

Workers News



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DON'T PAY, DON'T COLLECT, STRIKE AGAINST THE POLL TAX

No retreat on the poll tax fight!

COUNCIL WORKERS throughout the country are coming into increasing conflict with their employers over cuts in jobs and services resulting from the poll tax. In the forefront are workers employed by Labour-controlled councils 'charge-capped' by the government.

At the same time, councils are stepping up their efforts, despite some successful disruption of the proceedings, to drag non-payers through the courts where they are told to pay or face the bailiffs. In July, yet another participant in the huge anti-poll tax demonstration on March 31, Simon O'Reilly, was jailed. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment - a total of 434 people were charged following the demonstration.

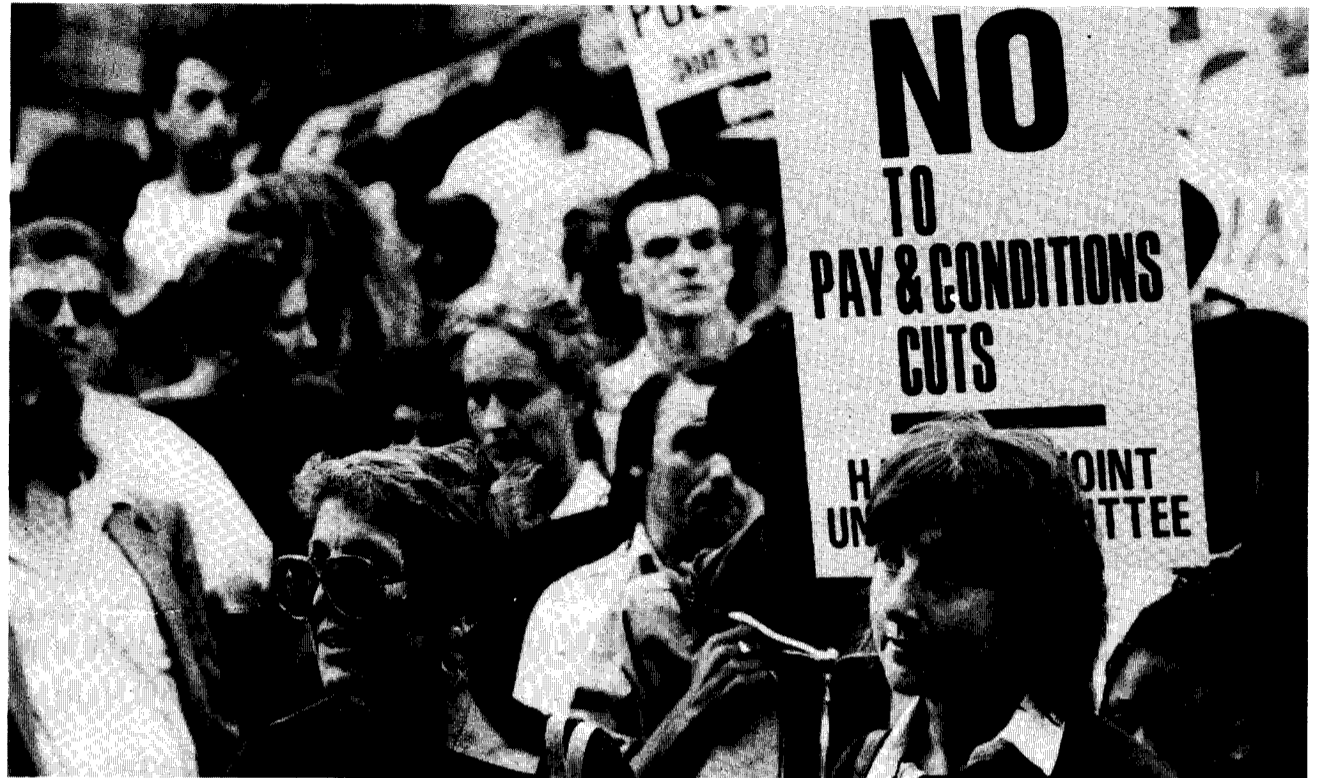
It is now more urgent than ever that the anti-poll tax unions are built on the estates and in the workplaces. In the community, they must seek to mobilise the widest layers of the working class, the unemployed, young people, senior citizens, housewives and particularly members of the ethnic minority communities who, being seen as a soft target, are always the first to feel the effects of council cuts. They must organise against the bailiffs with mass pickets, and defend services facing the axe such as libraries, swimming pools, old people's homes and

By Daniel Evans

community centres with occupations, whilst seeking the closest links with council workers.

The workplace anti-poll tax unions must oppose every attempt by local or national trade union bureaucrats to blame the cuts on non-payers whilst they make secret redundancy deals with the council. They must demand that the trade unions organise strike action against the tax, and fight independently for strike action, especially among council and benefit office workers.

The emergence of anti-poll tax unions was itself a reflection of the cowardice and treachery of the trade union and Labour Party leaders, who condemn so-called 'law-breakers' because they know that if they were in office, they would be administering the same laws. The Labour Party's announcement that it will, if elected, re-introduce the rates



The rally outside Haringey Civic Centre on July 23 against the cuts in jobs and services announced by the Labour council after being 'charge-capped'

system has nothing to do with a concern for what is 'fair', but is designed to take the wind out of the sails of the anti-poll tax movement.

It is vital that the APTUs step up the fight to mobilise the working class to smash the poll tax and bring down the Tory government. If they don't, they could become an obstacle to this struggle.

The question of leadership within the APTUs is therefore crucial. From the outset, *Militant* have sought to dominate them for the purpose of boosting their own political reputation, rather than leading a fight against the Tories. In some areas, they have split the anti-poll tax movement rather than see it pass out of their control.

That the *Militant* leadership has no intention of mobilising

the working class against the state is borne out by the offer of *Militant* supporter and chair of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, Tommy Sheridan, to 'name names' following the clashes with the police on the March 31 demonstration.

Militant opposed calls for mass strike action to defeat the tax at the Federation's trade union conference, preferring instead to channel the efforts of the movement they dominate into organising a 'national people's march'. The bureaucratic way in which this decision was pushed through would have impressed Norman Willis. Anti-poll tax unions must demand that the march banners carry slogans supporting the Trafalgar Square defendants, calling for the building of workers' defence groups

to oppose the bailiffs and protect demonstrations against state attack, and for mass strike action to smash the poll tax.

Despite the cuts and redundancies the councils are making, *Militant* still insist that the main task is to 'make Labour councils fight'. Using the *Militant*-led Liverpool City Council of 1983-87 as a model, they put forward, not a series of demands designed to break workers from reformism, but a detailed scenario which has Labour councils forcing the Tories to 'capitulate' over the poll tax (but not, apparently, over anything else).

Eleven years of Thatcher, have failed to halt the decline of British capitalism and, as a recession approaches, the Tories are preparing to drive up unemployment and

announce a cuts budget which will put the 1980-81 budget into the shade. Neil Kinnock demands that the working class accept this and wait for a Labour government. Millions of middle class voters, despite high interest rates and inflation, will once again vote Tory if they see no alternative. The working class must offer that alternative by fighting back now.

Nicholas Ridley said of the poll tax which he 'master-minded': 'The duke will pay the same as the gardener. What could be fairer than that?' The working class should reply: 'If the duke's mansion is made available to house the homeless and his land becomes the property of all, then nothing. But until that day, Smash the Poll Tax! Down with the Tories!'

HANDS OFF IRAQ!

Imperialists out of the Middle East!

Workers International League Central Committee statement

WORKERS everywhere must mobilise against the enormous imperialist military build-up in the Middle East which is preparing for war against Iraq. Led by the United States and Britain, the task force includes contingents from France, West Germany, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Canada and Australia, and has even succeeded in drawing in Pakistan, Egypt, Syria and Morocco. Imperialist intervention has been sanctioned and supported by Gorbachev and the Soviet bureaucracy, which has announced its willingness to participate in an attack on Iraq, subject to its being under UN control.

President Bush and other Western leaders have justified their onslaught by invoking international law, the defence of Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian sovereignty and the rights of the 'legitimate' government of Kuwait. International law, so-called, is a fig leaf for imperialist interests. It serves, under

the auspices of the United Nations, as a framework to underwrite and legitimise imperialist plunder throughout the world, whilst maintaining a discreet silence over such events as the US invasion of Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989), the bombing of Libya (1986) and the support given to such murderous counter-revolutionary movements as Unita in Angola, the Contras in Nicaragua, the death squads in El Salvador and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

American imperialism's pose as the defender of small nations is a hollow fraud. No less is its feigned concern for the population of Iraq. Bush has, because of the

gas-bombing of an entire Kurdish town by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1988, although at the time the United States, Britain and France were increasing credits to Iraq to sustain its war against Iran, while West Germany and Israel were supplying Iraq with raw materials for the manufacture of chemical weapons.

The real cause of the conflict can be summed up in one word - oil.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 1 caught the United States, which had long favoured Iraq against Iran, on the hop. As recently as April, a \$1 million credit to Iraq was announced. The invasion

changes into panic as the prospect of a rapid rise in the price of oil resurrected the spectre of the slump of the mid-1970s. Against a background of steadily rising inflation in the imperialist countries, Iraq's effective control of a substantial portion of the world's oil reserves poses a direct challenge to their existing trading relations with Arab oil producers. The imperialists' fears were rapidly confirmed as oil prices rocketed by 250 per cent. As the price of oil has escalated, so has the scale of military intervention.

The rallying cries in Western capitals to defend 'poor Iraq' are as hypocritical

as the crocodile tears shed for 'gallant little Belgium' in August 1914. As for the 'legitimate' government of Kuwait, the Emir and the royal family have ruled without even the semblance of a parliament since 1986, and head what one writer describes as 'a viciously reactionary state with an untarnished record as a supporter of imperialist interests'. Kuwait - like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman - is an entirely artificial creation of imperialism, carved out to safeguard oil production after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Historically and culturally it does not constitute a nation. Over half its popula-

tion, including almost all workers, are foreign nationals. For these reasons, there can be no question of Kuwaiti self-determination. The artificial divisions imposed on the Arab population of the Middle East can only be resolved through the creation of a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

Whilst we unconditionally defend Iraq against imperialist intervention, we condemn the arrest of Iraqi oppositionists, including members of the Iraqi Communist Party, in Kuwait, and demand their immediate release. There have also been widespread reports of Iraqi soldiers raping women. If there is any truth in these stories, we unreservedly condemn such actions. Workers in Kuwait must have full rights to organise within trade unions and join political parties of their choice.

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Defend Arthur Scargill! Down with the witch-hunt!

ARTHUR SCARGILL's explanation of the current witch-hunt against him and Peter Heathfield – that 'the establishment cannot forgive the courageous fight of our members, their wives and families in the historical miners' strike' – is correct, but only half the story. It should be added: 'Neither can most of the Labour Party and trade union leaders.'

Since March, when the *Daily Mirror* and Central Television's *The Cook Report* initiated the campaign to oust Scargill and Heathfield from the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers, the 'establishment' has largely been able to take a back seat. The momentum of the witch-hunt has been sustained by right-wing Labourites and Stalinists, taking their cue from the 'liberal' press.

Robert Maxwell, owner of the *Daily Mirror* and a 20 per cent stake in Central Television, is a supporter of the Labour Party leadership and a vigorous opponent of effective trade unionism in his companies (see picture story this page). The intentions of this autocratic media baron are not hard to fathom: in an increasingly competitive commercial environment, a handful of giant corporations are vying with each other to dominate the press and broadcasting after deregulation. Local agreements, personal contracts and payment by results are becoming the norm throughout the industry. Trade unions which block this 'progress' do not feature in Maxwell's vision of the future.

When Gavin Lightman QC, a so-called 'socialist lawyer', produced his report in early July clearing Scargill and Heathfield of the most damaging allegation of misappropriating NUM funds for their own use, it looked as if the witch-hunt might have run its course. However, Lightman had left the door open for further attacks, especially over the question of money it was claimed had been donated to the NUM from the Soviet Union and Libya.

Lightman criticised Scargill for keeping two sets of accounts after the NUM's assets were sequestered in October 1984 – an action which was imperative if the miners were to continue the strike, and with which no genuine socialist could possibly disagree – and particularly for not submitting proper accounts after the receivership had ended. His report concluded that money from the Soviet Union and Libya was lodged with the Paris-based International Miners' Organisation (IMO), of which Scargill is president, and that it had not been used for the benefit of NUM members. Lightman, of course, is interested in points of law and the progress of his career, not in fighting the Tories. His secondary deliberations on what he termed Scargill's 'breach of duty' were seized on by right-wingers.

Yuri Butchenko, from the Kuzbass Union of Workers in Siberia, appeared at a press conference in London organised by the anti-communist

By Philip Marchant

Soviet Labour Review. He warmly praised the scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers, equated Scargill with corrupt Stalinist officials in the Soviet Union and called for the return of up to £10 million which he claimed that Soviet miners had donated to the NUM.

The Cook Report, in a programme timed to coincide with the opening of the NUM annual conference in Durham, produced its star witness – Roger Windsor, the former chief executive of the NUM and one of the two original sources for the attack on Scargill and Heathfield. Windsor claimed that £29,500 he borrowed from the NUM in June 1984 to buy a house was repaid from Libyan money intended for striking miners. A document signed by Windsor and his wife agreeing to transfer the debt to the IMO was a forgery, he said. The *Mirror* echoed the allegations.

This was the signal for TUC leader Norman Willis and Labour Party NEC member David Blunkett to add their voices to the criticism of Scargill's handling of the 1984-85 strike. Had Scargill, Willis asked, misled him when he denied seeking financial aid from Libya?

On July 19, the NUM executive submitted to the mounting pressure from outside, and from within the NUM leadership itself. It voted to sue Scargill and Heathfield, along with Norman West, MEP for South Yorkshire, and IMO general secretary Alain Simon, for the recovery of £1.4 million, allegedly belonging to the NUM, deposited in accounts controlled by the IMO. Though High Court writs were served against the four, the action was subsequently adjourned after assurances from Simon that an NUM team could inspect the IMO's accounts.

Two main factors lie behind the attack on Scargill. The first is the need of the right wing to 'put its own house in order', to demonstrate to Tory voters, the City and industry that Labour can safely be entrusted with the reins of government. To this end, rank-and-file militants and those few leaders such as Scargill who refuse to march to the tune of 'new realism' are being purged.

The second factor, which to a large extent has determined the timing of the witch-hunt, is the political climate created by the revolt against Stalinism. The complete collapse of Stalinist rule in a number of Eastern European countries and the Stalinists' own embrace of the 'free market' has, in the absence of genuine revolutionary leadership, considerably strengthened the right wing of the labour movement, 'confirming' its own prejudice that co-operation with the employers is preferable to conflict. Scargill, with his 'old fashioned' commitment to industrial action, can thus be characterised as an 'unreconstructed Stalinist'.

This task is made easier by the fact that he has no history of principled opposition to Stalinism.

Miners, and all other groups of workers, must see in the witch-hunt a threat to their own ability to defend wages, jobs and conditions. Though Scargill has been singled out, this is in reality an attack on every militant struggle of the working class.

Scargill's defence campaign must be supported and resolutions passed by workers' organisations condemning those who have participated in the witch-hunt. The right of trade unions to raise money, conduct their own affairs and regulate the activities of their officials without outside interference must be defended.



Demonstrators outside the Old Bailey on July 16 as the trial opens of the man charged with the murder of Kuldip Singh Sekhan. The police continue to deny that it was a racist killing.

Offshore workers fight back

By David Lewis

THE STRUGGLE of North Sea offshore contract workers for union recognition has taken a major step forward. The strikes and sit-ins of maintenance, engineering and catering workers shows a determination that there will be no repetition of the Piper Alpha disaster of two years ago, in which 167 workers lost their lives.

The employers, who are all sub-contractors to the big oil companies, are attempting to divide and rule through a campaign of lies and intimidat-

tion orchestrated by the Offshore Contractors Council, which has persistently claimed that the number on strike has been much lower than it really is. The OCC's initial promise of talks on recognition if the action was called off was, as subsequent developments show, worthless. This was recognised by the strikers who recalled that a similar undertaking last year was reneged upon by the employers. Many of those who have been on strike have been sacked.

The strikes are being organised by the unofficial Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) and have, from the start, been opposed

by the leadership of the seven unions whose members are involved. Bob Eadie, a EET-PU official, has met with employers' representatives to try and reach a compromise. Roger Lyons, assistant general secretary of the MSF, has asked the government to resolve the dispute, saying that the Energy Secretary would 'have only himself to blame if he fails to intervene to prevent developing anarchy offshore'. As Lyons knows very well, the Tories have already proposed making unofficial strikes illegal. His comments will only encourage them that they can introduce the necessary legislation without resistance

from the trade union leaders.

The central weakness of the dispute is the tactic of sporadic action adopted by the OILC. The morale of the workers is high – maintenance work is at a peak which means that output is limited, but the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait puts pressure on the employers to get back to full production as quickly as possible. All these factors mean that an all-out, indefinite stoppage would have a most powerful impact. Added to this, the third 24-hour strike on August 9 drew support from 2,000 onshore workers at construction yards in Dundee and Inverness, and at the St Fergus gas processing terminal near Peterhead.

At the end of the strike, 400 offshore workers stayed out. They came under immediate attack for 'unco-ordinated' action from their own unofficial leader, Ronnie McDonald, who ordered them back to work! The employers responded by withdrawing earlier offers to help carry out a ballot on making the action official and to reinstate sacked strikers. The instincts of the 400 who stayed out are a surer guide to the tactics needed to win the battle than those of Ronnie McDonald. Sitting in his office in Aberdeen, paid for by £100,000 raised by the workers themselves, he is a trade union bureaucrat in the making.

On August 17, the day before the fifth one-day strike, Tom MacLean, chair of the OILC and executive member of the AEU, pleaded for 'an indication that the employers are prepared to enter discussions with us' so that 'we can call the whole matter off'. This came in the wake of a threat of legal action by the oil companies.

For offshore contract workers, there is no such thing as job security, and official union leaders turn a blind eye to the lack of safety provisions in one of the most dangerous industries in the world. A campaign for all-out strike action must be launched immediately with the demands: 'Full union recognition!', 'Workers' control of safety!' and 'No victimisation!'.



Journalists from Robert Maxwell's Oxford-based publishing company, Pergamon Press, on picket duty in August, almost 15 months after being sacked. Twenty-three NUJ members lost their jobs on May 24, 1989, after taking part in a one-day official strike in defence of union recognition.

The class struggle in Argentina

How would you characterise the present situation in Argentina?

The system is in complete crisis. What we see is a permanent attack on wages, rising taxes, recurring bouts of inflation and recession, high unemployment and increasing pauperisation.

The bourgeoisie is unable to make the slightest concession to the mass movement and is selling off the country to imperialism and the 'big bosses'. President Carlos Menem's government has not only resumed paying the foreign debt, but has also begun an extensive privatisation programme by selling the telephone company and the national airline to the highest overseas bidders through the mechanism of a \$7 billion debt-asset swap. However, this crisis is not peculiar to Argentina, but is common to the whole of Latin America.

How has the workers' movement responded?

At the beginning of the year there was a series of actions by public sector workers for higher wages and against privatisation, which reached its peak with strikes and demonstrations on March 21. The workers demanded a plan for struggle, including a general strike, from the union leaders. The general secretary of the CGT (the Argentinian equivalent of the TUC in Britain), Ubaldini, told them to 'wait for the opportune moment'. Organisations for the co-ordination of the most militant workers emerged (for example, 'Coordinadora Ferroviaria', gathering the vanguard of the railway workers), although they were too immature to act as an alternative leadership.

Thanks to the betrayal by the bureaucracy, the government regained the offensive and is implementing the IMF programme. But, according to a presidential adviser, wages of metalworkers and some public sector employees are still 'too high' for the economic plan to succeed. The metalworkers' union, the most powerful in Argentina, launched a plan of action almost two months ago, and has held successful 48-hour stoppages in each of the last three weeks. This marks the highest point in the struggle of the industrial working class for years. If it develops, the situation in the whole country could change, especially if linked with the struggle in Brazil with the metalworkers using methods like the occupation of Ford factories in Sao Paulo.

What is the relationship of the mass movement to the Peronists?

One of growing mistrust. The UTA, which organises bus workers, was among the first to take action last year. Along with the metalworkers' union, it was once a bastion of Peronism within the working class. This mistrust does not stop at the Peronists, but extends to all political parties. The democratic illusions generated after the collapse of the dictatorship

Juan Chingo, a member of the Central Committee of the Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) – the Workers Party for Socialism, an Argentinian Trotskyist organisation formed after a split in the MAS in May 1988 – spoke to a Workers News reporter during his recent visit to London

are losing their grip after years of austerity measures.

What can you tell us about the role of the United Left?

The United Left is the embryo of a popular front between the Communist Party, the MAS and IDEPO (a petty-bourgeois party led by the ex-Christian Democrat lawyer Nestor Vicente who was the United Left's presidential candidate in the last elections). When the fightback by workers opened up the possibility of a general struggle against the economic plan, the United Left, and above all the MAS, raised the demand of a Constituent Assembly in opposition to that of a general strike. They called on the masses to vote, not to fight!

The MAS and the United Left refuse to openly criticise the Radical Party (a bourgeois party which governed from 1983-89 under Alfonsín) and the bureaucracy in order to form an 'opposition front' against the government. They breathe new life into the theory of a progressive bourgeois camp. The culmination of this line was the rally on May 1 called under the slogan 'all those who are on the opposite side of the road to the govern-

ment' where, for example, the platform was made available to the traitor Ubaldini.

What tactics would you advocate to break the working class from Peronism?

Our party fights for the political independence of the working class. As a step towards this, we call for a workers' party based on the trade unions and rank-and-file workers' organisations. We are in favour of workers' organisations having the opportunity to put their weight behind political solutions because there is no way out through syndicalist struggles. In no way does this mean that we are for the building of a reformist workers' party such as the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil has become. We do not at any time hide our objective of building a revolutionary party, but as Trotsky said of the United States in the 1930s, the slogan of a workers' party 'helps the workers to advance and prepares the ground for our party'.

What is your assessment of the recent congress of the MAS?

The Fourth Congress of the



This year's May Day rally in Buenos Aires. The MAS and the United Left campaigned for it under the slogan 'all those who are on the opposite side of the road to the government'

MAS was a further opportunist turn. Present at the congress were the general secretary of the Communist Party, the chief of the youth wing of the Radical Party and Nestor Vicente. Attending from outside Argentina were representatives of the Lambert current and a special representative of the Brazilian PT who said: 'We need to strengthen the links between the forces of the MAS comrades, the PT and the Uruguayan comrades [of Frente Amplio – the Wide Front – an alliance between General Seregni and the Communist Party] to build the broad unity of the really revolutionary forces of Latin America on the road to socialism.' In return, the congress declared the PT to be 'a revolutionary party with which we can advance towards the construction of revolutionary leadership on the national and international level'.

The congress voted to continue the strategic alliance with the Communist Party, to open the door to all kinds of electoral horse-trading, including a popular front with the left wing of the traditional bourgeois parties, and, if need be, to establish a classical re-

formist party.

The embracing of Lulaism is the abandonment of the fight for revolutionary leadership. A delegation from the MAS went on to attend the Seventh National Meeting of the PT. Present were representatives of over 30 organisations from around the world, including the Argentine, Italian and Cuban Communist Parties, the PLO and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. The intention was to found a 'Yellow International' to fill the vacuum created by the crisis of Stalinism.

What connection would you draw between the policy of the MAS in Argentina and its attitude to the crisis of Stalinism?

The MAS holds the position that in the USSR and Eastern Europe it is man who has failed and not the Stalinist system. In this way they adapt to the reactionary theory of 'socialism in one country'. To the MAS the problem is the lack of democracy: 'socialism with democracy' is their preferred slogan. In other words, socialism in one country plus democracy of an undefined character. Their adaptation to bourgeois democracy in Argentina

is carried over to the situation in the USSR and Eastern Europe where their slogan of democratic pluralism is indistinguishable from that of social democracy and imperialism.

Could you briefly explain the policies of the PTS?

The PTS advocates the necessity for the working class to find a way out of the crisis of the country. It must unite with all oppressed sections and advance a programme for a fight against the monopolies, imperialism and the big bosses. This programme will only be realised if the workers take the power into their own hands. For this, a struggle to the death with imperialism, not only in our country but throughout the continent, is needed. We call for the building of a continental fighting united front, led by the working class in the trade unions, on a programme which begins with the non-payment of debts and a break with all the pacts which link us to imperialism. Our party, as a part of the Internationalist Faction of the LIT, fights for the reconstruction of the Fourth International, purged of revisionism.

July 26, 1990

HANDS OFF IRAQ!

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Iraq's motives for invading Kuwait are not a mystery. By the time that a ceasefire had ended the Gulf War, Iraq had accumulated a foreign debt of between \$70 billion and \$85 billion. The cost of the war had been exacerbated by the steep fall in oil prices in 1986 – a slide which was followed by four years of stagnation. Saddam Hussein's revival of Iraq's long-standing claim to Kuwait is an act of self-preservation by the Iraqi bourgeoisie against the Western stranglehold over the oil market, which followed the decline of OPEC's bargaining powers.

A mixture of ultra-lefts, pacifists and reformists will chorus: 'But Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party are butchers, who have been the hangmen of Iraqi workers and of the Kurds. You cannot possibly give any support to such a regime.'

We hold no illusions in the viciously anti-working class character of Hussein's government, but neither are we abstract moralists opposed to all wars. Iraq remains a semi-colony of imperialism, largely dependent upon the sale of crude oil. In spite of Hussein's

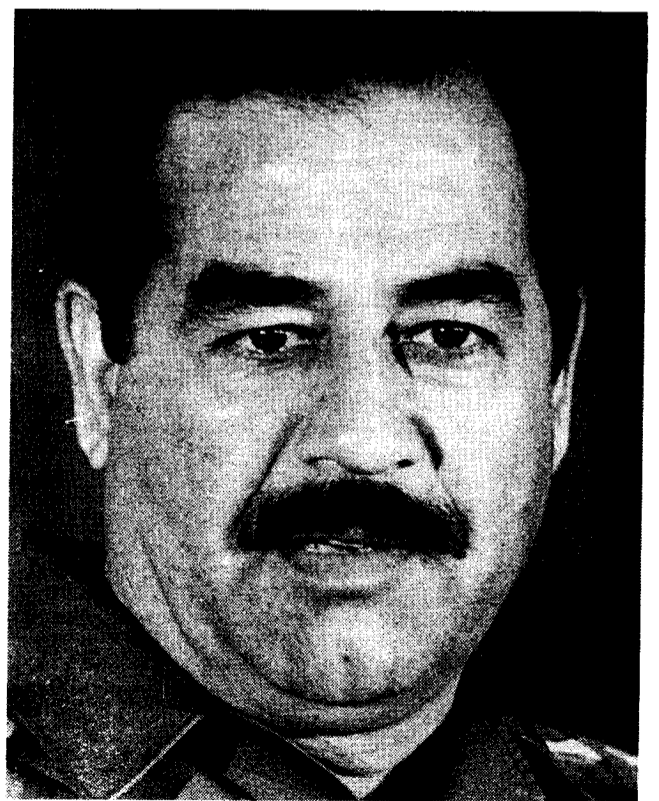
intentions of pursuing good relations with the West, Iraq faces a direct conflict with the major imperialist powers. As Trotsky wrote, only cowards, scoundrels or complete imbeciles can remain neutral in such a confrontation. Whilst we lend full military support to an Iraqi victory, and stand for the defeat of all imperialist and Arab interventionist forces, we do not lend any political support to the Baghdad regime. We do not call upon workers to suspend the class struggle either in Iraq or Kuwait, nor do we call for the Kurdish minority in Iraq to abandon its struggle for self-determination. On the contrary, we call for independent workers' mobilisation against the imperialist threat, and warn the Arab masses that the Iraqi bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying through the struggle to the finish – let alone liberating Palestine. We fight imperialism not by Holy War but with the methods of the class struggle.

'But wouldn't victory strengthen capitalism in Iraq?', some ultra-lefts persist. The logic of such a position is to deny the legitimacy of all wars of national liberation, which contain the possibility of enlarging the sphere of opera-

tions of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie. This is indeed the goal of Saddam Hussein's dream of a 'Greater Iraq'. An Iraqi victory would – as the popular demonstrations in Jordan and Tunisia indicate – greatly raise the self-confidence of the Arab masses, and facilitate the struggle against the Arab bourgeoisie, the sultans, sheikhs and emirs. An imperialist defeat would conversely mean a serious blow for Bush, Thatcher and Co.

The Soviet bureaucracy's offer to jointly intervene with the imperialist states is entirely in line with its counter-revolutionary pursuit of 'regional settlements', and in accord with its treacherous record during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. Throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, workers must demand:

- Break off all bi-partisan agreements with the imperialists!
- Full support for Iraq!
- To workers in Britain, we say:
 - Not a penny, not a man for Bush and Thatcher's war! The main enemy is at home!
 - Boycott the movement of all war materials!
 - Pass resolutions throughout



Saddam Hussein

the Labour and trade union movement demanding that the Labour and TUC leaders break from supporting the Tories, and organise class-wide action to defeat imperialist intervention!

- Oppose all attempts to whip

up anti-Islamic racism and chauvinism!

- Build solidarity with Iraqi workers!
- Down with the war! Down with imperialism!

August 18, 1990

EDITORIAL

Counter-revolution
in East Germany

THE EFFECTS of the July 1 monetary union between West and East Germany have been swift and savage. Tens of thousands of workers have been thrown out of work; half a million more have been laid off or are on short time. The centralised planning machinery has been largely dismantled, subsidies on essential items withdrawn and the West German Bundesbank wields life and death authority over the nationalised enterprises. The deformed workers' state has had its back broken.

East German workers face levels of deprivation not seen since the early 1930s. Within two weeks of monetary union, unemployment had risen by 60 per cent to 224,000. By the end of July, the official figure had reached 272,000. Some projections put the number of jobless by the end of 1991 as high as four million. Such are the benefits of 'democracy' and the 'free' market - democracy and freedom for the asset-strippers and speculators, while workers will be left in industrial ghost towns.

With as many as 50 per cent of East German enterprises scheduled to close by the end of the year, industrial workers already face a series of bitter defensive struggles. For farmworkers, the situation is even more bleak. Half of them are set to lose their jobs as a result of retailers stocking higher-priced West German produce. The anarchic logic of the market is being revealed every day. Production was disrupted at Praktica in July after loans were delayed by Treuhandanstalt - the body set to oversee the privatisation of East German enterprises. The successful camera company - 25 per cent of all cameras bought in Britain are made by Praktica - plans to sack 80 per cent of its workforce by the end of 1991. Even bakeries, selling bread at DM1.5, have been forced to close as distributors have established contracts with West German rivals charging DM4 per loaf!

The euphoria for reunification has melted away in favour of a gloomy recognition of the price that capitalist restoration will exact. Many - perhaps most - East German workers continue to see reunification and restoration as the only way out and regard the economic crisis in the east as the inevitable overhead. At the same time, the haemorrhage of jobs and the soaring cost of living has propelled workers into action. On the day monetary union became effective engineers took widespread strike action. During July, miners, car workers, shipyard workers, steelworkers, dockers, local government workers and others struck. Among their demands were wage increases, shorter hours and job security.

Such a movement, whilst it is not consciously directed against West German imperialism's *Anschluss*, has a great potential. The task of revolutionaries - Trotskyists - lies in patiently explaining that it is not 'socialism' that has failed, but Stalinism. The combination of police repression and economic impasse produced illusions in capitalist democracy. Fed on the mirage of prosperity of West German proportions, a majority of workers voted in the March elections for the shortest route to reunification, with the result that the conservative CDU won a landslide victory.

However unpalatable these illusions are for those of the West European left who saw the events in East Germany as the unfolding of political revolution, it is pointless to deny their existence. Those who cannot distinguish between revolution and counter-revolution will not make good revolutionaries!

The initial leftward impulse that the implosion of the ruling Stalinist SED (renamed the PDS) lent to the mass demonstrations last November subsided as the PDS and SDP lent full support to capitalist restoration. The immediate task of revolutionaries in such circumstances lay in swimming against the stream and opposing the drive for capitalist reunification, whilst simultaneously advocating the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the establishment of workers' democracy based on workers' councils. This required, in turn, a programme of action aimed at mobilising workers, women, farmers and intellectuals in defence of their social gains in preparation to move onto the offensive - the conquest of political power. The vacuum of revolutionary leadership has meant that when resistance to the effects of monetary union has emerged it has been very largely spontaneous, or 'managed' by the West German trade union bureaucracy.

Even at this late hour, the aim of revolutionaries must not be to contemplate the 'inevitable', but to rouse East German workers to defend nationalised property, re-establish a planned economy and stop the takeover by West German capital. Enterprises which have closed or are threatened with closure must be occupied and run by factory committees elected from the workforce. Workers' councils must be set up to co-ordinate the resistance throughout the GDR. They must strive for the maximum unity in action with their class brothers and sisters in West Germany.

In no event, however, can the defence of the GDR - so long as it exists - be made conditional on the level of consciousness of West German workers. A victory for the bourgeois parties in the forthcoming all-German elections will give the final seal of approval to the *Anschluss*. Along with the formal act of unification, it will signify the abolition of the GDR and a defeat, though not an irreversible one, for the working class.

The process of capitalist restoration is being facilitated by the close proximity of the West German bourgeoisie. That being said, the creation of a viable capitalist structure in East Germany is strewn with problems for the imperialists. Not only does no 'native' capitalist class exist, but the response of workers to the prospect of a 'semi-colonial' existence threatens to disrupt their best-laid plans.

East Germany has become a test-bed for restoration throughout Eastern Europe. Next in line are Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The eyes of workers in the Soviet Union and the deformed workers' states are trained on the events in East Germany. Spontaneously, the need to defend jobs will have made a deep impression upon their collective consciousness. But the task of disentangling their hatred of the Stalinist regimes from the necessity of defending the social gains embodied in nationalised property falls to Trotskyism, which alone can lead the fight for the positive goal of political revolution, and bar the road to restoration.

By Richard Price

FIFTY YEARS ago, on August 20, 1940, Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin of the Russian revolution, founder of the Left Opposition and of the Fourth International, was mortally wounded in Mexico by the Stalinist assassin, Ramon Mercader. All over the world, countless commemorative rallies will take place and hundreds of articles will honour him and lay claim to his heritage.

The name of Trotsky and Trotskyism is synonymous in every part of the planet with the goal of world revolution and the unswerving battle against the monstrous perversion of Marxism - Stalinism. Today, in the Soviet Union, Trotsky's prestige, as a result of his struggle against Stalin and the betrayal of the Russian revolution, stands higher than at any point since the early 1920s.

Purely historical tributes to Trotsky can, however, serve not only to detract from the profound relevance of his ideas today; all too often they become self-serving justifications by those who have distorted almost beyond recognition the method and programme fought for by him.

Convinced by the victory of fascism in Germany in 1933 that the prospect no longer existed to reform the Communist (Third) International, Trotsky declared that it had decisively entered the camp of counter-revolution. He devoted the remaining seven years of his life to building a new, revolutionary Fourth International. In the diary he kept whilst in exile in France during 1935, he wrote: 'And still I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life - more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil War or any other.' Trotsky had nothing but contempt for those all-too-numerous currents in the 1930s, such as the London Bureau, for whom internationalism meant holiday speeches and hollow platonic affirmations of international solidarity. Revolutionary internationalism for Trotsky was a conscious political and organisational expression of the world market and the international character of the class struggle. It was the living embodiment of Marx and Engels's famous declaration at the end of the 'Communist Manifesto': 'Working men of all countries, unite!'

On many occasions, Trotsky warned those organisations at the fringes of the Fourth International, which strove to maintain their own national organisational 'independence', of the impossibility of maintaining a revolutionary orientation on a national terrain. (However, we note that such remarks are often dusted off and hurled at organisations such as our own by centrist international cliques. Our answer, if such people are remotely interested in listening, is that for Trotsky internationalism was grounded not in an affiliation, but in a programme. And since such people are rarely prepared to have their programmatic positions discussed, still less criticised, this is usually the point at which discussion ceases and hysterical accusations begin.)

The Fourth International for which Trotsky fought so energetically on the one hand, and so patiently on the other, survived its founder's assassination as a genuinely revolutionary body by less than a decade. Does this mean that the entire enterprise was doomed to failure from the outset? There are those such as the SWP (Britain) and the late Isaac Deutscher who answer quite clearly in the affirmative. Then there are others, including the major 'Trotskyist' tendencies (USec, LIT, etc) who disagree on the grounds that they represent Trotskyist 'continuity'. While we reject the scepticism and pessimism of the former, the

mythologies of the latter scarcely represent any advance.

For us, the founding of the Fourth International remains Trotsky's greatest achievement. Its formation took place not as the result of any ideal mental scenario (major revolutionary victories, mass parties, etc) but under the weight of necessity - the impending imperialist war, and the imperative need to construct an international leadership capable of withstanding the huge pressures bearing down upon it and of seizing the revolutionary opportunities which the further development of the war would bring. Behind Trotsky lay the experience of the First World War, in which the internationalist forces were, for much of the time, scattered, ill-co-ordinated and unprepared for the depth of the Second International's betrayal. He was determined that the youthful cadres of the Fourth International should go into the Second World War prepared to meet the tasks that faced them.

Without the founding of the Fourth International, Trotskyism might have become relegated to an object of historical or academic interest. Today, despite all the vicissitudes of its development, Trotskyism not only haunts Stalinist and social democratic bureaucrats the world over; it alone carries forward in a conscious way the revolutionary aspirations of the world working class.

This, however, is no cause for complacency. In the past year, the collapse of Stalinism throughout Eastern Europe has powerfully vindicated every major aspect of Trotsky's analysis. Without, in most cases, even embryonic revolutionary leadership, the mass movement has been channelled into support for 'democracy' (i.e., capitalist democracy). Meanwhile, millions of worker-members of Communist Parties throughout the world feel bewildered or betrayed by the dizzying disintegration of regimes they had for decades been told had achieved 'socialism'. In 'regional conflicts' and 'regional settlements' throughout the world (Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Southern Africa and the Gulf), the Soviet bureaucracy acts ever more openly in tandem with imperialism.

If genuine Trotskyists are not driven by these events to unite their struggle and integrate their efforts towards rebuilding the Fourth International - an International worthy of the hopes Trotsky placed in it - then a historic opportunity will have been lost. Such an aim in no way implies that any new short-cuts exist, nor that a spurious 'unity' can be achieved based upon diplomatically agreeing to disagree on the burning tasks of the hour. The movement of history, however, is neither patient nor forgiving.

In order to move forwards, it is necessary sometimes to look backwards. If agreement among the best revolutionary elements can be achieved to *rebuild* the Fourth International, it is necessary to ground it firmly upon an understanding of how it failed to survive as an international leadership. On this question we do not seek to force our views like an ultimatum down the throats of others - 'renounce your entire past and join us' - but we make no apologies for the importance we attach to them. In brief outline, we consider the main landmarks of the crisis and subsequent degeneration of the Fourth International between

1940 and 1953 to be the following:

(a) The assassination of Trotsky himself, which deprived the new International of its foremost teacher and pre-eminent leader.

(b) The organisational dislocation of the FI under the impact of war, and stemming in part from the defection of a majority of the International Executive Committee to the Shachtmanites.

(c) The failure of the SWP (USA) to shoulder the tasks of international leadership, which fell to it as the FI's 'flagship'.

(d) The deviations of the leading European and American sections - both opportunist and sectarian - from a consistently revolutionary opposition to the imperialist war: for example, the semi-patriotic positions of the *La Verité* group (France); the abstentionism of the RSL (Britain); the bleak pessimism of the IKD (Germany); the equivocal positions of the SWP on revolutionary defeatism.

(e) The decimation of Trotskyist cadres at the hands of both fascists and Stalinists during the war and its immediate aftermath, particularly in France, Belgium, Vietnam, Greece and the Netherlands.

(f) The errors of perspective adopted by the FI leadership following the war, which denied the possibility of capitalism reviving on the one hand, and failed to grasp the significance of Stalinism's expansion on the other.

(g) The failure to place the experience of the Vietnamese Trotskyists in the 1945 revolution at the centre of the International - a serious error, which made possible the subsequent betrayal of the Chinese Trotskyists.

(h) The consolidation of errors of both method and perspective in relation to Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union into a thoroughly centrist adaptation, from the worship of Tito to the decisions of the Third World Congress.

(i) A parallel adaptation to the left-reformist milieu in the Labour Party by Healy's 'Group' in Britain.

(j) The misleadership given to the Latin American sections by the FI leadership, leading to disorientation in relation to Peronism in Argentina and a highly opportunist interpretation of the anti-imperialist united front in Bolivia, which ensured the defeat of the 1952 revolution.

(k) The bureaucratic suppression of opposition to the degeneration; for example, the RCP majority (Britain), the PCI majority (France) and the Chinese Trotskyists.

(l) The failure to criticise the LSSP's passivity during the Great Hartal (general strike) in Ceylon in 1953.

The foregoing in no way means that the sins of the leaders should be visited upon the ranks of the FI, who fought heroically throughout this period, facing unparalleled persecution and privation in every continent. But neither does it mean that the philosophy of Dr Pangloss - 'All is for the best in the best of all possible Internationals' - serves any useful purpose. The partisans of the United Secretariat will object that, despite mistakes here and there, the International survived, while those identifying with the International Committee traditions will argue that the degeneration was decisively reversed by the split of 1953.

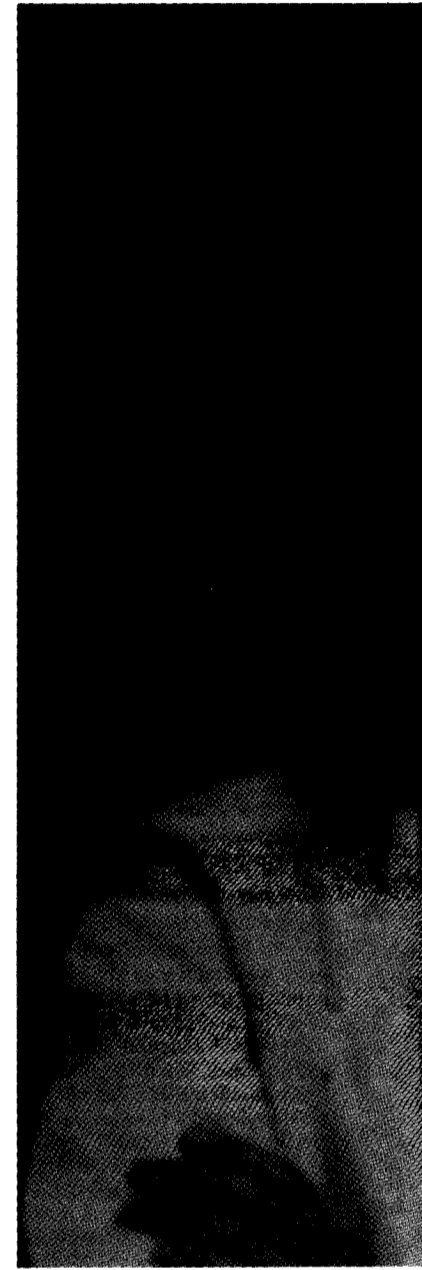
What emerged from the split were in reality two centrist formations - with different features - oriented towards elements within Stalinism, reform-

ism and bourgeois nationalism.

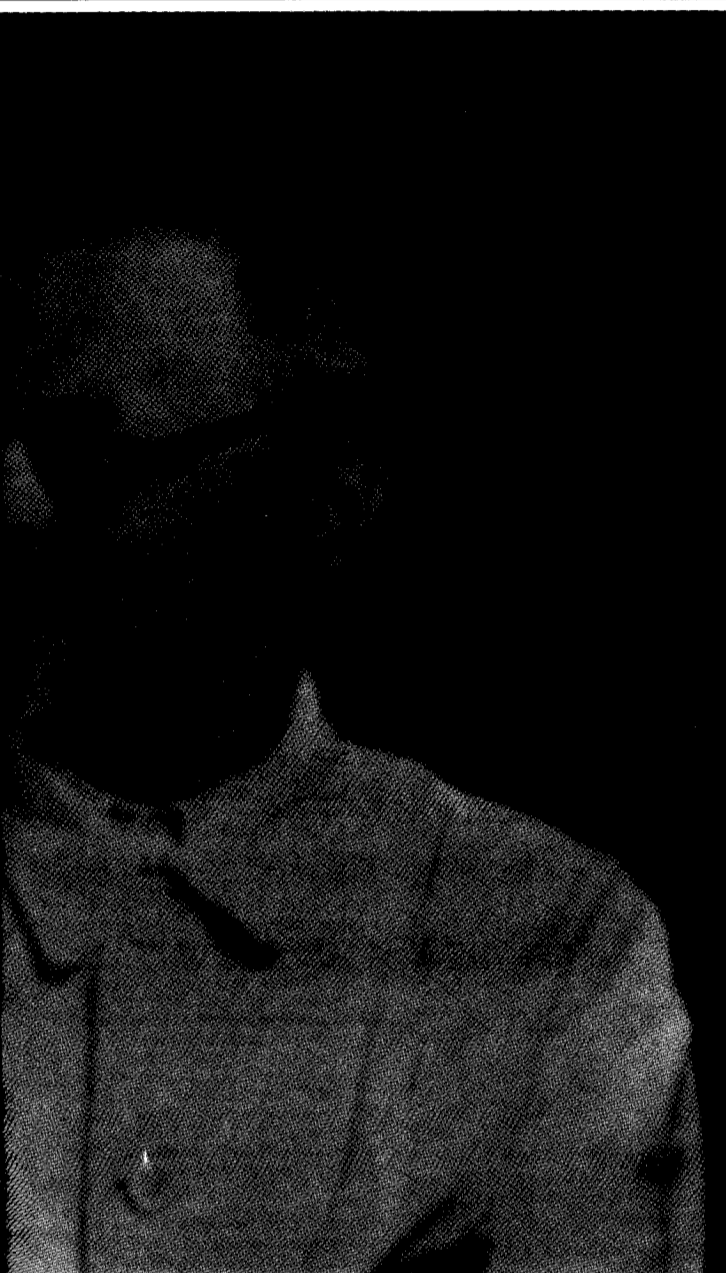
The position is sometimes advanced that the Fourth International is not 'dead' because it did not commit a historic act of betrayal comparable to that of the Second International in August 1914, or the surrender of the Third International to Hitler in 1933. But since the Fourth International never led millions of workers as did previous internationals, this argument lacks conviction. In any case, in those countries where Trotskyism *did* have either mass or substantial support - Bolivia, Ceylon, Vietnam and China - a pattern of betrayal was established. In the first two instances, revolutionary opportunities were squandered while in the second two, Trotskyist forces were left high and dry by the International's leadership.

The distinction which must, however, be drawn between 1914 and 1933 and the collapse of the Fourth International is that, whereas the first two cases marked the passage to the counter-revolution, the descendants of the organisations adhering to Pablo and Mandel's International Secretariat and Cannon, Healy and Lambert's International Committee have remained, with few exceptions, in the orbit of centrism, veering between revolutionary positions and reformism. As a result, in the eyes of advanced workers and intellectuals, the name of the Fourth International remains, despite the deprivations of the epigones, tied to the goal of international socialism.

Not that the claim to adhere to Trotskyism has been any insurance against the counter-revolutionary evolution of organisations such as *Militant* to-

How to re
International

Rebuild the Fourth International – and how not to



Leon Trotsky

wards reformism, the SWP (US) and the Healyite 'Marxist Party' (Britain) towards Stalinism, or most notoriously the LSSP (Ceylon) which joined the bourgeois government of Bandaranaike in 1964.

But just as centrism does not preclude a counter-revolutionary evolution, neither does it exclude a revolutionary one. Individuals and oppositions within the major tendencies have intermittently taken up revolutionary positions, while groups moving in a healthy direction have split from their centrist parent bodies. Such developments under today's conditions make revolutionary regroupment under the banner of the Fourth International not only possible, but the responsibility of every serious internationalist.

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Recognising that most of the tendencies today which describe themselves as Trotskyist are in fact centrist in their politics represents at least an advance upon the notion that all belong to an extended 'Trotskyist family' – a position which naturally leads on to the project of rebuilding the Fourth International being seen as bringing the 'members' of the 'family' back together for a reunion. That being said, pinning the label 'centrist' on a given grouping does not necessarily reveal very much about the particular characteristics of it. For instance, if we take the two principal groupings in the 1950s and 1960s, whereas the International Secretariat/United Secretariat was characterised by interminable discussions generally lead-

ing to rotten compromises, the International Committee organisations prided themselves on their bureaucratic methods of leadership and their absence of internal life. Such methods have left deep scars. Organisations descended from the ICFI have tended to view thorough democratic discussion as inherently dangerous, while the United Secretariat and its offspring see unity in action as 'bureaucratic' – and in some countries have created two or even three competing 'sections' to cater for their followers' divergent positions.

There is nothing inherently more radical about centrist 'Trotskyists' than other avowedly non-Trotskyist tendencies. For instance, left-wing anarchists during the Spanish Civil War stood closer to revolutionary positions than the POUM; the state capitalist SWP (Britain) today generally stands to the left of *Militant*. Equally, nothing intrinsically ties the epigones of Trotsky to the programme he fought for, except verbal allegiance. The evaluation of political tendencies cannot be based upon what they say about themselves; it must be derived from what they do. Where do they stand in relation to the burning questions of our time? What is their attitude to the forces which dominate the workers' movement internationally – Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism? With what methods – strategy and tactics, programme – do they propose to resolve the crisis of leadership in the working class?

In the early 1930s, the conjunction of world slump and a crisis of both social democracy and Stalinism on an international scale gave rise to centrist

movements of many different shades, among them the SAP (Germany), the ILP (Britain), the POUM (Spain), and the groups associated with the Bukharinist Right Opposition – the Lovestoneites (United States) and the Brandlerites (Germany). Without making any 'diplomatic' political concessions, or ceasing to make an accurate characterisation of their politics, Trotsky attempted to test out the best elements in practice around the axis of the struggle for a new International (e.g., 'The Declaration of the Four'). For Trotsky, the revolutionary potential of such fluid elements could not be established *a priori*.

In contrast, the centrist tendencies today, which lay claim to Trotskyism, neither have the sizeable base of the groups which Trotsky fought in the 1930s, nor are they a reflection of sharp swings of mood among the masses. Instead, they have continued over several decades to plough parallel furrows, and have been without any dynamic, spontaneous development (with the possible exception of the period after 1968).

In our view, no prospect exists of reforming such pretenders to the title of the Fourth International as the United Secretariat, the Lambertist tendency, the Morenoite LIT, North's ICFI and the Spartacist tendency (ICL). The 'continuity' of Trotskyism each lays claim to rests upon historical distortions, blatant falsifications and myths. The practice of each at decisive turning points in the class struggle has proved time and again its inability to give a revolutionary lead.

In United Secretariat circles it is fashionable to regard the 'main enemy' as sectarianism, leaving the door wide open for all manner of opportunist adaptations to Stalinism, reformism and nationalist forces. Meanwhile, groups such as the Spartacists and North's ICFI wear their sectarianism as a badge of honour. In truth, opportunism and sectarianism (in the true meaning of the word – ultra-left abstention from the struggles of the mass of the workers) have had an equally baleful and complementary effect on much of what has passed for Trotskyist politics.

The experiences of the healthiest groups which have emerged from the main centrist tendencies have much in common – much more in fact than at first might seem to be the case given the different traditions. Administrative methods, bureaucratic disloyalty and even violence have been used repeatedly to stifle serious criticism.

To sum up: only a rigorous struggle against the centrist misleaderships can prepare the way for rebuilding the Fourth International.

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Another, and highly important aspect of the degeneration of many organisations claiming adherence to the Fourth International is the legacy of what might be called 'Great Power' Trotskyism. The norm in the evolution of many tendencies has been the domination of one 'big' organisation (typically based in an imperialist democracy) over a series of much smaller satellites, which can be controlled and manipulated. In place of international comradeship co-operation is substituted leadership based on the Führer principle, bolstered by a nationalist rationale. Thus for Healy, Britain was the centre of the world revolution, for Lambert, France and for More-

no, Argentina.

As a consequence of their experiences, many revolutionaries in semi-colonial and colonial countries developed a legitimate distrust of 'Trotskyists' in the advanced countries who treated them as poor relations or worse. This distrust, in turn, has been utilised by the leaderships of such organisations as the LSSP (Ceylon/Sri Lanka), the POR (Bolivia) and, more recently, the Partido Obrero (Argentina) to justify national isolation and to turn away from constructing an international leadership.

The Fourth International cannot be rebuilt on the basis of thinly-disguised chauvinism and national self-centredness. Its rebuilding is, nonetheless, inconceivable without the mutual co-operation of Trotskyists in the imperialist and colonial/semi-colonial countries. The multi-millioned growth of the working class in the semi-colonial countries underlines the significance of internationalism in practice.

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Why not call for the building of a Fifth International? Hasn't the Fourth International run its course and been found wanting? Haven't its various claimants proved repeatedly unable to provide leadership in revolutionary situations?

We can agree that the Fourth International as an organisation does not exist and that its cadres were destroyed or dispersed by the revisionist course steered after the Second World War. Unlike the Second International, however, which collapsed in August 1914, its programme had not run its course. Although the Transitional Programme was not wholly 'self-sufficient' to meet the post-war expansion of Stalinism, the weight of responsibility lies overwhelmingly with the betrayal of the Fourth International's programme by its leadership, not with its inadequacy.

Whereas this fact is self-evident to some small groups of Trotskyists, it is clearly not the case for tens of thousands of those who continue to regard themselves as Fourth Internationalists. For the advanced sections of workers and intellectuals, and even for those hostile to its aims, the name of the Fourth International continues to inspire both revolutionary optimism and reactionary hatred as the party of the extreme left. In our view, the slogan of a Fifth International will appear to such forces as a sectarian ultimatum, as an unnecessary obstacle to serious discussion and debate.

We are well aware that the slogan of rebuilding the Fourth International has itself been misused and abused by such organisations as the Lambertist PCI, as well as the experience of such abortive projects as the Moreno-Lambert 'Parity Committee' and the 'Reconstructed Fourth International' of Ramos and Assouline. Therefore, the goal of rebuilding the Fourth International – which in all likelihood will pass through several stages of regroupment – must be tied to *reappropriating* Trotsky's banner, and in unequivocal opposition to the epigones. Given such an approach, discussion will of necessity be centred around the programmatic foundations of our movement and how these are to be developed in relation to the most important tasks facing the world working class today. To draw a historical balance sheet of the experiences of the Trotskyist movement since the Second World War – both positive and negative – is an essential part of

this political rearmament.

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At its International Pre-conference in February 1933, the International Left Opposition (forerunner of the Fourth International) laid down eleven 'fundamental principles' which it added to 'the spirit and the sense' of the decisions of the first four congresses of the Comintern. These included:

- The independence of the proletarian party.
- The permanent character of the proletarian revolution.
- Defence of the Soviet Union as a workers' state in spite of the bureaucratic regime.
- Condemnation of the economic zig-zags of the Stalin faction.
- The need for consistent revolutionary work in mass workers' organisations.
- Rejection of the formula of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'.
- The necessity to mobilise the masses under transitional slogans.
- The necessity of a united front policy towards the mass organisations of the working class.
- Rejection of the theory of 'social fascism'.
- A clear demarcation of the three groupings within the Communist movement – the Marxist (Trotskyist), the Centre (Stalinist) and the Right (Bukharinist).
- Inner-party democracy.

Some of these formulations passed into history or required modification with the transformation of Stalinism from bureaucratic centrism into the camp of counter-revolution. The essential positions, however, were the basis for Trotsky's further extension of the transitional approach in the Action Programme for France (1934), in the Transitional Programme (1938) and in numerous other documents and declarations. Trotsky viewed the Transitional Programme itself as incomplete in several respects, and insisted that it had to be read in conjunction with the other documents of the Fourth International.

The Transitional Programme remains the most important summary of the foundations of our movement, and its attitude to the tasks of the imperialist epoch retain their validity in almost all respects. That, however, is not the same as the mistaken belief that it is somehow the repository of all knowledge or that history stopped dead 52 years ago.

If Trotsky considered the sections of the Transitional Programme on economic questions and the colonial revolution inadequate in 1938, how much more do Trotskyists today need to apply themselves to extending this work. The vast growth of the semi-colonial proletariat, the development of the 'national' bourgeoisie in such countries, the rise and decline of petty-bourgeois guerrilla movements – and despite all this there are those who believe that all that is necessary to prove their 'orthodoxy' is to recite, parrot fashion, Comintern resolutions drafted almost 70 years ago! Then there are others, more numerous, who have discarded the heritage of Lenin and Trotsky entirely in pursuit of some 'new reality', some 'blunt instrument' in the shape of a Fidel Castro, a Ho Chi Minh or a Daniel Ortega who has rendered the building of Trotskyist parties redundant.

The most pressing question of the present period – the disintegration of Stalinism – must be approached not from the stand-

point of cheerfully idiotic optimism, but by applying afresh rather than learning by rote the strategy of political revolution.

Trotsky's famous description of the epoch as the 'death agony of capitalism' remains correct on the historical plain; this however in no way excuses the methodology of the ostrich used by the 'red professors' of the WRP/*Workers Press*, who claim that the productive forces have stagnated since the Second World War. A serious accounting of the post-war expansion of capitalism and the rise of powers such as Japan cannot be avoided. No internationalist policy can be developed without it being based upon the laws and tendencies of world economy.

This far from exhaustive list indicates the areas in which we believe the Trotskyist programme can and must be renovated, as the basis for a rebuilt Fourth International.

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A cautionary tale of how *not* to rebuild the Fourth International is presented by the three-year existence of the Preparatory Committee, recently grandiosely, and oddly, renamed the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International. Having acquired an international reputation as the leaders of the fight against Healy, the WRP/*Workers Press* leadership issued a ten-point call in January 1987 which was framed in such a way that it, on the one hand, restricted entrance to a pre-selected list and, on the other, bound participants to a pledge to recognise each other's part in the 'continuity' of the struggle against 'revisionism'.

The purpose of such wordy generalities and evasions was to facilitate a shot-gun wedding with the Morenoite LIT, and for a year the WRP leadership desperately fought off both internal and external criticism of the LIT. In February 1988, the ten-point call was expanded to include, among other things, a eulogy to the 'long and principled struggle led by comrade Moreno'. Relations between the Preparatory Committee and the LIT only broke down when the former realised the latter were only interested in a raiding expedition.

Subsequently, the WRP leaders have sought to maintain that their 'struggle against' the LIT was entirely principled, and refer in the founding resolution of the 'Workers International' to the 'Stalinist methods and degenerate leadership' of ... Moreno! Bureaucratic skulduggery and the wilful and sometimes criminal misrepresentation of political opposition within the Preparatory Committee have characterised its evolution. What else is to be expected from a 'Workers International' which is living a *rentier* existence off the ill-gotten assets of G. Healy and has reinstalled many of his methods. The epitaph such an organisation deserves is one of its own original ten points: 'Condemnation of the method, inherited from Stalinism, of slanders, violence and frame-up designed to silence and drive out political opponents.'

FUNDS

Workers News urgently needs to boost its £10,000 Building Fund, which currently stands at £1,947.91, in order to play a greater role in the tasks outlined in the article on these pages. The crisis tearing through Stalinism and the imperialist war machine massing in the Gulf are the most graphic illustrations of the correctness of Trotsky's struggle to build the Fourth International. Send a donation today for the £300 Monthly Fund, and something extra for the Building Fund. Post to:

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BY 1950, when Gerry Healy secured his ascendancy over the Trotskyist movement in Britain, the Fourth International had entered a deep political crisis. Confronted by the stabilisation of capitalism, the expansion of Stalinism and the consequent marginalisation of Trotskyism, the International's leaders had become disorientated. In an attempt to overcome the movement's isolation, this leadership – in particular its secretary, Michel Pablo – began to jettison some of the main planks of the Trotskyist programme. The FI rapidly plunged into the centrist degeneration which characterises its fragments today.

It was at the Ninth Plenum of the International Executive Committee, in November 1950, that the FI first embraced the programmatic revisions which Healy would later furiously denounce as Pabloism. Healy's own organisation in Britain, however, had already anticipated this collapse into 'Pabloite revisionism' by several months. The perspectives document adopted by the 'Club' at its national conference the previous August had defined 'the basic antagonism in the world today' not as the class struggle internationally, but as the conflict between US imperialism and Soviet Stalinism. A 'developing economic crisis', Healy insisted, compelled the USA towards an 'armed showdown with the Soviet Union and the colonial world'. With imperialism 'forced to prepare for, and then embark upon, a world war under extremely unfavourable conditions for world capitalism', the stage was set for 'an international civil war' in which the Fourth International would be able to lead successful revolutionary struggles.¹

Typically, Healy sprung these new perspectives on the Club without giving the membership any opportunity to discuss them before the conference. In a manoeuvre which Ted Grant condemned as 'Zinoviev trickery', Healy presented the conference with an entirely new document, while claiming that it was merely an amended version of the original, and quite different, draft.² In imposing Pablo's political conceptions on the British section in this way, Healy demonstrated the utter contempt for Bolshevik methods of party organisation which was to be a distinguishing feature of his political career.

There seems no reason, then, to dispute Livio Maitan's claim that, when Pablo's notorious essay 'Where Are We Going?' was circulated for discussion within the International early in 1951, Healy expressed no disagreement with it whatsoever.³ Nor did Healy challenge the adoption, at the FI's Third World Congress in August-September 1951, of a full-blown 'Pabloite' program-

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy

me. This put forward the perspective that with the outbreak of another world war, which was held to be both imminent and inevitable, the counter-revolutionary character of Stalinism would be transformed. Following the supposed examples of the Yugoslav and Chinese CPs, Stalinist parties could be expected to break with Stalinist politics and 'project a revolutionary orientation'.⁴ All the British delegates to the Congress – Healy, John Lawrence and Bill Hunter – voted for these perspectives.

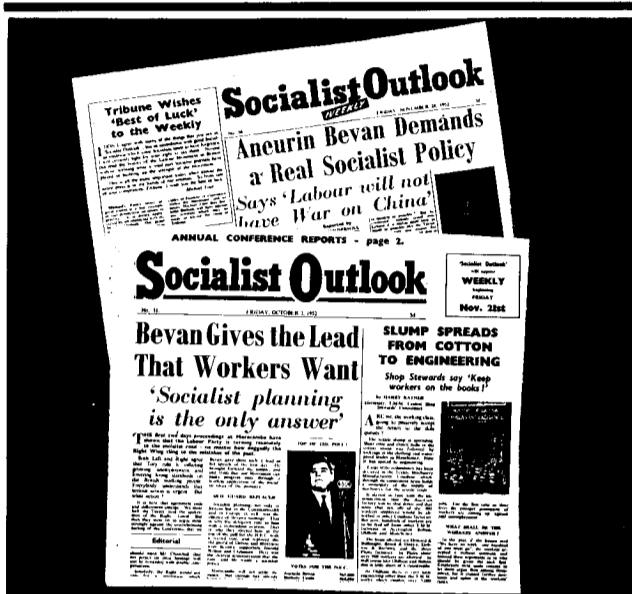
Only the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, led by Bleibtreu and Lambert, took a stand against Pablo at the Third World Congress. For, while they were enthusiastic supporters of Pablo's pro-Stalinist line on Yugoslavia and China, they balked at its application to France, where the PCI had its base in the anti-communist Force Ouvriere trade union confederation. Faced with the PCI leadership's stubborn resistance to his policy of 'entrism *sui generis*'⁵ in the French Communist Party and the Stalinist-dominated CGT unions, in January 1952 Pablo abused his authority as FI secretary to suspend the majority of the PCI central committee.

Needless to say, the French received no support from Gerry Healy. On the contrary, when Pablo's bureaucratic action was narrowly endorsed – by five votes to four – at the IEC Tenth Plenum in February, Healy sided with Pablo.⁶ And at the Twelfth Plenum in November, Healy voted for the expulsion of the PCI majority from the Fourth International.⁷ According to one account, Healy even turned up in person at Pablo's side to inform the Lamberites that they had been expelled and replaced as the official section by the Pabloite minority led by Pierre Frank and Michelle Mestre.⁸

Healy played a no less rotten role in relation to the FI's Vietnamese section, within which a minority faction supported the Bleibtreu-Lambert position. Before chairing a meeting of Vietnamese comrades who were about to return from France under orders to enter the Viet Minh, Healy approached his fellow IEC representative Peng Shu-Tse who was to address the meet-

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

PART FIVE



Healy's liquidation into social democracy writ large

ing, and persuaded him to remain silent about the Mao regime's persecution of Trotskyists in China. Peng was left in no doubt that this was 'an instruction or suggestion from Pablo'.⁹ In order to defuse opposition to the entrism *sui generis* tactic, Healy and Pablo thus conspired to conceal from the Vietnamese Trotskyists the extent of the repression they could expect at the hands of Stalinism.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the Club continued to pursue Healy's unprincipled approach to entry inside the Labour Party – without any noticeable success. As Jock Haston had pointed out, Healy's technique of deep entry kept the Trotskyists' politics secret from the Labour Party rank and file, but failed to fool the bureaucracy, who were well aware who the entrists were.¹⁰ In April 1951, the National Executive Committee decided to proscribe the Socialist Fellowship, condemning it as a 'disruptive influence'.¹¹ Unable to contemplate life outside the Labour Party, Healy capitulated without a fight, and immediately wound up the Fellowship. *Socialist Outlook* explained that the now liquidated Fellowship's supporters were 'loyal members of the Labour Party who have never had any interests separate and apart from the Labour Party'.¹² This mangled paraphrase of the Communist Manifesto only served to underline the depth of Healy's political opportunism.¹³

In any case, Healy soon had bigger fish to fry. The proscription of the Socialist Fellowship was followed by Aneurin Bevan's resignation from the Labour government in protest at the decision to cut Health Service expenditure in order to finance a massive armaments programme. After discontent had been further fuelled by Labour's defeat at the 1951 general election, Bevan became the focus for rank-and-file opposition to the Labour Party leadership.

In contrast to the mere front organisation which the Socialist Fellowship had become, Bevanism was a genuine left-wing movement with a real

base of support in the party, and it was undoubtedly necessary for Trotskyists to develop a political orientation towards it. But Pablo, ignoring Bevanism's organisational weakness and unambiguously left-reformist character, greeted this development as the beginnings of a centrist tendency which could be won to a revolutionary programme. Trotskyists could best promote such an evolution of the Bevanite movement, Pablo wrote, 'by penetrating it and helping it from the inside to develop to its last resources and consequences', thereby accelerating its 'left centrist ripening'.¹⁴

Healy eagerly seized on the opportunist implications of this perspective, in order to transform British Trotskyism into a left component of Bevanism. Thus Bevan's speech to the 1952 Labour Party conference was hailed by *Socialist Outlook* with the headline 'Bevan Gives the Lead that Workers Want'. Bevan's election to the NEC on a record vote, and the replacement of right-wingers Dalton and Morrison by the Bevanites Harold Wilson and Richard Crossman, the front page editorial stated, was 'the clearest indication' that the rank and file wanted socialism.¹⁵ A month later, next to a message of support from Michael Foot on behalf of *Tribune*, the paper carried the headline 'Aneurin Bevan Demands a Real Socialist Policy'. Yet, by *Socialist Outlook's* own admission, Bevan had done no more than defend political positions which were commonplace in the Labour Party before 1945, and he had made it plain that he had no desire to wage a serious struggle against the right wing.¹⁶

Healy provided a 'theoretical' gloss to this political adaptation in his review of Bevan's book *In Place of Fear*. Not only did Healy accept Bevan's reformist premise that the working class could advance to socialism through the gates of parliament, but in doing so he shamelessly echoed the patriotism underpinning Bevan's political philosophy. 'Great Britain,' Healy wrote, 'can never regain its position of world leadership under capi-

talist auspices . . . Britain, however, can rise to a newer and higher level of world leadership, provided the Labour movement resolutely carries its struggle for Socialism to victory here in the coming period.' The chief conditions for success, as enumerated by Healy, were: '1. Complete reliance on the organised power of the working class. 2. No confidence in Britain's capitalists or America's imperialists. 3. Finish without delay the job of nationalising, democratising, and reorganising industry along socialist lines. 4. Put into effect a Socialist and democratic foreign policy.' This programme, which was to be implemented by a future Labour government, was, Healy wrote, 'the only road to workers' power and Socialism in Great Britain'.¹⁷

We can agree with Tom Kemp that Healy's attitude to Bevanism, as expressed in this article, was that of a 'fully-fledged Pabloite'¹⁸ – except that this does not go far enough. For, despite Healy's later fulminations against Pabloite liquidationism, if he had any difference with Pablo in this period it was that Healy favoured a more thoroughly liquidationist course within the Labour Party. After all, the FI leadership did take the view that, in addition to *Socialist Outlook*, the British section should publish 'a theoretical organ, openly defending revolutionary Marxism'¹⁹ – only to have their repeated requests to this effect ignored by Healy.²⁰ Indeed, Pablo himself would subsequently criticise Healy's adaptation to Bevanism as an 'opportunist application' of the entry tactic.²¹

When a struggle broke out within the American SWP between the pro-Stalinist Cochran-Clarke faction, who took their inspiration from Pablo, and the party's old guard headed by James P. Cannon, Healy was scarcely in a position to take a political stand against Pabloism. His response was merely one of anxiety that the dispute in the SWP might spill over into the International, which – accord-

ing to Healy – was making great strides under Pablo's leadership. 'Some very serious work in the mass movement is being done now,' Healy wrote to Cannon in February 1953, 'and in France in particular. Everyone wants to get on with the job, and the nearness of the war adds to their determination. My first feeling, therefore, is one of extreme worry – are we threatened with another international split? If so we must avoid it at all costs. Our movement must not go into the war smashed up and divided!'²²

To be continued

NOTES

1. 'British Perspectives: final draft which includes all accepted amendments', Healy group internal document.
2. Anon. (E. Grant): 'Statement to the BSFI'.
3. 'Les Congres de la Quatrieme Internationale', La Breche, Montreuil, 1989, vol.4, p.9.
4. 'International Secretariat Documents, 1951-1954', SWP, 1974, pp.25-30.
5. Entrism 'of a special type'. Pablo explained that the bureaucratic character of the Stalinist movement made it impossible to engage in total entry, and required the combination of entrism with open work. (Ibid., p.37.)
6. 'Les Congres de la Quatrieme Internationale', vol.4, p.373.
7. Ibid., p.375.
8. R. Stephenson: 'The Fourth International and Our Attitude Towards It', Chartist, 1976, p.13.
9. 'International Committee Documents, 1951-1954', SWP, 1974, p.170. For political reasons – he is writing after the 1953 split in the FI – Peng omits to name Healy. I am obliged to Al Richardson for the identity of the anonymous chairman.
10. J. Haston: letter to the Club, June 10, 1950.
11. M. Jenkins: 'Bevanism: Labour's High Tide', Spokesman, 1979, p.103; Labour Party Conference Report, 1952, p.14.
12. Jenkins, op.cit., p.104.
13. The 'Communist Manifesto' states that Communists 'have no interests separate and apart from the proletariat'. As Keith Hassell comments: 'The sleight of hand whereby "proletariat" becomes Labour Party speaks volumes.' ('Crisis in the WRP', Workers Power, 1986, p.8.)
14. 'International Secretariat Documents', p.35.
15. *Socialist Outlook*, October 3, 1952.
16. Ibid., November 28, 1952.
17. *Labour Review*, August/September 1952.
18. *News Line*, November 3, 1985.
19. 'Resolution adopted unanimously by 8th Plenum IEC', Healy group internal document, 1950.
20. As late as August 1953, when Healy was in the midst of his 'historic' battle against the liquidationism of the International Secretariat, the IS was still urging – in vain, as far as Healy was concerned – 'the publication of a genuinely revolutionary, Marxist, Trotskyist periodical which openly defends the full line and programme of the Fourth International'. ('SWP International Information Bulletin', September 1953.)
21. M. Pablo: 'Trotsky and His Epigones', 1977, p.23.
22. 'International Secretariat Documents', p.82. Strangely enough, this letter does not appear in the official 'Healyite' documentary history, 'Trotskyism versus Revisionism'.



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AGAINST VIOLENCE AND SLANDERS IN THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT!

FOR A WORKERS' ENQUIRY INTO THE PHIL PENN CASE

THE JUNE 23, 1990, edition of *Workers Press*, the weekly paper of the Workers Revolutionary Party, carried an article entitled 'The WRP and Richard Price' which attempted to relaunch a slander campaign against the Workers International League over the case of WRP member Phil Penn.

Penn, a former Central Committee member of the WRP/*Workers Press*, who is currently in political retirement, was convicted on a charge of grievous bodily harm in February 1987. The charge resulted from a brutal assault carried out by Penn on WRP/*News Line* supporter Eric Rogers following a demon-

stration at Wapping on May 3, 1986.

After Penn was convicted, *Workers Press* ran an 11-week campaign (totalling 19 pages in all) claiming that Penn had himself been attacked by four members of the *News Line* group, that he had been shopped to the police and subsequently framed in court. Had the *Workers Press* story been true, it would indeed have been cause for outrage in the workers' movement. The campaign generated considerable support from left-wing tendencies and individuals both in Britain and internationally; unfortunately, those who wrote to *Workers Press* supporting Phil

Penn in the spring of 1987 made no attempt to check the truthfulness of his account, with the result that Penn rapidly achieved the status of a martyr.

During the course of the campaign, the founder members of the WIL (including Richard Price, against whom many of Penn's lies were directed) had broken with Torrance's WRP/*News Line* group. The first edition of *Workers News* in April 1987 carried an article ('The "big lie" of *Workers Press*') refuting in detail Penn's claims and relating his attack on Rogers to a catalogue of violence carried out by *Workers Press* supporters in 1986-87. Far from having broken

with the legacy of 'Healyism', we argued, the WRP/*Workers Press* was perpetuating it.

The response of *Workers Press* was to fall suddenly and strangely silent. It had milked the campaign for all it was worth and boosted its image as an embattled band of heroes fighting 'Healyism'. Confronted by an exposure of their lies, and without a single witness to back up Penn's tale, they were forced to put up or shut up - and chose the latter.

Now, three years and two months later, *Workers Press* publishes an article purporting to answer the evidence outlined in our article. What lies behind

this belated reply? One reason is that at least some members of the WRP/*Workers Press* either do not believe their leaders' account of the Penn case, or have doubts about it. Another reason is that the WRP leadership has become alarmed at the reputation the WIL has acquired as an honest and politically principled organisation, and the important political contacts which we have established as a result. It is a measure of the political cowardice of the WRP leaders that no individual or committee put their name to the latest lying article.

The facts of the incident at Wapping concerning Phil Penn are straightforward. As we wrote in the first issue of *Workers News*:

'Following numbers of mounted police charges, stewards from the *News Line* contingent decided to escort youth and female members to safety. Penn caught up with a group of six WRP/*News Line* members, three men (Eric Rogers, Richard Price and Paul Williams) and three women (Kay Wrightson, Susan Keepence and Mary McEntegart), as they were walking in the direction of Tower Hill station and were midway between Thomas More Street and the end of East Smithfield.

'Penn, walking in the roadway, separated from the six on the pavement by railings, immediately began taunting them that they were "running away from the police". He continued this for 150 yards despite being told firmly to "clear off".

'At the point where the railings ended Penn launched himself with fists flying towards Richard Price (then London District Secretary of the WRP/*News Line*) shouting: "This time you're going to get it." Rogers and Williams, who were closer to Penn as he ran up attempted to parry his frenzied attack. In the ensuing scuffle, which lasted less than 30 seconds, Penn grabbed the hood of Rogers' anorak and punched him repeatedly in the face, smashing his spectacles.

'A police car was parked in a lay-by only 30 yards away and a coach, with about 40 police in it, 50 yards away. The police, having witnessed the entire incident, ran over within seconds and arrested Penn as the only person offering violence. With Eric Rogers' face covered in blood from cuts, Penn said as he was arrested that he hoped he had seriously injured Rogers. Police then took the names of two women witnesses to the assault.'

As a result of the assault, Eric Rogers suffered serious damage to his eye from glass splinters. Penn made no attempt to settle the case out of court in the nine months which elapsed between

the attack and the trial. He has never (as the *Workers Press* article shows) demonstrated the slightest remorse for his brutal assault. On the contrary, he has sought to portray his victim as the perpetrator of violence.

Penn's claims that he was attacked by Richard Price with a banner pole, that he was arrested 'thanks to Price and co' and that he was framed in court are outright lies. *Workers Press* no longer claims that Penn was knocked to the ground and its other 'evidence' is riddled with contradictions. Nor does it say a word about Penn's evidence in court, where he made no claim that he had been attacked, but that he had felt 'threatened' and had decided that 'attack was the best form of defence'.

SUPPORTERS OF A WORKERS' ENQUIRY

Initial supporters of the call for a workers' commission of enquiry into the case of Phil Penn include: Workers Power; Al Richardson; Barry Buitekant; Arthur Shute; Gerry Downing (RIL, former WRP/*Workers Press* CC member); Nick De Marco (RIL, ex-WSL/Socialist Group); Peter Farrell (treasurer, Kentish Town and Hampstead UCATT, former WRP CC member); Gary Hollingsbee. In a personal capacity: Ellis Hillman (Labour councillor, Barnet); Clive Bootle (former Labour councillor, Haringey); Hal MacDermot, Alton Williams, Bob Russell (branch secretary) (all NUR Willesden No.1 Branch).

Workers Press has repeatedly argued that political differences should not be resolved in bourgeois courts, and that Penn's victim 'crossed class lines' by appearing as a witness against him. We do not recognise that beating up a political opponent constitutes a legitimate means of expressing 'political differences'. For this reason, the argument about 'crossing class lines' is entirely bogus.

Workers Press's slanders cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. If there was a shred of truth in their story, then they would not be afraid to defend it publicly. The WIL, therefore, repeats its challenge to the WRP/*Workers Press* to take part in a public debate on the case, and calls for the widest support for the formation of a workers' commission of enquiry.

Workers News Editorial Board

● For further information on the Phil Penn affair write to: WIL, 1/17 Meredith Street, London EC1R 0AE.

ICP's sectarian antics

By Richard Price

DENIS HEALEY once likened being attacked by Sir Geoffrey Howe to being savaged by a dead sheep. A two-page tirade against the Workers International League by Chris Talbot of the International Communist Party (*International Worker*, April 7, 1990) merits a similar comparison.

Talbot accuses us of nationalism, chauvinism, revisionism, national reformism, centrism and subservience to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. We are also charged with being 'concerned' at our own 'isolation' from 'petty bureaucrats, middle class radicals and assorted politically diseased elements who at present dominate the workers' movement' and - simultaneously - of siding 'with all the middle class revisionist groups'.

The occasion for this latest 'decisive blow' struck by the ever-declining ICP was a letter to *Workers News* in February this year from Colin Harrison, in which he outlined some of his experiences inside that organisation. Comrade Harrison was one of three members of the WIL who left in March 1988 to join the ICP. He has subsequently rejoined the WIL.

In the good old ICFI tradition, Talbot doesn't feel obliged to prove any of his allegations. It is enough to assert them. For good measure, however, he includes a 336-word quotation from ICFI leader David North - a man whose natural modesty forbids that his name be mentioned more than 20 times in any single edition of an ICFI publication.

In his letter, Comrade Harrison accurately described the ICP's politics as closely paralleling the sectarianism of Third Period Stalinism, and gave the example of the ICP intervention in the P&O dispute. Talbot accuses Harrison of lying when he wrote that the ICP opposed the demand for a national seafarers' strike. We suggest that he looks back over the relevant issues of *International Worker*. It was five months into the dispute before the ICP adjusted its line and made a single, isolated call for a national strike. Whilst it was entirely correct to agitate for solidarity action by seafarers and dockers throughout the world, particularly in northern Europe, to pose an international strike as an ultimatum to the seafarers at Dover, with the rider that they could not win short of the socialist revolution, served only to get McCluskie and the NUS



Seafarers at Dover during the P&O dispute

bureaucracy off the hook.

Talbot takes the WIL to task for not raising as an immediate demand the expulsion of the bureaucracy from the labour movement. In doing so, he only reveals his ignorance of the tactics advanced by the Comintern during Lenin's lifetime and by the early Trotskyist movement. But the ICP fails to follow even the logic of its own, incorrect, position. By what means should these wholesale expulsions be carried out? Aside from ritual exhortations to 'Join the ICP' and 'Build the ICFI', not a clue can be gleaned from the pages of *International Worker*.

The same method is applied to the struggle against the poll tax. Anti-poll tax unions are described as 'multi-class' organisations, part of an embryonic popular front behind which 'sinister forces' are active. In order to justify the ICP's abstention, the predominantly working class composition of the APTUS is conveniently overlooked. Even if they did represent a 'popular front', the task of revolutionaries would be to intervene, calling for bourgeois elements to be thrown out. *International Worker* (July 7, 1990), whilst finally demanding 'Smash the Poll Tax', explicitly denigrates the non-payment move-

ment and has the gall to criticise *Militant* and the SWP for belatedly calling for non-implementation. As for how to smash the poll tax, we are still advised to adopt a programme of world socialist revolution. Since the ICP refuses even critical support to the non-payment campaign, workers will be entitled to ask whether ICP members themselves are paying the tax!

According to Talbot, the WIL has assembled 'every slanderous attack on Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International and [placed] them at the disposal of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and the revisionist swamp'. Presumably this is the only reply we are likely to get to our detailed critique of David North's book 'The Heritage We Defend'.

Talbot further accuses the present writer of being in collusion with the bureaucracy of the UCW, which he claims circulated 'articles by Price' to get ICP member Keith Livesey sacked from the Post Office. We were so mystified by this allegation that we challenged Livesey at a recent demonstration to state which aspects of which articles had been 'used' by UCW bureaucrats. Livesey couldn't remember. When pressed, he said

that he thought it was an Open Letter to the SLL of Australia. When it was pointed out that this was signed by Philip Marchant, Livesey seemed confused until ICP CC member Vicky Short said that details like that didn't matter!

Talbot writes that Colin Harrison simply 'left' the ICP. Another lie. In fact, after he had criticised the ICP's trade union work and its antics at the Socialist Movement conference, and attempted to open a discussion on Cuba, he was accused by Dave Hyland of leading a 'clique' and of being 'hostile to the Fourth International'. Thereafter he was frozen out of the ICP, and not invited to attend any more meetings. The claim that Comrade Harrison has capitulated to the trade union bureaucracy is particularly out of place considering that he played a leading role in the struggle to defend trade union conditions in Kent, in the course of which he consistently fought the NALGO bureaucracy.

Talbot can fantasise that we are part of a grand conspiracy to present the ICP as 'beyond the pale'. In truth, the ICP's own stupidities have done far more than anything we have written to convince workers that it is not to be taken seriously.

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Romania – the unfinished revolution

In the first of two articles on Romania, Ian Harrison looks at how a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy managed to cling to power after the revolt against the Ceausescu regime

IN DECEMBER 1989, workers, students and peasants throughout Romania pronounced their verdict on the Stalinist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. A mass uprising in the major cities and large areas of the countryside threatened the destruction of the entire Stalinist bureaucracy together with the hated Securitate secret police.

Since the early 1980s, a series of drastic austerity measures had been introduced by Ceausescu with the aim of paying off Romania's foreign debts by 1990. According to an official publication, Ceausescu stated in 1980: 'We must understand that we cannot consume more than we produce.' In 1981, bread rationing was introduced and an official campaign against 'hoarding' cooking oil, sugar, flour, coffee, rice and corn. Medicines became an increasingly difficult commodity to find for the majority of Romania's population of over 20 million people. The long slide began into conditions which by December 1989 were little better than the post-war famine period. The cuts in foreign expenditure led to chronic shortages in plant, machinery and spare parts for industry and agriculture. A situation developed which was characterised by some experts as the 'destruction of good raw materials'. Such were the fruits of Stalin's policy of 'building socialism in a single country'. It very soon became apparent, however, that the dictator's 'We' (when referring to austerity, hardship and sacrifice) was to apply to workers and peasants, but not the bureaucracy and secret police.

Symbolising the increasing gulf between the Romanian masses and the 'Conducator' was the huge palace he had built for himself, and the special living quarters for the secret police, after pulling down some of Bucharest's finest old streets and boulevards. In common with the Stalinist bureaucrats who ruled neighbouring Bulgaria and Hungary, Ceausescu sought to channel growing mass resentment to his policies into an officially-sponsored Romanian nationalism. Minority peoples were forcefully 'Romanianised', their culture, religion and customs ridiculed and suppressed. The genuine flowering of national culture which took place at the turn of the century in the realm of music, literature and art was destroyed under the weight of sterile 'socialist realism'. Many of the finest and most unique examples of architecture to have emerged since the Middle Ages at the crossroads of European and Islamic cultural traditions had been buried under concrete.

And yet in a period lasting only a few days, a section of the Romanian Communist Party bureaucracy was able to seize back the initiative from the mass uprising and stabilise a new government which today threatens the foundations of the nationalised economy. Within weeks, the anti-Ceausescu Stalinists, sup-

ported by Bush and Gorbachev, set to work splitting the component parts of the December revolt, setting workers against students and ethnic minorities.

The single most important factor inhibiting the working class from taking power was the absence of a Bolshevik-type revolutionary party to guide it. This weakness is the key to understanding the ability of the Stalinists to survive, regroup and remain the dominant factor in the months that followed.

Throughout the world, one Stalinist party after another is lining up with imperialism, declaring Marxism bankrupt and opening the door to capitalist restoration. But for workers and peasants, the lessons fought for by Lenin in the Bolshevik Party on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the tasks of the working class, and the necessity for sensitivity towards minority peoples, retain all their vital significance today. Contrary to the claims of the Stalinists and petty-bourgeois apologists for capitalism, the events in Romania, the rest of Eastern Europe and the USSR demand the building of revolutionary parties and the seizure of political power by the working class.

Ceausescu overthrown

On Sunday December 17, news spread through the town of Timisoara, in the west of Romania, that the local bishop had applied to the courts for an eviction order against the young dissident priest Laszlo Tokes. For the majority of Timisoara's ethnic Hungarians, Tokes was seen as an outspoken opponent of Ceausescu's policies aimed at abolishing every trace of minority culture. A large demonstration took place, led mainly by young people and children who forced their way into the local headquarters of the RCP, assaulting officials and demanding the release and return of Tokes.

When reports reached Ceausescu in Bucharest, he ordered troops and armoured vehicles to occupy the centre of Timisoara. The troops were issued with live ammunition and given instructions to kill the demonstrators occupying party premises as a salutary lesson to opponents of his regime. For Ceausescu, the order to punish Timisoara's residents was no more than the daily business of tyrants. But for his intended victims it was the proverbial last straw which broke the camel's back. Inspired by the courage and sacrifice of the youth, strengthened by the experiences in Eastern Europe in previous weeks, Timisoara raised the flag of defiance. The mass uprising engulfed Ceausescu's armed forces sent to meet it and rapidly spread



Demonstration in Bucharest on December 21, 1989 – the prelude to street fighting in the capital

across Transylvania, drawing workers, peasants, students – young and old – into a popular revolt.

When Ceausescu returned from a brief visit to Iran to address a staged rally in Bucharest on December 21, he was booed and heckled by demonstrators standing amid party loyalists. He resorted to denouncing the hecklers as 'hooligans' and the challenge was flung back in his face – 'Timisoara, Timisoara, we know about the massacre in Timisoara'. Ceausescu fled from his balcony as the demonstrators surged forward, smashing up the official placards and scattering party loyalists. This was the prelude to open street fighting in Bucharest between troops, secret police and largely unarmed groups of young people.

Student agitators visited factories, calling on workers to support them with a general strike. Workers responded by joining the street fighting, occupying the factories and threatening to blow up chemical plants if the government did not resign. But the government was on the run. Ceausescu was reported to have fled the country for Iran.

The scale of the revolt forced many rank-and-file soldiers to reflect on their own grievances against the government – bad pay and appalling living conditions. The conscripts began to waver, going over to the side of the workers and students and assisting them to capture arms. On December 22, when the Minister of Defence, Vasile Milea, ordered a disintegrating army back to barracks, the secret police responded by executing him for 'betraying his country', as a lesson to waverers. Rank-and-file soldiers were executed in public, refusing to fire on civilians.

By December 23, a general strike gripped the main cities, and increasing numbers of conscripts and junior officers went over to the workers' ranks, reinforcing the street-fighting detachments and the road blocks set up throughout the country. The capture of several Iranian students who had been fighting with the Securitate and the news from Timisoara of the discovery of mass graves containing the bodies of children bound with barbed-wire, victims of the secret police, fuelled the determination of worker, student and peasant alike to root out and destroy Ceausescu's regime.

With Ceausescu on the run and the Securitate stretched to the limits trying to contain the revolt, the bureaucracy entered its hour of crisis. Some party officials were paralysed, others ran for cover. An opening was created for a section of the bureaucracy to regroup around Ion Iliescu and Silviu Brukan.

The Ceausescu regime had retarded the growth of a restorationist wing in the RCP which would have been able to find a base in the population and oust Ceausescu while preventing an armed revolt of the working class. For Iliescu and his co-thinkers, the route to salvation taken by bureaucrats in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and neighbouring Hungary was closed to them at that stage. (Gorbachev's refusal to intervene in Eastern Europe, as the Moscow bureaucracy had done in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, ruled out the likelihood of Soviet armour coming to the aid of the RCP.) Nor was it possible for Iliescu and Co to mount a Tiananmen-style counter-offensive with the army disintegrating from below.

The only option was to buy

tion of capitalism in another region of the increasingly unstable Balkans.

The new regime in action

Iliescu's first task was to rally as much of the party bureaucracy as possible, throughout the country, to staff the new regime. While the army generals took over the direction of mopping-up operations, they threw a protective screen around bureaucrats and secret policemen, rescuing many from detachments of workers and peasants. Local party members began to appear in the salvation committees denouncing the Ceausescus and advocating support for Iliescu and the 'people's' army. Fuel from the USSR began to heat workers' homes and food waiting for export, or reserved for the consumption of bureaucrats, was distributed to a starving population, together with medicines.

Against a background of tolling church bells, the ritual chants of the corrupt priesthood and the staccato gunfire of street fighting, Iliescu announced the formation of a new government, the National Salvation Front. A ten-point plan was broadcast from Bucharest including: national elections in April; the banning of exports of foodstuffs; an end to enforced assimilation; abolition of the death penalty; the restoration of the right to birth control; abolition of the 'leading role' of the party; and the legalisation of bourgeois political parties. Iliescu, anxious to gather, recruit and select assistance from every layer in society, cautiously stated that the lists for membership of the local councils of the NSF were not yet closed – an invitation to those who had not played an active role in the fighting to come out from their hiding places.

A decisive juncture in the uprising had been reached. Just how far the new 'democracy' was to go was clearly underlined by Iliescu when he announced that the economy was to be placed under the direction of the 'heroic' generals. General Stanculescu was duly appointed Minister for the National Economy, with the task of demobilising workers and peasants and getting them back to work. Meanwhile, a concerted campaign was mounted by the imperialist powers to push Iliescu as far down the road of restoration as possible by speculating on the return to Romania of ex-King Michael. Iliescu said he had no objection to his return, but only as a private citizen. This was the same king whom the RCP had extended greetings to in its daily paper in 1946, wishing him 'a long life, good health and a reign rich in democratic achievements'.

To be continued