

Workers News



Paper of the Workers International League

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WHERE IS LABOUR GOING?

THE LABOUR Party's new policy document is the clearest indication yet of the extent to which the Kinnock leadership is prepared to sacrifice the past gains of the working class in order to defend British capitalism.

'Looking to the Future', published at the end of May, is the latest stage of the policy review embarked on after the Labour Party suffered its third successive defeat at the hands of Thatcher in the June 1987 general election. Its cornerstones are the retention of the major part of the Tory anti-union laws, acceptance of the privatisation programme and wholehearted support for the European Community.

Employment spokesman Tony Blair set the tone for a future Labour government's attitude towards workers' struggles when he told TUC leaders in March that 'the law is here to stay in industrial relations'. 'Looking to the Future' makes it official. In a straight reversal of previously declared policy which pledged their repeal, Labour now intends to leave the Tory anti-union laws virtually intact. Limitations on the closed shop will be kept. The attack on picketing has been taken up with relish by the Labour leadership, who express the same hatred of the strength of the working class - embodied in the flying picket and the mass picket - as do the Tories. The straitjacket of compulsory balloting for official industrial action and most of the restrictions on secondary picketing will continue to be enforced. The plan to introduce an industrial relations court, designed to enable employers' injunctions outlawing strikes to be heard immediately, has been given a warm welcome by the British Institute of Management.

Labour's 'bosses' charter has the overwhelming support of trade union leaders, including T&GWU general secretary Ron Todd who publicly dissociated himself from the campaign against it. Trade union members must step up the fight at every level to reverse this decision. They must insist that the Labour Party commits itself to repeal all the anti-union laws, and that their leaders fight for this policy. Those unions such as NALGO which have already formally taken this position must be held to it. Their leaders must be forced to lead a fight in deeds as well as words.

Of the privatised industries, Labour now proposes to re-nationalise only water and the national grid part of the electricity industry, and to purchase two per cent of British Telecom shares to take the state share to 51 per cent. Even this 're-nationalisation' is

By David Lewis

a fraud, since it compensates shareholders for their 'loss', and in the case of BT, leaves the company effectively under private control. The demand for re-nationalisation without compensation must be raised. All those industries must then be placed under workers' control.

Labour's record of 'opposition' to the EC was based on economic nationalism - protecting British capitalists from their European competitors. Now that a sizable proportion of British industry and business sees unrestricted access to the European market as its best prospect, Labour has obligingly changed its tune. The document proposes that the EC 'must become both deeper and wider in its membership' and, in line with this, advocates increased power to the European parliament.

The European Community is an attempt by the imperialist powers in Europe to surmount the historical limitations of the nation state, primarily at the expense of the working class. The Labour leaders' newfound enthusiasm for the EC is at the same time an acceptance of the increased exploitation that will accompany the 'open market' of 1992. Against this, the demand must be raised for the United Socialist States of Europe.

For its overall economic policy, Labour brings together a rag-bag of pre-Thatcher Tory policies. The bedrock is membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism whose successful operation depends on the strength of the West German Deutschmark. The Labour leaders are intent on tying the working class to an economy set to move into huge deficit as capitalist restoration gets under way in East Germany. Already, the Kohl government has called for major sacrifices from the West German working class to this end.

Harking back to the 'golden age' of 'beer and sandwiches at Number 10', regular discussions between government, employers and unions are supposed to solve 'Britain's' chronic industrial problems. The only thing that the trade union leaders will agree to 'round the table' is more concessions to the employers and consequently greater attacks on their members. The decline of British capitalism and the growing impoverishment of workers cannot be halted by such nostalgia. Only the taking of industry out of the hands of the capitalists can do this. Workers must demand that Labour adopts a programme of nationalisation without

compensation of all major industrial corporations and financial institutions.

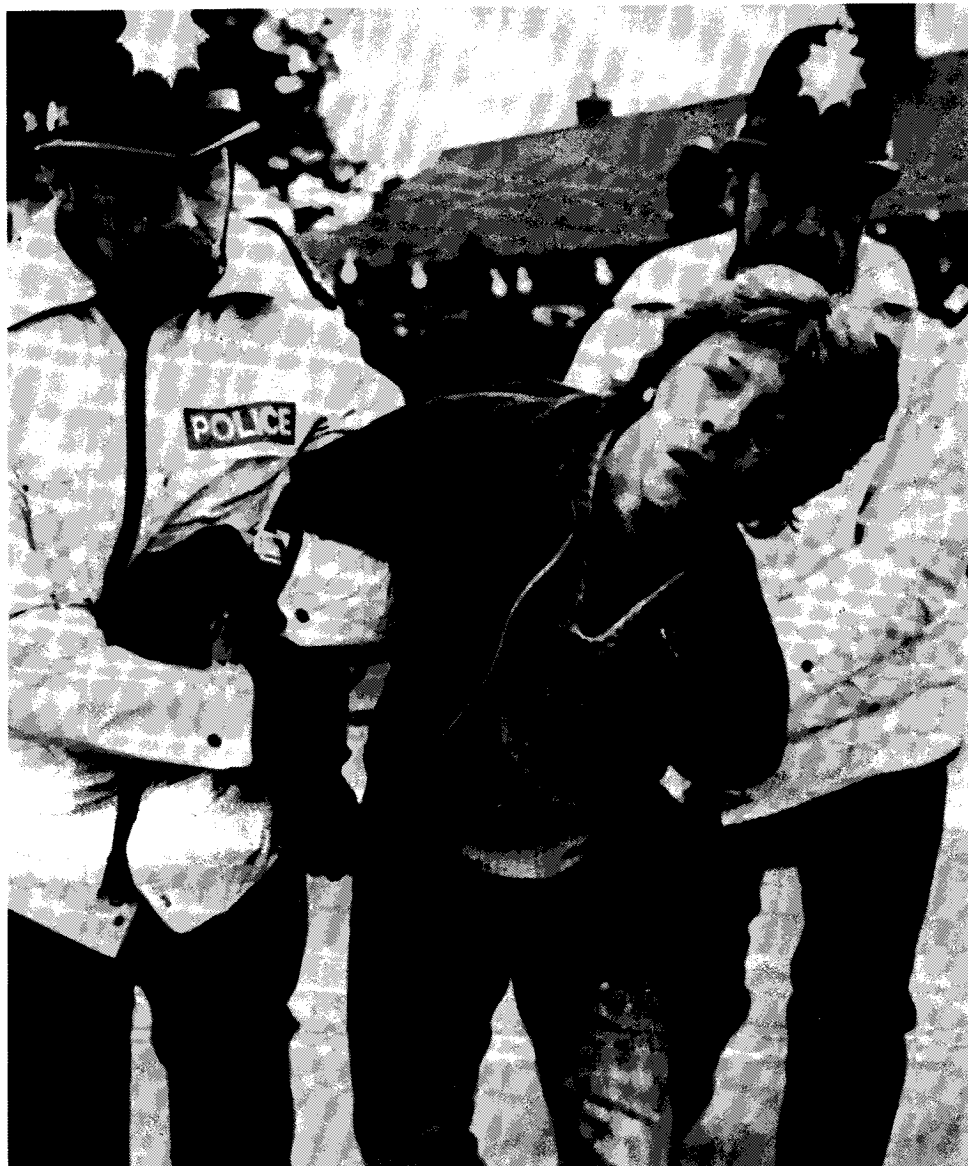
In education, no attempt will be made to roll back the Tory attack. Keeping the national curriculum, pupil achievement records and schools managing their own budgets means holding on to the Tory view that education should be business oriented. The long-standing commitment to scrap private schools has been dropped; the much-trumpeted replacement for YTS, which guarantees school leavers a four-year 'traineeship', is an attempt to institutionalise cheap-labour schemes - again with increased competition after 1992 in mind. A full and free education system for all must be demanded, as part of a programme which includes the replacement of school governors with elected committees of teachers, pupils and parents, and the abolition of private education.

The main effects of the Tory programme of dismantling the National Health Service will be untouched. A few cosmetic changes are planned, but there is no commitment to provide even the funding necessary to restore health authority budgets to previous levels. Demand a full and free health service under the control of committees of health workers and patients' representatives, the abolition of private medical practice and the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical companies.

'Looking to the Future' makes no attempt to challenge the 'right' of the rich to get richer. It insults workers with plans for a top rate of income tax of only 50 per cent, and that only for those earning over £40,000 a year. Just how modest Kinnock's plan to 'soak the rich' is can be seen from the fact that under the last Labour government, the top rate of taxation stood at 83 per cent. The demand for punitive taxation of the rich must be taken up. On the single most important question for most workers - will Labour definitely abandon the poll tax and what will replace it? - the document is silent.

Paper commitments to abolish the House of Lords - never popular with the upwardly mobile Labour and trade union leaders - have finally been torn up. The removal of this feudal throwback, along with the abolition of the monarchy, must be an elementary part of any progressive programme.

The previous policy of dissolving both NATO and the Warsaw Pact is now abandoned in favour of continuing to support NATO for the foreseeable future. Kinnock's transformation from pacifist nuclear disarmament to pro-



RIGHTS AT ISSUE If the Labour Party forms the next government it will keep most of the Tory anti-union laws.

imperialist warmonger is complete. In opposition to this, demand: down with NATO!

The Labour leaders challenge the Tories not by opposing them but by mimicking them. They attack not Tory policies, but the right of the Tories to carry them out. They want that job themselves! The process embodied in 'Looking to the Future' - of gradually ending the Labour Party's responsibility to fight for the defence of the working class - is no manoeuvre aimed at achieving office and then legislating measures to benefit workers. It is, on the contrary, the preparatory stage for a Labour government which will do battle royal on behalf of the capitalist class. Should the Tories fail to resolve their crisis, then Kinnock will step into the breach and continue the attack on the working class.

From its birth, the Labour Party - reflecting the outlook of its founders, the trade union aristocracy - has been a capitalist party, albeit one which draws its support from the working class and which therefore seeks to win certain concessions for that class (and considerable privileges for its leaders). The deepening problems of British capitalism require that the Labour Party and trade union leaders intensify their efforts to hold back militant struggles and assist the

Tories in stepping up the rate of exploitation of labour.

In 1930, Trotsky explained this phenomenon as follows: 'The imperialist stage of evolution, which increasingly aggravates contradictions, often forces the bourgeoisie to transform the leading groups of reformists into real activists for its trusts and governmental combinations. This is what characterises the new - much higher - degree of dependence of reformism on the imperialist bourgeoisie, and sets a much more distinctive stamp on its psychology and politics, making it suitable for directly taking the helm in the affairs of the bourgeois state.'

The Labour Party's lurch to the right is not ultimately

governed by the ambition of its leaders to achieve high office, but by the requirements of the ruling class and capitalist production in general. One thing is absolutely certain: a Labour government which carries out the policies in this document will be a capitalist government. The 'future' proposed for the working class by Kinnock, Hattersley and Co is no future at all. 'Looking to the Future' must become the focus of a struggle to remove the Labour right wing and to fight for the defence of every vital interest of the working class - jobs, wages, conditions, housing, education, health and social services - and for the repeal of the anti-union and poll tax legislation.

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SEE PAGES 4-5

EDITORIAL

Cover-up story

ON MAY 17, a summary of the report by the Stevens enquiry into security force collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in the north of Ireland was published. Having done its job – whitewashing state terror in the Six Counties – it slipped quietly out of the headlines.

The enquiry was commissioned in September 1989 by Hugh Annesley, chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, following the discovery that photographs of republicans had gone missing from Dunmurry RUC station in south Belfast, and the statement on August 29 by the Ulster Defence Association's paramilitary wing that information was routinely 'leaked' to them by members of the security forces. According to the UDA, classified material obtained in this way had enabled them to target and subsequently kill Loughlin Maginn, who was identified in security force documents as an IRA 'suspect'.

John Stevens, deputy chief constable of Cambridgeshire, was named as head of the enquiry team as reports in the media daily fuelled speculation that the security forces and the loyalist paramilitary groups were working hand-in-hand to assassinate republicans, led by an 'Inner Circle' of RUC officers. Stevens's task was to be more in the field of public relations than criminal investigation. Along with the replacing of the discredited RUC chief constable Sir John Hermon with Annesley, Stevens's appointment was an attempt by the Tory government to boost confidence in the security forces, already seriously undermined by the Stalker affair and the revelations of Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd.

In case Stevens was tempted to take his job too literally, there was a mysterious fire on January 9 which damaged his control centre located in RUC premises outside Belfast. There was no need to worry, however. The formula for the cover-up was to concentrate the investigation on the UDA and other loyalist paramilitary groups, and to criticise only the recruitment practices of the Ulster Defence Regiment which had allowed a few 'extremists' through the net. Of the UDR, the report says: 'Individuals who had been adversely vetted by the RUC had nevertheless been recruited. A small number of these went on to commit terrorist-related criminal offences while serving with the regiment.'

Stevens goes out of his way to give the RUC a clean bill of health – not surprisingly, he finds no evidence of the 'Inner Circle'. He draws attention away from senior officers in all the security forces, laying responsibility for the leaks on a combination of administrative error and a handful of low-ranking individuals under 'pressure' because they live in staunchly loyalist areas. Only 59 people have been charged, ten of whom are members of the UDR, the rest members of loyalist paramilitary organisations, and the report notes approvingly that vetting procedures have now been improved.

Socialists must fight to expose the Stevens cover-up. As part of the struggle to remove British imperialism from the Six Counties and for self-determination for the whole of Ireland, they must demand a labour movement enquiry into the activities of the security forces.

Reject the NSF road

EVERY WORKER and student in Romania must take sober stock of the events which began in Bucharest on June 14 and lasted for 38 hours. Under the direction of former Securitate officers, miners wielding clubs smashed up the demonstration in University Square and went on to terrorise the capital's gypsy population, leaving five dead and 100 injured.

Once again the Stalinists in the NSF, who hijacked the December revolution, have turned one section of the population against another. In March, the scapegoat was the ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania.

The question is, who benefits? Not the working class anxious to defend the nationalised property relations against the restoration of capitalism, and not the students who were in the forefront of the December revolution, and who have consistently demanded a purge of the Securitate, warning against their protectors, the Stalinists in the NSF.

The NSF succeeded in winning a landslide victory in the May general election. The result made it clear that pro-monarchist and openly restorationist parties have little popular support, but it did give a mandate to a government whose programme includes the introduction of the capitalist market – which spells increasing unemployment and hardship for the working class, students and rural labourers. The present situation is a real measure of the confusion pumped into the working class and students by the Stalinists of the NSF.

The students' demands are essentially still those they raised in the December revolution: 'Down with Stalinism!' and 'Purge the secret police!' – demands supported by the young officers and rank-and-file soldiers and airmen in February when they established the Committee for Democratisation of the Army, forcing the government to purge senior officers. That is why the army was reluctant to move against the core of students occupying University Square. While the miners attacked the students, Iliescu turned on the young officers outlawing their committee and reinstating purged officers.

The only force capable of defending the interests of workers, students and the ethnic minorities is the organised working class. Workers must establish, as a matter of urgency, factory committees to take control of production. Purge the workplaces of Stalinist bureaucrats. Establish a workers' militia and workers' tribunals to try the secret police. Agitate among the soldiers for the establishment of rank-and-file committees to elect their own officers. The workers' militia must protect the rights of students and intellectuals to demonstrate, and suppress the reactionary pro-monarchist elements and black marketeers.

Release the Tottenham 3!

By Daniel Evans

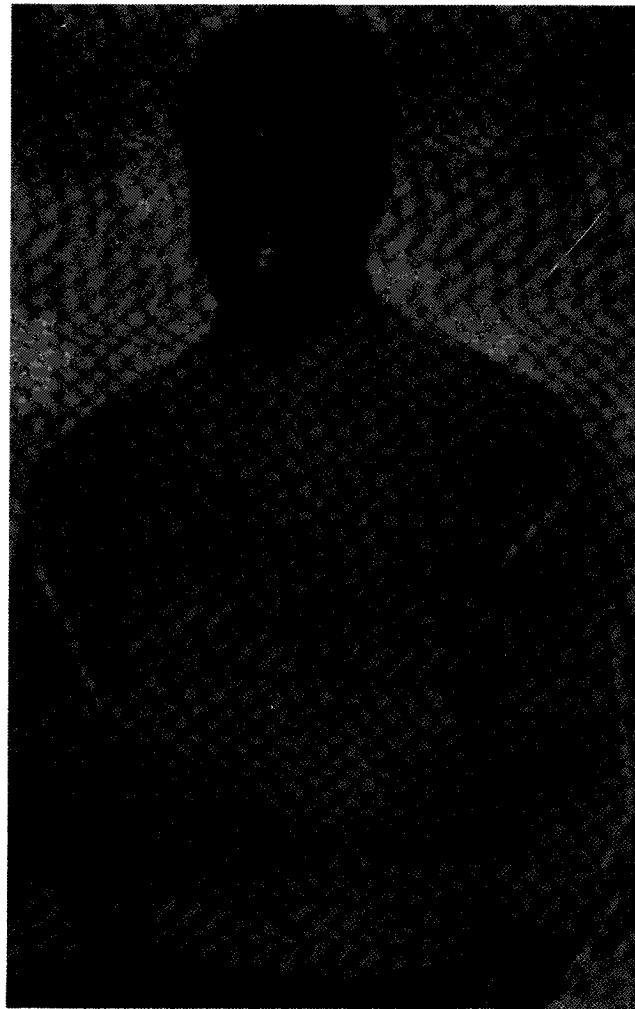
DETECTIVE chief superintendent Graham Melvin was promoted to head of the Scotland Yard Organised Crimes Task Force following his handling of the investigation into the death of police constable Keith Blakelock at Broadwater Farm in 1985. On June 4, he was found guilty of a disciplinary offence committed during the course of that investigation by a tribunal ordered by the Police Complaints Authority.

The tribunal was arranged following revelations during the 1987 trial of Winston Silcott, Engin Raghup, Mark Braithwaite and three juveniles for the murder of Blakelock. Raghup and Braithwaite were convicted solely on the basis of so-called confessions, whilst Silcott was found guilty because he allegedly had a 'guilty posture' following hours of questioning at the hands of Melvin without a solicitor. The police had no other 'evidence', and evidence in Silcott's favour mysteriously went missing.

The three juveniles, however, all had the cases against them dismissed by the judge, Mr Justice Hodgson, and the charges against Melvin relate to incidents involving one of the juveniles, Jason Hill, then aged 13.

Melvin, after holding Hill in the cells for 48 hours in only his underpants and a blanket, questioned him threateningly for 15 hours until, in Hodgson's words, he had 'broken down emotionally'. Denying him access to a solicitor or his parents, Melvin managed to extract a 'fantastical, strange and make-believe' confession.

Melvin was cleared by a three-man panel, which included a Scotland Yard officer, of two of the three charges against him and found guilty of denying suspects their right to access to a solicitor during interrogation. His punishment is likely to be a fine or a reprimand.



Winston Silcott

Following the tribunal, the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, Michael Bennett, said: 'I have always maintained that the Broadwater Three will be released not because of their innocence, but because of political expediency. I believe Mr Melvin has been sacrificed to that expediency.' This statement amounts to an admission that the evidence against the three was never sufficient to secure a conviction, and that the denial of access to solicitors is considered legitimate, despite it contravening the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and Judges' Rules.

The Melvin case comes on top of a series of reverses for

the police which include the quashing of the convictions against the Guildford Four, the enquiry into the trial of the Maguire Seven and the uncovering of widespread corruption within the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad. For a section of the ruling class, the police have gone too far and curbs need to be put on their activities. Their main concern, however, is not for the wrongly-convicted prisoners, but that the police are discrediting themselves and the judicial system. Chief among the critics is Lord Scarman who says 'we simply cannot go on like this', and recommends the presence of an independent judicial officer

during police interrogation to guarantee the suspect's right to have a solicitor present.

The pressure on the police from these quarters is mounting, but only a year or two ago the idea that the Guildford Four would be released, or that there was a possibility of the case of the Tottenham Three being reopened, would have been considered wildly optimistic. In part, this is due to the emergence of serious political problems for the Thatcher government. 'Thatcherism' is losing its appeal amongst a wide layer of its former supporters – the middle class and better-off workers – and under fire from within the Tory party. The police force no longer enjoys the same degree of political cover given to it by the 'party of law and order' riding high in the opinion polls.

But it is no thanks to 'liberal' judges or Labour politicians that Melvin was disciplined or that the convictions against the Tottenham Three are coming under scrutiny. The families, friends and supporters of Winston Silcott, Engin Raghup and Mark Braithwaite have campaigned tirelessly for their release, and have broadened their fight to one against all police harassment of working class and ethnic minority communities.

As with every other case of the police framing innocent people, the Labour Party leaders remain silent until it becomes a 'popular' issue, that is, one which might win them a few votes. They are resolutely opposed to the working class taking the defence of its communities into its own hands – as was shown by their condemnation of the youth at Broadwater Farm, and their unreserved support for the police at the time.

The fight for the release of the Tottenham Three must be stepped up. Resolutions must be passed in trade union branches supporting the campaign by mobilising members for its lobbies and demonstrations, and giving financial assistance.

Two cheers for the fall of SDP

By Jon Bearman

ITS MISSION to replace the Labour Party a failure, Dr David Owen's Social Democratic Party was officially wound up at the beginning of June. In the unsightly scramble by right-wing reformist leaders to get back into government, the SDP has been outflanked by the 'new realism' of Kinnock and Hattersley.

The final decision to swing the axe was taken after the Bootle by-election where the SDP could muster only 155 votes, considerably less than the Monster Raving Loony Cavern Rock Party. Those old enough to remember Screaming Lord Sutch performing rock 'n' roll songs in a coffin will especially relish the sight of him trouncing the candidate from Dr Death's party with a creditable 418 votes.

The SDP was formed in 1981 by Owen, Shirley Williams, Bill Rodgers and Roy Jenkins. Little separated the 'Gang of Four' in the way of political outlook from those

they left behind – although they departed because the Labour Party had taken a 'left' turn with the election of Michael Foot to the leadership, and conference decisions to subject MPs to automatic reselection and give the unions a greater say in choosing the leadership. Most of the Labour leaders, however, had recoiled in horror at the so-called 'Winter of Discontent', and blamed working class militancy for alienating the middle class and ensuring Thatcher's victory in the 1979 general election. And alongside those who subsequently founded the SDP, a new generation of right-wingers was also being hatched inside the Labour Party. Owen and company thought they could shake off the stigma of 'old-fashioned class war' by splitting the Labour Party and stealing its vote. Today, it's Owen that most resembles a dinosaur.

But it would be wrong to

view the short history of the SDP as a non-event. From its founding, through the 1983 general election and beyond, on its own and as part of the Alliance, it was a factor in Labour's evolution to the right. Its impact was particularly felt at local government level, where it forced the pace at which Labour councils capitulated to the rate-capping legislation, and in its early acceptance of the Tory anti-

union laws which pushed the Labour leaders to take the same road.

The SDP's remaining 6,200 members are being approached by all the major parties. Labour, it turns out, has been quietly readmitting the former 'traitors' for some time. But what of Owen? Surely 'great principles' must still separate him from the Labour leaders? No special treatment, says Roy Hattersley, but 'I suspect that I would put my hand up to have him in'.

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Price rise protests deepen CPSU split

By Philip Marchant

AS PLANS for implementing the first stage of a so-called 'regulated market economy' in the Soviet Union were stalled after country-wide protests at the end of May, there was a sharp increase in tension between the 'reform' and 'hardline' sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The first draft of the economic changes, put forward last December, was criticised by 'radical' deputies to the Soviet 'parliament', the Supreme Soviet, as 'too cautious'. Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov announced the revised package on May 24. Bread would double in price from July 1; the rest of the year would be used to establish the legal framework for a 'regulated market economy' - to be operating by 1995. On January 1, the second stage would begin: price controls on a whole range of goods and services would be either wholly or partially removed leading to dramatic increases in the cost of food, fuel, electricity, fares, alcohol, tobacco and luxury goods.

The day before the announcement, Gorbachev cynically compared socialist revolution with capitalist restoration, telling deputies that market reforms were a development 'equal to the October Revolution'. In the event, the plan sparked the opposite kind of revolt to the one he'd hoped for, forcing him to drop the idea of putting the changes to referendum. A wave of panic buying and food hoarding swept the country, prompting the Moscow authorities to ban the sale of food to non-residents. Other areas quickly retaliated by refusing to send goods and produce to Moscow. In the Supreme Soviet, the Inter-Regional Group of 'radical' deputies talked of a vote of no confidence in the government though, of course, they had been amongst those who criticised the original plan as not going fast enough towards a market economy. But most ominously for Gorbachev, miners from the Soviet Union's largest coal mining region, the Donetsk basin in the Ukraine, threatened renewed strike action if the price rises went ahead.

On May 29, former Politburo member Boris Yeltsin was elected as president of the largest Soviet republic, the Russian Federation (RSFSR). His programme of 'market reforms' differs little from Gorbachev's, but in the light of the protests he began to stress the need for 'safeguards' against hardship, and promised an as yet unspecified 'alternative', less painful transition to capitalism for the RSFSR.

When the plan was debated in the Supreme Soviet in mid-June, deputies made a show of delaying a decision on the price rises until September, calling for consultation with the governments of the republics, but sent Ryzhkov away to make the scheme more palatable. At the same time, they empowered Gor-

bachev to pass a series of presidential decrees to implement the existing laws on limited private ownership and the leasing of land. He was also asked to initiate a full-scale privatisation programme by issuing immediate decrees legalising small businesses, restricting state monopolies, denationalising and decentralising ownership and setting up joint stock companies. Far from being concerned for workers facing massive price rises, the Supreme Soviet opted for a rapid acceleration of the programme of capitalist restoration.

As deputies were voting for this by 319 to 33, miners holding their first congress independently of the official trade unions, in Donetsk, were rejecting the government plan, saying they could not sustain any further drop in their living standards. At the end of the week-long congress, they voted by almost two to one for a resolution which declared 'we do not consider the Communist Party of the Soviet Union our party. We call for a mass exit from the party'. They also agreed to call a national strike on July 11 if the government did not resign, and laid plans for an independent miners' union.

By May 27, anger at the proposals had reached such a pitch that Gorbachev appealed for calm in a special television broadcast. If anything, it made things worse. Explaining the impact of the 'reforms', he referred, euphemistically, to unemployment. The change to a market economy, he said, would 'liberate the people for creative work, talent and initiative.' More bluntly, he

went on to say that some people would have to be 'released' from their jobs.

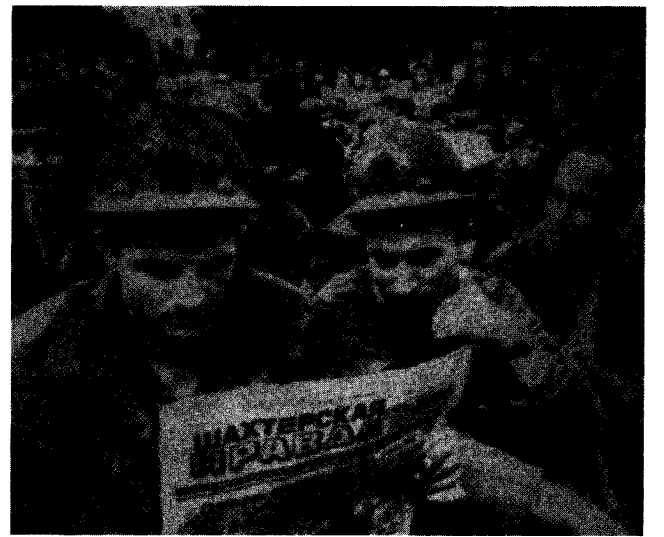
Whilst the number of national minorities in revolt against Moscow has continued to grow weekly, adding to his problems, it is the working class hostility to the assault on jobs and living standards posed by the market economy which has precipitated Gorbachev's current, and gravest, crisis. The effect on the Stalinists has been to produce a clearer demarcation between the two camps - on the one hand, 'hardliners' who see the retention of the bureaucratic 'command' economy as the route to preserving their privileges; on the other, the so-called 'radical reformers' who to a greater or lesser extent tie their future to the restoration of capitalism. Both groups have attempted to make the situation work to their own advantage.

However, confusion exists among miners on the role of Boris Yeltsin and other 'radicals'. Some Siberian miners are wary of strike action, saying it will make Yeltsin's job more difficult. In a television appearance two days before the congress opened, Yeltsin had specifically appealed to the miners to work normally to avoid further damage to the economy.

The 'hardliners', predominantly composed of party functionaries, government apparatchiks and army officers for whom the end of the party monopoly on power heralds the end of privilege, visibly gained confidence after the upsurge of opposition to the price rises. Though there is no indication that ordinary work-

ers are more inclined to support them than previously, any set-back to the introduction of 'market reforms' is seen as strengthening their position of retaining the nationalised economy. Their success in demanding, then dominating, the conference which re-established the Russian Federation Communist Party in June has provided them with a base to counter-attack the 'radicals'.

No section of the Stalinist bureaucracy, however, has the real interests of Soviet workers, peasants and national minorities at heart. As Gorbachev tries to hold the government together, the forthcoming 28th Congress of the CPSU promises only to deepen the divisions.



Soviet miners on strike last year

The role of Soviet troops

COMMENT

OVER THE two days May 28-29, during clashes with nationalists in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, Soviet troops killed over 20 people and wounded many more.

The battle began with the shooting of Armenians attempting to turn back a Soviet troop train. Barricades were erected throughout Yerevan, and soldiers exchanged fire with armed nationalists, 14 of the deaths occurring when Armenians tried to prevent a convoy of armed personnel carriers entering the city. General Yuri Shatalin, who flew in from Moscow to take charge of the situation, condemned the local Stalinist government for failing to suppress 'illegal armed groups', and promised 'resolute measures to disarm Armenian terrorists'.

These bloody events have close parallels with the storming of the Azeri capital of Baku by Soviet troops in January, even if on a smaller scale. They expose as bogus the claims of the Soviet bureaucracy that its intervention in Azerbaijan was in order to defend Armenians from Azeri pogroms.

As Workers News emphasised at the time, the Kremlin is the enemy of all the Soviet Union's national minorities. In Armenia itself, we stated that the government's loss of control to nationalist militias was 'not a situation which Moscow will allow to continue. The troops which are used today against the nationalist move-

ment in Azerbaijan can be used tomorrow against nationalists in Armenia'. The bloodshed in Yerevan has precisely confirmed this assessment.

Those on the British left who argued that Soviet troops could play a peace-keeping role in the region - for example, *Socialist Outlook*, which called for the maintenance of 'sufficient state forces to prevent further pogroms' - have been flatly contradicted by these developments. The Soviet bureaucracy's military intervention, whether in Armenia, Azerbaijan or Georgia, far from preventing inter-ethnic violence, is intended to crush the emerging national movement and reimpose Moscow's authority.

The reactionary and chauvinist elements in the leaderships of both the Azeri and Armenian national movements can only be combated by supporting demands for national self-determination, while directing the struggle against the main enemy - the bureaucracy itself. This cannot be achieved by giving support, 'critical' or otherwise, to the armed forces of this same bureaucracy, whose acts of brutal repression are an inevitable consequence of the Kremlin's policy on the national question. In this way, Azeri workers can be brought to see that opposition to the legitimate demands of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination is a diversion from the struggle against their common enemy.

We say:
 ■ Withdraw Soviet troops!
 ■ For independent soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan!

German radicals discuss reunification prospects

From Dieter
 Wilhelmi
 in Cologne

ABOUT 1,300 people met in Cologne at the beginning of June to discuss new perspectives for the West German left. They covered a political spectrum which stretched from radical ecologists who remain in the Green Party, through 'autonomists', anarchists and feminists, to a variety of socialists, among them Trotskyists and disillusioned Stalinists. All the participants have been engaged, to a greater or lesser extent, in the opposition to the current German nationalist frenzy. All have rejected the annexation of East Germany by West German imperialism, and have declared their intention of continuing their political resistance.

The debate, however, centred around real and imagined dangers of the spectre of a 'Fourth Reich'. The latest wave of xenophobia, racism and fascism in both German states has given fresh impetus to this discussion. Contributions revealed that many German radicals are far from having a clear analysis and

understanding of fascism. Instead of explaining ideological trends as a product of the present social conditions - and recognising the need, first and foremost, to fight to change these conditions - they claim that it is the 'aggressive national character' of Germans which lies at the root of fascism. These forces therefore tend to replace a clear class struggle policy with pessimistic moral appeals which ignore the material basis of fascist ideology.

The debate on the collapse of Stalinism disclosed that a growing section of the German left is shedding its illusions in Gorbachev and *perestroika*. Gorbachevism is now being identified more and more with capitalist restoration. However, the exclusion from the agenda of the most urgent subject for discussion - the attitude the left should take towards the Stalinists of the former ruling SED party in East Germany - shows that the changing perception of Gorbachev does not signal any real advance towards a correct analysis of Stalinism by the majority of the participants. The SED, now called the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), is currently exploring

the West German political scene to prepare its expansion in view of the coming all-German elections.

This omission had been criticised in advance in a joint leaflet put out by *Sozialistischer Umbruch* and *Maulwurf*: 'The radical left is in danger of not meeting the challenges of tomorrow. We have to mention especially the question of collaboration with oppositionists in the GDR and, in this context, the question of the character and the politics of the PDS, which cannot be by-passed if there are to be all-German elections.'

The collapse of Stalinism has led to deep changes in the West German left. The Communist Party had already lost a pro-Gorbachev opposition by the time the Berlin Wall came down in late 1989. Since then, the fall of the SED/PDS in East Germany has deprived the West German CP of its financial backing and the membership has become even more disoriented. At the same time, the apparent triumph of capitalism over 'socialism' has accelerated the rightward movement of the Green Party, and consequently has completed the marginalisation of its left wing. As for the

German Social-Democracy, the SPD made itself the front-runner of imperialist expansion into Eastern Europe - without any visible inner-party opposition.

The transformation of the SED into the PDS and its professed adherence to 'democratic socialism' has now placed the question of the nature of Stalinism centre-stage. *Sozialistischer Umbruch* and *Maulwurf* stressed that this 'turn' to open advocacy of capitalism is the necessary outcome of Stalinism, and not its antithesis. Centrist elements on the West German left - those who vacillate between reformism and revolution - believe that the PDS can eventually be reformed into an authentic socialist party.

The conference agreed to organise more discussions and to mobilise for a national demonstration in November against the capitalist reunification of Germany. Despite their numerical weakness, German Trotskyists will intervene in these events to fight for political clarification, particularly on the role of Stalinism, and to polarise the 'Radical Left' in order to regroup its best elements.

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Statement by the Workers News Editorial Board

May 30, 1990

ONE YEAR after the slaughter of students and workers in Tiananmen Square, the rule of the Chinese Communist Party remains far from secure. This bloody act, committed in full view of the international working class, has, more than any other, assured the ultimate downfall of Stalinism in China. The names of Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping will be forever bracketed by all honest workers and socialists with those of Nicolae Ceausescu and their political godfather, Joseph Stalin.

Terrified by every manifestation of opposition, and riven internally by Byzantine intrigue, the bureaucracy balances precariously on top of an ever-growing series of contradictions which threatens to explode once more. From wholesale terror to the release of detainees; from harsh austerity to concessions in the face of workers' demands; from denunciations of 'bourgeois liberalisation' in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to the frantic search for 'socialist' friends; from the ditching of the 'reform' programme to the reassertion of 'central planning' and back again. Each new zig-zag corresponds to the bureaucracy's desperate attempts to find a basis upon which to stabilise its rule.

THE ECONOMY

In his report to the National People's Congress in March this year, Finance Minister Wang Bingqian described the position of China's economy as 'grim' and 'grave', and bemoaned the extent of budget expenditure on subsidies. For once, the opaque language of the bureaucracy hinted at the real situation. Industrial growth for 1989 was the lowest for any year since 1976 – the year of Mao's death and investment fell by 20 per cent in real terms. Inflation for the year stood at 20 per cent, while the Renminbi was devalued by 21.2 per cent in December 1989 in an effort to bridge the trade deficit. The budget deficit stood at Rmb 9.53 billion.

The true extent of the crisis, however, is even deeper. In January it was estimated that 15-20 million workers in state and urban enterprises had been laid off (11-15 per cent of the total workforce in the state sector). Up to one in five factories remained idle in 1989. In addition, three million rural and village enterprises – one sixth of the total number – closed down or merged with other enterprises, leaving 8-9 million rural factory employees redundant. In the first nine months of 1989, 18,000 construction projects were cancelled. Industrial output fell most sharply in the four months after the Tiananmen Square events – a clear indication of continuing opposition by the working class.

By drastic measures – control of the money supply, controls on credit and wage-cuts – borrowed from the textbooks of capitalist 'monetarism', inflation has been temporarily controlled and the trade deficit reduced.

But no sooner were the deflationary effects of these policies registered, than the resistance of the working class forced a partial retreat by the bureaucracy. In October and November 1989, bonus payments to workers at the giant Capital Iron and steel works in the Beijing suburb of Shijingshan were withdrawn on the pretext that production quotas had not been achieved. Attempts to extend such measures to other state-owned plants were resisted, and the government was also forced to pay laid-off workers their full basic rate. Demonstrations opposing wage cuts took place in Wuhan, Chengchu, Tianjin and other industrial cities, while workers petitioned for the right to demonstrate in Chungqing, Nanjing and Shanghai.

In the face of the reviving working class militancy, the bureaucracy drew back from an all-out assault on living standards, and was forced to underwrite huge losses in state enterprises by injecting a massive Rmb 100 billion in the last quarter of 1989. By 'loaning' state enterprises the necessary funds to pay back taxes and 'profit' quotas, the bureaucracy has staved off a social explosion in the short term, at the expense of fuelling a larger one in the future. State enterprises are in effect saddled with a larger debt burden, and the official budget deficit of Rmb 9.53

billion represents only the tip of the iceberg.

Such expedients and short-cuts in no way represent a return to 'Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy' as has been claimed by leading 'China watchers'. In fact, this thrashing around, oscillating between 'centralised planning' and 'reform', reflects the twin pressures of imperialism and the working class. Moreover, in bailing out the state sector, the bureaucracy has not abandoned 'reform' – that is, the ever greater weight of the market in determining production. Instead it has, by a reflex action, sought to shore up the source of its own privileges, whilst preparing to resume the process of privatisation under conditions more favourable to itself.

The Chinese bureaucracy cannot contemplate the restoration of capitalism at a single blow without risking its own extinction as a parasitic caste. Like its Soviet counterpart, it requires a period of 'peaceful' evolution (albeit based on brutal coercion) through the medium of the 'market' economy, in which its privileges can be converted into a private stake in the means of production. The differences within the Stalinist leadership, no matter how sharp they become, are tactical, and centre on the tempo at which this strategy should be pursued.

No discernable differences exist on the 'open door' policy to foreign capitalist investment, which remains in full force. The Amended Joint Venture Law passed by the National People's Congress in April 1990 contains further concessions to imperialism. These include a pledge not to nationalise joint ventures; provision to appoint a non-Chinese chairman of the board of such projects; and the extension of the duration of joint enterprises from a maximum of 30 years to 50 years or more. The Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, Zheng Tuobin, told the NPC that the amended law demonstrated China's 'commitment to its open door policy'. In addition, overseas banking operations have increased, and have begun to deal in stocks of foreign-owned enterprises and in the sale of smaller state enterprises to foreign capitalists.

Only a revision – and a reassertion – of planned economy from top to bottom can prevent the continued dismemberment of the Chinese workers' state. This in turn is impossible without the creation of a real workers' democracy. Without the initiative of the working class at the centre of planning and decision making, the regime of bureaucratic incompetence, mismanagement, graft and corruption can only serve to discredit the concept of nationalised property and planning itself. The low productivity and obsolescence of the state sector under Stalinism reinforces the belief of those petty-bourgeois elements who think that capitalism could at least do no worse. The necessity of defending nationalised property does not in any way imply a 'defence' of the existing management of state enterprises. On the contrary, it requires, above all, the fight for workers' control of production.

THE PARTY AND THE ARMY

Every faction struggle within the bureaucracy is at root an expression of the contradictory pressures bearing down upon it. The dismissal and arrest of Zhao Ziyang and the promotion of Li Peng in the aftermath of the massacre represented the temporary victory of the elements closest to the old guard of both party and army over the younger 'technocrats'. Li Peng, however, represents not so much a policy as a mailed fist. This arch-mediocrity, whose sole credential for power is that he is Zhou Enlai's stepson, lacks the slightest political independence. He cannot be anything other than a transitional figure, and rumours have already suggested that he will be demoted. Zhao Ziyang's replacement as General Secretary, Jiang Zemin, who took over as chairman of the Central Military Commission in November 1989, earned his position by virtue of his role in suppressing the workers' and students' movement in Shanghai – the centre of worker militancy in April and May 1989.

One year since the Tiananmen Square massacre

The decision to halt the purge within the party and the People's Liberation Army indicates the fear that the masses will seize the opportunity of open divisions. Zhao and other 'reformers' have not been executed, as sections of the old guard initially demanded, but are being held in reserve, whether in prison or under close surveillance, as a second team which can be brought on should the need arise.

The official campaign against corruption is designed to act as a safety valve. Corruption is on such a vast scale that the main focus of the campaign has been to offer lenient terms to bureaucrats who admit embezzling over 10,000 yuan! According to the Beijing Review, 10,000 officials took advantage of the offer. Government sources state that 101.97 million yuan worth of 'illicit money and spoils' were recovered – a figure which underlines that the total extent of bureaucratic corruption must be astronomical.

The bloody close to the Beijing Spring revealed deep divisions within the PLA, with two military regions refusing to advance on Tiananmen Square, and reports of soldiers refusing to fire, fraternising with the crowds, throwing down their weapons and marching back to barracks. The armed might of the PLA is the sole guarantor of Stalinist rule. It was to the 80-year-old veterans of the Long March – not the regional party bosses – that Deng Xiaoping turned in the first instance to organise the massacre of June 3-4. By now halting further trials within the army, the intention is to rebuild a semblance of unity within the military command in time for the next wave of discontent. A further indication of this policy was the 15.2 per cent increase in military spending agreed by the National People's Congress in March. In an otherwise 'tight' budget, the army was the only sector of the state and economic apparatus allowed to increase its spending in real terms.

In addition, or rather in parallel, to the divisions which emerged last June, tensions exist between two rival schools of military thinking. On the one hand, younger military 'technocrats', mainly based in the south, favour the transition to a more modern professional army, with close links established with a modern weapons industry geared to the international arms market. On the other, the PLA veterans favour the traditional mass conscript army, whose strength lies in weight of numbers, and whose peasant base reflects their innate fear of the urban masses.

Splits also appeared in the People's Armed Police in June 1989. Earlier this year the PAP was reorganised with senior military commanders drafted in to head PAP units and improve their 'efficiency'.

One paramount lesson must be learnt from the events of last June – that in order to defeat the bureaucracy it is necessary to split the army. Agitation and propaganda among rank-and-file soldiers must become a central task of the political revolution. This must extend beyond fraternisation with ordinary soldiers and the neutralisation of sections of the army, and include the struggle for soldiers' committees (soviets) and for a thoroughgoing democratisation of the army, including the election of all officers.

FOREIGN POLICY

In the sphere of foreign policy, in an effort to break out of its isolation, the bureaucracy has revived relations with other Stalinist states, and wooed a number of the most viciously anti-



Beijing university students demonstrating on April 27, 1989

working class regimes in the Middle and Far East. Li Peng visited Moscow in April, and Gorbachev announced that he 'hailed the headway made in every area of relations with China'. The Chinese leadership has also declared its intention of 'normalising' relations with Vietnam, and has reduced its support to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Diplomatic links with Mongolia have been stepped up. Clearly none of their fellow Stalinists has objections to shaking hands with the butchers of Beijing, despite protestations of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

Thailand, Burma and Indonesia have all had overtures from China, the visit by senior Chinese officials to Indonesia taking place shortly after Indonesian Communist Party leaders imprisoned for over 20 years had been taken out of jail and shot. The Kuomintang government of Taiwan has indicated its readiness to break with tradition and have government to government talks, and has stepped up trade between Taiwan and the main-

land.

In the Middle East, China has concluded a series of weapons deals with Israel, Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Finally, US President Bush has renewed China's Most Favoured Nation trading status, while vetoing legislation aimed at granting limited protection to Chinese students in America. The solidarity shown to the government of Li Peng in the aftermath of Tiananmen Square by this motley assortment of Stalinists, reactionary nationalists and imperialists is no mystery. All share a common dread of a new upsurge of political revolution in China, with the inevitable effects it would have on the rest of Asia.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The struggles of minority peoples who mainly live in the most remote and poorest regions of the People's Republic, will continue to play a

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ing to the stand of bourgeois liberalisation and a handful of separatists [who] have not taken their defeat lying down, but are still co-ordinating with foreign anti-Chinese and anti-Communist forces and carrying out acts of separatism and sabotage'. Army detachments, drawn from areas far from the interior, have been incited to act against the 'scum of the Chinese nation' and the 'counter-revolutionary rebellion'.

The affinities of the Turkic-speaking peoples lie naturally with their compatriots, who live along the southern border of the USSR as far as Turkey. The struggle of the Uygurs has a long and bitter history. Nationalists claim that between 1950 and 1972, 360,000 Uygurs were killed by government forces. Discontent erupted in 1981, 1985 and again in 1988.

The population of Inner Mongolia cannot but be affected by the crisis in the Mongolian People's Republic, where the leading role of the Stalinist party has been abandoned.

The working class of China must undertake the defence of the national minorities. It must oppose every expression of Greater Chinese 'patriotism' invoked by the bureaucracy against them, and uphold their rights to self-determination, including the right to secede from the People's Republic and establish independent workers' (soviet) republics.

THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT AND THE POLITICAL PROSPECTS

The democracy movement continues to exist despite the executions and mass arrests of the past year, and the straitjacketing of every aspect of political and cultural life. Events in Eastern Europe have not only terrified China's rulers; they have given renewed impetus to the opposition. In December 1989, students appeared with banners outside the Ministry of Radio and Television in Beijing. One of the banners asked 'Why is China so poor?'. State Council spokesman Yuan Mu was hissed at Beijing University when he attempted to outline government policy.

Students celebrated the fall of Ceausescu in Romania on their campuses. The bureaucracy was so nervous that it put one third of the People's Liberation Army on alert. Another regular event in student opposition circles has been the organisation of collective 'strolls' around university campuses. Students also meet to discuss politics - in English! - in Beijing's English Garden. On the anniversary of the death of Hu Yaobang, whose funeral last April sparked the democracy protests, troops occupied Tiananmen Square.

It is a measure of the bureaucracy's political senility that its remedy for student discontent is interminable study classes in which the works of such great thinkers as Deng Xiaoping are learnt by rote! This shows as much imagination as the recommendation of the Central Committee Plenum in March that cadres must 'frequently go down to grass roots units and agitate and organise the masses'. This might be possible if the 'cadres' were not terrified of the masses, and were not actively engaged in ripping them off on a grand scale.

Despite the freeing of 573 detainees in January, and a further 211 in May, thousands more of those arrested during the military crack-down remain in jail without being charged or brought to trial. According to the Christian human rights organisation Asia Watch, between 10,000 and 30,000 people were imprisoned in 1989, the majority of them workers. In April, the Chinese government admitted for the first time that prisoners had been tortured and that some had died in custody. More than 490 cases of death or serious injury during the extorting of 'confessions' came to light in the first quarter of 1990.

The movement for 'democracy' has begun to revive since the defeat of June 1989. No significant room for manoeuvre exists for the bureaucracy to buy off the student movement since the economic situation has sharply deteriorated. A movement on the scale of last year will undoubtedly re-emerge. For the Stalinist leaders, the writing is on the wall. Only a renewed reign of terror could save the situation for them. But it would carry the danger of a revolt within the ranks of the army,

which until now has remained the sole guarantor of Communist Party rule.

One year ago, we wrote: 'Despite their audacity, students cannot carry out the overthrow of the bureaucracy unaided. "Democracy" cannot hang in mid-air. It must be filled with a social content: either workers' or bourgeois democracy. The demand for "democracy" raised by the students can lead down either path - reform of the bureaucracy by the removal of its most hated and corrupt figures will not change the essential nature of Stalinism.' This remains true today.

The boldest and most advanced elements amongst the students must find their way to the working class. Gandhian-style passive resistance will not defeat the tanks of the PLA! What can be mass strike action based on the development

of independent workers' unions, factory committees and workers' councils, coupled with the building of a militia organising both workers and students.

Every effort must be made to build bases of support among the poorer sections of the peasantry by assisting the development of peasant committees which must seize and divide up the land and assets of the nouveaux riches, the speculators and the hoarders.

Such tasks unavoidably pose the destruction of the bureaucracy root and branch, and the defence of the nationalised property relations through the successful carrying out of the political revolution. Only a Trotskyist party can fulfil the aspirations of the masses of China.

May 30, 1990

CORRESPONDENCE

Restoration impossible?

Dear Comrades,

There is a tendency to believe or fantasise about the possibility of a restoration of capitalism in half the planet. Historical experience has shown that the French revolution led to the abolition of feudalism, the Russian revolution to the abolition of capitalism. The restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, and likewise the domination of Stalinism, did not lead to a return of previous forms of property relations. History marches forwards, not backwards.

The fact that tendencies exist inside the bureaucracy which for years accumulated hidden privileges, and would like now an open and unceasing enrichment modelled on the bourgeoisie, does not imply this is possible. In order to restore capitalism they would require a social force which would defend them with arms so as to impose their desires. But such a force they lack, as a bourgeoisie rooted inside private property as a class does not exist. Bourgeois views without the existence of a bourgeois class is like a car without an engine. It goes nowhere.

Private companies in the East cannot function profitably inside economies which are wholly nationalised. A state-owned economy cannot be privatised, first of all because the capital does not exist which could buy back whole countries. The bureaucracy is also faced with the following dilemma: from whom, for how much and in what currency will the factories be sold? But most significantly, the working class itself will oppose with arms attempts at wholesale privatisations.

On the basis of today's property relations, the only democracy which is possible is workers' democracy and the plurality of working class organisations: parties, trade unions, soviets, with differences on the methods of building an authentic and advanced socialist society. Capitalism cannot offer a solution for the East as it is in terminal crisis as well.

V.N. Gelis
May 16, 1990

■ **Workers News replies:** Had Comrade Gelis's letter been written before the events of last autumn, it might have been possible to assume that he underestimated the danger of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China.

Today, with the daily evidence of the trajectory of Stalinism, we have to say: 'You must be kidding!' The new laws on property in the USSR, the election of restorationist governments in Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Romania and now Czechoslovakia, the auctioning of nationalised assets across Eastern Europe - all testify to the tide of restorationism. To maintain under such conditions that the October Revolution and the post-war overthrows of capitalism are 'irreversible' - when the imperialists, the Stalinists and the masses clearly think otherwise - is to succumb to a form of fatalistic 'optimism' which can only disarm the working class.

In terms of method and programme, Comrade Gelis has nothing in common with Trotsky, who foresaw possibilities of capitalist restoration 60 years ago. It would be futile to search Trotsky's writ-

ings for a blueprint for the present situation. However, in his 1933 article 'The Class Nature of the Soviet State', Trotsky's prognosis stands closer to current reality than does Comrade Gelis: 'The workers, having lost control over the state and economy, may resort to mass strikes, as weapons of self-defence. The discipline of the dictatorship would be broken. Under the onslaught of the workers and because of the pressure of economic difficulties the trusts would be forced to disrupt the planned beginnings and enter into competition with one another. The dissolution of the regime would naturally find its violent and chaotic echo in the village, and would inevitably be thrown over into the army. The socialist state would collapse giving place to the capitalist regime, or, more correctly, to capitalist chaos.'

The absence of a developed bourgeois class in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union undoubtedly creates obstacles for the reintroduction of capitalism. However, contrary to what Comrade Gelis thinks, with the exception of Albania and North Korea, there is no Stalinist state in which property is 'wholly nationalised'. In countries such as Yugoslavia and Hungary there is already a 'flourishing' private sector. Private agriculture can also underpin the emergence of a capitalist class. In general, no 'Chinese Wall' exists between a petty-bourgeoisie and a fully-fledged bourgeoisie. Additionally, no adequate audit exists of the extent of private savings. Under the stick of inflation and the carrot of investment opportunities, these will be converted into capital.

Nor are we of the opinion that Western business is suffering from a collective delusion in its belief that profits can be made in Eastern Europe. If capitalism finds a readier return in Eastern Europe than, say, in South America, it will switch its investments. The problem for capitalism today is not the under-production of capital, but its over-production and inability to find a secure source of profit.

Comrade Gelis tells us that 'history marches forwards, not backwards'. On the timescale of millenia, yes. In the meantime, however, history has also encompassed breaks in continuity, reversals of all sorts, periods of black reaction. History, we remind him, walks, as Marx said, on two legs. Without a working class political leadership capable of meeting the tasks of the hour, there are no citadels capitalism cannot capture. Today, the fractured Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe no longer defend the nationalised property 'in their own [i.e., Stalinist] way'. They are marching arm-in-arm with the restorationists. Trotsky was firmly of the opinion that without the construction of a party of the Fourth International in the USSR, restoration was ultimately inevitable.

Comrade Gelis does not tell us what political conclusions he draws from his position. In our view, it can only lead to passive contemplation of the situation. The task of revolutionaries lies above all in mobilising the working class in defence of its gains (along the lines proposed by the Draft Programme of Action for East Germany published in the last edition of Workers News). This in turn demands the building of Trotskyist parties to fight for political revolution. The alternative is to end up like Mike Banda, who declared (in 1988!) that the October Revolution was 'irreversible', or like Ernest Mandel, who stated in December 1989 that restoration was 'completely impossible' in the short-term - and Mandel considers the 'short-term' to be anything less than two decades.

Death of an agent

Mark Zborowski:
An obituary by
Barry Buitekant

ONE OF Stalin's key agents in the Trotskyist movement died on April 30 in San Francisco, aged 82.

Mark Zborowski ('Etienne') was born in Russia in 1908. In the 1920s he went to France where he studied medicine. There he was recruited by the NKVD to spy. He joined the Trotskyist movement, and by 1936 had gained the confidence of Leon Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, and was working in the Paris office of the Left Opposition in an important position. His duties included working on the *Bulletin of the Opposition*. Here he provided information to the NKVD that led to the stealing of Trotsky's Russian archives from the International Institute of Social History in November 1936.

In 1937, it seems Zborowski was involved in setting up the NKVD defector Ignace Reiss for murder. Reiss was murdered because of his defection to the side of Trotsky. Reiss was a close associate of Theodore Maly, the reputed recruiter of Kim Philby and Anthony Blunt to the Soviets. Zborowski is also suspected of providing information to the NKVD in 1937 that allowed them to pursue another high-level NKVD defector, Walter Krivitsky. Although Krivitsky made it safely to the United States he was probably 'suicided' in 1941.

In 1938, Leon Sedov was taken ill with abdominal pains and rushed to hospital. Here he was operated on but died soon after. Immediately, suspicion was raised that the Stalinists had been involved with his death. This has never been proved. However, in 1956 Zborowski admitted to a United States judicial sub-committee that he had 'probably' told the NKVD which hospital Leon Sedov was in. Given the hatred of Stalin for Trotsky and his family, it is quite likely that Leon Sedov was either poisoned or 'assisted' to die.

Also in 1938, Zborowski was probably involved in providing information to the NKVD that led to the murder in Paris of the Trotskyist Rudolf Klement shortly before the founding conference of the Fourth International.

Zborowski fell under suspicion as an NKVD agent (particularly by Henricus Sneevliet and Pierre Naville). At the end of 1938, in an anonymous letter from the NKVD defector Alexander Orlov to Trotsky, a person named 'Mark' who had helped Leon Sedov to edit the *Bulletin of the Opposition* was identified as an NKVD agent. However, as the letter was suspected of being an NKVD provocation, Zborowski continued his spying activities unhindered.

In 1941, Zborowski fled Europe for the United States and pursued his spying activities with (amongst others) Jack Soble, who as Senin had been a Stalinist agent in the German Trotskyist movement in the early 1930s. Zborowski's spying continued for several more years but its extent is not yet clear.

In 1955, Zborowski's cover was finally broken publicly by Henry Kason in *New Republic*. This followed secret testimony given earlier in the year by Alexander Orlov before a US Senate Sub-committee on Internal Security investigating Soviet spy activity in the United States. Later, Zborowski was forced to testify before this sub-committee. In 1958 he was charged with perjury - for lying to the FBI in 1955. He was found guilty and eventually served several years in prison. He worked in the medical field and was the author of several books, including one on the infliction of pain(!).

Zborowski's death leaves unresolved several questions: for instance, at the founding of the Fourth International in Paris in 1938, was he involved in arranging the association of Trotsky's murderer, Ramon Mercader, with Trotsky's follower Sylvia Ageloff? Much work remains to be done.

An assessment of the political career of the former WRP leader by Bob Pitt

PART FOUR

'IF ONE were to undertake to write the real history of British Trotskyism,' James P. Cannon wrote to Gerry Healy in 1953, 'he would have to set the starting point as the day and the date on which your group finally tore itself loose from the Haston regime and started its own independent work. What happened before that is nothing but a series of squandered opportunities, material for the pre-history of British Trotskyism.'¹ This statement combined illusions in Healy, subjective hostility to the Revolutionary Communist Party leaders and ignorance of British Trotskyist history in about equal proportions; but it accurately conveyed the attitude of the Fourth International's leadership to the movement in Britain. Unable to tolerate the independent political judgement exercised by the RCP, this leadership had found in Healy an unthinking mouthpiece for its political line. By imposing a split on the British Trotskyists in 1947, the International Secretariat hoped to shunt the recalcitrant RCP majority aside and establish the Healy-led minority as the de facto official section.

It was under the political direction of the IS that Healy's anonymous group – secretly known as the 'Club' – began its work inside the Labour Party. The object of this work, FI secretary Michel Pablo confidently asserted, was to win over 'whole sections of the workers in the Labour Party and in the trade unions affiliated with it to revolutionary action'.² Yet there is no evidence that prior to entry either Healy or Pablo had made a serious study of the political situation in the British labour movement. Had they done so they would have found that, although an amorphous left wing did exist in the Labour Party, it was by no means the type of centrist formation, breaking with reformism and developing in a revolutionary direction, the emergence of which had led Trotsky to advocate total entry into social democratic parties in the 1930s. This Labour left did not dispute the right wing's view that the 1945 Labour government had commenced the construction of socialism, but objected only that the Attlee administration had not proceeded fast or far enough – an outlook which was summarised in the slogan 'More socialism, not less'. In 1947, even the most militant of the Labour Party rank and file was convinced that a socialist society was to be achieved, not by revolutionary action, but

through parliamentary legislation.³

In practice, the entrism strategy pursued by Healy and Pablo involved abandoning any fight for revolutionary politics in favour of liquidation into this left-reformist milieu. Thus the first issue of *Socialist Outlook*, the paper launched by Healy's Club in December 1948, carried a front page editorial headed 'Back to Socialism',⁴ uncritically echoing the illusion among Labour left-wingers that, with the retreat from further social reform announced by Herbert Morrison at the 1948 party conference, the Labour bureaucracy had reneged on its 'socialist principles'. Healy himself informed the readers of *Socialist Outlook* that in order to win the 1950 general election the Labour Party would have to 'adopt a full socialist programme today. Dilly-dallying around with reforms and capitalist patchwork will be disastrous'.⁵ But nowhere did Healy suggest that the necessary first step in the transition to socialism was the establishment of independent organs of workers' power and the overthrow of the bourgeois state. As Jock Haston pointed out, such views were restricted to the Club's internal discussions: 'Publicly in the paper it is argued, not by right or left wing Labour Party members but by Trotskyists, that the Labour Party is a socialist party . . . and that this party can transform society through parliament'.⁶

In contrast to his stated intention to 'Build the revolutionary opposition within the Labour Party, on the basis of a real socialist programme',⁷ Healy in fact dedicated himself to organising an undefined 'left wing' around a social democratic platform. His chosen vehicle for this was the Socialist Fellowship, which was launched at a Labour Party conference fringe meeting in June 1949. Announcing this venture in *Reynolds News*, Ellis Smith MP, a leading contributor to *Socialist Outlook*, explained that the aim of the Fellowship's founders was to resurrect the 'crusading spirit' of the Labour Party pioneers. 'We shall encourage comradeship and fellowship wherever we go . . .', he wrote. 'We shall sing songs again and mean them – the great Socialist songs'.⁸ Such vacuous sentiments attracted other left MPs like Fenner Brockway and Bessie Braddock into the Socialist Fellowship, and Healy happily engaged in joint political work with them – not on immediate

practical issues, as would have been permissible, but on the basis of a common reformist programme.

If political liquidation into social democracy was the main feature of Healy's work in the Labour Party, a prominent sub-theme was his adaptation to Stalinism. In this Healy expressed, in a characteristically crude manner, the failure of the Fourth International to deal with the political problems posed by Stalinism's post-war expansion. Having followed the FI leaders in denying the reality of the social overturns in Eastern Europe, Healy enthusiastically implemented the International's opportunist turn towards Tito after the Soviet-Yugoslav split in June 1948. Although only two months earlier at the FI's Second World Congress it had been characterised as still capitalist, Yugoslavia was now hailed as a workers' state, and a basically healthy one at that. From then on Healy uttered not a word against Tito, the butcher of the Belgrade Trotskyists, while a letter from Millie Lee criticising the Yugoslav Communist Party was refused publication in *Socialist Outlook*.⁹



RCP May Day demonstration, 1946

In 1950, Healy organised a youth brigade to visit Yugoslavia which came back spouting eulogies to the YCP's success in building socialism in one country, dismissing as 'groundless' allegations that political repression existed under the Stalinist regime there.¹⁰ Alas for Healy, the brigade's return coincided with the Yugoslav government's declaration of support for the United Nations in the Korean War, a development which left Healy and his supporters floundering. Mike Banda described Yugoslav Foreign Minister Kardelj's speech to the UN as 'regrettable' and appealed to this Stalinist bureaucrat to observe 'the moral principles of Truth and Justice'.¹¹ Even in the Club's internal bulletin, Healy could do no more than criticise the Yugoslav decision as 'opportunist' – and in any case subordinate to 'progressive developments' in a YCP which had 'broken with Stalinism' and was 'returning in many respects to Bolshevik practice'.¹²

As part of his strategy to 'build the left wing' in the Labour Party, Healy had cultivated Communist Party sym-

pathisers like Jack Stanley of the Constructional Engineering Union, Jim Figgins of the NUR, and the MPs Tom Braddock and S.O. Davies. He maintained this relationship only by making unprincipled concessions to their views in *Socialist Outlook*. 'On the plea that it will drive these fellow travellers away from the paper if they criticise Stalinism,' Haston wrote bitterly of the Healyites, 'they refuse to tackle Stalinism sharply in any aspect of its policy'.¹³ So although Healy correctly defended the North in the Korean War, he remained silent on the Stalinist character of the regime, while the Chinese Communist Party received uncritical acclaim in *Socialist Outlook*. Even the Soviet bureaucracy was treated tenderly, Stalin's support for anti-imperialist movements being described editorially as 'neither as consistent nor as socialist as we would like it to be'.¹⁴ It was only after this scandalous position had opened Healy to attack inside the Trotskyist movement¹⁵ that factional considerations forced him to take a clear stand against Soviet Stalinism.¹⁶

scarcely be trained as revolutionary Marxists.¹⁸

In the adverse political conditions of the late 1940s, the RCP too had stagnated. Realistically, its task was now reduced to that of maintaining a 'semi-agitational propaganda group' in order to take advantage of future political opportunities, as a group of rank-and-file RCPers correctly argued.¹⁹ But Haston, demoralised by the failure to build a mass party, began to argue for entry into the Labour Party on a political basis no less liquidationist than Healy's, a proposal which received the opportunist backing of Grant who, though unconvinced by Haston's arguments, was unwilling to face the break-up of the RCP's leading team. In July 1949, the RCP formally dissolved itself, and its members joined the Labour Party. There, by the edict of the IS, they were placed under the leadership of Healy, on the absurd grounds that his utterly false political perspectives had been proved correct. However, the former members of the RCP majority far outnumbered Healy's 80 or so supporters, and would certainly have deposed him at the Club's 1950

transferred from his own branch into one led by Healy loyalist Bill Hunter, was ordered to get a job in a factory, and when he refused this instruction to become an industrial militant – a proposal which suggests that Healy was not without a certain warped sense of humour – he too was thrown out.²³ In reaction to the pro-Stalinist line of Healy and the IS, the state capitalist position of Tony Cliff had won a growing number of adherents in the Club; but Healy, incapable of answering this faction theoretically, resorted to organisational suppression as a substitute for political argument, and the Cliffites were also expelled.

'You cannot remove people and defeat their ideas by bureaucratic expulsion,' Healy had told the 1949 Labour Party conference. The truth of this statement was to be demonstrated by the fact that in later years both Grant and Cliff built large centrist groupings which complemented Healy's own efforts in politically misleading tens of thousands of genuine militants. In 1950, however, Healy's victory appeared to be complete. He had succeeded in smashing up what was left of the RCP, driving the overwhelming majority of its members out of the Fourth International and establishing his own exclusive domination over what now passed for Trotskyism in Britain.

To be continued

NOTES

1. C. Slaughter, ed: 'Trotskyism Versus Revisionism', Vol. 1, New Park, 1974, p.262.
2. S. Bornstein and A. Richardson: 'War and the International', Socialist Platform, 1986, p.194.
3. For a useful account of the Labour left in this period, see D.E. Martin and D. Rubinstein, eds: 'Ideology and the Labour Movement', Croom Helm, 1979, pp.226-57.
4. Bornstein and Richardson, op. cit., p.210.
5. *Socialist Outlook*, June 1949.
6. J. Haston, letter to the Club, June 10, 1950.
7. RCP internal bulletin, August 1947.
8. *Reynolds News*, May 22, 1949.
9. Haston, op. cit.
10. *Socialist Outlook*, October 1950; Bornstein and Richardson, op. cit., p.212.
11. *Socialist Outlook*, October 1950; Healy later claimed that, at a reception for the returning youth brigade given by the Yugoslav Embassy in London, he instructed the Club's members to criticise Kardelj (Slaughter, op. cit., p.145). If Banda's article is anything to go by, the criticism must have been extremely mild.
12. *Marxist Review*, n.d., but early 1951 from internal evidence.
13. Haston, op. cit.
14. *Socialist Outlook*, August 1950.
15. Anon. (E. Grant), Letter to the BSFI, n.d., but 1950 from internal evidence.
16. *Socialist Outlook*, November 1950.
17. Labour Party Conference Reports: 1948, pp.137, 200-1; 1949, p.162; 1950, pp.81-2.
18. Cf. R. Kuper, ed: 'The Fourth International, Stalinism and the Origins of the International Socialists', Pluto, 1971, pp.97-8.
19. RCP internal bulletin, February 14, 1949. The Open Party Faction, as this group was known, argued that the RCP should do fraction work in the Labour Party but concentrate on intervention in the trade unions, combining this with an emphasis on theoretical clarification and political education of the membership.
20. Labour Party Conference Report, 1949, p.121. Healy was opposing the expulsion of Stalinist fellow travellers Zilliacus and Solley.
21. E. Grant: 'History of British Trotskyism'. Transcript courtesy of Socialist Platform.
22. Bornstein and Richardson, op. cit., p.231.
23. Grant: 'History of British Trotskyism'.



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In defence of the theory of permanent revolution

PART 17

By Richard Price

THE FINAL phase of the second Chinese revolution, from Chiang Kai-shek's Shanghai coup in April 1927 to the ignominious defeat of the Canton Commune in December of the same year, also marked the decisive period of public struggle of the Opposition within the Soviet Union against Stalin. An important component of this struggle was the policy of the Comintern in China, and it was to lead to Trotsky's major restatement and development of the theory of permanent revolution.

The formation in April 1926 of the United Opposition brought together the Trotskyist Left Opposition of 1923 with the supporters of Zinoviev and Kamenev, whose alliance with the Stalin faction had broken down at the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925. Although this bloc between consistent revolutionaries and vacillating left-centrists was a correct tactical move, and considerably augmented the Opposition's forces, it created further problems, not least with regard to China.

Zinoviev and Kamenev, while critical of Stalin's capitulatory policy towards the Kuomintang, continued to defend the necessity of maintaining the Chinese Communist Party's alliance with the Kuomintang. Whilst it is true that Trotsky did not fully abandon the slogan of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' for China until the summer of 1927, the entire thrust of his arguments were diametrically opposed to those of Stalin. Although Trotsky may initially have questioned the feasibility of socialist revolution under existing conditions, he never doubted that the working class would have to play the leading role in the Chinese revolution in practice.

For Stalin, on the other hand, the need to preserve an alliance with the bourgeoisie overrode all other considerations, and to this end the working class should not antagonise its allies by violating bourgeois legality. Zinoviev occupied an intermediate position, in favour of pushing forward the agrarian revolt, but convinced that the direct struggle for workers' revolution was not on the agenda.

Among the Trotskyists the situation was complicated by the position of Karl Radek, who held views close to those of Zinoviev, and refused to call for a clear break from the Kuomintang even after Chiang's coup in Shanghai. Radek's estimate of the capacities of the Chinese bourgeoisie can be gauged from his obituary of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, in which he described him as 'the first great leader of the peoples of the East to understand Lenin's thought and to do all in his power to put it into practice' (K. Radek: 'Portraits and Pamphlets', Wishart, 1935, p.198). This was written at a time when, according to Wang Fan-hsi, young Chinese Communists found the 'Three Principles' of Sun Yat-sen 'too

laughable for words'.

Writing to Max Shachtman in 1931, Trotsky reviewed the struggle within the Opposition on China as follows: 'In 1926 and 1927, I had uninterrupted conflicts with the Zinovievists on this question. Two or three times, the matter stood at the breaking point . . . But since it was a question of splitting with the Zinovievists, it was the general decision that I must submit publicly in this question and acquaint the Opposition in writing with my standpoint. And that is how it happened that the demand was put up by us so late, in spite of the fact that the Political Bureau and the plenum of the Central Committee always contrasted my view with the official view of the Opposition. Now I can say with certainty that I made a mistake by submitting formally in this question' ('Leon Trotsky on China', Pathfinder, pp.490-1).

Chiang Kai-shek's Shanghai coup in April 1927 had followed the pattern laid down by his seizure of power in Canton in May 1926, but on a much larger scale and with yet more serious implications for the Chinese Communist Party. Stalin refused to countenance any change of policy and declared that the Comintern line up to the coup had been entirely correct. Now he declared that the Wuhan government, led by Wang Ching-wei, was the 'revolutionary centre', and it was now cast in the role of completing the bourgeois revolution and evolving into 'the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'.

The rift opened up between Wang Ching-wei's 'Left Kuomintang' and Chiang Kai-shek's government was a struggle between different bourgeois factions. The Wuhan government, despite its formal expulsion of Chiang (after the event), was in no way the representative of either workers or poor peasants; it acted at all times as the guarantor of bourgeois and landed property.

After the fall of Shanghai, many Communists had fled to Wuhan, armed with illusions in the new 'revolutionary centre'. Once there, they were pressed into staffing the Kuomintang apparatus. Communist Party internal activity in Wuhan virtually ceased, and the hard-won gains workers had made were ceded back, one by one, without a fight. Two CCP members were co-opted into the government as ministers of agriculture and labour. These 'revolutionary' hostages in a bourgeois government were given the role of preventing 'excesses' on the part of the workers' and peasants' movement.

From the moment that the Comintern discovered a new 'revolutionary centre' in Wuhan and a 'reliable ally' in Wang Ching-wei, the Kuomintang 'left' gave every indication of its true colours. Although the defeat in Shanghai had been a serious one, the potential existed, given the correct policy, to reverse the tide of events and reopen the road to revolution. Had the



Peng Shu-tse and Ch'en Pi-lan, founders of the Chinese Trotskyist movement

strategy of working class political independence from the bourgeoisie based on soviets and CCP independence from the Kuomintang been adopted, it would still have been possible to consider episodic tactical agreements with Kuomintang radicals against the right wing. Stalin, however, clung to the line of strategic support for Wang Ching-wei. In Hunan and Hupeh, the peasant movement reached its climax in April and early May 1927. Spontaneous land seizures were universal, and the Hunan Peasant Association alone organised ten million peasants. The role of the CCP, under instructions from Moscow, was to contain rather than push forward the peasant movement while timidly pressing Wang Ching-wei to implement land reform.

At the CCP's Fifth Congress in late April, Comintern representative M.N. Roy insisted that, following Chiang's coup, the Kuomintang had swung leftwards and was now transformed into a 'revolutionary bloc composed of the industrial proletariat, the peasants, and the petty-bourgeoisie (in addition to several strata of the bourgeoisie)'. This meant, Roy claimed, that the Chinese revolution could not yet be 'submitted to the exclusive [?] leadership of the proletariat' (H. Isaacs: 'The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution', Stanford, p.218).

The acid test of the Wuhan regime's 'leadership' of the agrarian revolution came when General Hsui K'e-hsiang took over Changsha in Hunan Province on May 21, and unleashed white terror against local mass organisations. Once more the CCP pleaded with the Wuhan government to act against the rebellion. Instead, Wang sent an observer who, on his return, declared himself fully satisfied with the process of 'normalisation'. Again the CCP did nothing.

By June 1927, Wang Ching-wei was putting out feelers through intermediaries to Chiang Kai-shek in the hope of a rapprochement. Like lambs to the slaughter, CCP trade union leaders allowed the unions' militia to be voluntarily disarmed. While two CCP members were still nominally in the Wuhan government, Communists like the young Wang Fan-hsi were being imprisoned - in his case because of private notes he had made describing Wang Ching-wei as a counter-revolutionary.

Sections of the CCP leadership, entirely cut off from the criticisms of the Russian Opposition, tried once again to extricate themselves from the deadly embrace of the Kuomintang. General Secretary Ch'en Tu-hsiu proposed withdrawing from the alliance in mid-June, while Central Committee member P'eng Shu-tse wrote a pamphlet, 'The Basic Problems of the Chinese Revolution', in which he defended the 'excesses' of the workers and peasants.

But as Isaacs' classic account states: 'Moscow had imposed a formula which cancelled itself out: victory was impossible without the agrarian revolution; victory was also impossible without the co-operation of the Left Kuomintang. But, as we have seen, under the leadership of the Left Kuomintang, it was impossible to have the agrarian revolution. Hence, on Moscow's terms, victory was impossible' (Isaacs, p.220).

When the Communist ministers finally withdrew from the Wuhan government, it was not to make a demonstrative break with the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it was accompanied by bleating apologies about failing to 'put the peasant movement on the right track'.

Wang Ching-wei's ultimatum to all Communist members of the Kuomintang, issued on July 15, instructed them to resign CCP membership. It was the prelude to the crushing of the workers' movement in Hankow, Hanyang and Wuchang and the extermination of thousands more Communists and their supporters. The Left Kuomintang-CCP alliance was broken not by the would-be revolutionaries but by the counter-revolutionaries - at the time they chose, on their own terms and without organised resistance.

Stalin and Bukharin's response to the disaster was characteristic: they declared all previous policies to have been correct; placed all blame on the 'opportunism' of the CCP leadership; and shifted from an extreme right-wing policy to ultra-left adventurism.

In August 1927, the Chinese Communists received the order - in the midst of the ferocity of counter-revolution - to launch immediate uprisings of workers and peasants. In rapid succession, the Nanchang uprising, the 'Autumn

Harvest' uprisings and the Canton Commune were bloodily defeated, the masses largely indifferent to the party, which had already led them into disastrous defeats under the banner of the Kuomintang. Thus ended the second Chinese revolution - a setback for the world working class of historic proportions.

Stalin's rationale of his policy during the Wuhan government merits serious attention since it bears a close resemblance to so many subsequent capitulations to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism by avowed 'revolutionaries'.

Stalin's overall conception of the Chinese revolution was divided into two distinct stages. In a series of 'theses for propagandists' produced shortly after Chiang Kai-shek's coup in Shanghai, he explained that the task facing the working class was 'to overcome the resistance of the national bourgeoisie, secure the complete victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and then gradually convert it [!] into a socialist revolution' ('On the Opposition', p.658). What form would this 'overcoming' of resistance take? Clearly not a soviet one since, as Stalin said, to advocate the formation of soviets 'would mean placing in the hands of the enemies of the Chinese people a new weapon against the revolution, enabling them to spread new legends to the effect that what is taking place in China is not a national revolution, but artificially transplanted "Moscow Sovietisation"' (ibid., pp.665-6).

Talking to Chinese students at Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow on May 13, 1927,

Stalin spoke of the Kuomintang Left standing 'head and shoulders above all the various imperialist "socialists" of the Kerensky and Tsereteli-type' (ibid., p.672). Within weeks, of course, it would be the same 'lefts' who were separating Chinese workers' heads from their shoulders, and with much greater success than their Russian counterparts. Responding to a student's question as to why Wuhan was not conducting an offensive against Chiang Kai-shek, Stalin replied: 'Well, comrades, you are asking too much of the Wuhan government' (ibid., p.681). Meanwhile, in Wuhan there were spontaneous demonstrations demanding an 'Eastern Expedition' against Chiang Kai-shek.

Stalin never tired of declaring the slogan of soviets inappropriate, until the victory of the counter-revolution was all but complete. Then it was finally unfurled in an atmosphere of desperate putschism. In his speech to the Executive Committee of the Communist International on May 24, 1927, Stalin described the Wuhan government as 'performing approximately the same role' as soviets had in Russia in 1905 (ibid., p.715).

Only two months later, in an oddly titled *Pravda* article 'Notes on Contemporary Themes', Stalin declared that the Chinese bourgeoisie had overnight 'taken fright at the agrarian revolution and utterly discredited itself in the eyes of the peasant millions' (ibid., p.749). Why? Because it had 'lost contact with the broad masses of the people'. Of course, by now the Kuomintang had not 'lost contact' with the broad masses, but was busily executing their representatives and smashing their organisations.

As late as September 1927, Stalin was declaring the sole aim of the Chinese revolution to be the resolution of the agrarian question (ibid., p.853). Then, shortly afterwards, with the peasant movement smashed and the working class on the retreat, Stalin placed 'purely socialist' tasks - immediate workers' insurrection - on the order of the day.

It was in opposition to this travesty and putrefaction of Marxism that Trotsky, anticipating every main trend of development, renovated the theory of permanent revolution, and extended its application to all colonial and semi-colonial countries.

To be continued

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July 1990 30p

POLL TAX ROUND-UP

NALGO leaders toe the Kinnock line

THE ANNUAL conference of the local government workers' union NALGO, which took place in June, rejected calls for stepping up the fight against the poll tax.

A composite motion in the name of Ealing branch sought to instruct the NEC to campaign for NALGO members, not to process debt recovery,

and to support members taking industrial action in line with this policy. It also called on Labour councils to refuse to prosecute individuals for non-payment of the poll tax, and not to discipline employees for taking industrial action in support of non-payment. The motion avoided making any clear demand that the national

leadership organise and co-ordinate industrial action against the tax, seeking instead to limit NALGO policy to giving support to militant groups of members to fight local employers. It was defeated on a card vote by 380,165 to 220,108.

A series of amendments aimed at strengthening the motion were all heavily lost. One from Birmingham sought to link up branches with local anti-poll tax campaigns, and called for the organisation of a one-day general strike and national demonstrations. Ian Hay, moving the amendment, pointed out that at least 250,000 NALGO members fell into the category of those who could not afford to pay. He was roundly attacked by the newly-elected general secretary and avowed Kinnockite, Alan Jinkinson, for making demands 'straight out of the Trotskyist litany' which would place NALGO outside the 'mainstream' of opposition to the poll tax.

An amendment calling for local authorities to adopt a 'charter of good practice' in relation to the poll tax, sponsored by Stalinists in the Metropolitan District, produced a sharp clash between otherwise friendly wings of NALGO's bureaucracy. It attacked the 'sectarian' and 'divisive' nature of existing campaigns, claiming that a campaign for non-collection could only be built when there was a mass movement for non-payment(!). Opposing the amendment on behalf of the NEC, Jim White, fresh from his betrayal of last year's local government pay strikes, said it would be 'suicidal posturing' for NALGO to adopt such a policy since a mass campaign for non-payment did not yet exist. NALGO would be the laughing stock of the trade union movement if both the amendment and the composite motion were not defeated by conference, he continued.

Jan Liff of Avon branch echoed the NEC's position from the floor, stating: 'We should all be united in our opposition to the tax, but recognise that issues like non-payment are for the individual to decide.' An amendment calling for NALGO to affiliate at national level to the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation was defeated by a vote of three to one.

By Richard Price

IN THE three months since its introduction in England and Wales, non-payment of the poll tax is running at a high level. It shows that millions of people have understood that the tax is an attack upon the whole working class, and that the Labour leadership's insistence on obeying the law is being widely ignored.

Sober polling agencies have estimated the rate of non-payment so far at 30 per cent. Such an overall figure includes substantial regional variations, with the highest rates in the big urban areas. By June, half the adults in Birmingham had not made the first payment. In the inner-London area, 75 per cent had not paid, with Hackney standing at 80 per cent and Camden at a staggering 96 per cent.

These figures show the enormous potential of the anti-poll tax movement, but they also show the great disparity between the number of non-payers and their level of organisation. The danger in the current situation is a complacency that the present forms of struggle are enough, and that they will, of themselves, force the Tories to withdraw the tax.

All indications are that the Tories have begun to recover from their acute political crisis of the spring, aided by the political cowardice of the Labour leaders. Meanwhile, in many areas of England and

Step up the fight against poll tax!

Wales, local anti-poll tax groups remained small or non-existent, and have not achieved the authority of those in Scotland.

Poll tax campaigners must reckon with the fact that a proportion of current non-payers are watching and waiting before making up their minds. These forces can be convinced of the necessity of fighting the tax only by demonstrative class-wide action. This means winning anti-poll tax unions and the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation to a fighting programme of action.

Militant's leadership of the Federation has been an important factor in containing the struggle within reformist limits. Since it took fright at the confrontation with the police at the end of the March 31 demonstration, *Militant* has kept activity at a low level. No national demonstrations are on the agenda - only a national rally in October. *Militant* plainly wants to straitjacket every activity into this format, where it can avoid serious debate over policy.

On the other hand, police activity has been stepped up.



Demonstration against the poll tax in Hackney on May 26

In addition to the 396 people arrested on March 31, there have been about 100 further arrests using photographs supplied by the press and by studying hours of videotape. On June 21, 11 people were arrested in a dawn raid in

Hackney by plainclothes police armed with axes.

Urgent tasks in the present situation must include:

- Building the non-payment campaign by extending anti-poll tax unions to every locality.

- Developing workers' defence groups to protect demonstrations and those faced with legal penalties.

- Rallying support throughout the labour movement for the Trafalgar Square defendants.

- Defending all Labour Party activists from the leadership's attempt to proscribe the All Britain Federation.

- Fighting to transform existing trade union struggles to defend conditions in the town halls, social security offices and in the post office into political strike action.

Initiatives sidelined at Liverpool meeting

THE ALL Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation's trade union conference, which met in Liverpool on June 23, attracted some 600 delegates, of whom over half were supporters of *Militant* and a further substantial group supporters of the SWP. The conference failed to draw a number of groups on the left in Britain and made little impact outside *Militant's* and the SWP's base in the trade unions. Why?

The conference was called at short notice by Tommy Sheridan and Steve Nally, chair and secretary respectively of the national organising committee. It is widely believed that they took the decision without convening a national committee meeting, or even consulting the elected trade union officer, Sham Singh. Their action was aimed at sabotaging a proposal from the Socialist Movement for joint work to organise a trade union conference.

Militant have all along fought shy of taking the fight

against the poll tax on to the plane of nationally organised trade union struggle. By containing the fight at the level of non-payment, supported by only limited industrial action, the *Militant* reformists seek to transform a class struggle against the Tories into a movement that they can exploit for their own sectarian ends.

The proposal from the Socialist Movement for joint work was perceived by *Militant* as a threat to their control over the Federation. Sheridan and Nally manoeuvred against the proposal by rejecting it, and then hastily organising a conference on their own terms. The pay-off was that they succeeded in further alienating trade unionists, as well as syndicalist, anarchist and socialist groups, some of whom sent only a token presence to the conference - at a crucial stage in the struggle against the poll tax.

Whatever Sheridan and Nally's reasons for rejecting joint work in the trade unions with

the Socialist Movement, their action has undermined the growth of a broad-based rank-and-file movement. It must be said that such a setback also assists the TUC and Labour Party bureaucrats who have moved might and main to suppress co-ordinated industrial action against the poll tax.

Further evidence of Sheridan and Nally's sectarian manoeuvrings emerged at the conference in the form of a leaflet circulated by Danny Burns, vice-chair, Ian Greaves, assistant secretary, and Sham Singh, trade union officer, resigning their positions on the national committee. In a statement which dissociated themselves from Nally's offer to the police to name names following events in Trafalgar Square, and which pledged support for anti-poll tax campaigners harassed or victimised by the state, the three signatories cited among other reasons for resigning the fact that Sheridan and Nally had refused to distribute over 25,000 copies of bulletins writ-

ten and printed on behalf of the national committee.

The conference was, in the event, so organised that few delegates other than *Militant* supporters were given the opportunity to speak from the floor. Of 24 motions submitted, many were moved 'formally' due to lack of time. The majority of the motions failed to offer a perspective other than resisting wage attachments or benefit deductions branch by branch, or as *Militant* preferred to describe it, 'trench by trench'. A motion from COHSE Cumberwell branch and Camden Trades Council calling for nationally co-ordinated strike action and a fight at the Labour Party conference against Kinnock's sell-out was defeated, as was a motion from Keighley AEU calling for a general strike. Sheridan called a snap vote on the motions, creating confusion among delegates by revealing that the national committee was opposing them because they cut across its own plans for a national people's march against the poll tax.

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