

Militant

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Summer 1980.

No 20.



IMPORT CONTROLS. TROTSKY.

POLAND.

40p.

CONTENTS

Britain's crisis: Are import controls the answer?	4
Forty years since Trotsky's assassination	11
Poland's winter of discontent.....	24

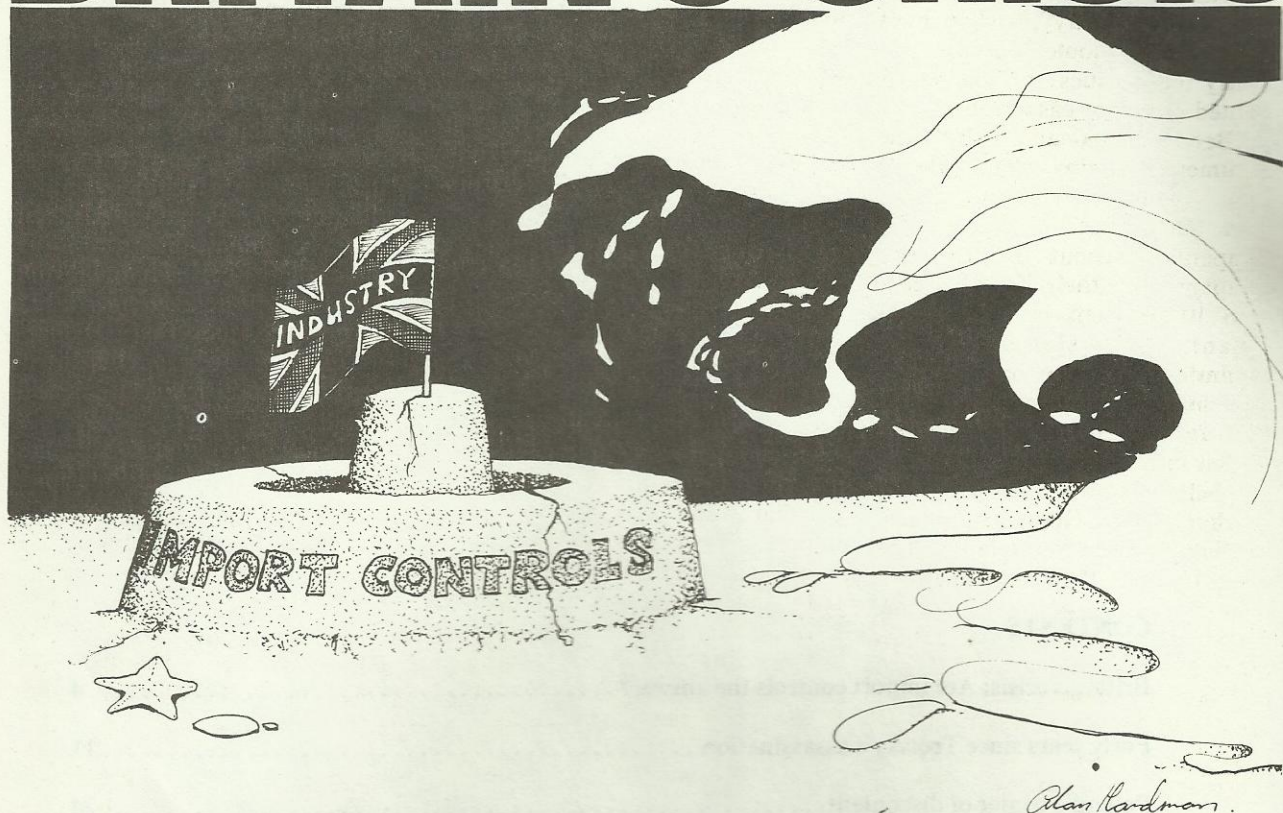
Published by Militant
1 Mentmore Terrace
London E8 3PN

Printed by
Cambridge Heath Press Ltd (TU)
Mentmore Works
1 Mentmore Terrace
London E8 3PN

August 1980

ISSN 0144-9265

BRITAIN'S CRISIS



are import controls the answer?

By Alan Woods

The frightening collapse of Britain's economic power, bringing ruination to entire industrial areas and communities, has compelled ever wider layers of the trade union and labour movement to come to grips with the new situation brought about by the crisis of capitalism.

Confronted with this terrible spectacle of decay and destruction, a significant section of the movement is desperately seeking a way out, but has yet to accept psychologically the need for a decisive break with capitalism as the only way of saving the new generations from a future of mass unemployment, misery and degra-

vation.

Amongst the leaders of the trade unions and the Labour Party there is a frantic searching after panaceas which might, so they fervently hope, make things a little better within the confines of the "mixed" economy—i.e. within the strait-jacket of capitalism.

The most graphic expression of the decay of British capitalism, and the one which most easily captures the popular imagination, is the avalanche of cheap foreign imports which has reduced whole branches of industries to rubble with the same ease as the siege engines of medieval armies battered down the walls of enemy castles.

The call for import controls, a remedy easily understood and apparently just as easy to apply, has all the power of attraction as an instant "miracle cure" for a painful and unpleasant disease. But in economics, as in medicine, woe betide him who applies the remedy before carefully analysing all the consequences and side effects!

The latest and most serious attempt to defend the idea of import controls is the document 'Import Controls Now', published by TASS.

The authors of this document are to be congratulated on the impressive array of factual material with which they illustrate the decisive

defeat of British industry, not only on a world scale, but on the home market also.

The result is a devastating indictment of the self-styled "captains of industry", who have systematically looted British industry for decades in their shortsighted greed for easy profits.

"Between 1960 and 1976," the document explains, "our rate of growth of industrial output was less than half that of our main competitors—about 2 per cent compared with their 4 to 5 per cent (and 10 per cent in the case of Japan). This slower rate of expansion has been accompanied by a lower rate of investment. In 1976 for example, investment per worker in manufacturing in Britain was half or less the investment per worker in West Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The result has been that productivity in these countries—output per man hour in manufacturing—has grown much faster than ours. Thus productivity in manufacturing in the UK in 1974 was nearly 40 per cent lower than that in West Germany or France, whereas twenty years earlier it had been much the same in the three countries. Since 1974 the gap has widened: manufacturing productivity up to 1978 rose by 17-18 per cent in West Germany compared to 4 per cent in Britain." (p5, my emphasis, AW)

The document proves its point with a wealth of statistical data, dealing with many branches of industry. British Leyland is a case in point. Quoting from the company's own reports (page 15), the document proves irrefutably that: "The biggest gap between BL's performance was in the early 1970s when it was privately owned."

The Ryder report of 1975 states clearly that: "In the automotive industry most manufacturing equipment is replaced after 8-12 years. In BL more than half the machines and equipment are over 15 years old." And the same report goes on to show how the money which should have been invested in

new models and new equipment was frittered away in hand-outs to the shareholders:

"Despite the low level of profit BL has over the period distributed nearly all of them as dividends. In our view this policy was clearly wrong." (page 15, emphasis in original)

The case of BL is typical of large sections of British industry, which, after decades of neglect and under-investment, now find themselves hopelessly outclassed by competitors in the USA, Japan, Western Germany, and even formerly backward France and Italy.

Yet having taken great pains to show the real cause and culprit for the relative decline of British industry, the authors of the document then resort to a most peculiar mode of reason to justify import controls as the alternative.

In the first place, they appeal to such unlikely "authorities" as the CBI Conference, the chairman of the British Institute of Management and Tory MP Alan Clark, in support of their position.

'Selective Controls'

Now, as any worker knows from bitter experience, any economic policy that is defended by the bosses is ninety-nine per cent certain to be in direct contradiction to the interests of working people. Far from being a conclusive argument, the fact that the most died-in-the-wool reactionaries of the Tory Party and the CBI are now "coming round" to the idea of import controls should make us think twice before adopting the same position. Why are these Tories and wealthy industrialists calling for import controls? What interests lie behind this? And in whose benefit would this policy work?

What is more to the point: if import controls are such a good idea, why have they not been introduced up till now? What

concrete affect would their introduction have on jobs, prices and productivity? These are the questions every thinking worker should ask himself before joining in the protectionist chorus.

The advocates of import controls argue that they would afford British industry, or rather specific sections of it, the necessary protection, guaranteeing at least the domestic market for home industries, and allowing the capitalists the time they need to re-tool and re-equip industry. That task having been accomplished, the "temporary" measure of import controls can be dispensed with and Britain can once again become the "workshop of the world."

Secondly, they argue that controls would only apply to those parts of the economy which were seriously threatened. Almost no-one argues in favour of general import controls, but only "selective" ones.

The arguments sound plausible. But on closer examination, they do not hold water.

Firstly, the difference between "selective" and general controls is more apparent than real, because, at the present time, almost every section of British manufacturing industry is under threat. As the CBI admits in a recent report: **"All British manufacturers of consumer goods and other standard technological products will become vulnerable in the 1980s."** ('The Times', 7 January). Textiles, steel, motor-bikes, cars, televisions, radios...the list is endless. And let us be clear on one point. What is at stake is not at all a peripheral question affecting unimportant sectors of the economy. On the contrary. **Import controls would have to embrace the decisive parts of manufacturing industry—that is, precisely those sections which, on a world scale, are presently subject to the most cut-throat competition.**

This is precisely the reason why, up to the moment, the decisive sections of the British capitalist class have baulked at the introduction of protectionist measures,

at least in an open and undisguised form. They fear the prospect of retaliation from their foreign rivals which would seriously damage the British economy, heavily dependent on world trade.

The risk of retaliation is cavalierly dismissed by the TASS document. Yet historical experience shows that it is real enough.

When the Wilson government introduced the Temporary Import Surcharge, it was forced to abandon it ignominiously after two years, under threat of massive retaliation and the breakdown of EFTA. Yet this measure was far less ambitious than what is now being proposed, and, moreover, was introduced in a period of world economic expansion. Any attempt to close the door in the face of foreign products in a period of economic recession would provoke a stormy reaction on the part of Britain's rivals, especially in the EEC.

Of course, there's no honour among thieves. **Disguised** import controls have existed for a long time, in the form of quotas, state subsidies and a whole gamut of legal regulations tending to limit imports and protect "national" industries. The steady growth of these tendencies is an expression of the cutthroat competition in a situation of contracting world markets.

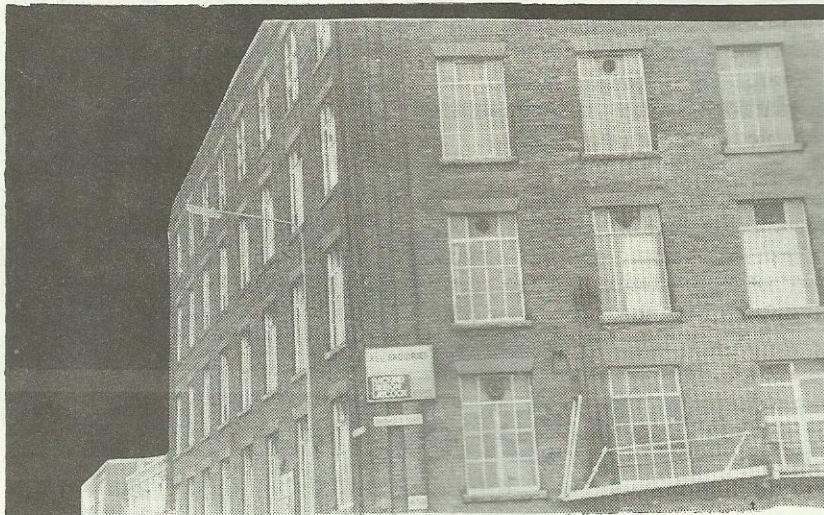
But were the British capitalist to "break ranks" and introduce open import controls, that would undoubtedly invite retaliation, and what would be gained on the swings would be more than lost on the roundabouts.

If all countries resorted to protectionism, the workers would be no better off and the capitalists would be no better off. But over a period of time, world trade would contract, with disastrous consequences for economic growth and unemployment on a world scale.

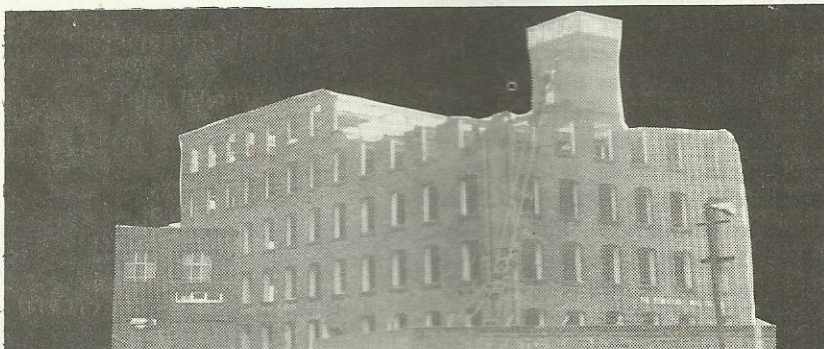
The prospect of a return to world-wide protectionism, and the collapse of the delicately balanced mechanism of world trade which has been established over the last three decades, fills the strategists of

going...

Townhead Mill, Rochdale



going...



subsidised, 'protected' and used cheap imports to make bigger profits.

Union's verdict: Death through owners' refusal to invest in new technology.



capital with horror.

They understand that one of the basic features which sustained the general upswing of capitalism from 1945 to 1974 was precisely the lowering of tariff barriers and the expansion of world trade to an unparalleled degree. This in turn enabled capitalism to partially overcome—at least for a temporary historical period—one of the fundamental obstacles to the growth of the productive forces—the national state. The erection of new tariff barriers, of retaliation and counter-retaliation, and the kind of open trade war which took place in the period between the two world wars, would produce a downward spiral in world trade, and even the possibility of another 1929-type crack. It is this, and not any consideration for the principles of “fair play” which has restrained the British, American and other capitalists from resorting to import controls—at least up till now. Yet the TASS document has barely a word to say on all this.

Many workers, who still have the illusion that it is possible to find a way out on the basis of capitalism, are prepared to embrace import controls as a seemingly “practical” solution to unemployment in the short run. In reality, they are no such thing.

The introduction of “selective” import controls might well save **some industries**, at least for a short period, **but only at the expense of the others**. The increased price of goods which would inevitably flow from such a measure would lead to a reduction of the ability of British workers to buy other products, thus provoking crises in other sections of the national economy. It would only mean the transference of unemployment from one industry to another.

As for the argument that British industry needs a “breathing-space” to allow the capitalists to re-tool and re-equip behind the safety of tariff barriers, this simply flies in the face of all previous experience.

The greedy parasites who control the flow of life-blood to British industry, whenever they have been

given the chance to make extra profits, have not ploughed these back into industry but squandered them in higher dividends or invested them in purely speculative activity.

When the Wilson government devalued the pound by 14%—a measure, it should not be forgotten which the Tribune Left had campaigned for with the same ardour with which they now embrace import controls—the British bosses did not make use of the opportunity to export British goods more cheaply, but simply raised their price to make a quick killing, while the British workers and their families were left to foot the bill in the form of higher prices.

So much for the economic justification of protectionism. But for socialists the matter does not end here. For behind the clamour of the most right-wing sections of the Tory Party for import controls there lurks a real threat to break down the class consciousness of the workers and to replace the instinctive bonds of class solidarity—nationally and internationally—with the venom of nationalism.

Japanese ‘Danger’

This Tory MP Alan Clark—approvingly quoted in the TASS document—explains his support for protectionism in purely political terms:

“The ‘siege economy’ is a pejorative term,” he gloats in the pages of *‘The Times’* (7 March); “but within its definition is that latent nationalism and pride which even the most cynical (!) may hope to feel once more and without which no great political endeavour can succeed.”

Of course, it comes as no surprise that members of the Tory party, that traditional party of protectionism, can come up with this reactionary nationalist clap-trap. But for representatives of Labour (and of Labour’s left, at

that) to appear on a common platform with these Tory gentlemen is utterly unacceptable, and shows precisely where the defence of import controls ultimately leads: to a “common front” of British workers with British bosses against foreign workers and their employers.

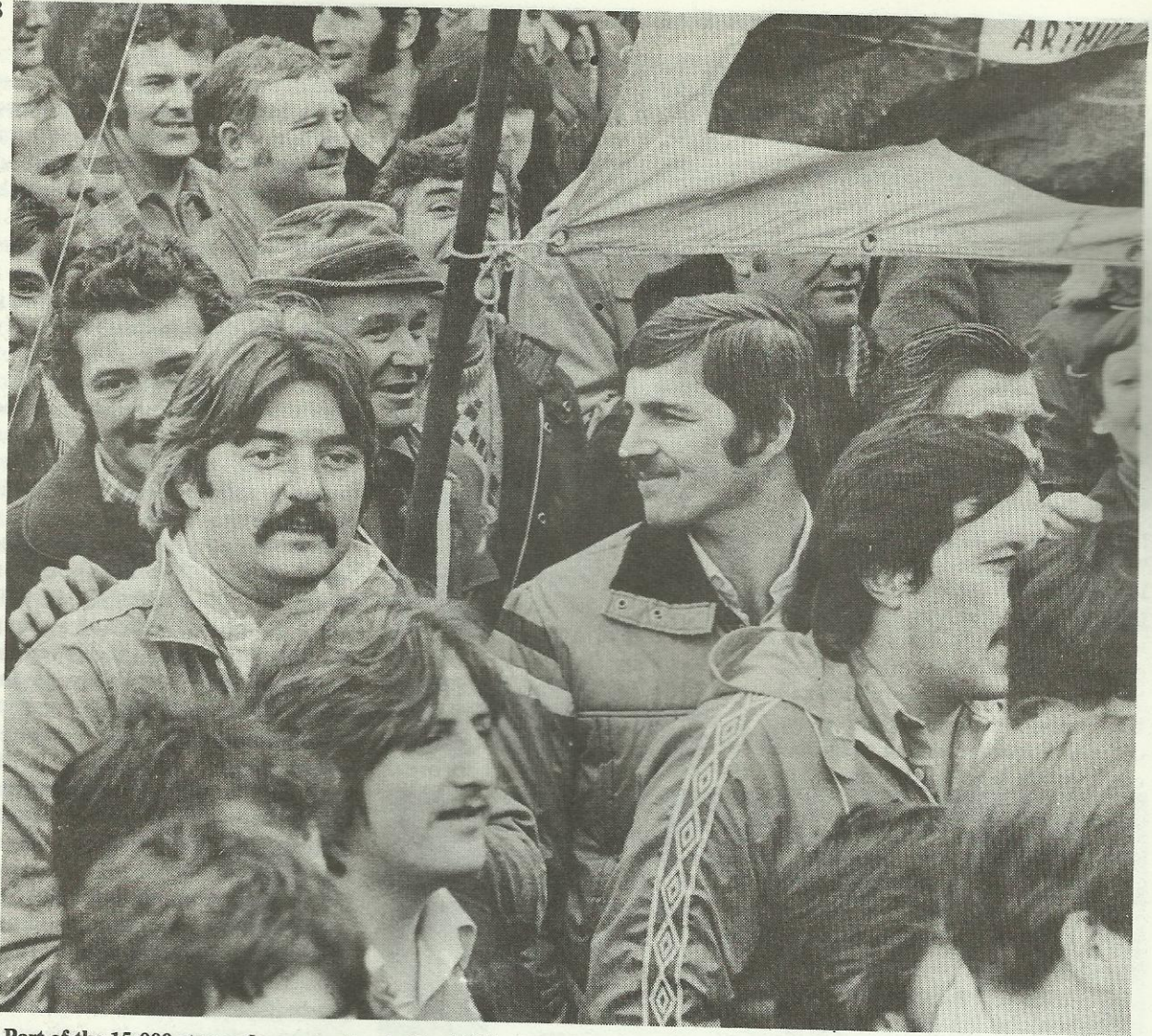
The blame for the appalling decline of British industry lies fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the British capitalists. This is clear from the material published in the TASS document itself. It is also clear to any thinking worker who pauses to reflect on the state of his own industry.

Not long ago the journal of the Sheet Metal Workers’ Union published an interesting article based on the experience of a group of trade unionists in Coventry, concerned at the inability of the machine tool industry to compete with foreign rivals.

The workers who made up the Coventry Machine Tool Workers’ Committee had set out precisely with the idea that “unfair competition” from imported Japanese lathes were responsible for the loss of jobs in their industry, and even imposed a successful campaign of “blacking” against the Japanese products.

“One of our main concerns,” said Gordon Woodhall, chairman of the joint shop stewards at Wickman Machine Tools Ltd, “was not just the question of imports, but that those from Japan with their own stringent import laws, did not allow fair trading. **But our continued investigations into job losses in the industry led us to realise that Japanese imports were not the main danger confronting our job security.**” (My emphasis, AW)

On the basis of a careful examination of the facts, the Coventry workers discovered that the plight of their industry was not due to “unfair foreign competition.” **“It soon became evident to them that the decline had started well before any major penetration of the home market.”** And the article goes on to explain:



Part of the 15,000 strong demonstration in Cardiff during last winter's steel strike. "Workers must rely on their own strength."

"Between 1965 and 1970, Alfred Herbert (then boasting they were the 'largest machine-tool producer in Europe'—but later being bailed out by a Labour government) made £8.7 million profit—but distributed £9.2 million in dividends!"

"Lack of capital re-investment in design and development in the early '70s led to the industry becoming vulnerable to foreign competition due to its relative backwardness. Not only have the 'captains of industry' led the machine tool industry into its present blind alley; they have also put under threat of dispersal the pool of technical skill which is the lifeblood of a thriving machine tool industry." (My emphasis, AW)

These lines are highly instructive because they show how at least certain of the most advanced layers of the class have come to understand, through their own experience, that import controls are not the answer to unemployment.

Karl Marx explained over a hundred years ago that neither "free trade" nor "protection" could solve the problems of the working class.

The attraction of import controls is that it appears to provide an easy way out. The innate conservatism of the human mind, which always lags behind the development of the productive forces and technique, and resists the idea of fundamental change until it is forced upon it by

the categorical imperative of social development, means that the great majority of society, including the working class, will desperately seek solutions which do not imply a sudden and decisive break with the past. In the first instance, many workers will seek the "line of least resistance." All sorts of "quack" theories and panaceas will come forward to meet this demand. The leaders of the TUC and Labour Party, many of them for the sincerest motives, are putting forward all kinds of ways of shoring up decrepit and decaying capitalism. They do not see that, by so doing, they are merely prolonging the death-agony of the system and lending it a more violent and

convulsive character. The dialectical contradiction of reformism—and especially of its most “left” variety—is that it always succeeds in achieving results that are diametrically opposed to its original intentions.

The advocates of import controls among the leaders of the TUC and Labour Party imagine they are being “practical”, when in reality they are being utopian. They imagine they are defending a socialist policy, when in reality, as the TASS document shows, they are prodding the workers along a path marked out by the sharks of the CBI and the most reactionary sections of the Tory party. Just as in the case of devaluation (which the Tribune leaders today would prefer to forget), the left reformists are doomed to have their clothes robbed—this time, in all probability, by the Tory government itself.

And how will the Tribune MPs react when Thatcher (or her successor) is finally forced to do a ‘U-turn’ and introduce import controls? Will they really welcome it as a great victory for socialist principles? Do they really imagine it will serve the workers’ interests and solve the problem of unemployment?

It is the task of a leadership to lead, not to tail-end the bosses and their representatives. The hue and cry over import controls is no substitute for a fighting socialist policy against redundancies and factory closures. It only serves to divert the workers’ attention from the fundamental issues.

Indeed, it seems that the supporters of import controls have half realised that they are barking

up the wrong tree. They seek to camouflage their defence of protectionism with such phrases as “planned growth of trade”.

What is the meaning of this? How can trade be “planned” under capitalist anarchy? If the phrase is to mean anything at all it must mean, as a minimum, a state monopoly of foreign trade. But this already presupposes the nationalisation of the banks and monopolies and a socialist planned economy. If this is what the advocates of the so-called “planned growth of trade” stand for, then ‘Militant’, the Marxist tendency in the labour movement, will support them wholeheartedly. If it does not mean this, then it is only a “nicer” way of saying import controls. Unfortunately, the substance of a thing does not change merely by altering the name.

The authors of the document also hint at “trade union control” of the giant multinationals in order to resist trade between the nations. But if the trade unions were strong enough to impose their will on the capitalists on such fundamental questions as the flow of investment and the direction of trade, then they would also be in a position to expropriate the capitalists on an international scale. In the context of a socialist united states of Europe, with the dovetailing of the different economies and the mutual planning of the productive forces, it would be possible to achieve a planned growth of trade as a logical consequence of the general planning of the economy on a European, and ultimately, a world scale. In practice, the notion of all the European trade unions coming

together, for example, to persuade Henry Ford to invest in the South of Italy is so preposterously utopian that it cannot be taken seriously.

Instead of diverting the workers’ attention from the central issue which is the fight against their own bosses, by pointing a finger at the “enemy without”, the labour and trade union leaders should launch a serious campaign against redundancies, on the lines explained in the pages of ‘Militant’ and the ‘MIR’:

- ★ No redundancies.
- ★ No selling of jobs.
- ★ Immediate introduction of the 35-hour week without loss of pay.
- ★ Nationalisation with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need of all industries in crisis.
- ★ For a useful programme of public works, hospitals, council houses, schools, etc. Opposition to all cuts in the social services etc.
- ★ For a socialist plan of production, based on the nationalisation, under workers’ control and management, of the banks and the 200 monopolies as the only way of eliminating the nightmare of unemployment.

Instead of advocating policies which inevitably lead to collaboration with “our” capitalists, the Labour leadership, especially those who claim to stand on the left, must teach the workers to rely on their own strength and trust only in themselves and their class organisations. Once these powerful forces were mobilised for the socialist transformation of society, no force on earth could stop them.



40 YEARS SINCE LEON TROTSKY'S ASSASSINATION

11

EXILE AND REPRESSION

By Lynn Walsh

Stalin conducts the struggle "on a different plane with different methods."

This year is the fortieth anniversary of the death of Leon Trotsky.

On 20 August, 1940, Trotsky was struck a fatal blow with an ice-pick by Ramon Mercader, an agent sent to Mexico by Stalin's secret police (the GPU) to murder the exiled revolutionary—alongside Lenin, the leader of the October revolution, the founder and leader of the Red Army, and the co-founder of the Third, Communist International.

Trotsky's assassination was not just a malicious after-thought on the part of Stalin. It was the culmination of a systematic and bloody terror directed against a whole generation of Bolshevik leaders, and against the young revolutionaries of a second generation prepared to defend the genuine ideas of Marxism against the bureaucratic, repressive regime developing under Stalin. By the time the GPU reached Trotsky in 1940, they had already murdered—or driven to suicide—many members of Trotsky's family, scores of his closest friends and collaborat-

ors, and countless numbers of the leaders and supporters of the International Left Opposition.

Despite the murder of a whole generation of Bolshevik-Leninists, however, and the bureaucracy's Herculean efforts to bury the ideas and historical personality of Trotsky under a mountain of distortions, lies, slanders, and grotesque historical fabrication, Trotsky's ideas have never had more relevance or more appeal to working-class activists than they have today, at the beginning of the 1980s, when there is unmistakably a perspective of new revolutionary developments in the advanced capitalist countries, the underdeveloped lands of the ex-colonial world, and the deformed workers' states of Russia and Eastern Europe.

This will no doubt be grudgingly conceded by even the capitalist press this August. But, predictably, an enormous amount of rubbish will be written, whether through an inability to understand the real historical role of Trotsky or a

deliberate effort to obscure and confuse the political issues involved.

For instance, despite the incontrovertible evidence—some clear at the time, much more which has since come to light—some journals (eg. the 'New Statesman', 8th December 1978), anxious it seems to exculpate Stalinism, have even tried to cast doubt on the GPU's responsibility for Trotsky's murder.

More fundamentally, however, the old question (raised, for instance, by Max Eastman in the 1930s) will inevitably come up. Why, if Trotsky was one of the foremost leaders of the Bolshevik party and the head of the Red Army, did he allow Stalin to concentrate power in his hands? Why did Trotsky not take power himself? The idea will no doubt be put forward again that Trotsky was "too doctrinaire", that his policies were "impractical", and that he allowed himself to be "outmanoeuvred" by Stalin. As a corollary, it will again be suggested that Stalin was more "practical" and that he

was a more "astute" and "forceful" leader.

Trotsky himself completely refuted these ideas, not just in answering Max Eastman's point, but through his whole analysis of the degeneration of the soviet workers' state and his criticism of the bureaucracy's policies. From the standpoint of Marxism, it is completely false to pose the conflict that opened up after 1923 as a personal struggle for power between rival leaders.

"In view of the prolonged decline in the international revolution," wrote Trotsky in 1935, "the victory of the bureaucracy—and consequently of Stalin—was for-ordained. The result which the idle observers and fools attribute to the personal forcefulness of Stalin, or at least to his exceptional cunning, stemmed from causes lying deep in the dynamics of historical forces. Stalin emerged as the half-conscious expression of the second chapter of the revolution, its 'Morning after'." ('Diary in Exile', p.38)

Neither Trotsky, nor any of the Bolshevik leaders in 1917, had imagined that the working class of Russia could build a socialist society in isolation, in an economically backward and culturally primitive country. They were convinced that the workers had to take the power in order to carry through the largely unfinished tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; but in pressing forward to the imperative tasks of the socialist revolution, they could proceed only in collaboration with the working class of the more developed capitalist countries—because, as compared to capitalism, socialism requires a higher level of production and material culture.

The defeat of the German revolution in 1923—to which the blunders of the Stalin-Bukharin leadership contributed—reinforced the isolation of the Soviet state, and the enforced retreat of the New Economic Policy speeded up the crystallisation of a bureaucratic caste which increasingly put its own

creature comforts, desire for tranquility, and demands for privileges before the interests of the international revolution.

The ruling stratum of the bureaucracy "was rapidly discovering that Stalin was flesh of its flesh," and reflecting the interests of the bureaucracy, Stalin began a struggle against "Trotskyism"—an ideological bogey which he invented to distort and stigmatise the genuine ideas of Marxism, and of Lenin, upheld by Trotsky and the Left Opposition.

It was the bureaucracy's fear that the opposition's programme for the restoration of workers' democracy would find an echo among a new layer of young workers and give new momentum to the struggle against bureaucratic degeneration that motivated Stalin's bloody purge against the Opposition. Its ideas were "the source of the gravest apprehensions of Stalin: that savage fears ideas, since he knows their explosive power and knows his own weakness in the face of them." ('Diary in Exile', p.66)

This fear also explained Stalin's personal craving for revenge against Trotsky and his family. Stalin, remarked Trotsky, "is clever enough to realise that even today I would not change places with him [in 1935, while living in "modified prison style" in France]...hence the psychology of a man stung."

Expulsion and Exile

Answering in advance the false idea that the conflict was in some way the result of "misunderstanding" or unwillingness to compromise, Trotsky related how, while he was exiled at Alma-Ata in 1928, a "sympathetic" engineer, probably "sent surreptitiously to feel my pulse", asked him whether he didn't think some steps towards reconciliation with Stalin were possible:

"I answered him to the effect that at that moment there could be no question of reconciliation, not because I **did not want it**, but because Stalin **could not** make his peace with me. He was forced to pursue to the end the course set him by the bureaucracy. 'How will it end?' 'It will come to a sticky end.' I answered. 'Stalin cannot settle it any other way.' My visitor was visibly startled; he obviously had not expected such an answer, and soon left." ('Diary in Exile' p.39).

Beginning in 1923 Trotsky led a fight in the Russian Communist Party. In a series of articles (published as 'The New Course') he began to warn of the danger of a post-revolutionary reaction. The isolation of the revolution in a backward country was leading to the incipient growth of a bureaucracy in the Bolshevik Party and the state. Trotsky began to protest at the arbitrary behaviour of the Party bureaucracy crystallising under Stalin.

Shortly before he died in 1924, Lenin agreed with Trotsky on a block in the Party to fight bureaucracy.

When Trotsky and a group of left oppositionists began a fight for a revival of workers' democracy, the Politbureau was obliged to promise the restoration of freedom of expression and criticism in the Communist Party. But Stalin and his associates made sure that this remained a dead letter.

Within four years—on the 7th November 1927, the 10th anniversary of the October revolution—Trotsky was forced to leave the Kremlin and take refuge with oppositionist friends. A week later, Trotsky and Zinoviev, the first Chairman of the Communist International, were expelled from the Party. Next day, Trotsky's fellow oppositionist and friend, Adolph Joffe, killed himself in protest at the dictatorial action of the Stalin leadership. This was the first of Trotsky's comrades, friends, and family to be driven to death or directly murdered by Stalin's

regime, which through systematic and ruthless repression of its opponents, opened up a river of blood between genuine workers' democracy and its own bureaucratic, totalitarian methods.

In Janaury 1928, Trotsky was forced into his third foreign exile. First he was deported to Alma-Ata, a small Russian town near the Chinese border, and from there he was deported to Turkey, where he took up residence on Prinkipo Island, on the Sea of Marmara near Constantinople (now Istanbul).

In an attempt to paralyse Trotsky's literary and political work, Stalin struck at his small 'apparat', which had consisted of five or six close collaborators: "Glazman, driven to suicide; Butov, dead in a GPU prison; Blumkin, shot; Sermuks and Poznansky vanished. Stalin did not see that even without a secretariat I could carry on literary work, which, in its turn, could further the creating of a new apparat. Even the cleverest bureaucrat displays an incredible short-sightedness, in certain questions!" ('Diary in Exile', p.40) All these revolutionaries had played important roles, particularly as members of the military secretariat or on Trotsky's armed train during the civil war. But Stalin, as Trotsky remarked, "Was conducting the struggle on a different plane, and with different weapons."

If Stalin subsequently devoted such a large part of the resources of his secret police (known by its various abbreviated names: Cheka, GPU, NKVD, MVD, and KGB), to planning and executing the assassination of Trotsky, why did Stalin allow his opponent to go into exile in the first place?

In an Open Letter to the Politbureau in January 1932, Trotsky publicly warned that Stalin would prepare an attempt on his life. "The question of terrorist reprisals against the author of this letter," he wrote, "was posed long ago: in 1924/5 at an intimate gathering Stalin weighed the pros and cons. The pros were obvious

and clear. The chief consideration **against** was that there were too many young Trotskyists who might reply with counter-terrorist actions." (Writings 1932, p.19)

Trotsky was informed of these discussions by Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had briefly formed a "ruling triumvirate" with Stalin, but later moved—temporarily—into opposition against Stalin.

Persecution

But "Stalin has come to the conclusion that it was a mistake to have exiled Trotsky from the Soviet Union", wrote Trotsky: "...contrary to his expectations it turned out that ideas have a power of their own, even without an apparatus and without resources. The Comintern is a grandiose structure, that has been left as a hollow shell, both theoretically and politically. The future of revolutionary Marxism, which is to say of Leninism as well, is inseparably bound up from now on with the international cadres of the Left Opposition. No amount of falsification can change that. The basic works of the opposition have been, are being, or will be published in every language. Opposition cadres, as yet not very numerous but nonetheless indomitable, are to be found in every country. Stalin understands perfectly well what a grave danger the ideological irreconcilability and persistent growth of the International Left Opposition represent to him **personally**, to his fake 'authority', to his Bonapartist almightiness." (Writings, 1932, pp.18-20)

In the early period of his Turkish exile, Trotsky wrote his monumental 'History of the Russian Revolution' and also his brilliant autobiography, 'My Life'. Through voluminous correspondence with oppositionists in other countries and especially through the 'Bulletin of the Opposition' (published from Autumn, 1929), Trotsky began to

draw together the nucleus of an international opposition of genuine Bolsheviks. But Trotsky's prognosis that, using the GPU, Stalin would ferociously purge and attempt to destroy everything working against him, was soon borne out.

Towards the end of his Turkish exile, Trotsky suffered a cruel blow when his daughter, Zinaida, ill and demoralised, was driven to suicide in Berlin. Her husband, Platon Volkov, a young opposition militant, was arrested and disappeared forever. Trotsky's first wife, Alexandra Sokolovskaya, the woman who first introduced him to socialist ideas, was sent to a concentration camp where she died. Later Trotsky's son, Sergey, a scientist with no political interests or connections, was arrested on a trumped-up charge of 'poisoning the workers'—and Trotsky later learned that he had died in prison. Alongside his morbid fear of ideas, "the motive of personal revenge has always been a considerable factor in the repressive policies of Stalin." ('Diary in Exile', p.66)

From the start, moreover, the GPU began to penetrate Trotsky's household and the groups of the Left Opposition. Suspicion surrounded a number of people who appeared in Opposition organisations in Europe, or who came to Prinkipo to visit Trotsky or assist in his work. Jakob Frank, for example, a Lithuanian Jew worked at Prinkipo for a time but later went over to Stalinism. Another, known as Kharin (or Joseph) handed over the text of one edition of the "Bulletin of the Opposition" to the GPU, thus seriously disrupting its production. There was also the case of Mill (Paul Okun, or Obin) who also went over to the Stalinists, leaving Trotsky and his collaborators uncertain whether he was just a turn-coat or a GPU plant.

Why were such people accepted as genuine collaborators? In a public comment on Mill's treachery, Trotsky pointed out that, "The Left Opposition is placed in extremely difficult conditions from

an organisational point of view. No revolutionary party in the past has worked under such persecution. In addition to repression by the capitalist police of all countries, the Opposition is exposed to the blows of the Stalinist bureaucracy which stops at nothing...it is of course the Russian section which is having the hardest time...But to find a Russian Bolshevik-Leninist abroad, even for purely technical functions, is an extremely difficult task. This and only this explains the fact that Mill was able for a time to get into the Administrative Secretariat of the Left Opposition. There was a need for a person who knew Russian and was able to carry out secretarial duties. Mill had at one time been a member of the official Party and in this sense could claim a certain personal confidence." (*Writings* 1932, p.237)

Looking back, it is clear that the lack of adequate security checks was to have tragic consequences. But resources were extremely limited, and Trotsky understood that a phobia about infiltration and an exaggerated suspicion of everyone who offered support to the work of the Opposition could be counter-productive. With his positive, optimistic view of human character, moreover, Trotsky was averse to subjecting individuals to searching enquiries and personal investigation.

One visitor to Prinkipo, however, was quite definitely a professional GPU agent. The subsequent course of this agent's treacherous career was much later to throw considerable light on the GPU's deadly manoeuvres against Trotsky and the Opposition. This was Abraham Sobolevich, who as "Senin" was a leading member of the German Left Opposition, together with his brother, Ruvin Sobolevich, known as "Roman Well". These brothers conspired to disrupt the activities of the German group—with considerable success. In 1933, with Hitler's seizure of power, they returned to the GPU headquarters in Moscow—but not before Trotsky had confronted

"Senin" while on a brief visit to Copenhagen in 1932 and denounced the "so-called Trotskyite" as "more or less an agent of the Stalinists." "At the mildest estimate," Trotsky wrote, "we can call these people [the Sobolevich brothers] nothing but the garbage of the revolution," and commented that there were certainly connections between such agents and the GPU in Moscow.

Purge Trials

Much later, this was confirmed by "Senin" himself: "My services for the Soviet secret police went back to 1931," he confessed (though they almost certainly began earlier). "The job was to spy on Leon Trotsky for Joseph Stalin, who was obsessed with the idea of knowing everything his hated rival was doing and thinking even in exile...for two years, in 1931 and 1932, I spied on Trotsky and the men around him. Trotsky, suspecting nothing, invited me to his heavily guarded home at Prinkipo, Turkey. I duly reported back to the Kremlin everything Trotsky told me in confidence including his pungent remarks about Stalin." This was revealed in the United States in 1957/8, when "Senin", now under the name of Jack Sobel, was put on trial as the key member of a Russian spy ring in America. In the course of his testimony, at his own trial, at the perjury trial of his fellow agent, Mark Zborowski, and also at Senate hearings on espionage, Jack Sobel, together with his brother, now known as Robert Sobel, confirmed in detail the murderous role of the GPU in relation to Trotsky, his family, and his supporters.

Trotsky was eager to escape the isolation of Prinkipo and find a base nearer to the centre of European events. But the capitalist democracies were far from willing

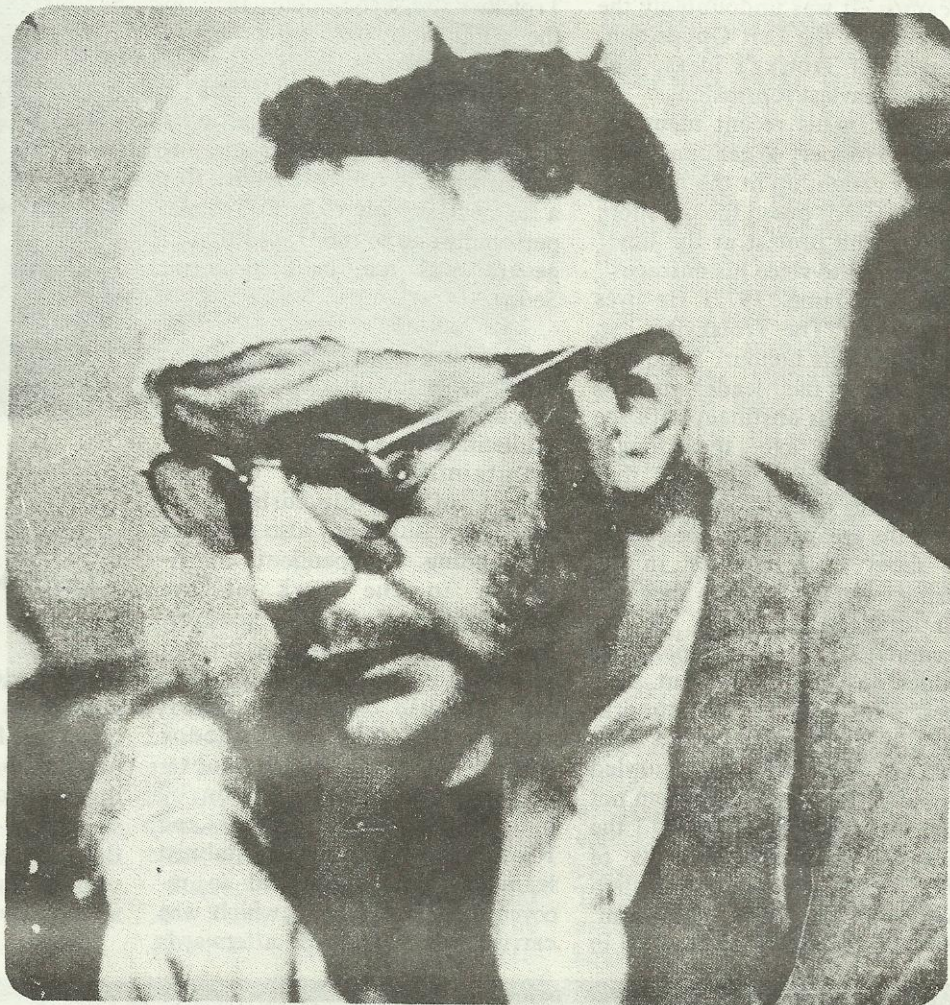
to grant Trotsky the democratic right of asylum. Eventually, in 1933, Trotsky was admitted to France. The sharpening of political tension, however, and particularly the growth of the nationalist and fascist right, soon led the Daladier government to order his expulsion. Practically every European government had already refused him asylum. Trotsky lived, as he wrote, on "a planet without a visa." Expelled in 1935, Trotsky found refuge for a short time in Norway where he wrote 'The Revolution Betrayed' (1936).

"Lies, falsification, forgery, and judicial perversion have assumed a scale hitherto unheard of in history..." (*Diary in Exile*, p45) wrote Trotsky while still in France. But shortly after his arrival in Norway, the first big Moscow purge trial exploded in the face of the world. "Disturbing trials are now taking place in the USSR," Trotsky commented in his *Diary*; "Stalin's dictatorship is approaching a new frontier." In the first monstrous show trial, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and other prominent leaders of the Bolshevik Party were tried on trumped-up charges—based on false confessions extorted by brutal pressure, torture, and threats against the defendants' families. The leading defendants were sentenced to death and immediately executed. Stalin's campaign against "Trotskyism" reached a climax. In these great purge trials, Trotsky was the chief defendant in absentia, accused of staging innumerable conspiracies with the alleged purpose of assassinating Stalin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, and other Soviet leaders, and of acting in secret collusion with Hitler and the Emperor of Japan in order to bring about the downfall of the Soviet regime and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, Stalin exerted intense pressure on the Norwegian government to restrict Trotsky in order to prevent his replying to and refuting the vile charges hurled against him in Moscow. To avoid virtual imprisonment, Trotsky was



**Above: Trotsky's funeral
in Mexico City**



**Right:
Assassin Ramon
Mercader after
his struggle
with Trotsky's
guards**

obliged to find an alternative refuge, and he eagerly accepted an offer of asylum from the Cardenas government in Mexico. En route, Trotsky recalled his Open Letter to the Politbureau in which he had anticipated Stalin's "world-wide bureaucratic slander campaign," and predicted attempts on his life. With chilling premonition, Trotsky added: "Stalin conducts a struggle on a totally different plane. He seeks to strike not at the ideas of the opponent, but at his skull." (Writings 1936/37, p44)

The purge in Russia was not confined to a handful of old Bolsheviks or Left Oppositionists. For every leader who appeared in a show trial, hundreds or thousands were silently imprisoned, sent to certain death in Arctic prison camps, or summarily executed in prison cellars. At least eight million were arrested in the course of the purges, and five or six millions rotted, many of them to death, in the camps. It was undoubtedly the supporters of the Left Opposition, adherents of Trotsky's ideas, who bore the heaviest repression.

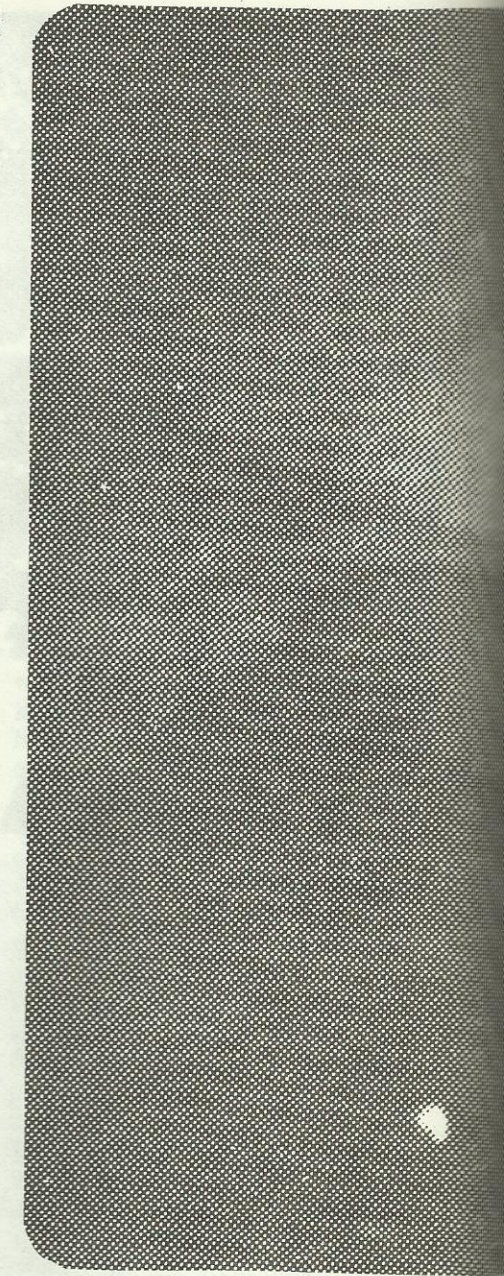
Writing in his recent memoirs, Leopold Trepper, a genuine revolutionary caught up in the machinery of the GPU, posed the question: "But who did protest at the time? Who rose up to voice his outrage?" ('The Great Game', 1977). He gives this answer: "The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honour. Following the example of their leader who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice axe, they fought Stalinism to the death and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra. Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in

the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not 'confess', for they knew that their confession would serve neither the Party nor socialism." (p56)

The purges in Russia were also linked to Stalin's direct, counter-revolutionary intervention in the revolution and the civil war which erupted in Spain in the summer of 1936. Through the agency of a bureaucratic leadership of the Spanish Communist Party controlled from Moscow, the apparatus of Soviet military advisers, and through the GPU's "Special Tasks Force," Stalin extended his terror to the anarchists, left-wing militants and especially the Trotskyists who stood in the way of his policies.

Meanwhile, Stalin's secret police also intensified his measures to destroy the centre of the International Left Opposition, based in Paris and under the direction of Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov. In 1936 the GPU stole part of Trotsky's archives stored in Paris, a move intended to undermine Trotsky's ability to reply to the monstrous charges and faked evidence put forward in the Moscow trials. But a far heavier blow to both Trotsky personally and to the Opposition in general was the death of Leon Sedov.

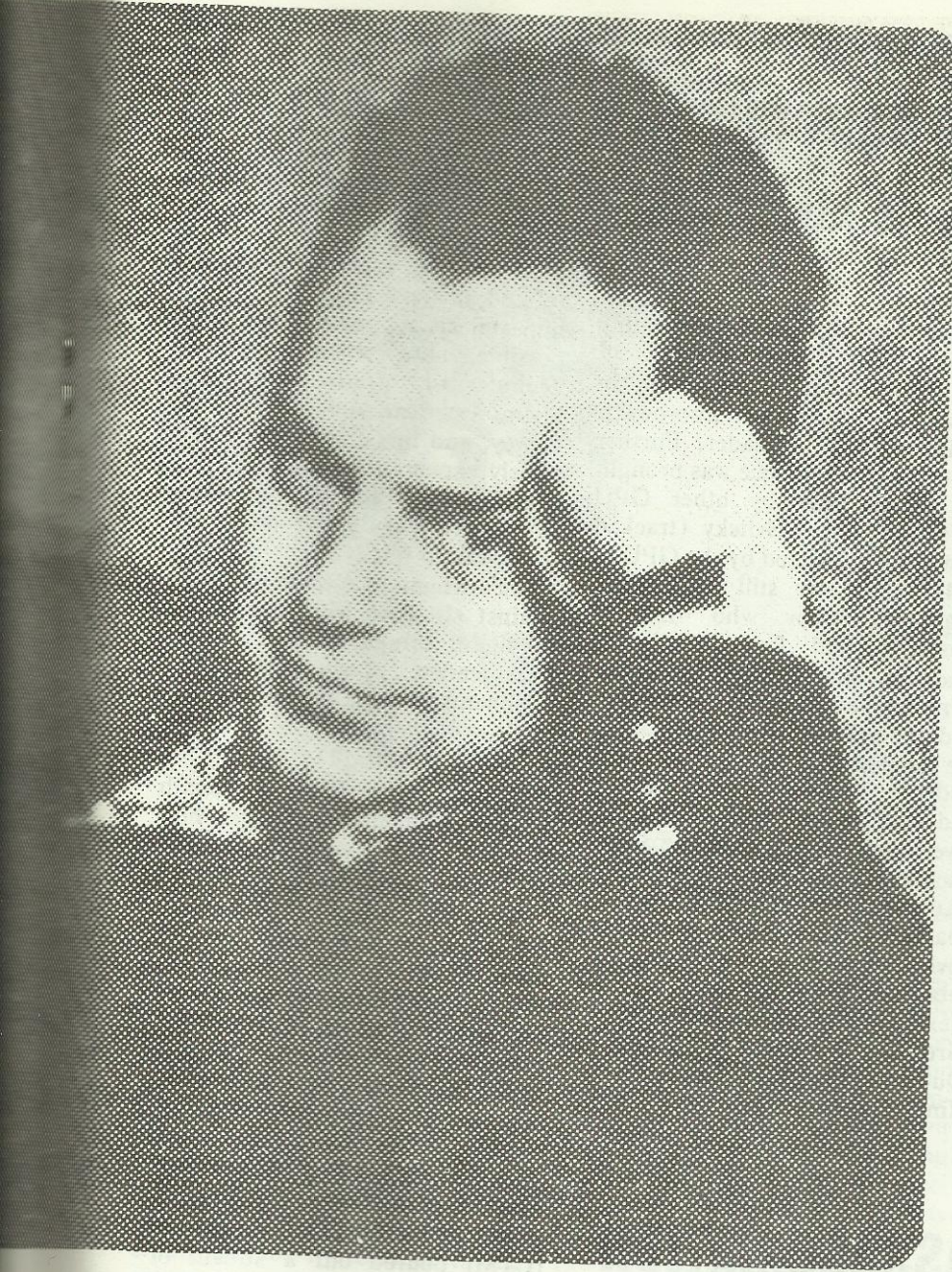
Sedov had been indispensable to Trotsky in his literary work, in preparing and distributing the 'Bulletin of the Opposition', and in maintaining contacts between groups of oppositionists internationally. But Sedov also made an outstanding, independent contribution to the work of the opposition. Early in 1937, however, he was taken ill with suspected appendicitis. On the advice of a man who had become his closest collaborator, "Etienne", Sedov entered a clinic—which subsequently turned out to be run by both "White" Russian emigrés and Russians with known Stalinist leanings. Sedov appeared to recover from the surgery which was carried out; but shortly afterwards



Leon Sedov—'Son, friend, fighter'

he died with extremely mysterious symptoms. The evidence, and the opinion of at least one doctor, pointed to poisoning, and further investigation produced a strong suggestion that his illness had in the first place been produced by sophisticated, virtually undetectable poisoning.

Trotsky wrote a moving tribute



to his dead son, "Leon Sedov—Son, Friend, Fighter". (Writings 1937/38, pp 166-179). He paid tribute to Sedov's role in the struggle to defend the genuine ideas of Marxism against their Stalinist perversion. But he also gave some indication of the depth of the personal blow. "He was part of both of us," Trotsky wrote,

speaking for himself and for Natalia: "Our young part. By hundreds of channels our thoughts and feelings daily reach out to him in Paris. Together with our boy has died everything that still remained young within us."

Subsequently it was revealed that Leon Sedov had been betrayed by "Etienne", a GPU agent far more

insidious and ruthless than the previous spies and provocateurs who had infiltrated Trotsky's circle. Etienne was later unmasked as one Mark Zborowski, who like the Sobels was exposed in the United States in the late 1950s as the key figure in the GPU's American espionage network. By that time, Zborowski, already had a long trail of duplicity and blood behind him. In his US trial, Zborowski confessed that he had led the GPU to Trotsky's archives and had been responsible for "fingering" Rudolf Klement (Trotsky's secretary, murdered in Paris in 1938), Erwin Wolf (a supporter of Trotsky who went to Spain and was murdered in July 1937), and Ignace Reiss (a top GPU agent who renounced Stalin's terror machine and declared his support for the Fourth International, murdered in Switzerland in September 1937).

By his own admission Zborowski had been a professional GPU agent since 1931 or 1932 (though more likely since 1928). He may at one time have been a member of the Polish Communist Party (though he denied this), but he was undoubtedly a mercenary Stalinist agent. He undoubtedly had contact with Jack Sobel in Paris, and also with the agents of the GPU's "Special Tasks Force" in Spain, which was responsible for the murder in Barcelona of Erwin Wolf—and which included in its ranks the infamous Colonel Eitingon. It was this man, under numerous pseudonyms, who was to direct the assassination attempts against Trotsky in Mexico, in conjunction with his GPU associate and lover, Caridad Mercader, and her son Ramon Mercader, the agent who eventually murdered Trotsky. Zborowski was also responsible for beginning the task of infiltrating Mercader into Trotsky's circle. Nearly two years before the assassination, he set up an elaborate scheme to enable Mercader to seduce a young American Trotskyist, Sylvia Ageloff, as a means of gaining entry to Trotsky's household.

SHOW TRIALS AND BLOODY PURGES

“Stalin’s dictatorship is approaching a new frontier...”

All the evidence at the time pointed to the GPU’s responsibility for the murder of Trotsky, his son Leon Sedov and other leading supporters. But later this was more than amply confirmed, not only by the detailed evidence of the Sobels, Zborowski, and others forced to testify in the United States courts and Senate hearings in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but also by the detailed evidence of a number of top GPU officers who fled from Russia and revealed the truth about the murderous activity in which they had been involved. The first, had been Ignace Reiss himself, who soon paid with his life for his denunciation of Stalin’s crimes. Later Alexander Orlov, who had been director of the GPU machine in Spain during the civil war, escaped to America. He attempted to warn Trotsky of the plot against his life, though this was only partially successful because of Trotsky’s understandable fear of being misled by a provocateur. But Orlov, both in evidence to the US

government and in his revealing book, ‘The Secret History of Stalin’s Crimes’, confirmed in detail the role of Zborowski, Eitingon, and Mercader. Further corroborative evidence was brought out much later by other GPU defectors, like Krivitsky (tracked down and murdered by the GPU in 1941) and later still by Colonel Vladimir Petrov who fled to Australia and Captain Nikolai Khokhlov. Khokhlov testified that: “Trotsky’s assassination was organised by Major General Eitingon, the same general who was in Spain under the name of General Katov,” and who “recruited Spaniards for diversionary activities of the Soviet intelligence.” Khokhlov added: “And that is where he recruited a Spaniard who was brought to the Soviet union and who was briefed in detail and who was later sent to Mexico under the name of Mornard” (ie. Mercader or ‘Jason’). (Quoted in Isaac Don Levine, ‘The Mind of an Assassin’, 1960, p.34)

Mexico as in Norway...” (‘The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky’, page 212). Once again Trotsky exposed the internal contradictions of the manufactured evidence used in these monstrous frame-ups, and in a stream of articles completely refuted all the accusations against him and his supporters. It proved possible, moreover, to organise a “counter-trial” presided over by the liberal American philosopher, John Dewey, and this commission completely exonerated Trotsky of the charges hurled against him. Trotsky warned that the purpose of the trials was to justify a new wave of terror—which would be directed against all those who represented the slightest threat to Stalin’s dictatorial leadership, whether as active opponents, potential bureaucratic rivals, or simply embarrassing accomplices from the past. Trotsky was well aware that the death penalty pronounced against him was far from being a platonic sentence.

From the moment of his arrival, the Mexican Communist Party, whose leaders loyally followed the Moscow line, began to agitate for restrictions to be placed on Trotsky to prevent him answering the show trial allegations, and ultimately to bring about his expulsion from the country. The newspapers and journals published by the Communist Party and the Communist-controlled trade union federation (CTM) poured out a stream of slanderous allegations, to the effect that Trotsky was plotting against the Cardenas government and allegedly collaborating with fascist and reactionary elements. Trotsky was well aware that the Stalinist press was using the language of people who decide things, not by votes but by the machine gun.

In the middle of the night on 24th/25th May, came the first direct assault on Trotsky’s life. A group of armed raiders forced their way into Trotsky’s house, raked the bedrooms with machine-gun fire, and set off incendiaries evidently intended to destroy Trotsky’s archives and cause the maximum

ARMED RAID AND ASSASSINATION

“Retribution will come to the vile murderers...”

Trotsky, Natalia Sedova, and a handful of close collaborators arrived in Mexico in January 1937. The administration of General Lazaro Cardenas was the only government in the world that would grant Trotsky asylum in the last years of his life. In marked contrast to his reception elsewhere, Trotsky was given a flamboyant official welcome and went to live in Coyoacán, a suburb of Mexico City, in a house lent by his friend

and political supporter, Diego Rivera, a well-known Mexican painter.

Trotsky’s arrival, however, coincided with a second Moscow show trial, shortly followed by a third, even more grotesque trial. “We listened to the radio,” related Natalia, “opened the mail and the Moscow newspapers, and we felt that insanity, absurdity, and outrage, fraud and blood were flooding us from all sides, here in

**Robert
Sheldon Harte—
innocent victim**



possible damage. Trotsky and Natalia narrowly escaped death by lying on the floor beneath the bed. Their grandson, Seva, was slightly injured by a bullet. A large bomb left by the raiders failed—fortunately—to go off. Afterwards, it was found that the raiders had been let in by Robert Sheldon Harte, one of the secretary-guards, who was apparently tricked by someone in the raiding party he knew and trusted. His body was later found buried in a lime pit. The raiders, moreover, knew the layout of the building and the security devices—they clearly had inside information. Although an accusing finger was pointed at Sheldon Harte as an accomplice, he was undoubtedly duped—as Trotsky emphatically maintained at the time—by somebody familiar to him. No one fits this inference better than Mornard, alias 'Jacson.'

All the evidence pointed to the Mexican Stalinists and, behind them, the GPU. Through a detailed analysis of the Stalinist press in the weeks before the raid,

Trotsky clearly showed that they had foreknowledge of, and were preparing for, an armed attempt on his life. The Mexican police soon arrested some of the minor accomplices of the raiders, and their evidence soon incriminated leading members of the Mexican Communist Party. For a start, the suspects had previously been involved in the International Brigades in Spain—already notorious as the recruiting ground of Stalin's agents and killers. The trail soon led to David Alfaro Siqueiros, like Diego Rivera a well-known painter, but unlike Rivera, a leading member of the Mexican Communist Party. Siqueiros had also been in Spain and had long been suspected of connections with the GPU. Despite the Stalinists' outrageous attempt to portray the attack as a "self-inflicted attack," supposedly organised by Trotsky to discredit the CP and the Cardenas government, the police eventually arrested the ring-leaders, including Siqueiros. However, as a result of pressure from the CP and

the CTM, Siqueiros and the others were released in March 1941, for "lack of material and incriminating evidence"!

Siqueiros did not deny his role in the assault. In fact, he openly boasted about it. But the Communist Party leadership, clearly embarrassed—not so much by the attempt itself, but by the way it was bungled—tried to disassociate itself from the raid, blaming it onto a gang of "uncontrollable elements" and "agents provocateurs."

The Stalinist press alternated between proclaiming Siqueiros a hero, and, on the other hand, a "half-crazed madman" and "irresponsible adventurer"—and even... as being in Trotsky's pay! With shameless 'logic', the CP press asserted that the attack was an act of provocation directed against the Communist Party and against the Mexican state—and therefore Trotsky should be expelled immediately.

Thirty-eight years later, however, a leading member of the Mexican

Communist Party admitted the truth. In his memoirs, 'My Testimony', published by the MCP's own publishing house in 1978, Valentin Campa, a veteran member of the party, flatly contradicted the official denials of the party's involvement and gave details of the preparation for the attempt on Trotsky's life. Key extracts from Campa's memoirs, moreover, were published in the daily paper of the more influential French Communist Party ('L'Humanite', 26/27 June 1978) on the authority of the party's general-secretary, George Marchais. (see 'Militant', October 1978.)

Campa relates how, in the Autumn of 1938, he, together with Raphael Carrillo (a member of the CPM's central committee), was summoned by Herman Laborde (the party's general secretary) and informed of "an extremely confidential and delicate affair." Laborde told them he had been visited by a Comintern delegate (in reality, a GPU representative) who had informed him of the "decision to eliminate Trotsky" and had asked for their co-operation "for the task of carrying out this elimination." After a "vigorous analysis", however, Campa says that they rejected the proposal. "We concluded...that Trotsky was finished politically, that his influence was almost zero, moreover we had said so often enough throughout the world, besides, the results of his elimination would do great disservice to the Mexican Communist Party and the revolutionary movement of Mexico and to the whole international Communist movement. We therefore concluded that to propose the elimination of Trotsky was clearly a serious mistake." For their opposition, however, Laborde and Campa were accused of "sectarian opportunism," of being "soft on Trotsky," and were driven out of the party.

The campaign to prepare the Mexican CP for the murder of Trotsky was carried through by a number of Stalinist leaders already experienced in ruthlessly carrying out the orders of their master in



Siqueiros—leader of unsuccessful attempt on Trotsky's life

Moscow: Siqueiros himself, who had been active in Spain, probably a GPU agent since 1928; Vittoria Codovila, an Argentinian Stalinist who had operated in Spain under Eitingon, probably involved in the torture and murder of the POUM leader Andreas Nin; Pedro Checa, leader of the Spanish Communist Party in exile in Mexico, who actually took his pseudonym from the Soviet secret police, the Cheka; and Carlos Contreras, alias Vittorio Vidali, who had been active with the GPU's 'Special Tasks Force' in Spain under the pseudonym of 'General Carlos'. Co-ordinating

their efforts was, of course the ubiquitous Colonel Eitingon.

After the failure of the attempt by Siqueiros and his group to take Trotsky's house by storm, Campa writes; "a third alternative was put into practice. Raymond Mercader who was living under the pseudonym Jacques Mornard, assassinated Trotsky on the evening of the 20th August, 1940."

Trotsky regarded his escape from the Siqueiros raid as "a reprieve". "Our joyous feeling of salvation," wrote Natalia afterwards, "was dampened by the prospect of a new visitation and the need to prepare

for it." ('Father and Son'). The defences of Trotsky's house were strengthened and new precautions were taken. But unfortunately—tragically—no efforts were made to check up more thoroughly on the man who turned out to be the assassin, despite the suspicions that several members of the household had about this strange character.

Trotsky resisted some of the additional security measures suggested by his secretary-guards: for a guard to be stationed by him at all times, for instance. "It was impossible to convert one's life solely into self-defence," wrote Natalia, "...for in that case life loses all its value." Nevertheless, in view of the vital, indispensable nature of Trotsky's work and the inevitability of an attempt on his life, there is no doubt there were serious deficiencies in the security—and that tighter measures should have been implemented. Shortly before Sheldon Harte's abduction, for instance, Trotsky had noticed him allowing workmen strengthening the house to pass freely in and out of the courtyard. Trotsky complained that this was very careless, and added—ironically, this was only a few weeks before Harte's tragic death—"You might prove to be the first victim of your own carelessness." (Natalia Sedova, 'Father and Son'.)

Mercader met Trotsky for the first time a few days after the Siqueiros raid. But the preparations for his attempt had already been in hand for a long time. Through Zborowski and other GPU agents who had infiltrated Trotsky's supporters in the United States, Mercader had been introduced in France to Sylvia Agaloff, a young American Trotskyist who subsequently went to work for Trotsky in Coyoacán. The GPU agent managed to seduce Sylvia Agaloff, and make her the unwitting accomplice of his crime.

Mercader had an "elaborate cover," which although it aroused many suspicions, unfortunately served its purpose well enough. Mercader had joined the Communist Party in Spain, and become

active in its ranks in the period 1933-36 when it was already a Stalinised party. Probably through his mother, Caridad Mercader, who was already a GPU agent and associated with Eitingon, Mercader too entered the service of the GPU. After the defeat of the Spanish Republic, aided by Stalin's sabotage of the revolution in Spain, Mercader went to Moscow where he was prepared for his future role. After meeting Agaloff in Paris in 1938 he later accompanied her to Mexico in January, and gradually ingratiated himself with members of Trotsky's household.

After gaining the acceptance of Trotsky's household, Mornard arranged to meet with Trotsky personally on the pretext of discussing an article that he had written—which Trotsky considered to an embarrassing degree banal and devoid of interest. The first meeting was clearly a "dress rehearsal" for the actual assassination.

The next time he came was on the morning of 20th August. Despite the misgivings of Natalia and Trotsky's guards, Mornard was again allowed to see Trotsky alone—"three or four minutes went by," Natalia relates: "I was in the room next door. There was a terrible piercing cry...Lev Davidovich appeared, leaning against the door frame. His face was covered with blood, his blue eyes glistening without spectacles and his arms hung limply by his side..." Mornard had struck Trotsky a fatal blow in the back of the head with a cut-down ice axe concealed in his raincoat. But the blow was not immediately lethal; Trotsky "screamed very long, infinitely long," as Mercader himself put it—and Trotsky courageously grappled with his assassin, preventing further blows.

"The doctor declared that the injury was not very serious," says Natalia. "Leon Davidovich listened to him without emotion, as one would with a conventional message of comfort. Pointing to his heart, he said to Hansen in English, 'I feel...here...that this is the

end...this time...they've succeeded'." ('Life and Death of Leon Trotsky,' p.268)

Trotsky was taken to hospital, operated on, and survived for more than a day after that, dying at the age of 62 on 21st August 1940.

Mercader seems to have hoped that, after Siqueiros' lenient treatment, he too might get a light sentence. But he was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment, which he served. However, even after his identity had been firmly established by finger-prints and other evidence, he refused to admit who he was or who had ordered him to murder Trotsky. Although the crime was almost universally attributed to Stalin and the GPU, the Stalinists brazenly denied all responsibility. There is ample evidence, however, that Mercader's mother, who escaped from Mexico with Eitingon, was presented to Stalin and decorated with a high bureaucratic honour for her son and herself. Mercader himself was honoured when he returned to Eastern Europe after his release. In spite of his silence, a chain of evidence, which can now be constructed from the elaborate testimony of Russian spies brought to trial in the United States, top GPU agents who defected to Western countries at various times, and the belated memoirs of the Stalinist leaders themselves, clearly link Mercader to Stalin's secret terror machine based in Moscow.

In the end, Stalin succeeded in murdering the man who—alongside Lenin—was indubitably the greatest revolutionary leader in history. But, as Natalia Sedova wrote afterwards: "Retribution will come to the vile murderers. Throughout his entire heroic and beautiful life, Lev Davidovich believed in the emancipated mankind of the future. During the last years of his life, his faith did not falter, but on the contrary became only more mature, more firm than ever. Future mankind, emancipated from all oppression will triumph over coercion of all sorts..." ('How It Happened', November 1940.)

TROTSKY'S VITAL ROLE

"arming a new generation with the revolutionary method..."

Many attempts have been made to portray Trotsky as a "tragic" figure, as if his perspective for socialist revolution in the capitalist states and for political revolution in the Soviet Union was "noble"...but hopelessly idealistic. This is the view implied by Isaac Deutscher in the third volume of his Trotsky biography, 'The Prophet Outcast', in which he denigrates Trotsky's efforts to re-organise and re-arm a new international Marxist leadership, dismissing Trotsky's tenacious, painstaking work as futile. The latest biographer, Ronald Segal, entitles his book 'The Tragedy of Leon Trotsky.'

But if there is a tragic element in Trotsky's life, it is because his whole life and work after the victorious Russian Revolution was inseparably bound up with the revolutionary struggle of the international working class—in a period first of retreat and then of catastrophic defeats. For the very reason that Trotsky played a leading role in the October revolution, his past dictated that with the ebbing of the revolution he would be forced into exile and political isolation. But while faint-hearts and sceptics abandoned Marxist perspectives and made their peace with Stalinism or capitalism—or both—Trotsky, and the small handful who remained committed to the ideas of the Opposition, struggled to re-arm a new generation of revolutionary leaders for the future resurgence of the working class movement.

In exile, Trotsky enriched the literature of Marxism with magnificent works: but he was far from accepting that his role would simply be that of historian and commentator on events. "I am reduced," wrote Trotsky in his 'Diary in Exile' (pp 53-54), "to

carrying on a dialogue with the newspapers, or rather through the newspapers with facts and opinions.

"And I still think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life—more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil War or any other.

"For the sake of clarity I would put it this way. Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place—on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it occurring—of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to conquer the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders. The struggle with 'Trotskyism' (i.e. with the proletarian revolution) would have commenced in May 1917, and the outcome of the revolution would have been in question.

"But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway. The same could be said of the Civil War, although in its first period, especially at the time of the fall of Simbirsk and Kazan, Lenin wavered and was beset by doubts. But this was undoubtedly a passing mood which he probably never even admitted to anyone but me.

"Thus I cannot speak of the 'indispensability' of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is 'indispensable' in the full sense of the

word. There is no arrogance in this claim at all. The collapse of the two Internationals has posed a problem which none of the leaders of these Internationals is at all equipped to solve. The vicissitudes of my personal fate have confronted me with this problem and armed me with important experience in dealing with it.

"There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third International. And I am in complete agreement with Lenin (or rather Turgenev) that the worst vice is to be more than 55 years old! I need at least about five more years of uninterrupted work to ensure the succession."

BOOKS and articles with material relating to Trotsky's assassination: **Trotsky's Diary in Exile** (London 1959); Leon Trotsky: **Writings 1929-40** (12 vols plus two-part supplement, New York 1969-80); Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky: **The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky** (London 1975); Natalia Trotsky: **How it Happened and Father and Son** ('Fourth International,' May 1941 and August 1941); Jean van Heijenoort: **With Trotsky in Exile** (London 1978); Elizabeth Poretzky: **Our Own People: A Memoir of Ignace Reiss** (London 1969); Isaac Don Levine: **The Mind of an Assassin** (London 1960); Georges Vereeken: **The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement** (London 1978); Alexander Orlov: **The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes** (London 1954); Walter Krivitsky: **I Was Stalin's Agent** (London 1941); Isaac Deutscher: **The Prophet Armed** (1954), **The Prophet Unarmed** (1959), and **The Prophet Outcast** (1963); and Ronald Segal: **The Tragedy of Leon Trotsky** (London 1979).



BRITAIN & IRELAND 13 issues...£3.25
26 issues...£6.50 52 issues...£13.00

EUROPE **REST OF WORLD**
[by air] [by air]
26 issues...£7.25 26 issues...£10.00
52 issues...£14.50 52 issues...£20.00

Name

Address

.....

Make cheques payable to **MILITANT** and return to Circulation Department, Militant, 1 Mentmore Terrace, London E8 3PN
Bulk orders available, sale or return

MILITANT IRISH MONTHLY

Marxist Paper For Workers
Unity and Socialism

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

6 issues...£1.08
12 issues...£2.16

Order from: 75 Middle Abbey St.
Dublin 1

Newer readers of the *Militant International Review* may be interested to know that supplies of the previous ten issues [Nos. 10—19] are available from World Books at the price of 40 pence a copy.

MIR No. 10

CONTENTS: Crisis in Britain and the Prospects for Labour / Spain; Towards Revolution / International Notes / Book Reviews

March 1976

MIR No. 11

CONTENTS: The General Strike: 1926 and Now / Crisis in the Southern European Parties / International Notes / Book Reviews

August 1976

MIR No. 12

CONTENTS: British Perspectives and Tasks for the Labour Movement; the Crisis of British Capitalism and how to Find the Way Out

February 1977

MIR No. 13

CONTENTS: What Next for the Trade Unions? / Soweto and the Future of South Africa / Poland: a Regime in Fear of the Workers / Review Article: The Control of Technology

Autumn 1977

MIR No. 14

CONTENTS: The Brutal Face of Toryism Behind the Liberal Mask / The Colonial Revolution and the Deformed Workers' States

Summer 1978

MIR No. 15

CONTENTS: Perspectives for the Spanish Revolution / Sri Lanka Moves Towards Dictatorship / British Communist Party in Crisis

Autumn 1978

MIR No. 16

CONTENTS: Editorial: Decisive Turn in Britain / Middle East Crisis / The Battle for the 35-hour Week / International Notes / Freedom of the Press and the Working Class

Winter 1979

MIR No. 17

CONTENTS: After the Election—Perspectives for Britain / Ghana at the Crossroads / Iran New Stage of the Revolution / Profits—Catastrophic drop / Book Reviews

Autumn 1979

MIR No. 18

CONTENTS: Forward Into the 'Eighties / The Forgotten Revolution; the Hungarian Soviet Republic 1919 / Letter from Madrid

Winter 1980

MIR No. 19

CONTENTS: The Crisis of Thatcherism / Russia: Reform or Political Revolution? / USA Perspectives / If Sharks Were People and Questions of a Reading Worker—Brecht / Jack London; The Man, the Socialist, the Fighter

Spring 1980

Please add 25% to all orders to cover postage.
Also write now for a free comprehensive booklist. From: World Books, 1 Mentmore Terrace, London E8 3PN

MIR BACK NUMBERS



POLAND'S WINTER OF DISCONTENT

By Kevin Ramage

This article was written in June 1980. An appendix has been added dealing with more recent events.

The sudden 'resignation' of Piotr Jaroszewicz, the Polish Prime Minister at the recent 8th Congress of the 'United Workers Party' (Communist Party) reflects the enormous hidden tensions in Polish society.

The economic problems—especially a fall of 2% in National product in 1979—have led to calls by the leadership for 'austerity'. In the next period, as in 1956 and 1970, Polish workers will once again begin new struggles in an attempt to rid themselves of the

burden of rule by a privileged bureaucratic elite.

Kevin Ramage (LPYS National chairman), a recent visitor, reports on the developing situation in Poland.

The enormous development of the Polish economy since the overthrow of capitalism in 1945 has been achieved by the efforts of the working class despite the dead weight of the bureaucratic bungling and mis-management. The growth of National Income at an average rate of 7% in the years 1951-1972

(compared with a world average of 5%) is a clear vindication of the benefits and strengths of a planned economy which is based in Poland on the nationalisation of 80% of the means of production, as against the anarchy of capitalism. The 13 times increase in industrial production since 1937 speaks for itself in the language of steel, concrete, roads and railways. The social advances based on this development have been enormous. Illiteracy, which stood at 20% of the entire population over 7 years old in

1945 has now been reduced to 10% (mainly old people) in the rural areas, and only 2.4% in urban areas. The education system, which suffered from the destruction of 60% of buildings during the second world war has been completely rebuilt. The proportion of gross national product spent on education in Poland (6.5%) is five times that of Britain (1.3%). Average class sizes of 62 in 1937/8 have been reduced to 23 in 1979. 63,000 go to university every year. In the field of medicine, Poland now has 18 doctors per 10,000 of the population compared with a figure for Britain of 13.1 per 10,000.

These examples, and many more, social and economic, are a devastating answer to those reactionaries like the Tories and Solzhenitsyn who oppose the concept of a planned economy. It is at the same time also a crushing refutation of those sectarian groups on the fringe of the Labour Movement who for years proclaimed Poland to be 'state capitalist'. Apart from the solitary example of Japan, no major capitalist country has had such a rate of development in the last 50 years. However, today these gains are being threatened by the existence of the massive deadweight represented by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

In 1939, Poland, a semi-feudal country with very little industry, was invaded by Hitler's armies, which advanced up to a common border agreed with Stalin in the terms of the Stalin-Hitler 'non-aggression pact'. The bulk of the capitalist class in Poland quickly found itself comfortably co-operating with the Nazi's government of occupation—preferring collaboration and continued profits to any kind of resistance. The resistance movement, as in other countries such as France, Italy and Yugoslavia was organised by workers and peasants, and in particular by Socialist and Communist Party militants.

During the occupation 6 million,

20% of the entire population, died. Along with the barbaric massacre of millions of Jews, hundreds of thousands of trade unionists, activists and communist workers were also murdered.

Despite this, in 1944, the workers of Warsaw organised a courageous uprising with the aim of speeding the defeat of the Nazis and aiding the Red Army in liberating Poland. But the Russian Bureaucracy feared nothing more than a situation where armed workers would have controlled Warsaw before the entrance of the Red Army. Under these circumstances, the workers would never accept the imposition of rule by a privileged élite.

The Red Army advance was halted on Warsaw's outskirts by its chiefs in Moscow until the Nazis had crushed the uprising. When the Nazis retreated in early 1945, in the face of the rapidly advancing Red Army, the Polish Quisling bourgeoisie, the industrialists, police chiefs and others who had collaborated with the Nazis during the occupation fled with them.

Workers' State

Engels explained long ago that the state, in the final analysis consisted of 'armed bodies of men'. In Poland in June 1945, the capitalist state ceased to exist. The 'armed bodies of men' who controlled the streets, factories etc were the Red Army, controlled by the Russian bureaucracy. The Polish bourgeoisie, never strong in a country that had barely emerged from feudalism, had largely fled the country, fearing punishment for their collaboration with the Nazis.

Manoeuvring between the classes of Polish society, and backed up by the might of the Russian Red Army, the Polish Stalinists occupied key positions in the state

administration.

A fake 'coalition' in which the 'Communist' Party had the decisive Ministries such as the Interior, Army and Police, was set up.

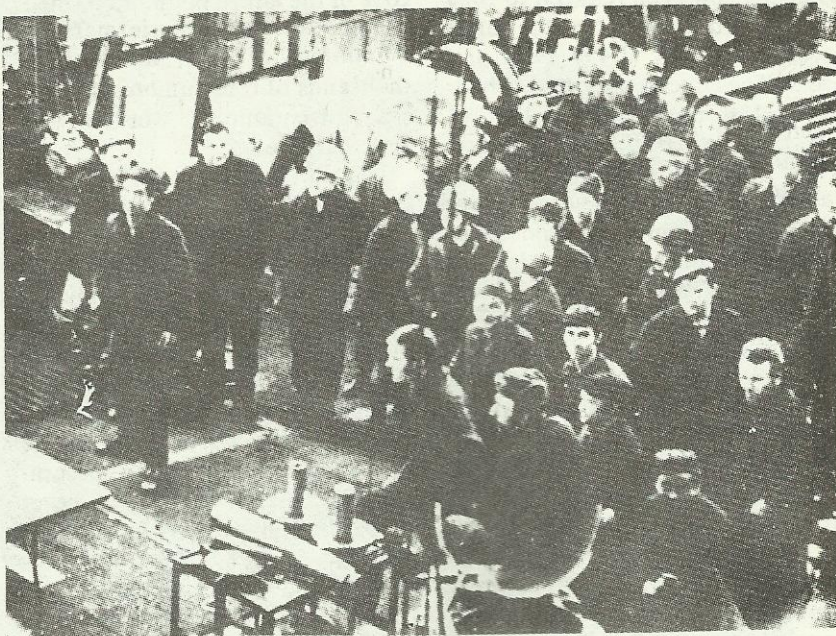
But this new edition of the 'popular front' was fundamentally different to the coalition governments with bourgeois parties in France and Spain in the 1930s. As in these countries, the Stalinists entered a coalition, not with the bourgeoisie (which had all but vanished from the scene), but with the shadow of the bourgeois state. The weakness of capitalism in Poland meant that the task of elbowing aside the pathetic remnants of the bourgeoisie presented the Stalinists with no great problem. As Trotsky once remarked: to kill a tiger you need a shotgun, but to crush a louse, two fingernails will suffice. Having succeeded in eliminating any threat of independent movements of the Polish workers, the Stalinists, once they felt themselves securely in the saddle, moved to snuff out what remained of capitalism, resting on the support of the workers and peasants in doing so.

A plan of production and state apparatus were established in the image of Moscow. Not Lenin's Moscow of 1917, based on workers' democracy, but the Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship of 1945. The Russian bureaucracy feared like the plague the development of workers' democracy in Poland which would mean the ending of their power and privileges. The example of a healthy workers' state in Poland would have stood out like a beacon to workers throughout Eastern Europe, and in the capitalist countries in many of which revolutionary movements developed in the closing stages of the war. Nevertheless, despite all its monstrous bureaucratic deformations, the new regime marked a decisive break with feudalism and capitalism. On the basis of the nationalised economy and five year plans, Polish society went forward with giant strides.

1956

At the 20th Congress of the Soviet 'Communist Party' came the 'Revelations' of Khrushchev's 'de-stalinisation' speech. 30 years after the event, one section of the bureaucracy had decided, in order to fend off the risk of a social explosion, to lift part of the veil around some of the worst excesses of Stalinism. There was never any attempt to analyse how the bureaucracy established its position of power and privilege. Neither was there any rectification of the lies and slanders that had been heaped against Trotsky and many other former Bolshevik leaders. To do that would have meant condemning themselves. Nevertheless, the revelations had a profoundly unsettling effect in Eastern Europe.

Eleven years of domination from Moscow, during which time the bureaucracy squeezed \$20,000m in reparations from its East European satellites, had led to growing anti-Russian sentiments. This was especially marked in Poland, a country with a history of hundreds of years of national oppression by Russia. Thus when a general strike began in the Poznan area in the summer of 1956, the nationalist wing of the Polish bureaucracy were able to de-rail the developing movement along anti-Russian lines. Gomulka, who was released from jail to become 'party leader' acted above all to prevent the spread of the workers' councils—embryonic soviets—which were set up spontaneously by the workers in the course of the general strike. The bureaucracy had made many concessions, including accepting the existence of the workers' councils for 18 months, anything to preserve its basic control of society. In order to gain support in the countryside, Gomulka handed back to the peasants 80% of the land, which had been bureaucratically nationalised in 1945. This was done not on the basis of the encouragement of co-operatives, but by the creation of a large number of tiny, inefficient individual farms. Agriculture, and thus



Strike meeting in Warski shipyard

Queuing for meat in a Warsaw supermarket



the whole economy is still paying the price of this move today. The Russian bureaucracy was prepared to put up with these measures and even Gomulka's nationalistic propaganda as long as the threat of workers' democracy was headed off.

The movement which developed in Hungary a few months later took a fundamentally different course. The two general strikes, and two armed insurrections, which took place either side of the Russian intervention (the Russian troops which had been stationed in Hungary before 1956 were completely unreliable and had to be withdrawn) were on class lines. This was clearly shown when Gomulka supported the crushing of the Hungarian workers' uprising.

After the war, under the impetus of a planned economy, and particularly after 1956 the introduction of modern technology made a very rapid growth in the economy possible, but as the economy developed, so too did the contradiction within it. The increasing participation in world trade after 1956 on the part of the bureaucracy showed how utopian the 'theory' of 'socialism in one country' is. While the increased participation in world trade undoubtedly brought benefits in the short term, it was at the expense of importing many of the 'products' of the developing crisis within the capitalist system, such as inflation, and forcing a greater proportion of production to be exported to pay foreign exchange debts, with the accumulating interest charges on these debts.

From a position of being a relative fetter, limiting the potential growth of production, the existence of the bureaucracy became increasingly an absolute fetter. The more an economy develops, the more complex the relationship between different sectors of the economy become, the more and more urgent is the need for every section of the working class to be involved in planning production.

In addition to these problems, the bureaucracy's over-rapid ind-

ustrialisation in the 1960s which was carried out with no reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the economy—as in Russia in the 1930s—led to economic dislocation, and shortages of many basic and vital products.

Economic Crisis Today

By 1970, the beginning of stagnation in the economy, and food shortages (a product of the reforms of 1956) led to an attempt by the bureaucracy to 'solve' shortages by raising prices of food, fuel and rent by 10-30%. Immediately the workers gave their answer. Workers in the Baltic shipyard towns such as Gdansk and Gdynia and the coal mining area of Krakow and Katowice led the uprising. They occupied factories, shipyards and mines. In several areas workers' committees—genuine elected bodies of workers' representatives from the factories, shipyards, etc, appeared. Very quickly the bureaucracy withdrew the price rises. Instead, fearful of the situation 'getting out of hand' they introduced massive subsidies on many prices, aided by the Russian bureaucracy which feared the movement might spread over frontiers into the USSR. Again, on June 25th 1976, 'overnight' food price rises of 45% were met by mass strikes, demonstrations, and the ripping up of railway tracks. Within days they were withdrawn as a 'Mistake'! Since then the bureaucracy in Poland has been walking a tightrope, with an economy beset by shortages and bottlenecks and a strengthened, confident young working class. Today 55% of the Polish population live in towns compared with 31.8% in 1946 and half of the population is under 28. Today the bureaucracy is terrified of openly increasing prices—nevertheless inflation in 1979 has been unofficially estimated at between 11 and 19%. This despite the massive subsidies which cost an estimated 7.9bn zloties (\$250 million at official exchange rates) in 1970 (current prices), now

amount to a massive 170bn zloties—about \$5.5bn. As these subsidies have become an intolerable burden on the economy, the bureaucracy now has to introduce price increases surreptitiously by 'product changes' and the presence of the 'commercial' sector (private rented shops) where the state does not control prices, and many goods are now only available in 'commercial' shops. Poland's foreign debt has more than doubled, from \$7,000m in 1975 to \$17,000m in 1979, which means more and more industry and agricultural production must be geared to the export market. This in turn leaves shortages, and frequently large queues for the basics of life (especially meat).

While Poland does not officially have unemployment (the 'right to work' is written into the constitution), many officials accept that youth, and especially young students now have to 'lower their job expectation'. At the same time 50,000 youth who have 'fallen foul of the law or the authorities' are involved in the so called 'voluntary' labour corps. Strangely enough 35,000 of these are involved in unskilled construction work, a field where there is a labour shortage, at rates clearly below the normal for the job!

Industrial production only grew 2.8% in 1979 compared with the target of 5.8% (which itself was modest compared with the average since World War Two of 8.9%). Overall national income fell by 2% in 1979. This was largely due to the fall in industrial growth, a bad winter which helped cause agricultural output to fall by 1.4%, and the enormous drain of servicing foreign loans. The target growth for 1980 has been scaled down even lower to between 1.4% and 1.8%, a figure low even by expectations of many capitalist economies. According to the government publication 'Polish Perspectives': "investment in 1980 is only planned to be 600bn zloties, 53bn less than in 1979—a fall of 8% in absolute terms, or allowing for inflation

far nearer to 20%. This will in turn mean a further decline in growth of industry and productivity in the future."

It is these kind of economic problems which lead to the bureaucracy increasingly bearing down on the working class. Gierek the party leader, speaking at the recent CP Congress has told workers that they face 'five years of austerity' and that real incomes would grow by only 9-11% in that period.

In a report to the 'Communist' Party, a group of 50 Party officials point out that Poland is facing 'an acute crisis which has embraced basic fields of social, political, and economic life'.

Another official report commented: 'The development of socialist Poland—as is the case with any kind of development—is accompanied unavoidably by complications in production structures related to constant raising of production and service quality'. In other words, the Polish economy is gasping for the fresh air of workers' democracy, of the genuine involvement of workers in the running of society. Today in Poland, examples of bureaucracy, waste and corruption abound. Tractors, vitally needed to develop agriculture are made in Poland under licence from Massey Ferguson. There is only one small problem that was overlooked—all the sizes of parts are inches, not metric measurements which makes spare parts an enormous problem—one which would be clear to any mechanic!

Officials have openly admitted that while there are more engineers than West Germany or France, their utilisation is inferior to that within a capitalist economy. During a recent development of a frozen food factory, all the money for the project was spent on construction, so that none was left for actually fitting the building out properly, with the result that it only operates at 60% of potential capacity. These individual examples clearly reflect a far wider problem.

According to one Party official in Warsaw, 40% of the population is employed in manufacturing industry, 35% in 'commerce' and services and a massive 25% in administration, law and health. Undoubtedly much of the bureaucracy describes itself as 'commerce'. The same official stated that while 'state administration is very small, local administration is more 'numerous', and economic administrators are growing more than we need'!

In 'State and Revolution', written in 1917, in anticipation of the overthrow of capitalism, Lenin wrote: 'We know that the fundamental social cause of excesses which violate the rules of social life is the exploitation of the masses, their want and poverty. With the removal of this chief cause excesses will inevitably begin to 'wither away'...with their withering away, the state will also wither away'. In Poland as in the other Stalinist states, the opposite process has taken place. Reports in the official Polish government publication, 'Polish Perspectives' before and after the 8th Party Congress give an insight into the real situation.

'Expenditure on administration and official hospitality and travel are to be cut'. 'At the same time efforts will be made to narrow down inordinate and unwarranted disproportions in incomes....Firm emphasis was laid by the Congress on the necessity of counteraction of abuses, corruption and unlawful incomes. This 35 years after the Stalinists proclaimed that 'socialism' had been introduced!

Far from 'withering away', the state has become a greater and greater burden on the backs of the masses. This is a clear indication of the deepening contradiction between the presence of a bureaucracy and the workers' interests.

Like several other East European countries, Poland has what are impressive sounding schemes of "workers' self-management" in the factories. In reality these are an attempt to draw on the experience and initiative of the workers in the

same way as the bosses in Britain use suggestion boxes and 'works councils'—without ever giving the workers any say in the fundamental issues. Marx explained the importance of distinguishing between FORM and CONTENT. The most formally democratic structures can be worthless in the hands of those whose position of the privilege could suffer as a result. Thus it is in Poland. The 'trade unions' and the 'United Workers Party' are in reality part of the state apparatus and, as such, incapable of independently representing workers' interests. At one carpet factory the chairman of the 'trade union council' admitted that "each proposal by the manager—such as the firing of a worker—must be conveyed to the trade union who must have a 'substantial' basis for disagreement." "...We don't have many disagreements"! By a strange coincidence, at the same factory 85% of the management were "party members."

The increasing numbers of dissident intellectuals is, as with the 'Crooked Circle' in Poland in 1956, and the Petöfi Circle in Hungary in the same year, an indication of the growing social tensions within Poland.

The apparent growth of support for the Catholic Church is a distorted symptom of the massive tide of opposition which is building up against the hated and corrupt rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy. As in Ireland, for historical reasons, the Church in Poland has always been identified with the struggle for national independence. Under a totalitarian, one-party system, the Church can act as a semi-legal cover for opposition to the regime. This was the case, as Trotsky pointed out, with the Catholic and, to some extent, the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany, which served as the vehicle of opposition of a section of especially the middle layers of society to Hitler. This explains the peculiar phenomenon of the strength of the Church in 'socialist'

Poland, precisely at a time when it is dying on its feet in the countries of Western Europe. The Church serves as a distorted expression of the anti-Stalinist moods among wide layers of society, especially the students and young intellectuals, but also the working class. For their part, the Church authorities are ready and willing to come to an understanding with the Stalinist bureaucracy, as it has come to an understanding with any regime in history that is based on power, wealth and privilege. On the other hand the 'Communist' officials (many of whom go to Mass on Sunday as a means of taking out a spiritual insurance policy) are anxious to do a deal with the Vatican whereby the power and wealth of the Church would be 'respected', in exchange for a mutual 'respect' for the power and privileges of the bureaucracy. The Church builds its support by nominal opposition to oppression, and for the Stalinist leaders the church represents a safety-valve for the masses, as long as its opposition doesn't go too far.

This was spelt out by Cardinal Wyszyński when he defended Prime Minister Gierek, and the 'Party' leaders in his Christmas message... "We hope that God will somehow forgive us and reward the nation for its extraordinary patience...", and he went on to say that food shortages and economic problems were not the fault of bad planning by the leadership. The Church leaders, like the Stalinist leaders, fear a healthy workers' democracy more than anything else because it will sweep away the basis of their existence. It is an indication of the bankruptcy of the Stalinist bureaucracy that the ideas of religion can still seem to be an alternative over thirty years since the overthrow of capitalism!

A further indication of the growing disillusionment of the masses is the increase in social problems such as drunkenness. (According to an official newspaper, 'Prawe Izycie': "the number of drunkards is estimated at 4.3 to 5 million," i.e. about 20% of the

adult population!—KR)

All these pressures came to the fore at the 8th Congress of the 'United Workers Party' early in 1980. Given that the UWP is more a government institution than a political party, the 'sudden' resignation of Piotr Jaroszewicz, the Prime Minister, which took place at the Congress, after a barrage of attacks on government 'errors' from the lower party officials, is an unprecedented indication of the crisis of the bureaucracy. Splits in a ruling class or caste in society are always one of the first indications of the beginning of a period of revolutionary upheavals. The bureaucracy is divided because of the crisis in the economy that it presides over, and the knowledge that workers will not tolerate cuts in living standards or renewed repression. They have no clear path forwards. The movement towards the Church, the growth in the number of dissidents, and the split in the bureaucracy are in reality the first tremors of an earthquake. When the movement erupts the working class will be moved to independent representation.

The apparent 'openness' of the Polish Stalinist leaders, and the lack of overt oppression, at least on the same scale as in the USSR reflects the weakness and unsteadiness rather than strength and confidence on the part of the bureaucracy. They recognise that they are sitting on a powder keg. The slightest spark could cause the frustrations of the workers to boil over, as in 1970 and 1976, but on a higher level. The Stalinist leadership is acting in Poland in a Bonapartist fashion, combining reform and repression, dealing out repression both to the workers, but also to sections of the bureaucracy that flaunt their privileges too openly. Thus since 1970, the apparent differentials in wages seem to have narrowed from 11:1 to nearer 5:1 of highest to lowest. In reality, the bureaucracy finds other ways of maintaining its privileged position by the black market and other means. What a difference compared with that in backward,

decimated Russia of 1917! Lenin considered even a differential of 4:1 to be a temporary, capitalist measure and yet in Poland today the differentials are far wider.

Workers in Poland are undoubtedly preparing under the surface for a new reckoning with the bureaucracy. Recent reports have revealed activities of illegal opposition groups. Not reactionaries such as Solzhenitsyn, but movements struggling in a confused way for workers' democracy (see 'Militant' 484). That there are no legal independent non-government parties (the two other parties apart from the UWP being shell organisations for show and part of the 'National Unity Front' government) is an indication of the reality of the 'freedom of expression' in Poland. Such a system is a caricature of socialism. To those in the labour movement who claim Poland (and other East European states) to be 'socialist' the question must be asked: why are these regimes frightened of legal opposition? In Russia under Lenin and Trotsky even at the height of the civil war, opposition groups were allowed to function, and were only banned when they took up bomb attacks and assassination attempts and then as a temporary measure in an emergency situation.

Likewise the 'resignation' of Piotr Jaroszewicz makes a mockery of the notion of the UWP as a genuine communist party. Surely he was carrying out the policy of the central committee and party congress? Fundamental economic problems are not the fault of one man! They are the product of the bureaucratic regime as a whole.

Likewise the fact that the UWP was holding only its eighth congress in 35 years shows how far removed that organisation is from any real political debate.

Karl Marx explained long ago that any ruling class or caste in history which is incapable of developing the means of production is doomed. This is as true in Poland of the bureaucratic caste which is stifling society, as it is of capitalism in the West albeit for different

reasons. The strike waves of 1970 and 1976, the movement to form new, independent parties, is a reflection of the profundity of the discontent among the masses. When the workers move again it will not be for the return to capitalism, but to follow the ideas of Leon Trotsky to carry through a Political Revolution—to overthrow the bureaucracy and bring in genuine workers' democracy. One penance the bureaucracy has to pay for living off the workers' backs, is their lip-service allegiance to Marxism. Thus in offices and ministries busts and pictures of Marx and Lenin abound, the collected works of Lenin, Marx and Engels collect dust on the shelves. The Polish workers also are undoubtedly studying the writings of Marx, Lenin, Engels and, in secret study circles, those of Trotsky. They will return to the ideas of Lenin—not as an official state handbook—but as a method and a guide to action. Once again they will discover the programme which Lenin outlined in his 'April Thesis' in 1917:

1. Society should be run through a system of soviets (workers' councils) with free elections and immediate recall of all officials.
2. No official to receive higher wages than those of a skilled worker.
3. No standing army, but the armed people.
4. No bureaucratic elite. Each post or office should be rotated amongst the workers in turn. "When everyone is a bureaucrat in turn, nobody is a bureaucrat."

Added to these is the demand raised by the Hungarian workers in the uprising of 1956, after the experience of Stalinism: no more one-party state! Lenin and Trotsky stood for the freedom of all political parties that accepted nationalisation of the economy and the plan of production. Today in Poland, with its developed economy, it would be possible to go further: For the freedom of all political parties except fascists and anti-semitic parties. Liberals and others campaigning for a return to capitalism would, in the context of a healthy

workers' democracy, appear like cranks demanding a return to feudalism!

When they move into action the Polish workers will quickly draw on the experience of 1956, and see that nationalism offers no way forward. Likewise artificial forms of opposition such as religion will be swept aside. The slogans of the Szezecin shipyard workers in 1970, replying to the bureaucratic allegations that they were hooligans, show the way the Polish workers will look in the future, to the struggle for genuine workers' democracy, "We are workers not hooligans, long live the workers state." "Stalin for the bureaucrats, Lenin for the workers," "Russia 1905—Hungary and Poland 1956, Russia 1917—Poland and the world 1971?" "Lenin in Moscow, but not in the Kremlin."

Of crucial importance to the struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy, and replace it with workers' democracy will be the building of an independent workers' party, based on the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Such a party, armed with an internationalist perspective, would be able to link the struggles of workers in Poland with those in Eastern Europe, and in the Western capitalist countries.

In the new decade of the 1980s, not only does capitalism face crisis, but the Stalinist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe are also becoming increasingly unsteady. Thus, while in 1970 the Russian bureaucracy was able to bale its Polish 'brothers' out with subsidies to offset food price rises, today they have got their own economic problems. Throughout Eastern Europe, even in formerly backward Rumania, the workers are beginning to flex their muscles. A successful political revolution in Poland now would set Eastern Europe ablaze, and in its train, Russia and Western Europe and the USA. For all time the arguments of reaction, that socialism means dictatorship would be destroyed in the eyes of the workers throughout the world. Workers in Eastern Europe would see before their eyes a living example of how the

bureaucracies could be overthrown. The way would then be paved for a genuine federation of workers' states, as a stepping stone to the establishment of the Socialist United States of Europe and the Socialist Federation of the World.

APPENDIX—August 15th 1980

The July/August strike wave following more meat price increases on July 1st, has further confirmed that Poland is the most unstable country within Eastern Europe. By mid-August 150 strikes had broken out, and the regime had conceded 10-15% wage increases.

The stoppages assumed nationwide proportions involving railwaymen in Lodz, dustmen and bus drivers in Warsaw and again the shipyard workers on the Baltic. In Gdansk the strikers won permission to build a monument to those killed by the police in the 1970 strikes.

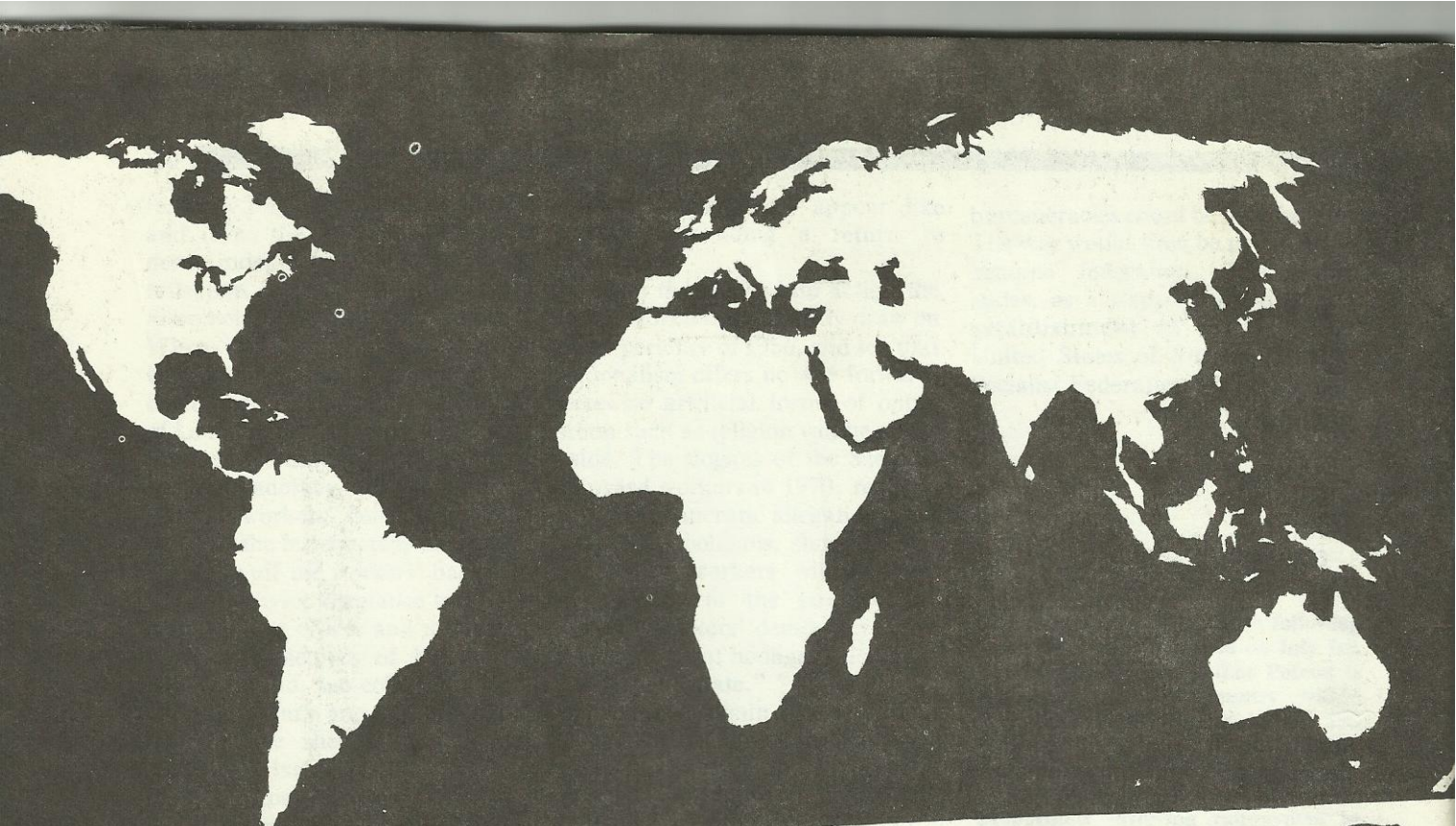
As in every major movement in Eastern Europe, the official state-run unions have been bypassed. The workers have no confidence in these institutions which, like the Communist Party, are part of the state itself.

Direct political demands have inevitably come to the fore. The workers have demanded the right to strike, the right to build genuine, democratic trade unions, an end to press censorship and the closure of the "commercial shops," which are patronised by the privileged.

Such a programme of demands would naturally emerge at the beginning of any direct challenge to the regime. While the bureaucracy is paralysed by indecision and splits in its own ranks.

They have agreed to negotiate with the workers' own unofficial representatives and avoided a crackdown against the working class on the lines of 1970. A section of the bureaucrats favours more repression, but the majority as yet has been afraid of taking on such a widespread movement. They know it would cause a social explosion.

The Polish bureaucracy sits astride a volcano of accumulated discontent, facing an ever more confident working class. Throughout Eastern Europe the bureaucrats are trembling.



WORLD BOOKS

GLYN—Capitalist Crisis:
Tribune's 'alternative strategy' or
socialist plan—60p
(A Marxist reply to left reformism,
what a socialist plan of production
would mean to the workers)

**INGHAM—35-hour week. The
fight against unemployment—20p**
(The burning question of the hour
for all working people. Ingham
hammers out the socialist case)

**South Africa: the workers'
movement, SACTU and the ANC
—a struggle for Marxist
policies—50p**
(What every worker needs to know
about South Africa)

**HADDEN—Northern Ireland—
Tory cuts—Common misery,
common struggle—30p**
(A programme for workers'
unity and socialism)

- ★ Write now for free
comprehensive booklist
- ★ Please add 10p to the cost of
each pamphlet to cover postage

WORLD BOOKS
1 Mentmore Terrace
London E8 3PN

CAPITALIST CRISIS

TRIBUNE'S
'ALTERNATIVE
STRATEGY'
OR
SOCIALIST
PLAN

By Andrew Glyn
A MILITANT PAMPHLET 60p

THE 35-HOUR WEEK

ALL WE
SEEK
IS A
35
HOUR WEEK!

The Fight Against
Unemployment

By Brian Ingham
MILITANT PAMPHLET 20p

South Africa



a struggle for Marxist policies

Northern Ireland



**Tory Cuts—
COMMON MISERY,
COMMON STRUGGLE**

By Peter Hadden

30p

A Labour and Trade Union Group pamphlet