

Workers News



Paper of the Workers International League

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By the Editorial Board

THE HUMILIATING defeat of the Iraqi army after a land war lasting only 100 hours has strengthened imperialist control over the Middle East. The destruction of large parts of the infrastructure of Iraq, the restoration of the Kuwaiti Emirate and the enrolling of Syria and Iran into the allied-imposed settlement has created a new balance of power in the region.

Saddam Hussein's regime pursued a disastrous military policy. However, the root causes of the Iraqi defeat do not lie solely in blunders on the battlefield but in the incapacity of the Iraqi bourgeoisie – and indeed the Arab bourgeoisie as a whole – to wage a consistent struggle against imperialism. There was no shortage of sympathy and support for Iraq among the masses of the Arab world, other Muslim countries and semi-colonial nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Morocco, 300,000 people demonstrated against King Hassan's support for the coalition onslaught. But the Iraqi regime was incapable of harnessing the latent anti-imperialism of the masses. Instead it cynically played on their emotions, dropping its secular, 'socialist' and 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric in favour of language of holy war.

Saddam Hussein conducted the entire struggle over the heads of the Iraqi workers and peasants and, for all his pledges of a 'Mother of Battles', repeatedly indicated his readiness to seek a compromise with the allies. Small wonder that large sections of the Iraqi masses came to regard the occupation of Kuwait as an adventure on the part of the Ba'athists at their expense, and saw no prospect of winning the war.

Throughout the seven-month crisis and war in the Gulf, the Workers International League placed itself unconditionally on the side of Iraq. It fought within the anti-war movement in Britain for the defence of Iraq from imperialist attack, against UN sanctions and, when the war came, for an Iraqi victory. Statements co-authored by the WIL supporting these positions were distributed in five European and four Latin American countries. But we consistently warned against placing any confidence in the Ba'athist leadership. In December we wrote: '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.'

Following the rout of the Iraqi army, the suppressed anger of the Kurdish and Shi'ite minorities has exploded. Conscript soldiers returning from Kuwait have joined the rebellion in the south and have surrendered in large numbers to Kurdish forces in the north. The re-

venge exacted against Ba'athist officials – including the burning down of many regional offices – is the logical pay-off for a regime which has lived by the sword.

We are entirely for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by the working class. But the leadership of the anti-Ba'athist coalition, formed in Damascus in December, seeks to replace Saddam with a pro-imperialist government of national unity embracing bourgeois democrats, right-wing Kurdish nationalists, Iranian-sponsored Shi'ites and the Iraqi Communist Party.

For the time being, US imperialism is prepared to let the contending forces slug it out and to allow disease and shortages to further ravage the country. So much for the concern of Western governments for 'human rights'.

It is imperative that Iraqi workers do not hitch themselves to the cart of any of the bourgeois factions, but on the contrary rely only on their own strength. This means fighting for their own class interests – rebuilding independent trade unions, supporting the right of Kurdish self-determination and fighting to convene a revolutionary-democratic constituent assembly to break the shackles of imperialist domination and mobilise the oppressed sections of the peasantry.

The Kurdish uprising in the northern provinces faces a similar danger from its own leadership. The leaders of the Talabani-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Barzani-led Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) are semi-feudal chieftains, whose goal is not a genuinely independent Kurdish nation but an autonomous region, dependent on imperialism and Turkey, in which they can maintain their own class domination. This represents the aborting of Kurdish national aspirations at the very point when Kurds in Turkey have pressed demands for full independence. It assists the plans of both the Iraqi and Turkish bourgeoisies.

For the time being, the allied victory and the continuing pro-Western turn of the Iranian government have secured the Gulf region for the imperialists. Saudi Arabia has increased its oil production by 55 per cent since last summer. Together with other producers it has made up for the losses in Iraqi and Kuwaiti output and has halved the price of oil from the \$37-high last October. European and American companies can expect to pick up fat contracts for the reconstruction of Kuwait and Iraq.

A PEACE BUILT ON SAND

Elsewhere there are fewer grounds for Western self-congratulation. Having willingly accepted American bribery to stay out of the Gulf war, Israel is now even less disposed to make any concessions on the Palestinian question, thereby ensuring it will remain at the centre of Arab politics. Syria, which until two years ago counted as a 'terrorist state', has been brought into the Western fold, but there is overwhelming opposition within the country to the Assad regime's participation in the allied war effort. Another major supporter of Western intervention, Turkey, has recently experienced an unprecedented period of working class militancy, while the government has extended martial law in the eastern provinces and carried out mass arrests of Kurdish militants. The Arab states of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia have emerged from the war less, not more stable. All have chronic economic problems, experienced major demonstrations in support of Iraq and have seen a rise in Islamic fundamentalism. Already humiliated in the local elections of 1990, the FLN government in Algeria is likely to be swept from office by fundamentalists in the forthcoming general election.

Fundamentalism offers no solution to the oppressed masses of the Middle East. The conditions for its growth have been created by the bankruptcy of the old Arab nationalism symbolised by Nasser. Its fervour and its 'anti-imperialism', of course, reflect deep discontent among broad layers of the Arab peoples and a reaction against the treason of the Westernising Arab bourgeoisies. But its attempts to implement Sharia law, 'Islamicise' the economy, restore the veil and attack secular reforms are reactionary and hostile to the interests of the working class.

On the battlefield, the Western powers have carried the day in the war against Iraq, but at a high political price. To the storm clouds of economic recession which already threaten Bush's 'new world order' must now be added the deepening hatred of imperialism among the Arab and Muslim peoples.



Police move in to break up a picket of the Home Office organised by Black People Against War in the Gulf on February 20. They arrested 11 people for chanting 'US murderers out of the Gulf!'. On an anti-war demonstration on February 2, Spartacist League supporter Alastair Green was arrested for raising the slogan 'Victory to Iraq'. We urge all labour movement organisations to defend the democratic rights of those arrested and demand that all charges are dropped.

The Emir's back in town

By David Lewis

THE REMOVAL of the Iraqis from Kuwait by the forces of the 'democratic' Western powers does not herald a democratic future for the people who live there. The return of the Emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, in fact signals the opposite.

He is the leading member of the 1,500-strong al-Sabah family which, before the Iraqi invasion, ran most things in Kuwait. His first act at the end of the war was to impose martial law for three months. This includes the setting up of military courts, a ban on political meetings and an overnight curfew. The aim of all this is to prevent any challenge to his rule. The attempted assassination of a leading oppositionist, Hamed al-Juwaan, a Nasserite Arab nationalist, on March 1 shows that even the limited aims of the businessmen and bourgeois politicians who comprise the democratic opposition in Kuwait are too extreme for the al-Sabah family. The claims of Abdul Aziz Sultan, chairman of the Gulf Bank of

Kuwait, that members of the al-Sabah family have raised private militias to re-establish their rule through terror are entirely consistent with the previous record of the ruling clique.

The National Assembly has been suspended by the Emir for ten of the last 15 years. As a battleground between the al-Sabah family and their rivals for power amongst the other rich families and business interests, the Assembly did not represent any kind of genuine democracy. Out of a population of 2 million, only 60,000 male Kuwaitis had the vote. The 400,000 plus Palestinians, many of whom have been in Kuwait for generations, and the half-a-million or so Asians and other migrants who make up the working class and most of the white collar professionals had no rights at all. Nor did the vast majority of women. The return of the Emir also means that the oppression of

women will be re-established.

The pogrom which has been unleashed on the Palestinians is part of the al-Sabah strategy. The Palestinians are now under attack from the Kuwaiti and Saudi armies, armed groups of civilians and a sprinkling of mercenaries. The plan to rebuild Kuwait City at half its original size is another part of that attack. The rulers will then exclude most Palestinians and bar the return of migrant workers, whom they have exploited and oppressed for decades.

For the imperialists, however, the spoils of war are great and varied. Out of the rubble which their armies helped produce, £36 billion worth of new buildings and services will arise. British, American, French, Egyptian and Turkish firms will all get their share of the business.

For the al-Sabahs and their Emir, the aim is business as usual. For the working class internationally, the priority must be to defend the Palestinians against pogroms and victimisation.

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The way forward for NHS workers

THROUGHOUT the 1980s, sections of health service workers launched campaigns in defence of living standards, jobs and services.

In 1982, the fight to defend wages was led by ancillary, clerical, nursing and technical grades. By September 1982, when an estimated five million workers were taking supportive action, the campaign threatened to topple the Thatcher government. In 1984-5, a wave of occupations of hospitals threatened by closures was joined by ancillaries organising strikes against privatisation of their jobs. Following the defeat of the miners, occupied hospitals and picket lines held out against government policies, in some cases into 1986.

In December 1987, nurses took industrial action in defence of their living standards which lasted until March the following year. In 1989, the ambulance workers launched a campaign of action which again threatened the government by the groundswell of sympathy it drew across Britain for opposition to Tory attacks on the NHS.

On each occasion, the Thatcher government succeeded in finally pressing home its attacks due to the weakness of the existing leadership of trade unionists in the health service. Workers in the NHS were not spared the servile and cowardly policy of TUC and Labour Party leaders, intent on distancing themselves from the strike struggles of the previous decade as an electoral gambit to woo the

middle ground of voters away from the Tories. In fact, they threw away more support than they gained by this method since a significant sector of the Tory vote they sought to win demonstrated their support for the fight against government policy on the NHS.

The TUC and Labour Party bureaucracies worked might and main to confine the actions of health workers and isolate them from the mainstream of the organised working class. The government's strategy of describing health workers' actions as inspired by 'rent-a-mob' and 'outside interference' was supplemented by attacks from Labour front-bench spokesmen such as Robin Cook who, in 1988, condemned striking nurses.

The composition of the NHS workforce, in part, assisted the TUC and Labour leaders in derailing and selling-out the strikes and occupations. Since its inception in 1948 there has been a strict division of labour throughout the NHS. The professional groups - doctors, nurses, senior technical officers and administrators - were allowed by a Labour government to determine their own representation through professional bodies outside the TUC such as the BMA, RCN, etc. They have retained highly restrictive practices of recruitment aimed at excluding workers or those 'susceptible' to trade union organisation. They constitute not only a conservative bloc sitting on all the key bodies determining policies in the NHS and budget expenditure but also a ready-made strike-breaking force.

The bulk of semi- and unskilled jobs - clerical, ancillary and auxiliary nursing posts - are for the most part filled by women workers. Even here, management have exploited every opportunity to promote the growth of a workforce which resists trade union organisation. Teams of personnel staff have regularly been sent out to recruit in Hong Kong, Malaya, Ireland and west African states such as Nigeria and Ghana, looking for young women from rural areas with no experience of trade union organisation. Their isolation in Britain from the mainstream of workers' lives, living in hospital residences as a condition of employment or due to low rates of pay, makes the

PART TWO

By Ian Harrison

task of recruiting them to the trade unions a difficult one.

A further obstacle to unifying the bulk of the NHS workforce is the proliferation of trade unions within the service, often along lines of skill demarcation. Attempts by trade union militants to overcome this obstacle by calling for the creation of a single health service union were consistently defeated at conferences by the bureaucracy throughout the 1980s. Only in the latter part of the decade did a group of trade union leaders begin consultations aimed at a merger. The leaders of NUPE, NALGO and COHSE were, however, primarily motivated in securing a merger by self preservation, due to falling revenues from subscriptions.

The Tory attacks throughout the last decade have succeeded in destroying half the ancillary, clerical and nursing auxiliary posts in the NHS. For a growing number of health workers, as with workers in other services and industries, the trade unions are seen to be indifferent to the problems they face. The proportion of workers organised by TUC affiliates had sharply declined by 1990. Today they represent no more than 25 per cent of the workforce in many of Britain's largest hospitals.

The struggles of the 1980s, however, did not only reveal the inability of health workers to see through the popular front treachery of TUC and Labour leaders. They also exposed the failure of the left to break workers from their illusions in the existing leadership.

Central responsibility for this must be borne by the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP has conspicuously failed to sustain a campaign to expose the bankruptcy and demagoguery of TUC and Labour Party leaders. At times it even armed the bureaucracy with slogans for selling out the strikes. Such was the SWP's central slogan during the nurses' strikes in 1987-8, which put forward the demand to 'Make Budget Day NHS Day'. Never slow to spot an opportunity for channeling militancy into illusions in parliamentary reform, NUPE leaders Bickerstaffe and Sawyer, national office holders within the Labour Party as well as the TUC, adopted the slogan and printed it on placards used in the later mobilisations during the strikes, thereby successfully robbing the strikes of a perspective beyond Budget Day. At a decisive turning point during the nurses' strike, the SWP's militants in the NHS were instrumental in defeating calls for the establishment of a national committee to co-ordinate industrial action. They combined with RCP members to prevent the action being spread to other health workers, isolating the struggle as a 'nurses only' issue and thereby playing into the hands of TUC and Labour leaders. In spite of the SWP's anti-bureaucratic rhetoric it

has adapted to a cosy relationship with TUC and Labour leaders, for whom it acts as foot soldiers. As long as the SWP keeps its militancy within bounds, the bureaucracy allows it to enjoy a niche among rank-and-file workers.

The lessons of the defeats and misleadership of the 1980s must be spelt out to all health workers. The left sectarians who oppose drawing up a balance sheet of the experiences must be challenged and defeated.

Militants in the NHS must draw confidence from the widespread support for the ambulance workers' action, and the opposition to the poll tax which has done so much to discredit the Tories. There can be no doubt that workers in the NHS can, if given a lead, return to the front ranks of organised opposition to Tory

policies. The TUC and Labour leaders have abdicated responsibility for defending the NHS, despite the April 1 implementation of Tory legislation designed to break it up. What is urgently needed is a programme of action for health workers. Shop stewards' committees must be built at local, regional and national level as the basis for a campaign within the trade union and Labour movement. Among their tasks should be the following:

- The defence of victimised militants;
- The defence of oppressed groups;
- The defence of jobs, services and working conditions;
- The defence and extension of trade union organisation;
- The recruitment of low-paid and part-time workers with resources provided nationally by trade unions organising

within the NHS;

- The defence and extension of rights for paid time off for education programmes;
- The linking up of struggles, particularly with other public sector workers;
- A campaign demanding that a future Labour government be pledged to the restoration of all jobs, the reversal of all cuts and closures and the abolition of prescription charges;
- The democratisation of trade unions with all national and full-time officers elected by and accountable to the members;
- The nationalisation of the pharmaceuticals industry under workers' control;
- The replacement of existing health authorities and special trusts by committees of elected health service trade unionists and professionals.

FUNDS

With this 30th edition of Workers News, our international work has taken a modest but definite step forward. We intend to continue with the struggle to regroup genuine Trotskyist forces, confident that the voice of revolutionary internationalism will win a growing response. Workers News, which now has readers in 15 countries, is very much an international paper. In order to strengthen the links it has established, it needs your support. The Workers News £10,000 Building Fund now stands at £2,214.45. Don't forget our regular £300 Monthly Fund. Post your donations to:

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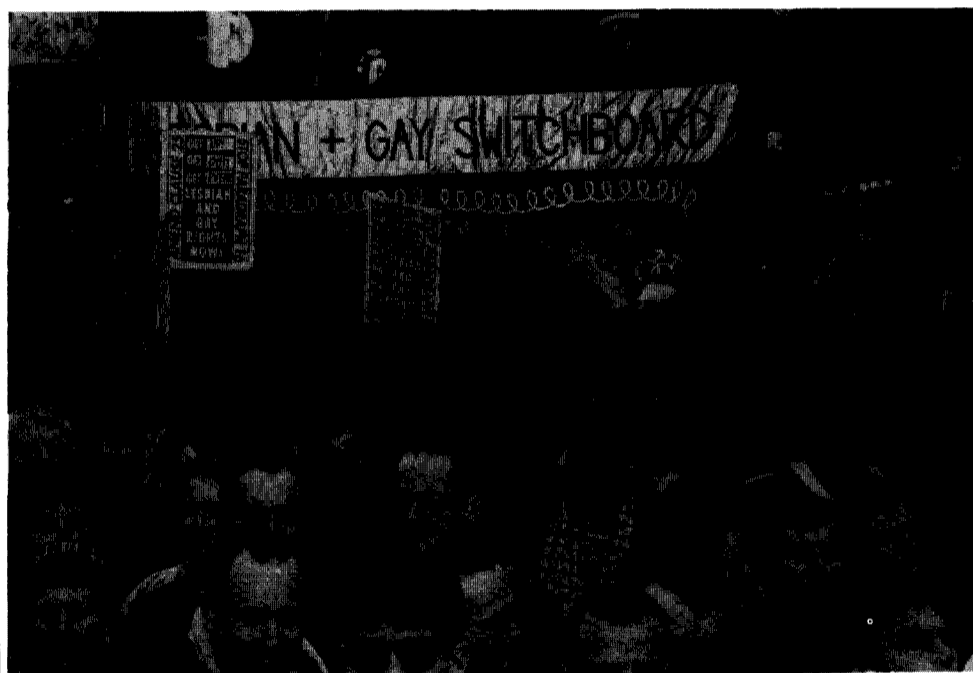
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March 25 demonstration against Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill

Defend gay and lesbian rights

By Graham Fenwick

LABOUR movement activists must rally to the defence of the gay and lesbian community, who are the target of proposed new Tory legislation currently being debated in parliament.

Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill will increase the sentences for some forms of homosexual behaviour (that which at present is illegal, despite being between consenting couples). Gays and lesbians will face prison sentences of up to five years, and after that may be ordered to have five years of psychiatric treatment!

The 'crimes' that will be made comparable to child abuse or indecent assault are: soliciting, which could involve two gay men exchanging phone numbers in a public place; procuring, which means assisting a homosexual act to take place (for instance, allowing two men to sleep together in your house); and indecency, which could mean jail for gays and lesbians who show affection to each other in public.

If passed, Clause 25 will not be the only recent legislation directed at gays and lesbians.

Paragraph 16 of the Children's Act, which is already law, effectively stops them from becoming foster parents or adopting children. In their desperate attempt to bolster the traditional bourgeois family, the Tories ignore the fact that almost all child abuse is carried out by heterosexuals. In the last few years, convictions for homosexual acts have risen by 50 per cent - in 1989, over 100 people were imprisoned, an increase of 2,000 per cent over the year before. The government admits that police surveillance of gays and lesbians has increased. One example of this was 'Operation Spanner' in Birmingham, which recently led to the jailing of eight men for a total of 25 years for taking part in 'sado-masochistic' sex parties.

The period of Tory rule since 1979 has given the seal of approval to the 'moral majority' with its calls for censorship and a return to so-called 'family values'. One outcome

of this has been to encourage attacks on gays and lesbians. Officially-inspired attacks (for example, the closing of gay theatre groups after local government funding was withdrawn) have given the go-ahead to the most backward elements in society to engage in 'queer bashing'. Violent attacks on gays have increased dramatically, and there have been a number of murders.

It is essential that socialists give a lead in the struggle against this reactionary homophobia. They must take the battle into the trade unions with the purpose both of defeating the Tory legislation and tackling the homophobic attitudes that exist within the labour movement itself. Lesbian and gay activists should also turn to the trade unions, as their own interests are best served by fighting for the emancipation of the whole working class. The fight against Clause 25 must be stepped up and the demand raised that a future Labour government immediately repeals all discriminatory legislation against gays and lesbians.

SACP prepares the counter-revolution

STALINISM world-wide, which has tied itself to the coat-tails of imperialism, is in a mortal crisis. But it knows only one solution – to attach itself ever more tightly to imperialism in its death throes. One example is the arch-Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP) which is participating in, and giving a left cover to, the ANC's negotiation embrace with the South African state.

The SACP rewrites history

In order to dupe the South African masses into accepting negotiations, the SACP claims it 'was our struggle that forced them to talk in the first place. It was our struggle that unbanned the ANC and the SACP. It was our struggle that freed our leaders' (*Umsebenzi*, Vol.7, No.1, 1991). This cannot be further from the truth. The ANC and the SACP were unbanned and their leaders released when the state was firmly in control after the defeat of the 1984-86 near-insurrection. In fact it was the SACP's own misleadership which significantly contributed to that defeat. For instead of giving support to the establishment of those embryonic soviets, the street committees in the townships, the SACP contributed nothing to building grassroots organisation. It merely repeated the ANC's hollow call to make the townships ungovernable.

The SACP's theory of negotiations

The SACP's programme, 'The Path to Power', states: 'We communists believe that the struggle must be given forms appropriate to the concrete political situation. It is this situation which determines whether the revolutionary transformation can be achieved by military or non-military struggle or a blend of both' (*African Communist*, 120, 1990). And: 'There is no conflict between the insurrectionary perspective and the possibility of a negotiated transfer of power ... Liberation struggles have rarely ended with the unconditional surrender of the enemy's military forces. Every such struggle in our continent has had its climax at the negotiating table, occasionally involving compromises judged to be in the interests of revolutionary advance' (ibid).

The very notion that the proletariat, in the face of the bourgeoisie and its state, has a number of options depending on the 'concrete political situation' is a gross distortion of Marxism. The concrete situation of oppression and exploitation leaves the proletariat with no option but to declare war on the bourgeoisie and smash its state. The aim must be the dictatorship of the proletariat headed by a Trotskyist party.

No ruling class willingly relinquishes state power. The SACP is blatantly incorrect. There is utter conflict between the 'insurrectionary perspective' and the 'possibility of a negotiated transfer of power'.

The SACP's reference to the liberation struggles on our continent is a clear indication of what it is fighting for in

Vusi Makabane examines the counter-revolutionary theory and practice of the South African Communist Party

South Africa. For if Zimbabwe, with its Lancaster House sell-out settlement is anything to go by, the South African masses can expect nothing other than a bourgeois nationalist regime presiding over a crisis-ridden economy, making ever more muted noises about 'Marxism-Leninism'.

The SACP's practice

The conflict between negotiation and insurrection is clear from the SACP's own practice. It has defused the masses' desire for insurrection and has foisted on them the path of negotiation. The ANC, assisted by the SACP, called for the South African army to quell the fighting between ANC militants and Buthelezi's thugs in Natal and Transvaal. The SACP did not even whimper when Mandela rejected those comrades' calls for arms and instead told them to 'throw their weapons into the sea'. At present, with the ANC, it is having confidential high-level talks with the state to integrate ANC guerrillas into the South African army!

The SACP's reformism on key questions

a) Interim Government

To achieve a 'non-racial, unitary, democratic South Africa' through negotiations, the SACP calls for both an Interim Government and a Constituent Assembly. It sees the Interim Government as ensuring the best conditions for convening the Constituent Assembly.

To justify its position, the SACP falsifies and distorts Lenin's conception of a Provisional Revolutionary Government. Whereas Lenin saw a Provisional Revolutionary

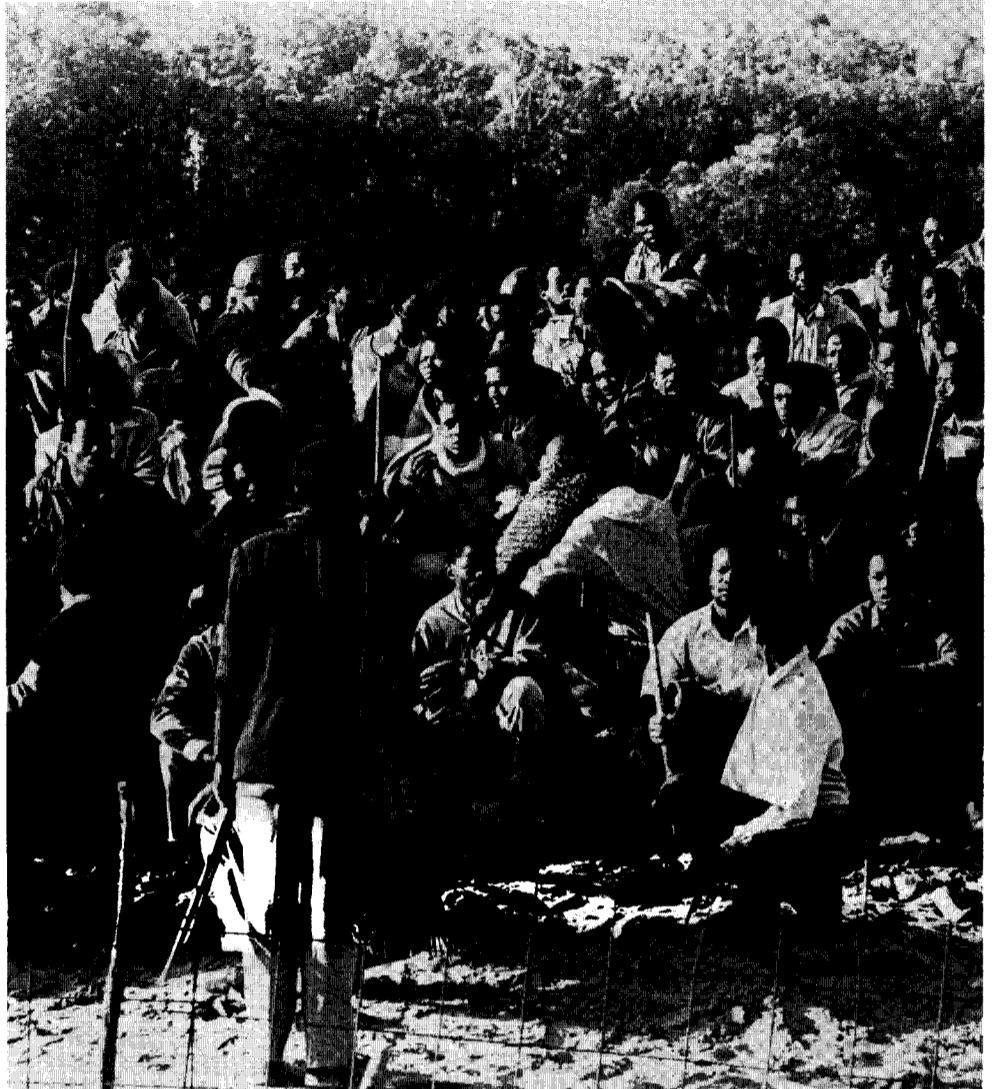
Government emerging out of a victorious armed insurrection of the working class and the peasantry, the SACP sees its Interim Government as being established by negotiating with the De Klerk regime. Thus the violent smashing of the South African bourgeois state machinery is rejected by the SACP, which in a cowardly fashion declares 'we are not about to smash the apartheid regime arms in hand. We are not in a position to unilaterally impose a Provisional Revolutionary Government' (*Umsebenzi*, Vol.7, No.1).

b) Constituent Assembly

So under this Interim Government, the South African army, the police, their bantustan counterparts, and right-wing vigilantes will remain intact and be free to unleash their well-known reign of terror on the masses. The SACP is deceiving the masses by calling for an Interim Government to convene and guarantee free and fair elections to a Constituent Assembly in the absence of both a revolutionary onslaught on these 'special bodies of armed men' and their replacement by armed popular organs of power.

c) All-Party Conference – a rotten compromise

The reformism of the SACP became crystal clear when the ANC-SACP-COSATU joint executives called for an All-Party Conference as one possible 'suitable forum for securing agreement on the formation of an interim government' (ibid). Those to be invited included the ruling National Party, the right-wing Conservative Party, the reactionary Inkatha, bantustan leaders and various puppets of the regime. Such a combination of



ANC supporters 'the ungovernables' prepare to resist Inkatha vigilantes

forces can only plan one thing – the defence of capitalism against a restless black working class.

Unmask the counter-revolutionary SACP!

Trotskyists must explain to the militant workers and youth who are members or supporters of the SACP that this party has not changed a bit, despite its leadership distancing itself from the crimes of Stalinism. The rotten history

of the SACP must be thoroughly exposed.

A Programme of Action is necessary!

Hand-in-hand with mercilessly exposing the counter-revolutionary Stalinist theory and practice of the SACP, Trotskyists should advance a programme of action before the masses. This should take up all their economic and political demands, and systematise them to attack the

very foundations of apartheid bourgeois rule. These demands should be tied to the call for a revolutionary democratic Constituent Assembly. In the fight for the Constituent Assembly, mass organisations of struggle must be built, and disciplined armed defence units under working class leadership must be formed to defend the masses and their organisations from attack by the state and other counter-revolutionary forces.

For a Provisional Revolutionary Government and a Constituent Assembly!

It is also imperative to make propaganda for a provisional revolutionary government to replace the present regime and convene a Constituent Assembly.

Lastly, in all mass meetings, rallies, demonstrations and national congresses, the slogan of a workers' government must be fought for and concretely explained to the oppressed. The daily suffering which the masses endure under bankrupt South African capitalism must be taken as a starting point in raising the need for a workers' government, the only government that can end their suffering and misery. The masses in South Africa and many 'Third World' countries have had enough of rotting capitalism. They are resisting. They will be aroused by propaganda for the socialist revolution. This must be done not only in words but also through practical struggle.

Only Trotskyists organised in a party can tackle these tasks and guide the working class and its allies in the battle ahead!



Inkatha vigilantes prepare an attack on ANC supporters under police protection

EDITORIAL

Back to the unions!

OFFICIAL unemployment statistics for February rose above 2 million. In reality, of course, the figures are already much higher. The same manufacturing and service industries which were hailed in the late 1980s as representing the economic miracle of the Thatcher years are now the fastest contracting, throwing tens of thousands onto the dole every month.

Leading Tory economists admit that the gathering world recession is hitting Britain harder than any other advanced capitalist country. With unemployment predicted by many to reach 3 million by the end of the year, workers are faced with a major round of struggles to defend jobs.

The trade unions are the basic defensive organisations of the working class. They have been the backbone of workers' struggles for the last 200 years. In the decade after 1980, trade union membership fell by 30 per cent to 8,416,832 – a level first achieved in 1957. The decline as a proportion of the total workforce has been even greater.

The Tory-inspired slump of the early 1980s hit the traditionally strongest sections of the unions in the older manufacturing industries. The credit-fuelled partial boom that followed saw the creation of jobs in sectors of the economy with little or no tradition of organisation.

The growing weakness of the unions under Thatcher, however, was based not only on economic factors, but on a chain of defeats due primarily to the sell-outs of the union bureaucrats and their retreat in the face of successive anti-union laws. The defeat of the 1984-5 miners' strike was a watershed, and strikes are currently running at their lowest level for half a century. As a result many workers, and particularly the younger generation, have lost confidence in unions as organisations capable of securing them any real gains.

Under the weight of setbacks, it is understandable that sections of workers should respond in this way. But there is absolutely no excuse for self-styled 'Marxists' attempting to justify this pessimism. Two of the trendier magazines on the left – the 'Euro-Communist' *Marxism Today* and the RCP's *Living Marxism* – arrive at a common conclusion that trade unions have had their day and it is time to turn towards new social forces. Whether it is avoiding the struggle against the right wing in the case of the RCP or actively assisting it in the case of the Euros, both end up turning their backs on the working class.

In Lenin's day, real communists took a very different line. In 1922, when the unions were at a low ebb, the Communist Party of Great Britain raised the slogan 'Back to the Unions!'. It linked this to a call to reforge the unions and commit them to a class struggle policy. It called for a vigorous recruitment drive, demanded that the leaders carry out a militant defence of jobs and wages and fought for the removal of those who refused to do so.

Out of an apparently disastrous situation, the CPGB was able to build a powerful industrial base through the Minority Movement. Despite the political weaknesses of the Minority Movement, this approach should be studied by all trade union militants today.

Against the smooth-talking, sharp-suited bureaucrats who believe that unions can be rebuilt through glossy brochures and credit cards, we insist that this will only be done in struggle. The lessons of the syndicalist militancy of the 1970s, which lost its way once the Labour government began attacking the unions, must also be learnt. Industrial action must be firmly linked to political struggle against the right-wing Labour leaders who are prepared to retain the Tories' anti-union laws, and the TUC leaders who will go along with them. A real recruitment drive must turn to part-time workers, to women workers, to the greenfield sites and the industrial estates. And a real struggle must be mounted against unemployment and the obscene lottery of early retirement and voluntary redundancy. To win millions of workers back to the unions above all requires revolutionary socialist leadership.

LTT/WIL Fusion Document, March 10, 1991

Rebuild the 4th International!

The following document constitutes the main platform adopted at the fusion congress of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (Belgium/Germany) and the Workers International League (Britain) held in London on March 9-10, 1991. This followed 18 months of close theoretical discussion and practical collaboration between the LTT and the WIL. This document stands alongside extensive agreement between the LTT and WIL expressed in documents already produced on Poland, China, the German question, Stalinism, Nicaragua, the Gulf War, Fourth International history, the perspective for international Trotskyist regroupment and general tactics towards reformism. The two organisations will now act as a single international body, organised on a democratic centralist basis, retaining the title Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency.

1. The objective basis of world socialist revolution

With the imperialist epoch, capitalism exhausted its progressive potential. Since 1914, capitalism has, again and again, demonstrated that it can assure its survival as a system only through misery for the great majority of the world's population, through the destruction of countless numbers of workers and poor peasants (by war, famine, disease etc), and through the destruction of nature. But, with its creation of a world market, capitalism also brought into being a worldwide class of workers whose objective interests remain to overthrow capitalism internationally, as the first step towards the building of a world socialist federation.

The imperialist epoch remains 'the epoch of wars and revolutions' (Lenin), in which the objective conditions for world socialist revolution have matured. But capitalism will not collapse automatically or be overthrown spontaneously. Socialism can only be the result of conscious revolutionary leadership of the international class struggle. Socialism is both possible and necessary but it is not inevitable. Setbacks and defeats, some of historic significance, have also occurred. The development of society does not proceed in a straight line, and its outcome is not predetermined. The death agony of capitalism has been far more protracted than Trotsky envisaged in 1938. In the decades since the Second World War, the growth in the productive forces has been accompanied by a higher degree of the socialisation of production and massive new proletarianisation has taken place worldwide. The opposite side of this combined development has been the exacerbation of the unevenness of world economy. The spectacular rise of Japan has been mirrored by the devastation of large parts of Africa and Asia. On the plane of history, the alternatives are still those posed by Marx: Socialism or Barbarism!

2. The necessity of revolutionary leadership

The parties of the Second International, with few exceptions, increasingly accommodated themselves to their 'own' ruling classes, through the medium of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The catastrophe of the First World War revealed openly that the social democratic parties had capitulated to the capitalist system. From parties of the proletariat, they had become transformed into political agencies of the bourgeoisie in the workers' movement. Only in Russia was the working class, led by the Bolsheviks, able to overthrow capitalism and install its own dictatorship. The October Revolution confirmed

the correctness of Lenin's conception of the party as a combat organisation – democratic in discussion, disciplined in action. It also confirmed that the downfall of capitalism must be a conscious act of the proletariat.

The Communist International, founded in 1919, fought to solve the crisis of proletarian leadership, but its young and inexperienced sections were unable to take advantage of the revolutionary wave which followed the war. The isolation of backward Russia was reinforced by the resulting defeats. The exhaustion of the Soviet working class, its decimation in the civil war, and the destruction of large parts of the means of production, created fertile conditions for the growth of bureaucracy both within the party and the state apparatus and, ultimately, Stalinism. The victorious bureaucracy under Stalin increasingly used its domination of the Comintern to defend its own particular national interests, finally destroying it as an instrument of world revolution.



The international proletariat paid for the crisis of leadership with terrible defeats in the class struggle (Italy, Bulgaria, Estonia, Britain, China, Germany), leading to a chain of fascist victories and finally the inferno of the Second World War.

3. The degeneration of the Fourth International

Stalinism triumphed over the Left Opposition both in the Soviet Union and in the Comintern. The demoralising effect of defeat upon the international working class, and the consequent revival of social democratic fortunes, created extremely unfavourable conditions for the struggle of the Trotskyists.

Nevertheless, the Left Opposition represented the continuity of genuine Bolshevism and trained the cadres with which a new, Fourth, International would be built. The great achievement of the founding congress of the Fourth International, despite the numerical weakness of the forces it represented, was to systematize a programme of transitional demands – fulfilling the task set by the third and fourth congresses of the Comintern.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the sections of the Fourth International became the target of all governing powers. No organised tendency in the world workers' movement except the adherents of the Fourth International can lay claim to defending revolutionary Marxism during the imperialist war. The heroism of the Trotskyists, hundreds of whom were murdered by fascists and Stalinists, does not however blind us to the political weaknesses which the war revealed. The objective difficulties created by the war and the absence of a functioning international leadership for four years favoured the development of both opportunist deviations and sectarian abstentionism among the sections of the Fourth International. But, in 1944, the International did show a capacity to criticise and correct many of these errors.

The closing stages of the Second World War saw a deep radicalisation of the masses – in France, Italy, Britain, Belgium, Greece, the United States, in Eastern Europe and in other countries – leading to pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations in some instances. The colonial masses in Indo-China, India, Ceylon and Algeria surged forward. But the European revolution was strangled by Stalinism in alliance with social democracy. Despite its leading role in this political defeat of the European working class, Stalinism's prestige and strength were greatly enhanced by the defeat of Nazi Germany and by the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe. The revolutionary movement of the masses in the colonial countries was contained and betrayed by bourgeois nationalism, supported by Stalinism.

The genuine enthusiasm with which Trotskyists applied themselves to re-establishing the Fourth International at the end of the war was undermined by the increasingly false perspective developed in relation to the post-war world. In place of a sober analysis of the emerging boom and the expansion of Stalinism, the leaders of the Fourth International sought to make reality conform to Trotsky's pre-war prognoses. Together with the questionable methods with which the FI was rebuilt after the war, this disorientation marks the beginning of a rapid process of degeneration.

From denying the possibility of Stalinism overturning capitalist property relations, the great majority of the FI's leading cadre moved over to an accommodation and finally a capitulation to Stalinism, from the adulation of Tito in 1948 to the Third World

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Congress in 1951. The Trotskyist movements in Vietnam and China were betrayed by the international leadership, and those in Ceylon and Bolivia misled, with the result that revolutionary opportunities were missed. In countries such as Britain which lacked a large Stalinist movement, a parallel liquidation into social democracy took place. Well before the split of 1953, the FI had ceased to be a consistent revolutionary movement. The outcome of the 1953 split between the IS of Pablo and Mandel and the IC of Cannon, Healy and Lambert was two centrist currents, neither of which was capable of honestly assessing – still less correcting – the post-war crisis of the FI, the abandonment of Trotsky's programme and the failure to meet the political challenge of the world after 1945. These two centrist currents were dominated by a European or North American leadership which consistently demonstrated their political bankruptcy by failing to provide revolutionary internationalist leadership, not least in cases of revolutionary crisis in Latin America, Asia and Africa (eg Bolivia in 1952, Ceylon in 1953, Vietnam in the 1970s and South Africa in 1976).

4. The causes of the post-war imperialist boom

Capitalism owed its survival after the Second World War to the active help and support of social democracy and Stalinism. Faced with war-shattered economies and the extreme weaknesses of the bourgeoisie, they applied themselves to rebuilding the capitalist order. The weakness of revolutionary leadership and the legacy of the political atomisation of the working class under fascism greatly assisted this task. The onset of the Cold War in 1947 split the workers' movement throughout much of Western Europe, enabling the bourgeoisie to use social democracy and Stalinism to divide and rule.

The hegemony of US imperialism at the end of the war as the world's banker and creditor and its ability to finance reconstruction through the Marshall Plan, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank was the prime factor in the stabilisation of the metropolitan countries. To a far greater extent than either the First World War or the world crisis of 1929-33, the Second World War had caused an enormous international destruction of productive forces. In the absence of significant revolutionary opposition, conditions were created for a new period of growth on a higher scale. The rapid expansion of armaments expenditure, the creation of 'welfare state' reforms and large service sectors, the opening up of colonial and former colonial markets to international competition and the founding of the Common Market (EEC) all served to prolong the boom.

5. Stalinism and Cold War

With the retreat of revolutionary prospects in Western Europe, and the exhaustion of the working class, an extremely unfavourable balance of forces for revolutionaries existed in the workers' movement. The Stalinist bureaucracy, anxious to shore up the Soviet economy in order to defend its own privileges and ward off the spectre of political revolution, plundered the countries occupied by the Red Army. This policy, however, had the effect of undermining the rebuilding of capitalism in Europe. At the same time, Stalin brutally repressed every manifestation of independent workers' action, protecting the remnants of the bourgeoisie, preventing factory and land seizures, stamping out revolutionary opposition and establishing 'People's Front' governments. The historic 'alliance' between the wartime allies broke down in 1947. Having already begun to recover, the imperialists could scarcely regard the East European coalition governments tolerated by the occupying Soviet forces as reliable

guardians of capitalist property relations.

With the launching of the Cold War and Marshall Aid, Stalin was forced to consolidate the 'buffer zone'. The bourgeoisie and its political parties were suppressed by bureaucratic methods backed, in some cases, by a limited mobilisation of workers. Deformed workers' states came into being. Stalinist repression in every sphere of life, and in particular the crushing of independent workers' activity, fuelled from the outset anti-communist moods among large sections of the population, including workers, both east and west.

6. Revolution and negotiation in the colonies and semi-colonies

The Second World War – an inter-imperialist war – had weakened the imperialist world system, especially in the colonies and semi-colonial countries. The relations between the great powers and their colonial possessions were shaken to their foundations. The weakness of the old colonial empires was compounded by the destruction caused by the war (China, Indo-China and in many countries of the Pacific) and by the 'open door' to the colonial market demanded by US imperialism in return for bailing out Western Europe. Stalinism reacted as it had done in Europe – it fought alongside the national bourgeoisie to stabilise social relations. (Social democracy, an openly pro-imperialist force, played little or no role in these countries). In many cases Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands were compelled to retreat and hand over power to the embryonic local bourgeoisie as the guarantor of their future interests, after military struggle had proved impossible. In other cases, where the imperialist boom lessened the political risks, the colonial powers opted for 'peaceful' negotiated settlements within the framework of continued economic dominance.

In China and Vietnam, Stalinist parties were compelled, by the imperialist offensive in 1946-7, to take up armed struggle, based largely upon the peasantry, in order to preserve themselves. Far from breaking with Stalinism, these parties imposed their own schema of 'stages' upon the struggle, remained tied to the theory of socialism in one country and did everything possible to prevent the working class fighting for its own independent interests. The creation of deformed workers' states, not qualitatively different to the other Stalinist regimes, gave the lie to Mao and Ho Chi Minh's alleged 'break with Stalinism'.

The unique nature of the 'Cuban road' in fact lay only in the non-Stalinist political origins of the forces which led the Cuban revolution. In its reliance on guerrilla warfare based on the peasantry and the intelligentsia, Castro's July 26 Movement closely paralleled the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences. The extreme weakness and corruption of the Cuban bourgeoisie made it unable to reach a compromise with this ostensibly petty-bourgeois democratic movement. On the other hand, under the pressures of the international situation and the threat of American intervention, Castro was compelled to break with and expropriate the bourgeoisie, implement a planned economy and create a deformed workers' state. With the merger of the July 26 Movement and the Cuban Stalinists, the new Cuban Communist Party was proclaimed in 1965, bringing Cuba into conformity with the other Stalinist regimes. The subsequent evolution of the Castroite movement, far from proving the unconscious triumph of permanent revolution, demonstrated the necessity of political revolution in Cuba and of an internationalist Bolshevik-type party.

The friction and open rifts which developed between the different communist parties, culminating in the Sino-Soviet split, signified the fracturing of Stalinism into different 'national' Stalinist bureaucracies, all pursuing their own and frequently opposed interests. This, in turn, registered a new stage of crisis for Stalinism, brought to a head by economic crisis.



V.I. Lenin, leader of the October revolution, speaking in Moscow

The semi-colonies/ex-colonies, while frequently relying on the rhetoric of Stalinism ('non-alignment', 'African socialism', 'the non-capitalist path of development' etc) remained completely dominated by imperialism.

Over the last decade, under the economic and military ravages of imperialism (collapsing and debt-stricken economies; the imperialist-sponsored terrorist armies of the Contras, UNITA and RENAMO), previously 'non-aligned' countries have been forced to drop their pretence of being anti-imperialist or pro-socialist. Now, with the collapse of Stalinism and the disappearance of the Soviet Union as world rival to imperialist America, the pressures on a variety of radical/non-aligned bourgeois nationalist regimes have increased enormously. They can no longer rely on the radical-sounding language of Stalinism, material aid has disappeared and the prospect of military aid is non-existent. The rhetoric of 'a transition to socialism' or 'Marxism-Leninism', which these regimes used to raise their credibility in the eyes of the masses, has been abandoned. Instead, these regimes have been driven to embrace openly the virtues of the 'market economy', imperialist investment and the policies of the World Bank and the IMF.

7. The break-up of the boom and the combined crises of imperialism and Stalinism

By the mid-sixties, the driving forces of the boom in the United States and Western Europe were weakened, rates of growth sank and the rate of profit declined. Sharpened competition forced international finance capital to abandon its policy of class peace ('full' employment, steady growth of the standard of living) and go onto the offensive

against key sections of workers, one by one. The post-war rise of Japanese imperialism was accompanied by a revised international division of labour, with the growth of such manufacturing centres as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. The two decades after the Second World War saw the emergence of South Africa as a minor imperialist power.

At the same time, imperialism sought to renew its counter-revolutionary alliance with Stalinism (outlined in the Harmel Report of NATO in 1967), aiming not at any lasting coexistence with 'socialism' but rather at capitalist restoration. It obtained the neutrality of the Soviet bureaucracy during the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, and its backing for the Balkanisation of the Lebanon. Whilst strongly pursuing a policy of capitalist penetration of Eastern Europe, imperialism continued to escalate the arms race. The bureaucracy's room for manoeuvre was increasingly restricted, faced with the masses' insistence on an improvement in their living standards on the one hand, and the military-economic pressure of imperialism on the other. The Soviet bureaucracy became more and more an absolute-brake upon the development of the planned economy and, by excluding the democratic initiative of the working class, it guaranteed that the gathering crisis would explode. The chain of workers' and students' revolts in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia clearly showed the writing on the wall for the bureaucracies if they did not find a new *modus vivendi* with imperialism.

The combined crises of Stalinism and imperialism were far from under control by the rulers of East and West. In Vietnam, in February 1968, the Tet Offensive brought US imperialism to the brink of defeat. In Czechoslovakia, the Stalinist party fell apart after the Prague Spring, and workers attempted to build a new anti-Stalinist socialism. In May 1968 in France, the general strike gave the lie to then fashionable theories of the New Left that the working class had become 'incorporated'

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into the capitalist order. The Cultural Revolution (which many Western radicals misinterpreted as an anti-bureaucratic struggle) showed the instability of the Chinese bureaucracy.

8. The continuing crisis of revolutionary leadership

The long boom of post-war capitalism held back revolutionary developments in the imperialist countries. Unable or unwilling to theoretically rearm themselves, the organisations descended from the Trotskyist tradition entered a deep political crisis. Many of those forces which had expected an 'automatic' collapse of capitalism rapidly became demoralised. Others became sects, ignoring reality and preaching – for decades – the imminence of revolution (SLL/WRP and OCI/PCI). Still others developed theories rationalising the boom and believing that capitalism had overcome its contradictions – the theories of state monopoly capitalism (Stalinism), neo-capitalism (the United Secretariat) and the permanent arms economy (the British IS/SWP).

The revolutionary character of the imperialist epoch does not consist in the possibility of social revolution at any and every moment; rather it is contained in the growth of the inherent contradictions and anarchy of the capitalist mode of production on the international arena. The development of revolutionary cadres cannot however be accomplished merely on the basis of subjectively revolutionary intentions and an acknowledgement of the nature of the imperialist epoch. Only those who link their day-to-day activity with the ultimate socialist goal through a system of transitional demands will be able to mobilise and politically prepare the working class to act as the conscious agent of socialist revolution. To reject such a method inevitably means a relapse into the old social-democratic division between minimum and maximum programmes and a retreat into opportunism or sectarian propagandism – or both.

The objective development of social revolution continues even during periods of relative social peace. The exploitation of the working class, the existence of unemployment and hunger on a massive scale, the oppression of women, of racial, national and other minorities, the threat of war and the destruction of the environment are fundamental to capitalism, even during periods of boom. Even in the advanced capitalist countries, every apparent social advance is paid for in suffering and misery. The development of capitalism forces it to attack even the limited gains workers have made. In the world system of capitalism, development in particular countries has only been possible through the maintenance of backwardness in the continents of Latin America, Asia and Africa. This has created an unevenness within the world proletariat, which can only be overcome – in both political and economic terms – by revolutionary internationalism.

Socialism remains the only solution for the international working class and the oppressed of the planet. The attempt by the bureaucracies in the workers' movement in the capitalist countries to limit all struggles to reforms leads not to a generalised steady advance; on the contrary, it leads to an assault on the reforms and rights workers have won in the past. This is the common experience of workers in the imperialist, semi-colonial and colonial countries. In many semi-colonial countries and in the workers' states the prospect of improved living standards on the part of the masses has all but disappeared. The unleashing of the 'free market' upon Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union underlines the urgency with which the first steps toward resolving the international crisis of working class leadership must be taken.

9. The collapse of Stalinism



The Soweto uprising, 1976 – turning point of the South African revolution

The degeneration of the first workers' state was an expression of its isolation and backwardness in the face of international defeats of the working class. The triumph of the bureaucracy was accompanied by the systematic destruction of the vanguard of the working class through state terror and purges. By thus eliminating its opponents, the bureaucracy was able to assert its relative independence and initiate primitive socialist accumulation through the five-year plans. But the bureaucratically-dominated industrialisation programme had tremendous social costs: Bureaucratic planning placed new burdens on the Soviet Union, creating political tensions which were held in check only by police methods and, in spite of the rapid economic growth of the 1930s, ultimately prepared the ground for capitalist restoration.

Even with the expansion of Stalinism into Eastern Europe after the Second World War, political and economic nationalism remained dominant. COMECON was merely a federation of national bureaucracies, each pursuing separate national roads to socialism. These 'command economies' stifled the creativity of the working class. The conscious initiative of workers was replaced by generalised demotivation. Bureaucratic planning ignored the needs of the masses, and thus thoroughly alienated them. The planned economies, basing themselves on the Stalinist theory of 'socialism in one country', were unable to surpass capitalism in developing the productive forces and technology, and moreover created terrible environmental disasters. The more the Stalinists became empirically aware of the limitations of their own planning methods, the more they turned to market experiments which, in turn, further undermined the planned economies.

These inherent contradictions and the blocking of a qualitatively higher development of productive forces were veiled by the fact that post-war reconstruction in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe started at a very low level. Subsequently, the Soviet economy gained some benefits from the capitalist post-war boom. Higher oil prices made some concessions to the working class possible, in spite of the deep-going stagnation of the economy. But by the end of the boom, Stalinism stood at the edge of an

abyss. It could only escape political revolution with the aid of imperialism.

The break-up of the post-war boom, signalled by the dollar crisis in 1971, led to a chain of instability and revolutionary upheavals. The quadrupling of oil prices as a result of the Middle East war in 1973, the Watergate crisis (1973-4), the fall of the Heath government in Britain (1974), the collapse of the colonels' regime in Greece (1974) and of the Franco regime in Spain (1975), the Portuguese revolution and the overthrow of colonialism in Angola and Mozambique (1974-5), the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam (1975), the Soweto uprising in South Africa (1976) and the Lebanese civil war (1976) signified a period of acute economic and political crisis.

Stalinism and social democracy rallied to the defence of the bourgeois state in Europe. During that period, the Stalinists in the USSR and Eastern Europe still clung to the illusion that they could collaborate with and obtain aid from the imperialists, whilst maintaining the foundations of the workers' states. The metropolitan capitalist countries weathered the storm and recovered economically, resuming the offensive against the workers' states and the workers' movement in the West. With the direct collaboration of the Chinese bureaucracy, imperialism managed to block further revolutionary developments in South-east Asia, and extended its military-strategic pressure upon the USSR.

The victory of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas in 1979 threatened US hegemony over Central America, despite the limited assistance given by the deformed workers' states, including Cuba. Although the Sandinistas armed the people, and nationalised important sectors of the economy, their government remained at all times a bourgeois government. Large sections of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie broke with them, but the Sandinistas never broke with the bourgeoisie. There was no repeat of the 'Cuban road', with the ultimate result of the bloodless election victory of Chamorro in 1990.

Faced with the continual instability of the Middle East, and particularly with the Iranian revolution, the Soviet bureaucracy moved to secure its sphere of influence by the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The response of US imperialism was to go onto

the offensive, in a determined drive to overcome the trauma of defeat in Vietnam. Stalinism was to be forced economically to its knees by a combination of escalating the 'arms race' and 'regional confrontation' (Angola, Nicaragua, Afghanistan). Favourable conditions for the imperialists were created as the bureaucratic workers' states, like many semi-colonial countries, fell deeper into the debt trap.

At the same time, Stalinism was confronted at home by the growth of workers' resistance. The unprecedented scale of the struggle of the Polish working class showed the writing on the wall for international Stalinism. Despite the assistance of social democratic and reactionary clerical forces, it was impossible to control the Polish workers without a military crackdown. This was covertly supported by international finance capital in a 'historic compromise', whose ultimate function was to create conditions for capitalist restoration.

After the senile interregnum of the last years of Brezhnev and the brief episodes of Chernenko and Andropov, Gorbachev emerged as the new face of the bureaucracy. Perestroika (restructuring) aimed initially at a cautious market-oriented reform intended to relieve the chronic crisis of Soviet economy. Glasnost (openness) was meant to create a political constituency of support among the expanded intelligentsia for the reform programme. At first, the Gorbachev leadership was able to keep the centrifugal forces which had been unleashed under control because of its monopoly of political power. But, as the economy continued to deteriorate, and with the lessons of Poland in 1980-81 in mind, Gorbachev escalated the turn to the market, to the point where large sections of the bureaucracy openly embraced capitalist restoration. With the command economy tottering, but without a viable capitalism to replace it, the Gorbachev leadership increasingly took on the appearance of someone in the driving seat of a runaway train.

Because of the virtually insoluble problem of creating a national bourgeoisie, and because of the sporadic resistance of workers, the bureaucracy was only able to introduce inconsistent half-measures. Far from reversing 'the Brezhnev era of stagnation', perestroika has led to ever greater social and economic chaos. The bureaucracy

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has thus further discredited socialism, and its actions have fostered the growth of nationalism as well as fascist movements and the Orthodox and Muslim religions.

The latest stage of Stalinist decadence, in which the destruction of the planned economy results in the devastation of the (still very modest) conquests of the working class through unemployment and a general decline in living standards, is paradoxically nourishing illusions in capitalism.

Of the Eastern European countries, Poland became the model for the first stage of capitalist restoration. When, in 1988, the Walesa leadership was able to contain and stop the spontaneous strike wave, and when Jaruzelski failed to get a popular mandate through a referendum to restore capitalism, the old project of a national alliance based on the Walesa leadership, the Catholic church and the bureaucracy was revived. A coalition of all restorationist forces was formed. Poland set the pattern, which was followed with certain variations by Hungary, the GDR (the 'Round Table' government led by Modrow), Czechoslovakia, Romania (after the fall of Ceausescu), Bulgaria and even Albania.

The second and more advanced stage of capitalist restoration, completed in the GDR and under way in the rest of Eastern Europe, is the period of the total destruction of planned economy, widespread privatisation of nationalised property, and the transformation, or rather the destruction, of the state apparatus. This is accompanied by the demolition of the Stalinist parties, which were the expression of the old apparatus, and/or their transformation into open defenders of capitalism. The latter process has been seen most graphically in the GDR, but is also apparent in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

It would be an error to expect this pattern of development necessarily to be a universal one. In China, the Bonapartist bureaucracy, basing itself on the control of the army, opted for a military solution in Tiananmen Square to safeguard its power and prevent the political explosion destroying its rule. Yugoslavia, and indeed the Soviet Union, can potentially follow a similar road. It would be an even greater political error to confuse the defence of the foundations of the workers' state with political support for nationalist and chauvinist bureaucrats, who direct their fire against the working class and oppressed nationalities. The Polish, Chinese, Romanian and indeed the Soviet examples show that even where the bureaucracies claim to be defending the workers' states they do not give up their conscious pro-capitalist orientation. So long as they hold power, the Stalinists remain the main enemy of the political revolution within the degenerated and deformed workers' states, and the main danger to the remaining conquests of the working class.

With the ongoing implosion of Stalinism, the Communist Parties have dropped their 'Communist' and 'Marxist-Leninist' pretensions, thereby fully exposing their Menshevik, ie social democratic, politics. This will only deepen their crisis, in both the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries.

Gorbachev's 'new thinking', a direct product of the Soviet Union's mortal domestic crisis, is only a new brand of peaceful coexistence, but on terms completely dictated by imperialism. Even more now, with the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union has been reduced to the role of junior partner in a counter-revolutionary alliance with imperialism. In Central America, southern Africa, South-east Asia and now most graphically in the case of the Middle East and the Gulf War, Stalinism in its death agony proves itself to be capable of nothing but the most criminal betrayal of the masses.

10. No lasting consolidation of imperialism

The process of capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union threatens a major defeat for the international working class. Trotskyists take no comfort in the defeat of

Stalinism at the hands of pro-capitalist forces. 'Anti-Stalinism' which cannot distinguish between blows from the right and blows from the left will end up as anti-communism.

Nevertheless, capitalism has neither solved its problems nor overcome its contradictions. The most glaring evidence of the imbalance within world economy remains the debt crisis, which brings with it a dramatic escalation of the class struggle in many deeply indebted countries. The integration of the countries of Eastern Europe into the world market will lead to similar developments – mass unemployment, lower purchasing power, poor investment and inflation. With the United States unable to mount a second edition of the Marshall Plan, the positive effects for the metropolitan countries in the short term can only be very limited. The lack of enthusiasm on the part of the imperialists for baling out the bankrupt economies of the east will accelerate the disillusionment of the masses. Without a revolutionary leadership, the working class has not been able to take advantage of the collapse of Stalinism. However, the logic of restoration will force it to defend its most basic class interests. In the medium term, a revival of the class struggle under the whip of the capitalist offensive is inevitable.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990



Leon Trotsky, founder of the Fourth International

came at a critical juncture. With the growing world recession and the disintegration of Stalinism, Iraq's attempt to assert its 'independent' political and military domination of the Gulf and the immense economic and strategic importance of Kuwait prompted an unprecedented response.

The crisis in the Gulf and the subsequent imperialist war against Iraq have dramatically underlined the fragility of the 'new world order' sought by US imperialism. The reactionary nature of the Ba'athist regime made it unwilling and unable to rally the Arab masses in a real anti-imperialist struggle. Together with the green light given to the imperialists by the Soviet bureaucracy, a crushing defeat for Iraq was ensured. The immense bombardment of Iraq's cities and the smashing of its military machine is intended as a brutal lesson to intimidate all national struggles of the peoples of the Middle East.

However, the continuing instability of the entire region – particularly the Maghreb countries, the unresolved Kurdish and Palestinian struggles and the fate of the Ba'athist regimes in Iraq and Syria – demonstrates that the situation has not been decisively resolved in favour of the imperial-

ists.

11. For the rebuilding of the Fourth International

Today a revolutionary perspective can only be developed if it is based upon the founding principles of the Fourth International. The failure of the Fourth International in the face of the problems of post-war development in no way invalidates this; rather, it demands the rebuilding of the Fourth International, with sections in every country.

With this strategic aim, we unite our small forces in a single democratic-centralist international tendency, as an initial step. On an international level and in our respective countries we fight to regroup genuine Trotskyist forces.

In addition to our existing areas of agreement, we base ourselves on the revolutionary traditions of the international workers' movement. We defend and fight to develop its programmatic heritage – especially every positive aspect of the first four congresses of the Communist International, the fight of the International Left Opposition, the Movement for the Fourth Interna-

against imperialism, Stalinism and other counter-revolutionary forces.

- e) Defence of the Trotskyist analysis of fascism; rejection of all varieties of the theory of 'social fascism' as well as 'anti-fascist' policies which counterpose the struggle against capitalism to the struggle against fascism.
- f) Defence of the basic anti-militarist positions of Marxism as codified in the theses on 'War and the Fourth International' (1934).
- g) The necessity of mobilising the masses behind transitional demands.
- h) Opposition to the oppression of women and all national, racial, and sexual minorities.
- i) Defence of inner-party democracy, including the right to organise to fight for alternative political positions, whilst upholding discipline in action.
- j) Rebuilding the Fourth International. As a preliminary step, building an international centre and acting as an international fighting propaganda tendency, without baulking at fighting for practical leadership of the struggle under conditions of revolutionary upheaval.
- k) Demarcation from the major self-proclaimed 'Trotskyist' currents – United Secretariat of the Fourth International, International Workers League-Fourth International, Fourth International (Inter-

tional and the founding congress of the Fourth International, including the Transitional Programme. We consider the following positions to be of primary importance:

- a) The imperialist epoch as one of capitalist decline, opening up the possibility and necessity of world socialist revolution; an epoch characterised by abrupt shifts and sudden turns in international and national politics.
- b) The recognition of the international character of the socialist revolution and, as a result, the fight for the programme of permanent revolution as a combined process of social, political and anti-imperialist revolution.
- c) The defence of the heritage of Bolshevism concerning the bourgeois state, parliamentarianism, the role of soviets, of the revolutionary combat party, united front policy, the national question and the necessity of systematic work in all proletarian mass organisations.
- d) Defence of the Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism as a counter-revolutionary force within the degenerated/deformed workers' states and the world workers' movement; defence of the workers' states

national Centre of Reconstruction), International Communist Union etc – which are centrist organisations, not representing the continuity of Trotskyism.

- l) Rejection of the concept of a world 'Trotskyist family', whilst remaining open to frank, honest discussions and joint action both with forces from the Trotskyist tradition and with revolutionary-minded forces outside it.
- m) The importance of a balance sheet of the historical experiences, both positive and negative, of Trotskyists since the war.
- n) Recognition that an international leadership of the working class will only be rebuilt by systematic intervention in the class struggle.

In addition to the above principles we commit ourselves to develop and extend our programmatic positions upon all vital questions facing the working class today, including international political perspectives, problems of world economy, including the development of the productive forces, revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial countries and women's oppression.

ORIGINS OF THE SWP

IN RESPECT of Bob Pitt's articles, you might be interested in hearing one of the ways in which Healy purged his organisation in 1950. In Birmingham, where I lived at the time, the 'Club' branch was evenly divided between supporters of the old RCP majority and Healy supporters (most of whom had arrived after 1947). Most of the old RCP were reluctant entrists, and were most certainly incensed at the manner in which our organisation had been turned over to the Healy faction in a most undemocratic manner. However, none of us had supported the Open Party Faction in 1949; rather we grudgingly went along with the leadership. There was a great fund of political loyalty to the Haston-Grant leadership, and this is what really swung most of us behind the move to entry. This loyalty, incidentally, was rapidly used up in the following year.

We found it difficult to adjust to the new regime and above all we found it extremely hard to stomach *Socialist Outlook*. If one compares the pages of *Socialist Appeal* with Healy's paper, this problem becomes understandable. Gone were any criticisms of Stalinism or Social Democracy in any meaningful sense. We found ourselves selling a paper which gave front page coverage to known Stalinist trade union leaders or fellow-travelling Labour MPs. As can be imagined, this did not do much for our morale. On top of this we found as ex-majority supporters we were treated like second class citizens by the Healy supporters; they seemed to adopt a sneering attitude towards ex-majority supporters. Then we began to hear rumours of expulsions or departures from activity of people who had been members of the movement for some years.

It must have been in early 1950, just what date I cannot recall, that the ex-majority supporters in Birmingham began to meet secretly as a separate group to discuss our dilemma. Certainly we knew by then that most of the old leadership around Haston had either deserted us, had been expelled or were under threat of expulsion. We decided to submit a short document to the forthcoming group conference criticising the *Socialist Outlook*. It was quite short and very cautious, since we were concerned not to give Healy an excuse for expelling us. We found it difficult to arrive at an estimation of the group's (or International's) policies on the basis of documents because we were not allowed to retain them. We were issued with documents and allowed to keep them for one week and

The following contribution by John Walters examines the methods used by Gerry Healy to break up the Revolutionary Communist Party in the late 1940s and the emergence of Tony Cliff's Socialist Review group - forerunner of the largest organisation on the British left today, the Socialist Workers Party. Comrade Walters was

a participant in the struggle within the RCP and became the first secretary of the Cliff group, leaving it in 1954. Far from being the result of a much later 'degeneration', this account demonstrates that Healy's contempt for inner-party democracy was a significant factor in the emergence of British state capitalism in 1950.

then had to return them to the branch secretary (who naturally was a Healy supporter, Harry Finch). This was on the grounds of 'security'. When we started meeting in secret we decided to try to copy the documents so as to retain some evidence of what was supposed to be going on. However, in those days there were no photocopiers available and none of us had typewriters, so we were reduced to copying them by hand.

The document which we submitted to the 1950 conference was drafted by myself and then amended by what I suppose could be called our faction, and then submitted in the name of Percy Downey and myself. Even then Harry Finch was most belligerent about it being a joint document - he was very suspicious by then. I was elected to attend the conference, along with Harry Finch, as one of the two Birmingham delegates.

However, I should mention that before the conference our secret faction invited Tony Cliff to meet us, which he did, and we had a long discussion with him about the group and the International. He had a very plausible line which went something like this:

'If one continues to see Stalinist Russia as a workers' state and admit that the Stalinists can carry through a revolution (Eastern Europe, China) then you end up adopting Stalinist policies (e.g., *Socialist Outlook*, the IS line on Yugoslavia, etc and Stalinist organisational methods are used, e.g., Healy's group). The only way out of the dilemma was to adopt the state capitalist line.'

This is, of course, a compressed summary. We were quite impressed with his line of argument, but at that point we refused to throw in our lot with his faction. As ordinary rank-and-file members we felt we needed more time to consider the issues and see what happened at the conference. We were certainly not committed to a state capitalist position, although we were obviously swayed by Cliff's arguments.

The conference was held in an atmosphere of repressed hysteria, since by then the Korean War had begun, and Healy used this to whip up a feeling that at any moment we could expect the police to raid us. (Look-outs were posted to warn of any police move.) The result was that any criticism of the leadership was met by cat-



American troops in Korea: the Cliff group took a third camp position

calls, boos and hisses as though the critics were the 'enemy'. Naturally, Healy had rigged the conference to give himself an overwhelming majority. This had been done by manipulating the composition of branches. Some branches were divided, others were amalgamated, but in each case the net result had been that Healy's supporters gained more delegates. Ted Grant in particular was the butt of some very vicious barracking and at one point Healy shouted out 'Get back to the dung heap'. I remember this very well, since it was the first time that I had seen such conduct within the movement or heard such language used against comrades, so it made a lasting impression on me.

At the conference I had a discussion with Ted Grant and told him in unmistakable terms what the Birmingham comrades thought about his spineless attitude before the dissolution of the RCP, and pointed out that he and Jimmy Dean had considerable responsibility for landing us in our predicament. I made it clear that we were not prepared to support him in any leadership role in the future, nor were we alone in this attitude amongst the opposition. So the opposition to Healy, such as it was, was fragmented right from the start. At this conference Healy introduced another novelty - a

slate for election to the National Committee. The EC had drawn up this slate and if any delegate wanted to nominate someone who was not on the slate they also had to nominate someone else to be taken off! This was, of course, designed to sow dissension. (This did not stop me nominating.) I cannot recall now just how many opposition delegates there were at that conference, but it was not many, half-a-dozen, perhaps slightly more. However, this in no way reflected the true strength of opposition, since during that year nearly 100 comrades left, some to form the original Cliff group (about 50), some to join Ted Grant and others just drifted away.

When I reported back to my comrades in Birmingham we came to the conclusion that Cliff was correct and it was then that we decided to help found his group. It was clear that we would have to form a group outside the 'Club' since the majority of Cliff's supporters had already been expelled. However, we decided that we would not just walk out but ensure that we were expelled so as to maximise the political point to be made, and put us in a position to appeal to the International since none of us wanted to leave the Fourth International.

It was then decided that Percy Downey would submit a

resolution to the Birmingham Trades Council putting a third camp position on the Korean War. The upshot of this was an immediate summonsed branch meeting of the 'Club' at which Healy was present. It was very acrimonious to say the least, and Healy was at his most venomous. Healy laid a resolution for the expulsion of Percy, and refused to allow any discussion of the political issues. He insisted that the only issue was 'did Percy, or did he not, break discipline by putting the resolution to the Trades Council'. Each time anyone tried to raise the political issues Healy broke into a rage and shouted us down. However, when the vote was taken there was a tie! Healy then called a halt to the meeting, declaring the branch was suspended until further notice. Outside the pub where we had been meeting Healy wagged his finger under Percy's nose and growled 'we'll get a unified branch in Birmingham one way or the other Mr Downey'.

Shortly after that there was another summonsed meeting and we arrived to find that John Williams of Coventry was there. JW had been inactive for about two years before this and had not paid any subs even before the RCP had collapsed. But Healy had restored him to full membership and this meant that he (Healy) would have a majority in the branch.

The resolution for Percy's expulsion was again put, and again no discussion was allowed, and this time it was passed by one vote. Percy then left the meeting. Healy then went round the room pointing to those of us who had voted against the motion and said something like 'Do you retract your vote?' When we answered no, Healy said 'You are suspended for one month. If after that time you haven't retracted this vote you are expelled.' So nearly half the Birmingham branch was expelled for voting against the expulsion of another member! With Percy it meant that 50 per cent of the Birmingham branch were pushed out. And similar events were going on up and down the country.

Certainly in our case Healy had fallen into our 'trap' since we then went on to help to found the Cliff group. But we were only able to dig this 'trap' because of the bureaucratic manner in which the group was run. Had there been anything like a democratic regime such as had existed in the RCP we would not have wanted to leave the organisation. And of this I am sure, had there been a credible alternative to Healy around which maintained a workers' statist position, Cliff would not have made so many recruits. Despite being hampered by the immigration laws at that time, Cliff was very active in contacting people, meeting them and discussing for as long as it took to recruit them. This entailed some personal risk for Cliff, since he faced being deported back to Palestine and a very uncertain future to say the least. Grant, on the other hand, was completely inactive, as far as we knew, and seemed to have retreated into his shell. In this respect one could argue that one of the people who was most responsible for the creation of the state capitalist group in this country was Gerry Healy!

One other point. When it became known in later years that physical violence had been used by Healy against his own members it did not come as a shock to people like myself. Even in 1950 he carried around with him an atmosphere of violence. Even if at that stage it was only verbal, he certainly created a feeling of fear amongst those around him. I recall that in a letter I wrote to Sam Bornstein in December 1956, before any evidence of violence was known, I characterised Healy as a political gangster. This may not be a very precise political characterisation but it summed up for me at the time what I considered Healy to be. Given all that has happened since 1950, I feel that I was correct in my assessment of Healy.

We should not ignore the responsibility of Haston and other leading members of the WIL/RCP for the role Healy played later on. There was a certain element of cliquishness in the treatment of Healy in the early 1940s. All the evidence points to the fact that he should have been excluded from the WIL because of his behaviour, but he was allowed to rejoin after resigning and stay in. Also, Haston was prepared to offer Healy political advice at least until the mid-1960s. Healy would often meet Haston in his home for discussions. This I verified while renting a room in Haston's house in the mid-1960s. So the clique persisted for many years.

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The Ghetto Fights
by Marek Edelman
Bookmarks, 1990, £3.95

Reviewed by
Ellis Hillman

Heroes of the Warsaw ghetto

THIS BOOK deserves a better introduction. It describes the background to the events that led almost inexorably to the final, desperate struggle of the leaders of the Jewish ghetto against their tormentors in 1943.

Nazi troops crossed the Polish border on September 1, 1939, a few days after Hitler and Stalin had signed their non-aggression pact and agreed to carve Poland into spheres of influence. Poland was and had been an uneasy home for some 3.5 million Jews, a million of whom lived in Warsaw. Britain and France declared war on Hitler on September 3, but the Polish forces – no match for the Nazi Panzer tanks and Stuka bombers – capitulated on September 28.

The Nazis then systematically 'resettled' Jews from all parts of Poland. The Jews in Warsaw were 'locked up' in a ghetto surrounded by barbed wire in November 1940. Conditions deteriorated as the phoney war on the Western front (from September 1939 to June 1941) progressed, with Jews being forced to wear the yellow Star of David if they dared venture beyond the bounds of the ghetto. By the time the Nazis had turned on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the daily food ration had been reduced to 184 calories and typhus was rampant, causing 15 per cent of all deaths.

As Marek Edelman writes, the segregation of the Jews into the ghetto 'had a very definite purpose'. Regulations prevented any newspaper coming in, keeping all news from the outside world from 'entering' the closed world. 'Everything taking place outside the ghetto walls became more and more foggy, distant, strange. Only the present day really mattered. Only matters of the most personal nature, the closest family circle of friends were by now the focal point of interest of the average ghetto inhabitant: the most important thing was simply to be alive.'

It is odd that Marek Edelman does not describe the change in the mood of the Warsaw ghetto when the Nazis turned their guns to the east in June 1941. The Jewish resistance recognised at an early stage that the Stalin-Hitler pact only 'cemented' the regimes at a 'superficial level' – Trotsky, after all, had seen the *symmetry* of Nazism and Stalinism long before – but the social bases of the two systems had to clash, as they did with volcanic fury in the summer of that year. In this clash alone was there hope for, eventually,

a successful challenge to their Nazi oppressors.

The deportation of Jews from July 1942 onwards finally led to the creation of ZOB (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa – Jewish Fighting Organisation), formed mainly from the youth of the left socialist Zionists and the Bund. Its first successful action was the execution of Jacon Leikin, collaborator and chief of Jewish police. Six months later, in the spring of 1943, the final attempt to liquidate the ghetto was met by fierce and heroic resistance. The rising lasted for three weeks – 7,000 Jews were killed, 6,000 burned to death in their hideouts and 56,000 were taken to Treblinka. The few remaining survivors escaped through cellars, sewers and other irregular routes. The author was one of these heroes who lived to be able to write this moving account of one of the greatest risings of the Second World War. A few were even able to take part in the Warsaw rising of 1944 – and others were to find their way to the partisans in the forests. Such is the story of the Warsaw rising!

Falsifying history

Reading the introduction, one would form the impression that the Socialist Workers Party's position on all questions is vindicated by this account of the rising. John Rose, judiciously selecting from Trotsky to back up his own analysis of events, carefully avoids taking up the critical question of where the SWP itself would have stood in these events. Trotsky, together with the Fourth International, during the Second World War had come down firmly in *defence* of the Soviet Union. He realised even in August 1939 that the Stalin-Hitler pact could not bridge the gap between the two social systems – one born out of a triumphant German counter-revolution, the other out of a socialist revolution which had degenerated. The comrades of the SWP take the view that Russia is state capitalist and have identified themselves with the 'third camp position' – 'neither Washington nor Moscow' – during the Korean war and all subsequent conflicts between US imperialism and the Soviet bloc.

One can only take it that the advice the SWP would have given to Marek Edelman and the leaders of the Warsaw



Residents of the Warsaw ghetto being taken for forced labour

ghetto would have been to unfurl the flag of 'neither Berlin nor Moscow' – as the social system of the Nazi-SS regime was, in essence, no different from the Stalinist state capitalist regime. Such a position would rightly have been rejected by the leaders of the rising and all the resistance forces in Poland and Europe fighting the Nazis. The suggestion that the victory of Hitler's armies or the Stalinist armies should have been a matter of indifference would have been laughed out of court by the working class resistance in Poland and occupied Europe based on the 'socialist' and 'communist' parties.

Equally dishonest is John Rose's attempt at acting as 'spokesman' for the Bund, who were regarded by the Bolsheviks with even greater hostility than the Zionist-socialists, if only because they had preceded them and had deeper roots in the Jewish working class in Poland and Russia. It is not surprising that the author of the book proper – a long-standing Bundist – repudiates his 'apologist'. Rose states that Zionism (which Zionism? – who in Zionism?) has claimed the Warsaw ghetto 'as a symbol for itself', 'stressing the virtue of exclusive Jewish struggle and the failure of non-Jewish solidarity' (p.13). But wasn't this *also* the position of the Bundists, and wasn't this precisely the reason why the Trotskyists, following in the tradition of Lenin's internationalism, repudiated them?

In his spurious re-write of the history of the Warsaw ghetto, Rose cannot explain how the manifesto to the

Poles, which he admits is 'one of the greatest socialist appeals of the twentieth century', could be drawn up by left Zionists and Bundists. 'Poles, citizens, soldiers of freedom! Through the din of German cannon, destroying the homes of our mothers, wives and children, through the smoke of the ghetto, that was set on fire, and the blood of its mercilessly killed defenders, we, the slaves of the ghetto, convey heartfelt greetings to you. Long live the fraternity of blood and weapons in a fighting Poland! Long live freedom! Death to the hangman and the killer! We must continue our mutual struggle against the occupant until the very end – Jewish Armed Resistance Organisation (ZOB)'.

No, it was not the 'State Caps' who sent this message of internationalist solidarity to the Polish underground and one which published a paper called *Di Royte Fan (The Red Flag)* – participating in this heroic struggle (see Hersh Mendel's *Memoirs of a Jewish Revolutionary*, Pluto, 1989, p.283).

This book has been hijacked by the SWP for its own petty factional purposes. Those who uphold the ideas of the Fourth International saluted and continue to salute this great rising. This 'little Stalingrad' – as it

was then called – is part of the wider struggle to permanently replace the world of Nazism and oppression of subject peoples with the world of socialism and internationalism.

Footnote:

In a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* of February 15, 1991, responding to a critical review of his introduction, John Rose states that 'The ghetto rising was launched by the militant socialist organisation which formed the backbone of the Jewish Fighting

Organisation.' He says that one of the principal participants was the Bund, which he describes as the Jewish socialist party of Poland, avoiding 1) the inconvenient fact that the other main groups were socialist Zionists and 2) that the Bundists were Jewish Mensheviks, ie social democrats. John Rose has the right to revise Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union, but surely a line has to be drawn when it comes to falsifying the history of the Warsaw ghetto uprising?

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TORIES RETREAT ON THE POLL TAX

The fight must go on!

Colin Harrison reviews the struggle against the poll tax in the light of the Tory budget

NO ONE should be fooled by the £140 poll tax bribe announced in the March 19 Tory budget. The poll tax remains in force and will continue to be levied on a flat-rate basis, punishing the poor and rewarding the rich. Chancellor Norman Lamont's announcement is nothing more than a cynical manoeuvre to prepare the ground for a snap general election. A large proportion of the £4.3 billion of central government subsidy to local councils will be raised by increases in VAT – a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

But whilst lower bills are clearly aimed at stiffening up the Tory vote in the marginal constituencies, most of which have mid-range poll tax charges, workers in the inner-city areas will still face substantial bills. In Lambeth this means that residents will still have to pay £450, while in Hackney the charge will only be reduced by £80 due to the fact that the borough had already received government aid announced in January.

The Tories had no option but to retreat: if the 13 per cent swing against them in safe Ribble Valley was repeated in a general election, it would cost them over half of their 375 parliamentary seats.

The Audit Commission's March report tells it all. Over 20 per cent of the poll tax remains uncollected, and most councils will be collecting the first year's tax well into the next financial year. Some 7.5 million people, 20 per cent of the adult population, have been summonsed for non-payment and three-quarters of those are still defying the bailiffs. A survey of 55 local authorities shows that non-payment rates vary from just under 18 per cent in the shire counties to 27 per cent in the large cities (34 per cent in inner London).

These statistics will spiral for as long as the poll tax remains, as people draw fresh confidence from the massive numbers of non-payers and the announcement of abolition.

The opposition to the poll tax is deep and powerful. Non-payers are primarily young and working class. The only thing that stands between the Tories and electoral catastrophe is the leadership of the labour movement. So successful was the trade union bureaucracy in stifling support for the anti-poll tax movement that the poll tax was not even discussed at the 1989 and 1990 Trade Union Congresses.

The Labour Party leadership has attempted to stamp

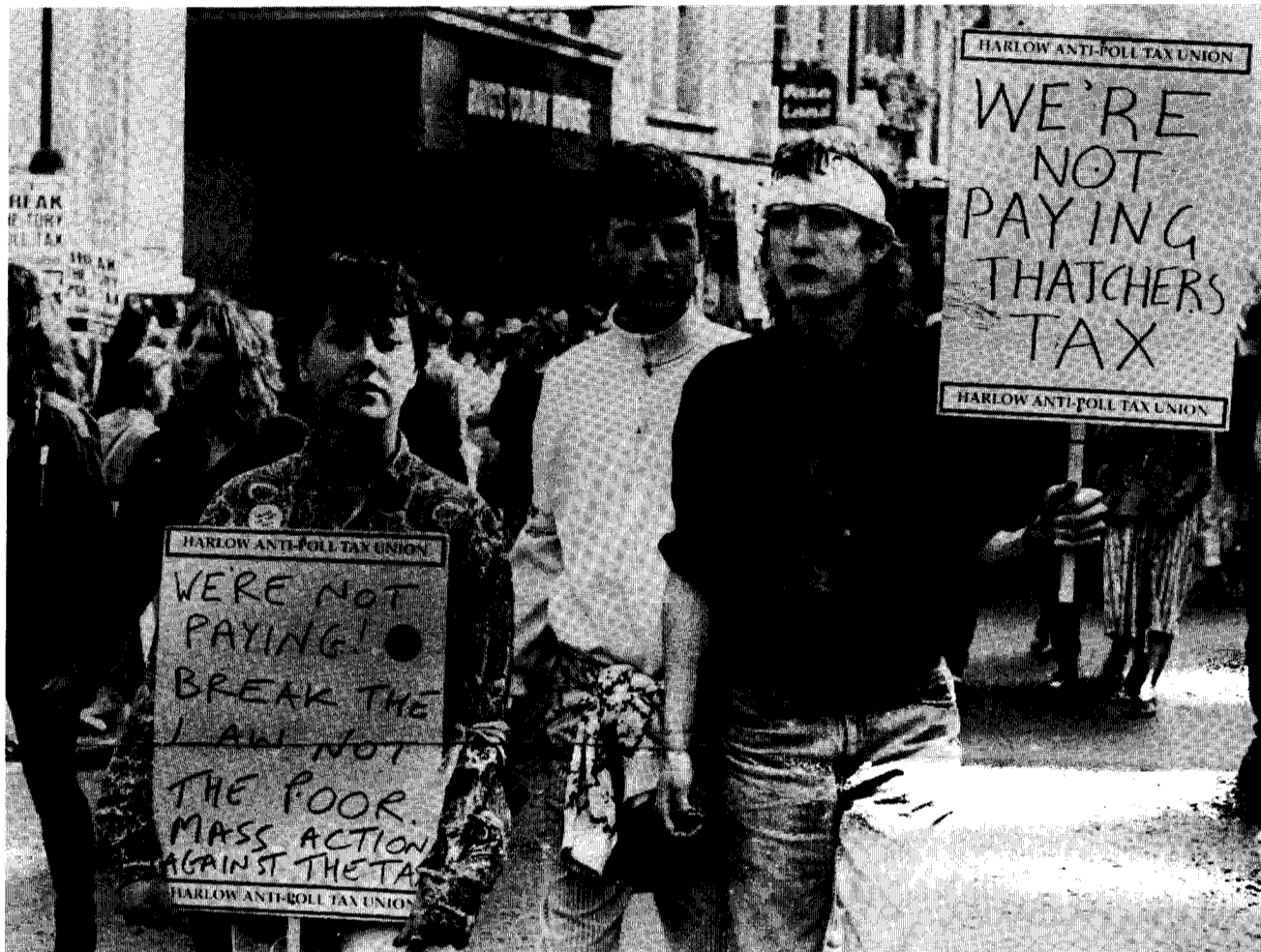
out all opposition. In Brighton, seven councillors were suspended from the Labour group for voting against the poll tax. When the Brighton party supported them it was suspended by Labour's NEC. In Liverpool the NEC has suspended 29 Labour councillors for opposing the poll tax and massive rent rises. Lambeth's Labour mayor secured a majority for the 1991-2 budget (involving 600 redundancies) by a ruling that two Labour councillors could not vote because they had not paid their poll tax. In sharp distinction to these betrayals, the NALGO members in Lambeth immediately staged a one-day walkout.

The net result is that the opposition to the poll tax, which gave Labour its highest ever number of councillors in the May 1990 local government elections, has had no effective political leadership, and the vacuum has been filled by *Militant*. *Militant* has monopolised the leading positions in the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, many of whose supporters have been among the most selfless and energetic campaigners for non-payment.

However, its reformist programme acts as a brake on the development of the movement. *Militant* is content to leave the campaign at the level of popular non-payment and protest, since its objective has been to use non-payment as 'a springboard to force a general election and get the Tories out' (Steve Nally, *Militant*, April 6, 1990). The Labour Party, it is proposed, should then 'introduce socialism' by means of an enabling bill in parliament.

When the riot police trampled on this cosy perspective at last March's 200,000-strong demonstration, *Militant's* reformist instincts came to the fore. Its stewards made no attempt to organise the physical defence of the march at the time, and afterwards Steve Nally appeared on television to deliver his infamous attack on the marchers. Nally's threat to 'name names' has never been repudiated by *Militant*, which has consistently defended him. What hope is there for a 'revolutionary' organisation with such political reflexes?

During the fighting in Trafalgar Square and the West End, 400 people were arrested, and scores more were seized after police identified participants from photographs and videos. Ferocious sentences were handed out. One demonstrator received two years for allegedly kicking a police van, while prison



The March 31, 1990, anti-poll tax demonstration in London

sentences were routinely handed out for threatening behaviour, usually a matter for a fine or bind-over.

Now is not the time to drop our guard. The struggle against the poll tax must be continued, deepened and generalised. By the end of this year, unemployment in Britain is set to reach between 2.5 and 3 million, with the poll tax alone destroying 50,000 local government jobs in 1991-2. But the poll tax itself is only a tactic – the Tories may abandon it but they will not abandon their plans to destroy local services and pauperise the working class.

Anti-poll tax groups must resist the temptation to see the fight as won. They must continue to campaign for non-payment and non-collection, and take up the fight for direct strike action against the tax. They must also give the fullest possible support to non-payers who are brought to court, threatened by the bailiffs or jailed, and to those arrested at Trafalgar Square, Brixton and elsewhere. They should broaden their activities, drawing together non-payers – most of whom are not active in the anti-poll tax movement – with delegates from local trade unions, tenants' organisations and oppressed minorities to resist attacks on jobs, services and the unemployed, and lay the basis for future strike action to kick the Tories out.

Free at last!

By Philip Marchant

THE RELEASE of the Birmingham Six on March 14 was a notable victory on the road to Irish freedom. The success of the campaign waged by the six men and their families – along with those of the Guildford Four, the Maguire Seven, the Winchester Three and many individuals detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act – has exposed in front of millions the lengths to which the British state will go in order to maintain its hold on the north of Ireland.

In proving conclusively that they were the victims of a frame-up, Hugh Callaghan, Richard McKenny, Paddy Hill, Billy Power, Gerry Hunter and Johnny Walker have also performed a wider service to the working class. The methods which the British state applies to its war on Irish republicanism come from the same textbook as those it uses against rebellious youth, poll tax resisters and striking workers.

The main purpose of the courts has never been to defeat the IRA – the state has implicitly acknowledged this by its reliance on a 'shoot-to-kill' policy to eliminate actual IRA fighters. Rather, the courts, armed with legislation like the PTA, are used to terrorise the Irish community in Britain in order to suppress its political voice and to deny

the IRA a base in the working class.

Nothing could illustrate this more clearly than the case of the Birmingham Six. The 'scientific' evidence that convicted them has collapsed for a very simple reason – it was never scientific. It didn't need to be. It was merely produced to order by a tame Home Office forensic scientist to give a veneer of credibility to confessions that were obtained by good old-fashioned methods – police brutality. The rest was left to the media, which launched such a vicious, racist campaign that Irish people all over Britain, and particularly in Birmingham, were subjected to verbal and physical assaults – exactly as intended.

As far as the British ruling class is concerned, no 'error of judgement' was made. Most of them admit that the Birmingham Six did not carry out the bombings, but continue to defend all the circumstances of their arrest, trial and subsequent appeals. The West Midlands police, who were the arresting force, refuse to apologise, stating only that the Six 'are innocent'. This lack of remorse by politicians, police chiefs and judges, combined

with acceptance of the fact that the Six are innocent, is instructive. It isn't only because they are closing ranks to protect their own people and carry out a 'damage limitation' exercise on behalf of the British judicial system. They recognise that what the state required after the 1974 bombings was a generalised campaign against the Irish – and it didn't matter then, and it doesn't matter now, if the wrong men were arrested.

Those who are campaigning for the end of the British imperialist occupation of the north of Ireland must take advantage of the situation and press home the attack in every workers' organisation. It is necessary, however, to oppose those in the labour movement who put their confidence in the Royal Commission and in the cross-party call, led by Roy Hattersley, for the sacking of the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, who presided over the unsuccessful appeal of the Six in 1987. If he goes, one of dozens of senior judges will fill his place, and the state will quietly proceed with its dirty war against the Irish. What's required is not a Royal Commission, but a workers' commission, drawn from the trade unions and Irish organisations, which will conduct a thorough enquiry into the frame-up of the Birmingham Six.