



Job losses, rent rises, NHS crisis...

TORIES PILE ON THE AGONY

FOR OVER 12 years the Tories have attempted to revive ailing British capitalism by waging an onslaught against jobs, services and the democratic rights of the working class. Yet they now find themselves in the midst of a severe recession, with their party deeply divided over future economic strategy.

An essential part of Tory policy has been to push up unemployment. In the course of reducing inflation to its October level of 3.7 per cent, unemployment has reached an official level of almost 2.5 million, a figure which is at least one million fewer than the number actually out of work. High unemployment – the total has risen continuously for the past 18 months – is a price worth paying in the infamous phrase of Norman Lamont. But it will have to rise to an official 2.75 million, that is at least four million, if his stated ambition to bring inflation down to German levels is to be realised.

Recently announced redundancy plans include 40,000 over the next three years by British Telecom and 5,000 by London Underground; 2,500 by British Coal, 3,500 by Royal Mail, 1,000 by Thames Television, 1,000 by Ford and 900 by train makers BREL.

The more we examine the actual state of the British economy, the more ridiculous Lamont's comparison with Germany appears. The reference is presumably intended to convey the idea that bringing inflation down to the German level of 3.5 per cent will somehow lead to an equivalent economic performance. But the British reality is entirely different. With its manufacturing base in steep decline and the recession leading to more than 400 companies going bankrupt each week, the only part of Germany that Britain can reasonably be compared with is the east, where layoffs and closures are the order of the day. While the Tories boast of their achievement in lowering inflation for 13 months in succession, they are less quick to publicise the fact that the last time this happened was in the early 1920s in the course of a major slump which quadrupled unemployment and halved production.

For the Tories, putting people out of work is only the start of the attack. Those on the dole are subjected to humiliating investigations

and attempts to make them accept low-paid work. Since 1979, the value of benefits has been progressively reduced and the means test has been widely extended.

The growth in unemployment has been accompanied by a reduction in support services and recreation facilities, much of which has taken place through government cuts in local council spending. Home help for the elderly has been abolished in many boroughs, child care facilities have been cut and priced beyond the means of those who need them most. Libraries have either been closed or their opening hours curtailed and their budgets slashed, and services for minorities have been hacked away.

In health care, prescription charges have been raised at an unprecedented rate, and charges for eye tests and dentistry now deter those in need. The break-up of the NHS is proceeding rapidly and a two-year wait for an operation is presented ludic-

rously in the 'Patient's Charter' as a desirable target.

In all areas, the drive is to put out to tender or close down 'unprofitable' services. In this process, the Tories find willing accomplices in the Labour-run boroughs. In Southwark, a private firm paying the slave rate of £2 per hour has taken over the cleaning of schools.

In education, equipment shortages, crumbling buildings and teacher vacancies are already reaching epidemic proportions. Parents are now obliged to help pay for basic items like pencils and exercise books. When education authorities are forced to implement the local management of schools next April, turning them into independent 'businesses', the transition back to pre-war conditions will have begun in earnest. For students in higher education, the Tory loans system is now in operation and will guarantee that those who do get jobs when they graduate will start off saddled with debt.

The London Housing Unit predicts 200,000 homeless in London by the mid-1990s. The Tory flagship borough of Westminster, having sold off all but the most rotten of its housing stock, now pays other councils to take homeless families off its hands. With house building at a historically low level, repossession orders are at a post-war high: 48,000 in the first half of 1991 and an anticipated 115,000 in 1992.

In England over the last 12 months, council rents have gone up by over 13 per cent and are set to rise by at least 10 per cent next year. The Tories aim to increase them to the same level as private rents. While the 103 per cent rise in Ealing must be a record, the £15 a week rise in Camden shows that the Labour leaders accept Tory policy in this area just as in any other. Meanwhile, many of those who exercised the 'right to buy' their council houses are facing repossession orders, while those who didn't are increasingly find-

ing their estates sold *en bloc* to private companies.

All the fanfare about falling inflation, therefore, must not be allowed to obscure the fact that the working class has been subjected to the widest ranging attack in modern times. For many, especially those who are out of work or on low pay, inflation is not the headline rate of 3.7 per cent at all, but is much higher. Alongside rents, the most basic commodities have seen steep price rises: bread by 9 per cent, tea by 12 per cent, potatoes by 25 per cent, electricity by 11 per cent, and bus fares by 16 per cent.

Can the Labour leadership be relied on to reverse the trend? The short answer is no. Kinnock is as committed to protecting the interests of British capitalism at the expense of the working class as are the Tories – he has, for example, now dropped even the modest aim of buying back a controlling interest in BT. The transformation of Labour into a European-

style social democratic party has involved the dumping of almost every commitment to social reform that the party ever had.

The issues at stake for the working class in next year's general election are too important to be left to a Labour campaign based on parliamentary manoeuvring, photo-opportunities and sound-bites. In France, Austria, Germany and Belgium, the rapid growth of the extreme right wing, both inside and outside parliament, shows the dangers contained in a period when economic problems are combined with an impotent social democracy. Wherever possible, workers threatened with unemployment must go on the offensive, using strikes and occupations as their weapons. Not a shred of evidence exists to support Kinnock's claim that industrial action damages Labour's electoral chances.

If a Labour government is elected, it will, of course, be a capitalist government. It will be taking office in a severe recession – with no leeway to implement reforms – and will carry out policies not fundamentally different from the Tories. Socialists, however, must recognise the necessity of standing with the working class against the Tories. While calling for a Labour victory, they must clearly distinguish their programme from Kinnock's. They must fight to mobilise workers around demands that a Labour government reverses all the Tory attacks of the last 12 years. These must include the following:

- Repeal all anti-union and other anti-working class legislation.
- Down with racist immigration controls. Defeat the Asylum Bill.
- End the NHS Trusts. Reverse the cuts. For fully funded health, education, transport and social services.
- All companies privatised by the Tories to be taken back into public ownership. Nationalise all firms threatened with closure.
- For an emergency programme of council house building and public works. Empty property to be requisitioned by local authorities to provide low-rent accommodation.
- For a living wage for those on the dole!

Victory for Tottenham 3!



Winston Silcott's parents, Mary and Bill, followed by his brother, George, leave the Appeal Court in the Strand, London, on November 25. The court had just quashed Winston Silcott's conviction for the murder of PC Keith Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm uprising in 1985

Kinnock the chameleon

Kinnock and socialism

UNLIKE many of his generation, Kinnock was never attracted to Marxism. He joined the Labour Party at sixteen, and graduated through CND, Anti-Apartheid, the presidency of his students' union in Cardiff and a lecturing post with the Workers Educational Association, before becoming an MP at 28 in 1970. Although, as his various biographers all stress, he has heavily traded on his working class credentials, Kinnock is very much a product of the post-war boom – the first Kinnock to attend university as he has never tired of telling everybody.

Even in younger, more radical, days, Kinnock's 'socialism' always lacked any theoretical basis. It was a matter of 'conviction': a hotchpotch of community solidarity, low church Christian morality, access to further education, a measure of public ownership, vague generalisations about greater equality, and even vaguer sympathies for the oppressed of the world – a typical cross-section of left reformist views.

It is said that Kinnock considered quitting the Labour Party around 1968, alienated by Labour's devaluation of the pound, its record on Vietnam and its plans for anti-union laws, which would be set out in the notorious white paper *In Place of Strife*. At any event, by 1969 he was toning down his radicalism to win the nomination for the ultra-safe seat of Bedwelty.

As a new Tribune Group MP, Kinnock quickly won a reputation as a brash, arrogant and extremely ambitious self-publicist. He epitomised what he would later pillory as 'gesture politics' – making a great deal of noise about issues for which he bore no practical responsibility. After initially hailing Labour's Queen's Speech of 1974 as 'a blueprint for democratic socialism', he rode the tide of left opposition under Wilson and Callaghan within carefully prescribed limits, studiously avoiding unpopular questions like Ireland, and assiduously building up contacts within the constituencies and the trade unions, who took him at his word.

Sometimes his mouth was inclined to run on ahead of him. He told the Bedwelty GMC in 1976 that 'It was not the task of Labour to salvage and re-establish capitalism'. (In fact, that was precisely the task of the 1974-9 Labour government, and Kinnock had no alternative programme to offer.)

In January 1979, at the height of the Winter of Discontent, he accurately told his

local party: 'We have a government totally operating Tory policies. We have a Prime Minister advocating people cross picket lines.'

This didn't prevent him from taking the post of shadow education spokesman under Callaghan's leadership five months later. He had milked the left for what it was worth, dissociated himself from an unpopular government, and now, swinging rightwards, was promoting himself as an alternative to both yesterday's men and the 'hard left'. He now spoke of 'socialism by plod'.

Having strongly supported Michael Foot's successful campaign for the leadership in 1980 – a move which in view of Foot's age was bound to pay dividends for Kinnock – he led a group of about 20 Tribune MPs to abstain in the Tony Benn-Denis Healey contest for the deputy leadership in 1981. This effectively delivered victory by the narrow margin of 50.4 per cent to 49.5 per cent to Healey, hated in the radical-



Remember me, the anti-nuclear campaigner?

ised constituency parties.

The year 1983 saw the victory of the Kinnock-Hattersley 'dream ticket', the result of a new alliance of the 'soft left' with the majority of the centre and right wing. The rest, as they say, is history – the betrayal of the miners, the notorious 'dented shield' policy in local government, the embrace of the anti-union laws, the largest witch-hunt in modern Labour history, and the ditching of nationalisation and unilateralism. The support he had given the miners in 1972 and 1974, and even the equivocal defence he made of the trade unions during the Winter of Discontent, had mutated into a hostility to every militant trade union struggle.

In truth, Kinnock had never set himself the task of abolishing capitalism. What then is left of his 'socialism'? He has

These days it takes an effort to remember that Neil Kinnock, leader of the New Model Labour Party, was once Neil Kinnock, rebellious backbencher. **Richard Price** traces the evolution of the man who is now expelling and suspending Labour activists for the crime of holding views little different from those he once held

come round in stages to Herbert Morrison's cynical old adage that socialism is what a Labour government does.

Party democracy

By one of life's little ironies, today's Witchfinder-General was himself an early member of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. He managed to combine this with being opposed to one of the main goals of CLPD – mandatory reselection – and always upheld the rights of MPs to independence from their constituencies.

with no sustained objections to the British occupation of the north of Ireland.

He joined CND in his teens, only allowing his membership to lapse in the late Eighties. Although occasionally letting off steam against the level of defence spending and arms sales to right-wing dictatorships, he was never a consistent anti-nuclear campaigner. For the first 13 years of his parliamentary career he managed never to be in the Commons when the annual defence budget came up. Kinnock supported the sending of the task force to the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982 and wrote in

Tribune defending Foot's support for the Thatcher government.

After assuming the leadership in 1983, Kinnock quickly repented his long-standing unilateralism, shifting in stages towards the verbal multilateralism supported by the right wing under the guise of uniting the party and making Labour electable. Once again, Kinnock's commitment to 'moral' principles was proved to be a sham. He had been a unilateralist when it was a minority pursuit. Once a majority of the party stood for nuclear disarmament, and his lifelong 'cause' threatened to have practical implications for a future Labour government, he moved in the opposite direction.

At the same time, Kinnock's minders made sure he was seen to be standing with 'our boys' in the armed forces, with carefully planned trips to visit the British army in Germany and NATO headquarters in Brussels, and an American tour whose message was to emphasise that he represented no threat to US strategic interests.

Like Aneurin Bevan before him, Kinnock discovered that Labour governments could not go 'naked' into the conference chamber. Nuclear weapons were, in fact, positively necessary as bargaining counters. And lingering doubters in the military establishment must have been heartened by his grovelling performance during the Gulf War.

War and peace

Contrary to some myths, Kinnock has never been a pacifist. By origins, he was a believer in non-nuclear national defence,

Kinnock and the economy

Never too hot on economics – he once cheerfully admitted that he had only read one book on the subject – Kinnock's views in this field, like so many others, have undergone a conversion. His 'innovations', like a National Economic Assessment and a British Investment Bank, are warmed-up leftovers from the era of Wilson and Callaghan.

In the Seventies, he could hold forth on workers' control of production, but it takes an effort to recall that even Denis Healey addressed the 1973 Labour Party conference on the subject of 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families'.

Some of Kinnock's former pronouncements sound like biting attacks on his later self. After recent years, in which Kinnock and his shadow chancellor John Smith have invested so much time in wooing the City of London and the CBI, it's almost funny to rewind Kinnock's career back to 1977 when he could attack Denis Healey and his Treasury team in ringing tones: 'They treat the City of London as if it were some kind of winnable Tory marginal constituency . . . They think, generation in and generation out, as their predecessors have done, that somehow there is some deal, some kind of understanding, that can be reached with people who are sworn ideological enemies.'

Or to that time long before Kinnock's policy reviews had expunged the dreaded n-word in favour of 'social ownership' and rehabilitated 'market' economics, when he could say of the Gang of Four: 'They want a kindly capitalism, a gentle market economy, an air-conditioned jungle.' You tell 'em, Neil!

The European Community

Kinnock the enthusiastic pro-European is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the Seventies, like many other left reformists, he opposed the EC from the standpoint of nationalism. Unlike many, however, he didn't concentrate on demagogic speeches against European big business; he argued from the pragmatic stance that the economic benefits of EC membership 'for Wales' were doubtful. Kinnock seems to have played no special role in the 1975 referendum which approved EC membership by 2:1.

By 1980, Kinnock could still be counted on as vaguely 'anti-market', and supported the 1983 election manifesto which pledged that Labour would withdraw Britain from the EC within the lifetime of a single parliament. Immediately after the election, with the Labour leadership contest in full swing, Kinnock issued a 'Summary of Views' in which he argued that withdrawal was no longer possible: 'With the prospect of four or five more years of membership, and with Spain and Portugal about to join, the Common Market picture changes.'

What had also changed was Kinnock, who had swapped one set of reactionary ideas for another. Whereas in the

Seventies, the Labour left had clung to the notion of a siege economy defending 'British industry' against 'Europe', the sharpening world competition in the Eighties had led much of it to attempt to shelter behind European capitalism against the incursions of the United States and Japan. Such was the evolution of the man who now lambasts the Tory front bench for being anti-European.

The monarchy and the House of Lords

If Kinnock is summoned to the palace and asked to form a government, he might find it a bit embarrassing to be reminded of the days when, going through the ritual of playing the young firebrand, he sounded off against Britain's two most august institutions.

In 1975, Kinnock voted against the civil list, saying that the Queen was one of the world's wealthiest women. He later described the Duke of Edinburgh as 'a retired naval officer without visible means of support', and in an article in *The Guardian* in June 1977, at the time of the Jubilee, he claimed that watching the 1953 Coronation had made him sick as a child. In November the same year, he refused, along with Dennis Skinner, to listen to the Queen's Speech at the state opening of parliament.

During the Labour leadership campaign in 1983, his views miraculously changed and a new 'mature' Kinnock emerged. Asked by David Frost on breakfast television if the role of the royal family would change in 'Kinnock's Britain', he replied 'Oh, not the royal family. There is no reason why it should, is there?' Questioned by reporters during his American tour in 1986, he praised the royal family and argued that they were 'value for money!'

Meanwhile, their Lordships, once the target of Kinnockite passion, can all sleep safer in their beds these days. In November 1976, Kinnock had written in *Tribune* that 'The House of Lords must go, not be reformed, not be replaced, not be reborn . . . just closed down, abolished, finished'.

Homophobic?

Although the Labour leadership has, like John Major, attempted to make cosmetic changes to its traditional homophobia, a number of incidents in the course of Kinnock's career suggest that he holds similar reactionary prejudices against gays to those held by many Tories.

At the time of the infamous Bermondsey by-election, in which Peter Tatchell was viciously pilloried, Kinnock claimed that he represented the 'balls wing' of the party. He was quoted in the *Daily Express* as saying 'I'm not in favour of witch-hunts, but I do not mistake bloody witches for fairies'. On another occasion, Jill Craigie, wife of his mentor, Michael Foot, reports him as describing another MP as 'unmanly'. Kinnock's press secretary, Patricia Hewitt, wrote to Frank Dobson after Labour's defeat in the Greenwich by-election in 1987 that: 'The "Loony Labour left" is taking its toll; the gays and lesbians issue is costing us dear among pensioners.'

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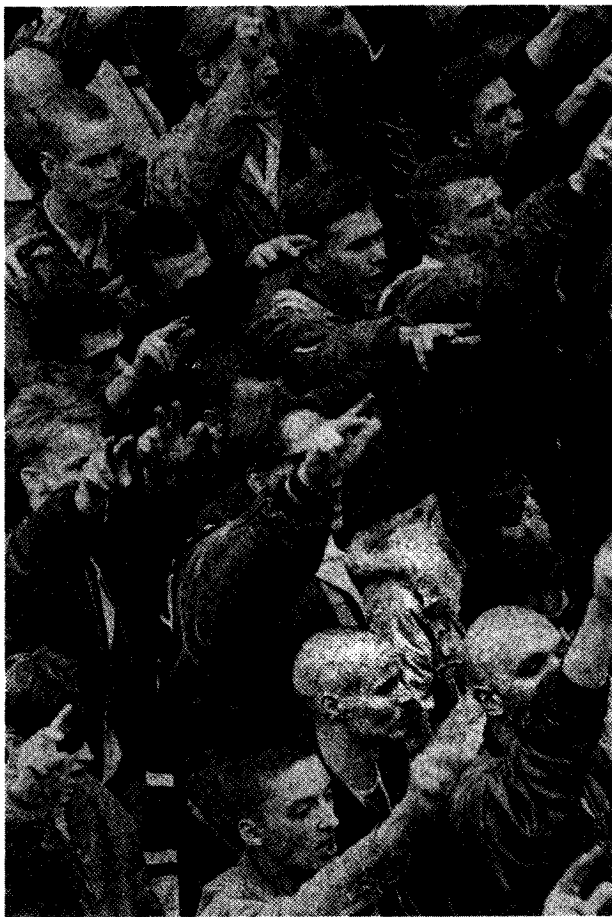
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GERMANY



German neo-Nazis – but the parliamentary parties are also playing the racist card

Stop the pogroms!

WE LIVE in a time of convulsive political change. What for many years seemed solid and unshakeable has started to crumble. Yesterday's certainties have disappeared. Those who once knew exactly where they stood now face the unknown. The political establishment, in fear of its life, declares in unison that triumphant capitalism is the best of all possible worlds. What follows is the wholesale suppression of former insights, convictions and aims.

Into the vacuum caused by the shift to the right of parties like the SPD, the Greens and the PDS pours an undigested mixture of fear, despair, aggression and various scraps of backward ideologies.

In the reunified Germany, there have been more than 400 firebombings and attacks on refugee centres this year alone. Pogroms carried out by skinheads, hooligans and 'ordinary citizens' against foreigners have become a daily event. But in both east and west of the new Germany, only the most extreme cases

Three anti-racist demonstrations took to the streets of Berlin on November 9, the anniversary of the Nazis' 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom which marked the start of the systematic murder and deportation of German Jews. The marches converged on the Lustgarten, in the eastern part of the city, for a 60,000-strong rally. The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency distributed a leaflet at the rally, the text of which is reproduced below

make the headlines – like the murder of Mozambican Jorge Gomondai in April in Dresden, or the kidnapping of a 26-year-old Sri Lankan refugee in October who was thrown in front of a train in Saarbrücken and lost a foot. The German political establishment only woke up to the strength of the fascist wave after the pogrom at Hoyerswerda.

Two years since the Wall came down, the SPD, the Greens and Gregor Gysi of the PDS are 'appalled at the outbreak of German racism and the widespread acceptance of

attacks on foreigners'. Even the Republicans (who can scarcely conceal their joy) have said: 'We don't want to profit from the hostility against foreigners.' (Wolfgang Hüttl, secretary of the Bavarian Republicans). Hüttl's predecessor, Harald Neubauer, MEP, also officially distanced himself from the attacks, saying he was 'vigorously opposed to the acts of violence'.

But it's not only the Republicans who are two-faced. The CDU, the FDP and the SPD all blame the pogroms on the victims. The CDU leader in Hoyerswerda, Wolfgang Schmitz, had sympathy for those who carry out the attacks: 'The behaviour of some Mozambicans and Vietnamese cannot be endured.' The deputy chairman of the SPD, Thierse, who calls on Germans to accept immigrants, speculated at the same time about the 'excessive demands' being placed on Germans in east and west. He wants an immigration law with 'initially low' quotas which will allow Germans to get used to 'alien culture' gradually. This is the kind of racism to which the Green practitioners of *Realpolitik* have also become sympathetic.

Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble supplied the key phrase 'asylum seekers' – now widely used as a term of abuse – for the debate in which the Bonn parties argue about how the slogan 'Foreigners out!' can best be adapted to fit the constitutional framework. The CDU wants the abolition of the official, unrestricted right of asylum contained in Article 16 of the constitution. The SPD wants the refugees concentrated in mass camps and summarily deported. By saying this, the SPD is placing itself on the same ground as the Republican Party's 1987 programme.

Naturally, there are important differences. The leading social democrats also reject the pogroms. But they, like the Greens, Bündnis 90 and the PDS, are not prepared to organise a united struggle of German and immigrant workers against the fascist gangs. They call on the state to intervene. The SPD chairman, Hans-Jochen Vogel, is not to be outdone by anyone. For him, the battle against the Red Army Fraction is the model: 'Deal with attacks on refugee centres as you would terrorism.' The Thüringer Greens, faced with the pogroms, are worried about how Germans appear to others ('Shame on the Bundesrepublik!') and call on the state to proceed 'with all measures, including police powers, consistently against the troublemakers'.

But the state is not as the 'political realists' want it to be. Everywhere, the government plays down the fascist terror. It ignores the obvious: the organised character of most of the pogroms. For a whole week in Hoyerswerda, the police were incapable of stopping 50 skinheads, but they managed

shortly afterwards to attack a demonstration organised in solidarity with the refugees. Throughout Germany, the fascist terror is able to develop almost unimpeded. The police can usually find nothing, are 'too poorly equipped' or 'overstretched'. From time to time, 'friends and sympathisers' assist the fascists. In Sachsen, Nazi leaders are chauffeured by policemen; in Greifswald, buses full of hooligans are directed to the refugee centre. But that's not typical, is it?

The 'political realists' have clear consciences. They preach morals, they are concerned about 'social harmony' and, like the *Neue Deutschland*, they are worried about 'the monopoly power of the state'. The Berlin SPD, the Greens and the PDS are of the same opinion, that the 'exploitation of the asylum question' in the 'speeches of the politicians' has brought about the pogroms. Meanwhile, the CDU and the SPD-led Berlin Senate prepare mass deportations of refugees. But deportations, where they are the outcome of 'constitutional procedures', are, even in the view of German bishops, a 'painful duty'. What a triumph for 'clean' racism!

We refuse to make people the subject of some kind of 'population politics'. For us, the difference is not between Germans and foreigners, but between bosses and workers. Mass unemployment, austerity measures and housing shortages were not created by immigrants. They are the result of capitalist politics. The fascist wave is not caused by a lack of morals, nor can it be reduced simply to the impact of the unpleasant aspects of capitalism. Neither demands for reform, nor appeals to people's better nature will stop the fascists. What is necessary is an internationalist, a socialist, perspective; what is necessary is a perspective for a united struggle of German and foreign workers against mass unemployment, increasing poverty and homelessness.

In addition to this, it is also necessary to struggle for the following immediate demands:

- Stop the pogroms!
- Abolish all discriminatory special laws!
- Freedom of movement for all!

South African VAT strike biggest ever

By Vusi Makabane

THE MIGHTY national strike on November 4-5 demonstrates clearly that the South African working class, despite the opportunist twists and turns of its leadership, is still highly combative.

Between three and four million workers, over 80 per cent of the workforce, participated in the strike, making it the biggest in South Africa's history. COSATU and its allies called the strike in protest against the state's introduction of VAT, which will push up workers' already rocketing cost of living by at least another three per cent.

The main economic centres of the Witwatersrand and the Eastern Cape were brought to a virtual standstill. Even in the Western Cape, which historically has been less militant, participation was more than 60 per cent, much higher than expected. In areas where, in the past, Inkatha has gone on the rampage – the hostels of the Rand and in Natal – more than 60 per cent of workers defiantly stayed away. Farmworkers, who have only recently been organised, heeded the strike call in significant numbers. Mineworkers, whose response to national and regional strike calls has been patchy in the past, took part enthusiastically.

With VAT coming hard on the heels of a range of other attacks on the working class, most notably the spate of dismissals, mounting inflation and continuing state and Inkatha violence, the working class was clearly saying 'Enough is enough'. The success of the strike exposes the treachery of the nationalist and Stalinist leaderships, who tried everything in their power to reduce the demands and limit active struggle.

By COSATU's own calculations, the imposition of VAT



South African trade unionists demonstrate against VAT

will make the ruling class R6 billion richer and the working class and others R4 billion poorer. In response, COSATU should have insisted that VAT be scrapped. Instead, its demand was: 'No VAT on basic foods, water, electricity, medicines and medical services'.

The COSATU leaders' overriding concern was to show De Klerk and the bosses that they would be 'reasonable' when they all sit round the negotiating table. Hence, they did not call for workers to have the right to work and to a decent wage, they called for poverty relief programmes to be negotiated – as if such pathetic handouts should be negotiable! The leadership did not demand that the De Klerk regime be forced from office, it simply called for a negotiating partnership with this self-same regime. So workers should now be under no illu-

sions as to what the leadership means by the 'New South Africa'!

This bankrupt leadership is vehemently opposed to harnessing the combative mood of the working class. Whereas the actions of the class indicate that it wants to put its stamp on the future South Africa, and that therefore the call for a revolutionary Constituent Assembly is on the order of the day, the leadership is interested only in rushing headlong into negotiations at the expense of the masses.

The term 'general strike' was bandied about, but the leadership demobilised and disarmed the workers by in fact organising a stayaway. The workers were told to be 'peaceful'. They were actively discouraged from organising pickets, factory occupations and militant demonstrations. Made defenceless, they became an easy target for all

their main enemies: Inkatha, the state and the bosses. Inkatha's thugs brutally set upon and killed striking workers – yet again Inkatha made a farce of the National Peace Accord which the ANC and COSATU leaderships so slavishly follow. The police shot and baton-charged demonstrators, and the bosses dismissed workers who had been on strike. Can there be any doubt as to who must take the blame for these attacks?

The key feature of the strike was that the workers' determination to fight was matched by the leadership's eagerness to sell them out. If it was not clear before, all workers should now realise that this leadership is utterly rotten – its interests are opposed to those of the workers. The most urgent task of the South African revolution is to build a new, truly revolutionary leadership of the working class.

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EDITORIAL

Whither the USSR?

THE COLLAPSE of the Moscow coup last August produced a wave of euphoria in the capitalist class. Dictatorship was dead. A new era of freedom had dawned. A road had been opened towards democracy and the market. This was the triumphalist message spelt out in the bourgeois press and on television, and by spokesmen for the major imperialist powers.

Four months on, and even the most vehement capitalist ideologues have been forced to adopt a more sober assessment of the situation. The 'constitutional coup' of December 8, in which the heads of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia proclaimed the death of the Soviet Union, brought a gloomy reaction from the US Secretary of State, James Baker, who had pinned his hopes on Gorbachev as a stabilising factor in the USSR's transition to capitalism. Baker spoke of the danger of a descent into civil war, a 'Yugoslavia with nukes'. The CIA, for its part, predicted imminent catastrophe. Agency director Robert Gates warned that inflation and unemployment resulting from the proposed market reforms might well result in a 'social explosion'. He raised the prospect that there would be 'a return to authoritarian government' in order to deal with the crisis. So much for the wonders of 'democracy' and the market!

The so-called 'commonwealth of independent states' launched by the December 8 agreement in Minsk is being promoted by Yeltsin as a new 'free' association of the former Soviet republics. But this is mere window dressing. In reality, it has no more guarantee of success than the Union of Sovereign States envisaged by the now sidelined Gorbachev. Behind all the fine words about voluntary association, the 'commonwealth' has been set up in such a way as to ensure the domination of the largest and most powerful states, and of Russia in particular. Those smaller republics who join will be kept firmly in a subordinate position. Nor will relations between the major players be free from potentially serious conflict, through economic rivalry, border disputes or the vexed question of control over strategic nuclear weapons.

As for the Soviet economy, it is - to use Gates's phrase - in 'free fall'. The old command structures of the bureaucratic plan have disintegrated as the Union has separated into its component parts, but without the emergence of a viable capitalist system to replace it. Hunger and even starvation face the major cities, especially in Russia, despite the substantial food aid agreed by both the European Community and the Group of Seven leading industrialised nations. The 'freeing' of prices - that is, the removal of all subsidies - now scheduled for January, will have a devastating effect on living standards. Millions will lose their jobs as privatisations and closures mark the passage to a fully capitalist economy.

The form of capitalism that does emerge will be barbaric to say the least, the effects of economic breakdown being compounded by the character of the nascent bourgeoisie. The latter is being drawn in part from the bureaucracy itself, as state-owned enterprises are transformed into the private property of their erstwhile managers. The black market and Mafia-style organised crime provide the other main sources of recruitment for this new business class. Against a background of economic devastation, these rapacious 'entrepreneurs' will grow fat off the misery of the masses. Here, indeed, is the material for a 'social explosion'.

At the political level, the stability of the existing governments is far from assured as they supervise the process of capitalist restoration. Their leading figures consist predominantly of former Stalinists whose at best limited record of struggle against the old regime cannot provide them with the popular support that, say, Lech Walesa was able to exploit. In the Ukraine, Kravchuk only baled out of the Communist Party after the defeat of the August coup, opportunistically adopting the stance of a nationalist 'democrat' in order to secure his election to the presidency. Yeltsin built his reputation on demagogic denunciations of centralised bureaucracy, but having succeeded in his aim of shunting the all-Union administration aside, he is left without a scapegoat for the escalating economic crisis. Given the scale of the attacks which they will be forced to mount on the working class, such leaders will find their popular base rapidly disappearing.

It is therefore doubtful whether the present bourgeois-democratic forms of government can be maintained in the course of the transition to the 'market economy'. In the face of widespread discontent, restorationist regimes may well resort to repression and even open dictatorship. Yeltsin's courting of the Soviet military chiefs suggests that he himself has such a possibility in mind. Having been sold capitalism on the basis that it is the only means of achieving democracy, the masses will find themselves deprived of democracy as the only means of achieving capitalism.

While they are capable of predicting the inevitable slide into chaos, the factor which the bourgeois prophets of despair leave out of their calculations is the revolutionary potential of the working class. The period of glasnost has been put to good use by Soviet workers, who have established the basic defensive organisations required to resist the onslaught of the restorationists - independent trade unions, factory committees, etc. Moreover, these organisations have already been tested in struggle. So far, however, the emergent workers' movement has been largely dominated by political elements which favour a return to capitalism. But the direct experience of 'the market', which is still seen by many workers as the only alternative to bureaucratic despotism, will shake the rank and file's illusions in capitalism. The small groups of Marxist revolutionaries who are at present marginalised from political developments will find an audience for their programme.



Militant in a m

COMMENT

THE GROWING rift within the top leadership of *Militant* since the Walton by-election in July poses serious questions not only to *Militant* supporters but to all those who consider themselves Trotskyists. Neither the Peter Taaffe-led majority nor the Ted Grant-Alan Woods-Rob Sewell minority have the answers, but neither have many others on the left, who see this not as an occasion for a constructive contribution to the debate but for a chorus of 'I told you so'.

The remarkable thing is not that the crisis has developed, but that it hasn't happened sooner. Eight years of attacks from the Labour bureaucracy, the expulsion of many of its leading members, the generally low level of the class struggle and the decline of the Labour left, combined with its apparent success in the anti-poll tax struggle, made it almost inevitable that a section of its supporters would balk at *Militant's* 40-year project to 'transform' the Labour Party, and would seek an 'open-party' orientation.

Until the mid-Eighties, *Militant's* tried and tested entrism strategy had appeared to pay dividends. Founded by Ted Grant, the origins of *Militant* lie in a faction of the majority of the Revolutionary Communist Party which had either been expelled or had resigned in disgust at Gerry Healy's growing adaptation to both Stalinism and reformism after the majority had followed Healy's faction into the Labour Party in 1949.

With its only significant implantation in the north-west, the growth of *Militant* as a national force was for a long time very slow, lagging well behind its rivals, Healy's Socialist Labour League and Cliff's International Socialism Group. After *Militant's* rupture with the United Secretariat in 1965, Mandel's new protégés, the International Marxist Group, rapidly outgrew the previous holders of the franchise.

But in the Seventies, while Healy and Cliff's attempts to proclaim new alternative 'parties' foundered, and the IMG lurched from juvenile ultra-leftism to building 'class struggle left wings' with left reformists, *Militant's* assiduous con-

centration on entry work made it the chief beneficiary of rank-and-file opposition to Wilson and Callaghan.

By the Eighties it could claim a serious presence in a number of unions - particularly the CPSA - control of the LPYS and a dominant position on Liverpool City Council, and it had avoided serious splits within its own ranks. Alongside these organisational successes, however, grew a range of adaptations to reformism stemming from its dogmatic and schematic conception of entrism. *Militant* transformed the relative truth that trade union struggles would be reflected within the Labour Party into an absolute article of faith - workers would sooner or later stream into the Labour Party and 'reclaim' it. Whereas for Trotsky, the purpose of entry had been to facilitate participation in the mass struggles of the class, for *Militant* the task was nothing less than the 'transformation' of the Labour Party lock, stock and barrel and the reassertion of its supposedly 'socialist' ideals.

With this strategic aim came a reformist position on the capitalist state. According to *Militant's* scenario, a majority Labour government (dominated presumably by its supporters) would pass an enabling act, abolish the House of Lords, and nationalise the top 200 companies. Basing itself on hypothetical possibilities raised by Marx and Engels a century before, *Militant* projected a peaceful, parliamentary seizure of power by the working class.

On Ireland and the Falkland/Malvinas War, *Militant* found 'socialist' reasons why it was necessary to capitulate to British imperialism. During the Gulf crisis of 1990-91, *Militant* played no role in the anti-war movement until the final stages of the conflict. On an international plane, its jerry-built theory of the state led it to enroll every country with predominantly nationalised industry as a workers' state (including some very strange ones like Syria and Burma!). Its co-thinkers in the Committee for a Workers International mechanically copied their big brother in entering reformist parties - or found surrogates in the Pakistan People's Party and the African National Congress.

Although *Militant* did not generally engage in building

propaganda blocs with left reformists - unlike *Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook* - its refusal to engage in a range of united front struggles, except where it was obliged to (in the unions) or where it could dominate them, alienated many other left-wingers. Its membership was warned off from honestly debating its differences with others with the self-serving catch-all that everyone else on the left was a 'sectarian'.

Militant's 'soft' politics were camouflaged by a rigid internal regime and an unhealthy work-erism. As with Healy's WRP, the presence of relatively large numbers of working class youth is not in itself proof that the organisation's political line is correct.

Although *Militant* has frequently been proved wrong in its estimation of the likely course of the class struggle in Britain and internationally, its leadership is not without instincts when it comes to sizing up political opportunities. When the poll tax was launched in Scotland, *Militant* rapidly switched its emphasis to 'open' work on the estates and in the communities, and picked up numbers of new supporters. With the extension of the poll tax to England and Wales, *Militant* was in a position to dominate the movement - even if it frequently used organisational chicanery - so that by the time of the Battle of Trafalgar Square, when Tommy Sheridan and Steve Nally made their infamous offer to name names of 'rioters', it was probably at its greatest strength yet.

The tendency's triumphalism spilled over. 'We beat the poll tax' it proclaimed to the world at large. When *Militant*-backed Broad Left candidates defeated official Labour candidates in council elections, illusions of mass growth were strengthened. Dizzy with such successes, *Militant's* new recruits provided the base for the majority faction led by Peter Taaffe to argue for an 'open party' orientation.

The result of the Walton by-election, in which Lesley Mahmood, standing under a 'Real Labour' tag in *Militant's* oldest stamping ground, polled a mere six per cent should have brought these flights of fancy back to earth with a jolt. Instead, Taaffe, who had argued that outright victory was possi-

ble, presented the '2,600 votes for socialism' as a victory in itself.

The Walton experience, combined with a dramatic escalation of the witch-hunt, precipitated a sharp conflict within *Militant's* leading committee, with founding father Grant, together with Sewell and Woods, in a small minority, standing by the old orientation.

In the ensuing factional struggle, *Militant's* normally hermetically sealed walls have perforated, with judicious leaks of the Grant minority's positions and a spate of letters in *The Guardian*.

This division is not a simple left-right one. The majority, for all its 'leftism', is shot through with opportunism. The rationale of the majority's 'Perspectives and Tasks Document' prepared by leading Scottish comrades runs as follows: 'In important areas of Scotland, the Labour Party is being outbid by the SNP, particularly among young people, as a result of its refusal to fight the poll tax. At the same time, the Tories are likely to grant a Scottish Assembly on the basis of proportional representation. Therefore, in order to catch disaffected youth and take advantage of possible seats in the assembly, an independent organisation should be proclaimed in Scotland. Thus 'leftism' joins hands with parliamentary cretinism.'

Grant's reply presented to *Militant's* leadership in mid-July, 'The New Turn - A Threat to 40 Years Work' (reprinted in *Socialist Organiser*, November 8), is an attempt to return to the old trusted methods. As such, we have no sympathy with it, even if it punctures the majority's arguments on a number of issues.

Grant argues that Walton was far from being a victory, and 'to dress up a setback in this fashion is the worst kind of deception for a Marxist organisation'. He points out that to motivate standing against Labour candidate Kilfoyle on the basis that he is a right-winger carries wider implications: 'It is true that Kilfoyle is a gangster, but this is the case with most of the right-wing candidates nationally.'

From the standpoint of *Militant's* history, Grant is stating the obvious when he calls the lurch to an open party a 'break with the method, perspectives

DEMONSTRATORS outside the Sheraton Park Hotel in Knightsbridge on December 4, where the French racist political leader Jean-Marie Le Pen was attending a meeting of the 14-strong Group of the European Right MEPs.

Le Pen, who heads the rapidly-growing Front National, was on a three-day trip to London at the invitation of the Western Goals Institute, an extreme right-wing organisation whose leading lights include members of the Tory party Monday Club. He was also scheduled to meet six Tory MPs.

On December 6, up to 1,000 anti-fascists demonstrated outside the Charing Cross Hotel, where Le Pen was the main speaker at the annual dinner of Western Goals.

A recent opinion poll in France found that 38 per cent of the sample electorate agreed with the Front National's 50-point racist agenda, which includes calls for the forcible integration of ethnic minorities into 'French culture' and the holding of 'unwanted' immigrants in concentration camps pending their mass deportation.

HANDS OFF CUBA!

For a political revolution!

By Philip Marchant

FOR THE American ruling class, one of the most gratifying aspects of the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is the possibility of watching the same process take place in its own back yard. The presence of the avowedly 'Marxist-Leninist' state of Cuba 90 miles off the coast of Florida has been both an embarrassment and a thorn in its flesh – providing as it did a focus for struggles against US imperialism throughout Latin America.

The prospect of Cuba's growing economic isolation leading to the restoration of capitalism is a real one. In 1989, 85 per cent of Cuba's trade was with the countries of the now defunct

Comecon bloc. By August 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was talking about gradually reducing one important form of economic aid to Cuba by insisting on hard currency for Soviet goods in place of barter. Then, in January 1991, a new agreement was signed which amounted to the start of the USSR's 'phased economic withdrawal' from Cuba.

By October 1991, only 38 per cent of the agreed Soviet imports for the year had arrived, while supplies from most East European sources had largely dried up. Additionally, some 84 new Soviet-backed factory projects had been shelved. One indication of the damaging impact all this will have on the economy is the fact that Cuba is the world's largest exporter of sugar, most of which used to go to the Comecon countries at a guaranteed price, normally above that obtainable on the world market. Since finding a replacement market for the entire crop will prove impossible, Cuba now faces the monumental task of diversifying its economy, when it cannot afford to pay the interest on its estimated \$8.7 billion debt and has been denied fresh loans by Western banks. To make matters worse, Cuba only produces six per cent of its own oil requirements. Gorbachev has already announced that trade will be further reduced in 1992 – although the current break-up of the Soviet Union means that even these quotas are unlikely to be fulfilled.

But the economic crisis in the Soviet Union is not the only factor which is determining Gorbachev's attitude. The US government is attempting to tie its aid to the USSR to a quid pro quo reduction of Soviet support for Cuba. Graphic evidence of this pressure from US imperialism came on September 11, when Gorbachev held a joint press conference with US Secretary of State James Baker, announcing the withdrawal of Soviet military personnel from the island. For 32 years, the US ruling class has employed every weapon in its considerable arsenal in an attempt to overthrow the Cuban regime – from the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 and bizarre CIA plots to assassinate Castro, to the draconian economic blockade which became fully effective in 1964.

Ironically, the first real chance to destroy the Cuban workers' state comes about with the assistance of Soviet Stalinists – Cuba is being forced entirely onto the world capitalist market, under conditions where it is unable to trade with the United States or any US-owned manufacturing or transport companies anywhere in the world, or purchase any US-patented products. The imperialists think they have Cuba just where they want it, but there remains one avenue which the working class can take to prevent the restoration of capitalism and defend the gains of the past – political revolution.

When Castro's petty-bourgeois July 26 Movement toppled the US puppet regime of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, most workers and peasants were living in grinding poverty. But Cuba's close proximity to the North American mainland, its corrupt pro-imperialist ruling class and its lack of stringent financial laws had made it a magnet for both 'legitimate' and Mafia investment. The average

standard of living was actually higher than in many other Latin American countries, and Havana had become infamous as a playground for wealthy tourists, a centre for gambling and the laundering of hot money.

After Castro took power, he was obliged to rapidly carry out economic and social reforms in order to secure the backing of the masses for the new regime. True, one of his first acts as prime minister had been to introduce a law forbidding land seizures, but this was primarily aimed at curbing the independent actions of the peasants, who were busy expropriating the hated landowners. Within a few months, limited land reform and nationalisation had been started, and rents, taxes, electricity and telephone charges reduced. Because of the high level of US control over the economy, these measures immediately brought Castro into conflict with Washington. Increasingly, Cuba was forced to turn to the USSR, China and Eastern Europe as an outlet for its raw materials and produce, and as a source of oil, grain and manufactured goods.

In June 1960, US-owned refineries were nationalised after they refused to process Soviet crude oil. In the months that followed, numerous other US and Cuban enterprises were nationalised, including factories, agricultural holdings, sugar mills and banks. The US responded by announcing its first embargo on trade with Cuba in October that year. In November, it extended the embargo to include all exports to the island except food and medicines. Thus did the self-proclaimed 'anti-communist' Fidel Castro find himself, of necessity, transforming the Cuban economy by bureaucratic decree and drawing politically ever-closer to Moscow.

The Soviet Stalinists welcomed this, despite their reservations about the crash programme of nationalisation which was counter to their policy of 'peaceful coexistence'. In return for economic assistance, they were gaining an important military foothold in the Caribbean which strengthened their bargaining position with imperialism in the Cold War.

The wave of nationalisations between June and October 1960, the fusion (albeit protracted) between the Fidelistas and the Cuban Stalinist party, and the increasing dependence of the economy on the Soviet Union set Cuba irrevocably on the road to becoming a deformed workers' state, ruled by a bureaucratic caste.

Living standards improved considerably. The advances which took place in health and education can be seen from a comparison between the statistics for 1958 and 1988. Life expectancy shot up from 57 to 74; infant mortality dropped from 60 to 13.3 per thousand; there was a 150 per cent increase in the number of hospital beds and a ten-fold increase in doctors; and literacy rose from 76 to 98 per cent.

However, the Cuban Stalinists were incapable of developing the economy beyond a certain point. Their economic strategy has been characterised by frantic zig-zagging to meet each new crisis, with new policies being imposed from on high. For example, faced with virtual isolation from the world capitalist economy when the US boycott took hold, the indus-

trialisational plan began to founder. Castro switched back to dependency on sugar in October 1965, announcing that output must double in five years. When this campaign ended in abject failure, new pledges were made to broaden the country's economic base and make management more efficient.

But these, too, were phantom prospects for Stalinists to whom workers' democracy meant not calling a congress until ten years after the establishment of the Cuban Communist Party, and who sought to break out of economic isolation by alternately basing themselves on the hope that petty-bourgeois guerrilla movements would take power in Latin America, or on handouts from the Soviet bureaucracy. In place of democratic debate, eight-hour speeches by Fidel Castro; in place of the innovation of the masses, bureaucratic inertia.

In 1985, Cuba was still a one-crop economy and Castro was once again announcing a turn towards 'industrialisation', this time in response to the country's burgeoning foreign debt. What was devised was the 'Rectification' policy, launched at the end of the following year following the shutting down of the small farmers' markets. It was aimed at depressing the private sector, whose growth had previously been encouraged to stimulate the economy, but which now threatened to become a social force in its own right which would challenge the bureaucracy. 'Rectification' has only deepened Cuba's economic problems by attempting to legislate away the conflict between the state Agricultural Production Co-operatives and the private sector.

By September 1990, the crisis of the Cuban economy was so severe that the Castro regime was forced to introduce the most stringent of austerity plans. The petrol and diesel ration was almost halved, and hundreds of thousands of bicycles were imported from China so that Cubans could still get to work; families were told to reduce their electricity consumption by ten per cent or face a month with their supply cut off, and told to wear the same clothes until they wore out; farmers were urged to replace tractors with oxen; and while some factories were closed, others experimented with pedal power to run their machines. This was the start of Castro's 'special peace-time period', which was expected to last several years and cover the transition from dependency on the Soviet Union to 'self-reliance'. It would mean, Castro warned, mass unemployment.

Despite the widespread privations caused by the austerity programme – everything is now rationed, from food and clothing to rum and cigars – Cuban Stalinism has not followed its Eastern European and Soviet mentors in collapsing like a house of cards. There is, as yet, no movement opposed to Castro capable of sweeping him from power. The reasons for this difference are clear: in Eastern Europe, workers looked to the standard of living in neighbouring imperialist countries as a guide to what their own expectations should be, whereas in Cuba, the more realistic comparison is with the impoverished Caribbean and Central American countries. And Castro himself is of a

different order to the Ceausescu, the Honeckers and the Gorbachevs – he led a revolution which demonstrably bettered the conditions of the Cuban people, a fact which is not lost, especially on the older generation.

But if the Cubans are not taking to the streets, some of them are showing their discontent in other ways. As economic conditions have deteriorated, there has been a dramatic rise in crime, gaming, prostitution and black market activities.

The threat to the Cuban deformed workers' state lies in the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy knows no way out of what it calls the 'twin blockade' – the US embargo and the end of what amounted to a Soviet subsidy of up to \$5 billion annually – except by turning towards capitalism. At the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party, held between October 10 and 14, Castro made a great show of defending the 'Cuban Road', saying that Cuba would follow its 'socialist' course alone if necessary. He vehemently rejected 'multi-party democracy', referring to it as 'complete garbage'. The Cuban system was 'the most democratic in the world', he said, 'and now we want to make it still more perfect'.

But Castro's fine tuning of the Cuban Stalinist system is, in fact, nothing more than an attempt to broaden the base and increase the popularity of the Communist Party. The party is to open its doors to Christians and other religious believers (a decision which, for Castro, made the congress both 'historic' and 'heroic'), there are to be fewer bureaucrats and some mild reforms of the voting system. Although the congress ruled out the widespread introduction of 'free market mechanisms' and held on to the principle of state planning, it made concessions to petty traders, appealed for greater foreign investment and called for state companies to work towards financial autonomy.

The overtures to capitalism became even more explicit in early November when Castro inaugurated the Ninth Havana International Trade Fair, attended by 700 firms from 24 countries. Cuba was opening up its socialist economy 'as wide as possible', he told the assembled business people, and foreign partners were required to provide capital, technology and markets. 'Collaboration between the socialist system and the capitalist system is perfectly compatible', he said.

This course, if it remains unchallenged, will inevitably lead to the restoration of capitalism in Cuba. The crucial struggle which lies ahead of the Cuban working class is the overthrow of Castro's Stalinist regime from the left, and the establishment of a genuine workers' democracy based on workers' councils. Trade unionists and revolutionaries around the world must take concrete steps to defend Cuba from the impact of its isolation, demanding, among other things, an end to the US embargo and the cancelling of its debt. But the most important weapon that can be placed in the hands of the Cuban workers is Trotskyism, whose representatives were suppressed by Castro in 1961. The construction of a Trotskyist party in Cuba is the key to the situation.

muddle

and theory formulated over 40 years'. He is correct in thinking that 'the attempt to create a "substitute" Labour Party in Liverpool can only end in tears', as he is in his description of Lesley Mahmood's election platform as 'left reformist' rather than revolutionary – a campaign in which 'everything was subordinated to maximising the vote'.

The majority's lengthy rejoinder, 'The Scottish Turn – Against Dogmatic Methods in Thought and Action', makes much of the experience of *Militant's* fraternal section in Spain in exiting from the PSOE – a move apparently endorsed by minorityite Alan Woods.

The upshot of *Militant's* conference in September, at which Grant was outvoted by 9:1, was to forestall dire predictions of a split with a kind of compromise whereby supporters would continue to operate within the Labour Party, while preparing to stand candidates at the general election.

The spectacle, however, of Grant and Taafe – *Militant's* most senior leaders – handing out mutual accusations of a 'sectarian binge' and 'adaptation to reformism' suggests that the likelihood of a split remains probable. What is more, the position of both remaining in the Labour Party and standing against official candidates is untenable in the medium to long term. As Grant warns, the majority of workers will remain indifferent to a walkout as long as it sees the main task as that of removing the Tories. Its attitude to a 'new' party would be that it can 'paddle its own canoe'. It is indeed likely that the majority of workers, after 12 years of the Tories, will consider that independent *Militant* candidates – in the absence of any profound radicalisation – are splitting the anti-Tory vote. A derisory vote accompanied by further waves of expulsions could turn euphoria rapidly into demoralisation. Given that the turnover of youth supporters is high anyway, the most significant casualties in such an experience – as the SWP and the WRP found to their cost in the Seventies – would be the middle-ranking cadre on which the organisation depends.

The majority's justification for an 'open party' turn rests also on the line that the Labour Party is being transformed into a party not essentially different

from the Democratic Party in the United States. For this to be true, a decisive change in the relationship between the Labour Party and the working class would have to have taken place – and it plainly hasn't. But this justification, which rests on a superficial assessment of the political conjuncture, is possible only because *Militant* has always believed that in Labour's distant past lay 'socialist' traditions – a complete misunderstanding of the nature of reformism, for which 'socialist' phrases have only ever served to cover thoroughly bourgeois politics.

Both sides in this factional struggle make partially correct criticisms of each other. Certainly the Grant faction has made serious adaptations to reformism, but this did not begin yesterday – it has been the common history of the organisation over the past three decades or so. Certainly the Taafe-led majority's arguments in favour of its abrupt 'left' turn are shallow and false.

Both sides accept the essential character of *Militant's* politics – right centrism. Neither side shows any sign of breaking with the long-ingrained rejection of the method embodied in the Transitional Programme. For decades, *Militant* has substituted a range of immediate demands coupled to a wooden repetition of the need for a 'socialist' Labour government – the old division between a minimum and a maximum programme, with a distinct reformist twist.

Without serious consideration of these and other principled considerations, the short cut to the 'open party' can only further disorient the hundreds of supporters who have loyally, if misguidedly, sacrificed to build *Militant* over the years.

The real choice is not between two polar opposites – heads down and stay in at all costs or immediately build a 'mass' independent party. It lies in combining both revolutionary work in the anti-poll tax struggle, the trade unions, among youth, etc, with continuing to fight the Labour bureaucracy in its own domain. Only an honest and loyal discussion both within the tendency and with other Trotskyists can clarify the issues at stake.

SINCE 1957, when the Socialist Workers Party leadership first responded favourably to proposals for reunification with the International Secretariat, Healy had been playing a double game with his US comrades. For, while he was plainly opposed to unity and did his best to obstruct progress towards a merger, he nevertheless failed to mount an open struggle against the SWP. In fact, during discussions with the Americans, Healy always declared his support for their line on reunification. Early in 1960, when Healy held a second meeting in Toronto with Jim Cannon and other SWP leaders, he had agreed with them that the political differences between the two international currents were not sufficient to justify continued separation, and he had endorsed the SWP's proposal to seek unity with the IS on the basis of parity leadership. The only objection Healy raised was the difficulty of persuading the French section of the International Committee to go along with this.¹

However, when a movement towards unity got under way later that year, Healy had second thoughts. In June 1960, SWP leader Joseph Hansen entered into correspondence with an Indian IS supporter, in the course of which he expressed enthusiasm for reunification and dissociated himself from Healy's public polemics against 'Pabloism'. In December, the IS, while retaining its deep hostility to the SLL, began to make overtures to the SWP in the form of two flattering letters from Pierre Frank. A worried Healy immediately wrote to SWP national secretary Farrell Dobbs declaring his opposition to 'the new unity offensive, designed to split the SWP from the SLL'.² And in January 1961, the SLL sent off a long letter to that month's SWP National Committee Plenum, in which Healy for the first time came out openly against reunification. 'It is time to draw to a close the period in which Pabloite revisionism was regarded as a trend within Trotskyism,' the SLL stressed. 'Unless this is done we cannot prepare for the revolutionary struggles now beginning. We want the SWP to go forward with us in this spirit.'³

When the SWP Plenum both endorsed the leadership's lurch towards Castroism and launched a turn towards international reunification, the SLL made another sharp intervention. A second letter took up the 'Pabloite' deviations which had characterised the SWP's regroupment drive in the late 1950s (about which Healy had, of course, remained silent at the time). It argued, in relation to Third World nationalist leaderships, that it was 'not the job of Trotskyists to boost the role of such nationalist leaders' (quietly forgetting Healy's per-

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy

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

PART THIRTEEN

sonal courting of Messali Hadj). And the letter emphatically denied that workers' states could be established in the absence of organs of workers' power (ignoring the fact that, by this criterion, the SLL would be forced to deny the formation of workers' states in Eastern Europe and China).⁴

Despite the inconsistencies of the SLL's political line, Healy's defence of 'orthodoxy' was welcomed as an alternative to the SWP's opportunism by a dissident grouping in the US party. Headed by Tim Wohlforth, James Robertson and Shane Mage, this still inchoate opposition had come into conflict with the SWP leadership over the latter's uncritical attitude towards the Cuban regime, Wohlforth having acted as the sole opponent of the party's pro-Castro line at the January Plenum. From early 1961, the group began corresponding with Healy, and proceeded to organise their faction under his guidance.⁵

lished in the SWP internal bulletin. The SLL was 'off on an Oehlerite binge', Cannon asserted, and its line on Cuba had been adopted for purely factional purposes. 'The breach between us and Gerry is obviously widening,' he wrote. '... In my opinion, Gerry is heading toward disaster and taking his whole organisation with him.'⁶

Healy was not yet ready to break with Cannon, though. In his advice to the SWP minority, which became the Revolutionary Tendency, he urged a long-term perspective of working as a loyal opposition with an orientation towards the SWP's 'proletarian kernel'.⁸ As Wohlforth recalls: 'Healy

matter, he simply excluded Robertson and his supporters by 'reorganising' the tendency.'¹²

A split was thus imposed on the RT, as Wohlforth himself now recognises, 'in typical Cominternist style'.¹³ For what was at issue was not the tactical question of whether it would be counterproductive to openly denounce the SWP as centrist (this characterisation was made in a document intended for circulation only within the RT). The real issue was that Healy's intervention amounted to an ultimatum that, as the price of remaining in the SLL-recognised group, the RT majority would have to renounce their political views.

were equally confused. As Peng Shu-tse pointed out, the SLL leaders could proclaim the necessity of 'uncompromisingly separating ourselves ... from the Pablo gang', while at the same time blithely declaring that they were 'not against unity'.¹⁶ The contradiction was not resolved by Healy's insistence that he would accept reunification on the basis of 'fundamental political agreement', for he had made it perfectly clear that with the 'Pabloites' no such agreement was possible. Yet in August 1962, on the SLL's initiative, the IC proposed the formation of a parity committee with the IS to prepare for reunification, and in September this committee began a series of meetings.¹⁷ Healy's intention was presumably to delay fusion by engaging in a prolonged political discussion. He may even have hoped to attract some dissenting elements from within the IS, for he had earlier expressed the view that there were 'undoubtedly people in Pablo's organisation in different countries who can be won to our position'.¹⁸

But Healy had considerable difficulty in winning anyone to his position on Cuba, which he portrayed as a capitalist state with Castro in the role of a bourgeois Bonaparte. It is hardly surprising that, as Wohlforth reveals, Healy 'did his best to try to avoid a discussion of the class nature of Cuba, feeling quite defensive about his own theory'.¹⁹ When Joseph Hansen attempted to raise the question at an SLL National Committee meeting in February 1962, Healy just ignored him. He preferred to concentrate on such weighty matters as Hansen's refusal to defend him during a confrontation with Isaac Deutscher at Natalia Trotsky's funeral, where Deutscher had accused Healy of 'sectarianism' towards the IS.²⁰ Yet, given the centrality of Cuba in the pre-unification discussions, without a coherent theory on this issue Healy could scarcely hope to hold most of the existing IC sections, still less to attract forces from the IS. Hansen certainly took advantage of the SLL's mistaken line on the Cuban Revolution in order to dismiss the Healyites as 'ultra-left sectarians'.²¹

Later that year, with the aim of putting the Cuban question in its historical context, Wohlforth began work on his 'Theory of Structural Assimilation', which represented a serious attempt to grapple with the theoretical problem of the post-war formation of workers' states. But his efforts were received with 'total lack of interest' on the part of Healy and the SLL leadership. 'I informed him of every step of my work,' Wohlforth recounts, 'and sent him the draft as I produced it. I got no comments. This seemed strange to me because the heart of Healy's critique of the SWP had been his contention that the party had abandoned Marxist theory. Here I was trying to develop an inclusive theory of post-war Stalinism - the very issue which was at the heart of so many of the disputes and splits in our international movement - and Healy

couldn't care less.'²²

By 1963, Healy found himself under severe pressure, with an IC Congress scheduled for April and a majority for unification with the IS a virtual certainty. Worse still, the SWP had dropped its demand for parity leadership, thereby removing the IS's one objection to fusion. In March, however, Nahuel Moreno of the IC's Argentinian section wrote to Healy asking for a deferment of the Congress until July or August. As IC secretary, Healy had until then shown complete contempt for the IC's Latin American affiliates, failing to answer their letters and refusing to publish their theses in the international bulletin,²³ and he had apparently viewed the Argentinians' entry work in the Peronist movement as a variety of Pabloism.²⁴ Now, seizing on Moreno's letter as an opportunity to delay fusion, Healy suddenly developed a deep concern for the Latin Americans' rights. He wrote to the SWP urging that the IC accede to Moreno's request and postpone the Congress.²⁵

But the SWP leaders would have none of it. Demonstrating their own contempt for the international current of which they were part, the Cannonites organised a breakaway meeting of those IC sections favouring unity, and in June 1963 led them into the IS at its 'Seventh World Congress', to form the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. The official IC Congress met in September, attended by the British, French and Hungarian groups - the only sections opposed to unification. The Latin American sections, who opposed the SWP's unprincipled split but themselves favoured unification, broke with the IC shortly afterwards and joined the USec. The end result of Healy's manoeuvring was thus to leave the SLL holding joint ownership with the French of a rump IC, which was isolated from the vast majority of those currents throughout the world claiming adherence to Trotskyism.

To be continued

Notes

1. Letter from Tim Wohlforth, November 16, 1991.
2. 'Deep Entryism' and Pablo's Anti-Unity Offensive, SWP, Education for Socialists, 1978, pp.82, 86, 87.
3. C. Slaughter, ed., *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, vol.3, New Park, 1974, p.49.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.46-55.
5. Excerpts from the correspondence can be found in T. Wohlforth, *What Is Spartacism?*, Labor Publications, New York, 1971, pp.5-9.
6. The reference was to Hugo Oehler, a US Trotskyist who opposed entry into the Socialist Party in 1935, arguing that the maintenance of an independent revolutionary party was an absolute principle.
7. Slaughter, op. cit., pp.71-3.
8. Wohlforth letter.
9. T. Wohlforth, *Memoirs*, unpublished draft, chapter 5, p.20.
10. *Marxist Bulletin* No.1, Spartacist, New York, 1965, p.18.
11. *Ibid.*, No.2, 1965, p.22.
12. *Ibid.*, No.3, 1968, passim.
13. Wohlforth, *Memoirs*, p.32.
14. *Ibid.*, p.31.
15. Slaughter, op. cit., vol.3, pp.236-68; vol.4, pp.76-107.
16. *Ibid.*, vol.3, p.139.
17. *Ibid.*, vol.4, pp.2-6.
18. Healy, Letter to Geoff White, December 20, 1961.
19. Wohlforth letter.
20. SLL National Committee meeting, February 3, 1962, extract from minutes. A heavily edited version of this document can be found in Slaughter, op. cit., vol.3, pp.177-84.
21. *Ibid.*, vol.4, pp.20-71.
22. Wohlforth, *Memoirs*, pp.51-2. 'When I went over to England in 1964,' Wohlforth continues, 'Gerry told me to talk to Cliff Slaughter about my project. Slaughter gave me ten minutes on a bench in a railway station. While he did not disagree with its overall thrust, Slaughter made some vague methodological points. We went ahead in the winter of 1964 and published the document on our own. I never heard another peep from the Healy people about the theory over the next ten years, one way or another.'
23. See Ken Moxham's article in *Workers News* No.33, September 1991.
24. 'Deep Entryism', p.86.
25. Slaughter, op. cit., vol.4, pp.112-14. I am obliged to Tim Wohlforth and Ken Moxham for unpublished material cited in this article.



Fidel Castro



James P. Cannon

This unprecedented challenge by Healy to the SWP leadership - combining as it did sharp polemics against the SWP's politics with the promotion of a pro-SLL tendency within the party - provoked an angry reaction from Cannon. Abandoning his hitherto avuncular attitude towards the British section, in May 1961 Cannon wrote a number of letters severely criticising the SLL, which were then pub-

insisted that the main cadre of the SWP, workers around Dobbs and Cannon, remained revolutionaries and it should be our aim to win them over to our perspectives in time.⁹ So the RT's main document 'In Defence of a Revolutionary Perspective' presented the minority as party patriots, who saw the SWP as still essentially Trotskyist and sought to return it to a consistently revolutionary programme.¹⁰

While this approach was firmly supported by the Wohlforth section of the RT, the current around Robertson adopted a harsher attitude towards the SWP, which they came to regard - not inaccurately - as a 'rightward-moving centrist party'.¹¹ Fearing that the Robertsonites' factionalism would provoke a split with Cannon and Dobbs, in November 1962 Healy drew up a document which all members of the RT were required to sign. This stated that the tendency 'must not make premature characterisations of the leadership of the SWP', and that the majority of this leadership was 'not a finished centrist tendency'. There were, Healy conceded, 'elements of centrism in its thinking and activity, but these do not predominate'. When the majority of the RT refused to bow the knee to Healy on this

Healy had at any rate given notice of the sort of organisational practices he would later employ in his 'own' international.

Healy might have succeeded in postponing a split with Cannon, but he had done so at the cost of dividing and weakening the SWP opposition. Party members were now confronted with the spectacle of two rival pro-SLL groupings, which scarcely gave the impression of political seriousness. Moreover, Healy's increasingly bitter polemics against the SWP leadership cut across the tactical line he had agreed with the 'official' tendency. As Wohlforth observes, it was not easy for his group to argue convincingly that they believed the SWP to be a revolutionary party, when their sponsors in Britain were producing documents such as 'Trotskyism Betrayed - The SWP Accepts the Political Method of Pabloite Revisionism'.¹⁴ This contribution from 1962 was followed up the next year by another, entitled 'Opportunism and Empiricism', in which Cannon and Co were condemned as American pragmatists who had renounced the theory of Marxism.¹⁵

Healy's tactics in relation to international reunification



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FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PALESTINIAN INTIFADA

DOWN WITH THE PEACE TALKS!

THE HEROIC struggle of the Palestinian masses in the Occupied Territories – the Intifada – has continued for four years. Armed only with sticks and stones, the youth have withstood the might of the Israeli state as it attempts to crush their revolt with bullets, clubs and tear gas. Whole villages have been razed to the ground, thousands have been detained without charge or trial, and thousands more have been killed or injured.

In contrast to this fighting spirit, the Palestinian leadership has refused to treat the Intifada as anything more than an adjunct to its international diplomacy. One year into the uprising, in November 1988, the PLO announced its recog-

nition of the state of Israel, throwing out its long-held aim of a democratic, secular state covering the whole of Palestine. At the same time, it declared the existence of an independent state of Palestine in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – a shameful ploy to retain support in the centres of militant resistance to Zionism while it pursued a policy of conciliation with Washington and Tel Aviv.

By 1990, major shifts in political alignment were taking place on a world scale which were tending to isolate the Palestinians. The crisis and disintegration of Stalinism meant that the PLO and various Arab regimes could no longer rely on that source for aid, however limited and con-

By Ian Harrison and Philip Marchant

ditional, or as a trading partner and supplier of arms. In Iran, the 'pragmatists' were attempting to resolve the country's economic problems by re-establishing connections with the world market – a task which meant placating the West and curbing the power of the fundamentalists.

The arrival of the Gulf War, therefore, only accelerated a process of accommodation to imperialism that was already in train. But while the leaders of Syria, Iran and other former enemies of Israel were persuaded to either join the anti-Iraq coalition or remain 'neutral', it was only partly moti-

vated by a desire to improve relations with the US. Their main fear was that if Saddam were not defeated, he would emerge from the war greatly strengthened, with the real possibility of turning Iraq into a regional superpower. If the Middle East was to be stabilised to make it safe for long-term imperialist exploitation, these leaders had to be able to sell the deal at home – they had to be offered concrete evidence that the Palestinian question was being addressed. This they could employ to defuse the anger of the masses, which had erupted during the war in pro-Palestinian, anti-

imperialist demonstrations in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and elsewhere, and thereby bolster their own reactionary regimes.

The shift in US policy also reflected a belated coming to terms with the fact that the instability of the region was in large part due to the existence of several million stateless but defiant Palestinians, still with a distinct voice over 40 years after the creation of Israel and as committed to their self-determination as ever. Once this was accepted, and some form of compromise version of Palestinian statehood became desirable, the main stumbling block was the intransigence of the Zionists. Thus, pressure began to be exerted on Israel to come to the conference table, most notably through the threat to withhold credits. The continued financial underpinning of the country – amounting to \$50 billion since 1948 – was increasingly seen as throwing good money after bad.

But the Middle East peace conference which began in Madrid in October is a trap. At best, it can only lead to the setting up of bantustan-style Palestinian statelets in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. The price that Arafat and the Palestinian middle class are prepared to pay for a secure base in which to realise their bourgeois aspirations is to concede the greater part of the area seized in 1948, as well as the entire UN-conferred territory of 1947. Such an outcome to the 'peace process' will only serve to legitimise the state of Israel and set the seal on the betrayal of Palestinian self-determination.

Whether the Israeli government will now agree to this limited Palestinian 'autonomy' – essentially its own proposal of May 1989 – is by no means certain. The delay in the resumption of the conference, scheduled to take place in Washington from December 4 onwards, was caused by the absence of the Israeli delegation. One Israeli official explained the hold-up as a tactic to draw out discussions until the election of a more right-wing government in Tel Aviv, adding: 'There's always the possibility that somebody on the Arab side will do some-

thing crazy.' Clearly, what the Shamir government would most like to see is the complete break-down of the talks, preferably under conditions where the Palestinians could be blamed and the US obliged to relax the pressure. As for the PLO, it is anxious to be seen to be making the initiative for peace – both to impress the imperialists and to wrest back the leadership of the Intifada from the fundamentalists.

Meanwhile, a constant stream of anti-Arab chauvinism has poured out of the Likud and the smaller right-wing parties, backed up by continued, high-profile land seizures in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The 1,000th victim of the Israeli Defence Forces during the Intifada, 15-year-old Sufyan Nasr al-Din, was shot on a demonstration in support of the peace talks, and a renewed campaign of terror in south Lebanon has effectively extended the Israeli-occupied zone. There can be no peace with Zionism and its imperialist and Stalinist backers.

The only ally of the Palestinian masses in the Middle East is the working class. In their own struggle to defend jobs and living standards, Jewish workers in Israel must establish a fighting alliance with the Palestinians. Jewish and Arab workers must campaign together for the following: the release of all political prisoners; an end to the settlements; the right of return for all Palestinians; the legalisation of Palestinian political parties and workers' organisations; free elections to all municipal authorities; the end of martial law and the withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories and south Lebanon.

The rights of the Palestinians cannot be guaranteed by a combination of imperialists, Zionists and Arab nationalists any more than the demand for self-determination can be answered by the Balkanisation of the region and the creation of Palestinian bantustans. Only a socialist state of Palestinian and Jewish workers can meet the needs of the situation. To fight for this, it is necessary for Palestinian and Jewish workers to build a Trotskyist party, as part of a reformed Fourth International.

UNITED STATES

Abortion rights under attack

By Lizzy Ali and Julie Wilson

THE APPOINTMENT of Judge Clarence Thomas has strengthened the United States Supreme Court's right-wing majority. The scene is now set for the court to overturn its historic 1973 judgement in the Roe v Wade case, which established that women had the constitutional right to abortion.

In May this year, Bush appointee Justice David Souter tipped the balance in the Supreme Court's five to four decision preventing federally-funded clinics from 'promoting' abortion. This ruling bans staff at such clinics – already forbidden to use public funds to carry out terminations – from giving pregnant women any abortion advice.

Hard on the heels of the judgement, a Louisiana state law was passed banning almost all abortions. A Pennsylvania state law which forces a woman seeking an abortion to get her husband's permission (even if she is divorced) has been referred to the Supreme Court. This offensive against abortion rights has the backing of both the Bush administration and the Republican Party, whose 1984 and 1988 election platforms stated that 'the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed' – in other words, abortion is murder. The only proposed exemptions from the ban would be rape victims or women whose lives would be endangered by proceeding with the pregnancy.

The respectable anti-abortionists on the Supreme Court, in Congress, the churches and the state legislatures are backed by a right-wing populist movement. 'Operation Rescue' pioneered the blockading (and, in some cases, bombing) of clinics. Bush made his attitude towards such activities clear in August, when the administration publicly rebuked a local judge in Wichita, Kansas, who had ordered US marshals to stop 'pro-life' demonstrators from besieging clinics. The 'rights' of those harassing and threatening women and health



Young women on a pro-choice march in San Francisco

staff were upheld.

Younger women have been a particular target of the anti-abortion campaign. In Massachusetts earlier this year, a joint Senate-House committee on the judiciary rejected a Bill lowering the age of consent for abortions from 18 to 16, and instead approved a Bill which would allow parents to present evidence to a judge opposing their daughter's right to have an abortion.

In Minnesota, after a law was passed requiring parental consent for women under 18 seeking abortions, the number of young women seeking abortions in the more dangerous mid-term period of pregnancy increased sharply. The first Alabama teenager to contest parental consent in court failed. Commenting on his ruling in the case, the judge admitted that he 'based it on her looks'.

The statistics on abortion show the enormous impact that an overturn of the Roe v Wade ruling would have. There are currently 1,600,000 abortions performed in the

United States each year – just over a quarter of all pregnancies. Although abortion is an issue which necessarily affects all women, it is working class and young women who would be hardest hit by the removal of their right to choose. Wealthier women would resort to private doctors or travel to other countries. But for poorer women, it means the dangers of back-street abortionists, self-abortion, or the burden of bringing up a child who is either unwanted or whom they are unable to support economically.

For all these reasons, abortion must be seen not only as a woman's right to control her own fertility, but as a class issue which the workers' movement must champion and consistently defend.

The main 'pro-choice' movements – The National Abortion Rights Action League, The National Organisation for Women and Planned Parenthood – are predominantly middle class coalitions remote from the needs of, and not interested in mobi-

lising, working class women. Their leaders look to a Democratic Party president to safeguard abortion rights, or even a 'pro-choice' Republican. The reactionary backlash against abortion is part of a larger assault on democratic rights – union-busting, attacks on welfare rights, growing homelessness and unemployment. One thing is certain: the Democrats must not be entrusted with the job of defending abortion rights any more than defending workers' rights in general. Only class action will defend and develop the gains of the past.

Workers should mobilise against the blockade of clinics and mount a campaign drawing in all oppressed sections of society to demand:

- Free publicly-funded abortion on demand.
- A programme of sex education and contraceptive advice in all schools and colleges.
- Abolition of parental consent and age restrictions.
- A comprehensive national health service for all, free at the point of use.

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AFRICA IN TURMOIL

THE LAST few years have seen a new wave of mass struggles sweeping across the African continent. The downtrodden masses have risen up to challenge the ruthless dictatorships that, with the backing of imperialism, have kept them in perpetual slavery. No more are they prepared to bear the burden imposed on them by the worldwide crisis of capitalism, least of all in a continent where more than half of the population lives in abject poverty.

Unevenness in the world capitalist system has manifested itself very sharply in Africa. If the period since the Second World War has seen some form of economic growth and stability in imperialist countries, and even some semi-colonies, this has been less so in Africa. Today, even the oil producing countries of Africa are staggering under the economic crisis. While the mid-80s in Europe and America only signalled deeper forms of capitalist crisis compared to previous periods, in Africa catastrophic results were already obvious in the form of millions dying of hunger, malnutrition and related diseases.

Evidence of this economic crisis can be seen in almost every African country: a steady decline in both industrial and agricultural production, a huge foreign debt, a fall in national income and a high level of unemployment. All this makes the present song of imperialism about the victory of the 'market' over 'socialism' farcical.

Expectations of economic improvement and enthusiasm for political democracy at the gaining of national independence rapidly gave way to despair. Social and political life came under heavy policing by corrupt cliques of rulers, who appropriated the declining wealth of these countries and forced the masses to sacrifice more and more for the benefit of imperialist powers. The only form of political life known was the internal struggle within these bureaucratic cliques, as different fractions pursued their interests through the state apparatuses. Hence, coups were the order of the day. It was only through authoritarian forms of rule that the imperialists could secure their interests, and the African bourgeoisies and their political-military representatives survive.

However, this meant that the social base of these regimes narrowed day by day. Dictatorial measures could not suppress the masses forever, particularly where economies continued to decline. A volcano was also being prepared by the increasing urbanisation of rural youth resulting from landlessness. As the IMF and other agencies continued to insist on austerity measures, leading, among other things, to massive cuts in health and education spending, job losses and wage freezes, the masses began to take action. Workers, students and teachers went on strike, and there were immediate calls for the introduction of multi-party democracy. Strikes, school boycotts and street demonstrations, sometimes in violent confrontation

with the police and army, soon became common forms of protest against these regimes.

The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe also played its role as it demonstrated that crisis-ridden dictatorships could be overthrown through the strong resolve of the masses. It also directly undermined certain regimes masquerading as 'Marxist-Leninist', as they no longer got political, economic and military support from Eastern Europe. On the other hand, imperialism had to retreat from openly backing its puppets and advise them to introduce political reforms. This was an attempt to exploit illusions in capitalism and 'democracy' among the masses of Eastern Europe, and ensure that 'friendly', pseudo-democratic regimes were established in Africa as the best way of preserving imperialist interests in a politically unstable climate.

Dictatorships followed one another in donning the mask of bourgeois democracy, by introducing limited democratic reforms from above. A common feature of these changes was the appointment by autocrats in power of prime ministers, or commissions of hand-picked individuals to draft new constitutions. Sometimes, attempts at bribing and co-opting the opposition forces or their leaders were made.

THE SO-CALLED 'movements for multi-party democracy' are not different in substance from the present rulers. Composed of disgruntled elements of the old order who have for one reason or another fallen out with the dictators, bourgeois forces that see the present rulers as digging too much into the national coffers, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals with avowedly pro-imperialist policies, and certain army and police officers with colonial training, they deserve no support from the working class, poor peasants, students and lower sections of the urban petty-bourgeoisie. Where the masses have illusions in these forces, for example in Zambia, Zaire and various West African countries, the struggle for workers' political and organisational independence is crucial.

So far, imperialism is happy with these changes: the oppositionists are no threat either! However, the working class is flexing its muscles, even if without a conscious leadership. Workers' strikes and demonstrations in the former French colonies were vital in obtaining political concessions. Mass demonstrations in Zaire have undoubtedly

Long-standing dictatorships in Africa are under growing pressure to introduce 'multi-party democracies'. Jabu Masilela looks at the background to the current struggles and outlines an independent course for African workers

weakened the grip of Mobutu Sese Seko. In Madagascar, the working class recently challenged the regime with a three-week general strike. The Zambian miners played no small part in the past in forcing the United National Independence Party to drop some of the IMF's austerity measures. It is this independent activity of the working class and the possibility of this class leading all the downtrodden masses behind its revolutionary banner that frightens the imperialists and the African bourgeoisies.

measures.

The greatest task facing revolutionaries in Africa is to build Trotskyist parties to enable the working class to struggle consciously for power, drawing all the oppressed masses behind it. The current political re-awakening provides important opportunities for revolutionary propaganda and agitation. Stalinism and 'revolutionary nationalism' have already demonstrated their bankruptcy by betraying the independence expectations of the masses. Social democra-



Ethiopian famine victims, 1986

In the absence of revolutionary parties of the African working class, there is a strong possibility that opposition forces or compromise coalitions will come to power. This can only prolong the economic crisis, and will ultimately lead to more political instability and sharp struggles. The new popular front government of Zambia cannot last very long without disintegrating into its different class components. Whatever hotchpotch regimes do emerge in Madagascar, Zaire, West Africa, Somalia, etc., and those already in place in Ethiopia and Eritrea, cannot look forward to a long reign. Neither can the present intransigent rulers of Kenya, Zimbabwe, etc., hope that mass protests will continue to be kept in check by repressive

cy and syndicalism never had a stronghold in Africa and the present situation does not favour them. Trotskyists must intervene vigorously and help forge revolutionary working class parties to advance the masses towards victory.

However, despite the political resurgence of the African working class, the situation is very uneven and contradictory, and needs careful assessment. The downfall of the East European deformed workers' states, the severe crisis affecting others, and above all the disintegration of the Soviet Union are a defeat for the working class internationally. In Western Europe, not only is the level of class struggle very low, but there is a wave of political reaction spreading

through most countries. While this cannot, as yet, be described as victorious, it certainly imposes difficulties on revolutionaries attempting to build genuine communist parties and forge working class unity irrespective of nationality. Right-wing attacks on immigrants and oppressed minorities cannot be wished away as activities confined to small lunatic groups. They are an important feature of the present period, and reflect the fact that the working class is in retreat.

THE GOALS of US imperialism in southern Africa are being realised step by step. First, there was the withdrawal of Cubans from Angola; second, the Namibian sell-out; third, the final accommodation of the MPLA and FRELIMO to UNITA and RENAMO respectively; fourth, the ousting or political retreat of other self-styled 'Marxist-Leninist' regimes such as Ethiopia and Benin; and fifth, there exists the very great possibility of a sell-out, negotiated settlement in South Africa.

This is a period when social democracy, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism, syndicalism and Stalinism are moving rapidly to the right, the latter even dissolving into various openly bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces. The courageous activities of the African working class and peasantry are taking place in this context, after decades in which all political life was crushed under the jackboot. It is no accident that the opposition groupings which are emerging at the head of the angry masses are completely different to the 'revolutionary nationalists' of the national liberation days. They can better be compared to the openly bourgeois, right-wing nationalists of the Kenyatta type, or even the Bandas and Moïs, only differing from these latter tyrants in their pseudo-democratic ideals.

Under such conditions the masses will naturally have democratic prejudices. Though the pro-imperialist bourgeois leaders cannot offer democracy, let alone economic improvements, the masses will still support them so long as they oppose the present rulers. These leaders will do all they can to divert the masses from the path of genuine freedom. From Chiluba in Zambia to Tshisekedi in Zaire, and throughout the West African countries, the sound of populist demagoguery can be heard.

However, the masses have become active not because of benevolence on the part of the rulers but because their lives have deteriorated to intolerable levels. The present struggles are organic and cannot easily be crushed. The limited reforms being implemented are living proof of the potential these struggles have. A material basis for revolutionary propaganda, agitation and organisation is emerging. Revolutionaries in Africa will have to utilise it to the max-

imum, especially in a period when revolutionary forces are not only small but also swimming against the stream worldwide.

PROGRAMMES of action should be formulated and discussed within revolutionary circles and the mass movement. While the attitude towards specific questions will differ from country to country, there can be no doubt about the centrality of the debt crisis and the national and agrarian questions for most of Africa. This by no means implies the postponement of struggles over more immediate issues. Wage freezes, job losses and cuts in health and education brought the masses onto the streets. It was bread and butter issues that led to the raising of outright political demands. An elaboration of these and other questions can lay the basis for fully fledged action programmes for the political mobilisation and organisation of the working class and its allies.

Concretely, the imperialist debt must be repudiated; foreign and big national capital must be expropriated without compensation and placed under workers' control; capitalist farms must be expropriated by the rural workers; an alliance must be formed between the working class and the poorer peasantry, so that the agrarian question can be solved in their interests; poor peasants must seize capitalist-owned land and forge links with rural workers with the aim of abolishing hunger and famine; there must be free and compulsory education for all; a sliding scale of hours and wages should be raised immediately to combat job cuts and pay freezes; nationalisation of the building and drug industries under workers' control must be fought for to put an end to appalling housing conditions and the diseases they give rise to.

For these burning questions to be really solved, the working class and its allies must reject compromises with the present rulers over political democracy. They should strive to convene, on their own terms and arms in hand, sovereign revolutionary structures that will act under their discipline. Committees of action must mobilise the masses in both the urban and rural areas, and even draw rank-and-file soldiers into their work. Trade unions independent of the bourgeois opposition leaders must be built. The struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat should also, depending on concrete conditions, raise the slogan of workers', or workers' and peasants', governments. On this basis, major strides can be made towards the building of Trotskyist (genuine communist) parties. In much of Africa, the question is no longer 'socialism or barbarism', but how do we escape the present, capitalist caused, barbarism and place ourselves firmly on the road to a world federation of socialist states.