

Workers News



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European unity heralds new attacks on workers

DOWN WITH A BOSSSES' EUROPE

By Philip Marchant

BY THE end of 1992, most of western Europe will have been transformed into a single, integrated market, in which all companies will be allowed to compete on equal terms. Obstacles to 'free' trade between the EC member states have been progressively eliminated since the Single European Act was ratified by national parliaments during the course of 1987. Between now and December 31, most of the remaining barriers will disappear.

According to the Act, 'the internal market shall comprise an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured'. In practice, this means simplified customs controls designed to speed up the transfer of goods; the end of company protectionism; differences in VAT and other indirect taxes ironed out; mutually-recognised educational qualifications to assist the movement of professional

people and technicians from country to country; standardised product labelling and health and safety requirements; and public authorities obliged to accept tenders from companies across the EC.

The eventual aim of these measures is to enable the countries of the European Community to function as a single economy, creating a trading bloc with a productive capacity larger than either the United States or Japan.

But for the workers of Europe, closer economic and monetary union will bring an intensification of attacks on their jobs, conditions and wages. This could hardly be otherwise - the single market is not conceived by the capitalists as a welfare society, but as a means of strengthening the individual economies of Euro-

pe relative to their international competitors. When the 'Common Market' was first proposed in the 1950s, its main function was seen as regulating relations between member states and protecting domestic economies. Indeed, one of its aims was to block the re-establishment of German domination over Europe by making policy subject to unanimous decision. As the post-war boom receded, however, it began to be viewed in a different light, and by the 1980s the momentum towards a single European market, centred on the all-powerful Deutschmark, increased out of sheer economic necessity.

The shift in attitude towards the EC among British capitalists is symptomatic of these changes at the level of the world economy. If the conversion has come rather late in the day, and has been accomplished only through a virtual civil war inside the Tory party, this is because the new facts of life about the British economy have been slow to take hold.

Britain's decline as an imperialist power has led it into a greater dependency on Europe as a trading partner. Over 50 per cent of Britain's import and export trade is now with the other countries of the EC. At the same time, British investment remains high in the United States and elsewhere around the world, and the traditional political axis of London-Washington remains important. Small and medium-sized manufacturing concerns have increasingly seen their future as being tied to Europe; large companies heavily committed outside Europe have been more cautious.

Since the formation of the Common Market, successive British governments have tried to overcome this contradiction. In 1957, the Tory cabinet under Anthony Eden, yet to

be convinced of Britain's relegation to the second eleven, overwhelmingly rejected the Treaty of Rome. Instead, an attempt was made to set up an alternative trading bloc which would allow Britain to maintain its special ties with the Commonwealth while reaping the benefits of a tariff-free Europe. The idea foundered when General De Gaulle vetoed Common Market membership of such a bloc.

Harold Macmillan's decision to apply for membership in 1961 was made in the light of a fall in Britain's trade with the Commonwealth countries, and a growth rate in the Common Market which far outstripped that of the stagnant British economy. Then, as now, the arguments of Tory traditionalists were swept aside in favour of a 'commercial deal' which would stimulate 'competitiveness'.

In order to become a serious rival to Japanese and US imperialism, however, the EC requires not just economic union, but a single currency, a central administration with executive powers, and a common foreign and defence policy. That's where the Treaty on European Union, agreed in Maastricht last December and

signed by EC foreign and finance ministers on February 7, comes in, and where the real problems start.

By opting out of the social chapter and currency union, John Major was expressing the fact that the interests of the British ruling class are not identical with those of the other EC states. Nor are such differences confined to Britain v The Rest. Economic and monetary union, and even political union, are possible under the whip of external circumstances, as European capitalism seeks to break the fetters represented by national boundaries in order to compete with the United States and Japan. But a 'united' capitalist Europe would not abolish the nation state; neither would 'freedom of movement' disperse capitalist classes historically bound together by a common language, location and culture. It would not be a Europe of peace, harmony and integration, but a time-bomb waiting to explode at the first sign of serious economic downturn.

In Britain, the Labour Party and trade union leaders have portrayed an increased decision-making role for the European parliament as some

kind of counterweight to the Tories. Workers have been encouraged to put their trust in this body rather than rely on their own strength and that of their counterparts in the rest of the EC. Some of the reforms contained in the social chapter, though modest in their scope, should certainly be fought for; others, like the proposal for European-wide works councils for 'workers' information and consultation', designed to circumvent independent trade unions, should be opposed.

The Tories want to avoid statutory regulation of minimum wages, the working day or rest periods, and deny part-time workers entitlement to holiday pay. This is what they refer to as the 'free market' model for economic prosperity and it's clear whose prosperity they have in mind! Not only has consideration of these clauses of the social chapter been postponed until next year, but they are designed to protect EC countries where these measures are already law and prevent Britain's low-wage economy acting as a magnet for inward investment. So much for the much-vaunted 'social' aspects of the EC!

As internal border controls are relaxed for EC citizens, there are plans for a crackdown on immigration. The

European Commission has proposed laws similar to the Tory government's Asylum Bill. In addition, to halt the migration from east to west Europe, it has called for member states to draw up a list of 'safe' countries, where no immediate threat to life is posed, whose citizens will automatically be refused refugee status.

The accelerated drive towards European economic and monetary union, with most imperialist countries in the grip of recession and even Germany now faltering, will be accompanied by a fresh onslaught against the working class. Those most immediately at risk will be the refugees and the minority communities, who risk becoming the scapegoats for rising unemployment and falling living standards. Trade unionists and socialists must forge links across the EC, establishing rank-and-file workplace committees to defend wages, conditions and jobs, and uniting with the minority communities to combat racist violence and the rise of Le Pen and other fascists.

- No to a Europe of the bosses!
- Build workers' united fronts against racism and fascism in every country!
- For a Socialist United States of Europe!

Memory lapse at Militant

AFTER months of factional struggle, *Militant* has finally split. The Ted Grant-Alan Woods minority has excluded itself/been expelled, depending on which version of events you believe.

The majority's justification comes in an article disingenuously entitled 'A parting of the ways' (*Militant*, January 24, 1992). Among other things, it argues that Grant's political judgement had become seriously impaired by the late Eighties. As evidence of this, the article cites Grant's prediction that the Stock Market crash of October 1987 would be followed immediately 'by a deep economic slump, possibly on the scale of 1929'.

There's only one problem with this line of argument - Grant has been making similar apocalyptic and categorical predictions every few years since the end of the Second World War. *Militant* also gives the example of Grant's opinion that the Gulf War would last between six months and two years. Such a perspective, the editorial board add unctuously, 'would have crippled our anti-war activity'. What activity? We didn't notice any. Surely Ted can't be held solely responsible for *Militant* snoozing for six and a half of the seven months of the Gulf crisis.

● An analysis of the split in *Militant* will appear in the next issue of Workers News.

TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND!



Demonstration in London on January 25 to mark the 20th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when British soldiers opened fire on a march in Derry against internment, killing 14 unarmed civilians and wounding many more

RAIL PRIVATISATION

The great train robbery

THE GOVERNMENT'S white paper on rail privatisation is due to be published before the general election. It has already been held up five times in the last year because of rifts within the cabinet over what form privatisation should take.

In January, discussions aimed at reaching agreement in time for concrete proposals to be included in the Tory manifesto were shaken by reports that parts of the InterCity network would be abandoned under private ownership. Driven by election considerations, Transport Secretary Malcolm Rifkind hastily

By an RMT member

put together a compromise package.

The wrangling is understandable. Running a railway in Britain hasn't been a profitable occupation since the early part of the century. As coal production and exports slumped following the First World War, an attempt was made to rationalise the tangle of private railway companies, many of which relied on hauling coal to stay in business. In 1923, they were brought together in four large private monopolies by act of parlia-

ment.

But at the end of the Second World War, shareholders in the 'Big Four' were still not receiving any dividends, and the infrastructure of the railways was suffering from an almost total lack of investment. Since this situation threatened the profitability of British industry as a whole, there was little opposition to the nationalisation of the railways carried through by the Labour government in 1948, especially as the previous owners received handsome compensation.

At the beginning of this year, there were still at least



End of the line for nationalised railways?

four different schemes for privatising the present railway system vying for government approval:

□ That it remain as a single company – this is favoured by the present British Rail management and is the least likely scenario.

□ That it be split up into regional companies.

□ That a private track authority be established which would then sell slots to private train operators.

□ That profitable sectors like InterCity be sold off intact and the rest run by a track authority selling slots.

The existence of so many conflicting views, and the long-running cabinet dispute, show that the Tories recognise that the issue of rail privatisation could either be a vote-winner or a vote-loser, depending on how they handle it. For election purposes, it is necessary to give certain guarantees about the future service, and keep the advocates of a 'free market' railway in the background. Thus the new cabinet blueprint merges two very diverse options: the return of several large, regionally-based companies – favoured by John Major – and the retention of the InterCity network – considered essential by Rifkind. It also promises that no lines will be closed and that loss-making services will remain in the public sector.

As well as representing a massive handover of state-owned assets to speculators and entrepreneurs, all the above options will continue to require government funding, much of which will now be pocketed by the new owners. Despite protestations to the contrary, all will mean substantial fare rises and reduced train services.

Management is preparing for the sell-off by stepping up its attacks on the workforce. In 1989, the British Railways Board attempted to ditch all its national agreements with the rail unions embodied in the 1956 Negotiating Machinery. It was met with a series of six one-day strikes, which forced it to make a temporary retreat. Since then, however, the Board has steadily completed the process of dividing the industry into several business sectors, spent millions on reorganising management, and is well advanced in its restructuring of all the different grades of employees.

Restructuring involves ending the traditional promotional ladders – currently seniority is the major factor. It also means the introduction of individual contracts and revised rosters with longer working days and no local negotiations. While there may be a rise in basic pay, most enhancements are abolished. It means personal assessments carried out by teams of managers to decide on pay rises – workers on the same grade with the same hours and responsibilities could be on different rates of pay. Worst of all, restructuring could see the end of national wage bargaining,

with each grade being forced to negotiate its own rises and a national strike deemed illegal under the anti-union laws as it would constitute 'secondary action'.

Meanwhile, transport ministers have been looking for companies to run services on the most profitable InterCity routes. Virgin Atlantic, P&O, British Midland Airways, the British Airports Authority and SNCF – the French state-owned railways – are possible contenders, while a company called Stagecoach has offered to buy InterCity outright. Stagecoach started with a couple of buses serving central Scotland when the Tories deregulated the industry. It subsequently made millions by running packed double-deckers from Scotland to London, driven at high speeds by non-union labour. Stagecoach could be operating its own service on BR-driven trains even before privatisation.

The Tories are not remotely interested in providing a modern, efficient public service railway. According to Transport Minister Roger Freeman: 'There's no reason why what I call a cheap and cheerful service, which is low fare but high density, high occupancy of a railway train should not be profitable.' This would be for 'typists', he explained, while a more luxurious train could be provided for 'civil servants and businessmen'. Apart from the bit about low fares, Freeman's vision of the future for the majority of passengers, squeezed into 'high occupancy' trains, has a ring of truth about it. His only 'gaffe' was actually saying it!

For most of the post-war period, the Tories displayed no interest in developing the railways. There was a massive contraction in the system as lines were closed in order to cut public spending and undermine the industrial strength of railway workers. The power of the 'road lobby' – the motor and tyre manufacturers, the oil companies and the road haulage contractors – remained unchallenged. After the election of the Thatcher government in 1979, privatisation became a matter of faith for the Tories, one of the key policies designed to revive British capitalism. Greedy eyes began to be turned on the railways.

But it was also the growing chaos on the roads – itself a threat to economic recovery – which focused Tory minds on investment in the rail system. Significantly, the Stagecoach bus company has dropped its routes to London, complaining that traffic in the South-east is so bad that timetables cannot be maintained.

But how are the RMT union leaders planning to fight privatisation? Judging by the way they have tackled restructuring, not at all! The first grade to face restructuring were Signalling and Telecoms Technicians. The leadership ignored numerous calls to break off talks with the Board and organise strike action. The most

militant workers, having refused to sign the new contracts, have been left to face management intimidation without any effective union backing. The Permanent-Way Track Maintenance grade and Senior Conductors are next in line. The leadership plans to ballot Senior Conductors not for strike action, but on whether or not they accept the 'new deal'. The Board is taking on the union grade by grade, and the union leadership is assisting that process.

For the last ten years, the NUR/RMT leaders have attempted to isolate militants with the line that strikes would jeopardise the election of a Labour government by alienating the middle class. In fact, one of the best ways of ensuring that the Tories don't return for a fourth term is for rail workers to open an industrial offensive against them. A national rail strike against privatisation and restructuring would not only rally other workers, but also inspire sections of the middle class.

While the Labour Party leadership has committed itself to retaining a nationalised rail network, it has also called for the private sector to help fund it. BR will be encouraged to borrow from the banks, who will then be in a position to dictate terms and impose 'austerity' programmes. New projects will go ahead only where partners from big business can be found – for example, Labour's proposed 'rail M25' around London which is of interest to such companies as Guinness, Tesco, Wimpey and Taylor Woodrow.

Under the Beeching axe most of rural Britain lost its rail services; under Tory privatisation the remaining unprofitable routes will be withdrawn, major towns will lose their InterCity connections, overcrowding will get worse and safety standards will be further threatened. The promise to continue subsidising loss-making services is a fraud – they will merely be given a temporary reprieve while attempts are made to make them profitable. The workforce will be slashed and its unions derecognised.

Rank-and-file members of the RMT, the train drivers' union ASLEF and the clerical workers' union TSSA must forge a united struggle to oppose privatisation and to defend their jobs, wages and conditions.

■ The union leaderships must be forced to mount an immediate campaign for a national strike to oppose restructuring and privatisation!

■ Demand that the Labour leaders pledge to renationalise sections of the network already sold off and bring the Channel Tunnel under state control. For a properly funded, integrated transport network providing low-cost, comfortable, single-class railway travel for all!

■ Down with the pro-Tory management currently in charge of BR! For workers' control of the industry!

'AIDS' AND THE LEFT

ON NOVEMBER 30, 200 people marked World AIDS Day by demonstrating in London against government inaction and to 'Stop the AIDS Crisis'. This was well under half the number of the previous year. Most notable by their absence were members of the various left groups.

ACT UP London, who called the demo, took no control over the speakers who were mainly from the gay male nuns, 'The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence'. The speakers gave us a mixture of turgid poetry, banal statements about 'uncaring' Tories, and New Age mysticism.

Any semblance of order was abandoned when, in response to protesters sitting down in the street to block Piccadilly Circus, the police broke with previous practice and assaulted several protesters while arresting them.

This annual demo by ACT UP London was the nearest attempt at a national political response to 'AIDS' on that day. There were, of course, dinner parties and gala evenings with the odd royal, which is the image the corrupt 'AIDS' charities want to project.

Given this shambles, is it surprising that there was not a single paper seller present, let alone any trade union or political banners?

I would argue, however, that the ACT UP demo was precisely where Trotskyist organisations should have been on November 30. (I am using the term 'Trotskyist' in its broadest sense, ie, to indicate all those who claim the title.)

The record of Trotskyist groups in relation to 'AIDS' is very poor. This arises from the ambivalence towards homosexuality, drug use and sex which is exhibited by most left groups, along with the influence of workerism.

Groups such as the SWP, Militant and others have generally ignored the subject but will occasionally reproduce the establishment line on 'AIDS'. An example of this is the acceptance of the (non-existent) heterosexual explo-

The development of the 'AIDS' crisis has been accompanied by an increase in homophobia, the strengthening of bourgeois morality and the targeting of communities most under threat by drug companies interested only in a quick profit. 'AIDS' activist Brian Dempsey argues that socialists must develop an independent analysis of the social implications of the disease and intervene to politicise the campaign

sion of HIV infection.

Other groups, such as the RIL, try to relate their propaganda material to the experiences of gay men and women, and perhaps drug users. This is done in an abstract way and no serious work or independent analysis is carried out.

Even the RCP, which until recently was the only left group to develop an understanding of 'AIDS' independent of the government line, has failed to carry out anything other than propaganda work around 'AIDS'.

In a well-researched article in the current issue of *Analysis*, Susil Gupta develops the RCP's position that HIV and 'AIDS' are overwhelmingly confined to 'risk-groups'. He argues that the heterosexual epidemic in Britain is a myth and uses the latest official figures to back his claims.

Why then, should Trotskyists intervene in an unfocused, single-issue campaign which has no defined class basis?

Firstly, because 'AIDS' is a major social issue with connections with the fight for lesbian and gay rights, anti-racism and many other issues. It also highlights the, literally, life and death necessity that society be reorganised to meet people's needs rather than to produce profit.

Secondly, because 'AIDS' activism attracts a constant stream of mainly young, enthusiastic people who want to change society. Generally, these are people who are new to political struggles. Their concern is with who is going to give the lead and be effective in developing the work, rather

than loyalty to any sectarian group.

Thirdly, at the risk of sounding workerist myself, I believe that in a meeting of a dozen 'AIDS' activists you are likely to find a greater number of trade union members and students than in many union branch meetings and the like.

Any Trotskyist group worthy of the name should be able to develop positions on the major 'AIDS' issues. By testing their theory in practice, they would stand to gain influence over lively new forces.

The left has much to offer in terms of organisational ability and contacts within the trade union and labour movement. More importantly, 'AIDS' cannot be dealt with as a single-issue campaign, as can be seen from some of the issues listed below:

■ Pharmaceutical companies whose concern is profit and not health.

■ Bourgeois moralising instead of clear safer-sex and drug use information.

■ Scapegoating of minority groups.

■ Massive debt in colonial countries.

■ Cuts in hospital and local government services.

■ Resources spent on arms rather than people's needs.

The list goes on. None of these issues are new to socialists and none of them can be addressed effectively without an understanding of the capitalist system and the need to overthrow it.

There is nothing new or difficult in intervening in this work and much to be gained.

THE CONVENTION FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

By Ben Jordan

WITH THE meeting of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) on December 20-21, 1991, a watershed in the negotiation process has been reached. It is the culmination of developments since the adoption of the Harare Declaration in late 1989, when the ANC openly embraced negotiations as the means for securing democracy and freedom for the oppressed masses of South Africa.

Sincere and loyal militants of the ANC-SACP alliance have had a traumatic time over the past two years. Mass mobilisation and open class struggle have been replaced by the politics of diplomacy, 'reconstruction' and reconciliation. The perspective of armed seizure of power has been ditched for a power-sharing agreement with the ruling class. With the ignominious collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union came the shattering of long-held beliefs and dreams. Almost overnight, the 'Soviet connection' disappeared and with it the confident rhetoric about socialism.

As imperialism's confidence soared, the petty-bourgeois leadership of the ANC-SACP capitulated completely. Exploiting the mood engendered by the counter-revolutionary developments worldwide, and by means of a series of clever and cynical manoeuvres, it has proceeded with measures that its mass constituency would have roundly condemned a few years ago:

□ Ditching the key economic demand in the Freedom Charter on nationalisation, fully embracing capitalism in place of discredited 'socialism'.

□ Abandoning the armed struggle and self-defence while the arch-enemies of the masses remain armed to the teeth.

□ Signing a 'peace' accord with the De Klerk regime and Inkatha despite the carefully orchestrated carnage and disorganisation they have wreaked in the townships.

□ Proceeding with negotiations without securing even the minimum preconditions set out in the Harare Declaration: arrests and detentions continue, 20,000 guerrillas and refugees are still in exile and the Internal Security Act remains in place.

□ Making rotten concessions to white privilege, with talk of guaranteed seats for the white minority, and now conceding even to the idea of an independent 'boerestaat'!

□ Accepting that the armed forces in a new South Africa will simply be a revamped version of the existing SADF/SAP, together with the bantustan armies and police, with MK members 'integrated' into it.

□ Accepting that the Interim Government that is to convene a Constituent Assembly will not be a government of the masses but one of 'national unity', including all the reactionary bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces in CODESA.

These are the key 'achievements' of the ANC leadership which have led it to hail the beginning of negotiations as a great 'victory for the people'.

VICTORY OR SELL-OUT?



Nelson Mandela

For Chris Hani, SACP general secretary and chief of staff of MK, CODESA's success was 'beyond our expectations'.

In reality, De Klerk and the bourgeoisie not only retain the initiative held two years ago, but their position has been strengthened. All the most significant concessions have been from the ANC leadership, which has sold the interests of the black masses cheaply.

The ANC-SACP leaders are now ready to be partners in a coalition government with the bourgeoisie. After all, they have assumed the role of respectable and responsible 'gentlemen' who play things according to the rules. Especially since the signing of the National Peace Accord, in anticipation of being in government, the ANC has become a staunch defender of bourgeois 'law and order'. As a result, the oppressed masses in the townships have been placed on the defensive in the face of Inkatha's terror campaign.

In the unions, an ANC-SACP dominated bureaucracy is effectively entrenched in COSATU and socialism has been demoted to an ideal, only to be fought for in the distant future. The last two years have seen a dramatic demobilisation of the organised working class, and a number of reactionary agreements have been signed that bind black workers to a new period of peaceful coexistence with the bosses. This betrayal takes place while capitalism heaps further misery on the poverty-stricken masses — with ever rising prices, the introduction of VAT, and mass lay-offs.

Consequently, the spirit of militancy and confidence, so characteristic of the black working class and the proletarian youth, has been systematically suppressed. There is widespread confusion, demoralisation and despair; reactionary moods have begun to grip significant sections of the black population. Apartheid divisions within the oppressed masses have been strengthened, with Zulu-speakers being set against Xhosa-speakers and 'Coloureds' against Africans.

CODESA is the beginning of the 'real' negotiations that the ANC has so eagerly worked for. But what is CODESA,

and whose interests are represented by its participants? According to Mandela: 'The strength of the CODESA initiative lies in the range of political parties and persuasions The diverse interests represented speak of the capacity to develop a consensus across the spectrum and of the desire to maximise common purpose amongst South Africans.'

In fact, this gathering of representatives of 19 organisations and 'governments', appropriately held at the World Trade Centre, is a rogues' market where all manner of horse-trading and rotten deals will take place over the heads and against the interests of the black masses.

The title itself is an obscenity. This is no convention of democratic forces. Outside of the ANC-SACP alliance, the rest have nothing to do with democracy; indeed, they have for decades been the most reactionary forces in South Africa, playing a vital role in maintaining the brutal system of apartheid-capitalism.

De Klerk takes a key place in CODESA as head of the white government and chief executive of the bourgeoisie. The ruling National Party is separately represented. This party was the chief architect of the barbaric system of apartheid, which it has enforced since 1948. Traditionally, it has had a popular base among the privileged white workers and petty-bourgeoisie, but it is squarely backed by the South African bourgeoisie and is its leading political representative.

The Democratic Party is also a party of the bourgeoisie but it has no pretensions to mass support. However, it was the first to establish open links with the ANC with a view to putting a negotiated settlement on the agenda, and it will continue to play a role in influencing the ANC.

Inkatha, led by Gatsha Buthelezi, is the best-organised representative of petty-bourgeois reaction and has long enjoyed the support of the apartheid bourgeoisie and imperialism. By means of a system of tribalist ideology, bribery and terror, it has secured influence over backward sections of the black petty-bourgeoisie and working class in Natal.

The other bantustan leaders and organisations are equally corrupt and ruthless; but they have no mass support and are despised by the vast majority of the proletarianised rural and urban masses they rule over. The remaining parties are the discredited and corrupt 'Coloured' and 'Indian' collaborators from P.W. Botha's tricameral parliament fraud.

Only the ANC's rotten policy of compromise has provided some semblance of credibility for these agents of apartheid tyranny. Now these reactionary elements are being granted their finest hour as they sit down to preside over the birth of 'democracy' in South Africa.

The Declaration of Intent signed by the ANC and the SACP leaders further confirms that they have drawn their organisations into a web of treachery and deceit. The document's pious generalities are only dust in the eyes of the oppressed masses.

It talks about working to 'heal the divisions of the past', promoting 'economic growth . . . and social justice for all' and 'eliminating violence, intimidation and destabilisation'. While embracing capitalist rule, which is based on the vicious exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie, the ANC-SACP alliance now joins hands with the class enemy and its most vicious agents and solemnly proclaims an end to the very divisions, injustices and violence produced by capitalism itself.

The Declaration also refers to a constitution that will 'guarantee . . . a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist state'. Only fools or willing partners in deception can believe that the signatories are committed to such noble sentiments. The ANC and SACP have been utterly inconsistent and more than ready to compromise these principles. But the other parties have been the very negation of them.

Rather than standing for a united South Africa, they have been the architects and executors of the balkanisation of South Africa with a divide-and-rule system of bantustans. Today these hypocrites, with their tribal and federalist schemes, seek to maintain the same reactionary divisions on

a modified basis.

Rather than standing for a democratic South Africa, they have resorted to decades of terror and tyranny to deny democracy to the oppressed masses.

Rather than standing for a non-racial South Africa, they have based their entire politics on dividing and ruling the oppressed on the basis of racism and tribalism.

Rather than standing for a non-sexist South Africa, they have been leading proponents of backward patriarchal ideology and practices.

The ANC and the SACP have committed their members to the Declaration of Intent signed by 17 of the 19 parties at CODESA. This means that they are 'bound by the agreements of CODESA' and will ' . . . take all such steps as are within [their] power and authority to realise their implementation'.

Mandela has already spelt out the implications of this clause. He has spoken about decisions being arrived at by means of 'sufficient consensus'. CODESA will therefore have nothing to do with the Harare Declaration's notion of the 'transfer of power' to the people. The implication is that whenever the ANC and the SACP disagree with the other parties on significant questions, they will have to go along with the 'sufficient consensus' of the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois rogues who in numbers overwhelmingly dominate.

Revolutionary militants in South Africa must stand firmly against the sell-out. Now is not the time for sentimentality and empty shows of 'loyalty'. CODESA must be systematically exposed for the anti-democratic fraud that it is.

Concentrate all efforts on building a mass campaign for a democratic constituent assembly convened by the masses. Turn especially to the workers in COSATU and NACTU, and the proletarian youth in the townships, with a programme of action based on all the political and economic demands of the working class and the oppressed masses.

At the same time, build the nucleus of a vanguard party of the working class based on revolutionary Marxism and a Trotskyist programme.

■ No to CODESA! Yes to a democratic constituent assembly convened by the masses!

■ No to negotiations! Yes to a programme of mass action!

■ Forward to a workers' government and socialism!

Greek CP divided on merits of coalition

ANDREAS PAPAN-DREOU, leader of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and former prime minister of Greece, was acquitted of corruption charges on January 16.

By a 7-6 majority, the Supreme Court in Athens found him not guilty of receiving bribes and orchestrating a scheme to embezzle \$200 million of state deposits at the Bank of Crete. However, two co-defendants, both ministers in Papan-dreou's 1981-89 government, were sentenced to terms of imprisonment for their part in the scandal which contributed to PASOK's defeat in the June 1989 election.

The most interesting aspect of the affair has been the stance taken by the Greek Communist Party (KKE). After supporting PASOK's eight-year rule as some form of 'socialist change', so that the right would not return to power, the winds of perestroika swept through the party ranks in the late 1980s.

Reconciliation was sought and achieved with the minuscule sect of Euro-communists, and together they formed the 'Coalition of the Left'. This, in turn, joined with the conservative New Democracy party in 1989 in a historic coalition government, with the aim of 'indicting PASOK for the financial scandals' and carrying out a 'catharsis' (clean-up) of the political system. In reality, the talk of purging corruption was nothing more than a cover for the KKE's rapid shift to the right.

At the KKE's 14th Congress, in December 1991, there was much discussion over whether it had been right to enter a coalition with the conservatives. The leadership said 'yes, without a doubt'. Others claimed it was a historic mistake, on a par with the KKE's disarming of the partisans in 1945, before the start of the civil war. But not a single delegate opposed participation in bourgeois coalitions in principle.

Meanwhile, the austerity measures introduced by the New Democracy government of Constantine Mitsotakis are affecting ever-wider layers of the population, and are radicalising a whole new generation of youth and workers. The loss of the KKE's influence among young people means it can no longer control, or rather stifle, any struggle which aims to go beyond the straitjacket imposed from above by PASOK and the KKE.

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EDITORIAL

Yeltsin: a wolf in democrat's clothing

BORIS YELTSIN's unceremonious eviction of Mikhail Gorbachev from the Kremlin and the declaration of the Commonwealth of Independent States marked the end of one process and the beginning of another.

Gorbachev's six-year tenure of the Soviet leadership coincided with the death agony of Stalinism. He attempted to maintain bureaucratic rule while opening the floodgates of capitalist restoration – to the point where the rising waters carried him off to political oblivion. He personified the turn to the market, but he attempted to control its speed through the traditional Stalinist channels. For all that he played a pivotal role, he remained a transitional figure.

By the time Gorbachev resigned from the CPSU after the August coup, it was too late. He was discredited and distrusted on all sides. The serious business of capitalist restoration required more than tinkering and experiments compounded by bureaucratic inertia and economic collapse. It needed the 'democratic' mantle that Gorbachev never had, combined with a readiness to trash those elements of the bureaucracy which stood in the way of the full rigours of building capitalism on the ruins of the USSR. Enter Boris Yeltsin, Russian president, member of the Politburo until 1987, member of the CPSU until 1990.

But if the restoration drive has for the time being found its figurehead, its success is far from assured. Of all the Eastern European states, East Germany was the best-case scenario for capitalism, with the powerful German bourgeoisie next door. Even there, the catastrophic destruction of productive forces has led to enormous problems for the restoring of a viable capitalism.

The ex-Soviet Union, in contrast, lies in the spectrum closer to the worst case. Although not at the level of Albania, its republics are gripped by an economic collapse of vast proportions. And while West German capitalism was prepared to underwrite the costs of restructuring in exchange for its *anschluss*, there are no takers on a comparable scale for the ex-Soviet republics of the CIS.

Moreover, where West German capital was able to substitute itself for an indigenous capitalist class, Russia will have to base itself on an altogether more motley assortment of ex-bureaucrats, small traders on the make, black marketeers, wealthier farmers and mafia bosses. This fact alone will make primitive capitalist accumulation CIS-style a brutal business – a breeding ground for ultra-nationalist movements and Bonapartist governments.

The impetus towards dictatorial methods will be fuelled by the objective problems that are piling up. The key tasks facing Yeltsin are to bring about a substantial reduction in workers' living standards, create a stable rouble, privatise large sectors of the economy and introduce 'normal' capitalist discipline into the workplace (the 'right' to hire and fire).

Surrounded by advisers like professors Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard and Richard Layard of the LSE, Yeltsin has adopted the Polish model, 'freeing' prices before attempting large-scale privatisation. But the price increases on staple items of between 300 and 1,000 per cent carried out on January 2, while they have accomplished the first of his main tasks, have achieved not so much a 'free' market as a bureaucratically-imposed one, hemmed in by the 97 per cent of the economy which remains nationalised.

What is more, the 'democratic' honeymoon is over. Yeltsin supporters in the new unions have been forced to respond to the widespread anger by calling strikes, winning wage increases or price reductions in some instances. Whereas Poland was able to control inflation and the money supply by an IMF-backed stabilisation fund for the zloty, the rouble is spiralling out of control. While Yeltsin's government talks of a stable currency, its printing presses are working overtime – the rouble currently exchanges at 170 to the dollar. Huge trade and budget deficits, and the vast cost of the former Soviet army, add to the crisis.

The collapse of the purchasing power of the rouble heralds a social explosion. No situation where a 'free market' kilo of sausages eats up a week's wages, or a pair of boots four months' wages, can remain stable for long!

Only large quantities of Western aid can stabilise the restorationist project. The alternative – short of proletarian revolution – is capitalism to be sure, but the capitalism of the poorest countries of the 'Third World'. But the prospects of a second edition of the Marshall Plan have received one setback after another, the latest at the G7 meeting in January. Germany, which has contributed 60 per cent of all Western aid so far, is reluctant to carry on picking up the tab.

The United States, gripped by recession at home, and with isolationist 'America first' Republicans making the running in election year, is unwilling to put its hand in its pocket. It views the 'reform' process as a long-term one; in the short term the risks are too high to warrant a stabilisation fund for the rouble.

The British Tories, anxious not to be totally excluded by German interests, have taken to championing Yeltsin – in marked contrast to their lukewarm attitude to Gorbachev at last July's G7 meeting. The CIS is fast becoming an arena for imperialist rivalries, just as Yugoslavia has been.

The expected entry of the CIS republics into full IMF membership in April is an attempt to spread the restructuring burden. The reality of their 'independence' will become clear as teams of IMF experts take over the supervision of their economies.

For workers in all the republics of the former Soviet Union, the writing is on the wall. Either the fight to defend nationalised property or a descent into semi-colonial poverty, fratricidal ethnic clashes and the threat of dictatorship.

THE SPOILS

It's one year since the US-led coalition fought its bloody war of aggression against Iraq. Ian Harrison counts the cost of the war for the peoples of the Middle East and questions whether the imperialists have managed to impose their 'new world order' on the region

ON JANUARY 17, 1991, the imperialist onslaught on the Gulf region began. Press reports described it as 'Sudden, massive, deadly and by night'.

Just as suddenly, 43 days later, after two million tons of explosives had been dropped on Iraq and Kuwait, the media began turning its attentions elsewhere. Only one national newspaper saw fit to publish an explicit photograph of the allied bombing of retreating Iraqi troops in the final hours of the war; the rest demurred on the grounds that it offended against 'public taste'.

By August, when the smoke had cleared from the battlefields and the scale of the casualties began to emerge, newspapers and television screens were being filled with images of mass poverty, unemployment and bloody civil strife, not in Iraq but in the republics of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Censorship and manipulation of news and comment had been enforced during the conflict – at the front, in Whitehall and Washington, and by editors and proprietors – and now a discreet veil was being drawn over the devastating consequences of the most sustained aerial bombardment in history.

It was a far cry from the blanket coverage in the months following the Iraqi army's occupation of Kuwait in August 1990. This period was utilised by US President Bush to create and justify a war, and the capitalist media played its role, whipping up reactionary anti-Arab chauvinism, patriotism and war hysteria. In the name of 'defending the sovereignty' of oil-rich Kuwait, Bush bludgeoned the small nations of the Middle East, Africa and Latin America into supporting his government's war drive. The anti-Saddam 'coalition' was assembled by threats, intimidation and bribery.

Bush had every reason to be confident of the outcome. The Stalinist bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing signalled support for the US, and Britain's newly-appointed prime minister, John Major, did not need reminding of the 'Falklands factor' – of what a good war can do for a government on the ropes. He proved a more than willing junior partner, not missing any photo opportunity to threaten the 'evil' Saddam, the better to prosecute the class war in Britain and pave the way for future munitions sales and rebuilding contracts in the Middle East. A number of Wall Street analysts even prophesied that a good war would assist in ending the economic recession, as 'joyful consumers' full of the 'euphoria of victory' went out on a spending spree.

One year on, and the claims that the Gulf War was an 'outstanding success' are revealed as patently absurd. The real war aims of Bush and Major have yet to be achieved. The dictator was to have been overthrown and a new world order of democracy brought to the 'liberated' peoples of the Gulf. Stripped of its exalted language, this means that the region was supposed to be stabilised under imperialist

influence to safeguard oil supplies and other strategic interests. In fact, not only is Saddam Hussein, though much weakened, still in power, but poverty, dislocation and political tensions have increased. Who, then, were the real winners and losers? Who paid the price for the onslaught? On these questions, politicians, analysts and the media maintain a deafening silence.

While no reliable estimates have been issued by either side in the conflict, relief and human rights organisations estimate that a minimum of 100,000 people, and up to 200,000, were killed during the onslaught and subsequent civil war in Iraq. Tens of thousands more were maimed or psychologically damaged. A further 20,000 deaths, mainly of children, have occurred among the Kurdish people due to dehydration, disease and the freezing winter conditions.

Doctors who visited Iraq in July 1991 estimated that the destruction of housing, sanitation and water supplies – leading to the spread of disease – combined with the continuing economic blockade, would kill a further 170,000 people by mid-1992.

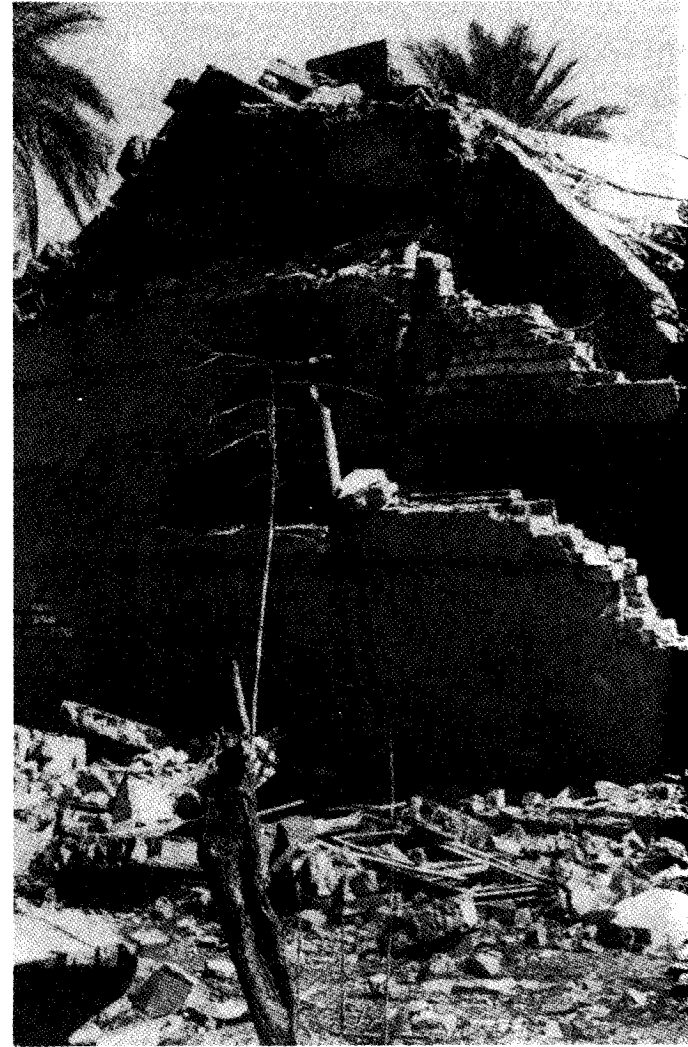
The number of refugees in the region between August 1990 and April 1991, arising directly from the Gulf conflict, was approximately five million. The loss in terms of wages remitted by migrant workers to their families in Asia, the Middle East and Africa is not less than \$3.9 billion a year. According to UNICEF, five million children in the Middle East are suffering deprivation as a result of the war.

Staple food crops have been blighted by acid rain, produced by oil fires, as far away as Pakistan and Turkey. The world's largest oil slick – 3.3 million gallons – is strangling life in the waters of the northern Gulf. The cost of rebuilding the devastated infrastructures of Iraq and Kuwait will be not less than \$230 billion.

The scale of civilian casualties, and the destruction wreaked on non-military targets, gives the lie to the allied propaganda that this was a 'surgical strike' with 'smart bombs'. The US armed forces' own statistics reveal that only seven per cent of the weapons used were precision guided. The remainder were cluster bombs, area impact munitions and fuel air explosives. Targets outside Baghdad were subject to intensive and indiscriminate carpet bombing.

For the newly-united republic of Yemen, the war came as a crippling blow. The loss of Soviet subsidies, trade with Iraq and remittances from 700,000 workers expelled from Saudi Arabia was compounded by a US-imposed economic boycott. When Yemen voted against the war at the United Nations, the US government described it as 'the most expensive "no" vote you ever cast'. Over \$1,070 million of aid from the US and Gulf states to the Yemen was cut off.

The Syrian and Iranian governments, previously 'pariahs',



Iraqi civilians inspect their bomb-damaged homes. Contrary to propaganda claims,

were rewarded for supporting imperialism in the war. Syria was given the green light to strengthen its control in Lebanon and both countries won new diplomatic and trading status in the world market place. Assad's regime pocketed billions of dollars' worth of loans. Iran concluded multi-billion dollar deals with Germany and Japan, its trade with Britain increased by 90 per cent, and it regained territory and access to waterways lost to Iraq in the 1980s. The contribution of other countries in the region was also recognised – Egypt and Turkey became major recipients of loans and debt relief from the US, Saudi Arabia, the IMF and the World Bank.

The Chinese government's crucial abstention in the vote on the UN Security Council which 'authorised' the use of force against Iraq was bought for \$114 million in non-humanitarian aid. The Soviet government received a gift from Saudi Arabia of \$4 billion.

Not to be outdone, however, the US sold \$18 billion of arms to the countries of the Middle East, while the US Army Engineering Corps awarded reconstruction contracts in the Gulf estimated at \$100 billion to US corporations. And that's just the start! Companies from around the world are still queuing up for contracts. The debris of war has to be cleared; houses, schools, hospitals, public buildings, roads, factories and oil installations have to be rebuilt. Despite the enormous expense of mounting the war, the imperialist countries stand to make a considerable profit out of it.

Since the war, conditions for the Kurdish people have deteriorated drastically inside and outside Iraq. The regimes in Turkey, Syria and Iran – which oppress large Kurdish populations within their own borders – have been strengthened by imperialism. Attempts are being made to railroad the Palestinians into a sell-out settlement, while thousands of them have been forced to flee Kuwait to

avoid murderous reprisals for opposing the war on Saddam. Iraq lies in ruins, its population facing a social catastrophe of imperialism's making. The economies of Jordan and Yemen

ONE OF the side-effects of the civil war in Yugoslavia has been to expose the political and programmatic deficiencies of many groups on the British left. In a situation which demands clear-cut positions to advance the struggle of the working class within the specific context of the break-up of Yugoslavia into its component republics, most have ended up reaching for abstractly correct, 'internationalist' formulations.

While it is clearly necessary to publish propaganda for socialism and outline strategic tasks, in the hands of some groups these become a substitute for concrete analysis, and a way of avoiding the thorny problem of elaborating transitional demands which intersect with the immediate concerns of the masses.

Indifference to the life-and-death struggles of workers and peasants is a familiar trait among middle-class layers, especially in imperialist countries. One of the forms it takes in left-wing groups is a failure to understand the importance of the national question among oppressed peoples, leading to an inability to separate the national aspirations of the masses from the reactionary chauvinism of their leaders. Out of laziness, theoretical sloppiness or plain ignorance, many prefer to retain their ideological 'purity' by avoiding this contradiction altogether, confining themselves to generalised calls for proletarian solidarity or socialist revolution.

After imperialism and Stalinism, Serbian nationalism has traditionally been the main oppressor in the Balkans. It is impermissible, therefore, to equate the drive for a 'Greater Serbia' with the Croatian demand for self-determination. Croatia is a nation oppressed by Serbia, and no amount of reference to the vile crimes of its leaders can change this fact. Any revolutionary worthy of the

F WAR



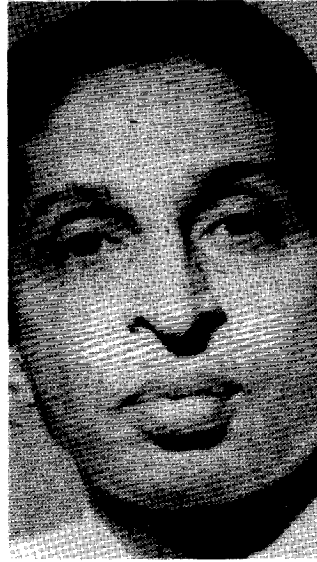
are in deep crisis. The net result is that there is now less democracy and freedom of movement for the peoples of the Middle East. The borders drawn in the sand by

British military officers after the First World War have been reinstated by US imperialism, and the seeds of future conflict scattered across the Middle East.

EDMUND SAMARAKKODY

(1912-92)

An appreciation



Edmund Samarakkody

WITH THE death of Edmund Samarakkody on January 3, one of the last links with the heroic period of Ceylonese Trotskyism has been broken.

Comrade Edmund was born into an aristocratic family, but rejected this way of life and became an early member of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. By the end of 1937 he had already played an important role in two strikes – at the Toluwangoda coconut mill and the Colombo fertiliser works. For his part in the latter action he was arrested along with Leslie Goonewardene. Within the LSSP he was a member of the 'T Group' – a Trotskyist tendency which took control of the party after expelling the Stalinist faction in 1940.

During the Second World War, the LSSP was singled out by the British colonial authorities for repression. From the start, the party had characterised the war as imperialist. Opposing Ceylon's participation, it proceeded to organise a series of strikes by Tamil plantation workers in 1939-40, in which Edmund not only played a prominent political role, but also defended strikers in court.

With the support of its local servants, the British had four leaders of the LSSP, including Edmund, arrested in June 1940, and drove the party underground. But after recruiting their jailer, the four detainees escaped on April 7, 1942, causing a sensation. Three of them – N.M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena and Colvin R. de Silva – went to India, where they founded the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, while Edmund remained in Ceylon to continue working underground. In 1944, he was rearrested, charged with escaping from jail and sentenced to a further six months' rigorous imprisonment.

Within months of its formation, the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India had split, and the effects of this were carried back to Ceylon, where by 1945 it had produced two rival Samasamajist parties – a reformist LSSP led by N.M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena and the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, of which Edmund was one of the principal leaders, along with Leslie Goonewardene and Colvin R. de Silva.

In 1947, parliamentary elections were held in anticipation of the end of direct colonial rule. Edmund was

selected by the BLP to stand against D.S. Senanayake – the leader of the right-wing United National Party who was to become the first prime minister of Ceylon after independence came into force on February 4, 1948. Edmund polled 10,000 votes against Senanayake's 16,000.

The two Samasamajist groups were reunited in 1950 as the LSSP, but with the reformists of the Perera group in leading positions. Soon after the reunification, a liberal bourgeois party was formed in Ceylon – the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led by Dr S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. The LSSP increasingly adapted to the SLFP, initiating discussions aimed at minimising clashes between their respective candidates in the 1952 election (in which Edmund became an LSSP MP), and striking a no-contest pact in the 1956 election which assisted an SLFP-dominated front, the MEP, in defeating the UNP and forming an administration. The LSSP leaders promptly offered 'responsive co-operation' to this bourgeois government.

In 1957, Edmund, together with three other members of the LSSP Central Committee, came out in opposition to the line of 'responsive co-operation', arguing that 'However unpalatable and unacceptable it may have been, the party should have characterised this government as a capitalist government, and thereafter proceeded to explain... the aim of the party in relation to the MEP government is revolutionary overthrow of the government'. But, as Edmund was later to complain, this opposition received no support from the International Secretariat of Pablo and Mandel, to which the LSSP was affiliated.

The year 1960 saw two general elections, in March and July, the first of which resulted in a hung parliament. In the intervening period Perera successfully proposed that the LSSP abandon its call for a Samasamajist government in favour of a coalition with the SLFP. This result was only prevented by an SLFP landslide in the second election. When the LSSP's parliamentary group voted to support the government's programme, Edmund, along with Meryl Fernando, defied the party whip and voted against. As before, there was little support from the IS which criticised the parliamentary vote, but kept silent on the vote in favour of coalition.

Edmund again headed an opposition, this time of 14 CC members, to the formation of the United Left Front in 1963 between the LSSP, the Communist Party and a Sinhala chauvinist grouping led by Philip Gunawardena. Its purpose was the election of a coalition government of the three parties, and its programme was entirely parliamentary-reformist. The CC minority correctly condemned this as a blatant revision of the united front tactic, and Edmund argued that it was a step towards 'the establishment of a capitalist coalition government, in association even with the SLFP'. Yet again, opposition was undermined by the international

leadership's support for the ULF.

The prediction proved accurate, and in June 1964 the LSSP formed a coalition with the SLFP – the first time a 'Trotskyist' party had entered a capitalist government. Less than a quarter of the party split to found the LSSP (Revolutionary section). The LSSP(R) included 14 CC members and two MPs, Meryl Fernando and Edmund Samarakkody. It also had control of the powerful Ceylon Mercantile Union, headed by Bala Tampoe. That the new party was unable to rally more support from the ranks of the LSSP is attributable to the lack of political preparation for the split, for while Edmund had firmly opposed the party leadership, he had failed to form a revolutionary opposition faction.

This also had consequences for the new party, which was a collection of disparate political elements, united only because they had opposed entry into the Bandaranaike coalition. Its subsequent history was a series of splits, in which it broke up into its constituent parts. Not the least of the LSSP(R)'s mistakes was the vote by its two MPs against nationalisation of the Lake House newspaper group in December 1964. By forming a bloc with the right wing, they effectively brought down the coalition under conditions which were far from clear to the masses. In the next general election, both MPs lost their seats, with Edmund only getting 278 votes as against the LSSP candidate's 13,023.

In 1968, after a number of unsavoury scandals involving Bala Tampoe had surfaced, the LSSP(R) split, with Edmund's faction walking out to form the Revolutionary Samasamaja Party (later renamed the Revolutionary Workers Party). Edmund submitted a report to the 1969 United Secretariat World Congress, detailing Tampoe's junketing with open class enemies and his opportunist trade union record. Although the USec's Ceylon Commission criticised Tampoe, the congress recognised his group as the official section, and Ceylon was deemed worthy of only half an hour's debate.

In 1971, Ceylon was convulsed by an uprising of rural Sinhalese youth led by the semi-Maoist JVP. It was met with vicious repression by a coalition government, once more including LSSP ministers, who justified the state's actions in killing 15,000 people. In his capacity as a civil rights lawyer, Edmund defended the JVP leader, Rojan Wijeweera.

Throughout his life, Edmund championed the rights of the oppressed Tamil minority. When the Tamil struggle escalated from one for equal rights to one for secession, he supported the right of an independent Tamil state, while continuing to advocate working class unity.

During the 1970s, the RWP maintained links with the Spartacists, but was never a full member of their tendency. The relationship broke up in 1979 over a number of differences, including the national question. In 1982, the RWP declared fraternal relations with the Gruppo Operaio Rivoluzionario of Italy.

Although he was not able to build the RWP into a significant force, Edmund remained to the last a man of integrity and political principle. In contrast to so many of his former comrades, he had not sold out. On a personal level he was charming, and he enjoyed good relations, if not full agreement, with our tendency. He will be greatly missed.

Croatia's right to take up arms

name should be able to combine opposition to Croatia's bourgeois nationalist and fascist leaders with support for the nationalist sentiments of the workers and peasants. The former's nationalism is that of a nascent capitalist class anxious to retain as large a territory as possible for exploitation, the latter's that of an oppressed people with a legitimate desire for self-determination.

For the Socialist Workers Party, the present conflict in Yugoslavia is largely the product of a conspiracy by the 'old bureaucratic rulers' who 'played the nationalist card to try and hang on to power'. Lip-service is paid to 'the right of self-determination for all people in Yugoslavia's republics' which 'must be combined with guaranteed rights for all minorities within each republic', but this is never translated into programmatic demands. Do socialists fight for this position in identical ways in Serbia and Croatia? According to the SWP, yes, except that the 'fight' consists of nothing beyond a wish to see enlightenment drop from the sky: 'The only hope is that workers in all the republics begin to understand they are being cynically manipulated by their rulers and that the civil war is not their war.'

Workers, then, should abstain on the question of Serbian attempts to dominate the region at the expense of minority nationalities. In Croatia, presumably,

the SWP's advice would be that they reject the use of arms to defend themselves against the Serbian-controlled Yugoslav Army and the Chetnik militia. We recommend that an SWP delegation be immediately despatched to Zagreb to campaign for this position! Unable to see any way out of the mire, the *Socialist Worker* editorial in which this pacifist tripe appeared (September 21, 1991) takes on a highly pessimistic tone. 'There is, however, a long way to go before workers realise that instead of fighting each other they should be fighting the common enemy,' it gloomily concludes. The 'theoretical' groundwork had been laid down the week before in an article by Ian Taylor entitled 'Socialism and nationalism' (*Socialist Worker*, September 14, 1991). Here, using quotations from Lenin, the SWP attempted to pass its abstentionist position off as Marxist. The technique involved repudiating those who 'denounced all nationalist movements as backward', and 'defending the right of Croatia to be free from Serbian domination'. Nowhere, however, did the article move beyond the acceptance in principle of the 'right' to secede; its function was to issue orthodox propaganda to satisfy those SWP members with a smattering of political theory, while avoiding taking sides in the civil war.

This was confirmed by the

fact that none of the arguments employed in the theoretical article found their way into a news item in the same edition of *Socialist Worker* which reported the 'bitterest bloodshed yet' in Yugoslavia. With aircraft bombarding Croatian towns, the only comfort offered to Croatian workers was the hope that they would 'begin to see the only way to build effective resistance to Milosevic and Yugoslav generals is to build unity with Serbian workers against their bosses!'

The same schizophrenia was exhibited in the October 1991 edition of the SWP's theoretical magazine, *Socialist Review*. 'Socialists have to respond to this situation by arguing for equal rights for all nationalities,' thundered its editorial. 'That means opposing the invasion of Croatia and supporting its right to split away if it wants.' But just how far does the SWP's 'opposition' to the invasion run? To a military bloc with Croatia, within which socialists would stand shoulder to shoulder with workers and peasants against Serbian oppression, but would seek to drive a wedge between them and their right-wing leaders, proletarianise the struggle and fight for an independent workers' republic? Well, no, not exactly. After much wailing and gnashing of teeth over the inequity of it all, the real line emerges. What's needed is 'a movement from below which can identify

and build around common grievances across the nationalities'. How very civilized!

Initially, Workers Power attempted to combine two mutually exclusive positions in order both to satisfy the requirements of proletarian internationalism, and to extend support for militant self-determination by an oppressed nation. It called for 'multi-national workers' militia', while asserting that 'the question of defending national rights means that not all combat should be condemned. The Croatian Republic has every right to defend itself militarily against Serbian or Federal aggression' (*Workers Power*, September 1991). Quite how it was possible to build *multi-national* workers' militia in a war situation was not explained.

In October, it was still defending the right of Croatia and Slovenia 'to resist the Serbian backed attempt to keep them in the federation by force', but the following month a prominent correction was inserted in the paper stating that this was not meant to imply support for Croatia since the civil war 'at present does not have the character of justified national defence on either side'. By December, under the headline 'Workers' revolution – the only answer', the new line was amplified. Since both sides were now 'fighting for reactionary goals', the advice was that 'workers should at present take no side in the war between Serbia and Croatia'.

It's clear from the contradictory nature of Workers Power's original position that the group has problems incorporating the unruly events of the real world into its schema for proletarian revolution. Despite everything, on the question of the civil war in Yugoslavia it finds itself essentially in the same camp as the SWP.

TODAY, what passes for the world Trotskyist movement is fragmented into a multitude of competing tendencies, but the situation Healy faced in 1964 was very different. For after the reunification of the International Secretariat and the majority of the International Committee, very few 'Trotskyist' forces remained outside the United Secretariat. If Healy had possessed a correct political line (which he didn't), it would probably have made sense to participate in the reunification and fight out the differences inside the USec. As it was, Healy's decision to go it alone placed the Socialist Labour League in a position of national isolation.

This situation undoubtedly accelerated Healy's retreat into the insularity which had always been encouraged by the federal structure of the IC itself. He developed a political outlook which has been dubbed 'Trotskyism in One Country',¹ whereby his work at national level became a substitute for – or rather, in Healy's mind, identical with – the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International. This reasoning was expressed quite openly by Healy's political attorney Cliff Slaughter, who explained that the SLL was fulfilling its internationalist obligations by demonstrating in practice the correctness of its orientation towards the construction of independent revolutionary parties. 'Building the SLL in Britain,' Slaughter asserted, 'is fighting in the front line of the reconstruction of the Fourth International.'²

Healy's readiness to pursue his own national course was reinforced by the organisational success registered by the SLL in this period. According to one account, during 1962-4 the League's membership grew from 300 to 1,000.³ While such forces were tiny in relation to the multi-millioned British working class, the SLL was nevertheless the largest organisation claiming adherence to Trotskyism that had ever existed in Britain, and was far bigger than any of the USec's European sections. As a result, Tim Wohlforth argues, Healy 'became convinced his methods worked and those of his competitors in the Fourth International did not'.⁴ From this standpoint, the International would be rebuilt when groups in other countries saw the need to emulate Healy's superior political methods.

The SLL's advances were the product of its effective intervention in the Labour Party youth movement. Despite the proscription of its paper *Keep Left* in 1962, and the subsequent suspension and expulsion of some of its leaders, the SLL faction in the Young Socialists took a majority of seats on the National Committee at the 1963 and 1964 YS conferences. As he had during the 1956-7 crisis in

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy

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

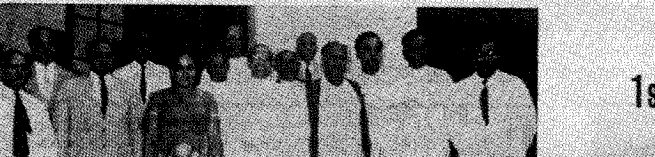
PART FOURTEEN



CEYLON The great betrayal

Two reports from Ceylon
by G. Healy

★ Correspondence ★ documents ★ resolutions



When the LSSP entered a bourgeois coalition government in 1964, Healy attributed all the blame to 'Pabloism'. In fact, his own record on this issue had been no better

the Communist Party, Healy completely out-manoeuvred his opponents on the left. Despite pooling their resources to bring out the paper *Young Guard* in competition with *Keep Left*, the SLL's rivals – Tony Cliff's state-capitalist tendency, Ted Grant's followers and the fore-runners of the International Marxist Group – were unable to equal the gains made by Healy's faction. Furthermore, *Young Guard's* willingness to compromise with the Labour leadership contrasted shabbily with the young Healyites' defiance of the bureaucracy, leading to charges of 'scabbing' from *Keep Left*. Conflict between the groupings reached a peak at the 1964 YS conference, when Healy's car was mobbed by *Young Guard* supporters demanding that he stop 'interfering' in the YS, while NEC representative Reg Underhill looked on approvingly.⁵

A number of important individuals were won out of the YS. Roger Protz, for example, resigned as editor of the official Labour youth paper, *New Advance*, in 1961 to become editor of *Keep Left*. It was in this period, too, that Sheila Torrance joined the movement. The League's youth work also attracted militants from the Young Communist League, and there was a furore which spilled over into the capitalist press in 1964 when Jean Kerrigan, daughter of a leading Stalinist, came over to the SLL. Healy was able to assemble a staff of able full-timers from such recruits, which greatly strengthened his organisation.

But the success of the *Keep Left* tendency stemmed from its ability to recruit thousands of working class youth, either unemployed or in low-paid jobs, whom the post-war boom had passed by. These youth were used as 'Healy's shock troops' – the phrase is Tim Wohlforth's⁶ – against the Labour bureaucracy. Here again, as in 1956-7, Healy's talent for spotting a political opening and directing his organisation's resources towards it paid real dividends. By September 1964, on the eve of the general election which put Harold Wilson's government in office, *Keep Left* was able to mobilise 3-4,000 youth on a 'Fight the Tories' demonstration.⁷ These adv-

ances were reflected in the expansion of the SLL's press. *The Newsletter* reached a weekly circulation of 10,000,⁸ and by 1963 Healy was talking of transforming the paper into a daily.⁹

However, and here there is another parallel with his earlier intervention in the CP, Healy showed his incapacity to use the forces won from the YS in a revolutionary way. One of the problems, as Wohlforth observes, 'lay precisely in the rebelliousness and rootlessness of these youth [who] took to the revolutionary rhetoric of the SLL more easily than trade unionists, as they had little or no experience in the major institutions of the class, the British Labour Party and the trade unions. This could and did encourage Healy to escalate his rhetoric...'.¹⁰ Thus by 1963, Healy was projecting a scenario in which an economic slump, combined with the political crisis which the Profumo scandal had produced in the Tory party, would give rise to a revolutionary situation. 'The problems of the British economy are so acute,' a resolution at that year's SLL conference declared, 'and the relation between capital and its political agents so full of contradictions, that the problem of power is in fact continually posed.'¹¹

Of course, ultra-left bombast had always been a feature of Healy's political style. And to the extent that his more exaggerated pronouncements reflected a euphoria generated by his organisation's spectacular growth, there was an element of 'honest' self-delusion

time in the League, members never achieved the level of political experience which could enable them to mount a challenge to the ruling clique. Healy's bureaucratic stranglehold over the organisation was thereby considerably tightened.

That the youth's energies were directed into such activities as paper selling and organising for the SLL's meetings and marches also had its negative consequences. For it became a substitute for serious work in the basic organisations of the working class, where young revolutionaries would have been forced to grapple with the domination of reformist ideology over the movement. This freed Healy from the need to develop a programme to break workers from social democracy, and allowed him to indulge instead in sectarian propagandism. Symptomatic of this transformation of the SLL into a sect, walled off from real developments in the working class, was the increasing tendency for *The Newsletter* to hail the League's own achievements as milestones in the history of the workers' movement.

Ultra-left sectarianism went hand in hand with the familiar adaptation to reformist parliamentarianism, as embodied in Healy's call for 'a Labour government pledged to carry out socialist policies'. Such policies included the nationalisation of basic industries under workers' control, and for the capitalist state to be 'abolished and replaced with a socialist one' – in other words, the economic and political expropriation of the bourgeoisie. All of which, apparently, was to be carried out by a Labour majority in the House of Commons! Transitional demands were completely absent. Indeed, according to Healy, the implementation of workers' control was to be secured, not through the class struggle at the point of production, but through parliamentary legislation.¹³

Healy's one foray into the international arena during this period was in response to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's

examination. In fact it had been one of the criticisms levelled at Healy by the Pennington-Grainger opposition back in 1960 that he had failed to take a stand against the degeneration of the LSSP.¹⁴ And despite the fact that two leading members of the SLL – Mike and Tony Banda – had close links with the movement in Ceylon, Healy had taken no action regarding the LSSP during the following years, apart from an opportunist attempt to recruit LSSP oppositionist Prins Rajasooriya during a visit to Britain in 1963.¹⁵

In June 1964, however, on the eve of the conference which was to endorse the party's entry into the government, Healy suddenly flew to Ceylon in a last-minute effort to intervene in the LSSP. Having been preceded by no political preparation whatever – not even a letter to the LSSP to inform them of his impending arrival, still less a request that he should be allowed to address the conference – Healy's intervention amounted to little more than a crude attempt to gatecrash the proceedings, to which he was not surprisingly denied entry. The articles Healy wrote afterwards for *The Newsletter* – later published as a pamphlet, *Ceylon: The Great Betrayal* – were shoddily written and politically inaccurate, and can have done little to convince militants in the breakaway LSSP (Revolutionary) that the IC represented a serious alternative to the USec.

On his return to Britain, Healy apparently used the betrayal in Ceylon as a pretext to withdraw his forces from the YS¹⁶ – presumably on the basis that the example of the LSSP showed the need to split the revolutionaries from the reformists. This decision was announced to the membership at the SLL's summer camp in July-August 1964.¹⁷ The *Keep Left* tendency was faced with increased repression by the bureaucracy during the run-up to the general election, it is true, but the expulsions fell far short of the 'thousands' claimed in Healyite mythology.¹⁸ In early 1965, *Keep Left* was claiming that just over 50 leading members had been expelled nationally.¹⁹ 'The leaders of the *Keep Left* tendency,' it has been pointed out, 'decided on an organised break with the Labour Party in the face of the witch-hunting and limited expulsions, and thereafter they set out, by being awkward and provocative in local Labour Parties and elsewhere, to have as many people as possible expelled and branches closed down. The bureaucracy did not need much provocation!'²⁰

To be continued

Notes

1. R. Black, *Fascism in Germany*, Steyne Publications, 1975, p.1109.
2. *Labour Review*, Summer 1963.
3. T. Whelan, *The Credibility Gap: The Politics of the SLL*, International Marxist Group, 1970, p.6.
4. T. Wohlforth, *Memoirs*, unpublished draft, chapter 6.
5. *Keep Left*, May 1964.
6. Wohlforth, op. cit.
7. *The Newsletter*, October 3, 1964.
8. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1964.
9. *Ibid.*, September 28, 1963.
10. Wohlforth, op. cit.
11. Quoted by M. Hoskisson and D. Stocking, 'The rise and fall of the SLL', *Workers Power*, February 1986.
12. J. Cleary and N. Cobbett, 'Labour's misspent youth', *Workers Action*, July 28, 1979.
13. *The Newsletter*, June 22, 1963.
14. *By Their Words Ye Shall Know Them*, Solidarity pamphlet no.4, 1960, p.13.
15. See *Workers News*, October/November 1990.
16. So Mike Banda later claimed: *Workers Press*, February 7, 1986.
17. Whelan, op. cit., p.6.
18. This figure is given by Charlie Pottins in *Workers Press*, December 7, 1991. The article also covers up for Healy's role in provoking his own and other comrades' expulsions from the Labour Party following the launch of the SLL.
19. *Keep Left*, January 1965.
20. Cleary and Cobbett, op. cit.



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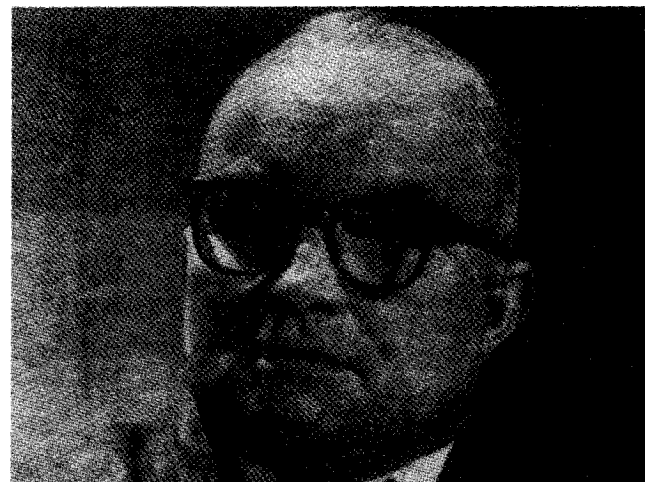
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Gerry Healy in 1964

Aside from boosting the circulation of his press, and providing bodies for the SLL's demonstrations, the activism of his young followers had two main advantages for Healy. First of all, it kept the rank and file so occupied with organisational work that they had little time to give critical thought to the leadership's political line. And secondly, it led to a high turnover of members, with the result that, during their short

entry into a bourgeois coalition government in Ceylon. This betrayal by the USec's largest section was a major calamity for Trotskyism, and one which Healy was eager to blame on the evils of 'Pabloite revisionism'. However, quite aside from the fact that, within the USec, Pablo himself was the main opponent of a soft line towards the LSSP leaders, Healy's own record on this question scarcely stood up to

The RIL side of the story

WHEN THE Workers Revolutionary Party expelled its long-time leader Gerry Healy in October 1985, its action was greeted with acclaim by many on the left. For a time it seemed that the WRP might break from the old Healyite tradition and perhaps even provide a catalyst for the regroupment of revolutionary forces internationally. Such hopes proved illusory. Today the politics of the WRP (*Workers Press*) are mere warmed-over Healyism – with self-justifying moralism and hysterical Stalinophobia the only new ingredients. The WRP leaders have resurrected the ludicrous claim that they embody the continuity of the struggle for Trotskyism, and they are constructing their own mini-‘International’ whose affiliates are transformed into clones of the parent organisation in Britain.

Gerry Downing's lengthy study attempts to explain how the WRP failed to overcome the legacy of Healyism. He

deals in a very detailed way with the WRP's evolution from 1985 up to his own departure from the group in 1988, and successfully demolishes many of the myths which the present leaders of the WRP have broadcast about themselves around the world. This aspect of Downing's pamphlet can only be welcomed.

Thus Downing rejects the Slaughterite version of the 1985 split in the WRP, according to which ‘near fascist defenders of rape’ were routed by the defenders of ‘revolutionary morality’. However, he doesn't really explain why such a large proportion of the WRP membership refused to back Healy's expulsion. Downing does refer to Mike Banda's record of violence against party members, including women comrades, during the faction fights of 1985. But he doesn't mention that the anti-Healy faction on the Central Committee used its majority to block disciplinary action

WRP Explosion
The Sabotage of an Opportunity to Regenerate Trotskyism, 1985-91
by Gerry Downing
Revolutionary Internationalist League; £4.95

Review by Jean-Pierre Goethuys and Bob Pitt

against Banda, and then proceeded – under Banda's leadership – to charge Healy with assaulting party members and abusing women. Furthermore, Banda was already launched on the political trajectory which would take him into the arms of Stalinism. Under the circumstances, it was understandable – though not excusable – that many WRP members (including some current members of the WIL) rallied around Sheila Torrance, and went along with the unprincipled deal she stitched together with Healy's supporters in the autumn of 1985.

It is a merit of Gerry Down-

ing's account of the WRP (*Workers Press*) that he makes no attempt to prettify the organisation which emerged from the split. He doesn't try and cover up the scandalous proceedings at the February 1986 WRP Congress, from which delegates supporting David North's ‘International Committee’ were excluded with the assistance of the police. He also outlines the campaign of violence waged by the *Workers Press* group against members of the Torrance-Healy WRP.

While this is to Downing's credit, it serves to undermine his central thesis, that the

explosion of the WRP had opened up ‘an opportunity to regenerate Trotskyism’. How could an organisation which engaged in these contemptible political practices hold any such potential? The truth is that by 1985 the WRP was so rotten politically, and its members so disorientated by years of Healyite miseducation, that neither side of the split was capable of regeneration. The most that could be hoped for was that some elements who emerged from the break-up could evolve in a healthy political direction.

This is not to deny that positive developments took place in the Slaughter group in the immediate aftermath of the split. Under Dave Bruce's editorship, *Workers Press* did for a while become a forum for serious political discussion, and even Simon Pirani produced some worthwhile material on Vietnamese Trotskyism. But this period of reassessment did not have any constructive outcome. For, having made a *tabula rasa* of its old politics, the WRP didn't replace them with new ones. The result was, as Downing demonstrates, that the period of glasnost was swiftly terminated, veteran hacks corrupted by past decades of hatchet-work for Healy reclaimed control of the party (or what was left of it), and ‘all the old crap revived’.

Gerry Downing's approach – which centres on the author's own political experiences, mainly in Britain – weakens his understanding of this process. For it was on the international level that the WRP's project of ‘regeneration’ was aborted. The initial proposals for regroupment were jettisoned in favour of the WRP's ‘Preparatory Committee’ which was intended as an instrument for imposing a shotgun wedding with the Argentinian-based LIT, led by the late Nahuel Moreno. From then on, the only question for consideration in the WRP was whether one was for immediate fusion with the LIT. When this objective failed to materialise, the different groupings within the WRP tried to settle political accounts with each other.

The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (with which the WIL has since fused) did its best to intervene in the debates raging in the WRP, and

established relations with the Internationalist Faction, of which Gerry Downing was a leading member. The IF contained a number of strong individuals, but politically it was little more than an anti-LIT bloc. At meetings in London and Brussels, the IF was urged by the LTT to develop its own perspectives for work in the British working class, which was the only way in which militants in the WRP could be broken from the Slaughter leadership. The LTT's efforts were in vain. The IF leaders evidently feared that if their tendency engaged in a discussion on such concrete programmatic issues it would disintegrate. As it was, the IF took a small group out of the WRP and then promptly fragmented.

Yet Downing's account makes no mention of the LTT's intervention. Given that one of the declared aims of his pamphlet is to provide a balance sheet of the groups involved in the PC, this omission amounts to political dishonesty. Elsewhere, the LTT is accused of unprincipled manoeuvring with regard to the PC, and even of ‘acting as a left cover’ for Slaughter!

Contrary to what Downing suggests, the LTT is proud of its record on the PC. Yes, the LTT did sign the WRP's ‘Ten-Point Call’. Yes, it signed the document recognising all participants as Trotskyists. And yes, it participated in the PC while others were excluded. The LTT did so in order to engage in a debate that would take place on the PC irrespective of the intentions of the WRP and LIT leaders. Here was the possibility of influencing thousands of militants who considered themselves as Trotskyists, and it would have been foolish not to take up this opportunity. The LTT decided, therefore, that it could make some tactical concessions. It has not regretted them since.

The LTT intends to publish its own account of the Preparatory Committee in the near future. Meanwhile, we understand that Gerry Downing is preparing a revised edition of *WRP Explosion* with the assistance of his comrades in the International Trotskyist Committee. It is to be hoped that the new version will take into consideration some of the points raised in this review.

1953: Stalin's last purge

The Doctors' Plot
by Yakov Rapoport
Fourth Estate; £17.95

Review by Richard Price

WRITTEN 20 years after the event, it was a further 15 years before Professor Rapoport's memoirs of Stalin's infamous anti-Semitic purge found a publisher in the Soviet Union. His book became a bestseller. Now in English, it sheds a great deal of light on a subject which has often been treated as little more than a footnote to Stalin's last days.

Although not one of the principal figures arrested in the 1952-3 campaign against ‘killer doctors’, Rapoport's personal account of the ‘plot’ sets out with dignity and passion what it was like to pass through the mill of Stalin's final purge.

When, in January 1953, the Tass news agency broke the ‘story’ that a group of terrorist doctors guided by the CIA and financed by Jewish capitalists had been uncovered, Rapoport was a distinguished pathologist with an impeccable record of service to Soviet medicine. Like the majority of other doctors arrested he was Jewish, although he considered himself assimilated into Russian culture. And, in spite of his experiences, he continued to regard himself as a communist and an internationalist.

Rapoport brings to his writing the meticulous qualities of his professional training – honesty and attention to detail – from the nuances of questions at the interminable interrogations to which he was subjected, to the reactions of friends and colleagues to his plight.

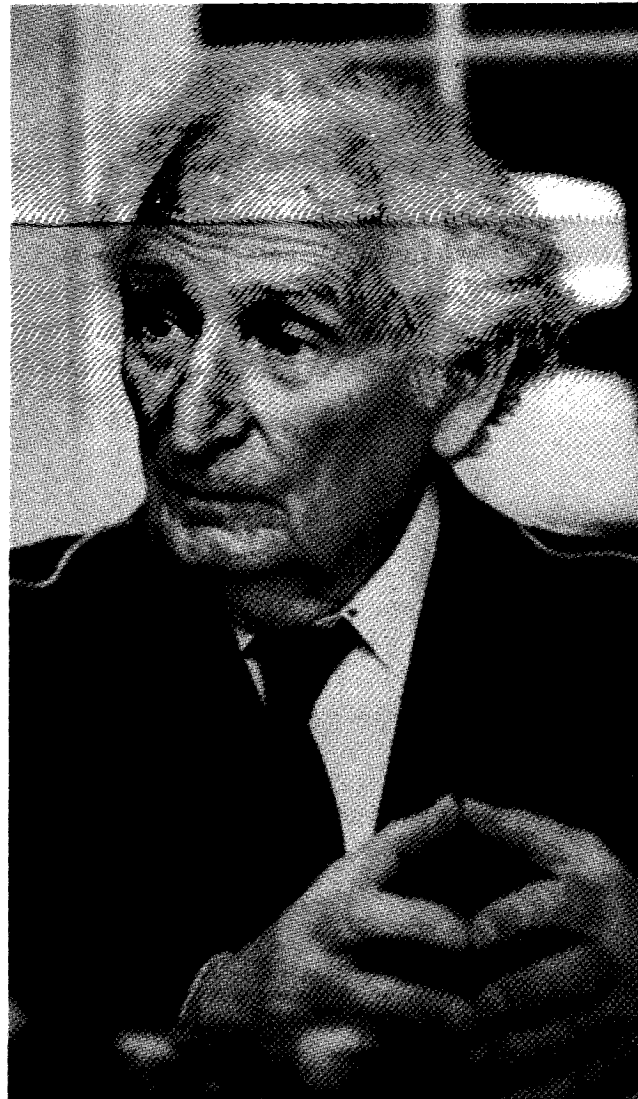
What possible purpose did the Doctors' Plot serve? Professor Rapoport admits that he does not feel qualified to give a complete answer. Indeed, he declares that ‘It defies common sense’. He tends towards the clinical explanation that Stalin was a paranoiac. But regardless of Stalin's morbid suspiciousness – a trait exacerbated by age and ill-health – purely psychological explanations cannot account for why

the Soviet Union was turned upside down in the hunt for white-coated terrorists.

Whereas the purges of the Thirties had struck at centres of opposition – real, perceived, potential or imagined – extending from the party, through the army and bureaucracy to the minority nationalities, a group of middle-aged doctors could not have represented a threat to anyone. But there was nonetheless a rationale.

The post-war Soviet Union faced considerable problems after the immense loss of life and destruction wreaked by the Nazis. Although there was an improvement in the economy, little of it filtered through to workers and even less to the countryside. This was the period of the *Zhdanovschina* in culture; of the fraud Lysenko's dominance of genetics; of frame-up trials in Eastern Europe; of the battering down of the hatches in all walks of life. Competing factions of bureaucrats intrigued behind the scenes, waiting for Stalin to die. Russian nationalism, fanned by the bureaucracy during the war, remained unfulfilled in its aspirations, and bureaucratic rule was dangerously close to an impasse.

At the intersection of these contradictions developed an official campaign of anti-Semitism, which served a similar purpose for Stalinists as it did for Nazis – to scapegoat a minority in order to distract attention from the crisis of the regime. In 1948, denunciations were made in the official press of ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ (ie, Jews) in the cultural sphere. This spilled over into science, where the hallmark of ‘cosmopolitanism’ was a failure to extol all things Russian. In 1952, the campaign leapt forward with the execution of all but one of the members of the wartime Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. By the time the MGB secret police had got the Doctors' Plot under way, plans



Yakov Rapoport in 1989

were afoot to deport Jews en masse and hold them in camps.

By combining an attack on Jews in general with an attack on doctors, the secret police could incite the most backward elements of Soviet society against a section of the intelligentsia. Here was the real source of their ills – privileged Jews in the pay of foreign powers, conspiring to wreck the country by murdering its leaders as well as ordinary citizens. Once more, anti-Semitism proved itself to be the ‘socialism of idiots’.

That such an ugly and preposterous campaign could win a degree of popular support so soon after the horrors of Nazi Germany was an index of the sickness of Soviet society. Rapoport describes the alacri-

ty with which hospitals and institutes sacked their Jewish staff, while other Jewish intellectuals (with honourable exceptions) stepped forward to sign a declaration of solidarity with the campaign.

Freed from this nightmare by the death of Stalin and the subsequent collapse of the MGB's conspiracy, Professor Rapoport has lived to a ripe old age, and performed a valuable service in writing this book, which deserves a wider and cheaper circulation in paperback. Appropriately, he concludes by saying: ‘This is only a glimpse through the back door of Stalin's charnel house, compared with which the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition are mere child's play.’

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SMASH THE ASYLUM BILL!

Son of ANL has all the old vices

By Richard Price

LIKE successive immigration and nationality acts, the main aim of the Asylum Bill is to reduce the entry of black and Asian people into Britain. The majority of people who seek asylum are from Africa, while most of the rest are from Asia or the Middle East.

Details of the proposed legislation were first announced in July last year by Home Secretary Kenneth Baker. Similar developments are taking place in many other countries in Europe as preparations go ahead for closer integration of the EC by the end of 1992.

But it is also the European countries, along with the United States, which are primarily responsible for the fact that people have to flee in the first place. The Gulf War and its after-effects, capitalist restoration in the deformed workers' states and the growing insistence on 'democracy' as a precondition for aid or loans have deepened existing problems and generated a massive number of refugees. John Major's crocodile tears for the plight of the Kurds are a suitable accompaniment to Kenneth Baker's plan to ensure that very few of them come to Britain.

The Tories are also anxious to bar the door to political activists. Whether nationalist or socialist, most of them are definitely not Tory. Under the new law, asylum seekers will risk having their applications turned down if they engage in political activity directed against their own governments.

The provisions of the bill and the draft rules which go with it clearly underline the racist intent of the government. They propose to deny entry without a valid passport or visa, as though anyone can take the time to apply for official documents while on the run from the death squads. The plan to introduce compulsory finger-printing, ostensibly to prevent multiple applications under different names, is not only demeaning and insulting but is also intended to criminalise refugees.

But the measures most effective in keeping the numbers down will be the abolition of legal aid and restricting the time given to refugees to appeal against a deportation order. Originally set at 48 hours, the latter has now been increased by a few days as one of a number of cosmetic changes designed to placate the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster, who fear for the image of Britain as a 'Christian' country. The Tories have already doubled to £1,000 the fines on airlines which bring in passengers with invalid papers, and have put new barriers in the way of refugees seeking council housing.

While most who seek asy-

The Asylum Bill received its third reading in parliament on January 21 and threatens to become the latest in a long line of racist legislation. David Lewis looks at the measures contained in the bill and explains that the fight against it must centre on the building of a workers' united front against fascism and racism, committed to the abolition of all immigration controls



Demonstration against the Asylum Bill in London on January 18

The way to organise opposition to the Asylum Bill is through the development of an anti-racist programme within the working class and, in particular, within the labour and trade union movement. This would also assist in cutting through the hypocrisy of the Labour Party leaders. Their complaints about the compressed timescales for processing applications and the removal of the right to legal aid have been accompanied by Roy Hattersley's stated agreement with the need to 'stamp out abuses'. They have voiced no principled opposition to the essential purpose of the bill because they themselves have a racist position on immigration which differs little from that in Britain are fleeing from violent oppression, it would be wrong to base a campaign against the bill wholly on that fact. It must be fought as part of an opposition to the general restriction on the free movement of the oppressed. Workers have no stake in any particular country and must have the right to live where

they wish. Alongside the call for the smashing of the Asylum Bill, therefore, the demand must be raised for the repeal of all laws restricting immigration.

The campaign against the Asylum Bill must also be waged alongside an effective struggle against racist attacks. The bill is not a development which can be treated as separate from the growth of fascist and racist groups in Europe or, for that matter, in Britain. The climate which permits the British National Party to parade its despicable policies also provides the context for this attack on refugees. Having planted the ideas that immigrants are responsible for taking scarce jobs and houses, and are a burden on the social services, the Tories hope that the Asylum Bill will be an 'election winner' that of the Tories. They do not fundamentally dispute the exclusion of black and Asian immigrants and the families of people who have already settled here. A glance at the history of immigration controls

migration Act and the 1981 British Nationality Act.

With a record on immigration policy indistinguishable from that of the Tories, it is hardly surprising that the Labour leaders ignore the consistently racist practices of the government and immigration officials. Thus there was little opposition to the instructions given to British embassies in 1989 'not to risk' encouraging people to apply for refugee status. Nor was there any outcry from the Labour front bench when the majority of Hong Kong citizens, previously entitled to enter Britain, were barred; to the summary deportation of Tamil refugees facing death at home; or, in 1989, to Kurds fleeing oppression in Turkey being required to obtain visas. And when did Labour oppose the right which immigration officers have had since 1988 to deport people without reference to the courts or the minister responsible?

The actions of officials have been backed up by campaigns of race hate in the capitalist press, in which the *Daily Star* has been to the fore. In May and June last year, it ran a campaign 'to halt the influx of foreigners who end up living off the state'. Citing lurid 'evidence' of 'international criminals' penetrating the passport office and bringing in a flood of immigrants, it claimed success in persuading the Home Office to promise tighter controls.

No confidence should be placed by refugees in the various full-time agencies which claim to represent them while in reality they help to confirm the precarious status of those forced to flee here. The United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service is the most prominent of these and also the most compromised. It is funded by the Home Office and, under the Asylum Bill, the original intention was that it take over from the legal aid system the task of representing applicants for refugee status. However, it is currently rent by an unseemly squabble between rival factions for control of the organisation and its large budget, and in January, the government announced the termination of the £600,000 grant to its refugee unit.

Refugees must be encouraged to seek allies in the mass organisations of the working class. Socialists, trade unionists and Labour Party members must campaign vigorously to prevent the Asylum Bill becoming law, and must build a workers' united front against fascism and all forms of racism. Such a movement would bring into united action workers, refugee communities and all minorities under attack.

■ Down with the Asylum Bill!
■ Abolish all immigration controls!