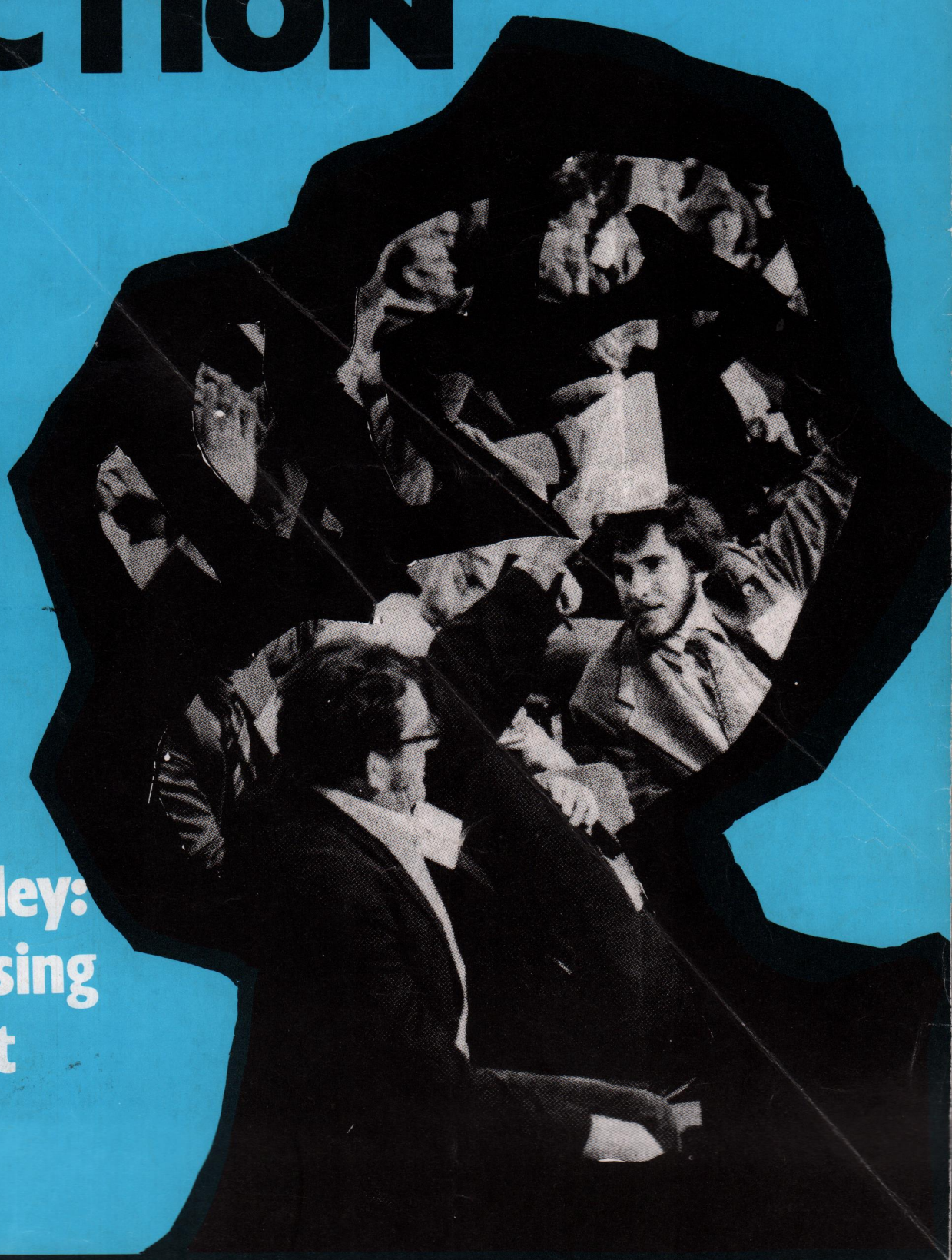


WORKERS' ACTION

50p

No.182



**After
Wembley:
organising
for left
unity**

Women and the labour movement ●● 'Militant' and Afghanistan
Lessons from the Comintern ●● **Poland: towards a showdown**
Workers and the Stalinist state 'unions' ●● The slump and the
class struggle ● **Rank & file movements in building** ● A new 'F.I.'

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Letter to readers

WITH THIS issue Workers' Action changes format and goes onto a monthly schedule of production. We offer our apologies to regular readers for the long gap since the weekly stopped appearing in late July. For some time before July it had been the case that Socialist Organiser, which Workers' Action supporters joined with others to produce, was presenting an adequate class-struggle political response to the practical issues as they arose. It reached substantially more people than Workers' Action did, and it organised and coordinated the work of far more. Supporters of Workers' Action would claim some of the credit for that. But it led to us having to re-think what the role of Workers' Action should be, now that a large part of its former function had been taken over or duplicated by Socialist Organiser.

The result was a decision to throw more of our resources behind Socialist Organiser, making the paper fortnightly and building Socialist Organiser groups, and to make Workers' Action into a monthly, in magazine format. We expect-

ed to start monthly publication in September or October, but we couldn't manage it before now. The pressure of other work on our resources increased with the tempo of the struggle leading up to the victory at the Wembley conference [so far, only a provisional victory]. Workers' Action was, of course, heavily involved, through the SCLV and Socialist Organiser, in setting up and campaigning with the Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy.

Workers' Action will appear monthly from now on. It will carry heavier and less immediate material than Socialist Organiser. [The present issue is, however, more 'heavy' than we expect the average Workers' Action to be]. On the question of doctrine and programme, it will represent and argue for the views of a distinct trend in the labour movement. It will attempt, by linking militants together on those politics, to knit together the trade union, Labour Party and other fronts of the class struggle, and to discuss and [we hope] clarify the political

questions that arise in and from the struggle.

Our viewpoint, of course, is that of Trotskyism. However, there are now many individuals and groups who set out to respond to political events on the basis of Trotskyism and yet arrive at different conclusions, sometimes radically different conclusions. So it must be with any living movement. For this reason we will try to make Workers' Action magazine a forum for discussion of principles and issues, and a vehicle for dialogue and interaction. In politics, the monotone makes for lifeless music! In that spirit, we offer the comrades of Militant space to reply to the discussion of their views in this issue.

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Production work on this issue was done by Jo Thwaites, Constantin Giannaris, Martin Thomas, Andrew Hornung, and Bruce Robinson.

AFTER WEMBLEY: TURN TO THE UNIONS

RACHEL LEVER, a member of the Executive Committee of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, outlines the tasks facing Labour's Left after Wembley.

FOR FLEET Street, Labour's Wembley conference all had to be fitted in to the 'greedy unions' or 'union barons' mythology.

Yet the victory for a real change in the method of electing the Party Leader (as against the GMWU's sabotage proposal) actually reflected the enormous pressure of rank and file trade unionists, who increasingly support the democratisation of the Labour Party. If it had been left to the whims of general secretaries, the principle would never have been carried in Blackpool, or a wrecking proposal would have gone through at Wembley. All the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's 'tactical brilliance' would have been to no avail without the support of hundreds of trade union delegates.

The Press wanted to give the credit for the Wembley result to Clive Jenkins. But in fact the casting of the ASTMS vote was decided by the *delegation*, and against Jenkins' plea. At Blackpool, he had swung the delegation against a 'vote for both' position which would have settled the issue there and then at 50% trade unions, 25% CLPS, and 25% shared between the PLP and prospective parliamentary candidates. So much for the idea that Jenkins was the chief architect of the 'union majority' position.

Even now, unless the rank and file steps up its fight, there is a serious danger of the Wembley result being reversed by a counter-attack from the Parliamentarians and sections of the trade union top brass. Yet there is also every reason to hope that the Wembley result will help to stoke up an important fight to democratise not only the block vote, but many other union procedures and structures as well.

For one thing, the Wembley formula provides for all votes to be recorded and published. If it's to be done for electing the party leader, why not for all conference votes. Trade unionists are bound to be asking this question, and others.

Immediately the spotlight is on the Leader election, and how the rank and file is going to have democratic control in that process.

Normally, if the block vote is functioning halfway democratically, it is cast according to union policy as agreed at conferences or nationally elected committees, and if there is no previous policy it is up to the delegation to decide.

But the leadership election will require other arrangements. Nominations will not be known in time for union conferences to decide and mandate their delegates. So if it is not to be decided by Executives, there will have to be some recall or special delegate meeting in September to mandate the delegation. This raises

the possibility of other matters that have come up since the union conference being discussed and decided at such a meeting, which would have by then the published agenda for the whole Labour Party conference.

Mostly what's wrong with the block vote is that the union delegations are often dominated by non-elected officials, or leaders who might once have been elected but are now in position for life and therefore less accountable than the Labour Leader they are electing. To remedy this, all delegates should be lay members of the union, elected either at annual conference, or in branch or workplace ballots, or at special mandating conferences. And attention will have to be paid to those sections of unions at present wholly or virtually disenfranchised: women, who can be a majority in a union and absent from the delegation; and black people, who are rarely seen in the trade union seats at Labour conferences. Special measures will have to be taken to include them in delegations.

If these measures are taken under pressure of the Wembley decision, they will have profound repercussions. Quite a number of unions have now cast their votes for measures in the Labour Party which they would do well to emulate themselves. How many trade union general secretaries and presidents submit themselves to annual election, as a Labour Leader must now do?

Although in the short-term anti-union feeling has found an echo among constituency party members, the increasing pressure from rank and file trade unionists in favour of both trade union and Labour Party democracy could undo this damage in the longer term. Specific measures to give the constituencies a heavier vote at Annual Conference might also help — such as shifting some of the union vote into the constituencies accord-

ing to their affiliated trade union membership, and into workplace party branches.

The next immediate battle, however, is to make the Wembley vote stick. This means getting union conferences that had no chance to adopt a position between Blackpool and Wembley to support the decision arrived at on January 24th, and explaining to any doubters that a reversal would not bring a slight adjustment in favour of an essentially similar option such as the three-thirds formula, but would sweep away major features such as annual election and the recorded vote and give the PLP a decisive say.

The sooner the new system is put into practice, the better. It should mean an electoral college at the Brighton conference in October. But we cannot put it past the waverers on the NEC, under the tutelage of the Conference Arrangements Committee, to plead that it's all too sudden and can't be done for another year. Letters and resolutions to the NEC supporting an electoral college this year are essential.

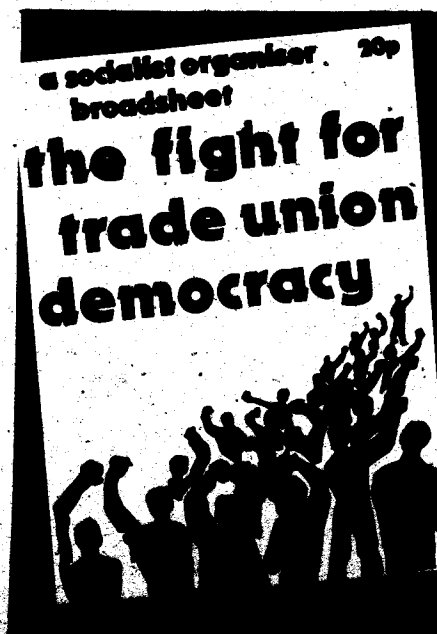
This is also the year in which MPs will for the first time face the reselection process. And there are many democratic changes still to be won: control of the Manifesto; the functioning of the PLP, local government.

To extend the gains the rank and file have won, to make them work, and to fend off a counter-attack (which will also focus on weakening the left on the NEC), we must step up the left unity that has been forged in the past year. And we must extend support for the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy through affiliation of both Labour Party and trade union bodies.

The Rank and File Mobilising Committee has been a significant force in the past year in turning back the right's machinations. Formed in June 1980 on the initiative of the SCLV (Socialist Organiser), it brought together up to ten organisations and supplemented the unremitting detailed work of the CLPD with meetings, broadsheets, rallies, and press publicity. While not the ruthless phalanx the right wing fear it to be, it has enabled some of its component organisations to get together at local level; provided a regular framework for central cooperation instead of the previous episodic, ad hoc or non-existent contacts; and helped to focus attention on the priorities and play down or remove inessential barriers to victory.

The tremendous authority it had on the left, gained from the appeal of unity, may well have been a decisive factor at Wembley, persuading delegations to back the only formula which would win against the right even though it was not their preference.

In the coming months, maintaining that unity, and extending the scope of united activity into the trade unions, can be decisive again — in consolidating the democratic reforms and making them work.



32p including postage from Socialist Organiser, c/o 214 Sickett St, London N1

FIGHT THE TORIES

AS WE GO to press, the National Union of Mineworkers' executive has responded to threat to miners' jobs posed by the National Coal Board's demand for the closure of 50 pits over the next two years by declaring that it will call a national strike.

Contingency plans are already under way to get the support of the railway workers, steelworkers, and dockers. The steelworkers' leaders themselves have so far backed down to every attack on their members' jobs, but this joint approach might have the effect of rallying the rank and file to put pressure on Sirs, Smith, Basnett, Evans, and the craft union leaders.

At the same time the Tories are rushing a bill through Parliament so that the British Steel Corporation can get an immediate £500 million transfusion while the Tories continue their internal wrangles over the McGregor plan. The McGregor plan will certainly call for many more thousands of job cuts in the industry.

Meanwhile Linwood workers have been told that the Talbot works there will be closed. According to the parent company, Peugeot, the problem is the age of the machinery — a tribute to decades of underinvestment by the owners while they enjoyed the profits. About 5,000 jobs will go at the plant itself, with another 5,000 in ancillary industries.

Although there has been a promise to continue production at the Ryton plant in Coventry for the present, workers there know their days are numbered.

The initiative of the NUM leaders should be seized on not only by workers in the coal industry — unofficial strikes have already broken out — but by workers in other industries. A linking up of

major industrial sectors could confront the Tories with a general strike — it could confront the rank and file workers' movement with the possibility of imposing its solution to the crisis on the backs of the capitalists.

The working class must go on the offensive against the Tories. It must do to Thatcher what it did to Heath. But this time it dare not leave the conduct of affairs to a Labour Party dominated by the right wing and uncontrolled from outside Parliament: it must reach for power itself.

THE IMPERIALIST WAR DRIVE

THE PENTAGON wants to up US military spending by about \$32,000 million (£13,675 million) in line with the priorities outlined by President Reagan during his election campaign.

The shift to the right in American politics that brought Reagan to power has meant a particularly war-like twist to the political expression of imperialism's aims. Since Reagan's election, he and his administration have taken a number of serious steps that could bring the trigger-touch of world war much nearer.

Firstly, Reagan has announced his intention of reactivating the neutron bomb programme which Carter had defused after a lot of public pressure in 1978. The neutron bomb, which produces less blast and more radiation than other nuclear weapons, increases precisely the factor that is least controllable. A more vivid example of capitalist irresponsibility could hardly be found.

Politically, the resumption of the neutron bomb programme is part of Reagan's 'get-tough-with-Russia' line. That line will have serious domestic effects as Reagan attempts to create a new cold war atmosphere. And that in turn will be one of the factors seriously affecting the likelihood of war.

Several foreign policy statements have indicated the same tough line. The public statement by the new Treasury Secretary that aid programmes will be cut is one example, though this seems to have been partly revised on the insistence of the new Secretary of State, Alexander Haig. Haig is the man whose pressure on Nixon to step up the war in Cambodia resulted in an orgy of devastation there.

Reagan has also expressed his dissatisfaction about the progress of the so-called rapid deployment force to protect US interests in the Middle East. He wants the direct stationing of US troops in the area, something that will enormously contribute to raising the danger of war.

All this takes place within the context of virtually abolishing detente, for now. (However, current reports suggest that the aim of Kissinger's pupil, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, is to negotiate a new accord with the USSR, on the basis of a new agreement on spheres of influence. The pact would be negotiated in

1972, fell apart in the mid-'70s period of weakness of the USA and assertiveness by the USSR).

Of course, for revolutionary socialists detente represented not the peaceful intentions of US imperialism, but a cynical deal made between rulers to allow them to get on with oppressing the masses under their domination.

Today, world imperialism is in crisis: inflation and unemployment ravage the working class, capitalist profits decline, and whole sections of industry are wiped out as the recession proceeds. National competition threatens to escalate into full-scale trade wars.

The post world war 2 capitalist world economy, and its imperialist world politics, were organised around the USA and under its hegemony. That set-up is in an advanced state of disintegration. Reagan's goal must be to try to restore it. The bellicose demands that the Russian bear should be driven back into its lair are secondarily designed to help achieve this, and to rally the other capitalist powers round the USA.

How real the likelihood is that the imperialists will deliberately unleash war, it is impossible to know. We know that the present chaotic state of world capitalism, the tensions and the bellicosity, make it more and more a real possibility. At the same time, the instability within the sphere of influence of the USSR, in Afghanistan, Poland, and elsewhere, raises the possibility of military action by the Russian bureaucracy panicking imperialism into a military venture.

But it is pointless to try to guess at the likely trip-wire for total war. Revolutionary socialists must emphasise that essentially it is the appetite of imperialism that causes the war threat. But we must not hold back from pointing out the role of the reactionary bureaucracy of the Stalinist states.

We must couple two political approaches: on the one hand, a fight for unilateral nuclear disarmament, against US bases in Britain, and for British withdrawal from NATO; on the other hand, opposition to nationalist economic solutions, for independent working class struggle against capitalism. This means a determined struggle against the bipartisanism of the politics of the centre and right within the Labour Party, and against the class collaborationist nationalism of the trade union bureaucracy.

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Labour movement at the crossroads

“Comrade Gorter looks upon trade unions and parliamentarianism as supra-historical categories, as magnitudes that are given once and for all. And since the utilisation of the trade unions and parliamentarianism by the Social Democracy failed to lead to revolution, therefore Comrade Gorter proposes that we turn our backs upon the trade unions and parliamentarianism, not noticing that he thereby is, at the given moment, turning his own back upon the working class itself”.

Leon Trotsky, ‘On the Policy of the KAPD’, 1921. In ‘The First Five Years of the Communist International’, vol.1, p.180.

THE BOURGEOIS press is full of the crisis which Labour’s Right is experiencing. You have to read the press of the revolutionary Left, and with some care, in order to appreciate the crisis which is being brought to a head for the far Left groups by the events in the Labour Party since the defeat of the Callaghan government 18 months ago.

Socialist Worker has responded to the Wembley conference, where the trade unions gained the major vote in electing a future Labour prime minister, by telling its readers that it is unimportant and that they should not join the Labour Party to help the Left because, ‘if you want to push a wheelbarrow, you don’t sit in it’.

These are parallel crises.

The entire far Left either came into existence during the years after Wilson formed his majority government in 1966, or, where groups like the present SWP and Militant existed before that, they have been radically reshaped and remoulded by the experience of Labour in government after 1966 and by the character of the class struggle since then. Of course, the overwhelming majority of individuals in the far left spectrum are people who have come in since 1966.

What has shaped this far Left?

- Disappointed with the Labour government, then joining the angry resistance to it, all the left groups except Militant left the Labour party between 1964 and ’67.

- Then, and in the 1970s increasingly so, there was the pull of the industrial direct action, which was where the power of the working class was manifested, time and time again; to the culminating point of shouldering the Heath government off the track and into an election which it lost.

- It has been influenced by the guerilla, insurrectionary, and sometimes terrorist third world — and Irish — struggles; by the generally petty-bourgeois composition of the far Left itself; and by the ‘confrontation now’ spirit of student politics, which was partly an extrapolation from third world struggle but fundamentally expressed the short life-span of student radicalism. The labour movement was not merely a different world; the idea of a long haul to transform it belonged to a different class outlook.

- The weakness of any stable and tempered revolutionary tradition, the habitual chameleon-like willingness to adapt to its environment of the USFI, and

the sheer paucity of revolutionary cadres with any sort of political education, experience, or tempering, allowed an extraordinary luxuriance of left fads and experimental ideas of an ultra-left character to develop and continue for a long time.

- The women’s movement gave a valuable dimension to the post-’68 left, bringing forward issues that had previously been part of the far Left but only in the pages of old books (for example, the chapter on women, youth, and the family in Trotsky’s *Revolution Betrayed*). At the same time it added to the pressures on and within the left which pushed it away from the political labour movement — for of course that movement congeals, in its practices and attitudes, everything oppressive of women in capitalist society and restricting the exercise of equality. And the women’s movement boosted lifestyle-ism.

- The toxic increase in both official state racism and freelance racism, after the Labour government slammed the door on Asian passport-holders from Kenya, has made necessary the self-organisation of blacks in parallel to the labour movement — generating pressures away from the labour movement similar to those generated by the women’s movement.

The result is that the far Left now looks something like this.

There is the Socialist Workers Party with two or three thousand members. It does trade union work, mainly though not exclusively in white collar unions; and it makes propaganda for socialism and for ‘building the party’ which is the only thing that supposedly links the trade union struggle with socialism and indeed with politics.

There is Militant, 1500 to 2,000 strong, making passive propaganda in the Labour Party and in the unions. There is the IMG, 600 or 700 strong, whose last conference decided that they should really be in the SWP, except that the SWP won’t have them.

Round *Socialist Organiser* a tendency has developed which is active on a revolutionary basis in both the trade unions and the Labour Party. Then there is the WSL, and beyond that an enormous galaxy of political meteorites and cosmic political dust.

Essentially this fragmentation is a product of the fact that the SWP became a tightly-controlled and bureaucratic organisation almost a decade ago (after the ejection of the Workers’ Fight tendency in December 1971).

Beyond the organisations there are a lot of individuals, generally ‘revolutionary’ but alienated from the revolutionary left. Some of them are in the Labour Party. The dominant trait of this far Left however is that it has taken shape apart from the labour movement, and therefore apart from the working class in so far as it has yet organised itself as a coherent social or political force in our society. In many cases it stands apart from real work in the unions; in its big majority, it stands apart from, and counterposes

itself organisationally to, the workers’ political movement. The post-’68 radical left differentiated fundamentally on the issue of whether or not to have a working class orientation; but even those, the IS-SWP (including at the time Workers’ Fight), who opted for such an orientation, opted for a purely trade unionist, syndicalist definition of what they recognised as the workers’ movement.

Militant, apparently the opposite of the extra-Labour Party left, was in fact moulded negatively by the same experiences. Confronted in 1965-6 by the reactionary Labour government, it abandoned struggle of any sort and retreated up the ladder of propagandist abstraction, as a technique of peaceful coexistence with the Labour bureaucracy. It abstained from solidarity movements like the Vietnamese, ignores the women’s movement, and disregards gay rights. At every point, politically and organisationally it has adapted and accommodated to the movement that the others were repelled by. The task, however, is neither to run away from it, nor to accommodate and absorb its backwardness, but to change it.

The picture which the disunited and squabbling far Left presents today is an offputting one, indeed often a disgusting one. Yet much has in fact been achieved in the last 15 years. Many thousands of people are acquainted with the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. Ideas about revolution, knowledge of the real history of the modern socialist movement — these are very widespread now. The literature of Marxism, much of it out of print for decades, is now widely available. The forces of revolutionary Marxism are potentially very powerful already, if only we can organise ourselves, and if the forces of the left can reorientate to the working class and the working class movement as they exist in Britain now.

The way the present far Left came into existence in the period since 1966 has equipped it very badly to do the first job of revolutionaries — to reach and mesh with the existing working class and labour movement. Betrayals and cynicism, such as those of the Wilson and Callaghan governments, take their toll also by what they do to socialist consciousness. The forces and experiences which allowed the far Left to reach an unprecedented level of growth after 1967, together with the disgust caused by Labour in power, have created a widespread sectarianism, and made it very difficult for revolutionaries to begin to reorientate after 1974.

The experience in 1974 of mass working class direct action resulting in a Labour government, was the point at which, all prior knowledge and understanding from the history of the working class discounted, it became a to-be-or-not-to-be question to face the conclusion that:

- Direct action was not enough; and, short of general strike, had no possibility of generating the necessary society-wide answers. For that reason the reformist leaders of the Labour Party were able to derail the movement.

• The Labour Party was far from being a spent force in working class politics, as it had seemed to be in 1969 and as it deserved to be. It became necessary to understand that a 'revolutionary movement' like the SWP built outside the real workers' political movement was a white elephant, a stupid repetition of the sectarian mistakes of the SLL in the '60s and the CP earlier. It was in fact not a revolutionary movement at all, but a caricature of one — what Tony Cliff used to call 'toy-town Bolshevism'.

Most of the revolutionary Left failed to make the necessary reassessment. Ever the Workers' Fight group, which had begun to reorientate in 1972 and, with more energy, in 1973, found itself inhibited and dragged back by the combined weight of 'left' emotionalism and propagandist methods. The IMG, which began to orient to the Labour Party in 1975, turned to the sectarian fantasies of Socialist Unity's toytown electioneering a couple of years later. The truth is probably that in terms of numbers, the major reorientation by far Left forces was the one made by separate individuals going into the Labour Party.

These individuals were undoubtedly a leaven for the fight within the political wing of the labour movement to make sure future Labour government could not ignore the labour movement like Wilson and Callaghan did. This movement for Labour democracy, provisionally victorious at Wembley, was the proof that the toytown 'Bolsheviks' had gone off at a tangent. Instead of the Labour Party being irrevocably discredited, the flexibility of the movement allowed a powerful campaign for political renewal and reclamation of the political wing of the movement to develop.

Even if it should prove true that such a campaign for political renewal cannot possibly conquer the whole Labour Party, it remains a fact that now, with a great political ferment going on in the labour movement, based on an attempt to draw lessons from past failures and betrayals and to adopt measures to guard against a repetition, the possibility of serious workers breaking organisationally from the Labour Party to join a group like the SWP is non-existent. Nobody in their senses would want to opt to build from the ground up if the chance exists to fight to claim the existing movement for working class politics.

And that chance does exist.

The fact that the Labour Left is active — albeit with the collaboration of union leaders who pursue other and separate interests and goals — and capable of winning the existing labour movement to new methods and policies, does not just indicate that the anti-Labour Party revolutionary Left has taken a wrong turning, but also that one of the facts of political life that has shaped the far Left — since the early '60s, in fact — is changed.

For the sectarianism which has settled itself into place as the gravitational axis of the far Left (beginning with the SLL/WRP in the early '60s, and continuing with groups like the IS/SWP in the mid-'60s) was only one side of a phenomenon. The other side of it was the collapse, feebleness, and inconsequentiality of the Labour Left after its surrender to defeat by Gaitskell on unilateral disarmament in 1961. In the same way, the rightism of the Italian CP and the terrorism of the

Red Brigades are also two sides of one phenomenon...

All of this means that the decisions of Blackpool and Wembley pose the question to the revolutionaries even more sharply than it is posed to the Parliamentary Liberals calling themselves 'social democrats' — where do you stand in relation to the labour movement? Not some past or future or fantasy labour movement, but the one that exists and is struggling to sort itself out politically.

True to form, the IMG has absolved itself of its Socialist Unity stupidities and irresponsibilities, and is trying to snuggle up to the Labour Party. But the important far Left force outside the Labour Party is the SWP. Its reaction to Wembley shows the pressure it is feeling.



As we saw above, its response has been to tell its readers that what is going on in the Labour Party is not very important! The unions are the important thing.

But when the unions have appropriated 40% of the vote for the next Labour prime minister, when the labour movement can dominate Parliament, to counterpose the importance of the unions to the political concerns of the labour movement is effectively to advocate that the trade unions abstain from politics! In fact, the opposition of the SWP to the Labour Party is grounded on a half-heartedly expressed, but in practice dominating, rejection of the use of Parliament.

Workers vote, so the SWP said vote Labour in the last election. But its whole thrust of criticism is towards the view that Parliament does not matter and is a sideshow to distract attention and to damp down the 'real' — industrial direct-action — struggle. Workers' Action holds no brief for Parliament, nor for the view that power is to be found there. But the choice for the labour movement is either that it will engage in the political processes and institutions of the society in which it exists — even if its purpose is to subvert and replace them — or it must abstain from effective political action in the here and now, either rejecting politics explicitly in favour of trade unionism, as syndicalist movements have done, or confining itself to propaganda. The SWP tries to combine both of these alternatives to politics in its own small sideshow.

Events have destroyed the pretence, behind which the SWP long hid, that the Labour Party and the unions exist in separate compartments. They don't. More and more the SWP is forced into explicitly opposing the participation of militant workers in the political processes in which the trade unions are central — a position which serves only the right wing, and is thus reactionary.

Paul Foot, the SWP's leading anti-Parliamentarian and therefore a propagandist for the view that the Labour Party is an irrelevance, made his major — and already much-quoted — contribution to maintaining SWP militants in frozen irrelevance with the feeble joke —

'If you want to push a wheelbarrow, don't sit in it'. What is it supposed to mean? The class has pushed the Labour Party — because it hasn't confined itself to internal Labour Party concerns. Therefore, comrades of the SWP, don't join the Labour Party! Anything more maladroit from Foot's point of view, and more stupid, is hard to imagine! The

deadweight, the people who hold back the movement and therefore the working class, are those who abstain from the struggle, confine themselves to cold and lifeless assessments, and stay fixed in hopeless political demoralisation instead of throwing their weight behind the drive of the militant Left to make the political wing of the unions an instrument of the working class.

Foot's attitude is a million miles from the spirit of Marxism. If the trade unions did not have a political wing, we would have to advocate that they create one and engage in politics. We would try to ensure that a labour movement party adopted revolutionary politics. The SWP can't recognise that something similar is going on — or can be made to go on — within the shell of the existing political labour movement. Even the Fabian ex-Minister Tony Benn has a better sense of history than these Marxists, when he says it is a matter of refounding the Labour Representation Committee.

The tradition of British Marxism is a sectarian tradition for the 100 years of its history. The Fabians got more influence on the labour movement than even the objective conditions of British capitalism would have given them because of the sectarian abstentionism of the Marxist SDF.

The peculiarities of British history and the accumulated wealth of privileged British capitalism, which on the one hand created, with the help of Fabians and sectarian Marxists alike, a reformist labour movement, at the same time have preserved that movement in a flexible form that allows it to recast itself in a different mould, and perhaps in a fundamentally different mould. The test for Marxists is whether they can make themselves into a force that can, unlike our predecessors when the Labour Representation Committee was being formed, win the movement to our politics. History does not often allow such second chances!

The tasks and opportunities we face in Britain now parallel what the world revolutionary Marxist movement faced after world war 1. It tried to claim and reshape all or sections of the existing labour movements for our politics. It is well known that Leninism took shape as a repudiation of reformism. It is known that it was shaped too by a conflict with ultra-leftist rejection of parliament, of united fronts, etc. It is less well known that the fully-developed ultra-lefts, as distinct from people guided by ultra-left moods and partial views, had a completely worked-out position which paralleled [and reflected] the opportunists'.

These were the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) and their co-thinkers in Holland. Their leaders were Gorter and Pannekoek. Essentially they said that the Second International had been a mistake. A newer and purer movement had to be built, eschewing parliamentary action and trade unionism alike.

In contrast, Lenin and Trotsky and their comrades set out to reclaim and reorient the labour movement built in the period of the Second International, and thus to undo the work of those in the Second International who had betrayed socialism and the working class by supporting their own governments in world war 1. Otherwise, the project of building the Third International would have been at

best a very long term goal, implying the impossibility of anything but defeats and betrayals for the foreseeable period.

In fact, the Third International was built by winning the existing workers' movements, or big sections of them, for revolution. In France, the majority of the old Socialist Party was won at the Congress of Tours in 1920. In Germany, the Independent Social Democrats in 1921; in Italy, successive sections of the Socialist Party in the early '20s. It is a sobering truth that where there existed big workers' parties and the Communist International failed to win them, or big sections of them, communism remained a minor force. (It was thus in Britain).

This is how Trotsky, in a polemical speech against the KAPD, explained the relation of what the majority of the Communist International was trying to do to the previous history of the labour movement. *

"As a matter of fact, the Social Democracy — from whom we broke by breaking with the Second International — marked a certain epoch in the development of the working class. This was not the epoch of revolution but the epoch of reform. Future historians, comparing the bourgeoisie's course of evolution with that of the proletariat, may say that the working class, too, had a reformation of its own.

"What was the gist of the bourgeois Reformation? At the dawn of its independent historical action, the bourgeoisie did not immediately set itself the task of conquering power but sought instead to secure for itself, within the framework of feudal society, living conditions most comfortable and best suited to its needs. It proceeded to enlarge the framework of the feudal state, to alter its forms and to transform it into a bureaucratic monarchy. It transfigured religion, personalising the latter, that is, adapting religion to bourgeois conformities. In these tendencies we find expressed the relative historical weakness of the bourgeoisie. After securing these positions for itself, the bourgeoisie went on to the struggle for power.

"Social Democracy proved incapable of translating Marxism into social-revolutionary action. The role of the Social Democracy dwindled to an attempt to utilise bourgeois society and the bourgeois state in the interests of the working masses. The goal of the conquest of power, although formally set forth, exercised virtually no effect upon the actual practice. Activities were not directed toward the revolutionary utilisation of parliamentarianism, but toward adapting the working class to bourgeois democracy. This adaptation of a proletariat not yet fully conscious of its own strength to the social, state and ideological forms of bourgeois society was apparently a historically inevitable process, but it was just that and nothing more, that is, a historical process delimited by the given conditions of a given epoch.

"This epoch of proletarian reformation gave birth to a special apparatus of a

labour bureaucracy with special mental habits of its own, with its own routine, pinch-penny ideas, chameleon-like capacity for adaptation, and predisposition to myopia."

[*'First Five Years of the Communist', vol.1, p.180-1.*]

In fact there was a second epoch of 'working class reformism' after world war 2. It came because of the defeats and betrayals of the revolutionary movement, whose spokesman Trotsky had been, and it was made possible by the expansion of capitalism. It was in the '40s and after that the British labour movement experienced its reformist high point.

But the reformist phase of the British working class movement is clearly over and done with for the foreseeable future. The sick capitalist system can now offer the working class only drastic counter-reforms amidst mass unemployment. All that the workers gained through the period of reformist class collaboration is at risk or is vanishing. *The labour movement is being forced to re-think its whole outlook*, and in these conditions Marxists have every reason to believe that we can win it to the only politics that express its historic interests — Marxist politics.

It is only now that the dialectic of history has led the British labour movement to the crossroads of stark choice to which the Communist International tried to bring the workers' movement in 1920.

That is why the disunity and sectarianism of the forces of Marxism, and especially the sectarianism of the SWP, are of enormous importance. History does not work of itself. The ferment in the labour movement now will not spontaneously throw up scientific Marxist consciousness. If we do not succeed in winning the labour movement, or weighty sections of it, for the politics of socialist class struggle, then the chance may go again for decades. And then they will be certainly grim and probably bloody decades for the British working class.

The odds are against us — especially because of the condition of our own forces — and we may fail. But the working class will not forgive those Marxists who do not try, but confine themselves to tired whinings, bad jokes, and a self-exclusion that means turning their backs on the working class itself, 'at the given moment'.

◆◆◆
The chronic disunity of the Marxist movement has of course many causes, and it would be naive or IMG-style demagoguery to pretend that unity can be created immediately. The Socialist Unity campaign was essentially an attempt to unite the revolutionary Left around a tactic of mini-scale electoralism, foolish in the circumstances and, to anyone with any political sense, or with a sense of the labour movement, obviously irrelevant to serious politics, whether reformist or revolutionary.

It made 'unity' a bit of a joke. That is a shame, because the united strength of the Marxists, or of a sizeable portion of them, could be a major boost for the working class struggle for the political renewal of its movement in the months up to the Brighton 1981 Labour conference, where a major offensive against the decisions of Wembley will have to be faced.

Is there then no way to unite the forces of the Marxist left? There is a way to

begin to create unity — around the work of political intervention in the mass labour movement. After all, the lack of a stable and responsible functioning in the class struggle and in the labour movement, the fact of being marginal to that movement, is a major reason for the fissiparousness and disunity of the left, for the creation of sects around fads, persons, tactics, and fetishes, and for the creation of undemocratic self-perpetuating régimes which spawn a new group with each important difference.

It is necessary — in the first place for the labour movement, but also, perhaps, for the Marxists! — to create a revolutionary movement *in the working class movement, inside it, of it, and not outside it and needlessly counterposed to it.* Whether such an organisation should, or in the circumstances could, call itself a party is a minor detail. The Leninist conception of the revolutionary party is not of an apparatus, a public name or badge, but *fundamentally* of a body of Marxists who have clear ideas and who organise so as to enable strict and honest political accounting, rounded assessments, and decisive organisational and political initiatives. Its members or 'supporters' work in the labour movement, in all its areas and aspects, and attempt to gain the political leadership and to tie the movement together into a coherent class force able to take power.

Such a movement can and will be built in the existing movement. Without it only limited and unstable progress can be made. For example, the work of Labour Party militants can only be barren if it is not integrated with work in the trade unions. The struggle for democracy is an immediate case in point. Neither the struggle in the Labour Party nor in the trade unions can be adequate without ideological combat against all the friends and agents of capitalism in society and in the labour movement. *The revolutionary party is the organisation of Marxists that can effectively do these essential tasks and tie together the fronts of the class struggle — in the political labour movement and in politics generally, in the trade unions, and in ideological struggle — into a coherent whole.*

Back in the mid 1920s Leon Trotsky, pursuing the sort of reasoning expressed in the quotation above, thought it might prove possible for the Communists to become an affiliated organisation of the Labour Party. While the Labour Party maintained its broad character, embracing socialist societies and unions, the CP could gain the effective political leadership, displacing the ILP from that role. (See 'Where is Britain Going?')

And now, fruitful unity of the Marxists can be fought for on the perspective of building such a Marxist organisation in the labour movement to do these tasks — a 'revolutionary party' that is part of the labour movement.

From the point of view of serious Marxists, the most important thing is *what to do now*. We are in the middle of a historic struggle. We must rally the forces to consolidate the Wembley decision. In the last year, the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, initiated by Socialist Organiser/SCLV (a small group of Marxists), played an important part in the outcome at Blackpool and then at Wembley. We must continue that unity, while organising the hard forces of Marxism at the same time.

* It is instructive to read the SWP's official handbook on the party, by John Molyneux (put out with Tony Cliff's imprimatur and edited by him). Molyneux presents a completely ahistorical account of the Second International, in which it is judged and found wanting because it did not have the SWP's (they think it is Lenin's) theory of the party. This is not the view of the Second International insisted upon by the Third International majority led by Lenin and Trotsky. It is a bloodless first cousin to the KAPD view.

Poland: towards a showdown

...A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against social inequality and political oppression... The struggle for the freedom of trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and for the freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of Soviet democracy.

The Transitional Programme

THE MOVEMENT of the Polish workers over the last eight months has once again confirmed Trotsky's perspective for the political revolution. And, unlike the shortlived movements of 1970-1 and 1976 in Poland itself, or the upheavals in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Polish movement has now unfolded with increasing breadth for nearly eight months.

As Poland's external debt mounted and exports faltered, the bureaucracy had turned to an even more direct attack on the workers' living standards.

While workers were bound hand and foot, hindered from fighting back by the bureaucratic police state unions, and unable to have their voice heard in a press and mass-media censored into a morass of lies, the inequalities between the 'Communist' Party flunkeys and the mass of workers increased.

For the Polish workers, it was a stark prospect of physical and moral degradation. But that working class, over the last decade, had shown its capacity to fight back. It had not won outright, but it had toppled a government, it had forced the bureaucracy to retreat, and most important it had developed leaders from its own ranks. Uniquely for a Stalinist state, those leaders had been able to organise in a limited way, discuss, and publish papers. The repression was severe, but not completely crushing.

Last summer the explosion occurred. Workers struck against the withdrawal of foodstuff subsidies. The bureaucrats initially tolerated the strikes, and even encouraged them by speedy concessions. They hoped to provide a safety valve for the anger against the food price rises. They miscalculated. The workers sensed their strength. The sit-in strikes along the Baltic coastline were the climax of the earlier waves of strikes and occupations, and also represented a more radical departure.

The 21 demands formulated by the Lenin shipyard workers were no longer simply to do with wage increases, but posed explicitly political demands. Above all, the previous experience of the bureaucrats reneging on agreements made the workers determined to insist on their own independent organisations to safeguard and extend their victories. This was the most bitterly contested of all the issues at the negotiating table.

Solidarnosc is now perhaps the largest single union organisation in the world. Through a series of partial confrontations with an obstructive and recalcitrant bureaucracy, it has succeeded in toppling governments and ministers, replaced local apparatchiks, and achieved

its official registration as a legal entity. It is clearly seen by the overwhelming mass of the oppressed in Poland as the only true representative of their interests.

Within the few months of its existence, it has gained a legitimacy in the eyes of the workers which no Stalinist institution can ever have claimed to have. Even if its leaders intend it to be 'only a trade union', it is in fact an opposition political party.

Its existence and its unshakeable popular support have thrown the Stalinists into disarray. Leaderships come and go, the internecine conflict between different factions in the leadership gets worse, and the clamour of the CP's rank and file for greater democratisation and a special Party Congress meets deaf ears. Such a Congress, the leaders know, would wreck the 'unity' of the CP.

Although the CP is not a political party in any real sense, but a bureaucratic/police apparatus, its large membership among workers means that ferment and revolt are expressed in the CP's ranks too, seriously weakening the CP as an instrument of police-state rule.

Yet the formation of Solidarnosc, and the substantial victories it has gained, was also a defensive retreat from the possibilities opened up during the summer strikes.

A national trade union structure whose aim is to barter within the existing system is a step backwards from the Inter Factory Committees (MKS) which the workers had thrown up over the summer.

These workers' councils, on the Baltic, in Silesia, in every major urban and industrial centre of the country, grouped millions of workers, from factory committees right up to larger regional councils. They represented the beginnings of an alternative genuine workers' state power, contesting the political might of the Stalinists.

The fear of Russian intervention (many strike-hit regions were only miles from the Russian border), the bitter memories of the massacres in Gdansk in 1970 and the defeats of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak workers, held the Polish workers in check.

So the road of piecemeal reform favoured by the Solidarnosc leadership seemed more appealing.

Solidarnosc's strategy is apparently to try and allay the fears of the Polish bureaucrats, by insisting somewhat unconvincingly on their non-political and purely 'trade unionist' nature. Meanwhile they contest partial struggles, and with every victory they whittle down the bureaucrats' power even more. At the same time they bring international pressure to bear, through foreign trade union confederations, the Polish diaspora, and the Church, and hope to avoid an intervention.

This strategy requires keeping the mass movement within bounds so that the situation does not immediately become too desperate for the Stalinists. It is not at all clear that this is possible. The impatience of the rank and file has already on occasions outstripped the moderation of the leaders.

But most dubious is the idea that a

fairly lengthy 'transition' period of ever-great democratisation is possible, and that the USSR will count the cost of direct intervention to be too great.

The Party cannot allow the uncertainty which surrounds its existence to continue indefinitely. Its political system cannot accommodate even ordinary trade union bargaining. Nor can the Russians allow the contagion of Poland to spread without decisive action to stop it. A showdown is clearly mapped out. The situation must either be resolved in favour of the Stalinists and the Western bankers, or in favour of the workers.

Thus the perspective of political revolution is not 'adventurist', but the only road forward for the Polish workers to safeguard the precious conquests they have gained so far.

The beguiling suggestions, coated in nationalist rhetoric, about 'social peace' and greater discipline, which the new prime minister is trying to peddle, will be rejected by a working class which has been excluded from any effective control of the economy. Responsibility for the economic chaos rests squarely with the Stalinists.

A complete end to the secrecy surrounding economic decisions is necessary. Only the working class, by its active involvement in the planning of the national economy according to its own class needs, can prevent economic disaster and eliminate the parasitism of the bureaucracy.

Factory committees, housewives' committees, and committees of consumers must plan the allocation of resources. The foreign debt, which the Stalinists and the bankers are using as a stone round the neck of the workers, must be repudiated.

For a real debate to occur, and information to be spread as widely as possible, an end to censorship is essential. The Party's monopoly of the media must be smashed, permitting free access by the workers to newspapers, radio and television.

All workers' and peasants' parties must be free to operate.

The advanced workers must forge a worker-peasant alliance, and support trade union recognition for the small farmers and rural workers. Worker-farmer committees should allocate supplies and determine agricultural prices beneficial to both workers and the small producers.

All the oppressed in Poland must find their voice and representation in workers' councils, the basis of a new democratic socialist Poland. Under the leadership of a new, revolutionary, genuinely communist party, the political power and social monopoly of the bureaucrats must be completely broken, their privileges abolished, their apparatus smashed. The violent resistance of the bureaucrats and their Kremlin paymasters must be met by the armed force of the workers and peasants, backed up by an appeal to the international working class, and above all the workers of the East European states, to defend the Polish revolution.

ALEXIS CARRAS

Soviet union leader 'poorly'

BY DAVID SATTER IN MOSCOW

THE LEADER of the Soviet Union's first independent trade union, Mr. Vladimir Klebanov, was reported yesterday to be in poor physical condition after treatment with strong behaviour modification drugs in a special psychiatric hospital in Dnepropetrovsk.

Mr Klebanov, a former mining foreman from the Donbas region, tried in December, 1976, to organise a union which would fight for Soviet workers' rights outside the official trade union structure.

Mr Klebanov's grievances against the Soviet trade unions were similar to those of the Polish workers against the offi-

cial trade unions in Poland, which are also part of the structure of Communist Party control.

The Soviet trade union group was disbanded after a series of arrests in early 1977 and Mr. Klebanov was committed to the special psychiatric hospital in Dnepropetrovsk where Soviet dissidents have been held.

According to a reliable report, Mr. Klebanov has since been receiving continual forcible injections of behaviour modification drugs intended for severe paranooids or schizophrenics.

The effect has been to cause a severe swelling of Mr. Klebanov's face and to distort

his features and speech. His complexion has become yellow and the effect of one of the drugs has been to distort his physical movements.

Mr. Klebanov has continued to insist that he is psychologically normal and to denounce his detention in hospital as a form of repression, but this has only led to him being given extra injections of drugs with painful effects.

According to the report, Mr. Klebanov is forbidden to walk in the corridor and is only allowed out of his room for one hour a day when 300 people at a time are taken for exercise in the hospital yard.

Murray — bridge builder

MR. LEN MURRAY, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, told a Soviet trade union journal recently that he welcomed the development of co-operation between the trade unions of the two countries.

The Soviet news agency Tass reported yesterday that Mr. Murray stressed the "problems on which our views diverge," and ascribed these to the different political, social and economic structures of the two countries.

Tass said that Mr. Murray, in an interview with the trade union journal *Trud*, had compared contacts between British

and Soviet trade unions with the supports on which "bridges of understanding could be built."

"We should build these bridges carefully and thoughtfully, paying special attention each time to the weight which they can sustain," the agency quoted him as saying.

Mr. Murray described problems of mutual interest as including attitudes to the multinationals, improvement of labour protection, and use of leisure time as well as disarmament, peace, detente and the relaxation of tensions between East and West.

The Morning Star [lower cutting] applauds as Len Murray 'cooperates' with the bureaucratic apparatus which runs the fake official 'unions' in the USSR — and hounds genuine trade unionists like Klebanov.

BRITISH WORKERS AND THE STALINIST STATE 'UNIONS'

TAKEN together, the above two news items should make us angry and ashamed for our own trade unions*.

Both appeared just as the Polish workers' movement was flaring into life, full-grown and militant from its beginning last summer, when the Polish working class kicked aside "the police-state 'unions' that had helped shackle them for the last third of a century and, proceeding to take on the bureaucrats' government, then created a real workers' movement in Poland once again. Throughout the bitter and dangerous struggle of the Polish workers to win the right to have free and self-governing trade unions, the British TUC maintained friendly contact and cooperation with the strike-breaking government unions. Even when millions of Polish workers had repudiated them, the TUC continued to recognise the anti-working class police-state "unions" as genuine labour organisations. In the middle of the strike movement the TUC stubbornly refused to call off the schedul-

ed visit of its delegates to the battlefield as guests of the scab 'unions' which were doing their best to help the Government beat down the insurgent workers. In the event the visit was called off by the Poles.

Our trade union movement maintains friendly contact with the police-state 'trade-union' apparatus of control over the working class which exists in the USSR. By its links with it, the TUC recognises this repressive apparatus as a trade union — which is to help sustain and spread a great lie. For what exist in the Stalinist states (except, for now, Poland), are not trade unions in any sense at all.

It is to preserve the monopoly of these mis-named 'trade unions' that working class militants like Klebanov and no doubt many others whose names we don't know are tortured and murdered in the USSR and the other Stalinist states.

The only real trade unions we know of in Russia are those in which Vladimir Klebanov is a militant (though there may well exist other underground workers' organisations).

The official Russian 'trade unions' are no more trade unions than were the official trade unions in Poland, against which the workers revolted.

They are even worse than those of Poland, because in the USSR the 'unions' are part of a regime which represses and controls the workers of the USSR with a cauterising totalitarian thoroughness that has not been experienced in its fully developed form in Poland since 1956 (if it ever fully existed there).

Seen in the light from Poland's *Solidarnosc*, the ties of the TUC and its constituent unions with the police state 'unions' in the various Stalinist states, the endorsement of the lie that they are real unions, is not merely scandalous but intolerable.

We must do something about it!

But the official British labour movement does not seem to want to know about or concern itself with the conditions of the working class in the Stalinist states, or their struggles for basic liberties and the right to form trade unions

* They are reproduced from Socialist Organizer no. 27, October 11th, 1980.

LAST MARCH Socialist Organiser helped organise a meeting in London to protest at the three year jail sentence imposed on Edmund Zdrozynski for organising an independent trade union in Poland [his release was gained as part of the Baltic workers' victory].

Socialist Organiser EB member Stephen Corbishley shared a platform with Edmund Baluka, a leader of the Baltic shipyard movement in 1970-1. Corbishley called on the British labour movement to break connections with the police state 'unions' in the Stalinist states and help real working class movements.

We must, he said, support the struggle in those states for a workers' revolution against the ruling bureaucracies. This is the precondition for any working class socialist advance on the basis of the collectivised property already existing in those states under the self-serving control and mis-management of the bureaucrats who defend by massive repression the political monopoly and the monopoly of social initiative on which their power is based.

We should, he said, aid the nascent labour movements in the Stalinist states with every ounce of moral, political, and financial support we can muster. We must break all 'fraternal' links between the British labour movement and the police state apparatus.

for self-defence against the bureaucratic state. From Bill Sirs on the right, who openly defended his 'colleagues', the strike-breaking Polish 'trade union' leaders, during the strikes, to Alex Kitson and Mick McGahey on the left, large sections of the British labour movement indulge in the pretence that the official 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states are real working class organisations — when in fact that they are part of a police-state 'Labour Front' apparatus for controlling and policing the working class and for preventing real trade unions and an independent working class movement developing.

It says everything about the nature of these 'unions' that their present leader in the USSR was transferred to this post from his previous job as head of the secret political police which tortures and jails and kills militants of the real trade unions such as Vladimir Klebanov. He merely moved from the general organisation for controlling and repressing the population to a specialised 'trade union' sub-section, dealing directly with the working class.

During the August 1980 strike movement, the then chairman of the Polish 'trade unions', Jan Sydlak, was one of the most outspoken and vicious of the bureaucrats in threatening the strikers and their helpers with tanks and slaughter. He called publicly for them to be 'taught a lesson they would never forget'.

It is not just that many bureaucrats of our trade unions feel an impulse of solidarity for and have a real feeling of fellowship with the ruling Stalinist bureaucrats — though they obviously do. Nor just that many left wing officials are of a generally Stalinist persuasion — as are Kitson and McGahey.

Most importantly, the reason why they get away with it is that many rank and file militants, too, don't want to come out against the 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states and against the British trade union

leaders who aid those police-state 'unions'. Many who consider themselves anti-Stalinist revolutionaries take the same view.

They would feel uncomfortable at having to say on this question something like what Margaret Thatcher and Frank Chapple say. This is understandable, but it is a really trivial consideration in a situation where the workers of the Stalinist states need our moral and practical support. We have a duty as basic as not crossing a picket line to give it to them.

To allow the noise made by the Chapples and Thatchers to force us into silence on the struggle of a big part of the world's working class is to sink into a blinkered national narrowmindedness.

As people who believe, with Marx and Engels, that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself, we would be obliged to support any independent workers' movement against the police state even if we considered its politics to be seriously mistaken and wrong.

That a real labour movement should exist is much more important than any social transformations achieved apart from or against the working class. But in fact, as an Open Letter to Frank Chapple from six British Leyland shop stewards in *Socialist Organiser* no.25 showed in detail in relation to Poland, the Thatchers and Chapples are on a radically different wavelength from any real or likely workers' movement in the Stalinist states.

Some in the labour movement believe that contact with the 'institutions' of the states in the Stalinist bloc is a force for peace ('peaceful coexistence') and against war. If that view encourages the pretence (and the facts are too well known today to make such an attitude other than pretence) that the Stalinist states are not savagely oppressive; if it leads to ignoring the fact that the 'trade unions' there (and most other social institutions as well) have nothing in common with things of the same name in Britain; if it blinds us to the fact that they are 'anti-unions' and 'counter-unions' rather than working-class organisations — then it amounts to a craven siding with the oppressors against the oppressed in those states.

Yet other militants believe that socialists should refrain from stark condemnation and denunciation of the Stalinist regimes because they are relatively pro-

gressive and/or because socialists should defend the system of state-owned property in those states against any attempts by NATO to restore private ownership of the means of production.

This inhibition is of course found in Communist Party militants, who often may not know the full extent of the repression against the working class under Stalinism.

But many who do know about Stalinism, who are influenced by Trotsky, and who even commit themselves vaguely and abstractly to the working class struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, are also inhibited.

They recoil from the demand that the British workers' movement should have no dealings with the Stalinist labour fronts. For example, *Socialist Challenge*, which, in general, favours self-governing trade unions in the Stalinist states, nevertheless supported the scabbing TUC on the planned visit of its delegation to Poland last summer! Earlier it backed a controversial TUC invitation to the Russian political policeman who heads the Stalinist labour front in the USSR.

Why? It is not entirely clear, but it is probably connected to the fact that there was a bourgeois anti-USSR propaganda outcry in both cases. Yet something fundamental was involved, compared with which all that was unimportant: the attitude we try to get our own labour movement to take to the struggle of our class in the Stalinist states, and to their oppressors. To fudge that class issue, worse still to argue that our movement should have and maintain links with the anti-unions of the Stalinist states, with part of the apparatus that oppresses our people there, is to do the opposite of the work of Trotskyists — which is to fight for international working class solidarity with the real labour movements in the Stalinist states, or with their pioneers, like Klebanov.

To fear to call the Stalinists what they are for fear of chiming in with the reactionaries, and to endorse the links our own scabbing bureaucrats maintain with the Stalinist 'unions', is to adopt the stance of those 'Friends of the Soviet Union' who called Trotsky a reactionary for speaking out in the '30s†.

These comrades suffer from a dominating fear of anti-Sovietism which leads them in practice to leave the issue of the workers' movement to the Chapples. This amounts to playing Pontius Pilate with the affairs of our own class in the Stalinist states, and it is the sure way to allow the issue to be used to lead the mass of trade union members to anti-Soviet conclusions, and simultaneously to help keep many good militants entrenched in ignorant Stalinist or semi-Stalinist opposition to what Chapple and Thatcher support*.

† What would Socialist Challenge have done in the '30s when it was often only right wing outfits that were spreading accurate information — Trotskyist information — about Russia? In Britain, for example, it was the 'Right Book Club' that published Victor Serge, Walter Krivitsky, etc; and it was the 'Labour Book Club', during the coalition, in 1940, that published Anton Ciliga.

* There is surely a more profound reason, though. Look at the record.

In June 1953 the USFI tendency's European sections refused to call for the with-

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Trotsky would turn in his grave at the notion that attitudes such as those of Socialist Challenge have anything to do with the politics he fought and died for. Trotsky argued that the USSR was a 'degenerated workers' state' which should be defended against the military onslaughts of imperialism. So does *Workers' Action*. But that does not mean that we regard the USSR (or the other Stalinist states) under the bureaucracy as 'better'. Far from it. The bureaucratic USSR is only to be defended insofar as it is a product of the struggle against capitalism, and *against* being conquered by imperialism — not 'for itself'. In most respects it is the opposite of the ideal socialists strive for.

Its collectivism has more in common with the caricature evoked by enemies of socialism like Von Hayek than with what socialists want to achieve.

drawal of the Russian Army which was shooting down the insurgent workers of East Berlin. They called instead for the withdrawal of both the US and Russian armies from Berlin, and by thus taking the issue to the 'higher' plane of bloc relationships, maintained their own fundamental position then of being advocates of one bloc. That is, in real terms of politics and working class struggle, they refused to side with the East Berlin workers, while generally, abstractly deploring Stalinism. It was a classic piece of centrist evasion.

The same segment of the USFI rejected the programme of a working class anti-bureaucratic revolution in China (a 'political revolution') until 1967. The entire USFI today rejects that programme for Cuba. The European majority has consistently rejected it for Vietnam (though reportedly some groups have reconsidered.)

In their propaganda in favour of the PDP regime in Afghanistan, the minority around the SWP (USA) cited as one of that regime's merits that it had legalised trade unions — and neglected to mention that it forbade workers to strike. (See *Intercontinental Press/Militant* for the first six months of 1980). In other words, they accepted police-state labour-front-building by an aspirant totalitarian regime as genuine trade unionism, the labour-front apparatus for controlling the workers as organs of the working class.

All the USFI sections, which uncritically support and endorse the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua (a genuinely radical petty bourgeois regime), make propaganda citing as a great merit of the Sandinistas that they are building trade unions. Yet if their firm belief that the Sandinistas will replicate the Cuban regime in Nicaragua proves to be true, then what the Sandinistas are building are their own labour-front organisations. For there to be any other possibility in the Sandinista union-organising drive, the membership would have to fight for genuine self-controlling unions independent of the state.

The USFI will not help anybody in Nicaragua (not to speak of Cuba) to understand this or fight for it. They themselves have simply abandoned the programme Trotsky proposed at the end of his life for the independence of the unions (see *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay and the Transitional Programme*). The inability of the IMG and Socialist Challenge, faced with a hypocritical bourgeois outcry against TUC links with Stalinist 'trade unions', to know what is important, the complete collapse of any sense of proportion — that is an aspect of the politics of the undrainable swamp of Brandlerite confusion of which it is part. They seem to have forgotten which side of the line on these questions is the

Trotsky rejected the idea that 'defence of the USSR' against imperialism meant spreading illusions in the regime or refraining from rousing the international labour movement against it. He was bitterly scathing against the 'Friends of the USSR' who were silent or evasive on the regime for fear of damaging the USSR



Trotsky took sides — and tried to get the international labour movement, whatever its given political coloration at that moment, to take sides — squarely with the workers of the USSR (and with the oppressed nations within the USSR, like the Ukrainians) against the totalitarian regime.

He never allowed the need to distance himself from the imperialist and pro-imperialist critics of the USSR to determine what he said. *The Russian reality and the duty to tell the truth to the labour movement did that.*

He did not hesitate to classify things and name them according to what they were. For example, for the last three years of his life at least he insistently repeated his belief that "*Stalin's political apparatus does not differ [from that in fascist countries] save in more unbridled savagery*" (The Transitional Programme)

Nor is it any different today, 40 years after an agent of that regime struck Trotsky down.

A major psychological reason why there is reluctance to call things like the Russian 'trade unions' by their proper names is probably the fear of thereby praising by implication the regime which our movement exists to fight — that of 'liberal' capitalism. There is probably a subconscious reluctance to face the facts about the Stalinist regimes, and their implications, because those regimes are so terrible compared with the political regimes in the historically privileged advanced capitalist countries that the latter seem almost good by comparison. And of course, horror at the reality of the Stalinist regimes has, in the last four or five decades, led many one-time revolutionary socialists to 'reconciliation' with 'liberal' capitalism.

But the choice is not confined to either Thatcher and Reagan or Brezhnev and Honecker: there is also the possibility of a working class socialist democracy.

The programme of working class democracy and revolutionary socialism is rooted in the

ing class. Capitalism periodically ravages the lives of working class people with slumps and wars, and it is now ravaging the lives of over two million working class families in Britain alone.

In many areas of the world it imposes its own forms of dictatorship. In social crises like Britain's present crisis it has time and again resorted to savage repression. It is now attempting, as yet in a limited way, to tie our own unions to the state. Now less than ever before is there a basis for any labour movement reconciliation with capitalism or its advocates.

In fact, irreconcilable working class and socialist opposition to our main enemy at home cannot be stable or politically serious if it is based on anything other than a clear and independent working class view of the world, and on the experience of all the struggles of the working class throughout the world.

Therefore we must not block out of our consciousness a real awareness of what our class faces under the Stalinist regimes. We must not mollify or console ourselves with half-conscious assumptions that the totalitarian Stalinist regimes are *really* not so bad, are *really* rather benevolent and paternalistic to those they deprive of civil rights and personal and group autonomy, and are *not really* dripping with the blood of workers who have dared to stand out against them.

They do really drip with workers' blood.

The inspiring rebirth of a labour movement in Poland now highlights and underlines the situation in the other Stalinist states. It highlights and underlines what our responsibilities are in this situation.

We must actively support the workers in Russia and the other Stalinist states, and that means opposing their oppressors in every way we can.

It means rousing the anger, the hatred and the active hostility of the labour movement against them.

It is, to repeat, as basic as not crossing a picket line. And as basic as the



THE RECESSION AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

The Longbridge sackings are a warning to the whole labour movement.

Nine workers, including four TGWU stewards, were sacked on December 3rd on charges of causing damage or (in the case of the stewards) of being 'ringleaders' during a protest against lay-offs on November 21st. One was reinstated on appeal, on December 15th; but the other eight sackings stood.

The Metro trim and assembly workers struck on hearing the appeal results. After long delays the TGWU made the strike official over Christmas. BL boss Michael Edwardes threatened to sack all 1500 strikers if they did not start back on January 5th after the Christmas break. The TGWU response was limp. Eventually, at a meeting on the 4th, they recommended a return to work — pending a new management/union inquiry. The inquiry formula preserved a total right of veto for the bosses. But the workers, seeing no courageous lead from the union (or the CP-led Works Committee), reluctantly voted to go back. The inquiry later confirmed the sacking of six workers including the four stewards.

The assertion of management power by the brutal victimisation without right

activists; the undermining of the workers' spontaneous response by the cowardly policy of the union bureaucrats; the use of an 'inquiry' formula which just gains time for the bosses while keeping the sacked workers out of the plant — it was all like a re-run of the Derek Robinson victimisation in November 1979.

As one BL worker told *Socialist Organiser* (10th January), "Unless we get ourselves properly organised soon, I can see these sackings becoming an annual event. Every November or December it'll happen. We could call it Robinson Day."

But Edwardes' tactics in BL will be a model for other bosses to follow. Already in British Steel Ian McGregor is using Edwardes' practised technique of bypassing the union, balloting the workers directly on a job-cut plan, and trying to force a 'yes' vote by the menace of widespread closures if the plan is not accepted. The other techniques — unilateral imposition of pay and conditions formulas, the threat of closure or sacking to black-jack any workers into submission, the victimisations — will follow.

Under the Labour Government, too, there was a wave of victimisations, in the dark days of 1975-7: Blackmans (Tottenham), BL, Cooley (Coventry)

Blackwood Hodge (Northampton), Ford Dagenham and Halewood etc. Then, too there was the background of economic slump, depressed industrial militancy and working class confidence and a no-fight line from union leaders.

But it's worse now. The slump is worse. One of its results is that union membership is declining seriously. The TUC lost perhaps one million members in 1980: the TGWU 140,000, the AUEW 100,000, the GMWU 40,000 etc. (The worst-hit union, the National Union of Blastfurnacemen, has lost half its membership over the last 18 months). In contrast, union membership, and the number of shop stewards rose steadily even in the worst days of the Labour government.

And of course the Tory government is aggressively assisting the bosses in their drive against union organisation. Almost certainly the Robinson sacking, at least, was agreed beforehand with the Government; so were the sackings at Brixton dole office. The defeat on Robinson and the victory at Brixton dole show the difference that a militant response and militant leadership can make.

The strike figures show the problems we face. 1979 had the biggest total of

strike-days for any year since 1926 — and by far the highest number of workers involved in strike action for decades (over 4½ million — twice as many as in 1968, nearly three times as many as in 1972). The first four months of 1980, with the steel strike, had strike figures running at a similar level.

Since May 1980 strike figures have suddenly plunged to the depression levels of 1976 and lower. The number of new stoppages in 1980 was the lowest figure since 1941 and strike-days in July to November were the lowest since 1966.

But there is another side to the picture. and the Edwardes-led offensive can be defeated.

Slump

The downturn in industrial militancy is obviously a product of the slump but its scope and depth are not part of some inevitable, automatic process. The slump conditions put weapons into the hands of the bosses and it becomes more and more difficult to win *despite* the existing trade union leadership. Experiences like the fiasco of the TUC's 'Day of Action' in May 1980 — largely a result of the half-hearted way it was organised — inevitably disillusion militants and dampen militancy. The call to get rid of the Tories is normally popular — but the cynicism people in the labour movement feel about the last Labour government means that, despite the transformation in the Labour party, few look forward with much hope to a successor which will solve their problems. This too dampens down industrial combativity.

The picture does not however show what the SWP is inclined to theorise: a fundamental, qualitative weakening of working-class organisation.

Potential

Inevitably a slump takes its toll, and this slump, together with the Tory policies which deepen it, has taken a specially heavy toll.

But there is still tremendous explosive potential. A major struggle, or of course, even a mild economic revival, could release it. One can confidently predict that even a mild economic recovery will unleash a new round of struggles.

In the first place, the downturn in strikes was not entirely spontaneous. There was a sharp and sudden turnaround between April and July. (April: 155 strikes beginning, 744,000 strike-days. July: 67 strikes beginning, 177,000 strike-days). It was not because of a sudden turn for the worse in the economic situation, or a dramatic defeat. It reflected a conscious decision by the trade union leaders.

May 14th, for the TUC, was an embarrassing left-over commitment from the winter's militancy. And after that they took the decision to put struggles on the shelf and wait for better days.

Indeed, the TUC policy on jobs is now *consciously* one of throwing its weight behind a particular section of the capitalist class. As the *Economist* puts it, "The TUC is relying on the Confederation of British Industry and Tory backbenchers to force its economic prescriptions on the

government: lower interest rates, selective import controls and a measure of inflation". A survey by the London Chamber of Commerce showed that 60% of firms favoured import controls, and in a circular to all branches the TGWU has said: "Trade union negotiators should join with employers in joint campaigns... against specific import penetration."

Weak

Instead of working-class action for the right to work — based on work-sharing under workers' control with no loss of pay and a policy of nationalisation without compensation — we are told to team up with the bosses (against workers abroad) and propose a policy of nationalism mixed with economic nuttiness.

At a time when closures, cutbacks and short time are escalating, this failure to fight on jobs must weaken the fight on all other fronts, in particular the wages fight, the fight against racism and the fight for full equality for women.

Of course, the downturn in strikes is not just the product of some conspiracy by union full-time officials against a rank-and-file otherwise red-hot for a fight. The bureaucrats' reasoning, that in the present slump strikes are on a hiding to nothing, and it's best to sit tight and salvage what we can, is accepted by many, perhaps most, workers.

But it would be equally wrong to think that the bureaucrats are just faithfully reflecting the workers' mood. The bureaucrats actively help to create the mood of pessimism which they then 'reflect'. And even when the rank-and-file's mood is defeatist, it is *not the same* as the bureaucrats' defeatism. A shop steward may be bitterly angry at the bosses' attacks, but s/he feels that, with constant threats of sacking and closures and no prospect of any real support from his or her top union leaders for a thorough-going battle now is not the time to fight. What about a top official? He or she may well be vexed by the bosses' and government attacks — though seeing them less in class terms than as a disruption of the desirable friendly relations between management, government and unions. He or she aims to preserve as much as possible of these friendly relations — perhaps occasionally using rhetorical threats of 'civil disorder' and the like to try and twist the bosses' and government's arms. He or she 'calculates' that any fight is best postponed — but, unlike the shop steward, the top union official has the direct possibility of rousing an organisation of thousands of workers, a force which can actually turn the tables and upset the calculations. The bureaucrats at national level could rouse the working class and have a good chance of defeating the Tory offensive.

Sackings

The TGWU and AUEW leaders had that possibility over the BL pay settlement. And they deliberately sabotaged a fight. The sackings at Longbridge were the direct result.

But many demonstrations — especially the May 14th Day of Action — have shown that a militant minority exists, willing and eager to fight the Tories with industrial

courage, the struggles at Brixton and Gardners have given the same message. So has the anti-cuts conference called by the Lambeth labour movement on November 1st.

When other workers see a winnable immediate cause, they will then rally to that minority. Victory or defeat then depends on how well-organised, how politically clear, and how independent of the trade union bureaucracy that minority is.

If the working class is cowed by the slump, that does not mean that the Tories' programme of drastically weakening trade union strength has won out. The Left still has every chance of mobilising the labour movement to stop them. To do that, we must work tirelessly to organise rank-and-file militants; to develop them into a force which, while not isolating itself by premature confrontations with the bureaucracy, is capable of offering an independent lead when necessary; and to arm those militants with policies that can guide and generalise an effective class response to the bosses' attacks, especially work-sharing under workers' control with no loss of pay and automatic inflation-proofing of wages in line with a workers' price index.

The generalising, political slogans are vital. For it is probably a fact that the economic slump does seriously close off the perspective of limited sectional economic struggles until the start of some economic recovery. The point is to fight instead for generalised struggle, not (as with the TUC's calculations) for no struggle at all.

Struggle

Many workers are well aware of the need for generalised struggle, and have been acting accordingly — on one front at least. For, although industrial direct action is the regular and indispensable lifeblood of class struggle, it is not the whole of it. There are many other important forms of class struggle. And workers have been taking up one of them by moving into the Labour Party in significant numbers and trying to get control over the party leadership and ensure that there is never again a Labour government like 1974-9.

That struggle cannot be a substitute for, or independent of, the industrial direct-action struggle. But it is important in its own right. It also has important *implications* for the industrial direct-action struggle. For the workers' willingness to take direct action against the Tories must partly depend on how much of a perspective they can see for a real alternative to the Tories.

And there is a direct rebound from the Labour Party democracy struggle onto the struggle for democracy in the unions.

So revolutionaries must strive to give a lead on this front of struggle, too: by drawing workers into the Labour Party, organising the left on the broadest basis to win Party democracy, and arguing for Marxist politics.

We also need a perspective which ties together the different fronts of struggle: a fight for a workers' government, a government totally independent of the capitalists, basing itself on the organisations of the working class that in their breadth and depth most express the will of the

The Tories' slump?

The graphs tell a simple story. Since the summer of 1979 there has been a drastic and accelerating economic slump. It started at almost exactly the same time as the Tories took office.

So is it all the Tories' fault, pure and simple? Not entirely. The most important economy of the capitalist world, the USA, hit serious trouble in autumn 1978. The value of the dollar, as against other currencies, started sliding faster and faster. To stop the slide, the US government imposed tight-money policies — squeezing credit, restricting demand. Industrial production started turning down in summer 1979, vacillated for some months, and then finally lurched into slump in the spring of 1980.

And there has been a downturn — milder or more severe — in every major capitalist country. Steel consumption in the Western economies was about 5½% down in 1980. Industrial output in West Germany fell 5% between spring and autumn 1980. In Japan the high point of industrial output was February 1980; since then it has fallen 5% and is now stagnant. In France and Italy, too, industrial output is declining (the latest figures show a 2% drop between October 1979 and October 1980).

Britain was especially vulnerable to the world recession. Its recovery from the 1974-5 slump was weaker than any other major capitalist economy's. Investment (gross domestic fixed capital formation) in 1979 was actually lower than in the slump year of 1975, a slight increase in private investment being more than offset by the cuts in public investment.

The Tories did not create the slump. But their policies have made it sharper. For they calculated and expected that something like "three years of unparalleled austerity" (in the words of Tory Treasury Minister John Biffen) would be the result of their policies. Even before the 1979 election, Keith Joseph was insisting on how vital it would be for the next Tory government to stick to its policy despite "apparently high levels of unemployment".

They have made credit difficult and they have cut back state spending, especially construction and other 'capital spending'. They think, or hope, or suppose, or pretend, that this will purge the economy of inefficiency and create a leaner, more dynamic, less inflationary economy at the end of a period of hardship. But for here and now they know their policy will help the bosses black-jack the working class and raise the rate of exploitation.

And seriously raising the rate of exploitation, thus boosting profits, is the only way out for the British capitalists.

For the Tories' desperate efforts mesh into a long-term decline: Crude steel production in Britain has been on a downward trend since 1970 and is now running at barely 40% of its 1970 level. In another central area of modern capitalist industry, car production is now likewise only just over 40% of its highpoint (1972).

Employment in manufacturing industry is now 75% of its top level, which was in 1965. Apart from the temporary bonanza of North Sea Oil, no major new industries are arising to replace these older ones in mortal decline.

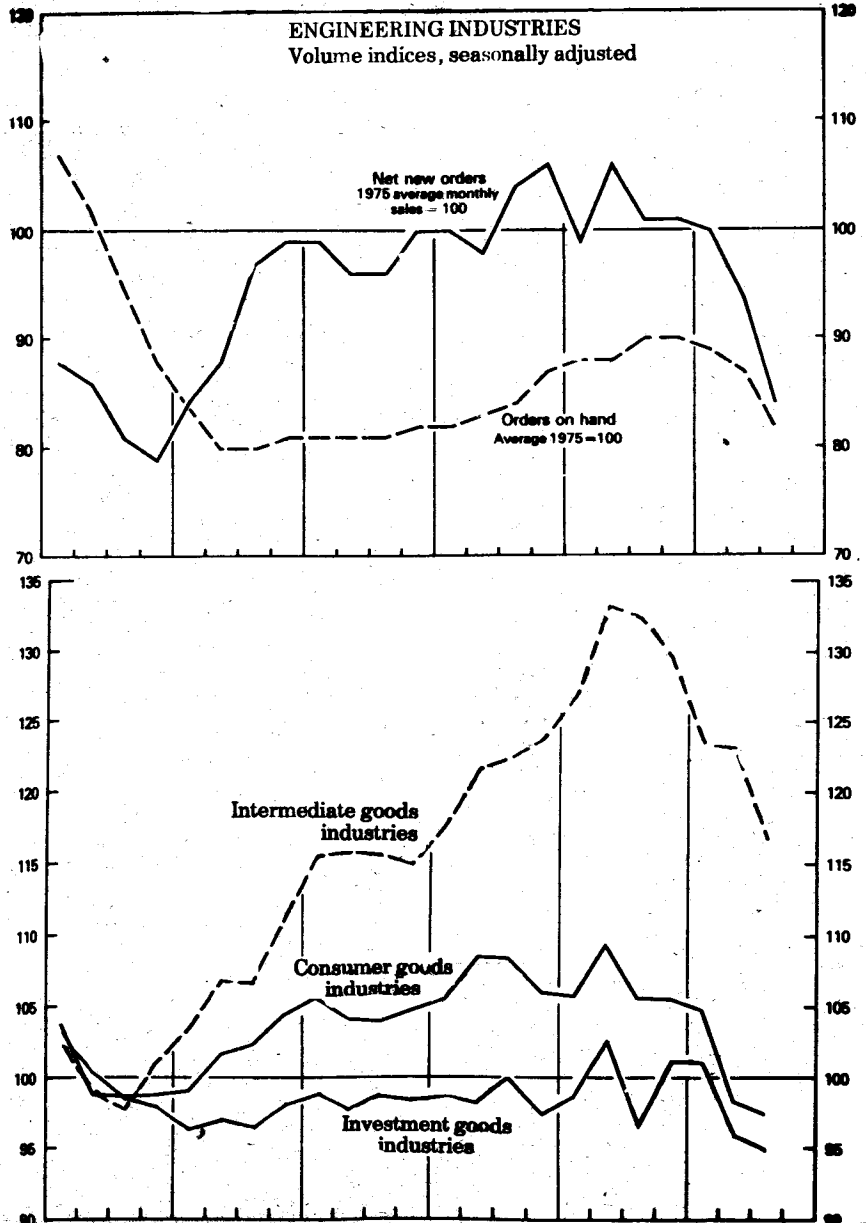
Profit levels in Britain are low by international standards — and declining. The pre-tax rate of return on capital is estimated to have slipped steadily through the 60s to 9% in 1973, 5% in 1974-6, a bit more in 1977-8, and perhaps 4½% in 1979 and 3% in 1980. When it was 7% in 1973, the comparable figure for West Germany was 14%, for the US 21% and for Japan 22%.

In combination with this long-term trend, the Tories policy produces devastation of basic industries (metal manufacturing output dropped by over 25%, just from 1979 to autumn 1980), further shortfalls in investment (instead it goes abroad), an endless vicious circle of cuts where declining expenditure on evermore decrepit services constantly seems "too high" a proportion of declining

national income... and working class misery.

The high level of the pound against other currencies, and capitalists' efforts to clear stocks, have reduced inflation slightly (November 1980 retail prices were 15.3% above November 1979 prices). But these factors are only temporary. There is no guarantee that inflation will not accelerate again very soon. Certainly the big rent and rate increases currently on the agenda will mean a big leap in the working-class cost of living.

What is the outlook? The world recession will certainly continue through most of 1981. It may even make a new plunge into slump if, for example, Chrysler and Massey Ferguson finally go bust. Britain's slump will continue at least as long as the world recession. Any recovery will be late and partial, like after 1975. Painful and accelerating decay is the longer-term prospect — that, or a successful drive by the working class to overturn capitalism and restructure the economy on a rational basis.



How women can change the labour movement

In this article, first published as a paper for the first Fightback conference, Gerry Byrne explains how the Fightback campaign links in with the general perspective of building a mass working class based women's movement — a movement built in the struggle to remould the labour movement in line with women's needs and demands.

WOMEN ARE coming under the most severe attack on our rights and conditions since the War. We knew it would take a long fight to get the right to work, to child-care, to free health and equal education, to control our fertility and to define our sexuality, the right to maternity leave and financial independence; but at least we were inching forward.

Now it is all threatened, and the fragility of the reforms we have won must confront the women's movement with the need to re-think.

The groundwork for today's attacks was in many cases laid by the Labour government, especially its 1976 cuts. But the Tories are pushing us back on all fronts with a single-mindedness which calls into question the adequacy of our movement, organised around local struggles or particular aspects of our oppression.

The scale of the Tory attacks, against a background of sharp crisis, demands massive resources of human energy and organised strength, on a greater scale than the women's movement alone can muster.

That is potentially present in the labour movement, though its bureaucratic set-up, its domination by middle-aged white men who actually fear to win, and its conservative ideas, make it a difficult ally for the women's movement.

Many women active in groups and campaigns feel they can place no reliance on the labour movement to fight for women's rights, even though it is now confronting the same enemy. But it is not only women who cannot rely on the labour movement as it is: any group of workers, men or women, who engage in struggle with employers or the state, find that their leaders more often stand in the way. To make the most use of the vast potential of the labour movement — and the Labour Party too — the ordinary members need to take control. In that process, socialists and fighters for women's liberation must fight also against most of the ideas that dominate the movement: national interest; petty bargaining, sexism and racism.

But it is not only as an ally in the present struggles that we need to re-shape the labour movement.

The real social liberation of women is inconceivable in a society where resources are directed to where they will make a profit rather than to where they are needed by the majority of the people, whether they can pay or not. Our liberation is predicated on a qualitatively different system, one in which the vast mass of people who actually produce the social wealth will decide on how it is to be used. But how do we get such a system?

Roots of oppression

Marxism has always argued that it is the struggle of contending classes that produces major social changes; and that capitalism's life-long fundamental enemy — the working class — has both the potential of burying the profit system and the basic motivation and ability to reorganise society for mutual cooperation instead of cut-throat competition. Because the working class (including all its sectors: white-collar, service workers, etc.) is the first class in history with no vested interest in oppressing any other class, it can in freeing itself also free humanity for rule by the vast majority and put an end to repression and exploitation.

Women's oppression developed alongside class society. The subjugation of women, their isolation from social production and reduction to the role of childbearing and servicing of individual men in the family unit, arose with the rise of private property: private inherited wealth meant a woman tied to a man as his sexual property to ensure a 'legitimate' property line.

The family, in all epochs of class society, exists as the basic instrument of women's oppression. It is also one of the central pillars of class rule. For the ruling class, it ensures the succession of wealth and privilege; for the oppressed classes, it is a framework for instilling obedience, subservience and self-limitation in the interests of the rulers of society, and provides millions of isolated and competing units to break down the solidarity of the oppressed.

The real social equality of women will only be achieved by the disappearance of the family as an economic unit, and the breaking of the link between woman's biological role in child-bearing and her social role as child-rearer and home-keeper. It is easy to point to the facilities that will be needed to break this link: they are all the things the women's movement is fighting for now (though it is possible to envisage other gains too, such as the socialisation of housework). But there is no general agreement in the movement about the social changes that will be needed.

Marxists in the movement argue that women's liberation is inseparable from socialist revolution, and that socialist revolution is inseparable from working class struggle; not just economic struggle, but political and ideological struggle as well.

Women have a vital role to play here. Not only are we half the working class (and thousands of others striving for personal liberation too) and as such a major component in the economic struggle; but arguably we also have an irreplaceable political and ideological job to do, to clear away the sexist garbage that is so powerful a weapon in the establishment's armoury. For the working class can only overthrow class rule by breaking the mental and ideological chains that tie it to its present rulers. The working class cannot hope to organise society as the vast majority ruling itself, while at the same time maintaining racial oppression, anti-gay practices, or the enslaved position of half its number. And in fighting the sluggish reformist bureaucrats who channel the crippling ruling-class ideas into the working class, the radical energy of the women's movement is another bonus.

For the working class to successfully overthrow capitalism and put an end to oppression and exploitation, it must become conscious of just how oppressed women are, and it must take up and pursue the fight for the liberation of women as a central part of its own self-liberation.

There are of course other, more general, ideas that need to be fought for: an understanding of our history; an economic and social analysis of present-day capitalism; a sense of internationalism; a view of the state institutions, of parliament, of religion and ideas themselves, of strategies, tactics and principles that will lead the working class movement forward avoiding bourgeois snares; and a hundred other things. These are crucial tasks for socialists, men and women: and *Workers' Action* aims to contribute to these tasks.

The Women's Movement

THE YEARS SINCE the Second World War have brought major changes in our lives, sharpening the contradictions governing our lives.

The laundrette, convenience foods, and press-button heating have objectively cut down household labour. Advances in fertility control (though still terribly imperfect, and incomplete without abortion on demand) make us no longer slaves to our bodies. The growth of service jobs, the NHS, etc., have brought millions more women onto the 'labour market' and into the trade unions.

But these are low-status, low-paid jobs. In the unions, though we are a third of the members, our voice is small and weak. We are still utterly lumbered with the shopping, cooking and child-care, both because of the lack of socially provided facilities and because of men's barely changed expectations and demands for personal service; and this burden, whether we have another job or not, serves to isolate us and weigh us down, keeping us out of political and public life. And the media continue to portray us as the little woman in

the home, trivialising our lives. The loosening of the bonds of petty respectability has been paid for in an upsurge of the most vulgar and brutalising sexism.

Rising expectations meeting cramping limitations produced increasingly conscious anger and the formulation of our own demands. Added to this was the impetus of a parallel ferment; the labour movement in the late 1960s, increasingly pressed by the outriders of approaching capitalist crisis — unemployment, wage freezes, anti-union laws — was pushed into sharper confrontation with the system as a whole. In France in 1968, students' actions sparked a general strike of ten million workers in every sector of the economy (including media and professions), whose aspirations clearly went beyond a mere change of government.

In the USA, the black movement for civil rights of the early sixties in the southern states exploded in full-scale rebellion through dozens of industrial cities, demanding not just votes and jobs but pride and power and dignity too. And out of all this grew a women's movement echoing the black rebellion and the May events in the cry: we've waited too long.

In many ways, today's women's movement still retains the imprint of those days: the emphasis on pride and autonomy, the libertarian political outlook, the uneasy relationship to the organised labour movement, the radical élan, and the concern with personal alienation.

The women's movement is a living movement; it grows and develops; some early ideas have been pursued, clarified, and led to conclusions; some have been lost and rejected, have disappeared. Nor does it exist in a social

lead to passivity on the part of the led, a passivity that is our socially-given lot as women and which we are struggling to break free of. Delegation to 'responsible' bodies and people often means loss of control over decision-making, exclusion of minority opinions; manipulation by people who 'know the procedure', can 'handle meetings' and so on. Large meetings and complicated formalities can intimidate and soon drive away those who lack assertion and self-confidence — precisely those attributes that as women we are conditioned not to develop.

But lack of formal structures does not guarantee against dominance, leaders or unacknowledged cliques. Most women in the movement have probably experienced at some time that feeling of being on the outside looking in, a feeling that the real action, the real decision-making, is going on elsewhere. 'They' all seem to know each other, seem to have the same views on everything, and the only way to join the charmed circle is to acquiesce, nod your head and look like you know what you're on about.

All it proves is that organisation abhors a vacuum. Dispensing with structure doesn't make all the evils associated with it disappear. It's like the argument we use on abortion: making it illegal doesn't make it go away, it just drives it underground and makes it more dangerous. You can take the analogy too far, but the 'underground' organisation in the women's movement, the cliques, the unspoken leaders, is dangerous precisely because its 'non-existence' means there are no channels for change.

This way of organising interacts with the existing class base of the women's movement and conspires to exclude working class women because they do not share the same



The labour movement workshop at the first Flightback conference

vacuum: it interacts with other social forces, it picks up their ideas and develops them, it creates changes in other movements; it is sometimes repulsed, absorbed, diverted or distorted by them.

So the movement is not a dead thing, to be skewered and dissected or analysed as a specimen. But that does not absolve us of the responsibility of trying to understand it, take a measure of it, see how it changes and what is constant.

One of the constant features is the movement's concept of organisation. Spontaneity is valued above almost anything else. Hence, the almost across-the-board rejection of formal structures, of permanent positions, of hierarchies, rules, leaders, or even the possibility that these might develop. Hence, the emphasis on small groups, individual participation, rejection of delegation, of 'speaking for' anyone else, or indeed of decision-making at all beyond a collective 'organic' consensus.

To some extent this mode of organising is valuable, reflecting real insights into how formal organisation can deter participation; to some extent it is an unnecessary self-limitation on what the movement could achieve. Which outweighs the other, or can the gains and the losses be reconciled in some way? It has to be asked. It would not do for a movement which sets itself the aim of breaking down some of the most deeply-held but irrational ideas, the most ingrained prejudices, itself to raise its form of organising to a fetish, to be defended automatically against all comers.

What are the important and valuable features? The idea that formal structures can harden into a 'machine', the property of an elite, no longer controllable by those it is supposedly there to serve. The idea that leaders and hierarchies

experiences and social networks.

The massive scale of the attacks on our rights means that we need a movement that is capable of mobilising the mass of women and focusing their struggles. But the very ferocity of these attacks is also forcing thousands, hundreds of thousands, of women, to fight back. At first on a partial basis, in defence of a particular nursery, particular jobs that are threatened, or attempted wage cuts. But this opens the possibility of drawing them into a movement struggling against the whole range of attacks and for the complete liberation of women. We must make sure this movement is open to their involvement.

Small groups, informal discussions, consciousness raising sessions and rudimentary procedure are a good way of gaining confidence, of finding and exploring our way around new ideas, of working out what we really think and feel. These things are valuable gains. But why should they be *all* that the movement is? Wouldn't it be good to find ways of turning the *feelings* of solidarity we get in these groups into a really powerful effective solidarity that can take on the most powerful institutions in society and win.

To do that we also need ways of organising that are appropriate to mass struggles, to sharp confrontations. We need to ensure that these ways of organising provide maximum democracy, real active participation by the mass of women. We cannot just hope that small groups will 'come together' in ready-made agreement. We have to find ways of handling differing views and still retain our cohesion, of being confident that decisions taken are likely to be acted on

and realised because they reflect the needs and wishes of the majority of women involved.

We need to learn from the experiences of other movements and other struggles. We turn for inspiration not to the 'great traditions' of the official labour movement — slow routine and cumbersome 'procedure', ways of deciding and organising that exclude and confine to passivity not only the majority of women, but also the majority of the male membership. We need to look to those situations when the movement has broken out of the well-worn channels of official routine and swelled to mass involvement: strikes, occupations, mass pickets, general strikes, insurrections; and to the ways of organising that have been thrown up spontaneously by these struggles — strike committees accountable to mass meetings, factory and neighbourhood councils as in Portugal, councils of action, soviets, popular militias. We can learn from these struggles.

One of the things the women's movement prides itself on is its openness, the ability of different currents and points of view to coexist without the movement tearing itself apart. This, again, is both a strength and a weakness: A strength because we need to be open to trying different ways, testing them out in practice, rejecting some, accepting others.

It becomes a weakness when confusion is elevated to a point of principle. Failure to follow through an analysis to its conclusion, the coexistence of contradictory ideas held by a single person, are justified as 'open-mindedness'; theoretical consistency is dismissed as 'dogma'. At the worst, a kind of guilty anti-intellectualism is propounded on the grounds that logic, abstraction and objectivity are 'male' modes of thought, and that women should rely on their own experience and not on theories coming from outside themselves.

We would argue that there is no such thing as 'pure' experience, outside of an interpretation of what that experience means; different people experience the same objective situation differently depending on their existing ideas or prejudices, predispositions, previous experiences; and one thing the women's movement should have taught us all is that we all to some degree conspire in our own oppression, internalising the self-limiting destructive values of society. What we need, to break out of this, is not to wallow in subjectivism (which only reinforces the grip of these unconscious and semi-conscious ideas) but a much more rigorous attempt to become conscious of where our ideas have come from, whether they relate to our real situation, whether they



Fightback at the TUC conference

can take us forward.

The rejection of 'a theory' also has its dishonest side: first of all because this stance itself is the expression of a 'theory'; second, because it is not actually a call to reject all theory but a special pleading for one particular theory and an especial intolerance for another.

Moreover, instead of ideas being appraised on their own merit, they are accepted or rejected according to their source: specifically, ideas put forward by women defined as members of 'male-dominated' left groups are often rejected out of hand and certainly viewed with deep suspicion. Actually, it narrows down even further, because Labour Party women are OK, and even those from the Communist Party (and you can't get more authoritarian than that!) In the end it is those women who are in an organised revolutionary left group who are most vilified and dismissed.



Fightback at Blackpool Labour Party conference

Since the women's movement is so constructed as to prevent its being taken over by a minority capturing some leading position, one is bound to ask: if there isn't that sort of danger, isn't it a very anti-democratic suppression of ideas that is being practised?

No, it might be objected, it's not the ideas we object to, it's the fact that you're 'putting the line' that's been worked out in advance together with men, abusing the spontaneous working out of ideas that is the hallmark of the movement. But this is disingenuous. While there undoubtedly is a lot of fumbling around for ideas, most of the major theories we meet with in the movement have been worked out by closed little cliques; nor are any of them especially pure or new or particular to the women's movement.

Radical Feminism or Marxism

RADICAL FEMINISM sees the fundamental divide in society as a sexual one, rooted in the opposed biological natures of men and women. All societies have been based on a male monopoly of violence arising from the inherently aggressive nature of male sexuality. The more spectacular instances of male violence (rape, wife-battering) are only the overt manifestations of the systematic degradation of women by men which is the basis of all social organisation. Culture, always male-dominated, provides the spurious justification for women's oppression by over-valuation of male virtues — strength, power, competition, objectivity, abstract logic, technology — and underplaying women's contribution to society: compassion, cooperation, caring, intuitive understanding.

The solutions radical feminists propose to women's oppression range from cultural re-emphasis on 'female' values and withdrawal from male society (especially from personal relationships with men) and development of an alternative female culture, to outright 'destruction of men as a sex-class'. They all, however, reject work alongside men for common goals as collaboration with the enemy; however 'nice', non-sexist, or sympathetic individual men may be, they are all members of the oppressing sex-class. In this they see the central focus for women's liberation being directed against men, rather than as a struggle alongside men of the oppressed and exploited class against the class system which perpetuates their oppression.

At a fundamental level radical feminism is a concession to reactionary ideas on women. It accepts the 'natural division' of the sexes, the ascription of innate qualities to both sexes, the unchangeability of human nature whether the male or female half. It downplays both men and women as social beings, formed by their experiences and circumstances but also capable of changing those conditions and, in that, changing themselves, and relies instead on a rigid biological determinism. Because of this, it is fundamentally pessimistic for the prospects of women's liberation; if women's oppression is rooted in unchanging biological reality, then the prospects for breaking out of it are reduced either to doomed utopian schemes or genocide.

Marxism and radical feminism stand at opposite ends of the women's movement. Conscious adherents of either pos-



Fightback at the LPYS conference

ition are in a minority, and as such are not easily accepted by the middle ground. But they represent the only two internally consistent perspectives for women's liberation.

Many feminists see themselves as 'revolutionary' — to indicate that they are not just concerned with reforms to ease women's position, that formal equality is not enough, that a fundamental upheaval is necessary to shake up the old ideas, to put human relationships on a new footing, to ensure that equal rights before the law are backed up by the material, social and 'psychological prerequisites for real equality and liberation. In this we concur.

But, for most feminists, revolution is one thing — proletarian revolution quite another, especially if the centrality of the class struggle means that feminism should direct itself towards, and aim to base itself on, working class women. Perhaps unable to envisage a socialist revolution in which working class women play a central part to claim their rights as workers, as women, and as people, such feminists simply fear that women's concerns and energies will just be dissolved into the class struggle. They prefer to hold out the perspective of women's liberation as a kind of 'separate but equal' struggle, going on parallel to the class struggle.

This is understandable as a reaction to many bad experiences women have had in trying to organise in the labour movement, and indeed with some left groups. But it avoids the central question: what sort of a revolution, and what sort of a society, will issue from this 'separate but equal' struggle? The only content a 'feminist revolution' can have outside of class struggle and socialist revolution is a radical feminist sexual holocaust.

The Labour Movement

GIVEN THE PRESENT state of the labour movement, there is some justification for the fears of many feminists that a class struggle perspective will simply swallow up women's specific demands. It is male-dominated; its organisational practice (when and how meetings take place, bureaucratic procedures etc) serves to exclude women from participation because it takes no account of the needs created by domestic and childcare responsibilities that still rest on women. The prevailing attitudes are sexist, making women feel either that they are invisible or that they stick out like a sore thumb. Its priorities are male-defined, according much greater emphasis to the economic interests of male, skilled white workers than to women or other oppressed, less easily organised sections, limiting itself to issues of wages and conditions that concern them and missing those issues that are vital to women and crucial to their ability to organise.

But should we just give up on the labour movement because of this?

That would be passive, fatalistic resignation. It ignores

the fact that women, especially working class women who are the majority, cannot opt out of the class struggle. We can choose to be passive victims of it or active fighters to change our conditions, but class society and class oppression will not simply go away because we choose to ignore it or not 'concentrate all our energies' on it. And as the present Tory attacks show, the crisis of class society is deepening and there will be less and less chance of closing our eyes to it.

It is fundamentally pessimistic to say: here we are, we're going to change the world, free ourselves from millennia of oppression, eradicate mountains of prejudice, but we can't tackle the labour movement, we'll get swamped.

But we *are* the labour movement, at least a very substantial section of it, and have a damn sight more right to our ideas and needs than the jargon-ridden officials who sit on it. Millions of women *are* in unions, simply to defend their basic interests (and some women, like those at Chix or Grunwicks, go through bitter struggles for the right to organise); millions of women vote Labour and see it as their party. It is already our movement in the sense that women comprise a large part of it: the point is to *make it our movement* in the real sense, in that it takes up our concerns and fights for our interests.

But it will take a fight. *Fightback* can make a start by helping to coordinate those feminists already active as individuals in their unions, Labour Parties, trades councils etc. How we organise together need not in the least be dictated by how the labour movement as a whole functions: it may be as issue campaigns, small groups to help women gain confidence and learn to be more assertive in union meetings, autonomous caucuses organised either by union or by workplace or both, day-schools and workshops to exchange experiences, etc.

The answer to those who fear that the aims of the women's movement would get lost or stifled if it turned its energies towards the labour movement is that, on the contrary, we would be in a position to gain millions more women for the struggle. In transforming the labour movement for our needs, we could call on the support of all those whose interests it is to open up the labour movement to real participation by the mass of its members.

In the Labour Party there is already a struggle going on for greater accountability, more control by the membership, to turn it into a party that can articulate and fight for the real interests of its members. The women's movement has a lot to contribute in showing how particular ways of organising can militate against women's participation. And the entry into the struggle of substantial numbers of radical left-wing women intent on smashing hierarchies could tip the balance against the Callaghans and Healeys.

Does organising in the labour movement mean we have to drop issues of specifically sexual oppression because they're 'personal' and that we only concentrate on 'big' issues of wages, jobs and pensions? The answer is, only if we accept the right of male bureaucrats to define what the labour movement is about. It exists to defend the conditions and forward the interests of all workers. Our right to organise, participate, even our right to work in the first place, are dependent on a whole range of other things.

The present attacks on the welfare state, the social services, the threat to whole communities such as Corby and South Wales, is forcing the labour movement to the realisation that the interests of the working class cannot be narrowly encapsulated by just the question of wages and conditions at work. It is beginning to accept that the fate of the unemployed, the young and old and sick, dependents or wage-earners or claimants, are its responsibility too. With the anti-Corrie campaign we have started to win the argument that 'personal' questions like the right to decide when and if to have children are also class questions.

Nor should we have to buy our right to organise in the labour movement at the cost of putting up with sexist treatment. We have a right to be there and to put forward our views. It is the male chauvinists who should be forced to explain why they think they have a right to abuse sections of the labour movement just because they're women.

If *Fightback for Women's Rights* can mount a strong campaign along these lines — challenging the existing hierarchies, helping to turn bits of the labour movement outwards to join up with struggles of the women's movement, and constructing bridges and signposts to show women ways to get into and organise together inside the labour movement — it could open up whole new territories for the women's movement.



RANK AND FILE MOVEMENTS: 1. THE BUILDING INDUSTRY

JOHN BELL is one of the leading activists in the group that produces the paper *Building Worker*.

He was a member of the International Socialists (now SWP), serving on their National Committee, until he left in 1976. He is now a member of the Labour Party.

Mick O'Sullivan, a UCATT shop steward in Haringey direct works, talked to John Bell about the history of rank-and-file groupings in the building industry.

WHILE IT is true to say that the Communist Party have played a major role in the rank-and-file building groups, they have not totally dominated them, at least not since the 1960s.

We don't know much about the grouping which started in the '30s and was disbanded by the CP in 1955, the New Builders' Leader. The CP have for some reason refused to publish the book about it by Frank Jackson, a lifelong CP member (he died two years ago) and building worker militant. So the history of the New Builders' Leader remains obscure. All I know about it is that one of the major planks of the paper was for union amalgamation. Many of the present-day bureaucracy left the CP at the time the paper was wound up.

The paper Rank and File developed in the mid-'60s. To my knowledge, the paper grew out of a number of unofficial rank and file bodies around the Manchester area. It campaigned against right wing domination, particularly in the craft unions, and was sustained by a number of big and protracted disputes both in the North and in London. Horseferry Rd and the Barbican were examples.

Politically the paper was an amalgam of different forces, from the CP through the SWP/IS to libertarians and anarchists. The Party pulled out and it ground to a halt. As far as I know there was no reason given for this, but certainly I think the credibility IS was getting through the paper determined the pull-out.

The Charter did not develop directly from Rank and File. It was started in 1970 from the Joint Sites Committees, which

were groups of stewards and rank and file members who met to coordinate strikes and disputes. It reactivated the base which Rank and File had organised. Coordination was particularly important given that there were four main unions organising in the building industry.

One of the main cutting edges of the Charter was the struggle for union democracy.

The Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (ASW) under George Smith held a ballot in 1970 to introduce the check-off system and the appointment of regional officials. Smith lost.

When the leadership saw the vote had gone against them, they called for another ballot, to include the Amalgamated Society of Painters and Decorators (ASPD), who were at that time in the process of amalgamating with the ASW to form UCATT, the Union of Construction and Allied Trades Technicians. ASPD had a long history of banning CP members from office and of craft elitism. The second vote went with the bureaucracy.

The struggle to reverse this decision was to be a focus for the Charter. It culminated in the UCATT rules revision conference of 1975, which saw a major defeat for the bureaucracy. Conference voted for election of full-time officials, though check-off was maintained. The Charter had played the role of organiser of the rank and file. It reflected the strength of the CP at the base of the union, and had taken the struggle into the branches.

IS also played a part in this struggle. Many of the leading activists in the Charter were IS members, though of course the CP had far greater numbers.

THE NATIONAL strike of 1972, over the annual pay claim, was the first, and to date the last, national strike of UCATT. Its most important feature was that it was run by the rank and file through local coordinating committees. To a certain extent the bureaucracy lost control to these committees, and we saw the deve-

lopment of the flying pickets adapted from the miners' strike earlier that year.

However, the Charter did not appear. The CP said that the people who produced it were too busy running the strike. I think the real reason was that they were trying to gain favour with the bureaucracy.

At that time George Smith, the general secretary of UCATT, was writing regularly for the Star. If the Charter had appeared, then he would not have touched it with a barge-pole. For King St, a general secretary writing in the Star is a lot more important. It gives them far more credibility, in their opinion, than a rank and file paper.

The IS, in the absence of the Charter, brought out a number of Socialist Worker building workers' specials, which sold very well.

The main thing that came out of the strike was the Shrewsbury 24 case, when 24 North Wales building workers were prosecuted on charges including conspiracy, based on alleged damage caused by flying pickets during the strike.

The Tories wanted a weak industry to have a go at, and they picked on building. The CP at first refused to do anything about it on the grounds that they were criminal charges. So did the bureaucracy. It was Workers' Fight who first took the issue up, and then it gained support from all the left groups. The CP were forced to act because of this initial pressure and the outrage from their own base. Then the Charter began to move on the issue, and after that the union bureaucracy took it up.

Had the union leadership been prepared to take on the Tories in the first instance over the 24, then I think the Government would have backed down. After all, they were treading on dangerous ground. The Pentonville Five were fresh in everyone's memory.

The CP at that time had enough clout to have forced the bureaucracy into action. But they failed to do it. As in so many other cases, they let the leadership off

the hook and tied the Charter to inaction. The Charter was never officially wound up. The beginning of the end was 1976. The CP had won a number of positions in the union, so to a large extent the Charter had lost its rationale for them. Consistently the CP policy has been to attempt to influence the bureaucracy at the expense of organising the rank and file. Such a strategy ends up in a cat and mouse game, with the CP always cast in the role of the mouse.

When they thought they had become part of the Establishment, then the need for organisation round the Charter simply disappeared.

IN 1976 the paper Building Worker started. A number of comrades had left the SWP over the leadership's attempt to channel all our activity into the Right to Work campaign — or, rather, that had been the straw which broke the camel's back.

We, along with SWP members and other non-aligned building workers, continued to attend the Charter meetings. We often found that we had a majority at the meeting. When this happened the CP refused to hold the meetings. Or if we did get anything like support for the Right to Work march through one meeting, the CP would reverse it at the next.

Then we put a resolution for the 1976 Charter conference, condemning UCATT and TGWU rivalry. The CP member who went as delegate did not even bother to get the resolution on the agenda. It must be understood that this rather modest resolution cut across the CP's pro-UCATT line.

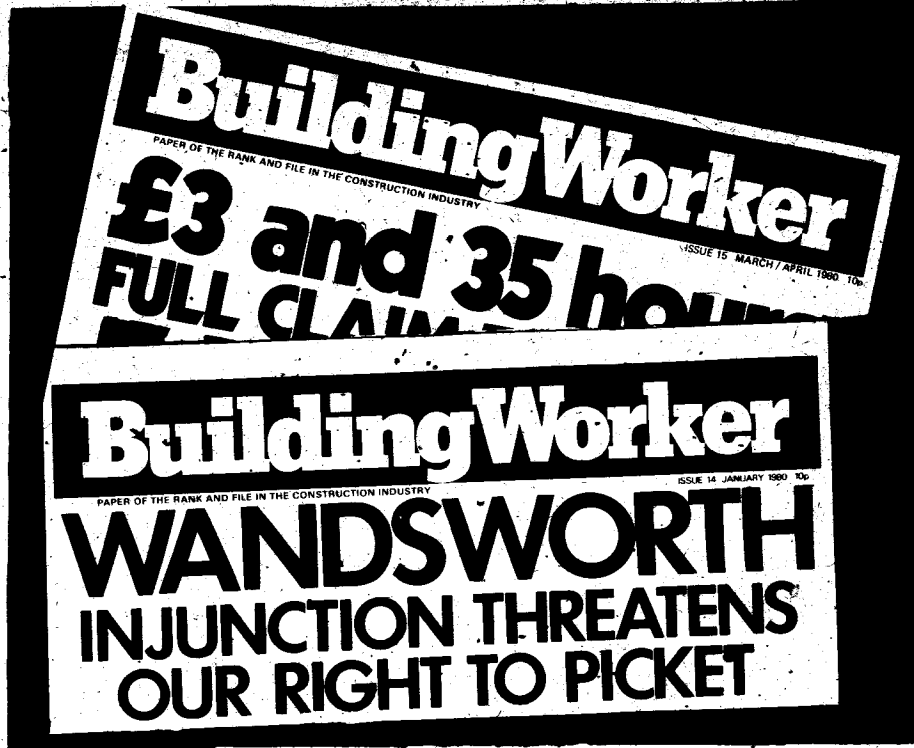
We realised then that they weren't going to accept any democratic decisions, so we decided to leave.

It was shortly after that, though not because of it, that the Charter began to fade away.

The Charter still organised the odd conference, but it had effectively stopped producing the paper. So we started publishing Building Worker.

There is clearly a strong need for con-

Revolutionaries led the fight to defend the Shrewsbury 24



From 30 Horton House, South Lambeth Estate, London SW8.

sistent rank-and-file work in the building industry. You build up the union on site, and then six months or a year later, you have to start all over again. A long job is a year to eighteen months. Thus, in a much more limited way than the Charter was able to do, we attempt to play that coordinating role for the rank and file, filling the gap left by the Charter.

There are members of the SWP, the Labour Party, Big Flame, Workers' Action, IMG, and a couple of CP members in the Building Worker group, so we have certain differences among us. But we manage to work very well as a group.

While this gives us a certain coherence among the individual members of Building Worker, my personal opinion is that both the IMG and the SWP are not interested in rank and file groupings which they don't control. We have difficulty getting articles and even ads placed in their papers.

Our main function has been that of coordinating militants, where this has been possible. It has taken us a long time to build up, but over the last year we have been able to develop this role in terms of helping some strikes and pickets. With our small forces, I don't think this is any small achievement.

Also, we have made an impact on the union bureaucracy. While I can't say we worry them, they certainly know of our existence.

If over the next year or so there isn't an upturn in the struggles, the role of the group will be much more one of holding together militants in different areas.

The economic situation has hit the industry hard. Large numbers of building workers are unemployed, and in UCATT check-off has taken a massive toll on branch life. Before at stewards' nights you could not get in the door. You would have literally hundreds in the room. Now, to a large extent, branches are dead.

In 1978 56% of members' dues were deducted at source. While this is a general trend in most unions, it has a far more sinister side in building. Sub-contractors do deals with the union and buy in bulk orders. The employers hold the cards. Many of the workers don't even know they're in the union.

It has got to the stage now where UCATT has started a price war with the TGWU, whose rates are cheaper. They are offering a six-week rebate if you pay for a year.

This situation has not only destroyed branch life, but also made it virtually impossible for the union to take national action. The contractors would just have to issue instructions to stop paying in to the union, and they couldn't finance a strike.

It is this growing hold of the contractors, plus the slump in the industry, which has put UCATT as a union in such a precarious position. Yet the fact remains that Building Worker is there, and will be in a relatively strong position to help build or initiate a comeback against this trend.

A new 'Fourth International'

ON 27 DECEMBER 1980, after an international conference, the Fourth International (International Committee) was proclaimed. One of the main organisers, the French *Organisation Communiste Internationalisiste* (OCI), declared that "without considering the Fourth International" — the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 — "as already reconstructed", the conference must mark "an important step forward on the road of the reconstruction of the Fourth International, disrupted by Pabloite revisionism in the years 1951-3" (*Informations Ouvrières* 979, 13.12.80).

The OCI added: "The Fourth International, in its whole history, has never before had organisations of the strength and size of the united OCI and of the PST" (Socialist Workers' Party of Argentina).

The OCI has about 5,000 members. The PST claims 5,600. The new FI(IC) also has organisations of some substance in other Latin American countries and in Spain, as well as small groups in many countries (for example, the Socialist Labour Group in Britain).

The FI(IC) has been formed by the fusion of the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International (OCRFI, centred round the OCI) and two currents which split last October-November from the other major would-be Trotskyist international movement, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI): the Bolshevik Faction (centred round the PST) and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (strongest in France and Spain). In several countries, most importantly Spain and Peru, the BF, OCRFI, and/or LTT forces are however still not united at the national level.

In what remains of the USFI, the strongest organisations, the LCR (France) and the SWP (USA), cannot have more than 1,000 to 1,500 members. Then the Spanish organisation and the British (IMG) have, apparently, 500 to 1,000. Most other sections are much weaker. So the USFI is now almost certainly organisationally weaker, though perhaps rather more alert and dynamic, than the rival 'Fourth International' organisation.

IS THIS a positive "process of regroupment of the Trotskyist forces on a world scale", as the organisers of the FI(IC) argue? We think not.

Revolutionary socialism (Trotskyism) is an international programme. Trotskyists, therefore, have always aimed to coordinate and organise their activities internationally.

In Trotsky's lifetime, though detailed practical coordination was extremely weak, Trotskyism was nonetheless clearly one international movement, centred round the heroic figure of Trotsky himself. After Trotsky's murder by a Stalinist agent in 1940, relatively inexperienced comrades led the international movement with increasing difficulty.

In the hard times of the early '50s, international unity eventually collapsed.

The movement split into two factions of comparable weight, but both very weak.

The problem was how to coordinate the work of building Trotskyist parties with the task of relating to the radical and revolutionary movements developing under the control of other political forces. One faction, led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel and centred round the European Trotskyists, tended towards an approach of chasing after every promising radical movement, constructing grand schemes and theories about how to 'assist the evolution' towards socialist struggle. The other faction was a loose alliance of the SWP (USA) (then led by James P. Cannon), British Trotskyists led by Gerry Healy and French Trotskyists led by Pierre Lambert (fore-runners of today's OCI). They counterposed concentration on building their own organisations — an approach which sometimes led to political opportunism when that seemed organisationally advantageous.

The SWP (USA) was always the most rational and balanced of the 'anti-Pabloites', and in 1963 it reunified with the European movement.

But the reunified movement, which took the title USFI, continued the approach of the old Pablo-Mandel faction, despite some protests from Cannon (who by then was well over 70 years old). The Healy-Lambert forces, continuing their own 'International Committee' retreated into sour sectarianism. In 1971 the rump 'International Committee' collapsed, with a split between Healy and Lambert. From then until 1980 the USFI was able to give some plausibility to its claim to be 'the' Fourth International, outside which only sectarian fragments could be found.

In that perspective the founding of the FI(IC) might look more like a reconstitution of the split of 1953. But it is not quite that, either. The resemblance is much closer with the 1963 division, but even then it is far from exact.

NICARAGUA WAS the issue that set things moving. After the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in July 1979, the Bolshevik Faction tried to intervene. The USFI leadership wanted to 'assist the evolution' of the Sandinistas instead. They supported the Sandinistas' expulsion of non-Nicaraguan members of the BF. This support was later toned down by a statement that the expulsion had been a mistake, but at the same time the USFI instructed its members to cease independent activity in Nicaragua and "act as loyal militants" in the Sandinista movement.

The Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency took the side of the Bolshevik Faction. (Prior to 1977 a Leninist-Trotskyist Faction had existed in the USFI, round the SWP (USA). In 1977 the SWP dissolved it. The comrades opposed to the dissolution formed the LTT).

From October there was a de facto split. The LTT already had links with, and was heavily influenced by, the OCI. A three-way link-up was quickly organised. At the end of October a joint 'Parity

Committee' was established.

It called for an open conference of the Trotskyist movement to discuss the crisis provoked by the Nicaraguan revolution and its implications. This might have been promising. *Workers' Action* commented at the time: "Nicaragua poses sharply the to-be-or-not-to-be question for Trotskyism. It therefore calls for, and makes possible, a fresh assessment and appraisal of all the forces of the Trotskyist movement".

We approached the Parity Committee, with a view to taking part in the open conference and the preparations for it. So did other Trotskyists, for example the Workers' Socialist League.

We had been bitterly critical of the OCI in the past. Despite the truth of its criticisms of the USFI on Nicaragua, we were adversely impressed by the fact that the OCI gave very little attention to Nicaragua until the crisis in the USFI erupted, and then spent much more time denouncing the Sandinistas and the USFI than they had supporting the Sandinistas against Somoza. We knew less of the Bolshevik Faction. It had been part of the SWP-led LTF, splitting over differences on Portugal and Angola in 1975-6. What we knew of it did not inspire confidence. Despite all this, it was vital to test the promises and the possibilities.

But those possibilities started disappearing very quickly. The Parity Committee was set up, right from the start, on a far tighter basis than appropriate for organising an open conference. Its founding document made its appeal to "all the organisations basing themselves on the founding programme of the FI, on its foundation in 1938 and its reconstruction in 1943-53, its continuity despite its dislocation in 1951-3 under the effect of Pabloite revisionism". In a letter to us (28 December 1979) they spelled it out: the Parity Committee was based on the position that "the political continuity of the Fourth International has been preserved, through the struggle of the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International and of the organisations and currents, including the BF and the LTT, which undertook the struggle against revisionism within the Unified Secretariat, despite whatever differences there may have been". So this was an 'open' discussion — open to all who accepted in advance that the OCRFI, BF and LTT all represented "the struggle against revisionism"!

The response to the WSL, too, showed the Parity Committee was going back on its programme of an open discussion. The open conference just disappeared. First, January 1980 was mentioned as the date. Then it was postponed. Then it appeared as a conference "open to the United Secretariat and its organisations" — who of course did not wish to attend! (*Informations Ouvrières* 950, 24.5.80). In December 1980 the conference finally took place, and it was not open at all.

At the time of the October split and realignment, there were large and obvious political differences between the OCI/

OCRFI, LTT and Bolshevik Faction. OCI leader Stephane Just even spoke of "enormous differences" (quoted in the OCI magazine *La Verite* no.589). As well as many historical differences associated with 16 years of having been in bitterly opposed organisations, there were live, current differences.

The OCI held Cuba was capitalist. The BF comrades had never been known to dissociate themselves from the USFI line that Cuba was a more-or-less healthy workers' state. The OCI is notorious for barnstorming denunciations of Stalinism, sometimes implying that social democracy is a progressive alternative to Stalinism. BF leader Nahuel Moreno had, in contrast, been noted inside the USFI for a semi-friendly attitude to Maoism, and in a recent polemic he had insisted that there was more democracy in the Stalinist states than in any capitalist country.

There were sharp differences on the Middle East. There were even differences on Nicaragua itself (to use, or not to use, the slogan of the Constituent Assembly).

These differences, surely, called for a full and honest discussion. Instead there was a bureaucratic stitch-up. There is no other way to describe it.

By late November, Stephane Just was declaring that the Parity Committee had a common political platform "of perfect (??) clarity... a clear and solid basis, which... should permit common political actions as from now" (*Informations Ouvrieres* 925, 24.11.79).

Pierre Lambert of the OCI quickly discovered that he had been wrong for nearly 20 years on Cuba. "For some comrades, this was a workers' state. I posed the problem a little differently. Of course, for me, Cuba was a workers' and peasants' government. But I considered that in the situation of collapse that had taken place in Cuba, the nature of the state could not be determined. In that sense I made a parallel with the Committee of Public Safety of 1793-4 [in France], which was an error since there cannot be a state which is neither workers' nor bourgeois" (*IO* 926, 1.12.79).

And Moreno announced, surprisingly to say the least, that "Since 1961, we have denounced the Castroite leadership as a petty-bourgeois leadership alien to the workers' movement, as alien as its strategy of guerilla war..." (*IO* 951, 31.5.80).

Even historical differences were stitched up. After insisting that the 1963 reunification was "positive" (Andreas Delgado, *IO* 926, 1.12.80), the BF finally consented to say that the reunification was "the product of confusion [and] speeded up confusion" (Parity Committee declaration, February 1980: *International Correspondence* no.2). And the whole Parity Committee was committed to the peculiar OCI theory that the productive forces have declined since World War 2, and to the views, or at least the rhetoric, of the OCI on Stalinism.

A common position was also taken on the invasion of Afghanistan... but a remarkably incoherent position. The Parity Committee argued that the opposition to the Taraki/Amin regime (in fact mostly tribal-based and backward-looking) was a deformed expression of the world proletarian revolution, and the



Founding conference of the new 'F.I.'

USSR's invasion, suppressing that revolution, actually served the interests of imperialism.

"The Kremlin bureaucracy thus made use of its presence to maintain the bourgeois semi-colonial state upright and, thereby, to maintain the link of subordination to imperialism..."

"The revolutionary wave which started in Iran could not fail to have destabilising effects in Afghanistan. While religion can be understood to serve as a means by which people express their feeling of nationhood, the movement which permits the rebellion against the central power is not a 'religious' movement any more than it is in Iran. It forms part of the general mobilisation of the masses in the region. It is directed against a state which remains a semi-colonial state..." (*International Correspondence* no.1).

"The rising of the worker and peasant masses of Afghanistan took place in the framework of the development of the proletarian revolution in the whole area, and is part of it" (*International Correspondence* no.2)

So the Parity Committee correctly assessed the invasion as reactionary — but it evaded, by constructing a mythical picture of events, all the real issues behind that assessment. It also evaded the logical conclusions from that assessment. It did not call for the withdrawal of the Russian troops! Stated reason: defence of the nationalised property relations in the USSR. But the Parity Committee itself noted: "a military attack against the USSR seems highly improbable" (*IC* 2). So how are the nationalised property relations threatened? — unless every setback to the USSR in world diplomacy and power-politics is to be considered a potential threat to the property relations, in which case 'defence of the USSR' would mean near-total subordination to the Kremlin's diplomacy.

The cracks in such reasoning have been stuffed with a sort of rhetorical ideological putty: "we are in the epoch of the impending world revolution... [a continuous] revolutionary rise [since 1943]... the process which is irresistibly driving the masses to oppose the exploitation of man by man... the process which is driving the masses towards the world socialist revolution... the inter-penetration of

the struggle of the masses tends to unify the revolution which is going forward... The revolution is going forward and will triumph" (*International Correspondence* no.2).

And so joint 'theses' were put together for the founding conference of the Fourth International (International Committee) — without the slightest real open discussion ever taking place. (These theses are not available to us at the time of writing).

1953, FOR ALL the confusion involved, was a split produced by a genuine, living effort to grapple with the political issues, on both sides. This 1979-80 realignment is more like a bureaucratic swapping of alliances between some of the powerful nationally-based groupings which have dominated all would-be 'Internationals' since the breakdown of the early '50s. The politics and the theory have been squared after the event. The impulse which the Nicaraguan revolution could have given to clarifying the revolutionary movement has been stifled. An opportunity has been missed.

But there are lessons to be drawn, and there will be people to draw them. Now there are two would-be 'Fourth Internationals' of comparable weight, no-one can stake a claim to be the authoritative centre of world Trotskyism purely on the basis of organisational inclusiveness. Any such claims must be argued out politically. And the argument can hardly fail to make it clear to many comrades that there is no Fourth International today, no authoritative centre of world Trotskyism. Much of the theoretical, political and organisational work necessary to build a real revolutionary International remains to be done. It must be tackled seriously — with theoretical and political dialogue which confronts the real problems, with work to establish a real intervention in the workers' movement where we have the chance to do that, and with collaboration where feasible. Neither of the two now-dominant blocs in world Trotskyism, neither the USFI nor the FI(IC), is stable. New workers' struggles, new political issues, will break up the patchwork alliances. And when they do, the experience of the Parity Committee will stand as witness that the Trotskyist movement needs, not 'reconstruction' in the form of organisational jugglery, but thoroughgoing political and organisational regeneration.

**OUR
MOVEMENT
60 YEARS
AGO**

The Third International: Organising the revolutionaries to revolutionise the movement



Trotsky, Lenin and Kumenev discussing at the Second Congress

Many of the basic ideas of revolutionary Marxism were formulated most clearly and comprehensively by the first four Congresses of the Third International, between 1919 and 1922. Stan Crooke reviews the ideas of the Second [1920] Congress — one of the most important.

ON THE OUTBREAK of the first imperialist World War in 1914, the mass social-democratic parties affiliated to the Second International collapsed into nationalism and class collaboration. Instead of mobilising the working class against the imperialist slaughter, the leaders of the Second International became recruiting sergeants for their own ruling classes. Lenin recognised that this betrayal marked the ultimate bankruptcy of the Second International, and set about preparing the ground for the founding of a new, Third International.

The first congress of this new International, held in Moscow in 1919, could

not have been held in any other country. Few of the delegates represented really functioning parties.

But by the time of the Second Congress, which opened in Petrograd [Leningrad] 60 years ago this July, the situation was very different. Functioning Communist Parties now existed in a whole number of countries, and the colonies of European and American imperialism were also well represented at the Congress. It was this, second, Congress, rather than the first, which laid the political and organisational foundations of the Third International, and its debates are still of vital relevance to revolutionaries today.

The Third International was a very different organisation from the Second International. The Second International, as the Russian Communist [Bolshevik] leader Zinoviev contemptuously pointed out, had been a 'letter-box'. It had operated as little more than an information centre and talking shop, turning a blind eye to the acts of betrayal and class collaboration committed by the affiliated organisations.

Its attitude towards the struggle for socialism had been a passive, propagandistic one: socialism was seen as inevitable, sooner or later, so the only thing left

to help along the steady and inevitable process of socialist advance.

The Third International was based on a fundamentally different outlook: "We want to organise ourselves as a fighting organisation that not only propagates communism but also wants to turn it *into deeds*, and to create an international organisation for the purpose... We want to be an *international of deeds*... The Third International is to be an instrument of *struggle*".

It was this basic idea of a single international fighting organisation, mobilising and leading forward the working class on a world scale for head-on confrontation and overthrow of capitalism and imperialism, which ran through all the major debates at the Congress.

But the first debate which had to be won was whether or not a party was needed at all to carry out the revolution. A minority of the delegates, particularly those from Britain and America who had been influenced by the syndicalist movements in their countries, believed that all political parties would end up betraying workers as those of the Second International had done in August 1914.

The minority was certainly correct to condemn the parties of the Second Inter-

□ August 1914: Major parties of the Socialist [2nd] International support their 'own' ruling classes in the World War. Lenin, Trotsky, and other revolutionary leaders come out for a new International.

□ March 1915: International socialist women's conference condemns the war.

□ September 1915: Zimmerwald conference of left wing socialists condemns the war but fails to call for a new International.

□ April 1916: Second anti-war socialist conference, at Kienthal — closer to Lenin's position.

□ November 1917: Bolshevik revolution in Russia. In 1918-20 revolutionary upsurges followed in Germany, Hungary, and Italy, and a huge political ferment in other countries.

□ January 1919: Lenin and Trotsky invite revolutionaries to the founding conference of a new International, to be based on the principles of the Bolsheviks and of the German Spartacusbund.

□ March 1919: Founding congress

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national; but their mistake was to generalise from this and write off all political parties. In doing so they were allowing themselves to be influenced by bourgeois ideology and propaganda. Zinoviev said: "Every good bourgeois joins a political party as soon as he is 21. But to the workers he comes with propaganda against joining parties, and quite often he catches workers hook, line and sinker".

And not only were the revolutionary syndicalists wrong to believe that the bankruptcy of the Second International meant the bankruptcy of the party type of organisation. They were also illogical. After all, the trade unions had been guilty of crimes against the working class just as gross as those committed by the political parties of the Second International. But the syndicalists did not argue that the idea of trade unions was bankrupt, although, logically, they ought to have.

The class struggles in Russia and Hungary proved, in different ways, the need for a revolutionary party. The October Revolution and the overthrow of capitalism in Russia would have been impossible but for the existence of a Bolshevik party. "If we had not had a centralised, military, iron-disciplined party, which we organised for twenty years, we would have been beaten twenty times over" (Zinoviev).

In Hungary, on the other hand, the numerical and political weaknesses of the party had led it to rely on the trade unions, with fatal consequences. The unions had been entrusted with tasks such as the re-organisation of production, the formation of a Red Army, the distribution of food, etc.

"But", the Hungarian Communist leader Rakosi recounted, "it emerged that these questions could not be solved by them. They did indeed take on these tasks, but in no area did they achieve a satisfactory solution to them. Not only because they were mostly reactionary but also because they were not created to solve political questions. After a few months we were faced with the absolute necessity of forming a strong new Communist party".

But the "centralised, military, iron-disciplined party" which Zinoviev talked of was not simply a necessity for organisational reasons. It was also a political necessity. Because the bourgeoisie controls all the means of propaganda, culture and information in capitalist society (schools, mass media, the church, etc.), the thinking and actions of the working class come to be dominated by bourgeois ideology. Only a party which has purged itself of all bourgeois influences and is a concrete embodiment of revolutionary socialist struggle can break the working class from bourgeois ideology and organise it to overthrow capitalism.

For the Third International the Communist Party was not just a collection of industrial militants. The party was a part of the working class, but also differed from the whole working class in that it had "an overall view of the whole historical road of the working class in its total

ity". It was "the organisational and political lever with whose help the advanced part of the working class can steer the whole mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat onto the correct road".

However correct the syndicalists were to recognise the absolute bankruptcy after 1914 of the parties of the Second International, they were wrong to oppose all party-type organisations. The collapse of the Second International did not signal the bankruptcy of all parties. What it did signal was the need to create a new party of the proletariat: the Communist Party, modelled on the Bolshevik Party which Lenin had built in Russia.

Trotsky declared: "I proceed from the assumption that there is a rather sharp contradiction between the march of historical events and the opinion expressed here with such Marxist magnanimity [by Paul Levi of the German CP] to the effect that the broad masses of workers are already excellently aware of the necessity of the party. It is self-evident that if we were dealing here with Messrs Scheidemann, Kautsky or their English co-thinkers, it would, of course, be unnecessary to convince these gentlemen that a party is indispensable to the working class. They have created a party for the working class and handed it over into the service of bourgeois and capitalist society..."

"Just because I know that the party is indispensable, and am very well aware of the value of the party, and just because I see Scheidemann on the one side and, on the other, American or Spanish or French syndicalists who not only wish to fight



Zinoviev. against the bourgeoisie but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off — for this reason I say that I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American and French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable for the fulfillment of the historical mission which is placed upon them — the destruction of the bourgeoisie. I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience, and not by counterposing to them Scheidemann's long years of experience and saying that for the majority this question has already been settled".

And the main fire of the Congress was directed against the Social-Democratic renegades and traitors. "Opportunism is our main enemy", declared Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution. "Here is our main enemy and we have to defeat this enemy. We must go away from this Congress with the firm resolve to carry on this struggle right to the end in every

Why then were delegates from the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), the French Socialist Party (SFIO), and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), invited to the Congress? All of them contained their fair share of right-wingers and waverers (centrists), especially among their parliamentary representatives and top leaders. Their delegacies were accepted not in the hope of reaching some compromise with the opportunists, but in order to sharpen the contradictions in these parties to the point of a split and win over the majority.

Particularly in the case of the SFIO and the USPD, the right-wing leaders had sent delegates to the Congress under the pressure of their leftward-moving rank and file. The leaders hoped that in exchange for making a few left speeches at Congress, the Third International would provide them with a left cover to carry on with their opportunism and treachery at home.

But Lenin and the Executive Committee of the Third International insisted on posing the political differences clearly.

As Zinoviev put it at the end of the 7th session of the Congress: "I ask the Congress, have we lost anything by negotiating so clearly and so exhaustively with these representatives? Will it be bad if yesterday's and today's minutes are published and workers read them?... In this way we will talk to the workers who still have confidence in the centrists. What would we have told them if we had not negotiated with Cachin and Frossard?" (delegates from the SFIO).

The right-wingers in the leadership of organisations like the USPD, PSI and SFIO were exposed to withering criticism, on the basis of their political record of opportunism and class collaboration. The USPD leadership (which included figures like Kautsky and Bernstein) had "sabotaged the revolutionary struggle and until now had given the best service to the bourgeoisie". Turati and the other leaders of the right wing minority of the PSI were denounced as "carrying out counter-revolutionary propaganda". The Third International demanded that the PSI make a clear break from these "people who have been saying the same thing for 30 years because they are consistent reformists".

There could be no room for such people in the national sections of the Third International. The parties affiliated to the Third International were to be the centralised shock troops of the workers, and there was no place in them for the right-wing and opportunist deadwood set adrift by the collapse of the Second International: "These gentlemen should not be allowed to remain in our party and sabotage our fight. We have too many open enemies to allow our concealed enemies into our party" (Zinoviev).

So in its approach to the waverers the Third International combined absolute firmness of principles with flexibility of tactics. In his pamphlet, *Left-wing Communism*, written just before the Congress, Lenin argued: "attacks of the German Lefts on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany for entertaining the idea of a bloc with the 'Independents' [USPD]... appear to us to be utterly frivolous and a clear proof that the 'Lefts' are in the wrong... The German Independent Social-Democratic Party [USPD] is obviously not a homogeneous body: alongside the old opportunist leaders... there has arisen in this party a Left, proletarian wing which is

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growing with remarkable rapidity... To fear a 'compromise' with this wing of the party is positively ridiculous. On the contrary, it is obligatory for the Communists to seek and to find a suitable form of compromise with them, such a compromise as, on the one hand, would facilitate and accelerate the necessary complete fusion with this wing and, on the other, would in no way hamper the Communists in their ideological and political struggle against the opportunist Right wing of the 'Independents'...

In the months following the Congress both the USPD and the SFIO split, and in 1922 the PSI as well. The great majority of the USPD and the SFIO came over to the Third International, though in Italy, partly because of the rigid ultra-leftism of the Communist nucleus led by Amadeo Bordiga, only a minority of the PSI came over to Communism.

The task of the Communist Parties was not just to combat the organisations openly loyal to the bourgeoisie, it was also their task to drive out all agents of the class enemy within the labour movement as well, which demanded a final and irrevocable break with the hardened reformists and opportunists of the USPD, SFIO, and PSI leaderships.

But when Lenin spoke to the wavering PSI leader, Serrati, his advice was: Split with Turati [the PSI's leading right-winger] — and then form an alliance with him.

The sixth of the 19 theses on the role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution adopted by the congress began: "The most important task of a truly Communist Party consists in always remaining in the closest contact with the broadest layers of the proletariat". Communists were not simply the guardians of some perfect programme; they had to fight for the programme in the working class, which involved fighting in the existing trade unions.

The most 'pure' ultra-leftists argued that it was wrong to fight for higher wages, since higher wages would reduce the militancy of the working class — but industrial sabotage was a valid method of struggle against the bosses.

Karl Radek, a militant prominent in both the German and Russian revolutionary movements, replied. The winning of wage increases was necessary to maintain the "fighting fitness" of the workers, and opposition to fighting for higher wages was based on the myth perpetuated by the Second International that capitalism would inevitably collapse of its own accord. Nor was industrial sabotage of any use: it was an individualistic method of struggle, whereas Communists fought to mobilise the masses, for "the extension of the fighting front by enlisting millions of fighting workers, the sharpening and prolonging of the fight and the unification of the fighting masses".

But the main source of opposition to Communists working in the existing trade unions came from some syndicalists present at the Congress. They believed it to be impossible to do any useful work in

trade unions were needed.

"It is simply nonsense and ridiculous to talk of conquering the old trade unions with their ossified bureaucracy", argued the British delegate Willie Gallacher, for, despite working in the unions for 25 years, "we have never succeeded in revolutionising them from the inside. Every time we succeeded in making one of our own comrades an official of the trade unions... the trade unions corrupted our own comrades".

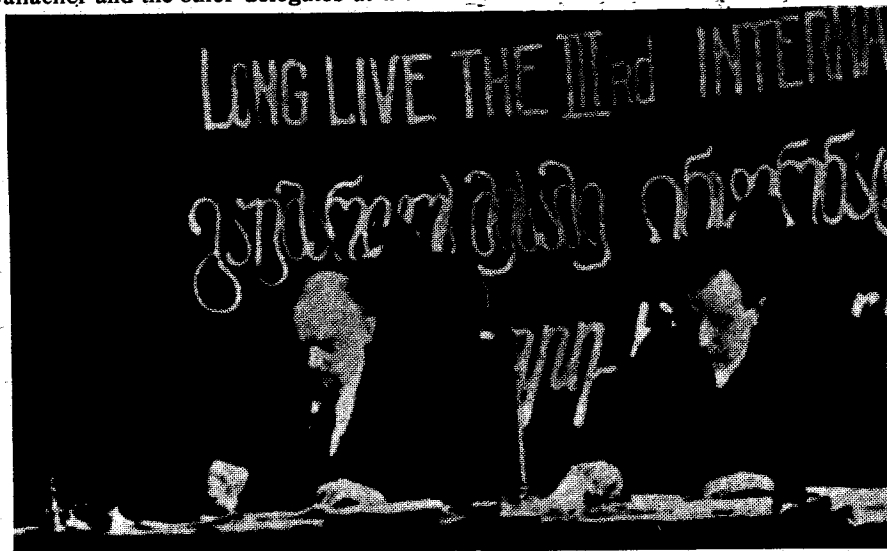
Gallacher went on to deny that the unions were a road to the masses: "in a trade union with 500 members, there are normally only 30 members at the trade union meeting, and the latter is under the control of the bureaucracy". Gallacher's pessimistic conclusion was that "it is as nonsensical to talk of winning the trade unions as it is to talk of winning the capitalist state".

The starting point for the arguments of Gallacher and the other delegates at the

overthrow capitalism! The argument for breakaway union was in fact a totally pessimistic one which, if correct, would have meant that the socialist revolution was impossible: if the rank and file of the unions could not be mobilised to defeat their own bureaucracy, they could never be mobilised to smash capitalism.

In two cases the Congress did sanction the formation of new unions. If the regime in the existing union was so totalitarian that it was absolutely impossible to carry out revolutionary agitation in them. And if an existing union, because of its craft-chauvinistic outlook, failed to organise unskilled workers, as was the case with the American Federation of Labour.

But apart from these exceptions it was the job of Communists to fight in the existing union. The logic behind this position was the logic which dominated the whole of the Congress: Marxism was not a set of formulae, but a guide to action.



Congress who shared his position was a healthy gut reaction against the conservative craft chauvinism which dominated many European and (even more) American unions, and the class collaborationist role played by the trade unions during the war. But the conclusion they drew was a suicidal one.

For revolutionaries to withdraw from the existing unions would have been an act of voluntary self-isolation from the millions organised in the unions and would have played right into the hands of the union bureaucracy. It would mean that the bureaucrats, freed of any opposition within the union, would have a free hand in keeping down the rank and file and selling out their interests at every opportunity.

"We have not one, but a hundred, proofs of the fact that the trade union bureaucracy will festively greet the day that the Communists leave their ranks... Our comrades know that would be just like uncoupling the locomotive from a train and driving around with it, but leaving the train itself to its fate", declared the German Communist Jacob Walcher.

In fact the argument for breakaway unions was based on a single, massive contradiction. On the one hand the syndicalists argued that the masses were straining at the leash and that revolution was imminent; on the other hand they claimed that the bureaucracy in the unions could not be overthrown by the membership.

But the union membership which was too weak to overthrow the bureaucracy

Communists had to go where the masses were and fight for their politics there, rather than isolate themselves and preach from the sidelines.

The debate around the issue of whether revolutionaries should participate in bourgeois parliaments was in many ways a parallel to the trade union debate. The two sides in the two debates were roughly the same, and one side was again guided by superstitious fears of what might happen to revolutionaries in parliament, whilst the other based itself on the idea that there was no corner of society into which Communists did not carry the class struggle.

Gallacher and others believed that the Third International was on the road to becoming opportunist by advocating work in Parliament, for "one cannot demand agitation from those who enter Parliament. The Communist Parties all over the world now have something other to do than wasting time on parliamentary elections". As far as Gallacher was concerned therefore, anyone entering parliament would automatically become a traitor and a reformist in the 'best' traditions of the Second International.

With some very important exceptions, the parliamentarians of the Second International did sell out the workers — but there was nothing automatic or inevitable about it. It had been the result of the weaknesses of the individuals and, more importantly, of the organisations to which they belonged. A thoroughly revolutionary organisation of hardened Bolsheviks need have no qualms about its members

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in parliament. In fact, if a would-be revolutionary organisation could not keep its parliamentarians under control, then it could never carry out a revolution:

Lenin pointed out: "If you said: 'Comrades, workers, we are so weak that we cannot create such a disciplined party that forces its members of parliament to obey it', then the workers would desert you, they would say to themselves: 'How shall we set up the dictatorship of the proletariat with such weak people?'"

It was significant that it was the weakest and smallest parties at the Congress which were opposed to work in parliament, whilst the stronger ones, including the only one to have ever carried out a revolution, were in favour of it. There was nothing inevitable about revolutionaries ending up as reformists in parliament — it was a reflection of the weakness or strength of the organisation to which they belonged.

And the very fact that revolutionaries had successfully worked in parliament proved that no inevitable degeneration of revolutionaries took place. In Germany, Karl Liebknecht had successfully used parliament as a platform for revolutionary agitation, just as the Bolsheviks had in Russia, or the Communist Party in Bulgaria was doing at the time of the Second Congress itself.

The anti-parliamentarians argued that socialism could never be achieved through parliament, and therefore it was



Sylvia Pankhurst

useless, if it did not create illusions, to work in parliament. After all, Communists had better things to do than 'waste time on parliamentary elections'.

They were certainly correct to recognise that there could be no parliamentary road to socialism. But the question was how this fact was to be proven to the millions who still had illusions in parliament? Was it to be done by giving lectures on what's wrong with bourgeois democracy, or by exposing the sham nature of parliament from the inside, by "blowing them up from the inside" as Bukharin put it. The history of the Bolshevik Party showed that the latter was the only path to follow:

"How will you reveal the true nature of parliament to the really backward masses deceived by the bourgeoisie if you don't enter it?... the history of the Russian revolution has clearly proved

that the great masses of the working class, of the peasant class and of the petty clerks would not have been convinced by any arguments if they had not made their own experiences." (Lenin)

The anti-parliamentarians believed parliament could be exposed, and socialism achieved by passive lecturing and propagandising. The advocates of revolutionary parliamentarianism recognised that these two tasks could be achieved only by the conscious intervention of revolutionaries answerable to a consistently revolutionary Communist Party. And since the October Revolution had been executed by adopting the latter method of work, the congress called on "all comrades to enter parliament with the cry 'Down with parliamentarianism.'"

The thirteenth session of the congress was dominated by the question of whether the various revolutionary groups in Britain, at that time in the process of fusion to form the Communist Party, should affiliate to the Labour Party. Affiliation had been debated long before the Congress. Sylvia Pankhurst's arguments against affiliation had a certain ring of familiarity about them: "The Labour Party is very large numerically, though its membership is to a great extent quiescent and apathetic, consisting of many workers who have joined the trade unions because their workmates are trade unionists, and to share the friendly benefits... We must not dissipate our energy in adding to the strength of the Labour Party... We must concentrate on making a communist movement that will vanquish it."

At the Congress itself affiliation was argued against for much the same reasons as Pankhurst had put forward in the debate in Britain. Gallacher argued that affiliation would be a diversion from the revolutionary struggle, and that it "would cause the Communist Party to distort its character", whilst Tanner claimed that affiliation "would do great damage to the British Party, for the whole British working class is sick and tired of the tactics of the Labour Party."

Pankhurst argued against affiliation on the grounds that "all members of the parties which belong to the Labour Party are subjected to the strictest discipline," and therefore they would be "forced by membership of the Labour Party" to adopt reactionary politics. Given the connection between the Labour Party and the Unions, affiliation to it would mean handing over the fate of the British working class to the "ossified, bureaucratic trade unions".

But Lenin argued, successfully, in favour of affiliation. The different approaches which had led Lenin and Pankhurst to different conclusions on the question of affiliation were a duplicate of the different approaches to the question of work in parliament. Pankhurst's argument was based on a superstitious fear of what might happen to revolutionaries in the Labour Party and therefore wanted Communists to keep a healthy distance from it. Lenin, on the other hand, wanted communists to fight for the leadership of the British working class inside the Labour Party, just as they should fight inside of Parliament for the same purpose.

Lenin agreed that "The Labour Party is a thoroughly reactionary party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie."

"A party affiliated to the Labour Party is able... to mention the old leaders by name and call them social traitors... In such circumstances it would be a mistake not to join the party"

Lenin

Even so, the Communists should join it in order to reach the workers in the Labour Party and the millions in the trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party. The British Communist Party could be a real workers' party only if it really linked up with the masses and fought against the reactionary, corrupt leaders of the British labour movement. And it was possible to attack these leaders from inside the Labour Party: "a party affiliated to the Labour Party is able, not only to severely criticise, but openly and specifically to mention the old leaders by name and call them social traitors... In such circumstances it would be a mistake not to join the party."

The British Communist Party was not to be a party of propagandists, but a combat organisation fighting to win support for their ideas and drive the agents of the bourgeoisie out of the labour movement. Just as it was necessary to get into parliament to expose the sham of bourgeois democracy, so it was necessary to get into the Labour Party to expose the traitors who led, and lead it: "When communists enjoy such freedom, it is their duty to join the Labour Party."

Apart from a debate about the theses on the agrarian question, the other main debate at the Congress focused on the national and colonial struggles against imperialism. The Second International had never bothered itself with such struggles, but for the Communist International the struggle for socialism was inseparable from the struggle against imperialist oppression.

But the question arose as to which movements in the colonies should be supported by Communists. Originally Lenin had argued for support for "bourgeois-democratic movements", but after discussions with M.N. Roy, an Indian in the Mexican delegation, changed to support only for "national revolutionary movements".

The "non-revolutionary" bourgeois-democratic movements were exemplified by the Congress Party in India, a party of the Indian wealthy classes, which was far from being consistently anti-imperialist: it was more concerned with reaching an amicable agreement with British imperialism than driving it out of India. The same developments had taken place elsewhere, "so that, very often, even perhaps in most cases, the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries, although they also support national movements, nevertheless fight against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes with a certain degree of agreement with the imperialist bourgeoisie, that is to say together with it."

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'National revolutionary' movements did not share the revolutionary socialist politics of the Communist International. In fact they too were bourgeois-democratic in the final analysis: "There can be no doubt of the fact that any nationalist movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement because the great mass of the population of the backward countries consists of the peasantry which is representative of bourgeois-democratic relations." (Lenin) What distinguished the national revolutionary movements from the bourgeois democratic ones was their consistent anti-imperialism. Instead of "the programme of political liberation with the conservation of capitalist order," they were based on the "struggle of the property-less peasantry for their liberation from every kind of exploitation."

British imperialism's oppression of Ireland and the duty of socialists in Britain in relation to this, was constantly raised in the course of this debate. It was a life and death question for the British revolution to break British workers from the chauvinism which bound them to their own ruling classes. Radek declared: "If British workers, instead of opposing bourgeois prejudices, support British imperialism or tolerate it passively, then they are working for the suppression of every revolutionary movement in Britain today."

As MacAlpine, an American delegate, pointed out, the English working

class had largely failed to understand the problems raised by Ireland, and the same applied to the revolutionaries. The British bourgeoisie were able to use Ireland to divide the working class and create the illusion of a false "community of interests" between the British ruling classes and British workers on the issue of Ireland.

The policies of British socialists about Ireland were not to be some "bourgeois humanitarian reaction to oppression", but rather the expression of common class interests between the oppressed masses of the two countries. It was the duty of British revolutionaries to "help the Irish movement with all their strength, to agitate amongst the British troops, to use all their resources to block the policy that the British transport and railway unions are at present pursuing of permitting troop transports to be shipped to Ireland." (Radek)

"The British socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland against the London plutocracy deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet"

Trotsky

In the manifesto of the Second Congress, Trotsky underlined it: "The British socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against the London plutocracy — such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a

bullet, but in no case merits either a mandate or the confidence of the proletariat."

On the issue of the colonial, anti-imperialist struggles, as on all other questions, the Third International marked a clean break with the wretched tradition of the Second International. While the Second International paid lip-service to internationalism, but in practice had turned a blind eye to imperialist oppression, the Third International worked to unite the struggles in both the colonial and imperialist countries into a single struggle for the overthrow of world capitalism.

An abyss separated the two internationals. The Second International combined an elitist, bureaucratic attitude towards the class struggle, believing socialism would come about of its own accord, with a grossly opportunist, class-collaborationist practice. The Third International was to be a single party of world revolution of which the national sections would wage the war against the exploiters on every front of the class struggle. The debates at the Second Congress of the Communist International provided the national sections with the weapons to wage that struggle. As Trotsky put it in his speech to the Congress:

"With your hands, comrades, we have fanned a blaze in our Moscow forge. In this blaze we have heated the proletarian steel to white heat, we have worked it with the hammer of our proletarian Soviet revolution, we have tempered it with the experience of the civil war and forged a splendid, and incomparable sword for the international proletariat.

"We will arm ourselves with this sword, we will arm others with it. We say to the workers of the whole world: 'We have forged a strong sword in the Moscow fire. Take it in your hands — and plunge it into the heart of world capital.'"



THE LEFT AND AFGHANISTAN 'MILITANT' ON THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

UNLIKE most other would-be Trotskyists, Workers' Action opposed the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and called for the withdrawal of the troops. John O'Mahony examines the arguments put forward in favour of supporting the Russian occupation by 'Militant'.

"What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude towards oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their 'rights' and parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of those rights. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in advanced countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection; and it assumes full responsibility for their work in the face of 'civilised' executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over that boundary remains centrism".

Leon Trotsky, 'What Next'.

THE Russian invasion of Afghanistan was a test case for the attitude of political tendencies towards Stalinism and towards the rights of oppressed nations.

Militant took some time to hammer out its response to the invasion. It took a very long article by Ted Grant and then, a month later, another long article by Lynn Walsh supplementing it, before their line was clear. The following article examines the emergence of Militant's line on the invasion of Afghanistan as expressed in those two articles and in an article by Alan Woods, published in July 1980, which brutally expressed the satisfaction with which this 'Trotskyist' tendency greeted the prospect of a Stalinist transformation in Afghanistan.

Militant's first response to the invasion was a three-page long article by Ted Grant (Militant, 18.1.80). The last third of the article fell apart into an unintegrated series of musings and reflections, not too far above the stream-of-consciousness level. We shall see the consequences. Despite that it was a knowledgeable analysis of the events that preceded the Russian occupation. Though the analytical framework was different, the essential features of Grant's description paralleled that presented in Workers' Action (12.1.80 and 19.1.80).

In contrast to the fantasies peddled by others who call themselves Trotskyists, (especially the SWP-USA and the large part of the USFI which consists of its international satellites), Grant knew quite well who it was that had made the original so-called revolution, that is the military coup of April 1978.

"The April 1978 coup was based on a movement of the elite of the Army and the intellectuals and the top layers of professional middle-class people in the cities". But he does not know what it was that they made. His definition of the regime that resulted rings strange in the ears of a Marxist, "... Conditions of mass misery and the corruption of the Daud regime resulted in a proletarian Bonapartist coup. Proletarian Bonapartism is a system in which landlordism and capitalism have been abolished [when?], but where power has not passed into the hands of the people, but is held by a one-party, military-political dictatorship".

He goes on. "After the seizure of power, they abolished the mortgages and other debts of the peasants, who were completely dominated by the usurers, and carried through a land reform".

Now if this is what happened, it becomes impossible to explain why the regime had so little popular support, why its initial support declined, and why it needed the Russian Army to keep it in power.

What the PDP did

They *did* decree an end to usury and a cancellation of debts; they decreed steps towards equality for women; and they legislated a land reform — *but they could not carry them out.* Everywhere and in everything, they proved to have *neither* popular support that would move to gain through mass actions what the regime decreed, *nor, alternatively,* the strength and resources to manipulate from the top and to wean people from the age-old network of dependence on landlords, usurers, and priests (often the same people). They had neither a banking system to offer instead of the system around the usurers, nor an agricultural supply system to carry through the land reform. Their efforts from on high alienated the people, and their good intentions found real expression mainly in bureaucratic/military repression of their own people.

The whole experience was shaped by these facts. The Afghan 'revolution' was a coup by the officer corps of the air force and a section of the officer corps of the army, differing from other efforts by officers in backward societies to take the role of developers of the country (e.g. the coup of 1968 in Peru) in that the officers, trained and equipped by the USSR since 1955, took the bureaucratic USSR as their social model. And they took the bureaucracy itself as their model for their own future role.

Because of the link with the USSR and the magnetic attraction of the Stalinist states on the central state forces of Afghanistan, the PDP gained its major force in the Army and among the urban

middle class, especially in Kabul. Estimates of its strength at the time of the coup range from 2000 (in an extremely well-informed article in the Financial Times in 1978) to 10,000 (Intercontinental Press, publication of the SWP-USA, which, give or take a few ritual criticisms, acted for six months after the invasion as vulgar propagandist for the USSR and the PDP in the style of the CPs in the 30s).

How extraordinary this was is best seen if translated into British figures. Its equivalent would be for a 'party' of between 5,000 and 25 or 30,000 to seize power in Britain via the Army! Even this comparison is inexact, because of the structure of society in Afghanistan. The divide separating town from country, centuries and even millennia wide in terms of culture and development, meant that the Party and the upper layers of the Army were sealed off from the masses in a way that would be impossible for even a small party in Britain.

Thus the PDP began alienated from the masses; and *their behaviour* deepened the alienation and drove masses into the hands of the landlords and mullahs. This happened because of the extraordinarily elitist, bureaucratic, militarist, commandist attitude adopted by the regime. (It was absolutely typical of such military regimes, whether of right or 'left' persuasion, though there are examples of radical state-capitalist regimes far less elitist than was the PDP/Army regime). Brute military force was their essential tool, at least outside of the main towns;

and a severe permanent police-state terror decimated even the supporters of the April coup. The PDP used force from the beginning with terrible abandon, sending the airforce with bombs and napalm against recalcitrant villages. They seem to have thought this would be sufficient to implement their programme.

One gets a strange feeling from the accounts of the brutal regime of government ukases backed by napalm. It was as if they knew neither their own society nor themselves. They acted as if 'the revolution' was already made, as if the government could command the forces and the tides by its very word.

State capitalist

It was as if they were mimicking the established Russian bureaucracy. The PDP was a bureaucratic, militaristic social formation in control of the state apparatus (though a state apparatus not even traditionally in full control of the society — one whose rural subjects are accustomed to bearing arms and acting for themselves). But the PDP stood on one side of a revolutionary transformation which had yet to be won, led, or even

evoked. And the Russian bureaucracy — on which they modelled themselves — stands on the other side of a revolution of the working class and peasant masses, erecting its power on that revolution's political grave but also on its social-economic achievements and accomplishments.

In fact, as the statement of the Workers Action editorial board defined it (9.2.80):

"The 20-month history of the PDP-Army regime, until the Russian invasion essentially put an end to it and replaced it, was marked by the narrow base of the regime and the attempt to use the armed forces as the instrument of a social transformation which proved obnoxious, for varying reasons, to the big majority of the population.

"Despite its unusually close links with the bureaucracy of the degenerated workers' state, the regime never got beyond the stage of being a military-bureaucratic state capitalist regime attempting to carry through the bourgeois programme of land reform, educational reform, and some easing of the enslavement of women.

"Its methods in relation to the Afghan masses were never other than military-bureaucratic; the bombing and strafing of villages, including the use of napalm, from the first weeks of the regime, and the figure of 400,000 mainly non-combatant refugees, graphically sum up the military-bureaucratic regime's relationship with the Afghan masses."

The central point is that the PDP did not carry through a revolution, and proved unable to do so. There are few clearer examples of the impotence of the middle class to achieve a revolution and open the way for serious development in the Third World today (though there are special problems in Afghanistan).

It was a middle-class regime, symbiotic with the Russian Stalinist regime, but still resting on the old state. It never succeeded in making itself, still less the society, into a replica of the USSR's social institutions, and the invasion snuffed out its independent development.

'Proletarian bonapartism'

But Grant, as we have seen, views the Afghan events through the prism of his own special theory — the theory of 'proletarian bonapartism'.

'Proletarian bonapartism' describes regimes as identical to the Stalinist system on the sole basis of the state ownership of industry. It is a 'profile' derived from the features which the Stalinist states have in common in repose'. What the theory lacks is any conception of the dynamic and the struggles whereby the Stalinist states have come into existence.

The East European states were subjugated by Russian military power and assimilated to the Russian system. Apart from that, the only Stalinist-type states (that is, states identical to the USSR) which have achieved any stability have had in common mass peasant (and sometimes working-class) mobilisations, under the leadership and control of militarised Stalinist parties. The Stalinists, via the mass mobilisation, break the state machine, or at least the upper

layers linked to the old ruling classes, collectivise industry and the land, and radically root out the old ruling classes. As in 1928 in Russia, all major competitors for the surplus product are eliminated, and the newly-created bureaucracy then becomes the master of the state economy. In this way a truly radical break is made.

(Cuba is partly an exception. But there too there was a mass mobilisation and a radical overturn, with the new regime then settling over time into the Stalinist mould).

In contrast, the general experience of regimes which have emulated statism purely from on top, without a radical overturn, has been unstable. There has been no real replication of the existing Stalinist states. In Egypt, for example, industry was statified, but the old ruling class was kept on (stock exchange dealings in Government compensation bonds continued, for example), and eventually reasserted itself. The Army acted as agent and caretaker for the bourgeoisie.

Grant and Militant have a history of being unable to distinguish between real Stalinist-type transformations and developments like in Egypt in the late '50s and the '60s. They consider Syria, Burma, Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique, for example, as of the same order as the Stalinist states (deformed and degenerated workers' states). Their urge to play at 'prophets' and to 'spot the trend' leads them repeatedly to make foolish and hasty judgments. They briefly hailed Portugal as a workers' state in 1975, and are now seemingly on the brink of so classifying Iran.

They see a fundamental trend — the autonomous movement of the productive forces — in the colonial revolutions of the Third World, manifesting itself everywhere, through many different forms. Thus Militant spent most of the '60s predicting the eventual manifestation of this trend within South Vietnam, and US withdrawal... while others were building the anti-war movement.

Analysing Afghanistan, Grant, the prisoner of his dogmas, scans the horizon for 'empirical' confirmation of what he knows in his heart, and so decrees that the PDP regime was proletarian Bonapartist — whereas the whole dynamic of the events he is dealing with derives from the PDP's failure to be what he calls a proletarian bonapartist regime.

When Grant assimilates the pre-invasion Afghan regime to his proletarian bonapartist scheme, then he, like the regime itself, mistakes form for substance, government decrees for achievements, impotent middle class aspirations to be a Stalinist bureaucracy for a society in which the old ruling class has been overthrown.

The invasion

Why, in Grant's view, did the Russians invade?

Because "the Russian bureaucracy... could not tolerate the overthrow, for the first time in the post-war period, of a regime based on [?] the elimination of landlordism and capitalism and the victory of a feudal-capitalist counter-revolution, especially in a state bordering on the Soviet Union".

Fear of the ferment spilling over to the Muslim population of the USSR was

also a motive. The Russian bureaucracy, thus, intervened, "not only because of Afghanistan's strategic position, but for reasons of their own power and prestige".

Grant denounces the hypocrisy of the imperialist outcry and chronicles recent imperialist 'interventions' — South Africa in Angola and Zimbabwe, Belgium in Zaïre and France in Chad and Zaïre. True, as far as it goes, but it obliterates in a cloud of minor propaganda/agitational points what is 'new' in Afghanistan — the fact that the USSR, acting from strength, was overstepping the agreed boundaries that had prevailed since world war 2.

The US, says Grant, is using the pretext of Afghanistan and "attempting to hit at Russia because of the class character of the Soviet Union, where landlordism and capitalism have been eliminated". This is typical Grant-thought. Basic, general historic truths about capitalist class antagonism to the anti-capitalist regime are used to 'explain' specific developments.

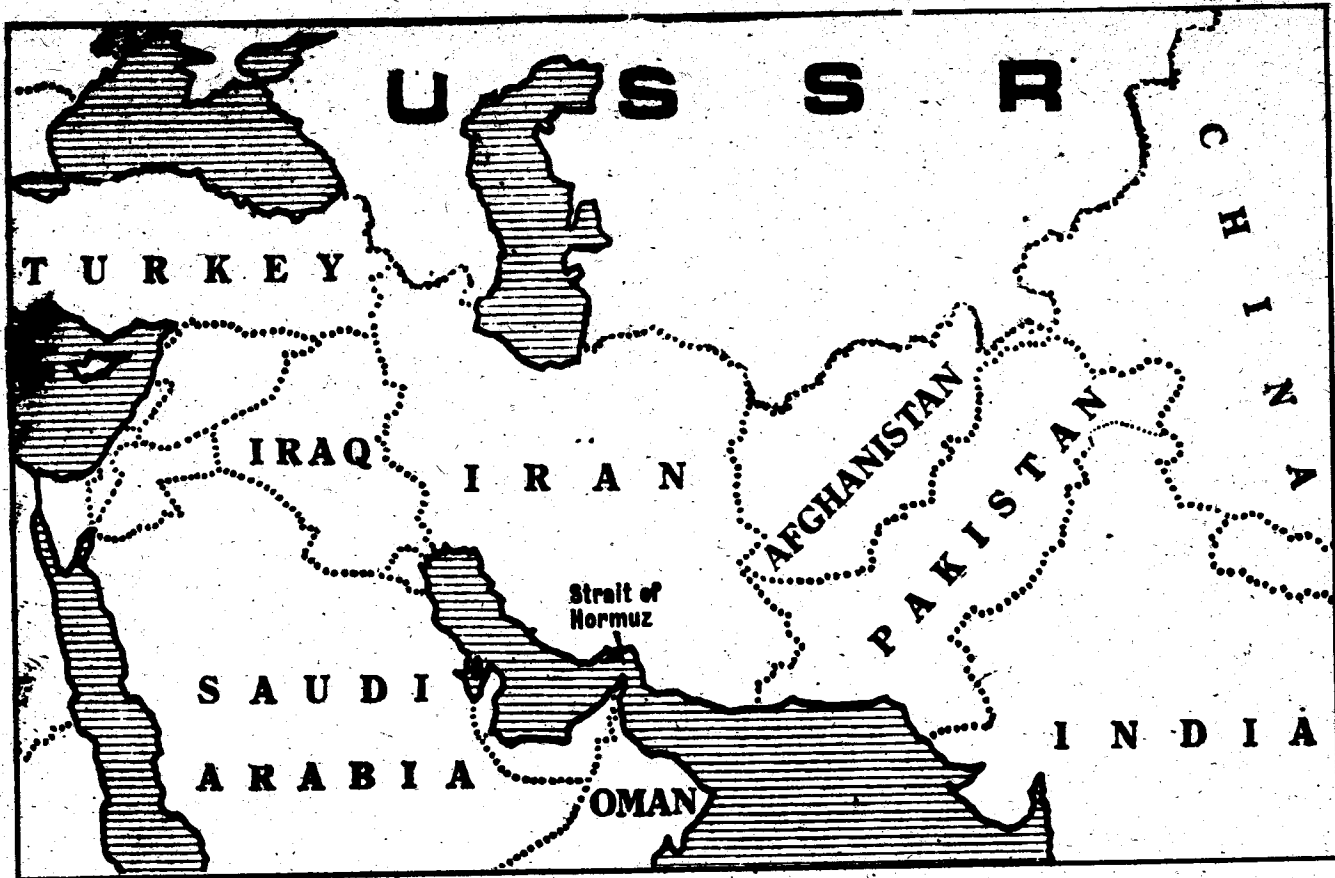
What response should socialists make to the invasion? How do we advise the labour movement to see it?

Grant and Stalinism

Grant attacks the Communist Parties for opposing the invasion because, he says, they proceed from "abstract principles" of opposition to "aggression between peoples", support for the UN, etc — "instead of viewing the process from the point of view of the class struggle internationally and the class relations between the nations". Which means? Grant doesn't tell us. Others — his pupils — subsequently will. In fact, it's a way for Grant to evade the by no means abstract question of what the Afghan masses would choose.

Everything is skewed by Grant's basic attitude to Stalinism. 40 and more years after Trotsky and the Bolshevik rear-guard publicly declared that a river of blood separated Stalinism and Bolshevism, Grant is still — in his mind — engaged in a political and ideological dialogue with the Stalinist bureaucracy. The bureaucracy in the 1920s accused Trotsky of wanting to use the Red Army to 'export revolution'. (Grant mistakenly asserts that Trotsky did advocate this). Lo and behold, says Ted Grant in 1980, we now have a grossly bureaucratic use of the Red Army (the same Red Army?!) without the support of the workers, etc. The point of course is that the Russian bureaucracy is necessarily against the workers and the common people of Afghanistan.

In the same vein, as a critic of the technique and crudities of the bureaucracy, Grant comes to his central objection to the invasion. It will repel the international working class. The Russian state conducted itself differently in Lenin's and Trotsky's time. "They based themselves on proposals and actions which would raise the level of consciousness of the working class internationally". "Anything which acted to raise the consciousness of the working class was justified; anything which had the opposite effect was to be condemned", etc. etc. Yes (though the Bolsheviki were sometimes forced to do things irrespective of the



effect on international working class consciousness). But what have Lenin and Trotsky got to do with the present Moscow regime, with its character, selection, education, motivation, lifestyle, relationship to the Russian and other USSR peoples, relationship to the workers in the USSR or outside it. The answer, for Ted Grant, seems to be that they carry on the same business in a 'distorted' way. The train of thought runs on tracks laid down by Isaac Deutscher — Stalinism is the continuation of Bolshevism, or at least the custodian of its social-economic achievements and the transplanter of them to other countries, carrying them on the point of bayonets to people who are crushed by tanks if they resist.

This is very strange stuff. But it is of interest as illustrating the confused thought processes of the main political leader of one of the biggest groups in Britain calling itself Trotskyist (a group which also has some supporters outside Britain). He is confused to the point of seemingly not knowing who he is supposed to be, who and what the Stalinist rulers of the USSR are, and what their relationship is to the working class. He is seemingly confused about what time of the political clock it is. Like the legendary professor of history who asked a colleague, "what century is this?", Ted Grant must have occasion to ask his associates, "What decade is this?". (But they won't be able to tell him!).

Having explained at great length the different techniques of the bureaucracy and of Marxist working-class revolutionaries, Grant then comes close to the truth that it is a matter of different people, of a different social formation, and of different aims. He puts his own gloss on this. The policies of the proletarian bonapartist regime in the USSR are determined by the 'income, power, prestige and privilege' of the bureaucracy. But

they support revolutions in backward countries "when it takes place in the distorted form of proletarian bonapartism". That's only for backward countries with 'distorted revolutions'; "they are opposed to a socialist revolution in advanced countries [because]... the establishment of a democratic socialist regime in any country in the world would immediately threaten the foundations of the bureaucratic misrule in Russia, China, and the other Stalinist states". This seems to mean that despite what they are, and in the course of serving their own interests, the Russian bureaucracy can nevertheless do good work in backward countries. But Grant manages simultaneously to conflate and link as parallel phenomena the workers' revolution and the mutations: the idea is clearly one of distinct stages reflecting levels of development. At the same time Grant's scheme of workers' socialist revolution for advanced countries, 'distorted (Stalinist) revolution' for backward countries, ignores the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy has made its own 'revolution' in advanced countries too — in Czechoslovakia*, in East Germany (a backward part of Germany, but that is relative), on condition of having military-bureaucratic rule over them.

Now Grant gets to the crux. The ending of feudalism and capitalism in Afghanistan opens the way to bring that country into the 20th century. "If we just considered the Russian intervention in isolation, we should have to give this move critical support".

"But because of the reactionary effect it has on the consciousness of the working class... Marxists must oppose the Russian intervention".

* He has a selective memory. He forgets the Czechoslovak Stalinist coup of 1948, and he forgets that his own organisation (the RCP) was then alone amongst Trotskyist organisations in supporting the coup.

ian intervention".

"The Russian intervention in Afghanistan must be condemned despite its progressive aspects, because it is spitting at the opinions of the world working class".

It is clear from the article that when he talks about the bad effects on working class consciousness of the invasion, he has something specific in mind. "The overriding danger under contemporary conditions is the alienation of the workers of Japan, Western Europe, the USA and other advanced countries from the idea of socialism and socialist revolution [i.e. Russia?!]. This is shown by the attitudes taken by the Tribunites. Like the CP, they unfortunately base themselves, not on the real movement of the class struggle and on the actual relations between the great powers. [sic!] but, on the contrary, rely on abstract moral condemnations... But [world antagonisms] are a reflection of the dialectical contradictions between the capitalist states, and, above all, of the major contradiction of our time, that between the Stalinist states, on the one hand, and the countries of capitalism on the other".

It is clear that Grant is being tossed between the implications and necessary conclusions from his theory, and the pressure of the Tribunites. It may, 'in isolation', be progressive in Afghanistan, but it makes life difficult in the Labour Party! The complete prostration into bloc politics, and the consequent abandonment of independent working class politics, should be noted.

But Grant deplores the invasion. Should the Russians then withdraw? Grant seems to think so, though it is not quite clear. His way of expressing it is to dismiss "the demand by the imperialist powers supported by the CP and the Tribune group" as "utopian". (Why? Grant adds immediately after this: "Russia, of course, has wanted this de-

mand in the UN Security Council').

It seems that the CPs should be criticised for no longer automatically backing what Moscow does. Nothing here is abstract, or 'idealistic', or contrary to 'the real movement of the class struggle' and the taking of sides with one bloc in 'the major contradiction of our time'! The advancing tanks move, backed by History, and all your programmes and tears will not roll them back one inch!

Finally, what prospects does Grant see in Afghanistan?

"Balancing between the different nationalities of Afghanistan, and leaning on the poor and middle peasants, the Afghan regime, based on Russian bayonets, will undoubtedly be able to crush the rebels and establish a firm proletarian bonapartist state as a Soviet satellite". But things won't be so bad. "Once the counter-revolution has been defeated, most of the Russian troops will be withdrawn... The Bonapartist regime and the Russians will find a way to compromise with the mullahs". Essentially this is the same basic assessment as was made in Workers' Action last January. But the nice 'optimism' is Ted Grant's.

The international contradictions will soften, too. Russia may, in response to the American trade reprisals, back the Baluchis and Pathans in Pakistan and maybe "fulfill the old dream of Tsarist diplomacy, a warm water port". But "Before things go that far, however, it is likely, in the not too distant future, that there will be a compromise between the US and the bureaucracy". This soporific message will perhaps lull the many readers of Militant who did not have the duty in 1965 and after to read Militant's monthly assurance that compromise was just ahead in Vietnam. It has the effect, however, of minimising the degree of blame the readers of Militant will attach to the bureaucracy for the invasion and the boost it has given to the warmongers.

Setting it straight?

GRANT'S ARTICLE, though it left many things in the air, seemed to come out against the Russian invasion. In fact, it was utterly contradictory. The whole assessment of the 'progressive' side of the effective annexation of Afghanistan implied support for it. The opposition to the invasion was grounded in the need to bow to working class public opinion. Grant declined to take a stand on an independent working class political assessment, and confined himself to describing a process and scoffing at the 'utopians' of the CPGB and Tribune.

Within a short time, some of Grant's pupils inserted the appropriate explicitly Stalinist politics.

One month after Grant's analysis there appeared part 1 of a two-part reply to a letter from 'Roy Bentley', who had 'just read' Ted Grant's article. He wanted to inquire what Grant's line really had been! He offered an interpretation, based on Grant's comment that the call for withdrawal was 'utopian'. "Does that mean that Militant is against the withdrawal of the troops, having quite rightly condemned the invasion"? He "could see" that if the Russian troops were withdrawn, "the Afghan regime of Karmal would soon collapse and there would be an almost inevitable bloodbath and

a return to feudal downing and backwardness... This would justify support for the troops being there now they have invaded. Is this the position Militant is putting forward?"

"Roy has indeed drawn the right conclusion from Ted's article", began the 'reply'. Thus, ludicrously, Militant began to correct itself.

The reply, by Lynn Walsh, made the following new points.

To call for withdrawal would open up the risk of "Afghanistan's proletarian bonapartist regime" being overthrown (But where was there a regime other than the one installed against the government that they said invited the troops in? This is a bit of camouflage. The Russian troops are the regime). Supporting withdrawal would therefore mean siding with the forces of counter-revolution. (The whole question of any rights for the Afghan people is wiped out by equating the Russians with the left, and by the pretence that the regime has an independent existence).

Militant couldn't support the invasion "because of the reactionary consequences internationally. Once Russian forces had occupied the country, however, it would have been entirely wrong for Marxists to call for the withdrawal of Russian troops". In other words — don't take responsibility, but be glad the bureaucracy is not so fastidious. This attitude of saying 'no' while meaning 'yes' combined the joys of abstention from direct responsibility with those of vicarious realpolitik, via hypocrisy. If it is necessary for the troops to stay, on pain of undesirable consequences, then it was right to send them in in the first place. Responsible people should have called for the invasion and should acknowledge now that the initiative of the bureaucracy (even for motives of their own) showed them their error if they didn't. Serious people should — like the SWP-USA — praise the historically progressive role being played by the bureaucracy in Afghanistan.

But Walsh continued: "The Russian intervention in Afghanistan was a progressive move" — Grant is quoted as stating this, though in fact he said it would be progressive if it could be taken in isolation, and that in fact it could not be. "The reactionary international repercussions of invasion completely outweigh any immediate gains in Afghanistan", admitted Walsh; but preventing the downfall of a proletarian bonapartist military regime was 'in itself' another blow to world imperialism. And the invasion "established the development of historically progressive social relations in this small country".

"In Afghanistan, though it has moved to prop up a bonapartist regime that rules through dictatorial methods, the Russian bureaucracy is defending new, fundamentally progressive, social relations". A mass base of support for the regime (that is, for Stalinism) will be created by land reform, planning, etc. "When the proletarian bonapartist regime is consolidated in Afghanistan, which will be within a measurable period, the Russian leadership [sic] will probably withdraw its forces. But", adds Walsh defiantly, "in any case if there were no danger of counter-revolutionary forces threatening the regime and the social changes that have been carried through, we would

then call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops..."!

What exists in Afghanistan is "a grotesque totalitarian caricature of a socialist state", "because of the isolation of the social change in an economically and culturally backward country, and the fact that the bonapartist leadership has inevitably taken Russia's Stalinist regime as its model". (Apart from the fact that it is nonsense now to pretend that the regime has an independent existence, it is not isolated: the character of the regime is determined now not by the conditions in its own society alone, but by the bureaucratic domination of the much more developed Russian society. It is that Russian domination that determined the shape of the regime even in immensely more developed Czechoslovakia).

Walsh insists that Militant "stands for a further supplementary political revolution". But this is an epochal perspective. For Afghanistan it would be after a whole historical period. In Walsh's scheme, the first stage is the growth of support for the regime, under the Russian tanks whose presence Militant supports. And Walsh underlines the point: in Russia and Eastern Europe the bureaucracy has "outlived any progressive role it played in the past through developing the planned economy". (When was it progressive in Czechoslovakia, for example?) But not in Afghanistan. There it has prospects of an organic growth and consolidation of mass support, with the bureaucracy as the natural leading force, despite its methods, for society at that stage — the bearer of a higher civilisation.

Press fantasies?

MILITANT'S THIRD major article on Afghanistan, published in July 1980, brutally ties all this together. Its author was Alan Woods. Like Walsh, Woods is one of those who gathered around the dead stump of the old ISFI (Pablo-Mandel) British group in the early '60s and helped developed the mutant strain that is the present Militant tendency.

Grant established some account of the April 1978 'revolution'; and Walsh (perhaps after an internal dispute, but it scarcely matters) established a (hypocritically dressed-up) pro-invasion line from Grant's unresolved contradictions. Woods emerges as the arrogant champion of the civilising mission of the Army of the Russian bureaucracy, picking up (I should think consciously) the arguments of Fabian imperialism — all the way to the explicit paternalist depiction of the Afghan masses as necessarily the mere objects of someone else's boot and bayonet in history.

Entitled 'Afghanistan: what is really happening? — the truth behind the press fantasies', Woods' article is a polemic against the press reports of mass resistance to the invaders. That aspect of it is not important. It is, indeed, ridiculous. For his case is that the Western press is grossly unreliable, and making anti-Russian propaganda on Afghanistan — and he establishes it entirely by quotations from the Western press!

The piece is studied by quotations

from the Times.

In fact, of course, the bourgeois press has to be read carefully and watched. But what emerges from Woods' own rather silly polemics is that whereas an effort was being made in the Times and Financial Times to establish the facts, and this involved printing not entirely checkable accounts and then correcting them or repudiating them, what Woods himself does is take the comments of the Times on press inaccuracies and reports that proved false, one-sidedly seize on a series of their self-corrections, and belabour them in order to disguise his own partisan and one-sided propaganda for the civilising mission of the Russians.

Woods doesn't notice how ludicrous it is to end one point with, "And the Times reporter commented laconically: 'Not to put too fine a point on it, the Voice of America was talking rubbish'" — and then immediately go on: "But the Times itself has not been averse to talking rubbish in recent months, as when it screamed in banner headlines: Hundreds dead in Kabul revolt against Russians [28 February], a typically exaggerated report of the strike of reactionary shopkeepers in the Kabul bazaar in February ...". Woods is clearly a master of the major tool of Grantite reasoning, the non sequitur. Or perhaps he means — it is certainly his underlying train of thought — that dead shopkeepers are not worth tallying.

Woods does not need to read the serious bourgeois press (the only source of information available to us, and for that matter the only or main source of world news available to Marx, pre-1917 Lenin, and post-1927 Trotsky). He knows what is going on, from Grantite theory. This is the core of the article — his assumptions and interpretations.

The point is not assessments like the following (which are basically the same as in Workers' Action): "Moscow's strategy is first to dig in in the towns, secure control of the administration and the main highways, and then gradually consolidate their influence over the villages and the backward mountain tribes". Nor is it his support (despite the reiterated hypocrisy about how the Russians should not have gone in) for the Russians. It is his interpretation of what is happening and why.

'Dark masses'

For Woods, because "these tribesmen [are] 'dark masses', sunk in the gloom of barbarism, whose conditions of life and psychology have not changed fundamentally in 2000 years", that "the task of dragging [sic] the Afghan countryside out of the slough of primeval backwardness and into the 20th century would be formidable, even with correct leadership and Marxist politics". "The Russian bureaucracy and their Afghan supporters are, in effect, carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in that country". In a "distorted, bureaucratic, bonapartist fashion", Woods of course adds. Still, that is what they are doing in Afghanistan; and it is the totalitarian bureaucracy that is doing it. And therefore we should be glad that they are doing it.

This is a new version of 'permanent revolution'. In Trotsky's formula, the

proletariat took the political lead of the peasant masses in the struggle against reaction and backwardness, carried out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, and in the same movement took power, eliminating the bourgeoisie. Woods' formula is one of 'international bonapartist permanent revolution' in which the *bureaucracy* of the USSR is the protagonist and its instrument is an Army which has the task of subjugating, as a bitterly resented foreign invader, the rural masses. (And not only the rural masses. Woods asserts falsely that the towns are solidly with the invaders, but in fact one of the results of the invasion is the alienation of the masses in the towns and even of sections of the PDP (the Khalq faction)).

What will happen in this special case of the permanent revolution that Woods thinks is likely to unfold in Afghanistan?

A foreign military machine conquers the country; organises, beginning from an initially tiny basis of support, a replica of the totalitarian Russian political regime; carries out reforms from above, manipulating the population (for example land redistribution under such a regime



Russian tanks in Kabul

is no more than a transitional stage to collectivisation with or without consent). At the same time, unless the regime proves to be different in Afghanistan from what it is in Russia, it will oppress, massacre, and deport as many of the Afghans as necessary. The norm for this regime is that the population has no civil rights.

What has this got to do with permanent revolution? Nothing whatever! Here permanent revolution is only an — unintentionally — ironic phrase to point up the contrast between Trotsky's programme and what is likely to happen in Afghanistan.

Woods rightly locates the pre-invasion dynamic in the backwardness of the country and the self-defined mission of the officer caste to modernise in face of the feebleness of Afghan capitalism and its bourgeoisie. He accepts that the PDP/officer caste symbiosis was only possible on a programme of transforming that caste and associated sections of the middle class into a ruling elite of the Russian bureaucratic type. The 'revolution' was nevertheless "a step forward in comparison to the previous situation". But the point is that it proved impossible for the PDP and the army to make that 'step'; and that for Trotskyists to support such a formation, rooted in the existing state and pitted against the masses, is a programmatic betrayal

It was quite distinct from the sort of movement that existed in Vietnam and China, where Stalinist forces led masses against reaction and imperialism.

Woods tells us that the attitude to the invasion is not determined by sentimental considerations but "first and foremost [!] by class considerations". Which class forces stand behind the present Kabul regime, and which behind the Mujaheddin rebels?

Woods puts his shoulder and full weight to an open door by proving that the rich stand behind the rebels

Progressive Stalinism?

The rebels have next to nothing in the towns; says Woods triumphantly. "The new regime can count on the support of the small working class that exists, plus the great majority of the students, intellectuals and functionaries". Woods does not present his evidence for thinking that this is how it actually is. He knows that it is so for it is ordained in the schemas

that it is so. "The struggle in Afghanistan is essentially a struggle of the towns against the countryside [which was true before the invasion], of civilisation against barbarism, of the new against the old". Stalinism is the progressive next stage, the bearer of civilisation.

Citing facts about the rebels burning schools, Woods declares that the victory of these 'reactionary gangsters' "would lead to a terrible bloodbath and an orgy of violence and destruction which would plunge Afghanistan back into the dark ages". He lists the traditional cruelties and mutilations used by the rebels; he is completely silent about the napalm and the Russian tanks and bombers. The 'historical mission' of the rebels is "about as 'progressive' as that of Genghis Khan" — unlike the mission of the Army of the Russian totalitarian bureaucracy.

And no starry-eyed enthusiast for the conquering armies of capitalism was ever so 'optimistic' as Alan Woods. After the brutal disregard comes the consoing cant: the future — after the invading army has completed the subjugation, buried the dead, and re-built the bombed villages — is bright and hopeful. "As the social benefits of the revolution [the conquest] begin to become understood by the poor peasants... the mass base for reaction will evaporate... Moscow will eventually withdraw 'the bulk' of its troops (and



Russian hardware on parade in Kabul

of course Militant will approve their judgment and wait for it). "Despite all the totalitarian deformations [!] the new regime will mark a big step forward for Afghan society. Industry will be built up rapidly... The growth of an industrial proletariat in Afghanistan will ultimately serve to undermine the base of bureaucratic rule and prepare the way for a new political revolution, and the establishment of a healthy workers' democracy in Afghanistan".

CONCLUSION

MILITANT'S WHOLE argument on Stalinism and Afghanistan is dependent on an unstated analogy with the attitude Marxists took to early capitalism.

In 19th Century Europe capitalism developed industry, cleared away feudal restrictions, and also developed the working class. Marx and Engels argued for a recognition of the progressive role of capitalism, and an alliance between the working class and the middle-class revolutionaries.

Stalinism today in some backward countries — so Militant's argument runs — develops industry, develops the working class, clears away feudal remnants. So why not 'critically' support the Stalinists' efforts to 'drag Afghanistan into the 20th century'?

Why not? In the first place, Marx and Engels also argued for independent anti-capitalist activity by the working class at every stage. Lenin developed this emphasis with great sharpness in relation to capitalist development in Russia, denouncing the Mensheviks' passive, self-limiting policy of accepting that the bourgeoisie was preordained to lead all and any general revolutionary movements for the foreseeable future.

There is nothing similar in Militant's policy. Nothing the Mensheviks did comes near to equalling the fatalistic prostration of Militant before the Afghan Stalinists, and the Russian Stalinists in Afghanistan.

Even the worst of the Mensheviks tried to organise workers independently for their immediate interests. Militant accepts that such workers' organisation is impossible under Stalinist rule. It deplores the fact, but accepts it as an inevitable feature of a whole stage of development in which the active agent,

deserving of support for its progressive work, is the Stalinist bureaucracy.

At the end of that stage Militant sees the political revolution. But no practical conclusions follow for now.

Although Militant give an accurate description of who dominates now in Afghanistan, of what the motives for the Russian invasion were, and although they describe the bureaucracy as totalitarian, at no point do they draw any conclusion about the oppressive, anti working class character of the regime that the Russians will create. They know there will be 'totalitarian deformations' but that is not important, it is a secondary aspect of a fundamentally progressive phenomenon.

Trotskyists say that the bureaucracy can be (and has been) in certain circumstances revolutionary against the bourgeoisie, treating it (as Trotsky expressed it) as a competitor for the surplus product. It is in all circumstances counter-revolutionary, against the working class. Militant, which might accept this formula, adds however — even so it is also progressive in backward countries.

Militant completely identifies with the transformation it projects. It portrays the fact that the Russians will probably be able to create a stable regime as reason for hope in the circumstances. It assumes, takes for granted, that the workers will support the transformation, and blandly sets aside the fact that this means cooption of individuals into the new bureaucracy and repression for the masses.

A false analogy

In any case, the historical perspective is wrong. The presentation of Stalinism as a progressive historical force analogous to early capitalism is fundamentally false — and moreover undermines, as we shall see, the ritually-proclaimed perspective of political revolution.

It is the relationship of Stalinist regimes to the working class that makes the analogy with developing early capitalism completely untenable.

Under the regime of Stalinist totalitarianism the working class is bound hand and foot, deprived of all rights by a highly conscious and militantly anti working class state apparatus which concentrates the means of production in its own hands

together with immense powers of oppression and terror.

It was possible, within developing capitalism, for Marxists to look to a capitalist evolution and still to relate to the working class, support its struggles, and try to organise it independently. The prospect was not

that if the bourgeoisie established their regime, then the working class would be held in a totalitarian vice. On the contrary, even in the worst and most repressive early capitalist hell-holes, the working class retained individual rights and could take advantage of loopholes to organise itself.

Bourgeois society offered the possibility of the workers organising themselves and developing politically and culturally. This did not happen without struggle, repression, and setbacks — but it was not ruled out, it could happen and it did happen. And otherwise the Marxist policy would have been a nonsense.

A specific, repressive, and terribly reactionary regime is inseparable from Stalinism. Economic development was separable from the often-repressive early capitalist regimes because the exploitation of the working class did not rest on its legal status but on economic (market) transactions and the bourgeois ownership of the means of production. Stalinist economic development is inseparable from totalitarian oppression of the working class; the economics are not separable from the regime, and to opt for one is necessary to opt for both. The surplus product is not seized primarily via market transactions, but via the winepress grip of the bureaucracy. For this reason, the analogy with the capitalist development of the means of production is a piece of monstrous Stalinist nonsense.

Defence of USSR

But surely Militant's approach is implied in the idea that the Stalinist states should be defended against imperialism? Not so. That is fundamentally a position against imperialism, against according it any progressive role, against looking to anyone but the working class to deal with the bureaucracy, against allowing imperialism once again to feed off the areas taken out of its control in the USSR and later the other Stalinist states.

The remnants of the conquests of October are defended against imperialism *despite* the monstrous totalitarianism that is grafted onto them.

Already in 1939-40, Trotsky and his comrades declared, "We were and remain against the seizure of new territories by the Kremlin". (They took sides with Russia against Finland because Finland was then an outpost of Anglo-French imperialism; they did not evaluate an expansion of Russian control as progressive. On the contrary, Trotsky spoke of the fate of the people of former Eastern Poland as becoming the "semi-slaves" of Stalin). The historically progressive elements were massively overlaid by the reactionary anti working class regime. The experience since then has reinforced this attitude one hundredfold: in an advanced capitalist country like

stan.

To slip from the view that Stalinist collectivism contains progressive or potentially progressive elements compared to imperialism or imperialist-backed alternatives, into the view that the Stalinist regime is progressive apart from the working class, while atomising and oppressing the working class and plebeian population, is to accept the bureaucracy as the protagonist of history — for now or for 'the next stage'. *It is a reactionary and elitist position.* No wonder Woods finds himself speaking of the 'dark masses' of Afghanistan!

If we assume that no conscious or sub-conscious racism is involved here (and I do assume that), we are left with a choice example of Militant's insensitivity, and with a naked expression of truly Fabian contempt and disdain, licenced by pater-

priorities, concerns and considerations belong to the militants compared with the philosophers in the watch-towers. Of course Marxist militants inform their work with the general historical considerations. *They do not allow them to override their goal of mobilising, organising, and rousing up the oppressed.* They do not allow the goal of industrial development on the back of the masses to supplant the goal Trotsky outlines in the quotation at the head of this article*.

In the Granite view of Afghanistan everything is eventually — and quickly — to be made right by the workers taking political power from the bureaucracy in Russia and elsewhere. Such a view is rational only on an analysis of Stalinism such as Trotsky's, which identifies the bureaucracy as being in fundamental contradiction with the basic socialised relations of production. (In the final analysis, that is because it is in fundamental contradiction with the working class).

Grant presents a different picture: the bureaucracy (the Russian one or its would-be Afghan duplicate) is the bearer of a higher civilisation and will do for Afghanistan what capitalism did for Europe. That bureaucracy is at one, at least for a whole historical period, with the collectivised means of production, which for that epoch of history are 'its' means of production.

The implication is inescapable that Stalinism, which has a progressive role in the backward countries, *has had a progressive role in Russia too.* We have been through, and are still in, an epoch of progressive Stalinism. And it follows that the Stalinist states are stable class societies, whose ruling group is not a usurping bureaucracy in contradiction to the property relations but a historically legitimate ruling class, whose role in history is to develop the forces of production. Grant, in fact, like Isaac Deutscher, is a Shachtmanite (bureaucratic collectivist) disguised within the verbiage of Trotsky's theory, and placing a plus sign of appreciation against the new class society between capitalism and socialism while Shachtman placed a minus sign, calling it barbarism.

In that perspective, it is not clear why the working class political revolution against Stalinism in Russia should be on the order of the day now, or even on the agenda of the next epoch at all.

Bloodbath

Finally, all arguments and details aside, there is the fall-back argument: if the Russians go, there will be a bloodbath. *If the Russians stay there will be [and there is] a bloodbath.* The argument is in fact thoroughly dishonest. It is also incomplete. The complete version would say, and not just imply — a bloodbath of PDP people and collaborators with the Russians.

Militant is not raising a humanitarian objection, but taking sides with the Russian army and its supporters. *It is a variant of the idea that it is better if the Russians*

* As on Afghanistan, so in British politics, where Militant see their role as that of making propaganda for their 'perspectives' about how things will develop. Echowring action and struggle, they mistake the role of passive commentators and would-be prophets for the proper work of proletarian militants.



Chinese leader Huang Hua visits right-wing rebels

Czechoslovakia with a mass labour movement and a mass Communist Party (a real party, not a ruling apparatus), Russian control meant the annihilation of the labour movement.

Trotsky's view, in fact, was that the property relations were *potentially* progressive; imperialism should not be allowed to destroy that progressive potential, but working class revolution was necessary to realise the potential. "In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy" (Trotsky). The USSR "as a whole" — property relations *plus* bureaucratic tyranny — was a *reactionary* force.

To advocate the expansion of that system is an *explicitly pro-Stalinist* position.

Of course, we supported the Vietnamese, for example, against imperialism, *despite* the Stalinist leadership. In the case of Afghanistan, there is nothing to support but a Stalinist leadership and the brutal extension of Kremlin power.

To say that the overthrow of already established nationalised property by imperialist intervention is reactionary and should be resisted is one thing. It is another to support the Russian bureaucracy against the people of an invaded country. We say to imperialism: hands off Afghanistan. We can't, or we should not, say that to the people of Afghani-

stan, towards the people of Afghanistan. The brutal expansion of Russian Stalinism is looked to to sort them out rather than the brutal expansion of British imperialism. But it is the same spirit, the same tone, even the same image — complete with self-aware quote marks — for the people who are mere objects of history and of someone else's drive to conquer and perhaps industrialise them.

The broad sweep

But, in the broad sweep of history, is it not true that the development of industry lays the basis for progress? In the broad sweep, yes — on condition that the working class liberates itself and seizes the control of the means of production from the hands of the bureaucracy. But politics is necessarily concerned with a more immediate focus, a sharper focus. *In that focus the idea that the oppression [and slaughter, deportation, etc. which has been the stock-in-trade of the Stalinist bureaucracy ruling the USSR], is a detail in the broad sweep of history, is a monstrous anti-Trotskyist nonsense. It loses the viewpoint of the militant who stand with the working class and with oppressed peoples, trying to organise them to make themselves the subjects of history, not its passive objects, in favour of the viewpoint of the historian/prophet: the man in the ivory tower. An entirely different set of values,*

do what the PDP/Army aspirant bureaucrats could not do — subjugate the population and make a Stalinist 'revolution'.

The first question to the hypocritical 'humanitarians' is, how many of the Afghans will the Russians shoot? The second question is, *why is such a brutal transformation by conquest necessary?* Why should it not be what the majority of the peoples of Afghanistan want that occurs? Why can't this area wait until the majority of its own population decides to fight for social change, or until a socialist revolution in the advanced world makes it possible to attract its people to the work of transforming their own country? From the point of view of the international socialist revolution, there is no reason why not.

Fundamentally, however, it is *impossible* to work out a serious independent working class political assessment on the basis of yes or no to such gun-to-head questions as: do you want the right-wing Muslim reactionaries to triumph? (In Militant's case, anyway, the question is an afterthought to dress up and explain a decision to support the logic of their theorising. When they, initially, opted to bend to 'working class opinion', it did not worry them at all).

In any situation where a large revolutionary working class movement does not exist, the gun-to-head appeal to responsibility, humanitarianism, and lesser evilism can almost always be counterposed to an *independent working class political assessment*. In 1969 when the British Army was deployed to stop sectarian

fighting in Derry and Belfast, enormous pressure was generated to support the use of the troops, or refrain from opposing their use, on the grounds that they had probably saved Catholic lives and that Catholics had welcomed them. A lot of socialists succumbed to the pressure. The IS (SWP) organisation did. The small minority at the September 1969 IS conference who resisted and called for opposition to the British imperialist troops were met with hysterical denunciation and slandered as 'fascists' who 'wanted a bloodbath'. Yet it was those Marxists who refused to be panicked or to abandon their understanding of Britain's role in Ireland who had the better grasp of reality.

But then, Ted Grant might say, it was plainly a matter of a reactionary imperialist army. *And in Afghanistan it is a matter of the thoroughly reactionary anti working class army of the Russian bureaucracy.*

If the Russians withdraw, it might well prove to be the case that the final result of the strange episode of the seizure of power by the putschist PDP/Army 'bureaucratic revolutionaries' would be a massacre of PDP supporters. That would be a tragedy. *But it cannot follow that because of this Marxist socialists should abandon their programmatic opposition to the expansion of the area under Kremlin control, or should abandon the idea that the consolidation of a Stalinist regime in Afghanistan would be a defeat for the Afghan working class.*

We cannot abandon independent working class politics for the lesser evil — for the PDP and the supporters of the Russians — in the situation which the putsch, the policy of the PDP Army, and the

Russian invasion has created for them. We are not, to quote Trotsky, the inspector-general of history.

Political independence

The *political independence* of the working class, and in the pioneering place the political independence of the Marxists, is the to-be-or-not-to-be question for socialism — independence from the bourgeoisie, from the labour bureaucracy, and from the totalitarian state bureaucracies of the Stalinist states. This is the immediate political question for people who take Militant's pro-Stalinist line on Afghanistan for Marxism.

While Militant is unlikely to influence events in Afghanistan, it does influence people in Britain (and perhaps elsewhere). *It influences them away from independent working class politics and towards the role of cheerleaders for the 'progressive Stalinists in Afghanistan,* where it supports a Stalinist transformation, abandoning the very commitment to working class political independence as well as the Trotskyist programme.

Militant insists that the proper role for socialist militants is to line up firmly with one of the international blocs. It deplors the lack of class consciousness and failure to relate properly to the 'major' contradiction of our time on the part of the British CP, because it does not support the invasion. Militant even criticises the Tribunites, as we saw, for not basing themselves on the actual relations between the great powers!

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† I summarised above what Trotsky's attitude to the expansion of the Stalinist state actually was in 1939-40. This is a much mythologised episode, and many 'Trotskyists' think Trotsky supported Stalin's expansion. (Walsh does, for example). Some think that Trotsky identified with the 'revolution' in eastern Poland. Nothing of the sort.

During the Stalinist occupation of Poland and invasion of Finland in 1939-40, Trotsky argued that revolutionaries must recognise that the Russian Army was likely to stimulate revolutionary struggle which the Stalinists would use against the Polish and Finnish ruling class — and then strangle. Revolutionaries should support any such independent working class and poor peasant mobilisation, and align themselves with it. They should at the same time try to warn the workers and peasants against the Stalinist Russian state and all its instruments, as deadly enemies. They should immediately fight for political independence from the Stalinists... and prepare to fight them with guns.

It was a policy for the orientation of revolutionaries in a situation where (Trotsky assumed) the 'Red' Army had still a revolutionary prestige and authority with the oppressed 'Polish' Ukrainians, and others, where its call to seize land, etc., could be expected to evoke responses of a revolutionary sort. Nothing like that can be even imagined in Afghanistan now. The Russians have alienated even former supporters of the PDP.

And, as far as I know, Trotsky's assumptions about Eastern Poland and Finland were seriously mistaken. (He was starved of concrete information). Even in 1939 the 'Red' Army's power to rouse revolutionary action was minimal; its power to kill off Poles was much greater. Between one million and 1.5 m. Poles alone were deported to

ed to make Poland safe for Stalinism. (The Poles numbered 5 million out of 13 million in Eastern Poland, the rest being Ukrainians and White Russians).

Trotsky partly acknowledged his misestimate (see 'In Defence of Marxism'). And in any case, as we saw above, he did not hesitate to describe the fate of the people of East Poland, in so far as they were subjugated by the 'Red' Army, as that of 'the semi-slaves of Stalin'.

Where is the analogy with what Militant is supporting in Afghanistan? Militant is supporting the implied 'promise' of nationalisations and agrarian reform to be carried out by a totalitarian state which has imposed itself by force, against the resistance of the people of Afghanistan. **Where Militant parts company with Marxists is clear at this point: they do not relate to the working class and its struggles and its interests [the struggle against repression, the struggle to secure the basis for its own free organisation — the sorts of issues Marxists would relate to if they assumed, in an open, rational and demystified way, that a revolution was occurring but not a proletarian revolution].**

The Stalinist 'revolution' will impose a savagely oppressive regime, which will destroy and continually uproot any elements of a labour movement. To go from the clear and simple idea of 'defencism' — that the conquest of the Stalinist states by imperialism and their return to capitalism would be reactionary and should be opposed by socialists — to support for the conquest and hoped-for transformation of Afghanistan is to travel light-years away from revolutionary socialism. It is to take up residence on the grounds of Stalinism; to accommodate to the existing Stalinist bureaucracy with the 'perspective' (i.e., passive hope) that after the totalitarian 'stage' will come a better stage.

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