

International Socialist League

socialist VOICE

50p • September 1999 • Volume III Issue No 4

BLAIR'S WORLD



WELFARE CRISIS

POVERTY CRISIS

FOREIGN CRISIS



**FOR A UNITED
ALLIANCE OF WORKERS
AND THE LEFT**

- DEPLETED URANIUM IN IRAQ AND KOSOVA
- REPORT OF IWL CONGRESS
- STUDENTS IN ARGENTINA



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- Published by:
ISL PO Box 9
Eccles SO
Salford M30 7FX

- Socialist Voice, is the Journal of the International Socialist League and is published every two months.
- Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the ISL.
- We welcome contributions and comments from readers.
- Subscriptions cost £5 for six issues including postage.

For a class alliance against Blair

On 7 August the *Financial Times* editorial stated that if "the recovery" of the British economy continues, "the UK economy will have enjoyed continuous steady growth for eight years, averaging 2.6 per cent a year". Unemployment is, according to government statistics, less than 4.5 per cent, the lowest for 19 years. So, is the spin-doctoring of the Blair clique correct after all? Is the so-called "third way" really working?

Yes, for the moment, but at what price and for whom? Blair recently complained to venture-capitalists how hard his job has been to make public sector workers change their ways and accept that the market is good for them. Keeping profits up and wages down is an essential part of Blair's Britain. On 6 August, Barclays Bank announced another 1,000 jobs cut in addition to the 6,000 announced six weeks before, and further job cuts have been hinted at. Meanwhile oil giant Shell, whose current cost-cutting programme involves 2,000 job losses in Britain, achieved a 5 per cent rise in net earnings in August.

Profits may be up but the attack on services is conducted as if we were in a deep economic crisis.

According to *The Independent*, 10 August, Alastair Campbell's instructions include the necessity of each government department coming up with "at least one positive announcement [cut] for each week of the parliamentary recess".

However, the incessant search for ever-increasing profits provides no solutions for the problems of British society. There is massive over-production of commodities and capital in the world and Britain's economy is increasingly coming under the hammer. Britain's arms sales, for example, collapsed last year by 80 per cent, whilst US arms exports increased, to \$7.1 billion.

In the middle of all the smiles from Tony Blair, British Airways saw its profits drop by 45.6 per cent. The BA chairman blamed the fall on excess capacity on North Atlantic routes, subdued economic activity in Europe, the lack of any convincing recovery in the Far East, the strength of sterling and the growth of low cost carriers. But the reality is that there is increasing trade war between airlines in which the US, French, German and Italian airlines have increased the number of seats offered, not lowered them as BA has done.

The Labour government supports the rapidly increasing number of millionaire fat cats and is intent on continuing the essence of Tory policy in every field.

On education, it continues to attack teachers just as the Tory government did. Blair says that "many local authorities are failing", meanwhile the Chief Inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, says, exactly as the Tories did, that larger class sizes are no bar to higher achievement. And now the government wants to link teachers pay with performance, but the performance will be measured by their statistics. Who will suffer? The teachers and pupils, particularly in the working class areas of Britain.

Stress and poor health is already widespread in the teaching profession. So what does the government do? It moved, in August, to curb what it described as the unacceptably high level 'ill-health retirement' in the public sector. Inspections, paper-work and increased demands on teachers cause the stress in the first place. Curbing 'ill-health retirement' may save money but will only add to the stress on teachers.

But performance related pay is not applied to everyone. A number of multi-national companies, such as Siemens, have been awarded contract to manage public sector computer systems. However, whenever they have failed

to deliver the government has simply waived the financial penalties it could have imposed.

Who suffers? In the case of computerised student loans - the students, not the computer companies who created the problem whilst reaping the profits from the public purse.

When Frank Dobson declared that he was going to cut the price for drugs for the National Health Service by 4.5 per cent the regulation only covered the cost of brand-named drugs. The cost of generic drugs has soared. According to *The Independent* On Sunday, 8 August, by up to 1,000 per cent. The drug companies said that the generic drugs still cost less than the branded drugs; which only shows that the Blair government does not have a monopoly on spin. And who suffers? - the patient.

Blair's programme of privatisation or 'partnership' with business means that increasingly every sector of life is being placed under the control of the market and the profiteers. The greatest losers are the users of the services and the ordinary workers who work in them.

If this government is consistent in anything it is in its moral bankruptcy. Its so-called Ethical Foreign Policy (Robin Cook now tries to deny he ever meant such a thing) has been replaced by a naked war-mongering as in Kosova. Blair's concern for the Kosovars does not stretch far. He avowed his concern was for humanity and

However, the incessant search for ever-increasing profits provides no solutions for the problems of British society. There is massive over-production of commodities and capital in the world and Britain's economy is increasingly coming under the hammer.

ISL Comment

the refugees, but now, when the refugees return to radioactive areas in Kosova, he is silent. (See article on Depleted Uranium in Kosova). At the same time a report by the Commons international development committee criticised the United Nations High Commission for Refugees for failing to meet the needs of the thousands of refugees forced out of Kosova but made no criticism of the British government for its refusal to welcome them here.

In Sierra Leone Britain's involvement is driven more by the falling profits of the arms industry and the need to keep a toe-hold in a mineral rich area than the very real problems of the local population.

The attacks by Blair and the attacks by private capital go hand in hand. The real problem is not convincing workers that Blair supports the fat cats, or that in reality the Parliamentary MPs have become part of the fat cats club but how to develop a united and combative movement which can develop an alternative to Blair.

In many cases the top leaderships of the trade unions are supporting the programme of Blair. The programme called 'Best Value' which replaced the 'Compulsory Competitive Tendering' of the Tories, but which amounts to the same privatising agenda for the public services, is being supported fully by the leadership of public sector union Unicon. Take, for example, the Unicon funded report into the corruption and the strike in Tameside where sacked care workers waged a 14 month battle for reinstatement. The report contains two main demands: an Audit Commission enquiry and a 'Best Value' analysis of Tameside care services. This presents no real alternative to the right-wing Labour council in Tameside and is in reality a way of smuggling in Blair's policy as a 'solution', when it was precisely policies of this type which were and still are the problem. It is notable that the report was never issued during the dispute but only after it was over.

The Blair government has in its sights the break-up of the national fire service, the privatisation of the London underground, the dismantling of the Remploy employment service for the disabled and a whole host of other attacks.

The high level of abstention in the European elections of Labour's traditional supporters is a mark of the opposition to Blair's policies. Another, more dynamic mark, was the "anti-capitalist riot", as the *Financial Times* said the day after, in the City of London on 18 June.

Every move by the Labour leadership to continue privatisation is creating an opposition and there is a growing awareness that only the development of a combative policy linked with the greatest unity will be able to defeat Blair. This is evidenced by the growing number of alliances that are emerging inside a number of struggles.

This is a process that is not confined to Britain as was shown in France, for example, in the recent European

elections where nearly one million people voted for a revolutionary programme. This vote was achieved by a joint slate between two Trotskyist groups, Lutte Ouvriere and the Revolutionary Communist League. In most working class areas the slate won between 7 and 10 per cent of the vote, including the 'red belt' of Communist Party-controlled towns around Paris. In Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Lille and Clermont-Ferrand, it did better than the Communist Party. Struggles like the movement for a 35 hour week, the regularisation of the 'sans-papiers' (undocumented immigrants), and opposition to pension cuts, privatisation and the poisoning of the European food supply by the agro-industrial complex were some of the themes of the LO-IRC campaign. The two parties have only about 4,000 members between them but attracted some 32,000 people to their public meetings. The Communist Party had its worst result ever.

This tendency was not as strong in Britain. Nevertheless, the Scottish Socialist Party leader, Tommy Sheridan, was elected to the Scottish parliament. In England, the Socialist Alliances stood a full list of candidates in the West Midlands and the process of developing common election slates was thoroughly discussed in other areas. In the North-West the ISL participated in a series of fraternal meetings with the Merseyside Socialists, the Communist Party of Great Britain and other tendencies.

The process, in general, was brought forward by the Liverpool dockers dispute, where trade unionists and political groups had to find new alliances. These types of alliances continued in the form of strike support groups in London.

One of the most important developments was during the war in the Balkans when many groups on the left created a new alliance opposed to the Nato bombing and in support of self-determination for Kosova. It was formed in opposition to the main leadership of the anti-war movement which had a pro-Serb nationalist line. They included Stalinists, the Greens and the Socialist Workers' Party.

The alliances which are developing are an essential part of the development of a working class alternative. The working class as a whole, of which the Marxists groups are a part, will not overcome its sectional barriers without going through the experiences of these alliances and working out how to create bigger ones.

A new leadership has to be fought for in the trade union movement, but it has to be part of a fight for services for the communities and against any compromising of workers interests to the interests of capital either locally, nationally and internationally. This also therefore necessitates an educative and theoretical arming of the most class conscious militants in the working class. The ISL will attempt to play its part in this process to the best of its ability.

They used it for 'humanity'

THE FOLLOWING article about the widespread use by Nato of Depleted Uranium in Kosova was sent by Ray Bristow. Ray served in the army medical service in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf war. He did not put a foot in either Kuwait or Iraq but is now suffering from radiation sickness and is fighting the Ministry of Defence.

In his letter he said: "The majority of the Veterans who are fighting the system from a medical background, they and myself are ill and not stupid and between us we can see when we are being hoodwinked.

"The MoD and Government are spending millions of pounds to find reasons why Veterans are not ill. With the biological half-life of DU it would have been too late to identify in Veterans in a few years time and then we would have been stuffed the same as the Nuclear Test Veterans/Victims of the fifties were.

"I can tell you that there are many, many veterans suffering and presenting with the classic signs and symptoms and the MoD Medical Assessment Program 'choose' to keep these quiet for fiscal reasons."

"The head of the MAP, Prof. Lee, is in actual fact a Treasury Department Expert Witness when claims are brought against the Government. As no useful information is passed to our GP's or Consultants, it can only mean that Veterans are 'conned' into going so that they can prepare a legal defence when the matter goes to Court."

Over 250,000 DU shells were used in Kosova but, as a number of commentators, such as Robert Fisk, have said, only 13 Serbian tanks were destroyed. So what was it all about, why contaminate an area when even by military results the use was not justified? When the first deformed babies are born in Kosova will Tony Blair still say 'we did this for humanity'?

The article is from the Sunday Herald, 1 August 99. It was written by Felicity Arbuthnot, who has written extensively about the terrible effects, particularly on children, of DU in Iraq since the Gulf War.

DU, the Sunday Herald and Kosova

MINISTRY of Defence personnel in Kosovo have been warned to stay clear of areas which have been affected by depleted uranium weapons unless they are wearing full radiological protective clothing.

However, returning refugees have been kept in the dark about the perils of moving back to the highly contaminated areas, with the MoD claiming that responsibility for alerting them lies with United Nations relief workers.

When asked if there was a co-ordinated Nato response relating to the returning refugees, and the locals, rebuilding, and to the advice to avoid disturbing areas of depleted uranium contamination, an MOD spokesperson replied: "There's no specially reviewed policy re DU. It would have to be co-ordinated by Nato.

"We would follow and adhere to any of their directions."

Now some UNHCR personnel are threatening to pull out of the affected areas, expressing "extreme concern" over the risk to their staff and locals. The Sunday Herald can reveal that the National Radiological Protection Board has issued a warning of the potential hazards of radioactive depleted uranium to the health of personnel working in Kosovo. It has urged press and relief agency workers to avoid disturbing contaminated areas.

An estimated 250,000 rounds of depleted uranium were fired, primarily from American A-10 aircraft.

At an international Conference in London on Friday medical and scientific experts estimated that an additional 10,000 cancer deaths in the region will result.

DU, first used in the 1991 Gulf war, has been linked to so-called 'Gulf war sickness' among veterans and to the epidemic of cancers and birth defects in Iraq.

The NRPB - the government's radiation watchdog - has warned: "There are two types of potential hazard posed by the use of DU: a chemical toxicity hazard and a radiation hazard.

"DU could be absorbed into the body following inhalation or ingestion.

"In this case the kidney is the organ most likely to be affected by the chemical toxicity of DU."

A further 'hazard' would arise from disturbing the contamination and inhaling the dust.

"DU deposited in the lungs could be contributory cause of lung cancer."

The warning concludes: "People visiting or working in Kosovo, for example press and relief agencies, should seek advice from appropriate authorities on the disposition of damaged vehicles or areas of DU contamination to avoid disturbing these areas.

"If access to these areas is deemed essential then advice should be sought from the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign Office."

The Ministry of Defence admits that it has advised all of its personnel on no account to approach any area which may have been affected by DU and that they should wear full radiological protective clothing and breathing apparatus if it is unavoidable.

However it has washed its hands of all responsibility for others in the region. "Responsibility for those living in the area and for returning refugees lies with the United Nations Commission for Refugees." There has been no official communication between the Ministry of Defence and UNHCR officials in Kosovo, who only learned of the danger from a concerned scientist. It has now amassed a volume of material which has been sent to its head office in Geneva, after staff expressed 'extreme concern' over the risk to personnel and locals - some demanding that all UNHCR personnel be withdrawn forthwith.

The significance of the NRPB's warnings and UNHCR's concerns were enlarged by scientist Dr Roger Coghill at the International Conference on depleted uranium, whose audience included Ambassadors and dignitaries from the Middle East concerned about the health and environment of their populations since the Gulf war.

"Inhaling DU directly into the lungs has a bio-effectiveness one hundred times more than Chernobyl!" said Coghill.

"One single particle lodged in a lymph node can devastate the immune system from within. Damage is non-repairable."

Pointing out the distance DU can travel he commented: "The Technical Institute at Kazan in Budapest, reported that during the Balkans war (DU associated) radiation levels rose 25%.

"Alarming rises were also reported in all neighbouring countries."

Iraqi doctor replies

The following letter was sent to a comrade of the ISL by a doctor in Iraq.

For safety reasons we are not publishing the name of the doctor.

Thank you very much for your letter. I received it with great pleasure.

The crimes against the Iraqi people were done under the flag of the UN and are worse than nuclear weapons. The sophisticated sanctions kill everything slowly with more pain and suffering. Iraqi families are losing their kids because of a lack of nutrition and medicines. The real leaders of these crimes are the USA and United Kingdom. The sanctions are killing innocent children and their mothers and are destroying the new generation. The matter is far away from the invasion of Kuwait, the matter is control of oil and they are ready to kill the whole Iraqi people for this aim. Again, I thank you very much for your high humanitarian feelings. I will remember your support forever.

Readers' Writes

Why We Support The Tamil Tigers

We are group of ordinary British activists, concerned with human rights abuses on the island of Sri Lanka for about 10 years. However, through contacts with many people from the island we have come to our own view of the situation. We certainly do not hold with right-wing propoganda which we read in the media and which comes mostly from the Sri Lankan government itself. But we also differ with most of our comrades on the British left who, without knowing much about the history of events, tend to dismiss the LTTE, the Tamil Tigers as nationalist separatists.

There are many myths bandied about the Tamil people and their present champions the Tamil Tigers. Frequently, we are told that the Tamils of Sri Lanka have only been there about 150 years, and that this makes their claim for a separate Tamil nation a nonsense. It is true that some Tamils were shipped from Southern India in the 1850's by the British to help work the tea plantations in the central highlands - but these Tamils, known as Estate Tamils, are quite separate from those of the North and East who have been on the island for at least 2000 years. Indeed, it is the descendants of these Tamils who are today fighting for self-determination.

Under both the Portuguese and Dutch administrations, Tamil Eelam was a separate country. The British, however, lumped the two nationalities, Tamil and Sinhala together as one. At the independence of Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was then known, the Tamils, the smaller of the two groups, agreed to support the new 'independence from imperialism', hoping that their rights as a minority would be respected. How wrong they were. One year after independence the Sinhala dominated parliament began by disenfranchising half of the Tamil population. The Estate Tamils were declared stateless unless they reapplied for citizenship, with only the luck few being reaccepted. Parliament then passed the 1956 Sinhala Only Act which decreed that the Tamil language could not be used officially anywhere on the island, but it also meant much more.

Conditions for the Tamils began to get worse and worse. Initially they registered their dismay through normal 'democratic' channels, but finding these methods achieved nothing, they began to demonstrate openly but peacefully. This brought only abuse, arrests and physical attacks on their heads. Eventually, the state began to organise anti-Tamil

pogroms which lasted from 1956 through to the 1980's. Around 5000 people were killed in the streets, offices or homes by nationalist Sinhala mobs. Finally, the Tamils fought back, leading to the situation we find today.

Originally several different para-military groups emerged as hopeful champions of the Tamil cause for justice. These included the PLOTE, EPRLF, TELO, EROS, the LTTE and others. However, over time, only the LTTE has gained the support of most Tamils. The other groups were often seen as working with the Sinhalas, doing deals with the government, and even murdering fellow Tamils. Only the LTTE or Tamil Tigers have won the confidence of 90% of the population in those areas under attack from the military.

We have often heard British left activists say that "I support the Tamil people but I don't support the Tigers", or argue that the ordinary people are caught between two monsters, the government and the LTTE. We feel that this is rather like saying that under apartheid in South Africa that we should give some abstract support to the South African people, whilst refusing to give support to the ANC. Few would argue that the ANC were perfect, but most on the left would agree that the ANC were the choice of the South African people, and therefore the ones we should have supported. We say that the same applies to the LTTE and we continue to be saddened by the lack of support shown by the left in the West.

The stories which originate from Sri Lanka are mostly the constructs of the Sri Lankan government. They suggest that the LTTE threatens ordinary people into providing food and shelter for their soldiers. However, no liberation army could last more than months under such circumstances. These are the usual falsehoods disseminated by reactionary governments when under attack, so why do we still believe them? How did the Viet Cong or the ANC itself survive? Only by the ordinary people providing support, and only because they were seen as the only groups truly prepared to fight for the people's rights.

As Socialists, even if we don't agree with all the views of a national-liberation struggle, we should still support that struggle because it must be, in the long-term, another blow at international imperialism. After that struggle has been won, then we can argue whether the peoples concerned are making the right moves in their development. But even then, it is up to them to make their own decisions about their own futures. We on the left in the West - the very place from which originates so much of the misery of the world - should give them every encouragement.

Helen Whitehead,
Campaign Against State Terror In Sri Lanka,
Dept 131, 255 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 5LW.

Editor's comment

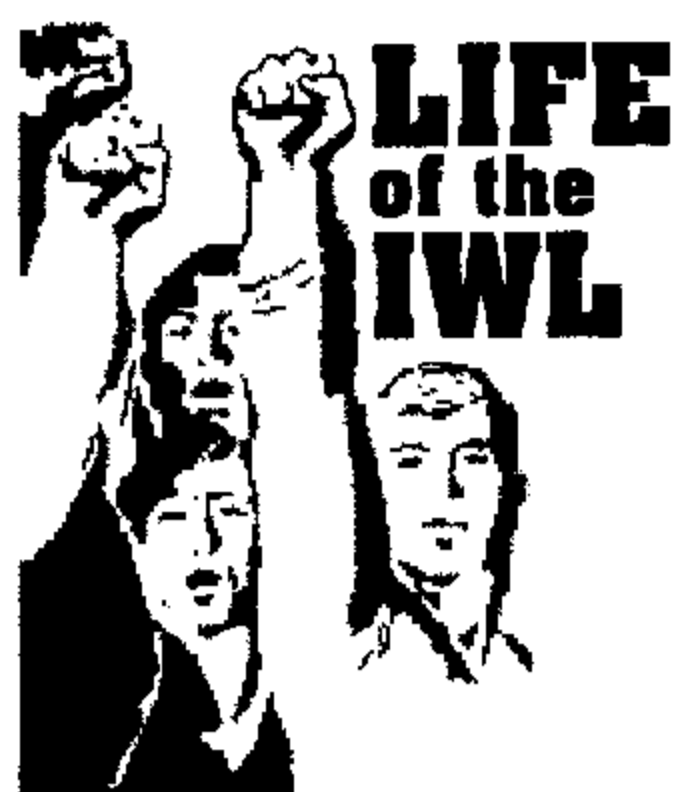
We are publishing this letter because it contains important information about the history of the Tamil people. Their struggle should be unconditionally supported. Support for their just democratic rights will assist the deepening of international fraternity between workers and peasants in the Indian sub-continent

Her letter also raises important criticism of the 'left' in Britain which we think need to be discussed. We agree entirely, for example, that criticisms of the leadership of a national-liberation struggle should not become a reason for not supporting the struggle.

Our view of the policies and actions of the Tamil Tigers should not be based simply on the rejection of sectarian attitudes which have been held by many on the left. We cannot support uncritically a nationalist leadership, this was not our view in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

We think we were right to support the development of COSATU in the 1980's and we are proud that we helped mount pressure on the South African government to save Mosos Myekiso - who was mainly responsible for organising the people of Alexandra township - from the death penalty. The ANC (and the South African Communist Party) opposed both at the time. We also think we were right to raise the criticism of the ANC that they took the best young activists and fighters away from their communities and the struggles of the people and placed them in 'training' camps in other countries. Most of these youngsters only returned to South Africa after apartheid had fallen.

The real issue is how is the control of the nationalist movement put into the hands of workers and peasants. We welcome discussion on these points.



Extraordinary World Congress

In July, the International Workers League held a special world congress. There were delegates and observers from IWL sections in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Bolivia, Peru, Turkey, Portugal, England, Russia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Greece and Sweden.

Observers also came from the Pakistan Labour Party (formerly a part of the Militant) and the leaders of the International Trotskyist Opposition from Italy and the USA.

The congress was dominated by discussion on the Balkans war, recent developments and experiences of some of the sections in the IWL against it and the re-building of the IV International. The Congress was a step forward as it was the first congress for some years in which the majority did not have to focus, mainly, on the internal struggles to defend the heritage of Trotskyism.

There were different points of view on the characterisation of the war expressed at the congress, the main ones of which can be read in the Koorkom Magazine that is advertised in this paper. The experience of the European sections of the IWL were very interesting and reflected a movement of the left and workers trying to face a complex situation.

In Spain, Portugal and England and elsewhere the anti-war movement leadership had a right-wing position of only supporting the fight of Serbia against NATO. Inside those leaderships there also existed pro-Milosevic and Serbian nationalist forces. In England the Socialist Workers Party was part of that leadership and moved closer to a Serb nationalist position as the war continued. However, inside the movement in most European countries alliances were made that linked together the two questions of being against NATO but also opposing Milosevic and for self-determination of the Kosovars.

The forms and extent of the alliances were different in every European country. Most of the Spanish section of the IWL is inside the United Left. They and other left forces had a battle against the Stalinist leadership which proclaimed that Milosevic was 'a man of the left'. They succeeded in over-turning that position in Catalunya and elsewhere.

In Portugal the Communist Party retains an important influence in the working class movement and was in the

leadership of the anti-war movement. An alliance was formed with our section, the group of the United Secretariat and others. That alliance, however, was not consistent because the USec group supported the United Nations going into Kosovar.

The second main topic was the reorganization of the labour movement and in particular the situation of the Koorkom.

Reports were given on the last meeting of the Koorkom and from other organizations who attended the congress (from the USA, Pakistan, Italy and Brazil); they showed the different tempos of re-organisation of the Trotskyist, revolutionary, working class and peasant movements.

Clearly independently of our discussions and agreements there is a process of re-organisation, which is taking many forms. In France, for example, there is a section of the advanced guard of workers that is supporting a revolutionary programme, nearly a million people voted for the Trotskyist alliance in the European elections.

In many countries the situation is contradictory and complex but there are some extraordinary developments taking place in the international working class. In Mexico workers have forced a change in the law which legalised the formation of trade unions independent of the State. On May Day this year the independent unions called a May Day demonstration and attracted over 250,000 workers and students; the government official unions attracted 35,000 to their demonstration. During this period 250,000 students had struck for 3 months against the introduction of tuition fees, a new process is also beginning for a new party of labour. While we were meeting one of the largest workers demonstrations in the history of the Turkish movement occurred. The discussion at the World Congress was how it could face these events and bring new forces into the Koorkom project.

The participation in the congress of the Labour Party of Pakistan and the discussion on Pakistan was a new experience for the IWL. It was also the first time that the Pakistan party had had a direct experience of the IWL and Brazil. The combativity of the Pakistani working class and peasantry came through in the reports about the forming of new unions and community organisations and the rapid growth of the party. There was agreement on the need



for the re-building of the Fourth International without the strict and undemocratic centralism of the Militant International (CWI), and the national struggle and the fight to root the International in the theory and practice of Lenin and Trotsky. (Any readers who want material in Urdu or who want to contact the comrades should contact the ISL). The LPP have pamphlets written in English including their fight inside the CWI before they were expelled. It was agreed to develop work in common between the IWL and the LPP.

The contributions of the International Trotskyist Opposition were very important. It follows the participation of a representative of their English group in the Manchester international meeting of the Koorkom as observers and an exchange of experiences between the North American comrades and the PSTU (the party of the IWL in Brazil) in relation to trade unions.

In this point we discussed, also, the policy of the Koorkom, in relation to the building of an International Union Committee. From the initial idea a series of meetings and exploratory contacts were already made that gives the possibility to advance in the construction of such a committee.

A balance sheet of the IWL was also discussed. The existence of the IWL had been threatened by the revisionism, which had its main base in the MAS in Argentina but also included the French group (LSR) and others. The centre of this revisionism was a turn away from the working class and a rejection of the fundamental basis of Lenin's and Trotsky's fight to establish a world party of socialism based on democratic centralism.

In this struggle there were not just two tendencies but inside this Congress whatever the disagreements, a central agreement was on the fight against the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism) and the need to turn towards the processes in the world and the mass movements. The congress marked the beginning of a new phase of the IWL, however there is no automatic process to success.

Experiences demonstrate that leadership is formed in the struggle of the classes, in the political and theoretical struggles and in the internal theoretical-political struggles which themselves reflect the real processes that are within the class struggle. The IWL stands on many important traditions but it is more difficult to build an international in the working class in its organisations, in the communities and the youth and the women than in defending principles, in words and speeches, inside an international. - The most difficult tasks are yet to come. The IWL was in deep crisis for many years and the effects of that crisis are not overcome in one step. While the struggle for

the IWL has a long history at the same time about eighty per cent of the forces that were formed in the IWL are no longer with the IWL. However even in a deep part of the crisis there was a turning point. In 1994 at the Fourth

Congress of the World Congress the Liaison Committee with the Workers International marked the beginning of what became the Koorkom and at the same time the orientation to re-build the Fourth International with the IWL as an important force and as a driving force inside that process.

Anyone who desires to take their part in the re-building of the Fourth International needs to study (as part of that process) the central questions of the fight for Trotskyism that have taken and are taking place in the IWL.

GREETINGS TO THE CONGRESS

The following messages came from two organisations that had been invited but were unable to attend. For reasons of space they have been edited

Merseyside Socialists send fraternal and comradely greetings to the Congress of the International Workers League in Brazil, July 1999

We are a group of Socialists on Merseyside, numbering approximately 40 people, who up until 12 months ago were members of the Socialist Party and the CWI. We have a long history of struggle on Merseyside and nationally and internationally. Many of us were involved in the struggles of the Liverpool City Council, in the mid-80s, to defend jobs and services. We were actively involved in the miners strike of 1984/85, we led the battle against the poll tax, led school students strikes. We were involved in anti-fascist and anti-racist work, campaigning against domestic violence, campaigning against hospital closures, and most recently supporting the struggle of the sacked Liverpool dockers and campaigning against the war in the Balkans and for self-determination of the Kosovan people...

In the mid 90s, as part of Militant Labour and then the Socialist Party we recognised that the Labour Party was no longer a party to represent working class people. We took the step to build our own organisation and at the same time raise the idea of a new workers or socialist party. At this time, the majority of the active members on Merseyside began to come into conflict with the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party over the emphasis of the work and the analysis of the current social, economic and political period. The leadership of the Socialist Party were continuing to put forward an economic determinist position. All the time the prediction was and still is for economic collapse and a consequent movement of workers back into struggle through the trade unions which would result in the leadership of trade unions being pushed to the left. We recognised the importance of work in the trade unions, with many of our comrades in leading positions as stewards. However we raised that the Socialist Party



Greetings to the IWL congress

had too much emphasis on Broad Left work and winning positions in the union, rather than building solidarity for struggles such as the sacked Liverpool dockers. The consequence of the Socialist Party analysis of the current period is that it is imperative to build their own organisation above raising the ideas of socialism and building solidarity with workers in struggle, and building links with other organisations. This unfortunately appears to be the analysis of the three biggest socialist organisations in England the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Socialist Party. All seem to be 'racing' for the breakthrough to be THE party when a new struggle unfolds.

We instead believe it is more important at this point to have open and honest discussions with others on the left, on how to build a new movement, building solidarity and raising the ideas of socialism. We recognise that it is a very difficult period for revolutionaries and socialists to work. It has been the lowest period for strikes since records begun. To many people, capitalism appears to be victorious with the collapse of Stalinism. Young people are rejecting traditional forms of politics and instead are finding new forms of expression of opposition to the system. This was demonstrated by 30,000 people on the streets of the City of London in a 'Carnival against Capitalism'.

...We are still finding new ways of organising after rejecting the highly centralised and hierarchical structures of the Socialist Party.

We welcome the opportunity to send this message, to build international links and look forward to a continuing dialogue with you.

On behalf of Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League, I would like to convey our warmest greeting to your Congress and wish you success in your struggle against Capitalism.

We believe that in the light of the deep economic crisis of the world economy, the time for re-groupment of the revolutionary socialists and building an International organisation based on the tradition of the Comintern is the order of the day.

We as Iranian revolutionary socialists would like to participate in such an international. This is why we keep and develop our fraternal relationship with revolutionary socialists in other parts of the world, especially with those who in practice have broken from opportunism and secularism and developed a working class orientation.

Comrades! We were intending to participate in your Congress as observers, but the upsurge of student movement in Iran and the tasks we had in hand did not allow

us to do so. While you are holding your congress the militant students in Iran are continuing with their struggle against the clerical capitalist state in Iran. Today a split is taken place between supporters of pro-Western President (Khatemi) and those students who not only oppose the hard-liners (Khamenie) but also are against the President and his so called reforms.

Students in Iran are now entered their third stage of struggle against the regime within 10 days! In the first stage they were for freedom of the press. In the second stage they called for the downfall of the leader of the Islamic Republic (Khamenie). Now they are against the "Reformer" president. Of course without involvement of workers this movement will not achieve the full success. Comrades in Iran now are taking the revolutionary line of linking the students to the workers.

M. Razi Iranian revolutionary Socialists' League



FINANCIAL HELP TO THE PAKISTAN LABOUR PARTY

The ISL is selling copies of **Revolution Betrayed by Leon Trotsky** for £10+£2.50 p&p. send cheques to the ISL.

Workers Democracy Website

The Web site of the Workers Democracy network is now up and functioning! We have free discussion on all topics relevant to the struggle for workers' democracy, open to comments by anyone who joins the network and registers at our Website.

Our bulletin board now has discussion of the Carpenters struggle in New York, the fight against corruption in the Boilermakers' union, the battle for union democracy and a decent contract at Boeing, a Decatur victory in turning back the corporate agenda in education, a report from the national conference of Students Against Sweatshops, and a report from abroad on the successful seizure of two factories by workers in Russia.

Check it out at

www.workersdemocracy.org

Letter from Argentina

Elizabeth, a long standing member of the International Workers' League, writes on the student's struggle in Argentina

The student movement in Argentina was once described as the weathercock of the class struggle, not because of its fickleness, but because it seem to forecast the winds of forthcoming storms. That was especially true some twenty years ago, when the expression was first coined. The explanation was then that, at the university, lots of young men and women of a very plebeian origin came into contact with information that made them much more aware of what was wrong with society. And that made them angry. If their protest connected with the workers' demands, the two were often unbeatable. A demonstration chanting "Obtremos y estudiantes, Unidos adelante" usually spelt trouble for the authorities.

Things changed substantially as years went by, for even though the State University was still free of charge, fewer and fewer children of workers could afford to go to college. When you have to choose between buying a book and buying a meal for the whole family, there is no real option.

Supporters of the establishment clicked their heels out of pure joy. They spoke derisively of the times when "activists went to the university not to study but to practise politics" and said that now only "respectable people" could study, the temple of knowledge would regain its real status. They were wrong. Instead of gaining rank, the once proud University of Buenos Aires started dwindling into mediocrity where underpaid and overworked teachers tried to explain things often a far cry from what the students really needed to learn.

Students grumbled, teachers grumbled, but nobody went beyond that. And then all of a sudden, this year, in the middle of the first term, the news came that there would only be enough money to pay the teachers until the second or third month of the second term. After that there would be no more lessons. This shook the foundations of the ancient institution! One lecturer said: "Normally the topic that I am teaching now is an essential part of the examination, but as things are I cannot tell when and if there will be an examination."

The students' response was immediate. In less than no time the "up-to-now-snowed-down-with-everyday-problems-individuals" became natural fighters. Connections were established with other parts of the universities, younger brothers and sisters were summoned to get the backing of the high school students and teachers and thousands of leaflets were printed and distributed.

A neighbour of mine, a first year student, told me that they had voted for a big demonstration for that day: "I was really a bit worried, for I had never taken part in a

demonstration before. I knew my parents would disapprove. Voting for a demonstration is one thing. Actually going to it is something altogether different.

"So there I was at the bus stop wondering whether to go to the appointed meeting place from where we were to march to Plaza de Mayo or to Susan's where we would both study for the term test. Then I realised that no busses had come along the Pan-Americana Motorway. I was wondering what could be holding them up when I heard a crowd chanting. I was amazed. Football fans at this time of an ordinary working day? Then I saw them. An impressive eight-person-wide column carrying a huge banner: "Hands off our university!" and "Money for our education - not the IMF!" And then I nearly fell backwards. It was my former high school responding to the university appeal. Suddenly I had no more doubts. I dashed across the road and joined the column."

My neighbour looked at her watch.

"It's getting late, I came home just to change my clothes and get a couple of hours' sleep. I must be back there. We are going to decide what to do next if Menem does not meet our demands. By the way, have you been watching the news? What are they saying about us?" I replied. "Well, there are riots in at least three other cities. And quite a few politicians have come out to say that you are right in doing what you are doing."

"Oh, the politicians! They have to say something sensible, for elections are near and many of us will vote for the first time! Well, I must run."

I saw her chase down the street waving at a passing bus. I couldn't help smiling. It was like seeing myself, never mind how many years ago.

At first Menem was adamant, accustomed to either manipulating a very corrupt Parliament or imposing things by decree. He had been the champion of compliance with the neo-liberal rules. For turning the once very combative Argentine workers into a pool of unemployed, he had secured the IMF payments and lots of cheap labour for the "foreign investors". He had privatised everything he could lay his hands on. He had reduced the state health service to something that still exists only because the doctors and nurses work for next to nothing and with next to nothing with which to cure people. He got away with things that at a different moment would have meant riots all over the country.

The explanation for his survival is that all the representatives of the establishment: the "opposition" parties, trade union leaders, journalists, the Church, had made a pact known as "together till '99". They had agreed that no

matter what happens, they must not allow the people's protest to overthrow the government before it ends its term in October 1999, after which the same policy would be applied by a new team of pro-imperialist capitalists.

They knew that they were powerless to prevent protests from breaking out but if each explosion could be dealt with separately the October deadline could be met. It was the students who overturned their neatly arranged apple cart. Not only did they force the "unbeatable" Menem to meet their direct demands, but also they started a rumour going: "You see? It can be done."

It is not a coincidence that soon after that defeat new Waterloos started cropping up. Just one example. Schoolteachers have been demanding an increase in their salaries for quite a while. Argentine schoolteachers have a tradition of using their most powerful weapon: their access, through their students, to the families of all the social classes. So Menem thought of a truly diabolic scheme, a way of complying with the teachers' demands without entering into conflict with the usurers from the IMF and, at the same time, of creating hostility between the teachers and the rest of the population. He created a new tax. Every car owner had to buy a sticker for the Educational Fund. Once the money was collected, the teachers would receive an increase averaging \$50 each.

The teachers' trade unions tried to make it look like a sort of "tax on the rich to pay the poor", but many of the teachers did not see it this way. "This is ridiculous", one of them complained, "I have a car, for I need it to get to the two different schools at which I teach. So now I have to pay \$60 in order to get, some day, a \$50 increase."

Many teachers went as far as distributing leaflets advising car owners not to pay the tax. Many car owners arrived at the same conclusion without the leaflet. Road hauliers not only refused to buy the stickers, but blocked the main roads to the capital. So, for a few days, this was like a besieged city. Shop owners and manufacturers started pressing the government to "do something". But what could Menem do? Send the tanks out to clear the motorways? He might have balanced this possibility against the political price of such an overt act of repression. How far would a decision like this contribute towards jeopardising the famous "together till '99"? The result is that the deadline for buying the sticker is long passed, and more than half the car owners have not paid the "teacher tax".

But do not get too excited about this. The relationship between the forces in the class struggle has changed considerably since the student's saved the university but this does not mean that revolution is round the corner. A lot of things have to happen before that stage can be reached, both here and in the rest of the world.

But the situation has changed. There are also things happening in Patagonia. They do not hit the headlines because Patagonia is a far away and rather isolated region. I can tell you about it in my next letter.

Elizabeth.



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US Gun Law in the Philippines

by Andy Higginbottom

Andy Higginbottom is Secretary of the British Section of the International Committee Against Disappearances (ICAD). He has just returned from the Philippines where he was attending the conference "*Disappearances and other forms of Human Rights Violations: The Worsening Effects of Globalisation*". In the following report he describes how the new methods of imperialist control are developing. His report has been edited for length.

Amidst growing opposition the Visiting Forces Agreement was approved by the Senate on 27 May. The VFA was initially signed by Philippine and US officials in February last year. It provides the legal framework for the resumption of large-scale joint military exercises. One of the most controversial clauses limits the Philippine government's right to prosecute US soldiers who commit crimes. This immunity clause is especially opposed by human rights groups who predict that it will lead to even more human rights violations and disappearances, of which there have already been 34 cases during the 10 month old administration of Joseph Estrada.

On 20 May twenty protesters stood silently in the public gallery of the Senate, holding up paper placards which read 'Junk the VFA'. They were beaten by the police, held for 27 hours and charged with violation of article 144 of the Revised Penal Code for disruption of a public hearing. One of the protesters was Rafael Mariano, chair of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) the landless peasant movement. Mariano had written: "Toxic and radioactive spills, live ammunition, weapons and equipment can be left in our waters and land and the United States will have no obligation to clean up afterwards or repair damaged food production areas."

A clear majority in the country was against signing away their national sovereignty. Yet only five out of the 23 Senators voted against the VFA, a proportion that betrays the Senate's unrepresentative and self-seeking character.

Popular protests were organised by the 'Junk the VFA' Movement in Dumaguete City, Naga City, Bicol, Legazpi City and the town of Sorsogon. An alliance of commercial sex workers, gays, members of a militant women's group and city councilors demonstrated together in Davao City where Belen Obija, chair of Lawig-Bubai, said, "Prostituted women were rejecting the VFA because this would encourage the rise of giric bars and prostitution dens in areas designated as landing points of the visiting US forces. This was what happened in Olongapo and Angeles when the US bases [Clark and Subic] were still around." Gays expressed fears over the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, in these areas.

Blair Is In There Too

The Blair government is eager to reach a similar arrangement on the coat-tails of the US. HMS Glasgow visited Manila from 22 to 27 May. The destroyer is taking

part in joint exercises with the Philippine Navy. Military co-operation will be expanded this year, according to Capt. Chris Peach, the defence attaché at the British embassy in Manila, with a Philippine officer coming to study at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London. Other British military teams will provide technical training to the Philippine Air Force and Navy. Peter Sullivan, first secretary of the British Embassy, stressed that "the offer to forge a military training agreement was not linked to Britain's bids to supply equipment for the Philippine military's modernisation program, which is expected to cost P331 billion (£5.4 billion) over the next 15 years".

The IMF's New Regional Model

President Joseph Estrada was recent invited to address a forum in Hong Kong of over one thousand senior business executives from Asia-Pacific. Former crony of Ferdinand Marcos, Estrada has become the darling of big business in the region. "Meanwhile", notes the *Manila Standard*, "International Monetary Fund Director Michel Camdessus lauded the Estrada administration for making the right economic and political decisions that enabled the country to suffer the least, and recover the first, from the Asian economic crisis." The positive outlook by the IMF came weeks after its sister institution, the World Bank, also came up with a similarly upbeat report commending the "strong commitment of the Estrada administration to attack poverty and official corruption while opening up further its market".

Certainly, as Asia's finance ministers are being urged to further liberalise their financial sectors, the Philippines is a standard bearer of the IMF policy. Rafael Buenaventura, Estrada's key financial adviser, predicts that the 63 commercial banks now operating in the Philippines will be reduced, through a wave of mergers and acquisitions, down to just five major domestic entities competing against 14 or so international banks.

George Soros is poised to take a massive share in the privatised Philippine National Bank, which the government is obliged to sell both under the terms of its IMF agreements and as a condition of its World Bank loan program. Buenaventura, himself a private banker, is expected to take over leadership of the Philippines central bank.

The lie to the Estrada-Camdessus commitment to 'attack poverty' could be found just down the road from their recent 'love-in' at the Shangri-La Hotel. Amongst Hong



Kong's migrant quarters, where thousands of Filipinos work as domestic slaves. Poverty is so bad at home that altogether there are 8 million Filipinos, 10% of the population, working overseas - including nurses on contract in our own NHS.

The Filipino average daily minimum wage is P180.48 (£2.94), but the estimated daily cost of living is more than double that at P369.87 (£6.03). At least two members must have a job at or above the minimum wage for a family to survive. With inflation at double-digit levels, real wages are falling. Moreover, as *Kilusang Mayo Uno*, the May 1st Trade Union movement explains: "To attract foreign investors the Estrada government is proposing the following: a wage-freeze up to year 2000; profit-sharing schemes in lieu of minimum wage increases; the hiring of regular workers at apprentice rates (75-80% of minimum wage); the adoption of 'special minimum wage rates' for 'distressed companies'; the inclusion of collective bargaining deadlock among 'non-strikeable issues' to be automatically assumed by the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE)."

While Philippines' Gross National Product grew by up to 1.5% last year, manufacturing output fell by 3.3% in the same period. This industrial contraction is the result of World Banking policies, which push investment towards the production export-oriented primary commodities in the agricultural sector.

The Poor Resist

The urban and rural poor communities have been organising their own forms of resistance for survival. On 17 May a protest rally by a group of several hundred displaced squatters from the North Triangle Homeowners Association was attacked by Marines guarding the Congress buildings in Batasan Hills, Quezon City. The protesters carried a coffin bearing the body of starved ulcer victim 50 year old Rebecca Bota, the eighteenth squatter to die from illness since the 600 families were displaced last year.

The New People's Army recently marked the thirtieth anniversary of its rural based armed struggle. It claims more than eighty fronts in different parts of the country. The motto of the Philippines Armed Forces is Relevant, Credible, Trustworthy. Yet terror strikes against specifically targeted homes, and the moving of whole villages into strategic hamlets are two tactics used by the army in its counter-insurgency strategy to defeat the NPA.

The internal opposition spans the political spectrum from Cardinal Sin to the illegal Communist Party of the Philippines CPP, founder of the NPA.

Many of the opposition voices warn that the Philippines will become a massive airbase, a forward staging post for US aggression in East Asia. If the US determined to launch airborne strikes on China, where better to start them from than the Philippines?

koorkom

Review of the Co-ordinating Committee
for the construction of the
International Workers' Party, Issue
No.2

No to the NATO 'Peace' NATO out of the Balkans Right of Self- determination to Kosovo

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“One Small Stride”

by Mark Abraham

Review by Naomi Kawabata

It's not often that a new book of poetry comes out with a political slant. Indeed, there are many who still believe, who'd like to believe, that poetry and politics do not mix.

Thank goodness nobody told that to Percy Shelly, Bertolt Brecht or many other great masters or mistress of the arts.

'One Small Stride' is a booklet, that is dedicated to the memory of Colin Murphy who was a well known activist in the North West. Colin was involved in such varied issues as Irish politics, miner's support, anti-racism, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Clause 28 and many an anti-deportation campaign. Sadly Colin died under mysterious circumstances, in a fire near the Church of Ascension, Hulme, nearly seven years ago. He was only 24.

Two of the poems in 'One Small Stride' relate directly to the incident of Collins death.

Others, we are told, were pieces that he liked or are based on things he said, whilst others are included to make political comments in general but not all poems in this pamphlet are political and what I find so fascinating about Mark Abrahams poetry is that the poetry comes first whilst carrying the message with it.

Altogether, with radical poetry the author is all to keen to get their point accross that they loose the muse and eventually the piece is lost but Mark Abraham manages to balance these elements together with a piece on sea-urchins and another on the glory of seeing Ireland from the mountains of Wales.

'One Small Stride' costs £2.50 and can be obtained by post from; I*D Books, Connah's Quay Library, Wepre Drive, Connah's Quay, Flintshire, North Wales.

Or from Front Line Book Shop, Wilmslow Road, Manchester.

With Apologies to Pastor Niemoellor

First they came for the Jews
and I spoke out
even though I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists
and again I spoke out
and the Jews spoke out with me
even though many of us at that time
were not with the Communists.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and again I spoke out
and the Jews and the Communists
spoke out with me

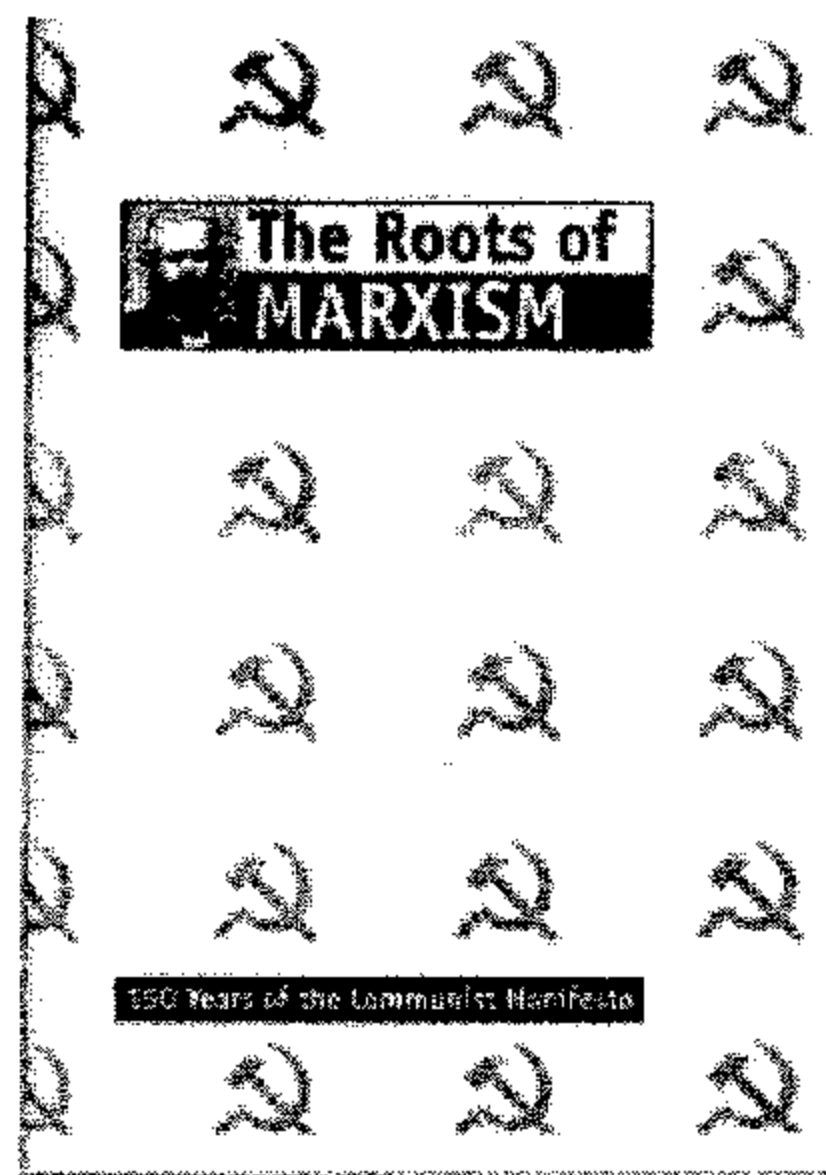
and even more in Lenin's mechanist fallacies and determinism..." Bill characterises Thompson and his allies as "making their way to 'left reformist' politics" and praises Peter Fryer's defence of Lenin and Marx, without giving details.

The argument can't be seen off so flippantly. By Bill's own method, he should examine the question not on the basis of where Thompson ended up but as an issue in its own right. Perhaps Thompson's questions were relevant even if his answers were wrong.

Lifelong Apprenticeship is published by Porcupine Press and is available by post from Living History Library, PO Box 9, Eccles SO Salford M30 7FX

(Continued from back page)

Also by Bill Hunter



Copies available from the ISL
price 50p + 20p (P&P)

even though again
many of us were not trade unionists.

And when at last they came for me
the Jews and the Communists,
the trade unionists and many others
all recognised our common enemy
and spoke out together.

And suddenly the enemy
seemed very small indeed
and simply faded away.

Mark Abraham



“A Lifelong Apprenticeship” The Life and Times of a Revolutionary, Volume I (1920-1959)

Greg Dropkin reviews the first volume of Bill Hunter's autobiography.

Greg does not agree with Bill on every issue and we will take up some of the differences in future editions. The review has been edited for length. The full version appears on the Labournet web site.

The book is remarkable for not attempting to rewrite, justify or control the past to suit the present. Even while relating his personal story, Bill does not cast himself as the central character. His spotlight is on the argument within the working class, the unions, the Labour Party and the Trotskyist movement during his lifetime.

Bill judges events in the context of their own time, disentangling what he knew and when he knew it, from what he or others thought about it later. That care shows right from the start.

He was born into a Durham mining community. “When I was a child, conversations would go on around me in which events would be measured in terms of mining struggles. ‘Oh yes, she got married just before the 1912 strike.’ You breathed in the sense of class with the atmosphere.”

Bill became a revolutionary in 1938, when the legacy of his childhood collided with the impending war. At the end of 1942 Bill went to work in the machine shop at Chrysler's, converted to produce the tail sections for Halifax bombers. “A large number of women had been conscripted from jobs in offices and shops; many had husbands or boy-friends in the Forces. They had been compelled to come into dirty conditions, with long hours of work, noise and smell. A remark by one of the older working women sticks in my mind: ‘If I don't fight for conditions and wages or let them get worse, my husband will kill me when he comes home.’”

During the war, Bill moved from the Wicks-Dewar group in the ILP to the main wartime Trotskyist organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Party. Rae Hunter, Bill's wife, was already active in a forerunner of the RCP and her sister, Ann Keen, was one of 4 comrades charged with conspiracy for their alleged role in fomenting the famous 1944 Tyneside engineering apprentices' strike against conscription into the mines.

British troops came home in 1945 and threw out the coalition government, sweeping Labour into power. Bill analyses this period with his eye on two debates: whether or not Trotsky had wrongly predicted a revolutionary upsurge coming out of the war, and whether his followers should have entered the Labour Party at that point.

On the first question, the discussion of Europe is fascinating. Bill highlights the role of the Soviet Union in containing revolutionary movements, which in turn explains why the Cold War was delayed until the Americans could be certain of European stability even though the US had already signalled its intentions towards Russia with the atomic bombing of Japan

Bill had (*initially*) opposed Labour Party entry but changed his mind in 1949 as the RCP headed for collapse, against his expectations.

Since the 1970's, revolutionaries who enter Labour invariably get expelled, abandon hope or make their careers there... Bill and Rae didn't make their way into Labour's corridors of power, though Bill was an Islington councillor for a while. They were expelled all right.

It happened in 1954, after the Trotskyist movement had suffered its deepest split yet (*the international split of 1953*), an event Bill discusses at length. By now, he was on the editorial board of “Socialist Outlook” which, at that time, had a mass circulation amongst trade unionists and the left.

The political story reaches its climax at the Communist Party Congress in Easter 1957. Krushchev's secret speech (denouncing Stalin) had been obtained and released by the US State Dept. in June 1956, sending shock waves through the Party and triggering developments in Poland and Hungary.

The journalist Peter Fryer resigned from the “Daily Worker” (CP newspaper) which had sent him to cover events in Hungary but suppressed most of his dispatches supporting the revolution and condemning the Soviet invasion. Fryer came back to Britain; Bill and his comrades made contact and began a determined intervention from outside in the debate exploding within the Party. This culminated in a daily bulletin reporting to delegates at the Party Congress and produced by Hunter, Healy, Fryer, Cliff Slaughter and Dot Gibson.

After the Congress, Bill and his comrades opened a debate with the anti-Stalinist opposition in the CP. EP Thompson had written ‘Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines’ which, as Bill puts it, “tried to show that several features of Stalinist ideology had their roots in Marx