

# The life and death of Yitzhak Rabin

## Editorial

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 falls before the bullets of a Jewish chauvinist, Yigal Amir, because he has agreed to give Palestinian Arabs limited control of the areas wherein they constitute the majority.

Who, when the peace accords were signed, would have predicted that it would be Rabin and 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 irrevocably 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, crazy 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 — irreplaceable 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 loathe to trust to 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

door to progress earlier.

The peace process, or something like it, is the only progressive way forward, taking account of the legitimate interests of both the Jewish and the Arab nations in what before 1948 was Palestine. The working class in the Arab countries is sociologically massive, but it has not yet emerged as an independent

political force. The Jewish working class too is heavily weighed down by nationalism and limited by the exigencies of the Arab-Jewish conflict.

Unity of the working class across the great national divide will come. An essential part of it will have to be acceptance by the Arab working class that the Jewish people have a

incontestable right to their own state for as long as they want it. Not a right to oppress Arabs, but the right to live in peace free from the threat of annihilation.

Let us hope that the death of Rabin will strengthen the peace process within Israel and that Yigal Amir has not dealt that a death blow too.

# The Workers' Liberty conference

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 sectarians pronounce the political labour movement dead and — like a demented echo of the misguided German Stalinists who crowed when Hitler took power, "after Hitler, our turn next!" — 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.

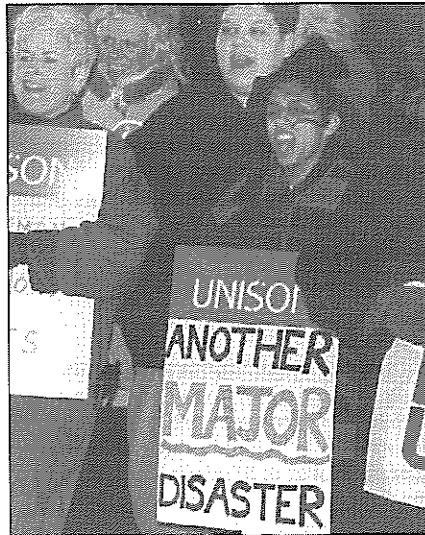
The labour movement has not ceased to hate and resent what the Tory pigs in office have done to the working people. The labour movement is not blind to the savagery unleashed and the degradation cultivated in our cities by the Thatcherites.

The labour movement will expect a Blair Labour government, no matter how moderate it is supposed to be, to do something about all this, and at least *begin* to do it quickly.

A Blair government will immediately be confronted by a hungry mass of expectations and demands.

The defeat of the Tories will at the same time remove many of the defeat-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 — 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 class struggle does not end.

From day one of a Labour government, the inevitable antagonism between that government, managing capitalism, and the interests of the labour movement would begin to undermine the control of the bureaucrats and the parliamentary leaders.

Right now, the will of the organised labour movement is concentrated on one thing only: getting the Tories out and putting Labour in. That achieved, both the new possibilities and the disappointments that result will begin to revive the labour movement.

That is why socialists who do not now place the defeat of the Tories and the victory of the Labour Party in the general election at the centre of all their efforts are hopelessly disoriented and hopelessly out of step with both the thinking and the needs of the broad labour movement.

And yet the Labour Party is now very hostile territory for socialists.

That is what happens when a frightened right-wing clique, made up in part of renegade Stalinists, is in control of an intimidated rank and file. It makes life difficult for socialists; it does not change the basic relations inside the labour movement, which should determine what socialists do, or the political situation facing the working class. The deletion of Clause Four does not change the basic character of the party either.

The class struggle does not end. It goes on. If the working class is quelled, it rises

again. The class struggle is the pulse of social life under capitalism. The job of socialists is to learn from the class struggle and from history, and to prepare and organise the workers' side so that we can win the next major class struggle confrontations.

Modern socialism is the generalised, refined consciousness of the working class struggle, and that struggle will go on as long as capitalism goes on. The revival of a mass socialist movement is therefore inevitable. But how it revives, and when it revives can depend massively on the capacity, the will and the political quality of the socialists who work to help it revive.

The vigour, or lack of it, with which socialists like ourselves stand up to the present anti-socialist mud-storm of lies, contempt, misrepresentation and abuse will speed up, or slow down, the inevitable socialist revival.

The will and ability of Marxists like ourselves to resist the characteristic vices which cripple the sectarian Marxists (the SWP is the most important British example) and our capacity to construct a Marxist movement free of these vices — that too can play a great role in speeding up, or slowing down, the revival of a real socialist working-class movement.

For example: if in the 1980s so many Marxists had not stood aloof from the struggles of the left in the political wing of the trade unions, the Labour Party, then the outcome might have been more favourable for the left. They continue to stand aloof, using the victories of Blair as their excuse. Thereby they give up on the struggle for socialism in the actually existing labour movement.

Serious working-class politics demands the integration and coordination of the different fronts of the class struggle into a coherent strategy against the common capitalist enemy. It demands an organised force to push through that strategy. Given the character of the entrenched leaders of the labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party alike, only an organised network of socialists can achieve this, and such a network has to be built up over years, in advance of such big confrontations as the miners' strike of the 1980s and those battles that will come.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, an independent revolutionary socialist organ-

isation, exists to do this work. It groups together and co-ordinates trade union and Labour Party activists to fight the class struggle, and works to win support for socialist politics in the labour movement.

It makes independent propaganda for socialism, and takes initiatives for socialism, in its own name. It is of the labour movement, but not bound by the mini police state rule of the bureaucrats. It is not confined to the Labour Party in its activities.

It binds socialists together to fight the working-class struggle on the three great fronts: in the trade unions, in the political Labour Party, and in the field of ideas.

It works to overcome the chaos and disorder on the would-be revolutionary left.

That chaos is rooted in the long chain of defeats suffered by revolutionary socialism at the hands of the Stalinists and the bourgeoisie. The conditions which have reduced the would-be revolutionary movement to an archipelago of often irrational sects are only

now lifting, at the end of the Stalinist era.

Against the sectarians, with their airtight underground organisations, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty counterposes open, rational discussion, combined with proposals for practical co-operation and coordination in the class struggle — unity in action, dialogue about our differences; and recognition of the fact that revolutionary socialism in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg must be recomposed, re-elaborated and redefined for the conditions in which we live now.

On 25-26 November the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will meet in conference to discuss these issues and to plan its future activities. The AWL is an organisation of a few hundred people, most of them young. We believe that its ideas, and its rational, democratic approach to the problems which beset the left, will allow it to grow, develop, and, perhaps, unify what is salvageable in the existing "revolutionary left",

in the period ahead.

That work is especially urgent now in face of the spread of the distemper of sectarianism across the left, in a self-defeating socialist response to Blair. It will be central if Labour wins the election, and central if Labour loses, too.

We believe, therefore, that Workers' Liberty's conference is an important event in the life of the labour movement.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty attempts to embody and fight for the political qualities outlined here. That is the basis of our claim for the right to exist in the labour movement, and our claim on the active support of our readers — who, of course, must be the judges of how we measure up to the tasks and needs we outline here.

If you reject both Blair and the politics of the sectarian deserters from the mass labour movement, join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. If you would like to attend our conference contact the editorial address. ■

# 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 starvations in Africa and elsewhere, by ecological disasters now and the certainty 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 in places like the former Yugoslavia, in Ireland, in the Middle East and wherever different sorts of people have not yet learned to live together in amity.

Serious, working-class socialism remains the only possible answer to the world's problems. But Stalinism, which Trotsky called "the syphilis of the labour movement", has undermined, sapped, butchered and discredited the old socialist movement. Reform socialism, which built imposing structures on 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 squalor 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 criticised 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 furthest 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, stultified 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 capitalism should be forced to move in their minds from a world of delusions and pretences 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 redevelopment of a real socialist movement 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 disorientating *now*. The pain and disorientation is made all the more deep because the outright reformist currents 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 reform socialism: the power of the bourgeoisie.

On a world scale, they kept the advanced areas of the world economy and have successfully “sat out” the Stalinist bureaucratic “revolutions”. In countries like Britain, even when the working class forced big reforms on them, the bourgeoisie kept both the commanding heights of the economy and the power of the state machine (permanent civil service hierarchy, army police, etc.). They have used them to take back many of the reforms; Mrs Thatcher ruthlessly 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 erected the new world of steady 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 counterfeit of socialism has seen the working-class experience a series of great defeats and missed chances. Structural change in the working class itself has shaken up the traditional labour movement. In turn those changes have led superficial and ignorant people to claim that the working class is disappearing.

Capitalism cannot exist without a working class to exploit! The working class has undergone vast structural change time and again in its history: the workers who built history's first mass working-class movement, the British Chartists 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 being wage-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 unfaltering 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 sour disappointments produced by reformism.

Socialists must live under — and respond to — an incessant bombardment of propaganda 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-revolution 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 Stalinism have taken over Stalinism's lies as they took over its bankrupt stock.

The bourgeoisie and people like Blair now repeat the great lie of the Stalinists. Stalinism, they say, was socialism; Stalinism was Bolshevism; the Stalinist states were Marxism come to life — and therefore socialism, Bolshevism and Marxism are now deservedly dead and rotten: socialism is impossible.

This is, so to speak, the new Popular Front of the Liars 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 in *Workers' Liberty* believe that only stubborn resistance to those lies and stubborn reiteration of the truth about socialism, about Marxism and about the real Russian revolution can stop these lies from continuing to poison the ground on which the renewed working-class socialist movement must be built, thereby retarding the rebirth of that movement. That is why we turn to the youth, who are undismayed and uncorrupted.

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 — *Socialist Worker* and the SWP are a good example — who, though they 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 demagoguery;
- by indifference 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 popes and prophets. The SWP will for for an example here too.

● by the practice of self-organisation as undemocratic, cultish sects 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 existing “revolutionary” and “Trotskyist” left. They stand as an insuperable barrier between most of those calling themselves Trotskyist and the future a regenerated Trotskyism 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 prepare the future by fighting the class struggle now, and by learning and transmitting the lessons of the past. This activity is irreplaceable. It can make the difference between working-class victory and defeat in the battles of the future.

In Eastern Europe and the states of the former USSR now we can see what the absence of Marxism can mean. In countries where the genuine socialist tradition was extirpated by the Stalinists and where the oppressors of the workers long claimed to act in the name of socialism, a working class emerging from Stalinism gropes for answers, towed 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 Stalinism, 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 over to capitalism, outdoing even the traditional Labour Party right wing. Many socialists — organised round *Militant* and *Socialist Worker* — run away from the real working-class movement, which still, despite everything, includes the Labour Party, into sectarian ghettos, organised on semi-Stalinist principles into so many ideological command “economies.” Real discussion is choked off. Unity in action is very rare.

Socialism *will* reconstitute itself, hardened, sharpened, clarified and cleansed by the bitter experience of working-class history so far this century. In spite of everything, and in defiance of the faint-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. ■