







# David Mercer speaks to Workers Press

## 'At every point of confrontation—Workers Press has been there'

A THEME of playwright David Mercer's work is the impact of Stalinism on artists and intellectuals and here he discusses with Stephen Johns what kind of situation the intelligentsia in E Europe face after the suppression of the 1968 Czechoslovakian uprising and the December 1970 workers' revolt in Poland. He also gives his views of the situation in Ulster and the future of the Workers Press—which he has consistently supported since it was launched over two years ago.

China for the repression of rebellion at home. The English government could be testing out methods in N Ireland by which it could cope with critical conflict here.

Also there is the formation of virtual private armies and vigilantes, or if not actual formation, talk of forming them. Another sinister phenomenon, though it wears the mask of the public good, is the existence of private armies concerned with guarding private property.

One can't help wondering what role they would play in a polarized situation, where the country was in turmoil and one had to move either to the right or the left. It seems to me that private armies have always fought for the status quo.

republic being created. This is what one wants to see.

Despite these anxieties about the consequences of the Indian war, the war seems to me to be a just war. There is something sickening about the American anger at India in the context of their own colonial history in Latin America, in Korea and so on.

**SJ: What do you think about the Chinese bureaucracy which consistently supported Yahya Khan?**

**DM: Isn't it the story of weaker, more backward nations always being caught as pawns between powers, which, whatever their alleged ideology, have in fact got traditional realpolitik interests and mutual fears and aggressions.**

**SJ: You describe Russia, China and America as great powers interested in realpolitik. There is a difference in origin between America, which is an imperialist power and Russia and China, which have experienced successful revolutions.**

**DM: It would seem to me to require a socialist revolution in one or more of the advanced industrial countries, placed firmly in an analysis of the international situation, before the contradictions of Chinese and Soviet historical development can lead towards a further revolution within their own countries against their different types of bureaucracies.**

**The kind of terminology Russia and China use is very confusing. Both call each other Trotskyists, whereas neither country has a principled party with a Trotskyist-oriented policy and theory and practice.**

**SJ: How do you think the struggle for national determination in Bangladesh should proceed? What are the dangers involved for the workers and peasants?**

**DM: Well I think the national liberation movement, which is socialist oriented, needs to gain control of the situation. Indeed if India just leaves after clearing out the elements of the W Pakistan regime, leaving a flimsy social-democratic structure based on the Awami League, there may have to be further struggle in which the socialists fight against those who govern.**

**I think that it is a question of dialectical forces. That every situation creates a new one, the end of one struggle may create a situation in which a new struggle must occur.**

**SJ: On a number of occasions you have spoken about the situation in E Europe and countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary which you have visited. What is the position of intellectuals and writers in these countries now? What do they face?**

**DM: I have the impression that they are for the time being holed up, because certainly in Czechoslovakia and Poland and to a lesser extent in Hungary the contradictions of their systems, both in ideological and economic terms, are beginning to throw up changes and developments which are going to be transforming to them.**

**In a way it's a kind of mirror image of what is going on in the W, the clash of the interests in the W of capitalism and the productive forces and the relations between the two. This is what**



is going to carry forward the struggle, and characterize the struggle as a confrontation between those who work and labour and those who own the profit.

**I think a very similar thing is happening and obviously was happening in 1968 in Czechoslovakia and which we know was very firmly put down.**

**Events in Poland indicate the overwhelming conflict is once more between the industrial forces and the ruling forces of the country.**

**In the W I think that writers and intellectuals either become pessimistic, aloof or disengaged, or they commit to the struggle. In the Soviet Union, E and central Europe the writers and the intellectuals perhaps are more powerless in this kind of his-**

personal fear of imprisonment and torture, but their historical role.

**SJ: Workers Press was launched in September 1969 and you have been a consistent supporter of the paper over these two years. Shortly it will be enlarged and improved. As a man with considerable experience in the field of communications have you any suggestions?**

**DM: I think on almost every occasion the Workers Press has consistently focused attention of national and international events. It has taken a principled stand on the situation being analysed**

awareness are moving them along those lines.

**One thing that still gives me some anxiety—I don't know if this is the kind of bourgeois remnants in me or not—is the tendency to attack personalities. I would rather see a blistering attack on the position of a man or woman or his organization than the actual person themselves. I'm always discomforted by personal attacks and I think the paper tends to do this.**

**SJ: How do you feel the paper should broaden its appeal to the working class?**

**DM: Well I think I cannot improve on what the paper is actually doing. As far as I understand, the policy of the paper is**

**I don't think you can separate the Ulster crisis from the general economic crisis.**

**SJ: How do you see the situation in Ulster developing now?**

**DM: Here one has to concede to a number of possibilities. There is the possibility of a dirty deal between Westminster, Paisley and Lynch on the basis of some kind of unification formula. As always they will try to find a formula which has a liberal appearance on the surface but underneath will defend the capitalist and land-owning interests of Ulster.**

**I don't think you can separate the Ulster crisis from the general economic crisis. The whole thing has been conveniently obscured by the religious divisions in Ireland, but there is no doubt that it is basically an economic problem.**

**British troops acting against the people in N Ireland are, as it were, symbolically acting against their comrades in England.**

**I think the immediate withdrawal of British troops would be the first principled move. This scares people because they say you will get immediate civil war. In fact it would be a war arising out of the economic predicament of the people of N Ireland.**

**Who can but condemn the random acts of violence carried out by various groups? There are the Provisionals, and the Official IRA. But I believe there is a strong presence of Protestant right-wing extremists. They are able to operate in a terroristic way and the IRA and the Provisionals carry the can for it.**

**I would say that if, without**

**British troops, there had to be a civil war, then I think the confrontation would take its basic character from the economic conditions of both N and S of Ireland. It might look like a civil war between religious factions, but its real character would be social and economic.**

**On one particular question, the logic of the Ulster situation is unmistakable. If the government says we are taking this 'regrettable' and necessary action in N Ireland because it is part of the United Kingdom, then, by this logic, troops and what amount to concentration camps are being used against the United Kingdom.**

**Therefore the introduction of internment, the camps and the undoubted use of torture—despite the cynicism of the Compton report, which is utter semantic hogwash—confirms the fact that the British are prepared to take these measures not merely near home, but at home.**

**SJ: You talked of the religious divisions between the workers in the N. Can you see a solution for the Irish working class, which would involve its unification, separate from the British working class?**

**DM: I think the fate of our society in England and that of Ireland is intimately connected in terms of the class struggle. If the**

**struggle is fought and won here, part of that victory must be on the basis of a united socialist Ireland. Otherwise the awful and recurring situation in Ireland could continue even without the presence of the British, simply because of the relationship between the Protestant and Catholic elements.**

**SJ: Do you see the use of troops in Ireland as a threat to the working class and trade union movement in Britain?**

**DM: It is a clear indication of how far the government is prepared to go, isn't it? As I said—in their own view—they are using the army in a part of England.**

**Bangla Desh: There may have to be further struggle in which socialists fight against those who govern.**

**The government is not wagging its finger at workers here in so many words—but that's what it amounts to.**

**SJ: I think certain Tory MPs and officers have actually stated that the methods developed in Ulster might have to be deployed in places like Clydeside, for example.**

**DM: Yes, just as the Americans developed all kinds of repressive techniques in their wars in Indo-**

**have been resolved without the involvement of super powers. I don't think it could have been resolved in any other way than by India taking this war into E Pakistan; certainly the vicious Khan regime there had to be eliminated.**

**One is glad that India has belatedly recognized Bangla Desh. But my only anxiety is that India will leave a presence there which is more or less the centre right of the Awami League, an element which would be committed to a regime more or less on the lines of the Indian rulers, whereas I think there exists in Bangla Desh real possibilities of a socialist**



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