



TORIES HACK AT WELFARE STATE

By Richard Price

BEHIND the smoke screen of promoting a wide-ranging debate on social security spending, the Tories are preparing a multi-pronged assault on the welfare state. The flurry of leaks in June confirm that Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley's review of spending is in reality a plan to severely reduce non-means tested benefits.

Plans to throw 60,000 people off unemployment benefit and to grant state pensions are the tip of the iceberg. From the government which has already given us private prisons and the NHS internal market, we can expect further measures to deregulate every aspect of state provision. Child benefit, at present paid to all mothers, is high on the Tory hit list.

The attack on non-means tested and universal benefits is justified in terms of 'better self-provision' and 'targeting'; the real goal, however, is a fundamental structural alteration of welfare services. The Tories are well aware that there is still overwhelming support for a national health service which is largely free at the point of use, and for the principle of child, unemployment, sickness and invalidity benefits, and state pensions.

By abolishing or reducing non-means tested benefits, step by step, by underfunding health and social services to the point where they begin to collapse and by greatly increasing the charges for previously cheap or free items such as dental check-ups, eye tests and prescriptions, they want to create a situation where there is nothing in what remains of the welfare state for the middle class and skilled workers. In this way, the Tories hope to throw ever-greater numbers into the arms of private insurance companies and drive a deep wedge between 'responsible citizens' on the one hand, and 'scroungers' on the other.

The ideological ground for this long-term strategy has been prepared by Tory ministers John Redwood and Tom Sackville ranting against 'feckless and irresponsible' single mothers and calling for a return to 'traditional family values'.

The economic justification has been provided by the growth of public sector borrowing to a predicted £50 billion this year, while both Tories and Labour have

pointed to the 'worrying' demographic trend that, despite the Tories' best efforts, people are managing to live longer. Aside from the fact that the growth of the budget deficit is in large part the result of high unemployment, itself the consequence of the Tories' demolition of manufacturing industry, these arguments don't hold water. The growth of the proportion of the population of pensionable age has been apparent for at least a century and has very little to do with the Tories' frenzied behind-the-scenes 'debate'. A team from the London School of Economics recently reported that social security spending has remained at 22 per cent of Gross Domestic Product for the last 15 years, and on current trends would take another 50 years to reach 25 per cent.

The truth is that the Tories' plans for the welfare state are part of a larger project to continue with the deregulation of every aspect of the economy. They are nothing to do with delivering more efficient services courtesy of sensitive market forces. Even the chairman of the august British Medical Association has warned that the internal market in the NHS has brought the service to a point where it is close to falling apart. A panel of government-appointed specialists reported in July that the internal market is putting at risk seriously ill patients, including children with cystic fibrosis and leukaemia. For the first time, one million people are on hospital waiting lists; while nine major London hospitals, including Barts and St Thomas's, face closure.

For patients and low-paid NHS workers it's a bad situation which is getting worse. But for the Tories and their friends it's a gravy train. The wage bill for senior NHS managers rose by 109 per cent between 1990 and 1992. The private health company BUPA is currently negotiating to run London's GP services; and the government is said to be considering charging convalescing NHS patients up to £30 per night.

The Tories want to deregulate further and faster than their European competitors. That is what lies behind their opposition to the social chapter of the Maastricht Treaty. British workers now work the longest hours in the EC and have slipped to seventh place in the hourly wage table.

But even these statistics only tell

part of the story. Department of Social Security figures show that the poorest 10 per cent of families suffered a cut of 14 per cent in their real living standards between 1979 and 1990/91.

Flushed with such achievements, Chancellor Kenneth Clarke was able to boast in his June speech at the Guildhall that 'Our labour market is one of the most flexible in Europe'.

For low-paid workers there is the ever-present threat of unemployment, while for those already on the dole or on social security order books, there is even greater pressure to force them into the lowest paid jobs. On the other side of the counter, market testing is being introduced throughout the civil service in an effort to compel staff to bid for their own jobs. If the Tories get their way, the privatisers will come

in like bounty hunters on commission to kick claimants off benefits.

Labour's only response to this range of attacks upon the welfare state, with which it has traditionally been identified, has been the predictable round of parliamentary exchanges and press conferences. All this huff and puff is undercut by the fact that Labour's Social Justice Commission has an open-ended brief in which everything is up for discussion. Rather than raising more money from the rich to sustain welfare spending, it is considering ways and means of cutting taxes. The result is that the main problem the Tories have faced is their own electoral base rather than any organised challenge by workers.

The destruction of the NHS, the attack on benefits and market testing can only be defeated by national strike action and hospital

occupations. But for this to become a reality the trade unions have to be dragged off their knees and a fight carried out against Labour's right wing.

The political crisis gripping the Tories is there for all to see. The loss of the deeply conservative constituency of Christchurch in the July 29 by-election showed the widespread discontent among Tory voters. In the same week the government was brought to the brink of defeat by its own right wing over Maastricht. A determined struggle by workers in defence of their rights can take advantage of these contradictions. The paralysis summed up by the idea that 'All we can do is wait for a general election' can be overcome if caucuses are formed in every union of all those prepared to fight the bureaucrats and demand action now.



A section of the demonstration in London on July 24 to mark the tenth anniversary of the racist pogrom against the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. Over a thousand Tamils were murdered during July 1983 by mobs of Sinhalese chauvinists encouraged by the anti-Tamil policies of the UNP government led by J.R. Jayawardene. Many thousands more had their homes, businesses and personal property looted or destroyed as the rioters sought to 'ethnically cleanse' areas outside the Tamil majority provinces of the North and East.

EDITORIAL

The attack on Clause 4

BACK IN 1918, amid the turmoil following the Russian Revolution and the end of the First World War, the Labour Party adopted its 'socialist' constitution. On the one hand, its leaders recognised that, to win the working class away from the Liberals, Labour would have to present itself as a workers' party with a distinct programme; on the other hand, in order to counteract the appeal of communism, it needed to offer at least the vague promise of replacing capitalism with socialism.

The committee charged with drafting the constitution, which included veteran right-wing Fabian Sidney Webb, came up with Clause 4 (part 4), which was cleverly worded so that it could mean all things to all people. It declared that the aim of the Labour Party was 'to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production [distribution and exchange were added later], and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service'. Without defining what 'full fruits', 'common ownership' or the 'best possible system' actually meant, it implied a hazy sort of socialism.

Down the years, the Labour left has viewed Clause 4 with a kind of religious awe. It is held to symbolise the great traditions of the British labour movement. Labour's right wing, for their part, have had mixed feelings about the commitment to 'common ownership'; some have been content to let it remain as an ideological safety valve, while others like Hugh Gaitskell have treated it with unconcealed hostility – as a quasi-Marxist menace.

Today, as the party leadership plunges to the right, Clause 4 is once more under attack. Apparently it is responsible for large numbers of people not voting Labour. Such an idea is of course ridiculous, since only a tiny percentage of either Labour or Tory voters have any idea what Clause 4 of the Labour Party's constitution stands for. Those who want to ditch it – like Jack Straw in his recent pamphlet *Policy and Ideology* – are in full retreat in the face of the Tories' promotion of individualism. Anything that looks remotely like nationalisation, or indeed collective action of any sort, has to be exorcised.

Straw proposes a redraft, defining Labour's aims as supporting 'full democratic citizenship', calling for markets to be 'the servants and not the masters of community', and advocating 'regulation, control and public ownership'. He probably thinks this is the last word in new thinking; in fact, it takes him approximately to where Anthony Crosland had got to in the mid-1950s. Straw, urged on by Will Hutton of *The Guardian*, is in fact proposing the same old utopian nonsense – a socially responsible capitalism.

So, while they should have no illusions about Sidney Webb's old chestnut, Labour Party members should oppose every attempt by the right wing to abolish Clause 4. Like one-member-one vote, this is part and parcel of the drive to extinguish the collectivist traditions of the labour movement in favour of neo-liberal individualism.

Son of Norm

MANY TRADE unionists will not have noticed that the new general secretary of the TUC has been appointed. Indeed, Norman Willis's successor, John Monks, is so faceless that this is not surprising. Time was when the job of general secretary alternated between professional bureaucrats and right-wingers who had risen through the ranks. These days it's a procession of back-room boys – the types who have never led a strike in their lives, and who can't remember what it's like to work anywhere except at Congress House.

And in this respect it must be said that John Monks is a bureaucrat's bureaucrat. For nearly a quarter of a century he laboured behind a desk in Great Russell Street waiting for the great day when he could lead the British trade union movement. Perhaps after all that time to ruminate on the state of the unions he has a powerful vision to share with us – a rallying call to defend the traditions of Tolpuddle, to hold high the people's flag dripping with the blood of the martyrs of past struggles.

Apparently not. Instead, he's detected a new mood among ministers which he hopes to develop. He wants to work with good employers and expose bad ones. And he wants the TUC to be more independent, to build up 'networks across the political spectrum' and to reach out to Liberals and Tories. In June, putting his mouth where his money is, Monks addressed a conference of something calling itself 'Working Together' which attracted 150 Labour and Liberal 'activists'.

It's an open secret that most of the TUC General Council had come to regard Norman Willis as an embarrassing buffoon who should be encouraged to spend more time at home with his family as soon as possible. Monks represents no policy alternative – just better presentation and a sharper understanding of what the Labour right wing is up to. So, while John Smith wants to distance Labour from the unions, Monks wants to make the TUC more open to influence from the class enemy. And while moves are afoot to junk Clause 4 – that product of mature Fabianism – Monks harks back to the early Fabians, who didn't aspire to a distinct workers' party of any type, but tried to 'permeate' their ideas through progressive Liberals and Tories.

It adds up to complete political bankruptcy. If labour lieutenants of capitalism like Monks have their way the trade union movement will become nothing more than a third-rate policy institute for promoting worker/management co-operation. But there's no danger of personal bankruptcy – at £50,000 a year he can look forward to a comfortable retirement. Let's make it sooner rather than later!

Occupy Timex!

By Andrew Mills

THE SACKED Dundee Timex workers are continuing their picket and their campaign for reinstatement despite the announcement on June 15 that the plant is to close by Christmas.

Having failed to force the 343 strikers into accepting pay cuts, worse working conditions and redundancies, the company has decided to transfer production elsewhere.

The strike committee has sent delegations to seek support from workers at other Timex plants in Europe and the United States. A group of 25 recently spent a week in Besancon in France, where 4,000 watches originally intended for repair in Dundee had been sent. With the help of French trade unionists, they managed to turn away lorries and stop mail from being delivered.

There has been some success in Britain in persuading workers in

other companies, notably Creda and Electrolux, to refuse to handle components made by Timex. But the strikers have failed to get the non-unionised workforce at the IBM factory in Greenock to comply. There is also a consumer boycott campaign being organised around the country.

The picketing of the Dundee factory has not stopped the bussing in of white-collar MSF members and the 200 or so replacement workers. There are, however, problems in production as the scabs are not accustomed to the work. Many of the strikers have 20-30 years' experience in assembling electronic products.

The strikers' union, the AEEU, and the Scottish TUC have been of no help whatsoever. The AEEU

leaders have only visited the picket line twice, apparently with the sole intention of ensuring that the strikers obey the anti-union laws. Letters were sent out threatening the withdrawal of strike pay and possible expulsion from the union if members were involved in confrontations with the police.

The response of local AEEU leaders at the beginning of the dispute, when Timex called for 150 workers to be laid off for six months, was to suggest the lay-offs be rotated in order to soften the blow, but this was refused by the management. In early June, after secret negotiations with the company, AEEU national officer Jimmy Airlie put a revised management 'offer' to a mass meeting of strikers which included a 27 per cent cut in pay, a two-year wage freeze and the sack for those who failed a retraining programme. It was almost unanimously rejected by the strikers, who criticised Airlie for bothering to read out an offer worse than the one which had caused the strike in the first place.

The union leaders are now asking Timex to bring in an independent consultant to study the feasibility of continuing work at the Dundee plant, saying that they would abide by the findings. They are also attempting to organise a meeting with management at ACAS.

They know that to have any chance of successfully defending their members' jobs and conditions, they would have to challenge the anti-union laws, but they are frightened that this would lead to the sequestration of union assets.

As for the STUC, it called a day of action on July 1, but then backtracked, complaining that it was too busy with the campaign to keep Rosyth dockyard open. Of course, no attempt was made to bring Rosyth and Timex workers together in a joint struggle.

What, then, is the way forward for the Timex strikers? Their militancy has been exemplary throughout – from the 92 per cent vote for strike action in January and their solidarity on the picket line since the lock-out began on February 15, to their refusal to accept defeat to this day. But important as the campaign to win support from other workers is, it must not become a substitute for direct action in Dundee. Since Timex will not operate the plant under acceptable conditions, it must be occupied by the original workforce, whatever the difficulties, and the demand raised for its nationalisation. If the strikers go down to defeat – however heroically they may have fought – it could have the effect of discouraging other groups of workers in struggle.

Labour movement activists should therefore place the fight for an occupation at the top of their agenda. They must seek to provide the Timex strikers with the funds and practical assistance necessary to carry out such a plan, develop rank-and-file support groups throughout the labour movement, and carry out a determined fight against the AEEU and other right-wing union bureaucrats. Not only is an occupation the only way to defend jobs and conditions at Timex; it would also provide a focus for the wider struggle against the employers and the Tory government.

The London Timex Support Group can be contacted on 071-733 5670.



Scabs are bussed through the picket line into the Timex plant

Busworkers meet to set up rank-and-file committee

THE FIRST steps were taken in the formation of a London rank-and-file busworkers' movement at a meeting in Conway Hall on July 15. Called by the T&GWU reps of six garages in east and south London – Capital Citybus (Northumberland Park), Thornton Heath, Croydon, Clapton, Stamford Hill, Upton Park and Leyton – it was attended by about 30 busworkers, who decided to set up a steering committee at the next meeting at the end of September. Following the disastrous leadership given by full-time officials, it is clear that a number of reps now feel the need to begin a more militant campaign.

However, all the political problems faced by busworkers were present at the meeting. Steve Cushion, the Clapton rep who convened the meeting, spoke of the need to unite all of London's busworkers, and then revealed that he had agreed to a settlement in Leaside of £5 a week (including the 1.5 per cent pay rise) in return for abandoning the London-wide struggle against the imposed cuts of £30-£60 a week!

In line with this, the intention of the organisers is to launch a campaign centred on the demand for a shorter working week. But some units are determined to continue the fight against wage cuts as well –

on July 30, Metroline voted to reject a local deal for the second time in just over a month.

Peter Gibson, who played so crucial a role in betraying the initial struggle, also spoke from the platform, mainly in platitudes. However, he was instrumental in getting the meeting to agree that the new body should not seek union recognition. International Communist Party members spoke from the floor. While correctly attacking the bureaucracy, they offered no alternative and opposed the setting up of a London-wide rank-and-file body. One member even confided his belief that the unions had become concentration camps for their members!

A London-wide body that remains dominated by the methods of the bureaucracy would be just another obstacle in the way of the membership, but that will be determined in the course of future battles. Cushion put the emphasis on struggle, and the presence of militants from Shepherds Bush garage and elsewhere means that this will be a serious attempt to establish a fighting rank-and-file organisation. Cushion also agreed to an emergency recall if serious industrial action broke out in any garage before the next meeting.

TRADE UNIONS IN TORY BRITAIN

All but outlawed

By Daniel Evans

FURTHER clarification of the government's one-and-only policy for 'economic recovery' came in June when it slipped an amendment into the latest raft of anti-union legislation currently proceeding through parliament.

The amendment seeks to legalise an employer's right to pay members of a trade union lower wages than non-members. It was prompted by the victory of three Southampton dockworkers, a *Daily Mail* journalist, and their respective trade unions in a Court of Appeal judgement in April upholding a section of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978.

The case of the dockworkers began in February 1991 when they were offered personal contracts which included a substantial increase in basic and overtime payments in return for giving up all rights to trade union recognition and representation. They refused and were awarded pay increases considerably lower than those who had signed the new contracts, despite the fact that they had informed management they were prepared to work as flexibly as everyone else.

An industrial tribunal ruled against the employers who then

took the case to the Employment Appeal Tribunal, which ruled in their favour. When the case came before the Court of Appeal, management argued that their action was not based on an individual's trade union membership but on his or her use of facilities offered by the unions, such as representation. The court decided the distinction was too fine and that it was clear the management were offering extra pay to those on personal contracts to discourage trade union membership. On this basis they were in breach of the law.

The government, having anticipated the court's decision in what was effectively a staged test case, wasted no time in drafting its new amendment, the implications of which prompted even a former Tory employment minister, Peter Bottomley, to vote against it on the bill's second reading in parliament.

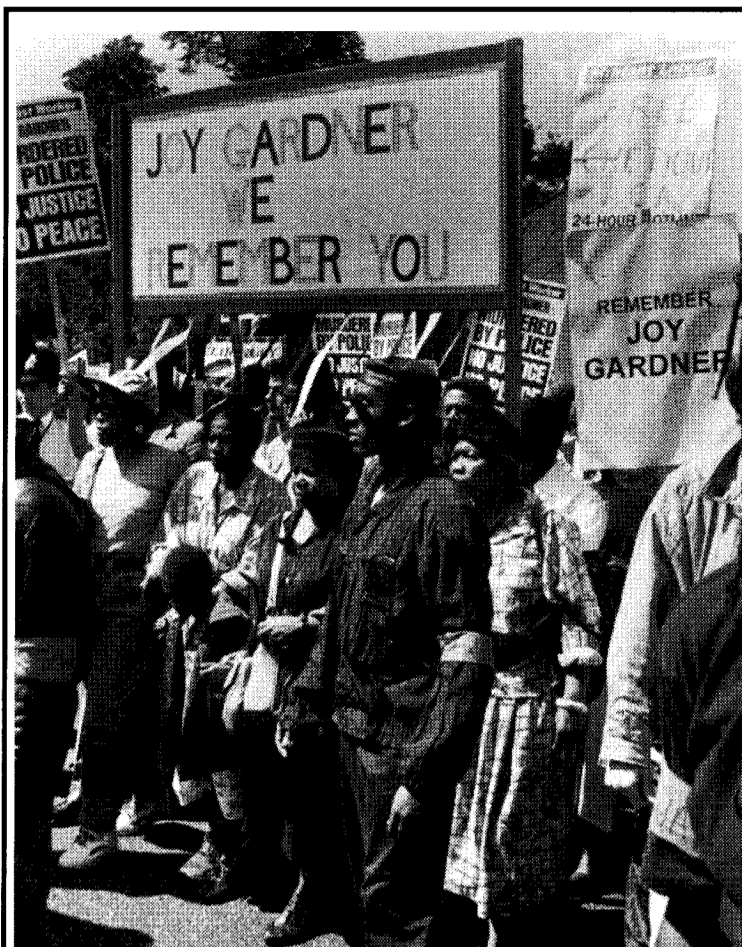
The measure, he complained, would shackle the workers like no other event since the Tolpuddle Martyrs' protest of 1834. Even the Liberal Democrat employment spokesman, Alex Carlisle, said it was 'a form of political discrimination not known in this country in peacetime'.

The amendment is but the latest of the Tory assaults on working class organisation and democratic

rights – which encompass the abolition of the welfare state (including the dismantling of the NHS, the selling of council houses and attacks on state benefits), the increasingly draconian anti-union laws, the ending of wages councils and the introduction of compulsory cheap-labour schemes for the unemployed. It ties in neatly with the government's total opposition to the social chapter of the Maastricht Treaty on European union.

The recently-published '1993 World Competitiveness Report' shows that, in the last year, Britain has dropped from 13th to 19th place among the top 22 industrial nations in terms of domestic economic strength. The only department in which Britain is No.1 is in attracting inward investment.

From being the world's premier exporter of capital at the end of the last century, Britain's decline has been irresistible. It is now one of the largest importers, and the need to go even further along this path is a major preoccupation of the current government. The British ruling class is well aware, through its own experience, that the big attraction for foreign investors is a cheap, unorganised, servile workforce. To this end, it is attempting to introduce sweatshop conditions throughout the British economy.



Myrna Simpson and other family members at the head of the demonstration

AUGUST 7 – Over a thousand people took part in an angry demonstration through Hornsey to demand justice for Joy Gardner, the 40-year-old Jamaican woman who died after a dawn raid on her north London flat by Scotland Yard's extradition and deportation squad. Her mother, Myrna Simpson, has cut through the police account of what happened. She told a public meeting on August 4 that her daughter had been sat on by police, and that her mouth, legs and feet had been taped. The family also have evidence of lacerations to her wrists and extensive bruising. The suspension of three officers involved in the raid is a sop to the wave of protests which have taken place. The real circumstances of Joy Gardner's death must be established by an independent enquiry conducted by the labour movement and the black community.

Teachers need a fighting organisation

By David Lewis

THE NEED to build a new leadership in the teaching unions has never been more urgent. The determination of the Tories to turn back the educational clock has been little affected by this year's successful boycott of school tests.

Doug McAvoy of the National Union of Teachers and Nigel de Gruchy of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers are no match for John Patten and the civil servants of the Department for Education; nor do they wish to be, citing the anti-union laws as an excuse for inaction at every opportunity.

Even with a clear mandate for action, as in the NUT vote at its Easter conference for a boycott of teacher appraisal, the NUT leaders refuse to act. Indeed, the NUT executive opposed a total boycott of this summer's tests until it became clear that they would be outflanked by the NAS/UWT and the non-TUC, non-strike, potential scab union, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. To their relative credit, the NUT leaders did oppose the tests on the basis of their being just a part of an overall unacceptable policy while the NAS/UWT insisted that the issue at stake was only the extra workload involved.

Although neither the cowardice of the union leaders nor the belligerence of the Tories has changed, teachers have become aware of the

possibility of carrying out a successful fight against the Tory 'reforms'. What's needed now is a clear understanding of the role played by the union leaders. Their treachery must be challenged through the building of a rank-and-file opposition to teacher appraisal.

Presented originally as a 'career development' tool, appraisal is now clearly linked to the implementation of performance-related pay, the latest Tory move to divide teachers and undermine the collective role of the unions. The call by the NUT executive for no co-operation with performance-related pay is meaningless without a boycott of appraisal.

Further attacks on teachers' conditions may be expected as part of the government's onslaught on all that is even mildly progressive in education, including modern teaching theory and practice, and genuinely comprehensive schools. The Tories are attempting to reduce what they see as the pernicious influence of teacher-training institutions by cutting the time that student teachers spend there and increasing the time they spend on teaching practice. More extreme plans to qualify non-graduates as primary teachers after one year's teaching practice in an infants school look unlikely to go ahead in the face of a boycott by the National Association of Head Teachers.

The attack on comprehensive education is proceeding through the implementation of local budgeting

which, together with the publication of league tables, encourages a dog-eat-dog approach in which schools vie with each other to market themselves and win parental popularity. The result, for over-subscribed schools, is in practice an insidious return of selection to what are formally non-selective schools.

The response of the Labour Party leaders has been woefully inadequate. They have refused to open an attack on Tory policies, have no

plans to reverse any of the changes, and only came out in support of the teachers' action on testing after the event. The fight must be taken up within the party to commit the leadership to reverse opting out and local management of schools, and to defend comprehensive education.

The leading role in the struggle must belong to the teachers and their unions, although all who wish to defend and extend the right of workers' children to an adequate educa-

tion have a part to play. The struggle against appraisal and performance-related pay requires united action by all teachers; the perspective must be to create a single, fighting teachers' union. In the short term, the unofficial actions which are already under way must be defended and built upon. To be effective they require a genuine rank-and-file movement to take the leadership of teachers' struggles out of the hands of the bureaucrats.

WIL Workers International League

For more information about the Workers International League and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, write to: WIL, 1/17 Meredith Street, London EC1R 0AE

The WIL is the British section of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. Together with comrades in South Africa, Belgium and Germany, we fight to rebuild Trotsky's Fourth International. We are for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a worldwide federation of workers' states, based on workers' democracy and planned economy. Only by workers taking power can the unemployment, poverty, starvation and war bred by capitalism be ended.

In Britain, it is necessary for revolutionaries to fight within the mass organisations of the labour movement, as well as participate in the struggles of all those oppressed by capitalism. We aim to build rank-and-file opposition to the trade union and Labour bureaucrats who stand in the way of any serious struggle to defeat the Tories. Only in this way will a genuine revolutionary party, rather than a sect, be built.

We support all struggles against imperialism, without endorsing the politics of any nationalist leaderships. In wars waged by imperialist powers such as Britain against oppressed countries, and in inter-imperialist wars, we are for the defeat of our own ruling class.

In the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which are no longer deformed/degenerated workers' states, we are for the defence of those gains of the working class that still exist. The remaining deformed workers' states in Cuba and Asia must be defended against imperialism, and the Stalinist bureaucracies overthrown before they too open the door to capitalist restoration.

Behind the recent upsurge in loyalist violence in the North lies the fact that British imperialism's economic and political priorities in Ireland are changing, argues Dan Gallagher

Loyalists fear loss of status

THE LEADER of the Irish Labour Party, Dick Spring, has made an extraordinary intervention in Britain's policy impasse over the North of Ireland. In a recent interview in *The Guardian* he suggested that perhaps the British and Irish governments could reach an agreement on the North over the heads of the unionists and then put this to a referendum there.

In the recent past the Irish President, Mary Robinson, has visited West Belfast and shaken the hand of Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams, and the British Labour Party has produced an SDLP-influenced document that proposes joint British/Irish sovereignty over the North 'in the context of the EC'. Gerry Adams and SDLP leader John Hume have had talks at which they agreed on the need for peace and opposed

an internal settlement. Things are moving in the right direction... or are they?

No! These are merely a reflection of the changing perspectives and conflicting material interests of different sections of British imperialism and Irish capitalism.

The Tory party is at war over its relationship with Europe. The Thatcherites have some 100 anti-European MPs, the Heathites have a small strongly pro-European group and John Major balances between the two. Divisions in the Labour Party also reflect this conflict of capitalist interests in Britain; in a world more and more dividing into three rival trade blocs, where should Britain turn?

Into this crisis Spring intervenes. Irish capitalism needs Europe, the Irish and British trade union

bureaucracies favour the EC — and they all hope that the Heathites will eventually win the political arguments about where the interests of British capitalism lie.

Moreover, the development of manufacturing industry in the South of Ireland over the past decades means that this is now a more profitable area of intervention than the North; the relationship between Dublin and London is now more important than the relationship between Belfast and London. The manoeuvres of the past few weeks, indeed the very war in the North, is used as part of the footwork in determining this new relationship. Domination continues, but in a different form.

Spring was annoyed because since taking office as Taniste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Foreign Min-

ister at the start of the year he had made several conciliatory noises to the unionists which they contemptuously rejected. These included promising to scrap Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, which claim sovereignty over the North.

In a move to consolidate unionist votes in the House of Commons and to appease the Thatcherite right wing, Major rejected Labour's joint sovereignty proposals and referred to the Tory party as the 'Conservative and Unionist Party', a term that has not been used in parliament for many years. James Molyneux, the leader of the Official Unionists, claims that Major promised to allow the Anglo-Irish Agreement to 'wither', and offered more 'local democracy' (that is, more opportunities for pro-loyalist discrimination) in return for their support against the Labour motion on the Maastricht Treaty.

The increase in sectarian murders by the loyalist paramilitaries over the past year reflects the fears of the most reactionary and backward Protestant workers that Westminster will not guarantee them first call on jobs and housing indefinitely. Allied to this is the fear that the nationalist population is growing in proportion to the loyalist, and that they might become a majority in the next few decades and assume power even without the political defeat of the reactionary ideology of loyalism. Sinn Fein's votes increased in the local government elections, particularly in Belfast.

The political hold of the Official Unionists and even of Paisley's Democratic Unionists is threatened by extreme reactionaries, who have now begun to rationalise that huge pogroms might be necessary to drive out the nationalist population from loyalist areas and even from the

North itself to maintain the status quo. The nationalists are in the majority now west of the Bann and may even take control of Belfast before the end of the decade. The SAS and MI5 actively collaborate with the Thatcherite wing of the British ruling class in assisting the loyalists in assassinations, and the loyalists still legally hold over 100,000 guns.

Into this web of intrigue the British and Irish working class must intervene to impose their own solution. Principled solidarity work in Britain for the withdrawal of troops must be combined with propaganda for a socialist solution to the crisis of working class leadership. Socialism must never be posed as a precondition for withdrawal but must be fought for as the only answer. Likewise the struggle for leadership in the trade unions in Britain and in Ireland must be seen as a struggle against imperialism and Irish capitalism.

The utopian ideology of the rightward-moving Sinn Fein leadership needs to be constantly exposed. A letter to Sinn Fein's paper *An Poblacht* of July 15 makes its point well. Dahi De Bru says:

'Socialist sounding rhetoric has often been employed [by Sinn Fein] in order to attract working class support but nothing has been done to flesh out this "socialism" in order to prevent the alienation of other support, be it real or potential. The result has been a vague promise of better things to come and a real hope that no one ever asks how... In any case any political movement that refuses to commit itself to the right of women to self-determination over their own bodies for reasons of political expediency, has no right to call itself either socialist or revolutionary.'

UN reign of terror in Somalia

By Jabu Masilela

EIGHT months ago the United Nations proclaimed to the whole world its 'noble' mission of ending the civil war in Somalia. But very soon Operation Restore Hope became in effect another Operation Desert Storm. After less than a month in Somalia, UN troops were slaughtering and maiming residents of the capital, Mogadishu. As a result, most Somalis began to identify them as their main enemy.

As UN troops entered Mogadishu thousands of Somalis took to the streets demanding that they leave

the country immediately. Independent aid agencies took the same stand, warning that the troops would put at risk the progress achieved so far in Somalia. According to Jamie McGoldrick of Save the Children Fund, 'The relief work is dead'. Even worse, 'This has become a purely military operation'. He says that 35 feeding centres in Mogadishu are now closed, and about 2,000 people dependent on food aid are starving while 15,000 tonnes of food lie idle in the port. He adds that the Somali masses absolutely hate the UN troops because of their cruelty.

Any credibility the UN might

still have had among Somalis was finally destroyed by the reign of terror its troops unleashed against the residents of Mogadishu in June and July. After 23 Pakistani soldiers were killed by General Mohammed Farah Aideed's forces while attempting to seize the latter's anti-UN radio station, UN troops started attacking Somali civilians with such ferocity that many journalists now characterise the UN as the 'new warlord of Mogadishu'. For instance, Pakistani soldiers mowed down many unarmed demonstrators on June 17. Later, even more civilians perished at the hands of the US troops (the most notorious of all the UN contingents) when they launched their two savage attacks on Aideed's headquarters.

Some UN officials are now advocating sanctions against the entire population of south Mogadishu, mainly supporters of Aideed, in the hope that they will blame their leader and turn against him. Is the starving of people to death part of the humanitarian effort? Did the majority of the people of Somalia ever demand such sanctions to topple their dictators? If so, why did the UN not respect similar wishes by the oppressed majority in South Africa? And what about Jonas Savimbi who is still violating the results of UN-supervised elections in Angola? To crown it all, the chief of the UN operation in Somalia, Admiral Jonathan Howe, has offered a \$25,000 reward for Aideed. This is simply a new pre-

text for the UN to continue its bloody crusade against the Somali people, especially their front-line militants.

However, the masses have answered this naked brutality by massive demonstrations, and attacks on 'foreigners' (four journalists have been killed) and anyone suspected of UN links. Armed militias are engaging the enemy troops in combat — about 19,000 UN troops are on the defensive from daily guerrilla attacks, according to *The Economist* of July 10-16. This has resulted in the imperialist army of occupation cracking along national lines. The 'rebellious' contingents of Pakistan, Botswana, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Italy now claim to be in favour of negotiations with the Somalis, especially Aideed, and opposed to the Rambo-style approach of the Americans. Consequently, they now refuse to participate in any offensive actions, or to carry out important UN instructions, without the go-ahead from their governments.

Once again the UN has been exposed as a tool of imperialism, especially that of the United States. First, the US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, forced UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to replace his trusted special envoy in Somalia, Ismat Kittani of Iraq, with Admiral Howe. Second, the US insisted that the military commander of the UN operation in Somalia be General Cevit Bir of Turkey. Third, Bir's deputy, Major-General Tom Montgomery, is

an American. Only then did the US agree for the first time to put its troops under UN command!

The masses of Somalia have no choice but to intensify their heroic fight against the UN. The shock-troops of Mogadishu carry the great political responsibility of rallying behind them every Somali in a united national war of resistance. The crisis facing the UN is a living testimony of this revolutionary potential. But the 'warlords' are a major obstacle to a really successful struggle against the UN. If the dictator Saddam Hussein could not lead the Iraqi masses in a serious anti-imperialist struggle against the same UN troops during the Gulf war, then a factionalist 'warlord' like Aideed is even less reliable.

Hence, the present anti-UN struggle must be deepened through a worker-peasant alliance programme counterposed to the reactionary policies of all the 'warlords.' Those parts of Somalia, including the independent Republic of Somaliland, that still have 'peace' should offer every possible support to those in the front line. A victory for imperialism will rob them of this 'peace' for it will instal another Siyaad Barre. Moreover, their non-clan unity can inspire the rank and file of the different groupings to unite around their common interests. At the same time, in countries with troops in Somalia, working class militants, especially revolutionary socialists, should actively campaign for their immediate withdrawal.



One of the 14 civilians killed by UN troops in Mogadishu on June 13

ITALY

The system goes down

Federico Parodi reports from Italy on the crisis that has engulfed the country's political establishment

IN THE present world situation, with all the media hype about the so-called 'death of communism', you might think that everything is going well for the bourgeoisie. But it is enough to take a look at Italy to think twice. Right now the political system as it has been run by the Italian bourgeoisie since the war is going to pieces: those above can no longer rule like before, and those below no longer want to be ruled like before.

Not only have the ruling parties which kept Italy going for the bourgeoisie – the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party – taken a beating in the recent local elections, but a good number of leading politicians and other servants of capitalism are in jail indicted of

crimes ranging from pure and simple corruption and blackmail to collaboration with the Mafia in assassinations.

A dangerous factor in the situation is the rapid growth of the Northern League, a movement based on demagoguery against immigrant workers, southern Italians and Rome (which supposedly symbolises a state which steals from the industrial north to provide the lazy and mafioso south with handouts). Its followers could easily turn into fascistic shock troops to be unleashed against the working class. In just a few years it has become a force to be reckoned with – the largest party throughout the north of Italy in the recent elections, with 40 per cent of the votes in Milan.

On the side of the working class, there has been a powerful sequence of strikes and protest demonstrations since last autumn. Workers fought against the austerity plans of the government of Giuliano Amato – who fell flat on his face after only a few months – and the current one led by Azeglio Ciampi, formerly Governor of the Bank of Italy.

The situation could open up for workers if – and this is a big 'if' – there was a proletarian revolutionary party offering a way out of the crisis: a radical and deep-going transformation of society, a socialist alternative to the rotten capitalist system.

The bourgeoisie in crisis: a country tied up in bribery

For well over a year, political life in Italy has been dominated by revelations about the corruption of the parties and the bribes they get ('tangenti'). The whole thing started in Milan, where the inquiring magistrates launched an investigation into the relationship between the bosses and local administrators in charge of public works.

The 'clean hands' inquiry is leaving behind quite a number of illustrious corpses. The former prime minister, Bettino Craxi – head of the Socialist Party and aspiring 'Bonaparte' – was compelled to resign his position. His party scored a pitiful one per cent in Milan, down

from 19 per cent. The Christian Democrat Giulio Andreotti, another former prime minister and a key figure in the regime for the past 40 years, today finds himself in the hot seat accused of connections with the Mafia and involvement in murder.

Although it makes big headlines this is really nothing new. As long ago as 1948, the Communist Party was campaigning against the corruption of the Christian Democrats and their allies. What is different now is the attempt by some sections of the Italian bourgeoisie to change the political institutions. They are trying to find a way to prop up their crumbling system of rule, and use the situation to impose anti-working class measures.

This produces a lot of talk about a 'Second Republic'. (The 'First' was created after the defeat of fascism at the end of the Second World War.) The new set-up is intended to be much less democratic from the outset by changing the present electoral law based on proportional representation and bringing it closer to the British system of 'first past the post'.

The growth of the Northern League, which gets money from some of the bosses and votes from most of the middle class in one-third of the country, does not really provide the bourgeoisie with an alternative. This is a political party without any clear programme, except for the silly idea of splitting northern Italy from the rest of the country, which goes directly against the interests of those who control the purse-strings of Italian society.

A militant working class keeps fighting

Under capitalism the political regime does matter, but things are really decided at the level of the class struggle. The bosses know this, and the advanced elements of the proletariat know it too. For many decades Italy had the largest Communist Party in the West. The PCI was for a period the largest party in the country, with over a third of the popular vote.

The PCI's crisis of perspectives, together with the crisis of Stalinism on an international level, led it to announce its own death in 1991. The right-wing majority became the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) and joined the misnamed Socialist International, while the left-wing minority drew in various far-left groupings to establish the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC).

But most important of all, the militant Italian proletariat did not give up. Facing a series of reaction-

ary anti-working class measures, strikes and demonstrations have grown in number and importance. They culminated on February 27 with a big national demonstration in Rome against the economic policies of the government. Organised by the factory councils (the equivalent of shop stewards' committees) over the heads of the trade union leaders who were too busy collaborating with the bosses, the demonstration was a show of strength, with almost 300,000 people taking part, many of them carrying red flags with the hammer and sickle of the PRC.

All this points to the contradictory nature of the present situation. The PRC could rightly be regarded as a kind of 'united front' of the working class. Within it have regrouped several tens of thousands of activists who did not accept the propaganda of the bourgeoisie and its lackeys about the 'death of communism' following the destruction of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe. And in the recent election, workers expressed themselves by making the PRC the second party in northern Italy, ahead of the PDS.

Can the PRC provide a way forward?

For advanced workers and for conscious revolutionaries active in the PRC this is no idle question. If this party is to rally popular opposition to capitalism there has to be a clear break with all notions of a 'struggle' which remains firmly confined within the framework of the parliamentary institutions of the bourgeoisie. It has to become a genuine communist party with the perspective of bringing the workers to power.

And that is why Trotskyists in Italy fight to regroup within the PRC all those who regard themselves as genuine communists, and argue for a political line that could win wide support among party activists and within the working class. This means a programme of resistance against the attacks of the bosses, centred on the sliding scale of hours and wages, and the reorganisation of the trade union movement on the basis of the factory councils and workers' democracy.

Within the PRC itself there must be an open debate about its aims and perspectives, beyond a narrow focus on everyday work, and a serious balance sheet drawn of the causes of the destruction of the Soviet Union and today's 'crisis of communism'. Our class enemy is well organised, nationally and internationally. We need to be organised even better!

Divisions grow in China

By Ian Harrison

SINCE 1989 there has been a rapid acceleration in the growth of the Chinese economy, in large part fuelled by the injection of billions of dollars by the exiled bourgeoisie. Accompanying this growth – 12 per cent in 1992 and 15 per cent in the first quarter of this year – has been the tendency of the eastern coastal provinces to pull away from the western and hinterland regions, and for the gap between rich and poor to widen.

Twenty-five million urban and 220 million rural workers were officially categorised as 'surplus' by 1990, with 80 million unemployed migrating from the countryside to the cities. The paper *China Daily* estimates that there will be a surplus of 300 million people by the year 2000. Only workers in state-owned enterprises are eligible for unemployment benefit.

Unofficial sources claim that the period since 1979 has seen party bosses, not content with living in luxury, salting away \$15 billion in Swiss bank accounts. According to the state statistics bureau, personal savings on deposit now stand at the equivalent of \$200 billion – up 49 per cent on the 1978 figure. But 28 per cent of these deposits were made by just three million families. Approximately a quarter of the population – 300 million people – earns less than \$30 per year.

Neither peasants nor workers are benefiting from the reforms, which newspapers in Hong Kong acknowledge are leading to the restoration of capitalism. Since 1979, it has been the turn of provincial party bosses to increase their plundering of the economy and resources. The vast corruption of the bureaucracy and the growth of inequality could lead to a reactionary and bloody civil war on a scale far exceeding that seen in ex-Yugoslavia and the Caucasus. The alternative is the struggle for political revolution, the overthrow of the bureaucracy and



Unemployed rural workers from Henan province queue for train tickets to Beijing

the establishment of workers' democracy supported by the mass of poor peasants.

Party bureaucrats faced the tremors of such a movement earlier this year when peasants, overburdened with new taxes by local party leaders and refused payment in cash on IOUs for last year's crops, began to demonstrate. Such is their plight, exacerbated by the ending of state subsidies on staple food items, that up to 30 per cent of the best arable land is lying fallow in provinces such as Zhejiang and Hang Zhou. Their revolt was soon followed by important strikes in areas penetrated by foreign capital. Much of the unrest took place in provinces previously considered 'loyal to the party' such as Shaanxi.

The Beijing leadership responded to the prospect of combined rural and urban class struggle by reining in the worst excesses of the provincial party bosses and expelling a handful of corrupt officials. Vice-premier Zhu Rongji, the latest protégé of Deng Xiaoping, was placed in charge of the central bank on July 2. Strict instructions have been issued to the provincial bureaucrats to curb speculative investments and pay outstanding debts to the peasants in cash. But attempts by Rongji to slow down the flow of funds to

the coastal regions, where opportunities for speculation are greater, will undoubtedly be resisted. The provincial leaders control vast sums of money and scarce hard currency, and use this economic clout to force concessions from Beijing.

Despite the tensions within the bureaucracy, links with the exiled bourgeoisie are steadily growing. In April, the first 'high level' talks since 1949 were established between representatives from the mainland and the Guomindang in Taiwan. They took the form of economic, scientific and cultural agreements, setting the scene for the formal opening of political relations.

Only the working class in China is capable of blocking the bureaucracy's road to capitalist restoration. It must draw on all its historical experiences and organise, on an illegal basis, a workers' party. Such a party would need a programme capable of uniting the working class throughout China, winning the support of the unemployed, the rural masses and the oppressed minority peoples. It would also need to seek the support of those students and intellectuals who are in struggle against the bureaucracy, while making no concessions to pacifist and pro-restorationist elements within their ranks.

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THE AUGUST COUP

The attempted coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991 has proved to be a contentious issue among Trotskyists. **Martin Sullivan** examines the various responses to what was clearly a turning point in history

IT IS now two years since the August coup, which had such profound political consequences for what was then still the Soviet Union. The ignominious collapse of this attempted putsch by the so-called Emergency Committee revealed the impotence of the extreme 'hardline' section of the bureaucracy. In doing so, it also pulled the rug from under Mikhail Gorbachev, whose balancing role between the hardline and reforming wings of the bureaucracy was made redundant by the former's political disintegration. In the aftermath of the coup, Gorbachev was quickly shunted aside, and the most pro-capitalist forces around Boris Yeltsin established their ascendancy.

The Soviet Union proceeded to break up into its constituent national republics. This in itself effectively destroyed the old centrally 'planned' economy, and the resulting independent states are now headed by regimes all of which are presiding over the restoration of capitalism. Although

their economies will remain predominantly state-owned for some time to come, the regimes themselves are defending not the old nationalised property forms but the emergent capitalist ones. The attempted coup of August 1991 was thus the crucial link in a chain of events which has resulted in the destruction of the degenerated workers' state.

Even on the most basic factual level, completely conflicting reports of the coup appeared in the left press. One popular version had it that the coup's collapse was ensured by a mass opposition movement in which the Soviet working class played the leading role. *Workers Press*, never at a loss for a stupid headline, splashed across its front page the announcement 'Workers Action Decisive in Coup Defeat'. *Militant* reported that 'across the Soviet Union, demonstrations took to the streets. After Yeltsin's appeal for a general strike, workers stopped work from

the Kuzbass in the south to Vorkuta in the north. Workers in Leningrad factories formed armed defence squads'.

In complete contrast, tendencies such as the Spartacists and the International Bolshevik Tendency denounced the resistance to the coup, arguing that it was dominated by capitalist-restorationists who represented a bigger threat to the working class than the coup-makers themselves. Dismissing those who rallied to the parliament building in Moscow (the White House) as 'Yeltsinite rabble', the IBT asserted that 'Moscow's pimps, currency speculators and other "entrepreneurs" . . . along with their private security guards, comprised the bulk of the crowd'. For its part, the Revolutionary Trotskyist League (a US group at one time associated with Workers Power), claimed that the defenders of the White House comprised 'militias of capitalists, stock-brokers, fascists, confused petty bourgeois elements plus young anarchists' - which must qualify as the first recorded sighting of a stockbrokers' militia!

Concerning the objectives of the coup, there was equal disagreement among the different groupings. The IBT, ever eager to find an anti-capitalist wing of the bureaucracy to support, argued that the putschists were 'Stalinist bureaucrats attempting to hang on to the power and prerogatives of the central apparatus, which depended on the existence of a state-

owned economy'. Though they later changed their minds, Workers Power and its League for a Revolutionary Communist International initially agreed that the coup leaders sought to 'defend their privileges on the basis of post-capitalist property relations'. A more realistic assessment was made by a member of the United Secretariat's International Trotskyist Opposition. 'Both the coup plotters and the Yeltsinites had a restorationist programme,' he pointed out. 'The coup plotters wanted to preserve the Soviet Union intact, slow the pace of restoration in order to maintain control and "order" and to close down workers' democracy.' The Spartacists succinctly summarised the Emergency Committee's programme as 'Perestroika minus glasnost: the introduction of the market but not so fast'.

As to the outcome of the coup, for many tendencies mindless optimism was the order of the day. The United Secretariat, predictably, 'hailed' the defeat of the putsch on the grounds that this had defended democratic rights, ignoring the fact that it had also speeded up the process of capitalist restoration. 'August 1991,' the USec's British section declared, 'was the month when the democratic revolution, having swept through eastern Europe in 1989-90, finally came home to the Soviet Union.' Workers Power/LRCI announced that 'the failed coup d'etat of 19-21 August has deepened the pre-revolutionary situation in the

USSR', while the Lambertists went even further, proclaiming that 'a new phase in the political revolution' had opened up. The Spartacists, for their part, argued that the coup's failure had 'unleashed a counterrevolutionary tide across the land of the October Revolution'.

With regard to the state formations which emerged subsequent to the coup, there is by no means agreement among Trotskyists as to their present character. Although most tendencies would now concede that the destruction of the Soviet workers' state has been politically completed, Workers Power/LRCI emphatically deny that the outcome of the coup's debacle was the emergence of capitalist states. According to their analysis, the various fragments of the ex-USSR will remain workers' states until the law of value has been restored as the main co-ordinating principle of these economies.

On the central question of what action Trotskyists in the USSR should have taken in response to the coup, here again groups took diametrically opposed positions. The IBT's bizarre answer was that we should not have organised resistance to the coup, but rather 'an assault to disperse the few hundred lightly armed Yeltsinites in and around the Russian White House'. The IBT held that 'Yeltsin was the greatest danger', and that revolutionaries should therefore have rallied the working class behind the coup-

Bosnia and the British left

THE BREAK-UP of Yugoslavia has put all those who call themselves Marxists to a severe test. On balance, virtually all have been found wanting, and it is on the national question in particular that they have shown their Marxist credentials to be fake.

It is not surprising that the analysis of the SWP, the largest group on the British left, bears the least resemblance to Marxism - this comes naturally to an organisation whose contempt for principled politics is barely concealed. In the May 1993 edition of *Socialist Review*, Chris Bambery put forward the SWP's position that the conflict in Bosnia has been reactionary on all sides from the start. He rejected giving any support to the Bosnian Muslims, who are facing daily pogroms, on the grounds that 'pouring more arms into the region can only escalate the conflict', repeating almost word for word the statement of Tory Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd the previous month. The article was accompanied by uncritical interviews with a number of pacifists in various parts of the former Yugoslavia, whose views fit neatly with the SWP's own position. In the next issue of the journal, Alex Callinicos repeated this liberal-pacifist nonsense.

The SWP makes no attempt to formulate a programme for socialists who are actually in ex-Yugoslavia, preferring to leave the solution to a spontaneous uprising of workers against their leaders sometime in the future. This conveniently ignores how such struggles could come about, as well as the vital issues of the national question, self-determination and the

fight for an internationalist Marxist party.

Militant shares the SWP's view that the war is reactionary on all sides. In the May-June 1993 issue of *Militant International Review*, Peter Taaffe argues that, whilst the Serbian leaders share some responsibility for the conflict because of their attempts to create a Greater Serbia by nationalist repression, 'the Croat and Muslim incipient capitalist elements, together with imperialism' are also guilty. His analysis, though interspersed with a smattering of Marxist phraseology, in fact evades the need for a concrete analysis of the situation. It also indicates that *Militant* still regards Serbia as some form of workers' state, which is being undermined by imperialism's support for Croatian and Bosnian 'capitalist elements'. The logical conclusion would be to support Serbia in the conflict but, true to form, Taaffe settles for an abstract call for a Balkan Socialist Federation, thereby keeping his 'purity'. But since he doesn't provide any explanation of how this might be achieved, in practice *Militant*'s position is little different from the SWP's.

In contrast to the SWP and *Militant*, Workers Power has at least attempted to provide a serious analysis of the situation as it has developed. The problem has been a lack of consistency. At the beginning of the Yugoslavian break-up in 1991, the group took an abstractly correct position in support of the right of self-determination for Slovenia and Croatia. However, it hit problems with this line when it tried to formulate more concrete positions. After initially (and

correctly) supporting the right of the Croats to resist the Serbian onslaught - at that time the main issue of the war was Croatia's right to secede from the federation - Workers Power publicly repudiated this position and stressed that the conflict was reactionary on all sides (*Workers Power*, November 1991).

Workers Power came back on side - briefly - when the war shifted to Bosnia. 'Workers should condemn the bloody and wholly unjustified annexationist attacks of the Yugoslav army against the Muslim and Croatian population of Bosnia-Herzegovina,' said a prominent article on the back page of the June 1992 edition of *Workers Power*. 'We should support the victims of these vicious attacks when they resist being driven out of towns where they and their ancestors have lived for centuries.'

However, three months later the line had changed back again: the war was once more viewed as reactionary on all sides, and the Bosnians were condemned for claiming the right of self-determination (when at the time of the referendum the only other immediate choice was to become an oppressed part of a Greater Serbia). Worse still, Workers Power took the SWP line of not supporting the Muslims because they would 'wreak the same damage' as the Serbs and the Croats (*Workers Power*, September 1992), forgetting that you can't fight against pogroms without weapons.

But this line soon changed yet again! In *Workers Power* of December 1992, an LRCI thesis stated that 'revolutionaries critically support the defensive struggle of the Muslim Bosnians

against the policy of ethnic cleansing from the Serb and Croat side. We call for the defeat of Croat and Serb forces at the hands of the Bosnian Muslims and their allies'.

These inconsistencies have been compounded by the mistaken view that 'Serbia (like Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia) remains a degenerated workers' state' (*Workers Power*, September 1992) - which rests on a one-sided 'economic analysis', leaving out of consideration the political leaderships who are presiding over weak bourgeois regimes where the law of value is only just beginning to be restored, as it is in the ex-USSR.

We believe that it is not enough for socialists in the west simply to state that they are against imperialist intervention, or talk abstractly about self-determination or workers' unity without presenting a concrete analysis of the steps necessary to achieve this. The analysis of the break-up of Yugoslavia made by the Workers International League has consistently underlined the central role of the national question in the situation. We explained that, far from solving the national question, the right of self-determination adopted by Yugoslavia under Tito in 1946 'was in reality a fiction' (*Workers News*, July 1991), and defended the right of all minority nationalities to secede from the Yugoslav Federation, whilst at the same time arguing for a genuine Socialist Federation of the Balkans.

From the beginning we were against imperialist intervention, as well as the poison of Greater Serbian chauvinism (see the LTT's 'Theses on Yugoslavia', August 1991, *In defence*



Fleeing the carnage: a UNHCR convoy

of *Marxism* No.1). On the national question we argued that 'Trotskyists are not partisans of union where the masses feel the state to be a prison house . . . In the epoch of imperialism socialists must prove themselves as vigorous defenders of democratic rights and as opponents of every manifestation of national chauvinism' (*Workers News*, October-November 1991). Where a majority of the masses had expressed its desire to secede 'then it is the duty of socialists to defend its right to do so. Only on this basis can the unity of the working class be re-established'. We also made it clear, however, that 'we are not partisans of nationalism or national culture', but that where national oppression exists 'socialists must stand shoulder to shoulder with the o-

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makers, because the latter's victory 'could . . . have slowed the restorationist momentum at least temporarily, and bought precious time for the Soviet working class'.

If the Spartacists refused to go along with this, it was only because the hardliners failed to organise a proper crackdown à la Jaruzelski in 1981. Had the Emergency Committee proved capable of crushing the masses in approved Stalinist fashion, of course, it would have received the wholehearted approval of these misnamed Trotskyists. As it was, the Spartacists were not prepared to throw their political authority behind such a 'comic opera coup', and adopted an abstentionist position.

Then there were those who considered forming a hypothetical bloc with the coup plotters if the latter had mobilised the workers behind them. 'If sectors of the working class had rallied in support of the coup, wanting to struggle against austerity and other moves toward capitalist restoration,' wrote Franco Grisolia of the ITO/USec, 'Trotskyists should have allied with them.' Voce Operaia have explained that they didn't support the coup 'but faced by Yeltsin's counterputsch we wouldn't have hesitated to form a united front with the bureaucracy and CPSU sectors ready to fight mobilising and arming the working class'.

Other tendencies recognised that the duty of Trotskyists was to rally

workers against the putsch. 'It would have been criminal not to have opposed the coup,' the RTL wrote. But they rejected any bloc with Yeltsin to fight the coup, arguing for the mobilisation of the working class independently of the Yeltsinite forces. This brought the RTL into conflict with Workers Power/LRCI, who had argued for a 'united front' with Yeltsin. The LRCI's position was that, failing the success of the political revolution, Yeltsin's victory over the Emergency Committee was the preferred political outcome, because it maintained democratic rights for Soviet workers and gave them a breathing space in which to organise against capitalist restoration.

What forces were in fact mobilised against the Emergency Committee? First of all, the view that the Soviet working class was the decisive force in defeating the coup must be rejected. The response to Yeltsin's call for a general strike was patchy to say the least. There was a strike movement in the coalfields, though even this was partial, and some factories in Leningrad came out. But the bulk of the working class remained passive. Partly this was due to the failure of leading Yeltsin supporters to back his demagogic call for mass resistance to the coup. Leningrad's Yeltsinite mayor, Anatoly Sobchak called on strikers to return to work, while Marxists who leafleted Leningrad factories calling on workers to arm themselves were reportedly beaten up by Yeltsinite thugs. More fundamentally, many workers saw in the coup only a conflict between rival wings of the bureaucracy, neither of which had anything to offer the working class.

As for the crowd who gathered outside the Russian parliament and erected makeshift barricades against the coup, it is impossible to make an exact analysis of its composition. But it is worth noting that of the three protesters killed during the army's half-cocked efforts at repression, one was an architect and another an economist. This would tend to bear out the view that the forces who rallied to the White House were predominantly pro-glasnost sections of the 'middle class'. No doubt there were also some extreme reactionaries present, along with spivs and racketeers. But it must be said that the latter category of people are not much given to acts of heroism in defence of political principles. Getting shot or crushed to death under a tank tends to seriously interfere with future profits.

What were the objectives of the coup? It is doubtful whether the putschists themselves were entirely clear on this. But in general the analysis of the ITO/USec and the Spartacists, quoted above, seems correct. The Emergency Committee hoped to prevent the political break-up of the Soviet Union, favoured a slow-track restoration of capitalism and intended at least to severely curtail those democratic rights which both the working class and the intelligentsia had established during the period of glasnost.

The dual role of the Stalinist bureaucracy – which had in the past defended by its own counter-revolutionary methods the nationalised property on which its parasitic existence depended – had completely evaporated. These 'hardliners' had scarcely

any more confidence in the old Stalinist system than the most pro-capitalist elements in the bureaucracy, and they were unable to put forward any serious alternative programme to Gorbachev or Yeltsin. It was these developments, and not the immediate threat of a popular insurrection led by the working class, which explains the collapse of the coup.

What were the consequences of the coup? If the political groups who claimed that the Emergency Committee was defeated by a workers' uprising were guilty of substituting wishful thinking for sober political analysis, this was equally true of those who saw the coup's collapse as a step in the direction of the political revolution. Two years on, it is clear that the main result was to greatly strengthen the drive towards capitalist restoration. Whether they are headed by former Stalinists or new bourgeois politicians, the various regimes in the former USSR are all firmly on the road back to capitalism.

This makes nonsense of the claim that these remain workers' states. It is true that the nationalised property forms cannot be abolished immediately, and that these economies will probably retain a large state sector for an extended period. However, the role of the state apparatus will not be to defend the remains of the old bureaucratically-misplanned economy, but to facilitate the development of capitalist property ownership. If workers were to occupy a factory and oppose its privatisation, it is not difficult to predict what the role of the 'bodies of armed men' in these new states would be. The former Soviet republics cannot be seen as anything other than bourgeois states.

What should revolutionaries have done in August 1991? The short answer is that they should have organised resistance to the coup. Those who say that the main enemy was Yeltsin are arguing with the benefit of hindsight. This only became clear after the collapse of the coup. *During the three days of the coup, the main threat was the coup.*

As Workers News stated at the time, what was necessary was to 'mobilise workers to take mass strike action against the coup on the basis of their own independent class interests'. But, contrary to the RTL's line, this would necessarily have required at least a temporary bloc with the Yeltsinites. A Trotskyist miner, for example, faced with the proposal to support Yeltsin's call for a general strike, couldn't have opposed it on the grounds that he would have preferred some other kind of general strike. He would have spoken in favour of strike action, while warning against the consequences of Yeltsin's programme.

In the case of the demonstrations outside the Russian parliament, those supporters of the LRCI and the WRP/Workers Press who appeared at the barricades were entirely correct to do so. Trotskyists could not dismiss pro-glasnost demonstrators as 'rabble' but were obliged to bloc with them against the coup, while arguing against their illusions in capitalist restoration.

For Trotskyists to have blocked with the Emergency Committee in crushing these demonstrations would have been politically suicidal. The question for revolutionaries was how to develop the workers' movement, how to overcome the atomisation the working class had suffered during



Tanks head towards the Kremlin on August 19, 1991

more than half a century of Stalinism. A victory for the coup would not have accomplished this. On the contrary, the Emergency Committee could not have 'stabilised' the USSR without the most massive repression, which would have been directed first and foremost at the emergent workers' organisations.

Under these circumstances, abstract deliberations about the possibility of an alliance with the coup plotters, if only they had rallied the working class in defence of nationalised property, were meaningless. It is true that Trotsky raised the hypothesis of a united front with the Thermidorian wing of the bureaucracy against capitalist restoration. But that was back in 1938, when the social revolution which had established nationalised property relations still lived in the consciousness of the masses, and the dominant section of the bureaucracy identified its own survival with the preservation of state-owned property. In 1991, with the Soviet economy in a state of virtual collapse, the principle of economic planning was discredited in the minds of workers and bureaucrats alike, and Trotsky's hypothesis was inapplicable.

Any bloc with the Yeltsinites, however, was permissible only on the basis of no political support. And it must be said that Workers Power/LRCI equivocated on this. Their argument that a Yeltsin victory was preferable because it would give the working class a *political* breathing space was simply the obverse of the IBT's position that a victory for the Emergency Committee would give workers an *economic* breathing space. In fact the 'plague on both their houses' attitude of many workers contained an important element of truth. Revolutionaries who were trying to convince these workers to overcome their passivity, and to take political action on their own behalf against the coup, couldn't have done so by arguing that a victory for Yeltsin was preferable to his defeat by the Emergency Committee.

Some may object that this is rather an abstract discussion. After all, none of the tendencies who have argued so hotly over their analysis of the August coup, and over the action revolutionaries should have taken in response to

it, could have played any significant role at the time. Either they had no forces at all in the Soviet Union in August 1991 or, if they did, their numbers were so small that they couldn't have influenced the outcome of events, however correct their analysis or programme.

But this is no academic debate. Organisations which are unable to respond in a Marxist fashion to a major historical event like the August coup are unlikely to develop a Marxist analysis and programme in a situation where they do exercise political leadership. During the 1930s, although Trotsky and his supporters rarely carried sufficient political weight to influence the major events of the period, they had a correct analysis and programme – and this was where the strength of the Trotskyist movement lay. In the post-war period, however, the movement became politically disoriented, and lost its ability to analyse and respond programmatically to events. An assessment of the response of would-be Trotskyists to the August coup therefore carries important lessons, not the least of which is the need to rebuild the Fourth International on a principled political basis.

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pressed. In doing so, they must put forward the slogan of independent workers' republics – that is the bridge by which they reach out to the masses and win them to the task of overthrowing their own pro-capitalist leaders or remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracies. On such a basis, genuine internationalist relations will be established between workers of different nationalities'.

It is from this correct analysis that we have developed our position on the break-up of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia. We are proud of our record, but we cannot claim the credit for its origins; they rest with the method of Lenin and Trotsky, in whose tradition we stand. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of most the British left.

A delegation from the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency recently visited Sri Lanka. In his second report on the trip, **Martin Sullivan** examines the various political tendencies in the Sri Lankan workers' movement

MARXISM IN SRI LANKA

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party

The longest-established workers' party in Sri Lanka is the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which was founded back in 1935 when Ceylon was still a British colony. In 1940 the LSSP expelled its Stalinist faction and formally adopted a Trotskyist programme, becoming the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International. It was expelled from the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in 1964 after entering a coalition government under Mrs Bandaranaike of the capitalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Since then, for almost 30 years, the LSSP has had no links with any international organisation claiming to be Trotskyist.

It's rather ironic, therefore, that the first thing you see when you approach the LSSP's Colombo headquarters is a sign bearing a hammer and sickle with a '4' on it—the emblem of the Fourth International. Inside, next to pictures of former LSSP parliamentarians N.M. Perera, Colvin da Silva and Leslie Goonewardene, large portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky hang on the walls. One of the LSSP leaders we spoke to, Batty Weerakoon, apparently still regards himself as a Trotskyist.

The LSSP uses a 'Marxist' analysis to justify its break with Marxism. Its leaders were insistent that the SLFP is a petty-bourgeois party, not the party of the national bourgeoisie, and that there is nothing unprincipled about a political alliance with Mrs Bandaranaike. They dismissed our argument that what is needed is a united front of workers' parties to fight for a workers' government. The urgent necessity was to defeat the UNP, they argued, and this could only be done in co-operation with the SLFP. For the Provincial Council elections the LSSP formed a bloc called the People's Alliance with the SLFP and the Communist Party, together with two small petty-bourgeois parties. The LSSP's weight within this alliance may be gauged from the fact that it was allowed 35 candidates compared with 302 for the SLFP.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party's collaboration with the SLFP goes back a long way. It began with electoral pacts in the 1950s, and moved on to coalition governments in the 1960s and 70s. The truth is that, even in the LSSP leaders' own electoralist terms, it has proved a complete disaster. It's a general rule of politics that when a workers' party encourages its supporters and potential supporters to believe that a 'left' bourgeois party represents some kind of progressive alternative to a right-wing bourgeois party, this is entirely self-defeating. People say to themselves, if this 'left' bourgeois party really is so progressive, why do we need a workers' party? The last four decades have seen a dramatic erosion of the LSSP's

electoral base, as whole sections of its former supporters have deserted it and gone over to the SLFP.

Nevertheless, in the Provincial Council elections the LSSP did benefit from the swing away from the UNP. The Western Provincial Council is now controlled by the People's Alliance, with Chandrika Kumaranatunge of the SLFP as chief minister and LSSP general secretary Bernard Soysa as one of her cabinet ministers. This is obviously seen by all parties concerned as a dry-run for another coalition government.

As it turned away from independent class politics and embraced popular frontism, the LSSP also retreated from its defence of Tamil minority rights. The party's original stand in support of both Tamil and Sinhala as official languages soon collapsed in the face of the Sinhala-only movement. When the LSSP was in government it presided over the deportation of hill country Tamils to India, and brought in legislation which discriminated in favour of Sinhalese against Tamils. The LSSP has consistently refused to support the right to an independent Tamil state in the North East.

The party recently published a pamphlet written by Bernard Soysa, entitled *The Only Possible Approach to a Solution of Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis*. This recognises only 'the right to a contiguous Tamil territory as a unit of power devolution'. In other words, regional autonomy for a merged North-Eastern Province within a unitary Sri Lankan state. In this way the LSSP abandons the Leninist principle of the right of oppressed nations to self-determination up to and including secession. In line with this approach, the party also rejects the Tamil people's right to wage a war of national liberation. Of the Tigers, Bernard Soysa writes that 'there cannot be any opening of negotiations with them unless they first undertake to surrender their arms'.

The Communist Party of Sri Lanka

On domestic issues the policies of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka are barely distinguishable from the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's. The CPSL is equally committed to an alliance with the SLFP as the only means of defeating the United National Party. In the past, it was the Communist Party's links with Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and elsewhere which was the main point of disagreement between the two organisations. With the collapse of these regimes, this obstacle has been removed, and at its conference last year the Communist Party voted in favour of unification with the LSSP.

When we were up in the hill country we made contact with leaders of the Communist Party's Red Flag

Union, which organises plantation workers. We were received in a very friendly manner. Comrade A. Ramiah, the union's general secretary and a former Maoist, told us that all this Stalin-Trotsky business was so much water under the bridge and really had no bearing on current political issues. He said that there was a long tradition of co-operation between the Communist Party and the LSSP, and 'workers are more interested in practical tasks than historical conflicts'. The rank and file of both the LSSP and the Communist Party were in favour of unification, he said, and the only problem was the leaders, some of whom were worried that they might lose their positions in a merger.

The Nava Sama Samaja Party

The third significant workers' party, standing to the left of the LSSP and the CP, is the Nava Sama Samaja Party, which claims some 3,000 members. The NSSP has its origins in the 'left tendency' of the LSSP, which was formed in 1972 in opposition to the coalition politics of the party leadership. It was originally influenced by the Militant tendency in Britain, and when it broke from the LSSP to form a separate party in 1977 the NSSP became the Sri Lankan section of Militant's international organisation. It broke with Militant in 1989, and has since become a section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International led by Ernest Mandel.

Niel Wijetilika, the NSSP's international secretary, told us that they had come into opposition with Militant on a range of issues over the years. The NSSP opposed Militant's dual defeatist position on the Falklands/Malvinas war. They also disagreed with its adaptation to reformism in its work in the Labour Party, and its theory of 'proletarian Bonapartism' which led to the designation of Burma, Syria and Ethiopia under the Dergue as workers' states. But most of all the NSSP resented Militant's attempts to direct their own political work in Sri Lanka. Militant didn't want to be part of a democratic world party, Comrade Niel argued, 'they want a sectarian, authoritarian international'.

Comrade Niel told us that the NSSP had differences with the USec leadership on a number of issues, notably over Nicaragua and Cuba. He charged the USec with having 'capitulated'—and he emphasised the word—to the Sandinistas and Castro. The NSSP was for a political revolution in Cuba, he told us. We pointed out that these were serious differences. If mass struggles against the Castro regime did break out, the NSSP would find itself on the opposite side of the barricades from some of its comrades in the International. Didn't this require a factional struggle inside the USec now, we asked. But we were told that the time wasn't ripe for this.

No doubt there is an element of genuine internationalism in the NSSP's membership of the United Secretariat. Party members did emphasise that they had learnt politically from this connection. Overall, however, it's difficult to escape the conclusion that, for the NSSP, the main appeal of the USec lies in its rejection of the centralist component in democratic centralism, which allows its sections to do as they will in their 'own' countries. As for the USec leadership, its part of the deal is that it acquires the prestige of having a big section in Sri Lanka. All this sounds very much like a repetition of the relationship that existed for years between the International and the LSSP.

On the question of electoral tactics the NSSP, to its credit, opposes the LSSP's alliance with the SLFP. But its own record on electoral blocs is scarcely flawless. In 1987, the NSSP joined the United Socialist Alliance, which included not only the LSSP and the Communist Party but also the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, which had split from the SLFP and was basically a petty-bourgeois party with a following among unorganised workers. Like the LSSP, the NSSP misuses class analysis in order to rationalise its opportunism. In order to justify its participation in the USA, the NSSP hailed the SLMP as a 'new mass workers' party'.

While we were in Sri Lanka the NSSP formed a new alliance to contest the Provincial Council elections. This was called the People's Liberation Organisation. It was based on a 4-point agreement, which committed the signatories to: 1) rejection of the conditions imposed by the IMF/World Bank and in particular to reverse the privatisation programme; 2) recognition of the Tamil people's right to self-determination; 3) land to the tiller and abolish water taxes and cuts in agricultural subsidies; 4) overthrow the dictatorial constitution and 'establish a democracy based on workplace councils'.

The PLO included workers' organisations like the New Democratic Front, which is led by a veteran militant named A. Illanchellian and has a base among Tamil plantation workers. But the Sri Lanka Progressive Front, a petty-bourgeois organisation which split from the SLFP, also joined the PLO. Its members were previously sympathetic to the JVP, although the NSSP argued that they have now broken from Sinhalese chauvinism. Another signatory to the PLO agreement was the People's Bikku Front, which is not a political party at all but an organisation of Buddhist monks (its leader is in fact a prominent member of the NSSP).

Our opinion is that the Nava Sama Samaja Party should have publicly called for a united front with the LSSP and Communist Party. Of course, the leaders of those parties wouldn't have accepted this, and would have refused to break their alliance with the

SLFP, but the NSSP should have called on the LSSP and CPSL rank and file to oppose their leaders. This would seem to be elementary Marxist tactics. But the NSSP comrades we spoke to dismissed the need for an orientation towards LSSP and Communist Party members. Their justification for this was that these are largely moribund parties.

In the event, the NSSP won no more than 0.88 per cent of the vote nationally. Even in the Ratnapura District, where the party has a solid base (its MP represents this area), the NSSP managed to get only one councillor elected—and elsewhere it failed to register a single success. This didn't exactly compare favourably with the gains made by the 'moribund' LSSP.

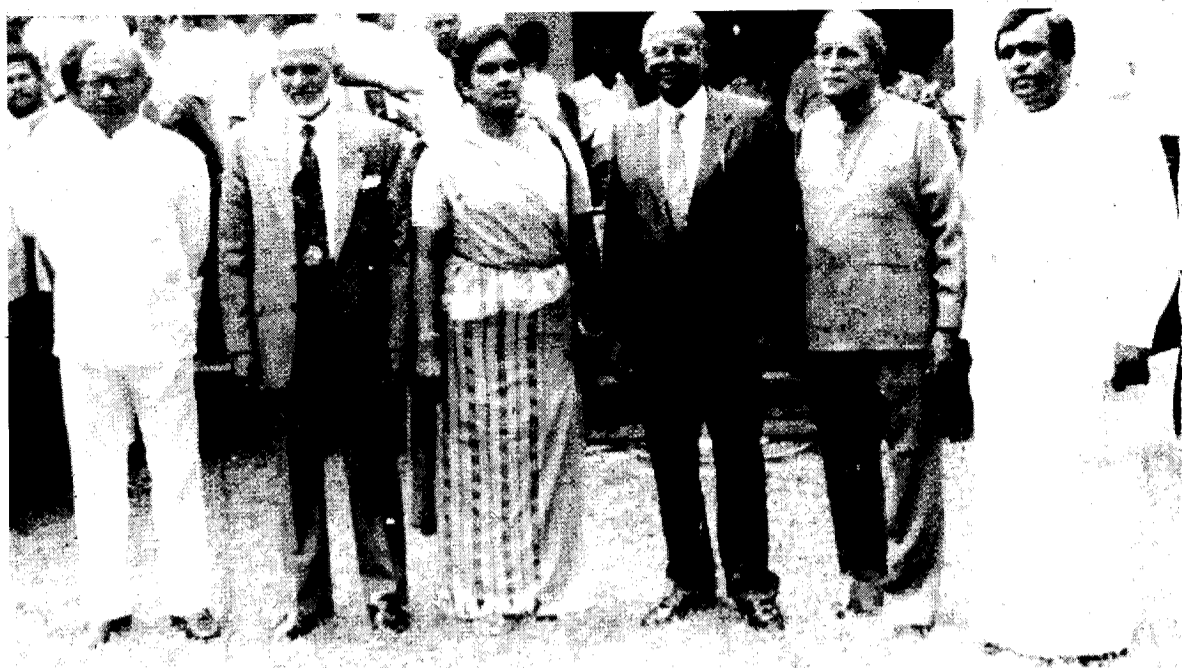
On the Tamil national question, it seemed to us that the NSSP position represented a fudge. Niel Wijetilika explained to us that the party unconditionally defended the right of self-determination for the Tamil people up to and including secession. 'But we don't advocate a separate state,' he continued. 'Our Tamil comrades argue for the unity of the working class.' The NSSP supports 'regional autonomy for the merged Northern and Eastern Province with powers over security, land settlement and allocation of adequate resources from the national product'.

It seemed to us that this position would be appropriate if the demand for secession didn't yet have majority support. But surely in a situation where the majority of the Tamil people in the North and East do want a separate state, and where a full-scale war has been fought for the past decade over this very issue, it is necessary for Trotskyists to actively support the demand for secession. That is the Marxist ABC on the national question, I would have thought.

At the same time, despite these political weaknesses, the NSSP is clearly a serious organisation, which has drawn a large number of genuine militants around it. The atmosphere of the NSSP offices is completely different from the LSSP headquarters. There is a sense of energy and enthusiasm, of an organisation which believes it is going places. When we visited the party offices, we met their MP Vasudeva Nanayakkara. Even the NSSP's political rivals describe comrade Vasu as 'a real fighter', and that was very much how he impressed us. He told us how his interventions in parliament have on occasion provoked physical violence by UNP MPs. All in all, our conclusion was that the building of a genuine revolutionary party in Sri Lanka will require a specific orientation towards the NSSP.

The Marxist Workers Tendency

When the NSSP split from Militant to join the United Secretariat, a small minority remained loyal to Militant.



Western Province cabinet ministers: (left to right) Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, A.H.M. Fowzie, Chandrika Kumaratunge, S. Sharvananda, Bernard Soysa, Premaratne Gunasekera. Dry-run for another coalition government?

They left—or were expelled, depending on whose account you believe—in 1989, and they formed the Marxist Workers Tendency. We spoke to Siridhunya Jayasuriya, the secretary of the MWT. The close association of the MWT with Militant was immediately obvious. Their Colombo office was decorated with two large Militant posters calling for a 24-hour general strike to kick out the Tories. It did strike us that this demand probably had only limited resonance among the working class of Colombo!

On the question of political alliances, the MWT is clearly well to the right of the NSSP. Comrade Siri showed us a newspaper interview he had given, and drew our attention to his statement that the MWT had 'no hesitation' in supporting the SLFP-LSSP-CP alliance. Like the LSSP, the MWT believes that the defeat of the UNP government is the overriding task, and that other questions are subordinate to this. Comrade Siri agreed that the call for a united front of workers' parties would be the 'orthodox' policy. But he said that it wasn't relevant to the present situation in Sri Lanka.

According to comrade Siri, the immediate cause of the MWT's expulsion from the NSSP was a dispute over tactics in the 1989 presidential election. The NSSP had backed the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party candidate, but opposed the Militant supporters' argument that a second preference for Mrs Bandaranaike should have been called for. 'We have to be in the camp against the government,' Comrade Siri argued. We got the impression, though this was not spelt out explicitly, that the MWT was carrying out fraction work in the SLFP. The NSSP had told us that the MWT rejected the theory of permanent revolution and believed that the national bourgeoisie could play a progressive role. So it would seem that there was some basis to this accusation.

Comrade Siri argued that the People's Alliance couldn't be described as a popular front—on the grounds that it had no common programme or structures and was simply an electoral bloc. He said that if the Left Alliance won the Provincial Council elections, then there would be moves towards establishing a real popular front. The MWT would then oppose this. But it seemed to us that, having urged workers to support the People's Alliance in the Provincial Council elections, the MWT would have some difficulty explaining why they should oppose a more formal political bloc whose purpose, after all, would be to defeat the UNP.

On the Tamil national question, however, the Marxist Workers Tendency put forward a more principled line than the NSSP. With the Tamil people fighting for a separate state,

the MWT argued, it was necessary to support this demand. But there couldn't be real self-determination under capitalism, and it was necessary to argue for socialist policies and put forward transitional slogans. The MWT also demands rights for Muslim and Sinhala minorities in an independent Tamil state. It was necessary to fight for an autonomous province for Muslims and for the right of Sinhala people in the East to determine their own fate. The MWT produces a single paper in both Sinhala and Tamil, which forces its members to confront the chauvinism of Sinhala workers. Judging by the account we were given, we thought the MWT's stand on this question was correct.

The New Democratic Front

Another of the smaller Marxist organisations we made contact with was the New Democratic Front. As I mentioned earlier, the NDF was one of the signatories to the PLO agreement, and is based on Tamil plantation workers. We met comrade Illanchellian and other NDF leaders. The NDF and its Young Socialist Front evidently have a number of young militants around them, and they describe themselves as Trotskyists. The NDF comrades argue that the Indian-origin plantation workers are 'the most important section of the Sri Lankan proletariat' and are 'central to the Sri Lankan revolution'. The plantation Tamils suffer the double oppression of being a national minority as well as being workers. The betrayal of the plantation workers by the workers' parties has left them prey to political leaders like Thondaman. What is necessary is to win workers to a sense of their class interests and break them from the present leadership.

Though the NDF joined the PLO, it is critical of the NSSP. Comrade Illanchellian told us that at the March 23 meeting where the PLO agreement was signed, the NSSP announced that it had pursued a no-contest pact with the SLFP. He had replied that this was exactly how the LSSP began its slide towards coalition. There were no bourgeois parties in the PLO, the NDF pointed out, but not all the signatories were committed to a consistent working class programme. The NDF also argued that the PLO shouldn't simply be an electoral bloc but should be a practical alliance for organising the class struggle.

One disagreement we did have with the NDF's programme was its approach to Tamil self-determination. The NDF presented the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Tamil question with a detailed plan containing many good proposals, but it

seems to be based on the assumption that a solution to the national question can be secured through a reformed bourgeois constitution. Nevertheless, an organisation committed to organising among plantation workers and challenging Thondaman's political domination must be taken seriously.

The Revolutionary Communist League

One of the things that impressed us during our visit to Sri Lanka was the non-sectarian way in which political organisations were willing to talk to us. Despite the demands of their own political work—our arrival coincided with the launch of the Provincial Council election campaign—these comrades had no hesitation in giving us an hour or so of their time to explain the politics of their organisations. If we have some sharp criticisms to make of their politics this shouldn't be taken as ingratitude for the comradely reception we received.

The one exception to this was the Revolutionary Communist League, the former Healyite organisation which is now the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, presently led by David North of the US Workers League. We did visit the RCL offices in Colombo, but when they found out who we were they refused to talk to us. So unfortunately I can't give an informed report on this group's politics. We heard from other sources that the RCL has a formally correct line on some issues, notably the Tamil national question, but that their ingrained sectarianism renders their politics completely sterile.

This charge of sectarianism is borne out by a recent communication from the RCL which appeared in the May 3 issue of the Workers League's new glossy publication, the *International Workers Bulletin*. Referring to the situation in Sri Lanka, the RCL's letter stated that the NSSP had 'no differences with the pro-imperialist Premadasa regime' and went on to assert that 'the treacherous role of the NSSP today is to forge a fascist auxiliary force from the remnants of the JVP to support their imperialist designs'! Whatever differences rank-and-file NSSP members might have with their leadership, their loyalty to the organisation is certainly not going to be shaken by this kind of idiotic ranting.

Workers Voice

Of the Marxist tendencies we met, we were most impressed by the com-

rades who produce the paper *Workers Voice*. We held discussions with them on a range of issues, both national and international, and found ourselves in basic political agreement. These comrades split in 1990 from another group called the Revolutionary Workers Party, which was led by the late Edmund Samarakody. Comrade Edmund was a veteran Trotskyist who led the revolutionary opposition that broke from the LSSP in 1964 in protest at its entry into a coalition government with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

The Revolutionary Workers Party put forward many correct political positions. But the *Workers Voice* comrades became increasingly frustrated by Edmund's propagandist and sectarian approach, which they said prevented them from actually fighting for these positions within the working class movement. They broke away and began to publish their own monthly paper in May 1991. But they also told us they were confident that, if it hadn't been for Edmund's untimely death last year, they would eventually have won him over to their group.

The *Workers Voice* group emphasises the need for a non-sectarian approach to the rank and file of the larger organisations. They say that the NSSP is particularly important in that it has support among many working class militants. They don't dismiss the membership of the LSSP either. They say that it is a degenerated party, but that it still attracts workers and youth who can be won to a revolutionary perspective. They argue that a major weakness of the working class movement in Sri Lanka is the lack of basic Marxist theory among the rank and file, and that this greatly assists the leaders in carrying out their betrayals. They therefore emphasise that a central task is to raise the theoretical level of the membership of the self-proclaimed Marxist parties.

Workers Voice also puts forward a clear political alternative to the official line of the existing workers' parties. In the Provincial Council elections they opposed the SLFP-LSSP-CP bloc as a popular front, and criticised the PLO as a 'mini popular front'. Their view was that the Nava

Sama Samaja Party should have stood its own candidates in the areas where it has strength and advocated a vote for the candidates of the other workers' parties elsewhere. In the circumstances, *Workers Voice* called for a vote for the working class parties. On the Tamil national question they are for an independent Tamil state and for unconditional defence of the national liberation struggle, while opposing the methods of the LTTE. They argue that the Tamil national question cannot ultimately be solved under capitalism. The fight for independence must be combined with the fight for socialism.

We were particularly impressed by the comrades' firm commitment to internationalism. Revolutionaries in Sri Lanka have had some bad experiences of international organisations claiming to represent Trotskyism, from the United Secretariat to the Spartacists. Some of them, if they have not left politics altogether, have concluded that the struggle to build a revolutionary international is a waste of time, and that they should concentrate on their national work. But the *Workers Voice* comrades stressed that the building of a revolutionary party in Sri Lanka cannot be achieved apart from the struggle for the Fourth International. On this issue, they share the views of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency that none of the existing international groupings represent the political continuity of the Trotskyist movement, and that the Fourth International must be rebuilt.

This a small group, and they are conscious of their limited resources. But we were convinced that they have the potential to grow in the coming period. The result of the Provincial Council elections indicates that the long night of UNP rule may be drawing to a close, and that a revival of the class struggle can be expected. In a country where Trotskyism has such a long tradition in the workers' movement, and where there are so many lessons to be learned from its history, the construction of a genuine Trotskyist party should be a central task for those of us who are fighting to reforge the Fourth International.

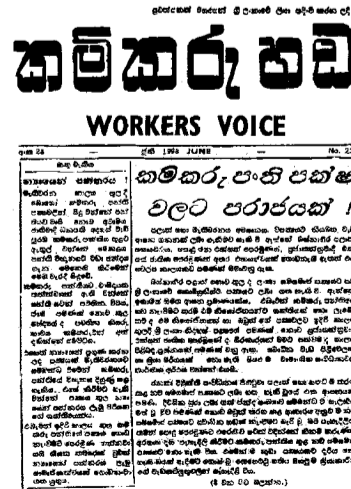
Based on a talk given at Conway Hall, London, in May 1993

AN APPEAL ON BEHALF OF *Workers Voice* Sri Lankan Trotskyist paper

Workers Voice is a monthly Trotskyist paper containing articles in Sinhala and English. Its regular appearance is a tribute to the political dedication of the group of comrades responsible for publishing it, who are working with very small resources. *Workers News* is therefore issuing an appeal to our readers for financial support for *Workers Voice*. This would enable the comrades in Sri Lanka to expand the paper's coverage, and to publish translations into Tamil. Given the long-established roots which Trotskyism has in the Sri Lankan workers' movement, we believe it is particularly important for socialists internationally to assist those who are fighting to rebuild the revolutionary tradition in that country.

Please send all donations to:
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An assessment of the political career of the former WRP leader by
Bob Pitt

PART TWENTY-ONE

THE ELECTION of a majority Labour government in October 1974 posed a considerable challenge to Marxists. It wasn't difficult to predict that the administration headed by Harold Wilson (and, after Wilson's resignation in 1976, by James Callaghan) would respond to the economic problems of British capitalism by attacking the working class. Nor did it require much foresight to recognise that these attacks would provoke resistance from a class which had achieved such a high level of organisation and militancy during the anti-Tory battles of 1970-74. What was necessary was to develop tactics and strategy which would take forward the political struggle against the Labour leadership. This was the challenge that Healy failed to grapple with.

The WRP's political line towards the Labour government followed an identical course to the one the SLL had pursued after 1964. It was based on the same delusion that under the impact of social democratic betrayals workers would inevitably break from Labour and rally to an alternative revolutionary organisation. And in mid-1975, after the Wilson administration imposed a pay limit below the rate of inflation, Healy issued the same foolish call to bring down the Labour government. But whereas in the mid-1960s Healy had pulled the SLL back from this suicidal policy, he now plunged headlong into ultra-leftism. The WRP continued to repeat its mindless call for the overthrow of the Labour government right up to 1979, when the government was finally brought down — by the Tories.

This sectarianism towards the Labour Party made even less sense than it had a decade earlier. For, in the course of the fierce conflicts between the trade unions and the Heath government, Labour had recovered from its late-1960s decline and the Constituency Labour Parties had returned to political life. The row which erupted in 1975 over Newham CLP's deselection of its right-wing MP, shadow cabinet minister Reg Prentice, was the first shot in the battle over party democracy which was to be central to the rise of the Bennite movement. But Healy's abstention from intervention inside the Labour Party completely isolated the WRP from these developments. The projected 'mass party' was reduced to a shrinking sect shouting ultra-left slogans from the sidelines.

The WRP's failure to correct its self-destructive course was partly due to Healy's own withdrawal from active organisational work. Though the Healyite tendency's lack of internal democracy had always prevented the membership from critically evaluating its experiences in implementing the party line, Healy had to an extent

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy



United against Healy: Ernest Mandel, George Novack, Tariq Ali, Tim Wohlforth, Francois de Massot, Pierre Lambert, Betty Hamilton and Tamara Deutscher at the meeting in London in 1977

been able to overcome this through his active involvement in the work of the branches. But the energetic, hands-on approach of the 1960s was now long past. These days Healy didn't even bother to attend central committee meetings all the way through, often leaving before the reports from the regions had been heard. The expulsion of a whole layer of worker militants around Alan Thornett, and Healy's increased reliance on middle class followers like the Redgraves, further removed him from actual developments in the working class.

Healy tried to extricate the WRP from its political isolation, and the consequent slump in membership and income, by closing down *Workers Press* in early 1976 and moving operations to a new print shop in Runcorn, where the party could replace printworkers on union rates with party members on subsistence wages. The daily paper was relaunched in May 1976 as the *News Line*. An attempt at a mass-circulation 'popular' tabloid, the new paper drew on the undoubted skills of former *Sunday Times* journalist Alex Mitchell, but its political level marked a sharp decline even in comparison with its predecessor. True, the paper enabled the WRP to get a hearing from workers in struggle, notably during the long firefighters' strike of 1977-78. But the Party had nothing sensible to say to them.

In fact the WRP's politics had by this stage become completely crazed. Having announced that a revolutionary situation had been ushered in by the Labour government's attacks on the working class in 1975, Healy now proclaimed that the struggle for state power was directly engaged. 'This is the end of a whole historical era of parliamentarianism and class compromise which began approximately in 1848,' he informed the membership at the end of 1977. 'The struggle for power opens up and... the WRP has been emphasising this since the beginning of August — before the firemen's strike'.¹

In the face of this political idiocy the WRP's numbers went on declining and the circulation of the new 'mass paper' stagnated, resulting in a chronic financial crisis. On December 31, 1977, a 'special conference' — in fact made up of leading party members selected by Healy himself — was called to deal with the deteriorating

situation. After the assembled 'delegates' failed to come up with the required 25 per cent increase in *News Line* orders, Healy called a meeting of the political committee and got it to agree to the expulsion of nine leading members. 'When, at 4.00am on the morning of the 2nd January 1978, the conference finally reassembled,' one participant recalled, 'G. Healy claimed that it was clear that no one, apart from himself, was capable of defending the party in its crisis. He proposed that expulsions be rescinded only on the basis that he be given personal powers to expel whomsoever he saw fit from the party over the next period. The proposal was passed unanimously by the tired delegates'.²

In search of further scapegoats for the party's difficulties, Healy then proceeded to carry out a purge of the *News Line* editorial board. This provoked resistance from one of the victims, Jack Gale, whose hitherto unquestioning loyalty to the organisation had resulted in him being used for years past as Healy's whipping boy on the central committee. In an internal document, which was suppressed by the WRP leadership, Gale demolished Healy's rantings about a revolutionary situation and an immediate struggle for power, and he savaged Healy's use of 'philosophy' as a substitute for serious political analysis. 'The party now starts not from a study of objective reality,' Gale wrote, '... but from an iron-clad assumption that its analysis of the objective situation cannot be wrong and that any failure of real life to live up to the party's expectations is the subjective fault of individual comrades which must be combated by sackings, expulsions, hysterical denunciations and threats'.³

Healy was now able to use the WRP's College of Marxist Education in Derbyshire to inflict his bogus and almost entirely incomprehensible version of dialectics on the membership. This full-time college was in fact well beyond the requirements of a group the WRP's size, and new 'members' recruited on a minimal political basis were frequently pressured into attending courses there to make up numbers. Complaints by one of them — an actress named Irene Gorst — about the treatment she received were featured in a 1975 *Observer* article, and this was used as a pretext for a police raid on the col-

lege. The WRP subsequently sued the *Observer* for libel, and when the case came to court in 1978 the party's witnesses (undoubtedly on Healy's instructions) disgraced themselves by equivocating over revolutionary principles in a vain attempt to convince the jury of the WRP's respectability.

If finance for the 'mass party' and the 'mass paper' could not be raised from the working class, Healy had to look elsewhere. Although the WRP's mid-1970s turn to the 'Arab Revolution' had its roots in the SLL's wrong positions a decade before (if not earlier), the immediate shortage of cash was probably the main determining factor in the new turn. A WRP delegation was sent to Libya in April 1976 to request money for a new printing press for the *News Line*, and Healy himself visited in August 1977 in search of further financial assistance from the Libyan regime.⁴ Not surprisingly, adulatory articles about Colonel Gaddafi were one of the notable innovations of the new paper. *News Line* gave equally uncritical support to the Arafat leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and to the Ba'athist regime in Iraq. In the late 1970s, Healy achieved a level of sycophancy towards 'Third World' nationalists which outdid anything the derided 'Pabloites' of the United Secretariat had ever managed.

Under these circumstances, political criticisms of the USec became increasingly difficult to sustain. Instead, Healy launched the 'Security and the Fourth International' campaign. This 'investigation' began by charging US Socialist Workers Party veterans Joseph Hansen and George Novack with being 'accomplices of the GPU' because of their failure to counter Stalinist penetration of the Fourth International. It went on to denounce Hansen as a GPU/FBI double agent, and ended up by accusing the entire SWP leadership of working for the FBI — on the sole basis that many of them once attended the same college! In 1977, a public meeting was held in London where representatives of virtually every other tendency claiming adherence to Trotskyism condemned this Stalinist-style frame-up.

Meanwhile, the Labour government lurched from crisis to crisis. In 1976, faced with a collapse in the value of sterling, it turned to the International Monetary Fund for a loan,

and this was granted only after massive cuts in public spending had been agreed. With the trade union bureaucracy having imposed a policy of wage restraint in support of the Labour leadership, the working class suffered a sharp decline in living standards. The so-called 'social contract' collapsed with the 'winter of discontent' in 1978-79, during which the Callaghan government was assailed by successive industrial disputes. All this fell far short of a pre-revolutionary situation, never mind the full-blown revolutionary crisis of Healy's imaginings. What it posed was not the struggle for power, but the necessity of a fight to remove the right-wing Labour leadership and the union bureaucrats who sustained it.

In March 1979, the Callaghan government was defeated in a vote of confidence in the Commons, and a general election was called for May. The WRP put up 60 candidates, which strained the organisation's resources to breaking point, in order to qualify for a five-minute television election broadcast. It began its campaign by condemning rival left groups for arguing that Labour represented any political alternative to the Tories. After all, according to Healy, the era of parliamentary politics was now over. 'The stage is set in Britain for a general strike and a civil war, whoever wins the coming General Election,' *News Line* declared.⁵ However, where its own candidates were not standing, the WRP called on workers to vote Labour 'in solidarity against the Tory enemy, but without any confidence in the class collaboration of the Labour leaders'.⁶

What this ignored was that workers did have at least some confidence even in the Labour Party's reactionary leadership. In one of his more sober moments, Healy did note 'the reluctance to break with Callaghan of the masses of the working people of this country. It is not that they believe Callaghan is going to make much difference. It is because they feel that what they have seen of him is more acceptable than a return to the years 1970-1974 of the Tory government of Heath'.⁷ But the WRP's stupid ultra-leftism prevented it from addressing this problem. Indeed, the perspectives document for the party's Fourth Congress, held on the eve of the general election, explicitly condemned calls for the expulsion of the Labour leadership as 'reformist'.⁸

Support for the WRP's candidates ranged from Roy Battersby's 95 votes in Dundee to Simon Pirani's 820 in Ormskirk — all of them, needless to say, lost their deposits. Healy dismissed this humiliation with the argument that the WRP wasn't standing to get votes but to put forward its revolutionary programme, which ignored the fact that the votes the WRP got were a clear indication of its abject failure in winning workers to this programme. The defeat of Labour and the election of an extreme-right Tory government under Margaret Thatcher were also brushed aside by Healy. No need to be depressed, he told a London area aggregate immediately after the election, the arrival of a Tory administration would 'blow away a few cobwebs'.⁹ During the coming years of vicious attacks on the labour movement, the Thatcher government would succeed in blowing away rather more than that.

To be continued

NOTES

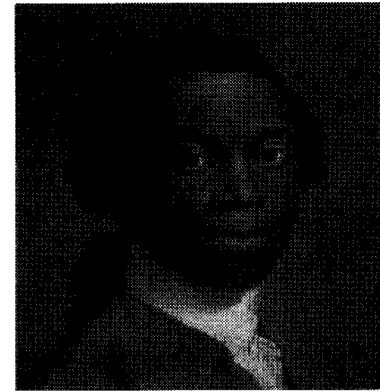
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3. J. Gale, *The WRP and the 'Revolutionary Situation'*, WIL, 1989, p.9.
4. International Committee Commission, Interim Report. This document detailing the WRP's mercenary relations with various bourgeois regimes in the Middle East was published in *Workers News*, April 1988.
5. *News Line*, April 7, 1979.
6. *Ibid.*, April 17, 1979.
7. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1979.
8. WRP internal document.
9. Author's recollection.

FUNDS

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Up from slavery



Olaudah Equiano

former slaves like Frederick Douglass, and so its influence continued. Today, the book remains a powerful indictment of the capitalist system that profited from the slave trade, and of the racism that trade produced.

For more information on Olaudah Equiano and other black fighters, see Peter Fryer's excellent *Staying Power - The History of Black People in Britain* (Pluto Press 1984).

The Life of Olaudah Equiano Longman £5.99

Review by Jim Dye

THIS IS a remarkable autobiography. Olaudah Equiano was born around 1745 in an Ibo village in the eastern part of modern Nigeria. When he was about 11 he was kidnapped, together with his sister, by slave traders. After passing through many slavers on his way to the coast and becoming separated from his sister, he finally ended up being transported to the West Indies.

And this might have been the end of his life had he, like millions of his fellow Africans, been sold to one of the plantation owners and died a premature death from overwork and cruelty. But Olaudah was bought by a British naval officer (who gave him the slave name Gustavus Vassa, which he rejected as soon as he could), and he served on a number of warships where he obtained a basic education.

Like all slaves, Olaudah suffered numerous cruelties, but he also found solidarity among many of his white shipmates. When his ship was moored in the Thames (where

he believed, because he was baptised and in England, he was a free man) he was, without warning, sold to another officer whose ship was bound for the West Indies, but, he writes, 'some of my old shipmates told me not to despair, for they would get me back again; and that, as soon as they could get their pay, they would immediately come to Portsmouth to me, where this ship was going'. They kept their word, 'and sent me off some oranges, and other tokens of their regard. They also sent me word they would come off to me themselves the next day or the day after'. But before this daring rescue could be enacted Olaudah's ship sailed.

After being sold again, to a Quaker merchant in Montserrat who owned him for three years, Olaudah finally managed, by astute trading himself, to acquire £40, the sum needed to 'buy' his freedom. After more travels he finally settled in England, where he married.

Again, this could have been the end of the story, but Olaudah did not forget those who were still slaves, and so he began a tireless campaign for the abolition of slavery, helped by friends like Granville Sharpe. During this time Olaudah was to become one of the first political leaders of the black

population in Britain, as well as a member of the radical London Corresponding Society where he worked closely with its leading figure, Thomas Hardy (who believed the fight for black emancipation was inseparable from the struggle for political liberty as a whole). His book was published in 1789 and immediately made a big impact, being reprinted many times and leading to Olaudah being in great demand to speak at abolitionist meetings across the country.

Olaudah died in 1797, and so did not live to see the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, or the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies in 1833. But his book played a significant role in the agitation against slavery, not least

among industrial workers in towns like Manchester who led the way in many campaigns against it. This agitation played a supporting role to the main factors that led to abolition: firstly, a decline in the relative economic power of the West Indian planters and mercantile capitalists, against that of the British industrial capitalists who opposed mercantile protectionism in favour of free trade and free wage labour; and secondly, the fear of further slave rebellions like the successful San Domingo revolution of 1791-1803, and the Jamaican rebellion of 1831-32 which took the British two months to suppress.

In America, Olaudah's book also gained a wide readership, alongside similar works by American

Monk hits the spot

The Thelonious Monk Quartet featuring John Coltrane 'Live at the Five Spot' Blue Note CD

IN THE summer of 1957, a quartet led by pianist Thelonious Monk and featuring tenor saxophonist John Coltrane began an extended residence at New York's Five Spot jazz club. The music the group produced was acclaimed at the time as 'the most electrifying sound since Charlie Parker', but because Monk and Coltrane were contracted to different companies no official live recording of the quartet was made. The writer and critic Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) denounced this as 'one of the worst crimes in recent recording history'!

Monk's label, Riverside, did in fact record a short studio session with the group, and the resulting three titles were finally released some years afterwards. But it seemed that the sound of the group's ground-breaking performances at the Five Spot itself had been lost forever. The appearance of this recording, over three and a half decades later, is therefore cause for celebration. Taken from a private tape made by Coltrane's wife, the sound quality is surprisingly good, and the occasional background noise from the audience only adds to the atmosphere.

Monk's long residence at the Five Spot was a sign of a welcome upturn in his career. In the early 1950s, when the bebop revolution had given way to the 'cool school', it looked like the familiar story of a diluted version of black music finding commercial success with white audiences, while the musicians who pioneered the original music were condemned to neglect. Monk, dubbed the 'high priest' of bop, appeared to be a figure from the past - so much so that in 1955 Riverside had been able to buy his contract from his former record company for \$108.27. But dissatisfaction with the anaemic character of cool jazz led to a shift in fashion towards 'hard bop' - a music distinguished by strong, often gospel-influenced rhythms and a more aggressive style of playing. Though

his own music didn't strictly conform to the conventions of hard bop, Monk was suddenly back in favour with record buyers and club owners.

Despite their sharply contrasting styles - Monk's spare, self-contained playing could not have been more different from Coltrane's expansive, 'sheets of sound' approach - the collaboration worked brilliantly, as the pieces on this recording demonstrate. Most of them - they include such great Monk compositions as *Trinkle Trinkle*, *In Walked Bud*, *I Mean You* and *Epistrophy* - follow a similar pattern. After the theme statement, Monk accompanies Coltrane for a few choruses before laying out and leaving the saxophonist, accompanied by only bass and drums, to hold forth for a dozen or so further choruses in his characteristic declamatory style. While Monk's own solos contain his usual quirky humour, Coltrane's presence seems to move him to play in a much more extrovert manner than usual.

The music reviewed here arguably marked a peak in the development of both musicians. Though

Monk continued to enjoy a successful recording and playing career, by the end of the 1950s his truly creative period was behind him. And the groups he later headed rarely included players who could bring Coltrane's powers of interpretation to his music. After leaving Monk, Coltrane himself returned to work with his former boss Miles Davis, notably on the celebrated *Kind of Blue*, whose modal forms he adopted for his own music. Coltrane welcomed the greater freedom this gave him in comparison to the rigid chord sequences of bop. But his playing, though never less than inspired, lost the tension it has on this recording, where his improvisations are forced to negotiate the intricate harmonic structures of Monk's compositions.

There are only five tracks on this CD, and the total playing time is just over 42 minutes, but it is a classic of what was once termed 'modern jazz'. It provides a definitive illustration of how thoroughly this African American art form could obliterate the distinction between 'popular' and 'serious' music.

The politics of extinction

THE HYPE surrounding Steven Spielberg's new film, *Jurassic Park*, is the latest example of Hollywood's ability to sell a commodity. But for those that manage to see past the slick advertising and endless promotion, there is a fascinating story to discover in natural history, and one that can only be understood in the light of dialectical materialism that sees the evolutionary process as being marked by revolutionary transformations.

Spielberg's film gets its title from the middle point of dinosaur evolution, and its most abundant phase, the Jurassic period. Dinosaurs became extinct around 65 million years ago at the end of the Cretaceous period. The reasons have yet to be fully understood, although natural disasters, probably the result of asteroid or comet collision, are currently the favoured scenario.

What is clear is that the history of dinosaurs, like that of all animals, is made for them, not by them. Human beings, however, are separated from animals by their conscious ability to shape the environment, to direct events and predict results. This capacity to shape the world has been shown many times, from the destructive power of the atom bomb to the development of medicines to cure disease. But capitalism, and the class society on which it rests, creates a situation where the potential for peaceful human development cannot be realised. Capitalism now acts as a fetter on the productive forces.

If we view the industrial revolution of 200 years ago as corresponding to the energetic Jurassic period of dinosaur evolution, then today we are living in the last stage of the Cretaceous period. But unlike the dinosaurs, capitalism will not become extinct naturally - it will take the conscious effort of millions of workers across the globe to destroy it. Hollywood may be able to bring dinosaurs back to life, but only socialism can end war, famine and exploitation permanently. Over 100 years ago Frederick Engels, in his book *Dialectics of Nature*, wrote that:

'Only conscious organisation of social production, in which production and distribution are carried on in a planned way, can lift mankind above the rest of the animal world as regards the social aspect, in the same way that production in general has done this for mankind in the specifically biological aspect. Historical evolution makes such an organisation daily more indispensable, but also with every day more possible. From it will date a new epoch of history, in which mankind itself, and with mankind all branches of activity, and particularly natural science, will experience an advance that will put everything preceding it in the deepest shade.'

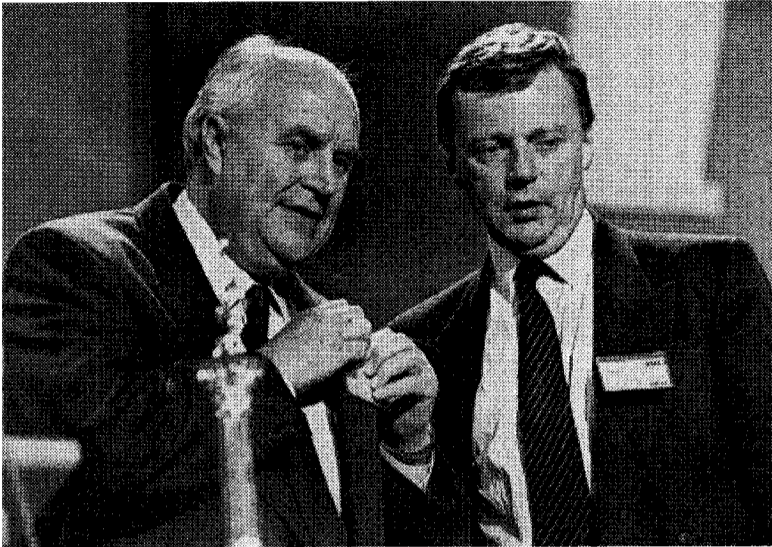
Today, this task is even more urgent. Only the extinction of capitalism can save humanity from further barbarism; only Marxism can provide the tools to achieve it.

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TUC general secretary Norman Willis with his successor, John Monks. See page 2

THE QUESTION many Labour Party and trade union members have been asking is — why? With the Tories lurching from one political crisis to another, and the need for a united struggle against this hated government more urgent than ever, why did the Labour Party leadership decide to launch a civil war in the labour movement over the party's links with the unions?

One thing is certain — it has absolutely nothing to do with concern for party democracy. Far from extending democratic rights, as the party's 'modernisers' fraudulently claim, one-member-one-vote (OMOV) in fact restricts these rights to the 200,000 people who are individual party members and excludes the four million trade unionists who pay the political levy. The party leadership's real attitude to democracy in the labour movement is entirely clear. It is one of complete contempt.

If anyone doubts this, they need only look at the way in which OMOV has already been steamrollered through by the Labour leadership. In the ballot for candidates for the Newbury and Christchurch by-elections and the Euro-elections, participation was restricted to individual party members and affiliated union branches were denied the right to vote. No democratic decision was ever taken by the party authorising the leadership to exclude the trade unions in this way. On the contrary, last year's conference explicitly declared in favour of retaining union involvement at every stage of the selection process.

Further evidence of the party leadership's attitude to democracy was provided at the May meeting of Labour's National Executive Committee, where John Smith produced a statement in support of 'levy-plus'. This would debar trade unionists from the selection of party candidates, and from the election of the leader and deputy leader, unless they made another payment in addition to the political levy — which would then entitle them to participate as individual members. Although Smith's statement was neither open to amendment nor voted on, it was nevertheless released to the press to be depicted as official NEC policy. In this way Smith and his cronies sought not only to by-pass democratic debate on the NEC itself, but also to pre-empt the results both of the party's review group on the trade union link and of the consultation exercise in the Constituency Labour Parties, which were still under way at the time.

Smith's call was taken up by five members of the constituency section of the NEC — Robin Cook, Gordon Brown, David Blunkett, Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair — who signed a letter sent to all Labour Party branch secre-

taries urging support for levy-plus. 'Giving every member a right to vote is clearly the most democratic way of choosing candidates,' the letter stated. 'Why should the Labour Party not trust you with the choice of your candidate.' The letter thus lyingly insinuated that the present electoral college, which allows trade unions a maximum of 40 per cent of the vote, somehow excludes individual party members from the selection of candidates.

In fact the results of the consultation showed that the CLPs were split on the issue — half of them defied the leadership and rejected OMOV. With the overwhelming majority of unions having voted for rejection, Smith looked set to face a humiliating defeat at this year's party conference. In anticipation of this, the June NEC voted to delay parliamentary selections until January 1994, in order to give the leadership time to reverse any 'unacceptable' conference decision — possibly through a referendum of individual party members. This is the kind of disgraceful manoeuvre the Labour right wing resort to in order to push their 'modernising' project through.

The right wing's assault on Labour's union links is really just a continuation of their now well-established practice of allowing political pundits from the capitalist media — most of whom are avowed enemies of the labour movement — to determine the party's political agenda. Having insisted that Labour would become electable only when it had rid itself of its 'left-wing' image — unleashing a ferocious purge of socialist oppositionists by Kinnock and his supporters — these same pundits now proclaim that Labour's electability is dependent on separating the party from the unions.

Smith swears blind that he has no intention of actually breaking the link with the unions. But the truth is that these media commentators will finally be appeased only when the party has ceased to be a *labour* party in any shape or form. An editorial in *The Independent*, urging Smith to take an

LABOUR AND THE UNIONS

uncompromising stand against the unions, made this quite explicit. 'The idea that employees as a class require a political party to represent them,' it declared, 'is an absurd anachronism.' What these people really want is a political system like the one in the United States, where the working class has no collective political representation and the only choice voters have is between rival bourgeois parties. Every measure that weakens the link between the Labour Party and the unions marks a step down that road.

One of the ironies of this situation is that according to opinion polls — usually regarded by Labour's new realists as their political bible — only a small minority of 'floating voters' give the party's link with the unions as a reason for not voting Labour. Other polls indicate that the unions presently enjoy a high level of popular support. There is widespread recognition, extending well beyond the organised labour movement, that trade unions play an essential role in defending the interests of working people. It would, of course, be too much to expect the Labour leaders to take a stand on political principle, but elementary common sense would suggest that the party could only benefit from an identification with the unions. Instead, Smith and Co launched themselves on a course of confrontation which provoked angry condemnation even from right-wing bureaucrats like John Edmonds of the GMB.

Despite rejection of OMOV and levy-plus by successive union conferences, the danger all along has been that the union bureaucrats will stitch together a rotten deal with the Labour leadership. Smith himself, adopting a carrot-and-stick approach, now proposes that the unions can retain a voice in electing the leader — though their share of the electoral college would be reduced to one-

third — if they accept exclusion from the selection of parliamentary candidates. The party's review group agreed to present a statement endorsing this proposal to an NEC meeting in July, where it was adopted by a 20:7 majority. It was then announced that in the run-up to the Labour Party conference there will be a period of 'discussion and persuasion' — in other words bureaucratic arm-twisting, intended to secure Smith and his supporters a conference majority. As we go to press, Tom Sawyer of Nupe/Unison and Garfield Davies of Usdaw are evidently looking for a way to overturn the decisions of their union conferences and accept Smith's 'compromise'.

In any case, most union leaders favour trade union involvement in the selection of Labour candidates, and in the leadership elections, through a system of 'registered supporters'. This is a bit like levy-plus, except that you don't have to pay the 'plus' in order to qualify as an individual party member. The registered supporters scheme represents an adaptation to OMOV and individual postal ballots, and opens the door to an attack on the principle of a *collective* input by the trade unions into the party. It is this collective principle that party members and trade unionists must organise to defend.

● For the selection of party candidates, we should for the time being defend the present system — which itself represents a retreat from the old method of delegate voting at general management committees — against the right-wing modernisers. The final ballot should be based on votes taken at Labour Party and trade union branches, with postal votes available on application only for those unable to attend.

● The existing procedure for electing the party leader and deputy leader,

with the percentage vote at conference split 40:30:30 between the unions and socialist societies, MPs, and the Constituency Labour Parties, must also be defended. Smith's original proposal was to divide the vote 50:50 between MPs and the party membership (which would make one MP's vote the equivalent of a thousand individual members' votes — so much for OMOV!). This would deprive the unions of any say in electing the leader of the party which they founded and which continues to exist only because of the financial contributions of union members. If Smith is prepared to give ground on this question today, you can be sure that he has only temporarily shelved his original proposal to exclude the unions altogether.

● In the case of the block vote, we should resist attempts to shift the present 70:30 per cent balance between the unions and the Constituency Labour Parties. Socialists have no interest in defending the way in which the block vote is currently wielded by union bureaucrats. But the right wing's proposal — to allow union delegates to vote individually at conference — would undermine the principle of collective decision-making. Our response should be to fight within the unions for the democratisation of the block vote, with union delegations casting their votes on the basis of decisions taken at union conferences and branches.

The rationale behind the Labour leadership's attack on the union link is the deluded view, most blatantly expressed by the appalling Tony Blair, that Labour must present itself to the electorate as 'the party of the individual'. In reality, this is the road to political suicide. The Tories and the Liberal Democrats can always outbid Labour in appeals to individualism.

The strength of the labour movement lies in our collective methods of organisation and our collective methods of democracy. If the right wing succeeds in its present onslaught on these collectivist traditions, this will be a historic setback for the workers' movement. Don't let them get away with it!

Defend the link!