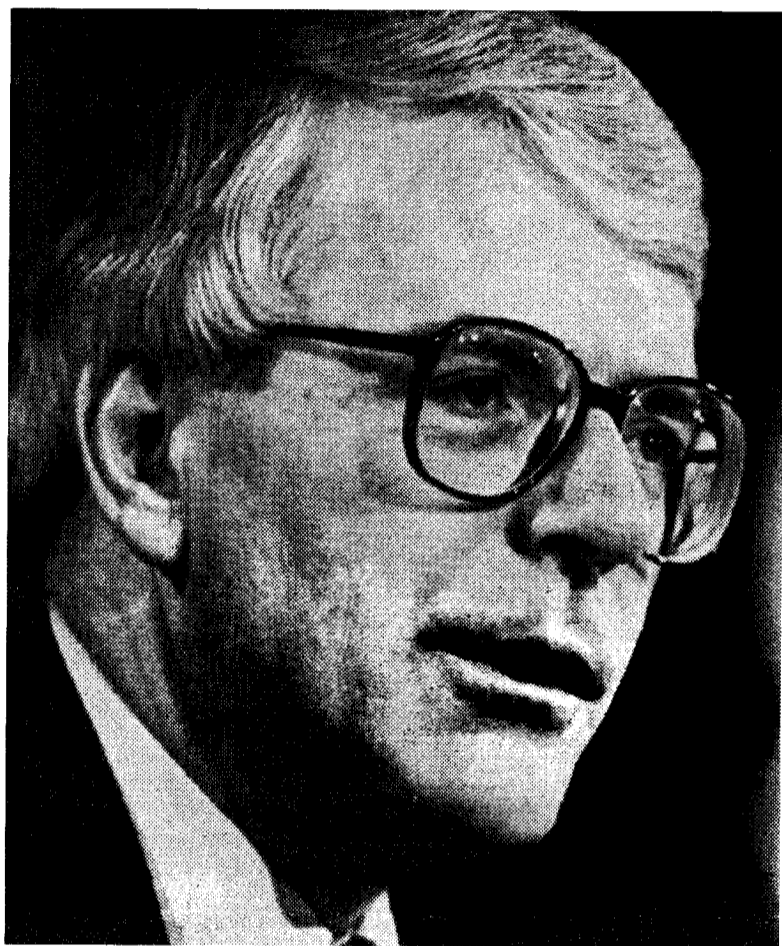




As the Tories lurch from crisis to crisis . . .



TIME FOR MAJOR SURGERY!

'JOHN MAJOR will be prime minister to the autumn.' This back-handed support from Kenneth Clarke is just one of a string of remarks made by leading Tories which have cast doubt on John Major's survival as prime minister. Michael Heseltine, like Clarke, has indicated he is a possible replacement, while arch right-winger Michael Portillo would also like to be in the frame.

Whatever they say to the contrary, the Tory big-shots are jockeying for position in the leadership stakes because they expect the next few months to bring fresh disasters for the government. The economic recovery resolutely refuses to take off and the 'back to basics' campaign has rebounded on the Tories with a vengeance.

Almost every week brings further embarrassing disclosures about dubious business ethics or personal behaviour that runs counter to the official line. With the impact of the tax changes in April still to register on the electorate and losses anticipated in the local and European elections, the contenders for the Tory leadership are sensibly setting out their stalls.

The aim of 'back to basics' was to rally the Tory faithful and provide a vague 'theoretical' justification for the huge reduction

By Philip Marchant

in public spending which the Tories need to make if they are in any way to stem the decline of the British economy. The basics that Major wants to get back to are in fact the laws of the capitalist jungle. There is nothing new in Tories stressing the need for personal responsibility over reliance on what they call the 'nanny state', but in the feverish atmosphere of current political life, the slogan, and those advocating it, have been subjected to far more scrutiny than was intended.

Much of the Tory right wing had been delighted with the policy. The working class needed reminding of its obligations towards the state, and 'basics' seemed to fill the vacuum left by the decline of religion. But they tended to take it too literally, believing that there should be a

moral agenda applicable to everyone, and this has brought them into conflict with the more sophisticated elements in the leadership of the party.

If 'back to basics' was a desperate attempt to solve long-running problems of credibility and public image, it has had exactly the opposite effect. Personal indiscretions, statements by ministers, government and local authority policies – all are now judged against the standards set by the Tories themselves.

At root, the air of panic in the Tory party and the belligerent attitude of previously loyal sections of the press are the result of the failure to revive the economy, but in such a situation the political crisis has its own momentum. Consumed by internal conflicts, this looks more and more like a lame duck administration. After almost 15 years in office, the party that claims to stand for low taxation is about to reduce mortgage interest relief and the married person's allowance, raise national insurance contributions and introduce VAT on fuel, making it the highest taxing government ever. There are even sections of the ruling class that would prefer to see a Labour government take over.

How can workers take advantage of the Tory crisis? A change at the top of the Tory party is obviously no answer. And with the most vociferous opposition to the government coming from the right-wing press, there is clearly a problem with just sitting back and watching the spectacle. If the Tories were to be brought down in this way and a Labour government elected, the effect would be to stretch the links between Labour and the organised working class almost to breaking point. Having been elected with only the passive support of workers – and with a good deal of support from former Tory voters and sections of the ruling class besides – the Labour leaders would be more pro-big business than ever, and would be encouraged in their mission to create a 'modern' party modelled on the US Democrats.

The surest way to remove the Tories, and make the Labour leaders accountable to the working class, would be to launch a political and industrial offensive. While the impact of Tory legislation, unemployment and the shift to the right in the Labour Party and the trade unions means that there is a low level of strike activity, the willingness of work-

ers to take action against the Tories should not be underestimated. The immediate task of militants, therefore, is to fight for strike action in every workplace under attack – wherever jobs are being lost, factories closed, services cut, run down or privatised, wages frozen or democratic rights removed. They should seek to forge the broadest possible links between workers in struggle, for example in the public sector, and mobilise youth, pensioners, the unemployed and oppressed minorities. In this way, and under the conditions of a raging Tory crisis, the problems of the last few years could be surmounted.

In the local elections in May and the European elections in June, militants should fight for a clear, class vote for Labour in all areas except where left-wing candidates have a serious base of support in the working class. They should demand that the Labour leaders support all industrial action and mount a campaign of rallies and demonstrations to force the Tories to resign. Every opportunity must be seized to deepen the government's crisis. When the Tories are down, what they need is a good kick in the basics!

EDITORIAL

UN steps up pressure for pro-Serbian settlement

THE SITUATION in Bosnia has taken a new turn with the entry of a Russian battalion of UN troops intent on accelerating a Croat-Serbian carve-up. Using the pretext of the massacre in Sarajevo's market square, their real purpose is to counter the growing success of the Bosnian army against Croatian forces and to prop up the Serbian regime of Milosevic, which is reeling from hyper-inflation and growing resistance from workers. Serb nationalists hailed the Russian troops as the guarantors of Greater Serbia.

We demand the removal of all foreign troops – both imperialist and Russian – from Bosnian soil, the return of weapons collected from Bosnian government forces under the terms of the Sarajevo cease-fire, and the lifting of the arms embargo. Bosnia must have the means to defend itself!

Meanwhile, the US-backed proposal for a Croat-Muslim federation is an imperialist trap for all those who are fighting for a multi-ethnic Bosnia. The Izetbegovic government is unable to wage a consistent struggle for self-determination for the Bosnian people because it is thoroughly pro-capitalist, frightened of its own working class, and depends in the final analysis on imperialism.

Only the Bosnian working class, with the assistance of workers in the rest of ex-Yugoslavia and internationally, can guarantee self-determination and carry the struggle forward. The example of Tuzla, where the multi-ethnic Miners' Brigade is based on the trade unions, must serve as an inspiration to workers throughout the region. Independent trade unions in Croatia are opposed to the carve-up of Bosnia and those in Serbia oppose Milosevic's war effort. Workers' militias and councils of action throughout Bosnia would open the road to a workers' solution. It is this that the UN, and the Russian troops in particular, want to prevent!

We condemn the shooting down of four Serbian aircraft by NATO fighters on February 28, just as we continue to condemn all UN sanctions. But an all-out assault on Serbia – on which many left groups have based their reading of the situation – remains as unlikely as ever. The UN's limited military intervention within Bosnia is designed to impose a partition of the country which accommodates Serbian ambitions.

Socialists must call on the working class in Croatia and Serbia to organise industrial action against their restorationist leaders and build links with the working class in Bosnia. We call on rank-and-file Croat and Serb soldiers to turn their guns against their own ethnic cleansing officers. We likewise demand the disbanding of the Bosnian Muslim fundamentalist Ninth Brigade, which has been responsible for similar crimes against Croat civilians.

Workers throughout Europe now have an opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity with beleaguered Bosnia. They must make the next International Workers Aid convoy to Tuzla, which assembles in Split on April 7, a big success. Trade unions and Labour Party branches, as well as Muslim, Jewish, Irish and other community groups, must be approached for affiliations and donations.

● Further details are available from the IWA office at 12 Thornton Street, London SW9 0VL; Tel: 071-978 8622.

Courage in Chiapas

THE MASSACRE of poor peasants by the Mexican government early in January leaves no room for doubt at whose expense the newly-signed North American Free Trade Agreement will be implemented. The governments of the United States, Canada and Mexico have declared 'open season' on the most downtrodden peoples in the Americas.

Some 2,000 landless peasant men and women, armed with light weapons, occupied towns in Mexico's southern Chiapas state on New Year's Day as the trade pact came into effect. They released imprisoned peasants and broadcast their protests. Their demands included a call to the leaders of the state to depose the president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas, and his government. They also demanded food, housing and education for the peasants made homeless by the government's 'reforms', which in the last two years have accelerated logging operations and the seizure of land used by the poorest indigenous people for subsistence farming.

The uprising was led by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), named after Emiliano Zapata, the leader of insurrectionary peasants during the 1910-17 revolution. It threatened to march on the capital on behalf of Chiapas's seven million indigenous people. One of its leaders declared: 'NAFTA is the death certificate for the indigenous people of Mexico.' The track record of all three signatories to the pact in dealing with their indigenous peoples shows the warning of the EZLN to be well-founded.

At the heart of every bloody suppression of the native peoples of the Americas is the land question. That is why Salinas reacted with such ferocity, sending soldiers and planes to liquidate the EZLN guerrillas, even after they had withdrawn from the towns. The area was all but sealed off to journalists. Although Salinas made some concessions to liberal opinion – sacking a cabinet minister, offering financial aid to the peasants, and establishing a framework for negotiations – he did so in order to restore order to the region as rapidly as possible. The uprising came as a big embarrassment to the Mexican ruling class, which is doing everything it can to attract US investment and profit from the new trade agreement.

But the peasants and indigenous people will get nothing of substance out of negotiations with the Mexican government. Neither can they succeed militarily on their own against overwhelmingly superior firepower. The tragedy of the Mexican revolution was the inability of the insurgent peasants to form a lasting alliance with urban workers. It is essential that the organised working class builds on the expression of solidarity heard on the streets of Mexico City on January 12, when over 100,000 protesters demanded an end to the slaughter. Strikes must be organised to paralyse the government's war machine. The flow of weapons from the United States must be stopped. It is essential that workers and their organisations in Mexico, the United States and Canada establish a class struggle pact of their own against the capitalist governments, and give every practical assistance to the courageous indigenous peoples of the Americas in their struggle for control of the land.

No let up in attack on state education

By Vusi Makabane

THE PUBLICATION of the final Dearing Report in January and its immediate acceptance by the government reveals the willingness of the Tories to carry out a small tactical retreat in the face of a united teachers' opposition. Although this shows that determined action by teachers can have a significant influence on the course of events, scarcely a week passes without the announcement of yet another scheme to transform state education along reactionary lines.

Although the Dearing Report states that the National Curriculum will be streamlined and teachers' workloads will be cut, the present system of testing will continue indefinitely. There is therefore no justification for calling off the boycott, as has been done by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

With the process of opting out grinding to a halt, the Tories are generating ever wilder schemes to destroy the system of universal free education which they hate so much. At the end of 1993 they floated the idea that parents should get together with charities, businesses and churches to set up new private schools. More recently, Education Secretary John Patten suggested that parents should not be involved in voting on proposals for their children's schools to opt out! So much for the Tories' avowed commitment to give parents more power.

John Major got in on the act by bringing his 'back to basics' campaign into the discussion. He apparently yearns for the days of well-behaved children in clean school uniforms, sitting in neat rows in classrooms where the teachers command universal respect while they inculcate the children with strong moral principles and the three Rs.

Such nostalgic hogwash masks the

real aim of the Tories, which is expressed in the cut in funding for schools of £50 million announced at Christmas. This is taking place while school buildings are falling apart through lack of cash and class sizes are at their highest since the 1970s. At the same time, and as part of their moral crusade, the Tories find no difficulty in funding 'truancy watch' schemes which encourage bus drivers, park keepers and shop assistants to report stray children.

Pupils who manage to make their way through the school system to higher education will find that Tory enthusiasm for cost-cutting means steadily decreasing grants. Already

so low that they have to be supplemented by part-time work or bank loans, student grants will continue to be cut year by year if the Tories get their way. This will particularly affect working class students and others from low-income households.

The Tories have a definite agenda for education. In contrast, neither the Labour Party leadership nor the leaders of the trade unions have the slightest intention of rallying workers for a counter-attack. But a fighting programme is necessary. This must be built upon continuing opposition to all testing, a boycott of appraisal schemes and an all-out fight to bust the public sector pay freeze.

Homophobia in Hackney

By Tony Fox

'IT'S LIKE living through volume two of Deutscher's biography of Trotsky,' said Tony Whelan, publicity officer for Hackney Unison, describing the Labour leadership's reactionary regime in the council.

'It is symptomatic of the way in which the Labour leadership has taken on and is using policies pioneered by the Tories in central government – new management techniques, drastic prohibitions on civil liberties, etc. Cut-backs on flexible hours have an adverse effect on women, for example. One woman was told she would just

have to get social services to look after her kids! This Stalinisation is spreading to the other Association of Labour Authorities councils. Camden is introducing similar codes of conduct to Hackney, which make it a disciplinary offence to speak to the press.'

Whelan was speaking as Hackney was involved in two major public incidents, leading to charges of racism and homophobia against the council. In December, two African workers got two written warnings from the council for speaking to each other in their own language!

The other incident was the disgraceful hounding of Kingsmead school head teacher Jane Brown. The Tory press launched a witch-hunt against Brown because she had refused to send a group of her school children to a performance of the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. This came just in time to take the heat off John Major, reeling from the latest scandal in his 'back to basics' fiasco. Gus John, Hackney's director of education, became the plaything of the gutter press, accepting and supporting every filthy Tory lie and attempting to suspend Brown, basically for being a lesbian.

Unfortunately for the council leaders, whose actions were supported by Jack Straw for the Labour Party front bench, the parents and governors of Kingsmead school were having none of it. Brown had transformed the school from being on the 'at risk' register in 1990 to one which the government's own schools' watchdog described in the summer of 1993 as having a warm and caring environment with a very good leadership. It concluded that Kingsmead was bound to improve under the present head and deputy.

The Tories had transferred power from local authorities to school governors in the hope of encouraging parents to act against 'left-wing' councils. But the Kingsmead governors, supported by the parents, refused to accept the homophobic instruction from Gus John to suspend Brown, putting their children's education first. Brown herself has had to flee her home after receiving death threats from British National Party fascists. All trade unionists and socialists must rally to her defence.



Demonstrators outside the Moroccan Embassy in London on January 24. Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn demands the release of all political prisoners in Morocco, including Abdelhaq Rouissi, a trade unionist who disappeared 30 years ago but is believed to be still alive in secret detention.

HEALTH SERVICE UNDER SIEGE

Payment by results

By Ian Harrison

THE GOVERNMENT's plans for smashing up the national wage bargaining machinery for health workers have been taken a step further. Directives have been issued to health trusts and the remaining directly-managed services requiring employers to introduce performance related pay for nursing and ancillary grades of staff at local level.

For nurses this will mean the end of their pay review body, while ancillaries will be taken off existing bonus schemes. The task of putting the Department of Health's directives into

practice will provide a bonanza of lucrative contracts for the private sector. If they are to meet the deadlines for implementation, trusts and non-trusts alike will have to rely on management consultants to advise them of the best schemes.

The government has set about its assault on national pay bargaining machinery in a manner designed to shift the administrative burden on to local employers. In the case of nursing grades, a mere 23-word directive was issued by the DoH. No guidance has been issued through the Whitley Council machinery.

Individual employers have been given a free hand to choose how they

will measure staff performance. One trust has already indicated that, for nurses, 'throughput' will be used as the benchmark. If this is adopted, it will of course create an incentive for nurses to discharge patients from their workload early.

Other methods under consideration are to link pay to one or more of the following: individual appraisals, financial savings and attendance records - with the last obliging employees to attend work even when sick.

Special duty payments for working unsocial hours or weekends, and psychiatric and geriatric lead payments are also under review. Em-

ployers are to be allowed to negotiate these at local level, or even withdraw them altogether.

When the Tories last threatened these payments, in 1987-88, it led to a wave of strikes and national protests. The leaders of Cohse, Nalco and Nupe (now merged as Unison) successfully isolated that action and channelled it into harmless parliamentary protest. They were ably assisted in some areas by members of the SWP and RCP, who opposed in practice the mobilisation of non-nursing grades for an all-out fight to defend jobs and services.

In a circular to its health branches, Unison has advised its nursing grade members: 'We are not against performance related pay in principle. However, in practice it does not work. Every study comes to the same conclusion - PRP does not improve performance.' In other words, Unison leaders have no intention of waging a serious fight against PRP.

Rank-and-file health workers must now make immediate preparations for a national campaign of strike action which will unite all sections of the workforce in defence of jobs, wages and the national negotiating machinery.

Every opportunity must be grasped to link the struggles of health workers to others in the public sector, and put a stop to the Tory assault on the public sector.

FOUR MEMBERS of Socialist Caucus, a left-wing rank-and-file grouping in the CPSA, are standing for election to the union's Employment Service Section Executive Committee (SEC).

The decision to stand was taken after the Militant-led Broad Left failed to respond to a modest Socialist Caucus proposal for two of its members to be included on the Broad Left slate.

The four, Christine Hulme, Mayuri Patel, Colin Pritchard and Lee Rock, are calling for national industrial action to defeat market testing and for rank-and-file opposition to be built both to the far right 'Moderate' group, which controls the union nationally, and the reformist BL84, which dominates the SEC. BL84 has been responsible for secret negotiations with management on a revised personnel handbook which threatens a serious attack on the terms and conditions of union members in dole offices and job centres.

Last year Socialist Caucus backed Mark Serwotka for the presidency of the union against the independent Albert Astbury, who had the backing of both Broad Left and BL84. Serwotka, who was the only candidate to call for national action against market testing, won about 40 per cent of the left vote in the election.

Socialist Caucus candidates will also call for a vote for six members of the Broad Left slate.

Ambulance decline unchecked by Unison leaders

THE TORIES are laying siege to every sector of the NHS. A report published in December by Unison, which organises 500,000 health workers, highlights the crisis in the 17 area ambulance services covering England and Wales.

It draws on official government statistics to demonstrate that 30 per cent of services in England and 44 per cent in Wales failed to meet minimum response times in the year 1992-93. Between 1987 and 1992, the workforce in the two countries was

cut by six per cent, while spending on the service was slashed by ten per cent between 1982 and 1990.

But this is directly connected to the role played by Unison leaders such as the associate general secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe, and Roger Poole. When ambulance workers began a national campaign in defence of wages in the winter of 1988, Bickerstaffe and Poole were instrumental in its defeat. They kept the dispute isolated and opposed calls for all-out action.

Last September, ambulance workers passively signalled their lack of trust in the Unison leadership when 60 per cent of them failed to vote in a national ballot for industrial action to defeat the public sector pay freeze.

What is needed now to prevent further cuts and privatisation is a sustained campaign to remove Bickerstaffe, Poole and their allies from the leadership and replace them with principled rank-and-filers prepared to lead a fight in defence of members' interests.

More DSS jobs to go

By a Merseyside CPSA member

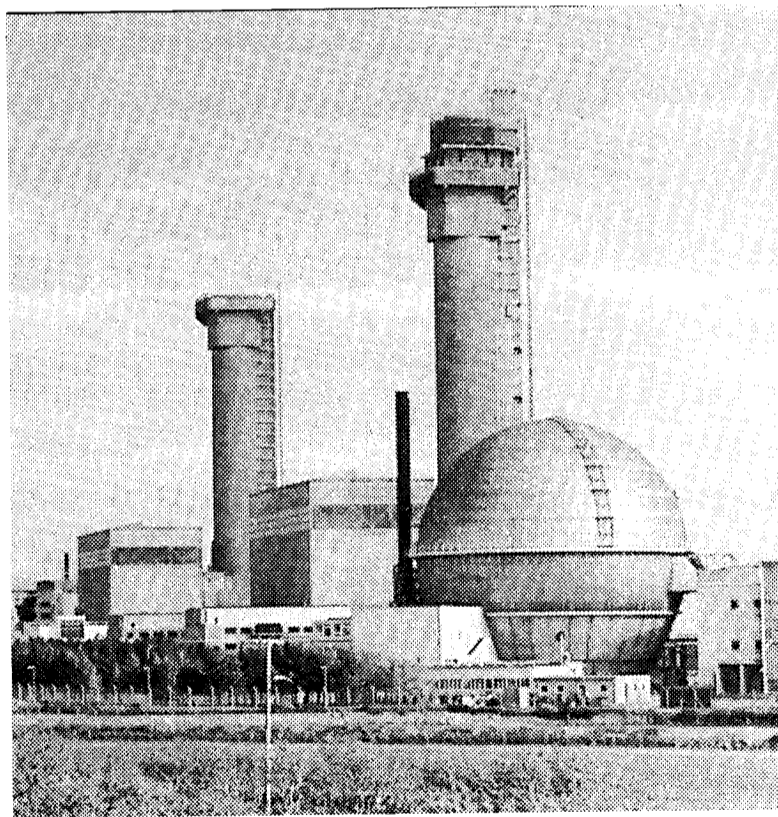
THE LATEST round of market testing within the Benefits Agency has led to three contracts for staff training programmes going to Group 4. The Tories' new scam for fiddling the dole figures must be to train DSS staff to lose claimants!

However, the plan to put Benefits Agency workers outside the civil service pay and conditions structure from April, and the recent announcement that the work of the ITSA section is to be 'outsourced' (ie, given to private contractors) with the loss of over 2,000 jobs, means that time is running out for the unions to start a fight.

There is massive anger at the Tory attacks among civil servants, who are now expected to think of their departments as 'business units'. But this anger is combined with demoralisation because union leaderships have done nothing.

Socialists must fight to build a strong rank-and-file opposition to the bureaucrats and prepare for strike action in defence of jobs. In the CPSA, this task is at present being hampered by the rightward-moving Militant Labour, whose commitment to rank-and-file organisation and strike action has been downgraded in favour of electoral manoeuvres.

The Militant-led Broad Left has struck a deal with BL84, the group that split from the Broad Left in 1984 in opposition to 'Trotskyism', to stand a joint 'Unity' slate in the NEC elections. While the fight for left unity is essential, it must be waged on a programme of struggle, not one of electoral opportunism.



British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield complex

Fusion offers potential for cheap, safe fuel

IN DECEMBER last year, US scientists working at the Tokamak Fusion Test Reactor at Princeton University managed to produce a record output of power in a well-publicised experiment. Although the amount was relatively tiny, lasting for only four seconds, it is a significant development in the attempts to create a viable fusion reactor.

Nuclear fusion is one of the most exciting concepts in the quest for a cheap and inexhaustible fuel source. Unlike the existing nuclear reactors which are based upon fission (where the atom is split apart, releasing both energy and vast amounts of radioactivity), fusion reactors use the same

process that powers the sun: hydrogen nuclei are fused into helium. This releases energy, but without the large radioactive by-product of fission. It is also theoretically very safe, being incapable of 'meltdown' - the constant threat of disaster that haunts existing nuclear power plants. Above all, in basic terms nuclear fusion uses water as its power source, which on a global scale is not in short supply. (It is estimated that Lake Geneva alone would provide enough power to fuel the world for 3,000 years.)

Although many scientists have been sceptical about the feasibility of sustainable fusion (it requires extremely hot temperatures - around

300 million degrees C), there is a joint plan by scientists in the US, Europe, Russia and Japan to develop a large new reactor which is expected for the first time to be able to produce more energy than is needed to power it.

Whilst we should remain cautious, the possibility that fusion can be successful is to be welcomed, although it remains to be seen whether the resources for such a development will be provided by the same governments which promoted nuclear fission reactors because of their military role in the production of plutonium. If fusion can provide cheap and abundant energy, then it will surely become one of the building blocks of socialism.

GMB support for Thorp misguided

By Jim Dye

THE DECISION to proceed with the opening of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant (Thorp) at Sellafield is one that all socialists must oppose.

Thorp is designed to reprocess spent nuclear fuel in order to recover plutonium. The new plant, like all of the British Nuclear Fuels complex at Sellafield, was designed solely for the military needs of nuclear warhead production. The plan to export the plutonium that Thorp will produce can only have meaning when viewed as a means for other nations to construct their own bombs, as plutonium has no real energy-led demand now that fast breeder reactors have been discredited in the nuclear industry.

Thorp has become Britain's most expensive civil engineering project, costing £2.85 billion, which even by capitalist standards represents an appalling waste of resources - and a waste that was commissioned by the last Labour government. On top of this, even official reports concede that about 200 people will die as a result of the radiation Thorp will discharge into the atmosphere during its lifetime, not counting those who will continue to die of cancer because of existing operations at Sellafield.

We oppose the position of the local GMB union leadership to support Thorp because of the jobs it will create. Far more could have been created if the billions Thorp has cost had been put into other, non-nuclear, construction projects, whilst the safest method to deal with spent nuclear fuel rods remains dry storage rather than reprocessing.

As socialists we believe that the world's energy needs can only be solved by a democratic plan of production, and investment in safe energy sources. Not only would this cut the massive waste and over-production of capitalism, but it would also reject the entire logic of the present nuclear industry which is simply a by-product of nuclear weapons programmes.

However, unlike some environmentalists, we believe that it is reactionary to want to return to a pre-industrial existence. Capitalist industry and technology have provided workers with the basic tools for ending poverty, once they are directed to providing for real human need. Marxism remains the only ideology that is capable of realising this potential.

By Richard Price
and Martin Sullivan

OCTOBER 4, 1936, remains a landmark in working class history – the day when the East End stopped Mosley's Blackshirts and dealt British fascism a blow from which it never fully recovered. With the same area once again targeted by fascists, the Battle of Cable Street contains valuable lessons for today.

The British Union of Fascists (BUF) was formed in 1932 by the aristocratic adventurer Sir Oswald Mosley. Mosley's early career as an MP had traversed the political spectrum: Tory (Harrow, 1918-20); Independent Conservative (Harrow, 1920-23); Independent (Harrow, 1923-24); Labour (Smethwick, 1926-31). In 1931, having failed to win Labour to a radical programme of state 'socialism', Mosley formed the New Party. With its vague platform of 'action now!', state intervention and populist calls for strong leadership in the face of the acute economic crisis, the New Party initially attracted a number of prominent intellectuals. At the general election of October 1931, however, the New Party polled disastrously, winning only 36,777 votes in 24 constituencies, and losing the seats of four MPs including Mosley who had defected to it.

Mosley's growing interest in authoritarian solutions was fuelled by the debacle, and following a trip to Italy he launched the BUF, modelled on Mussolini's fascist movement. In a circular to potential recruits, Mosley wrote: 'Our object is no less than the winning of power for Fascism, which we believe is the only salvation for our country.'¹

The BUF made a definite impact, with its full-time blackshirted Defence Force, its aristocratic and Tory sympathisers, and, for a period, the backing of Lord Rothermere and the *Daily Mail*. Its meetings – notably the Olympia rally in June 1934 – were ruthlessly stewarded, and it spread the fascist message through provocative demonstrations and a range of publications. The police treated the fascists with the utmost leniency.

But after this initial push, which took its membership to 40,000,² the BUF faltered. As some of his early backers fell away, alarmed by the violence surrounding BUF activities, Mosley focussed his attention on building up a base in working class areas. Anti-Semitism, although previously present in BUF propaganda, became its central feature from the autumn of 1934 onwards. By linking the questions of unemployment, housing and racism Mosley was able to win young workers demoralised by the slump, repelled by the retreat of the official Labour movement and looking for action. But his strategy also had its limitations. Many of the hardest hit 'distressed areas' in the 1930s not only had very little immigration; they were often strongholds of the Communist Party.

The East End of London, however, offered the fascists definite possibilities. Although the 350,000 Jews in Britain were only 0.7 per cent of the total population in 1936, nearly half lived in the East End – 60,000 in Stepney alone. Then, as now, it had some of the worst living conditions in Britain. It had also been a seed bed of anti-Semitism and racist propaganda in general. The British Brothers' League, founded by ex-army officers in 1900, claimed 45,000 members in the East End. Organised on a semi-military footing, it campaigned against 'alien' and especially Jewish immigration from eastern Europe, influencing the passing of the Aliens Restriction Act in 1905.³

Mosley's east London campaign began in earnest in the summer of 1936 with a big rally in Victoria Park in June. Through endless street-corner meetings, fire-bombing and smashing the windows of Jewish shops, racist abuse and physical attacks, the fascists worked overtime to create an atmosphere of siege. In late September 1936 the BUF announced its intention to mount a show of strength on the afternoon of Sunday October 4, designed to intimidate the

THE BATTLE OF MYTHS AND REALITIES

organised working class and in particular the local Jewish community. Uniformed fascists were to gather in military formation at Royal Mint Street, where they would be reviewed by their führer, before marching in separate contingents to four meetings in east London.

THE RESPONSE OF THE WORKERS MOVEMENT

The Jewish People's Council responded to this provocation by organising a petition calling for the march to be banned. Having received 100,000 signatures in 48 hours, the petition was presented to the Home Office on Friday October 2 by a deputation consisting of the Labour MP for Whitechapel, the secretary of London Trades Council, a priest and two leaders of the JPC. But the Home Secretary refused to stop it.

News of the demonstration provoked enormous anger: 'Crowds gathered wherever a bill poster halted to paste up a notice, but order was preserved by the police' reported the *Daily Herald*. 'It was expected that every Fascist advertisement in the East End would be defaced or "removed" by this morning.'⁴ The CP's *Daily Worker* reported the hatred expressed by East London workers for Mosley. One was quoted as saying 'We must give them such a reception that they will not march down here again'.⁵

However, rather than preparing to confront Mosley's thugs, the CP initially called on its members and supporters to attend a Young Communist League rally in solidarity with the Spanish Republic, which was to be held in Trafalgar Square on the same afternoon as the fascist demonstration. On September 30, the *Daily Worker* only carried a small article on the BUF march tucked away at the bottom of page 6, reporting that the CP's London District Committee had issued a call 'for workers to go in their thousands to Trafalgar Square, and after the demonstration to march through East London's streets to show their hatred of Mosley's support for the Fascist attacks on democracy in Spain'.

By the following day, the *Daily Worker*'s line had changed only slightly. 'To the Square on Sunday at 3.30pm', a front page article read. On page 5, a further appeal to attend the march to Trafalgar Square and the subsequent return leg was printed.⁶ In other words, the CP was going to assemble its forces near to where the BUF was rallying, and then march them off in the opposite direction! By the time the CP's 'anti-fascist' march returned to the East End in the early evening, the fascists would have succeeded in carrying out their provocation without serious resistance from the CP.

Although the CP did give its backing to a demonstration by the Ex-Servicemen's Committee Against Fascism, which was to assemble in Stepney on the Sunday morning, the party's main emphasis was to rally support for the

JPC petition calling on the state to defend workers against fascism. As one study of CP history observes: 'It was not that the Party's leaders were lacking in either courage or anti-fascist feeling, but the Popular Front line predisposed them to respectable protest rather than direct militant action, which could only antagonise those they were so anxious to influence among the Tories, Liberals and "Progressives"'.⁷

In the mean time, a smouldering argument between rival groupings in the CP had broken out into an open dispute. The 'leftists' led by Stepney CP secretary, Joe Jacobs, advocated so-called 'street work' – directly confronting the fascists. The other tendency around Phil Piratin favoured more cautious 'trade union work' in keeping with the popular front line.⁸ Jacobs was appalled at the prospect of the CP marching away from the battle: 'The pressure from the people of Stepney who went ahead with their own efforts to oppose Mosley left no doubt in our minds that the CP would be finished in Stepney if

mass mobilisation when it became clear that the march would go ahead. On Friday, October 2, an ILP meeting at Hackney Town Hall issued a call for 'an overwhelming demonstration against the Fascist march'.¹³ The ILP 'announced in the Press that it had called to the East End workers to mass in Aldgate in such numbers that the march would be impossible. . . . For hours at the Head Office duplicated copies of the leaflet were run off, and soon they were being distributed in thousands throughout East London'.¹⁴ The *Star* ran the headline 'ILP Call to the Workers' on its front page, and printed the ILP's statement in full.¹⁵

On October 4, the Socialist League's London Area Committee distributed a pamphlet written by Trotskyist Reg Groves which opposed the Stalinists' popular front line.¹⁶ Otherwise, although Trotskyists took part in the events, they do not seem to have made any distinctive intervention.¹⁷

Labour leaders, both nationally and locally, acted disgracefully. East London's Labour councils supported the JPC petition for an outright ban on the march, but George Lansbury, the Labour MP for Poplar and former party leader, could not even bring himself to demand that. He merely called on the Home Secretary to re-route one of the four BUF marches through a less 'congested' area. 'What I want is to maintain peace and order,' Lansbury stated, 'and I advise those people who are opposed to Fascism to keep away from the demonstration.' This was 'sound advice', counselled an editorial in the official labour movement paper, the *Daily Herald*. 'Fascist meetings are in themselves dull. . . . The only attraction is the prospect of disturbances. Withdraw that attraction and Fascist meetings would die on the organisers' hands.'¹⁸ 'If the procession does take place,' the Mayor of Stepney told the local press, 'I appeal to all East Londoners most earnestly to stay away.'¹⁹

The East End erupts

The fascists were due to gather in Royal Mint Street at 2.30pm. 'Hours beforehand every street between the Mint and Aldgate was thronged with people,' the *Daily Worker* reported.²⁰ Up to 300,000 anti-fascists had assembled, with 50,000 pressed around Gardner's Corner alone. Ten thousand police, according to the *Daily Herald*'s estimate, were brought in from all over London and deployed to protect the fascist march in what was obviously a well-prepared battle-plan: 'Many of the side streets . . . were cordoned off by police long before the march was due to start. No one was allowed to go through unless he could satisfy the cordon officer that he had legitimate business there. The inhabitants were scarcely permitted to leave these streets at all. . . . The police called every modern device into action to help them in their activities.'²¹

The crowds showed what they thought of Labour's pacifist advice: 'At 1.30 two lone Blackshirts appeared at Royal Mint Street. They were told to stand against the wall and six policemen were detached to stand in front of them, hiding them from the crowd. Shortly afterwards a covered vanload of Blackshirts appeared. As the first two men dismounted the crowd was on them before the police could intervene, and in another second both were stretched out unconscious. Then the police activities started in earnest. From all quarters foot and mounted police appeared on the scene. Within ten minutes, there were three baton charges in Royal Mint Street and all the while crowds were being pushed back and more streets cordoned off. Eventually the Minorities was closed entirely and the crowd pushed back down Cable Street. By this time Royal Mint Street itself was emptied of workers and was occupied by 500 police and the assembling fascist forces which came up mostly in closed vans.'²²

The *Daily Herald* found its pleas similarly ignored: 'Outside Mark Lane station the crowd closed in on six of Mosley's men, and before the police could do anything three of the Fascists had been knocked down and were bleeding profusely from head wounds. One of them had been hit on the head with a bottle. Several men and women were hurt in a fierce exchange of fist blows. . . . But the police precautions enabled the rest of the Fascists to assemble unmolested. They formed in military formation, a column of 3,000, stretching for half a mile, with over 200 black-bloused women in the centre. . . . The Blackshirts jeered back at distant booing. "The Yids, the Yids, we are going to get rid of the Yids", they chanted. Or, "M-O-S-L-E-Y, we want Mosley", to which the crowd shouted back, "So do we, dead or alive". New detachments arrived in the steel-protected Fascist vans, behind steel-wire meshing.'²³ Police attempted to clear the streets close to Royal Mint Street with repeated baton charges. Workers responded with stones, fireworks and marbles hurled under horses' hooves chanting 'They shall not pass!'

The confrontation between police and anti-fascists was concentrated on Cable Street, through which the fascists were intending to march. Some of those arrested were liberated, and several policemen themselves 'arrested'. The brutality of the police only succeeded in spurring on the anti-fascists: 'Barricades were built in the street, and packing cases, a lorry and a couple of carts, to say nothing of the contents of a builder's yard, were called into service to build it. Paving stones were torn up and broken into convenient sizes to serve as ammunition, glasses and bottles were broken and the splintered glass ground into the road to impede the passage of the mounted. The police tried to stop these operations but were powerless to do so.'²⁴

Having retreated, the police later returned with reinforcements, cleared the street with a baton charge, and set about dismantling the barricades. Several hours later, the scene still resembled 'the aftermath of a battle in Spain' according to one eyewitness.²⁵

The demonstrators showed an admirable gift for organisation – some of it planned, some improvised. Local headquarters were established to direct the struggle. Motor cyclists and cyclists were organised to carry messages, and both the CP and ILP established first aid



Cable Street, October 4, 1936: anti-fascist demonstrators under attack from the police

CABLE STREET



Oswald Mosley (left) marching down Cable Street on October 4, 1936

stations to treat those injured.

Mosley finally rolled up in a black sports car around 3.40pm – over an hour late, and ten minutes after the march was due to set off. 'Union Jacks on decorated poles rose in the air and a forest of hands above the black-coated ranks went up in salute as Sir Oswald, wearing the new Blackshirt uniform, with a peaked cap, drove down the ranks with two other officers of the movement.'²⁶

Shortly before this, the police had begun preparing to clear a route towards Houndsditch for the BUF march. But by the time Mosley spoke to the Police Commissioner these plans had been abandoned and Mosley was told that the march could not proceed because of the threat of disorder. The intervention of ILP leader Fenner Brockway, who phoned the Home Office, may have had some influence on the Police Commissioner's U-turn.²⁷ But, as the *Herald* reporter pointed out, 'it was obvious to him, as it was to everyone, that any attempt to force a way for the Fascist column would have meant serious riot and bloodshed'.²⁸

At 4pm the Blackshirts were escorted out of Royal Mint Street by thousands of police and diverted down the Embankment – away from East London. As the fascists skulked off towards the West End, 'everyone of Jewish appearance was insulted and in some cases they were spat upon'.²⁹ When they reached Trafalgar Square the fascists tried to hold a meeting there but were prevented from doing so by the police. They were forced to disperse, having been comprehensively humiliated.

LESSONS OF THE BATTLE

The BUF issued a statement deploring the fact that 'Socialists, Communists and Jews openly organised not only to attack the meetings but to close the streets of London by violence to members of the public [i.e. uniformed fascists] proceeding to the legitimate meetings'.³⁰

The Communist Party drew the lesson from Cable Street that it was necessary to intensify the campaign against non-intervention in Spain: 'Neutrality must go! Spanish democracy must be saved!'³¹ It weathered the internal storm, and recruited heavily on the strength of its role in the struggle against Mosley. Party membership doubled between 1935 and 1937. Joe Jacobs was expelled from the CP in 1937 for advocating a more militant line. Phil Piratin went on to become MP for Stepney from 1945-50, although it was on a programme to the right of Labour.

The ILP drew more radical conclusions: 'As in Spain, Fascism must be opposed not by appeals for the defence of Capitalist Democracy, but by a call to united working-class action for Workers' Power and Socialism'.³²

The Trotskyist *Red Flag*, paper of the Marxist League, called upon militant workers to follow up their victory and 'swing the entire organised working class movement into action. The effort of the Labour Party leaders to teach the workers reliance on the police must be exposed for what it really is – a policy which will secure the Fascists freedom to conduct their anti-Jewish, anti-working class propaganda, and engage in brutal attacks on workers in East London'.³³ It went on to link the fight against fascism to bringing down the National Government and the struggle for workers' power.

Cable Street took place on the eve of the Labour Party annual conference, which unanimously passed an emergency resolution condemning 'the tragic and deplorable events of yesterday in the East End of London'. It condemned

the Tory government's refusal to ban the march, proposed the illegalisation of political uniforms and 'militarised politics', and called on the Tories to organise a government inquiry into Fascism! Moving the resolution, London County Council leader Herbert Morrison placed the blame for the battle in the East End not only on the BUF but on the 'threats of counter-demonstrations from the Communists and from the Independent Labour Party'.³⁴ The Mayor of Stepney meanwhile paid tribute to 'the splendid behaviour and good humour of the police'.³⁵

The ruling class took its cue from the Labour leadership, and with its support, rushed the Public Order Act through parliament. Although the act banned the wearing of political uniforms, it was primarily used against left-wing demonstrators and anti-fascists.³⁶

What lessons can be drawn from the struggle against racism and fascism today? The most obvious conclusion is that to call on the state to defeat fascism is both futile and counter-productive. Far from defending workers and Jewish people, the state mobilised a huge force of police to defend the fascists. In fact, physical confrontation between anti-fascists and the BUF was very limited. The real battles took place between the

anti-fascists and the police.

Cable Street demonstrates the one-sidedness of those who argue that all actions must take place through the official labour movement. If it had been left to the leaders of the labour movement, no mobilisation against the fascists would have taken place.

But it also disproves the facile arguments of those who claim that because the Labour leadership is so hostile to independent working class action its hold over the class as a whole will automatically weaken. There is no evidence that the treacherous response of the Labour Party leaders nationally and locally to the BUF provocation lost the party the allegiance of any but a small minority of the class.

Anti-fascist mobilisations, however militant, do not absolve Marxists from the task of breaking the mass of reformist workers from Labourism. After all, it was in this period that Trotsky argued for a turn to the Labour Party, anticipating a leftward movement in its ranks. A militant united front policy of opposition to all forms of racism and fascism is a vital component of revolutionary politics. But it is not a substitute for an all-round programme to take the class as a whole forward.

NOTES

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3. Benewick, pp.25-7; F.G.Clarke, *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, OUP, 1983, pp.26-7.
4. *Daily Herald*, October 1, 1936.
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14. *New Leader*, October 9, 1936.
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17. Information from Daisy Groves and Arthur Shute.
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20. *Daily Worker*, October 5, 1936.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*

23. *Daily Herald*, October 5, 1936.
24. *Daily Worker*, October 5, 1936.
25. *East London Advertiser*, October 10, 1936.
26. *Daily Worker*, October 5, 1936.
27. Brockway, p.272.
28. *Daily Herald*, October 5, 1936.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Daily Worker*, October 5, 1936.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *New Leader*, October 9, 1936.
33. *Red Flag*, October 1936.
34. *Daily Herald*, October 6, 1936.
35. *Daily Herald*, October 5, 1936.
36. See M.Turnbull, 'The Public Order Act 1936', in *Labour Review*, January 1978.

ANC leading the retreat

Following a recent visit to South Africa, Jabu Masilela reports on the mood of the masses in the run-up to elections in April

AS THE first 'non-racial' elections approach in South Africa, the crisis of working class leadership becomes even deeper. While it is true that state-Inkatha violence has played a major role in weakening the organisations of the working class, negotiations have also had a big effect. Capitulation by the ANC-SACP-Cosatu leadership on key political questions like the Constituent Assembly has been accompanied by a systematic demobilisation of the masses. The tri-partite leadership neglects even the most basic issues facing the masses in the workplace and the townships. It has no plan of action to combat unemployment, the crisis in housing, health, education, etc, and it has dropped the anti-VAT and PAYE campaigns. This has driven activists away from the ANC to the civics and the unions, which are seen as the only structures still committed to resisting the bourgeoisie. Today it is common to see a good turn out for civic or union meetings, but not at ANC/SACP branches.

However, the situation in the unions is pretty bad. Financial crises and, above all, a treacherous leadership have led to such pessimism among workers that many are now leaving the unions too. Once-militant unions like Saccawu are now faced with bankruptcy, with thousands of members having left to join very dubious rivals in some regions in the Transvaal. The Stalinists and syndicalists are only interested in their jobs as officials, and winning the present faction struggle at the expense of their members. The crisis in Saccawu is certainly related to the betrayal of the national strike last year.

The NUM has not recovered from the crisis which resulted from the betrayal of the 1987 miners' strike by its leadership under Cyril Ramaphosa. Gone are the days when the NUM waged militant struggles against the mining magnates and inspired the entire working class. Today the NUM is known for paying the highest salaries in the South African trade union movement to its officials. It has suffered one of the largest membership losses of any union, under the impact of growing unemployment.

The Congress Alliance leadership will do nothing to resolve this crisis. Its commitment to the social contract – the so-called 'reconstruction accord' –

drives it even closer to the bosses.

The struggles of school youth have been constantly sabotaged by the Congress leaders. Sometimes they refuse to back the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in its campaigns against the Department of Education and Training (DET). This was obvious during the campaign against the exam fee. When ignoring struggles fails, they intervene to close them down. Despite its weaknesses, COSAS still inspires millions of oppressed students, even in the remotest villages. This is a clear challenge to both the DET and the petty-bourgeois cowards heading the Congress movement.

However, at the tertiary level, the politics of the present period emerge vividly within the South African Students' Congress (SASCO). Its leadership has always been reactionary. The betrayal of the students' struggles at Wits University and the University of the Western Cape for accommodation, reduction of fees, and a democratic Students' Representative Council, are only the latest examples of its treachery. Coupled with these betrayals are the vicious slanders, purges and physical assaults SASCO's leaders have directed against student militants, especially at UWC. Last year students at Turfloop University fought a bitter battle against the administration over the same issue of exorbitant fees. During this crisis, in which many students nearly starved, the national leadership of SASCO offered no way out. Under its present leadership, SASCO is incapable of waging any national campaign to advance the interests of students, let alone join forces with COSAS and the Youth League in building a militant youth wing of the mass movement.

The masses in the townships are still facing the state-Inkatha violence alone, with virtually no assistance from the Congress leaders, who have placed their hopes in the so-called National Peacekeeping Force combining former guerrillas with De Klerk's army. Militants on the ground are correct to build their own Self-Defence Units (SDUs). Without these SDUs, Inkatha would have overrun the townships – ANC strongholds – with the tripartite leadership politically disarming the masses with peace sermons. However, the SDUs are certainly experiencing serious problems. The violence between them and community structures like the civics and the ANC Youth League branches could destroy the gains that have been achieved by the armed masses. Efforts must be continued to ensure the accountability of the SDUs to the communities they defend. But this violence reflects a wider crisis of leadership in the working class, and not simply a lack of accountability on the part of the SDUs.

Unionisation among farmworkers is not making much headway. Flimsy excuses are always offered to explain away this criminal neglect. The Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) had enough time and resources to execute this task, but its Stalinist leadership plunged the union into a major financial crisis, making the task almost impossible. It demoralised workers even more by purging socialists, democratically-elected worker-leaders and militants in general from the union. FAWU is no longer in charge of this work, but Cosatu has not yet produced a concrete plan of the way forward. But this task is beyond the careerists leading the federation. It is criminal that the farmworkers are being abandoned when they are displaying so much heroism in trying to end the slave conditions under which they labour. Their militant and protracted strikes in the Transvaal recently are an indictment of the deserters at Cosatu head office.

The ANC's present campaign in the countryside has not been accompanied by any serious policy to end unemployment, very inadequate health facilities, the land crisis, etc. It is clear that the ANC just wants to use the masses as their voting cattle. Its election list itself proves that the rural masses don't count for much at Shell House.

The PAC and AZAPO are undergoing even deeper crises than the ANC. The fact that they were among the bottom three in an electoral poll which appeared in the *South African Times* recently shows the bankruptcy of their politics. Their empty rhetoric is not taken seriously by the masses, and they have completely failed to win over any significant forces since their unbanning. The left – mainly entryist – within the ANC, is completely disarmed. It is not making any serious headway in the face of the ANC-SACP leadership's onslaught against militants inside the two organisations. The policies of the left groupings offer no political or organisational alternative to nationalism and Stalinism. Their programmes are just a mish-mash of ANC-SACP politics, with a few ABCs of Marxism thrown in. They continue to dogmatically oppose the struggle for a workers' party on the basis that socialists must be in the ANC, or be isolated from the masses. They are only prepared to consider the need for a workers' party independent of the ANC as a last resort! All this derives from their utopian nonsense of trying to transform the ANC into a socialist party. As we go to press, the dramatic events in Bophuthatswana have underlined the instability of the political situation in South Africa. The next edition of *Workers News* will contain an extended report on the outcome of the elections.

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy

By Bob Pitt

PART TWENTY-FOUR

TO GIVE an accurate account of Gerry Healy's expulsion from the WRP in 1985, as with most other decisive episodes in his political career, it is necessary to separate reality from myth. At the time, because of the well-deserved contempt in which Healy was held by most of the left, few questioned the story that a heroic band of anti-Healyites had suddenly risen up to throw out the old tyrant and what were commonly dismissed as 'his most mindless followers'.¹ The truth, however, is rather more complex. In fact the October 1985 split in the WRP was the messy outcome of a confused factional struggle which developed over a period of months and was characterised by a number of unstable and shifting alliances.

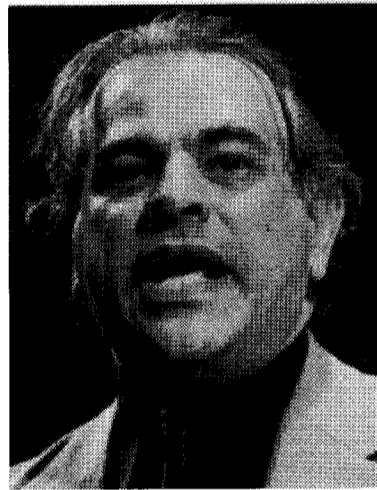
The loose alignment of anti-Healy oppositionists that had appeared in the early summer—the Clapham-based grouping around Dave Bruce, Dot Gibson and others, together with Sheila Torrance and her allies in the London District Committee and YS leadership—soon broke up. Torrance's obstruction of the demand for a control commission into the allegations against Healy had the effect of losing her the backing both of the youth and of a section of the LDC. Indeed, in the course of September, and behind the backs of her own supporters, Torrance mended her fences with Healy and his personal clique, of which the Redgraves and Alex Mitchell were the most prominent representatives. Torrance and the Healyites now established a new bloc, with the avowed objective of defending the WRP's Seventh Congress perspectives, which called for the overthrow of 'Thatcher's Bonapartist regime' through 'the organisation of the General Strike and the creation of a Workers' Revolutionary Government'.² The campaign against Healy, they argued, was merely a cover for a right-wing liquidationist tendency in the WRP which wanted to overturn these 'revolutionary' perspectives.

Meanwhile, Healy's erstwhile lieutenant Mike Banda, whose politics were oscillating wildly, had turned into Healy's most vitriolic opponent. And Cliff Slaughter, who at the August CC meeting had staunchly defended the WRP's cover-up for Ken Livingstone, returned in late September from a holiday in Greece to become another born-again anti-Healyite. These two men, themselves deeply compromised by their long history of support for Healy—which had involved framing, expelling and, on occasion, beating up his opponents—emerged as the new leadership of the anti-Healy forces. As details of the allegations against Healy gradually leaked out, increasing numbers of the WRP membership, quite rightly appalled by these revelations, rallied behind Banda and Slaughter. In their insistence on calling Healy to account for his abuse of women, and their recognition that his sectarian ultra-leftism had led the organisation into a blind alley, these comrades were undoubtedly correct. The question remains as to why so many other WRP members refused to go along with this. The assertion that the majority of them were motivated by the desire to defend 'their idol'³ will satisfy only those who have renounced political honesty in favour of self-justifying fairy tales.

The low esteem in which both Banda and Slaughter were held by many party activists was one important factor in their failure to attract more support. Banda was widely regarded as an ineffectual windbag, Slaughter as a supercilious academic

who refused to soil his hands with any practical work; Torrance, by contrast, had won respect among the party rank and file as a hard-working and effective organiser. Another factor was that, within the crazed ultra-leftist perspectives, there was a grain of truth to Torrance's accusations against the Banda-Slaughter camp. Richard Price argues that, as far as Banda was concerned, 'there were some indications, from my experience, that the guy was ... finally heading off to a left-Stalinist position. I don't say he'd arrived at it, but he was heading that way. I remember he said, and my jaw dropped, that he'd learned far more from Mao Ze Dong ... than he'd ever learned from Trotsky'. Torrance was therefore able to point to some of the anti-Healy faction and say that they were breaking from Trotskyism. 'That's undoubtedly true,' Price points out. 'Some did become Stalinists'.⁴

The obvious solution to the WRP's crisis was to set up a control commission into Healy, and to pursue a systematic discussion over political perspectives. This, in fact, was the course that Torrance herself came to advocate. At the first of two CC meetings in September, which confirmed the decision to retire Healy, Price recalls that 'Mickie Shaw appeared — Aileen



Mike Banda

Jennings's mother — appealing for the CC to find the whereabouts of her daughter, and calling for a control commission.... Torrance was very sarcastic with her, implying that she knew perfectly well where Aileen was and that this was a load of hog-wash. But I remember her saying words to the effect of "Well, if you want your control commission, have one". And there was actually a vote formally taken that the next CC meeting would set it in motion. But the next CC didn't discuss the question of the control commission at all. It was devoted to a political discussion which was in fact a showdown between the returned Slaughter and various others, and Torrance, in which Torrance was attacked for her mindless ultra-leftism.⁵ In fact it was at Mike Banda's insistence that the question of the control commission was deferred until the next CC meeting, due on October 12.⁶

At this stage, it still seemed possible that the related issues of the party's political perspectives and Healy's sexual corruption could be resolved without a split. On October 2, however, Healy entered the party's Clapham headquarters in what was apparently an attempt to reassert his position within the organisation. A meeting of the Political Committee held that he was in breach of the terms of his retirement and banned him from the premises. But at the next PC meeting on October 9 the ban was overturned, causing Banda and his supporters to walk out in protest. On his own authority and without waiting for the CC to meet (although a majority of the CC subsequently endorsed his actions), Banda then instructed the Runcorn print plant to halt pro-

duction of the *News Line*, and called staff at Clapham, the WRP's bookshops and the College of Marxist Education out on strike. Banda's coup, it should be noted, was accompanied by considerable political violence. He himself physically assaulted Corinna Lotz, one of Healy's supporters, and those printers at Runcorn who attempted to bring out the paper were attacked by Tony Banda and a group of North West WRP members wielding iron bars.

In the course of this developing crisis some truly mindless followers of Healy had turned almost overnight into his hysterical enemies. Members of Healy's 'security department' who had happily burgled other left groups' premises for him, now transformed themselves into self-righteous defenders of 'revolutionary morality' — the slogan around which the Slaughter-Banda faction launched their bid for control of the organisation. And when the definitive Healyite apparatchik Simon Pirani ended up on the anti-Healy side of the split, even members of his own faction were left scratching their heads in surprise. The use and justification of violence by the Banda-Slaughter grouping is perhaps to be explained by the fact that, in many cases, this somersault in political allegiance was not accompanied by any fundamental change in political method.

For example, Ian Harrison — then a rank-and-file WRP member — recalls a morning in September 1985, towards the end of a night's guard duty at the Clapham headquarters, when Healy had suddenly appeared, accompanied by his driver Phil Penn. Healy was 'looking very white ... very nervous, and he shook Phil Penn like Penn was his older brother saying "Tell him, Phil, you tell him"'. And Penn pointed a finger at me and said, "You're withholding Gerry Healy's mail. We want all his mail". Ignoring Harrison's assurances that Healy's own mail had already been sorted and sent up to his office, Penn then pushed into the guardhouse and scooped up letters which were addressed to the WRP's various companies along with obvious business circulars. 'And he pointed his finger at me ... saying "I'll break your legs if you take Gerry's mail"'. When Harrison next went to the centre for guard duty a few weeks later, after Healy had been banned, he was summoned to see Penn, who launched into a tirade against Healy, and concluded: 'If you let that bastard through the gates, I'll break your legs!'⁷

A further irony of these new factional alignments, Richard Price points out, was that while many of Healy's toadies had flipfopped, most of the Torrance-Healy faction on the Central Committee (with the obvious exception of the Redgraves and Mitchell) weren't really Healy's people, in terms of his intimate set. These were Ben Rudder, Simon Vevers, Ray Athow, Dave Oatley, Frank Sweeney — these were not the inner circle. These were people basically who wanted to maintain the existing line'. They justified their refusal to back the campaign against Healy with the argument 'that there was the personal and the political, and while the personal had been shocking, dire and everything else, there were nonetheless politics to be fought out, and on these things these people [the Banda-Slaughter faction] were wrong. This was the psychology of the ordinary Torranceites — those without a stake in covering things up. Of course, there were other people who had a stake in covering lots of things up — people like Mitchell and the Redgraves'. None of this, Price adds, alters the fact that 'we were totally wrong, really, politically and in many other ways — and of course over the control

commission business, and this warped democratic centralism'.⁸

When members of the Torrance-Healy faction arrived at the Central Committee on October 12, they found themselves confronted by a mass lobby of Banda-Slaughter supporters. Although this was presented as an exercise of democratic rights by the WRP rank and file, given that only supporters of one faction were present it really amounted to organised intimidation of their political opponents. In the CC meeting itself, Price recounts, 'there was a kind of lynch atmosphere. People were jumping up and down volunteering to get Healy, bring him here and deal with him now. Tony Banda was screaming at the top of his voice "We are now a military faction". This sort of stuff... It was extremely difficult for anyone who wasn't with the majority to speak — I mean, they were allowed to speak, but they were heckled, interrupted, there was a very, very hostile atmosphere.... People like Ben Rudder and Athow spoke in quite a reasoned way — this was one of the peculiar things about it. Of course the politics were completely out of the window. But the other side had no coherent line at all. There were people like Dave Hyland saying that there never had been a Trotskyist movement in Britain, and I think Peter Jones had a similar kind of position. Well this meant ... that really it had all been a complete waste of time, this is what it felt like. So you can see a bit of the psychology of why people would react against that.'⁹

The meeting opened with a 90-minute contribution by Mike Banda,

the major part of which was devoted to his own rambling personal reminiscences, suggesting that he was in the throes of a breakdown. Banda's speech also featured an account of Healy's coercive relations with women members going back many years, and in such detail as to indicate that Banda must have known about this all along. The meeting lasted some 12 hours. When it reconvened the following day, however, the majority guillotined the debate, arguing that the tension — which they themselves were of course primarily responsible for creating — made further discussion impossible. The CC then voted by 25 to 11 to charge Healy for expulsion on the grounds of violence, slander and abuse of women members. It also decided to sack three full-timers — Torrance, Price and Corin Redgrave — for the crime of supporting the opposition. Counter-proposals by the minority to resume publication of the *News Line*, and to charge Banda with violence against Corinna Lotz, were voted down by a similar margin.

To be continued

NOTES

1. Alan Thornett and John Lister in *Workers Press*, February 22, 1986.
2. Resolutions Adopted by the Seventh Congress, WRP internal document, pp.64, 82.
3. Charlie Pottins in *Workers Press*, September 25, 1993.
4. Interview with Richard Price, November 22, 1993.
5. Ibid.
6. *Workers News*, April 1987.
7. Interview with Ian Harrison, January 13, 1994.
8. Price interview.
9. Ibid.

Tom Kemp 1921-93

TOM KEMP, who died at the age of 72 on December 21, was one of a number of talented intellectuals who left the Communist Party during the crisis of 1956-7 to join the Trotskyist movement. A Marxist economic historian, he was associated for the rest of his life with the Socialist Labour League and the Workers Revolutionary Party.

Influenced by the development of capitalist crisis and fascism, he joined the Young Communist League in Wandsworth in 1936 and the Communist Party in 1939. After serving in the navy during the war he became a lecturer, first at Southampton University and then at Hull. Within the CP he does not seem to have been a prominent figure, probably due to his independent spirit. When the crisis in the CP broke, unleashed by the twin shocks of Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, he was, according to one contemporary, 'ready for it', having already read Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*. By 1957 he had joined Gerry Healy's 'Group', operating at that time in the Labour Party, having been unimpressed by either Tony Cliff's Socialist Review Group or Ted Grant.

He contributed prolifically on economic and historical questions to the various publications of the SLL and the WRP — *Labour Review*, *Fourth International*, *The Newsletter* and *Workers Press* — as well as to *International Socialist Review*, published by the Socialist Workers Party (USA). His work was often of a significantly higher quality than the hack work Healy frequently demanded from the party intellectuals.

At the same time Kemp did not have an uncritical relationship with Healy, and tended to keep his distance. In 1967 he put a counter-resolution to the SLL congress, attacking the growing economic catastrophism of its perspectives — and received precisely one vote in favour. He also seems (privately at least) to have opposed Healy's paranoid spymania, which culminated in the infamous 'Security and the Fourth International' campaign.

These factors, combined with Healy's frequent rages against 'brain damaged' intellectuals, contributed to his leaving the WRP in early 1980. According to one possibly apocryphal story, he walked out during one of Healy's lectures on 'philosophy', saying that he was 'not going to listen to any more of this rubbish!'

He maintained literary collaboration with the WRP in the 1980s, and rejoined enthusiastically after the expulsion of Healy in 1985. However, he continued to have differences with the group, notably over *Workers Press*'s support for the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Although his literary output was considerable, he was passed over for a chair in economic history on clearly political grounds. He taught in both the United States and more recently in South Africa, where members of the CWG, the South African section of our tendency, benefited from talks he gave on Marx's *Capital*.

His books, although uneven in quality — several of them were too clearly written as undergraduate textbooks — will remain valued by Marxists. They demonstrate a gift for generalisation, combined with a firm empirical grasp of the subject matter. They include *Theories of Imperialism*, two volumes on French economic history, the first volume of a history of the French CP, three studies of industrialisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and a study of US imperialism.

CORK



Pro-choice activists threatened with jail

On February 17, three of the supporters of Campaign for Choice pictured above were fined for posting abortion information on a vacant shop front in Cork city centre. **Dominic Carroll**, a spokesperson for the organisation, explains the background to the case

THE SOCIETY for the Protection of the Unborn Child is a cumbersome title for any organisation. Its abbreviation, SPUC, is an appropriately four-lettered word. In Ireland, these self-styled moral majoritarians have been on the rampage for over a decade and have had alarming success. In 1983 they prompted a referendum which inserted a 'pro-life' clause into the constitution in a country where abortion was already illegal. Later, they closed down pregnancy counselling services which offered advice on abortion in England and slapped legal orders on three student union bodies, including the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), preventing them from including abortion information in student handbooks.

The tide began to turn two years ago when the High Court served a restraining order on a girl of 14 who had been raped and was attempting to travel to London for an abortion. Traditional Catholic attitudes were shaken to the core, the court order was overruled in the Supreme Court and a new referendum quickly followed. The ban on abortion information was lifted, the right to travel abroad upheld and a majority even indicated support for abortion where a woman's life was threatened by continued pregnancy.

However, the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition government have been predictably slow in drawing up legislation to give effect to the referendum results. It will be a long time before a legal abortion will be performed in Ireland. In the meantime, the issue of abortion information may be resolved later this year, though the legislation is likely to be restrictive. At the moment, British magazines sold in Ire-

land, such as *Cosmopolitan*, blank out advertisements relating to abortion clinics. It's not long ago either that an entire issue of *The Guardian* was seized on arrival at Dublin airport because it carried a full-page advertisement for the Marie Stopes organisation. The law on abortion information is unlikely to redress this situation.

Nevertheless, things have begun to change in Ireland, and SPUC are fighting something of a rearguard action. But they retain the capacity to inflict damage. Recently, three people in Cork, supporters of Campaign for Choice, were each fined £300 for putting up abortion information posters. The judge in the case wanted to jail them but as the legislation didn't allow for this he warned that they would each do 45 days in prison if they failed to cough up.

More seriously, USI and Trinity Students Union were recently put into receivership by SPUC for failure to pay court costs. Unfortunately, the unions have done little to prepare for this situation. Instead of resisting the bailiffs, they have launched a belated appeal for donations to pay off SPUC. The final bill could come to £200,000!

The issue of abortion in Ireland is still far from being resolved. SPUC may be down but they're far from out. However, the sea-change in Irish attitudes is tangible and after a decade of defensive activity by the pro-choice movement we're in a position finally to take the initiative.

● Donations to help pay the fines and legal fees of those prosecuted for putting up abortion information posters may be sent to: Campaign for Choice, 3 St Mary's Avenue, Dillons Cross, Cork, Ireland.

How the Mosleyite revival was halted

The 43 Group
By Morris Beckman
Centerprise; £7.50

Review by Lizzy Ali

FIRST published in 1992 and now in its second edition, Morris Beckman's exciting account of anti-fascism in London's East End in the 1940s should be required reading for all those engaged in the struggle today.

In 1945, Jewish men and women returned from the war thinking that they had defeated fascism. But to their horror Oswald Mosley's fascists resurfaced under a variety of different names and, under the protection of the 1936 Public Order Act, resumed their campaign of virulent anti-Semitic propaganda. The Mosleyites set up a range of groups and publications with the aim of spreading fascist ideas, without actually mentioning the word 'fascist'. When they had grown sufficiently, the plan was to stage a dramatic fusion of the various groups and appeal to the 'reluctant' Mosley to come out of retirement and lead the movement once more.

Mosley had a two-pronged strategy. Middle class contacts were cultivated through discussion groups, while open-air meetings concentrated on the East End aimed to win over backward workers. By February 1946, 14 fascist groups were operating in London. Their public activity was provocatively carried out in areas such as Hackney which had a significant Jewish population. A network of fascist bookshops was established, and regular sales of their literature took place outside tube stations, including West Hampstead, Finchley Road, Edgware, Angel, Mile End and Whitechapel.

Jewish ex-servicemen felt betrayed and sought help from their MPs and Labour Home Secretary Chuter Ede, but they were knocked back with the argument that any action would amount to an infringement of freedom of speech. Jewish people who attempted to heckle fascist speakers found themselves charged with breaching the peace. In desperation the ex-servicemen went to the Jewish Board of Deputies. This conservative voice of the Jewish establishment refused – as it had in the 1930s – to support direct action against the fascists, preferring to obey the existing law and lobby behind the scenes.

It was in such circumstances that the 43 Group was formed, named after 38 men and five women who met in March 1946 at Maccabi House in West Hampstead following several clashes between Jewish ex-servicemen and fascists. The aim of the group was strictly limited – to physically confront the fascists and prevent them from meeting. The group had no other platform or political affiliation. This proved to be both its strength and its weakness.

For a period the fascists grew quite rapidly, and were able to hold dozens of meetings and a number of sizable rallies protected by large numbers of police. Because of its high degree of organisation and the courage of its members, the 43 Group was able to smash up many of the fascists' events. Groups of 'commandoes' would heckle speakers, rush the platform and deal with the stewards. Members were selected on the basis of a high level of commitment. Even so, hundreds joined. 'Aryan'-looking 43

Group members infiltrated the fascists, while sophisticated intelligence-gathering gave advance knowledge of their plans. Many of these methods make much of today's anti-fascism look amateurish in comparison. As a result, after four and a half years of almost continuous battles, Mosley's comeback was defeated and his Union Movement broke up.

Inevitably, the 'apolitical' anti-fascism of the group had its drawbacks. Many members burned out after a short time. With its single-minded emphasis on physical force, its appeal was largely to tough young men. As a fairly exclusive and largely Jewish-based group it seems to have had little impact on the wider labour movement. What is more, without a core of socialists able to explain the relationship between racism, fascism and capitalism, there was nothing to hold the group together once the Mosleyites' campaign dwindled.

The immediate threat over, most 43 Group members felt they had achieved their aim and got on with their everyday lives without drawing

wider political conclusions. From a number of the author's comments, it is clear that many group members sympathised with the establishment of the state of Israel. This in itself is not surprising given the period and the impact of the Holocaust, but there is a clear irony in the support given to a state founded on the racist expulsion of Palestinians from such a committed group of anti-racists.

While it is clear that the Communist Party had little influence over the group, relations between the two are not explored, which considering the dominance of the CP over radical movements in the East End at this time is surprising.

Morris Beckman's vivid account of the street battles against the fascists has brought to light a largely forgotten episode in working class history, and is highly recommended. Any serious anti-fascist movement today would do well to draw on the 43 Group's highly effective organisational methods. At the same time, lessons must be drawn from its lack of a wider anti-capitalist strategy.

Workers International League

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.

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

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An open letter to Irish republicans

Peace process no way forward



WE CALL on militant republicans and socialists in Ireland to reject all attempts by the Sinn Féin leadership to abandon the fight for a united Ireland. Although still unpublished, it seems obvious that the Hume/Adams agreement differs little from the London/Dublin Joint Declaration. According to deputy SDLP leader Seamus Mallon, Hume/Adams also concedes the loyalist veto over Irish self-determination.

Clearly there is fierce resistance to the Joint Declaration from republicans. In 'Peace Commission' meetings all over Ireland, Sinn Féin leaders have relied on an array of former enemies and 'peace people' to sell the deal. Prominent among these were supporters of the ex-Stalinist, pro-partition groups like the Workers Party, the Communist Party of Ireland and Democratic Left.

But this process has been given a left cover by the fake Trotskyists of Militant Labour, who equate the armed struggle of the IRA with the activities of the loyalist death squads. The Socialist Workers Movement has also adopted this line, having previously held, at least on paper, a position of 'unconditional but critical support for the IRA'. Under the headline 'Class not creed: Workers unite to fight sectarianism', a lead article in the SWM's November 1993 paper wrote off the IRA as a 'communal organisation' and called for Protestant and Catholic workers to sink their differences in the struggle against the Tories. Unbelievably, it cited the reactionary Ulster Workers' Council strike of 1974 as an example of the potential of the working class to topple the government. And it was indeed disgraceful for Eamonn McCann, the SWM's leading public figure, to get Derry Trades Council to collaborate with the anti-republican Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in organising one of the main pro-imperialist peace rallies on November 3.

Lasting unity between Catholic and Protestant workers will not be achieved by fighting for immediate economic demands and 'peace'. Militant republicans and socialists must reject the pseudo-Marxist version of the loyalist veto which says that the unity of the working class is a pre-condition for ending British occupation. Reaction will have to be crushed, and the clearer and better prepared revolutionaries are for that battle, the less will be the bloodshed. Loyalism will never concede equal rights for nationalists voluntarily!

Since Hume/Adams, the British government has strengthened the loyalist position, establishing the Select Committee on Northern Ireland promised to James Molyneux, leader of the official Unionists, in return for his party's votes in the House of Commons. The select committee will recommend increasing the powers of local authorities in the six counties, a move intended to enhance the ability of the Unionists to discriminate against nationalists. The

proposed electoral boundary changes will also boost the loyalists, while at the same time favouring the SDLP over Sinn Féin in constituencies like West Belfast by incorporating adjoining middle class nationalist areas.

The political retreat of the republican leaders is the inevitable outcome of their rejection of the revolutionary potential of the working class. The forces of reaction cannot be defeated by military methods alone, nor by a combination of guerrilla war conducted by a handful of volunteers and reformist politics – the 'armalite and ballot box' strategy. The broad ranks of the nationalist working class have to be mobilised on a revolutionary programme, with the priority being to organise the physical defence of the nationalist communities against loyalist death squads. The lesson from South Africa is not the one that Adams and McGuinness like to promote; in refusing to arm the masses in the townships and agreeing to a peace accord with De Klerk, the ANC leaders have opened the door to the

current campaign of Inkatha violence.

Committees must be built, drawn from the nationalist communities under attack and the trade unions. Though their first task must be defence, they should also take up the question of jobs, pay, housing, discrimination and education, establishing themselves as organisations fighting for the rights of all workers, regardless of religion.

Such committees must not act as a substitute for the trade unions; they must fight inside the unions to replace the current sell-out leaders with revolutionaries. Sinn Féin trade union leaders are almost indistinguishable from any others. And Sinn Féin councillors, while they defend the democratic rights of the nationalist community, vote for cuts and accept that the working class must pay the price of the recession – a return to the old de Valera 'Labour must wait' policy. Their reliance on the 'pan-nationalist' front and on Fianna Fáil as some sort of genuine republicanism has meant a disastrous alliance with the very forces who are destroying

jobs, services and social welfare.

Neither does Republican Sinn Féin offer any answer beyond a mixture of a Federal Ireland and the old right-wing nationalism. Of course, they should be supported against the open capitulators. Leading members of Republican Sinn Féin have been arrested and harassed north and south of the border and their offices in Dublin raided in January. The former INLA Chief of Staff, Dominic McGlinchy, was murdered by unknown gunmen after declaring his opposition to Hume/Adams and the Joint Declaration and beginning a political collaboration with Bernadette McAliskey – another forthright opponent of the 'peace process'.

Any organisation that hopes to win sections of Protestant workers away from loyalism, as well as mobilise nationalist workers on both sides of the border, must demonstrate a genuine commitment to the struggle for socialism in the whole of Ireland. In the south, it must fight against the wage-cutting Programme for Economic and

Social Progress and the backward 'Irish' campaigns, and particularly against reactionary social legislation and clerical traditions. But Sinn Féin joins with the most conservative sections of Irish society in refusing to support abortion rights. With policies like this it cannot hope to win the best Protestant workers.

What is needed is a radically different strategy to that of Sinn Féin – one that is more in the tradition of the left wing of the 1934 Republican Congress led by Nora Connolly O'Brien and Michael Price, who correctly fought for the Workers Republic.

The working class must take the lead in fighting for a united Ireland, but this will only be achieved in the struggle for socialist revolution. We urge republicans who are opposed to the current process of betrayal to discuss these proposals with revolutionary socialists such as ourselves who are committed to the cause of Irish freedom.

*Workers International League
March 13, 1994*

The North school of slander

By Richard Price

LAST YEAR, the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (of which the WIL is the British section) sent a delegation to Sri Lanka. This small country has a long tradition of revolutionary Marxism and has been in permanent crisis for the last decade. In view of the dismal record of virtually all the 'revolutionary' international movements in relation to Sri Lanka we saw this as our internationalist duty. The results of the visit were presented in two extended articles (see *Workers News* Nos. 45 and 46) and at a public meeting in London.

The interest these reports aroused – almost 100 copies were sold on a Tamil demonstration in July last year – and the appeal we have printed for *Workers Voice*, a Sri Lankan Trotskyist paper, have clearly rattled David North's International Committee and its Sri Lankan section, the Revolutionary Communist League. RCL general secretary Wijie Dias has responded with two pages of vitriol entitled 'Hobnobbing with traitors in Sri Lanka', a contribution which marks a new low in the already appalling standard of this organisation's neo-Healyite polemics.

Along with the usual IC broadsides – 'hostility towards Marxism', 'petty bourgeois', 'national (?) opportunist humbugs', etc – come other more sinister allegations. Not only are the comrades from Britain and South Africa who visited Sri Lanka described as 'pro-imperialist agents', but *Workers Voice*, which publishes a small monthly journal with

very limited resources, is described as a 'non-existent group' carrying out 'reactionary political work on behalf of world imperialism and British imperialism in particular' and in receipt of mysterious funds.

We have no intention of filling our pages with replies to such disgraceful and unsubstantiated slanders. We simply draw attention to them because they speak volumes about the kind of 'Trotskyism' North and his clones represent, and go some way to explaining why in the eight years of its reborn existence, North's IC has been unable to win a single new group to its ranks.

Located within Dias's abuse, however, is a political line struggling to get out. He ridicules our statement that 'the majority of the Tamil people in the north and east do want a separate state', and consequently our support for Tamil self-determination up to and including secession. This, he argues, amounts to support for the Tamil bourgeoisie, and an independent Tamil state would be a 'reactionary utopia'. It would 'like any other comprador regime, offer the masses of Tamils as cheap labour to the transnational organisations... The RCL's struggle is not to establish a separate Tamil state of Eelam'.

Our only mistake, it seems, was being over-generous to the RCL. If we mistook its line on the Tamil national question as something resembling a principled position we can only apologise. Closer study of the evolution of the RCL reveals a chain of political somersaults.

Having initially supported Tamil self-

determination, the RCL reversed its policy in 1972. From the late 1970s it supported the struggle for Tamil Eelam, although it did so in a manner that shaded off into political support for the Tamil Tigers. Writing in 1983, the late Keerthi Balasuriya denounced as 'nauseating' and 'an insult to the Tamil nation' the speech of a Stalinist MP, in which it was claimed that a Tamil state would be unviable for economic and geographical reasons: 'The Sinhala racialist oppression has developed to a level where joint life has become absolutely intolerable... Under these circumstances, only the creation of a separate state will create the best possible conditions for the class struggle of the working class and the poor peasants to develop unhampered.'

In 1986 the RCL, having broken with the WRP, continued to argue that 'separation is in the interests of the Tamil people, aids the development of the class struggle of the Sinhalese proletariat against the bourgeoisie and its state, and creates the best conditions for unifying the Sinhalese and Tamil working class and poor peasants', although it was more critical of the Tigers and the Tamil bourgeoisie.

By 1988 this had shifted to the slogan of the United Socialist States of Tamil Eelam and Sri Lanka, which, while not explicitly upholding the right of Tamils to a separate state, clearly implied a federation of two states. Today a further shift away from the defence of Tamil self-determination has taken place, with the call for 'a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam' – which sounds

remarkably like a 'socialist' version of the Sinhalese bourgeoisie's unitary state.

Upholding the demand for Tamil self-determination, which the RCL did for a decade, is now counted as proof of being both an imperialist agent and a political ally of the Tamil bourgeoisie! Like most left organisations in Sri Lanka, the RCL has suffered political repression and the murder of a number of its members. We will continue to defend it against the state and other reactionary forces. But we will also expose its third-period sectarianism and its political zig-zags. It is clear to anyone who reads the RCL's material that it has proved manifestly incapable of maintaining any consistent line on the touchstone of politics in Sri Lanka.

Dias also attempts to make political capital out of *Workers Voice*'s call for a critical vote for the workers' parties in the provincial council elections last year, on the grounds that the predominantly Tamil population of the north and east was disenfranchised. But when local government elections were called courtesy of Jayawardene's constitutional coup in 1987, and were boycotted not only by all workers' parties (except the LSSP) but even by the bourgeois opposition, the RCL was alone among left groups in advocating participation. Yet in 1993, with all the workers' parties contesting the elections, the RCL calls for a boycott!

If this is an example of what Dias calls the 'theoretical calibre' of the RCL, if this is its 'spotless programme'... then workers in Sri Lanka clearly need a new revolutionary party.