

Workers News



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Jobs massacre and wage cuts

NO MORE TUC TIME-WASTING!

IN THE two months since the announcement of savage pit closures, the TUC has done everything possible to undermine solidarity with the miners and has given the Tories time to repair the divisions in their own ranks.

Instead of capitalising on the 250,000-strong march on October 25 and calling for industrial action, the TUC launched its 'Campaign for Jobs and Recovery'. This is a transparent diversion from any fight to defend the jobs of miners or any other section of workers. So far, it has amounted to a series of token demonstrations and an appeal for all-party support to protect 'British' coal. Where days of action have been fought for which involve striking, it has been in the teeth of opposition from the TUC.

In part, the TUC has been assisted by the confused character of the movement which suddenly developed in October. The extent of middle class support for the miners was taken by most of the left as an unconditionally 'good thing'. While it is certainly true that the Tories' middle class base had fractured, it is a measure of the cross-class nature of that movement that the *Daily Express* could urge its readers to march alongside the miners.

What had happened was that for an instant the fear of suburban Britain over the fate of the economy, interest rates, house prices, Maastricht and general government disarray had intersected with the fate of the miners - with the bizarre result that many of those who had bitterly opposed the miners in 1984-85 now sympathised with the plight of the remaining pit communities. The virtual extinction of coal mining seemed to symbolise the economic decline of Britain.

Of course, we are not suggesting that support from professional people should have been rejected. The key question was - and is - to mobilise the movement behind fighting demands for action which would dispel any illusions in wet Tory and Liberal support. Workers News considers that the demand for an indefinite general strike was premature (see page two) and took no account of the necessary steps towards such a decisive confrontation. Under the conditions, however, a 24-hour general strike would be a major step forward and a lever towards all-out action.

After the October 25 demonstration, there were high hopes of a further TUC day of action. In the event, the TUC designated December 9 'National Recovery Day' and advised trade unionists to meet with their employers to ask for 'assurances' on redundancies, investment, training and partnership with the trade unions, and information on the impact of the autumn statement. The pinnacle of this ridiculous exercise was supposed to be a

By Richard Price

call on each employer to support the TUC's 'Programme for National Recovery'. Even full-time officials, hardened to class collaboration, found this embarrassing. To cap it all, the TUC did not even organise a demonstration to greet the miners who marched from Scotland - issuing instead a joint appeal with the STUC for lights to be turned off for five minutes on December 19.

Seeing no prospect of the TUC organising solidarity action, and facing the loss of redundancy payments, several thousand miners accepted British Coal's terms. In the weeks running up to the publication of the energy policy review, it is vital that remaining miners, their families and other workers in the front line have a clear perspective on how to carry the fight forward.

RELY ON YOUR OWN STRENGTH: Don't rely on Tory back-bench rebellions, empty protests or import controls. Fight for joint industrial action with rail and power workers.

OCCUPY THE PITHEADS, HOSPITALS AND FACTORIES UNDER THREAT OF CLOSURE: Make occupations the focus for mobilising the local working class and demand the TUC and Labour leaders support them.

BUILD A PUBLIC-SECTOR ALLIANCE TO SMASH THE TORY 1.5 PER CENT PAY LIMIT AND FIGHT CUTS IN JOBS AND SERVICES: Call for emergency conferences and organise delegate-based joint committees of teachers, civil servants, health, transport and post office workers at every level to build industrial action.

FIGHT PRIVATISATION: The threat is now posed directly to the railways. It is essential that members of RMT, ASLEF and TSSA learn from previous failures to fight privatisation. Campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion without industrial action will fail. Rail workers have natural allies among bus workers already fighting deregulation and London Underground workers faced with redundancies.

DON'T TRUST YOUR LEADERS!: A ballot in favour of strike action on London Underground was ignored by RMT leader Jimmy Knapp. Demands from the capital's health workers for action to defeat the proposed hospital closures have been ignored. A call from Ford workers to be balloted for industrial action has been blocked by the AEEU bureaucracy. This does not



The rally in Liverpool on November 17 in support of the miners

mean we stop making demands on the trade union leaders, but that rank-and-file opposition must be organised.

NO MORE TIME-WASTING, CALL A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE!: While we support all local initiatives and regional days of action, these are not enough. ASLEF leader Derek Fullick has called for a rolling programme of one-day national stoppages; Arthur Scargill and Dennis Skinner for a day of action. Workers News is under no illusion that a 24-hour general strike would in itself solve the problems facing workers, but it would open the way for further action. At present, with no major strikes under way, demands for an indefinite general strike can be shrugged off by the TUC leaders. They would find it much harder to rubbish demands for an immediate 24-hour general strike.

FIGHT THE LABOUR RIGHT WING: To be successful, industrial action must be translated into political strength. Labour must be forced to support all industrial action against Tory attacks. The Tories must be driven from office and replaced by a Labour government which fights on behalf of the working class.

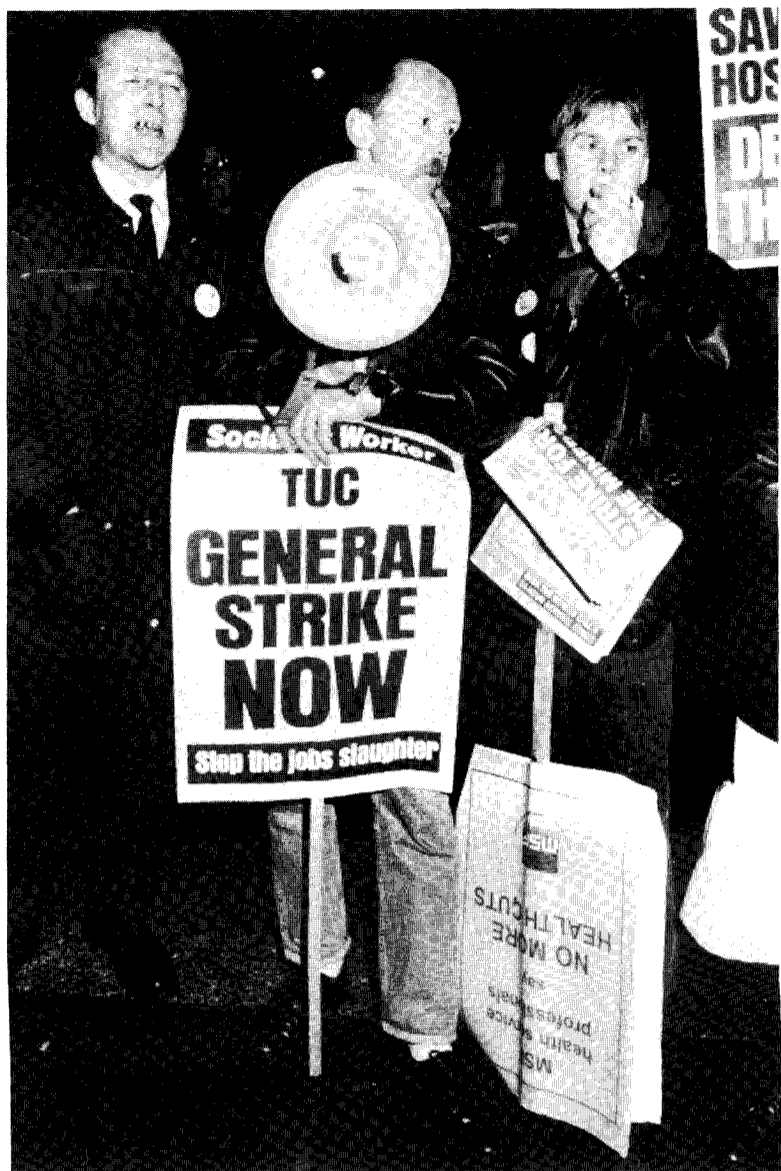
Militant import controls?

THERE ARE clear indications that Militant is ditching yet another of its traditional positions - opposition to import controls. Militant supporters on Merseyside have been campaigning against plans to build a new coal terminal on Gladstone dock. They have argued, along with many in the local community, that coal dust represents a serious health hazard. So far, so good.

But reports in *Militant* on December 4 and 11 make it clear that the valid environmental argument has been linked to reactionary calls to ban coal imports, thereby putting foreign miners out of work. In Bristol, Militant supporters have called for Colombian and South African coal to be banned. Aware that there are problems with this latest turn, the paper hastens to add: 'Bristol Militant supporters don't support import controls, which set workers in one country against those in another, but these planned coal imports are not an import control issue [!]. If we didn't oppose them then we'd be supporting the racist regime of South Africa and enforced child labour in Colombia.' Yet in the same breath, banning such imports is presented as a way to defend jobs.

Such reasoning is dangerous nonsense. If the real issue is miners' jobs, then why not call for all foreign manufactured goods in industries currently under threat to be banned? (This would, of course, trigger an immediate trade war of awesome proportions.) If the main question is child labour, then why not keep out imports from India and virtually every other 'third world' country? Why this sudden discovery of the harmful effects of capitalism?

The answers lie not in mining conditions in South Africa and Colombia, but in Militant's adaptation to the programme of Benn, Skinner and that section of the Labour left which still supports a 'siege economy'. Of course, if there was a miners' strike, then it would be entirely correct to oppose scab coal imports. But Militant is bending to the pressure of the quick-fix left MPs, who think that jobs can be defended not by workers' action, but by economic nationalism.



The SWP and the general strike

By Ian Harrison

FOR TWO heady weeks in October, the Socialist Workers Party put out the call for a general strike. SWP members reportedly put up 150,000 posters and distributed 30,000 stickers. But no sooner had this heroic, if abrupt, turn been carried out, than any mention of a general strike was dropped from the pages of *Socialist Worker* without explanation and it was back to the staple diet of 'solidarity', 'building to win', etc. This episode is highly instructive because it contains all the hallmarks of the SWP's politics – its populism, its frantic desire to follow every perceived 'mood' going, its pragmatism, and its opportunism mixed with a dash of ultra-leftism.

The SWP's initial response to the announcement of pit closures carried no hint of the call for a general strike. Instead, while recognising it would 'not be easy to convince miners to take industrial action', the SWP called for 'united action by miners, rail and power station workers' (SW, October 17). But this edition of *Socialist Worker* had barely hit the streets when the SWP detected sufficient 'anger' to raise the stakes by organising a lobby of the TUC and demanding it call a general strike.

This was in itself noteworthy given that the SWP had never raised the demand throughout the miners' strike, or indeed within the living memory of most SWP members. In 1984-85, it managed to both patronise and insult miners' fighting capacities by making its main policy 'Build the pickets', and restricting its horizons to the collection of money and food. Traditionally, the SWP has dismissed raising demands on the TUC and Labour Party leaderships as at best a waste of time, and at worst a capitulation to the bureaucracy.

On the strength of successful paper sales and in anticipation of the TUC demonstration on October 21, a four-page special issue was rushed out. It was notable for trying to be all things to all people. While the front page proclaimed 'All out for the miners' march on parliament', the general strike demand was tucked away on pages two and three. No serious criticism was made of the TUC, while Arthur Scargill, who had by now done a deal with the general council to abide by its call for a symbolic 'campaign' without industrial action, was positively boosted. The call for a general strike was based entirely on an overheated estimation of 'mood', 'anger' and 'revolt' – without any assessment of workers' preparedness to immediately carry out what Trotsky described as the highest form of class struggle short of an armed insurrection.

What strategic goal did the SWP set the general strike? The answer is not one but several, and all of them reformist. To coin a phrase, you pays your money and you takes your choice. It could be to 'Sack Major, not the miners' (SWP placard), or to 'drive the government from office' (SW, October 31); but it could also be to force a government U-turn on health cuts (SWP members at a London NHS conference on October 31). As to what would replace a Tory government, *Socialist Worker* remained silent. (At least all 40 members of the WRP/*News Line* had the courage of their mad convictions and called for a workers' revolutionary government!)

Had the SWP posed the question of the general strike in a revolutionary way, it would have advocated the building of rank-and-file opposition to the bureaucracy, from strike

the SWP had recruited 1,000 new members in the previous three weeks.

This is a 'perspective' drawn not from objective reality but from the group psychology of the SWP. Having benefited from the crises of its main rivals – the IMG/Socialist League, the WRP and more recently Militant – the SWP has achieved its stated goal of 'hegemony' on the left. In doing so, however, its gains have been relatively modest, and modelled increasingly on Gerry Healy-style 'mass recruitment' on a minimal political basis. This will only lead to an ever-greater turnover of members, and so it is necessary to sustain the momentum with morale-boosting injections. Underlying the triumphalist rhetoric, however, is pessimism, expressed by SWP members bemoaning the fact that they haven't been able to get action off the ground in their workplaces and industries. In the NHS, SWP members supplemented calls for a general strike with a candlelight vigil – on the grounds that health workers were not prepared to strike.

The SWP's flirtation with the general strike slogan was based on a false perspective from start to finish. It mistook the TUC's massive demonstrations on October 21 and 25 as a movement directly towards a general strike. It thought that key sectors of industrial workers were ready to take action without any intervening stages, and refused to grapple with the contradictory elements of a movement generated not by rising class militancy, but by economic and governmental crisis. Consequently, the SWP dismissed the demand for a 24-hour stoppage, which could have been a powerful lever towards a general strike and a valuable means of estimating the readiness of workers to take wider action.

Instead, the SWP was left clutching its general strike petitions. It had taken up a 'demand too far' and didn't know what to do with it. Rather than undertake the patient work of developing rank-and-file opposition in the unions and seriously fighting for action, it recruited some members – and ran.

EDITORIAL

Signs of a revival?

THE PRESENT world recession is already one of the longest on record, and if its effects have been less catastrophic than the slump of the Thirties, it has nonetheless been accompanied by wide-ranging political changes. The much heralded 'new world order' has not been achieved in anything other than a military-strategic sense. Far from creating great opportunities for imperialism, the economies of the former workers' states for the most part lie in ruins, with few avenues for profitable investment.

For German imperialism, the destruction of East Germany was a political necessity. In economic terms, however, it has proved to be a millstone around the neck not only of Germany, but of western European capitalism as a whole. High German interest rates to offset the overheads of reunification are a major barrier to any recovery in the short term.

For governments in almost all 'advanced' countries, the political consequence of recession has been a decline in support not seen since the early to mid Seventies. The fall of the Republicans after 12 years in America, the extreme unpopularity of the Tories in Britain and Mitterrand's 'Socialists' in France, the defeat of the Canadian government in the recent referendum on the future of Quebec, electoral reverses for both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael in the Irish elections – to a greater or lesser extent this pattern is repeated in country after country.

Yesterday's certainties have become today's uncertainties. The euphoria of the late Eighties boom has been replaced by desperation in the face of over 30 million unemployed in the 24 OECD countries. The apparently inexorable progress towards European integration has stalled. And while January sees the inauguration of the single European market – 'the free movement of goods, services and labour' – Europe is increasingly fragmenting along national boundaries.

Faced with these challenges, the traditional leaderships of the workers' movement have miserably failed and betrayed. The social democrats have abandoned even modest reform programmes and the Stalinists have disintegrated. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the crisis of the workers' movement has deepened, and that the chief beneficiaries in most cases have been the anti-immigrant demagogues of the far right. Another strand of populism – anti-American, anti-'big government' and anti-EC – is represented by the farmers' movements in several European countries. Any significant revival of the class struggle would narrow the base of the far right and have the prospect of winning important sections of the unemployed and the farmers to the side of the working class.

Only mindless ultra-leftists believe that economic crisis automatically generates mass action by workers. The evidence of the last three years has forcibly demonstrated that this is not the case. However, there have been a number of indications of a turn in the international situation in the past year. Mass strikes have taken place in Italy, Greece and Spain; Germany saw its first important industrial struggles for many years; and massive demonstrations have taken place in Australia. In Britain, despite the fourth Tory election victory, there has been a sea-change in the political situation, although it has yet to translate itself into action.

It used to be said that when America sneezes the rest of the world catches a cold. But one of the consequences of America's relative decline is that Europe is less susceptible to US-led recoveries. The slight upswing in the US economy is unlikely to be immediately reflected in Europe; if anything, Europe and Japan's problems could prolong the recession in the US.

Continuing recession unavoidably means further attacks on jobs and wages on an international scale. By linking their future to the defence of all minorities under attack, workers can build on the signs of change in 1992 and take advantage of capitalism's political disarray. The rise of the far right is neither irreversible nor irresistible.

FUNDS

Our expanding international work has meant that more and more of our slender resources have been committed in this direction. At the same time, we urgently need to buy more equipment to assist in the production of *Workers News* and other literature. Please send your donations, small or large, to the **£10,000 Building Fund**, currently at £3,314.63, and don't forget our **£300 Monthly Fund**. Send your donations to: *Workers News*, 1/17 Meredith Street, London EC1R 0AE.

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COSATU and the fight for socialism in South Africa

On the failure of the COSATU leaders to build on the week of action

'There have been shifts in the leadership with regard to leading the class; they have been wavering, wanting a deal and not a full escalation of the campaign. The predominant position was pushing for shortened action and a deal with the bosses, so potentially that had the danger of demobilisation - it's dangerous, very dangerous. . . I think the masses are ready, but the crisis of leadership shows itself very clearly. . .

'To me, the question of questions is to organise the class around concrete issues which will heighten their consciousness and their ability to take power. We have argued that it must not sideline or ignore the possibility of insurrectionary takeover. If the possibilities do exist, we must push for that, but of course it is a struggle within a struggle. There are those who don't wish to rock the boat.'

On the crisis of leadership

Comrade Sipho holds a leading position in an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions. He spoke to Workers News on his recent visit to Europe

'It isn't possible to resolve the leadership crisis in the short term because I think the masses want a resolution to the present stalemate. They want a new government. COSATU's position is that we must fight for the installation of a new, democratic government, and that we will resolve other issues later. So the immediate task is to overthrow the regime - that's the priority. In the short term, there is a sense in which people don't want to create more and more divisions. . . So the two-stage approach has won the day. We are there; we are in that process.'

'Some of us already see the trappings of that strategy - the struggle for socialism has been abandoned. The COSATU congress passed a significant resolution to convene a

conference of the left on socialism, and to work out a programme of action on how to take up the struggle. . . But the meeting has still to be convened. . . It's no longer being spoken about, it's been strategically marginalised. And of course it depends on those within the COSATU ranks who are serious about the struggle for socialism to take it further, to fight to actualise that resolution.'

On arming the masses

'When Mandela visited Boipatong, people called for arms and this call has been heard across the country. . . We from our side have been calling for the formation of workers' militias - we cannot remain sitting ducks. We have lost hundreds and

hundreds of members in the violence: shop stewards in Natal and Transvaal, and active members who have been caught in the cross-fire. We take seriously the question of arming the masses, but you must understand that in the context of the armed struggle being suspended and the negotiations process, these things don't go together. . .

'There must be revolutionary activities to arm the people. . . The struggle for socialism must be put on the agenda of every local, regional and national structure, and there must be arguments around that side by side with arguments for strong people to defend that programme. This means that workers must be able to defend their lives against reactionary forces, against state agents, against vigilantes, and also they must be able to defend their

programme against those who are against the struggle for socialism. . . But you can't expect the ANC leadership to support that. I think the revolutionary sections within the ANC must now stop shouting and do the job - organise people and train them to defend themselves. . .'

On Inkatha

'The people must be armed - to defend themselves and to neutralise Buthelezi pound for pound. At the same time, all attempts to discuss must continue because Buthelezi is taking advantage of the people he's leading. . . The apartheid system has created fertile ground for him in the hostels, where he gets the support of the unemployed migrants. We should not forget that these people have been manipulated by an elite in Natal around Buthelezi. So while we're talking about defence, we're talking about defence against Buthelezi's vigilantes, and in the process trying to win the masses that follow him. . .'

On the struggle against lay-offs

'We have to make it clear to our members that the only way to fight retrenchments is by invoking our right to take strike action. . . It must not only be the struggle of individual affiliates, but of the whole federation. We must have industrial retrenchment committees, where workers in the industrial areas, in the shopping areas, can say "Look, there is no employer who is going to retrench here!". . . There will be a struggle, a hard one; there will be targeted employers. We are using all ways to protect jobs. We're using the law if necessary, but we make it very clear to our members that we are just using that as a way of strengthening our footing, our base to fight. . . Workers are actually challenging the power relations on the shop floor. They are saying that we are suffering because of your mismanagement, so stop and give way to the workers. . .'

On the next stage of the struggle

'We must keep the class mobilised and ready to fight - that's the major task. We must fight demobilisation at all costs, we must be creative, we must make sure that we keep our structures alive. . . The period including the week of action has put the struggle back on the rails - there is no retreat by the class. We have the capacity to push forward. What is important, of course, is a clear programme to keep us on the offensive and to keep us strong.'

China

Setback for China's 'hardliners'

THE 'REFORMIST' wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy in China inflicted a heavy defeat on the 'hardliners' at the 14th party congress in October. Measures were adopted which signal an end to the three-year period of austerity which began in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, and the Yang Shangkun faction was removed from the People's Liberation Army. Although the final composition of the three leading committees of the Communist Party saw casualties from both wings, there was an overall settlement favouring Deng Xiaoping and the pro-restorationists.

The congress approved a series of domestic and foreign policy initiatives which Deng and his supporters have been promoting since January in a bid to accelerate the dismantling of the workers' state and the restoration of capitalism. For ten months, the remnants of the old guard, now minus Chou Enlai's widow, have failed to put forward an alternative programme, leaving little doubt that their resistance to the restoration of capitalism is based solely on self-interest - the defence of bureaucratic privileges.

The only gains made by the old guard were linked to the official pronouncement on Zhao Ziyang, the former general secretary and protégé of Deng, whose pro-restorationist faction was held responsible for the events in May-June 1989. Currently under house arrest in Beijing, Zhao was formally criticised for 'splitting the party' and accused of actions which 'supported the turmoil'. A number of reformists sympathetic to Zhao were removed from positions of leadership. Some of Zhao's closest associates were tried in the run-up to the congress on charges including 'counter-revolutionary incitement' and 'divulging state secrets', and received prison sentences, but Zhao will not be charged with any criminal offence and is being allowed to

retain his party membership.

Policies which further undermine central economic planning and the monopoly of foreign trade were endorsed by the congress. These measures, which began to be implemented throughout the summer months, include the opening of 28 inland cities to foreign investment and the establishment of more Special Economic Zones - in Tibet for instance. The number of free trade areas is being increased and cross-border trade encouraged: the Tumen River Delta on the borders with Russia and South Korea is being developed as a joint free-trade area. State enterprises down to local factory level are being given greater autonomy and made responsible for their own finances, with freedom to trade directly on the world market.



Deng Xiaoping

While the public sector is to remain 'predominant' for the foreseeable future, it will have to compete 'in the market on an equal footing'. The state subsidy on oil will be cut in January; crude oil, currently \$5 a barrel, will be allowed to rise to \$16, closer to world market levels. The two stock exchanges, which list shares from 123 enterprises for domestic and foreign investors, will be retained. Party chairman Jiang Zemin stated that China should 'widen differences in personal income' and accept that while 'effi-

cient enterprises prosper, inefficient ones will be eliminated'. At least 66 enterprises have been declared bankrupt this year, including 15 state-owned firms.

Deng's latest choice to pilot the restorationist policies is Zhu Rongji, who has been elevated from the relative obscurity of the planning bureaucracy to the post of vice-premier without serving on the central committee. He will head a new ministry charged with closing down loss-making state enterprises and curbing the powers of the organisations responsible for exercising the monopoly of foreign trade. Another blow aimed at weakening resistance to the restoration process was the decision to abolish the Central Advisory Commission.

Behind all the rhetoric about 'socialism built on Chinese characteristics' and 'socialist market economics', the bureaucracy is working in ever-closer harmony with imperialism. Deng's campaign to speed up restoration has been accompanied by an intensification of diplomatic activity during the course of the year. Relations have been established with Israel and South Korea, and overtures made to South Africa. A number of new bilateral trading agreements have been struck and the flow of capital into China has increased. The Stalinists' favoured economic models are the autocratic regimes of the 'Four Dragons' - Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The most significant investments so far are \$6.5 billion from the Chinese capitalists in Hong Kong and \$4 billion from those in Taiwan.

The congress ruled out any question of legalising other political parties. Chinese security police arrested 20 people earlier in the year after they had attempted to establish the Socialist Democratic Party of China. But in a bid to woo intellectuals, leading hardliners were removed from posts in the official press and cultural organisa-

tions, and a 'thaw' in arts censorship appears to be under way.

Notwithstanding recent diplomatic shadow boxing between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the Chinese capitalists in Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is clear that relations are going from strength to strength. Indeed, it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that in the province of Guangdong at least, the bureaucracy of a deformed workers' state is administering a thriving imperialist enclave on behalf of the neighbouring Hong Kong bourgeoisie. For the remnants of the old Guomindang in Taiwan and the Hong Kong magnates, the massacre at Tiananmen Square and the subsequent crackdown on workers and students served as proof they could do business with Stalinism.

What is needed to meet these developments, and to defend the interests of workers and the growing army of rural poor, is a workers' party armed with a programme for political revolution. A vital role in establishing such a party must be played by those students and intellectuals who support the gains of the Chinese revolution. Their interests are inextricably bound up with the fate of the working class.



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The political situation in

THE SRI LANKAN political situation has reached a crossroads, but the road ahead is less clear than at any other time in history. The fraud of capitalist democracy since 1977 has been exposed. Not only are there physical assaults on opposition members of parliament, but the ruling party has gone so far as to justify such assaults.

Groups of thugs have been mobilised to attack oppositionists and representatives of the media on sight. The abduction and killing of people has become a way of life. Capitalist mythology with regard to the police and the judiciary has become hollow. People are beginning to realise that the right to change the government through democratic means, enjoyed by the opposition hitherto, has been snatched away completely.

The emergency regulations, which have been in force for a lengthy period of time, have come to be accepted as common law. People have adjusted themselves to an oppressive system and there is political inactivity throughout the country.

Within this situation, the opposition is incapable of providing a viable political alternative. The main party of the opposition, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, offers no political leadership and no alternative to the economic policies of the existing government and its civil war in the north. For this reason the SLFP leadership is unable to mobilise the masses around itself. The internal crisis which is raging within the SLFP is contributing to its further weakening but, more than anything else, it is the confusion among the capitalists who surround the SLFP that has become the most powerful factor in this debacle.

As for the parties of the left, they are not charting a course independent of the bourgeoisie. In particular, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and

A report from Workers Voice (Fourth Internationalist) on the tasks facing revolutionary socialists in Sri Lanka today

the Communist Party of Sri Lanka are openly displaying their tendency to march together in a common front with the SLFP – they have no policies apart from this. Although the Nava Sama Samaja Party (affiliated to the United Secretariat) is making an attempt to place before the working class an independent 'way forward', it has not succeeded in bringing this out as an alternative. So far, it has been unable even to clarify how it is going to fight for this in the working class. Being a party of centrist elements, it is quite natural that such a situation exists in the NSSP – it is a result of the poor theoretical knowledge of its membership. The NSSP has a long way to go before it can develop into a Trotskyist party!

The Lalith and Gamini clique, the agents of imperialism who broke away from the ruling United National Party, have succeeded in consolidating their position among the masses to a certain extent. They are also winning the support of sections of the liberal bourgeoisie. It is clear that they are determined to challenge the government over who should get the backing of the imperialists.

The question is whether there would be sufficient reason for imperialism to withdraw its support from the existing government, which accepts every piece of advice from the World Bank without question. What is important for imperialism is to have a disciplined government in place in Sri Lanka, not necessarily one based on the most lumpen elements of the capi-

talist class. Its purpose is not best served by having the capitalist state in a shambles and a government which destroys the economy. It would also be opposed to any government with a shaky commitment to the principles of capitalism. It is possible that imperialism would prefer a more tactful government than the present one, one which could consolidate the economy. Although the Lalith group has all these advantages, it has been forced to keep silent in the face of the undemocratic onslaught of the government.

Throughout Sri Lanka, there are signs of growing restlessness among sections of the armed forces. This was given clear expression in the aftermath of the funeral of General Kobbekaduwa, one of the nine officers killed in a landmine explosion in the north during August. This is another bad sign – and it is important to consider whether there is a group in the top levels of the military which can win the sympathy of the imperialists.

There are no apparent possibilities today for any left party to create



Military plot? The funeral of Major-General Denzil Kobbekaduwa on August 10 took place in the north, handling the war against the Tamil guerrillas

the ground for political action outside the wishes of the imperialists. This reflects the situation in Sri Lanka in relation to the defeat of the international left movement. We should also recognise the fact that

the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the north have made all the opposition parties inactive through sheer force.

Building a Marxist movement today, therefore, is an uphill struggle.

The roots of capital

ACROSS the world, the capitalist system is in crisis. Half the world starves but food mountains are created to keep prices high. Throughout Europe, millions are without jobs or homes whilst fortunes are squandered in the money markets. In Britain, the Tories have attacked the working class to try and make us pay for the bosses' problems – millions are forced

on to the dole and our kids are given no future.

But must capitalism always produce crises? The leaders of the Labour Party reckon they could manage the system to the benefit of us all. Is this possible? Over 100 years ago, Karl Marx analysed capitalism and provided answers to these very questions.

Marx examined where profit came from and found that only workers, or 'living labour', can produce it, even though this is often hidden in the vastness of the production process. Through this he discovered that there exists an inbuilt tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

Profit, in the form of surplus value (what the bosses keep after paying wages and other production expenses), is achieved by exploiting living labour, not from the use of machines which are known as 'dead labour'. Therefore, the higher the ratio of living labour to dead labour, the higher the rate of profit. But capitalist competition means that continuous attempts are made to reduce the costs of production, a favourite method being investment in new technology and machinery that replaces many workers and increases output. This will give an initial advantage to the first capital (ie, the capitalist or company) to introduce it, as the cheaper production costs will enable it to undercut its rivals in the market.

In other words, it will increase the mass of surplus value (and, of course, the mass of profit as well), but – and here comes the catch – at the same time the rate of profit will actually fall because of the increased ratio of dead labour to living labour. In the short term this will not be of any importance to the capital which has benefited from the process. But new technology does not remain in the hands of a single capital for very long; sooner or later, the rivals will also introduce it to prevent themselves from being undercut. Once the technique has become generalised among all the competitors, then the ratio of dead to living labour (also known as

Jim Dye takes issue with the crisis in the system is due to capitalism could be stabilised

'the organic composition of capital') will rise across the board. Now we can see that not only will the rate of profit have fallen, but also the mass of profit.

This theory of the falling rate of profit was crucial to Marx's explanation of capitalist crises. Although he saw the falling rate of profit as a tendency only, and one with many 'counteracting influences' such as increased exploitation, lowering of wages, colonial profits, etc, he was the first to understand that because of competition – the dynamic motor that powers capitalism – in the long run, a rise in the organic composition of capital will lead to a widespread falling rate of profit and therefore to capitalist crisis.

Crises are actually necessary to the capitalist system because they serve to 'cleanse' it of weak and unprofitable capitals, and thereby reduce over-production. The remaining capitals are usually then able to obtain the machinery of their bankrupt competitors cheaply, which means that the value of the dead labour will be reduced in the production process and the rate of profit can be restored. The increased market share of the survivors, or even the monopoly of one capital, will also increase the mass of profit.

Today this seemingly endless process of boom and slump, that occurred around every ten years in Marx's day, does not work quite so smoothly. Now the individual units of capital are so large (monopolies, nationalised industries, multinationals, etc) that were this law of capitalism to operate freely then not only would massive companies go bust, but whole nations as well. Such a course would make the present world recession look puny.



BRUSSELS, OCTOBER 24: Fifteen thousand enthusiastic and mainly young people joined a European demonstration against fascism organised by Youth Against Racism in Europe. It attracted groups from as far afield as Czechoslovakia and Poland, and was notable for the large numbers of youth from Germany, including coaches from Rostock – the scene of neo-Nazi attacks on immigrant hostel dwellers. However, despite wide trade union sponsorship, there were few union banners.

Although the demonstration was organised through YRE by Militant and its fraternal groups in

Europe, it attracted significant numbers of Turkish workers, as well as a large delegation from the Anti-Fascist Front in Antwerp. Whether this marks a new willingness on the part of Militant to work alongside other organisations remains to be seen, since YRE in Britain is still very much a Militant front organisation and is counterposed to existing anti-racist/anti-fascist groupings.

Members of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency from Belgium, Britain and France took part in the event, achieving a good sale of a special issue of *Revolution Permanente* in French and Flemish.

Sri Lanka



... amidst growing criticism in the armed forces of the way the government is

The primary task in this regard is very similar to that which Marx himself had to fulfil. It is to take the lead in propagating Marxist teachings within the working class. If we succumb to sectarian methods, it

will definitely bring victory to the capitalists. Hence, today we must consider it our duty to refrain from sectarianism, nourish ourselves in Marxism and bring Marxist ideology to the working class.

Capitalist crisis

... who argue that the ongoing under-consumption' and that the bosses paid higher wages

... and the bourgeoisie recoils before the prospect of such instability and economic breakdown. Therefore, every leading capitalist nation now pumps billions into unprofitable enterprises, and the banks have been forced to write off large amounts of 'third world' debt.

But this capitalist intervention in the system results in other problems. If 'market forces' cannot work properly, it becomes almost impossible to restore the profitability of the system; the failure to allow all the weak capitals to go to the wall (as many Tories would dearly love, but cannot afford to let happen) means a never-ending recession, punctuated by only partial and weak booms. Even in the 1930s, the slump was only effectively ended by the Second World War and the resulting mass destruction of the means of production. Understandably, the bourgeoisie has so far held back from using a third world war to solve its problems.

This analysis is vital if we are to be able to combat the view propagated by some bourgeois economists, and echoed by many in the Labour Party (and also by Militant), that the crisis is due mainly to 'under-consumption', i.e., that crises occur because workers cannot buy back all that they produce. This view, popular among reformists, holds that by paying workers higher wages you can increase the consumer market, thereby boosting production and restoring profit. However, there are ultimately limits to the amount of washing machines, televisions, etc., that workers could own, even if they could buy back more of what they produced. It is therefore capitalist over-production that is the real key to understanding the crisis.

This is not to say that under-

consumption is not important, as Marx stressed: 'Since the aim of capital is not to minister to certain wants, but to produce profit, and since it accomplishes this purpose by methods which adapt the mass of production to the scale of production, not vice versa, a rift must continually ensue between the limited dimensions of consumption under capitalism and a production which forever tends to exceed this immanent barrier.' (*Capital*, Vol.3, Moscow 1974, p.256.)

But under-consumption by itself tells us nothing, as Engels explained: 'But unfortunately the under-consumption of the masses, the restriction of the consumption of the masses to what is necessary for their maintenance and reproduction, is not a new phenomenon. It has existed as long as there have been exploiting and exploited classes. . . The under-consumption of the masses is a necessary condition of all forms of society based on exploitation, consequently also of the capitalist form; but it is the capitalist form of production which first gives rise to crises. The under-consumption of the masses is therefore also a prerequisite condition of crises, and plays in them a role that has long been recognised. But it tells us just as little why crises exist today as why they did not exist before.' (*Anti-Duhring*, Moscow 1978, pp.348-9.) In other words, the real cause of capitalist crises is over-production and a falling rate of profit, not under-consumption.

To destroy the beast of capitalism we must attempt to understand it, including the reasons why capitalism cannot survive without crises. In opposition to the Labour leadership's utopian and reactionary dream of being able to control capitalism for the benefit of workers, we recognise that only by its destruction can the poverty, misery and violence it produces be ended. That is why we fight for workers' control of industry and government, and a socialist plan of production to provide for human need and not capitalist greed.

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Students marching in support of the bus workers: 'In the universities and the EAS, we will smash the right wing'

Bus workers betrayed

From K. Nicolaou
in Athens

IT WAS no small thing to witness or take part in the daily demonstrations of thousands of sacked Athens bus workers over the summer months. One of their most popular slogans – and the only one with real meaning – was the call for the leaders of their union to fight to bring down the Mitsotakis government: 'EAS, EAS, get the scum out!'. But the struggle of the bus workers was finally betrayed and defeated.

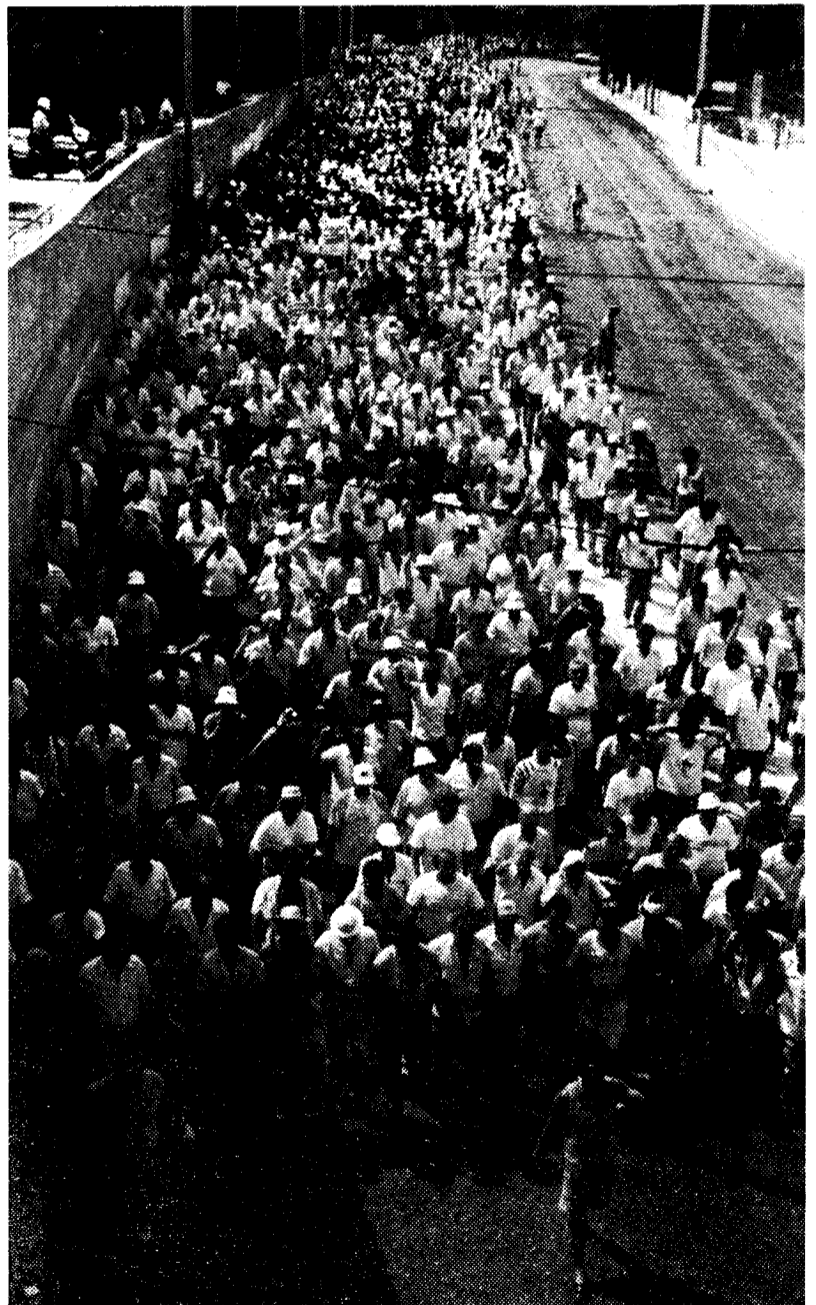
During the dispute, there was a mass picket outside the depot at Votanikos to prevent the buses from being removed. The secretary of EAS, the Communist Party member Stamoulos, was asked why union leaders had attempted to stop the rank and file shouting anti-government slogans and other slogans such as 'Anyone who takes a bus will be dead!'. In reply, Stamoulos argued that if the government was brought down, it would only be replaced by another similar one, and that anyway 'today, we came here to place our demands on the government'.

The same evening, Kollas, the president of EAS and a member of Papandreou's PASOK, appeared on TV and promised that the strikers would not interfere with the removal of buses from the depots. This was eventually carried out by army conscripts guarded by riot police – to the satisfaction of the government and all the other reactionaries. In a demonstration which followed in Omonia square in central Athens, Kollas asked the sacked bus workers not to shout slogans against the government as they did not 'aid the struggle'.

The way in which Kollas has conducted the strike demolishes the myth that PASOK is seeking the downfall of the government through the development of struggle. Papandreou's demand for elections has been used primarily to ensure that Mitsotakis does not fall as a result of the political struggles of the workers' movement. It's well known that many PASOK leaders have talked about a forthcoming 'social explosion', with uncontrollable situations for the government and the status quo.

Kollas and Stamoulos are nothing more than the lap dogs of PASOK and the Stalinist KKE. By joining in a coalition with New Democracy in 1989, PASOK and the KKE helped create the present much-hated administration. Now they are helping Mitsotakis to stay in power.

After publicly condemning every



Sacked bus workers demonstrate in Athens

militant resistance of the workers (in Votanikos, the union leaders blamed 'provocateurs and police agents' when strikers stripped scabs of their clothing) and letting the struggle as a whole degenerate, Kollas and Stamoulos now say they are in favour of the council jointly running the buses with private enterprise. It wasn't long ago that they criticised the government for putting forward the same plan. This is the measure of their struggle against privatisation!

The recent strike-wave revealed the fragility of the political consensus in Greece. The Athens bus workers, despite their leaders, managed to

attract wide attention and support. They were broken and defeated. Next time round, a generalised militant upheaval may squash the plans of Mitsotakis and his 'opposition'.

■ Almost all the 8,000 sacked bus workers joined the demonstration to the US Embassy in Athens on November 13 to mark the anniversary of the fall of the colonels' junta in 1974. Most left-wing organisations marched in a contingent behind a banner which read 'Neither capitalism nor Stalinism – Forward to socialism', and shouted the jointly-agreed slogans 'No soldiers for the Yugoslav war' and 'For a red socialist Balkans'.

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

PART EIGHTEEN

AS THE conflict between the British and French sections of the International Committee escalated towards an open split, Healy responded with his usual combination of evasions, political zig-zags and dishonest polemic. Instead of attempting to clarify the issues involved, Healy pursued his dispute with the OCI on a thoroughly unprincipled basis, for which his repeated appeals to Marxist theory and dialectical materialism merely served as a cover.

At the 1970 SLL summer camp, which took place a few weeks after the IC pre-conference, Healy declared that he was launching a fight 'against all those who display arrogance against theory in this camp and in the International Committee, against sections which think they are superior because they have had some success in struggle, but which refuse to recognise that, with their snobbishness towards Marxist theory, they are leading the International to destruction... I was very shocked at the pre-conference to hear the French comrades argue that Marxist theory does not exist. I declare war on them'.¹

It might have been supposed that this statement, made as it was in front of an OCI delegation attending the camp, was intended to unleash a sharp political struggle inside the IC. Yet, when Pierre Lambert wrote to him asking for an explanation of these remarks, Healy sent back a conciliatory reply, assuring Lambert that he was 'no more and no less in conflict with you and the OCI than at any moment in the past'. Challenged by Lambert to produce a detailed critique of the political document the OCI had presented to the pre-conference, Healy simply prevaricated.²

Healy was at this time more interested in a political dialogue with the 'revisionists' of the United Secretariat than he was with his French comrades. Having for years denounced the hated 'Pabloites' as traitors to the working class, in April 1970 Healy suddenly dispatched a friendly personal note to USec leader Pierre Frank proposing informal talks on 'matters of mutual interest'. As a result, Healy held two meetings with Frank and other USec representatives in Paris the following month. According to Frank's report, Healy stated that the situation had changed since 1963 when the SLL had rejected reunification, and that he now believed 'joint discussions, perhaps a conference, would be useful'. The clear implication was that unity between the IC and the USec had become a practical possibility.³

What was Healy up to? That he genuinely intended to test out the possibility of unity with the 'Pabloites' seems improbable to put it mildly. It is more likely that he saw an opportunity to win some oppositionists from the USec's European sections, which had experienced a substantial growth since 1968. Healy's search for international recruits to reinforce his 'faction' in the IC was given urgency by the fact that the OCI was busy establishing fraternal relations with organisations such as Guillermo Lora's POR in Bolivia. On the eve of the pre-conference, Healy proclaimed a new, Irish section of the IC (acquired by imposing a premature split on the League for a Workers Republic, with whom the SLL was holding discussions) in order to provide himself with

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy



The OCI youth rally at Essen, July 1971

another vote to use against the French.⁴

If Healy hoped to pick up some additional forces from the USec to strengthen his hand against Lambert, he was to be disappointed, for the USec leaders refused to play ball. Publicly they took the line that the IC's 'slandering attacks' on them ruled out any prospect of discussions,⁵ while internally they justified their decision on the grounds that 'Healy's overtures are a manoeuvre'.⁶

Undeterred, in July 1970 Healy published an article in *Workers Press* repeating the proposal for a joint conference.⁷ And he issued another statement in September offering to refrain from public polemics against the USec while discussions took place. Healy went out of his way to play down the political differences between the IC and the USec, openly embracing Mandel, Frank and Co as fellow revolutionaries. 'Both the organisations of the International Committee and the Unified [sic] Secretariat,' he wrote, 'are thrust more and more into the bitterest struggles against the counter-revolutionary forces of Stalinism and social democracy. The building of mass revolutionary parties based on the working class is within our reach in a number of important countries'.⁸

Not only did Healy's appeal fail to move the USec, but it led to a further deterioration in relations with the Lambertists. In late September, the French sent the SLL a letter bitterly criticising Healy's opportunist adaptation to 'Pabloism' and reasserting the principles of IC orthodoxy. Healy's proposal for a joint conference, the letter pointed out, had no basis in the decisions of the IC, which had only

authorised him to approach the USec for discussions. 'As national secretary of the SLL,' the OCI wrote, 'he counterposes his orientation to that of the International Committee - for which, nonetheless, he himself voted. He violates the most elementary rules of the functioning of the IC.' The letter concluded by demanding a recall of the IC pre-conference. Healy, however, didn't even bother to reply.⁹

As had been the case during his break with the SWP in the early 1960s, Healy's readiness to defy his longstanding international partners was undoubtedly related to the growth of his own organisation in Britain. The Tory victory in the June 1970 general election, and the assault on the trade unions embodied in the Heath government's Industrial Relations Bill, produced an upsurge of anger in the working class. This was reflected in a significant expansion in the SLL's influence. In February 1971, a YS anti-Tory rally at Alexandra Palace was attended by over 4,000 people - by far the biggest meeting Healy had yet organised.¹⁰ The conclusion which Healy drew from these developments was made clear at an IC meeting early in 1971. 'It is we who struggle against the Tory government, the centrists and the Stalinists,' he boasted. '... It is in England that the situation is explosive. It is by starting there that the Fourth International will be able to overcome the crisis'.¹¹

The first public rupture between the British and the French took place at the international youth rally which the OCI organised at Essen in July 1971. It was the YS delegation which provoked this open declaration of differences by presenting the rally with a resolution which called for youth to dedicate themselves to the study of Marxist theory, on the basis of the one-sided (and essentially idealist) assertion that political opportunism in the workers' movement was caused by revisionism in the sphere of theory. The 5,000-strong rally overwhelmingly rejected the YS resolution, with the OCI voting against it in company with a number of organisations hostile to the IC.¹²

Although Healy subsequently claimed that the conflict at Essen marked the 'real split' in the IC, this argument seems to have been thought up after the event. In fact a strong OCI delegation attended the SLL summer camp shortly afterwards. And Lambert himself was invited to give the

closing speech to the camp, on the subject of dialectical materialism. He made it clear that what the French rejected was not Marxist theory as such, but the SLL's attempt to separate philosophical issues from the basic practical tasks of tactics, strategy and programme. Lambert was able to underline this point with a quotation from *The German Ideology* in which Marx argued that, with the development of a materialist approach recognising the primacy of practical activity, 'philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence'.¹³

Perhaps this was what finally decided Healy to make a complete break with the French. But the pretext on which the split was carried out was the role of the POR during the right-wing coup in Bolivia in August 1971. Barely had the new military regime been installed than Tim Wohlforth of the US Workers League published, at Healy's instigation, an article holding the Lora leadership of the POR responsible for the Bolivian workers' defeat. In October the OCI, the POR, Michel Varga's Hungarian group and the Mexican section of the IC issued a statement defending Lora and attacking his critics, whereupon Healy immediately announced that a de facto split had taken place in the IC. And despite repeated appeals by the OCI that the differences should be fought out at the forthcoming World Congress, Healy refused to budge.

Although Healy declared the split in the name of a majority of the IC, this claim was questionable to say the least. Indeed, it was one of the products of the loose, decentralised character of the IC (for which Healy himself was mainly to blame) that it was far from clear who the IC's sections actually were! The SLL's split statement was co-signed by the Workers League, the Revolutionary Communist League of Ceylon, the Workers Internationalist League of Greece and the League for a Workers Vanguard of Ireland. But the OCI pointed out that the Greek 'section' no longer existed, as it had split into two organisations back in 1967. The SLL, for its part, having earlier hailed the POR as a member of the IC, now denied that the Bolivian party had ever joined at all.

As for the political issues in dispute, the Healyites' documents criticising the OCI (which were finally produced after the split!) simply added to the

confusion. In addition to the usual abstract dissertations on philosophical method, the SLL now attempted to outline some programmatic differences with the Lambertists, condemning both their syndicalist line during the 1968 general strike and their opportunist interpretation of the united front tactic, which centred on the demand for a joint Socialist-Communist candidate in the 1970 presidential election. But the SLL's critique was extremely light on alternative proposals. Similarly with the POR, the Healyite documents accused Lora of capitulation to a nationalist wing of the Bolivian military, but were almost entirely devoid of suggestions as to what the POR should in fact have done.

Healy - and the SLL intellectuals like Cliff Slaughter who presumably wrote the documents - could pontificate endlessly about 'Marxist theory', but they were incapable of seriously addressing questions of Marxist programme. (The main programmatic statement produced by the SLL in Britain at this time - the 'Charter of Basic Rights' around which the big February 1971 rally was organised - was a jumble of elementary democratic demands and ultimatum calls on a future Labour government to abolish capitalism.)¹⁴ Far from addressing practical issues concerning the class struggle, the purpose of the SLL's anti-OCI polemics was to justify the ludicrous fantasy that Healy and his supporters were the sole embodiment of revolutionary continuity.

In April 1972, Healy tried to give this myth of continuity some organisational basis by holding his 'own' Fourth World Congress of the IC, minus the OCI and its allies. The congress voted to draw up a constitution based on the original statutes of the Fourth International, in order to facilitate 'centralised work and guidance to the sections'.¹⁵ In reality, the IC was now a thoroughly bureaucratic set-up which bore no resemblance to the democratic centralist International envisaged by Trotsky. Indicative of Healy's method of international organisation was his treatment of the Greeks. An exile group in London led by Dimitri Toubanis was adopted by Healy as the official section, while the Karliafis group in Greece - which had made the mistake of raising political disagreements with the SLL - was demoted to the status of a sympathising section.¹⁶ The OCI commented that there was nothing new in all this. 'It is merely a caricature of the Zinovievist conception of the Communist International'.¹⁷

This point is endorsed by Tim Wohlforth. 'At least the old IC,' he writes, 'was an arena for two reasonably sized, and somewhat politically distinct, parties to discuss with each other and negotiate an occasional joint international venture. Now the IC was nothing but a collection of satellites hovering around the Great Guru, Gerry Healy. At least this is what Healy now clearly wished it to be. There was still a bit of sorting out to take place before the IC could be completely purified of deviations, or even potential deviations, from the British model. Healy got the international movement he wanted. The price he had to pay was the impotence of his international worshippers'.¹⁸

To be continued

NOTES

1. *Bulletin of Trotskyist Discussion*, February 1986. (This is a translation of an article by Gerard Bloch which originally appeared in the OCI publication *La Vérité*, April 1972.)
2. *Ibid.*
3. International Marxist Group internal document.
4. See D. Whelan, 'The SLL and Irish Marxism (1959-1973) - a disastrous legacy', reprinted in *Workers News*, September 1989.
5. *Intercontinental Press*, July 27, 1970.
6. Statement by the Secretariat on the Report of Discussions between Healy and the Fourth International, July 7, 1970 (IMG internal document).
7. *Workers Press*, July 7, 1970.
8. *Ibid.*, September 8, 1970.
9. *Bulletin of Trotskyist Discussion*, February 1986.
10. *Workers Press*, February 15, 1971.
11. *Bulletin of Trotskyist Discussion*, February 1986.
12. Material relating to the SLL-OCI split can be found in C. Slaughter, ed., *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, vol. 6, 1975.
13. *Bulletin of Trotskyist Discussion*, February 1986.
14. *Fourth International*, Winter 1970-71.
15. Slaughter, op. cit., p. 108.
16. *Documents of the Workers Vanguard*, Greece, 1979, p. 68.
17. *Bulletin of Trotskyist Discussion*, February 1986.
18. T. Wohlforth, *Memoirs*, unpublished ms.

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Race and class in Liverpool

The two-part series 'Behind the Crisis in Militant' prompted correspondence in the last issue of Workers News.

Graham Campbell replies to some of the points raised

THE accusation of scabbing by black workers in Islington made by Mike Jones in his letter to Workers News is typical of the sectarianism that calls for class unity regardless of the prejudices of white workers and their failure to take up the issue of black oppression. It shows how wary of black self-organisation some socialists really are. But how can we have class unity when black workers are denied access to jobs? How can they play a full part in the organised working class when their oppression is treated so lightly?

I can speak of Islington from personal experience as former secretary of Islington Trades Council. According to NALGO branch secretary and strike-leader Brian Gardner, less than ten per cent of the original 700 strikers have returned to work, and no significant proportion of these are black. Far from scabbing on a 'white man's strike', black members are very active. If anything, they are over-represented on the picket lines now that the strike has escalated to 1,100 workers, including those in the libraries and the council finance department. This would be clear to comrade Jones if he'd visited picket lines in Islington. One of the strikers is a leader of the NALGO Black Members Group, which is supporting the action despite Islington NALGO's

How should we fight for black and white unity?

weakness in fighting the recent spate of racist discriminatory sackings by the council.

Socialists should know that class differences within the black communities in Britain originated in the semi-colonial societies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Tensions between the 'plantocracy' (the descendants of the bourgeois plantation owners), the petty-bourgeois civil servants, the working class and the rural poor are suppressed to some extent by the general oppression experienced here by black and Asian people of all classes. On arriving in Britain, the plantocrats and higher-ranking civil servants, denied access to the capital necessary to start their own businesses, lost their bourgeois status. The workers and the rural poor saw a marginal improvement in their living standards, although not in their social position as the most oppressed layer in society. Since exclusion from job opportunity was common to all black people, the class divide narrowed, creating the basis for cross-class unity against discrimination.

Naturally, the focus of attention for the black petty-bourgeoisie is the public sector – the civil service, local government, the NHS, etc – where many became white-collar workers during the 'municipal socialism' period of the early 1980s. At the same

time, the race relations industry and the business development agencies were fuelling the aspirations of the more conservative sections of the black petty-bourgeoisie to advance within the system. By portraying this method of advancement as a gain for all black people, the petty-bourgeoisie helped extend capitalist influence. There was also a conscious effort by national and local government to help them maintain political control over the black communities.

In 1984, this black petty-bourgeoisie was not nearly so defined. They sought political rights within working class organisations, forming black caucuses in the trade unions and Black Sections in the Labour Party. Darcus Howe, in an editorial in *Race Today* in 1985, wrote that he supported 'Black Sections for the black middle class' because they were fighting against oppression, but that they were no answer to the problems of black workers.

The initial leftward movement of the Black Sections gave an impetus to the fight against the right-wing Labour bureaucracy. Black caucuses could have had a similar impact in the unions by fighting for rank-and-file democracy and for elected and accountable black representatives on union executives. This was, and is, a basis for working class unity on the

question of race and, in so far as the movement pursued these objectives, it was progressive.

The ignorance of these dynamics led many socialists to adopt a class reductionist approach which failed to distinguish between the left section of the black petty-bourgeoisie, which temporarily expressed the demands of black workers for equality, and the more conservative, nationalist elements. In the early 1980s, Militant opposed Black Sections on the same grounds as Roy Hattersley and the Labour bureaucracy, namely that they divided the working class 'on the lines of race' – a position that lost them allies in the fight against the witch-hunts. But the working class was already divided on lines of race due to institutionalised racist oppression. Instead of driving a wedge between the black petty-bourgeoisie and the black working class, Militant's leaders, by default, appeared to support the status quo of discrimination.

In Liverpool, Militant's tactics helped reinforce the grip of the petty-bourgeois opportunists rather than build working class unity. The chance to mobilise a black workers' movement linked to the wider struggle in the city (which could have put the petty-bourgeois leaders to the test) was missed. Jim Dye is probably correct in saying that Liverpool Black

Caucus members were incensed at Sam Bond's appointment because one of their number didn't get the job. But though there was certainly a degree of petty-bourgeois envy in their opposition, it isn't true that they represented no one. Bond had no experience of Liverpool 8 and, given years of extreme racist discrimination in the city, the Black Caucus's demand for a local appointee as Principal Race Relations Advisor was not unreasonable, and had wide support in the community. It was, however, entirely correct for socialists to support Bond against the vicious press witch-hunt.

Militant explained its opposition to positive discrimination as flowing from the necessity to treat all workers the same, regardless of race. But this colour-blind approach refuses to recognise that black workers are more heavily oppressed than others, and confuses the legitimate fight for equality with the fraud of state-backed 'equal opportunities'. To describe the struggle for equal rights as 'divisive' is effectively to capitulate to the racism of sections of the white working class.

Calling for class solidarity from black workers when little has been shown in return presents no problem to the class reductionist, but is of no value in building a revolutionary socialist leadership. Anyway, isn't it time that comrade Jones moved on a few years politically? Nowadays, in almost mirror-images of opportunism, both Labour through the 'Black Socialist Societies' and Militant through Panther UK recognise black self-organisation.

Fact and fiction in the Old West

MANY REVIEWERS hailed Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* as a 'revisionist' Western – one that rejects the mythical 'Wild West' in favour of a more historically accurate representation of the period. True, Eastwood sets out to strip violence of its glamour and gives us an unlikely hero in the ageing former outlaw Bill Munny, driven to take up the gun once more when his small pig farm in Kansas is hit by a ruinous bout of swine fever. But some of the claims made for the film are almost as exaggerated as the myths.

The Western has been in the process of 'revision' ever since the appearance in 1903 of *The Great Train Robbery*. In part, this can be explained by technical developments: the spread of mass means of communication and the consequent growth in audience awareness. But the film industry trades in 'intellectual product' and in order to remain profitable must respond to changes in the cultural, social and political climates. Just as forms of rule may change without fundamentally altering the nature of the state, so the film industry can incorporate a degree of 'radicalism' without threatening its basic philosophy.

What gives the Western its enduring and universal appeal is that it dramatises the struggle to 'bring civilization to the wilderness' within the confines of America's 'own' territory. This has obvious attractions for the ideologues of capitalism since it allows them to justify colonialism without appearing to advocate it. Moreover, the expansion west took place relatively recently, and was carried out by recognisably 'modern' people and machines (the 1873 Colt 'Peacemaker' revolver is still in production today). This makes the Western film a useful medium for airing contemporary issues and moulding 'public opinion'.

The lone gunman occupies a cen-

Film

By Philip Marchant

tral place in the Western myth; his function is to raise the status of the bold, enterprising individual and thereby to expose the limitations of the masses. He helps simple folk reach the Promised Land... but makes damned sure they don't join a union.

Take *Shane* (1953), George Stevens's highly-regarded interpretation of the small homesteader versus big rancher theme. Based on real events that took place in Johnson County, Wyoming, in 1892, when immigrant settlers banded together to defend themselves against 50 gunmen hired by the cattlemen's association, it nevertheless manages to totally reverse the lessons of this, the largest and most brutal of all the 'range wars'. Had the settlers not organised themselves as an independent fighting force, they would have been wiped out. Apart from the local sheriff, the law was definitely *not* on their side – the group of mercenaries included several federal marshals and many state officials, and the plan to murder 80 named 'rustlers and anarchists', the brainchild of the capitalist ranchers in Cheyenne, was almost certainly given official sanction.

But in *Shane*, the small homesteaders hand over the job of defending their rights to a solitary drifter; a gunfighter with a murky past who redeems himself by turning his lethal skills to the benefit of the community. Given that in real life, the distinction between lawman and outlaw was often blurred, it's difficult not to see the figure of Shane as symbolising a policeman. No one expects strict historical veracity in a

feature film, but when the past is shamelessly rewritten in an attempt to undermine collective action and promote law and order in the present, one has a right to object.

It wasn't until 1980 when Michael Cimino made *Heaven's Gate* that anyone attempted to tell the real story of the Wyoming events. But by making the central character an idealistic Harvard graduate from a wealthy background, who throws in his lot with the immigrants but ultimately fails to stop the march of the empire-builders, Cimino surrounded the hard political centre of his screenplay with the fudge of liberalism.

Eastwood's contribution on this particular theme is *Pale Rider* (1985). Though not a great film, it more than passes muster, and detractors who accuse it of being a rip-off of *Shane* ignore the fact that it carries a quite different message. The mysterious stranger who helps a group of miners fight attempts by a big corporation to drive them off their claims continually urges them to 'stick together' and organise themselves. It's a good example of how the Western changes with the times, but remains on safe ideological ground: the company in question is practising the ecologically unsound 'hydraulic' method of mining – washing away entire mountain sides.

Poorly received at the time, in retrospect John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) looks like the first of the knowingly 'revisionist' Westerns. A young lawyer becomes a hero after apparently shooting a notorious outlaw in a fair fight, but when the true story comes out years later, the editor of the local newspaper decides not to use it – 'when the legend becomes fact, print the legend'.

The Sixties and Seventies saw a steady stream of films which cast a more jaundiced eye on the colonisa-



Clint Eastwood in 'Unforgiven'

tion of the West, arguably the best being Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969), which focuses on the role of the robber baron railroad owners. *Unforgiven* continues this tradition, but is mainly to be admired for its concentration on character and setting – old-fashioned virtues in the age of *The Terminator*. When Native Americans are allowed to tell their own story, when the extent of the vicious anti-Chinese racism is exposed, when we are shown the early struggles of organised labour, and when the significant role of African Americans in the West is acknow-

ledged (about a quarter of all cowboys in Texas after the civil war were black) – then perhaps we can talk about a breakthrough!

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CLINTON RIDES THE WIND OF CHANGE

By Philip Marchant

GEORGE BUSH was defeated in the November presidential elections because his administration lined the pockets of the rich while millions were experiencing growing economic hardship. However, the rejection of 'Reaganomics' took on a confused appearance. The bulk of the anti-government protest went to Bill Clinton, indicating a desire for a more 'caring' brand of capitalism, and in the absence of any viable alternative he won the support of most of the working class. But there was also a significant rightward shift in parts of the population and a hesitant move to the left by some workers.

The consistently high vote for independent candidate Ross Perot marked a premature development towards a right-wing populist movement. The typical Perot voter was white, male and of low-to-middle income. Perot's 'one nation' philosophy, his paternalism and his call for economic protectionism went down well among hard-pressed small farmers and backward sections of the white working class in search of easy solutions. There was a strong whiff of racism surrounding his campaign.

On the other hand, in the primaries there was a sizeable working class vote for Democrats to the left of Clinton: Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, the AFL-CIO nominee until his withdrawal from the race in early March, and the wealthy former governor of California Jerry Brown, a maverick 'left-populist' whose main theme was to lambast big business. There was also growing support for the establishment of a Labor Party, with a campaign organised by reformists gathering thousands of signatures.

Though Clinton had no coherent economic policy of his own, he was able to capitalise on the mood sweeping the country by stressing that he stood for change. His real pitch was made at the middle class, to whom he promised tax cuts, 100,000 more cops to tackle violence in the cities, and a crack-down on 'welfare scroungers'. At the same time, his hostility to trade unionism struck a chord with both the middle class and the employers,

enabling his campaign team to raise millions of dollars from the business community.

If Clinton appeared at all 'liberal', it was primarily because the Republicans refused even to acknowledge the need for a change in economic direction. But he was also able to take advantage of the ground swell of support for gay rights and the freedom to choose abortion - democratic rights which pose no real threat to the capitalist system. Lining up behind these popular issues enabled the Democrats to distinguish themselves from the Republicans (achieving this on the plane of economic policy proved more tricky), and make worthy pledges which will cost little or nothing to deliver. The result was even better than could have been anticipated: Clinton's timid endorsement of gay and abortion rights led to high-profile support for the Democrats in Hollywood, and the Republicans ended up losing votes in every category - except among Christian fundamentalists.

The Republicans' image was further tarnished by extreme right-winger Pat Buchanan, Bush's rival in the primaries. Buchanan stood for economic 'self-sufficiency' and openly canvassed for the racist vote, opposing quotas and affirmative action in jobs and calling for an end to immigration from Mexico. He described women as being psychologically unsuited for high office and referred to Hitler as 'an individual of great courage'.

But Clinton himself increasingly adopted 'traditional values' during the course of the campaign as a counterweight to Democratic Party support for liberal causes. Patriotism oozed from his speeches and photo-opportunities invariably included the Stars and Stripes as backdrop. Hillary Clinton started out making contributions in her own right, but under advice from party managers ended up playing the role of devoted wife. On the floor of the Democratic Convention in New York, numerous 'Pro-choice' placards (provided by the organisers) were being waved; on the platform, Clinton was reassuring the electorate how much he 'loved America'.

Clinton promises a reforming presidency in the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt - for New Deal, read



Bill Clinton

'New Covenant'. It will be an attempt at a more interventionist style of government, with a degree of state-directed investment. But part of the covenant will be that there is 'nothing for nothing': Clinton was silent on the disaster that has overtaken most of the country's inner-city areas, except to make clear that he won't be throwing money at them. He envisages a low-wage economy and one in which the poor don't get hand-outs but 'hand-ups', that is, they are forced to work for their dole money. Job training, child care and welfare payments will only be provided for two years, after which the recipient must find a job or do community work.

As governor of Arkansas for 12 of the last 14 years, Clinton has plenty of experience of crisis-ridden economies. Always a backwater of rural poverty, Arkansas remains near the bottom of the league table of states. The average weekly wage is \$8.98 an hour, compared to \$11.20 nationally, and one in five families are below the official poverty line. It has the worst record on industrial safety, a low level of funding for schools, and among the most limited opportunities for black and women workers in the country.

Clinton's economic 'achievements' in Arkansas have been based on attracting new businesses with the promise of cheap labour and tax breaks worth tens of millions of dollars. An official brochure circulated to companies openly boasted of the low wages paid in the state. Central to the success of this policy has been the so-called 'right-to-work' law, enthusiastically supported by Clinton, which is an obstacle to effective trade unionism in the state. Clinton's style has always been that of a union-buster: he took on the teachers' union, forcing through legislation which made tests for 'teacher competence' compulsory, and in 1990 he intervened in a dispute between the United Auto Workers and Morrilton Plastics, extending a \$300,000 loan guarantee to the bosses which enabled them to secure a \$1 million bank credit line to shore up their operations while they defeated a strike.

On a range of other issues as well, Governor Clinton showed that he was no liberal. He supported the death penalty, giving the go-ahead

for several prisoners to be sent to the electric chair; in January, his failure to commute the death sentence on a black prisoner with brain-damage led Jesse Jackson to threaten to switch his support to Tom Harkin (who opposes capital punishment) on the grounds that Clinton was playing the 'race card'. He also poured resources into the state police force and was the only Democratic governor to openly back Reagan's policy towards Nicaragua - he sent the Arkansas National Guard to Honduras for a period of 'training' with the Contras.

Despite Clinton's emphasis on the importance of training, it played little or no part in his strategy in Arkansas where the jobs created were mostly unskilled. His projected federal retraining programme is not aimed at teaching workers new skills, but at making US industry more competitive. It would require companies to spend 1.5 per cent of their payroll on retraining their own workers or contributing to a government-run scheme. The immediate effect of this would be to increase unemployment, since the smaller the workforce, the less 'payroll tax' companies would have to pay.

It was Clinton's record as an anti-union, law-and-order governor, combined with his 'liberal' veneer, that enabled him to unite the party behind his campaign. In the absence of a labour movement-based party, the Democratic Party - the older of the two parties of the American ruling class - has traditionally drawn support from workers, channelled towards it by the union bureaucrats and the civil rights leaders, but this makes for an uneasy coalition of forces.

Crucially, Clinton won the support of the right wing, notably the powerful Southern Democrats; this gave him the funding and the connections which were to prove essential in out-manoeuvring the liberals in the course of the primaries. In South Dakota in February, for example, all the candidates canvassed the vote of Native Americans, agreeing that they deserved an 'apology' for past mistreatment (!) and support for jobs and training. But Clinton was able to draft in Choctaws from Arkansas to campaign among the Lakotas, a tactic which gave authority to his otherwise unremarkable campaign. Only Jerry Brown supported the call for the restoration of tribal lands in South Dakota; Clinton implied that he would support legislation to stop the desecration of burial sites, but even this is unlikely since it would mean direct confrontation with the big power companies which are prospecting for uranium in the Black Hills.

After Clinton secured the nomination, the liberals threw their weight behind him. Jesse Jackson, deemed too radical for Clinton to be seen with in public, concentrated on winning the support of poorer black workers; union leaders forgot Clinton's record in Arkansas and poured

money and personnel into the campaign; and New York Governor Mario Cuomo provided Clinton with a ringing endorsement at the party's convention. It wasn't necessary for Clinton to balance between contending wings of the party; as ever, the liberals succumbed willingly to the whip and practised self-censorship. Given the parlous state of the Bush presidency, it only remained for Clinton to remain on his feet for the duration of the campaign in order to win.

Before his inauguration on January 20, Clinton must devise a policy which goes some way towards fulfilling his pledge to spend \$20 billion on public works. It was this 'job creation package' that convinced many workers to turn out and vote for him, but with the news that third-quarter growth was 3.9 per cent, Clinton will either have to renege or risk 'overheating' the economy. In addition, there is the problem of reducing the \$290 billion annual budget deficit and the \$4 trillion national debt. While the US economy may not look quite as sick as others around the world - annual inflation is 2.2 per cent and the current unemployment rate is 7.4 per cent - the gigantic deficits threaten to drag it into the mire. During the 1980s they could be financed through the sale of US Treasury bonds to foreign investors; now, the recession and the problems of the Japanese and German economies mean that investment capital has dried up. Despite his election promises, in the medium-term Clinton has to cut government spending and raise additional revenue in taxes.

For workers and youth, therefore, the future under Clinton will mean renewed attacks on all fronts. The task of revolutionary socialists must be to build on the deep-seated resentment against the system shown during the election period, and to fight within the trade unions and other working class organisations for the establishment of a Labor Party. They must intervene in campaigns such as Labor Party Advocates, countering the reformist outlook of the organisers with their own programme.

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