

UN out of Bosnia!

By Adie Kemp

WOULDN'T it be nice if there were some organisation that could go into the world's trouble spots with an open mind and solve the problems? And wouldn't it be nice if that organisation had some military strength to go in on the ground and protect people? There are a lot of people who think that we already have such an organisation, and it is called the United Nations.

However, the reality is somewhat different. Right from its inception after the Second World War, the UN was designed to have a very particular axe to grind — to maintain the status quo. The status quo is often quite barbaric, and cruel to a large mass of people. But the driving forces behind setting up and maintaining the UN are precisely those powers who have most to gain from the status quo — the United States, China, France, Britain, and the former Soviet Union.

The situation in Bosnia at the moment is a tragic case in point. UN involvement in the conflict in former Yugoslavia has been far worse than useless. Because the primary aim of the UN has been to strive for some kind of stability as quickly as possible, the objective result has been to make the UN an accessory to Serbian aggression simply because the Serbs appeared best placed to achieve that stability. However, the strategy of stability at any price has been hampered by the need to respond to the public outcry at the barbarity of the war, fuelled by the media who know a good story when they see one.

This leads the UN into fatal errors like the safe havens policy — persuading thousands of people to move into particular areas on the false promise that they will be protected by UN forces. The harsh consequences of that mistake were learnt by the Bosnian people killed or driven out of the safe havens when they were over-run by the Bosnian Serb army.

The UN's intervention in Bosnia is worse than useless, it is positively harmful. Instead of giving any sort of protection to the people defending their homes in Bosnia, it gives the dangerous false comfort of safe havens, and the real sting in the tail is that UN involvement is on the basis of an arms embargo which leaves the Bosnians caught in a terrible position — reliant on an organisation that does not want to defend them, and with no way to defend themselves.

The UN is incapable of providing justice for the people of Bosnia. The only way to get that, is for the Bosnians to take it for themselves. The only thing the UN can do to speed that process along is to get out of Bosnia altogether.

Unfair to Serge

By Tony Dale

REVIEWING "The Serge-Trotsky Papers" Cathy Nugent's conclusion was "Serge's doubts about the "Leninist" party, and reactions to the problems of Soviet power began to dominate his thinking... Serge's views changed after he settled in the West. It seems this was because he succumbed to the pressures of his time... Serge

was a centrist". (*Workers' Liberty* no 23)

Cathy is far too harsh in her assessment of Serge culminating in denouncing Serge as a centrist. Serge was a revolutionary who made serious mistakes on important issues in the 1930s but remained committed to the cause of socialist revolution.

What was Trotsky's assessment? "You have remained in the ranks of the opposition without hesitating in the midst of unprecedented repression when those less firm than you capitulated one after another... You will be among those whose name will be forever linked with the renaissance of the working class's struggle for liberation," Trotsky stated in an open letter in 1937. In 1939 Trotsky wrote to Serge "I have not lost hope of seeing you return to the path of the Fourth International".

Trotsky had sharp disagreements with Serge over Kronstadt, the Popular Fronts, the POUM, and the Fourth International. On these issues Trotsky was by and large correct, but not 100% correct all the time. A more honest balance sheet is needed than the one presented by Cathy's review.

Moreover, the differences between the two were exacerbated by the interference of Stalin's secret police and the antics of some factional-

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ists within the Trotskyist movement.

I believe one of the most convincing arguments ever put forward to defend the suppression of the sailors' revolt at Kronstadt, near Leningrad, in 1921, was by Victor Serge. "Let us suppose briefly that the Kronstadt mutiny had turned out to be victorious. Its results would have been immediate chaos, the terrible kindling of a civil war".

Serge defended the repression against other opponents of the Bolshevik government such as the left SRs and the anarchists. He accepted the Bolsheviks had little choice. Those groups had taken up arms to overthrow the government, and "the revolution has the right and the duty to defend itself against those who, even with the best intentions, try to shoot it in the back".

The reason why Serge's defence of the Bolshevik repression is so convincing is his political background. Victor Serge came to the Bolsheviks from an anarchist background. He arrived in Russia in 1919 following his experiences in the failed revolution in Barcelona in 1917, where the anarchists and anarchosyndicalists dominated the revolutionary movement. He saw that the success in Russia was in no small part due to the Bolsheviks. Their influence had ensured a workers' victory while the "anarchists have behaved like kids or lunatics".

Serge broke from the anarchists, became a

prominent supporter of Bolsheviks and worked in the Communist International. When Stalin took over, Serge joined Trotsky's Left Opposition. He worked tirelessly to try and open up the debate within Stalin's Communist Party. He faced internal exile. He was released and deported thanks to international protests. Otherwise he would have faced certain death alongside the other Oppositionists held in Stalin's jails.

Serge believed in the Bolsheviks and the Revolution. He also believed revolutionary Marxists had a double duty to defend the revolution, from the external threat of counter-revolution but also from the internal threat, bureaucratic reaction. "This defence is a double one: defence externally and defence inwardly".

It was only much later in his life, in 1947, that Serge concluded that "beyond the borders of Russia, the Bolshevik idea of the party has failed completely". He arrived at this wrong conclusion after experiencing the far from perfect Trotskyist movement of the late 1930s and 1940s.

In the 1930s Serge was full of hope and spirit for the fight for healthy democratic Marxism against the poisoned counterfeit "Marxism" being hawked around by the Stalinists. In 1936, after Serge's deportation from Russia, he wrote to Trotsky giving him a full report on the discussions and views of the Oppositionists in internal exile inside Russia:

"Since we had no illusions in the Third International, we did not have to debate the principle of the Fourth". Serge wrote, giving his backing in principle to the launch of a new revolutionary International. He wanted an International which would be a "rallying point for groupings which will be serious enough to give it some solidity".

Before 1933, the year of the debacle in Germany when the Communist Party did nothing to stop Hitler coming to power, Trotsky opposed those of his supporters who had argued for a break from the CPs and for a new International. In 1933 and for a period after Trotsky hoped to form a broad new International within which the Trotskyists would just be one tendency. By the late 1930s, however organisations such as the ILP had clearly moved away from the Trotskyists. The Fourth International launched in 1938 was much weaker than Trotsky and his comrades had hoped.

Serge opposed the launch of the Fourth International: "I am convinced that one cannot build an International while there are no parties... One should not play with the words "party" and "international"... the solution, I believe, lies in an alliance with all the left-wing currents of the workers' movement (its platform: the class struggle and internationalism)".

Other people in the Left Opposition tradition shared Serge's misgivings. At the 1938 founding conference the Polish delegates argued against launching the Fourth International.

Despite the problems which beset the project, Trotsky was right to argue for the movement to declare itself the Fourth International.

In the late 1930's, with world war approaching, the declaration of the Fourth International announced their intention to fill the vacancy for a democratic revolutionary socialist voice for workers, independent from the big world pow-

ers. The launch of the International was important to sharply and clearly declare the Trotskyists as a distinct tendency, ideologically demarcated from both Stalinism and reformist Social Democracy.

Serge's criticisms would seem to have been confirmed by the crisis in the Trotskyist movement after World War 2. But nothing was inevitable. In 1938 Trotsky was right to persuade the movement to declare itself the Fourth International. The later problems were due to political weaknesses, not to the decision for the Fourth International.

So Serge was wrong to oppose Trotsky's position on the Fourth International — but other revolutionary socialists had made the same mistake. Rosa Luxemburg had opposed Lenin's moves to launch the Third International.

Serge's opposition to the launch of the Fourth International followed a number of disputes over the Popular Front in France, the Popular Front in Spain, and the POUM.

The Popular Front, a coalition between the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the capitalist Radical Party, formed the French government in 1936 against a backdrop of huge social upheaval. The Popular Front's programme was far from radical. The role of the workers' parties was to hold back workers' demands and support a pro-capitalist programme so as not to alienate their coalition partners.

Trotsky was rightly scathing about the Popular Front, comparing it to the February 1917 government in revolutionary Russia. It was fundamentally an anti-revolutionary alliance at a time when France was being rocked by a mass strike wave.

Serge was not as hostile as Trotsky to the Popular Front. He saw the mass strike wave as part of the recovery of the French working class, and not a potentially revolutionary situation. His policy towards the Popular Front was to "transform the popular front from an instrument of class collaboration into one of class struggle."

Some people present Serge's position as if he had a simple position of support for the Popular Front. Serge did say that it "can be a useful transitional form which will allow workers to enter the later phases of the struggle with greater possibilities." But his position was more critical. He advocated a "split with bourgeois or bourgeois-demonstrated elements and the regrouping of the working-class forces around a revolutionary programme."

Serge admitted in later years that Trotsky had been right: "Trotsky wrote... that the Popular Front was leading to disaster, and I disagreed, wrongly, for at that juncture he saw far and true."

The biggest and most important area of dispute between Trotsky and Serge was Spain and the POUM.

The Spanish Left Opposition, formed in 1930, was one of the more influential Left Opposition sections. Andrés Nin, one of the main leaders, had a long and important association with the Bolsheviks. Like Serge, he was a well known "Trotskyist".

In 1931 a dispute broke out between Nin and Trotsky over whether the Trotskyists should solely concentrate on the Communist Parties. Nin was in favour of a more open profile and didn't want to be seen as an expelled faction of the CP. In Spain the CP was weaker than in

many countries, and there was a dissident Catalan Communist organisation, the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc.

Nin also disagreed with Trotsky's proposals for his supporters to enter the Socialist Parties. This was one of Nin's most serious mistakes, as the Socialist youth organisation eventually joined the Stalinists. Instead, Nin wanted to join up with the Catalan dissident Communists. In 1935 the Spanish Trotskyists merged with them to form the POUM, the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification.

The POUM, after initially being critical, signed up for the Popular Front's election platform in 1936. After the election they re-adopted a semi-critical position. They then joined the Catalan coalition government, with Nin becoming the Minister of Justice. The POUM were all over the place on the Popular Front.

In May 1937 the Stalinists moved in to attack the POUM and the anarchists in Barcelona. The leadership of the POUM and the anarchists seemed gripped by a fatal pessimism. The opportunity to take power in Barcelona and defeat the Stalinist repression was squandered. The POUM paid for this in bloody repression. Nin was murdered by the Stalinists.

At the end Trotsky saw the POUM's obsession with having "their own trade unions and their own militia which guarded their own institution or occupied their own section of the front" as "isolating the revolutionary vanguard from the class."

The POUM, despite being a committed anti-Stalinist organisation with wide support and 40,000 members, made fatal mistakes. Trotsky saw the POUM as centrist. Even then he recognised the heroism and commitment of many of its leaders and members. After the murder of Nin, Trotsky wrote "Nin is an old and incorruptible revolutionary... He tried to defend the independence of the Spanish proletariat from the diplomatic machinations and intrigues of the clique that holds power in Moscow."

"POUM is the only healthy, mass organisation there and [I] believe that despite its many mistakes it behaves splendidly on the whole" argued Serge, and he eventually joined the POUM as a sign of solidarity. He repeated his confused position on the Popular Front. But that is not quite the end of the story.

On many day-to-day issues, there was agreement between Trotsky and Serge. In July 1936 Trotsky stated "Your practical suggestions on Spain are excellent, they fully agree with our line... there is real common ground between us." Serge proposed a united front between the CNT-FAI (anarchist/syndicalist organisations) and the POUM. He suggested "launch the slogan of workers' control in the army". Trotsky replied "The most important thing now would be to find organic forms of collaboration between the POUM and the unions in Catalonia." So there were some important areas of agreement on Spain, even if the two were seriously divided on the question of the POUM.

On the issues in dispute Trotsky was usually in the right. Does this make Serge a centrist? I don't think so. He was a committed revolutionary who faced repression and the threat of death all his political life. Throughout he maintained a fight for a socialism based on workers' self liberation.

We have a double duty to Victor Serge — to

analyse and learn from his mistakes, but also to defend him as one of our own. He was a revolutionary committed to anti-Stalinist socialism from below. Was Serge a centrist? No, he was a revolutionary socialist who made a number of important mistakes.

Any questions? Please leave

By Jack Milton

I WRITE in response to the invitation in WZ23 for contributions to a 'completely free' discussion about the SWP.

The SWP came to Barton Hill in Bristol asking, "Will there be a Revolution?" The answer to that is "yes" — but you would think that if you're going to hold a meeting with that title you would have something to say about capitalism digging its own grave (as Marx and Engels explain), or have a go at explaining the over-production crisis of imperialism and the need to build a cadre party steered in Leninism, giving a correct lead in the fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat. None of this got a mention, however.

The problems of imperialism mount daily. As over-production grips the world and vast amounts of surplus capital must seek more and more profit, leading to trade war, and on to shooting war (world war part III), you can see that the economic crisis that's hitting Mexico now is just the tip of the iceberg of the problems that imperialism is going to face in the near future.

Meanwhile back in this part of the globe, as the British bourgeoisie's influence and fortunes decline, the Tories are all at sea over where Britain's best interests lie in the impending trade war, whether to get behind a Europe dominated by Germany, or stick with USA, or become little Englanders.

Whatever avenue the British bourgeoisie takes, it must take on the working class and its allies. With the unification of Ireland on the cards (with snail's pace withdrawal by British imperialism from the north-east of Ireland), this will be a big obstacle out of the way for the British working class. As Marx, Engels and Lenin said, no country that suppresses another can be free itself.

Confronted with these fundamental Marxist-Leninist questions on the crisis of imperialism (over-production) and Ireland, the SWP had no answer.

When someone asked them to defend their paper's line on Ireland, they complained that the meeting was being 'disrupted' and the questioner should leave. When he subsequently left they did not defend their paper's line or answer any of the questions put forward to them.

Any party with an ounce of salt in

them calling a meeting titled "Will there be a revolution?" should talk about the crisis of imperialism and the problems of over-production in front of the working class; and what the implications of the pending victory of the bourgeois national liberation struggle in Ireland are for the British working class. Instead, the SWP only talked trade union conformism and shallow anti-communism.

The working class will have a lot more burning questions as the imperialist crisis unfolds which the SWP are not going to be able to answer.

The right side of armed struggle

By John McNulty

ANNIE O'KEEFFE (Workers' Liberty 23) starts off by getting my name wrong. The rest of her letter goes rapidly downhill from there.

She asks a thoroughly fatuous question, breathing moralistic idealism: "Can socialists 'forgive' people who have been sectarian paramilitaries; if they 'convert' to socialism can socialists work with them?"

Damned if I know or care! I never asked such a question. The Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme is not engaged in quasi-religious speculation but in real concrete politics. What we did do was condemn Militant for inviting Billy Hutchinson of the PUP onto their platform. Billy is not any hypothetical "former paramilitary." He is the living breathing spokesperson for the PUP — a hastily cobbled together front for the very real and concrete UVF. Let me assure you that there is nothing "former" about this far-right death squad or its links with fascist groups throughout Europe.

Do Billy and his group have a part to play in advancing socialism? May I dare to suggest that the answer is possibly not? Should socialists give them a platform? No way!

The moralistic idealism — the very antithesis of Marxism — with which she begins her letter is used to plunge new depths. Essentially she asks if the Provisionals have committed atrocities. The answer is yes. This is used to draw an equals sign between them and the far right death squads of the UVF and UDA, who throughout their history have not had any practice other than the random killing of Catholics. What a useful question! It's guaranteed to put you on the wrong side of the barricades of any progressive struggle involving the use of arms anywhere in the world.

Then we get to the heart of the matter. The Provos are wrong because they demand the right of the Irish people to self-determination. An equals sign is put between this and Unionist support for the British occupation. The struggle is one between communities and it turns out that British imperialism was right all along! They really were "piggy in the middle" acting out of a humanitarian concern that the mad Irish would create a bloodbath! The long list of draconian measures and suspension of democratic rights were all aimed at republicans. Loyalist killers held dual membership with

the British armed forces. Death squads were able to paper the streets with intelligence details on nationalists made freely available to them by the state forces. These real facts don't matter because Annie O'Keeffe can analyse the situation in terms of what she patronisingly decides to put into the heads of the participants.

Historical facts, like the fact that the present troubles began when the nationalist minority set aside the demand for national self-determination, demanded British rights in a British state and were met with sectarian pogroms supported by the state forces, these can be set aside while we consider the platonic equations dreamed up by Ms O'Keeffe.

I have been involved in the struggle in Ireland for almost 30 years. I never dreamt that I was acting for "Catholic communalist goals." I believed that my actions were part of a body of praxis called Marxism. I would have great difficulty in setting that body of knowledge aside. Given the theoretical weapons deployed by Annie O'Keeffe, she should have no such difficulty.

"Revolutionary History"

By Sam Lewy

I WOULD LIKE to contribute to the discussion on *Revolutionary History*. In its earlier days I was a fairly active member of the editorial board.

I remember hearing on the TV an interview and discussion between the late EP Thompson and Tariq Ali. The point that struck me most was Thompson's admission that he missed the intellectual milieu and even the organisational structure that he found in the CP. In other words as a political writer he felt the need to be rooted. Historically this has been the basis for the development of Marxist ideology. The great examples was *Die Neue Zeit*, the journal of German Social Democracy at the turn of the century up to 1914. All the creative thinkers of the Marxist movements contributed, adding to our now accepted understanding. No doubt there was also dross produced, but that is par for the course. Again the various journals of the Bolshevik party up to the early thirties, but particularly in the twenties, also developed our understanding of Marxism further, for example the polemic on the long wave theory.

These organisations expressed the aims and ideals of developing Marxism, which means to me today Trotskyism. However today Trotskyism is fragmented; our differences make it impossible to work together even when we have a common interest.

To give an example, we all face the ridiculous position that much of the writings of Trotsky in English are held under copyright by Jack Barnes and the American SWP, who, after expelling the Trotskyists who actually did the translation, now deliberately overcharge for these translations. We are compelled to pay danegeld to those gangsters.

One would think that either individually or collectively we could have a new and more up to date translation, or if not, an agreement with the French Trotskyists to acquire their translations. Here is an example where the collective interests of the Trotskyist movement are not realisable because of divisions.

In this context the aims of *Revolutionary History* seem laudable and justified. Also, in Al Richardson they seem to have an editor of energy and drive. Because of its independence it can no doubt have a wider range than the official journals that operate now.

However, as Trotsky was fond of saying, truth is concrete. It is in this context that it should be measured.

Does *Revolutionary History* fulfil the role as an instrument of Trotskyist education and development? In my opinion it has good and bad parts. But does it help and enlighten the Trotskyist movement, or the opposite? In my opinion it is the opposite. It seems the key core writers around Al Richardson are definitely anti-Trotskyist, from a reactionary angle — such writers as Mike Jones, Walter Kendall and sympathetic associates such as Robin Blick. Whilst the writings of Richardson have a halfway house atmosphere, in my opinion his political book reviews are shocking.

Of course the question is democracy, or so it is claimed. This I doubt. I'm all for full participation of all revolutionary tendencies like anarchists and syndicalists. I am equally happy for anti-Trotskyists to give a criticism of a Trotskyist journal and get back at least as much as they gave. But what I am against is anti-Trotskyists playing a key role in a journal which claims to be based on revolutionary Marxism.

To give a couple of examples: one of the earliest articles by Mike Jones was an article of 11,000 to 12,000 words on Germany. When I wrote a critique of 3,500 to 4,000 words it was not published on the grounds of being too long. When criticism is published of his various articles, one notes whilst the criticism is one page the reply is often 3 to 4 pages. Also it must be pointed out there is at least one article and one reply of Mike Jones in every issue of *Revolutionary History*.

Again we have Walter Kendall as the authority on Communism and Trotsky. His anti-Trotsky phobia is well known. If one wants to get an anti-Trotskyist "authority", why not get a normal bourgeois one?

In my opinion what goes under the name of democracy is an abuse and distortion of the function of a revolutionary political journal. *Revolutionary History* had definite political possibilities in its creation. It could have filled a role not filled by the various Trotskyist journals. It has done some good things, like dealing with the history of Trotskyist movements in various countries. When it is coupled with material by people like Mike Jones, Walter Kendall and Robin Blick, even that good part becomes corroded by the linkage.

I think *Revolutionary History* has lost its way.