



IT'S TORY BLAIR!



THE 'VISION' presented by Tony Blair at the Labour Party conference in October, which received a rapturous ovation, is the most right-wing Labour agenda for over 60 years. It represents a declaration of war against anything in the party that sounds even vaguely like socialism, and must be fought tooth and nail by every activist in the labour movement.

Where Thatcher and Major moved the political and economic goalposts to the right, Kinnock, Smith and now Blair have followed. The pre-conference build-up was carefully prepared, with Blair winning applause from the press for refusing to back striking signal workers, and Gordon Brown fronting an economic seminar, the centrepiece of which was an assurance that Labour had turned its back on the bad old days of 'tax and spend'.

Blair's conference speech did not even present a minimum reform package. Labour's spin doctors have successfully argued that promising *anything* before an election is dangerous. Instead, it was an unashamed bid for southern Tory voters' hearts and minds. Leafy suburbia can sleep easier at night, safe in the knowledge that a Blair government will stand up for its values – law and order, sound economics, back to basics education, no renationalisation and the trade unions kept in their place. Add some comforting but meaningless phrases about 'community', scrap Clause 4 and you have a perfect recipe for a rerun of the SDP. And sure enough, those who split to form the SDP in the 80s are to be welcomed back.

None of Blair's ideas are new or remotely original. He is an intellectual lightweight and a sponge for other people's ideas. Labour 'revisionists' in the 1950s like Anthony Crosland put forward the idea that further nationalisations were unnecessary. Hugh Gaitskell tried to ditch Clause 4 in 1959. And it was Harold Wilson who insisted

that social advances would have to be paid for by economic growth rather than touching private wealth. What Blair has done is pull together these various strands of right-wing Labourism in a way that previous leaders didn't dare.

What brought hardened Labour apparatchiks to their feet with lumps in their throats wasn't so much what Blair said as the way that he said it. At long last they feel they are in the driving seat. With the left so marginalised, they are no longer obliged to pay lip service to the party being a broad church. The unions have been downgraded, but the bureaucrats remain loyal. And the Tories are deeply unpopular and discredited among their own supporters. The right wing has long dreamed of a fully Europeanised social democratic party. But what was once only debated behind closed doors, surfacing occasionally in discussion documents and think-tank reports, could now become reality.

Defeating the modernisers will be an uphill battle. Some on the left have drawn optimistic conclusions from the resolution narrowly passed at conference reaffirming Clause 4. This paints too rosy a picture of the present balance of forces. No sooner had it been passed than several trade union barons were reassuring Blair that they would vote differently next year. Meanwhile, a significant section of the rank and file is so demoralised by 15 years of the Tories that it is desperate for any kind of Labour government – even one with a programme barely distinguishable from the Liberals.

But a determined campaign to oppose the right wing's constitutional changes, to defend union links and the class basis of the labour movement, and to democratise the party could rally thousands of activists. The axis of such a struggle should not be the sentimental phrases of Clause 4, but an anti-capitalist programme which provides fighting answers to all those under attack from the Tories.

The gospel according to St Anthony

- Family values
- Law and order
- Anti-union laws
- Traditional teaching methods
- Low taxes for the rich
- Minimum public ownership

CLAUSE FOUR

COMMENT

What's in a number?

THE STING in the tail of Tony Blair's keynote speech to the Labour Party conference was a promise to rewrite Labour's constitution and include 'a clear, up-to-date statement of the objects and objectives of our party'. As it dawned on delegates that this meant scrapping the hallowed Clause 4, Section 4, which appears on every membership card, they either became more euphoric or more despondent.

Conference gave the NEC the task of drafting a replacement clause to the constitution. Blair's favoured amendment will probably define industry as a 'partnership' between government and private business, in line with his vacuous sermons against the excesses of the free market on the one hand, and the dangers of too much state interference on the other.

The call to ditch Clause 4 was sprung unexpectedly, with only a few trade union leaders and senior Labour figures in the know. The media roared its approval, but Dennis Skinner, re-elected to the NEC, and Arthur Scargill angrily called for a campaign of resistance.

Blair did suffer a narrow defeat when a motion from Glasgow Maryhill reaffirming support for Clause 4 was carried by 50.9 per cent to 49.1 per cent. But he made it clear that this will not have any effect on the constitutional review.

Clause 4 notionally commits Labour to secure for workers 'the full fruits of their industry' through 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'. It is of course utterly vague - what exactly is 'common ownership'? - and has never had any bearing on Labour's policy in government.

It was drafted by the arch-gradualist Fabian, Sidney Webb, who was a lifelong opponent of Marxism. Commenting on Webb's 'socialism', Leon Trotsky wrote: 'Poor, wretched, feeble-minded Fabianism - how disgusting its mental contortions are!' It is truly ironic that, today, Clause 4's fervent supporters include people like Arthur Scargill, who claims Karl Marx as his inspiration, while its opponents are middle class Fabians like Blair.

Clause 4 was never intended to be a bedrock of socialist principle. It was drawn up pragmatically in 1918, at a time when Labour had yet to form its first government. Having spent most of its formative years as a junior partner of Liberalism, Labour could no longer rely on a weakened and divided Liberal Party to give it a helping hand. It needed a programme which would distinguish it from Liberalism. The socialistic phrases of the 1918 constitution could appeal to militant workers, and head them off from more radical conclusions in the revolutionary atmosphere after the First World War.



Conference delegates in Blackpool vote on the Clause 4 motion

Hugh Gaitskell's attempt to rewrite the constitution in 1959 was opposed by shrewder right-wingers like Harold Wilson, who understood that it was better not to upset the party faithful, who could be manipulated to support the right wing if they were allowed to hold on to Clause 4 like a catechism.

But Wilson combined a right-wing agenda with a messianic belief in state intervention. Blair is the product of the new Labour thinking, which wants to uproot anything which smacks of collectivism or 'Morrison-style nationalisation' in favour of a 'partnership' with business.

Should socialists defend Clause 4? Only sectarians will refuse to take sides against Blair and the modernisers. However, that doesn't mean building illusions in Clause 4. Socialists should oppose whatever amendments Blair comes up with on the grounds that they will represent a further lurch to the right. They should use every opportunity to expose the right wing's trajectory, frustrate its plans, and promote a discussion on what kind of party is necessary to defeat the Tories, defend workers' rights and fight for socialism.

There is every reason to suspect that most of the parliamentary left will put up very little fight at all. Peter Hain, who has been regarded in some quarters as the great white hope of the left, declared himself 'very relaxed' about the proposed constitutional revision, and claimed that Blair had delivered 'the best speech I have ever heard'.

The campaign around Clause 4 must be broadened into a wide-ranging struggle against the disastrous course which the right wing is pursuing. It would, after all, be a hollow victory if Clause 4 were retained, but the right wing carried the day on everything else. The first step must be the building of a mass democratic campaign uniting all those opposed to the modernisers, and prepared to defend jobs, wages, workers' rights, party democracy, the trade union link, etc, in struggle.

Back to basics with Tony Blair

By Andrew Mills

'IF YOU had had your eyes shut, you would have thought that chunks of this had been spoken by a Tory Secretary of State,' observed Teresa Gorman, the Tory MP for Billericay, after hearing Tony Blair address the Labour Party conference. 'We had law and order. We had sack the bad teachers. He's like a Tory plant in the Labour Party.'

Gorman accurately summed up the Labour leader's new thinking. Blair spent much of his speech in Blackpool spelling out his moth-eaten Christian 'socialism', with such profundities as 'We are the party of the individual because we are the party of the community'. He is trying to balance between Tory voters who cheered Thatcher when she claimed that there was no such thing as society and who think that social problems are caused by 'bad' individuals, and Labour voters who tend to see unemployment, poverty and crime as products of a 'bad' society. Rather than proposing even a reformist alternative to Toryism, Blair is trying to inject 'community' spirit into Tory individualism. Socialism in the hands of Blair has become middle class self-interest with a conscience.

Warming to traditional Tory themes, he claimed that the Tories are 'no more the party of the family than they are the party of law and order'. He promised measures to combat 'family instability' and is on record as supporting the idea that good parenting skills should be taught at school to help prevent future family breakdown. Blair's formula of 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime' is an equally shameless bid for the Tory law and order lobby, while trying to sound concerned about the effects of social deprivation. Turning to education, his main target was not cuts, but the familiar Tory scapegoat of the 'bad' teacher. 'If teachers can't teach properly they shouldn't be teaching at all,' he said.

There was also reassurance for those who have benefited from Tory tax breaks. Blair is in favour of 'fair taxes', but this doesn't mean lowering them for workers and increasing them for the rich; on the contrary, it means assuring the 'middle income' bracket - in reality the upper middle class - that they will escape tax increases. Those who argue against him are talking 'daft politics'.

Tory anti-union laws on strike ballots, the closed shop and secondary picketing will also be safe in Blair's

hands. He told a TGWU meeting during the leadership contest that it would not be 'sensible to say we would repeal all the Tory trade union legislation'. And just in case anyone thinks that a future Labour government would favour the unions, Blair has stressed that 'Labour has to govern in the interests of the country as a whole'.

The realities of this even-handed approach were spelt out during the signal workers' dispute. Refusing to support the strikers, he called for both sides to resume negotiations, since 'Any sensible member of the public would want to see a sensible solution to the dispute, which is one bringing it to an end so we can get the railways back to normal'. Clearly this 'sensible solution' did not involve busting the Tories' pay limit.

But where trade unionists in struggle get the cold shoulder, the same can't be said of former members of the SDP. These scabs are being encouraged by Blair to rejoin the Labour Party. 'I welcome back those people who left the Labour Party in the early 1980s for reasons that were understandable at the time,' he told them, conveniently ignoring the fact that the SDP rump defected because it couldn't stomach being democratically defeated at the party conference. These are the kind of allies Blair is recruiting to support the modernisers' project.

Does this make Blair the most right-wing Labour leader this century? Perhaps. But this shouldn't lead us to see his predecessors in a rosy light. Ramsay MacDonald betrayed the General Strike in 1926 and split in 1931 to form a coalition with the Tories. Clement Attlee, who led the 1945-51 governments, used troops to break strikes, pioneered the British nuclear strike force and presided over the bloody dismemberment of India. Hugh Gaitskell was proud to 'fight, fight and fight again' for the right to keep nuclear weapons and ignore conference policy. Harold Wilson used a vicious red scare against striking seafarers, plotted anti-union laws and supported US imperialism in Vietnam. Callaghan held down wages and called on workers to cross picket lines during the Winter of Discontent. And so the list goes on.

But previous Labour leaders faced the constant problem of a mobilised trade union movement which they could not entirely ignore. Blair has been able to get this far without significant opposition. All of which means that a class fight-back is unpostponable if Blair's reactionary ambitions are to be defeated.

Climbing the greasy pole

Background: Father a former leading member of the Young Communist League in Scotland, who became a Tory judge. Mother a Tory loyalist from Donegal. Brother and sister both barristers.

Education: Public school and Oxford, where he read law.

Early Political Interests: Stood as Tory in mock election at school. No record of student politics. Attracted to Christian socialism of John Macmurray ('community'). Joined Labour in his mid-twenties.

Occupation: Lawyer
Political Career: Stood as Labour candidate in by-election in safe Tory seat of Beaconsfield in 1982, losing deposit. Gained nomination for safe Labour seat of Sedgefield at last minute and held it at the 1983 general

election. Joined the Kinnockite Tribune group; supported expulsion of Militant. In 1984, became junior spokesperson on Treasury Affairs under Kinnock. Given the City Affairs brief in 1987, he was elected to the shadow cabinet in 1988 and promoted to Energy Spokesperson, replacing out of favour John Prescott; then to Employment in 1989 in place of ex-left-winger Michael Meacher, where he spoke out in support of Tory anti-union laws. Became close ally of rightward-moving moderniser, Gordon Brown. Promoted again by John Smith in 1992 to Shadow Home Secretary and prominent in Labour's general election team, banging the law and order drum. Elected party leader on the death of John Smith in July this year.

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Reluctant Revolutionary

Media lies fuel racist backlash

By Vusi Makabane

THE KILLING of Richard Everitt in Somers Town on August 13 has again heightened racial tensions in the London Borough of Camden. While it has not yet been established that the attack on Richard, a 15-year-old white youth, was racially motivated, there is no doubt that teenage frustration, violence, deprivation and racism are endemic to the area.

The response of the capitalist media was typically hysterical and racist. Its saturation coverage conveyed the distinct impression that the local white community was under attack from rampaging Asian youth. This was also fuelled by the police who issued leaflets and posters seeking information about a group of Asian youth seen in the area. The British National Party jumped on the bandwagon, issuing a leaflet which echoed the 'Killed because he was white' line of the Tory press, and claimed that the majority of racist attacks in Britain are carried out on white people.

Needless to say, in the past when gangs of white racists have gone on the rampage in Somers Town, stabbing Asian youth and attacking Bengali shops and restaurants, the press has virtually ignored the subject. Certainly the reality for black and Asian people in the area is that they suffer racist abuse, assaults and attacks on their homes on a daily basis. Little wonder that Asian youth are angry.

In the wake of the media onslaught, racist and fascist groups swamped the area with leaflets and tried to recruit on the estates. Their presence, however, is not unusual

in the area, which has a long history of racism. Recent years have seen a number of demonstrations against racial violence and police harassment of black and Asian people in the area.

Labour has controlled Camden council for many years and its response to racism has been weak to say the least. At best, Asian families reporting long-term racial harassment and abuse will be moved to another estate instead of the culprits being rooted out.

Situated on the north side of Euston Road between Euston and St Pancras railway terminals, Somers Town has long been a forgotten area. In stark contrast to the prosperous and predominantly white north of the borough, Somers Town is blighted by high unemployment, rundown estates and a lack of local amenities – all factors which have exacerbated racism in the area. It is the centre of the local Bengali and Somali communities.

However, it is short-sighted to argue, as the SWP does, that a few pounds spent on youth clubs and other local facilities will eradicate the underlying racist sentiments held by many on the estates. The problem of racism must be tackled through a concerted campaign to mobilise the whole community against the main enemy of the working class – the Tory government. Its openly racist policies sow disunity and rip communities apart. At the same time it is necessary for local communities under attack to be organised to defend themselves – self-defence is no offence. The local Labour leaders must be held to account. They must either fight racism consistently or be driven from office by those who will.

Health care or couldn't care?

By Pat Doyle

WHEN, three years ago, US-based Health Care International expressed an interest in building a state-of-the-art private hospital in Britain, the Scottish Office and Locate in Scotland fell over themselves to ensure that it came north of the border.

The £186m project was the biggest inward investment of its day, and HCI was rewarded with regional assistance, tax allowances and other incentives of around £80m. The new hospital was hailed as a prime example of Thatcherite policies attracting overseas investment and creating jobs.

The hospital was built on the site of an old asbestos plant in Clydebank (cleared at a cost to the taxpayer of £7m), but from day one it was obvious that local asbestosis sufferers were unlikely to benefit. With charges of £1,100 a night, the hospital was clearly intended only for the very wealthy.

Perhaps it was the bleak wasteland on which the hospital was built, or perhaps it was just the Scottish weather, but for whatever reason the fat cats failed to register an interest. The Industrial Bank of Japan, which had provided approximately 13 per cent of the project costs, pulled out of the deal. Alternative financiers refused to fill the gap on the grounds that HCI had too much debt and not enough

cashflow. It seems that the potential patients were suffering not so much from a medical condition as from the capitalist recession pinching their assets.

HCI's financial backers then began to make grovelling noises in the direction of the Scottish Office, which produced benefits in the shape of 100 heart patients who were re-assigned from a West Midlands NHS Trust to HCI. Due to the distances involved, the patients' families are to be given accommodation at HCI, and all under the guise of a good deal for the Trust hospital involved. It's becoming clear that the Tories will do almost anything to avoid the embarrassment of HCI being flushed down the pan – and the banks know it. They are threatening HCI with receivership in order to pile pressure on the Tories. Given that many under-equipped NHS hospitals would give their eye teeth for HCI's facilities, the backers hope that the government will save face by rescuing the equipment, or even the hospital itself, out of public funds.

If the hospital closes, 700 people will be thrown onto the dole in an already depressed area of Clydeside. Workers should fight for it to be taken over and incorporated into the NHS, but with no compensation to HCI or its financial backers. Health care must not be left at the mercy of Tory dogma and big business.

BANKING AND INSURANCE WORKERS

Time to fight back

By a BIFU member

WORKERS in banking and insurance, who until recently have enjoyed a high degree of job security, are now finding that with the current recession pay and conditions are under attack and thousands of jobs are being lost.

Disputes this year at the National Westminster, TSB and Midland banks, and at Guardian Royal Exchange – or Guardian as it prefers to call itself after a recent reappraisal of its image – show the potential for organising among traditionally conservative groups of workers.

Guardian is the latest in a long line of employers who are cutting staff and introducing 'performance-related pay' on the pretext of trying to survive in an increasingly hostile and competitive market. The fact that it is a market of their own making appears to have slipped their minds.

In 1993, after two years of record losses – the result of bad investments and large insurance claims due to 'unforeseen catastrophes' – Guardian management opted for the leaner and more efficient approach. Restructuring was the name of the game and redundancy was the reward for years of loyalty. Branches were closed and work transferred to other parts of the country. The banking and insurance union, BIFU, negotiated behind the scenes, but accepted redundancies as inevitable.

Not content with the levels of cuts achieved by its own managers, Guard-

ian decided to bring in professional hatchet men Price Waterhouse to implement an Organisational Efficiency Review (OER) throughout the group. Management claimed that if the workforce didn't participate in the process by suggesting savings, Price Waterhouse would base its findings solely on information supplied by the company.

The truth was that Price Waterhouse couldn't produce any findings at all if the workforce refused to co-operate. Unfortunately, fear of redundancy won the day and departments began to attack one another as 'inefficient' – the old tactic of divide and rule had set worker against worker.

Over 200 jobs were lost at the Lytham office and a further 69 in Edinburgh. Some of those who remain have had their jobs 'realigned' – meaning downgraded – and all have been expected to pick up the work of those who were paid off.

It's now clear that OER had nothing to do with better organisation or efficiency, unless efficiency equates directly with exploitation. It was simply an exercise in how to increase productivity whilst decreasing costs, the highest of which is labour. Once again, BIFU accepted the redundancies with hardly a whimper.

In March, negotiations began for the annual pay round, normally a quite staid affair. This year, however, Guardian BIFU members were not prepared to let union officials go through their usual rubber-stamping exercise, and made it plain that they

wanted a decent wage rise to compensate for the additional workload and all the upset. Management agreed an increment based on satisfactory performance (payable to most, but not all, staff), but would not give in to a demand for an across-the-board increase on basic salary.

BIFU put the offer to the membership, and it was rejected out of hand. Union officials had made it clear that if the offer was rejected, the next step was to ballot for industrial action. But given that there was no history of militancy at Guardian, management imposed the pay settlement without further ado, and announced that the backdated increase would be included in the September wage packets. This left BIFU with no option but to go all-out for a yes vote in the industrial action ballot if it was to retain any credibility.

In the event, the call for action was rejected by 1,792 votes to 1,055 on a two-thirds turn-out. But the lessons for labour movement militants are clear. Despite being saddled with a union leadership that has failed to take up any serious fight against restructuring and job losses, Guardian workers came to the brink of taking strike action.

Inside BIFU and the MSF, there must be a determined struggle to build a fighting leadership. At the same time, trade unionism must be extended to sections of white collar workers who are as yet unorganised. A vigorous recruitment campaign must be launched in what is a key sector for modern capitalism.

Defend the McLibel Two!

By Jon Bearman

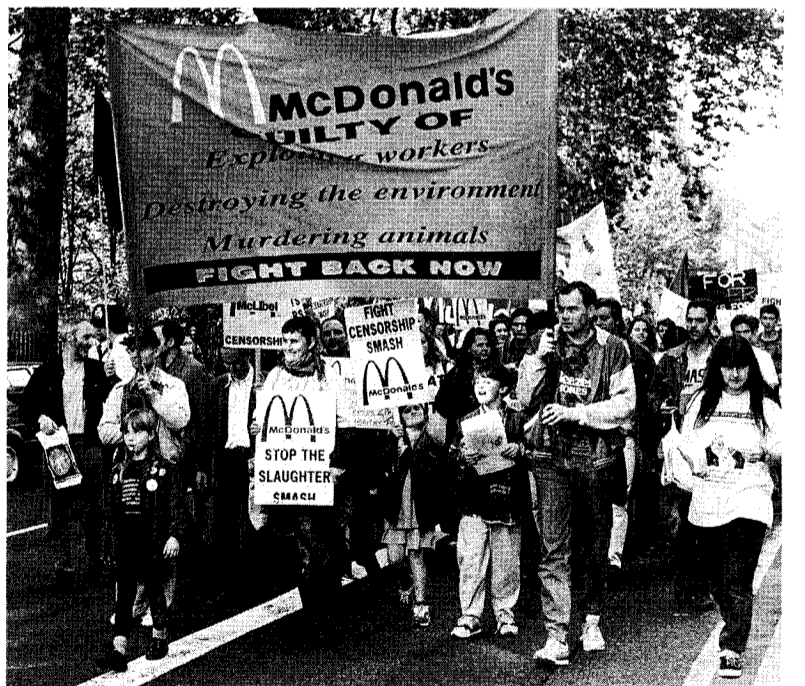
THE GIANT fast-food corporation McDonalds is prepared to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds taking two London Greenpeace campaigners to court in a case which began in June and is scheduled to run to December. By then, it is expected that more than 170 witnesses will have given evidence.

Since Dave Morris and Helen Steel – the McLibel Two – are both unemployed, McDonalds has no hope of recouping its legal costs. But as it has shown in previous cases (for example, when Transnational Information Centre was bankrupted in 1989 by the threat of action), McDonalds is prepared to go a long way to protect its image.

The defendants are accused of libelling the multinational in a leaflet entitled 'What's Wrong with McDonalds'. The leaflet made allegations about the company's advertising campaigns, the nutritional quality of its food, the wages and conditions of its workers, its attitude to trade unions, its global impact on health and the environment, and its treatment of animals.

Much of the trial has concerned arguments about nutrition, with experts called by the defence testifying to the effects of a diet high in fat and sugar, and low in fibre – said to include heart disease, high blood pressure, tooth decay, diabetes and cancers of the breast and bowel.

McDonalds admits much of this, but argues that its food is not unhealthy as part of a balanced diet, and that responsibility for this rests with the consumer. But as Dr Tim Lobstein,



Demonstration in London on October 15 in support of the McLibel Two

a co-director of the Food Commission, points out, 'You could eat a roll of sellotape as part of a balanced diet.' A survey conducted by the Food Commission in 1987 found that 31 per cent of the people it questioned at outlets in Peckham, south-east London, ate fast food every day.

Witnesses for the defendants also attacked the morality of introducing junk food – a term not contested by McDonalds' barrister – into underdeveloped countries, undermining poor but otherwise healthy diets. Evidence has also been given on McDonalds' use of dozens of food additives and on the effects of its packaging.

Robert Beavers, a senior vice-president of the corporation in the United States, denied that its starting rates of \$3.35 (about £2.20) per hour amounted to low pay – although he declined to reveal his own salary. He admitted that a 'flying squad' of senior managers had been set up in the early 1970s to intervene at any McDonalds branch in the USA at the first sign of union activity.

● The issues raised by the McLibel trial are of wide-ranging significance. For more information, or to send messages of support write to: McLibel Support Campaign, c/o London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX. Tel/fax: 071-713 1269.

EDITORIAL

Haiti's Pax Americana

SINCE THE collapse of Stalinism, US imperialism has been anxious to give its military interventions a respectable cover. From the Gulf to Somalia and now Haiti, American troops, armed with UN resolutions, are busily 'restoring democracy' – or so they would have us believe.

The reality is that things haven't changed so much since the United States engineered coups in country after country under the banner of anti-communism. US ambassadors have rubbed shoulders with so many torturers, death squad leaders and drug barons in Latin America and the Caribbean that the new line may have a few credibility problems. But whatever the official reasons, America's incursions into its global 'backyard' are still determined by strategic and economic interests.

The invasion of Haiti on September 19 and the restoration of elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide met, unusually, with the support of many of the country's poor and oppressed. But the chains which have for decades made Haiti a by-word for poverty were forged by US imperialism in alliance with one of the most vicious and corrupt ruling classes on the planet.

Between 1916 and 1934, Haiti was occupied by the United States, which later happily coexisted with the regime of Papa Doc Duvalier for decades. Since 1986, when his son was overthrown by a popular rebellion, US imperialism has worked with each successive military dictator on the grounds that only the Haitian army could guarantee a transition to democracy.

In fact, the army doesn't fulfil even the minimum requirements of national defence. Instead, it exists solely and nakedly to defend the interests of the rich. In alliance with the hated tontons macoutes gangs, the innumerable generals run drug operations and sort out the perks of state office between themselves, while the ranks are given free rein to collect kickbacks and terrorise oppositionists and the poor in general.

Aristide's election was greeted with elation in the slums of Port-au-Prince. His popularity stemmed from his courageous defiance of the military, and because he claimed to champion the rights of the dispossessed. But Aristide did nothing to rouse his own supporters against the army, which overthrew him in 1991. Instead, he chose to ally himself with US imperialism, which he relied upon to produce a settlement.

Why the sudden American concern for democracy? Like Noriega in Panama, General Raoul Cédras – the latest in the chain of Haitian dictators – was running a regime which was so out of hand that it threatened to provoke the masses to insurrection, and thus endanger US interests. What is more, it was producing a flood of refugees to the United States, and the eight years of upheaval since 1986 have hardly created a stable business environment.

But while US troops have eased Cédras out of office, they have been careful not to undermine the army as an institution. They want it intact to suppress the masses when the need arises. Time and again workers, youth and the poor have shown their courage and preparedness to fight the crippling weight of oppression. Aristide has shown conclusively that he is nothing more than a compromised liberal. Workers in Haiti need their own party to take the road of socialist revolution and fight for the expulsion of US troops. Without this, the bloody cycle of imperialist-supported dictatorship will recur.

Railroaded!

THE SIGNAL workers' struggle generated a huge level of support, reflecting the deep unpopularity of the Tory government and its policy of rail privatisation. But after a series of one- and two-day strikes – a total of 19 strike days over a period of 16 weeks – the outcome was not the hoped-for victory against a discredited Tory government, but a defeat for the signal workers and a new impetus to privatisation.

How could this have occurred when the situation was so loaded with potential? We need look no further than the leadership of the Labour Party, the TUC and the RMT for an answer. Tony Blair adamantly refused to support the strikers, while deputy leader John Prescott and shadow transport minister Frank Dobson – both RMT-sponsored MPs – insisted on negotiations with Railtrack. RMT general secretary and TUC president Jimmy Knapp was determined to keep the strikes isolated and limited. Their efforts culminated in a stitched-up conference of signal workers' delegates voting for a resolution which ended the dispute on Railtrack's terms.

Any other outcome to the dispute – which could only have been won by stepping up the action and drawing in other sections of rail workers – would have undermined Tony Blair's insistence that the only way Labour can get elected is by distancing itself from the trade unions in order to win over Tory voters. Blair's main concern was to get the strikes called off before the Labour Party conference.

While the RMT leadership has tried desperately to convince the media, and its own membership, that the negotiated settlement was a victory, rail workers are confronted with a different reality. Rail privatisation is in full swing and management's 'right to manage' has been strengthened. In fact, the Tories happily allowed the strikes to drift on, in order to drive passengers away from the railways, boost private bus companies, and have an excuse to close non-profit making branch lines prior to privatisation. The scale of the projected job losses is enormous.

The Tories intend to sell Railtrack, British Coal and British Nuclear Fuels before the next election to finance tax cuts. Meanwhile, they are holding down public-sector wages – with almost all pay increases performance-related.

It is essential that a fight is taken up now for national strikes in industries threatened with privatisation, and a co-ordinated campaign launched to smash Tory public-sector pay policy. This in turn means building rank-and-file movements throughout the trade unions to defeat the current leadership.

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams calls the 'peace process' a great opportunity, but there's nothing on the table for the nationalist community in the north of Ireland. What is needed is a new revolutionary politics, argues Dan Gallagher

A SHORT and cynical letter from one James Clark in the *Irish Post* of September 24 gives us a flavour of what is happening in the north of Ireland:

'So the Provo litter-bin war is over! Messrs. Adams and McGuinness have changed their polo-neck sweaters and blue denims for suits and jumped on board de Rossa's peace train.

'A fleet of hired black taxi cabs drive up and down the Falls Road displaying the Irish Tricolours for the benefit of the television cameras. Adams informs the faithful that the war is over and that the troops are going home.

'Once again the poacher has turned gamekeeper, and, if past history is anything to go by, will prove to be a better gamekeeper than ever he was a poacher.'

A whole swath of British left organisations have fallen in behind the 'peace initiative' and welcomed it as some kind of victory. The *Morning Star* is naturally delighted, as are *Socialist Worker*, *Militant* and *Socialist Organisation*. They and others welcome it as an opportunity to engage in the real struggle for class politics, which was until now obscured by 'sectarianism'. Now it will be possible to unite Protestant and Catholic workers in struggle against capitalists, north and south. Meanwhile, Fianna Fáil and the SDLP see a future in which American dollars will mingle with European euros and provide jobs and homes for all. In a few decades, everybody will be wondering what all the fuss was about back in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. These optimistic scenarios have about as much chance of coming about as Albert Reynolds drinking Lough Erne dry!

The socialist 'optimists' are in fact capitulating to British imperialism. Ireland's right to self-determination is being sold out by Sinn Féin's leaders. The Unionists can now add the Irish government, the SDLP and Sinn Féin to the list of those who defend their right to a veto over the rights of the majority of the Irish people. Those groups descended from the Official IRA and Irish Stalinism – Democratic Left, the Workers



Sinn Féin leaders Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams in Dublin in October after talks with the Irish government about setting up a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

CEASEFIRE IN IRELAND

The cause of conflict

Party and the Communist Party of Ireland – are now joined by much of the British left in an unholy alliance supporting the pro-imperialist ceasefire.

Sinn Féin's abandonment of the armed struggle marks its final conversion to a reform perspective for the northern sectarian statelet. The ceasefire is an indispensable part of the future settlement of the dispute in Britain's favour and on Britain's terms. Some on the left argue that it is possible to welcome the ceasefire, while at the same time condemning the settlement. But they are directly linked.

Any lingering doubts on the part of the British government as to the 'permanence' of the IRA ceasefire have been effectively answered by the announcement of a ceasefire by the loyalist paramilitaries. These sectarian murderers clearly believe that the IRA has shut up shop, the border is safe, and that they can return to the good old days of a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people. As both opponents and supporters of the 'peace process' have pointed out, the nationalist community has gained nothing of substance.

Sinn Féin will argue that it continues to call for an all-Ireland referendum to decide the issue. But the reality is that Sinn Féin has been sucked into a process whose entire basis is that any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland will depend on a referendum in the north alone. Far from out-manoeuvring the British, Sinn Féin's leaders have only shown their own gullibility in accepting as good coin the British government's claim that it has 'no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland'.

Both republicans and Irish premier Albert Reynolds have held out the prospect of Irish unity in a generation. The talk is of persuading the Unionists of its benefits, and of taking the gun out of politics – in fact, almost exactly the same arguments with which Michael Collins defended the acceptance of the Treaty and partition of Ireland in 1921. No doubt some hack will soon propose



TROUBLE

that the settlement is a 'stepping stone' towards a united Ireland, forgetting that the same words were used by Collins in the Treaty debates. Gerry Adams is consciously following in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela and Yassir Arafat.

There is growing speculation about the Republic rejoining the British Commonwealth. Southern Unionists are beginning to organise themselves politically for the first time since partition. *Irish Times* correspondent Kevin Myers has attacked the political rehabilitation of Gerry Adams and claims that the IRA ceasefire is a con-trick. The same line has been pushed in at least four British and Irish dailies by ex-Labour Party minister Conor Cruise O'Brien, now effectively a spokesman for the southern, pro-Unionist 'Castle Catholics'. Such people clearly see the break from the empire in 1921 as a mistake, and look to Britain to provide the framework for a closer relationship. Symbolically this year the Irish president, Mary Robinson, became the first non-Commonwealth head of state to visit the Commonwealth Games.

The northern capitalists, represented by Molyneaux's Ulster Unionist Party support the peace process. They see it as the opportunity to restore their influence over the whole of Ireland, which they very reluctantly abandoned in 1922 in the face of the southern settlement with Britain.

All this leaves the Irish working class as in 1922, with no voice in the settlement. Then the Labour Party abstained now it is forcing the pace as part of the Dublin government. Year after year of collaborationist wage agreements, under which the southern trade union bu

NO WAY FORWARD!

Causes of remain



PS OUT NOW!

reocrats agreed to police the working class, have made the Republic extremely profitable for imperialist investment, and have cut state benefits and health care to the bone. Ireland has one of the highest unemployment rates in the European Union. In the north, discrimination against nationalists remains rife, while industry continues to decline.

One of the by-products of the 'peace process' will be tens of thousands of redundancies from the overwhelmingly loyalist security forces. But although there are growing rifts within Unionist politics, it would be foolish to imagine that this heralds a new era of class politics in the north. It is the perceived 'betrayal' of Protestant working class interests by the Unionist establishment which is spurring the development of a new 'working class' loyalism, which is determined to hang on to its marginal privileges.

Ironically, Sinn Féin is now reduced to depending on the RUC to protect the nationalist communities in the event of a loyalist backlash. Unconfirmed reports have indicated that some, at least, of the IRA's weapons will be handed over to Dublin. There is even talk of the IRA acting as an unofficial police force in nationalist areas. Although the IRA has carried out punishments against 'anti-social' nationalist youth, it is doubtful that Unionists would accept such an arrangement.

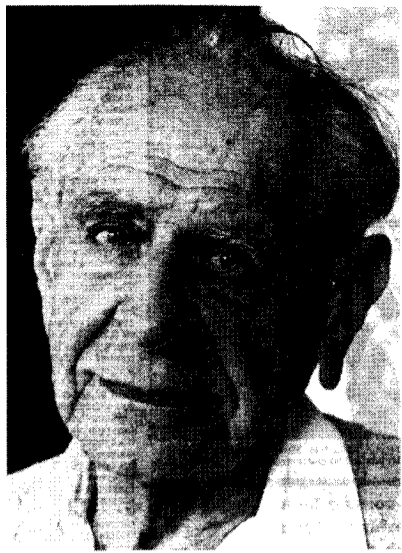
Socialists and republican workers must remain on their guard. The causes of the conflict remain completely unresolved. There is no guarantee that the loyalist death squads will maintain their ceasefire. The nationalist community must not hand over its arms. Account-

able defence committees should be formed, and no retreat made on the demand for the removal of British troops, or the struggle for Irish self-determination. Every attack on workers' jobs, wages, rights and conditions must be fought to enable the best of the loyalist workers to see that their real enemy is capitalism and British imperialism.

Sinn Féin's capitulation is in line with the actions of guerrillaist movements internationally. Its call for a return to the politics of the Civil Rights Movement is no answer. Having accepted in practice the existence of the border, Sinn Féin is left with 'civil disobedience' in an attempt to reform the unreformable. A new revolutionary party is needed to lead the working class, north and south.

But just as republicanism which ignores class politics inevitably leads to an accommodation with imperialism, so the brand of 'class politics' put forward by Militant and the Socialist Workers Movement, which ignores the national question, arrives at equally bankrupt conclusions. Let us repeat yet again that the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution is the central political and theoretical orientation which all real socialists and consistent anti-imperialists – and you cannot be one and not the other in Ireland or anywhere else – must adopt in Ireland.

Only the working class has a real material interest in fighting for the national unity of Ireland, and therefore it is the only force that can do so consistently. Only by fighting for international revolutionary socialism and consistent anti-imperialism will this unity be achieved and capitalism overthrown.



By Jim Dye

ONE OF the establishment's favourite philosophers, Sir Karl Popper, died on September 17 at the age of 92. Since the publication in 1945 of his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Austrian-born Popper had been recognised as a vigorous ideological opponent of Marxism. His central political concept was that of 'freedom', which he identified with an 'open' and democratic society in opposition to totalitarianism.

Popper did not separate fascism from Stalinism (the latter he viewed as Marxism in practice), seeing both as examples of societies where the freedom of the individual was negated. He blamed Hegel as the inspiration for both ideologies. 'Hegel's hysterical historicism is still the fertilizer to which modern totalitarianism owes its rapid growth. Its use has prepared the ground, and has educated the intelligentsia to intellectual dishonesty,' he wrote in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. This bizarre notion explains fascism as the result of a few bad intellectual arguments! Although Popper was open in his sympathies towards Karl Marx's 'humanitarianism', he saw Marxism as dangerous and fatalistic. This fatalism came, he argued, from the assumption that history has a direction, and that it can be predicted and manipulated by the enlightened activist. The overall term Popper gave to this outlook was 'historicism' (see his book *The Poverty of Historicism*), and he traced it back to Greek thought represented by Plato.

Historicism was to Popper a deterministic outlook, and whilst his interest in science forced him to recognize the existence of various causal, deterministic processes within nature, he opposed the idea that human society could be analysed in this way, arguing that it was characterised by a uniqueness that resisted generalisations. In philosophy, Popper was a materialist and empiricist in the positivist tradition. In politics, he was a defender of the West during the Cold War and a liberal reformist. He took an activist approach to social problems, but where Marx identified the interaction of classes within a base/superstructure model of society, Popper looked instead at the microcosm of human society in the form of individual relations. These relations, he maintained, showed no identifiable regularities that would allow a prediction of future social development.

This attack on the powers of social prediction showed Popper's empiricism, standing apart from an overall conceptual framework of generalization from the particular, at its most limiting. Whilst on one level Popper was undoubtedly right – no individual life is lived in exactly the same way as others, and historical events do not repeat themselves in the manner of a carbon copy – it is completely wrong to extract from this the belief that history has no identifiable regularities. No substantial human activity could occur without reference to past experience and the predictive power that produces. For example, agriculture, which played a pivotal role in human evolution and development, could not be carried out without the accuracy of prediction gained from past practice. This gave rise to tradition, as the aggregate product of past experience

Karl Popper: philosopher of the bourgeoisie

and knowledge, where changes were for thousands of years extremely minute and ritual ideology grew out of this very repetitiveness.

The stability of social relations in primitive agricultural societies, in which changes in technique were a rarity, meant that the changes from one generation to another could also be tiny. Indeed, those social groups closest to nature in the sense of being completely controlled by it, in particular hunter-gatherer societies, show a marked repetitive history. The seeming chaos and unpredictability of modern social life under capitalism, where the means of production and social relations are constantly changing in a revolutionary manner, was the real source of Popper's flawed and superficial method. In examining ideological concepts such as 'freedom', he resorted to an idealism that lifted these concepts above real human activity and put them into generalized metaphysical categories that stood outside history.

Popper's answer to the exploitation of workers, which as a good liberal he did not deny, was 'piecemeal social engineering'. But he thought that any attempt at equality must end in an attack on individual 'freedom' – including, no doubt, the freedom to exploit the toil of workers. He proposed that different social classes should live in equilibrium on the basis of individuality and freedom, with class interests being rejected in favour of 'rationality'. Indeed, it was the opposition between the individual and the collective that lay at the root of Popper's attack on Marxism. The reason for this reactionary outlook was revealed in a passage dealing with his student days in Vienna in Popper's 1985 autobiography, *Unended Quest*:

'The incident that turned me against communism, and that soon led me away from Marxism altogether, was one of the most important incidents of my life. It happened shortly before my seventeenth birthday. In Vienna, shooting broke out during a demonstration by unarmed socialists who, instigated by the communists, tried to help some communists to escape who were under arrest in the central police station in Vienna. Several young socialist and communist workers were killed. I was horrified and shocked by the brutality of the police, but also by myself. For I felt that as a Marxist I bore part of the responsibility for the tragedy – at least in principle.'

Incredibly, Popper lays the blame for the deaths of those young workers not on the trigger-happy cops, but on those Marxists who had tried to oppose them. The actions of the oppressor are excused because of the 'arrogance' of the oppressed in fighting back. Since decisive action might lead to confrontation, workers should rely on the intellectual to provide rational solutions to their problems! Scared by the implications of workers' life and death struggles, Popper turns tail and runs, and in the process drops his fleeting adherence to socialism. The only escape for him was into his own mind, where here at least the quest for freedom could be undertaken without fear of bloodshed.

This timidity was relevant to Popper's whole outlook, and was revealed in his influential but mistaken views on science. He argued that the central factor in the pursuit of scientific knowledge about our existence and of matter in general was the ability to disprove theories, rather than verify them. Science had the greatest meaning when it stated what did not exist. This outlook was nothing more than a version of

scepticism, rejecting the notion that progress can be made in scientific theory by activity that relates to existing, imperfect, theorems. But, to take one example, Newtonian physics clearly acted as a spur for the development of new theories such as relativity and quantum physics precisely because of its negative aspects and the conflicts they produced. Popper's empiricism was incapable of understanding that the actual history of science operated as a structure on which new theories had their intellectual origins.

For Popper, the destruction of democracy and the rise of totalitarianism were not due to economic conditions and the balance of class forces, but to ideological conceptualizations like 'fascism' and 'communism'. But – paradoxically for someone who preached the fallibility of theory – this means that the idea is absolute, and that the empirical factors upon which a particular ideology develops are not relevant. In this outlook, rationality becomes a 'thing in itself', and suddenly we find that Popper the materialist has been reduced to Popper the impotent idealist.

In contrast, Marxist theory has time and again been proven in practice. For example by Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, put forward in 1906 and empirically vindicated eleven years later. Popper's belief in the ability of mature capitalism to provide for the needs of all by the application of timid reformist measures has been dealt a cruel blow by real events, not least by the existence of chaos and social breakdown in the former areas of 'communism' that have given way to 'freedom'. His central contentions – and his empiricist method – have been destroyed on the rocks of empirical observation itself. To use a Hegelian memorial, the negation has been negated.

SYLVIA BOLGAR

Workers News expresses its regret at the death on October 18 of Sylvia Bolgar, the secretary of Camden Trades Council and a long-standing member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Although we had major differences with her on many questions, she was a principled class fighter who played a prominent role in numerous local campaigns, including the struggle against the poll tax and the miners' and printers' strikes.

With the demise of the CPGB, she swung to the left, defending trades councils against TUC attempts to close them down. She frequently read Workers News, and was keen to discuss the way forward with others on the left. She favoured uniting the left around the defence of the October Revolution.

At a well-attended memorial meeting on October 22, tributes were paid by trades council delegates and members of her local NUT branch. It was Sylvia's wish that her death should not be a cause for sadness, but that the struggle for socialism should be carried forward. A Sylvia Bolgar Fighting Fund has been set up under the auspices of the trades council.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS SINCE STONEWALL

The American SWP and gay liberation

By Brian Dempsey

THE 1969 Stonewall riots in the United States and the birth of gay liberation throughout the advanced capitalist countries posed a problem for Trotskyist parties. A new social movement had erupted and Trotsky had not left clear instructions on how to react.

Of all the parties claiming the title Trotskyist, the American Socialist Workers Party, during the years 1970 to 1973, conducted the most detailed and serious discussion on the gay question. In common with all left groups, the SWP was, until the events of '69, in ignorance of the historic connections between the struggle of sexual minorities and the struggle for socialism. The history of this relationship had all but been obliterated by the social conservatism of Stalinism on the one hand and by the smashing of the early gay rights movement in Germany by the Nazis on the other.

Almost since their inception, organised working class movements have had to consider the role of women and of black people in the struggle for socialism. When the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement grew in the 1960s, therefore, the SWP had some information on which to base its policies. In addition, some work would have already been done to combat racism and sexism both within the party and within the working class movement as a whole. Racism and sexism, however, continued to exist within the movement and there were to be deep-going divisions over the appropriate policies to adopt on these questions.

In the case of the gay rights movement, the revolutionary left had little information to hand at the end of the 1960s and no work had been done to counter bigotry within the party or the labour movement. It is to the credit of the SWP that it actively tried to work out policies on this new social phenomenon at a time when the Stalinist and Maoist 'communist' parties throughout the world held to the 'homosexuality as bourgeois deviance' model. Most other left groups ignored this new development in the real world until the mid- to late 1970s.

The discussion within the SWP was forced upon the leadership when members became increasingly troubled by the party line, adopted in the early 1960s, which proscribed homosexuals from membership. In a report to the SWP Political Committee in November 1970, Jack Barnes suggested that this policy was, in the main, intended to protect the party from the consequences of the state blackmailing homosexual members into compromising the security of the party. In recommending the abolition of the blanket proscription, Barnes nevertheless managed to be wrong even when arriving at the correct conclusion. He recommended that the proscription be removed not on principle but because it had proved difficult to enforce and caused more problems for the party than it solved. He also strongly suggested that homosexuals would generally be less likely to make good recruits.

In the summer of the following year, the SWP instructed its branches to carry out a probe into the gay liberation movement and the reports received were published in the party's internal bulletin. These reports provide an interesting snapshot of gay movement activity in a dozen American cities in 1970/71. The 1971 party convention voted to approve Barnes's proposal to abolish the proscription of homosexuals from membership and to hold a 'literary discussion' on the gay lib movement and the party's orientation to it.

The documents generated by this literary discussion are of great value to

the lesbian and gay rights movement as they are, in the main, serious attempts by revolutionaries to develop a Marxist approach to the questions of the oppression and liberation of homosexuals. They would also be valuable to revolutionaries seeking to understand the relationship of the revolutionary party to the lesbian and gay movement today. The most important document to come out of this process was 'The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)', which was first published in the SWP Internal Discussion Bulletin in June 1973 and remains one of the standard texts on homosexual rights and socialism.

The other 400 pages of documents range over attempts to put gay lib into the context of the women's and the civil rights movements and to understand the nature of homosexual oppression as being rooted in the nature of capitalist society, policed by the nuclear family and the church. The history of repressive legislation and of the medical profession's crimes against homosexuals are explored, along with information about gay resistance and liberation struggles internationally.

The vast majority of documents came from those who argued for a more active intervention by the SWP in the gay lib movement. They often attempt to answer the objections of the bigots in the party, dealing with such issues as the danger of the party appearing 'exotic' in the eyes of workers and the fallacy that gay lib (and homosexuality in general) was petty-bourgeois in nature. These documents also dealt with questions of the orientation of revolutionaries to non class-based social movements of all types.

Those opposed to the party actively engaging in the gay lib struggle were at

pains to stress that the SWP should be 'opposed to all forms of oppression' and support the right of gays to fight against their oppression. Most opponents of gay lib, however, chose not to engage in the discussion at all. One of the few opponents of SWP intervention in the gay liberation movement who was prepared to argue his case, Nat Weinstein, argued that the oppression of gays was not as severe as the oppression experienced by black people and women (gays have the 'luxury' and 'safety' of the closet) and that the gay liberation movement was unlikely to be of any great historical weight. His arguments were underpinned by the anti-Marxist concept that sexuality (and sex) should be treated as though it was an individual and private concern and not a social construction, a position endorsed by George Novak. Issues of sexuality did not, Weinstein suggested, concern workers as they were too tired after a day at the factory to concern themselves with sex, and he further implied that same sex activity was of even less interest to workers.

The literary discussion lasted until the summer of 1973. The timing of this discussion was significant for the leadership as it ensured that the SWP membership remained largely isolated from the gay lib movement during its most vital years. The party leadership rarely ventured into print with their views on the question, preferring, it seems, to allow the pro-gay libbers to burn up their energy in the discussion. Although the pro-interventionists had won the debate, the SWP leadership refused to adopt their position. At the SWP convention of August 1973, the party adopted a memorandum from the National Committee that would effectively destroy any possibility of

working within the gay lib movement.

The memorandum tried (unsuccessfully) to give a liberal cover to its contents by repeating in an abstract manner that the party should oppose oppression of homosexuals. The party leadership, however, had no intention of making that support concrete. It stated that the party could not take a stand on the nature of homosexuality (eg, on the slogan 'Gay is Good') and claimed that little was known about homosexuality. If the SWP could not take a stand on the nature of homosexuality and so little was known, how could it be sure that opposing oppression was the correct line? The memo had the effect of bringing to an end any possibility for SWP members to work within the gay lib movement, while it appeared to retain the principle of support for that struggle.

Why the SWP leadership should seek to scupper the opportunity offered by the rise of the gay lib movement in the early 1970s is unclear. There may have been genuine fears that the party was moving away from class politics in its relations with other liberation movements and that a line had to be drawn somewhere. Individual leaders may have simply been reluctant to give up their personal prejudices or have felt unequal to the challenges that would inevitably come from recruiting new forces. Whatever the reason, the opportunity was lost and the SWP was never to move beyond a liberal and abstract support for the struggle for lesbian and gay rights.

The documents from, and conduct of, this debate highlight the many problems of developing a genuinely revolutionary approach to the question of lesbian and gay liberation. The quality of leadership is put to the test by chal-

lenges that cannot be answered by direct reference to 'Marxist classics'. Without the capacity or inclination to analyse new movements, these leaders argue that sexual politics are of interest but not a priority. Most left groups in Britain have reduced their lesbian and gay work to selling their press at Gay Pride marches while condemning the low political level of such events. Their abstention from the lesbian and gay movement is one of the reasons that such events are in the control of the reformists in the movement.

Few serious attempts are currently being made to develop a Marxist theory of sexual politics. Despite the low level of analysis, this is a vital task for the future development of both the revolutionary left and the lesbian and gay movement. Lesbians and gay men cannot fundamentally improve their position in society without an understanding of the roots of their oppression. Revolutionaries cannot hope to overthrow capitalism if they are incapable of understanding new social movements and integrating them into the struggle for socialism.

NOTES

- 1. Some of the documents from that discussion, along with analytical and supplementary information, were published by David Thorstad as Gay Liberation and Socialism, New York, 1976.
2. Ibid., p.5.
3. SWP Internal Information Bulletin, 1971, No.3.
4. The words 'gay' and 'homosexual' were usually taken to include lesbians.
5. J. Lauritsen & D. Thorstad, The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935), Times Change Press, New York, 1974.
6. Gay Liberation and Socialism, p.34.
7. Ibid., p.65.
8. Ibid., p.3.

LENINIST-TROTSKYIST TENDENCY

Joint statement with Sri Lankan comrades

1 The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency and Workers Voice announce their intention to establish close co-operation between the two groups, with the aim of fusion at the earliest possibility. This is the result of political discussions and collaboration between us since 1992, and a visit to Sri Lanka in 1993 by comrades of the LTT. These discussions revealed a wide range of political agreement between us on most of the main questions of revolutionary strategy and tactics facing the world working class and Trotskyism internationally.

2 None of the international tendencies claiming the name of the Fourth International represents the political continuity of Trotskyism. Faced with the crisis and continued degeneration of the main tendencies claiming the name of Trotskyism and the Fourth International, we reaffirm our commitment to principled revolutionary regroupment as the only way forward for Trotskyists internationally. While the struggle to regroup a revolutionary vanguard may take different forms in different countries (fraction work, entryism or independent activity), it must have the same aim: the rebuilding of the Fourth International, based on all the positive aspects of the struggle for a revolutionary programme since the Russian Revolution. The central points of reference for us are the Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky, and the fight for the Fourth International against the Stalinist degeneration.

3 Although the Transitional Programme and the documents of the Communist International are an essential theoretical and practical foundation for any

revolutionary programme today, we recognise the need to develop these positions in a critical spirit in the light of the contemporary class struggle - to reassert everything that is positive against the opportunist and sectarian centrism of the main 'Trotskyist' currents, while rejecting the notion that Marxism is a closed system which has provided a final answer to every theoretical, programmatic and practical question.

4 We recognise the historic importance of the struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon/Sri Lanka - a country in which Trotskyists led major class battles and were the main leadership of the workers' movement. At the same time, the legacy of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's (LSSP) degeneration has led to an uninterrupted crisis of revolutionary forces in the country since 1964. The subsequent fragmentation of the LSSP(R) reflected a failure to fully assimilate the lessons of Samasamajism. The result was a scattering of the old LSSP left wing, and the tendency of the various groups to evolve in either sectarian or opportunist directions. The best of these was represented by the late Edmund Samarakkody and the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP). However, the failure of the RWP to develop an active orientation towards the mass organisations and struggles of the working class increasingly condemned it to a sectarian-propagandist existence. Tensions over the RWP's orientation finally resulted in a split in 1991, from which the Workers Voice group emerged. The regular publication of the monthly Workers Voice since that time is a tribute to the comrades' determination to overcome the weak sides of the RWP.

5 While fighting for socialist revolution throughout Sri Lanka and for a socialist federation of the Indian sub-continent, the LTT and Workers Voice restate their support for the right of the Tamil people to self-determination, up to and including secession. We oppose all manifestations of Sinhala chauvin-

ism. Only on such a basis will it be possible to win the best Tamil workers, peasants and intellectuals to Trotskyism.

6 In order to build a genuine Trotskyist tendency for regroupment internationally it is necessary to overcome the past traditions of 'Trotskyism' in relation to Ceylon/Sri Lanka and operate under conditions of real equality and unity in action. The failure of Pablo and Mandel's International Secretariat to check the opportunism of the LSSP leadership was

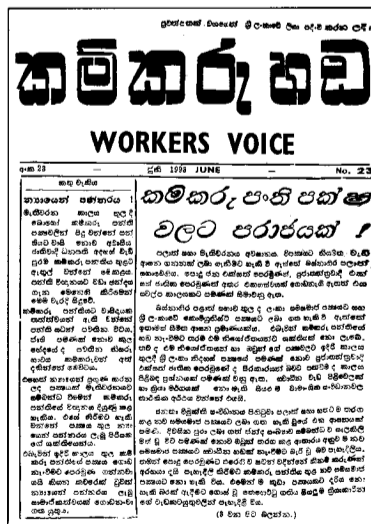
complemented by the LSSP's own 'national Trotskyism', which was content to leave international questions to the European leadership. Today this federal relationship has been resumed by the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) in its relations with the United Secretariat.

Equally disastrous have been the attempts of various international tendencies to build client groups in Sri Lanka. Far from resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership, this method contributes to it, and is only capable of creating sects. It reproduces to an extent the relationship between imperialism and the semi-colonial world. Only a resolute struggle against both 'national Trotskyism' and federalism can regenerate Trotskyist internationalism.

7 In the course of resolving any outstanding programmatic questions, we intend to build a solid foundation for theoretical and practical collaboration as the basis for the fusion of our two organisations.

The crisis which the world workers' movement has undergone, particularly in the last five years, can be reversed and overcome if committed revolutionaries unite their efforts - against rightward-moving reformism, against the degenerate remnants of Stalinism and against centrism masquerading as Trotskyism. We appeal to critically-minded militants in the United Secretariat, the International Workers League (LI), the Committee for a Workers International and other tendencies to enter into discussions with us and to take up a common struggle for a radical realignment of revolutionary forces internationally.

LTT/Workers Voice July 25, 1994



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LETTERS

Debating the age of consent

From David Thorstad, a former president of New York's Gay Activists Alliance and a founding member of the North American Man/Boy Love Association

I READ with interest Tony Fox's piece 'Socialists should fight age of consent laws' in the May-June 1994 issue of your newspaper. I presume the article arose in part at least as a result of the recent campaign to lower the age of consent for male-male love to 16 from the ridiculous 21 (and the equally ridiculous 18 that Parliament settled on as a 'compromise'). I hope that your group and others will continue to explore the issues surrounding consensual sexuality and male-male love, including the age of consent. I share your opposition to laws that criminalize consensual sex. Age is not the issue here. The issue is consent, and it is precisely consensual sex that is being criminalized - particularly between males. For some reason, the British government (like several other European governments - Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, and formerly France) believes males need special state 'protection'. In the case of males, it seems, heterosexuality is a delicate flower whose survival depends on energetic state intervention.

I would like to say too that although removal of age of consent laws would be a step forward (as would lowering any of the current ages throughout the world), the liberation of young people (not to mention adults) involves far more than that. Canada has an age of 14, but it is one of the most repressive countries in the West, where mere possession of the Bulletin of the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) can bring five years in jail, and where the Bulletin collective risks up to ten years in jail there merely for publishing it! Clearly, sexual liberation cannot be a product only of progressive law reforms, but will involve many more far-reaching transformations of society. These days, when the left seems more and more marginalised, if not almost irrelevant, it is encouraging to see critical approaches to issues like these.

FUNDS

Sleazy Tories - sleazy system. That should be the first conclusion anyone who wants to dig behind the headlines should draw. The same Tories who throw millions out of work reward themselves with directorships of privatised companies, insider deals, luxury holidays and cash for questions. They aren't just corrupt individuals, but representatives of capitalism. Those who fight to overthrow capitalism don't have the same advantages - Workers News relies entirely upon its supporters and readers. There couldn't be a better time to support our £300 Monthly Fund and boost our £10,000 Building Fund, which stands at £5,823.73. Send your donations to:

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1/17 Meredith Street
London EC1R 0AE

I was quite puzzled by Fox's efforts to distinguish your position from that of the United States Spartacist League. Personally, I couldn't detect any real difference, except that in some measure Fox seemed to want to have his cake and eat it too. The position of the Spartacist League seems to me to be completely principled and sensible on the issue of getting the state out of the bedroom in all cases where consensual sexuality is involved. This libertarian stance is, in my opinion, completely correct and courageous. It's too bad that most so-called socialists hold positions far to the right of this, positions that differ in no way whatever from those of the ruling class and the bourgeois state. It is quite wrong to characterize the Spartacists' position as 'ignor[ing] questions of power and dependency relations, of the impossibility of free and equal sexual relations between a child and an adult...'. You should investigate the SL's writings on this subject, which go back at least to the late 1970s. I have always found their proclamations eminently sensible on sex questions (including 'date rape', women's oppression, children's rights, and sexual expression). I realize that they can defend themselves better than I can, but I would like to register opposition to the unfairness of Fox's characterizations.

It sounds like Fox leans towards approving free sexuality at the age of puberty (whatever that is, since everyone is different in that regard as in most others), but such a legal limit appears unnecessarily artificial. No one can dispute the fact that puberty is a major threshold in human development. But, as you know, children's sexuality does not wait for puberty. Fox seems, somewhat contradictorily, I thought, to recognise this by urging the repeal of age of consent laws yet privileging the postpubertal.

I hope you will refine your positions and try to go beyond efforts a leftist oneupmanship. Boylovers and other sexual outlaws can welcome your contributions to discussions on these matters, but of course have no desire to become political footballs in the internal disputes of any groups.

From Robert Farr

AFTER reading the article by Tony Fox in the May-June edition of Workers News, I was left wondering about two points. Firstly, if the Sparts are wrong to call for 'Government out of the bedroom', just what role does Tony envisage for the state in his bedroom? Should state intervention be under the control of the 'State Bureau for the Sexual Hygiene of the Working Class' or the DTI? I ask merely for information.

Secondly, if the issue in inter-generational sex is equality of power, rather than consent, does Tony believe that people of different genders, racial backgrounds, education, wealth, class, physical ability, and so on should not be having sex with one another? In our sexist and racist society there will always be differences of power. The outlawing of sex between men and women would have obvious advantages but to legislate against sex between people of different racial groups etc is clearly reactionary. Perhaps when it comes to children, Tony advocates 'Don't do as I do, do as I say'.

From Tony Fox

IN REPLY to the letters from Robert Farr and David Thorstad on my article 'Socialists should fight age of consent laws', let me first repeat that I am for the sexual liberation of all youth, whether gay or straight, and that the abolition of the age of consent laws is a necessary step in that direction.

The Netherlands has an age of consent of 12. This is a progressive liberal measure and the incidence of child abuse appears to be lower than in Britain. However, it doesn't solve the issue and could give the impression that 12-year-olds are 'fair game'. Whatever non-exploitative sexual or other relationships adults and teenage or adolescent boys or girls form are nobody's business but their own.

The North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) is opposed to all sexual abuse, and fights against the appallingly repressive anti-youth legislation, prejudices and vicious imprisonments which exist in Canada and many states of the USA. NAMBLA should be defended unconditionally against the current witch-hunt against it led by reactionary US Senator Jesse Helms, and endorsed by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). NAMBLA has been expelled from ILGA on Helms's demand, after he threatened to withdraw the USA's annual contribution of \$100 million to the United Nations unless ILGA expelled NAMBLA, or the UN expelled ILGA. ILGA is currently funded by the UN, where it has observer status.

However, the politics of NAMBLA smack very much of petty-bourgeois stuntism. The very name of the organisation is designed to shock, and quite often it is impossible to proceed further with any argument after the name is spelled out. A 'boy' can refer to a male aged from four to eighteen, though it is clear from NAMBLA's journal that it uses the word to mean adolescents. NAMBLA's defence of the term 'paedophile' is also confusing. Most people understand 'paedophilia' to mean the male rape of small children, or any sexual relations or interference with them, and do not at all understand that in legal terms it means any sex under the legal age of consent - 18 in many places!

If comrades Farr and Thorstad agree with this distinction, they should take care to spell out the difference between young children and adolescents who are seeking to find and express their own sexuality. This seems to be the area of disagreement. I would say that it is the main confusion your enemies are using against you and that it would not be a capitulation to homophobia to continually rebut this charge.

You must not become so disgusted at the homophobia of capitalist society and the way this is whipped up by cynical politicians and professional bigots that you fail to patiently explain the case, and fight to convince those who can be educated. In reply to comrade Farr's question as to what role the state can possibly play 'in the bedroom', I would argue that socialists do not oppose it prosecuting genuine cases of sexual abuse, including the abuse of young children. Similarly, we cannot oppose the prosecution of rapists on the grounds that family and sexual relations would be transformed in a future workers' state. We must, of course, distinguish between statutory rape and actual rape, where the former is a cover for reactionary anti-youth prejudice.

However, what sexual libertarians frequently either ignore or deny is that in the case of young children very often some form of 'consent' has been obtained because of the child's dependency on, or fear of, the adult. (By 'child', I mean the pre-pubescent under the age of approximately 12.) The Spartacists acknowledge this problem by their use of the term 'effective consent' (see *Workers Vanguard*, No.605, September 2, 1994), which is in conflict with their statement in *Women and Revolution* (Spring 1994) that 'whatever sexual activity one engages in is

nobody else's business'. Not even rape?

Is the term 'effective consent' one that you agree with, and should you not use it in place of the unqualified 'consent' which ignores power and dependency relations? Also, it is quite wrong, and potentially insulting to women, to compare male-female relationships with relationships between adults and children. Of course, both can be abusive. Women's oppression and racial oppression are naturally carried over into sexual relationships, which are distorted by power inequalities and dependency. However, oppressed groups have shown their capacity to resist throughout history.

The situation facing children is qualitatively different. Because of their immaturity and vulnerability, they are obliged to depend on and trust adults to provide clothing, shelter, food and love. The problems children have in leaving their parents or escaping abusive relationships are enormous.

Only communal childcare in a socialist society will begin to liberate children from abuse and from being treated as somebody's 'property'. But while we should not have illusions in the capitalist nuclear family or its 'values', we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater, to coin a phrase. It does not follow from the existence of abuse within the family, that all parental control or advice is necessarily oppressive. What is more, the existence of

millions of street children in Latin America and Asia, victims of sexual abuse, drug addiction and death squads, is proof that capitalism has even worse things to offer the young than life in the nuclear family.

Revolutionary socialists should formulate demands to involve the labour movement in defence of victimised youth and adults who are their lovers. Some socialists have proposed that the labour movement should establish investigations, which would aim to distinguish between sexual abuse and bigotry, and fight for their findings to be implemented. In a pre-revolutionary situation such moves could become the foundation for a genuinely enlightened policy of a future workers' state. But at present, such demands can only play a propaganda role. Under today's conditions, we have no interest in bigoted labour bureaucrats becoming a new moral police force.

Socialists must support gay youth self-organisation (which NAMBLA claims as its goal), but fight to turn it towards the labour movement and other oppressed sections in a common struggle against the capitalist state. This could play an important educative role.

With an upturn in the class struggle, the connection between the goal of sexual liberation and the revolutionary overthrow of class society will hopefully gain more ground in groups such as NAMBLA.

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CUBA

Revolution in danger!

By Phil Watson

THE EXODUS of large numbers of 'boat people' from Cuba in recent months has only served to highlight the issues surrounding the future of the Cuban Revolution. It looks increasingly as if the next six months could decide the fate of the Cuban deformed workers' state.

United States sources claimed that in August up to 3,000 refugees per day were being 'rescued' in the Florida Straits - 'rescued', that is, only to be shepherded into the 15,000-strong tent city at the US naval base at Guantánamo. The fact that 2,500 of the inmates attempted a break-out in September is an indication of the des-

perate conditions within the camp.

The background to this situation is the accelerating crisis of the Cuban economy. The collapse of Stalinism and the COMECON trading bloc deprived Cuba of most of its traditional trade, and has been compounded by an increasingly harsh US economic blockade. This has meant that conditions of life have become steadily worse for the Cuban masses, with chronic food and fuel shortages and a lack of such basic necessities as soap and detergent. Despite the exhortations of the Castro regime for the Cuban workers to tighten their belts, it is clear that this cannot be an indefinite process.

It is not just the question of the refugees - which has striking parallels

with the situation in East Germany in 1989 - that is ominous for the future of the Cuban Revolution. There are also clear signs of a shift in the policy of the Castro regime towards market experiments and diplomatic contacts with the United States.

Although such diplomacy has been limited so far to the issue of the refugees, it has been seen by many as the precursor of wider talks, and Castro himself has stated that he is willing to negotiate with the United States over the blockade. At the same time, there is a growing body of opinion in the United States which sees Clinton's continuation of a hardline stance towards Cuba as only adding to the moral authority of Castro's regime. One American businessman was quoted as saying 'there's a strange fascination with Cuba, almost a mystique. It's as if it was part of the US that was about to open up'.

This so-called 'mystique' is little more than US capitalism's desire to assert its authority over its Latin American 'backyard'. Having said that, the US State Department co-ordinator for Cuban policy has stated

that negotiations on the blockade 'would delay... not hasten, reform in Cuba'. US-Cuban relations are clearly not going to develop in a straight line.

The Cuban bureaucracy is faced with a crisis which is the outcome of its Stalinist politics. In particular, it has been Castro's international policy that has endangered the continued existence of the Cuban deformed workers' state. In its early stages, Castro's policy was to back petty-bourgeois guerrillism throughout Latin America. This policy was abandoned in the 1970s, partly as a result of pressure from the Soviet bureaucracy. Recently, Castro's foreign policy has been a mixture of building links with bourgeois nationalist and military regimes, and preaching the doctrine of 'peaceful co-existence'. With the collapse of first COMECON and then the Soviet Union, Cuba was effectively left alone to face US imperialism, which in 1992 further tightened its blockade by extending it to foreign-based subsidiaries of US companies. The situation that the Cuban people face is the result of the attempt to build a 'national' socialist economy.

Either the socialist revolution is international, or it undermines its own existence.

The Castroite bureaucracy cannot be relied upon to defend the undoubted gains of the Cuban Revolution. Time is fast running out for Cuba, and the scenario of Castro using the break-up of Cuba's socialised economy as a bargaining chip for the lifting of the US blockade seems increasingly likely. This would have the added bonus for the bureaucracy that it would be left at the centre of any 'solution' to Cuba's current plight. Recent events appear to bear out this perspective. In October, it was announced that a free market in agriculture was to be restored.

The Cuban Revolution has foundered on the rock of the theory and practice of 'socialism in one country'. It can only be revived through the struggle for workers' democracy and internationalism by the Cuban working class. This means sweeping away the Stalinist bureaucracy and appealing to workers in the main imperialist countries to lift the blockade which is squeezing the life out of the Cuban people and their economy.



PNP makes Jamaica sweat for IMF

By Graham Campbell

THE PEOPLE'S National Party (PNP) government led by P.J. Patterson has not improved the living conditions of the workers who elected it last year. Having turned its back on the leftist policies of the 1970s, the PNP is carrying out a tough IMF-controlled structural adjustment programme, continuing the economic policies developed by the reactionary Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) in the 1980s.

Patterson's government prides itself on meeting IMF targets, repaying loans on time and balancing the books. But although the Jamaican dollar has regained some of its value, inflation stands at over 30 per cent, and Patterson's claims to have stabilised the economy rest largely on squeezing workers' living standards.

Step rises in food prices and in taxes on fuel and petrol, together with charges for health and education, have hit workers hard, while higher interest rates have depressed small businesses. Patterson became the first elected black premier, attracting the votes of many workers, who painted slogans such as 'black man can rule' on walls. But the only section to benefit has been a small but growing black middle class. Even the bosses,

who put up \$800 million towards the PNP election campaign, are complaining that the government has failed to deliver.

The reality after 32 years of independence is that Jamaica remains locked in the vice of international capital. The continuous outflow of Jamaica's national wealth to US and Canadian banks has been mirrored by the movement of people: 2.4 million people live in Jamaica, while 2.5 million Jamaicans live abroad. The collapse of world sugar and bauxite prices has left the country heavily dependent on tourism. Faithful to its IMF masters, Patterson's government has embarked on a policy of 'divestment' (privatisation), involving the sale of sugar estates, telecom and Air Jamaica, whose flotation has been a loss-making disaster.

The PNP government's foreign policy is as reactionary as its domestic policy. Patterson has supported the invasion of Haiti, while keeping 200 Haitian refugees under police-military detention at the airport.

The failure of the PNP's reformist half-measures in the 1970s and the right-turn of the 1990s has led to a deeper crisis of leadership, as former PNP leftists and supporters of the Stalinist Workers Party of Jamaica (WPJ) have retreated in the face of neo-liber-

alism. Anti-party and anti-politician moods have grown among workers. Into this vacuum stepped the New Beginnings Movement (NBM), an avowedly 'non-party' grouping around ex-WPJ leader Trevor Munroe, which includes 'Marxists', social democrats, rastafarians, Christian liberation theologians and ex-JLP members.

Although Munroe makes radical noises about workers having representatives on boards of management, his repudiation of communism has made him the darling of the media. A recent volume of his speeches includes addresses to employers, rotary clubs and various professional bodies. This year has seen growing rifts between Munroe's supporters, who want to form a new party, and the NBM majority, which wants to remain non-party. There are also strong rumours that Munroe has been negotiating with the JLP.

The trade unions are split on political lines, with the National Workers Union (NWU) affiliated to the PNP, and the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) affiliated to the JLP. In practice, both sets of bureaucrats have effectively policed the working class. This has led to growing support in union representation ballots for the non-aligned University and Allied

Workers Union (UAWU), whose general secretary is Trevor Munroe. With the demise of the WPJ, the UAWU has become less politicised, but has won support away from the traditional unions among sugar workers, industrial workers, clerical and professional staff - if only because of its independence stance.

There is support for trade union unity among rank-and-file members of the NWU, the BITU, the TUC and the United Union of Jamaica. But with little internal democracy, and with bureaucratic annual pay negotiations taking the place of union activity, there are real obstacles. However, there have been a number of significant disputes recently, including a lock-out at Seprod (which manufactures soap and detergents), and a strike at Ciefuentes Cigar factory. In August, the statue of PNP founder Norman Manley in the centre of Kingston was cut off at the knees and daubed with slogans including 'Down with the PNP' and 'Stop NWU harassment of Alpart workers' - a reference to the bauxite and aluminium company, where the UAWU is challenging the NWU for representation rights.

Mass unemployment and extreme poverty in ghetto areas has led to soaring rates of crime and gang war-

fare. The PNP response has not been to address the causes, but to preach morality and practice repression. In September 1993, it formed the Special Anti-Crime Task Force. In the first seven months of this year, the force killed 20 suspects in shoot-outs. Meanwhile, Finance Minister Dr Omar Davies has called for a return to family values.

Youth bear the brunt of this situation, but like workers, lack any revolutionary leadership. The PNP Youth Organization had a mass membership in the late 1970s, when it was headed by pro-Cuba socialists. Subsequently it moved to the right, and its support declined, although there has been a small revival recently. Its 10th conference, marking its 25th anniversary, was held on August 7, and was attended by about 200 youth as well as the main party leaders. PNPYO leaders gave moderate speeches against drugs and crime, while Patterson claimed that this year would be the last of IMF-imposed restrictions and borrowing.

This brief survey of the situation in Jamaica shows the urgent need for the building of a revolutionary vanguard party to lead workers, youth and the oppressed to fight against the betrayals of the PNP and for socialist revolution.