



BOSNIA

WHY WE DEFEND THE MUSLIMS

By Richard Price and Philip Marchant

THE CIVIL war in Bosnia – the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Second World War – appears to be changing in character, if only because the Serbian militias have seized as much territory as they need. Serbs now control 70 per cent of Bosnia, Muslim resistance in these areas is greatly weakened and the imperialist powers are unwilling to intervene. In effect, the Serbs have won the war in the north and east, and the Vance-Owen plan – which itself justified ‘ethnic cleansing’ – is dead.

In the course of the year-long war, the Bosnian Muslims have been subjected to all the horrors resurgent nationalism and chauvinism have to offer – forced removals, mass executions, rape, torture and daily bombardment. Having been driven out of most of eastern Bosnia, they are now getting the same treatment at the hands of the Croatian militias in the west. Imperialism has been a false friend to the Muslims, despite all the anguish about ‘human rights’.

In contrast to the hawkish tone of his election speeches, US President Clinton has swung round to a position which in practice legitimises Serbian gains. From the siege of Srebrenica to the Athens conference on May 1-2, US sabre-rattling was at its loudest – but the fact that this evaporated almost overnight showed that it was never meant to be anything but a war of words. The deciding factor seems to have been the massive rejection of the Vance-Owen plan in the Bosnian Serb referendum. While this didn’t mean that the Serbs would continue their offensive, it did make it clear that they would resist any attempt to dislodge them from areas they consider part of Greater Serbia.

Faced with the prospect of actually having to wage war on the Serbs, on May 22 in Washington the US joined with Britain, France, Spain and Russia in accepting the present carve-up of Bosnia as the basis of a solution. Officially, the imperialists still oppose the creation of a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia, but there is nothing about this which

conflicts with their over-riding aim – to see capitalism successfully restored to the region.

All of which is a slap in the face for much of the left, which for the past year has convinced itself that a military strike against Serbia was imminent, and that the sole issue was the ‘struggle’ of Serbia ‘against imperialism’. According to this scenario, the break-up of Yugoslavia was entirely the result of an imperialist plot, without any genuine national dynamic. Leaving aside the fantastic notion that pogroms have anything to do with fighting imperialism, is it really so easy for diplomats to persuade workers and poor peasants to butcher each other? If so, there really isn’t much of a future for humanity!

The ‘plot against Serbia’ theory doesn’t hold water. In fact, although they have different priorities in the Balkans, most imperialist powers hoped for an orderly transition to capitalism, by maintaining a federal Yugoslavia. But with the eruption of civil war, they switched to backing a new balance of power between Serbia and Croatia, with Bosnia a weak buffer in between, as a revised framework for restoring capitalism. To remind Belgrade not to go too far, sanctions were imposed. For their part, the governments of Serbia and Croatia, despite remaining differences, agreed to partition Bosnia between them.

The motivation of the Stalinoid-nationalist bureaucracy in Belgrade, for all its rhetoric, has never been to confront imperialism. It accepted

Serbia’s future status as a semi-colony, and its ambitions were strictly confined to becoming top dog in the region. As the Yugoslavian deformed workers’ state crumbled, the Serbian bureaucracy, along with those of the other republics, turned to nationalism.

The particular characteristics of Serbian nationalism had already been revealed in the treatment of the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, who were routinely portrayed as living off the backs of hard-working Serbs. The autonomous status of Vojvodina, whose majority consists of ethnic Hungarians, was withdrawn along with that of Kosovo in 1989. The decisive turn of the Serbian bureaucracy under Slobodan Milosevic towards rabid nationalism and chauvinism took place amid mounting economic crisis, following the waves of strikes in 1987-88.

Under such conditions, and without any alternative working class leadership, the nationalism of a dominant majority acquires a logic and momentum of its own. Fear begins to grip masses of people, who see no way out other than to revenge themselves on minorities who stand in their way. Yesterday’s neighbours are today discovered to be enemies and are summarily dealt with.

The national question is always a reflection, even if a distorted one, of the class struggle. It has been largely ignored that in Bosnia the fighting has been between predominantly peasant Serbian militias and the mostly urban Muslims. Historically, the Muslims have never aspired to a separate ‘national’ status, and even today, in cities like Sarajevo, they continue to live in multi-ethnic populations. For this reason, sections of the left have denied that any national question exists. The Muslims, they argue, are simply Serbs with a different religion. But the treatment they have received

may well have forged in the space of a year what previous centuries failed to produce – a Bosnian Muslim nation.

From the start, the Vance-Owen plan was nothing more than a face-saver for the imperialists. While giving the appearance of a humanitarian solution, it conceded the ‘principle’ of ethnic cleansing and in fact encouraged the Serb and Croat militias to get on with it. Furthermore, one of the main roles of the UN task force in Bosnia has been to assist in this process by ferrying Muslims to ‘safe areas’ – that is, areas which the Serbs are less likely to lay claim to – and disarming their militias.

The man who convinced Milosevic that to accept the Vance-Owen plan was the first step towards a settlement on Serbian terms was Greek prime minister Constantine Mitsotakis, the most pro-imperialist leader in the Balkans. Though the Greek ruling class has a vested interest in seeing the maintenance of a strong Serbia, and has a pathological fear of a Muslim state being set up in the region, Mitsotakis’s trips to Belgrade and his behind-the-scenes diplomacy at the Athens conference could not have been accomplished without the full backing of the imperialists. In return for Milosevic’s acceptance of the plan, further concessions were made. The UN would police a corridor through a Muslim area of northern Bosnia, and Croat and Muslim militias would be expelled from areas ceded to them which contained Serb minorities.

As for the Washington agreement, Serb and Croat leaders have welcomed it as providing the launch-pad for a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia. The so-called Muslim ‘safe areas’ are little more than concentration camps, and the only US defence commitment is to UN troops. The offer to monitor the Serbia-Bosnia border is entirely dependent on the co-operation of Milosevic, and concern for the

situation in Kosovo comes with the assurance that ‘we do not support declarations of independence there’. There could scarcely be a clearer indication that the imperialists have decided to abandon the minority peoples to their fates, and that they think the stabilisation of the region is best left to the Serbs and Croats.

We are for the withdrawal of all UN forces from ex-Yugoslavia. Whether through aid agencies or troops, imperialism is looking to use the civil war to strengthen its influence over the entire Balkan peninsula. We call for the lifting of UN sanctions from all the former Yugoslavian republics and for the doors to be opened to refugees. We call on workers’ organisations to send food, aid and arms to the beleaguered Muslims.

We call for the defeat of Serbian and Croatian militias in Bosnia, and for ordinary soldiers to turn their guns against their officers. While it was correct to defend Croatia’s right to independence at the outset of the civil war, any legitimate content to its side has long since disappeared. In conflicts between Serbia and Croatia we are defeatists on both sides.

Self-determination for the nations and peoples of former Yugoslavia cannot have any meaning either under imperialism, or at the end of the barrel of a gun. Support for genuine equality means a fight against the dominant nationalisms which will strangle any freely-taken decisions by the minorities. The struggle of the Muslims must be linked by a revolutionary socialist leadership to the demands for self-determination or autonomy for the Albanian and Hungarian minorities, and to the defence of the remaining gains of the working class in former Yugoslavia. Such an internationalist programme would in turn be a powerful weapon against the reactionary leaderships of all the republics. Only on such a basis can the slogan of a Balkan socialist federation have any meaning.

AND OPPOSE IMPERIALIST INTERVENTION

Major limps on – thanks to Labour

WITH HIS cabinet reshuffle of April 27, John Major finally responded to repeated demands from the Tory press for 'fresh faces' to 'improve the government's image'. A more appropriate cliché that comes to mind is the one concerning deck chairs and the Titanic. For it doesn't require much political sophistication to recognise that the reshuffle has neither changed the government's disastrous policies nor covered up the fact that Major himself bears direct responsibility for them. As an attempt to off-load the blame for the government's economic record, the sacking of Norman Lamont as chancellor of the exchequer was really too transparent to be effective. Within a week of Major announcing his new cabinet, an opinion poll revealed the prime minister to be the most unpopular since polling began in the 1930s.

The Tory party as a whole is in no better shape. On May 6, in the county council elections and Newbury by-election, voters delivered their shattering verdict on the government. The Tories were virtually wiped off the electoral map in the shire counties, retaining control of only one county council in England and Wales, while the 'safe' Tory seat of Newbury was lost to the Liberal Democrats on a swing of 28.4 per cent.

The Tories seem to have developed an unerring ability to antagonise their middle class electoral base. The collapse in house prices in particular has alienated a whole swathe of Tory support in southern England. The education 'reforms' have provoked massive hostility from both parents and teachers, culminating in the booing and jeering of education secretary John Patten at the National Association of Head Teachers' conference in May. The looming Christchurch by-election seems set to repeat the pattern of Newbury, with a massive defection of Tory voters to the Liberal Democrats.

There is no sign that the Tories' political crisis will ease in the near future. The Maastricht treaty continues to be a running sore, with Baroness Thatcher and Lord Tebbit maintaining their public assault on the party's pro-European wing. Indeed, the party appears to be descending into virtual civil war. Major is condemned as politically incompetent by many of his former supporters - notably Norman Lamont, who organised Major's campaign for the leadership back in 1990 - and there is open talk of a leadership challenge following the party conference in October.

The most fundamental problem

the government faces - the economy - will certainly not be going away. The much-vaunted upturn is so small that even the employers' organisation, the CBI, has warned against undue optimism. The marginal fall in unemployment reflects a slightly higher level of consumer spending rather than any return of confidence to manufacturing industry, where closures such as that at Swan Hunter continue remorselessly.

This 'recession' - the longest since the end of the Second World War - has had a devastating effect on government finances, as a sharp decline in income and corporation taxes has been accompanied by escalating expenditure on unemployment benefit and income support. The result is a surge in the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, which is predicted to reach £50 billion this year. Knives are already being sharpened for a package of cuts which will amount to a wholesale onslaught on the welfare state. The replacement of Lamont by Kenneth Clarke, whose expertise in economics is non-existent, was dictated by the need for someone with the pugnacity necessary to push this politically explosive programme through.

If the Tories have been able to ride out this crisis, it is primarily because of the pathetic response of the Labour Party leadership. Devoid of any alternative programme to Major's, John Smith and Co have settled down to a long-haul 'strategy' which relies on the Tories' growing unpopularity producing a Labour election victory - in four years' time! As for the present, the Labour leaders are more interested in fighting to divest themselves of the party's link with the trade unions than they are in fighting the Tories.

Even a right-wing union leader like John Edmonds of the GMB has been able to make these elementary points. But the fact is that the record of trade union bureaucrats like Edmonds has been no better. The potential for a political fight against the government which arose from the huge upsurge of opposition to pit closures last October was squandered by union leaders right and 'left'. The possibility of using the miners' and railworkers' strikes this spring to launch a united industrial struggle against the Tories was similarly sabotaged.

In short, the political crisis of the Tory government has served to underline the political crisis of the labour movement. The need to build a new fighting leadership in the unions and Labour Party could not be more urgent.

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MAY 8 - Anti-fascism turned a corner when over 3,000 people joined an angry demonstration from Plumstead in south-east London to the British National Party's headquarters in Welling, following the vicious racist murder of Stephen Lawrence - the fourth such murder to take place in the vicinity of the BNP's 'bookshop'.

Originally billed as a Youth Against Racism in Europe event in central London, the route and the character of the demonstration were changed as a result of the intervention of Panther UK. Whereas YRE has remained little more than a Militant Labour front, Panther, the black organisation set up by Militant, has increasingly adopted an independent attitude - with the result that for the first time in years large numbers of black youth were rallied to an anti-fascist demonstration. But for the sectarianism of the SWP and the Anti-Nazi League leadership, which called another demonstration a week

later, it would have been bigger.

Faced with angry marchers outside the BNP HQ, police responded by splitting and attempting to disperse the demonstration - for which the YRE stewards seemed ill-prepared. Protesters and even journalists were indiscriminately batoned, with the police singling out Panther stewards in particular. At least 14 people were taken to hospital as a result, most of them black.

Meanwhile, Marc Wadsworth, leader of the Anti-Racist Alliance which is backed by the TUC and Labour bureaucracy, accused left-wing groups of using the march for 'pseudo-revolutionary ends'. They had 'cynically exploited local feeling about racist murders . . . with a flagrant disregard for people's safety', he said. Wadsworth's own brand of respectable anti-fascism appeals to the capitalist state to deal with the fascists. Try telling that to those who were subjected to racist taunts by police in Welling!

Cost-cutting scheme puts lone mothers in danger

By Lizzy Ali

ON APRIL 1, another vicious piece of Tory anti-working class legislation came into force. The Tories claim that the Child Support Act will help single mothers by compelling absent fathers to contribute to the maintenance of their children. In reality, the act is a crude cost-cutting exercise designed to cut £600 million per year from the social security budget by attacking lone parents.

The act will be policed by the new Child Support Agency. Its task is to trace fathers, mainly through a section of the act which requires mothers claiming benefit to name the father of their child or children. Those who refuse will automatically lose 20 per cent of their income support.

Maintenance received will not go to the lone parent; it will be pocketed by the state. Labour's shadow social security secretary, Donald Dewar, stated: 'The tragic fact is that most children in lone parent families will not gain a brass farthing through this act.' It has also been criticised by such normally moderate organisations as Save the Children, Barnardo's, the National Children's

Home, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Gingerbread.

The effects of the act will be far-reaching. There are 1.3 million lone parents in Britain, 90 per cent of whom are women and 895,000 of whom are currently claiming income support. Far from restoring 'family values', the most obvious effect will be to step up the harassment of women. Those attempting to escape from violent partners will now face a renewed threat, as fathers may take revenge for being caught by the Child Support Agency, or use the fact that they are paying maintenance to demand unwelcome access visits. Some lone parents may lose their right to benefits altogether if the father agrees to pay the full tariff set by the agency and lose out on free school meals, dental charges and prescriptions. On the other hand, the act is riddled with anomalies which enable absent parents on high incomes to avoid paying.

The agency says that it will handle all claims confidentially, and that any woman in fear of reprisals will not have her benefit cut, provided she can prove her allegations. Many thousands of women have already experienced the 'tact and concern' with which they have been

interviewed by the DSS in order to obtain the money they need to survive.

Before the new act came into force, a procedure existed for putting pressure on women to reveal the father's name and last address. Women were regularly called into DSS offices for interviews to find out if they had had any contact with the father, or if they knew of his whereabouts. However, if they refused to sign an authorisation for the DSS to pursue the father for maintenance, there was little the state could do.

This new scam by the Tories has nothing to do with helping lone parents out of the poverty trap, and everything to do with saving money by attacking one of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. In keeping with the Tories' reactionary and hypocritical 'family values', it sees lone parents as a 'problem' and a drain on the economy.

The labour movement must actively take up the defence of those under attack from the Child Support Act. It must fight for full state maintenance for lone parents and their children, without fear of harassment either by government agencies or ex-partners.

THE ASSASSINATION OF CHRIS HANI

The real face of the De Klerk regime



Chris Hani

Far from being an attempt to derail the negotiations, the assassination of Chris Hani was part of a state-sponsored terror campaign to pressurise the ANC leaders into making concessions at the conference table, argues **Jabu Masilela**

IN THE early hours of April 10, four bullets struck comrade Chris Hani, national executive committee member of the African National Congress, general secretary of the South African Communist Party and former chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe. His death has given further strength to that most favourite of 'theories', namely that right-wing, or 'third force', elements are working day and night to destroy the current negotiations process. The ANC-SACP leadership united with the racist De Klerk regime, reactionary liberals of the Democratic Party, Inkatha stooges and other rotten forces in condemning the murder as 'anti-negotiations'. This dust being thrown into the eyes of the black working class must be actively combatted by all revolutionaries, and especially by Trotskyists.

At the memorial meeting in the Jabulani amphitheatre, ANC president Nelson Mandela was booed for reading a message of 'condolence' from the regime. This was the very same regime that had refused to allow Chris to remain inside the country when he came back to South Africa during the first round of talks. It had harassed him and even issued a warrant for his arrest, forcing him to go into hiding in Transkei. It had arrested his bodyguards for possessing self-defence weapons. So the masses were not fooled by the hypocritical sympathies of the National Party. As in the past, revolutionary instinct led them to the only correct conclusion: that the white capitalist state headed by De Klerk killed Chris Hani. The scoundrel Janus Waluz, who pulled the trigger, finally carried out the order from Tynhuis.

The ANC-SACP leaders have denounced the right wing because like all petty-bourgeois reformists, they are naive. They believe that by not exposing the real criminals - the De Klerk regime - they will be seen as 'reasonable' by the capitalists, saved from further blows, and rewarded in the not too distant future with the running of the country. It was such political stupidity that led to Allende dying at the hands of the bourgeois counter-revolution in Chile, and at the Jabulani rally, a speaker from the ANC Women's League correctly warned the leadership of the dangers involved

in this kind of complacency.

More importantly, the leadership knows that to tell the truth about this savage act would be to open a can of worms. The masses have already demonstrated in the days following the murder that they are for driving De Klerk from power. De Klerk has shown that he can impose Botha-style repression at any moment. Faced with such alternatives, the cowardly leadership declares itself for negotiations, 'peace' and 'reconciliation'.

When the negotiations process started, the regime embarked on a series of violent attacks on the township masses to weaken the mass base of the ANC. In many cases it relied on Inkatha, hired thugs or police-army-security to carry out random killings, systematic repression and the assassination of comrades. Later it targeted the militant youth and more radical activists within the movement, with the aim of getting rid of the forces that are pressurising the leadership not to accept crumbs from De Klerk's table. The regime wanted the outright reformist leaders to have a free hand in selling out the masses.

The slaying of Reggie Rhadebe, a well-known militant leader in Natal, was part of this plan. There are parallels between his murder and that of Chris. He worked for reconciliation between the ANC and Inkatha in Natal, but he was also among those who tried to lead a militant ANC march to Buthelezi's headquarters in Ulundi. The fact that he was working to implement ANC-Inkatha 'peace agreements' did not succeed in endearing him to the regime and its puppets. They knew that he was still capable of expressing the anger of the masses, and that to this extent he was dangerous. He was butchered in broad daylight after attending an ANC-Inkatha meeting to discuss the 'peace' proposals.

Similarly, Chris fully supported negotiations with the regime. Much has been published recently about his efforts at reconciliation, and even the leaders of apartheid-capitalism have praised him as someone who was dedicated to peace. It has also been stated that he was capable of taming the Young Lions - in other words, he was one of the few leaders who could sell the negotiated settlement to the township militants.

At the same time, he could reflect the anger of the masses. He demonstrated this when he and fellow SACP militant Ronnie Kassrils led the Bisho march against the Ciskei regime. A few months ago, he criticised the ANC's plan to share power for five years with De Klerk's National Party. He even said he would not join such a government, but would instead challenge it on the streets. Surprisingly, he called for an alliance of socialists to help salvage the present situation. It was none other than hardline Stalinist-turned-liberal Joe Slovo who had to put Chris's position into its 'proper context'. If it hadn't been controversial, there wouldn't have been any need for Slovo's explanation.

The bourgeoisie could not be happy with such a 'dual' role, any more than it was with the ANC's rhetoric about nationalisation and the armed struggle, for the masses tend to stretch such radicalism beyond its limits. Though the SACP is firmly committed to negotiations, it still has the support of millions of militant black workers and youth who associate it with the struggle for socialism. The SACP's ability to control the masses cannot be absolute and, for this reason, the bourgeoisie is definitely interested in destroying it, or at least severely weakening it by eliminating its most popular leaders.

Furthermore, Chris's political-moral authority was desperately needed by the SACP, especially at this critical juncture. The SACP has no long-term future given the liquidationist politics of the majority of its leadership and the irreversible collapse of Stalinism internationally. It was no mistake that Chris was elected to the SACP's most responsible post. There is no other leader that can match his political credentials, and his absence will hasten the party's disintegration.

Those who argue that Chris's murder was an attempt by the right to derail negotiations should stop covering up for the racist bourgeoisie's dirty plans. They said this when Inkatha embarked on its mass slaughter in the Transvaal, but even the imperialist media finally exposed the vital financial, political and logistical support Inkatha got from the regime. Police-military-security personnel commanded by De Klerk's trusted generals directed these gruesome murders. One newspaper reported two years ago that the security forces had begun infiltrating organisations and carrying out surveillance on certain individuals and political groupings with the aim of physically eliminating revolutionaries and militants in the mass movement.

Documents came to light containing plans for De Klerk to hand over to the army if the bourgeoisie failed to squeeze most of what it wanted through negotiations, and for a campaign of political, economic and military sabotage of a future ANC government. The masses of Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and now Transkei have immense experience of their former oppressors resorting to these methods when they are no longer in power. It is therefore absolute treachery to point to the currently impotent right-wing/fascist movement when the real monster is the Bonapartist De Klerk regime. Every class conscious worker in South Africa knows this.

In fact, violent acts against the masses have not destroyed the talks but strengthened them. After every break, usually due to rank-and-file pressure on the leadership, the resumption of talks has been accompanied by a further shift to the right and more concessions to the bourgeoisie. Rather than rely on the fighting strength of the black working class to defeat apartheid, the cowardly reformist leaders

accept De Klerk's arrogant warning that there is no alternative to negotiations.

Having thus tested the ANC-SACP leadership and found that it was harmless, the regime became even more bloodthirsty. But in order to deliver a body blow to the masses, it needed a period of political lull during which expectations could be raised about the immediacy of the elections. When Chris's murder came, it was with the aim of facilitating negotiations. As expected, the ANC-SACP leadership joined with the regime in denouncing the revolutionary acts of the masses, calling for 'calm', 'peace' and 'reconciliation', and insisting that the prospective elections must not be 'damaged' by mass anger.

Comrades, the time has come to begin a decisive struggle to get rid of the De Klerk regime and the capitalist system it defends! Let us fight and defeat this counter-revolutionary onslaught! The six weeks of mass action called for by the leadership must serve as the beginning of a protracted struggle to bring down the government.

The leadership's call for an early election date is designed to fool us. The regime was going to set this date anyway, and most CODESA participants have stated that we will be voting early next year. Our leaders want to appear to be making radical demands on the government. This is opportunism of the worst kind; they are avoiding crucial questions by making an issue out of a reformist demand that has already been won. Furthermore, they still insist on a Transitional Executive Council and so-called 'joint control' of the army-police-security. We must reject these reactionary demands with the utmost contempt. The goal of mass action should be to replace the white minority regime with a Revolutionary Interim Government based on our own fighting organisations. Only such a government can convene really free and fair elections for a Revolutionary Democratic Constituent Assembly.

Mass action must also aim at forcing the ANC-SACP and PAC leaders to break completely with negotiations and adopt the perspective of driving De Klerk from power. They must drop all plans for a coalition government of so-called 'national unity' with the regime and its puppets. The repressive bodies whose sole purpose is to crush us cannot be transformed into instruments for

our defence - they will always be controlled by the bourgeoisie. We have to smash them, and replace them with our own 'people's militia' based on the black working class and its allies. Mass action cannot lead us to a workers' government unless we build active and disciplined defence units firmly rooted in our organisations. MK, APLA and AZANLA combatants should now be integrated into the mass movement to assist in setting up these units.

Our campaign should be based on all the political, economic and social demands of the oppressed masses. We must solidify the unity shown during the events following Chris's murder by fighting in all the people's organisations - Congress/SACP, Pan Africanist and BC - for the crystallisation of a strong left wing on a working class programme of action. Without drawing lines of demarcation between the working class rank and file and the petty-bourgeois leadership, our efforts will be doomed to failure. If our anger and mass actions have been unable to defeat the sell-out up to now, it is precisely because we have failed to develop an independent working class programme to counterpose to the nationalist and Stalinist-reformist programmes that always deliver us into the crushing arms of De Klerk.

Comrades for a Workers' Government, the South African section of the LTT, has outlined certain key tasks. We urge all dedicated class fighters to discuss this programme of action, amend it, develop it according to their own concrete experiences and, above all, fight for it throughout the cities, farms, villages and bantustans. This will take us a long way towards the practical realisation of a workers' party - an independent working class banner. Trade union, youth and women's organisations are where we should concentrate most of our energies. Needless to say, a lot rests on those who have openly declared themselves to be revolutionary socialists, who must find ways to combine their forces in joint practical struggles and provide a revolutionary way forward.

The blood of comrade Chris Hani and all other martyrs who have fallen in the struggle against apartheid-capitalist tyranny shall be avenged! Down with the De Klerk regime! Forward to a Revolutionary Democratic Constituent Assembly! Forward to a workers' government!



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EDITORIAL

Where is Militant going?

THE RECENT 'transformation' of the Militant tendency into Militant Labour has come as no surprise to those of us who have watched the Taaffe leadership gradually abandon any serious analysis of the Labour Party, or any fight against its right wing. By Militant's own insulting past definition of others, it has become yet another 'sect on the fringes of the labour movement'.

The familiar triumphalism surrounding the launch of Militant Labour cannot hide the fact that the organisation is, by anyone's standards, in crisis. Membership continues to decline - it is now no more than half that of the SWP - and Taaffe has looked increasingly to stunts in an effort to boost morale. Since the split last year with Militant's founder, Ted Grant, who took with him most of the tendency's best writers and a significant number of cadres, together with at least half of the international organisation, many members have become demoralised and confused.

Militant's sectarian centrism of the past has in recent years become combined with a desperate opportunism. The organisation has attempted to recruit on a minimal political basis, and has without explanation reversed its views on issues like black nationalism, women's struggles and gay and lesbian liberation. While we welcome the fact that Militant has abandoned its previous reactionary positions on these latter issues, it now seems to be repeating the SWP's experiences in the 1970s, when front organisations like Women's Voice and Flame were set up with the intention of using them as conduits from the women's and black movements into the party, only to find that the process operated in reverse.

It appears that Militant has already relinquished direct control over the *Panther* newspaper - though not before it contained articles like the one in issue four that uncritically praised T&GWU leader Bill Morris on the sole grounds that he was black, without mentioning the fact that he was also a bureaucrat. The Campaign Against Domestic Violence, for its part, with its cross-class approach to the question, is anything but a serious attempt to build a working class women's movement.

While Militant evidently has high hopes for youth recruitment through Youth Against Racism in Europe, the tendency's rechristening as Militant Labour indicates that the main focus of activity is on elections, with the aim of emulating the localised successes that Scottish Militant Labour has had north of the border.

Militant has abandoned the correct argument, put forward during the dispute with Grant, that it is necessary to combine open work with fraction work. Taaffe and his supporters now claim that it is impossible to function inside the Labour Party. As soon as socialists raise their heads against the right wing, it is asserted, they are immediately expelled. Not satisfied with exaggerating the admittedly very real difficulties which socialists face today inside the Labour Party, Militant also overstates the decline in Labour's active membership in order to portray it as a party virtually dead on its feet. In a recent interview with *Labour Briefing*, Militant veteran Ray Apps happily repeated the lie, culled from the capitalist press, that Labour's national membership is down to 90,000. In this way Militant seeks to justify its own sectarian abstention from the fight against the Labour leadership.

Militant Labour's first attempt at an electoral intervention in England, in a Lambeth council by-election in March, left Steve Nally in third place with 12 per cent of the vote. While this was not an absolute disaster - the Labour candidate received only 26 per cent - the fact is that the main result of disaffection with the Labour Party in Lambeth was a massive swing to the Liberal-Democrats.

In the May county council elections, Militant Labour stood four candidates. They polled respectably, but were all easily defeated by Labour. Even in East Hull, where the Militant Labour candidate was the sitting councillor, he got only 33 per cent of the vote to Labour's 44 per cent. In Coventry, Militant Labour was down to 11 per cent. Given that Militant was able to concentrate all its forces on these selected seats, and taking into account the desultory campaigns *Militant* claims some of the local Labour Parties waged, these results can hardly be taken as evidence that large sections of the working class are on the verge of breaking from Labour to the left. The prospect of Militant Labour presenting a realistic electoral challenge to the Labour Party nationally appears remote.

What is more, Militant Labour's programme is no closer to revolutionary socialism than the one the tendency put forward when it was operating the old entryist strategy. If anything, the new programme is further to the right - witness the recent junking of Militant's earlier principled stand against import controls as the organisation uncritically tail-ended the NUM leadership's economic nationalism. For all the talk of providing an 'alternative' to the Labour Party, what Militant Labour actually offers is another version of left reformism - and one that ultimately lacks the essential reformist ingredient of electoral credibility.

Militant's preoccupation with electoral success at the expense of political principle has also shown itself in the unions, where the Militant-dominated CPSA Broad Left campaigned for a Grade 7 senior manager for president in the ridiculous hope that this alone would provide 'left unity'. In fact, it led to a split in the Broad Left itself as non-Militant activists baulked at what had all the appearances of being a bureaucratic stitch-up.

We believe that the leadership of Militant has politically misled many working class activists over the years, and that the launch of Militant Labour does not indicate any change on this score. During the recent split, Grant outlined how degenerate Militant's internal regime has become, dominated as it is by full-timers and with an unwillingness to allow democratic debate in a genuinely Bolshevik manner (although Grant himself cannot escape blame on this matter).

We recognise, however, that there are sincere revolutionaries within Militant Labour and we call on them to mount a fight against the continuing degeneration of their organisation. Our doors are open to these workers and youth should they wish to take part in an honest, fraternal debate on the way forward.

THE POLITICA

A delegation from the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency recently visited Sri Lanka. In the first of two articles, **Martin Sullivan** reports on the political situation there and looks at the background to the present crisis

THAT THERE is indeed a deep political crisis in Sri Lanka requires little justification. On May 1, Ranasinghe Premadasa, the country's president and leader of the ruling United National Party (UNP), was killed by a suicide bomber. A week earlier, another assassin shot dead Lalith Athulathmudali, a leader of the rival Democratic United National Front (DUNF). Although the police were quick to pin responsibility for the killings on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tigers themselves have denied it, and it seems just as likely that the deaths were the product of a feud among rival political factions of the Sinhala ruling class. Certainly DUNF supporters were convinced that Premadasa was behind the assassination of Athulathmudali.

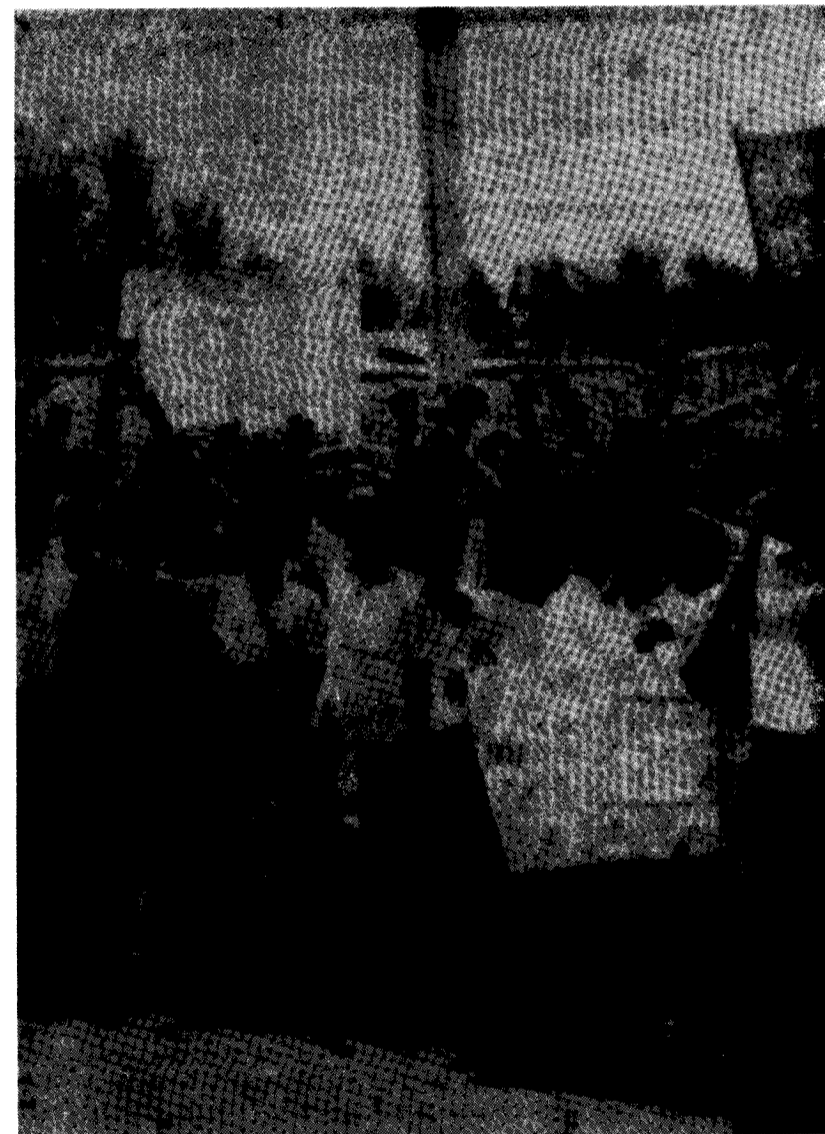
The formation of the DUNF was itself the expression of a serious crisis in the ranks of the right-wing bourgeois UNP. It was launched in 1991 after dissident UNPers led by Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake tried to impeach Premadasa for abuse of power, corruption and incompetence. The attempt was defeated when the speaker blocked the impeachment proceedings in parliament, having reportedly been given a massive bribe by the Premadasa wing of the UNP.

This split in the UNP leadership was portrayed in the bourgeois press as the result of tensions between high caste UNPers and the low caste Premadasa. Or it was explained as the product of Athulathmudali's resentment at being passed over for the post of prime minister in favour of D.B. Wijetunga (who now replaces Premadasa as president). No doubt there was some truth to this. But, more fundamentally, the split reflected mounting discontent among leading circles of the UNP with Premadasa's political methods. Internationally, he retained the solid support of imperialism, having loyally carried out the instructions of the IMF and World Bank. But more sophisticated UNPers understood that the sheer crudity of Premadasa's rule - based as it was on open corruption, blatant ballot-rigging, the suppression of anti-UNP newspapers, and the use of thuggery and murder against political opponents - had destroyed his political credibility domestically.

The launching of the DUNF posed a significant political threat to the UNP. For one thing, the new party had considerable financial resources at its disposal - its leaders' public stance against corruption had not prevented them from using their positions in government for the purpose of personal enrichment. The DUNF took 15 per cent of the seats in the Provincial Council elections on May 17, contributing to the setback suffered by the UNP which lost control of three of the seven contested provincial councils.

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which

divided. The SLFP emerged in 1951 when the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike led a breakaway from the UNP, and it has traditionally been the party of a more nationalist section of the Sinhala bourgeoisie, who see their interests as not always identical with those of imperialism. Of course, there can be no question of a 'national bourgeoisie' pursuing a consistent anti-imperialist line. The SLFP has always vacillated between the pressures of imperialism and those of its mass base, inevitably succumbing to the former. And it has always contained an openly pro-



Workers on strike at Ravi Industries Limited in March, but trade union militancy is g

imperialist wing.

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's son, Anura, now leads that section of the party which believes that, with the UNP weakened and discredited, the SLFP can win the backing of imperialism. He is a strong advocate of the economic programme of the IMF and World Bank. Anura's sister, Chandrika Kumaranatunge, and their mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, head the majority faction which favours the retention of the SLFP's traditional pseudo-socialist demagoguery together with support for import controls and some welfare concessions to the masses. This doesn't represent a fundamental difference with the Anura wing of the SLFP, however. They are merely worried that too sharp a right

turn by the party might lose it the backing of the rural poor and those sections of the working class who follow the SLFP.

The SLFP did well in the Provincial Council elections, defeating the UNP in the important Western Province which includes the capital, Colombo. This has no doubt encouraged the Sirimavo-Chandrika leadership to believe that it can win the future presidential and parliamentary elections. But it is also possible that the crisis of the UNP might encourage moves towards a government of 'national unity' - that is, of capitalist unity. With Premadasa gone, fences could be mended between the UNP and the DUNF, and a section of the SLFP could perhaps be persuaded to cross over.

The political crisis of the bourgeoisie can only be welcomed by the Sri Lankan working class, which has come under heavy attack since the election of a UNP government under J.R.

Jayawardene in 1977. In collaboration with the IMF and World Bank, Jayawardene implemented the sort of programme which has become familiar throughout the capitalist world. It was based on the 'freeing' of the economy through the removal of import controls, the destruction of social services and the wholesale privatisation of state-owned enterprises. The latter were bought at knock-down prices by UNP supporters, for whom the government helpfully arranged large bank loans.

The most visible expression of the UNP's privatisation policy in Colombo is public transport. In 1979, the government deregulated the buses, allowing private operators to compete with the state-owned bus service, and

L CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

in 1991 what remained of the latter was itself privatised - or 'peoplised' as UNP rhetoric has it. The result is a chaotic system of fiercely competing minibuses, ruthlessly cutting each other up in the battle to reach potential customers waiting at bus stops, and cramming their vehicles with passengers in complete breach of every safety regulation.

During the long period of UNP rule, the organised workers' movement has suffered serious reverses. In 1980, a general strike was called in support of a pay claim, and went down to defeat. This had the same sort of demoralising effect on the Sri Lankan working class that the Thatcher government's victory over the miners had on the labour movement in Britain. The fighting unity of the class has been further undermined by war and ethnic conflict. And the situation is aggravated by the organisational fragmentation of the Sri Lankan trade unions. These have

however, the plantation workers remain saddled with an extremely reactionary political leadership. Their main organisation, the Ceylon Workers Congress, which doubles as a trade union and a political party, is led by one Saumyamurti Thondaman, who is minister for industrial development and tourism in the UNP government. It was Thondaman's assurances that workers would benefit from an end to state ownership of the plantations which undermined resistance to privatisation. And in the Provincial Council elections Thondaman took the CWC into an alliance with the UNP, standing under the same banner (the UNP's 'elephant' symbol) and on a common programme, with the result that in the central hill country the opposition went down to defeat.

Back in the 1950s, the Sinhalese-Buddhist revival, to which the SLFP in particular adapted, provided the opportunity for political demagogues from the majority Sinhalese community to boost their careers by attacking the Tamil minority. The first significant move in this direction was the Sinhala-only campaign, which saw the adoption in 1956 of Sinhala as the sole official language. Since then the Tamil community has been subjected to systematic discrimination in employment and education and to repeated pogroms by Sinhalese racist gangs. In the Tamil areas of the North East, the Colombo government adopted a policy of Sinhalese colonisation, comparable to the methods of the Zionists on the West Bank and arousing the same bitter resentment among the indigenous people.

The refusal of the traditional workers' parties to take a principled stand against Sinhala chauvinism allowed Tamil bourgeois parties to take the lead in the defence of Tamil rights. But these parties themselves ceded influence to more militant organisations, notably the LTTE, which has been waging an armed struggle since the 1970s for an independent Tamil state in the North East. All other Tamil political tendencies in that area have been destroyed by the LTTE, which denies its political rivals the right to exist.

It must be said that some of these organisations undermined their own position by their wrong policies. The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), for example, collaborated with the misnamed Indian Peace-Keeping Force after the latter was 'invited' into the North East by Jayawardene (in order to forestall an invasion) under the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987. The IPKF behaved like any other bourgeois army of occupation - killing, raping and looting. This had the effect of completely discrediting the EPRLF among the Tamil masses, allowing it to be wiped out by the Tigers after the withdrawal of the Indian army in 1989.

Although the Tigers have defeated their Tamil rivals in the North East, they have been unable to win an outright military victory over the Sri Lankan armed forces. The war continues unabated, while reports from the Jaffna peninsula describe a population suffering from lack of electricity, food and medicine. There have been repeated rumours that Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran would be prepared to abandon the demand

for a separate state in favour of a federal arrangement which granted regional autonomy to a unified North-East province. This demand is supported by other Tamil organisations, but both the UNP and SLFP are opposed to it.

The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, which aroused considerable resentment in the South, gave a boost to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). This organisation based itself on rural

its supporters. It denounced Jayawardene's decision to allow Indian forces to enter Sri Lanka as a betrayal of the 'motherland', and began a campaign of assassination of UNP officials with the aim of destabilising the state. The established workers' organisations were similarly condemned as traitors to the Sinhalese people, and were themselves subjected to terrorist attacks by the JVP. When we spoke to Wimalasiri de Mel, the

60,000 youth were killed by the state forces and the UNP's own gangs of murderers. Needless to say, these victims were by no means all active supporters of the JVP. Anyone suspected of JVP sympathies was liable to be arrested, tortured and killed, while the opportunity was taken to settle accounts generally with the government's political opponents. The sight of burnt bodies or of headless corpses floating downriver became familiar in the South during the late 1980s. With the arrest and murder in 1989 of JVP leader Rohanna Wijeweera, along with a whole section of the leadership, the government inflicted a decisive defeat on the rebels, and the JVP itself has now been crushed.

The effects of war, ethnic conflict and state repression, and the accompanying decline in the class struggle, have posed a major challenge to the working class parties in Sri Lanka. They have been required to swim against the stream, to take a firm stand in favour of Tamil national rights in the face of an upsurge of Sinhala racism, and to resist the temptation to form unprincipled political blocs in an attempt to defeat the UNP government. It must be said that, in our estimation, very few of the avowedly Marxist organisations in Sri Lanka have measured up to this challenge.

In his second article, Martin Sullivan will give an account of the various political tendencies in the Sri Lankan workers' movement



Premadasa (left) and Athulathmudali - assassinated within a few days of each other



Sinhalese youth, particularly those with educational qualifications who were understandably embittered by the lack of job opportunities. The JVP was also able to take advantage of a crisis in the agrarian sector which was intensified by the surge of agricultural imports resulting from the government's 'open economy' programme.

The JVP was Maoist in origin, but increasingly tailored its ideology to the Sinhala chauvinism prevalent among

assistant general secretary of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, he showed us the scars from shrapnel wounds he received when the JVP threw a grenade at his car. The Nava Sama Samaja Party told us that over 20 of their cadres had been murdered by the JVP.

Premadasa responded to the JVP threat with a campaign of terror which amounted to the launching of a second war in the South. According to Amnesty International figures, some

OBITUARY

Prins Rajasooriya

IT WAS with great sadness that we learned of the death, on April 5, of Prins Rajasooriya. Comrade Prins was 72 years old. He dedicated his life to the interests of the working class, for whom his death will be a great loss.

In 1947, Prins joined the Bolshevik Sama Samaja Party, which was the Ceylon arm of the Fourth International's section, the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India and Burma. After the Ceylonese Trotskyist groups fused in 1950 to form a united Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Prins became a member of its central committee. He played a major organisational role in the Great Hartal (general strike) of 1953.

Prins became secretary of the LSSP's trade union wing, the Ceylon Federation of Labour. In the early 1960s, when the Joint Committee of Trade Union Organisations was formed, Prins was elected joint secretary with M. Shanmugathan of the Communist Party. The JCTUO grew in strength, and in 1963 it launched the famous '21 demands' campaign against Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party government.

In 1964, a special conference of the LSSP voted to join a coalition government with the SLFP. Prins was one of the group of comrades - which included Edmund Samarakkody, Meryl Fernando, V. Karalasingham and Bala Tampoe - who broke away to form the LSSP (Revolutionary). This became the Ceylon section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

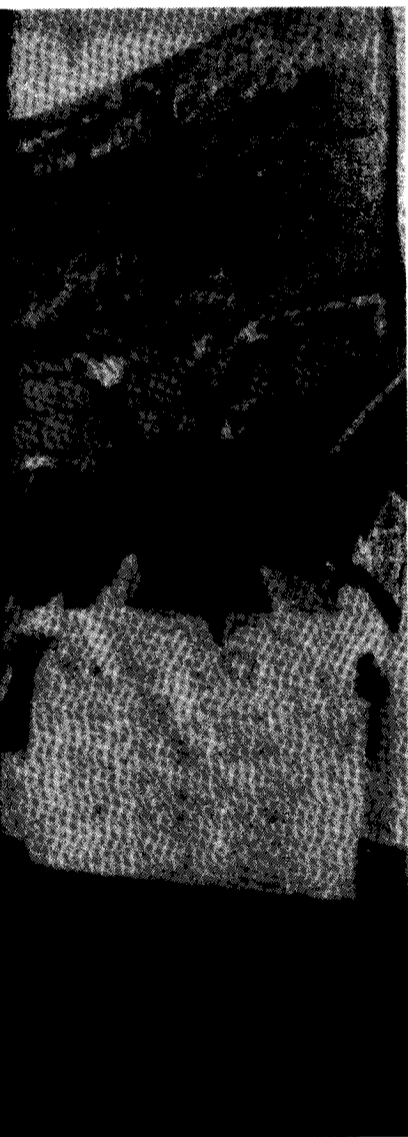
The LSSP(R) split into two groups in 1969, led respectively by Edmund Samarakkody and Bala Tampoe. Prins sided with Tampoe's group, which

was recognised as the USec section. In 1972, in the course of the repression which followed the abortive JVP uprising the previous year, he was arrested by armed police and held in prison for six months.

After his release, Prins left the LSSP(R), which had been reduced to little more than an annexe of Tampoe's Ceylon Mercantile Union. He became secretary of a small Trotskyist group, latterly known as the Marxist League. Prins worked as a lawyer and was active in the defence of democratic rights against the United National Party government.

'In his private life he led a simple existence,' Prins's comrade Oscar Pereira writes, 'although he could have lived in luxury through his legal profession alone. He was widely known as a lawyer who appeared only for the employees in industrial disputes and labour tribunals. His home was his legal office and was popularly known as his "clinic" where he dispensed legal and other advice to all who asked for it. Fees were his least consideration. He always told poorer clients to pay what they could afford.'

We first met Prins when he visited London in 1990. He was eager to discuss with us, and we were able to benefit from his long experience in the revolutionary movement. He gave us a detailed and informative interview on the history of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka, part of which appeared in the October/November 1990 issue of *Workers News*. After Prins's return to Sri Lanka we corresponded regularly. We will miss him greatly. *Workers News* extends its condolences to Prins's relatives, friends and comrades.



generally at a low level in Sri Lanka

traditionally been attached to different political parties - not only to the workers' parties but also to the SLFP, UNP and DUNF - while there are in addition a number of independent unions such as Bala Tampoe's Ceylon Mercantile Union. Although small-scale disputes continue, trade union organisation and militancy are today generally at a low ebb in Sri Lanka.

The exception is the Tamil plantation workers, whose fighting capacity and high level of organisation have been largely unaffected by the general decline in the labour movement. Over the last year they have fought a persistent battle against the attacks on their wages and conditions which have resulted from the privatisation of the estates. Despite this militancy,

BRAZIL

The PT and the referendum

From Portilho Simões
in Sao Paulo

ON APRIL 21, Brazilians voted to retain the presidential form of government. The referendum, which offered a choice between three systems - presidential, prime ministerial or constitutional monarchy - was proposed in 1988 during the drafting of the new constitution.

It's clear, however, that the majority of the Brazilian bourgeoisie supported the 'parliamentary' option, one of their aims being to limit the power of the next president - which according to the polls could well be Lula, the leader of the Workers Party (PT). Such a system would also enable them to replace the prime minister at any time, without giving rise to the kind of mass demonstrations that led to the resignation of President Collor last year.

At the 1988 constitutional assembly, the PT voted to keep the presidential system. The position had been agreed almost unanimously and, at the time, the PT acted less like a social democratic party than it does now. However, *Convergencia Socialista* (CS), the Brazilian section of the LIT, was in favour of a parliamentary system, along with the Stalinists and other class collaborators.

With the shift to the right of the PT, several of its leaders took to defending the parliamentary system. The party then held an internal ballot to determine what position it should take in the referendum. But despite the fact that

the majority of the leadership supported the parliamentary system, 75 per cent of the rank and file voted to keep the presidency.

The leaders of the right wing criticised the decision to hold an internal ballot. Their view, published in the capitalist press, was that individuals 'should choose a system of government according to their own conscience'. In other words, the party shouldn't have a position, and even if it did, nobody should be bound by it!

Although under attack from the right, internal democracy and common discipline are principles which distinguish the PT from other parties. While the bourgeois parties of Brazil are merely vehicles for assisting individual politicians to power, the PT has always been admired for having definite policies.

Among the PT leaders who opposed the internal ballot was Pedro Dalari, a member of parliament who is politically close to Luiza Erundina, the ex-mayor of São Paulo. Erundina was suspended from PT membership after accepting an invitation from President Itamar Franco to become a minister in his government. But the PT executive hasn't taken any disciplinary action against Dalari. What would its reaction have been if militants from the left of the party had publicly criticised its policies (presuming that the capitalist press had given them space)? Would it have been as benevolent as it has been towards the right wing?

Presumably because it would have looked bad to stand alongside class collaborators, Stalinists and now the

majority of the rightward-moving PT leadership, CS called for a blank vote in the referendum - while at the same time affirming that the parliamentary system was better than the presidential system.

The ruling class has always resorted to deception in order to hold back the mass movement, and the referendum - which it was claimed would 'rescue the country from its crisis' - was an example of this. Workers were even promised wages on a level with those in Scandinavia! Instead of exposing the content of government, the left sat around discussing its form (as if there could be any form of political domination by the bourgeoisie that was good!) and the mass movement, which the left should have been mobilising, remained paralysed. But it was equally wrong to call for a blank vote, because the introduction of a parliamentary system was supported by all those who oppose socialist revolution.

Since the referendum, the political crisis of the Brazilian ruling class has gone from bad to worse. Luiza Erundina was removed from her post as minister of administration on May 19 after criticising the appointment early in March of Eliseu Resende as finance minister. Resende was a minister under the military regime and within weeks of taking up his new job was accused by the press of awarding contracts to a construction company that once employed him as a director. A few hours after Erundina was sacked, Franco also dismissed Resende. He is now on his fourth finance minister since he took over nine months ago.

No peace while Ireland remains partitioned

THE TRAGIC death of two children in the IRA bomb attack in Warrington on March 20 provoked a predictable round of hypocrisy from the British government. *Workers News* unconditionally defends the right of republican militants to take up arms against the British state and its loyalist agents in their struggle for self-determination, whether in the occupied Six Counties, mainland Britain or anywhere else. The ultimate responsibility for the deaths in Warrington lies with the British ruling class and its security forces, whose continued occupation of the north is at the root of the conflict.

However, the present republican strategy is incapable of advancing the struggle for the withdrawal of British troops and a united Ireland. We do not support IRA actions like that at Warrington; they are counter-productive to the cause of Irish freedom and hand the British government a propaganda victory.

More than ever, the struggle for Irish self-determination has to be seen as inseparable from the struggle for socialism. Without adopting a Marxist orientation, based on working class unity in the tradition of James Connolly and Jim Larkin, together with a commitment to link the fight against British occupation of the Six Counties with a fight against the reactionary clerical republic in the south, it will be impossible to mobilise the forces necessary to defeat the common capitalist enemy. That is why the fight for a Marxist party in Ireland, guided by the theory of permanent revolution, is so vital.

But this task is hampered by the actions of much of the British left, which proves to be incapable of following a principled anti-imperialist line when dealing with Ireland. The attitude towards the Dublin-based Peace

'93 (originally, and revealingly, called 'Mothers Against the IRA'), an organisation set up after the Warrington bombing with the support of various pro-partition groups such as Peace Train and New Consensus, shows the opportunism of many self-styled 'Marxists'.

Predictably, the SWP combined pacifism and opportunism when it portrayed the reactionary rally organised by Peace '93 in Dublin on March 28 - where prayers and hymns alternated with attacks on the IRA - as 'a sad distortion of the genuine feelings of many who turned up' (*Socialist Worker*, April 3). Does the SWP include among those with 'genuine feelings' the section of the crowd which spat and swore at a small group of people from the north holding pictures of their children who had been murdered by the British army?

Militant, which believes that the IRA is no different from the loyalist paramilitaries, also seeks to associate itself with Peace '93, and even to act as its adviser. Peace '93 must not only condemn the violence of the IRA, counsels Militant, it 'must also be prepared to oppose state violence and collusion with loyalist death squads' (*Militant*, April 2). But any genuine opposition to state violence must be linked to the demand for British troops to get out of Ireland, which Militant refuses to fight for.

In reality, Peace '93 is no different from previous campaigns like the 'Peace People' of the mid-1970s, which was equally one-sided in condemning violence and which soon revealed itself as just another pro-imperialist group.

There can be no peace in Ireland without justice, and there can be no justice while Ireland remains partitioned. Troops out of Ireland! Down with the sectarian Orange state in the north! Defeat British imperialism!

GREECE

Building workers' leaders continue their treachery

THE SLUMP in the building industry in Greece has created massive unemployment, with most workers considering themselves lucky if they get three days' work a week. The scale of the crisis can be seen by the fact that about 40 per cent of building workers are no longer entitled to free health care because they were employed for less than 45 days in the last year.

With the number of building workers eligible for state benefits rising rapidly, in the summer of 1991 the New Democracy government of Constantine Mitsotakis launched an attack on rights won by the union more than 30 years ago. The response of the Stalinist union leaders has been to organise a series of token strikes and demonstrations through Athens to demand that the government reverse its policy. They have assisted the riot police in preventing building workers from carrying out more militant actions and attempted to silence anyone fighting for an all-out strike to bring down the government.

On April 8, several thousand building workers marched from union

headquarters to the Ministry of Labour (see picture), where union leaders spent over an hour discussing with government officials. Predictably, the minister refused to give any assurances on either jobs or conditions, and the demonstration broke up with workers expressing both anger at the government and frustration with the union leaders' tactics. *Workers News* spoke to Petros, a 60-year-old building worker and Trotskyist, who has been active in the union since 1957.

'Today we are striking to demand the return of certain rights which the ruling class has abolished. Firstly, the right to work - some building workers haven't worked for six months. Secondly, the right to our previous level of winter benefit payments of between 120,000 and 130,000 drachmas [£365 to £395] a month. Last year, Mitsotakis cut this benefit in half, and many other rights have disappeared as well. One of the things we're trying to do today is get enough money for the Easter holidays - in other words, the government has turned us into beggars.



'This situation has come about because of the way the union leadership has handled the problem. It doesn't want to come into class conflict with the government and so it concentrates mainly on negotiations.

'Everything we're fighting for today, we originally won in the famous building workers' struggles of 1961. The union has been under a Stalinist leadership since 1955, but at that time there was a strong Trotskyist faction. We educated the rank and file and played a vanguard role during the 1961 events. This was

the first time that Greek workers uprooted paving stones and threw them at the police - it has since become something of a tradition!

'In 1961, we placed demands on the union leadership that were brushed aside, but all the gains made were those fought for by the Trotskyists. We won a seven-hour day - the first group of workers in Greece to do so - holiday pay, winter benefit and free health care.

'Over the last two years, we have had more than 20 one- and two-day strikes

against the Mitsotakis government without any sign of victory. The Stalinist leaders of our union are committed to peaceful change of the social system alongside PASOK. So far, they have successfully prevented us from linking up with other workers in struggle and coming into direct conflict with the ruling class.'

The series *The Rise and Fall of Gerry Healy* will resume in the next issue of *Workers News*

Pioneer who stuck to his principles

Keeping My Head: The Memoirs of a British Bolshevik

By Harry Wicks
Socialist Platform, 1992
£5.95

Review by Ellis Hillman

IT IS difficult to believe that more than half a century has elapsed since the assassination of Leon Trotsky. It is perhaps even more difficult to accept that a diminishing number of comrades who were associated with the aftermath of the October Revolution in this country have survived to tell the tale. Such a comrade was Harry Wicks, who died in 1989. Harry was a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and one of the earliest supporters of the Left Opposition. Unlike many of the pioneers of the Trotskyist movement, he held firmly to the principles of international socialism throughout his eventful life.

Harry Wicks was born in Battersea, a truly working class district of south London. In the first chapter of these memoirs, he describes the formative period of his life with a penetrating insight into the economic, social and political environment of his times. Chapter two - 'From Class to Socialist Consciousness' - contains vivid descriptions of the opposition to the interventionist war against the Soviet Union and the 'colonial war in Ireland', and the struggle to 'get rid of the poverty and unemployment that were to be seen on the streets of Battersea'. The powerful alliance of the whole labour movement against the imperialist intervention brought the Labour Party and the newly-born Communist Party closer together - certainly at the rank-and-file level.

The role of the TUC leadership in trying to rein in the General Strike and prevent it from becoming a confrontation with the government is convincingly portrayed. It was Harry's view, however, that Britain was not 'by Leninist definitions' in a revolutionary situation in May 1926. 'You only have to read Lenin on thoroughly revolutionary situations to see the obvious difference from our reality,' he writes on page 66. He challenges the view held by 'Stalinists and many Trotskyists' that Trotsky 'argued that May 1926 actually did see Britain already in such a situation'. Presumably this is based on his reading of Trotsky's *Where Is Britain Going?* Here Harry perhaps oversimplifies Trotsky's perception of the General Strike and the role of the Labour and trade union leaderships, and of the Communist Party.

Interestingly, too, Harry takes to task those who explain the tail-ending of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee and the TUC lefts by the British Communist Party - then in the process of Stalinisation - as the result of pressure from Moscow, which was anxious to obtain credits from Western bankers for Russia's industrialisation. Not so, says Harry. The CP leadership had already accommodated to the

first Labour government in 1924. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on his argument that 'the British Communist Party needed no manipulation from anywhere outside itself in order to go too far to the right'.

Of special interest, of course, is the account of the formative period of British Trotskyism - how the movement emerged on the fringes of the increasingly Stalinised British CP. Here Harry paints a remarkable picture of his experiences in the Soviet Union attending the Lenin School in the late 1920s, and of his meeting with Trotsky in Copenhagen in 1932. The 40 members of the Communist League - adherents to Trotsky's position - collected enough money from their meagre unemployment pay to send Harry to Copenhagen. His meetings with some of the early pioneers of the International Left Opposition and the Fourth International - Pierre Frank, Pierre Naville, Raymond

Molinier, Henk Sneevliet and the Hamburg dockworker Georg Jungclas - gave him a profoundly internationalist outlook, an internationalism that shines through the pages of this autobiography which has been skilfully edited by Logie Barrow.

In the final chapter, 'Defeat and Survival 1933-46', we are taken through the complexities of the disputes in the Trotskyist movement before the Second World War, as well as the difficulties the small band of comrades faced in campaigning against the Moscow Trials frame-ups. The Spanish civil war is referred to only in passing, which is a great pity.

Barrow's endnote is particularly apposite on this point: 'As readers will have noticed, the pages after Harry's meeting with Trotsky feel flat when compared with the liveliness and sophistication of struggle which precede them.' Harry's life after 1946, including



Harry Wicks

his involvement with the state capitalist International Socialists (forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party) and the International Marxist Group, is unfortunately unrecorded. Barrow bitterly regrets his failure to ask him about this period, noting that it was something that Harry 'never talked about'. Perhaps he found it difficult to relate the hopes of the movement before and during the war to the unbelievably complex situation that confronted it afterwards, with the 'stabilisation' of capitalism and the long night of Stalinism. We will never know.

Harry Wicks emerges from the

pages of what is essentially only half an autobiography as an honest proletarian revolutionary, a comrade of integrity, courage, acute intelligence, wide reading and modesty - a refreshing contrast to certain post-war 'leaders' and self-appointed 'Lenins'. This book should find its way into the libraries of all socialist historians and all those, in and out of the Labour Party, who are fighting to bring about the socialist future Harry struggled for throughout his life. Congratulations to the comrades of Socialist Platform for their publishing venture!

The unconquered spirit

The Case of Comrade Tulayev

By Victor Serge
Bookmarks/Journeyman, 1993
£8.95

Review by Jim Dye

WRITTEN between 1940-42, this book is not only one of the best literary descriptions of Stalin's counter-revolutionary terror, but also one of the finest novels of the twentieth century. The fact that it is little known outside the ranks of socialists from the anti-Stalinist tradition has nothing to do with any lack of literary merit (indeed, its powerful style more than equals that of Orwell), but everything to do with its unrepentantly revolutionary message of hope - hope that future generations would break out of the Stalinist nightmare of fear and terror, and once again enter the path of human liberation begun in October 1917.

The plot is loosely based on the Stalinist purges that followed the assassination in 1934 of Sergei Kirov, head of the party in Leningrad and a high-ranking member of the politburo, around whom opposition to Stalin had begun to form. Although Kirov represented the same reactionary forces as Stalin, some party members saw in him 'Stalinism with a human face'.

At the time, Trotsky accused Stalin and the GPU of involvement in the murder, and what followed gave credence to this view. Zinoviev and Kamenev were accused, together with several officers of the GPU, of acting with White Guards and Trotsky in an international terrorist conspiracy. These lunatic charges, and the hysteria that followed, served as a cover for sending thousands to the concentration camps and firing squads. It was a pattern that was to repeat itself with ever-increasing ferocity in the purges that continued

throughout the period. Only by understanding the processes that Serge fictionalises can this book be properly appreciated.

Although many of the characters are recognisable, the use of fiction to represent the horror of the Stalinist regime actually results in a greater impact. The story focuses on no single character, but rather a number of individuals with apparently no connection between them: Kostia, the young worker and party member who seethes at the everyday petty injustices of the bureaucracy without comprehending fully the reasons behind them; Romachkin, a clerk and timid petty-bourgeois on a lower rung of the state bureaucracy, who is fearful that his own calculations of wages and prices show that each wage increase granted by 'The Chief' (Stalin) is in reality a cover for the lowering of living standards; Makeyev, an ex-peasant turned brutal and stupidly loyal party chief of an outlying region; and Kronratiev, based on Antonov-Ovseyenko, whose conscience is torn by his mission to Spain where the GPU is strangling the revolution and murdering Trotskyists and other revolutionary fighters.

Serge describes the psychology of each of his characters to great effect - for example, the Paris intellectuals who deliberately ignore the crimes of the regime (as did those 'Friends of the Soviet Union' in the West). Gradually, all are connected in the madness of the purge that follows the assassination of Tulayev, the Kirov of the story. What Serge manages to do is point to explanations for this madness, a madness that had a grim logic in the maintenance of the Stalinist bureaucracy during the most rapid industrialisation ever seen.

Those who become victims of the trials and the executions that follow react in different ways. Ryzhik, the old party member who is one of the last Trotskyists left alive in the camps (itself due to bureaucratic

incompetence), remains true to the ideals of socialism to the end, starving himself to death rather than give the regime the pleasure of putting him on trial or before a firing squad. Others, although recognising the utter falseness of the charges against them, believe that there is no choice but to sacrifice themselves and plead guilty in the show trials. They do this not so much because of the violence of the GPU interrogations, or the fact that members of their families have been taken hostage, but because they believe that to renounce the regime in front of the world's bourgeoisie would only help the growing forces of fascism in a war that everyone knows is coming.

What Serge shows, in a way few others have managed, is the massive alienation produced by the tyrannical rule of the bureaucracy. Every character feels ultimately powerless in the face of impersonal forces that appear to have a direction of their own. The consequence of the working class being deprived of power, and therefore of consciously controlling its destiny, was to return it to being the object of historical forces rather than the subject.

However, this product of Stalinist rule not only affected the workers, it also affected members of the bureaucracy and the party, and even 'The Chief' himself. It is the portrayal of the Stalin character in this light that shows the genius of Serge. It would have been easy to portray 'The Chief', the last of the Old Bolsheviks after the others had perished at his hands, as a one-dimensional tyrant. But Serge shows him as a prisoner of the machine, alienated from what in theory he controls, alone except for the lying nonentities he has created. 'The Chief' is hated by surviving old party members - like Kronratiev, who recognises the defeats his policies have produced in Spain - but without becoming genuine Trotskyists they can see no

alternative to his rule.

Throughout the book, references to the cosmos and its physical laws reinforce the theme of alienation. This imagery of vast uncontrolled forces contrasts with the minute detail of the situations of the characters, and serves to underline the loss of control over destiny that the defeat of the revolution produced. But it also suggests that time does not stand still and that new victories can come in the future. Ryzhik, thinking to the end, realises that the revolutionary tradition is being extinguished among his own generation, but that a new proletariat is being formed in the factories - for the moment confused and lacking in class consciousness - whose experiences will produce a new generation of revolutionaries. This is what separates *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which the workers are condemned to live forever as ignorant slaves.

Serge uses the last writings of Rublev (a character whom some have seen as representing Bukharin, but who seems closer to the great Marxist historian, Ryazanov), before he too is executed, to defend the October Revolution. For Rublev, the catastrophe has been caused by opposition from without and the clamour for peace from within (giving rise to the idea of 'socialism in one country'), but he understands that the only hope for humanity is in revolution, and that in 1917 'we alone, in this universe in transformation, had the courage to see clearly'.

We are still waiting to take hold of our destiny. But this does not negate our hope, nor the vision of a new and better society that flickered briefly after the October Revolution. In fighting to reforge revolutionary consciousness within the working class, especially in the ex-USSR as it is torn apart by the barbarism of capitalist restoration, Serge's book can play a positive role.



BUSWORKERS BETRAYED

Questions for comrade Gibson

LEADERS of the T&GWU have no intention of mounting a real fight against the deregulation and privatisation of London's buses. Having tricked busworkers into signing the new wage-cutting contracts, union officials have now dropped any pretence of a London-wide struggle in favour of local negotiations.

The ability to carry out this betrayal relied on the active co-operation of so-called 'left' leaders of the busworkers, including WRP/Workers Press member Peter Gibson. The letter we print below was refused publication by *Workers Press*, which went on to mount a scandalous attack on its author, Gerry Downing, accusing him of playing into the hands of management. Geoff Pilling, writing in *Workers Press* on April 3, claims that managers distributed copies of the letter with the aim of sowing divisions among the workforce. He goes on to justify Gibson's part in persuading busworkers to sign a document committing them to accept the new contracts. Only the militants would have refused to sign, Pilling says, giving managers the opportunity to sack them and weaken union organisation. The advice 'to sign the document, to remain united and to prepare for strike action throughout London was not simply correct. Any other course of action would have been in line with management plans'.

The kind of unity that *Workers Press* proposes is with a right-wing bureaucracy bent on selling out the struggle. The London-wide strikes took place - but if anything was in line with management plans, it was the union leadership staging a few token protests, then capitulating, with Gibson providing 'left' cover. Bosses will always seek to divide workers, but to use this as an excuse not to speak out against bureaucratic betrayal is opportunism of the worst kind.

The Editor, *Workers Press*

Comrades Peter Gibson and Roy Thomas have given seriously misleading accounts of the London busworkers' struggle. Their failure to expose and criticise the treachery of the T&G bureaucracy indicates complicity with that bureaucracy in imposing what may well become one of the most serious defeats ever inflicted on the best organised section of busworkers. The only criticism of leadership in *Workers Press* is by Roy Thomas of the 'ultra-lefts' who wished to 'Go down fighting'. I suspect they simply wanted to fight. Gibson, as chair of the London Divisional Bus Committee and T&G Executive Council for the buses, was excellently placed to rally the rank and file against the attack orchestrated by the Tories. Instead he collaborated with chief full-timers Oli Jackson and Ken Fuller in betraying his own members. If this is untrue and you were the leading revolutionary fighter for busworkers' rights, comrade Gibson, then you need to answer some questions.

Why were the local negotiating teams instructed to continue talks up to the end of January when the scale of the attacks was known at the first meetings in November or December? The union leadership were aware that the block grants were to be cut on 1st April and the companies wished to have the new contracts in place by then. This gave a maximum of nine weeks to organise a fight. In practice it turned out to be five weeks as the companies set the deadline for the end of February, something you could have

easily anticipated. If you opposed the machinations of the bureaucracy in this, why did you not warn your reps and members of the disastrous consequences of this strategy, using the pages of *Workers Press* or by public meetings, etc? If you feared a witch-hunt you could have used a pen name. But, anyway, what better cause to be victimised for than rallying your members for a fight against the worst attack ever launched on them?

The ten companies, correctly reading the vacillations of the T&G, seized the initiative and never lost it thereafter. They delivered the 'first option' to every individual at the end of January. This threatened loss of rota position if members did not indicate, by the 10th or 12th of February, their willingness to be considered for compensation payments if they were to sell their contracts of employment by the management deadline of 28th February. It had an implicit threat of the sack, asking 'Do you wish to remain employed on the new contracts? Tick yes or no' and also implicitly de-recognised the union by going over their heads like this.

Why did the T&G leadership not instruct all their members not to sign this blackmail document? Instead they instructed reps and members that it did not matter if they signed the first option as a signature on the union's covering letter would protect their legal rights. Management simply returned this letter as they pointed out that, having signed their one, it was meaningless. Willesden Garage achieved one of the highest no signing rates because at two mass meetings on 8th February it



A picket line outside Willesden bus garage during the one-day strike on March 17

was moved from the floor that no one would sign. When one of the branch officers returned from Headland House the following day and said a T&G official had told him to sign both the management and union letters, I rang you up to strengthen the opposition to signing. You told me it did not matter if people signed, the thing was to get a positive result on the strike ballot on the 19th. I thereupon told the militants (ultra-lefts?) that Peter Gibson had instructed me that on no account were we to sign the management letter. The militants held the line and reaffirmed the decision of the mass meetings. Not signing the first option was a crucial indication to management of willingness to struggle and the garage management had real problems until they discovered that there was a high rate of signing elsewhere, including a complete collapse in your area, South London, on your advice. In *Workers Press* of 27th February, Thomas blames busworkers for signing and says that they did so 'in spite of a struggle by stewards'. Well, these stewards did so in opposition to the advice from T&G leadership, including you, comrade Gibson.

Why did the T&G allow confusion to reign for four weeks by seeking legal opinion on whether the companies had a right to unilaterally terminate contracts of employment and issue new ones? They came to the conclusion at the end of February that under 'domestic law' it was legal but there might be a case under European law. Were you and all T&G leaders not aware that the Norbiton Garage High Court

judgement had determined this in 1987? Why did you not expose the illusion being fostered in bourgeois law by the T&G bureaucracy while time was running out? In *Workers Press* of 27th February, Thomas ascribes these illusions to busworkers themselves, again defending the bureaucracy's treachery.

Why did the T&G organise the strike ballot for as late as 19th February when they had several months' notice of the Tories' intentions? Why did they allow their members to face the stark choice of sign or be sacked at the end of February when no date was set for industrial action to halt the attack? You told me that the T&G 'would look foolish' if they set the date in advance of knowing the outcome of the ballot. Well, we will all look very foolish now when we have to claim family credit from the DSS while working an extremely demanding, responsible and stressful full-time job.

The ballot for strike action was 2:1 in favour. **How much bigger a majority would there have been if the T&G bureaucracy had given a single indication that they intended to fight this attack by preparing the membership through mass meetings over the past few months?** Why did you or your colleague Thomas not expose the bureaucracy instead of blaming the members: '... many succumbed to the blackmail and signed to accept the lump sum payments... because - at this stage - they could see no alternative' (*Workers Press*, 20th February).

They decided that there was no alternative because the T&G

bureaucracy, you included, did not give them any. You had no alternative and never proposed any alternative apart from writing to MPs, demanding a 'Select Committee of Enquiry' and protecting Stephen Norris, the Tory minister of transport in London, from the anger and questions of outraged busworkers at the House of Commons meeting on 27th January. Your comment on that occasion that we had to respect Norris 'because at least he had the bottle to come and speak to us' contrasts quite sharply with your own bottle when faced with this Tory attack. If respect for Tory anti-union laws is what held you back then it is time you declared your true political allegiances and ceased masquerading as some sort of a 'revolutionary'. London's busworkers are absolutely furious at being rolled over so easily, without the opportunity of a fight, by a, useless and cowardly bureaucracy. Many are throwing in their cards in disgust but others are preparing to sort out this T&G leadership, you included, comrade Gibson.

The question for the Workers Revolutionary Party and the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International is: can you seriously claim to be advancing towards your stated goal of socialist revolution and the solving of humanity's main road-block in that aim, the leadership of the working class, if you yourselves are part of the problem or tolerate within your ranks those who are?

Comradely,
Gerry Downing
1st March 1993