



Labour Party and the trade unions

DON'T LET THEM BREAK THE LINK!

THE LABOUR leadership's post mortem on the general election, which was presented to the NEC on June 18, was the expected combination of hollow phrases, pathetic excuses and political evasions. It also marked the beginning of a campaign by the Labour leadership to move the party even further to the right.

With the election defeat, the right wing's project lay in ruins. Having purged the left, renounced collectivism in favour of appeals to individualism, and distanced Labour from its class base, the Labour leaders had convinced themselves that their new model Labour Party had finally been made 'electable'. Now, like a medieval physician whose patient fails to respond to repeated bloodletting, the new realists have concluded that the treatment is fine and that what is required is more of the same. The consequences of this procedure for the patient do not need spelling out.

Speakers at the NEC meeting wholeheartedly endorsed a post-election analysis by the hard-right Shadow Communications Agency, which was responsible for the conduct of the disastrous election campaign. In characteristic media-speak, the SCA defined Labour's problem as 'negative perceptions of its core values, images and historical association' among the electorate. The party's identification with the working class, and with the trade unions in particular, was the object of the SCA's attack.

An adaptation to middle-class prejudices against the organised working class was in fact a prominent feature of Labour's election campaign. Trade unionists were notable only by their complete absence from Labour Party platforms. And party leaders responded with embarrassment to assaults by the capitalist media on Labour's reliance on union funds. Their repudiation of anything remotely resembling class politics rendered them incapable of defending Labour's source of finance in the working class by attacking the Tories' dependence on donations from big business.

It is this political philosophy which lies behind the present attempt by the Labour right wing to undermine the party's constitutional links with the trade unions. The aim is to weaken, or even break, these links, with the intention of making Labour more saleable to anti-union sections of the electorate. In the inquiry set up by the party into the relationship between Labour and the unions, right-wingers like the slimy Tony Blair will undoubtedly be pushing for the principle of one person one vote to be extended throughout the party, in order to destroy the trade unions' domination of the Labour Party annual conference.

The proposal for a constitutional break between Labour and the unions receives the support of the extreme right wing in the trade union bureaucracy. Jordan and Laird of the AEEU are the most vocal supporters of this view. They have moved so far to the right in accommodating to the bosses on the industrial level that they no longer see any need for the unions to organise opposition to their parties on the political level.

Such an outcome would represent a major setback for the workers' movement in Britain. The Labour Party was built by the unions, who saw the need – particularly after the 1901 Taff Vale case – for independent political representation in parliament. This organic link with the unions is, historically, an important part of the relationship between the party and the class which gives Labour

its character as a bourgeois workers' party – a party with a capitalist programme but based on the working class.

Ultra-lefts who argue that the Labour Party has already been transformed into the equivalent of the US Democratic Party are conceding defeat before the battle has been joined. In fact, this particular development is unlikely to say the least. The Democrats do receive financial backing from some of the US trade unions, but their primary source of finance is from a wing of the capitalist class, whose political representatives they are and have always been. There is no prospect of a significant section of the British bourgeoisie funding the Labour Party. Despite attempts by Walkworth Road to shift the emphasis to individual donations, Labour is necessarily dependent on the unions, who covered some 50 per cent of the party's general election campaign expenses.



Most union leaders are less than enthusiastic about the prospect of continuing to provide the Labour Party's main source of income without having any control over the political purposes for which the money is used. At NUPE's annual conference, its general secretary Tom Sawyer – who as an NEC member has in other respects thoroughly supported Kinnock's new realist project – strongly opposed the destruction of the block vote, and raised the slogan 'No say, no pay'. Pressure from this section of the union bureaucracy was responsible for the NEC overturning, on June 24, a previous decision to endorse Kinnock's proposal that the unions should be denied a voice in the selection of parliamentary candidates, which would be based on one member one vote.

While the complete 'Americanisation' of Labour is scarcely a going proposition, a campaign to weaken the trade union link is definitely under way. Various proposals have been floated by the Labour right wing for bringing the union connection with the party more in line with the norms of bourgeois democracy. Trade unionists who pay the political levy may be disenfranchised unless they take out individual 'associate member-

ship' of the party. And the vote wielded by unions at conference will be based on this individual membership. It is more than likely that union bureaucrats will accept a compromise along these lines.

Trade unionists and party members must reject their leaders' cowardly retreat, under pressure from bourgeois 'public opinion', over the issue of the union link. In the face of massive contributions by the bosses to the Tory party – which far exceed the financial support Labour receives from the unions – we have every right, as organised workers, to fund our own party and fight for it to adopt a programme which defends our interests.

The fact that the block vote is abused by trade union bureaucrats is no argument against the block vote as such. In essence, it represents *collective* control by the working class over the Labour Party. We should campaign for the block vote to be democratised, not on the basis of one member one vote, but according to the principles of participatory democracy – with union branches and conferences deciding how the block vote is to be cast.

It is one of the ironies of the current attack on the union link that the Labour right wing has in the past often relied on the block vote to counter the left in the constituency parties. It proved crucial in defeating both the Bevanite and Bennite movements, which enjoyed majority support in the CLPs. The party's right wing is certainly aware of this. We can therefore expect that any dilution of the block vote will be accompanied by further purges of left-wing activists, and by a renewed campaign to reduce party members to passive supporters of the leadership's pro-capitalist programme – content to restrict their political participation to individual postal ballots, televised election rallies and the occasional barbecue with Tony Blair.

If the right-wingers believe that a Labour Party reorganised on these lines would be capable of presenting any effective political challenge to the Tories, they are deluding themselves. A passive membership might be handy for rubber-stamping right-wing policies, but it wouldn't be much use for fighting election campaigns. Not only would such a party fail to win voters from the Tories, who can always outbid Labour as the party of capitalist self-interest, but traditional Labour supporters in the working class would be driven away by the leadership's adoption of the Tories' anti-collectivist, anti-trade union philosophy. The right wing's proposals, in short, are a recipe for yet more political defeats.

The scenario envisaged by some ultra-left groupings, whereby the crisis in the Labour Party will automatically lead large sections of the working class to break from reformism to revolutionary politics, is equally illusory. The fact that the Labour right wing feels confident enough to launch an attack on the trade union link is closely connected to the historically low level of the class struggle in Britain today, and the consequent decline in workers' political consciousness.

In this situation, it is necessary to defend the existing gains of the working class, as a precondition for going onto the offensive against the bosses and their accomplices in the labour movement. The link between the Labour Party and the trade unions is one such gain, and it is the duty of revolutionary socialists to wage an uncompromising struggle against those who seek its dilution or destruction.

Prescott – for and against

An exchange of views on the Labour Party deputy leadership contest

Dear comrades,

Whilst I was in broad agreement with your analysis of Labour's recent general election defeat (Workers News No.38), I think that you are mistaken when you argue for socialists to totally abstain from the current leadership contest now that the Socialist Campaign Group has been barred by the undemocratic electoral procedure.

Abstaining from labour movement votes must always be a last resort for socialists, when there exists no alternative. This is true for the leadership position with the 'choice' of two right-wing no-marks, but I'm not convinced that this is also true for the deputy leadership position.

The main issue of the campaign has been the continued link between Labour and the unions. Gould has made it quite clear that he wants to sever that link and therefore transform the party into a new SDP. (Despite what many ultra-lefts say, until the link is broken the Labour Party remains a workers' party, despite its capitalist policies – as Lenin said, a 'bourgeois workers' party'.) Smith, like Kinnock before him, shares the sentiment, although for the moment he is sensibly keeping quiet.

Only John Prescott has campaigned for the retention of the union link. In that way (and only in that way – his politics are still on the right) Prescott actually represents the working class forces, such as they exist, within the labour movement against the Walworth Road functionaries and the middle class 'yuppie tendency' represented by all the other candidates.

Therefore I believe the correct tactic for the left is to critically support the political and trade union centre against the right, whilst at the same time fighting for genuine socialist politics. In concrete terms this means advocating a vote for Prescott.

Yours fraternally,
Jim Dye
Liverpool

The editor replies:

Workers News recognises that there has been a certain movement of support for John Prescott among trade unionists and party members during his campaign for the Labour Party deputy leadership. As comrade Dye points out, a central aspect of Prescott's appeal is that he is seen as an opponent of the anti-union views which have gained prominence on the Labour right. For this reason, his candidacy has been backed by *Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist Appeal* and even *Socialist Worker*.

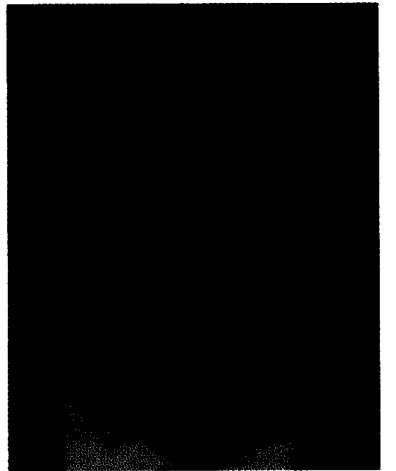
But it seems to us that Prescott's defence of the trade union link is equivocal to say the least. While he argues against 'destroying' the link, he does so on the basis that the unions' financial support is 'essential in a country bereft of state finance for political parties'. By this argument, it would presumably be acceptable for Labour to break its link with the unions if the state did provide funding for political parties.

Furthermore, Prescott declares himself a long-time advocate of one member one vote. In May, when the NEC accepted Kinnock's proposal that in future the party's parliamentary candidates should be selected on this basis, thereby eradicating the trade unions from the selection process, Prescott failed to oppose him.

Like Smith and Gould, Prescott recommends that every union should establish a Labour Party fund separate from its general political fund, as is proposed in the case of the COHSE-NALGO-NUPE merger. And he defends, 'on democratic grounds', the right of union members to refuse to contribute to the Labour fund. Here again, Prescott seeks to substitute individualism for collectivism, to replace the methods of workers' democracy with those of bourgeois democracy.

Not surprisingly, Prescott has refused to make any explicit criticisms of the Labour right wing, over the issue of the trade union link or anything else. On the contrary, he has emphasised that he would be able to work harmoniously with John Smith as the latter's deputy. His main line of argument has been that the deputy leader should concentrate on party organisation, while the leader is left to get on with the politics.

Prescott's appeal, in our estimation, is more on the level of personal style than of political content. His pugnacious approach, which obviously owes much to his earlier experiences as a rank-and-file member of the National Union of Seamen, contrasts forcefully with the slick presentation of the Walworth Road 'yuppie tendency'. Nor is he averse to proclaiming that he is



John Prescott

'proud to be a trade unionist' (which, of course, commits him to absolutely nothing – least of all to supporting industrial struggles). In the absence of any candidate of the left, it is understandable that many trade unionists and party members should rally to Prescott – if only on a barrel-scraping basis.

We would certainly not condemn those who voted for Prescott against Beckett and Gould. Indeed, we did consider the case, cogently argued by comrade Dye, for critically supporting Prescott's candidacy. But, given his total failure to take any real stand against the right wing, we believe we were correct not to advocate a vote for Prescott. While in general we are against abstaining on votes in the labour movement, in this instance we think that calling for abstention or the spoiling of ballot papers was the best course of action for revolutionary socialists.

Trade unions and the political levy

A reply to Workers Press

THE JUNE 6 issue of *Workers Press*, weekly paper of the Workers Revolutionary Party, carries an article by Charlie Pottins ('Consistent crawlers') making yet another attack on the Workers International League. It features the usual catalogue of slanders against us. Pottins claims that WIL member Richard Price 'helped put one of our comrades in jail' (a lie), that we are guilty of 'crawling before reactionary leaders' (which leaders, and when?), and that we condemn former WRP leader Gerry Healy 'only for "sectarianism" towards Labour' (does Pottins actually read our paper?).

If we were to answer every such attack on us by the WRP, it would take up about half of each issue of our paper! Pottins' article deserves a response, however, because it deals with an important question: the trade unions' link with the Labour Party. He takes issue with our statement, in the May-June issue of *Workers News*, that the WRP's line is that 'trade unionists should refuse to pay the political levy to the Labour Party because of its anti-working class policies'. According

to Pottins, this amounts to the false accusation against the WRP that it advocates individual non-payment of the political levy.

In fact we did no more than summarise the WRP's own statement of its position in *Workers Press*. A front-page article in the paper's October 26, 1991, issue, for example, condemned the Labour Party leaders' plan to retain the Tory anti-union laws if Labour won the general election. 'Trades unionists are going to have to fight against such a government,' it argued. 'Why should they continue to finance such a party?'

We did not suppose that the WRP was advocating individual non-payment of the political levy (although some of its supporters appear far from clear on this point). The WRP's position, as we understand it, is the same as that upheld by the extreme sectarians of the Revolutionary Communist Party –

that union members should support the formation of a general political fund, but should oppose the political levy being used to support Labour. If the WRP now believes that the unions *should* finance the Labour Party, at least until the time when Labour breaks its institutional links with the unions, it should say so openly and explain why. The fact that *Workers Press* doesn't do this suggests to us that our summary of the WRP's position is correct.

It is true that the passage from *Where Is Britain Going?* cited against the WRP in the May-June issue of *Workers News*, in which Trotsky characterises a refusal by trade unionists to give financial support to the Labour Party as political strike-breaking, is directed at individual non-payment. But this doesn't affect the point we were making. Trotsky's argument is that in refusing to fund the political activities of the Labour Party, trade unionists are assisting the political activities of the bosses' parties. And this is precisely what the WRP proposes workers should do – the only difference is that the political strike-breaking it advocates is collective rather than individual.

An editorial in the June 13 issue of *Workers Press*, which continues Pottins' polemic against us, makes the strange assertion that the WIL 'cannot envisage a situation where the trade union movement might have a political levy which is not used to finance the activities of the Labour Party'. It seems to have

escaped the comrades' attention that this exists today in NALGO, which has a political fund but is not affiliated to Labour. 'Revolutionaries' who supported such a situation, and refused to fight for their union's affiliation to Labour, would find themselves in a bloc with Tories and Liberal Democrats. But this would be nothing new for the WRP. When the NALGO leadership used the union's political fund to place pro-Labour advertisements in the press during the general election campaign, *Workers Press* joined with supporters of bourgeois parties in attacking this!

The WRP's ultra-leftism puts it in a similarly compromising position with regard to attempts by the Labour right, and a section of the trade union bureaucracy, to weaken Labour's link with the unions. The duty of revolutionaries, it should be obvious, is to resist these attempts. But the WRP's line of calling for the trade unions to break – or to 'consider' breaking – from the Labour Party completely disarms it in the face of this assault on the Labour-union link. The Labour right wing pushes the trade unions away from the party, while the WRP stands on the other side pulling. If anyone is to be accused of assisting reactionary leaders, it's not us but the *Workers Press* group.

The WRP tries to wriggle out of this problem by implying that the unions should break with Labour to form a revolutionary party. But such a proposal is meaningless as an *immediate agitational demand*, given the existing level of political consciousness in the working class.

It represents an evasion of the real struggles that are presently under way in the unions and the Labour Party. Furthermore, given that the WRP regards itself as the only revolutionary tendency in the workers' movement, it presumably amounts to a proposal that the unions should affiliate to the WRP itself!

The reality is that the WRP consists in large part of paper members, who can pontificate in the pages of *Workers Press* about the crisis in the Labour Party providing a great opportunity to win workers to Marxism, but who do little or no work in the labour movement. In fact the WRP has difficulty mobilising more than a handful of its supporters on any major national demonstration. It would be interesting to see this 'party' wage a campaign to win the affiliation of the trade union movement. Perhaps the WRP's 'leading trade unionist' Peter Gibson could raise this at the next meeting of the TGWU national committee. It would at least give his fellow committee members the opportunity to have a good laugh.

As for Charlie Pottins, we suggest that he devote his next column to arguing against attempts, from the right or the 'left', to break the link between Labour and the trade unions. In a further article, he might usefully examine Trotsky's position on relations between revolutionaries and the Labour Party – something about which the WRP membership is completely ignorant, judging by their uniformly stupid contributions to the 'post-election debate' in *Workers Press*. For Pottins to address serious issues like these would certainly make a welcome change from the puerile sub-Healyite sniping at rival left groups which usually fills his column.

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Third anniversary of the Beijing massacre

CALL FOR TRADE UNION ACTION TO DEFEND VICTIMISED WORKERS



Liu Weiping, chair of the Workers' Autonomous Federation of China, at the May 31 rally in London

BROTHERS and sisters, on the third anniversary of the May-June events in Beijing, we salute the heroic struggle and sacrifice of the Chinese working class. For a brief period the workers of China gained a breathing space and began to organise themselves independently of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. We supported their demands then – for the exposure of corruption in the Chinese Communist Party and the right to organise independently through the Workers' Auton-

On May 31, there was a rally in London to commemorate the third anniversary of the founding of independent workers' organisations in China and the massacre in Tiananmen Square. WIL member **Ian Harrison** gave the following speech in his capacity as secretary of Bloomsbury Health Branch of NALGO

omous Federations – we continue to support them now.

We condemn with contempt the lying propaganda of the Li Peng regime which claimed that workers and students were responsible for

promoting 'counter-revolutionary turmoil' in China. The Chinese CP leaders have stolen, one after another, the fruits of the revolution. They have brutally suppressed workers, poor farm labourers and minority peoples whose only crime was to call for their rights under the constitution. The Li Peng regime stands before history dripping from hand to foot with the blood of innocent people. We demand an end to the continuing persecution of workers and the intellectuals of the Democracy Wall Movement, imprisoned since 1979.

We cannot ignore the role of the British government, which continues to suppress workers in Hong Kong and passes racist immigration laws preventing Chinese workers from joining their families in Britain. We condemn the recent agreement between the British and Vietnamese governments for the forced repatriation of thousands of refugees from Vietnam, incarcerated behind barbed wire in Hong Kong. We warn that the British government will establish more reactionary agreements with the Chinese and Vietnamese CP leaders at the expense of workers in Asia.

The British and United States governments are not the friends of Chinese workers. They seek to enslave you for imperialism. When they speak of democracy and human rights, it is the democracy of the exploiting class eager to plunder China's trade and natural resources. The only ally Chinese workers and refugees can rely on is the international working class fighting to end wage slavery and exploitation.

We cannot leave the fate of our brothers and sisters to the leaders of our trade unions. These leaders refuse to fight anti-trade union laws, unemployment, homelessness and racism. They discriminate against workers in our ranks who come from overseas. The response of these leaders to the plight of Chinese workers is pitiful. They refuse to mount an international campaign to fight for the release of imprisoned workers and the legalisation of workers' organisations. We demand that they break off all relations with the All China Federation of Trade Unions, the tool of the butcher Li Peng's regime. We demand their support for the Workers' Autonomous Federations now!

In the best traditions of trade union internationalism and solidarity, we call on our brothers and sisters in Europe, Africa, Australia and America to establish committees for the defence of Chinese workers, based on the rank and file of the trade unions. Such committees should campaign for political, moral and financial support for Chinese workers. This is the way forward to truly commemorate their sacrifice in June 1989. The committees should also campaign for equal status for Chinese workers overseas and an end to the racist immigration legislation which divides us.

Organise demonstrations now outside the Chinese embassies to demand the release of imprisoned workers and legal recognition by the Chinese government of the Workers' Autonomous Federations. We must be ready to support the workers of China in their struggle against the Deng Xiaoping-Li Peng regime. Victory to the Chinese workers!

■ Anyone who wishes to assist in the formation of a standing committee for the defence of Chinese workers should write to: Bloomsbury Health Branch NALGO, 4 Greenland Road, London NW10AS.



Camden social workers marched through the London borough on May 23, after one year on strike

NALGO leaders consign 24 strikers to the dole

THE YEAR-LONG strike of Camden social workers ended just before NALGO's June conference. Although the strike had been in defence of a national agreement, and although the employers' objective has long been to destroy national negotiations, the NEC had done nothing to build support either nationally or in London, even after Camden sacked the 133 remaining strikers in March.

There is in NALGO a Broad Left, dominated by the SWP. A leading 'left' on the NEC, until his defeat in this year's election, was Militant supporter Roger Bannister. What did Bannister and the Broad Left/SWP do to fight this betrayal?

Bannister never raised his voice against the NEC's failure to campaign, even voting to send the strikers back to work in an 'agreement' which amounted to unconditional surrender and resulted in the sacking of 24 strikers. In January, Bannister had also joined the majority of the NEC in defeating a Metropolitan District motion of censure on NALGO president Mike Blick for crossing unofficial Camden picket lines. Bannister, in tones more of sorrow than of anger, referred to the right-winger Blick as 'a man of principle – but he has not got a monopoly on principle'.

The Broad Left/SWP did not campaign for solidarity action, did little to expose the treachery of the NEC, and maintained a polite silence about Bannister. The SWP's role, as always, was to tail-end the struggle and duck the fight against

By Colin Harrison

the bureaucracy, especially bureaucrats with 'left' credentials like Bannister.

Their tail-endism exercised its pernicious influence even in the death throes of the strike. At NALGO's conference, the strikers appealed for support from delegations to censure the NEC, and instruct it to resume the boycott of Camden posts and the campaign for reinstatement. Unfortunately, the strikers were also insistent that all the sacked Camden workers, including three who returned to work in the eleventh month of the strike, should be financially supported by NALGO.

A number of branches which would have moved a motion in support of the strikers against the NEC (and in opposition to the strikers' own branch, whose leadership endorsed the sell-out) would not condone financial support to the three strike-breakers.

The SWP had a number of delegates at conference and several members among the Camden strikers and delegation. Instead of trying to convince the strikers that they were incorrect in asking for strike pay for strike-breakers, the SWP openly supported this position, which effectively scuppered support for the censure motion.

The class compromise politics of Bannister and a number of Stalinists – including Beavis, Geldart and Eades – made it impossible for them

to fight off the challenge of the right wing in this year's NEC elections. The problem of revolutionary leadership, of the construction of a revolutionary party, remains. Only the undertaking of that task can lay the political foundations for a genuine rank-and-file movement capable of asserting democratic control over the union and driving out the parasitic bureaucracy.

Ian Harrison adds: The back-to-work agreement was drafted by NALGO's District Officer Andrew Jack, the chair of SERTUC and a Labour Party member, with the approval of Labour-controlled Camden council. The strikers were forced to accept the agreement, or risk having NALGO's support for their action withdrawn. The agreement included a clause stating that Camden council had not victimised the strikers, yet when it was drafted it was already known that 24 of the strikers would not have jobs to go back to. Fourteen of those who subsequently lost their jobs were black NALGO members.

Since the beginning of the strike, Camden council had resorted to advertising the strikers' posts, filling them with agency staff. NALGO responded with a national boycott of the posts. The terms of the back-to-work agreement also included a pledge from NALGO to lift the boycott, which it did. The message from NALGO's full-time officers to Labour-controlled councils carrying out the Tories' cuts is clear: you can victimise and sack our members with impunity.

Gaddafi turns informer

THE TRANSFORMATION of Colonel Gaddafi of Libya from the favourite hate figure of western governments into an international 'supergrass' introduces a new dimension to the meaning of treachery.

When, in the middle of June, Libyan diplomats gave British intelligence lists of IRA contacts and details of shipments of weapons to Ireland, they did so as part of Gaddafi's plan to cling to power by selling himself to those whom he had always claimed to despise.

It was the latest instalment of Gaddafi's entry fee to the not-so-exclusive club of Arab leaders who have prostrated themselves in front of the imperialists. British officials, who described the information as 'in places incomplete and unsatisfactory', clearly expect considerably more.

For his part, Gaddafi is equally clearly preparing to turn his back on every other aspect of his 'anti-imperialist' past. More than that, he is also in the process of dumping one of the central tenets of his time in power: the principle of Arab unity. The newspaper *Al-Jamahiriyah* has recently carried numerous articles denouncing attempts at Arab unity, which were almost certainly penned by Gaddafi himself.

These betrayals are, more than anything else, a result of the enormous pressure exerted by the west-

ern powers on the Arab nations, indirectly through Israel and directly through, most recently, the Gulf war. Gaddafi's isolation has increased the more that other Arab leaders have seen it as in their interests to fall in with imperialism and treat him as a 'pariah'. And since Gaddafi's idea of 'Arab unity' is not, of course, the unity of the Arab working masses against both imperialism and their own leaders, but is based on reaching an agreement between the various Arab ruling classes, the project has failed. On the principle of 'if you can't beat them, join them', Gaddafi has now decided to follow the example of most other Arab regimes and make his peace with imperialism.

His method of proving his credentials is particularly obnoxious – grasping up a national liberation movement which, until recently, he claimed to be fighting alongside in the same trench. Such an act must command the disgust and contempt of socialists and liberation fighters the world over.

But, as with all informers, Gaddafi must now be living on borrowed time. Western governments, and that of the United States in particular, are unlikely to change their view of him. At the same time, those within Libya who oppose Gaddafi may well be tempted to try and oust him.

Argentinian MAS splits on May Day

MAY DAY in Argentina saw a public split in the world's largest party claiming the name of Trotskyism. The Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), founded by the late Nahuel Moreno, has lost perhaps as much as 40 per cent of its membership – including its two most prominent leaders, Luis Zamora, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, and Silvia Diaz, a deputy in the provincial assembly of Buenos Aires. Half of the central committee elected before Moreno's death in 1987 has left. The MAS leadership has tried to shrug off the departure of Zamora's Morenist Tendency (MT), claiming it is 'only a small group'. In reality, the MAS and the LIT, the international tendency which it dominates, have suffered a body blow.

The split follows two years of internal struggle, during which time the majority Bolshevik Tendency (BT), led by Nora Ciappone, did everything to preserve a facade of unity. Although Zamora's MT rep-

resents a split to the right, the majority's claims to have fought a consistent struggle against electoralism, reformism and Stalinism do not bear examination. The majority's belated 'leftist' rhetoric cannot hide the fact that the MAS and the LIT spiralled rightwards during the 1980s, and that the line pursued by Zamora is merely the outcome of a long-standing policy.

The decision of Zamora and Diaz's supporters to participate in the May 1 rally organised in Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo by the Communist Party, the Partido Obrero and sections of the railway workers precipitated the split. They did so in defiance of the decision of the MAS to hold a rival rally in Plaza Once, under the slogan 'For a May Day of the workers, socialists and internationalists'.

Zamora justified his faction's participation in the Plaza de Mayo event by arguing that 'On the first of May we have to side with the work-

By Richard Price
and Yara Oliveira

ers who confront the government because they are the practical example of the new trade union leadership which we support in order to carry out the building of the political leadership that we need' – a reference to the railway workers who had recently ended a 37-day strike.

At the same time, however, Zamora argued that this 'does not mean that there is a split in the very heart of the party'. For its part, the majority was clear that it did! 'The leaders who call for the Plaza de Mayo rally,' Nora Ciappone warned, 'leave the party because they support the Communist Party.'

A perfunctory statement in the MAS paper *Solidaridad Socialista* (April 27) prior to

May Day argued: 'The split by this section of our party represents the departure of those who prefer electoral campaigns to the hard organisation and struggle of the workers' movement, and the pact with the CP – yesterday the representative of Stalinism, today the representative of Castroism – to the struggle against the capitulatory bureaucracies of the workers' states.'

The majority also accused Zamora of 'playing Menem's game' and of supporting the candidacy for the senate of the film director Pino Solanas, a petty-bourgeois nationalist backed by the Communist Party.

But this routine heaping of all blame on the shoulders of Zamora by the 'centre' represented by the BT does little or nothing to explain the roots of the crisis in the MAS. It is yet another manoeuvre by the leadership to cover its back and forestall a critical examination of its own record. However justified the criticisms of Zamora, they do not

alter the fact that the BT leaders defended a similar orientation for years.

Between 1985 and 1987, the MAS and the CP took part in the 'Front of the People', an electoral bloc which subsequently drew support from several small petty-bourgeois groupings. In 1988, this populist policy deepened with the founding of the 'United Left', which went on to nominate the bourgeois radical Nestor Vicente for the presidency. Prior to this, the present leaderships of both the BT and the MT were united against left critics within the MAS who went on to found the Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS).

The years which followed took their toll on the MAS cadre. Despite the size and apparent influence of the party, its perspectives repeatedly proved false, and as Stalinism crumbled in eastern Europe, it advanced a bourgeois-democratic programme, giving 'unconditional support' to German unification. In the elections which swept the Peronist Carlos Menem to power in May 1989, Zamora gained a parliamentary seat on the United Left ticket. But the alliance with the Stalinists was a double-edged sword. Far from winning the CP's rank and file, it gave the Stalinists a new lease of life.

At the same time, confident predictions that 'the fragile glass of Peronism has shattered' were confounded by a series of defeats. Menem inflicted on the working class which assisted a partial stabilisation of the economy. Not surprisingly, endless announcements that a revolutionary situation lay just around the corner began to pall, giving way to two trends – the MT, which drew the conclusion from the decline in the MAS's vote when it stood alone in local elections that a deeper, more reformist, turn resuming the alliance with the CP was required; and the majority BT, which blamed the receding fortunes on having prolonged the United Left bloc. Matters came to a head when the BT gained control of the party at the fifth congress of the MAS last year.

In the event, neither faction has anything to congratulate itself about. Despite dire predictions, Zamora did in fact criticise Fidel Castro at the Plaza de Mayo – only to be cut short by a hail of stones and bottles from a section of the Stalinists. His supporters numbered slightly less than a quarter of the 9,000-strong rally. The MAS drew substantially less than 9,000 to its event in Plaza Once.

The split in Argentina is also bound to have repercussions in the LIT, already suffering from deep internal divisions. It is characteristic of both trends that they have chosen an abrupt split over a conjunctural question. It is also characteristic of Morenism that both can find support in Nahuel Moreno's ambiguous legacy of centrist zig-zags. For honest militants in the rank and file of the MAS to navigate their way out of this minefield requires a thorough-going revolutionary reorientation, including a critical re-examination of the past of Morenism.



MAS demonstration



Luis Zamora

Germany: class struggle policy needed

THIS YEAR Chancellor Helmut Kohl, backed by the entire German capitalist class, set out to teach workers a lesson. Public sector workers were singled out as an example to others, and offered only a token wage rise. The result was an 11-day strike in the western part of the country that brought much of public transport and refuse collection to a halt, and disrupted air traffic and postal services.

Not only was the morale of the strikers unexpectedly high, but they gained widespread public support in spite of an intensive media campaign against them. The confidence of the ruling class was shaken and it was forced to bring forward a compromise wage deal – a compromise which, psychologically at least, meant a defeat.

But if the government and the public-sector employers were obliged to retreat, the result was hardly a victory for the working class which was forced to accept settlements that mean a further decline in living standards. The strikers, after being condemned to 18 years of passivity by the union bureaucracies, gained a feeling of their own strength and were able to resist the ruling class offensive. They succeeded in re-establishing their own fighting capacity but they were halted abruptly, not by the ruling class but by their own leadership. Having demanded 9.5 per cent, the union bureaucrats accepted 5.4 per cent.

This treachery got the reaction it

The first mass strikes for years shook western Germany during April and May. Hans Sabetzki assesses the outcome

deserved. In all the public-sector unions, a majority of the workforce rejected the rotten compromise. The DAG leadership faced the most widespread opposition, gaining the support of only 39 per cent of members. Railway workers voted by 51 per cent to reject the sell-out. But it was Monika Wülf-Mathies, the leader of the ÖTV union (organising public service and transport workers), who created the biggest scandal by bending the union rule book to get the deal pushed through.

The gulf which had opened up between the union leaderships and the rank and file did not remain an object of media interest for long. Monika Wülf-Mathies' loss of face was reported in order to divert attention away from the government's set-back, but the media sensed that it had to drop the coverage so as not to stimulate the development of a radical alternative to the existing leaderships.

IG Metall, the metalworkers' union, which has for years been the flagship of the German union movement, did everything possible to calm down the situation. Alarmed by the fighting spirit of its members expressed in numerous token strikes, and having been defeated in previous strike ballots, the lead-

ership signed a two-year wage agreement – 5.8 per cent for 1992 and 3.0 per cent (less than the employers were prepared to concede) for 1993.

The failure of the government and the political establishment (including the SPD and the Bavarian CSU) to accurately gauge the situation is understandable. For years the union movement had renounced all fighting struggles against redundancies and mass unemployment. Every effort to shorten the working week was paid for by losses in pay and the intensification of work. Long-term binding contracts turned the unions into social insurance institutions with a paralysed rank and file. The collapse of the workers' states of eastern Europe encouraged the social democratic leaderships to abandon even a modest reform perspective, and commit themselves more than ever to the market economy and 'social partnership'. Their failure to mount any serious fight against the effects of capitalist restoration in the ex-GDR, the evident disorientation of the eastern German working class and the generalised drift to the right all served to encourage the offensive. Now, the ruling class hoped, the burdens of German reunification could be shifted onto the west-

ern working class.

The bureaucrats' policy of defending the status quo gave way, step by step, to the acceptance of cuts in wages and conditions as the 'lesser evil' in western Germany. In the east they have covered up for de-industrialisation, sabotaging all attempts to fight back, while busying themselves making capitalist restoration more 'socially acceptable'.

Workers will only be able to resist the policy of the ruling class if they free themselves from their own illusions in 'social partnership'. Central to this perspective is the fight for an alternative, class struggle policy in the unions. This must begin with the revival of rank-and-file activity and lead to the re-conquest of the unions by their members, and their transformation into 'schools for socialism'.

A first step in this direction would be the convening of a national shop stewards' conference. A conference of stewards from the ex-GDR took place in late June, but was boycotted by the union leaderships. This initiative suffered from the limitations of its organisers, who still follow a 'social capitalist' line. Nevertheless, such efforts must be supported by the dispersed elements of the German left who retain a class struggle perspective, in order to deepen the movement of discontented rank-and-file workers. This in turn poses the regroupment of genuinely revolutionary forces into a revolutionary party.

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Critical Comments on the
Policies of the LIT

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The war in the Gulf highlighted the struggle of the peoples of Kurdistan for an independent homeland. Workers News recently spoke to a leading member of a revolutionary workers' organisation based in Dersim, eastern Turkey. He outlined the current situation, stressing the need for the working class to play the central role in the resolution of the national question

When was the Kurdish Communist Movement established?

The KCM was established in 1989, but it was not declared until January 1990. We recently established another section for the Kirmanc and Zaza peoples known as the Communist Movement of Dersim.

What influence do the KCM and CMD have among workers in eastern Turkey?

We have some influence among workers, mainly in the trade unions. Our base is in Dersim, which is a mountainous region between the tributaries of the Euphrates River. We also have contacts in Iraq and Iran which we are developing.

Our movement emerged from a tendency called Tekoşin, which means 'The Struggle'. Tekoşin was formed in 1978 in eastern Turkey. It declared a guerrilla war against the Turkish state soon after the military coup in September 1980. For three years Tekoşin was the only organisation to conduct guerrilla warfare against the state. Then there was a special time in Turkey with talk of democracy and a period of transition. The government called it a 'period of civilisation' and some censorship was lifted. The press and media reported the guerrilla activities of the PKK [Kurdish Workers' Party], which only began in 1984. Because of the censorship prior to 1984, the only place you can find reports of Tekoşin's guerrilla activities in Kurdistan is in the Turkish army's own press.

In 1984, while the PKK launched its guerrilla activities, Tekoşin went through a period of serious internal discussion. We analysed the experiences we had made, and the reasons for the defeat of the left in general. Tekoşin was influenced by Stalinism, populism and Kurdish nationalism. Our policies then were centrist and nationalist. Among other leading members of Tekoşin, I said we should fight against these influences and break from them.

A minority of comrades wanted to defend the old line and so we split from them. We continue to refer to the name Tekoşin, however, because we want to make clear that we come from that tradition of struggle against the state. The leaders of Tekoşin founded the KCM after serious self-criticism of our past. We inherited many supporters and much influence from the struggle of Tekoşin.

There are particular problems which affect the development of our influence among workers. The situation in the east of Turkey is very difficult for communist work. Unlike the west of Turkey, martial law is still in force. Apart from Kurds, there are other oppressed peoples such as the Kirmanc, Zaza and Alevi. There are also Armenians dispersed in the region, many of whom have taken on a non-Christian identity in order to escape persecution. We produce regular publications in the Kurdish, Kirmanci and Zaza languages to fight for our programme. Our members in Turkey and in exile face two fires – not just the state, but Kurdish nationalists who threaten our lives. The nationalists live in fear of the development of a workers' movement in Kurdistan. Until 1986, intellectuals and Kurdish leaders consistently denied the existence of a workers' movement in the east of Turkey. As part of the KCM's work, I documented the history of workers' struggles and published my find-

The workers' movement in Kurdistan

Interview with Seyfi Cengiz of the Kurdish Communist Movement



Young supporters of the fight for an independent Kurdistan in a village in eastern Turkey.

ings in a book – *Workers' Movements in Turkish Kurdistan*. Now it is not possible to continue denying the existence of a working class struggling for its emancipation. The book is being translated into English, on which occasion the title will change to include recognition of the workers' struggles in Kirmanciye.

The KCM and CMD will not grow rapidly under these conditions of extreme repression. But we do recruit, and we are extending our influence steadily.

What is the KCM's attitude to the PKK and how would you characterise this organisation?

According to us, the PKK is a nationalist movement. The PKK's programme, strategy and principles are the same as the other Kurdish nationalist groups. The only difference is that the PKK has carried out an armed struggle against the Turkish state and for a period it demanded independence for Kurdistan. The other nationalist groups called for autonomy or the establishment of a federation in Turkey. Today, the PKK would accept autonomy or some sort of federation. In practice it is now no different from other nationalist groups, whatever its members may say or write.

The PKK's claim to be revolutionary was put to the test by the uprising in Iraq against Saddam Hussein in 1991. Hussein allowed the PKK to cross the border from Syria into Iraq. Its members were seen liaising with the Muhabarrat – Hussein's secret police. Hussein used the PKK. Faced with the uprising, the PKK did not join it – although it had hundreds of guerrillas in the region – proving conclusively that it is a tool of the bourgeoisie, not a revolutionary organisation.

The PKK repeatedly declares its preparedness to hold negotiations with the Ozal government on condition that the Turkish state recognises it as the sole legitimate representative of the Kurdish people. If and when the state agrees to this, I believe the PKK would not insist on an independent Kurdistan. While he was in the Bekaa Valley under the protection of the Syrian govern-

ment, the leader of the PKK said to Turkish journalists that the Turks and Kurds must live together for at least another 40 years. These journalists were in fact acting as diplomatic go-betweens for the Turkish government.

The PKK always had a reformist tendency, although it carried out a radical struggle. If it was recognised by the state, it would be a reformist organisation. On many points, the PKK is anti-democratic. It does not recognise the existence and the rights of other nations, such as the Kirmanc and Zaza, living in the area known to the outside world as Kurdistan. Like other Kurdish nationalist circles, the PKK claims that there is no nation in Kurdistan other than the Kurds. But there are many minorities, some of them Christian, and there is also the Alevi question – they too are suppressed by the state. The PKK, in common with many other Kurdish nationalists, is not secular. It is Sunni fundamentalist. We heard recently that the PKK has opened mosques in Holland and Paris to use for its propaganda.

The KCM supported the PKK's fight for independence as a legitimate fight. We still support it against the Turkish state, but at the same time we have criticised its nationalist programme and strategy. No other group on the left in Turkey has exposed the PKK's politics. The criticism carried in our papers led to attacks on our members from the PKK. It tries to stop our papers circulating. But we will not cease our criticism – we must do our job whatever the cost. We do not criticise the PKK's armed struggle, but sometimes it uses methods such as the destruction of whole villages and the indiscriminate killing of civilians. These have provoked chauvinistic feelings in Turkey, and led to fights between Turkish and Kurdish workers. Such methods of struggle are wrong and we condemn them.

What was the strength of the Stalinist in the Kurdish workers' movement before the collapse of the bureaucracies in Eastern Europe?

The left in Turkey is mainly Stalin-

ist. The exceptions are the KCM, the Socialist Workers – sister group of the SWP in Britain – and some small groups which split from Stalinism. There are also a few small groups which refer to themselves as Trotskyist.

The majority of the left could be characterised as centrist and populist. Their base is not the working class, but the petty-bourgeoisie, the students and a number of small trade unions for professional people. They had no influence in the workers' movement in Turkey or Kurdistan. The larger of these groups did attract individual workers who sought a route for struggle through them. But they did not recruit workers through struggle in the mass organisations of the working class. They did not even place the emphasis of their work on the working class and its role in society. Only the Turkish Communist Party and the Turkish Workers' Party had any influence in the main trade unions in Turkey and Kurdistan. They were both pro-Moscow Stalinist parties which later merged and, not long after, dissolved.

Have the collapses in Eastern Europe made any impact on leftist groups in Kurdistan?

Yes, of course. Now the Stalinist groups cannot easily and openly defend Stalinism. Before, they were fanatical if you criticised Enver Hoxa or Mao. You could not have serious discussions with them. Now it's different – you can discuss the history of Maoism etc. Within many groups there are now signs of critical struggle against Stalinism and Stalinist methods of work, with splits developing.

Is it possible to take advantage of this situation and have a freer discussion in the trade unions and workers' organisations?

The situation in Turkey and Kurdistan is not quite the same as in other countries, because the left mainly works outside the trade unions and workers' movement. Although the left groups talk about the working class, the majority do not carry out a practice consistent with socialist principles by fighting in the workers' mass organisations. When it comes to practice they are not revolutionaries.

What is the KCM's attitude to the Armenian question?

There are some Armenians in Anatolia. They are dispersed, not concentrated in one area. Some have become assimilated with the Kirmanc, Zaza and Kurds. They have converted to Islam, mostly to the Alevi sect, and speak Kirmanci, Zaza or Kurdish. Kirmanciye, the country of the Kirmanc people, is situated in the heart of what used to be known as Armenia. Some still remember their historic roots, but there is no longer an Armenian nation in Turkey – it has been dispersed by massacre.

The massacre of Armenians,

which began in 1890 under the Ottomans, was a process which continued into the 1920s. During that period, and particularly around 1915-16, many Armenians fled to Kirmanciye and made alliances with the Kirmanc and Zaza people who protected them. Their struggle is linked to the struggle of the Kirmanc and Zaza against the Turkish state.

In the KCM and CMD manifestos we demand the right for the Armenians to return to their historic land. There is another point here, though. Watching developments recently between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it seems to me as if there is some sort of secret agreement between the Turkish and Armenian governments that Armenia will, de facto, have Nagorno Karabakh and Turkey will take control of Nakhichevan. This would give the Turkish government an important bridgehead into central Asian republics populated by Turkish speaking-peoples.

What impact have recent developments in the old Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had on the Turkish bourgeoisie?

There is a section of the bourgeoisie, including the fascists, which has long sought to unite Turkish-speaking peoples in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and the central Asian republics into one federation. The bourgeoisie seems to believe that a favourable situation has been created by the collapses in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the defeat of Iraq, for its aim to be realised. There is a strong rivalry developing between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan for control of the central Asian republics. The fascists, and politicians such as Bulent Ecevit, exploit the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan as an excuse to demand the sending of the military into the region.

At present, the government of Suleyman Demirel tries to realise the aims of a Turkish federation by diplomatic means. It seeks the support of US imperialism and develops foreign and economic policies in line with establishing Turkey as a superpower in the region. For the moment, it warns against military intervention in the Armenian-Azeri dispute, pointing to the fate of Iraq.

What prospect is there for linking up with the struggles of workers in the regions of Kurdistan occupied by Iraq, Iran, Syria and the former Soviet Union?

In the former Soviet Union the Kurds are a dispersed minority, but there is not a Kurdish territory. We support the demands of the Kurds in the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan for democratic rights.

In Iraq, Iran and Syria there is a Kurdish working class, but we do not know of a developed workers' movement in these territories – we only have contacts with individual socialists there. The highest development of class consciousness among workers in Kurdistan at the moment exists in Turkey, where we have our base. The workers' movement in Dersim and Kurdistan has a long history which I documented in my book in 1986. We fight for an alliance among Kurdish workers across the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, but saying this does not mean that we fight for an alliance among workers only within that limit. We must fight to link up the struggles with workers throughout the world and the Middle East as a whole. We put forward our programme as the basis for uniting all Kurdish workers. We fight for a single working class party for the whole of Kurdistan which must have a transitional programme to bring together democratic and revolutionary demands. We defend the idea of permanent revolution, by which we understand that the working class can lead the national democratic liberation struggle. Socialists must work for this among Kurdish workers to win them away from the nationalist leaders. This is the only road for revolution.

EDITORIAL

Hands off the Balkans!

AFTER three months of civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the US and European governments are losing patience. Their project for the restoration of capitalism in the republics of Yugoslavia, and the subjugation of the Balkans to imperialism, is being delayed by the ambitions of the Serbian leaders to dominate the region themselves.

The imperialists are not motivated by a concern for 'human rights'. The United Nations airlift of aid to the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, though it masquerades as sympathy for the 300,000 people trapped under the Serbian guns, is primarily an attempt to create the conditions for a cease-fire along the lines of the one supervised in Croatia in January.

The timing of the intervention is significant. The reactionary Serb policy of 'ethnic cleansing' has seen tens of thousands of Muslims driven out of their towns and villages in eastern Bosnia. Serbian paramilitaries, supported by the former federal army, now control two-thirds of Bosnia's territory. Croatian forces, meanwhile, are consolidating their grip on much of the western part of the republic.

The cynical assessment of the imperialist leaders is that Serbia is probably ready to sue for peace, since it has now seized most of the territory it covets. Furthermore, economic sanctions are having a devastating impact on Serbia - already suffering from the decades of Stalinist mismanagement which made Yugoslavia, of all the deformed workers' state, the most indebted to the western banks and the IMF. Price rises exceeded 100 per cent in June, and some estimates put annual inflation as high as 100,000 per cent - another compelling reason for the Serbians to come to the conference table.

Enter Lord Carrington, acting on behalf of the European Community, with the suggestion that Bosnia should become a federation of three ethnically distinct areas, and that there should be no further population shifts - thus giving the EC seal of approval to 'ethnic cleansing' as the only way to achieve the necessary stability in the Balkans for future capitalist exploitation. The implications of this were grasped by both sides in Bosnia - the Muslim leaders rejected it outright since it would substantially reduce their former territory, while Serbian irregulars in Sarajevo stepped up their campaign, launching an ethnic purge of the mixed suburb of Grbavica. At the same time, in order to exert more pressure on the Serbians, elements of the US Sixth Fleet moved into the Adriatic and Washington announced that it was ready to deploy warplanes in a combat role to support the UN relief effort.

What should be clear from all this is that the Muslim and Croat populations of Bosnia cannot rely on the UN to provide a solution which genuinely takes their needs into account. The call for western military intervention, though understandable from those subject to murderous artillery and sniper fire, is profoundly mistaken. While Workers News defends the right of Bosnian Muslims and Croats to militarily resist the Serbian onslaught, and is neutral on the UN relief operation insofar as it confines itself to providing food and medical aid, we are opposed to the UN sanctions and would support Serbia in the event of it coming under attack or invasion by imperialist forces. Should the west use military power against the Serbians, it will be to impose its own policies on the entire Balkan region - to the detriment of all its peoples.

If workers cannot look to the west for their salvation, neither can they place the slightest confidence in their own nationalist leaderships. The Croat and Muslim leaders refuse to recognise the rights of the Serbian minorities in the regions they control, a policy which, during the civil war in Croatia, drove Serbs in Krajina and Slavonia to opt for secession. As for the Serbian leaders, they are not fighting to defend what remains of the deformed workers' state, but are seeking the largest possible area in which to conduct their own experiment in building a 'market economy'.

Workers in Bosnia - Muslim, Serb and Croat - must unite in opposition to Belgrade's expansionist aims, to the fragmentation of the republic into ethnic 'cantons' and to imperialist intervention. They must campaign for a return to pre-civil war borders in all the former Yugoslav republics, combined with the establishment of autonomous regions and full rights for all minorities.

No more negotiations!

IN SOUTH AFRICA, the reactionary plans of the bourgeoisie and the reformist hopes of the ANC leadership have been placed in jeopardy by COSATU's call for an indefinite general strike scheduled to start on August 3.

Now, more than ever, the De Klerk regime will be straining to keep the initiative, by trying to ensure that the masses remain in check and that events are still dictated from above. And the ANC leaders, despite their fist-waving and threats of 'mass mobilisation', are as desperate as De Klerk to prevent things from getting out of hand. They are reluctant to take responsibility for the general strike, hiding behind the fact that it has been called by COSATU. Already they have stressed that the negotiations have not been broken off but 'suspended'. Furthermore, Pik Botha, the regime's foreign minister, has disclosed that secret talks between the government and the ANC are continuing.

The ANC leaders have clearly been in a state of panic since the deadlock of CODESA II. They realise that after two and a half years of wheeling and dealing with the ruling class, many once-loyal militants among the rank and file are calling the proceedings by their proper name - a rotten sell-out. They are now attempting to show a left face in order to regain the confidence of the masses. But the situation is too explosive for these petty-bourgeois conciliators.

With the mood of the masses so highly charged with built-up political frustrations and economic desperation, the Boipatong massacre is the spark that could set the country aflame. The reformist ANC-SACP-COSATU leaders must be given no space to use the prospective general strike simply as a means of pressuring the De Klerk regime into conceding to their pathetic demands, in order to return to CODESA. The break with negotiations must be made permanent and the National Peace Accord completely renounced. The demand for arms and organised self-defence must immediately be met. If the leaders oppose these steps, as we predict they will, they must be pushed aside.

The masses must now take charge of their own destiny. The general strike must be used as a means of expressing the revolutionary will of the black working class; it must serve to unite in action all oppressed and exploited layers with the aim of convening a democratic constituent assembly.

BEHIND THE
IN MIL

THROUGHOUT much of the 1980s, the Militant Tendency was the largest organisation on the British left. After a short but bitter factional struggle during the latter part of 1991, which culminated in the expulsion of its founding father Ted Grant and his supporters, the tendency has been torn in two, with a resulting haemorrhage of members. General secretary Peter Taaffe retains control of the *Militant* newspaper and the majority of the membership. Grant and his supporters have set up a new organisation around the journal *Socialist Appeal*.

Background to the crisis

Although the roots of Militant's problems lie in the earlier history of the tendency, when its distinctive political positions - a semi-reformist attitude to the state, deep entryism, etc - were developed by Ted Grant, the present crisis is connected more directly to its growth from the late 1970s onwards. This posed questions of programme, tactics and strategy which, for all its claim to be the sole Marxist tendency on the planet, the Militant leadership was unable to answer.

The tendency's expansion took place in the context of a general leftward shift among the Labour Party rank and file in reaction to the betrayals of the Wilson and Callaghan governments. As the only substantial 'revolutionary' organisation dedicated to working inside the Labour Party, and with a firm base in the LPYS, Militant was uniquely positioned to recruit from this swing. Its main rivals, led by Tony Cliff and Gerry Healy, had launched independent 'mass revolutionary parties' and issued empty calls to the working class to break from Labour and rally to the SWP or WRP. Grant's perennial argument that a movement in the class would inevitably find its reflection in the Labour Party, and that it was necessary to hang on in there until this development took place, appeared to have been vindicated.

Militant's reputation was of a serious, persevering - if rather plodding and uninspiring - organisation, dedicated to burrowing away inside the 'traditional' labour movement. In the 1980s, however, it acquired a higher, more active profile. A right-wing campaign against Militant in the CPSA, the expulsion of its editorial board from the Labour Party in 1983, and its control of Liverpool city council, made the tendency a pole of attraction for workers and youth looking for a way to fight against capitalism and its agents in the labour movement. From 1,500 in 1979, Militant's membership rose to 5,800 in 1983 and a claimed figure of nearly 7,000 in 1985.

There had always been a distinct lack of theoretical vitality in Militant. Its 'Marxism' was a brand of mechanical materialist dogma which owed more to the tradition of the Second International than to that of Lenin and Trotsky. Capitalism's (always imminent) descent into slump would produce an automatic upsurge in the class struggle, radicalising the Labour Party rank and file and transforming 'the Marxists' into the mass leadership of the working class. This produced a strongly messianic streak which walled Militant off from discussion, debate and joint political work with other forces on the left - who were collectively dismissed as 'the sects'. This, in turn, reinforced the tendency's theoretical woodenness.

With the expansion of the early 1980s, the little training in Marxism that members had received in the past was shunted aside as an obstacle to mass recruitment. Although Militant based its entry work on the public perspective of 'transforming the Labour Party', it had previously initiated members into the more realistic understanding that it would be neces-

sary to split Labour in order to build a revolutionary party. Now this latter perspective was played down in order to win members from a left-reformist milieu. By the mid-1980s, the picture emerges of a Militant cadre lacking elementary grounding in Marxism and emphasising organisational objectives - recruitment, circulation of the paper, etc - at the expense of raising the political level of the membership.

This growth of opportunism was accompanied by a distinct outbreak of triumphalism. The election of Terry Fields as MP for Liverpool Broadgreen in 1983 was said to have lit 'a spark . . . which will fire the imagination of tens of thousands of workers throughout Britain, hastening the day when the transformation of society is on the agenda'. The leadership's stated aim was now to transform *Militant* into a daily paper, which they claimed would enable the tendency to become a mass organisation within the space of two years.

All this left Militant's membership theoretically and politically unprepared for the reversals suffered by the Labour left after the defeat of the miners' strike and the collapse of the struggle against rate-capping in 1985.

Towards Walton

As Kinnock's new realist project made its impact on the Labour Party and trade union activity drastically declined, opportunities in the traditional organisations of the working class contracted. Many on the left anticipated that Militant would respond by keeping its head down and shifting to the right - as it had always done in the past. But the substantial growth of the organisation - by 1986 it was claiming over 8,000 members - in fact fuelled a leftist mood among both leadership and membership. Labour Party work was increasingly downgraded, and there was a corresponding empirical shift towards 'open' work - paper sales, the youth rights campaign, etc.

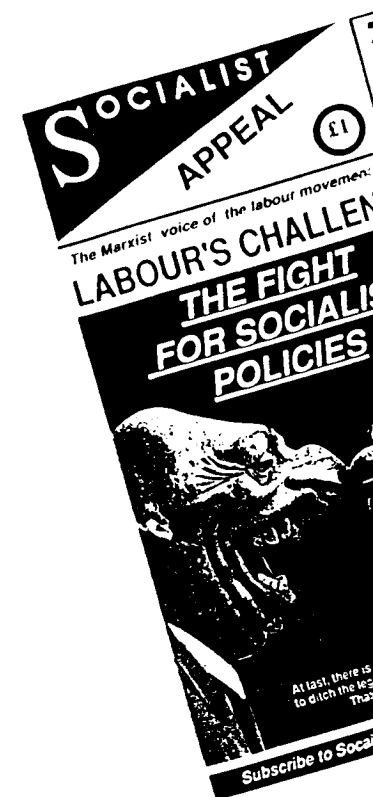
This drift away from the Labour Party was accelerated by the Militant leadership's failure to organise an effective campaign against Kinnock's witch-hunt. The virtual closure of the LPYS, Militant's traditional stronghold in the party, was conceded without a real fight. After all, the Labour right wing was 'doomed', and would be swept away by the 'irresistible tide of history' - or so Militant had argued a few years earlier. And in any case, was it not 'inevitable' that the Marxists would eventually be propelled into the leadership by the developing crisis of capitalism? For every Militant supporter expelled, the membership was told, 'hundreds, thousands will replace them'. In this way, Militant's mechanical materialism was used to justify passivity in the face of the right wing's onslaught.

By 1988, the indications were that Militant was in serious difficulties. The tendency had lost control of its flagship, Liverpool city council, while the number of Militant delegates to the Labour Party conference fell from a peak of 70 in the early to mid-1980s to around 30 or 40. And even by the tendency's own inflated figures there had been a serious loss of membership - down by 2,000 compared with two years earlier. The leadership was evidently disoriented, incapable of presenting any clear political perspective to the membership.

Thatcher's decision to impose the poll tax proved Militant's salvation. While much of the left was deeply sceptical about the prospects for fighting the tax, Militant astutely moved in on the ground floor of the campaign in Scotland. The experi-

ence and the gains it made there enabled it to dominate (albeit in a highly bureaucratic manner) the Anti-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, so that by the time of the mass demonstration in London on March 31, 1990, Militant's size and influence had probably reached an all-time peak. The composition of its membership had changed too, with the recruitment of workers who were committed to fighting the Tory government, but had little connection with traditional labour movement organisations and even fewer illusions in the Kinnock-led Labour Party. In Scotland, some of these new recruits were drawn towards Scottish nationalism.

At the same time, the tendency's considerable gains gave rise to a renewed mood of triumphalism in the leadership. Giving itself the credit for defeating the poll tax and forcing the removal of Thatcher as Tory party



leader, the Militant leaders trumpeted these as 'among the greatest achievements in the history of the Trotskyist movement internationally'. They saw themselves once more on the verge of building a mass political organisation.

'2,600 votes for socialism'

It was against this background that the turn towards transforming Militant into an independent political party, which would mount an electoral challenge to Labour, took place. And this, of course, was the issue which provoked the sudden split. The faction around Ted Grant, unwilling to accept the junking of Militant's long-established line, opposed the turn and found itself unceremoniously booted out of the organisation.

The watershed was the Walton by-election of July 1991 - brought about by the death of Eric Heffer - in which Militant and Broad Left member Ley Mahood stood against the official Labour candidate, Peter Kilfoyle. The latter had distinguished himself by leading the purge of Labour left-wingers on Merseyside, resulting in the expulsion of some 600 party members. Already, in the council election two months before, expelled Broad Left councillors had stood successfully against the official right-wing Labour candidates. Furthermore, the

THE CRISIS MILITANT

viciously anti-working class Labour administration under Harry Rimmer was engaged in a confrontation with Liverpool's refuse collectors, who had struck against plans to sack them and privatise the service. Kilfoyle, needless to say, gave his full support to Rimmer and denounced the strikers.

The Broad Left (in which Militant was the main organised force, but constituted only 40 per cent of the membership) had made it clear that it intended to put up a candidate against Kilfoyle. Militant's national leadership, in Liverpool to attend Hefner's funeral, met with local tendency leaders who also argued strongly in favour of contesting the by-election. Lesley Mahmood, who had only been defeated by Kilfoyle in the selection process through vote-rigging, was

Kilfoyle as an ultra-left adventure. They were able to make some correct criticisms – of Militant's overestimation of the political situation in Walton, its subsequent refusal to face up to the reality that the tendency had suffered a defeat, and the fact that Mahmood stood not on a Marxist but on a left-reformist programme. However, the line that the Grantites apparently advocated, of campaigning and voting for Kilfoyle, would have been politically suicidal, given that the Broad Left was going to stand a candidate irrespective of whether Militant supported this. In the circumstances, even if they believed the decision to oppose Kilfoyle to be a political misjudgement, it was the duty of revolutionaries to support Mahmood's candidacy, while warning of the dangers.

As for the Militant leadership majority under Peter Taaffe, there was a high degree of opportunism and

organised working class and to build on the scale necessary to conquer the leadership of the labour movement in the next decade.'

This new turn was backed up with the usual predictions of imminent working class radicalisation. 'The fear and awe which Thatcher instilled into the trade union leaders and which permeated deep down into the ranks of the working class has been replaced by a growing sense of confidence and preparedness to fight among sections of the rank and file.' However, the old view that such radicalisation would automatically find its expression within the Labour Party had now been ditched by the leadership majority. 'Many workers, working women, young people, black youth, etc, desperately want to see a political change, but have a deep hatred for Kinnock and Co. Unlike workers of an earlier generation, they will not automatically look to the Labour Party at this stage. Mass loyalty to the traditional organisation has been undermined over the last decade, not least by the role of the Labour leaders themselves.' Just as in an earlier period Militant had made concessions to left-reformism, so it now adapted to this anti-Labourist outlook.

At the end of February 1992, the new turn was implemented with the launch of Scottish Militant Labour.

Again, the Grantite minority was able to make some perceptive criticisms. They pointed out that, by the majority's own admission, industrial struggles were at their lowest level for half a century, which contradicted claims of growing working class radicalisation. Moreover, Militant had no more than 300 members in Scotland – though the majority claimed double that figure – and this was an insufficient base from which to launch an independent organisation. Grant's criticisms were partially borne out by events. The SML launch attracted only a few hundred people, and the Taaffites' anticipation that thousands of Scottish workers, hostile to Kinnock's Labour Party, would rally to the banner of an open organisation proved largely misconceived.

Grant also landed some accurate blows on the majority's attitude to Scottish nationalism. Not only did the Taaffites overestimate the extent to which the SNP was drawing workers away from their traditional allegiance to Labour (as the general election results demonstrated), but the SML itself, as a separate Scottish organisation, represented a distinct adaptation to nationalist sentiments.

But Grant's doctrinaire insistence that there was no future for a working class political organisation independent of Labour ('SML is an adventure . . . it will end in disaster') was contradicted by the high poll for SML candidate Tommy Sheridan in the general election – he won 19 per cent of the vote in Glasgow's Pollock constituency. And this was followed by the success of Sheridan and three other Militant candidates in the Glasgow council elections in May. Admittedly, Sheridan won support as an individual jailed for his defiance of the poll tax, and the development is almost certainly not typical of Scotland as a whole, still less of the rest of Britain. Nevertheless, as in Walton, Grant's line of supporting official Labour candidates against such a breakaway would only isolate revolutionaries from the very sections of the working class where they were trying to get a hearing.

Militant's internal regime – the house that Taaffe built

The differences between the Taaffe and Grant factions, deep though they were, could have been containable in a healthy organisation based on the principles of internal democracy, and with a tradition of political discussion

In memory of Henk Sneevliet

ON APRIL 12, a commemorative meeting was held in Westerveld, Holland, where there is a monument to Henk Sneevliet and his comrades of the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front who died 50 years ago in the struggle for socialism.

Sneevliet and six other comrades – Ab Menist, Willem Dolleman, Jan Schriefer, Jan Koeslag, Jan Edel and Rein Witteveen – were executed on April 13, 1942, by a firing squad of the Nazi occupation forces. A seventh, Cor Gerritsen, had committed suicide.

The first big wave of arrests to hit the MLL-Front – the continuation of the outlawed Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (RSAP) – took place at the end of June 1941, immediately following the invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany. At this point, the SD (the German security service) did not succeed in beheading the central leadership, but it was closing in. Between the end of February and the beginning of March 1942, all but one of the main leaders were arrested.

Some were savagely tortured to make them give names. None renounced their beliefs. Out of about 20 arrests, eight were put on trial on April 7, 8 and 9. Following a long Marxist tradition, Sneevliet and his comrades turned the trial into its opposite. They defended the goals of the RSAP/MLL-Front, and deliberately belittled the extent of the party and its activities so as to protect, as much as possible, comrades who were still free. Sneevliet took sole responsibility for his organisation's actions.

The attorney-general demanded the death sentence for the accused – such revolutionaries were too dangerous for the Nazis and their Dutch collaborators. In his final speech, Sneevliet again defended his ideals, and attacked Stalinism and the Dutch monarchy. Sentence of death was pro-



Henk Sneevliet 1883-1942

nounced for seven of the eight men on the afternoon of April 12. Later the same day they were transported to the concentration camp at Amersfoort, without Cor Gerritsen who had killed himself.

April 13 was the last day in the lives of these remarkable revolutionaries. At six in the morning they were told that their appeal for grace – the commuting of the death sentence – had been rejected. They asked to be shot with their hands linked. This too was refused – they had to die with their hands tied behind their backs. They then asked not to be blindfolded, which was agreed to. Sneevliet requested that he be shot last, since he was the oldest and also the leader of the group. Just prior to being taken out for execution, the seven revolutionary prisoners joined hands and sang the Internationale. They were then driven away in a car and murdered by the fascists.

In his last letter to his wife, Henk Sneevliet expressed the hope that he would act according to a Malay saying, 'Berani karena benar' – 'To be brave because it is good'. Despite the differences that opposed Sneevliet and some of his comrades to Trotsky, they should never be forgotten.

Further material (in Dutch) on Sneevliet is available from: M. De Jong-Lagerwaard, 1^o Kiefhoekstraat 30, 3073 KT Rotterdam, Holland.



chosen by the Broad Left to stand as the 'Real Labour' candidate.

Militant at first spoke optimistically about winning the by-election, although this political estimate was soon revised downwards, with the tendency's supporters predicting a vote of 10,000 for Mahmood. In the event, she got only 2,633 votes while Kilfoyle won with 21,317.

By any evaluation, this amounted to a defeat for the Broad Left. But Militant greeted the result as a political success, with the paper proclaiming that it was '2,600 votes for socialism'. The Taaffe leadership argued that 'Marxists do not judge success in elections purely in terms of electoral support. We have won valuable recruits to this organisation. We have touched the lives of countless thousands of workers throughout the country in this campaign, and we have put down a marker for the future.'

The Labour bureaucracy, which had been assiduously compiling photographic and other evidence on Militant supporters involved in the campaign, was presented with an excuse to step up the witch-hunt. Expulsions of Militant supporters, which until then had numbered only 219 nationally, dramatically increased. The MPs Terry Fields and Dave Nel-list were the most prominent victims of the purge unleashed by the Walton campaign.

Ted Grant and his supporters condemned the decision to stand against

cynicism in their approach to the Walton by-election. They saw it as a chance to get an MP, gain publicity for the tendency and do some recruiting. They therefore poured Militant supporters from around the country into the constituency, enabling the capitalist media to present the campaign as a Militant stunt. All this helped to obscure the real issue – a confrontation between the Liverpool working class and a Labour Party right wing carrying out Tory policies – and sowed confusion among Labour voters. The outcome was that many workers feared that a split vote would let the Liberals in and cast a class vote for Kilfoyle.

The 'Scottish turn'

Walton proved the immediate prelude to a more general political turn implemented by the Taaffe leadership. Known as the 'Scottish turn', it has an application throughout Britain, as a majority document makes clear. 'Only with an open, public organisation,' it argues, 'can we attract towards us the best fighting elements of the working class and youth in Scotland who are already looking for an alternative to Kinnock's Labour Party. On an all-British scale too it is to those sections that we must look to prepare the forces to conquer the ranks of the

and debate. In 1917, the Bolsheviks managed to handle much more fundamental disagreements without a split. But Militant isn't a Bolshevik organisation. Documents produced by the Grant minority provide a picture of a party dominated by a clique of full-timers on the Executive Committee, with general secretary Peter Taaffe in particular playing a dictatorial role.

To anyone with experience of the Healy-led WRP, Grant's depiction of the Taaffe regime will appear uncannily familiar. 'To cross the General Secretary,' the minority complained, 'would result in a tantrum or some kind of outburst. Comrades became fearful of initiative without the sanction of the General Secretary. Incredibly, even the opening of a window during an EC meeting would not go ahead without a nod from him! Under these conditions, the idea of a "collective leadership" is a nonsense, despite all the talk of it. Those who learned to agree with the General Secretary were cultivated and promoted. . . They got their authority, not as a physical moral authority, but as an appointee or collaborator of the General Secretary.'

At the height of the struggle, minority supporters were forcibly searched as they left a national committee meeting, in the interests of 'security'. Grant himself – a man of over 70, in far from good health – was physically prevented from leaving the centre until a leading majority supporter gave the go-ahead. Grant subsequently refused to go into the centre because of the atmosphere of 'hatred' towards him which the Taaffites had whipped up.

Taaffe proceeded to crush the Grantite minority with a ruthlessness worthy of Peter Kilfoyle. 'The Opposition has been banned,' the Grantites declared. 'Throughout the country a purge is taking place against Opposition comrades, with branch committees being called as kangaroo courts.' Having got rid of Grant and his followers in this fashion, Taaffe covered himself against objections from Militant's members and supporters by publishing a 'more in sorrow than in anger' editorial, sensitively entitled 'A parting of the ways!'

That the emergence of a factional struggle within the tendency could have such sudden and explosive results was proof of how rotten the organisation had become. While Taaffe would appear to be the main architect of this bureaucratic set-up, it is obvious that Grant cannot escape his share of the blame. He handed over to Taaffe the 'practical' task of organising the tendency, threw his authority behind him as general secretary, and turned a blind eye to Taaffe's anti-democratic practices. Militant's leadership as a whole placed an increasing emphasis on the growth of its finances, the acquisition of impressive headquarters and large numbers of full-timers, all at the expense of educating the membership and developing a healthy political life inside the tendency. It bears collective responsibility for the disaster which has struck the organisation.

The next issue of Workers News will examine the consequences of the Militant split, including its international repercussions.

CAPITALISM AND APARTHEID

South Africa is popularly regarded in this country as a 'third world' or 'backward' economic structure. In view of this, would you describe in outline the main trends in its economic development, for example since the war?

I regard the South African economy as one that approximates more to those of the 'advanced countries' for the following reasons: firstly, its flexibility of resources; secondly, its stockpiling of tremendous reserves; and thirdly, its degree of financial independence, thanks to gold. Of course, within South Africa we have also a large population with a colonial status and a standard of living which is as low as that of the 'colonial' countries. This is an illustration of the 'Law of Combined Development' – the combination of the latest in modern technology with the most barbaric means of exploitation in the world, for example in the migrant labour system and the existence of tribal forms side by side with modern technological institutions. I say tribal 'forms', for the substance of them was destroyed long ago and they are artificially maintained with government 'chiefs' and 'headmen'.

South Africa is the focus of 60 per cent of all imperialist investments in Africa. At the end of 1966 (according to United Nations statistics) \$5,313 million were invested there by foreign capital, an increase of 10 per cent over the 1965 figures. The 1968 investments of the United Kingdom amounted to \$3,042 million. The gross domestic capital formation has expanded from R406 million in 1945¹ to R1,134 million in 1960 and then up to R1,710 million in 1965. The gross national product itself has grown by an average of six per cent yearly in real terms between 1960 and 1968. In 1969 it stood at £6,777 million.

Could you outline the interrelation of the issues of class and colour in the economic and political set-up?

Race legislation was used in South Africa to create a black proletariat. This legislation divorced Africans from the land on the grounds of colour and confined their land rights to a mere 13 per cent of the country, which meant that neither a peasantry nor a rural bourgeoisie could develop. In addition, an established, permanent urban working class could not take root because, in terms of the migrant labour system, Africans are allowed to work for certain periods only in the cities and are then returned to the reserves, where after a period they can renew their job contracts. This has been a factor that has inhibited the growth of working class consciousness in the country.

The black proletariat was thus formed under the hammer blows of race legislation, so that class and colour lines coincide in South Africa. The exploited classes are really the black people. The upper middle class and industrialists are white. The so-called 'white working class' or 'labour aristocracy' is not a working class in the real sense of the term for the following reasons: firstly, because of the terrific scarcity of white labour, the white 'workers' can dispose of their labour at a terrific price in a sellers' market. For example, because of the tremendous shortage of white builders, some of them can command wages of up to £1,000 a month with overtime. Secondly, the white workers, with their monopoly of political power as members of the white ruling class and their exclusive trade union rights (because blacks are not allowed to organise), can use the state power to keep black wage rates at rock bottom levels. Thus the white worker's standard of living is second only to that of the American worker. He regards as a subsistence

An interview with Ken Jordaan (1971)

THIS INTERVIEW was conducted by Al Richardson and Clarence Chrysostom in early 1971 and published in the Revolutionary Communist League's *International Bulletin No.3, Spring 1971*. Its subject, Ken Jordaan (1924-88), identified in the original only as Comrade 'D', is little known today but deserves an important place in the history of South African Marxism.

He joined the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA) in 1942, and was later active in the Forum Club, in which a number of Trotskyists continued to work after the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. Forced into exile in 1964, he was repelled by the politics of both the dominant Trotskyist organisations of that period, and of the South African exile groupings. While teaching in Britain he wrote a number of studies of South African class relations and the role of racism. In the 1970s he flirted with Maoism, seems to have briefly joined the PAC, and was a member of the editorial board of the journal *Race and Class*. In 1981 he went to Zimbabwe, where he died in political isolation. His ideas, however, influenced a number of young Marxists who emerged in the period after the Soweto uprising of 1976, and we understand that an edition of his writings is currently in preparation. (Further information on his life is contained in Baruch Hirson's useful article 'A Question of Class: The Writings of Kenneth A. Jordaan', published in *Searchlight South Africa No.2, February 1989*.)

The central ideas expressed by Jordaan in this interview stand head and shoulders above those of almost all his contemporaries.

level the use of at least one car and one or two domestic servants. Because the white workers know that their super-wages are based upon the super-exploitation of the blacks there is no community of interests between them. Because of the racist tradition historically conditioning them, all talk of black-white class unity is utopian.

Is it possible to organise the black working class on a factory level?

There are black trade unions, but because they are not registered they are not recognised and have no powers of negotiation with the government. They cannot strike and can only 'request' higher wages. Any demand for such can result in simply being mown down, or lead to imprisonment. Illegal factory organisation was discussed by some bodies some years ago, though the fact that not much progress has been made does not mean that it is wholly impractical. It is possible to think in terms of underground factory committees organised on a cell basis at the point of production, with a view to *revolutionary action* in the future. I use these words 'revolutionary action' because since strikes are illegal and blacks doing so are simply cut down, they would occur as a *consequence* of armed struggle and would follow from it rather than the other way round.

Another form of organisation is to establish links between the urban industrial areas and the African reserves in the countryside. The migrant labour system lends itself to co-ordination between city and countryside because the migrant takes home with him city ideas and disseminates them among the people in the country. This is one method of spreading ideas and coordinating the struggle between the workers' centres and the countryside.

Would you say that there is any value in such activities as the 'Boycott South African Goods' campaigns in this country?

The boycott was initially inspired by the Stalinist Communist Party and Liberal Party of South Africa, who nourished the illusion that a Euro-

pean and North American boycott of South African goods could precipitate a crisis in South Africa and bring down the nationalist regime. For this reason we opposed this call at the time (in the early Fifties), and many in fact, especially among the Liberals and Stalinists, regarded the boycott of South African goods and the call for United Nations intervention as a substitute for the South African revolution and equally as a means of forestalling such a revolution, which they feared. The attitude of Marxists is that the boycott of South African goods by 'progressive' Europeans and North Americans is a gesture of solidarity with

the oppressed people of South Africa for which we are grateful, and which we think should continue even if it merely helps to highlight the situation in South Africa. However, of more practical significance is the view that to make the boycott more effective, instead of the refusal by individuals to buy South African goods in shops, the workers should be organised to refuse to unload South African goods at the port of entry, and to refuse to handle goods destined for South Africa. This, we feel, would be a more practical and effective means of helping the South African liberation struggle.



Durban, 1973: Strikers reject Zulu King Goodwill Zwelethini's call to return to work

What has been the role of the ANC and other Moscow- or Peking-influenced movements in the resistance struggle?

Firstly, the ANC, as a national movement, has always been interested in petty reforms within the framework of the existing South African social structure. It was formed in 1912, but it was only in 1944-45 that it demanded equality for black and white. Even after 1945 it collaborated willingly with the government to operate special segregatory institutions designed as safety-valves for the black people. It never really had a mass base, although it was widely known. One reason for this, of course, is that in order to keep the more radical elements in the background, the bourgeois, and especially the Liberal, press highlighted its activities because its programme implicitly called for the creation of a black bourgeoisie and middle class which the international bourgeoisie felt was necessary to stabilise the situation in the country.

The Communist Party was formed in 1921, and a year later it participated in the strike of the white gold and coal miners who had struck work because the mining magnates wanted to relax the colour bar in the mines in order to employ cheap black labour. The Communist Party, which was exclusively white for a number of years, found itself supporting the slogan of the strikers – 'Workers of the World Unite and Fight for a White South Africa'^{1,2} – and to this day the SACP has never rid itself of its chauvinism.

The Communist Party infiltrated the ANC and some of the prominent leaders of the ANC are to this day members of the central committee of the party. Both organisations are committed to the goal of the 'national democratic state', embracing all classes and race groups – in short, a neo-colonialist solution.

Peking has had some influence among the guerrillas who have been trained there and the delegations of political organisations which had visited that country, but the influence of both Moscow and Peking is virtually nil in South Africa. The big problem facing South African revolutionaries is to effect a synthesis

of Marx's doctrines with the native traditions, and while we draw inspiration from the Chinese and Russian revolutions, South African Marxism will crystallise in the crucible of the struggle and through hard theoretical disputation.

Strangely enough, Trotskyism has more influence than either the Moscow or Peking 'lines' in South Africa, though it has no mass base there.

Is there any validity in the perspective of 'People's War' or guerrilla struggle when applied to South African conditions?

I notice from the decisions of the world congress of the Mandel 'Fourth International', which was presumably attended by South African delegates, that a guerrilla war is on the order of the day backed by an external military invasion. We feel that this is not the correct appraisal or the correct perspective for South Africa. In the first place, there is no armed struggle going on at present in South Africa, contrary to the claims made by both the African National Congress and the Unity Movement. There have, of course, been isolated skirmishes with the military police in various parts of the country during the last decade, as well as individual acts of terrorism, but there has been no armed mobilisation of the people. As for 'external invasion', this has caused more suffering and setbacks to the cause of the South African revolution. For example, in 1967 the African National Congress threw about 200 guerrillas into a conventional war with Rhodesian military forces in the Zambesi River valley. It was a confrontation, not a guerrilla war, in which the guerrillas dug trenches to oppose the might of the South African and Rhodesian artillery and air force. The result, of course, was a foregone conclusion, because the ANC guerrillas ostensibly 'forgot' one cardinal maxim in guerrilla war: that is to say, to fight battles of quick decision tactically, but wage a protracted war strategically. I say 'ostensibly', because the real motives of the ANC leaders in sending the guerrillas to their deaths in a suicidal campaign were really to hit the world headlines, to give them an extended lease of life and to justify their claims for more money from the Organisation of African Unity and other sources. The professional political exiles abroad have instilled the illusion among large layers of people at home that they only need sit back and wait for liberation from outside. The external missions of various organisations like the ANC and the Communist Party have instilled this into them via radio broadcasts from Cairo, Algiers, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Lusaka, etc.

Marxists who have discussed and thought about the notion of armed struggle for a decade or more have come to the conclusion that a guerrilla war on classical lines in South Africa is ruled out. In the first place, the peasantry and self-sufficient agrarian economy have to all intents and purposes been eliminated, as a result of rapid forced industrialisation. Secondly, the economy is an integrated economy, apartheid notwithstanding. The system of communications is very well developed, and sharp distinctions between town and country are not evident any longer because of the decentralisation of industry now being carried out and the migrant labour system. Another reason we say this is that the system of local domination has been so well developed that the spy and police network extends into the so-called most 'remote' villages. Within minutes the extremely mobile South African army and police can descend upon a trouble spot anywhere in the country. Next, and this is more important, the proletariat now constitutes about 70 per cent of the black oppressed (of course including farm workers), and by virtue of their specific weight in the economy their role is crucial in the struggle almost from the outset, so that we do not envisage the fight being initiated in the countryside

and spreading to surround the towns. We conceive of the struggle in terms of an armed uprising on a national scale that can be maintained for long periods at a time. This would involve the co-ordination of urban workers, farm workers and migrant workers. It is obvious that towering problems of organisation are involved in carrying out such a task, but this is something with which South African revolutionaries will have to grapple, both in theory and practice.

There are some supporters in London of an organisation called the Unity Movement, which makes quite broad claims for itself with regard to South Africa. How valid would you say these claims are?

To begin with, there are supporters of all the liberation movements of South Africa in London - the ANC, Pan-Africanist Congress, Communist Party of South Africa and the Unity Movement. Most of the adherents and supporters of these organisations have paraded a carnival of extravagant claims for their respective movements. This is part of exile politics, especially where fundraising is involved. But I should say that these external 'missions', having been abroad for ten years or more, are now completely out of touch with South Africa and have gathered a momentum all of their own.

In 1965 a few of us met Mandel, who had already been in touch with the Unity Movement which he felt was the authentic voice of the South African masses. We made it clear to him that the Unity Movement was part of the liberation movement of South Africa, but that we could not regard it as a representative of the oppressed, that it was in fact a very small organisation and had been so for a number of decades. In any event, the question of the 'bigness' or 'smallness' of an organisation is irrelevant. All great movements begin as minority groups, and it would be opportunistic to back or join an organisation solely because it happens to be a big or growing one at a particular time. We told Mandel



Ernest Mandel - 'imperialist paternalism'

that Tabata must be examined on what programme he is putting forward and to what practical tasks he is committed. As far as we are concerned, having studied the various programmes of the organisations concerned, the Unity Movement's programme was even more reformist than that of the African National Congress, because that programme merely called for political and legal equality within the framework of capitalism. Mandel had posed the problem wrongly. Instead of telling us which was the biggest or most influential organisation we should back, which was opportunistic, he should have asked us, as we told him, what were the prospects of forming a Marxist party that can stand at the head of the liberation movement, especially in such a country as South Africa where the majority of the population is proletarian. In other words, Mandel's attitude was what one could call 'imperialist paternalism', telling us colonials what we should



Alexandra Township, 1976: Dustbin lids against police bullets

do in a country of which he himself admitted that he knew little, telling us whom to back or what to join.

This Unity Movement was formed in 1943, its leading members originally belonging to the Workers' Party, a Trotskyist group that had written to Trotsky about their controversy with another organisation which at that time formed the Fourth International grouping in the country. The issue was about the national and agrarian question, the problem of a peasantry in South Africa. The Workers' Party, that is, the precursors of the Unity Movement, said that there was a large peasantry in South Africa, and that the land question took precedence over the national question. The Fourth International group said at the time that matters stood in reverse order - that there was no peasantry, and that the national

dent mass struggle at all.

The decline of the Unity Movement set in in the Fifties, largely because of sectarianism and its incapacity to say specific issues to fight on and so build up the movement. Much of its support consisted of government employees such as teachers, who could not carry on a real struggle, and the Unity Movement rationalised this by saying that it would only fight for 'full democracy', while condemning struggle around other issues as 'reformist'.

It actually disappeared from the public eye about 1960, round about the time that the PAC, Communist Party and ANC were banned, but to this day the Unity Movement has not itself been banned as an organisation, though individuals in it have been. It surfaced again externally when Tabata established the external mission of the Unity Movement abroad in 1964.

What would you describe as a revolutionary perspective for South Africa today?

The whole evolution of South Africa shows that racism is an essential component of capitalism, that it has been the driving force of intensive industrialisation, and that it was the actual means whereby the South African working class was formed. The state itself created the classes, initiating the formation of some and preventing the crystallisation of others. It lifted up the white worker to an elite position by race legislation; it artificially encouraged and

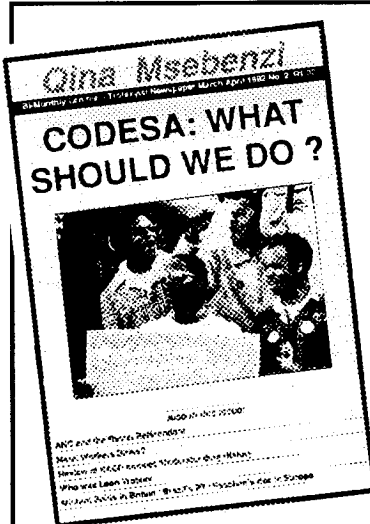
protected the growth of Afrikaner capital, and blocked for ever the rise of a black middle class. Thus race legislation and discrimination and capitalism are part and parcel of each other and cannot be divorced in any way.

This shows that a neo-colonial solution, the handing over of the country to an administration of the Kaunda variety, is out of the question in South Africa. The whole state and economic structure must be destroyed, as racism is so crucial to the continued existence of South African capitalism and is its chief generator.

It is thus ludicrous to hope for liberalisation as a result of the organic development of the economy with the free play of market forces, since 'race' is so deeply built into the society that it has gathered a life of its own as an autonomous factor, which continues to act upon the whole edifice along with the interests of foreign and native capital. There can be no 'peaceful road' to racial equality - not even the creation of a non-racist bourgeois democracy. The revolution in South Africa can only take shape as a socialist revolution.

NOTES

- 1 At the time, a pound sterling was worth R1.72 and a dollar R0.72.
- 2 On this point, see S. Ellis and T. Sechaba: *Comrades Against Apartheid*, Indiana University Press/James Currey, 1992, p.14. 'The slogan has, naturally enough, haunted the Communist Party ever since it was paraded on the streets of Johannesburg, although it is fair to say that it was never a Party slogan, and that the Party tried to dissociate itself from it even at the time.'



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An assessment of the political career of the former WRP leader by
Bob Pitt

PART SIXTEEN

FROM LATE 1966, the Socialist Labour League began to recover from the decline which had followed Healy's break from the Labour Party in 1964, and entered another period of sustained growth. Partly this was due to mounting disillusionment throughout the working class with the second Wilson government, which attempted to resolve the problems of British capitalism – centring on a chronic balance of payments deficit and consequent pressure on the pound – at the expense of workers. The Labour government fought viciously against the seamen's strike of May-June 1966, denouncing it as communist-inspired, and then proceeded to impose a legally binding wage freeze. The SLL's attacks on Wilson, which by *The Newsletter's* own admission had earlier found little resonance in the class, now won the Healyites a hearing among militant workers.

Another reason for the SLL's recovery was Healy's retreat from the ultra-left excesses of the earlier period. This retreat, admittedly, was only partial. Predictions of an ever-deepening economic crisis continued unabated. And in September 1966, Healy was asserting that the most conscious sections of the bourgeoisie were convinced that 'even a Tory government cannot extricate capitalism from its current crisis' and were therefore 'looking for a British Hitler!'. However, calls for the overthrow of the Labour government, and declarations that the SLL was an immediate contender for state power, were temporarily shelved. Healy now conceded that even an open clash with the government like the seamen's strike 'did not mean that the question of political power is on the agenda',² and that it was 'not a question of bringing down the Labour government'.³

Towards the end of 1966, Healy launched his campaign to 'Make the lefts fight' – a further indication of adjustment to political reality, since less than two years' earlier the SLL/YS had believed itself to be 'a thousand times stronger' than these same Labour lefts. 'The SLL,' Healy stated, explaining the new tactical turn to a special League conference in November 1966, 'calls upon all those left MPs to fight inside the Parliamentary Labour Party in order to remove Wilson with the other right-wingers from the leadership, and replace them with MPs who will fight for socialist policies'.⁴ This campaign did have the merit of countering the syndicalist limitations of purely industrial struggle, and focusing militants' attention on the need to fight the existing political leadership of the labour movement. Nevertheless, Healy's tactic was seriously flawed in a number of respects.

First of all, it sowed the usual confusion about what exactly 'socialist policies' were. It was entirely correct to demand that the left MPs take up a fight against the Wilson leadership, but there wasn't much sense in calling on them to form a government, based on a majority in the House of Commons, which would 'introduce a policy of nationalisation of the major industries under workers' control' (i.e.,

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy



The Vietnam Solidarity Committee demonstration of October 27, 1968. The Healyites refused to participate, and distributed a leaflet headed 'Why the Socialist Labour League is not marching'.

carry out the complete expropriation of the big bourgeoisie). And, in any case, there was little point calling on the left MPs to put down a motion inside the PLP demanding Wilson's resignation,⁵ given that the parliamentary party was overwhelmingly dominated by Wilson loyalists. Healy's campaign could have had practical relevance only if it had been based on an opposition movement against Wilson within the ranks of the Labour Party. As it was, in the absence of any organised opposition, many party members expressed their anger at the Labour government's betrayals by resigning, or lapsing into political inactivity, which only strengthened Wilson's hold over the party.

But Healy refused to link the 'Make the lefts fight' slogan to any work inside the Labour Party. Ironically, he justified this position with the identical argument used by his opponents in the RCP during the late 1940s, when he himself had argued for entry into the Labour Party. Healy now defined entry as a short-term tactic, applicable only when there arose within social democracy 'a left wing moving in a revolutionary direction' – which, as he pointed out, was 'not the case today'.⁶ All the evidence suggests that, despite having ditched the more extreme manifestations of sectarianism, Healy still held to an essentially ultra-left perspective – that there was a pre-revolutionary situation in Britain, that the majority of workers had broken from right-wing reformism, and that it only remained for the SLL to expose the Labour lefts in order to win the mass of the working class to an independent revolutionary party.

Not the least of the factors in the SLL's late-1960s expansion, of course,

was Healy's own energy, hard work and organising ability. Tim Wohlforth, Healy's US collaborator, recounts how Healy would typically snatch four or five hours' sleep before being picked up at 7am to attend an editorial board meeting at eight. 'Gerry then usually headed out of town to make a meeting with a branch or an important comrade in Oxford or Reading. He might turn up back around 2pm to check over the copy for the paper or for other meetings and then off again in the evening for a meeting in some other part of the country. He was not exaggerating when he had written to me that he travelled 1,200 miles a week!'. The SLL leader's approach, Wohlforth continues, was 'personal and energetic. Healy was deeply involved in every aspect of party and youth work and he got to know almost every member pretty well, even when the movement had 1,000 or more members. No man ever personally drove an organisation in the way Healy did. Healy can quite rightly claim much of the credit personally for the growth and success of the SLL in the 1960s'.⁷

This picture is confirmed by Alan Thornett, an ex-CP shop steward at the BMC car factory in Cowley, who joined the SLL in 1966 along with a group of fellow militants. Thornett describes how 'the SLL set up a factory branch to organise our work. We met weekly with Healy in attendance. It was dramatically different from the CP, strongly organised and strongly political. Meetings always started with an up-to-date report and discussion, relating the work we were doing in the plant to the industry, and to national and world politics. They were very impressive meetings. Healy kept himself closely informed on the factory situation. He would want to know the tactics of the management, the situation in the unions, the details of current disputes and what the other political influences such as the CP were doing. It was very much what we were looking for'.⁸

That the SLL's numerical gains were not greater, however, was due largely to Healy's sectarian attitude towards the protest movement against the Wilson government's support for US imperialism's war in Vietnam, and towards the youth radicalisation which arose from the movement. The SLL should have been well-placed to take advantage of this development,

as the YS had pioneered demonstrations in 1965 against Wilson's backing for US aggression, campaigning for 'Victory to the Vietcong'. But the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, which brought together a broad-based coalition of left-wing forces opposed to US imperialism, was evidently regarded by Healy not as an arena in which to intervene but as a rival to his own organisation – which, in Healy's mind, was the established revolutionary leadership to whom all others had to defer.

The SLL was involved in the VSC's first major public meeting in August 1966, and was even able to put up Mike Banda as a platform speaker. But SLL contributions from the floor concentrated their fire on the crimes of Stalinism rather than the need to oppose US imperialism, and the chairman – Bertrand Russell's secretary Ralph Schoenman – prevented Healy from speaking and physically wrested the microphone from another SLLer.⁹ Healy then used this as an excuse to break off all relations with the VSC. 'To Messrs Schoenman and Russell we say: To hell with your rotten "united front" of state capitalists, Pabloites, Stalinists and centrists.' Mike Banda wrote in *The Newsletter*. 'Your campaign stinks'.¹⁰

While the VSC leadership undoubtedly held an opportunist conception of united front activity, according to which joint practical work precluded sharp criticism of rival political tendencies, it is difficult to see the SLL's intervention as anything other than a provocation. The motive for Healy's action, according to one participant in the VSC, was that the committee was building a relationship with the Young Communist League – who rejected the CP's cowardly refusal to call for victory to the Vietnamese revolution – and Healy was intent on sabotaging this.¹¹ The same rationale apparently lay behind Healy's performance at a demonstration against US aggression in Vietnam at Liege in October 1966, which was organised by Ernest Mandel's Belgian section of the United Secretariat. Here again, the organisers had built a united front with the Stalinist youth organisation, which was similarly in conflict with the adult party. And, once more, Healy launched a wrecking operation. He had the YS contingent raise a banner commemorating the 1956 Hungarian Revolution,

which caused the Stalinist youth to withdraw from the march,¹² as indeed was Healy's purpose.

One thing is certain, Healy's actions were not the product of any principled opposition to Stalinism as such. In early 1967, Mike Banda's infatuation with Maoism was allowed full rein in *The Newsletter*, which devoted several articles to enthusiastically supporting the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guards.¹³ A year later, in an editorial in the theoretical journal *Fourth International*, Banda delivered a eulogy to the guerrilla warfare strategy of Mao and Ho Chi-Minh.¹⁴ After protests by the Lambert group, a correction was pasted into the next issue of the journal, making the excuse that the article should have appeared under Banda's byline and was not an editorial at all.¹⁵ But Healy failed to distance himself or his organisation from Banda's pro-Stalinist positions, or take up a struggle against them.

The famous Vietnam demonstration in London on October 27, 1968, which drew an estimated 75-100,000 people and culminated in battles with the police outside the US embassy in Grosvenor Square, was condemned as a diversion by the SLL. It refused to participate, and issued a leaflet headed 'Why the Socialist Labour League is not marching', which denounced the demonstration as no more than a publicity stunt hatched by the capitalist media in order to undermine the work of Healy's own organisation.¹⁶ This conspiracy theory, which verged on clinical paranoia, was subsequently spelt out in detail by Cliff Slaughter. 'The content of the October 27 demonstration,' he wrote, 'the essential aim of the VSC and its political directors was . . . the rallying together of some alternative to the building of the SLL as the revolutionary Marxist party'.¹⁷

A front-page article by Healy in the next issue of *The Newsletter* pursued this theme. The demonstration had only 'encouraged confusion amongst students and young people around the all-important issue of the building of the revolutionary forces'. Healy asserted. He dismissed out of hand the idea of any joint work with other political tendencies on the left around the specific issue of the Vietnam war. And although he argued, correctly, that the mobilisation of British workers for a revolutionary struggle against their own ruling class was a vital part of the struggle against imperialism, according to Healy this could 'only be done by the SLL, and not by middle class protest movements'.¹⁸

That the movement against the Vietnam war was a protest movement, and a largely middle class one at that, is not in dispute. But it was the elementary duty of a self-styled revolutionary grouping to intervene in such movements – not to denounce them from the sidelines. Healy's abstentionist and ultimatum attitude to the VSC denied the SLL the opportunity to recruit students and other middle class youth and turn them towards the working class. Tony Cliff's state capitalist International Socialists, for their part, won over hundreds of students and grew into a significant organisation – as large, if not larger, than the SLL. The British section of the United Secretariat, the International Marxist Group, also underwent a considerable expansion. The days when Healy could enjoy almost complete domination of the far left in Britain were now over.

To be continued

Notes

1. *The Newsletter*, September 3, 1966.
2. *Ibid.*, June 4, 1966.
3. *Ibid.*, December 10, 1966.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, December 3, 1966.
6. *Ibid.*, April 1, 1967.
7. T. Wohlforth, *Memoirs*, unpublished draft.
8. A. Thornett, *From Militancy to Marxism*, Left View Books, 1987, p.82.
9. C. Slaughter, *A Balance Sheet of Revisionism*, SLL, 1969, p.6.
10. *The Newsletter*, September 3, 1966.
11. Information from Al Richardson.
12. *Spartacist*, May-June 1967.
13. *The Newsletter*, January 21, 28, 1967.
14. *Fourth International*, February 1968.
15. *Ibid.*, August 1968.
16. The leaflet is reprinted in D. Widgery, *The Left in Britain*, Peregrine, 1976, p.349.
17. Slaughter, *op. cit.*, p.7.
18. *The Newsletter*, November 2, 1968.



Join the Workers International League

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Symptoms of a crisis in the Fourth International

By Richard Price

Trotsky in Mexico 1937-40 by Alain Dugrand (Carcenet, £12.95); The Fourth International in Danger! Selected Documents 1944-48 by Grandizo Munis, Benjamin Péret and Natalia Sedova-Trotsky (Greenleaf Press, £4.50)

FIRST published in France in 1988, Alain Dugrand's book is a well-intentioned but curious attempt to paint a portrait of Trotsky 'the man' in his last years. It is divided into four parts: Dugrand's account of how he 'discovered' Trotsky in the course of visits to Mexico; a brief article in homage to Trotsky by novelist James T. Farrell, reprinted from *Partisan Review*, October 1940; 60 pages of photographs, some of them previously inaccessible to an English-speaking audience, from the Institut Leon Trotsky and the collection of Josep Maria Oliveras; and a summary and chronology of Trotsky's life contributed by Pierre Broué.

The problem is that the whole doesn't hang together particularly well. Dugrand's essay might have been subtitled 'a romantic tragedy in an exotic location'. Reminiscence and vegetation beat politics into a poor third place. True, he has interviewed Esteban Volkov, Albert Götzen, David Rousset, Gerard

Rosenthal and Marguerite Bonnet, but then so have many others. Mixed with other well-known memoirs, the result is the product of the French impressionist school.

The brief tribute by James T. Farrell is no more than that. Pierre Broué's short and rather pedestrian summary of Trotsky's life draws little from his own vast researches. So overall we have a book which unfortunately does not add to the sum of human knowledge.

The Fourth International in Danger! is altogether a more substantial and challenging read. In reprinting a number of documents which Natalia Sedova wrote or associated herself with, the publishers have unearthed a controversy which most 'Trotskyist' tendencies would rather leave brushed under the carpet.

After Trotsky's murder, Natalia came increasingly into conflict with the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International. This culminated in her repudiating the defence of the Soviet Union, resigning from the FI in 1951 and adopting a state capitalist position. To her death at the age of 80 she remained passionately opposed to both capitalism and Stalinism. But while Natalia ultimately drew the wrong conclusions, she was by no means always wrong in registering the symptoms of the FI's degeneration. For instance, in her resignation letter she wrote: '... your



Natalia Sedova and Leon Trotsky in Mexico

entire press is now devoted to an inexcusable idealisation of the Titoist bureaucracy for which no ground exists in the traditions and principles of our movement.'

This collection documents an earlier phase of her evolution, during which she was strongly under the influence of the leader of the exiled Spanish section, Grandizo Munis, who had already crossed swords

with the SWP over James P. Cannon's conduct of the Minneapolis trial defence. Two letters from Munis's group from June and September 1944 point to the moribund nature of the FI's international secretariat, as well as questioning the designation of the Soviet Union as a 'degenerated workers' state'. Two further letters from Natalia from September and November 1944 develop this latter position.

Munis and Péret went on to criticise the entire basis on which the 1946 FI conference was called – insufficient preparation and pre-conference discussion, inadequate representation and the absence of a balance sheet of the activities of sections during the war.

The most interesting document, which gives its name to this volume, appeared under the names of Natalia, Munis and Péret prior to the second world congress of 1948. Among other things, it exposes the arbitrary nature of representation at the congress – seven out of 33 sections controlling over one-third of the delegates, at the expense of Trotskyist organisations in Greece, Vietnam and Bolivia which enjoyed far greater influence – designed to entrench the position of the leadership and its political line. Although the authors' third-camp position coloured much of their political judgement of what did and what didn't amount to an adaptation to Stalinism, they weren't wrong about Vietnam: '... support to our section has been forgotten for so long and ... even to demand who assassinated Ta Thu-Thau has been forgotten in order to support, without serious criticism, the Stalinist government of Ho Chi-Minh.'

Nor were they wrong in their open letter to the French section to

point to the fact that 'positions of all shades' had existed in the International during the war, from those who supported resistance movements to those who opposed them outright. The balance sheet they demanded was not forthcoming: it would have upset the facade of unity. Pablo, Frank and Mandel hoped for at the second world congress. Munis also criticised the FI leadership for allowing the Healy minority of the British RCP to enter the Labour Party under its own discipline.

It should be stressed that the rational kernel of many of these criticisms has to be extracted from their authors' ultra-leftism. Munis's addiction to grandiose rhetoric and his support for a range of wrong positions – opposition to any demands for the reformists and Stalinists to form governments; denial of the existence of any national question in the countries occupied by the Nazis; refusal to defend the Soviet Union combined with an emotional conviction that capitalism had somehow been restored – prevented his grouping from playing a positive role in reorienting the post-war FI.

This, however, should not put off serious militants from studying these documents. The opposition of Natalia, Munis and Péret was symptomatic of a real crisis in the FI which rapidly led to its degeneration.

One final word concerning the quality of this production. It is not unreasonable to expect, given the price, something which does not begin to self-destruct after one read. In other respects, however, the publishers have performed a useful service in assembling these documents from a range of internal bulletins unavailable to the vast majority of would-be Trotskyists.

CORRESPONDENCE

Stalin's evil traffic with the Gestapo

Dear comrades,

I'm sure that your readers would be interested in knowing the facts around the controversy in Germany over the book *Zwischen NKWD und Gestapo: Die Auslieferung deutscher und österreichischer Antifaschisten aus der Sowjetunion an Nazideutschland 1937-1941*, by Hans Schafranek, as the book unearthed shocking revelations concerning the crimes of Stalinism.

While researching the fate of Austrian socialists who sought refuge in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s, Schafranek, who some readers will know as the biographer of Kurt Landau, the one-time leading Trotskyist murdered by the NKVD in Spain, was able to find details of over 900 German and Austrian people handed over by the Soviet authorities to the Nazi regime in the years 1937-41.

Some were technicians who, sympathising with the Soviet experiment, went to put their skills to use in the five-year plans. Others had stayed since the First World War, while some had been born in Russia. A large number had sought refuge there from the fascist regimes at home. Schafranek found the facts in the archives of the German Foreign Office. His book gives short biographies of 305 of the victims. What was shocking, among other things, was to find that this odious traffic began in earnest in February 1937, not in the period of the Stalin-Hitler Pact as previously thought. Isolated cases had occurred even earlier.

After reading press accounts of jailings, trials, etc. the German authorities took the initiative in asking for their citizens to be repatriated in the latter part of 1936. It would appear that the Soviets took the opportunity of getting rid of disillusioned left-wingers and communists they deemed unreliable.

After the war, Margarete Buber-Neumann, widow of Heinz Neumann, the KPD leader who defied Stalin at the eleventh hour in Germany, described her own handing over in December 1939 in *Under Two Dictators*. The Stalinists denied that such deportations had taken place, and have continued to do so until recently. Buber-Neumann is once more the subject of controversy.

Schafranek appended to his book statements by survivors of Buchenwald concentration camp, among them that of Benedikt Kautsky concerning the controversial role there of Emil Carlebach. Formerly a KPD Landtag deputy and leader of the Jewish communists, Carlebach had been imprisoned from 1934 for resistance activity. He was the last Jewish Block Senior in Buchenwald before liberation and was accused of being

responsible for the deaths of various prisoners.

The statements had been made to assist Buber-Neumann in a case against Carlebach for defamation of character, libel, etc. over the revelations in her book. The court found against Carlebach. However, that was in 1950 – today, Buber-Neumann, Kautsky et al are dead, whereas Carlebach is still a prominent figure in the organisations of survivors of the Nazi terror, and still a hard-line Stalinist apologist.

On the appearance of Schafranek's book in late 1990, Carlebach complained to the Frankfurt County Court of defamation, etc. by the author, because, as well as appending the statements, he'd quoted from Kautsky without comment. The court ruled that, by failing to distance himself from Kautsky's accusations, Schafranek was guilty of defamation. The passages in the body of the book must now be blacked out for sale in Germany – although one can read them in the appendix – and costs will eventually be awarded against author and publisher.

Carlebach claims not to have seen the statements by Kautsky et al when Buber-Neumann brought the case against him, although the Frankfurt press quoted from them at the time. That explains why he didn't take them to court, he says.

A declaration drafted by eminent German historians opposing the verdict of the court has been signed by 270 historians, social scientists and writers concerned with labour movement history in 15 countries. It points out that although Carlebach and his co-thinkers were themselves victims of the Nazi regime, they covered up for the crimes of Stalinism and were thus its accomplices; and that the freedom of historians and writers to quote from documents must be defended against those who wish to censor to protect their own personal reputations or those of their organisations.

Unless the original judgement is overturned, the costs could be ruinous for the small left-wing publisher ISP Verlag, Frankfurt. Anyone who is able to assist in any way, or requires documentation on the case (in German), can write to: Wilfried Dubois, Postfach 9002 64, D-6000 Frankfurt 90, Germany; or to: Komitee gegen die stalinistische Zensur, c/o Buchhandlung 'Rieve Gauche', Taborstrasse 11, A-1020 Vienna, Austria. Even small sums of cash would be useful in paying for, and spreading, information.

Greetings
Mike Jones
Chester

NEW FROM Prinkipo Press HOW THE BOLSHEVIKS ORGANISED THE UNEMPLOYED

By Sergei Malyshev

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia, thousands of workers in St Petersburg were locked out of their factories and victimised. This pamphlet, first published in 1931, shows how the Unemployed Council under the leadership of the Bolsheviks fought back, wringing concessions out of the City Duma and maintaining the unity of the working class. Its author was a local Bolshevik leader who was a participant in the struggle.

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The battle for socialism in South Africa

Opposing the fraud of a negotiated settlement

Comrade Bheki is a South African Trotskyist, a member of the group which produces the journal *Qina Msebenzi*. He spoke to *Workers News* on his recent visit to London

AFTER six months of discussions with the De Klerk regime, the ANC has been forced to withdraw, at least temporarily, from the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). The *Qina Msebenzi* group has been opposed to the idea of a negotiated settlement from the start. 'We stand for 100 per cent democracy,' said comrade Bheki. 'There can be no compromise on majority rule – one person one vote in a unitary state is not negotiable. At the moment we believe that the central call should be for a democratic constituent assembly convened by the masses themselves.'

He explained that QM's position was based on the belief that only the working class had a vested interest in securing 100 per cent democracy. Fearing the will of the majority working class, and recognising the explosive contradictions in the situation, the South African bourgeoisie had always, and would always, oppose genuine free and fair elections to a constituent assembly.

'We insist on fighting for genuine free and fair elections. Experience over the past two and a half years of De Klerk's glasnost has demonstrated that to have free and fair elections can only mean that all the anti-democratic forces – including the South African Defence Force and police, Inkatha, and the Bantustan armies and police – are demobilised and disarmed. And only the working class, with arms in hand, can do this. This is the crux of the matter.'

QM was thus determined to fight consistently for the most democratic conditions, he continued. It sought to ensure that the masses were drawn into a nationwide campaign free of intimidation, harassment and terror from the forces of reaction. 'The loud and confident voice of the masses of the urban areas, on the farms and in the bantustans, giving full expression to all their demands and aspirations, must be heard. This will only be possible through a mass campaign of marches, meetings, rallies, demonstrations and strikes, based on a united front of the existing mass organisations and the formation of committees of action countrywide. This is what QM fights for.'

QM believed that the ANC and the SACP leaderships feared the masses on the march. 'They do not

want their reactionary utopian plans for a peaceful negotiated settlement with the bourgeoisie to be upset. For over two years they have ushered things along a path of sell-out.'

In the unions, the SACP and the syndicalists had been the chief brokers for a reformed capitalism, encouraging social peace with the bosses, and undermining the traditions of militancy and the commitment to socialism amongst the workers. 'While actively supporting the disarming and demobilisation of the masses by means of the succession of agreements with the De Klerk regime – including the Groote Schuur Minute, the Pretoria Minute and the National Peace Accord – the ANC-SACP leadership has simultaneously opened the masses to direct and systematic attack by the forces of Inkatha. And the winner has been De Klerk, chief executive of the bourgeoisie.'

This had resulted in the defenceless masses being driven into despair and demoralisation, while the more conscious worker militants and youth had grown more frustrated. Their anger against the ANC leadership had grown as the latter repeatedly called on the De Klerk regime and its armed forces, the chief orchestrators of the campaign of terror, to stop the violence.

Asked about recent developments, comrade Bheki pointed to the ANC's readiness to do a deal at any cost. It had accepted that detention without trial and emergency legislation would be in force during the period of the interim government, and had compromised over how many votes would be sufficient to ratify the new constitution – eventually agreeing to 70 per cent, after once having insisted on 51 per cent and later proposing 66 per cent. This would allow De Klerk to marshal reactionary forces against any clauses in the constitution which the ruling class objected to – effectively creating a 'white veto'.

'However,' he went on, 'De Klerk's intransigence at CODESA II and the resultant deadlock has thrown the ANC into a panic. It now needs to project a left face to salvage credibility in the eyes of the masses.' He felt that the massacre in Boipatong and the ANC's response – pulling out of the negotiations – required careful analysis. Both De Klerk and the ANC leadership clearly wanted a compromise settlement. But both were scared of losing the support of their respective constituencies. The ANC was worried about its mass base in the townships. Already a large number of its more militant supporters were losing patience. 'The spontaneous anger of the residents of Boipatong and the widespread calls for arms directed at Mandela and the ANC suggests that the massacre could set in motion a train of events outside the control of either the ANC leadership or the De Klerk regime. QM will be ready to give a lead in such an eventuality.'

Finally, the comrade was asked



Women's protest in Cape Town, March 1992

about QM's approach to the question of internationalism. 'We believe that the most crucial international task remains the construction of a world vanguard party of the proletariat, with sections in every country,' he replied. For QM this could only be a reconstructed Fourth International, basing itself upon the programmatic documents and experience of both the Third International under Lenin's leadership and the Left Opposition and Fourth International under that of Trotsky.

'As a result of discussions with the

Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency,' he said, 'QM has come to better understand the causes of the protracted crisis of international revolutionary leadership. The cardinal role of Stalinism, assisted by Social Democracy, in blocking revolutionary developments worldwide is also now more fully grasped.'

It was QM's view that objective difficulties during and after the Second World War, compounded by a series of mistakes, had produced a major crisis within the Fourth International. A number of false perspectives were developed,

serious anti-Trotskyist revisions were made, a split into two organisations – the International Committee and the United Secretariat – had occurred and profound degeneration in both groups had set in.

QM was committed to playing a full part in resolving the crisis of international revolutionary leadership through seeking the regroupment of the most principled Trotskyist fighters worldwide. 'We are convinced,' said comrade Bheki, 'that the LTT has an important role to play in this process of regroupment.'

Rio offers no solutions

By Jon Bearman

IT SHOULD come as no surprise that the Earth Summit held last month in Rio de Janeiro achieved very little in terms of protecting or improving the environment. To have thought otherwise would be to expect the major capitalist countries and multinationals to renounce their imperialism and turn into charities. While cosmetic work will be carried out, imperialism has no alternative but to live with the disastrous consequences of its own rule. In fact, it now seeks to use environmental issues as a further screw to impose its domination over the semi-colonial countries.

Global warming: Greenhouse gas emissions, mainly from burning fossil fuels in the 'advanced' capitalist countries, in addition to their effects on crops and natural habitats, could lead to the flooding of huge areas of land. The United States, the world's worst offender, refused to commit itself to even the modest target of keeping emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Extinction of species: The US refused to sign the biodiversity treaty – Bush wants to exploit and patent whatever they find.

Destruction of the rainforests: This is continuing at such a pace that many will have disappeared altogether by the end of the century, with the resulting loss of many

species and of oxygen-producing capacity. No agreement was reached on this vital issue.

Land: Hundreds of millions of peasants are being thrown off their land in order to make way for modern farms and factories. Those displaced are mainly retreating to mountain areas or to the jungles, where they are destroying the natural habitats in order to survive.

Over the last ten years, debt repayments to the tune of \$150 billion annually have been made to western banks and governments, and there has been a net transfer of \$50 billion a year from poor nations to rich. The world's richest billion people are 150 times as wealthy as the poorest billion, a ratio double that of 30 years ago.

Export drives to tackle the crippling debt burden, often to meet conditions dictated by the World Bank, are creating intense competition between primary producers and forcing down prices on the world market. Those poor countries with valuable natural resources see no alternative but to exploit them, irrespective of the environmental destruction that results – hence the refusal of the G77 group of developing countries to agree to any treaty on the rainforests.

Against this background, it was predictable that Rio should produce only generalised statements of intent. The World Bank, a central pillar of imperialist domination, was given the role of managing the Global Environmental Facility with about \$3-4 billion; and the International Development Association, a World Bank affiliate with funds of about \$6 billion a year, will get a 15 per cent increase plus an 'Earth increment' of \$3-5 billion.

This is a tiny fraction of the \$600 billion a year seen as necessary by the summit organisers. It does not mean extra funding, but a further centralisation of 'aid' through the World Bank, giving imperialism another stick with which to beat developing countries.

The working class internationally must fight for the cancellation of all 'third world' debts, for an end to ecologically damaging industrial practices, and for a properly funded global authority to monitor and police the defence of the environment. But it would be utopian to believe that a system based on the pursuit of profit could meet these demands – capitalist exploitation is the cause of the destruction, not the solution. Only a world economy planned on the basis of human need can prevent environmental disaster. The future of the planet lies in the socialist revolution.

Negotiations in South Africa

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