large we were unaware of divisions within the ISL, so that when it came out that Shachtman (in his defence before HUAC) had said that he had written pamphlets for use by the American forces for dropping on Korea, this was assumed to have been done on behalf of the ISL, and the American Third Camp committee started to go through the motions of dissociating itself from the ISL.

Editors note: It is Workers' Liberty policy to print letters without political censorship. What is said here about Max Shachtman and the Korean War seems to us to be very improbable. We expect that comrades who know more about these things will respond.

Roots

Cockney in voice, English by birth And domicile, he bears, one apart, The teacher's cool, cold dissertation, Recounting Ern's old Starvation. Matters of fact, no cause to fret, The telly shows you things like that! "Hunger in England is forty-five," A young lad says, "They had to grive, 'Cos we came first." "Got some relief," Teacher replies, "meat, not beef (The export trade ate that)." "But were They grateful? No, I'll bet! Eh, sir?"

Alone, suddenly, under threat, The anger rising in his throat, He turns, knowing the Fanale tale, With stomach tight, breath quick, face pale: His grey, hurt eyes are raw nerve ends Extending back and down, wound Root-tight to staved and murdered folk Beyond sea, years, past shallow talk: Tied by folk memory to those who died, "That's me you're talking off" he cried.

Sean Matgamna
Dockers and firefighters on Merseyside are taking action to defend jobs

FIVE WEEKS AGO, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) sacked 500 dock workers for refusing to cross a picket line. The conflict had been provoked by the employers who want to replace Transport and General (TGWU) members with casual non-union labour.

This action by MDHC comes after a series of attacks on dockers' pay and conditions. The workers have had contracts imposed on them which bind them to 12 hour days and seven day weeks for less pay. Liverpool is amongst the most profitable ports in the country. Last year profits were in excess of £35 million.

Support for the strike is pretty solid. At the start of the action 21 workers were scabbing. Two of the scabs have now walked out and joined the dispute. No other workers have crossed the picket line.

On 20 October, the MDHC offered a deal: 130 workers would be reinstated on new contracts; other workers would get £10,000 compensation. This offer was rejected — unanimously.

Now strikers face escalating intimidation. Employers' stooges are phoning them at home, offering bribes for a return to work on the bosses' terms.

Local Labour MPs have demanded that the workers be reinstated. An early-day motion on the issue, signed by over 60 Labour MPs, has been submitted in parliament.

Paralleling the docks dispute is the fight by 1,300 FBU members in Merseyside against 20 job losses and a cut of three days in their annual holidays for the remaining workers.

The firefighters began their action with a series of 9-hour strikes, forcing management to offer unconditional talks. The bosses refused to back down and the FBU has ballots for 24 hour strikes. 90% voted yes, on an 84% turn-out. The firefighters have begun a series of three 24 hour strikes. Emergency cover is being provided by the army, in 40 year old Green Goddesses.

Both sets of employers look to be settling in for long disputes.

Chris Jones, a former chair of Merseyside FBU told Workers’ Liberty: "these disputes are having broad repercussions. The business section of the local paper, the Daily Post, has commented that the strikes, though not dangerous in themselves, have implications for wage struggles which are looming in the local Ford and GM car factories. The example of militancy may prove contagious."

The dock and fire-service strikes come after the victory won by 300 residential social workers in Liverpool.

The Liverpool Labour council wanted to stop nationally-agreed payments for workers off sick, on maternity leave, or on training courses. The council took the workers’ union, UNISON, to court under the Tories’ anti-union laws, to try to undercut the action. To no avail.

The subsequent strike forced the council to back down on the issue of pay, though there is still disagreement over the hiring of new workers.

Workers’ action on Merseyside shows that despite anti-union laws, and even in the face of determined, unscrupulous bosses, strike action can still be effective. Militancy pays!