



US AND BRITAIN HOLD MIDDLE EAST HOSTAGE

By Graham Fenwick and Richard Price

Imperialist forces out of the Gulf!

AFTER FOUR months of phoney war and military build-up, the vote of the United Nations Security Council on November 29 has set the seal on an imperialist blitzkrieg against Iraq.

The 12-2 vote demonstrated that the UN, far from being a force for peace, is an instrument of imperialist policy. The ultimatum to Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait by January 15 was supported by a Soviet bureaucracy desperate to gain Western aid for the transition to a 'market' economy, while the Chinese Stalinists abstained, refusing to exercise their veto. Only Yemen and Cuba voted against.

With 50 nations committed either militarily or financially to the blockade, the position of US imperialism and its junior British partner appears unassailable. But behind the facade of unity, rifts exist between the various imperialist powers which can only deepen once a shooting war starts. France, with its large-scale interests in Iraq, and Germany, facing the bill for re-floating the East German economy, are less than enthusiastic about being drawn into a major conflict. Initial American bravado has given way to a 'long haul' perspective as domestic opposition grows, economic recession looms, and military-strategic problems pile up. Above all, the Western powers fear not only the effects of a protracted war, but the prospects of a Pyrrhic victory over Iraq which would succeed only in unleashing a new round of anti-imperialist struggles throughout the region.

Bush's offer of talks with Iraq is an attempt to sell war under the cover of talking peace. In addition, the White House, after years of dealing with Saddam Hussein, has learnt to read between the lines of his rhetoric. It knows that it is not dealing with a committed anti-imperialist, but with a pragmatist who is quite capable of backing down.

But the stakes for both sides are extremely high. The Iraqi economy, already in such bad shape that it prompted the invasion of Kuwait in August, is now suffering severe shortages as a result of the UN



Demonstration called by the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf on November 24

blockade. Withdrawing from Kuwait, however, would solve none of Iraq's problems.

For the imperialists, the cost of maintaining its huge army and the increased price of oil make an indefinite stay in Saudi Arabia unthinkable. But the destruction of both Kuwaiti and Iraqi oilfields would spell a disaster of even greater proportions. The longer the crisis develops, the more likely war becomes as the economic – not to mention the political – consequences of a humiliating climbdown are contemplated on both sides.

Iraq is a semi-colonial country. For that reason, we defend it against Western attack without giving any political support to Saddam or the Ba'ath Party. This is no different, in essence, from defending a trade union with a treacherous, or even corrupt, leadership from the

state. We reject as a reactionary diversion the demand for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait put forward by *Socialist Organiser*, *The Leninist* and the bizarre theatrical sect known as the Marxist Party. It is not the self-determination of the non-existent 'nation' of Kuwait which is at stake, but the self-determination of the Arab peoples as a whole. Let the self-appointed 'socialist' experts on Middle Eastern borders get to work in the meantime on the dozens of outstanding disputes between Saudi Arabia and its neighbours. If there are any honest people among them – and we suspect the majority are moralists and hypocrites – they will discover that all such questions can only be resolved through a socialist federation of the Middle East, without emirs, sheikhs, sultans, military cliques or imperialists.

The Security Council's ultimatum to Iraq has already had one notable victim – the pacifist illusion promoted by those on the Labour left like Tony Benn that the UN is the guardian of peace. True to form, the UN has acted in the Gulf crisis as it did in Korea, Aden, Cyprus, Vietnam and Cambodia – as the regulating mechanism for relations between

oppressor and oppressed nations. War is the continuation of sanctions by other means.

Those quite numerous sections of the Labour left who believe that the UN can be 'used' to serve 'our' purposes as well as those of the imperialists are on the wrong end of a sick joke. Victory against Iraq will not only be used to impose a new imperialist settlement on the whole of the Middle East, but will mean a new round of attacks upon workers at home.

Benn's Committee to Stop War in the Gulf (CSWG) ardently supports sanctions against Iraq. Its anti-war, pro-UN balancing act will come unstuck as soon as the first shot is fired by the UN-sponsored task force. CSWG has only been able to build itself as a result of recent energetic leg-work by the Socialist Workers Party. Although the SWP is committed on paper to the withdrawal of troops and against sanctions, it has ditched those demands in practice in order to build a 'broad' movement with CND, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru, church leaders, Stalinists and the odd Young Liberal.

With a characteristic disregard for elementary principles, the SWP has tried to palm off

this 'Stop the War' umbrella as a united front. This is a hollow fraud. CSWG is not committed to any form of united workers' action against the war threat. Instead, it directs its appeals to the ruling class and to the UN not to bomb Iraq flat – only to strangle it slowly by sanctions. CSWG is in reality a miniature popular front, which includes marginalised bourgeois parties, and actively bars the affiliation of those who fight for the immediate withdrawal of interventionist forces.

A genuine workers' united front is not a mutual non-aggression pact of all those who are 'against war', drawn up on the terms of clergymen and the pro-sanctions lobby. It is a fighting call to rally workers in action against their own ruling class and its imperialist war drive. The central demands of a genuine anti-

movement. That is why the organisations affiliated to the Ad Hoc Hands Off the Middle East Committee (including the WIL) have participated in every major demonstration and picket during the past four months, regardless of the political basis upon which they have been called, in order to fight for a principled position.

We will continue to oppose Benn's pro-imperialist politics, while critically supporting him or any other element of the labour left should it take half a step forward. Under the immediate threat of imperialist war, or during its opening stages, it is inevitable that revolutionaries will find themselves swimming against the stream. For that reason, we recognise the need for a principled dialogue with workers who initially moved in a pacifist direction. We shall do so, not by hiding our politics, but by seeking joint action.

Finally there are those who claim that fighting for the defeat of imperialism and for an

A 'revolutionary struggle against the war' is merely an empty and meaningless exclamation, something at which the heroes of the Second International excel, unless it means revolutionary action against one's own government even in wartime
Wartime revolutionary action against one's own government indubitably means, not only desiring its defeat, but really facilitating such a defeat.

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imperialist campaign must be the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist forces and their allies and the breaking of the UN blockade. There is nothing 'abstract' in such a position. It requires international co-ordinated workers' action to boycott all transport of war supplies, to organise strikes in armaments factories, and to agitate for ever-wider political action against the imperialist war.

Is this 'sectarian'? Does it mean turning your back on the working class or left Labour MPs (which *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook* believe amount to the same thing)? On the contrary, it is necessary to carry such a fight into the broadest sections of the labour

Iraqi victory amount to capitulating to Iraqi nationalism. Whilst recognising the progressive content of war on the part of Iraq, we harbour no illusions as to the 'anti-imperialism' of Saddam Hussein. In all likelihood, the Ba'athists will renege on the war and it will be necessary for the Iraqi working class to overthrow them to win it.

Saddam's opportunist attempt to latch on to the Palestinian struggle must be replaced by real working class internationalism, which will forge its own 'linkage' of the struggles of Palestinians, Kurds and the Arab peoples for self-determination through the Middle East socialist revolution.

Ad Hoc Hands Off the Middle East Committee

TROOPS OUT OF THE GULF CONFERENCE

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HOW TO FIGHT IMPERIALIST WAR

Popular Front or United Front?
Pacifism or Defeatism?

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Admission £1

TUC critics silenced

By Ian Harrison

AT ITS October meeting, the TUC General Council voted by 24 to 14 for a package of cuts affecting trades councils, TUC committees and unemployment centres, under the guise of a cost-cutting exercise.

The cuts confirmed the increasingly corporatist role played by the TUC — its drawing closer to the employers and state. Among the cuts announced was the abolition of a number of industry-related committees which had failed to meet, together with committees for defending the arts and education. The TUC's recognition that these committees, covering the building and printing trades among others, had become defunct is proof of the TUC's past failure to fight government attacks on jobs and trade union rights.

The General Council adopted a number of priority objectives, none of which would offend the main employers' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry. These include support for a single European market, regeneration of manufacturing and a 'balanced' framework for industrial law. Not one serious measure was adopted for tackling the existing government anti-union legislation or the hated poll tax.

Further confirmation of the bankruptcy of TUC policy in the last decade came with the decision to withdraw funding from unemployment centres and abolish regional organiser posts. The TUC cites local government reduction in funding for unemployment centres, which has reduced the number of centres from a peak of 210 down to 140, as its justification for withdrawing its own support. Its action will undoubtedly give the green light to local government to close even more centres.

The growing trend of corporatism within the General Council was particularly clear in the decision to sever links between local borough trades councils and the TUC. The county associations and the annual conference of the County Associations of Trades Councils have been abolished without any consultation with the bodies concerned. Their abolition is part of a wider attempt by Labour Party and TUC leaders to stifle any forum for debate which could result in criticism being levelled at them. The 1990 annual conference of trades councils

had passed resolutions which called on the TUC to organise campaigns against the Tory anti-union laws and the poll tax, and which were critical of TUC policy on Ireland.

Immediately after the General Council decision was made public, the media reported that union leaders had made proposals for a deal with the Tory government on pay and conditions following entry into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, and had offered to 'act responsibly' over pay claims.

The TUC's cuts package must be exposed for what it is in front of the whole trade union movement. Trade union branches, trades councils and shop stewards' committees should pass resolutions condemning the cuts and demanding that the previous status of trades councils and funding for unemployment centres be restored. Above all, the fight must be waged throughout the trade union and labour movement to oppose the corporatist policies of the TUC and Labour Party leaders. Build a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions and break the growing links with the state.

THE TORY CRISIS

Thatcher: the reality behind the rhetoric

COMMENT

THE CONVENTIONAL wisdom amongst Tories and other admirers of Margaret Thatcher, including those in the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain, is that she was instrumental in introducing new freedoms into British social and economic life.

From the standpoint of the employers and the rich, this was indeed so. From the abolition of currency exchange controls to the abolition of the right to strike, measures were introduced to remove every fetter on profit.

However, for the working class, these 'freedoms' have a different significance. For them, the eleven and a half years during which Thatcher was Prime Minister was a period of sustained attacks on rights and conditions — the gradual removal of freedoms won in struggle — and the creation of mass unemployment. The centrepiece of these attacks, the backbone upon which the other policies were built, was a series of anti-union laws and changes in social security rules.

Unions and their members have been opened up to legal action for a whole range of reasons, all aimed at limiting the right to strike. Striking workers can all be sacked. Most secondary action is unlawful. Picketing is heavily restricted. Secret ballots are compulsory for industrial action and union elections. The closed shop has been outlawed. Social security payments to strikers' families have been cut.

Armed with the Tory laws, the employers went to war. From the defeat of the NGA in 1983 in the battle against Eddie Shah at Warrington, through the defeat of the miners' strike in 1985, to the defeat of SOGAT and the NGA at Wapping in 1986, the anti-union laws have been used to good effect to rob the unions and jail their members.

It was not, of course, Tory laws alone which brought about these defeats. The trade union leaders reneged on the

decision of the 1982 Special TUC Congress to come to the aid of any union under attack.

In the circumstances created by these defeats, the Tories' big capitalist supporters were bound to grow rich. And they did. In addition, there was a bonus — with few exceptions, the nationalised industries were fattened up and sold off.

The freedom to own your own home (or, rather, for a building society or bank to own it) was one Thatcher's favourite policies. The fact that, at the same time, many workers were deprived of homes through the sale of council houses was conveniently ignored. Why, even the young could acquire their own homes — thanks to Thatcher, large numbers of youth now live in their very own cardboard boxes.

The mentally ill have not been forgotten in the rush for freedom. As beneficiaries of the policy of 'community care', they too are now free to



Thatcher

live on the streets. The cuts in the rest of the National Health Service mean that good health care is now the prerogative of those who are prepared to be free with their money.

The reign of Margaret Thatcher did indeed make workers free — millions are unencumbered by a job, good health or a place to live.

Telecom engineers' pay fight betrayed

By Eugene Ludlow

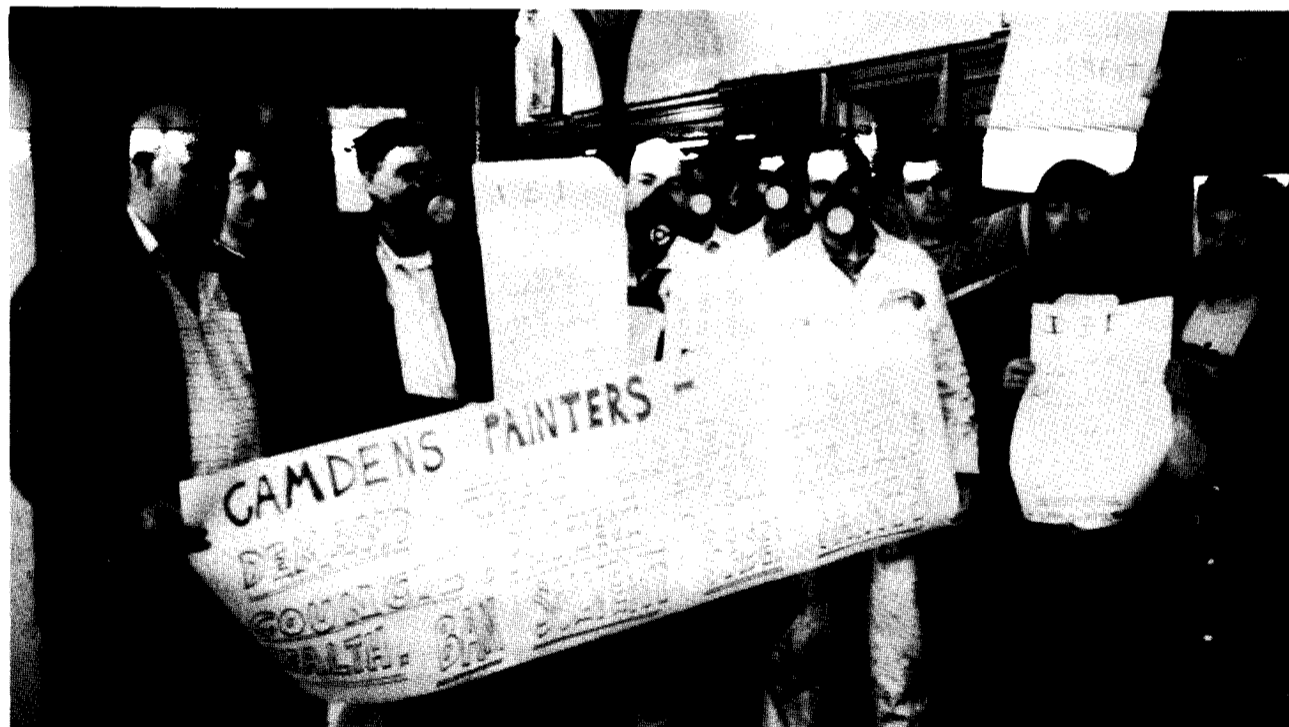
ON OCTOBER 24, the leadership of the National Communications Union (NCU) decided to ignore the result of a ballot of British Telecom engineers and recommend acceptance of BT's 1990 pay offer.

Engineers in the London area voted by 15,000 to 5,000 to reject the 10 per cent rise which carries with it the acceptance of a number of new working practices, including a revised Shift Working Agreement. Nationally, engineers voted to reject the deal by 36,871 to 34,881.

Tony Young, general secretary of the NCU, justified the sell-out by describing the no vote in the Engineering Group as only a 'narrow majority' and by pointing to a 'massive majority' of clerical workers (15,112 to 2,251) voting to accept the offer.

But Young, deputy general secretary of the Engineering Group Derek Bourn and other leading officials were obliged to launch a double-sided campaign against strike action. They attempted to scare more conservative elements among the membership by telling them that 'the only real alternative to accepting the whole package is to take industrial action', while at the same time trying to discourage militants by quoting anonymous branch officers who 'frankly admitted' that they could not get support for a strike from their members.

The NCU leaders' betrayal came only a few weeks after a leaked BT report revealed that the company plans to reduce its workforce by 80,000 over the next five years. Three weeks later, the government published details of future legislation which will end the telecommunications duopoly, and lead to a further stepping-up of attacks on BT workers.



Painters from Camden Direct Labour Organisation outside Camden town hall demanding the abolition of oil-based paints

PHOTO: ALAN DALTON

Workers seek ban on oil-based paints

PETER FARRELL pointed out that professional painters, while familiar with the dizziness and nausea caused by vapour from oil-based paints, were until recently unaware of the real dangers they faced. It was only after July 1989, when *The Observer* leaked the contents of a World Health Organisation report, that some of the facts were publicised in Britain. The WHO report, which has since been published, has established that painters suffer a 40 per cent higher than average incidence of lung cancer, that children of painters run increased risks of leukaemia and brain tumours, that women painters are more likely to suffer miscarriages, and that spray painters stand a greater chance of testicular cancer.

The Observer article, and subsequent coverage in the UCATT paper *Viewpoint*, prompted Farrell to seek further information. He found

UCATT member Peter Farrell, who is a painters' steward in the London Borough of Camden building department, recently attended an international conference in Denmark on the dangers of oil-based solvents in paint. He spoke to *Workers News* about this little-known but deadly hazard in the building industry

that an investigation carried out in Denmark as long as 15 years ago had concluded that oil-based solvents in paints cause not only cancer but also brain damage. Indeed, 'painters' dementia' is now a recognised industrial disease in Scandinavia, and 1,300 painters are registered as sufferers. As a result of an extended campaign by the building trade unions there, 90 per cent of paints now used in Denmark are water-based alternatives which, although not completely free from risk, are substantially safer.

Farrell emphasised that there are strong vested interests

principles established in Denmark, would be used to undermine the achievements there.

In Britain, local authorities in Exeter and Camden have agreed in principle to replace oil-based with water-based paints. Farrell argues that the campaign must be stepped up to ban solvent-based paints throughout the building industry. This objective is supported by UCATT, in which most unionised painters are organised, and by the rank-and-file Construction Safety Campaign. Farrell says it is necessary for trade union safety reps to build links with each other and with sympathetic experts in order to carry this campaign forward and in view of the growing economic and political integration of European capitalism, the campaign must be fought on an international basis.

For further information contact Peter Farrell care of *Workers News*.

FUNDS

Throughout the duration of the Gulf crisis, *Workers News* has used every opportunity to intervene in the many mobilisations against the war threat. We have done so without making any political concessions, but by fighting for a principled class line against imperialist intervention in the Middle East.

If war breaks out, we state quite clearly that we are for the defeat of British, American and all other invading forces. *Workers News* needs your financial support at this turning point for imperialism's 'new order'. Our £10,000 Building Fund stands at £2,010.33, and we need regular donations to our £300 Monthly Fund. Post your donations to:

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POLAND

Walesa steps in to restore capitalism

THE ELECTION of Solidarity leader Lech Walesa as president with 75 per cent of the vote will speed up the rate at which capitalist restoration takes place in Poland. But the nature of the election shows that such a process is unlikely to be accomplished without major conflicts, and may lead to the growth of widespread opposition in the working class.

Walesa finally emerged victorious in round two of the elections on December 9, but not before a completely unknown emigre, Stanislaw Tyminski, had given him and his movement a severe shock.

Tyminski, who owns a small factory and is chairman of an even smaller right-wing party in Canada called the Libertarian Party, spent some years in the Peruvian jungle selling cable TV and dabbling in mysticism and mind-bending drugs.

His message to the Polish electorate was peddled by well-organised members of the supposedly disbanded secret service, the former official trade union *Intermarium* and various other elements from the former ruling elite including the military. His campaign manager and ghostwriter of his book-cum-manifesto, 'Sacred Dogs', was Roman Samsel, the erstwhile Cuban correspondent on the Polish Communist Party's daily, *Trybuna*.

In 1989, after the Round Table talks with the military dictator General Jaruzelski and the limited elections which followed in June, Solidarity formed a government. Lech Walesa declined the post of president, preferring instead

By Daniel Evans

to leave Jaruzelski in that position with much reduced powers, and nominated Tadeusz Mazowiecki as the new prime minister.

Mazowiecki appointed Laszek Balcerowicz as his finance minister, and Balcerowicz immediately drew up a plan for the restoration of capitalism. The theory behind the plan was that a free market economy would become the base upon which a parliamentary democracy could be built. The transformation in the political sphere, it was imagined, would resemble the gradual handover of power from fascism to bourgeois democracy which occurred in Spain in the early 1980s.

However, the Balcerowicz Plan, whilst it succeeded in bringing inflation down from 700 per cent in 1989 to 1.8 per cent in August 1990, has sent unemployment soaring to its present level of over one million. Though small-scale private enterprise has flourished, most of the new commodities available are at a price beyond that which most Poles can afford.

Perhaps the greatest source of bitterness, however, is the way the billions of zlotys stashed away by workers and peasants over the years, because they had nothing to spend them on, have been devalued in the name of achieving currency convertibility with the West to the point where they are practically worthless. Only the very wealthy, including top men from

the deposed Stalinist bureaucracy, have survived this process and gone on to set up thriving companies and make deals with Western banks. The privatisation of state enterprises, when it comes, will not be the promised share bonanza for the masses, but a chance for Western capitalists to move in and a 'golden handshake' for the outgoing bureaucracy. The first five medium-sized enterprises were sold off only last month and a stock exchange due to be established in the old Communist Party headquarters is yet to appear.

Sensing the growing disillusionment with the Mazowiecki government, Walesa sharpened the divisions between the 'intellectuals' and his own faction within Solidarity to the point of a split. The government had become arrogant and detached from the people, he claimed. It was too cosy with the old regime, the time had come to take revenge and to speed up the reform programme.

Jaruzelski warned that a witch-hunt would ruin the economy and that sacking former officials, as the new parliament due to be elected in the spring is expected to do, would 'paralyse public life'. 'They are going to cut away the officials as if they are weeds,' noted the general, and the Western media, urging caution on Walesa, sprang to Jaruzelski's defence with glowing tributes about how he, despite the eight years of martial law, should be praised for allowing the first democratic elections in Eastern Europe.



Lech Walesa, Poland's new president

Walesa declared himself a candidate in the presidential elections and launched a campaign of outrageous demagoguery. There would be jobs for all and state cash hand-outs. Furthermore, only he could keep the peace whilst industry was privatised. Under Mazowiecki there would be strikes and just to prove it he secretly organised a couple. Only he could attract Western capital to invest in Poland.

Significantly, Walesa failed to distance himself from the growing anti-Semitism of many of his supporters which led to Mazowiecki's campaign posters being daubed with the Star of David, despite the fact that he is not Jewish.

Then along came the mysterious Mr Tyminski. Apparently in Poland by chance to launch his book, Tyminski began a well organised and professional campaign which far out-stripped Walesa's for demagoguery, and turned Walesa's arguments against him. The whole of Solidarity was clique-ridden and in the pockets of the old regime. Poland was being sold too cheaply to the West and was being turned into a nation of 'white negroes'. Poland needed its own A-bomb, to be renamed the Z-bomb (the Polish word for Jew being Zyd). Everyone would have the chance to get as rich as he had.

In round one of the election, Tyminski snatched second place, forcing the humiliated Mazowiecki to resign and winning the chance of a head to head contest with Walesa in round two.

Tyminski's supporters make strange bedfellows; on the one hand he appealed to the unemployed and those facing unemployment, whose first taste of the 'free market' is not to their liking; on the other to bureaucrats in the countryside who have all but transformed themselves into feudal barons over the past years, to many of

the peasants they influence, to thousands of bureaucrats in the towns and cities and to the secret police, all of whom fear that a purge following a Walesa victory might rob them of the fruits of capitalist restoration.

Poland's economic crisis is of such monumental proportions that the opening shots in the restoration of capitalism are already plunging millions into unemployment and abject poverty. The fact that an extreme right-winger like Tyminski should appeal to 25 per cent of the voters is not without significance for the future. There is already a powerful current of anti-Semitism; the conditions are ripening for the emergence of a fascist movement.

On the other hand, Poland is the only country in Eastern Europe where an organised workers' movement played the central role in toppling the Stalinist bureaucracy. The political task ahead is to break workers from their illusions in the market economy and turn the fighting spirit that created Solidarity into a force to defend the nationalised property relations, kick out the capitalists and build a socialist state based on workers' councils.



Supporters of the campaigning organisation ACT-UP make a Rolls-Royce owner wish he'd avoided central London on December 1, World AIDS Day



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The fall of Thatcher

THE ARRIVAL of John Major as Prime Minister in no way signals the end of the Tory crisis. Although the Tories were moved to get rid of Margaret Thatcher by their perception that she had become an electoral liability, the roots of the crisis lie in their inability to solve the economic problems of British capitalism. Having set out in 1979 to change the face of Britain, they now fall flat on their faces over the unshakable fact that the British economy is decrepit, the poor relation of both the United States and its European 'partners'.

While the underlying cause of the crisis is not Europe, it is no accident that relations with Europe precipitated the move to oust Thatcher. Setting herself up as the main proponent of the 'special relationship' with the United States, her repeated clashes with the pro-European wing of the Tory party led, until the final one with Geoffrey Howe, to the departure of her adversaries from the Cabinet. The Thatcher wing of the Tory party, whose emphasis is on developing the banking and financial services sector, has been at odds with the elements who look towards basic manufacturing industry since 1979. The de-industrialisation which Thatcher embarked on led to the point in the late 1980s at which Britain became a net importer of manufactured goods for the first time since the industrial revolution.

The growing recession makes the turn towards Europe an urgent necessity in the eyes of major sections of the ruling class, especially those concerned with manufacturing industry. Entry to the Exchange Rate Mechanism at the end of September not only offered the prospect of relatively stable exchange rates which assist manufacturers in planning production, but also opened the door to trading relations with Europe becoming much more significant in general. The discipline that ERM membership imposes on interest rates and inflation rates requires companies to become more 'competitive'. However, the majority are prepared to risk going out of business in order to exploit what is, temporarily at least, a much-enlarged domestic market which promises to include the countries of Eastern Europe. As was the case when France joined the ERM, industry will look to the working class to pay the bill, and unemployment will rise.

The fact that the long-running feud inside the Tory Party over relations with Europe assumed such a critical nature that it sparked the coup against Thatcher must be seen against the backdrop of deepening problems in the world capitalist economy. The Tories junked their most popular leader of modern times at almost the same time as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade talks in Brussels ran into their most serious trouble since 1947. GATT was established to regulate world trade when the global economic dominance of the United States was unassailable. The significance of the breakdown of the GATT negotiations at the beginning of December is not so much the question of farm subsidies, which affect a relatively small proportion of world trade, but the challenge to US hegemony and the development of regional trading blocs.

But if Thatcher's departure in some part reflected this process, it also required a home-grown component to convince the bulk of Tory MPs that it was time for a change. High interest rates and the poll tax had combined to erode Tory support to the point that a Labour victory in the next general election looked extremely likely. Rather than lose their seats, Tory MPs opted to lose Thatcher.

No-one should be under the illusion, however, that it will be anything other than 'business as usual' for the Tories under John Major. It goes without saying that there is general agreement on Thatcher's determined assault on the working class and the public sector – the attacks on education, the health service, the trade unions and local government spending will continue. The Tories are driven by the economic quagmire of British capitalism, not by editorials in the bourgeois liberal press. Industrial output is going down – signalling the onset of recession – whilst inflation is still high. If, as looks likely, the Tories reorient themselves to some extent away from the United States and towards Europe, it will open up a period of intensified competition leading to speed-ups, factory closures and further attacks on the trade unions.

Although the political crisis in the Tory Party may have receded, Thatcher did not create it and her departure will not solve it. However, it would be light-minded to suppose that the Tories cannot recover. And even if they lose the next election, the incoming Labour government would be the most right wing in history.

It is ironic that one of the most lasting effects of 'Thatcherism' will probably be the changes wrought in the Labour Party and TUC leaderships. Neil Kinnock worked hard to impose Thatcher's policies on the Labour Party so as to be able to offer the electorate 'Thatcherism' without Thatcher, and the TUC leaders have agreed to tie down the trade unions under Labour just as comprehensively as they have been under the Tories.

Whatever the scale of opposition to Tory policies – including the poll tax – and the impact that had on Tory MPs, Thatcher was removed in a 'palace coup', not by the action of the working class, despite what groups like the Socialist Workers Party say to the contrary. The immediate danger is that the combativity of the labour movement, already at a low ebb, will sink even lower.

The task of militants must be to fight to mobilise the industrial strength of the working class to defeat the poll tax, bring down the Tories and defend democratic rights. A Labour government elected under such conditions would have a fight on its hands from its first day in office.

What is your analysis of the situation opened up by the miners' strikes of 1989-90?

There are different factors which contribute to the emerging crisis of the labour movement. First of all, the movement is not really a class movement and not really a national movement. The miners' movement was localised, very much concentrated in Kuzbass, Donbass, Vorkuta, Karaganda and so on, without any real extension to the non-mining areas. In the mining areas, they managed to influence and incorporate within the movement some other sectors of the working class. But mostly, they managed to incorporate them around demands concerning local autonomy, regional interests, not along the lines of class unity. That's one of the main factors. Second, it is divided into regional factions. There are already conflicts between, for example, Donbass, Kuzbass and Vorkuta because different regional interests are contradictory. Third, it's very important to understand that local bureaucratic elites and local entrepreneurial elites want it to be a sort of regional separatist movement and thus they are really corrupting and trying to control the movement.

So the third thing is that there are different sources of political influence on the movement. In Kuzbass, at least in Prokopyevsk and Khemerovo, in two very important strike committees, there is a real presence of socialists – while, for example, in Vorkuta, the main dominating political group which manages to influence the strike committee is the extreme right National Workers' Union, NTS. It's a fascist organisation. That's not our accusation. It was part of the German fascist 'international', so to speak, in the Thirties. They worked together with German fascists; they had their offices in Germany, in the Third Reich; they participated in German activities during the Second World War. It's one of the few remaining traditional fascist organisations which managed to survive after all that. The Americans encouraged it after the end of the Second World War, gave it support and used it in the Cold War. Now, of course, they deny that they're fascists but they agree that they're an extreme right-wing organisation. In Vorkuta, they made a big effort, investing a lot of money, a lot of hard currency, to buy off some of the strike committee leaders.

How was this reflected in the conference of the new workers' organisations held in Novokuznetsk on April 30-May 2?

There is a lot of heterogeneity in the labour movement, which was seen for the first time when all the labour organisations came together in Novokuznetsk. You could see the extreme left-wing people from Proletarian Dictatorship, which is the furthest to the left – a sort of orthodox Marxist-Leninist party, probably like the Socialist Workers Party in England – and you could see us and another minor left-wing party called the Democratic Workers Party. So you could see all those left-wing groups, you could see anarchists, you could see Social Democrats.

In the Soviet Union, the Social Democrats are a right-wing party, not even centre-left, more or less like the West German Christian Democratic Union. For example, they are against democratic socialism – even the social-democratic interpretation of it – they are against redistribution, they are against progressive taxation. They are against everything which is the core of the social-democratic identity – not to speak of the left-wing identity. It's a typically right-wing party which dropped almost everything which connected it with social democracy in the West.

You could see Nikolai Travkin's party, the Russian Democratic Party – also an extreme right-wing party – which is mainly based on the ideology of anti-communism, almost speaking with the hard-line Reaganite rhetoric of destroying the evil empire and so on. And then there was the NTS, the National Workers' Union. Also there were some communist renewalists and middle-of-the-road liberals.

PROBLEM WORKER

Most of the people who represent those groups are not really very influential within the labour movement – because most workers are interested just in getting higher wages locally. They don't move from one place to another, they don't come to the conferences. So the people who come to the conferences are mostly interested in representing their own political groups.

What is the policy of the bureaucracy towards the miners' committees that emerged last year?

Another factor which is very negative is the role which local bureaucracy plays. The local labour committees which exist on the enterprise level, or on the level of the mining communities, are outside the control of the bureaucracy. If there is somebody who is really an agent for the local bureaucracy, he'll be immediately removed by the workers. That is why the local bureaucracies always encourage the establishment of different superstructures, co-ordinating committees on regional level and on national level – the national co-ordinating committee is now transformed into a so-called Confederation of Labour. The rank and file has absolutely no reach to these bodies and yet they speak on behalf of the labour movement. In reality, they prevent the growth of the labour movement. For example, Kuzbass provincial labour committee is composed of people who are not workers, just local functionaries like Vyacheslav Golikov, although there is a lot of criticism against those people from the local committees. There's a split between the co-ordinating structures and the local structures which see the former mostly as their enemies. But this establishment of, so to speak, fake co-ordinating structures prevents the emergence of authentic co-ordinating structures, and people are becoming very suspicious about any co-ordination at all. They don't obey their so-called superior structures, they just ignore them. They feel that any co-ordination is bureaucratisation, is the expression of outside interests within the movement, and so instead of building co-ordination from below, they just became suspicious about any co-ordination at all. So those are the negative movements and that's why we now have a sort of regression.

What are the expectations of the working class concerning the 'market economy' and how do you think its introduction will affect the working class?

Everyone's waiting for the introduction of the market and we think, though of course we attack the free-market liberals and we disagree with capitalist restoration, but we think that in one sense the introduction of the market is a positive and necessary thing. Because the market shows workers where their real economic interests lie, who their enemies are and what the real conflict is, because it forces them to face their situation as wage-earners. There is a feeling that it's not the economic situation of workers as wage-earners which is central but the subordination of workers to the state. This is used by the liberals who propose legal regulation of the relations between citizens and the state. Even if the state is basically authoritarian, its base will be the rule of law! The position of workers as wage-earners, as the exploited object of domination economically, is overshadowed now by their position as the object of state domination. An understanding of their real economic and social interests is not difficult for most workers now, and the market will increase

this understanding. It will hit them economically and socially, and will force them to resist and to organise for the resistance. A normal trade union movement will be a product of the market and, in that sense, the left also needs the market. It's a very important element of the development to pass this stage of the market, to organise and to resist those policies and then to create the alternative to overcome it. So you mustn't mistake me as a supporter of free market policies. As a sociologist, I'm just saying that it is probably a very important and necessary stage for us. It's a contradiction, but from the very beginning we're against it politically. But our criticism of the market will probably be accepted by society only after some real experience of it. Without that, people just believe the tales of the free marketeers about everybody being happy and prosperous two or three years after the introduction of the market and private property. In reality, the Soviet Union will be, in the best case, like Argentina. The best case! So you can imagine the worst case!

The Latin Americanisation of the Soviet economy is emerging. From this autumn, they're introducing the free circulation of dollars within the Soviet Union, which means the formal establishment of a dual economy. Some sectors which are connected with exports and tied to the multinational corporations will be dollarised and be a sort of external economy. And there will be an internal economy working with roubles, with very low living standards, very low wages, and with hyper-inflation. And the so-called international sector will also have very low wages compared to the wages of the West and even probably compared to the wages of some Latin American countries, because the value of the dollar compared to the rouble is so high that you can pay people, say, 30 to 50 dollars a month – lower than in Brazil – to give them higher living standards than the rest of the population. People may feel privileged in the first period but very soon they will realise that for the same work they are getting much less than their colleagues in the rest of the world, including some more developed Third World countries.

Generally speaking, all that, according to our analysis, will in a year or two contribute to the emergence of a real, class-based labour movement. In the Socialist Party, we are trying, first of all, to educate our activists, to create the structures which could expand, to prepare ourselves for promoting this movement and giving it a better understanding of its tasks, and helping the formation of class consciousness. We describe this as class consciousness of the modern type. In the new proletariat it's not just the men with hammers and sickles who are workers – but also computer specialists and highly-skilled modern technicians and engineers who are very attractive as objects of exploitation for multi-national capital. For us, one of the tasks is to organise those sectors to resist the multi-nationals. It's a situation which is very contradictory because they could form a labour aristocracy, but on the other hand they could form a sort of vanguard if they really understand the level of hyper-exploitation they're subjected to.

It's also very much the movement of subjective consciousness – whether workers know what exists in the rest of the world or not; whether they're organised and thus can achieve something better or they're not organised, cannot bargain and cannot fight against the domination.

ON JUNE 20-24, the founding congress edited transcript of an interview with Trotskyist paper *Avanzada Socialista* early August.

As the Soviet economy reaches bre society is essential. In this respect, Kagarlitsky, who was born in 1958, written numerous books and articles their allies in the intelligentsia. His book 'Thinking Reed'. He is probably the best

His views and positions must therefore as the only agent for progressive change course of this interview, carries with

In particular, his position, which re emergence of a real, class-based labour greatly underestimates the extent of position is reminiscent of the ultra-left which led to the notorious statement Germany's progress towards the pro

Kagarlitsky's view that the disintegration factor ignores the ability of the Stalin new guise, as made only too clear in

Another position with which we must had the misfortune to fall amongst li right. It would be more correct to po good reason that he needed to establish

In spite of these criticisms, this interview taking place in the Soviet Union through



Soviet miners on strike last year

There are some sectors of skilled labour which are not of interest to the multi-nationals. They're going to absorb, say, five to ten per cent of skilled labour and they don't need any more. So the important thing is to organise those people who are now in the state sector, who see their jobs and skills threatened and who are not gaining anything from the market. Working with a shovel makes you more competitive with the market in a country like the Soviet Union than working with a computer. Computers cost money, your education costs money, you have to get higher wages, you have to get access to books, to information and so on. You have to compete with, say, IBM and the Japanese who have a very high level.

So computerised modern industries will be threatened, while those working with shovels, on very low wages, will be needed. It means that there is a general danger of dequalification of some sectors of skilled labour, which will naturally face a lot of resistance. And that is another factor. I think, in the formation of the new labour movement. I think this section of skilled labour, outside the multi-national or, let's say, capitalist sector, mainly within the state sector, is the most threatened and the most interested in defending nationalisation. That will be, I think, the core of the Socialist Party project

S OF THE SOVIET RS' MOVEMENT

of the Socialist Party of the USSR took place in Moscow. What follows is an interview with one of its leading members, Boris Kagarlitsky, by the Argentinian journalist, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Cordero. The interview was conducted in English at Kagarlitsky's Moscow home in the city of Moscow.

Starting point, an appreciation of the concrete impact of this process on Soviet society. The publication of this interview is most timely. Kagarlitsky was arrested and jailed for 13 months in 1982 for oppositionist activities, has written on matters related to the political tasks facing the Soviet working class and has published books including 'The Dialectic of Change', 'Farewell Perestroika' and 'The New Left in the Soviet Union'. He is a well known and most influential member of the 'New Left' in the Soviet Union. The interview is taken seriously, especially as he clearly identifies the working class as the main force for change. However, his schematic blueprint for that change, which emerges in the interview, is not without serious deficiencies.

The interview conveys some emphasis, that capitalist restoration is a prerequisite for 'the workers' movement', and hence for the struggle for a genuine workers' state, and that the defeat which the restoration of capitalism would represent. Indeed, this is the stance of the Comintern as Hitler consolidated his rule in Germany in 1933 when 'The establishment of an open Fascist dictatorship... will hasten the proletarian revolution' (ECCI, April 1, 1933).

The interview also conveys the opinion that the restoration of the CPSU would mean the disappearance of Stalinism as a political system and the shedding of their outer political skins and continue their privileged life in a capitalist society in Eastern Europe.

The interview also takes issue with his evaluation of Boris Yeltsin as a left-wing populist who has been elected President. On the contrary, Yeltsin has clearly attacked Gorbachev from the beginning and it is clear that Yeltsin was initially silent on economic matters, for the very reason that he had a political constituency before he unveiled his economic programme. The interview is of great value in revealing important aspects of the developments in the Soviet Union through the eyes of a committed left-wing opponent of the Stalinist regime.



in Lenin's sense; it's not even parliament in the Western sense. It's an offspring of the old system: completely corrupt, completely dominated by liberal sections of the same bureaucracy, with an internal structure which prevents any popular initiative from being really important and influential. If you can compare the soviets of today with anything in Western history they're like Medieval forms of democracy - oligarchic democracies completely dominated by the ruling classes, completely incorporated in the structure of ruling class domination - which is even quite far away from the Western democracies, which I'm not going to idealise. Even normal parliamentarism, in the Western sense, would be a step forward.

But the liberals always insist that one has to give power to the existing semi-democratic structures like soviets and then through the process of their normal evolution they will transform themselves step by step into something more efficient, more democratic, and there'll be some sort of continuous peaceful evolution and self-modernisation of those institutions, which is simply not true. It's complete bullshit. They're not interested in their modernisation. They're interested in keeping those structures as they are and when they're in power, they create enormous bureaucratization of the new structures - like the Moscow Soviet. I'm a deputy myself of the Moscow Soviet and I know that it's not capable of functioning as a democratic body. There are no less than three bureaucracies within the Soviet - the presidium, the executive committee and the Soviet itself. It's becoming more and more complicated and more and more bureaucratized. This year the Soviet alone - not to speak of the executive - consumed five million roubles. There are less than 500 deputies which means that each of us consumes 10,000 roubles a year. I assure you we don't produce the results of 10,000 roubles a year! What most of our Socialist Party deputies did was to reject payment from the Soviet, because we don't want to be a burden on the public. We continue to work elsewhere to earn our living, unlike the others who just consume public money. Anyway, we cannot cure the inefficiency of the system or change its nature as a system of social domination. We are present there as socialists but we cannot cure that by our presence, not to speak of all the deputies of the other groups and parties.

That is why I think it's a complete illusion about the transfer of power to the soviets from the Communist Party. But it is the

only alternative which is now available and understandable for the mass of the workers. It was proposed to them by the whole mass media and they of course have no political experience and it seemed to be a step forward. Probably it is a step forward compared to direct party rule, although it is such a limited step that it is not solving any problems. It's just changing the form of the problems. What happened is that they took up those slogans like 'drop Article Six from the Constitution' - about the leading role of the Communist Party - and 'change the government'. They got it mostly from the liberal media, from the liberal intellectuals who came to the miners and tried to persuade them to follow their line, and it was a natural first step for the movement. In most countries, the labour movement in the beginning in some way or another was dominated by some sort of liberalism. And this feeling that you have to do something with the existing state, but you don't have the power to establish a state of your own, produced all those political demands which immediately were consolidated by the liberals who then said, now we're speaking on behalf of the working class. I think that people are already becoming very frustrated by the results of their own political demands and activities - which is dangerous because some people could become apathetic, depoliticised. That's why I think that probably the next step will not be a new political radicalisation but an explosion of trade unionism which could then be radicalised and politicised, or re-politicised in a different way.

What is the Socialist Party's evaluation of the Communist Party?

We always said that the Communist Party had no future, even when they tried to get rid of some troublemakers. First of all, it's not homogeneous - it doesn't have a political identity, it doesn't have its own political line. They now say that anybody who is not going to accept the political line, who is not happy about the party as it exists, can quit. So people are leaving the party in large numbers. In Moscow, thousands of people are leaving daily. For example, there is the case of the secretary of a party organisation in one of the enterprises where we now have our own cell. Our representative there went to the secretary of the CPSU organisation, saying: 'Why haven't you left the party?' And the CPSU man said: 'I am the secretary. There has to be somebody who registers the papers of the people who leave the party. When everybody leaves, I will also leave.'

That's the mood of the rank and file. It has no interest anymore in staying there and the party's politically completely bankrupt because it didn't manage to form any sort of political identity of its own. What remains is still completely heterogeneous because nobody knows what the general line is or the real identity behind which you have to consolidate yourself as a political group. Even if 90 per cent left, the remaining ten per cent wouldn't be real communists because what remains is uncertain and confused about everything. Also, they stay for different reasons, mostly because they're inside the apparatus or have connections, or they expect some sort of promotion. If they have ideas about communism, the ideas are all different. There are some people who remain 'hard-line communists', there are 'renewalists', there are 'democratisers' in the liberal sense and there are 'democratic socialists' who are also attempting to work inside the CPSU. Politically,

it's incapable of regaining any initiative.

On the other hand, it's a party which is very rich - it has buildings, it has money, it has newspapers. It still has a lot of influence in the sense that it has its people all around, though it's much weaker now and becoming weaker every day. There are people who are just interested in business, in creating joint ventures, commercial enterprises with party money, becoming stock managers and bosses and owners and shareholders and so on. And there is still an element of political operators who say, whatever happens, we'll still have thousands of people. Just yesterday I had a meeting with one of the functionaries of the Moscow CPSU committee. They invited me to speak because they now see that we are an emerging force. But on the other hand, they also said: 'How many people do you have in Moscow? Probably about 40 activists and a few hundred sympathisers and supporters. Well, we still have thousands of rank-and-file members, we have a lot of money, we have big buildings. Do you have a big building like this? You don't. You probably have one or two rooms. Your offices are quite small. We have such a nice office here...' and so on. 'So it means you have to co-operate with us.'

Which is senseless, because it doesn't represent their real political influence. They lost the elections, their people are not getting votes. We are getting votes even though the mass media is against us. The Communists have a lot of media of their own and they're still losing votes. They are not active at present on the enterprise level and, although we have only a few people working in enterprises, they're real leaders.

There are people who are real communists, who really believe in socialism and who are really Marxists. What we say to those people is if you really want to continue, you have to come to us, or work with us, or form something new. If you don't want to join us, you can create an organisation of your own - we'll co-operate. We're not insisting on being the only force of the left. Unfortunately, now, we are the only real national organisation of the left within Russia, but we are not insisting on being in a vanguard or being a monopoly of the left. OK, if you form something new, we'll co-operate, but staying within the Communist Party is suicide and more and more people are now moving from the Communist Party to us.

There is another group which has emerged inside the Communist Party called Democratic Platform which is very interesting. It's a bit absurd because it's the same thing as the CPSU itself. But people want to leave the party. They leave for different reasons but they want to stay together to get some parts of the party property - buildings, money or newspapers. They're led by ex-party functionaries, and they've created a sort of mini-CPSU, with all the same contradictions, because they unite people who are discontented with the party leadership for very different reasons. They have their congress in September or October and it seems that they will become either one more liberal party, dropping everything which connects them not only with communism but also with socialism or Marxism, or they will split into different factions or groups. Or both: the majority will remain as a liberal party and some people will leave them and either join us or form a new organisation of the left.

So, generally speaking, it is not excluded that the CPSU, Stalinist communism, from next year could disappear as a serious political

factor. We think that the faster it happens, the better, because now the existence of the Communist Party is one of the main inspirations for anti-communist agitation, and anti-communist feeling within the masses of the population. It is always used by the demagogues of the right - the right-revivalists or, as we say, pogrom liberals. They speak in favour of liberal democracy of the Western type. At the same time, the methods they propose to reach it are mostly pogroms, killing the communists and so on. And it's certain that it's not only against communists. It would be used against anybody who disagrees with their ideas. So for us, it's quite evident that the faster the Communist Party disappears - as the real problem of the political life in this country - the better. Which doesn't mean that things would become better objectively, but the ideological situation would change and people would finally face the real problems produced by the economic crimes of today, not by the ideological mythology of yesterday.

What is the role of the President of the Russian Republic, Boris Yeltsin?

In the beginning, when Yeltsin left the bureaucracy officially, he was a sort of left-wing populist, mostly concerned with social justice and equality, against privilege, and so on. He became hijacked by the liberals, or he moved to the right. It's a very interesting problem how and when it happened. When Yeltsin and other populists got into parliament they formed a united front with the liberals, and intellectually - because they have a very low intellectual level - they were just absorbed by them. There was no left present in the Congress of People's Deputies and that was another factor in their absorption by the liberals. So the populist leaders were mostly integrated within the liberal project and the populist movement shifted from the left to the right. In some periods of Argentine history, Peronism, in opposition and even in government, pretended to be a progressive left-wing populism. But modern Peronism has nothing to do with anything like social justice. Peronism took about 40 years to get to this point while in the case of Yeltsinism we had probably three years to reach exactly the same results - with Yeltsin now in government and appointing as his prime minister a traditional old-style bureaucrat with extreme liberal ideas, who says that his main priority is privatisation and access to the Soviet economy for foreign capital.

This shift by Yeltsin and other populists to the right produced a split and confusion among the people who follow Yeltsin because most of them voted for him because of the social justice slogans. It means that the movement behind Yeltsin, at least in Moscow, is just disappearing. He is not based on a mass movement anymore. He continues to have some support, probably some important support, but it's much smaller than it was earlier, and it's becoming smaller almost every day. You very often hear people speaking publicly against him, and you can easily learn that most of them voted for Yeltsin in the election for the Soviet Congress. Now he is no longer considered to be the right candidate for those people.

What do you define as the objective situation of the Soviet Union now?

There's a process of Third Worldisation going on. What happened to the Soviet Union is that the Stalinist superpower project failed

completely. It is bankrupt. The whole Stalinist concept of a world state is no longer realisable. So the ruling elite are turning to their role as a minor partner of big brother - United States imperialism. Now it's a real struggle for Gorbachev to ensure that the Soviet Union should remain a regional power at least. But the price for getting the status of regional power is subordination to the world capitalist system, and becoming an integral part of this system.

That's the main tendency. And paradoxically, I think that it is also positive because it helps us to generalise the anti-capitalist struggle all over the world. There are no longer two different worlds - the capitalist world and the so-called communist world. Now it seems that there is only one global capitalist world. I think that's not so bad for the left-wing alternative in reality because it also produces the possibility of a global alternative to capitalism and for unifying the struggles in East and West and in the Third World. So I'm not as pessimistic about that as many people in the Western left. On the contrary, I think it's a great possibility for us which didn't exist earlier. As one of the people in the West, I think one of the American left-wingers, said, the main challenge capitalism is going to face now is itself. Earlier it had to face communism, which was not such a real threat. It was very easy to face the challenge of 'real existing' Stalinist communism, but it's much more difficult for capitalism to face itself, to face its own contradictions and the problems it generates.

Internally, subordination to world capitalism means accepting the role of a Third World country and, taking into account the level of development of the Soviet Union and the state of crisis we face, it means the Soviet economy will be very weak on the world market. The more 'openness' we have for the world market, the more we reveal the weaknesses of the Soviet economy, including the sectors which, if you take into account the level of technological development and the level of skills the people possess, are objectively rather strong. But they're not prepared to compete and they're not prepared to change their command mechanism. We are now facing a very dangerous trend of technological degeneration. Enterprises are shifting from high-tech to low-tech to remain competitive - or to produce the products which the market needs. We're going down - and this is a long-term process; it's not a transitory phase because the rules of the world market we're going to accept will reproduce this sort of degeneration.

It's also the same problem of debt, of foreign debt, and of technological dependency. Added to this is the problem of the incompetence of the ruling elite which wants a market but which has absolutely no skills or experience in operating the real market. The most extreme free marketeers are sometimes the most naive and most incompetent when it comes to operating the market, understanding market forces and so on, because they have completely illusory ideas about the market. The Soviet economy has no immunity from the ills of the market like inflation and unemployment, and the population is used to social guarantees. So with all these things, it seems that we will face an explosion of discontent, probably very quickly, especially if the capitalist economy globally goes into recession. In this case the Eastern Bloc countries will explode tremendously, together probably with some of the Third World countries like Brazil, Argentina - or probably even Chile, which now looks quite good for the capitalists but which I think is not as stable as they would like it to be. In that case, there is a real possibility of a joint front of the left-wing forces of the so-called Second and Third Worlds in an alternative to global capitalism. Because all these countries are going to face dual domination - the domination of local elites and the domination of multinational capital - which means there is the possibility of international co-operation in the struggle against multi-national capitalist domination.

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

PART SEVEN

THE 1953 SPLIT in the Fourth International may have forced Healy to take a confused half-step back from the pro-Stalinist line he had pursued over the previous five years, but it failed to alter his course of political liquidation into the Bevanite movement. This was one aspect of 'Pabloism' which Healy had no intention of challenging.

In September 1953, at the very time that he was flaying the 'capitulatory' politics of the Pabloites, Healy was telling *Socialist Outlook* readers that the forthcoming Labour Party conference presented an opportunity to deliver 'the knock-out blow' to the bureaucracy. And how was this to be achieved? 'It is to be hoped,' Healy wrote, 'that the Bevanites on the platform will join forces with the rank and file on the floor and thus guide the conference in a real Socialist direction.'¹ This approach - which has been summarised as 'Hope the Lefts fight'² - offered not the slightest warning as to the real willingness of the leaders of the Labour left to take on and defeat the right wing.³

Healy's problem was that his attacks on Pablo's British supporters threatened to damage his relations with the Bevanites, who stood closer politically to John Lawrence's group than to Healy's. Healy evaded this difficulty with his usual political dishonesty. Thus he denounced as 'a shameful cover for the hideous facts of class collaboration' Lawrence's endorsement of the popular frontist Paris conference against German rearmament of March 1954,⁴ yet he refused to criticise Jennie Lee for having attended the same conference.⁵ And while he condemned Lawrence's readiness to build a campaign against German rearmament in co-operation with anti-German chauvinists,⁶ Healy remained silent on the fact that some of the worst examples of such chauvinism were to be found in the Bevanite journal *Tribune*.⁷

In order to counter the accusation that his polemics against Lawrence also reflected on the Bevanites, Healy stepped up his sycophancy towards Aneurin Bevan to unprecedented levels. Bevan's resignation from the shadow cabinet in April 1954, in protest at Attlee's support for US warmongering in South East Asia, prompted a breathless eulogy from Healy. 'Implicit in the position put forward by Bevan,' Healy wrote, 'is the recognition that what the world faces today in its struggle for survival is an international class struggle. Implicit in the statement of policy he proposes is a rallying cry for international working class action.

Implicit in his attack on the counter-revolutionary plans of American Big Business is an appeal to the great and traditionally militant American working class . . . Our task is to aid in spelling out the programme for Labour implied in his stand.'⁸

At this time the Bevanites were also being courted by the Communist Party, which was attempting - not unsuccessfully - to draw the Labour left into a cross-class 'peace' campaign. Healy's 'Group', small though it was, represented an obstacle to the Stalinists' aims. It was scarcely accidental, therefore, that in March 1954 the CP weekly *World News* published an attack on Trotskyism which included potted political biographies of Healy and other former RCPers involved with *Socialist Outlook*. The Labour Party right wing gratefully accepted the political ammunition provided by the Stalinists, and the following month the National Executive Committee pronounced that anyone associated with *Socialist Outlook* was ineligible for membership of the Labour Party.⁹

Healy launched a campaign against the ban - 'Join the Labour Party today' was the fighting slogan, 'And Ssh! Still read *Socialist Outlook*'¹⁰ - and he was able to rally broad support within the labour movement, in particular among the Bevanites, who were themselves under threat of expulsion.¹¹ Nevertheless, at the 1954 Labour Party conference the reference back of the NEC's report on *Socialist Outlook*, moved by Jennie Lee, was lost by 1,596,000 votes to 4,474,000.¹² Speaking at a *Socialist Outlook* meeting during the conference, Healy had demagogically warned the right wing that 'no matter what they fixed by the use of the block vote, they would not prevent the *Outlook* from appearing or becoming a bigger paper'.¹³ But this proved to be so much hot air. In October 1954 *Socialist Outlook* ceased publication, and the Healyites turned to selling *Tribune*. It was in co-operation with the Bevanites' paper that Healy carried out his intervention in the 'Blue Union' struggle of 1954-55.

In the course of this struggle thousands of dockers in the northern ports, disgusted by their union officials' collaboration with the employers, deserted the Transport and General Workers' Union and joined the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers (known as the 'Blue Union' because of the colour of its membership cards). The NAS&D leadership proceeded to lead successful actions against compulsory overtime and against attempts to deny its

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy



Aneurin Bevan (right) with Harold Wilson

members employment under the Dock Labour Scheme. But a six-week strike to enforce negotiating rights for the 'Blue Union', which began in May 1955, went down to defeat. The NAS&D leadership turned out to be no real alternative to that of the T&GWU. Not only did it do its best to sabotage the recognition strike, but it tried to force its thousands of new recruits back into the T&G, under instructions from the TUC. The 'Blue Union' membership had to take its leaders to court in order to secure the democratic right to join a trade union of their own choice.¹⁴

The mass exodus from the T&G was not a purely spontaneous development, but the outcome of a strategy consciously worked for by the Healyites. As early as 1953 Healy had met with a group of Birkenhead dockers who produced the rank-and-file paper *Portworkers Clarion*, and it had been agreed to prepare a breakaway. In August 1954 Healy himself, who was introduced as 'a sympathiser from London', addressed a mass meeting during the Hull dock strike which initiated the large-scale defections to the NAS&D. Indeed, the Group played a crucial organisational role throughout the ensuing struggle.¹⁵ John Archer goes so far as to describe this intervention as 'Healy's greatest achievement'.¹⁶ Given Healy's political record, however, a more critical attitude seems appropriate.

Certainly, the T&G members who marched out to join the NAS&D did so out of a healthy hatred for the union bureaucracy, and it was absolutely necessary to defend them against both the attacks of the right wing and the scabbing of the Stalinists. But it was quite a different matter to set out, as Healy did, to engineer a breakaway movement. Instead of working patiently to build a rank-and-file opposition to the T&GWU leadership, which would have been the principled course of action, Healy tried to find a short-cut to establishing a political presence on the docks. Such methods can only be described as thoroughly opportunist. And

Healy's attempt to use an essentially conservative craft union like the NAS&D as a vehicle for his aims proved disastrous. It was one of Healy's star recruits, NAS&D secretary Dick Barrett, who tried to lead a return to work in London during the 1955 recognition strike.¹⁷ 'In retrospect it was a fiasco,' one present-day supporter of Healy's strategy is forced to concede. 'It led to a split on the docks and even to a certain amount of non-unionism . . .'¹⁸



Messali Hadj

Tribune gave full coverage to the 'Blue Union' struggle, which it saw as an opportunity to undermine the Bevanites' enemies in the T&G leadership, and the Group enthusiastically promoted its sales in the docks. As a result of Healy's efforts, Bevanism was able to acquire what it had previously lacked - a base in the trade union movement. After the collapse of the upsurge on the docks, the Healyites continued to work closely with *Tribune*, for example in organising meetings for the Bevanite MPs Crossman and Mallalieu in Yorkshire.¹⁹ In exchange for such services, members of the Group were occasionally allowed a letter or short article calling for a programme of nationalisation without compensation under workers' control or for a sliding scale of hours in response to automation.²⁰ But if Healy had been minded to draw up a political

balance sheet in terms of what he got for what he gave, the answer would have been - very little. For Healy, of course, no such question arose. His purpose was not to build a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, but to pursue Pablo's strategic line of 'assisting the evolution' of Bevanism into a supposedly centrist movement.

Healy's own contributions to *Tribune* were shallow, journalistic pieces which did nothing to introduce Trotskyist politics to leftward-moving workers within the Bevanite current. But he did give his readers a taste of what passed for 'orthodox Trotskyism' within the International Committee of the Fourth International. In November 1955 *Tribune* published Healy's fawning account of his visit to Messali Hadj, the Algerian National Movement leader held under house arrest in France. In an article notable for its total lack of political analysis, Healy paid tribute to 'the amazingly confident personality' of Messali Hadj, and to his ability to create 'an atmosphere which is unique for its calm, impressive feeling'.²¹ Clearly, crawling to Third World nationalists was not something Healy invented in the 1970s! But this was no mere personal deviation on Healy's part. He was visiting the Algerian leader to convey a message of political solidarity to the MNA from the International Committee, which earlier that month had passed a resolution hailing Messali Hadj as a 'living symbol' of the struggle against imperialism.²²

The IC had in fact proved to be politically stillborn. In November 1953, James P. Cannon had imagined that the authority of the SWP was such that the mere publication of the Open Letter would be sufficient to win the world Trotskyist movement away from Pablo. But most sections of the FI, unable to understand why a split had been publicly declared before documents had even been circulated within the International, observed organisational discipline and refused to break with the International Secretariat. Most significantly, the only section with a real mass base, the Lanka Sama

Samaja Party of Ceylon, declined to join the IC, even though its leaders were politically sympathetic to Pablo's opponents.

In July 1954 the LSSP delegates to Pablo's 'Fourth World Congress' visited Britain and proposed to Healy that a parity commission should be formed to discuss the possibility of reuniting the IC and IS. Healy eagerly supported this initiative, reasoning that Pablo had been seriously weakened by the defection of the Lawrence, Clerk and Mestre groups at the World Congress. Indeed, when IC secretary Gerard Bloch refused to participate in the parity commission Healy demanded his resignation and took over the secretaryship himself. However, after a single meeting of the commission the US leadership announced its opposition to continued negotiations. In compliance with the SWP's instructions, Healy reversed his position, and on his proposal the IC unilaterally wound up the parity commission in April 1955.²³

The International Committee itself remained no more than a loose federation of national groupings, and as such had nothing in common with Trotsky's Fourth International. It lacked even a functioning international centre which could pose as an alternative to the Pabloite IS. After 1955, the IC led an increasingly shadowy existence, gradually lapsing into almost complete inactivity. Such was the outcome of what Healy in 1953 had laughably described as 'the greatest struggle in the whole history of our movement'.

To be continued

Notes

- Socialist Outlook*, September 18, 1953.
- K. Hassell in 'Crisis in the WRP', *Workers Power*, 1986, p.6.
- Michael Foot states that the 1953 party conference 'was a restrained, inconclusive affair. Over the previous months, the Left had resolved not to open a new front against the Right . . .' ('Aneurin Bevan', Vol.2, Paladin, 1975, p.405).
- Socialist Outlook*, April 9, 1954.
- Ibid.*, April 23, 1954.
- Ibid.*, May 7, 1954.
- Later, Healy suddenly shifted his position and openly criticised the Bevanites' attitude to German rearmament (see *Socialist Outlook*, September 17, 24, October 1, 1954). He probably did so in response to the publication of Ted Grant's pamphlet 'Socialism and German Unity', which took a distinctly more principled line than Healy had on this issue.
- Socialist Outlook*, April 30, 1954.
- M. Jenkins, 'Bevanism', *Spokesman*, 1979, pp.182, 241-2.
- Socialist Outlook*, August 13, 1954.
- Tribune* (August 13, 1954) carried a front page article by Michael Foot denouncing the ban, under the headline 'I Call This An Outrage'.
- Labour Party Conference Report, 1954, p.165.
- Socialist Outlook*, October 1, 1954.
- See W. Hunter's account in *Labour Review*, September-October 1958.
- See J. Archer, 'The Trotskyists and the Merseyside Docks Strikes, 1954-1955', lecture to WRP Public Forum, May 24, 1990. This account is based on research by Steve Lloyd.
- Ibid.*
- Tribune*, July 1, 1955.
- J. O'Mahony in 'New Problems New Struggles', *Socialist Organiser*, 1989, p.39.
- Tribune*, November 9, 1955.
- Ibid.*, February 11, September 16, October 28, 1955.
- Ibid.*, November 25, 1955.
- C. Slaughter, ed., 'Trotskyism Versus Revisionism', Vol.4, New Park, 1974, pp.132-3.
- For Healy's zig-zags over the parity commission, and the subsequent evolution of the IC, see Peng Shu-tse's account in 'How Healy and Pablo Blocked Reunification', *SWP*, 1978, pp.77-8.

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The making of the South African working class

BARUCH HIRSON's new book is to be welcomed. It is a ground-breaking and unique account of the development and struggles of the black working class in South Africa.

The book deals with the important period 1930 to 1947. During this time black workers experienced the ravages of the depression, the war years, the drought in the rural Reserves (the precursors of the present-day homelands), and the economic decline in the immediate aftermath of the war. The book concentrates on the Southern Transvaal which at that stage already had the highest concentration of the urbanized African working class. This region was of course the centre of the expanding mining and industrial heartland of South Africa.

The book weaves an interesting tapestry of the rich variety of struggles of the period. It charts the responses of a diverse range of people, all members or potential members of the black working class. They formed unions for mineworkers, for distributive workers, for domestic workers, and so forth. They rioted, they protested in rural areas, they boycotted buses, they formed squatter movements, and they participated in numerous strikes. To the book's credit, the reader is also given a sense of the trials and tribulations of everyday life for African people in urban areas. The verbal images are reinforced by a number of photographs depicting characters and scenes from the period.

Given the quality of the research, this book will appeal to academics and intellectuals. However, it is far more important that it is read by workers and activists in both Britain and South Africa. A serious attitude to politics demands a serious attitude to history, to which this book makes an

Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa, 1930-1947

by Baruch Hirson; Zed Press

Review by Vusi Makabane

important contribution.

From this book interested readers will learn that the rotten politics of the ANC and the SACP, which now dominates the South African working class movement, goes back a long way. A graphic example of their treachery occurred during the war. Between 1941 and 1942 the greatest expansion of African trade unions took place amidst an unprecedented strike wave. Because both the ANC and the CPSA (as the Communist Party was called at the time) were pro-war, they actively discouraged strikes. Thus 'the effect of the CPSA policy was to act as a brake on some of the key unions where workers called for strike action' (p.89).

It is also noteworthy that the book recounts the activities of the small but active Trotskyist groups in South Africa. These included the WIL (no relation to the present-day WIL in Britain). To their credit they were consistently against the imperialist war. Not surprisingly, this incurred the wrath of the ANC and CPSA who branded them as provocateurs and wreckers for advocating strike action. But the Trotskyists were not without their own problems. In the face of the defeat of the trade union movement during the 1940s, the WIL, after a bitter internal battle, decided to withdraw from all trade union activity. This was an amazing act of self-destruction, and by 1946 the WIL had collapsed (p.189).

Hirson's book no doubt has much to commend it. But it falls down on two counts.

Firstly, it assumes that the reader already has a knowledge of the period. As a result there is no account of the history and development of the political organisations which are described. The reader is given no indication of the size, composition, and extent of the influence of such important organisations as the CPSA, the ANC, and even the WIL.

Secondly, and more importantly, there is a serious flaw in an important political conclusion it draws. It attempts to account for the defeat of the strike wave which culminated in the 1946 mineworkers' strike by claiming that in the 1940s 'the African workers were at a disadvantage, fighting not from a position of strength but from weakness' (p.201). In evidence it cites a number of external factors, including the strength of the state and the declining economic conditions. However, what is not mentioned is the importance of political leadership, that is, the subjective factor. The defeat of those strikes must first and foremost be ascribed to the treachery of the ANC and CPSA and the disorientation of the Trotskyists (if the WIL is taken as an example). The crucial importance of the correct political leadership is as important a lesson for the working class of the 1940s as it is for the working class today.

These reservations are intended to make all interested readers tackle this book more critically, but read it they must.



First day of the Alexandra township bus boycott, August 1943

Dual power in Limerick

Forgotten Revolution: Limerick Soviet 1919

by Liam Cahill; The O'Brien Press; £14.95

Review by Richard Price

FOR TWO weeks in April 1919, workers in Limerick mounted a general strike against British military occupation, and effectively controlled Ireland's fourth city. Fearing the threat not only to British rule, but to the foundations of capitalist property, Irish and British trade union bureaucrats combined with the Catholic hierarchy to get the strike called off.

Liam Cahill, an Irish journalist and trade unionist, has done a thorough job researching this important movement. His central argument - that the defeat of the Limerick soviet condemned the Irish working class to playing second fiddle to bourgeois nationalism in the struggle against British imperialism - is correct. If there are any complaints, they are over his dry documentary style and the steep cost of this relatively slim volume.

The crisis in Limerick took place against the background of the Black and Tan war and a period of rising trade union militancy. It was precipitated by the killing of Robert Byrne, a local trade unionist and IRA volunteer, during an attempt to free him from hospital where he was on hunger strike. Byrne's death aroused deep anger and the British authorities responded by proclaiming Limerick a Special Military Area. This collective punishment, which partitioned the main working class district from the rest of the city and imposed provocative pass restrictions, threw fat on the fire. Limerick Trades and Labour Council called a general strike on April 13.

On an organisational level its impact was impressive. Economic life and administration passed into the strikers' hands. The strike committee controlled transport and maintained essential services; it issued employers with permits to operate; it fixed the price of food, and ensured its distribution; it published its own newspaper and even issued its own paper currency. Strong support was won from farmers in the neighbouring country areas, and sympathy was strong among a Scottish regiment which had to be redeployed.

It is no exaggeration to say that the spread of such a

movement - in a year which saw other local general strikes and the occupation of creameries which were also declared 'soviets' - could have resulted in an entirely different outcome to the anti-British struggle. The central problem, however, was leadership. Although Limerick's May Day rally in 1918 had sent greetings to the Russian revolution, its labour movement was strongly influenced by republicanism. Catholicism and syndicalism - all opposed to uniting the fight against British imperialism with the socialist revolution.

More serious, the leadership of the united Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC), after initially declaring its support for 'a fight of workers against military domination and imperialist forces', was determined not to upset its Sinn Fein senior partners or loyalist trade unionists in the north. Having consulted the Dail Eireann executive, the entire ILPTUC

executive descended on Limerick. While the trades council leaders called for national strike action in support, the national leaders were determined to be rid of what they regarded as a 'Sinn Fein affair'. The British TUC stood aloof as it had done during the Dublin lockout, and Ramsay Macdonald condemned the strikers. From the pulpits, initially sympathetic clergy attacked this manifestation of 'Irish Bolshevism', as did employers who supported Sinn Fein. Faced with such an unholy 'united front', the strikers reluctantly and bitterly backed down.

Was this a genuine soviet? In terms of conscious revolutionary leadership, clearly not. But the Russian soviets of February 1917 were led by Mensheviks and SRs. Despite its limitations, the Limerick Soviet deserved an important chapter in Irish working class history, and Cahill has rescued it from being a mere footnote.

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, relaunched 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*, was convicted on a charge of grievous bodily harm in February 1987, after carrying out a brutal assault on WRP/*News Line* supporter Eric Rogers following a demonstration at Wapping on May 3, 1986.

Workers Press then ran an 11-week campaign claiming that Penn had himself been attacked by four members of the *News Line* group, and that he had been shopped to the police and subsequently framed in court. They argue that political differences should not be resolved in bourgeois courts, and that those who appeared as witnesses against Penn were 'crossing class lines'.

The WIL does not recognise that beating up a political opponent in the labour movement is a legitimate means of expressing political differ-

ences'. On July 26, the WIL wrote to the WRP *Workers Press* Central Committee asking them to co-operate in setting up a commission of enquiry into the affair composed of individuals from the labour movement acceptable to both sides. Over four months later there has been no response other than a grossly inaccurate article in the *Workers Press* 'personal column' of non-WRP member Peter Fryer. Nevertheless, the WIL repeats its call for a public debate and for the dispute to be settled by a workers' enquiry. The following individuals and organisations have supported this call:

Workers Power; Revolutionary Internationalist League; Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (Belgium/Germany); Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Argentina); Ben, Vusi, Jimmy, Mtshana and Theresa (South African Trotskyists); *La Voce Operaia* (Italy); Revolutionär Kommunistische Liga (Austria); Maulwurf (Germany); *Searchlight South Africa*; Al Richardson; Barry Buittekant; Arthur Shute; Peter Farrell (treasurer, Kentish

Town and Hampstead UCATT/ex-WRP CC member); Gary Hollingsbee; Mick Byrne (ex-WRP CC/ex-ICP CC); Linda Byrne (ex-WRP Western Region Committee/ex-ICP); John Rees (ex-chair Tower Hamlets Printworkers' Support Group/Workers Power supporter). In a personal capacity: Ellis Hillman (Labour councillor, Barnet); Clive Boult (former Labour councillor, Haringey); Steve King (former Labour leader, Haringey Council); Hal MacDermot, Alton Williams, Bob Russell (branch secretary) (all NUR Willesden No.1 Branch); Paul Flewers (RCP supporter/ *Revolutionary History* editorial board); Andy Fletcher (secretary, Tower Hamlets Health Branch, NALGO); Jim Mansfield (secretary, Hampstead Health Branch, NALGO); John Pestle (secretary, City and Hackney Health Branch, NALGO); Paul Duployen (chair, Bloomsbury Health Branch, NALGO).

● For further information, write to: WIL, 1/17 Meredith Street, London EC1R 0AE.

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

Federation calls for legal logjam to defeat the tax

THE SECOND national conference of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation met on November 25 in Manchester in an atmosphere of self-congratulation at the downfall of Margaret Thatcher.

The conference was dominated by *Militant*, with a group of about 200 Socialist Workers Party supporters among the 1,300 or so who attended. It should have provided the delegates from local APTUs, trades unions and trades councils with an opportunity to draw up a balance sheet of experiences made in the struggle against the poll tax in 1990, and to prepare the Federation's work for the coming year.

The fact that it did not rests with the leadership, which maintains a bureaucratic stranglehold over the Federation aimed at securing the interests of *Militant*. An attempt to break the *Militant* stranglehold failed when a slate of candidates committed to democratising the Federation's national structure was overwhelmingly defeated. The SWP refused to join this opposition grouping, preferring to put forward their own candidates who received marginally more votes.

With summonses being issued to non-payers up and down the country and the bailiffs being used in some boroughs, resolutions were passed on 'beating the bailiffs', 'wage arrestments/attachment of earnings' and 'income support deductions'. Although verbal support was given to trade union action against implementation of the tax, this was not a central pillar of conference policy, nor was any strategy outlined to achieve it. *Militant*'s main weapon for fighting the tax is to clog up the courts, thus making it time-consuming and expensive for councils to chase non-payers. They laid great emphasis on informing poll tax resisters of their legal rights against the bailiffs, on the necessity of turning up in court, the use of 'MacKenzie's friends' as advisers in court and so on.

When it came to the defence of those arrested on and after the two large London demonstrations, the Federation leadership showed its true colours. Many speakers were sharply critical of Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan's offer on television to 'name names' after the March 31 demonstration. It has subsequently become clear that the demonstra-

By Jon Bearman

tion was subject to a pre-planned attack by the police, which led to the running battles and the damage to property in the Trafalgar Square and West End areas. *Militant* speakers were outraged, their leader was 'no police provocateur' - but no explanation was offered for his action.

In continuation of this equivocal attitude to the forces of the state, the conference pledged to 'fully support the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign to provide the fullest legal back-up to those arrested', but were directed by the Federation leadership to vote down a resolution calling for affiliation to the TSDC.

The conference agenda actually contained correspondence between the TSDC and the ABAPTF in which the Federation condemned the Campaign's organisation of the Brixton Prison picket on October 20. The picket was

about 4,000-strong and organised without any support from the ABAPTF or the London Federation. It ended in violence after the police separated the organisers from the main body of protesters, and charged into the penned-up crowd.

Essentially, the Federation leaders are trying to smear the TSDC with responsibility for what was, in fact, an orchestrated police assault. They indict the TSDC for leading demonstrators 'into an ambush' and failing to take precautions to protect them. While they admit that the police were responsible for the attack on the Brixton picket, their constant demands that the TSDC denounce the actions of 'provocateurs' and anarchist groups, together with their insistence on orderly, well-behaved demonstrations, court pickets etc, serve the purpose of fingering the TSDC as irresponsible elements. Such foul insinuations must be condemned throughout the trade union and labour movement and repudiated by all serious supporters of *Militant*.



The Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign contingent on the October 20 demonstration through London

FREE POLL TAX PRISONERS!

AS WE go to press, there are 13 people in prison for resisting the poll tax. Those already convicted are Gordon Allum (HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs), Wayne Calder (HMYOI Huntercome), Ray Caldwell (Brixton), Alan Clarke (Pentonville), Neil Harding (Brixton), Debbie Harper (Holloway), Robert Robinson, aka Simon O'Reilly (Camp Hill) and Bryan Wright (Lincoln).

All have been found guilty of public order offences except Bryan Wright who is the first person to be jailed for refusing to pay the poll tax. Wright, an unemployed bricklayer, was

sentenced to three weeks on December 7 by magistrates in Grantham, Lincolnshire, who told him he must pay his £345.21 bill or go to jail.

Those on remand are Daniel Attwood (Letchmere House), Paul Jacob (Brixton), Ken Moseley (Wormwood Scrubs), Marcus B. Roskilly (Rochester) and Antonio Rossi (Rochester). Further details can be obtained by telephoning 071-833 8958.

The Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign has now published a preliminary report on the October 20 demonstration and picket, together with proposals and recommenda-

tions for action to defend the anti-poll tax movement. Copies can be obtained from TSDC, Room 205, Panther House, 35 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP. It should be read in every APTU, trade union branch and trades council.

Motions of support for the TSDC should be passed throughout the labour movement and money raised without delay to fight for the release of those jailed and for the defence of those charged in connection with the demonstrations on March 31 and October 20.

What is sectarianism?

An open letter to members and supporters of the SWP, *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook*

ANYONE attending one of the numerous meetings, demonstrations, conferences or pickets called around the Gulf crisis will be familiar with the word 'sectarian'. This all-purpose swear word, which has also achieved wide currency in the anti-poll tax movement, has become so debased and so removed from its original meaning that it is necessary to restate the ABC of Marxism on the question.

Stern - or even hysterical - accusations of 'sectarianism' are the stock-in-trade of those who want to stifle debate, who don't want to call things by their real names and who don't want their own programme examined too closely.

Sectarians are those who abstain from the struggles and the organisations of the working class in the interests of preserving their own purity. They disdain the fight for immediate and partial demands on the grounds that these are an obstacle to socialist revolution. They refuse to take part in joint actions for fear of contaminating themselves. The sectarian looks

upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum. Then the task would be solved' (Trotsky). Into this category fall such organisations as *The Leninist*, the Spartacist League, the International Communist Party and the *WRP/Workers Press*. The latter's resignation from the Ad Hoc Hands Off the Middle East Committee on the grounds that it was hampering its own 'intervention' at least provided the Committee with opportunity for a little light relief.

But none of the foregoing has much to do with the targets of SWP, *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook* allegations of sectarianism. What really upsets them is the consistent application of the Leninist position on imperial-

ist war. Teaching young militants to sneer at the heritage of Marxism as if it were just so much outdated rubbish is the worst form of political education possible. This is justified by all three organisations by the need to build a broad anti-war movement.

In practice this leads to two sets of 'principles' - one for internal consumption (troops out of the Gulf, opposition to the UN and even defence of Iraq in the event of war) and another set tailored to the agenda set by the left-reformists. In order to achieve 'unity' with Benn, Corbyn, Grant, Primarolo and the rest, it is necessary that the first are entirely subordinated to the second.

In the case of the SWP, this ditching of their own programme has gone even further in order for them to appear on platforms alongside forces outside the workers' movement like the Green Party, CND

and church leaders. In Kent, the SWP have even proposed that a public meeting be chaired by a clergyman.

These might seem to be harmless concessions. But in reality, SWP leaders consciously play down their differences with their allies and refuse to make sanctions an issue. This has nothing in common with the Trotskyist position on the united front ('march separately but strike together') and is starkly reminiscent of the Stalinist policy of the popular front (non-class division into 'peace-loving' and 'aggressive' camps).

Things are little better in the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, whose leaders have declared their intention 'to orient to the right'. In order to silence the internationalists, they ensured that the CAWG conference, held in November, was a stage-managed flop complete with an outrageously

biased chair and a bar on policy-making motions.

CAWG's avowed 'labour movement orientation' amounts to tail-ending left MPs and CND (whose shrunken membership is strongly pro-sanctions). As for its vaunted 'mass work', *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook* have yet to secure a single trade union branch affiliation to CAWG, and managed to rally all of 30 supporters to a picket of the US embassy on December 5.

We will leave the last word to that old sectarian, Leon Trotsky: 'A centrist always remains in spiritual dependence on rightist groupings and is inclined to cringe before those who are more moderate, to remain silent on their opportunist sins and to cover up their actions before the workers.'

Well, comrades, which road is it to be? A workers' united front against imperialist war or a popular front arm-in-arm with the reformists, the pacifists and the church? Centrism or Marxism?

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