

Workers ACTION

No.5 – November / December 1998 – Price £1

Can workers seize the moment?

- * Conference season – the big sleep
- * Pinochet and British justice
- * Germany – workers' new expectations
- * Malaysia – masses take to the streets
- * Catastrophism or Marxism?
- * Martov and the Jewish workers' movement

Workers **ACTION**

No.5 - Nov / Dec 1998

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Pinochet and British justice

Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet regards Britain as a model of 'democracy, civility and moderation'. It must have come as quite a shock to the ageing general therefore when he was detained by police in a London clinic. Apparently the Spanish government wanted to extradite him to Spain to stand trial for the murder and torture of Spanish citizens during his bloody coup of 1973. It was also quite a shock to those of us on the left that the Labour government was actually doing something progressive. Never mind, nobody need have worried.

What the case illustrates yet again is the fraudulent nature of bourgeois democracy. In Chile itself Pinochet is protected from prosecution for his crimes during the coup. This government agreement is part of the so-called transition to democracy and 'national reconciliation', and is supported by both the Socialist and Communist parties in Chile. After Pinochet supposedly stepped down, he was appointed a life-long senator. This means that he will never be brought to justice in Chile, and his supporters claim that it also gives him diplomatic immunity abroad. On this basis, Pinochet regularly visited Britain on the understanding that no one would question his role in the overthrow of the Popular Unity government, murdering Salvador Allende and thousands of his supporters. While Pinochet's detention must have been a real surprise, his faith in British democracy was ultimately rewarded.

The ruling by Lord Chief Justice Bingham that Pinochet was indeed immune from prosecution goes against even the bourgeois legal framework. Britain is a signatory to the UN Convention on Torture, and has incorporated its provisions into the Criminal Justice Act (1988). Under the act Britain is obliged to arrest 'public officials' for torture or complicity with torture, no matter where the crime occurred, and the convention explicitly states that it is above previous laws which gave diplomatic protection to heads of state and diplomats. In particular, it supersedes the 1978 State Immunity Act, the act under which Bingham ruled that Pinochet was immune from prosecution on the absurd grounds that a head of state is not a 'public official'.

After the US-backed coup in Panama, the former head of state General Noriega was arrested and tried. When Bingham was presented with this precedent he ruled that the cases could not be compared because the newly installed US-friendly Panamanian regime wanted Noriega arrested, while Chile opposed Pinochet's prosecution. This perverse ruling renders the UN convention completely pointless — it becomes impossible to arrest heads of state complicit in torture until the regime that employed them has been overthrown. Since these regimes use torture as a form of terrorism to ensure their continued rule, Bingham's interpretation in effect increases the likelihood of the use of torture.

All this is of course nothing more than the legal establishment of a bourgeois state doing its job. The global ruling class has a collective interest in maintaining itself against the working class and except for a few squabbles such as the US displeasure with Noriega they will stick together. Who knows, if the British ruling class turn on Pinochet today for his torture of Chilean oppositionists then

maybe someday in the future the Chilean ruling class or its allies may indict Blair, Clinton or Thatcher for their murderous warmongering in Iraq, the Malvinas and elsewhere. United they stand, divided they fall; the legal system has to generate the ideological cover for the realpolitik.

Ultimately Britain, Spain and the US had to sort out something. Otherwise the true story about Pinochet might emerge. For the bloody coup that brought Pinochet to power was supported by the Nixon administration and the CIA. Following this the Pinochet regime became the testing ground for free market capitalism. Pinochet's tough economic and welfare policies were lauded, not only by Thatcher's ministers, but also by the likes of New Labour's Frank Field. Surely such a great role model and someone who had received so much support from the west could not be put on trial?

But nevertheless, one wonders ... it seems that Pinochet had a habit of coming to Britain to buy weapons and take tea with Mrs Thatcher. It is inconceivable that the government did not know he had arrived for surgery and even more inconceivable that the police should arrest him without conferring first with the cabinet. Mandelson is the least likely governmental figure to give forth any emotional expression of anything progressive at all, yet after his high-profile statement welcoming the arrest Labour has abstained completely from political comment and has hidden behind legalisms. The immediate conclusion is that Labour were running a scam to gain some ethical credibility while using the law to avoid having to deliver; the secondary conclusion is that they have shown massive lack of political judgement in thinking they could get away with it.

The appeal against Bingham's ruling takes place in the House of Lords as *Workers Action* goes to press. After tea with Margaret, the contortions of Bingham, and the deafening silence of the Labour government the Law Lords will have plenty of clues as to what decision the British establishment wants. Since the selection of Bingham for Lord Chief Justice was hailed by the legal establishment as a great liberal move — because the other Law Lords were even more right-wing — it is extremely unlikely the appeal will have any effect. Pinochet will almost certainly be in transit to Chile very soon. Blair's Britain will remain a safe haven for the most vicious scum of the planet. Robin Cook will continue to prattle about an ethical foreign policy — steadfastly refusing to say which set of ethics it is based on — and 'British Justice' will remain the leading oxymoron in the language.

However, not all about this peculiar case is negative. The important historical lesson of Chile has been raised again before a new generation. In Chile itself it has galvanised the masses into street protests throughout the working class areas. It puts more pressure on other regimes like, for example, Menem's Argentina. Menem, on his visit to Britain, was forced to defend Pinochet because such cases are very liable to reveal similar problems in Argentina's past — a can of worms he does not want opening. The left must use this opportunity to expose these regimes and the role of the west in supporting them.

Labour and TUC conferences

Bastards and ballots

By Charli Langford and Jonathan Joseph

Three items dominated the papers and television during the party and trade union conference season – the left won four out of six Constituency Section seats on the Labour Party National Executive Committee, John Edmonds called company directors ‘greedy bastards’ and Tony Blair made speeches using very few verbs. After looking at what happened this year one has to admit that the media got it about right.

Writing in Workers News last year, we denounced Labour’s ‘Partnership into Power’ proposals for their aim of concentrating political power in the hands of the prime minister and cabinet, shifting policy to the unaccountable National Policy Forum and further marginalising the membership. Conference this year proved the strategy to be effective; the only opposition resolutions came from the unions and both were seen off easily – the RMT resolution on renationalising rail was soundly defeated and the AEEU resolution against proportional representation was remitted.

The four slots for discussion of immediate issues were easily captured by the Blairites, so no discussion took place on key issues such as Blair’s support for the US terrorist attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan last August, or the emergency anti-terrorist legislation passed last September.

However, the Labour leadership’s plan to use conference to showcase ministers and their policies was a dismal failure, mainly because there were no policies or ministers worth showcasing. Blair’s speech – tough on verbs, tough on the causes of verbs – set the tone. Verbs, as the Guardian pointed out, are ‘doing’ words, and when you do not intend doing anything you are willing to talk about you have no need of them. The economy remains in the unelected hands of the Bank of England. Youth will still be excluded from the minimum wage legislation. Single parents will be pressured into work. The conference message to British workers was that the poorest and most vulnerable will continue to be attacked while the fat cats continue to coin it.

Blairites humbled

The high spot of conference for the left has to be the defeat of two-thirds

of the Blairite slate for the executive committee in the constituency section. This was despite a concerted campaign by the Blairites based on large amounts of members’ money and the unconstitutional use of the party apparatus and its supposedly impartial General Secretary, Tom Sawyer. Mark Seddon topped the list with 75,584 votes with Liz Davies (61,970), Cathy Jamieson (61,707) and Pete Willsman (58,108) also getting elected. Christine Shawcroft with 53,897 just missed out but came well ahead of half the Blair slate. In contrast, Andy Howell of Labour Reform (the most right-wing component of the Grassroots slate) got just 30,305 votes.

Dennis Skinner almost won election from the MPs and MEPs section. The rules were changed last year so that Skinner could no longer be nominated by the constituencies. He missed out this year partly because the ballot papers were numbered and MP’s feared that their votes would be traced and partly because the Campaign Group of MPs failed to campaign.

Campaigns, not constitutions!

But at the same time we must understand these results for what they are. The situation is not – as *Labour Left Briefing* claims – a ‘victory for democracy’. The pathetic, stage-managed and essentially pointless conference was a defeat for democracy, and those elected to the NEC will find it almost impossible to have any relevance in the positions they were elected to.

The important point is that the vote signals a large measure of opposition by Labour Party members – and a sizeable number of MPs and MEPs – to the policies of the government. The left candidates were elected despite being pilloried as ‘Trotskyists’, whereas the most right-wing member of the Grassroots Alliance gained only

half as many votes as the rest of the slate. Concerns about the left being ‘too extreme’ to win the middle ground are a serious misjudgement of the party membership. As the party starts to polarise our task now is to build on the left vote, to harden it out and to win it to political activism.

In this context, the weakest people are the MPs. Unfortunately, their elected parliamentary position gives them unwarranted credibility in an electoralist milieu such as the Labour left. Time and again they have proved incapable of organising their base of support, and they have proved to be in thrall to parliamentarianism rather than to grassroots activity. In order to combat this frittering away of oppositional possibilities it is necessary for the Labour left to organise much more actively, relating to and promoting struggle within the working class.

What is needed now is for the Labour left to organise itself. A first step would be the calling of a conference of supporters of the Grassroots Alliance and the setting up of a structure and adoption of an action programme to support struggles and to raise alternative demands in parliament.

In the enemy camp

If Labour’s conference was a big yawn, the affairs of the other parties were like being spiked with valium. The only point to note from the Liberals is that they will sell out every principle they ever had for a promise of proportional representation, and down in Toryland the Clarke-Heath axis was completely eclipsed by the Eurosceptic alliance – a conglomeration of aristos, landowners, blimps and relics of empire who resemble nothing so much as dinosaurs who have yet to notice the asteroid approaching.

Greedy bastards

Meanwhile down at the TUC conference, GMB boss John Edmonds caused a bit of a storm by calling overpaid company directors ‘greedy bastards’. It might be pointed out to Edmonds that these are the same greedy bastards with whom the TUC wants to have a partnership.

This year’s conference was interesting for this apparent contradiction. As

well as Edmonds's controlled explosion, Unison leader Rodney Bickerstaffe called for an end to public sector pay restraint and, along with the TGWU's Bill Morris, called for a higher minimum wage.

Yet despite Edmonds calling the government's policies "fag-end Conservatism", these union bureaucrats are still completely loyal to Tony Blair, Peter Mandelson and the New Labour government. Their words are mere conference rhetoric. They actually have little intention of rocking the boat.

The fact that the bureaucrats find it necessary to use such rhetoric is, however, of some significance. In a sense they are firing a shot across the bows. They do not want to take on the government, but they recognise the changing situation. The Labour honeymoon may not be entirely over yet, but its declared policy of creating stable economic growth is hitting the rocks as the country heads into recession.

The union leaders are aware that Labour has made certain commitments and that these might be under threat. These commitments are clearly pathetic. Central to this year's conference was the "Fairness at Work" White Paper. Despite their noisy statements the union bureaucrats again caved in before the government and the Confederation of British Industry on issues like union recognition. In many respects this legislation will make no difference, but the union leaders are trying to sell the deal to their members as at least some sort of progress. Now with a recession they are aware that even this might be threatened.

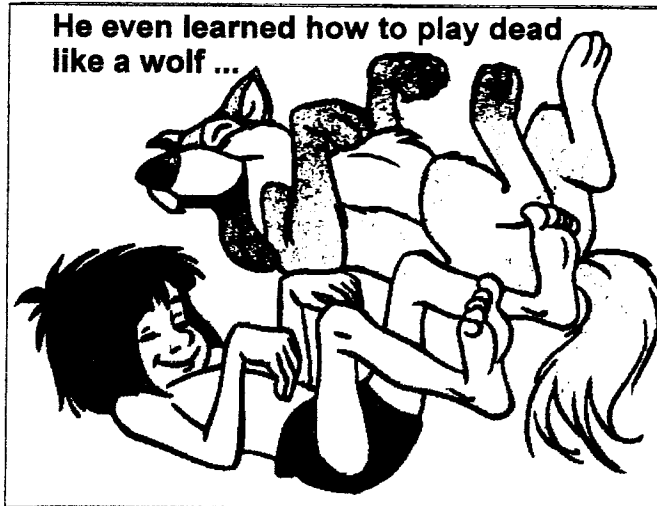
Recessionary pressures

Above all, the union leaders need to maintain a base. For this they have to recruit new members. A Labour government, for all its anti-working class policies, does offer a better climate for this. However, a recession is not so good. The TUC is looking for some concessions from Labour in order to rebuild its base. But Labour is not so forthcoming.

The crisis at Rover is one such case. Following the news that the Longbridge plant might be closed Gordon Brown rushed to defend the company and attack the workforce. The problem, he said, is

that productivity is not high enough, and this despite a massive increase in productivity over the last decade, due to the introduction of super-exploitative management tools such as team working and quality circles. In the context of a recession it is therefore quite clear that the government will support bosses and their renewed attacks on the workforce.

The union leaders are therefore



TUC leaders plan their strategy

worried about their own positions. They are afraid of losing the confidence of their members and appearing powerless in the face of a recession. They need to talk tough even if they do not want to act tough.

Trade unionists should fight to force the bureaucrats to keep to their words. We have bitter experience what they are really like. Tough talkers like Morris and Bickerstaffe blatantly sold out the strikers at Liverpool docks and Hillingdon hospital. Bickerstaffe even attempted to expel the Hillingdon strikers from Unison. Despite a complete lack of Unison backing, the courageous Hillingdon strikers have managed to win an industrial tribunal case against their sacking — this despite Bickerstaffe's active opposition.

Unfortunately, most trade union members still look to their leaders to do the business. While we should have no illusions in them, we should recognise this situation. If John Edmonds talks tough at TUC conference we should demand that he acts tough. We should follow up Bickerstaffe's criticisms of public sector pay restraint and the low level of the minimum wage. The rank-and-file in the unions has to organise and put demands on the leadership to act. And if the speeches at this year's TUC conference are shown to be mere rhetoric, then the likes of John Edmonds should be exposed as the frauds that they really are. **WA**

Paul Wozny 1954 – 1998

It is with sadness that Workers Action has learned of the sudden death of Paul Wozny at the age of 44.

Many of us knew Paul well from our time with *Socialist Outlook*. His ideas were always extremely valuable and we learned a lot from his record of principled struggle in the labour movement. His work as a trade union activist was excellent and we were only recently discussing with him tactics for work in Unison and the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union (CFDU).

Paul attended the last congress of the Workers International League (forerunner of Workers Action) on behalf of *Socialist Outlook*. More recently we met and shared ideas, jokes and beers at the *Socialist Outlook* summer school at Bangor which Workers Action participated in.

Paul was at the centre of everything that happened in Southampton. He helped build one of the most militant Unison branches, possibly the largest local Socialist Campaign Group and one of the few functioning Trades Councils. He had been a member of the CFDU's National Committee since its inception in 1993.

Our very high regard for Paul seems to be shared by most comrades who came across him, regardless of what political background they were from. His funeral brought together nearly 100 people — friends, family and comrades.

To them we send our condolences. The class struggle has lost a great fighter.

A commemoration meeting for Paul will take place next January. It is being organised by Unison, Trades Council and Campaign Group comrades in Southampton. Details will be available from those organisations and will also appear in the left press. **WA**

Debate

How should the Labour left organise?

The large vote for the Grassroots Alliance centre / left slate in the NEC elections is one of the few positive things to have happened in the Labour Party recently. However, it also poses questions about how the left should organise and on what basis it should fight. *What Next?* editor **Bob Pitt** debates with **Jonathan Joseph** from *Workers Action* on the lessons of the election campaign.

Labour NEC Elections: Lessons for the Left

By **Bob Pitt**

The remarkable achievement of the centre-left slate, the Grassroots Alliance, in gaining four of the six places in elections to the constituency section of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) will have been applauded by all but the most hardened sectarians in the socialist movement.

The Grassroots Alliance succeeded despite enjoying a fraction of the financial support given to the leadership-backed Members First slate, whose expenditure has been estimated by Alliance press co-ordinator Tim Pendry at between £80,000 and £150,000, compared with a £2,500 outlay by the Alliance. The origins of the vast sum of money are not yet entirely clear (although we know that some £30,000 came from the AEEU). But it enabled Members First to buy half-page adverts in the national press, to hire a telephone canvassing company to cold-call Labour Party members, and to mail the tens of thousands of lapsed party members who had been allowed to participate in the ballot in a blatant breach of party rules.

To compound this overwhelming financial advantage, Labour Party general secretary Tom Sawyer abused his official position to write letters to the press making personal attacks on the Grassroots Alliance candidates. And, in a last-minute attempt to stampede the party membership into backing Members First, Neil Kinnock was wheeled out to write an article for the *Guardian* denouncing the Alliance as a bunch of Trots and their dupes.

All in vain. Party members showed a commendable independence of mind and rejected these disgraceful manoeuvres by the leadership. Their response demonstrated the absurdity of the claim by certain ultra-lefts that the Labour Party has been 'Blairised' from top to bottom. Even the two Members First candidates who did get elected to the NEC – Diana Jeuda and Michael Cashman – are not really paid-up Blairites and were undoubtedly perceived by the membership as being on the left of the party. The failure of the Blair 'project' to get a grip in the consciousness of the Labour rank and file was revealed for all to see.

The Alliance's good showing was a vindication of the decision to build a broad-based electoral bloc, which was backed by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups (formerly the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network), *Labour Left Briefing*, *Tribune*, the Campaign for Socialism in Scotland, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, and Labour Reform. The latter organisation, some of whose members readily admit that they supported Blair over the abolition of Clause IV, was an important and necessary part of the coalition even though its candidate, Andy Howell, failed to get elected.

This broad coalition was not to the taste of some on the far left. The Alliance for Workers Liberty, for example, argued forcefully for a hard left slate on which they hoped, two of their own supporters would feature prominently; and, after failing to get their way, they effectively boycotted the campaign. Even *Socialist Outlook*, which to its credit did participate in the campaign, was critical of the

political composition of the slate.

These criticisms were based on a serious misconception of the political tactics appropriate to the Labour Party today. In the present situation, *Briefing* supporter Liz Davies was the furthest left you could go in putting together a credible anti-Blairite slate for the NEC. Standing a slate of hard left candidates, including a brace of Trotskyists, would not have been a practical political intervention but a mere propaganda exercise, and a very damaging one at that. The majority of the NEC constituency seats would almost certainly have gone to leadership-backed candidates, allowing Blair to claim that he the solid support of the membership against his left-wing critics.

The Grassroots Alliance, by contrast, was able to tap into the widespread opposition to Blairite politics that exists within the party, and which goes far beyond the left, hard or soft, through to the Hattersleyite right and beyond. As Ken Livingstone pointed out when the result was announced, it was a vote by the membership to 'keep the party Labour'.

Indeed, at the heart of the Blairite project is the plan to destroy the Labour Party as a *labour* party. Blair's aim is the recomposition of the centre of British politics, pulling Labour into a coalition, first with the Liberal Democrats and then possibly with pro-European Tories, leaving the organised working class in a politically marginalised position, as it is in the United States. Decisive steps along this road would include a deal with the Lib Dems over PR, state funding for political parties and curting the institutional link with the trade unions.

It is around such issues that major struggles will emerge within the party in the next period. The result of the NEC elections shows the sort of broad alliances that the Labour left must build in order to defeat Blair's plan to split the party from its working-class base. ■

Debate

Is Grassroots the way forward?

by Jonathan Joseph

To make things clear from the start, the election of four Grassroots Alliance candidates to Labour's NEC is a great result. What it shows above all else is that the membership of the party has not been 'Blairised' and the leadership does not have absolute control over the minds of the membership. This is despite the fact that a considerable number of left-wing members have left the party. It also somewhat disproves the idea that all Labour's new recruits are paid-up Blairites. Those on the left who claim that Labour is a barren wasteland should seriously reconsider their opinions.

However, Bob Pitt's praise for the Grassroots Alliance as the way forward also goes way over the top. He draws the conclusion that the result of the NEC election points to the sort of broad alliances the Labour left should build in order to defeat Blair's 'project' to break the party from its working class base. The problem with this view is that it conflates a whole number of issues.

For a start, what is an alliance? Who is it with, what is it for and what does it entail? These questions need to be seriously dealt with. Unfortunately this did not happen with the Grassroots campaign. The decision by the Socialist Campaign Group to form a bloc with *Tribune* and Labour Reform was not taken after open political debate in front of Campaign Group Supporters' Network members. It was put together through a series of elite meetings at the Red Fort restaurant involving Labour Reform, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the ex-left Socialist Action.

Bob criticises *Socialist Outlook* and the Alliance for Workers Liberty for questioning this. He is wrong. We all have every right to know how a particular slate is put together and on what politics it will organise. Even if we are happy with the political basis of the slate (as Bob is) this does not excuse the lack of discussion and debate in arriving at this point. In fact this method of backdoor manoeuvring is typical of the Campaign Group and should

be vigorously fought against.

The Grassroots Alliance claims to be fighting for democracy. Yet the way it decided its slate and opposed open discussion shows it still has a lot to learn itself.

The purpose of the alliance is still (deliberately) unclear. We need to ask questions like: what are the most important issues to raise in the Labour Party? How broad an alliance do we need to build to do this? The answer: 'as broad as possible' is never a correct one. Building or participating in alliances is a tactical issue related to the united front approach and must always be linked to political considerations like the nature of the demands and the base of support.

The Grassroots Alliance was called a centre/left slate because of the participation of the Labour Reform candidate Andy Howell. Labour Reform makes no secret of the fact that it is not on the left of the party. As Bob says, many of its supporters agreed with Blair's attack on Clause IV. Andy Howell, as a Birmingham councillor, has pushed through spending cuts.

When the Campaign Group decided to work with them last year over the Partnership into Power document which attacked internal democracy, it adopted Labour Reform's slogan that this was not a left or right but a class issue.

Yes, attacks on the democracy of the party are a class issue, but they are *also* an attack on the left and denial of this is a surrender to the right. Blair's internal 'modernisation' is aimed against the left and the unions and is a logical continuation of the New Realist attacks and witch-hunts of the left that were started by Kinnock and Hattersley — the same Hattersley who many of the Grassroots motivators now look to as an ally.

Now I believe that we could have an alliance with Labour Reform around very clear party democracy issues. As a supporter of the united front approach I have no problem with this. But it should be limited to a clear issue where we can agree to work together and it should not involve an adaptation to their politics in the way, for example, that the 'neither left nor right' and the 'delay rather than re-

ject' approach to the Partnership into Power document took.

Unfortunately this was not at all clear with the Grassroots campaign. The issue, let us remember, was not explicitly internal reforms, although this was obviously the main focus. The campaign was about elections to the NEC and this therefore requires a broader political focus. If a candidate is standing for the NEC we need to know what their political priorities are and what they are prepared to campaign for. Labour Reform was clearly not prepared to stand for left politics and the Campaign Group was quite happy to go along with this.

This happens all the time in the Labour Party, even on the far left. For example, during the Clause IV campaign, *Socialist Outlook* and the AWL were prepared to argue for the 'defence of the wording' without raising any concrete political demands which might give the wording some life. Even basic things like 'defend the welfare state' or 'renationalise the privatised utilities' were left out of the campaign lest they offend our potential 'allies'. And during the follow up 'Socialist Policies for a Labour Government' campaign the AWL actively opposed raising the demand for the repeal of the anti-union laws in case this upset poor old Mr Hattersley and his chums.

What happened in these cases was that the immediate issues became part of a longer-term project and the tactical alliances became strategic alliances. It was done in such a way that maintaining an alliance became more important than the politics on which it was founded. It became impossible to raise political issues without jeopardising the whole project. The various lefts became the 'best builders of the campaign' and in doing so they forgot about being the best *leaders*.

The question now is: do we want the Grassroots Alliance to become a long term campaign? And if we do, what will be the political effect of the participation of the likes of Labour Reform?

It is argued that including Labour Reform broadens the appeal. This is not necessarily true. Andy Howell, the Labour Reform NEC candidate got just 30,305 votes, half that of the most left-wing candidate, Liz Davies. It is not clear, therefore that the inclusion of Labour reform will win the left a wider support.

And if that support is won by moving the politics rightwards and not raising important class issues, then we may at-

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Is Grassroots the way forward?*Continued from previous page*

tract some Hattersleyites, but we may also lose the confidence of good trade unionists and left-wingers who are looking for something more meaningful. A campaign might, for example, ditch the demand to repeal the anti-union laws in order to win over some right-wingers. But in doing so the campaign will undoubtedly lose the support of union militants who are looking to such a campaign to support them.

Also at stake is what kind of campaign is necessary to beat Blair. Bob's support for the Grassroots Alliance approach is support for a campaign which becomes overly concerned with internal Labour affairs and the kind of backstage manoeuvring seen in the setting up of the alliance.

What is needed is a campaign that looks beyond internal affairs and relates to the concerns of the class struggle. At the end of the day, Blair will not be defeated by internal manoeuvring, but through the working class being mobilised in struggle. That is why it is essential that we develop key demands that relate to the interests of the working class. These might include such things as the anti-union laws, minimum wage, full employment, welfare state, and nationalisation of privatised utilities.

These are not ultra-left demands, far from it. They are very basic demands that reflect the current low level of consciousness. But they will, nevertheless, challenge the whole basis of the Blairite consensus. And in doing so they begin a dynamic which will allow further and more radical demands to be raised.

By contrast, a Grassroots Alliance style approach which is stitched up in advance with minimum debate on political issues cannot provide the basis for such a strategy. As the name implies, it is a policy that is rooted to the ground, related to the particular moment but unable to provide any ongoing momentum. It is an approach dictated by the right-wing of the alliance and tailored to suit their needs. Yes, we may well need alliances with these kinds of people if a particular issue requires it. But we don't need to turn this into a *strategic alliance* that carries over into everything that we do, and where keeping the alliance going becomes more important than the actual politics of the struggle.

So well done to the Grassroots Alliance. Their victory can give the Labour left new impetus. But in order to develop momentum we need to go beyond the limited political basis on which the alliance was formed and on which Bob, it would seem, wishes it to stay. **WA**

Unite for free education!**Can't pay, don't pay!**

by Steve Revins

The November 18 demonstration in London has been called by the Campaign for Free Education (CFE) in response to the biggest attack upon student funding ever seen in Britain. The Labour government is carrying on where the Tories left off in attacking higher education, intending to abolish maintenance grants for students while introducing tuition fees. The inaction of the New Labour-dominated National Union of Students leadership is criminal. The response of these creatures to Labour's planned assault on freely accessible further and higher education – a bastion of the welfare state – was to change the long-standing NUS policy from demanding free education to calling for the introduction of a 'graduate tax', a slightly different method of making students pay for their education.

How can we win our demands? This time last year, the soon-to-be lame duck government of Helmut Kohl announced the introduction of tuition fees

into the massively overcrowded German universities. Before long, students in university towns and cities throughout the country became involved in marches, occupations and other actions, linking up in joint activity with education and other workers, and culminating in over 500,000 students on the streets in protest with striking workers. The plans for fees were withdrawn forthwith.

In France over a quarter of a million school students recently took to the streets to protest against the lack of spending. In Israel there have been violent clashes between police and students who are striking against tuition fees.

We need to build a united movement in Britain that campaigns for free education and decent grants, with an ongoing campaign based upon mass action. If thousands of students refuse to pay their fees then the system can be made unworkable, just as it was when the poll tax was introduced. If this is combined with radical demonstrations and occupations, the government's plans can still be defeated.

- * The CFE now needs to call a national conference to work out and plan our activities. Students from every university, and also from FE and Sixth Form colleges need to be involved.
- * Other campaigns for students' rights – 'Save Free Education' and the SWP-led campaign – should be invited. We need to forge some unity among the existing campaigns.
- * We need to be demanding not only the restoration of the student grant, but also that it is for a realistic amount, decided nationally by student unions – students need enough money to cover adequately all their needs.
- * Students need to link up with all working class bodies that are opposed to attacks on the welfare state – primarily the trade unions.
- * The CFE – currently in opposition on the NUS national executive – needs to link up with left wing and rank-and-file movements in the trade unions, particularly those active in colleges (Unison, AUT, NUT, NATFHE). **WA**

National demonstration

Grants not fees!November 18, 12 noon
University of London Union.

To contact the Campaign for Free Education
or for information about the Can't Pay – Won't Pay campaign
write to: PO Box 22615, London N4 1WF
or call: 0958 556 756.

PCSU – The Socialist Party and New Deal:

A Tale of Two Hats

by Lee Rock

New Deal is Labour's flagship programme. Although widely touted as a job creation and training initiative for the young unemployed, it is in fact a continuation of the Tories' attacks on those on benefits. The scheme, which initially targeted 18-24 year olds unemployed for over six months, and has recently been extended to include those over 25 and unemployed for over two years, introduces major elements of coercion aimed at driving workers off benefit and into low paid work.

Those who fail to get jobs have to attend 'gateway' interviews, following which they have five options:

- * Taking up a low paid job; the employer receives a subsidy of £60 per week for 6 months, but has no obligation to keep the trainee on after 6 months;
- * Taking a training course (NVQ1s or NVQ2s) just to get their benefit;
- * Working full-time for benefit plus £15 per week for a voluntary organisation or charity;
- * Working as part of the Environmental Taskforce;
- * Self employment

Those who don't do any of these, or leave the other options early, will lose 2 weeks benefit for the first 'offence', and 4 weeks for a further infringement.

In addition to the attacks on the unemployed, New Deal is also being used to undermine public sector workers. In ten districts, the scheme is being run by private companies such as Reed Employment, and the gateway process has a considerable amount of public/private 'partnership'.

Faced with such measures, the response of the average decent civil service trade unionist would be to mobilise opposition. But the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) which for a number of years has held key positions in the Employment Service section of first CPSA, and now the merged PCS union, has refused to come out in opposition to New Deal. Motions at both CPSA Section Executive Committee, and now PCSU Group Executive Committee (GEC) opposing New Deal have been voted down by the Socialist Party's 4 members and 2 fellow travellers

on the leadership. The furthest they have been prepared to go has been to say that they 'opposed the thinking' behind New Deal – and this only in a letter to Socialist Caucus.

In October, at the annual conference of Left Unity - the grouping in PCSU controlled by the Socialist Party - SP members put forward a classical justification of opportunism. As socialists, SP members were 'politically opposed' to New Deal. However, they also had to wear their trade union hats, which meant that it could not be op-

posed. SP members argue opposing New Deal is counterposed to fighting for improvements in trainees conditions - the opposite of the line they traditionally took towards cheap labour schemes.

A further attack on Employment Service workers' conditions comes in the form of 400 National Traineeships. These will bring 16 to 24 year olds into Job Centres to do normal jobs for £75 per week. Despite there being no guaranteed jobs at the end of the traineeship, the GEC has entered into a 'conditional agreement' with management, on the basis that if it doesn't management will refuse to talk to it. In other words, it has signed up to a measure undercutting its own members' jobs before it has even entered talks to see if significant improvements can be made. Another masterpiece of Socialist Party bargaining strategy! **WA**

RMT Elections

Left must build a united campaign

by Richard Price

The left is currently stronger in the RMT – the main union for railway workers – than in any other major union in Britain. Two sets of elections in the next few months will put the leadership to the test. But the disarray of the Socialist Labour Party, which holds nearly half the seats on the executive, threatens to undermine the left. It is essential that socialists exert the maximum pressure so that a united campaign can be fought against the supporters of Jimmy Knapp.

The ballot for president of the union, which finishes early in December, illustrates the problem. Mick Atherton, a member of the SLP who is supported by a majority of left activists, is being opposed by *Morning Star* supporter Ken Thomas. But the election has been given an added twist by the fact that SLP president Arthur Scargill has let it be known that he supports Thomas against his own 'comrade'. Meanwhile, Bob Crow – who is both SLP vice-president and one of the two RMT assistant general secretaries – is sitting on the fence. This is not surprising, since Crow has never tired of telling SLP meetings that he sees the party as the continuation of the Communist Party of

Britain, of which he was a longstanding member before joining the SLP.

Next spring two more crucial positions come up for election – the general secretary and second assistant general secretary. Although nominations have yet to be submitted, the chief contenders are already fairly clear. The incumbent general secretary, Jimmy Knapp, is standing again. Crow, the obvious contender for the left, will not stand, presumably hoping to slide into the general secretary post after Knapp retires. In his place executive member Greg Tucker – a supporter of *Socialist Outlook* – is likely to stand and deserves the support of all activists. In the run-off for assistant general secretary, likely candidates are the incumbent, Vernon Hince, supported by Knapp, and two SLP members, the London Transport regional council secretary Pat Sikorski and executive member Jim Connolly! Although Connolly ran Hince to within 300 votes in the last election, he is regarded as something of a liability and a loose cannon. Sikorski, who remains nominally vice-president of the SLP, is out of sorts with the Scargill leadership since the last SLP conference, while Crow is refusing to come out in support of either. So much for the party which presents itself as the alternative to New Labour. **WA**

Trade Union Congress**Edmonds – the new messiah?**

Birmingham socialist **Geoff Usher** gives his impression of a meeting at which the politics of the trade union leaders plumbed new depths

This year's TUC conference witnessed a fairly unusual phenomenon at Blackpool. No, it wasn't the invitation to the Governor of the Bank of England to address the Conference, although one could probably be forgiven for wondering just what it is the average trade union activist is supposed to have in common with such a senior figure from the world of finance. It was something even less likely – the Conference President, GMB leader John Edmonds calling sections of top industrialists 'greedy bastards' with their 'snouts in the trough'.

Fighting talk indeed, and surely all the more welcome when Peter Mandelson calls for 'responsible trade unionism' (whatever that means) at the same Conference at a time when hundreds more workers in Yorkshire and the North East are about to be thrown out of work.

While it is highly unlikely that Edmonds' no-nonsense words will save the livelihoods of any workers currently sweating over whether or not they will have a job next week or next month, is the trade

union movement seeing the emergence of a 'new messiah of the left' who might attract more popularity than somebody like Arthur Scargill? Well, as Edmonds' words are really little more than a radical populist supplement to the TUC's calls for a raising of interest rates and even some tax increases in order to save jobs, can we not presume that Edmonds is not so much a messiah, but more a maverick thoroughly conversant with the art of *playing to the gallery*?

While Mandelson's appeals for 'responsible trade unionism' (no mention of responsible management of course!) actually amounts to a call for the labour movement to unite with a balance-sheet orientated job cutting management (a little bit like turkeys uniting round the board-room table with a certain Bernard Matthews really), the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's deep aversion to those trade unionists who are 'frozen in iron', is conveniently intercepted by another voice. The voice in question is none other than that of the *Daily Mail*, whose front page response to Edmonds' 'greedy bastards'

speech announced the 'Roar of the Dinosaur'.

Let me see if I have got this right. If somebody calls big financiers (who give themselves massive pay increases while workforces get the rate of inflation at best and a place in the dole queue at worst) 'greedy bastards', he or she is emitting the roar of a long extinct creature. Furthermore, if we are to advance from the dinosaur age we must, according to Mr Mandelson, act responsibly (if only I knew in which context such a sentiment was meant) and regard those who close workplaces and decimate whole communities as natural industrial partners.

So this is to be the future, and the dreadful history of trade union struggle, of demonstrations, of strikes, of workplace occupations even – actually, unless ordinary workers were to remain without hope and rights, such actions are quite necessary and have a proud tradition in the movement – must be 'frozen in iron'. How could we have been so mistaken? With apologies to anybody who has ever read *Private Eye* – *shorely shome mistake – ed!*

Actually, there is a moral to this story – and it is this. When senior Labour Party figures such as Mandelson (or for that matter, Blair or Prescott) deliver their message with such impunity, it is not difficult in the prevailing 'moderate' political atmosphere to appear militant through a populist and almost certainly vacuous speech which John Edmonds will not have to back up – not have to that is, unless the trade union movement mobilises and forces Edmonds and left-talkers like him to have to go beyond speechifying. ■

Brazil – investors courted as**Cardoso promises cuts**

by Philip Marchant

As he starts his second term as Brazil's president following his success in the October 4 elections, Fernando Henrique Cardoso is preparing a major attack on workers' living standards in an attempt to stem the country's financial crisis.

Following the collapse of the south Asian and Russian economies, the share markets of Latin America came under intense selling pressure as Western speculators took fright. Brazil is the main focus of concern since it is the largest economy in Latin America, accounting for 45 per cent of the region's Gross

Domestic Product. Less than a fortnight after the start of the Russian crisis in mid-August, share prices on the São Paulo exchange had fallen by over 35 per cent. By the beginning of October, some \$30 billion had been transferred out of the country to safer havens, despite the fact that the government had raised interest rates to almost 50 per cent, as investors began to panic at the size of Brazil's budget deficit – more than 7 per cent of its GDP.

Western creditors fear that Brazil's currency, the real, will have to be devalued, and that Argentina, the next largest economy in the Mercosur trading bloc, will be forced to follow suit. This will heighten the possibility of widespread defaulting on debt repayment to foreign banks, since, as was the case in south

Asia and Russia, a weaker currency would mean that the repayment of dollar-denominated loans would become prohibitively expensive. US banks have lent heavily to Brazil – far more so than to Russia, for example – and if Brazil goes down, the chances are it will take a number of US and European financial institutions with it. For this reason, the IMF is currently preparing a gigantic \$30 billion rescue plan – despite the fact that the organisation is reputedly almost broke, and in stark contrast to the pitiful response by US and European governments to the devastation caused in Central America by Hurricane Mitch.

For its part, the Brazilian government will be expected to slash its budget deficit. At the end of October, finance minister Pedro Malan announced a savage programme of cuts and additional taxation for public-sector workers and pensioners, aimed at saving \$24 billion and balancing the budget by next year. As well as smoothing the way for the IMF credit line, this highly optimistic target is designed to take

As East Asian crisis continues

Now Malaysia is on the brink

by Mark Boon

The economic crisis that has struck East Asia is continuing to bring political havoc in its wake. Just as the bursting of the economic bubble has brought mass protests to the streets of Indonesia (restarting, as *Workers Action* goes to press), so the Malaysian regime has been challenged by mass protests and demonstration. However, there is a peculiar twist to this tale.

The economic crisis has seen a big bust-up between Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy and Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim. To a large extent this represents a power struggle within the ruling UMNO party. The recent instability means that Mahathir now fears that Anwar will replace him. He therefore spread false rumours of sex scandals in order to discredit Anwar and sack him.

This case has stirred the masses. Following his sacking, Anwar began a speaking tour and addressed large crowds who defied the reactionary Police Act that requires public meetings to have a permit. The government is

widely blamed for the economic crisis and Anwar is cashing in on his rebel status. He has attacked government corruption and cronyism and has drawn parallels with the situation in Indonesia, calling for a Malaysian version of the *reformasi* movement.

Between two evils

However, underlying this split are differences over how to respond to the economic crisis. Prime Minister Mahathir stands out in East Asia as rejecting the IMF plans and denouncing 'neo-colonialism'. He blames the economic crisis on foreign financial speculators and has imposed strong controls on currency movements.

By contrast Anwar, for all his popular claims, is a pro-western, pro-IMF free market supporter. He has the strong support of the US and is chair of the IMF's Development Committee. He may be waging a battle against the government and he may have called for a reform movement, but ultimately he is a stooge of the west and has nothing progressive to offer. His main aim is not to set up an independent reform movement but to return to the rul-

ing UMNO party, preferably as leader. He is rightly picking up on the lack of democracy in Malaysia, but this is largely in line with his neo-liberal economic approach.

Austerity response

However, there are real concerns that have caused the masses to take to the streets and to look to an alternative to Mahathir. The 50 per cent fall of the ringgit's value against the dollar has led to rising prices and serious hardship. Despite the rhetoric of stronger intervention, the government has actually embarked on an unpopular programme of privatising public utilities. And following the 70 per cent fall in share prices, people's savings funds were used to bail out the government's cronies.

Unfortunately we have a situation where people are looking to a pro-IMF, free market supporter to fight for reforms and against corruption, and we have a corrupt leader who has denounced neo-colonialism. But ultimately neither the laissez-faire approach nor government regulation can resolve the fundamental contradictions that are intrinsic to capitalism itself.

What are the specific reasons for the crisis?

The specific reasons for the crisis in Malaysia and elsewhere are complex. First, there is the general world financial crisis. Recent months have seen massive instability of financial markets and currency values. This is fuelled by the policies of laissez-faire financial deregulation that have been pursued since the 1980s. Second is the serious slump in the Japanese economy and the effect of this on foreign investment. Third is the unprecedented recent growth of the Asian tiger economies that was reliant on this foreign investment and which now cannot cope with its withdrawal. Fourth is the lack of a stable domestic capital base and the weakness of state and institutional bodies which might try and regulate the situation. They have proved particularly vulnerable to currency speculation.

Therefore, because of the huge amounts of foreign investment, the world financial crisis has hit South East Asia very hard. Unlike the USA, the EU and Japan, this area does not have the relative protection of a sizeable domestic capital and a sizeable domestic market. Countries like Malaysia, instead of pushing into the twenty-first century, will continue to suffer serious socio-economic instability. Unfortunately, in most of these areas the working class is weak and unorganised. The situation in Malaysia and the fiasco over Anwar is a sad example of what happens when there is a lack of a working class, socialist alternative. **WA**

the pressure off the real by convincing investors that the government is serious about reducing public spending.

Cardoso, leading a coalition of five conservative parties, was re-elected president on the strength of his management of the economy over the last four years. He was responsible for the 'Real Plan', the essence of which was the creation of a new currency tied to the US dollar, combined with a massive privatisation programme. The stability of the real was underpinned by foreign investment attracted by the sale of publicly-owned industries, and hyperinflation of over 3,000 per cent a year was eliminated.

For Cardoso's main challenger, the Workers' Party (PT) candidate Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva, it was the third unsuccessful attempt at winning the presidency. Although based on the trade unions, the PT's activist base has declined and its record of attacking strikers when controlling local government has alienated it from some sections of the work-

ing class. This time round, Lula was representing a broader coalition including parties to the right of the PT. Faced with the present crisis, what was required was a bold economic policy to defend workers' living standards — including renationalisation of the privatised utilities — coupled with a rejection of IMF demands for 'restructuring' and repudiation of the foreign debt. But the best that the PT could offer was to promise to defend Brazil's industry by introducing import controls in the event of a currency devaluation.

Nevertheless, many observers were surprised at the PT's relative success in the election after its low-key and confused campaign, and the second round on October 25 may see the party making further gains. It seems that the PT leadership set more store by Cardoso's record of stabilising the currency than many workers. The task now must be to mobilise those workers against the government's attempt to make them pay for the crisis. **WA**

ETA ceasefire leads to realignment of Basque nationalists

by Jim Padmore

After the death of Franco, three of Spain's four Basque provinces were granted limited autonomy, and in 1980, the first parliamentary elections took place. The combined nationalist vote was 55 per cent. Since then, the nationalist vote has averaged 56 per cent in the Basque elections, and 48 per cent in Spanish general elections. Within that, Herri Batasuna, which is linked to the armed movement Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) — 'The Basque Country and Freedom' — has averaged 17 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. October 25 saw the sixth elections to the Basque parliament.

The background to the elections is the new political situation after ETA declared a ceasefire in mid-September. ETA had been without any clear political direction for some years, seemingly content to carry on a disastrous policy of killings and kidnappings. By the time of the 1996 general election in Spain, Herri Batasuna was down to 12 per cent of the popular vote in the Basque country. When, in July 1997, ETA's killing of local councillor Miguel Angel Blanco sparked massive demonstrations throughout the Basque country and elsewhere in Spain, it was Herri Batasuna's lowest point. More isolated than ever, the ETA leadership had become a millstone around the neck of Herri Batasuna.

The Partido Popular (PP) and the social democratic PSOE couldn't believe their luck, and the PP-led government in Madrid went on the offensive. In December 1997, the entire national leadership of Herri Batasuna was sent to prison, and in July this year, the government closed down *Egin*, the party's daily newspaper. These actions were condemned by the other nationalist parties and by Izquierda Unida (the United Left), which was the only non-nationalist party to oppose the repressive measures and support the right of self-determination in the Basque country. The contrasting record of IU and the PSOE is striking: while IU has supported self-determination, the PSOE has organised the GAL death squads to assassinate ETA members. Former PSOE interior

minister Barrionuevo has been jailed for his part in setting up GAL. The PSOE holds weekly demonstrations outside his prison in solidarity!

Herri Batasuna organised a broader electoral front, Euskal Herritarrok (Basque Citizens), to contest the October elections, and on September 17 ETA declared an indefinite ceasefire. Another element in the new situation has been the talks between the three nationalist parties (HB, PNV and EA) and Izquierda Unida in the so-called 'Foro de Irlanda' (the Irish forum). The four parties along with 19 other organisations signed an agreement at Lizarra calling on ETA to declare a ceasefire, and on Madrid to recognise the right of self-determination. The signatories polled around 60 per cent of the vote in the Basque elections between them.

In the run up to the elections, both Izquierda Unida and Euskal Herritarrok ran effective campaigns. Both called for self-determination and for a reduction in the working week with no loss of pay. Euskal Herritarrok also called for an amnesty, while IU's other demands included the call for a republic and for something similar to Income Support, which doesn't exist here — unemployment stands at 17 per cent.

The PP, and to a lesser extent the PSOE, fought very dirty campaigns. Having billed the elections as a referendum on the future of Euskadi, they ran campaigns based essentially on scaremongering. Playing on the fears of non-Basques, and to some extent on the fears of all those who don't speak the Basque language, they talked a lot about 'nationalist blocs', of the danger of having independence imposed upon them, of being 'forced' to speak Basque, of having to choose between being Spanish and being Basque, of the day when they would have to 'pack their suitcases'. The fact that there are real fears to be played upon can be blamed to some degree upon the policies of the PNV in government, and its brand of cultural nationalism. In particular, it is increasingly difficult to get any job in the public sector if you do not speak Basque. Given that only a minority of the population in the Basque country speaks Basque as its first language, and given the very high levels of unem-

ployment, this is a very divisive policy — something which Herri Batasuna has always been quite happy to go along with.

In any case, given the bland and non-descript campaign of the PNV, and the fact that the PSOE seemed to be saying a slightly softer version of the same thing, the PP definitely struck a chord. Ten years ago, it would never have reached 10 per cent in the Basque country; four years ago it polled 14 per cent; this time it got 20 per cent — the first time that the PP has outpolled the PSOE in the Basque country. The record turn-out — 71 per cent, compared with 60 per cent four years ago — appears to give this even more legitimacy.

The other clear winner was Herri Batasuna and its electoral bloc, Euskal Herritarrok. HB ran a militant and dynamic campaign, distancing the party from ETA but emphasising itself as a party of the left. Formed in 1977, HB's highest level of support was achieved in the late 1980s, when it could count on nearly 20 per cent of the electorate. By 1995, this had fallen to 15 per cent; by 1996 it had dropped to 12 per cent. To win 18 per cent this time, with such a high turn-out, was a significant victory.

The election marks a growing polarisation between the nationalist and non-nationalist blocs. The main loser was Izquierda Unida, which was squeezed between the PSOE on the one hand, and HB on the other. Its vote fell from nine per cent to six per cent. Its message and attitude to the national question was unclear to many voters. IU was not a nationalist party, yet it defended self-determination. This created confusion in voters' minds as to which bloc it belonged to. In a situation in which all the other parties and the media sought to blur the difference between self-determination and independence, people found IU's position difficult to understand. Complicated legalistic explanations of possible future federal or confederal arrangements within the Spanish state didn't help its case.

Media commentators have suggested that IU has been 'punished' for supporting the agreement at Lizarra, and for defending the right of self-determination. While it is quite likely that some voters switched to PSOE for this reason, far more votes went to HB/EH, which ran what was in many ways a very left-wing campaign. IU was unable to effectively differentiate itself from this to the more militant sections of the Basque working class, and especially among youth.

It is too early to say what conclusions IU will draw from these elections. It should, however, develop its level of political education, and fight to build united fronts with both the PSOE and Euskal Herritarrok.

WA

German elections

Election of SPD government raises new prospects for class struggle

by Nick Davies

If expectations in the government of Tony Blair were low, those in the government of Blair's pupil and imitator, Gerhard Schröder, who was elected to office on September 27, are even lower. On the campaign trail, Schröder was notoriously difficult to pin down, relying on the usual buzzwords – 'modernisation' and 'innovation' – and dismissing any illusions of any real break from the Kohl years. Once in office, as Germany's first social-democratic (SPD) Chancellor for 16 years, Schröder has not disappointed. The message was 'business as usual', stressing that the three pillars of his administration would be economic stability, law and order, and foreign policy continuity. (Although Schröder has promised to drop German opposition to a French proposal that finance ministers attend meetings of the European Central Bank, suggesting a trend towards greater government regulation of fiscal policy.)

Like Blair, Schröder presents himself as pragmatic and managerial – scorning principle and contemptuous of ideology. Like Blair, 'does it work?' means 'does it work for business?'. To be fair, Schröder has made some promises: to reverse cuts made by the Kohl government in welfare, sick pay and pensions. He has also promised to scrap Germany's reactionary and racist citizenship laws. At present, German citizenship is based on 'blood and soil' ethnicity – on who your mother is, rather than where you were born. Members of German communities in Russia or Romania are therefore entitled to citizenship, second or third generation members of the large Turkish community are not.

The coalition

The SPD should have formed a coalition government with the ex-Stalinist PDS. But instead of forming a coalition of workers' parties it chose an alliance with the Greens, who are in government for the first time. Although the Greens may exert some progressive influence and while this is obviously better than an alternative alliance with the Free Democrats, it is nonetheless a step in the wrong direction. The Greens

are now a far cry from the radical, disparate and idealistic movement of the 1980s. The power struggle between the 'realos' (suits) and the 'fundis' (jeans) saw to that. The main Green in the government, the new foreign minister and vice-chancellor, is Joschka Fischer, on the right of the party, and, to the German ruling class, the 'acceptable' face of the Greens.

Despite their move to the right, the Greens are still anti-nuclear. The new government has therefore promised to phase out nuclear power. However, when Schröder headed a SPD-Green coalition in Lower Saxony between 1990 and 1994, it was beset by endless bickering on this very issue. Nuclear power supplies one-tenth of Germany's energy and one-third

of its electricity, and the nuclear lobby is powerful. There is public opposition to it, as shown by the massive protests whenever nuclear materials are transported across the country. Will Schröder deliver on this? His record shows that when he wrestles with his conscience, he always wins. If he backslides, he will surely jeopardise the coalition. On the other hand, if the Greens were then to stay in government they would stand condemned as spineless opportunists.

The split in the labour movement

As well as from the Greens, there is also pressure on Schröder from Oskar

Continued next page

Workers Action has received the following information from Gruppe Spartakus (German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency). Comrades wanting to pass support back to the organisations attacked can do so via Workers Action at the address on the inside front cover.

Stop state attacks on leftists!

On 24 September 1998 there were police raids against three cultural associations in Duisburg - the Cultural Association of Immigrants, Workers and Youth, the Association for the Advancement of the Cultural and Social Situation of the Turkish People, and the FABRIK Cultural Association.

The FABRIK Cultural Association was searched by order of the Duisburg county court. Rooms were photographed, identity details recorded, and a leaflet confiscated (in both German and Turkish versions). The judicial excuse for these police infringements are proceedings being taken against a young female immigrant charged with breaking paragraph 164 (2) of Germany's penal code. The leaflet describes earlier police attacks as 'unlawful', and on that basis she is charged with having wrongly accused the police in a way that is likely 'to induce or allow the continuance' of 'official proceedings or other official measures' against the police. If found guilty she is liable to up to five years imprisonment.

The state is offended by a leaflet published by leftist Turkish and Kurdish immigrant associations and Kurdistan Solidarity Duisburg, which protested against the repeated police attacks on those associations. This state repression of left immigrant organisations has been going on in Duisburg for years. Attacks have sometimes been intensified, and for a time were virtually weekly, leading on 15 November 1997 to a protest demonstration by Kurdish, Turkish and German organisations.

These court and police measures are intended to put the memberships of these associations under pressure as well as deter visitors to their premises, and to intimidate neighbours. The clear aim of these police attacks is to criminalise free political activity and organisation (especially the political activity and organisation of immigrants) and to suppress political co-operation among German, Turkish and Kurdish leftists.

An injury to one is an injury to all! The left and the workers movement of all countries must unite against state repression! ... [we] demand: Immediate cancellation of all proceedings against the Duisburg leftists! Stop state attacks against the left!

Election of SPD government . . .*Continued from previous page*

Lafontaine, the powerful chair of the SPD and new finance minister. Lafontaine is credited with provoking the walk-out of the non-party millionaire Jost Stollman, whom Schröder wanted as his economics minister. Already there has been a warning in the *Times* that Schröder must 'rein in' Lafontaine.

Prior to the election Schröder defeated Lafontaine for the SPD nomination. SPD members voted for Schröder on the basis that he offered the best chance of victory. However, this represents a real division within the higher levels of the German labour movement. Lafontaine was the candidate of the wing that wishes to see a return to Keynesian policies and he is supported by many top union

leaders, such as Zwickel from IG-Metall.

The other parties

Kohl regarded the unification of Germany as his finest hour, but it soon turned sour. The cost of financing the absorption of the former GDR, and the cost of meeting the conditions of the Maastricht treaty – to fulfil Kohl's other dream of a single European currency – has been met by the German working class in the form of four million unemployed. So they kicked him out.

The disappointment felt in the east that unification has not brought the promised 'flourishing fields' has been exploited by fascists, who have established 'foreigner-free zones' in some towns. In the election, however, the fascists were the rottweiler that did not bark. The performance of the

two main parties, the NPD and the DVU, was abysmal, even in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern where they were expected to do well.

The PDS did well, getting the five per cent needed to get seats in the Bundestag, and showing signs of outgrowing its earlier status as a pressure group for pensioners and former GDR officials. It attracted votes from youth and the unemployed, suspicious of Schröder, and from some middle class people in the former GDR, sick of being patronised by and paid less than their western counterparts.

The struggle!

During the West German boom years of the 1960s and 70s, it was fashionable in some quarters to write off the working class as having been bribed by consumerism, high wages, and welfare. The strikes of the 1990s have put paid to that idea. The German working class, with a tradition of struggle going back over 100 years, is finding its voice again. Many workers have high hopes of the new government, especially on issues like unemployment. However, the reality is that the SPD government will continue to chip away at the social benefits provided by the German model. The effects of economic recession and European monetary union should see the emergence of important struggles. With the exception of Spain, Social Democratic governments are now in power in all major European countries. Although these parties have all moved significantly to the right, the rejection by Europe's workers of Conservatism and Christian Democracy should not be underestimated. In order to critically engage with the workers who look to the new government in Germany we should start by demanding:

- * Work for the unemployed! For a programme of socially useful public works – not prestige projects!
- * Restore pensions and sick pay!
- * No attacks on the social wage, increase benefits!
- * No to the Maastricht Treaty!
- * For an end to nuclear power! For an immediate start to the decommissioning of all nuclear power plants!
- * Germany out of NATO!
- * For the right of asylum! Down with Fortress Europe! Scrap the racist citizenship laws!

WA**US upholds racist frame up –**

Political activist faces execution

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a long-standing fighter against racism and injustice. He was a prominent member of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and the MOVE organisation in the 1970s and is a renowned journalist. Because of this he was targeted by the police and was framed and falsely convicted in 1981 for the killing of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. The result is that Jamal has become America's most prominent death row prisoner. The state wants Jamal dead because of his politics.

In October the Pennsylvania Supreme Court issued a 71-page ruling endorsing every aspect of this racist frame-up. It supports the lies and coercion of the Philadelphia Attorney's office and the cops to support Jamal's conviction. Jamal was found in the street after being shot in the chest by Faulkner. At least five witnesses from five different vantage points told police that it was another man who had run from the scene of the shooting. There is no evidence that Jamal's legally registered pistol had been fired that night.

The Philadelphia Police Department is notorious for its racist frame-ups and its widespread physical abuse of witnesses and suspects. Hundreds of recent convictions have had to be thrown out on such grounds. Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge has vowed to sign a death warrant as part of the bipartisan Democratic and Republican campaigns to speed up executions. This takes place in the current climate of racism and bigotry against homosexual rights and the right to abortions. The attempt to execute Jamal highlights what the barbaric, racist US death penalty is all about.

In 1995 a big international campaign of protest got Jamal a stay of execution. Those committed to the fight for Jamal's freedom, and to the black struggle, must mobilise in the unions, on the campuses, in communities across the country and around the world.

* Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal!
 * Abolish the racist death penalty!
This report was written up from the October 30 bulletin of the Partisan Defence Committee, New York. ■

Julius Martov and the Jewish workers' movement

Julius Martov (1873-1923) is today almost forgotten, remembered only as the leader of the Mensheviks - an opponent of the October Revolution, a man bypassed by history. Yet his contribution to the formative period of Russian Marxism was considerable, and his contemporaries considered him as one of the most talented figures of his generation. Trotsky, writing in 1918 described him as 'Without doubt ... one of the most tragic figures in the revolutionary movement.'

In *My Life*, Trotsky expands on this theme: 'The outstanding figure among the Russian émigrés in Paris without a doubt was Martov, the leader of the Mensheviks, and one of the most talented men I have ever come across. The man's misfortune was that fate made him a politician in a time of revolution without endowing him with the necessary resources of will-power. The lack of balance in his spiritual household was tragically revealed whenever great events took place. I watched him through three historical cataclysms: 1905, 1914, and 1917. Martov's first reaction to events was nearly always revolutionary, but before he could put his ideas on paper his mind would be besieged by doubts from all sides.' Lunacharsky in *Revolutionary Silhouettes* calls him 'a supremely gifted analyst', Sukhanov in his memoirs, 'an incomparable political analyst'.

Lenin, in spite of launching the sharpest polemics against him, retained warm feelings towards the comrade of his youth. 'They say Martov is dying too', he sadly told Krupskaya during his final illness. This anecdote is underlined by the intriguing information, corroborated by two unconnected sources, that Lenin sent money abroad to finance Martov's paper, *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* during the latter final exile in Berlin.

Martov's literary output is almost unrepresented in English, aside from one pamphlet, *The State and the Socialist Revolution* (Slienger, 1977) and a number of articles and speeches covering the period 1903-20 in *The Mensheviks and the Russian Revolution* (Ed. A. Ascher, Thames and Hudson, 1977). His *History of Russian Social-Democracy*, praised even by his opponents, has yet to find an English translator.

This speech, delivered on May Day

1895 in the Lithuanian city of Vilna (modern day Vilnius) is an important document from the formative period of Marxism in the Tsarist empire, the context of which requires some brief explanation. The early 1890s saw Marxists attempting to break out of study circles and reach out to the working class. An influential pamphlet, *On Agitation* written by A. Kremer in 1894, had motivated the turn, based upon his first-hand experience among the Jewish workers of Vilna. Martov had first encountered Plekhanov's writings in 1892, and became a Marxist shortly afterwards. In exile in Vilna, he assisted Kremer in the mimeographing and distribution of his work.

Martov had been born into an assimilationist family, and his natural affinities lay with the Russian intellectuals. Martov merged his group with the circle in St Petersburg around Lenin to form the League for the Emancipation of Labour. In this speech, however, he speaks of the need for a specific Jewish workers' movement, along with the need to publish agitational material in Yiddish. At this point, Marxist ideas were taking root most rapidly among the Jewish workers in the west of the Tsarist empire. In 1897, Kremer was instrumental in bringing together a number of Jewish workers' organisations in Vilna at the founding conference of the Bund - the General Jewish Workers Union of Poland and Lithuania, to give it its full title.

There is no doubt that the Bund played a decisive role in this period, as the first mass social democratic organisation. It was the main organiser of the first congress of the RSDLP in 1898, which took place in Minsk in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, and was broken up by the secret police. (Martov was in exile in

Siberia at this point.) However, by 1900, when *Rabochoye Dyelo* (published by the 'economist' League of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad) reprinted his speech, the paths of Martov and the Bund had already begun to diverge. Indeed, Martov's biographer suggests that its publication may have embarrassed him. The Bund favoured 'cultural-national autonomy' for the Jewish people; its opponents, including a number of prominent Jewish intellectuals, supported an integral party, although they recognised the Bund's right to participate within it. Together with Lenin, Martov became a partisan of *Iskra*, which was identified above all with the project of centralising the party. The Bund walked out of the second congress of the RSDLP in 1903 over its claim to exclusively represent the Jewish working class, prior to the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

As one of the most prominent leaders of Menshevism, Martov almost always stood on the left of the group. From 1915-16, he was together with Trotsky an editor of *Nashe Slovo*, the internationalist Russian language daily published in Paris. Active in the Zimmerwald movement, he supported the 'centre' grouping. In the course of 1917, a de facto split took place between the right wing majority of the Mensheviks, and the Menshevik-Internationalists led by Martov. Although opposed to the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917, he was prepared to critically accept Soviet power. Martov left the Soviet Union in September 1920 for Berlin, where he died of TB in April 1923.

We are indebted to Robert Goldie for the translation from Russian, and to Paul Flewers for helping to locate a complete text.

Richard Price

Further reading: The only full length biography of Martov is by Israel Getzler (Oxford, 1967). A short sympathetic history of the Bund is provided by Clive Gilbert, *A Revolution in Jewish Life: The History of the Jewish Workers' Bund* (Jewish Socialist Group, 1987). A number of Lenin's polemics against the Bund are contained in Hyman Lumer (ed.), *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, (International Publishers, 1974), while the three-way split between the Bund, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks is documented in *1903: Minutes of the Second Congress of the RSDLP* (New Park, 1978). The later history of the Bund is touched on in Hersh Mendel, *Memoirs of a Jewish Revolutionary* (Pluto, 1989), while Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (Merlin, 1981) contains several essays relating to the Jewish workers' movement in Poland.

Introduction to Martov's speech (from *Rabocheyo Dyelo*)

The speech we publish below is of two-fold interest — primarily historical for the Jewish, and topical for the Russian workers' movement. It illustrates the turning point of the Jewish workers' movement, illustrates the essence of the move away from study-group activity and towards mass activity which it underwent in the early '90s.

We can see the basis for the new tactic of a mass workers' movement, in the first phase of its development in the pamphlet *On Agitation*, published in Russia at the same time as this speech.

The Jewish workers' movement has come a long way since then; the economic struggle of the working masses has united them and politically educated them. The Jewish workers' movement now has a sharply defined political character, and the Jewish working masses are actively struggling for political rights and freedom.

In the Russian workers' movement this significant move away from educational work amongst small groups of workers and towards mass agitation for the material interests of the labouring masses began in the late '90s, when Russian social democracy also 'put the mass movement at the centre of their programme.'

This turning point in the Russian workers' movement is taking place before our very eyes; in Petersburg, Kiev and Moscow it began after the mass strikes of 1895–97, the Shuysko-Ivanovsky and Yekaterinoslav regions have been experiencing it for the past two to three years, in the more backward industrial centres of Russia it is still only on the horizon.

And everywhere we can see the identical nature of this transformation, the main features of which are so well documented by the author of the speech we print here:

'Our movement has become, first, more democratic, and, second, more materialist. The democratic character of our movement today compared to that of the past consists in the fact that we have tailored our programme, our tactics and our struggle to the masses; that our main task is now not propaganda work in study groups, but agitation amongst the masses. The materialist character of

our movement today compared to that of the past consists in the fact that all our hopes and expectations are grounded in the needs of the masses, the development of those needs and the transformation of the masses under the influence of those needs'.

The application of these basic principles of the tactic of mass workers struggle has been crowned with complete success in both the Jewish and the Russian movements.

'For the masses material needs are the most important things in life' and the rise of the workers movement, first in Poland and Lithuania, then in the industrial centres of Russia, appears everywhere in the form of a struggle for an improvement in the economic condition. But this struggle for the basic needs of the working class develops its political consciousness, convinces it of the necessity of political rights for the movement's success.

So the struggle for better working and living conditions inevitably leads the working class to realise the necessity of an organised struggle for political freedom. The author expresses it thus: 'We expect political development not from our success in convincing the masses of the justness of our political ideals, but from the masses working out political requirements as a consequence of economic development.' This is making the point that the entry of the struggle of

the working masses onto the scene raises the very issue of political freedom in Russia.

The most important task for Russian social democracy is now not the abstract propagation of 'our political ideals' but acquiring the practical ability to link political agitation with the everyday struggle of the working masses to improve their economic position.

This task has already been accomplished by our Polish and Jewish comrades, and it is now also starting to be accomplished by the Russian workers' movement too, as the struggle for a better life and the effect of persecutions by the tsarist government lead more and more workers to begin to realise the necessity of political rights and freedom for the success of the workers' struggle.

And so throughout Russia the striving of the working masses for an improvement in their material position is developing into an organised struggle for liberation from economic and political slavery, and the workers' movement is more and more taking on a class and political character.

The author's prediction is already starting to come true: the decrepit edifice of feudal Russia, which rests on the despotism of the tsarist government, oppression, and the complete lack of rights of our people, is already trapped on all sides by the flame of the revolutionary struggle. In Warsaw, Vilna, Lodz, Riga, Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev, Yekaterinoslav and Tiflis, Ivano-Voznesyensk, Odessa and the Urals, everywhere divisions of the social-democratic workers' army are being formed, an army which, in the struggle against the capitalists and the tsarist autocracy, will win for the Russian working class human conditions of existence, political rights, and freedom.

Rabocheyo Dyelo — April 1900

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Dear comrades!

Today every group of the struggling proletariat is witnessing successes in its activities. Amongst you, as the vanguard of the army, the vanguard in which is concentrated the leadership of this army, which works out the movement's programme, amongst you it is especially relevant to talk about those victories which our movement has won in the field of consciousness, in the work of clarifying to ourselves our character, our tasks and our tactics. And so I want now to talk about what kind of successes, especially over the last year, have been achieved by our movement in the consciousness of its leading activists.

First of all, we must make clear what sort of successes we are talking about here. What can be considered a success in the development of the consciousness of the representatives of the proletariat and what cannot? This question is easily answered if we bear in mind what exactly we mean by success and progress in the class movement. Success in the proletarian movement consists in the continuous process of its liberation from the economic and political yoke under which it finds itself in modern society. We talk about the successes of the workers' movement in the economic sphere, when the working class increases its independence from the ruling class through a shortening of the working day, the organisation of trade unions and other such means, we talk about the proletariat's political successes, when it wins for itself one political right after another; when, by electing its representatives into the legislative bodies, it increases the strength of its opposition to the bourgeoisie. And so by the progress of the workers' movement we mean the growth of the working class's independence. Further, by the success of the workers' movement in the ideological field and the growth of working class consciousness we mean its liberation from the ideological yoke to which it is subject by the bourgeoisie. You will agree that this explanation is correct if you simply recognise that in modern society the working class is in a position not just of political and economic, but also of ideological enslavement.

Enslavement

The conception of right, morality, and religion — this is all the creation of the representatives of the upper classes, it is all unconsciously tai-

A turning point in the history of the Jewish workers' movement

(Speech delivered at the May congress of agitators in 1895 in Vilna).

lored to the interests of the upper classes and, moreover, it all exerts a powerful influence on the enslaved classes.

Patriotism, that militant patriotism that seeks to smash and destroy the whole world, this patriotism springs, as we are well aware, from the soil of bourgeois relations, it is simply an expression of international capitalist competition, and it is therefore not surprising that the upper classes are in the grip of this patriotism. But the people, the very same people that give their sweat and blood in this struggle — what do we gain by being driven to the point of fanaticism by patriotic feelings? Are we not correct in seeing in this situation an example of the ideological enslavement of the people?

I will cite another, far more typical example of the influence of bourgeois ideas on the consciousness of the proletariat. In a developed capitalist society, in which industry and trade, lines of communication and credit are highly developed, economic prosperity unavoidably calls for complete freedom of economic and civic life: every surveillance, every extra control, every constraint on individual energy holds back and hampers industry and commerce.

Bourgeois idealists

In such a society the complete freedom of competition of individual entrepreneurs represents the economic ideal, and it is natural that the views of the educated section of the bourgeoisie should be completely defined by this ideal, and that the bourgeoisie's intellectual representatives, therefore, consider the highest and most just idea to be the idea of freedom, an idea which they expand and generalise so that in their eyes it is no longer just the freedom of trade and industry or competition but the freedom of the individual, and they extend this idea into politics and religion. These bourgeois idealists are

convinced that they are for freedom of trade and industry because it follows from ideas of the freedom of the individual. In fact, they stand up for the freedom of the individual because the social conditions of their time have posed the question of the urgent need for freedom of competition. And yet, we repeat, bourgeois writers and scientists (in whose number, of course, there have been and still are some mercenary characters, but it is not them we have in mind), bourgeois idealists, have convinced themselves that they are practising and defending the highest, most just idea of the freedom of the individual. And so whenever the question of legislating to limit the working day is raised all these bourgeois people are naturally indignant at such a suggestion as destroying freedom of trade, which is in their opinion but the logical conclusion of the idea of freedom in general. They are indignant not only because a law to limit the working day deprives the factory worker of the right to reach an agreement with the worker to lengthen the working day, but because it restricts the will of an adult human being, preventing him from reaching an agreement as he sees fit.

And I warn you again: do not think that such bourgeois arguments are merely arrogance. However strange it may seem to us that intelligent and educated people could seriously share such a conviction, we should not see it as mere hypocrisy.

Disease

In medicine there is a disease known as daltonism. This is when the eyes lose the ability to see all colours except one, and every object seems to the sufferer to be painted the same colour. This disease is extremely widespread in history and the class and historical epoch in which an individual finds himself distorts his mind by painting all his ideas the same colour. It is natural, therefore,

that when discussing the question of the limitation of the working day the entire bourgeoisie, led by its leading representatives and not directly affected by the question of the working day (for example bankers, merchants, lawyers etc) opposes the limitation of the working day, completely sincere in the belief that they are opposing it for idealistic reasons. And we must not disbelieve them – we must merely add that this belief is itself born of the bourgeois capitalist system and is a justification and illumination of that system because it corresponds to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

But what should we say when we see that this idea has taken hold not just of the bourgeoisie, but also of the working class, that workers' organisations have, like some English and American workers' unions, fought against the eight-hour day law from the standpoint of free bargaining! Is it not clear that we are dealing here with the intellectual enslavement of the working class, with an intellectual immaturity that has led it to lap up ideas which spring from the upper classes and correspond to their interests, and which are therefore hostile to its own interests?

This example graphically illustrates that even when the working class is struggling to improve its position it is still under the influence of bourgeois ideas, it is still under the intellectual yoke of bourgeois society.

Workers' movement

The same example shows us that the growth of a workers' movement consists not merely in the struggle for economic and political freedom, but also in the struggle to overthrow bourgeois ideas and create its own class theory and class programme, to work out what Lassalle called the 'idea of the workers' estate'. And so, turning to our movement, I intend to show in what ways we have moved forward along the path of liberation from the influence of bourgeois ideas, along the path of class consciousness, to show that the changes our young movement has gone through recently are progressive changes which testify to the growth of our intellectual independence.

Turning now to an elucidation of our movement's theoretical successes, there are two, mutually dependent successes on which should dwell: our movement has become first, more democratic, and second,

more materialist.

The democratic character of our movement today compared to that of the past consists in the fact that we have tailored our program, our tactics and our struggle to the masses; that our main task is now not propaganda work in study groups, but agitation amongst the masses; and in the fact, finally, that the object of our agitation, in both our everyday and our holiday (May Day) work, is not the working class intellectual who stands out from his environment by his intellectual abilities and thirst for enlightenment but the average worker of average needs, average morality, average level of development.

Materialist

The materialist character of our movement today compared to that of the past consists in the fact that all our hopes and expectations do not rest on a belief in the omnipotence of our ideas and theories the characteristic of an idealist world view – but are in the needs of the masses, the development of those needs and the transformation of the masses under the influence of those needs.

We expect political development not from our success in convincing the masses of the justness of our political ideals, but from the masses working out political requirements as a consequence of economic development.

Democratisation

You will agree with me, comrades, that these two changes – greater democratisation and greater materialism – genuinely differentiate our present epoch from the past. You may be wondering whether such changes in our movement are progressive, whether they represent success in the business of freeing our opinions from those of the bourgeoisie?

Yes, without a doubt! The bourgeois intelligentsia is incapable of looking on the masses as anything other than raw material out of which 'great' people can fashion what they will: they are incapable of looking on the masses in any other way because the conditions of bourgeois society, which to the bourgeois intelligentsia seems the only possible system (this is precisely what makes this intelligentsia bourgeois) are such that they try to turn the masses into a passive flock which plays no conscious role and blindly follows this or that shepherd. In primitive society the whole

people is one homogeneous mass, everyone does the same work and plays the same part in social affairs. But the more civilisation develops, the wider the division of labour becomes, not just between town and country, between the thousands of branches of production, but between mental and physical labour, so that in developed capitalist society all political affairs are concentrated in the hands of the upper classes, and amongst them predominantly in the small layer of professional politicians.

Intelligentsia

It is not surprising that the bourgeois intelligentsia, to whom the bourgeois system seems the highest system, believes that history is made by an intellectual minority. And this point of view reflects the aristocratic character of all bourgeois idealism, all bourgeois parties and theories, a character which is the consequence of the conditions of bourgeois society, a consequence of the division of labour between the labouring masses and the intellectual minority.

Only the theory of Marx and Engels has given socialists the opportunity of throwing off the yoke of bourgeois ideas. Explaining the whole history of bourgeois ideas as a product of the constant class struggle, Marx showed that behind the struggle of the intellectual minority, that is, of political and other parties, is hidden the strug-

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gle of masses and classes, that although in modern society the division between political activists and the masses has reached an extreme, the former are completely a product of the latter and in essence struggle for their interests. It is only by understanding the class character of every historical struggle that socialism has become scientific and at the same time democratic.

But there is another consequence of the division of labour in modern society: the division of society into the masses and intellectual activists also represents the separation of ideas from material needs. For the masses material needs are the most important things in life – whilst the intellectual minority lives a life predominantly of ideas, it struggles not for a better material position but for the triumph of this or that idea.

Primitive

In primitive society there is no such division between ideas and material life. Every bourgeois scientist willingly admits that in primitive societies religions are nothing but a reflection of the material life of those societies, that the foundation for all ideas in primitive societies are material needs. But when the subject is civilised society, bourgeois scientists refuse to recognise this dependence of ideas on life: they say that in an educated society ideas are the cause of material facts, and not vice-versa; they refuse to accept that the ideas of this or that philosopher or politician reflect the social conditions of the time. And the reason for this attitude on the part of bourgeois ideologues to their ideas lies, in fact, in the division between ideas and life, the division between an intellectual minority and the toiling masses. Those politicians and public figures who concentrate in their hands all social life, who give society its ideas and programmes, cannot, of course, see it any other way; for they believe their ideas to be the most just and moral ideas, and they are convinced that they defend these ideas only because they are the most true. Every honest bourgeois politician thinks that he is struggling against socialism not because socialism threatens the material interests of the ruling classes but because the socialist ideal is offensive to his thoughts and feelings. Certain that history is made by perceptive intellectuals, he is convinced that perceptive intellectuals

fight for this or that idea only because they believe in its truth. And so his programme is therefore always the same: to disseminate this idea amongst perceptive intellectuals and to help these people to develop. It is clear from this that the aristocratism of the bourgeois intelligentsia is inseparably linked with its idealism, with its belief that history is advanced by ideas.

Role of the idea

Bourgeois activists cannot understand why, at any given time, a particular intelligentsia should be attracted to a particular idea: they cannot understand it because for them there is only one true idea, and so they explain its success purely in terms of its truth, whilst the success of other ideas seems to them explicable only as the product of insufficient development of the critical faculties. It took the great genius and revolutionary spirit of Karl Marx, expressed utterly independently of all bourgeois ideas, to make us understand why it is that a particular idea plays a particular role in history. And Marx explained that the reason for this lies in the fact that history is made by the masses, whilst the intellectual minority are not independent creators of an idea but are completely dependent, albeit unconsciously so, servants of a particular class. He explained that every intelligentsia belongs to a class, and that every idea to which a given intelligentsia is attracted at any given time grew out of the material needs of that class. As it is the class struggle that is the motive force of history, then the role of ideas in history is merely to express and sanctify the material needs of the struggling classes.

Thus, the destruction of aristocratism has gone hand in hand with the destruction of idealism. And this is why we can say that in becoming more democratic our movement has also become more materialist; instead of the ideas of the few, it has as its foundation the needs of the masses.

Aristocratism

The idealism and aristocratism of the bourgeois intelligentsia consists in the fact that they believe that history is made by perceptive intellectuals moved to struggle by an idea. The intellectual slavery of the proletariat is expressed in the fact that some of its representatives are inclined to took

at history in exactly the same way. But bourgeois politicians can comfort themselves with the thought that they are the creators of history, since they stand at the top of society. Not so with workers, even those belonging to the working class intelligentsia: chained in spite of everything to the very bottom of society, they need a great deal of imagination to believe that their strength, the strength of the critically aware workers, can overturn the world. Therefore in the minds of the more sober representatives of the proletariat the dependency on bourgeois idealism is expressed in the fact that, unable finally to give the masses up as a bad job, they ascribe to them the characteristics of critically aware individuals. From this springs the theory that the first step in the struggle of the proletariat should be its intellectual and moral development. This is, of course, more democratic, because the masses are not left completely on the sidelines, but it is none the less bourgeois idealism. First, because, as we have seen, the view that ideas are the motive force of history is a product of bourgeois conditions; and second, because the view that the first condition for the proletariat's economic liberation is its moral and intellectual development is nothing more than the reflection in the mind of the worker of the bourgeois view that the economic superiority of the bourgeois over the worker is a consequence of his higher intellectual and moral development.

'Cultivate and develop'

Every educated bourgeois subscribes to the programme of our adversaries; that before thinking about improving his position the worker should become a developed individual – he will even give you an old twenty-ko-peck alphabet to help achieve this worthy goal. Taking the liberation of Russian peasants from serfdom and American Negroes from slavery was being debated, the Russian landowners and American slave-owners shouted with one voice: first cultivate them, turn them into developed human beings, *then* give them their freedom. Our view, on the contrary, the view of scientific socialism, of the class theory of a proletariat that has freed itself from the intellectual chains of the bourgeoisie, is this: economic enslavement is the foundation of the intellectual ignorance and moral depreciation of the working

class: in the struggle for economic freedom the working class achieves a higher morality and a higher consciousness, and the most important success in the development of consciousness is the liberation of the politically conscious workers from the prejudice that the economic liberation of the working class can be achieved through its intellectual regeneration. And we can say that our work has strikingly confirmed that the morals and consciousness of the working class are created in the course of the development of the economic struggle — we became convinced of this when we saw how, at the time of the meeting in support of Russian workers and during recent events, the masses, nurtured in the economic struggle, developed a level of morality and class consciousness which, heaven knows, even our very intelligent, critically aware adversaries do not display.

Base and pathetic

Let us turn to our third theoretical success, just as sure as the first two and inseparably linked to them. We have seen how our movement has thrown off the aristocratic and idealistic tinge which we inherited from bourgeois idealism. We will now turn to point out a trait which we inherited not from the bourgeoisie in general, but specifically from the Jewish bourgeoisie, from its intellectual representatives. It is our unenviable lot, the lot of the Jewish proletariat, to be exploited by the basest, most pathetic bourgeoisie in the world. Our bourgeoisie, although deprived not just of political rights like the entire Russian bourgeoisie, but even of civil rights, not only makes no attempt to improve its situation but simply expects everything to come from the kindness of the Russian government. It does not enter the heads of our bourgeois intelligentsia that the Jew can only expect an improvement in his situation by his own actions. The Jewish bourgeoisie does not even lend energetic support to the Russian liberal movement. There are many causes of this characteristic of our bourgeoisie — they all render it utterly useless to the Jewish working class; moreover, the views of this bourgeois intelligentsia have played an utterly damaging role in our movement, which was at first influenced by this national passivity. In fact, the Jewish bourgeois intelligentsia expects

everything to come from the Russian tsar and nothing from the initiative of the Jewish people; in the early years of our movement we expected everything to come from the Russian working class movement and saw ourselves as merely an appendage to the all-Russian workers' movement. Trusting the movement of the Jewish working-class in the background, we were disdainful of its actual position, which was reflected in the fact that our work was carried out in the Russian language: in our desire to retain our links with the Russian movement which is, of course, essential we forgot about keeping our links with the non-Russian-speaking Jewish masses. Yes, this showed our distrust of the Jewish masses, a distrust borrowed from our bourgeoisie; we put an ideal Russian movement centre-stage and could not see beyond it to the inclinations of the genuine Jewish movement.

Propaganda

Life forced us to change our tactics and the main reason for this, it seems, was that at a time when we were pinning all our hopes on the all-Russian movement, we had raised the Jewish movement to a level which the Russian movement had not yet reached. It would obviously have been absurd to continue to restrict our work only to those elements of the Jewish masses who were already influenced by Russian culture and in whom we could inculcate that culture. Our becoming more democratic and materialist helped us move forward in this respect. Having put the mass movement at the centre of our programme, we were forced to take our propaganda and agitation to the masses, that is, make them more Jewish. And we can see in this another of our victories over opinions borrowed from the bourgeois intelligentsia. And we must hold fast to the view that, although we will always feel the bonds that tie us to the Russian workers' movement, we must not shut our eyes to the fact that it is still very weak; what is more, we must remember that our slogan of 'everything through the people' does not permit us to expect the liberation of the Jewish proletariat from economic, political and civil enslavement from either the Russian or the Polish movement. The Jewish working class, when organised, is a solid enough mass to represent an impressive force. By itself this

strength is insufficient, of course, to win the economic, political and civil freedom of the Jewish proletariat, and this is the root of the inseparable bond that ties us to the all-Russian and Polish movements. We well understand that without the help of the Russian and Polish workers we will not achieve very much, but on the other hand we can no longer expect everything from the Russian proletariat as our bourgeoisie expects everything from the Russian government and bureaucratic liberalism. We must keep in mind that in its class development the Russian working class will be faced with obstacles such that the smallest gain will cost it enormous efforts, and so it will only succeed in gaining political and economic concessions by sustained, dogged struggle; and in this situation it is obvious that if the Russian proletariat has to sacrifice some of its demands to gain anything it will sooner sacrifice those demands which concern only Jews, for example freedom of religion or equal rights for Jews. It is the same with the Russian liberal movement, which will also be inclined to sacrifice Jewish interests to make any gains. And we should not complain about the Russian proletariat or the Russian liberal bourgeoisie because of this. A class does not deserve freedom if it is incapable of winning it by itself. However, the organised Jewish proletariat will always lend its support to the Russian and Polish movements and side by side with them will achieve a common liberation.

A specifically Jewish movement

This is why we must resolutely recognise that our goal, the goal of social democrats working amongst Jews, is to create a specifically Jewish workers' movement, to lead and educate the Jewish proletariat in the struggle for economic, civil and political liberation.

The question arises, by setting ourselves this goal are we not turning into a national party? By setting ourselves this goal are we not betraying one of the fundamental principles of socialism, namely its internationalist character?

Yes, socialism is internationalist, and the historical process which creates the class struggle in modern society leads inevitably to the destruction of national boundaries and the merging together of different peo-

ples. But you will of course agree that as long as today's societies exist it is a pressing need for every nation to achieve, if not political independence, then at least full equality of rights. Once you recognise this fact you have to recognise that the national downtroddenness and passivity of a people deprived of basic civil rights acts as a brake on its development, and that its liberation from an ancient lethargy, the awakening in it of a striving for liberation from its lack of civil rights is one of the tasks of a socialist party. In fact, a working class which is reconciled to the lot of an underpeople will not rise up against the lot of an underclass. Therefore, national passivity is also an obstacle to the awakening of class-consciousness, and the awakening of national and class consciousness must go hand in hand. It is true that if we Jews had, as they do in Poland, a national-revolutionary but not a socialist movement, then it could blur the consciousness of our proletariat. Luckily, we do not: we have no reason to fear that by recognising once and for all the special character (call it national if you will) of our movement we will fall under the influence of bourgeois nationalism, which was, is and will be the mortal enemy of the class-consciousness of the proletariat.

In this we are rendered a huge service by that nonentity, that national apathy of our bourgeoisie which we talked about. Because we have to free ourselves from this defect foisted on our consciousness by

the bourgeois intelligentsia, we are completely insured against that other gift of the bourgeoisie — nationalism. Therefore, we may boldly proclaim the distinctively Jewish character of our movement without exposing ourselves to the danger of being marginalised from both the international workers' movement in general and the Russian movement in particular.

By our actions, we have created a movement only second in importance in the proletarian movement in Russia today. We must recognise that the character of our movement, its special features and, consequently, its successes depend almost entirely on the special conditions in which the Jewish working class finds itself; we must take these conditions into account, conditions which have in themselves created and are strengthening our movement.

Thus, we should see in the more national character of our movement the third result of our movement (sic), our third theoretical victory over the influence of bourgeois ideas.

Victories

My task is finished. I have tried to show what exactly the qualitative progress of our movement consists of. It only remains to me to express my deepest hope that all these successes in the domain of our consciousness will definitely have a beneficial influence on our movement in the future. Our movement has won these victories by hard and agonising progress, which has cost some

individuals dear. With these victories behind it, let it now go forward faster and lighter, embracing every section of the Jewish proletariat and beneficially influencing, by its example, the movement of the other peoples of Russia, the consciousness of the Russian and Lithuanian workers. And in our struggle let us gain strength from the knowledge that in the hard conditions of Russian political activity the Jewish working class has succeeded in creating a movement and putting it on its feet, and that we, the vanguard of this movement, have succeeded in freeing ourselves from the influence of the ideas of the bourgeois intelligentsia. With such successes behind us, we can look boldly to the future!

Picture a solid, vast old building. Its walls have become damp and covered with moss. Imagine that a group of people has set itself the task of setting fire to this building, to destroy it to its foundations. But the damp, dank old walls do not catch fire easily, and, what is more, each arsonist has very little time; he has to hurry and work furtively, because the area is patrolled by guards, vigilantly protecting the building, and one arsonist after another falls into the hands of the guards without having burnt a single corner. This is the picture that used to occur to me whenever I heard about the unsuccessful attempts of various individuals to start up a workers' movement in this or that corner of Russia. But now it seems to me that one corner of this building has successfully been set alight and this flame cannot now be extinguished, although individual arsonists are caught red-handed. And it seems to me that this flame will continually spread further and further; and although I know that you cannot burn a huge building to the ground from just one corner, I fondly hope that the flame will flare up and send sparks flying to the other side of the building, sparks which will undoubtedly fall onto corners where other people are struggling with the same task and cannot yet boast of any success, where one timely spark will help to set yet another corner alight.

So let this beneficial, cleansing flame spread ever further in our own corner until it meets with flames coming from other corners and, merging with them, becomes one solid, destructive fire!.... ■

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Understanding the Irish peace process

The Real Irish Peace Process

by Joe Craig, John McAnulty and Paul Flannigan

Socialist Democracy, May 1998

Reviewed by Jonathan Joseph

This is a major new publication by the Socialist Democracy group in Ireland. Socialist Democracy is a sympathising section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec). However, its political analysis is very different to that of the USec. Whereas the pages of the USec's *International Viewpoint* tend to support the Sinn Fein leadership, Socialist Democracy are implacably opposed to the peace process, the consequences of which they spell out in this new book.

The areas covered by this book are very wide. It ranges from the strategy of republicanism, guerrillaism, capitalist developments and the role of imperialism. All this naturally has a wider context given world developments and the new political period opened up by the collapse of Stalinism and the development of trading blocks.

The reasons for the peace deal

The strategy behind the peace deal is quite simple. For both the British and Irish capitalist classes the deal offers stability based on reinforcing partition and the sectarian unionist state.

The main aim of the agreement is the creation of a new Stormont Assembly. In this assembly, political parties must register as either green or orange. A majority of each side must agree to contentious decisions if they are to be passed. In other words, the unionist veto is safeguarded, while the power of the nationalists is defined in purely negative terms. The deal safeguards against radical change while reinforcing what already exists.

Sinn Fein sold the deal on the basis of the concessions it offers to republicans. As the above outline of the set-up makes clear, no radical pro-republican change is possible. Sinn Fein claims that powerful all-Ireland bodies will be set up. This is not true. Only areas like tourism, EU programmes and

agriculture will be dealt with by these bodies - areas which had cross-border co-operation anyway. There will be no challenge to the institutions of the sectarian state. In fact far from disbanding bodies like the RUC, security measures are being drastically increased.

Furthermore, the nature of the assembly will make Sinn Fein totally dependent of the bourgeois nationalist SDLP. Instead of transforming the 'nationalist family', Sinn Fein is being sucked into it as a junior partner. As far as the British are concerned, the deal is perfect. It gets the republicans on board while 'normalising' politics based on the entrenchment of the sectarian state.

The reasons for the deal are clear. Britain wants to 'normalise Northern Irish politics' by incorporating the republicans into a pro-unionist treaty. It can do this because the republican movement has reached a dead-end and its leadership is now looking towards Irish capitalism, the EU and the USA. Meanwhile, for British and Irish capitalists, the deal creates a more stable environment for the accumulation of capital.

Ireland and imperialism

As the book argues, Britain is the imperialist power in Ireland because of geography, history and economic ties. Britain has long-standing political and economic interests in Ireland. The peace deal aims to shore up partition in order to maintain a stable economic framework which will benefit both the British and Irish capitalists.

Groups on the left, most noticeably the Alliance for Workers' Liberty attempt to argue that the term imperialism no longer applies to the situation in Ireland and that the Irish state is no longer a semi-colony. They back this up with the latest economic statistics. The AWL's concerns can be shared to the extent that terms like 'imperialist'

and 'semi-colony' are often used by orthodox 'Trotskyism' in an unthinking and uncritical way. Certainly it is high time for a re-examination of the Marxist theory of imperialism in order to explain the changes that have taken place in the world since the time of Lenin and Trotsky. To rely on Lenin and Trotsky is, despite their strengths, inadequate.

Terms like imperialist and semi-colony imply an over-simplified picture of the world where a line can be drawn down the middle and the categories 'imperialist' and 'semi-colonial' applied to each side. Certainly this poses problems when attempting to classify somewhere like New Zealand or Yugoslavia. It is also a problem if we end up lumping Ireland in with Somalia as examples of 'semi-colonies'. Clearly the term has some value. But this has to be weighed against a serious lack of precision.

Having said this, the book does an excellent job in refuting some of the arguments put forward by the AWL and others. Claims that Southern Irish capitalism is more or less as strong as Britain, therefore the relation is not an imperialist one, do not stand up to scrutiny. The Southern economy is based upon foreign, not domestic capital. US multinational capital alone makes up 24 per cent of GDP. The AWL, in promoting the view that Ireland is now a 'Celtic tiger' (now not such a compliment!) concentrates on Gross Domestic Product, ignoring the fact that Gross National Product is 14 per cent lower. The fact is that the South is totally dependent on foreign investment in a way in which Britain is not. If a large multinational pulled out of Britain it would cause some difficulties, but if Intel, say, pulled out of Ireland, it could cause serious problems across the whole economy.

Foreign owned firms account for 30 per cent of output and 40 per cent of exports. Government policy is dictated by this. Much of the South's native business has gone, replaced by industries dependent on the multinationals. Multinationals have in turn imposed conditions on the Irish economy - low taxation, large grants, free trade and a flexible workforce.

The idea that Southern capitalism is strong is therefore nonsense. As the book says, a major reason why Ireland was partitioned in the first place was because the 'green' capitalists were not strong enough to secure capitalism on the whole Ireland on their own. Because of the major multinational investment

in the South, partition is a convenient guarantee to the South's political stability, hence securing the conditions for capital accumulation.

British imperialism

Ireland's 'semi-colonial' status (for want of a better term) is not just a product of its subservience to multinational capital. Ireland is also subject to imperialism of a more political nature - Britain's possession of the North.

The strategic importance of possessing part of Ireland is emphasised by Britain's expenditure. There is no straightforward economic explanation for why Britain should have spent £23.5 billion on maintaining its rule in the North.

As the book spells out, while it might be a sensible economic policy, the consequences of Britain losing the North are serious. Defeat in Ireland would not just be a defeat for the policy of the British state but for the state itself. It would, in all likelihood result in the break-up of Britain. Tony Blair's policy of 'normalisation' is therefore in line with his wider modernisation project (including Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly) which is an attempt to renew the union through constitutional adjustment.

The peace process reinforces the right of a people to self-determination when, in fact, these people can only be defined in negative, sectarian terms. For what nationality are the Northern Irish Protestants? They claim to be British, but Britain is not a nation. The only definition is a sectarian one and the only expression of their 'national' rights is through sectarian privilege.

The book recognises that Britain is trying to hold on to the North but at a greater arms length. This is in fact an acknowledgement that richer pickings are to be had through a good relationship with the South - Britain's fifth biggest market and one of its only trading surpluses. However, partition is the chosen way of attempting to maintain stability in the South.

Republicanism

Into this scenario is added the collapse of the programme of republicanism. The supporters of the republican movement are war-weary after years of a campaign that could not, in itself, defeat the British. The Sinn Fein leaders claim a draw, but in reality the movement has collapsed.

The peace deal offers no significant concessions to the nationalists. It only increases Sinn Fein's dependency on the bourgeois nationalism of the SDLP,

Fianna Fail and supporters in the USA. This is concretised through the rules of the assembly.

In fact, Sinn Fein is more than just dependent upon bourgeois nationalism. Its peace strategy represents the collapse of the republican movement to the agenda of bourgeois nationalism, indeed, the collapse of the republican programme itself. Quite astonishingly, Gerry Adams and the rest of the leadership now accept that Britain no longer has any selfish, strategic or economic interests in holding on to Ireland.

Socialists recognise that Irish republicanism represented a progressive force, basing itself on a movement of the oppressed and on a stated anti-imperialism. We recognised Irish republicanism as a revolutionary movement. However, this was a petit bourgeois revolutionary nationalism rather than socialism. At best, Irish republicanism had a two stage theory of national liberation first, socialism may be next.

As the book makes clear, we characterise Irish republicanism as petit bourgeois nationalist, not because of its class composition - many of its rank and file are working class - but because its political programme fails to identify with the working class and it has no organic links to the workers' movement. Now the vast majority of the republican movement have accepted the peace process and therefore partition. Sinn Fein's new strategy looks to an alliance with the SDLP, Fianna Fail, Irish capitalism, the EU and the USA. We cannot but conclude that they have become straight-forward bourgeois nationalists. Sinn Fein is now inextricably tied into the peace strategy. There is no turning back.

Most of the tiny handful of those within the republican movement who oppose the turn of events are equally bankrupt. Nothing is offered by the opposition republican groups. Initially they argued for a return to the failed politics of militarism. This has been blown away by the Omagh bomb. The military strategy of the IRA depended on elite control

and actions which were indeed substituted for the mass movement. Unfortunately, the mass movement for the moment, has gone with Gerry Adams.

Where next?

This poses a huge problem for socialists. It should not be surprising therefore that the weakest aspect of the book is that it is not clear on what to do. Having argued that Irish republicanism has collapsed, the book argues for a new mass movement based on socialist principles and the demand for self-determination for the Irish people.

This is of course what we would like. And it is certainly true that continued British rule in Ireland will maintain the conditions that push people into opposition. However, the idea that a new mass socialist movement can be built is, at the moment, wishful thinking. As the conclusion to the book concedes, the main battle at the moment is over ideas, and at best, converts to revolutionary socialism will come in ones and twos. We have to face up to the fact that the collapse of Irish republicanism is a historic defeat and that rather than clearing the way for a socialist alternative, it makes that alternative all the more difficult.

The comrades from Socialist Democracy need to spell out a clear strategy. How do we relate to the base of the republican movement? Should we call for a critical republicanism in order to try and win the best layers? We can talk about the need for a socialist alternative but it still seems likely that the best activists - in terms of workers, youth, women and others - will be found in what is left of the republican movement. To just write off all these people would be sectarian.

This is the challenge that the comrades face. It is understandable that their book does not have a ready made strategy. Unfortunately these are the problems generated by a historic defeat. This book provides an excellent analysis of these conditions. But constructing an alternative strategy will be an altogether more difficult task.

WA

Two books from Ireland:

Ireland: The Promise of Socialism

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by Joe Craig, John McAnulty and Paul Flannigan

Published by Socialist Democracy

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Revolutionary Socialism in the Belly of the Beast

Trotskyism in the United States: Historical Essays and Reconsiderations

by George Breitman, Paul Le Blanc and Alan Wald

Humanities Press, 1996

Reviewed by Richard Price and Mike Calvert

For many years, the Socialist Workers Party of the United States was seen as the core party of the Fourth International. Its leaders had been in the close contact with Trotsky during his exile in Mexico, and Trotsky's intervention in the 1939-40 faction struggle with Burnham and Shachtman lent authority to Cannon's followers as the authentic proletarian wing of the party. The SWP led the split in the FI in 1953 which became the International Committee, and it also organised the reunification of most of the IC's sections with the International Secretariat in 1963. The 1970s saw the last hurrah of SWP orthodoxy when it stood with Nahuel Moreno supporters against the Mandeliste supporters of the turn to guerrilla warfare, before abruptly renouncing Trotskyism in the early 1980s. More than that, even when the SWP was in a minority, its views were sought and weighed heavily. Its substantial list of publications served as educational primers throughout the English speaking world.

For all these reasons, a series of essays covering 300 pages and six decades of Trotskyist history in the United States ought to be compelling reading. Unfortunately it isn't. This book consists of six essays - two by Paul Le Blanc, three by Alan Wald and one by the late George Breitman. Wald and Le Blanc are members of Solidarity, one of the groups resulting from the series of expulsions and splits within the SWP milieu, while Breitman was a member of the SWP and its predecessors from 1935 until he was purged by the Barnesites almost fifty years later.

Paul Le Blanc's 70 page introductory essay, 'Trotskyism in the United States: the First Fifty Years' is oddly weighted. It deals with the Cochran-Clarke faction struggle and the split in the FI in two paragraphs! (P.32) Cannon's closest collaborator internationally for nearly two decades, Gerry Healey (sic)

merits a couple of mentions in the text and a couple more in the footnotes. We learn of Goldman and Morrow, who raised strong objections to the SWP's tubthumping maximalism towards the latter stages of the Second World War, that they 'were the first to insist that reality required a more pessimistic analysis. Yet their pessimism slid into demoralization and resulted in a deeper questioning of the SWP's revolutionary program and orientation.' (p.28) Breitman's essay, 'The Liberating Influence of the Transitional Program', says that Morrow 'succumbed to Stalinophobia during the war' (p.137) And that's about it. Anyone who wants to know almost anything of their political positions will have to look elsewhere. The Vern-Ryan tendency, which developed a novel, if flawed, understanding of events in the 'buffer zone' and some penetrating criticisms of the FI's role in the Bolivian revolution isn't mentioned at all.

While the authors come from different generations and elements of the SWP tradition, all assume in general that on issues of substance Cannon was almost always right. The 1946 'American Theses', Le Blanc tells us, 'expressed a resounding confidence in the revolutionary capacities of the US working class' (p.29), and provided 'an innovative application of Bolshevik perspectives to the mid-twentieth century United States ... A clear analysis of key developments in twentieth-century capitalism and a bold vision of the possibilities of revolutionary working-class struggles in the United States' (p.179). It seems to have escaped Le Blanc that something can be 'bold' and 'innovative' and wrong! The 'American Theses' underpinned the SWP's leadership's view that any sustained boom was impossible, that the expansion of the US domestic market was equally out of the question, and that revolution-

ary struggles were directly on the agenda in the United States.

From this vantage point, such a perspective at the gateway to the greatest sustained upswing in world capitalism - one moreover in which the US economy played a central role - was manifestly false. But not only does Le Blanc dismiss such considerations. As we have already seen, he writes off those who warned as much *at the time*. It is interesting to note that while the authors strike a familiar note taking Goldman and Morrow to task for violating 'organisational norms', they don't mention the SWP's disloyal role in promoting its own grouping behind the back of the RCP leadership in Britain. Gerry Healy became Cannon's loyal bag carrier in order to pursue similar catastrophist perspectives in Britain, in opposition to those like Jock Haston and Ted Grant who held a more realistic appraisal of the post-war world. (See Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson's *War and the International*.)

The SWP's forays into international Trotskyism receive scant attention in any of the essays. Of course it can be argued that the focus of the book is the role of Trotskyism in the United States. Yet largely ignoring international issues makes much of SWP history inexplicable. All the major internal crises in its history - the Burnham-Shachtman split, the Cochran-Clarke struggles, the various anti-Cuban and pro-Chinese splits of the 1960s, down to the wave of expulsions of the Trotskyist old guard in the 1980s - centred upon international events. For much of its history, the SWP reacted to such crises by relying upon its own version of orthodoxy. This consisted in large part of canon and precedent (or should it be Cannon and precedent?) The party's history, and especially its relationship to Trotsky, was brandished at opponents daring to put their heads above the parapet. Tradition in a country in which

revolutionaries were a tiny minority exercised a powerful influence, especially when it was wielded by leaders like Cannon whose experience stretched back to the early years of the century. But when re-examined, the SWP's role comes over very much as that of the curators of Trotsky's heritage, rather than as Marxists grappling to understand new and unexpected realities. Any honest reading of the various SWP contributions to the buffer zone debate bears that out.

And when the SWP did decide to innovate, it was usually with highly dubious results, most noticeably over Cuba. Here Le Blanc wants to draw a distinction between what he sees as a healthy adaptation to the Cuban leadership at the outset, and its ultimately disastrous conclusion in the 1980s, by which time the Barnes leadership had decided that it should present itself as the sister party of the Cuban Communist Party and kick out anyone retaining an allegiance to Trotskyism. Le Blanc writes of Hansen's *Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution* as 'a penetrating interpretation' (p.35), but that the conclusion of the SWP leaders that by 1980 'the classic "Trotskyist" outlook could no longer be considered adequate' was 'bizarre' (p.65). In fact, the shift was a matter of degree more than anything else. First Hansen transformed the theory of permanent revolution from a conscious strategy to an objective dynamic guiding the 'world revolutionary process', which was capable of transforming a non-proletarian nationalist leadership into a

proletarian revolutionary one. From there to junking permanent revolution altogether, in favour of a new international composed of Cuban Stalinists, Nicaraguan Sandinistas, the New Jewel Movement of Grenada, Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, not to mention (don't laugh!) Nelson Mandela was - at the risk of sounding rather 'dialectical' - a process. Of course, Hansen would surely have been appalled at what Barnes and co did to the party of which he was a member for so many years. But let us not forget either the role of the entire SWP leadership in the 1960s in alibing such unsavoury episodes as the suppression of the Cuban Trotskyists by Castro, and in expelling those within the SWP who were critical of its pro-Castro turn.

What then is the legacy of the old Trotskyist SWP? The impression repeatedly created is of a party whose members, often fighting in a very hostile environment, carried out dogged and often impressive campaigning, propagandist and interventionist work. But - despite the significant fringe of ex- or pro-SWP intellectuals - you are also struck by the party's theoretical barrenness; by how often when it came to the big things it got them badly wrong. And by how constantly self-referential it was - and how its diaspora remains so. The party developed new positions by modifying and extending old ones. The relationship with the rest of Trotskyism - partly, it is true, as a result of the Cold War - became increasingly platonic. The enthusiastic

American-centred perspectives of 1946 had become pessimistic US-centredness a decade later. It's no great surprise to learn that on the SWP Political Committee in the late 1950s 'world events were rarely discussed' (p.203).

James P. Cannon naturally features heavily in this book. Although the picture that emerges is generally positive, it is not hagiographic. Pungent criticisms from inside and outside the SWP are at least aired, as are some of his less endearing qualities, such as his drink problem (p.10). Cannon's predilection for organisational solutions to political problems is also discussed, although again he is generally acquitted. Cannon was certainly no Gerry Healy in terms of party democracy. Oppositions within the SWP were generally given the opportunity to present their case for an extended period. That being said, after 1940, he shared a tendency to view differences as undesirable, probably disloyal and 'petty bourgeois'.

The 1940 split was a watershed in the party's history. What is often seen as almost a victory, was in fact something of a tragedy. With Shachtman departed many of the party's critical faculties, so that although its membership had recovered and gone beyond pre-war levels by 1946 (p.72), the ability to orient itself both in relation to the close of the war and the situation in eastern Europe was sadly lacking.

The second section of the book is at least less pedestrian than the first. Collectively entitled 'Reconsiderations', it attempts to survey what went wrong with the SWP. Le Blanc's 'Leninism in the United States and the Decline of American Trotskyism' is rather less than its title promises. It is in fact a study of the increasingly undemocratic organisational practices within the party, from the mid-sixties onwards. Wald's 'From the Old Left to the New Left and Beyond' is not so much history as sociological musings on the relationship between older and younger radicals in the 1960s. The final piece, Wald's 'The End of "American Trotskyism"?' is an elegant meander around the possible causes of the movement's failure, without coming up with any very solid answers, beyond the need to avoid 'sectarianism, leader idolatry, hair-splitting, and so forth that have afflicted and disabled U.S. Trotskyism' (p.280) - a justification, in fact, for the kind of looser, networking body that Solidarity aspires to be.

In place of the sociology of a left party, (and a failed shell of one at that), what could have made the book valuable - some serious political analysis - is largely missing. **WA**

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Letters

PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX

Dear comrades –

I was saddened to hear of the death of comrade Eileen Gersh and salute her memory, but wish to take up some points raised in the article attributed to her which is a synopsis of the position of the 1991 World Congress of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) on the environment.

The ideas in the piece deserve some *serious* debate and discussion, but they are not the final word and should be seriously challenged in some places. Many youth are attracted by the ideas of environmental protest – but unless a real anti-capitalist edge is added there is little point: it is purely the system co-opting yet more protest movements as it has done so many in the past!

The article does not really acknowledge the leading role of the working class in the struggle for socialist revolution. Millions of workers all over the world are falling foul of globalisation and the policies of the IMF and the World Bank. As I outlined in my piece on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (*Workers Action* no. 4), the capitalist system is modifying its *modus operandi* to allow it to extract profits through treaties such as Mercosur, Nafta, Gatt and bodies like the IMF, World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. Child labour is still widespread, unemployment rises, multinationals and trans-national corporations stalk the earth looking for fast money and the economic system begins to crash.

After the Second World War, Ernest Mandel – the undisputed leader of the USec tradition of Trotskyism – argued that capitalism was in a ‘third age’. He stated the post war boom and the growth of phenomena like cybernetics proved the validity of such arguments. He contended World War III was around the corner (as did all the post-Trotsky Trotskyists). Mandel was wrong!

The line of the article and of the USec today is directly descended from these mistakes. In the 1950s others argued that it was the parasitic debt spiral and arms economy that were developing what were termed the destructive forces: science and technology were directly advancing along these lines. While this is simplistic, I think it is historically true. Technology is the servant of humanity—and the dominant economic system: capitalism. Nature is exploited like the working class under this hideous and deformed economic system.

In Europe, the groups associated with the USec are breaking with their Trotskyist moorings in an attempt to recombine and regroup with all manner of flotsam and jetsam like the Maoists in the German VSP, the Juquinites in the French LCR, the Spanish Izquierda Unida, the Italian refounded Stalinists in the Democrazia Proletaria etc. All this in an attempt to ‘recompose the labour movement’. A part of this process is tailending any supposed leftist vanguard you can find, including the

Swampys of this world.

On the other hand, those who cling tenaciously to outmoded, irrelevant concepts will get nowhere fast either. What is the point of a transitional demand that is written in the language of the 1930s? It is as useful as garlic against nonexistent vampires!

The crisis of what some call ‘Post-Trotsky Trotskyism’ is deep. Ernest Mandel and the USec tradition deserve their share of the blame alongside the likes of Gerry Healy, but I am not into a ‘bad person interpretation of history’. Chasing leftward moving vanguards and tailending Stalinists – whether decomposed or recomposed – is tilting at windmills, or chasing shadows.

All socialists should reject this blind alley. Environmentalism, like pacifism, is an expression of discontent with the system, but without the existence of a revolutionary socialist organisation to educate and train the cadres of the future revolutionary group it leads to Friends of the Earth, the Green Party, Jonathan Porritt and Prince Charles!

Workers Action should have a regular feature entitled ‘How capitalism fouls things up’ or some variant and attempt to intervene into the ecology movement. Part of the renewal of Marxism needs us to reach out to youth here and abroad, but not on the basis of their weaknesses—but in an attempt to develop our understanding and politically enrich both ourselves and those who look to us.

Mike Calvert

London

Dear comrades –

I have just finished reading ‘Socialist Revolution and Ecology’ by Eileen Gersh in *Workers Action* No.4. If a better article of its kind has been published in the British left press, then I should like to see it. *Workers Action* has done the British Left a service by posthumously republishing this excellent piece. My complaint is that the editorial note accompanying it is somewhat grudging. Leaving aside the argument over whether the United Secretariat represents the continuity of the Fourth International of 1938-1953, the criticism that the article omits to mention the leading role of the working class is not borne out by reference to the

text (see the paragraph beginning: ‘Environment is a class issue’). Furthermore, the note does not say much about the strengths of the article.

Eileen makes the obvious but necessary point that environmental damage and the waste of resources are intrinsic to an economic system based on the production of commodities and the pursuit of profit. Therefore, the struggle against environmental destruction should not be a bolt-on extra for revolutionary Marxists; it should be part of the terrain of the fight against capitalism. Unfortunately, many ‘green’ activists are way ahead of the socialists in terms of practical campaigning and knowledge of the issues. Many of them see socialism or Marxism as

being an ecologically destructive 'twin' of free-market capitalism, based on the simplistic notion that economic growth *in itself* signifies progress. This mistaken idea is given credence by the environmental record of social-democratic governments (except possibly some in Scandinavia), the appalling environmental damage done in the USSR, China and eastern Europe, and the stupid and sectarian attitude of much of the revolutionary left, which sees environmental questions as 'petit-bourgeois' or middle-class consumer faddism.

This provokes many greens to write off the 'reds', in turn encouraging the isolation of the greens from the labour movement, and the strengthening of the petit-bourgeois and utopian tendencies (such as the reliance on individual stunts and gestures) which undoubtedly exist within the diffuse collection of campaigns and struggles known for convenience as the 'green' movement. This is a tragedy. Many environmental activists are not tree-hugging mystics. They are only too aware of the links between environmental destruction and capitalist exploitation. If they are not aware at the outset, they are soon brought face to face with corporate thuggery, lies and greed. (For example, the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment brings the two questions together perfectly.) By rights, they should be won to revolutionary Marxism, and the perspective of the democratic planning of production and the use of resources to satisfy need, not profit. That they are not is largely our fault. We have not answered the questions they have raised, and so they have gone elsewhere.

In *Workers Action* No.1, a

thoughtful article looked at the question of a 'red-green alliance'. This will not be achieved simply by the 'reds' taking the greens and green issues a little more seriously, although that would help. While the greens undoubtedly ought to become 'red' (the rightward trajectory of the 'realo' wing of the German greens is the logical alternative), this will not be achieved unless the 'reds' also become 'green', not in the sense that we adapt to those aspects of 'green' ideology (in so far as it is possible to speak of such a thing) which are utopian or anti-working class, but in the sense that we develop our programme and our practice, so that the protection of the environment is as much our concern as the defence of trade unions.

An explicitly anti-capitalist, effective ecological movement would terrify those ruling class politicians who cynically pay lip-service to environmental protection because they realise there may be votes in it, those on the right wing of the 'green' movement who see the urban working class (who usually bear the brunt of the pollution, while the ruling class are safely upwind) as part of the problem, the neo-Malthusians, who put the blame on the population growth in the 'third world', and the 'greenwashers' — those, usually employed in public relations departments of large companies, who substitute images of change, and manufactured optimism, for change itself.

The obvious limitation of Eileen's article is its length. It is necessarily a summary. Every one of the demands or proposals in Eileen's list is the basis for further analysis and discussion in the future. I hope *Workers Action* can make a positive contribution to that process.

Nick Davies

Swansea

Workers Action editorial team responds:

It is gratifying to receive letters, even if they are from *Workers Action* contributors! The two make diametrically opposed criticisms of the environment article in *Workers Action* No.4. However, we view the idea that the truth lies between two extremes as a lazy and unscientific mode of thinking and will try to take up very briefly the criticisms made.

The article was originally written by Eileen Gersh in 1995 as a synopsis of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) 1991 resolution on socialism and the environment, and should not be taken as Eileen's own position. In 1996, for example, she supported the view of the WIL congress that a red-green alliance would be impossible 'unless the greens were to become reds'.

While we generally agree with Mike's comments about the USec's tendency to tail all kinds of questionable movements, we do not think that therefore everything the USec produces is rubbish. We would agree with much of what Nick says about the value of the analysis in the article.

However, we do not agree with Nick's view that our preamble to the article is 'grudging'. While the article does state the need for the working class to take up environmental issues, it does not give the working class a *leading* role, and (as Mike's letter says) a major failing of the USec's politics is the tailending of the radical petit-bourgeoisie in preference to promoting a working-class based programme. In the same vein, while Nick states powerfully the case for working with the green movement, the USec resolution refers to *green parties*. The politics of the USec leave it in great danger of tailending these parties, which all have a common characteristic of refusing to take their environmental analysis to the logical conclusion of opposing capitalism. **WA**

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Waiting for the big one: Catastrophism and the *Transitional Programme*

Many of those claiming to be Trotskyists have used this year's anniversaries of the founding of the Fourth International and the writing of its *Transitional Programme* to restate their commitment to Trotsky's legacy. However, they have done this, largely, in an uncritical way, failing to address the questions of period and epoch and the unfulfilled nature of Trotsky's predictions. Following on from Richard Price's article 'The Transitional Programme in perspective' in *Workers Action* no.2 **Nick Davies** argues for a more critical approach capable of addressing some of the problems contained in Trotsky's analysis.

It is 60 years since the best-known founding document of the Fourth International, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and Tasks of the Fourth International – The Transitional Programme* signed off with a rhetorical flourish so typical of its author: 'Working men and women of the world, place yourselves under the banner of the Fourth International. It is the banner of your approaching victory!'.¹ Six decades later the victory of the world working class is still, unfortunately, over the horizon, while in Britain fewer place themselves under the banner of the Fourth International than pay to watch a third division football match. These include rather too few workers and rather too many cranks, trainspotters and godseekers. Some of these post-Trotsky Trotskyists do not appear to have even grasped that there is a problem. *Marxist Review*, journal of the Workers Revolutionary Party (*News Line*) tells us in the Editorial of its January 1998 issue that 1998 'will be the year in which the workers will rise up in country after country'. A year earlier, the corresponding edition had declared that 1997 was the 'year for building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International all over the world', and that 'in front of the working class of the world, at point blank range is the task of smashing capitalism and imperialism, and going forward to complete the world socialist revolution'. Maybe these deranged fantasists should get out of the house a bit more.

More importantly, these dedicated disciples of Trotsky appear to have no idea whatsoever of what is the greatest strength of the *Transitional Programme*, the *transitional method*. Richard Price in *Workers Action* No.2 argued, quite correctly, for the continuing validity of this method, which links the struggles of the present with the need of the working

class to challenge its existing leadership and advance from its present level of consciousness. Of course, this method pre-dated the *Transitional Programme*; it was effectively employed by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917. *The Transitional Programme* was, in 1938, the latest development and expression of that method, in the light of the political experiences of the 1920s and 1930s.

So much for the strengths of the *Transitional Programme*; what about its weaknesses? Those post-Trotsky Trotskyists who are not completely off the radar screen are a little reticent about these. Some admit that there is a problem: the perspectives sketched out in the *Transitional Programme* for World War Two and its aftermath did not come to pass, and since then Trotsky's political descendants have been trying to re-orient themselves in the light of post-war reality. Therefore the problem is not Trotsky, but the Trotskyists. There is some truth in this; however, as an alibi for Trotsky, it is not entirely convincing. If we are to get the *Transitional Programme* into perspective, we must look at its important weaknesses. The failure of post-Trotsky Trotskyists to do this has resulted in these weaknesses outweighing the strengths of the *Transitional Programme* in their political practice.

Over-optimism

The most obvious weakness is a profound over-optimism concerning the political situation of the time. Certainly the 1930s were a turbulent and unstable time, and it would have been utterly wrong to exclude the possibility that the coming world war and the concomitant social upheaval could result in socialist revolution at least somewhere. However, at the time of the final draft of the *Transitional Programme*, September 1938, a period de-

scribed by Trotsky as 'pre-revolutionary'² the working class in Germany and Italy was firmly under the iron heel of fascism. In the USSR an atomised working class was reduced to industrial serfdom amidst the unbridled terror of the Moscow Trials and the Great Purges. In Spain the working class of Barcelona had won power, but had lost it again – as was predicted by Trotsky – due to the crimes or mistakes of its leaders. Franco's final victory came the next spring. In the democratic countries, workers in Britain were still laid low by the defeat of the general strike and the depression. US workers were certainly radicalised by the struggles of the Minneapolis Teamsters and the autoworkers, and the formation of the CIO, but this development, while important, did not even result in a break by the US unions from the Democratic Party. It is difficult to see it as Trotsky saw it: 'the most indisputable expression of the instinctive (sic) striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history'.³

In France, the wave of strikes and anti-fascist struggles was one of the most exciting developments in the history of the French working class. In May and June of 1936 two million workers, about a quarter of all wage earners, were on strike. The response of the Popular Front government, led by Leon Blum, was the Matignon Agreement, between unions and employers. The concessions granted say something about the fright the employers had had: wage increases of seven to fifteen per cent, a 40 hour week and two weeks' paid holiday. Quite correctly, Trotsky described Matignon as a necessary expedient, and pointed to the role of the Communist Party in propping up the Popular Front government of socialists and radicals.⁴ With the employers on the defensive, it was essential to try to build

on this achievement. However, the entire left, except for the Trotskyists who at the time were reorganising themselves into the International Workers Party (IWP), supported Matignon and the ruling class was able to go on ruling in the old way. Trotsky admits in the Transitional Programme that the socialists, Stalinists and syndicalists 'succeeded in canalising and damming, at least temporarily, the revolutionary stream'. Certainly by 1938 the French workers had lost the initiative. In *Whither France* (1936) Trotsky announced that 'the French Revolution has begun'. He admitted that: 'to say "French revolution" may seem exaggerated. Not at all. This is no exaggeration. That is precisely how a revolution springs into being',⁵ which, it could be argued, is a little more than a truism. Whether events would have taken a different course had the Trotskyist movement in France been able to cease its constant internal squabbling and been capable of constituting itself as a viable pole of attraction for leftward moving workers is, of course, a matter for speculation.

Dialectics and mechanics

This over-optimism does not simply stem from an empirical misassessment of events, although given Trotsky's isolation after 1935 in Norway and Mexico, dependent on the US SWP for much of his information, this is part of the problem. It stems from Trotsky's methodology – his understanding of the objective and the subjective factor in politics. The quotation cited above concerning the US labour movement ('the most indisputable expression of the instinctive striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history') is suggestive of a crude determinism. Other examples pop up frequently throughout the text: 'the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus',⁶ 'the approaching wave will lift it (the Fourth International) to its crest'⁷ and so on. Gramsci criticised Trotsky for not having fully broken from the mechanical Marxism of the Second International. Considering that Trotsky's principal contribution to Marxist theory is, arguably, the concept of permanent revolution and uneven and combined development, such a criticism – if accepted at all – must be heavily qualified. However, Ticktin speaks of Trotsky's 'dialectical decline',⁸ contrasting this later mechanical approach and the catastrophism of the Transitional Programme with what he sees as a more dialectical approach from the 1920s. Certainly, some of the formulations in the Transitional Programme have lumbered Trotsky's political heirs with some awkward theoretical baggage.

The other element of Trotsky's understanding of the objective and subjective factors is his notion that the objective prerequisites for socialist revolution were already present. What was required to make it become reality

was the intervention of the subjective factor: revolutionary leadership, or more precisely, the revolutionary party. This idea is a leitmotif throughout the Transitional Programme: 'The strategic task of the next period – a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organisation – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard . . .'⁹ and 'the objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ripened, they have begun to get somewhat rotten . . . It is now the turn of the proletariat, i.e., chiefly of its revolutionary vanguard.'¹⁰ From this, it is easy and logical to reduce the question to: 'the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership',¹¹ and consequently, 'the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind's culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International'.¹²

This approach has an air of plausibility, and indeed an element of truth. Capitalism was as rotten in 1938 as it is in 1998. It will not disappear all by itself. Its overthrow requires the conscious intervention of the working class with a revolutionary, not a social-democratic or Stalinist, leadership. However, the error is the reduction of the revolutionary project to simply the question of leadership. This carries with it all sorts of connotations of voluntarism, sectarianism, and elitist vanguardism. Trotsky, had he lived longer, and in the light of events after 1940, may well have reassessed his perspectives and also his methodology. However, in the hands of the tin-pot autocrats who followed Trotsky this notion – that the crisis of mankind was reducible to the building of their particular sect – was absolute dynamite. It legitimised, in the eyes of generations of sincere and dedicated militants, the bewildering zigzagging of the United Secretariat, forty years of Labour Party Ward meetings in the case of the Militant, and, probably the worst of all, toleration of the vanity, violence, and monomania of that charlatan and brute TG Healy. For the rank and file it meant exhortations to fortitude and self-sacrifice and then, ultimately, to guilt and burnout. For the self-aggrandising leaders, it meant 'le parti, c'est moi'. Even for those currents organised on more-or-less democratic lines (and they have existed!), this reductionism on the question of leadership spells trouble. It encourages a somewhat primitive conception of: the next big crisis + the primitive accumulation of members = revolutionary party, leading to revolutionary party + even deeper crisis + insurrection = socialist revolution. This view of relationship between the objective and the subjective factors neglects an obvious point, which is that a revolutionary situation requires the entry of the masses into politics. The fact that revolutionary Marxist organisations are tiny suggests that the prospects for revolution are

distant. Tiny sects masquerading as revolutionary parties cannot substitute themselves for a non-existent revolutionary situation. Trotsky elsewhere recognised this point, (and in fact, warns against this substitutionism in a section of the Transitional Programme entitled 'Against Sectarianism'). Many of his successors, however, do not. Further, this reductionism concerning the question of leadership neglects the entire question of the need to develop a strategy, of the development of a hegemonic project for the taking and keeping of power. It neglects the need to challenge bourgeois legitimisation of its system, and the acceptance of its ideas as the dominant ideas in society.

Objective and subjective

At first sight, the Transitional Programme involves an apparent paradox: the coexistence of crude historical determinism with the constant emphasis on the subjective factor. But this is because Trotsky separates the objective and the subjective all the time. Therefore, on one hand we have all the objective prerequisites for proletarian revolution, but because the subjective prerequisites are absent, because the working class is weak, unorganised, badly led and most of it accepts, in some form, the ideology of the ruling class, revolution might be as remote a possibility as ever. This is a bit like the old saying: 'if my aunt had balls she'd be my uncle'. Although this separation of the objective and the subjective is a feature of the Transitional Programme, its origins lie some twenty-odd years further back, and therefore it might be necessary to take issue with Ticktin's notion of a 'dialectical decline'. In October 1914 Trotsky wrote that: '... the war heralds . . . the crack-up of the capitalist form of economy',¹³ and went on to proclaim a new epoch – an epoch of proletarian revolutions. This approach was refined in Trotsky's extremely detailed Report on the World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International¹⁴ which he made to the third Comintern Congress in 1921. He reiterated the view, which was shared with other members of the Bolshevik Party, that capitalism had reached its last zenith of productive development in the pre-war imperialist phase, and repeated his characterisation of the epoch as one of proletarian revolution:

'With the imperialist war we entered the epoch of revolution, that is, the epoch when the very mainstays of capitalist equilibrium are shaking and collapsing. Capitalist equilibrium is an extremely complex phenomenon. Capitalism produces this equilibrium, disrupts it, restores it anew in order to disrupt it anew . . . in the economic sphere these constant disruptions and restorations of the equilibrium take the form of crises and booms . . . capitalism thus possesses a dynamic equilibrium, one which is always in the process of either disruption or restoration . . .'¹⁵

Trotsky went on to argue that historically, the underlying curve of capitalist development could be divided into five segments. Taking as his model the British economy, he identified a first stage of 1781 – 1851, a period with no rapid economic growth, then a period of more rapid expansion from 1851 to 1873, then a third period of stagnation until 1894, then a fourth period of boom until 1914. The fifth period began in 1914, the period of the destruction of the capitalist economy. This fifth period of revolutions was then discussed in more detail. Trotsky did not exclude a 'new commercial-industrial upswing'.¹⁶ '... As long as capitalism is alive it continues to inhale and exhale'. However, such upswings could only be of a 'superficial and primarily speculative character, while the crises become more and more prolonged and deeper-going'.¹⁷ Further, Trotsky maintains that: 'The only thing that is excluded is the automatic restoration of capitalist equilibrium on a new foundation and a capitalist upswing in the next few years. This is absolutely impossible under the conditions of modern economic stagnation'.¹⁸

By 1921, Trotsky, and the other more astute members of the Comintern leadership had recognised that the revolutionary tide was ebbing. Of course, Trotsky was correct in this, as opposed to the ultra-lefts such as Bela Kun. It was in an attempt to square the circle, and reconcile his economic perspectives with the real world that he separated the objective from the subjective, posing the dichotomy of the objective situation, ripe for revolution, but requiring the intervention of the subjective factor.

The 'revolutionary epoch'

This conception of the 'revolutionary epoch' is the root of Trotsky's revolutionary over-optimism. In turn, it is rooted in a somewhat mechanical-determinist conception of the economy which is derived from the Second International. This denies, or at least underplays the relative autonomy of politics, of the class struggle, and of ideology. It underplays the extent to which the economy is subject to contingent, as opposed to necessary, laws of development. In other words, it underestimates the extent to which economic planning and state intervention can influence economic development, as was the case in the post-war boom. In turn, it takes us on to the catastrophism exhibited in the *Transitional Programme*.

Saddled with Trotsky's conception of the revolutionary epoch, which they accept uncritically, Trotsky's political heirs have spent the last half-century in a bind: What do revolutionaries do when, as has mostly been the case, revolution is not a realistic prospect and the concept of seizing power is absent from the political thinking of most workers? Do they, like the Socialist Labour League / Workers Revolutionary Party of Gerry Healy, give

vent to, and grotesquely magnify, the voluntarism implicit in the *Transitional Programme*, larding it with a religious millenarianism, or, more pragmatically, do they beaver away in shop stewards' committees or on local authorities, defending, or attempting to defend the interests of workers as best they can? Whilst the latter will undoubtedly do more good, it is a pragmatic adjustment rather than a systematic development of the revolutionary Marxist method.

But back to Trotsky himself. Empirically, his perspectives of 1921 had a certain plausibility in the light of the tumultuous events of the 1920s and 1930s: the short-lived US boom followed by the crash of 1929 and the stagnation of the 1930s. However, they do not stand up to serious examination today. The years 1948 to 1968 saw the greatest expansion of the productive forces in the history of the planet. To be critical of his perspectives of 1921 and 1938 does not merely involve a reliance on hindsight. It is to examine critically the method which lay behind them. Trotsky's perspectives were bound up with how he saw the relationship between economics and politics. In the course of his report to the 1921 Comintern Congress, he stated that:

'If the further development of productive forces was conceivable within the framework of bourgeois society, then revolution would generally be impossible. But since the further development of the productive forces within the framework of bourgeois society is inconceivable, the basic premise for the revolution is given'.¹⁹

Is economic collapse necessary?

Does socialist revolution require this basic premise? Should the success of socialist revolution depend on the existence of some 'final', generalised collapse? That such a 'final' collapse need occur at all is surely arguable, from the point of view of Marxist economic theory. If such a collapse, general or localised, were to occur, would it necessarily be a positive development from the point of view of socialist revolution? A response may take the form not of socialism, but of religious or linguistic communalism, fascism, or warlordism. In fact this is already happening. Look at the localised collapses occurring at the moment. In East Asia, with the qualified exception of South Korea, in the face of the abject collapse of crony-capitalism there is barely any response at all by workers *as a class*, still less any possibility of socialist revolution. In Indonesia the response has taken the form of Islamic populism and violence towards the Chinese minority. In Russia the economy is in meltdown, and yet the working class, if it mobilises at all, can only organise sporadic protests against not having been paid for six months.

Neither should a successful revolution

necessarily have to wait for a cyclical capitalist crisis. Surely socialist revolutions are possible in a period of capitalist expansion? After all, the working class is able to bid up the price of its labour power and build up its organisations. Anyone who has lived through the Thatcher years can attest that mass unemployment is a stick to keep the working class scared and demoralised, not necessarily a spur to a more self-confident militancy.

The conclusion here is that capitalism will continue to undergo crisis and boom. That is its nature. We may be on the point of the fourth world recession in 25 years, yet socialist revolution seems further away than it did 25 years ago. This is not to give up on socialist revolution. It is to say that despite crisis after crisis, the bourgeoisie is able to get itself off the hook, and create conditions for further capitalist reproduction, on a long or short-term basis. It is able to do this by a formidable array of weaponry, but also, in large part, because it exercises a hegemony over the rest of society. Its ideas are accepted as the dominant ideas in society. Post-Trotsky Trotskyism dismisses the necessity to undermine bourgeois hegemony and bourgeois legitimation of the system. This is why it often appears primitive and facile. However, its basis is Trotsky's tendency to underestimate the strength of reformist ideology among workers in western countries (although of course Trotsky had a wider knowledge of European politics and culture than most other Bolshevik leaders). Too often he tended to see reformism as *simply* the making of concessions when expedient, a clever way of swindling the workers using involving corrupt and unscrupulous leaders, and the creation of a privileged labour bureaucracy, based on a relatively well-paid labour aristocracy (although at times it can be all of these things). Reformism is not simply a swindle, or a few crumbs from the bosses' table. If it were, it would not be so enduring. Surely reformism must have, in western Europe at least, an ideological and structural dimension. Are workers so bovine and stupid that they can be 'swindled' again and again, over nearly a century? Of course not!

An example of the gap in Trotskyist thinking, incidentally, is the way in which most post-Trotsky Trotskyists were completely unprepared for the strength of support amongst intellectuals and workers in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic after 1989 for reformist, social-democratic ideas, and specifically, for the concept of a civil society. This was a conscious orientation towards western Europe. It is difficult to take seriously the idea that after nearly 50 years of Stalinism the workers would flood into mini-caricatures of 'Leninist' parties, albeit run by 'Trotskyists'. This is not to accept reformism as invincible, in west or east Europe, or to say that revolutionary Marxists should not try to build organisations in the east. It is to say that if we wish to com-

bat reformism successfully, we have to understand it.

If we dismiss the idea of a 'final' catastrophic breakdown of capitalism, that does not mean we can be reconciled to the system, on the basis that better times will come round every few years, and that our job is just the best possible defence of workers under that system. The Marxist dictum: socialism or barbarism? does not refer to some future showdown. The barbarism is already with us. Surely it is not over-sensitive to regard the Holocaust, or the carpet-bombing of Vietnam, or the war in Bosnia as barbarism? This winter people will starve to death because a smirking currency dealer in a yellow blazer is shouting 'sell, sell!'

On the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International and the publication of the *Transitional Programme*, a far more critical and questioning spirit is necessary. This article poses, or tries to pose, as many questions as it tries to answer. One pertinent question might be whether it is misleading to call the *Transitional Programme* a programme at all; it is more in the character of a manifesto. The most important question, however, is this: should revolutionary Marxists try to build on Trotsky's strengths and address his weaknesses, or perpetuate 'Trotskyism' as a secular religion, a cult around a dead leader, with the *Transitional Programme* as its Book of Revelations?

Notes:

1. *The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution* (hereafter: TP) Pathfinder Press p152.
2. *ibid.* p113
3. *ibid.* p113
4. *Leon Trotsky on France* Pathfinder Press p157
5. *ibid.* p162
6. TP p113
7. *ibid.* p148
8. 'H. Ticktin, Trotsky's Political Economy of Capitalism' in *The Ideas of Leon Trotsky* Porcupine Press p89
9. TP p113
10. *ibid.* p112
11. *ibid.* p112
12. *ibid.* p112
13. I Deutscher ed. *The Age of Permanent Revolution* New York 1964 cited in Hodgson *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism* Spokesman p13
14. *The First Five Years of the Communist International* Vol 1 Monad p.174
15. *ibid.* p174
16. *ibid.* p208
17. *ibid.* p208
18. *ibid.* p211
19. Op. cit. Vol.2 p4

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