

# Workers' Liberty

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



Towards  
the  
abyss?

Capitalism's  
spiralling  
crisis

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# Varieties of barbarism

**C**LIMBERS roped together who plunged, one after the other, into the abyss. That was one description of the link of treaty and obligation, of power to power, in the chain of diplomatic and military events that produced the First World War. Something like that has happened to the economies of a number of countries in recent months. They are linked not by treaties but by contagious panic on the Stock Exchanges and money markets of the world. The collapse of the Russian economy and its partial default on its international debt raises urgent questions. Will all those linked together in the chain go down?

Russia embodies only 1% of the world economy. But in the last 7 years Russia has been firmly connected up to the capitalist world. It is a debtor on such a scale — the combined foreign debt of the Russian government and individual capitalist enterprises is US\$194 billion — that its ruin can also ruin its creditors, setting off chain reactions of pressure on stock exchanges, currencies and banks.

The crisis broke in June, in Thailand, one of the smaller “Asian tiger” economies that were the glory of capitalism at the end of the twentieth century, then spread. The Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan. The collapse of currency and stock-markets led to convulsive economic contractions. The collapse of Russia adds immense weight to the downward pull on Europe and America. Can these comparatively unaffected units in the world economy resist the pull of the common financial rope? There has been turmoil on the New York and London stock exchanges.

In the world financial market tribes of speculating shareholders and currency buyers pursue narrow huxtering self-interest. Panic scrambles in one direction or another occur. They are prone to changes of direction in flocks, like birds in a formation flight. Their moods, urges, superstitions determine what happens to vast millions of people. Such movements can take on the force of natural phenomena, economic “tidal waves”, economic “earthquakes”, economic “landslides”. The Stock Exchange crisis of 1987 did not feed into the “real” economy: there is no guarantee that this one won’t.

Does the collapse of the Russian economy signal the beginning of a world-wide depression? With the once-tigerish South East Asian economies “gone” Japan — the second biggest economy in the world — in depression and Latin America seemingly going into economic crisis, and now Russia, every part of the world except Western Europe and North America is already in serious trouble. It seems increasingly improbable that, even though the US and Europe between them account for over 50% of world production, they can remain prosperous and uninvolved. A writer in the *Financial Times* compared the idea that “Fortress Europe” could remain immune to the notion that people in a medieval castle surrounded by famine and plague could remain untouched by the world around them.

Sober bourgeois economists think that the world is in the process of being engulfed in the worst slump for decades. How deep, how widespread and how destructive will it be?

Already the economic destruction is of enormous proportions. It has brought catastrophe and ruin to many millions in Asia and, though it is a special case, in Russia. The more optimistic bourgeois economists compare the prospects before us to past relatively recent slumps, expressing an opinion on what is before us in the precedent they choose. Is it the “mild” slump of the early '90s, or the deeper one of 1980-81? The less optimistic talk of something on the scale of the oil-price crisis that followed the Yom Kippur war of 1973. Others talk of “the 1930s” and recall the great slump that followed the Wall Street stock market crash of October 1929. Alexander Chancellor, City Editor of the *Daily Mail* wrote: “Russia could be the last domino to go down before Wall Street loses its nerve and there is a repeat of 1929, sending stock markets everywhere crashing and putting the world economy into a depression.”

**W**ILL HUTTON, editor of the *Observer* is a neo-Keynesian critic of unregulated financial marketism. He believes that the financial markets are inherently unstable and, while they remain unregulated, bound to be a destructive force at the heart of capitalism. He is one of the comparative optimists: the risk of a, “world economic catastrophe,” is, “still slight,” though, “it is a risk that is growing day by day.” Yet he thinks that this is, “the most serious threat to the world economy since the Second World War... we are now about to reap the whirlwind,” created by the unshackling of the volatile financial markets and the rise to something like world dictatorship of the financiers and their markets.

Yet it isn’t just the surface phenomenon of stocks and shares and money markets. The skinning of the Asian “tiger” economies seems to have started with the devaluation of the Chinese yuan in 1994. This made Chinese exports more formidable competitors with the “tiger” economies, which were found to have developed a productive capacity that outstripped their markets. That gave the international money people the jitters. If the current convulsions do not lead to more than a slowdown in the European and US economies it will be because their profit margins are still strong and the real economy therefore resilient.

In the former USSR the global triumph of capitalism, around 1991, has combined with the legacy of Stalinism to generate a relapse into barbarism. Large areas of Russian society have regressed not to capitalism but to pre-capitalism. Many millions of people live virtually outside the money economy, depending on barter.

The old Stalinist command economy has been replaced by the economic rule of a handful of robber barons who have cornered about 50% of the Russian economy — operating in an economic and social chaos that resembles the post-nuclear holocaust world of Mad Max more than it resembles an ordered, functioning social system. They operate as social, political and economic bandits, with Yeltsin as their stooge — in a society without proper markets, a developed banking system or a proportionately large entrepreneurial middle class. This is an attempt at capitalism without capitalists! The matrix of the old Stalinist bureaucratic state framework has been bro-

ken and the elements it held scattered: chaos has ensued. Free-lance banditry, in which the robber barons, operating behind the front of "democracy" are the biggest and most successful bandits, has replaced the bureaucratically structured, organised and regulated banditry of the old Stalinist bureaucratic system. Except that Stalinism existed in a social economy that worked. It worked very badly but it worked. The system that replaced it doesn't work for most Russians. Millions of workers have not been paid in money for months and some not for years.

The breakdown of bureaucratic state power in the direction of capitalism inevitably meant the breakdown of society. Long ago it was asserted that the collapse of the state power meant anarchy and the dissolution of society into a chaos in which life would be, "nasty, brutal and short." A thousand times more is this true in a society where the state was the prime entrepreneur and social integrator. The Stalinist bureaucratic state did that very badly and ultimately simply ceased to be able to do it. The society's need for it to be done remained after the Stalinist centre collapsed. Real capitalism is an historically evolved organic system that was not conjured up overnight out of the elements of the collapse of another social system.

In 1990, Russia was historically as unready for capitalism as it was for socialism in 1930. The attempt to impose capitalism, driven by greed in Russia and IMF dictat, has proved to be an act of blind dogmatism, as gross and destructive in its own way as was Stalin's forced collectivisation. Its consequences in human suffering, in the dislocation and ruin of millions of lives, are already immense.

Russia was eagerly bound in chains of international debt by creditors who were lured by the immense riches that seemed to be there for the plundering. It will be justice if the victims of Russia's economic convulsions shall include its plunderers.

Working class socialism was the only way to stop the collapse of society into this chaos. Stalinism should have been replaced by a rational, socio-economic system in which human need came first — in which the rule of bureaucrat, capitalist or hybrid robber baron would be impossible. Democratically, the citizens could have planned their own lives and set their own goals and priorities.

In a Russia afflicted by the chaos resulting from the breakdown of the old bureaucratic state and the trauma of a half-born Third World capitalism, the need for socialism is increasingly self-evident. Millions of Russians fell for the idea that bringing capitalism to Russia would lead to the prosperity

and greater liberty which existed in the West. Instead they have got the rule of robber barons and for millions of them not US or European capitalism but a primitive barter economy. They are being disabused of their illusion.

Stalinism was one sort of political, social and economic barbarism; this is another, and historically a more familiar type of barbarism.

In Russia all the objective conditions exist in superabundance for a new working class socialist revolution: the old rulers can't, for now, go on in the old way. Large and increasing numbers of the population don't want to go on in this way. The tragedy is that the subjective preconditions for socialism do not yet exist: a class conscious labour movement and a revolutionary socialist organisation able to lead it to the remaking of society along democratic, working class socialist lines: central planning by a democratic state, controlled use of markets in limited areas of the economy. The Bolshevik pro-

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**"In Russia all the objective conditions exist in superabundance for a new working class socialist revolution."**

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gramme of a socialist working class revolution is as necessary against the post Stalinist system as it was against Stalinism. Throughout its existence the Stalinist bureaucracy worked to stop the working class taking over. Here it succeeded. The Stalinists persecuted and extirpated socialists; they turned socialism into a badly tarnished name for their incompetent greedy system of oppression. There

was no freedom to think, speak, write, read, organise. And so the workers could not before the crisis erupted work out an alternative, clear socialist view of the world, or organise. The Stalinist dictatorship thus acted to prevent the working class from making itself an independent political force. Not socialism but collapse followed. If the bureaucratic tyranny made it impossible in the years before 1991 for socialists in the former USSR to prepare a socialist succession to the old system, the discrediting of capitalism that must follow this experience opens new possibilities. If not the delusory nirvana of US-style and European capitalist prosperity — what? A workers' government! A new October Revolution!

**T**HE chaos in Russia is a lesson against capitalism written in social horror and in the degradation of tens of millions of people: it will be socialism or barbarism. The degradation and horror is now likely to get worse.

In 1991 the triumphant bourgeoisie proclaimed that we had reached, "the end of history." History seems to be asking for a replay. A global economic crisis the like of which has not been seen since the 1930s may be unfolding. It is proof, if any more were needed, that the very existence of capitalism is inseparable from recurrent economic crises and mass poverty.

With rare exceptions, such as the miners' strike of 1984/85, socialists in Britain have been on the defensive for nearly two decades. Tory victories in four successive General Elections combined with the Blairites' conquest of the commanding heights of the Labour Party have reduced many socialists and militants to demoralisation and inactivity.

But today, as capitalism stumbles, the forces of socialism in Britain and other countries will begin to revive. The champions of the "free market" are being discredited by the workings of the system which they defend. The ideas and values of socialism stand out as the only hope of humanity.

We appeal to our readers to join with us in the rebuilding of a socialist movement — rooted in the working class, freed from the poison of Stalinism, irreconcilable in its opposition to Blairism, and committed to ending the barbarism of capitalism.

## Workers' Liberty

Incorporating Socialist Organiser

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Russia in crisis:

# Mafia-capitalism's debt time-bomb

By Stan Crooke

THE collapse of Stalinism at the close of the eighties was described by the champions of capitalism as "the end of history". Its collapse, they claimed, would usher in an epoch of economic prosperity and political stability. Capitalism would rule triumphant.

But now, less than a decade later, capitalism — not just in the former Stalinist states, but on a global scale — is convulsed by crisis.

In Russia the economy is in a state of meltdown. Internationally capitalism is paralysed by what the *Guardian* has described as, "perhaps the most serious breakdown in the modern capitalist era — a possible re-run of the Depression of the early 1930s."

Since Russia has emerged as an independent state from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 it has been victim to a combination of untrammelled free-market capitalism and large-scale organised crime. It has often been impossible to draw a clear dividing line between the two. Successive de-nationalisations of state industries were "justified" in terms of the need to create private enterprise. In reality they were often simply taken over for little or nothing by Communist Party bureaucrats turned businessmen.

For the vast majority of the population, however, mafia-capitalism meant increasing misery and poverty. Savings were wiped out by hyper-inflation, running at 2,500% in 1992. The government was unable to pay out pensions and wages: by the summer of this year 78 billion roubles were owed in unpaid wages.

In the last decade the Russian economy as a whole has shrunk by more than 40%. The situation is even worse in particular sectors and regions. Steel production has fallen by 50% and lorry production by 80%. In eastern Siberia industrial output has collapsed by 90%.

In the opening months of 1998 Western economists and political commentators proclaimed — yet again — that the Russian economy had finally "turned the corner". The rouble was relatively stable, inflation was under control and there had even been a slight increase in industrial output.

This was wishful thinking. Figures released last month showed that the gross domestic product had fallen by 4.5% over the preceding twelve months



(the biggest fall since 1996), real incomes had fallen by 8.2% and the volume of unpaid wages had increased by 6.5%.

The government continued to hover on the brink of insolvency. Insofar as it functioned at all, its day-to-day operations were financed by the issue of short-term high-interest bonds. This was pyramid-selling raised to the level of economic strategy: successive bond issues eventually served no other purpose than covering the costs of redeeming earlier bond issues.

Repeated tranches of Western economic aid did nothing to stave off the impending crisis. In the words of the *Economist*, IMF loans were, "squandered, or perhaps stolen." Some loans were squandered in a vain attempt to maintain the value of the rouble. Other loans, to quote the *Economist* again, simply disappeared into, "banks run by thieves."

By the middle of last month, the government's debt time-bomb was due to explode: it had effectively run out of money to service debts, to defend the value of the rouble, or even to finance its own drastically trimmed-down daily operations.

In response, a package of measures was announced on 17 August: devaluation of the rouble; a moratorium on the repayment of short-term government debts; a rescheduling of the redeeming of dollar-denominated bonds; and a bank bail-out scheme.

The announcement of such measures tipped the Russian economy into a full-scale crisis, sending out shock waves which convulsed stock exchanges and

money markets around the world.

The value of the rouble began to slump. It lost over 20% against the dollar within a week. So steep was its fall in value — in a single day (26 August) it fell in value against the German Mark by over 40% — that within a fortnight trading in the rouble against the dollar had to be suspended.

The collapse in the value of the rouble has triggered a fresh burst of inflation, possibly hyper-inflation. As prices began to rise on a daily, if not an hourly, basis, shops closed down in order to avoid selling goods at a price which might double in a matter of hours.

The moratorium on the repayment of short-term government debts rendered most Russian banks technically insolvent, due to their liquidity being dependent on the government's repayments of earlier short-term loans. As the *Guardian* put it: "Banks hover in limbo, technically bankrupt, but not yet officially dead."

The rescheduling of the repayment of dollar-dominated bonds left creditors facing major losses. The bonds are to be redeemed in roubles in three to five years time at an interest rate of between 20 and 30%. But, given the collapse of the rouble and the resurgence of inflation, this means that the bonds will be redeemed at a loss.

The moratorium and rescheduling of debt payments have destroyed any lingering confidence in the creditworthiness of the Russian economy, effectively severing the lifeline which has enabled the Russian government to keep its head above water, even if only just. As one Moscow

economist put it: "If you default on one set of debts, why not default on all of them?"

The bank bail-out scheme, details of which are yet to be spelt out, is a guarantee that, even in the midst of a full-blown crisis, Russian bankers with the right connections to the ruling elite can sleep easy in their beds at night. In the caustic words of the Economist:

"Russia's true priority has re-emerged; those banks and their owners who paid for Yeltsin's re-election in 1996 and gobble up quantities of privatised assets are now to be saved. The bank bail-out looks at the moment like being a cosy deal for owners, paid for by taxpayers (foreign and local)."

"Western bankers in Moscow suspect that chummy relations between

members of Yeltsin's courts and the tycoons helped shape the worst bits of the current package, especially the bank bail-out."

Clearly, the package of measures announced on 17 August have only served to plunge Russia still deeper into crisis.

The supposed achievements of the Yeltsin regime — a stable currency and low inflation — have turned into their opposites. The until-recently flourishing stock market is now worth less than the value of Sainsbury's on the London stock exchange. Russian creditworthiness stands at zero, if not even lower.

Devaluation of the rouble will import inflation without improving Russia's balance of trade: Russian production continues to be of such poor quality that,

however low its sale price, it cannot compete with better-quality Western goods.

Even the export of raw materials — Russia's main source of foreign hard currency — will scarcely benefit from the August package of reforms. The price paid for such commodities slumped as a result of the onset of the economic crisis in Asia. If Russia now attempts to increase its exports of raw materials, then prices will slide even further.

The Russian government can now claim, at least temporarily that it is running a budget surplus. But this is simply the result of imposing a debt moratorium and a continuing failure to pay unpaid wages. Moreover, the current budget deficit is likely to disappear into the pockets of Chernomyrdin's business and banking backers.

## Notes from a provincial Russian city: Inside the post-Stalinist chaos

By Sam Benn

The events of the last 10 days in Russia are easy to describe. After two weeks of saying there was no crisis and that the rouble would not be devalued Yeltsin and his Prime Minister, Kirienko, had to admit that the rouble could not be maintained at the rate of R6.1 = \$1 and allowed the rouble to vary within a range of R6.1 to R9.5 = \$1.

The immediate effect of this was that the rouble sank on the official exchanges. On the street the effect was even more dramatic. In some regional towns, for example Chelyabinsk, the rouble was being exchanged at a rate of R13.5 to \$1 from day one.

The reason for this is that most Russians hold whatever wealth they have in the form of dollars — most of this for ordinary people is held in their mattress. As it transpired they were right not to trust the banking sector! The impact on the Russian stock market was such that share prices fell and have continued to do so. Furthermore, the government announced the imposition of capital controls, debt restructuring and a moratorium on the payment of foreign debt. The net effect of all this has been to precipitate a financial, economic and political crisis, the end of which no one can either foresee or foretell.

However, in order to say something about the present crisis in Russia it is necessary to identify the political and economic roots of the present problems. For the whole period since January 1992 it

is possible to talk about the crisis of the Russian economy. The inflationary surge after the liberalisation of prices was followed by a precipitate decline in industrial production and GDP. The reshaping of the Russian economy involved the increasing integration of the financial sector and raw material producers into the world market and the virtual abandonment of domestic accumulation and production. The process of self-cannibalisation involved not only the sale and asset stripping of any valuable parts of the Russian economy but also the wholesale export of capital to foreign financial centres.

This process was of course accompanied by the privatisation process through which a combination of the old Soviet nomenklatura and the criminal vestiges of the old black economy (often not very far apart in the past) transformed their power and/or capital into control of the newly privatised assets. In economic terms the old ruling group attempted to transform what they had controlled by virtue of their position in the old system into what they owned in the new. However, for various fractions within the ruling group, this process had a degree of chance about it.

If you were located in a region, an enterprise or a sector with prospects within the world economy this process was unproblematic. If, however, your position of power resided in the declining sectors or in a region with few economic opportunities then this process posed

extreme difficulties.

This basic fracture gave rise to sections of the old ruling group coalescing in different political blocs and vying for prominence in the post-Soviet period. Yeltsin, as the figurehead and progenitor of this period, held the ring as the various factions pressed their particular variant of transformation onto economic policy making.

For Yeltsin this provided two possible strategies. Firstly, under pressure from the West, it was possible for him to align himself with the pro-market young-Turks, which led to his successive championing of Gaidar, Fedorov, Chubais and latterly Kirienko. Secondly, when the going got tough internally or when he was placed before the populace in some popular test (election, referenda, etc.) he could ditch his pro-market stance for a populist face and side with that part of the old ruling group comprised of more protectionist and interventionist old industrial directors. In fact the government under Chernomyrdin represented a structural compromise along these very lines. On Yeltsin's part this vacillation may have been the result of a carefully constructed policy or more likely was the result of the man's natural cunning and desire to cling to power.

Over this period a semi-criminal quasi-capitalism has developed with peculiarly Soviet features. To call this "market-Stalinism" may be misleading because wide swathes of the economy were simply non-

## THE COVER STORY

monetised. (For example, on a recent visit to an enterprise producing car parts, the enterprise director informed me that out of his total turnover only 6% was paid for in money. The mayor of the local town received only 2% of his budget in money!)

What was certainly true was that the disintegrative process that had begun with Gorbachev has simply continued, and the centre's control over the regions or the activities of industrial/financial groupings is minimal. The budget crisis and the inability of the centre to collect taxation best exemplify this. But in order to maintain some semblance of social peace government expenditures continued in excess of revenues — but nevertheless at a level unable to sustain adequate economic activity or living standards for the bulk of the population.

The net effect of this has been that the living standards and life opportunities of the mass of the Russian populace simply deteriorated. The level of unemployment grew way beyond the official levels because of short-time working, administrative leave and the acceptance by Russian workers of a minimum wage simply to stay on the factory's books. Anyone who has visited a Russian enterprise in the traditional sectors over the last few years will comment on how there does not seem to be anyone there and nothing actually happening! Income differentiation grew rapidly and the proportion of the population living below poverty thresholds could only be maintained at around 30% by redefinition of those thresholds. Even those above lived a parlous existence.

All kinds of social indicators deteriorated, with perhaps the most dramatic being the life expectancy of males, which has now declined to 58 years.

Even those people who remained in work, particularly in the budget sector, were simply left unpaid! As budget revenues contracted it became impossible to pay teachers, health workers, transport workers and of course, miners. The most visible poor were of course the elderly, whose meagre savings were destroyed in the 1992 price hike and who could not even rely on the regular payment of their measly pensions.

But other changes were also occurring that contributed to the present collapse. The old ruling group began to experience internal change. Some of the new financial and industrial groupings have become relatively more successful and powerful and a process of concentration and centralisation has occurred extremely quickly. It is these forces that have been decisive in the current period. The so-called oligarchs who call the shots have been the real force behind Yeltsin over the last period. The oli-



**Chernomyrdin: the man most likely to succeed?**

garchs control large integrated financial/industrial and media empires, support and control considerable security forces and make or break local and national politicians. The best example of such power is Boris Beresovsky who is widely believed to have been the major actor behind the current events, in particular the return to power of Chernomyrdin.

What the oligarchs appear to want is a stronger, more centralising state. As their position is established what they require is not further market reform but the consolidation of a unified state power that can deliver social peace and allow them to accumulate further power and wealth. It could be argued that from their point of view the political fractions in the Duma and the ongoing schism between Yeltsin and the Duma represented a destabilising struggle that can no longer be tolerated. Hence Beresovsky's support for the return of Chernomyrdin and Chernomyrdin's attempts to produce some kind of coalition government.

What of the effects and the impacts, and whose interests are being served, in the current crisis? The impact on ordinary people was immediate. Banks operated a policy of only allowing small withdrawals to be made from customer accounts, restricted their hours or closed altogether. In regional towns a number of banks ran

out of dollars completely and as a consequence street rates rose rapidly (today the black market rate for dollars has reached R17). Ironically the individuals and enterprises most effected by this were precisely those who had attempted to act in a manner necessary for a market economy. Individuals who saved and kept their money in banks have yet again been given a sharp lesson about the vagaries of the market. It is even worse for those on middle incomes who clubbed together to buy government securities: they will receive no return and will only recoup their basic investment at some indeterminate time in the future.

Most ordinary people, including some of the intelligentsia, do not have bank accounts. The immediate impact may seem remote — but this is not the case. For workers whose enterprises did work through the banking system the collapse has meant in some cases immediate lay-offs. In Vologda, north of Moscow, for example, approximately half the town's enterprises have laid off their entire workforce. What is certain is that the financial crisis will exacerbate the decline in industrial production and produce further unemployment, hardship and misery.

Furthermore, another legacy of the past period is the increased reliance of Russian cities on imported foodstuffs. For example, it has been estimated that 70% of Moscow's food supply is imported and in regional cities the figure can be almost as high. Imported food prices must inevitably rise, placing more pressure on already difficult family budgets. In a number of cities decrees (ukaz) have been promulgated by regional governors against unwarranted price rises — but it was obvious from the start that these would be unenforceable. In fact last weekend many shops and kiosks closed (some remain closed) in anticipation of price increases later this week. The Russian populace as far as possible tried to buy with its roubles at the old prices but found it increasingly difficult to do so.

Who will benefit? The main beneficiaries of the current crisis will be the strong

**OUT NOW FROM WORKERS' POWER**

## **TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL** **ISSUE 24**

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# South Korea factory occupation

By Mark Sandell

Militant action by Hyundai workers in South Korea has forced the company to withdraw redundancies for 1,600 workers. Up to 1,500 riot police had been surrounding a car plant in the south-eastern city of Ulsan which 5,000 striking workers and their families had been occupying for several weeks.

The government brokered a deal despite the South Korean cops' bloody record of attacking the workers' movement. One capitalist observer told the *Financial Times*: "I'm glad it did not end in violence, which could have triggered national labour unrest."

The strike and occupation was led by the Hyundai "vanguard" of the radical Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) which has been at the forefront of industrial militancy, sometimes even getting the state-initiated "moderate" Federation of Korean Trade Unions to take action too.

The south-east Asian economic crisis has shaken Korea. Now the bosses want to force the working class to pay the price for the crazy behaviour of capitalism. Hyundai wanted to reduce its workforce by 18%, sacking 8,700 workers. This cuts across a tradition of a job for life that was even enshrined in South Korean law until the liberal government of ex-political dissident Kim Dae-jung repealed the law to allow restructuring.

As South Korea has no welfare state the issue of unemployment is a question of starvation. The KCTU have struck and protested in support of decent unemployment support already this year.

The economic crisis hitting South Korea will almost certainly lead to a recession here too. Korean bosses are worried that the result at Hyundai might set a precedent of a fightback that will stop them throwing hundreds of thousands out of work to restructure the economy. Let's hope it does — and not just in Korea but across the world — as the world market drives us into yet another recession.

The last word though should go to the KCTU at Hyundai: "The fight by the labour unions is the only way to deter mass redundancies."

industrial/financial groupings who will be able to further consolidate their control over those vestiges of the Russian economy that are worthwhile. They will also benefit from the concentration and centralisation occurring in the financial sector. Currently there are around 1,500 commercial banks in Russia and this crisis will reduce this number, by an as yet unknown amount. The powerful oligarchs will see their economic power increase and their control over the economy strengthened.

What of the popular response? People are undoubtedly angry: the mood in the queues around the banks and exchanges were ample evidence of this. People feel they have been cheated yet again by a government that seeks to serve interests other than their own. Each time these crises occur (for example, the price hikes of January 1992 and the rouble collapse of Black Tuesday) the populace are further convinced that they are right not to bank with the banks, not to pay taxes to the government, not to work at work, etc., etc.

But the popular response so far should not be over-exaggerated as a popular movement. It is true that strikes have continued throughout the year and that they have spread beyond the small number of sectors where they have traditionally occurred, but it is too early to talk of a national strike movement. The majority of the response is individualised and atomised.

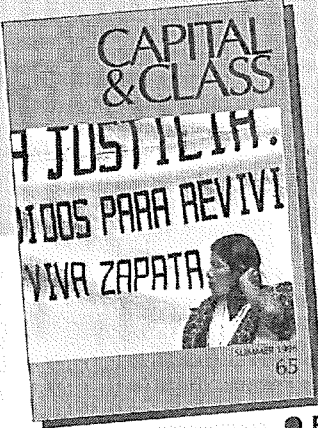
No political movement or group appears to offer any solution or possibility of a solution. A television poll on Russian TV last night suggested that of its respondents only 3% expected the situation to normalise — but at the same time only 11% suggested that they would be prepared to take part in the most minor of social protests at the current time. In this city the picket by a variety of "leftist" (i.e., Stalinist)

groupings of the main square has never attracted more than a handful of people.

The common response can be summarised in the following way. The installation of Yeltsin's candidate Chernomyrdin will make no difference: after all, he was Prime Minister for 5 years and created the background for this crisis. Zyuganov and Zhironovsky are seen as simply two sides of the same coin — the red-brown coalition of old Stalinists and new fascists! Many people, particularly the intelligentsia, are perturbed about Zyuganov. This is for good reason as a brief perusal of the bookstall run by rank and file Zyuganovites at the Lenin Museum near Red Square shows. The bookstall is split about 50-50 between pictures, books and even tapes celebrating Stalinism and on the other side the same kinds of merchandise featuring Hitler, swastikas and Nazi paraphernalia. The uniting theme between the two halves is anti-Semitism, extreme nationalism and a virulent patriotic chauvinism.

The only real consensus to emerge is that the people who will pay for the current crisis are the Russian populace and that this winter will be extremely difficult. Already prior to the crisis there have been many reports from the regions suggesting that the harvest has been bad and that food supplies will be difficult (exacerbating the price hikes in foreign foodstuffs) and that energy supply problems will cause widespread power cuts during the winter months. The situation is, however, extremely fluid — and it would be unwise to write off popular action at this early stage. The crisis will continue into the autumn and the call for a national strike in early October will be a test of how far the situation has deteriorated and how far any common popular response has emerged.

30/31 August



## Capital & Class

Journal of the Conference of Socialist Economists

### Issue No. 65 – OUT NOW

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- John Lovering *Labour and the Defence Industry*
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# Indonesia: the workers will revolt

ACCORDING to the *Wall Street Journal*, Indonesia is, "a country that passes each day in fear of an eruption of working class fury." The *Wall Street Journal's* fear must be the great hope of millions of Indonesians, as the country's economic crisis worsens and the supposed reform regime of President BJ Habibie, appointed after long-time dictator General Suharto resigned on 21 May, strives to maintain the structures of crony capitalism and military domination.

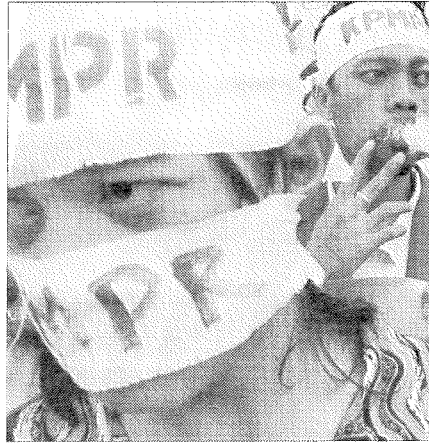
At road intersections in the country's capital, Jakarta, children as young as four and five weave through the traffic, begging or banging home-made tambourines for money. When Indonesia's school year started on 20 July, only 54% of school-age children turned up. The rest have had to abandon education in order to hustle for money and food for their families.

About 40% of Indonesia's 200 million people have been pushed below an official poverty line set at the equivalent of about £2.50 a month. Prices are rising at about 9% a month, and rice is in short supply. On one estimate, industry and commerce have shrunk by nearly one half in the last eight months. Five million workers have lost their jobs. Meanwhile, the US business magazine *Barron's* reports that the Suharto family have moved out \$8 billion — enough to sustain the whole population at the official poverty line for ten months — into get-away accounts in Austrian banks.

Some of the millions facing starvation have seized idle plots of government and private land to grow food. They have dug up the golf courses and parks built for the country's wealthy classes in the boom years in order to plant vegetables, banana trees and fast-growing tubers. A showcase cattle ranch owned by ex-president Suharto was invaded by some 300 villagers last month.

But since the 1980s Indonesia has become a predominantly urban and industrial country. To secure the means to live the country's main productive class, the wage-workers, will have to seize not just golf courses but the industrial means of production.

Among the dozens of new political parties declared since May the *Jakarta Post* lists the Indonesian Workers' Party, the All-Indonesian Workers' Solidarity Party, the Indonesian Prosperous Labor



Union (SBSI) Party, the Proletarian Party, the Federation of All Indonesian Workers' Union (SPSD) Party, and the Students' and Workers' Struggle Party. The most vigorous socialist group, the People's Democratic Party (PRD), has secured a court decision declaring it legal, though its general secretary Budiman Sujatmiko and its trade union leader Dita Sari remain in jail. About 120 political prisoners have been released since jail, and the PRD reports that 200 remain locked up.

Unifying and consolidating the socialist and working class groups remains a difficult task, made more difficult by the catastrophic decline of industry. The Indonesian Prosperous Labour Union, SBSI, which appears to be the strongest independent labour group, says that it had 500,000 members in 1994 — when it was illegal and its leader Muchtar Pakpahan was jailed — but has formally signed up only 30,000 of them since becoming legal. It is striving to combine a campaign of political demonstrations, demanding the resignation of Habibie, with organisation in the workplaces.

An additional problem is that the PRD remains tied to the perspective of a "People's Coalition government", in which workers' representatives would unite with the pro-capitalist opposition groups, rather than a workers' and small farmers' government.

Elections have been promised for May next year. Habibie still plans strict controls on democracy. The army will appoint 55 members of parliament (as against 75 now), and parties will be allowed to contest only if they have 1.2 million registered supporters.

In the only political opinion poll pub-

lished so far — based essentially on surveying the middle class in big cities — nearly 60% said "don't know" or refused to answer when asked what party they would vote for. By far the most popular party was the PDI, led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the populist leader Sukarno, deposed after the 1965 military coup. It got 40%, with Suharto's government party, Golkar, a distant second on 12.9%.

70% of those polled said that they were against religion-based parties. An Islamic party was part of the official facade of politics under Suharto, and some Islamic leaders had a high profile in the unrest which toppled Suharto. The 70% opposition is an encouraging sign for the possibilities of preventing a diversion of social discontent into chauvinist and fundamentalist channels. Earlier this year there was much looting of businesses owned by Indonesia's ethnic-Chinese minority, and more recently, according to the *South China Morning Post*, many Chinese have fled Indonesia's big cities.

The half-million strong Indonesian army — the core of the political structure, and a major business empire, too, under Suharto — is striving to maintain its position by selective reform. Two senior police officers have been convicted of ordering the shootings of student demonstrators in May — four died — and 16 more security personnel will be tried for their roles in that slaughter. (In Indonesia, police are under the command of the military.) A military council has recommended that one of Suharto's sons-in-law be court-martialled for ordering the abduction and torture of political activists.

Troops have been withdrawn from the disputed territory of Aceh. Troop withdrawals have also been announced from East Timor, a territory seized by Indonesia after it was released from Portuguese rule in 1975. The Habibie government has declared itself willing to negotiate "autonomy" for East Timor. However, East Timorese leaders say that 30 to 40,000 Indonesian troops still occupy their land, and are demanding a free referendum on independence.

● An article in *Workers' Liberty* 48 described the Indonesian People's Democratic Party (PRD) as, "a mass party," "Maoist-influenced." In fact the PRD, though important and fast-growing, is a small student group. The shaping influence on its "two-stages" strategy (first "People's Coalition government" and only after that struggle for socialism) is not so much Maoism as the Australian Democratic Socialist Party, an ex-Trotskyist (now Castroist) group with which it works closely.



# Globalisation and its analysts

By Martin Thomas

**G**LOBALISATION, according to the US writer Doug Henwood, "is shorthand for our evolution into a single borderless economy, with free flows of money and goods, under the dominance of several hundred giant corporations."<sup>1</sup> The many-volumed debate on globalisation asks, essentially, to what extent and with what implications are we living through a "transformation of quantity into quality" in a capitalist process earlier stages of which were described 150 years ago by Karl Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*.

"The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries... whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible... The bourgeoisie... compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image."

A sketch of the facts under discussion can be set out in a table (see overleaf).

In some versions of the argument, there is a cast-iron logic connecting economic and cultural globalisation with the decline in working-class social-reform politics in the 1980s and '90s<sup>2</sup>. Faced with the huge scale and speed of global financial flows, and the power of the giant global corporations to centralise information and know-how but shift production wherever they like, nation-states have no choice but to join in a Dutch auction of bidding down social costs, tax rates on profits and high incomes, and social and legal restraints on profit-making, in order to keep favour with global capital<sup>3</sup>. Their only alternative would be to opt out of a more and more richly-interwoven world division of labour, and thus fall into isolated poverty.

Working class power is being reduced. The workforce is more and more divided between some higher-paid workers doing



well and a mass pushed into insecure, casual or low-paid work. Workforces are more place-bound, slower on their feet, than the global companies. "The defensiveness of municipal socialism, the insistence on working class community, the localisation of the fight against capital, become central features of working-class struggle within an overall patterning of uneven geographical development... In clinging, often of necessity, to a place-bound identity, however, such oppositional movements become a part of the very fragmentation which a mobile capitalism and flexible accumulation can feed upon"<sup>4</sup>.

Tighter migration controls, a real and markedly "anti-globalist" feature of the "globalist" 1980s and '90s, do not account for all the "place-boundedness" of workforces. Even in the European Union, where workers are legally free to move at will from country to country, the great majority will be slower to move from the area where their friends and family are, and where their mother-tongue is spoken, than footloose capital. Moreover, working-class traditions which supply the ethical bonds for class struggle are increasingly broken up by the kaleidoscopic "globalist" fragmentation of all fixed identities.

The prime example for the destructive effects of globalisation on working class social-reform politics is Sweden. In the 1980s social-democratic Sweden defied general trends. Unemployment was below two per cent, welfare provision was strong, and yet output grew well and Swedish industry outstripped most other countries in its application of new technology. Then in 1989-90 capitalists started to pull money out of the country (the government had abolished exchange control in July 1989). Higher and higher interest rates offered by the central bank failed to stop the flight. \$14 billion was pulled out in 1990. The big Swedish manufacturing companies — Ericsson, Stora, Asea, Volvo, Electrolux — moved more and more investment into the European Union. Their bosses became increasingly assertive. By 1994 the top bosses were openly intervening in a general election campaign to insist that the government must restrain taxes and cut public

spending, or else they would shift production, or even company headquarters, abroad.

In late 1990 the Social Democratic leaders collapsed under the pressure. Since then, under both right-wing and Social-Democratic governments, unemployment has rocketed — it reached 9% by October 1993, and has been around that level or higher ever since — and cuts in welfare have become routine, mainstream debate being limited to argument about the scale and speed of those cuts.

The *Financial Times* commented at the time (29 October 1990) that, "the international money markets have become the arbiters of Sweden's future, not the Social Democratic ideologues," and an academic study concluded that, "globalisation... would inevitably have left the Swedish model in ruins, whatever the action of the SAP [social-democrats]... Sweden's large export companies are now in a position where they are virtually able to 'blackmail' the Swedish government."<sup>5</sup>

Many social-democratic politicians accept this logic and argue that the best they can now do is to "civilise" the inexorable processes of "global capital". Some look to pressure on existing international-capitalist structures (like the European Union) or proposals for new ones as the proper new form of politics, to replace the old processes of reform through individual states. Yet other social-reform advocates argue for directly combatting globalisation in order to return to an (often idealised) past of more nationally or locally based economics and politics<sup>6</sup>.

More radical writers see globalisation as creating a "post-imperialist" epoch where working-class political choices are posed more sharply as revolutionary internationalism or nothing: to be concerned for national welfare provision, anti-imperialism, or national liberation is to hanker after a lost past<sup>7</sup>.

Other analysts have argued that to see globalisation as creating a completely new world of "giant firms and dwarf states"<sup>8</sup> is so exaggerated as to be false<sup>9</sup>. They insist that states still have autonomous weight; some of them look to the highly state-regulated — and, until late 1997, successful — economies of East Asia as models which the left can critically adapt for asserting priorities which cut across those generated by the free play of global markets.

None of these responses seems to me fully adequate — and nor does another one current on the left, which is to dismiss all talk of globalisation as irrelevant hype. In a second article, I will propose a new way of assessing and interpreting the changes in the shape of capitalism since the early 1980s, and suggest some political conclusions.



# THE COVER STORY

## Notes:

- 1 Doug Henwood, Antiglobalization, *Left Business Observer* 71, January 1996.
- 2 Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* p.76, quoting Dunning.
- 3 For the pioneering analysis of "the New International Division of Labour" see Frobel, *et al*, The New International Division of Labour.
- 4 An (American) management consultant quoted in a *Financial Times* survey on The Global Company reckons that, "outside a handful of companies... between a dozen and twenty worldwide... companies are very German, or very British, or very American... American companies... assume globalisation means Americanising the world. Others don't have that arrogance..." *Financial Times*, 8 October 1997.
- 5 Martin Thomas, The Economics of the New Depression, *Workers' Liberty* no 34.
- 6 OECD, International Capital Markets Statistics 1950-1995, table 1.
- 7 Philip Golub, L'incontrollable Contagion de la Crise Financiere Asiatique: un Tournant dans L'histoire de la Globalisation, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 1998.
- 8 Boyer and Drache; see also David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernism* on the possible "cooling of the casino economy".
- 9 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York*, p.325, 329. To the extent that Sassen is right, there are two implications for the left. One, the emergence of a "new labour aristocracy". Two, that left groups focusing their activity (as we do) in big city centres are orienting almost exclusively to service workers, missing out on factory workers increasingly sited in smaller towns and outer suburbs.
- 10 For example, the phenomenon of unprecedentedly high real interest rates since the early 1980s, described and analysed in this magazine last year (Martin Thomas, The New Rules of Big Money, *Workers' Liberty* No 31) has already "cooled down" a lot.
- 11 Harvey, p.292, 306. Alain Gresh notes (Les Aleas de L'internationalisme, *Le Monde Diplomatique* May 1998) that, "at the very moment when globalisation triumphs, when the means of communication put us in real-time contact with every point on the planet... the space given to 'foreign affairs' in the media is diminishing... Every study shows that in Paris as in Washington, in London as in Madrid, television and the press have markedly reduced their coverage of international problems." Given the elusiveness of hard measurable fact in this area, descriptions of cultural development can stress the "global village" (a fashionable idea as long ago as the 1960s, from Marshall McLuhan) or the growth of particularism, "information overload" or "dumbing down".
- 12 Martin Thomas, Social Democracy in the 1990s, *Workers' Liberty* No. 31.
- 13 The Multilateral Agreement on Investment now under international discussion is designed to write this state of affairs into international law. Under the draft Agreement, multinational companies would be able to claim damages from states for any policy which harmed their profit-making (Lori Wallach, Le Nouveau Manifeste du Capitalisme Mondial, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 1998).
- 14 Harvey, p.303.
- 15 Stuart Wilks, "Class Compromise and the International Economy: the Rise and Fall of Swedish Social Democracy, *Capital and Class* spring 1996 p.94, 107.
- 16 Mark Latham makes the first choice explicit in the title of his book *Civilising Global Capital*. Hirst and Thompson, "present an argument" so they themselves say in *Globalisation in Question* (p.197), "against the idea that the international economy has become or is becoming 'globalised' in a radical way, but in their conclusions they orient mostly to the second choice (accepting that economic processes have deprived national politics of any grip, and looking to reform through international capitalist structures). The third choice (anti-globalist) represents the tone of much of the coverage in *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Ignacio Ramonet, for example, writes: "In face of the rise in power of global firms, the traditional counter-powers (state, parties, unions) seem more and more impotent. The main phenomenon of our epoch, globalisation, is not piloted by states. In face of the giant firms, the states more and more lose their prerogatives. Can citizens tolerate this new type of global coup d'etat?" (June 1998). Doug Henwood in his article quoted above (note 1) criticises, "populist screeds, left and right" in the USA on the same sort of "anti-globalist" lines.
- 17 I take this to be the logic of the book by Becker and others, though maybe I misunderstand or exaggerate.
- 18 This is the title of Ramonet's anti-globalisation editorial in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1998.
- 19 In different ways, Weiss and Hobson (*States and Economic Development*), Hirst and Thompson, and David Gordon (The Global Economy, *New Left Review* 168) all argue this point. Tom Bramble, Globalisation, Unions, and the Demise of the Labourist Project, *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 38, criticises the orientation to the model of East Asian states which he sees in Weiss and Hobson.

<p><b>Trade</b></p>	<p><i>World trade has grown much faster than output since 1990, increasingly trade in manufactured goods. Trade grew relatively slowly in the 1970s and 1980s, but also expanded much faster than output over the long stretch from 1948 to 1973. Trade barriers and tariffs have generally been reduced. China, the USSR and Eastern Europe have been opened up for world trade.</i></p>	<p>The ratio of trade to total output for each of the USA, Japan, and the EU (considered as a unit) is still low. In 1913 the world ratio of trade to output was higher than it is now. Increase in the economic importance of services like education and communications, and relative decrease in the importance of bulk raw materials, limits the rise of the ratio of trade to output.</p>
<p><b>Production</b></p>	<p><i>Foreign direct investment has grown since the late 1980s, including in some Third World countries. Although multinational capitalist companies go back to 16th century, the largest 300 multinationals account for 70% of global foreign direct investment.<sup>2</sup> Global companies now sell, plan and locate production on a global market-space.<sup>1</sup></i></p>	<p>Globalised production in, for example, cars and electronics, is still a small part of world output. Almost all multinationals still have a distinct national base<sup>1</sup>. Lower transport costs, increased use of sub-contractors, "just-in-time" supply policies, and heavy investment in automation, make big manufacturing companies less footloose than they seem. Cheaper and quicker transport and communications, and rapid development of new technologies, make it harder for multinationals to dominate particular sectors as they used to. (Examples: Ford in the European car industry, IBM in computers.)<sup>5</sup></p>
<p><b>Finance</b></p>	<p><i>Funds raised through bonds and bank loans have increased from \$3 billion in 1965 to \$40.5 billion in 1975, \$260 billion in 1985, and \$832 billion in 1995<sup>6</sup>. Foreign-exchange deals multiplied 25 times from 1980 to 1993, and are now about \$1.5 trillion a day<sup>7</sup>.</i></p>	<p>International long-term flows of capital were proportionately larger before 1914. The vast ballooning of foreign-exchange dealing is due to floating exchange rates and abolition of exchange controls — particular political decisions which could be reversed<sup>8</sup>.</p>
<p><b>Transport &amp; communications</b></p>	<p><i>International air and sea cargo and travel costs have fallen sharply. With communication satellites, faxes, the Internet, etc., large amounts of information can be transmitted across world instantaneously</i></p>	<p>Much of the drop in costs happened in a previous era; for example, air transport costs fell 85% between 1945 and 1980, ocean freight charges 70% between 1945 and 1960.</p>
<p><b>Cities</b></p>	<p><i>Global companies can spread their production sites across the world but need headquarters — and financial, legal, accounting, and other services — in a few control centres. Thus, "the weight of economic activity has shifted from production places, such as Detroit and Manchester, to centres of finance and highly specialised services [New York, London, Tokyo]." Those centres, with service industries requiring both highly-skilled information workers and a mass of ancillary labour, produce a, "massive expansion of a new high-income stratum alongside growing urban poverty."<sup>9</sup> Since a very rapidly-increasing proportion of the world's people live in cities, such trends loom large. A division between "core" and "periphery" (casual, part-time, subcontracted) workers is also developing in manufacturing and other services.</i></p>	<p>Truly global companies are still a relatively small part of world capitalism, and the much higher profile of finance may be a product of particular political circumstances rather than inexorable long-term economic trends.<sup>10</sup></p>
<p><b>Culture</b></p>	<p>The vastly speeded-up and increased global transmission of images on TV, the expansion of global marketing, the development of mass international air travel, and competition between states and cities to attract the global companies, make for a kaleidoscopic world culture where the desperate desire to differentiate continuously reproduces "serial monotony" (everyone striving for the same sort of novelty). In response, "the religious revival... localism and nationalism have become stronger... because of the quest for security... in the midst of all the shifting."<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>This argument may link political and cultural developments too "deterministically" to modern microelectronic technology, when in fact that technology contains many possibilities, and the actual development is heavily shaped by particular working class defeats, and by the collapse of Stalinism.</p>

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## DIARY

OF  
AN  
RMT  
ACTIVIST



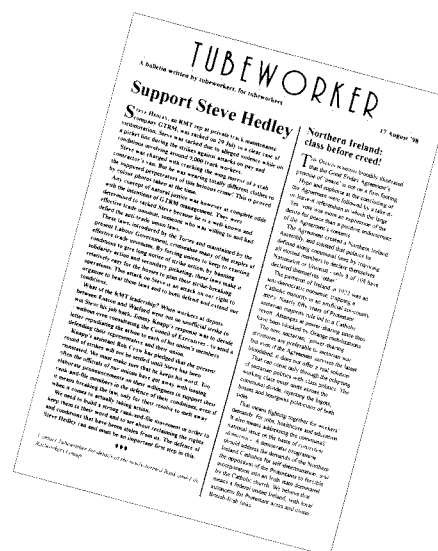
# Defending Steve Hedley

**S**TEVE Hedley, an RMT representative at private track maintenance firm GTRM, was sacked on 29 July in a clear case of victimisation. He was sacked due to alleged violence while on a picket line during strikes against attacks on pay and conditions involving around 9000 rail maintenance workers.

Steve was charged with cracking the wing mirror of a scab contractor's van. This van had driven at the picket line without stopping. The description given by the driver of the van was of someone wearing totally different clothes to those Steve was wearing at the time, as proven by colour photos taken of the picket line. Steve was also accused of crossing the track without a high visibility vest, and of intimidating someone (an ex-bodyguard!). None of these charges stood up but GTRM were determined to sack Steve anyway because he is a well known trade union activist, an effective rep, and someone who was willing to defy the anti-union laws. Steve's appeal against his sacking was unsuccessful, lasting only 15 minutes.

When workers at depots between Euston and Watford went out on unofficial strike to win Steve's job back, Jimmy Knapp sent a letter to every GTRM RMT member repudiating their action. He did this in a flagrant abuse of the union's democracy, without consulting the Council of Executives, which was sitting at the time.

A support group has been set up to help the fight to win Steve's job back. Meetings are happening every week with attendance of 40 plus people from various labour movement organisations in London. Supporters have been leafletting both workers and the public, which is very important given a ballot is being held at Euston and planned ballots at depots up the line. Jimmy Knapp has come up trumps again, outrageously sending a letter to all RMT branches denouncing the support group and saying that RMT branches should not send money to it. This is in a situation where workers who have taken 17 days of official strike action have had *no* money



*Tubeworker*, produced by tubeworker members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and distributed to train and station staff across London.

from the official RMT hardship fund. Knapp has made it quite clear that he does not want to see rank and file organisation to defend Steve. The support group has been giving money to strikers facing financial hardship and producing publicity in support of Steve.

Steve is waiting for an Industrial Tribunal. However even if he is found to have been unfairly dismissed GTRM will not be obliged to give him his job back. The only way Steve will win reinstatement is through industrial action. RMT Assistant General Secretary Bob Crow has stated that the dispute with GTRM will not be settled until Steve has been reinstated. We need to make sure that he keeps his word.

Out of the campaign to defend Steve Hedley a Rank and File Railworkers group has been formed. This is an important step in a situation where the union bureaucrats have shown themselves willing to stamp on every attempt at rank and file mobilisation. We can't rely on the bureaucrats, we need rank and file organisation to win back Steve's job and to continue the fight to defend pay and conditions in all sections of the railway industry.

H.

# What price learning?

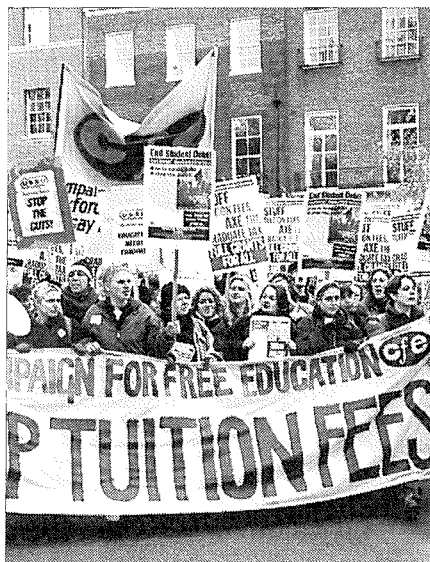
**W**ORKING CLASS people will pay the price this autumn as the cost of a university degree rises to around £15,000. This is the reality of New Britain.

Further and higher education, like the rest of the welfare state, are appallingly underfunded. The much-trumpeted Blairite "solution" of university tuition fees will be matched by equivalent cuts in college budgets. That means fewer books, more overcrowding, lower quality education. Meanwhile the rich and big business get tax cuts.

Fees mean that hard-up students will be forced to hunt round for those bargain-basement courses which are most likely to provide a quick return in the form of vocational qualifications — a job at the end. That will pay the bills. Politics or Philosophy probably won't.

Tuition fees and the scrapping of grants will force yet more students into working — usually in low-paid McJobs — during term-time, cramping their lives and damaging their ability to study. Participation in sport, drama and other horizon-broadening, energising social activity will be limited to those who can afford the leisure time. Instead of living independent lives, more students will stay for longer reliant on their parents.

New Labour's new higher education system is not worthy of the name. Education at its best is a force for human growth, emancipation and liberation. It enables people to learn about the world around them, about science, nature, art, literature; about ideas and how to turn ideas into reality. That — in part — is why in so many radical movements in history students have played a vitally progressive role. Turning education into



an unalloyed, undiluted commodity undermines the potential for building that sort of movement.

Socialists especially recognise the importance of education in the fight for human liberation. We know that unless workers and students learn the lessons of history, the lessons of the Russian Revolution and its defeat by Stalinism, of the Paris Commune, of May '68, of the current workers' struggles in South-East Asia, then we will never defeat the ruling class. We must not allow the bourgeoisie to keep education to themselves, for higher education to be the privilege of an elite. But if the Government wins the battle to introduce tuition fees and scrap student grants, that is what will happen.

Student supporters of *Workers' Liberty* are working to revitalise the student movement, to build campaigns capable of taking on the Government.

The Campaign for Free Education

(CFE), in which *Workers' Liberty* students have played a leading role in the three and a half years since its launch, has initiated a campaign for non-payment of fees: Can't Pay, Won't Pay. In alliance with other free education campaigns, it has called a national demonstration against tuition fees and the scrapping of student grants for November 18.

To defeat the Government, we will need a mass campaign of activity in colleges around the country: pickets, demonstrations, occupations, direct action. We will need unity amongst all those who want to defeat free and progressive education.

Students across the country must get involved in this action if it is to work. Go to your MP's surgery and demand to be seen. Take some placards. Occupy the place. Come on the national demonstration. Organise one locally. Take responsibility for your future — and the future of education.

Student unions should be taking this responsibility. They should be outgoing, campaigning organisations: the students united to defend our interests and fight for something better. But the legacy of Thatcherism and the sell-out Blairite leadership of the National Union of Students have left many student unions in the hands of a right-wing bureaucracy. These people — whose influence in NUS is increasing — run our unions as businesses. Their priorities are cheap beer, sports and shops. Not for them any campaigning which might damage "their" profits.

The campaign against tuition fees and to save student grants has the potential to mobilise tens of thousands of students in action against the Government. It also has the potential to turn around our own student unions to representing and fighting for students, rather than being the lead weight against campaigning so many of them now are.

Students this autumn must tell Tony Blair that we will not stand for the Government's attacks on our right to education. We must unite with all those others who demand better from New Labour in our fight for education, free and equal.

*Cath Fletcher*

● Contact the Campaign for Free Education by calling 0958 556756, e-mailing [cfe@gn.apc.org](mailto:cfe@gn.apc.org), or writing to CFE, PO Box 22615, London N4 1WT

## What is Workers' Liberty?

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty organises to fight the class struggle on all levels — trade-union and social battles, politics, and the combat of ideas. We are active in workplaces, in trade unions, in the Labour Party, in single-issue campaigns, in student unions, and in debates and discussions on the left, aiming to integrate all these activities into a coherent effort for socialism.

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

If you want to know more about the Alliance for Workers' Liberty write to: PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, phone 0171-207 3997. or e-mail [awl@gn.apc.org](mailto:awl@gn.apc.org).

# Ireland: peace and internment

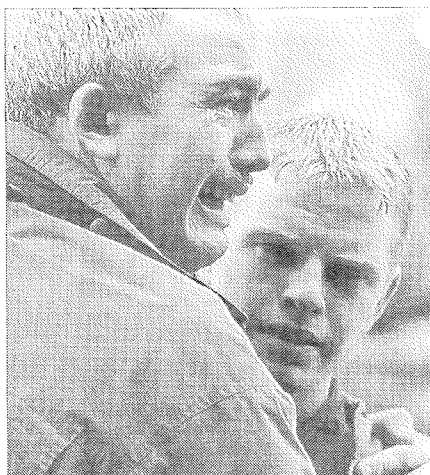
**T**HE "Real IRA" bomb which killed 28 people in Omagh last month has had the effect of a deliberate explosion used by firefighters to control a forest fire. It seems to have blown out the Northern Irish war. Apart from the militarists associated with Republican Sinn Fein all the Republican groups are now on ceasefire.

**E**FFECTIVE internment — people can be locked up for "membership of an illegal organisation" on the say-so of a policeman — is being introduced in both the 26 Counties and in Britain.

This came five weeks after Orange Paramilitaries did similar job of self-destruction when they burned to death three children on the night of 11 July. The Orange forces gathering at Drumcree to confront the forces of the state the next day, melted away. Before that terrible event it looked as if nothing could stop Orangeists, some of them armed, fighting the RUC and British soldiers at Drumcree. Orange Protestant dead at the hands of the police or the British Army would have generated intense pressure on David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party and possibly defections from Trimble to the Paisleyites.

In both incidents the *moral advantage of the last atrocity* worked powerfully for Dublin and London and the advocates of the Good Friday Agreement. State experts have studied the political effect of such things since the early 1970s. In July 1972 Operation Motorman, the reoccupation of the barricaded off Catholic ghettos, was made very much easier by Bloody Friday in Belfast, when people were blown to bits by a bomb because a warning went wrong. It is not necessary to assume cold-blooded state murder. "Accidents" happen: the fact that governments know how to use them is not evidence of authorship. Yet had the three children not died as and when they did, the situation in Northern Ireland would probably be radically different now. The situation remains volatile: a situation that has changed so dramatically in one direction may change back again.

The intention and potential of the paramilitaries are hard to judge because now they are intensely concerned to behave in a way that gets their prisoners out of jail. One of the most significant things in the days before 12 July was that rank and file members of Orange paramilitary organisations which remained officially on ceasefire — UDA and UVF — all across the province were engaged in open conflict with the RUC. The future of the Agreement is in the hands of the UVF's



political wing, the PUP, which holds the balance of the Orange forces in the newly elected Assembly. There, nearly 50% of Unionists oppose the Good Friday Agreement.

Most people voted in the referendum for what the politicians promised and for what they hoped was in the deal, or would come out of it. 71% voted Yes. But that figure was misleading. The whole idea of there being one Northern Ireland is misleading: there are still two Northern Irelands. There are always two Northern Ireland elections, one in each "community". And there were two referendums and two elections for the Assembly.

Things were arranged so that communal distinctions in the referendum were hidden. There was no public official breakdown of the vote in terms of the two sides. Yet the gap in the communities between Yes and No voting was marked. Overwhelming support for the Agreement from Catholics was countered on the Protestant side by a very big No.

The 25 June elections to the Assembly which must implement the Agreement brought out the hard facts of the Protestant-Unionist, Catholic-Nationalist division hidden by the authorities in the published figures for Yes and No in the referendum.

Of the 58 Unionist members of the 108 member Assembly, 28 are outright opponents of the Agreement (20 Paisleyites; 5 UK Unionists, who want full integration of Northern Ireland into Britain, and 3 independents) and 30 supporters (28 Trimble Unionists and 2 PUP, the political front of the UVF) of the Good Friday "settlement".

Everything must work by dual consent, a majority in both Catholic and Protestant blocs in the Assembly or an overall cross-community majority of 60% in which 40% from each communal bloc concurs. For purposes of the weighted and communal voting system mem-

bers of the Assembly are required to declare themselves Unionist, Nationalist or "other".

Those "Paisleyite" 28 Assembly members are proportionately 7:7.5 of Protestant Unionists in the Assembly (48.25 - 51.75%). They reflect a minority roughly the numerical equivalent of the Catholic minority at the beginning of the Troubles. The all-important fact is that in the assembly elections, division amongst self-designated Protestant-Unionists cut roughly down the middle, with only a thin majority backing the Good Friday Agreement.

A majority of the Trimble party's Westminster MPs opposed the Agreement. The party leaders were able to ensure that none of them stood for the Assembly; but amongst the 28 UUP members in the Assembly, there are a number who are said to be likely to go into opposition — that is, to add their number to the 28 — if Trimble sits in a Six Counties Executive in which SF is represented without the IRA having "decommissioned" its weaponry.

The real strength of the support for the Agreement is Catholic-Nationalist support. Sinn Fein, which is now publicly a party that has broken with "republicanism" and accepted Partition, won 18 seats, the Catholic-Nationalist SDLP 24. From now on, if it continues on its present course, and if it should turn out that the Catholics in Northern Ireland do not in a relatively short time become the majority — that is if the present demographic trends do not continue — a republican united Ireland will, for Sinn Fein, be what talk of socialism and Clause 4, etc., was for old-style social democratic parties, a distant nominal goal that has little bearing on what the party does on a day-to-day basis. In the pro-Agreement camp in the Assembly the Catholic-Nationalist parties — SDLP and SF — together have 42 seats to the UUP's and PUP's 30. Here, one side's move on to a United Ireland is the other's copper-fastening of the union with Britain.

There are massive and perhaps irresolvable contradictions amongst the supporters of the Agreement in the Assembly, specifically between the Trimble Unionists (UUP) and Sinn Fein. They have radically different interpretations of what it means.

If the war is over, the pro-Good Friday people have not yet won the peace. With the Unionists split 28/30, nothing can be taken for granted. The political reason why they have introduced effective internment is probably not unconnected with that situation. It should be opposed in every way the labour movement can oppose it.

Sean Matgamna

# Should socialists stand against Labour?

By John Nihill

HOW do things stand now between the trade unions and New Labour? The trade unions still have 50% of the vote at Labour Party Conference; they have 20% of the places on Labour's National Executive Committee; 200 MPs, a majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, are members of the trade union group of MPs. (The trade unions used to have 70% of the votes at conference, and before that 90%.)

But against this seeming strength of the unions in New Labour stands the following: both conference and the NEC have lost their old role, which was often only a nominal role, in making Party policy. Policy is — nominally — now made by a new body, the National Policy Committee, on which the Cabinet has 50% of places, the NEC 50% and the leader the casting vote. In practice, this means that the Cabinet controls the Labour Party. It is a logical and for them necessary extension of the rigid control which the Government exercises over the MPs. Parliament is rigidly subordinate to government and, if the Party was not to make life impossible for the MPs, the Party too had to be subordinate to government. Democracy is invisible.

The Blairites think they have thus solved the historic dilemma of Labour governments. Running the capitalist system according to its own needs, Labour governments have mostly disappointed the hopes and expectations of their supporters. Repeatedly they have come into conflict with their own party.

To avoid this, New Labour's leaders have gone a considerable way towards abolishing the Labour Party! Blair towers above the Party. He was elected by "One Member, One Vote" — the first Labour leader to be so elected — and he can confront the party structures as an independent power. Local MPs, also selected by OMOV, can do the same and will be backed by the all-powerful Party centre at Millbank Towers.

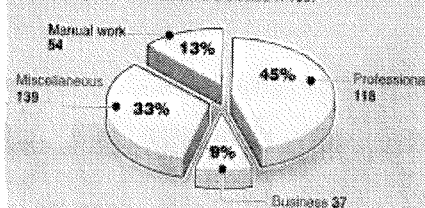
The proportion of New Labour MPs from any sort of working class or trade union background is now infinitesimal. MPs tend to be lawyers, journalists or lecturers. There has been a big influx of women into Parliament, but not of working class women. Trade union financing continues. But there is much capitalist money too, for the Leader's Office, from the likes of Bernie Ecclestone.

Old Labour trade union relationships exist within a network of new structures. The unions are effectively, though not definitely, imprisoned in these structures. When Augustus Caesar founded the Roman Imperial monarchy, he incorporated many of the forms and names of the subverted Republic — the Emperor was only the "first" of the senators, etc — but it was actually a new system. So it is with New Labour.

## "Union fights for working class MPs"

### Labour old jobs

Former occupations of Labour MPs elected in 1997



The AEEU's decision to set up a £1 million fighting fund to get working-class Labour candidates is a step in the right direction but needs to be linked to a campaign for union politics against Blair. *Guardian* 2.9.98

It is too soon to see it as an *irreversible* victory for those whose aim it is to destroy the Labour Party and replace it with something like the US Democratic Party. But they are in control; the new structures and relationships embody their project.

After the left's "half a revolution" in 1979 and early '80s the right slowly won back control: what chance is there that the labour movement — the trade unions — can do the same sort of thing with New Labour? What might happen if the trade unions — that is the trade union leaders — were to try and exert themselves inside the new structures against the New Labour establishment? Is this conceivable?

In fact the unions could still have the possibility of destabilising the not-quite-set new structures. They could try to assert the primacy of working class interests in the Labour Party. However, unless the Blairites who now have the Party by the throat were to unexpectedly collapse, it is highly improbable that the trade unions and constituency Labour Parties could take back the Labour Party. The best they could hope to do would be to split it, hiving off the Blairites.

A movement of Labour resurgence, based on the unions, could still hope to rally a big proportion of the forces now grouped around the Labour Party. There is a precedent, of sorts. In 1931, the labour movement hived off its old leaders — McDonald, Snowden, JH Thomas — who, a minority, formed the National Labour Party and went into coalition with Tories and Liberals. The Labour Party was devastated at the 1931 election, but without that split the Labour Party would have been finished.

Plainly a "1931" development — though a majority of the MPs would probably hive off —

would be preferable to a consolidation of Blairism and the end of mass working class politics in Britain for the calculable future. Unless they exert themselves, the trade unions will remain prisoners of the neo-liberals and Christian Democrats who control New Labour.

In this situation the central thing for socialists is to bring *class* back to centre stage in politics. If, at the end of the day, the labour movement in politics is not striving for the creation of a workers' government — a government that will do for the working class what Tory governments have done and what Blair's Government now does for the bourgeoisie — then the labour movement in politics has no independent role to play. It will only be the electoral drudge and pack horse of middle class careerists. The need for a workers' government has to be explained and propagandised for in the labour movement today.

Rank-and-file trade unionists locally and nationally need to be organised to secure working class representation in Parliament. Where workers are an almost extinct species in the PLP, worker-only shortlists might make sense in certain areas.

In assessing what is new, it is important not to idealise the past of the Labour Party. Lenin at the 2nd World Congress of the Communist International in 1920 rightly defined the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party". It has never been anything else. It was a bourgeois workers' party when, under pressure from the working class, it brought in elements of "the political economy of the working class" (the expression is Karl Marx's, describing the Ten Hour Bill to limit the working day), the welfare state.

The famous Clause Four of the party constitution, committing the party to an ill-defined socialism, had no effect on what the party in government did. Nevertheless, there were open valves between the trade unions and the Labour Parties, locally and nationally. Through these valves, membership and influence, as well as finance, flowed.

Under Blair, there has been an enormous tipping of the balance towards the bourgeois pole of the bourgeois workers' party. The unions remain in the structures and they continue as financiers of the party. But New Labour has blocked up nearly all the old channels of working class political self-expression. Its Labour and trade union connections function only to allow it more plausibly to occupy the space working class politics should occupy. New Labour now functions entirely as a block on working class politics.

In the past socialists said: "Vote Labour and fight". What did it mean? How did it differ from "Vote Tory and fight"? Many workers in the '60s



did “vote Tory and fight” — in industry. What was different about Labour was that the fight was also waged within the structures of the labour movement, including the Labour Party. Socialists in the Labour Party fought to take forward the broad working class movement, and in the first place trade union activists, beyond Labourism on the basis of their own experience.

Labour as a right wing and trade union-dominated party was a brake on the working class — but it worked flexibly and by way of a network of labour movement consent. It had structures that might have allowed the bedrock labour movement to shed its old reformist skin. Central to the Blair project is the driving of the working class movement out of politics. With almost all channels blocked to working class involvement and participation, New Labour is not a possible vehicle for working class politics, but a barrier raised against politics for the labour movement. The unions remain affiliated but New Labour is not too far from what the Liberal Party in Britain was until the end of World War One, and the Democratic Party in America is today.

The fundamental strategic concern of socialists in this situation is to argue within the trade unions for the reintroduction of class into British politics wherever it is possible to overcome the stifling.

The final triumph of Blairism would mark an historic defeat for the Labour Party. To accept the definitive victory of Blairism prematurely, while there is still the possibility of turning the trade unions — in the first place the rank and file — towards a struggle for class politics would be desertion. It would, for socialists, be to indulge in the most profound and debilitating sectism. Socialists who do not see their role as that of those who point the way forward for the broad labour movement are sectarians, not Marxists.

Against this background what if any role can the standing of independent Labour and socialist candidates against New Labour in elections have? Is it a matter of principle, as some would argue, not to stand against what is still, just about, definable as the trade union party?

It was *never* a matter of principle amongst Marxists not to stand against the Labour Party. There were, however, massive practical reasons against it, not least the comparatively open structures of the Labour Party and the genuinely open-valve relationship with the unions. It is the choking off of these open valves that puts the question of candidates in a new light. So long as *most workers* continue to see Labour as their party an anti-Labour candidacy makes sense only as an occasion to make propaganda for socialism. Such propaganda in the election puts an additional hurdle in its own path, requiring workers to break with the party they consider their own. For so long as the open structures existed, so long as living trade union based working class politics could exist in and

through the Labour Party, then only in very special circumstances could it make sense to stand against Labour. Now that Labour increasingly stands as an absolute block on working class and socialist politics, things are becoming different.

To counterpose a little bit of socialist propaganda to the labour movement in politics — a labour movement and Labour Party within which one could make such propaganda most fruitfully — did not make sense. To continue to forgo socialist propaganda in elections in deference to the monopoly of the anti-socialist and anti-working class Blair party is increasingly to boycott our own politics and our own proper, working class concerns.

The experience of the socialist left in elections over the last decade has not been one to encourage casual electoralism. In Liverpool, we had sections of the old Militant-led Labour Party bureaucracy, people who had recently controlled the council and made jackasses of themselves, standing against the Labour Party. In the Walton by-election they pretended to be the Labour Party, made timid reformist propaganda in the hope of maximising the vote, and, trailing Militant's and Derek Hatton's record in the Liverpool council behind them, like tin cans tied to a cat's tail, they did very badly. The Socialist Labour Party, walking out of the Labour Party on a whim of Arthur Scargill's and grouping together a rag tag and bobtail of sectarians and reformists, and itinerant socialists looking for lodgings, stood against Blair's party in the last election. With few exceptions they too did very badly.

Sections of the left are now beginning to make a fetish of small scale electoralism. Toy-town Bolshevism is being supplemented by toytown electioneering. Nothing can be more foolish. Socialists need flexible tactics to relate to the crisis of working class representation.

We need to work where possible within the Blairite Labour Party and against it and outside it. Standing in elections will for the little groups on the left, including the Socialist Worker's Party, be only a small part of what must be done in the foreseeable future. If it is counterposed in the period ahead to work to bring the question of class centre stage in politics by a fight for the representation of the trade unions in Parliament, then it will be only the soft electoralist face of the old debilitating left sectarians.

In the unions we should focus on making the unions fight for union policy against the Labour Government. That means fighting the union leaders. That should include both mass action — strikes, demonstrations, etc., and the use of the unions' potential powers within the new LP structures. Particular pressure should be put on union-sponsored MPs to defend union policies and amend legislation along those lines. Key focusses would be the legal right to strike and engage in union activity without fear of the sack. Fundamentally, we need to build rank

and file trade union groups which combine the fight for labour representation in politics with the fight to democratise the trade unions and save them from the largely unaccountable no-fight leaders who have surrendered the political labour movement to Blair.

Standing in elections will logically lead to calls for trade unions disaffiliating from the Labour Party. That sounds radical, but right now it is an acceptance of utter defeat: we should not do that, but campaign to get the unions within the structures of New Labour to fight for class politics. Not to do that is to throw in the towel in the fight against Blairism — with self-mocking radical slogans scrawled on it.

The key question for work in the constituency Labour Parties is the removal of Blairite MPs, i.e., a serious fight for their de-selection and working class candidates instead. Given the central control in the Party, the Blairites will make victory in such a fight practically impossible. But if pursued properly and with the aim of mobilising the local working class base of the Party it would provide a broader basis for an independent electoral challenge to sitting Blairites than could normally be produced simply by organising the already non-Labour left.

In a number of constituencies in the 1997 General Election, there was more than one socialist candidate. The left will have to find ways of uniting its efforts — that is of uniting itself — before it can mount effective socialist propaganda challenges to New Labour in local and Parliamentary elections. A combination of standing united left candidates in selected elections and continued work, as above, in the Labour Party is what we need.

Finally, it is useful to look back at how things were done 100 years ago, when the Liberals dominated the working class politically and small socialist organisations, like Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party and the Marxist Socialist Democratic Federation, conducted electoral guerrilla war against Liberals and Tories. Socialists would stand to make propaganda — principally in local government elections. Thus they built up support. Parliamentary candidacies were rarer. Socialist groups would sometimes vie for the right to stand in a particular seat, but there would in the election be a rallying behind the socialist candidate. These groups were not free of destructive rivalry, but they lived in a different world from today's inter-warring left. Above all they had — all of them in varying degrees — a common basic idea; working class politics, which they pushed in local, and occasionally Parliamentary, elections. They were building a movement — and in the unions, which mostly backed the Liberals, they competed with the Liberal Party for the allegiance of the trade unionists. Any socialist electoralism now that does not do that — and what it involves is outlined above — will be a more or less noisy irrelevance to what needs to be done.



# Afghanistan: the countryside's revenge

By Mark Osborn

**"I**LIVED in Kabul for two years as a child, right before the Russians invaded in 1979," writes journalist Carla Power, "I remember it as an ochre city smelling of roses, wood smoke and sewage. Parakeets sang in the bazaars, and kids flew bright pink and green paper kites from the dusty hills ringing the city."

Not anymore. Much of Kabul is in ruins and the Islamic Taliban rulers have banned singing birds. They've banned kites too.

Invite a foreigner over for tea? Take a friend's photograph? Then Taliban edicts have been broken; it is sometimes difficult to know what not to do, as the edicts change week by week.

Television and music are banned. TV sets and video recorders are displayed on telegraph poles. Police checkpoints are draped with streamers — the magnetic tape from seized cassettes.

Religious police from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice carry whips made of leather or electrical cable. These religious enforcers roar around Kabul in jeeps and trucks — as they approach men pluck at their beards to prove they are the required length. The Taliban demand each man has a beard at least the length of a fist.

But the symbol of the Islamic militias war against Kabul's godlessness is the Taliban's war against women. Women are banned from almost all work and must wear the all-covering veil, the burka. Girls over eight are forbidden to attend schools.

One of the most telling stories comes from a foreign aid worker who witnessed a discussion about medical treatment for women. A group of Taliban leaders had the role of a gynaecologist explained to them. Their reaction? To giggle behind their hands, embarrassed like little boys. These are simple country people, organised into a political force, armed to the teeth and hardened after many years of fighting.

Two years after overrunning the capital Kabul the Taliban control most of Afghanistan. How have such people come to power in Afghanistan at the end of the twentieth century?

Afghanistan has been traumatised by a series of wars which began slightly more than twenty years ago, in April 1978. In that month an air force and army coup brought down the Daud government, which itself had been put in place by a previous coup five years earlier.

The new government declared itself devoutly Muslim and insisted it was not

"Communist" (ie pro-USSR) but was simply nationalist, concerned to develop the country.

Indeed, the key question was: who would bring

Afghanistan in the twentieth century? The country, which until 1973 had been ruled by a monarchy, had not even a single railway line. Only

one in ten males were literate, and the rate for women was even worse. There were one or two million nomads among a population of perhaps 16 million.

There was a small working class in Kabul. But in the countryside, where more than 85% of the people lived, 5% of the landowners owned nearly half the land. Afghanistan had never been knitted together by a national economy. There existed over twenty ethnic groups, and they had a long tradition of resistance to central authority.

Since the mid-1950s the USSR had developed Afghanistan as a client state, providing aid and training (and influencing) the officer corps of the armed forces. The officers — a part of Afghanistan influenced by the modern world — saw a "Russian road" for Afghan development — using the state to build the economy up and force social progress.

Many of the army and air force officers were recruited to the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a pro-USSR party: a sort of "communist" party. When the coup took place in 1978 the PDP — this small, otherwise isolated organisation with possibly as few as 2,000 members - became the government party.

The PDP decreed an end to usury and the cancellation of peasant debts; they decreed moves towards equality for women; they legislated land reform. But they could not carry their programme out.

*Workers' Action* (a forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) explained: "Everywhere and in everything [the government] proved to have neither popular support, nor, alternatively, the strength and resources to manipulate from the top and to wean peo-



The Taliban enforces strict code on hair length to stop the Satan "nesting" there

ple away from the age-old network of dependence on landlords, usurers and priests (often the same people). They had neither a banking system to offer instead of the system around the usurers, nor an agricultural supply system to carry through the land reform. Their efforts from on high alienated the people." (WA no. 182, magazine format, 1980).

While arguing against absurd fantasies of some of the revolutionary left (in particular the American Socialist Workers Party) that the coup was in fact a "revolution" *Workers' Action* spelt out a socialist attitude towards the PDP: "Afghan socialists would have had to give critical support to specific measures of the state capitalist [PDP] regime, but in no sense could have supported the regime as such. It would have been necessary to maintain class independence... and expose the brutal military-bureaucratic methods of the regime as both counter-productive in relation to the reforms and expressive of the class-character of the regime... Socialists would have directed their line of fire against the reaction and in that sense only would have 'supported' the PDP regime." (WA no. 166, 9 February, 1980)

In the first weeks after the April coup the government used napalm against its own villagers, making up to 400,000 people refugees. Pakistan, China and a number of Muslim states funded and armed the reactionary, countryside-based Islamic opposition to the PDP. The PDP turned in on itself, ripping itself apart in faction fights. Afghanistan became seriously destabilised. And at the end of December 1979 the Russians invaded to prop up a client regime and

to prevent a hostile government taking over on a southern border of the USSR.

The USSR made use of America's relative weakness after defeat in Vietnam, and the invasion broke the post-World War 2 stand-off — the USSR's invasion had breached the rules the Superpowers had played by for the previous 30 years. The US — alarmed — began massive funding, arming and political support for the reactionary Muslim opposition.

Shamefully most of the world's revolutionary left backed the Russian war of subjugation (beyond ourselves the exceptions were the French group Lutte Ouvriere and the British SWP). They did so using one or both of the following arguments:

1. That not to back the Russian occupation would mean a victory for the right-wing, US-backed, Muslim reactionaries and the massacre of PDP supporters;

2. That Russian society is post-capitalist, some form of workers' state, and the expansion of this state is to be welcomed. The Russians will force through 'progress' and build industry, creating a working class and so preparing the socialist future.

Polemicalising against Ted Grant's *Militant*, who backed the Russian war, *Workers' Action* (no. 182) responded: "it is impossible to work out a serious independent working class political assessment on the basis of yes or no to such gun-to-the-head questions as: do you want the right-wing Muslim reactionaries to triumph?..."

"In any situation where a large revolutionary working class movement does not exist, the gun-to-head appeal to responsibility, humanitarianism, and lesser evilism can almost always be counterposed to an independent working class political assessment..."

"If the Russians withdraw [there may be] a massacre of PDP supporters. That would be a tragedy. But it can not follow that because of this Marxist socialists should abandon their programmatic opposition to the expansion of the area under Kremlin control, or should abandon the idea that the consolidation of a Stalinist regime in Afghanistan would be a defeat for the Afghan working class..."

"We can not abandon independent working class politics for the lesser evil - the PDP..."

"[Militant influences workers to take up the role] of cheerleaders for the 'progressive' Stalinists in Afghanistan..."

"Militant insists that the proper role for socialist militants is to line up firmly with one of the international blocs..."

"Militant is supporting the implied 'promise' of nationalisations and agrarian reform to be carried out by a totalitarian state which has imposed itself by force, against the resistance of the peoples of Afghanistan... The Stalinist 'revolution' will

impose a savagely repressive regime, which will destroy and continually uproot any elements of a labour movement."

Militant's Alan Woods [now, like Ted Grant, in *Socialist Appeal*] argued that the opposition to the Russians were "'dark masses', sunk in the gloom of barbarism...The task of dragging the Afghan countryside out of the slough of primeval backwardness and into the 20th century would be formidable, even with the correct leadership... the Russian bureaucracy and their Afghan supporters are, in effect, carrying out the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution." (*Militant*, July 1980). For Woods the views of the Afghan people — or 'dark masses' — were more-or-less irrelevant. They were the subjects of history.

Our tendency, despite — at that time — holding to the "deformed and degenerated workers' states" theory had always defended the rights of workers to fight and organise, of dissidents to speak out in the Stalinist states, and of oppressed peoples to fight for national freedom against Stalinism. We asked: "Why should it not be what the majority of the peoples of Afghanistan want that occurs? Why can't this area wait until the majority of its population decides to fight for social change." In other words: backward peoples should have the right to self-determination too! People have the right not to be forcibly "dragged out of backwardness".

To the 'bloodbath if the Russians leave' argument we replied "if the Russians stay there will be (and is) a bloodbath." And truth is that in the period of Russian occupation, from Xmas 1979 to Gorbachev's tired, final withdrawal in 1989, the Russian war devastated the country without ever coming close to quashing the resistance. Military experts calculated that complete conquest would have required up to three times the 100,000 of troops that the USSR had committed.

Nevertheless, their brutal imperialist war of conquest against the Afghans left one million dead, 5 million refugees in neighbouring countries, and half the villages destroyed. They had used exactly the same 'pacification' techniques as the Americans employed ten years before in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos — napalm, indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations, crop burning, terror. Afghanistan was the USSR's Vietnam.

And just as the American's bombing and pulverisation of eastern Cambodia had directly led to the destruction of many of the existing structures of society, to militarisation and to chaos, and to the rise of the ultra-nationalist, racist, genocidal brand of Stalinism/Maoism, the Khmer Rouge, the Russian war bolstered and strengthened the most extreme, no-compromise wing of

the fundamentalists.

The Khmer Rouge were a rabid creation of the US, albeit a monster with roots in the local nationalist and in Stalinist traditions. The Taliban regime is a product of the Russian-made mayhem of the 1980s, but they too are shaped by the Afghan past and the global rise of Muslim fundamentalism.

As Gorbachev's army left Afghanistan the power of the Soviet ruling class, its hold on Eastern Europe, its standing in the world had withered and weakened. The Russians left their Afghan friends to face the consequences.

Our paper, *Socialist Organiser, Workers Action's* successor, commented on the situation: "When the overwhelming majority of the people of Afghanistan fought to drive out the Russians, they were entitled to the support of all socialists.

"Now that the Russians have gone, the question is posed differently. The question now is what attitude we take to a civil war in Afghanistan — a civil war likely to be in large part a war between the cities and the countryside, between the men and women of the towns, with their relatively modern outlook, and the viciously reactionary and medieval forces which have been the main organisers of the Afghan resistance to Russian imperialism. The question has to be posed like that, because no working class exists in Afghanistan strong enough to transform the situation." ('Afghanistan: defend the cities!', 22 February 1989.) The nature of the war had reverted to the period of 1978-9, before the Russian invasion.

The civil war between the regime the Russians had left in place and the fundamentalist militias lasted until 1992 giving way to intra-fundamentalists fighting. The Taliban over-ran the capital in 1996.

Now the Taliban rule over Kabul like an occupying force — the revenge of the countryside over the town, the revenge of the past over a brutal modernity.

**Afghanistan: USSR Troops Out!**

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# Blame the British ruling class!

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

LIKE everyone else whose human feelings are not blocked or numbed by national hatred or chauvinistic self-righteousness, you are horrified and angry over the IRA bomb in Warrington which exploded in a crowd of weekend shoppers and killed two children.

I understand those feelings, and I share them. So, evidently, do most Irish people, here and in the two parts of Ireland. Upwards of 20,000 people marched through Dublin last Sunday to condemn the IRA's bombing campaign.

What happened in Warrington was monstrous and unforgivable. The so-called Irish Republican Army, who think they are Irish patriots, are a disgrace to Ireland and to Irish Republicanism. That they now say, faced with a howling gale of outrage, that "they won't do it again" — in British cities — shows how far they are from coherence or sense.

Does the outcry against this killing of small children surprise them? Or did they think they could go on letting off bombs in crowded streets without things like this happening?

As *Socialist Organiser* has said more than once in the last few months, the miracle is that there has not been a massacre on the scale of the Birmingham pub bombs of 1974 or the Enniskillen Remembrance Day slaughter of Protestants/Unionists in 1987. Instead there was the "small" massacre of the children in Warrington.

Yet condemning a deed like Warrington is easy. It is even cheap. Northern Ireland Protestants cannot but reflect that most of those who condemn Warrington have been pretty blasé about numerous horrors in Northern Ireland, where over 100 children have died during the last 20-odd years. Northern Ireland Catholics and many of the Irish in this country will remember how little comment the killing of small Catholic children by police and army plastic or rubber bullets in Northern Ireland has evoked.

More needs to be said. If you'll let me, I want to say some of it.

I came to England as a child. As a working-class socialist, that is, an internationalist, I believe — and I have believed it all my life, from before the age of 16 — that I have more in common with you than I have with any member of the Irish boss class.

Still, I am Irish. I consider myself an Irish patriot and an Irish Republican — in the



older sense of "patriot", one who loves his own people, without hatred or animosity towards any other people; and the proper Irish (Wolfe Tone) sense of Republican, one who believes in uniting the peoples of Ireland in a democratic state free from outside control and from any form of oligarchic domination.

As an Irish patriot, my quarrel with the Provisional IRA is that they divide the people of Ireland.

Their military campaign is counter-productive and anti-Republican. "Success" for it could only mean sectarian civil war and repartition in Northern Ireland.

THE mass outrage and the choking angry sense of horror are real: but the campaign is being orchestrated and used. It is being used by the establishment in defence of the status quo in Northern Ireland, and in support of the idea that the status quo is the best thing possible.

It is not! The two dead children in Warrington are being used to sell a great lie. It is because the status quo is not livable for the people of Northern Ireland that the IRA thrives and the Orange sectarian assassins who have killed five people since the Warrington bomb find refuge in the Protestant community.

Read the following, which I take from an editorial in the *Sunday Express* (28 March).

*"Yesterday Irish Premier Albert Reynolds reacted to this new mood by calling for a renewed effort to find a political settlement in Northern Ireland. So far as it went, his reaction was welcome. But it is all so predictable.*

*"What is required now is not some great new hunt for some great new political initiative. There is only one solution to the current slaughter..."*

*"The entire pressure of both governments should instead be directed against the gunmen. They are the sworn enemy of both countries. They have no political justification whatsoever for their disgusting trade. They are driven by a blood lust, not some high-flown moral crusade."*

That note, that tone, that attitude, that "law and order" prescription has, I believe, killed far more children - Irish children - and adults — Irish adults — than the Provisional IRA's bombs ever did. It is the age-old voice and tone and prescription of the British Establishment — of those who are responsible for what is happening in Northern Ireland and for what happens when Northern Ireland comes to Warrington.

The Provisional IRA is a symptom, a by-product, of something else. The real villains do not speak in the slogans of the Provisional IRA but in the voice of the *Sunday Express*, and of the British establishment of which it is one of the ornaments.

These things need to be said now, and it is fitting that *Socialist Organiser* should say them — since we have had to spend a lot of space in recent years belabouring the Provisional IRA and criticising the historical ignorance, romantic political stupidity, and habitual irresponsibility of the British left where Ireland is concerned.

For where do the Warrington, London, Manchester and other bombs come from? Where does the Provisional IRA come from?

The Provisional IRA arose, won large-scale support (about a third of the Catholics in Northern Ireland), and most likely will continue to keep that support, because of what the British ruling class has done to Ireland.

The men and women of the Provisional IRA, people who start out dedicating themselves to the high and splendid ideal of the unification and independence of Ireland, wind up planting bombs in British shopping centres or shooting down Protestant Irishmen who do not share their politics or their tradition — often shooting them in their own houses in front of their small children — because of what the British ruling class has done to our country.

The British ruling class — with the once reluctant but now case-hardened support of the Catholic Irish boss class, Ireland's yahoo bourgeoisie — have locked the people of Northern Ireland into an impossible

constitutional arrangement, into a Northern Ireland which is a narrow bearpit for its two antagonistic communities, Protestant and Catholic, and for all of its people.

The Catholic minority in that Six Counties entity is now a massive 40%. They have always been the majority in about half the land area of the "Protestant state", in the areas adjoining the "little Republic" of 26 counties.

Those Catholics were kept against their will in a Six County state to which they are hostile. For the first 50 years they lived as second class citizens, terrorised by British-armed Protestant-sectarian special police and subject to special laws under which they could be interned without charge or trial, and many were.

When they revolted in the late 1960s — at first demanding equality within the Six Counties state, or, as some of them said, "British standards" — they were met with the heavy hand of first the Orange and then the British state. Internment camps were set up. Large-scale repression hit the Catholics with such force that it drove many of them to acceptance of the Provisional IRA.

On 30 January 1972 in Derry the British Army opened fire on an unarmed political demonstration, killing fourteen, among them a number of teenagers.

Since then there has been — essentially — deadlock. The Six Counties state is maintained at whatever cost. It is now a giant ghetto and an economic slum. The British state guards the border and patrols the streets, as of a great prison compound.

**N**OW, THERE IS — let us be clear about it — in Ireland a real minority problem: the problem of how the one million strong Protestant minority relates to the Catholic majority on the island. The decisive opposition to a united Ireland comes not from Britain but from one million Irish people.

The evidence suggests that Britain would like to get out. But Britain is locked into maintaining the Six Counties/26 Counties status quo, than which it is hard to imagine a worse "solution" to Ireland's minority/majority problem.

Instead of the peoples of Ireland being allowed to work out their own relations to each other, establishing a *modus vivendi* over time, Ireland was artificially split in two by partition — and in such a way that the Catholic minority in the Protestant state is a much bigger proportion of the Six Counties population than all the Protestants of Ireland would be as a proportion of a 32-counties United Ireland.

That alone shows up the absurdity of the present arrangements — out of which came desperate men and women with bombs to

kill children in Warrington.

Britain, the British ruling class, created this monstrous arrangement. They — the fathers and grandfathers of those whose voice echoes in the *Sunday Express* editorial — did not do it by sweet reason or by democratic parliamentary procedures. They carved up Ireland by way of a bloody terroristic war against the supporters of the democratically elected Dublin government, whose territory they occupied. British gangs — the Black and Tans are the best known — raged around Ireland shooting at random, pillaging and burning rural factories, towns, and even the whole centre of Cork City.

They got the Irish bourgeoisie to agree — temporarily, they said — to the present partition by the credible threat to wage, as the only alternative, a renewed "terrible and bloody" war against the people of southern Ireland, which the British Army was still occupying.

During those 1921 negotiations, in which nationalist Ireland's representatives talked with a British gun to their heads, and a powerful British army still in occupation of all Ireland, the British state was making detailed plans for that war. The plans included — as has since been revealed by way of official state papers — preparations to round up a proportion of the southern Irish population and imprison them in "concentration centres".

All the people of Northern Ireland — Protestant majority as well as the artificially created Northern Ireland Catholic minority — are now the victims of that brutal imperialist "settlement" of the "Irish Question" in 1921-22.

The history of Ireland's relations with England is, as I guess you will know in general, a terrible history. It is a history of the conquest and then the enslaving and repeated robbing — with vast recurrent slaughters — of the people of the smaller island. Wars of genocide were waged; for centuries the whole Catholic people were treated as the South American Indians were treated by the Spanish conquistadors or the South African black people by the whites.

And, after the Gaelic people of Ireland, surviving the massacres and the centuries of slavery in our own country, finally won a half-acceptable settlement with the powerful British Empire 70 years ago, it proved not to be a settlement. Partition bred strife, hatred, and murder.

It is not, as the canting hypocrites in the British press say, a collective Celtic Irish neurosis about ancient wrongs that generates continuing conflict. Not ancient wrong but continuing present wrong generates events like Warrington.

The British ruling class's continuing crime against Ireland — and against the people of guiltless Warrington and other places

— is that it continues to maintain an untenable status quo.

**W**HAT, you will ask, is the alternative, given that the fundamental problem in Northern Ireland is the determination of the one million Protestants that it should remain as it is?

The only way out is through the creation of a free United Ireland within which the Protestant-majority areas would have regional autonomy. Ties of some confederal sort between that United Ireland and Britain would give further guarantees to the Protestants that this solution aimed to do away with the oppression of the Northern Catholics, but not to replace it by making the Protestants a new oppressed minority.

The programme of a federal united Ireland is not a magic solution to be presented to Westminster and Dublin — but it is the only solid political base on which a united Catholic-Protestant workers' movement can be built and can give answers to the national and communal conflicts which are torturing Ireland, and, now, killing British children.

Our concern — yours as well as mine, as trade unionists and socialists — is not with the uniting or the separation of territory. We are concerned with the uniting of people. The great Irish Republican James Connolly — the trade union leader whom the British ruling class shot at the public urging of the Dublin Catholic capitalists — once rebuked ancestors of the Provisional IRA, saying: "Ireland apart from her people means nothing to me".

The task is to find a way of uniting the Irish people. Our ideas about some form of federal Ireland would allow socialists - British as well as Irish - to talk to our class in Northern Ireland across the sectarian divide.

I put nothing forward as a panacea, or an "easy" solution. No such thing exists. Above all else, however, British socialists and trade unionists need to resist the British ruling class - whose ideas are also expressed within the right wing of the Labour Party.

Resist their propaganda. Know that more repression in Northern Ireland is not the answer. Don't let the Express and the Sun and the other callous lying hypocrites brain-wash you.

Maintain and develop the unity of British and Irish workers in the labour movement of this country. Argue for a consistently democratic solution to the majority-minority conflict in Ireland, and specifically in Northern Ireland.

The Provisional IRA is a symptom, not the root cause, of Northern Ireland's problem. The British Establishment — and their Irish bourgeois collaborators — are the biggest villains in this tragedy.

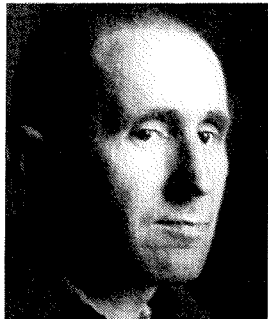
**John O'Mahony**  
(editor *Socialist Organiser*)

# Berthold Brecht in his time

**T**HE playwright Berthold Brecht stayed loyal to the German Communist Party all through its history of inadequacy, betrayal and — reconstituted after World War 2 — Stalinist rule. He was mildly, and sometimes not so mildly, critical. He wrote his famous Aesopian fable of the 1953 Berlin workers' uprising as a comment on its suppression by the Stalinist East German government. In Brecht's fable the government grows dissatisfied with the people and proposes to "elect a new people".

After wartime exile in America, Brecht was driven out by the anti-Communist witch-hunt (in 1947, the year this poem was written). He went to live in Stalinist East Germany, typically ensuring himself a line of retreat by holding on to a foreign passport. He died there, greatly honoured, in 1956.

In politics, Brecht embodied the accommodationist spirit that destroyed so many of his generation of would-be communists. They bowed — grumbling sometimes, it is true — to the power of Stalinism. They made their peace, suppressed their own judgement, and told lies, or were collusively silent about



lies. Brecht portrayed himself and all the others in this condition in his play about the seventeenth century astronomer Galileo, who was forced by the Inquisition, against his own better knowledge, to affirm that the sun revolves around the earth and not the earth around the sun.

Brecht himself played a very unheroic, evasive role when he appeared before the witch-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee — and then caught a plane out of America.



"After the rising on the 17th of June the Secretary of the Writers Union had leaflets handed out in the Stalinee in which it can be read that the people had forfeited the confidence of the government, and could only win it back by redoubled efforts. Would it not be simpler if the government dissolved the people and elected another?"

*The Solution*

And yet, Brecht's work is — as in this poem — sometimes true and moving. Here he portrays the predicaments that, in one way or another, destroyed so many of the socialists of his time.

Indeed I live in the dark ages!  
A guileless word is an absurdity. A smooth  
forehead betokens  
A hard heart. He who laughs  
Has not yet heard  
The terrible things.

Ah, what an age it is  
When to speak of trees is almost a crime  
For it is a kind of silence about injustice!  
And he who walks calmly across the street,  
Is he not out of reach of his friends  
In trouble?

It is true: I earn my living  
But, believe me, it is only an accident.  
Nothing that I do entitles me to eat my fill.  
By chance I was spared. (If my luck leaves  
me I am lost.)

They tell me: eat and drink. Be glad you  
have it!  
But how can I eat and drink  
When my food is snatched from the hungry  
And my glass of water belongs to the thirsty?  
And yet I eat and drink.

I would gladly be wise.  
The old books tell us what wisdom is:  
Avoid the struggle of the world, live out  
your little time

Fearing no one,  
Using no violence,  
Return good for evil —  
Not fulfilment of desire that forgetfulness  
Passes for wisdom.  
I can do none of this:  
Indeed I live in the dark ages!

I came to the cities in a time of disorder  
When hunger ruled  
I came upon men in a time of uprising  
And I revolted with them.  
So the time passed away  
Which on earth was given me.  
I ate my food between massacres.

The shadow of murder lay upon my sleep.  
And when I loved, I loved with indifference.  
I looked upon my nature with impotence.  
So the time passed away  
Which on earth was given me.

In my time streets lead to the quicksand.  
Speech betrayed me to the slaughterer.  
There was little I could do. But without me.  
The rulers would have been more secure.

This was my hope.  
So the time passed away  
Which on earth was given me.

Man's strength was little. The goal

Lay far in the distance,  
Easy to see it for me  
Scarcely attainable.  
So the time passed away  
Which on earth was given me.

You, who shall emerge from the flood  
In which we are sinking,  
Think —  
When you speak of our weakness,  
Also of the dark time  
That brought them forth.  
For we went, changing our country more  
often than our shoes,  
In the class war, despairing  
When there was only injustice and no  
resistance.

For we knew only too well:  
Even the hatred of squalor  
Makes the brow grow stern.  
Even anger against injustice  
Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we  
Who wished to lay the foundations of  
kindness  
Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when at last it comes to you  
That man can help his fellow man,  
Do not judge us  
Too harshly.



# When women fought for liberation

By Cathy Nugent

**T**OWARDS the end of 1968 a new movement for a social revolution began. Following the events of May in France, the biggest general strike in history, taking its inspiration from the bitter and explosive rebellion of black people in the USA, it had its roots in the students' movement and the struggle against the Vietnam war. What revolutionary movement was this? The women's liberation movement!

The struggles of 1968 came to represent for the militants of the day an irrepressible, kick-ass fighting attitude against capitalism and against all forms of oppression. The youthful desire of 1968 to smash the old order and replace it with something more human was to be a continual reference point for the women's liberation movement as well.

Looking back in 1979 Sheila Rowbottom described the galvanising effect of '68: "The energy which erupted in May 1968 was overwhelming. You could catch a glimpse of that extraordinary concentrated force of people's power to dissolve constraining structures which must be the subjective experience of a revolutionary process... Nothing seemed impossible... Capitalism was seen as claiming your whole being. We were all colonised and had to become total resisters. The focus was not only on production or even on a wider concept of class struggle

but on oppression in everyday life — particularly the family and consumption."

The new women's movement was born anti-capitalist and involved many socialist women who, in their energetic debates, attempted to create a radical critique of capitalism and bourgeois existence which put the oppression of women centre stage. They were rediscovering, recreating and reassessing the old, rich literature of the early Marxist movement on the "Woman Question". They also attempted to go beyond it.

"Women's Lib" was a creative movement with a lasting impact. The original goals of the movement were only half won — we have a legal right to equal pay with men but are still low-paid — or not won at all, such as 24 hour nurseries under community control. Nonetheless a social revolution did take place. Women are much more sexually free for instance.

The women's revolution was only half a revolution, and it was never a world-wide revolution: although a few women may walk on the moon, millions of us still can't go out of our homes without having to cover our bodies from head to foot. Women were not affected equally by the revolution. Class and race continues to obstruct female emancipation.

These issues were discussed in the women's movement — at the level of theory at least. How to combine the categories of class and sex was the theoretical conundrum. The socialist feminist current made some progress towards constructing an integrated revolutionary theory. However by the end of the '70s this debate became arid, convoluted and confined to the breeze-block buildings of Britain's new universities. Yet the issues remain very relevant.

**I**T wasn't all theory in the beginning: it was much more about picketing, postering, graffiti-ing, marching and fighting the police at the Miss World contest. And it wasn't just a middle class movement of ex-student women.

In the UK a fight in 1968 by fishermen's wives to improve the safety on trawlers showed working class women campaigning publicly and provided initial inspiration to the women's movement. It was only the latest, modern example of working class women fighting for their communities, in solidarity with men. Such a class struggle was seen again with Women Against Pit Closures and more recently with Women on the Waterfront.

A more important struggle of 1968 came from sewing machinists at Ford's in Dagen-

ham, striking for equal pay. Equal pay became the first demand of the broader women's movement.

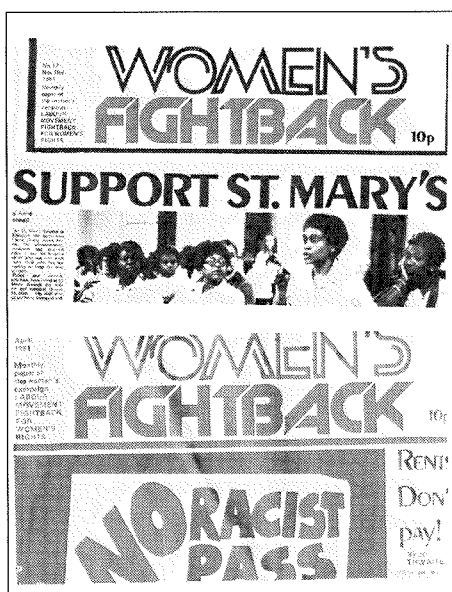
The modern women's movement was also impelled by social changes affecting working class women. From the end of the 1960s more and more women began to come into the workplace, a trend which will — all things being equal — continue into the next century. The experience made women more economically independent, brought them out of the isolated world of the "married home" and into the social world where they could shake off the constrictions of a life centred purely on family and private relationships. It helped women to recognise their own oppression. To a degree this has always been so.

At the end of the last century when women clattered down the Lancashire streets, on their way home from working at the textile factories, laughing at the men they worked with, with money in their pockets, confident and carefree, they may not have *automatically* recognised their own oppression. But, for some, it was natural to want more equality and to join the women's suffrage movement. They may also have joined unions or even parties like the Independent Labour Party.

The battles for class and sex equality have often coincided. So it was with the modern women's movement, with its origins in the social changes and anti-capitalist struggles of the late '60s. Yet by the end of the 1970s the radical and cultural feminists, for whom male dominance was the primary motor of history, had become *the* mainstream feminists. So much so that Andrea Dworkin was feted by the likes of Ken Livingstone and other leftists when she came to town.

What, then, happened to the socialist feminists? A number political pressures and problems combined to ensure their eclipse. The American socialist feminists were influential. Although what they had to say was as interesting as their European sisters, their conception of socialism was more often influenced by Stalinism, Maoism, and the Marxism and professional sociology of academia. The combination of feminists with such a political background and the influence on European feminism of the quasi-Stalinism and Maoism of post-Trotsky Trotskyism and groups like Big Flame ["libertarian" Maoists] was lethal.

Most Marxists, socialists and Trotskyists of the '60s and the socialist feminists of the '70s were not able to get to grips with what was happening to the working class — in particular



**Women's Fightback**, the paper we initiated and used: building bridges between the women's movement and the socialist movement, trying to make the labour movement fight for women's rights.





how the class would relate to the existing workers' parties, be that social democracy or the Communist Parties. Some Trotskyists looked for substitute revolutionary vanguards — the Maoists, the students etc. For some socialist feminists the vanguard was women. For instance Barbara Ehrenreich — an American socialist feminist — conflated the political and organisational defeat of the North American working class with the subjugation of women. She argued that this working class has been “atomised” and women as keepers of, tenders of, private existence have been central to this process: “Autonomy and creativity can only be expressed through our choice of furniture, or clothes or cigarettes.” This may be a reasonable description of modern life but it takes no account of the responsibility of the workers' leaders for the defeated state of the class, its “atomisation” and apathy.

Instead of a strategy which aimed to transform the labour movement and make it fight for women's rights, the women's movement, Ehrenreich said, will be a new vanguard which can rebuild a class movement. Such ideas pushed in the direction of putting male and female struggles against capitalism into separate categories.

In the UK there was a continual ambiguity about how distinct socialist feminism should be as a political tendency on the left. Should it be a movement of women in socialist organisations? If the rest of the left was so sexist why not compete against it? Was socialist feminism to be an integral, caucusing, autonomous part of the left?

The discussion was complicated by the various confused attitudes of the left organisations. At one end of the spectrum of confusion was Militant, who only “discovered” feminism about the same time they left the Labour Party

in the 1990s! At the other end of the spectrum were the International Marxist Group (IMG) who, to their credit, were at least involved in the movement from the start. They had a women's paper — *Socialist Woman* — which, though it may have covered socialist feminist debate, appeared to have no political life independent of the socialist feminist current. Then there was the hot/cold sectarian/opportunist attitude of the International Socialists. Individual women in IS were involved but it was not until the mid-'70s that their group saw the movement as anything connected to “real struggle”. Eventually the IS, (by then the Socialist Workers' Party) started their own paper,

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**“In the UK there was a continual ambiguity about how distinct socialist feminism should be as a political tendency on the left.”**

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*Women's Voice*, which set up discussion groups with independent life. At this point the SWP shut down *Women's Voice*. Clearly it was becoming unreliable at what it was set up for — to be a recruiting front.

There is a more simple explanation for the problems the socialist feminist movement had in trying to establish a collective identity. They were under pressure from both sides. It's not very pleasant being called a “bloody feminist”, “precious”, etc., etc., from out-of-date lefties. But it's more annoying to be described as — words to this effect — a bimbo from the “male dominated socialist movement” who can't think for herself and has been brain-

washed by those nasty Leninists. It was a bit rich when members of the Communist Party(!) in alliance with a group of radical feminists pushed that line against female *Workers' Liberty* supporters in the student movement at the end of the 1980s. But by that point the chances and opportunities were over for socialist feminism to develop as a strong and coherent political current with which the revolutionary socialist left could have made a healthy united front.

*WZ's* forerunners tried to work out a way of being Trotskyists, working class socialists — to intervene sensitively in the movement but at the same time forthrightly. We got involved in National Abortion Campaign and the campaign around the Working Women's Charter, but it took a long time to think of a way to take the initiative. In March 1982 we did initiate a conference — Fightback for Women's Rights. Bringing together 500 women, including single issue equality campaigns such as NAC and Women's Aid, and focusing on the rights of working class women it was an attempt to lay the basis for mass campaigning work under the new Tory government and to find the links between the goals and aspirations of socialist feminists and the needs and demands of working-class women. The conference came at a time when many socialist feminists were changing direction and were joining the Labour Party in order to be part of a struggle for democracy and political regeneration inside the political wing of the labour movement.

From this point on the fate of socialist feminism is more closely bound up with the history of the left both inside and outside the Labour Party. For a time the struggles of socialist feminists in the Labour Party women's sections looked like being crucial in the battle to regenerate the labour movement. The women's sections were often more radical than the main-

stream of the party — they opposed the Falklands War for instance. Organisations like the Women's Action Committee argued for greater representation for Labour Party women but their strategy foundered when the leadership of WAC chose not to link up with the fight to get Labour's leaders to oppose the Tory cuts.

When much of the left — Ken Livingstone when he was leader of the GLC for instance — backtracked from the fight against restrictions on local government spending, the consequences were damaging for the cause of socialist feminism. Money for community projects to help the oppressed — women, black people, lesbians and gays — became the hallmark of GLC "radicalism". Fighting the Tories fell off the agenda. Some socialist feminists, along with much of the Labour left, fell in with the strategy of putting off the fight — they raised the rates, they introduced the "dented shield" [policy of making "selective" cuts now while "holding out" for a Labour government], they implemented the poll tax. Suddenly there was no longer any women's centres. Finally International Women's Week became an aromatherapy/reflexology fest.

Leading socialist feminist, Hilary Wainwright, went off to help found the Socialist Movement — an amorphous movement, founded in the wake of Kinnock's counter-revolution in the Labour Party, whose members were all committed to "socialism" but were not invited to debate how to achieve socialism.

There was nothing inevitable about the retreat of the left or socialist feminism. When the women from the mining communities started to organise themselves as a powerful battalion in the strike the left in the Labour Party, its sisters too, rallied round. It was a fantastic example of working class women organising and could have given socialist feminism a reason for existence for many years to come. The strike was defeated, and it was not to be.

**W**HILE it lasted the socialist feminist current in the women's movement was a genuine attempt to rethink and to rediscover a socialist past. So many questions...

What is the role of the family under capitalism? Did women's labour in the family constitute productive labour? What could we learn from the experience of the Russian Revolution? Could we socialise housework and childcare? What would the family have looked like under socialism?

From Kollontai [Alexandra; leading Bolshevik who eventually capitulated to Stalin] the socialist feminists claimed the idea that revolutionary transformation included *all* aspects of human existence. After the revolution personal relationships would be more

equal and humane. The issues surrounding Kollontai's writing were discussed. How can we take these ideas as prescriptions for the future if they have emerged from an historical experience that was flawed and difficult. Socialist feminists had to confront their own utopian instincts.

The personal and emotional aspects of the women's movement were difficult to deal with. Over-concern with issues of psychological health risked charges of middle-class life-stylism. A lack of concern with what oppression *feels* like was a point of agitation against the Marxist organisations — and a reasonable point of agitation no doubt when socialist men felt they could call you "girl" or "love" and get away with it.

Some feminists, such as Juliet Mitchell and Lynne Segal, used a psychoanalytical framework as a source of intellectual ideas for socialist feminism. Reich, who most clearly linked societal exploitation and oppression with repression, was rediscovered by the left. The concept of repression as a controlling mechanism in the construction of female sexuality was popular.

The debate on sexuality was a response to the radical feminists. In the mid-'70s the national conference of the women's liberation movement had adopted a new demand — the "right of women to a self-defined sexuality". For radical feminists the idea of a freely chosen sexuality (if such a thing is possible) could be skewed to mean that only a sexuality freely chosen as lesbian, and strictly separate from men, was liberating. The socialist feminists made a defensive response.

Another issue was how ideological sexism related to economic life, to production. A sometimes Stalinist distortion of Marxist political economy obscured the debate — "Marxism says in the final analysis the superstructure is determined by the economic base" — that sort of thing. The crude misreading led to ideological back flips — an idealistic view of society where consciousness determines being. The notion of an integrated class struggle, of fighting on all fronts — the economic, political and ideological — could have been an antidote to both the "economic determinist" view and the idealistic view, but that modal of class struggle was simply not available from the socialist movement.

Sometimes there was a demand to put a socialist feminist stamp on everything: anti-fascism, health, Ireland, trade unions. Everything had to be intricately scrutinised, "added-in", deliberately, audited for content. There was a overwhelming self-consciousness to our feminism in those days.

In the end some feminists, tired of trying to integrate class and sex chose to make it separate — equal but different, as the old

male chauvinist expression goes. The writings of Heidi Hartman *et al* exemplified this political choice: society was made up of two systems, one divided by patriarchy the other by class.

The ideas of socialist feminism are still relevant. We desperately need political signposts to guide us through the contradictory nature of the changes which have occurred in the relationships between the sexes. By the end of the century as many women as men will be in waged work. This women's work has a critical role in the restructuring of capitalism. The left has scarcely begun to analyse these changes. Should we turn once against to Marx's *Capital*? Rereading his [copious] notes about work for nimble fingers, in areas of the economy where unions scarcely existed and where low wages were so low they were used to drive down the wages of the whole working class, it seems things have hardly changed!

The central focus of all the socialist feminist debates was the family — they had an alternative vision of a society where social chaos could be replaced by rational, humane and equal relationships, where there could be a myriad of "family" relationships, but freely chosen. In capitalist societies, where existing family relationships are visibly disintegrating, without social institutions of any kind to replace them, we need alternatives to the various moral panics from the right and the so-called liberal establishment.

Everything changes, everything stays the same. We live in a world where abortion rights may be established but discussion of abortion is still taboo. Women may no longer be prepared to be wife slaves, serving their man's meal up on the dot of 6.30, but we are still slaves to our children, taking the lioness's share of responsibility for childcare.

In the end it is working class women who still have a world to win. "Juggling" with the nanny, the job and the trips to the gym are simply not the same as being exhausted by poverty wages, insecurity and the constant worry that your kids will face a future of unemployment, poverty and despair.

The sexual confidence that young working class women have today has brought us closer to the original goal of the women's liberation movement. This progress has even affected women with religious backgrounds, albeit in a contradictory way — platform shoes peeking out from underneath purdah. Yet as long as capitalism makes women into commodities that look like stick insects we are still quite far away from getting our sexual freedom.

Nothing has changed... only socialism in the end can liberate humanity, lay the basis for the liberation of women and guarantee every individual man or woman can be creative, whole and free.

# The “other Trotskyists” and Palestine

By Alan Johnson

**I**N THE DEBATE between Sean Matgamna and Jim Higgins, about Israel and the Palestinians (*Workers' Liberty* June 1996; July 1996; September 1996; February/March 1997) both sides have, in passing, invoked Hal Draper in their defence. Here, I will assess Hal Draper's thought as it evolved from 1948 to 1990 in the organs of third camp revolutionary Marxism — *Labor Action*, *The New International* and *New Politics*. I will summarise the writings and speeches of Hal Draper on this question, using his own words as much as possible.<sup>1</sup> What emerges is a Marxist approach to Israel-Palestine which avoids both Zionist apologetics and Arab chauvinism of the “destroy Israel” kind, in favour of consistent democracy as a basis for accommodation between the two peoples, clearing the decks for the class struggle.

## 1948: Marxists and the state of Israel

IN 1948 HAL DRAPER was a member of the Political Committee of the Workers' Party and editor of the party's theoretical journal *New International*. He worked out the party policy to the new state of Israel in an unsigned editorial *War of Independence or Expansion?* in *Labor Action*, May 24 and 31, 1948, and in the July 1948 *New International* article, *How to Defend Israel*. He wrote:

“Before partition, the road to a basic solution lay only in joint struggle by the socialist workers of the Jewish community together with the oppressed Arab peasantry to throw off the yoke of their common oppressor — British imperialism, based on the two ruling classes, Arab landlords and Zionist capitalists; and such Arab-Jewish co-operation from below could have forged a united Palestine in the fire of anti-imperialist struggle. Now that partition is virtually an accomplished fact, this basic road can only take a different form.”

There were two elements to this “basic road” in Draper's 1948 articles. It is important not to lose sight of either. The first element was “the defense of Israel's right



of self-determination against a reactionary war of invasion”, on the grounds that:

“As Marxist socialists — that is, as the only consistent democrats — we believe in and accept the democratic right of all peoples (including the Palestinian Jews) to self-determination...even while advising against the exercise of this right to the point of separation [which] we are more firmly than ever of the opinion...was a mistake and a set-back for the only long-range solution.”

It will surprise many on the contemporary far left that Draper and the Workers' Party opposed the “Pan-Arab war” against the new state, writing that, “the imposition of ‘unity’ upon Palestine by Abdullah, the Mufti or the Arab League would be a reactionary solution.” He registered that Israel was established, “in the teeth of opposition... of the imperialist capitals,” and that, “the attack upon the Jews right to self-determination comes from a deeply reactionary social class — the Arab lords.” The Workers' Party demanded the US gov-

ernment recognise Israel and was for, “the lifting of the imperialist embargo on arms to the new Jewish state.”

The second element of the Workers' Party position was the warning that to defend Israel against reactionary Arab invasion was, “not the end of the question but only the beginning.” For with the establishment of the state of Israel a crossroads had been reached. Two roads lay open: “a war of nationalist expansion, or a revolutionary war for the reunification of Palestine from below against both the Jewish and Arab ruling classes.” The war was, “a war of defense in the immediate circumstances,” but, “tomorrow their struggle will inescapably be transformed into one or the other!” Israel could not “go it alone”. In a sea of Arab hatred Israel's Zionist leaders would, Draper predicted, “look for aid and comfort only towards the imperialists,” and seek, “to act as an imperialist outpost in the Middle East.” Down this road “Israel cannot exist as a splinter state quivering in the flesh of the Arab Middle

1. A collection of Draper's writings on the Middle East has been published by Center for Socialist History, 1250 Addison St., Suite 101, Berkeley CA 94702. *Zionism, Israel, and the Arabs. Notes on the Historical Background of the Middle East Tragedy*. Hal Draper, Berkeley, Centre for Socialist History, 1997, pp. 215. The CSH has a website: [www.gn.apc.org/csh](http://www.gn.apc.org/csh)

East without constant war-skirmishing or imperialist entanglements or both."

The progressive democratic alternative, the, "only road that can save the Jews from subservience to imperialism or destruction by the Arabs," was, "a course directed toward the reunification of Palestine on a basis which will permit the two peoples to live together in fraternal harmony." This alternative road lay through "struggle from below" by Jewish workers and Arab peasants. The duty of socialists in Israel, while, "opposing any attempt by the Arab landlord regimes to overthrow the Jewish state and impose their own reactionary sway," was to fight for this alternative road by fighting for the transformation of the war of defense into a "social war — not Jew against Arab, but a war of classes," a war waged with the Arab people against both the Zionist ruling class and the Arab lords. And the "key to such a program" was "right at hand". Thirty to forty per cent of Israel was Arab, and, "Israel's future will be determined in the first place by how it acts towards them." Israel must demonstrate it opposes only the, "Arab dynasts and landlords who are also the oppressors of the Arab people," and not the Arab people themselves, by its treatment of the Arab minority within Israel. Socialists should campaign for:

"...reversing the whole Zionist policy toward the Arab people — accepting them as equals and collaborating in the building up, not of a Jewish state, but of a bi-national state. We use the term 'bi-national' to designate merely the aim of a state which is the home of two peoples and comports itself as such, the forms to be worked out in common agreement."

Equal rights for Arabs within the state of Israel, no Jim Crow in the trade unions, no boycott of Arab goods, end the ousting of Arab labour, the "constitutional guarantee of the Arabs fully recognised status as a national people" — this was the program of action Draper proposed in 1948:

"A 'deal' with the discontented masses, that is, of a revolutionary approach to them — from below... [A] road leads from unity with the Arab population at home to the implementation of a binational approach to drive a class wedge inside the encircling Arab states."

A line of march: defend Israel by, "transforming the war of defence into a social war... a revolutionary war against the Arab feudal masters — and... the perpetrators of Deir Yassin massacres who call for Jewish expansion against the Arab people." A prediction: if Israel does not move in this direction then it will become, "a death trap of the peoples and a happy hunting ground of revived imperialist influence."

When it was put to the 1949 ISL con-

vention it was rejected and the ISL, "temporarily reeling under the wave of Jewish-nationalist sentiment unleashed by the establishment of Israel," "teetered on the brink of endorsing an essentially Zionist view of Israel." Shachtman abstained on the vote. But by 1951 Draper position was endorsed unanimously and the ISL, "never staggered again."

### The destruction of the Palestinian nation

DRAPER PUBLISHED TWO long articles in *The New Internationalist*, Israel's Arab Minority (Summer 1956) and The Great Land Robbery (Winter, 1957). He examined the expulsion/flight of Palestinians in 1948, the robbery of their land from 1948-1957, and the role of Zionist ideology in both crimes. From 1949 Draper had been reading on Zionism and the position of Israel's Arab minority, helped by non-Stalinist critics of Zionism in Israel such as J Artusky, the Polish Bundist, and M Stein,

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### "to set the aim of establishing a Jewish state in a land inhabited by an Arab nation is to set out to destroy that nation"

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who was fighting the regime's war on Yiddish. Their reports were published in *Labor Action*. He was also helped by his relationship, in New York, "as a friend and mentor," with William Zuckerman, editor and publisher of the *Jewish Newsletter*. Twenty years older than Draper, a mild social democrat but vastly knowledgeable, Zuckerman was "a basic recourse" for Draper from 1949 to 1957. In 1955 Draper received an article on the treatment of the Arab minority in Israel but refused to print it. Concerned about its accuracy he researched the question himself, in great depth, over the next two months, using the Zionist library in New York. The result was the two major articles for *The New Internationalist*. He also used Don Peretz's dissertation, "a magnificent job of research and at that time the sole honest-scholarly inquiry into the question." He limited himself to Zionist or pro-Jewish sources to, "neutralise the typical Zionist reflex." Writing in 1990, Draper claimed that, "most of the material has not yet been superseded. This is shocking and betokens the extent to which the facts about Israel have been long suppressed." Even a wave of books published in 1986 and 1987, by Segev, Flapen and Morris, while presenting new, previously secret material, did not give the publicly available facts Draper pulled

together in *The New Internationalist* in 1956 and 1957.

The politics of the articles were a development of the 1948 position. By now it was clear which of the two roads set out in 1948 had been followed by Israel and with what consequences. The Arab minority and its treatment by Israel remained "the key" to the transformation of the war of defense into a "social war". So the appalling facts of systematic discrimination against, and brutal dispossession of, the Palestinian Arabs, must be registered and fought against as a matter of absolute principle by all socialists. And, as Draper saw it, the Zionist politics from which this flowed must be understood. Looking back in 1968 he wrote, "Especially from the vantage point of 1968, we have to discuss the political reality. The political reality is: to set the aim of establishing a Jewish state in a land inhabited by an Arab nation is to set out to destroy that nation. And that is exactly what happened."

### The role of Zionist forces in the flight of Palestinian Arabs in 1947-8

DURING THE 1948 Arab-Israeli war around 570,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were pushed out. By the end of the war only 170,000 were left. The subsequent Zionist theft of Palestinian land was justified by Israel's leaders with the pretext that the Arabs had fled in enthusiastic answer to the call of Israel's enemies. They were fifth-columnists expecting the booty from a quick Arab victory. This "old tale", Draper argued, provided, "the moral and even juridical justification for three aspects of Israel policy":

"(1) Israel claims little responsibility for or to the hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees from its territory who are now living across its borders in misery and seething hatred

(2) The government used the Arab flight to justify a series of laws which have stripped these refugees, as well as many Arabs who never left Israel, of their lands, groves and property.

(3) The version of the Arab flight is also... the justification for the maintenance... of military-government rule over the large majority of Arabs still in Israel... [and justifies the land-grab]."

In fact, before the land grab began, Ben-Gurion [Prime Minister, 1948-53] said, "Arab villages have in their overwhelming majority kept aloof." Only later, after the land-grab began did the other "official" version appear, the version which justified treating Israeli Arabs as a fifth column. In truth, their flight, argues Draper, was not a heeding of the call of the Mufti or the Arab armies except in the case of the Arab



upper class, who did flee of their own free will, before the start of heavy fighting, guided by Arab armies' strategy. In truth, the Palestinian masses fled in the face of three things: the Arab states invasion and the normal fear of war; the actions of the Zionist forces, regular and irregular, including the Deir Yassin massacre; and the character of the British departure, in havoc-creating bitterness. *In toto* the facts refute the official Zionist version and the legitimation for the land-grab and the treatment of Israel's Arab minority.

The role of the Zionist forces has caused most controversy. Draper's view: "The Zionist-Israeli forces themselves played a prominent role in causing and intensifying the flight," and, "The Zionist rulers utilised the attack by the foreign Arab states to run Palestinian Arabs off their land." The most extreme Zionists had the policy of Arabrein (Arab-free Israel) and used the war to achieve that objective. The official Zionists — and this is the dominant pattern of Zionism's history, argues Draper — uneasily drifted to the same end. The massacre of 250 Arabs at a village, Deir Yassin, by the Irgun, a Zionist guerrilla group, happened on April 9 1948. Draper shows that Deir Yassin was chosen by the Irgun because it was friendly to Jews. To show that, "even a record of friendship to Jews was no protection, no insurance. It was after this that the Arab flight became general." After official Zionist condemnations of the massacre the Irgun released a text of a Haganah communiqué showing that the official Zionist army agreed to a military assault (though not a massacre) on the village. After Deir Yassin, Irgun-Haganah relations grew closer. An agreement of co-operation was reached in April, the very month of Deir Yassin. The other official Zionist armed force, Palmach, was at the village and gave covering fire to wounded Irgunists. Moreover, "Within three months after Deir Yassin, the official Haganah forces themselves were driving the Palestinian Arab population out of their native villages, towns and cities like cattle." When Ramleh and Lydda fell on 13 July 60,000 were expelled, "simply driven out, to make the towns Arabrein and provide property for incoming Jews to expand into... This was done by the Haganah, not by Irgun." Draper quotes *The New York Herald Tribune's* war correspondent, Kenneth Bilby:

"At dusk one evening an Israeli jeep column took off from the Lydda airport and raced into Lydda, with rifles, Stens and submachine guns blazing. It coursed through the main streets, blasting at everything that moved. The town toppled in panic. I went into Lydda the following day with major Yeruham Cohen, brigade intelligence officer. The corpses of Arab men,

women and children were strewn about the streets in the wake of this ruthlessly brilliant charge. Civilians who had been trapped by the Jewish encirclement cowered behind shuttered windows; white flags were draped from every home."

Draper caustically points out that these civilians, "driven into the open road," would be punished for becoming "absentees" by laws which stripped them of their "abandoned" property. He did not deny that, "the invaders had their Deir Yassins too." That ranking of atrocities was not his concern. The political point was that:

"Many Arab peasants against whom the lootings and atrocities were committed, and who were driven out or who fled in fright, were later robbed of property and land and had a military government imposed over them because they had fled or were driven out — i.e., because they left their habitations as a result of or in fear of such atrocities — and this was done not by Haganah soldiers but by the parliament and government of Israel. This was the real atrocity."

In other words the land-grab began during the war. Draper quotes the leading Israeli paper, *Haaretz*: "Every piece of land which had been abandoned for any reason whatever — whether in the whirl of war, or during the truces, or soon after the Israeli occupation — was at once seized by the nearby [Jewish] settlement or settlements and attached to their estates." This land-grab was, says Draper, "organised and stimulated by Zionist authorities for Zionist aims." He quotes Don Peretz: "The Jewish Agency was directing the flow of new immigrants toward the vacant Arab settlements."

The political point of retelling this story, for Hal Draper? Not to establish that the historical clock should be reversed. Not even to suggest that a simple "return" of the land *in toto* is a viable solution. But Draper is establishing why Zionism cannot form the framework for a political solution. Accommodation between the peoples can never be based on pro-Zionist apologetics about the flight of the Palestinians or on Zionist ideology. Draper was establishing the ground of a non-revanchist socialist anti-Zionism. He wrote:

"The moral indignation should not be visited in the first place against the miserable, harassed, driven Jewish D[isplaced] P[erson]s from Europe who, in their fear and need were used as pawns to grab the land and property of the dispossessed Arabs. They were steered and pushed into this position by those who knew what they were doing — Zionist arms like the Jewish Agency, Zionist authorities in the armed forces and government, both by design and by toleration. Zionism — the ideology

of Jewish chauvinism — showed that it was and is one of the deeply reactionary conceptions of the political world. The child of anti-semitism, it became the father of another form of ethnic oppression; if genocide means the murder of a people as such, then there should be a word for the robbery of a people as such. What Zionism created in Palestine in 1948 was the first act of the tragedy."

### The scale and meaning of the robbery of land from the Palestinians in 1948 to 1957

THE LAND-GRAB IN war was one thing. What came next was "of a different order": "The robbery of a people carried through in planned, deliberate 'legal' action by the formal action of the Israel government over a period of years and not in the heat or turmoil of war." The cultivable land taken from the Arabs equalled one-fifth of the total area of the country. 80 per cent of Israel's total area was land "abandoned" by Arab refugees. 38 per cent of the villages, one-quarter of all buildings, 10,000 shops, businesses and stores, 52 quarries, and four million Palestinian pounds in Arab bank accounts blocked in Israel (the latter released in 1956). The theft was not only from those who fled or were driven out but also from those who stayed. Forty per cent of the land owned by legal Arab residents of Israel was taken.

Draper examined in great detail how this was done stage by stage between 1948 and 1957, and how not a single Jewish deputy had opposed it. Indeed the "socialist" thieves like Mapai and Mapam got so much land they ended up renting it back out to the very Arabs who rightfully owned it. Draper quotes Moshe Keren writing in *Haaretz*: "It was precisely those groups who presume to establish a new society free from injustice and exploitation — the kibbutzim, in other words — who marched in the vanguard of the seizure campaign, and foremost among them were... Mapam..."

Draper argued that the scale and the meaning of the land-grab had not been understood. It meant, for the Palestinians, "literally, destroying their way of life." In 1957 Draper warned that the land-grab was not over because, "what governs the real policy of the government is an ethnic chauvinism derived from the Zionist ideology." Guilt does not lie with "the Jewish people" says Draper but with, "the Zionist authorities, the Zionist movement and the Zionist government."

### Zionism and the "race against catastrophe"

AFTER HIS 1956-7 articles Draper's position can be summed up by his phrase, "race

against catastrophe." Israel, in choosing to build a "Jewish state" as an imperialist outpost in the region, was creating a "state wide ghetto" for Jews and was doomed to sink in a sea of Arab hatred. But Draper did not, for one second, from 1948 to his death in 1990, give an inch to the idea of the "destruction of the state of Israel" which he saw as the, "hallmark of Arab chauvinism." He continued to urge a political solution based on mutual recognition and accommodation. To admit being against the "destruction of the state of Israel" on today's far left is to invite being roundly denounced as a "Zionist" and probably a racist. Yet Hal Draper, recognised on the American left in the 1960s as a fierce anti-Zionist, never felt it had any part of a socialist, anti-Zionist politics. In 1990 he wrote in these terms of the spread of this "program" to the left itself:

"Politically there is one all-important difference in the situation... [the] preoccupation of Arab socialist elements with the 'militant' line of crushing Israel out of existence, rather than changing its policies. We Independent Socialists refrained from giving political support to any of the Palestinian political groups, precisely because their official policies were formulated in terms of 'destroying Israel'."

Draper celebrated the "great Intifada" and the PLO's change of line, in 1990:

"We can now say, and with great satisfaction, that the general line being followed by the PLO leadership under Arafat and by the Palestinian movement of rebellion is essentially the line that we advocated among both Jewish-Zionist and Arab-nationalist socialists. This is simply a matter of 'pointing with pride,' you understand, since there is no claim about influencing events; but the pride involved bears on the general nature of our Independent Socialist and 'third camp' politics as a guide to an era."

### The critique of Zionism

"AS A MARXIST I held a dim view of Zionism, as negative then as it is now," wrote Draper in 1990. Why was he so fiercely critical of Zionism, without let-up, from 1948 to 1990? In 1967, in *New Politics*, he argued Zionist ideology was a composite of three elements. First, a mystical blood-tribalism which, "asserts that Jews are inevitably aliens everywhere... just as the anti-semites say." Second, the idea of Eretz Israel: a state, in Palestine, all of Palestine, and no less. Third, the idea of the, "ingathering of the exiles": all Jews are to live in Eretz Israel. Draper was convinced that US Zionists played a bad role in US policy not to open up immigration to Jews, "in my eyes one of the basest crimes committed by the Zionist leadership." The generation

of Zionists who established the state of Israel were, he thought, "a curse." But in establishing that state they precipitated a crisis in Zionist ideology. Zionism became pared down to its, "heart and soul," its essence, which is the "ingathering of the exiles." Draper argued that when Ben-Gurion visited the USA and rounded on American Jewry with "You are Exiles!" he had all consistency on his side, as a Zionist. America must be Galuth (Exile) to a Zionist. Zionism, warned Draper, was once an "ism" to be propagandised for. After Israel was established Zionism became simply... "Israelism". In other words Zionism was reduced to defending the state of Israel. Not just the existence of the state but the expansionism and the oppression of the Palestinians.

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**To admit being against the "destruction of the state of Israel" on today's far left is to invite being roundly denounced as a "Zionist" and probably a racist.**

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### Who has national rights in Palestine ?

WHILE DRAPER SUPPORTED the national rights of the Palestinian Jews, the Yishuv, he rejected the idea that "Jews" *per se* had national rights in Palestine. In 1951 he wrote:

"The view that the Jews of the world, and not merely the Jewish yishuv in Palestine, constitute a nation in the Zionist usage is a view which can only have a mystical basis." (154.)

[This] "mystical concept which is at the heart and soul of Zionism ..of tribal blood-solidarity... collides with class solidarity... [for] the working class... it is an alien and corruptive element in any attempt to build a consistent, genuine, socialist movement. It collides with the solidarity of internationalism... it collides with the need for a policy of equality, toleration and peace with the Arab peoples. Scientifically, ideologically, philosophically, if you wish, it does not have much to recommend it above the 'Aryan' theories of the Nazi theoreticians."

In 1952 Draper opposed the Nationality Act which wrote Zionist theory into the basic law of the state. In 1953, in an article in *Labor Action* titled Thou Shalt Not Criticise Israel, Draper summed up his objections to writing "the Jewish state" idea of Zionism into law:

"It is a view which (1) implicitly makes all non-Jews, especially the Arab Israelis,

aliens and interlopers in the land, the short or long term objective being to drive them out; (2) makes the perspective of Israel expansionist, no matter what diplomatic declarations on that score are put out for occasional world consumption by its leaders; and (3) poses the question of dual national allegiance for all Jews in the world as the Israelis see them, regardless of the fact that only a small minority of Jews are made happy thereby."

In 1954, in *Labor Action*, he summed up the ISL position on the "Jewish state":

"[The ISL] oppose, above all, the basic aim of Zionism of building a 'Jewish state'. The idea, the concept-aim of a 'Jewish state' and all that it implies is central to the Zionist ideology. As long as the people and government of Israel, following the Zionist road, continue to try and build Israel as a 'Jewish state', there can be no peace between Jew and Arab. So we believe."

### Israel and the "burning ground" of Europe

BUT DRAPER DID NOT reduce the creation of the state of Israel to the machinations of Zionism. He understood that Israel was created because, "for the Jewish remnant Europe represented burning ground: they had to get out — somehow, somewhere, anywhere." He argued, in 1954, with an Arab socialist, Maksud:

"At the side of the Zionists reactionary aspirations there also developed a different, a new, an accompanying factor which did not owe its motive force and impact to Zionism. Our comrade Maksud sees only the impact of Zionism. We would like to call his attention to this other explosive development. This was the exterminationist fate which loomed before a whole people in Europe, the Jewish people."

No country opened its doors to the Jews. The ISL campaigned for the US to open its doors to Jewish refugees and for the right of "untrammelled free emigration and immigration":

"We believe it was the duty of socialists to support the right of Jews to immigrate to Palestine. In our view, as in Maksud's, it was a misfortune that the Jewish exodus was channelled into Palestine to the extent that it was. That is one of the crimes for which world capitalism and imperialism ought to answer some day. But it was a fact, and not a Zionist plot. The Zionists were able to take advantage of this anti-semitic windfall... but the problem that was created... could not be faced merely by yelling against Zionism."

The historical clock could not be reversed. A political solution was necessary. Draper replied to Maksud's program for the "destruction of Israel" in these terms:



Partition was no solution. The setting up of Israel was no solution, your program to destroy Israel would be no solution. The problem is to bring together the Jewish and Arab peoples on a revolutionary democratic basis, and this problem had to be dealt with on the basis of conditions that exist. Israel is a fact. Nothing will be gained by an Arab war against it... The problem that we [the ISL] see is not whether Israel has a "right" to exist, but how all of the people of the region can live together. Israel may have a 'right' to exist but its existence will be a hell for the Jews and a thorn in the flesh of the Arabs as long as it insists on being a Jewish ghetto in an Arab world. Before Israel can find a *modus vivendi* with its neighbours, it must overcome its Zionist illusions and policies... the country must be built as a bi-national state, with cultural autonomy and full equal political and social rights for both peoples. Zionist expansionism must be repudiated. Its anti-Arab measures must be reversed. All this requires an internal revolutionary rejection of Zionism's specific politics, whether it consciously takes the form of a repudiation of Zionism or (perhaps more likely) takes the form of a gradual abandonment of all of Zionism's conclusions. A movement towards this objective can we believe be built in Israel... but what will never be built in Israel is any movement or even grouplet which will advocate giving up the country's independence. The 'emasculat[i]on' of Israel's independence and sovereignty can be accomplished only by war, and then only perpetuated by armed force and terror."

The Israeli Jews had national rights. Draper supported the rights of, "the specific Jewish community situated in a certain territory in Palestine... not as 'Jews' in general but as a certain community in the land." He warned: "Marxists do not impose our schema about 'who constitutes a nation' upon facts. It is sheer doctrinairism to counterpose some theory about nationhood against the fact that the Palestinian Jewish community has acted exactly as if it were a national people." Reactionary though Israeli nationalism tends to be it remains, "a historical event which a Marxist has reason to keep in mind in renovating his theory." Were the Jews not just interlopers, even invaders? No. They were, "a whole people, settled in a land, and not merely as military garrison." For sure the, "wound is rawer," for the Palestinians. It is a, "hellishly difficult dilemma." But, "we can see no other socialist standpoint possible."

### De-Zionisation : a political solution

ON DECEMBER 17 1968 Draper took part in an Arab Students conference. The hand-

written notes of his speech on the Arab-Israeli conflict indicate a continuing rejection, here in the face of radical Arab public opinion, of the program of the "destruction of the state of Israel" and his continuing support for a positive political solution of consistent democracy:

"Military solution' is no solution.

"There is only limited value in arguing simply in terms of 'who's right/wrong'. Even when one has decided that a great wrong has been done to the Palestinian Arab people, this does not automatically provide a solution (i.e., reverse what has happened by military means). Let justice be done but the only possible road is the road of a political solution... there is no solution in merely turning the clock back (especially with guns). Hence the program of 'destroying Israel as a state' is a myth empty of any real content, but if accomplished its consequences would be reactionary both for Arabs and Israelis... it would merely mean the continuation of the present impasse (irredentist bitterness and civil war) with better organised Israelis substituting for Pales[tinian] guerrilla forces. At worst it would mean [the] transformation of Middle East limited war into world war... A political solution entails not the destruction of any state but a (revolutionary) transformation of Israel, and also therefore of the present Arab states. There is no quick easy route — except the illusory route of military destruction... I am talking about a transformation far more basic and therefore long-term, over the long pull as is true of any genuinely social-revolutionary movement. As far as Israel is concerned the practical aim is: De-Zionisation. The political perspective of the Israeli left: (first of all — them):

(a) Not a 'Jewish state' but a 'bi-national state' in concept and law. [Another Middle Eastern country.]

(b) Complete equality in rights and privileges for Arab population in Israel, and program to integrate them fully in every area of economy and politics. [Details easy.]

(c) The land development program in Israel to be directed for the benefit of the Arab refugees not of immigrant world Jewry. [Plus compensation and compromise as proposed in past.]

(d) The aim of integrating Israel and its Arab neighbours into a Middle East federation [not based on blood but on econ[omic] and geopolitical realities].

(e) Within the framework of a federation perspective, the right to self-determination (in Israel as in Arab world) for any religious people [to self-determine as a unit in federations].

(f) This will require a social and political revolution in Israel, but also: such a program has to be complemented by a social

revolutionary movement in the Arab countries... and I do not mean the present regimes which call themselves revolutionary but a rev[olutionary] movement against them."

In 1967, in exchanges in *New Politics*, Draper argued the Arab-Israeli war was a "clash of chauvinisms" but with its roots in the brute fact of, "a nation that has been destroyed." He argued for the same broad position he had developed for the Workers' Party in 1948:

"The de-Zionisation of Israel will mean the abolition of the 'Jewish State' concept, in favour of the view of Israel as a bi-national state, the home of two peoples. This is the basic socialist orientation. It is only such an Israel that can live in peace in the midst of the Arab world... My analysis points to the basic aim of 'de-Zionisation', this is concretised politically in the program for a genuine bi-national state; this in turn provides the framework for a series of detailed proposals." (NP 6/2 1967.) [The] best place to start, in revolutionising the relations of this beleaguered Israel with the Arab world, is not by appeasing Nassers but by appeasing the Arabs of Israel itself — that is, according them justice — and the Arabs of the Palestinian nation."

This program was not aimed, he insisted, at the, "bleeding heart left-Zionists of the Mapam bureaucracy," but at, "the only hope for Israel... a new revolutionary generation which will rebel against the dead-weight of the 'Jewish state' ideology, which will see itself not as an ingathering of the 'exiles', but as a Middle Eastern people living as a nation as a harmonious part of the Middle East, not as a thorn in its side." By 1967 his hopes in the Jewish working class were quite sober. He saw a, "miasma of chauvinist feeling which lies over [Israel] like a chilling fog," and, "no one really knows how much opinion escapes it". But he never lost hope in that minority, representatives of the, "current of Jewish humanism which was one of the glories of the Jewish people," and whose voice was seldom heard. Certainly, for Draper it was, "the only Israel with whom one can identify."

But this program had profound implications for the "destroy Israel" position. In sharp words addressed to Arab socialists, but which speak powerfully to much of today's far left, champions of the "anti-imperialist" credentials of the murderous sub-imperialism's of the region, to the extent that they threaten to destroy Israel, Draper warned:

"Only insofar as you show fight against the reactionary and chauvinist aims of the Arab governments can you expect to awake and enflame courage and heart

among Jewish socialists who want to break out of the Zionist trap! The responsibility is yours too. It belongs to the genuine socialists on both sides of the line." (134.)

The "race against catastrophe" came down to this:

"Whether such a revolutionary generation will arise and take over from the old Zionist reactionaries before the other reactionary chauvinism (that of the Arab ruling classes) manages to get sufficiently modernised so as to use its crushing weight of encircling population to destroy Israel as a state altogether as the end result of escalating hatred... Israel needs its revolution, as a matter of life and death."

**A socialist anti-Zionist**

HAL DRAPER OPPOSED Zionism, not in the name of "the destruction of the state of Israel" but in the name of a consistently democratic politics able to unite Jews and Arabs in struggle against all chauvinist and reactionary ideologies. He criticised both those on the Arab left who passed off anti-semitism as anti-Zionism and those Zionists who, "use and abuse the cry of anti-semitism as a means of intimidating or discrediting any critics of Zionism or Israeli policy." He warned that the "destroy Israel" school was pushing Jews into the arms of Zionism and, oddly, had the same framework as the Zionists:

"It is not: For Israel or Against Israel — this is only the way Zionists inside and outside Israel see it. It is: For or Against the Zionist Program and ideology for Israel."

My guess is Draper would have had a debate with Matgamna, as Marxists sharing a common framework, about the merits of "two states" as against a "bi-national Palestine", the agreed division rather than the reunification of Palestine. Certainly he applauded the PLO adoption of the "two peoples, two states" position in 1988, towards the end of his life. Had he lived he would have condemned as criminal Israel's refusal to cede an independent state to the Palestinians after 1988 — even in the one-fifth of historic Palestine the PLO now aspires to. He would have laid that crime at the door of Zionism. Maybe Draper would have warned Matgamna that a few Zionist myths had found their way into his long and necessary campaign against the "destroy Israel" school. He would have shared Jim Higgins hostility to Zionism, and some of his facts, such as the Zionists role in the flight of Palestinians in 1948, but he would have said to Higgins what he said to the radical Arab students in 1968: "The program of destroying Israel as a state is a myth empty of any real content... reactionary both for Jews and Arabs."

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# Socialists and the Good Friday Agreement

**WORKERS' Liberty** advocated a Yes vote in the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement. A minority disagreed. Here, the debate opened in *WL* 48 continues.

## Key questions and answers

**I**S the disagreement about voting for the deal a question of tactics or principle?

A Principle.

**What is the principle?**

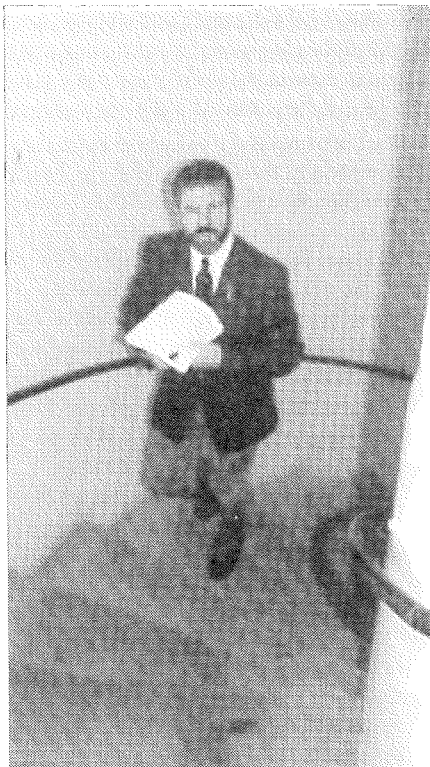
That Marxists do not recommend to the working class things they do not agree with. We do not repress our independent political judgement for the sake of going along with moods in the class, but maintain, defend and propagate an independent working-class viewpoint.

**How does this relate to the question of "not taking responsibility"?**

This is a question of Marxist basics, of sticking to our guns ideologically, not gratefully accepting any crumb the bourgeoisie throws our way and instead using what voice we have to condemn the system and argue for an alternative. In the Good Friday Agreement not taking responsibility means distinguishing between any progress the deal may bring in relation to the previous situation, without undermining the force of our own independent politics and becoming partisans for one bourgeois camp or another.

The citation of Trotsky on the Cortez, which said that a Marxist deputy would not vote for the bourgeois republican government's war budget during the Spanish Civil War, was an attempt to provide some sort of anchor for the discussion. Trotsky was arguing that Marxists should not give political support to a bourgeois government even when it is carrying out apparently progressive work — in this case sending guns to the front to be used against Franco's army. Trotsky upholds the basic attitude of irreconcilable opposition to the ruling class. This attitude was for decades expressed by the German Social Democracy with the slogan "Not a penny, not a man for the system!"

This stance is a question of principle in the dictionary sense: "a fundamental truth as a basis of reasoning". The fundamental truth here is that the Marxists will never succeed in educating, organising and mobilising the working class to take power into their own hands if we fail to instill in the workers a healthy contempt for their rulers — even when those rulers are, or appear to be, making concessions.



The Good Friday Agreement is not our kind of solution. Socialists should not take responsibility for selling it or for making it stick. Still less should we take on the role of apologists for its "good", "democratic" side. It has all the hallmarks of a classic bourgeois politicians' "fix":

- It provides no stable long term answer to the antagonism between the two Irish peoples.

- Taking the gerrymandered six county statelet as the basis for a solution, the framework for its structures are — because the Six Counties is the frame — inevitably sectarian.

- It means different things to different people. On the one hand, it is welcomed by the Unionist establishment because it copperbottoms the union. On the other, it is accepted by nationalists as a step towards a united Ireland and also thus opposed by half the Unionists.

We are opposed in principle to this kind of chicanery. We can't go along with the systematic fudging and blurring of issues of democratic principle which the Agreement involves.

**Are Marxists against all bourgeois reforms?**

No. For instance, we would — other things being equal — vote Yes to a republic in a referendum. The problem with the

deal is not that it is a bad and ineffective bourgeois solution cobbled together by forces we don't trust. It doesn't address the fundamental questions of majority and minority rights in Ireland. Supporting the deal necessarily means extending critical support to the forces behind it and uniting with them to make it stick, all the forces of bourgeois Ireland plus the UK and US governments and the EU authorities in their central political project for Ireland.

It is possible, for instance, to vote for the repeal of the anti-union laws and for positive workers' rights without taking responsibility for the capitalist system. It is not possible to argue for a vote for the Good Friday Agreement without taking responsibility for the system of communal politics from which it has emerged — and which it expresses.

But there are elements in the deal that we can support — the Assembly itself, the abandonment of the South's claim on the North, the power-sharing. This is a limited extension of democracy.

Formally, an elected assembly is an extension of democracy. According to abstract logic it is to be preferred to direct rule. But Northern Ireland is not just any state. This assembly is based on an unstable entity, the six county statelet. This is an extension of democracy within an unstable anti-democratic framework. Democratically the deal is a dud. It satisfies neither of the basic drives of Ireland's two peoples. Right now, it keeps the Northern Catholics separate from the rest of their people. In the future the same constitutional framework could become a trap for the Protestants in exactly the same way that it has been in the past for the Catholics. It is quite simply ideological self-deception to describe this set-up as an extension of democracy. Such a description is at best a partial truth. The truth, however, is indivisible. In the proverb, a spoonful of tar spoils a barrelful of honey. In this "extension of democracy", sectarian tar is mixed in more than equal proportions with the desirable democratic honey!

**But aren't you being ultimistic — refusing to support any progress that doesn't fit our pre-conceived schema? In the unions we vote for deals which may contain marginal advances, but also of necessity copper-bottom wage slavery.**

That's true about the trade union struggle. But it's irrelevant here. The trade unions are the basic defensive organisa-

tions of the class. They bargain over the terms of the labour contract. When we make assessments about this or that trade union struggle we tend to judge things quantitatively — looking at wage levels, hours and whatever strings may be involved and ask “Is this on balance a gain or a setback?” and, “Has this strengthened, or weakened the workers’ forces?” Sometimes we even endorse deals that involve concessions by our side to the employers, but when we do so we tell the truth to the workers.

It is not possible to apply the same criteria to bourgeois democratic issues. These are issues of principle, rather than of degree. We are either for or against an equal age of consent, republic or federal united Ireland. The trade unionist method if applied here simply leads to us trading in principles — “The deal may be based on the six county statelet, but its better than the status quo, so forget federalism for now and mobilise for the deal.”

**Are you saying that we wouldn't vote for any reform within the framework of the Six Counties?**

Of course not. It's just that we don't put forward the six county entity (with or without cross-border institutions) as the framework for a solution to the communal conflict. Think about the analogy with the trade union struggle. Piecemeal gains are a necessary part of the evolution and development of the workers' movement — which, of course, also involves radical breaks, ruptures and revolution. Contrast this to the Agreement. It is not a necessary stage in solving the national questions in Ireland. In fact it is not an answer at all.

**If the deal holds, then the Six Counties will no longer be the same. The Northern Ireland statelet will be placed within a broader multi-national framework of UK/ Eire relations, new cross-border institutions and the EU. This could drain the poison out of the communal antagonisms. Isn't there a danger that our neat formula can prevent us from recognising what is new in the situation and stop us thinking?**

Of course we should beware of becoming ossified political sectarians who refuse to recognise developments outside their formulas. Unfortunately, we are unlikely to be put in that position by the Good Friday Agreement. We cannot predict the future. All we can do is assess the deal on its merits and in the light of what we understand about the conflict. On that criterion of politics as opposed to hope, the prospects don't look good. In fact, much of what needs to happen to make the agreement work — like cross-border institutions — has not yet been thrashed

out in the Assembly. So why rush to endorse it?

**Welcoming the deal means supporting it. Therefore why not vote “Yes”?**

There is a long Marxist tradition of being able to recognise progress without feeling compelled to give it a proletarian seal of approval. For instance, Bismarck's welfare reforms were to be welcomed in comparison to the situation that existed before they were introduced. This didn't, however, compel the German Social Democracy to vote for them in the Reichstag. The general rule here is that while all progress is to be welcomed — and recognised as such — not all progress is worth political endorsement.

**But voting for the deal places you on the inside and makes it easier to get the rest of our message across.**

It makes our message incoherent. A worker with a brain would ask: “If you support federalism within a united Ireland, why are you backing a deal which is based on the six counties?”

How would we reply? “Because we want you to listen to us...” Anyway it is self-delusion to think that voting Yes would put us on the inside. It is fantasy mass politics. We didn't negotiate the deal, so why take responsibility for it?

**But we often ask people to vote for things we don't agree with. We call for a Labour vote, but we don't endorse its programme. Why can't we do the same with the deal?**

We no longer call for a Labour vote in quite the same way as we used to. We have had to adjust our slogans to recognise the way Blair is trying to change the party and the extent to which he has already succeeded. But nevertheless, let us go back in the time machine to the time when “Vote Labour and Fight” was an adequate summary of our position. The slogan expressed an entire orientation. It recognised the Labour Party as a distorted expression of working class independence, while simultaneously underlining the bourgeois nature of its policies and programme and the need for a working class fightback against Labour in office. The tension in the slogan was simply a reflection of the tensions in reality and the highly qualified nature of our support for Labour. The slogan was expressive of a dialectical contradiction. To oppose the contents of the deal, and then argue for people to vote for it is not dialectical but flatly self-contradictory, like saying: “The deal is crap, back the deal.”

**So why don't you just say “Vote No!”?**

Advocating a No vote would put us in an implicit alliance with the Paisleyites

and irredentist Republicans. It would make it more difficult to get our message across to the workers who are voting for the deal out of a gut — if delusory — working class pacifism. The essential point is not to take responsibility for the deal and not to help spread illusions in it. We are not partisans of direct rule or the Protestant ascendancy, or of die-in-the-last-ditch physical force republicanism. We take no pleasure if the deal fails. We do not actively want it to fail: therefore we don't say vote No.

*Tom Rigby*

**It extends democracy!**

**T**HE discussion on the Irish Peace Agreement has taken place on shifting sands. It was insisted at first that the decisive thing was not the Agreement itself but our posture on such matters, that “we are the party of irreconcilable opposition”. Only Sean Matgamna made any serious attempt to comment on the terms of the Agreement, but in his argument this was inseparable from the question of posture because his essential point was that any sort of Yes, however critical, would mean, “positively to endorse the agreement in all its details.” It would also mean, “a positive expression of faith in the agreement to really achieve what London and Dublin and the various green and orange parties say it will. It is to accept that the political issues and alternatives are as defined by the authors of the agreement.” In effect that is an argument that we could not in principle express any support for any bourgeois settlement or interim settlement. It is impossible to imagine circumstances where we would want to endorse the detail of any bourgeois proposal or express faith in the London and Dublin governments.

The argument against a Yes vote now rests heavily on the nature of the agreement and what it represents. The argument over principle is a cul-de-sac. Our posture (declaration of “who we are”) is not always and in principle expressed by opposition to bourgeois measures but by advocacy of an independent working class line. Neither, I agree, do we give support to bourgeois measures simply because they generally represent progress or create better conditions for working class struggle and unity. We consider concretely, on the merits of the case and based on our class interests, whether communists can advocate any support for constitutional reforms or proposals from bourgeois governments.

Mark Osborn believes the agreement is, “the project of imperialism and communalism. It does not even address the

democratic question in a democratic way." Martin Thomas says it, "is only an elaborate and empty edifice of parliamentary and bureaucratic structures offering in and of themselves no alleviation at all to a single Irish worker." For Sean the deal, "institutionalises sectarianism and communalism within an artificial state framework." He goes further when, in an attempt to locate the agreement in the classical Marxist debate on the national question, he describes it as "Austro-Marxism" because it is based on cultural/communal identity and not territory.

My position is not that the agreement is either a consistently democratic settlement or certain to succeed where others have failed.

The assessments made by Martin and Mark and to some extent Sean logically tend to a No vote rather than abstention. They recoil from this only by evasion and sleight of hand.

Those who think the Agreement is appalling cannot oppose it because the Paisleyites do and those who think it represents some progress cannot give it any support because the two governments and the main unionist and nationalist parties do. There is no coherent picture here from a working class point of view. This is the very opposite of independent socialist politics.

Essentially, the agreement is a limited extension of bourgeois democracy. It has all the weaknesses and limits of any such reform and, because it tries to take account of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, even a few more. This is a reform that reflects real felt needs in the population — and, I would argue, above all — in our class. It isn't a simple matter of always being "with the class" or "going through the experience with them", but of how we relate to democratic demands and bourgeois democratic politics.

Those arguing that this agreement was imposed by imperialism are missing the wood for the trees. The British and Irish governments' strategy has not changed significantly since 1972. They have been unable to impose their will up until now. The fundamental change has been internal to Ireland and particularly to the North. The leading forces in Irish Nationalism and Unionism have gone through dramatic changes as a result of the last 30 years which may well have altered their goals as well as their methods. (See my article WL48.) The future of the Agreement depends not on the power and will of imperialism, but on how fundamental these changes have been. They are clearly embryonic, unfinished and unstable. In and of themselves they have little

or nothing to do with working class politics. I welcome the potential reduction in communal antagonism and think it could benefit working class politics. Whether it does depends entirely on what socialists do and say. First they need to recognise what is happening.

Our attitude to a popular vote on an assembly in these circumstances is comparable to the line we took in Scotland (though the "national question" in Scotland is not the same). Within limits an assembly in Northern Ireland elected by PR, with links to the Parliament in Dublin and guarantees against communal domination built in, constitutes a partial democratisation of Northern Ireland (and indeed British) society. The massive budget of the Northern Ireland Office may be transformed from civil servants into an elected body. A majority of people in both Northern Irish communities support self-government; 71% voted for it. Well over 90% of voters in the Republic endorsed it. For the first time in its history, Northern Ireland has an elected assembly supported by both communities. To this extent it is possible to make a socialist case for supporting its existence.

There is no serious comparison with the Middle East peace agreement. The Israeli election is not comparable: it was an *election* and not a referendum; it was exclusively *Israeli*.

The Northern Irish working class will only benefit if it can assert its identity and rebuild its organisational strength, making its own demands on the assembly and its Executive. This, necessarily, means that socialists must develop a democratic programme on the national/communal question and the plethora of related issues likely to polarise the assembly (marches, job discrimination, sectarian violence, language, education). The only consistently democratic answer to the underlying conflict is a federal Ireland with voluntary agreed confederal links to Britain. Advocating a Yes vote in the referendum makes sense as part of a simultaneous fight for that perspective. It is not a matter of separating out stages of a process. We are for democracy and communal compromise but we will argue for consistent thorough-going democracy. We say to workers: yes take what you can get, but you will not really gain from it unless you use the new situation to fight for independent workers' interests from the start, including a real democratic settlement.

This limited democratic reform has the potential to create new and much better conditions for the emergence and growth of independent working class politics. "Anti-war" arguments have been denounced as mere pacifism. If there is

some of that by all means bring it out. An end to the communal war is of central importance to socialists, however, for much more tangible reasons. The sectarian divide is the critical obstacle to working class politics in Northern Ireland. The military conflict polarises that divide to the point where the most elementary work of socialists is impossible. The radical ground is monopolised by the most sectarian elements. Those who are angry at the state and its forces, those who are exploited by the economic system, gravitate towards the immediate and apparently revolutionary answer of communal violence. A democratic reform agreed by the two communities, including their main paramilitaries, doesn't end sectarian politics as many have prided themselves on pointing out, but the notion that the end of the war would in and of itself create better conditions for working class politics is based on more than pacifism, on the sort of analysis which led the AWL to break from the pro-Republican left in the 1980s.

Those who talk as if it makes no difference whether we have a continuation of direct rule and sectarian war (low-level or full-blown) or a ceasefire and an elected assembly, however unstable, have effectively given up. They offer a counsel of despair dressed up as militant class politics.

Is this Austro-Marxism? Driven, I think, more by heresy-hunting than the need to clarify this debate Sean Matgamna has described the Agreement as Austro-Marxist, a reference to the ideas of people like Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, leaders of the Social Democrats in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early years of this century. This was an empire which had annexed or absorbed surrounding territory including Czechs, Bohemians, Serbs, Croats and others. It was a multi-national state. The Austro-Marxists' programme for the national question was an adaptation to the dominant (Hapsburg) state, though it appeared to safeguard the rights of each national group. They advocated something called "cultural-national autonomy," the gist of which, in the words of Lenin, was, "that every citizen registers as belonging to a particular nation, and every nation constitutes a legal entity with the right to impose compulsory taxation on its members, with national parliaments and national secretaries of state." (*Critical Remarks on the National Question*). In order to hold together the unity of Austria-Hungary at all costs, in the belief that they were thereby preserving workers' unity, Renner and Bauer advocated a utopian and reactionary programme which would have perpetuated and encouraged indefi-



nately national and cultural divisions. Lenin counterposed to this the idea of nations as territorial entities and insisted that socialists had to support their right to secede from larger centralised states. He advocated internationalism and centralisation but on a voluntary, democratically agreed basis.

Austro-Marxism was a programme on the national question advocated from within the Marxist movement. It was proposed as a solution to particular national conflicts. Sean takes one aspect of the Northern Irish Agreement, the fact that politicians elected to the Assembly are asked to declare themselves as unionist, nationalist or other, to suggest that what we have here is the ghost of Otto Bauer. A brief reminder of the agreement is enough to see how little it has to do with Austro-Marxism. The point of this communal identification is not to enable separate decisions to be made for each "national" community but precisely the opposite, so that certain decisions (called "key decisions" in the agreement) which affect the whole community cannot be taken unless there is cross-community consent. The assumption is that decisions apply to both communities. If anything this is closer to Lenin's counter-proposal to Bauer that there should be, "a fundamental law which shall declare null and void all privileges enjoyed by any one nation and all infringements of the rights of a national minority." It isn't such a law but it is based much more on that goal than "national-cultural autonomy". In addition the idea of territorial self-determination is central to the agreement. Northern Ireland remains part of the UK precisely because and as long as the majority of people in that territory want it to, and could form part of a united Ireland when a majority decide in a referendum that it should. Sean knows this and a fair amount of his commentary has been quite rightly concerned with the dangers in this part of the deal. Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of these measures we are not going to develop our response by mis-labelling it Austro-Marxist.

Is an elected assembly supportable in "an unviable democratic unit"? The usefulness of this formulation, a commonplace on the left for decades, is in its assertion that Northern Ireland was an undemocratic state from birth and that no attempt to resolve the national question democratically would succeed if it was based on denying the Northern nationalists the right to determine their own future together with the majority of people on the island. *Workers' Liberty* has aspired to a much fuller appreciation of the problem and developed a programme which rejects the

idea of a conquest of the Protestants and insists that no working class force for progress can be built which does not advocate the legitimate rights of the Unionists/Protestants as a distinct community. Thus we cannot see how an internal settlement could be adequate. Are we in principle against the establishment of any elected assembly in Northern Ireland? I cannot see that it does. Whether we advocate such a development or think that, in all the circumstances, it is a likely stage in an overall democratic settlement, those are different matters — but faced with popular demand for a democratic body internal to Northern Ireland (not just a built-in majority Unionist demand), endorsed by popular vote in the republic, are we in principle against? Even when the conditions created are likely to be more positive for our class than the alternative? It doesn't seem to me that a position of intransigent opposition to that makes sense. It doesn't make it part of our programme, it doesn't cut against the need to counterpose to such a limited development the notion of consistent democracy represented in the call for a federal Ireland. In the case of the present agreement, in any case, it isn't an entirely internal settlement as, in its own clumsy way, the new framework re-establishes a North-South Council of Ireland and talks of referenda on unity in the future.

The unmistakable drift in our own discussion is that we are, in principle, against any democratic accommodation reached by the two sides in Northern Ireland short, in effect, of socialism. Federalism enabled us to address the national question in all its complexities and from the point of view of the working class. It is nothing if we do not then have a strategy for creating the agency to fight for it. There is a danger, implied in some of this discussion, that it is just a comforting fig leaf behind which lurks the same old bankrupt ultimatum: no solution but revolution. But: who is to create this revolution and on what basis are they to be united?

Pat Murphy

### Pragmatic arguments against Yes

I STARTED out sharing the initial position of those who advocated voting Yes to the Agreement. While I share the concerns of the Yes camp, I have been convinced that there are good pragmatic reasons not to vote for an agreement with which we largely disagree. These lie in the need to have a coherent explanation of what is going on and what we do and do not advocate in our programme.

Mark Osborn and Tom Rigby in particular have made not voting Yes an issue of principle. Why isn't it? In certain circumstances, for their own reasons and in different ways, the bourgeoisie can implement elements of our programme. This may be a response to pressure — as, for example with restrictions on working hours — or it may, particularly in the case of democratic issues and the national question, occur because there is a temporary coincidence of class interests. As the quote from Lenin [in 1913, see WL48] indicates, the democratic programme of socialists is not necessarily incompatible with capitalism. Our response to this when it occurs is to point out deficiencies in what is being proposed, to argue for no confidence in what the capitalist class is doing, but to support the measures themselves insofar as they serve our interests.

It was a recognition of this — combined with the weakness of their own forces — that led Marx and Engels to give critical support to Bismarck's war to unify Germany in 1870. Engels wrote: "... to raise anti-Bismarckism to a guiding principle for this reason [that a German victory would reflect glory on Bismarck's system] would be absurd. First of all, just as in 1866, Bismarck is doing a share of our work; he is doing it in his own way and without wanting to, but nevertheless he is doing it. He is giving us a clearer field than we had before." The key issues of principle in this case were not the question of whether to give any form of support to Bismarck's war but an analysis of the concrete content of the war and maintenance of the socialists' political independence. This enabled Marx and Engels to withdraw their highly conditional support when the war ceased to have any progressive content (as Germany had by then been united) and became a war of conquest of France.

It is not in principle impossible to support bourgeois measures while maintaining working class independence even if they are proposed by "the largest Popular Front in the world." Rather the question is one of concrete analysis of the Agreement and whether it does "a share of our work" in any sense.

*Workers' Liberty* in distinction to a lot of the "anti-imperialist" left, rejected long ago the idea that the British bourgeoisie has any particular economic, political or military interest in the maintenance of partition or the prolongation of the national conflict in Ireland, which costs the British state millions of pounds to little advantage. As outlined in WL48, "the Agreement models itself on the European Union experience of slowly knitting Europe together economically and politi-

cally, thus draining off the national antagonisms..." The Agreement is a product of trying to balance these long-term aims with the "real, existing" state of politics in the North. This contradiction is what makes it unlikely that the Agreement will "do a share of our work".

The Hapsburg Emperor Franz Josef referred to his policy in Austria-Hungary as "maintaining the nationalities in a uniform state of discontent." Concessions and disappointments for all were the starting point of the Good Friday Agreement, as any of the parties could otherwise have vetoed any shifts. This, rather than any inherent antagonism to a federal solution, is why the architects of the deal are putting forward a series of compromises which will not in themselves resolve the national conflict. This naturally makes the Agreement unstable, though this is a reflection of the communal antagonisms rather than anything newly created by the Agreement. Blair, Ahern and Co hope in the longer term that being locked into these structures will provide the parties with no alternative but to defuse the situation. This may or may not be so. Personally, I think that they still have a number of weapons to bring to bear to try and ensure the Agreement does stick. Either way our policy cannot simply be dependent on its likely success or failure.

The Agreement does not represent our programme. What attitude would we take if the architects of the agreement did succeed in these aims, if they did "do a share of our work"? The abstentionists don't have a clear answer to this.

Despite this, I think the most potent argument against the Yes vote is that these measures are not in themselves things that we would advocate and that this would necessarily make us incoherent in arguing for our own programme. It is difficult to argue with any normal person: "Vote for this; we are not in favour of its provisions, but still support you voting for it." The essential Yes argument is not that the Agreement itself resolves anything or has any more progressive content than a general ceasefire, but rather that it "may" have beneficial effects in the longer run. It might if the bourgeoisie is able to resolve the contradiction I mentioned before. However, this is too dependent on contingencies and forces outside our control to allow us to avoid ultimately compromising our own independence. The argument for some form of abstention — which form is ultimately dependent on the balance of forces — comes, for me, from this rather than either the likely success of the Agreement or the supposed principle that we can never support bourgeois measures.

Bruce Robinson

### "Revolutionary" cop-out

THE approach to the Irish referendum simply cannot be deduced from a quote from Trotsky on whether to support the military budget of the Republican government in the Spanish Civil War. This is overly bookish. The need for an independent working class alternative is a general principle but the state of the movement must also be taken into account.

In Britain the refusal to campaign seriously for a properly-funded health service, on the grounds that this is mere reformism, has been eloquently rubbished by *Workers' Liberty*. Similarly *WL* has, to its credit, taken on the misperception on the left that the Irish question is primarily about British imperialism. *WL* has said that the chief obstacle to the emergence of working class politics is the communal conflict. Thus when the British and Irish governments try to end the communal conflict, proposing a ceasefire and a compromise agreement, it makes no sense at all not to vote for it. For the kitsch left, on the other hand, opposition is consistent with their perception that Adams and co

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### "For the kitsch left opposition is consistent with their perception that Adams and co have sold out the revolutionary struggle."

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have sold out the revolutionary struggle. Perhaps these people are also reluctant to align themselves with the Paisleyites by voting no. Not to worry, abstention is the perfect "revolutionary" cop out.

On occasion, abstain might be appropriate. Take the Common Market referendum as an example. *WL*'s predecessor abstained from voting, but regarded capitalist partial integration of Europe as the "lesser evil". This was a defensible stance, but how visible was the campaign? At the time I was in Manchester and (as a CP member) I actively campaigned for a vote for withdrawal. I knew Labour Party members who voted to remain in the EEC. I was inclined to sympathise with their reasons. I had no difficulty in distinguishing these people from Ted Heath. I was also aware of the IS slogan: "No to the bosses' Europe!" and did not equate this with support for Enoch Powell. Yet I was totally unaware of any campaign that did not advocate Yes or No, let alone the

motivation for such a campaign.

We agree that the communal conflict is the main obstacle to the development in working class politics in Ireland. Therefore there is a clear rationale for a Yes vote, namely to deny the paramilitary groups a mandate for continuing their campaigns. This does not imply political support for the details of the agreement, notwithstanding the assertion that "the details matter". The argument that the Yes people disagree with most of the detail is combined with the assertion that a "critical" Yes is really just a plain Yes. The Yes camp are criticised simultaneously for being insufficiently critical and for being so critical that they shouldn't be voting Yes at all. Perhaps one of these arguments could be sustained, but not both!

We can endorse the positive features in a proposal by voting Yes while criticising the negative, or we can vote No to the negative features while agreeing with the positive. Oh dear! What do we do?

This is very well dealt with by Lenin in Left-Wing Communism. Ultra-lefts want a nice safe rule like "no compromises" in order to guarantee themselves against opportunism. However, saddling ourselves with such a silly "principle" would, in practice, be a gift to the opportunists.

The point is not to never make compromises, but to distinguish between those compromises that are treacherous and those that are not. Sometimes we will get it wrong, but hopefully we learn from our mistakes and so reduce their frequency.

There has been a suggestion that Yes advocates hold a "stages theory". Quelle horreur! The reason I find it difficult to take this suggestion seriously is that it is the stock phrase of the left anti-semites when arguing against our "two states" position on the Middle East. We do have the advantage over these people of understanding that the Stalinist "two stages" theory not only conceptually separates a democratic stage from a socialist stage, but concedes the leadership of the democratic stage to the bourgeoisie. No one who has advocated voting Yes favours any such course. As Jean Lane put it: "There is nothing in saying vote Yes which prevents us from saying anything else. We have not been gagged."

Roger Clarke

### Northern Ireland: an unviable unit for democracy

PAT Murphy does not state definitely that the deal was created essentially as an agreement from below, but he

seems to imply it when he writes of, "a democratic reform agreed by the two communities." "For the first time in its history Northern Ireland has an elected assembly supported by both communities."

I think this assessment of the Agreement is wrong. But if it is right, much more follows than just voting Yes in the referendum. If today the perspective of "partial democratisation" of Northern Ireland is immediately workable and can "create new and much better conditions for the emergence and growth of independent working class politics," then that perspective was always feasible, if not immediately. The core strategic view of the Workers' Party and their sidekicks (Henry Patterson, Paul Bew, etc.) of the nationalist-minded wing of the old Northern Ireland Labour Party, and of elements of the SDLP, has always been sound: first "normalise" Northern Ireland by somehow freezing the national and communal questions, then promote working class politics there, then deal with the national and communal questions. Our programme for a united working class party to fight for a united Ireland with regional autonomy in the north-east and confederal links with Britain was possibly better as a long-term ideal, but to insist on it in immediate politics was foolish pedantry.

Pat is, I think, arguing that the Agreement is a substantial, though of course limited, installment towards the "consistent democracy" we fight for in Ireland, and thus creates a fundamentally new and in principle more favourable framework for working class politics. It is such a substantial advance that to counterpose our democratic programme to it is tantamount to counterposing socialist revolution to all immediate reform. I ask: if so, then why for all those years were we ploughing our own furrow and not backing those bigger forces who argued for this "democratic reform" as their immediate programme?

In fact the Agreement is not a, "democratic reform agreed by the two communities." We still lack even such minimal signs of free democratic compromise from below as a significant political party which unites Catholics and Protestants (unless you include the Alliance; but that has existed for many years, has had no sudden increase of influence and vigour, and indeed is under pressure to abandon its "non-sectarian" label for that of "Unionist"). For every party involved, the Agreement is a second-best, accepted through war-weariness, and seen as a stepping-stone to a different future. For the Provisionals and the SDLP, it is a means to corner the British state into forcing the Protestants into a united Ireland ten or

twenty years down the track, when Northern Ireland has a Catholic majority. For the Unionists, it is a means to establish a legitimised Northern Ireland state which in operation can gain enough inertia, patronage and political credit that the clauses about a future united Ireland, dependent anyway on uncertain population projections, will prove a dead letter. Each side is taking the other by the hand the better to take it by the throat.

The Agreement was not "imposed" on Ireland by the pan-imperialist alliance in the sense of direct military coercion. But it is unmistakably the British state's policy, constant in essentials if inventive in detail ever since the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, and even before. And what has let it get this far is not that anyone (except Pat!) has seen previously-invisible virtues in that policy, but that the Provisionals, Orange paramilitaries and mainstream Unionists have concluded that no amount of bombs, bullets, or demonstrations can push the British state immediately into granting what they want.

That now, "for the first time in its history Northern Ireland has an elected assembly supported by both communities," seems to me doubtful factually. Didn't the Stormont parliament in, say, the early 1960s, have at least as much "support" (grudging acquiescence) from the Catholic community as this assembly has from the Protestant community? Anyway, haven't elected assemblies for Northern Ireland been a constant of all British plans for it ever since Partition? What is so specially good about this one that makes it a substantial democratisation?

Northern Ireland is an unviable unit for democracy: that this assertion is no mere mindless left-wing slogan is shown by the extraordinary network of rules and limits imposed on the new Northern Ireland Assembly by the Agreement. And the institutionalised-sectarian character of those rules speaks against any claim that the Assembly can be considered a "democratic reform".

The point of our democratic programme is not that it is an ideal blueprint which can be imposed by anyone, any time, but that it is a political weapon whereby socialists undercut and marginalise Paisleyite, Adamsite (and other) reaction. The pro-Agreement forces essentially have no such political weapons beyond the baseline might-is-right argument: Give up. Make the best of a bad job. You're banging your heads against a brick wall. And in order that we have such political weapons, or at least can help socialists in Northern Ireland to develop such political weapons, we must refuse assent to the Agreement.

No-one has suggested that we should never vote for bourgeois reforms. Voting Yes in Australia's 1967 referendum on civil rights for Aboriginals seems to me a clearer example than the Scottish Assembly. In such cases, though, the bourgeois reforms give the working class clear advantages; they are clearly distinct from any political confidence or trust in the government; and they do not cut across or contradict class struggle answers to the issues at stake. With the Agreement, the advantages are a matter of hopes and balances of probabilities (and also, it seems to me, advantages which can only be realised with continued mass political passivity). The hopes and probabilities depend entirely on a favourable estimate of the future actions of the British Government. And, as already discussed, many provisions of the Agreement directly contradict our democratic programme.

Where "posture" comes in is that the minority agree that the Agreement is, on the balance of probabilities, a lesser evil than the immediately-available alternatives, a return to low-level civil war or open Paisleyite reaction; but we deny that in such situations Marxists should vote for the bourgeois "lesser evil" rather than standing out for our socialist and democratic (not immediately-available) alternative.

*Martin Thomas*

### Answer the question!

THE debate in *Workers' Liberty* reminds me of the story of the traveller in Ireland who, when asking a local how he gets to a certain destination, is told that if he wants to go there he should not start from here. Finding the correct approach to the Stormont Agreement is not possible from the programmatic starting point of both sides.

A recurring theme has been the question of "lesser-evilism" — but the choice of the devil or the deep blue sea has been self-imposed, because the problem is defined as one of communal division and of conflicting "distinct national identities" described as being "autonomous", but is clearly not only autonomous but determining. Imperialism is effectively written out of the equation. Unfortunately, of course, the deal writes it back in and *WL* are thrown into confusion. The logic of their analysis is to support imperialism's plans but, posed so starkly, many recoil from this.

Why is this the logical conclusion of *WL*'s programme? Defining the conflict as one of democratic rights, the comrades put forward "a federal united Ireland, with self-rule for the Protestant majority areas, coupled with closer, perhaps confederal,

links between the UK and independent Ireland." Socialist Democracy opposes this formula because it obscures the key democratic question of national self-determination and the domination of imperialism, fails to completely reject the sectarian "rights" of unionism, invites sectarian struggle over exactly what the "Protestant majority areas" are — although this has already been decided (it's the Six Counties), and is explicitly based on the idea that the "constitutional" question involved should be settled by "compromise" (Dave Ball), communal division "accommodated" — as opposed to "abolished" (Pat Murphy) — and democratic rights "regulated" (Mark Osborn).

"To have gone beyond these general ideas to discussing precise details would be futile: the details can only be worked out in discussion," says Sean Matgamna. We have just had the discussion and have just been presented with the solution, not in a small left wing journal but in the real world. It appears that the deal is not so very far from *Workers' Liberty's* own democratic programme. The false, exaggerated view of the south's role and the equally false view that the Agreement is designed for a united Ireland; the view that it has been negotiated by Unionism to defend Protestant rights with a view to just such an eventuality; and finally the benign role of Britain in setting the framework for the overall agreement — make it all very evocative of Sean's description. In fact, given its overwhelming endorsement by the two communities, whose division is held to be the key problem, it must be better; real life compromises and accommodations must surely be judged superior to *WL's* hypothetical compromises.

And yet almost no-one in the debate has a good word to say about the deal. The Agreement is designed to provide for stable imperialist rule, strengthen and institutionalise sectarianism and legitimise a repressive state apparatus. Tom Rigby ridicules those who want to vote for the deal, saying "It is the equivalent of saying 'The deal is crap, back the deal.'" Quite true. His, and others', position appears to be, "The deal is crap, don't vote against it."

The origin of this contradiction is the role of imperialism in the analysis. Imperialism, it appears, is trying to convey the Protestants to a united Ireland, it has pushed, "for normalisation and conciliation both sensitively and with energy," and we can, "reasonably believe that the... London government(s) have... some ability to rise above their imperialist arrogance." Britain wanted reform but the Catholics were too impatient for it. The imperialist solution is "progressive"

though should not be supported (Martin Thomas). Pat Murphy believes that there is "plenty of evidence" that imperialism is trying to dissolve communal differences. This sits uneasily with the view that the deal is crap and strengthens sectarian division. There is clearly confusion here and perhaps a real divergence of analysis. Normally such a fundamental difference over the nature and role of imperialism would be central to a Marxist debate but imperialism is completely secondary and irrelevant in *Workers' Liberty's* analysis.

Often repeated is the argument that intra-class struggle within communities is the core problem. *WL* appears unaware that this undermines, "the most basic principle of Marxist politics: the political independence of the working class." (*SO* editorial 28 April 1994) Such independence only arises as a necessity because of the primacy of class struggle. Where such primacy does not exist, where the problem lies within classes, as the comrades say it does in Ireland, socialist support for imperialism can become unavoidable, particularly when it appears that the project of imperialism is "progressive" in relation to the primary and fundamental problem

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**"Voting No no more puts us in alliance with Paisley than opposing the closure of Belfast shipyard puts us in alliance with the majority of the representatives of Unionism."**

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of communal division. The debate now rages because some of your comrades are quite happy to follow the logic of your analysis while others are not.

This abandonment of working class independence is most explicitly stated by Martin Thomas: "If the Irish workers remain in the tow of bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalist and communalist politicians, then only top-down bourgeois solutions are possible in Ireland." Leaving aside the many contradictions within such a short statement, for us, no matter how long Irish workers remain prisoners of sectarianism it will only be a democratic and socialist programme that can free them. Some in *Workers' Liberty* believe imperialism can, at the very least, start this process. This entails a theory of stages, that is a necessary stage in the struggle where opposition to imperialism is subor-

dated to a more fundamental struggle within which it is possible to actually support imperialism.

As Mark Osborn wrote: "...the question on the ballot was: Do we back the peace agreement cobbled together by British and US imperialism, the Irish ruling class and the more mainstream communalist politicians in the North? Yes or No?..." Unfortunately he does not then say Yes or No. Once again the comrades rob themselves of the possibility of taking up a "position of intransigent opposition" and asserting an independent working class stance. The refusal to call for a No vote because they might be seen to be in alliance with Paisley! Apparently the possibility of principled opposition is destroyed by sectarians who oppose the deal for their own reasons.

Both practically and in principle such an approach is false. Voting No no more puts us in alliance with Paisley than opposing the closure of Belfast shipyard puts us in alliance with the majority of the representatives of Unionism. If by chance workers see only our No and not our arguments this will be far outweighed by the lead we will have given to the most thoughtful workers whom we have engaged in debate. Refusing to call a No vote gives no leadership to such workers and disarms them.

Even after reading the debate I still don't know whether those opposing a Yes vote want to abstain, spoil their vote or just put their head down and wait until it all blows over. No matter how awful they think it is it cannot be bad enough to vote against. In the atmosphere prevalent during the campaign this would have been understood as, "Look at the extreme Marxists, even they will not vote against it."

The final defence of this position is that the only alternative is sectarian war. There is not the space to challenge the view that the last thirty years has been primarily a sectarian war. (For us the real content of the republican peace process is an acceptance of imperialist rule that sets back the necessary democratic, and socialist, struggle of the Irish working class.) Here it is only necessary to say that the same flawed approach is apparent. The possibility of opposing imperialism's plans and fighting for continued opposition to imperialism on the basis of a socialist programme is lost. Despite protests to the contrary, the alternatives that the comrades present themselves are those set by imperialism.

A blatant abandonment of independent working class politics is implicit in their common analysis of the problem is common to both sides in the debate. It will come as no surprise that we advocate

# Livingstone uses slander to cover disruption of anti-fees fight

## An open letter to Ken Livingstone

From "an MI5 Agent"

Mr Livingstone,

Marx once rightly said: "To leave error uncorrected is to encourage intellectual immorality." But that has little to do with what I'm engaged in now! Dealing with an irresponsible old gobshite, unserious in everything political except self advancement, is no matter of an exchange of ideas and views with another socialist or of comradely "correction" and counter-correction. It is work akin to what sanitation workers do — unpleasant but necessary.

Three *Workers' Liberty* people report that from the platform at a meeting of 30 or 40 students at Birkbeck College, London, last July you said of me that I am, "certainly mad and most probably an MI5 agent."

This was a meeting organised by people who, only a few months previously, stood their own candidate for President of the National Union of Students against the candidate of the (for the first time ever) united left in NUS, advocating second preference votes not for the united left but for the Blairite candidate. These people — long-time allies of yours — got a paltry vote, but deprived the candidate of the united left and of all those who wanted NUS to fight the government on student fees, Kate Buckell, of the presidency. The Blairite won — by only 15 votes (or 8 second preferences!), from a total of around 1,100 votes cast.

I'd be inclined to treat the MI5 agent stuff as a joke were it not that in an Irish context this idiocy might one day cease to be funny. I assume that statements like this are not confined to public meetings or made only in the presence of *Workers' Liberty* supporters. You say such things all the time, about many people on the left — about Arthur Scargill, for example — not only about me. This will surprise only those who don't know you and your history. You are not quite what you seem, Mr Livingstone. Your easy way with such charges brands you as, at least, a bit of a nut.

Yet if I were new in politics, trying on impressions to separate the worthwhile political people from the career-mad power-suited citizens who swarm around Blair, I'd probably think there was a lot to be said in your favour. You seem to stand in marked contrast to the regiment of New Labour MPs who, with slight gender variations, dress alike, think alike, talk alike, walk alike and sing identical hosannas to His Majesty Tony.

Where a mysterious Invasion of the Body



Lord Redken-Gobshite of the GLC: an official portrait. He hopes soon to be known as Mayor Gobshite.

Snatchers has turned most Labour MPs into political robots, connected electronically to a single will, brain and public relations-obsessed answering machine in the Whips' Office, you appear to be that rarity in the Parliamentary Labour Party, a creature with the characteristics of a human being — a man with a mind of his own, who occasionally speaks it. If I didn't know you and your past I'd think having you as Mayor of London was a pretty good idea.

**B**UT I do know you. I know your political record. I know your past political associates and benefactors: I know that the late Gerry Healy and the late Workers' Revolutionary Party financed your 1980s weekly newspaper, *Labour Herald*. And I know that those habitual champions of civilisation, socialism, progress and enlightenment, Colonel Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and various lesser oil-rich Middle East potentates financed Healy.

You know that I have long held the opinion that a Labour Left which accepts you as any sort of leader, or even as a member, is a Left that lacks purpose, standards, memory, self-definition and proper self-respect. Thus the slander. Yours is the record of a relentlessly self-serving careerist — albeit one with an eccentric streak — who will say and do anything that it is in his interest to say and do. Today you would — you have said it publicly

— be a loyal member of the Government now, if only Blair would give you a job. Politically who and what are you? Let us look backwards for a moment.

You were elected left-wing Leader of the Greater London Council in 1981, before Mrs Thatcher had used the Falklands War to consolidate her grip on power. She was then still very unpopular. The labour movement had not yet been shackled by, "the most repressive labour laws in western Europe" (Blair). As Leader of the GLC you chose to duck out of confronting Thatcher when she and her anti-union legislation might still have been beaten.

These were the questions on which you initially fell out with what was then the paper of Labour's broad left, *Socialist Organiser*, which you had helped found: should Labour councils try to avoid conflict with the government by passing on social service cuts as rate rises (to substitute for government funding) — or mobilise their supporters by way of defying the government, turning the councils towards confrontation with the government?

The GLC might have been a fortress of the class-struggle left. By dramatic, ringing defiance of a very unpopular government you might have given a lead to other Labour councils and made life very difficult for the anti-working class Thatcher government. Instead, you ran the GLC as business-as-usual Labour local government, with left frills and gesture politics. You made small donations out of public money to good causes and indulged in conventional middle class "leftist" talk. Neither the working class nor the class struggle had any central part in your scheme of "socialist" politics.

When Tory judges forbade you to bring in "low fares" on the Tubes, a policy the electors in London had voted for, you backed down. You put your career first — you "obeyed the law".

You did — no: mainly you *said* — enough to provoke the Thatcherites and their press. And when they came after you to abolish the GLC you pioneered in life what the late neo-Stalinist journal *Marxism Today* only theorised about, "rainbow-coalition" politics able to reach right across the spectrum as far as ex-Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath.

By the time the miners were taking on the Tory government and their police (1984-85) you were too busy kissing the Queen's hand as she opened the new Thames Barrier — at your invitation — and hobnobbing with Liberals and dissident Tories to pay much attention.

You described your approach to politics



then, with disarming pseudo-candour, in *Tribune*: "I'm for manipulative politics," you said, "the cynical soft-sell." Your future career and personal interest came before anything else. Ken Livingstone über alles!

"Red Ken" survived the abolition of the GLC without incurring legal penalties or disqualification. You broke with the left and became a maverick supporter of Neil Kinnock's soft left Labour Establishment — those who blazed the trail for Blair. The "cynical soft-sell" got you into Parliament in 1987.

But Kinnock lost the '87 General Election and you tacked "left" again. In 1992 you went through the motions of standing for leader of the Labour Party and let the Tory *Sun*, which had for 6 years been boycotted by trade unions as a scab paper, endorse you — you wrote a weekly *Sun* column! — and run you, tongue-in-cheek, as *its* candidate for Labour leader. You, the rate riser of the GLC days, ran for "left" leader of the Labour Party on a *Sun* platform: you criticised Labour in the 1992 Election for proposing tax rises!

You used your column in Murdoch's *Sun* to attack would-be revolutionary socialists, the SWP, for their style of anti-racist campaigning. This was shameless clowning and buffoonery.

That didn't stop desperate and disoriented sections of the "gis-a-fix" left — *Briefing*, for example, and *Socialist Outlook* — backing you. Today you are the "left" candidate for Mayor of London...

But it is your recurrent tendency to find imaginary MI5 agents in the labour movement that has led me to write this letter. "Agent"-baiting left-wing political critics and opponents is a trick you picked up from your friend, mentor and financial benefactor, Gerry Healy.

Three years ago when the Socialist Labour Party stood in the Hemsworth by-election, you agent-baited Arthur Scargill, publicly commenting: "Stella Rimington [Head of MI5] couldn't have done it better, Arthur." When Anne Murphy, representing a small socialist organisation, stood against you in Brent in the 1992 General Election you accused her — before the TV cameras at a public meeting — of being "MI5".

Now I don't mind being called "mad" by someone who himself sees "agents" everywhere and is prone to shouting "spy" and "agent" at anyone who disagrees with, threatens or challenges him; who seems to believe sincerely that what's good for Ken Livingstone — the future Lord Redken Gobshite, as *Socialist Organiser*, with admirable restraint, used to call you — is *ipso facto* good for socialism. Socialism? "It is I"!

"Mad" is often a loose-mouthed, slobbish way of dismissing what one can't quite fathom. Indeed, it would be a miracle of cultural and political empathy if you, with your solopistic "socialism", could comprehend what *Socialist Organiser* was *Workers' Liberty* is about.

"Mad!" here is just abuse hurled across the political, social, moral, intellectual and, no doubt, psychological void that separates us. If, in socialist terms, you are sane, then — I insist on it — I am, indeed, mad!

The guff about MI5 is altogether more serious. Indirectly, it is a charge against everybody associated with *Workers' Liberty*, and, before that *Socialist Organiser*.

One of two things — either: you are an irresponsible blatherskite making wild charges you cannot substantiate. Or: you can substantiate. Then why don't you? Don't you think it matters that someone you believe is "probably" an "MI5 agent" can wander around the left politically corrupting and confusing the innocent and unwary? I challenge you: put up or shut up! Prove your case, or suggest plausible reasons for thinking what you allege. If you don't you thereby tacitly admit that you are a slanderer and a liar.

**A**ND how about you, yourself? Who gave you your "security clearance"? You were long associated with the late Gerry Healy and still associate with some of his political heirs. You wrote the introduction to their book about Healy.

Healy ran an organisation in Britain [the WRP] which, in return for large quantities of petro-dollars, contracted to report to Arab governments on the activities of dissident Arabs in Britain and of prominent British Jews. Until the WRP exploded, and Healy's opponents made them known, you couldn't know the details, but you'd have had to have been an idiot not to know in general — and, socialist politics aside, you are no idiot — from the contents of Healy's press.

In *Socialist Organiser* I said, repeatedly, that they were being paid and by whom, challenged Healy to sue me. In the person of Vanessa Redgrave — who, though splendid as an actress, is, in politics, at least 57 pages short of a full shooting script — they had sued me for saying they were thugs and for comparing them to the Moonies, but they let us go on saying with impunity that their organisation depended on Gaddafi's, and Saddam Hussein's, money! If they had sued, we would, under the "disclosure" rules, have had a right to see their books. It was almost as good as an admission.

And you? In 1981 Healy set you up with a weekly paper, *Labour Herald*. For the first 18 months at least the WRP financially subsidised *Labour Herald*, and not only by providing you with a full time editor — a member of the WRP Central Committee, Stephen Miller — free of charge. Let me underline it: people getting money from Arab governments financially subsidised you in politics! Conversely: you acted as front man for Healy's Labour Party paper.

Your *political* association with them was open and visible. Sometimes you seemed to

share or endorse their obsessions. You appeared in one issue of their daily paper *Newstime*, on the page opposite a clinically crazy but unmistakably anti-semitic editorial about a "Zionist"-imperialist conspiracy against them. It stretched they said, from the editorial offices of *SO* through Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet all the way to Ronald Reagan's White House! [See attached text]. This was only high-concentrate everyday Healyism.

Did you demur, or dissociate yourself from this criminal nonsense? *Socialist Organiser* invited you to. You refused. You continued to speak at their public meetings. In interviews you reassured them that, yes, they were through the "Zionist" BBC being hounded by "the Zionists".

The whole political scene in which you were then pivotal is one to conjure work for a cartoonist! Holding hands with Ted Heath, former Tory Prime Minister — he was against Thatcher and against the abolition of the GLC — you bow and kiss the Queen's hand at the opening of the Thames Barrier; your other hand, behind your back, is holding one end of a wad of notes while Gerry Healy, who is simultaneously kissing not Gaddafi's hand but a different part of his anatomy, holds the other! It was not, I guess, done with wads of notes but by special book-keeping at their printshop.

**G**ERRY Healy in his last phase does present the observer with a mystery. To those who knew him Healy was, underneath the tough-guy James Cagney talk and the WC Fields bluster, a timid, frightened little fellow whose mania for control came from a drive to compensate for his fears and insecurities. He was brave only in his own "corridors of power", where he had mesmerised youngsters he could bully, and was surrounded by an initiate "adult" clique of guilt-freaks and masochists, who, telling themselves it was good "Bolshevik" politics, got their kicks out of being abused, and, vicariously, out of watching others being abused. The real Gerry Healy was to be found in the screams of panic-stricken and hysterical dissociation with which his press always greeted the — English — activities of the Provisional IRA.

Yet late in life, when he was well over 60, this guy enlisted in the service of Gadaffi, whose other employees were at that time shooting at the police in London. In 1983, from their embassy, they shot the policewoman Yvonne Fletcher dead. Psychologically, that just does not add up — unless you assume that little Gerry had reasons for thinking himself safe, unless he had "insurance". Who could give him that assurance? I once met a student of the "secret state" who had a plausibly detailed explanation for Healy's antics: always, Healy expressed the views of one of the warring MI5 factions.

I am less than fascinated by the subterranean faction fights of the spooks, so I can't

recall the details. It *sounded* plausible. That is the problem. Concocting tales is easy; *knowing* hard facts and testing them are usually impossible.

In the eyes of any self-respecting agent-buff your ties to Gerry Healy, Mr Livingstone, render you yourself highly suspect. So, I repeat: who gave you your security clearance? Who decontaminated, de-loused and de-Healysed you?

And, while I'm at it: tell me, who do you work for, Ken? Who pays you to slander me? Is it a case of "stop thief"? One of the Tory candidates for Mayor, Jeffrey Archer, has had his character and his past subjected to a merciless public scrutiny and demolition. When Gadaffi was giving Gerry Healy money, Gerry Healy was giving you money for *Labour Herald*. No-one has used it against you. Why not? Are you being protected? By whom? Why? Are you being blackmailed? Are "they" holding it in reserve in case you ever stop being a political buffoon? Shall I go on? No? Are you sure? Why don't you want me to go on?

In fact, of course, that way lies lunacy: speculation about things that are for now unknowable is fruitless, corrosive, poisonous and disruptive. Your great friend Gerry Healy, for whom speculative, cosmic spy hunting became a crazy religion, a mad, state-fixated search for a "First Cause", proved that.

Mr Livingstone: your political record, your political character, your past and present associations, and your mind — in which the nut jostles with the self-serving careerist for control — render you unworthy of the confidence of anyone who takes seriously, politics, probity, truth, honesty or plain political decency.

I repeat: if you have proof, or even plausible ground for suspecting, that I am anything other than an honest socialist, acting according to my understanding of what that involves, then make it public. I offer you space in *Workers' Liberty*. If you don't do that now, you thereby brand yourself a slanderer and a deliberate liar.

Sean Matgamna

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From 'Socialist Organiser' to Thatcher & Reagan

THIS MORNING SATURDAY April 9, 1983

# The Zionist connection

A POWERFUL Zionist connection runs from the so-called left of the Labour Party right into the centre of Thatcher's government in Downing Street. There is no difficulty whatever in proving this.

Top of the list, we have the most recent appointment of Mr Stuart Young, a director of the 'Jewish Chronicle', as youngest-ever chairman of the BBC, having been a governor only since 1981. He is the brother of Mr David Young, another Thatcher appointee who is chairman of the Manpower Services Commission.

This is the key organisation which the Tories are transforming into a 'corporatist front', behind which they seek to mobilise jobless youth from 14 years upwards into a 'slave labour body to break trade union wages, safety procedures and working conditions... Thatcher has rolled out these appointments with magisterial arrogance while the Labour Party and TUC chiefs have accepted them without a murmur of protest'. (News Line, March 28, 1983).

The Tories know they can rely totally upon Zionist imperialism to produce the most hated reactionaries, in order to transform the situation at a later date into a pro-fascist, anti-Semitic pogrom against all the Jews in general.

Zionism made it possible for a number of rich Jews to leave Nazi Germany with the agreement of the Fuhrer

denounce it as 'the reactionary Islamic government of Libya' and seek a 'neutrality' between US imperialism and Gaddafi? This is the position of 'Socialist Organiser', claiming to speak for 'lefts' in the Labour Party.

The same organ supported the Zionist-sponsored 'Money Programme' on March 20. They wrote: 'We ('Socialist Organiser') didn't wait for the BBC to tell us about the WRP's probable links with Libya. The fact that the BBC now says it *doesn't* make it any less likely to be true' (April 7, 1983). (Our emphasis).

Here is unqualified support for the work of Thatcher's appointee as chairman of the BBC, who is also a director of British Caledonian Airways and the British Overseas Trade Group for Israel. 'Socialist Organiser' has landed itself right bang in the middle of Thatcher's hand-picked Zionists as an outright supporter of their policies of witch-hunting the WRP and the News Line for our principled stand against imperialism and in support of the Libyan masses under their leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The question of the hour, we repeat, is the pro-Zionist policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations and their hatred of the Palestinians and Libyans alike.

In the background of the 'Socialist Organiser' one can detect a powerful current of anti Arab racism — also shared by Reagan and Thatcher

Newsline, 9 April 1983

## The attempted lynching of Socialist Organiser

ON the page across from the above craziness GLC leader Ken Livingstone told an interviewer that, yes, of course "the Zionists" in the BBC were responsible for the little item in the *Money Programme* about Healy's finances and Colonel Gadaffi. The Healyites at that time had a libel action in the courts against John Bloxam and Sean Matgamna. In *Socialist Organiser* Sean Matgamna endorsed the BBC story. The WRP daily paper *Newsline* then ran a campaign of denunciation against SO, identifying the paper and Matgamna with Thatcherites, "Zionists" and the BBC.

Every day for two months there was a page, then half a page, of solicited letters and statements denouncing SO, Sean Matgamna and the BBC (in that order). Prominent actors who seemed sane on the TV screen wrote or signed prize specimens of Healyite gobbledygook about "dialectics" and MI5. A lynch-mob atmosphere was whipped up in sections of the left. The public association of Livingstone and others with the WRP helped to make this possible. They got motions passed in a few trade union branches and in a couple of trades councils condemning SO, "the Zionists" and the BBC. People let themselves be lined up

on the primitive basis that if the BBC said it it couldn't be true. "Zionist" was a dirty word, akin to racist. SO had stepped outside the "left" consensus created by such as Livingstone. Stamp on them!

Ken Livingstone, leader of the GLC, and Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth Council, a long-time Healyite were platform speakers at a meeting on the issue at Conway Hall, London. When Sean Matgamna and three others tried to enter the meeting to defend themselves, they were barred. Appeals to two of the star speakers, Livingstone and Peter Tatchell — then a recent Labour Parliamentary candidate — to defend SO's right to defend itself, were unavailing. The Healyites kept Vanessa Redgrave's libel case in the courts for 5 years, spinning out the cost to SO in money and time. (If we hadn't defended ourselves the verdict would mechanically have gone against us.) After Healy was expelled from the WRP (October 1985) with much newspaper scandal and lurid stories, including charges of serial rape, the libel case collapsed. Livingstone sided with Healy. *Labour Herald* died, a casualty of the WRP implosion. The anti-Healyite WRP made some effort to clear the record, publishing in their paper a piece on the libel case by Sean Matgamna. We never received a word of retraction or apology from any of those in the broad movement who had taken part in the "lynch SO and Sean Matgamna" campaign. Not a single one.



## Post-modern imposters

**I**NTELLECTUAL *Impostures* grew out of a hoax article written by one of the book's authors, Alan Sokal, for the American cultural-studies journal *Social Text*. Sokal describes the article (*Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*) as:

"A melange of truths, half-truths, quarter-truths, falsehoods, non sequiturs, and syntactically correct sentences that have no meaning whatsoever... appeals to authority in lieu of logic, speculative theories passed off as established science, strained and even absurd analogies, and confusion between the technical and everyday senses of English words."

And yet *Social Text* published the article. In fact, it was published in a special issue given over to rebutting criticisms of the post-structuralist and postmodernist arguments parodied by Sokal in his article.

*Intellectual Impostures* was subsequently written by Sokal and co-author Jean Bricmont to analyse in more detail the post-modernists' intellectual shoddiness and abuse of modern scientific theories which the *Social Text* article had parodied.

Sokal and Bricmont demonstrate how post-modernists take scientific terms with precise meanings (chaos, linearity, compactness, choice, etc.), and then, having misunderstood their meaning, misapply them to prop up their own quirky ideas. They rightly describe the products of such an approach as "utterly meaningless", "as pompous as [they are] meaningless", "totally devoid of meaning", and "devoid of logic and sense".

Jean Baudrillard, for example, is quoted as describing the Gulf War of 1991 in the following terms: "What is most extraordinary is that the two hypotheses, the apocalypse of real time and pure war along with the triumph of the virtual over the real, are realised at the same time, in the same space-time, each in implacable pursuit of the other. It is a sign that the space of the event has become a hyperspace with multiple refractivity, and that the space of war has become definitively non-Euclidean."

Even less coherent are the psychoanalytical ramblings of

Jacques Lacan: "In order to introduce itself as a half to say about women, the subject determines itself from the fact that, since there does not exist a suspension of the phallic function, everything can here be said of it, even if it comes from the without-reason. But is it an out-of-universe whole, which is read without a hitch from the second quantor of notall."

More interesting than this exposure of pseudo-scientific quackery, however, is the authors' political analysis of post-modernism, and of why it is an enemy rather than (as it claims to be) an ally of the left. As Sokal puts it:

"I confess that I'm an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class... My concern is explicitly political: to combat a currently fashionable post-modernist/post-structural/social-constructivist discourse which is, I believe, inimical to the values and future of the Left."

### "Post-modernist 'leftists' now challenge the very possibility of objective and objectively verifiable knowledge."

The left has traditionally been the champion of rational thought and the enemy of obscurantism. And yet, Sokal points out, post-modernist "leftists" now challenge the very possibility of objective and objectively verifiable knowledge.

The worst forms of post-modernism are exposed as a glorification of reactionary prejudices. Irigaray, for example, argues (wrongly) that physics is more concerned with solid mechanics than fluid mechanics. This is because of its supposed male bias (solid/erection/male, as against fluid/menstrual blood/female). Damarin detects the same bias in linear-time mathematics as against cyclical-time mathematics (linear/erection/male, as against cyclical/menstruation/female).

As Sokal points out, this echoes Victorian ideas that "women, with their delicate reproductive organs, are unsuited to rational thought and to science.

With friends like these, the feminist cause hardly needs enemies."

Moreover, if, as the worst elements of post-modernism argue, there is no such thing as objective truth and everything is culturally valid in its own terms, then sexism, racism and homophobia are just as valid a way of seeing the world as any other. In which case, the entire socialist project is bankrupt.

Sokal sees postmodernism's emergence and its conquest of a section of the "left" as rooted in a combination of factors.

Firstly, there has been the emergence and growth of new social movements dissatisfied with the predominant economist version of Marxism. But Sokal qualifies this by the argument that, "the new social movements' penchant for post-modernism exists mostly within academia, and is much weaker than both the postmodernist left and the traditionalist right portray it to be."

Secondly, the collapse of Stalinism (falsely equated with socialism), the rightward shift of social democracy, and the collapse of illusions in Third World liberation movements have led to a "political discouragement" which makes its victims vulnerable to postmodernist cant.

Sokal quotes Noam Chomsky's description of a meeting with Egyptian left-wingers to illustrate the argument:

"Rather than have me talk about the details of what's going on in US policy or the Middle East, where they live, which is too grubby and uninteresting, they would like to know how does modern linguistics provide a new paradigm for discourse about international affairs that will supplant the post-structuralist text."

Thirdly, science is seen as an easy target in these times of "political discouragement": "It is tempting to attack something that is sufficiently linked to the powers-that-be so as not to appear very sympathetic, but sufficiently weak to be a more or less accessible target. Science fulfils these conditions."

Sokal and Bricmont's exposure of postmodernist nonsense has grabbed the headlines and secured many reviews of their book. But, combined with that necessary work of exposure, there is also a serious analysis of postmodernism as a political phenomenon. And it is in the latter, rather than the former, that the real value of the book lies.

Stan Crooke  
*Intellectual Impostures* by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, Profile Books, 1998, £9.99.

## Limits of "pure" unionism

**W**HAT'S *Happening*, a collection of articles by union activists on union struggles in most major areas of work, is a useful pamphlet for those who want to know the lie of the land on the British shop floor.

Several key themes in a generalised bosses' offensive emerge: management newspeak and "new" methods to undermine shop floor union influence and encourage competition between workers; increasingly vicious attendance and sickness procedures; increased intensity of work; increased hours and flexibility; an explosion in the use of casual and temporary workers along with other increases in job insecurity.

These do indeed provide the basis for much of the general picture of job cuts. However, when it comes to explaining why this offensive is happening and how workers can fight it the pamphlet falls down. All the contributors quite rightly stress the need for strong workplace union organisation and high membership levels, but the alphabet of union militancy fizzles out or goes astray after this A and B.

Bel Wringer from the TGWU, for example, writing about the buses, states: "The prospect of a minimum wage threatens Stagecoach — in many rural bus companies they are paying drivers as little as £3.50 an hour"; and: "Stagecoach management has now agreed to meet the TGWU for talks despite being previously totally obdurate — perhaps the election of a Labour Government has made them think again."

Bel — one of the few contributors to raise the issue of the new Labour Government, though as hopeful supporter rather than active element — seems to have had great hopes in new Labour, yet the reality has been very clearly, and predictably, worse. It should be clear to any trade unionist that massive pressure from the labour movement will be required to make Blair deliver anything for workers. Bel's

offers no strategy to use the Labour-union link or broad campaigns to get a decent minimum wage or repeal the anti-union laws to back up her hopes.

No Better Under Labour for Care Workers by Chantelle Brown, as its title implies, does not invest great hopes in Blair. Rather it paints a vivid picture of the ongoing attack on terms and conditions and the tragic impact of privatisation, explaining that Labour are aping the Tories and that union leaders have even blocked action so as to avoid "embarrassing" the Government. This anger at new Labour and disappointment with the union leaders' collusion does not lead Brown to a political strategy for fighting across the unions to force either a change from Labour or to create a movement to challenge Labour.

Chantelle identifies the seed change in the public sector — "There has been a drastic change in management style from what used to be an understanding attitude to one which is far more aggressive and finance-based" — but does not explain, or feel she needs to explain, that this was the direct result of a full scale assault on the welfare state started in 1975 by a Labour government but driven through by Thatcher and her ideological offspring, including the Blairites.

Such a society-wide attack cannot be combated on a purely "industrial", workplace or single union level. Only a combined political and "industrial" movement to rebuild the welfare state — combining strikes with demonstrations, workplace organisation with community campaigns, national union action and a political battle inside and outside the Labour Party's structures — can win. The lim-

its of "pure and simple unionism" are most evident in the public sector.

While *What's Happening's* sober and detailed description of the real situation of the movement is quite proper it also leads to low aspirations, such as in Dave Ward's article on the 1996 national post dispute, which has a very rosy view of the result.

In 1996 postal workers had Royal Mail on the ropes. Yet the dispute was called off, even despite a second ballot with a 60% vote in favour of more strikes. The strikes stopped the introduction of managements' Employee Agenda, yet the CWU did not win our demands for job security, a shorter working week and an end to the six-day week. All we "won" were two Joint Working Parties that even Dave admits have broken down. It was a defeat for Royal Mail but not necessarily a victory for postal workers.

Dave's wishful thinking about the negotiations with "defeated" Royal Mail appears to combine with low aspirations as to what unions can win: "Rather than saying to management — Give us 1.5 hours off the working week — Why? Just because we want it — we should be looking at a process that locks [management] into continuous moves towards the shorter working week in return for those increases in productivity they secure."

Royal Mail have squeezed massive increases in productivity out of postal workers, taking Royal Mail from heavy losses in the '70s to massive profits (currently over £1 million a day). What have postal workers got out of this? Very little! Now we face a whole new generation of technology and major threats to terms and conditions that could see a mostly part-time workforce and massive job

losses.

Royal Mail management are trying to bring in their plans by stealth, region by region. In this situation the only union response that can work is a major cut in the working week to defend jobs. Can we ask for a 35 hour week for nothing? Why not! Royal Mail have got plenty of productivity out of us for nothing. But how are they going to keep profits growing? That's not our problem, their profits are sucked out of postal workers' labour.

What's Happening is a vivid and useful guide to workplace class struggle, but it lacks both an overall view of where the drive for this offensive is coming from and a rounded working-class struggle answer to it, even in Sheila Cohen's introduction.

Cohen outlines the main elements of the bosses' offensive and makes the important point that this offensive is having similar effects across industry and services in private and public sectors. She accepts that the "finance-based approach" is not so new, citing Taylorism and Fordism. She could have sighted Marx's *Capital*, too. Yet Cohen glosses over the Thatcherite driving of this approach into the public sector, an offensive which highlights the need for a political response.

Likewise Cohen makes no mention of Labour either as the Government or, as a party, as an arena for trade unionists to campaign in. Cohen's answer is a return to "grassroots" trade unionism, pointing to the success of "resistance pure and simple" based on workplace strength, for example in the 1996 postal dispute. Yet she counterposes this not only to the media image of a half dead union movement but to union leaders and the TUC who, "seem more concerned with lofty issues of public policy than with what's actually happening to their members."

This is a dangerous confusion. The union leaders showing such an interest in the correct politics, or even basic gut working class solidarity, would be a good thing! If only they would campaign for the Government to scrap the anti-union laws, introduce a decent minimum wage, legislate a 35 hour working week to cut unemployment, or rebuild the NHS, etc...

Cohen's confusion of politics per se equaling bad trade unionism has its mirror image in her assessment of the "grassroots" trade unionists writing in *What's Happening*. Uncritically she highlights the argument (see above) against

calling for a shorter working week. While highlighting the problem of divided unions on the underground explained in a good article by Glenroy Watson, Cohen ignores the major issue discussed by Glenroy, Tube privatisation, abstractly calling for a "grassroots link-up" on the tube.

The inspiration for the pamphlet was the 1996 Post strike, discussed above. Cohen's assessment of the result is glowing. Royal Mail management, "will be unable to impose teamworking in postal workplaces because the membership will simply refuse to accept it." It is certainly true that the Post Office remains a bastion of militant trade unionism but, as we have seen, the battle is far from over and the threat of privatisation remains. Again no mention is made of these essential aspects of the issue.

Cohen concludes her introduction with a section headed *The Key Point — Independence*, making the very important case for the unions' grassroots to link up and develop a cross-movement perspective that challenges the class collaborationist nonsense of "partnership" with the bosses. However the "independence" Cohen appears to want is an "independence" from politics that itself removes the key to building a class struggle perspective across the unions.

Of course the experience of exploitation and the bosses' offensive has created many similar problems for workers, yet unity is best built not by comparing wounds but by re-recognising and understanding our common enemy, the capitalist class. That can only be done on the level of a society-wide perspective that sees class struggle not only as a battle of workers against their individual boss but as a battle of ideas, such as "Can we afford decent public services?", and a battle for society-wide change: a legal 35 hour week at a decent minimum wage, scrapping the anti-union laws and legislating for workers' rights.

Effective trade unionism can never be "independent" of ideology and politics. Of course trade unionism needs to be rebuilt from the base up: we need to re-learn how to fight on the basic shop floor issues. But rebuilding the movement will require the rebuilding of its basic ideas and promoting solidarity with workers outside the unions or in weaker unions, if we are not again to fall prey to a capitalist ruling class that fights on all fronts.

Mark Sandell  
*What's Happening* is available now.

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# “A matter of terminological taste”

By Hal Draper

Tony Cliff's *Russia* was published 50 years ago. This was a review of the first printed edition (1955).

TONY Cliff's work is not one of those overplentiful books on Russia which merely set out to describe, cuss out, or philosophise about the horrors of Stalinism. It is a serious and valuable study, from a Marxist viewpoint, of the nature of the Russian state.

The author — long a leading Trotskyist in England and now associated with the left Labor *Socialist Review* — believes that the best theoretical description of the Stalinist system is “bureaucratic state capitalist,” and we will have to say a word about his handling of this state-capitalist theory; but his political conclusions are very close to, if not identical with, those of Independent Socialism.

Apart from this point of view, however, Cliff's Stalinist Russia does a preliminary job in its first two (long) chapters which is alone worth the price of the book.

These two chapters present an analytical description of the social and political conditions of Stalinism, virtually constituting a handbook on “Why Stalinism is not socialism.” And this is done by marshalling a vast amount of factual material based on official Stalinist sources laws, publications, etc.

The first chapter does this job on the socio-economic relations of the Stalinist system, including: the destruction of workers' control, role of the “trade unions”, the wage system, legal restrictions on the worker, draconian punishments for lateness or other offences, position of women in society, slave labour, depression of the standard of living and subordination of consumer goods production, the productivity of labour under Stalinism, expropriation of the peasantry, the turnover tax, the atrocities of the criminal law, the advance of inequality and salary differentiation, etc.

And finally in this chapter Cliff presents an excellent discussion of the unplannedness of this “planned economy,” stemming from the built-in dislocations of bureaucratic mismanagement.

In Chapter II, State and Party in Stalinist Russia, Cliff has equally authoritative summaries of the Russian reality on the structure of the armed forces, the role of the “soviet” organs of government, the rigging of the elections, the monolithism of the party, etc.

All of this material is fully documented as to sources. In the course of taking up many of these questions, Cliff counterposes the Stalinist reality to the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky, making clear the gulf between the Stalinist counter-revolution and the Bolshevik state which this counter-revolution destroyed.

Socialists have long looked forward to a contribution of this sort. An approach to it — and a useful one — was a section entitled Soviet Myth and Reality in one of Arthur Koestler's books (an otherwise vapid collection of essays whose title, *The Yogi and the Commusant*, has

become better known than any of its contents). There was a report some years ago, I remember, that this section was going to be expanded to book-size by Koestler and Dwight Macdonald, but nothing seems to have come of it, if it was true. In any case, Cliff's two chapters represents the best accomplishment of this task to date, for its size.

Much of the material in the subsequent sections of Cliff's book, dealing with the nature of the system, is devoted to refuting the view that Russia is a “workers' state” or “socialist state.” An excellent chapter, which appears as an appendix, deals directly with An Examination Trotsky's Definitions of Russia as a Degenerated Workers' State. It is a very effective attack on this theory, which has led to the present extreme degeneration of both wings of

**“The ‘state-capitalism’ is analysed as so basically different from ‘private’ capitalism that it tends to take on the characteristics of a new social system, which is not the same as any other existing system, and which is labelled a hyphenated-capitalism only as a matter of terminological taste”**

the “orthodox Trotskyist” movement and its Fourth International.

In a couple of other chapters (III and IV) Cliff describes a great deal of material which would be a necessary part of any Marxist discussion of the nature of Stalinism. These take up some general considerations about “workers' states” and then The Material Heritage of Pre-October (Revolution) Society in Russia. It is the next three chapters which attempt to present the theory of “state capitalism as applied to Russia.

Of course, as our readers know, this theory is quite mistaken in our opinion; but since this is not the place to polemicise against it, it is more important to note *what kind of* “state capitalist” theory is this one of Cliff's. For there are all kinds of people who have applied this label of state-capitalism to Russia, with quite different political and theoretical meanings: just as, for that matter, the same is true of our own label of bureaucratic-collectivism.

We have often pointed out that the “state-capitalist” theory sometimes shades into versions which make it virtually identical with our own. This tends to happen where the “state-capitalism” which is seen in Russia is analysed as being so basically different from “private” capitalism that it tends to take on the characteristics of a new social system, which is not the same as any other existing system, and which is labelled a hyphenated-capitalism only as a matter of terminological taste.

Cliff's analysis does not begin this way, but it tends to wind up so. To begin with, he makes a brave attempt to subsume the Russian Stalinist “capitalist” system within the same (Marxist)

economic categories as the old capitalism. With him, as with all others who have attempted this feat, it boils down to stripping capitalism of all essential attributes which do not fit into the Stalinist picture; and, as with all others, the first of these attributes to go is capitalist profit as the motor of the system.

But he moves from this type of analysis to something else, which becomes increasingly important for his analysis till it governs his political conclusions.

This is: heavy stress on the importance of the *differences* between the two different “state-capitalisms” which he finds himself discussing. One state-capitalism is that which is “an organic, gradual continuation of the development of capitalism”; the other is the “state-capitalism which arose gradually on the ruins of a workers' revolution.”

At the point where he makes this distinction explicit, he also reveals the Achilles heel of his whole theory:

“Historical continuity in the case of state-capitalism which evolves from monopoly capitalism [the first type] is shown in the existence of private property (bonds). Historical continuity in the case of state-capitalism which evolves from a workers' state that degenerated and died, is shown in the *non-existence of private property.*”

The italics are Cliff's, and his answer to this question of historical continuity is vital for him, for it is the same as asking: What is the systematic common ground between capitalism and this “state-capitalism” of his, *which did not and cannot arise from capitalism?* When he answers “non-existence of private property” the game is up, I think; for obviously this “non-existence” shows only that the old capitalism has not been resuscitated and says nothing at all about the positive question of what it is that has grown up on the ruins of the workers' state.

However, I cite this to show how Cliff's analysis moves over to the more fruitful question of the gulf between the capitalist world and the Stalinist “state-capitalist” system, and it seems to me that it would be easy to show that every one of his political, and even social, conclusions flows from his analysis of the differences between the two systems, and not at all from his (to me) laboured exposition of the “capitalist” nature of Stalinism.

So in the final two chapters, where Cliff takes up The Imperialist Expansion of Russia and The Class Struggle in Russia, the sharp point of his analysis is directed against any conceptions of the “progressiveness” of Stalinism and toward a revolutionary opposition to the whole system.

Cliff's political standpoint is that of the Third Camp and makes no compromise with any illusions about Stalinism. This is its political strength.

Without any doubt, the book belongs in every socialist's library.

*Labor Action*, 16 January 1956



# Support our fight for union rights

By Steve Hedley, victimised rail striker

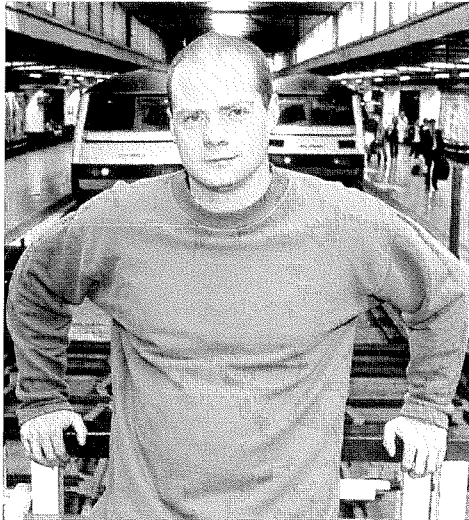
I WOULD like to appeal to all trade unionists to support the campaign for my re-instatement. I've been sacked for one reason only — doing the job of a trade union rep as effectively as I could. My only crime is doing what other trade union reps across industry try to do. I have fought as hard as possible to make management stick to agreements. I have refused to budge when they have tried to cut corners with trackworkers' safety in order to boost their own profits.

Because I wasn't prepared to buckle under and accept the agenda of the new privatised rail companies I've been targeted and sacked for alleged violent behaviour on the picket lines during the recent national trackworkers dispute.

Management have changed the allegations against me to suit themselves.

At first I was told that I was sacked for damaging a contractor's van on the picket line. When photographic evidence was produced to undermine these allegations management simply put forward some new allegations.

I'm supposed to have assaulted a supervisor and crossed the tracks without a high visibility vest. Both these charges are equally ridiculous. The supervisor in question has no other witnesses to the supposed assault, and the idea that as a union rep I would ignore health and safety guidelines — precisely the thing I've been targeted for upholding — is simply unbelievable. Management have been able to move the goalposts about like this



because when I was originally suspended it was for, "involvement in a serious incident," and not the precise allegation about the contractor's van, though that is all that was mentioned at first.

We have responded to my victimisation with unofficial and now official industrial action. At the moment RMT members at the Euston depot of GTRM (the track company who sacked me) are balloting for a series of strikes to win my re-instatement. Once we have a clear mandate for strikes we will attempt to spread the official dispute throughout GTRM. We are also going to revive the national trackworkers dispute — perhaps through an overtime ban at first — with the clear intention that there will be no settle-

workers are going to be in demand. The West Coast main line will be the major rail engineering project of the next decade or so. The line and rolling stock are to be modernised to reduce travelling times between London, Birmingham and Manchester. Huge amounts of public money is to be given out to private companies like GEC, Tarmac, Balfour Beatty and Virgin Trains for this project.

● The lower these companies can keep the wages bill, and the more corners they can cut with health and safety, the more profits they can make out of the public money available for the project.

For management there is one conclusion. Remove any trade union reps who will fight for decent wages and conditions for all railworkers. That's why GTRM have chosen to target Steve Hedley right now.

ment with GTRM until I've been re-instated.

What we are asking other trade unionists to do is to come down and support our picket lines, send messages of support and donate to our hardship fund. We are also appealing to other trade unionists to learn the lessons of our fight so far — and first of all that means tubeworkers fighting privatisation while they still can through industrial action, rather than waiting for it to come in and hoping they can limit its worst effects.

● Please send messages of support and donations to: "RMT Strike Support Group", 145 Imperial Avenue, Victorian Road, London N16 8HL.

● For speakers contact 0181 314 5222 or, in an emergency, *Workers' Liberty*-supporting railworkers: 0171 207 3997.

## The litmus test for New Labour's legislation

**T**HE RMT and the TUC should be turning Steve's case into a major national scandal. They should do everything in their power to mobilise the full might of the trade union movement behind the fight for Steve's reinstatement — including solidarity action. They should be using his case to highlight the injustices of current employment law and to expose the way in which union reps can be fitted up and framed. They should be screaming from the rooftops about how outrageous it is that people deemed by law to have been unfairly dismissed still won't be able to secure automatic reinstatement under New Labour's proposed new *Fairness at Work* union laws.

They should issue a clear statement that winning Steve's reinstatement is a litmus test for the trade union movement. If union reps can still be picked off by an anti-union management then nothing has really changed. The union leaders should tell Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson that this case will really test the Government's claim to, "protect people from victimisation for trade union activities."

## A fight for all railworkers

**F**ITTING up Steve Hedley is a strategic operation for the rail companies.

● Steve is the linchpin of trade union organisation among trackworkers on the southern end of the West Coast main line.

● Unionised trackworkers with full-time permanent jobs are paid up to twice as much as contract workers who often work for £4-5 per hour.

● Union activists like Steve have done a lot of work to recruit casual workers, though many feel so insecure that they are frightened to join a union.

● All that is about to change. Track-