



WHAT CHOICE IS THIS?

Labour Party leadership contest

IN THE light of a fourth consecutive Tory general election victory, the Labour Party leadership contest between John Smith and Bryan Gould is rightly seen by many party members and trade unionists as a complete irrelevance to the problems facing the working class. The leadership contest is in fact a conscious diversion by the Labour right wing in order to avoid an accounting of the election debacle, for which both candidates bear direct responsibility.

Smith and Gould are both representatives of the right, and have played leading roles in the Labour Party's acceptance of new realism which took place under Kinnock. Smith was the architect of the party leaders' attempt to sell Labour as the party 'business could do business with'. It was he, as shadow chancellor, who enthusiastically lunched his way round the City, assuring bankers and investors that Labour was even more reliable than the Tories as the party of British capitalism. His failure to convince anyone (apart from the editor of the *Financial Times*) will only have strengthened his resolve to drag the Labour Party further down this road.

As for Gould, his reputation as a 'radical intellectual' (!) cannot disguise the fact that he is no less an advocate of new realism than Smith. On some issues he is even further to the right. He is as firmly committed as Smith to scaling down Labour's organisational links with the trade unions. While Smith has tried to play down the issue of proportional representation, Gould has announced himself in favour of this system which would condemn Labour to a future of permanent coalitions with the Liberal Democrats.

But the main policy difference which Gould has raised against Smith concerns the level of the pound within the European Exchange Rate Mechanism - Gould supports devaluation, while Smith wants to maintain sterling at its present level. That this issue should be the main point of conflict between the two candidates speaks volumes. While millions of workers face the ravages of another five years of Tory rule, the two contenders for the Labour Party leadership are arguing over the finer points of how best to tinker with capitalism. In this they merely continue the main theme of Labour's election campaign.

Why did Labour lose?

'What we need,' Dennis Skinner commented after Labour's election defeat, 'is a bit of class politics.' Although what is needed is far more than a 'bit', Skinner is correct to identify Labour's appeal to individualism as a political shot in the foot.

Having driven the party sharply to the right in the interests of 'electability', the leadership had produced a situation in which the

party's programme was not easily distinguishable from that of the Tories. In the mid-1980s, convinced that Thatcher's economic programme and anti-collectivist social policies had 'worked' - by promoting material prosperity and a growth of individualist ideology - the Kinnockites consciously adapted Labour's programme to this 'new reality'. They distanced themselves from the trade unions, abandoning earlier promises to revoke the Tory anti-union laws. They renounced public ownership and enthusiastically embraced 'the market'. They accepted the principle of council house sales, recognised the virtues of a 'share-owning democracy', and endorsed much of the Tories' restructuring of education, health and social services and local government. All talk of 'working people' and of 'socialism' was cut from Labour's official statements. Events in eastern Europe only served to accelerate Kinnock's reformist lemmings in their rush to ditch anything that sounded vaguely anti-capitalist.

Meanwhile, Kinnock's supporters in the TUC presided over a four million decline in trade union membership, betrayed every important struggle under the Tories and helped reduce strikes to their lowest level for a century. Their belief that co-operation rather than conflict would help a Labour victory flew in the face of all historical evidence. Labour governments were elected in 1924, 1929, 1945, 1964 and 1974 on a surge of anti-Tory militancy - not by demobilising the unions. The bureaucrats' failure to resist the Tories' attacks undermined workers' belief in collective solutions, and reinforced the individualist outlook which left them prey to Tory propaganda.

But the Labour leaders' cynical bid for political office proved largely counter-productive. The sight of Kinnock earnestly advocating policies which he himself had bitterly opposed only a few years earlier could only produce scepticism among potential Labour voters. It allowed the Tories to portray Kinnock (not inaccurately) as an unprincipled opportunist who couldn't be trusted. However, the attempt by some Labour Party members to blame Kinnock's individual performance for the Tory election victory really misses the point. It was the entire Labour leadership which proposed that the way you win over the middle ground is by repudiating class-based policies in favour of sound-bites, photo-opportunities and other gimmicks picked up from the advertising industry and the media.

The absence of any vestige of class politics was central to the electoral failure of Labour's taxation proposals. A fighting policy which would have appealed to the mass of manual and professional workers would have been to inflict punitive taxation on the very rich. This was ruled out because it would have cut across John Smith's pitch for the support of the business community. Instead, Labour chose to fiddle with insurance contributions, in a way which adversely affected those on over £21,000 a year - a level of income which falls way below that of the ruling class.

Even this policy could have been successfully defended against Tory attacks if it had been promoted as a shift of resources from the well-off minority which would benefit the overwhelming majority. But the Labour leaders, intent on avoiding any accusation of class bias, couldn't even argue

this point in a clear and decisive manner. The result was that many voters who earned well below £21,000 swallowed the Tories' lying propaganda about 'Labour's tax bombshell', and came to believe that they too would find themselves afflicted with a substantial increase in taxation by a Labour government.

In short, the Labour leaders not only antagonised sections of the middle class, they also undermined the party's own natural constituency. It was notable, for example, that while an estimated 39 per cent of the unemployed voted Labour, another 33 per cent voted Tory. On the face of it, it might seem absurd that one-third of unemployed voters supported the party responsible for throwing them on the dole. But what did the Labour Party offer the jobless? An inane-grinning Tony Blair, claiming that Labour was very much against mass unemployment and would certainly do something about it - some time in the indefinite future. As for proposals to drastically reduce unemployment in the here and now, Labour's programme had nothing to say. In the circumstances, many of those out of work preferred to stake their hopes of finding a job on a Tory-led economic recovery.

In the face of a severe economic recession, and with the replacement of Thatcher by Major having failed to fully overcome widespread hostility to the Tory government, it is not surprising that Labour was able to make some gains in the election, reducing the Tory majority to 21 seats. But in the absence of a fighting programme which presented a positive alternative to Tory rule, Kinnock's new model Labour Party was unable to establish a clear lead over the Tories during the election

campaign. In fact, the evidence is that the final days of the campaign saw wavering elements among the electorate rallying to the Conservative Party.

Kinnock's attempt to explain this late swing away from Labour as the result of the scurrilous campaign waged by the tabloid press is simply an evasion of his own and the other party leaders' responsibility for the defeat. It is part of the cover-up that is presently under way among the party's right wing, designed to shift the spotlight away from the deficiencies in Labour's official programme. The capitalist press undoubtedly engaged in a particularly vicious propaganda campaign against the Labour Party, but when has the press ever been anything but an enemy of the labour movement? The truth is that the Labour leadership's own equivocations and retreats opened the door to a media onslaught on Labour's policies.

Nor can the party's left wing escape its share of the blame for the defeat. Although some of them now step forward to condemn Labour's rightward shift, during the election campaign they kept silent in the name of party unity. The same excuse was used to justify their scandalous failure to support the candidacies of Dave Nellist and Terry Fields. It is all very well for Dennis Skinner to talk now about the need for class politics, but it was his duty to fight openly for such politics in the course of the election campaign.

What is to be done?

Socialists must resist the temptation to turn their backs on the Labour Party. Bombastic declarations that 'Labour is finished', reformism is dead and all that remains is to steer a separate course towards building a revolutionary party cannot offer a serious way forward. The fight for a revolutionary party is, in reality, inseparable from the struggle to remove the treacherous leaders of the existing organisations of the working class.

The election defeat has put the Labour and trade union leaders in a vulnerable position. Not only has their new realist programme proved an electoral disaster, but any further shifts to the right are also fraught with difficulties. Proportional representation, which is being promoted as a means to remove the Tories, carries little conviction, given that it's first necessary to remove the Tories in order to introduce PR. Nor are electoral pacts likely to deliver the goods for the right wing - many Liberal Democrat supporters would undoubtedly defy any call to vote Labour. And the drive to transform Labour into a Euro-style social democratic party is hardly a going proposition - witness the recent collapse of the French Socialist Party's vote.

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With the leadership's strategy in a shambles, there is a real opportunity for the left to go on the offensive. All those who want to fight the right wing must organise themselves without delay. A thorough discussion on the causes of Labour's defeat among the rank and file is required. Those waverers who swallowed new realism on the grounds that it would win the election must be won to class politics. The labour movement as a whole – both the Labour Party and the trade unions – must organise conferences at local and national level to discuss the way forward. One of the first demands must be for an end to the witch-hunt of the left and for the reinstatement of the hundreds of socialists who have been hounded out of the party.

This struggle in the Labour Party cannot take place in a vacuum – it must be linked to a campaign to revitalise the trade unions. With the bureaucrats no longer able to justify passivity with the argument that we must 'wait for a Labour government', conditions exist for a resurgence of industrial action against the Tories' attacks. Only by reasserting the principles of the class struggle among rank-and-file workers can we hope to win the political battle against the right wing.

Workers must firmly oppose any attempt to loosen the links between the Labour Party and the trade unions. We must argue for retaining the block vote, not in its present bureaucratic form but on the basis of democratic decisions by union branches. All proposals for PR or electoral pacts with the Liberal Democrats must be emphatically rejected as an assault on the political independence of the working class. Labour Party and trade union members must demand the abolition of the 20 per cent rule which allows the Parliamentary Labour Party to dictate who we can and cannot vote for in the leadership contest.

As for the contest itself, Workers News will give no support to any of the candidates, for either the leadership or the deputy leadership. If Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant had been allowed to stand, we would have advocated a critical vote for them. As it is, the remaining candidates are all representatives of the right wing and all, therefore, are directly implicated in the election defeat. We call for abstention and, in the case of postal ballots, for party members and trade unionists to spoil their ballot papers – we suggest with the slogan: 'Down with the 20 per cent rule! For a candidate of the left!'

Don't let the right wing off the hook! Organise the fightback! Build a revolutionary socialist tendency in the trade unions and the Labour Party!

Lessons of the general election

How the left was wrong

By Martin Sullivan

THE GENERAL election campaign found the 'revolutionary' left completely divided in its response, with some groups refusing to call for a Labour vote while others happily adapted to reformism. Underlying these widely different reactions was the problem of the attitude of revolutionaries to the Labour Party, which is the rock against which would-be Marxists in Britain have repeatedly wrecked themselves, either through sectarianism or opportunism. A round-up of the far left's response to the election, therefore, can help to clarify the position which Trotskyists should take towards social democracy. In this respect, it must be said, the performance of most left groups during the election campaign provided only negative lessons.

The attitude of the ultra-left sects was summarised in the Revolutionary Communist Group's daft slogan 'Break with the Labour Party'. It seemed to escape them that, so far as there has been any significant defection by workers from Labour (with exceptions such as the Broad Left in Liverpool), it has almost invariably been a break to the right – to the Tories and Liberal Democrats. This elementary truth was underlined by the result of the general election.

Not that this prevented the Revolutionary Communist Party, *The Leninist* and the International Communist Party from refusing to call for a Labour vote and standing their own candidates. The derisory votes they received made nonsense of their claims to be appealing to the vanguard of the working class. If they attracted any potentially revolutionary elements as a result of their campaigns, these sects only succeeded in walling them off from those class-conscious workers who, in their overwhelming majority, gave their political support to the Labour Party.

Most of the 'Don't Vote Labour' brigade justified their stance with the unsubstantiated claim that a fundamental change has taken place in the character of the Labour Party. The Spartacists, for example, urged 'No vote to Kinnock's Labour Party' on the grounds that, while it had been possible to give critical support to Labour in the past, this would be impermissible today, when the party is openly identified with pro-capitalist policies. But when have

the Labour leaders ever *not* been identified with such policies? And whose Labour Party would the Spartacists have called on workers to vote for? Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Party? Hugh Gaitskell's? Harold Wilson's?

The RCG, for its part, announced its unique discovery that Labour, since its foundation, has never been a workers' party of any sort! This would certainly come as a surprise to the millions of workers who have historically voted for the Labour Party and financed it by paying the political levy.

Moving away from the further reaches of ultra-leftist idiocy, we come upon shame-faced sectarians like the WRP/*Workers Press*. They began by reiterating their line that trade unionists should refuse to pay the political levy to the Labour Party because of its anti-working class policies. Trotsky characterised a refusal to pay the levy as the political equivalent of strike-

build a socialist alternative'.

Militant, the other organisation on the British left of any significant size, supported the independent candidates Dave Nellist, Terry Fields and Tommy Sheridan, while calling for a Labour vote in other constituencies. This was correct. Unlike the stunt candidates of the ultra-left sects, Nellist, Fields and Sheridan enjoyed substantial working class support. But they stood on a left reformist programme, and posed no revolutionary alternative to Labour. Furthermore, Militant retained its wrong slogan 'Labour to power on a socialist programme', which serves to reinforce belief in a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. The slogan is rendered even more absurd when you consider that Militant has given up any serious work inside the Labour Party.

Then there were the loyal supporters of Bennite reformism like *Socialist Outlook*. The casual reader would certainly have difficulty recognising this as a paper produced by an organisation claiming to be the British section of the Fourth Inter-

nationalist League. While they made many correct points about why, when and how Trotskyists give critical support to social democracy, the RIL made no demands on Labour and ended up by outlining a programme for a workers' government which, in the absence of any explanation of the political forces which could establish such a government, remained on the level of abstract propaganda.

Far better was Workers Power, who took a political line much like our own. They made demands on Labour without raising any illusions that a Labour government under Kinnock was any solution for the working class, while making consistent propaganda for communism. All of which, unfortunately, was rather undermined by their support for proportional representation, which is a recipe for Lib-Lab coalition governments. Moreover, in the aftermath of Labour's defeat, Workers Power seems to have undergone a shift towards sectarianism, effectively writing off the Labour Party and calling on workers



breaking, and called for the expulsion of non-payers from the unions. *Workers Press* does its best to turn industrial militants into political scabs. The logic of this stupid line should have led the WRP to argue against voting for the Labour Party, since without trade unionists' financial contributions Labour would be unable to mount an election campaign. The WRP leaders did eventually come out grudgingly in favour of a Labour vote – only to add that as soon as a Labour government was elected, they would fight to bring it down!

Another, more important, grouping with a semi-sectarian position was the Socialist Workers Party. In previous general elections the SWP has campaigned under the slogan 'Vote Labour without illusions', blithely ignoring the fact that workers vote for the Labour Party precisely because they do have illusions in it. This time, however, *Socialist Worker* argued that it was socialists who should vote Labour without illusions. With the Kinnock leadership having eradicated the barest mention of socialism from the party's programme, this was somewhat redundant advice. As for the mass of workers who still have illusions in reformism, the SWP offered no strategy or tactics to break them from these illusions. It placed no demands on the Labour leadership, made no proposals for organising opposition to Kinnock within the party, and contented itself with the vacuous appeal 'Vote Labour but

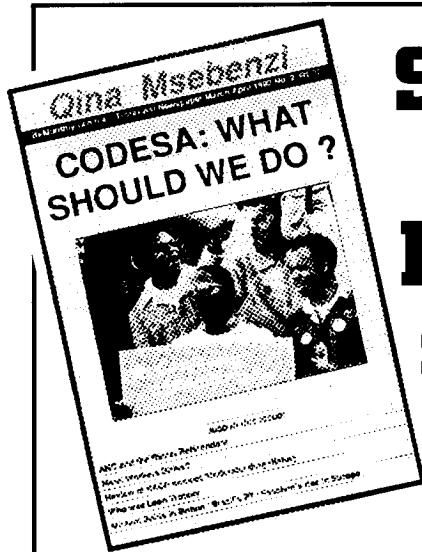
national. It outlined a programme to be implemented by a Labour government, including heavy taxation of the very rich, nationalisation of the banks, etc – which was alright as far as it went. But that was as far as it went. There was no attempt to explain that Trotskyists stand for the expropriation of the capitalist class, still less that a revolutionary government based on soviets is the precondition for the transition to socialism. As Trotsky once remarked, anyone who hides his communism from the masses ceases to be a communist.

Socialist Organiser was a thousand times worse. It put forward no policies of its own, restricting itself to promoting the reformist programme of Socialists for Labour. This proposed to reorganise the economy on the basis of 'accountable, democratic, environmentally-conscious planning' – apparently without going through the troublesome business of confiscating the capitalists' property, for the programme contained not a single demand for nationalisation. Worst of all, the call to 'Vote Labour in every constituency' allowed *SO* to denounce the campaigns by Nellist, Fields and Sheridan – which placed this supposedly revolutionary group to the right of most left reformists.

Finally, there were those groups who tried to implement some of the lessons of the early Communist International and the Trotskyist movement. The least successful was

to break with reformism and build the Workers Power group.

It is sobering to reflect on the political ignorance, lack of principles and downright stupidity which characterised the performance of most self-styled revolutionary groups during the election. At the same time, the transparent political bankruptcy of most tendencies on the far left does open up the prospect of regrouping honest militants from their ranks into a genuine revolutionary organisation. This is the fight which the Workers International League will take up in the coming period.



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FUNDS

A bad month for the New World Order and the End of History – American cities on fire, mass strikes in Germany and more shudders in Japan. The smug belief that liberal democracy was emerging all over the world looks more and more like a sick joke as civil war spreads in the Balkans and hunger grips the ex-Soviet Union. Our answer is to fight back – against imperialism and against the bankrupt reformist and Stalinist leaderships of the working class. To do this we need our readers' support to expand our work internationally. Workers News £10,000 Building Fund stands at £3,010.16. Don't forget our £300 Monthly Fund. Send your donations to: Workers News, 1/17 Meredith Street, London EC1R 0AE.

Witch-hunt deepens in Germany



Thousands of jobless-sector workers march through Hamburg during the recent 11-day strike. An anti-programmer of Western Germany's job-transport and refuse collection is also on the list. (Associated Press photo by AP Wirephoto)

IF IT was Stalinism which led the East German economy into deep crisis, it is the cure promoted by the capitalists – integration into the ‘market economy’ – which has proved the greater disaster for the working class. Since German reunification, two-thirds of the GDR’s former industrial production has been lost, along with five million out of a total of 9.7 million jobs. And the decline is still continuing.

The German ruling class has made the most of this historic opportunity to extend its internal market. It has cannibalised the best sections of the GDR’s nationalised economy and destroyed the rest – with the result that its profits have soared.

But despite the deep-going disorientation of the working class in eastern Germany – its illusions in the ability of capitalism to solve social and environmental problems, and its lack of self-confidence – the ruling class is worried about the effect the market economy will have on political consciousness. In order to prevent a rise in militancy, the ruling class and its political parties are using immigrants as scapegoats

Dieter Wilhelmi reports from Berlin on the continuing purge of former East German Stalinists from public life

for the unpleasant realities of life under capitalism, while officially distancing themselves from the violent attacks carried out by fascists.

The capitalists have also managed to prolong their anti-communist triumphalism, although in a modified form. Formerly they presented the collapse of Stalinism as proof of the superiority of their own system; now, the de-industrialisation process created by capitalism has forced them to alter their ideological offensive. They had to explain why they were unable to fulfil Helmut Kohl’s pledge that ‘everyone will be better off’. Month after month, they had to postpone the promised ‘upswing’ in the east. Then the propagandists of the bourgeoisie made a discovery – the ‘inherited burden’ of the Stalinist party, the SED, was to blame for the evils of capitalism!

In addition, they orchestrated a campaign in the media to further discredit and slander the GDR, especially the positive conquests of the working class. One example: a variety of attempts were made to undermine the widely-appreciated health care system – which despite its lack of sophisticated techniques was better organised and more effective in preventative medicine than private health care in the Federal Republic. Doctors were accused of having been informers for the GDR’s state security service, the Stasi. Leading physicians lost their jobs, many with insufficient proof of their guilt being offered, and at least one for whom the evidence was completely fabricated. A renowned hospital in East Berlin was falsely accused of illegally transplanting organs from seriously injured patients to prominent Stalinists. The latest fake story of this kind is that East German doctors routinely killed babies which were not considered ‘viable’.

But the centrepiece of this reactionary propaganda drive consists in portraying the workers’ state (amalgamated with its ruling Stalinist bureaucracy) as illegitimate, criminal and even terrorist. In this picture, the vile Stasi is still required to play the most prominent role. Hatred of the Stasi, especially among those who had never attempted to resist Stalinism, is exploited in a populist way. In late 1989, the political revolutionists had called for the Stasi to be ‘put to work in the factories’, now, former Stasi officers who found jobs as dustmen after reunification are being purged with the cry: ‘The Berlin refuse collection department has to be cleaned up!’

It should be noted that although all the sacked former Stasi members are portrayed as having been part of an inhuman and criminal conspiracy, there is a marked reticence to mention any concrete crimes in public discussion. So far, the only accusations have been of espionage against the old FRG. (The much less effective spies of the West German secret services are still considered to be heroes, of course.) And despite the endeavours of dozens of public prosecutors busily sifting through the Stasi archives – which were doubtless compiled with typical German thoroughness – the authorities in Berlin have up to now been unable to charge Erich Mielke with anything relating to his job as head

of the Stasi. Instead, they have reopened a fraudulent case brought against him by the Nazis, according to which Mielke was supposed to have shot dead a Prussian police officer during the course of street fighting in Berlin in 1931!

The inherent weakness of this anti-Stasi hate campaign lies in the fact that crimes against socialism cannot legitimately be prosecuted by a bourgeois state, and it appears that other crimes are hard to prove. Nevertheless, there are widespread calls for ‘justice’. Many people expect the bourgeois state to do what they themselves failed to do when the process of political revolution was terminated in the winter of 1989-90 – to settle their accounts with the Stasi.

But the German ruling class is getting over the problem by the sheer scale of its current propaganda campaign. This is directed at the people inside the SED who ‘pulled the strings’ of the Stasi and against all those who had ‘contact’ with the Stasi. The witch-hunters simply proclaim that all these people are guilty of having supported a ‘criminal state’ – a verdict sufficient to get them purged from leading political positions in parliaments and parties, and especially from jobs in any of the public services.

Thus, east Germans are almost entirely eliminated from political leadership within the reunified Germany. In this, the ruling class shows itself extremely ungrateful to all those GDR politicians who embraced capitalist policies! It seeks trustworthy personnel who can run a reliable state apparatus in the east. For this reason, west Germans have been appointed to all the important posts, most research institutions have been reorganised or closed down, and thousands of school and university teachers have been fired.

Former GDR oppositionists, who once fought for a reformed socialism but now support capitalism, are taking a prominent part in the witch-hunt. In the name of ‘democratic morality’, they make themselves figureheads of the reactionary drive to purge the public services, demolishing democratic and trade union rights along the way. They are closely followed by the Social Democrats, who have only partially realised that the witch-hunt will not necessarily be confined to former Stalinists. But the fact that one of their most popular personalities, Manfred Stolpe from Brandenburg, has become a main target is causing some of them to do a little serious thinking.

Trotskyists must defend all the rights of the working class. They must condemn every attempt to sack workers because of their political convictions, both in the public and the private sectors.

- Stop the *Berufsverbot*!
- Stop the witch-hunters!

The next issue of **Workers News** will carry a full analysis of the split in *Militant*

BRAZIL

Managing the system

IN 1988, there was an upsurge in the economic and political struggles of the Brazilian working class. The social movement had already been gathering strength, with the number of strikes increasing each year. At the head of these mobilisations were the Workers Party (PT) and the Central Workers Union (CUT), with the CUT following the political line of the PT.

Working together, the PT and the CUT were key factors within workers’ struggles. Thus, in 1988, the year of the municipal elections, the victory of the PT in important cities such as Sao Paulo, Campinas, Porto Alegre and Sao Bernardo do Campo came as no surprise.

Even though the PT lacks a revolutionary perspective, its members have always rejected the ‘Social Democrat’ label and declared that they stand for the end of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. The PT calls itself ‘socialist’, but it has always spoken of socialism in very broad terms.

At the same time that it took over the municipal administrations, a political deterioration of the PT set in. In contrast to what had initially been thought – that a ‘landmark had been established in Brazilian revolutionary history’, that the ‘first step towards socialism had been taken’, that a ‘new stage had been reached’ – what was soon being verified was that the PT was beginning to adapt to the capitalist system and to rule by the norms imposed by that system.

Despite the fact that local government in ‘third world’ countries like Brazil is bled dry of resources, the administrations under the control of the PT did not fare too badly. Rather than running up debts in order to carry out big projects (which is what attracts votes in Brazil), the PT municipal administrations sought to put their finances in order. In other words, the PT was an excellent manager of the capitalist system. Wherever the PT was in charge, it simply strengthened the state apparatus of the ruling class.

The Workers Party has been held up internationally as the model for a new type of party, neither Stalinist nor social democratic. Brazilian correspondent Portilho Simões examines its record in local government

As for addressing the demands of the masses, although some administrations were able to make a few concessions, in general the results were disastrous. In contrast to the period up to 1989, the popular movement began to spiral downwards. Recession, rising unemployment and a lack of political perspective on the part of the trade unions and political leaderships led to a decline in the number of strikes. The axis of the struggle changed from ‘wage rises’ to ‘keeping one’s job’, despite the fact that, since the start of Collor’s term of office in 1990, purchasing power had been dropping fast.

The PT had put all its energies, and its best leaders, into the municipal administrations. The popular movement was left without proper direction. Instead of working alongside the people to help them win their demands, the PT’s militants were running the town halls.

By then, the media had plenty of ammunition. It was not difficult to point to the failings of local government, and then blame the PT for causing all the problems affecting society at large. The PT was rapidly losing its character of leader of the working class struggle, and instead became identified as the political force behind unpopular governments.

And what of the cities where the PT did not get elected? Well, in those the state of the working class struggle is a little better. But the PT’s efforts nationwide are now entirely geared towards ‘administering city halls’. This policy has been strengthened because the bleak economic situation means that workers wish only to stay in work, even if that means a drop in their wages: ‘Strike? Don’t even think of it. What I want is to keep my job.’

The issue of the general orientation adopted by the PT is particularly serious since the party has never defined a programmatic line, and never explained what kind of ‘socialism’ it stands for, let alone how it would be achieved. As a result, far from changing the municipal administrations, the PT has been changed by them. Instead of continuing its former fight against increases in bus fares, the PT began to be seen as the party which put up the fares. In fact, the PT did not initiate the fare increases, it only ceased to combat them, and in defending municipal government it also defended price rises as necessary for the improvement of the public transport system.

At the PT’s 10th Conference, its experiences in local government were used to justify, among other things, a defence of the market economy! But the conference was unable to agree a programme to rescue the party from the contraction it is now suffering. The consequence of the ‘administrativist’ policy was the loss of the PT’s role as vanguard in the political struggle – an erosion of the party’s authority due to the fact that it did not live up to the masses’ expectations.

It could not have been different. Given the lack of a revolutionary line, under which the PT’s position in municipal government would have been utilised to develop the popular movement, the results could only be negative.

However, for genuine revolutionaries, the experiences of the PT demonstrate the impossibility of resolving the problems of the masses, particularly in a country like Brazil where extremes of wealth and poverty go hand in hand, if a workers’ government stays within the limits of the capitalist system.

EDITORIAL

The real terrorists

THE AIR blockade and other sanctions imposed on Libya by the United Nations must be opposed. They have nothing to do with 'justice'. They are yet another example of imperialist-sponsored aggression against a small nation which refuses to toe the line.

The demand for the extradition of the two men accused of being the 'Lockerbie bombers' to stand trial is intended to sow discord within Libya. The main instigators of the sanctions - Britain, France and the United States - are relying on their past record of vicious military attacks on Libya to either bring Gaddafi to heel or panic a section of the Libyan army into overthrowing him.

If this fails, they are more than ready to use force again, as was made clear by their UN representatives in March. They have also indicated that they want much more than the handing over of the two men. Even before the sanctions were imposed, British state officials were making the additional demands that Libya supply information on supposed IRA contacts and renounce 'state terrorism'.

The accusation of state terrorism against Libya is especially ironic coming from the two countries, Britain and America, which between them have terrorised half the world for the past century. The Middle East has seen Arab set against Arab and Jew set against Arab by the masters of terrorism in Washington and London. The terror technique of blowing up villages as a reprisal measure was introduced to Palestine by the British, and refined using napalm by the Americans in Vietnam. From Iraq to the north of Ireland, the most modern means of mass destruction have been liberally deployed by these 'advanced' nations.

This is the state terror that must be opposed and against which we take a stand when we say:

■ Hands off Libya!

■ Down with British, French and American imperialism!

Uprising in LA

FOUR DAYS in April and May have transformed the political situation in the United States. Despite the acquittal of the four police officers who beat Rodney King to a pulp in March 1991, the attempt by the Los Angeles establishment to bolster its brutal and racist methods of policing the city's black population has backfired. The thousands who took to the streets, not only in LA but in San Francisco, Seattle, Las Vegas, Atlanta, New York City and elsewhere, are testimony to the fact that this was a major miscalculation.

The decision to hold the trial in an overwhelmingly white, middle class county, without a single black juror, was designed to guarantee an acquittal in the face of cast-iron evidence on video that the cops were guilty. The scale of the response, however, cannot be explained solely in terms of the conduct of the case - scandalous though it was, even by the standards of capitalist justice. It produced an explosion of anger because King's experiences chime with those of millions of others.

All official statistics, whether they be of unemployment, health, educational and job opportunities, or the likelihood of being arrested, tried, convicted or executed, show that black people are consistently disadvantaged and discriminated against at every level. The racism built into the foundations of American capitalism is alive and well.

The display of shock and surprise on Capitol Hill at the outcome of the trial was unconvincing. Certainly, many political leaders would have preferred a guilty verdict as this would have maintained the fiction that justice is obtainable through the courts. The debate on institutionalised racism would have subsided, and it would have been business as usual on the streets of South Central Los Angeles for the LAPD. But the real cause for the concern exhibited in ruling class circles was the political and economic implications of such a militant uprising by a large section of the working class.

'Racial tension' is, as ever, a function of the class struggle. The Reagan years saw a series of defeats inflicted on organised workers, the decline of the trade unions, the cutting of urban aid programmes and the growth of the low-wage, fly-by-night service sector. While quotas, affirmative action and black leadership in some major cities created opportunities for a narrow black middle class layer to advance, the mass of black workers found their conditions of life steadily deteriorating. It is no accident that the chain of youth rebellions sparked in Los Angeles came at the depth of a long recession which has seen the destruction of hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs. Vast pools of unemployment and poverty have hit black workers and youth hardest. And with this year's California state budget showing a \$14 billion deficit, the authorities have recently introduced drastic cuts in welfare and other public services.

We reject the reactionary idea that this was a 'race riot' motivated by 'race hate' and criminality. There is ample evidence that in some areas Hispanic and white youth joined in, and that black businesses were torched along with the rest. This was a rebellion with a distinct class content, directed against institutions and symbols of oppression and parasitism.

Respectable black 'community leaders' and organisations like the National Urban League were quick to endorse Bush's call for a return to law and order and to support the sending of troops and National Guardsmen. Neither they nor the more radical-sounding Jesse Jackson deserve the slightest confidence - they are playing the administration's game.

Socialists do not claim that firing cities can, in itself, answer any of the problems facing black communities. However, it is their principled duty to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who took to the streets in a legitimate expression of rage. Racism is unavoidably connected to capitalism, and will not be eradicated without its overthrow. While socialists critically support all reforms, the idea of a capitalist state with equal opportunities is a reactionary utopia.

Whether, like Watts in 1965, the Los Angeles uprising leads to a wider working class radicalisation, or whether it intensifies the vertical divide between different working class communities remains to be seen. In large part this depends upon the building of a workers' party independent of all wings of the ruling class, within which the fight must be for a revolutionary programme.

Chinese workers

OUTSIDE CHINA, the democracy movement of May-June 1989 has largely been portrayed as a struggle conducted by students and intellectuals - the role of the working class has been obscured by the capitalist media. But for a brief period, Chinese workers began to organise themselves independently of the Stalinist bureaucracy for the first time in 40 years. New organisations known as Workers' Autonomous Federations were established. On the third anniversary of these events, Workers News spoke to Liu Weiping, a workers' leader who was active in Beijing in the days prior to the bloody crackdown in Tiananmen Square on June 4.

The Deng Xiaoping regime began its programme of economic reforms in 1978. Are you aware of any attempts by workers to organise resistance to these reforms before May 1989?

The reforms were welcomed by most people in China, including workers. They thought the reforms would improve their conditions. It was not until the second half of 1980, following implementation of the reforms, that workers began to realise their salaries and state subsidies were falling behind inflation. The fact is that reforms brought certain advantages to most people. When statistics were published showing salaries and subsidies falling behind inflation, a lot of workers took unpaid leave from their factories in order to set up small businesses. Their posts were kept open for them in the factories while they engaged in other activities.

It is also necessary to understand that there is no experience of trade union organisation independent of the Chinese Communist Party bureaucracy. Workers did not have a conception of organising themselves to resist the reform programme and defend their own interests.

What were the circumstances which led to the formation of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation on May 19, 1989?

Workers responded enthusiastically to the student movement focused on the occupation of Tiananmen Square in Beijing. They organised support groups for the students with worker prefects, or stewards, assisting the students in Beijing. In May, rumours circulated in Beijing that the CP leaders were organising a military political congress. This congress subsequently issued the Martial Law decree on May 20.

Until May 19, the students and their leaders in Tiananmen Square stopped workers entering the square. They alienated many workers and citizens in Beijing by their attitude. So much so that workers and citizens were concerned for the fate of the democracy movement if the mass of the people could not be united. On May 19, there were rumours that the CP leaders had ordered troops to take up positions in the tunnels under Beijing which lead to the Tiananmen Square area, in readiness for an assault on the students occupying the square.

A number of worker activists felt the need to organise to defend the democracy movement. A public announcement was made from the meeting place for workers by the entrance of Zhong Shan Park, to warn the people of dangers ahead and rally workers to support the movement. The immediate response from workers was not very significant but as dissatisfaction with the government grew following the announcement of Martial Law in Beijing early on May 20, more workers rallied to support the BWAFF.

Can you tell us something about the background of the founding members of the BWAFF?

All of the founding members were workers except for Li Jinjin, a law student. Han Dongfang was a railway worker from Beijing; Liu Qing was also from the Beijing area and so was He Lili. The founding members had not met each other before the occupation of Tiananmen Square by the students. It was a very difficult situation with policemen around, so the people engaged in these activities did not advertise their past or their experiences but got on with what had to be

done as best they could.

Did any women workers play an active role in founding the BWAFF?

Yes. A good example would be Zhang Meirang, a technician from an engine factory in Beijing.

How did you become involved in the founding of the BWAFF?

I was a captain in the merchant navy based in Shanghai. I led a merchant navy support group near the square. I was not a founding member of the BWAFF - I joined a few days later. By May 21-22, the situation was very tense. I was very worried by the attitude of the students which alienated so many workers. The troops were at the outskirts of the city and, we thought, in the tunnels leading to the square. At that stage I was clear that an attack would take place on the students, but I did not think it would be a massacre. I volunteered to organise workers, about a hundred, to block the tunnel entrances around the square. I made a speech appealing to workers to throw away their stones and batons. I opposed the students who said the workers must be kept out of the square because they were not very intelligent and would get the students into trouble with the party leaders.

I considered it was essential to unite the workers and students in order to defend the democracy movement. I thought that the workers carrying batons and stones would give the party leaders an excuse to attack and smash the movement. He Lili heard me speak and asked me to join the BWAFF. After I spoke, I was allowed by some students to enter the square.

The sanitary conditions were very poor. The students had isolated themselves and were arguing intensely. I spoke to some of the student leaders and appealed to them to abandon their occupation - a different tactic was needed. Above all, they must overcome their attitude to workers and to the citizens of Beijing who were blocking the entry of troops at the city's outskirts. The only thing I was able to do was convince a few students of the need to withdraw from the square. I worked with a team of health workers to prepare for casualties when the assault came. Even then I did not expect a massacre.

Personally, I felt the only way to save the democracy movement was to evacuate the city, so that the troops could come in and clean up the square, but the seed of the movement would be preserved by dispersing it outside the city. I was not for advocating any more demonstrations or marches at that moment.

What were the aims of the BWAFF?

The aims were not clear. The BWAFF was against the corruption in the party bureaucracy; it supported the students' demands. There was no clear idea of how to organise workers or what workers' rights were. Remember, workers had not been allowed to organise themselves in China since 1949. There was no control or selection process in operation which determined the leadership of the BWAFF.

We learned a big lesson from a very important mistake. We stressed the safeguarding of workers' welfare, which had suffered as a result of the reforms. What we did not stress, what we should have stressed, was the political and economic rights of the workers.

Although Article 45 of the Chinese Constitution states that people have the right to organise, freedom of assembly and the right to strike, these

Interview
Chair of the Wor

have never existed in practice. The working class has no experience of organisation, such as workers in Britain for instance. We suffered very much from this lack of experience and state repression.

What was the attitude of the BWAFF towards the student movement in the square?

The BWAFF supported the students' demands for exposing corruption and for the removal of [prime minister] Li Peng, and was also opposed to Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang. It did not support the students' opposition to workers participating in events around the square. It supported the students' slogan 'Support the CCP and the Constitution'. The BWAFF was not calling for the overthrow of the CCP - it did not make anti-CCP, anti-socialist propaganda.

How widespread was the movement of workers throughout China during these events?

Many workers were alienated from the start by the students' attitude towards them. May 21 and 22 marked a turning point, after the declaration of Martial Law in Beijing and the movement of soldiers to Beijing. A spontaneous wave of Workers' Autonomous Federations sprang up in such cities as Shanghai, Changqing, Xian, Guangzhou, Changsha and Hangzhou, among others. Their aims were not very clear but they were determined to support the movement. There were not many actual strikes, however.

Was there any attempt to organise factory-based strike committees in



WAF members prepare to head off troops at Beijing or other cities?

I know of one in Beijing where pickets were organised - it was not a state-run factory. I am not aware of any others. Conditions for organising workers were very hard and the situation especially tense after the declaration of Martial Law. Workers in factories did call for strikes but not many took place.

Are you aware of any attempts by workers to organise an armed militia to defend the square or the factory districts?

No.

Why did the military crackdown take place on June 3-4?

As a consequence of the faction struggle among party leaders. Those who supported reformer Zhao Ziyang preferred peaceful tactics. The hardliners around Deng Xiaoping and [military leader] Yang Shangkun favoured the use of force. There was a period when party leaders went silent. In reality, an intense power struggle was taking place inside the party. Then Gorbachev came to Beijing. When Zhao Ziyang remarked to Gorbachev that

Workers after Tiananmen

Interview with Liu Weiping
 Workers' Autonomous Federation of China

Deng Xiaoping was the captain, and he took important decisions, student feeling was aroused. The students enthusiastically supported Zhao and it became clear to them he was not taking the important decisions. In the CCP there is a saying: 'I can survive, if you die.' This outlook dominated the faction struggle.

Zhao Ziyang played his last card when he visited the student hunger strikers early one morning and apologised to them for 'coming too late'. If the students had understood his message, his warning, and left Tiananmen Square, Zhao's faction could have won. But for the students this would have involved what they thought would be a loss of face. They had a powerful emotional attachment to their occupation of the square. So the majority remained.

Deng's faction set police agents at work disguised as student activists in the square. A number of these agents were caught and exposed by the students and worker prefects.

The workers' support for the students was an important matter for the party leaders. Both factions, reformers and hardliners, feared the workers - if workers went on strike, if the strike movement spread, the economy and the party bureaucracy would be threatened.

The crackdown marked a victory for Deng, Yang Shangkun and Li Peng's faction, but it also secured the future for the whole party.

The Li Peng government denied that any massacre took place in Beijing on

soldiers armed with batons. His fate was, however, considered better than that of many workers who endured psychological and physical torture and were subsequently shot. You see, when you are beaten with batons it strengthens you. It arouses your spirit against your captors. The stress and terror suffered by those who were shot was much harder to bear.

How has the BWAFC reorganised its work since June 1989?

We suffered a serious defeat. Those left alive are in exile overseas. We have regrouped members of WAFs outside China, and have established a worldwide organisation with sections in Britain, France, Japan, the USA, Canada and Australia.

The Annual General Meeting of the WAFAC laid plans for the publication of a magazine to assist the task of organising workers within and without China, to be called *Chinese Workers*. We have very little in the way of funds so the magazine will be published quarterly at first. The organisation has its headquarters in London and elected representatives at every level. We have published a number of reports which are available in English for workers and their organisations.

The WAFAC is committed to the promotion of the 1989 independent workers' movement. We aim to establish an autonomous workers' organisation in China to fight, via non-violent methods, for the basic rights of workers, including the right to strike, the right to collective bargaining, etc. We



Han Dongfang

the luxury market - the party bosses and the tourist industry. Where they once raised rice and grain, now they raise peacocks and ducks. Farm workers have more options than city workers, but their living standards have fallen since 1978.

What experiences have workers made in the Special Economic Zones?

They are not allowed to organise in trade unions. In some cases they earn one-tenth of the wages paid to workers in Hong Kong. But they cope with the situation by doing several jobs with different employers.

How do workers respond to the pressure to increase production under circumstances where they have no legal organisations?

Workers in factories consider themselves the lucky ones. They have a regular salary and certain benefits that go with the job. In state enterprises it is very difficult for them to strike and resist the police regime.

Individually, some workers suffer great anguish - they might kill their manager and then commit suicide themselves. In China, murder is punishable by execution so by committing suicide they avoid that punishment.

Workers also adopt the tactic of the 'slow down', reducing their rate of productivity. They also sabotage machinery, not as the Luddites did in Britain many years ago, but by misusing machines so that they break down in ten years instead of 50. In this way they avoid detection and punishment. Stealing is also a tactic adopted by workers who want to protest against their working conditions and low salaries.

Is there any evidence of workers organising resistance to investments made in the SEZs by capitalists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea or elsewhere?

No. Workers will not oppose investment in China. They will not welcome an increase in inflation which depresses their living standards, though, as a result of the opening up of China's economy.

What particular problems do women workers face?

Extremely low pay and very hard work, particularly in the textile industry where equipment is very old and air-conditioning in factories very poor. Housing accommodation is very overcrowded. Working and housing conditions give rise to serious health problems for women workers. In the tourist industry, women suffer sexual and psychological harassment from their employers and party officials. In rural areas, women wishing to move to the cities suffer particularly from sexual harassment by party officials.

In conclusion on this point, I would like to say, from my experiences in the merchant navy, seeing workers in many different countries, that Chinese workers are among the worst exploited and lowest paid in the world. Health and safety conditions in workplaces are appalling. Workers officially do an eight-hour day, six days a week. But they are forced to give extra 'contributions' of labour in the evenings and on their day off for no benefit.

How do workers respond to govern-

ment claims that the party is being reformed and corruption stamped out?

The reason workers took to the streets in 1989 was corruption among party leaders while workers' living standards were falling. Workers then had illusions that the government as a whole would reform itself. Now they see that the 'Big Tigers' make examples of rank-and-file party members in order to protect themselves. Deng Pufang, Deng Xiaoping's disabled son, lives a life of luxury. He heads a trust fund for the disabled and collects tens of thousands of yuan from state enterprises. The disabled, who are forced to beg on the streets, want to know what happens to this money. Since 1989, many workers have become bitterly disillusioned in the party leaders. But they are unable to do anything about it.

Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping announced in January and February this year that the process of reform would be speeded up. The disgraced party leader Zhao Ziyang appears to be on the way to rehabilitation. Where do you see these reforms leading China?

The editorial in the *People's Daily* which appeared in February is a clear expression of a transition to capitalism. Since 1978, Deng has been steering the economy in the direction of capitalism. When Deng speaks of socialism, he does so only to deceive the Chinese people. As for Li Peng, he is seen as a joker. He has no opinions of his own, but says what is necessary to stay in power.

In 1976, there was a mass demonstration in Tiananmen Square which you took part in with many workers and students, in support of Chou Enlai's call for economic reform and modernisation. The call was supported by Deng Xiaoping and opposed by the Gang of Four, including Mao's widow. Have workers' and students' living standards improved or declined since then?

In 1976, Deng raised the slogan, which won a lot of support from workers fed up with Mao and his associates in the party leadership, 'It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white, as long as it can catch mice!'

At Tiananmen Square in 1989, workers carried a banner saying 'It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white, but if the cat doesn't catch mice can you call it a cat?' The mouse is a symbol of corruption, eating up the nation's wealth. The cat is the government, the party leaders. Workers were saying to Deng, since your reforms have brought us nothing, we have to oppose you.

The reforms have brought wealth into China under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund, which advises Deng and the party leaders. But the party leaders have taken all the benefits - the workers have none. Today, inflation forces many workers to do two or three jobs.

Earlier this year, official announcements attacked activists among minority peoples in western China (Uyghir Autonomous Region) and Inner Mongolia, who are fighting for greater autonomy or the right to secede. What is the attitude of the WAFAC towards the demands of the minority peoples?

First, let me say I am not a Han Chinese. I am from the Manchurian minority. The problems of the minorities are not always the concern of the working class in China. In some respects, birth control for instance, minorities are seen as having preferential treatment - they are allowed to have two children. If we compare the government's response to Tibetan nationalism in 1987 to its treatment of the democracy movement, an important difference emerges. In 1987, soldiers and policemen dealt with the Tibetans by beating them with rods. But full military force was used to drown the democracy movement in blood - it was a massacre. This demonstrates that the government is more

afraid of a mass movement from workers.

My personal reflections make me feel that China, a very large country, has been created by a long history and should not be divided. Perhaps we should have a federation of states. The WAFAC seeks to organise workers independently from the party bureaucracy in the minority regions. We oppose any use of force by the government against minority peoples.

What is your policy for Hong Kong's future?

The future of Hong Kong is not an issue for the WAFAC. Personally, I am opposed to independence for Hong Kong. You know it was taken from China by an unequal treaty. It should be given back to China.

Since the May 4 Movement in 1919, the Chinese working class, and its most advanced leaders, have shown a great capacity to learn, to sacrifice and to struggle. What lessons do you think workers have learned since the May-June events in 1989 which will assist them in future struggles?

First, it is necessary to remember that the May 4 Movement in 1919 was initially led by students who roused the working class to struggle, making it a significant event in Chinese history. When comparing the May-June events in 1989 it must be said this was a step backwards by the students. In 1919, the students would do anything to rouse the workers. In 1989, they joined hands to make a wall to stop workers joining them.

The CCP leaders have learned from many experiences the importance of the role played by workers. So on May 18, two days before he declared Martial Law, Li Peng went to meet workers at the Beijing Steel Complex. The Beijing steel works is the largest in China, employing a quarter of a million workers. Li Peng told these workers that a small group of 'bad elements' among the students wanted to overthrow the government and set the country backwards. 'Open your eyes,' he said, 'support the government.' During the movement in 1989 there was a saying: The people of China observe Beijing Steel. If Beijing Steel strikes, it is the signal for the rest of the country to strike.

The failure of the 1989 movement was largely the responsibility of the students. Millions of workers spontaneously tried to get to the square to support the students. They had to endure insults from the students. Even the BWAFC had to be founded in a park away from the square. The workers' movement has taken a leap forward, the students have stepped backwards. They realised their mistake too late.

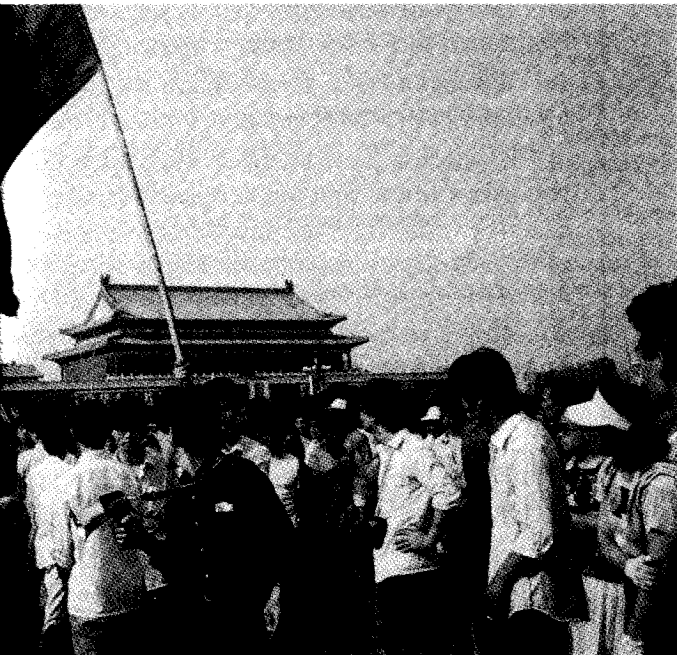
What will the WAFAC be fighting for in the future?

A workers' organisation independent of the CCP. The right to strike, organise and negotiate. Deng uses this beautiful phrase - the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. In reality, it is the dictatorship of corrupt party leaders in order to deceive the Chinese people. The WAFAC must fight this dictatorship.

What should worker activists do in Britain and Europe to assist workers' struggles in China?

The WAFAC needs their support and the support of their unions. We also need financial support to develop our work.

Workers News wishes to thank the translators who made this interview possible.



Marching Tiananmen Square

June 4, 1989. How many people do you estimate were killed as a result of the crackdown?

One thousand in the whole city. The majority of them were killed outside the square.

The government claimed that external forces were manipulating the democracy movement. Has it produced any evidence to support this?

This claim was made for internal use. It was made to deceive the people of China.

How many workers do you estimate were arrested after the events of May-June 1989 and what was their fate?

There has been a nationwide campaign of arrests with tens of thousands detained. The fate of these workers has been harsher than that experienced by the students. Not many students were executed - many workers were. Their arms were tied behind their backs, and they were shot in the head from behind. There was one case of a worker who was declared mentally unfit by doctors. He was beaten to death by

are raising funds to assist the families of workers killed, injured or arrested in China as a result of the clampdown. We strive to establish and maintain links with the underground workers' movement in China in order to prepare for the next stage of struggle.

The National People's Congress held in March 1991 adopted a programme of new reforms and promised a review of trade union rights and workers' salaries. How have these reforms affected the working class?

I have not seen a Chinese version of the new labour law yet. In general, I can say there will be no breathing space for workers.

How have the economic reforms, begun in 1978, affected farm labourers?

There has been a growing differentiation in the rural population with the break up of the communes. In general, there has been a vast waste of resources. Some farmers have become very rich. They no longer grow the staple crops needed by the people. They get rich growing cash crops for

Workers' Autonomous Federation of China

The WAFAC welcomes affiliations and donations from trade unions and other workers' organisations. It has also published a number of reports in English on the experiences made by workers in China since 1989.

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HEALY's decision to break his youth section from the Labour Party, and launch an independent Young Socialists, marked the end of an entry tactic which he had supported for fully two decades. As usual, this turn was implemented with the minimum of discussion and political clarity. In February 1965, just before the conference which formally launched the independent YS, Healy was still emphasising that this development had 'not in any way altered our conception that it is necessary to build up a strong movement in the Labour Party to fight the right wing'.¹

Such a combination of open and entry work would have enabled Healy to preserve his youth organisation in the face of expulsions by the bureaucracy, while at the same time intervening inside the party against the policies of Harold Wilson's newly-elected Labour government. In practice, the new turn carried the Healyites in an increasingly sectarian direction. 'Already we are a thousand times stronger than Foot, Mikado and company,' YS national secretary Dave Ashby boasted in January 1965.² And although the independent YS conference the next month attracted no more than 1,000 youth, this did not prevent Ashby from hailing the gathering as 'one of the most important events in the history of the British working class movement'.³ This mindless triumphalism, for which Healy himself undoubtedly bore primary responsibility, was combined with the usual exaggerated predictions. A former YS National Committee member recalls how the perspective presented to the youth was 'that there was going to be a major economic crisis, which would lead to a break between the working class and the Labour government, and that we would be in a position to intervene as an independent leadership in that situation'.⁴

It was at this time that Healy began to concretise his proposal for a daily newspaper, which he had first broached in 1963. The purchase of expensive new equipment for this purpose was announced in June 1965 at the SLL annual conference, where Healy informed the delegates that the daily paper was 'the whole essence of Leninism'. And he cited Lenin's call in *What Is To Be Done?* for an all-Russian political newspaper - ignoring the fact that Lenin wasn't proposing a specifically daily newspaper at all. 'If we can launch that paper at the height of the crisis of leadership of the labour movement,' Healy assured his members, 'we are set for a transformation. We can transform the SLL from the present organisation into a mass organisation'.⁵

Healy's belief that the SLL was about to become a mass party was based on the delusion that the Labour Party was rapidly losing its influence over the working class. British social democracy, it was confidently asserted, was 'breaking up', while Labour's 1965 budget was described as 'an epitaph for reformism in Britain'.⁶ Healy's call to 'bring down the Labour government', which the WRP was to employ to such self-destructive effect in the 1970s, now made its first appearance. 'They disgrace the name of socialism,' Healy declared, denouncing the Wilson government at

The rise and fall of Gerry Healy

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

PART FIFTEEN



The Third World Congress of the International Committee in April 1966: (standing) Mike Banda and Cliff Slaughter; (seated) Pierre Lambert, Gerry Healy, M. Rastos, Stephan Just

an SLL public meeting in April 1965. 'It is better that they should be brought down. They divide and weaken the working class...'⁷ That the SLL, whose membership barely reached four figures, could overthrow the government was obviously ridiculous. But Healy seems to have convinced himself that his organisation was now in a position to confront the Labour Party as direct 'challengers and contenders for power', or so he told the 1965 SLL conference.⁸

Healy did not quite achieve the level of foolishness of some of his pupils today, who talk of 'driving the Labour leaders out of the labour movement'. The SLL did correctly argue that the task of revolutionaries was to 'remove Wilson and Co from positions of leadership'.⁹ However, any idea of building a Trotskyist fraction inside the Labour Party in order to further this objective was soon dropped in favour of an exclusive emphasis on independent work. Healy organised

a 2,000-strong demonstration outside the 1965 Labour Party conference, yet the SLL didn't have a single representative inside. The 'real place' to fight Wilson, Healy told an SLL rally afterwards, was not in the Labour Party but 'in the factories through strong organisation, on the streets, and in the youth movement, to provide an alternative leadership to take this movement to power'.¹⁰

Healy's sectarian stupidity reached its culmination during the Hull North by-election of February 1966, when Labour left-wingers were attacked for having 'swallowed their principles and gone out canvassing' for their party's Wilsonite candidate.¹¹ The by-election in fact produced a substantial swing to Labour, making nonsense of Healy's firm prediction eight months earlier that it was 'no secret that the Tories are on their way back'.¹² Healy now executed a swift about-turn. Previously *The Newsletter* had informed its readers that 'virtually nobody has any more illusions in the right-wing Wilson government'.¹³ Now, on the eve of the general election, it was forced to admit that 'millions of workers will vote Labour, refusing to return to Toryism, but not yet understanding the extent to which the Wilson leadership betrays the interests of the working class'.¹⁴

Healy's change of tack came too late to prevent his 'Third Period' line on reformism causing serious damage to the organisation. According to one account, following the abandonment of Labour Party work the Healyites proved 'totally unable to recruit, despite enormous efforts on the part of the

rank and file. Many rankers - and some leaders - resigned. Even full-time workers were displaced. And so, in the following months, tired of knocking their heads against brick walls, hundreds of demoralised youth left the YS and the SLL. Branches were closed down. By the time the Labour government was re-elected in March 1966, with a majority of nearly a hundred, the membership of the SLL was probably cut by half'.¹⁵

Healy met with no more success in his efforts at 'Rebuilding the Fourth International' - the title of an International Committee statement which was circulated in preparation for the IC's Third World Congress. This repeated the familiar IC mythology about 'Pabloite revisionism', but did at least have the merit of recognising that the FI had been 'destroyed'.¹⁶ When the congress met in London in April 1966, though, it was prevailed upon to accept an SLL amendment, moved by Mike Banda, putting the entirely contrary position that the FI had 'successfully resisted and defeated the attempts... to destroy it politically and organisationally'.¹⁷ The motive for this change was accurately identified by the French *Voix Ouvriere* group, who attended the congress as observers. 'Anyone who says that the International has been destroyed,' they pointed out, 'must analyse the causes of its destruction; this, however, would force the IC to submit its own past to a severe and painful criticism'.¹⁸ And this, of course, was something Healy refused to countenance.

Under Healy's urging, the IC - which from its foundation in 1953 had seen itself as no more than a faction within the world Trotskyist movement - now suddenly proclaimed itself to be in effect the Fourth International. The adoption of Healy's bogus theory of 'continuity' did not stop the congress accepting another amendment, from Pierre Lambert's French IC section, which declared that the International Committee was not a democratic centralist organisation and that its decisions should be based on the principle of unanimity.¹⁹ This was reflected in a congress resolution which defined the task of the IC as 'working towards' a centralised international leadership.²⁰ How this could be squared with Healy's assertion that the FI still existed 'politically and organisationally' was not explained.

The Third Congress turned out to be a complete shambles. The IC itself could muster only a handful of sections. Apart from the British and French, delegates were present from Michel Varga's Hungarian group and a Greek organisation led by Loukas Karliafitis. There were also representatives from two ex-SWP groupings, led by Tim Wohlforth and James Robertson, between whom Healy was trying to organise a fusion. In order to make up numbers, observers were invited from *Voix Ouvriere*, from groups in Africa and Germany, and from a state-capitalist tendency in Japan, along with individuals from Usec sections in Ceylon and Denmark. The politically confused basis on which the congress was put together was indicated by Healy's angry announcement, halfway through the proceedings, that he had no idea that *Voix Ouvriere* held a state-capitalist position on China, and that if he had known he wouldn't have invited them.²¹

The incoherence of the IC's own

position on the question of workers' states was brought out in a contribution by James Robertson, who criticised the SLL's absurd analysis of the Castro regime as a capitalist government ruling on behalf of a 'weak' bourgeoisie. If the Cuban bourgeoisie was weak, Robertson commented, this could only be because it was tired after its long swim to Miami, Florida!²² This was too much for Healy, who evidently decided that it was necessary to whip this insolent American into line. As one eyewitness recalls, Healy marched into the congress later that day 'and he came up to Robertson, and started shouting and screaming at him and banging his fist and saying that Robertson was a petty-bourgeois'.²³ The latter's crime was to have missed the session where his contribution had been attacked by SLL speakers, and Healy demanded that Robertson make a self-criticism before the congress.

The purpose of this provocation was presumably to crush Robertson's independence, compromise him politically and give Healy a hold over him. After refusing to comply with Healy's demand, Robertson recalls, he was 'called into Healy's room, with Banda in a shadowy corner, and Healy quite drunk, and he said, "Listen, Jim" - very friendly then, the sudden switch - "we can work this out. The fusion can go through. Just go and make a good act of contrition... I care nothing for Wohlforth - you'll go back home the leader"... And we got out of the room as fast as we could... We got downstairs at the end, and Gerry was... running around and he was visibly working himself up into a punchout... it was Lambert who intervened to cool Healy off, and we got out of there'.²⁴

Not only did Healy lose the majority of his projected US section, but he succeeded in thoroughly discrediting the IC in the eyes of everyone else at the congress. As one of the Ceylonese observers recalls, it was quite clear to them that Healy 'had just brought together a whole group of disparate people who had no real political agreement. What made the thing bizarre was his behaviour... Here at what was supposed to be a world congress, with so many different people present, we find the most senior person behaving in the most abominable manner... And that was the thing that really finally broke it up, because it was obvious to everybody that there was not going to be a free and meaningful exchange of ideas'.²⁵ Healy provided a further insight into his commitment to the free exchange of ideas a few months later, when Usec supporter Ernest Tate tried to sell a pamphlet exposing the fraud of the Third World Congress outside an SLL public meeting. At Healy's instigation, Tate was beaten up by a group of SLL stewards and hospitalised.²⁶

To be continued

NOTES

1. *The Newsletter*, January 30, 1965.
2. *Keep Left*, January 1965.
3. *Ibid.*, March 1965.
4. Interview with Tony Gard, May 10, 1992.
5. *The Newsletter*, June 12, 1965. 'Healy put the cart squarely before the horse,' it has been pointed out. 'The mass daily is the result of the winning of mass influence by the revolutionaries. It cannot create that influence for a small propaganda grouping.' (*Workers Power*, February 1986).
6. *The Newsletter*, February 13, April 10, 1965. The quotations are from Robert Black and Tom Kemp respectively.
7. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1965.
8. *Ibid.*, June 12, 1965.
9. *Ibid.*, May 1, 1965.
10. *Ibid.*, October 2, 1965.
11. *Ibid.*, February 12, 1966.
12. *Ibid.*, June 12, 1965.
13. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1965.
14. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1966.
15. T. Whelan, *The Credibility Gap: The Politics of the SLL*, IMG, 1970, p.12.
16. *Fourth International*, August 1965.
17. C. Slaughter, ed., *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, Vol. 5, New Park, 1974, pp.5-6.
18. *Marxism Vs. Ultraleftism*, SWP, Education for Socialists, 1974, p.99.
19. *Ibid.*, p.85.
20. Slaughter, op. cit. p.31.
21. *Marxism Vs. Ultraleftism*, p.93.
22. *Spartacist*, Winter 1985-86, p.39.
23. Interview with Upali Cooray, May 10, 1992.
24. *Spartacist*, Winter 1985-86, p.23.
25. Interview with Upali Cooray.
26. *Marxism Vs. Ultraleftism*, p.108.



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Spain: demolishing the Stalinist myth

STALINISM may have entered a terminal crisis, but some of its political myths are not yet dead. One of these concerns the Spanish Civil War. A picture of this bloody struggle as a conflict between democracy and fascism – and thus, supposedly, a precursor to the Second World War – remains widespread in the labour movement, having been buttressed by volumes of Stalinist and liberal propaganda. According to this view, the defeat of the Spanish Republic is to be explained solely as the result of the fascists' military superiority, the responsibility for which is laid at the door of the imperialist democracies, who imposed an embargo on arms and volunteers to Spain while the German and Italian regimes poured in military aid to Franco.

This new book published by Socialist Platform and *Revolutionary History*, which is dedicated to the memory of the late Sam Bornstein, presents a very different analysis. It brings together contemporary pieces and more recent studies, written from an anti-Stalinist standpoint, most of which appear

The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left *Revolutionary History/Socialist Platform; £12.95*

Review by Martin Sullivan

for the first time in English. They demonstrate that the fascists were victorious essentially because a genuine workers' revolution was strangled by those who claimed to be defending 'democracy'.

This position is usefully summarised in the book's concluding chapter, 'Spain 1936-39: The Murdered Revolution', by the French Trotskyist Jean Rous, who was sent to Spain after the outbreak of the Civil War to co-ordinate the work of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists. He outlines how Franco's military rebellion of July 17, 1936, was initially repulsed by an armed workers' uprising. In a process which developed most fully in Catalonia, workers and peasants ousted the capitalists and landlords and seized the factories and the land. A network of workers' militias and committees spread across Catalonia. With the Republic

can government impotent, having been deserted by its armed forces, the opportunity existed to co-ordinate these embryonic organs of dual power into workers' councils (soviets) and form a revolutionary workers' government.

None of the existing workers' organisations – neither the anarchists, nor the Socialists, nor the Stalinised Communist Party – was prepared to take on this task. All were supporters of a Popular Front strategy that tied the working class politically to various minor capitalist parties, with whom a succession of bourgeois coalition governments were formed.

The Stalinists, in particular, were dedicated to the defence of capitalism in order to avoid disrupting the Soviet bureaucracy's diplomatic objective of securing an alliance with the 'democratic' imperialist



Republican militiamen leaving for the Madrid front, July 1936

powers against Nazi Germany. And it was they who proved the most consistent and ruthless exponents of the Popular Front line. The preservation of a coalition with the bourgeois parties required the eradication of dual power and the crushing of all those in the workers' movement who, in however confused a way, defended the gains of the July Revolution. With the assistance of imported GPU squads, the Stalinists set about the extermination of their left-wing opponents.

Two of the authors represented in this collection, Kurt Landau and Hans David Freund, were among the thousands of courageous militants who fell victim to the Stalinist campaign of torture and murder. These criminal policies inevitably spread demoralisation among anti-fascist workers, who were required to fight and die to defend a police state which served to maintain the power of their exploiters. The Stalinists thereby paved the way for the victory of Franco.

As Trotsky emphasised at the time, the Stalinists were able to accomplish their treachery only because of the political failure of the revolutionary forces. He showed how the centrist POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) carried a major share of the blame. Although led by subjective revolutionaries – notably Andrés Nin, the former leader of the Spanish Left Opposition – and containing in its ranks tens of thousands of working class militants, the POUM refused to take up the struggle for workers' power.

It is on this issue that the book lacks clarity. Because it includes contributions from a variety of anti-Stalinist currents, the sharpness of

Trotsky's critique of the POUM is somewhat blunted. Thus Andy Durgan's opening article, 'The Spanish Trotskyists and the Foundation of the POUM', while intensively researched and illuminating on many details, rejects some of Trotsky's criticisms of Nin as 'excessively harsh'. The Austrian POUMist Kurt Landau, for his part, justifies Nin's participation in the Popular Front government in Catalonia with the theoretically incoherent argument that this was 'a mixture of a bourgeois government and an organisation of dual power'. Although major contributions from the Trotskyists Rous and M. Casanova act as a counterweight to such arguments, due to the format of the book they inevitably appear as one among several 'views from the left'. It is therefore necessary to emphasise the point made in the introduction to this collection, that the book must be seen as a companion to Trotsky's own writings on the Spanish Revolution, and to Felix Morrow's classic study *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain*.

Overall, however, this book can be thoroughly recommended. For those who hold to a revolutionary Marxist analysis of the Spanish Civil War there is much here to deepen their understanding; for those who have swallowed the prevailing Stalinist/liberal orthodoxies, the book's revelations will come as a political shock. And in a period when the fascists are once more on the march in Europe, while in South Africa the Stalinists are again seeking to harness the workers' movement politically to the bourgeoisie, an exposure of the counter-revolutionary nature of the Popular Front could not be more relevant.

From armed struggle to round the table talks

THE COLLAPSE of Stalinism has wreaked havoc among the Communist Parties outside eastern Europe. Some have dissolved, others have split, and many have changed their names. By virtue of its four decades of illegality and its part in the mythologised 'armed struggle', the South African Communist Party continues to enjoy a prestige and influence well beyond its 20,000-strong membership through its role in both COSATU and the ANC.

A book which attempts to set out the modern history of the SACP's relationship with the ANC is timely, given the absence of serious histories to which militant workers drawn around the SACP can turn to make any sense of its policy zig-zags. For those who took the SACP's 'insurrectionary' rhetoric of 1984-86 at face value, its present role in advocating a deal with the white ruling class is proving to be like a ride on a roller coaster.

But the authors have only been partly successful in their task. For this is less a political history than an insight into the organisational manoeuvres and crises of the SACP within the ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). While there is considerable detail on the SACP's dominant role in ANC and MK structures in exile, there is very little analysis of SACP politics. Although this book is far from uncritical of the SACP – a fair amount of dirty linen is washed in public – its utterances are treated as Marxist good coin. Joe Slovo, for instance, is described as 'a fundamentalist believer in classical Marxism-Leninism of the Soviet school'. The authors also seem to think that the suppression of internal discussion and debate is the authentic expression of democratic centralism. The explanation is that in distancing themselves from Stalinism, they have mistaken it for genuine Marxism.

That being said, the impression they give of SACP leaders is of generally well-meaning people, prone to the occasional organisational excess. There is no sustained attempt to relate the history of this most Stalinist of parties to the history of Stalinism as a whole. This no

Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile

by Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba

Indiana University Press/James Currey; £9.95

Review by Richard Price

doubt reflects the collaboration between Stephen Ellis, a former editor of *Africa Confidential*, and Tsepo Sechaba, the pseudonym of a (presumably dissident) SACP member, who we are told 'remains faithful to the ideals of the ANC' – whatever that means today, when even the demands of the Freedom Charter are being ditched.

The first chapter, which takes the story of the Communist Party from its foundation up to its banning in 1950, is fairly sketchy. It doesn't, for instance, mention that the party's first black general secretary, Albert Nzula, who died in the Soviet Union, was possibly murdered because of his Trotskyist sympathies. The Second World War, during which the party attempted to tie workers to the Allied war effort and opposed strikes, takes up a mere page.

The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 dealt the party a severe blow, for which it seems to have been ill-prepared, and an underground SACP was not rebuilt until 1953. Although some SACPers had previously been dual members of the ANC, the extensive overlapping of the organisations dates largely from this period. But while the outlawing of the SACP produced a closer political alliance with the ANC, the banning of the ANC in 1960 led to a military alliance, MK. It is this latter aspect which is the central focus of this book.

Ellis and Sechaba show how weak ANC organisation within South Africa, combined with the reliance on Soviet arms, gave the SACP growing authority in the guerrilla army and the ANC itself, particularly after the 1969 Morogoro Conference. They also demonstrate that the squalid living conditions of the fighters in the camps – while the leadership lived in relative comfort – along with the frustrations of an 'armed struggle' consisting of a

handful of battles, repeated disastrous attempts to infiltrate guerrillas into the country and sporadic bombings, led to growing discontent in MK, culminating in the 1984 Mutiny. Chris Hani, who had risen in MK by voicing some of the grievances of the Sixties generation, played a leading role in suppressing those of the Eighties. The authors' view of these events is that they were a 'tragic' consequence of extensive infiltration by South African intelligence. Although such penetration was real enough, this runs dangerously close to giving the torturers of the ANC Security Department an alibi.

Throughout the period of 'armed struggle', the chief pillar of SACP theory remained 'colonialism of a special type' – today quietly shelved as it sits around the table with the 'colonialists'. Other than remarking that it was the 'latest incarnation' of the two-stage theory pursued since 1928, its implications are left unexplored. Little is said about the SACP's attitude to the emerging black trade union movement in the Seventies and Eighties – it would remain hostile to COSATU until the eve of its official launch in 1985. There are also occasional lapses into vacuous 'journalese'. Oliver Tambo's greatest personal quality, it turns out, 'has probably been his simple Christian morality which has served the organisation well'.

These critical comments aside, there are a number of positive aspects to the book. Its concise but detailed account of relations and tensions within the leading circles of the ANC-SACP alliance has yet to be bettered, and the impact of the shift in the balance of forces both internationally and in Southern Africa in the mid-Eighties is well grasped. Despite its faults, it will be an important reference work for South African socialists.

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The struggle for Irish freedom

REBUILD THE SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

SEVENTY years ago the Dail ratified the treaty which partitioned Ireland and created Northern Ireland – a sectarian statelet founded on discrimination against the Catholic/nationalist minority and dependent for its existence since its inception on the denial of democratic rights. Twenty-three years since troops were sent in by a Labour government, the solution to Ireland's unfinished revolution is no closer.

Labour's election programme, as ever, refused to acknowledge the right to Irish self-determination. Instead, it made the pious hope for a united Ireland dependent on 'democratic consent' – in other words, on the loyalist veto. In the meantime, the Labour leadership continues to operate in complete agreement with the Tories on Ireland. The occupied Six Counties have nothing to do with democracy. They were sliced off from the other

By Colin Harrison

twenty-six by Lloyd George's threat of 'war, and war within three days'.

If the general election result has not altered British imperialism's policy on Ireland, everything else has not remained equal. Irish solidarity work in Britain has sunk to a new low. Time to Go, launched in 1989 as a broad-based all-party campaign for withdrawal, which its sponsors claimed would break the mould of Irish politics in Britain, disappeared shortly afterwards, to be followed by the demise of the Labour Committee on Ireland.

This alone should concentrate the minds of socialists and consistent anti-imperialists. Karl Marx's dictum that no nation which oppresses another can itself be free remains as valid today as it was over a century ago. Opposi-

tion to the policies of the British ruling class in Ireland is essential to the development within the British working class of an independent class position.

Central to rebuilding a principled Irish solidarity movement is the fight against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy in Britain. Their record of support for imperialism in Ireland stretches from 1916, when Labour MPs rose in the Commons to applaud the execution of James Connolly, to their present active or tacit support for repressive legislation, state censorship, on-the-spot executions and death squads.

The bottom line of such a campaign must be for self-determination for the Irish people as a whole and for the immediate withdrawal of troops. These demands must be fought for not only against the openly pro-imperialist labour bureaucracy but also against the disguised pro-im-



JUDITH WARD RELEASED

Judith Ward, found guilty of the M62 coach bombing in 1974 and sentenced to life imprisonment, was released on May 11 after the Appeal Court decided that the confessions which were the main evidence which convicted her 'could no longer be regarded as reliable'. In fact, this was known at the time of her trial, but was deliberately withheld from the court. Ward, along with the Maguires, the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, was a victim of the state's campaign of terror against Irish republicanism, which ranges from the assassination of IRA volunteers to the framing and jailing of non-participants.

perialism of campaigns such as Time To Go, which called for the ruling class to withdraw 'constructively', in its own time, and in its own interests... please. Of course, if such a popular-front style campaign attracted any widespread support it would be necessary for revolutionaries to intervene in it to raise such principled demands.

We call for the immediate withdrawal of British imperialism because it has no progressive role to play in Ireland. We unconditionally defend the right of Irish republicans to fight for the ending of partition. We call for a campaign to defend their militants. We make no concessions either to British imperialism or to pacifism.

Sinn Féin seeks to resolve the Irish revolution within the confines of capitalism. Its programme of reunification on a capitalist basis limits its support to the most oppressed section of the Six Counties' nationalist working class. Sinn Féin has proved incapable of mobilising the discontent of the working class in the south, where unemployment stands at over 20 per cent, or of breaking the grip of loyalism on northern Protestant workers. Sinn Féin's programme is utopian. Its inability to make headway is now driving its leadership further to the right.

Ever since Sinn Féin embraced 'community politics', this social-democratic style reformism has sat more and more uneasily alongside its support for the armed struggle. Statements distancing Sinn Féin from military actions have become more frequent. Although the party's vote at the general election only slipped from 11.4 per cent to 10 per cent, the psychological blow of the loss of Gerry Adams's West Belfast seat may well accelerate the shift to the right as the political wing attempts to hold onto its electoral base.

Already last year, at the time of the abortive Brooke talks, Sinn Féin indicated its preparedness to

discuss round the table. In February, the Ard Fheis (annual conference) dropped the demand for British withdrawal in the lifetime of a single parliament as a condition for talks. The new policy document *Towards a Lasting Peace* calls on the British and Dublin governments to 'co-operate' to end partition 'in the shortest possible time consistent with obtaining maximum consent to the process'. Gerry Adams has also called for intervention by the United Nations and the European Community in the 'decolonisation process in Ireland'.

Irish freedom cannot be won by compromising with the British ruling class or their long-time lackeys in Dublin, nor with imperialist fronts such as the EEC or UN, whose hands are still soaked in the blood of Iraqi workers. The colonial shackles on Ireland's development can only be shattered by a party whose programme is based on the interests of the working class.

While defending Irish republicanism under its present leadership, we put our faith not in the programme of petty-bourgeois nationalism but in the programme of Trotskyism, and a fight for a rebuilt Fourth International. In Britain, the fight for workers' revolution must include unconditional support for the struggles of all oppressed peoples against imperialism. In Ireland, and around the world, the fight for national liberation can only be won under the banner of the working class.

- Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole!
- Immediate withdrawal of troops!
- Release all Irish republican prisoners!
- Repeal all repressive legislation, including the PTA and the broadcasting ban!
- Take the fight into the trade unions and the Labour Party!
- For a united socialist Ireland!

Women POW's subjected to brutal strip search

WORKERS NEWS has received a letter from 22 women republican prisoners in Maghaberry Prison near Belfast detailing their experiences of the brutal and degrading practice of strip searching.

On March 2, under the pretext of having received information from anonymous sources, the prison authorities told women POW's to expect a search of the cells. They were subsequently informed that each would be subjected to a strip search. When they protested they were threatened with loss of remission and solitary confinement.

'What happened over the next ten hours can only be described as sexual, physical and psychological torture. Gangs of screws dressed in riot gear and armed with batons and shields entered the wings. A gang of screws entered a cell and set upon the defenceless woman inside, in each case up to 16 screws. The POW's were seized and dragged to the floor, their faces pushed tightly into the floor so that they couldn't see their assailants and their mouths covered to stifle the screams. Once

inside, the screws began to remove the woman's clothes until she was totally naked. Every other woman in the gaol could hear each attack as it took place, so in actual fact each woman spent the entire day listening to comrades being sexually abused before and after her own turn came.

'The use of strip searching has been well researched and it has been concluded time and time again that this practice has no security value...'

'When one woman refused to be strip searched and a doctor objected to her being forcibly strip searched she was left locked in her cell until a decision was made about her. It was decided she could be searched by MO's using metal detectors and then she was unlocked with security clearance. Obviously this form of search (which none of us would have objected to) was enough to satisfy security requirements. Why then was the forcible strip search of women pursued? One can only conclude that degradation, control and submission, rather than security, were on the agenda.'

The Northern Ireland Office

has attempted to pass off these events as 'women over-reacting' and an 'unnecessary violent reaction' to a 'routine search'. The women have passed statements to their solicitors describing their ordeal and the injuries they sustained. They describe what they underwent on March 2 as the Northern Ireland Office's contribution to International Women's Day. The letter is signed by Marie Wright, Ailish Carroll, Shauneen Baker, Bernie Reilly, Patricia Deane, Louise Nash, Karen Quinn, Pat Moore, Annmarie McKee, Paula Burns, Donna McMenamy, Rosaleen McCorley, Carol Cullen, Mary McArdle, Theresa Browne, Bronwyn McGahan, Geraldine Ferrity, Ann Cavanagh, Mary Ellen Campbell, Frances Symington, Teresa Malocco and Maureen Delaney.

Workers' organisations must demand an end to strip searching and sexual harassment within the overall context of demanding troops out of Ireland, self-determination for the Irish people as a whole and the release of all republican POW's.