

Week school on political issues from the history of AWL

Day One

1. Why we started: 1966-8

<http://www.workersliberty.org/wwwaawwmb>

Session: Party and perspectives

What happened in 1968 and how the left responded

Why we fused with IS (SWP)

2. Ireland: 1968-71

<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/10010>

Session: The debates in 1969 - "withdraw subsidies", "southern arsenals", "troops out" before August 1969, "Catholic economism" and transitional demands, "troops out" in August 1969.

Day Two

3. The Tories and Labour 1970-4

Session: General strike

Our Labour Party debate then: syndicalism, economism, and politics

4. Stalinism 1968-75

Session: Czechoslovakia 1968

"Soviet dissidents"

Vietnam and Cambodia 1975

Day Three

5. Europe 1971-5

Session: The EU

"Absolute anti-capitalism"

6. Splits and fusions 1975-81

Session: Workers' Power

WSL: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/3864>

Party and democratic centralism

<http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/wl52/left.htm>

Day Four

7. The SCLV turn, 1978

Session: Debate with WP on the Labour Party, 1975-6

SCLV and "organising the left"

Workers' government

8. The revaluation of values, 1978-88: Stalinism

Session: Afghanistan 1979

Poland 1980-1

Eastern Europe and USSR 1989-91

The class character of the Stalinist USSR

Day Five

9. The revaluation of values, 1978-88: "anti-imperialism"

Session: Iran 1978-9: <http://www.workersliberty.org/wl3-5>

Falklands 1982: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/8074>

Ireland 1973-85

Israel/Palestine 1980s

10. The two Trotskyisms

Session: Heterodox, orthodox, and "orthodox Mark 2"

Trotskyism:

<http://www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/555>

The AWL's tradition:

<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/5146>

Timeline

1964

July 2: After years of civil rights agitation in USA, Civil Rights Act becomes law.

October 15: Labour wins general election, after 13 years of Tory rule

1965

January 31: USA starts bombing of North Vietnam. Vietnam war, and movement against it, escalate.

February: SLL, then biggest revolutionary group in Britain, launches its own independent "Young Socialists" as a response to limited expulsions by Labour Party after SLL wins majority in Labour youth movement.

1966

Summer: Beginning of "Cultural Revolution" in China: a faction of the bureaucracy mobilises gangs to purge rivals reinforce autarkic, ultra-statist policy. But many leftists in the West will admire the "Cultural Revolution"; Maoism will be a big force on the revolutionary left from 1968 to the mid-70s, though less so in Britain than in other European countries.

October: the initial nucleus of what is today AWL walk out of the RSL (later Militant, today Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal) on the basis of document "What we are and what we must become".

Late 1966: first issue (no.15/16) of the Irish Workers' Group magazine An Solas/ Workers' Republic produced by the proto-AWL group

1967

June: Six-day war between Israel and Arab states: ends with Israel occupying West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights, and (until 1982) Sinai.

July: Gay sex legalised (with restrictions).

October: first issue of Workers' Fight magazine calls for a Trotskyist regroupment

October: Abortion Act passed, legalising abortion.

1968

March and October: big demonstrations in London against Vietnam war. SLL refuses to take part in October march, with leaflet, "Why the SLL is not marching", claiming that demonstration is a stunt to divert attention from SLL.

March: Irish Workers' Group splits, after a fierce faction fight between "Bolshevik-Trotskyist Tendency" (around proto-AWL) and an unprincipled anti-Trotskyist coalition.

April: London dockers strike and march in support of Tory racist Enoch Powell.

May-June: General strike of nine million workers in France. Many factories occupied. This sparks a large growth of the revolutionary left in many countries.

June: Women workers at Ford Dagenham strike for equal pay - one of the triggers of the new women's movement.

Summer: IS (today's SWP) switches from a monthly, Labour Worker, to weekly Socialist Worker, and puts out a call for left unity (motivated on "urgent challenge of fascism" as in the march for Powell).

August 20: Czechoslovakia invaded by Russian and allied forces to crush reforming regime

November/ December 1968: Workers' Fight group (proto-AWL) fuses with IS

1969

January: Labour government publishes White Paper, "In Place of Strife", proposing anti-union laws. Government puts an anti-trade union Bill through the Commons (April 1970), but eventually backs down after union revolt. It becomes very unpopular among leftists and militant workers.

August: British troops go on the streets in Northern Ireland to take control after communal clashes developing from the rise of the Catholic civil rights movement and the Protestant backlash. IS, after headlining "troops out" earlier in 1969 when the troops were playing little role, now switches to de facto support for troops. Workers' Fight group inside IS (Trotskyist Tendency) argues for "troops out". Bitter faction fight.

December: Death penalty abolished in Britain.

1970

February: First women's liberation conference, in Oxford. There will be lots of women's groups active in the 1970s, and a series of further women's liberation conferences, through to April 1978 (Birmingham), after which the women's movement divides more into different strands.

June 18: Tories win general election. They will push proto-Thatcherite policy, and introduce anti-union laws, before being pushed back by big workers' struggles, especially in 1972.

1971

January 12: half a million workers take part in TUC day of action on anti-union law; 21 February, 300,000 on TUC protest march. Labour Party reviving; RSL/ Militant, who have gained control of the rump of the Labour Party youth movement and will keep it until 1987, grow.

February: First killing of a British soldier by Provisional IRA; start of a "long war" that will run until 1997.

June: Tony Cliff proposes IS switch from responding to British entry to EU (then being negotiated) by advocating workers' unity in struggle "in or out", to opposing entry. Workers' Fight/ Trotskyist Tendency combats the switch. IS leadership responds by calling special conference to expel ("de-fuse") Workers' Fight (4 December).

August: USA, hit by a vast outflow of dollars (partly because of Vietnam war spending), cancels the "convertibility" of the dollar into gold, which was the lynchpin of the international system of more or less fixed exchange rates established after World War Two.

1972

January 9 to February 15: miners' strike over pay. Ends in victory.

January: First issue of Workers' Fight newspaper.

January 30: "Bloody Sunday". British troops kill 14 peaceful marchers in Derry.

July: Five dockers jailed under new Tory law for picketing in dispute over containerisation. 250,000 workers strike unofficially, TUC calls one-day general strike, Tories free the dockers.

1973

January: A wave of strikes in Durban, South Africa, marks the beginning of the rise of a non-racial trade union movement in that country which will become a mighty force in the 1980s.

January: Britain, Ireland, and Denmark join European Union (EEC), expanding it to nine states. The EU will continue to grow and become more integrated over subsequent decades.

March: International financial framework set up after World War Two (Bretton Woods) finally collapses, and all the major economies move from fixed to floating exchange rates.

September 11: Reformist government in Chile ousted by bloody military coup.

October: Arab-Israeli war. Arab states push up oil price (it

quadruples 1973-4). This helps push an economic crisis already under way (stock market crash from January 1973) into severe slump in 1974-5.

1974

April 25: Fascistic regime in Portugal, in power since 1926, toppled by military coup; opens up period of huge ferment in Portugal.

February: In response to another miners' strike, Tories call general election on "who runs the country, government or unions?" Labour wins. SWP "turns left" (its own terms), in expectation that strikes will rise still further and workers will quickly see through Labour and turn to SWP. It also goes through a semi-Maoist phase (alliance with Maoist groups in Italy and Portugal). Workers' Fight develops more activity in Labour Party and Labour youth movement.

1975

March 11: Attempted coup by "moderate right" of military in Portugal fails. Ferment redoubles.

April 17: Fall of Phnom Penh: complete victory for Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Over the next few years, information will trickle out about mass murder and terror under the Khmer Rouge regime.

April 30: Fall of Saigon; complete victory for Stalinists in Vietnam war. After this, and especially in 1978-9, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese flee the Stalinist regime, or attempt to flee, in small boats.

June 6: Referendum on British withdrawal from EU. Almost all the left campaigns hard for withdrawal: Workers' Fight dissents. 67% majority for staying in.

November 25: Another "moderate right" military coup in Portugal succeeds. Ferment begins to subside; parliamentary regime established by elections in June 1976.

October/ December: IS expels its remaining dissidents, Left Faction and IS Opposition (the latter including much of its 1960s cadre). It has already expelled the "Right" ("Revolutionary") Opposition in April 1973.

December: Left Faction fuses with Workers' Fight to form International-Communist League, publishing Workers' Action.

1976

April: first national conference of the Working Women's Charter campaign, which has existed in diffuse form since 1974. I-CL heavily involved.

May: WRP (former SLL) closes down its daily paper Workers' Press, and starts a new one, Newsline, dependent on funding from Libyan, Iraqi, etc. governments.

June 16: Soweto rising, in South Africa - initially about the imposition of Afrikaans as the language of education for black South Africans - marks the start of eventually-unquenchable popular revolt against the apartheid regime.

September: Labour government gets loan from IMF in return for sharp cuts in public spending.

September: Ex Left Faction leaders, and some of their members, split from I-CL, form Workers' Power group.

November: Lotta Continua, one of the three big revolutionary groups in Italy at the time, each of which has tens of thousands of members, dissolves itself. Over the next few years the other two big groups in Italy, and many other soft-Maoist revolutionary groups across Europe, will disband and disintegrate. Their activists scatter.

1977

July: Deng Xiaoping, purged in the Cultural Revolution, wins power in China from Maoists. Start of an accelerating shift by China towards integration in capitalist world market.

November: SWP launches Anti-Nazi League with a big range of MPs, celebrities, etc. (Fascists have been increasingly active).

1978

July: Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, a left coalition to organise a campaign to vote Labour but oppose the Labour leadership, holds founding conference, initiated by I-CL.

September: National Front (then on the rise) marches on the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane, London. ANL tells people not to join counter-demonstration because ANL has a carnival already scheduled for the same day.

From September through to early 1979, a wave of strikes (Ford workers, tanker drivers, lorry drivers, NHS workers, council workers) defying Labour government wage controls.

October: SCLV paper Socialist Organiser launched (monthly).

1979

In Britain, union density peaks at 55.4%

January 16: Shah of Iran flees after huge wave of demonstrations and strikes. Ayatollah Khomeiny returns to Iran (1 February) and quickly establishes Islamic regime even more repressive than the Shah's.

May 3: Tories win general election, Thatcher becomes prime minister. Big left upsurge in Labour Party begins with recriminations about Labour government's record. (Will run to 1982).

July: Left-wing guerrillas (Sandinistas) overthrow Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. Sandinistas will run a left-wing regime, pro-Cuban but not Stalinist, through years of counter-revolutionary war assisted by the USA, until they hand over to a right-wing parliamentary regime in 1990. Many leftists acclaim the Sandinistas as the new model for revolutionary strategy.

October: "Volcker Shock". US Federal Reserve starts a policy of pushing interest rates as high as it takes to tame inflation and the working class. Similar economic policy under the Tory government in Britain: vast swathes of manufacturing industry in USA and in Britain shut down, unemployment soars.

November: SWP conference adopts "downturn" thesis. Working class has already suffered an epochal defeat; left upsurge in Labour Party, trying to build rank and file movements in unions, etc. all a waste of time; nothing for it but to orient to "little battles" and "build the party".

November: SCLV splits on the issue of rate-rises. Rate-risers secede to launch Briefing (February 1980).

December: British government abolishes controls on the trading of currencies. This, and similar moves by other countries, are an almost inescapable consequences of the collapse in the earlier 1970s of fixed exchange rates between currencies. Result: the start of a vast expansion, over the following three decades, of world financial markets, the "financial" side of a process which also sees a growing globalisation of production processes.

December 27: Russia invades Afghanistan, where a pro-Russian regime looks like collapsing. It becomes mired in a long war, napalming villages, etc.

1980

January 2 to April 3: steelworkers' strike over pay and jobs. Ends with a pay rise but strings which open the way for big job cuts and closures in the industry.

March 1980: SCLV initiates "Women's Fightback" at a big conference. A paper, Women's Fightback, will be produced through to the mid-80s, and then again, recently, as an occasional supplement to Solidarity.

Summer: Socialist Organiser goes fortnightly; "Socialist Organiser groups" set up in many areas; Workers' Action ceases publication.

August: Strike at Gdansk shipyard, Poland, marks start of a revolt which will create a huge new union movement, Solidarnosc, fighting for a "self-managing society".

August: Tory government passes its first anti-union law, the Employment Act 1980. This will be followed by a long string of other laws, especially the Employment Act 1982 (October), illegalising solidarity action and severely restricting all industrial action.

September: Iraq invades Iran: start of an Iran-Iraq war that runs to 1988.

November 10: Michael Foot elected Labour Party leader to replace James Callaghan. Foot had been a prominent Labour leftist for decades, on occasion having the whip withdrawn for voting against the front bench. He promised to rouse a storm of indignation against the Tories; but did nothing of the sort.

1981

December: Military coup in Poland to suppress Solidarnosc. (Despite repression, it is able to continue an underground existence).

January: In response to continuing left ferment in Labour Party since 1979, several Labour right-wingers split away to form "Social Democratic Party" (now merged into Lib-Dems).

April/ May: Socialist Party/ Communist Party alliance wins elections in France, after 23 years of right-wing rule, with big programme of nationalisations and welfare measures. But after April 1983, jinxed by a flight of capital, the SP/ CP government turns to austerity and privatisations - a decisive acknowledgement of the hegemony of "neo-liberalism".

July 26: After a year of discussions, I-CL fuses with Workers' Socialist League, led by Alan Thornett and originating from a group expelled by the WRP in 1974. The fused organisation has the name Workers' Socialist League and publishes Socialist Organiser (which now goes weekly).

Summer: Ballot (now involving individual Labour Party and trade union members) for deputy leader of the Labour Party. Tony Benn gets the big majority of the constituency vote, but loses overall to right-winger Denis Healey, 49.6% to 50.4%.

August: Mass sacking of striking air traffic controllers by Reagan government in USA: a key turning-point in a fierce anti-union offensive in the USA which continues to this day.

October: Hunger strike by Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland ends after 10 deaths. The agitation around the hunger strikes will prove to be the start of a slow but decisive turn by the Provisional IRA towards politics.

December: Labour Party leader Michael Foot denounces Peter Tatchell, the officially-selected Labour candidate for Bermondsey, south London, because Tatchell has called for working-class direct action against the Tory government. Subsequently Tatchell was removed as the official Labour candidate; reinstated; and lost the eventual by-election (February 1983) amidst intense witch-hunting.

1982

January 26: Unemployment tops three million.

April 2 to June 14: War by Britain to re-take Falkland Islands, seized by Argentina. At first WSL agrees to oppose the war on both sides, but from May 9 Thornett and his friends argue for backing Argentina. A row over this leads in to endemic faction-fighting in WSL in 1982-4, between old-I-CL core and a rump around Thornett, repeatedly depleted by split-offs of more impatient "anti-imperialists".

1983

June 9: Tories win increased majority in general election. Labour sags from 37% to 28% of the vote.

October: "Soft-left" Neil Kinnock becomes Labour leader, and starts winding Labour back towards the right, paving the way for what Blair will do after 1994.

November: Print union NGA has its funds seized because it has defied anti-union laws by picketing a scab printworks in Warrington (a pioneer operation for what Murdoch will do with his papers in 1986). TUC refuses to back NGA, and the workers are defeated.

1984

March 12: Year-long miners' strike over pit closures begins.

March 31: WSL issues a "call to order" ultimatum to rump

Thornett group, leading to their expulsion. (The few of them remaining active will end up in ISG).

July: New Zealand Labour Party wins election, after many years of the country being run with little interruption by the right-wing National Party. Labour government declares NZ nuclear-free but also introduces drastic Thatcher-like measures to deregulate, privatise, open NZ to the world economy, and cut welfare: the first "neo-liberal" social-democratic government, anticipating Blairism.

October: "Convergence": the Socialist Organiser groups restructure as a tighter "Socialist Organiser Alliance", and the WSL is dissolved in favour of the SOA.

1985

March: Miners' strike ends in defeat. This will be followed by heavy defeats for other groups of well-organised workers (national press, docks, etc.)

March: Mikhail Gorbachev becomes leader of Russia. Over the next years he will attempt to reform the sclerotic Stalinist system and end up shaking it to bits.

March: Student Jewish society banned at Sunderland Polytechnic because it will not disavow Zionism. This is the first in a series of such bans.

June: AWL conference votes for "two states" policy on Israel-Palestine.

October: The rump WRP (ex-SLL) collapses. Gerry Healy expelled by his previous acolytes. Also in 1985, the former IMG (Mandelites) fall apart into three groups: one which becomes today's ISG (a small group inside Galloway's Respect), another called Socialist Action (most of whose leaders eventually get jobs as aides to Ken Livingstone as mayor of London), and a Castroite splinter.

1986

January 24: Newspaper owner Rupert Murdoch responds to a strike by printworkers at his Fleet Street (London) offices by sacking them and moving production to a new site in Wapping, with a scab workforce. Despite months of picketing at Wapping, Murdoch eventually wins the dispute (February 1987).

October: At Labour Party conference, Neil Kinnock launches attack on Militant, now discredited after its hegemony in Liverpool's Labour council has led to cuts rather than a fight against the Tory government alongside the miners. Militant eventually decides not to fight the purge, but to quit the Labour Party, setting up "Militant Labour" (1990) and then the Socialist Party (1997). A minority remains in the Labour Party around Socialist Appeal. Militant/ SP will decline steeply before recovering some ground after about 2004.

December: British Gas privatised. Dozens of other privatisations will follow.

1987

March: AWL conference votes to drop "troops out" as a slogan for Ireland; to argue for a federal united Ireland, and explain that we do not support troops but "troops out" must be accompanied by a political settlement.

Summer: SWP swings to support Iran in Iran-Iraq war (previously it had, like AWL, opposed both sides). Together with a 1985-6 shift to a much sharper anti-Israel tone, this marks the start of a big "anti-imperialist" turn by SWP, leading towards support for Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah, etc.

November: As Stalinism in Eastern Europe frays, AWL organises a big "Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc" conference in London.

December: Start of "first intifada" - civil disobedience, stone-throwing, etc. - in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. This will run through to the early 1990s. PLO recognises Israel (November 1988) and accepts a "two states" policy.

1988

January: Big demonstration against the Alton anti-abortion-rights bill - the biggest of many mobilisations since

abortion was legalised in 1967 in defence of the 1967 Act.

March: "Gorbachev doctrine". Russia says it will no longer send in troops to stop change in Eastern Europe. This declaration will trigger a quick collapse of Stalinist rule throughout Eastern Europe.

April: Russia agrees to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. Its last soldiers will leave in February 1989. The Russian-backed regime holds on a bit, but its capital, Kabul, is conquered by Islamists in 1992, and then by Taliban ultra-Islamists in 1996.

April-August 1988: New strike wave in Poland, where Solidarnosc has continued to organise underground. In August the Polish government finally agrees to talk with Solidarnosc.

Summer: SWP declares "downturn" has been replaced by a new period of "volatility".

September: AWL moves from formally calling Stalinist states "degenerated and deformed workers' states" (a position which has become increasingly formal) to recognising them as exploitative class societies and a historical blind alley in relation to capitalism.

1989

February 14: Ayatollah Khomeiny proclaims "death sentence" on novelist Salman Rushdie for offending Islamic sensibilities. Big demonstrations in support of Khomeiny in many countries.

April: Tens of thousands of Chinese students on streets of Beijing demanding democracy. Thousands will be killed as the government sends in troops (June 4).

April: Solidarnosc formally relegalised. June: wins a landslide victory in semi-democratic elections. August: takes prime ministership.

April: Tory government abolishes the Dock Labour Scheme, which previously regulated the industry, opening up the docks to domination by non-union labour.

November: The Berlin Wall, separating East and West, comes down. By the end of 1989, Stalinist regimes have fallen everywhere in Eastern Europe.

1990

August: Iraq invades Kuwait.

March 31: Poll tax "riot" after big march in London.

October: Labour Party conference confirms ban on Socialist Organiser decreed by National Executive earlier in the year. Socialist Organiser refuses to cease publication. Expulsions (a few dozen) follow.

November 22: Thatcher resigns. John Major becomes Tory prime minister.

1991

January 17 to February 27: US and Britain invade to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. US troops continue into Iraq, but stand aside to let Saddam crush a popular uprising in the wake of the war.

July: Militant signal exit from the Labour Party by standing one of their people as a "Real Labour" candidate against Labour in a by-election in Walton, Liverpool.

July: Attempted Stalinist coup in USSR leads to collapse of the regime and the rise to power of Boris Yeltsin on a pro-capitalist-market, pro-democracy platform. USSR breaks up (December). This is followed by disarray on the left world-wide, since in popular awareness, for many decades, the USSR and its allies have been the "actually existing" (if imperfect) "socialism". Communist Parties in Europe collapse or shrink drastically.

August: As formerly Stalinist Yugoslavia breaks up, the Serbian-controlled Yugoslav federal army wages war to stop Croatia becoming independent. This war, and similar war in Bosnia from March 1992, will continue to late 1995, when the US intervenes to impose a settlement.

1992

September 16: Tory government forced by financial crisis to abandon its attempts to hold exchange rate of pound

steady against European currencies, and heavily discredited.

1993

July: SWP, increasingly brutish in its attitude to other currents on the left, beats up AWL member Mark Sandell for leafletting and petitioning outside its summer school ("Marxism 1993") about a physical attack a few days before on another AWL member at the event, Jason Bonning.

August: Agreement signed between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organisation which is supposed to provide for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

1994

April 27: First multi-racial election in South Africa marks the end of apartheid.

July 21: Right-winger Tony Blair wins Labour leadership (on the basis of strong mood that it doesn't matter how right-wing Labour moves so long as it can win middle-ground votes and oust the Tories).

August: Provisional IRA announces ceasefire. (It will resume bombing in February 1996, but reinstate the ceasefire in July 1997).

October: Tony Blair announces that he wants to abolish the Labour Party's Clause Four: the clause previously printed on all membership cards which formally commits Labour to "common ownership" and "popular administration and control".

October: AWL launches Welfare State Network, a campaign for the rebuilding of the NHS and other services, with a broad monthly paper, Action. Socialist Organiser will cease publication from early 1995 (it continues as a newsletter a little longer); the Workers' Liberty magazine, of which 17 issues have been produced irregularly since the mid-80s, will become a monthly (to 2000), and AWL members sell Action and Workers' Liberty. Action will become fortnightly from early 1998, more and more a general socialist paper rather than just one covering welfare-state issues. After Blair takes office, labour-movement fightback against his continuation of Tory policies on public services proves weak, and the WSN dwindles. From early 1999 the paper is renamed Action for Solidarity, and from February, 2002, Solidarity.

1995

April: Despite a fairly wide campaign to save Clause Four, Tony Blair wins abolition at a special Labour conference.

Summer to October: AWL makes experiment in trying to re-establish operations in the Labour Party (there is a small upsurge against Blair's move to scrap Labour's nominally socialist Clause Four) by joining with the Briefing group to produce a "new" Briefing monthly. This quickly breaks down because the proprietors of Briefing are unwilling to allow AWL the freedom of debate in the monthly (specifically, on Ireland) which they had nominally agreed to.

1997

May: Labour wins general election.

October: Labour conference adopts new rules ("Partnership in Power"), closing up most of the democratic channels which previously existed in the party.

1998

April 10: Good Friday Agreement for Northern Ireland.

Early 1998: Labour expels Euro-MPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, and Coates sets up the short-lived Independent Labour Network. Discussions for united-left election candidates start between AWL, Socialist Party, and ILN, and later SWP joins the talks. A slate is planned for London for the June 1999 Euro-elections, but is aborted because SWP pulls out at a late stage to back Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (a 1995 split from the

Labour Party, much dwindled by 1999) instead.

1999

February: Scottish Socialist Party founding conference. The SSP's forerunner was the Scottish Socialist Alliance formed by Scottish members of Militant (who broke away from Militant in England) in 1996-8; they were spurred to it by Arthur Scargill's launch of the SLP in 1995. The SSP will grow to get a fairly steady 10% of the vote in Glasgow, and some members of the Scottish Parliament, before being severely set back by a split by Tommy Sheridan in August 2006.

March 24: After Serbian government, which has been increasingly repressive in Kosovo, refuses to accept a deal for Kosovar autonomy, NATO launches air strikes on Serbia. Serbian army initially responds by stepping up terror against Kosovars, but eventually (June 9) agrees to pull troops out.

November: Big demonstrations at World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle mark the rise of the "new anti-capitalist" movement.

2000

January: "Euro" was launched as an electronic currency for 12 countries in the European Union; euro notes and coins will be launched in January 2002.

May: The links first made in 1998 have been renewed, and SWP, Socialist Party, AWL, etc. stand a common slate ("London Socialist Alliance") in the London Assembly elections.

September: As Israeli-Palestinian talks to progress the "two-states" settlement supposedly agreed in outline in 1993 break down, the "second intifada" starts. It quickly becomes a spiral of Palestinian suicide bombings of Israeli civilians and vicious Israeli army repression in the Occupied Territories. Israeli politics move to the right; Hamas (a small factor in the first intifada) gains strength among the Palestinians.

2001

January: Final breakdown of Israeli-Palestinian talks for a peace deal, under the auspices of president Clinton in his last days of office.

June: Joint left slate ("Socialist Alliance" - SWP, Socialist Party, AWL, etc.) stands candidates in 98 constituencies in general election.

September 11: Al Qaeda crash aircraft into New York and Washington, killing about 3,000.

October 7: US and Britain attack Afghanistan, and, with help of militias based in Afghanistan's northern peoples, oust pro-Al-Qaeda Taliban regime (9 December).

December: Socialist Party walks out of Socialist Alliance (on pretext of constitutional changes in it).

2002

September 28: Huge demonstration against invasion of Iraq. There will be an even bigger one on February 15 2003.

2003

March 20: US and Britain invade Iraq. They win a quick victory over Saddam Hussein's regime, but then become mired in conflict with rival sectarian militias.

May: SWP begins process of trashing the Socialist Alliance, moves towards alliance with George Galloway to launch "Respect" (January 2004).

2006

January: Workers' Liberty relaunched as a pull-out supplement to Solidarity.

2007

June: Following Israeli withdrawal from Gaza (2005), Hamas takes power there through a coup.

October: Respect splits, SWP versus Galloway.

2008

September: Global financial crisis simmering since early 2007 lurches into biggest crash since 1929. US government carries through huge nationalisations.

November: US signs deal to withdraw troops from Iraq by December 2011.

Trotskyism in the 1960s:
an eye-witness account
By Sean Matgamna

It has not been given to many organisations belonging to one or other strand of the Trotskyist tradition to have the chance to play a major role in largescale class struggle. The organisation known variously as the Revolutionary Socialist League, Militant, and, now, the Socialist Party, had such a chance in Liverpool in the 1980s. Indeed, at the time of the 19845 miners' strike it perhaps had an opportunity to bring into the battle forces that might have made the difference between a victory for the miners and the whole labour movement against the Thatcher government, and what actually happened unqualified victory for the Tories and the ruling class, and all that has in consequence afflicted the labour movement since. Militant proved unworthy of that opportunity. It did not rise to the occasion, but led by Derek Hatton, a sad character from an oldtime farce who had wandered onto the wrong stage it sank into burlesque parochialism and an altogether astonishing incomprehension of, if not deliberate indifference to, the overall class struggle. It was the selfreferring and self obsessive solipsism of the sect dead to the world around it other than on its own terms.

The most malicious of satirists could not have invented what happened in Liverpool. Despite their, so to speak, posthumously brave talk about "The City That Dared to Fight", Liverpool under Militant leadership did not fight not even there was ample indication that the labour movement would fight, and when the miners were already fighting Thatcher's mounted and militarised police. Militant's leaders in Liverpool, intent on preserving their organisation, made a shortterm deal with the Tories and left the miners in the lurch. Since 1985, Militant, like the working class and the broader left, has had to live in a world shaped by the miners' defeat and the Tory victory. Militant too has paid a heavy price.

There are other reasons for Militant's subsequent disintegration, but that sectarian refusal in 1984 to be guided by "the logic of class struggle" is central. Of the "other reasons", the collapse of European Stalinism is foremost. It shattered the "perspectives for world revolution" which Ted Grant had spun for four and a half decades around the survival of Stalinism in Russia, its expansion into East and Central Europe, and its replication in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, etc. The Labour Party's ban on Militant and the closing down of the Labour Party Young Socialists created organisational difficulties that Militant was politically not in a good state to face. It had been heavily dependent on the structures of the official labour movement, especially the LPYS, which it controlled for 18 years. It had threaded itself into the trelliswork of those structures, not only organisationally but also emotionally and intellectually. Disintegration has followed.

The organisation's spinner of ideologies, Ted Grant, was expelled and formed a separate group (Socialist Appeal) in 1992. The majority veered from Militant's old political certainties towards something very close to the identikit Mandelkite, kitschTrotskyist left. The organisation continues to decline and disintegrate.

One of three things: those Militant people who took seriously its claims for what it was and for what it would do will stand back, subject Militant's history and distinctive ideas to the necessary critical reevaluation in the light of events and of the

Trotskyism of Trotsky, and help regroup the left. Or they will continue, politically directionless, with routine activity in unions and campaigns. Or they will give up, as many seem to have done.

For those who want to reevaluate and rebuild a healthy revolutionary socialist movement, it is necessary, first and foremost, to understand what was wrong with Militant and with much of postTrotsky Trotskyism. For people who spent years in the organisation, that can be a painful job. Serious Marxists will nonetheless face up to it. The contents of these booklets and a number of collections of shorter documents on Ireland, Liverpool, racism are designed to help in that task.

The 3 booklets, of which this is number 1, consist in the main of two large documents, separated in their writing by two decades, in which were analysed key aspects of Militant's politics. The first was written in June and July 1966 by members of the RSL (mainly by the present writer, with irreplaceable collaboration from Rachel Lever and help from Phil Semp).

The 1966 document was an attempt by quite young people to come to terms with what seemed to us to be the bankruptcy and political collapse of Trotskyism in Britain. Rachel Lever and Phil Semp were 22, with three years in Trotskyist politics; I was 24, with seven, plus an earlier inherited "mother's milk" Irish republican background, and a short period as an incipiently Trotskyist Young Communist.

Much that has happened in the decades between then and now might have gone very differently but for that comprehensive Trotskyist political collapse into incoherence, sectism and radical incapacity to be what it set out to be. Revolutionaries now must come to terms with that history.

It was not just Militant. "Trotskyism" of one sort or another began to grow in the mid 1960s, and spectacularly after 1968, but to us it seemed that it had suffered a political collapse that could not but make the organisations a political nullity or worse, a source of political confusion and destruction. The main Trotskyist group in Britain, judged by numbers, resources, energy, or vitality, was Gerry Healy's SLL. It had degenerated into a destructive and disruptive ultraleft sect, which was also heavily bureaucratised. It would become a very great deal worse, and then again worse, and wind up selling itself for money as an agency for publicity and spying (on dissident Arabs and prominent Jews in Britain) to Libya, Iraq and other Arab regimes. Compared to what it would become, the SLL in the mid 1960s must seem a relatively healthy organisation, albeit sectarian and bureaucratic. We were at one with the leaders of the RSL in seeing the SLL as highly destructive. But by 1966 it seemed to us that the politics of Militant, from its belief in the possibility of peaceful revolution to its passive, contemplativeMarxist, waiting on events, were only a bizarre mirrorimage inversion of the ultraleft voluntarism of the main Trotskyist group. (The other "Trotskyist" organisation, Labour Worker/IS, was a very loose group, explicitly nonLeninist, which shared the passivity of Militant but was beginning to develop a strong syndicalist strain that at least had the merit of trying to attach itself to the industrial militancy then very widespread.)

In this introduction I confine myself largely to personal reminiscences of the Trotskyist movement in Britain 30-odd years ago.

1. The first sighting

I first caught sight of the RSL the British section of the Fourth International led by the International Secretariat of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel (ISFI) on the Easter Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) march in 1960. "Caught sight of" is the proper expression, for the RSL was not easily located in the labour movement.

On the annual march, we would start from a point near the nuclear research centre at Aldermaston, and march to London, growing in numbers day by day until we got to Trafalgar Square at around midday on Easter Monday. At the end of the 1960 march over 100,000 people crowded into Trafalgar Square. The next year it was 150,000.

1960 was the third such march. The original idea in 1958 had been to march from London on Aldermaston, but that was changed. The Easter marches became tremendous popular festivals of many sorts of people concerned at the threat of nuclear weapons. People had not yet got used to the existence of such weapons Britain had fairly recently acquired them and US bases in Britain were seen to make Britain a "nuclear aircraft carrier", sure to be annihilated in the event of war with the USSR.

Religious bodies like the Quakers and others, political pressure groups, trade unions, Labour Party and Communist Party branches, all would send marchers carrying their banners. Family groups, with small children on shoulders or in prams and push chairs, were very common. It was a sort of antinuclear festival. In a halfway decently led labour movement, or one possessing an adequate rank and file organisation, we might have such festivals now in defence of the welfare state. There would be many bands playing tunes like "When the Saints Come Marching In" and jazzy versions of the Red Flag spread out amongst the immense and evergrowing column moving on London. We would, intermittently, sing special antinuclear songs "If I Had a Hammer", or "Can't you hear the H Bombs Thunder?" (Echo like the crack of doom/As they rend the earth asunder/Fallout makes the earth a tomb/Men and women stand together/Do not heed the men of war/Make your minds up now or never/Ban the bomb for evermore).

Overnight for three nights people would lie in sleeping bags, jampacked in tents, coop halls, schools, church halls, sometimes town halls. Inevitably it was an annual bazaar for political literature sellers, who would range up and down selling, "making contacts" and organising. The revolutionary left renewed itself in this movement and in the LPYS.

At Easter 1960, I was 18 and a Trotskyist. I was at the end of a process of moving from Deutscher to Trotsky on questions like the USSR, but still a member of the Young Communist League. I was, after much hesitation, in the process of joining Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League. It had a very bad reputation for a repressive, violent and undemocratic internal regime. But it was, I thought, the nearest thing to a Trotskyist party in Britain. On the march I sold the Daily Worker "for cover" I would continue to work inside the YCL for eight or nine months after joining the SLL.(1)

The left press in those days was very "thin" and lacklustre. The SLL had a small weekly, The Newsletter, not quite A4 size, usually 8 pages, and occasionally 6. Pictures, which required expensive blocks, were very rare. Feature length articles were few and it was mainly short reports a day's work for a halfway competent journalist. The SLL had a more impressive magazine, Labour Review. From January 1957 it had been bimonthly, but by 1960 it was quarterly (2).

Then there was the monthly press. The SPGB's Socialist Standard, published since 1904, made timeless "Marxist" essentially moralpreaching propaganda against capitalism. Socialist Review, the paper of the Cliffite group (now SWP), had gone fortnightly for a couple of years after 1956 when the Russian slaughter in Hungary, following on Stalin's successor Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin as a paranoid mass murderer led to the exodus of thousands from the CP and turned some hundreds of them towards follow in the wake of the SLL in much of its politics (Black the Bomb, etc.) but it was a good paper, with articles of some substance.

It was always characteristic of the group that, though it carried the slogan "Neither Washington nor Moscow" (of Shachtmanite origin) under its masthead, its statecapitalist analysis of Russia led to few practical conclusions. Socialist Review too had more than a little of the chameleonism that characterised so much of postTrotsky Trotskyism. It was loath to offend the pervasive Stalinist tinge in the British left which reached way beyond the circles of the CP. In the Labour left there was a strong psychology of pacifist accommodation to Stalinism "Better Red than Dead" and of Deutscherism. It had failed thoroughly in the competition with the Healyites for exCPers, essentially, I think, because the Healy group was a far more serious, more active and better organised group, and had the advantage of winning over the two best known exCPers, Peter Fryer, and, perhaps more importantly, Brian Behan, a building worker and ex-member of the CP's Executive Committee.

Socialist Review had begun to pick up odds and sods usually transiently - from the SLL when that organisation's internal regime led to protracted crisis and a scattering of forces.

And then there was Socialist Fight, the RSL's paper. The issue I bought at Easter 1960 was 12 foolscap duplicated pages, with some such pageone headline as "Internationalism: the only road". That sort of timeless general propaganda statement was pretty frequent on Socialist Fight's and later Militant's front pages in the 1960s. It made an impression not too far from that of the SPGB "Dead Men Walking", or very tired people ambling anyway, with not much to say about current events. SF had been a printed four page monthly from 1958, neatly put together, but the RSL, newly established in late 1956 or early 1957 as the British section of the ISFI, began to fall apart into its component parts in 1959. Broadly the division was between those primarily loyal to "the International" whose approach included the idea of organising the Labour left, and the group around Ted Grant and the brothers Jimmy, Arthur and Brian Deane, which had existed continuously since the final breakup of the RCP in 1949 and made rather timeless, passive propaganda. In the early 1950s, the DeaneGrant group had published an intermittent magazine of 16 or 20 small pages (the size of a Penguin book) called The International Socialist. They had for a published Socialist Current. (3)

The "International" quickly produced a small bi-monthly Workers' International Review to appeal to people breaking with the CP, but the magazine Labour Review, which the Healyites put out from January 1957, was much bigger, and impressively endowed. Moreover, the Healyites, though not numerous were a vigorous organisation that did things they were responsible for the motion on unilateral disarmament at the 1957 Labour Party conference that led Aneurin Bevan to break with his Labour left supporters on the question of nuclear weapons. Decisive, perhaps, was the fact that the Healyites used with the dissident CPers the same approach of adapting to the audience that they had used in the Labour Party. Labour Review, written mainly by recent CPers, adopted the tone and manner of insiders. Where retrospectively endorsing Trotskyist history, it did it in the tone and manner of people discovering it. Many exCPers a couple of hundred, perhaps joined Healy. Not many joined Grant. The most important of those who did was Pat Jordan, a recent CP fulltimer in Nottingham who, with Ken Coates, had first been part of a fusion with SR in 1957.

Soon an old, old pattern from the 1940s and the RCP developed once more in the RSL. In the RCP, Healy and Lawrence had organised a faction that took its line from the international leadership against the RCP leadership, against which the SWP-USA pursued a vendetta. The "International" was plainly right against the RCP leaders on the question of the Labour Party; and plainly wrong on other questions economic perspectives, and political prospects in Europe. On

the question of defining the Russian satellite states in Eastern Europe, the International first directed loud derision and contempt at the RCP leaders, and then followed them in defining those regimes as deformed workers' states.

The "proInternational" group around Healy had some political merit. But there is at least one documented incident in which Healy, arguing one line at a meeting had it sprung on him that the international leadership had just changed their line and now shared the opinion of the RCP majority. Without turning a hair, Healy shrugged and said: "So we've got agreement!" (In 1964 the RSL triumphantly showed me the internal bulletins concerning this ancient incident, as if it had happened yesterday or the day before).

Now, within the RSL it was happening again: a group of International "loyalists" the equivalent of the Healy group in the 1940s emerged around Pat Jordan. They rejected Ted Grant's "economic perspective" of major capitalist economic breakdown very close ahead; and they also attracted people dissatisfied with the organisation's inefficiency (the secretary, Jimmy Deane, worked not for the organisation but as an electrician). Finally the seed of the future IMG hived off, initially to group themselves around the new International Socialism Journal, launched by Tony Cliff, Mike Kidron and a now long forgotten eminent academic Alasdair McIntyre who played a major role in that group 1967/68, supposedly as a broad enterprise. (4)

The RSL would at some point return to a four page monthly, but there was no superabundance of life or energy in the group. In late 1961 more or less all the smaller Marxist groups active in the Young Socialists (later called the LPYS) united to create a common youth paper, Young Guard, to compete with the Healy paper Keep Left.

The RSL had a small duplicated paper, Rally, based in their heartland, Liverpool. Socialist Review had a small printed paper, Rebel. Labour's Northern Voice, published by eclectic CPinfluenced lefts and pacifists, like the East Salford MP Frank Allaun, had a youth page edited by Paul Rose, who became an MP and is now a judge. There were Glasgow youth linked to another Trotskyist group led by the future MP Harry Selby, and some of the Nottingham group, the future IMG, derisively called the "NotTrots". All merged into Young Guard, named after the Belgian youth paper Jeune Garde. (There had recently been an all-out General Strike in Belgium.)

YG had the pluralistic character and sapontherise sense of burgeoning life that a genuine youth paper should have. In that it contrasted sharply with KL which was very much a rigid party paper. For what interests us, the RSL, the most notable thing is although the RSL's Keith Dickinson, who had published Rally, was Business Manager, their literary input was virtually nil. It was in practice an IS paper. Even where disputes arose over "defending" Cuba in the 1962 missile crisis, the "workers' state" and "defencist" lances were carried into the battle not by Militant but by the Selbyites and the NotTrots. I have no explanation for it; but the files of YG tell the story.

One of the few "mistakes" Peter Taaffe would later admit to was this period of politically dumb packcarrying for IS that seemed to be because the decision to do it had been other people's. A big part of the RSL's problem, I would later conclude, was the clique character of its central leadership. They hung together even when to observers they seemed to have hung themselves out to dry passively in the gentle winds.

Jimmy Deane was National Secretary, though extensive family financial commitments meant he worked. He had not a lot of time to devote to being National Secretary of the British Section of the Fourth International. The evidence suggests that he had been demoralised for a long time and was just

"going through the motions". He had family roots in the movement going back over thirty years. For all of the RSL's central people, revolutionary politics was a parttime activity (Grant was a telephone operator). Deane ceased to be National Secretary sometime in 1964, perhaps, and simultaneously dropped out.

Pat Jordan once described to me a dispute at some national gathering a conference, I think at the time of a brief reunification in 1964 of the seeds of the IMG and the RSL. Jordan was no unbiased witness, but the story rings true, and there is objective evidence for it. At the gathering a discussion developed about the need to find some central executive officer usually called National Secretary if the momentum from the fusion were to be sustained. The only plausible candidate for National Secretary was Jordan, a competent enough man of business. But Jordan would be loyal to the newly united "Fourth International" (combining the PabloMandel current with some of those who had split with them in 1953 minus, notably, the British Healyites and the French Lambertists) not to the RSL majority or its leadership. They couldn't agree to that, even though they had no alternative candidate. So the whole discussion developed around a contrived nonsense argument that the group did not really need a National Secretary. Instead of arguing the truth which from their own narrow point of view, was even reasonable that they didn't want to give the day-to-day running of the organisation into Jordan's hands, Grant, Taaffe and then, one after the other, their supporters, argued passionately, according to Jordan that the group did not need a functioning national executive officer!

That was their way in politics: to rationalise and argue from themselves, their situation and their inadequacies. In any case, there would be no fulltime National Secretary, until Taaffe was moved down to London early in 1965, after the brief fusion had broken down. It had been a shotgun wedding, under the impetus of international unification. In December 1965, the RSL was reduced to sympathiser status and the International Group (the protoIMG) raised to the same status.

The Grantite RSL had always been something of an anomaly in the PabloMandel "International". There were very large streaks of Stalino-populism and neo-Bakuninist ideas in the views of Pablo and Mandel. They criticised the autonomous Stalinist revolutions China, Yugoslavia, North Vietnam, later Cuba a bit but accepted them as genuine proletarian revolutions. Following that model, the "wretched of the earth" together with the Stalinist states had made, were making, and would make the proletarian revolution. Pablo and Mandel were not for a new workers' revolution ("political revolution") in Cuba, Vietnam, or China. The Grantites were in stark contrast, and could seem to someone like myself trapped within the common "workers' state" framework to be a great improvement.

They had a crude and bold "totalitarian economist" definition of a deformed workers' state. A nationalised economy made a workers' state, and that was that. They did not go in for mystification to make Maoist peasant armies qualify as workingclass revolutionary socialist organisations. They had a fully worked out twostages theory of Third World Stalinism. The Russian Mensheviks had had a scheme of first the bourgeois revolution, and then in the notnear future, after the capitalists had developed the economy and the working class, the proletarian revolution. Grant had a similar scheme, with Stalinism in place of the bourgeois revolution that is, with the statedeveloped, peopleenslaving economy of Stalinism in the place of the bourgeois epoch. For Trotsky, permanent revolution was uninterrupted unfolding of the revolution through the bourgeois stage to direct workers' power, the locomotive yoking the two revolutions being the leading role of the working class heading the peasantry in the fight for the "bourgeois" tasks (a republic, democracy, land reform, national liberation). For Grant all that was to be done by the

working class in Trotsky's theory, and in fact was done by the Bolshevik-led workers in Russia in 1917 fell to the Stalinist and other bureaucratic-military formations. And at the end was not workers' power but the power of "proletarian Bonapartist" bureaucracy. The bourgeois "tasks" of democracy were never accomplished. Totalitarian Stalinist states replaced them. The Stalinist drive for development - paralleling capitalism replaced Marxist revolution. The Stalinists substituted for both the bourgeoisie and the working class.

Though it was nationalised economy that defined the worker-slaving bureaucracies as "proletarian", in fact Grant described them as developing an economic system all their own. Grant was a "bureaucratic collectivist" in everything but a mystifying verbiage (workers' state) and the firm conviction, partly rooted in a bowdlerised Trotsky, that these systems were the progressive next stage in history. He was the heir and must at some level have known it of the theories of Bruno Rizzi, who thought that the totalitarian systems, Stalinism and Fascism and Nazism, were all collectivising forces in history doing work the proletariat had failed to do, and therefore were progressive. Grant and Rizzi too, I think were heirs of the old Fabians in their 1930s dotage, the Webbs, and Bernard Shaw. The Webbs wrote a long, arid, lawyerly book lauding the "New Civilisation" in the USSR, and Shaw thought and proclaimed Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin to be all part of what others would call "the wave of the future".

As in 19468, when the RCP's position that the East European Russian-Stalinist occupied states were "deformed workers' states" horrified their comrades of the Fourth International and stimulated loathing and contempt in those who would eventually feel themselves forced to follow after them, so now also, in the 1960s, they represented too much of the truth about the Stalinist states, and exposed too crudely the underlying logic ("progressive bureaucratic collectivism") in the whole neo-Trotskyist adaptation to Stalinism, to be other than very strange guests at the populist table of Pablo Mandel. In 1963, when that "International" recombined with some of those who, led by James P Cannon, had broken incoherently but in the direction of the consistent anti-Stalinist left, in 1953, it was around a scarcely critical adulation of the Castro revolution in Cuba. There was also an antagonism going back to the late 1930s between Grant and the SWP (USA), which neither forgave nor forgot. The RSL's days in its strange international affiliation were numbered.

It was during the RSL's period with the USFI that I first came across them seriously and started to seriously consider their politics. 2. Organising Cheetham YS, Peter Taaffe and Ceylon

I encountered Militant in mid 1964. I was very much at odds with the SLL, but had not made the definitive break I would make at the end of the year when they broke the apprentices' strike, for good "Third Period" bureaucratic ultra-left motives.

I was organising Cheetham YS, which met in "The Waterloo", a notoriously rough and violent Irish pub (though we never had any difficulties), at the corner of Elizabeth St and Hightown. YS branches organised or influenced by the SLL tended to be more social than political. The drive to "build" on any terms destroyed all political purpose other than the drive to create the similitude of substance. The formula was that you would invite youth off the street to a social to listen to records and dance if they wanted to. Then you would stop the music and someone would talk simple politics conditions at work, police violence on the street, racism for 20 minutes.

I (Racism was a real problem. We had a half-Indian comrade, Shanti very, very English; indeed I had to explain to her about British imperialism in India, but she looked Indian. Going around with her, I learned a little about racism close up the stony faces in pubs, the manifest disapproval, the twisted sexuality in much of it, sometimes the outright hostility. In the late 70s and 80s when it became fashionable on the

Labour left to go on about anti-Irish racism it seemed to me false and contrived. Anti-Irish "racism" was a long way in the past. If any of the anti-Irish or anti-Catholic prejudice I've encountered is to be called racism, then we need another word for what black people experience).

In Cheetham YS we played records, but the balance was heavily tilted towards politics.

We had half a dozen or more members of a left-Zionist youth group, Hashomer Hatzair I think, all young women, clever and politically-minded high school students. We discussed more complicated questions, such as the state and socialist transformation, or, were the kibbutzim in Israel a road to socialism? I remember arguing that they were utopian socialist colony-building. That was the extent of our dispute with the leftwing Zionists; the vicarious Arab chauvinism that still grips the left was far in the future.

One evening Tony Mulhearn of the RSL turned up. He was a recent ex-seaman, a printer on a luxury liner. He was over in Manchester from Liverpool on some printing course. He found himself in a nest of disaffected SLLers and ex-SLLers, but friendly relations were established. On our part it was curiosity as much as anything else. There was no RSL in Manchester. The group had no publication (they would start Militant a few months later, in October 1964). Mulhearn fixed up for my friend Rod Baker, who was more amiable than I was, to meet some Militant people from Liverpool, the heartland of the tendency. When Rod told me about it, I went along with him, to meet two or three Liverpoolians in a car, among them Peter Taaffe.

Peter was a civil service clerk in some Liverpool office where his work included paying the police. At the beginning of 1965 he would go to London to work at the RSL centre. Peter, in specs, was dressed in an "intellectual's" corduroy jacket; (a donkey jacket made my own sartorial statement!). As against the SLL, Militant projected itself as representing "theory", "perspectives", and political "sophistication". I don't know how we impressed Peter Taaffe, but he made a very bad impression on us. A staple of our YS agitation, when we went out with cometoourmeeting leaflets and gave them to every youth we met within a radius of our meeting place, was denunciation of police violence. Experience of casual police violence was, we found, very widespread, though officially this was the era of Dixon of Dock Green. Peter Taaffe was concerned to confront us ultra-lefts, and chose to do it by telling us, as one who knew from the inside, how pleasant many of the police he dealt with were when you really got to know them, as he did, paying out their wages.

I'd recently worked in a Wimpy Bar kitchen on Oxford Road, in the centre of Manchester, trading terrible pay for time in the Central Library. Quite a few police would pop in over the evening for a drink (the sergeant and the manageress were lovers). Very pleasant they could be, jolly and playful even. In a sidestreet onto which the kitchen opened there was a urinal under a railway bridge frequented by cottaging gays. (All homosexual activity was still illegal.) Some of the cops visiting the kitchen always thought it great sport to finish their break by going across to put a scare into gays ("watch this"...). So I did know what lovely people relaxed and sportive cops could be! And I had had the experience of being slapped around in a police station when I was 18. What Taaffe conveyed was the idea that he was either naive or thick, or both, to build anything on his experience with off-duty cops getting their wages and more than a little presumptuous to try to lay down the law politically to us on that basis.

Here, though I didn't know it yet, was Ted Grant's RSL encapsulated. Superficial observation, one-sided perception, without sense, proportion, context, tradition, realistic perspective flaunted and displayed with the pride and over-valuation of the infant for its "product": bumptious banality

and naively, puffed up with the visceral belief in its own omniscience and profundity, that is, in itself!

Taaffe, who was my age, perhaps a little younger, was, I assumed, a sheltered and limited, though selfimportant, young fellow: there were, could not but be, more real-minded, more sensible, cadres in this Trotskyist group. There were better educated people, certainly and people formed before the modern group, who were far bigger people, Pat Wall, for example but in fact Taaffe, when you got to know him, was, if anything, less rigid on the surface, anyway and less hidebound than many others.

Superficialities and halftruths, attached to the great evolutionary "perspective", were central to the RSL, especially later: parttruths that allowed accommodation to the existing labour movement. They always brought to my mind an ancient Irish poem, well known in James Clarence Mangan's translation, "The Woman of Three Cows". The poet admonishes her for much pride in her modest wealth by a series of remembered past greatnesses, long perished: "Well then, may you be proud, my woman of three cows!" And the RSL had not three, but only one!

The highlight of anyone's life as an RSL "contact" was a chance to hear Ted Grant speak, which he did frequently in Liverpool. Rod Baker and I were invited to come over. From the start I found the RSL members' attitude to Grant very odd. He was treated as both a holy idiot and a holy political genius. As the most casual of contacts I was told smutty "hehe" tales, and in the next breath that Grant was a very great Marxist (the booklist the RSL put out read: works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Plekhanov, and Grant!) The smutty tales left me with a bad taste on the level of human behaviour, and made a very bad impression politically.

Grant was to speak in Liverpool on the recent decision of the biggest Trotskyist organisation in the world, the LSSP of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), to join a bourgeois coalition government. The LSSP, like the RSL, was part of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. This was a tragic event, the result of years of degeneration. For us young Trotskyists, it was deeply shocking and traumatic. Certainly for me it was: that "Trotskyists" could behave like old Social Democrats and Stalinists! I remember arguing, no doubt hysterically, that the whole Trotskyist movement should make a public declaration that we would one day shoot the traitors. Grant was in Liverpool to explain what had happened and why. I found it all deeply unsatisfying. Everything was explained as a mechanical reflex of material conditions, "the period".... Throughout the speech, again and again, Grant referred to all of the leaders in Ceylon the traitors, the trimmers, and even the leader of a 1953 proStalinist breakaway, Philip Goonawardene chummily, as one who knew them, by their first names. The chief traitors, Pereira and Goonawardene, were "M.N." and "Leslie". I think it was Ceylonese practice, this first name style. But it struck me as deeply inappropriate when discussing downright traitors, and symptomatic of political softness, woolliness, and lack of political rigour. 3. Breaking from the SLL

When I first made "contact" with the RSL in mid1964, I had not finally broken from the SLL. Expelled in September 1963, I'd remained an active supporter. Early on a Sunday morning in the first half of 1964, I met an SLL comrade, "Tiny", together with whom I was rounding up unemployed youth to go on a coach on an SLLorchestrated lobby of Parliament, to discuss details.

Blandly, he said I no longer remember how we got to it "We might even have you back in the branch". People were "in" and "out". When you met a comrade and spoke of an acquaintance one of you would ask "is he in or out?".

For some reason, Tiny's remark stung and I answered:

"Perhaps I don't want to go back". I probably said more truth than I know about my feelings; but I had continued to behave as a member, one without rights, and I intended to go on doing that. Politically I did want to rejoin. That facile exchange with Tiny if it was that opened up a world of new experiences for me! Soon I found myself the target of sustained and active hostility.

Our Young Socialists branch was linked with others and there was much coming and going from branch to branch. And unexpectedly, I discovered on the night of our AGM that they'd secretly organised to remove me as branch secretary. I had been reclassified as an enemy and a renegade. The only explanation I could think up was the exchange with Tiny but you never know: maybe there had been divine intervention from London. Or maybe it was the new fulltime organiser Reg Perry. A postHungary, exCP bricklayer, he was a stiff, humourless fellow who had been London organiser. He belongs to a small band of prominent SLLers who, when they "broke", seemed to disappear off the face of the earth, going off covering their tracks to prevent themselves as being hounded and harassed (or maybe one day someone will dig up a pile of bones from under the stairs down which dissidents were routinely kicked at SLL headquarters in Clapham High Street!

I met him at some meeting and he started threatening me: "We know how to deal with people like you!" brandishing his fist close to my face. Their intervention into Cheetham YS branch halfwrecked it by electing a transient member of theirs secretary, someone who soon gave up. We had to rescue the branch; we included some, like Tommy Byrne, who retained membership in the SLL. We would have private meetings to try to regulate the conflict with the SLL the SLLers in the branch would have been expelled were this known.

The experience of the boneheaded, solipsistic and irrational sectarianism of the SLL was mindbroadening for me. I'd done such things, of course. A rightwinger had inconveniently been elected chair when we started the branch. He walked out in a huff one night, leaving the meeting chairless, when we rejected a proposal to ask the local Tories to debate with us what did we have to debate with the Tories? Debate with the Labour rightwing yes! and by the next meeting I'd organised the vote to throw him out as chair, glad of the chance. (5)

But that was in our good cause "against the right wing"; their behaviour towards me I thought was 'mad'. I was a very slow learner. I don't know if I could be said to be 'loyal' to the SLL by that stage but I was inhibited by the belief that this was the revolutionary party. I was forced to warn people against them in the reorganised branch they weren't going to catch me napping again but it was all restrained, and strictly defensive.

I had serious political differences with them by now. They had got a majority in the LPYS national committee and were plainly headed for an organisational break with the Labour Party. Pretending that the youth could be counterposed to the Labour Party, they went in for bombast and braggadocio. They drove for a break with the Labour Party on the eve of Labour coming to power, when all sorts of labour movement people could be and were radicalised by the experience of Labour in government. This policy made no sense to me, and I agreed with Labour Worker (IS) and Militant that it was utterly destructive sectarianism. Yet I doubt very much that I would have fully broken from them on the Labour Party question: important though that was, it was a question of tactics and one did not turn hostile to the revolutionary party on such questions. I broke when they went in for third period Stalinist strikebreaking. I broke finally and fully.

The circumstances were as follows. Engineering apprentices, lads learning the trade for years on very low pay, began to organise. Wellattended, open organising meetings were held

(I went to some of them and there was a great spirit of young people rousing themselves and learning) in Manchester and Liverpool and other places. They wanted better wages and conditions.

There had in the past been a number of such apprentices' movements. There had been a national apprentices' strike for some weeks four years earlier, and a similar one a decade before that. The '64 movement could have grown into a big national movement. A committee to organise and spread the movement was elected, involving YCL people, RSLers, and some SLLers. This committee decided to call a strike in the November of 1964. The SLL minority voted against this.

By now the SLL was in a white heat of 'revolutionary' ardour. They had the leadership of the LPYS and were in process of breaking from the Labour Party. They had a right to lead "the youth" and "stinking Pabloites" RSL/Militant, the "running dogs" of the YCL Stalinists could not be allowed to stand in their way. The SLL said the decision to call a strike in November was "premature" more preparation was needed. How much of this was honest judgement and how much an attempt to discredit the "Pabloites and counterrevolutionary Stalinists" I can't judge from this distance. For what it is worth, I thought they were right: it was premature and even adventurist. But the decision to strike had been taken and the minority had either to make the best of it, and if it was a mistake to work at limiting the damage or disrupt the movement

The SLL the "leadership" of the YS and therefore of "the youth" split the apprentices' committee, and set up one of their own. They denounced the decision to work for a strike in November and set out to stop it happening. This was strike breaking? No! The Pabloites and Stalinists were deliberately trying to abort and wreck the movement. They had to be stopped! The apprentices movement had, if necessary, to be killed, in order to save it from the Stalinists and Pabloites.

The SLL committee set a date for their own apprentices' strike three or four months from November and counterposed that to the November strike call. On the morning of the November strike, when some apprentices came out in response to the call of the Apprentices' Committee, the SLL went around the industrial estate in Trafford Park, Salford, giving out leaflets telling apprentices not to strike and telling them to wait for the "real" strike in a few months' time.

It was straightforward strikebreaking third period Stalinist stuff from the "Third Period" of the Communist International (1929/34/5: when the socialists were declared the main enemy and their activities actively sabotaged).

The confusion such activities caused could not but have swayed wavering apprentices. Whether the decision to strike was "premature" or not, the SLL helped make sure that the strike was a failure. It was straightforward strike breaking. Two YCLers I know they later became Birchite relatively sane Maoists were subjected to mild physical violence by SLLers in a lather of selfrighteousness against the "counterrevolutionary Stalinists" except that the "counter-revolutionary Stalinists" were trying to organise a necessary strike and the "revolutionaries" were strike breakers! The apprentices' movement was aborted. Months later, on the date set for the SLL strike, nothing happened.

This grotesque experience wiped out what was left of my allegiance to the SLL and brought all my political dissatisfactions to clear judgement that this organisation was an entirely negative force. If I had not come to that conclusion earlier it was because I distrusted myself and the strong feelings I had: one had to be "objective". Strike breaking in the class struggle, deliberately aborting this promising movement of young engineering workers, put an end to my doubts and selfdistrust. Everything became clear.

In fact, the organisation would continue to degenerate.

As the SLL was deliberately breaking the YS from the Labour Party (their "history" of the affair, that they were victims of the Labour Party bureaucracy, is essentially untrue: they deliberately provoked most of the individual expulsions). I went along to the Manchester YS committee (the "federation" of YS branches) with a resolution ritualistically condemning the Labour Party leaders, but, in mild, halfcoded language, condemning the SLL too. The YS was being torn apart and that scheduled "federation" meeting did not happen. I never moved the resolution I intended as the formal break with the SLL.

Illness took me out for two or three months. When I came back everything had changed. 4. What next?

I was in and out of hospital for operations at the end of 1964 and in early 1965, when the Healyites were pulling out of the Labour Party Young Socialists, gutting it. By the time I was active again, where once there had been a bustling Labour youth movement, now everything was changed and quiet. I broke with the SLL finally and forever in November 1964. Giving up on the SLL, which seemed to me to be reenacting a parody of Third Period Stalinism, left me politically disoriented and more than a little depressed and demoralised.

The US bombing of Vietnam had just started, and I went on a Communist Partyorganised protest march in the centre of Manchester, where I met a lot of old comrades, people with whom I had remained personally friendly or halffriendly through bitter political conflict. Afterwards, for perhaps a day, I mulled over the idea of rejoining the CP to see what I could do for Trotskyist politics there. The CP had a big proletarian base in Manchester, and that was one of the considerations. In 1960, for example, the CP had 1200 members in Manchester, and a few hundred in the Young Communist League; the only Trotskyist organisation in Manchester, the SLL, had, when I joined it early that year, about a dozen members.

Yet it was a fantastic idea: if I got in, then either I'd go in and be silent, or if I was not silent I would face very quick expulsion. I've always thought of the day or so in which I was attracted to that idea as the measure of my own political disorientation at that time. Yet it was not at all clear what else to do. Some of us revived the local YS, and an informal discussion group developed, made up of ex SLLers like Jimmy Shaw, John Parkinson and myself and people who were still on the fringes of the SLL, Tommy Byrne, Phil Semp... perhaps ten people in all. Phil Semp thought we would have to start a new organisation there was nothing else for it. He was 21, a student. Nothing daunted him. It daunted me! A couple of years older, I had had a proletarian schooling in what can and can't be done, and had a not overrobust notion of my own capacities. Psychologically I could not do what Phil thought necessary and what proved necessary until I was absolutely sure there was no other alternative except giving up revolutionary politics.

I argued that we should join the RSL/Militant and see what we could do there. I eventually did that on my own just before Easter 1965.

Now I saw Militant in a different light. Its blatant faults were now to be measured against the qualitative degeneration I saw in the SLL and I have never doubted that I saw truly, albeit belatedly. The RSL was a sorry organisation, but a sorry Trotskyist organisation. There was, I thought, no other.

Its very flabbiness offered the hope that it could be improved. I decided to join the RSL. Reestablishing contact with them, I joined some time before Easter 1965. There was, I need to stress, no question of "entryism" in the RSL. I was looking for a political organisation to join. If this was a decrepit one, one

could hope to improve it.

In an old file I found a copy of a letter to an exSLL miner, trying to persuade him to do the same and explaining how I saw things. The copy is undated, but it was probably written in early 1966:

"This question of [antiunion] legislation will evoke hostility and even activity from all the left groups from Tribune through Labour Worker to the Stalinists: what they will do will be determined by what they are; as Trotskyists we agree that there are enormous inadequacies in all these groups from the point of view of organising a campaign that will genuinely take the movement, or a section of it, forward. Hence the vital need for some serious Trotskyist activity which is neither as passive as some Militant supporters are, or as wild and sectarian as the SLL.

"...In small political organisations such as the RSL and SLL I think there are two types, which are comparable to two biological species. The one, the SLL, is rigid, specialised and very definitely developed in such a way as to make it incapable of serious modification or adaptation to change other than disintegration. The RSL is much more flexible, less rigidly organised, and can be modified. The SLL in my opinion holds no hope of changing seriously though elements in it could be reorganised. The RSL can develop, though of course there is nothing inevitable about that. The statement on the SLL I think you'd agree with; on the RSL you should consider it."

I was wrong, but that is how I saw it even as late as early 1966, before the seamen's strike and Militant's role forced me to re-evaluate things in the light of the allregulating concern of Marxists the class struggle.

Phil Semp joined soon after I did; Jimmy Shaw and John Parkinson came to the threshold, but Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe spoiled their chances with the others. 5. The peaceful revolution

I learned to my astonishment that the RSL, this "Trotskyist" group, believed in peaceful revolution soon after I joined it, in the following way. I set up a public meeting for Ted Grant, a number of the exSLLers whom I knew attended.

Peter Taaffe, who was about 23, had become fulltime secretary of the RSL at the beginning of the year, and would travel around the country to chair Grant's meetings. Something to do establishing authority, I was given to understand. With Taaffe in the chair, Grant gave a general socialist speech. Socialism was desirable and possible, and, moreover, if enough people wanted it, it could be peaceful... Now if my aunt had wheels she would be a bicycle (and if Grant had balls, or Taaffe brains, they would be Bolsheviks!)

It is possible to construct a scenario in which socialists intent on destroying the bourgeoisie as an exploiting class are allowed to get to a position to do it by the normal mechanism of bourgeois democracy. In reality the bourgeoisie would have intervened long before it got to that, with extraparliamentary actions. It is legitimate to provoke thought in politically unschooled people by pointing out that the Labour government in 1945 could have made peacefully the revolution which millions of people wanted it to make, though the seeming possibility is an optical illusion (if the Labour leaders had been in the least inclined to make such a revolution, the issue would have moved outside parliament long before the 1945 election). Grant was talking as to raw young socialists at the beginning of their education. I thought he had just mistaken his audience.

When one of the exHealyites, by no means a youngster, said aggressively what the few sentences above say, and said it at length, I expected that Grant would orient himself to the real

audience and concede the point. No. He took a solid stand that the revolution would be peaceful, or could be if ultralefts did not mess things up. We did not convince any of the exHealyites to join the RSL. A couple whom I had pulled close (or I thought I had) pulled away. ..

Later, at a meeting of the Secretariat with Rachel Lever and myself, I forced the issue to pointblank answers. Yes or no, did the group believe that we should orient towards the likelihood of a peaceful revolution in Britain? Did they think that the peaceful achievement of a socialist revolution, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, was likely, or possible?

Ted Grant, Ellis Hillman and Arthur Deane announced yes, they did think that. Peter Taaffe and Keith Dickinson said they were not sure but tended to think not. (6)

I had joined the RSL before I managed to take it in that Ted Grant and others believed that the transition to workers' power and socialism would be peaceful. It beggared belief. Yet I had indications of it. Ted Woolley was an old SLLer for whom I had great respect, an exclerk who went down Agecroft colliery for political reasons and had survived through the 1950s. I told him that I had joined the RSL. He was very hostile to them. "Do you know", he said, "that one of the Liverpool group, Laura Curtan, was a Justice of the Peace?" I didn't.

I asked Peter Taaffe if it was true. Yes it was, but she was now only a sympathiser. So it had been wrong to let a comrade be a Justice of the Peace, or to let a JP be a comrade? Not at all, he insisted, with the vehemence that was a stock RSL leadership response to any suggestion that they had ever been wrong. She had "won" the position of JP by her work in the labour movement, and it would have been wrong for the RSL to "deprive her of it."

How, I asked, could a revolutionary socialist take, why should she want to take, responsibility for administering the bourgeois law against young working class people, for example? Oh, that wasn't how it was at all. She was a socialist JP. When young people came up on charges before her, she would arrange to meet them afterwards and take them to the YS. Always? Always! That anyone could be satisfied with such a fairy story, or think I would be, provoked the suspicion that Taaffe was very thick. Or did he think I was? Rationalising and bluffing for the indefensible, how could he avoid sounding stupid? But anyway it was in the past. She was now only a sympathiser. (I believe she survived to be a strong opponent of the Hatton regime.)

Liverpool was the heartland of the group. A detailed account of what the branch was like politically in early 1966 will be found in part 1 of What We Are And What We Must Become. There was also a fairly wide network of sympathisers there, oldtimers like George McCartney and his wife, whose first name I forget. I spent some weekends there, going the rounds. Oddly enough, considering the knownothing boorishness of Militant in later years, it was all selfconsciously "intellectual", and rather pretensively so. The RSL prided itself on possessing a culture and a breadth of vision that the SLL lacked, and in being relaxed about it". A lot of time was spent chewing the cud into the morning hours of a Saturday night. I remember once, desperately tired and with some drink taken, I guess and wanting to go to sleep, sitting-in on a many-personed conversation about things cultural, including Shakespeare. George McCartney explained that King Lear was all about capitalism, the storm representing market forces, etc. Like any oldstyle labour movement autodidact, from King Lud onwards, I was interested he and had some acquaintance with Shakespeare, and probably thought there were "secrets" and hard and clear "class keys", and King Lear surely dealt with the destruction of old values. But all I got out of it was the sensation of pseudery and quackery. Ms McCartney put the cap on it that night. We got talking somehow about

Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, and her accommodation (following Zinoviev) with Stalin after 1927. I expressed unhesitating condemnation. She said: "Ah, it's easy when you're young..." She "understood". Easy or hard, people in politics are defined by what they manage to do with or against the stream, whatever it costs them. For me, the comment summed up the whole soft spirit of the RSL and its environs.

Taaffe was characterised for me by his attitude to a mutual acquaintance, Ian Hawksey, an SLLer in Liverpool who had died at 21 in a car crash. Taaffe was about my age or a little younger, and had been politically active since 1961. I asked him how he had come to join the RSL, which did very little, rather than the main Trotskyist organisation, the SLL. One thing, he said, had decided him: the RSLers in Liverpool were, as people, so much nicer and more pleasant. He was talking about the past, and an earlier self, but not only about the past. "Niceness" was a major distinction now, too. This was both apolitical completely outside of the proper and most important considerations and, I thought, showed still a lack of serious purpose. Then we got to the poor young fellow, Ian Hawksey, an old SLL comrade of mine and an old opponent of Taaffe's in the YS.

Taaffe was still full of bile and hatred towards him! How, he asked rhetorically, did Ian come to be in the car in which he died? Because he had "a petty boorjwah" girlfriend, whose car it was, that's how! Aggression and hostility in operational politics I could understand. I was not lacking in that myself; indeed, I had too much of it, and a raw vehemence that projected more than I had. But hate and spite beyond the grave for another young Trotskyist, a poor fellow dead at 21, dismayed me. Mixed with softness and lauding of RSL "niceness" and denunciation of SLL indifference to personal diplomacy, it repelled me doubly.

6. Documents and books

Part of my political problem was that I was no longer sure of many things. The SLL had opposed the idea embraced by most Trotskyists that Cuba was a workers' state but did it with utterly incoherence. China was a workers' state, according to them... This contradiction left me unhappy on the whole question. I read what I could. I tried in vain, in 1963, in the SLL, to get hold of the discussion documents from the late 1940s. One of the attractions of the RSL was that they were keen to lend me the documents of the 1940s. As pioneers of the workers' state scheme for Eastern Europe, China, etc. that is, of the neoTrotskyist theory of the deformed workers' states, which was radically different from Trotsky's theory of the USSR - they were very proud and proprietorial. The documents "vindicated" them. I studied Tony Cliff's Russia, which was in the Manchester Central Library, making notes, "arguing" pro and con with it on paper, comparing Trotsky. I wanted to be convinced by Cliff, but I was not able to convince myself. For a while I found Ted Grant's theory plausible, and then not. Phil Semp fell for it completely, for a while. Rachel Lever had been weaned politically on it.

I spent the summer holiday in 1965 going through the archives at the RSL centre, sleeping on Keith Dickinson's floor. The archives included Internal Bulletins; letters from members of the 1940s Trotskyist group, the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and replies; old publications; Jimmy Deane's letters to his mother when he was in Paris on the executive of the Fourth International in the late 1940s. One consequence of this was that I developed knowledge and perhaps some understanding of the history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain. I thought I saw how the very passive and fatalistic RSL had developed out of the RCP. There was, I thought, a continuing thread of mechanical Marxism.

At that time very few of Trotsky's 1930s articles, and not many of his books and pamphlets, were in print. When Unwin

published a small Essential Trotsky, including Lessons of October, in 1963, it was a big event for us. The wealth of literature available now was locked up in files of old newspapers. The only pamphlets by Trotsky in circulation were a few printed on very cheap paper in Ceylon. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s not much had been published in Britain. The SLL published Trotsky's Where is Britain Going? in 1960, and The Permanent Revolution in 1963. You got writings like Rosa Luxemburg's Reform or Revolution, if you were lucky enough, in an edition published on very thin paper in India in the 1940s. On the other hand, Manchester Central Library had a good collection of Trotsky, and I had worked through all of it when still in the Young Communist League and undecided about joining the only visible Trotskyist organisation, the Healy group.

Ted Grant would oracularly refer to such very important articles as Trotsky's The Third Period of the Comintern's Errors as relevant to the SLL as indeed they were but there was no idea of republishing such things. They were part of the priestly "secret knowledge".

The ten days or two weeks I spent in the RSL archives were well spent. I never felt comfortable in the RSL. Everything was too leisurely. They said I was impatient, meaning unwilling to await the ripening of events. I was and very impatient with them. I found their easy praise of each other, and the flattering appreciation one could get for trivial things very uncongenial and, soon, debased, cheap, worthless, and even worse. It registered with me as mockery or self mockery; and the knowledge that they didn't see that alienated me from them as from people speaking a language I could not understand. It seemed to me very soft and, "social democratic", minimising "consciousness" and the proper tough matteroffact relations of workingclass militants who share serious convictions and commitment and a common revolutionarycommunist ethos. I found their unwillingness to admit any responsibility for the state of the Trotskyist movement the absolute predominance of the Healyites repulsive. I could have forgiven Grant his obvious incompetences; not his ridiculous mechanicalmaterialist smugness. It was all inevitable, all down to the period or to Cannon's misdeeds never Ted's fault.

7. The RSL leadership

The group leadership was structured as a National Committee of perhaps 15 from which was elected a Secretariat of five to be both a Political Committee and an administering executive. The NC met every two or three months. Every National Committee was an extended National Committee. That meant that every member of the organisation could attend and was encouraged to, with a customary right to speak. These were not National Committee meetings but what later became known as teachins: schools, lecturing sessions, educational. Votes were rare, or the purely ceremonial endorsement of something, and purely NC votes rarer still. Dissent, except for us when that started, was nearly unknown. In practice "the NC" was only a sort of differential franchise held in reserve at the national aggregate meetings called "Extended National Committees".

This was the semblance of extreme democracy, but without the political preconditions for it neither equal citizenship nor, as we discovered, the right of free discussion. Dogma and dogma's priests ruled. A number of members of the "National Committee", that is of the people entrusted with a reserve vote, were people isolated from local groups people, that is, who could not build anything around themselves, but had been members a while and were both reliable and politically "sound" that is, true believers in Ted Grant as the Trotsky of our epoch, and therefore fit to play the role they played, that of senators.

There was a layer of younger people, about our age, like Roger and Julian Silverman, whose father was the Labour MP Julius Silverman, and others recruited at Sussex University.

These were all acolytes, fervent believers in Grant's stuff on the colonial revolution and so forth.

They had chosen to join the RSL rather than the SLL for very specific reasons: it was a finepoint, precise selection; and like all small groups, a selection of psychological types, too. In terms of class background, all the prominent young recruits were bourgeois or pettybourgeois. The selection, I repeat, was on the basis of accepting a view of the future evolution of the world and the labour movement. "Below" this layer there were people who listened, convinced that they were in the presence of the prophet and the Keeper of the Knowledge, and that they did not have the equipment to judge for themselves. Militant presented them with two or three bare ideas, and convinced them that they understood Marxism. What Militant gave them was a labour movement routine and an organisation to build which they could see in a heroic and a historic light through Grant's evolutionist perspective.

It is difficult to convey the atmosphere in those meetings, then usually held in the upstairs room of the Lucas Arms in Kings Cross, London. It was what I imagine Sunday Schools to have been like (and there were socialist Sunday Schools early in the century), or what I remember of the atmosphere during religious instruction in Irish Catholic schools. There was a doctrine and a big coral reef of mystic pseudohistory; there were priests who knew it, teachers with derived authority to transmit it, and pupils who might ask questions or request more explanation but were not expected to reason about any of it. Ted knew.

Ted was the link with the Golden Age "the days of the RCP". At one of those Extended National Committee meetings, I heard Grant bracket himself with Lenin and Trotsky, not as a wry or humorous comment on the state we were in, but in deadly earnest. There was not the slightest intimation that anyone found this risible or even odd.

As late as their 1989 book, *The Unbroken Thread*, Militant were claiming: "It was Grant's analysis and understanding that maintained and developed the thread of ideas that had continued unbroken from Marx and Engels through Lenin and Trotsky... It is to one person alone that the credit must go for the maintenance and development of Marxist theory in this most difficult period", etc.

They were schooled to believe that. The atmosphere was such as to demand acceptance of it. Not the least of their problems with our document was its mockery and debunking of Grant's "Marxology" in it. The Infallible One was not only questioned on matters of "faith and morals", but denounced for forgetting or not knowing the ABCs. We were Old Believers, "backtobasics" Protestants, visavis Pope Ted and his altar boy Peter. The prophet was dressed in rags and tatters; but, as with Hans Christian Andersen's undersocialised child who rashly pointed out that the Emperor was naked, nobody could, get away with saying so.

The organisation was modest, what the group tried to do was very modest, its immediate expectations were very, very modest and its conception of itself, what it "really" was and would be and what its prophet was, would be and for decades had been, despite the conspiracies of Healy and Cannon and Sam Gordon against him all of that was gigantically, perhaps even borderline crazily, immodest. In due course, History, almost unaided, would raise the group to the place in the world that it occupied already in its mind. The Labour Left would become dominant, and a bigger Militant would assume control in the stage after that. They would become the Labour Party. The scenario was, I guess, based on the experience of the Bevanites in the 1950s.

Political leadership, initiative and daytoday organising was in the hands of the Secretariat, which was not just both secretariat and Political Committee rolled into one, but also de

facto the surrogate for the National Committee that wasn't a National Committee. The Secretariat was five people. Keith Dickinson had been around since 1957 and '58, and was very devoted, selfsacrificing, and genuinely modest. Peter Taaffe had been active since 1961. Then there were three "older" comrades. Ellis Hillman had been around from perhaps 1949. He wrote to Natalia. He had been expelled from the Socialist Review group (forerunner of the SWP) in about 1951 (for "poisonous gossip", according to Tony Cliff; and, whatever about that, Ellis was no mean gossip). For a while he was a British correspondent of Labor Action, paper of the US Independent Socialist League of Max Shachtman and Hal Draper, using, so he told me, the name Eugene Vaughn. He joined the Healy group in about 1955, and broke with them in early 1959 when they declared a public organisation, the Socialist Labour League, and were immediately banned by the Labour Party. Though a number of SLLers were expelled, Ellis managed to remain a London County Councillor. When he linked up with the RSL, I don't know. Ellis was likeable and had revolutionary convictions, but the idea that he was a functioning revolutionary was only a series of misunderstandings. As a revolutionary, Ellis was a London County Councillor that is, a labour movement routinist.

He would leave the group sometime in the late 1960s. In 1981 he was a Greater London Councillor and Deputy Leader of the Inner London Education Authority. I went to see him in his office at County Hall, with the defence in the libel case that Gerry Healy and Vanessa Redgrave had brought against John Bloxam and myself. It was our first contact in 15 years. He was amiable and helpful. He never referred to the RSL, and nor did I. He told me that of course he was still a Marxist. Getting up from behind the desk, he went to the side of the room, pushed back a big rack displaying Greater London Council and Inner London Education Authority pamphlets and literature, and revealed, like a secret altar in a time of persecution, a bookshelf on which were volumes of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky (I didn't notice anything by the fifth great teacher, Grant...) See I'm still a Marxist! In fact he had been a functional rightwinger, or anyway a politically neutral techniciancouncillor, for many years. Soon afterwards he was deselected by the Bennite left in his constituency. Afterwards he could be encountered around the far left, including some of our meetings.

Like Ellis Hillman, Arthur Deane was about 40. He was the last one active of at least three brothers, son of Gertie Deane, an early'30s recruit to Trotskyism. His brother Jimmy had been secretary of the group until he dropped out, perhaps in 1964. The Liverpool group had been led by Brian Deane, who had also dropped out by my time. Arthur Deane was an amiable, obviously intelligent, and able man, utterly immersed in the routines of an appointed (nonelected) tradeunion official. The revolutionary organisation was a concern of low priority, a claim on some of his spare time, and probably as much a matter of family tradition the organisation had been known to SLLers in the early 1960s as "the Deane group" as active conviction and drive (which, in "this period", wasn't considered necessary anyway). He too, I believe, dropped out within a few years. 8. Grant, Trotsky and Bruno Rizzi's theory

Ted Grant was, I suppose, in his early 50s in 1966; he claimed to have been a Trotskyist since 1928, and maybe that was true. Certainly he had been a Trotskyist since the early '30s. By this time, he had got into the habit of using Marxism not to analyse the world, but to spin webs of ideological fantasy from it. At that he was very good. He cast an imaginary net over large parts of the world, the Stalinist states, and the Labour Party, and construed facts as parts of a continuing, unfolding, inexorable evolution to socialism. He was the Prospero of British Trotskyism. In fact he played the dancing elephant game. The elephant seems to move to the hand gestures of the trainer, whose power over the animal seems very great. It is an illusion. The animal, trained to stand on its hindlegs, moves to its own rhythm, and the

trainer is adept only at moving his hands accordingly. Consciousness, agency "at this stage", anyway played no part.

The "autonomous movement of the productive forces", the spontaneous movement towards collectivism that Marxists see in capitalism, was for Ted Grant a spontaneous movement beyond capitalism. "History" was an important, albeit shadowy, activist, unwilling to wait on the working class and moving the productive forces "autonomously" towards the first stage workers' states. Any agency to hand would do. Grant's entire miasma was derived from the ascription of a class character intrinsic to nationalised property. Where Marxism including the Transitional Programme and The Revolution Betrayed gave primacy to political power, class power, in determining what class character a given nationalised property had, Grant cut off that consideration completely at least "for this stage". This was the reductio ad absurdum of a distortion of some strands of Trotsky's notalwayscoherent late 1930s attempts to grapple with the conundrum of Stalinism the evolution of a system where the initial workingclass political power imparted a class character to the first USSR nationalisation.

Grant's ideas had some roots in the dualism that Trotsky developed to account for the USSR's development after 1929/30. The working class, argued Trotsky, could take power only consciously; but in the USSR it could hold power once taken, even though politically expropriated. The criterion was nationalised property. For Trotsky this argument was rooted in a view of the legacy of the October Revolution. Then Stalinism created elsewhere as much as "remained" of the October Revolution in the USSR. Grant and others mimicked and parodied Trotsky. But Trotsky never subscribed to or gave credence to Grant's key notion a workingclass character that inhered in nationalised property per se. True, from 1936, Trotsky often, for the sake of argument, separated the question of whether the USSR's economy was progressive compared to capitalism from that of whether the USSR was a workers' state. He argued that the nationalised property in the USSR which developed the forces of production while the privateprofit economies were mostly paralysed by the great slump was progressive, workers' state or no workers' state. He also contended that the USSR was a degenerated workers' state. But he never fell to the flat conclusion that any state nationalising the bulk of industry must be a workers' state, no matter who ran the state and how.

Grant's skill was as an ideologist, able to reconcile seeming irreconcilables, essentially a priest. Stalinism was progressive, he said, but also, and inescapably, totalitarian slavery for the working class. He believed in a new workers' revolution against Stalinism while also fervently championing Stalinist states and fervently wishing for the creation of more Stalinist states.

The adherents of Grant could believe simultaneously that the Chinese revolution was made by a "proletarian Bonapartist" formation around Mao but it was nonetheless a workingclass revolution. They could simultaneously denounce the USSR as a slave state and hail its contribution to progress. They could see the British labour movement as run by bureaucrats and traitors, yet also as if there were no such thing as a class struggle, as if the bourgeoisie and even the bourgeois state were utterly enfeebled and could not defeat us and throw the movement back, as it actually would in the 1970s and '80s in the grip of a ripening socialist awareness that could not be derailed or led to defeat by those who controlled the movement.

Grant worked those ideological wonders by seeing a stageist development of Stalinism and in fact seeing Stalinism as a progressive stage akin to the bourgeois revolution in Menshevik and Stalinist views, for large parts of the world. You could be in Militant and in terms of your operational

theory be all "unconscious" bureaucratic collectivist, seeing a new totalitarian class rule and able to describe its horrors, and simultaneously seeing the "bureaucratic collectivism" you described as progressive and, or therefore, workingclass. Grant was the outstanding heir of Bruno Rizzi (who believed that both Stalinism and fascism were aspects of a world drive to collectivism, and that they were both progressive).

As theory, Grant's doctrine was a sticky, congealed mess of incongruous ideas nothing was developed, analysed, described or named logically or truly. But if you did not think about it, you might find it satisfying: simultaneously antiStalinist and glorying in and cheering on the achievements of Stalinism; simultaneously critical of the labour movement's structures, sure you were building something better, and a citizen of a labour movement that was inexorably evolving your way. All you had to do was be in it, like a passenger on a train that was too slow, and stopped for long spells, but nonetheless travelling forward on set rails. It would get there could not but get there. In fact, though, false consciousness like this was simply rationalisation for accommodation to facts, entities, powers, to the labour movement as it actually was. The rest was fantasy and selfconsolation.

Grant, a bachelor, looked something like the actor Walter Matthau. He had a strong South African accent that would rise to a high tenor pitch and beyond in excitement or oratorical flights, and to a curiously parrotlike screampitch when he said of some group or position (as he often did) that it was "craazy". Phil Semp could do a very funny imitation. Ted was likeable, too human, until he put on the robes of the High Priest. But when he twigged that you were critical or rejecting, he became petulant, childish and fretful, and was easily made hysterical, his voice breaking with it. You didn't love him any more...

A cult demands a cultist at the centre of it. His strength in politics, if mere blinkered, selfhypnotised perseverance is strength, was a passive aggression charged stubbornness and a boundless selflove, above and beyond the common call of responsible parenting of one's own best efforts. He had no doubt that he was the Trotsky of today, and the only fountain of Trotskyist truth. The Doctrine was fully elaborated and set out in letters of stone.

He was immensely proud of the RCP leadership's pioneering or semipioneering efforts in developing and extending the workers' state formula to the Stalinist states beyond the USSR, and of his own efforts alone since. He would stubbornly rehearse the same ideas in virtually every speech. In conversation, once you'd got to know him, you could, so to speak, press a button and wait for an entirely predictable response even word for word, phrase for, phrase, emphasis for emphasis. Before it was "infatuation with their own inadequacies", it was plain selfinfatuation.

Next door to the RSL office was a little Italian cafe with ledgeseats against the wall behind tables and a continuous belt of mirrors on every wall above the seats. It was hard to have an unbroken conversation with Ted in that cafe. His attention would stray to the mirrors where you could see yourself from all angles. He'd look at himself out of the side of his eyes, then straight, eyeball to eyeball with himself, so to speak, jut out his chin to get a clean jawline, pat. his hair, unselfconsciously flirting with himself. He took a curator's care with his own body. Rachel Lever was at a school at the centre on a very hot summer's day, and the room slowly became suffused with a horrible smell, as of many sweaty socks and long unwashed feet. It turned out to be Ted's special diet cheese in his pocket. During two hours in a pub with me one night in Manchester, waiting for someone, he sat with the halfpint of bitter I'd bought as a stageprop in front of him never touched, improving the moment by repeatedly telling me how many destroyed brain cells each pint cost me. I wish I'd listened to him but it was an eccentric voice from far, far

away. And yet it was Ted's attitudes, concerns, values that, filtered a bit through the more "with it" younger ones, came, by the extension outwards of Militant's internal cult regime into the "youth movement", to set the tone and norms of the Labour Party Young Socialists.

Grant didn't think. He had stopped thinking in the late 1940s, having gutted himself by accepting Bruno Rizzi's progressive bureaucratic collectivism disguised with Trotsky's verbiage and "workers' state" nametags. He looked for illustrations to fit a "position", "prediction", a thesis, adopted in the late 1940s. Since the factual basis of his position was a growing trend of economic stratification, he found many illustrations, except that he radically misunderstood, misdefined and mislabelled them from a socialist, workingclass and Marxist point of view and had, as well, a completely undialectical conception of the question. His "perspective" was all extrapolation in straight lines from what was happening, with no account of countervailing and contrary forces, no breaks, no shifts in direction, no unforeseen syntheses. Capitalism was dying. 9. Grant's morality

One consequence of the learning by rote and by authority schoolroom quality of the internal life of Militant was that when they came to control the Labour Party Young Socialists (1969 to 1987), and extended it into the YS, it produced the strangest of youth movements one such as a malevolent imagination might invent to prove that socialism was inherently authoritarian and lifeinhibiting. At YS conferences you would see young people who appeared not of their own generation, but old before their time. Everything was terribly straitlaced and uptight. Legalise marijuana? Relate to the vast numbers of young people using it? Gay rights? You'd get debates in which young people would get up and spout, as the full fruit of Marxism, social views and morals like those of their more staid grandfathers or those you would expect from some evangelical religious sect. These youngsters were schoolroomed into the attitudes of an elderly South African and other uptight folk.

The level of argument was often imbecilic. Legalise marijuana? "Comrades, it will just lead to one more monopoly like the alcohol and tobacco monopolies!" So, we should campaign to ban tobacco? "The workers wouldn't understand". The youngsters who got up to speak had all been through the same school of oratory. The style and hand gestures. Many more spoke with Liverpool proletarian accents than came from working-class backgrounds or could possibly have come from Liverpool. Labour Party bureaucratic procedure was adopted, to give the platform a massive mechanical predominance. There was always a long summingup from the National Committee and an announced National Committee "recommendation" on how to vote.

YS youngsters were hegemonised and politically and socially arrested by the dominant faction, and never given a chance to develop. Quite a few of them would by temperament probably have been supporters of "the establishment" wherever they went. Sour grapes? Probably. Sour truth, nonetheless, I think. Tremendous possibilities were wasted to build a living, vibrant, thinking, rebellious youth movement, able to reach out to workingclass and disaffected middleclass youth, in the 1960s and '70s counterculture and elsewhere, and politically educate them.

This controlled "old" quality which Militant stamped on the YS was probably one reason why they were left undisturbed by the Labour Party for so long. It grew straight out of the RSL that we encountered in the mid 1960s. Of course it was a form of political child abuse. Sometimes it was political child poisoning. When Militant in the Liverpool council came into conflict with the local black community and its leaders, the youth were told at the YS summer camp that year, for example that the leaders were "pimps and gangsters", repeating the most vicious of the antiblack racist stereotypes

of the 1950s and '60s. The youth were infected with an unthinking religious fanaticism against the rest of the left and miseducated about it. Inevitably, some of the "wisedup" leaders were cynical about the workingclass youth they manipulated and kept underdeveloped or backward. One of them ones boasted to a WL supporter at a YS camp that "they" the youth "would tear you to pieces if we let them off the leash". They didn't just reflect the existing workingclass level and try to work with it they embalmed the attitudes of backward workers and petty bourgeois of an earlier generation, and froze the youth in them. 10. Grant and Ellis Hillman

In late 1964, its centre was three rooms in Kings Cross, London, rented from the Independent Labour Party and run by a parttime worker, Keith Dickinson. Even when Taaffe joined Dickinson as a full-time secretary, early in 1965, the centre was still sluggish and feeble. It was characterised for me by the fact that you would always get circulars dated, "Date as postmark".

Though there was already a trickle here and there of young people coming into the organisation from the Young Socialists, from which the Healyites had just split off a large section, the atmosphere was elderly lacklustre, tired, and deliberately and selfconsciously relaxed. They tended to spin rationalisations from what they were. All was for the best... After the manic, driven atmosphere of the SLL, this had its attractions. You could talk, raise political problems, go up the Pentonville Road for a leisurely curry with Ted, who was interested in politics more than organisational nuts and bolts. There would be endless talk about the past and "the days of the RCP", and lots and lots of stories about the unsuppressible villainies of Gerry Healy from his very first appearance in the Trotskyist movement. Ellis Hillman would tell you exactly what Gerry Healy had "on" prominent Healyites what he was blackmailing them with to keep them docile. X was homosexual, Y beat his wife, Z had a scandal in his past, refusing to marry someone he wanted to, and who was "in trouble", because he was dominated by a Jewish chauvinist mother, etc. It was fascinating!

Yet I found Grant, Hillman, and some of the others likeable, and for a while I thought Grant made some sort of sense about Russia (I had come to consider myself an agnostic on the all-defining question, was Russia a workers' state). What alienated me from them was a smugness about the past that at first I could scarcely register, still less comprehend. They had, of course, made a "mistake" here and there when they led the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s, but everything the revolutionary left entirely dominated by the Healyites, themselves marginalised had happened as a result of "the period", workingclass prosperity, and the machinations and intrigues of James P Cannon and of Sam Gordon, the representative in Britain of the Socialist Workers' Party of the USA.

In this world of ancient stories, current gossip, and freewheeling malice, you got the feeling of being in a parliament of mice obsessed with the big cat Healy. I was politically very hostile to Healy. Nonetheless I felt demeaned. 11. After Protz

Militant had been launched as a professionallooking eightpage paper in October 1964, with Peter Taaffe's name on the masthead, and Roger Protz as editor. After a few issues Protz left, and the paper became a very clumsily laidout, underedited, and amateurish four pager. Protz, a recent defector from Healy, moved on to the ISSWP, where he edited Socialist Worker for the five years before 1974.

Militant was four tabloid pages a month, and not quite regular either. The mystery was how an RSL "centre" that included Ted Grant, who had some experience of such work, could produce a paper quite so badly put together, so dull, so under

edited and so lifeless. The first three or four issues, Protz's work, were goodlooking and lively. Then Militant hit the bottom of awfulness.

It improved a bit thereafter Julian Silverman was editing it, I think but it reflected the mind and spirit of the group. Its staple was endless repetition of slightly peculiar politics. For example, speaking the language of the broad labour movement, Militant advocated the "nationalisation" of virtually everything. Proper Marxist propaganda would have sought and found ways to raise the question of questions about nationalisation: whose state nationalises? Who has the political power which gives nationalisation its class character?

Not so Militant. Nationalisation was enough. All the odder was this because the workingclass experience with nationalised coal and rail had not been exactly socialist; nor, of course, could it have been, with statecapitalist nationalisation. In the late 1940s, before it collapsed, the RCP had begun to stress the demand for workers' control to differentiate socialist nationalisation from what the Labour government was doing. Socialist Review/IS continued this very onesidedly through the 1950s and '60s. You would get blindmenandtheelephant debates in the mid1960s YS between Militant people insisting that nationalisation was decisive and workers' control not essential, and IS people insisting that workers' control was the thing and nationalisation did not matter.

I don't know for sure how Militant got to that stage. There would seem to be an obvious connection with the root alldefining theory that so much nationalisation in the Stalinist states and others: Militant decided early in 1965 that the level of nationalisation in Syria (and later Burma) had reached the point where they were deformed workers' states amounted to a workers' state. But Militant believed in a "political" revolution in those states which implied that for socialism nationalisation was not enough. How could it be enough in Britain, under the bourgeois state? To this was added the belief of Ted Grant in a peaceful socialist transformation in Britain a peaceful revolution. The political confusion was as deadly as the dull and lifeless "nationalisation: the only road" propaganda that was the Militant staple.

I don't, even after so many years, feel that I fully understand how Militant got into this state, or how people calling themselves Trotskyists could settle for it. They were SPGBtype propagandists not for socialism, though they thought it was socialism, but for a sort of allembracing speededup Fabianism (that is, for state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism!) It was all the more mysterious in that there was a vast Marxist literature against this approach.

Maybe part of it can be explained as the product of Grant's inner need to have everything rationalised, theorised, tidily accounted for in a scheme and the comforting function that the literary products of such an inner need can have for people desirous of a socialist future but uncomfortably aware that what they are doing towards that future is dim and feeble. Thus, in the 1950s, for example, all the Trotskyists, and not just Grant's group, chose to duck the question of violent revolution. Within limits there was sense to this. They wanted to win support for their general objectives. The question of revolutionary violence was not immediate and could be dealt with in due course, in better circumstances. But Grant, unlike the rest, insisted that he was propounding "the full Marxist programme".

What We Are... reports him responding to criticisms of Militant as "overentrist" by asserting unnecessarily, self-destructively from a factional point of view that the paper would be exactly the same if the RSL were not in the Labour Party. Grant evidently could not live with the "gap" between modest daily agitation and semisecret revolutionary ambitions which all the other groups accepted as a necessary way of life. Nor could he find the proper dialectical relationship between agitation,

propaganda and theory. Theory, propaganda and agitation all had to be squared into the same box. And because of Grant's timidity, they were squared into a box defined by the "agitation", instead of a converse choice which would have led to strident highpitch "hard" sectarianism.

And yet what the RSL advocated for Britain was part of a world view that was selfconsistent. The world was moving, evolving, towards socialism. The "subjective agency" the working class in Marxism for Militant could be any formation. Nationalisation defined a workers' state and gave its "class character" to Maoists and Ba'athist militarists. It was an ongoing process, registering qualitative advances in unexpected places such as Syria and Burma. This, said Ted Grant, was part of "the autonomous movement of the productive forces" towards collectivism, which was by definition, from the first stage, workingclass and developing to socialism, and could not ever be defined as anything else. This in fact led Militant to a twostages view of the immanent socialist revolution though this was not elaborated which in its first stage was, so far, Stalinist. Grant called it "proletarian Bonapartism", in fact describing new social formations, but putting a plus sign where Max Shachtman, for example, put a minus sign.

Grant was, I think, the most consistent among the neo-Trotskyists in applying what had been the theory of Bruno Rizzi (and, for example, the Fabian George Bernard Shaw) in the 1930s about a drive towards collectivism which, despite peculiar forms, was everywhere progressive. (For Shaw it was "the Spirit of the Age"). Inevitably this world view affected Militant's British politics. They were vulgar evolutionists. British capitalism and the British labour movement were evolving towards the socialist transformation of society. The job of Marxists was to be there on the labour movement train, telling people the real destination. This was an essentially Second Internationalist conception of politics. But come to think of it, that is unfair to the Second International. Their "evolutionism" was for a long time reasonable on the empirical evidence.

Fatalism can, of course, go hand in hand with enterprise and energy as well as lifelessness... Essentially, what Militant converted its people to was commitment to a certain view of the future to a conception of an evolution from now to the future. The labour movement was evolving: there was already vast evidence, great fruits of its evolution look at the Stalinist world! look at the British trade union conference resolutions for nationalisation, comrade! The idea of dialectical movement of possible defeat and regression played as little part in their vulgarevolutionists evolutionism as the idea that real evolution, real history, includes qualitative breaks, that is revolutions. Militant waited for the development of the "mass left wing" in the Labour Party. Even if this were a correct estimation, it scarcely followed that energetic minority activity now to build up forces was ruled out. That only followed when the "perspective" of the mass left wing was used for comfort and consolation to accompany labour movement routinism and a bit of resolutory activity about nationalising the 250 monopolies. In fact there Noms even a strong element in Militant in the 1960s of people who believed they existed in the world before their proper time had come, comparable to the Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution... Yet, it added up to something like a coherent world view, or a pastiche of a coherent world view. I was more than a little startled at the Labour Party Young Socialists conference, in 1973 or 1974, encountering Militant again after a gap of some years, when it struck me that young people could be got to believe that it was the ultimate left-wing position to advocate "full" nationalisation what seemed to me to be passive, indifferent, or lukewarm to the class struggle, and therefore rightwing bletherskating combining it with lifeless routinist propaganda and that people who focused on "limited" things like strikes were nowhere near as "left". The psychology its familiar to anyone who has ever talked to an SPGBer. 12. The fight in the

RSL

Rachel Lever was very much of the RSL, the first organisation she had joined. She once hit me in the face for making some dismissive or less than respectful comment about one of the RSL leaders! Phil Semp, who like me had been in the SLL, became for a time a full and enthusiastic convert to Grant's theories about Stalinism. As a final year sociology student at Leeds University, he wrote essays which seemed to me, though I didn't agree with them, to be more lucid expositions of Grant's ideas than anything available from the RSL. All three of us came to find the group's lifelessness, routinism, and platonic optimism unconvincing as we found personally intolerable.

They said of me in reply that I was "impatient". I surely was. Trouble was, I couldn't buy into the thinking that allowed them to be patient and, I would have said, politically somnolent. Just as the present was an inevitable consequence of an unalterable past, so also the future prosperity of the tendency was mechanically assured when conditions were right so lol!" as you believed in the perspective.

In late 1965, when the Labour government started to signal that it intended to bring the state heavily into wage bargaining, against the workers, in the form of a statutory incomes policy, Rachel Lever and I proposed that the group take the initiative in working to create an activist campaign in the labour movement against this first modern (and, ill retrospect, very modest) attempt to shackle the trade unions in Britain. No chance! Such initiatives were unnecessary. The "perspective" would in the ripening of time be its own midwife. The subsequent story is told in what is now the appendix to the 1966 document.

We made proposals for activities, and initiated some. Finally, we felt obliged to try to understand what was wrong politically. What We Are And What We Must Become was the result.

I started to write a critical analysis of the great shibboleths of the group such as "perspectives" and "the socialist consciousness of the British labour movement". I didn't get very far. It required a great deal of reading and rereading and thinking it through. Endless "reading around" the subject quickly displaced the goal of showing in writing what was wrong with the RSL's perspectives and their politics. I knew what I disliked and what made no sense to me and what contradicted much that I was sure about for example, I was sure that the idea of a peaceful revolution, as a real possibility and not just a theoretical toy, was idiocy. I had had the disputes about this, about what Marx believed and so on, already in the Young Communist League, six years earlier. But to sum it all up was daunting work. I lacked the selfconfidence and, after the stimulus of the conflict over the impending antiunion legislation died down, the impetus and drive necessary.

I finally tackled the job in earnest, and with a will, in response to another experience of the political nature of the RSL its performance in the sea strike of 1966. That was an important class struggle, and one of the preludes to the July 1966 statutory incomes policy. Prime Minister Harold Wilson made a witchhunting attack on the strikers as "politically motivated men". There were major political dimensions to this strike the role of the bourgeois state, the nature of the Labour government, etc.

A Marxist paper that failed to explain that, and to orient as much of the working class as it could reach towards conflict with the Labour government and the labour bureaucracy, was a very poor thing. Throughout the strike Militant confined itself to the case for the seafarers' demands on a sympathetic trade unionist level. Only when the strike was over was some effort made, in response to our criticisms, to fill a

few gaps.

When we raised the matter at an Extended National Committee, we were given lectures about "the period, comrade", "the group's perspectives", and the popularity of the newlyelected Labour government. Most memorably, Roger Silverman, Ted Grant's most devoted disciple, told the meeting in an excitement of rationalising that it didn't matter much what the paper said, because, after all, its main function was to act as a "calling card" to give us the chance to talk to workers. I took this "loyalist" idiocy as evidence that in some part of his mind he could see the point. I discovered that people held together against criticism here as in the SLL except that here it was not a brutal regime and self hypnotism with militant slogans that shaped the group, but a soft regime full of excuses for itself and for everyone who was docile towards it, and selfhypnosis by sleepy mantras and principled reasons for not getting excited. The authentic atmosphere of the group then is to be found in the detailed account of a discussion in the Liverpool branch on incomes policy and antiunion legislation.

After that, from mid June, I worked at sorting it out politically in my head and in discussion with Rachel Lever and Phil Semp, and, with the help of Rachel Lever, at putting it into more or less readable shape and onto stencils, so that when the holidays started in August I could go to London and get the discussion started.

Rachel Lever and I went to London on 1 August 1966, the first day of my two week annual holiday, and straight from Euston to the RSL office at Kings Cross, in order to duplicate the document, as previously arranged. We showed a paper copy of What We Are And What We Must Become to Keith Dickinson, who expressed surprise that it was quite so long (but he had expected a long document).

We proceeded to discuss practical details. We had only the one paper copy of the document, made by putting carbon and paper behind the stencils as they were cut on the typewriter, and we left it with Keith Dickinson who was to see to paper, ink, etc. and went for something to eat. When we came back, everything was changed. Keith Dickinson, Peter Taaffe, and later Ted Grant looked at the contents of the document. Thereafter we were given the run-around. They had decided to stop us producing and circulating the document. The ridiculous details will be found in the documents appended to the main 1966 text.

The succession of evasions and excuses they made seemed to us as if designed to satirise themselves. Possibly they were subconsciously a form of selfassertion: stubborn and impregnable selflove was a strong thing with them! They were indeed, as I wrote, using words of Lenin's, "infatuated with their own inadequacies". They even tried to confiscate the only paper copy of the document we had. (We had not left the stencils in the office). They refused to give it back to us. It was in a locked filing cabinet: and we had to resort to subterfuge to get it back.

After wasting some days being messed around, we went one evening and sought out Peter Taaffe in the office and engaged him in political discussion. I pretended to be, and Rachel Lever genuinely was, upset at their attitude and comments such as that the document was all about "the warts on Peter Taaffe's face". We engaged him in a discussion, earnestly and "sincerely". I projected uncertainty and contrition and said I couldn't remember some of the things he said were in the document. "That can't be right, Peter. Where exactly is it?" Peter got carried away with himself and undertook to "prove" it. He unlocked the filing cabinet and took out the document... He started thumbing it to find the passage: the only things he'd marked were the comments about his behaviour. I said, "Let me see". He handed me the document, open where he'd marked it. I dropped the mask and said I was taking the

document back. He didn't attempt to stop me.

For over two months we were refused the right to circulate the document, though it was supposedly a "pre-conference period" (in fact, the conference would be postponed). Finally, we left the group in October 1966 after a day of headbanging at an Extended National Committee in the Lucas Arms pub in Grays Inn Road, London.

I can recall exactly the point at which I decided to leave the RSL and to propose to my collaborators that we should all leave. Peter Taaffe made a speech in which he justified the suppression of the document by the fiveperson Secretariat (which was the only functioning committee: National Committee meetings were rare, and usually Extended National Committees, open to all). There was no dissent from the sizeable proportion of the members present. That did not surprise me: Taaffe and his friends had succeeded in branding us as people influenced by or possibly "agents" of the Healy organisation, the Socialist Labour League. What startled me, and decided me not to stay in the organisation, was the particular justification that the RSL members accepted from Peter Taaffe for some particular bit of clumsy bureaucratic blocking by the centre. "This is exactly how it is done in the broad labour movement. It is perfectly democratic".

In the bureaucratised, routinised, ideafriendly "broad labour movement"? I aspired to something better. On the second day of the Extended National Committee, I made a formal statement, and we left.

For decades, cheap reproduction of texts was done by poor leftists by way of Gestetner and Roneo duplicators, which could produce some hundreds of copies of what you had typed or "cut" on a wax stencil which went round an inked drum and reproduced the typewritten letters on paper fed through the machine. The first Workers' Fight (1967-8) was duplicated. The dispute about the circulation in the RSL, of What We Are And What We Must Become was determined by the technology, and may be difficult to understand for people used to the modern availability of cheap photocopying.

We made other arrangements to produce our document. Ernie Tate, the representative in London of the Mandeliste United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), had his own fish to fry, and said we could produce the document in Nottingham at the office of "The Week" (later IMG), which was a sympathising section of the USFI. Rachel Lever and I spent a day in Nottingham running off 100 copies.

In so far as the ideas in the document had influence outside the ranks of what is now Workers' Liberty, it was among members of the Labour Worker or the International Socialism group (now SWP, then an unstable and mixed group).

The experience of being messed around seeking access to the RSL duplicator determined us to buy a duplicator, which we soon did. We had learned that power grew out of the barrel of a duplicator! First we bought a very old machine which I, staggering under the weight, carried on my shoulder from Islington on the tube to Ealing, where we were staying, and then humped back to Manchester only to find it didn't work! Then we bought a reconditioned Roneo for the then very large sum of £60. 13. Looking to Cannon

The idea of joining IS (the later SWP) was at that stage not even something we would consider. We were locked into a mindset which saw the political world as "Trotskyists" and others. The RSL were Trotskyists, albeit very bad ones. IS was not Trotskyist. We had a postTrotsky Cannonian definition of "Trotskyism". "Trotskyists" were those who adhered to the "orthodox" neoTrotskyist line on the Stalinist states, the "colonial revolution", etc. That line seemed, on the basis of Trotsky's last writings known to us In Defence of Marxism to be the continuation of Trotsky's politics. The others were

backsliders, people who had buckled and reneged under pressure in IS's case, in the Korean war.

Despite my long agonising about the theory of the Stalinist states, I don't think I ever questioned the neo-Trotskyist political conclusions. So long as one adhered militantly to the idea that in all the Stalinist states a new workingclass revolution (a "political revolution") was the programme of Trotskyism, such questioning seemed unnecessary. My understanding was that in any clash between "defence of the workers' state" and workingclass interests, we would put defence second. That was my understanding of the dispute on whether or not to call for the withdrawal of the Russian army during the Berlin uprising of 1953, which was a major issue in the Cannon-versusPablo split of 1953.

Trotsky's authority was immense, and Cannon's interpretation of the neoTrotskyist formulas in 1953 satisfied my antiStalinism. It was not Stalinism we "defended", but the possibility of going from what the Stalinists had created to a higher order. Defeat by capitalism would destroy that possibility. Trotsky's uncoupling, after 1936, of the idea that the nationalised economy is progressive from the question of whether it is or is not a workers' state, was central to it, as it is to all "orthodox" neoTrotskyism. So was the fact of a world that was split into two blocs, one anti-capitalist albeit not our anticapitalism and selfproclaimedly "communist", and one capitalist. Capitalism and imperialism were the enemy. The Russian empire was somehow not imperialist, because it was not capitalist. With the Stalinists, though we would have to overthrow them, we had an anticapitalist programme in common. Unfortunately the Stalinists did not always fight for that programme. We believe that they had not wanted to in China and look at France and Italy after the war, where powerful Stalinist parties had helped to reconstruct capitalist power.

In that way we answered the "raison d'etre question" that troubled Trotskyists: what was our role given that the Stalinists had made anticapitalist revolutions, and in places were still making them? Grant's stageism seemed to give a satisfying political answer. For Grant was both 300% for the Stalinist, and other collectivist, revolutions and, "at the next stage", for political revolution. He scorned the typical self-deluding that made Mandelites and others pixillated partisans of Tito, Mao, Castro.

As against the RSL and the SLL, IS were in a different league. Without wanting to minimise the importance in my head of the religious fear of sin and heresy against nonsensical dogmas to which the feelings and fidelities appropriate to the basic socialist goal had become attached, the decisive thing that counted against IS for me was its anti-Leninism, its explicit scorn for the idea of building combat party.

Perhaps 18 months later, I would become very self-critical about this, and see our attitude here as having been stupid religiosity and that helped shape our futile interaction with IS, with which we fused in October/November 1968. At the beginning of August 1966, joining IS even to organise around our Trotskyist politics was still unthinkable. What then? We either gave up or we started a new Trotskyist group, necessarily a very small and weak one. Giving up was unthinkable. We had to publish an "organ" of some sort. I remember drawing confidence, and the possibility of developing substance, from doing entirely talentfree designs of possible covers and pages, and enjoying it.

But I was as daunted as I had been when Phil Semp had suggested that we start a separate organisation, 18 months earlier. Rachel Lever, typically, was full of courage and militancy. She had had a very bad time learning the faults of Militant and being disabused of her illusions in, and affection for, them. Nine months earlier, as I've already said, her response to a slighting remark I'd made about one of the RSL

leaders had been to hit me! Now our experience before and after 1 August had completed her education, and she was clear and sure. I saw no politically acceptable alternative, but I wasn't sure of anything, especially myself, except that giving up, desertion, was unthinkable. We needed a "manual". Six years or so earlier I had borrowed James P Cannon's History of American Trotskyism and The Struggle for a Proletarian Party from Ted Knight in the Manchester SLL. These were the manuals! So Rachel Lever and I searched for and eventually found a copy of the early 1940s edition of History of American Trotskyism - there was no other to buy in London. Here was the manual, the "knowhow", The Prince, for those who wanted to know what to do and how. It was, too, though as with all such material the "copy" develops features from the beginning distinct from the original. You modify, you interpret. Circumstances are not, or not quite, the same. You emphasise different aspects. In our case we were directed by our experience in the existing British Trotskyist groups to emphasise democracy and permissiveness, where in fact after 1940 that was not the emphasis of Cannon's SWPUSA. 14. The RSL and the USFI

What about the other political tendency, the one which became the IMG, and whose major residue today is Socialist Outlook? As far as I can now reconstruct it, one of the things that decided me to join Militant was that it was the British section of the USFI, the nearest thing to a Trotskyist international. One could draw some comfort and reassurance from that, though I was something more than sceptical and sour about the USFI. In large part this was still the SLL influence; the point is that a lot of the SLL's criticisms were true, though they themselves were incoherent, subjective, arbitrary, unstable and irrational a few months later, the SLL would go Maoist for a year! I had no doubt the SLL was incoherent. If China was any sort of workers' state, then Cuba had to be one too. (The SLL said it was capitalist not statecapitalist, just capitalist) .

I was repelled by the USFI's uncritical adulation of Castro, and by their history of being "lawyers" for various Stalinists. Looking back on it, I too was soft on Cuba, then: but to me it was selfevident, axiomatic, that a state that lacked "direct" working class rule, however free from many of the typical horrors of Stalinism it seemed to be, needed a workingclass "political revolution". I was not sure how much resistance to it the Castroites would mount, but if we didn't advocate that, and try to organise for it, then we were foreshortening Trotskyism by its workingclass head.

The Grantites too had no doubt about all that. Castro was and would be a Stalinist. They were highly critical of the USFI, and educated the new recruits in distrust of it. They made much of the old ISFI (Pablo-Mandel) segment of the USFI not believing China needed a political revolution, and I more than agreed with them on that. In fact they were on their way out of the USFI. When the RSL's break with the USFI came in December 1965, nobody in the RSL, as far as I know, backed the USFI.

In 1964 the "new start" that produced Militant had been triggered by a fusion of the RSL and the other British USFI supporters, the International Group (later IMG, then Socialist Outlook and various other fragments). The core of the International Group were Ken Coates and Pat Jordan, who had come out of the Communist Party in 1956. They fused with Socialist Review/ IS in 1957. Some of them Ken Coates then joined the SLL for a while; then they declared for Pablo and Mandel, whose British section, since late 1956, was the RSL. The RSL went through a big crisis in 1959-61, and for a while ceased to be able to maintain the lessthan tabloid size fourpage Socialist Fight as a printed monthly. The man who had got it out, himself and Ted Grant working full time, John Fairhead, went over to Socialist Review. (He would be a pioneer British Posadist in 1962; go to the Tory Party and the Monday Club; and wind up in the National Front in the

1970s!)

Differences arose over Grant's "perspective" that major economic crisis was round the second next corner, and that there would be big class struggles in the metropolitan countries as opposed to the Third World. Grant though he shared a vulgar evolutionism with them was always somewhat at odds with the populist PabloMandel "Fourth International" of that time, and the International Group were more "loyal". They hived off in 1961 and, after helping to publish IS journal for a while and shedding their Posadists, a couple of years later they started The Week. This was a duplicated 12page "news service for socialists", edited by Ken Coates and Robin Blackburn, and published with an impressive list of MPs and wellknown people as sponsors below the masthead. This was the period when the USFI before turning violently ultraleft in 1967 was trying to have its people in the European social democracies present themselves as representing the broadleft politics that a broad left wing "would have" when it developed, like the witchdoctor dressing in green to encourage the spring. Where Grant wanted propaganda for the nationalisation of the monopolies, they wanted to organise the broad left around such questions as workers' control, and, where it didn't exist, to substitute for it. (There is always in such things a delicate balance between pioneering and substitution).

It was a perennial dispute: passive propaganda, or organise the left. Essentially the same difference of approach had been at the heart of the division of Healy from the RCP majority in the late 1940s.

Under pressure from the reunified "Fourth International", from September 1963, the International Group unwillingly fused with the RSL again for a few months. Partly by way of manipulation by Healyite agents (notably Ted Knight), but essentially because they wanted to anyway, they split off again early in 1965, before I joined the RSL. After December 1965, when the RSL was demoted to a sympathising section of the USFI, the International Group was promoted to the same status. Relations between the USFI and the RSL more or less ceased from then on. The USFI was represented by The Week and the International Group. To us, they seemed buried in their "left socialdemocratic" disguise: the mask was also the face. The International Group developed neither cadres, nor any presence for revolutionary, Marxist politics. Joining the International Group was as inconceivable to us as joining IS and we thought that USFI was simply not Trotskyist in its rejection of "political" revolution in China and other Stalinist states where autonomous Stalinists, not under Russian control, had made anticapitalist revolutions.

Out of the RSL, four of us, we at first intended to publish a small duplicated journal, perhaps bimonthly. In fact, for the next year we collaborated with an emigre Irish organisation, the Irish Workers' Group, to produce the magazine An Solas/ Workers' Republic. This group had taken initial shape in 1964 as the Irish Communist Group. It was variegated group of Maoists, Trotskyists, and everything in the political spectrum in between, kept together by the "Irish" matrix. Not for long. In the summer of 1965, in the period when I was in London, it began to split apart. The Trotskyists had had a sort of client relationship with the RSL. When the factionalism had almost reached the parting of the ways, I joined to help the Trotskyists against the Maoists. The split produced the Irish Communist Organisation (later the British and Irish Communist Organisation), and the IWG. The IWG was still a hotchpotch. Rachel Lever and I took over production of its magazine on the understanding that we would develop it into a more general Trotskyist publication which could also be used in the British labour movement. Which we did. We finally produced the first issue of Workers' Fight in October 1967. 15. Post-Trotsky Trotskyism

The core of What We Are And What We Must Become is a

discussion of how revolutionary socialists relate to and interact with a large living, but bureaucratised and reformist, labour movement. How can they be of that movement but not submerged in it? How can they be with it at its existing broad level politically without letting themselves sink to that level? How can they relate to a labour movement where there is a broad "ceremonial" aureole of "socialist consciousness" that is not an adequate, scientific consciousness for example in understanding the class nature of the state and functions in the daytoday affairs of the movement as solace and uplift rather than as a guide to class struggle? These are enormous questions. If they have receded in importance it is thanks to what Mrs Thatcher did to the labour movement. Yet those events showed how far, alas, we were from being wrong in our, demolition of the theoretical basis of Militant's platonic optimism.

In the broader spectrum of post-Trotsky Trotskyism one can define two polar responses to the disappearance of the old large revolutionary socialist movement in the 1930s and '40s. The mainstream "orthodox" Trotskyists resolved "the crisis of working-class leadership" by postulating the creation of the Stalinist states as deformed working-class revolutions and seeing a prospect of other such revolutions (there were lots of qualifications and variables). In essence they solved the crisis of leadership and sustained their belief that this is the epoch of the socialist revolution by dispensing with the working class for now. The polar opposite (inverse) of that was the way in which Max Shachtman, after the dissolution of the Independent Socialist League in 1958, came to terms with the disappearance from world history, and for a prolonged period, of the old bigscale revolutionary workingclass movements. He fetishised the labour movement as it was, sought citizenship in it on the old terms that he once categorised scathingly in terms of timeserving, corruption, and bureaucratism. He dispensed with the notion of a conflict between the union bureaucracy and working class interests (the bureaucrats were, of course, it is true, sometimes politically ahead of the average worker). He either abandoned or entrusted to the future, in the ripening of time, the Leninist tasks which we spelled out in 1966 of fighting for political clarity and ideological demarcation, to eradicate bourgeois ideological influence in the working class and to group the revolutionaries together. In essence, or for the time being, he adopted an evolutionary idea of the labour movement, developing and growing with capitalist society.

In the case of the Shachtmanites, the corrosion they underwent was compounded by the participation of the trade unions and the Socialist Party in the foully corrupt and corrupting world of stultified American bourgeois democracy Tammany Hall bourgeois politics, with its huckstering, backscratching, and logrolling (tying disparate issues together to compound support). They encountered it at the moment they ceased to see it is central, the fundamental problem behind all sorts of other problems the limitations and failures of bourgeois democracy. They were right to try to integrate themselves into the existing labour movement. So too was Militant. But they drowned themselves in the movement.

Militant managed to combine both of these poles, sectarian and opportunist! It subscribed to a version of "official" Trotskyism that differed from its siblings and cousins by the broader range of possible locums for the working class in making a workingclass revolution which it admitted to its theoretical categories and summarised from the events it analysed. Where the group existed eventually not only Britain they also adopted something like the Shachtmanite alternative to Stalinism: worship the existing labour movement and see it in a vulgar evolutionary perspective. At the same time Militant maintained a stifling organisational structure, softened in our time by looseness and inefficiency but later hardening into Stalinoid forms. Their concepts of how to organise were shaped by Stalinist-model rigidity and sect psychology, tempered by inefficiency; when the

"machine" became more efficient, the tempering went and the rigidity was predominant in practice as well as implicitly. 16. Militant, into the '70s

If you had asked me in October 1966 what chance the RSL/Militant had of serious growth, I would have answered, none. It seemed to have the power to take young people in and slow them down. It aged them years in a month, at the same time giving them the sustaining arrogance that came from the conviction that with a few key notions perspectives, permanent revolution, colonial revolution, the future mass left wing in the Labour Party they understood everything and could read the secret signs and codes and future itineraries of Dame History herself. If someone had convinced me that the RSL could grow, I would have answered that then its politics would ensure that it would not be growth for serious revolutionary politics. But I did not believe that it could grow.

Of course, people moving away from an organisation tend to diminish it, to see its faults and not its strengths, but even so that was not an unreasonable opinion. The series of events that allowed Militant to grow, were special, and some very strange.

In the later 1960s came an explosion of the youth culture "sex, drugs and rock'n'roll" and the "youth" revolt against the Vietnam war. There was a series of waves of syndicalist workingclass struggle effectively syndicalist, but without the broad perspectives and societytransforming hopes of the old syndicalists before World War 1. The Labour Party government raised up a wave of revolt against itself when it tried to bring in antiunion laws in 1969; when the Heath government elected in mid1970 put such laws on the status books, it stoked up tremendous mobilisation. When five dockers were jailed in July 1972, mass strikes and a TUC decision for a oneday general strike forced their release within days.

In this situation Militant was in a unique position. It controlled the Labour Party Young Socialists from 1969, and had been the dominant group in it for a year or two. Other Trotskyists had controlled the YS before the SLL in 19635 and a much bigger and more impressive YS. What was unique about Militant was that it found a way to coexist with the Labour Party bureaucracy, so that it would be allowed to keep control for 18 years!

It operated by concentrating on general, abstract, LabourPartystyle "socialist" propaganda. Socialism was bureaucratic nationalisation; Militant, unlike the Labour Party leaders, wanted a lot more of it. Militant focused on such constitutional placebos as an Enabling Act as the means of achieving mass nationalisation.

Probably the Labour leaders, who knew that all their predecessors had had trouble with Labour youth movements, thought that a Militantled youth movement, leftwing but docile, was the best it could hope for given the raging youth revolt all around it. Militant kept order! Militant "socialised" the youth.

Militant was uniquely tooled politically for this coexistence with the Labour bureaucracy. Their important tools here were precisely those characteristics of theirs we had found most antipathetic, not least their Fabianbureaucratic concept of "socialism".

In the early 1970s, the Labour Party regime loosened up greatly. The list of banned organisations was abolished. Life flowed back into the Constituency Labour Parties as the struggles with the Tory government exploded and reverberated. Militant had stability of routine, and key catchment points for recruiting young people. Since the YS was used very much for their needs, they even had an annual subsidy from the Labour Party! This finally included having a

Militant member, Andy Bevan, as the Labour Party's salaried youth officer.

Militant threaded itself busily into the trellises of the labour movement's routines, avoiding conflicts. Its activity had much in common with the routinised and bureaucratised trade union work of the Communist Party after the 1940s. For Militant, the test of political virtue was not militancy, combativity, or efforts at democratic renewal of the trade unions or the Labour Party. Militant was very slow to get involved in the Rank and File Mobilising Committee in 1979/80 but support for "socialist" resolutions about nationalising industry. The truth was that this sort of thing was both very commonplace in the labour movement and largely meaningless, since a very large swathe of those who paid lipservice to it didn't believe it, and nobody believed a Labour government would be affected by it. For those who thought it sufficient, the "revolutionary socialism" was pernicious.

Ah, Militant would say, we need a Labour government with socialist policies. How? More resolutions! In fact Militant's idea were a fantasy on sparepart surgery. The living part of Militant's "perspective" was the idea of an evolutionary ripening of the labour movement towards revolution. It was commitment to a vision of the future. Here and now building the RSL in the labour movement was preparing the transformation of that movement. Militant would grow big enough so that when Labour would slough off the Right, then, eventually, after a transitional stage of a labour movement dominated by 'centrists' vacillating socialists there would be a Militant-dominated labour movement, which would "nationalise the top 200 monopolies" peacefully. This idea could make socialist sense of routine timeserving. It was a perspective patterned on the old Second International notion of building the labour movement slowly, avoiding disorder and disruption, while simultaneously capitalism ripened towards its own dissolution. Except that Militant would build its party within the Labour Party.

In fact Militant was a fully fledged sect, but the idea of revolutionary activity independent of the existing labour movement was nonetheless no part of its conception of the world until catastrophic changes began to occur in its environment in the middle and late 1980s. These underlying ideas of Militant were confronted in our 1966 document. In the days of Militant's seeming triumphs, it was more difficult to see that were not wrong that it is now. This evolution in Britain would be an evolution within the "evolution/Revolution" that was going on in the world, where an all-transforming and unstoppable anticapitalist revolution was occurring. All in all, Militant's Ted Grant's ideas, though they were no use, and were indeed harmful, for the tasks of revolutionary Marxists, were tremendously educative artefacts of political ideology ideology in the sense of false consciousness. What they rationalised was a mindless routinism in the labour movement, to which they gave the delusion that it was something entirely other than what it was, and was pelt of something it could not be part of evolution/Revolution. They built an ambivalent confidence, courage and optimism in the comrades they educated by glorying in the alleged historical significance of the Stalinist expansion which they also denounced.

Militant had feared to risk taking Liverpool "over the top" with the miners in 1984 and chose instead to do a stopgap deal that gave the Tories time to clear with the miners, and Militant in Liverpool a year's grace. Following "the logic of the class struggle", that is, refusing to do deal with the Tories, would either have led to working class victory over Thatcher and that would have halted the Kinnockite drift in the Labour Party or it would have led to a breach between the Militant-controlled Merseyside District Labour Party and the Labour Party. That would have been the way to go out of the Labour Party! Labour Party consequences will have been in their calculations over Liverpool. The party that is growing up

inside it to replace the Labour Party must be preserved! Syndicalism is no answer: politics, comrades!

Here, however, the "perspective" was selfdestroying. First, Militant became very isolated in the Labour Party following the Liverpool fiasco. That created conditions for a successful purge the attempted purge since 1982/3 had so far done Militant more good than harm, bringing them immense publicity at the cost of a tiny handful of expulsions. Militant worsened matters by a rattled, selfrighteous response to the purge. They conducted no campaign against it within the labour movement not even the factionally limited campaign they had run in 1982/3 spurned other leftists who tried to run a "Labour Against the Witchhunt" drive, and instead responded exclusively by legal action. They let the LPYS be wound up without a fight.

Then they found an easier and more profitable channel for activity, in the anti-poll tax campaign. And finally they broke with the Labour Party on the pretext that Militant was not allowed by the Labour Party to have the parliamentary candidacy in Walton, Eric Heffer's old seat. It was hysterical and unbalanced. In terms of allowing the right wing to intensify the purge, it was an act of suicide. It reflected no qualitative change in the Labour Party: though the drift was plain, the qualitative constitutional changes we now confront were way in the future.

Subtlety and flexibility and walking a balanced walk were never Militant capacities. The necessary combination of independent work and some Labour Party work was, of course, especially difficult for people trained in the ideas above of an evolution and replacement surgery (Body Snatchers). In the 1990s Militant slowly tore itself to bits. Symbolic, but practically important too, was the separation of a minority around Grant from the organisation. Grant did not want the adventurist nonsense around the Walton byelection. Grant's power to shape ideological lenses that allow him to see what he wants to see and to construe as he wants to construe remained formidable. He wanted to repair the rents in the seamless fabric of his fantasies.

It was delusions about what they could achieve in Liverpool and by campaigns like the poll tax that made so many of the others reject Grant at this point but also probably an impulse towards political health and for facing reality. Without Grant's distinctive theories and fantasies, Militant's politics, and none too slowly, became those of an eclectic identikit kitsch/Trotskyist group. Central to the process of separation from Grant must have been the effect on Grant's political and theoretical credibility of the collapse of Stalinism.

That is the subject of volume 2 in this collection Militant's and Grant's theory of Stalinism. Militant supported Russia in "Russia's Vietnam war" of colonial conquest in Afghanistan. At Christmas 1979 the Russians took over the country and eight years followed of savage colonial war. An estimated one quarter of the Afghans were driven as refugees across the borders by Russian gunships spraying bombs and napalm. If Russia was a workers' state, then the revolution was being exported to Afghanistan, wasn't it? Ourselves, still nominally workers' statist, we found that we had to reprise the sort of discussions that had erupted on the eve of Trotsky's death in 1939/40 around the Russian invasions of Poland and Finland. We could see no sense in such an export of "revolution", at the cost of possibly millions of Afghan lives, if any sort of progressive revolution it was. And we could see no way of avoiding the conclusion that, workers' state or not, this was a display of Russian imperialism.

There were big minorities in the United Secretariat in the French LCR, for example who wanted to come out against the troops, though I'm not aware that any of them shared our conclusion about Russia as an imperialist power, whatever its "class character". Lutte Ouvriere, in France, came out against

the troops. The rest of the orthodox, official Trotskyists divided into two groups. The majority said that they did not support the Russian troops going in but they were there now, and they would not call for their withdrawal, because unpleasant consequences would ensue. Anybody among them concerned with consistency and honesty, and reading back from their final position, that the Russians should stay and win their colonial war, would conclude that they should have supported the Russians going in and indeed called on the Russians to send troops in and denounced them a counterrevolutionary Stalinists if they dawdled.

The other group consisted of three internationally organised tendencies, the SWP-USA and its satellites, then part of the USFI, the international Spartacist tendency, and Militant with its international associates. Differing a little in what they said exactly, the three groupings had in common a positive and even enthusiastic support for the Russians. "Hail the Red Army!" intoned the Spartacists. The USSR "goes to the aid of the Afghan revolution", exulted the SWPUSA and its satellites. (This was too good to last, though. After some months they abandoned this position and criticised themselves for it. They had failed, so they told readers of their press, to read with the attention it deserved an important speech of Fidel Castro's. That would have put them right!)

Militant stumbled at first (see the document), but after a month came down against calling for withdrawal. They used the common formula (the troops are there, so we don't say go), but thereafter they were positive enthusiasts, and stuck to the pro-Russian position for years after their cothinkers (the Spartacists excepted) had abandoned it. 17. No weddings and Sam Gordon's funeral

At Golders Green crematorium one day in 1982, I watched as the "Trotskyist" crowd assembled legendary long-gone figures; clan and clique chieftains; heretics, renegades, banditti, lunatics; political turncoats and political fadecoats; active revolutionaries, and long-retired, crestfallen, contrite or intimidated, revolutionary warriors of yesteryear; uncompromising militants, half-guilty or thick-skinned, self-servers who had utilised the skills they acquired in revolutionary politics to get on in the bourgeois world you could not stop yourself being reminded of Mafia funerals you had seen in films like *The Godfather*.

Me, I found myself also remembering what happened in Bulgaria in 1923. The Communist Party, in an ultra-left phase, assassinated a prominent politician, and then when ministers, politicians, plutocrats and aristocrats assembled to honour their dead the CP blew up Sofia Cathedral, massacring the country's ruling elite. In the sequel, though, the biggest massacre was eventually wreaked on the communists and the labour movement, by the Bulgarian state.

The assembly at Golders Green crematorium was the funeral of Sam Gordon, an associate of Cannon and of Trotsky, and most of those who had played any role in Trotskyism in Britain in the previous 45 years were there to honour Sam with one notable exception.

A Jewish Pole, born in 1910, Sam was taken to the USA as a child and was a Trotskyist in his teens. In his early 20s he was for a while editor of the US Trotskyist paper, *The Militant*. He was in Germany as the Nazis drove towards power and the German labour movement crumbled. You will see Sam, outstandingly tall, stringy, and spectacled, in some of the well-known pictures of Trotsky in the late 1930s with his American comrades in Mexico.

For a while, in the early 1940s, Sam was secretary of the rump Fourth International, based in New York. During the Second World War he, like a number of other US Trotskyists, became a merchant seaman so that he could travel between the Allied countries, making and maintaining contact with the

Trotskyist groups. In that capacity he came to England in 1943. The British section of the Fourth International, recognised at the founding conference in 1938, called the RSL, was moribund, paralysed by faction fighting and incompetent leadership. By contrast, the Workers' International League (WIL), denounced by the 1938 conference for not fusing with the RSL, was a viable, energetic, and growing organisation.

Sam set out to unify the two organisations, bringing together prouner elements in both organisations, notably Gerry Healy in the WIL and John Lawrence in the RSL. The consequent fusion in mid 1944 created the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). In the political disputes that followed within the RCP about the Labour Party and the Russian-occupied territories in Eastern Europe, Sam was with James P Cannon, and actively involved with the Healy-Lawrence minority who opposed the RCP leadership of Jock Haston, Millie Lee, and Ted Grant.

Sam had to live in England because his British wife Mildred could not get the right to reside in the hysterically anticommunist USA. (She was a onetime member of the RCP, and became a Labour MP in the 1980s, on the silent left until the 1997 election). When the RCP collapsed in 1949, Sam worked with the Healy organisation, and he continued to do so until the early 1960s. In the 1970s he kept contact with all sorts of Trotskyists, and he would advise us on issues like the Labour Party.

The first time I ever went through the doors at the Palace of Westminster, it was at Sam's insistence. Late one night, in the mid-1970s, the pubs shut before we were ready for them to do so. Sam saw a bus he knew, said "Come on!" to me, and jumped on to the platform. It took us to Westminster. Sam sent in a message to one of the MPs, a onetime Trotskyist and in his head still a Trotskyist. The MP who was, I think, a teetotaler came out, and at Sam's bidding took us in to one of the ever-open House of Commons bars. In *News from Nowhere* William Morris predicted the Houses of Parliament after socialism would be used to store manure. Sam had found a special use for it under capitalism.

An ultraloyalist to the SWPUSA, Sam disagreed with them on Israel, but did not fight on the question. He encouraged me to write against their support for the Russian troops in Afghanistan in 1980. Sam was an especially good, likeable, much-liked and much-respected man, and his funeral, attended by so many people who had vast political differences with him, as with each other, left no doubt of it.

Jock Haston and his partner Millie Lee, people thirty years and more removed from revolutionary politics and against whom Sam had helped to organise the RCP opposition, were there. CLR James, a very tall, slim, good-looking, greying-haired old man of 80 was there, held erect when he moved to the podium by a man on either side holding his elbows because his legs no longer worked. Tony Cliff and Chanie Rosenberg of the SWP took their places in the crowd without fuss. Politically, they had had enormous differences with Sam for 35 years.

Gerry Healy with whom Sam had fallen out bitterly 20 years earlier small, pudgy, bald, with a noticeably pink gnome's dome sticking out of his topcoat like the head of an overproud paranoid tortoise, made a late entrance, surrounded by tough-looking bodyguards much bigger than himself, all swiveleyed and very alert, as if they feared that the great man would be attacked. While others sat, he stood, walled off inside his protective human knot, in but not of the ecumenical gathering, recognising no-one and greeting no-one. Alan Thornett, who had been Eliza Doolittle to Gerry's Professor Higgins, looked hurt as Healy and his entourage swept past without acknowledging him; Martin Thomas looked disbelieving; John Bloxam was busy with the business of

standing still.

It was the most comprehensive gathering of the Trotskyist and ex-Trotskyist clans in a third of a century, and a very big crowd in all. Most of those I recognised were long dead. It was to a considerable degree a gathering of political ghosts and politically dormant folk. And who was absent?

Which single Trotskyist group was conspicuously not represented? Ted Grant was absent. The only organisation not represented was the RSL/Militant. Singularly unrelenting spite and hate, with neither the will nor the capacity to make a distinction between the political and the personal that was the RSL and its leadership, unforgiving and unforgetting and measuring everything and everyone with infantilistic self-centredness.

Sean Matgamna, February 1999

Notes

1. In CND's first years, the Communist party had opposed it as too 'extreme' for wanting a complete ban on nuclear weapons. They had denounced the Trotskyist opposition to conscription too, arguing to 'cut the call up' from two years to one! Easter 1960 was the point at which they jumped on the bandwagon, but the Daily Worker blithely talked as if the Party had been in from the beginning.

The SLL had indeed been in from the start. It had published a pamphlet in 1957, in the build up to the marches advocating 'Black the Bomb and the Bases' - trade unionists should refuse to work on or service nuclear bases. SLL member Vivienne Mendelson had moved a motion for unilateral nuclear disarmament at the 1957 Labour Party conference. But the SLL, like the CP, had a pro-Russian foreign policy and soon - late 1960 - Gerry Healy would pronounce in the Tribune letters page, an explicit line of opposition to calls for Russian nuclear disarmament.

2. The ILP, rigidly sectarian to the Labour Party which it had helped to found, but from which it had disaffiliated in 1932, also had a weekly, Labour Leader. The ILP was a strange repository of every type of political sectarian in the political zoo, most of them, I suppose, elderly. Quite a few refugees from the collapse of 1949 of the old RCP had found refuge there. Some ILPers were 'Shachtmanites', the ILP had links in the 1950s with the Independent Socialist League of Max Shachtman and Hal Draper in the USA, and sometimes exchanged articles - and some were outright Stalinists. In 1956 their most prominent writer, the learned old muddlehead Frank A Ridley, had shamefully supported the Russian suppression of the Hungarian revolution on the quaint grounds that the issue in Hungary was 'The Red International' (Stalinism!) versus the 'Black International' (the Catholic church). Ridley was a life-long active secularist (the main room in the Secular Hall in Leicester is now named after him and something of a shrine to him). The idea that the Russian imperialist butchers were "Red" and the insurgent Hungarians who fought tanks with petrol bombs merely agents of Catholic conspiracy was, in plain English, lunatic.

In the ILP, semi-Shachtmanites and Stalinists co-existed in a culture that was also 'Luxemburgist'. They published Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolsheviks in power - written in jail and never published by Luxemburg herself - as "Leninism versus Marxism", and a pamphlet on workers' control by the Council Communist Anton Pannokeok. In fact the Stalin strain aside, the culture of the ILP in the 1950s was pretty much what would be the culture of the IS/SWP in the 1958-68. The IS took over wholesale after 1958, just as after 1968, and especially after 1971, they began to appropriate much of the sectarian culture of the SLL. The ILP withered to nothing and in the 1970s rejoined the Labour Party, renaming itself "Independent Labour Publications" in order to keep its initials.

It was a quirky far-right of the broad Labour left of the '70s and '80s. In 1960 the ILP press, like the ILP itself, was like a field under flood water, still visible but dead.

3. The British section of the Pablo-Mandel "International" was then a group around John Lawrence and Hilda Lane which had split from the Healy organisation when the International split in 1953. They had quickly gravitated towards the CP, becoming a CP-oriented group in the Labour Party, (Lawrence was leader of St Pancras Borough Council), and then most of them openly joined the CP. So the ISFI had no section, and only a few British supporters. They were reduced to advertising in Tribune in an attempt to regroup supporters. They began to publish a duplicated journal, Fourth International. The French Trotskyist, Pierre Frank, who had been interned in Britain during the war and had served as an anti-RCP leadership expert in the post-war polemics, began to write a series of articles in FI on the history of British Trotskyism - bitterly critical of the whole Haston-Grant tendency and of the RCP.

The series came to an abrupt end, unfinished. The Deane-Grant group were to be recognised as the nucleus of a new British section! At that point the late Sam Levy and four or five others split off, taking Socialist Current with them. They would continue to publish it for 20 years, recruiting two, maybe three, people in all that time.

4. Some of them - Theo Melville and John Fairhead - became Posadists, followers of Juan Posadas and perhaps the strangest variant of post-1951 neo-Trotskyism, with its positive advocacy of nuclear war against the West by the USSR and its claims that flying saucers showed the existence of socialist civilisations on faraway planets. Politically, Posadism was a product of the Pablo-Mandel International; organisationally, in Britain, it was a split from the IS/SWP current. John Fairhead was probably a member of the SR group, and certainly a very frequent writer for SR.

5. They did the same sort of thing to us. Cheetham was mainly a right-wing party with a millionaire, Harold Lever, as MP and a strong Catholic Action group allied to him. At the GMC - I was a delegate - after we removed the YS branch Chair, the LP official in charge of youth, a man in his 50s with a clipped, military-style moustache called Arthur Johnson, was in attendance and launched a fierce full-scale diatribe against Trots, and me in particular. I had no warning, nor had anyone except the party officers known Johnson was coming. We had enough support to buffer us from the assault and no action was taken. In truth, though we liked to present the "right wing" as "witchhunters" and could work ourselves up into a state of paranoia over "security" the LP was pretty liberal. Harold Wilson, a Bevanite of the 1950s, had become leader of the party after the sudden death of Hugh Gaitskell. The party was going through the early stages of a liberalisation which would last a quarter of a century.

6. Seen from our time, looking back across a long period in which neo-Trotskyism, in Britain and elsewhere, has - since the late 1960s - been characterised by more or less rampant ultra-leftism, the 'peaceful revolution' idea of the RSL Secretariat in the mid-60s must seem odd, unique, a product of mutant politics.

But from the late-'40s to the late 1960s all the British Trotskyist groups were very much hegemonised by the experience of the Labour government of 1945-51. Not only had it created the Welfare State, but had nationalised whole swathes of British industry. An observer like Max Shachtman thought in principle this could go on to expropriating British capitalism. It seemed all part of the "spirit of the epoch", a British manifestation of the "impatience of history" that led Stalinists to create many "workers' states". In the late 1940s the RCP focused working class concerns on criticism of the lack of workers' control in the nationalised industries. By the

1950s the idea of revolution was more or less absent from the Trotskyist press. In its place were, variously, calls for a Labour government that would continue and nationalise the rest of industry and (from some) for workers' control. The Socialist Review group programme, repeated in every issue of SR, called for nationalisation and workers' control by a Labour government.

In 1957 they fused with a small group of ex-CPers in Nottingham around Ken Coates and Pat Jordan, the people who would later found the IMG. As a result of that fusion the "programme" was rewritten to include the statement that nationalisation and workers' control could only be achieved by a high level of working-class mobilisation.

It was a vast improvement. yet the formula was the exact wording that the CP had in 1951 substituted for the old Leninist politics of smashing the bourgeois state, when it adopted its parliamentary road to socialism in Britain! As far as I know, no Trotskyist criticism of the British Road to Socialism from that angle was produced in 1951, though the Healyite paper, Socialist Outlook, carried an article by Tom Braddock criticising the British Road for sectarianism towards the LP. There is a sort of exception. Nye Bevan, the leader of the very powerful Labour left after he resigned from the government in 1951 in protest against the imposition of a charge (one shilling, or five pence), for NHS prescriptions - Bevan published a book, In Place of Fear. The tiny and then rarely appearing magazine of the Healy group, Labour Review appeared in pamphlet edition by Gerry Healy critical of Bevan. Following Trotsky in Where is Britain Going? it recalled the revolutionary struggles of the past, like Cromwell's, in refutation of Bevan's exclusive reliance on parliament. It was diplomatic, but it did point towards the need for revolution. My guess is that this pamphlet was written by the US SWPer George Novak and/or possibly Sam Gordon. Even this polemic was deeply tainted by the idea of some intrinsic 'class character' of nationalisation per se.

The ideas of Grant and his friends in 1965-6 were less peculiar than they might seem now...



Document for 1997 AWL conference.

Living in an age of apostasy to socialism and Marxism, and of a great turning of backs on the past, it is necessary for us to publicly identify and proclaim our roots and traditions.

1. We are Marxists: that is, we believe that Marx was right in his fundamental analysis of capitalist society as a regime of wage slavery; in his analysis of the roots of capitalist exploitation; in his understanding of the class struggle as the locomotive of history; in his identification of the proletariat, the slave class of capitalist society, as the bearer of a new and higher civilisation: "The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself"; "The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race and sex."

2. We are Leninists: that is, we believe that the October Revolution was one of the greatest liberating events in human history, and that all socialists who came after that revolution must learn, critically assess, and reassess, its lessons, and adapt them to their own conditions. Centrally, these are: that the class struggle is fought on at least three fronts — the economic, political and ideological fronts — and that socialists are effective only if they fight that struggle on all three fronts in the Bolshevik way: consistently, relentlessly, implacably,

irreconcilably; that to do this work in the class struggle, socialists organise themselves into a disciplined, educated, democratic collective, guiding themselves by a Marxist theory, constantly examined, assessed and sharpened in the light of working class experience; that because socialist revolution can be the creation only of a roused, active working class, socialists serve the working class by helping it rouse, educate and organise itself; that socialists connect themselves indissolubly to the working class wherever it is to be found, at whatever level it is at, in all the varying conditions — political, social, ideological — in which it is held under the rule of capital; that, because in all conditions, even when they act as a working class vanguard who believe that their propagandising, lesson-drawing and organising work is essential to the class, socialists serve the working class, and therefore can neither substitute themselves for the working class, nor adopt the role of mere passive speculators about future working class activity; that the serious socialists prepare for the class struggle when they are not fighting it, or when it is at a low ebb: without the slow, preparatory work of many years there would have been no working class revolution in 1917.

3. We are Trotskyists: that is, we root ourselves in and endorse the politics of the rearguard of the Russian Revolution, led by Trotsky; we endorse and glory in the Trotskyist movement's fight against Stalinist totalitarianism; its efforts through a long epoch of murderous reaction to help the working class free itself from the crippling and sometimes suicidal limitations placed on it by Stalinist "communism" and by reformism; its efforts after the collapse of the Communist International to rebuild revolutionary working class parties and a new International, organically of the working class; its policies for fighting fascism in pre-Hitler Germany and for consolidating and defending the working class revolution in Republican Spain during the Civil War: in short, we base ourselves on the first four congresses of the Communist International and on the subsequent development of the politics of those congresses by the movement led by Trotsky until his assassination in 1940.

4. Trotsky summarised his approach thus, in 1938:

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives — these are the rules of the Fourth International."

[The Transitional Programme]

5. The first manifesto of our tendency (October 1967) defined Trotskyism as we understood it then, and understand it now:

"Trotskyism is the basic Marxist programme of the conquest of power by the international working class. It is the unfalsified programme, method and experience of the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky. It embodies the world experience of the workers' struggles, including the defence and development of Bolshevism by Trotsky and the Left Opposition in battle against the Stalinist counter-revolution in the Soviet Union. Trotskyism is the only developed working class alternative to venal Stalinism and supine Social Democracy. It means reliance on the self-controlling activity of the masses of the working class, which it strives to mobilise on the programme of transitional demands as a bridge to the overthrow of capitalism and the attainment of workers' power. It is the programme of the workers' revolution, organically linked with the practical struggle to aid its development. It is not only a programme, but the struggle to build a revolutionary party to fight for that programme. Its traditions are those of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition: workers' democracy, unremitting struggle for theoretical clarity, revolutionary activism, unbending hostility to and struggle against capitalism and those within the labour

movement who stand for its continuation."

6. The Trotskyism of Trotsky, like Lenin's Bolshevism out of which it grew, suffered defeat because in that epoch the working class suffered defeat; it is not a final defeat. The malign Stalinist counterfeit of socialism is dead; the Trotskyist tradition is alive because revolutionary socialism is alive and will remain alive until the working class wins the last battle in the struggle with the bourgeoisie: "Until the last bond and debenture shrivels to ashes on the grave of the last warlord."

7. This is the tradition in which the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has its roots. In an independent history spanning nearly three decades we have on the basis of this tradition, evolved our own distinct AWL tradition. Beginning as adherents of one of the strands of post-Trotsky Trotskyism — that of James P. Cannon — we have critically re-worked and re-evaluated that tradition, supplementing and amending it on both the level of political ideas and organisational practice. We have, over the years moved a long way from our starting point.

8. We were forced to conclude that, though Trotsky's concrete analyses and descriptions of the Stalinist degeneration of the USSR, and of what that means for the working people there, were exact, continuous, accurate and adequate as an account of the USSR — he did not fail to record that Stalinism differed from Hitler "only in its more unbridled savagery" — and though the conclusions he drew for working class politics inside the USSR were adequate and consistently socialist — from 1935 he advocated a new working class revolution to overthrow the political and social rule of the bureaucracy, calling it a political revolution — Trotsky's conceptual framework was first inadequate and finally led him to radically wrong conclusions. We can see now that the designation "degenerated workers' state" made no sense in the 1930s. He himself tentatively acknowledged this at the end, when he accepted the theoretical possibility that the USSR could, while remaining exactly as it was, bureaucratically collectivised property intact, be conceived of as a new form of class society [The USSR in War, September 1939]. He refused to draw that conclusion then only because he believed that the fall of the Stalinist USSR — either to capitalist restoration or workers' revolution — was imminent.

"Stalin testifies to nothing else but the incapacity of the bureaucracy to transform itself into a stable ruling class. Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?"

[In Defence of Marxism]

9. Trotsky bears no responsibility for the often grotesque politics which his "official", "orthodox" would-be followers built on Trotsky's failure in time to draw the conclusions to which everything he wrote pointed, that the USSR was a new form of class society. Had he lived, Trotsky would either have had to reverse and repudiate his entire train of thought, or draw those conclusions. Everything he wrote on Stalinism in his last three years points to the virtual certainty that he would have diagnosed Stalinism as a new form of class society: Trotsky would not have been a post world war two "Trotskyist" on this question. The politics of the post-Trotsky Trotskyists towards Stalinism is no part of the authentic Trotskyist tradition but a Stalinist excrement on it.

10. The majority of the would-be post-Trotsky Trotskyists followed Pablo, Mandel and their associates in analysing the Stalinist states as degenerated and deformed "workers' states", socially in advance of, and superior to, capitalism. The USSR, its satellites in Eastern Europe, China etc. were, they believed, "post-capitalist", in transition between capitalism and socialism.

Keeping Trotsky's label for the USSR — "degenerated workers' state" — and adapting it to the whole cluster of Stalinist

formations, the post-Trotsky official Trotskyists, assembled behind the "workers' state" label ideas and assessments starkly at variance with those Trotsky expressed in the same terms. Trotsky's label was retained; all his analyses, perspectives and definitions — all the ideas for him encapsulated in that term — were radically changed. The Marxist politics of honestly settling theoretical accounts with the past gave way to the ancient arts of palimpsestry and to the survival techniques of the chameleon. This would be the cause of much obfuscation and confusion.

11. For Trotsky, at the end, the USSR was an unstable, transitional regime; the Stalinist bureaucracy was a "cancerous growth" on the society created by October, not a necessary social organism capable of defending the USSR or of creating the USSR's post-World War Two empire of 90 million people.

In stark contrast to the views Trotsky expressed in the term, "workers' state", Stalinism was seen by Mandel and the post-Trotsky official Trotskyists as stable; as an agency for accumulating and defending the gains of an ongoing world revolution, which, tangibly, was identical with Stalinism itself. Changes could come only by way of reform (Yugoslavia, China) or political revolution (the USSR), not by regression. These were societies 'in transition to socialism', not, as the USSR was for Trotsky, an aberrant, hybrid formation that could not possibly last (and if it lasted, could not continue to be seen as any sort of workers' state). The Stalinist formations were progressive, post-capitalist, on the broad highway of history — unconditionally progressive, not, as Trotsky at the end said of Stalin's nationalised property, "potentially progressive", on condition that the workers overthrew Stalinism.

12. Trotsky had in 1939/40 already recognised "elements of imperialism" in Stalin's foreign policy, and said: 'We were and remain against the seizure of new territories by the Kremlin.' Though the USSR had a vast empire, for Mandel and his friends it was not "imperialist."

13. Stalinism destroyed labour movements and imposed totalitarian regimes on the working class of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland etc., regimes like that of the USSR which Trotsky in 1938 had rightly described as differing from Hitler's regime "only in its more unbridled savagery", but still this was the — deformed — workers' revolution

According to every criterion the labour movement throughout its history had measured by — civil liberties, political democracy, the free existence of labour movements, free press, speech, sexuality — the USSR, China, etc. were at least as much of a regression as Nazism had been. But, because the — totalitarian — state monopolised property, these systems, vis-à-vis capitalism were, for Pablo and Mandel, unconditionally progressive.

14. Does the bureaucracy play a necessary role in production? You could not, on the post-world war two facts, continue to give Trotsky's negative answer, not even for the USSR. If these were workers' states it was not according to Trotsky.

15. Pablo, Mandel and others reinterpreted the ideas of Trotskyism so as to present the expansion of Stalinism and the creation of totalitarian states in large parts of the world as the first stage of the socialist revolution. Despite the crushing of the working class in the Stalinist states, and its quietness in the big capitalist countries, the "world revolution" was continuing to "develop" — albeit, said Mandel and company, in a deformed way. Ernest Mandel became the word-spinning high priest of the vast, unstable and inchoate ideological edifice which grew up around these core ideas in the 40 years before the USSR collapsed.

16. Ernest Mandel and his friends accepted on their rulers' terms, "critically", of course, such systems as Mao's China and Tito's Yugoslavia, and for decades adopted the role of loyal critic, adopting for these Stalinist states the "reform"

politics which the Brandlerites, Lovestoneites, ILPers etc. had, for the USSR in the later 30's counterposed to Trotsky's call for a new — "political" — revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic caste. It was twenty years after Mao's victory before Pablo and Mandel's "Fourth International" came out for a working-class "political" revolution in China.

17. For the post-Trotsky official Trotskyists the workers' state label expressed new ideas, not what it had expressed in Trotsky — and new politics, not those of Trotsky. Whose ideas did the term now express? Bruno Rizzi's! Trotsky had polemicised with Bruno Rizzi's acceptance of Stalinism as a stable system of post-capitalist rule by a collectivist new class. In fact, Rizzi — mimicking Fabians such as Bernard Shaw — believed that Stalinism and fascism were essentially the same, and that — though Trotsky's polemic ignored this aspect of his thought — both were progressive, both transitional between capitalism and socialism, evolving towards socialism; he saw their horrible features — such as Nazi anti-semitism — as mere kinks in an immature but sufficient anti-capitalist consciousness.

By the end of the 40s Official Trotskyism was expressing not Trotsky's but, essentially, Rizzi's — and Bernard Shaw's — ideas about Stalinism in the terminology Trotsky had used to express his radically different ideas.

18. The epigones of Trotsky proclaimed that the survival and expansion of Stalinism meant defeat for Stalin's "Socialism In One Country" and posthumous triumph for Trotsky and his Permanent Revolution. Mao and Ho were Trotsky's legatees, not Stalin's. In fact, this assessment of the Stalinist states and the Stalinist-led world revolution implied acceptance of the essentials of Socialism In One Country.

The point for Trotsky and his comrades, as for all earlier Marxists, was that socialism had to come after advanced capitalism, could not come otherwise. Though the workers might take power in a backward country, socialism could not be built in backwardness. If the revolution did not spread to countries ripe for socialism, it would be doomed. The idea of stable, evolving socialist growth from peripheral backwardness to socialism, in competition with advanced capitalism, was a revival on a gigantic scale of the pre-Marx colony-building utopian socialism of people like Etienne Cabet, who built small socialist colonies, parallel worlds, in the American wilderness in the 1840s. Pablo and Mandel in their "World Congress" documents [The Rise and Decline of Stalinism (1954) and The Decline and Fall of Stalinism (1957)] vainly chopped logic to hide this. One country? No longer one country! Socialism in isolation? Not isolated now! Etc.

It was the work of religious zealots, reasoning around daft, unquestionable, fixed ideas, not Marxism. The need for it arose because all the "revolutionary" perspectives and hopes of "official" post-Trotsky Trotskyism were spun from the survival, expansion and likely continuing success of "Socialism In One Country", that is, of the USSR, a world power 'in transition to socialism'.

19. Worse than that. In Lenin and Trotsky, as in Marx and Engels, the historical protagonist of the anti-capitalist revolution is the proletariat. The Trotskyism of Trotsky was the revolutionary working class politics and perspectives of the early Communist International minus, deprived of, the working class armies assembled by the Communist International to make the revolution. Stalinism had "captured" and perverted them. Thus the terrible combination in 1930s Trotskyism of acute awareness, accuracy in understanding and prediction — in pre-Hitler Germany, and in Spain for example — combined with the incapacity to affect events of tiny, tiny groups whose natural identity, like their "constituency", had been stolen.

All Trotsky's "optimistic" hopes and perspectives were premised on the shifts and regroupments in the proletariat and its parties which he worked to bring about. There would

be working class self-clarification, self-regeneration and political regroupment in the heat of class struggle. Wrong, certainly. Fantastic, possibly. But Trotsky's was a perspective in which ends — democratic workers' power — and means — working class risings, the creation of soviets — were appropriate to each other.

By contrast, in post-Trotsky official Trotskyism — "Mandelism" — the identification of Stalinism and Stalinist expansion as the "actually existing" unfolding, albeit deformed, workers' revolution led ineluctably to the destruction of all rational notion of ends and means. The 'official Trotskyist' fetish of nationalised property — which for Marxists is a means, not an end, and by no means a self-sufficient means — took the central question out of rational assessment: Stalinist statification and its alleged working class character was a 'given', something to reason from, not about.

20. When the "Trotskyists" transformed themselves into an epiphenomenon — critical, of course — of Stalinism, they thereby became millenarians.

Primitive millenarian sects, often communistic in their desires, have looked to supernatural events like the second coming of Christ, to transform the world into an ideal place. They had no notion of ends and means such as the labour movement would develop — action by named human forces for specific goals. In practice, they would look to some bandit, warlord or lunatic to begin the designated change. Central for our purposes here was their lack of a rational notion of ends and means.

In post-Trotsky Trotskyism, c.1950, both the ends and means of the proletarian revolution in the original Trotskyism, as in traditional Marxism, disappear — or are pushed to the far horizon of history. The "world revolutionary perspectives", which Mandel wrote and refurbished for successive world congresses were, though dressed up in the husks of ideas taken from Trotsky and Lenin, now spun around the USSR, not around the proletariat or its methods or its old socialist goals. The protagonist in "the workers' revolution" is, for now, the Stalinist bloc — Mandel's mentor Raptis-Pablo once speculated that Stalinism would last for centuries — not, as in Trotsky, the working-class, self-clarified and politically regrouped. The protagonist is the Stalinist state, the "Red" Army, the Chinese peasant army. Though "Perspectives" and hopes for bureaucratic reform and for working class democracy are plentiful in Mandel, they are just tagged on.

21. The proletariat may be crushed under regimes akin to fascism but despite such 'details' this, nevertheless, they said, is the proletarian revolution. "Nationalised economy" conditions and defines all. How could a Chinese peasant army led by declassed intellectuals, be seen, as the "Fourth International" saw it, as a workers' party? By circular logic: only a workers' party could do what the Maoists did, replicating Stalin's USSR. Ergo, this is a workers' party. Rationalising the Stalinist phenomenon, Mandel's Marxism became arid, eyeless scholasticism. Trotsky's ideas of 1940 were turned into their opposite.

22. The point at which millenarianism triumphed can be dated: the Korean War and the belief that the seemingly inevitable World War Three would be a war-revolution, an international civil war. The nuclear Armageddon — albeit with early nuclear weapons — would also be the revolution. The "Red" Army and its Communist Party allies in western Europe would bring working class victory in the looming war-revolution. You could not go much further from the idea of the socialist revolution — protagonist, ends, means — in Trotsky, and in all previous Marxism. When, a decade later, the Posadas wing of Mandel's organisation took to advocating that "the Russian workers' state" start the third world war, because this would accelerate the world revolution, it only brought out the crazy other-worldly millenarian logic with which Mandel's group had replaced the Trotskyism of Trotsky at the time of the so-called third congress of the Fourth

International.

23. The tight millenarianist scenario of 1951-3 centred on Stalinism and war as the agency. Eventually that gave place to a looser millenarianism, promiscuous in its ever-changing choice of saviours. Various nationalist forces, plausibly and implausibly assessed, were anointed — though Stalinism always would be central to the "world revolution" perspectives of all the factions — WRP, SWP USA, Morenists, Lambertists — that made up the "Fourth Internationals" of Trotsky's epigones. Trotsky's tradition and Trotsky's political terminology were thus reduced to mere building blocks in scholastic constructions. Ernest Mandel was from his youth the pre-eminent master in this work. He had many imitators and competitors.

24. Of course their adaptation to Stalinism was never uncritical adaptation — those who ceased to be critical ceased to be even nominally Trotskyist — never inner acceptance of it, never a surrender of the idea that the Stalinist states had to be democratised and transformed. But a man like Ernest Mandel used his erudition and his intellectual talents to weave, from the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, ideological clothing which could be draped on Stalinism to identify it as part of the world revolution of the proletariat. Directly and indirectly, Mandel and his organisation and its ideological splinter groups such as the Lambertists and Healyites over the years tied large numbers of anti-Stalinist militants into accepting, tolerating or justifying, "critically", Stalinist regimes and aspects of Russian Stalinist imperialism.

25. Mandel especially played a role similar to that of Karl Kautsky two generations earlier, who rationalised, from the point of view of a hollow "orthodox Marxism", what the leaders of the German social democracy and trade unions did. Here Mandel and his friends were worse than Kautsky. Kautsky devised ideological schemes to depict the time-serving activities of a bureaucratized labour movement as an effective drive for working-class liberation; Mandel produced similar rationalisations for totalitarian Stalinist machines, convinced that they embodied the spirit of history and that it was his job to interpret and rationalise for it. Mandel was the Kautsky of "the historic process" itself.

26. And then, fifty years after Trotsky's death, Stalinism collapsed in Europe. It was revealed as nearer to being pre-capitalist than post-capitalist. Far from "defending and extending, in its own distorted way, the gains of the 1917 workers' revolution", Stalinism must be judged historically to have had no relationship to socialism and working-class emancipation but that of a destroyer of labour movements and an enslaver of working classes.

27. In the course of our work the Alliance for Workers' Liberty discovered that there were other Trotskyist traditions paralleling Cannon's, Mandel's, and that of post-Trotsky official Trotskyism, and in conflict with its peculiar positions on Stalinism; traditions — importantly that of Shachtman's Workers' Party — to which our own evolution — on the question of Stalinism and of democratic procedures in our own ranks, for example — has brought us close. We have learned, and intend to go on learning, from the Workers' Party of the '40s and its successor in the '50s, the Independent Socialist League.

28. In essence our moves away from our origins in post-Trotsky "orthodox Trotskyism" have been part of a journey back to Marx's clear doctrines of working class liberation, without the mystifications and confusions generated in post-Trotsky Trotskyism by its identification of Stalinist states, in which a savage system of class exploitation of workers prevailed, with "deformed" working class revolutions.

29. Tradition is never finished so long as an organisation lives; it goes on being lived, reassessed, amended, transmuted, and developed in the life of a political tendency like ours. In sources of ideas and in the examples — negative as well as positive — we learn from, we are both Cannonite

and Shachtmanite: in our continuing development we are neither: we continue to evolve our own AWL tradition.

30. Critically drawing from the experience of the whole current of Trotskyism, in Trotsky's time and after, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will continue to build up its forces and fight to win influence for Marxism in the labour movement.

31. Proudly proclaiming that we are Marxist, Leninist, Trotskyist, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty asks for the support of those who see the need to combine clear adherence to the great traditions of the working class past with a commitment to open-minded Marxist thinking about that past and about the struggles of the present. In the name of our traditions, the traditions of militant class struggle and honest revolutionary Marxist socialism — the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Mehring, Connolly and countless others — we call for the adherence to our ranks of serious socialists, determined to devote, not the spare evenings of dilettantes, but active dedicated lives to the greatest cause in the world — the fight for the liberation of humankind from capitalist wage slavery and all that goes with it.

32. Marxism is the single most precious achievement of the international proletariat. Of course, Marxism is a product in part of working class experience. The continuing experience of the proletariat is its nourishing life blood. Yet Marxism, scientific consciousness, does not arise spontaneously in the working class. Initially, as the Communist Manifesto rightly says, it comes from outside of the proletariat. It is created by members of the enemy class who come over to the working class, Marx, Engels and others, who fuse the early bourgeois scientific economics, German philosophy and French utopian socialism, with the experience of the first mass working class movement, Chartism, to create a new world outlook. A proletarian world outlook.

Marxism, whose adherents analyse, interpret, codify and try to shape an ever changing, evolving, permuting, social world is never 'finished'. It grows and develops, or else — as in many of its sectarian embodiments — it petrifies or withers; and thereby dies. Marxism can not stand still, because social reality does not stand still.

33. The AWL bases itself on Marxism — that is, an awareness of the basic texts and theories, and history of Marxism, together with knowledge of the history of society and of the working class and social movements required to make sense of the codifications that make up Marxism.

One of two things then.

Either: 'Marxism' is the property of the whole organisation, that is, the whole organisation consists of Marxists educated above a high basic level; or Marxism in the organisation is the property of a minority, even a small minority, who form a mere sect inside the organisation. If they are the leadership, they assume the role of a priestly caste in relation to the rest of the organisation's members. It is a pre-requisite of a healthy Marxist organisation, that everybody knows the basics; that, up to a high minimum, everybody is able to understand what is going on, what the ramifications and implications of the issues raised are.

If a basic minimum education is not a condition of participation of the organisation's deliberations, that is, of membership in the Marxist organisation, then inequality is built into the organisation, and into its system of recruitment and induction. So is the potential of the emergence of a priestly caste, and of the corruption of the organisation's internal life by demagoguery; and, even as in the case of SWP, of the suppression of all real internal political life in the organisation.

34. A feature of most of the kitsch-Trotskyist sects is that in them there is a priestly caste, with an unhealthy, manipulative relationship to the membership.

The SWP which is a mutant strain of kitsch-Trotskyism is one of the clearest examples. Even when it was an open, more or less democratic organisation, 'theory' was the property of a small elite of bourgeois intellectuals, and not even minimally — on such a thing, for example, as the group's fetishised theory of state capitalism — the property of the membership. We criticised them at the time, for that and for the crude and manipulative demagoguery that served the priestly caste to mediate between their theory and the rank and file of the organisation. They did not, we said, understand what theory was for in a revolutionary organisation; that either it was a real guide to cogitations, discussions and decisions by all the members of the party, or else that the organisation could not be a functioning Marxist collective at all. We said with tragic accuracy, before it occurred, that this state of affairs would inevitably lead to the degeneration of the organisation (see documents reprinted in International Communist No.5 1977).

35. There will of course, unavoidably, always be different levels of understanding and of learning in any organisation; and then again different levels within any leading committee. Some people will know and understand more, and contribute more in the common deliberations. A serious Marxist organisation has no tolerance for denial of this, or for demagogic pseudo-worker demands for levelling down — no one has a right to know more, or if they know it, to express more than us poor workers can effortlessly understand — of the sort the — essentially petit bourgeois — Thornettites once made notorious in our ranks. The Marxist movement levels up, not down.

The serious Marxist organisation will normally insist on a process of recruitment and induction where the aspirant member is put through a basic minimum education in Marxism, and does not acquire full rights inside the organisation until such an education is completed. In conditions of major working class upsurge we would of course recruit more loosely. We can only do that with safety to our basic identity and security for our political integrity when:

- 1) There is already a properly educated cadre
- 2) and when that cadre understands that one of its cardinal functions is to educate the militants recruited in the heat of the class struggle. Thus it was with the Bolshevik Party in 1905-7, and again in 1917.

Any organisation trying — as organisations like the AWL must — to function as a collective, able to analyse the world as Marxists while making propaganda for Marxism inside the labour movement, and in the class struggle, will suffer a number of terrible, and ultimately self destroying, consequences if it recruits too loosely and neglects education.

Iran: How the clerics took power

Paul Hampton

The old regime in Iran, the dictatorship of the Shah, had been installed in a military coup in 1953. Fuelled by oil reserves and repression, the Shah backed state-sponsored industrial development and land reform.

In 1962 industrial workers made about just over 20% of the total workforce. By 1977, 33% of the workforce was in industry and over 50% of the economically active population (of nearly nine million) were waged workers.

The Shah's rule was marked by the savage methods of SAVAK, the secret police. Torture and state-sponsored murder were widespread. No opposition, neither a bourgeois parliament nor trade unions were allowed — only the Shah's National Resurgence Party. The Shah's policies drove peasants off the land into urban slums, squeezed the middle-class bazaar and challenged the entrenched clergy.

The 1953 coup ended efforts at unionisation and a 1959

labour law proscribed workers' self-organisation.

In the mid-1970s, the economy began to falter. Members of all classes began to challenge the Shah.

The Shah faced an array of opponents. Firstly, the working class a third of which was concentrated in large plants and a few major cities, notably in Tehran. But workers were politically atomised, lacking representation, and able to organise only secretly in individual workplaces.

Secondly the national minorities. Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, Baluchis, Qashquaia and Turkmans constituted at least a third of the population of Iran and were denied their national, language and cultural rights.

Thirdly, the minority Sunni Muslims, as well as Jews, Zoroastrians and Bahais, who suffered religious oppression.

Fourthly, there were also sections of the bourgeoisie, middle class students and intellectuals opposed to the regime. Some took part in left-wing guerrilla movements from the 1960s.

Finally, the most visible group opposing the Shah were the mullahs and the bazaar. Both the clergy and the bazaar had lost out as capitalism developed. The Shah's land reform had reduced the mosques' revenue and educational reforms had weakened their influence at schools.

The figurehead and driving force of the mullahs was Ayatollah Khomeini. Expelled by the Shah in 1963, Khomeini spent most of the next fifteen years in Najaf in Iraq, developing his ideas on theocratic rule. It was his forces that led the movement to overthrow the Shah and ultimately replaced him.

In June 1977 police were sent in to clear slums in south Tehran. Thousands of the urban poor clashed with the police for weeks, eventually staging the first successful mass protest against the Shah since the 1950s.

Intellectual and religious opposition became more assertive. Religious demonstrations started in the holy city of Qom in December 1977. After demonstrators were killed, Khomeini called for 40 days of mourning, to be followed by another demonstration. These religious-inspired protests, mobilising the petty bourgeois from the bazaar and the lumpenproletariat, continued through spring and summer 1978.

In summer 1978 the industrial working class intervened — although at this stage mainly for its own economic interests rather than for wider social and political goals.

The religious mobilisations and the industrial struggles began to shake the regime. The Shah ordered troops to attack a demonstration in Tehran on 8 September 1978, known as "Black Friday", when thousands were killed.

The response of workers was to take industrial action, both for their own immediate interests but also for social and political demands. "[On 9 September] about 700 workers at the Tehran oil refinery struck not, as previously, just for higher wages, but as a protest against the imposition of martial law and the massacre at Jaleh Square. Two days later, on 11 September, the strike had spread to the oil refineries of Isfahan, Abadan, Tabriz and Shiraz..." (Nima).

In October, strikes spread further. The most important were those in the oil industry, which were organised by militant strike committees. Their political demands, formulated on 29 October, included the abolition of martial law, freedom for political prisoners, and the dissolution of SAVAK.

The Shah responded by sending in the army. But the workers did not give up. On 4 December 1978 they began an all out strike, bringing production to an absolute stop.

The Shah left Iran on 16 January 1979, never to return.

Although it was the power of the working class that brought

the Shah to his knees, it was not working-class organisations that led the overall opposition movement. As Bayat put it: "While the workers indeed controlled all revolutionary activities within the workplaces, they did not and could not exert their leadership upon the mass movement as a whole. This leadership was with someone else: Khomeini and the leadership associated with him."

"No other opposition organisation could muster a network of 180,000 members with 90,000 cadres (mullahs), some 50 leaders (ayatollahs), 5,000 'officers' (middle clergy), 11,000 theological students and a whole mass of ordinary members such as Islamic teachers, preachers, prayer guides and procession organisers" (Nima).

Khomeini had already appointed the Islamic Revolutionary Council in exile. He returned to Iran on 1 February 1979, greeted by millions at the airport. On 5 February he appointed Bazargan as his provisional prime minister.

An insurrection on 9-11 February 1979 brought the end of the prime minister left behind by the Shah.

As the old state began to crumble, workers set up shuras (councils) in workplaces. These shuras took many forms — in Tehran alone there were as many as a thousand — and in the first months of 1979 they thrived.

In the period from February to August 1979, workers "waged a struggle independent from, and at times directly against, the [clerical] leaders of the revolution" (Bayat).

But immediately after the insurrection of 9-11 February oil strike leaders were arrested by the new regime and charged as counter-revolutionaries. Three days after the insurrection Khomeini ordered all strikers to return to work "in the name of the revolution".

On 18 February the Islamic Republic Party was formed to spearhead Khomeini's supporters in official politics. Militias and other storm troopers such as the Hezbollahi (Party of Allah) were organised to attack opponents in the streets and in workplaces.

Speaking in Qom on 1 March 1979, Khomeini said: "Democracy is another word for the usurpation of God's authority to rule... What the nation wants is an Islamic republic; not just a republic, not a democratic republic, not a democratic Islamic republic. Do not use the term 'democratic'. That is the Western style."

From March 1979 Khomeini made attack after attack on women's rights, enforcing the veil, banning mixed education, changing family law.

On 31 March the Minister of Labour announced that the government "believes that workers can defend their interests only through a healthy Syndicate; therefore the ministry will support such organisations and intends to dissolve any other forms of organisation which are wasteful."

On 30-31 March the government held a referendum, with the question: Yes or No to an Islamic Republic. The voting slips were red for No and green for Yes. Members of local Komitehs handed voters their preferred voting slip and stamped their identity cards.

The regime nationalised 483 factories, 14 private banks and all insurance companies in June 1979. It took control of 70% of the private sector, paying compensation to foreign and domestic capitalists. The Islamic Mustazafin Foundation took over the assets of the Shah's family Pahlavi Foundation, which included 20% of the assets of all private companies. State managers were appointed to impose government policy. In May 1979 the government introduced the Law of Special Force to prevent shuras intervening "in the affairs of the managements and of the appointments" of government-nominated managers.

On 6 May Khomeini ordered the creation of the Islamic

Revolutionary Guards, the Pasdaran. On 22 June a demonstration at Tehran University demanding a popularly elected assembly was broken up by the Hezbollahi. The government decided that an Assembly of Experts would draft the new constitution.

On 7 August 1979 the government enforced a two-month old press law, with the Pasdaran occupying the offices of the liberal daily paper, Ayandegan. Later that month the government banned 41 opposition papers and took over two large publishing houses.

The first widespread wave of outright suppression against the shuras was launched in August. According to Bayat, "many independent shura activists were arrested and a number of them executed."

Khomeini's forces also attacked the left. Khomeini made his attitude clear in a speech on 19 August in Qom: "We made a mistake. If we had banned all these parties and fronts, broken all their pens, set up gallows in the main squares and cut down all these corrupt people and plotters, we would not be facing all these problems."

When Iraq attacked Iran in late September 1980, the result was "an hysterical chauvinist wave which rapidly engulfed the country, including the working class and most of the left". The Pasdaran were trebled and new organisations such as the Basij corps were set up. By June 1981 the last traces of independence by the shuras were stamped out.

The Khomeini regime was a form of "reactionary anti-imperialism", opposed to the domination of foreign capital but utterly hostile to the Iranian working class. It is not an abuse of language to describe it as a form of clerical fascism, given its destruction of the labour movement.

Khomeini disguised his programme for a theocratic state beneath vague, liberal-sounding phrases. As Nima put it, Khomeini's "rhetorical allusions to freedom were unfortunately misunderstood by many within the anti-Shah opposition, including many on the left."

The left failed to prepare the Iranian working class and warn of what to expect. Instead the left used spurious analogies to incorporate Khomeini's movement within a mechanical parody of "permanent revolution", which was far from Trotsky's original theory.

The forerunners of the AWL, like most of the left, underestimated the nature of Khomeini's ideas and his movement. For example, we wrote:

"The role played by Muslim clerics in the opposition movement does not mean that it is reactionary... It means no more than that the mosques have been the only possible meeting places for the opposition..." (11 November 1978).

About the closest we came to warning of the impending catastrophe was an article which said: "We can predict a clash between Khomeini and the workers. British socialists must be ready to give every support we can to the Iranian workers" (24 February 1979). The only organisation which had a third camp line of "down with the Shah, down with the mullahs" was (ironically) the Spartacist League, who warned in advance of the consequences of theocratic rule for the emerging workers' movement, the left, women and national minorities.

Although we opposed the exclusion of the Spartacists from meetings and demonstrations on Iran by the SWP and the "Mandelite" IMG (the other most visible left group at the time), we did not spell out clearly the dangers of Khomeini coming to power. We should learn the lessons!

• This article is abridged from [Workers' Liberty 3/5, "Iran: revolution and counter-revolution 1978-9",](http://www.workersliberty.org/wl3-5) www.workersliberty.org/wl3-5. [1]