

**LAST MARCH Socialist Organiser helped organise a meeting in London to protest at the three year jail sentence imposed on Edmund Zdrozinski for organising an independent trade union in Poland [his release was gained as part of the Baltic workers' victory].**

**Socialist Organiser EB member Stephen Corbishley shared a platform with Edmund Baluka, a leader of the Baltic shipyard movement in 1970-1. Corbishley called on the British labour movement to break connections with the police state 'unions' in the Stalinist states and help real working class movements.**

**We must, he said, support the struggle in those states for a workers' revolution against the ruling bureaucracies. This is the precondition for any working class socialist advance on the basis of the collectivised property already existing in those states under the self-serving control and mis-management of the bureaucrats who defend by massive repression the political monopoly and the monopoly of social initiative on which their power is based.**

**We should, he said, aid the nascent labour movements in the Stalinist states with every ounce of moral, political, and financial support we can muster. We must break all 'fraternal' links between the British labour movement and the police state apparatus.**

for self-defence against the bureaucratic state. From Bill Sirs on the right, who openly defended his 'colleagues', the strike-breaking Polish 'trade union' leaders, during the strikes, to Alex Kitson and Mick McGahey on the left, large sections of the British labour movement indulge in the pretence that the official 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states are real working class organisations — when in fact that they are part of a police-state 'Labour Front' apparatus for controlling and policing the working class and for preventing real trade unions and an independent working class movement developing.

It says everything about the nature of these 'unions' that their present leader in the USSR was transferred to this post from his previous job as head of the secret political police which tortures and jails and kills militants of the real trade unions such as Vladimir Klebanov. He merely moved from the general organisation for controlling and repressing the population to a specialised 'trade union' sub-section, dealing directly with the working class.

During the August 1980 strike movement, the then chairman of the Polish 'trade unions', Jan Sydlak, was one of the most outspoken and vicious of the bureaucrats in threatening the strikers and their helpers with tanks and slaughter. He called publicly for them to be 'taught a lesson they would never forget'.

It is not just that many bureaucrats of our trade unions feel an impulse of solidarity for and have a real feeling of fellowship with the ruling Stalinist bureaucrats — though they obviously do. Nor just that many left wing officials are of a generally Stalinist persuasion — as are Kitson and McGahey.

Most importantly, the reason why they get away with it is that many rank and file militants, too, don't want to come out against the 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states and against the British trade union

leaders who aid those police-state 'unions'. Many who consider themselves anti-Stalinist revolutionaries take the same view.

They would feel uncomfortable at having to say on this question something like what Margaret Thatcher and Frank Chapple say. This is understandable, but it is a really trivial consideration in a situation where the workers of the Stalinist states need our moral and practical support. We have a duty as basic as not crossing a picket line to give it to them.

To allow the noise made by the Chapples and Thatchers to force us into silence on the struggle of a big part of the world's working class is to sink into a blinkered national narrowmindedness.

As people who believe, with Marx and Engels, that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself, we would be obliged to support any independent workers' movement against the police state even if we considered its politics to be seriously mistaken and wrong.

That a real labour movement should exist is much more important than any social transformations achieved apart from or against the working class. But in fact, as an Open Letter to Frank Chapple from six British Leyland shop stewards in *Socialist Organiser* no.25 showed in detail in relation to Poland, the Thatchers and Chapples are on a radically different wavelength from any real or likely workers' movement in the Stalinist states.

Some in the labour movement believe that contact with the 'institutions' of the states in the Stalinist bloc is a force for peace ('peaceful coexistence') and against war. If that view encourages the pretence (and the facts are too well known today to make such an attitude other than pretence) that the Stalinist states are not savagely oppressive; if it leads to ignoring the fact that the 'trade unions' there (and most other social institutions as well) have nothing in common with things of the same name in Britain; if it blinds us to the fact that they are 'anti-unions' and 'counter-unions' rather than working-class organisations — then it amounts to a craven siding with the oppressors against the oppressed in those states.

Yet other militants believe that socialists should refrain from stark condemnation and denunciation of the Stalinist regimes because they are relatively pro-

gressive and/or because socialists should defend the system of state-owned property in those states against any attempts by NATO to restore private ownership of the means of production.

This inhibition is of course found in Communist Party militants, who often may not know the full extent of the repression against the working class under Stalinism.

But many who do know about Stalinism, who are influenced by Trotsky, and who even commit themselves vaguely and abstractly to the working class struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, are also inhibited.

They recoil from the demand that the British workers' movement should have no dealings with the Stalinist labour fronts. For example, *Socialist Challenge*, which, in general, favours self-governing trade unions in the Stalinist states, nevertheless supported the scabbing TUC on the planned visit of its delegation to Poland last summer! Earlier it backed a controversial TUC invitation to the Russian political policeman who heads the Stalinist labour front in the USSR.

Why? It is not entirely clear, but it is probably connected to the fact that there was a bourgeois anti-USSR propaganda outcry in both cases. Yet something fundamental was involved, compared with which all that was unimportant: the attitude we try to get our own labour movement to take to the struggle of our class in the Stalinist states, and to their oppressors. To fudge that class issue, worse still to argue that our movement should have and maintain links with the anti-unions of the Stalinist states, with part of the apparatus that oppresses our people there, is to do the opposite of the work of Trotskyists — which is to fight for international working class solidarity with the real labour movements in the Stalinist states, or with their pioneers, like Klebanov.

To fear to call the Stalinists what they are for fear of chiming in with the reactionaries, and to endorse the links our own scabbing bureaucrats maintain with the Stalinist 'unions', is to adopt the stance of those 'Friends of the Soviet Union' who called Trotsky a reactionary for speaking out in the '30s†.

These comrades suffer from a dominating fear of anti-Sovietism which leads them in practice to leave the issue of the workers' movement to the Chapples. This amounts to playing Pontius Pilate with the affairs of our own class in the Stalinist states, and it is the sure way to allow the issue to be used to lead the mass of trade union members to anti-Soviet conclusions, and simultaneously to help keep many good militants entrenched in ignorant Stalinist or semi-Stalinist opposition to what Chapple and Thatcher support\*.

† What would Socialist Challenge have done in the '30s when it was often only right wing outfits that were spreading accurate information — 'Trotskyist' information — about Russia? In Britain, for example, it was the 'Right Book Club' that published Victor Serge, Walter Krivitsky, etc; and it was the 'Labour Book Club', during the coalition, in 1940, that published Anton Ciliga.

\* There is surely a more profound reason, though. Look at the record.

In June 1953 the USFI tendency's European sections refused to call for the with-

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