

# workers power

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**INSIDE: PALESTINE**  
**S.W.P./RANK & FILE**  
**SUPPLEMENT**  
**ON THE W.S.L.**

# KICK OUT THE WITCH-HUNTERS!

**MICHAEL FOOT HAS gone through several remarkable transformations in the last decade. From doyen of the Tribune intransigents to Callaghan's parliamentary Mr. Fixit. He fixed the social contract with the 'terrible twins' Scanlon and Jones. He fixed the Lib-Lab pact that enabled Callaghan and Healey to go on cutting wages, services and jobs. To crown it all he fixed the pact with the Orange bigots and his respected debating partner Enoch Powell. From CND 'inveterate peacemonger' he became leader of Her Majesty's Opposition 'speaking for Britain' and backing Thatcher's dirty Falklands War. Now the old Bevanite rebel appears in a new, and for many, surprising guise - Witch-finder General.**

These changes of form conceal a consistent content. Underneath it all Foot stands by his two basic obsessions, unscathed and undiluted - the complete subordination of every interest of the working class to the national interest and parliamentary democracy. Had Foot passed his declining years in the dignified obscurity of the backbenches and the annual seaside conference outing, he might have preserved his left-wing reputation with the great majority of Labour supporters.

Instead the PLP centre-right, staggering under the blows of conference decisions in favour of minimal accountability, drafted Foot for the leadership. The Labour left in both its 'hard' and its 'soft' varieties connived at Foot's election believing naively that he could be used for the left and that he was some sort of defence against the right. But Foot's 'softness' or 'weakness' has not been of any use to the left.

The only real strength of the lefts lay in the indignation of Labour's rank and file and of the class conscious workers at Callaghan and Healey's betrayals. Their only defence was their own organisation and willingness to fight. Foot's election was a measure of both their objective strength and their subjective weakness. It was a 'compromise' between right and left - a rotten one on the former's part but disarmingly genuine on the part of Tony Benn and his supporters. That the right did not attack immediately was no thanks to Foot.

The Labour right had to wait until they had four factors on their side. A pro-purge NEC and party bureaucracy; the block votes of the union general secretaries; the prospect of a crushing defeat in an imminent general election; clear signs that the left advance had halted and indeed that a decided retreat was in process. The period from the Bishop's Stortford Truce through to Thatcher's Falklands War saw the materialisation of all these conditions. Behind and beneath them lay a year and a half of working class defeats inflicted by a cowardly and venal union leadership. Soaring unemployment, slumping real wages, strikes and occupations isolated and defeated, Left councils brought to their knees over cuts and transport policy, did nothing to stiffen the resolve of Labour's left.

The right, whose policies of capitulation wherever workers' interests are involved and intransigent commitment to ruling class incomes policy, rationalisation, wage freeze, NATO etc, thrive in periods of working class passivity. Naturally they looked for the first opportunity to take the offensive to make Labour safe for these policies. Michael Foot was petrified to take a step out of line with the Tories over the Malvinas. Likewise he is scared rigid that unless Labour enters the election stakes under 'sensible' policies, ones acceptable to the bosses, and under trustworthy bosses' men such as Healey, Hattersley and Shore, then it will be the Labour Party itself that the media will launch a witch-hunt against.

The Falklands War has, moreover, just reminded Foot and Kinnock and Co of the power and the measureless venom of the reptile press. Foot as a product of the Beaverbrook stable should of course be well aware of it. Despite the fact that Tony Benn's policies, conference policy, the policies of Labour's programme are identical with those supported by Foot, Kinnock and Co for many years, they are panic-stricken at the thought of including them in an election manifesto, let alone implementing them. They know that what the ruling class will unleash upon them will lose them the election if the working class remains just passive voting fodder. On the other hand they cannot conceive of arousing the working class by 'extra-parliamentary' means. A handful of demonstrations in two years was quite enough.

Basically for them all that matters is for Labour to win an election - no matter under what policies and under what leadership. They welcome the opportunity to repeat the 1974-9 experience. Benn and Co however know, through their sojourn amongst the grass roots that this will spell annihilation for the party. Foot and Kinnock's perspective itself is illusory. The worsened economic and political conditions of 1982/83 and the determination of the bosses not to have Thatcher's 'good work' undone will make Foot-Healey Mark 2 a much more anti-working class government than Mark 1

Thatcher will doubtless be looking for the first opportunity to spring an election on a Labour Party and an Alliance tottering under the effects of the new jingoism. Foot, Healey and their trade union backers assume that they can only win by proving their City of London and State Department credentials. They need to prove to their backers that a Labour Government will be, as usual, completely out of the control of Labour's rank and file. The Hayward/Hughes 'recognised list' is a permanent and powerful weapon to discipline all the 'Left' pressure groups in the party. Their immediate aim is probably the expulsion of a number of 'Militant' leaders, the bureaucratic 'de-selection' of 'Militant' parliamentary candidates and the demoralisation and disintegration of the Bennite alliance.

The gist of Foot and Kinnock and Co's arguments are that Militant and other supposed 'Trotskyists' do not believe in parliamentary democracy and that they are a 'party within a



Pictures: Tessa Howland (IFL); John Sturrock (Network)



party'. Both are cynical arguments but they hide a desire to drastically modify the character of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party was founded as, and remains, a federal body. It was founded by the trade unions and three small 'parties'; the right-wing Fabians, ancestors of today's 'Right', the ILP, ancestors of today's Bennite 'Left', and the Marxist SDF. Though the Marxists voluntarily left the party soon after its foundation, re-affiliating in 1916, their successor, the British CP, was undemocratically excluded in 1921 from the 'party of the trade unions'. Marxists, Trotskyists as such have never been absent from the party nor has the party ever ceased to consist of parties and organisations with their own organisation, propaganda, subscriptions, discipline etc.

The Labour right has a myriad of organisations often of a highly secret and mysterious character; the Labour Committee for Transatlantic Understanding (Chapple, Duffy, Mason, Hattersley), the TULV, Labour Solidarity etc. Certainly they rarely need organs for their own propaganda. Whilst their 'principles and policy' are highly 'distinctive' from those of Labour Conference, the NEC etc, the organs of the bosses in Fleet St. give them ample and repeated coverage. Who needs papers funded by supporters' pennies when you have the Tory press lords' millions behind you?

The Hayward/Hughes report spuriously uses Clause 1 section (3) of the Constitution to declare Militant in breach of the Constitution and Standing Orders. Whilst this clause is an undemocratic restriction of an important original feature of the Labour Party, it clearly refers to affiliation: "Organisations not affiliated to or associated under a National Agreement with the Party on January 1st 1946 having their own programme, principles and policy for distinctive and separate propaganda, or possessing branches in the constituencies or engaged in the promotion of Parliamentary or local government candidatures or owing allegiance to any political organisation situated abroad, shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party." (WP emphasis).

Nowhere does the constitution ban newspapers or their supporters, which of necessity must have distinctive principles and constitute propaganda for them. Such 'unofficial' papers have existed continuously throughout the Party's history, not have they hitherto been subject to a licensing system. Certainly some, such as the Left Reformist /Trotskyist hybrid Socialist Outlook have been banned. At the time, (August 1954) Michael Foot called it an 'outrage' and 'the first time in history' that the LP had 'taken steps to suppress a newspaper.' Such a decree he said 'might fittingly be issued within a Fascist or Communist party.' He then went on to point out the long line of papers that published 'propaganda hostile to the declared policy of the party' and which 'organised conferences and meetings'; Robert Blatchford's 'Clarion', George Lansbury's 'Herald' not to mention 'Tribune' itself. For the criticised leadership to proscribe such propaganda or organisation would in Foot's words 'destroy all democratic debate within the party.' Good words Michael Foot, followed 30 years on by very bad deeds.

As for the famous commitment to Parliamentary Democracy that Foot Heffer and Kinnock demand from members, no such commitment is to be found in the 'objects' defined in Labour's constitution. Labour has never had a 'programme' as Marxists understand that term i.e. a document which lays down the party's strategic goal and the tactics necessary to achieve it. Its 'programmes' are list of legislative proposals and policy for the next Labour government. Clause IV is the nearest. The LP has to a programme. None of its sub-clauses contain any exclusive commitment to parliamentary means as the sole, sufficient or essential means for realising socialism. If Eric Heffer wants to include such a test clause for membership he will be turning a widely held and preponderant view of the party and certainly the basis of Labour's actions into a precondition for membership. This, like Hayward and Hughes' 'approved list' would be an innovation.

Both, if effective, would further violate the democratic rights of what

claims to be 'the party of the working class' or the party of the trade unions. Not only revolutionaries but all supporters of workers' democracy, whether they be right or left reformists, should oppose these efforts to complete the process of turning the Labour Party into a tightly policed social democratic party, or rather, ultimately, into a plain Liberal Party.

Revolutionaries inside and outside the Labour Party must mobilise the maximum strength of the Labour Movement against the current witch-hunt. Above all this means mobilising the only genuine mass organisations of our class, the unions, in particular their rank and file base. In every current struggle workers must have the issue of workers' democracy in the unions and democracy in the Labour party put before them.

Weighell's NUR members, Sirs' steel workers, Spanswick's COHSE members, all involved in direct action or solidarity, must be mobilised against their leaders' undemocratic use of the block vote for the right at the Labour Party Conference. Executives must be bombarded with resolutions from branches demanding an end to the witch-hunt and demanding that the PLP submit to the decisions of conference. If anybody is a 'party within a party' it is the PLP which can and does flout conference decisions, manifesto commitments and the views of the constituencies and unions that put them into parliament.

The witch-hunters must be cleared of the NEC. But in the end it is not special agitation in the constituencies or even the unions that will be decisive. An offensive against the Tories this summer can turn the tide against the right. Of course there is no contradiction between these struggles. Indeed without a fight-back against the Tories the odds are heavily against the left, and heavily stacked in favour of a vicious right-wing clamp-down in the Labour Party.

In the constituencies amendments for conference condemning the Militant victimisation and the proposals for a register must be passed. But the right and centre of the PLP and their allies

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# S.W.P. turns its back on the

NOTHING CAN BE taken for granted in the Socialist Workers Party these days. Having watched Tony Cliff's single-handed victory over Women's Voice, party members now face the winding up of the SWP plethora of rank and file groups and the abandonment of the perspective which has been virtually the raison d'être of the SWP since the early 1970s. In the May/June issue of "Socialist Review" Cliff publicly airs a debate which has been going on inside the SWP for sometime; namely what are the implications for revolutionaries in the trade unions of the defeats suffered by the working class in the past period. Cliff's conclusions are dramatic and are put in characteristically exaggerated terms when he declares "you can't have a rank and file movement if the factories are empty." (Socialist Review, 1982; 6).

As with previous "turns" of the Socialist Workers Party, this one has more to do with the internal state and membership of the SWP than with the external class struggle. The SWP has suffered a serious loss of seasoned members in the past period, particularly its trade union militants - industrial and white collar. Cliff, sensing hard times ahead and fearful of the siren calls of the Bennite left to his party faithful, has set out to "toughen" his grouping. If Women's Voice groups were seen as a block to recruitment, worse a conduit for SWP members out of the party into feminism, so now the Rank and File groups are seen as a similar "threat". Indeed Cliff comes close to his real reasoning for the turn when he complains "Instead of recruiting people from Rank and File groups into the Party, comrades disappear into the Rank and File group." (S.R.p.19)

This relatively honest assessment of the problems facing the SWP is not the starting point for an examination of the political questions underlying these problems.

If Cliff's reasons for this latest move are purely sectarian, placing the needs of his own party above those of the working class, and his argumentation spurious, the debate in the SWP has raised serious questions that must be answered by revolutionaries working in a new and less favourable period of the class struggle. Is it possible to build a rank and file movement in a period of downturn, to rally the militant minority and turn it into a majority? What are the lessons to be drawn from the young Communist Party's attempts to do just that in the 1920s, and what lessons should SWP members draw from the failure of the SWP to emulate it in the 1970s and 80s?

Cliff, as is his normal practice, starts his argumentation with a historical falsification. We are told that J.T.Murphy, a leading figure in the Shop Stewards movement in World War I and a founder member of the Communist Party, was against building a Rank and File movement in 1922 because of the "fantastic weakness of the shop organisation" (Cliff, S.R.p.18). Cliff gives no reference for this astonishing assertion but it is strangely at variance with J.T. Murphy's own account of what he was doing in this period as a leading organiser of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) in Britain, the forerunner

of the minority movement:

"By the end of 1922 the Bureau of RILU had 130,000 miners, 100,000 engineering workers and 70,000 outside these two industries affiliated to it. It issued a monthly paper named 'All Power' with a circulation of 12,000 copies. During 1922 it launched the 'Back to the Unions' campaign which was later taken up by the Trades Union Congress. In a programme pamphlet 'Stop the Retreat' it propagated a plan for the reorganisation of the Trades Union Congress in alliance with the Labour Party and the co-operative movement and projected the corresponding reorganisation of the Trades Councils, local labour parties and co-operatives in three-fold local alliances." (J.T.Murphy - "Preparing for Power", p.216, Pluto Press, 1972).

While Cliff is lying about Murphy's views on the Rank and File in 1922, he is right about one thing. This was a period of retreat and defeats for the working class. The end of 1920 had seen a massive recession on a world scale. In Britain unemployment rose from a quarter of a million in September 1920 to over 2 million by June of the following year. Nearly 2 million workers, a quarter of the national Trade Union membership, flooded out of the unions. The miners were betrayed by the leaders of the "Triple Alliance" - miners, transport workers and railwaymen on "Black Friday" April 13th 1921 and as a result faced massive wage cuts. By 1924 real wages had fallen by 26% for miners,

by 20% for iron and steel workers, by 11% for textile workers as compared to 1920. Yet it was precisely in this period, despite Cliff's assertion to the contrary, that the tiny communist party (of no more than 3,000 members) set about rallying the militants to fight back.

During the engineers' lockout the RILU organised a series of "Back to the Unions" conferences. It launched in August 1921 the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement which was to play a central role in the bitter struggles of the 20s and 30s. And here, unlike the SWP which is only in favour of a National Unemployed Workers' Union if the TUC builds it, it did in the teeth of bitter opposition from the TUC leaders. The work of the RILU and its paper "All Power" during the period of economic slump and defeat was the essential groundwork for the building of the minority movement in 1924 - the first National conference of which was based on the RILU and already existing minority movements in individual unions. (For a full account of the RILU/Minority Movement see "The Comintern, the CPGB and the Minority Movement" in Marxism and the Trade Unions, Workers Power Journal no.7/8.)

Clearly Cliff's attempt to "prove", by reference to the communist experience of the early twenties, that the building of a Rank and File movement is only possible in periods of "generalised" class struggle is false. Certainly he is right to say that in the building of such a move-

ment is a tactical question rather than a question of principle. Yet he never attempts to explain why such a tactic - the communist united front tactic in the trade unions - was developed in the first place.

The adoption of the tactic of the united front by the revolutionary communist parties followed decisions by the 3rd and 4th congresses of the Communist International in 1921 and 1922. The CI recognised, in the wake of the passing of the revolutionary upsurge after the First World War and the reestablishment of capitalism on a world scale, that revolutionaries remained a minority within the working class and its organisations. In both the industrial and political organisations of the working class the majority of workers remained tied to reformism, normally under the leadership of parties of the Second International.

In such a situation it was necessary to seize every organisational avenue to achieve maximum co-ordination between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries around the immediate needs of the class. Through this tactic it would be possible, in action, to win reformist workers away from their bankrupt leaders and to communism. As Radek put it at the Third Congress, whereas in the previous period, during the revolutionary upsurge: "We placed in the foreground the slogan of the Soviet Dictatorship...now we place in the foreground concrete transitional demands" (Dejras, Documents of the Communist International, vol.1,p.308).

Obviously Cliff is not suggesting that we are now in a period where the Soviet Dictatorship is the slogan of the day! So why abandon the tactic of the united front - is it not longer necessary to relate, through united action to non-communist workers, to those in the broad lefts, those who follow the Stalinists or Tony Benn?

The fact of the matter is that Cliff and the SWP (and its forerunner the International Socialists - IS) never followed or understood the Communist united front tactic or how it was used in the British Minority Movement. Cliff reminds SWP members that he and the IS never called for a Rank and File Movement in the mid 1960s. True - the IS, deeply imbued with syndicalism and at that time openly rejecting Lenin's theory of the party in favour of Luxemburg's, was content with the Shop Stewards Movement as it was, as a vehicle for socialism. The "principal tasks of socialists" were "To do what we can to unify the working class and to encourage the movement from below." (Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards, May 1966,p.185)

Despite the "change of tactic" in the mid 1970s to building a distinct "Rank and File Movement" and the discovery in the meantime of the need for a Party, the tasks of socialists in that movement remained the same for Cliff and the IS. That is, IS viewed the role of the party as a largely organisational one, "the glue that sticks the fragments together" in Steve Jeffrey's words (The Challenge of the Rank and File, IS, 1, No.76). The party brought together the existing militants, linked up struggles, organised blacking, in a word attempted to "generalize" the struggle. The party consisted of those willing to "overthrow capitalism" while the Rank and File organised those who were "willing to fight". What was never part of the IS or SWP's understanding was the political role that communists have to play in the united front. When Radek

**workers' power**

*for rank and file militants there is no return to the sixties*

Straitforward spiritual leadership Henry of the apt Michael Fern would like to go back to, but would have been to completely insufficiently by hand, to overcome the new problems facing our class. The militancy and the militancy of the progressive workers can no longer answer the questions posed by the employers' offensive. "What if the boss goes broke?" "Is there really enough money to higher wages?" "What will happen if the Labour government is elected?" These cannot be a single rank and file militant here today who has not asked, and been asked, such questions. Today's declaration does not even try to answer them.

Workers' organisations and living standards can only be defended and advanced at the expense of capitalist relations. To suggest that the fight to defend the working class can be reduced to the conscious struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

The capitalist offensive is a well-prepared strategy. It will be consciously worked out and constantly re-assessed by the various fractions of the ruling class. The working class must also develop its own strategy and tactics to counter this.

A crucial first step is to organise the most class-conscious militants around a programme of action to tackle the immediate late problems facing the class. The fight around such a programme cannot be one that aims just to narrow the distance against the capitalists, to get back what we've lost and then call a truce. On the contrary, we need to fight for demands that show mass today's needs and which have been the result of organisation and consciousness in the class, bringing more workers into the fight for socialism.

The objectives of such a programme, with a programme to be demands aimed at uniting the class against the immediate late threats to its strength and militancy in the struggle for control against the capitalists.

On all the central political questions facing the working class today's declaration is silent!

"Nowhere does it take up the question of the Labour Government, or the threat of a Thatcherite Tory."

"The increasing use of state power, police and military against the workers is not even mentioned. No policy is outlined to counter the direct attacks of the capitalists - despite the importance of the 'organised' case' arguments and the divisions between skilled and unskilled, 'productive' and 'unproductive', employed and unemployed, black and white, men and women.

With the trade union leaders pledged to capitulate and self-sell with a new generation of 'Left' like Spang, Collins etc already the focus for fantastic illusions, the declaration says nothing about how to build a rank and file movement in the teeth of opposition from an unionism of the bureaucracy, except to call for 'total rank and file delegate support committees for specific demands' and the formation of an unspecified 'National Rank and File Council'.

"Enforcing 'pure' trade unionism to politics, the declaration offers only an inadequate list of demands on a pay-call for a wage offensive in January around demands for minimum £15 increase, equal pay, and a safety £50 minimum wage."

Workers Power leaflet at 1977 rank and file conference: we said then that rank and file groups based on a reformist trade union programme were built on sand.

# ORGANISE THE H.C. RANK & FILE

ON JUNE 22ND Norman Fowler made his second "final offer" to health workers. He's offering a paltry 7.5% to nurses and 6% to ancillaries. Despite a slap in the face from his usually trusted leaders of the RCN, who were forced by their members to reject the 6.4%, he has continued to pursue his divide and rule strategy and came up with an offer that Dame Catherine Hall and her cohorts have jumped at.

Fowler made it plain that one third of the increased offer will have to be funded from within the health authorities existing budgets. In this way he can put the responsibility for further cuts in patient services and jobs on the backs of the hospital workers, a tried and tested method of black-mailing them back to work. The government sees fit to condemn health workers to poverty line wages for yet another year.

However, on June 23rd, thousands of health workers demonstrated their determination to carry on the fight for their 12% claim. The fourth one day strike called by the TUC Health Service Committee also won enormous support from other sections of workers. Miners, dockers, seamen, civil servants, firemen, teachers, gas and water workers struck in support of the health workers. Of course at the various rallies and demos it was union leaders like Spanswick and Rodney Bickerstaffe who claimed the credit for the success of the one day action.

The truth is somewhat different. Stewards and rank and file militants have done all the work to bring workers out on seemingly disconnected days of action which have not yet forced Fowler to go anywhere near to meeting the full claim.

The chiefs of staff in the health workers' 'war of attrition' are posed to further dissipate the militancy and willingness to fight that exists amongst the rank and file. In formal terms they appeared to have stepped up the action, calling for 'something like a general strike.' But this is not to take place till July 19th.

Between now and then the union leaders have called for more selective action and the 'preparation' for the July 19th action. The next major action, therefore, will be one month since the last one and 3 1/2 months since the settlement date.

In the meantime, Fowler will be busy using the RCN, the press and the disorientation amongst many health workers bemused at their seemingly endless dispute, to weaken and isolate all these workers prepared to carry on the fight.

Spanswick and Co. are blocking an effective fight. Their role has been to thwart the development of all-out action. Rank and file militants need to understand what their leaders are up to so that, now, during the struggle, they can forge links and build an organisation capable of kicking out the bureaucrats. The events during the dispute reveal the urgency of this task.

Workers at Edinburgh, Rotherham and Leeds were prepared to take all-out strike action, in defiance of the leadership. Spanswick's response

was typical - he ordered COHSE workers in Edinburgh to cross NUPE picket lines. But NUPE leaders are no angels! They withdrew strike pay in Rotherham effectively starving strikers back to work. Again, after a militant lobby forced the NUPE conference to call for all-out strike action Fisher used the 'unity at all costs' argument, to justify the executive's sitting on the decision. This was revealed by the May 26th circular to full-time officials.

"Will you please ensure no action is taken in the division on the resolution headed 'NHS Pay Dispute' which calls for an all-out stoppage commencing 4th June 1982, until you receive a further letter from the General Secretary."

The lobbies and protests of militants, angered by this record of betrayals, has not really budged the union leaders. Like the Tory government, they too can ride out one day protests. What they could not ride out is a well-organised political opposition to their rule based firmly on the rank and file.

The starting point for building such a movement is to be found in the localities. Over the last 2 years the national union leaderships have been actively encouraging the building of hospital and area joint shop stewards committees (JSSC). These area JSSCs, based as they are on hospital committees, can provide the potential for developing rank and file control of the strikes.

To ensure that they can, however, it is crucial that they are opened up as strike committees, with new delegates elected from mass meetings of the strikers themselves. In this way it is possible for them to become true representative bodies of the

strike. These strike committees must be linked together in a national delegate strike committee that takes control of the dispute out of the hands of the bureaucrats.

Failure to open up the local JSSCs in this way leaves them at the mercy of the bureaucracy and the time-serving right wing. This danger was revealed in Sheffield in the course of the present strike. As soon as moves were made to commit the JSSC beyond mere paper agreement on all-out action it was rendered powerless. Stewards were told not to attend as it was an 'unofficial body'.

This incident should be used to teach every militant a golden rule in their struggles against the union leadership. The building of a rank and file movement requires politics as well as organisation.

Militants must be clear that the present battle is not only over pay. The Tories are hoping to pave the way for further massive cut-backs and privatisation. Job losses will inevitably follow. Also, in the course of the strike, the Tories are toying with the idea of wheeling out their Employment Act for use against the pickets. While Spanswick can only mutter 'we will have to face that situation when it comes', militants have to be more decisive. The laws must be scrapped and militants in the health service must link up with other workers to do just that.

Winning militants to these politics and linking them up in a permanent fighting movement can win this strike. It can also lay the basis for ousting the traitors in the unions once and for all. ■

# militant minority Mitterand's "socialism" bites the dust

talked about placing to the forefront "transitional demands" he was referring to the necessity of politically arming the most advanced militants with tactics, slogans and a perspective which was a clear revolutionary alternative to the one put forward by the reformists in the working class.

For the SWP, in contrast, Rank and File conferences never rose above the level of "rallies" where militants were encouraged to stand up and say how they fought in their workplace. They were a reflection of the militants in struggle, with the SWP being content to put up one or other of its leaders (at the end of conferences) to argue why socialism was relevant to their struggle. The conferences never thrashed out the problems facing the leading layers of militants in the workplaces, never developed answers to the problems of inflation, sectionalism, special case arguments etc. As British capitalism slipped ever further into crisis and the ideological and legal onslaught on the leading militants increased, exhortations for more militancy, heavier picketing, more effective blacking, became more and more obviously threadbare. They provided no answers to militants threatened with whole sections of industry being closed down, employers threatened with bankruptcy demanding real wage cuts etc. The reformists had answers, they had wage freezes and controls, "social contracts", temporary "tightening of belts" to get through the crisis. The Stalinists, like Derek Robinson, had their answers, greater participation, the Ryder proposals, British workers showing that, in partnership with management, they could outstrip the Japanese car industry. All these crucial questions and false solutions demanded revolutionary answers, a programme of action that provided an alternative strategy for the working class.

In fact in the absence of such an alternative strategy, and an organised militant minority led by the party and able to fight and argue for it, it became increasingly difficult to win the shop floor to militant action. Pure militancy, on which the SWP based its Rank and File perspective, had run aground on the rocks of the economic crisis which demanded a class-wide, political response. The militants could no longer win the arguments with their members and sections of them became disorientated and demoralised.

The first response of the SWP to this crisis of leadership on the shop floor was to cry "back to trade union principles." The "Code of Practice" launched at the June 1979 Rank and File Conference was a desperate attempt to rally the militant minority around a return to "traditional" trade unionism. It was rather like an engineer on the sinking Titanic exhorting the mechanics to keep pumping, and it had about the same effect. Seeing the building of a Rank and File movement as merely linking together the existing struggles and militants, it is little wonder that the architect of this strategy, Tony Cliff, now wants to dump it. If there are no "generalised struggles" how can you link them up?

The net result of the SWP's experiment was the creation of a number of phoney, SWP controlled, rank and file groups - Nalgo Action Group, Red Collar, Redder Tape, Journalists Charter, Engineers' Charter, Dockworker etc. The list gives the game away. Most of the groups were havens for white collar workers keen to be "real" trade unionists. The blue collar groups by and large disintegrated under the impact of the retreat of the working class. The white collar groups held on - but as caucuses of SWP members pretending to be militant groupings but with no perspective other than trade union business as usual. Not surprisingly the role of the party in those circumstances diminished. It could not offer a political lead and there were few struggles, if any, to organise. So these white collar elements drew the obvious conclusion and became simple trade unionists. Cliff reveals this himself when he says: "so there have been cases where people stopped being revolutionaries and became simple trade unionists". (SR 1982.6)

But Cliff throws the baby out with the bath water. The phoney rank and file groups are wound up - but so too is the whole united front, rank and file perspective, because it is a barrier to recruitment to the party! As we have shown, the proper application of the tactic provides a bridge for militants to the party, not an obstacle. It is the SWP's failure to understand and properly apply the tactic that has resulted in their loss of membership.

Cliff, playing Mr. Wise-After-the-Event, is now saying he saw the failure of the Rank and File tactic in January 1978 after the Fourth Rank and File Conference. This claim obviously relies on the short memories (or more likely short stays) of SWP members. Long standing members might just remember that Cliff backed Deason in calling the June 1979 Fifth Rank and File Conference against the opposition of Steve Jeffreys. They might also remember a key article by Tony Cliff which appeared in Socialist Worker 26th May 1979 entitled "Ten Years On 1969 to 1979" which ended "The (Tory) Government as the enemy, will help generalise the struggle. With the increasing and deepening crisis of world capitalism the attack on workers is bound to come. The possibility of once more building a rank and

file movement far more independent of the union bureaucracy than in 1969-1974 is with us."

In fact what Cliff is trying to cover up is that the leadership of the SWP has shown itself incapable of giving leadership in the class struggle at a most crucial period, when the working class is faced with the most vicious onslaught on its organisations and conditions of life. The abandonment of the Rank and File perspective during the present period is virtually an admission that little can be done to rally the forces for a fight-back is, that the SWP which claims to be the revolutionary party of the working class is helpless. The failure of the SWP to build a genuine Rank and File movement which could take the unions out of the hands of traitorous Trade Union leaders and lead a successful struggle not only against the attacks on the working class but against capitalism itself, shows not as Cliff believes the inapplicability of the tactic in the present period, but the bankruptcy of the politics that the SWP based its rank and file movement on.

To come back to Cliff's starting point we must ask - can a militant minority movement be organised in a period of downturn? We have shown that it was possible in the 1920s. We firmly believe that it is possible in the 1980s, on two conditions. First that such a movement be won to a clear revolutionary action programme. Second that such a movement be built in the actual struggles that pit the militant minority against the bosses and the bureaucrats. The SWP have consistently failed to meet this second condition, just as they failed to meet the first. The truth is that in situations of actual struggle, the SWP have boycotted their own tactic.

Take the Steel Strike. Here a whole layer of newly aroused militants were involved in a bitter struggle with the Tories, that Bill Sirs of the ISTC was constantly selling short. The strike, its newly formed committees, the energy of the militants - here was the most promising raw material for a rank and file movement to be seen for years. But to connect with it and to organise it, a party would have had to be prepared to secure the political independence of the rank and file during the strike. Failure to do so, would necessarily give the bureaucracy the whip hand. It would enable them to dissipate the energy of the rank and file, break up the links forged, in the aftermath of the strike in an atmosphere of "normality". By campaigning on jobs, closures, pay and a fight for a democratic union, militants could have mounted a challenge to Sirs, prevented a sell-out and delivered a body blow to the Tories.

What was the SWP's response? They relaunched Real Steel News not as a rank and file movement paper but merely as a strike bulletin. They argued against building a rank and file movement during the strike on the grounds that the first task was to win the strike - as though the two were counterposed! Their strategy was therefore, to wait until the strike was over. In a Socialist Worker report of a Real Steel News article Pete Clarke of the Industrial Department summed this up: "After the strike Real Steel News will have to take up issues like the reform of the ISTC and the fight against redundancies, as well as the general political argument." (Our emphasis).

Needless to say Sirs is still firmly in control of the ISTC - and Real Steel News? Presumably under the chopper along with the other rank and file groups. Against this Workers' Power argued, and will continue to do so, that at every flash-point of struggle against the bosses offensive, the task of revolutionaries is to link up the militant minority in a movement that can smash that offensive.

Against the pessimistic prognosis of Tony Cliff, we have reason to believe that the possibility for doing this still exists. In British Leyland, despite defeat, a clear minority were prepared to fight the Edwardes' onslaught - the "tea-break" strike demonstrated this. Today the strike in the health service shows once again how a militant struggle brings forward new layers of rank and file leaders. Once again, despite conference decisions (for all-out strike by NUPE), they are faced with conscious sabotage by their own leaders. To say in a period like this, where miners and dockers and other workers are striking in solidarity with the health workers and challenging Prior's law, that it is impossible to organise the militant minority is to openly admit political bankruptcy.

In a previous article in Workers Power No.21 we said of the SWP "Thus despite their ritualistic claims to stand for a new minority movement the SWP, in circumstances of increasing capitalist instability, lack the politics to be able to carry this claim into life. They remain cheerleaders for the class struggle as it is. When it is at fever pitch they can only marvel, when it is in retreat they can only mourn. In no circumstances can they give it revolutionary leadership."

The SWP has obviously decided to bury its dead, but as Cliff steers the SWP away from the living class struggle to build a "tough party", its members will discover it is their party, not the militant rank and file, which is terminally ill. ■

by Stuart King

**PRESIDENT MITTERAND'S FRENCH Revolution - hailed by European reformists as the turning of the right-wing tide - is now protecting the Bastille of capital that it had promised to destroy. The familiar, and inevitable, run on the franc is the pretext for Mitterand's anti-working class austerity package**

Having chosen, consciously and in the time-honoured fashion of all reformists, to manage capitalism, the French Socialist Party has been forced to abide by the priorities of profit.

President Mitterand revealed his austerity package on June 13th, after just one year in office. The key component is a total freeze on wages, beginning June 11th and lasting until October 31st. This will be followed by the generalisation of 'solidarity contracts' and moderation contracts' over the next 18 months. Continued speculation against the franc and the lack of 'competitiveness' of the French capitalists compared to their international rivals explain the devaluation of the franc by 10% in relation to the Deutschmark. This is France's second devaluation since Mitterand came to power last May.

The government has used this devaluation as an excuse to argue for economic 'realism' from French workers. A variety of terms are used by Mitterand and his ministers: 'rigueur' (which can be translated as rigour and severity...) 'patience', 'solidarity' 'effort' 'firm accounting'....As Le Monde points out (15.6.82) "Austerity! Socialists are afraid of the word...Francois Mitterand and Pierre Mauroy (the Prime Minister - WP) take care not to use it, preferring to use camouflage terms to express the same idea."

Whatever euphemisms the propagandists of French Social Democracy cook up they cannot conceal the sharp about-turn of their government. The bourgeois 'Economist' cruelly, but accurately, described the reality of what had happened:

"The language of priorities is the religion of socialism, Aneurin Bevan once remarked. But on June 13th the priorities of French Socialism were suddenly changed, and it may take some time for the religion to adjust to the new order of service." (19.5.82)

This austerity programme is an attempt by Mitterand's government to solve a 14% inflation rate and allay the fears of capitalists. The Socialist Party economists had based their economic policies on a world economic boom at the end of 1981. It did not materialise and now experts predict it for 1983 at the earliest.

The new package is the outcome of a year of backtracking by the government. Last year they proclaimed their aim was to bring down unemployment as a priority. Yet today unemployment tops the 2 million mark and the government has dropped its objective of reducing the dole queues, preferring to concentrate on 'fighting inflation'. The fight against unemployment has now become a fight against the unemployed. The government is now campaigning to weed out the 'phony unemployed' and threaten workers with the cutting off of their benefits if they refuse to accept jobs offered to them, even if these jobs do not correspond to their previous employment.

The wage freeze, the first in 40 years, also applies to all wages increases won before this date but not yet paid out. The only increases will be for those earning less than the minimum wage, whose bosses will receive 500 million francs in state handouts in compensation. After the 4 month freeze, wage restraint will continue at least until 1983. Prime Minister Mauroy is aiming to bring down inflation to 10% this year and to 8% by 1983. To do this the government will encourage the signing of branch-by-branch agreements between bosses and the unions. The measures also include limiting the increase in family allowance to 6% instead of the expected 14%. And it is certain that workers' contributions to social security - already increased by 1% - will shoot up.

To try to sweeten this bitter pill, the government has also declared a 8% limit to share dividends and a price freeze. However the prices of electricity, gas, coal, petrol, sugar and all fresh foods - butter, fish, meat, bread, milk, fruit, vegetables, etc - will not be included. The cost of gas and electricity alone is expected to go up by 10% over the summer while the price of foodstuffs is currently increasing at a rate of around 16%. A law is to be passed to freeze rent but until that (unspecified) date rents are sure to be pushed up by the landlords.

This 'little electric shock' as Finance Minister Delors described the package, has not charged the official leaders of the working class with any enthusiasm for action against it.

In spite of the reluctance felt by many Socialist Party members, including MPs, to adopt measures which are sure to create fierce opposition among rank and file workers, the party has faithfully followed the government's line.

In Parliament the PCF is supporting the govern-

ment's plan without wishing to compromise itself in front of rank and file workers. The government has helped the PCF in this by using para. 3 of article 49 of the Constitution which says that a Bill can be passed in its entirety if the motion of no confidence to which it is linked fails. Only votes in favour of the motion, in other words, against the government, are counted. This means that the PCF and dissenting Socialists can remain silent, hold onto their rank and file support, and yet in practice support the passage of the government's measures.

As George Marchais said "Obviously we will vote for it" (the government's measures -WP) but "our vote does not signify approval, on the contrary." The PCF has brought out 'counter-proposals' which strongly resemble the Marchais 131 Proposals during last year's presidential campaign. The latter were shelved when the PCF entered the government (see WP No. 22 May 1981).

The PCF is prepared to leave the government - but only if it can secure definite electoral advantage against the Socialists by so doing. At this early stage of their austerity programme, the Socialists still need the PCF in the government as a means of controlling the working class response. The PCF keen themselves to maintain a foot in the government, is therefore hedging its bets.

It is doing this through the use of the CGT - which it controls - as a bargaining counter with the government. The CGT, along with the Socialist influenced CFDT and right wing FO union federation, have come out against the wage freeze - on paper.

Henri Krasucki, General Secretary of the CGT, has called on workers to reject the wage freeze, but 'factory by factory'. No organised national opposition is being considered. Of course a minimum of formal opposition is needed by the union bureaucrats in order to keep the support of their rank and file. At the CGT conference in Lille, Pierre Mauroy was booed by delegates when he dared mention wage freeze.

In practice, however, they have retreated from a fight on the issue. For example, at the Talbot car factory in Poissy where workers have been on strike for a month, on hearing the news of the wage freeze the CGT dropped its demands for wages increases, except for those earning less than the minimum wage. It did not push an existing struggle into a conflict with the government. Its preferred strategy will undoubtedly be the time-honoured 'day of action' (such as that of the CGT gas and electrical workers on June 24th) or the one day general strike.

This will let off steam, let the CGT (and the PCF) off the hook, but not force the government to withdraw its programme.

The CFDT's attitude has been the most 'moderate' of the three major union confederations. Its leader, Edmond Maire, has recently spent his time campaigning to get his members to accept wage reductions in return for guarantees on jobs and 'workers' participation' in the boardrooms of companies. His argument is that 'it is more revolutionary to fight to create jobs than to defend wages.' (Le Monde 15.12.81) When asked if he meant that workers should work less hours for less money so that other jobs should be created he said: "Exactly. Isn't it a much more positive and even much more revolutionary attitude for a trade unionist to fight for a job for young people who are on the dole queue than to fight for the full defence of the purchasing power of those who today have a good wage and a job?"

In this the CFDT is merely echoing the government's doublethink justification for the wage freeze. Dole versus wages, instead of a fight to defend both, becomes the rallying cry for the right. However, fearful of being outflanked by the CGT and the militancy of its own rank and file, the CFDT has declared against the actual freeze. It has done so only on the grounds that it does not provide sufficient guarantees for the lower paid.

However - like the right wing Force Ouvriere Confederation - this opposition has not yet gone beyond words.

French workers have been lulled by their leaders - Socialist and Communist - into thinking that their day had come. One year on instead of the socialist millennium workers now face a return to Giscardian-style austerity. The dangers of disillusion and demoralisation that Mitterand's actions could cause can and must be offset by building a revolutionary alternative to the PS and PCF. In every pay dispute revolutionaries must win workers to a fight against the austerity programme. The CGT and CFDT must be swung into action by massive pressure from the rank and file organised to fight to defend their jobs and living standards. Militants must be won to a fight that does not stop at confronting 'their socialist government'. That government is proving itself to be every inch a defender of capitalism. It must be fought, defeated and replaced by a revolutionary government that implements real socialism by razing to the ground the whole capitalist system. ■

by R. Ascal

# ZIONIST HOLOCAUST

AGAINST STAGGERING ODDS the Palestinians have held down the Israeli Army more effectively than any regular Arab force has ever managed. The dispossessed and oppressed Palestinian people have fought with remarkable courage and heroism against an invader intent on their annihilation.

The thousands who have fought, arms in hand, to defend Tyre, Sidon and Beirut, the Palestinians of the squalid refugee camps of Lebanon, have been standing in the front line of the battle against Imperialism and its agents in the Middle East. We salute their struggle. It is the task of the international workers' movement to solidarise with their Palestinian brothers and sisters by actively struggling to undermine and destroy the Zionist state that threatens the Palestinian Arabs with genocide.



Arafat - PLO leader

Some fifteen thousand Palestinian irregular troops have faced the onslaught of up to sixty thousand regular soldiers advancing under cover of the bombs and missiles of their US-supplied air force and armoured columns. Already ten to fifteen thousand Palestinians and Lebanese are dead. Untold thousands more have been herded into Zionist concentration camps. Nothing short of a new holocaust faces the Palestinians unless the Zionist state is defeated.

The Israeli invasion of the Lebanon has been meticulously planned over the last year. What is at stake is Zionism's ability to impose its 'final solution' on the dispossessed Palestinian nation.

Israel will not rest content with the destruction of the Palestinian settlements in the Lebanon. At the same time it has stepped up its war against the Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which Israel invaded fifteen years ago. In the aftermath of serious resistance to the Zionist occupiers on the West Bank, the Israeli Army was dispatched to secure a crushing victory against the PLO in Lebanon in order to cow Palestinians everywhere. Sharon, Israel's Defence

Minister, made this clear in the middle of the battle for Sidon, when he declared, "The bigger the blow and the more we damage the PLO infrastructure, the more the Arabs (of the West Bank) and Gaza will be ready to negotiate with us and establish co-existence." (Time, 10.6.82)

Victory for Begin will mean consolidation of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank, preparatory to its annexation. The traitorous Arab States that have stood aside as the Palestinians have been slaughtered will be pressed into overseeing an emasculated West Bank administration on behalf of the Zionist occupiers. The expansionist Israeli state will prepare for a further drive for annexations and occupations.

The Palestinians do not only face the armed might of Israel. Behind it stands the Imperialist system that arms and equips it and for which it is the principal agent in the Middle East. And at the heart of the Imperialist system lies the economic and military power of Israel's major source of support — the United States of America.

"Israel is a strategic asset for the US". Ronald Reagan declared during his 1980 campaign for the Presidency. He has been uncommonly forthright about his reasons for this. In his first presidential press conference he noted Israel's "combat-ready and even combat-experienced military", and remarked: "If there was no Israel with that force, we'd have to supply that with our own" (Mid-East Observer, 15/2/81).

Israel provides the manpower, the US provides the military hardware and the advanced technology. It further provides the only staging post for a "rapid deployment force" onslaught on the Gulf area for the United States. The Israeli state is, however, of long term political centrality to US imperialism — that is what underlies these military factors.

The creation of Israel aided the break up and dissolution of Anglo-French imperialism's colonial and semi-colonial system after the Second World War. The US and its oil companies gained open-door exploitation of the Arab world via the continued Balkanisation of the region. The original mandated territories or ex-colonies: Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Libya etc were, at first maintained under corrupt semi-feudal monarchies. But even after most of these had fallen to more radical Arab nationalist regimes the divisions and rivalries between these states time and again provided the opportunity for the US, either directly or through its UN intermediary, to break up any co-ordinated resistance whether on the part of the Arab bourgeois states themselves or from the dispossessed Palestinians.

If Israel is thus a vital and central element of the US domination of the mineral wealth of the Middle East it is not its only concern or agent. Likewise Israel, as an expansionist settler state that can only permanently establish itself by the physical, economic, and cultural genocide of the Palestinians, has interests that clash, on occasion, with those of its US sponsors. Israel's 'security' (read expansion) permanently disrupts the equilibrium of the Arab world. As long as this works to disrupt Arab unity against imperialism this is fine. Should it disrupt the Arab regimes that the US relies upon to control the oil-fields or provide an



Palestinians searching for bodies amidst the ruins

anti-national liberation force then there remains room for clashes between the White House and Israel.

While it may be the case that news of the ferocity of Israel's invasion upset Reagan's digestion during one of his recent banquets in Europe, it certainly did not upset his political strategy. Despite the harsh words between Reagan and Begin, over by whom and how the PLO in Beirut should be disarmed — US imperialism remains firmly wedded to Israel. Secretary of State Haig's May 26th speech on the Middle East clearly gave Begin the green light. After the attack, the US vetoed the UN Security Council resolution condemning the invasion and the administration has refused to cancel the sale of another 75 F-16 planes to Israel.

Despite this, there is a degree of tactical helplessness involved in America's support. A Reagan aide confessed a feeling of loss of control. "Are we in charge of the world? The United States no longer has that kind of commanding role." (21.6.82) Newsweek This is the voice of Dr. Frankenstein not always in control of his monstrous creation.

The strategic, global interests of US imperialism do not always coincide with every bullet and rocket fired by Israel. Reagan has two aims in this

## UN: ratchet for Zionism

THE ATTITUDE OF the UN to Israel is a prime example of the organisation's subordination to the interests of the United States. Ever since the declaration of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 spelt out America's intention of controlling the political colouration of the Middle East as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, Israel has played a central role in American foreign policy.

Despite a plethora of resolutions condemning Israeli aggression, the UN has always acted to ensure that the Zionist state could consolidate expansion gained by war and use it as a basis for future grandisement.

Israel first became a subject for UN deliberation in April 1947 when the British Labour Government announced that it intended to relinquish the Palestinian Mandate granted to it by the League of Nations under which it had controlled the area since the end of the First World War. Labour's policy, which was aimed at retaining only a series of strategic bases in the Middle East rather than a full scale colonial administration (Attlee believed that the whole Red Sea area was a burden, an 'incubus' on the British economy) was for the UN to administer the Palestinian region through an international trusteeship over a federal state composed of a Jewish region and an Arab one. The UN set up a special commission (the UN Special Commission on Palestine, UNSCOP) to produce proposals.

In carrying out this work the commission agreed to recognise the Zionist organisation, the Jewish Agency, as the legitimate representative of the 'Jewish People' but did not recognise any body as representative of the Palestinian Arabs, whose case was, therefore, never heard. The commission recommended the foundation of a Jewish state, as part of a partitioned Palestine. Ben Gurion, the Zionist leader immediately accepted this because, 'the proposal makes possible the immediate establishment of a Jewish state'.

United States reaction was, at first, mixed. As well as the powerful Jewish vote (incensed by Britain's insensitive handling of the Jewish refugees whom the Labour Government forcibly repatriated to, of all places, Germany) there was also the powerful oil lobby who were wary of upsetting Arab opinion. However, the pro-Zionist lobby won out and the White House acted fast to obtain UN endorsement of the commission's proposals. Sumner Wells, one of the US diplomats involved recalled in his memoirs, "By direct order of the White House every form of pressure, direct and indirect, was brought to bear by American officials upon those countries of the Moslem world that were known to be either uncertain or

opposed to partition. Representatives of intermediaries were employed by the White House to make sure the necessary majority would at length be secured." An example of this is given by Secretary Forrestal in his diaries in which he records that the Firestone Tyre Company was used to bring pressure to bear on Liberia, where the company had an important plant, to change its original position of opposition to Partition. The change was forthcoming.

Increasing unrest in Palestine in the Autumn of 1947 and winter 1948 led to a temporary change of heart because the White House believed Partition could only be achieved by direct US military intervention which, at the time, it was incapable of. However, as the Zionists began to gain the upper hand, on the basis of increased Soviet arms supplies, America returned to its pro-partition policy. On May 14th Ben Gurion announced the foundation of the state of Israel and America interrupted the business of the UN to give its immediate recognition.

The following day the armies of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon moved against the new state and were, at first successful in driving back the Zionists. However, as they prepared to enter Tel Aviv on the 25th, the Security Council, following an American resolution, called for a ceasefire which was accepted by the Arabs. The UN special representative, Count Bernadotte, negotiated a ceasefire which both recognised Israel's right to exist within the proposed partition border and allowed her to admit to that area persons of military age. The Zionists used this breathing space to prepare a new offensive which was launched on July 9th. A further ceasefire was negotiated by Bernadotte on the 15th. By this time Israel had extended its control to Lydda Ramle and lower Galilee.

The most militant Zionists, Menachem Begin's Stern gang, repaid Bernadotte by murdering him on September 17th and within days Israel had broken the ceasefire and invaded the Negev desert in the South of Palestine. Bernadotte's replacement, Ralph Bunche, called this a 'violation on a scale never seen before'. Israel flatly refused to obey UN orders to relinquish territory so gained. Notwithstanding this, the UN again arranged a ceasefire in January 1949, recognising, de facto, the new borders despite the expulsion from their homes of some 1½ million Palestinian Arabs.

With the signing of a General Armistice the UN admitted Israel to membership on May 4th, 1949, Israel was already 2,268 square miles bigger than the originally proposed partition state.



UN troops (on right) and Israeli Camel Corp face each other across border line after 1967 war.

During the war of 1948 the UN despatched an observer force to Palestine whose role now became the enforcement of demilitarised zones between Israel and her neighbours. Contrary to the agreement, Israel immediately began to establish settlements in these zones and along all her forward lines. In an attempt to win back their lands the dispossessed Palestinians, the Fedayeen, launched a campaign of guerrilla raids against them. At the same time the UN, anxious to stabilise the region, recognised the need to take up the question of the refugees and appointed the UN Conciliation Commission to draw up proposals. This body recommended a resolution calling for the repatriation and compensation of the Arabs and their return to their lands, 'as soon as possible'. The US forced an amendment to this to the effect that the Palestinians should be repatriated or compensated, "when practicable" thereby legitimising Israel's argument that the question could be settled when Israel was granted 'secure borders'. In effect this meant that the land they had seized had to be recognised as Israeli territory before repatriation could be considered, by which time the dispossessed would no longer have a legal claim.

In October 1953, Israel used the need to make its border settlements viable as a basis for undertaking engineering works to divert the waters of

the Jordan river into Israeli, rather than Syrian, territory. The UN condemned this, and the work continued.

Israeli incursion into Egyptian and Syrian territory continued in 1955 and early 1956 and was condemned on several occasions by the Security Council and the General Assembly, however, it was in Autumn 1956, as part of the Anglo-French Suez invasion, that Israel made its next major military advance. On the pretext of 'aiming to eradicate the Fedayeen bases' (Abba Eban) Israel invaded the whole of the Sinai Peninsula, reaching as far South as the Egyptian town of Sharm el Sheikh on the Gulf of Aqaba.

As part of their attempts to disentangle themselves after the abortive attempt at invasion, Britain and France called for the installation of a UN force in the areas occupied by Israel. The latter, however, refused to allow them into the newly-conquered Gaza Strip and the forces were therefore entirely based on Egyptian territory. Eventually Israel did withdraw from Aqaba, but continued to deny UN access to what it considered its territory. As before, the UN was 'obliged' to accept this in keeping with US wishes.

In the years after Suez, Israel shifted her tactic of building new settlements in the land she had conquered and to launch raids into adjoining territories in response to Fedayeen attacks. Again

# PLO trapped by its own strategy

THOUSANDS OF PALESTINIANS have laid down their lives these last weeks for a just cause - the fight to recover their homeland. Fury at Zionism's remorseless incursions and determination to complete their destination as a people fuels their heroism.

But the cruel lesson that will have to be learnt now is that their leadership, the PLO, has failed to match their courage with a programme that meets their real needs. More brutal, perhaps than the bullets and bombs of the last weeks, is the truth that the whole preceding period of the PLO's political activity has paved the way for this most catastrophic of defeats.

The political organisation of the Palestinians has always been difficult because of their dispersal across Arab borders. Up to 1964 they were represented by these Arab Governments virtually alone. The PLO was formed in 1964. It brought together some 40 groups in a popular-front coalition. Its formation arose out of the obvious failure of coalescing the state forces to defeat Israel which Nasserites and Baathists were verbally committed to. The demise of the United Arab Republic (i.e. Egypt and Syria), put the final nail in this coffin. On the other hand the Palestinians were inspired by the self-reliance shown by the Algerians in their struggle against French imperialism.

El Fatah, the biggest Palestinian group remained outside the PLO because the PLO refused to recognize the primacy of the military struggle against Zionism. The failure of the Arab states and the PLO to resist Israel in the 1967 war produced a shift. El Fatah joined the PLO in 1968 and in 1969 its leader Yasser Arafat became chairman. The new leadership reflected the PLO's commitment to a relentless military campaign against Israel. The PLO adopted a programme that same year that called for a "democratic secular state of all Palestine". This, together with the refusal to recognise Israel, underlined the fact that the Zionist state had to be destroyed as a pre-requisite for Palestinian self-determination.

In many ways this position expressed the high point of the PLO's independence from the diplomatic needs of the various Arab states. Despite the PLO being funded by the latter and lodged within their borders, the Arab states have in practice been opposed to an independent Palestinian state, recognising the radicalising effect any mass struggle such as theirs has on their own population. Moreover, the Hashemite dynasty of Jordan or Assad's Syria have their own reactionary territorial expansionist aims which make them lukewarm about a Palestinian state. The PLO has thus been used by them as a pawn on the chessboard of Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Whenever the independent actions or potential of the PLO and the Zionist response become intolerable for them, then the Arab states will militarily smash the PLO and Palestinians themselves. This was the significance of the Black September, 1970 in Jordan and the 1976 invasion of Lebanon by Syria which aimed to prevent the PLO gaining a victory against the Maronite Christians, and thereby establishing a 'semi-state' in Lebanon.

The chronic subordination of Palestinian aspirations to the Arab states deepened after the October 1973 war, as the Arab states strove to come to terms with Israel under US promptings. The impact of this on the PLO over the last eight years has led them to abandon the fight for real self-determination, that is, the fight to destroy the Zionist state, whose continued existence will ensure that no real progress can be achieved for the Palestinian Arabs. The twelfth National Council of the PLO in 1974 passed a resolution which, in the words of PLO No.2 Abu-Iyad, meant 'putting an end to the policy of all or nothing' (Rodinson, Israel and the Arabs). The resolution introduced a note of 'realism' that is, opportunism,

backing in the Security Council she refused to withdraw to the previous status quo on the grounds that the old borders had been proved insufficient and, in themselves, a cause of war!

US opposition within the Security Council and diplomatic activity in the General Assembly, ensured that the UN could not achieve the necessary two-thirds majority for any resolution of the Six Day War. Israel, while prepared to take part in 'negotiations' continued to hold the land it had conquered. True to form settlements were established along all the front lines both to establish Israeli credentials as the legitimate state power and as a basis for further expansion and the achievement of the 'Eretz Israel' or Greater Israel as described in the Bible.

That the UN remains, at heart, a compliant tool of the US was shown by the change of position that accompanied the Yom Kippur war of 1973. That war, brought about by Arab recognition of the utter futility of trying to regain their lands by negotiation, marked an important change in the position of the United States. As a result of the oil embargo that forced the West in general to limit support, in the form of supplies as well as diplomacy, to Israel, the US was obliged to try to face both ways; to continue support Israel but also to appear to accept the need for lands occupied in the war of 1967 to be returned.

calling for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank, whereupon the PLO would accept the establishment of a national authority. In short, the PLO recognised the legitimacy of the expulsion of its people in 1947/8.

This line was bitterly resisted in the refugee camps. Yet the PLO leadership has continued on its course. They have been sucked into the mire of the United Nations, taking up observer status. In his maiden speech to the General Assembly, Yasser Arafat referred to the PLO 'goal' of a unified democratic state in Palestine as a 'dream'. And by adding his signature to a UN document on Palestine in 1976 he committed the PLO to recognise Israel's right to exist. Only a couple of months ago, Abu-Maizen in a speech in Germany recalled Arafat's remarks when he said: "That (a secular democratic state-WP) is our dream, as you have yours in Germany when in the preamble to your constitution you adhere to reunification." (The Middle East, May 82)

The material basis for this growing opportunism lies in the very nature of the PLO as an organisation. Over the last ten years the Arab bourgeoisie and the European imperialists have encouraged the PLO to immerse itself in the wheeling and dealing of bourgeois diplomacy. The PLO already has, in fact, a state apparatus. At its base the PLO controls numerous manufacturing plants and plantations. They run a network of social and welfare services including ten hospitals in the Lebanon. The PLO has a budget that runs into hundreds of millions of dollars a year. The oil rich Islamic nations donate 250 million dollars a year alone. PLO investment analysts place its huge reserve funds in development projects throughout the Mediterranean. Soon the PLO hope to have 120 diplomatic missions (ie. embassies). Only Egypt among the Arab states has more. At the top this whole edifice is run by a 301 member 'parliament' comprised of impeccable bourgeois and professional Palestinians from the various Arab states. The working class figure very low down, with the General Union of Palestinian workers only having 1% of the seats.

The Department of Political Affairs foreign offices have won many friends among the European bourgeoisie, and this influence is exploited less to further the aims of full self-determination than to ensure that the PLO is recognised by the imperialist and Zionist bourgeoisies as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. The limited horizons of the PLO were expressed crudely by Arafat last year: "For the Palestinians, the PLO is their homeland and their future, it is the government-in-exile, the state. All we need is a piece of land." (The Middle East No. 81) And increasingly, it seems, the PLO will pay any political price to get that 'piece of land.'

It is, of course, no surprise that the PLO's opportunism has produced a series of splits. Very shortly after the 1974 resolution Dr. George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) split and helped form the Rejectionist Front, committed to the destruction of Zionism. But reports from Beirut suggest that under the latest blows even the PFLP will now consider a more 'realistic' solution.

The PLO reliance upon the Arab, European, and more recently the American bourgeoisie and the Zionist 'peace-camp' has been a bloody failure. A few weeks before the invasion on the Lebanon The Middle East magazine remarked that the PLO's only real function today "is to push for the best possible terms for the Palestinians in any peace settlement. The task of resisting the Israeli occupation directly has now passed to those living inside the territories." (May 82).

After the debacle in Lebanon a new Camp David type initiative can be expected with even more disadvantageous results for the Palestinians. The only perspective that can spoil the plans of Zionism is a generalised offensive by Palestinian workers beginning on the West Bank. The strikes of spring indicate the power is available to shake

Once again the UN provided the ideal forum for this, the acceptance of Resolution 242, which called for the return to the pre-67 status quo both implied acceptance of the legitimacy of the expansion Israel had achieved prior to that date and recognition of the rights of the Arabs states to their annexed lands. It did nothing, however, to actually achieve the restoration of those lands.

Equally, it did nothing to dissuade Israel from further warlike activity aimed at the Palestinians. Already, in May of 1970 Israel had invaded Southern Lebanon in an attempt to liquidate Fedayeen camps there. Although the occupation only lasted from May to September it represented an important staging post in Israeli strategy for its Northern borders. The alliance formed then with the Phalangists of Lebanon provided a basis for the destabilisation which resulted in the Lebanese Civil War of 1976 and the Israeli second invasion of 1978.

In the wake of these wars the UN again intervened, this time with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Again the supposed aim was simply to ensure peace between the belligerents but its effect was of benefit only to Israel. The stationing of the UN troops on the Lebanese side of the border was justified by the

Zionism. It is a sign of the PLO's political degeneration into the swamp of bourgeois 'realpolitik' that according to PLO leader Qaddoumi the West Bank events came 'as a semi-surprise to our leadership.' Arafat himself was more candid at the time: "We do not lead the uprising in the occupied homeland." (The Middle East, May 82).

The future generation of Palestinian leaders who will rise from the rubble of South Lebanon to resist again must learn the lessons of these bitter years. Only a perspective that establishes the political independence of the proletariat, breaks from the national designs of the Arab states and the pro-Zionist schemes of imperialist 'peace-makers' can ever begin to repair the damage.

If this is not done in the weeks and months ahead, then thousands more Palestinians will find themselves disarmed and dispirited in new refugee camps on the Syrian border. They will figure merely as so many human counters in the schemas of the State Department, the Knesset, the opulent palaces of oil sheiks, and Egypt's Mubarak.

It has to be understood by the new generation that it is the Palestinian working-class which has to be in the vanguard of the struggle to defeat Zionism. It alone has the cohesion and social power to lead a serious mass struggle, which goes beyond courageous commando raids which barely dent the armoury of the Zionist fortress.

Arab revolutionaries must turn to the traditions of the Arab working class which rocked Sadat's regime in 1975 and 1977. They must learn from the example of the Iranian workers who tipped the scales against the Shah in 1979. The Palestinian working class is stronger now than ever. The small landowners of Gaza and the West Bank have continuously been stripped of their property, as within Israel, and turned into proletarians and semi-proletarians.

A revolutionary Trotskyist party is an urgent necessity, one which can, around the programme of permanent revolution, bind the militants of the refugee camps to the workers of Israel and the West Bank. National unification on the ruins of the Zionist state under the leadership of the working class is the only 'realistic' answer to the needs of over 4 million Palestinians. Such an anti-imperialist programme would blow apart the PLO stuffed as it is with bourgeois figures tied irrevocably to imperialist bondage. It would pit the Arab bourgeoisies against their Palestinian minorities. The wrath of Zionism will be unchanged but the ability to resist its displeasure will be immeasurably strengthened. It would be the basis for real unity with the Arab masses against imperialism, Zionism and the Arab bourgeoisies.

Since the violent rapids of the Palestinian struggle course their way across several Arab nations, they cannot fail to irrigate the class struggle in each one, drawing closer all the Arab workers of the region.

The fate of the Jewish working class hangs in the balance. Tied, by privileges denied their Arab brothers and sisters, to the Zionist state, they must be broken from it or fall with it. In the period ahead, as the crisis of imperialist rule intensifies, there will be opportunities to make the Jewish proletariat understand the real disinterest that imperialism has for their own fate. There will be opportunities to win them to the side of the Palestinians - a people cruelly persecuted and dispersed by a people who have experienced that fate themselves. Only then will one of the savage ironies of the imperialist epoch be at an end.

- \* Self-determination for the Palestinians
- \* No negotiated compromises. Continue the struggle
- \* No recognition of the Zionist state's right to exist
- \* For a Palestinian Workers' Republic
- \* For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East ■

by Keith Hassell

need to keep the two Lebanese forces apart, this institutionalised the creation of the Phalangist semi-state (Haddadland) with a common border with Israel over which it was kept supplied with arms and munitions. Yet again Israeli settlements were brought right up to the border. The same was true on the border with Syria, the Golan Heights. There the UN force (The UN Disengagement Observation Force UNDOF) proved predictably powerless to prevent Israeli settlement and expansion.

In the thirty-four years of its official existence, Israel has massively expanded its territory through four major wars against the Arabs. Despite the fact that this is in blatant contravention of the Charter of the UN which forbids expansion through aggression, Israel not only remained a member but has openly conceded the gains she has won by warfare. At every step of the way it has been US support for Israel that has assured UN compliance, despite occasional reprimands, with Israel's strategy for aggrandisement. In this way the UN has played an important role in ensuring the success of the Truman Doctrine and in continuing the internecine conflicts in the Arab world which have kept the entire region Balkanised and powerless. ■

by Steve McSweeney



ut after Zionist attack

area. First to crush any anti-imperialist movement in the Middle East and secondly to prevent the USSR gaining a foothold in the region by exploiting Arab-Israeli conflict. Until 10 years ago, the USA thought this was best done by bolstering Israel's military right to cow a petit-bourgeois Arab nationalist governments (e.g. Nasser's Egypt.) The Six Day War, 1967 confirmed this, as Newsweek commented at the time, "As an indirect beneficiary of the Israeli blitz, the US should at least be in a position to neutralise the Middle East, so that its oil can be profitably marketed." The next six years saw the heyday of this attitude. The monster, could do no wrong in Frankenstein's eyes. The anti-imperialist pretensions of the Arab regimes were cruelly exposed and their military impotence displayed. The US refused to countenance a return to pre-67 borders.

The October of 1973 however, exposed weakness in Israeli power. In addition the oil producing states harnessed their economic power to cajole and threaten the imperialist power. However, in addition, in the wake of its defeat by Zionism, Egypt threw off its pro-Sovietism and made overtures to the US. Disillusionment with the rhetoric of Arab socialism and chronic economic difficulties spawned mass unrest. Aware of where this led in Vietnam and Portugal, Secretary of State Kissinger was forced to conclude in 1975, "The strength of Israel is needed for its own survival but not to prevent the spread of communism in the Arab world", (MERIP) New allies were needed and they were found in the 'moderate' Arab states (Egypt and Jordan) and the oil rich, underpopulated, monarchies of the Gulf. Israel could not be allowed to unilaterally veto US interests.

The Arab-Israeli conflict thus stood in the way of a stable Middle East and at the heart of this conflict remained the Palestinian question. Due to the latter's dispersal in various Arab states, especially in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, these regimes had to express to some limited degree the national aspirations of the Palestinians. This included allowing the PLO a degree of extra-territorial autonomy and military organisation for the continued armed struggle. In return it made these states prime targets for Israeli attacks.

US diplomacy, has, since 1974, been designed to facilitate the pro-US orientation of the Arab States and use this as a lever to disorganise the forces and moderate the claims of the Palestinians. It has aimed to encourage acceptance of Israel's so-called security raids and above all recognition of its historical legitimacy. Camp David concluded an important episode of this diplomacy. The lack of any serious response by any Arab country to the present Israeli invasion illustrates just how well this process has worked. The Palestinians stand virtually alone in their darkest hours. ■

UN condemnation, but nothing more, followed. Throughout this period the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) was stationed on Egyptian territory. As Israeli attacks on Syria and Jordan intensified, culminating in the sending of two armoured columns into Jordan in November 1966, Nasser, the Egyptian President, called for partial evacuation of the UNEF troops from Sinai and their replacement by Egyptian units (still on Egyptian territory). U Thant UN Secretary General refused on the grounds that either the whole force should remain or it should be withdrawn in its entirety.

At the same time Israel repeated its refusal to allow any UNEF troops on 'its' side of the border and, instead moved up more of its own forces. In June 1967, Nasser requested that the UNEF be removed. Within days Israeli troops had launched the Six Day War and taken over lands three times the previous size of Israel, incidentally killing several of the UNEF forces who had not had time to withdraw. This move was justified by Israel on the grounds that the removal of the UNEF left her vulnerable to attack, the UNEF was, "like a fire brigade which vanishes from the scene as soon as the first smoke and flames appear."

Calls from the UN General Assembly for an immediate ceasefire were ignored by Israel until she had achieved her objectives, then with US

# U.S. IMPERIALISM'S PUPPET PARLIAMENT

THROUGHOUT THE WAR against Argentina virtually the only demand that united all currents within the official Labour Movement was the call for 'UN intervention'. This same call is now being raised as a supposed answer to Israel's long-planned invasion of the Lebanon. In both cases substance has been lent to the 'left' image of the demand by opposition from, respectively, Thatcher and Begin.

Yet, at the same time both the Tories and the Zionists have themselves argued that they are acting in accordance with either the Charter of the United Nations or resolutions adopted by its General Assembly.

In the face of mounting tension throughout the world it is clear that revolutionary Marxists must have a clear understanding of the nature of the United Nations if they are to be able to explain such apparent contradictions. This is particularly the case in Britain where, ever since its foundations, the UN has been presented by both Left and Right reformists as the cornerstone of foreign policy, especially with regard to the colonies of the British Empire.

In reality, the UN, like the World Bank and the IMF which were founded alongside it, is an extension and an instrument of US foreign policy. None the less, its role as a quasi 'World Parliament' has ensured that this has been obscured by a democratic facade, much in the same way that the fundamental character of national parliaments as instruments of bourgeois rule is obscured by the presence within them of non-bourgeois elements.

After the First World War, the League of Nations was established under the leadership of Britain and France, both of whom were exhausted from the war and badly shaken by its revolutionary aftermath. Lenin referred to the League as an 'imperialist thieves' kitchen' underlining that its sole purpose was to provide the imperialists with a mechanism for sorting out their differences without recourse to the wars they could not, for the time being, afford to wage. Against the League the working-class needed its own international organisation through which to express and organise its own 'foreign policy'. The creation of the Communist International emphasised the need of the international working class for complete independence from the bourgeoisie.

The nature of the League of Nations as a forum for the imperialists, not an independent force in its own right, ensured that it reflected the real balance of forces, militarily and economically, as they existed in the world. Although Britain had not been defeated in the war it was no longer powerful enough to act, as it had previously, as an 'international gendarme'.

The United States, although it was now the most powerful imperialism in terms of economic and military potential, was not yet in a position to undertake that role. As a 'late developer' America had almost no overseas possessions upon which to found an American Empire. On the contrary, it saw its interests in breaking into the colonial markets of the established imperialisms. Its watchword was not colonial expansion but the 'open door' - the right of US capital to invest and sell wherever it saw fit. The League, dominated by the old colonial powers could play no role in this and, accordingly, the US remained outside it.

It is against this background that the role of the US in creating the UN has to be seen. The outbreak of World War Two, and the eventual involvement of America in it, convinced Roosevelt (and American capital in general) that the United States could only protect its interests in the post-war world by taking a lead in reorganising its political and economic institutions. In particular this meant dismantling the colonial empires which were not only a limitation on the American economy but a source of further global conflict.

Without doubt the principle colonialism he had in mind was that of Great Britain - and the area of acute instability that threatened a further war was India. Only six months previously the Viceroy of India had reported to Churchill, "I am engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security."

Recognising the impossibility of containing such rebellion forever, Roosevelt believed that they could only be defused by the removal of direct colonial rule and the creation of semi-colonies that were open, and thereby subordinated to, direct imperialist capitalist investment. In this he was drawing on the experience gained by the US in extending its control over Latin America by the creation of semi-colonies, that is formally independent countries controlled by imperialism via puppet regimes who owed their power to American support and investment.

The withdrawal of the colonial powers and the creation of a world wide system of semi-colonies obviously could not be achieved overnight. Most importantly the future puppet rulers had to be identified and trained as responsible agents of imperialism. It was as a means of achieving this that Roosevelt conceived of the United Nations.

He first used the term 'United Nations' to describe the war time alliance against Germany: America, the Soviet Union and Great Britain and it was these three powers which Roosevelt saw as the basis for the creation of a world force that would impose the peace that US capital required. His own conception, originally, was of a global armed force, based on the military power of the Allies, he later added China, under Chiang Kai-shek, to ensure that America would have a majority should differences arise. With regard to the dismantling of the colonial system the role of



United Nations Security Council in session

the 'Four Policemen' as Roosevelt called them, was to act as "impartial trustees" of the interests of the developing world while they developed their own abilities. "There seems no reason why the principle of trusteeship in private affairs should not be extended to the international field....For a time at least there are many minor children among the peoples of the world who need trustees in their relations with other nations and peoples."

Roosevelt's studied paternalism did not veil the implications of his proposals for Churchill. In November 1942 he replied to Roosevelt, "Let me make this clear, in case there should be any mistake about it in any quarter. We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."

It was opposition to this 'colonialism' of Churchill and the majority of the Tory Party which formed the root of Labour's foreign policy in respect of the UN and the Empire. While they certainly had no intention of allowing insurgent forces to liberate the colonies and seize British Imperialism's assets, as can be seen by their brutal suppression of such movements in Borneo and Malaya, the Labour leaders were opposed to the maintenance of what they considered the unnecessary overheads of the empire.

In common with other Social Democratic parties, the Labour Party saw imperialism as an expensive, incorrect and possibly unjust foreign policy rather than a necessary development within capitalism that could express itself either in direct colonial control or by the 'more modern' methods of semi-colonial rule.

Attlee typified Labour's understanding of imperialism as entirely a policy option, not a necessity. For him the alternative could be, "the reunification of national sovereignty in colonial areas and their development by a system of international administration." That this would potentially dovetail very snugly with Roosevelt's ideas does not need to be underlined. The suggestion that the colonies could simply be given their independence also revealed a similarly vile paternalism when Herbert Morrison retorted that, "It would be ignorant, dangerous nonsense to talk about grants of full self-government to many of the dependent territories for some time to come. In these instances it would be like giving a child of ten a latch-key, a bank account and a shotgun."

Roosevelt's idea that the ascendant US imperialism could sit down alongside the increasingly decrepit British imperialism, the newly strengthened degenerated workers' state of the USSR and the populous but completely shattered semi-colony of China and reorganise the world on the basis of pooled military resources, was not the only concept for the UN developed in Washington during the war. The Post War Foreign Policy Advisory Committee, in particular, developed proposals for an organisation embracing all the world's nations on a 'parliamentary representation' basis. Within this scenario Roosevelt's Four Policemen were to act as an executive rather than as a completely independent agent. In fact, the Four Policemen became Five when Britain insisted on including France in order to balance colonial powers against the decolonisers just as Roosevelt had added China to buttress him against the UK and the USSR in the first place. Thus, when the UN was established in 1945, it had within it in Britain and the US mutually conflicting elements which, while they were both aimed at consolidating imperialism's interests in the world, nevertheless favoured different methods for achieving this.

The provision within the UN Charter for the formation and use of UN armed forces against upsets of the 'world peace' suggested that the UN would act as a direct instrument of the majority of the UN's members. America had ensured that this majority would always be pro-American by forcing its Latin American puppets to declare war on Germany in 1945, thereby qualifying them as founder members of the UN. However, the 'parliamentary' aspect of the UN implied that the new body would be more of a diplomatic channel of activity, attempting to forestall outbreaks of conflict via negotiation and the 'pressure of world opinion' - again represented by the pro-US majority. On top of this the need to reflect the real balance of forces in the world was in-

stitutionally expressed by the creation of the Security Council, a body of twelve national delegates of which five were permanent members (US, UK, USSR, France and China) the other seven places being filled on a rotating basis by other countries. That this new world organisation was, again, nothing more than a thieves' kitchen, albeit one that now admitted non-imperialist thieves, was underlined by the right of each of the permanent members to an absolute veto over all issues in the hope that this would ensure that the UN was not destroyed by any attack on the interests of its most powerful members.

In the early years of the existence of the UN the in-built American majority ensured that both aspects, military and diplomatic, operated in tandem to America's benefit. Up to 1952 for example, only 20 resolutions out of a total of some 800 were adopted by the General Assembly against US opposition. While US proposals were defeated on only 2 occasions, US control of the Security Council was ensured by its veto of the recognition of the People's Republic of China, representing the government of one quarter of humanity and, therefore, the retention of Chiang Kai-shek's veto although his government only controlled a relative handful on an off-shore island. On the military front, although the original intention of establishing a military force to impose the will of the UN, as provided for in Article 42 of the Charter was not fulfilled, the role of the UN as an armed arbiter of the decolonisation process was carried out in, for example, the sending of an observer force to oversee the population exchanges involved in the creation of India and Pakistan in 1949.

However, the Korean War underlined an essential alteration in the role that America wished the UN to play. Where Roosevelt had seen the continued existence of the old colonial empires as a threat to world stability and, therefore, US profits, his successor, Truman, was quite clear that the real enemy of the US was the Soviet Union. This was even more the case after capitalist property relations were overturned in Eastern Europe after 1947 and the onset of US initiated Cold War.

The existence of the Soviet Union, a degenerated Workers' state within imperialism's world organisation certainly constituted, and still constitutes, a major contradiction. Ultimately, however, it is one that works to the advantage of the US in that it legitimises the role of the UN as a neutral, all-embracing parliament. The heart of the contradiction, lies not in the nature of the UN itself but in the nature of the Stalinist regime that governs the USSR. This contradiction exists in the fact that, although this regime is based on post-capitalist property relations, and is, therefore, a constant thorn in the side of imperialism, it seeks, nonetheless, to maintain its rule via a compromise with imperialism, an acceptance of the continued existence of imperialism rather than a struggle to destroy it. The USSR's presence within the UN is precisely an institutionalised expression of the modus vivendi that the Stalinists wish to establish with imperialism. This desire did not begin with the establishment of the UN. The intransigent opposition of the Soviet government to imperialism, illustrated by Lenin's characterisation of the League of Nations and expressed in the formation of the Comintern was completely overthrown by the Stalinist clique that seized power in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death. The change of policy from opposition to cooperation was underlined in the mid Thirties by the entry of the Soviet Union into the League. The Soviet delegate Litvinoff, for example, referred to the League in 1938 as, "the organisation on which were fixed the great hopes of our generation". During the war, as an earnest of his willingness to cooperate with imperialism, Stalin liquidated the Comintern entirely thus opening the way for the UN to be the single world body within whose framework differences with imperialism could be amicably settled.

The invasion of Korea by the United States in 1950, the subsequent endorsement of this by the UN and its recommendation to all member countries to place their armed forces under the control of the US to ensure the defeat of North Korea could have been used by the Soviet Union to reveal the true nature of the organisation as an extension of US imperialism. However, true to its policy of not challenging the

legitimacy of the UN, the Soviet Union did not use its veto against the support for America. Such a veto would have forced America's hand and revealed the completely sham nature of the UN. Instead of that the Soviet Union did not attend the meeting of the Security Council as a token protest against the non-recognition of Peking as the legitimate government of China.

When the UN was founded in 1945 it had 51 member states, today it has a further one hundred, the great majority of which are ex-colonies. This has necessarily altered the way in which the UN operates and set some limitations upon it. Although the basic structure of the organisation has remained the same the size of the Security Council has been increased 15, the additional three places, however, are not of permanent members and the original five permanent members with their right of veto still dominate it, despite the substitution of Peking for Taipei in the Chinese seat (true to form the UN changed its policy when America recognised Peking!).

The appearance, since the Korean war, of such figures as Kenyatta, Mugabe and Arafat at the UN rostrum, not to mention representatives of newly established degenerate workers' states such as Castro has to be seen in the light of the original role designated to the UN by Roosevelt. While it is true that the major pre-occupation of the US has been the Cold War against the Soviet bloc, this should not blind us to the success that has been achieved in dismantling the old empires and replacing them with semi-colonies. By and large the original proposal of such states be 'guided' to maturity via UN trusteeships has only been applied where the territories concerned were either so small or so disparate that they could not, of themselves, generate a national leadership acceptable to imperialism. This was the case, for example, with Ruanda-Urundi (now Burundi) and French Togoland. On the other hand the widely scattered Pacific Islands of Micronesia, invaded by the US during the Pacific War, have remained under US trusteeship on the grounds that they are 'strategic' territories necessary for the defence of the US against a former enemy, Japan.

With only a few exceptions, such as Vietnam, the granting of independence by an imperial power has only been forthcoming as a result of the creation of a national leadership willing to remain within the orbit of imperialism. This has been the case in every one of the former British colonies irrespective of whether that national leadership originated in a military struggle or not. In effect the recognition of independence and acceptance into the 'family of nations' - the UN - has been the result of the willingness of the leaders of national liberation struggles to abandon their anti-imperialism and become, whether consciously or not, agents for the continued domination of their countries by world imperialism.

The entry into the UN of representatives of newly independent countries, particularly those with their roots in armed struggles against imperialism has naturally given weight to the UN's pretensions to be a neutral body, a forum for all countries. But it should not be forgotten that, while it is the more dramatic debates over armed conflicts that catch the attention of the world, the greater part of the UN's activities consists in its 'aid' organisations; the World Health Organisation and UNESCO which serve as stabilisers and ameliorators of imperialism's domination of the world. The UN as a whole, and its subordinate agencies, play a vital role as domesticators of the leaders of the semi-colonies.

The contradictory but ultimately pro-imperialist role played by the UN in the process of 'decolonisation' can be seen from the developing tendency of the organisation to intervene directly in anti-imperialist struggles before independence has been won. In the 1950s the demand for recognition of nationalist movements as the legitimate governments of colonial countries was, correctly, raised by the left on the governments of their respective imperialist countries. With the increasing number of ex-colonial countries present in the UN General Assembly, all of whom were interested in maintaining their anti-imperialist credentials, it became possible for resolutions recognising the leaders of continuing anti-imperialist to be adopted, against the wishes of the imperialist power who were being fought. However, whilst this could furnish moral support for anti-imperialist struggles and even financial aid as in the case of the PLO and SWAPO at the present time, its ultimate effect is to help in the nurturing of a 'responsible' leadership of those struggles who will, when the time is right, take their seats in the General Assembly and play their role in maintaining the stability to which the UN is dedicated. The steady transformation of Mugabe from the leader of the most militant wing of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe into imperialism's trusted breaker of strikes and disarmer of popularly based militias is a recent testimony to the efficacy of this strategy on the part of the UN. That, in the process, imperialist powers may be caused some discomfort, even to the extent of threatening their own allegiance to the UN as was the case when the US Congress voted to withdraw funds from UNESCO when that body granted observer status to the PLO, does not alter this. It does show, however, that the way in which the UN plays its pro-imperialist part has altered a little in keeping with the times. In the own way the seventy-one US Senators who support a resolution which condemned the UN for a 'serious departure from the original principles of the UN' when Yasser Arafat was allowed to address the General Assembly paid the organisation a back-handed compliment - it had managed to keep pace with the world even if the Senate had not.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 ►

# Workers must overthrow the military junta

IN ARGENTINA THE defeat suffered at the hands of the British in the Malvinas has greatly exacerbated the political crisis which the very retaking of the islands was meant to head off. Galtieri's resignation on the 17th June and the effective withdrawal of the Navy and Airforce from the ruling Junta are reflections of the deepening crisis of the military regime.

The roots of this crisis lay in the economic policies pursued by the military regime since the Videla coup in March 1976 which ended the regime of Isabel Peron. The regime in partnership with its Washington backers pursued a two-pronged policy-terror against the working class and its organisations and a ferociously 'monetarist' economic policy.

The former resulted in the 'dirty war' of 1975-78 in which tens of thousands of militants - often followers of the Montoneros, a left-Peronist movement - were murdered or just 'disappeared'. The trades unions were either pushed into semi-legality - like the Peronist federation the CGT - or 'intervened' against with military officers put in control. Government repression was combined with the open operation of police and army backed death squads, operating under the name of the 'Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance', which alone were responsible for some 6,000 killings.

Alongside this ferocious onslaught, designed to intimidate and break any resistance by the working class, went the attempt to restructure the Argentine economy after the monetarist recipes of Milton Friedman. Videla's economics minister Martinez de Hoz set about freeing the economy from the 'restrictions' of peronist nationalism. Above all this meant opening up the economy to foreign competition, privatisation of the very large state holdings in industry, oil and gas and banking and or course making the working class pay for the economic 'restructuring' through real wage cuts. When Galtieri came to power he reaffirmed the intention of the junta to pursue this policy with a sweeping denationalisation programme put forward by his economics minister - Roberto Alemann.

In pursuing his policy the regime came increasingly into conflict with two powerful sources of opposition. First from the strong traditions of Peronism which remained a powerful force within the working class and even among sections of the military and middle class. Peron in his first period of power between 1943 and 1955 established a bonapartist nationalist regime which set about gaining a greater degree of independence from British and US imperialism through state promoted industrial growth. To pursue the goal of 'The New Argentina' Peron proceeded to strengthen the organisations of the working class, through the CGT, both to tie the working class and its leaders to his bourgeois nationalist project and to give himself a greater degree of independence from the Argentinian oligarchy which was tied

lock stock and barrel to imperialism. Peronism's anti-imperialist demagoguery meant that it remained a powerful force within the working class even after the bloody debacle of the Peronists' 'second coming' in 1973-6.

The second and growing source of opposition to the military junta came from sections of the bourgeoisie itself. In 1976, faced with a working class on the offensive even against its 'own' Peronist government, the bourgeoisie gratefully handed power to the military to crush the threat from the workers. But the economic policies pursued by the Junta have been a disaster for important sections of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes. The high interest rates and the cold blast of foreign competition while benefitting the financial interests (the sector most closely tied to imperialism) has severely damaged the industrial and agrarian sectors of the bourgeoisie.

The monetarist period has been punctuated by an increasing number of major bankruptcies of private firms. In 1981 the economy as a whole shrank by 6% with manufacturing shrinking by a massive 14%. In car assembling for instance, there has been a disastrous slump in sales. A projected sale of 100,000 units in 1982 compared to 260,000 in 1980 is widely expected to result in the closure of one of the four major car manufacturers, all of which are foreign owned. Unemployment is estimated officially at 1.5 million and in reality is probably nearer 3 million. Inflation according to the Economist has reached 200% (19-25th June) while the foreign debt with its massive interest burden reached 36 billion dollars by April. Some 6 billion dollars worth of public sector projects have been suspended, while a wage freeze introduced last December resulted in a 25% fall in the purchasing power of this group of workers in the first three months of 1982. It is little wonder that civil servants and white collar workers have become increasingly prominent in opposition to the regime.

It was this growing opposition, reflected in the formation of the *multipartidaria* - a coalition of bourgeois parties which includes the Peronists, the Radical Party and the Christian Democrats - which began to create divisions within the junta itself over the questions of a return to civilian rule. The ousting of General Viola from the presidency last year and his replacement by the Galtieri/Alfredo Saint Jean axis was one reflection of this.

These two figures stood for a gradual and controlled liberalisation leading to elections - possibly standing themselves at the head of their own party. Another hard line wing of the military were highly suspicious of this project suspecting Galtieri of using 'populism' of the Peron type to gain power. Not only was this group - around General Cristino Nicolaides, Costa Mendez, De Hoz etc committed to continuing the 'free market' policies, but they also opposed any immediate return to civilian rule. Preferring a transitional government of 'Notables' resting on the traditional landed oligarchy and military.

It was this growing crisis in the regime itself and the massive explosion of opposition triggered

off by the huge CGT demonstrations in Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Rosario, etc on March 30th, which led the Galtieri regime to embark on the desperate gamble of the Malvinas seizure. Success would have strengthened Galtieri and he hoped to demobilise the opposition to his regime. The Malvinas war had quite the opposite effect. Faced with the united opposition of the imperialists - most importantly the US and the prospect of imminent war with British imperialism, the regime was forced to grant the opposition virtual political freedom for the duration.

The many leaders of the CGT who had been arrested after the March 30th demonstration were released and the 'intervention' against many unions lifted. Political parties including the Peronists, the Communist Party and the far left openly marched on demonstrations. The slogans raised on these demonstrations were far from ones indicating the masses were taken in by the junta's anti-imperialist rhetoric. On the huge government-sponsored demonstration of April 10th called for Haig's benefit, popular slogans included 'The English are gone now it's Alemann's turn'. On April 26th 40,000 chanted 'Galtieri take note the Malvinas belongs to Argentina and the people belong to Peron.' Other slogans included 'The Malvinas are Argentine so are those who have disappeared' and 'No to the government Yes to the Malvinas.'

The response of the Peronist trade union leaders was predictable. Having learnt nothing from the appalling results of tying the working class to the bourgeoisie and its military apparatus through Peronism, the CGT leaders quickly tried to subordinate the class struggle to support for the junta. Having just been released from the junta's goals, the metal workers' leader Lorenzo Miguel, proposed a march to the military headquarters to congratulate the armed forces! While massive layoffs and other attacks on workers continued, the CGT leaders suspended economic struggles for the duration of the war, a position which led to a threatened breakaway by the Greater Buenos Aires CGT.

Any revolutionary current in the Argentine workers movement, while supporting the government's moves to oust British imperialism from the Malvinas, would have done so from a clear revolutionary perspective. It would have argued for a continuation of the class struggle up to and including the overthrow of the junta. It would have consistently pointed out the fake anti-imperialism of the generals. Under the slogan 'spread the anti-imperialist struggle to the mainland' it would have demanded the expropriation under workers' control of all the imperialists' assets, and the cancelling of the crippling foreign debt to the imperialists. The only exceptions made to the struggle against the bosses and their junta would have been industries directly producing for the war effort eg. the aircraft industry. Here we would fight for workers' inspection and control - fighting for workers' control of the armaments industry. We would have raised demands for the democratic rights of soldiers, for the election of

officers, the right of political association, for the formation of an armed workers' militia. Against the junta a revolutionary tendency would have raised the demand for the immediate convening of a constituent assembly, the lifting of the state of siege and all the laws against trade unions and political parties. We would have argued that only a workers' and small farmers' government which armed the workers and broke the power of land-owning oligarchy and bourgeoisie and their military apparatus could guarantee a real and successful struggle against imperialism. Only such a programme based on the independent interests of the working class could have offered a perspective of winning the struggle against British imperialism and rallied to the side of the workers the small farmers and petit bourgeois strata.

The defeat of Argentina was a further crushing blow not just to Galtieri but to the military as a whole. It increased the confusion and divisions within the armed forces, which the economic crisis had already exposed. With the "anti-communist" alliance of the US and Argentina in South America temporarily inoperative, and the prospect of thousands of conscript troops, disillusioned with their officers and generals, arriving back from the Malvinas, the military is desperately trying to hold on to power and to keep the lid down on the opposition. When Galtieri had to announce the defeat of the Argentine forces he called for a 'patriotic' demonstration. So patriotic was it that Galtieri dared not appear on the balcony which was pelted with coins and other projectiles. The crowd was chanting, "The boys were killed, the Chiefs sold them out!" (Latin America Weekly Reports, 18th June.)

The bourgeois opposition is equally terrified of the crisis of the regime. Although under pressure from their rank and file to have nothing to do with the discredited military leaders, frightened of a repeat of 1973 and an explosion of working class militancy, are desperate for a smooth transition. Carlos Contin, leader of the Radical Party, expressed this fear when he declared after a meeting with General Bignone, the new President designate, that he and other leaders believed, "the military junta is disintegrating which is a matter of concern because it deprives the nation of stability." (from Herald Tribune, June 26-27th)

The present situation in Argentina poses a real threat to the Argentinian ruling class and to American imperialism. Both the new Commander in Chief, Nicolaides, and Bignone are hard liners committed to the free market economy, the alliance with Washington and the elimination of 'subversion'. Whether they can ride out the present crisis within the country and the armed forces depends above all on the actions of the Argentine workers and their leaders. The deep divisions within the military and the ruling class create a situation in which an offensive by the Argentine proletariat, a mass political general strike, can bring the junta crashing down. Armed with revolutionary democratic and transitional slogans, the Argentine workers can put their own class power on the agenda. ■

by Stuart King

## ▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

The history of Labour's calls for UN intervention in post war crises reveals that for the Labour leaders the UN has always had the potential to impose a stabilising pro-imperialist solution when other methods of maintaining the status quo have failed. The first attempt by Labour to put Attlee's idea of 'decolonisation' via an international administration into practice was with regard to Palestine, and its attitude to India which was granted independence during the same period underlines the real principles of Labour foreign policy. Whereas in India a 'dependable' stratum of new leaders of the nation had been trained over several generations and power could be transferred to them relatively safely, in Palestine no such potential leadership existed. The sheiks and kings with whom Britain needed to do a deal to safeguard oil supplies were based in the region surrounding Palestine, but not within it. Unable to even conceive of the idea of returning the country to the control of the Palestine Arab majority of its people, and fearful of offending the oil sheiks by giving too much away to the Zionists, the Labour Cabinet shunted the problem off onto the UN, its minutes reveal the intention, "His Majesty's Government would not be under obligation themselves to enforce whatever solution the UN might approve. If the settlement suggested by the UN were not acceptable to us, we should be at liberty then to surrender the Mandate and leave the UN to make other arrangements for the future administration of Palestine."

Labour's own proposal to the UN was for a trusteeship to be established under UN auspices which would provide an administrative framework within which some federal arrangement to separate Jews from Arabs could be arranged. This proposal was blocked by both the US and the Soviet Union who saw it as a veiled attempt by Britain to maintain its influence in the region with none of the costs.

This setback to Labour's vision of the role of

the UN did not for one moment alter the government's commitment to the organisation, or rather to its American backers. When the UN flagrantly flouted its own Charter by supporting the US invasion of Korea, Labour not only voted for such support but sent troops to try to enforce it. The Suez crisis of 1956 revealed another role that the UN could play for Labour - that of a stick with which to beat the Tories. True to its pro-imperialist traditions the Party had no intention of giving any support to Egypt and its nationalisation of the Suez Company. The 'Left' Aneurin Bevan summed up his party's commitment to capitalist property thus, "If sending one's police force into the darkness of the night to seize somebody else's property is nationalisation, Ali Baba used the wrong terminology." At the same time, however, when it became clear that the Tories had seriously miscalculated in sending troops to re-take the canal, Labour called for UN intervention as a peaceful alternative to the Tories warmongering.

The Rhodesia crisis in 1965 repeated several of the problems that had faced Attlee over Palestine. For geopolitical reasons Harold Wilson could not cede power to the tiny white minority that had declared UDI but, at the same time, there was as yet no Black bourgeoisie which could be trusted to hold the country within imperialism's orbit. Wilson turned to the UN as the only policy which, while appearing to do something, would actually buy time in which history could provide imperialism's necessary stooge. As luck would have it, it was the Tories who actually reaped the harvest - the UN having had absolutely no effect on the economic strength of the white regime, had nevertheless played an important part in training the present rulers of Zimbabwe in the arts of 'statesmanship'.

Its attitude to the UN reveals very clearly Labour's 'principles' in foreign policy. Their first

thought is for the maintenance of stability, i.e. the status quo of general imperialist domination if this can be achieved through colonial administration then their only quibble is over the expense of it. If imperialism is directly threatened by a militant nationalist struggle then Labour will not only accept the use of force by other imperialisms outside the UN but will use it itself if in power. The role for the UN, as far as Labour is concerned, is in defusing crises which imperialism cannot immediately solve either by force or diplomacy. In this it is at one with the White House and the Pentagon.

But if the Labourites have invariably painted the United Nations as an impartial, neutral and potent organisation, the major imperialist powers have never let their actions be dictated by United Nations resolutions. They accept the mantle of the UN only when it serves their purpose. They have the power to veto its resolutions, and faced with their refusal to accept UN resolutions the UN is completely powerless to enforce its will.

The role assigned to the UN by the Tories during the Malvinas war underlines many of the features of that organisation in the contemporary world. On the diplomatic front the acceptance of resolution 502 which called for Argentinian withdrawal and recognised Britain as the aggrieved party was a useful legitimisation of Thatcher's strategy of re-conquest. At the same time, the smoke-screen on "UN negotiations" provided a supposed evidence of Britain's reluctance to resort to force and usefully filled the inevitable time lag between the decision in favour of war and the actual arrival of the Task Force in the South Atlantic.

It is also significant that in any case where an imperialism is directly threatened it places no reliance whatever on the UN but, rather, relies on its own independent resources. This has consistently been the case throughout the history of the UN from Korea via Malaysia and Kenya to

the recent French invasion of Zaira. At June's Disarmament conference Thatcher, for example, made it abundantly clear on behalf of British imperialism that she would not be bound by any pious calls for disarmament. The fact that the UN cannot be automatically relied on to act as the immediate and direct enforcer of imperialism's plans, has often left its pretensions to being a world arbiter looking rather threadbare. It is this combination of powerlessness and pretention that results in the apparently contradictory position that much of the right wing of imperialism regards the UN as an unnecessary concession to the Soviet Union and the ex-colonies, an impotent but self-imposed obstacle to a forthright imperialist policy of world control. On the other hand, the left wing of imperialism, the reformists of the Socialist International and the stalinist co-thinkers believe that the possibility of the UN genuinely acting as a force for peace, and therefore against the worst excesses of imperialism, is only thwarted by the obstinate opposition of the imperialists. Thus 'Comment' the journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain can argue that, "the UN has its weaknesses and limitations. But the major cause of its limitations is the consistent refusal of powers such as Britain to give full backing and respect to its agreements and declarations." (5.82)

The most farsighted political leaders of imperialism, however, are not fooled by the image of the UN, they are perfectly aware that it is one, but only one, of the various instruments and options by which they can advance their interests. Revolutionaries have to be equally clear; the UN, by its structure and design can never be anything but a 'thieves' kitchen controlled by imperialism, a revolutionary workers' state not only would not be able to advance its interests through it but would be the object of concerted attack by it. ■

by Steve McSweeney

# Workers Power

## After Weighell's treachery...

# UNITE THE PUBLIC SECTOR!

**FLUSHED WITH THEIR** their request of the Malvinas and stung by the resistance of the health workers, the Tory Government has declared a new battle in its war to defeat the organised working class. They won the first battle in that war when the NUR called off its strike after less than one day.

The NUR was an important part in the Tories' strategy for taking on the workers of the public sector. They knew that its members had been softened up by the scabbing on the ASLEF strike during the winter, and by Weighell's insistence that he would implement the job cuts agreed last year.

It was the confusion and uncertainty over the seriousness of the leadership which produced the 47 to 30 vote for calling off the strike.

To add yet more confusion, Weighell announced that he was very pleased with the decision. He called it a proof of the democracy within the union. That democracy consisted of 77 delegates representing over 150,000 members. The delegates were not chosen by the members with whom they work but on the basis of the electoral regions into which the 580 branches are divided.

By abdicating his own responsibility and leaving the decision to conference, Weighell hoped both to torpedo the strike and to destroy the influence of his own executive which overruled him to call the strike in the first place.

As we go to press it is too early to say if the NUR retreat will prove permanent. What is certain is that it will have a demoralising impact on the other major dispute in the public sector, the healthworkers' fight.

Here too the Tories have been helped by the union leaders. The delay in action until late July is bound to effect confidence, that is the intention. However, the depths of duplicity to which union leaders can sink is not the key lesson. Rather this is the existence of militants willing to fight despite the successes of the Tories.

Their strategy in the private sector has worked remarkably well. Relying on the threat of bankruptcies and unemployment—now once again over the three million mark and rising—they have managed to savage the living standards of the working class. Wage increases are now running well below

ten per cent and wage costs per unit of output in manufacturing industry were down to 2.7% in 1981 as compared with 18.1% in the previous year.

The possibility of the present conflicts reaching explosive proportions, however, lies in the fact that the Tories have not yet succeeded in definitively breaking the power of the trade unions. Despite leaders who have stayed in their corners every time the bell has rung for a new round, thousands of workers have the will to prevent them doing so.

Fowler and the Cabinet were clearly shocked by their failure to inflict a quick defeat on the healthworkers. The determination and unity of the workers themselves and the solidarity shown by others have stalled the Tories. Now the government is out to crack all the public sector workers. They hope to isolate the healthworkers by breaking other, weaker, unions.

They are confident that in the NUR and ISTC those weak sections exist. They have the measure of the spineless leaders of these unions. Weighell revealed his attitude to the battle with Parker and the Tories when he whined, "I don't know why I am being forced to go to war, I have delivered..."

Too true, and the Tories intend to make sure that you deliver even more. It is precisely the cringing and pusillanimous record of the NUR in the ASLEF dispute this winter that makes it such an ideal sacrificial lamb for the Tories. Likewise, Bill Sirs' militant rhetoric exposed his own track record of 'resistance' to Macgregor, "That's the end of the closures, now it is a fight to the finish if they want to close any more plants down." What an admission!

The Tories have reduced BSC to a workforce of barely 100,000 from one of 180,000 in 1979. The weakness of the unions in the face of this onslaught has given the Tories confidence and has had a demoralising effect on those militants who have been willing to struggle.

It is the Tories' relentless pursuit of their own anti-working class goals and the mounting threat of an exodus from the unions that would threaten to remove the source of the bureaucrats' salaries, that forced Weighell, Sirs and others of their ilk, to adopt a militant posture.

The Tories have their eyes on the miners too. The Triple Alliance presents an awesome threat to the bosses. They are out to nip it in the bud, to put



Miners join Health Workers in demonstration

Scargill on the spot in the hope of denting the fighting morale of the miners by bringing them down to defeat alongside Sirs and Weighell.

With all this at stake it is no wonder that the Tories have put their own class fighters on alert for a long and protracted battle. They are playing for very high stakes. More than wanting to simply bloody the public sector unions, they want to bloody the public sector itself — taking the profitable plums into private ownership among themselves — leaving even more dilapidated and squalid services upon which millions of workers depend.

They also have the perspective of using a long drawn out battle with the public sector unions as a possible means of securing a further term of office to finish off their hateful work. With all the economic indicators suggesting that Thatcher will not be able to ride into an election on an economic boom, with the Labour Party leaders set on a witchhunt of their own activists, the potential exists for the Tories to call a general election on a union bashing ticket.

The potential for mass strike action against these Tory plans has received a severe setback with the NUR conference decision. By linking that strike to the Health and London Transport strikes a working class counter offensive to defend the public sector as a whole could have been launched.

The treachery of the union leaderships — Spanswick's delaying tactics, Weighell's outright sabotage — now means that launching a fight will be a difficult task. Difficult but not impossible. If militants can be won to a perspective of generalising and co-ordinating their struggles and kicking out their existing bankrupt leaders then the Tories can still be routed.

How can this be done? The NUR decision revealed that, even in the rarefied seaside air of Plymouth, a minority of militants exists who are willing to move into action against the Tories. This has been the pattern in dispute after dispute over the last two years — at Leyland, in the Health, on the railways and in the mines. The militant minority has been repeatedly outflanked by a bureaucracy able to rally backward workers to, 'no strike' decisions.

In the coming months this weakness

can be overcome. The militant minority must be organised into a rank and file movement. In every strike and in every union militants need to be brought together in joint shop stewards' committees, trades councils, strike committees, caucuses and regional and national conferences. The monopoly of power that the official leadership enjoys can be broken by such organisation. In every workplace regular bulletins — newspapers if the resources exist — open to all rank and file workers, and serving as a counterweight to the propaganda of the bosses' press, must be produced.

The case for militant policies must be put to the membership clearly, and directly. When Weighell refuses to give a lead, "in the name of democracy" he does so safe in the knowledge that his cowardly case will be given plenty of coverage in the bosses' propaganda machine. The militant minority must be for 100% democracy — sovereign mass-meetings, regular section meetings, democratic lay conferences etc. But within the framework of such genuine workers' democracy there is no place for leaders who refuse to give a lead. Militants must not only democratise their unions, they must lead them by putting forward clear alternative policies. This is the best way to convince the majority of the need to organise against the bosses' offensive. It is the best way, the surest way, of turning the militant minority into the militant majority.

Organisation alone is not enough, the bureaucrats have the power, and certainly the determination, to root out any opposition to their rule. They will not give up their privileges lightly. They are able to hold onto their positions because so far they have been able to mobilise the majority of union members who share their political outlook. Their craftism, sectionalism, and above all their commitment to reforming capitalism, instead of destroying it, are all crucial weapons for them in isolating the militants who want to fight from the majority.

Only the patient struggle to convince the majority that a political alternative does exist, can overcome the obstacles that are blocking the fight back. Against the craft divisions that led ASLEF drivers to scab on the NUR (and vice versa last winter) a rank and file movement would fight for class unity against the bosses. One union for all railway workers and one for health workers

Picture: John Sturrock (Network)

would constitute much more powerful threats to the bosses than three divided unions in BR and thirteen in the NHS. Such unity must be forged in common struggles. The attack on the public sector is an attack on all workers. The first stage of organising all workers against that threat is the building of a public sector alliance uniting the Triple Alliance with the healthworkers and activating that alliance to fight for:

- \* All claims to be met in full.
- \* Restore all cuts in services to their pre-1979 levels.
- \* For a massive injection of cash into the public sector. For a programme of useful public works under trade union control — no more closures, no more cuts, no more redundancies.
- \* For the protection of public spending from the ravages of inflation by a sliding scale of public expenditure.
- \* End low pay, especially for women in the public sector, through a national minimum wage of £100.

These policies can unite all public sector workers. They could unite the whole working class behind the public sector. A new minority movement must be built now to fight for them, winning majority support for them and, in so doing, turning the tables on the bosses and the bureaucrats. ■

### CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

amongst the Trade Union bosses will only be stopped by the utmost determination. To talk of the threat of civil war is not enough. They have launched a war against rank and file democracy. They will only be defeated with the most resolute defiance. Constituencies must

- \* 1. Support a slate of NEC candidates pre-pledged to junk the Report and oppose any witch-hunt or expulsions. Stand candidates (for leader and deputy-leader) to oust the witch-hunters. Benn, for one.
- \* 2. Pledge themselves now to refuse to implement any expulsions decreed if the Report is steamrollered through conference.
- \* 3. Pledge themselves to support all democratically selected parliamentary candidates; whatever the NEC decision they should be the candidate of the constituency at the general election.

\* 4. In the event of expulsions or the disbanding of constituency parties to refuse to recognise this, to form an alliance with other constituencies and to hold all funds in trust until democratic rights shall have been restored in the party. All the 'unofficial' papers, organisations and groups of supporters in the Labour Party must pledge themselves not to register under the new proposals. They must mount a united campaign to defend Militant and any other papers, groups or tendencies victimised.

In the interests of workers' democracy, all rights won by the rank and file must be defended. But revolutionaries should also fight to rescind Clause 1 (3) and re-establish the right of all working class parties including the CP, the SWP and the groups claiming to be Trotskyist to formally affiliate to the Labour Party, issuing their own press, having the right to be nominated and if selected, stand as Labour candidates. ■

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# Workers Power

SUPPLEMENT  
ON THE W.S.L. AND  
SOCIALIST ORGANISER

SUMMER 1982  
5p if sold separately

## Open Letter to the

# Workers' Socialist League

COMRADES- We address you because in your ranks are one time supporters of Workers Fight and Socialist Press, both of which had a conscious project of criticising and over-coming the opportunism of Healy, Mandel and Cliff. But now, after a period of systematic revisionism enshrined in the pages of Socialist Organiser, your organisation has failed the test of an imperialist war against Argentina. It failed even to recognise the imperialist character of Britain's war. Your paper has become a vehicle for the propagation of social pacifist politics. Your leaders have proven themselves incapable of defending, let alone developing, the principles and programme of revolutionary Marxism.

Those of you who remain committed to the struggle against revisionism and opportunism must realise that this means waging a battle *now* to remove your present leadership. To take any other course means admitting defeat in the face of the degeneration of revolutionary Marxism.

### WHY DID IT HAPPEN ?

The Falklands war has proved to be a decisive test for all the organisations in Britain claiming to stand in the traditions of Revolutionary Marxism and Trotskyism. This is hardly surprising. Wars have always proved a make or break question for the workers' movement. They reveal in the starkest light the real character and the mettle of rival organisations.

The Falklands war was a deadly serious affair for British imperialism. However the Socialist Organiser leaders claimed that it was merely a "war to save the face and prestige of Thatcher" (SO 6.5.82). Such a position could only be considered valid by people with the shallow analytical equipment of a Labour MP.

The ink that has been spilled on surveys of Antarctica and the South Atlantic points to the real, underlying cause of the war. British imperialism has strategic and economic interests of capital importance at stake. The 'Economist' magazine spoke for its class when it said that the security of the Falklands was vital as a link in the chain that ties Britain to the Antarctic. This is why the British bourgeoisie was willing to spend billions, to lose ships and military equipment, to jeopardise its extensive imperialist investments in Latin America, and its close relations with the U.S. and European imperialists. Such actions indicate that far more is at stake than the fate of a Prime Minister.

In our view this war marks the opening up of a new period of British imperialism. Thatcher gave the game away in Parliament after her "victory" when she welcomed the war as a means of restoring Britain's dominance in the world.

In conjunction with the Israeli assault on Lebanon and the Palestinians, this war has a further significance. It has heightened world tension. It has increased the "war danger". The Falkland War is an outlier for much greater conflicts. As such the responses to it by would-be revolutionary organisations are a clear measure of their ability to weather the storms ahead.

With the exception of Workers Power, all of the British Trotskyist Groups - from the ultra-sectarian Spartacists to the ultra-opportunist Militant - have failed to offer anything resembling a revolutionary perspective in the face of this war. Within this generalised collapse of the left, your organisation has played an inglorious part. Speaking plainly, your leadership has dragged its pretensions to internationalism through the Labourite mire.

We will not repeat at length arguments against the positions that have appeared in the pages of Socialist Organiser which you continue to sponsor. Our paper has already exposed the gulf between marxism and Socialist Organiser's discovery and defence of the supposed "right to self-determination" of the Falklanders. The Falklanders are not only a British settler population *in origin* but have always been economically and militarily so. *They can never be otherwise.* Thatcher has made great play of their right to self-determination because she knows that every Falklander's choice will be to remain part of the British Empire!

For marxists the right to self-determination must mean the right to form a separate independent nation state.

To be exercised, this right involves the ability to do so, and the Falklanders have never wished to be anything beyond a Crown Colony because they are not and could not be an independent people. They can only exist as British colonists.

In the letters page of Socialist Organiser certain clowns have pointed to the settler *origins* of Argentina itself, or indeed the U.S.A. and attempted to draw a parallel between these peoples and the Falkland Islanders. The 1,800 kelpers - many of whom were born in Britain and will retire to Britain or New Zealand - who are largely employees of a British company, living on land owned by British capitalists, dependent on British supplies and now on a British garrison and war fleet - are clearly not an equivalent national entity.

Unlike Foot you have not dared deduce from your support of the Kelpers' rights, support for Thatcher's war. No, instead your own political conclusion is to repeat the social pacifist phrases culled from your left reformist allies, and plead with British imperialism to "renounce" its economic (sic) interests in the South Atlantic.

Your leaders now regard imperialism as a matter of "policy", a matter, simply of "economic interests", which working class pressure can persuade imperialism to renounce. Comrades, this is the analysis of the left Labourites. This is the thinking of Tony Benn. Your organisation has begun to think and analyse the world in the same manner as the Bennites!

Are we exaggerating? We do not think so. Lenin's theory of imperialism has not guided your actions in this war. You have implied in articles in Socialist Organiser (especially those of Martin Thomas in SO 87/88) that Argentina is not exploited by imperialism. No doubt it is this discovery that led you to call for negotiations between the British and Argentine capitalists (SO 6.5.82). Your position, like that 'discovered' by Kautsky in August/September 1914, implies that imperialism is potentially peaceful - if only it would negotiate and not fight. Wars are deemed irrationalities - 'face savers' for the imperialist government, 'red herrings' for the imperialised nations. Imperialism, from being an economically predatory system that inevitably spawns war, is reduced to a matter of policy - and the role of communists is reduced to raising the call 'peace through negotiation'.

Your evidence for this position is particularly flimsy. Argentina, we are told, is a 'prosperous' and 'advanced' country. Since when have marxists used such criteria as a means of characterising an imperialist or imperialised state? Never. We analyse imperialism by looking at the development and dominance of Finance Capital within a country, its fusion with industrial capital, its export of capital and its repatriation of super-profits, its possession of colonies or economic control of semi-colonies etc. Argentina's history, looked at from this standpoint, reveals none of these characteristics. Its history is the reverse of an imperialist power. It is the history of a semi-colony, dependent on imperialism for its development. To be sure it is a relatively wealthy semi-colony but a semi-colony nevertheless.

Was Russia 'advanced' or 'prosperous' in 1914? Was Japan comparable, according to your criteria with the U.S.A. in the 1920s and 30s? Of course not, but both Russia and Japan were imperialist powers, according to Lenin's criteria.

### NOT AN ACCIDENT

But this is no isolated 'mistake' by Socialist Organiser. By exactly the same reasoning you have also deduced that Ireland is 'comparable' with Britain today. As John O'Mahoney put it in SO 75 Ireland's bourgeoisie is "now an integral segment of the European capitalist class and in as much control of their state as any EEC ruling class is." Formal control of one's state (in fact of only one part of one's state in Ireland's case) and being capitalist, are sufficient causes to lump semi-colonial Ireland together with the imperialised power whose army still stalks the streets of the North! But then John O'Mahoney has never disguised the fact that for him Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution has no integral part to play in the Irish revolution. The present war has obviously led him to extend his junking of the "old" Trotskyism and Leninism to Latin America. Now the theory of permanent revolution has no use for him in Latin America or Ireland. Comrades, in this you have joined hands with no less than the Spartacists (Yes!) in junking any operative use of Lenin's theory and Trotsky's strategy. Your leaders may think these issues are "old hat", but they won't take this hat off without quickly putting on another one that of Labourite social pacifism.

How has such a position emerged within an organisation that claims to be marxist? We have repeatedly argued that increasingly your positions are determined by programmatic adaptation to the pressure of the left reformists that you hope to coax into your alliance. Your position on the war signifies that you have yielded to chauvinist pressure, mediated via Tony Benn and Reg Race and their brand of semi-social pacifism. We say "semi" because these gentlemen only objected to Thatcher's decision to wage war over the Falklands while both have advocated the use of economic measures against Argentina. Socialist Organiser was quick to praise Benn for supposedly rejecting this call. It has been silent on the fact that, on the very day this praise was proffered, he actually called for economic sanctions. That is he called for the use of the very imperialist economic stranglehold, via the City of London, that you so strenuously deny governs the relations between Britain (and the U.S.A.) and Argentina.

You have failed to stand by the basic marxist position of defending a semi-colonial country against "one's own" imperialism. Instead you dodge behind the misapplied slogan "The main enemy is at home!" True, but as we have argued, in this case our ally was the Argentine nation because it was fighting a death battle with our enemy in a justified national war.

You did not even pose sharply in your slogans the fact the British socialists should work for the 'defeat' of Britain. The almost complete absence of your banners from national anti-war activities highlights your shame and the fact that the above slogan meant for you 'The main fight is at home; against Thatcher's anti-working

class policies, ie. Trade Union, and above all, Labour Party business as usual. Perhaps this endeared you to your "left Labour" friends and boosted your tally of "socialist" local councillors. But comrades, the failure to mobilise against the war in a serious, sustained and principled way has helped the forces of reaction in this country to enjoy a resounding victory. The walls of "Fortress Islington", behind which your centrist leaders are sheltering, will prove to be a short-lived and feeble protection against the effects of this victory

The chief protagonists of this position in the paper, are not, surprisingly, John O'Mahoney and Martin Thomas. Workers Power has direct experience of these characters. In 1976 they broke up the fused organisation to which we belonged.

They are seasoned opportunists who have, since the break up of the I-CL, been pushing their supporters further and further to the right in a bid to construct a strategic alliance with the forces of left reformism. They have become impatient with the arduous tasks of developing a revolutionary programme for today's class struggle, they have lost all belief in the possibility of building a revolutionary party.

The experience of the 1974-9 Labour Government was decisive in the formulation of the I-CL's political strategy. The mass strikes of 1972-4 did not spontaneously generate a layer of political militants capable of challenging the betrayal of the Callaghan/Healy/Foot/Benn government. Indeed the militancy that had existed was largely dissipated. Struggles, like those of the Firemen in 1977 and even the Public Sector workers in 1979, did not result in a generalised working class offensive. For Sean Matgamna this experience was registered in a wholly empirical and short-sighted fashion. In the old Workers' Action newspaper he explained that this dissipation of militancy meant that revolutionaries should focus their main attention of the Labour Party. The direct action struggles of the workers were less political and therefore less open to revolutionary ideas. The Labour Party, however was overtly political and therefore inevitably more receptive. Thus he argued: "One of the major reasons for the divisions in the revolutionary marxist left in Britain has been different attitudes on what to do about the Labour Party. This is the major strategic question for militants trying to restructure and remould the British labour movement." (WA 155).

In an interview on the SCLV, which originally launched Socialist Organiser, John O'Mahoney explicitly criticised the leaders of the SLL/WRP for breaking with this position in favour of orienting centrally to direct action struggles: "But in retrospect one must accept that, for example, 'Militant' was able to make gains and can now play its present role partly because the revolutionaries did not just go with the radicalised people, who were often immature and ultra-left; they capitulated to them, and completely abandoned their previous understanding of the Labour Party and the problem of the broad Labour Movement. The old leaders of the Trotskyist movement those who had a political education, served very badly the people who became radicalised in the 60s." (International Communist No. 9).

Who are these old leaders and what is the political understanding of the Labour Party nostalgically hankered after by O'Mahoney (which he has now regenerated)?

Comrades, it is the provenly bankrupt understanding pioneered by Gerry Healy and Michel Pablo in the 1950s. It is the 'entrism sui generis' that led to the disorientation and liquidation of the Trotskyist movement and programme. It is the antithesis of Trotsky's tactic of entrism developed in the 1930s which was based on a clear and determined fight for revolutionary policies, by a revolutionary tendency in a reformist or centrist milieu. The tactics of Healy, Pablo and the Militant praised by O'Mahoney is based on the perspective of "transforming" the Labour Party through a series of left alliances. It is based on the false premise that the Labour Party can be transformed into a 'roughly adequate' instrument for the working class. The "revolutionaries" can sure a "Labour government pledged to socialist

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ▶

# Open Letter (cont.)

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policies" (or as Socialist Organiser likes to call it a "workers government", meaning a Labour government accountable to the Labour Party as O'Mahoney and Bloxham made clear in their resolution to the S.O. annual aggregate.

This understanding of the Labour Party is based on a grand illusion. It has little to do with reality. We do not underestimate the need to win workers from the Labour Party. We do not rule out work in the Labour Party. We do not - despite the slanderous claims of Matgamna and Thomas - abstain from the struggles in the Labour Party. But we have no illusions about these struggles either. We do not dress the participants up as anything other than what they are - reformists, left and right. The left we will seek to win by the sharpest revolutionary criticism of their vacillations and support for their positive actions. To do this requires one vital thing - a revolutionary programme, a revolutionary voice, and a revolutionary tendency to raise both in the Labour Party. But, comrades of the WSL, where is your revolutionary banner and revolutionary programme?

Matgamna's project is that of a latter-day Healy or Pablo (yes - these two supposed arch-enemies were the very co-architects of 'entrism sui generis'). Any of you who think that Socialist Organiser even pretends to be a clear revolutionary tendency would do well to be reminded of Workers Action's description of it: "Socialist Organiser, by its nature a left alliance, cannot have a razor-sharp ideological definition, but it should be based on definite political positions." (WA 160) Definite does not equal revolutionary. And without a razor-sharp identity a tendency in the Labour Party can only become one other thing - a blunt instrument.

In this scheme your hopes have been pinned on the possibility of a Workers Government based on a Labour Party that "is no longer a stable instrument of the bourgeoisie." Apart from the fact that for revolutionaries the call for a workers' government is a tactic not a stage that has to be passed through, the ludicrousness of this assessment of the state of the Labour Party is one of the things that has been shown up by the Falklands War.

Look at the real Labour Party of the last months. Compare it with the paper fantasies of Matgamna. Paper will take anything that is written on it - life, and the Labour Party, is not so obliging to centrist pen-pushers. Not a stable instrument for the bourgeoisie? A potential workers' government (and for revolutionaries this means one that would take the steps to arm the workers and base itself on workers' councils)? No. As in 1914-18, as in 1939-45, as in Korea, Suez, Borneo, Malaya, Aden and Ireland it posed no threat to the bourgeois war mongers. It assisted them. And Benn? He differed over which strategy would best bring Argentina to its knees. The one vote he led against the war - 6 weeks into the crisis - was only as significant as the silence of the left, Benn included, during the days of the ground fighting. In those crucial days the demos stopped, there were no more votes - there was collapse. If Labour dare not contradict as threadbare an imperialist plunder-raid as this, what can be expected of them when the bank deposits, the arsenals and the factories of the bourgeoisie are at stake at home. To pose these questions is to answer them. Reselection and an electoral college, even the presence of the Socialist Organiser Alliance, do not make the stuff of a Workers' Government.

## OUR RECORD

Of course your leaders will meet such criticisms with a whole range of apologetic insults and charges. Blind to the fact that the war has placed them in the same camp as the Spartacists, the Militant and the Socialist Workers Party - all arch sectarians in Matgamna's analysis - your leaders will attempt to label us as irrelevant sectarians so as to discredit our arguments.

After the break up of the ICL Matgamna predicted our collapse into the IMG. Since then we have been told, on several occasions, that our

collapse into the Spartacists was impending. Similarly after the old WSL leadership broke off political discussions with Workers Power (NB it was not us who broke off discussions - we only refused immediate fusion) they informed their members that we were sectarian 'proto-Spartacists'. These predictions have all proved false and empty. The charge of sectarianism has been shown up for what it is - a handy slur for your leaders to avoid discussions with us.

We know what sectarianism is and you will never find us guilty of it. Our record is living proof of our ability - despite our size - to resist sectarianism. The Steel Strike, the Plansee's Strike, the People's March, the Ansell's Strike, our consistent work inside the Labour movement, our industrial bulletins, our anti-war work and more besides, are our answers to the charge of sectarianism and to the idea that we inhabit an irrelevant wilderness. We have a proven record of struggle. We are hounded by labour bureaucrats in the health strike and in the anti-war movement - not because we are sectarian but because we are honest revolutionaries. We are hated for that by the bureaucrats. Your centrist leaders will try to make you hate us for the same reason.

Certainly we are a small group. Indeed so is the WSL. You may have blown yourself up with left reformist wind but you remain a frog and not a bull. Our size means that we are nearer to being a "propaganda society" than we are to being a mass party, but we make no virtue out of this. While we do not try to imitate a mass party, do not behave like a mini-mass party, nor do we abstain from the class struggle. As we have said since 1976 we have been involved in every struggle to the limit of our capabilities (size and location). We are a fighting propaganda group. Our principal task is to re-elaborate Trotsky's Transitional Programme, developing it and focussing it on today's international class struggle. This involves patient and difficult theoretical work. But we focus our propaganda towards the needs of the class struggle, acting on it where possible.

We fight with our class against its enemies outside and inside the labour movement. We also fight to transcend the limits of being a propaganda group, but not by ignoring our propaganda tasks and liquidating the struggle for a revolutionary party and international into syndicalism, economism or left reformism. We seek to link our propaganda work, at every stage, to the class struggle itself. We welcome all revolutionary fighters into our ranks on this basis. We seek principled fusions on this basis.

We do not have a static, dogmatic, "know-it-all", "take us or leave us" attitude. On the contrary we would seek in any fusion an advance towards the strategic goals we have set ourselves. The more comrades with class struggle leadership, theoretical, literary and agitational abilities, the faster we can progress. The political and economic defeats Thatcher has inflicted - Reagan and Thatcher's drive to war, and confrontation with the anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles, and conflict with the workers' states all indicate to us that we have no mortgage on time. We hate sectarianism as we hate opportunism. That is a word rarely used in the pages of your publications these days - with good reason. Opportunism means casting aside the valuable weapons forged by revolutionary marxism over 100 years of struggle, in the interests of "popularity" with the masses (or more usually their reformist leaders) on their terms. We value these weapons. Unlike the sectarians though, we do not allow them to lie unused so that they rot and become useless. We develop them, refine them and focus them on the tasks of the day. Your leaders, impatient with such tasks have chosen the opportunist course. That is why they never use the word. It describes their whole policy.

The opportunist articles on "Marxism and Democracy" by the prime generator of opportunism in your ranks John O'Mahoney, showed the tortuous (and torturing) lengths to which your leadership will go to junk the "old baggage" of Trotskyism. Unlike this particular revisionist we would assert that the methods and doctrines of Lenin and Trotsky are, to use a phrase of the old WSL, "valid today" on condition that they are developed.

We write this open letter to you now because we think that the deep-rooted opportunism of your leaders has, under the impact of the war, sullied your banners over the last 3 months. The (non-party) Socialist Organiser that you sponsor has become an organ for neutralism. The revolutionary internationalist line, which does not flinch from the defence of the oppressed against Britain's armed might, is only seen on the letters page courtesy of a handful of principled correspondents. The line of the paper itself is indistinguishable from Chris Mullin's Social-pacifist Tribune. The National Left Wing Youth movement has been pushed into the shameful act of voting for "workers" economic sanctions against Argentina. Individuals now say this is wrong. But where is the clear voice of your organisation denouncing this vote and its 'Militant' chauvinist inspirers? Comrades, a Youth Movement should, in the spirit of Liebknecht, be in the vanguard of opposition to the war. Unless Trotskyists teach the working class youth to rally to the defence of all those attacked by "our own" imperialism, then the chauvinist poison of the press will rally them to the national colours, literally and metaphorically. Working class youth will not be captivated by do-nothing but wring-your-hands petty-bourgeois peacenikery - class war against war or imperialist war is a stark choice, but one that working class youth will take.

At an international level the TILC - a prisoner of the WSL "majority" - did not publicly utter one word on an event of capital international importance. Yet, all its sections but one took a correct stand for Argentina against British imperialism. For O'Mahoney the rupturing of this international alliance will not be the cause of anxious insomnia. For a serious internationalist, such a lightminded approach to international relations and the international class struggle should be a cause of extreme concern.

Some of you may think that the TILC could serve to change the line of the Socialist Organiser editors. We don't think so comrades. When O'Mahoney once "went from Socialist Organiser to report of" the TILC school in 1981 he could say no more of the TILC than that it "groups a number of small Marxist organisations." What hope for life from an international tendency that splits first time it hits the test of an imperialist war and is incapable of issuing a public statement because its major section refuses to call for the victory of Argentina in a war against the British bourgeoisie?

## WHERE NOW FOR THE W.S.L. ?

At fusion the WSL committed itself to programmatic discussions and development. It committed itself to raising an independent and revolutionary banner in the workers' movement. None of this has happened. Either the WSL must come to life, fight its centrist leaders and change course or the WSL will have proved itself in the sharp test of war to have become an instrument for trampling on revolutionary Marxism - not fighting for it!

At the time of your fusion we made clear our differences with both of the founding organisations and with the political basis of your fusion. From the start your fusion was based on the opportunist strategy of the fight for a "Workers' Government" of the type that had been master-minded by the Workers Action paper. Although Socialist Press had once formally condemned this position as revisionist it was openly embraced by Alan Thornett at your launching rally.

"We have to fight not for a Labour Government of the old type - or a left Labour Government to implement the Alternative Economic Strategy - but for a workers' government - a government committed to the working class, responsive to the labour movement, and controlled by it." (Workers Socialist Review No. 1).

The organisation was set in the strategic mould of the politics of accommodation to left reformism. Socialist Organiser's re-iteration of this position has gone unchallenged by the WSL. You committed yourselves to producing a programmatic joint document (see Socialist Press May 14th 1981). Where is it comrades? You committed yourselves to producing a theoretical journal which John Lister suggested would be quarterly and which John

O'Mahoney reported would be "perhaps bi-monthly" (SO. July 30 1981). Only one pathetic copy has appeared comrades and it contains no programmatic documents and no notice of the rest of the disputed questions you were jointly to resolve - Afghanistan, the General Strike, the and Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea. When O'Mahoney reported from the TILC summer school that the WSL magazine "will not be in competition with Socialist Organiser" he was only too right. The WSL has presented no challenge to the politics of Socialist Organiser and certainly no competition to its sales pitch.

Perhaps the Falklands war has made a few of you wake up. We hope so. But even if you do it won't be enough to declare, after the event, that the WSL - silent throughout Britain's murderous war - refuses to endorse the position adopted by the Socialist Organiser editorial board during that war. Of course you should reject the politics of the Socialist Organiser. You should, even at the event, declare yourselves for the victory of Argentina over British imperialism. But you can't let matters stop there comrades. You have to ask yourselves why the S.O. took this line and why the WSL swallowed it at precisely the time that it mattered! We have our answer to that question. We have repeatedly stated that paper you sponsor is orchestrated by centrist political trajectory has been one of accommodation to left reformism. It follows therefore that all key tests they will junk any 'old' Leninism and Trotskyism that threatens to imperil their centrist project of a strategic alliance with left reformism. It won't be enough to change the line on the Falklands. You've got to fight the programme and method that S.O. is based on which the Falklands line originates from. Unless you fight that method and its perspectives, even a line change on the Falklands will be for nothing if you allow the S.O. editors to continue their weekly coining of their centrist line.

Comrades who oppose the record of betrayal of elementary internationalism by Socialist Organiser must recognise that debate in your letters page is not enough. You have passed through the war with soiled and lowered banners. Perhaps there has been a struggle to reverse the position. We do know. We do know from our own experience if there is a struggle Sean Matgamna and Mar Thomas will sacrifice any remnants of political principles in the interests of tactical manoeuvre.

If there are comrades fighting these rotten lines be warned. Even if a formal reversal of position takes place on the war, its originators, Matgamna Thomas, would remain a constant source of revisionism. Look at their record on left reformism, marxism and democracy, Ireland, imperialism, Permanent Revolution, the Transitional Programme, the Party, the Workers' Government. If they are now approaching the positions of a Kautsky, they do so with the velocity and appetite of a Barrabas.

We do not doubt that Matgamna will accuse any oppositionists, as he accused us in 1976, of moving towards one or another rival tendency. That is because he is preparing for a split. If a split does take place then we wish to make the choices we think exist clear to honest revolutionaries who break with Matgamna. There is, of course the prospect of joining the IMG, the other big "Trotskyist" organisation in Britain, sponsored by the USFI. Their position on the war is ostensibly a principled one. But the USFI's position is part and parcel of their overall capitulation to petty-bourgeois nationalism. It is perfectly consistent with the SWP(US) attempts to jump on the bandwagon. In practice their national section has subordinated their defeatism to 'peace slogans', under the guise of a united front. They have offered only the most muted criticisms of the weaknesses and vacillations of Benn and Race.

The IMG have a weekly paper, a large full-time staff, a youth movement and all the paraphernalia of yet another mini-mass party. To them may be an attractive proposition. But, comrades, they are a sick organisation, sick with the disease of centrism. Look at their record and that of their international-groveling before the Stalinist Castro, cheering the Islamic butcher Khomeini, capitulating to Mitterand in France and even to outshout Socialist Organiser last year in praise of Tony Benn. They are inveterate capitulators. E left trade union bureaucrat they interview is treasured by them as the potential leader of a "class struggle left-wing". They are riddled with every "ism" that was fashionable in the 60s and 70s. They are a petit-bourgeois formation with no political spine. That is one choice for "Trotskyists" in the WSL.

There is another. It is to engage in open, honest and far-reaching discussions with Workers Power and explain our perspective. We would ask you to read our positions in our papers and journals. We think, unlike the IMG, we have a consistent authentic Trotskyist record. We make no secret that discussions with you would be aimed at establishing a new fused revolutionary organisation. We would aim to campaign internationally with any co-thinkers for a democratic centralist Trotskyist tendency really working to rebuild an international in the traditions of Lenin's IIIrd and Trotsky's IXth. If an opposition were to win a majority against Matgamna's leadership then such a process could begin between WP and the WSL. If an opposition loyal to Trotskyism were reduced to a minority due to the bureaucratic and manipulative tactics (which we know too of the old ICL leaders, or is the self-avowed "Bennites" in your ranks were to outweigh the voice of revolutionary internationalism, then we would urge any oppositionists to join us in setting the basis for an enlarged organisation that can continue the fight for revolutionary leadership of the working class. ■

## PUBLICATIONS FROM WORKERS POWER

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# The WSL/ICL fusion

**SOCIALIST PRESS** ★

**Socialist Organiser**

The SCLV's paper, Socialist Organiser, was fashioned to fit in with joint activity with the reformists around democracy and accountability within the Labour Party. When Workers Action was dropped in the summer of 1980, Socialist Organiser made clear that it was not based on a revolutionary programme inside the Labour Party: "The political platform contained in our Where We Stand column is not a scientific programme" (SO 30/8/80).

The battle for Labour Party democracy was described as the most crucial aspect of the class struggle. Before closing down, Workers Action had spelt out the premises for this position. It advanced the idea that the depth and temper of the capitalist crisis, together with the democratic reforms within the Labour Party opened up the possibility of "transforming" the Labour Party into "a real instrument of the working class". A "real instrument" was a handy substitute for the revolutionary party, which was, after all, proving difficult to build.

In addition the ICL proclaimed that the democratic reforms of the 1979 Labour Party Brighton Conference "demonstrates that transforming the political wing of the labour movement is a possibility, and thus that it is possible to raise the transitional demand for a workers government in Britain, where in the initial stages such a government would inevitably have the Labour Party as its major or only component" (Workers Action No 174 26/4/80).

Prepared to settle for second best with regard to the party, the ICL were also prepared to settle for second best as far as the Workers' Government was concerned. A Workers' Government which was, in effect, a left reformist led Labour government, made more accountable through the reselection of MPs, was posited by Workers Action as a definite and desirable stage of the class struggle.

As long ago as the summer of 1980 the WSL approvingly quoted Zinoviev against the opportunist position of the ICL:

"Woe to us if we allow the suggestion to creep into our propaganda that the workers government is a necessary step, to be achieved peacefully as a period of semi-organic construction which may take the place of civil war" (Socialist Press No 202 16/7/80).

Then the WSL said it was only permissible to raise the slogan "workers government" "in the context of the overall strategy of socialist revolution in which the objective is not simply another parliamentary Labour government but to establish a government genuinely representative of the working class, a workers government based firmly on the independent strength of the workers movement, organised through councils of action. Only on this basis can such a government take the necessary steps of nationalisation and destruction of the machinery of the capitalist state" (Socialist Press No 207 16/7/80).

This position quite clearly has little to do with the one put forward by the ICL.

## NO EXPLANATION GIVEN

The reader of Socialist Press has not been given any explanation of the WSL's change of position on the workers' government question. Yet, changed it has - in the direction of the ICL version of the slogan that had formerly been described as "liquidationist". From at least February 1981, the WSL was abandoning its original position. Thus, SP 236 proclaims in the wake of the miners victory: "the only guarantee of protection for jobs and living standards is the mobilisation of the labour movement for a general strike to bring down the Tories and to press home the fight for socialist policies from a Labour government". (Socialist Press 25/2/81).

Tied to this is a refusal to take on and criticise the "lefts" who are going to lead this new Labour government. This was later made explicit in the joint SO/SP, People's March Supplement: "Build a new leadership in the workers movement prepared to fight for these policies against the right-wing and the Communist Party!". The "socialist policies" referred to above, which included correct calls for direct action, are apparently not under threat from the "lefts" like Benn - but merely from Denis Healey and Gordon McLennan. Such a position actually serves to bolster illusions in the likes of Benn and prepares the way for defeats of the working class as a result of left reformist treachery.

Taken as a whole, together with the absence of the old WSL call for a revolutionary leadership and the absence of a call for Councils of Action as the base for this government, these positions represent a complete surrender to the positions of the ICL and SO.

In the joint Peoples March paper, the WSL dropped all pretence of opposing the formula on the workers government pioneered by Workers Action:

"All this will require the stepping up of the campaign for democracy in the Labour Party and the trade unions, so that the Labour movement can take

On the next two pages we reprint two articles from Workers Power on the politics and project of the WSL and Socialist Organiser. The first article was written in June 1981, at the time of the WSL/ICL fusion. In it we argue that the new organisation was created on an opportunist basis and was likely to continue on that course. As we make clear in the Open Letter, we think our predictions have been proved absolutely correct. The

The second article was written in March of this year. It shows the way in which John O'Maboney abandoned the revolutionary position on democracy in his series of articles "Marxism and Democracy". The fact that his positions, so extensively presented in Socialist Organiser were never subsequently challenged in the paper demonstrates the gulf that exists between revolutionary marxism and the principal writers on the staff of Socialist Organiser.

We appeal to all WSL members to read and discuss with us the politics of these two articles.

WHENEVER OSTENSIBLY TROTSKYIST organisations take up opportunist positions, it is normally done in the name of 'anti-sectarianism'. This is convenient camouflage. The Trotskyist movement has been dogged by splits. Any declaration of intent to fuse Trotskyist organisations can appear to be a break from this apparently 'sectarian' tradition. The Workers Socialist League, as we predicted in Workers Power 21, have made such a declaration. They have announced that they will be fusing with the International Communist League, whose supporters are grouped around the paper Socialist Organiser.

Workers Power does not underestimate the damage done to revolutionary communism by the existence of numerous small organisations claiming to be Trotskyist. We have declared ourselves to be in favour of regroupment. But, for us, regroupment can only last, can only be prevented from breaking up into further, potentially demoralising splits, if it is carried out on the basis of a revolutionary programme. Goodwill and non-aggression pacts are no substitute for the hammering out of the real political differences that do exist between the organisations that claim to be Trotskyist.

The proclaimed fusion of the ICL and WSL is not taking place on such a basis. The battle against sectarianism, with no specification of the political content of the sectarianism referred to, is the major point of agreement between the two tendencies. The WSL's soon-to-be wound up newspaper, Socialist Press, made this clear:

"both the WSL and the ICL have for some time committed themselves to a struggle against sectarian isolation from the mass movement, and set out to intervene in the struggle within the organised working class". (Socialist Press 14th May 1981.)

There are few organisations who would declare in favour of 'sectarian isolation' - but that does not mean that a basis for unity exists.

The WSL obviously recognise the shortcomings of their own position. In their report on the fusion they are unclear on whether the new organisation yet has a principled basis, or whether it in fact has to find one:

"The fusion is the most substantial attempt so far to find a principled basis to tackle the problem of the Trotskyist movement in Britain" (our emphasis).

If this is the case then it would be reasonable to expect some political accounting for the differences that have previously separated these organisations. Only last summer the WSL wrote a series of polemics against the ICL, which went so far as to accuse the latter of being "engaged in a process of political adaptation to the left reformist forces now engaging in the Labour Party: an adaptation which involves the junking of previously established political positions" (SP 6th August 1980).

But no such accounting has ever appeared in the WSL's press. What is apparent, however, is a shift in their own position on the Labour Party. A shift which has placed them on the same opportunist terrain as the ICL despite their apparently rigid, but entirely formal, declarations of adherence to Trotskyism.

The political and organisational liquidation of the ICL can easily be traced. Their supporters switched from the ICL first to becoming Workers Action supporters, then to the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV). Out of the SCLV Socialist Organiser supporters groups were born (which involved dropping Workers Action as a regular newspaper), and now there is to be a new Socialist Organiser Alliance, which will include Socialist Press supporters in the Labour Party.

This political equivalent to musical chairs has, at every stage, involved greater degrees of political adaptation to the left reformists inside the Labour Party. The SCLV, which included, and initially apologised for, Ernie Roberts, Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone, was a rotten propaganda bloc that never once acted to put its left supporters to the test of action. For example it covered for Ernie Roberts in 1978 when he went along with the ANL's refusal to direct their carnival to challenge the fascists who were marching on the same day.

only imply that the "lefts" somehow represent a qualitative alternative to the right-wing. It spreads illusions - it does not combat them.

The WSL's schema in 1974-1979 appeared very hard, accompanied as it was by fierce denunciations of Benn's refusal to challenge Callaghan for the leadership. But under a Labour government the schema was inoperable since the "left" always backed away from a confrontation with the right in order to preserve the Labour government.

The opportunist core of the prescription has emerged since October 1980. Why then? Firstly, the WSL and Socialist Press continued to desperately look for the working class upsurge against the Tories, long after it was clear that a mood of caution and retreat predominated. Revolutionaries recognise that new tactics are required for such a period. But Socialist Press continued to fiddle while Rome burned. Yet the smoke eventually got up their nose. Recognising that the working class was not straining at its leash in the industrial front, and since it must be moving left somewhere, the WSL found that movement in the Labour Party, in Tony Benn's campaign around democratic reforms. Or, as the editor of Socialist Press, John Lister put it: "Telling confirmation of the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist current within the British labour movement was offered by this year's Labour Party conference" (SP No 218 3/10/80).

Since the "left" were now fighting, without the onerous responsibility of keeping a Labour government in office, it is no longer a question of "making" them fight, but of "helping" them fight. Enter ICL stage right.

## A DEMORALISED ORGANISATION

The WSL have taken their time coming around to these positions. After all, Brighton in 1979 saw the beginnings of Benn's fight, and in 1980 the WSL still poured scorn on the ICL and Benn. But the WSL is now a demoralised organisation. T. Smith's warnings about "demoralisation of our comrades" have become a reality, in the face of a working class retreat that the WSL are not equipped to understand. The much-vaunted Cowley base is seriously weakened following two years of defeats in BL at the hands of the Tories. The WSL has not grown significantly. Added to this the WSL has been ravaged by two splits to the sectarian Spartacist League, and the leadership feels the possibility of another, on its right wing, by its Labour Party activists who have gazed enviously for years at the Socialist Organiser project.

The ritual proclamations of John Lister fool nobody: "The discussion has been marked throughout by an avoidance on both sides of any attempt to impose a "moratorium" on differences or "agree to disagree" formulae that have marred previous fusion bids and laid the basis for further splits" (SP No 246 14/5/81). Differences over Afghanistan, the ANL, work amongst women, and the EEC, at one time all symptomatic of differences in method, are now glossed over as "tactical", or simply conceded on.

The WSL leadership have already capitulated to the ICL on a number of points without a fight. Even more portentous they have "agreed to disagree" over "trifling" questions like the creation of degenerate workers states after the war, on which an analysis of and programme towards Stalinism depends. Without clarification on such questions, differences, like those over Afghanistan, will occur again.

An unprincipled fusion, psalms of praise for the Labour left, and the call for a "workers government" which will in fact be a "new" left/Benn-led Labour government, are all embraced by the WSL in their bid to avoid "sectarianism".

## PROGRAMMATIC CLARITY

The "new" WSL is being founded on an "anti-sectarian" basis. For both organisations this formula is short-hand for discounting all obstacles and differences between themselves and between them and "the movement of the working class that actually exists, and as it actually exists, here and now in Britain" (SO 30/8/80). These obstacles are not merely organisational. They include "ideological formulas" (ibid), presumably such as the revolutionary programme and party.

Against this, we would insist that the failure, hitherto, to build Trotskyist parties is not because the revolutionary programme is an obstacle to intervention in the class struggle, but because it has either been trampled on by centrists or turned into a lifeless fetish by sectarians.

The starting point for any regroupment of revolutionaries, therefore, is the question of programmatic clarity, as the basis for revolutionary intervention in the class struggle. Trotsky made clear the essential relationship of these two things:

"How many times have we met a smug centrist who reckons himself a "realist" merely because he sets out to swim without any ideological baggage whatever, and is tossed by every vagrant current. He is unable to understand that principles are not dead ballast but a lifeline for a revolutionary swimmer" (p154. Writings 1935-1936).

In short, the WSL leadership, tired and demoralised, are in the process of "junking Trotskyism" as they accuse the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of doing. They are displaying a lightminded contempt for their membership who they hope will not remember the polemics or the lessons they tried to teach the IMG about "spurious unity".

To those in the ranks of both organisations who are alarmed, we say:

Examine your past positions! Demand an honest accounting of your leadership! Do not let them take you along the road of political liquidation in silence! ■

on the capitalist state and impose a government accountable to the movement - a workers' government" Benn and Co become an indispensable bridge in the transition to a workers state. How different from the statement by the WSL-led Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC):

"It is on the construction of such a Trotskyist leadership and not on any ability of the reformists and Stalinists to transform themselves into a revolutionary force that the fate of the struggle for a workers government and the dictatorship of the proletariat must depend" (Socialist Press 207).

Further, the capitulation to Socialist Organiser does not stop at the question of the Labour Party. At the recent National Left Wing Youth Movement Conference, the WSL's youth wing, the Socialist Youth League (SYL), voted against a Workers Power call for a "revolutionary working class youth movement", which they themselves had hitherto called for. They also argued that the ANL, formerly denounced, correctly, as popular frontist, now represented a positive arena for anti-fascist work. On both of these points, they were conceding to the positions of Socialist Organiser, so as to hold together the new alliance.

We are not surprised at these shifts in position by the WSL leadership. Our paper has polemicalised against the weakness of the WSL's political method on a range of issues. In discussion with them last summer and autumn, we pointed out the instability of their positions, arguing that it was a consequence of their method. A method which failed to understand the interconnection of principles, strategy and tactics. Thus despite repeated proclamations of loyalty to the principles of Trotskyism, the WSL are now uncritically trudging along the opportunist path of political capitulation to left reformism. What lies at the root of this development?

## REACTIONARY CASTE

The WSL have always had a clear conception of the nature of the trade union bureaucracy as a betrayer of working class struggles. But the working class, upon which this reactionary caste sits, was presented by the WSL as virtually homogenous - always willing and able to struggle against a bosses offensive. The union bureaucrats, particularly Stalinists, were constantly working to hold back this struggle. All that was needed was a party, armed with Trotsky's 1938 Transitional Programme, to replace the union bureaucracy. While it is true that the bureaucracy will betray or try to betray every workers struggle, it is not true that workers are always struggling and are always defeated only by the action of the bureaucracy. Such a view is thoroughly undialectical. It underestimates the effect of the betrayals on the organisation and capacity to fight of the rank and file. It prevents the WSL from recognising defeats and periods of retreat in the class struggle.

In the April 1980 WSL conference perspectives, they did, for once, recognise the possibility of such set-backs: "Failure to understand that such a period (ie of retreat - WP) is one possibility, where the attacks of the employers and the government appear to be successful, will demoralise our comrades in the way it can also demoralise layers of militant workers". (SP 16/4/80). Yet in the Socialist Press review of British class struggle in 1980 by T. Smith (SP 12/12/80), we are presented with a scenario of undifferentiated betrayal and working class combativity. There is no understanding of the effect of the defeat of the steel strike (April), and TUC passivity (May 14th) on the rank and file. Factors which led to a serious retreat in the working class in the second half of 1980.

But if the analysis was wrong, the prescription was worse. A casual glance through SP during 1974-1979, the period of the last Labour government, will show that much time and energy was spent in exhorting (ie "make") the "lefts" to fight the right-wing leadership of Callaghan-Healey. We have always argued that this "Make the Lefts Fight" position was wrong. It is a sterile schema. It poses left social democracy in power (now graciously dubbed a "workers government") as an inevitable and necessary stage of the class struggle. There is a deeply embedded seed of opportunism in the slogan (which explains why the WSL are willing to concede on the question to the ICL).

It implies that the "lefts" do somehow represent a way forward for the working class. The real point is for revolutionaries to demand of any and all workers leaders that they fight for policies that represent workers interests, irrespective of the positions they occupy. Of course we recognise the possibility of a tactical compromise in which we would call on the working class to put the Labour lefts to the test of action, even to take governmental office. But this tactic does not form part of our programme - we do not raise the demand as a blanket demand always and under all conditions, as part of the struggle for power. To do so can

# CENTRISM AND DEMOCRACY

THE SHARP RIGHT turn in the Labour Party leadership reflects a serious slump in membership from 358,950 in 1980 to 303,953 in 1981.

The most optimistic interpretation Labour Weekly can put on the figures is a real loss of 21,500 or 6% over the year.

The long projected influx of aroused militants has not materialised. In fact the decline in the level of class struggle as measured in strike figures and union membership is reflected also in the exit from the Labour Party. Hence the renewed offensive of the Right and the disarray and retreat of the Left.

But this retreat is reflected not only in the official or 'legitimate left' but also in the ranks of the 'hard' or 'revolutionary' left. Socialist Organiser's chief ideologue John O'Mahoney, under pressure from the Right offensive, has behaved like a cuttle-fish - he has spilled gallons of ink hoping to beat a retreat in the murky waters of the debate over "Socialism and Democracy".

Having spent the last three years attempting to 'organise' Benn's socialist bandwagon, John O'Mahoney has adapted Trotskyism in much the same way as Kautsky once adapted Marxism.

His long-running series "Socialism and Democracy" should be reprinted as a pamphlet and thoroughly studied as a prime example of the inner collapse of the 'Trotskyism' of the 1970s.

O'Mahoney manages to discuss the question of Socialism and Democracy without once raising the central issue of the class character of the state. On the basis of private ownership of the great bulk of the means of production arises a machinery of state, a permanent unelected bureaucracy, judiciary, police force and army. The senior civil servants, judges, police chiefs, generals are all flesh of the flesh of the industrialists, bankers, landowners that constitute our ruling class. This is the bourgeoisie and parliament belongs to it.

Tony Benn is quite wrong when he claims the labour movement created democracy. In reply a Guardian writer once wittily quipped "that would be the Athenian Labour Party." Ancient democracy was a minority slave owners democracy. There was no democracy at all for the majority of the population. Bourgeois democracy is wage-slave exploiters' democracy. It came into being as a weapon against the feudal landowners and their King. With its property qualification and its exclusion of peers it was the 'democracy' of the gentleman farmers and the city merchants. Peasants, artisans, the poor were all excluded from this democracy.

From 1867 the function of Parliament began to change by a series of stages - 1867, 1888, 1918, 1928, 1947 - into an instrument for legitimizing and concealing the real power of the bourgeoisie. For the bourgeoisie, Parliament's function now is to convince the working class and lower middle class that they have endorsed the actions of the government which directs the state machinery.

On the basis of a five yearly vote, supposedly on the basis of a manifesto but more realistically on the basis of TV commercials, posters and the popular press, each individual citizen is supposed to have made a free choice. It is this formal equality in the right to vote and the 'omnipotence' of a parliamentary majority that makes parliament seem so tempting a vehicle for any kind of social change including the overthrow of capitalism.

But this formal aspect of democracy is completely hollow. As long as a government or a parliamentary majority keeps within the guidelines of the defence of capitalist property the machinery of state 'obeys' its instructions more or less. Should a parliamentary majority be elected that seriously attempted to attack capitalist property in its vitals, or even failed to act as the agent of the bosses in resisting an extra-parliamentary working class offensive, then - parliament or no parliament - the military bureaucratic machine would suddenly cease to be turned by its Parliamentary handle.

Of course matters rarely come this far. Capitalism has its means of preventing 'radical' solutions being endorsed by its democracy. Trotsky understood this apparatus of force and fraud very well: "The capitalist bourgeoisie calculates: while I have in my hands lands, factories, workshops, banks; while I possess newspapers, universities, schools; while - and this is the most important of all - I retain control of the army; the apparatus of democracy, however you reconstruct it, will remain obedient to my will. I subordinate to my interests spiritually the stupid, conservative, characterless middle class, just as it is subjected to me materially. I oppress and will oppress its imagination by the gigantic scale of my buildings, my transactions, my plans and my crimes. For moments when it is dissatisfied and murmurs, I have created scores of safety valves and lightning conductors.

At the right moment I will bring into existence opposition parties, which will disappear tomorrow, but which today accomplish their mission by affording the possibility of the lower middle class expressing their indignation without hurt therefrom for capitalism. I shall hold the masses of the people, under cover of compulsory general education, on the verge of complete

ignorance, giving them no opportunity of rising above the level which my experts in spiritual slavery consider safe. I will corrupt, deceive, and terrorise either the more privileged or the more backward of the proletariat itself. By means of these measures I shall not allow the vanguard of the working class to gain the ear of the majority of the working class, while the necessary weapons of mastery and terrorism remain in my hands." ("Terrorism and Communism")

In case anyone should think that democracy and dictatorship are incompatible opposites, they should muse upon the dictatorial methods imposed during the two World Wars by the governments 'defending democracy'. Suspension of elections and legal rights (habeas corpus etc), suspension of normal parliamentary supervision and rule by 'orders in council', etc., censorship, internment without trial, arrest and imprisonment of revolutionaries, pacifists etc.

In fact bourgeois democracy is always in the last analysis, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie - ie the forcible, arbitrary defence of private property against the working class or against rival capitalist states.

Just so with a workers state, with a society attempting to create socialism. It too will be a dictatorship and a democracy. A dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, suppressing its every move of resistance, as it has always and everywhere bloodily suppressed the working class revolts. A workers democracy, wider, more responsive, freer than any parliamentary system.

Within the periods of capitalism's growth and relative stability, within successful world dominant countries like Great Britain and the United States, the bourgeoisie could maintain its rule behind the facade of 'parliamentary democracy'. It paid a price in secondary concessions to the working class in terms of wages and social welfare.

Parliament, with its associated paraphernalia of committees, commissions, boards and agencies, became a refined mechanism of corruption. Here the workers' leaders 'parleyed' with the representatives of the bosses. They put forward the partial or immediate interests of the workers with more or less sincerity and vigour.

The bosses, of course, did not willingly concede crumbs from their table of their profits. Working class pressure and struggle were the motor force behind each concession. Reforms, as Rosa Luxemburg astutely observed, are a by-product of revolution. The periods of considerable social reform, 1906-11, 1918-20, 1945-48 were, on a European scale, periods of revolution and mass struggle when the revolutionary sword of Damocles hung over capitalism's head. Such reforms, as those enacted by Labour in 1974-75, were carried not on Labour's slender majority in the House of Commons but on the shoulders of the miners and dockers who caught Heath and the bosses totally unprepared in 1972 and 1974.

Revolutionary Marxists can affirm on the basis of the last sixty years that not a single Labour government has made any attempt to settle accounts with capitalism. The famed parliamentary or democratic road to Socialism has proved its bankruptcy both as a road to Socialism and as a means of permanently and progressively ameliorating the worst features of capitalism.

In his Socialist Organiser articles, the first three of which we discussed in our last issue, O'Mahoney seeks to bowdlerise Trotskyism and, consequently, the programme of Marx and Lenin, in a right-centrist manner. Firstly he wants to express the revolutionary programme as an 'extension' of existing parliamentary democracy. Why? He wants to castigate Foot and company for worshipping and fetishising existing repulsive parliamentary democracy, 'the backside of bourgeois democracy' whereas he wants to form a political bloc with Benn on the basis of his programme of extending democracy (i.e. its, "shining face"). "Thus Marxists have much in common (How much? What? - WP) with people in the Labour Movement whose best notion of democracy is parliamentary democracy. We can agree to fight to rejuvenate the existing system, we could agree to defend it with guns against, for example, a military coup." (SO 4.2.82.)

O'Mahoney explains that there have been two, "distinct but interwoven" attitudes to parliamentary democracy in the Labour Movement. One, "was and is ardent championing of parliamentary democracy and democratic liberties" of, "reshaping the existing parliamentary system". The other is, "the drive to create new, different, specifically working class organs of democracy - either by converting the old forms for the purpose, or by establishing completely new ones". An intermediate position, O'Mahoney claims, was to, "graft on" to parliament, "features of the workers' council system." Our zealous epigone then informs us, "In 1934, Trotsky suggested a united front with reformist workers in France for a similar programme."

To bolster this claim a sizeable quotation from Trotsky's Action Programme for France is included as a forepiece to the concluding article of the series. The quotation, we are told, expresses the attitude of Marxists to, "deepen, develop and preserve democracy".

First of all the Marxist attitude to bourgeois democracy could never be expressed in a necessarily episodic and tactical bloc. Moreover, the creation of a tactical bloc (united front) with reformist workers, "democratic socialists" and their leaders, in Trotsky's specific action programme is predicated on the fact that the ruling class is set upon the, "suppression of all reforms! Suppression of the democratic regime" via Fascism.

## FALSIFYING TROTSKY'S ACTION PROGRAMME

The O'Mahoney article grossly distorts this quotation by obscuring the political context of the united front to defend democracy - eliding the defence against Fascist and Bonapartist attack with a general commitment to, "deepen, develop and preserve" 'democracy' 'in general'. Marxists certainly defend all democratic rights and the democratic constitutional forms themselves against fascist or Bonapartist assault. But this implies no general or permanent programme of democratic development.

The Transitional Programme itself made this clear, "Of course, this does not mean that the Fourth International rejects democratic slogans as a means of mobilising the masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role. But the formulas of democracy (freedom of the press, right to unionise etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie's agents (Spain!!)".

Perhaps this is in contrast to the Action Programme of 1934? Not a bit. The two sections preceding the one quoted by O'Mahoney are entitled, "Down with the Bourgeois 'Authoritative' State! For Workers' and Peasants' Power!" and "The Struggle for the Workers' and Peasants' Commune!". Perhaps these are some sort of 'deepening' of parliamentary democracy? Not at all. The essence of the former is that, "the task is to replace the capitalist state ... by the workers' and peasants' proletarian state." The conclusion of the latter is that this commune will be erected on the basis of "organs of power of the workers and peasants".

## DOCTORING THE QUOTES

In fact O'Mahoney has been obliged to trim his quote. The sentence preceding it, the opening sentence of the whole section, "For a Single Assembly!", declares, "We are, thus, firm partisans of a Workers' and Peasants' State which will take the power from the exploiters. To win the majority of our working class allies to this programme is our primary aim." This alone makes it clear that no, "grafting on" of soviets to deepen bourgeois democracy is envisaged. Certainly it is not envisaged that the "democratic socialists" will, or can, carry through such a misbegotten programme.

O'Mahoney helps obscure this fact by a doctoring of the quotation. Between the sixth and seventh paragraphs of the Socialist Organiser version is omitted a paragraph which says: "If during the course of the implacable struggle against the enemy, the party of 'democratic' socialism (SFIO), from which we are separated by irreconcilable differences in doctrine and method, were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be ready to defend an SFIO government against the bourgeoisie."

Furthermore Trotsky called on reformist workers to draw inspiration for the defence of democracy not from the Third Republic but from the Convention of 1793. This was not a call to deepen and extend constitutional provisions but to defend vigorously and ruthlessly 'the people' against reactionary attack.

## JACOBINISM AND PARLIAMENTARIANISM

What were the methods of 1793? The 'levee en masse' is the arming of the sans culottes and the peasants for the defence of the revolution, the institution of the Committee of Public Safety and the Terror against the agents of feudal reaction (including those who claimed to be revolutionaries). The methods of 1793 included the suspension of the constitution! In short they add up to what is known to history as the Jacobin dictatorship. What were the methods of the Third Republic? Peaceful Parliamentarianism, endless speeches in parliament. Coalitions with the liberal bourgeois parties and the socialists in the name of blocking reaction. Trotsky is saying to the reformist workers threatened by Fascist dictatorship - by all means 'defend democracy' but you will need revolutionary means to do so.

If you wish to take governmental power you will have to strike at bourgeois counter-revolution as ruthlessly as the Jacobins did, in order to survive. In every step towards doing this you will have our support. Trotsky does not hide that such a situation would pose both the need for, and the possibility of, transforming such a government into the proletarian dictatorship. It is clear from this that the methods of Tony Benn are of the "Third Republic". It is clear too that John O'Mahoney's are nearer Benn's than Robespierre's or Trotsky's.

For Trotsky then there is not programmatic identity with the French reformist party, only a proposal for united front with it against a fascist attack. O'Mahoney is motivated by completely opposed purposes. He has no need to offer the LP a united front to defend it against fascist attack. He offers to refine the Marxist programme of the proletarian dictatorship (democracy for the workers via soviets; repression of the counter-revolutionary parties, press, generals, fascist bands) into Benn's programme of developing democracy. Certainly O'Mahoney thinks that Benn wants to develop it 'very inadequately' he thinks workers' democracy is the ultimate development or 'grafting on'. But lest this put him on the wrong side of an irreconcilable difference of doctrine and method, he makes it clear that he advocates the strictest constitutionality by arguing with 'those on the Right of the Labour Movement who insist (I think rightly) that a socialist government should be willing to accept its own dismissal by a majority of the electorate (in Britain anyway, that would be a clear working class majority)'

The struggle between classes for power is thus transformed into the small change of electioneering. A 'socialist government', that is a government carrying through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is envisaged as bowing gracefully out on a majority vote in parliamentary elections. This ludicrous scenario is the true and deserved outcome of O'Mahoney's servile accommodation to Bennery. He, or more importantly his readers, no longer know the difference between reform and revolution, between parliamentary and soviet power; and between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is no wonder that in his eagerness to embrace 'democratic socialism' he can't find words bad enough to distance himself from Stalinism. We are told that the Stalinist bureaucrats have "all the worst features of historic ruling classes" with none of their 'historic virtues' and that the 'only connection' that they have with socialism is that of 'murdered to victim'. O'Mahoney claims that Trotskyists call the workers' revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy 'political' for technical reasons! In the face of Foot's deeply chauvinist attacks on the Soviet Union, the 'Trotskyist' O'Mahoney tries to hide behind phrases which hide any estimate of the class nature of the Soviet state and the duty of revolutionaries to unconditionally defend it against attack by imperialism.

Many supporters of Socialist Organiser must be embarrassed at O'Mahoney's excursion into the realm of democracy. Some doubtless object on the good principle that "one does not say such things; one does them". Socialist Organiser's practice of uncritical Bennery is long established. But a disjunction between theory and practice is a permanent danger and it may be seized on by the witch-hunters looking for 'juicy' quotes. Sooner or later theory had to be lowered to the level of practice. We doubt however that lowering the banner of Trotskyism will ward off the enemy. For SO to strike its colours, along with all the other 'left' forces in the party will in fact encourage the Right to press home the attack. It will not strengthen their bloc with Benn. He is already tottering under the impact of the secret treaty of Bishop's Stortford.

In the face of the 'democratic' witch-hunters, the principled position of revolutionaries including the supporters and sympathisers of Workers Power within the Labour Party must be as follows: We criticise sincere reformist because they desire an end to capitalism, yet will not take the only means available to achieve it. Instead they wish to tie the working class to the parliamentary form of the bourgeoisie's rule. But the choice arises in every serious struggle for socialism between parliamentary forms or workers' rule, between workers' democracy or bourgeois dictatorship.

The Paris Commune stood against the Versailles National Assembly; the Congress of Soviets against the Constituent Assembly; the Berlin workers against the Weimar Assembly. Nor do such confrontations lie in the past. In 1973 in Chile and in 1975 in Portugal parliament or a constitutional assembly became a rallying point for all those forces bent on bourgeois dictatorship over the working class. The 'peaceful' continuity of British parliamentarianism (if one ignores the anti-union acts and a myriad of vicious anti-working class measures) may have lulled many workers into belief that parliament and democracy are weapons in our arsenal. It is the duty of Marxists to warn them sharply of the fatal error of this assumption.