

**Labour
Movement
Press
Defence
Fund**

A STATEMENT FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

WHEN JULIAN Lewis and Paul McCormack tried to use the law courts as a weapon in their fight to control Newham North East Labour Party, they were condemned throughout the labour movement. The act branded them as aliens within our movement. Ultimately it did them more harm than good.

The WRP's attempt to use the courts against SO is an attack on free speech, on free comment and on free debate in the labour movement. It shows what little confidence the WRP has in its ability to make a political response to our comments on them (SO 33). It shows the WRP to have as much contempt for the principle of keeping the bourgeois state out of the affairs of the labour movement as had the mysteriously funded Lewis and McCormack.

Why does the WRP choose this course of action?

Because SO's outspoken comments on them threaten their central project of the moment.

They are making a concentrated effort to rebuild support for the WRP in Lambeth. In an effort to regain some credibility they have entered the service of the right wing and of Ted Knight, who leads a big section of the Left in Lambeth.

They swung what weight they have behind Ted Knight's foredoomed policy of trying to fend off the Tory cuts drive by hiking up the rates and the rents. Now they support Knight's 10% general cut — the proof positive of the bankruptcy of Knight's anti-Tory policy.

Meanwhile Newsline, snarling at the left, makes its characteristic contribution by spitting the slander that we are "Thatcher's people". A Newsline editorial seriously equated the Socialist Workers Party with the NF because both oppose rate rises in Lambeth. And with the impudence characteristic of them, the Newsline carried an immediate public attack on Cllr Bryn Davies for daring to vote against Knight's policy! In this coin they pay for their alliance with Knight and his right-wing allies.

Ted Knight and his comrades have views on how to fight the Tories which we emphatically disagree with. We have discussed the issues many times in SO. But Knight and his politics is one thing. People who brand the left as the equivalent of the NF for opposing Knight are clearly something altogether different.

The WRP has set up one of their so-called Youth Training Centres in Lambeth (the other is in Liverpool).

These offer night-school style training and facilities to youth on a very broad and supposedly non-political basis, ask for money from businessmen, etc, appeal for volunteer instructors and so on, without any reference to politics other than 'anti-Toryism'.

But the Youth Training

Centres are run by a political party, a party which for the last 20 years has gained its only (transitory) successes from recruiting politically raw young people to its ranks.

Its purpose for the Youth Training Centres is as a means of drawing young people into a network at the centre of which is the WRP.

Politically the WRP is today an unknown force to most labour movement activists, who would naturally incline towards toleration of it. The SO article argued against toleration of the WRP, especially as people fit to offer 'training' to vulnerable young people.

The result was a writ against the printer and against Sean Matgamna (who usually writes for SO under the anglicised version of his name, John O'Mahony).

Why not make a formal tongue-in-cheek apology? For a number of important reasons. In the first place, SO values its own reputation as a responsible and serious non-sectarian socialist paper. We do not lightmindedly attack or condemn socialists, or those who call themselves socialists (or anyone else!). SO can and will defend Sean Matgamna's article on the nature and character of the WRP.

In the second place, it is an important matter of principle for a working class newspaper like SO not to allow itself to be bludgeoned into silence by Ms Redgrave's money, which is being used on behalf of the WRP leadership, even though her money gives her an enormous advantage in litigation.

Redgrave and ourselves are, of course, equal before the courts. But the libel laws are a rich person's option. No libelled striker or victimised shop steward ever has, in reality, such an option, though it does exist in law. It is part of the general problem of formal equality under capitalism encapsulated in Anatole France's apt description: "The law in its majestic

equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to steal bread, to sleep under bridges and to beg for food".

Free speech and free comment are vitally important for the labour movement. They are irreplaceable where its own affairs and the affairs of those who claim to be part of it are concerned.

Thirdly, the original article was a blow in a necessary and unavoidable political conflict with the WRP arising out of the struggle in Lambeth. That conflict continues: the political health of the labour movement in Lambeth and perhaps other areas will be affected by whether or not the point of view of SO can be expressed and heard by the labour movement. We are not prepared to abandon our viewpoint or be silenced because the WRP is richer than we are.

And while a tongue-in-cheek apology would provoke a cynical wink from those in the know, it would add considerably to the problems of the uninitiated — young people in the Youth Training Centres, for example — in getting to know what's what. They are the people who most need the benefits of free comment in the affair.

Fourthly, given that our real opinion is that SO should in honesty defend the article in court, to make an insincere apology would be to allow ourselves to be forced to tell lies under the compulsion of Ms Redgrave's wealth.

We are not prepared to tell lies to the labour movement or to the youth. That is in general a rock-basic rule. It is urgent to preach it and to live by it because for fifty years deliberate and systematic lying and other falsifications of truth have been a major part of the labour movement.

Spreading outward from the totalitarian Stalinist state via the Stalinist parties, the politics of lies and double-talk, of the double standard or none, of 'anything goes' for my organisation or for my faction, the politics of the numbed or dead conscience

and of the supple spine — these have wreaked havoc with the political consciousness and the political morality of the labour movement. They are not the sort of politics SO exists to promote.

Not for nothing did Leon Trotsky preach and insist again and again that one of the first principles of revolutionary politics was 'to tell the truth to the labour movement and to the masses'.

We subscribe to Trotsky's principle. And we will fight for it.

Fifthly, while the WRP uses the courts and the threat of bankruptcy to present SO with the option of paying out a lot of money or denying its opinions by issuing a formal apology that would be a lie, the WRP's own press spews out libels against its socialist opponents of such a volume and at such speed as to deserve at least a nomination for the Stalin prize for mendacity.

With utter lack of scruple it uses the libel laws to inhibit its critics and relies on the scruples of those it libels to keep it out of court. It has used the threat of the courts against working-class newspapers before. Yet it is not uncommon for Newsline to accuse its socialist opponents of murder or complicity in murder!

To give one of many cases:

A youth who supported the US WRP (the Workers' League) was shot dead in October 1977. For three years there were no arrests — a common occurrence in New York. Newsline commented:

"While the police investigation has never begun... the International Committee of the Fourth International [the WRP's international self-projection] have exposed [they mean repeatedly made groundless allegations about] the FBI agents who control the leading positions in the revisionist SWP [not connected to the British SWP] as the ringleaders of this political murder..." [emphasis added]. "[The vicious killing did not stop a

struggle to unmask and drive out the agents of counter-revolution in the workers' movement" (Newsline, October 16th, 1980).

Three or four days later a suspect was arrested and Newsline rushed its editor, Alex Mitchell, to New York. His report carried the ritual attack on the SWP (USA) — but not quite as strong as before. Now the charge against them was that: "The agent-led revisionist SWP refused to support the campaign and fought against it wherever possible" (Newsline, 20.10.80).

The 'campaign' which the SWP (USA) would not join was the campaign of the US WRP to get the police to arrest the killers, whose 'ringleaders', they insisted, were the SWP's leaders! This is typical Newsline fare.

Reading the WRP's press reminds SO how important Trotsky's principle about the necessary link between revolutionary politics and the fight for the truth is. **It does not suggest to us that we should apologise to the WRP.**

For all these reasons we have decided to fight the case. SO would not choose to spend time and effort on this. There are many far more important things. But we do not consider the only alternative to be an option for us.

We ask trade union branches and Labour Parties to condemn Vanessa Redgrave's and the WRP's use of the courts against the labour movement press. For socialists, the only proper tribunal for accusations against a labour movement newspaper or tendency is a labour movement inquiry.

Merely by taking out the writs, the WRP has already drawn us into a costly process that now strains our usually stretched resources. So we are starting a fund to pay for our defence.

We ask our supporters to send us a supporting donation. And we ask the SO groups to discuss what they can do to raise money to cover the costs of the case.

Libel writ will be contested

A writ has been issued by Vanessa Redgrave against Morning Litho Printers Ltd. and Sean Matgamna, alleging libel in respect of the article entitled 'Gaddafi's Foreign Legion to Knight's rescue', written by Sean Matgamna in issue no.33 of Socialist Organiser of 24 January 1981, misdated 24 January 1980. This writ is being contested by Sean Matgamna who will defend the said article.

Facilities have been offered to Vanessa Redgrave to publish an article in reply in 'Socialist Organiser', in exchange for one of the following articles to be published in 'Newsline':

(a) an article by Alan Thornett of the Workers

Socialist League, to explain to the readers of 'Newsline' how 20 members of the WRP came to Oxford two weeks ago and made a mass distribution at British Leyland's Cowley plant of a printed broadsheet, which, among other things, implied that he was a police agent;

(b) an article by George Novack, on behalf of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, to reply to the WRP's libellous campaign;

(c) an article by the Stalinist Iraqi Communist Party, the slaughter of whose members 'Newsline' has publicly justified;

(d) an article by Sean Matgamna, discussing the

recent statement by Colonel Ghaddafi calling for the rehabilitation of Hitler and Nazism.

Sean Matgamna has also offered to confirm that he accepts that it is no part of the WRP's objectives to use violence against the state.

And Sean Matgamna has proposed that a labour movement inquiry be set up to investigate the statements made in his article, in the interests of contributing to the continuing public debate on the issues.

These offers were made by Sean Matgamna in a letter dated 26th February 1981 to Vanessa Redgrave's legal advisers, and to date the only response has been the issue of the writ.

A LABOUR INQUIRY, NOT THE COURTS

We, the undersigned, condemn Vanessa Redgrave's and the WRP's use of the courts against the labour movement press. We support the proposal that a labour movement inquiry be set up to investigate the statements made in the Socialist Organiser article.

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Return to Labour Movement Press Defence Fund, c/o 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.

Appeal for funds

**LABOUR MOVEMENT
PRESS DEFENCE
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Send donations to Jonathan Hammond [Hon. Treasurer], c/o 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY. Cheques payable to 'Labour Movement Press Defence Fund'.

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