

# Battle of Ideas

Monthly supplement to Red Weekly

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The anti-working class policies of the Labour Government, together with the upsurge of the European working class in Spain and Portugal, are today creating a much greater debate on Marxist ideas than has existed for years. Not only are there far more people coming to accept Marxist ideas on the nature of society, and the solution to its crisis, but a ferment is taking place within the revolutionary left. New organisations have been formed and old ones split. Even within the Communist Party a debate on the ideas of Trotskyism has taken place. The old ideas and divisions within the British left are being shaken up.

One of the chief aims of Red Weekly has always been to plunge into these debates. The 'Portugal Forum', the 'Angola Forum', the series on 'Party and Faction' and a whole host of other articles and polemics have been part of the attempt. But there is a limit to what can be achieved

in the pages of a weekly newspaper. We are limited both in space and by the need to try to cover all the developments of the class struggle. There has been a constant clash between developing the agitational side of the newspaper and taking up the many points of debate on the left.

To deal with these competing needs Red Weekly has now decided to launch a regular monthly supplement 'The Battle of Ideas'. In this we will be able to take up and deal much more fully with the important debates on the left. Some issues will be devoted to a single major article. Others will be debates. Some will deal with several questions. We aim to make 'The Battle of Ideas' one of the main forums for the debate on the Marxist left today. We hope our readers, and in particular those who disagree with articles, will let us have their views on articles as well as topics and issues we should deal with.

In the first issue ALAN JONES looks at a central question of the history of the Trotskyist left in Britain — how the current led by Gerry Healy, which today stands as one of the most vile sects in Britain, built an organisation which from the early 1950's until well into the mid-1960's was the strongest single force on the revolutionary left. We have already exposed in Red Weekly Healy's disgusting present day frame-up campaign against Trotskyist leaders Joseph Hansen and George Novack. That campaign reveals the depths to which Healy has sunk. But there are many lessons also to be seen in the rise of the Healy current. To see where Healy started from, and to see the consequences of his break with that path, is a contribution to understanding the weaknesses and developments of the British left. We hope this article will help stimulate a real debate on the history of British Trotskyism.

# The Rise of Gerry Healy

BRITISH TROTSKYISM, like British Marxism before it, arose in almost uniquely unfavourable objective conditions. Lenin had stressed in *Left Wing Communism — An Infantile Disorder* in his famous analysis of the rise of the Bolshevik Party, that the conditions for the creation of a real proletarian revolutionary party were a mass tradition of revolutionary struggle, a firm grasp of Marxist theory, and a wealth of international connections. Only the absorption of those most advanced experiences of class struggle could provide the guide to action necessary to lead a national revolutionary struggle. (2)

Conditions in Britain were virtually the exact opposite of those Lenin had described. Firstly, although the British working class has a tremendous record of trade union struggles, there is absolutely no modern tradition of mass revolutionary struggle. There is no British equivalent of the 1848 Revolution in France or the Paris Commune, of the German revolution of 1918-23, of the factory occupations of Italy of 1920, or of the Spanish revolution and civil war, let alone of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Secondly, British socialism was marked by an absence of any serious Marxist theory. Far from, in Lenin's words, "following with the utmost diligence and thoroughness each and every "last word" in this sphere in Europe and America" the veteran Trotskyist Harry Wicks expressed the situation perfectly accurately when writing of the early British Communist Party:

**'It is possible to maintain and develop a revolutionary political grouping only on the basis of great principles... It is possible for a national group to maintain a constant revolutionary course only if it is firmly connected in one organisation with co-thinkers throughout the world and maintains a constant political and theoretical collaboration with them. The Fourth International alone is such an organisation. All purely national groupings, all those who reject international organisation, control and discipline, are in their essence reactionary.'** [1]

'The British movement as a whole for generations was devoid of theory, one could almost say contemptuous of it. What Deutscher termed the "classical Marxism", those debates that occupied Social Democracy before 1914, scarcely found an echo in this country.' (3)

Finally, in contrast to the Bolsheviks' 'wealth of international links and excellent information on the forms and theories of the world revolutionary

movement such as no other country possessed' (2), the British labour movement was isolated and shut off from these international connections and developments. While in Europe the Pole Rosa Luxemburg polemicalised with the Frenchman Millerand on reform and revolution; the Russian Plekhanov denounced the German Bernstein on philosophy and politics; and the Austrian Adler was attacked by the Russian Lenin on the national question; in Britain many of these discussions were considered 'hot air' to

be left to 'theoreticians' while British revolutionaries got down to 'bread and butter practical issues'. (4)

This great political underdevelopment of the British working class and British Marxism is not a reflection of the inferiority of the inhabitants of this island, but a product of the historical strength of British imperialism — a strength which in the nineteenth century kept the British working class under the domination of liberalism; and in the twentieth created the hegemony of the consistently reformist Labour Party. This political underdevelopment could not but deeply affect the development of Marxism in Britain. Marx himself pointed out:

'The development of socialist sectarianism and that of the real working class movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other.' (5)

The counterpart of the great political underdevelopment of the mass working class movement in Britain was the ultra-sectarian and nationalist characteristics of those weak revolutionary and Marxist currents which did develop. (6)

Under these conditions of national insularity, sectarianism, and theoretical backwardness, it is not accidental that the most developed theoretical and political expression of the interests of the working class, Trotskyism, developed with extremely thin roots in British society. Trotskyism did not at all emerge even out of the core of the Communist Party — let alone the core of the working class movement. (7)

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Trotsky had refused a split with the Communist International over its betrayal of the British General Strike and the Chinese Revolution, and was later to reject the idea of a split in the American Socialist Workers Party even over the issue of the class character of the Soviet state itself. British Trotskyism right from the beginning commenced the long series of splits over tactical questions which have marked its course ever since. The very first split in a British Trotskyist organisation, over the tactical question of whether or not to enter the Independent Labour Party, occurred within 18 months of the organised foundation of British Trotskyism. (10) The 1938 founding congress of the Fourth International, then personally led by Trotsky, could note that:

'For a long time the adherents of the Fourth International in Great Britain have been divided into small separate groups... This light minded attitude on the organisational question led not only to ill-considered splits over tactical differences but even to splits over purely personal disputes having no discernible political base.' (11)

By June 1940: 'no less than four groups claiming adherence to the Fourth International exist outside the ranks of our official section in Great Britain'. (12)

## Fundamental

These splits took place on the national sectarian basis of subordinating the fundamental interests of the proletariat to various tactical disagreements — expressed in an organisational form in splits over various questions of national tactics. For once Healy himself is quite correct in characterising what was the attitude of the particular organisation to which he belonged:

'Shortly before the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938 the Workers' International League (WIL) opposed the...'

## Roots of British Trotskyism

THE EFFECTS of this backwardness could not be overcome simply by adopting the label and formal political positions of Trotskyism. Historical materialism does not stop at the door of the revolutionary organisation with everything inside determined purely by theory and ideology. The founders of the British Trotskyist movement undoubtedly came to their positions not merely because of British, but also international, developments of Stalin's policies. (8) Nevertheless how little had been absorbed of Lenin's conclusions on how to build a revolutionary party can be seen by this extraordinary estimate by one of the founders of British Trotskyism of the relation between the 'Balham Group', the founders of the Trotskyist movement in this country, and international Trotskyism:

'Instead of clearing away political lumber and its jargon, the pronouncements of the International Left Opposition (LO) merely added to it... As the British section LO we were invited to send someone to an enlarged meeting of the LO International Secretariat, to be held from 4 to 8 February 1933, in Paris. On 30 January, Hitler had been appointed Chancellor of Germany by President Hindenburg, and it was felt that we ought to send someone to the meeting. A reluctant delegate, I travelled to Paris, and sat through complex, heavily jargonised discussions in French and German, with someone whispering occasional explanations in English... That evening, walking through the streets of Paris with an aching head and jaded spirits, I

officialdom had been pushed into making an impressive show of strength — indeed within 12 months the government would be in startled retreat. There was a revival, renewal of struggle, but to what end? So that the working people could be sold out by shallow-pated Labour careerists, or duped by Stalinism? There was, too, something unreal even in retrospect about the LO conference solemnly pronouncing on the controversies of the Comintern, and even earlier ones of Russian Social-democracy. Hitler and the Nazis stood on the threshold of total power. Surely there could be no true renovation of socialist ideas, or renewal of the forces and spirit of rebellion and resistance, in those old, obscure contentions, argued out again in the thick accents of a now degenerate communism.' (9)

To understand just how extraordinary this text is, it

and in some cases internationally, known leaders of the working class. The events which the Left Opposition discussed were the greatest in the world — the defeat in Germany, the French Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War. Absolutely no political writings in the entire world in the 1930's were on a level even remotely comparable to those Trotsky developed for the Fourth International. Yet British Trotskyists could find in these developments only ridiculous 'solemn pronouncements on the controversies of the Comintern' and the 'thick accents of a now degenerate communism'. The events which centred their attention were not the gigantic struggles of Spain, Germany and France, but demonstrations against unemployment in Britain. While Lenin stressed the 'last word' in international experience and revolutionary theory:

## The RED FLAG

Monthly Organ of the British Workers' International Left Opposition

Number One Vol. 1 Our Paper May 1933

### FOR LENIN AND TROTSKY!

On The Anti-Fascist Front.  
A LETTER FROM GERMANY.

Why The RED FLAG Appears.  
TO REGENERATE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT.

This was a serious mistake which had at its roots a misconception of international responsibilities in favour of a nationalist approach.' (13)

The founding conference of the Fourth International was quite clear in its political characterisation of the WIL:

'The invitation of the International Secretariat delegate to this group to be represented (at the founding Congress) and present its point of view at the world conference, either by delegate or letter, was disregarded; all we have is a statement, apparently addressed to the world at large, rejecting in advance any decision of the world conference not in accord with their untenable demands.'

'Under these circumstances it is necessary to warn the comrades associated with the Lee group that they are being led on a path of unprincipled clique politics which can only land them in the mire. It is possible to maintain and develop a revolutionary political grouping only on the basis of great principles... It is possible for a national group to maintain a constant revolutionary course only if it is firmly connected in one organisation with co-thinkers throughout the world and maintains a constant political and theoretical collaboration with them. The Fourth International alone is such an organisation. All purely national groupings, all those who reject international organisation, control, and discipline, are in their essence reactionary.' (14)

These words could have been written as an epitaph to the later degeneration of two thirds of British Trotskyist groups.

## Rise of Gerry Healy

AGAINST THIS appalling background of national insularity, sectarianism, and political backwardness the Healy current developed. Gerry Healy apparently joined the British Trotskyist movement in summer 1937. (15) At that time the main organisation of British Trotskyists was the Militant Group. This consisted both of British Trotskyists and a group of South African Trotskyists led at that time by Ralph Lee. This latter group became the subject of various slanderous attacks by Stalinists, which the leadership of the Militant Group mishandled, and in December 1937 a group of members including Lee, Jock Haston, Ted Grant and Gerry Healy split to form the organisation which later became the Workers International League (WIL). Healy played no leading role in this split — although he was involved in an extremely unpleasant episode in which he felt it necessary to deny that he had declared that various political opponents would give information to the police. Although the circumstances surrounding the split of the Lee group were extremely obscure they were in fact rooted in differences regarding the policy of entry into the Labour Party.

During most of the period following the founding of the Fourth International in 1938, and during most of the period of the Second World War, the WIL maintained its independence from other Trotskyist forces. It also rejected membership of the Fourth International. The Militant Group and various other smaller forces had meanwhile unified into the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL). The chief difference of tactics between the two organisations was that of entryism into the Labour Party.

## Coalition

The RSL advocated a policy of entry. This was entirely correct in the late 1930's and rapidly became

## The turn to the Labour Party

THE CORRECTNESS of the orientation of the Healy current towards the Labour Party, and the correctness of the position taken by the leadership of the Fourth International on this, was rapidly revealed in the developments of the late 1940's. While the 'open' RCP stagnated and declined, individual membership of the Labour Party leapt from 266,000 in 1944 to 645,000 in 1946, to 730,000 in 1949. However, despite the arguments of Healy and the International leadership the RCP majority refused to change course and orient towards entry into the Labour Party — a more sectarian and bankrupt refusal to face reality has seldom been seen. In 1947 confronted with this refusal of the Haston leadership of the RCP to change course, the International took a disastrous decision. In a reversion back to the very worst principles of splits over tactical decisions which had crippled pre-war British Trotskyism, the International leadership intervened to split the RCP and allow Healy's current to enter the Labour Party. Only eighteen months after the split the RCP majority recognised that they had been wrong on the question of the Labour Party and came over to the policy of entryism. By then, however, the damage had been done. Relations between the majority of the Trotskyist cadres who had remained in the RCP and the Healy group had become even more poisoned than the already factional atmosphere of the RCP. When the reunification took place, Healy demanded, and got, a majority on the leading bodies of the fused organisation, even though he was in a minority in the section. This impossible situation was then rapidly 'resolved' with Healy's expulsion of the supporters of Tony Cliff and Ted Grant. Not merely were many valuable militants



so again following the formation of the 1945 Labour Government. During the actual war years, however, it was wrong. The Labour Party was part of a coalition government with the Tories which was pursuing an imperialist war and savagely attacking the working class. Far from being attracted into this Party workers were, in these conditions, repelled from it — individual membership of the Party, even on paper, fell from 409,000 in 1939 to 266,000 in 1944. Although holding a general strategy, that of entryism, which was correct for the period of the 1930's and most of the 1940's, the RSL failed to grasp the needs of the particular specific situation, and the tactics which flowed from them, and remained extremely weak.

The WIL however, although sectarian to the core and holding quite false estimates of the general political situation, nevertheless was led by its very sectarianism and wild overestimation of the situation to an essentially correct tactical position — to do fraction work in the Labour Party but to concentrate on building an external public organisation. In consequence of this correct tactic, the WIL grew rapidly while the RSL stagnated.

## Fused

In March 1944, under the impact of these developments, the RSL and the WIL fused to form the Revolutionary Communist Party. The WIL recognised its error in not joining the Fourth International and corrected this by fusing with the official section, the RSL. The RSL, in practice, came over to the more correct tactic of the WIL as in a fused organisation the WIL, with 52 delegates to 17 at the founding of the RCP, was bound to have a majority on tactical issues.

It was also at this time in the mid-1940's that the Healy current as a specific formation came into existence. Its exact origins are not clear — Healy claims it was over recognition that the WIL had made a grave political mistake in refusing to join the Fourth International. (16) Whatever the exact motivation for its formation, the Healy current came rapidly to stand for one clear and distinctive thing — it supported and called for a policy of entry into the Labour Party. As the war ended, and international links between Trotskyists became re-established, this policy of Healy was endorsed by both the International Secretariat of

the Fourth International, whose General Secretary at that time was Michel Pablo, and by the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States, whose National Secretary was James P. Cannon.

At the same time as the main leaders of the Fourth International supported the policy of entry into the Labour Party Healy absorbed at least some of the lessons of the international class struggle and the international Trotskyist movement. Above all he learned from the SWP. Cannon's *History of American Trotskyism* and *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* were the basic 'textbooks' of the Healy current. It was from these that Healy absorbed both Cannon's experience of the American workers movement, and involvement with the Communist International, and the flexible tactics for building the Party which the SWP leadership had carried out with the collaboration of Trotsky in the 1930's. Compared to the inveterate sectarianism and dogmatism of the early British Trotskyists, the necessity for concrete analysis and organisational flexibility utilised by the SWP in its successful propaganda struggle with the Communist Party of 1929-33, its participation in the leadership of the mass Minneapolis strikes of 1934, its fusion with the Musteite American Workers Party in December of that year and its entry into the Socialist Party in 1936 and then its turn to open work again, were a blinding revelation in British revolutionary politics — and they remain a magnificent school to this day. This experience was insufficient and one sided and should have been supplemented by an understanding of the European and colonial class struggle, but for a British Trotskyist leader to have seriously absorbed the experience and lessons of even one other country in the world was, in the 1940's, a decisive step forward. (17) In particular it was an incalculable advance on the insularity, chauvinism and philistinism of the leading circles of the RCP.

## Absorption

By the late 1940's, therefore, the Healy current was clearly demarcated within British Trotskyism on two decisive criteria — its advocacy of a break with sectarianism and entry into the Labour Party and its absorption of the lessons of, and close ties with, the Fourth International. A new force had developed.

The first clear demonstration of the superiority of

the Healy current's links with international experience over the national insularity of the Haston group and traditional British Trotskyism came precisely over the very Labour Party question which Healy made the touchstone of his political line in the late 1940's. The relation between open work and entryism had always been the most vexed of all questions among British Trotskyists because it clearly involved, in particular in the rapid shifts often necessary between the two types of work, a clear break with sectarianism (18). Instead of the revolutionary standpoint of firmness in principles and the utmost flexibility in tactics the British Trotskyists thundered along on one tactic or shibboleth or another. They gained temporary success in the moment when that tactic was particularly appropriate and then fell into decline the moment it was no longer apt. (19) What a contrast to this record of sectarian bankruptcy Healy was able to find in the experience of the SWP!

## The Struggle for a Proletarian Party

by James P. Cannon



CLEMENT ATTLEE - Labour Prime Minister 1945-51, a period of rapid growth for the Labour Party.

Although the long term consequences of this decision of 1947 were to be disastrous, in the short term they allowed Healy to demonstrate the superiority of his political line over any other proposed at that time. Although by 1949 even the RCP majority had abandoned its line and turned to entry inside the Labour Party this in itself by no means exhausted the issue of what political line to take. Above all what had to be decided was what *practical* attitude to take towards the developments in the Labour Party and the left wing that was developing there.

## Mechanical

The RCP majority of course had its own answer to this problem. Both their own sectarianism and a

'... this tactic (the pre-war entry one) had a rather ephemeral character, of short duration, and with limited objectives. What was involved was to enter these parties (the mass reformist parties), to profit from their temporary left turn, to recruit members or to court certain thin leftist currents which were developing there, and to get out... The entire conception of carrying out the entry and the work inside these parties was dominated by this perspective.' (20)

The type of entry which flowed from this approach was the refusal to engage in joint collaboration and publications with the left social democratic and centrist forces, a propagandist commentary on centrist developments and a wariness of alliances. In the case of Britain this had been compounded by the natural sectarianism of the Trotskyist groups involved. All the experiences on entryism previously were of that type.

gigantic in relation to the Trotskyist forces. Furthermore, far from being 'thin and shortlived', the general development of the left in the Labour Party showed every sign of being prolonged and wide. While the temporary exception of 1956-58, it was not until the mid-1960's that the left of the Labour Party ceased to be the political focus of the working class and the chief source of recruits for the Trotskyist movement. In these circumstances what was required was not at all the type of entry pursued before the war, but a real penetration into these left social democratic and centrist currents with the aim of becoming a real organising centre for them. Without this the Trotskyist forces would remain simply intellectual commentators and in practice leave the workers in the hands of the reformists. As the resolution of the Tenth Plenum of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International in 1952 put it:

'We are not entering these parties in order to come out of them soon. We are entering them in order to remain there for a long time banking on the great possibility which exists of seeing these parties, placed under new conditions, develop centrist tendencies which will lead a whole stage of radicalisation of the masses and of the objective revolutionary processes in their respective countries. We wish in reality from the inside of these tendencies to amplify and accelerate their left centrist ripening and to contest even with the centrist leaders for the entire leadership of these tendencies.' (21) \*My emphasis - AJ.

## Liquidation

While this orientation was undoubtedly based on quite wrong short term economic and political perspectives, in particular the 'War Revolution Thesis', and was later to be developed by some of Pablo's followers into outright liquidation of the Trotskyist forces, nevertheless, this general orientation gave the correct answer to the necessary tactics towards the British Labour Party at that time. Its conclusions were supported by the SWP and by Healy as well as by the European Trotskyist leadership. Most of all it gave

with their full forces. As the French Press of the IEC put it:

"Bevanism, varying in scale from one country to another, is an inevitable phenomenon of the present conjuncture... Bevanism polarises the discontent of the masses... and will retain it within the framework of these organisations (the social democratic parties). Just when and how Bevanism will be by-passed and a genuinely revolutionary tendency and leadership having a mass base will be created we cannot say at present with exactitude. What is certain is that it will first be necessary to go through the experience of penetrating it and helping it from the inside to develop its last resources and consequences." (22) \*My emphasis — AJ.

## Differences

In order to carry out the necessary tactics a complete break with the sectarianism of British Trotskyism had to be made. It was on this basis that the real differences between Healy and the other currents from the RCP emerged in the early 1950's. Haston himself abandoned Trotskyism in 1949, but the ex-members of his majority, Ted Grant and Tony Cliff, who later founded respectively the Militant current and the International Socialists, remained fully active and gradually came round to the policy of entryism in the Labour Party. As events were to show, however, they had not at all broken with the national sectarian concepts of British Trotskyism. The Cliff group went on, after their utterly bureaucratic expulsion by Healy, to form a newspaper *Socialist Review* which continued the old tradition of the 'independent' Trotskyist journal. It, and the organisation which produced it, remained, not surprisingly in the circumstances, without significant influence. The Grant group, after a period of wild syndicalism, settled down to producing the standard sectarian paper *The Militant* which continues to this day.

Healy however had a wholly different experience which he could draw on. He was well aware of the extreme organisational flexibility which, in sharp contrast to the British groups, the SWP had shown — producing a three times a week paper in some circumstances, abandoning their own paper altogether in others, joining the Socialist Party as individuals, offering organisational compromises to get a fusion

with the centrists etc. Drawing on this experience, Healy was able to break radically with the sectarianism of the RCP in line with the perspectives of the International, and plunge into creating an organising and political centre for the developing left wing of the Labour Party.

## Instrument

The instrument which above all embodied the break with sectarianism carried out by Healy in this period was the paper *Socialist Outlook* which his current created on their entry into the Labour Party. While Cliff's *Socialist Review* for example stood on the edges of the movement in a sectarian fashion, and in effect simply commented on it, Healy launched right into a policy of collaboration with left social democrats and centrists. Issues of the paper included headlines such as "Bevan Gives the Lead that Workers Want: Socialist Planning is the only Answer" and "Left must press the Offensive". (23) Elements such

# Socialist Outlook

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3d

## Aneurin Bevan Demands a Real Socialist Policy

### Says 'Labour will not have War on China'

### Tribune Wishes 'Best of Luck' to the Weekly

I DON'T agree with many of the things that you say in "Socialist Outlook", but in accordance with good Socialist tradition which some Socialists seem to have forgotten I will certainly fight for your right to say them. No-one can read the history of the Labour Movement in Britain without realising what a vital part Socialist journals have played in building up the strength of the Movement.

This is all the more important today when almost the entire press is in the hands of our enemies. So from one of your competitors, Tribune, I wish you the best of luck.

Michael Foot

Michael Foot's letter of good wishes is a fine example of real democratic socialism in practice. It is deeply appreciated by all connected with the Socialist Outlook. Our paper is based on these same prin-

ciples of freedom of expression within the movement, and we assure Michael Foot that Socialist Outlook will fight against any attempts which may be made to silence the voice of Tribune.

as Bessie Braddock, then a 'left' figure, wrote articles for the paper. While undoubted errors were committed nevertheless, and in contrast to the sectarianism of the other currents of British Trotskyism, Healy's essential line and tactics were vindicated. Around issues such as the defence of the Health Service, German re-armament, the Korean war, and all the other issues of Bevanism, the Healy group acquired real impact. Real influence was gained in particular in the Labour League of Youth. By the end of the first four years of the 1950's Healy, through an absorption of some of the lessons of international class struggle and party building, and through a radical break with previous sectarian traditions of British Trotskyism, had succeeded in building an organisation which not merely completely outstripped all its rivals which had emerged from the RCP but which had an influence and significance qualitatively greater than anything which had hitherto been achieved by a Trotskyist organisation in Britain. It could not have been achieved through a different tactic. It was also in this period, in his non-sectarian tactics and a clear line of solidarity with the North in the Korean war against the

anti-communism of the Cliff group, that he laid the conditions for the next decisive step forward — the wide recruitment from the Communist Party following the crisis of that organisation in 1956.



ANEURIN BEVAN

## The crisis of the CP

THE WAY in which Healy plunged into the crisis of the Communist Party in 1956 was another confirmation that at this time his current, which was still working closely with the SWP following the split in the Fourth International, had still absorbed what it had learned from the SWP and the International. The theoretical journal *Labour Review*, which was the Healy group's initial chief theoretical instrument for intervening to win over the ex-CPers, had a wide range of contributors. Its March-April 1957 issue stated its aims quite clearly:

"We do want, however, to emphasise that *Labour Review* is not a sectional Trotskyist journal. We wish to make it the main journal for conducting the principled discussion of every aspect of revolutionary theory... Our columns are open to all who wish to put a point of view on how Marxist science is to be enriched." (24)

## Welcome

Furthermore, *Labour Review* did welcome the whole range of political views in its columns. Isaac Deutscher was a contributor. Brian Pearce wrote outstanding articles on the early history of the Communist Party and the history of Bolshevism

Top right; *Socialist Outlook*, despite accommodations to Bevanism, as graphically illustrated by the headline, its tactics and line were vindicated. *The Newsletter* was a real service to the left, while *Labour Review* opened its pages to writers on the sole criterion of enriching Marxism. Its analysis of the early years of the British Communist Party remains one of the finest to this day.

Tom Kemp wrote a fine reasoned article on the class nature of the Soviet Union. Cliff Slaughter at that time was acknowledging the importance of Gramsci and even Lukacs. Even twenty years later many of the articles of this period could be reprinted with profit. *Labour Review* stands as one of the high points of a theoretical journal in Britain to date, which still has to be fully appropriated for the Trotskyist movement in Britain. It achieved its eminence because, in exactly the same way that *Socialist Outlook* had gone out in a non-sectarian way to be a real organising centre for the Bevanite milieu, so *Labour Review* set out to organise and hegemonise a whole layer breaking from the Communist Party after 1956. Nothing less like the shrill ranting monologues of latter day Healyism could be imagined.

At the same time that *Labour Review* developed as a non-sectarian organising centre for various layers breaking from Stalinism around important theoretical questions, Healy also helped found, in May 1957, *The Newsletter*. With its first editor, Peter Fryer, the ex-correspondent of the Communist Party in Hungary who had broken with the Party over his support for the Hungarian Revolution, this was a non-sectarian newspaper with particular emphasis on trade union struggles. Linked to the trade union cadres recruited from the Communist Party it came to reflect the major intervention of the Healy current into important industrial struggles in 1956-59 — in particular the London busmen's strike and a number of important building strikes. Through this activity *The Newsletter* was able to call an industrial conference in November 1958 which was attended by over 600 militants. This was followed up by a number of good pamphlets and a second conference the next year.

## Crucial

In retrospect it can be seen that the period 1956-59 was a crucial one in Healy's development. He was still working with the SWP (Novack's famous essay on uneven and combined development (24) was written because Healy was scared by the type of conceptions the ex-Stalinist intellectuals were bringing into his organisation) but by now the ties were much weaker. Under the leadership of the youth, the economic crisis

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a service to socialists

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# LABOUR REVIEW

Vol. 2

JULY-AUGUST

No. 4

## The Fall of MOLOTOV

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### BOOK REVIEWS

TWO SHILLINGS



...until the early 1960's. Furthermore the American government had banned the SWP leaders from travelling abroad. Simultaneously with the decline in direct influence and weight of the SWP, the split of the International in 1953 had removed Healy from the direct influence of the European leadership of the International. As for the 'International Committee' itself, which the SWP, Healy, Lambert, Peng and others had created in 1953, it scarcely existed at all by 1956-57. (25) Finally Healy, showing a clear sectarianism in contrast to 1953-54, when he had been most opposed to a split, was in sharp disagreement with the SWP moves in 1957 to reunify the International. This was undoubtedly connected with the fact that Healy both drastically overestimated his own possibilities in Britain and furthermore had by now no intention of letting any opposition whatsoever develop within his own organisation — a reunification of the International would have meant a fusion with other Trotskyist organisations in Britain. Undergoing a relatively rapid development of his own forces, seeing his main international collaborator in decline, and with the International Committee in practice non-existent, Healy began to break with the two great political assets, ties to the International and non-sectarianism in orientation, which had brought him from utter obscurity in the RCP and WIL to the position of the dominant revolutionary current in Britain. Instead Healy fell back on his own resources and the few Marxist intellectuals and theoreticians he had recruited from the CP. As Healy himself put it to the SWP:

'In 1957 when the SWP claimed differences (with the International Secretariat) were growing less, we were undergoing an important theoretical development.' (26)

The results of that 'theoretical development' were to bring Healy to his present state!

## CND— the slide

ALTHOUGH FROM 1956-57 onwards the Healy current was clearly beginning to develop away from the strengths which had brought it its early successes, it was shortly after this that the massive desertion of cadres which marked the first stage of the open degeneration of Healyism was to start. However, the utter sectarianism of later years did not commence immediately — that was to begin in the 1960's with the final break with the SWP and the Fourth International. In particular the Healy current, which had organised itself as the Socialist Labour League at Whitsun 1959, oriented itself, after the crisis in the Communist Party, to the rising campaign against nuclear weapons.

Already in 1957 the Norwood resolution to the Labour Party Conference, which had been a key event in stimulating the unilateral disarmament movement, had been moved by a Healy group member, V.



The bloody aftermath of the Hungarian uprising. The ensuing crisis in the Communist Party produced many recruits for Healy.

# workers press

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Mendelson. Peter Fryer's 1958 pamphlet *Black the H-Bomb* called for the Summit Conference to be opened to the representatives of all nations and for the extension of the Rapacki plan for a nuclear-free zone to the whole world. (27) All this was codified in the more or less correct analysis made at the 1960 SLL conference that:

'The CND movement is an indirect reflection of the growth of the class struggle in the ranks of the professional and middle classes. A considerable portion of its membership consists of young people, who find the policies of the reformists and stalinists repulsive. They are looking for a lead in the fight

against the war and their membership of the CND is their first step in this direction. The SLL must retain friendly relations with this stratum of the population.' (28)

## Mainstay

It was the last non-sectarian and correct campaign the Healy current was to participate in — the gains in the LPYS in 1962-64 were rapidly lost in an orgy of

sectarianism. Within three years the SLL had split definitively with the SWP and the international ties which had been its mainstay. The next time it was to encounter a major political campaign, in the rise of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, everything which it had once learned in *Socialist Outlook*, *Labour Review* and the crisis in the Communist Party, and the CND had been forgotten. Instead of its previous orientation the SLL was to announce to the world that the VSC and the people who led it, and who got 100,000 people out onto the streets of London in solidarity with the NLF were:

'... not just left groupings, but a definite middle class diversion of the proletarian struggle and the fight for Marxism. They now appear openly as the advocates of anti-theory, anti-programme, trying to bring together all kinds of middle class elements, particularly students, as a substitute for the revolutionary organisation of the working class.' (29)



CND demonstrators stage sit-down outside the American Embassy in London 1962.

## EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS

### MARXISM Vs. ULTRALEFTISM: THE RECORD OF HEALY'S BREAK WITH TROTSKYISM

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY JOSEPH HANSEN

Available from Red Books,  
182, Pentonville Road, London, N1. Price £1.45 plus  
35p postage.

## Footnotes

(1) Resolution on Britain of the Founding Congress of the Fourth International.

(2) Lenin — *Collected Works* Vol. 31, p.25.

(3) H. Wicks — *British Trotskyism in the Thirties in International* Vol. 1, no. 4.

(4) History has of course already given its verdict as to whether the really practical people in building a mass revolutionary working class party were the 'bread and butter' men of Britain or those obsessed with revolutionary struggle, Marxist theory, and international connections such as Lenin.

(5) Marx to F. Borte, 23 November 1871.

(6) The sectarianisation and national insularity of British 'Marxist' organisations developed right from the beginning of the revolutionary socialist movement in Britain. Already by 1894, in describing the first Marxist current in Britain, Engels could write:

'The Social Democratic Federation ... has managed to transform our theory into the rigid dogma of an orthodox sect; it is narrow mindedly exclusive and thanks to Hyndman (its leader) has a thoroughly rotten tradition in international politics.' (Engels to Sorge, 10 November 1894). These traditions of nationalism and sectarianism were carried over into the early British Communist Party. It took the personal intervention of Lenin to persuade the CP to apply to affiliate to the Labour Party. It was largely the determined intervention of the Russian Communists which succeeded in persuading the Party to reject the proposal to refuse on principle to participate in Parliamentary elections. As for its national insularity, even the official Communist Party historian Klugman cannot make out a serious case that the CP carried out a major campaign of solidarity with the war of independence in Ireland which was raging throughout the period of the CP's formation.

(7) In most countries, even leaving aside the overwhelming case of Russia, the original Trotskyist forces were founded

national; in the United States, James P. Cannon was one of the three chief leaders of the Communist Party and a delegate to the Congresses of the Comintern; in Spain, Andreu Nin had been one of the top leaders of the CNT, a founding member of the Communist Party, and the secretary of the Red International of Labour Unions; in Greece, Panellis Poullopoulos had been the secretary of the Communist Party; in China, Chen Tu-hsiu had been the secretary of the CP. In Britain, however, the roots and tradition of revolutionary Marxism were so weak that not a single one of the central leadership of the Communist Party came over to Trotskyism. The British Trotskyist movement was formed from heroic militants but ones who were, at best, in the local leadership of the CP. They would have been the first to have ridiculed the idea that they represented the continuity of the historically created leadership of the working class in a way that Nin, Roemer, Cannon, or Poullopoulos, let alone Trotsky and Rakovsky, did.

In fact so weak were the traditions from which British Trotskyism emerged, itself reflecting the political backwardness of the labour movement, that most of the major leaders of Trotskyism in Britain came to Britain from other countries. The Lee-Haston-Grant group which dominated the RCP were Trotskyists from South Africa. Tony Cliff is from Palestine. Even Healy had his roots in Ireland, although he was won to Trotskyism in Britain. It is a sad comment on the tradition of the far left in Britain that it could not even rise to the level of producing home-grown sectarians. Internationalism is the precondition of building anything remotely resembling a Trotskyist group — even if it is just at the level of personal ties.

(8) Reg Grove, one of the founders of British Trotskyism, writes:

'Events in Spain and Germany in 1930-32 ... together with changes taking place in the British Party, convinced us

(10) H. Wicks — *op cit.*

(11) *Documents of the Fourth International 1933-40* p.258.

(12) *Ibid* p.359.

(13) Healy — *Problems of the Fourth International in Trotskyism versus Revisionism* Vol. 4, p.273.

(14) *Documents of the Fourth International 1933-40* p.270.

(15) See M and J Archer — *Notes on Healy's Role in the Early Days of the British Trotskyist Movement in International Press* 10 May 1976.

(16) Healy — *op cit.*

(17) Healy never attempted to conceal his debt to the SWP. He accurately wrote in 1953 to Cannon:

'We educated ourselves from your history. This not only served us well in the big fight with Haston, but continues to assist us all the time.' (Healy to Cannon, 21 June 1953). Even as late as 1961 Healy was prepared to admit:

'It is well known internationally that the Socialist Labour League (the predecessor of the WRP) is deeply indebted to the great and constant political assistance given it in the past by the Socialist Workers Party.' (Letter of the National Committee of the SLL to the National Committee of the SWP, 2 January 1961).

This was of course in the days before Healy 'discovered' that the chief leaders of the SWP were, or at least were infiltrated by, 'accomplices of the GPU'!

(18) Already in 1932 Trotsky had attacked the first British Trotskyist group for its sectarian refusal to enter the ILP — they had instead counterposed retaining the majority of their forces outside and therefore in practice merely orienting to winning over a thin layer through an 'open paper'. (See Trotsky — *The Lever of a Small Group in Writings 1932-33*, p.25). Then in 1935 Trotsky had to wage a struggle against those who wanted to remain within the ILP when that organisation was clearly in decline and refused to enter the Labour Party. (See Trotsky — *Interview by Collins in Writings 1935-36* (First Edition, p.76). Finally during the war, as we have seen,

(19) This pattern has continued right up until today. Apart from the one period when Healy broke with this nonsense — for example in the policy of entry in the early 1950s, the turn to the Communist Party in 1956-58, the turn to industrial struggles in 1958-60 and the turn to the LPYS in the early 1960s — each of the groups rose and fell with its particular tactic (e.g. as it favoured entry the RSL would quite probably have overtaken the WIL again in the post war period). In general commitment to the strategy of entryism, or the open party or whatever is justified by selective quotation of one period of Trotsky's advice in the 1930s — for example entryism is almost always justified in terms of his interview with Collins. This completely misses the point that the hallmark of Trotsky's policy was its extreme flexibility — for an orientation to the CP in the early period, for entry in the ILP in the mid 1930s, for a turn to the Labour Party in the late 1930s etc. Absurd timeless formulae such as 'we must be with the masses therefore we must enter the Labour Party' were the complete opposite of Trotsky's method. In 1933 for example, Trotsky was for entry in the ILP, because that was where the most advanced workers were to be found at that time, and not for entry in the Labour Party despite the fact that the ILP was not at all an organisation of the masses.

(20) Pablo — Report to Tenth Plenum at the IEC (1952).

(21) *Ibid.*

(22) *Ibid.*

(23) Cited in Martin Cook — *The Myth of Orthodox Trotskyism*, p.21.

(24) Cited in D. Hallas — *Building the Leadership in International Socialism*, no. 40.

(25) For a description of conditions in the International Committee in 1956-57 by a leading participant see Peng — *On the Suggestions and Proposals on the Unity of the World Movement in Trotskyism versus Revisionism* Vol. 3.

(26) Minutes of the NEC of the Socialist Labour League, 3 February 1962.