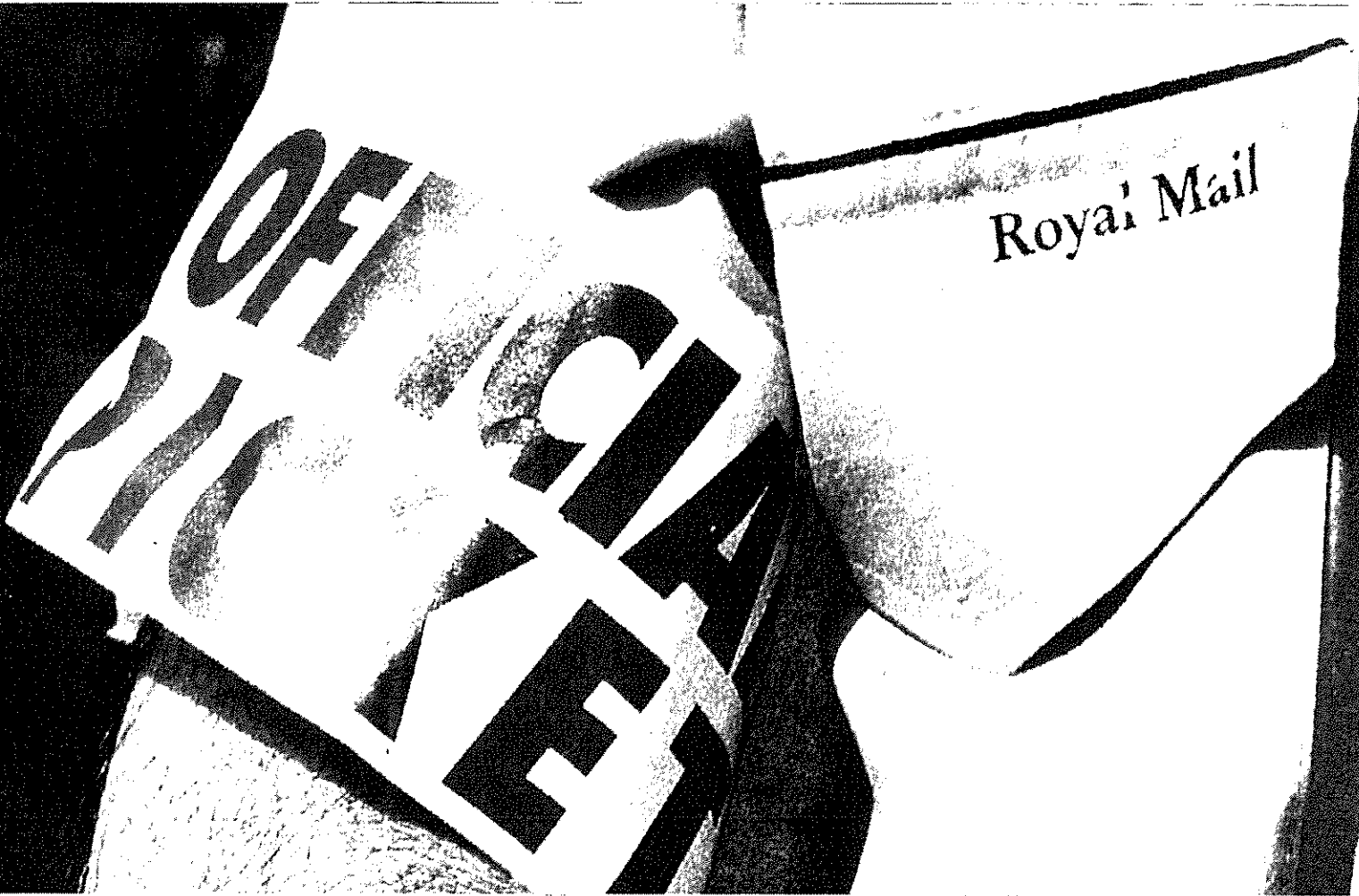


# Workers' Liberty

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself



**Free trade unions**

# The nightmare haunting Blair

**The future for Hong Kong 1972: When workers beat the anti-union laws  
The real history of IS Neville Alexander on internationalism**

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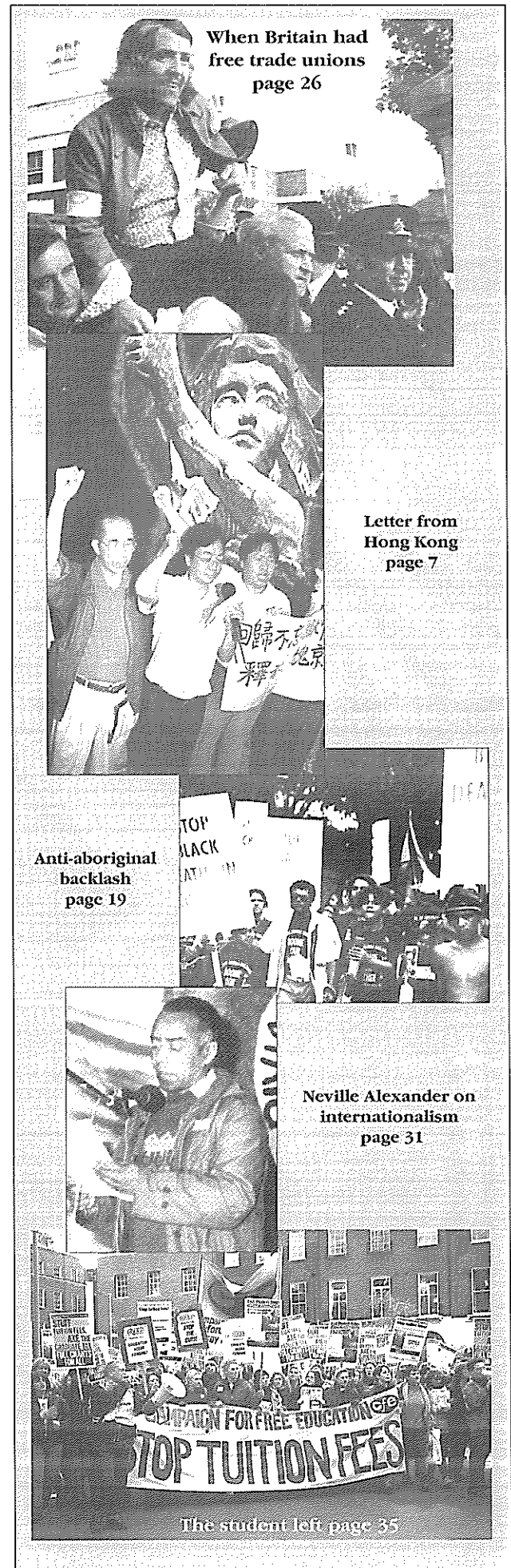
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# Why Blair fears strong unions

**W**E live in a society in which it is illegal for a group of low paid hospital cleaners — the Hillingdon strikers for example — facing a severe pay cut to appeal to other hospital workers, nurses, porters, lab technicians, to take industrial action alongside them. It is illegal for these same cleaners to appeal to other workers employed by the same spiv contractor to take similar action. If more than six of these cleaners turn up on the picket line that too is illegal.

Meanwhile it is not illegal for people to be suddenly sacked after working for an employer for one year, eleven months and thirty days, and have no legal redress and no way of winning the job back. Nor is it illegal for an employer to sack the entire workforce simply for daring in a secret ballot to vote to strike and then act on that vote. No financial penalties are proposed against British Airways, who have threatened to sack thousands of cabin crew members simply for going on strike. Nor are any financial penalties proposed against the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, which has sacked 500 dockers simply for refusing to cross a picket line.

This is blatant class legislation, designed to make it easier for bosses to exploit workers, yet the leaders of the Labour Party claim it is fair and democratic.

In Britain today capitalist democracy is limited far more than in most countries throughout the world where similar bourgeois democratic systems exist.

In Britain today it is more difficult for workers to use effectively their numbers, organisation and solidarity to maintain their own living standards and the general level of culture as expressed through things like the NHS, than it is for workers in places like France which lack our anti-union laws.

In Britain today there exists a special apparatus of law which is specifically designed to intervene into the terms of the bargain over the labour contract — wage rates — by limiting the ability of workers to effectively organise through trade unions in order to regulate collectively the selling

price of their own labour power.

The anti-union laws introduced by the Tories since 1979 are designed to ensure that the “fair exchange” between the owners of capital and the owners of labour power is even more “fair” — from a capitalist point of view — than it is in those countries that have a relatively untrammelled labour movement. The anti-union laws function to keep the working class as atomised and disorganised as is possible within the framework of a capitalist democracy and without resorting to the full scale banning of the trade union movement.

## II

**L**OOK at the realities of the “free exchange” between labour and capital in Britain today. Building on the basic all-shaping fact that the owners of the means of production monopolise the means of life, forcing people to either work for them or face unemployment, poverty or homelessness (the average “well-off” worker with a mortgage is perhaps six months away from having their home repossessed should they find themselves jobless), the law gives additional protection to the capitalist while limiting the ability of workers to come together effectively for mutual self protection:

● Workers have no right to reinstatement even if an industrial tribunal declares that they have been unfairly dismissed.

● Part-time, temporary and zero hours contract workers lack even the right to take issues to an industrial tribunal. So does any worker

who has not been with the same employer for at least two years. With the spread of “flexible” working, perhaps 40% of the working population now lacks even this protection.

● As the Liverpool dockers and the British Airways workers know, there is no secure right to strike. Workers can be sacked for breach of contract if they go on strike even after abiding by all the intricacies of the law regarding balloting.

● The trade union is liable to fines and the seizure of its assets if its members go on strike, unless it does the following:

● The trade union is liable to fines and the seizure of its assets if its members go on strike, unless it does the following:

**“The anti-union laws function to keep the working class as atomised and disorganised as is possible within the framework of a capitalist democracy and without resorting to the full scale banning of the trade union movement.”**

- Informs the employer of the name, home address and National Insurance number of every member balloted. If there is more than a tiny number of inaccuracies, then the whole ballot can be declared invalid.

- Gives the employer at least seven days' notice of the start of strike action.

- Disowns any walk-outs that its members may be involved in as a protest against management attacks and victimisations during the course of the dispute.

- It is entirely unlawful for workers to take strike action and even to ballot for strike action in the following cases:

- In protest against government policy, even when employed by the government.

- In solidarity with another group of workers — such as nurses — who may lack industrial muscle themselves.

- In support of workers in the same workplace who may work for contractors or for a bogus "separate" company in the same workplace.

- To win the re-instatement of workers sacked for taking part in "unofficial action".

These anti union laws — and we have only detailed a fraction of them — amount to the biggest restriction on democracy in Britain today. They hold the working class movement down and prevent it from responding to injustice according to the principle of class solidarity.

## Positive rights, or legal immunities?

**S**OME comrades argue that it is wrong to campaign for positive legal rights for workers because in doing so we accept the right of the bosses' state to interfere in the trade union movement.

This argument is based on a healthy contempt for the bosses and their state, but it is mistaken.

Immunity for trade unionists from legal action by the employers for damages resulting from industrial action is certainly something we should seek to establish. It is not counterposed to winning positive legal rights, such as the right to strike without fear of victimisation or the sack. Though it would be a huge victory to win legal immunity, that would still not necessarily protect the weakest sections of workers, those who lack industrial muscle and can easily be replaced by scabs.

Bringing in a law which prevented bosses from sacking strikers would massively change the balance of power in the workplace in our favour. For the first time ever there would be a real, legally enforceable right to strike, something that workers in Britain have never enjoyed, not even at the height of shop steward power in the Sixties.

Therefore, the fight for positive legal rights should be seen as a way of copper-bottoming the new freedoms we will win when we win the repeal of the anti-union laws.

They function to stop the working class forming itself into an effective class movement that can organise around the watchwords, "An injury to one is an injury to all!". They are testimony to the fact that contemporary capitalism requires not just a "free" economy but a strong state and a compliant trade union officialdom to police these laws and dis-organise their own membership.

They reveal that while capitalism may be moving away from giant state monopolies to privatisation it now requires more, not less, direct state intervention into — and regulation of — the basic Wage Labour/Capital relationship.

When Tony Blair declares that he is in favour of "fairness, not favours" for the trade union movement, he is telling the truth. It is just that the kind of fairness he has in mind is that which is imposed on the working class through authoritarian laws, a de-regulated "flexible" labour market and the capitalist monopolisation of the social means of production. He calls it fairness, we call it exploitation.

### III

**T**ONY Blair has made no secret of his intention that the Labour government will keep in place the essential core of the Tory anti-union laws. He has quite rightly described them as the most restrictive in Western Europe. But Blair sees this as a recommendation not a criticism.

It is not difficult to fathom why. The maintenance of the framework of anti-union law is absolutely vital to New Labour's economic strategy. Without the existing restrictions on cross union industrial action, and particularly on cross public sector industrial action, Gordon Brown's plan to keep to the Tories' public spending limits might well be blown apart by a wave of French-style industrial action.

If the anti-trade union laws were repealed, it would open up the possibility of a major re-assertion of trade union strength. Those sections of the working class that are already unionised would feel greatly strengthened, while it would be possible to launch an aggressive unionisation drive in the unorganised sectors.

Quite simply, the New Labour project of modernising British capitalism requires the use of the anti-union laws as an instrument of economic policy. The "Tory anti-union laws" are now "Labour's anti-union laws". For all their talk of skills and training, the key movers behind the government's economic strategy are united in wanting to make the British labour market more like the American, and less like the European. That means expanding the size of the lowest paid

## Workers' Liberty



**THE WORKING CLASS WILL RISE AGAIN!**

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sector of the working class and breaking the protective arrangements for public sector workers presently in existence. Blair works to transform the core of the British working class into a low paid, insecure, rightless and unorganised mass whose lives are to be expended in the service of the capitalist Gods, "Flexibility" and "Globalisation".

That is why the trade union leaders are seriously mistaken in their "strategy". They hope gradually to win a few key reforms, over two whole terms of New Labour government — over 10 years! The TUC "left" pursues a strategy designed to secure repeal of the laws by the back door, and without upsetting Blair! The facts of trade union life were shown to Blair's favourite trade union leader Alan Johnson, formerly of the postalworkers' union, the CWU, by the Prime Minister's reaction when Johnson dared to raise the question of the anti-union laws on Labour's NEC.

Johnson argued that the draft Labour election manifesto lacked many reforms that are supposed to be established Labour Party policy — reforms previously supported by the NEC and even by Blair himself. The former CWU leader then went on to remind Blair that the trade union laws really are restrictive, vindictive, etc. Blair said nothing. But immediately afterwards he began to stress in public how much he supports "the most restrictive anti-union laws in the western world". Blair was telling the trade union leaders where they stood. And they just stood and took it.

**T**HE decisive question is: will Blair's hard nosed response provoke workers into raising the issue of the anti-union laws, or will it serve to further demoralise activists? The answer to that question will depend on what the serious left in the trade unions does in the days, weeks and months ahead. If we can succeed in building up a head of steam around the issue of the anti-union laws and link it to the immediate struggles of groups of workers like the Liverpool dockers, the Magnet strikers, and others, then we can make sure that the anti-union laws become an issue that refuses to go away. That's why the conference *We Need Free Trade Unions* in Liverpool, on 19 July, is so important.

The conference has been called jointly by Liverpool UNISON and the Welfare State Network. Liverpool UNISON are currently on the verge of a test case strike against the closure of old people's homes by a Labour council. The WSN is the major labour movement-based campaigning body defending the welfare state.

The conference is supported by all the major groups of workers currently engaged in battle: Liverpool dockers, Magnet Kitchens, Critchley Labels, Hillingdon Hospital, Project Aerospace, London postalworkers. It has the backing of the Trade Union Left Alliance, which unites all the Broad Lefts and rank and file groups across the unions. It is supported by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, which brings together the rank and file of the Labour left.

If the conference can succeed in bringing together a united, trade-union based, rank and file campaign that can work inside both the Labour Party and the unions, and actively promote physical support in solidarity with workers in struggle, then the trade union left will have regained something that it has lacked for a very long time — a coherent sense of political purpose.

The perspective of pressing ahead with a campaign that may not immediately promise spectacular results is not popular with some on the trade union and Labour left. They seek "good left wing causes" that won't create conflict with Blair. This issue cannot be ducked, however. Free trade unions — restoring to the working class the legal right to act in its own interests — are not an optional extra!

The campaign to free our unions is an irreplaceable part of the battle to transform and remake the entire workers' movement. Even limited progress in building up a demand in the working class for free trade unions will do an awful lot to put real movement back into the labour movement. And that will only be the beginning!

## Report from Germany

By Bertolt Brecht

We learn that in Germany  
 In the days of the brown plague  
 On the roof of an engineering works suddenly  
 A red flag fluttered in the November wind  
 The outlawed flag of freedom!  
 In the grey mid-November from the sky  
 Fell rain mixed with snow  
 It was the 7th, though: day of the Revolution!

And look! the red flag!

The workers stand in the yards  
 Shield their eyes with their hands and stare  
 At the roof through the flurries of icy rain.

Then lorries roll up filled with stormtroopers  
 And they drive to the wall any who wear work clothes  
 And with cords bind any fists that are calloused  
 And from the sheds after their interrogation  
 Stumble the beaten and bloody  
 Not one of whom has named the man  
 Who was on the roof.

So they drive away those who kept silent  
 And the rest have had enough.  
 But next day there waves again  
 The red flag of the proletariat  
 On the engineering works roof. Again  
 Thuds through the dead-still town  
 The stormtroopers' tread. In the yards  
 There are no men to be seen now. Only women  
 Stand with stony faces; hands shielding their eyes, they gaze  
 At the roof through the flurries of icy rain.

And the beatings begin once more. Under interrogation  
 The women testify: that flag  
 Is a bedsheet in which  
 We bore away one who died yesterday.  
 You can't blame us for the colour it is.  
 It is red with the murdered man's blood, you should know.

# After the two Irish elections

**T**HE two recent polls in Ireland, in the North on 1 May as part of the UK elections, and in the Republic on 6 June, suggest that many people in Ireland blame the British government for stonewalling.

The Provisional IRA's short ceasefire, and indeed all the efforts at negotiation and politicking since the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, have delivered no visible progress in Northern Ireland. In the North, the Provisionals won two seats, and in the South, one.

Caoimhghín O'Caoláin, elected with 19% of the vote in the five-seat border constituency of Cavan-Monaghan, will become the first Sinn Féin member to take his or her seat in the Dail since 1922, in a move which may sharpen the long-simmering division between politicians and militarists in the Provisional movement.

Fianna Fáil, traditionally the more nationalist of the major parties, has regained office from a coalition led by the less-nationalist Fine Gael.

Fianna Fáil will govern in coalition with the economic-rationalist Progressive Democrats; and it would be foolish to see the nationalist swing as likely to help break the political and social impasse in Ireland.

The swing was in any case slight. Fianna Fáil gained few votes. Sinn Féin still gets only 2.5% of the first preference votes in the Republic.

More fundamentally, all there is on offer from nationalist politics at present is the plan (backed, with variations, by all the major parties in the UK and the Irish Republic, and by the majority Catholic party, the SDLP, in Northern Ireland) for gradually-knitted links between North and South in the framework of and on the model of the European Union.

The fierce, concentrated and resilient resistance of the Protestant or Anglo-Scots majority in north-east Ireland to any subordination of their community to the island's Catholic-Gaelic majority stands in the way of any more radical or rapid nationalist moves. The Provisionals have, in effect, turned to a strategy of demanding that the British state, urged on by Dublin, overwhelm that resistance. No British government, nor any Dublin government wants to try that. They probably could not do it if they tried, and even if they should succeed that would produce no better than a renewed version of the current communal conflict, where the aggrieved minority would be the Northern Protestants (in all Ireland) rather than the Northern Catholics (in Northern Ireland).

Real progress, both on social issues and on the national and communal questions, depends on developing at least a degree of working-class unity and independent working-class politics. On this front the election results from the Republic were, if not unambiguously hopeful, at least interesting.

The big gainers in the poll were the independent and smaller-party candidates, winning a total 9.8% of the first preferences. Two Greens were elected to the Dail. In Dublin West, Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) gained one of the constituency's four seats, with 16% of the first preference votes.

These gains for left-wing candidates came at the expense of the established left parties. The Labour Party declined from 19% of first preferences overall to 10%. The Democratic Left — the bulk of what was the Workers' Party, which, originating from the Republican movement but moving in a sharply anti-nationalist direction, at one time outstripped the Labour Party as a left-wing alternative in Dublin electorates — continued its decline, going from 2.8% to 2.5%. Both Labour and the Democratic Left had been in coalition with Fine Gael. The Workers' Party rump got only 0.4%.

**Y**ET the fact is that the voters moving from Labour and the Democratic Left remained on the left. It would be optimistic to see Joe Higgins's victory as one for the "bold socialist programme" which Militant used to promote in its heyday: a lot of his vote was personal, he stood as part of the Taxation Justice Alliance, and even the Socialist Party's own election manifesto was very limited.

It said nothing at all on Northern Ireland. There is some sense here: working-class voters in Dublin, as against rural Catholics in Cavan-Monaghan, are not moved by green flag-waving. Yet even in its journals and pamphlets the Socialist Party has few answers on the democratic issues. It has advocated a federal solution which would unite Ireland and give relief to the entrapped Northern Catholics while allowing autonomy to the north-eastern Protestants — but only as something which might be devised "after socialism", and certainly not as a platform for immediate working-class unity. But it is precisely as a means of giving an answer to "the constitutional question" — a united Ireland; a partitioned Ireland? — *now* and thus creating a basis for working-class unity across the Catholic-Protestant divide, that this idea is of vital importance to Irish workers! All qualifications granted, though, Higgins' victory is a hopeful sign.

## What is Workers' Liberty?



The key Marxist idea is that the class struggle takes place on the three levels of trade union and social struggle, political struggle and the combat of ideas guides the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty exists to fight and co-ordinate the class struggle on every front: our supporters work in the trade unions, the Labour Party, in single issue campaigns, in the students' union.

**"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex." Karl Marx**

**If you want to know more about the Alliance for Workers' Liberty write to PO Box, 823, London SE15 4NA.**

## Letter from Hong Kong

# Nothing to celebrate

**L**AST month Britain's last major colony was handed back to China, and a new Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China is about to be established. It should be an uplifting and proud occasion for Chinese people and for working people all over the world. It ought to be the end of 150 years of national humiliation, imperialist exploitation and racism, and a progressive step forward towards self-determination for Chinese people as a whole.

But it is nothing of the sort. It is not a fatal blow to imperialism, or real liberation from exploitation for workers in Hong Kong or China. This is a business-like handover to be celebrated by Big Business with much fireworks, fanfare, festivities, and financial bonanzas on the stock market. It is true that British imperialism will lose certain economic benefits in Hong Kong itself, but this is just the levelling of the playing field. It is merely the continued development of Hong Kong's economy, away from being a prop for Sterling in the '60s and becoming the third leg, after New York and London, of a round-the-clock world finance market. Both the Chinese regime and international capital, including British, are looking forward to the new opportunities for the super-exploitation of a new generation of Chinese workers now drawn into the nearby hinterland north of Hong Kong.

According to the Joint Declaration signed between Britain and China in 1984, Hong Kong as an SAR will enjoy a high degree of local autonomy and the rule of law for the next 50 years without change. The phrases coined by the Chinese regime led by Deng Xiaoping at the time were: "Hong Kong people will rule Hong Kong, and there will be One Country and Two Systems."

The 1984 deal was struck without consultation with the six million people in Hong Kong. The Tory government had agreed to hand over a compliant working population which had never enjoyed one person one vote, and a free market economy geared to meeting the needs of international capital. The agreement included the handing over by Britain of



Workers' rights will be the first target for the new regime

existing organs of local government and laws, including those which restrict freedom of speech, assembly, association and the right to strike and demonstrate. In return, China agreed to allow the Hong Kong economy to continue along existing lines. All was signed and sealed, except that the whole process received a nasty jolt, and what should have been a smooth transition had become an almighty wrangle.

**T**HE spanner in the works is Tiananmen, June 4th 1989. The bloody repression of the Chinese Democracy Movement by the Chinese People's Liberation Army under Party orders had transformed the political consciousness of Hong Kong people. Once out, they can never be put back inside the pressure cooker again. In their eyes, Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Communist Party had been responsible for "Chinese killing Chinese"; "the People's Army killing the

People". Hong Kong people followed every minute of those fateful weeks and days, cheered for democracy, demonstrated for the regime's downfall, and brought the city to a standstill time and time again when over a million spilled into the streets, in fighting mood and eventually in utter despair.

The shock was so much the greater for those who had fervently wished that Deng would bring about a more democratic and modern China. When Deng eventually died earlier this year without making it to Hong Kong, the mourning and open weeping of people here was genuine enough. I suspect most of them had felt depressed by the fact that Deng had in their eyes forfeited an honoured place in history by his terrible decision over

Tiananmen.

The rulers in Beijing were furious that Hong Kong had become a "centre for subversion". The millions of dollars raised in support for the democracy movement, plus the determined and disciplined work of Hong Kong activists and their contacts inside China had created an "underground railway" for hundreds of dissidents to escape capture and imprisonment. The campaign has defiantly held annual commemoration candlelit vigils, organised demonstrations and generally been a thorn in the side of both the Hong Kong government and Beijing.

The Hong Kong government realised that they were dealing with a volatile mass movement. There have not been many occasions in world history when over a million people are on the march; certainly none that the writer can recall in Chinese history at any time. They had no means at their disposal to suppress or even diffuse the angry protest in Hong

Kong. As for the political escapees, again it would have been extremely embarrassing for a hard talking right wing UK government to be seen collaborating with a communist regime at the height of its brutality by sending them back as illegal immigrants. The Hong Kong government rode along with the wave of popular protest, while seeking all ways and means of gradually toning it down and bringing matters under control.

**T**he UK Government and the West at first adopted either a wait-and-see or even an anti-communist triumphalist position, half expecting some further collapse in China after the dramatic disintegration of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Reassuring noises were made to Hong Kong people, and Chris Patten was appointed to be Hong Kong's last Governor probably as part of this agenda of exerting political pressure on the Chinese regime. A Bill of Rights, and Patten's package of electoral reforms were delivered to the people of Hong Kong in the early 90s.

However, as it became clear that the Chinese CP regime had survived its worst ever crisis, the Tory Government and its political representative in Hong Kong began to back-pedal. Beijing was by now furious, accusing the UK (quite correctly) of reneging on the unwritten understanding established in 1984, of keeping the lid on Hong Kong nice and tightly and keeping the economy buoyant. At the elections for the Hong Kong Legislative Council (Legco) of 1995, under the new framework introduced by Patten, there was a landslide victory for those forces

which have consistently supported the Chinese Democracy Movement, headed by the Democratic Party.

Beijing's response was to refuse to keep to their side of the handover agreement, to grant the 1995 Legco a "through train", ie allow it to serve its full four year term until 1999. Beijing insisted on ending the Democratic Party's dominant position on Legco. A Preparatory Committee of 400, handpicked by Beijing, representing conservative elements in the territory, was assembled to firstly "elect" the SAR's Chief Executive, and secondly to appoint a Provisional Legislature which will take over from Legco on July 1st 1997. The Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa is a local business tycoon with strong connections with Beijing (and a native of Shanghai, same as Chinese President Jiang Zemin). He was a member of Chris Patten's cabinet, and a conservative in every sense (he donated £50,000 to the Tory election fund in 1992). He is in favour of Hong Kong people "leaving June 4th behind", as well as restoring those repressive local laws on public order which Chris Patten had started to dismantle selectively. He has moved so rapidly toward being a Beijing rubber stamp since his "election", that the head of the local civil service Anson Chan has taken the unprecedented step of speaking out publicly, including an interview with *Newsweek*, stating her concerns and hinting at resignation.

The Provisional Legislature has been forced to meet in Shenzhen during the past months, for fear of being challenged as an unregistered society under existing laws. (These laws are quite draconian but

they have never been applied to the most important unregistered society of them all, the underground Hong Kong branch of the Chinese CP.. The latest row is that China intends to inaugurate the Provisional Legislature, along with the Chief Executive and the Chief Justice, at the handover ceremony. This has prompted the USA and then Tony Blair into boycotting the latter half of the ceremonial rituals.

**H**OW are the working people of Hong Kong reacting to all this? For a start, 50,000 people attended the June 4th commemoration event, in direct defiance of Tung Chee Hwa. This was more than the total in the past few years. University students have protested en masse against campus authorities in their fight to erect the "Pillar of Shame", a work of art commemorating the Tiananmen martyrs. The democracy movement supporters, including the Democratic Party and other parties, are planning to stage alternative protest events during the handover period. The bulk of organised labour are bureaucratically controlled by pro-Chinese CP forces, and these are generating a whole series of patriotic committees and events. There appears to be a quiet refusal by a lot of people to get involved in the numerous handover celebrations. There are also over 150,000 migrant workers in Hong Kong, largely from the Phillipines and Thailand, who are anxious to hang on to their jobs. The general mood seems to be one of being on guard, and waiting to see what will happen.

For the past months, the local media have largely been exercising self-censorship. The Hong Kong press is still relatively free in the Asia region, compared to Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia. The most likely scenario is that subtle economic pressure by conservative corporate powers will keep the local media compliant, rather than any high-profile heavy handed legal clamp-down.

More than ever, the fate of Hong Kong is closely linked to the fate of democratic and working class forces inside China. The new layers of workers recruited to Hong Kong-financed factories in Shenzhen and further inland will in time organise themselves in response to super-exploitation, and it will be in the best interests of democracy forces in Hong Kong to rally in support of their fellow workers across the border as well as supporting the right of migrant workers to stay in Hong Kong, and to oppose existing immigration controls which drive families apart.

*Chen Ying*

# Workers' Liberty

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# Showdown on private railways

**A**S reported in the last issue of *Workers' Liberty* a major rail strike is looming over the private train operating companies' plans to increase profits by taking away the safety and operational role of guards and cutting their pay.

The private rail bosses are using salami tactics. They hope to destroy RMT as an effective union by weakening the position of the guards who are usually RMT members. In order to get this they will bribe members of ASLEF, the drivers' union. But once RMT are beaten management will come after ASLEF. What are the tactics we need to stop this attack?

In both 1994 and 1996 ASLEF drivers were central to management's strategy of breaking the signalling workers' and traincrew railworkers' strike. They are clearly confident that this strategy will work again in attacking the operational role of the guard and extending Driver Only.

Traincrew can prevent this and can also obtain acceptable restructuring deals but only if we unite and co-ordinate industrial action in resistance to management's plans.

Unity will only happen if rank and file members of ASLEF organise and seriously demand unity in action of their elected officials. Moaning will not succeed.

RMT would not have tolerated these divide and rule tactics if most of the drivers had been in their union. Nor would they tolerate it in the future battle to come. They would not have tolerated the kind of drivers' proposals and deals that have been recommended by the ASLEF officials either. United we stand, divided we fall.

This is a battle that will determine the safety or otherwise of travelling by

train, thousands of railworkers' jobs and the power and credibility of the union for years to come.

However, given the deals around Driver Restructuring Initiatives (DRI) combined with management's use of technology and the use of non-striking members of other unions it is going to be a very difficult strike to win.

The leadership must learn the lessons of our two most recent large strikes. The exclusive use of the power of one grade of worker combined with one-day strikes led to long drawn-out wars of attrition. The powerful signalworkers' national strike in what was then an integrated railway lasted over three months. Traincrew on Scotrail lasted over nine months.

With documentation to prove that the bosses have got it in for shunters, station staff, guards, drivers and signalworkers in the smaller boxes, we should be hitting management with the power of all these grades right at the outset in a *real* strike.

One-day strikes in 1996 were impossible to get away from as the membership got used to making that low level of sacrifice. It would be foolish to repeat this mistake and be faced with the same problem of management almost indefinitely running a service. Or, in other words, managing to manage.

The rail bosses will be planning for some kind of repeat of 1996. We should give them a short, sharp shock and demonstrate our power as a union.

- For coordination amongst Train Operating Crews.

- Sustained industrial action beyond isolated one-day strikes.

- All affected to fight for job security and retention of existing roles.

*A Scotrail driver*

## Blair's plans to gut party democracy run into trouble

**A**T its annual Congress in Brighton last month the GMB (general union), now Labour's biggest affiliate adopted a response to the "Labour Into Power" proposals which talked of "A growing crisis of accountability" within party structures and argued that "the timetable for consultation has been far too short".

The GMB says: "It is essential that sufficient time is allowed at the 1997 Party conference for a substantial debate to be held, and for all the key issues to be considered, before any decisions are reached."

The GMB document then defines what is the key issue in the battle over party democracy. It is essential that CLPs and affiliated organisations can submit motions direct to Party conference and not just to the Joint Policy Committee and National Policy Forum."

If this demand is won at this year's conference then it will remove the cornerstone of the "Labour Into Power" proposals by taking away the ability of cabinet to totally dictate the conference agenda. Building a united front around this demand is now the key task in the fight to defend party democracy and a democratic party/union link. If we can defeat Blair on this question it will make it easier to block his other proposals such as gerrymandering the NEC elections by banning individual party member from voting for left wing MPs.

It is also worth noting that the GMB and UNISON have both come out against delaying the vote on "Labour into Power", making it virtually impossible for the left to hope to win such a position at this year's conference! Instead, the GMB have opened up the prospect of a prolonged debate at conference presumably including the option of tabling a wide range of amendments to the final proposals. An option that Blair and Sawyer will find it difficult to oppose without looking very undemocratic!

The GMB decision comes in the middle of a conference season that has seen only one major union positively endorse "Labour Into Power" and some huge votes for the Keep the Link/Keep the Party ♦

**INSIDE THE UNIONS**



# The adventures of Tom Sawyer

**T**ONY Blair and his inner circle of yuppies are, generally, pretty good at dissembling. But in the presence of trade unionists their powers desert them: the Blairistas simply cannot hide their contempt for the trade union movement. This is something of a problem for the leadership of what is still a trade union-funded party bearing the name "Labour".

Which is where people like the tragi-comic Mr Prescott come in useful. Honest John still boasts of his firebrand past in the National Union of Seamen and at his first Downing Street meeting with a delegation from the TUC, playfully produced a sandwich and a can of beer.

But poor old John, for all his canine loyalty to the Leader, is not taken very seriously by anyone — even the TUC — these days. When it comes to selling the Blair "project" to horny-handed sons (and, these days, daughters) of toil, Party General Secretary Tom Sawyer is much more effective. Sawyer also claims a militant past and unlike Prescott, can produce evidence to back this up.

In the '70s Sawyer was an Area Officer for NUPE's northern region and played an active role in the 1979 "dirty jobs" strike against the Callaghan government's Social Contract. In 1982 he was appointed Deputy General Secretary and soon after became the first NUPE representative on Labour's NEC. As a good Bennite (he'd been the North East organiser of Benn's campaign for Deputy Leadership) Sawyer initially voted with the 'hard left' on the NEC. This was fine as far as General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe was concerned: the union's policy was broadly "Bennite" and, any-

way, there was a de facto division of labour whereby 'Bick' concentrated on TUC matters and Sawyer had a free hand in the Labour Party.

Quite soon, however, Neil Kinnock spotted something that is central to an understanding of Sawyer's character: an almost pathological need to ingratiate himself with people — especially powerful and influential people. It was noticeable that Sawyer's opposition to Kinnock was never based upon any principled arguments but upon the complaint that there had been no prior consultation with NUPE (i.e. himself). This was easily rectified and soon Sawyer was voting with Kinnock against the 'hard left'. Sometimes (like over the expulsion of Militant) Sawyer was able to persuade the NUPE Executive to adopt the Kinnock line. But even in situations when NUPE's policy directly contradicted Kinnock's wishes (as over reselection) Sawyer voted with his new-found, powerful friend.

When Tony Benn proposed "full support" for striking (NUPE) nurses in 1988 Sawyer demanded that the amendment be withdrawn and when Benn declined, voted against.

Sawyer's loyalty to Kinnock was rewarded when he was appointed Chair of the "Policy Review" (the process, you may remember, whereby Kinnock divested himself of most of Labour's 'unpopular' radical policies). Sawyer was assiduous in his efforts to sell the results of the Policy Review to the unions. One aspect of the Review might have caused a less craven apparachik some embarrassment: the dumping of unilateralism, a long-standing NUPE policy. Our hero had to choose between loyalty to his new

friend Kinnock and loyalty to his old friend Bickerstaffe. No contest. At the 1989 NUPE conference, Sawyer made a thoroughly demagogic speech, arguing that unilateralism had to be dumped so that a Labour government pledged to the minimum wage, redistribution of wealth and major defence cuts, could be elected. Sawyer won the vote — and in doing so reduced poor old Bickerstaffe to tears.

That incident tells us something else important about the Sawyer mentality: he is a fantasist who probably believes his own fantasies. Like in 1993, when he urged union delegates to back OMOV on the grounds that it would allow them to take over many Constituency Parties and thus increase union influence in the Party! Or this year, when he urged CWU executive members to back the Party Into Power document on the grounds that it consolidates the union link and makes the leadership more accountable.

So there we have Tom Sawyer: a self-deluding fantasist, craven supporter of the powerful, ingratiating creep who lives to tell people exactly what they want to hear. In fact, exactly the man to sell the anti-union Blair project to gullible trade unionists... or not, as the case may be.

One final point: during Sawyer's time as Deputy General Secretary, NUPE declined in membership, failed to resist privatisation in local government, was overtaken by COHSE in the health service, and only narrowly avoided financial collapse. With a record like that, the only surprise is that there's anyone left who takes Sawyer seriously.

*Sleeper*

Labour position of defending conference sovereignty and party democracy.

But Blair can only be beaten if we concentrate on the democratic merits of our case and don't take the edge off our arguments by becoming fixated with the technical questions of timetable and delay. ● Stop Press: some 100 motions have been submitted by CLPs to Labour conference critical of "Labour Into Power". Only 10 support it!

### How the key unions voted

**AEEU (engineers and electricians):** no vote at conference but can be expected to back Blair, though may go with GMB on conference motions.

**USDAW (shopworkers):** no vote at conference but executive will back Blair.

**UNISON (public sector workers):** unrepresentative Affiliated Political Fund structure backed "Labour Into Power" and committed the union to supporting a quick decision.

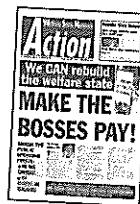
**CWU (post and telecom workers):** overwhelmingly rejected key proposals of Labour Into Power. As did FBU (firefighters), GPMU (print workers), BFAWU (bakers) and RMT (railworkers).

**MSF (technical, finance workers):** vote to reject the key proposals of "Labour Into Power" but also voted to "welcome" the publication of the document.

**GMB (general union):** supported the right of unions and CLPs to put motions directly to conference. At the time of writing **TGWU** and **UCATT** (construction workers) look likely to oppose "Labour into Power".

*Tom Willis*

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# A victory for socialism?

**A**LAS, the bankers, financiers, and profit-grabbers did not tremble when an alliance of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party won France's parliamentary elections on 1 June. But at least they fidgeted in irritation. The stock market and the international value of the franc both dipped.

French workers did not dance in the streets as they did in 1981, when the left won office after 23 years of right-wing rule. But there was a big demonstration in Paris on 10 June demanding "Europe for Jobs". And union leaders have been talking with some energy and confidence about holding the new Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, to his promises: a cut in the working week from 39 hours to 35 with no loss of pay over five years, in order to reduce France's 12.8% jobless rate.

All this is an after-effect from the great strike wave of November-December 1995. Rail, bus, metro, post, education, health, telecom, electricity and gas workers struck against social spending cuts, and repeated demonstrations brought over two million workers on to the streets. The strikers won significant, though partial victories, and so crippled the right-wing government of Alain Juppé that president Jacques Chirac eventually gambled on an early election this year.

The new government has increased the national minimum wage by 4%, halted civil service job cuts, and stalled privatisation of Telecom and other enterprises. Further measures have been postponed to September, on the pretext of an audit of the national finances.

Jean-Claude Trichet, Governor of the Bank of France, reprimanded the government, calling for cuts in the budget deficit, wage "moderation" and more "flexibility". Louis Viannet, leader of the strongest union federation, the CGT, declared that if the government says in autumn that the finances are worse than it had thought, and attempts a clampdown, then "we will be heading for a big clash. This majority has been brought to power to go in a new direction. If, in the name of the constraints of the euro, of Maastricht, and of the [European Union] stability pact, we find ourselves back with the policies which have been condemned, then neither the CGT nor the wage-workers will accept it".

The French Socialist victory caused a mini-crisis in the European Union. This year, 1997, is when European Union countries have to hit the Maastricht Treaty targets of budget deficit less than 3% of national



Lionel Jospin

income, and national debt less than 60%, for the creation of a single euro-money to go ahead in 1999.

France's national debt, however, has increased explosively over the last seven years, and on present lines its budget deficit will be about 3.8% this year and 4.8% next. Mild though Jospin's reforms are, they will certainly not reduce the deficit, and he is not raising taxes.

The European Union summit in Amsterdam in mid-June was a tense affair, with results universally reckoned to be a feeble compromise.

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**"The social democratic parties had a spell of neo-liberal-labour success. By the mid-1990s it was over. In Spain, Australia and France (1993), they were routed in elections."**

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I have thought ever since the Exchange Rate Mechanism crisis of 1992 that European capitalism was nowhere near having the stability necessary to go ahead with the single euro-money. Not only France has problems: Chancellor Helmut Kohl has just had to back down on a plan to wriggle Germany's figures into the prescribed limits by revaluing the Bundesbank's gold stocks.

Yet the big operators in the international money markets evidently have a different opinion. The French election results set them selling not only francs but also deutschmarks, calculating on the prospect not of a divergence of European currencies but of a fudged and weak monetary union.

Whichever way it goes, coming years promise financial turmoil in Europe.

France will not have a strong or confident government to deal with that turmoil. The Socialists got only 26% of the first-round vote on 25 May. Since 32% of registered voters abstained, and 5% cast blank votes, that was only 16% of the electorate.

France's parliamentary elections go to a second-round run-off a week after the first round. In that second round, on 1 June, the fact that the fascist National Front remained in contention in many seats, splitting the right-wing vote, helped the Socialists to win 275 seats out of 577. Together with the Communist Party and the Greens they have 320 seats. The electoral system magnified the shift in votes to create an impression of a huge swing from the 1993 elections, which brought in 484 right-wing MPs and only 93 for the left.

Public sector workers, who carried the November-December 1995 strikes and are less weakly unionised than the private sector, voted heavily but by no means overwhelmingly for the left (63%). Among manual workers generally the left's vote has fallen from 62% in 1986 to 49% in 1997. Conversely, the left has gained among senior managers and professionals: the left-right pattern of voting in these better-off layers was over 20% different from the pattern among manual workers in the 1980s, but is now only 3% different. The self-employed, small shopkeepers, and farmers continue to vote very heavily for the right.

**A**LTHOUGH the number of French people describing themselves as "interested in politics" has increased somewhat since 1978, from 46% to 50%, the proportion who believe that politicians are not interested in them has increased from 59% from 72%. Most startlingly, more than two-thirds of young people either abstained or cast blank votes in this election.

In short, the new government has been elected with very little positive support, amidst mass disillusion with established mainstream politics and a continued erosion of traditional class loyalties in voting.

The French Communist Party got 10% of the vote, a far cry from the consistent 20% it got until the 1980s, but a good score by recent standards. It has three ministers in the government. In November-December 1995 it showed that, unlike other ex-CPs in Europe, it still has a network of worker-organisers willing and able, on occasion, to lead large-scale class struggles. Its ability to

strangle such struggles, should they escalate beyond what the CP leaders want, is probably less than it was. The USSR no longer exists, and internal CP discipline is much looser.

The far left scored 4% on the first round, mostly for candidates of the Trotskyist group *Lutte Ouvrière*. LO did not repeat their tremendous result in the presidential election of 1995, when they won 1.6 million votes, but they did get their best-ever score in a parliamentary vote: 3.06%, up from 2.15% in 1993. They stood in 321 of the 577 constituencies.

**T**HE French Socialists' victory, following Blair's in Britain and the Olive Tree's in Italy, seems to mark a second Indian summer for social democracy in Europe. There are social-democrat prime ministers in nine out of 15 European Union states, and the German Social Democrats have a good chance of regaining office in elections next year.

Fifteen years ago, in the early 1980s, social democracy looked shattered. Its stock-in-trade — modest reforms and fairly full employment, through measured "Keynesian" increases in public spending — had been discredited in the chaos of the 1970s. The French Socialist government elected in 1981 attempted a last hurrah of the old reformist politics, but within a year retreated in disarray to neoliberal policies of cuts and austerity. In 1983 the British Labour Party suffered its worst election defeat for over half a century. The German Social Democrats were thrown out of office.

Then there was a first Indian summer. The social-democratic parties reshaped themselves in a neo-liberal-labour, "Blairite"

mould. The French Socialists regained office in 1988, after losing it in 1986. In Spain, Australia and New Zealand, social-democratic parties won elections while pushing through free-market measures in economies which had previously been heavily state-regulated under right-wing administration.

Arguably the social-democratic parties were better fitted than the traditional right-wing parties to carry through these measures, compulsory for any government which wanted to fit its national economy into the new world-capitalist regime of the 1990s, with its rapid restructuring and vastly-increased mobility of capital.

Traditional right-wing parties could be pushed by their middle-class base into conserving vested interests or, conversely, into dogmatic spite-fuelled excesses. The social-democratic parties, however, had been built as parties geared to governing at cross-purposes with their base. They were better able to sweeten the economic pain with liberal social reforms. As long as the working class remained relatively quiet — as sadly it did — the social democrats could be better bourgeois than the bourgeoisie.

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**"Whichever way it goes, coming years promise financial turmoil in Europe."**

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Anyway, the social democratic parties had a spell of neo-liberal-labour success. By the mid-1990s it was over. In Spain, Australia, and France (1993), they were routed in elections. The parties' activist base had been gutted. Corruption scandals hurt them in France, Spain and Australia, and wiped Italy's Socialist Party out of existence.

This election in France reminds us, however, that there are millions of people who want some left-wing alternative to the brutalities of modern capitalism, and, until we build something better, they will vote, however sceptically, for the social-democratic parties as the best on offer after the great collapse of the Communist Parties. Under pressure of those millions, even the most rotten and discredited social democracy — and few are more raddled than the French Socialist Party — can zig-zag to the left. Revolutionaries who think that they can now write off the social-democratic parties and rebuild the left from a blank slate are fools.

Yet social-democracy's revival is shallow, and goes together with a continued internal decay. Everywhere, the social democrats' base of committed activists and voters has dwindled drastically. And they have no answers to offer.

For now, the main gainers are the far right. Jean-Marie Le Pen's fascist National

Front got one of its best scores since its first electoral breakthrough in 1984, with 15% on the first round, though it won only one seat in the run-off. Its vote has hardened, while that of all other parties has softened. Previously, less than one-third of National Front voters described themselves as "identifying with" the party; now, over a half do.

While the core of the National Front vote remains with the self-employed, small shopkeeper, and small business class, it has bit deeply into the working class. It won 25% of manual workers' votes, 23% of the unemployed, and 22% among voters with no more than primary education.

In November-December 1995 the National Front was marginalised. Big workers' demonstrations jeered outside the NF-controlled town hall in its stronghold, Toulon, without the NF being able to mount any counter-demonstration. The idea that united and militant working-class industrial struggle is the best antidote to racism and fascism is important, but the election results show it to be only a half-truth. Racism has to be defeated ideologically and politically, not just pushed aside. Industrial struggle gives the best conditions for building a workers' party that can organise the ideological and political effort, but it cannot substitute for that effort.

Nationalism has long been the cancer of the French left. The French Communist Party has proved itself to have the deepest working-class roots of any European CP: it is also the only European CP that could, in the 1970s, have recruiting posters which said flatly: "I love my country, therefore I am joining the French Communist Party", or "No to a German Europe". It is the only CP which could have one of its mayors in a suburb of Paris lead a gang to smash up an immigrant workers' hostel and force out the residents, then excuse the action with the "class" argument that CP municipalities were being made to take an unfair share of the burden of dealing with immigrant workers, while the right-wing local authorities escaped lightly (Vitry, 1981).

The demonstrations of November-December 1995, when the idea of Europe-wide workers' unity was prominent and nationalist anti-Maastrichtism very subdued, were one sign of improved possibilities for building something better. The 10 June 1997 march, with its slogan "Europe for Jobs" is another; so is the Renault workers' fight for jobs, which has involved joint strikes and demonstrations of Belgian, French and Spanish workers.

Stormy times lie ahead for France, with great opportunities — but also a great urgency — for French Marxists to build a big movement which can wrest the political initiative from the far right.

*Martin Thomas*

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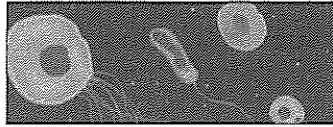
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# The limits of the Earth Summit

**F**IVE years ago, the governments of the world congratulated themselves on the great steps they had made towards saving the environment. They had agreed targets for cutting carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, reducing the loss of the world's forests, protecting the resources of the oceans, helping provide safe drinking water, protecting the diversity of life, and tackling world poverty, in particular by increasing aid for the poorest countries.

The Earth Summit held in New York last month met in the knowledge that each promise had been broken: it ended without significant agreement to start putting this right. Here are some of the details of the failure to protect the environment.

## Forests

TROPICAL forests were lost at the rate of about 32 million acres (12.6 million hectares) per year in the 1990s. Since the Rio Summit, 4% of the tropical forests have been cut down. This was virtually the same rate as in the 1980s. This did not include forests subjected to selective logging which can be almost as destructive in terms of damage to habitats. Friends of the Earth (FoE) estimate that around fifty plant and animal species are being lost per day.

Forest cover seems to have increased slightly in the industrialised countries but this is probably due to commercial planting where one species of tree predominates, creating a rather impoverished environment.

## Biodiversity

THERE is a great uncertainty in the amount of biodiversity at present: species of plants and animals so far identified amount to some 1.8 million with estimates of total species ranging from 3 to 30 million. Perhaps two thirds of these live in tropical forests. Of the larger animals, such as birds and mammals, which are more noticeable to people, the "natural" rate of extinction is between 1 every hundred and 1 every thousand years. However, over the last 400 years, 58 mammal and 115 bird species are known to have become extinct. Many others are effectively extinct, surviving only in protected pockets or in zoos, highly inbred and vulnerable to disease. The high rate of loss is firmly linked to destruction of habitats, including swamps, wetlands, and coastal systems as well as forests.

Human food sources are also experiencing a loss of diversity. Since 1900, 75% of the world's crop varieties have disappeared. When the world's population gets 90% of its calories from just 20 crop species (50% from rice, maize, wheat and potatoes) the reduction in varieties renders them much more vulnerable to crop diseases and makes growers more dependent on standardised seeds from companies and on chemical pesticides to protect them.

## Aid

IN 1992 the developed countries reaffirmed their commitment to reaching the United Nations aid target of 0.7% of GNP. It was estimated that it would cost some \$600 billion to implement Earth Summit commitments and goals in developing countries. In 1992, foreign aid totalled about \$60 billion, an average of 0.35% of the GNPs of the developed countries. Even if this all went on Earth Summit projects, it would take ten years to implement them. However, the level of aid has dropped since 1992, reaching 0.27% of GNPs in 1995, rather than risen. The USA gives only 0.1% of GNP, lower than all other industrialised countries and lower in absolute amount than Japan, France and Germany. Britain's "aid", 0.28% of GNP, includes grants to Malaysia for the Pergau dam, which does not benefit the environment, and to the repressive regime of Indonesia, a country which many believe does not need any foreign aid.

The European Union has funded ill-conceived schemes in Uganda and Ethiopia which will harm local populations. In Uganda, 35,000 people were expelled from the Kibale forest region with extreme brutality as part of a scheme to "protect" the forest and encourage tourism. In Ethiopia, 7,000 are to be expelled from national parks for similar reasons.

## Global warming

THIS is perhaps the most obvious failure of the Rio and New York summits. Developed countries agreed to return CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the 1990 level by 2000, a modest target, it has to be said. However, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 1996 were the highest ever, 2.8% higher than the previous year. It is estimated that CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere are the highest for 150,000 years,

nearly one fifth higher than at the start of the industrial revolution. While it is still too early to say that global warming has started to occur, the vast majority of the world's climate scientists agree to this effect: it is interesting that the 1990s are on course to be the warmest decade on record.

The EU is on course to miss its agreed target by 6%; the USA, which gives out nearly a quarter of global CO<sub>2</sub>, increased its output by 8% between 1990 and 1996. At the summit last month, the USA failed to make any commitment to reduce its emissions. This was rightly criticised by Prime Minister Blair, though his claim for Britain's virtue in this matter is somewhat disingenuous. Of those few countries which were able to claim a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the UK and Germany were able to achieve this only by closing down a large number of power stations and factories that used to burn coal (with an accompanying increase in unemployment).

Whether Britain's policies will improve in future remains to be seen. It was a notable success of Labour's environmental section, the Socialist Environment and Resources Association, to recruit several dozen MPs and MEPs before the last election, including several ministers. One of these, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, has argued strongly that a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions should be achieved by increasing energy efficiency. This would include a programme of energy conservation in homes and increasing public transport. Overseas Development Minister Clare Short has announced that future aid will be aimed at helping provide primary education, basic health care and clean water supplies. The decline in aid levels under the Conservatives, from 0.51% to 0.27% of GNP between 1979 and 1996 would be reversed. Furthermore aid would not be tied to the purchase of goods and services from UK firms, a form of hidden subsidy by British taxpayers. By itself, one country cannot do much. However, Labour Britain has the chance to influence the European Union, which itself could put great pressure on the USA. This would require rather more radicalism than is promised by Thatcherism with a human face.

*Les Hearn*



# The corridors of power?

**A**T the weekend one of the officers called me twice to let me know that the arrangements for the meeting this morning had been changed and explain why. No other officer would allay your suspicions about the changes like this. An effective member of the bureaucracy, it's a shame she's not on our side.

To BT Centre in Newgate Street for 'Pay and Personnel' meeting. The next move in the 'Pay and Grading' review of all BT non-management staff has been made: a letter from the head of Employee Relations outlining the company's line: 'flexibility' between the different BT divisions and an invitation to meet with one of the Business divisions to hammer out an agreement for the nitty-gritty of implementation. They have chosen the most 'cuddly' divisional management team for us to begin talks with. We in the Broad Left argue against meeting with them until a company-wide framework is agreed. This is a better tactic than going at BT's pace without any clear idea of the overall picture. Unity is strength in this context (and in all I know). We lose in the Committee.

Back to HQ for Broad Left caucus at 5pm. We report to the rest of the BL NEC members what happened at 'Pay and Personnel'. Decide it's really important to stop any divisional talks at the moment, and prepare to use whatever tactics necessary to stop the recommendation of the Committee due to be discussed tomorrow at the Telecoms Executive. Home at 10pm. Think, is their life outside trade unionism? Go to bed.

## Tuesday

TO be early for the meeting I leave two hours for the 90 minute tube journey from home to office. Can't be late, or I might miss something. At Telecoms Executive meeting we lose the vote by two and use a constitutional device called a constituency veto to block the recommendation — it is declared "not carried".

In the afternoon I sort through the expanding pile of papers from all the different committees. Adopt following filing policy: if it's important, someone else will have a copy, if it's not important, put it in the bin. Write memo to General Treasurer requesting some form of comms and arguing why I need to be in contact! I've been offered everything else as an NEC member: Impress account, Honorarium, travel warrants, etc. Sometimes you feel like you've joined an elite club. However, you

know the ticket is for one year only.

## Wednesday

EQUAL Opportunities Committee in the morning. Equalities monitoring comes up: the majority of people on the Committee look at me as if I'm mad when I suggest we include questions on sexuality. Their argument against is that it would alienate people from the monitoring process; I argue that you are alienated as a lesbian, gay or bisexual union member if something relevant to whether you get treated equally at work is not even mentioned on your union form!

Pub at lunchtime: a chance to meet people who don't work in your occupational area. Otherwise you only see some fellow NEC members once a month at the NEC meetings. I lose street cred by drinking sparkling water.

In the afternoon we have a Political Committee meeting with a special guest — Tom Sawyer, General Secretary of the

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### "Deference is alive and well in the British labour movement."

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Labour Party. He is here to tell us about 'Party Into Power' and why we have nothing to fear. Tom explains his trade union credentials and does his salesman pitch. Despite twisting and turning, even he cannot deny our union policy is incompatible with the proposals in 'Party Into Power'. He promises us things that are not in the document. At least two people at the meeting fall for it; with the three who were going to vote against union policy anyway (unreconstructed leadership clones) we are outnumbered.

Tom Sawyer sold them the devolution of policy-making to undemocratic Policy Forums and Policy Committees on the basis that:

1. Party structures aren't very democratic anyway (hey, let's get rid of the little democracy we've got then!);
  2. The new policy structures give the likes of us more chance to hob-nob with government ministers; and
  3. The leadership of the Party want it.
- And they fell for it. Deference is alive and well in the British labour movement.

## Thursday

STAY at home in the morning to write a response to the latest twist in the 'Party Into

Power' battle in preparation for Policy Committee meeting tomorrow. Get news that the BT Pay negotiations have ceased and we are left with a 4.3% offer. It's one of the quickest set of negotiations ever. It's obvious the company want pay out of the way in order to concentrate on other things. As usual, the "strings" attached to the deal are the ideological ones. We have to agree to "co-operate with change", and help the company be more competitive. This clause in the deal has been there for 10 years, and no-one on our side takes much notice of it except the General Secretary who is often caught lobbying on BT's behalf in the bourgeois media.

However, even in local negotiations, management use the threat of the union's 'disloyalty to the company' and often remind us that they pay our wages, give us union facility time, etc. As I begin epic tube journey, I ponder on the nature of company unionism. Decide to change on to the bus. Window-shop. I suppose I ought to wear smarter clothes now... No, I don't think so. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't afford to power-dress. However, part of the Executive allowances is meant for us horny-handed daughters of toil to buy a suit.

## Friday

IN early to find someone to type up my 'Party Into Power' paper for the meeting today. I'd do it myself, but they don't give you a word-processor here. Our union branch offices are better-resourced. A document is submitted to the Policy meeting in the name of the General Secretary by the Millbank mole who works in the General Secretary's office. I produce my paper. The chair expresses surprise. Apparently, it is not the done thing for Executive members to write papers. My document is taken as an amendment to the officer's proposals. We lose on the casting vote of the chair. Immediately start lobbying for the vote on the NEC that will be taken next week. I get depressed by the fact that only a small number of the NEC members are open to rational argument. Large sections are part of the leadership faction or owe their existence to keeping in with the leadership faction.

PS: We finally won on the executive on "Party Into Power". The proposals *are* contrary to CWU policy. It's official!

*Maria Exall was talking to Tom Rigby.*

# Whither Scargill's party?

By Helen Rate

**I**N the general election the Socialist Labour Party stood 65 candidates. With the exception of three or four constituencies their candidates managed to get only a few hundred votes. This is a terrible result for a party which has based so much of its existence on electoral activity.

Many people joined Scargill's party because they despaired at the direction in which Blair was taking Labour and the inability of socialists to challenge Blair's ascendancy. An understandable reaction but, as we said at the time, the SLP was set up before the decisive fight — the battle to save the unions' link with Labour — had taken place, let alone been irretrievably lost.

The Socialist Labour Party has not managed to win the influence Scargill surely hoped it would. It has not, for instance, managed to gain any large trade union affiliations. Why is this? No big mystery: many active trade unionists who identify with Labour but are unhappy or sceptical about the Blairites, do not think now is the time to abandon Labour either because they want to "give Blair a chance" or because they are not convinced that the fight to win back Old Labour, to preserve and remake Labour as a vehicle for working-class political representation, is over.

The visible flaws in the Socialist Labour Party cast serious doubt on its ability to stand up to the pressure which must result from its lack of a wider constituency.

First the SLP has never been clear on what kind of organisation it is. Does it aim to be a mass movement of the working class, organising and fighting to win reforms from the bosses — a workers' party based on trade union affiliation, a refoundation of the Labour Party? Its founding precept — "we are an alternative to Blair" — suggested the SLP was such a party.

Or is the Socialist Labour Party a revolutionary socialist party? Scargill has often implied that it is. The SLP mix of politics is confused and the confusion spills over into their electoral activity.

Why does the SLP stand for Parli-



ment? To gain a platform for its ideas? Because they think they have a serious chance of electing socialist MPs? Does the SLP think socialism can be legislated through Parliament? None of this is spelled out in their propaganda. Fudging the issues did not help them in the election. Continuing lack of political clarity will not help them in the future.

The politics that shape the SLP have not been created by its rank and file but by a clique of ex-Communist Party (*Morning Star*) people, grouped around Scargill, symbiotically entwined with another weaker clique from the IMG/"Fourth International" tradition who play the role of political valets and

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**"The politics that shape the SLP have not been created by its rank and file but by cliques."**

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bouncers for Scargill's.

One consequence of this is a fatal Stalinist lack of respect for basic democratic norms — for open debate and the right of minorities to exist and discuss. The internal life of the SLP has, since its foundation, been dominated by the fights of disparate groups, branches and individuals to establish the right to disagree with the leadership's line and the right to express differences while remaining members of the SLP. Whole groups — most recently the Communist Party of Great Britain (*Weekly Worker*) — have tried to establish a right to

freely make their own propaganda inside the SLP — in other words to affiliate to the party. The Scargillites will have none of it. Scargill rules okay!

**I**T would be reasonable for the SLP's leadership to ask comrades to conduct debate in a disciplined way and not to disrupt the essential campaigning functions of the organisation. It cannot, however, by any democratic working-class standard, be reasonable to summarily "void" (as the SLP disciplinary parlance goes) whole branches and expel members by the unchallengeable dictats of the leadership against which the poor "voidees" have no right of appeal or redress. This has more in common with the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland — "off with their heads!" — than it has with a healthy organisation of reds.

The leadership on the national executive take their authority from, and act in line with, the SLP's constitution. However as it is a constitution that has never been voted on by the members, the national executive's authority is questionable! Written by a barrister, the constitution was designed to stop "alien" groups from invading the SLP and to block off any legal comeback from such groups. Ironically Scargill used to argue against similar tactics when Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock used them against the left in the Labour Party.

The latest episode in this faction fight — as reported in the *Weekly Worker* — is as farcical as it is a

depressing example of the left's apparently incurable lack of respect for or ability to establish democracy in its own ranks. On 21 June opposition branches and individuals called a conference at Conway Hall in London to launch a "Campaign for SLP democracy". Several SLP National Committee members mounted a picket outside the meeting and tried to intimidate participants by handing out a special message from Arthur Scargill: "Such meetings will not be tolerated by the party. Any member who attends such meetings or becomes involved with those coordinating these meetings/campaigns against the Socialist Labour Party must understand they are acting in violation of the party's constitution."

The SLP will hold a conference in October where there is sure to be a continuation of this kind of episode. Stories of "voidings" and heavy-handed interventions by the Scargillites have been so well publicised by now (thanks to the *Weekly Worker*) that many branches and members will rightly feel unhappy at the direction the SLP is going in. The friction may well be so great that it will split the party. Can the SLP be saved? Should socialists want to save an organisation whose leadership has proved itself so set against building the open, free-thinking organisation the left so badly needs? The political failings of the SLP could be more easily forgiven — and possibly rectified — if it were a democratic organisation. We do, however, have a common cause on a number of serious questions with the many socialists inside the SLP. We have some questions to put to those socialists.

The Socialist Labour Party says it is an alternative to the Labour Party and serious contender in the Parliamentary game. It also says it wants to abolish capitalism and establish a socialist system. Does the SLP think socialism can be brought about through Parliament? Do members of the Socialist Labour Party even know what their party thinks on this question?

The Socialist Labour Party says it is for withdrawal from the European Union and, curiously, it describes this as an internationalist policy! The "internationalism of idiots"? The situation of British workers will not be improved if British bosses withdraw from the EU. The only thing that will help the British workers is for them to organise Europe-wide, just as Europe's bosses have done.

This policy is in fact a dogma which has entered the SLP via the Communist Party. That fact does not shock or

bother some members of the SLP, but some of your comrades do strongly object to committing the party to it without party-wide discussion and debate. Do SLP comrades want the SLP to be a *Morning Star* style Communist Party mark 2?

Some members of the Socialist Labour Party — in Vauxhall and elsewhere — wanted your Party to stand on a more left-wing programme during the general election. Vauxhall branch was "voided" for daring to suggest such a thing! Right or wrong should they not have had the right to state their case?

When the Party was founded in October 1995 the constitution imposed on the party included a ban on all groups working inside the SLP. This ban

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**"Many members feel unhappy about the direction in which the Party is going. Why has none of this been debated inside the Party, or in the pages of *Socialist News*?"**

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was used to exclude Militant Labour at the outset and is being now used against the CPGB. Why is this? The Socialist Labour Party, supposedly set up to be an alternative to New Labour (or for that matter Old Labour) with its intolerance and its bans and proscriptions, winds up within 18 months as a miniscule caricature of the Labour Party! Something has gone wrong somewhere comrades!

And if you are going to have a ban on entryism should it not at least be implemented "even-handedly"? Why has the ban not been used against the Fourth International Supporters Caucus? Why is the *Economic Philosophic Science Review* [strange Stalinist/homophobic sect] tolerated? Is it because these are groupings that tolerate and indeed implement all the voiding and banning that happens? Of course it is! Democracy, in the Socialist Labour Party, is only for those people who agree with Arthur Scargill.

**M**ANY members feel unhappy about the direction in which the Party is going. Why has none of this been debated inside the Party, or in the pages of *Socialist News*?

There is an urgent need for a large, effective, open and democratic organisation of socialists — of people committed to the abolition of wage slav-

ery, to the smashing of the capitalist state and the reorganisation of society along egalitarian lines. But that organisation cannot be built on illusory political notions such as a belief in the sufficiency of bourgeois, Parliamentary democracy. And no effective socialist movement can be built without a proper respect for tolerant, open debate where even radically differing views can be aired and where policies are not formulated *a priori* and behind closed doors.

As Lenin rightly said, the decisive question in politics is what to do next, what is the next step in the class struggle? Right now we need to fight Blair's "modernising project" — inside the Labour Party as far as we can — and inside the trade union movement. Our central, immediate goal must be to preserve intact the fact, the desire and the notion in the labour movement of political representation for the working-class. If, in the end there is a split in the movement, if we have to move towards founding a new Labour Representation Committee, it would be a step backwards — but we will engage in that task with as much vigour as we can muster.

Right now the SLP is not a fit vehicle to organise the refounding of the labour movement. The idea that it is an alternative to the Labour Party is a puerile fantasy.

Right now, we focus our fight on preserving the Labour-trade union link. This fight is inextricably linked to other battles — to force Blair to repeal the anti-trade union laws, to defend what remains of the welfare state. These are the central class struggle issues. We urge Socialist Labour Party members to help us in those tasks. In doing so they will have to rethink what the SLP is and what it has set out to do. They must also wake up to what it has become.

## HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

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# How not to lead a strike

By Paul Cooper, Chair  
Southwark NATFHE,  
Surrey Quays branch

**T**HE eleven-week strike at Southwark Further Education College in south London has been defeated. The dispute began when senior lecturers were threatened with compulsory redundancy. Some staff were to be replaced by casual, agency staff and £1.5 million from a staff budget of £10 million would be cut. Teachers voted by 2 to 1 to return to work on Friday 27 June.

This was further education's bitterest dispute. There are many lessons to learn — not least about the role of revolutionaries in such disputes.

The last week of the strike began with 150 members receiving recorded delivery letters from the Principal: return to work by 10am on Friday or you are dismissed. A strike committee later that day is told by Norman Jameson, President of the national union, that the national strike fund is exhausted. Our members will now depend on the collection of a voluntary levy. This was a major blow to a strike in its 10th week.

Here was a strike that had begun under a Tory government but woke up on its tenth day to share in the euphoria at the election of a Labour government. Most of us had reasonable hopes in the new government and what it would mean for our strike. For the Socialist Workers' Party however — who had maybe half a dozen members in leading positions in our union — nothing could dampen their expectations. Various fantasy scenarios were put forward about what Blair would do about the deeds of the evil Principal of Southwark College. Both the Principal and her spell-bound Board of Governors would be swept away to loud chants of "education, education education".

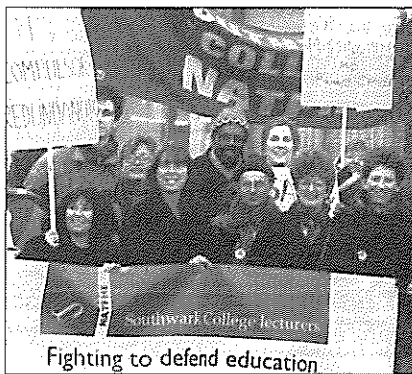
This sort of fantasising was to become a major theme of the dispute and a material factor in keeping a section of the membership attached to an increasingly directionless dispute. We were forced to debate nonsensical possibilities put forward by the SWP — would the Blair government allow a militant college union to demonstrate how to punch a hole in its Tory-inherited and accepted public spending plan and give a green light to every college, school and hospital union to follow suit? The real possibilities — which became clearer every day after 2 May — were very different. Labour would do everything possible to isolate, ignore and extinguish such a dispute. The lobbies and pickets we organised of Blunkett, Blackstone and Harman were politely received and then just as politely forgotten.

The reaction of Labour would have been expected by most experienced trade union militants. Yet leading revolutionary activists of the SWP couldn't, or didn't want to see it. The fan-

tasies about Labour were accompanied with fantasies about the general prospects of the dispute.

Two weeks into the dispute a "Picket Line News" written by an SWP member was telling us that: the "nutcracker tightens on Principal". The proof of this? An article in the *South London Press* had contained some statements of support for the teachers by a few parents. A letter campaign was being invested with the sort of force only a large and active involvement of the community would have had. The result of such aggrandising statements? We were, inevitably, distracted from building a larger community-based campaign.

It appears that the SWP did, in private, have fears about the success of the dispute. After the strike was over, we discovered that a leading SWP member of the strike had applied for and accepted another job! A nice little safety net for someone there. We would not have minded half so much if the same person along



agency staff could not do the job as well as we could. This is just not the point, the agency staff are there to break the strike!

As we enter the examination part of the term, it becomes obvious that the management do not care about what will happen to the students. All they care about is winning the dispute and forcing through cuts. As

teachers, we have possession of coursework and mark sheets which will enable students to complete examinations. The SWP say we should keep hold of these as it is the leverage in the dispute. All that withholding work will do, however, is hurt the students and offers the Principal a propaganda coup. The debate on coursework and marks was cut short when an injunction was served on us demanding the work is returned.

Such misjudgements, for which of course we must share as much responsibility as the rest of the strike leadership, were also the product of a low level of discussion in the union at key stages in the strike. A culture of informal caucusing replaced that of formal, organised, well-advertised open forums. For example we had been told the Board of Governors was on the verge of splitting over the Principal's tactics. Our lone supporter on the board was threatening to not turn up to future meetings. This fact was discovered by accident when a comrade and myself stumbled across an informal caucus in a beer garden! It was just one of the many fragments of reality which unfortunately did not puncture the hot-air balloon demagoguery of some strike meetings. Any alternative suggestions were branded defeatist. Some general conclusions and lessons must be drawn from this experience.

The membership of our union demonstrated all you could ask for in terms of courage, tenacity and comradeship. We all had a lot to learn about operating in a difficult dispute.

This was a small college headed by a determinedly anti-union management, surrounded by a labour movement full of expectations in a Labour government, but not yet possessed of the confidence to fight the government for our demands. The anti-union laws ensured that we could not hope to win solidarity from college workers all around the country who are facing the same attacks. Our union however does remain intact after this dispute. Along with other unions we will fight to demolish those anti-union laws. That particular nightmare of the Tories, and now Blair, will be consigned to the dustbin not by sectarian fantasies — how Southwark workers will become martyrs if we are dismissed, etc. — but by broad campaigns which attempt to unite the labour movement.

**"It appears that the SWP did, in private, have fears about the success of the dispute. After the strike was over, we discovered that a leading SWP member of the strike had applied for and been offered another job!"**

with the rest of her comrades had not spent so much time in strike meetings vigorously demanding we ignore the Principal's threats and stay out until September to "hit recruitment".

While all this was going on the Principal appeared increasingly belligerent and ready to sack the lot of us.

But not to worry, the same SWP comrade reassured us. Our sackings would rally "millions to our cause" when they read about it in... *The Guardian!* But if *Guardian* readers aren't rallying to the Mersey dockers' cause why should they bother with us?

Towards the end of the dispute about 40 scab lecturers arrived, provided by an agency and we are able to turn only a handful away at the picket lines. Clearly the union needed to reassess our position at this point. However, the inability of some to think clearly was not helpful. The SWP say this is a sign of desperation on the part of the Principal and, anyway,

# Australia's new left party

**Bob Leach is interim secretary of Australia's New Labour Party. A longstanding left activist, he was a member of the Australian Labor Party for 25 years to 1986. He spoke to Martin Thomas about the new party.**

**A**USTRALIA is different from the First World or core countries like Britain. Australia grew up in the 19th century under the aegis of the British Empire, and then as the Empire declined in the late 19th century, with German and American rivalry, the Brits became more inclined to change the nature of the dependency and allow a kinder social contract.

A social contract emerged based on white racism, awards [state-registered wage agreements] giving high wages to workers, and protection for local capitalism. Local capitalism was limited, with low-level technology, but the City of London was quite happy for colonial governments to borrow to set up a huge infrastructure and social services far in advance of England. Australia and New Zealand became the social laboratories of the British Empire.

All that has unravelled, with the UK moving into the European Community in 1972. Now Australia has a First World standard of living with a Third World economy, an economy based on raw materials exports.

Australia has had a petty bourgeois culture. The only time the Marxist sects have ever been able to break into its system was when it was breaking up — in the 1890s and in the 1930s, which was the only time when the Communist Party made any real inroads. Otherwise Deakinite state liberalism [after Alfred Deakin, the leading figure of Australian politics after 1901] has dominated.

The ALP has abandoned that Deakinite state liberalism. They're now social liberal, a party which believes in open markets but government intervention for those who fall by the wayside. There's not much difference between them and the Democrats.

At the same time capitalism is moving to a post-Fordist society, where twenty or so "global cities" are becoming communications centres and pivots for capital — and Sydney is one of them — as against the hinterland of the nation-state. The nation-state is cracking up.

There are different reactions to this, including Pauline Hanson here, Winston Peters in New Zealand, and Le Pen in France. But there is a big vacuum around the traditional social-democratic position. It's an ideal opportunity for left social-democrats, who have always been submerged by the right wing of the Labor

Party, to break out, as in New Zealand, and to come up with a new approach — by which I don't mean vanguard politics, or classic Leninist politics, but democratic politics. It's happening in New Zealand, in Mexico, and in the United States.

We need new allies in what Gramsci called the war of position. A Red-Green-Black alliance is the way forward in ex-colonial countries like Australia and New Zealand. I would suspect it is not as adaptable to core countries like Britain.

The Labor Party cannot fill the gap in politics. It is too much controlled by the right wing and by capital, bankrupt in ideas, and unable to ally with the Greens.

The New Labour Party has only been going three months, but input has been coming from students and unionists. We are already talking to the Greens and the Australian Indigenous People's Party. We need 500 members to register as a party under Australian law. We've got over 300 so far. We'll be pursuing civic action and electoral action, with civic action taking the brunt of it, campaigns against racism and for the preservation of the gains won by our ancestors, like the award system.

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**"Capitalism is triumphant and there is no other system to take its place. We either have democratic capitalism, or democratic socialism within capitalism, or we have a Blade Runner future — decay, underclass, crime..."**

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A lot of people who can't stand the Labor Party will still vote for them out of tradition. It's going to take a while to break through that.

Some left unions have shown interest in the New Labour Party. We hope to win over the unions from the ALP, though we're talking a long programme here, and we know we won't win them all. I think the unions are doomed with the ALP.

What we want now is to preserve the award system, introduce a new protectionism, preserve what is strong within the nation state against the World Trade Organisation and the transnational corporations.

Trade unions can fight global capitalism only through international labour links — bodies like the ILO, but that is terribly right-wing — and through national sovereignty.

Australia's minimum wage is about \$10.95 an hour. The Liberals argue that

because of that we have 10% unemployment. That's bullshit. If we had protectionism — a new protectionism based on ecology, opposition to child labour and prison labour, and demanding free trade unions — we would not have unemployment here.

*Will the New Labour Party allow dual membership with other parties?*

No. Why should we be the only party in Australia that allows dual membership? The DSP [the biggest far-left group in Australia] doesn't have dual membership. It's bullshit.

*You talk of the Greens as possible allies. But in Queensland you have the Greens supporting the National Party [right wing] government...*

That shows how important it is to have them in alliance with a red party. The Greens are in the alliance in New Zealand.

*Parties like New Labour in New Zealand and Rifondazione in Italy have had some success because they came out of long struggles in the old parties where they won over a large chunk of the activists, rather than a small group biving off and then asking the activists to join one by one. Otherwise you end up having neither the trade union based and established position of parties like the Labor Party, nor the radical programme and the energy of the revolutionary groups.*

That's possible. But in Australia we're well received both by the unions and by what you call the revolutionary groups. We'll benefit electorally from the ALP's inexorable move to the right. It's more difficult in England because of first-past-the-post elections and non-compulsory voting.

It would be impossible, I think — and I've got 150 years of Australian history behind me — to interest Australian people in a revolutionary situation. Even Fred Paterson, who was elected as Australia's only Communist member of parliament, from Queensland, never pushed that line. He always pushed the democratic line.

Of course, you can't predict the future. Who would ever have dreamed that Communism would collapse as it did? Many Trotskyites said Stalinism was inherently flawed, and maybe they were right. I hope they feel happy about it, but what we've got now is a situation where capitalism is triumphant and there is no other system to take its place. We either have democratic capitalism, or democratic socialism within capitalism, or we have a Blade Runner future — decay, underclass, crime...



# The anti-aboriginal backlash

By Rhodri Evans

**B**ETWEEN 1910 and 1970, the Australian authorities forcibly removed one Aboriginal child in three from their parents. Ronald Wilson, the conservative and moderate author of the recent official report on these Stolen Children, describes the policy as genocide.

It was not mass murder, but the aim was to wipe out Australia's Aboriginal people, by forcibly assimilating some into white society and leaving the rest to die out in isolated and poor rural communities.

The stolen children, dumped with racist carers in orphanages and foster homes, were often beaten and sexually abused. They grew up twice as likely to get arrested and convicted, and three times as likely to be jailed, as Aboriginal children who remained with their parents. The psychic toll of the policy is a large part of the cause of the terrible rates today of ill-health, joblessness, and alcoholism among Aboriginals. Until 1967, Aboriginals were not even counted as human beings in Australia's censuses, let alone granted voting rights or equal pay.

Since then some things have changed. School history, which up to the 1960s dismissed the Aboriginal people as hopeless savages, now explains the achievements of their culture and describes the horrors of the white settlers' drive to clear the Aboriginals off the land, which in some areas was indeed genocide through mass murder. Ownership of some tourist sites has been returned by the government to the local Aboriginal communities. There are special programmes to increase the numbers of Aboriginals in higher education. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission, ATSIC, with commissioners elected by the

Aboriginal communities, has been set up with funds for social projects in those communities.

But a backlash is developing. The loudest voice in the backlash is Pauline Hanson, a maverick MP elected in March 1996 who since April this year has been launching a new right-wing political party, One Nation — and getting about 10% support for it in opinion polls — but some of the quieter voices may be even more dangerous.

Conservative Prime Minister John Howard has refused to make any official apology to the stolen children and their families, saying it was all a long time ago and we must turn to the future... The same John Howard blocked the name Peace Park

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**“Until 1992, the assumption of Australian law was that this whole continent belonged to the first white settler to grab it.”**

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for a new park dedicated to links between Canberra and a Japanese city, because of pressure from the Returned Servicemen's League, dissatisfied at the inadequacy of official Japanese government apologies for Japan's crimes in World War 2...

Besides, said Howard, apologising might open up the government to court claims for compensation.

He has cut ATSIC's budget by 40%. He has repeatedly attacked what he calls the “black armband view of history”. He insists that white Australians should not feel guilty about their nation's past, as if that were what the argument is about, though in fact Aboriginal leaders have been explicit that confession of “guilt” is not what they want.

Labor leader Kim Beazley broke down in tears — reported even by sceptical observers to be genuine — as he protested in Parliament at Howard's attitude and made his apologies for the crimes of past Labor governments.

Yet, on another front of the backlash, more bound up with big business interests, Labor has gone along with Howard.

Until 1992, the assumption of Australian law was that this whole continent belonged to the first white settler to grab it. The Aboriginal people had no rights.

Then in the Mabo case of 1992, the High Court ruled that the Murray Islanders, off the coast of far north Queensland, held “native title” to their land. In 1993 the Labor government put through the Native Title Act, which laid down procedures for Aboriginal communities to claim “native title”, but only to “crown” (government-owned) land, all other land being protected against claims.

Over 500 native title claims have been initiated since then, though only one has been granted. The law makes claims unlikely to succeed unless they are on vacant land.

The ruling set the National Farmers' Federation and the National Party (the rural-based junior party in the government coalition) agitating for a new law to “extinguish” native title on leased land. Without this, they said, hard-working farmers would risk losing all they had.

Howard has formulated a “ten point plan” which makes native title claims far more difficult to win and leaseholders effectively as secure as freeholders.

Despite Beazley's tears, Labor has given decisive support for the “ten points”, through the backing for Howard from Australia's one Labor state government (in New South Wales) in the talks between the federal and state governments on the legislation.

This politicians' consensus reflects the fact that big business is heavily behind Howard on this issue, even though some vocal segments of the ruling class are more liberal. The leaseholders likely to gain most from the “ten points” are not small operators, but billionaires like Kerry Packer who own vast tracts of land. Their concern is not to be able to continue pasturing their sheep, but to be able to exploit new min-

eral finds ruthlessly and quickly without the long negotiations necessary on sites subject to native title claims — and, immediately, to see the cash value of their holdings increased.

Pauline Hanson is boosted by this big-business backlash, but represents something else besides. She is a former fish-and-chip shop owner, officially disowned by the Liberal Party for her anti-Aboriginal agitation just before the March 1996 federal election. Standing without Liberal opposition, she won a previously safe Labor seat.

On 11 April 1997 she launched her "One Nation Party". She has attracted huge crowds to her rallies in small towns in Queensland. It seems that her own electorate, Oxley, centred on the town of Ipswich, essentially an outlying depressed working-class suburb of Brisbane, is not typical of her base. She has not yet dared to attempt a rally in Melbourne, Sydney, or even Brisbane, and all her rallies in big cities have been heavily opposed.

In Newcastle, 4,000 people demonstrated and 2,000 attended an anti-Hanson concert while 1,200 came to her rally. In Perth, 2,000 protested outside a rally of 1,000 Hanson supporters. 500 protesters in Geelong, and 3,000 in Hobart, forced cancellation of the Hanson rallies in those cities. 1,000 demonstrated in Launceston outside a meeting of 500. In Adelaide, 1,000 anti-racists picketed 300 Hanson supporters, and 9,000 joined an anti-racist march.

In Ipswich itself, over 3,000 people joined a rally against racism on 25 May.

Hanson's message — that white Australia is being robbed by state handouts to Aboriginals, and swamped by Asian immigration — wins most support among older people in rural areas. Among high school students in a city like Brisbane, by contrast, she is almost universally hated as a "racist pig". As Noel Pearson puts it, "Old black Australia wants peace, young black Australia wants war; old white Australia wants war, and young white Australia wants peace... Those who most preach hatred, those most unwilling to compromise, are older white Australians".

Australia's population is and always has been concentrated in the cities strung round its coastline, most of which have in the last twenty or so years become very different from the White Australia of the 1950s and '60s. But the national myths and symbols — and many major industries — are based in the vast, thinly-populated hinterland, much of which is hundreds or thousands of miles away from any big city.

The Aboriginal people who live in the cities — about half of a total of 1.5% of the continent's population — are a poor but small, unghettoised, and even esteemed

part of a multicultural mix. In the bush it is different. Amid the vast emptiness, white and black stare at each across a huge social gulf. There are very few Asian immigrant s to these areas. Aboriginals are obvious and vulnerable scapegoats for growing economic tensions.

Older white people in rural areas, taught at school that the Aboriginal people were feckless nuisances, have seen the secure white Australia they knew 30 years ago ("relaxed and comfortable", as John Howard calls it in his pitch for the conservative vote) turned upside down by cuts in public service, railways, education, banks, the meat industry, and mining, and the loss of secure markets for Australia's agricultural exports.

The only way to stop them lashing out at scapegoats is to offer them real economic solutions, and sadly the Australian labour movement is not yet doing that.

**A**USTRALIA'S far-right and fascist groups have latched on to Hanson's party to try to make it into an Australian equivalent of France's Front National, Italy's Alleanza Nazionale, or Austria's Freedom Party — a mass electoral party with a more-or-less respectable exterior and a hardline fascist core. Their immediate prospects are probably poor. Social decay and despair is less advanced in Australia than in Europe. The far right here is weaker and less coherent, as repeated crises inside and around the One Nation Party show. Hanson's electoral base is more scattered and elderly than the European far-right's.

John Howard trims his message to the 20% or so of Australians who are clearly racist — they are a big part of his electoral base and he does not want them going off to vote for Hanson — but the Australian ruling class is genuinely against Hanson. Jeff Kennett, state premier of Victoria and the most strident anti-union, pro-free-market politician in the country, has also been one of the loudest and sharpest voices against Hanson. Although the coalition government has cut immigrant numbers, it is still possible to hear from mainstream conservative politicians here arguments which in Europe come only from the revolutionary left — that immigration does not cause unemployment, and that it would not necessarily be any bad thing if the country came to have a majority of Asian origin.

Australian capitalists know that their future lies in trade with Asia, and they also know that the Australian economy cannot pull Asian capitalists into doing business with them by sheer economic weight in the way that the US or Japan can. They will not get the rich of Asia investing here, buying supplies here, taking holidays here, or

sending their children to be educated here, if those Asian rich see Australia as racist against them. Australian big business does not want its courtship of Asian capital disrupted by Australian rednecks any more than by Indonesian workers or East Timorese liberation fighters. Hanson is bad for trade!

However, there are no Aboriginal capitalists to placate. And the Aboriginal people — less numerous, more scattered, and much poorer than Australia's Asian immigrants — are more vulnerable targets for a racist offensive to secure its first successes.

Even limited successes for Hanson represent a real danger. They can be prevented — but only if the trade union and labour movement mobilises against her, with a positive social counter-programme and not an attempt to construct a great Popular Front with bishops, judges, Governors-General and trade-with-Asia anti-racists.

## The militants

By Berthold Brecht

1st Man: Who are those people?

2nd Man: Not one of them  
Cared only for himself  
They ran without rest  
To get bread for strangers.

1st Man: Why without bread?

2nd Man: The unjustman may cross the  
street in the open  
But the just man hides.

1st Man: What's being done to them?

2nd Man: Although they work for low  
wages and are useful to many men  
Not one of them lives the years of his  
life  
Eats his bread, dies contented  
And is honourably buried, but  
They end before their time  
Struck down and trampled on and  
heaped with shame.

1st Man: Why don't we ever hear about  
them?

2nd Man: If you read in the papers that  
certain criminals have been  
Shot or thrown into prison, they are  
the ones

1st Man: Will it always be like that?

2nd Man: No.

*St. Joan of the Stockyards, Scene III*



The Euro-marches culminate in a demonstration through Amsterdam

# Adventures of a Euro-marcher

By Ruah Carlyle

**T**WELVE separate "Euro-marches" converged on Amsterdam last month at the end of a two month long series of marches, protesting at unemployment and social injustice. It was a peculiar yet inspiring display of internationalism. These Euro-marches arose largely from the success of shorter marches through France in the last few years.

The model was that of the "hunger marches" through Britain in the 1930s. The labour movement would organise funds and support them with food and accommodation. These were highly political marches of mainly unemployed workers whose destination would be the seat of government. In 1930s Britain this meant London and the Houses of Parliament. For the Euro-marches it meant Amsterdam and the European Summit — held on 14 June.

Just as in the past, on the Euro-marches the end destination was less important than the experience of the march itself. In theory the march would culminate in a "lobby" of the heads of the European states. In practice we scorned their summit.

The purpose of the march was publicity and propaganda. We were a mobile campaign which rallied local activists in

each town we passed through around our three masthead slogans:

"Against a Europe of Capital",  
 "Against unemployment and job insecurity",  
 "Against social exclusion".

We did not entertain any reformist/liberal illusions that marching across Europe

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**"The model was the hunger marches, destination the seat of government. For the Euro-marches that meant Amsterdam and the European Summit."**

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with all the correct arguments (for a minimum wage, cut the working week without loss of pay, make the bosses pay for our welfare state, etc.) would have the slightest effect on Europe's capitalist ministers.

The European march was a fully fledged campaign but with a limited lifespan — two months of marching, 18 months of preparation — whose three main demands could be and were read to mean

far more than the liberal slogans they clearly are.

It was a kamikaze campaign composed of revolutionaries, anarchists, reformists and even some liberals, with a central core of unaffiliated unemployed workers. For some the campaign was a "charitable" endeavour — save the trees, save the Third World, oh, and save the unemployed too. This patronising approach accounted for some of the middle class support we received — money and media coverage — in the towns we passed through.

But it was a genuinely broad-based affair which attracted new marchers wherever it went on the basis of the core demands. Here is a description of the march I joined in Paris. At that point it had already travelled from Tangiers, through Spain and southern France.

## France, 17-25 May

**I**N every town that the march visited, meetings were held. The first meeting in Paris was on the streets at Place d'Allègre. After speeches, a street theatre group performed a political play attacking the evils of Thatcherism. Then more culture

— this time in the form of a classical musical recital in the local trade union building. The building was, in fact, squatted property. We enjoyed all the art and appreciated the differences in culture between the British and French labour movements (they had some!) but we were still surprised and feared these people were soft. The recital was fascinating, performed as it was in a tatty room on the fourth floor, with the Alsatian dogs of the various crusty/punk marchers wandering between the two performers, followed by a drunken marcher staggering into the violinist. A unique performance.

The following day provided a stark contrast to the almost summer holiday ease of our first day on the march. We stayed in Paris to help out a local campaign against homelessness — *Droit Au Logement*. No music today, except the hippy songs on the Metro. Instead, we squatted empty property in the 16th arrondissement. The police took action, arresting over 50 people in two separate occupations. Three people were beaten up and later charged by the police for resisting arrest. Because of this action the march gained a great deal of publicity across Europe — on French TV, on European radio and in papers as far away as Germany.

The publicity gained us warmer receptions and new marchers in the towns we passed through as we headed north. It also brought some Parisian trade union branches out, to march with us in protest at the police action.

The day after the occupations, we had to wait for the release of the three marchers who had been kept in jail overnight. While our lawyers attempted to gain the release of the three at the Palais de Justice, the marchers and other protesters surrounded the court.

At one point, without any justification in law, the judge told our lawyers that unless we left the environs of the court the captives would not be released. To this our lawyer simply replied: "You think there are too many demonstrators outside now? If they are not released within one hour, by this evening there will be 3,000." Bluff or truth, it worked on the judge. The captives were released one by one and greeted with rapturous applause outside the jail gates.

One of the people arrested was not a marcher but a student involved in the homeless rights campaign. His clothes were bloodstained and a hastily sewn-up gash across the side of his head was so deep and long that it resembled a knife wound.

Following various protests, trade union action in solidarity with the marchers, and further arrests of marchers for purely intimidatory purposes, we held another action. Still keen on publicity and fuelled by an

ultra-leftism only seen in the most mental left groups in Britain, we occupied the French equivalent of the Treasury. With more cameras present to witness the scene, the CRS (militarised riot police) refrained from rushing in and cracking heads. The occupation lasted for about five hours and the CGT trade union branch in the government building held a solidarity picket and briefly joined the occupation.

At some points it was quite comical. Other suggestions for occupation included the Stock Exchange and Parliament. We did in fact occupy the theatrical display area of the Treasury where my friend found a placard — a stage prop — with "no nude bathing" in French on it. He planted it in front of a line of police and demanded: "Why not?"

There was violence on the way out with the CRS, the same squad who had arrested us two days before. The commandant and I recognised each other and I wondered if he would wave. He didn't!

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**"The bulk of the marchers are ordinary, out-of-work men and women with trade union or collective links, some homeless people, some alcoholics, some trade union officials and a smattering of revolutionaries."**

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They began stamping on people, but failed to arrest anyone. After this occupation — on the plus side, the publicity it had gained and, on the minus, the anger it aroused in the CRS — we decided it was time to leave Paris as quickly as possible and continue the march.

Some comments on the political and national make-up of the march. It is mostly French, with a significant number of Spaniards, mainly from Valencia, Barcelona and Catalonia, and some from the south. This means that the daily marchers' meetings are slow and laborious with much information being missed, as at least two translations are needed. This communication problem got worse as we went north, adding Flemish, Dutch and English to the language list. As we left Paris we were also joined by a Bosnian delegation — miners, postal workers, nurses and youth — three of whom spoke English.

The Spanish are mostly anarchists from the CNT and there are many French anarchists too. One difference between mainland Europe and Britain is that a sizable organic, organised, anarchist tradition sur-

vives and shares space with other revolutionaries. These aren't Class War, violence-glorifying, ultimately working-class-alienating wankers, or lifestyleist, dog-on-a-rope anarchists. These people have a worked-out, coherent (well, as far as anarchism can be coherent) philosophy and method of activism in conflict with that of revolutionary socialism. These people are political.

In addition, there are plenty of lifestyle anarchists too, more colourful, more dirty, more drunk: they make a principle of boycotting the daily marchers' meeting where we decide what to do. These people aren't political.

There are also lots of eccentrics and more sinister, essentially mad, people for whom the march's third slogan, "against social exclusion" has an additional meaning. There are a few "perverts" (voyeurs, as far as I could make out) who soon clear off, and more comical nutcases such as the bloke whose every article of clothing bears a Christ-like portrait of Che Guevara with a blazing sun in the background. On the continent and especially in Spain — partly as a result of the Rage Against The Machine logo and partly due to transferred Catholic emotion — the Che cult is vast.

More comical is Ivan, an ultra-left Spanish anarchist with a perm (more about him later), or Mao Monkey, a scruffy 19 year old, who was learning Chinese so he could read Mao in the original text.

The bulk of the marchers are ordinary, out-of-work men and women with trade union or collective (like co-ops) links, some homeless people, some alcoholics, some trade union officials and a smattering of revolutionaries.

Once out of Paris we put some space between us and the CRS, taking coaches to Arras up in the north, where in a round-about way we take part in the government elections (only a few days away at the time).

The Mayor of Arras is right-wing, affiliated to the Chirac-Juppé right coalition. The Arras council provides us with abysmal lunch — just rolls — which in France is an insult (the idea that a Tory council would provide a labour movement march with *any* food in Britain is astounding). Using this as our starting point, our march through Arras detours — the local CGT trade unionists with us — into the town hall which we occupy, strewing it with confetti and crow-frighteners (very loud fireworks). We also enlist the aid of some local peasants (yes, peasants: their tractor had a banner of the Peasants' Land League draped over it) who throw a bale of hay at the mayor, shouting: give him the food of a donkey!

In the evening we are fed gourmet food, garnished with beer, and provided with accommodation by the Socialist Party-



*Sans-papiers demonstration in Lille*

led council just adjoining Arras. We had in fact been enlisted by the reformists — in exchange for beer, food and a decent kip — to fuck up their opponent's last few days of campaigning. Way-hay!

The next few days are a succession of marches between small northern mining towns (*Gerrizinal* country) with incumbent Socialist Party councils who put us up and entertain us and are very patronising in the process. At one Town Hall reception, a marcher from Brittany demands of the Mayor, "never mind your objection to this or that condition, what are you doing right now to end unemployment in this town?" The reformist has nothing to say — town hall decked out with murals, heroically depicting the recently dead President Mitterand, was testimony to what his well-fed greed had done in the 1980s: increased unemployment and provided fertile ground for the Le Pen fascists. This mining area was now largely derelict, most mines being closed for at least 25 years, and had a great deal in common with the Yorkshire pit villages in Britain, including useless local politicians. The Mayor's face in one of the murals — greeting Mitterand — had been repainted, retouched with each new mayor, each new bourgeois 'functionary' giving a short span of imaginary glory even being painted out!

At this point in the journey the march had too small a kitty left to provide the marchers with a little necessary money — tobacco money for most people. To remedy this we went collecting on the motorway — a 'payage', something close to highway robbery. In France, you pay at toll booths for using the motorway. About 40 of us attacked the toll booths, broke the barriers across the road, and waved traffic through the gaping toll booths, after telling them that the Euro-march was performing this action and why, selling them the march paper (called *Amsterdam*; the march is really now like a miniature campaign) or just asking for and usually receiving 10 or 20 francs. We continued this for about two hours while motorway police milled around, failing to stop us. They didn't even try.

We cost the state a lot of money and made the equivalent of over £1,300! Not bad.

Following a large demonstration in Lille — at which the "sans papiers" (people without papers), immigrants denied permanent leave to stay and deprived of full citizenship rights, marched with us. We left France, crossing several hundred miles in a few days. We did not walk all the way: coaches, clapped out old minibuses and cramped cars carried us large distances.

## Belgium, 25 May-4 June

THE Belgian leg of the Euro-march was far more low-key than the French campaign. The local organisers decided against flamboyant occupations, preferring loud and frequent demonstrations wherever we went. We marched greater distances more often. The march split into three to maximise publicity and new recruits. Our leg went through the centre of the country to Brussels, then veered off toward the coast.

The march consisted of a tour of the Belgian labour movement — through Tournai, Quaregnon, Louvière, Tubize, Brussels, Vilvoorde, Mechelin, Antwerp and the border town of Tournault. The Belgian labour movement is strong but conservative. It provided us with support, but did not agree with the main intent of the marches and their call — for most in a confused and unfocused way — for some sort of fundamental change in society. Again, we are sponsored by reformist socialists.

The organisers of the march in Belgium — maybe as an attempted substitute for political actions such as those in Paris — provide more entertainment, creating a more carnival-like atmosphere. On the first day we are joined by a troupe of 10 or 12 actors, "les bouffons", dressed in macabre costumes and performing insane, sprite-like street theatre. They look like characters from Hieronymous Bosch, Breugel or Ken Currie paintings, misshapen, hunch-backed, black-toothed, dirty, one with two heads, another the devil on stilts.

They were employed to accompany the march at various points along the way to Amsterdam. They are superb, playing as a band in the evenings. One of them quotes Brecht from the steps of a Town Hall: "Knowing that you were strong and we were weak, you decided to make us serfs. Knowing that there was coal and you were cold... etc." (from *The Demands of the Communards*). Additionally, the march is joined on the second day by a seven-foot tall boot.

The more lightweight atmosphere does not dispel tension between marchers though. After a fist fight, two are expelled from the march in Quaregnon. Aside from crazy outbursts, simply the pressure of day-to-day communal living — sleeping in halls, queuing for food, for showers, not understanding the language of those around you, dealing with, or being, someone with psychiatric problems (of whom there were many on the march) — bred petty disputes and tensions — conflicts over sleeping mats, sometimes even over food, which occasionally became violent. Not a lot could be done about it.

The high point of the Belgian campaign was the visit to the Vilvoorde Renault

## Diary of an occupation

**I**N Paris, as in most European cities, there are more empty properties than homeless people. In conjunction with the local squatters' groups, we decided to occupy enough property to house 100 families.

Political activism in France is different from activism in Britain. The Socialist Party has cut all ties with the unions, and during 14 years in government did effectively what the Tories did in Britain. As a result, militants are more willing to strike, occupy, fight and break the law. Also, the fascists polled 15% in the last election, which gives activists more sense of urgency.

On the way to the 'target' squat, a big, fat Frenchman in a sheepskin waist jacket tore down all the fascist election posters we passed with a pickaxe. Very funny. We passed a monument 'in commemoration of French dead who died under German bullets'. A Frenchman exclaimed, "those were Nazi, not German bullets."

From the Metro, we charged inside a very large, very posh... well, mansion — not really a house at all. We hung banners out of the windows and brought mattresses, sleeping bags and desks for the students inside.

The wonderful building we'd reclaimed was very old but immaculately clean, with four storeys and about sixty rooms, in a bourgeois area of the city. It must have been the city home of a very rich family in the past.

A crowd gathers outside the building to listen to the speakers. All very Spanish Civil War (lots of CNT red and black flags stuck out of windows). We all chant, "un toit, c'est un droit" (a roof is a right!).

A few police turn up, but merely look flustered. The squatters' lawyer arrives. In France, a squatter has certain rights and, after inhabiting a property for a few days, only needs a legal document of some sort to gain tenants' rights.

About half the occupiers leave for another occupation. 30 of us stay to prevent the doors being boarded up again. People sit about chatting, but they are only half relaxed, expectant. The crowd outside grows smaller as people come inside. One occupant is showing his father around his new home.

A reporter from the French daily *Le Figaro* interviews some of the residents. She seems friendly at first but, with her tape recorder on, her questions reveal a deep scorn: "You expect to live in a house like this?"

A young man replies: "While there are buildings empty and young people homeless, yes."

Suddenly a torrential rain begins. The interview is interrupted by clanking feet up the stairs. At first I think they are running in from the heavy rain, but the agitation of the occupants in the room indicates something serious. Over 100 riot police are standing outside in the road, in formation, shields up. An alarm cry of "CRS, CRS" breaks out among those at the window.

The CRS are policemen who are actually part of the army, supposedly responsible for the security of the President, but notorious for being very violent, stupid thugs, used to smash up demonstrations.

The rain is pelting now, and the CRS look very military, not moving although they are getting soaked.

One of the squatters was standing out-

side when the police appeared and now wants to get inside the mansion to be with his friends. He's very comical as he clammers up the drainpipe. Someone shouts "dump your drugs" and we all sit down in the same room, arms linked, each with a sleeping bag, expecting a night in the cells.

The CRS march in and, after a brief refusal to stand up, we leave, arms still linked (the CRS are known for grabbing individuals and throwing them down stairs or separating them off and battering them in a quiet corner). CRS men line the stairs and exit; police vans are parked in front of the building and we are herded into them. An old lady is crying; one of the colourful banners that was hanging out of the windows earlier has been cut loose, and lies in the road, half submerged in a puddle.

Once we're in the van, we are more relaxed — we make jokes and sing *Summer Holiday* as the bus passes the Arc de Triomphe. We considered writing a tourist book, 'Paris from a Police Van'.

It took a while to be processed, and there were too many people arrested to fit in the cells, so they used the space between two outhouses to contain us. The Declaration of the Rights of Man was written across the top of the police station. We sang, "All the coppers' flies are undone". The really stupid ones kept checking.

The squatters' dogs — three big Alsations — are impounded. But, soon after, a civilian CRS man returns to tell us "we're letting the dogs go because they don't like the policemen looking after them." A chorus breaks out of "Lock up Juppé, free the dogs".

Someone lights up a joint, everyone's in conversation — if it wasn't for the two rows of policemen we would look rather jolly. Someone notices that one of the buildings alongside us is the CRS officers' locker room and one locker has a National Front election sticker on it. One of us attempts to photograph this and is warned that he will have his camera broken if he does.

When arrested in France, you are obliged to give only your name and age, but they ask you other details in the hope you will tell them. When being asked these questions I refused to answer, but felt guilty as the plainclothes lieutenant asking me was so polite! Then the commandant chased me out of the station and half way down the road, which reaffirmed my faith that all police are bastards.

As we converge outside, waiting for the last two evicted occupiers to be released, a fat policeman walks up to us and demands that we leave the area or the last two will not be released. "You smell" he says. You see, it's a rich area, and not the sort of place for homeless people and revolutionaries.

Later that evening, as we are making our way back to the sports hall where we will sleep, we meet another marcher, Christine, who has been waiting unsuccessfully for two hours for another marcher, Laurent, to be released from another police station, after the CRS arrested him for photographing them harassing an old man in the street.

Christine is very angry. My comrade consoles her: "I'm sorry you had to tell me this story."

She starts: "No, no, it's OK. I'm glad it happened, it's been revelatory. It makes things clear."

By Ruah Carlyle  
and Luke Koschalka

car plant, just beyond Brussels on the cusp of the divide between the Walloon (French-speaking) and Flanders (Flemish-speaking) parts of the country. Vilvoorde was the sparking point for a Europe-wide strike wave in Renault plants to combat the capitalist tactic of moving capital around, in this case closing down plants and re-opening them in countries with a less militant workforce. In defence of Vilvoorde, Renault workers struck all across Europe. The march is greeted and entertained by the workers, who occupy — with a barbecue — the front entrance to the plant's storage car park, christening it the Café Mégane. They also provide us with accommodation inside the car plant itself, in the company committee rooms, directly above the factory floor!

As we progress through the Flemish, northern part of Belgium, something in the air sends our loonies more loony. A Flemish masochist joined us and insisted on roller-skating to Amsterdam — even though he couldn't skate. Once he had all but severed his legs continually falling over, he went barefoot. When we had music in the evenings, he danced like a psychotic, flipping over and landing on his spine repeatedly until he had huge cuts all along it. Mao Monkey — similar in appearance to Stig of the Dump — made friends with the masochist, went barefoot as well, discarded his sweaty shell suit for ragged shorts and T-shirt, and took to carrying a spear broomstick around, while running with a pack of dogs. He thus clearly demonstrated the devolutionary role Maoism plays in history, for after Maoism comes — savagery; he had, after all, devolved from a Maoist into a troglodyte wolf-boy.

Ivan (anarchist with perm) decided to wander around in a judo suit with a stick and a floppy hat, like a cross between Luke Skywalker and a Bolivian peasant. Che bloke had taken to hugging trees, each and every one we passed on the road from Tournault to the Dutch border. I felt we'd better leave Belgium before normal marchers began to be affected by the air too, but Holland was not the ideal escape, considering the amount of dope there and the fleets of bicycles designed to kill stoned people.

## Holland, 5-14 June

**T**HE Dutch campaign was less low-key than the Belgian, partly due to the fact that it was less well-organised. At one point we were unsure where we would be sleeping a day in advance, as our usual dormitory, at the nearest leisure centre or sports hall, had not been arranged. As a result, there were fewer reformists to annoy and we had a freer hand. We met up with marchers bussed from southern Spain —





The author (far left) on the road

Andalusia and Alicante — as well as the English (stereotypically pissed-up) and Irish (stereotypically lost) marchers.

Our actions consisted of a job centre occupation, sit-downs and two attempted train occupations (a major demand of the labour movement on the continent is free transport for the unemployed) — one successful and one unsuccessful.

Holland's police were deceptively nasty. In France the police and the CRS were notorious for their violence and we had expected their behaviour. In Belgium, the police were comical, either very fat, handle-bar moustachioed, in leathers that made them look like bondage fetishists, atop huge motorbikes, or, at the other extreme, wimpy, plastic-coated lab technicians riding at most 50cc, phallically unimpressive pushbikes, at which we yelled "wiener", and who were constantly getting irate when we marched ahead of them, our supposed escort.

In Holland the police greeted us in shirt sleeves and on bicycles, were blonde, smiled, waved traffic on and were so seemingly inoffensive as to be almost cuddly. We assumed they would stay like this. When we attempted to occupy a train to take us to Delft, rather than let us break the law by fare-dodging, the police found us a spare driver to take us on a free, requisitioned train.

Understandably, we now considered these police absolute wimps. We characterised them too soon. When we attempted to 'requisition' another train the following day the police ambushed us inside and out of the platform.

They behaved like lunatics, clubbing us randomly and indiscriminately, splitting our eyebrows open. One police officer showed particular dislike to a Spanish anarchist who clubbed him while he was

cornered inside the train. Others attacked people as they scrambled over the tracks. Three people were hospitalised, one with a broken arm.

In Amsterdam we rendezvoused with the other French march (the German march had met us back in Antwerp), along with the northern march from Finland, who had in fact cycled all the way in four days. Euro-march over, its protagonists on the 14th of June joined the march of 40 to 50,000 people (police figures) through Amsterdam.

This march was like an enlarged Euro-march, with thousands of CNT and CGT from France and Spain, autonomists and anarchists from Germany and Holland, as well as a few hundred people from Britain. Several thousand Italians squatted trains to Holland but were prevented from joining the march.

Swathes of people converged in the Dam Square, the pre-march gathering, stretching back over half a mile on either side of the street.

The final rally had speakers from, among others, Vilvoorde, the Liverpool dockers and the Hillingdon strikers.

It was a resounding end to the Euro-march, making clear the commitment of the European labour movement to fight the capitalists' plans for our class. The march highlighted the plight of the twenty million or more unemployed workers in Europe. We left in each town we passed through and in its local campaign an enhanced sense of being part of a much bigger movement and a strong residue of anger, protest and resistance that will not quickly disperse.

The march was a contribution to the vital work of building the international working-class solidarity which is now more than ever necessary to combat the predatory internationalism of capitalism.

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# How workers' action freed the Pentonville Five

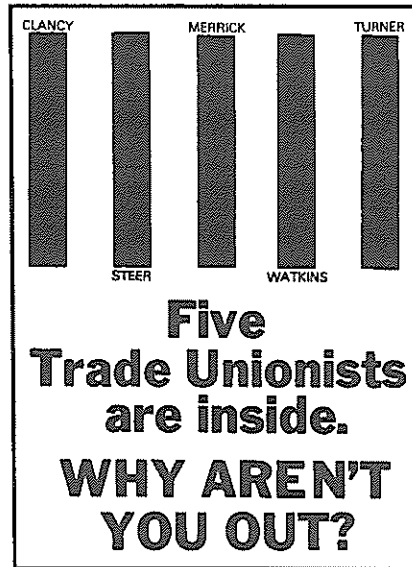
By Alan McArthur

**I**T is July 1972. With the union leaders safely in talks with Heath and knuckling under to his Industrial Relations' Act (IRA), the Tories now went for the real union power on the docks: the rank and file.

They were going to make an example of five dockers from east London — to cauterise resistance to the long-term running down of the docks, to stop the unofficial blacking of lorries and picketing at the container depots that were taking the dockers' work, and, most importantly, to complete the enforcement of the IRA (see page 30) and finally succeed in beating down the unions.

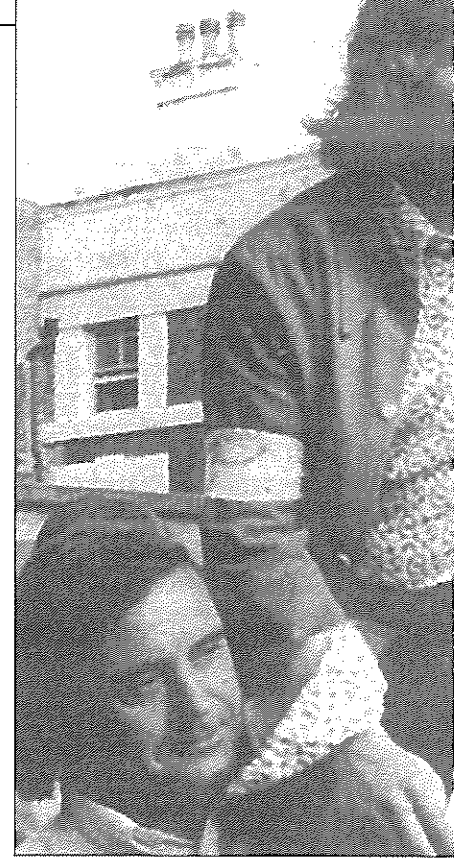
The Tories had chosen their moment carefully — annual holiday time in large parts of industry. Weeks of righteous press outrage about dockers disrupting good, honest work at the container depots prepared the ground.

Sir John Donaldson, judge of the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), ordered the arrest of the five dockers on Friday 25 July. Derek Watkins, Cornelius Clancy and Anthony Merrick were arrested on the picket lines at Midland Cold Storage in London, the firm that had taken them to the NIRC. Bernie



Steer was arrested later that day. They were taken to Pentonville Prison in north London.

By the time Vic Turner was arrested the next day on the mass picket at Pentonville, the majority of Britain's 42,000 dockers were on strike — and the incredible strike wave that was to see everyone from car industry workers to miners to

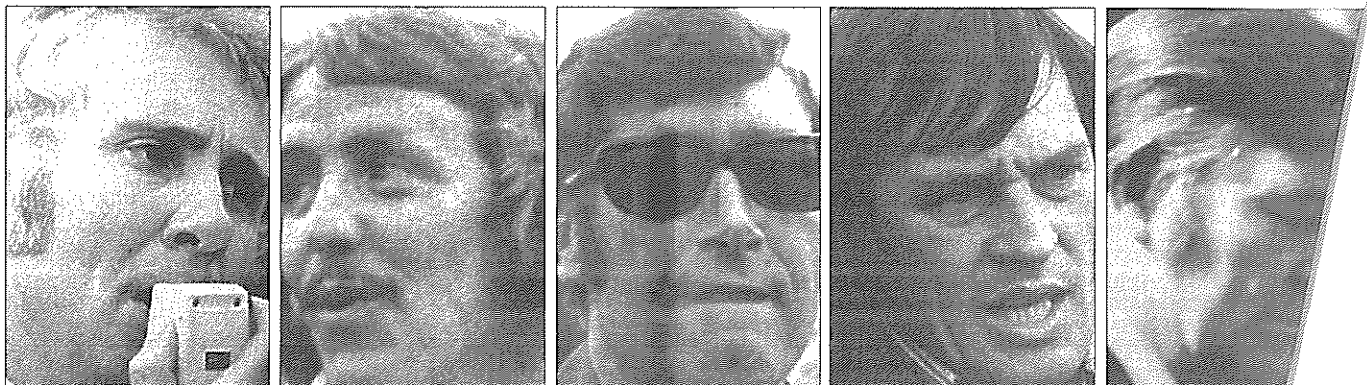


Cornelius Clancy carried

airport workers and bus drivers come out, had begun. The picket at Pentonville started as soon as the first arrested dockers arrived and continued until they were freed. Thousands of dockers were there day and night, joined by printers, building workers and even South Wales miners.

This incredible level of action — even given the numerous annual holidays that had, as the Tories planned, limited the potential for solidarity action — took just six days to free the Pentonville Five. The Tories dressed their action up in legal niceties as they freed the Five on Wednesday the 26th, but mass, direct working class action had (for the second time in 1972, following the Sattley Gates victory in February) brought the government to its knees.

There had been a long build-up to this so-called "July Crisis". On 8 April the NIRC fined the Transport and General Workers' Union £5,000 over the blacking of lorries at Heaton in Liverpool. (Heaton were joined in their action



The Pentonville Five, from left to right: Bernie Steer, Cornelius Clancy, Derek Watkins, Tony Merrick, Vic Turner

# Background on the docks

**T**HE cause of the docks dispute was containerisation and its attendant attacks on dockers' jobs and hard-won concessions of the post-war period.

In the seven years up to 1972 the number of dockers had been reduced from 65,000 to 42,000 — with 1,000 of those in the "unattached pool" on a minimum retainer but not working, a figure set to grow rapidly. Some estimates suggested a massive 90 per cent further reduction in numbers before the end of the decade.

The dockers' hard and bitter post-war struggles had won job security and (relatively) decent wages. They had gone from literally having to fight each other for a day's work to union-employer regulated, guaranteed work to registered dockers, under the National Dock Labour Scheme set up in 1947. The consolidation of the unions (helped by full employment) drove up wages.

It was still a long, hard and extremely dangerous job — the dockers handled chemical cargoes without protection, for example, and drivers of the cranes that loaded and unloaded barges could not see into the barges, relying on a system of hand signal directions to make sure they didn't crush anyone. There were a lot of accidents, and the docks destroyed the health of most of the men who worked on them. But the dockers had won real concessions.

Containers — increasingly brought in through the '60s — could be handled on average in a tenth of the time of non-packaged cargoes, being simply rolled on and off the ships. By moving over to containers the bosses could close docks, sell off the land for very large amounts of money and move to the inland ports not covered by the NDLS, using fewer people all on much less than registered dockers rates of pay. Simultaneously, they could undermine the NDLS and the unions, driving down wages and costs and driving up profits.

Rank and file militancy was high throughout, but the T&G leadership did not put up a fight. They collaborated with Labour's attempts to "rationalise" the docks (the Devlin Commission, set up in 1965). At the height of the struggle in 1972 T&G leader Jack Jones was busy conceding the absolutely key issue of registration of all dockers as part of the Jones-Lord Aldington Report. He even allowed the report to be rushed out by the government in an attempt to dampen down the July Crisis. Ironically, the press launch was unable to make much of a splash, rank and file T&G members having picketed out the newspapers!



through the streets of Islington, after his release from Pentonville prison

against the pickets and the T&G by Bishops Wharf in Liverpool, and later Craddocks). The T&G did not pay. On 20 April the NIRC fined them a further £55,000, and said that if the fines were not paid by 4 May they would issue a writ of sequestration. The T&G did not attend either hearing.

The Tories were pressuring the union leaders to reign in the rank and file by hitting what they held most dear — the union treasuries. It worked on the bureaucrats, who announced on 24 April that they would pay the fine (thus recognising the NIRC and the IRA, setting a precedent for the state to interfere in union affairs any time they fancied) — but not on the rank and file. At mass meetings on 27 April dockers in London voted to black two named container firms using unregistered labour. The same day similar decisions were taken in Tilbury, Hull and Manchester. 1 May saw a docks strike in Liverpool, Southampton and Preston. Another Liverpool docks strike on 7 May won a 35-hour week at the new Seaforth Terminal.

The 4 May Docks Delegate Conference voted to give 28 days' notice of strike (for improved pay and conditions and an agreement on containers being handled by registered dock labour). To make doubly sure the union leaders couldn't back down the National Port Shop Stewards Committee called a strike for 14 June, the day the Docks Delegate Conference reconvened. 30,000 dockers struck. Meanwhile, the Delegate Conference voted to postpone a strike for six

weeks in light of further negotiations (the Jones-Aldington Committee first met on 6 June), on the advice of the "leadership."

The same day — following a complaint lodged by depot workers at Chobham Farm container depot in Stratford, east London, on 8 June — the NIRC ordered the arrest of the three dockers who had refused to turn up to their hearing on the 12th — Bernie Steer, Vic Turner and Alan Williams — unless they attended the court the next day or lodged

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**"This incredible level of action — even given the numerous annual holidays that had, as the Tories planned, limited the potential for solidarity action — took just six days to free the Pentonville Five."**

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an appeal by 2pm on the 16th. (They did neither.) The previous day, 13 June, the Court of Appeal had amazingly overturned the £55,000 fines on the T&G, saying it was not responsible for the actions of its stewards.

All focus was on the three threatened dockers: mass meetings discussed that, rather than the calling off of the strike or the lifting of the fines. The picketing continued, and the arrests never took place. On the 16th (the day of the proposed arrests) dockers came out in

# Solidarity at Saltley Gates

By Jim Denham

**F**EBRUARY 1972. The miners were on strike over their pay claim against the Heath government. The Saltley depot was a crucial source of stockpiled coke for industry, and flying pickets from Yorkshire Area NUM had been attempting, with little success, to stop scab lorries getting in and out.

The leader of the pickets, a little-known Yorkshire NUM official called Arthur Scargill, appealed to the Birmingham trade union movement for support: despite the indifference (or hostility) of the national union leaders, Scargill's call won a magnificent response from the rank and file in Birmingham.

Arthur Harper, president of the East Birmingham AUEW, was crucial to the success of Saltley. He invited Scargill to address the AUEW District Committee which then put out a call for a solidarity strike. In addition, meetings were organised at all the major factories in East Birmingham to ensure that not only would the strike call be answered but also that the strikers would march on Saltley to close the gates.

Close on 50,000 engineers downed tools on the allotted Thursday (10 February) and a large proportion of them then marched on Saltley. Those who were present will never forget the scene: wave after wave of strikers came over the brow of the Saltley viaduct to swell the mass picket. Huge cheers and chants of "Close the gates!" went out as each new body of reinforcements arrived.

The police soon gave up the unequal struggle and the Chief Constable of Birmingham agreed to close the gates. Strikers from Fort Dunlop arrived just after the gates clanged shut and changed their chant to "Open the gates!", wanting the moment of victory to be relived in their presence.

Scargill and Harper addressed the assembled thousands from the roof of the dilapidated toilet outside the gates and claimed the Saltley closure to be a historic victory for working class solidarity. They were right: despite TUC codes of conduct and declarations of abhorrence of mass pickets by trade union and Labour leaders, solidarity action and flying pickets were reaffirmed as the cornerstone of effective working-class action by the Saltley Gates closure.

The early 1970s were great years for the British working class. By every measure possible — numbers, duration and quality — the class struggle reached new heights. In 1972 there were more strike days than in any year in British history except 1919 (a year considered by many to have been a pre-revolutionary situation).

Apart from the miners' successful

strike, there was also the biggest building workers' strike ever (300,000 out over two weeks), the overtly political strike to free the five dockers jailed for defying Heath's Industrial Relations Act, and even strikes in support of old age pensioners.

The second miners' strike at the beginning of 1974 was entirely illegal as it was a claim for nearly double the government's legally-binding pay norm. The Heath government had failed to impose its Industrial Relations Act in a series of key cases.

Because of the miners, the government was forced to impose a general lock-out throughout industry — the three day week — to save electricity.

Finally, Heath took the desperate gamble of calling an election under the slogan "Who rules Britain?" Labour won the election at a time of almost unprecedented class struggle, and solely on the backs of the miners and other groups of workers who had made Heath's continuing rule untenable.

It immediately repealed the Industrial Relations Act and scrapped

statutory wage restraint.

However, by the end of 1974 the Wilson government had produced the Social Contract — an incomes policy that

would keep down wage settlements.

It had TUC support and the backing of prestigious "left-wingers" of the AUEW and the TGWU.

The Social Contract succeeded (in the short-term) where Heath had failed: in 1974 there were 14.8 million strike days. The following year it went down to 5.9 million and in 1976 it was 3.5 million.

Working-class living standards were attacked and the promises to the low-paid and pensioners were not fulfilled. Planning agreements were nothing short of a debacle: Chrysler simply broke its agreement with the government (after receiving generous hand-outs) by selling off all its British plants and the government stood by and let them get away with it: this was the reality of trying to control capitalism without challenging the foundations of capitalist power.

How was it that the fantastic rank and file power of the early '70s — the militancy that had brought down Heath — could be dissipated into the defeats, demoralisation, and betrayal of the Wilson/Healey/Callaghan years?

How could it lead to a Labour Government so miserable that it would be followed by four successive General Election victories for the Tories? Because the labour movement never developed politics to match its economic militancy. The problem still remains.

**"The early 1970s were great years for the British working class."**

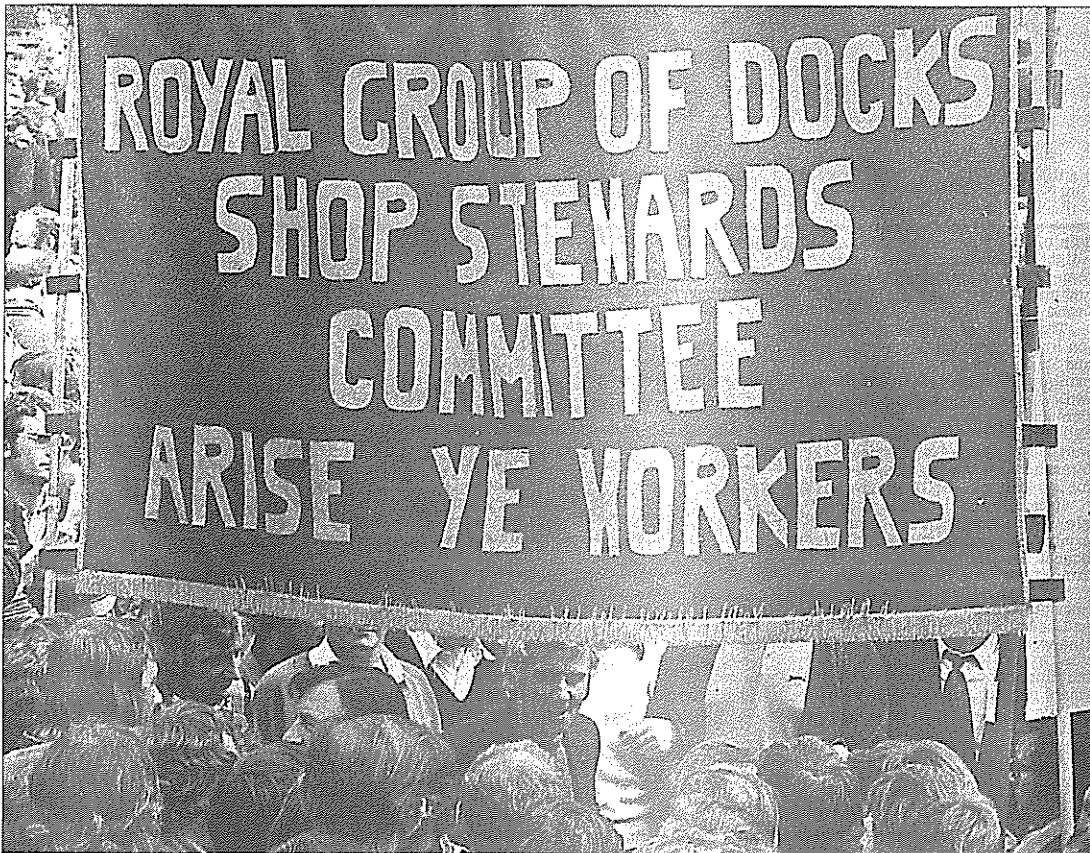
support of the three in London, Liverpool, Hull, Southampton, Tilbury, Cardiff, Newport, Manchester, Bristol, Barry and Preston. Workers at BMLH Longbridge car factory came out, too.

At Chobham Farm several thousand dockers awaited the arrival of the Tipstaff, the official who would make the arrest. But the Tipstaff never came. Instead, a hitherto unheard of state minion, the Official Solicitor, made his way — allegedly under his own steam — down to the Appeal Court to persuade them, in the name of all that is just and fair, that there was insufficient evidence against the three dockers. The arrests were over-ruled. The state had backed down.

By the 21st the bosses at Chobham Farm — having met NIRC officials in private — realised they had no room for manoeuvre and made a settlement with the dockers. It was an incredible victory. From 10 July the containers were to be handled by registered dockers. The present unregistered workers were to be found work elsewhere in the company, highlighting that the dockers' fight was with management, not other workers. The dockers even won a pay rise for the workers at the depot that took them to the NIRC!

The state tried again. Seven dockers were summoned to appear before the NIRC on 5 July because of a case put by Midland Cold Storage — a small container firm which was part of one of the huge shipping empires — against the pickets. They refused, and on 7 July the court issued a temporary order restraining the seven from blacking or encouraging blacking of lorries leaving or entering Midland's depot. The seven — carefully chosen after surveillance by private detectives, including pickets being photographed and tape recorded, and having wives and children "interviewed" by a detective pretending to be a journalist — ignored the orders. After unsuccessfully trying to take a similar action in the High Court, Midlands went again to the NIRC on 20 July. Meanwhile, with the TUC and the employers in talks, lorry drivers — at the very least encouraged by management, and according to some reports actually paid to do it — began to picket the dockers' picket at Midlands, later extending the picketing to the docks themselves.

On 21 July Donaldson ordered the arrests. The immediate solidarity that had sprung up with the threat at Chobham Farm was reborn on a far, far greater scale. The lorry drivers who had been picketing the docks immediately ended their action, in solidarity with the jailed



The 300 building workers who came out in Irving, Ayrshire, telegraphed T&G leader Jack Jones demanding a General Strike. Jones, however, did not even mention the Pentonville Five as he launched the rushed-out Jones-Aldington plan at a press conference. Meanwhile, the TUC leaders went to Downing Street for what proved to be an extremely short meeting with Ted Heath. They asked him to free the Five and put the Act "on ice." He refused. Tuesday's scheduled TUC-CBI-Tory talks on the economy were called off, and the leading inner committees of the TUC began to face up to the need for them to call action at Wednesday's General Council

trade unionists. Dockers in Liverpool who were already out in a local dispute gave their support; Hull dockers came out immediately. By the evening 26,000 dockers were out. Fleet Street electricians moved, though Saturday's papers were still printed.

A large Saturday demonstration against redundancies in the print industry turned to Pentonville. The Manchester dockers voted to not even discuss going back until the Five were freed. NATSOPA print-stop workers in Fleet Street came out, stopping the next day's papers.

On the Sunday the dockers picketed all the newspapers, using leaflets and a loudspeaker system to make sure everyone heard their case. The SOGAT van drivers responded and the papers were shut down. Now the bosses couldn't spread lies about the strikes or the dockers. The main London food markets were shut after solidarity action, too.

On Monday 24th ports that had never known an all-out strike were shut. The Fleet Street electricians voted to strike until the Five were released, shutting the presses indefinitely. The Scottish and northern editions of the papers were closed down, too. There was a half-day strike at Oldham's largest factory, Platt International. London lorry drivers and warehouse workers came out, as did Aberdeen, Fleetwood and Grimsby fishworkers and trawler crew — plus the Welsh and Scottish miners not on holi-

day, engineering workers, municipal workers in Tower Hamlets... and so the list went on. The Yorkshire District NUM announced action for later in the week: three Yorkshire pits came out immediately anyway.

before the spiralling movement slipped totally out of their control.

As Tuesday's 30,000-strong demonstration in support of the Pentonville Five passed the huge construction site at Mondial House, building workers walked off

## Eyewitness at Pentonville

**"P**ENTONVILLE jail, where the five dockers were imprisoned, is bordered on the Caledonian Road by high, white walls. Every day during the time the five were held there, vast crowds of trade unionists thronged up and down the road outside the prison walls.

"Some militants would stay there overnight, operating a shift system. Meetings were held in the side streets. Leftists moved about continually, selling papers. A street theatre group performed for the crowds.

"If the Revolution is, as someone said, 'A carnival of the oppressed,' then this looked remarkably like the Revolution! And on one level it was. It was a tremendous outbreak of working class revolt, stark refusal to accept that the Government, or Parliament, or any other power on earth, had the right to jail trade unionists for acting as trade unionists.

"It shook up British society. The

TUC felt obliged to call a one-day General Strike. The Government caved in. We won.

"The political limitations of the movement were plain even at this glorious demonstration of working class militancy, though. Bernadette Devlin, a left-wing socialist MP from Northern Ireland, turned up to show her solidarity with the trade unionists. She was soon surrounded by a very large group of dockers and others who associated her with the IRA, the Republicans.

"At least two of the loudest and most hostile of them I saw there every day during the Siege of Pentonville. Devlin had to be escorted away.

"But Ireland was an especially 'difficult' and 'complex' question. On the immediate issue, freeing the five jailed trade unionists, we won a great victory. When they came out of the gate, the five dockers were lifted shoulder high and carried to a side street through a great sea of cheering, joyful, triumphant people. The crowd roared with approval as each of the five said his piece from an impromptu platform on the back of a lorry. That was a great day for the working class movement."

Jackie Cleary

the job to join the march as it headed up to surround the prison. The Chiswick bus depot came out, ink factory workers, steel workers in their thousands, BAC at Bournemouth, 1,500 Bass brewery workers... Even the workers at Midland Cold Storage itself came out. Union districts and other bodies started to make plans for mass stoppages later in the week and the following week. As the movement

grew ever more rapidly no-one could even guess how many workers were now on strike. The government claimed a ridiculously low 62,000 excluding dockers — but the Western Mail estimated 100,000 in Wales alone. The newly famous — the newly heard-of-at-all, in fact — Official Solicitor was dusted down again to announce that he intended to apply for the release of the Five.

The TUC General Council met on Wednesday 26 July. It took them a full six days to take any action — other than mild condemnation of the government from Vic Feather: "Putting people in prison like this serves nothing... The damage that the Industrial Relations Act is doing to industrial relations and to the nation is now clear to everybody... The Act must be suspended. [!]" But the TUC leaders knew that they had to call some action or lose all credibility. Yet, an all-out, open-ended General Strike would very soon have been out of their control.

More scared of the rank and file than of the government — which they could no longer talk to — they called a one-day General Strike for the following Monday. The motion was moved by AUEW head Hugh Scanlon, his first and only known move since the "crisis" began. Meanwhile, 20,000 London bus workers came out, as did the ground staff at London Airport. All the major factories in Sheffield were on strike; 4,000 joined a demonstration through the town. Workers in local television came out, 10,000 lorry drivers on Merseyside (including at Heaton's, the firm that had gone to the NIRC in April), Lambeth refuse workers, Rolls-Royce Small Engine Division at Leavesden, Cammell Lairds and Fiddlers Ferry power station, Merseyside, Stourton container depot...

The NIRC, having, they said, weighed up all sides of the argument in a balanced and measured fashion in the finest traditions of British Justice, argued that the Jones-Aldington report and the House of Lords decision of that day to reimpose the £55,000 fine on the T&G for the Heaton's case (thus putting the pressure back on the trade union leaders to defuse the crisis), had clearly changed the situation as regards the five dockers. They could now go free. The state had backed down again: all the legal manoeuvring was just face-saving.

In reality, a huge, semi-spontaneous mass working class movement had succeeded in freeing the Pentonville Five, and in exposing the arbitrary class nature of the law. While that movement was not harnessed into a General Strike that smashed the Industrial Relations Act once and for all (see box), as was possible and even necessary, it was a truly incredible victory. The July Crisis was the British working class's highest point of militancy since 1926, which it remains to this day. As we look forward now to a labour movement revival we should both celebrate July '72, and learn the lessons of its potential and the failures of the left to seize that potential.

## What was the Industrial Relations Act?

**T**HE Industrial Relations Act was the first all-encompassing legislative attempt by the British ruling class to comprehensively shackle the trade unions.

British capitalism had been in decline since the turn of the century. Although temporarily buoyed up by the Second World War, new technology and markets, and cheap foreign labour, by the mid-60's the economy was (relatively speaking) in a bad way.

Britain's share of the world market had been declining rapidly. Growth lagged way behind Japan, the US and the rest of the developed world. Inflation and unemployment were growing.

To keep profits up and prices down the bosses, via the mid-60's Labour government, tried prices and incomes policies, i.e. squeezing wages. However, the strong shop stewards movement that had come out of the war and been consolidated through the 50's and 60's — strengthened by full employment — made a mockery of their efforts. "Independent of national union leaderships and untrammelled by legal controls," (John McIlroy, *The Permanent Revolution?*), the shop stewards remained the real wage legislators. Incomes policy failed.

So, the focus moved from trying to legislate incomes to reforming the trade union structures that made incomes policy unworkable. The Donovan Report of 1968 recommended avoiding restrictive legal legislation, instead integrating the shop stewards into workplace structures and making them part of the system — i.e. voluntary restraint rather than legal coercion.

Labour rejected the softly-softly approach and legislated to control strikes. 1969's *In Place of Strife*, defeated by a wave of unofficial strikes

(in increasing numbers in the public sector) against the measures and a coalition of the TUC and Labour MPs, was a miserable failure. The bosses' economy continued to fall behind its competitors.

Ted Heath and the Tories replaced Harold Wilson in 1970 — and at the end of that year came the Industrial Relations Bill. The IRB was an incredible and unprecedented (legally, that is) assault on trade union rights. The March 1971 *Labour Research* said:

*"The severe restriction on the right to threaten, call, organise, procure, incite, induce, finance, aid or abet strike action is only one tentacle of the Industrial Relations Bill. In addition there is the attempt to make agreements legally binding, the attack on closed shops, the prohibition of sympathy action, the encouragement of blacklegging and non-unionism, and the provision that the final arbiter of the control and conduct of a trade union's affairs is to be a government-appointed court, and not the union's membership. Any one of these proposals would, if implemented, seriously weaken the movement. Taken together they represent a massive, all-embracing class attack which aims to destroy the movement as we know it today."*

The Bill became law on August 5 1971. Under the Act unions had to register with a Trades Union Registrar with power to scrutinise and regulate their rules. If they refused, unions lost various financial benefits and tax immunities. The Act substantially ended the closed shop, and introduced emergency ballots and cooling-off periods for certain types of industrial action. It set up a new labour court, the National Industrial Relations Court, and made a number of "unfair industrial practices" into new civil offences — blacking, for example.

The aim of the Act was to cripple the unions at their grass-roots by making illegal the basic weapons of the rank and file — the closed shop, blacking, picketing and sympathy action. Instead, the rank and file, in a fantastic show of militancy, crippled the Act.

The Act was finally repealed by the 1974-9 Labour government.

# Internationalism after Stalinism

By Neville Alexander\*

THE world market necessitates an international. The need for an international organisation of the working class arises from the fact of the international division of labour and of the existence of the world capitalist market. This much was established by Marx and Engels as long ago as the forties of the last century when they composed that treasury of modern philosophical thought. The German Ideology.\* Were it not for the theoretical and strategic depredations of reformism during the last hundred years or so, this position would require no further discussion, especially in the era of globalisation where the dominance of trans-national corporations and the reality of international counter-revolution are evident beyond all doubt.

The failure of previous attempts to sustain international associations of the working class necessitates a careful review of the history of these attempts, on the one hand, and a thorough examination of the technological, ideological and organisational changes that characterise the present historical period, on the other hand. On the basis of such an analysis, new initiatives can be started and possibly sustained if all the converging and co-operating working-class and revolutionary socialist forces and elements remain committed to democratic practice both in theory and in day-to-day operations.

It is axiomatic and not worthy of further discussion that the survival of the human species in a world where the free development of all is dependent on the free development of each implies the destruction of the capitalist system. It is further abundantly obvious that most of the key problems with which we are confronted today cannot be resolved on the national scale. The threats to the biosphere through irresponsible profit-driven industrial and social pollution, the spectre of nuclear extinction, the spread of us yet incurable pandemic diseases such as AIDS, mass unemployment, mass poverty and hunger, as well as devastating recurrent civil wars, ethnic conflicts and international wars between two or more national states: all these are clearly beyond the control of any individual national state and the nature of the capitalist beast is such that it cannot

find a solution to this problem without committing systemicicide. Only the co-ordinated action of the international working class, i.e. of all those who have to earn their subsistence by selling their labour power, can bring an end to this system and establish the platform on which these and other problems afflicting the human species can be addressed with some hope of success.

Merely national, relatively isolated organisations of socialists cannot in the final analysis avoid the trap of national chauvinism. They are unable to generate a genuine internationalism which is based on the understanding that the working class is an international class by virtue of the fact that its capacity to work constitutes for the capitalist class a factor of production which is in the abstract (and, as we see ever more clearly, also in practice) not limited by national boundaries. Social democrats and other reformists see the world capitalist system as an aggregation of nationally bounded mini-systems and are, therefore, unable to get beyond the promotion of international solidarity. This is, in principle, no different from the kind of philanthropic sentiments associated, for example, with bourgeois pacifists. At times of extreme crisis, such noble sentiments are swept aside by the brute forces of nationalism, as we have seen in the course of two world wars and hundreds of others during this century alone. Without the ideological orientation towards international sectoral economic organisations of the working class and towards an international political organisation of the class, together with the systematic political education this entails, we are doomed to repeat on a regular basis the devastations of the past two hundred years of the dominance of the capitalist system.

## Globalisation and the crisis of socialism

TODAY, two related developments compel us to adopt a creative approach to the designing of a strategy for the building of an international organisation of revolutionary socialists rooted in the mass revolutionary workers' parties. These are, first, the crisis of credibility of socialism in the aftermath of the collapse of the Stalinist version of so-called real socialism; the second is the phenomenon of globalisation, both as a technological and organisational



reality of the late 20th century and as the ideological hegemony of blatant dog-eat-dog capitalist economics, otherwise euphemistically called "neoliberalism".

The perceived "crisis of socialism" requires of us an honest evaluation of many unproblematised aspects of what are taken to be the philosophical and strategic-organisational *a priori* of Marxism. At another level, it also implies that revolutionary socialists have to understand the life-and-death necessity of maintaining and protecting the independence of revolutionary socialist and workers' parties from any state, no matter how progressive it might appear at any given moment. The disasters associated with the dependence of revolutionary movements on the former Soviet Union, on China, and even on Cuba, are burnt into the memory of all of us.

We have, for example, to re-examine Marx's famous dictum that there is no such thing as human nature (in itself). While the statement is true in the most abstract and general terms, it has to be viewed against the dominant ideological and structural dynamics of every epoch of production. In other words, "human nature" in a tribal, a feudal or a capitalist era is decidedly different but it also tends — within each such epoch — to be decidedly uniform. If it is in fact the case that such an average human nature can be identified for each such epoch, and I am not referring to anything as vague and limited in time as a *zeitgeist*, than, in my view, some of the assumptions of socialists about the infinite variability of the human psyche are naive, to say the least. I realise that I am treading on dangerous — *nota bene*, not holy — ground, but I believe that questions such as these have to be re-examined since they have a direct bearing on the

\* Neville Alexander is a leading comrade in the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action. He spent 11 years in jail on Robben Island alongside Nelson Mandela and others for opposing apartheid.

strategy and tactics of revolutionary socialists everywhere in the world.

My own particular concern is with the path we have to plot in order to get to the formation of a genuinely internationalist organisation of the world working class. Particularly because of the totalitarian degeneration of the Third International, reinforced by the often quixotic attempts by sectarian groups to reincarnate that international as it was before 1929, it is simply not discussible today to suggest that an international party of revolutionary socialists should be the immediate objective of those who wish to work towards the establishment of such an organisation. It is our view in the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) that revolutionary socialists the world over have to get back in principle to the situation that obtained on the eve of the establishment of the First International. This does not mean, of course, that we are starting from scratch. It does mean, however, that all revolutionary socialist and anti-capitalist forces have to be brought together in co-ordinated revolutionary action with a view to understanding the real differences in the manifestation at the national, sub-regional and regional levels of capitalist exploitation and oppression in the era of globalisation.

For while the capitalist mode of production has not changed, the capitalist world system today has many unimagined and unforeseen features and contradictions which cannot be derived from first principles and the manifestations of which usually have the effect of dividing the national strata of the working class as well as the international working class. We need do no more than point to the racist consequences of so-called illegal immigrant populations in the advanced capitalist countries and the related genocidal ethnic conflicts in less advanced or "third-world" capitalist countries.

### A wheel without hub and spokes?

**I**MPERIALISM, neo-colonialism and the overriding fact of uneven development require that we find a practical organisational solution to the problems of disparity and real inequalities (of skills, resources, knowledge and information) which are such obvious features of the world socialist movement, taken as a whole. Hitherto, there has been a tendency towards what some comrades refer to as the "hub-and-spokes model" of an international. This refers to the historically attested fact that some, large or small, group of revolutionary socialists in some European (or, recently also, North American) metropolis creates "THE INTERNATIONAL", usually as a breakaway from some earlier version

of itself. This group then recruits individual, sometimes small groups of, intellectuals from one or other former British or French/Belgian colony (I am thinking of America here but the same is true by extension of other former colonial areas) who happen to be studying in the relevant metropolitan country at the time, and via them creates a "section" of the INTERNATIONAL in the relevant former colony. On a very few occasions, the etiology of such a "section" has been more organically related to real mass mobilisation in the former colony. Significantly, though, in most such cases known to me, the mass movement concerned has quickly disaffiliated from, or been kicked out of, the INTERNATIONAL concerned.

This slightly caricatured description of what has actually happened all too frequently is, needless to say, a travesty of what an international socialist organisation should look like. It is the reason, however, why we, in WOSA, consider that it is essential that any new initiative to establish an international political organisation of the working class and of revolutionary socialists will have to proceed differently and, above all, more cautiously. The fear of comrades who operate from "third world" countries of being treated paternalistically by comrades who are located in advanced capitalist countries is a very real one and is based on bitter experience. This is a very difficult and an extremely sensitive issue. There is, first of all, the brute fact of superior resources and a modern political culture which reaches back at least a century on the side of those who operate from the "North". On the other side, there is a real dependence and vulnerability but also a dignity and a pride born out of a liberated consciousness. It is clear that only an open, democratic discussion among equals, where there are no hidden agendas and where everyone is both educator and learner, will help us get over this hurdle. Not to face the facts of uneven development and to behave as though all wisdom and knowledge reside at the metropolitan "centre" is to play with fire and, in the end, to self-destruct.

We propose, therefore, that the first step should be to work for the establishment of an international Socialist movement which, by definition, will consist of co-ordinated action undertaken by nationally or regionally based organisations and parties. United-front global campaigns against the depredations of globalising capitalism such as the international debt, racism, gender inequality, unemployment, global pollution, etc., should constitute the testing ground for such a movement. Co-ordinated action based on mandates should gradually lead to more integrated decision-making procedures which could, in terms of lead-

ership styles and functions, eventually, lead to the replacement of a Co-ordinating Committee by a Central Committee. Whether and how this will take place should be left to the real movement of history rather than be the result of some organisational blueprint that is conceived of apart from the realities that determine the unique features of each participant area.

### Organisation or party?

**I**HAVE used the term "Organisation" advisedly throughout this article. We believe that the notion of a World Party, even if it were ever to be realised, is premature and in any case fraught with the most serious dangers of totalitarian hubris. Quite apart from the question of the continued relevance of terminology such as "democratic centralism" and "vanguard party" at the level of national organisation, I believe that this discourse is not only inappropriate but in fact self-crippling at the level of national organisation. The order of complexity at the international level, the vastly different historical and cultural milieus from which the participant organisations and movements derive and, not least, the real problems of international communication via *lingua francas*, simply render this kind of discourse utterly absurd or make the weaker groups into rubber stamps of the more powerful at any given time.

We may well have to find other words (in English) to describe the kind of formation which will best capture the needs of this historical moment. What is not in doubt for me is that sticking religiously to the terminology and the discourse of the past in this regard is no different from the mortmain that prevents the progressive deployment of resources in the life sphere of the propertied classes.

### Conclusion

**W**E are presently in the process of discussing these and other related ideas. It ought to be clear, therefore, that this is very much a work in progress, which is what Marxist scholarship should always be. For this reason, I do not apologise for the obvious incompleteness of some of the propositions I have put forward here. I believe that it is only through fearless debate and engagement among equal comrades dedicated to the same world view and to the same set of values that we can hope to enrich our understanding of the world we live in and of the tasks that we are expected to take on in our quest for a different world, one where the free development of all is determined by the free development of each.



# The organiser of victory

By Max Shachtman

**K**ARL Radek called the man who directed the work of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and became the first leader of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky, the "sword of the revolution", the "organiser of the victory". A few years later, Trotsky described his arch-opponent, Stalin, as the "great organiser of defeat".

One year ago, Trotsky was murdered in lonely exile and when he died those who acknowledged him as their leader numbered only a few thousand men and women throughout the entire world. His assassin in the Kremlin seemed at the height of his power, with more authority concentrated in his hands than anyone in history had ever known, unchallenged at home and wooed simultaneously by the two big aggregations of powers contending for the mastery of the world.

That was a year ago. Yet, as the shadows of history lengthen, they will throw into higher relief a permanent judgement of the two men; Trotsky will be recorded as the great organiser of victory and Stalin as the great organiser of defeat.

People with limited horizons, who boastfully call themselves "practical", find it difficult to understand this contrast in the roles of Trotsky, on the one hand, and Stalin, or other contemporary political figures, on the other. They judge by the fleeting and deceptive successes of a single day or a month. A clever ruse makes a bigger impression on them than a hard-fought battle, and victory or defeat in a battle means more than victory or defeat in a long, drawn-out war.

## His greatness as a revolutionist

TROTSKY'S greatness as a revolutionist, as a reorganiser of society, lay in his patience. He liked to point out the multitude of examples of impatience leading to wild adventures in politics or to short-sighted opportunism: and of both leading to dreadful calamities. He could never be persuaded to abandon the fundamental principles which were his life's work in order to achieve even a temporary victory, for he knew that victories bought at that price soon turned bitter and ate away the fibre of the victor himself. That is how he was able to regard Stalin, with all his "successes", as the organiser of defeat, and to consider himself, with true historical impersonality, or more accurately to consider his political philosophy as the organiser of victory.

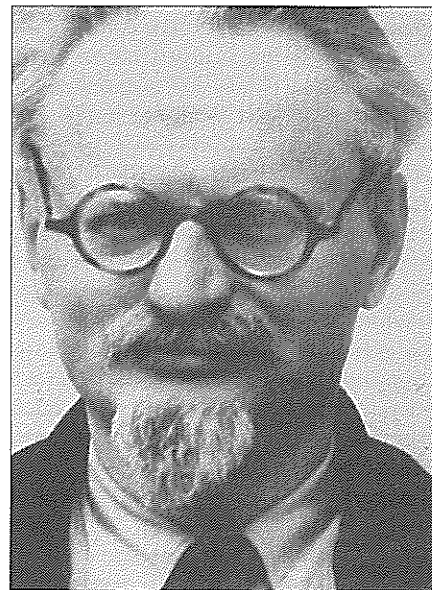
More than one example from the record of his struggle illustrates his method and his viewpoint. Surely everyone has heard of the armchair strategists who like to point out the "errors" and "shortcomings" in Trotsky's fight against Stalinist degeneration. That there was more than one goes without saying, and like every serious political person there is no doubt that Trotsky, too, would have done many things differently if he had had the chance to re-enact his life. But, oddly enough, the arrows of the dilettante and philistine critics usually hit wide of the mark and are almost always aimed at those spots in Trotsky's armour where he is invulnerable.

How many times have we heard, for instance, that in 1923, when Trotsky was still at the head of the Red Army, "he should have taken a couple of regiments into the Kremlin and cleared out the Stalinist gang at one blow"? "Oh, they are very clever, these people, very clever", Trotsky used to tell me, his eyebrows lifting sardonically with his voice. "All they lack is the capacity to think, that is all. The Opposition was fighting for revolutionary policy and workers' democracy, for the self-activity of the masses, in order effectively to combat the threat of Thermidorean degeneration and Bonapartist dictatorship. And how would these gentlemen have accomplished this? By organising, behind the backs of the Party and the masses, a Bonapartist military conspiracy and coup! Then, instead of a gradual process leading to Stalinist Bonapartism, we would have had an instantaneous Trotskyist Bonapartism. Yes, they are very clever people."

## Reaction reinforces bureaucracy

HE particularly enjoyed his elaborately sarcastic ridiculing of similar criticisms of the course of the Trotskyist Opposition made by journalistic observers of uniform superficiality. They would repeat time and again that Trotsky blundered fatally by confining his fight against the bureaucratic hierarchy to the ranks of the Bolshevik Party instead of appealing to the wide masses of the population, "where his name was still magic." Others pretend to see in Trotsky's policy an illustration of Bolshevism's "anti-democratic disdain for the masses."

"They do not understand anything at all," Trotsky would say. "The struggle started when the whole country was being swept by moods of reaction. With these reactionary



moods, the reactionary bureaucracy grew and its boldness and disloyalty increased. The only force capable of resisting these moods among the masses, and transforming them, was the Bolshevik Party, the revolutionary vanguard, with all its deficiencies and deformities. For the Opposition to appeal to the masses then would have meant to mobilise the increasingly conservative masses against the still revolutionary vanguard. The Opposition could not do that without betraying and destroying itself on the spot. The bureaucracy could make such an appeal. In fact, it had to make such an appeal. You know that it threw open the Party in its spurious 'Lenin levy' to a tremendous influx of hundreds of thousands of raw, untrained people, who constituted thereafter the big voting blocs of the bureaucracy. The Party was diluted and finally disintegrated by the Bonapartists by precisely this method. Only when the Party was finally dissolved and replaced by a repressive bureaucratic apparatus did the Opposition have to turn to the advanced elements among the masses for the re-formation of a party, a revolutionary vanguard against the pseudo-party, that is, against the Stalinist apparatus. Naturally, our critics do not understand this development. In general, they understand nothing."

## Optimism based on realism

TROTSKY'S patience of course had nothing in common with passivity or timidity. It was based on that unquenchable optimism that

struck everyone who came in contact with his writings or his person. His optimism, in turn, was based on the boldest, most perspicacious and realistic analyses of the course of development of history known since the days of Karl Marx.

Of all the revolutionists in Europe, Russia included, at the turn of the century, he alone foresaw and predicted with perfectly amazing accuracy the socialist course of the coming revolution against Czarism. Indifferent to all the charges of "utopianism" by the "practical" and "realistic" people, he worked out the dynamics of the future Russian revolution a dozen years before it actually took place. He showed why there was no class in semi-feudal, autocratic Russia that could lead and carry out a revolution except the proletariat. That, no matter under what conditions the revolution began, the working class could not, once launched on its struggle, ascetically impose upon itself such self-restraint as would keep the revolution within the limits of capitalist democracy. That, in the very course of carrying on the democratic revolution, it would find itself compelled, in alliance with the peasant masses, to make such encroachments upon the institutions of capitalist property as would direct it inexorably toward proletarian, socialist rule. The revolution, unless suppressed by counter-revolution, would have to proceed uninterruptedly; it would be a revolution in permanence.

It is instructive to read all the old socialist polemics against Trotsky before 1917. All the "practical" and "realistic" opponents of Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution read now as if they lived in the clouds. Even Lenin failed to grasp fully the clairvoyant forcefulness of Trotsky's analysis, although on some of the concrete aspects of the development of the revolution he displayed a keener insight into what was ahead than did Trotsky himself. Trotsky waited, patient but unceasingly active, throughout the years of bitter reaction that followed the 1905 uprising in Russia; waited patiently through the bleak years of the World War; waited — perhaps less patiently this time! — through the brief months of the democratic utopian, Kerensky; only to be vindicated to the hilt by the triumphant Bolshevik revolution of 1917-1918.

### His theories vindicated

THE vindication of the theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky's unique and magnificent contribution to the arsenal of Marxism, was not, unfortunately, confined to the victory of 1917. If he was vindicated once by success, he was also vindicated once by defeat.

The victorious revolution in Russia, he wrote in 1915, and even earlier, will not

succeed in maintaining itself if it remains in isolation, if it is not followed by socialist revolutions in the more advanced countries of Europe. This aspect of the theory of the permanent revolution was inseparable, in Trotsky's mind, from the one set forth above.

Taking direct issue with this view, Stalin developed the theory of "socialism in one country", that is, the theory that Russia could establish a socialist society regardless of what happened to the rest of the world.

It is not so much between these two men that the violent conflict developed, as between these two fundamental conceptions. One was the realistic theory of revolutionary working class internationalism. The other, the utopian theory of a reactionary, nationalistic bureaucracy. Stalin succeeded in destroying the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International, in crushing the revolution in a dozen countries all over the globe, in wiping out the Soviets and democracy in the Soviet Union, in slaughtering, imprisoning and enslaving the people of the country, and in plunging an axe into the brain of Trotsky. His theory "won". Only, he did not "build socialism in one country", for what he has established in the Soviet Union is not even a recognisable caricature of socialism or the rule of the working class. And, we are convinced, when history has had its last word it will have been shown that the Stalinist bureaucracy did not succeed in solidifying even its own rule "in one country". The great organiser of defeat, so admired by philistines and muttonheads for his "practicalness" and his precarious triumphs, will end in the successful organisation of the thoroughgoing defeat of himself and his murderous clique.

### His view on the Russian situation

**T**O THIS last day, Trotsky had only the serenest convictions about the eventual outcome of the struggle between the proletariat and the Stalinist bureaucracy, as he had about the outcome of the struggle between the world proletariat and world imperialism. His concern revolved only around the dilemma: will this perfidious bureaucracy be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat, which would thereby give a new and decisive impetus to the victory of international socialism, or will it succumb, together with the Soviet Union as a whole, to the blow of imperialist reaction, which would thereby set the inevitable proletarian revolution back for years and perhaps decades?

This concern disturbed him when the Second World War broke out even more than he had been disturbed in 1932 and 1933, when he feared that his clarion voice summoning the German proletariat to a

united front of struggle against Hitlerism would not be heeded. Not because, as some stupid people think, he was a "Russian patriot", or because his attachment to the Soviet Union was "personal" and "sentimental", but precisely because he remained to his dying hour what he had always been throughout his conscious life, an incorruptible old soldier of the international socialist revolution.

Only from the standpoint of the interests of that revolution did he continue to hold steadfastly to the slogan of "unconditional defence of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack". Because the war had taken forms none of us had anticipated, and Russia's role in the war was reactionary, we, who had learned our Marxism from Trotsky and his forebears, found it impossible to follow him in this course. Trotsky was uncompromising on matters he regarded as of principled importance, and there ensued between us a sharp polemic, that field in which among so many others he was a master. The breach that formed between us was widened unnecessarily by the vulgarisations of his supporters in [the USA] and by their bureaucratic procedure, and it was not bridged while he lived.

### Not with mummery...

EVEN so, we bow our flag at the still fresh grave of our greatest teacher, the most stalwart proletarian revolutionist of our time. Even so, despite our differences, we remain what we were, Trotskyists, partisans of the programme and principles of revolutionary Marxian internationalism, of the permanent revolution, of the Fourth International.

Trotsky was revolted by the hideous mummery of the Stalinists who embalmed the corpse of Lenin only the more easily to betray his principles and traduce his memory, as Lenin before him had been infuriated at the canonisation of Marx by the social democrats who betrayed Marxism. Nothing could be more remote from the life and teachings and deeds of Trotsky than to convert him into a religious image to be borne at the head of processions or worshipped in a niche. The generation of revolutionists to whom we belong have titanic tasks before them. They can be fulfilled only by assimilating into the blood stream the fundamental principles of Marxism which Trotsky defended so brilliantly and so brilliantly enriched, by infusing the working class movement with the spirit of hatred for all oppression, of militancy, of single-minded devotion, of courage, of boundless conviction in the triumph of socialism which animated Leon Trotsky throughout his life.

● The article was published by *Labour Action*, the weekly paper of the Workers' Party (USA) in August 1941.



# How the left established itself

By Sue Hamilton

A PREVIOUS article, in *WL40*, described how Labour Students won the leadership of the National Union of Students [NUS] in 1982. Then, they were a left-wing alternative to the previous leadership, around the Communist Party and its allies. After the 1983 election they moved to the right, but a left-wing challenge to them, both in the NUS and in the student Labour Clubs, was developing round Socialist Students in NOLS [SSiN].

NOLS, the National Organisation of Labour Students, had been relatively open and democratic in the early 1980s, but after 1983 it became harder and harder to set up new Labour Clubs, or to secure delegate credentials for the annual Labour Students conference.

Opposition clubs were ruled out on trivial technicalities. Leading critics' membership cards were lost in the national office so that they became ineligible to attend conference, and whole batches of cards disappeared to reduce the number of delegates that clubs could send to conference. Local Labour Party full-time officials, who had to be present for a new Labour

Club to be officially set up, would often cancel at the last minute.

Rules preventing part-time Further Education students from joining the Labour Students organisation meant that every student who was also signing on the dole became ineligible for membership.

The fight came to a head at the Hull Labour Students Conference in 1984. Many, many college Labour Clubs had been ruled out before getting to conference, but not enough: the combined opposition — SSiN and Militant — had at least as many votes as the ruling faction, "Clause Four".

In the first batch of elections, the left slate won some positions. The second batch never took place because the Labour Party official in charge closed down the conference after goading the Militant into behaving badly.

Clause Four alleged that one of their members had been thumped by a Militant supporter. Maybe she did hit him, but it is just as likely that one of his own side did it. More votes had been cast than delegates accredited. Militant declared that they had evidence of how the ballot had been rigged

and demanded a roll-call vote. They bungled it by accusing the Labour Party official in charge personally, without evidence. He took his chance and closed down the conference.

All the elections for a new National Committee were nullified and the old committee, dominated by Clause Four, stayed in office for another 12 months. SSiN candidates Clive Bradley and Bryn Griffiths had been elected as Publicity Officer and Vice Chair but never took office.

Years later, Danny Nicol, a delegate from Oxford University who had gone on to be a leading figure in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, revealed that his delegation had indeed rigged the ballot. They had been given more ballot forms than they had delegates, which accounted for the discrepancy between registered delegates and votes cast.

Clause Four made sure that subsequent conferences were firmly under their control, and Labour Students steadily dwindled from a political movement into a machine for putting careerists into NUS positions.

## The South Africa debate

**R**IGHT up until the end of the 1984-5 miners' strike, however, NUS was an open forum. That began to change after a debate on South Africa which frightened the life out of Clause Four.

Students had long supported the movement against apartheid in South Africa, for example in the protests against the South Africa rugby tour in 1970. Every big college had an anti-apartheid society. The Anti-Apartheid Movement had a full-time student organiser.

In the 1980s, struggles led by the new non-racial trade unions highlighted to the world the fact that other anti-apartheid organisations existed besides the African National Congress, which had heavy backing from Eastern Bloc governments, the Communist Parties internationally - and the Labour Students leadership.

Now the issue of direct links between British trade unionists or student unionists and the new non-racial unions and student groups in South Africa came to the fore. The ANC had always insisted that all contact with South Africa should be through them. Any other contact they insisted was a breach of the international boycott of the apartheid state. The new trade unions — developing in the teeth of hostility from the ANC, which recognised only its own exile trade-union front — did not agree. Many of their leaders talked about launching a new workers' party in South Africa. They wanted links with the international working class on their own terms — not mediated through the ANC.

In 1986, Moses Mayekiso, one of the leaders of the new unions, toured Britain with the backing of SSiN and Workers' Liberty, speaking to colleges, union branches, Labour Youth conference and NUS conference. It was impossible for the Labour Students leadership to denounce him as a pro-imperialist.

Labour Students had been saying that direct links would threaten the safety of activists in South Africa. When Moses said that of course caution was necessary, but the best way to make links was to telephone his union's office in South Africa, it was very hard for the ANC's "security" mumbo-jumbo to maintain its old credibility.

At NUS conference, the Labour Students leaders denounced SSiN as counter-revolutionaries, dupes of imperialism and so on. Yet several speakers had long family histories of involvement in the South African struggle; two had had their fathers murdered by the South African state.

The pro-direct links motion was lost by ten votes, thanks to the SWP, whose speak-

ers grasped the microphone to explain that only revolutionaries favoured direct links and reformists opposed them.

## Labour Students and Stalinism

**L**ABOUR Students also denounced SSiN and the rest of the left as "cold warriors" and "pro-American" because SSiN wanted NUS to support the independent student union in Poland set up by Solidarnosc in its revolt against the Stalinist police state in 1980-1. The Polish state-stooge student union, the NZSP, was a regular partner in the NUS's international lash-ups, and it was impossible for some people in Clause Four to grasp that there was a third camp in world politics, and neither Washington nor Moscow carried the banner of the international working class.

One reason they gave for not supporting the Solidarnosc student union was that it did not have a head office with a fax machine! The union had been driven underground, and its members communicated by tiny pamphlets which could be concealed in the inside lining of a jacket without altering the fit. Members wore electrical resistors as badges to identify themselves.

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### "SSiN became the main force campaigning against the banning of Jewish Societies and a general culture of "banning the unrighteous"."

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Labour Students' politics here, as elsewhere, were a mix of the Clause Four politicians' Stalinist ideology and the careerists' notion that student union development was to be measured by facilities and seats on the board of colleges, not by levels of participation and internal democracy!

Clause Four had begun as "Operation Icepick", named after the tool with which a Stalinist agent murdered Trotsky in 1940. Their more political members believed in Stalinism. Their younger careerists enjoyed international jaunts to Eastern Europe.

Each year NUS leaders would go off to the Eastern Bloc to be entertained by "peace movements" or "student movements" which were in fact nothing more than government fronts. When delegations arrived in the UK from the Eastern Bloc, it was party time for Labour Students; they genuinely believed that they were mixing with representatives from a higher form of soci-

ety, and that they were rehearsing for when they themselves would be grown-up politicians conducting matters of state. Now some of them do it with Blair.

Today, after the collapse of the Soviet Union it is hard to imagine the importance of this network, but it was as important as it was corrupt.

## Banning Jewish societies

**B**ESIDES South Africa and Poland, another big international issue — the Israeli/Palestinian conflict — also figured largely in the student politics of the mid-1980s. Here, the alignments were different.

In 1983, Sunderland Poly Student Union banned its Jewish Society because it was explicitly "Zionist" — i.e., it would not disown Israel. The Union referred to the United Nations declaration that Zionism was a form of racism, and argued that banning the Jewish Society was anti-racism.

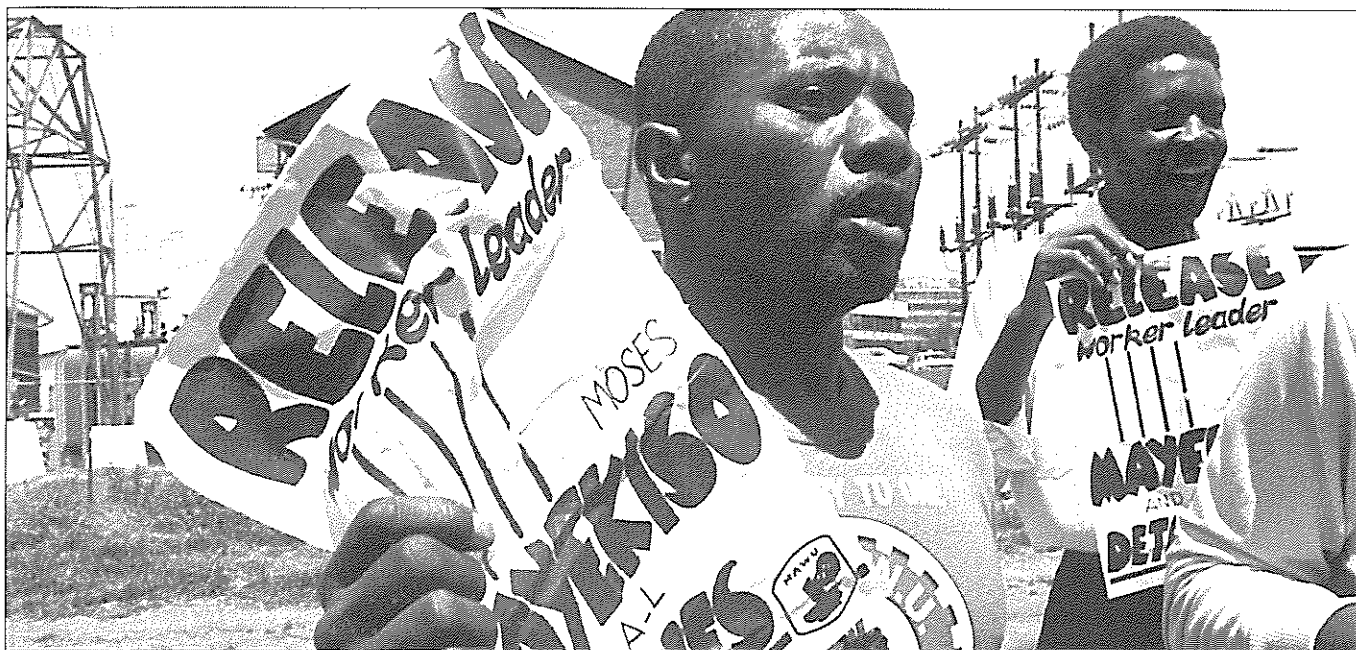
The long debate which followed covered many issues: the Palestinian question, anti-semitism, ways to fight racism, and also norms of democracy in student unions.

SSiN became the main force campaigning against the banning of Jewish Societies and a general culture of "banning the unrighteous". Workers' Liberty, the main group in SSiN, argued further that the right of the Palestinian Arabs to a state of their own — which we vigorously supported — did not and could not undo the right of the Israeli Jews to a state. For the Israeli Jews to want to be independent from neighbouring hostile nations was no more necessarily racist than the self-determination of any other nation.

Some of the Stalinist current in Labour Students were unmistakably anti-semites, but all the NUS leadership were against banning Jewish Societies. Left groups like the SWP and Socialist Action were in favour of the ban.

The argument also brought new players on to the NUS stage — people who had not previously been involved in the mainstream of NUS, who had perhaps been involved in single-issue international or anti-racist campaigns. Some black students saw the campaign to lift the ban on the Jewish Society as support for the policies of the Israeli state: those who opposed the ban were denounced as anti-Palestinian, racist and pro-imperialist!

As the row spread, it became clear that many students who considered themselves socialists, and certainly not anti-Jewish, believed that Zionism was not the majority reflex culture of British Jewry, but rather a conspiratorial ideology which declared the Jews a master race and ipso-facto the Pales-



SSiN organised solidarity with the new non-racial trade unions in South Africa

tinians as inferior beings. Nonetheless, the only Zionists anyone wanted to ban were Jewish ones. There was never a cry for banning Labour MPs like Tony Benn or Eric Heffer who backed Israel. Yet, before being allowed to have a Jewish Society in a college, Jewish students would have to denounce their heritage and their community culture, and side with those who wanted to destroy the state of Israel.

And to many students who saw themselves as militant anti-racists, the NUS leaders' opposition to banning was just one more example of the NUS Executive being too timid to carry through the logic of their position.

So misguided "Trotskyist" anti-racists went to bed with some anti-semites, who were also lashed up with Stalinists hostile to Israel from the viewpoint of the international interests of the Soviet empire. The battle line-up here influenced NUS politics

long after the Sunderland Jewish Society was reinstated and other, copy-cat bans were lifted.

### Holding together a broad movement

IT was a difficult time for SSiN. The project was building a broad left alliance in the student movement, but here SSiN had to oppose a large part of the left. SSiN members who were "anti-Zionists" — who accepted that Zionism = racism — suffered tremendous pressure to break with the majority, whom they considered to be "Zionists".

Through all the head-banging, name-calling and theatrical absurdity, SSiN stuck together by delivering results on the ground and getting the bread and butter issues

right. No matter what one's opinion was on the Middle East, there was more to keep the rank and file movement together than there was to split it.

Throughout this period, SSiN won nearly all the debates on domestic issues at NUS conferences — and there were then two conferences a year, large, lively affairs. On every issue of student unionism — the erosion in student grants, denial of social security benefits to students, housing crises, threats to student union autonomy, cuts in courses and facilities — SSiN had vigorous and practical policies for campaigning.

In a Britain where the Tories were running roughshod over the labour movement, we could score no big victories — and that fact determined a slow but steady drift to the right in general student opinion. Yet for anyone concerned to build a campaigning student union in their college, SSiN were the people with ideas.

Opposition to banning Jewish Societies in fact became something which bound SSiN together. Even those who felt that Zionism did equate with racism knew very well that banning the unrighteous was no way to build effective student unions with mass student involvement.

The SSiN coalition held together by doing all that a good working democracy could do, and that was a lot, to make the organisation habitable for the minority: they were offered space in SSiN publications, their alternative model motions were circulated and they were never denied a platform from which to put forward their opinion. Another of SSiN's strengths was that its slates for elections were not drawn only from the dominant tendency in the coalition.

SSiN's influence grew especially in the

Further Education colleges, where working-class youth study vocational and pre-university courses. The key here was the Area structures of NUS — autonomous, locally-funded, federations of local student unions. Because SSiN activists in the Areas were able to organise good campaigns at a county and city-wide level and to provide direct assistance to the hard-pressed student union organisers in Further Education colleges, we got access to the younger activists in the weakest sector of the national union.

Unable to match SSiN [and Militant's] ability to work in the Further Education sector, the NUS leadership decided to block up the conduit by giving Areas more equitable funding, from central resources, at the prices of the loss of the right to campaign on locally-decided policies.

SSiN combined with Militant to defeat the Labour Students plan, Areas remained autonomous, and the cack-handed, obvious ploy only served to discredit the leadership and widen the support of SSiN as the rank and file organisation which knew what was what in NUS.

### Establishing a voice on the NUS Executive

SSiN had first won places on the National Union of Students executive in 1984, with Karen Talbot and Simon Pottinger. In 1985 Simon won Vice President Welfare against the Union of Jewish Students' candidate Lindsey Brandt, who was supported both by the NUS leadership and by sections of the left.

In 1986 SSiN had to make a watershed decision. Up to then SSiN had never run directly against Labour Students in NUS

elections. Labour Students would (and still does) run only partial slates, leaving slots empty for other groups it wants to horse-trade with, and SSiN had always stood in those slots. Now Labour Students decided to stand their own candidate, Jo Gibbons, against Simon Pottinger in an attempt to stop him winning a second year in office. SSiN ran against Labour Students and won.

In 1987, after yet another Labour Students selection conference which would not have passed scrutiny by independent observers, SSiN ran against their official candidate for President, Maeve Sherlock, though we lost. Then Michele Carlisle stood in a "gap" that Labour Students had left for the Communist Party, and was returned as National Secretary, with Paul McGarry and Emma Colyer also winning non-sabbatical places on the NUS Executive.

In 1988 Michele was re-elected to a non-sabbatical post and was joined by Liz Millward, and by Dave Brennan as the Area Convenors' observer on the Executive.

Since then Left Unity and the Campaign for Free Education have regularly elected a left-wing minority to the NUS Executive. This year, 1997, CFE became the largest single faction on the Executive, with more members than Labour Students, though alliances with right-wing "independents" leave the Blairites' control of the executive still solid.

### Left cover for a right shift

AS the reverberations of the Sunderland Poly ban continued after 1983, we also had the University of East Anglia banning the pop group Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Preston Poly trying to ban the television, and an SWPer trying to ban Desmond Decker's song, "The Israelites".

The culture of banning remained deep-rooted in the student movement, and it was fuelled by many themes — from anti-fascism and "no-platform"-ing through to student unions who wanted to free their buildings from the contamination of the outside world's racism and sexism. The whole left culture was unclear about the importance of liberty and free debate. This took the "liberation campaigns" to absurd postures in the years which followed, and banning became an ideological weapon of the right wing against the left.

As the Labour Students leading group, Clause Four — by now renamed Democratic Left — moved right, it shifted from a broadly pro-working-class viewpoint to one which privatised politics. The old slogan of the women's liberation movement, "the personal is political" was reversed into "the political is personal". It became impossible, for example, to treat men and women

equally in political discourse. And how the "feminists" used this new-found moral blackjack!

The norms of democratic debate were superseded by assertion and counter-assertion in an ideology which became known to its critics as "femocracy". The ground rules of femocracy were that members of oppressed groups were always right, unless they were objecting to that assumption, in which case they were the intellectual prisoners of white, heterosexual men. To speak up against the collective assertions of a group of the specially oppressed was to lay oneself open to allegations of racism or sexism or homophobia. For a man to argue with a woman on a broader political issue was thought to be evidence of sexism or even sexual harassment!

We had the Communist Party denouncing SSiN as "the harem" of one of its leading men because SSiN objected to rhetoric of "I experience therefore I am right". The most enlightening incidents were in Manchester.

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**"Labour Students intend to relaunch themselves as 'independents'. They know that students will clash with the government, and they are not prepared to stand up and defend New Labour policies."**

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The Labour Club candidate for Campaigns Officer in the University student union's annual executive elections, Matt Davies, was in SSiN. He was gay, but he was denounced by the Gay Society and by some Labour Students as a homophobe — because he was standing against a Gay Society candidate! No matter that Matt was in the Gay Society, no matter what his politics or even his sexual orientation, the fact that he stood against the Gay Society made him a certified "homophobe".

An article in *Socialist Organiser* (the journal then published by Workers' Liberty) on "Class Politics not Rainbow Alliances" got Matt's posters ripped down and the author — Clive Bradley, a former member of the Labour Club and activist in the Gay Society at the university — banned from the union building!

Then, just across the road at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST), there was a social at NUS's national convention for Area Convenors (the elected organisers for the local federations of NUS). A SSiN area convenor

got into a row with two Labour Students convenors about NUS proposals to reduce the autonomy of the Area organisations. The Labour Students people were a man and a woman, and the SSiN convenor was a man. He spoke to the woman in an aggressive and argumentative way — just as he spoke to the man and they in turn to him.

The following day, at UMIST Labour Club, the NUS President denounced the SSiN member for sexual harassment! Later she had to retract and apologise, but only after the matter was taken to the NUS Executive.

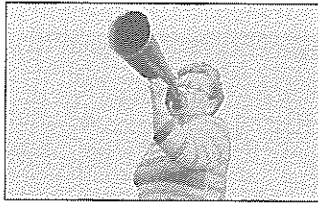
Despite SSiN's Michele Carlisle being well-respected as the student organiser for the National Abortion Campaign, SSiN lost the support of many women activists by a hastily written, and rather cross article in *Socialist Organiser* entitled "Feminism not Femocracy". It declared that it was time to put a stop to the trend in NUS whereby all politics was becoming a matter of pandering to and balancing the claims of the self-selected representatives of various oppressed groups. Speaking up against the tide was politically the right thing to do, but perhaps it could have been done more gently, and earlier on.

SSiN was able to survive the outbreak of femocracy in part because a good chunk of our leadership were women. Had the majority of our central organisers been men, then it would have been very hard indeed to survive the critical stand we took on 'liberation ideology'.

Yet we did survive, and established a base which has been built on since then by Left Unity and the Campaign for Free Education.

Since 1987 — which was Labour's third general election defeat in a row — Labour Students' march to the right has accelerated, in line with the "Blair project", as it is now known. Some of the minor figures in the triumph of this New Labour Right have been former NUS or Labour Students activists, and NUS has been well and truly consolidated as a pillar of Blairite good practice. In the past, the arguments in NUS were about how to campaign. Now the argument is about whether NUS should campaign at all.

Now, when the honeymoon period with the new government is over, the Labour Students faction in NUS intend to relaunch themselves as "independents" — so as to be able, for self-protection, to distance themselves from the Blair government. They know that students will clash with the government, and they are not prepared to stand up and defend New Labour policies. A serious left in the National Union of Students can soon, if its organisers know their business, come into its own.



## Encouraging critical thinking

EVERY much agreed with the drift of Thomas Carolan's article on "The left we have and the left we need" (*WL* 40), but I felt that it implied an unresolved question.

The "standard", "instinctive" politics of the far left which grew up in the late 1960s and the early '70s were, for reasons of political circumstance which Carolan describes, inclined towards ultra-leftism, populism, Third-Worldism, and rainbow-liberationism in place of patient working-class organising.

Yet in Britain, unlike many other countries, the Maoists who most extravagantly reflected those inclinations were weak. The major far-left groups of the last thirty years — the SWP, Militant (and, for the early part of the period, the WRP) — explicitly opposed most facets of the "standard" far left politics. They opposed, not comprehensively and consistently, and quite often by excessive and sectarian negation, but they opposed.

All those groups had their own sectarianism. Yet sectarians can do useful educational work despite themselves. Over the years, tens of thousands of activists have received a political education in the SWP, Militant, or WRP, and then rejected the group's sectarianism and gone on as trade-union or Labour Party activists.

Why haven't they brought elements of Marxist education and criticism into the movement sufficient cumulatively to create a culture very different from the "standard" or "identikit" far left? Why is it that on many issues — Ireland, for one — a quick look at the broad left of the labour movement would make you think that the major ideological influence was not the larger groups, but the comparatively puny IMG/Socialist Outlook current?

I think there have been three reasons.

First, much of the groups' criticism of elements of the "standard" culture has not been reasoned analysis. Rather, it has been the retort: "That's all very well, but the real answer is to build the revolutionary party... to promote militant workers' struggles... to build the Marxist current predestined to lead the broad labour movement..." To the politics of the "standard" culture have been counterposed abstract fetishes, essentially centred on the self-promotion of the revolutionary group rather than broad political perspectives for the working class.

When activists become disillusioned with the group and its fetishes, naturally they tend to gravitate to what they already believe is "all very well".

Secondly, in so far as there has been ideological content to the groups' criticisms, it is generally a matter of insisting on a particular emphasis within an eclectic culture, rather than developing an all-round dialectical alternative. Almost anyone active on the left, for example, will subscribe to two general ideas about Ireland: sympathy with the general historic aims of Irish nationalism and republicanism, and support for working-class unity. When the SWP and Militant have criticised the "standard" far-left culture, they have done so not by dissecting those

general ideas and integrating their elements into a rounded view, but by dogmatically emphasising the "working-class unity" strand. Activists freed from the constraints of "the line" can swing back towards the nationalist pole without feeling that they are abandoning the idea of working-class unity or doing any more than discarding an arbitrary and dogmatic emphasis.

Thirdly, the eclectic culture survives, with contradictions unresolved and unchallenged, in large part because of the increasing lack of real debate on the left.

Yet reason tells us that there must be large elements of counterpoint — of submerged critical thinking — within the "standard" left culture. Observation tells us that, too: a serious discussion on, say, Ireland, or Europe, in the trade unions or the Labour Party often reveals that the apparent "left consensus" is nowhere near as homogeneous as it seems.

By working hard at analysis, education, and promoting debate, we, round *Workers' Liberty*, can do a lot to bring that submerged counterpoint to the surface.

Martin Thomas

### US Labour Party debate:

## A long way to go

LAST year's US elections showed how timely was the founding of the US Labor Party in June 1996; they also show how far we still have to go. The AFL-CIO (the US TUC) poured \$35 million into supporting Democratic candidates. Even among the minority of union leaders who support the Labor Party, leading figures such as Bob Wages and Adolph Reed gave reluctant support to Democrats as the "lesser evil", though this undermines the Labor Party's attempt to become an independent pole of attraction for those disillusioned with the Democrats.

Though the Labor Party has a programme which is popular with union members, it had virtually no profile in the elections, at least partly because its non-electoralist strategy left it with little to say.

The current leadership of the Labor Party, based around organiser Tony Mazzochi and the affiliated unions, favour a "softly-softly" approach focused on winning union affiliations without unions necessarily breaking from their existing political allegiances. The Labor Party has decided not to undertake electoral activity for the next two years and not to support any other candidates officially. While this is partly a reflection of the Labor Party's current weakness, it also allows unions and individuals to support anyone they like — most usually Democrats.

The leadership's strategy side-steps the issue of political independence, central to the Labor Party's reason for existing. It may hold the Labor Party together in the short run, but the history of previous attempts to set up a labor party shows that independence will eventually become a life or

death issue.

If the Labor Party does not have a clearly distinct identity, why support it? And how might its programme conceivably be carried out? As long as the Labor Party does not directly challenge the established parties, its political action is either purely propagandist or comes down to lobbying and pressurising established politicians. A Labor Party supporter, a trade unionist representing municipal workers, encapsulated the problem: "We can't afford to abstain from the electoral arena. As public workers, so much of our wages, hours and working conditions are dealt with legislatively. We don't really have a choice but to find some way to have an influence in that arena". The absence of a Labor Party presence forces such workers to look to the election of "good" Democrats, thus undermining the Labor Party.

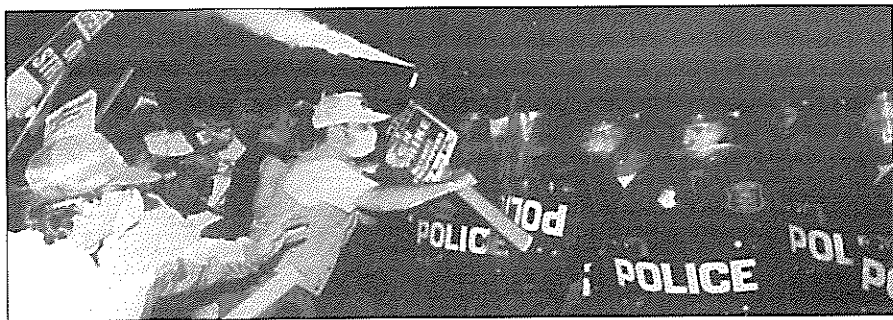
Can Marxists active in the Labor Party provide a coherent and non-sectarian alternative to the leadership's strategy? While the Trotskyist left in the US is small and fragmented, it can have an influence out of proportion to its size.

To do so, of course, they must first participate in the Labor Party and build it as their own party. The years of isolation of the far left in the US have created a range of sectarian attitudes to the labor party question. Some counterpose building a revolutionary organisation to building a labor party, as if they were mutually exclusive. Some say that a labor party is only a real labor party when it adopts a fully revolutionary programme. These attitudes build, rather than break down, the obstacles to fusing Marxist politics with the real labour movement; in effect, they demand that the working class first of all recognise the claims of this or that sect to its leadership before the class can begin to move. If this approach could be successful, there would be no need for a labour party in the first place.

The foundation of the Labor Party reflects the fact that the more advanced sections of the unions are beginning to move to an independent political position. It is necessary for Trotskyists to talk to these people, to seek to cement this first step forward, and to take people beyond the Labor Party's current politics and strategy where necessary. The Labor Party, if it is truly democratic, can become a forum where ideas can be argued out and tested in practice. Given the present-day reality of the US labor movement, there is no short cut, which will enable a revolutionary organisation to skip over this stage by recruiting raw militants in large numbers. Even the CIO upsurge of the 1930s followed a split in the official unions and, despite the gains the Trotskyists made then through their participation in the strike movement, they remained a small minority in the labor movement.

Another sectarian objection to work in the Labor Party focuses on its domination by trade union bureaucrats as demonstrating that it is a waste of time, will never fight, is a roadblock etc, etc. But the trade unions are run by bureaucrats, too! Only anarchists would conclude we should not work in the unions.

How the Labor Party will turn out is not given from the start and will depend on the balance of forces within it. Abstention will only aid the bureaucrats. It took 20 years for the British Labour Party to make a definitive break with the Liberal Party. The semi-abstention of the British Marxists from the party helped ensure that when Labour did finally make that break, it was not the Marxists who dom-



Detroit newspaper strikers fight the cops. The Labor Party needs to found itself on these kinds of struggles

inated, but the right-wing reformists and conservative trade union leaders.

Scepticism from those more sympathetic to the Labor Party project tends to take the form of saying that it is likely to fail because the conditions are not right. Naturally, it would be better if the Labor Party had been born out of a massive upsurge of militancy and trade unionists were confident and winning victories. However, to argue that the Labor Party cannot possibly develop without such an upsurge is to misunderstand the relationship between trade-union and political organisation. There is no set sequence of stages dictating that a labor party can only follow a rise in economic militancy. In fact, the logic has often been the opposite. Exposure of the limitations of economic militancy, or legal and governmental obstacles to trade union action, may spur the unions towards politics as they demonstrate that generalised action at the level of society as a whole, as well as at the workplace, is necessary to achieve their demands.

Equally, it is wrong to dismiss the Labor Party on the basis of a cold calculation that not many union leaders will support it officially. While support from top union leaders is important, to see it as all-important reduces the question of the Labor Party's success to diplomacy at the top of the movement, ignoring the pressure that can be brought from below. The absence of support from the top may slow down the growth of the Labor Party initially and make organisation more difficult, but if activists within unions start winning the political battle it will provide a much firmer foundation in the future than endorsements in which the rank and file remain passive.

There are already groups of Labor Party supporters working together in a number of unions and the issue has been raised at a number of union conferences. Building the Labor Party means taking politics directly into the unions, raising the issue of why political representation is necessary and why it must be independent of the bourgeois parties. There is now a great opportunity to argue these issues out as a living question, rather than in the abstract as in the past. If there is a real objective need for and move towards political organisation in the unions, opposition from the top will not in the end be decisive.

Some activists in the Labor Party see it as "just another arena of activity" alongside other activities — including other "Third Party" initiatives, such as the New Party or the Greens — which might go to make up a Rainbow Coalition; they also tend to see the working class as "just another" group of the oppressed. But the presence in the Labor Party of the unions, with their roots in the workplace, makes the Labor Party qualitatively different from these other initiatives, even if we leave aside the fact that the Labor Party has a much clearer working-class programme. The Labor Party is not just part of an amorphous collection of good causes which left activists should get involved in, but should be a focus through which those other activities become integrated into labor movement activity. This in turn requires that the

Labor Party be seen to take up the struggles of other oppressed groups and is responsive to their needs.

The concern expressed by some activists about the Labor Party being dominated by affiliated unions is misplaced as long as the unions' participation in the Labor Party is democratic and representative of the union members' views. Once unions affiliate to a labor party, the issues of union and labor party democracy become inextricably intertwined. It will not be possible to have a democratic Labor Party without democratic affiliated unions. But equally it will be impossible to have a Labor Party at all without the unions.

The precise balance between the unions and local chapters (branches) and the structures through which this is expressed are a secondary issue as long as both wings have a reasonable input into what is decided. But exclusion or (as has happened) minimal representation for the local activists is likely to be both undemocratic and counter-productive when they form a large part of the active Labor Party membership.

Marxists should be loyal, but not uncritical members of the Labor Party, seeing its development as of central importance for the class as a whole. They should not just see it as a pool from which to recruit to their own small groups. They should build the Labor Party by taking it into unions, communities and other campaigns. One of the most positive aspects of the Founding Convention was the way in which it was taken for granted that the Labor Party would actively support union struggles such as the Detroit newspaper workers' strike. This can be built on to make the Labor Party an outward-looking organisation that wins people by showing the relevance of independent political action to their own needs and struggles.

It will be necessary to argue for politics and strategy opposed to those of the current leadership when their views are hindering the development of the Labor Party. If caution doesn't have that effect, then it is sectarian to criticise it on the grounds that it comes from bureaucrats. And passive denunciations, whether from outside or inside the Labor Party, are likely to have little influence on the course of events, however satisfied they may make those who make them. Marxists should apply a united front approach to work within a political party made up of many different political currents and views.

Those who share this way of working within the Labor Party are scattered across a number of currents or are members of none. They must begin to work together as a caucus to maximise their impact, to assess the possibilities for work in the Labor Party and to provide a basis for regroupment of the Marxist left.

The foundation of the Labor Party, despite its weakness, provides great opportunities for the American left. We are now in a period of transition in which the precise form, strength and content of the party will be decided. The Labor Party is still sufficiently flexible to allow Trotskyists to make a constructive contribution to its outcome. Whether

they do or not may be decisive for its long-term existence.

Bruce Robinson

## Don't ban fox hunting!

**S**Ocialists should not support the ban on fox hunting which is currently being debated in Parliament.

Though it is easy to understand the gut class hatred towards the landed gentry which attracts left-wingers to the idea, the truth is that such a law would be profoundly unjust as it would discriminate against one "cruel" sport, while leaving other equally cruel sports — not to mention the carnivorous eating habits of the majority of the population — entirely untouched.

Let's first look at the argument about the special cruelty of fox hunting. Horses are put down after a bad fall in the Grand National. Falconry involves the forced starvation of the bird until it is released on a real life killing spree, while angling involves "playing" the fish by pulling it forcefully out of its watery lie in a primitive tug of war. If the fish isn't killed it is often very badly damaged from poor handling resulting in the loss of its protective slime.

All field sports inevitably involve violence to animals. That is because field sports are based on what was once a natural necessity for all of us: hunting. Hunting is by definition cruel, it is part of the assertion of human supremacy over the other members of the animal kingdom. Human beings have a right to hunt, just as they have the right to do lots of things that the majority may disapprove of, for instance smoking. The idea that there is an unbreachable gulf in cruelty between say fishing and fox hunting, because the fox is a higher animal, strikes me as fairly arbitrary. In any case, the argument about the animal's purported feelings is surely an argument for vegetarianism, not for restricting the methods of killing such beasts.

In fact, I suspect that if most people thought about the violence needed to despatch the cow or a pig they've just eaten for tea and which arrived in a nice cellophane and plastic package (did you know pigs can beat monkeys in conditioned response tests?) then they would probably become vegetarians at least for a few weeks. But people don't. Instead, we get morally confused and hypocritical campaigns like the drive to outlaw people watching dogs chasing after and killing foxes.

I don't like the idea of fox hunting, I wouldn't go fox hunting myself, but I can't see why we should prevent people from doing it, especially if we are to continue poisoning and killing foxes as a legitimate form of "pest control" because they might eat the animals destined for our bellies.

If people want to upset the landed gentry then they should support the campaign for public access to and ownership of the great private estates and rivers.

Bob Yates

© We welcome contributions to "Forum" but please keep it brief (max 700 words).



# The Trotskyist Tendency and IS A funny tale agreed upon?

By Sean Matgamna

**L**ET us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the looniness of Trots — of the left in general, but of Trots in particular. Let us tell tales that are funny ha-ha and tales that are funny-peculiar. Tell how some were born mad, some became mad and some had madness foisted on them.

*Editor's doppelganger:* No! No! This won't do. It's no good! Pre-tentious — Pseudsville! This is the age of the soundbite, the 30 second attention span and the comedy workshop. You must entertain!

Make a joke of it. Keep a curled upper lip.

These days, you've got to be funny or nobody will pay attention. Wear motley! There's humour in everything if you know how to find it.

Oh, like that guy who said he'd write the history of England so that it was as unputdownable as a novel. Something like that? "La Comédie Gauche"? The left as a perpetual burlesque? The theatre of the politically grotesque? The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul Sanity as performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at the Central Committee? Six Generals in Search of an Army? Clearing Up After Godot?

All our world's a joke, and all the men and women in it merely clowns and comic creatures. That sort of thing? Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be a licensed buffoon in IS was very heaven? Make 'em laugh!

*Doppelganger:* Yes, even the serpent in the garden of Eden was an amusing little guy, if you look at him from the right angle. He talked to Eve in a funny Israeli accent — did you know that? Charming and disarming it was. She laughed, and was lost! Make 'em laugh!

Use plenty of make-up. Paint a smile even over rage. The primacy of the pleasure principle! Don't let anything come out straight from the guts, unfiltered and unrefined! Aggression and stale malice are best served flippant and in a sauce of humour! And don't waste your time doing research or trouble your peace of mind taking a fresh look. So long as it *sounds* plausible, and is funny, that's enough.

Jokers of the world unite — you have nothing to lose but your brains, you have a guffaw to win...?

I don't see why you can't see,

I said, with winning charm;

I can't see why you can't see,

He lied — so I broke his arm! That sort of thing?

*Doppelganger:* Yes, but better. History? Never mind history! What is history but a funny story agreed upon? Just current politics read backwards — the malleable prequel to the sequel, to the all-defining *now*. Mental agility, *story*-lining, humour, that's what matters!

And the facts?

*Doppelganger:* Facts? Stories! Tell them funny stories. Be a Marxist, not an empiricist! Facts perplex. Human interest, not

hard, abstract stuff. Groucho was *never* into facts!

Laugh and the world laughs with you! Cry and nobody will join your Party. Or worse: the wrong sort of people will. It's a question of *finding* the funny side of things. The pleasure principle rules — OK? The left is full of funny stories. Think of all the revolutionary socialists in the 20th century who died laughing. Master the dialectic, transmute tragedy into comedy. Make 'em laugh!

Yeats in reverse, eh? A terrible humour is born-ee?

*Doppelganger:* Donald O'Connor! My dad said, be in politics, son. But be a comical one — Make 'em laugh! Make 'em laugh!

To take arms against a sea of troubles and by joking pretend they aren't there. Laugh yourself into complacency and precocious political senility?

*Doppelganger:* Parody is a low form of wit. What are you going to do next? Prove Marx a prophet by quoting what he wrote about the autodidact's propensity to indulge in clumsy displays of erudition? Stories! Learn from Jim Higgins. Tell funny stories! Get on with it!

Yes — alright! Hello, hello, you lovely people! This is Archie Rice-Higgins, your purveyor of funny stories from the Music Hall of the Left. I say, I say, I say...

Roll up, roll up, gentlemen and ladies, the supply of funny stories about revolutionary politics and groups is endless. We have a splendid supply tonight. You'd like to hear a political ear-trumpet joke? We cater for all levels of humour here! Did you hear the one about the deaf lad and the paranoiac? No? That's the best of the lot! As funny as tinnitus, that one is — but we serve a balanced and well-designed menu in this music hall, and the really good ones are best held back for later.

I say, I say, I say: you'd like something light now, eh?

Well, there was this endearing, little blighter sometimes called Cliff, who looked and sounded like a cross between Dr Ruth, the TV sexologist and one-time Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion. Very funny accent this little bleeder had too. One Saturday afternoon, he was telling the National Committee of his organisation, the International Socialists, about the tremendous level of contemporary class struggle sweeping through the land of the "Yetis". The Yeti is, of course, the "abominable snowman", the mythical giant the Americans call Big Foot. "The Yetis, Cliff?" "Yes" — impatiently — "the Yetis". Cliff had discovered a land populated by Big-Foot Bolshie Yetis? Mouths open in amazed disbelief. He thought it was the effect of his revelations and warmed up. The British press had been woefully silent, but comrade Andreas had told him about the waves of Yeti strikes and factory occupations. The Yetis were showing the way for all of Europe's workers!

By now giggles were breaking out here and there, but he didn't notice. Magnificent Yetis! All of Europe — as Rosa Luxemburg once said of another country — would soon have to learn to "speak Yeti", he could tell them that! "Yetis, Cliff?" "Yes. Yes, Yetis! You know — Y-E-T-I-S — Italians! Yetis!" "Oh, you mean 'I-tis'!" The entire meeting burst into laughter, and a warm burst of affection swept over Dr Ruth, they just

loved him.

I've heard versions of this story which have Cliff jumping on a table at this point and dancing an exultant Cossack jig for the IS National Committee, but — take my word for it — that's embellishment. I didn't see that. But maybe I missed it, distressed and worried by the sight of Jim Higgins, at the height of his glory, chairing the NC, cross-eyed with love and mirth, guffawing so loudly and violently that I feared he might swallow his dental plate. Yetis! I-tis!

Yes, ladies and gents, I say, I say... Did you hear the one about the vegetarian who fell among Healyites? As the Manchester branch meeting was breaking up one Sunday evening, it came out, somehow, that one of the comrades was a vegetarian. Bill Hunter, the Lancashire organiser, immediately reconvened the branch meeting to discuss this serious deviation from the social norms we revolutionary socialists had to comply with or risk "losing contact" with "ordinary workers". Bill, a decent man, 25 years a Marxist, decided to "raise the theoretical level" of the discussion.

"Sean", he said, the rest of the bemused branch listening keenly, "Have you read *Anti-Dilbring*? Now, in that book Engels explains that it was the *meat-eaters* who developed the brain." "Therefore", I interrupted, with the flippancy, though not the wit, that unmistakably indicated an incipient Shachtmanism: "My brain will shrink if I don't eat meat?"

Those were the days! When Marxism was an all-encompassing world outlook and an Orthodox Marxist system of dietary rules could be elaborated from "*The Books*", if only one knew how to read them!

I say, I say, I say — those were the days! Another time, at the IS NC, a becalmed, dull Saturday afternoon meeting and people trying to liven it up by offering each other practical tips. The Liverpool organiser, a sincere and humourless young man, has the answer to branch building: comrades should remember the power of slogans and catchy ideas. Remember *One Big Union* — OBU? Every IS member must be instructed to get a Big Old Bag, and stuff it with IS literature, and told never to go anywhere without it: "Everywhere, throughout the length and breadth of the labour movement, the IS member must be identified by always having his Old Bag along; the good IS member must aim to get himself known in the labour movement as *The Man With The Bag!* The Man With The Bag, I say, comrades!" By now, general hilarity, which he could not understand.

Yes, gents and ladies, those blue remembered jokes from the days of our youth, when politics was fun and IS was modest — Pecksniffian, but modest and fun-ny with it.

I say, I say, I say: That funny little loveable little bleeder Cliff — the things he used to say and do! The strokes I saw him pull — a proper left-wing Jeffrey Archer, that endearing little Dr Ruth fellow was.

IS conference at the Beaver Hall. Easter 1969. IS have over 1,000 members. Mostly young, politically raw, uneducated kids, full of life and enthusiasm and impatient of political restraint. Ultra-left — in the in-your-guts sense in which young people *should* instinctively be ultra-left. All they needed was experience, political education, tempering, and the benefit of the political wisdom of the older comrades. There is a dispute in the group about what we will say in the next general election. Can we *really* call for a Labour vote? For Wilson's Labour government? Everybody, even those who think we should vote for the labour movement's party, hates the Labour Party. It is only 9 or 10 months since nine million French workers have staged a stupendous general strike and seized the factories. Things are heated and alarmingly confused at conference.

Cliff is called to speak and trots down the gangway to the lecture room style lowered stage in front. He grabs the microphone militantly, as if he's going to fight with it, body language exuding combativity and positively teenage impatience with political restraints.

"This", he said heatedly, "is an unnecessary discussion. We don't need it. You know why we don't need it? Because we won't take part in the blinking election when they call it. What'll we do? We'll call for a general strike, that's what we'll do! Not a general election, but a gen-

eral strike!" Thunderous applause.

What happened when the election came? IS shouted: vote Labour.

The young people who needed calming down had been fed with amphetamines; those who needed political education, placated with political gibberish! But it 'worked'. Cliff knew how to handle them! Dr Ruth could "put it over"!

## *Doppelganger: A demagogue?*

You need a stronger word: how about *demagob*?

YES, I say, I say, ladies, gentlemen, comrades, the supply of such stories is endless. There are people who devote their political lives to collecting them. You could fill a book just with stories about IS alone. You want more? We're running out of time. Just two more, then.

Duncan Hallas — now there's a fun-ny guy, and talented too. Disappeared he did, old Duncan, ran off for 15 lean years and then came back in the prosperity of '68 to play the IS group's no-nonsense old Bolshevik, as if he'd been a revolutionary all his life.

Merlin's Cave, London, November 1971. Big meeting, with Duncan debating Sean Matgamna of the Trotskyist Tendency.

It is part of the build-up to the special conference at which the Trotskyist Tendency is to be "defused" — uncouth people say "expelled". That was one of the funniest things in IS's fun-filled history.

The Trotskyist Tendency had organised a rank and file campaign for a special conference to stop the NC jumping on the chauvinist, anti-EC bandwagon two months after IS conference by a massive majority condemned such politics. Now they were getting a special conference all to themselves! Fun-ny!

The Trotskyist Tendency is a tiny proportion of the meeting. The chair is Roger Protz, who makes a debating point each and every time he calls for a speaker opposed to the "defusion" of the Trotskyist Tendency: "If there is one."

Summations — Duncan, new-minted National Secretary of IS, is a thin-skinned, insecure bully who wouldn't be able to cut it without the machine — or, come to think of it, *with* the machine: he was to be a very short-lived National Secretary — is easily rattled. He has been showing signs of increasing anger at each show of opposition from the floor. He has a bitter hatred of the Trotskyist Tendency and the contempt any decent IS old Bolshevik would have for such scum. He is a powerful, emotional speaker, with an unpleasant schoolmasterish tendency to suggest that only an idiot would disagree with him. He is passionately convinced of his case; and also passionately resentful that the Trotskyist Tendency makes fun of his Old Bolshevik pretensions and has let him know they think him a spineless old poseur. Now, summing up, he rises to the occasion.

The Trotskyist Tendency has been a problem for three years. They have criticised people like himself and disrupted the group. Worse, they have made it difficult for people like him — real citizens of the IS group — to raise matters they might raise if the Trotskyist Tendency were not around. They were sure to try to exploit any division. It wasn't as widely known as it should be, but he, Duncan, had disagreed with the group's attitude to the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland in 1969 — which the Trotskyist Tendency had said amounted to IS supporting the troops — but what if he had spoken out? He'd have played into the hand of the "Matgamnaites". What could he do? He had to remain silent and support the leadership though he thought them seriously wrong on a very important question (this was an appeal for support and understanding from non-Trotskyist Tendency people who had thought his role during the heated debates on Ireland two years earlier despicable). By throwing out the Trotskyist Tendency, the rights of people like himself would be restored. They would be able to function more freely. Comradely discussion would come back to the group. By outlawing generalised opposition, IS democracy would — it was paradoxical but true — be enlarged and expanded.

Hands raised as if to embrace the whole meeting, passion distorting his face, his voice rising to a high, emotional scream, he appeals for support in throwing out the Trotskyist Tendency.

"Comrades! This has gone on too long. It has gone on year after year for three whole years! It should not go on any longer." Hand-chopping the air in an unconscious mime: "Comrades: we must put an end to it now. Find a solution!" Large swathes of the meeting have by now begun to giggle uneasily, but he is too high to come down or notice that he has lost most of his audience. "Comrades, I say it again: there has *GOT TO BE A FINAL SOLUTION!*" Most of the meeting is by now squirming, giggling or laughing in open derision. IS was still a living political organisation in November 1971.

## **Doppelganger: That was boring! Too much detail, too much political explanation!**

Sorry! But observing the disciplines of comedy is at least as difficult as obeying the discipline of the soundbite political culture; and it has something of the same distorting effect. Politics tends to get in the way of comedy. To compress political history into funny stories one has to be ruthless with encumbering truth. I haven't quite got the hang of it yet. Sorry! I'll make up for it with a really funny story — one of the the most hilariously funny political stories I know.

I say, I say, I say, ladies and gentlemen... Did you hear the one about the leading group of the old ISniks, the nearest thing to pigtailed mandarins you'll ever find in left-wing politics, who purged the Trotskyist Tendency, the right opposition and every opposition, real or imaginary, that so much as twitched? They set up a mindless, depoliticised machine for the group. They felt themselves masters of the organisation — a stable band of congenial souls and sworn chums grouped forever around this funny little, loveable Dr. Ruth guy with the much-appreciated genius for ideology-free organisational twists and turns and creative, opportunist zig-zags?

One fine day, Dr Ruth started snarling and frothing at the mouth and, with a mad look in his eye, a hatchet in one hand and a volume of Lenin in the other, screaming "greed is good, solipsism is better — Lenin lives: le parti, c'est moi!", slaughtered them all — all the princes of the House of Ygaele who would not kiss his feet and his backside ardently or frequently enough. Dr Ruth's victims had lovingly honed his axe and hand-tooled and hand-carved witty comic doodles all over the axe-handle for him. Nothing so funny as that had happened since Louis XVI of France, when still king had advised them to put an oblique blade on the newly invented guillotine to get a better cut. More than two decades later, some of the bodies still twitch, and ghosts and banshees still howl at night — especially when painful anniversaries fall — about broken faith, abused trust, unrequited love, bitter disappointment, cruel betrayal, lost hope and status brutally stripped away, like the gold braid off a dishonoured sergeant major's tunic.

I say, I say, ladies and gentlemen, you could write a book. Yes, you could, and Jim Higgins finally has. Bile and malice served in saccharin sauce, aggression giving itself airs because it wears a fixed idiot grin, and humour that is too often inappropriate and dependent on utter disregard for such old-fashioned notions as "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" is an acquired taste; Higgins' work is not by any standards a good or a useful book.\*

The problem with Jim Higgins — who was a leader of IS, and for a year or so, Duncan Hallas's successor as its National Secretary — and his account of the early IS is that Higgins doesn't know the difference between the arts of the comedian and raconteur and the arts of the historian or politician. Invariably, at the expense of politics and real

history, he goes for the rounded story, the piquant paradox and pseudo-paradox, the glinting bit of happenstance and the 'comic' stereotype. Never mind what is true. And why should his valuable time be wasted on research, or his complacency disturbed by a re-examination of events, of his own prejudices or his own role in what he recounts? God forbid that fact, balance or tale-cluttering nuance should be allowed to get in the way of a good story or a well-sounding phrase.

This is one reason why his "history" is patchy, uneven, unreliable and worthless as either record or interpretation of the early IS, the most promising organisation of the late '60s and early '70s. The only serious purpose of this book\* is self-justification and score-settling. Higgins has had nearly 20 years out of politics in which to reflect, re-examine and reconsider, and, perhaps, draw a balance sheet useful to others. Instead, he has produced the apologia of an uncomprehending ghost still obsessively trying to understand how he could have been "offed" so unceremoniously and discarded so contemptuously. He had thought better of himself! The factional nerves still twitch, but he has learned little and seems to have spent the 20 years polishing 'funny' stories and burying the memory of uncomfortable ones. He knows that the "history" he recounts is part of a stark tragedy, the defeat of the working class and of the left in the 70s, 80s and 90s, and the transformation of a once promising organisation of socialists into a closed, self-aggrandising, irresponsible and essentially stupid little sect (and, though it is big in comparison with Workers' Liberty, the SWP is still only a *little* sect).

He knows that he has to account for the strange fact that Dr Ruth

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with remarkable ease saw off — and sawed off — a sizeable chunk of the old IS, and most of the old leadership, the great men manqués, like Higgins himself. It still hurts; under the clown mask the bitterness and sense of loss and of lost love and betrayal still choke him. He does not account for any of it. Instead, he concocts alibis for himself and erects something not too far from a "Bad King Cliff" account of the fate of IS.

That accounts for much, but only King Cliff — or Good King Gerry Healy — have absolute power. But where did they get it from?

Higgins is, first of all, a comedian, an entertainer. Mock-"historian" Higgins presents the tragedy of IS as a parade of tired jokes and ludicrous old factional slanders. He casually repeats the old factional lies about the Trotskyist Tendency, some of them the grotesque opposite of the truth — on Ireland, for example. Perhaps he has no choice, because he simply doesn't understand what happened either to IS or to himself.

The present article and two others that will follow is not a review. † *More Years For The Locust* is not a serious historical work; but it is a useful starting point and sounding board for an account of the experience of the Trotskyist Tendency of IS, and a reassessment of IS's evolution, and I will refer to Higgins's book from time to time. Providing entertainment is not my prime concern: telling the truth about the things Jim Higgins reduces to 'music-hall' comedian's patter, and about other things, is. It is best told in the first person, in terms of my own experience.

I WAS IN IS from November 1968 to 4 December 1971. I represented the Trotskyist Tendency on the National Committee for those three years and was a participant in the things I will discuss. I saw, judged and reacted to IS in '68 and after, as a Leninist, and in retrospect I see its evolution as a negative illustration of the assessments of IS made by the Trotskyist Tendency in the light of the Lenin-Trotsky conception of a revolutionary party.

\* *More Years For The Locust*, published recently by the International Socialist Group.

† See page 51.

The "Trotskyist Tendency" was a grouping in IS which took shape around a nucleus of eight members of the Workers' Fight group which fused with IS just before the November 1968 conference — when a "new IS", centralised and "Leninist", was proclaimed. It was expelled — "defused" — at a special conference in 1971. That special conference was the decisive turning point in the processes that transformed IS into what it is, a kitsch-Trotskyist sect with doctrinal quirks. It took a year or so for all the implications to fall into place. The "big event" in Higgins' life, the split in the old IS cadre three or four years later, was a split in the group whose open, undisguised, factional dictatorship was established in 1971-2. A formal ban of "generalised" opposition made IS into a one-faction sect. It was an important staging post on the road chosen in 1971, but no more than that. 4 December 1971 was the watershed.

*Workers' Fight*/the Trotskyist Tendency and IS — now there was a hilarious story, and hilariously does Higgins tell it. Take as a representative example of his method and of his reliability, this general account of the "Trotskyist Tendency of IS". I choose to examine it for reasons that will not mystify the reader too much.

I quote from Jim Higgins.

"Workers' Fight was a tiny group with a handful of members in Manchester and a scattering in a couple of other places. They had been expelled from Healy's group, but there is nothing wrong with that, so had Cliff and, come to think of it, so had I. The story goes that Sean, who is hard of hearing, was forced, by Healy, to remove his hearing aid at the expulsion hearing, for fear it might be one of those Dick Tracy, two way radio, deaf aids. As if to prove that this expulsion was not a fluke, Sean and his comrades joined the RSL, only to find that they were up for expulsion once more. They let Sean keep his deaf aid, but they expelled him just the same. Now here he was signing up for IS. [...] The admission of Workers' Fight was essentially to acquire an ally in the move to democratic centralism and to help Colin Barker in Manchester, where the majority of the branch leaned to libertarianism. In the event it helped neither of these objectives but Matgamna was able to help himself to a few members."<sup>\*</sup>

Since we are all comedians now, let us examine Higgins' story and thereby also examine Higgins as "historian" and the value of his book as 'history'. Gerry Healy paranoia stories are the equivalent of mother-in-law jokes for the left-wing vaudeville performer; deaf man jokes, even in the good old pre PC days, were rarer, left by the less discerning left-wing comedian to the *Dandy* and the *Beano* alongside Desperate Jim, Korky the Sectarian, Biffo the Faction Fighter. There is an element of truth in the story of Gerry Healy and my hearing-aid, though Higgins radically misunderstands what was going on, reducing it to Gerry Healy paranoia stereotypes. We are, let us remember, still in the land of the tellers of funny and not-so-funny stories.

I was tried and expelled from the SLL in September 1963. I received a letter in mid week from Gerry Healy, the group's National Secretary, summoning me to appear the following Friday, two or three days later, before a committee of four people, set up by the group's Executive Committee to hear and try the charges against me. I was, the letter told me, being charged under a clause in the constitution which Healy's letter duly quoted in full, according to which disciplinary action should be taken against anyone who committed acts "contrary to the interests of the League and the working class". While quoting in full the constitutional clause under which I was to be tried, Healy's letter contained not one word about *what* I was supposed to have done, or failed to do, that was "contrary to the interests of the League and the working class" He never would elucidate; he couldn't.

A feeble attempt had been set in train to mount an accusation that I'd stolen group money; the centre denied I'd sent in money — in bank

notes; I had no receipt — for papers sold: but nobody in the branch who knew me, would for a moment entertain the idea that I had the attitude to the group such a miserable action would imply. Healy abandoned it, and "went to trial" without any charges at all!

I was to be hit on the head with the statue book itself, not with specific allegations about how I'd breached it. There were no charges, no allegations — and therefore no possible defence.

There had been tensions and conflicts and there was a lot of dissatisfaction in the branch. I was to be the chopping block, made an example of to intimidate the others. That was how things were done in the League. I'd seen it happen, and the first time I'd witnessed it, at the 1961 conference, I had been thrown into a serious crisis of confidence in myself and everything else for shame that I'd sat through it without protesting. I understood what was happening, but I was not prepared to play my allotted part in the sado-masochistic ritual of accusation, confession and self-denigration typical of the SLL. The hard core of the Healy group was a selection of people able, eager or willing to play a part in such rituals.

I loathed that system, the relationships within it, the brutality that kept it dynamic and self-sustaining. For a long time after I'd first seen it in rather mild operation at the 1961 conference I'd had great difficulty forcing myself to stay in the organisation. But this was, I believed, the revolutionary organisation. And I? How much of my repulsion was a disguised excuse for my own political and organisational inadequacies? There was no alternative to the SLL that I could see. What could be done now for revolutionary socialism had to be done here. The alternative was to desert the cause of socialism as it actually was in my real world. The revolutionary who pits himself against the immense power

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**"There had been tensions and conflicts and there was a lot of dissatisfaction in the branch. I was to be the chopping block, made an example of to intimidate the others. That was how things were done in the League."**

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of capitalism and yet cannot conceive that there are things more important than himself, his feelings, perceptions, experience, or even his continued existence, is a contradiction in terms... Classic dilemmas. Generations of CPers had faced them; generations of SLLers did too.

Between the ages of 15 and 18, I had made a long and tortuous journey to Trotskyism on my own from a deeply

felt Catholicism entwined symbiotically with a sense of national identity which had structured the way I saw the world. This meant that I had a political axis of my own, distinct from my relationship to the League and, reading the books of the movement, enough independence to judge the League according to the politics and tradition it claimed as its own. In short, I had a political 'hinterland'.

I had read and re-read Trotsky on Stalinism and the destruction of the Bolshevik Party, and I did not pretend to myself that the practices of the Healy regime were 'Trotskyism'. It was known that I loathed the Healy system and, from his own point of view, there was therefore no incongruity in Healy — who must over the years have developed an

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<sup>\*</sup>There is more in a similar vein including a culling of phrases, all reason and explanation cut away, from an introduction I wrote in 1970 to a Trotskyist Tendency collection of articles by Trotsky on the class character of the USSR. By way of a comment on how easily Cliff could have dealt with the disjointed phrases he quotes, Higgins even pretends that this is a representative sample of the 3,000 word introductory article and of what we said on this question! It is important that the reader grasps that for us it was never the decisive difference. In immediate practical politics, there were *never* any differences on attitudes to Stalinism or on a working class anti-Stalinist programme for the workers and oppressed nations in the Stalinist states. I will discuss this separately and establish exactly what the differences were. Understandably, he does not quote any of the things we said about what would happen to the organisation, and which the IS opposition group (Jim Higgins *et al*) would belatedly echo. But I will, in due course.

He rewrites history on many points. For example, the first attempt to get the group to orientate towards the goal of creating a rank and file trade union movement was made by the Trotskyist Tendency through the Manchester branch and proposed at the National Committee by Colin Barker and myself. The idea was part of the platform of the Trotskyist Tendency. But Higgins is not interested in the actual history of the group. I will deal separately with specific questions such as Ireland, and the semi-expulsion of Trotskyist Tendency branches in 1969.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LEFT

instinct about people in relation to his system, about who could be reshaped and who could not — picking on me.

On the other hand, I believed in the League and what I thought it represented politically. I had spent nearly four of my 22 years in it. On one level, unpleasant though I find the idea, I even believed in Healy. I was a devoted SLLer — the victims in these rituals always were — and would remain an active supporter of the League for 14 months after these events.

I had tried to anticipate the charges that were not made by making a list of all possible faults, real and imaginary or concocted out of malice, that could be laid against me; and I tried to avoid disruption of sales of the weekly paper, *The Newsletter*, for which I was responsible by double checking in advance that pub-sales, with the new issue of the paper, would go ahead as planned: and then I went to the Crown and Anchor pub, where our branch met, to be tried by the leaders of the revolutionary organisation for unspecified “actions harmful to the League and the working class.”

I bought a bottle of porter and, glass in hand, went upstairs. People normally took drinks to branch meetings; if I was exceptional it was in that I was still very much the adolescent ascetic, and rarely drank at all. I entered the meeting room and found the members of the court — Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter, Jack Gale and Jimmy Rand — already present, together with a good part of the branch, including most of the people I thought I’d organised to do the regular Friday night pub sale with the new paper that evening. Healy and Slaughter had thought the political education the comrades would receive from the events they would witness more important than routine branch work.

Eventually, almost the whole branch would be in attendance, sitting at one end of the room, slightly back from the big table around which the ‘court’ and I sat, like the audience in an American courtroom scene in a movie. When I appeared at the door, Healy, who was a tiny pudgy man with an enormous, high-coloured, disproportionately — or so it seemed — large head, with very sparse hair that looked like it had been drawn by an eyebrow pencil on his scalp, and tiny, always sore-looking eyes. He looked like a bad-tempered gnome some joking bad fairy had imprisoned incongruously in a lounge suit. He bristled — and he was very good at bristling — and pointed to the glass in my hand. He said: “Take that out of this room! We will not have drink in our meetings!”

I took it for what it was, a first bit of softening up and replied that people normally took drink into meetings. I forget what he said, but I went back downstairs. That mild but alerting taste of the intimidatory stuff, followed by a respite, was unintentionally helpful to me.

As the chair, Jimmy Rand called the meeting to order. I placed the body of my National Health-issue hearing-aid on the table in front of me — in a pocket it tended to pick up every rustle of clothes and magnify the noise, and I found it normally unusable — and went to put the earpiece in my ear. Healy and everyone else in the room had seen me do this before. Partially deaf, and having tinnitus — permanent noise that increases and becomes even more obtrusive with higher levels of stress or tension — I sometimes could not follow what was going on in a meeting of any size. I’d taken to using this machine, cumbersome and useless though it usually was, for most of my needs, so that I could better follow the ebb and flow of discussion in a meeting.

Now, as I uncoiled the cord and raised the earpiece towards my head, Healy leaned forward, staring intently at me. “What is *that*?” he said very sternly. “Is that a tape recorder you have there?”

Certainly Healy had seen it before: being a sensitive fellow, he had made a joke about it from the platform of a meeting in Liverpool a couple of months earlier.

Alerted and stiffened by the earlier incident, I said: “You know very well what it is. I refuse to pretend that this is a serious question. But if you want to examine it, go ahead — here”, and I held out the cream-coloured, oblong body of the little machine to him, sitting exactly across the table from me. He refused to take it, face and enormous bald head getting extremely red and angry looking, jiggling slightly with

fighting-cock energy on his seat, eyes and manner threatening.

“No! I want you to *answer* me: is it a tape recorder? We are entitled to ask such questions and have them answered.” I again refused to treat it as a serious question: “This is just bullying”. But, I repeated, that he could examine it if he liked. This exchange went on, back and forth, for a while, five minutes, perhaps ten, with Healy’s voice rising like his colour and his manner increasingly angry and suggestive of a man about to jump at me. He would glare at me with a fixed, angry stare and clenched little mouth in a very red face; and sometimes he would look histrionically at the audience down the room at the edge of the table as if to say — there, see what I have to put up with. I remember my friend Malcolm, very big and somewhat overweight, a Country and Western singer before he took up politics, who was able to dramatise and project and thus function as a Young Socialists youth leader in a way I could never hope to; in private he was far more critical than I was, and much less political about it. As a response to this meeting, he would go out of politics for a long time within a few weeks. He sat there silently wringing his hands, with a handkerchief clamped between them, afraid of being next in line for a psychological roughing-up and possibly afraid I would say something to “implicate” him.

Finally, I gave in. Trying to make my voice convey a continued denial that I took the question seriously, I said, enunciating with as much deliberate contempt as I could muster: “No, it is *not* a tape recorder.” He said something in acknowledgement; possibly “Thank you”. Evidently, he felt he had made his point. He made no attempt to examine the hearing-aid, which I then put in my ear. It had had nothing to do with “security” — or Healy’s ‘paranoia’. It was an exercise in intimidation and a demonstration of power and the “rights of the leadership” to the rest of the meeting, and a relegation of me to the status of suspicious outsider; no longer one of ‘us’.

Now the chair called on Prosecutor Healy to make the case against me. He delivered a strong, very heated and very angry, generalised diatribe — I was a critic by nature, resentful of authority, as they had seen already that evening, always suspicious of the leadership, and — I remember the phrase distinctly — therefore a “running sore” in the branch. I was “still fighting” my father. And so on. When Healy had finished, the Chair called on me to reply; everything was seemingly very democratic. So, formally, was the SLL constitution under which, or rather with which, I was charged.

These sorts of events were no revelation to me; I believed one had to be objective and impersonal about such things and that my experience could not be the measure of the League, still less of the purposes for which it existed.

I had no intention of ‘breaking’ with the organisation, even though I was not prepared to grovel or let myself be broken politically or play any of the set roles in the sado-masochistic ceremonies and rituals. Shaken by the force of the verbal assault — Healy was very good at what he did — I found it hard to reply to the general abuse, character assassination and condemnation; there had been no specific charges of any sort, nothing on the list I’d made, very little to catch hold of for a reply. And, of course, some of it was psychologically true. I knew better than Healy that I was still “fighting my father” — or rather, what Michael Bakunin had called the “God-father-state nexus”. But it had little direct bearing on the SLL or my relationship to it.

I was a boy trying to grow up, trying to bring what I found in myself into alignment with what I wanted to do in the world. I had subordinated my instinctive need to fight the “God-father-state-nexus” to Marxist political reason. If I had not been governed by belief in the need for a “revolutionary party” and seen membership in the SLL as the necessary way to work for socialism, then I’d have acted on my first instinct after the 1961 conference and ‘run’.

I MUMBLED a very brief and ineffective but unapologetic reply, whose content I no longer recall. Then, according to the preordained ritual, other members of the ‘court’ and one or two of their participants in the branch had a go at me, repeating and amplifying what Healy

had said. That would have happened, even if I had not been “defiant”. It was as much a part of the ceremony as the altar boy’s responses to the priest at the Mass. Only the tone would have varied.

In the course of this, recovering from the effects of Healy’s expert psychological working over, it occurred to me how I could best put the point to the “audience” — that the problem was not fundamentally one of my attitude but of the way the League leadership routinely behaved: the meeting so far was itself a very good illustration of it! So I put my hand up and in due course was called by the chair.

I cited the meeting so far, and the “trial” without charges, let alone notification in advance of the charges, to explain my ‘reserve’ — it had, all told, been not a great deal more politically developed than that — and revulsion against the “with-brutality-if-at-all-possible” practices and principles of the League leadership towards the membership. I’d said only a few sentences, enough to let Healy get my drift and register that I was still defiant and refusing to play my allotted role of penitent and self-accuser — and that I was trying to hit back at him. This was not the plan at all, not behaviour he wanted the assembled branch to see someone “get away with”, thus learning the wrong lesson.

Healy leaned forward, face very red again and eyes glaring fixedly and fiercely, and started to pound the table with his fist. “Stop! Stop right there! *I’m not going to allow you* to continue.” His banging and shouting made it impossible for me to continue, so I turned to Jimmy Rand, presiding as chair at the narrow end of the table, to my left, and appealed to him to protect my right to speak. If he had done that, he would himself have immediately become the target for Healy and for everyone else in the meeting who did not want to be a target. It was a narrow set of choices in the League! If he wanted to avoid that, he had to obey Healy. He refused to back me and instead made a memorable speech about ‘dialectical chairmanship’ — he didn’t use the phrase — denouncing ‘formal democracy’.

“We”, he said, were “Marxists, not formal democrats.” Dialecticians. We “allow our leadership to make whatever points they think necessary.” He repeated Healy’s phrase that he would not allow me to continue. He then, having silenced me, called on Healy to speak. Healy delivered more abuse, ending with an order to me, backed by the chair, that I must “now leave the meeting” so “we can talk to our people”.

I should have insisted that I had equal rights as a branch member and refused to leave. Perhaps physical intimidation — there was a strong atmosphere of latent, only just held back violence — was part of the reason, but I did not. It did not occur to me until long after. One of the things the League did to you was to more or less completely destroy the idea that you had any such a thing as personal rights vis-à-vis “the movement”. It was one of the ways the spirit of devotion and selflessness necessary to our common enterprise was abused — and in vast numbers of people passing through Healy’s “machine for maiming militants” ultimately destroyed and, not infrequently, turned into its own grotesque petit-bourgeois opposite.

I went down to the pub and, for the first time in my life, bought whiskey, and drank it, movie-style, in one gulp! On one level I felt relief. That mystified me, because I had no intention of “breaking”, and didn’t for over a year. I was not, I believed — and I was right to believe it — the measure of the revolutionary organisation, or Gerry Healy the measure of Trotskyism.

There is more to the story. I had no sense — despite Healy’s diatribe — of being politically or personally in the wrong, or that it was my political duty to accept their views without consent of my own reason, or to abandon my own ideas of right and wrong, and let them obliterate the hard-won sense of my own integrity. Healy was almost right: *I was* still fighting — the priests, but not anachronistically! With some accuracy, he might have called me a Protestant: but that would have carried an implied characterisation of what *he* was.

Politically, I was caught in murderous contradictions — believing in Healy’s ‘Church’ while claiming a right, denial of which was fundamental to Healy’s system, to form my own judgements. I *understood*

very little, but I saw the SLL regime in the light of Trotsky’s manifold condemnations of the Stalinist Party and Communist International regimes.

I went to the branch meeting on the following Monday evening, still in a mood of moral and political righteousness, intending to fight back. I arrived early and found Healy, Slaughter and two or three branch members present. Healy and Slaughter were visibly surprised to see me and went into a huddle, heads close together. When they came out of it, Healy shouted across the room to me: “Do you know you’ve been expelled?” I said in reply: “How could I have been expelled? Who expelled me?” He replied that the Organisation Committee had met over the weekend and expelled me. Almost certainly, he was lying. Healy didn’t need committees, except as camouflage. I can’t remember whether or not I thought that then. I did, I think. He shouted across to me again: “If you want to continue working with the League, you must from now on do as I tell you. I’m telling you to leave the meeting — immediately.” I did.

Though there was probably an element of physical intimidation in it, the fundamental thing was that I was politically still “League”. I had every intention of remaining with the League politically and did. I learned later that when he proposed that the branch expel me Healy cited as one reason my “contemptuous attitude” in not turning up for this important meeting! No-one who had seen me — they included my friend who’d been wringing his hands — said a word to contradict him. A few days later I met one of the comrades — Ralph, who had a lurching limping walk, having been disabled in a car-crash, and as he came towards me he assailed me in his loud, hectoring, friendly, Welsh voice: “So, why didn’t you come to the branch meeting then, and put your case?” I told him I had. Without pausing for breath he said: “Well, Healy was right. Of course, he was right...”\*

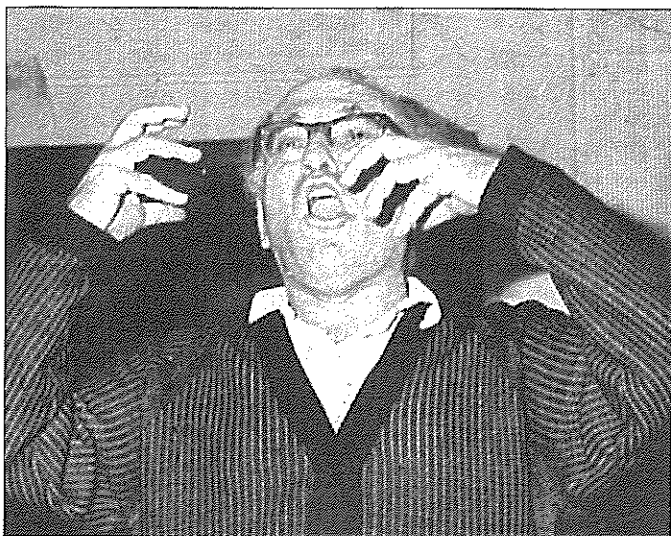
**H**IGGINS the comedian reduced the story as he heard it to the Gerry Healy paranoia stereotype, the mother-in-law joke amalgamated with a *Dandy* ear-trumpet joke. Why shouldn’t he? That’s how his mind works. The comedian has his values!

The rest of what I quoted from Higgins is no more solidly based. The original nucleus of *Workers’ Fight* were Rachel Lever, Phil Semp and myself. I was expelled from the SLL alone and broke politically with it 14 months later on my own. Phil Semp, a student at Leeds University, where his tutor was Cliff Slaughter, was involved in my expulsion — to be precise, he was one of a number of raw young people pulled into the Manchester branch to ensure Healy and Slaughter had a majority in the branch to expel me! After I broke with the SLL politically, Phil and I were both in Cheetham Young Socialists and had remained personally friendly — what had happened in the SLL was “not personal” and it was a matter of political pride not to take it personally. A few weeks after my expulsion I’d had to pick up the pieces of the youth work when Malcolm, the lad wringing his handkerchief at my ‘trial’, went back on the country and western circuit. I eventually got Phil Semp to agree with me. Neither Phil Semp nor I encountered Rachel Lever for a year after my political break from the SLL. None of us were expelled from Militant, either as a collective — we became a grouping in the Militant — or individually. We resigned.

If his treatment of the topics in the quote above is typical of Jim Higgins’ level of truth, accuracy and trustworthiness, then he plainly is not to be taken seriously.

Literary seriousness has many levels that interlace in several ways — the level of accurate recreation as truthfully as possible of the writer’s subjective experience; the level of honestly chronicling facts and events as the writer witnessed them, felt them, took part in them or can reconstruct them. The level of unsparingly truthful recreation — and in the history of political struggle this is a major test — of the true portrait of your opponents: truth like justice is indivisible. If it is not dispensed equally to those you despise as well as to yourself and your friends it does not count at all.†

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LEFT



Tony Cliff

**I**N a nutshell, the story of IS's transformation and the emergence of the neo-Healyite SWP out of it is the story of how a very loose group with a family cult at the centre, grew, centralised itself, developed a 'machine' with the once seemingly benign cult figure in control of it and made independent by it.

In discussing the history of IS — Jim Higgins' book is an example of it — there is a danger of scapegoating Cliff. For people like Higgins the "Bageshot Question" arises. Walter Bageshot, the Victorian political economist and analyst of the British constitution, asked the question concerning the then reclusive Queen and her playboy son, the future Edward VII: How does it come about that "a retired widow and her unemployed son" can play the pivotal role in the legal structures of the British constitution? How could "Dr Ruth" achieve such power in the organisation that prided itself — to a considerable extent hypocritically, but that is another story — on its "democracy" and freedom from Gerry Healy-style dictatorship, and which had members who were not

self-evidently devoid of the will and capacity for independent thought?

A central part of the answer is that the group was always a family cult with Cliff and Cliff's family at the centre of the larger political family. People like Higgins were *first and foremost* cultists in this system. The growth of the "Democratic Centralist" IS machine after November 1968 only changed its modus operandi. Cliff was central to this system and Cliff's ideas and Cliff's "whim of iron" (as Higgins puts it) was central, but it depended for its effects on others. You cannot have a cult unless the person at the centre is himself a cultist, is not uncomfortable in it, or vulnerable to corrosive irony and self-disparagement. The cultist needs an infant's level of solipsistic iron-clad egomania, something close to the borders of pathology or — Gerry Healy at the end illustrates it — way beyond its borders. Yes. But however solipsistic the cultist, he is not, in fact, the sole inhabitant of the world or of the cult: the successful cultist needs cultists.

Higgins and his friends were cultists, that is why they proved helpless to stop Cliff when it came to their own purging. True love disrobes and disarms, and sometimes, as in Higgins' book, is left to mourn incomprehendingly, in a sad old age.

**O**NE way of examining this issue and of presenting a portrait of the group as it was in reality, is to look at the dispute in IS on the attitude to the European Community which Britain was due to join on 1 January 1972. This triggered both the expulsion of the Trotskyist Tendency and the final organisational entrenchment and open dictatorship of the Cliff group by the ban on more than ephemeral and limited dissent decreed at that conference, (with almost 40% voting against the decision).

That was one of the most remarkable things I ever witnessed in politics. Some background is necessary for an understanding of it. Initially, all the Trotskyist groups refused to join the CP and Tribune Labour left in opposing the European Community. We said that European working class unity was decisive: "In or out, the class fight goes on!" Then, one by one, in their characteristic ways, they jumped on the anti-EC bandwagon. IS was the last to do so, and it could at that point not do it other than blatantly and shamelessly, with its opportunist motives undis-

\* So much of this story Higgins will undoubtedly have heard from me — ex-SLLers tend to swap tales like ex-soldiers comparing campaign medals or wounds. To my mind, however, the most interesting and instructive point of it was a sequel 11 years later. The chair of Healy's "court hearing", Jimmy Rand, was part of a big political family which broke with the CP over Hungary and a number of them were for years in the SLL. They all broke in the mid-'60s.

One of Jimmy Rand's brothers joined *Workers' Fight*. One evening, John Bloxam and I were in his house in Liverpool and, somehow, Jimmy Rand learned we were there and came round. Originally a bricklayer by trade, he had since gone to college and now lectured in English. He had moved a long way to the right and some of our comrades spoke of him as "almost" a "witch-hunter". I don't know if he was. His first words as he entered the room were: "Where's your hearing-aid?" Half-jeeringly, self-vindicating — no joke. Yet he *could not* have believed Healy at the time, that there was anything 'suspicious' about my hearing aid. He could not but have known perfectly well what was happening. In the circumstances, no-one but a crank could have seen it as a "security" issue — and Jimmy was no crank. The point at issue was one of Healy's rights and authority. Rand had behaved very badly as chair almost certainly — to judge by everything I ever saw of him, he was a thoughtful, decent fellow — against his own natural instincts. For peace of mind he had to rationalise. Healy controlled many League people thus: by making them complicit in his behaviour... That to me is the most interesting thing about this story. It was about intimidation and 'processing' members of the branch, not about 'security' and Gerry Healy paranoia.

In the more relaxed discussion that followed, Rand still thought Gerry Healy was Lenin — only now he didn't like Lenin. He summed up the Healyites for me, referring to bad experience of his own: 'Do you know what they are? They're bullies!' I'd guessed.

† Quite the most priceless bit of self-portraiture by Higgins is contained in this picture he paints of Andrew Hornung.

"Andrew Hornung, a strange young man who seemed to rather fancy himself in the role of tribune of the opposition. There was a certain theatricality about him that was quite endearing. On occasion he affected a flowing cloak and a silver topped cane, perhaps he thought they made him look Byronic. In fact it did, but after the fever took its deadly toll at Missaloughi. Hornung was the author of one of the more scabrous documents of the Trotskyist Tendency, called *Centrist Current*."

Now, I never saw Andrew with either cane or cloak. When I first caught sight of him in '67 or '68, he was noticeable for, then rare, shoulder-length hair, black and wavy, and an intricately shaped and cultivated beard and moustache. Maybe, having grown tired of Byron, he was going through his Jesus or his Dürer period. Students are, or used to be, like that. Next time I encountered him, at the IS conference in November 1968, he was a lot less pretty, having lost all his upper front teeth to a policeman's fist on an anti-Vietnam war demo. He had also been expelled from the University for being the organiser of a protest on the same issue which involved him in a face-to-face confrontation with a government minister, Patrick Gordon-Walker. In those days of mass student radicalism, very few "revolutionary" students took things as far as courting expulsion. Andrew then "colonised" himself for a while into an engineering factory.

The reader will by now have formulated a question: can Higgins and I be dealing with the same man? Yes, we are. He was serious, earnest and willing to incur inconvenience and personal loss for his politics. He tried to win me over to one of the IS semi-libertarian groups, the so-called Micro-faction, at the November '68 conference by arguing that Rosa Luxemburg had not "overestimated spontaneity" but "underrated it". I listened, but was perhaps too dumb to make sense of it. I met him by accident in a Manchester street early one evening and, after a ten or 12 hour discussion, by sunrise had persuaded him to join the Trotskyist Tendency!

He remained a member of the Tendency for 17 or 18 years. Active, responsible and often self-sacrificing — as a travelling organiser, for example, in the early '70s, living on next to nothing. In the late '70s he edited the weekly paper, *Workers' Action*, in tandem with Rachel Lever, a job performed with minimal resources which required that he work on it overnight once a week and then go into paid work (teaching at a Tech) without any sleep.

Now, it so happened that he and I did not for many years "get on". The group was not a clique, but a political formation, so it did not stop us working together.

He finally drifted away from politics into family life in 1986, having survived Jim Higgins in politics by six or seven years.

For sheer curmudgeonly injustice and presumption, characterising the person whose political life I've described, on the basis of a bit of student posturing in his early 20s, the prelude to two decades of serious political activity, is surely in a class of its own. An unpleasant self-characterising is there too in Higgins' few lines of quotation from a polemical pamphlet — *Centrist Current* — Andrew Hornung wrote early in '69 against a peculiar and peculiarly snooty Cliffite pseudo-faction calling itself "Marxist Current". The few lines from the final "peroration" which Higgins quotes are as unrepresentative of the pamphlet as a whole as the image of Andrew as a student playing Byron or Wilde or whoever, is untypical. It is over 30 pages, close on 20,000 words, long. It deals with many aspects of IS's work, theory and history, and with the then typical economic IS error of confusing sociology with politics, as seen by the Trotskyist Tendency.

Even in his little quote, Higgins misrepresents: for what he quotes from the final summing up is followed immediately by a long quotation from Trotsky's well-known letter to the SWP/USA urging "turn to the working class". I take full political responsibility for that pamphlet, and for its account of IS.

Hornung was effortlessly witty and on a good day he could be very funny. Maybe it's just a case of one comedian needing to bad-mouth a better one.

guised. As late as the Easter '71 conference the group voted wotj a big majority against the politics of the anti-EC campaign. There had long been a small minority against the group policy on the European Community — it included, ironically enough, John Palmer and the group's leading libertarian, the late Peter Sedgwick.

Two months after the Easter '71 conference, Tony Cliff and Chris Harman turned up at the NC with a small but lethal document covering two sides of A4, which, essentially, said: all the arguments we've used against joining the anti-EC campaign remain valid; but this has now become a battle between left and right in the labour movement, and in such a battle we are 'never neutral': we should side with the 'left' or we will be isolated. In that NC discussion, Cliff said, and when challenged repeated: "Tactics contradict principles."

But how, so long as politics aspires to be more than disjointed, episodic, unconnected, raw responses to events, or an ostensible 'response' to one event but with an eye to something else entirely, could IS 'side' with the Stalinist and Stalinist tinted Labour and trade union left on a political question on which they were mind-bogglingly insular and stupidly nationalist at best and at worst unashamed chauvinists? An issue, moreover, on which the CP line was unmistakably a mere reflex of USSR opposition to bourgeois moves towards European unity. Well, wrote Cliff and Harman, what we can do is repeat the group politics in any trade union branch discussion, then "*vote with the left*" — that is, with the chauvinists and little Englanders, thus repudiating what we had said in discussion!

Now, the aspiration to retain contact with workers and with "the left" is no contemptible one. But politics is politics and to argue as vehemently as the differences required against the CP/Tribune chauvinists and then vote with them — that was to invite and deserve ridicule. It would show that you had no confidence in your own politics, and put you in the role of fawning pup to those you allowed to determine your vote. It was impossible nonsense. In fact, a trick. Once the decision that we would vote in labour movement meetings against our own political line was carried at the NC it became necessary to justify it. Within a few weeks, *Socialist Worker* was making anti-European unity propaganda; in a short time, IS was amongst the least inhibited of the left-wing anti-EC campaigners.

If it's funny stories you want — there is a funny story for you: within weeks a massive conference majority on a subject that had been discussed for years, is turned on its head. But the really funny part of that very funny story is what the opposition to the change did and did not do.

The issue split the cadre of the Cliff tendency right down the middle. Even Paul Foot, high priest of the Cliff cultists, initially opposed Cliff. So did Higgins and a lot of others; a majority of the usually vocal people on the NC, in fact. Some of them went so far as to publish critical Internal Bulletin articles. But, what was to be *done* about it? *Either*, accept with conscience-salving protests, that the NC majority — it was not a big majority — could overturn the conference vote and bow down before the chauvinist tide — and it was chauvinism and there was a tidal wave of it, and what IS did within weeks of the Cliff-Harman document was haul down the banner of international socialism in face of it. *Or*, refuse to accept that this was a proper way to go about things. The only recourse then against the NC majority was a special conference. The constitution allowed for a special conference, if a certain proportion — in numerical terms, 23 branches then — of the group called for it.

Eventually, the Trotskyist Tendency decided to do that. The solid citizens of the group, such as Higgins, did not do it. Why not? After all, it was no small matter, this bowing down before the chauvinist wave in a political world where not only chauvinism but its even uglier brother racism was a feature of even the militant sections of the labour movement — London dockers had struck in support of Tory racist Enoch Powell — and the fascist National Front was a serious and growing force.

The Trotskyist Tendency watched with astonishment as it became clear that the Higginses of the group who could almost certainly have got a majority against bowing down to the nationalists, had no intention

of making a fight of it — that, consciences salved with protests, they were just going to go along with Cliff! Why? Habit and deference were, I think, part of it. For all their pretensions at independence they were and had been the core group of a cult. Paul Foot, opposing Cliff on the NC, quickly came to heel and published an Internal Bulletin article recanting, called, appropriately, "Confession". The jokiness could not disguise the fact that that is exactly what it was. The others did not 'confess'; but they acquiesced.

They believed, from habit and experience, that Cliff's instinct or, as the expression went, Cliff's 'nose' for these things was better than their own; they wanted the advantages the change of line would — nobody disputed it — bring and to avoid the possible costs of remaining internationalists; and they did not want to rock the IS boat or antagonise Cliff. They knew the group was volatile. They saw themselves as an elite, special people. The whole old pre-'68 IS system of custom, practice, deference, division of labour, allowed them to combine the satisfaction of saying no to Cliff with the joys and advantages of having their political virtue forced. To put it very politely, theirs was easy virtue.

The Trotskyist Tendency decided that it could not peacefully accept the nationalist turn, and mounted a campaign for a special conference. We saw this latest astonishing leap — nothing less than a cynical playing with chauvinism! — as emblematic of fundamental things we said were wrong with the organisation's politics, methods and tradition. The rules for calling a special conference were not as tight as the Executive Committee would have found convenient, so an arbitrary date was set by which the requisite percentage — 23 branches — of the group would have to declare for a special conference, or the initiative would lapse. Putting a final date on it was not in itself unreasonable; the way it was used was scandalous.

We got the support of 23 branches, but we did not get a special conference — not on the European Community question.

The new-minted national secretary, Duncan Hallas, said that notification from one of the 23 branches of support for a special conference had arrived a day late. It was not to be counted. He was ruling it out of order. The matter was now settled. The secretary of the 23rd branch said he'd posted it on time. Probably Hallas was lying, but in any case such rigid interpretations of an arbitrary committee-decreed date rule was, as far as I know, something new in the group. Thus a typical piece of labour bureaucrat's chicanery was their recourse against the threat of having to face the membership. Perhaps some of them — Duncan Hallas, maybe — saw it as part of "proletarianising" IS!

The leadership knew they would most likely lose at a special conference. And our co-thinkers on the political question in dispute, like Higgins, knew that at a special conference they would either knuckle under à la Foot and betray their own politics or else *fight* Cliff. They would do neither.

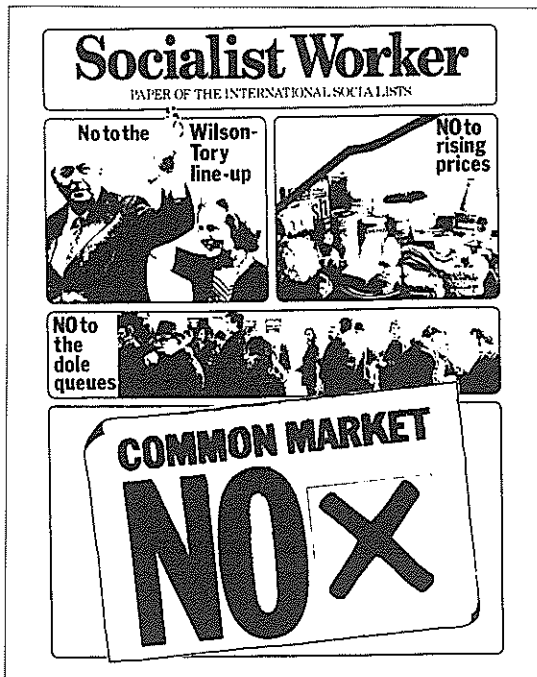
The Trotskyist Tendency's co-thinkers on the issue had refused to either take the lead in the special conference campaign or to back us. Nor did any of them protest at the secretary's blatant and certain chicanery and the way the members who had voted overwhelmingly at the recent conference against the group's new line on the European Community were cheated of their rights and the group denied the chance to wash itself clean of the nationalist mud.

That sort of behaviour is a textbook example of what the Trotskyist Tendency, after Trotsky, meant by saying IS was a "centrist" organisation.

The Higginses and the Birchalls *wrote* and I'd heard them speak as if they thought it was very important; but they *acted*, or rather did not act, these once-proud "Luxemburgists" — Luxemburgists! — as if it did not matter that the organisation had buckled before the nationalist wave. Nor was it that they were mollified until it was too late by a show of restraint and decorum by the new-hatched anti-Europeans. There was no time for that. The commitment to vote against our own politics ruled that out. It was just too absurd: the *politics* had to be got into some sort of sensible alignment with the vote — and quickly. The politics had to be changed. And they were — very quickly and with no more "autho-



## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LEFT



tant anti-EC propaganda in *Socialist Worker*. The minority on the NC, who almost certainly represented a big majority of the group when the line was changed, were allowed little acclimatisation time and given little or nothing to save their faces. Things would get worse, but by the time the last date for supporting a special conference or protesting against the bureaucratic cheating of the 23 branches fell due, no-one with a political IQ higher than 50 could fail to see the enormity of what had happened and the extent of the falling off from the politics proclaimed in the very name of the group. Yet, even then, the drive for a special conference remained exclusively the project of the Trotskyist Tendency and some allies here and there.

What the European Community affair showed was that either the group would be genuinely democratic — or become a typical kitsch-Trotskyist bureaucratic sect. A lot of the older people thought that they could go back to the good old pre-'68 IS circle days. But the group *couldn't* go back.

The group was supposedly run under the democratic and centralised constitution of 1968. *In fact*, it dealt with the change of line on Europe in the manner of the old pre-'68 Cliff-family circle group — 'nose', whim, forcing it through, people disagreeing but 'knowing their place' and Cliff's prerogatives. To do this, to stop the formal rules being used to subvert and cut across this old, cosy, circle-cult way of doing things, to stop the members from 'intervening' or, rather, to stop the Trotskyist Tendency from organising the members to intervene, they had to work outside the '68 constitution — they had to lay down tight rules to restrict the effort to appeal to the members and, then, even within their own new-made rules, to cheat. The nominal democracy had come into sharp and dangerous contradiction with the actuality of the group, the group leadership, and the cultist way in which the group had continued to be led after '68 within the democratic façade.

It was not only internal group concerns; it was the class struggle and their conception of their responsibility to it. Not only could the Cliff group have lost at a special conference — and I think they would certainly have lost; the evidence of their behaviour suggest they thought that too — but the effect on the external work of the group, according to their calculations, would have been seriously damaging to the group's prospects: they had, in their own organisational concerns and calculations good reasons for jumping into the nationalist camp.

Cliff and his allies on one side and the old ISers like Higgins on the other, looked at each other like lovers becalmed and emotionally exhausted after a fight and with the knowledge that they have come close to a serious rupture neither wanted. The first thing they did was to turn with great combined fury on the Trotskyist Tendency; our co-thinkers

risation" than the absurd and dishonest NC decision.

Within a few weeks of the NC vote, Duncan Hallas, the suppleness new National Secretary — who was himself a very recently born-again anti-European — was making bla-

on the defining and detonating political question in dispute, with at least as much fury as those whose opportunist hands we had tried to tie. It was time to settle accounts with the Trotskyist Tendency!

Its existence was intolerable. Yet that was a misunderstanding insofar as it grew out of the European Community dispute — and that was its starting point and the origin of the Grand Coalition to throw the Trotskyist Tendency out. Good or bad, villain or Bolshevik, the Trotskyist Tendency was not in itself their problem. Democracy was. Any system that tied down and limited Cliff or his machine — or that might tie them down and impose restraints on them — was. The 4 December 1971 conference set the stamp of a one-faction sect on IS, formally ruling out anything other than ephemeral opposition.

The first issue of a new series of *Workers' Fight*, which came out on 14 January 1972, commented:

"Why we were expelled from IS:

"Stripping away the hysteria and the exaggerations which dominated the internal struggle leading up to the December 4th Conference, the IS leadership's explanation for the expulsion move was that the Trotskyist Tendency called IS centrist (e.g. vacillating between reformism and revolutionary politics, being revolutionary in words but reneging in the crunch) and that this was intolerable.

"But this explains nothing. We never characterised IS otherwise, either before the 1968 fusion or after. We said clearly when we joined that we thought IS would only be changed as a result of a serious internal struggle.

"The IS leaders have created — often through good and useful work — a largish organisation, most of whose members are young and politically inexperienced, and consequently there is an absence of a serious and stable political basis for their political domination of the Group. They rely increasingly on demagogic manipulation of the members, and on a bureaucratic machine which has qualitatively changed and worsened the internal life of the IS Group.

"With increasing reliance for their control on a machine and on demagogy, real democracy becomes a threat. Or rather, the existence of an organised Tendency whose politics challenge the machine is a threat.

"Politically, the expulsion indicates a qualitatively bureaucratic hardening of IS. Now the leadership openly proclaims its right, when faced with an opposition tendency, which has fundamental political differences, to resort to pre-emptive expulsions, even when such a tendency is a disciplined part of the organisation. Thus they claim and proclaim their right to sterilise the organisation politically.

"The expulsion had the trappings of democracy, and no liberal could object. But Leninist democracy has nothing in common with the bare, empty forms, filled by the demagogy and witch-hunting and machine manipulation with which the IS leadership filled such forms.

"The expulsion of *Workers' Fight* is a disruptive and sectarian blow to left unity. Instead of practical concentration on the constructive work we can do, and have done, together with the majority of IS, and the creation of a Bolshevik internal democracy, we have one more split on the left.

"The real tragedy, though, is that the opportunities for the revolutionary left which existed in 1968 should have led only to the consolidation of a tightly controlled left-centrist sect, which is most certainly what IS now is."

● A *Workers' Liberty* clippings book containing contributions to our series on the "IS/SWP tradition" is available price £1 plus 38p postage from the *Workers' Liberty* address. Contributors include: John Palmer, Hilary Wainwright, Ken Coates MEP.

# Luxemburg and Leninism

By Leon Trotsky

**E**FFORTS are now being made in France and elsewhere to construct a so-called Luxemburgism as an entrenchment for the left centrists against the Bolshevik-Leninists. This question may acquire considerable significance. I wish to touch here only upon the essential features of the question.

We have more than once taken up the cudgels for Rosa Luxemburg against the impudent and stupid misrepresentations of Stalin and his bureaucracy. And we shall continue to do so. Our defence of Rosa Luxemburg is not, however, unconditional. The weak sides of Rosa Luxemburg's teachings have been laid bare both theoretically and practically. Certain tendencies make use only of the weak sides and the inadequacies which were by no means decisive in Rosa; they generalise and exaggerate these weaknesses to the utmost and build up a thoroughly absurd system on that basis.

There is no gainsaying that Rosa Luxemburg passionately counterposed the spontaneity of mass actions to the "victory-crowned" conservative policy of the German Social Democracy, especially after the revolution of 1905. This counterposition had a thoroughly revolutionary and progressive character. At a much earlier date than Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg grasped the retarding character of the ossified party and trade union apparatus and began a struggle against it. Inasmuch as she counted upon the inevitable sharpening of class conflicts, she always predicted the certainty of the independent elemental appearance of the masses against the will and against the line of march of the officialdom. In these broad historical outlines, Rosa was proven right. For the revolution of 1918 was "spontaneous", that is, it was accomplished by the masses against all the provisions and all the precautions of the party officialdom. On the other hand, the whole of Germany's subsequent history amply showed that spontaneity alone is far from enough for success. Hitler's regime is a weighty argument against the panacea of spontaneity.

Rosa herself never confined herself to the mere theory of spontaneity. Rosa Luxemburg exerted herself to educate the revolutionary wing of the proletariat in advance and to bring it together organisationally as far as possible. In Poland, she built up a very rigid independent organisation. The most that can be said is that in her historical-philosophical evaluation of the

labour movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin — without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions — took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei, illegally or legally, in the mass organisations or underground, by means of a sharply defined program.

Rosa's theory of spontaneity was a wholesome weapon against the ossified apparatus of reformism. By the fact that it was often directed against Lenin's work of building up a revolutionary apparatus, it

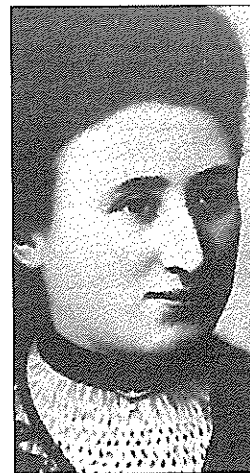
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**"She was much too realistic in the revolutionary sense to develop the elements of the theory of spontaneity into a consummate metaphysics."**

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revealed — to be sure, only in embryo — its reactionary features. With Rosa herself this occurred only episodically. She was much too realistic in the revolutionary sense to develop the elements of the theory of spontaneity into a consummate metaphysics. In practice, she herself, as has already been said, undermined this theory at every step. After the revolution of November 1918, she began the arduous labour of assembling the proletarian vanguard.

Let us again attempt to apply the conflict between spontaneous mass actions and purposeful organisational work to the present epoch. What a mighty expenditure of strength and selflessness the toiling masses of all the civilised and half-civilised countries have exerted since the World War! Nothing in the previous history of mankind could compare with it. To this extent Rosa Luxemburg was entirely right as against the philistines, the corporals, and the blockheads of straight-marching "victory-crowned" bureaucratic conservatism. But it is just the squandering of these immeasurable energies that forms the basis of the great setback of the proletariat and the successful fascist advance. Without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: the whole world situation is determined by *the crisis of proletarian leadership*. The labour movement is today still encumbered with huge rem-



nants of the old bankrupt organisations. After the countless sacrifices and disappointments, the bulk of the European proletariat, at least, has withdrawn into its shell. The decisive lesson which it has drawn, consciously or half-consciously, from bitter expe-

riences, reads: great actions require a great leadership. For current affairs, the workers still give their votes to the old organisations. Their votes — but by no means their boundless confidence. On the other hand, after the miserable collapse of the Third International, it is much harder to move them to bestow their confidence upon a new revolutionary organisation. That's just where the crisis of the proletarian leadership lies. To sing a monotonous song about indefinite future mass actions in this situation, in contrast to the purposeful selection of the cadres of a new International, means to carry on a thoroughly reactionary work.

The crisis of proletarian leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. It is a question of an extremely prolonged process. Not of a purely "historical" process, that is, of the objective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organisational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened — in a word, of restoring to the proletariat, under new and highly difficult and onerous conditions, its historical leadership. The latest spontaneity confusionists have just as little right to refer to Rosa as the miserable Comintern bureaucrats have to refer to Lenin. Put aside the incidentals which developments have overcome, and we can, with full justification, place our work for the Fourth International under the sign of the "three L's", that is, under the sign not only of Lenin, but also of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.



## Eclectic socialism and Ireland

THIS booklet (*Ireland the Promise of Socialism*) which is published by Socialist Democracy (Irish section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International), makes the less than modest claim: "This book represents a lot, not least two years work by each of the authors... [and] the experience of our members, stretching back over 30 years... Finally, it represents our understanding of the collective experience of working-class struggle... over the past two centuries."

But, alas, two years of literary endeavours, 30 years of political campaigning, and 200 years of class struggle have produced only a dimly turgid piece of writing, largely devoid of even a semblance of political and intellectual coherence.

Whether it is dealing with Stalinism, the EU, or Ireland, this poncif offers a pot pourri of contradictions, warped further by a Byzantine concept of anti-imperialism.

Stalinism is described as "a completely irrational system that was bound to fail." (The international political current [Mandelism] to which the authors belong struck a distinctly less critical note about Stalinism prior to its collapse.) At the same time the former Stalinist states are defined as "degenerate workers' states". (In fact, the authors mean "degenerated or deformed workers' states".)

Stalinism, claim the authors, "fell under the economic and political offensive of imperialism." As a consequence, its collapse has been "felt as a major defeat" by the workers' movement. But why the workers' movement should regard the collapse of "a completely irrational system" which banned all forms of working-class organisation as "a major defeat" is left unexplained.

The pamphlet moves on to the European Union. The authors refrain from calling for Irish withdrawal from the European Union. This represents a step forward (albeit an unexplained one) from earlier Mandeliste calls for withdrawal by "their" various nation states. But given the authors' rabid anti-Maastricht diatribe and their idea that the process of European integration is no more than the creation of "a united European imperialism", it is difficult to see why the authors do not advocate

Irish withdrawal.

Particularly quaint is the authors' line on the European Parliament: "Its bureaucratic and undemocratic nature must be exposed, (but) not in order to demand its reform. We have no illusions in a European capitalist parliament, any more than we have in a national one."

But surely, while having no illusions in national parliaments, socialists *do* campaign for their reform? Or is Socialist Democracy advocating that we in Britain should abstain from demanding abolition of the House of Lords and the monarchy?

Then total incoherence on Ireland. According to the authors:

"In the internationalist capitalist system Ireland is a small semi-colony utterly subordinated to imperialism... The national debt is not just an economic drain but a political weapon of control by imperialism and local capitalists... The specific form of national oppression suffered by Ireland — partition — is the specific political framework and mechanism through which imperialism exploits the whole island."

Southern Ireland is deemed to be a semi-colony because its economic development has been shaped by "the primacy of imperialist capital", whilst Northern Ireland's colonial status is derived from the existence of "British rule in the North" and its "occupation by the British army". In fact, if by imperialist is meant, even in part, international investment in Ireland then the fact remains that it is not mainly *British* investment. Make sense of this if you can!

If Southern Ireland is a semi-colony, how can it simultaneously be a full member-state of the European Union, enjoying the same rights as all other member-states? And how can it pursue an independent foreign policy, as it has for over sixty years? How many other "semi-colonies" can Socialist Democracy list which remained neutral during the Second World War? And if the relationship of Northern Ireland to Britain is reduced to simply one of colonialism and occupation by a foreign army, then what economic or military interest does Britain have in the heavily subsidised and strategically irrelevant Northern Ireland statelet?

Apart from some truisms about women's liberation (good), defence of the environment (good), class collaboration (bad), and sectarianism (bad), the booklet is a sorry hotchpotch of fashionable eclectic leftism — and proof that eclectic leftism is long

past its bury-by date.

Stan Crooke

## More years of self-justification

JIM Higgins is a highly literate, witty and intelligent man. No surprise then that his book (*More Years for the Locust*) about his days in the International Socialists displays all those qualities. It is also thoroughly self-serving and frequently dishonest.

Take just one example: writing about the expulsion of the AWL's forerunner, the Trotskyist Tendency (TT), Higgins states that IS/SWP guru Tony Cliff acted bureaucratically and should have defeated the TT in debate. The clear implication is that this was the course that Comrade Higgins and his co-thinkers advocated at the time. Well, if they did they kept remarkably quiet about it. Jim and his friends were actually at the forefront of the baying mob calling for the TT to be unceremoniously booted out. When I read the section of the book that describes the TT it seemed vaguely familiar: I dug out my old IS internal bulletins and, sure enough, there was an article by Jim's erstwhile chum Duncan Hallas putting forward precisely the same 'critique' of the TT that appears in Jim's book and in much the same language. Hallas's article was the "theoretical" justification for the expulsion.

I was not, in fact, a member of the TT but did fall foul of Cliff's version of "Healyite centralism" four years later, in 1975. That was when the "Left Faction" (whose politics on most questions were largely based upon the TT's) was up for the chop. Largely coincidentally, Jim and his friends (then trading as the IS Opposition) had fallen out with Cliff at the same time as us and the realisation was dawning upon them that we all faced the same fate. Suddenly, they became very concerned about internal democracy and even agreed to some joint "defence" meetings with us. I can distinctly remember one of them remarking with jocular candour that under other circumstances they would be pushing for our expulsion.

Jim's entertaining foray into revolutionary history also displays his characteristic ambivalence towards Cliff and the so-called "IS tradition". Jim will have no truck with any criticism of the roots of IS and the theory of "state capital-

ism" that allegedly underpins it and he seems remarkably relaxed about the junking of state capitalism's one-time complementary theory, the "Permanent Arms Economy". He is completely dismissive, for instance, of the entirely reasonable suggestion that Cliff's version of "state capitalism" was largely derivative. To admit that would be to admit the possibility of Comrade Cliff being anything less than a brilliant, thoroughly original theoretical thinker. Higgins also seems to have made a highly selective reading of Cliff's writings (under the name of "Rock") in *New International* on the subject of Palestine.

Jim's basic argument is that Cliff betrayed Cliffism and, in doing so, squandered the small but important gains that IS made within the industrial working class in the early '70s. Now, it is perfectly true that the IS destroyed its working-class base in the course of the grandiose project to transform itself into the Socialist Workers' Party in 1975. But why? Jim offers no serious answer and, worse, doesn't even attempt to do so. There are some passing references to Cliff's legendary impatience and to the cult of youth that superseded the dogged workerism of the early '70s. But this doesn't amount to any sort of explanation (let alone analysis) of what went wrong. That would involve an examination of Cliff's entire attitude towards industrial recruits (patronising glorification while they were useful, contemptuous dismissal when they weren't) which, in turn, would necessitate a fundamental critique of the IS tradition. Jim cannot do that for the very simple reason that it would have to be a pretty devastating exercise in self-criticism.

There are many amusing (and some moving and sad) stories in this book. As I had no personal involvement with most of them I cannot vouch for their accuracy or otherwise. But those episodes that I was involved in (albeit in a very minor and insignificant way) I know to be described in a one-sided, factional and often downright dishonest way.

Buy this book, laugh with it, and weep with it. But don't believe a word of it unless you've checked the facts with someone who has a better memory and is less factionally motivated than comrade Jim Higgins.

Jim Denham  
*More Years for the Locust*  
is published by the International  
Socialist Group, £5.99



## As Dearing reports Fight for Free Education!

**T**HE Dearing Committee was set up by the Tories to keep the crisis in higher education off the election agenda. It reports shortly. Almost certainly it will recommend tuition fees for students in higher education. This is its solution to the years of chronic underfunding which have led to course cuts, redundancies, rent rises, understocked libraries and severe student hard-

ship. But tuition fees will force students *further* into debt.

Many working class people will rule out university, full stop. Higher education will return to its old state — where those from well-off backgrounds can afford it and the rest are excluded.

We don't know exactly what proposals will be put forward, or what will appear in the government's response. But certain things are fairly predictable.

A longer-term loan will be available to students to cover maintenance and fees. This will be privatised (Gordon Brown couldn't possibly increase the budget deficit), it might be means-tested (there just isn't enough money to give everyone a loan), and it will very likely be subject to commercial interest rates. Tuition fees will be charged — the question is how much they will be (£1,000 flat rate per year is a popular figure) and whether they will differ between elite and other institutions and courses.

Tony Blair and David Blunkett have ruled out increased state funding for higher education. Students are going to have to pay up. The Blairites argue that this is right — after all students benefit financially

from their education. But education should be free to all as a right — not a commodity to be bought and sold as a 'good investment'.

The response of the so-called 'leadership' of the student movement to the threat of tuition fees has been pathetic. The Blairite Labour Students who run the National Union of Students have just about brought themselves to mention the words 'national demonstration', but only possibly and subject to a plebiscite of student union presidents.

Labour Students are in a difficult position. To keep power in NUS they must be seen to oppose fees. But to satisfy their puppetmasters Blair and Blunkett they must keep the student movement quiet so that New Labour can bring in fees without a fight.

There is a real opportunity for the student left to organise and build a fight against tuition fees which will mobilise students at a grass-roots level. The Campaign for Free Education is taking up this challenge, organising students in local and national action against fees.

This battle has the potential to transform the student movement, and set the standard in the fight to make Labour deliver — we must meet this challenge.

### Conference

## We need free trade unions!

### Saturday 19 July, Liverpool

BRITAIN HAS the least liberal trade union laws in the developed world... and Tony Blair wants to keep it that way.

Liverpool UNISON, in conjunction with the Welfare State Network, has called a conference to help organise the fight against the anti-union laws.

- Free Trade Unions Conference, Liverpool City UNISON, 4th Floor, Produce Exchange, 8 Victoria Street, Liverpool L2 6QJ. Tel. 0151-236 1944.

- Welfare State Network, 183 Queen's Crescent, London NW5 4DS. Tel. 0171-639 5068.