

# Workers News



Paper of the Workers International League

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## Don't pay poll tax! Build mass strikes!

### STATEMENT BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

**AS LOCAL councils in England and Wales prepare to send out their poll tax demands, the call must be raised throughout the whole working class: build the mass movement to stop the poll tax!**

Mass, community-based non-payment tactics must be united with strike action to defeat the vicious attack on workers which the poll tax represents. What is required is maximum unity in action. We therefore welcome the establishment in November 1989 of an All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation and the creation in February of a single All London Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Both organisations, dominated by *Militant*, lack a revolutionary leadership. *Militant* has taken the lead in forming anti-poll tax unions in Scotland, London and other important centres. But at the London conference on February 10, while *Militant* supporters gave demagogic speeches calling for 'an army of non-payers', they avoided any serious call for the development of strike action against the poll tax. If they did, it would pose their numerous supporters in the main civil service union, the CPSA - which organises in social security offices where poll tax deductions from benefits are made - with taking a lead in this struggle.

*Militant* also voted down a motion calling for quarterly conferences of the London federation in favour of the less democratic formula of an annual conference, supplemented by 'aggregate' meetings whose purpose remains unclear. The Socialist Workers Party, meanwhile, has played a mirror-image role to that of *Militant*, making deliberately vague and generalised calls for industrial action, and downgrading non-payment.

The example of members of the CPSA who refused to give information on claimants to poll tax investigators should inspire other workers required to implement the tax to refuse to do so. However, individual

and small groups of workers should not be expected to fight alone. Boycotts and strikes must be fought for in NALGO and the civil service unions, and the call for all-out action taken up throughout the trade union movement.

The various 'Can Pay, Won't Pay' stunts supported by the Scottish National Party, the Stalinists and an assortment of Labour 'lefts' and middle class radicals must be rejected in favour of mass non-payment and the perspective of industrial action against the tax. So-called 'Committees of 100' and sponsored individual non-payers are consciously designed to hold back the growth of a mass working class movement against the Tories.

The present situation in Scotland, where poll tax collection started in April 1989, shows the potential which exists for a mass campaign of opposition. In Lothian region, the non-payment rate is over 30 per cent and in Strathclyde 20 per cent. In Glasgow, the figure is over 30 per cent, and in some smaller areas more than 40 per cent have not paid. Scottish local authorities have issued, or are about to issue, summary warrants against over 500,000 non-payers, enabling sheriffs' officers to seize wages, bank accounts or personal possessions. But, in many areas, warrant sales have been stopped by mass action.

In the run-up to the introduction of the poll tax in England and Wales, the Tories have experienced a major revolt in their own ranks. Coming on top of the worsening economic situation and record high mortgage rates, the poll tax is causing widespread disaffection among Tory voters. The influential backbench 1922 Committee has told Thatcher to reduce the impact of the tax, while Tory councils setting the rate have faced angry demonstrations from the people who elected them.

With the Tories in disarray, the possibility for driving them out of office has never been higher. The Labour Party leadership in parliament and local government, however,



A demonstrator makes his point outside Haringey Civic Centre in north London as the Labour council meets on March 5 to set one of the highest poll tax rates in the country

has played a despicable role. It has attempted to squash every initiative to deepen the Tory crisis by organising practical opposition to the poll tax, with the full support of the TUC leadership.

Every Labour council is implementing the tax. Those who set a high rate, in order to fund services, directly attack the living standards of the workers who voted them into office. Those who set a low rate do so indirectly, through massive cuts in the services upon which the working class depends. Workers must reject this rotten choice. The struggle against the poll tax must be consciously linked to the defence of local government jobs and services.

Amongst the high poll tax councils, the Labour-controlled London Borough of Haringey has set a rate of £572.89 per head. This means that a family of two parents and two over 18s will face a bill of £2,291.56 this year, compared with an average rates bill last year of around £750. In Manchester, the Labour council leadership plans to cut 3,500 council jobs, and the services they provide, to keep the poll tax down to £425.

In contrast to these Labour councils, 18 of the 25 members of the Tory ruling group on West Oxfordshire District Council resigned the party whip en masse at the end of February in protest at the poll tax. They did not do this out of

solidarity with workers, but rather out of concern for their own political hides.

While the poll tax remains first and foremost a direct attack on the working class and a concession to the rich, the intention of the Tories to use it to clamp down yet

### NO POLL TAX!

Join the All Britain  
Anti-Poll Tax Federation  
**DEMONSTRATION**

12 noon Saturday March 31  
Kennington Park, London  
March to Trafalgar Square

further on 'high spending' Labour-run local councils must not be forgotten. The tax itself, and especially the plan to introduce 'poll tax capping' to force local authorities to reduce the rate, is a recipe for the wholesale devastation of local jobs and services and an incitement to voters to elect Tory councils.

By claiming that they have no course but to obey the law and implement the tax, Labour councils are opening the road for a Tory takeover of local authorities in working class areas. The Labour Party leaders have launched a witch-hunt in the ranks of the party: in Glasgow, several more members of *Militant* have recently been expelled, and

Beckenham and Penge Labour Party has launched an enquiry into four members active in the local anti-poll tax campaign. Constituency Labour Parties must vigorously condemn these moves and pass resolutions condemning all attempts by national and local leaders to bring disciplinary action against anti-poll tax activists. They must also demand that Labour councils refuse to prosecute non-payers, and support the defence campaigns of those who are prosecuted. Labour Party candidates for the forthcoming local elections must be called on to declare that they will refuse to either pay or support the collection of the poll tax, and that they will not vote for cuts in jobs or services.

With the campaign against the poll tax in Scotland well advanced and with every adult

in England and Wales now about to receive their first demand, the potential for an all-out struggle on this issue is clear. Even in traditionally conservative areas like the West Country there have been demonstrations thousands-strong outside town halls. But to those who say that the Tories will withdraw the poll tax if only the pressure is kept up, we reply: you underestimate both the depth of the economic crisis which is determining the Tory strategy of impoverishing the working class, and the capacity for betrayal of the Labour and trade union leaders. The fight against the poll tax is the fight to drive out the Tories, and force a Labour government to take office which must be compelled to provide indemnity for non-payers and refunds for those who paid. The basis now exists for a mass movement with this objective, but it will only be built in the teeth of the fiercest opposition from the Labour leaders themselves.

Workers News calls for the building of anti-poll tax unions committed to non-payment on every estate, in every town and in every workplace. In metropolitan areas and in the London boroughs, we support the formation of federations of anti-poll tax unions. These must draw in delegates not only from trade union branches, local labour parties, etc, but also from the unemployed, tenants' groups, ethnic minorities and women's organisations. As well as building the campaign of non-payment and defending those under attack from the courts, their task must be to fight for the perspective of a trade union boycott of all work on the tax and strike action.

- Build the mass non-payment campaign!
- Demand of Labour councils: Don't collect the poll tax! Don't cut jobs and services!
- Fight for a trade union boycott of all poll tax work! Build for mass strike action!
- Bring down the Tory government!
- Demand that the Labour leaders commit themselves to repealing the poll tax and all other anti-working class laws!

### INSIDE

## What is going on in South Africa?

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## AMBULANCE DISPUTE

# Poole under fire for ditching pay formula

**AFTER THREE days of talks with NHS managers on February 21-23, Roger Poole and the trade union negotiators representing 22,500 ambulance workers abandoned their members' central demand for pay parity with other emergency services, and recommended acceptance of the latest offer.**

As the talks broke up, Poole made a crude attempt to conceal the scale of his treachery by claiming he had 'driven a coach and horses through the government's pay policy', forcing them to concede a 17 per cent wage increase. In fact, as angry ambulance workers across the country pointed out, the consolidated increases in basic pay amount to only 9 per cent from March to September 1990, and 7.9 per cent from then until April 1991. For the period since April 1989, a non-consolidated lump sum would be provided.

The offer is designed to drive a wedge between paramedics, who would receive a new annual premium, and other ambulance staff, and has productivity strings attached to it. As the deal was announced, Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock appealed to ambulance crews to abandon demands for parity and accept the package as 'the best offer possible'.

For the TUC and Labour leaders the ambulance dispute has become a nightmare. It has won widespread support and highlighted the refusal of the leadership to mount a serious campaign of industrial action which could topple the crisis-ridden Tories. Labour Party and union leaders were silent when Thatcher and Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke sent in the army and police - professional strike-breakers, not scabs - to break the dispute. Now they race to the capitalist media to demand capitulation by ambulance crews. Workers on Merseyside and in north-west London, highly critical of their leaders, have gone on strike, but Poole and his team of negotiators will use every opportunity to persuade a majority of crews to accept the offer.

On February 26, the TUC Health Services Committee issued an appeal to the government and NHS employers for the compulsory arbitration of wage claims for all groups of NHS staff. Two days later, as more ambulance crews in London declared for a strike, TUC general secretary Norman Willis told a conference of employers that he would offer the TUC's services to curb pay demands if the government would increase investment in British industry. Meanwhile, representatives of other NHS staff groups quietly reopened negotiations at the Department of Health for the 1990 pay round.

As Workers News stated in February: 'For the ambulance workers to succeed with their pay claim, a struggle against their own leaders is now unpostponable. This means fighting for an all-out national strike and the development of rank-and-file strike commit-

tees to prevent the health union leaders, and full-time officials, selling out the dispute.' Ambulance workers must reject the offer and campaign for the extension of strike action.

The Tories' attack on ambulance workers cannot be seen in isolation from their general strategy of creating a two-tier NHS in preparation for handing the bulk of its facilities over to private enterprise. But throughout the dispute, Poole and the rest of the union leaders have refused to mobil-

ise even other health service workers in industrial action. Ambulance workers must fight for national delegate meetings of their unions - NUPE, the T&GWU, COHSE and the GMB - in order to call their leaders to account and give a clear mandate for continuing the dispute. Behind the ambulance workers stand other NHS staff groups threatened by Tory policies whom the TUC leaders will also seek to isolate. Ambulance workers have the authority to appeal to these groups now for solidarity

strike action in defence of living standards, jobs and services. They must do so without delay.

■ The leaders of NUPE, COHSE and NALGO are currently exploring a merger to create the largest health and public sector trade union in Britain. Members of these unions must draw the necessary conclusions from the role played by their leaderships during the ambulance dispute and launch a campaign to democratise the new union. All leaders and full-time officials must be elected by and fully accountable to the membership.

By Ian Harrison



The funeral procession of mini-cab driver Kuldip Singh Sekhon, the victim of a racist attack, took place on January 31. Shops and small businesses closed as over 3,000 people, including representatives from trade union branches up and down the country, marched through Southall in west London.

## Leaders sabotage Kent NALGO fight

By Colin Harrison

DURING last year's local government strikes in defence of national agreements, the NALGO leadership refused to call an all-out strike. For their part, the employers made a tactical retreat and abandoned their attempt to destroy national agreements at one blow.

Having gained a breathing space, the employers are now dismantling trade union conditions branch by branch. The first major branch to be targeted, Kent NALGO, has been abandoned by the union bureaucracy without a fight. Other employers are waiting to follow Kent County Council's example.

The employers' proposals, unveiled on October 5, 1989, and now accepted by 87 per cent of Kent's white-collar workforce, involve the replacement of nationally-agreed pay settlements by non-negotiable annual increases, evaluation exercises and performance-related pay with productivity strings determined by management consultants. In return, the employers have offered a 10.1 per cent pay increase this year, brought forward from July to April.

A section of the branch, mainly led by the social services shop stewards' group, argued that this was not a local matter, and that the only way to fight it was by means of branch strike action, nationally supported, initially by means of a national strike levy.

The national leadership, aided and abetted by branch officers, undermined any prospect of a fight. On November 7, 1989, Jim White, the chairperson of NALGO's national local government committee, told the Kent branch AGM that the main issue in last year's strikes had not been the defence of national agreements, but the 1989 pay claim. National conditions were 'not sustainable', he said, and the stand taken on their defence by NALGO's local government delegate meeting last June was wrong. Kent branch was too weak to fight, could not expect support from other

branches and should 'negotiate within' the employers' proposals.

Social services shop stewards fought against this sell-out, but were unable to rally members abandoned by both national and branch leaders. In January, at a poorly attended general meeting requisitioned to discuss strike action, the proposal was heavily defeated. The meeting went on to adopt a resolution, supported by the branch secretary, to set up 'negotiating machinery' for members on local conditions, side by side with existing national procedures, despite the fact that the locally-imposed conditions are explicitly non-negotiable.

The political cowardice of the bureaucracy has virtually destroyed national conditions in Kent. The 13 per cent who have not opted for local conditions will be whittled down by natural wastage. All vacant and reorganised posts will be advertised on local conditions. The employers are now in the initial stages of setting up staff associations in the various departments, and have already made veiled threats of withdrawing recognition from NALGO.

Other Tory shires are lined up to follow Kent. In January, Jim White responded to employers' calls for more flexibility by telling the Association of Metropolitan Authorities that he was now willing to discuss revising national agreements 'to satisfy the needs of both sides'. White knows better. Compromise is not on the employers' agenda. They are only interested in smashing the union in order to implement privatisation, wage cuts and job cuts.

White's talk of compromise is only intended to camouflage the bureaucracy's willingness to surrender throughout local government, and is a clear indication of the need to fight for a leadership committed to revolutionary policies, not afraid to mobilise the membership in the all-out fight which is necessary.

## Union officials break Ford strike

By Daniel Evans

MAINTENANCE craftsmen at Ford's Halewood plant on Merseyside voted to end their unofficial strike against the divisive 1989-91 pay deal on March 7. Electricians on official strike for the same reason also voted to return to work.

The collapse of the strike, which shut Halewood for seven weeks, came after manual workers restarted production on March 5. Under intense pressure from T&GWU and AEU officials, shop stewards had recommended at mass meetings two days earlier that they cross picket lines and co-operate with management in doing the strikers' work.

Whilst conceding rises of 10.2 per cent in year one and 8 per cent or the rate of inflation, plus 2.5 per cent, in year two, the Ford pay deal seeks to introduce new 'integrated manufacturing teams' and re-training bonus payments to undermine the position of skilled craftsmen and electricians.

The initial offer was made in November 1989 and a ballot of the workforce rejected it with a four to one majority in favour of strike action. As negotiations dragged on, the ballot result lapsed and impatient AEU and EETPU members at Halewood began unofficial action on January 15. The response of the company to a fresh ballot at the end of January was to threaten job losses should a strike go ahead. At the same time, T&GWU officials representing the vast majority of Ford's 32,000 workers pleaded that the extra day's holiday for all employees with over ten years service, wrung from the management after weeks of negotiations, was the only improvement they were going to get. The result was a 59 per cent vote in favour of acceptance.

But skilled workers at Halewood decided to continue their strike and spread the action. A separate ballot of EETPU members revealed a large majority in favour of strike action and the union's execu-

tive, headed by Eric Hammond, was forced to endorse an all-out strike of 1,600 Ford electricians on February 5. The AEU executive refused to call a ballot of its members. Instead, it urged them to work normally, but declined to sign the deal with the company, preferring to keep its options open and see whether the unofficial action spread.

The T&GWU's chief negotiator, Jack Adams, accused the EETPU of 'frustrating a democratic decision' and called on his members to cross picket lines. This instruction was responsible for helping to keep Ford's 19 other British plants open, as AEU members feared taking unofficial action when the T&GWU had agreed with management that its members would do their work. At this point, on February 20, the AEU leadership signed the pay deal, effectively completing the isolation of the Hale-

wood strikers.

The first management attempt to re-open Halewood came after five weeks, but failed when T&GWU shop stewards at the plant refused to co-operate with them. The effectiveness of the strike was also undermined by two other factors: the use of scab electricians from Belgium, which Ford justified by citing previous agreements signed by the EETPU; and the decision of the Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union, with most of its members based at the Dagenham plant, not to join the strike. (The EPIU was formed in 1988 following the EETPU's expulsion from the TUC for signing a series of single-union, no-strike deals.)

The world motor industry is faced with declining sales, increased competition and a 12 million-vehicle overcapacity. Ford's chief executive in the United States, Harold Poling, has said that the industry is on the brink of 'the commercial equivalent of war'. Nevertheless, in Europe, Japanese

manufacturers are preparing for 1992 and the so-called 'single market' by vastly increasing capacity in their Spanish and British plants, and General Motors became the first manufacturer to introduce round-the-clock working two years ago, to be followed soon by Rover. In Britain, demand for new cars has been significantly lower than a year ago for the past three months. Ford's share of the market slumped to 22.6 per cent in January this year compared to 29 per cent 12 months previously. The 1989-91 pay offer was part of Ford's response to the growing crisis of the motor industry.

The decision to scab on the Halewood strikers marks a new low for the T&GWU bureaucracy who, far from having a perspective of uniting carworkers internationally in a struggle against Ford's 'war plans', are working to undermine class consciousness in order to preserve their relations with the company, and their own privileged positions.

## EAST GERMANY

# Workers must oppose capitalist unification!

LESS THAN a year ago, the German Democratic Republic appeared to be the most stable of Eastern European states. The Stalinist regime of Erich Honecker seemed to have a firm grip on power, presiding as it did over the most prosperous of the bureaucratically planned economies and having at its disposal a vast apparatus of political repression.

Yet the GDR is now in the vanguard – if that is the correct term – of Stalinism's collapse. At the centre of this rapid development is the drive towards German unification, which has acquired apparently irresistible momentum.

Since the destruction of the Wall, tens of thousands of East German citizens have visited the West, where the public display of affluence – shop windows filled with consumer goods never seen in the GDR – has served to obscure the harsher realities of life under

By Bob Pitt

capitalism. Indeed, with mass emigration having seriously damaged the economy and social fabric of the GDR, many East Germans see unification with the capitalist FRG not merely as their hope for a higher standard of living but as the only real alternative to economic and social collapse. These factors have combined with an upsurge of German nationalism in the GDR, whereby the masses' legitimate hatred of a border

imposed on them against their will has been directed into right-wing political channels.

Nationalist fervour in the GDR has been whipped up by West German politicians, in particular by Chancellor Helmut Kohl. This political mediocrity plainly hopes that the successful accomplishment of German unity will transform him into a figure of Bismarckian stature, thus giving a welcome boost to the Christian Democrats' prospects in the December general election. But, more fun-

damentally, Kohl also expresses the predatory attitude of the West German bourgeoisie towards the deformed workers' state of the GDR. German unification would give them the chance to penetrate new markets, buy up the GDR's advanced industries and exploit a skilled workforce whose labour power can be bought much more cheaply than in the Federal Republic.

The disintegrating East German Stalinist party – now trading under the name of the Party of Democratic Socialism – has proved unable to resist the threat of capitalist unification. On the contrary, its leaders agree with Kohl that a united German nation must be established over the ruins of the workers' state. The opposition parties of the 'left' quickly came round to the same way of thinking. In February, almost all these groupings – New Forum, the Greens, the SPD – took up ministerial posts in a Stalinist-led government pledged to the restoration of bourgeois democracy and capitalist exploitation within a unified Germany.

Of these parties, it is the Social Democrats who have emerged as the dominant political force within the working class. Drawing on the historic strength it enjoyed in industrial areas of East Germany prior to a forcible merger with the Stalinists in 1946, the SPD has fraudulently claimed a commitment to preserving the social gains of East German workers – job security, health care and housing – within the framework of a market eco-

nomy. By mixing this with a flag-waving rhetoric, the Social Democrats have been able to attract the working class support which an openly bourgeois party like the Christian Democrats would have difficulty in winning, and are thus able to act as the most effective agency of capitalist restoration in the GDR.

However powerful the sentiment among East German workers in favour of national unity may be, it is the duty of Marxists to state firmly that unification on the basis of the GDR's assimilation into a capitalist Federal Republic would be a major political setback for the working class. The nationalised property relations of the GDR, despite their Stalinist origins and subsequent bureaucratic mismanagement, nevertheless represent a historic gain which must be defended against capitalist restoration. They are an essential precondition for the development of a genuinely socialist society in which production is planned according to social need, not carried out anarchically according to the requirements of private profit.

- Resist Kohl's *Anschluss*! No to capitalist unification!
- For the unification of Germany on a socialist basis only!
- No to capitalist restoration! Reorganise the planned economy under the control of the working class!
- Not a bourgeois democracy, but a real workers' democracy based on factory committees and workers' councils!
- For the united socialist states of Europe!

## Romanian parties agree to crack-down on demos

ROMANIA's ruling National Salvation Front, dominated by members of the Communist Party, has been forced to make concessions both to the petty-bourgeois parties and the working class in order to retain control of the state and defend the source of its privileges.

In January, the economy was placed under the direct control of military officers compromised by past association with Ceausescu's regime, and members of the Securitate secret police were incorporated into the armed forces. Demonstrators took to the streets in Bucharest demanding the banning of the Communist Party, a purge of Ceausescu's old supporters and the death penalty for members of the secret police.

Faced with this surge of militancy amongst workers and students, and with the defection of intellectuals and representatives of minority communities, on February 9 the Front established a coalition with the petty-bourgeois parties. The Provisional Council of National Unity is made up of representatives from 40 political and minority group organisations granted legal status since December 1989, including the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, both open supporters of capitalist restoration and the monarchy. The Front reserved 90 of the 180 seats on the Council for itself, while declaring its intention to stand as a party in the May 20 elections. Among the first acts carried out by the Council was the issuing of a proclamation banning mass demonstrations 'that can provoke tensions and violent confrontations'. The Front's own ruling council, which continues to function as a cabinet around President Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman, adopted legislation legalising small-scale private ownership and devalued the currency.

In spite of jointly agreeing the ban on demonstrations, both the Front and petty-bourgeois parties have organised their own marches and rallies – for and against the Front. Fascists within the Peasant Party have been quick to exploit their legal status, frequently referring to members of the Front's ruling council, including the prime minister, as foreigners or Jews.

While the Council of National Unity was in session, junior officers and rank-and-

file members of the armed forces began occupying the Front's headquarters in Bucharest. Supported by workers and students in the street, the officers demanded a purge of generals and Securitate members from the armed forces, including Defence Minister Nicolae Militaru and Interior Minister General Mihai Chitac. They claimed to have a video recording of Chitac directing the massacre in Timisoara which sparked the December revolution.

The Front responded by sending Securitate men disguised as soldiers to the headquarters of Romanian Television to oust the paratroopers who had been guarding the building since December. The paratroopers were known to be sympathetic to the officers occupying the Front's head-

quarters. Students and workers, concerned that the Securitate would gain control of the television station, immediately surrounded the building, refusing to allow the paratroopers to leave their posts.

Militaru resigned on February 16, after four days of protests, and President Iliescu promised the officers that the army and Securitate would be purged. Unconvinced, a group of students and young workers stormed the Front's headquarters on February 18, chanting 'Iliescu resign', 'Freedom, not *perestroika*', 'The National Salvation Front is the Romanian Communist Party' and 'The only solution, another revolution'.

The occupation was ended by troops, and 80 arrests were made. The leader of the

Peasant Party, Valentine Gabrulescu, congratulated President Iliescu for suppressing 'criminal demonstrators', and an emergency meeting of the Council of National Unity gave extra powers to the police and army to deal with 'violent protests'.

On March 3, the trial began of 21 army officers responsible for the massacre in Timisoara on December 17, 1989. Witnesses have already revealed that Militaru and Chitac played a role in the events. While the trial was taking place, General Gica Popa, the judge of the military tribunal responsible for the execution of the Ceausescus, killed himself. His wife claimed that Popa's life was under continuous threat from the Securitate, and that this had driven him to suicide.

## Trumka betrayal of Pittston strike weakens UMWA

MINERS IN Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky, on strike for over ten months against the union-busting efforts of Pittston Coal, have returned to work after a settlement in which the company emerges as winner all round.

By Suzy Allen

The agreement, reached after the US government had intervened and appointed a mediator, was announced by UMWA president Richard Trumka on January 1. On February 19, the miners voted by 1,247 to 734 to accept the new four-year contract, with only those in Kentucky voting narrowly to reject it.

At the root of the strike lay Pittston's withdrawal from the Bituminous Coal Operators' Association, which negotiates contracts with the UMWA on an industry-wide basis. The settlement allows the company to remain outside the BCOA. It also ends entitlement to comprehensive medical cover – one of the main issues of the strike. Instead, miners will receive \$500 every six months, enabling the company to make considerable savings.

Basic pay will increase by just 40 cents an hour, still 65 cents below that of miners on BCOA contracts. But one of the most damaging concessions made to the company is to allow it to introduce round-the-clock working, seven days a week, for the first time in the US mining industry. Pittston will operate a four-shift sys-

tem, saving itself three dollars a tonne. In the past, continuous production has been resisted on safety grounds, as it means that the coal dust – which kills 4,000 miners every year – never settles.

The single 'concession' won by Trumka is a fraud. For every five new jobs, Pittston has promised to re-hire four laid-off miners. But the agreement not only presupposes that new jobs will be created, it also allocates *union* miners to *non-union* operations, and is fully in line with the company's strategy over the last six years of transferring control of new coal reserves to non-union subsidiaries. Scabs are being retained at three mines which previously employed 500 union miners – the UMWA has lost the right to organise three sites, and the 500 will have to wait their turn for a job in a non-union mine.

Trumka has abandoned the fight for the reinstatement of 13 miners sacked for 'picket line violence', saying that 'the union will look after them'. And a further 175 strikers, working at mines leased to



UMWA president Richard Trumka and The Rev. Jesse Jackson, flanked by local miners' leaders, at the Camp Solidarity Labor Day rally for the Pittston strikers on September 3, 1989  
PHOTO: UMWA

another operator, are not even covered by the contract.

In January, Trumka insisted that the deal would not be signed until lawsuits and fines totalling \$64 million had been dropped. After a court ruling six weeks later, he capitulated, saying: 'The court's decision does not present an impediment to the rank-and-file ratification of the tentative agreement.' He later revealed that union officials had offered the court 10,000 hours of community service by UMWA

members in lieu of the fines!

The Pittston strike, during which over 3,000 miners and their supporters were arrested, was part of the upsurge of militant working class struggles in the United States in 1989-90. Throughout, UMWA officials worked to contain the action, calling off the wildcat strikes which spread across the whole country last July and ending the occupation of a coal preparation plant in September. The bureaucracy concentrated on a public relations

campaign to win the support of Pittston shareholders and Democratic politicians, emphasising the 'unfairness' of withdrawing benefits from disabled miners.

The hold of the Democrats, made possible by the AFL-CIO's reactionary bureaucracy, must be smashed. The fight for the political independence of the working class means the fight for a Labor Party, based on the unions, and the building of a revolutionary socialist leadership.



## EDITORIAL

# The fall of the Sandinistas

**THE BLOODLESS victory of Violeta Chamorro's National Opposition Union (UNO) in the Nicaraguan elections has brought to an end ten-and-a-half years of Sandinista rule, and achieved what \$2 billion of aid to the Contras failed to deliver.**

The Sandinistas have up till now provided a rallying point for many Western radicals who dreamed of a 'third road' – expressed in Ortega's election platform of 'neither capitalism nor communism'. The heroism of the Nicaraguan masses in repelling US-sponsored attempts to smash their gains, and the heady rhetoric of 'socialism' and 'anti-imperialism', have blinded the 'friends of Nicaragua' to the class basis of the Sandinista regime. They will point to the damage inflicted on the economy by the US trade blockade and by the continuous state of war.

It would indeed be foolish to deny the enormous impact of these factors. Chamorro's success at the polls undoubtedly reflected the disillusion of many workers and peasants with falling living standards and runaway inflation, after years of sacrifice. Complementing the imperialists' economic and military assaults has been the diplomatic horse-trading of the Soviet bureaucracy. Keen to buy an arms reduction agreement, Moscow has made it transparently clear at successive summits that Central America is the United States' sphere of influence. Accordingly, it suspended arms sales to Nicaragua in 1988 and put the country on starvation oil rations. To add insult to injury, the local Stalinists joined the UNO coalition, which on its right flank extends to the Contras, and which openly received \$1.8 million from the US towards its election campaign.

But if these 'external' factors are held solely responsible for the Sandinistas' defeat, then they become ultimately an argument against any serious struggle against imperialism, since the hostility of the imperialists and the treachery of the Stalinists are assured under all circumstances.

Faced with counter-revolutionary war and economic destabilisation, the only defence lay in the socialist revolution in Nicaragua and its extension throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean. This task not only lay beyond the Sandinistas – they were positively hostile to it.

Under the Sandinistas, the capitalist state remained. A mixed economy was retained with 60 per cent of output in private hands. While Ortega linked arms with 'patriotic' capitalists, the right of workers to strike was severely curtailed and the embryonic soviets which emerged in 1979 were quickly dispensed with. The National Directorate of nine Sandinista *comandantes* ruled without being responsible to workers' organisations, or even to their own party. In recent years there has been a retreat from the radical reforms which established state and co-operative farms in favour of private agriculture.

Such measures have failed to satisfy either the working class and poor peasant masses on the one hand, or the capitalists on the other. Ortega has fallen between two stools.

'The style is the man' runs an old saying. Daniel Ortega's election campaign was big on salsa, T-shirts, fireworks, free condoms, rock music and 'fun'; entirely absent was any programme to resolve the economic crisis in the interests of those for whom 'anti-imperialism' is not a fashion but a life-and-death issue. The result was the election of Chamorro who represents nothing so much as a beachhead for American imperialism to reassert its control over the country. Faced with this grave danger, Nicaraguan workers must reject Ortega's calls for peace and reconciliation and fight for their own class interests.

## Market trends

TWO LAWS passed overwhelmingly by the Supreme Soviet on February 28 and March 6 represent the first major steps towards providing the legal basis for the restoration of capitalism in the USSR.

Under the first, peasants will be allowed to stop working on state and collective farms and will be given their own plot of land, for which they will be required to pay an annual 'tax'. Although they won't be able to buy, sell, exchange or give away the holding, their children will be able to inherit it.

The second legalises private property for the first time since the New Economic Policy was abolished in 1928. It recognises the property of the state and the collectives, and that of an 'individual' or 'citizen'. But this is not merely a translation of the existing state of affairs into the language of the newly-established 'rule of law' – it goes far beyond the right to own personal property.

Individuals will now be free to own shares (when additional laws have been passed on banking, finance and enterprises) and pass them on to their heirs, and run their own 'individual' businesses. More importantly, they will also be able to take over the ownership of entire collectives and co-operatives. This is a step up from the previous relaxation of the controls over co-operatives and, despite the warning contained in the law that 'the exploitation of man by man' is forbidden, it sanctions precisely that.

Although limited as yet to a small sector of the huge Soviet economy, the accumulation of capital through the exploitation of wage labourers is now legal. And the small capitalists who will spring up in the wake of these laws are the social material through which imperialism can find its foothold in the USSR.

BETWEEN THE momentous days of 1984-86 in South Africa and the present there is a sharp contrast.

Then, British TV screens incessantly relayed vivid images of hundreds of thousands of fearless fighters, workers and youth, locked in open battle with the armed might of the apartheid state. The townships were made ungovernable; area and street committees were formed, people's courts established, apartheid collaborators attacked and driven out of the townships – the masses began to create embryonic independent organs of power. In this entire period the African National Congress (ANC) spoke of a protracted people's war against the apartheid state, which would culminate in the armed seizure of power.

Now, Nelson Mandela, like some new messiah, holds the attention of millions of TV viewers as he talks of reconciliation, peace and negotiations. The main site of 'struggle' is now the round table. He tells boycotting students to go back to school, suggests that striking workers return to their workplaces, calls on militant youth to cease throwing stones and setting up barricades. The armed struggle, he insists, is and has always been merely a defensive measure, and a compromise with the apartheid state is in the interests of everybody.

It appears that South Africa has changed from being the arena for a raging, bloody civil war between irreconcilable classes, to a meeting place for a family to settle its differences by discussions around a table.

British workers and youth can only be struck by the amazing transformation. 'Something is wrong here!', they must say to themselves, and their intuition is right.

### The role of the black middle class in South Africa

On the side of the oppressed, the vacillating nature of the middle class goes a long way to explaining the new situation.

The black urban middle class in South Africa has always played a role completely out of proportion to its size. Harshly oppressed by apartheid, it has managed to put its own peculiar class stamp on black politics by representing its interests as the interests of all the members of the oppressed. The middle class nationalist ANC's orientation is summed up in the Freedom Charter.

True to its class nature, it has vacillated from left to right under the impact of changing circumstances, alternately responding to the pressure of the working class and the capitalist class.

In the period 1984-86, when the masses came closest to bursting the chains of apartheid with wave after wave of nationwide militant activity, the ANC was at its most radical. The notion of protracted people's war, led by trained and armed Umkhonto We Sizwe guerrillas, was popularised in this period. Many of the best young militants – the 'ungovernables' – were strongly attracted to this conception and readily drawn into underground structures.

But the ANC could not take serious advantage of the favourable circumstances. Middle class nationalism inevitably lacked the revolutionary consistency and steadfastness to take developments through to the end. Most of all it feared the unbridled activity of the working

class.

The Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP), which regards the ANC as the undisputed vanguard of the struggle against apartheid, has made a major contribution to keeping the only truly revolutionary force in society in check. It has always provided the ANC with a left cover. Posing as the party of the workers, as the party of socialism, it could dupe many of the best worker and youth militants. But it combined revolutionary rhetoric with a treacherous two-stage perspective in order to undermine the class consciousness of the very workers it claimed to represent. Out-manoeuvring the anti-political syndicalists, it has used all its influence to bureaucratically strangle any serious independent political initiative on the part of advanced workers within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

So a combination of the middle class policy of the ANC, the treachery of the SACP and the related absence of an alternative vanguard leadership of the black working class resulted in the tragic squandering of the revolutionary potential displayed by the masses.

Having taken fright at the fact that the 1984-86 uprising did not lead to victory, instead falling victim to a serious counter-revolutionary offensive on the part of the apartheid state, the ANC-SACP leadership proceeded to take the line of least resistance. It moved sharply to the right. Purging itself of the 1984-86 radicalism, driving out all talk of socialism, it sought to make itself more respectable in the eyes of the ruling class. This change in orientation was couched in terms such as 'wooing whites', 'splitting the ruling bloc' and building 'a broad anti-apartheid front'. In relation to the Labour Relations Amendment Act, its middle class blindness even led it to seek an alliance with the bosses against the state.

Despite references to continuing the armed struggle, it has now completely dispensed with even petty-bourgeois revolutionariness: it has, in fact, phased out the idea of a 'protracted people's war' culminating in the armed seizure of power. It hopes to secure its limited, class-bound aims by peaceful means through negotiations with the bourgeoisie.

### How has the ANC justified its turn to the right?

Fearful of losing its constituency of militant workers and youth, the ANC has attempted to paint its reactionary course in bright colours. But the overall effect is messy.

Firstly, it resorts to an argument that there is a stalemate, so a negotiated settlement is the only way out. It argues that there is an inclination on both sides to end the impasse by mutual consent. But there is only a stalemate in the sense that the overthrow of apartheid is an uncompleted task. Only a revolutionary party with a revolutionary policy can arm the working class with the means to consummate the revolution. The course of the ANC reveals again that the middle class does not have the ability to pursue this path.

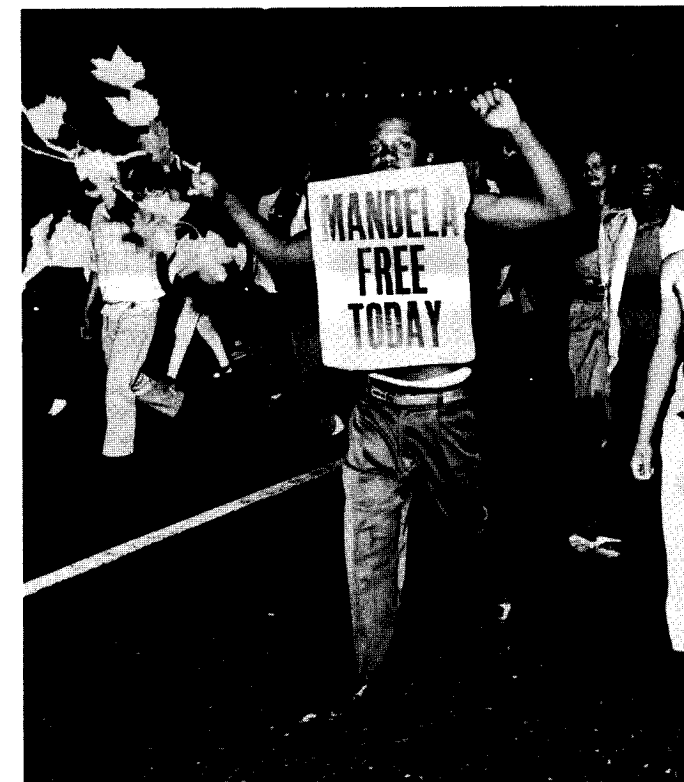
Secondly, it argues that it is in a favourable position. The spirit of the masses remains unbroken and the ANC has never been more popular, whereas the de

Klerk regime has its back to the wall as a result of sanctions and the economic crisis. This is a false picture. Relative to three or four years ago, the apartheid state is without doubt in the position of strength, despite the obvious difficulties it is in.

Thirdly, it says that it is simply following the new policy of world peace inaugurated by Gorbachev. It is nobly contributing its share to the process. Egged on by the imperialist bourgeoisie, it conveniently refuses to see that behind talk of world peace is the narrow self-interest of a crisis-stricken Stalinist bureaucracy.

Fourthly, it admits that it is being spurred on by the Frontline States. So, out of sympathy for these regimes that have been destabilised by imperialist South Africa, it has uncomplainingly moved its military bases further northward and has conceded to take the path of negotiations.

This is the eclectic mish-mash of 'reasons' given for the present course. Behind all the rationalisation lies the pressure of the ruling class on the ANC leadership, and the inclination of the middle class to take the line of least resistance.



Street celebrations in Johannesburg on February 11, the day of Nelson Mandela

### The position of the South African ruling class

The South African bourgeoisie as a whole has been content to let the National Party regime under Botha, and now de Klerk, wield the reins of state power. For only a brief moment during the 1984-86 uprising did certain key elements in the ranks of the ruling class panic. These captains of industry, including Gavin Relly of the colossal Anglo-American Corporation, angered the Botha regime by paying a hasty visit to the ANC in exile. But when it became clear that the besieged apartheid-capitalist system had weathered the storm, and the full range of repressive powers of the state had been used successfully to crush the mass uprising, even these jumpy elements settled once more behind Botha. The apartheid state and the bosses then jointly proceeded to bludgeon the working class into submission: the third State of Emergency, the bannings, arrests, detentions, imprisonment, the Labour Relations Act, privatisation, deregulation, lock-outs, dismissals. These acts of class violence were the order of the day.

### Ben Jordan analyses the wake

Finance capital has come to the conclusion that the social crisis in South Africa, that has raged on for over a decade and a half, will not abate and that another revolutionary uprising is unavoidable unless there is a new political dispensation.

The political situation remains entirely pre-revolutionary insofar as extreme instability in the relations between classes continues. Underlying this political instability is the continuing economic crisis and the enormous range of unfulfilled demands of the black working class.

But, as far as the apartheid regime is concerned, the position is far more favourable than it was previously. It is from a position of relative strength that the ruling class has taken the initiative on the question of a negotiated settlement. It has quelled the 1984-86 uprising and forced the working class into retreat. It has secured a favour-

able neo-colonial outcome in the Namibian elections (a coalitionist SWAPO in a coalition with the DTA). The gigantic foreign debt has been rescheduled and the gold price has risen significantly. Together with the imperialist bourgeoisie, it has also drawn strength from the international move to the right as a result of the failure of 'communism' (read Stalinism) in Eastern Europe.

So its timing of its negotiation initiative has everything to do with feeling relatively confident of its position. It tested the waters by releasing the several long-serving ANC political prisoners and permitting the ANC MDM to organise peaceful demonstrations. With the test coming out largely positive, it proceeded to unban the ANC and now has released Mandela. Of course, the ruling regime realises that the path of negotiation it has taken involves risks. The recent upsurge of mass activity indicates that its fears are not unfounded. Its bottom line is the maintenance of capitalist property relations, even if the government is black dominated. It realises that, in the context of both the international and national situation, the ANC is ready to compromise.

# g on in South Africa?

the political situation in South Africa in the wake of the release of Nelson Mandela

## The sell-out deal

The legend and myth that surrounds Mandela is being used to sell the idea of a negotiated settlement to the oppressed masses.

But there are numerous glaring contradictions in the ANC's position. It has not convinced its constituency of the correctness of the negotiations line. There is much uneasiness and suspicion, especially amongst the youth. And since Mandela's release, with his heavy emphasis on reconciliation, these feelings have no doubt been strengthened.

The ruling class's bottom line is clear. The existing state power cannot under any circumstances be broken up and the capitalist system cannot be undermined. These two things are not negotiable. Furthermore, de Klerk has insisted that one-person, one-vote in a unitary state is not acceptable, and that he is deter-



PHOTO: IDAF

mined to have all his puppet-collaborators at the negotiating table. In his words, 'their places are assured'.

All indications suggest that the ANC is quite prepared to agree to the bourgeoisie's basic terms.

As regards the economy, the ANC's Constitutional Guidelines deliberately excluded reference to nationalisation, and spoke of a 'mixed economy'. This was a sign to the capitalists that an ANC government would not seriously threaten its property. Mandela's statement about nationalisation is part of the shadow-boxing. He is no doubt sensitive to those workers and youth who have taken seriously the Freedom Charter line on nationalisation and has to play along with this for now.

The ruling class has left no doubt about who, throughout the negotiations process, will continue to wield real power through the 'bodies of armed men' (Engels). The South African Defence Force, the South African Police and the Security Police will have to do their job of maintaining 'law and order'. However, de Klerk has expressed a desire for the ANC to assist in the counter-revolutionary task. This is probably de Klerk's

way of nodding assent to the reactionary coalition which the Harare Declaration refers to as an Interim Government.

Mandela has said that the ANC's opening bid in negotiations is one-person, one-vote in a unitary South Africa. In his speeches and news interviews, he has made it clear that ultimately there will be compromises. What has been regarded by the ANC as a fundamental principle, on which there can be no compromise, it appears is now only the first price asked for in an exchange with a tough dealer. So the priceless freedom that the masses have sought, fought and died for will not be obtained in the bargain. Instead the ANC is asking the masses to accept some cheap imitation.

Mandela's letter to Buthelezi reveals that, far from regarding him as a collaborationist traitor from whose hands drips the blood of thousands of the most courageous workers and youth, he too has a role to play in the ending of apartheid. This is a departure from the ANC's stated position in the Harare Declaration. Now it appears that the ANC has backed down and conceded to sitting down and negotiating with every single puppet in the apartheid show.

## The likely course of developments

At the present stage, a game of bluff is being played. On both sides there is much posturing aimed at strengthening as well as preparing the respective constituencies. On the side of the ANC, there is a major emphasis on encouraging whites and allaying their fears. The other side of this coin is the intention of exercising control over the black masses. This is what the nauseating emphasis on discipline and peaceful action is all about.

Mandela repeatedly states his belief that de Klerk is 'a man of integrity', and so 'peace' and 'reconciliation', rather than militant mass struggle, have become the new watchwords in the ANC's approach.

But this petty-bourgeois fantasy is in stark contrast to apartheid-capitalist reality. The conditions and living experience of the working class, the unemployed, women, the youth, students, throughout the length and breadth of South Africa, defy a perspective of reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressors, the exploited and the exploiters. The hatred for apartheid and capitalism will not be contained despite the vigorous efforts of the ANC and the SACP.

Already, while the ANC and the de Klerk regime have droned on about peace and reconciliation, throughout South Africa the resistance to oppression and exploitation has continued to be met with armed violence and repression: the civil war in Natal claims a few hundred more lives, the bloody and bitter railway workers' strike, two more deaths in detention, peaceful demonstrations brutally broken up by the police. And this by no means completes the catalogue of violent conflict that has been the backdrop to the wildly optimistic talk about a new era of reconciliation and the euphoria engendered by Mandela's release.

And these struggles and vio-

lent clashes between the working class and the capitalists and their apartheid state will continue, for they are rooted in the irreconcilable class antagonisms of apartheid-capitalism. The reaction of the fascist white petty-bourgeoisie will be like sparks to tinder.

Trapped by their own rotten scheme, the traditional leaders of the masses are at their most vulnerable at this point. Pressured by the ruling class, dazzled by their own illusions, they are trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. A combination of rising expectations and the full range of outstanding political and economic demands of the masses will inevitably clash head-on with the sell-out, reformist, class-collaborationist policy of the ANC.

This will throw the negotiations process into disarray and open up a new and decisive chapter in South African history, if revolutionary socialists are at hand to seize the moment.

## The tasks of the workers' vanguard

How then should revolutionary socialists respond to the present situation?

In the first place they cannot simply stand on the sidelines and condemn negotiations. Certainly, it must be patiently explained that it is a trap for the working class being laid by the bourgeoisie and with the complicity of the middle class nationalist and Stalinist leadership. For negotiations feed the masses on a number of completely reactionary illusions:

that the ruling class is prepared to 'transfer power' to the masses; that the apartheid state has at last 'come to its senses'; and that its representative de Klerk is 'a man of integrity'.

Most of all it creates the illusion that freedom and democracy will not be won by the power of the struggling masses, led by the working class, but by the clever manoeuvres and tactics of the leadership around the table. We must call on the masses to take things into their own hands by resorting to open struggle for all their political and economic demands. All efforts must be concentrated on raising the militancy, class consciousness and organisation of increasing numbers of workers in the course of the struggles that will inevitably break out.

In the light of the unfolding developments, all revolutionary socialists must:

1. Take the lead in raising all the democratic demands of the oppressed. At the centre of this must be the call for a revolutionary democratic Constituent Assembly.
2. Reveal at every step to ever-greater numbers of workers and youth how and why negotiations will never result in the convocation of a truly democratic Constituent Assembly.
3. Consistently explain, and at every opportunity concretely demonstrate, that unless the existing apartheid state is smashed, unless its bodies of armed men are disarmed and the masses armed, no real democracy will be won.
4. Expose in every instance the rotten compromises and concessions that the ANC and the



The rally in Soweto on February 11

PHOTO: IDAF

SACP are prepared to make, and thereby convince the best militants of the necessity for an alternative revolutionary leadership.

5. Exploit the discontent amongst workers and youth within the ANC about the leadership's line, by placing a revolutionary socialist perspective before them.

6. Form committees of action to draw the working class into open activity on the basis of a programme of action around all the outstanding democratic and class demands. On this basis, concretely demonstrate why a consistent struggle against apartheid can only be a struggle against capitalism, why only a workers' government can satisfy the needs of the oppressed and exploited.

In the course of a struggle for a programme of action we are confident that the existing illusions in formal, i.e. bourgeois, democracy that the vast major-

ity still have will be dispelled. The committees of action will at the right time develop into organs of power, organs for the seizure of state power by the working class.

At every point, every effort must go into forging a vanguard party of the most advanced militants that can destroy the reactionary influence of the ANC and the SACP and lead the working class to a socialist victory.

The political opportunities for Trotskyism in South Africa, as in the case of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, have been thrown wide open. The mortal crisis of Stalinism and the bankruptcy of middle class nationalism must be fully exploited by the forces of Trotskyism. But the coming period in South Africa demands a concentration of energies, not only on the part of the Trotskyists in the country, but indeed all genuine Trotskyists throughout the world.

# Off-stage uprising

Lizzy Ali reviews *A Dry White Season*, the US film industry's latest attempt to portray the struggle in South Africa

A FILM set in Soweto in 1976, directed by a black woman, which persuaded Marlon Brando to come out of a nine-year retirement should have been promising. As it is, *A Dry White Season* follows the well-worn Hollywood path of choosing a naive white liberal as its main character. There are only glimpses of the Soweto uprising which shook the apartheid regime to its foundations, and the film's black characters remain two dimensional and undeveloped.

Ben du Toit (Donald Sutherland) is a comfortably-off Afrikaner schoolteacher and former rugby star who accepts the system. His liberalism extends only as far as paying for the son of his black gardener Gordon (Winston Ntshona) to attend school. Gordon is a standard Hollywood object of sympathy - upright, conservative and hard-working. His son Jonathan is involved in the school boycott which sparked the Soweto uprising. He is detained and then murdered by the police. This sets in motion a chain of events which destroys the families of both schoolteacher and gardener.

Gordon seeks help from du Toit to discover his son's whereabouts, but his investigations lead to his own imprisonment, torture and murder. Subsequently his wife is clubbed to death by police who are attempt-



Zakes Mokae and Donald Sutherland in a scene from Euzhan Palcy's *A Dry White Season*

ing to evict her. Meanwhile du Toit reluctantly becomes drawn into events, aided by local taxi driver Stanley (Zakes Mokae). He enlists a washed-up civil rights lawyer Ian McKenzie, played by Brando, who agrees to take on Gordon's inquest, if only to prove the futility of fighting the state.

As he becomes more involved, du Toit's cosy world disintegrates. His wife, Susan, played by Janet Suzman (niece of veteran South African liberal MP Helen Suzman) leaves him, his daughter betrays him and he is sacked by his school. In the final scene he too becomes a

victim of the Special Branch and is murdered.

Director Euzhan Palcy has missed a golden opportunity to portray the South African revolution. Instead, she has served up an unsatisfactory combination of morality play and thriller. The black characters suffer, but the film concentrates on the emotional traumas of the whites.

In a recent television interview, Brando, who has donated his fee to anti-apartheid causes, was highly critical of the fact that important scenes were left on the cutting-room floor. Brando's 20-minute appearance is

still the best piece of acting in the film. Sutherland, by contrast, gives a limp performance and fails to master the Afrikaner accent.

There is no doubting the film's hostility to apartheid - it portrays the secret police as ruthless and brutal, and the judicial system as a farce - but the implication is that the solution is for whites to follow du Toit's example and reform themselves. In fact, the events of 1976 prove that the black working class is fully capable of overthrowing the apartheid system, irrespective of the consciences of white liberals.



# The rise and fall of Gerry Healy

GERRY HEALY's expulsion from the Workers International League in February 1943 was rescinded soon afterwards, and once again he was re-admitted to the WIL. ('We always brought him back, because he was a good organiser,' Ted Grant later remarked regretfully, 'although that was not sufficient reason...')<sup>1</sup> If Healy anticipated a speedy return to the leadership, however, he was to be disappointed. Not only did he lose his position as industrial organiser, but he was also removed from the Political Bureau, the Central Committee and the editorial board of the WIL paper, *Socialist Appeal*.<sup>2</sup> Healy's demotion was not without its adverse effect on the group – in his absence, the WIL's industrial work was reduced to a 'chaotic condition'<sup>3</sup> – but the Political Bureau took the view that Healy would have to undergo a 'testing period' in the ranks before again being allowed to hold positions of responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

It is against this background that Healy's emergence as a spokesman for the Fourth International, and its demand that the WIL should submit to international discipline, must be evaluated. In 1938, it will be remembered, the WIL had refused to unite with the other British Trotskyist groups to form the Revolutionary Socialist League, and for this it was censured and denied recognition by the founding conference of the Fourth International.<sup>5</sup> Whatever merits the WIL's rejection of unification may have had at a national level – and the League's record in the class struggle over the following years was far more impressive than that of the official section, the RSL – it was undeniably an evasion of international responsibilities. After all, if political differences concerning national policy were to take precedence over the need to establish the world Trotskyist movement on democratic centralist foundations, this was effectively an argument against the very formation of the Fourth International.

The WIL's position outside the International undermined its claim to be the true representative of Trotskyism in Britain, and was used against it by both the RSL and the Independent Labour Party. This 'unofficial' status also weakened the effect of WIL propaganda against Stalin's dissolution of the Comintern

## The second part of an extended obituary in which Bob Pitt assesses the life of the former WRP leader

in 1943. Although the June issue of *Socialist Appeal* carried the headline 'The Third International is Buried! Long Live the Fourth International!', this rang a little hollow given the WIL's exclusive national existence. But the WIL leaders had made only token efforts to discuss unity with the RSL, apparently in the hope that the WIL's growing influence in the working class, in contrast to the stagnation and fragmentation of the official section, would eventually force the International to recognise the WIL.

Within the WIL, there had been no more rigid opponent of unification than Gerry Healy. Discussions with the RSL he rejected as completely futile, and the only approach to the Fourth International he would countenance was that of demanding unconditional recognition for the WIL. For these reasons, Healy refused to serve on a delegation to meet the RSL leadership. Convinced that everything in the official section was rotten, he dismissed as a waste of time the WIL's efforts to win over the 'Trotskyist Opposition', a faction in the RSL led by John Lawrence. And when Lou Cooper of the Socialist Workers Party (USA) wrote an open letter to the WIL in March 1943, sharply criticising its refusal to unite with the RSL under the discipline of the Fourth International, Healy not only objected to the letter being circulated among the membership, but even found an excuse to absent himself from a London aggregate called to discuss the question.<sup>6</sup>

In August 1943, however, Healy performed a characteristic political somersault. In a document entitled 'Our Most Important Task', followed up by a letter to the Political Bureau, he adopted Cooper's arguments as the basis for a polemic against the WIL leadership.<sup>7</sup> Discussions with the RSL, Healy now announced, had not been pursued seriously, but were intended only to convince the International Secretariat of the Fourth International that the WIL had done its best to achieve unity. This was 'Bronx' (i.e. petty-bourgeois) politics, Healy argued. As for

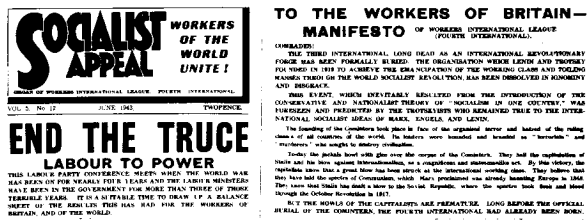
the WIL's claim that it implemented the Trotskyist programme more consistently than the RSL, Healy pointed out that programmatic agreement with the Fourth International was insufficient unless the WIL also accepted the International's organisational discipline. Nor was it enough to build a strong group in Britain if the WIL did not participate in the construction of the World Party of Socialist Revolution, with sections in every country. The question of becoming the official British section of the Fourth International, which could be accomplished only through fusion with the RSL, was the most important question facing the WIL, Healy insisted.

But at this stage he was far from appearing as the unequivocal upholder of interna-

Indeed, the suddenness of Healy's political turnaround could only raise suspicions as to its opportunist nature. Charging Healy with dishonesty in blaming them for a policy which he himself had taken an active part in formulating, the Political Bureau drew the conclusion that his abrupt change of line was motivated by the realisation that his removal from the leadership was not likely to be reversed for some considerable time. As for Healy's accusation of 'Bronx politics', this received a scathing response. The distinguishing features of the petty-bourgeoisie, the Political Bureau reminded Healy, included 'lack of continuity, impressionism and eclecticism, denial of and contradiction of all they swore by yesterday... Need we hang a label around our critic's neck?'.<sup>10</sup>

The WIL leaders' arguments carried more weight than Healy's new-found 'principles' with the members, and although Healy established a solid base in his own South

### THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL IS BURIED! LONG LIVE THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL



The June 1943 edition of *Socialist Appeal*, the paper of the Workers International League

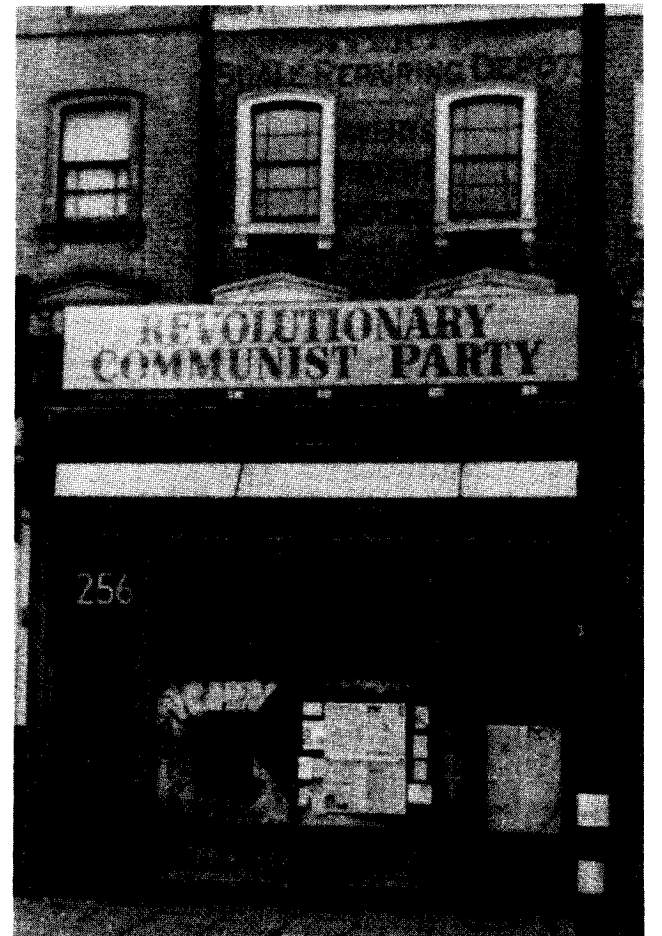
tional democratic centralism beloved of Healyite mythology.<sup>8</sup> Healy did not dispute that James P. Cannon might have acted bureaucratically when unifying the British Trotskyists in 1938, and he defended the WIL's decision at that time to defy the Fourth International by refusing to join the RSL. With worker members being demoralised by the petty-bourgeois politics of the RSL leaders, Healy wrote, it had been 'necessary to take a sharp stand if proletarian elements were to be trained and protected from this type of politics'. But Healy claimed that this had been only a short-term expedient. He accused the WIL leadership of turning it into a permanent principle, and of ignoring the fact that now, when the WIL's numbers would guarantee it an overwhelming majority in a fused organisation, the opportunity for unification should be seized.

In reply, the Political Bureau argued that the WIL's opposition to the 1938 unity agreement was not a temporary manoeuvre, but rather a political stand against the right of a minority to follow its own policy against a majority decision. Although readily admitting to a lack of enthusiasm for unity with the RSL, they declared their willingness to undergo a merger in order to join the Fourth International. But what would Healy say, the Political Bureau asked, if the International Secretariat demanded fusion on the same basis as in 1938? 'One pictures his face, red with rage, when Stuart made such a proposal less than 12 months ago'.<sup>9</sup>

West London branch, elsewhere his support was restricted to Hilda Pratt and Ben Elsbury in East London and Bob and Mickie Shaw in West London.<sup>11</sup> Healy was the only member of this group to be delegated to the WIL conference in October 1943. There his lack of political credibility among the WIL membership was demonstrated by his failure to gain any support for a South West London amendment to the resolution on international affiliation. The amendment, which proposed that the WIL should unite with the RSL on terms decided by the IS, had to be formally seconded for purposes of discussion, and presumably received only one vote – Healy's own!<sup>12</sup>

However, the picture of Healy leading a bitter struggle for a united British section of the Fourth International against the 'intense opposition' of the WIL leadership<sup>13</sup> is just another myth. Shortly after the conference, a letter was received from the IS containing a series of proposals for unification, which included acceptance of the principle that the policies of the fused organisation would be determined on a democratic centralist basis, by majority vote at conference.<sup>14</sup> This removed the major obstacle to fusion, and the WIL Central Committee immediately passed a resolution agreeing to unification with the RSL on those terms, thereby striking Healy's main factional weapon from his hands.

Healy's reaction was to shift his political ground yet again. Aligning himself firmly now



The RCP headquarters in Harrow Road, north-west London

with the IS, he declared that the WIL had been wrong to reject the 1938 unity agreement, and he demanded that the League's leaders should admit to their error and re-educate the membership on this basis.<sup>15</sup> The Healy group's campaign was thus reduced to condemning the way in which fusion was being prepared by the WIL. While their identification of a nationalist element in the WIL leaders' attitude to the Fourth International was not without foundation<sup>16</sup>, this scarcely constituted an adequate political platform on which to organise a faction in opposition to the elected leadership, and in January 1944 the Central Committee not unreasonably refused minority rights to Healy and his supporters on these grounds.<sup>17</sup>

At the fusion conference of March 1944, which established the Revolutionary Communist Party as the new British section of the Fourth International, Healy's minority still had not acquired any programmatic differences with the WIL leadership. On all the main issues debated at the conference – the open party versus entry work, the proletarian military policy, industrial strategy – Healy and his supporters were in complete agreement with the WIL's policies. Nevertheless, at the end of the conference, Healy's group and the pro-IS Lawrence faction from the RSL (with whom Healy had been collaborating for some months) met with the International's representative, Sherry Mangan of the SWP, to discuss their future tactics in the RCP.<sup>18</sup>

If the Fourth International had acted responsibly towards the new party, it would have made every effort to work in co-operation with Jock Haston, Ted Grant and the other RCP leaders, building on their very real strengths and fighting to overcome their weaknesses in the course of joint political activity. Instead the IS (and the SWP on which it was then dependent) wrote off the British leadership as a nationalist clique, and set up their own faction in the party. It was a faction with no political basis other than loyalty to the international leadership, and headed by a man – Gerry Healy – whose transparently personal motives for opposing Haston and Grant must have severely damaged the confi-

dence of the RCP rank and file in an International which saw fit to use him as its agent.

The events of 1943-44 were clearly crucial to the rise of Gerry Healy. At the beginning of this period he was in disgrace, reduced to the ranks for political indiscipline; at the end of it, he had been elevated to the position of the Fourth International's 'key man' in Britain. By boosting Healy's political fortunes in this way, it must be said, the IS/SWP showed gross political misjudgement. If Healy was to have made a positive contribution to the future of the Trotskyist movement, it could only have been as a member of, and under the control of, a collective party leadership. Yet he was now given a free rein, beneath the banner of internationalism, to pursue a factional struggle against the RCP leaders. Over the following years, the endless unprincipled manoeuvring of Healy's 'internationalist' minority was to have a thoroughly destructive effect on the Fourth International's British section.

#### NOTES

1. Ted Grant, interviewed by Sam Bornstein, August 22, 1982. Transcript in Socialist Platform library.
2. S. Bornstein and A. Richardson: 'War and the International', Socialist Platform, 1986, p.101.
3. WIL industrial bulletin, May 1943.
4. WIL internal bulletin, September 2, 1943.
5. See Workers News, No. 22, February 1990.
6. According to an account by the Political Bureau: WIL internal bulletin, September 2, 1943.
7. WIL internal bulletin, August 10, 1943; G. Healy: letter to Political Bureau, August 25, 1943.
8. Cf. D. North: 'Gerry Healy and his place in the history of the Fourth International', Part 1, *International Worker*, January 27, 1990.
9. 'Stuart' was Sam Gordon of the SWP, the Fourth International's liaison man with the British Trotskyists.
10. WIL internal bulletin, September 2, 1943.
11. Based on signatories to WIL minority statement, December 12, 1943.
12. 'War and the International', p.103; WIL Central Committee meeting, January 15-16, 1944, Report.
13. D. North, op. cit.
14. International Secretariat, letter to WIL, October 3, 1943.
15. WIL minority, political statement on reunification, December 1943.
16. For example, the Political Bureau's reference to the democratic centralist structure of the International as merely a 'formal connection' ('War and the International', p.100). This attitude, the Healy minority pointed out, encouraged WIL members 'to look upon affiliation to the Fourth International as the acquirement of a "label" and not at all as the responsibilities of Bolsheviks towards a Bolshevik organisation'.
17. 'War and the International', p.103.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.107-10.

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# In defence of the theory of permanent revolution

**BETWEEN Chiang Kai-shek's coup in Canton on March 20, 1926, and the smashing of the Shanghai workers on April 12, 1927, the Stalinised Comintern led the revolutionary upsurge of the Chinese workers to a crushing defeat – one which set back the Chinese revolution two decades, and had incalculable effects on world politics.**

Had a socialist revolution been carried out successfully, it is entirely conceivable that the Stalinist degeneration within the USSR would have been defeated, and that the victory of fascism in Germany could have been averted. In the event, the defeat of the Chinese revolution of 1925-27 not only strengthened Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy at home, but also dashed the hopes of workers internationally.

For over a year after Chiang's first overt move against the Communists, Stalin and his chief intellectual henchman, Bukharin, sought to promote confidence in the Canton government and its 'revolutionary' army. Chiang's March coup was passed over in silence, as was his shooting of workers, his promotion of 'yellow' scab unions and the suppression of the peasant movement.

Chinese Communist leaders, Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Peng Shu-tse, assessing the results of Chiang's coup, attempted once more to assert the independence of the CCP. In July 1926, they submitted a motion to the CCP's Central Committee, calling for CCP members to leave the Kuomintang, only to co-operate with the Kuomintang outside party ranks, and to establish a united front with the left wing of the Kuomintang (Peng Shu-tse: Introduction to 'Leon Trotsky on China', Pathfinder, p.55). This resolution – described by Trotsky as 'unconditionally correct' – was overruled by Stalin's chief representative, Borodin, who compelled the CCP humiliatingly to accept Chiang's 'Resolution Adjusting Party Affairs'. Under its terms, the CCP was bound hand and foot to the Kuomintang – it was barred from criticising Sun Yat-senism and from senior positions in the Kuomintang, and compelled to hand over its members' names and addresses.

Flowing from its military-strategic desire for a powerful ally on its southern frontier to enable the building of 'socialism' to proceed peacefully within the borders of the Soviet Union, the Stalin faction created its own schema which it imposed upon the unfolding events in China. According to Stalin's theory (principally elaborated by Bukharin and the ex-

## PART 16

By Richard Price

Menshevik Martynov), the chief characteristics of the Chinese revolution were the struggle against feudal survivals and against foreign imperialism. From this proposition, Stalin derived the conclusion that the 'national' bourgeoisie could be compelled to play a revolutionary role as part of a 'bloc of four classes' – the working class, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the urban democracy (a polite title for the capitalists) – which formed an 'all-national united front'. Because Stalin supposed that an absolute contradiction existed between the bourgeoisie and 'feudalism', the bourgeoisie was given the task of leading



Ch'en Tu-hsiu

the agrarian revolution. Similar reasoning led to the assumption that the Kuomintang would lead the struggle against the imperialists and their local agents, the *compradors*. If the capitalist was to be the liberator not only of the peasant from the landlord, but of China from imperialism, then the working class had to remain a loyal and subordinate ally, until the bourgeoisie had 'exhausted' its revolutionary potential, and completed the bourgeois 'stage' of the revolution. Then, and only then, could the Chinese workers take up the struggle for socialist revolution.

The Stalinist analysis of class relations in China eliminated all unpalatable facts. In reality, there was no rigid dividing line between a 'patriotic', 'national' bourgeoisie and the *compradors*, and, as the strikes in Shanghai and Hong Kong in 1925 had demonstrated, only the working class was capable of a consistent struggle against imperialism and the foreign concessions. Factory owners and merchants, tied by relations of trade with Japanese and Western capitalism, were driven to compromise at every stage, whilst defending their own class interests against the rising workers' movement. Nor were they reliable allies of the peasant. Indeed, through the medium of the banker and the moneylender, the urban capitalist took part in the exploitation of the peasant alongside the landlord. Despite the backwardness of China, capitalist relations predominated. Any invasion of the rights of



Chinese Communists executed by the Kuomintang, Nanking, 1927

private property by the peasantry had direct implications for urban capitalists, as the Russian revolution had shown. The agrarian revolution could only be carried out under the leadership of the working class, and against the landlord and the capitalist. Such a perspective would not have ruled out joint actions for strictly defined objectives between the CCP and sections of the Kuomintang, under conditions in which the working class could have clearly evaluated the policies of the Communists and the nature of the agreements which it had entered into.

Few modern Stalinists (with the exception of the Maoists) have attempted a defence of Stalin's policies in 1925-27 – with good reason. To open up such a can of worms would have an obvious bearing on the role of Stalinism today in the national struggles in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Stalin's speech on 'The Prospects of the Revolution in China', delivered to the Chinese Commission of the ECCI on November 30, 1926, is a representative example of the Comintern's line. An honoured guest at the meeting was Chiang's personal emissary, Sha Li-tzu, attending as a fraternal delegate from the Kuomintang. Like so many instructions since 1922, the policy of support for the Kuomintang was covered in contradictory formulae and pretended devotion to 'Leninism' to protect Stalin from the criticisms of the Left Opposition. For example, Stalin states that as a result of the weakness of the national bourgeoisie, 'the role of initiator and guide of the Chinese revolution, the role of leader of the Chinese peasantry, must inevitably fall to the Chinese proletariat and its party' (J.V. Stalin: 'On the Opposition', Peking, p.501). This formally correct and 'orthodox' judgement leaves out a small thing – what should this 'leadership' consist of?

In his analysis of the role of the Kuomintang government's army, Stalin implicitly gives his answer: 'Wherein lies the strength of the Canton troops? In the fact that they are inspired by an ideal, by enthusiasm, in the struggle for liberation from imperialism; in the fact that they are bringing China liberation' (ibid.,

pp.502-3). In other words, the tasks of the Communists lay not in building a *workers' army*, but in supporting a *capitalist army* intent on disarming the workers. In order to underline the point, Stalin went on to tick off the Soviet representatives in China for underestimating the 'revolutionary army' (ibid., p.505).

Stalin explicitly opposed the slogan of peasant soviets on the grounds that the agrarian revolution had not yet reached its highest point. (Small wonder! In a telegram to the CCP in October, Stalin had urged it to keep the peasant movement in check.) He also called for students, working class and peasant youth to be 'subordinated to the ideological and political influence of the Kuomintang' (ibid., p.515).

The Chinese Commission of the ECCI decided unanimously in favour of the CCP remaining within the Kuomintang, causing one member of the CCP Central Committee to remark: 'The Kuomintang died on March 20... why should we hold a decomposed corpse in our arms' (J. Degras (ed): 'The Communist International', Vol. 2, p.337).

In the summer and autumn of 1926, the Kuomintang turned its military forces northwards against the warlords. With the Northern Expedition backed to the hilt by Borodin and the Soviet advisers, the CCP was relegated to duties of raising popular and material support for the campaign, unable to unfurl its own independent banner.

In spite of the CCP's subservient role, the workers' and peasants' movement grew spectacularly as the Nationalist armies rolled northwards. This immense revolutionary fervour which immediately passed beyond the boundaries set for it by the Kuomintang, with peasant land seizures and a mighty wave of strikes, disproved all Stalin's assumptions that the situation was unripe for the slogan of soviets.

In his speech to the ECCI, Stalin had described the Northern Expedition as 'a blow aimed at imperialism' which would mean 'freedom of assembly, freedom of strike, freedom of the press, and freedom to organise for all the revolutionary elements in China in general' (Stalin, p.504). In fact, the victories of the nationalist armies, won with

comparative ease thanks to the local assistance of workers and peasants, led not to the extension of these rights within the newly occupied zones but most frequently to their further restriction.

Alarmed that the movement would lead to a break with Chiang, Borodin went so far as to accept an Arbitration Board in Wuhan, whose decisions were 'binding on both employer and employees' (H. Isaacs: 'The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution', Stanford, p.113).

Far from being a 'blow against imperialism', Chiang's expedition was directed at stabilising the Kuomintang's internal position, and strengthening its negotiating position with the imperialists, utilising workers and peasants as pack horses in preparation to despatch them to the knacker's yard at the first opportunity. It was only the working class which spontaneously attacked the British concession in Hankow.

Stalin had envisaged what he described as 'the new people's revolutionary government' in the recently occupied provinces pushing forward the peasant movement. The opposite was the case. Not only did the Kuomintang authorities fail to implement their own minimum programme of rent reductions, but they attacked the peasants who took matters into their own hands. As Harold Isaacs observed: 'The

resolution [of the ECCI] limited Communists to seeking confiscation only of the land of "reactionary" militarists. In China, every local satrap joined the Kuomintang as soon as it reached his territory. He thus became part of the "armed revolution" and his land became theoretically inviolate, along with the land of his satellites, his relatives, his supporters... This was the kind of "agrarian revolution" that even Chiang Kai-shek was pleased to support' (Isaacs, pp.120-21).

Having reached the River Yangtze, and established headquarters at Nanchang, Chiang turned his army east towards Shanghai, aiming to link up with both Chinese and foreign capitalists. Anticipating the arrival of the nationalist army, an ill-prepared general strike against local warlord Sun Chuan-fang was launched by the Communist-led General Labour Union on February 19. Lacking any clear leadership, the movement was suppressed with great brutality, while the nationalist troops under orders from Chiang Kai-shek suspended their advance on the city.

On March 21, the General Labour Union issued a further call for an insurrectionary general strike and after heavy fighting, the working class which had responded almost unanimously to the call, was master of the city. Chiang finally entered Shanghai on March 26, and set about re-establishing capitalist law and order. For their part, the Soviet advisors and the CCP leadership – with the exception of a few such as Peng Shu-tse – remained blind to the impending counter-revolution, and the warnings of the Left Opposition, and disarmed the victorious workers politically and well as physically. On the eve of Chiang's second coup, Stalin boasted to a Moscow party meeting that 'we shall squeeze him like a lemon and then be rid of him'.

Early in the morning of April 12, troops loyal to Chiang, together with criminal gangs, descended on the workers' quarters, unleashing a reign of terror. The result was the murder of 5,700 Communists and their supporters. Stalin's theory of a bloc of four classes lay in ruins, and the second chapter of the Chinese revolution closed.

To be continued

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# Workers News



Paper of the Workers International League

No. 23 March/April 1990 25p

## Don't pay poll tax! Build mass strikes!

### STATEMENT BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

**AS LOCAL councils in England and Wales prepare to send out their poll tax demands, the call must be raised throughout the whole working class: build the mass movement to stop the poll tax!**

Mass, community-based non-payment tactics must be united with strike action to defeat the vicious attack on workers which the poll tax represents. What is required is maximum unity in action. We therefore welcome the establishment in November 1989 of an All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation and the creation in February of a single All London Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Both organisations, dominated by *Militant*, lack a revolutionary leadership. *Militant* has taken the lead in forming anti-poll tax unions in Scotland, London and other important centres. But at the London conference on February 10, while *Militant* supporters gave demagogic speeches calling for 'an army of non-payers', they avoided any serious call for the development of strike action against the poll tax. If they did, it would pose their numerous supporters in the main civil service union, the CPSA - which organises in social security offices where poll tax deductions from benefits are made - with taking a lead in this struggle.

*Militant* also voted down a motion calling for quarterly conferences of the London federation in favour of the less democratic formula of an annual conference, supplemented by 'aggregate' meetings whose purpose remains unclear. The Socialist Workers Party, meanwhile, has played a mirror-image role to that of *Militant*, making deliberately vague and generalised calls for industrial action, and downgrading non-payment.

The example of members of the CPSA who refused to give information on claimants to poll tax investigators should inspire other workers required to implement the tax to refuse to do so. However, individual

and small groups of workers should not be expected to fight alone. Boycotts and strikes must be fought for in NALGO and the civil service unions, and the call for all-out action taken up throughout the trade union movement.

The various 'Can Pay, Won't Pay' stunts supported by the Scottish National Party, the Stalinists and an assortment of Labour 'lefts' and middle class radicals must be rejected in favour of mass non-payment and the perspective of industrial action against the tax. So-called 'Committees of 100' and sponsored individual non-payers are consciously designed to hold back the growth of a mass working class movement against the Tories.

The present situation in Scotland, where poll tax collection started in April 1989, shows the potential which exists for a mass campaign of opposition. In Lothian region, the non-payment rate is over 30 per cent and in Strathclyde 20 per cent. In Glasgow, the figure is over 30 per cent, and in some smaller areas more than 40 per cent have not paid. Scottish local authorities have issued, or are about to issue, summary warrants against over 500,000 non-payers, enabling sheriffs' officers to seize wages, bank accounts or personal possessions. But, in many areas, warrant sales have been stopped by mass action.

In the run-up to the introduction of the poll tax in England and Wales, the Tories have experienced a major revolt in their own ranks. Coming on top of the worsening economic situation and record high mortgage rates, the poll tax is causing widespread disaffection among Tory voters. The influential backbench 1922 Committee has told Thatcher to reduce the impact of the tax, while Tory councils setting the rate have faced angry demonstrations from the people who elected them.

With the Tories in disarray, the possibility for driving them out of office has never been higher. The Labour Party leadership in parliament and local government, however,



A demonstrator makes his point outside Haringey Civic Centre in north London as the Labour council meets on March 5 to set one of the highest poll tax rates in the country

has played a despicable role. It has attempted to squash every initiative to deepen the Tory crisis by organising practical opposition to the poll tax, with the full support of the TUC leadership.

Every Labour council is implementing the tax. Those who set a high rate, in order to fund services, directly attack the living standards of the workers who voted them into office. Those who set a low rate do so indirectly, through massive cuts in the services upon which the working class depends. Workers must reject this rotten choice. The struggle against the poll tax must be consciously linked to the defence of local government jobs and services.

Amongst the high poll tax councils, the Labour-controlled London Borough of Haringey has set a rate of £572.89 per head. This means that a family of two parents and two over 18s will face a bill of £2,291.56 this year, compared with an average rates bill last year of around £750. In Manchester, the Labour council leadership plans to cut 3,500 council jobs, and the services they provide, to keep the poll tax down to £425.

In contrast to these Labour councils, 18 of the 25 members of the Tory ruling group on West Oxfordshire District Council resigned the party whip en masse at the end of February in protest at the poll tax. They did not do this out of

solidarity with workers, but rather out of concern for their own political hides.

While the poll tax remains first and foremost a direct attack on the working class and a concession to the rich, the intention of the Tories to use it to clamp down yet

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further on 'high spending' Labour-run local councils must not be forgotten. The tax itself, and especially the plan to introduce 'poll tax capping' to force local authorities to reduce the rate, is a recipe for the wholesale devastation of local jobs and services and an incitement to voters to elect Tory councils.

By claiming that they have no course but to obey the law and implement the tax, Labour councils are opening the road for a Tory takeover of local authorities in working class areas. The Labour Party leaders have launched a witch-hunt in the ranks of the party: in Glasgow, several more members of *Militant* have recently been expelled, and

in England and Wales now about to receive their first demand, the potential for an all-out struggle on this issue is clear. Even in traditionally conservative areas like the West Country there have been demonstrations thousands-strong outside town halls. But to those who say that the Tories will withdraw the poll tax if only the pressure is kept up, we reply: you underestimate both the depth of the economic crisis which is determining the Tory strategy of impoverishing the working class, and the capacity for betrayal of the Labour and trade union leaders. The fight against the poll tax is the fight to drive out the Tories, and force a Labour government to take office which must be compelled to provide indemnity for non-payers and refunds for those who paid. The basis now exists for a mass movement with this objective, but it will only be built in the teeth of the fiercest opposition from the Labour leaders themselves.

Workers News calls for the building of anti-poll tax unions committed to non-payment on every estate, in every town and in every workplace. In metropolitan areas and in the London boroughs, we support the formation of federations of anti-poll tax unions. These must draw in delegates not only from trade union branches, local labour parties, etc, but also from the unemployed, tenants' groups, ethnic minorities and women's organisations. As well as building the campaign of non-payment and defending those under attack from the courts, their task must be to fight for the perspective of a trade union boycott of all work on the tax and strike action.

- Build the mass non-payment campaign!
- Demand of Labour councils: Don't collect the poll tax! Don't cut jobs and services!
- Fight for a trade union boycott of all poll tax work! Build for mass strike action!
- Bring down the Tory government!
- Demand that the Labour leaders commit themselves to repealing the poll tax and all other anti-working class laws!

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**What is going on  
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