

# Workers News



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## FIGHT LABOUR'S THOUGHT POLICE

THE FALL-OUT from the Walton by-election in July has not been long in descending on opponents of Kinnock and the right-wing Labour leadership. Labour's thought police have been hard at work taking reports and examining hundreds of photographs of canvassers for 'Real Labour' candidate Lesley Mahmood – the *Militant* supporter who polled 2,613 votes against right-wing nominee Peter Kilfoyle.

To date, 147 activists have been suspended, charged with supporting Mahmood's campaign. With the Labour right wing on the rampage against any opposition up and down the country, rank-and-file members and trade unionists must now, as never before, oppose the witch-hunt. The fight against bans, proscriptions, suspensions and expulsions is an integral part of the struggle against the right wing. No socialist who abstains from this fight can retain a shred of principle.

The gathering offensive conducted from Walworth Road and spearheaded by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee – a 'tendency' if ever there was one, with its own internal discipline and secretive operation – is designed to clear the decks in advance of a general election. The logic, according to ex-Tribunite Kinnock and his team of faceless fixers like Peter Mandelson, runs as follows: In order to win a general election it is necessary to transform the Labour Party along the lines of the most right-wing European social democratic parties. And in order to do that, all left-wing opposition must be stamped out or rendered harmless, and the link with the trade unions further downgraded.

Such a shift would, they claim, attract Liberal Democrat and wet Tory voters, by above all presenting Labour as a 'non-class' party firmly committed to the 'national interest', and capable of putting its own house in order. On the

policy front this has meant ditching nationalisation, unilateralism and any opposition to Tory anti-union law; complying with rate-capping and the poll tax, implementing cuts and even carrying out privatisation in local government.

The only cuts the Labour leaders have been vigorously opposing are the defence cuts proposed by the Tories. Kinnock's front bench team are now presenting themselves as the true friends of the City of London, the sternest critics of prison security lapses, the protectors of the small investor and the keenest pro-European. With a set of policies which look like an SDP shopping list from a few years ago, it's small wonder the right wing is putting the boot in – not to the Tories, but to its own rank and file.

The witch-finders have been escalating their activities throughout the past two years. In 1989, Kate Hoey was imposed as candidate in the Vauxhall by-election. In July 1990, *Socialist Organiser* was effectively proscribed. Fired up by these successes, Kinnock's hanging judges have spread the net far and wide: Brighton Labour Party – suspended in September 1990 over opposition to the poll tax; Wirral – under investigation and the deputy leader of the Labour group on the council expelled; Birkenhead – seven members expelled; Wallasey – under investigation; Liverpool – 29 councillors suspended; Bristol – seven councillors suspended; Nottingham East – suspended; Lambeth – 13 councillors and two members suspended; Sheffield Central – under investigation; Manchester – three councillors under investigation; St Helens – 19 members under investigation.

To this list have been added the 147 charged following the Walton by-election, and MPs Dave Nellist and Terry Fields (currently in jail for defying the poll tax). Thought-crime wasn't brought in by the Labour leadership in time for

By Richard Price  
and  
Graham Fenwick

1984, but it is top of the agenda in 1991.

In capitalist society, as the saying goes, 'There's one law for the rich and one for the poor'. In the Labour Party, increasingly, one law operates for the right wing and another for the left. Lesley Mahmood's supporters are being tried for the mortal sin of backing her against an official Labour candidate. But when Birkenhead MP Frank Field publicly denounced the Labour candidate in the neighbouring Wallasey seat in the 1987 general election, the NEC did nothing. And when Field was de-selected by his local party and threatened to stand as an independent, headquarters

arranged a re-run, packed the selection meeting and bent the rules to ensure the maverick right-winger held onto his seat.

Similarly, other right-wingers like Frank Chapple, who called for an SDP vote, and the 'Gang of Four', when they floated the idea of a breakaway party, were left undisturbed.

As for the allegations of membership of 'secret' groups, the right wing have their own caucuses, their own agenda irrespective of what the party conference decides, and, what's more, they are certainly against Clause 4 of the constitution.

Despite the right wing's professed outrage at secretive factions, one highly secret society has held a traditional attraction – the Freemasons. Post-war prime minister Clement Attlee and Edward Short, deputy prime minister in the 1970s, together with many

councillors, have been masons, rubbing shoulders with bishops, judges, police chiefs and members of the royal family, none of them known for their support for the labour movement.

The real crime of the hundreds of activists now targeted is their opposition to the party's plunge to the right, whether over the poll tax, local government cuts or the Gulf war. Such a purge does nothing to improve Labour's electoral chances. On the contrary, it paralyses entire constituency and district parties in the run-up to a general election. The sole rationale is to secure victory for Kinnock's brand of watered-down Thatcherism, and to prove to the bankers that Labour can be trusted in government.

This disgusting spectacle is only rivalled by the queue of 'soft left' and ex-left MPs like Clare Short, David Blunkett

and Tony Banks speaking up for McCarthyism.

Prominent left-wingers like Benn and Skinner who have opposed the witch-hunt have done so more from the standpoint of 'individual conscience' than that of developing a vigorous campaign against the right wing.

If the right wing is to be defeated, a united struggle by all those opposed to the purge must be mounted. The failure of *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* to clearly and unequivocally defend each other's supporters weakens such a fight. Indeed, *Socialist Organiser* proposes a loyalty oath as a condition of *Militant* supporters remaining within the Labour Party.

To Labour Party members and trade unionists, we say: An injury to one is an injury to all! Unite the ranks to defend democratic rights! No to the witch-hunt!

## Death throes of Stalinism

### STATEMENT BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

THE SUCCESS of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin and the 'pro-democracy' forces in resisting the coup by hardline Stalinist bureaucrats has given an enormous impetus to the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. It has hastened the break-up of the USSR into its national components and, under the guise of rooting out Stalinist influence, has unleashed a campaign of 'democratic' terror against communism. What remains of the world's first workers' state is on the verge of being swept away.

The coup by the so-called State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR, a group of Gorbachev appointees headed by Vice President Gennady Yanayev, was launched under the banner of the defence of the motherland from 'extremist forces', the re-assertion of central authority and a return to law and order. It was staged on behalf of a section of the bureaucracy who saw the break-up of the Union and the growth of non-party organisations as a mortal threat to their political domination. Although not opposed to the introduction of market reforms, they wanted to subordinate these to the retention of the bureaucratic 'command economy' on which their own

parasitic existence depended.

Mikhail Gorbachev had demonstrably failed in his mission to chart a middle course by balancing between the conservative elements in the bureaucracy, who were blocking the reform programme and were opposed to any break-up of the Soviet state, and the Yeltsinite restorationists with their rabid nationalist programme. Within the Communist Party, he had managed to hold pro-reform and hardline Stalinists in an uneasy alliance behind perestroika. For the reformers it offered the prospect of capitalist restoration at a measured pace; for the hardliners a possible way out of the economic catastrophe that would allow them to keep their grip on power. But as the economic crisis went from bad to worse, as the centrifugal nationalist tendencies escalated and the Yeltsinites grew in strength, the former supporters of perestroika either defected towards the Yeltsin camp or looked to the return of stronger control by the centre. As a result of this political polarisation, Gorbachev's mediating role became redundant.

The timing of the coup was determined by three main factors: the growing ability of the Yeltsinites over the past few months to dismantle the Stalinist apparatus, typified by



Yeltsin lays down the law in the Russian parliament

the decree by the Russian Parliament banning Communist Party cells from operating in the workplace; the failure of Gorbachev to return from the London G7 summit in July with any practical economic assistance; and the new Union Treaty, due to be signed on August 20, which would have formalised the ceding of control over their internal affairs to the republics.

But this was a coup with nowhere to go. The crisis in the Soviet economy is so severe that the compromise between the market and state

'planning' proposed by the coup leadership was plainly not viable. Nor was a return to classic Stalinist methods of KGB terror a going proposition. The inability of the State Committee to act with the required ruthlessness, itself largely a product of fissures within the repressive apparatus, explains the feeble execution and subsequent failure of the attempted putsch. Even the most conservative elements in the bureaucracy, it was clear, no longer had any

Turn to page 2

### Workers News PUBLIC FORUM

#### SOUTH AFRICA

Negotiated settlement or socialist revolution?

THURSDAY OCTOBER 3, 7.30pm

Conway Hall (Small Hall),

Red Lion Square, London WC1

Admission £1

RELEASE ALL POLL TAX PRISONERS!

## EDITORIAL

## Release Tottenham Three

THE SOLE piece of 'evidence' used to convict Winston Silcott for the murder of PC Blakelock during the uprising on the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham in 1985 was an unsigned seven-page 'confession' taken by police officers after they had denied the accused access to a lawyer. Silcott was jailed for life with a recommendation that he serve at least 30 years.

However, a forensic test - electro-static document analysis - which finally led to the release of the Birmingham Six, carried out six times at the Metropolitan Police laboratory by a scientist on behalf of Silcott's supporters, and with police witnesses present, demonstrated each time that the statement had been added to after the interview and that remarks made by Silcott concerning his innocence had been erased.

One of the officers who took the statement, Detective Chief Superintendent Graham Melvin, has since been found guilty by a Police Complaints Authority tribunal of four offences against youths arrested during the investigation in 1985.

The case of Engin Raghip, also convicted of the Blakelock murder, has been referred to the Court of Appeal for November, following an admission last year by the psychiatrist who told the jury that Raghip had average intelligence that he now believed that he had 'a significant degree of mental incapacity, suggestibility and compliance' at the time of his 'confession'. New evidence concerning the 'confession' of another of the Tottenham Three, Mark Braithwaite, was sent to the Home Office in December 1990, but with no response so far.

With the new evidence, and in the light of the recent quashing of other convictions obtained by the police through false confessions and manufactured evidence, Silcott, his solicitor and the Tottenham Three Families Campaign naturally assumed that Home Secretary Kenneth Baker would immediately refer the case to the Court of Appeal. Instead, Baker announced on the Jimmy Young radio show that he was ordering a Metropolitan Police investigation into the claims that Silcott's statement had been altered.

Winston Silcott summed up his frustration in a letter to *The Independent* on August 5, pointing out that the 'stalling tactic from Mr Baker is in reality a government cover-up'. The day before Silcott's letter was published it was revealed that the final and most important page of the statement had suddenly been 'lost' from the files where it was supposedly being kept under police guard.

The frame-up of the Tottenham Three was one way in which the Tory government tried to suppress the anger that erupted among working class, especially black, youth who were bearing the brunt of policies designed to fatten the rich at the further expense of the poor. By cracking down hard, the Tories hoped to intimidate young workers into accepting unemployment, poverty wages, cheap-labour 'training' schemes, poor education and bad housing.

Workers and youth must, therefore, not only demand the immediate release of the Tottenham Three; they must take advantage of the cracks in the Tory facade to drive a wedge into their entire economic and social policy; they must step up the fight against the Tories on all fronts.

## ... and Judith Ward

THE CASE of Judith Ward is finally under review by Home Secretary Kenneth Baker. Like the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, the Maguire Seven and the Winchester Three, she is a victim of a monstrous frame-up by the British state, concerned at all costs to show 'results' in its struggle against the IRA. A series of contradictory and patently false confessions, and a set of forensic tests which have been totally discredited in other cases, have kept her behind bars for 17 years.

The state knows that Judith Ward is innocent of the M62 coach bombing, for which she received 12 life sentences plus 30 years in 1974. Indeed it has known a very long time. If moves have finally begun to review her case, it is only because, after the humiliating reversals in other cases of framed prisoners, Judith Ward has become something of an embarrassment to a government anxious to limit further damage to the image of its legal system.

In common with other framed prisoners, Judith Ward was an implausible suspect - except in her case more so. She had joined the Women's Royal Army Corps in early 1971, deserted after ten months, and during a period of instability and fits of depression, formed a romantic attachment to Irish nationalism.

Hitching around the north of Ireland, she was frequently stopped, whereupon she would volunteer 'confessions' to incidents the police and army knew she had nothing to do with. In Britain, the pattern of self-incrimination continued. Although it appears she took part in some republican protests in London, it is inconceivable that such a person, prone to fantasy and highly suggestible, could possibly have been entrusted to carry out the M62 bombing.

When she was picked up in Liverpool for vagrancy, ten days after the event, Ward was denied access to a solicitor. After forensic tests carried out by the infamous Dr Frank Skuse - the man whose 'evidence' was largely responsible for the conviction of the Birmingham Six - she made two inconsistent confessions to the M62 bombing, as well as claiming fantastically to have carried out other missions for both the Provisional IRA and the Official IRA. She also claimed to have been married to an IRA leader shot dead by British soldiers in 1973. This was demonstrably false.

But with the British press screaming for revenge, such details did not concern the police or the court. The trial was conducted against the background of the Guildford bombings, and the result was a foregone conclusion - even though the IRA has consistently refused to claim her as a republican prisoner.

Workers in both Britain and Ireland must demand the immediate release of Judith Ward. But they must also remember that such 'miscarriages of justice' are not accidents; they are part and parcel of the British occupation of the north of Ireland and will only cease when all British troops have been withdrawn and the right of Irish self-determination has been won.

# How to combat unemployment

By David Lewis

THE REPORT that 73 per cent of the working population fear that they will lose their jobs is a spur to develop an effective movement to combat unemployment. At the official figure of 67,800, the biggest rise in jobless ever recorded for the month of July underlines the need for such a movement and belies Tory claims that 'the worst of the recession is over'. The actual number is higher, as have been all the monthly figures since 1982, when the Tories started eliminating whole categories of unemployed from the official statistics.

The prerequisite for a militant unemployed workers' movement is a programme of action, both to defend those who are without a job and to spearhead the offensive against those who make them jobless - the capitalist class.

At the core of such a programme is the need to maximise the unity of all workers - both employed and unemployed. One of the aims

must therefore be to prevent the employers using the unemployed against those in work. In the 1920s, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement succeeded in frustrating the bosses' plans to use the jobless as strikebreakers. As well as aiding trade unionists in struggle, such a policy will encourage those in work, and those in unions in particular, to see the jobless as their comrades and not as their potential enemies or rivals for their jobs. On this basis, further planks in the action programme can be laid.

The prevention of further job losses is the first plank, coupled with the defence of living standards. This requires the demand for a sliding scale of wages at the very least to keep pay in line with inflation. As work gets short, a sliding scale of hours with no loss of pay is necessary so that all keep a job. A fight for the related demand of a national guaranteed minimum wage, sufficient to give workers and their families a basic decent standard of living is long overdue.

Further ties between the employed and the unemployed



How the Tories fiddle the figures: unemployment over the last year - the official figures and those of the Unemployment Unit

will be made by opening the unions to the unemployed, on a new basis. Those unions which already offer the unemployed membership generally place them in special branches which rarely meet and effectively serve to isolate them from the rest of the members. Unemployed members are frequently barred from office in the union. These practices must be stopped. Instead there must be full membership rights for all trade unionists who lose their jobs, and all those who

hope to work in the field covered by a particular union.

But many of the unemployed have never been in a union and have no set preference for what kind of work they want to do. This is true particularly of school leavers and other young workers. An organisation of the unemployed is necessary above all for them. A national unemployed workers' organisation would place demands on the trade union leaders to come to the aid of the jobless, to fight sackings and redundancies instead of making them more palatable and, above all, to demand a job for every worker, with proper training under union control. The local unemployed workers' organisations would provide advice and assistance to those out of work and help to co-ordinate the work of the national body.

There is no time to lose. The fall in manufacturing investment of 28 per cent in the past year means that unemployment will continue to rise to over three million in official figures, which means more than four million in reality. The basis for action must be laid now.

## Death throes of Stalinism

From page 1

real confidence in their own political future.

Yeltsin's victory was a result not of his much-vaunted 'courage', to which not only the bourgeois media but also *Socialist Worker* paid fulsome tribute, but of his total commitment to the destruction of the old system. As the most prominent representative of that layer of ex-CPSU bureaucrats who recognise that Stalinism no longer has anything to offer them, Yeltsin is intent on carrying through the process of market reforms to its logical conclusion - full-scale capitalist restoration. He and his supporters understand that only popularly-elected, anti-Stalinist governments would have the political authority to impose the necessary economic sacrifices on the masses. Hence the Yeltsinites' readiness to encourage the devolution of power to the nationalist leaderships in the republics, and the ferocity of their campaign to smash up the crisis-torn Communist Party.

Despite Gorbachev's return to 'power', he is now a prisoner of the Yeltsin restorationists, to whom he has been forced to grovel in order to retain his position as president. His public humiliation by Yeltsin in the Russian parliament on his return to Moscow, his subsequent resignation from the Communist Party and his effective acceptance of the radicals' economic programme - all this demonstrates that Gorbachev has been reduced to a mere figurehead. If he is kept on, it will be to take advantage of his good standing with the imperialists, who are now reviewing their decision

to restrict investment and credits, and who will continue to see him as a stabilising factor in the USSR's transition to capitalism.

And what of 'the people', in whose name Yeltsin claims to speak? Despite being talked up by bourgeois political commentators, mass mobilisation against the coup remained at a relatively low level. Even judging by capitalist press reports, it is evident that the forces who rallied to defend the Russian parliament consisted largely of pro-glasnost sections of the middle class, with a sprinkling of distinctly lumpen elements. Demonstrations in the Soviet Union's two major cities, Moscow and Leningrad, numbered no more than 200,000 and 100,000 respectively. Unwilling to defend the discredited Gorbachev against his hardline opponents, the broad mass of the Soviet people remained neutral in the conflict.

The euphoria in some sections of the left press cannot disguise the fact that the resistance by the working class to the coup was extremely patchy. Yeltsin's call for a general strike patently failed to evoke a mass response. This was in part due to the Yeltsinites' own refusal to fight consistently for their own policy, no doubt for fear of bringing the Soviet proletariat onto the scene as an independent force. In the Kuzbass region of Siberia, the Yeltsinite leaders of the independent miners' union did call their members out; in Leningrad, on the other hand, liberal mayor Anatoly Sobchak appealed to 20 striking factories to place reliance on the city council's negotiations with the military and go back to work.

Other Soviet workers clearly remained unconvinced that Yeltsin's gung-ho restorationism represents a solution to their problems. What was lacking was a leadership which could mobilise workers to take mass strike action against the coup on the basis of their own independent class interests.

Unless this crisis of leadership is resolved, the Soviet working class faces a historic defeat. The triumphant Yeltsinites' campaign against 'communism' is directed not merely at the consequences of the October revolution's Stalinist degeneration, but against the entire heritage of Bolshevism. Symbolic of this was the toppling of Felix Dzerzhinsky's statue. Although he ended his life as a convinced Stalinist and an uncompromising enemy of the Left Opposition, as head of the Cheka Dzerzhinsky had earlier played a heroic role in defending the Soviet workers' state against bourgeois counter-revolution.

At stake in the coming period are the remaining gains of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Will the restorationists succeed in destroying the degenerated workers' state or will the working class block the road to restoration and take up the struggle for political revolution? On this question hangs the fate of the Soviet Union.

With the principle of economic planning discredited by decades of Stalinist corruption and mismanagement, Soviet workers will not spontaneously spring to the defence of the nationalised property relations. But the experience of Eastern Europe graphically demonstrates the devastating effects which the Yeltsinite

programme of wholesale privatisation will have on workers' lives. The only alternative to mass unemployment, falling wages and the destruction of social services is the re-establishment of centralised planning in the form of a democracy of producers and consumers. To win the working class to this perspective is the task which confronts revolutionary Marxists in the Soviet Union today.

Above all, the struggle against capitalist restoration and for the political revolution calls for the building of a Trotskyist party, as part of the reconstruction of the Fourth International - the world party of socialist revolution. This party will march under the banner of proletarian democracy. It will fight for independent trade unions and factory and workplace committees. It will carry out consistent agitation among the rank and file of the armed forces for the right to form soldiers' committees and elect their own officers. Its goal will be a state based on genuine soviets, with all government representatives paid at the average wage of a skilled worker and subject to immediate recall.

A Trotskyist party will give unconditional support to the right of the republics to independence and even secession, where workers desire it. However, in the context of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the growing influence of nationalist restorationists, the urgent need is to resist national chauvinism. The fight now must be for the unity of all Soviet workers on a communist programme.

# Vietnam CP rift widens

THE SEVENTH Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) took place in Hanoi from June 24-27. It marked the end of the five-year plan adopted at the Sixth Congress in 1986, which introduced market reforms under the slogans *doi moi* (renewal) and *tu duy moi* (new thought).

The pre-congress discussions were characterised by a sharp faction fight between the 'reformers' led by General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh and Prime Minister Do Muoi, anxious to maintain the leading role of the VCP while proceeding with market reforms, and the open advocates of the restoration of capitalism.

At the centre of the con-

trovery were the reformers' draft documents outlining plans for the rest of the decade. These were criticised for failing to tackle rising inflation, unemployment, stagnation in public sector industries and rampant corruption at all levels of the party and state bureaucracy. A measure of Vietnam's crisis is revealed by the fact that its foreign currency reserves are only sufficient to meet two days' worth of imported goods.

The restorationists also attacked Linh and Do Muoi's 'optimistic' analysis of the success of market reforms so far. These lie mainly in the sphere of rice production - Vietnam became the world's

By Ian Harrison

third largest exporter in 1989 - and small-scale private commodity production, and were achieved essentially at the expense of the working class. In the first half of 1991, Vietnam's crude oil output doubled, and is expected to rise still further.

The restorationists, many of whom were reformers in 1986, produced a battery of petitions, articles and theses calling for the immediate legalisation of the private ownership of land and bourgeois parties (the token Democratic and Socialist parties were abolished in 1988), and the convening of a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution and 'unite the country'.

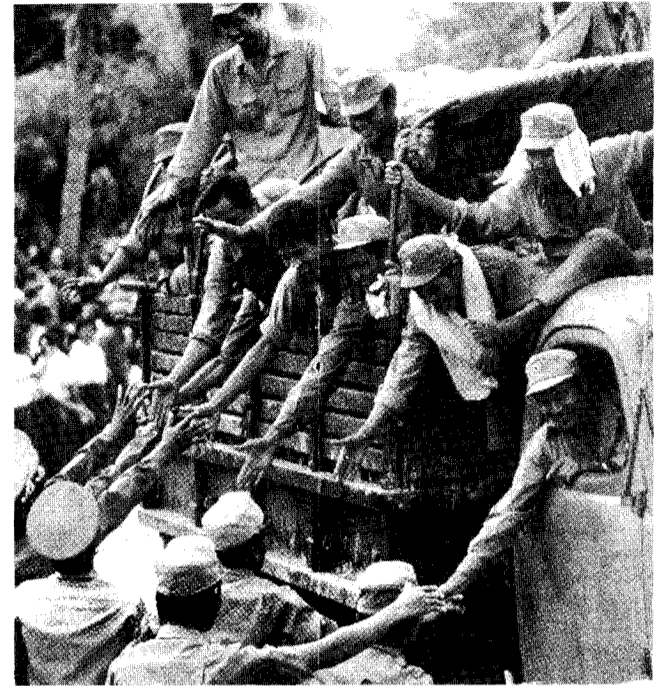
The collapse of the deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe and the economic and political crises in the Soviet Union have impacted on Vietnam's own economy and further fuelled the faction struggles in the VCP. Vietnam has now lost vital aid, credits and subsidies from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as markets for its own goods. By mid-1990, imports from the Soviet Union of cheap oil products, steel, cotton and fertilisers (critical for rice production) had all but ceased. Moscow now refuses to underwrite the cost of maintaining Vietnam's armed forces and insists that any future imports be paid for in hard currency at world market rates. Furthermore, outstanding loans will not be written off, but also have to be repaid

in hard currency.

When the scale of their problems became apparent, Linh and Do Muoi began a series of discussions with the Stalinists in Beijing. Aimed mainly at off-setting the blow from the Soviet Union to Vietnam's economy, the visits secured a resumption of diplomatic relations with China and the official re-opening of trade links. In return, China's leaders undoubtedly demanded that Vietnam drop its support for the Hun Sen government in Cambodia. The VCP leaders had, however, some credit with their Stalinist counterparts in Beijing due to their silence when the pro-democracy movement was massacred in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The Vietnamese government, and behind it party conservatives ousted by Van Linh in 1986, had been anticipating problems from the openly restorationist wing of the VCP in 1990. The 15th anniversary of the capture of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and defeat of US imperialism was expected to produce public demonstrations. Linh ordered crack military units from the north to take up positions around Ho Chi Minh City, considered to be a base for the restorationists, ready to crush any protests against the government. In the event, the restorationists did not take to the streets, though how much longer they can co-exist in the same party with conservatives and reformers they deem to be moving too slowly, with summary expulsions taking place, is debatable.

The reformers defeated the



The last Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia, 1989

challenge from the restorationists largely by a series of manoeuvres, including packing the congress with their own supporters. General Secretary Van Linh retired due to ill-health, to be succeeded by Do Muoi. The Politburo and Central Committee were purged of restorationists who were replaced by younger supporters of the government.

Under the two-fold pressures of a deepening internal economic crisis and the loss of support from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, all the VCP leaders can offer the masses is two tempos for the restoration of capitalism. In the person of Do Muoi, history has been turned on its head.

Following the capture of Saigon, Do Muoi was responsible for overseeing the nationalisation of capitalist businesses in the south. Today he is supervising the return of state industries to the private domain - in some cases to the very capitalists he expropriated them from - all in his capacity as general secretary of the VCP. The party which massacred the Trotskyists in Saigon in 1945-46 and crushed the militant working class, which demanded and got heroic sacrifices from the masses during the 30-year war with imperialism, today stands poised to return Vietnam to the arena of world capitalist exploitation.

## INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION

After extensive discussions in Britain and Europe in April-May 1991 between a representative of the Internationalist Faction of the LIT (International Workers League) and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, the following Declaration of Intent was signed outlining the course of further political debate and collaboration. The Internationalist Faction split with the LIT in 1988. It consists of the PTS in Argentina, the POS in Mexico and the LOT in Chile.

1 The LTT and the IF of the LIT, on the basis of the contact which has been established since July 1990, propose that they enter into a process of discussion and practical collaboration. Both organisations confirm that their aim is not discussion for its own sake, but to decisively advance the international regroupment of Trotskyists on a principled basis, with the ultimate goal of rebuilding the Fourth International.

2 The LTT and the IF of the LIT agree to deepen the fraternal relations between them by further developing the following points of discussion:

- The political situation in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, with the aim of elaborating a joint programme of action.
- The political tasks of revolutionaries in Germany, including the central question of programme,
  - from the time of the crisis which opened up in the GDR in October 1989 to the point of capitalist reunification and
  - in the present situation.
- To deepen our knowledge and understanding of the policies pursued by the sections and groups of both currents in their respective countries, enabling us to verify in practice the extent of our mutual political agreement and to further internationalist collaboration.

3 The main topic of discussion is the problem of rebuilding the Fourth International. Resolving these problems is the priority for Trotskyists to overcome the crisis of the leadership of the world proletariat. The LTT and the IF of the LIT will deepen a critical examination of the history of the Fourth International and the currents that emerged from it. Complete agreement on the Fourth International's history is not a precondition to developing political agreement. However, we acknowledge the significance of such an examination in guiding and developing revolutionary Marxism today.

4 The LTT and the IF of the LIT propose, depending on the level of agreement reached in the course of the discussion, to produce a magazine for joint intervention in the main problems of the international class struggle and to debate the policies of the USec, the FI(ICR), the LIT, the ICU, etc.

5 We reaffirm the method adopted during the Gulf war of producing joint statements with the object of developing common action around events of similar international significance. In securing co-signatories from other tendencies, we seek to oblige them to respond with urgency to the situation, thereby maximising unity in action on a principled basis.

6 The documents proposed to begin a written discussion are:

- Those issued by both our currents on the problems and history of the Fourth International.
- The main articles that have appeared in our press on the points under discussion.
- The fusion document of the LTT and the WIL.
- 'Frente a la debacle del Orden de Yalta y la crisis agonica del Stalinismo. Hoy mas que nunca: ¡Reconstruir la IV Internacional!' of the IF of the LIT.

7 In the interest of the most fruitful discussions, both our currents agree to circulate all documents to their respective membership as well as this statement.

June 2, 1991

Pablo Cortina on behalf of the IF of the LIT  
Jean-Pierre Goethuys on behalf of the LTT

## Fundamentalists losing grip

OVER THE last year, Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani has succeeded in weakening his fundamentalist opponents and stabilising his regime. A number of reforms are being, or have been, implemented aimed at further undermining the fundamentalists and creating conditions for the return of Iranian capitalists living in exile.

At the core of Rafsanjani's reforms lay the decision to strengthen his position as president by abolishing the post of prime minister. In addition, internal security organisations have been merged, the state bureaucracy purged and reduced in size, and the local committees (komitehs) responsible for enforcing fundamentalist rule at the level of the street and workplace have been abolished. In February, the currency (the rial) was substantially devalued against the US dollar.

While internal progress towards full participation in the world capitalist market is still being hampered by the fundamentalists and elements in the state bureaucracy - which multiplied and thrived on corruption in the period of Khomeini's regime - Rafsanjani has re-established diplomatic and economic ties with the major Arab governments, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt; and developed links with Brazil, Chile and Argentina, as well as African states such as Kenya and Uganda.

Iran has benefited from the lifting of sanctions by the EC countries, many of which are anxious to win contracts under the government's \$180 billion reconstruction programme.

The United States has developed its trade with Iran in the last year to the level of \$95 million dollars, but the Bush administration remains the major obstacle to Iran's full re-entry into the world market. It is currently using the Lebanese hostage issue to justify this continued exclusion.

Throughout the Gulf war, the Rafsanjani government was able to strengthen itself against fundamentalist opponents at home, such as Khomeini's son Ahmed. By lining up with the US-led coalition against Saddam Hussein but refusing fundamentalist demands to join the military offensive against Iraq, it was able to consolidate its support among the bourgeoisie and the war-weary masses. It was, however, prevented from taking a seat on the Gulf Cooperation Council - with responsibility for maintaining the imperialist status quo in the region - by the Bush administration. Notwithstanding this political setback, Iran has re-emerged as a leading producer of oil and gas.

The most important asset which Rafsanjani inherited from the previous regime was not, however, natural resources, but the systematic and sustained destruction of all the left-wing and radical parties.

Iran's population has grown from 36 million in 1979 to 56 million today. The war with Iraq and the domestic policies pursued by the Khomeini regime forced hundreds of thousands of peasants from the rural areas into the towns and cities to join the ranks of the working class and the urban poor. Rafsanjani's regime has been able, thus far, to survive the transition towards becoming

a bourgeois democratic regime due to the absence of trade union rights, and of organisations and parties representing the interests of the working class and poverty-stricken masses.

But there are signs, in spite of the dearth of reliable reports, that the class struggle is reviving. In January, thousands of oil workers in refineries across the country went on strike, shutting down production for two weeks. Teachers in a number of cities, including Tehran, also struck for several days in January against poverty wages. On July 29, hundreds of people spontaneously attacked the police when they tried to arrest women in Isfahan, Iran's second city, for breaking the Islamic dress code. According

to a pro-fundamentalist newspaper, 'notorious elements' came to the aid of the women and shouted slogans against fundamentalism and the government.

In Tehran the following day, hundreds of shanty town dwellers fought pitched battles with police and municipal workers demolishing slums to make way for reconstruction projects.

The apparent loosening of the fundamentalists' grip over the urban slum dwellers - their traditional 'shock troops' - provides the working class with a two-fold opportunity: a breathing space in which to rebuild its own organisations and the possibility of extending its influence over the slum-dwellers by championing their demands.



**Workers  
International  
League**

*For the rebuilding of  
the Fourth International!*

I would like to join/have more information about the WIL  
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Name: .....

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SOUTH AFRICAN Women's Day commemorates the events of August 9, 1956. On that day about 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the seat of the apartheid government, to protest against the threatened introduction of passes for 'African' women. The significance of the event was twofold: not only was it the first national campaign against passes for women but it was also wholly organised by women themselves.

Women's Day is an opportunity for all those involved in the struggle – men and women class fighters – to look more closely both at the nature of the triple oppression suffered by black women and also how to fight it today.

The prospect of a negotiated settlement and an ANC government has raised the expectations of millions of black women. But only a small number of black middle class women can look forward to improvements in their position under a 'non-racial democracy' within the framework of a capitalist 'mixed economy'.

In fact, with many of the legal trappings of apartheid having been abandoned by the De Klerk regime, we can expect that the bourgeoisie will seek to perfect other forms of super-exploitation to replace old-style apartheid. So despite the rhetoric and constitutional promises, the ANC's 'mixed economy' will not at all deliver the overwhelming majority of black women from oppression; indeed, under such a new-look capitalist regime they will continue to bear the brunt of oppression.

### Women in the bantustans

Nowhere are the peculiarities of South African capitalist oppression more glaringly evident than in the position of women in the bantustans. To end apartheid in South Africa can only be to radically transform the entire social position of the millions of proletarianised black women in the bantustans.

In most cases, over 70 per cent of the upkeep of rural bantustan households is from the wage remittances of male migrants working in the towns and cities.

While bourgeois ideology hypocritically glorifies the family, the migrant labour system destroys family life in an especially brutal manner. Both men and women are kept in a state of perpetual humiliation and degradation.

It is the proletarianised women in the bantustan households who for eleven months of the year are the *de facto* heads of the households. They have to raise the children and care for the frail and the elderly. They have to cope with living in a wasteland, where there is no electricity, no pumped water, no easy access to health care, no shops nearby, no decent roads, no transport, and where the schools are few and inadequate. It is they who have to wield the hoe in the exhausting and often futile effort to grow crops on infertile soil to supplement the family income. Back-breaking hours are spent every day fetching water and collecting firewood. They have to take responsibility for stretching a meagre income to cover food, other basic commodities and travel which are far more expensive than in the urban areas. They have to tend to the sick and the dying and withstand conditions of grinding poverty and starvation. But while in all essential respects women are the backbone of bantustan society, their social status relative to

## The choice for black women in South Africa

# Permanent revolution or perpetual slavery

## Statement by the Women's Fraction of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency on South African Women's Day



'Hewers of wood and drawers of water'... Women in a squatter camp in South Africa

men remains one of extreme subordination. Indeed, they are minors according to customary law.

The trade unions have had only limited successes in unionising farm workers and in struggles on the white farms in the last ten years. The objective difficulties are great. But political neglect of farm workers by urban-based mass organisations like the ANC and COSATU is also a key factor. Where serious work has been done, farm workers have responded with enthusiasm to being organised. In numerous strikes women workers have been active and in some cases leading participants. The potential for mobilisation of women farm workers cannot be doubted.

### Women in the urban areas

Capitalism has unevenly drawn black women into wage labour in the urban areas. Black women workers today make up over 36 per cent of the urban proletariat. However, as is the case with their rural counterparts, their general position of subordination in a male-dominated society has been taken full advantage of by the bourgeoisie, in order to keep labour costs as low as possible and boost profits.

Women workers are concentrated in sectors that are based largely on low-paid and unskilled labour. They constitute a huge majority of the workforce in the clothing and service sectors and in waged domestic service in white households.

Despite their growing incorporation into wage labour, for black women there is no equal pay for equal work, and there are no equal opportunities when being hired or promoted. However, sexual harassment – both by managers and workers – has been

increasingly challenged.

In the past few years, the trade unions have begun to focus on questions related to women's oppression, such as equal pay for equal work, maternity and paternity leave and benefits, health care rights and child-care. Women workers have taken a lead in these struggles and this has resulted in a significant increase in female membership of unions.

The steady stream of women from the bantustans and from the white farm areas, who move into the urban areas in search of jobs and economic improvement, face a new set of humiliations and difficulties on arrival. They move into a hostile environment where a relationship with a migrant worker who has hostel accommodation is one of the few ways of securing a roof over their heads. This results in an ugly dependence upon urban working men who often abuse the vulnerability of the women that live with them. Violence dominates the lives of black women – in the home, in the township streets and at work they are harassed and intimidated. This is an integral part of keeping women in a state of submissiveness and docility.

According to a survey conducted recently, 1,000 women are raped in South Africa every day. It is estimated that one-third of women in black working class homes experience domestic violence. In Natal and the Transvaal, Inkatha supporters, police and members of the South African Defence Force have regularly raped women during their rampages through black areas.

In the face of this monstrous oppression, in the past 15 years, hundreds of thousands of urban black women have been drawn into militant struggle and mass organisations.

The traditional system of tribal authorities has been adapted to facilitate the control of the rural masses and

relies especially on the subordinate position of black women. Today the tribal chiefs are nothing but puppets of their apartheid masters. The worst victims of these corrupt petty-bourgeois bureaucrats and their underlings are the women. Nothing is done – be it related to housing, land, education, pensions and other forms of social security, or the administration of 'justice' – without some male figure of authority demanding a cash bribe or a sexual 'favour'.

Economic necessity has also increasingly driven women to seek paid jobs in order to provide for their children. But where women of the bantustans do find jobs they are mostly irregular and casual, for extremely low pay and for long hours, and it often means they too have to become migrants, leaving their children in the care of their sisters or mothers.

There has been little serious attempt to ensure the organisation and mobilisation of the proletarianised women of the bantustans. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has raised the idea of such activity but little has been done.

Given the depth of their oppression, the potential for the women of the bantustans to become politically active, if a lead were given by urban women workers, is tremendous. What is required is serious and consistent propaganda, agitation and organisation aimed at realising this potential.

### Women on the farms

The lot of women farm workers is similar to that of women in the bantustans; but in many respects they suffer even more severe forms of oppression.

They have to work twice as hard as the men, both in the fields and in performing their

prescribed roles as wives and mothers. The vast majority of farm workers has neither electricity nor adequate water supplies in the home. As a result, the burden of domestic work – cooking, cleaning, child-rearing – is that much greater.

On the farms, women workers are not regarded as people in their own right by the farm boss. For example, if a male worker is fired or dies, his wife automatically loses her job and has to leave the farm. It is men workers who usually have permanent farm jobs. A large percentage of women farm workers are employed only on a casual or seasonal basis. Many are not paid wages at all. The subordinate position of women is thus reinforced by the exploitative employment practices of the white capitalist farmers. The struggle against sexual discrimination on the white farms must thus be seriously taken up: equal wages and opportunities and job security must be fought for by women and men workers through the unions.

On a daily basis women workers are subjected to the violence and verbal and sexual abuse of the farm owner and his supervisors. Given the desperate position of many women, and the power wielded by the white farmers, job-for-sex is a common practice.

However, their general position of subordination within such a sexist and patriarchal society continues to act as a brake on their political confidence and activity. Even the largest mass-based organisation – COSATU, with its 1.2 million members, over 36 per cent of whom are women – has failed miserably in ensuring that women are an equal part of the leadership.

### Smashing women's oppression: reform or revolution?

Within the mass organisations, the question of women's oppression has been placed firmly on the agenda in the recent period. At the ANC's Conference in July, women delegates caused a major stir, insisting on a 30 per cent quota for women on the National Executive Committee and threatening to walk out of the meeting. COSATU too has held a special Conference on Women and has adopted numerous resolutions aimed at combatting women's oppression in the workplace, in the home and in the unions. But these efforts are essentially within a reformist framework.

The revolutionary potential of black women, especially workers, is being curbed by the constitutional illusions spread by the leadership of the Tripartite Alliance of the ANC-SACP-COSATU. Every effort must go into ensuring that the millions of black urban and farm workers and the proletarianised women of the bantustans rise up, in a fighting unity with their male counterparts, against all the conditions of oppression and exploitation that apartheid and capitalism subject them to. Now is the time to demand and fight for everything. Black women must not accept the need to wait 25 years for an end to migrant labour (as the Stalinist leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers has proposed); nor must they accept or believe the idea that they have to wait for the post-apartheid capitalist 'mixed economy' to grow at a rate of six per cent before their living standards will improve (as the ANC economists argue). Black women must not trust some future constitution to end their oppression. They must raise all their demands in a vigorous campaign for a Constituent Assembly, fought for on the basis of a definite programme of action and convened by the masses themselves.

It must be recognised that only by liberating women from domestic slavery in the family can the social basis for women's oppression be overcome. The proposed programme of action must thus centrally address this question. The under-employment of women in productive labour and the fact that 50 per cent of the South African working class as a whole is unemployed means that the demand for work for all is central to overcoming the oppression of women. Neither this demand nor the demands for workplace and state-provided creches and socialised laundries will be met under capitalism. The South African bourgeoisie has already frantically declared that such demands cannot be realised if the profit system is to survive at all.

To this, women and men workers must answer with one voice: so be it! Let us take things into our own hands, let us fight for permanent revolution and, in fighting unity with the proletariat throughout the world, march decisively towards socialism.

For victory, a proletarian vanguard party is necessary. The ANC and SACP, with their nationalist-Stalinist politics of reform, will only prove to be obstacles in the way. Women revolutionaries, not only within the ranks of these political organisations and the trade unions but throughout society, must be drawn in to form such a Leninist weapon of struggle. How such a party will emerge depends on many factors, not least of which are theoretical and programmatic clarity and practical consistency on the question of women's oppression.

August 9, 1991

# Workers' power in Eastern Europe?

**Bob Pitt replies to allegations made by the Workers Power group that the Workers International League has written off events in Eastern Europe in 1989-90 as 'doomed from the start'**

OF THE various opposition groupings who were expelled from the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party) during the 1970s, the only one to undergo a positive political evolution was the Workers Power group. Having made a serious attempt to grapple with the historical crisis of the Fourth International, Workers Power was able to break with its state-capitalist heritage and develop political positions, some of which the Workers International League finds itself close to. On this basis, we have been able to form a bloc (albeit an often uneasy one) with these comrades in the course of some political interventions. All in all, the WIL regards Workers Power as a potentially healthy political tendency.

However, an article by Richard Brenner in the June issue of the *Workers Power* paper demonstrates that there are some real problems with this organisation, and raises doubts as to its future evolution. Purporting to offer a detailed critique of the WIL's response to the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe during 1989-90, the article blatantly misrepresents our political positions. Thus Comrade Brenner informs his readers that at the end of 1989 the WIL 'recognised that there was a political revolutionary crisis across Eastern Europe', but that in the course of 1990 we completely reversed our line and 'concluded that the masses had been mobilised from the outset on the basis of counter-revolutionary goals'. None of this bears the remotest resemblance to the analysis presented in *Workers News*.

## 'Political Revolutionary Crisis'?

First of all, we never held the position that there was a 'political revolutionary crisis' throughout Eastern Europe in late 1989. This term is used repeatedly in Brenner's article, although he never attempts to define it. When Workers Power leaders are pressed for an explanation, they resort to the argument that the Stalinist bureaucracies could no longer go on ruling in the old way, while the masses were unwilling to go on living in the old way. But if this quotation from Lenin were to be taken literally, it would mean that there was a revolutionary situation throughout Eastern Europe - which is patently absurd. Rather than examine the extent to which events really did develop towards a political revolution, Workers Power fudges the issue by generalising about a 'political revolutionary crisis'.

That the Stalinist bureaucracies went into deep crisis is, of course, undeniable. The fundamental reason for this was the stagnation and decline of the bureaucratically-misplanned economies, as a result of which most Eastern European bureaucrats had lost confidence in the system they leached off. Meanwhile Gorbachev, desperate to win Western aid to extricate the Soviet bureaucracy from its own economic impasse, had renounced the use of armed force to maintain the USSR's client regimes in Eastern Europe. The action of the masses, either potential or actual, was certainly a factor in the collapse of Stalinism. But the development of such action in the direction of a political revolution was very uneven.

Only in Romania in December 1989, in our opinion, did a full-blown revolutionary situation arise. Here there was a popular insurrection, a split in the army, and the emergence



Demonstration in Wenceslas Square, Prague, during the 'Velvet Revolution' of November 1989

of embryonic organs of proletarian power. In the absence of a revolutionary leadership, the movement was hijacked by a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy. In the GDR, a pre-revolutionary situation existed in October-November 1989, but this never reached the point where a political revolution was immediately posed, and by early 1990 the mass movement had been harnessed to a counter-revolutionary programme of capitalist restoration through German reunification. In Czechoslovakia, the movement was at a much lower level and lasted an even shorter time. It never reached a pre-revolutionary stage, being dominated from the start by openly restorationist forces. In Hungary, there was no actual mass movement involved in the collapse of the bureaucracy, which simply gave up the ghost and handed over political office to the bourgeois opposition.

At one extreme, therefore, we had a revolutionary situation in Romania, characterised by an armed struggle and embryonic dual power, while at the other extreme was Hungary, where the masses were almost completely inactive and the Stalinist regime peacefully abdicated. To include these dramatically different cases, and all variations in between, under the single heading 'political revolutionary crisis' is to

renounce the concrete analysis of the concrete situation, and substitute a reassuring but vacuous phrase.

## 'Counter-revolutionary from the outset'?

Nor is there any truth in Brenner's assertion that the WIL later came round to the view that prospects for a political revolution in Eastern Europe were 'doomed from the start' (the title of his article) and that events in the GDR in particular were 'a counter-revolution from the first moment'. The only evidence he produces to back up this claim is a quotation from a *Workers News* editorial of September 1990. There, referring to the illusions in capitalism which had led the majority of East German workers to vote for Kohl's *Anschluss* in March, we wrote: 'However unpalatable these illusions are for those of the West European left who saw the events in East Germany as the unfolding of political revolution, it is pointless to deny their existence. Those who cannot distinguish between revolution and counter-revolution will not make good revolutionaries!'

This criticism was directed against the mindless optimism of tendencies like the Morenoite LIT, some factions of the

United Secretariat, the Lambertists and the WRP/*Workers Press*, who refuse to recognise the incorporation of the GDR into the capitalist Federal Republic as any kind of setback for the working class. It in no way committed us to the view that developments in East Germany were counter-revolutionary from the outset. Indeed, in the sentence immediately following the passage quoted by Brenner, we referred to 'the initial leftward impulse that the implosion of the ruling Stalinist SED . . . lent to the mass demonstrations last November'. Yet Brenner blithely asserts: 'Demonstrations of millions . . . in the GDR between October 1989 and January 1990 are written off by the WIL as part of the counter-revolution'. Can Comrade Brenner explain to us how events which were counter-revolutionary from the outset could possibly be given an 'initial leftward impulse'? Perhaps he wants to introduce a new category into Marxist theory: the leftward-moving counter-revolution!

## The case of the GDR

Brenner summarises the demands of the anti-Stalinist opposition in the GDR as 'an end to bureaucratic privilege, special shops, the "leading role of the party", censorship and Stasi surveillance, the

right to vote, and freedom to travel'. If these were counter-revolutionary demands, he tells us, 'then Trotskyists are counter-revolutionaries'. But while most of these democratic demands would find a place in the programme of political revolution - which would have established workers' democracy, while defending the nationalised property relations - they could also be filled with the content of bourgeois-democratic counter-revolution. And it was to the latter programme that the democratic aspirations of the East German masses were hitched in early 1990. What purpose is served in obscuring this?

Brenner also accuses the WIL of changing its line on the issue of German reunification. Again, his criticism entirely misses the mark. If the political revolution had succeeded in East Germany this would undoubtedly have resulted in the destabilisation of the Federal Republic, in which case the demand for the extension of the revolution into West Germany would have been absolutely necessary. We do not think that it was wrong, therefore, to make propaganda for socialist reunification in late 1989, when the mass movement was still calling for a 'better socialism' in the GDR.

But, when the demand for 'one fatherland' took hold in

1990, it was necessary to swim against the stream and fight against capitalist reunification. It was nonsensical to suppose that this reactionary upsurge of German nationalism could be diverted into a progressive channel by calling for 'revolutionary reunification' - particularly when there was no sign of an anti-capitalist mass movement in the Federal Republic. That Workers Power believed it could only serve to illustrate one of their besetting weaknesses - a tendency to arrive at programmatic positions by a process of abstract deduction rather than through a study of concrete political developments.

## The role of the bureaucracy

Brenner goes on to make the ludicrous allegation that, for the WIL, 'the Stalinist bureaucracy is not simply a major force for restoration within the degenerate(d) workers' states, it is the only force'. How this squares with his earlier accusation that we came to regard the anti-Stalinist mass movements as counter-revolutionary forces, Brenner does not say. Nor does he provide any evidence for his argument. He quotes an article from the October-November 1990 issue of *Workers News*, which describes the Soviet bureaucracy as 'the main agency for the restoration of capitalism' in the USSR. But it is difficult to see how this substantiates the claim that we see the Stalinist bureaucracies as the *only* restorationist force.

The article he quotes from features an analysis of the divisions between sections of the Soviet bureaucracy over the question of restoration. But this does not stop Brenner telling his readers that the WIL treats the bureaucracy 'as an undifferentiated whole and as an uncontradictory phenomenon! We can only suggest that Comrade Brenner abandons the practice he has evidently learned in the bourgeois legal profession, that of 'constructing a case' without regard for the truth, and adopts instead the revolutionary communist tradition of dealing honestly with the arguments of one's political opponents.

## Whither Workers Power?

Why does Workers Power publish such a dishonest polemic against the WIL? We suspect it is connected with the fact that the comrades have renounced their original project of regrouping revolutionary forces in Britain and internationally. Workers Power now sees itself as *the* revolutionary party (if in embryo), and its League for a Revolutionary Communist International as the sole instrument for reforging the world Trotskyist movement. Revolutionary regroupment is thus reduced to the appeal 'Join us!' Those who reject such ultimatum can only appear, from this standpoint, as a political obstacle to be demolished. This method, we believe, will build only a small international sect. Workers Power needs to break from it.

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

## PART ELEVEN

'WHAT IS the situation in which the Socialist Labour League is born...?' asked a 1959 *Labour Review* editorial. 'If we were to choose one word to sum up the salient features of this period, on a world scale, that word would be "crisis".'<sup>1</sup> In Britain, Healy's perspective was the familiar one of economic slump producing an automatic escalation of the class struggle. But whereas he had previously envisaged a mass revolutionary current emerging from within the left wing of the Labour Party, in the late 1950s industrial action became the centrepiece of Healy's strategy. He believed that the upsurge of strikes was driving 'towards a showdown between the classes - towards another 1926 but with far more revolutionary possibilities'.<sup>2</sup>

The period following the formation of the SLL, however, saw the focus of struggle in the labour movement shift from industrial to political action. After Labour's third successive general election defeat in October 1959, party leader Hugh Gaitskell proposed to attract the middle class vote by junking Clause Four - which formally committed Labour to the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange - thereby provoking an outcry in the party ranks. Moreover, from 1959 successive trade union conferences registered votes in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament, a development which culminated in the passing of a unilateralist resolution at the 1960 Labour Party conference.

In response to this changed situation, Healy directed his forces back towards the Labour Party. In doing so, he replaced the ultra-leftist policy of provoking expulsions with a new right-opportunist line. This was already evident at the SLL's National Assembly of Labour in November 1959, where Healy went out of his way to deny the League's role in promoting industrial militancy. The SLL was 'not a strike-happy organisation', Healy insisted. 'Just because supporters of the League might be selling their paper around the area of the strike, we will not allow the Press to create the situation that we are responsible for the strike.' Healy condemned the trade union bureaucracy, not for selling out workers' struggles, but for dragging their members into industrial disputes without adequate preparation.<sup>3</sup> Harry Ratner, who was a leading participant in the Assembly, comments

that 'the spectacle of Gerry Healy striking the pose of a "responsible" workers' leader was unusual' - to say the least!

In adopting this new respectable image, Healy no doubt had an eye on the forthcoming Labour Party conference. But the right wing was able to use Healy's own record of authoritarianism against him to win the conference's overwhelming backing for the proscription of the SLL. The NEC spokesman argued that, while Healy had 'a great deal to say about democracy and the right of Trotskyists to be members of the Labour Party', he refused to tolerate any political deviation in the ranks of his own organisation. The speaker pointed to the cases of Peter Cadogan, recently expelled from the SLL for advocating a cross-class movement against nuclear war, and Peter Fryer, who had resigned from the SLL in protest at Cadogan's expulsion.<sup>5</sup> 'The League's general secretary,' Fryer had written in a letter to *The Guardian*, 'has made it clear that he will not tolerate free discussion, any more than [CPGB secretary] John Gollan will; and his methods of silencing dissenters and critics are odious.'<sup>6</sup>

The National Assembly of Labour was followed in early 1960 by a series of regional Assemblies, the purpose of which, according to Healy, was to 'strengthen existing socialist organisations such as Victory For Socialism inside the Labour Party'.<sup>7</sup> This involved the usual wholesale adaptation to left reformism. Healy ditched his organisation's long-standing policy of nationalisation with no compensation, advocating reduced compensation instead, while the demand for workers' control was quietly forgotten. The SLL's defence of Clause Four was thus reduced to uncritical support for nationalisation in its established Labourite form. The slogan 'Ban the Bomb and Black the Bases' was also dropped, presumably because of its call for direct industrial action.

The logic behind this right turn was Healy's conviction that the Labour Party would inevitably split over the disputed issues of nationalisation and nuclear disarmament. 'Right Wing Threatens Labour Split. Plan to Smash the Party and Keep the Bomb', read the headline to a front-page *Newsletter* article by Healy in June 1960.<sup>8</sup> 'The process of change under the surface of political life in Britain is about to be transformed qualitatively into

# The rise and fall of Gerry Healy



The platform at the National Assembly of Labour, November 1959. Left to right: Brian Pearce, Gerry Healy and Brian Behan

the emergence of powerful new trends,' Healy announced portentously. 'That is why all the King's horses and all the King's men, supported by the Fabian Society, cannot put the Humpty Dumpty of Transport House together again. The possibilities of a satisfactory compromise seem remote indeed. A new stage in the long process of revolutionary change opened up by the election of the Labour government in 1945 is now on the agenda.'<sup>9</sup>

Another traditional feature of the Healyite world-view to be shelved was the short-term prediction of economic collapse. Healy informed the National Assembly of Labour that the SLL 'did not say that a slump was imminent', and by January 1960 he was arguing that 'the recession of 1958 has given way to an upswing in the economy'.<sup>10</sup> The extent of this turnaround is underlined by Harry Ratner, who points out that only a few months earlier John Daniels had been roundly denounced by Healy for daring to suggest such a thing.<sup>11</sup>

The new line on the economy not only served to justify Healy's rightward lurch, it also had the purpose of undermining opposition from Brian Behan, who upheld the old perspective of an intensifying economic crisis necessitating a turn to open work, with the main emphasis on intervention in industry. Although the seven-member Behanite faction scarcely represented a serious threat to Healy, this did not prevent him from lashing out furiously against them. 'What he always feared,' Ellis Hillman explains, 'was the emergence of a proletarian tendency which could challenge him politically and organisationally - that was his fear all the way through.'<sup>12</sup>

Politically, Behan could offer no serious alternative to Healy's right-opportunism, his call for the proclamation of a revolutionary party by a few hundred militants being foolishly ultra-leftist. But, contrary to Healyite mythology, Behan was not so sectarian that he denied the need for fraction work in the Labour Party. Nor was he incapable of

making some correct criticisms of Healy's unprincipled political manoeuvring. 'The zig-zags of policy from "right" to "left" and back again,' Behan wrote, 'result from the opportunist considerations of a small clique... Those who opposed the turn to open work a year ago were denounced as reformists and capitulators to the right wing, but now the leadership are fighting to return to the old form of work in the Labour Party.'



It was on the organisational question - the concentration of power in Healy's hands - that Behan's attack really hit home. Not only did Healy hold the posts of SLL general secretary, IC secretary and, in practice, League treasurer and print shop manager, Behan pointed out, but he hired and fired full-timers and purchased expensive equipment, all without prior consultation with the League's elected bodies. Behan also opposed as grossly undemocratic Healy's control of the organisation's assets, the SLL's press being jointly owned by Healy, the Banda brothers and Bob Shaw. Behan described it as 'farfetched that even if the whole conference should decide on a change of policy, four people could frustrate the will of the conference by simply splitting and walking away with the assets'. He proposed to place all the League's property under the control of the membership.

The Behan faction also exposed the anti-communist methods Healy employed in

order to maintain his domination over the organisation. Celia Behan accused Healy of repeatedly humiliating SLL members 'by haranguing them at great length, preferably in front of a room full of people, for the most trifling errors'. Worse still was Healy's use of 'the personal chat, where he flatters the listener by making "in confidence" quite serious criticisms (usually of a personal nature) of another comrade... Every comrade without exception is subjected to this behind the scenes denigration'. By such means, Healy crushed comrades' confidence in themselves and each other. 'The biggest condemnation of Comrade Healy as a communist,' Celia Behan alleged, 'is that he has surrounded himself by a crowd of petty-bourgeois yes-men who, when they hear any criticism of him, spread their hands and say "Yes, but who but Comrade Healy could lead the movement?"'<sup>13</sup>

While Healy initially felt obliged to observe constitutional procedure with regard to Behan, this was never anything more than a formality. 'No, we won't expel him now,' Healy was heard to remark after Behan had addressed a Liverpool aggregate in May 1960. 'We'll wait until the conference.'<sup>14</sup> In the event, Healy was not prepared to wait even that long. A few days later, when Behan was attending a North London branch meeting to put the minority's case, in marched Healy with a group of majority supporters. Ken Weller, a member of Behan's faction who was present that evening, describes the scene: 'They take over the branch meeting, and start shouting and screaming and threatening. "Where do you stand on this? We demand an answer. You deserve a good hiding" - this sort of thing. They were actually trying to provoke a fight... So we just walked out. And then we were expelled - for walking out of the meeting!'<sup>15</sup>

Even some of Healy's political supporters balked at this. 'The "trial" of the Behan group,' Bob Pennington wrote, 'was reminiscent of the best traditions of Stalinism and

the Catholic Inquisition.' He and another National Committee member, Martin Grainger (Chris Pallis), developed a series of criticisms of the SLL's political positions, ranging from its uncritical line towards the SWP and the LSSP, to Healy's refusal to oppose Mike Banda's 'completely Pablotte attitude to the Chinese Revolution'. Grainger described how the leadership's 'obsessional fear of mildly unorthodox views - or of simple questions for which readily prepared answers are not available' had reduced intellectual life in Healy's organisation 'to the level of a religious service'.

But Healy utilised a report by Jack Gale of a personal conversation, in which Pennington and Grainger had admitted to sympathy with the anti-Trotskyist journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, in order to ban their faction for holding views 'contrary to the principles of the League'. Pennington and Grainger were summoned to a meeting of the London Executive Committee, where Pennington was subjected to a 20-minute diatribe from Healy, consisting entirely of personal abuse. When he and Grainger tried to leave, they were forcibly prevented from doing so and physically assaulted. Disgusted with Healy's methods, Pennington and Grainger renounced Trotskyism and founded the 'libertarian' Solidarity group. 'The crisis will deepen,' was Grainger's parting prediction for the SLL. 'The inevitable ideological ferment will be bottled up, or will erupt periodically in a violent manner. Intimidation will continue. Cases of assault within the organisation will either be denied - or referred to Control Commissions (themselves carefully controlled)...'<sup>16</sup>

### To be continued

#### NOTES

1. *Labour Review* April-May 1959.
2. Healy Group internal document, quoted in *News Chronicle*, November 13, 1958.
3. *The Newsletter*, November 21, 1959.
4. Harry Ratner, 'Memoirs of a Trotskyist', unpublished ms, p.340.
5. Labour Party Conference Report, 1959, p.104.
6. *The Guardian*, November 10, 1959. When Fryer had been expelled from the CP for criticising the party in a bourgeois newspaper, Healy had defended him. Yet he now condemned Fryer for having 'run to the capitalist press' (*The Newsletter*, November 28, 1959).
7. *The Newsletter*, January 23, 1960.
8. *Ibid.*, June 18, 1960.
9. *Ibid.*, June 25, 1960.
10. *Ibid.*, January 23, 1960.
11. Ratner, op. cit., p.340.
12. Interview with Ellis Hillman, January 4, 1991.
13. SLL Internal Bulletin No.5, June 1960.
14. Information from Charlie Pottins.
15. Interview with Ken Weller, April 17, 1991.
16. *By Their Words Ye Shall Know Them*, Solidarity pamphlet No.4, 1960.

### Dave Hughes

It is with deep regret that Workers News has learnt of the death, at the age of 43, of Dave Hughes, founder member and leading theoretician of the Workers Power group. We would like to express our condolences to his comrades.

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# Brazil's dirty war

THERE ARE about eight million children living rough on the streets of Brazil's major cities, the overwhelming majority of whom have been forced to leave home because their impoverished families cannot support them. They live on the proceeds of petty crime and prostitution, and by acting as couriers in the drug trade controlled by rival gangs.

They are the target of systematic violence and extermination campaigns carried out by the police, self-appointed groups of middle class 'guardian angels' and

death squads recruited from serving and ex-policemen and the urban poor.

Brazilian journalist Gilberto Dimenstein has interviewed people from both sides in this 'war' - the children themselves, police officers, former and present members of death squads, and representatives of local government, the church and the legal authorities. The results of his research make grim but required reading.

There are an estimated 27 million children living in a state of poverty in Brazil, and the situation is getting worse.

**Brazil: War on Children**  
by Gilberto Dimenstein  
Latin America Bureau; £4.99

Review by Yara Oliveira

The richest 10 per cent of the 150 million population receive 53.2 per cent of the national income; the poorest 10 per cent just 0.6 per cent. The infant mortality rate, at 85 per 1,000, is among the worst in South America, with 350,000

preventable deaths of under-fives each year from diarrhoea. Per capita income has fallen over the last few years from over \$2,000 to \$1,869 as the international banks pile on the pressure for payment of Brazil's \$120 billion debt.

The death squads are growing fast as a distorted response to the increasing number of children taking to the streets in order to survive. In many areas, they receive open support from sections of the population and invariably enjoy the protection of the police. Dimenstein gives an indication of the scale of the atrocities:

'Although it is difficult to be precise, and the tendency is for underestimation, the number of children murdered by the death squads for their supposed involvement in petty crime reached an average of approximately one a day in 1989. Out of every 100 children in the country who are

victims of a violent death, 33 are killed by the death squads. In Rio de Janeiro alone, from January to July 1989, 184 children and adolescents were murdered.'

The usual practice of the squads is to torture the children before shooting them several times. Their mutilated bodies are then dumped on the roads, parks or beaches as an 'example' to other children. The squads carry out their 'duties' with little or no interference from the police or local authorities. Even when official investigations get under way into specific cases of murder, they are eventually dropped for lack of evidence as the witnesses are too frightened to talk, knowing that they will be subject to reprisals.

Beatings and torture are also the standard response of the police when they arrest street children. The less fortunate 'disappear', either killed by the police themselves or handed over to the death squads.

Although the death squads are usually recruited by shopkeepers and other residents who may have been forced to pay protection money to street gangs and who want their neighbourhood 'cleaned up',

they have rapidly become the most brutal face of organised crime, preying on the poorest sections of Brazilian society. In a chapter entitled 'Heroes or villains?' Dimenstein shows that the victims of the squads are not dangerous criminals and are often completely innocent of any crime. The squads, by contrast, are involved in everything from theft and extortion to drug-trafficking and murder. Furthermore, he says, 'in this vast web of crime, it is difficult to distinguish between criminal and law enforcer'.

Unlike its predecessors, President Collor's government acknowledges the tragedy of the street children and has introduced a number of measures which, ironically, give Brazil some of the most progressive legislation on child rights in the world. But although the government has set up a Ministry of the Child and claims to be tackling what it refers to as the 'phenomenon of extermination', it refuses to identify the main cause of the problem as poverty. Indeed, its own economic and social policies are leading to a higher rate of impoverishment of the masses, thus increasing the number of children on the streets and fuelling the growth of the death squads.



The writing on the wall in Recife, north-east Brazil, reads 'Don't kill my kids. Who is to blame?'

## Brave new world

**Columbus: His Enterprise**  
by Hans Koning  
Latin America Bureau; £4.99

Review by Alistair Wrightson

NEXT YEAR marks the 500th anniversary of the arrival in the Americas of Christopher Columbus. Generations of schoolchildren have been taught that Columbus was a heroic explorer, the pious bearer of Christianity and civilisation to the 'noble savages' of the New World. Hans Koning's book is a clear and well-researched attempt to debunk the Columbus myth, and to lay bare the motives of this ruthless operator for merchant capital.

Columbus was born in Italy in about 1451, the son of a Genoese weaver. Little is known of his early life, but it seems likely that he went to sea as a trader - initially as a merchant's clerk - rather than a sailor.

With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Turks took control of the overland trading routes to the east and the search began for a sea passage to India and China. The Portuguese headed south, rounding the Cape of Good Hope by 1486 and eventually reaching India in 1498. Against all the scientific evidence even of that time, Columbus convinced himself and others of the possibility of discovering a westward route. After years of lobbying the courts of Europe, and by falsifying existing knowledge of charts and distances, Columbus succeeded in gaining the backing of the Spanish monarchy and the bankers of Genoa for his first expedition.

When Columbus landed on San Salvador in the Bahamas in October 1492 (believing himself to be in Japan), he declared that he was taking possession of it on behalf of the King and Queen of Castile - a fate which befell all the islands he encountered.

The first meeting between the Spaniards and the indigenous Arawak 'Indians' was not antagonistic. But the search

for gold was on, and what little the Arawaks had would lead to their destruction. Merchant capitalism's obsession with gold was far from irrational. In order to develop trade with the east, gold was essential, and in order to acquire it, freebooters like Columbus were prepared to go to any lengths. Columbus would later write: 'Gold is a wonderful thing! Whoever owns it is lord of all he wants. With gold it is even possible to open for souls a way into paradise!'

Before returning to Spain, Columbus established a garrison on an island he named Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) - the first colony of 'modern' Europeans in the Americas. However, when he returned there on his second voyage towards the end of 1493, he discovered that the atrocities committed by the colonists against the Arawaks had finally provoked retaliation, and the garrison had been destroyed.

Sailing from island to island, Columbus unleashed a terror campaign against the Arawaks. Convinced that there was a large gold field in the interior of Hispaniola, he introduced a system of quotas whereby every Indian over 14 years of age had to collect a measure of gold dust every three months. Chiefs were required to provide ten times as much. The 'reward' was a token which guaranteed their safety for a further three months.

Those without tokens were killed using methods only equalled in barbarity by mod-

ern fascism. Their hands and feet were cut off; their eyes were gouged out; they were hunted down with dogs and torn to pieces, or roasted slowly over fires.

The Arawaks responded with a series of mass suicides, taking cassava poison rather than endure further contact with 'civilisation'. In two years, half the estimated one million Arawak population of Hispaniola was wiped out; by 1515 it was reduced to less than 10,000; by 1540 it had disappeared completely.

However, gold extraction all but stopped, to be replaced with the export of slaves to Spain and the establishment of plantations on the islands. In fact, there were no gold fields in the Caribbean islands, only some traces of alluvial gold in the rivers.

Columbus made two further voyages, reaching the South American mainland in 1498, where he identified the delta of the Orinoco River as the 'mouth of the Ganges', and Veragua (Panama) in 1502, from which he promised 'gold without limit'. But by this time his role had been eclipsed by hundreds of other colonists and adventurers.

Koning does not fully locate Columbus's 'enterprise' within the early development of capitalism. But he does provide a vivid illustration of Marx's famous comment in *Capital* on primitive accumulation: 'If money, according to Augier, "comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek", capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.'

## Oskar Hippe and the IC

Dear comrades,

Further to the review and correspondence Workers News has published concerning Oskar Hippe's memoirs, I would like to point out some additional dishonest aspects of the review published in *International Worker* (March 30, 1991). John Francis writes that when Hippe returned to Berlin after his release from prison in East Germany in 1956, 'the group he was working with had been liquidated into the SPD by the leadership of the German section of the Fourth International...' (my emphasis, P.L.). Not only does this typically Healyite formulation imply that entry work in the SPD necessarily meant liquidation - an argument unworthy of anyone calling himself a Trotskyist - but it suggests that this was Hippe's own view.

It would help if Francis had actually read the book he was supposed to be reviewing, because it is clear that Hippe opposed not entry itself but the way it was carried out: 'Basically, the step taken by the comrades to work within the SPD was the correct one, for in a period of revolutionary downturn it is not possible to work directly on the construction of a revolutionary party. But if the price of such a step is the abandonment of an independent organisation, then it can have devastating effects' (*And Red Is the Colour of Our Flag*, p.246).

Maybe Francis can give us his views on Gerry Healy's 'Group' selling *Tribune* at the same time. Was that liquidationist?

Francis also writes that 'Hippe quickly recognised that the ICFI fought for the continuity of Trotskyism, rejected Pabloism and joined the ICFI in which he remained active for several years'. The truth about Oskar Hippe's attitude to the 1953 split is a good deal more complicated, and was consistent with the views he held until his death. Although politically sympathetic to the IC, Hippe was not convinced

### Correspondence

attitude organisationally and hopes to participate actively in a unified organisation.'

The attitude of the German IC group is confirmed in a report of the IC meeting of July 28-29, 1961, where Slaughter states: 'We cannot accept the method used by the German comrades in leaning towards unity... Unity with the German Pabloite section will surely solve nothing.'

Francis's claim that Hippe 'lost touch' with the IC when the Socialist Labour League 'turned its backs [sic] to [sic] the struggle against Pabloism in the late 1960s' is sheer invention, and a complete misrepresentation of Hippe's ideas.

To lie about the positions of such a courageous old militant for factional purposes once he is dead is surely the hallmark of political bankruptcy.

Yours in comradeship,  
Paul Lomax

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## Step up the fight against extradition

THE DUBLIN government took a further step along the road of collaboration with British imperialism with the passage through the Dail in December 1987 of the Extradition Act. Dessie Ellis, the first Irish citizen to be extradited under this Act, is now awaiting trial in a British jail.

Under the 1965 Extradition Act, Britain had experienced difficulties in securing extradition because of the political exemption clause and the obligation on Irish courts to scrutinise the evidence for the warrant. The 1987 Act not only dispenses with the political exemption clause for those accused of using explosives or automatic weapons, endangering life, hijacking or kidnapping, but also leaves the Irish Attorney General to establish that a *prima facie* case for extradition exists.

In the Seventies and Eighties, extradition was an uncertain process. The more compliant of the Irish judiciary were forced to pursue some embarrassing legal gymnastics in order to justify extradition. The extradition of INLA member Dominic McGlinchey in 1984 (the first republican to be extradited from the 26 Counties to the Six Counties) was justified on the grounds

By Colin Harrison

that he was not engaged 'in what reasonable, civilised people would regard as political activity'. In 1985, the Irish Supreme Court dismissed the appeal of another INLA member, Patrick Quinn, against extradition on the grounds that the INLA's aim, 'the establishment of a 32-County workers' republic', was 'unconstitutional' and therefore could not be deemed to be political. It is an indictment of such judgements that both McGlinchey and Robert Russell, extradited in 1988, were subsequently found not guilty in British courts.

On the other hand, extradition applications under the 1965 Act against James Clarke, Dermot Finucane and Owen Carron were rejected by the Supreme Court in 1990 on the grounds that their offences were political. In the case of Finucane and Clarke, the court also ruled that they might face ill treatment if returned to the Maze, from where they escaped in 1983. Summing up, Justice Walsh said 'it would be quite unrealistic to regard the situation as other than a war or quasi-

war'.

The change in extradition procedures was necessary to bring the law into line with the deepening dependence of the Irish bourgeoisie on British imperialism.

Fianna Fail has held power in the 26 Counties almost continuously since 1932. It originated as the party of native Irish capitalists who, because they were struggling to assert their relative independence from Britain, were able to draw electoral support from the workers and small farmers of the 26 Counties. Although it indulges in the occasional bouts of shadow boxing with London, the economic and political interests of the class it represents are thoroughly entwined with those of British imperialism.

The days when Fianna Fail could strike an 'anti-imperialist' pose have long gone. Since 1980, the deepening world crisis, particularly acute in its effect on the 26 Counties' debt-ridden neo-colonial economy, coupled with the prolonged national liberation struggle waged by the IRA in the Six Counties, has driven the Irish bourgeoisie into a much closer collaboration with imperialism.



The annual Irish Freedom Movement demonstration in London on August 10

This period opened with the Thatcher-Haughey talks of 1980 which laid the basis for the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985. The Anglo-Irish agreement was negotiated by Fine Gael and initially opposed by Haughey out of office, but characteristically accepted by him when he took office in 1986.

Its objective was to halt the electoral advance of Sinn Fein in the Six Counties and to isolate the republican movement by a mixture of repression combined with bribery of the middle class. The constitutional nationalists of the SDLP were strengthened by being given a voice in the Anglo-Irish conference, while their middle class supporters benefited from the grants distributed to small businesses by

the US-backed International Fund for Ireland.

Dublin's collaboration with London on legal matters and cross-border security was stepped up. Included in this package was Dublin's agreement to deliver on the question of extradition. Needless to say, the promised reforms of the legal system and security forces in the Six Counties have remained a dead letter. Imperialism continues to enforce partition in the only way it can, shoot-to-kill, death squads, torture and frame-up.

However, Haughey's attempt to strengthen extradition procedures is fraught with difficulties. The Irish working class is still imbued with a hatred of British imperialism learnt over centuries of struggle. As a consequence there is widespread opposition to extradition in the 26 Counties. The legislation was only passed by the casting vote of the speaker in the Irish parliament. Ratification was delayed for a year to give the British government time to improve the conduct of the security forces and the administration of justice in the Six Counties. At the end of that year Haughey had nothing to show for his wait.

Despite the writing in of paltry 'safeguards' (evidence for the warrants has to be scrutinised by the Irish Attorney General and the charges on the warrant have to be the charges faced in the British court), the Act was only saved from defeat by the anti-IRA hysteria whipped up in the wake of the Enniskillen bombing. After it was passed, 5,000 marched in protest through Dublin in the biggest anti-imperialist demonstration since the hunger strikes of 1981.

Fianna Fail's willingness to hand over Irish citizens is part of a process of surrendering sovereignty. The latest expression of this process is the offer by Fianna Fail to put the 26 Counties' constitutional claim to the Six Counties on the table in the Brooke talks and in any future talks involving the Unionists.

Despite the manoeuvres of the bourgeois parties, Ireland cannot be permanently 'stabilised'. In the Six Counties, the nationalist working class faces discrimination and savage repression.

In the 26 Counties, impoverished by debt (which stood at 50 per cent of GDP in 1989), bled dry by the multinationals, 25 per cent of the workforce are now unemployed, while the safety valve of emigration has been shut off by the economic recession in Britain and the United States.

The bourgeois parties and the two small reformist parties of the 26 Counties offer only intensified repression. Both the Irish Labour Party and the Workers Party condemn the republican struggle in the Six Counties and call for tougher extradition laws. In 1990, the Workers Party attempted to amend the constitution in the Dail to make the 26 Counties' claim to the Six Counties subject to a loyalist veto. At the time, this was too much even for Fianna Fail, who successfully opposed it.

Sinn Fein, the party based on the nationalist working class of the Six Counties but with a petty-bourgeois leadership and programme, calls for local anti-extradition committees to be built in order to put pressure on the rank and file of Fianna Fail. But Sinn Fein does not challenge the institutions of the 26-County state. Despite its vague call for socialism, it is incapable of mobilising the working class in the fight for national liberation through socialist revolution.

The coming period will see opportunities for the building of a Trotskyist party within the Irish working class, a party which will carry forward the struggle for national liberation in the fight for a united workers' republic of Ireland. Such a party will form a pole of attraction for the rank and file of Sinn Fein and the IRA, who have been steeled in over 20 years of heroic resistance to British imperialism.

In Britain, Trotskyists have a duty to render every practical assistance to the national liberation struggle. The fight against extradition must be carried into the unions and the Labour Party, and raised on demonstrations, in order to defend Irish republicans and the victims of frame-ups. This assistance must be given within the context of a relentless struggle to defeat British imperialism as the common enemy of Irish and British workers.

## Free Dessie Ellis!

By Terry McGinity

DESSIE ELLIS was extradited from Ireland in November 1990 on charges of conspiracy and possession of explosives brought under Section Three of the 1883 Explosive Substances Act. In the words of an Irish anti-extradition campaigner, the Dessie Ellis case is another example of 'the British judicial system moving the goal-posts in order to make it impossible for an Irish citizen to get justice'.

At the committal proceedings in February the original indictment was overturned. Stipendiary magistrate Daphne Wickham, fearful that the charges wouldn't hold, substituted two new charges; one under the Offences Against the Persons Act and the other under the Criminal Damage Act. She agreed with defence counsel that Ellis had not been in the country at the time of the alleged crime. The 1883 Act has a 'territorial bar' which rules that a non-UK national must have committed an offence in the UK in order to be prosecuted. The Irish courts had agreed to Ellis's extradition - to face specific charges under the 1883 Act - within the terms of the 1987

Extradition Act. This contains a clause stipulating that the accused can only face charges in a British court for which he or she has been extradited. Charles Haughey promised that Ellis would get a 'fair trial' and he was transferred to Britain on the 37th day of his hunger strike against extradition.

The Department of Public Prosecutions was not happy with the Wickham ruling which undermined the 1987 Extradition Act. The Irish government refused to consent to the new charges and has since demanded that the original indictment be re-applied.

On May 22, Lord Justice Glidewell quashed the new charges on the basis that a divisional hearing was not the 'appropriate procedure'. Clive Nicholls, QC for the DPP, went so far as to state that Wickham had 'erred in law' in making her decision. Dessie Ellis remained on remand in Brixton prison, now with no charges against him at all.

At the pre-trial hearing in June, Geoffrey Robertson, for the defence, accused the Crown of having a 'bogus position' during the extradition proceedings. It knew that Ellis was not in the country but only admitted to it at the committal stage, although

Daphne Wickham had 'unwittingly stirred up an international hornets' nest' by breaching a principle of international extradition law. 'There is no discoverable case in which a person has been prosecuted under Section Three without evidence of presence or nationality', Robertson said. He pointed out that in the trial of an alleged co-conspirator, Danny McNamee, the prosecution had emphasised his British nationality in order to make him eligible for conviction.

Judge Swinton Thomas (who, in the words of Dessie Ellis, 'gave the Winchester Three 25 years each for camping') threw out the Wickham charges. He ruled instead that the phrase 'in the UK' contained in the 1883 Act referred to the offence and not to the accused person. To support this inspired interpretation, he stated that the defence arguments were 'wholly contrary to the tenor of the law as it has been developed over the last century and particularly over the last two decades'. Such is the judicial expression of the changing needs of British imperialism in Ireland.

Since the Brixton 'break-out' in July, Dessie Ellis has been held at Parkhurst prison on the Isle of Wight. His

defence campaign in Britain sees this as a deliberate ploy to hamper preparations for the trial. According to supporter Annette Moloney, 'Dessie is an unconvicted remand prisoner... yet he is being treated like a convicted prisoner and his visits are being restricted.'

In a message to a public meeting held on July 3, Ellis urged a stepping up of the fight against 'the use and abuse of conspiracy charges'. He added: 'There is practically no defence against conspiracy and it's quite obvious to everyone I was not in the UK at any time during the alleged conspiracy.'

Despite the difficulty in making the charges against Dessie Ellis stick, the British government is determined that the trial, set for October, will go ahead and result in a conviction. With its standard methods of forced confessions and faked forensic evidence under the spotlight, the state is reaching for the archaic conspiracy laws as fresh ammunition in its long and dirty war against Irish self-determination.

● The Justice for Dessie Ellis Campaign is holding a public meeting in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 on September 25 at 7.30pm.