



SMASH RACIST ASYLUM LAWS!

By Steven Jones

THE ASYLUM and Immigration Bill, which is about to become law, is the latest attempt by the Tories to play the race card. With their popularity at rock bottom and a general election looming, racism – along with tax cuts – is the traditional Tory response.

However, the bill has a wider context. Throughout the European Union there is a crackdown on immigration as part of the racist 'Fortress Europe' process. Although Britain has yet to sign up to the Schengen agreements – the Tories insist on an independent immigration policy – the new legislation brings Britain in line with other European countries.

Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley has already implemented cuts which deny asylum seekers basic benefits and allowances. The Asylum Bill goes even further. It enables the immigration authorities to routinely deport asylum seekers from countries which the Home Secretary decides are safe. This will apparently sort out who is a 'genuine' refugee. Until recently, Nigeria was on this 'white list', until the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa put the international spotlight on human rights abuses.

The bill extends the 'fast-track' procedure for dealing with appeals, which gives refugees who have been refused asylum only two days to prepare their cases against deportation. It also gives new powers to police and immigration officers to stop and search people suspected of being illegal immigrants; makes it a criminal offence to assist 'illegal entrants' who remain in the UK; and requires employers to carry out checks on the 'immigration status' of their staff, although it will most likely be workers themselves who have to perform this task.

So the effects of the legislation go way beyond the victimisation of asylum seekers. All black people are potential victims and will face harassment from employers and police over their 'immigration status', regardless of whether they are asylum seekers or British citizens. They will have to prove that they are entitled to stay in this country in order to work or receive benefits. In effect, the Tories are introducing apartheid style pass-laws.

Racist employers will be only

too happy to use the new immigration rules as a basis for not employing black people, and racist cops will gladly step up their immigration checks. Asylum seeker Ibrahima Sey has already been murdered in east London by the police, who used their new CS gas spray on him.

A large, broad-based campaign – the Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill (CAIAB) – has been set up, and has already organised two successful demos. The campaign should be supported, but support for CAIAB is not enough on its own. CAIAB is designed as a cross-class alliance, involving church leaders and community figures, as well as Liberal Democrats. We cannot rely on campaigns like this to defeat such racist legislation. The fight to defeat it must be taken up throughout the labour movement.

The Labour Party has a bad record. At the level of its leadership, it has always been a racist party. In the 1960s, it pioneered immigration acts, and has always supported Tory legislation. Labour leaders will argue that because the new law is in the context of Maastricht, their hands are effectively tied. Although the Labour front bench has said it opposes the bill, in fact it has been looking for ways to support it – just as it has done with the Criminal Justice and Prevention of Terrorism acts. Jack Straw was booed off the platform at the CAIAB demo on April 20 for refusing to give any commitment to repealing the legislation. Meanwhile, Labour councils around the country are preparing to implement it. A future Labour government must be forced to repeal all racist legislation, close down the hated detention centres, and restore in full all benefit rights to asylum seekers.

Socialists must therefore fight inside the trade unions and the Labour Party for a policy of non-implementation. It means fighting in the workplace against carrying out immigration checks, benefit cuts and so on. The unions should be called upon to make this a strike issue – particularly if staff face victimisation for refusing to implement the legislation. It looks possible that UNISON may adopt this line. The unions must oppose the bill, prepare to defy the law, and take whatever action is necessary.



The demonstration through central London on April 20 organised by the Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill

- No pass-laws here!
- Asylum seekers welcome!
- Build a campaign of mass defiance!

EDITORIAL

North of Ireland

Boycott the elections!

IN IRELAND, as in other 'negotiated settlements', it takes two to tango. The IRA cease-fire of August 31, 1994, and the resulting peace process, backed by US imperialism, amount to an acknowledgement by both sides that neither has been able to inflict a decisive defeat on the other. British imperialism has not given up on its offensive against Republicanism. It has simply changed tack. The more astute brains at the heart of the British state recognised that by the early 1990s, Sinn Féin's 'armalite and ballot box' strategy was not working, but that sufficient support remained within the nationalist community to sustain a low-level guerrilla war for years.

Where outright repression had failed, the Tories, drawing the lessons from the political collapse of the ANC and the PLO, sensed that domesticating Sinn Féin might succeed. Ironically, peace and diplomacy could prove more corrosive to the Republican leadership than torture and death squads. For its part, Sinn Féin, using the pro-imperialist SDLP as intermediary, had shown its readiness to come to terms and take the constitutional road.

Despite the suspension of the IRA cease-fire on February 9, the Tories' judgement has so far proved sound. Although there have been grumbings in the ranks, IRA operations have remained firmly subordinate to the pro-peace stance of Gerry Adams and the Sinn Féin leadership. The purpose behind the resumption of bombings in London is quite clear: to encourage the British to remove the obstacles to all-party talks. Rarely can 'armed struggle' have had such a low horizon!

Much of the agenda of the peace process has been driven by those sections of the ruling class closest to the Unionists – the right-wing of the Tory party, the army top brass and the secret service. They recognised the political weakness in the Republican leadership, and calculated that the peace process would deepen the confusion and could open up a bloody internal feud. So far the latter has not materialised. But their calculation that a gulf had opened up between the IRA and the wider nationalist community, which had become increasingly sceptical about a directionless 'armed struggle', has proved correct. The majority of Republicans would be prepared to give up the armed struggle in return for the calling off of the loyalist terror gangs and some cheap constitutional safeguards.

If a militant wing of Republicanism re-emerged, it is likely that British forces would make a sharp and bloody intervention, both overtly and covertly, on the side of those currently upholding the 'peace process' and wipe out the die-hards, reckoning on their isolation within the nationalist community. This scenario is a variant of the murderous game which is currently being played out in Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinian 'self-rule' areas in the West Bank and Gaza.

Sinn Féin is roasting on the spit prepared by its own opportunism. By participating in the elections on May 30, it will be accepting that the problems of 'Ulster' can be resolved within the reactionary statelet. For the first time, Republicanism will have effectively recognised the rights of 'a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people'. Having failed to persuade the SDLP to jointly boycott the elections, Sinn Féin is now caught in no man's land. Republicanism has been manoeuvred into participation against its better judgement, out of fear of political marginalisation at the hands of the SDLP. Whichever way it turns on the spit, the fire grows hotter.

The Unionists, correctly reading the situation, and boosted by Tony Blair and Shadow Northern Ireland spokesperson Mo Mowlam's increasingly pro-Unionist stance, have begun to set the entire agenda for the road back to Stormont. Only the increasingly integrated Catholic middle class stands to gain anything tangible. Ironically, the only thing which Sinn Féin and the Unionists are agreed on is that there are no further concessions to be gained out of this lame-duck Major government. The Unionists are now fully convinced that Blair will be more pro-loyalist than Major. On April 27, BBC radio reported Ulster Unionist Party spokesman David Burnside as saying: 'We can certainly live under a Labour Party in power. Roy Mason was the best Secretary pro the union in the last 25 years. . . I see no reason why Ulster Unionists should not vote in the interests of their fundamental cause, the Union, and if they have to vote against the government and bring it down we'd be no worse off.'

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness said: 'I don't believe John Major is the British prime minister who will move decisively to resolve this conflict. I think that in reality we are sitting here hoping that the quicker there is a British general election the better, so that we can then move on and deal with whoever comes to power.'

The peace process threatens grave dangers to the nationalist working class in the north of Ireland. If it moves forward, it will complete the political incorporation of the Sinn Féin leadership, and shore up the very forces the last 27 years of struggle were directed against. If it recedes, the danger of a loyalist/British backlash will become very real. In this context, Bernadette McAliskey's call for a new Republican Congress – despite its semi-reformist motivation – is the only progressive alternative in view. Socialists, workers' organisations and militant republicans should fight for an active boycott of the fraudulent elections, campaigning instead for a Republican Congress which would aim to put anti-imperialism on a new plane – that of socialist politics.

- Down with the imperialist peace process!
- Troops out now!
- Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole!
- For a united workers' republic of Ireland!

JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE

New attack on unemployed

By a Benefits Agency
CPSA member

THE TORIES' introduction of a new benefit called Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) on October 7 will mark a new low in their systematic attack on the unemployed.

JSA will replace unemployment benefit and income support for those unemployed who are deemed capable of work. The benefit will operate on two tiers. Contributory JSA – the equivalent of unemployment benefit – will run for six months instead of the current twelve, while non-contributory JSA will, like income support, be means-tested, with a 'stricter benefit regime' enforced. All of this will save the Tories money, and lower the living standards of the unemployed still further.

But this is not the main reason be-

hind JSA. The truth is that JSA is part of a wider strategy to lower the living standards of workers as a whole by driving down wage levels and firmly establishing Britain as the sweat-shop of Europe. This is made quite clear in a glossy document produced by Benefits Agency and Employment Service management that lists the first objective of JSA as being 'to improve the operation of the labour market'.

JSA will require the unemployed to prove they are actively seeking work whether jobs exist or not. If it is believed that the unemployed are not doing enough then strict 'benefit sanctions' will be applied. In other words, benefit will be cut unless you accept any job, however badly paid, or go on a worthless slave labour scheme. The Tories hope that encouraging employers to offer low-paid work, knowing that the unemployed will be forced to take it, will drive down wage levels for all of us.

Another, linked, attack comes with the operation of the recently introduced incapacity benefit, which seeks to drive the sick back into the labour market by the introduction of the 'All Work Test'. This means that even if you are too ill to do your normal job, you may be deemed capable of other unspecified work and therefore refused benefit.

But, as well as an attack on the unemployed, these measures are also a threat to the civil servants expected to administer them. JSA is planned to be operated in unscreened offices. The increased levels of violence that will come with the stricter benefits regime are a real danger to staff. On top of this, tens of thousands of jobs are threatened in the Benefits Agency and Employment Service. The Benefits Agency has recently announced its 'Change Programme' of 25 per cent cuts over the next three years, a process that will speed up the privatisation and casualisation of the civil service, as well as stopping services such as language assistance and debt advice to claimants.

In this situation the CPSA, the main civil service union for low-paid grades, should be leading an effective campaign of industrial action against JSA. However, its present leadership, the right-wing 'Moderates' who act as Tory stooges, are more concerned with attacking left activists than with defending the membership. If the new 'Left Unity' bloc between the Broad Left and BL'84 is to succeed, it must become more than a mere electoral machine, and set about building a strong rank-and-file opposition.

Civil servants need to be wary of the apparent U-turn in Labour policy in favour of abolishing JSA. The Labour right wing is expected to mount a rear-guard action to dilute or reverse the commitment. The front bench's flirtations with workfare indicate what we can expect from these red rose Tories if they continue to be accountable only to the bosses.



Cleaning staff from Hillingdon Hospital in west London who went on strike last October after the private contractor cut their wages and conditions. The Jobseeker's Allowance is designed to force the unemployed to accept any job, however badly paid, and will further encourage employers like Pall Mall to offer poverty wage rates

Outside Left

A proper Charlie

NORMALLY we don't bother responding to 'Inside Left', Charlie Pottins's regular column in *Workers Press*, the paper of one of the WRPs. What is supposed to be a humorous round-up of the left is in fact so dull and sectarian that we are reliably informed by one WRP member that 'nobody reads it'. Why does Pottins, who has a detailed knowledge of the history and politics of the Middle East, waste his time writing such purple rubbish? It certainly says something about his political priorities.

Still, if you are going to set yourself up in the comedy business and take the piss out of other people, it does help to check your own material. Having attempted to raise a laugh out of an article in *Workers News* calling for solidarity with the Liverpool dockers, 'Inside Left' (*Workers Press*, March 30) moves on to the statement we published on Bosnia:

'Unfortunately, the joint declaration "between the PST of Argentina and the LTT" isn't very specific. They don't even bother explaining that PST is the Workers' Socialist Party, and LTT the "Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency" (to which the Workers International League, publisher of *Workers News*, subscribes).'

One reason we didn't explain in quite the way Comrade Pottins suggests is that the PST is in fact the PTS, the Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo. By the way, there are no inverted commas around Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency – it's our international tendency's name. Granted, it doesn't trip off the tongue like *Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International*, to which the WRP is affiliated. But if Pottins is going to award inverted commas to organisations, perhaps he should start by referring to the Workers Revolutionary 'Party'. After all, didn't Trotsky remind us that 'a revolutionary group of a few hundred comrades is not a revolutionary party'. And the WRP is a group of a few dozen, many of whom are totally inactive.

Meanwhile, one long-time WRP member has been busy. According to an article by John Simmance in the prestigious *Willesden and Brent Chronicle* (April 18), he is now the leader of the South Kilburn Safety Campaign, and organised a demonstration of 200 local residents to Kilburn police station to hand in a letter 'demanding action' against 'muggers'. Hang on a minute – doesn't the Met admit to using the

terms 'mugger' and 'black' almost interchangeably? Local black youth should think twice before supporting Simmance's efforts to 'unite all the community' behind Chief Superintendent Paul Green.

And if you think that the WRP positioning itself on the left wing of community policing sounds familiar, look no further than Militant Labour's co-thinkers in Ireland. Joe Higgins, their candidate in the Dublin West by-election on April 2 devoted the longest section of his programme to crime. 'Every person has the right to live in their community without fear and to have their property and person respected,' announced the respectable Comrade Higgins.

Perhaps Militant and the WRP are twins who were separated at birth. At any rate, relations between the two groups have suddenly warmed. But will the LIT (that's Liga Internacional de los Trabajadores, comrades) beat Militant to the wedding? Or will the WRP, as some of its members are urging, just give up the ghost and dissolve itself? Will it enter the Socialist Labour Party? Watch this space. As for Charlie Pottins, shouldn't he concentrate on weeding his own back garden?

The LRCI and centrism

By Barry Murphy

JUDGING by the oddly defensive tone of Mark Harrison's reply to Workers News (see opposite page), the author seems somewhat unconvinced by his own arguments, as well he might be. His reply consists largely of the repetition of previously rehearsed arguments, along with distortions and evasions concerning the positions of both organisations. Unfortunately, it does not take the discussion forward very much at all.

Harrison gets off to a bad start by suggesting that we are in favour of regroupment with groups which do not even formally claim to be Leninist. Then he tries to show that we have a positive attitude towards regroupment with the United Secretariat (USec), and implies that we approve of the USec's view that a 're-evaluation of the classical and fundamental division between "revolutionaries" and "reformists"' is necessary. Harrison, who has been debating and discussing with us for some years, knows very well that we think nothing of the sort. He is at it again when he asks whether we agree with the USec that the 'splits and complex cracks within the communist movement of the 1930s will become relative'. Harrison is resorting to distortion and innuendo, but we will do our best to explain what we mean.

The party-building tactics of Lenin and Trotsky cannot be 'applied' in a literal sense, as the LRCI seems to think, because they were developed for particular circumstances and a specific context. In the 1930s, Trotsky was at the head of a small band of followers struggling for political and programmatic clarification among a number of (by today's standards) relatively large and unstable centrist organisations which, for a short period, were vacillating between the 2nd and 3rd Internationals and revolutionary Marxism. The LRCI uses Trotsky's often brilliant and subtle writings in a timeless, abstract way, attempting to apply them to today's very different situation, in which a number of small propaganda groups, all of which claim to be Leninist and Trotskyist and which, from time to time, albeit inconsistently and inadequately, attempt to apply aspects of the Trotskyist programme in the class struggle. When we point out this difference, we are accused by the LRCI of trying to ditch the programmatic developments of the 1930s.

The LRCI is unable to distinguish programme from the precise tactical considerations of the moment, which of course flow from the programme, but are not the same thing. This is what we mean when we say that the LRCI collapses theory and programme into each other. In the 1930s, in the midst of enormous upheaval in the international workers' movement, Trotsky's main consideration in relation to the large centrist parties was whether they were moving to the right or the left. In very different conditions today, and in relation to much smaller forces, the LRCI repeats this like a mantra – as if it were the only thing worth saying on the subject.

This betrays another, related, misunderstanding by the LRCI on the question of revolutionary regroupment, and that is an inability to distinguish between the leadership of the various organisations involved and the members. It is correct about the flight even from formal Trotskyism of the USec. Using the LRCI's sole criterion – since the USec is undoubtedly moving to the right – we shouldn't bother with it at all. But what about the members? In many

sections there is hostility; in some, open rebellion and splits. The LRCI must know this from the experience of its Swedish comrades.

Harrison's point about revolutionary regroupment being 'A process of splits and fusions; splits from centrist organisations, fusions with revolutionary organisations' sounds plausible enough. But in practice Workers Power's 'regroupment initiatives' can be broken down into three stages: flirtation accompanied by flattery, combined with criticism of still-retained 'centrism'; then an ultimatum that you leave or disband your organisation to join the LRCI; and finally, when you decline to abandon your own positions and points of difference, dismissal as dyed-in-the-wool centrists. We should know, we've been there. From being a possible fusion partner in 1990-91, we have now 'evolved backwards' and are 'a form of centrism wavering between the left-wing of the USec and the LRCI'.

We would like to know how this attitude squares with the public approach to Militant Labour in *Workers Power* No.199, suggesting regroupment discussions and warning Militant Labour against a fusion with the right-centrist USec. But why has the LRCI suddenly gone silent on its designation of Militant Labour as right-centrist? In the absence of a contrary explanation we will have to put it down to rank opportunism!

For the LRCI, 'centrism' is an abstract concept, neatly definable as that which is outside the LRCI. We doubt whether the proposition 'we are not centrists because we are in the LRCI; we are in the LRCI because we are not centrists' will stand up to much critical scrutiny. To underline the point that centrists are 'other people', it emerges from reports by former members of the LRCI that a majority of the LRCI's International Secretariat hold to a semi-state capitalist position on eastern Europe. But that apparently doesn't count as centrism!

We must also reply to Harrison on a number of factual points. He says the LRCI did not split over Stalinism, but that the 'defection (sic) of the Bolivian group and one member in Britain... was due to differences on the national question and on the use of democratic demands'. This is an evasive reply, firstly because in an eastern European context it is virtually impossible to separate Stalinism from the national question, and secondly because he does not mention the New Zealanders and Austrians who most certainly did split over Stalinism. Further, there is an incredible statement from Harrison that 'there was no Peru section'! We can assure the comrade that there most certainly was, for a number of years, according to no higher authority than *Workers Power's* regular report of the LRCI sections and the list carried in *Trotskyist International*. Just as Stalinism had 'non-persons', it appears that the LRCI has 'non-sections'.

Harrison says that it is 'bizarre and groundless' that Workers Power is scaling down its work in the Labour movement in favour of an orientation to the SWP. In that case, why did Workers Power's last conference vote for a primary orientation to the SWP? Why has it virtually withdrawn from work in the Labour Party, in a pre-election period when it is unprecedentedly popular in the polls? Why did it fail to play any role in the Clause Four campaign?

Workers Power inflates the importance – not to mention the membership – of the SWP in the British Labour movement. Despite some pres-

ence in the public sector unions, it has become a left-populist club, with a high turnover and a low political level. If anything, its influence is disproportionately small for its size. Meanwhile, the LRCI's French section, *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, claims that *Lutte Ouvrière*, with 5.35 per cent and 1.6 million votes in the last presidential election, has no working class base! The LRCI claims to be an authority on centrism, and talks and writes about it all the time. But when a centrist current actually emerges in the working class it refuses to acknowledge it!

These are difficult times for Trotskyists. For many currents, the events of the past six years have resulted in crisis, disorientation and split. The USec, possibly still the biggest, is retreating as fast as it can from what remains of its formal adherence to Leninism and Trotskyism. It is also in discussions with Militant Labour and its international co-thinkers. Given the political trajectory of the USec leadership and its record of rank opportunism, we are confident that any organisation which emerged from a fusion would adopt Militant Labour's revisionist positions on the state and the parliamentary road to socialism.

For those of us who do not share this contempt for Marxist theory, for the programmatic achievements of

Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and for the possibilities of socialist revolution, it is not only possible and desirable, but absolutely necessary to attempt to regroup our forces. This is not just to act as a counterweight to whatever rotten bloc is in the offing from the USec and Militant (although we think that is necessary), and it is certainly not to act as Keepers of the Flame, revering as holy relics the texts of revolutionary Marxism and issuing largely correct but abstract criticisms of centrism.

Our job is to continue the fight for a revolutionary leadership of the working class – something which we see as intimately bound up with the development of Marxist theory, and the development and refinement of the revolutionary programme for the present conditions. Harrison very properly asks: 'Who does this process involve beyond those already in the LTT?' We say that while regroupment must involve small to medium-sized revolutionary groups and individual militants, in the current climate of crisis and desperate fusion-broking, there is an urgent need to engage leftward-moving currents in the main 'Trotskyist' international groupings.

We hope that the PTS of Argentina, with whom we agreed a joint declaration on Bosnia published in Workers News of March-April 1996,

will participate in such a process. Interestingly, when we were involved in talks with the PTS a few years ago, leading members of Workers Power asked why we were bothering. But now the LRCI has published a joint Declaration of Intent with the FT/PTS and is engaged in exhaustive discussions towards achieving regroupment. For nearly a decade, Workers Power took part in on/off discussions with Voce Operaia (Italy), the RKL (Austria) and the RWP (Sri Lanka). When our tendency participated in discussions with these groups between 1989 and 1990 in the Liaison Committee, the LRCI dismissed this as an addiction to 'discussion clubs'. The message is clear: don't do as I do; do as I say!

We also hope that the comrades from the LRCI will adopt a serious approach to regroupment. On a number of issues, they stand on the left of the Trotskyist spectrum. However, we think that they need to break from their method. To collapse theory into programme, and then to denounce as 'centrist' any militant who refuses to accept that 'programme' is sectarian. It is at best a way of picking up discontented twos and threes around the world. But what might work for the small change of tiny propaganda groups is not, we think, going to contribute in any significant way to revolutionary regroupment.

Build the campaign to free Satpal Ram!

By Pete Bloomer
Free Satpal Campaign
(in a personal capacity)

SIMULTANEOUS pickets of Long Lartin and Brixton prisons were mounted on April 18 to protest at the brutality of Long Lartin screws against Satpal Ram and other prisoners. Justice campaigners for the release of Danny Johnson, Gary Mills and Tony Poole joined the angry picket at Long Lartin, while supporters from London picketed Brixton Prison, where Satpal Ram is currently being held.

Satpal is in the tenth year of imprisonment after being attacked by a group of six racists. He defended himself with a knife, after being twice glassed by one of his attackers. This attacker died, after refusing medical treatment, leading to Satpal's life sentence for murder.

Since losing an appeal in November 1995, Satpal has been subject to a nearly continuous campaign of abuse, brutality, unwarranted terms in solitary confinement, a starvation diet and a series of forced and attempted rectal examinations. He has been assaulted four times by Long Lartin screws, the worst occasion being on March 5 – the day he was transferred to Horfield Prison, Bristol. In a letter, Satpal writes: 'I was brought here in a body belt after being set about by several prison officers at HMP Long Lartin... they subjected me to a terrifying and brutal attack. I now know what Joy Gardner must have experienced in the last moments of her life, they nearly killed me.'

The Free Satpal Campaign (FSC)



has sent hundreds of appeals to trade unions, MPs, and anti-racist and left organisations to protest to the prison authorities with a series of demands to attempt to secure Satpal's safety. At Horfield, where Satpal spent 28 days, the beatings and rectal examinations stopped, but his term in solitary confinement continued on an unsubstantiated allegation from Long Lartin. He has now been in solitary for eight weeks, and prison authorities continue to refuse an independent medical examination which would probably diagnose Satpal as suffering from malnutrition. Model letters of protest are available on request from the FSC.

Always active, the FSC demonstrated in January against Douglas Draycott, Satpal's trial barrister, whose negligent defence of Satpal contributed to his wrongful conviction. Draycott seems to be rattled and is rumoured to be suing a BBC re-

porter for his reporting of the demonstration. More action against Draycott is planned. On February 29, a benefit gig with Banner Theatre raised much-needed funds. It involved many groups and individuals in London, where there is discussion on establishing co-ordinated activity.

All the signs are that the setback of losing the appeal has not defeated the campaign to free Satpal. A further broadening of the campaign in the black communities and the labour and anti-racist movement will force the legal openings to secure Satpal's release. Unity around the militant slogans of the FSC of 'Self-defence is no offence', 'Racist attacks – we fight back' and 'British justice – no justice' remains an important political task for all those who oppose British state racism.

For further information, call 0121-507 1618 or write to FSC, 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B19 1HE.

Marxism and the struggle for gay liberation

Part 2: The impact of the Russian Revolution

In the second of two articles exploring the relationship between gay liberation and socialism, **Brian Dempsey** examines the record of the Bolsheviks and takes issue with right-wing gay academics who have attacked the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution and sexual freedom

IN DECEMBER 1917, the Bolshevik government abolished the Tsarist legal code, and thereby repealed the legal sanctions against sexual activity between males. This progressive step was to be reversed by Stalin in 1933 as part of the bureaucracy's attack on the gains of the October Revolution.

The most influential work on the Bolsheviks' attitudes to homosexuality is *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement, 1864-1935*.¹ This small book was first published in 1973 as an internal bulletin of the Socialist Workers Party (US), and was written by two gay members of the party, John Lauritsen and David Thorstad.² Their work made readily available to both the left and the gay movement the historical connections between the two movements for the first time since the rise of Nazism and Stalinism in the 1930s.

As evidence that the Bolshevik government went beyond simple decriminalisation, Lauritsen and Thorstad quote from a 1925 pamphlet by the director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, Dr Grigori Batkis:

'Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offences against public morality - Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called "natural" intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters. Only when there's use of force or duress, as in general when there's an injury or encroachment upon the rights of another person, is there a question of criminal prosecution.'³

Also quoted by Lauritsen and Thorstad is the section on homosexuality in the first (1930) edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, which condemned continued criminalisation of homosexuality in Europe - 'in the advanced capitalist countries, the struggle for abolition of these hypocritical laws is at present far from over. . . . Soviet law does not recognise "crime" against morality. . . .'⁴

Less direct evidence of the Bolsheviks' attitude to questions of sexual morality can be found in their attempts to replace the bourgeois family and to free people from the reactionary hold of religion. These two institutions have always been closely identified with the oppression of all human sexuality. However, years of war and famine meant that the Bolsheviks could do little in practice, other than legislate on such issues as homosexuality, divorce, and communal facilities to emancipate people, especially women, from the tyranny of the nuclear family and the slavery of household tasks.

In *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky conceded: 'Unfortunately society proved too poor and little cultured. . . . You cannot "abolish" the family; you have to replace it. The actual liberation of women is unrealisable on a basis of "generalised want".'⁵

It is in the context of the Stalinist recriminalisation that Trotsky's silence on the oppression of homosexuals is most peculiar. Though Lenin showed little interest in sexual questions, Trotsky did write on a wide range of social issues. However, the silence of the Bolshevik leadership on the question, while regrettable, does not provide any evidence of hostility toward homosexuals, especially when their silence is compared to that of even the most liberal of bourgeois politicians of the 1920s in Europe and America. It may be that there is suppressed material waiting to be uncovered in the Soviet archives.

By 1933, the Bolsheviks' revolutionary position in relation to the decriminalisation of homosexuality was targeted as part of the process of the rehabilitation of the nuclear family. In an article in *Pravda* on May 23, 1934, the Stalinist writer Maxim Gorky hailed Article 154 (later 121.1), which re-criminalised male homosexual acts, and went so far as to claim: 'Eradicate the homosexual and fascism will disappear'.⁶ In 1936, homosexuality was declared a crime against the state.⁷ This resulted in Communist Parties throughout the world branding homosexuality a bourgeois or fascist deviance, while at the same time German homosexual rights organisations were being smashed by the Nazis. This dual onslaught could only serve to obscure the connection between the struggle for socialism and the struggle for the freedom of human sexuality.

From 1934, homosexuals were subjected to horrific treatment in the gulag, descriptions of which carry strong echoes of the treatment of gay men in the Nazi concentration camps. Under both systems homosexual prisoners were the lowest form of life, and were routinely brutalised and murdered. Those who condemn the Stalinist and the Nazi regimes from a human rights perspective have tended to ignore the experiences of gay men and lesbians who suffered in

the camps. This brutalisation of gay men in the Soviet Union continued until at least the mid-1980s.⁸ Article 121.1 was finally repealed by Yeltsin in 1993, as part of his attempts to bring in elements of bourgeois democracy alongside the reintroduction of capitalism.

Anti-communist backlash

Following the Stonewall riot of 1969 and the rise of gay liberation in America and Europe, the task of formulating an analysis of the place of homosexuals in society was taken up by leftists of various persuasions. It was as part of this process that the work of Lauritsen and Thorstad on the connection between gay rights and socialism was published. In the 1980s, with the rise of consumerism, the impact of Aids, and the attacks of the Thatcher and Reagan governments undermining the gay community, a new reactionary approach to gay politics became more dominant.

In relation to the historical analysis of the Soviet Union, this change is seen at its clearest in a rabidly anti-communist tract⁹ published in 1993 by the self-styled International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and by the work of the American literature teacher, Simon Karlinsky. The object of their writing on 'Russia' is to prove that the Soviet Union was evil in all its aspects.

According to the IGLHRC, Yeltsin's 1993 repeal of anti-gay legislation 'was, of course, celebrated as a monumental victory by gays and lesbians all over Russia',¹⁰ yet they dismiss the 1917 decriminalisation by the Bolsheviks as part of a communist plan to 'obliterate privacy'. In the space of a single paragraph we are told that the Soviets were up to no good when they made divorce easily available in the 1920s, but that they were also up to no good when they made divorce more difficult to secure in the 1930s.¹¹ If all this seems hardly credible, it should be noted that these people rely on 'historians' who cite a passage from a 1920s novel as 'an accurate rendition of Lenin's view of this new morality'.

Simon Karlinsky, who teaches Russian literature in California, has put up the most sustained and widely quoted attack on the record of the Bolsheviks on the gay question. While attacking the Soviet Union for doing nothing to build upon decriminalisation in 1917, both Karlinsky and the IGLHRC seem oblivious to the fact that almost half of the states of the USA continue to this day to criminalise consenting sex between men.

Karlinsky's objective is to show that lesbians and gay men could live open, fulfilled lives under Tsarist rule, and that there was nothing at all progressive about the Bolsheviks' reforms. 'During the half-century that preceded the revolutions of 1917, one can find the

presence of relatively well-adjusted Russian gays and lesbians in every stratum of society, including the peasantry, the merchant class, the army and the clergy,'¹² he asserts. Yet the examples he gives are from the aristocracy and from artistic circles. The ability of a small number of privileged individuals to indulge their passions more or less openly surely says little about life for the majority of lesbians and gay men working in appalling conditions in Russia's factories, living as peasants or fighting in the Tsar's wars.

But Karlinsky's attempt to show that there were well-adjusted homosexuals living openly under Tsarism leads him to expose his own trickery. Discussing Soviet Foreign Minister Chicherin's homosexuality,¹³ Karlinsky states that he 'had been quite comfortable with his orientation prior to 1917. . . . Then [post 1925] he was urged by the Soviet Government to commit himself to a series of psychiatric clinics in Germany. . . . his cousin in the West revealed that the illness in question was his homosexuality'.¹⁴

The 'cousin in the West', Baron Meyendorff, does indeed assert that Chicherin sought treatment in Germany for his homosexuality. This treatment, however, he dates to the period shortly after 1904 and before Chicherin had become a member of the Bolshevik Party.¹⁵ Not only does Karlinsky have the Soviet government of 1925 urging Chicherin to seek medical treatment in 1904; if the source he relies upon is to be believed, he also exposes the fact that Chicherin was far from happy with his homosexuality before 1917 - in direct contradiction to the position Karlinsky is trying to construct.

Karlinsky's condemnation of Bolshevik 'medicalisation' of homosexuality has been shown to be ahistorical propaganda.¹⁶ In fact, the medicalisation of sexual questions in Russia pre-dated the Bolshevik government and, by the standards of the 1920s, the move from considering homosexuality a crime or sin to viewing it as a question for science was a relatively progressive step.

The revolutionary movement before the rise of Stalinism had much

to be proud of in relation to the struggle for sexual freedoms. From the recruitment of Johann Baptist von Schweitzer to a leading position in the German workers' movement, and the public condemnation of the persecution of Oscar Wilde by Eduard Bernstein, to the decriminalisation of homosexual conduct within weeks of the October Revolution, the revolutionary movement proved itself far in advance of the bourgeois politicians of the day.

It should not, however, be assumed that the struggle for socialism is of value to lesbians and gay men only in relation to sexual matters. The majority of lesbians and gay men will benefit from the general eradication of exploitation under socialism, notwithstanding the pro-capitalist propaganda of Karlinsky and the IGLHRC.

Notes

1. J. Lauritsen and D. Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*, Times Change, 1974, reprinted in a revised edition, 1995.
2. See B. Dempsey, 'The American SWP and gay liberation', *Workers News* No.52, Nov-Dec 1994.
3. G. Batkis, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia*, quoted in Lauritsen and Thorstad, p.64. Batkis represented the Soviet Union at several of the congresses of the World League for Sexual Reform.
4. Lauritsen and Thorstad, op cit., p.65.
5. L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, New Park, 1973, p.145.
6. Lauritsen and Thorstad, op cit., p.69.
7. Y. Mogotin, 'Gay in the Gulag', *Index on Censorship*, 1995, p.66.
8. *Ibid.*, p.67.
9. M. Gessen, *The Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men in the Russian Federation*, IGLHRC, 1994.
10. *Ibid.*, p.24.
11. *Ibid.*, p.7. The author does concede that this 'process of subjugation took a paradoxical form'!
12. S. Karlinsky, 'Russia's Gay Literature and Culture: the Impact of the October Revolution' in M. Duberman et al, (eds), *Hidden From History*, NAL, 1989, p.352.
13. Georgi V. Chicherin (1872-1936), Commissar for Foreign Affairs 1918-1930.
14. Karlinsky, op cit., p.361.
15. Baron Meyendorff, 'My Cousin, Foreign Commissar Chicherin', *Russian Review*, April 1971, p.175.
16. D. Healey, 'The Russian Revolution and the Decriminalisation of Homosexuality', *Revolutionary Russia*, June 1993.

SUBSCRIBE TO

Workers News

	6 issues	12 issues
INLAND.....	£3.50	£7.00
Europe, Ireland.....	£5.30	£10.60
Africa, Middle East, Asia, Americas.....	£7.90	£15.80
Australasia, Far East.....	£8.60	£17.20
Surface rate (worldwide).....	£4.70	£9.40

Name.....Encl £.....

Address.....

Send to: Workers News, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX

RUSSIAN ELECTIONS

The stench of chauvinism

BORIS YELTSIN's 'democratic' counter-revolution has hit serious problems. Between the August Coup in 1991, which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the siege of the Russian parliament in October 1993, Yeltsin's base of support steadily eroded. He alienated both those 'conservatives' who had opposed the coup, but saw Russia's great power status in decline, and the fast-track 'liberals', who despaired of Yeltsin's contradictory reforms being able to cure the collapsing economy.

The inherent instability of the present situation has been demonstrated throughout the presidential election campaign. It has been a showcase for Russian chauvinism and populist demagoguery. Yeltsin began the campaign well behind in the polls, whilst the resurgent Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), led by Gennady Zyuganov, was riding high after its successes in the Duma elections in December 1995, when it won 23 per cent. The CPRF's programme for the economy includes price controls, increased subsidies for state-owned industries and the agricultural sector, higher trade tariffs, limits on the private banking sector, curtailment of privatisation and the re-nationalisation of companies 'criminally privatised' under former Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais – the best known being the Zil car factory.

Zyuganov has a relatively broad base of support, which spans factory directors who have benefited from privatisation but are now fearful of being sacked by shareholders, professional strata who have seen their living standards plummet in the state sector, pensioners and sections of workers. The CPRF describes the directors as the 'national bourgeoisie', and its programme emphasises the need to protect and develop this class. Alongside this come anti-IMF, anti-Semitic and anti-Western rhetoric, denunciations of 'materialism' and the repudiation of Marxism. Zyuganov boasts of having rid communism of 'the temptation of world revolution', and praises Stalin for leading a 'patriotic crusade' against the Nazis. Instead of concentrating on the social welfare aspects of its programme (modest proposals such as paying wages owed to workers in state factories), the CPRF has concentrated on its desire to re-build the Soviet Union, and has refused to oppose the murderous war in Chechnya.

As a consequence, Yeltsin has been able to steal the CPRF's thunder and recover some of his popularity. During the course of the campaign he has received heavy imperialist backing, and secured a massive \$9.5 billion loan from the IMF which was neatly timed to underwrite his pledge to pay outstanding wages. He promised help for pensioners, successfully lied about ending the war in Chechnya and even managed to impose a treaty on Belarus, which virtually ensures the end of that republic's independent development.

Yeltsin has done everything to massage public opinion. In addition to his dubious promises, he has predicted civil war if the CPRF wins and implicitly threatened to cancel the election altogether, while at the same time calling upon all candidates to sign a pledge to respect the outcome! He has tried to cut a figure on the world stage, hosting the G7 nuclear summit in Moscow in April, and has stoked a spy frenzy at home to boost his nationalist credentials.

If the CPRF does win, Russia would not revert to being a workers' state, nor would it reconstitute the

Soviet Union. Far from it – that would require a social revolution. Behind a Zyuganov government, Russian and Western capitalism would continue to enrich itself. As for rebuilding the Soviet Union, the actual aim would be to re-establish Russia's role as policeman and chief plunderer of peoples and lands once down-trodden by the Tsars.

The privatised sector of the economy now accounts for 70 per cent of output, and the state has debts of \$130 billion to foreign creditors. Sales of government bonds to foreign banks fund much of the day-to-day running of the state, even though the regime is increasingly unhappy about the extortionate rate of interest. The Russian stock exchange has a total capitalisation approaching the total annual spending of the government. The productive capacity of the state sector, meanwhile, is in steep decline.

The Western governments have been playing up the bogey man of 'communism' because they fear that even the limited promises made by the CPRF may encourage organised

resistance by workers to the continuing restoration process. They view Yeltsin's increasingly autocratic tendencies as the lesser evil, and are keen to draw attention away from an even more unsavoury grouping within the regime which has displaced many of the advocates of swift privatisation and Western-style democracy. Yuri Skokov, founder of the Congress of Russian Communities (CRC), is one of the leading candidates to become Yeltsin's next prime minister. He has revived Russia's arms export trade, bringing much-needed relief to the still largely state-owned military-industrial complex. According to one Russia watcher, he is also the most important ideologue of 'ethnic Russians first'. He believes that the state needs a new 'glue' to replace Marxism. 'It is obvious,' says Skokov, 'that only the Russian people can provide this basis. We face the need to arouse the national, political and civic consciousness of the ethnic Russians who make up 80 per cent of this country.'

Mikhail Gorbachev, reinvented as a super democrat, has attempted to

rally pro-democracy forces around his presidential campaign, but he is discredited. He is held responsible for opening Russia to exploitation by the West, and even the 'democrats' prefer to remain tied to Yeltsin despite their growing marginalisation.

Opposition to the war in Chechnya, an unprecedented demonstration of 30,000 in Minsk against the Belarus treaty, a threatening strike-wave amongst workers who are owed back pay, opposition to the looting of state property and to the prospect of mass unemployment – all are signs of a potentially explosive social crisis for the Russian bureaucracy and the new capitalist class. Russian workers must reject the poison of chauvinism and nationalism, which attempts to hide the depth of the social crisis and scapegoat minorities. A workers' plan for the economy, based on genuine internationalism and workers' democracy, is the only way forward for all the peoples of the ex-Soviet Union.

What attitude should Russian socialists have towards the presidential

election on June 16? The CPRF scarcely resembles a traditional workers' party. Rather, it represents one wing of the splintered ex-Stalinist bureaucracy, whose programme accepts the mixed economy, and whose rhetoric is laced with thoroughly reactionary Russian chauvinism. However, significant sections of workers see it – however misguidedly – as representing a limited defence against the effects of capitalist restoration. In the absence of any other major contender for working class support, it is necessary to intersect with these workers and test out their illusions. For this reason, a critical vote for the CPRF should be advocated, along with demands that it carries out a real struggle to defend workers' rights and living standards, reverses privatisation and expropriates the new capitalists. It will also be imperative to wage a committed fight against every manifestation of Russian nationalism, and demand the withdrawal of troops from Chechnya and the adoption of the principle of self-determination throughout the Russian Federation.

ARGENTINA

Movement for justice grows

By Alejandra Martín
Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Argentina)

FROM 1991-94, Argentina went through a short cycle of growth which produced a consumer boom, but which ended with the 'tequila effect' following the collapse of the Mexican peso. This led to discontent among workers, provoking friction between the Menem government and its social base.

Following the events in La Plata on February 20, when a students' demonstration was violently attacked by the police, there has been a growth in the democratic movement. On the 20th anniversary of the military coup of March 24, 1976, more than 20,000 people attended a demonstration called by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS, a political organisation consisting of the sons and daughters of people who disappeared under the dictatorship. The majority of participants were youth, who expressed their anger not only against the government, but also against the opposition bourgeois parties in this 'democracy for the rich'. From the platform, the speaker from HIJOS called for the release of Horacio Panario, the left-wing activist imprisoned after an unemployed workers' demonstration in Neuquén last October, and for an end to prosecutions against all working class militants. Even in the football stadiums people sang songs against the dictatorship.

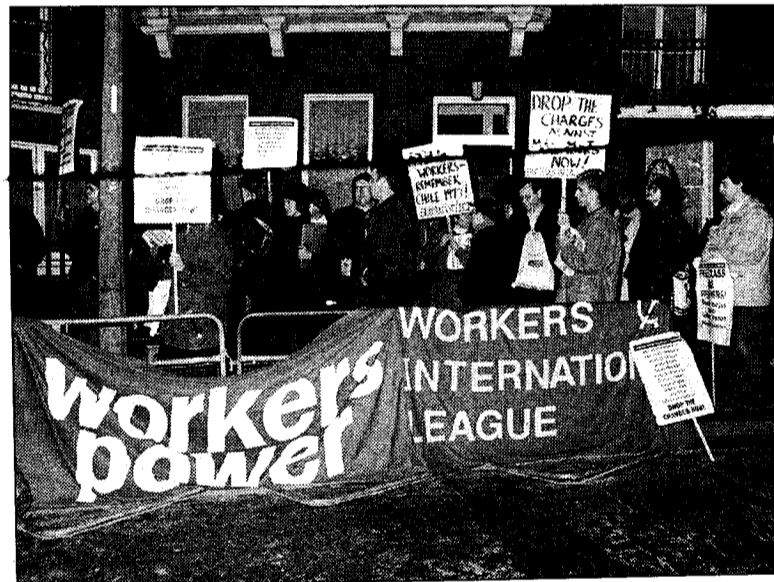
There was another demonstration on the anniversary of the coup, but this one was called by the centre-left parties and the Radicals. Its aim was to promote the bourgeois opposition to the Peronists and for this reason weak criticisms were made of the

range of laws which allow the military and all those responsible for carrying out torture and assassination to go free.

In early April, more than 11,500 prisoners at institutions around the country rebelled against the inhuman conditions in which they are kept. It is important to point out that in Argentina, 70 per cent of prisoners are on remand – they have not been convicted. After eight days of rioting, the prisoners received promises from the government that conditions would improve, and that one year in prison awaiting trial would count as two if they were convicted.

Meanwhile, the police have become discredited in the poor neighbourhoods because of their 'trigger happy' attitude. At a recent festival against police repression, which was attended by 10,000 people, a group of about 300 left the crowd in order to respond to a provocation by a group of skinheads. As a result, one skinhead died.

The leaders of the car workers' union SMATA, part of the CGT confederation, have recently signed an agreement with the Fiat management which commits them to guarantee flexible working – in other words, to help the bosses make more profit out of greater exploitation of the workforce. At a rally, the general secretary of the metal workers' union UOM, one of the biggest unions in the country, criticised management plans and said that the CGT had to stop the injustice against workers. His only proposal, however, was to call for a meeting of the central committee of the CGT – he made no call for a national strike or any kind of extension of industrial action. In fact, the UOM leadership is angry at being left out of the agreement between Fiat and SMATA. Among workers, on the



Picket of the Argentine Embassy in London on March 25, organised by the Campaign Against Repression in Argentina, to demand the release of Horacio Panario and Alcides Christiansen, and the dropping of charges against all other activists

other hand, there is fear that the new working arrangements will become the norm throughout industry.

In Argentina, a monthly deduction is made from wages in order to finance a benefit system which allows workers to use healthcare and leisure facilities controlled by the trade unions. Now, these gains from the past are under attack. The bureaucracy of the bank employees' union has contracted an American company to reorganise its scheme, which will mean redundancies among workers employed in clinics, clubs, hotels, etc, and a reduction in the quality of the service.

The government has embarked on the second part of the economic plan ordered by the IMF, known as 'State Reform II'. It consists of the privatisation of the remaining public companies, including the rest of the railway system, a hydro-electric dam, power stations, airports and defence companies, and threatens the jobs of 20,000 workers. However, there have been various political scandals surrounding the plan, one of which involves illegal arms deals with Ecuador and Croatia, another that the Central Bank is guilty of fraudulent administration.

The working class in Argentina has engaged in a series of struggles since the uprising which took place in December 1993 in the interior city of Santiago del Estero. Every single

one has been diverted by the trade union bureaucracy into truces, followed by settlements with local and national governments. In spite of the fact that the political situation is favourable and the state institutions are in crisis, the workers' movement has been unable to take full advantage of the situation.

The PTS is calling for a 'National Co-ordination Committee Against the Repression', headed by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, HIJOS and workers' organisations. We have launched the second stage of the campaign for the release of Panario and Alcides Christiansen, and the dropping of the charges against Oscar Martínez and other UOM activists. We are also campaigning in the trade unions against the FIAT-SMATA agreement.

Support for the government is declining because of the high level of unemployment and the deepening recession. The current wave of demonstrations is primarily directed against the police and the justice system, which imprison workers and activists while giving amnesties to murderers and torturers. These institutions are becoming discredited in the eyes of workers, yet they are the very forces that Menem is relying on to ensure that the economic plan is carried through. This is a weakness that should be utilised by revolutionary socialists and workers' organisations.

Revolutionaries and the ILP

IN RECENT months, many comparisons have been drawn between the newly-launched Socialist Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s. It is useful, therefore, to study the experience of those revolutionaries who intervened in the ILP.

The first split in British Trotskyism occurred in late 1933 over the issue of ILP entry. A minority of about a dozen members of the Communist League entered the ILP in early 1934, where they constituted themselves as the Marxist Group. Although Trotsky criticised the group's delay in joining the ILP, their work rapidly gained an audience among the party's rank and file. The Marxist Group recruited a number of outstanding individuals, including the West Indian revolutionary C.L.R. James, who became one of its leading members.

It faced a war on two fronts, against both the pro-Stalinist faction, the Revolutionary Policy Committee (RPC), and

the old leadership with its mixture of reformist, ultra-left and pacifist ideas. After the RPC split to join the Communist Party in October 1935, the ILP swung to the left, and the Marxist Group made its most important intervention in defence of Abyssinia against the Italian invasion. James led the fight for workers' sanctions against Italy. At the same time, however, both the Marxist Group and the wider ILP membership were split over electoral policy. A majority of the group opposed giving critical support to Labour candidates who supported League of Nations sanctions against Italy.

The crunch came at the ILP conference of April 1936, which passed a policy to ban 'organised groups' in the party. The Marxist Group submitted to the decision and formally disbanded in May. The rapid decline in the ILP's membership and influence, combined with the revival of Labour's fortunes, convinced Trotsky by July 1936 that it

was necessary to split from the ILP and turn into the Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth 'as rapidly as possible'. The Marxist Group itself was beginning to fracture, with members breaking ranks to enter the Labour Party.

The 'Geneva' conference for the Fourth International in July 1936 called on those remaining in the ILP to unite with other groups of Trotskyists. In December 1936, what remained of the Marxist Group finally split from the ILP in favour of an open party orientation, with some fraction work in the Labour Party and the ILP.

Below is the statement submitted by the former Marxist Group to the ILP leadership when it split. Despite the problems of the group, the statement is an interesting balance sheet of the work done inside the ILP, and in particular the struggle against popular frontism. It is reprinted from *Fight*, December 12, 1936.

Winning way to socialism

Some lessons from on tactics toward Labour Party

Towards the 'New Workers'

Statement to the National Administrative Council of the Independent Labour Party from the members of the former

TWO YEARS ago a group of Trotskyists joined the Independent Labour Party, stating openly their wish to convert the ILP to their own political principles. During our first year, the political struggle was directed mainly against the Stalinists in the party who were striving to accomplish a fusion between the ILP and the Communist Party. For many years the Trotskyists had warned the international working class of the steady degeneration of the Comintern. The ILP leadership, incapable of seeing this, formed a United Front with the Communist Party. It was only in August 1935 when the Stalinists openly betrayed the revolution, adopted a League of Nations policy, and urged

the class collaboration of the Popular Front, that the NAC partially recognised the road along which it was leading the party. It was the open betrayal of the Comintern and not the foresight of the ILP leadership which brought this useless and dangerous United Front to an end.

The Trotskyists, organised as the Marxist Group, took an active part in party work and fought for the participation by every ILP member in the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, for the policy of supporting the Labour Party (with the necessary criticism) in all elections where the ILP was not running a candidate, etc. To these and other basic revolutionary tactics, the

ILP leadership offered a confused, varying but nevertheless on the whole very real obstruction. But there is no doubt that the ILP, though declining in membership, moved steadily towards the left, a development in which the Marxist Group played a major part. Then in the middle of 1935 came the Abyssinian question.

Party policy unmistakably degenerated the support of colonial peoples working class action. The *New Leader* took that line with the enthusiastic approval of the party as a whole. The London Bureau, the international organisation to which the ILP is affiliated, unanimously adopted a similar decision, which was subsequently endorsed by the NAC, also unanimously. But as the crisis developed, the Inner Executive, including McGovern, Campbell Stephen and Maxton, abruptly ordered that party policy should be neutrality between the Italian and Abyssinian dictators and forced a complete change of line. The party was thrown into confusion and disgraced at home and abroad. At the April Conference in 1936, the party reversed this reactionary decision but the parliamentary group stated that they could not carry out party policy 'on account of their conscience' and threatened resignation if the matter were not submitted to a plebiscite. By falsifying the issues in the plebiscite papers the NAC managed to win a narrow victory. But a grave blow was struck at both the prestige and morale of the party. For political ignorance and cynical dishonesty the whole episode is one of the most disgraceful in the history of the ILP.

Recent events have shown that the behaviour of the leadership on the Abyssinian question is no isolated action but marks definitely its determination to control the party in the interests of the parliamentary group and not of the Socialist revolution. When the Stalinists started their agitation for a Popular Front with the sole purpose of forming a body of opinion in England to struggle for an alliance with the USSR, the *New Leader* took the correct position of opposing this collaboration of workers with Liberal capitalists bound to end in the deception and confusion of the workers. But James Maxton has come out in the *News Chronicle* for the Popular Front, Jennie Lee openly supports the Popular Front. Brockway writes against it. Once again the party creates confusion instead of giving a clear lead. It is possible that for the moment the party leadership may declare against the Popular Front but should the development of events give any popularity to this dangerous slogan

we have no doubt that the parliamentarians if they think it is useful to them will drag the party into the Popular Front as brazenly as they decreed neutrality on the Abyssinian question.

Equal vacillation and shuffling are shown on the international field. The Marxist Group stands for the principles of the Fourth International, under which slogan are comprised the revolutionary strategy and tactics of our present period, which include a ruthless condemnation of the policies of the Comintern and the ruling group in the USSR. We have proved that the various crimes and mistakes of the Comintern can be traced directly to the growth in the USSR of a caste of bureaucrats who use the Comintern merely for the purposes of their internal and external policy to which the struggle of the workers for socialism is strictly subordinated. We have repeatedly pointed out to the party and to the NAC the increase of bureaucratic exploitation and the relentless persecution of revolutionary socialists in the USSR. The NAC has consistently dodged this vital question. The recent trial and execution in Moscow of revolutionary socialists, unmistakable sign of the degeneration and nationalistic conservatism of the Soviet bureaucracy, have made this question one of urgent importance for all workers. If the Soviet bureaucracy persecute revolutionaries at home, it is because they view with fear the revolution abroad. The NAC has in its possession the statement of Adler, secretary of the Second International, which proves the trial to be a clumsy frame-up. Yet despite this and other impartial evidence it refuses to take a position and can only talk vaguely about its

'disquiet'. It avoids a clear decision because it fears to be labelled 'Trotskyist'.

Condemning the Second International and the Third at the April Conference, the NAC came out for a 'new' International, which however it carefully distinguished from the Trotskyist Fourth. It urged the party to support the London Bureau, a hypocritical and pretentious organisation of so vague and spineless a character that the ILP continues to play a leading part in it, despite its flagrant violation of the Bureau's policy on Abyssinia. The Bureau has recently held a conference at Brussels and once more the ILP leadership shows its unstable and treacherous character. At this conference Brockway, the Secretary of the ILP, dropped the slogan of the 'new' International and seeks to form an International which shall be 'truly revolutionary'. By avoiding the term 'new', he evades the explicit condemnation of the Comintern and thus opens the way for further confusing and delaying negotiations with that shamelessly counter-revolutionary organisation which has just voted for the war credits in France and recommends to the workers of Britain that if there is an alliance between Britain and the USSR against Fascist Germany, the workers must fight with their capitalists in the war 'until the main Fascist aggressor is defeated'.

Even where the ILP works hard to support the Spanish revolution, in typical fashion it disguises the weaknesses and mistakes of the POUM, the Spanish Party of the London Bureau, and refuses to enlighten the British workers on the criminal and treacherous role of the Stalinist bureaucracy which to-



Workers News Supplements

1. The Fourth International and Yugoslavia (1948-50). Articles by Bob Pitt and Jock Haston
2. The International Committee and Latin America (1958-64) by Ken Moxham
3. Critical comments on the policies of the LIT by Dieter Wilhelmi
4. In reply to the Voce Operaia Draft Theses by Dieter Wilhelmi
5. The centenary of Andrés Nin: Articles by Julián Gorkin and Andrés Nin
6. How Stalin aborted the Chinese Revolution by Max Shachtman
7. Vietnam: Stalinism versus revolutionary socialism by Richard Stephenson
8. Liars and their lies: a reply to the RCL by Edmund Samarakkody
9. Twenty years since the Portuguese Revolution by Barry Murphy
10. Where is the United Secretariat Going? by Barry Murphy

40p each including postage

Special Offer: All 10 for £1.75 including postage

Order from: Workers News, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX

Scargill's SLP in perspective

Revolutionary History editor
Al Richardson looks at the similarities and differences between the Socialist Labour Party and the ILP, and warns that the omens are not good for the new party

SEVERAL journals have drawn attention to the fate of a previous left split from the Labour Party, that of the ILP over 60 years ago. Let us see whether an examination of the two cases turns up anything useful.

On the surface, apart from the bare existence of a split in disillusionment with the policy of the Labour Party, there would seem to be few points of comparison. The ILP went back to the very beginning of the political labour movement, having been present at the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee; Scargill's organisation has no such roots, and appears to be attracting those who have already dropped out of the Labour Party, or are in the act of doing so. When the special conference of 1932 disaffiliated the ILP from the Labour Party, it had nearly 17,000 members; Scargill's party will be hard put to get a quarter of this. When the ILP split, Labour was at the furthest left point of its development: the manifesto on which it fought the 1931 election called for the nationalisation of banking and credit, and the

organisation of the country's basic industries and public services under national ownership, and the Executive Report to conference in 1932 called for a general strike in the event of war and the nationalisation of the joint stock banks. Scargill has split away from a Labour Party which is probably at the furthest point of its rightward evolution so far. The leadership of the ILP was a homogeneous group of parliamentary politicians, whereas the core of the SLP was moulded by the struggle of the trade unions.

However, if we focus a little closer, some disturbing similarities emerge which suggest that the new party may well be repeating the shipwreck of the old. The first to strike us is the fact that the split took place in both cases over the wrong issue. Although the impotence of the second Labour government in the face of mass unemployment was the real cause of the ILP split, the ostensible reason was over whether the ILP MPs in parliament should be bound by the policies of the ILP conference or by the standing orders of the Parliamen-

tary Labour Party, a distinction that could not be expected to make much sense to the ordinary party member, and still less to the voter outside. Scargill's contention that he has left the Labour Party because it has ceased to be socialist can hardly appear any more convincing, since the Labour Party has never been socialist, and you would have to be very old even to remember a time when it used socialist language to justify its actions. The working class depends upon unity for its very survival under capitalism. Splitting its institutions is a very serious matter, however necessary it may be for the building of revolutionary parties, and it has to be justified before the whole class in the clearest possible way. And the old ILP and the new SLP are far from being revolutionary parties.

The second point to note is that both splits took place at the wrong time. Labour in 1932 was moving rapidly leftwards, and the ILP would have built up a greater measure of support within its ranks if it had stayed. Blair's government has yet to come into office, but when it does it will come into collision with a major public service union, and if, as I suspect, he seeks to cut Labour's link with the unions by introducing state payment for political parties in proportion to the votes they gain (with or without a system of proportional representation), a major split could follow with the others. The worst calculation in politics is to mistake the first month of pregnancy for the eighth.

A third disturbing feature the Socialist Labour Party shares with the ILP in 1932 is that it appears to be mesmer-

ised by Stalinism. The ILP declined through years of 'unity' discussions with the CPGB, which promoted and encouraged a poisonous faction inside the ILP, the Revolutionary Policy Committee. Scargill's unique constitution, whereby he seeks to ring-fence the fag ends of the most servile defenders of the old Russian bureaucracy, has his new party expelling people even before they have joined it (at least Blair's party allows you to join before you get expelled!). And British Stalinism really has the Midas touch in reverse. How many movements has it taken over in the past and converted into front organisations, only to see them melt into nothing as soon as their members realised that they were being manipulated? Has it not just finished running down a party that once had over 50,000 members into a contemptible sect? As Trotsky pointed out in 1934, 'Unfortunately, having become an independent party, the ILP turned not toward the trade unions and the Labour Party, not toward the masses altogether, but toward the Communist Party, which had during a number of years conclusively proven its bureaucratic dullness and absolute inability to approach the class'.¹ Even the argument that this stratum of Stalinist functionaries will give the new party a trade union basis not matched by the old ILP does not hold water, for in the thirties ILP leader Bob Edwards was head of the Chemical Workers Union, and the party had important positions in USDAW and other unions far outweighing those of Scargill and his allies.

A fourth fatal flaw is that neither the party they have just left, which is still organically linked to the trade unions, still contains the majority of politically active workers, and is about to be voted into office by millions of others. These are precisely the people it is crucial to influence if a left party is to grow. 'But while breaking away from the Labour Party, it was necessary immediately to turn toward it,' concluded Trotsky.² The ILP in effect committed suicide in the trade unions by instructing its members to refuse to pay the political levy. But within five years of the split, the Labour Party gained 8.5 million votes in a general election, whilst ILP membership had fallen to little more than 4,000. The party was left impotent and powerless, on the margin of events.

So whilst there are deep differences between the two splits, there are also disquieting similarities. Perhaps we should take note of Trotsky's remarks made over 60 years ago:

'The ILP split from the Labour Party chiefly for the sake of keeping the independence of its parliamentary fraction. We do not intend here to discuss whether the split was correct at the given moment, and whether the ILP gleaned from it the expected advantages. We don't think so. But it remains a fact about every revolutionary organisation in England that its attitude to the masses and to the class is almost coincident with its attitude toward the Labour Party, which bases itself upon the trade unions.'³

NOTES

1. L.D. Trotsky, 'Cardinal Questions Facing the ILP', January 5, 1934, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1933-34*, Pathfinder, 1975, p.188.
2. *Ibid.*, pp.186-7.
3. L.D. Trotsky, 'The ILP and the Fourth International', September 18, 1935, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1935-36*, Pathfinder, 1977, p.141. These remarks by Trotsky would seem to be at variance with some who claim particular expertise on the question of 'centrism' yet argue that 'the ILP broke from the Labour Party on a principled issue and at the right time' (See John McKee, 'Lessons of the ILP split', *Workers Power*, January 1996).



Arthur Scargill and Pat Sikorski at the founding conference of the SLP

Socialist Labour Party Conference

Breaking the mould?

THE FOUNDING conference of the Socialist Labour Party took place in London on May 4. It was attended by between five and six hundred members. This represents just under half the national membership of the new party, which was reported as standing at 1,252 – barely half the 2,000-plus figure SLP activists had been led to believe.

Three groupings emerged in the course of the conference. Over half of those present came from the Stalinist milieu, and are politically close to Arthur Scargill. In alliance with this bloc is a much smaller, but highly influential grouping around Pat Sikorski, Carolyn Sikorski and Brian Heron originating from the former Faction 1 of *Socialist Outlook*, which has played a key rôle in excluding other sections

of the left from the SLP. In addition, a third, looser, network of younger leftists was in evidence.

On almost all important issues, the top table won the day, with the 'recommended' slate of three officers and 17 NEC members all winning. Votes for this list ranged from 72 to 199 votes, while the nearest opposition slate polled between 53 and 71 votes. Only 370 members present voted, which indicates a degree of confusion as to the politics of the 94 candidates.

The leadership, with Scargill elected as president and RMT executive member Pat Sikorski elected as general secretary and treasurer, managed to avoid discussion on the controversial constitution, which will now lie on the table for a further two years, giving the inner

circle around Scargill every advantage to control the party. Among the policies defeated were left amendments calling for opposition to all immigration controls, nationalisation without compensation under workers' control, and for 'no platform' for fascists. Only on Ireland was there an advance, with a call for 'troops out' being accepted.

Much of SLP policy remains undecided, since only six out of 26 draft policy papers were discussed. This will give the leadership even more room to avoid debate, make up policy on the hoof, and continue to steer the party in a left reformist/Stalinist direction.

■ This report is based on information from an SLP member who attended the conference.

Workers

ism

the past
the

Party

is as frightened of revolution in Europe as any capitalist class; makes Comintern both in and out of Spain not for a Workers' Spain but for Spanish democracy, and gives belated assistance to the Spanish workers only on condition that the revolution is kept within the bounds of bourgeois democracy.

This sorry record makes it clear that despite its revolutionary phraseology the ILP leadership, taken as a whole, is more than a body of political manoeuvrers without vision or principle, incapable of helping the party and workers to see the major political developments of the day, floundering on vague resolutions only when it is impossible any longer to evade a decision, and ready to break these for the sake of any trifling parliamentary advantage or internal or external party intrigue. It relies on parliamentary pressure and on the pacifists and reformists who came out of the Labour Party with them in 1932. In order to stifle exposure of their ignorance of Marxism, and crush opposition to their revolutionary disloyalty, these leaders made the Marxist Group an illegal organisation in April 1936, shamelessly exploiting always the sentiment of party loyalty. There is not the slightest reason to expect any change in them and revolutionaries in the party have to face the fact that at the great crises which are to confront the workers in the near future, the ILP leadership will unhesitatingly use all its resources to keep the party a docile instrument for its own petty activity. Under such leadership there is no hope for the ILP and the party has shown neither the will nor the courage to drive them out.

The national and international situation steadily worsens. No party in Britain gives a clear, comprehensive and plausible lead. Yet without the revolutionary party there can be no hope of success for the workers in Britain, without the revolutionary international movement for the workers of the world. We therefore withdraw from the ILP and upon revolutionaries inside and outside the party to join us or collaborate with us in laying the foundation of a revolutionary party which will lead workers to conquer fascism; will end the USSR by their independent action, the only possible way; abolish imperialist war and ensure the victory of socialism.

the new revolutionary party!
the Fourth International!

the Marxist Group,
secretary: Arthur A. Ballard
chairman: C.L.R. James

Revolutionary regroupment

A reply to Workers News

In the last issue of *Workers News*, we criticised the League for a Revolutionary Communist International for its attitude towards regroupment. Below, we publish a response by **Mark Harrison** of *Workers Power*, British section of the LRCI

BARRY MURPHY's critique of the LRCI centres on our 'wrong approach' to 'revolutionary regroupment, centrism and programme'. He asserts that we are ambiguous towards regroupment because we say that it is 'desirable' but that it is no substitute for building our own organisation.

He criticises us for using analogies with the methods of party building used by Lenin and Trotsky, arguing that their methods 'are applicable only in an extremely general sense between a number of competing currents, all of which, formally at least, lay claim to the Lenin-Trotsky tradition'.

This leads Murphy to conclude that we are not really interested in regroupment but only in a linear party building exercise, a practice which, he suggests, means we are becoming a sect.

Let us begin with our general attitude. We are not in favour of regroupment of all those 'struggling for political clarification', regardless of whether they formally lay claim to Leninism. Most of them are in fact struggling to shed what they consider to be the ballast of Leninism and Trotskyism (such as the vanguard party and democratic centralism).

The USFI, the only group Murphy mentions positively in the quest for

regroupment, is a good example. For the USFI Congress last year, 'political clarification' means they want a 're-evaluation of the classical and fundamental division between "revolutionaries" and "reformists"'. The USFI wants to fuse with groups 'which do not necessarily claim to be Trotskyist'. No thanks.

We are in favour of *revolutionary* regroupment. A process of splits and fusions; splits from centrist organisations, fusions with revolutionary organisations.

Murphy obscures his own organisation's view by talk of 'a regroupment project' and 'the regroupment process'. Who is this project aimed at, who does the process involve beyond those already in the LTT? Murphy does not provide any answers to such crucial questions. He criticises the LRCI for passivity, yet fails to subject our actual record on regroupment to any analysis at all.

He is silent on the joint declaration aimed at revolutionary regroupment between the LRCI and the PTS of Argentina and the Trotskyist Faction (published in *Workers Power* 196, January 1996).

Murphy does not indicate whether he thinks it is a principled or unprincipled initiative. What in the declaration can be quoted to back up the ultimatum, passive?

This initiative is not unique on our part. We have undertaken similar initiatives towards groups inside the LCC(I) during 1982-86, with the WRP (Workers Press) in 1985-87, with the RTT (USA) in 1990-91 and even with the WIL itself in 1990-91. And these leave aside the more successful attempts at regroupment that led to the formation of the MRCI in 1984; or to our work with Latin American comrades that joined the LRCI in 1989-90. Naturally, the balance sheet is mixed; some registered failure, not out of ill-will but out of genuine political differences. But passive, ultimatumistic and sectarian it is not.

Murphy does not tell us exactly what in Lenin and Trotsky's approach to this question is no longer relevant to 'today's conditions'. Perhaps he agrees with the USFI that, 'historical references to splits and complex cracks within the communist movement of the 1930s will become relative' (14th Congress), and therefore to insist on the need for political clarity on the key questions of programme is 'sectarian'?

For our part, we see no contradiction between favouring regroupment, regarding it as desirable, but not waiting until it happens before building our organisation. We think we have something unique and valuable to give. And if you do not believe that your organisation should be built, why should you expect anyone to either join or regroup with it?

On centrism Murphy tells us that 'it isn't enough just to denounce centrism' and that propaganda alone or 'telling others where we think they are going wrong' will not bring about revolutionary regroupment. Instead, we are told, it requires 'hard political struggle' and that we 'don't have the stomach for the fight'.

It isn't enough to denounce centrism. Agreed. But in centrist groups with a defined method, established leadership and an appalling track record it is necessary to remind the vanguard of their record. Patience is required explaining this to fewer members of these organisations, but

no less clarity of argument.

Propaganda is not self-sufficient, but it is indispensable to equip the subjectively revolutionary militants inside centrist organisations with arguments against their centrist leaders.

We do not argue for militants to abandon their groups without a fight. We encouraged our comrades in Sweden to fight for their views openly inside the USFI until the issues were clear for all to decide. This took two years. But there comes a point where the struggle to win cadre inside one part of the political vanguard no longer compensates for the absence of an independent group and a revolutionary press to sell to wider layers outside this group.

Murphy by contrast does not tell us the nature of the WIL's 'hard political struggle'. We are clear, we are fighting against centrism. Not a fight against revolutionary militants inside centrist organisations, but a fight against the politics and leaders of those organisations.

In the final part of Murphy's article he attacks us for having a 'scholastic, abstract view of programme' and for treating it as a key to all problems. Our error is revealed by the fact that despite our revolutionary programme we have just had a split in

The point about a programme is that ultimately it is only as good or as bad as the theory and perspectives which lie behind it. *Workers Power* doesn't understand this, and collapses theory and programme into each other.

That, says Murphy, is why we split over Stalinism. Factually he is wrong. As we have explained elsewhere, the defection of the Bolivian group and one member in Britain (there was no 'Peru section', nor has any Peru member left the LRCI) was due to differences on the national question and on the use of democratic demands. But leaving that aside, does our view of programme match that suggested by Murphy? No. He clearly hasn't bothered to either read our positions or review our practice. In our former journal, *Permanent Revolution* (Nos 6 and 7), we wrote two articles on the relationship between programme, theory and perspectives. The programme is derived from (amongst other considerations) the former and is given its focus and relevance by the latter. But whatever its relationship to theory and perspectives, it remains the key to revolutionaries being able to intervene in the world on a revolutionary basis.

We would ask in reply - if you do not regroup on the basis of a common programme, what other basis is there? Certainly perspectives and theory play their part, but in any living democratic centralist organisation there will always be differences on theoretical and perspectival questions. What you do, however, is decisive. And what you do is guided above all by your programme. Don't take our word for it. Trotsky is a higher authority than the LRCI on this question:

'The significance of the programme is the significance of the party... Now what is the party? In what does its cohesion exist? This cohesion is a common understanding of the events, of the tasks - that is the programme of the party. Just as modern workers cannot work without tools any more than barbarians could, so in the party, the programme is the instrument.'

Does this mean that programmatic agreement will save you from splits, as a result of unanticipated disagreements? Of course not, because for us the programme is a living thing. Its focus is the world and that world changes. That is why you will find that the real distinction of the LRCI is not the 'take it or leave it' attitude to programme that Murphy suggests, but the fact that we built our tendency on the slogan (against virtually all of the 'Trotskyist' fragments) 're-elaborate the Transitional Programme'.

The task of re-elaboration will involve splits and it will involve fusions on the basis of new programmatic developments. This is in the nature of political life. The great achievement of the LRCI was that its programmatic coherence prevented us from suffering anything more than a very minor split in the face of a dramatically altered world situation and the need for programmatic re-elaboration.

Does our insistence on programmatic agreement prove that we are becoming a sect whose only hope of salvation is to 'work with the LTT and other forces for the political regeneration and reconstruction of revolution-

ary Marxism'? We don't think so. A sect is defined by its relationship to the general class struggle, not its relationship to other left groups. A sect puts its own narrow interests before those of the class as a whole.

Murphy's only 'proof' is in the claim that we are 'scaling down [our] work in the labour movement in favour of an orientation to the SWP'.

This is a bizarre and groundless charge. We suggest that you take a look at our work in the labour movement: in the unions and rank and file organisations like the CFDU; in the anti-racist struggle around the Asylum Bill, police brutality and fascism; amongst working class youth in schools and colleges; around strikes and workplaces on a systematic basis. We do not deny our orientation to the SWP which, with a claimed membership of 8,000 socialists, is important within the British labour movement.

The WIL needs to stop tilting at windmills. You must make clear what exactly is the basis for revolutionary regroupment today, and what exactly is your view of the concrete initiatives (eg LRCI/TF; LIT/WRP/Militant, USFI regroupment) on offer today?

Ken Tarbuck (1930-1995)

IT WAS with much sadness that I learnt of the death of Ken Tarbuck on August 27 last year. I had first come into contact with Ken at the start of 1992 through his production of the discussion journal *New Interventions*. Having written a few pieces for the magazine, I quickly built up a strong polemical relationship with him, as we discussed various issues, both in the pages of *New Interventions* and in our own correspondence.

We disagreed on many things, but Ken was always at pains to keep a fraternal tone to these exchanges, despite my rather youthful manner that sometimes ignored the fact that Ken had a long history of struggle behind him. For example, I once remarked that I believed his own method, and that of *New Interventions* had abandoned any concept of revolutionary practice in favour of the comfort of pure theorising. With justified annoyance, Ken briefly mentioned a fraction of the activity and campaigning he had been involved in over the years, and asked if he hadn't earned the right to theorise a bit. I don't think I replied directly to that at the time, but, yes, Ken, you certainly had.

Ken had joined the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1947, and had a deep knowledge of the Trotskyist movement. He was a member of various groups after the break-up of the RCP, which included along the way Cliff's *Socialist Review* Group, Michel Pablo's tendency and the IMG. His all too familiar experiences at the hands of the various sects and sectarians which have littered Trotskyism had not turned him into a bitter anti-Trotskyist, although he believed he had gone beyond what he thought were the limitations of Trotskyist theory and practice.

He was by far the leading British authority on Bukharin, and edited several of the English editions of his works. By sheer intellectual honesty, he shamed hacks like the SWP's Mike Haynes, who wrongly tried to use Bukharin's economic writings as back-up for Cliff's muddle-headed state capitalist theorising. I'll always be grateful to Ken for the pointers and references he gave me in relation to studying Bukharin's economic writings, and for a total absence of the academic pomposity which can so often accompany an expert knowledge of a particular subject.

My last contact with Ken was in 1994. I had become increasingly exasperated by some of the contributions in *New Interventions*, together with some very right-wing editorials supporting UN intervention in Bosnia and Somalia that seemed to me to be dragging the magazine away from a vehicle for open debate and towards having its own political line. The last straw came with the publication of an article by the tiresome Robin Blick which claimed that Lenin was not only the creator of Stalinism, but had aided Black Hundredism and anti-Semitism into the bargain. That Ken could print such reactionary nonsense, that he himself did not agree with, showed not only his forgiving nature, but also a lack of political judgement at this time. I cancelled my subscription to *New Interventions*, but hoped my friendly relations with Ken would continue.

For whatever reason, I never did get around to writing to Ken again, although I dearly wish I had found the time. Although Ken had been suffering from ill health and had been debilitated by arthritis for some time, he continued to do what he could to promote Marxism until his death. He will be greatly missed.

Jim Dye

■ Ken Tarbuck's account of the formation of the *Socialist Review* Group, 'Origins of the SWP', appeared in *Workers News* No.30 under his pseudonym John Walters.

Correspondence

Dear Comrades,
I recently received the latest edition of *Workers News*, and am studying the debate on capitalist restoration. I found the article by Roy Wall illuminating, but I am not happy with the way he poses the question, 'do the countries of eastern Europe etc remain what they have been throughout this century' - in transition from 'complete free competition to complete socialisation?'

While the answer yes is undoubtedly correct, there is transitional and transitional. For example, Trotsky called Soviet Russia 'the most transitional country in our transitional epoch'. Comrade Wall also suggests that the contradiction between the state and the economy disappeared after the expropriations of autumn 1918, but this goes against the tenor of the rest of the article.

Yours fraternally,
S. Farrell
N. Ireland

Blair bends the knee

By Barry Murphy

WHEN Ron Davies, the Shadow Welsh Secretary, recently suggested what millions of people are already openly saying, that Prince Charles is not fit to be head of state, he was quickly slapped down by the Blair-Mandelson clique and forced into an abject apology. No doubt the Labour leadership's terror of the right-wing media played a part, but taken together with Blair's fulsome praise for Prince Charles's anodyne remarks about unemployment, and recent public endorsements of the monarchy, it indicates a further shift to the right in Labour's attitude.

Traditionally, Labour's view of the monarchy has been from a kneeling position, befitting the party's origins as the political expression of the privileged labour aristocracy, and its joint stewardship of the British Empire. An important early exception was Keir Hardie, but he could find little support from Labour MPs for his anti-monarchist propaganda in the Commons. Since then, nothing, apart from the odd protest from left-wing MPs

about royal extravagance. Party conference has not even discussed the monarchy since the 1920s.

Could Blair see the House of Windsor as the central unifying feature of his Christian-Democratic project, a bulwark against both socialism and the ravages of the free market? If so, the irony is that Blair's born-again monarchism coincides with the most widespread anti-monarchism for a century. Many workers who once held the royal family in awe now view that charmless bunch with a blend of pity and contempt.

Meanwhile, a small but growing faction of the ruling class and its representatives – bankers, lawyers, academics and journalists – are 'coming out' as republicans. We are now witnessing the bizarre spectacle of the Labour leadership trying to prevent discussion of the monarchy among MPs, while anti-monarchist articles fill the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the Murdoch press, including the *Sun*!

But this new wave of republicanism is not necessarily left wing in itself. In part, it stems from a desire to save British capitalism from itself. In

his book *The State We're In*, economist Will Hutton argues that the poor performance of British capitalism is largely due to Britain's antiquated and fundamentally undemocratic political institutions. Some of the more astute and enlightened representatives of the ruling class have caught on to this (although, in fact, Hutton envisages a 'republicanised' monarchy, a figure-head monarchy atop a 'democratic' constitution, as in the Scandinavian countries). While Blair has gone for Hutton's idea of 'stakeholder capitalism', tinkering too much with the monarchy is clearly off limits.

That the initiative in the debate on the monarchy is being taken within the ruling class itself is hardly surprising, given the defeat and marginalisation of the left in the Labour Party and the gag put on MPs. Much of the left outside the Labour Party is too caught up in its own sectarian obsessions to get involved in anything short of socialist revolution.

Yet the crisis of the monarchy does create political space for revolutionary Marxists to intervene. More than any other monarchy, the House of Windsor has been marketed as an

ideal family – a combination of moral leadership and sensible middle class values, cloaked in aristocratic ceremonial, designed to act as social cement for the British nation. Now it stands exposed for all to see as greedy, arrogant and hypocritical. The extremely close relationship which has existed for historical reasons between the British bourgeoisie and the monarchy is coming under strain, with sections of the ruling class beginning to see the royals as a liability rather than an asset.

Socialists should explain why they think British capitalist society is rotten to the core and how it should be transformed. We must distance ourselves from those for whom anti-monarchism is a way of re-invigorating British capitalism, but we must ad-

vocate the abolition of the monarchy (as well as the House of Lords and the established church) as a democratic reform. Not only does the monarchy consume vast sums of money, which could be used to rebuild education, the health service and public transport. It also stands at the heart of the secretive, non-accountable and undemocratic state machine, and is the basis for the arbitrary powers and corrupt system of patronage based on the royal prerogative.

We must break the silence on the monarchy imposed on the Labour Party and trade unions by the Labour leadership and its allies. We should bombard Labour Party and trade union branches with resolutions demanding the abolition of the monarchy and the confiscation of its assets.

About-turn on PTA

NEW LABOUR has proved just as quick as Old Labour at jumping to attention for the police and security services. Not content with dumping the policy of Annual Conference and the past 14 years in parliament by refusing to oppose the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), Tony Blair, Jack Straw and the rest of the brave new Labourites voted with the Tories to rush through one of the most hastily drafted and generally oppressive pieces of legislation ever introduced.

Under these new powers, any police officer can search for any reason, including no particular reason at all. This is a return to the 'Sus' laws and, like them, it provides a blank cheque for racial harassment. Anyone who refuses to be searched can be jailed for up to six months. The new provisions also include powers to search non-residential property such as lock-up garages, and unaccompanied freight at ports in Britain and the North of Ireland – at present only customs officials can do this. Police will now have the statutory right to cordon off an area and search all the people and houses within it, and suspend parking in a designated zone.

Twenty-five Labour MPs voted

against the renewal of the PTA on March 14, and 30 voted against the emergency stop and search powers that were added to it on April 2, on the grounds that both sets of legislation represent an attack on civil liberties. These MPs showed at least some kind of understanding of the real function of these laws – not so much to prevent bombs being planted as to facilitate the terrorism of the British state against Irish people, extended on April 2 to include anyone else the police want to target.

When the PTA was introduced in 1974, after the bombing of two pubs in Birmingham in which 21 people died, not a single Labour MP opposed it. The IRA immediately disclaimed responsibility for the bombs, but this did not stop six Irish men being arrested, beaten up, and sentenced to life imprisonment in the hysterical atmosphere whipped up by the press.

Since then, more than 10,000 people in Britain have been arrested under the PTA, but only a tiny handful have been charged with anything. The effect on 'terrorism' has been nil. In the North of Ireland, the act is just one of a range of oppressive laws used against the nationalist population and Republican supporters.

Old-fashioned exploitation

IN A RANGE of companies and public sector bodies there has been a rapid rise in recent years of 'new management techniques', mainly imported from the United States, under the general label of 'Human Resource Management' (HRM).

As you would expect, the hidden agenda of these new techniques is the old story of increased exploitation and lower wages. Along with this, they attempt to further weaken the position of the unions within the workplace, and undermine collective bargaining.

So what is HRM? In its fullest expression, it is a reaction against the old 'Fordist' hierarchical and adversarial techniques in favour of a devolved management style and flexible working practices. Managers are seeking to develop a comprehensive strategy that can include such concepts as 'mission statements', 'total quality management', 'empower-

ment', 'teamworking', 'continuous improvement', 'business process re-engineering' and various other bits of pompous tosh.

Trade unionists should not be fooled by this jargon. Its hidden meaning is made quite clear in a confidential document from the giant Cadbury Schweppes that recently found its way to shop stewards. It states that: 'The role of the trade unions needs to be marginalised by greater focus on direct communication and consultation, but without an overt statement to this effect.'

Companies try to achieve this marginalisation in a number of ways. A favourite method is to introduce discussion groups or 'quality circles', with worker, but not union, participation. These are carefully controlled and fed with the management agenda in order to give the appearance that workers themselves are suggesting changes. Terms like 'empowerment'

will then be used to make workers responsible for any problems caused by these new practices. 'Teamworking' is also a common device, and often competition will be encouraged between teams in order to split the workforce and increase productivity. These techniques are designed to pressurise workers into identifying with the company, or 'business unit' to use HRM language, rather than with the union and each other.

The impact of HRM is hard to judge, but union activists should not dismiss it as a passing management fad. Its aims must be exposed and fought. Only by understanding what the bosses are up to, and mounting a propaganda campaign of their own, based on strong workplace organisation, will workers be able to fight back.

Liverpool dockers still going strong

By Jim Dye

MAY DAY in Liverpool saw a massive demonstration in support of over 300 dockers who remain locked out by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company after eight months. Local dockers' leader Jimmy Nolan told marchers: 'Workers produce all the wealth in the world, and we should be the ones to decide how it's distributed.' The dispute is now firmly part of the fight for international workers' solidarity against international capitalism, and TGWU members remain solid despite the combination of bribery, blackmail and intimidation used by port bosses.

An international conference held in Liverpool in February was attended by dockers from 15 countries – the first such gathering since the Detroit conference of 1947. In a few short months, rank-and-file workers, led by the port shop stewards' committee, have achieved more in uniting dockers around the world than the TGWU and TUC bureaucracies have ever done. By sending numerous delegations throughout the coun-

try and overseas, they have ensured that financial support has been backed by real action. The result is that ships bound for and coming from Liverpool are being boycotted internationally.

The bosses have seen their profits hit and share prices tumble. They are running scared – to the extent that they issued writs against local Unison branches which defied their own leadership and organised solidarity walk-outs by council workers in Sefton and Liverpool on May Day. Local CPSA branches have also given support by refusing to advertise for scabs in Job Centres. In addition to the huge impact international solidarity has had, dockers' wives have played a prominent role in the struggle, forming a support group called Women on the Waterfront and taking a lead in picketing, addressing meetings and organising the campaign.

● Dockers still need financial support. Send donations and messages of solidarity to: Jimmy Nolan, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool 6. Cheques payable to 'Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Committee'.



There has been a series of well-attended demonstrations through Liverpool in support of the dockers. This was on March 23

Class struggle in Ontario

By Arturo Bilbao

LAST SUMMER, Mike Harris and the Liberal Party (Tories) in Ontario won enough votes to be able to form a majority government. Big business, small business and even sections of workers voted for them. But almost from day one, opposition to the Tories' conservative agenda has grown.

Harris moved quickly to dismantle the social safety net and attack gains made by workers in the course of hard struggles in the past. It began with anti-poverty groups, the first victims of what the Tories termed the 'common sense revolution', although it has nothing to do with either common sense or revolution. Next were child care workers and teachers; their struggle was joined by students.

Finally, the labour movement began to wake up. The winter months were marked by massive struggles by organised labour. On December 11,

London was shut down for one day, with a rally of 50,000 workers. In February, Hamilton was shut down by more than 120,000 workers and social activists, who controlled the city for two days.

This year is a contract year for both public and private sector unions and the mood of the working class has changed from apathy to opposition to the government. There is no longer a one-sided war waged by the bosses and their representatives in Queens Park and Ottawa to turn back the wheels of history. They face a labour movement that has begun to fight back, regaining confidence in its own power to turn things around for all workers, both employed and unemployed.

The events in Hamilton were followed by a five-week strike of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). The Tories expected not only an easy victory, but that they would be able to destroy the union as

a first step on the road of destroying other unions. They figured that since this was OPSEU's first strike, its members would not be able to maintain strong picket lines in the bitter cold and endure financial hardship. They also calculated that a divided labour movement would leave the strikers swinging in the wind. They were wrong on all counts. During the strike, the government tried to turn public opinion against the strikers by using the bourgeois media to scare-monger and lie. Yet as the strike went on, public opinion moved more and more in support of the strikers.

OPSEU workers, who had never held a picket line before and who lived on \$100 a week, were transformed into a fighting force over the course of the strike. While less than 10 per cent of OPSEU members scabbed, many militants from other unions and poverty groups joined picket lines and gave the strikers financial support.

On March 18, the Tories made a serious mistake when they sent riot police to break picket lines in Queens Park. Not only the strikers but anyone who watched television saw a Tory minister stepping over an unconscious picket, who had been brutally assaulted by the riot police. The role of the state apparatus as the defender of big business and its servants was exposed for many, at least for a short time. The Tories realised their mistake, and were forced to call for a public inquiry to investigate the incident. They hoped to whitewash the crime, but it was too late. Public opinion had swung against them and the riot cops, who had attacked not only pickets but even regular police who were in their way. To cut their losses, the Tories had to bite their tongues and sign a new contract, which gave the union some concessions.

Although there were some minor concessions on seniority and succession rights, OPSEU members have good reason to be angry. Lay-offs were accepted by OPSEU negotiators as inevitable from the very beginning of the negotiations, and on April 11 – less than two weeks after OPSEU members had resumed work – Harris announced that over 10,000 workers would be laid off in the next two years. This acceptance of the lay-offs by the OPSEU leadership was in sharp contrast to former times, when bargaining was supposed to prevent lay-offs.

The contract, which was ratified by 90 per cent of union members, also accepts the privatisation of some public services – privatisation that has *danger for both trade unionists and the public.* Furthermore, the new succession rights would cut current salaries by 15 per cent for those who choose to remain and work in the privatised service, if the employer still needs them.

Politically, however, the OPSEU strike can be characterised as a victory. The union was not destroyed and many union members learned valuable lessons in how to fight. Thousands of workers from public and private sector unions showed an unprecedented level of solidarity and militancy. This could be the beginning of a badly needed breakthrough to form a fighting united front of labour and the poor in coming struggles. Furthermore, the unemployed and the poor, who, according to the government's vision, should have sided with the scabs, showed a high level of solidarity with the union.

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) played an important role on the picket lines, in the March 18 confrontation, and in the April 19 action in Kitchener-Waterloo. One woman member of OCAP was badly assaulted by the riot police. If other unions had gone beyond contributing

money, and had organised sympathy strikes and joined picket lines, the strike could have achieved far better results.

Although the government has had to retreat, its commitment to massive cuts, further attacks on the most vulnerable sections of society and the creation of a cheap labour economy remains. What is needed, and many workers understand it, is a province-wide general strike to bring down the Tories. This demand should be placed on the union leaders, while forming democratically elected rank-and-file action committees. The danger of city by city strikes – the tactic used by the union top brass – is that it can demoralise workers. The government is not going to stop its attacks in the face of partial mobilisations. We cannot wait another three years to defeat the Tories and replace them with the New Democratic Party (NDP), as some union leaders believe.

The Tories must be defeated and replaced with a new government. The question in the minds of many workers is what to replace the Tories with. There is only one choice – the NDP. Despite its reformist leadership, the NDP is the only labour party that exists at present. To refuse to call for an NDP government will be seen by many workers as passive support for the parties of big business.

The NDP lost the elections last year because its shift to the right alienated its own base of support. But, for the moment, most politically-minded workers see an NDP government as the lesser evil, and wish they could turn back the clock to NDP days.

The renewed support for the NDP among workers was expressed in the Ontario Federation of Labour convention when many unions reaffiliated to the Ontario NDP. If the NDP returned to government in Ontario through a general strike, it would be under tremendous pressure from the working class. It would either have to give some real concessions, or openly betray its militant worker base, which would in turn open up the way for a sharp struggle inside the NDP which could lead to the defeat of the right-wing leadership.

Militants in the NDP can make use of the Ontario leadership race to defeat those leaders seeking to rule capitalism with a human face, while paying lip service to organised labour and the poor. The only candidate who deserves critical support is Peter Kormos, who is at least on record as opposing Bob Rae's social contract. Militants in the party should not give him a blank cheque, but demand that he leads a struggle on an action programme which will meet the needs of workers and the poor. This must be linked to the struggle for a general strike to bring down the Tories.

SCOTTISH SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Electoral machine or fighting organisation?

By Graham Campbell

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Alliance (SSA) held its founding conference on April 20 in Glasgow. One hundred and fifty delegates approved a 'Socialist Programme for Change', which contained many correct points such as the demand for a £4.15 minimum wage; opposition to water privatisation, the Maastricht Treaty and Trident; the reduction of the working week; and the renationalisation of public utilities. However, it is essentially a minimum programme of immediate demands, with no mention of the necessity of carrying out a socialist transformation of society.

The SSA bears the strong imprint of the main organisation behind it, Scottish Militant Labour (SML), but it also includes the Scottish Socialist Movement, the Stalinists of the Communist Party of Scotland (CPS), a number of SNP-aligned left nationalists around *Liberation* magazine, and other individual socialists. It represents the convergence of a section of the reformist and nationalist left in Scotland around the strategy pushing workers' demands through a Scottish Assembly.

At the conference, SML leader and Glasgow councillor Tommy Sheridan opposed attempts by activists to pass a 'No council tax rise' motion because, he claimed, council workers wanted an increase in the tax to safeguard their jobs! As in Liverpool in the 1980s, the safeguarding of Militant council positions takes precedence over the needs of the wider working class. The conference also backed SML's reactionary position of supporting the 'peace process' in the North of Ireland, and its line on anti-racism – despite its winding up of Youth Against Racism in Europe.

The SSA has effectively rescued SML after the latter failed to become the electoral alternative to Labour outside Glasgow. SML sees the alliance as a vehicle to combat the SNP's left nationalist face. After labelling the SNP as 'light years to the left' of New Labour, SML now places it in

the centre, with Labour on the right with the Tories! Militant no longer regards Labour as a 'bourgeois workers' party' because Blair destroyed its 'socialist roots' along with Clause 4.

Inspired by the electoral successes of ex-Stalinist parties and left alliances such as United Left in Spain and Communist Refoundation in Italy. Militant thinks it can replicate the experience in Scotland. The SSA is not intended to be a revolutionary party, but a left reformist electoral machine and a recruiting ground for SML. Militant remains on the parliamentary road to socialism, but in Scotland it has swapped the strategy of a Labour majority at Westminster for an SSA majority in the assembly in Edinburgh.

Labour's devolution plan for a 129-seat assembly, elected under proportional representation, gives the SSA an opening for its left reformist politics, while Blair will use it to derail Scottish working class anger against the Tories into constitutional channels and control any resistance to a Labour government, and the SNP, who once saw devolution as a 'betrayal of Scotland's interests', will use it as a platform for independence.

The SSA position reflects SML's call for a *sovereign* Scottish Assembly with tax-raising powers, a call which enables it to go 'beyond' devolution to effectively advocate independence. SML even says 'It is incongruous to call for a Scottish parliament with the power to carry out . . . radical social reforms, while suggesting that such a parliament could co-exist within the present Westminster system'. As if a Blair government at Westminster would allow wholesale nationalisation to take place in Scotland when it was expressly ruling it out in the rest of Britain! If the Scottish Assembly has powers given to it by Blair to raise taxes by up to three per cent above the standard rate, its Labour majority is unlikely to defy him. SML is building illusions in the assembly's socialist potential.

The SSA is limited in its tactics towards Labour since it balances between left nationalists who see inde-

pendence as a prerequisite for socialism – which means voting SNP, not Labour – and others like the CPS who still hold reformist illusions in Labour. The latter group don't want SSA candidates standing against socialists in other parties (Labour or SNP), particularly the Campaign for Socialism left-wingers like Dennis Canavan MP. Since no significant section of the opposition to Blairism in the unions and the Labour Party has broken away, the SSA standing candidates in selected areas against Labour won't deal decisive blows against the bureaucracy, nor break the majority of workers from supporting Labour. Giving critical support to Labour, while campaigning in the party, the unions and the rest of the working class for fighting demands to place on a Labour government, and pushing the Scottish Labour left to break with Blair, are still the most important tasks for socialists.

Despite its faults, the SSA is an important initial expression of working class independence which revolutionary socialists should not ignore. The future direction of the SSA depends on it giving leadership in the class struggle and organising workers, not upon winning seats in elections. The SSA should be a class struggle party which uses elections as a subordinate part of its strategy, complementing its main work of leading the day-to-day struggles of workers!

The SSA needs a programme of transitional demands, and non-sectarian tactics towards the majority of Scottish workers who will be voting Labour in the general election. It should stand in elections only where it has a significant base in the working class. Whilst supporting the establishment of an assembly as an extension of democratic rights, it must not see it as anything other than a bourgeois parliament. It should support the right of self-determination for Scotland, but in the event of a majority of workers choosing this road it should fight for a Workers' Republic. Marxists must build a fraction inside the SSA and fight to transform it into a revolutionary workers' party.

Drop charges against Athens protestors!

STUDENTS and working class youth are still being hauled before the courts in Athens as a result of a large-scale confrontation with police following last November's annual march to commemorate the fall of the Greek junta. About 3,000 people had remained after the rally was over, demanding the release of a jailed left-winger. There were several running battles and by midnight the police had sealed off the area, trapping a large number of demonstrators inside the Athens Polytechnic all night. Early the following morning, riot police stormed the building on the invitation of the Polytechnic authorities, arresting

550 people. It was the first time the Polytechnic had been invaded in this way since the tanks of the junta smashed through the gates in 1974, and this time it was taking place under a PASOK government. During a similar occupation in 1985, a 15-year-old was killed, but the police were unable to enter the university because the vice-chancellor was being held hostage. Many of those arrested have already been brought to trial, charged in the main with riotous behaviour. Some have been imprisoned and many have been fined. There has been a series of events to publicise the cases, including public meetings and rock concerts.

BOOK REVIEWS by Richard Price

Healy and the Blue Union

The struggle for an independent trade union by the dockers in Merseyside and Hull during 1954-55
By John Archer

THE LAST two years have seen a surge of interest in the 'Blue Union' struggle of 1954-55 with the publication of Bill Hunter's book *They Knew Why They Fought* (reviewed by Al Richardson in *Workers News* No.53), Harry Ratner's autobiography *Reluctant Revolutionary*, Keith Sinclair's pamphlet *How the Blue Union came to Hull docks*, and a vigorous debate in the letters column of *Workers Press*. This latest contribution is by another participant in the events. John Archer was a leading member of Gerry Healy's pre-SLL 'Club', which was operating in the Labour Party at the time and played a central role in the dispute.

Why this sudden flurry of excitement in an inter-union struggle which took place over four decades ago? At least part of the answer must lie in the psychology of sections of the left today after a decade of setbacks. The attraction of breakaway movements, whether political (the SLP and the 'new parties' proposed by groups like the CPGB and the WRP) or industrial (EPIU and OILC), is that they appear to offer a shortcut to fighting the bureaucracy, and it always helps to find a precedent for the latest enthusiasm – although it should be stressed this is not the author's position.

This pamphlet is less of an account of the Blue Union struggle, than a polemical reply to Tom Cowan's contributions to the debate in *Workers Press*. Rejecting the idea that the dockers' 'break out' from the TGWU to the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers (NAS&D – the 'Blue Union') was either an adventure or a bureaucratic manoeuvre, Archer defends the role of the Club, which organised energetically in support of the Blue Union. Indeed, such a bitter struggle could not be simply manipulated from behind the scenes – it had to be based on a genuine movement among the rank and file.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that the Club's advice to split from the

TGWU was correct. After all, the decision to form the United Mineworkers of Scotland and the United Clothing Workers Union by the Stalinists in 1929, and the equally ill-fated Glass and General Workers Union in 1970, were also based on genuine anti-bureaucratic strivings. NUPE appears to have been one of the few successful breakaway unions this century.

Archer rejects the view that the outcome of the dispute can be placed at the door of the Club as the 'unfair advantage of hindsight'. But while it is true that those engaged in a fight do not do so in full knowledge of the outcome, it is surely in order after 40 years to draw a balance sheet.

Means and ends are dialectically related. Or if you prefer, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. As Al Richardson pointed out in his review of Bill Hunter's book, while the Blue Union struggle ended up with sections of the docks deunionised, the TGWU had begun to swing leftwards

shortly after the dispute. With this development, the main justification for the 'break out' – that it was impossible to fight within the TGWU – disappeared.

As for the view that the Club 'concentrated all those genuinely Communist elements who had survived politically from the break-up of the Revolutionary Communist Party', this begs a few questions. Hadn't Healy been responsible for driving out virtually all opposition from the RCP, and assisted its decline from an organisation of 500 in 1945 to a group John admits had 'barely a hundred members' in 1954? And the idea that the split in the Fourth International in 1953 contributed to the struggle against the union bureaucracy on the docks is dubious. What can be said is that in both situations Healy used the same method – splitting before a serious fight had taken place.

■ Available from the author at The Old Tavern, Upper Denby, Huddersfield, HD8 8UN, price £1.

The LSSP at war

Britain, World War Two and the Sama Samajists
Edited by Wesley Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe

THE FIFTY-YEAR secrecy rule on certain government documents means that only now are some of the papers relating to the persecution of the Ceylonese Trotskyists of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party during the Second World War available. The editors of this volume and their collaborators are to be congratulated on putting together this excellent collection, which contains police and government reports as well as a wide variety of LSSP statements and articles, many of them previously inaccessible or available for the first time in English.

Formed in 1935, the LSSP's origins were unusual. It emerged from the nationalist movement associated with the Suriya Mal agitation. Its leaders were mainly drawn from the intellectual and social elite of the island, and many of them were influ-

enced by their experience as students in London, where they encountered the ILP and the early Trotskyists. For several years, however, the LSSP's socialism was not clearly differentiated from radical nationalism, although it energetically supported strikes. Nor was the struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism resolved.

But by 1940 the Trotskyists were clearly in control and had expelled a minority Stalinist faction – an event documented in Leslie Goonewardene's fine article, 'The Third International Condemned!', which is included in this volume. The Sama Samajists' courageous opposition to the Second World War brought colonial repression down on their heads, with the arrest of Colvin R. de Silva, Philip Gunawardena, N.M. Perera and Edmund Samarakody in June 1940. A flavour of the LSSP's anti-imperialist and anti-war agitation can be found in both the leaflets and secret reports reprinted in the book. The latter reveal not only the scope and detail of the spying operation directed against the party, but sometimes the inaccuracy and frequently the bone-headedness of the colonial authorities.

The four leaders were detained as members of an organisation which had published 'statements or comments calculated to: (a) incite hostility towards, or contempt for, the authority entrusted with the preservation of law and order in the Island; (b) bring about civil commotion in the Island; (c) create a belief in the defeat of the Empire in the present war and thereby to prejudice the defence of the Island; (d) vilify the Empire's cause or effort in the present war and thereby to prejudice the defence of the Island.'

The documents and articles take us through to the famous jail break in 1942, when the detainees recruited their jailer and escaped. The *News Chronicle* sniffily reported: 'Their guard is also missing', while the *Daily Mail*, not noted then or now for its accuracy, told readers: 'Ceylon quills break gaol!'

Revolutionaries in Sri Lanka and internationally will value this collection as an excellent source book, as well as a reminder of the heroic traditions of the early LSSP – all of which throw its later evolution into a reformist, coalitionist party (currently with one cabinet post in the SLFP-led government) into sharp relief.

■ Available from Wesley Muthiah, 27 Belmont Avenue, London, N13 4HD. Price £9.95 plus £1.30 p&p.

Real life or reel life?

Cult movie of the decade? Morag Kearney compares Danny Boyle's film *Trainspotting* with the novel by Irvine Welsh

IN 1979, the Tories began shutting down Scotland. My dad was made redundant at 53, two weeks after Margaret Thatcher was elected, and never worked again. A man called Jeff Torrington was made redundant on the same day from the same Linwood car plant. He went on to win the Whitbread prize in 1992 for *Swing Hammer Swing!*, his book about working class life in Scotland. For most Scottish youth, however, there were only three choices – move away, take to drugs and crime, or socialism. But the three became confused due to the lack of a viable socialist alternative.

Irvine Welsh knows what happened next. Instead of a trying to cope with a myriad of problems, many youth substituted just one – heroin. If heroin was not available then 'jellies' were what kept brutal reality from intruding too much. Drug addiction is rife in Scotland and the reason is unemployment and sheer poverty.

Welsh's novel tells the story of Mark Renton in a convincing way,

but the film is a disappointment in comparison. *Trainspotting* has become a cult movie but you should read the book first to get a genuine feel for the oppressed youth of Scotland. The film tends to romanticise drug addiction until it seems almost a part of normal existence. The book portrays reality far more brutally, as ongoing oppression. There are no jobs and no future under capitalism for these youth.

When Renton comes to London to escape the drug culture he is drawn into the same scene, because the root of the problem is in the hopelessness engendered by a dead-end existence – and not in the evils of escapism. The novel is unique in its faithful portrayal of that culture and shows the basic socialist sympathies of the youth. Although the film is very funny in parts and brilliant in places, it doesn't suggest a way forward which the book does. Maybe this had to be dropped for the movie genre, but socialists should be disappointed that their class interests have been sacrificed for sensationalism.

Prinkipo Press

REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE LABOUR PARTY	£1.50
BEHIND THE CRISIS IN MILITANT	£1.25
CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: The 1944 Police Raid on the RCP by Jack Gale	£2.45
DOCUMENTS ON POLAND 1980-81 (In German)	£2.00
FOR THE POLITICAL REVOLUTION IN CHINA! Articles and Documents 1989-90	£1.50
HOW THE BOLSHEVIKS ORGANISED THE UNEMPLOYED by Sergei Malyshev	£2.45
NEGOTIATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Democratic Constituent Assembly	£1.50
REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA (In German)	£2.00
REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN POLAND (In German)	£1.50
ROUMANIA AND BESSARABIA by Christian Rakovsky	£1.50
SOUTH AFRICA AT THE CROSSROADS: Draft Theses on the Present Situation	£1.50
THE WRP AND THE 'REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION' (1978) by Jack Gale	£0.80
WHAT NEXT? AND OTHER WRITINGS FROM 1917 by Leon Trotsky	£2.50

Send orders to Prinkipo Press, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX
All prices include postage and packing

When the vision blurs

The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)

By John Lauritsen and David Thorstad
Times Change Press

ALTHOUGH this pioneering work was last reprinted in 1976, and has been unavailable for many years, readers of *Workers News* familiar with Brian Dempsey's articles will need little introduction to it. It remains the best and most accessible introduction to the history of the struggle for gay liberation and its links with socialism, and deserves a wide readership.

Now reprinted in a revised edition containing additional material, the book concentrates on the chequered relationship between the early gay rights movements in Germany and Russia and the workers' movement from the beginnings of the Marxist movement to the suppression of gay activists under fascism and Stalinism. It also includes short biographical sketches of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs,

Magnus Hirschfeld, Sir Richard Burton, Walt Whitman and Edward Carpenter.

When the book first appeared, the gay liberation movement was rapidly growing and open to radical and revolutionary influence. As the authors observe in a new afterword:

'Now, two decades later, the gay movement appears, paradoxically, to be in decline – in North America, at least – just as it has achieved its greatest resonance ever in society. It has extended its reach into virtually all areas of society, both geographically and socially, yet at the same time it has lost its vision. The mainstream gay organisations of the present are politically correct zombies, in whose actions and literature there is not a trace of the humanist idealism that motivated the earlier movement. . . . Today, the gay movement seems to be giving up its liberationist vision in favour of assimilation into the dominant society. . . . If the pendulum of history has now swung in the direction of conformism and repression, dare we hope that reissuing this book might help to refocus attention on some fundamental issues?'

Workers International League

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

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

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

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

For more information about the Workers International League and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, write to:
WIL, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX



MIDDLE EAST

Down with the peace process!

By Yossi Rad

THE REAL character of the peace process in the Middle East was exposed on April 11 as Israel mounted a massive bombardment of Lebanon reminiscent of its invasion in 1982 and seven-day attack in 1993. Operation 'Grapes of Wrath' reached its barbaric climax on April 18 with the sustained Israeli shelling of the United Nations base at Qana in south Lebanon, which killed 100 civilians who had taken refuge there. By the time the US-brokered cease-fire came into effect in the early hours of April 27, about 150 Lebanese had died, hundreds had been wounded and thousands made homeless.

The Israeli government justified the onslaught as retaliation for Hezbollah's launching of Katyusha rockets against the Israeli town of Kiryat Shemona on April 9, when more than 30 people were injured. Hezbollah secretary-general Sheik Hassan Nasrallah insisted that the rocket attacks were provoked by a roadside bomb planted by Israel which killed a Lebanese boy. One reason for the attack was certainly the coming Israeli elections on May 29, the campaign for which formally opened at midnight on April 11. The Labour Party prime minister, Shimon Peres, was clearly trying to outdo Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu for hawkishness. But there are other reasons related to the growing resistance of the Arab masses to the so-called peace process. To understand why Israel attacked Lebanon it is important to review the preceding chain of events.

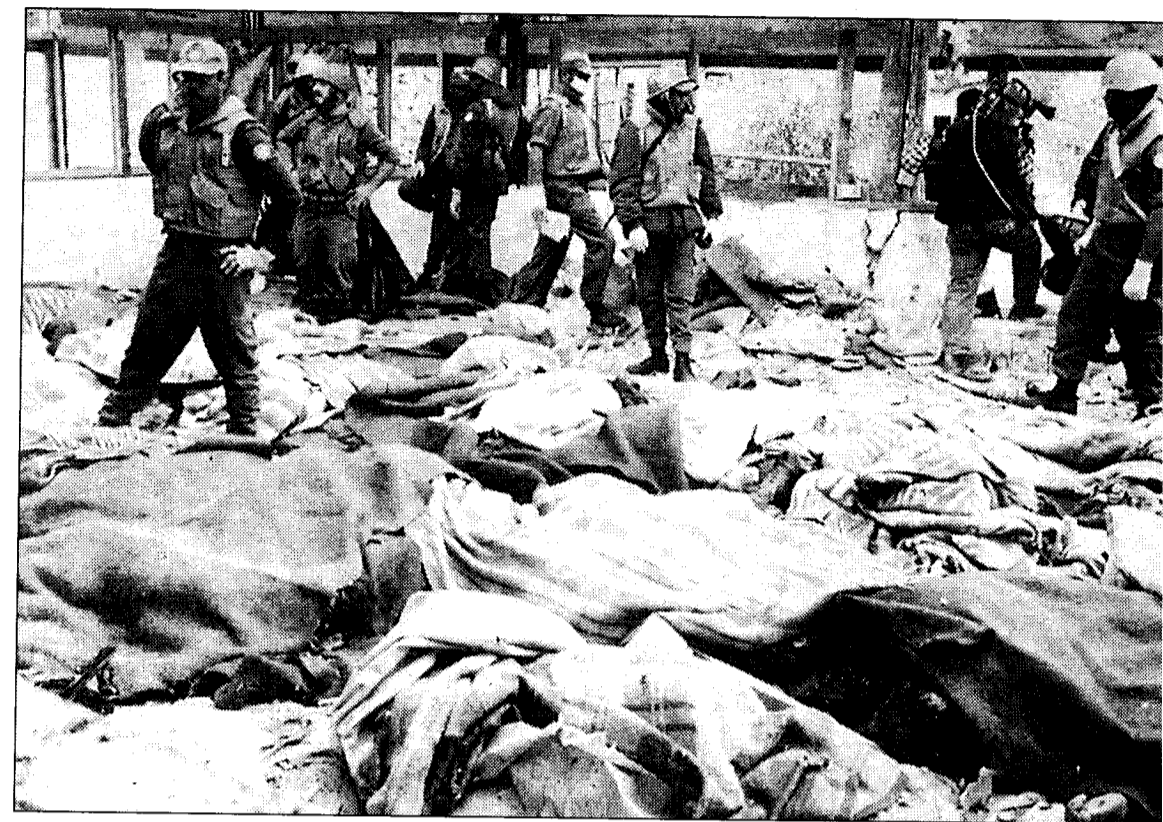
In January this year, the Israeli government, in collaboration with its loyal servant Yasser Arafat, assassinated Yehia Ayyasa – known as the 'engineer' – who was suspected of being the master bomb maker of HAMAS. If Peres had the impression that this assassination would end the Palestinian resistance to the reactionary peace process, the deaths of 60 Israelis in four explosions on February 25 were to

prove him wrong. Buses in Jerusalem, Ashkelom and Tel-Aviv were blown up by Palestinian suicide bombers in revenge for the assassination of Yehia Ayyasa and 28 years of brutal occupation.

The Israeli government's reaction to the death of 60 of its citizens was typical of colonial occupiers: the blowing up of Palestinian houses, the closing of the borders with the Occupied Territories and the starving of the Palestinian population. Israel and the United States stepped up the pressure on Arafat, who obliged by getting the Palestinian police to round up more than 800 suspected HAMAS activists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In response to growing criticism of his role, Arafat said that HAMAS had secretly declared war on the Palestinian Authority a year ago from Jordan, citing what he claimed was an April 19, 1995, HAMAS document aimed at killing off peace negotiations between Israel and Arafat, and replacing them with direct talks between the Jewish state and the 'new authority' – HAMAS.

In early April, Palestinian police armed by Israel and nominally under the authority of Yasser Arafat gassed and clubbed students at one of the West Bank's largest universities, Najah University in Nablus. A few days later, over 1,000 students broke through police lines and jeered Arafat in Ramallah outside a session of what is called the Palestinian Council. The growing hatred toward Arafat, who more and more openly betrays the Palestinians, makes him a poor instrument for controlling the masses, who are turning in their despair to HAMAS.

We regret the death of innocent Israeli civilians. Acts of indiscriminate terrorism can only help the rulers of Israel by pushing the Israeli population further to the right, thus allowing the government to commit more crimes against the Arab masses. Suicide bombs that do not distinguish between the civilian population inside Israel and the ruling class and its instruments of repression – the army and the



The UN base at Qana in south Lebanon after the Israeli artillery bombardment on April 18

police – reflect the reactionary ideological outlook of HAMAS. Yet the blood of these civilians is on the hands of the Israeli government and the imperialists, in particular the US, who back Israel's horrific acts against the entire Palestinian population. In other countries, among them Lebanon, the masses are also turning to the fundamentalists out of the same growing despair.

The attack on Lebanon shows that the 'peace process' not only aims to deny the rights of the Palestinians, but to secure US control of the Middle East and the position of Israel in this new reality. During the Cold War years, the Arab rulers and Israel competed with each other as to who would be the strategic political and military asset for the US in the region. In that competition, Israel won hands down, while the Arab states entered into friendly relations with the Soviet Union in an effort to put pressure on the US. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ruling classes of Israel and the Arab states are forming an open alliance under the control of the US against the Arab masses.

Following Israel's collective punishment of the entire Palestinian population, the kings, sheiks and presidents of the Arab states met with Israel's leaders in Sharm el Sheik with Washington's blessing. The purpose of this conference was allegedly to fight terrorism – in other words, to co-ordinate state terrorism against the Arab civilian population. To be singled out in particular are those who oppose the 'Pax Americana'. The conference was, in effect, the continuation of the Gulf War coalition from 1991, when the Arab rulers directly helped US imperialism and its allies in the dirty war against Iraq. The Israeli attack on Lebanon was within the framework of this agreement, its aim having been to terrorise civilians into submission and crush their aspirations to be free of imperialist control.

In spite of the similarity between the bandits who lead them, we do not equate these states. Israel is

neither a colony nor an imperialist state, but is at a stage in between. It is a colonial power aspiring to become an imperialist state, while the Arab states are neo-colonies. For this reason, the interests of the working class are to see the defeat of Israel in Lebanon. We call on Israeli soldiers to turn their guns in the opposite direction.

While we defend the Arab masses, regardless of their leadership, against the US, Israel and their own rulers, the only hope for the people of the Middle East is the successful struggle of all the exploited and oppressed against their rulers. The leaderships of HAMAS and Hezbollah lack such a perspective and cannot lead the masses to victory against imperialism. To win this struggle, an internationalist working class leadership is needed, but to build such a leadership is easier said than done. For years, the Jewish population has thought that the enemy was the Arabs, and not the Zionist ruling class. The Arab population likewise thought that the enemy was the Jews. The Israeli Jewish working class, part of an oppressor nation, holds an important key to the solution. It must oppose its own ruling class and support the Arab masses, first of all the Palestinians.

The Arab working class has a long history of class struggle. In 1958, it almost took power in Iraq, and indeed, were it not for the Stalinist misleadership that handed power to the nationalists led by Kasem, it would have done. The adoption by Arab workers of an internationalist position rather than a nationalist, religious one is essential. Such an internationalist perspective should include the recognition of the existence of the Israeli nation and the rights of the Jewish working class and poor to a common, secured, future with their Arab brothers and sisters. It would be an important step in struggling for their own interests. At the same time, it would be a great help in assisting Israeli Jewish workers to turn against their own ruling class and its state. Socialists in the Arab

states, while participating in the struggle against the rulers of Israel their bosses in Washington and their Arab collaborators, have the duty to struggle in the mass movement for an internationalist perspective.

Whether the Arab masses recognise the right of a Jewish Israel nation to exist or not, socialists in Israel should join in a common movement struggling to influence the Jewish working class with an action programme. Some key elements of such a programme are:

- Defeat the Israeli army which acts in the service of US imperialism and the rulers of Israel!
- End the collective punishment of the Palestinians by Israel!
- All Jewish settlers out of the Occupied Territories! Israel to withdraw from these territories and from southern Lebanon!
- Release all Palestinian prisoners, including those of HAMAS!
- For the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland in Israel and be compensated for property stolen from 1948 onwards!

Only class unity forged in the struggle for the realisation of these and similar democratic and transitional demands can open the road to a common workers' state for both the Palestinian and Jewish Israeli nations in historic Palestine, as part of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

In defence of MARXISM

Theoretical Journal of
the Leninist-Trotskyist
Tendency

No.4 NOW AVAILABLE

The Method of the
United Front Today

Price £2 from LTT, PO Box
7268, London E10 6TX