

Militant International Review

No28 Winter 1985



*Grigorenko —
From Bureaucrat to
Dissident*

*Poland —
A Regime on Trial*

*Plus . . .
Women in Revolt
Economic Notes
Book Reviews
Trotsky —
Unpublished Letters*

Militant

International Review

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Editorial

Crossing the Rubicon

"NO ARMY can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come"—Victor Hugo.

History is made by men and women. Yet frequently those who make history stand too close to the hurly-burly of events to realise the true significance of their actions.

This past year has been a year in which history was made. This idea is slowly beginning to dawn on the consciousness of all classes in British society. It is reflected on the picket line and in Parliament, in the conversations in a thousand pubs and workmen's clubs and in the pages of the "quality" press. Whatever the next twelve months may hold, this much is now clear: that something fundamental has changed in British life and that what has gone before has passed beyond recall.

1984 was the most decisive year for Britain since 1945. The miners' strike, which decisively set its stamp on all aspects of life, represented a revolutionary development which revealed a fundamental change in the relations between the classes.

The magnificent response to the strike dealt the death blow to the TUC's "New Realism". At that time, when the strike appeared to be advancing irresistibly towards victory, those leaders and "theoreticians" who had written off the working class with such indecent haste, temporarily abandoned their overt advocacy of surrender.

Now, when the strike has reached a difficult moment, all the merchants of doom are again creeping out of the woodwork, already rehearsing the lines of their dismal chorus on the inevitability of defeat and the invalidity of class politics.

Mark Twain once commented that "the rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated". It is entirely wrong to argue that Thatcher has been victorious. The Tories intended to crush the miners into the ground. Whatever happens now, that objective will never be reached because the miners have effectively fought the rulling class to a standstill. This is not 1926. The best the ruling class can hope for is some kind of compromise settlement which, in practice, would concede many of the miners' demands.

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Business Manager's Report

Cash needed to expand

THE *MIR* Editorial Board pledged at the start of 1984 to devote all resources necessary to ensure the regular production of the *MIR*. The titanic events of 1984 in Britain and internationally completely vindicated that decision. The revolutionary processes in Latin America have continued to unfold; the crisis in the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the USSR developed apace; and Western Europe saw significant movements of the working class none more profound than the British miners' strike.

All these events provoked discussions in the organisations of the labour movement on the methods, the tactics and the programme necessary to advance the struggles of the working class—discussions which urgently required the clarity of Marxism, expressed in a regularly produced theoretical journal.

The editors fulfilled their pledge in 1984. But, as we made clear in the first *MIR* of 1984: "The regular pro-

duction of this kind of material requires the active participation of the readers at all levels. We need your views, opinions and criticisms of the *MIR* . . . Above all we need CASH." While there have been some good sales with, for example, over 100 being sold at Labour Party conference, the response could have been better.

As the labour movement faces up to a new year of fresh battles and fresh problems for active workers to contend with, which only the ideas of Marxism can answer, there must be a meticulous drive to sell the *MIR* and send in the money for *all* paid sales. For, unless the sales and financial side of the *MIR* is improved then *we simply will not have the resources to make urgently needed improvements*. The editors renew our pledge to devote every effort to continue and expand the *MIR*—but the real effort must come from you, the reader, to make sure that the pledge can be fulfilled for 1985 and beyond.

The cost of the dispute in financial terms has taken a terrible toll on the economy. This factor must carry considerable weight among important sections of the Tory party.

The most serious representatives of the ruling class, however, realise that the most serious threat to their system is neither power cuts or the falling pound. It is the lasting effects upon the relations between the classes and the consciousness of the working class which will result from this strike—irrespective of the outcome.

The agonised pleadings of Lord Stockton—not the least capable of the leaders of the Tory party—reflected this fear of the strategists of capital. Unlike the blinkered and hysterical Thatcher, they can see a yawning abyss of class antagonism opening up at their feet. They are trying to warn the government that, even if they "win" the strike, in the long-run they will have lost. The bitterness and class hatred will remain for decades, as it did after the defeat of 1926. The effects of a defeat, given the catastrophic economic decline of British capitalism, would not usher in a period of labour peace, but would only be the prelude to new and more violent storms. And out of this, ever wider layers of the working class will begin to draw revolutionary conclusions.

Betrayal of right-wing

Yet the bleatings of Lord Stockton have no more effect on Thatcher and her clique than did the warnings of Cassandra about the fall of Troy. The blindness of the Tory leadership is not due to madness, as Neil Kinnock and the TUC imagine, but is a reflection of the impasse of British capitalism. From their class standpoint "there is no alternative" to driving down the living standards of the workers, the unemployed, the poor, the sick, the old and the young. By so doing, they are stoking up new social explosions in the future, but they have no choice but to continue.

If the miners, despite their truly magnificent struggle, were to be defeated, the main responsibility will lie at the door of the right-wing leaders of the TUC.

This strike has been deliberately provoked by the government in order to inflict a heavy defeat on the NUM in preparation for an all-out onslaught on the unions and the working class. The philosophy of this government is summed up in the phrase of Lord Londonderry after "Red Friday" in 1925: "Whatever it may cost in blood and treasure, we shall find that the trade unions will be smashed from top to bottom".

Yet, in the hour of danger, the right-wing leadership has played a



While right-wingers like Chapple, Hammond and Sirs carry the main blame for not mobilising in defence of the miners, the TUC 'left' leaders, although sincere in their support for the miners, have also failed to organise widespread solidarity action. Photo: Bill Thorndycroft

disgraceful role. Chapple, Sirs, Lyons and Hammond have openly stabbed the miners in the back. Chapple and Murray have already received their well-merited reward from the ruling class. Sirs will not be long behind in the queue for a Lordship "for services rendered".

The role of these people is too blatant to require further comment. But what of the left on the TUC? The railway and transport workers are led by men who are sympathetic to the miners' cause. Yet, in practice, however sincere they may be, the left leaders, too, have failed to deliver the goods.

The facts are perfectly clear. The government were prepared and organised for months and years in advance. They have had a clear strategy from the outset and have worked out their tactics with military precision from day to day.

Where has been the alternative leadership on the other side? The right-wing never had any intention of waging a fight against Thatcher. **If it had not been for the pressure of the miners and the rank and file they would have surrendered to Thatcher months ago.** But what about the left on the TUC? They undoubtedly would have liked to support the miners. But they lacked the most elementary strategy, tactics or method to do so. With all the resources at their command, they have proved impotent to wage a campaign to counter the poison of the Tory mass media, to rouse the membership and to organise efficient solidarity and blacking which would have brought the government to its knees in a very short time.

The argument which is advanced that "we can't carry our members with

us" really sums up the inadequacy of even the most honest left reformists. **The mood at the bottom is one of support for the miners.** That is revealed by the reception of the miners at every trade union conference and by the collections of food and money. But there has been no serious campaign to explain the issues to every union member and to organise effective solidarity action. Instead, union headquarters have issued instructions, frequently leaving the carrying-out of these instructions in the hands of local and district right-wing officials whose support for the miners is often far from clear.

Leaders' false pessimism

In the boom period of the fifties and sixties, this method of doing everything from the top was sufficient. The members could be relied upon to respond. But this is no longer the case. There is a new generation, with a more critical attitude to the leadership, who are not prepared to take everything on trust.

The example of Liverpool shows that a properly organised campaign of explanations can convince even layers of the population which do not even participate at the level of the union. That is how to galvanise mass support for struggle against the Tories. Only a conscious Marxist leadership is equipped with the necessary ideas and methods to carry this out. That is the real reason why the Liverpool labour movement was able to inflict the only real defeat Thatcher has suffered up to the present time.

From the beginning of the dispute, the supporters of *Militant* and *MIR* have consistently put forward the slogan of a one-day general strike as a

warning to the government and a preparation for an all-out strike at a later date.

Neil Kinnock, whose support for the strike can only be described as lukewarm, has launched an attack on this idea, which he contemptuously describes as the "big bang".

The right-wing—and unfortunately the left leaders also—are obsessed with the idea that, if a call for action were issued, the workers would not respond. Yet a recent survey published in *The Guardian* revealed that even now, without any campaign by the leadership and despite all the hostile propaganda of the media, 35% of trade unionists would be prepared to take action.

The possibility for action exists. What is lacking is a leadership capable of giving an organised expression to the pen-up anger of the rank and file. The right-wing—with whom Neil Kinnock has apparently reached complete agreement—have really accepted capitalist society and act accordingly.

On the other hand, *Tribune* has moved to the right, displaying a sorry spectacle. With a few honourable exceptions like Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn, the main features of the "left" have been spinelessness and amorphousness throughout.

As to the "Communist" Party, whose chief theoretician, Hobsbawm has earned the praises of the right with his "theoretical" justification of the abandonment of class politics, that organisation has now entered into a phase of final disintegration reflected in the unedifying spectacle of the "Star Wars" which has absorbed much of its energies throughout the miners' strike.

On the union front, of course, the leaders of the NUM, especially Arthur Scargill, have towered head and shoulders above the rest. But even they did not have a really worked-out strategy for the strike.

Yet the decisive factor in the situation has been the iron determination of the miners. Against this rock, all the fury of the enemy has been broken. Three times, the ruling class, using its tame hacks in the media, tried to break the strike by organising a "return to work" campaign. But each time, the attempt has failed.

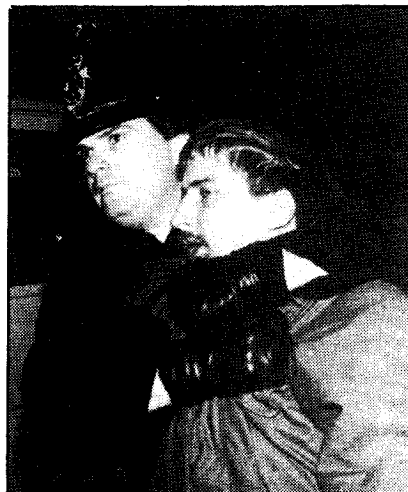
The strike has been a nightmare for the ruling class. They had hoped for an easy victory. Ten months later, the dispute has already cost them at least £5,000 million. A whole generation of workers have become transformed in struggle. The Tories have been forced to lean heavily on the state apparatus, exposing the role of the police in the eyes of the workers. They have been compelled to ditch the mask of liberalism and reveal the ugly face of capitalism beneath.

All this will have a profound effect on the working class. Beginning with the advanced layers, the class as a whole will begin to draw revolutionary conclusions from the whole situation.

The hopes of Thatcher and co for a period of tranquility if only the miners are defeated will soon be dashed. In the epoch of capitalist decay, strikes are no longer mere interruptions of "normal" class relations which are then resumed as before. The example of the Tilbury dockers shows the new face of capitalism. When a strike is defeated, the bosses put the boot in.

In this hard and cruel school, an entire generation of workers are re-learning the lessons their grandfathers had to learn in the past. The need for picket lines, the need for unions, the need for the Labour Party and socialism—all these things will be learned afresh in the terrible class battles which impend.

Photo: Martin Shakeshaft



The Tories have been forced to lean on the state apparatus, exposing the role of the police to the labour movement.

Even in the worst event—that of a defeat for the miners—the Tories, as the former Harold MacMillan tried to explain—would have lost. They have lost because their system is completely undermined. On the basis of capitalism there is no way out.

The extent of the terrible collapse of British industry was revealed in an incredible advertisement which appeared in *The Times* last November. This stated the following:

"After the war Britain was the 3rd largest steel producer. Now we are 10th. . . In 1900 Britain made 60% of the world's shipping. Today we make 3%. . . Britain once exported motor bikes to over 100 countries. Now we import almost every machine we buy. . . Before the war almost every car on our roads was British. Now well over half are foreign. . . Britain pioneered the world machine tool industry. Our share is now 3.1%. . . Bri-

tain discovered the wireless. We now import 96% of our portable radios. . . Britain made the first practical computer. Now we have only 5% of the Information Technology market. . . We once made all the textile machinery in the world. We now make 8%. . ."

In the past, Britain was pre-eminent in every field of science, technique and industry. Now, the irreversible decline of British capitalism poses terrible problems for all classes in society. A shrinking surplus spells **the inevitability of titanic struggles between the classes, of which the miners' strike is only the first.**

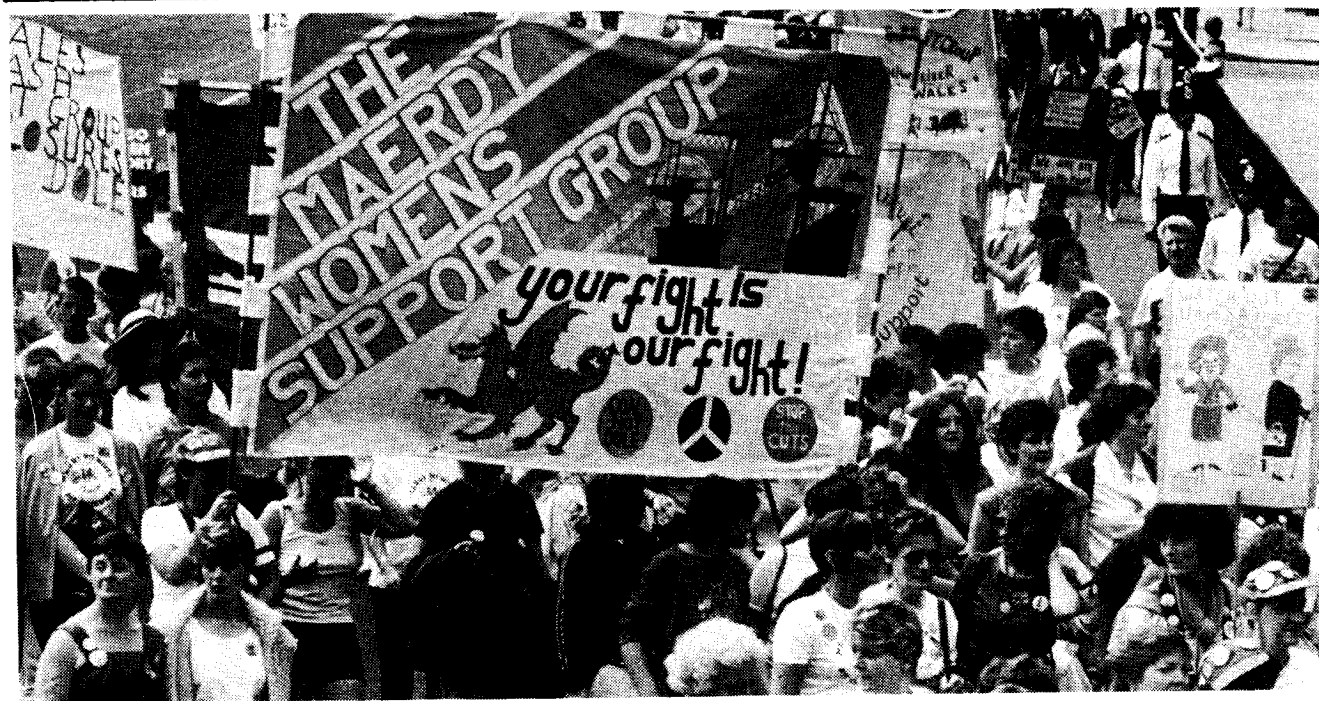
"Civil war without guns"

The economic policies of the new breed of parvenu Tory leaders—representing the parasitic wing of capital, the financiers, property speculators and "get-rich-quick" merchants will only hasten the decline. These well-heeled drones seriously imagine that Britain can survive without industry, on the basis of banking and services! They have invested £40,000 million abroad in the last five years alone. This represents, not only the tendency of the capitalists to try for greater profits, but also has a social purpose. Like the French ruling class before the war, they would like to turn Britain into a parasitic "rentier" economy, in order to reduce the numbers and power of the working class. Such a policy spells absolute disaster for Britain. It would mean, not three but five or six or more millions unemployed, and a finished recipe for social convulsions. Not accidentally, Brian Walden wrote in the *Evening Standard* that the events of the miners' strike resembled a "civil war without guns". That is a sombre warning of the shape of things to come.

1984 has marked the decisive change in the situation. With the miners' strike, the British working class has crossed the Rubicon. It has shown what stuff it is made of and what great things it is capable of.

In the next period, which will see great battles, with partial victories and defeats, periods of ebb and flow, the need for conscious Marxist policies will become clear. The workers will prepare for the task of the socialist transformation of society by carrying out a root-and-branch transformation of the Labour Party and trade unions. The idea will gradually take root—based upon harsh experience—that on the basis of this corrupt and degenerate system, no way forward is possible. Once that idea grips the minds of the millions of working class men, women and youth, no force on earth will be able to stop them.

Women in Revolt



By Margaret Creear

FOR MARXISTS, the movement of the miners' wives and the many thousands of other women who have supported the miners in this dispute, is a welcome continuation on a higher level of the upsurge of militancy amongst working class women in recent years. It underlines the increased polarisation brought about by the deepening crisis in capitalist society and is an indication of the willingness of this section of the working class to struggle to defend jobs and their communities. Many of the wives intend to remain organised and politically active after the strike, understanding the need to continue the struggle against the capitalist system. It is therefore important to set this movement in its historical context, to analyse what processes led to the increased activity amongst women and what implications this struggle will have for the future.

The first point to be made is that this movement stands in a long tradition of female militancy which predates even the establishment of the labour movement. Women were involved in spontaneous demonstrations and 'riots' for example against increases in food prices and, in the sixteenth century uprisings amongst woollen workers in the cottage industries. As capitalism developed mass production and drew women into factory labour, they formed Benefit Societies which provided basic insurance against illness and funds for strikes and lockouts.

When women workers were excluded from the craft unions due to fear of both female and unskilled labour which they represented, they built their own trade unions or joined the mixed unions prepared to recruit

them. Once drawn into struggle they proved themselves to be no less militant than the men. For example, in Stockport in the massive power loom weavers' strike of 1840, 24 men and boys and 21 women and girls were arrested for harassing scabs. Under the influence of the dockers' struggles, in 1911 15,000 unorganised women workers in 25 firms in Bermondsey struck against low pay. In the course of the strike, they were organised into a union by the Federation of Women Workers and won a pay increase.

Womens militant tradition

The whole history of the labour movement points to the conclusion that, in spite of the disadvantages they experience, women workers have been prepared to move with their class. At times of confident class movement even the 'unorganisable'—homeworkers, housewives, domestic workers have been organised, even if only temporarily.

Women not only involved themselves in trade unions but built political organisations. In their book *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, Jill Liddington and Jill Norris catalogue the struggle of thousands of working class women for the vote, which they saw as a means of influencing legislation which determined their pay and conditions and their right to organise. For working class women it also represented part of their struggle for increased education and health facilities for their class. In addition to their contribution to the building of the Independent Labour Party and the early Labour Party, they built their own women's organisation. Alan Hutt, in the *Post War History of the British Working Class* (pg 48) states:



Miners wives have drawn wider political conclusions from their experience during the strike. But do the Labour leaders understand that without a struggle legislation for women's demands will remain a dead letter? Photo: D. Pearson

"Even more spectacular in many ways (than the growth of the LP) was the spread of organisation amongst women. In 1919 there were 271 Labour Women's Sections, in 1920 there were over 425, in 1921 there were 650, several having around 800 to 900 members. The aggregate membership being 70,000."

This reflected the revolutionary mood in society at that time. Similarly, the Women's Organisation grew during the '26 general strike. The National Women's Officer's report at the 1927 Women's Conference described the important role the WO played in the '26 strike in the mining areas, where they had sections based on pit villages. "The number of Women's Sections in April 1926 was 1,642, an increase of 192 on the previous year. In April 1927 this was increased to 1,728. Membership has grown more quickly than before, especially since the lockout. Our estimate now reaches nearly 300,000 individual women members.

In addition to the WO of the LP there were also the Women's Co-operative Guilds which were particularly aimed at organising women in the home. At the end of the First World War they had 32,000 members, in 1930, 67,000 members in 1,400 branches. They campaigned on such issues as birth control, maternity care and education for girls. Their writings and reports give a graphic picture of the lives of working class women between the wars.

The significance of such organisations should not be underestimated. Women are sometimes referred to as 'backward' members of the class almost as if it were biological. Although such descriptions are partly based on historical ignorance of the contribution that sections of working class women have made to the labour movement, there are other factors, some of which will be dealt with later, which may cause women to be hesitant about undertaking or support-

ting a struggle.

One of these has been the isolation of women in the home and their material responsibility for the home and the welfare of children. Isolated in individual households, they experience a remoteness from the labour movement, are subject to the indoctrination of the media and may even not be aware fully of the issues at stake. This of course has also been a problem in the miners' strike for those miners who have not been active on the picket line. In future struggles the labour movement in any case will have to pay attention to ending this isolation.

The Women's Organisation of the LP and the Women's Co-operative Guilds were an attempt to overcome this problem. Recently, we have seen committees of wives at Hindle Gears and Cammell Launds and the most extensive and effective organisation in the form of the miners' wives' groups.

The extent and effectiveness of women's organisation such as the Guild and the WO was strongly influenced by the drawing of women out to work, raising their consciousness and confidence. Women workers, especially textile workers played an important role and undoubtedly amongst the miners' wives, the number of women who work and have some experience of trade union organisation has helped in developing some of the groups.

Struggle for equal pay

However, women, particularly married women, only represented a small proportion of the workforce until recent times. By 1931 only 10% of married women went out to work. In some industries and in clerical work, marriage bars were enforced to end women's employment once they married or became pregnant.

By 1951, the number of married women workers had risen to 21.7%. The boom years following the war led to a massive extension of jobs, especially part-time jobs in the public sector and the service industries. By 1977, 57.9% of the female workforce were married. The latest figures indicate that this has risen to 62% which includes almost 55% of women with dependent children. Women are now 40% of the workforce in Britain.

The drawing of women out to work in such large numbers in the boom years was a major contribution to the raising of working class living standards and aspirations. But we also saw a contradictory process taking place as far as working class women were concerned. On the one side reformism became deeply rooted in the labour movement. It was argued that capitalism had solved its problems, it could deliver the goods. It was simply a question of 'humane' management of the existing system. For women the quadrupling of further and higher education led them to believe that even if their jobs were monotonous and low paid their children might escape through education and acquired skills...a belief which has now been totally shattered by youth unemployment which is fuelling the anger of working class women against



Rag trade homeworking today. In 1930 the Women's Co-operative Guilds organised 67,000 women in the home.

capitalism.

At the same time as reformism was becoming entrenched, women were going out to work in such numbers and for a prolonged period of time that it raised the confidence of some sections of workers who began to feel that they were the equal of the men they worked with. We saw the struggles around the question of equal pay which challenged a fundamental assumption of capitalism that irrespective of their contribution to society, women are always secondary, subservient in work and in the home.

The struggle for Equal Pay was instructive from several points of view. There had been intermittent struggles around this demand since women had first gone out to work. The first recorded demand was in 1833 by the Powerloom weavers. The first resolution calling for equal pay was carried at the TUC in 1888. Both wars saw attempts by women workers, labelled 'dilutees', to gain the male rate for the job, often with the assistance of the men they worked with. The '45 Labour government dismissed the demand as inflationary. In the thirties and the sixties clerical and civil service workers took up the issue. USDAW launched a campaign in 1961. In the mid sixties the Women's Advisory Committee opposed Labour's wage restraint policy on the grounds that it made the struggle for equal pay more difficult. In 1970, 30,000 rag trade workers starting in Leeds came out on strike. But the major battle was at Ford Dagenham in 1968 when 187 women machinists struck against a grading system which put them all on the bottom two grades. They demanded upgrading to take account of the skills involved in their work. The strike was made official and the women won a temporary victory. Undoubtedly this was the most significant strike in achieving the Equal Pay Act.

It should be remembered by those calling for further legislation today that this legislation was conceded by a reformist Labour government not because of a belief in abstract principles or from the goodness

of its heart but under pressure from industrial action by women workers. Although the legislation legitimised their demands many sections of workers have since learned that without a willingness to struggle, eg at Tricos, legislation will remain a dead letter.

Another aspect of the Equal Pay struggle which contributed historically to the so-called backwardness of women workers, or more precisely in this case the scepticism they feel towards the leadership of the movement, was the equivocal support they received when they advanced this demand. It is often pointed out that many women workers don't fight for equal pay because they have been convinced to regard themselves as secondary breadwinners. However, the Labour leadership itself has contributed to this view.

Reformism bases itself on the idea that there is a fixed section of the national cake which is available to workers. Any advance, therefore, for one section of the working class must be compensated for by sacrifices by another. This approach, combined with an acceptance of the ideology of capitalism in relation to women's rôle in the home, has never actually prevented capitalism from using women as a pool of cheap labour for factories and offices. It has simply facilitated discrimination against women in terms of wages, opportunities and conditions.

Reformism blocks women's demands

It has also meant that the programme of the Labour movement has often lagged behind the consciousness and demands of women workers. A recent survey for the Department of Employment demonstrated that under pressure of women going out to work, many traditional views are changing amongst both women and men. When women were asked if married women should have the right to work whatever their family situation, 71% of the women agreed, 47% very strongly. Although husbands were more traditional in their views than their wives, there had been a significant change. In the coming period it will be essential for the labour movement's programme and leadership to build on these changes counteracting further traditional, discriminatory views on women.

These questions will be posed particularly sharply in the near future. The recession was a blow to women workers along with the rest of the class. The struggle for equal pay appeared more difficult at a time when the right to work at all was being threatened. However many sections of women fought tenaciously to hold on to what they had gained. The mid to late seventies was marked by struggles for trade unionisation in sweatshops, the continued growth of the public sector trade unions, accompanied by struggles over low pay and cuts in public expenditure and struggles against redundancies which led to factory occupations for example at Lee Jeans and Meccanos. One aspect of this period was the willingness of fresher layers of workers, who had little previous experience of struggle, to fight, where

other sections were more hesitant. A sure sign that women workers have drawn the lessons from these disputes, particularly the role played by leadership, and that the growing aspirations they developed during the boom years have not been wiped out by the recession, is the debate that is now taking place in the movement on the question of positive action and positive discrimination.

These issues are dealt with fully in the *Militant* pamphlet *Positive Discrimination or Class Action*. *Militant* supporters are opposed to a negligent, dismissive or patronising attitude to working class women in the movement. Women are seriously under-represented at all levels of the trade unions and labour movement particularly at leadership level regionally and nationally. This is a reflection of the difficulties experienced by women at rank and file level and of the failure of the trade unions to adequately fight for their members. We have therefore supported any provision which can be made to encourage and enable the mass of working women to be active through the provision of special schools and courses, crèches, babysitting, transport where necessary, meetings in works' time etc. We also support discussions on issues relating specifically to women on the agenda of mixed meetings and all male meetings. The responsibility for recruiting women to the labour movement and for fighting for their interests is not the monopoly of women but the responsibility of male workers too.

Positive action of this kind is essential if the demand of TU democracy of the Broad Lefts is to be translated into a concrete reality in many unions. In NUPE, for example, 2/3rds of the membership is female and half are part timers. Positive action is necessary to ensure that these women trade unionists can participate in the election and accountability of the leadership and in determining the policy of a union in which they have such a big stake.

Militant has only opposed those measures which we regard as no more than a token change eg. the reservation of seats for women on various committees which are no guarantee of a genuine change for the mass of women, and simply paper over the difficulties.

However, women want to change their organisations and to participate in them to struggle more effectively on issues such as jobs, pay and conditions. In the coming period, the national minimum wage will be a central demand. Already we have seen the magnificent struggles against low pay in the 78-79 winter of discontent and the CPSA and NHS disputes. Millions of women would be recruited to the trade unions and involved actively if this demand were part of a serious campaign.

The lack of urgency and caution of the Labour leaders in taking up such a demand is not just a question of prejudice against women. It illustrates the minefield which the most reasonable demands of women workers represent, particularly in a period of capitalist crisis, for the reformist leaders who consider capitalism to be eternal. Already the old, old

story of the right wing is being sung by Hattersley. 'If low paid workers are to advance, then this means sacrifices for the better paid. Any advance towards a minimum wage can only be considered as part of a package of wage restraint'.

The 'Left' such as Michael Meacher MP, have supported the demand for a statutory minimum wage. But women workers would point out that, welcome as legislation is in legitimising their demands, the Equal Pay Act did not give them equal pay any more than the Sex Discrimination Act ended discrimination against them. **A national minimum wage requires more than legislation—it requires a struggle.**

No movement which takes this demand seriously can obey anti-trade union legislation which outlaws solidarity action. One factor in workers being low paid is their lack of industrial muscle. They require blacking, solidarity action and secondary picketing to ensure a victory.

Womens double exploitation

Considering the proven ability of capitalism to avoid legislation and the rulings of the wages councils, the labour movement must have the right to police such legislation through the opening of the books of firms not paying, with the back up of the threat of nationalisation by a Labour government of any firm refusing to pay. But we also have to explain to women workers that a large number of the low paid are concentrated in the public sector, where expenditure cuts have hit both jobs and pay. A major struggle could force the payment of the minimum wage to a large section of workers. However, the main problem would remain. Because of the rapid decline of British capitalism especially the decimation of manufacturing industry the capitalists would attempt to reverse these gains. We support all workers struggling for reforms but in the end only an end to capitalism itself will secure these demands and more on a permanent basis.

But it isn't just the demands raised by women at work which represent a minefield for the reformists. Under capitalism, women are doubly exploited as workers but also as women in the home with the main responsibility for child rearing. Any crisis in the economy is reflected in all the institutions with which capitalism surrounds itself. Unbearable pressures are exerted on the family at times of economic crisis and at the same time, women's increased involvement in work outside the home leads them to question their role in it.

The history of the labour movement shows that when there is a movement of the class, women will use it to improve their position both as workers and within the home through campaigns related to violence, sexual harassment, health provision and especially, maternity care, education, birth control and childcare. Anyone reading the account of working class lives in 'Maternity' will have no doubt about the benefit of such reforms. Although fundamentally, birth control, for example, did not change women's

role in society, for millions of women it meant less of the chronic ill health and weariness brought about by endless childbearing and rearing and added to the combativity of the present generation of women.

Yet such reforms which attempted to combat the worst of women's oppression under capitalism did not automatically receive the support of the labour movement. In the case of birth control it was often put forward by the ruling class as a means of dealing with poverty which confused the issue. But issues

such as birth control, divorce, abortion have often been surrounded in a moral fog by capitalism backed up by the Church to prevent workers from seeing that such oppression of women is not natural but fostered in the interests of the capitalist system and the needs of private property.

In the early '20s and '30s one of the main battles being fought by the Labour Women's Organisation and the Guilds was for birth control. At the '27 Women's Conference it was second in importance only to the resolutions on the '26 strike and the nationalisation of the mines. Some activists had been arrested for distributing what was termed 'pornographic' literature—ie. leaflets on birth control. After their work and support in the General Strike, the women felt they had the right to ask for support on this issue at the LP Conference. The resolution was moved by a miners' wife. But their appeals fell on deaf ears and they were defeated. This was a setback both for the women and the movement as a whole.

It is because of such irresponsiveness by the official movement that such issues often become the subject of single issue campaigns, eg. the recent campaign for abortion. Yet when the TUC raised its little finger the largest-ever demonstration in favour of abortion took place.

Already working class women have fought to retain nurseries, transport, against closures in the NHS and education services, and there is increased opposition to sexual harassment at work. It is inevitable that these issues will be raised in the trade union movement. The oppression of women is one of the biggest indictments of capitalism. If the demands for good quality, flexible childcare, youth facilities, a crash house building programme, an expansion in the NHS, education and training were included in a socialist programme they would encourage women's involvement in the movement and enable all workers to understand that capitalism has distorted every aspect of their lives and will increase their determina-



Labour Women's Festival, 1982. During the 1926 Miners Strike the LP Women's Organisation grew to 300,000.

tion to see an end to it.

But how can such demands be fought for by a Labour leadership obsessed by the language of "priorities". Even the demand for a nursery place for every child appears unrealistic to reformists. But on the basis of a planned economy under workers control and management the resources could be generated and organised to provide for this elementary right if women are to take part on a truly equal basis in society.

In the coming struggles, millions of women will move into action. Their anger and bitterness against a system which condemns the majority of them to low paid monotonous work is added to by the fact that no matter how hard they work, how hard they try to feed, clothe and bring up their children, or keep their home clean and comfortable, capitalism undermines, belittles and trivialises their efforts.

The miners' wives have demonstrated the audacity and organisational ability of women when they move into struggle. They have also demonstrated the rapid raising of consciousness women are capable of in the course of struggle, rejecting old ideas and grasping the basic ideas of Marxism, eg in relation to the state. They have remarked that nothing will ever be the same again. If that is to be translated into reality it is the duty of Marxists to reach such women and offer them a clear alternative.

The emancipation of women is not an optional extra in the struggle for a socialist society. Marxism offers an end to the exploitation of women as workers and as women, through ending capitalism and building a socialist society which will provide the resources necessary to free women from domestic drudgery and the material responsibility for childrearing. Women therefore will look to the *Militant* with high aspirations. We must make sure we build a movement and put forward a programme which will channel all their considerable abilities and energies into the struggle for socialism.

From bureaucrat to dissident



Peter Taaffe
analyses the recently published
memoirs of Pyotor Grigorenko.

THE FIGURE of Grigorenko is familiar to those who followed the so-called "dissident" movement in Russia in the 1960's and early 1970's. Because of his determined and heroic opposition to Stalinism he was the only Red Army General to have been exiled by the regime.

He was also one of the most prominent victims of the barbaric "psychiatric" treatment meted out by the KGB to its opponents. Grigorenko has now recounted these and many other experiences in an interesting biography which was published in this country in 1983. For Marxists the book is of special interest. Grigorenko came from the bureaucratic elite itself. He was personally acquainted with the summits of the bureaucracy, Brezhnev, Krushchev, Andropov and many others. He traces out his evolution from a case-hardened "Stalinist" to an implacable opponent of the regime. The book is quite fascinating in showing the inner mechanics of the bureaucracy. The most illuminating pages are those which deal with the post-Stalin era.

In the aftermath of Stalin's death, even the bureaucracy itself, at least at its lowest levels, was shaken by the revelations of Krushchev at the 20th Party Congress. But Grigorenko was not just a liberal critic of the regime.

At a certain stage in his development he approaches a "Trotskyist" criticism of the Stalinist regime. The chapters which deal with the "rebirth of Leninism" are the most interesting in the whole book. But Grigorenko also supplies an invaluable account of the blunders of Stalin in the collectivisation adventure, in the decimation of the officer corps during the purges of the 1930s and the criminal blunders of the great "war leader".

At the time of the Nazis' attack on Russia on 1941, as a raw young organiser from a peasant background in the Komsomol (Young Communist League) in 1924 he participated in the struggle against Trotsky. "I could not stay on the sidelines. I read *The Lessons of October* and I read the periodical press. I was uneasy. Could Trotsky possibly be right? Might the creation of a socialist society be impossible? Would we perish if the world revolution did not come to our aid? At just this time Stalin's essay 'Trotskyism or Leninism' appeared in *The Workers newspaper*. With characteristic simplicity (today I will call it over simplicity) Stalin refuted Trotsky's affirmations one by one. We could, he wrote, succeed at building socialism in our country. The delay of the world revolution must not stop us... We were obliged to carry out the cause of the world revolution ourselves. I agreed with Stalin's every word. He liberated me from all doubt. From then on his essay was with me always. I never tired from explaining it to my friends. It was my best weapon during the arguments with the Trotskyists."

Revolution isolated

The leaders of the Russian Revolution Lenin and Trotsky never conceived that they could build socialism in one country, let alone in a backward, predominantly peasant country like Russia. The beginning of socialism would require a higher level of technique—productivity of labour—than even the most highly developed capitalist country. Russia never possessed either the economic base or the cultural resources to proceed to build "socialism in one country". The Russian Revolution was envisaged as the beginning of the international revolution. Only on an international plane through a world plan of produc-

tion would it be possible to begin to construct socialism.

However the Russian Revolution could be the spark which could set in train a series of revolutions in Germany, France, Italy, Britain and throughout Western Europe, in turn spreading to the citadel of world capitalism, America itself. These revolutions would come to the aid of Russia with enormous economic and cultural assistance. The lag of the world revolution, entirely due to the betrayal of the revolution in Germany in 1918, in Italy in 1920 etc by the leaders of the Social Democracy led to the isolation of the Russian Revolution. Its economic and cultural backwardness, together with the decimation of the flower of the Russian proletariat in the Civil War, were the factors which led to the usurpation of power by the bureaucratic elite, personified by the rise and triumph of Stalin.

Stalinism in its initial stage based itself on those like Grigorenko, with little theoretical or political education, from a backward rural background (Grigorenko came from a small farm in Ukraine). However the young Grigorenko was to question many aspects of the regime in the following years. He witnessed and protested at the ruinous effects of the forced collectivisation. But Grigorenko did not connect Stalin with the crimes of the bureaucracy. Like many other fervent Stalinists at the time it was not the great "helmsman" but his underlings who were "responsible" for the crimes which he saw at first hand.

Some of the best passages reinforce the evidence furnished by Leopold Trepper in his monumental work "The Great Game" which completely shatters the myth that despite any other "drawbacks" Stalin was at least "a great war leader". In the purge trials of 1937 to 1938 Stalin slaughtered 70% of the officer corps of the Red Army.

Chief amongst those who went to the firing squad were outstanding military leaders such as Tukachevsky and Yakir. The former had developed the theory of the *Blitzkrieg* long before the Nazis had either developed or carried through this method of warfare. The actions of Stalin were no mere caprice on his part. As Trotsky pointed out the purges at the time were a one-sided civil war to decimate

the last remnants of the Bolshevik Party.

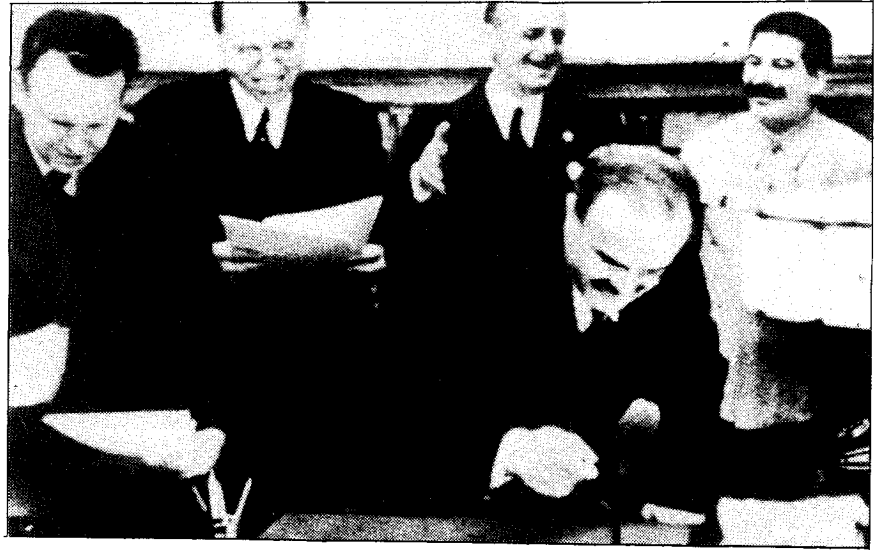
Stalin feared any outstanding figure associated with the heroic period of the Russian Revolution. In the event of a revolt of the Russian proletariat these figures, not withstanding their previous capitulation to Stalin, could have become a focal point of opposition. So also the officer corps, particularly outstanding generals like Tukachevsky and Yakir, could have become a pole of attraction to those who opposed the untrammelled, ruthless and blood thirsty regime of Stalin. Traditionally the Stalinist apparatus in the party and the government feared too great an independence on the part of the officer corps. The recent removal of Marshal Ogarkov as the Russian chief of Military staff is connected with the fear of the party and state bureaucracy of the officer corps becoming an oppositional force. Hence the denunciations of unnamed generals who it seems harbour "Bonapartist" tendencies.

Stalin's military blunders

If Stalin had been a conscious agent of the Nazis he could not have been more successful in sabotaging the military defence of Russia. Grigorenko gives examples of Stalin's crimes drawn from his own experiences. He personally participated in the fortifications on the Western front. Yet, as he remarks, "they were blown up without having fired even once at the enemy. I do not know how future historians will explain this crime against our people. Contemporary historians ignore it. I cannot offer an explanation myself.

The Soviet government squeezed billions of roubles (by my calculations not less than 120 billion) out of the people to construct impregnable fortifications along the Western boundary from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Then, right before the war in the spring of 1941, powerful explosions thundered along the entire 1200 kilometer length of these fortifications. On Stalin's personal orders reinforced concrete coponiers, semi-coponiers, tens of thousands of permanent fortifications were blown into the air. No better gift could have been given to Hitler's Barbarosa plan." Grigorenko asks: "How could this have taken place? Stalin's justifications must be that he was insane".

There are many other examples of Stalin's blindness, empiricism and "insanity". Hitler's invasion plans, including the exact date of when it was to begin, had been supplied to Stalin but he chose to ignore it as "Nazi propaganda". So unprepared were the Russians' armed forces that the Nazis succeeded in destroying most of the



Molotov (foreground), Ribbentrop and Stalin at the signing of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact. The Russian armed forces were completely unprepared for the Nazi invasion in 1941.

Russian planes while they were still on the ground! Moreover it is not generally realised that at the outbreak of the Second World War the Russian armies had a greater fire power than that of Nazi Germany. Stalin had replaced the flower of the Red Army with military idiots like Voroshilov. This "genius" advocated the use of cavalry to confront the tanks of the Nazis!

Grigorenko shows that it was the release from prison of those like Rokossovsky and Zhukov, together with many other generals who were awaiting execution in the Stalinist dungeons at the time of the invasion, which was a crucial factor in preventing the complete triumph of the Nazis. Other factors were the barbarism of the Nazi regime which completely repelled the peoples of Russia. The advantages of a planned economy also allowed Russia to produce the weaponry to defeat the Nazis despite the fact that Hitler had the industry and resources of the whole of Europe at his disposal. At the outbreak of the war the "great helmsman" was so shaken by the scale of the disaster and fear of the wrath of an outraged people that he was incommunicado for a period of days.

There is nothing new in Grigorenko's accounts of the military blunders and crimes of Stalin and the bureaucratic elite he represented. But invaluable first hand evidence is supplied which shatters once and for all the myth built up around Stalin which even people like Michael Foot accepted in the past:

"Of course, the achievements of the Stalin era were monumental in scale. Under his guidance the Soviet Union was collectivised and a largely peasant people were made literate. Thanks to these achievements, the Russian armies which were broken by the Ger-

mans in the First World War repelled and destroyed them in the Second... who in the face of these colossal events, will dare to question Stalin's greatness? How superhuman must be the mind which presided over these world-shattering developments?"—Michael Foot, writing in *Tribune*, 13 March, 1953.

Grigorenko and Brezhnev

During the period of the '30s, like many others, Grigorenko's life hung by a threat. At one stage Stalin made enquiries about Grigorenko's alleged "sabotage" to his superior. He was protected from the firing squad by his commanding officer. It was during the 1930s that Grigorenko first made acquaintance with Brezhnev who was to eventually rise to the position of chief bureaucrat. His pen portrait of Brezhnev describes not just one individual but a social type which still dominates Russian society. "It is not gratuitously that I describe Brezhnev's many facial expressions. His smile reminded me of the smile of a marionette. During my nine months of service under the Party leadership of Brezhnev I observed on him a whole repertoire of expressions. The first was an obsequious, servile smile; he donned this in the presence of higher-ups. It covered the area between his ears, the end of his nose to his chin and it looked as if it had been glued on or as if somewhere someone was pulling strings, since it suddenly would appear in full scale without any transition; someone pulled a different string and it disappeared just as suddenly."

Brezhnev was usually seen in public with a chest full of war medals. But Grigorenko comments: "everyone knows that Brezhnev did not see battle, but still they depict things as if

Brezhnev had himself led an attack. He too remembers the past rather poorly. If he had had a better memory he would be ashamed to have received the order of the Hero of the Soviet Union for participation in the battle actions of any army in which not one of the commanders or members of the military council received such an honour".

However the most interesting chapters of Grigorenko's book are those which deal with the period following the death of Stalin and particularly the aftermath of the 20th Party Congress where Khrushchev detailed the crimes of Stalin. He points out that in the early 1960s things were "very strained in both my service and civilian lives. My attitude towards the leaders became increasingly critical. It was more and more difficult for me not to react to the illegalities and pompous trivialities of the rulers of my country. When we went through the second post war currency reform (devaluation) I protested. Stalin's devaluation which was openly extortionate had not aroused the protest in me but I had changed. Khrushchev's declaration that no one gained or lost anything from his reform angered me."

20th party congress

Khrushchev's measures provoked discontent in the population. At the same time Grigorenko came up against the dead hand of the bureaucracy. "I began to hear account after account of how difficult it was to get backing for any new inventions. However significant and innovative, the government seemed to prefer sticking with the old. Technologically we were about 15 years behind the United States. I couldn't believe we were doing everything possible to catch up. It angered me. I had many acquaintances from various strata: directors of big enterprises, officials of the State Planning Commission, heads of agricultural organisations, teachers, workers, collective farmers—all were dissatisfied. All talked about instances of inefficiency, illegality, bureaucracy, stupidity. There was no agency or bureau to which we could take our dissatisfaction and so it began to appear in ordinary conversations."

Grigorenko wrestled with the dilemma, what to do. "I found it difficult to tolerate the hypocrisy of the rulers, but at the same time I knew that speaking out would ruin my entire way of life, one which suited me perfectly. Therefore I strove to suppress my mood of protest by my own strength of will and with the help of my work."

Thus at this stage even within the bureaucracy the impasse of the regime provoked a profound questioning

mood. "I'm tired of my General's insignia" writes Grigorenko, "of my high pay, of my special refreshment bars and stores." At another stage he declares "What do I care about some collective farmers or workers who are rotting in prison or concentration camps? I'll go on living as I please. Enjoy my life." And then reproaching himself "What a rat you are, Pyotor Grigoryevich".

This period of wrestling with his conscience came to a head at the Lenin District Moscow Party Conference which Grigorenko attended as a delegate on 7 September, 1961. All the accumulated bitterness and discontent which he felt for the regime spilled out in an astonishing outburst at this gathering of the bureaucracy itself. Intervening in a discussion on the programme of the "Communist Party" he declared: "What is our experience on the question of the state and the personality cult. Stalin puts himself above the party. This the central committee itself has established. Even more importantly there is in the experience of our party the case of a man who was not only alien to the party but who was hostile to our entire system and who turned out to be in charge of the highest organ of the government, the state, and the party. I am thinking of Beryia. If his was an isolated case we might have no cause for alarm." Grigorenko then went on to show other "deviations" and crimes of Stalinist leaders.

"Let us imagine Khrushchev had been destroyed like Voznesensky and others. After all, it was pure coincidence that Stalin died so early. He could have lived till 90". This naturally caused a stir in the audience of bureaucrats. However his next statement produced uproar: "we are approving a project for a programme in which the personality cult is condemned but the question arises: Is everything possible being done to prevent the repetition of a personality cult while the personality itself is perhaps arising."

The chairman of the conference naturally tried then to prevent Grigorenko from going on. But the audience roared "let him continue" and a decision in favour of Grigorenko continuing was carried by a majority of those present. But then Grigorenko goes to the heart of the Stalinist regime. "I consider that the principal paths along which the development of the personality cult took place were, in the first place, the abolition of the party maximum, and that very few people return to work at production, that they became bureaucrats, that they allowed the struggle for the purity of the ranks of the party to weaken

"Just look, if you will: How often it

is written that someone stole or deceived customers, and then it is reported that so and so has been given a party penalty. Is it permissible for such people to be kept in the party?" After making further criticisms of the regime Grigorenko went on to say: "My concrete proposals are the following: to strengthen the democratisation of elections, and to strengthen similarly the wide-scale replacement of officials and also our responsibility to voters. We must also abolish all conditions which give rise to violations of the Leninist principles involved, in particular high salaries and lack of replacement of officials. We must struggle for purity within the ranks of the party."

"We must write directly in the programme about the struggle against careerism, against deceit of the party and the state for the sake of personal advantage, something which is incompatible with party membership. If a Communist in a leading position is guilty of bureaucracy, philandering, servility, nepotism, or in any way suppresses criticism, he must be subjected to a severe party penalty, obligatorily removed from the position he occupies, and sent to do physical work in industry and agriculture". In the words of Grigorenko, this was met with "applause". Grigorenko's statements mirror in outline the criticisms which Trotsky said would be taken up by the proletariat in its struggle against the bureaucracy. It is all the more remarkable that they emanated from within the charmed circle of the bureaucracy itself. Even more striking is the fact that those bureaucrats gathered at this conference approved of Grigorenko's speech!

Questioning within bureaucracy

It was Trotsky who pointed out that in the event of a political revolution the movement of the proletariat would infect the lower and middle layers of the bureaucracy itself. They would be drawn behind the movement of the masses. In the post-Stalin era the simmering discontent at all levels in society burst out. Following Grigorenko's speech a large crowd gathered in the hallway with one young man shouting, "they have been allowed to get too far out of hand! They pull rank even at a party conference. The General was speaking as a Communist—and then they let loose the big star—that Marshal—in order to shut his mouth. Those big shots have gotten out of hand".

Nevertheless the bureaucratic tops managed to pressurise the conference, not without great difficulty, into com-

elling Grigorenko to surrender his credentials as a delegate. The Stalinist bureaucracy then unleashed the full power of its machine against Grigorenko. One *Pravda* journalist told Grigorenko: "your statement that the party was lucky that Krushchev and others survived and that Stalin died early sounds like pure irony, pure mockery. But the most painful of all is your declaration that the personality cult originates in high salaries, lack of replacement personnel, and bureaucratisation. Also painful are your proposals on the democratisation of elections, on the responsibility for elected officers, on the institution of broad-scale replacement of officials, on the struggle for purity in the ranks of the party and the expulsion from the party of careerists, bribe takers and other rascals".

A furious onslaught was launched against Grigorenko. The terror at the effect of his speech was shown in one particularly revealing encounter with a top party official, Serdyuk. At an official hearing this creature immediately denounced Grigorenko: "high salaries don't suit him—can you believe it! Why didn't you think about your own high salary?"

Response from youth

"I didn't distinguish from the party" declared Grigorenko. "You don't distinguish yourself! Don't play at being holy! You differentiate and distinguish in everything very well indeed. You thought about your own high salary when you gave your speech. You are convinced that as a highly trained specialist you had a right to such a salary. But you were thinking about my high salary." "He stressed the word my and throughout the tirade insulted me by using familiar rather than formal address."

Serdyuk continued, "you want to have removability of high positions—don't you! Well you don't think about your own removability. You are a specialist and don't need to be removed and replaced. You don't think about being removed yourself. You want to have me replaced".

Serdyuk went on: "He wants democracy, you see. So every good-for-nothing can meddle in the work of government and party institutions and hinder the efforts of conscientious officials. He wants free elections, you see, so that all kinds of demagogues can slander the conscientious Communists and can hinder the people from electing those who are most worthy. He spouted demagoguery like that and then he had the effrontery to complain we didn't deal with him lawfully, you see! Well we aren't going to waste our time in your clever



Andropov and his predecessor, Brezhnev. Despite Brezhnev appearing in this poster with a chest full of medals, Grigorenko comments: "Everyone knows that Brezhnev did not see battle".



listen to your demagoguery here! You can go." Enraged Grigorenko declared to his wife: "They were gangsters! They were dissolute, demoralised men". His wife calmly declared, "you have only just found that out. I've known it for a long time but now that you know about it, conduct yourself accordingly. Don't put your head in the beast's jaw."

Grigorenko's criticisms found an echo amongst students and his speech was published in clandestine leaflets. Perplexed and worried at the response which his mild criticisms of the regime evoked, Grigorenko then "out of habit went to Lenin for answers. Once again I sat down with his works, seeking proof that the present party line had been diverted from Leninism, seeking the means by which we could correct ourselves". Grigorenko's evolution in his opposition to the Stalinist regime, his groping for solutions to the problems he saw around him, is an indication of the process which will unfold and is unfolding at this present time, in a much sharper form amongst the Russian proletariat.

In Poland and the other states in Eastern Europe it is perhaps unlikely in the first instance that the opposition to Stalinism will look towards the works of Marx, Engels or Lenin. These figures are wrongly identified with the Stalinist regime. They are connected in the eyes of the masses (particularly Lenin) perhaps with the national oppression of the states of Eastern Europe by the Russian Stalinist regime. But in Russia the figure of Lenin is still revered as the founder of the state. The regime officially bases itself on "Marxism". It is forced to circulate the works of Marx, of Engels, of Lenin in millions of copies. A brief acquaintance with these works, particularly with Lenin's *State and*

Revolution, would allow the average discerning citizen to compare the simple measures which Lenin proposes for a healthy workers' state with the untrammelled rule of the bureaucratic elite!

Grigorenko misunderstands much in Lenin's writings. He sees a contradiction in Lenin's writings on such things as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'democracy' as well as on the 'freedom of the press'. But Lenin's alleged "inconsistencies" are entirely due to the different circumstances in which he wrote at different times. Because he is not theoretically equipped with a knowledge of the basics of Marxism or the objective reasons which allowed the rise of the Stalinist dictatorship, Grigorenko draws a number of wrong conclusions. Nevertheless, basing ourselves on the material of Grigorenko, it is possible to see how the opposition to the Stalinist regime can move from isolated criticisms of Stalinism to seeing the need for a political revolution.

'Alliance of True Leninists'

For instance, Grigorenko recalls that: "During the war I had been close to one radical officer and we had talked a great deal about the country and the party. I did not agree with many of his conclusions but concurred with his idea that after the war it would be necessary to change the course of the party sharply. During one conversation he mentioned that some people felt preparations for such changes should be taking place now. There was an organisation he said calling itself the 'Alliance of True Leninists' which was organised on the principle of a chain.

"Each member of this alliance knew only the person who had enlisted him

in it and those who he himself had enlisted. He might enlist ten members, but each would only know him. They would not know each other. It was impermissible also to know anyone outside your own cell, or group. If another member whom you did not know should try to enlist you in the Alliance you had to agree to enlistment without revealing that you were already a member. If one member was arrested, all those connected with him would act as end links of the organisations. The organisers of the Alliance believed in the infiltration of like thinkers into all of society, without creating any organisation, in as much as any organisation would be easily discovered through connections within it and organised activity”.

Grigorenko comments “at the time I did not agree to join the Alliance, but the idea intrigued me. Such a chain seemed indestructible, and it could accomplish quite a bit since it combined ideological unity (‘true Leninism’) with a broader sort of initiative”.

What this interesting little snippet shows is that during the war, when the blunders and crimes of Stalin and the bureaucracy must have been quite evident to widespread sections of the officers in particular, the idea of dealing with these gangsters in the aftermath of the war had already occurred to the more far-sighted and daring elements.

Forced underground

Grigorenko writes, “The thought of such a mass ideological organisation simply would not leave me. If I had known one of the Alliance members I would have joined right then. The officer who had attempted to recruit me died at the front, and I never met any other members. Several times I met people whom I suspected of Alliance activity, but I never strove to enter in permanent contact with them, though I believe the Alliance still existed and believed also that democratic trends in the CPSU arose from such a movement. I believe the organisation may still exist today, and it is precisely for this reason that I do not name the officer who proposed that I join the Alliance. I do not want to give even one small bit of evidence to the KGB”.

If such organisations have sprung up amongst army officers, ie from within the bureaucracy, imagine the developments amongst the mighty Russian proletariat. This proletariat, numbering 120 million strong, is potentially the most powerful proletariat on the planet. Grigorenko’s writings allow us to anticipate many such movements developing amongst the proletariat. Indeed he gives invaluable information on oppositional movements of the Russian working



Lenin with the delegates to the 2nd All-Russian Congress of Miners, 1921. The demands of Grigorenko’s underground organisation echoed Lenin’s conditions for a healthy workers’ state.

class which have been suppressed by the bureaucracy.

Grigorenko founded an underground revolutionary organisation: “Alliance for Struggle for the Rebirth of Leninism”. An introductory leaflet was produced on the 46th anniversary of the October Revolution. Another leaflet called for a: “struggle for the ousting of the government of bureaucrats and parasites, for free elections, control of the government by the people, and for frequent replacement of all persons in high positions, including the very highest”. These very simple demands echo the demands of Lenin for a healthy workers’ state:

- **No standing army, but an armed people.**
- **All officials to be elected by the workers’ organisations with the right of recall.**
- **All officials to receive the same wages as a skilled worker (because of a shortage of technicians the Bolsheviks were compelled to allow a clearly defined maximum differential of four to one: Lenin described this frankly as a “capitalist differential”).**
- **Popular participation in all administrative duties; direct management and control by Soviets (“When everybody is a bureaucrat, nobody is a bureaucrat”).**

In view of the experiences of Stalinism the proletariat, as in the Hungarian revolution, would add one other condition to those of Lenin for a healthy workers’ state—never again

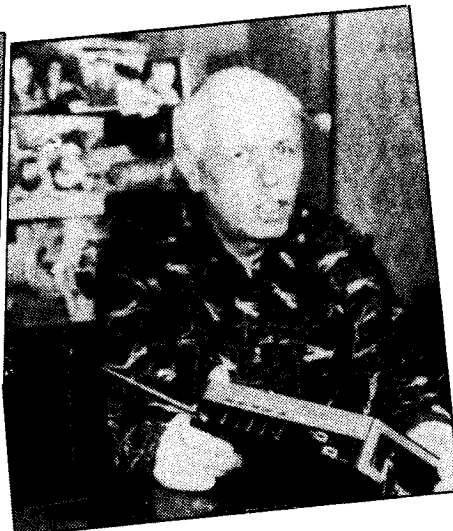
to permit a one-party regime.

Another leaflet criticised the food and bread shortages: “it answered the letter of the Central Committee which had claimed: ‘that bread shortages existed because slices were cut too thickly in the dining halls!’ The elements, no matter how imperfectly formulated, of an alternative programme for an opposition party striving to overthrow the bureaucracy is outlined in Grigorenko’s writings at this stage. Moreover his efforts found a ready response particularly from the youth.

Nevertheless he showed extreme naivety in the methods employed to gather recruits to his cause. Thus, he went to the ‘Hammer and Sickle’ factory in Moscow himself personally to distribute leaflets. On another occasion he went to a railway station to distribute a leaflet ‘to the public at large’ wearing his general’s uniform! Inevitably Grigorenko was arrested with his sons and others who belonged to his organisation.

Grigorenko arrested

His accusers stated: “you have created an underground organisation which has set itself the task of overthrowing the Soviet government. Dealing with that is the task of the organs of state security and not of party commissions”. Grigorenko replied “you are exaggerating. I did not create an organisation which set as its purpose the overthrow by force of the existing structure. I created an organisation for the dissemination of undistorted Leninism, for the exposure of its falsifiers”. The KGB accuser then stated: “If the matter only concerned propaganda of Leninism why have you chosen to go underground? Teach it within the system of party and political education and at meetings”.



Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, "intellectual" dissidents who adopted a completely pro-capitalist position. Grigorenko, on the other hand, initially "went to Lenin for answers . . . seeking proof that the present party had been diverted from Leninism".

Grigorenko replied: "You know yourself that this is impossible. That Leninism has to be preached in the underground is best evidenced by the fact that the present party leadership has departed from Leninist positions and thereby lost the right to leadership of the party. Thus Communist Leninists have the right to struggle against the leadership." The bureaucracy was of course incapable of answering the points which Grigorenko raised in his interrogation.

One such interrogation concerned a leaflet he had produced on the "dispersal by shooting of the workers' demonstration at Novocherkassk". His interrogator stated: "You write in your leaflet that the troops shot down the workers at Novocherkassk, but after all the whole matter was quite different than you say it was." Grigorenko replied: "How?". His interrogator: "well violations of public law had taken place".

Grigorenko then replied: "There were violations of public order in your version but in actual fact the Novocherkassk workers went out on the streets in a peaceful fashion. If there were hooligan or terrorist gangs which could only be dealt with with guns, why was this not reported in the press?". Interrogator: "It was reported". Grigorenko: "Where? In what newspaper? I did not read any such reports anywhere." His interrogator, quite embarrassed, added, "in the local press. They convicted the troublemakers and the local press reported it". Grigorenko said: "Well of course! They merely finished beating to death those who had not been shot on the streets. I know all about that.

"The local press briefly reported that there had been a trial of the initiators of public disorders and that fifteen persons were convicted in order

to frighten the entire population of the city. Out of the fifteen, nine were sentenced to execution and the sentences carried out. What interests me is not that—but who was guilty of firing upon a demonstration; who was guilty of the murder of several hundred people including women and children.

"And in particular I would like to know why the members of the politburo—Mikoyan and Kozlov—preferred bullets to words in their communications with the workers. This was a heinous crime. The bloodshed on the streets of Novocherkassk, Tbilisi, Temir-Tau, Priluki, Alexandrovov and other cities, has become an insurmountable obstacle between the party and the workers".

Psychiatric torture

These revelations about the movements of the proletariat and its brutal repression show the tremendous subterranean opposition which existed in Russia then and which is even greater today. An indication of the fear, bordering on terror, which Grigorenko's actions stimulated amongst the higher reaches of the bureaucracy is revealed by the fact that he learned later in 1965 that all the statements that he made during his interrogation had been taped and the tapes had been heard by all members of the Politburo.

Despite his hostility to the bureaucracy, and the devastating criticisms of its rule, Grigorenko's opposition took mostly the form of an appeal to the more "enlightened" sections of the bureaucracy to reform itself. Later on he was "ashamed to recollect what a rooster I must have seemed at the time. I suffered a great deal before I realised that I had no

sympathisers at the Lubyanka, that not a single person I dealt with was guided by conscience and honesty, and that to feel oneself superior to the interrogator, to be able to outwit him in the investigation is, at the very least, a mistake".

After his capture by the KGB Grigorenko was subjected to the most barbaric treatment in the psychiatric prisons of the Stalinist regime. His persecutors used the fact that he had suffered from shell shock during the war to diagnose him as "insane". He was tried, in his absence, before a military collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. The methods employed in these "psychiatric prisons" have been well documented by those like Bukovsky and others. However, the details provided by Grigorenko make the blood run cold.

The whole purpose of these prisons is to demoralise and break the spirit of those who oppose the regime. Drugs are administered which not only make the patient soporific but adversely affect the bowels, producing incontinence. Grigorenko was eventually released in 1965 and it was subsequently discovered that Brezhnev opposed this. Because of his previous experience with Grigorenko he wanted to keep him locked away in the regime's hellholes.

Once out of prison Grigorenko found himself participating in the growing dissident movement of the 1960s and 70s. At the same time he was compelled to look for the most menial kind of work. He was forced to work as a street worker in Yalta and as a janitor. But he was still able to take up the cause of those who had suffered at the hands of the Stalinist regime. He is perhaps best known in the capitalist West as the champion of the oppressed nationalities and minorities of Russia.

Above all he was seen as the most energetic opponent of the crimes perpetrated by Stalin against the Tartar people. He was absolutely tireless in fighting for the restoration of the rights of these unfortunate people. Following the invasion of the Nazis the whole of the Crimean Tartar nation had been convicted of "treason" by Stalin. In 1944 the whole nation had been deported from the bountiful Crimea into the deserts and the arid lands of Central Asia. In the words of Grigorenko "this cruel, senseless deportation in which over 46% of the Crimean Tartars had perished had rallied the people".

Following the death of Stalin, a most stubborn and heroic campaign began for the restoration of the rights of the Crimean Tartars. They were demanding the right to return back to the Crimea, and the restoration of their na-

tionality. Stalin's heirs proved to be just as vicious towards the Tartar people. three times a commission of the Politburo had heard the case of the Tartars and then left things as they had been before.

The last time a delegation was received was in connection with the decree of the "Supreme Soviet" of 5 September, 1967. According to Grigorenko, "this was the most false, the most hypocritical decree of all those issued in respect to these people. It began with a declaration that the Crimean Tartars had been charged with treason to the motherland and that there was no basis on which this charge would be removed. But the annulment was justified by the fact that a new generation that had never known the war had come of age. The greatest treachery of all was that by this decree the Crimean Tartars were denied the right to their own nationality. They were referred to as "Citizens of Tartar nationality who previously lived in the Crimea".

Andropov, who subsequently succeeded Brezhnev, was one of those who stubbornly resisted the demands of the Crimean Tartars. Grigorenko's speech to a banquet of the Crimean Tartars held in 1967 received a tumultuous reception. Space does not permit the full speech to be printed here. But the response from the Tartars to one of the demands raised by Grigorenko completely shatters the charge of "treason" levelled against the Crimean Tartars. In no way did these people show any "pro-capitalist" or "pro-Nazi" tendencies.

The Crimean Tartars

On the contrary Grigorenko's call for "the re-establishment of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" was met in the words of the author with "standing applause and cries of 'Hail the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic'". These alleged "anti-Soviet" peoples ended the meeting "in an uproar. You could barely make out what people were shouting but many begun to sing the *Internationale*". There are not many pro-capitalist or pro-Nazi nations that are prone to sing the *Internationale*!

The Tartars then decided to return back to the Crimea and appropriately the official date chosen for the return was 21 April, Lenin's birthday! Grigorenko's speech had a devastating effect. The KGB complained that it had been reproduced in 8 million copies! The return of the Crimean Tartars met with the most brutal repression by the KGB. Some of them did manage to settle in their former homeland, but even today the Crimean Tartar problem has not been solved. In

fact the national problem in Russia is one of the most serious issues confronting the Stalinist regime. It is completely incapable of satisfying the legitimate national aspirations of the Tartars, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, and the other nationalities which make up Russia.

Grigorenko also gives some very interesting material which shows that the movement in Czechoslovakia had an effect within Russia itself. Grigorenko was one of the very few who openly protested at the Russian intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968. He had left Russia by the time of the Polish events. However, the movement in Poland would have had an even more profound effect.

The Czechoslovak events took the form of a liberal national Stalinist opposition to the Moscow bureaucracy. The movement in Poland despite the religious overtones, involved a revolution, although incomplete, of the Polish proletariat. Following the demonstration against the Czechoslovak intervention Grigorenko was re-arrested.

The bureaucracy realised that in the wake of the Czechoslovak events a free Grigorenko could become a dangerous pole of attraction for those opposing the Stalinist regime. He was therefore imprisoned once more, this time for a total of five years. An international campaign secured his release and exile, this time in the USA. The book ends with Grigorenko as an admirer of the "political system" in America, of "Radio Free Europe" and of "Radio Liberty". He has also returned to the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church! But this in no way undermines the merit and importance of the book as an illustration of the process of opposition that is now unfolding to the Stalinist regime in Russia.

Despite his subsequent degeneration from an heroic fighter against the Stalinist regime to an admirer of capitalist America there is much to be learnt from this book. One of the factors in Grigorenko's degeneration is the lack of theoretical understanding of Stalinism. The overwhelming majority of "dissidents" have no real understanding of the causes of the Russian revolution, or of the material reasons which led to its subsequent degeneration. They criticise this or that aspect of the regime but do not have a worked out analysis of the society, the state nor a perspective as to how the situation can and will be changed.

At the same time the inhuman persecution which is meted out to all opponents of Stalinism developed in them an almost inevitable loathing and hatred of everything to do with

the regime. They throw the baby out with the bathwater. In the case of Grigorenko the weak side of his character, his lack of theory was reinforced by his association with the "intellectuals" within the opposition dissident movement. Those like Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov and others have adopted a completely pro-capitalist position. In the case of Solzhenitsyn he ended up as a supporter of the military-police dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile!

Things stand entirely differently with the as yet subterranean opposition of the proletariat in Russia. We already have had evidence in the trials of a group of young people recently who based themselves upon the works of Trotsky in their opposition to Stalinism. As we have pointed out in previous issues of the *MIR* it is the mighty Russian proletariat upon which a powerful opposition will develop to the Stalinist autocracy. This book allows us to anticipate such a movement.

Workers' opposition decisive

If an individual like Grigorenko, from within the charmed circle of the bureaucracy itself, can evolve in the direction he did then how much more dangerous are the groups of oppositional workers which surely exist in every industrial area of Russia at the present time. No amount of denunciations, lunatic asylums, nor all the other refined means of persecution developed by the KGB will be capable of stopping the movement of the Russian proletariat once it erupts. Russian tanks could be sent into Hungary in 1956. The threat of a military intervention in Poland was used in order to terrify the leaders of Solidarity and prevent them from completing the political revolution in 1981. But once a movement of the Russian proletariat in the direction of political revolution unfolds in Moscow or Leningrad or any other of the major cities (at least in European Russia), what forces could be used by the Stalinist regime to suppress such a movement?

It would be impossible to send Poles, Hungarians, East Germans, Czechoslovaks, etc against a political revolution in Russia. On the contrary these regimes themselves will be facing imminent overthrow once a movement of the Russian proletariat developed. It is in this context that we view Grigorenko's valuable and important book. It gives us an insight into the workings of Stalinism and allows us to forecast its coming collapse in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Settling a debt

THE EVENTS below are a true account. The place name and character names are fictitious to protect those concerned. A slight blurring of the period in which the events occurred assists this minor deception.

"Thacker" Armstrong was vexed. When Thacker was vexed it usually meant bad luck for someone or other. The last time he had been this way little Ronnie McCarthy had been the victim of a good scudding outside the club—merely for smirking at Thacker's scowling face as he lost the semi-final of the domino handicap. The committee had barred Thacker for three months and now he was forced to drink at inflated prices in the 'Three Horse Shoes' which hadn't improved his temper.

"Ronnie Mac", rationalised Thacker, "is a copper's nark and somebody should have clipped him long afore me."

Everyone hearing this in the 'Shoes' knew it to be the truth, but they also knew that if the Pope or Joe Louis had been in Ronnie's place then they would have been clouted too.

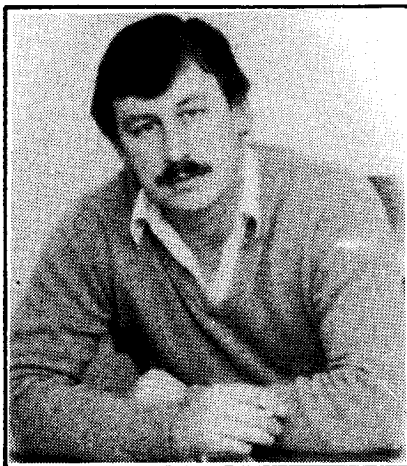
The cause of Thacker's vexation this time was debt. He brooded upon it so deeply that he was unable to read a paper or listen to the wireless without constantly returning to the source of his discontent—debt. Debt had cast a lengthened shadow across his whole existence to the extent that studying form or trying to select 8 from 10 was impossible—and, now—unaffordable.

Whilst Thacker had been in Durham last Saturday collecting a pair of cobbled shoes the Tallymen had been at his house. Isabel, his wife, had nervously informed him that their weekly budget was twelve and sixpence lighter as a result of their visit.

"We're cleaned out" she said simply.

"Oh yes", she said in answer to his question, "there's food, but that's all—no beer, no tabs, no betting!"

He sat alone, imagining the scene, his ugly anger rising. Debt! The curse of the working man! Debt! Bastard Debt! Thacker sat staring out at the Terrace in black melancholia. The Terrace or Finchale Terrace (to give it its full name) was a double row of colliery cottages, about 80 in all, right out in the country. The old Finchale Drift—which was the reason for the existence of the Terrace—had been closed upon nationalisation of the coal industry but all the men were now employed at the nearby Adventure colliery. The fronts of the cottages faced each other but everyone's backyard looked out over fields and woods dropping down to the River Wear.



By Bob Stothard (TGWU)

Thacker sat and gingerly rubbed his crotch as if to soothe pain. Pain! The thought made him scowl anew. On Saturday night he'd gone to the netty in the yard to empty his bowels and brood upon the debt. Trousers and braces around his ankles, he sat upon the bar over the ash pit awaiting nature to take its course when a lad, or lads, had silently lifted the night-soil hatch and stroked his testicles with a bunch of stinging nettles. The shock and the hurt had projected him forward with such velocity that he burst the door from its rusty hinges. The howling and cursing had brought curious neighbours to stare

at the incongruous sight of Thacker de-bagged and knock-kneed in the moonlight clutching his groin.

"I'll bet it was Dodds' young 'un!", cried Sweaty Thubron, "he hoyed a firework in my ash-pit last Bonfire night—I was sitting on it y'knaa!" There was general agreement amongst the stifled laughter of the onlookers.

"What about poor Mrs Appleby?", demanded Mrs Short, "she who has the lift-seat y'knaa! The dirty little buggers collected all the cats in the country, put them in and closed the lid! The poor old lady nearly took a stroke when she went for a piddle and all them cats sprang out covered in you know what!"

This time the laughter could not be contained and erupted with fury. Thacker had been in no position to stop the mirth and now he fumed at the memory as he watched the shadows lengthen along the Terrace. That he himself had indulged in similar antics when he was young was of no solace. Debt! It wouldn't cease its torment. His mind worked over and over as he pictured the oily salesmen on the doorsteps grinning over their canteens of shiny cutlery and gilt chiming clocks. "Half a crown down and half a crown a week," he heard them saying. The mental picture changed as he saw different men with books and leather satchels, their hard eyes piercing children sent to the door to fob them off their payment. Bloodsuckers! Leeches!

In the little community where Thacker socialised debt was universally attributed to Jews. It was true, it seemed to Thacker, that all the Tallymen were, if not Jewish themselves, employed by Jews. Many protested bitterly that Jews preyed on the poorest by offering goods 'on the knock' which ended up costing twice their value. Thacker, however, thought this argument flawed. The old coal-owners—the Joiceys, Lambtons and Londonderrys—were as Christian as Durham Cathedral but no sane man would deny they were robbers albeit in a different guise. Anyway, he

would argue, look at Doctor Goldman: a gentleman if ever there was; and compared with Doctor Mackay, the pit doctor who blamed pneumoconiosis on Woodbines; a friend of the working man.

Friday came and with it rain. Thacker dressed to collect his pay but his mood—with the prospect of his wages allowing a drink and a bet—had transformed itself from black despair to sharp aggression.

On the way he fell in step with Chuck Short on the same errand.

"Turing out for a half in the 'Shoes'?", enquired Chuck.

"I'm off to Durham to get a few bits and pieces," replied Thacker shortly, "but I'm out tonight!"

That night Thacker drank in the club despite his suspension. The committee-men, recognising his mood, decided discretion to be the better part of valour and let him be.

At lowse, Thacker rose uncertainly to his feet and glared around at the company.

"The biggest—the most dreadful," he searched for words, "the very wursht thing for the working man is DEBT!", he announced. The club grew quiet, everyone intent on hearing:

"There's not a man in this village without debt—except Frankie Lewins and he's so tight when he walks his arse squeaks!"

A tumult of laughter rose up and Frankie, red-faced and insulted, squirmed out of the door.

But tomorrow—Christ!—tomorrow," continued Thacker, "I'm going to clear this village of debt! See if I don't!" A buzz went through the club as the men speculated. Thacker walked unsteadily to the door and supported himself against the jamb: "See if I don't", he bellowed back into the bar.

Saturday morning came bright and clear and the Terrace bustled into life. Women pegged out the new washing and children could be heard gleefully playing beyond the midden towards the woods. Thacker rose thick-tongued and dressed. Isabel and the child had left early to take the bus to Durham and the cottage was quiet. With a steaming pot of tea Thacker took his seat at the window immediately noticing an unusual number of people strung out along the Terrace trying to look as if they had business to attend to. Some, more brazen than others, stood in little knots, shooting looks at his door, awaiting activity. Time passed and Thacker was immobile.

In the distance the tinny phut of a motorbike could be heard, growing louder as it approached the Terrace. Thacker rose. The Tallyman rode into the Terrace and shut off the motor. He hauled the machine onto its stand avoiding a puddle left by yesterday's deluge. Taking his heavy book from the pannier he shifted the satchel from his back to his front and, whistling 'Silver Threads Amongst the Gold' knocked on the door of no 3—Mrs Gibbons.

The door of Thacker's cottage opened and he stood blinking in the sunlight. The onlookers gasped as they took in the 12-bore double-barrelled shotgun in the crook of his arm. Instinctively they drew back as one. Thacker gazed down the street at the

Tallyman who had now moved to no 5—Chuck Short's—and was studying his open book oblivious to his fate.

"THIEF!", yelled Thacker, "THIEVING BASTARD!" The Tallyman looked up quizzically and took in the throng and Thacker with a gun but did not comprehend.

"AYE! YE! YE AND YOUR KIND—THIEVING ROBBING BASTARDS!" Aghast, the Tallyman realised he was the centre of attention. "Me?! I've never stolen a thing in all my life!", he protested, his voice constricted by sudden fear to a squeak.

"LIAR!", roared Thacker, "what are ye doing now if not robbing widows and hard-working men of their coppers in broad daylight? Ye come down here with your chatty gear which costs the bloody earth! You're a man who'd pinch a worm off a blind hen!"

"I just collect the money—it's my job!" pleaded Thacker's intended victim.

"Ho! Just a job eh? Well I've got a little job just here for you!", snarled Thacker and cocked the hammers. The Tallyman was aware of a great weakness in his knees:

"Now wait a minute," he pleaded, "be careful that thing doesn't go off—you might hurt somebody—BE CAREFUL!"

"They'll have to send some buggar from Sunderland with a brush and shovel to collect you—you shit-house!" Thacker raised the gun and took aim. The Tallyman stiffened against the door of no. 5 in white fright.

Instantaneously, it seemed to Chuck Short, as he opened his door with his book and half-a-dollar ready, the Tallyman tumbled inside and a loud report sounded in the street. The Tallyman, unhurt, was on his feet in a twinkling and raced screaming through the cottage, through the backyard gate, over the midden and into the field. Thacker, robbed of his prize, dodged through his own house into the back street and instantly spied the fugitive. He fired the second barrel. Too hasty. On hearing the sound the Tallyman screamed but kept running through long grass clutching his hat and satchel. As Thacker re-loaded the throng rushed into the back street to watch the excitement. Thacker took aim—"too far away, bastard!", but fired anyway. The running figure jerked faster and ran harder.

During the course of the afternoon, Fatty Thomson the policeman pedalled his bike into the Terrace. No-one was able to assist him in his enquiries and it was suggested that he try the gypsies camped near the bridge.

After a decent interval Fatty pedalled away sweating and blowing and soon the tinny phut of a motorcycle could be heard near the woods. Little Bobbie Short had taken the Tallyman's thick book up to Thacker from where it had been dropped. Thacker in his turn had visited every house, except Frankie Lewins', with the book and had written on each page: "PAID IN FULL—WITH THANKS".



Economic Notes By Bob McKee

1985 — The boom draws to an end

1984 WILL go down as the year in the current world economic recovery with the highest recorded growth in output. The US economy grew in real terms by nearly 7% and it was supported by Japan with 5½% and Canada with 4%. The countries of the EEC however continued to have a very sluggish revival in output after the severe world recession of 1980–82.

World trade was boosted dramatically by the expansion of the US economy. Fuelled by a massive government spending deficit in order to pay for Reagan's arms programme, the US economy revived, not so much in the basic heavy industries but more in the consumer industries, like motor vehicles and electronics, and most of all in the service sector such as catering, retailing and other services. These latter sectors of the economy were able to absorb a considerable portion of US unemployment, albeit at lower wages than that available in manufacturing.

World manufacturing markets leapt forward by 20% in volume, thanks to a massive 30% increase in US imports. The main beneficiary of the US market was Japan who sharply increased their share of the US market. The sluggishly growing European capitalists, including the UK, could not compete.

US growth slows

The Americans paid for these imports by printing money and relying on foreign investors, mainly from Europe, to bridge the gap by providing funds. The Europeans with only limited investments possible in their own markets, found greater returns through high US interest rates in investing or lending their money to the US market.

Thus the US economy boomed, despite high interest rates which should have restricted profits and dampened investment. Also the dollar remained strong despite a huge trade deficit created by the flood of imports. But this situation could not last indefinitely. Already in the last quarter of 1984 the bubble has burst and production tumbled to below 3% per annum growth rate.

That figure is the maximum growth expected for 1985 in the USA.

Unemployment will stop falling, investment will dry up, profits will grow much more slowly. High interest rates will increasingly affect investment without attracting foreign funds as profits decline. And the massive government borrowing to pay for arms will begin to accelerate price increases. Eventually the dollar will weaken, perhaps just as dramatically as it has remained strong during the last two years of the world recovery.

Even if the size of the dollar's decline is not certain, what is clear for 1985 is that the growth of production and trade will slow significantly and by the end of the year the world economy will be entering a new recession. Total OECD countries growth will decline from 5% in 1984 to 3% in 1985 with most of the major nations below that average. The collapse of the US boom will not be compensated by any sharp upturn in the European economies.

For the UK that can only mean an end to the already weak recovery in production and investment experienced over the last two years. At the beginning of 1984, the government was predicting a 3% growth in output, it achieved only 2.2% (including the production of oil). The government blames this low figure on the miners' strike and predicts 3½% growth for 1985, assuming an end to the strike early this year. Most other experts predict growth closer to 3% and some even lower, still assuming an end to the strike.

But when oil production, which reached its peak in 1984, is removed from the figures, the really parlous state of British industry is revealed. In 1984 which will be the peak of this present boom, manufacturing output was still 15% below the 1973 peak level. Not only can British industry no longer compete on world markets against its rivals in Europe and Japan, it has also lost its share of its own market. 1983 was the year that Britain for the first time since the start of industrial capitalism bought more manufacturing goods from abroad than it exported, by some £2,146m. In 1984 that deficit spiralled upwards to around £4,000m! Since the Tories came to power, i.e. since 1979 until now, the volume of UK manufacturing exports has risen by only 2% while world markets have expanded in

volume by 20%!

Without North Sea oil providing revenue to the government to pay for the continuing rise in the number of unemployed, holding up the pound sterling and so keeping down inflation levels, the British economy would have suffered an unmitigated disaster, even during the world recovery. As it is, with 1985 seeing off the present expansion of the world economy; with oil revenues levelling off; and oil prices beginning to fall; the British economy is going to be exposed to the cold winds of recession with little or no protection.

The government claims the last few years have made Britain 'leaner and fitter', ready to sustain continued economic growth, as long as workers do not ask for too much money. The truth is otherwise. During 1984 profits rose by 23% in industry, but much of this money went overseas (to the US market). Investment grew, but only by 7%—much smaller than could be expected with such a profit increase. Workers created these profits through increased productivity i.e. they worked harder for little extra money on old machines with less labour force.

Profits go overseas

The shake-out of labour continued and unemployment has inexorably risen right throughout the Thatcher-Lawson 'boom'. But the investment has not followed—now only 1½% of all investment goes on research and development of new techniques in Britain, compared to 2½% twenty years ago. And in 1985 total investment growth will fall to 4.4% and collapse completely in 1986. Thus the productivity increase in the UK, made on the backs of the unemployed, will stop because there has been no investment in new industrial plant, machinery and techniques. This will leave British industry stranded when the going gets really tough again in world markets.

The world boom will finish by the end of 1985 and a new recession or slump will develop during 1986 and pitch downward into 1987 and 1988. The feeble British capitalists and their government (along with the rest of us!) will be thrown into this crisis as we still struggle to come out of the last slump.

The UK: Land of cheap labour and low living standards

ACCORDING TO a report by the National Institute, the UK stands out as a land of cheap labour compared to most other advanced industrial capitalist economies. Labour costs (made up of wages and social insurance contributions) are 86% higher in the USA. West German workers cost 60% more on average, Italians 18% more and French 15% more. Even the Japanese workers cost their bosses 4% more than British workers. For British women workers it is even

worse. According to a survey by the Swedish Employers' Federation, British female workers receive pay relative to men lower than in any other EEC country.

But low wages do not make British industry competitive. Because output per head is also so low compared to other countries, unit labour costs ie wages per unit of output, are still much higher than elsewhere. British industry cannot compete because the bosses will not invest and raise productivity, not because workers' wages are too high, as the Tories insist.

Poor production and low wages obviously mean low living standards and the situation for British workers is graphically demonstrated in a new survey of living standards produced by

the OECD. The UK comes only 15th out of the top 20 capitalist nations in the level of living standards ie the real purchasing power available to each worker, measured in the amount that can be bought from a standard shopping list of goods.

The British worker has only two-thirds of the standard of living enjoyed by an American worker. Germans are 13% better off, and even the Japanese are 9% better off, the same as the French. And little places like Belgium, Luxemburg and Finland are more prosperous places to live than Britain. Of the relatively advanced economies only Italian and Spanish workers are poorer. At the bottom are the poorest semi-agricultural nations of Europe: Ireland, Greece and Portugal.

Wages, dole benefits and unemployment

ONE OF the favourite arguments of Nigel Lawson and the Tories is that British workers have too high wages and ask for too much in wage rises, so that they 'price' themselves out of jobs. If wage demands were reduced, or even better if wage levels were actually reduced, more workers could be employed by companies and unemployment would stop rising and begin to fall, say the Tories. The Treasury has argued that a 1% cut in real wages (ie after taking into account inflation) could increase employment by 75% or 150,000 jobs.

The Tories have relied on the support of the City University Business School whose economists provide much of the theoretical ammunition for the government and for Samuel Brittan, the brother of the Home Secretary, who is the *Financial Times* economist and strong backer of Tory arguments that if there was no trade union power and wages were forced down, the economy and employment prospects would improve.

Recently the City University's evidence on the relation between real wages and unemployment has been disputed by the National Institute for Economic Research, who deny the assertion that the depression of the 1930s only ended when real wages fell. They say that real wages did not begin to decline until well after the economic recovery started in the mid-thirties. And the recent drop in US unemployment cannot be attributed to a fall in real wages in the USA. Most of those who have obtained jobs had only been out of one for less than six months. Long-term unemployed and

young people who had never had a job are still without one despite the rise in US employment and they are the people who would be most likely to accept lower wages for work.

As it is when we look at the evidence over the period of the Tory government in Britain, the Tory argument is far from convincing. Unemployment has risen sharply since 1979. Real wages have also increased modestly. But unemployment rose the fastest in 1981 and 1982, at the height of the last world recession. During those years real wages stood still. Anyway the real wage increase for the whole period of the Tory government has been confined to non-manual workers. Manual workers' real wages have fallen since 1979 but unemployment among them has risen the most. Between 1979 and 1983 money earnings for manual workers rose only 5% (much less than increases in prices and taxes). Money earnings actually fell in 1981 and 1982!

UK benefits fall

Another myth that the Tories try to propagate is the idea that unemployment benefit is so high that many of those on the dole do not want to get a job because the wages are only just higher than dole money. It is true that many jobs do not pay well, but compared to average earnings, dole benefit in the UK is lower as a proportion of earnings than in any other Western capitalist country.

According to a recent UN study published in the *Economic Bulletin for Europe*, September 1984, UK benefits as a percentage of earnings have dramatically fallen in the last decade, from 75% of earnings for a married man with two children in 1972 to 47% in 1982. For a single person it is even worse, from 54% in 1972 to 26% in 1982.

The same pattern has been repeated for all countries in the survey. Benefits as a proportion of earnings are generally the same or have fallen—in the very period that unemployment spiralled upwards throughout the advanced world, including the UK. Too high dole can hardly be the reason for rising unemployment—but the Tories will still try to say it is.

Unemployment benefit as a % of earnings for a worker with three children

	1972	1982
Austria	50.5	52.2
Belgium	63.7	67.3
Denmark	90.4	92.0
Finland	58.2	44.0
France	84.7	90.0
W Germany	70.0	75.0
Ireland	—	89.8
Italy	43.6	47.0
Netherlands	85.0	89.4
Norway	70.3	69.3
Sweden	69.1	80.5
Switzerland	77.3	80.2
UK	75.0	47.0
Greece	56.0	59.8
Portugal	—	75.5
Spain	69.0	65.4
Canada	75.2	74.8
US	58.9	63.3

UK expenditure on housing

ANOTHER PRODUCT of the UK's poor economic performance and government policies is that a recent study of the International Union of Building Societies revealed that Britain spends less money proportionately on housing than any other country in the world! The world, not just the advanced world.

In 1982 Britain spent only 2.1% of GDP on housing compared to an average in OECD countries of 5%. France and West Germany spent the most.

A régime on trial

THE TRIAL of Popieluszko's murderers has opened up a new crisis within the Polish bureaucracy. The fact that very high officials, such as one of the interior ministers and Politbureau member Lt Gen Mileszki, have been implicated has been a source of extreme embarrassment to Jaruselski, who has been falling over himself to try and re-assure the Polish masses that he has liberal intentions towards the church.

The trial is itself a symptom of the weakness and lack of room for manoeuvre of the bureaucracy. It demonstrates their fear of the masses. Thirty years ago the only response from the leadership to such murders would have been to promote the murderers. But Poland of the 1980s is very different from the Poland of 1950.

The working masses stalk the bureaucracy, looking for a chink in its armour, looking for a new opening. Even from the depths of the counter-revolution there is a determination that the bureaucracy be held in check from its worst excesses.

The very fact that a section of the secret police, possibly with the backing of certain elements in Moscow felt it necessary to murder Popieluszko is an indication of the blind alley that the bureaucracy were in. He was very popular in working class areas of Warsaw because he had always been outspoken against the regime in his sermons.

"Both sides at an impasse"

The bureaucracy were unable to keep the Solidarity activists in prison because this was the basis of activity of much of the opposition. They did not dare put them on trial because they feared the public spotlight. They released them and declared an amnesty but still the opposition did not subside. So a section of the secret police decided to test public reaction to disappearances as in the '30s, '40s and '50s.

But the result was to provoke a huge wave of public protest and consequently the bureaucracy were obliged to organise an even more embarrassing trial—not of oppositionists but of their own henchmen.

At the same time the publicity around the trial has demoralised the police and the state forces, and made the workers and wide layers of the Polish masses more confident and open to political discussion. In the midst of counter-revolution there has been a slight shift in the balance of forces, a slight upturn in the level of activity within the underground, and a glimpse of hope for the masses.

Living standards in Poland are lower than they were three years ago and are falling. Industrial workers complain of a dire shortage of new machines due to lack of foreign currency. For working women it is a completely different situation compared to after the defeat of the movement in '56 or '70. At

by Maria Mirska



General Jaruselski. The Polish bureaucracy has been shaken by the trial of Popieluszko's murderers.

least then there was some improvement in living standards. The system of ration cards now applies to the most essential consumer goods such as meat. (Although manual workers and children get 4kg of meat a month and other adults 2kg, more than in the West). But what is very wearing on the nerves, especially of women is the endless queueing, and the fact that sometimes even things which are rationed are simply not available in the shops.

At a press conference for CP members only, Urbans, Minister of Propaganda was asked about the opposition now. He said **"Both sides are at an impasse. We don't know what to do. We have no programme to deal with them."** This confirms the fact that the bureaucracy have been unable to consolidate their position. They are moving very uneasily. They are zig-zagging between greater repression and liberalisation: Fearing to provoke the workers to new strikes yet dissatisfied with the extent of the counter-revolution.

There has been a series of unofficial strikes, estimated at one per week over the past period. Even in small towns and medium-sized workplaces there are strikes.

Urbans was also asked what is the situation with Solidarity now. He replied: "Solidarity itself is no longer a problem, what is worst is the distrust and scepticism of the people towards us. We cannot do anything to attract the youth towards us. The influx into the new trade unions has been disappointingly slow, because we cannot offer them anything like Solidarity could.

"And in some industries the workers are trying to use the official unions to organise strikes. For exam-

ple a strike is being prepared in the printing industry for new machines."

Asked about the role of the church, Urbans said: "The Primate is not a problem, the episcopate could be a problem, the priests in the country areas are not a problem, the priests in the big towns could be a problem".

Urbans complained, "None of the talented people are joining us. For example amongst the writers those who come forward to write for us in the official publications are not the best writers."

The Intelligentsia

These very revealing statements show a ruling caste that lacks perspective, is terrified of the future, living from one temporary expedient to the next.

There is discontent at every layer of society. The intelligentsia, who are a privileged layer, in reality a section of the bureaucracy, reflect the demoralisation of the bureaucracy.

Their totally confused ideas and lack of contact with political reality was responsible for the defeat of the movement in 1981. Some of them are grandchildren of the old exploiting classes. They yearn for the opportunity to exploit the working class again. They have almost a psychotic hatred of anything Russian. They would be completely incapable of organising propaganda for a fraternal appeal to Soviet troops.

For many of them their hero is Pilsudski! They love the Polish workers as long as they are going humbly to church, and gratefully accepting the advice of their "intellectual superiors". Their arrogance is nauseating.

They do not dare to openly call for a return to capitalism because they know they would not get any support. But this fantasy underlines their thinking. They support Reagan's arms programme because they hope it will force the Soviet bureaucracy to spend so much on arms that the USSR will go into an economic crisis.

Walesa and the Solidarity leadership were greatly influenced by this layer during '80-'81, and still are.

At the time of the Bydgoszcz beating in '81 the mass of Polish workers expected that this would be the start of a general strike and insurrection. Women in the queues were buying up flour and provisions to make ready for civil war. They were a million times more in touch with the necessary tasks of the hour than these cowardly dregs of the destroyed classes.

In December '81, at the introduction of martial law most of the advanced workers were prepared to take up arms. The miners in Katowice did arm and occupy their mines. The shipyards and the big factories had to be closed for several weeks. Tanks were sent into the workplaces to cower the workers.

In some ways although the mass of Polish workers are more open to political discussion than 30 years ago, the movement is on a lower political level than then. At least in 1956 the first thing the workers did was attack the CP headquarters and arm themselves;

they instinctively understood it was an all or nothing battle.

Today, thanks to the pernicious influence of the intelligentsia, the movement is hamstrung by hesitation, vacillation and indecision.

The influence of the church is not as profound as many bourgeois journalists imagine. It is widespread, about 80% of the population go to church, an increase over the last three years, but it is superficial.

Most Polish workers recognise that the church played a moderating role on the movement and it is generally accepted that Cardinal Glemp is a collaborator with the bureaucracy.

The importance of the church is that it symbolises opposition to the bureaucracy in a situation where all other open forms of opposition are repressed. Thus pilgrimages of thousands have taken place with the "pilgrims" displaying political placards.

However, it is clear that if, within the movement, clear Trotskyist ideas were being put forward, the church would not be able to restrain the growth of correct political conclusions in the minds of the masses.

The workers are experiencing the horrors of counter-revolution. There is widespread depression, and yet at the same time a universal acceptance that there will be another day. In every big factory and workplace there is quite extensive underground organisation of the free trade union.

They closed the shipyards for a month. They sacked the most militant layers. They are trying to force out as many as possible of the workforce through low wages and bad conditions, hoping to break the traditions of the organisation. But in every section of heavy industry there is a core of workers from the old days who hold the union together, collect dues, distribute illegal trade union broadsheets and keep the union alive.

The mood of the workers

The dialectical irony for the bureaucracy is that in purging the yards of the best militants they have failed to purge them of the union organisation and at the same time have spread a layer of experienced militants into other industries preparing an even wider and firmer base for the union next time.

All the workers, everywhere in Poland, agree that it is not a question of "if", only a question of "when". There is an almost insatiable thirst amongst the workers to discuss the lessons of '80-'81. There is a generally very high level of political awareness amongst the masses in comparison to the West.

In this situation, against terrible odds there is a very high level of activity in the underground. We have to make a correction to the analysis we have put forward in previous material since 1981. As the mass activity around Popieluszko indicates the bureaucracy have been unable to eradicate the workers' movement as they had hoped. It is a more favourable situation than we thought.

There has been a lot of public protest activity since

martial law was introduced. Every month on the anniversary of martial law there have been demonstrations in the big cities, despite curfews and police harassment of the workers.

On May Day last year the Solidarity workers entered the official marches out-witting the authorities. In Gdansk the "Guests from Leningrad" on the platform, who had been assured that the situation was now calm and safe again, wanted to run for their lives when they saw Solidarity placards. They thought they were going to be lynched! In Wroclaw the police opened up with teargas against the Solidarity section of the march, but the workers picked up the teargas cans and hurled them into the official platform! In a number of towns when the Zomos attacked the Solidarity workers they dispersed, mingling among the official marchers and the Zomos ended up beating up the party members!

The activity in the opposition

However the good qualities of the movement in initiative and heroism are not matched by the political ideas of its leadership. The authority of Walesa has dwindled somewhat amongst the activists, but he is still greatly loved by the masses. They look back on the period when he was leading the movement as a kind of golden era.

However, more radical elements are developing authority amongst the most advanced layers. For example, Edmund Baluka, a leader in the Ursus tractor factory, and Andrzej Gwiazda in Gdansk. These figures are now very popular. This reflects the groping of the working class towards a more radical position.

Yet the methods of this section of the leadership have been sadly lacking in perspective and an understanding of the stage through which we are passing. They have called demonstrations on almost any occasion regardless of the mood of the masses and with no explanation of the way forward. The bravest of the youth have responded to the call, risking arrest and a beating up but to no avail. These demonstrations have now dwindled and been mostly abandoned.

This radicalism in action is too late. The revolution of '80-'81 has been aborted. The task now is not to try and summon it up out of the midsts of counter-revolution, but to carefully prepare the advanced workers theoretically, for a new turn in events which will open up a period of revolution. This may still be a number of years away and the "precious leaven of mankind" the advanced layers, the activists within the working class must not dissipate their energy with futile ultra-left gestures.

The leadership in the underground mostly are extremely muddled and lack any coherent ideas.

In so far as there are any political programmes in the underground there is a division between right and left. It must be said that the combination of the lies of the official state propaganda and the distortions of the right opposition have laid the basis for quite

a bit of confusion amongst the masses. Many young people, including workers think that capitalism is better than socialism, private ownership better than nationalisation. But this idea amongst the masses is only superficial. It is based on the experience of "socialism" and nationalisation as bureaucracy, corruption and shortages. They only see capitalism from a distance: higher living standards and 'democracy'. This mood is more common amongst students and office workers and less common amongst industrial workers and technicians, but it is to be found quite widely amongst all sections.

Generally workers and technicians are not blind to the advantages of state ownership and a plan but they know that they must attempt to control it as they did in '80-'81.

All the demands of the *April Thesis*, against bureaucracy, are implicit in the struggles of the Polish workers. They demand to control the economy themselves instead of decisions being taken by remote, corrupt and out-of-touch bureaucrats. The workers also instinctively seek democratic rights, not just to organise freely and strike, but also for the free expression of political ideas and the right of opposition parties to exist.

In many heavy industries they have shop floor meetings and discuss all the new equipment and machines they needed. They take their demands to management, who tell them how good it is that they are taking an interest in the running of the firm etc and then cynically ignore their demands. The fundamental reason for this is lack of foreign currency with which to buy better technical equipment.

The idealisation of capitalism is superficial and will recede as the crisis in the West becomes more and more evident. (Many people today dismiss it as false state propaganda).

'Revolution Betrayed' circulated

Most of the opposition groups refrain from putting forward a clear political position. The right because they do not dare openly advocate capitalism as they would put off their supporters if they had to spell out its implications in detail, the left for fear of being associated with the bureaucracy.

But there are a few notable exceptions, for example, *Revolution Betrayed* has been published in the underground in a few thousand copies. Other Trotskyist literature no doubt is also circulating. This indicates the future lines of political development of the movement. If these ideas can find a clear expression amongst the Polish workers they would be eagerly adopted. If the advanced workers of Poland thrash out and develop a clear understanding of the way forward then the next time need not end in the blind alley of moderation and acquiescence, but could result in the seizure of power by the workers, the overthrow of the bureaucracy, and open up a new era with the spreading of political revolution throughout Eastern Europe.

The birth of the Italian Left opposition

Letters by Leon Trotsky, published for the first time in English.

Introduced and translated by
Juan Perez

THE X Plenum of the Communist International in July 1929 made a decisive break with the ideas of its founders, Lenin and Trotsky, and accelerated the change from the party of world revolution to a simple arm of the Stalinist bureaucracy and a counter-revolutionary force.

The Plenum ratified the theory that capitalism had entered its "third period", its final crisis, that throughout Europe there was a great polarisation of classes, and that all the social democratic parties had become "social fascists". "The aims of fascists and socialists are the same"—proclaimed Kuusinen at the Plenum—"the difference is in the words they use and in their methods."

Thus, the Stalinists suddenly decided that social democracy was a worse enemy than fascism. This represented abandoning the tactic that was at the centre of the October Revolution: the United Front.

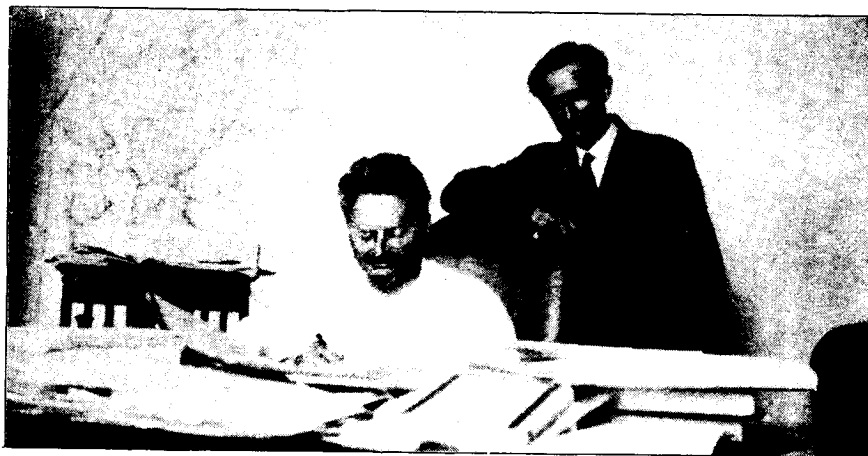
Given the existence of two workers parties in Europe (Social Democrats and Communists), it was necessary for revolutionaries to work with the reformists. This alliance, however, was made on the basis of a clear programme laid down by the Communists. Moreover, the Communists reserved their right to criticise and expose reformism constantly, while at the same time trying to win their best elements over to Marxism.

The United Front tactic, developed by Lenin and Trotsky was the only realistic revolutionary tactic that could lead the working class to victory. Stalin's "theory" of social fascism instead, called for an armed struggle against the socialist parties, and thus split the working class into two camps instead of uniting it against fascism. This led to the disastrous defeat of the German workers and the rise of Hitler.

The new 'line' was imposed on all the Communist Parties with no discussion whatsoever, as we shall see with the case of Italy.

This change of policy had a very serious effect on the Italian CP (PCI) for two main reasons: Firstly, the party had been working underground or in exile since Mussolini came to power in 1922; and their first leader and "father", Antonio Gramsci, had been in prison since 1926. The PCI had practical experience of fascism.

Secondly, the new line was



Trotsky in exile in Prinkipo, Turkey, with Alfred Rosmer, then one of the leaders of the International Left Opposition.

diametrically opposed to the one worked out by Gramsci and Togliatti of joint action with all anti-fascist forces.

In July 1929, Palmiro Togliatti, by then General Secretary of the party went to Moscow to discuss the new line. As he would do again in 1956 after the XX Congress of the CPSU and later the invasion of Hungary, Togliatti accepted the new ideas without a single criticism, although they contradicted his own beliefs. On his return to Italy, he said: "Is it right to discuss these questions with all the comrades in the party? If the Comintern says it is not, then we shall not discuss them (!)"

"Social fascism"

This event in the history of the PCI, known as "The U-turn" (la svolta) is still a subject of constant discussion today.

On September 12 at a meeting of the CC of the Young Communists, Togliatti declared: "Fascism and social democracy have a common ideological basis" echoing Kuusinen. Thirty years later, however, he wrote in *Rinascita*, the theoretical journal of the PCI (July/August 1959): "The most serious error was defining social democracy as social fascism and the political consequences that derived from this theory were mistaken (!)"

In 1930 a split was developing in the politburo of the PCI over an organisational issue. However, this soon developed into a political split, over the new course. Three members made a definite stand against it: Alfonso Leonetti, Pietro Tresso, and Paolo Ravazzoli.

The split became more and more

serious and they were accused of revisionism, "Trotskyism" and so on for criticising the new course as "adventurist and opportunist". When it became obvious that "the three" were irreconcilably opposed to the rest of the CC, they prepared a very detailed report of the situation and sent it to Trotsky for advice. He replied in a letter published in *New International* (July/August 1944) as "Problems of the Italian Revolution."

In this letter, Trotsky explained that an anti-fascist revolution had to be of necessity a proletarian revolution and not a bourgeois one. The working class, he explained, was the only force in society that could overthrow fascism, but once it began to move, it would not stop at the establishment of bourgeois democracy. It had to complete the socialist transformation of society, unless it was betrayed by the leadership. In this case, the establishment of bourgeois democracy would follow, and the victory of counter-revolution would be passed off as the victory of the bourgeois democratic revolution. This brilliant prognosis was proved totally correct after the overthrow of Mussolini.

Leonetti replied (3.6.30) "We were not surprised to see that all you say on the Italian situation generally coincides with our ideas... There is no doubt that in future your collaboration will be particularly valuable not only for us, but for all the Italian workers."

This initial contact was immediately followed by the expulsion of Leonetti, Tresso and Ravazzoli, and the birth of the New Italian Opposition (NOI). Of the three, Ravazzoli broke with the opposition shortly afterwards and Tresso got involved in the work of the

French Trotskyists. Only Leonetti continued the Italian work and maintained regular correspondence with Trotsky.

These letters have remained unpublished, and for the first time in Britain we reproduce five of them. These are the first five to be published in Italy, out of a total of 37 (all but one unpublished), and although they are very general, they give an insight into Trotsky's determination to build the International Left Opposition under the most demoralising circumstances; they reflect the crises and splits that marked the life of the ILO in a period of reaction and they point to the lively discussion that existed between Trotsky and the NOI which will be found when the rest of the letters are published.

An Attack Is The Best Defensive Tactic

Buyuk Ada, June 12, 1930

Dear Comrade Torino,

These are only a few hurried lines. I understand how difficult your situation is after an abrupt change caused by the Italian problems which, nevertheless, encompass problems of an international nature. I can imagine how the enemies will use "Trotskyism" against you after your "U-Turn". Yes, it is a difficult situation, but the more difficult the situation becomes, the more firm and courageous your position must be to defeat these problems. An undecided "wait-and-see" position, and above all, a wrong position can only weaken you. I believe you should not wait until you are asked questions or until unacceptable demands are made by Ercoli (Togliatti—JP) who really masters this technique. An attack is the best defensive tactic, and sometimes even an unexpected attack. It is now too late for the latter. But an attack is still possible, and moreover necessary. I see this offensive in the form of a declaration addressed to the CC or to the party as a whole. In this declaration you must explain what is happening without hiding anything. You must refer in detail to the Italian and international situation, make a stand on the International Left Opposition and so-called "Trotskyism", before our enemies do so. I also think that in the document you should make it clear that you remain unreservedly loyal to the party and the International, abide by its discipline and at the same time, will defend your ideas with the method of proletarian democracy....

Leon Trotsky

Let's Build The International

**Buyak Ada,
December 15, 1930**

Dear Comrade Torino,

...I am very sorry that our correspondence was interrupted after a good start. The situation of the NOI is an exceptional and very difficult one. All there is in front of you is a group of Italian emigres, already demoralised and divided. You can't make great gains there. Contact with the interior of the country is difficult. The discredit of the official party has fallen on you after the split. You can't draw directly on the youth. All this puts you for a time, and perhaps not a short one, in the position of a propagandist group. I am not saying this to spread "pessimism", but simply to evaluate the situation as it really is. I think your group could have another area of work, the international field....

Under these conditions, the fact that some of the leading comrades of your group were not only members of the official party but also in its central organs up to the last few months, is a great advantage for us. This is why I insisted that comrade Suzo (Leonetti—JP) should join the International Secretariat. The active and permanent participation of the NOI must help to create a truly international organisation, something which so far, has not been successfully done.

With best regards,
Leon Trotsky.

**You Are Few But Good
Saint Palais, September 17, 1933**

Dear Comrade Feroci,

I have not replied immediately because at present I am ill in bed and find it very difficult to work. I shall reply with a few lines. If in my last letter I spoke of a "last attempt" it was not just to use emotive expressions, but to underline the extreme seriousness of the situation. Today, great possibilities open up in front of us....

This new stage will bring an influx of new elements, much greater in number but with no education. Every comrade with a communist past who is not bitter or demoralised, who realises what our responsibilities are, will be invaluable in this new stage of education of the youth. That is why I value so much the political friendship with the Italian group which is not large but composed of very able comrades. The tone of my letter is explained in the fear of a possible split with your group. Your letter says this danger does not exist. I am very glad, I say this sincerely. I hope to see you soon so we can discuss the questions that remain unresolved.

My best regards,
Leon Trotsky.

**Mussolini Boasts
Honefoss, June 7, 1936**

Dear Comrade Martin,

Your letter coincides with the last chapter of my book on the USSR (The Revolution Betrayed—JP). I am writing this chapter now. But I was surprised by something in your letter: You quote Mussolini saying: "Three quarters of all production are in the hands of the fascist state". I have always considered this formula as pure boasting. The "Corporate State" simply means that the great official of capital, fascism, tries to manage the business of industrialists and bankers, to reduce and alleviate, etc. But it would be totally mistaken to identify this role of mediator on the basis of private property with a planned economy. Could you point me to a recent work on the stage of the Italian economy? This is very important for the last chapter of my book. In order to have some clarification on the Italian economy I am prepared to postpone the work for one or two weeks.

My best regards,
Leon Trotsky.

**We Agree On Everything
Honefoss, June 22, 1936**

Dear Comrade,

I warmly thank you for the precious material you sent me and for your last letter which has clarified a few misunderstandings. In my book I do not go into Germany, Italy, the Roosevelt experience, De Man, etc. All I want is to establish clearly the definition of state capitalism and show briefly the difference between the system in the USSR and the fascist and nazi regimes. I would like to use a couple of quotes from the essay you sent me (quoting you as Feroci since you still sign your articles like that, don't you?).

Only one point of clarification. The impasse of capitalism is determined by two historically linked causes: private property and the nation state. The fundamental difference between the USSR and Italy is in the abolition of private property by the October Revolution. A certain similarity can be seen in the autarchical tendencies of the economy. Nevertheless, this analogy is limited since that autarchy is directly linked to the economy, and the direction of the economy depends on the forms of property. I don't think there are any disagreements between us on this point. There is no need for you to send any more material on Italy, what I have now is sufficient, and I thank you once again.

Leon Trotsky

PS I have now received your last letter. I will return everything very soon. You are a really good comrade. Thank you.

Problems of the Italian Revolution

14th May, 1930

To supplement the five letters by Trotsky published here for the first time in English, the editors are reprinting extracts from "Problems of the Italian Revolution". As explained in the introduction to Trotsky's letters by Juan Perez this material was written by Trotsky in reply to the initial correspondence from Leonetti, Tresso and Ravazzoli.

1. You remind me that I once criticised the slogan "Republican Assembly on the Basis of Workers' and Peasants' Committees", a slogan formerly put forward by the Italian Communist Party. You tell me that this slogan had an entirely episodic value and that at present it has been abandoned. I would like nevertheless to tell you why I consider it to be erroneous or at least ambiguous as a political slogan. "Republican Assembly" constitutes quite obviously an institution of the bourgeois state. What, however, are the "Workers and Peasants' Committees"? It is obvious that they are some sort of equivalent of the workers' and peasants' soviets. Then that's what should be said. For, class organs of the workers and poor peasants, whether you give them the name of soviets or committees, always constitute organisations of struggle against the bourgeois state, then become organs of insurrection, to be transformed finally, after the victory, into organs of the proletarian dictatorship. How, under these conditions, can a Republican Assembly—supreme organ of the bourgeois state—have as its "basis" organs of the proletarian state?

The Constituent Assembly

I should like to recall to you that in 1917, before October, Zinoviev and Kamenev, when they came out against an insurrection, advocated waiting for the Constituent Assembly to meet in order to create a "combined state" by means of a fusion between the Constituent Assembly and the workers' and peasants' soviets. In 1919 we saw Hilferding propose to inscribe the soviets in the Weimar constitution. Like Zinoviev and Kamenev, Hilferding called this the "combined state". As a new type of petty bourgeois, he wanted, at the very point of the most abrupt historical turn, to "combine" a third type of state by wedding the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the proletarian dictatorship under the sign of the constitution.

The Italian slogan expounded above seems to me to be a variant of this petty-bourgeois tendency. Unless I have understood it in a wrong sense. But in that case it already has the incontestable defect of lending itself to dangerous misunderstandings. I profit by it to correct here a truly unpardonable er-

ror committed by the epigones in 1924: they had found in Lenin a passage saying that we might be led to wed the Constituent Assembly with the soviets. A passage saying the same thing may likewise be discovered in my writings. But what exactly was involved? We were posing the question of an insurrection that would transmit the power to the proletariat in the form of soviets. To the question of what, in that case, we would do with the Constituent Assembly, we replied: "We shall see; perhaps we shall combine it with the soviets". We understood by that the case where the Constituent Assembly, convoked under the soviet regime, would have a soviet majority. As this was not the case, the soviets dispersed the Constituent Assembly. In other words: the question was posed of whether it was possible to transform the Constituent Assembly and the soviets into organs of one and the same class, and not at all of "combining" a bourgeois Constituent Assembly with the proletarian soviets. In one case (with Lenin), it was a question of the formation of a proletarian state, of its structure, of its technique. In the other (with Zinoviev, Kamenev, Hilferding), it was a question of a constitutional combination of two states of enemy classes with a view to averting a proletarian insurrection that would have taken power.

2. The question we have just examined (the Republican Assembly) is intimately connected with another which you analyse in your letter, namely, what social character will the anti-fascist revolution acquire? You deny the possibility of a bourgeois revolution in Italy. You are perfectly right. History cannot turn back a considerable number of pages, each of which is equivalent to half a decade. The Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party already tried once to duck the question by proclaiming that the revolution would be neither bourgeois nor proletarian, but "popular". It is a simple repetition of what the Russian Populists said at the beginning of this century when they were asked what character the revolution against Czarism would acquire. And it is still the same answer that the Communist International gives today with respect to China and India. It is quite simply a pseudorevolutionary variant of the social democratic theory of Otto Bauer and others, according to which the state can raise itself above the classes, that is, be neither bourgeois nor proletarian. This theory is as pernicious for the proletariat as for the revolution. In China it transformed the proletariat into cannon fodder of the bourgeois counter-revolution.

Every great revolution proves to be *popular* in the sense that it draws into its wake the entire people. Both the Great French Revolution and the October Revolution were wholly popular. Nevertheless, the first was bourgeois because it instituted individual property, whereas the second was proletarian because it abolished individual property. Only a few hopelessly belated petty-bourgeois revolutionists can still dream of a revolution that would be neither bourgeois nor proletarian, but "popular" (that is, petty-bourgeois).

Now, in the imperialist period, the petty bourgeoisie is incapable not only of leading a revolution, but even of playing an independent role in it. In this way the formula of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" henceforth constitutes a simple screen for a petty-bourgeois conception of a *transitional* revolution and a *transitional* state, that is, of a revolution and a state that cannot take place in Italy or even in backward India. A revolutionist who has not taken a clear, point-blank position on the question of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry is doomed to fall into error after error. As to the problem of the anti-fascist revolution, the Italian question, more than any other, is intimately linked to the fundamental problems of world communism, that is, of the so-called theory of permanent revolution.

3. Following from what has been said comes the question of the "transitional" period in Italy. At the very outset it is necessary to establish very clearly: transition from what to what? A period of transition from the bourgeois (or "popular") revolution to the proletarian revolution—that is the one thing. A period of transition from the fascist dictatorship to the proletarian dictatorship—that is something else. If the first conception is envisaged, the question of the bourgeois revolution is posed in the first place, and it is then a question of establishing the role of the proletariat in it. Only after that will the question of the transitional period toward a proletarian revolution be posed. If the second conception is envisaged, the question is then posed of a series of battles, disturbances, changing situation, abrupt turns, con-

'Counter-revolution with a democratic face'

stituting in their entirety the different stages of the proletarian revolution. These stages may be many. But in no case can they contain within them a bourgeois revolution or its mysterious hybrid, the "popular" revolution.

Does this mean that Italy cannot, for a certain time, again become a parliamentary state or become a "democratic republic"? I consider—in perfect agreement with you, I think—that this eventuality is not excluded. But then it will not be the fruit of a bourgeois revolution, but the abortion of an insufficiently matured and premature proletarian revolution. In the event of a profound revolutionary crisis and mass battles in the course of which the proletarian vanguard will not have been in a position to take power, it may be that the bourgeoisie will restore its rule on "democratic" bases. Can it be said, for example, that the present German republic is a conquest of the bourgeois revolution? Such an assertion would be absurd. What took place in Germany in 1918–19 was a proletarian revolution, which for lack of leadership was deceived, betrayed, and crushed. But the bourgeois counter-revolution nevertheless was forced to adapt itself to the circumstances resulting from this crushing of the proletarian revolu-

tion and to assume the form of a parliamentary "democratic" republic. Is the same—or about the same—eventually excluded for Italy? No, it is not excluded. The enthronement of fascism resulted from the fact that the 1920 proletarian revolution was not carried through to its completion. Only a new proletarian revolution can overturn capitalism. If it should not be fated to triumph this time either (owing to the weakness of the Communist Party, manoeuvres and betrayals of the social democrats, the Freemasons, the Catholics), the "transitional" state that the bourgeois counter-revolution would then be compelled to set up on the ruins of the fascist form of its rule would be nothing else than a parliamentary and democratic state.

What in the long run is the Antifascist Concentration? Foreseeing the fall of the fascist state by an uprising of the proletariat and in general of all the oppressed masses, the Concentration is preparing to arrest this movement, to paralyse it, and to thwart it in order to pass off the victory of the renovated counter-revolution as a supposed victory of a democratic bourgeois revolution. If this dialectic of the living social forces is lost sight for a single moment, the risk is run of getting inextricably entangled and of swerving off the right road. I believe there cannot be the slightest misunderstanding between us on this score.

4. But does this mean that we communists reject in advance all democratic slogans, all transitional or preparatory slogans, limiting ourselves strictly to the *proletarian dictatorship*? That would be a display of sterile, doctrinaire sectarianism. We do not believe for one moment that a single revolutionary leap suffices to cross what separates the fascist regime from the proletarian dictatorship. In no way do we deny a transitional period with its transitional demands, including democratic demands. But it is precisely with the aid of these transitional slogans, which are always the starting point on the road to the proletarian dictatorship, that the communist vanguard will have to win the whole working class and that the latter will have to unite around itself all the oppressed masses of the nation. And I do not even exclude the possibility of the Constituent Assembly which, in certain circumstances, could be imposed by the course of events or, more precisely, by the process of the revolutionary awakening of the oppressed masses. To be sure, on the broad historical scale, that is from the perspective of a whole number of years, the fate of Italy is undoubtedly reduced to the following alternative: *Fascism* or *Communism*. But to claim that this alternative has already penetrated the consciousness of the oppressed classes of the nation is to engage in wishful thinking and to consider as solved the colossal task that still fully confronts the weak Communist Party. If the revolutionary crisis were to break out, for example, in the course of the next months (under the influence of the economic crisis, on the one hand, and under the revolutionary influence coming from Spain, on the other), the masses of toilers, workers as well as peasants, would certain-

ly follow up their economic demands with democratic slogans (such as freedom of assembly, of press, of trade union organisation, democratic representation in parliament and in the municipalities). Does this mean that the Communist Party should reject these demands? On the contrary. It will have to invest them with the most audacious and resolute character possible. For the proletarian dictatorship cannot be *imposed* upon the popular masses. It can be realised only by carrying on a battle—a battle in full—for all the transitional demands, requirements, and needs of the masses, and at the head of the masses.

It should be recalled here that Bolshevism by no means came to power under the abstract slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We fought for the Constituent Assembly much more boldly than all the other parties. We said to the peasants: "You demand equal distribution of the land? Our agrarian programme goes much further. But no one except us will assist you in achieving equal use of the land. For this you must support the workers". In regard to the war we said to the popular masses: "Our communist task is to war against all oppressors. But you are not ready to go so far. You are striving to escape from the imperialist war. No one but the Bolsheviks will help you achieve this". I am not dealing with the question of what exactly the central slogans of the transitional period in Italy should be right now, in the year 1930. To outline them, and to effect correct and timely changes, it is necessary to be far better acquainted with Italy's internal life and in much closer contact with its toiling masses than it is possible for me to be. For, in addition to a correct method, it is also necessary to *listen* to the masses. I want simply to indicate the general place of transitional demands in the struggle of communism against fascism and, in general, against bourgeois society.

Bureaucratic optimism

5. However, while advancing this or that democratic slogan, we must fight irreconcilably against all forms of democratic charlatanism. The "Democratic Republic of Workers", slogan of the Italian social democracy, is an example of this petty charlatanism. A republic of the workers can only be a proletarian class state. The democratic republic is only a masked form of bourgeois state. The combination of the two is only a petty-bourgeois illusion of the social democratic rank and file (workers, peasants) and an impudent falsehood of the social democratic leaders (all the Turatis, Modiglianis, and their ilk). Let me once again remark in passing that I was and remain opposed to the slogan of a "Republican Assembly on the Basis of Workers' and Peasants' Committees" precisely because this formul approaches the social democratic slogan of the "Democratic Republic of the Workers" and, consequently, can make the struggle against the social democracy extremely difficult.

6. The assertion made by the official leadership (of the Communist Party) that the social democracy

allegedly no longer exists politically in Italy is nothing but a consoling theory of bureaucratic optimists who wish to see ready-made solutions where there are still great tasks ahead. *Fascism has not liquidated the social democracy but has, on the contrary, preserved it.* In the eyes of the masses, the social democrats do not bear the responsibility for the regime, whose victims they are in part. This wins them new sympathy and strengthens the old. And a moment will come when the social democracy will coin political currency from the blood of Matteotti just as ancient Rome did from the blood of Christ. It is therefore not excluded that in the initial period of the revolutionary crisis, the leadership may be concentrated chiefly in the hands of the social democracy. If large numbers of the masses are immediately drawn into the movement and if the Communist Party conducts a correct policy, it may well be that in a short period of time the social democracy will be reduced to zero. But that would be a task to accomplish, not yet an accomplishment. It is impossible to leap over this problem; it must be solved.

The French Socialist Party

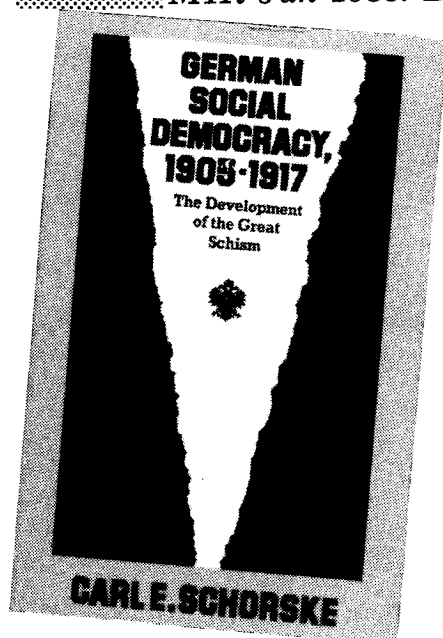
Let me recall at this point that Zinoviev, and later the Manuiskys and Kuusinen, announced on two or three occasions that the German social democracy also essentially no longer existed. In 1925 the Comintern, in its declaration to the French party written by the light hand of Lozovsky, likewise decreed that the French Socialist Party had definitely left the scene. The Left Opposition always spoke up energetically against this flighty judgement. Only outright fools or traitors would want to instill the idea in the proletarian vanguard of Italy that the Italian social democracy can no longer play the role that the German social democracy did in the revolution of 1918.

It may be objected that the social democracy cannot succeed again in betraying the Italian proletariat as it did back in 1920. This is an illusion and a self-deception! The proletariat has been deceived too many times in the course of its history, first by liberalism and then by the social democracy.

What is more, we cannot forget that since 1920 ten full years have elapsed, and since the advent of fascism eight years. The children who were ten and twelve years old in 1920—22, and who have witnessed the activities of the fascists, today comprise the new generation of workers and peasants who will fight heroically against fascism, but who lack political experience. The communists will come into contact with the full mass movement only during the revolution itself and, under the most favourable circumstances, will require months before they can expose and demolish the social democracy which, I repeat, fascism has not liquidated but on the contrary has preserved. . .

I shake your hand.

Yours,
Leon Trotsky



**German
Social Democracy
1905-1917
(The development
of the Great Schism)
Carl E Schorske
Harvard University
Press, £6.75**

Reviewed by Arthur Copus

ALTHOUGH THIS book is written in a dry and academic style, it occasionally gives an insight into the party's attitude on issues which are just as relevant today. The SPD was by far the best organised and the most successful workers' party in Western Europe. Its position in the Second International was second to none. All sections of the workers' movement in the International looked towards this "exemplary workers' party" as Lenin described it.

Its leaders (Kautsky and August Bebel) and its actions were held in great authority. Yet this powerful party had in its development the seeds of its own degeneration. The party despite its formal acceptance of a Marxist programme, had in its apparatus sections that gradually became reconciled to the capitalist system.

From the 1880s onwards the SPD had been able to gain many concessions from the ruling class. This was possible during the boom years. In 1882 the free trades unions had 237,000 members, by 1912 they had 2.6 million, and the SPD in the years

Book Reviews

prior to World War I had a membership of 4¼ million members. The party had been able to force the government to outlaw child labour and better working conditions. Ninety party newspapers were available for the party membership and the SPD had a staff of full time organisers of 15,000! Through the party's social clubs the average SPD member could lead a full life both culturally and politically.

The most significant development was the youth movement. Originally it had been formed outside the party by a group of apprentices in Northern Germany. From its beginnings the "Union of Free Youth Organisations of Germany" took a radical position, with one of its leading members being arrested for anti-militarist activity. Despite the Prussian law which forbade any kind of political activity for the youth, this organisation had by 1907 4,000 members. This was achieved by organising in conditions of semi-illegality. The "League of Young Workers of Germany" was formed in 1906 in the southern half of Germany. And even in the less repressive south the youth movement also took the struggle against militarism just as seriously as their northern counterparts. The reaction of the leadership of both the trades unions and the party was one of extreme caution. Bebel and others regarded their foundation as a "dangerous playing ground" (p100. para 2). Although the party endorsed the youth movement, and the Essen conference voted to "rear the youth in the spirit of socialism", Karl Liebknecht, however, criticised the party for its passive resistance towards the youth and in November 1907 the government revised the law which in reality made conditions even more difficult for the youth to organise. The government had passed this law because of the experience of the Young Guards in Belgium. They were the youth of the Belgian Social Democracy who conducted a similar "anti militarist" campaign there. As the army had been used to break strikes, the Young Guards had conducted a campaign in the barracks to appeal to the soldiers on a class basis.

Under pressure from the ruling class some of the SPD's leaders attempted to subordinate the youth to the main party, on the basis of "cultural

societies". However the party at a local level rallied to the youth's defence. Amongst the "Radicals" in the party, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, and Karl Liebknecht, recognised the important role the youth could play: "the most reliable force to keep us in continuous intellectual and moral development, to prevent us from rusting and resting"... "At the side of the adult fighters, whose duty is to weigh and consider, there must be younger elements who have the will to dare". In Germany at that time a policeman had to attend every SPD public meeting with powers to close it down under Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws. The years of prosperity had their effect, the revisionist ideas of Bernstein had some credence: All that was needed were social reforms and the minimum upheavals possible to achieve socialism. This ideological backsliding was directly related to the prolonged period of pre-war boom.

Gradual degeneration

But in the years up to the war it was becoming evident that the boom was coming to an end. Then, as now the only way for the capitalists to maintain their profits was to carry out counter reforms in order to maintain the system. In 1912 a coal miners strike had broken out in the Ruhr, and due to the union leaderships failure the strike failed. This gave the employers and their representatives in the Reichstag the opportunity to act. They began to take legal measures against the trades unions; the right to picket, preventing donations to the SPD. But in order to appear "even handed", the legislation was to include employers organisations. In fact, it was only the unions that suffered at the hands of the government.

The years 1912 to 1914 saw a period of recession in the economy, with very few strikes. This in turn led to a stagnation of the SPD's growth and there was a decrease in the circulation of the party's journal (with the exception of "Gleichheit" edited by Clara Zetkin).

The declaration of war in August 1914 saw the parliamentary faction vote unanimously for war credits. When the story appeared in *Vorwärts* Lenin thought it was a forgery concocted by the General Staff. Even though countless conferences of both the Party and the International resolved to oppose the war by any means possible, instead Noske, Scheidemann, and Ebert joined the war cabinet and submitted to the "Borgfrieden" (Civil peace). After years of opposition, these leaders were delighted to be part of the government: "Parliamentary junkets to the front, where high officers played

host to Social Democratic deputies, heightened their feeling of being in the club" (page 292-3). At the second vote in 1915 for further war credits Liebknecht and the lefts voted against. For this, he and his group were expelled from the SPD.

As Schorske points out, "Now this concept was stood on its head, Karl Liebknecht and those who joined him later in voting against war credits were condemned and ultimately expelled for adhering to the decision of congresses which the parliamentary majority violated" (p295, para.1)

By this time splits had begun to open up in the party, the Right became known as the "Majority Socialists", the left as "the Independents". However, it was only the Spartacus group who had already produced illegal pamphlets against the war. Luxemburg and Liebknecht alone, had seen the degeneration of the SPD coming, even Lenin had not imagined the official leadership would have gone this far! In May 1916, a demonstration in the Potsdamer Platz of 10,000 heard Liebknecht speak: "Down with the war!" "Down with the government!"

And despite the arrest of Liebknecht the demonstration went on for hours afterwards. Rosa Luxemburg wrote in her Junius Pamphlet condemning the behaviour of the SPD leaders and exposing the real nature of the war. Not a "war for civilisation" but for markets and bigger profits for capitalists and arms manufacturers.

Revolution spreads

The winter of 1916-1917 became known as the "turnip winter", with food shortages and child mortality rising by 50% of the pre war total. By this time the propaganda of the Spartacus group had reached the front. Meanwhile in January 1917 the Berlin munition workers demanded not only food but also "the speedy bringing about of peace". This was brutally put down by the soldiers in the Berlin garrison. The Russian revolution which began in October of that year had its effects in Germany too. In 1918 the Kaiser was forced to abdicate as a result of the revolutionary movement of the German workers and soldiers. Power was handed over to Prince Max

who in turn handed power to Ebert and Scheidemann, their faithful wartime servants. The leaders of the SPD were in charge of a government which had ceased to function, an army that was becoming revolutionary by the hour with soldiers and sailors soviets having been formed in Kiel. The right wing socialists hastily assured the ruling class that they too "hated revolution like sin". These renegades did not hesitate to organise the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and put down the rising of the Berlin workers in blood, using the service of the murderous "Freikorps" (who later formed Hitler's S.A.)

Although the book deals with these events in a purely descriptive fashion, it nevertheless gives an insight into the party that ultimately led to the failure of the 1919 revolution, and to the beginnings of the KPD (German Communist Party). Comrades should read this with "Rosa Luxemburg" by Paul Frölich or Evelyn Anderson "Hammer or Anvil", and above all Trotsky's writings on Germany.

Son of the revolution

By Liang Weng
and Judith Shapiro,
published by Chatto
and Windus, 1983
£9.95

Reviewed by Jim Chrystie

IGNORE THE publishers Hollywood-style title, this is a truly remarkable book. Often books on China are either dry, remote, academic analyses or highly impressionistic accounts from Western reporters, who having served their two-year stint in Peking, return to write up their 'China' episode. Nothing compares to this book. It is the autobiography of a youth growing up during the Cultural Revolution in Changsa, a city in Southern China, who sees his family torn apart, and himself nearly destroyed by that power struggle. His parents divorce, his family is scattered, relatives commit suicide and friends vanish.

Liang Weng's story is not unique, but it has come to print because it suits the current regime to let some of the truth emerge about that period just as Krushchev did about Stalin's camps, and also because in the end Liang Weng married Judith Shapiro, a visiting American teacher and was allowed to leave China. Born in 1954,



Mao, and his wife Chiang Ching

neither of Liang Weng's parents were members of the Communist Party, but both were intensely loyal to Mao and tried desperately to join the party. When in 1957, during the "Hundred Flowers" movement, people were asked to give criticisms, at first Liang's mother could not think of anything. But as ordered, she finally criticised her section head for not providing a bed for the housekeeper.

Hundred Flowers movement

The "Hundred Flowers" movement had been instigated by the regime to try and cope with the absence of workers' democracy. The Chinese bureaucracy had been terrified by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, when workers fought to take power away

from the bureaucracy and into their hands. Capitalism had been abolished and they did not want it restored. Hungarian workers were fighting for a second revolution, a political revolution, so that workers democratically decided what happened, not a group of bureaucrats. It was ruthlessly crushed by Russian tanks, but the repercussions were felt throughout Eastern Europe and in China.

Workers democracy did not exist in China, and the bureaucracy could not tolerate it, as it would mean the end of their privileged position. But they hoped by means of the Hundred Flowers movement that people could let off some steam, and if criticism could be kept within limits, it might prevent too many glaring and (for them) dangerous mistakes.

They quickly realised their error. The Hundred Flowers movement became a cascade of complaints, and some of the criticism got very close to home and raised the question of the bureaucracy itself and the need for political revolution. This could not be tolerated, and the clampdown was restored.

Unfortunately for Liang's mother this came after she had made her trivial complaint. All criticisms were suspect and the consequences for her were devastating. She was labelled a 'rightist', a 'counter-revolutionary'. According to Liang she never understood the storm which burst around her.

She was sacked and banished to a

countryside re-education camp. Her husband was forced to divorce her, and she never lived with her husband, son or two daughters again. It was not until 1978 that she even found out what the charges against her had been. This tragedy was a forerunner of what was to come during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's.

Probably few events in history have been so mis-named as "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution". There was nothing proletarian about it, nothing revolutionary, and nothing cultural, except in the excuse which prompted it (a dispute about a libretto criticising 'the Emperor').

The Cultural Revolution stemmed from a power struggle between different groups in the ruling elite. It came because Mao's group in the bureaucracy had been removed from centres of power. After the failure of the 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958-9, when the attempt to turn China into an overnight industrial giant collapsed into economic chaos, Mao was kicked upstairs. He had prestige, but no power.

"Little red book"

He bided his time and in 1966 struck back. In effect Mao staged a military coup in Peking. But opposition remained in the rest of China, so he launched the Cultural Revolution to oust his opponents. The aim was nothing to do with revolution; it was a power struggle between rival wings of the bureaucracy. The shock troops of Mao's forces were to be teenagers, formed into Red Guards. The main 'political' content was worship of Mao. It was the era of the "little red book", of 680 million posters of Mao being printed, and of Mao aged 72 apparently setting a world record during a swim in the Yangtze.

Liang Weng was twelve at the time and desperate to join in the excitement. His account of what happened to him is remarkable. Along with hundreds of others from his home town, he set off on a 250 mile march to a mountain where Mao had once had his military headquarters. This trek took on all the character of a religious pilgrimage. In canvas shoes, wet through, poorly looked after en route, abysmally fed, they sought out the most difficult routes over the hills, in order to suffer like Mao had suffered. Eventually they arrived at the snowy plateau. By this time there were thousands of them, and no facilities. Hundreds died from meningitis and Liang was only rescued by an army lorry. This did not dampen the ardour—the goal was now Peking to perhaps see Mao himself. The day Liang actually caught a glimpse of

Mao was ecstasy.

But what was he to do afterwards? Liang did not know. Denouncing 'capitalist roaders' sounded simple in theory, but not in practice. After all Mao did not want all bureaucrats removed, just those 'disloyal' to him. But when at a local level everyone swore loyalty, it was difficult to know who to trust. In short, the whole cultural revolution was a sham.

And it soon disintegrated into a clash of warring, personal factions. In Liang's city during 1967 there were numerous armed bands, continual gun-fights, mostly machine-guns and grenades, but once even tanks and missiles. In the end the army stepped in and restored 'order'. Mao came to an alliance with the army, and the Cultural Revolution was over.

But by that time Liang's family had been torn apart. In the search for those 'disloyal' to Mao, Liang's father had been denounced as a rightist, taking after his ex-wife. He was paraded through the streets, and forced to confess. His home was sacked by Red Guards and Liang watched as they burned his father's books and stole his wages—and all the time his father never lost his faith in Mao or the party.



反革命修正主义分子

Official humiliated by Red Guards.

His father was taken to a re-education centre, and his sisters sent away to the countryside. At the age of 13 Liang had to cope on his own, no school, no friends he could trust and no money. He drifted into a gang and like many other youth stole or begged in order to survive.

Then in 1969 his father was released, and together with Liang and other 'educated youth' banished to the countryside. The peasants did not welcome them, after all they were extra mouths to feed. Life was desperate. To survive Liang had to sneak out at night, dig up potatoes, brush off the dirt and eat them raw.

The peasantry worshipped Mao; as one peasant said "he got rid of the landlords. I've now got the landlord's table. If Chiang Kai Shek returned, the landlord would want his table back". But at the same time they had little faith in the Communist Party, which kept interfering with their lives. Mao was not at fault, just his advisers.

Whilst Liang was with the peasants, the order came to slaughter animals, because it was a sign of "developing capitalist tendencies". Those that did not were punished. Ten years before they had been ordered to cut down trees to provide fuel for backward furnaces in the disastrous 'Great Leap Forward'. The peasants had no control over their own lives. All power rested with party officials.

Workers' cynicism

One of the most dramatic incidents in the book comes when one of those officials thinks he can get credit by arresting Liang as a conspirator. This arose because Liang had been writing to a friend who had been active as a Red Guard in Peking. Unbeknown to Liang his friend had risen quite high and had then been purged. Anyone writing to him was suspect. For days Liang is interrogated and told to confess. At his lowest, one night he contemplates suicide: "I had lived fifteen years, but I had no desire to live even one more. I had been the victim of political movements since the age of three... the dusty dark lightbulb hanging several yards above was still visible in the night. Suddenly I realised that I could die. I could unscrew that lightbulb and put my hand where the current flowed and I would be dead. I should never again be tormented by memories of mother's humiliated and accepting face as father cursed her for betraying the Party's faith to her, of father kneeling before his burning books praising the party; of (sister) Liang Fang's faeces-covered shoes as she came home to write her thought reports..."

In the end after unscrewing the lightbulb he draws back. A day later he is freed, the order had come through that too many people were being arrested because of this conspiracy. Liang's nightmare life in the countryside continued for another two years. Finally he is saved, by of all things, his height.

A visiting teacher thinks he could become a good basketball player and selects Liang for training. Liang does well and comes to the attention of a factory in his home town. Through bribery they get him a permit to come and work at their shale oil factory and start in the works basketball team.

His account of factory life shows the

cynicism of workers towards the ruling bureaucrats. Workers see corruption all around them and are totally indifferent to all the political propaganda pumped at them. Bribery is the essential lubricant to get goods ordered from other factories and to get anything within the plant. Without workers democracy there is little proper planning. A week of activity is followed by weeks waiting for parts to arrive. Workers spent most of their time skiving. Liang is popular, because he is prepared to stand guard while they are away, as he enjoys reading.

He tries to bribe his way into college and is nearing success, when the rules are changed and exams re-introduced. He passes and in college he meets a visiting American teacher, gets mar-

ried and is allowed, as part of improving Sino-American relations, to leave China and live in America. This book is the result.

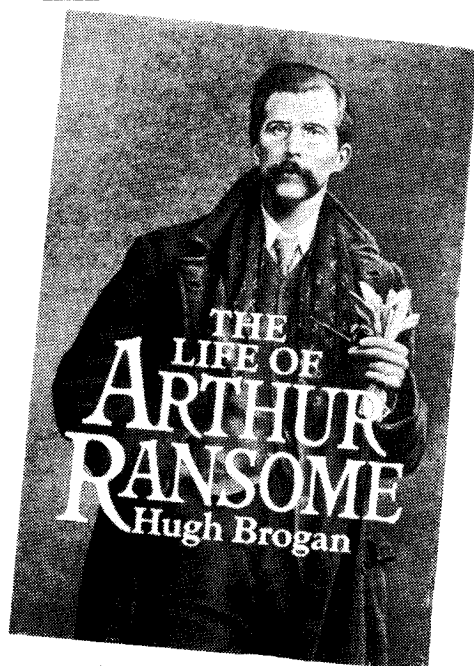
Classic account

The story itself is dramatic, but the book is not just valuable as an historical account. The detail and atmosphere of life in China rings so true and provides much of its fascination. It is superbly written with a restrained passion which totally engages the reader.

It is not a book which tries to explain the wider political relationships, and the background about the Hundred Flowers and Cultural Revolution given in this review is missing. The

book gives no political analysis. Throughout the Cultural Revolution is not explained in retrospect, but recounted as how in all its confusion it struck Liang at the time. Perhaps for someone coming straight to the book it might seem that the whole event was meaningless, a glimpse into a Kafkaesque world, with no logic except the arbitrary nature of officials.

But this would be a minor complaint. This autobiography of Liang Weng's first twenty years will stand as a classic account of what happened in China during the Cultural Revolution. If anyone wants to understand what is actually going on in China there are few, if any, better books to read.



**The life of
Arthur Ransome**
By Hugh Brogan
Jonathan Cape 1984
£10.95

Reviewed by Nick Bradley

"MY POSITION" was immediately behind and above the praesidium, looking down on Trotsky's muscular shoulders and great head and the occasional gestures of his curiously small hands.

Beyond him was that sea of men; soldiers in green and grey shirts,

workers in collarless ones, or jerseys, others dressed very much like British workmen, peasants in pleated red shirts and high top boots; all picked men, not elected from this assembly alone but proved and tested in the local soviets that had chosen them as delegates. And as I watched that amazing crowd, that filled the huge hall and packed the galleries, following point by point Trotsky's exposition of the international and inter class situation and the policy of the revolution I felt I would willingly give the rest of my life if it could be divided into minutes and given to men in England and France so that those of little faith who say that the Russian revolution is discredited could share for one minute each that wonderful experience."

Surprisingly the author of these words in 1918 was an English writer best known today for his works of children's fiction. His most well known book—*Swallows and Amazons*—has been recently dramatized and shown on television.

Revolution inspires writers

Arthur Ransome was born on 18 January 1884. Ransome—as a boy and adult—was a keen angler and sailor. These twin loves were reflected in his children's books. But remarkably there was another side to Ransome. He lived in Russia for ten years and worked as a journalist sending back vivid accounts of the Russian Revolution. Whilst Ransome lacked the insight and brilliant skill of the American journalist John Reed, whose book *Ten Days That Shook The World* is compulsive reading, he nevertheless became passionately caught up in the revolution in its early years. His pamphlet *Six Weeks in Russia* in 1919 reveals inspiration drawn from those events in Russia when the workers and

peasants overthrew the Czar and took events into their own hands.



Trotsky during the civil war. Ransome married Trotsky's personal secretary, Eugenia Shelepina.

In the introduction to his pamphlet he wrote about the atmosphere which inspired both writers and artists despite the desperate problems of poverty and armed intervention from the capitalist world.

"There was a feeling, from which we could never escape, of the creative effort of the revolution... set against a background of that extra-ordinary vitality which persists in Moscow even in these dark days of discomfort, disillusion, pestilence, starvation and unwanted war".

Ransome reported the effects of the First World War on Russia. He clearly began to understand the developments taking place in the midst of the workers and soldiers as a result of poverty and the war.

The impact of the Revolution throughout 1917 transformed Ransome. His daily reports in the *Daily News* captured the rapidly moving events.

On 1 May 1917 he wrote:

"Immediately below my window in the great square two processions are meeting. One of them includes a detachment from one of the regiments which first threw out the red flag in the days of the revolution. The other procession, noticing this, breaks into wild cheering which spreads over the whole sea of people far away into the distance under the gold domes and cupolas of the old Russian Church. The soldiers wave their caps and shout in reply. In all directions as far as one can see red flags are waving above the dense crowd which leaves only just enough room for the perpetually passing processions.

Ransome had also noted the role of the Soviets—as he wrote on 1st April: "it should never be forgotten that the Council of Soldiers and Workers Deputies enjoys practically decisive power in all questions which depend on the working class". As the months passed he noted the heated differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. He also became aware of the increasing support for the Bolsheviks amongst the people.

October 1917

The historian Hugh Brogan in his biography of Ransome referred to the upheavals in July 1917 and remarked that "it was becoming habitual with him, Arthur blamed the 'Cadets' (bourgeois politicians) for provoking this crisis" revealing the emerging awareness of Ransome.

Ill health demanded a holiday, and Ransome left the country on 9th October. When the Bolshevik revolution erupted in November, Ransome was in Britain. He immediately attempted to return by way of Sweden.

He eventually was given a pass to visit Russia and on 30 December visited the 'Peoples' Commissar for Foreign Affairs' at the Smolny Institute in Petrograd. He arrived outside the office:

"Beside it stood a sentinel, who was a workman from the Red Guard in ordinary clothes, with a rifle and bandolier over his overcoat. In the anteroom one of Trotsky's secretaries, a young officer, told me that Trotsky was expecting me...I got an impression of extreme efficiency and definite purpose. In spite of all that is said against him by his enemies, I do not think he is a man to do anything except from the conviction that it is the best thing to be done for the revolutionary cause which he has at heart."

Ransome visited the Smolny Institute (headquarters of the Bolsheviks) frequently. And in his visits he met and fell in love with Evgenia Shelepina. She was twenty

three years old. She had gone to work as a typist at the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs before the Bolshevik revolution. She was one of the few who stayed at their jobs at the Commissariat after the revolution. She had become Trotsky's personal secretary. During the events of 1917 Evgenia in her own words was "convinced that the Bolsheviks were the only party which had a chance to extricate Russia from the chaos into which the war, entered into so irresponsibly by the Tsarist government, plunged the country". Evgenia came to marry Ransome in later years.

The worst aspect of Brogan's biography of Ransome is the author's clear dislike of Bolshevism and the revolution. Time after time Brogan refers disparagingly to Ransome's support for Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. Brogan remarks typically "His view of the revolution was still somewhat romantic". Ransome, however, saw things differently. Having met and heard Lenin speak on a number of occasions, he observed that:

"He was the most Russian of them. Time and again after listening to speeches which might have been made in any country by men of any nationality I have been suddenly, as it were, brought back to Russia when this little urgent figure stepped to the tribune, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and mingled jest and argument in language that tasted of Russian tobacco and the life of the Russian peasantry. It was natural to him to talk of the principles of his international revolution in the language of the Volga peasants, and in his mouth political theory seemed in no way out of tune with the peasant proverbs that were characteristic of his speeches. At the Assembly which ratified the peace, for example, he suppressed Steinberg, who was asking questions, by remarking to the general delight, 'one fool can ask more questions than ten wise men can answer'".

Ransome became a friend of Radek—immediately after the revolution he was in charge of the Press Bureau of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. Radek—in 1918—wrote a preface to Ransome's first pamphlet on the revolution, "The Truth about Russia". Radek wrote of Ransome: "he is a man with his eyes open, with a warm heart, without any prejudices, a man whose deep love for the masses and for all who were hurled into this war and its hellish misery enabled him to understand Russia."

In his pamphlet published in 1921, *The Crisis in Russia*, Ransome showed much foresight in quoting the comments of Rykov who warned that "There is a possibility of so constructing a state that in it there will be a



Ransome as an old man. Tragically, "editorial restrictions" meant that even his autobiography gives only a pale reflection of his views.

ruling caste consisting chiefly of administrative engineers, technicians etc. that is, we should get a form of state economy based on a small group of a ruling caste whose privilege in this case would be the management of the workers and peasants."

The revolution clearly had an enormous impact on Ransome who saw at first hand the developments of industry and experienced the democratic control of society through the soviets.

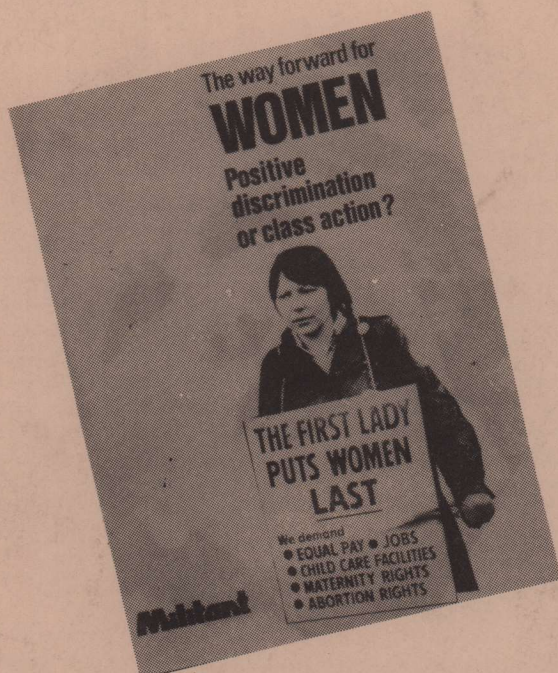
Ransome left Russia before Stalin and the bureaucracy had usurped power. But he returned—with Evgenia—to England to write more adventure stories. He fished and sailed in the peace of the Lake District. His Autobiography written between 1949 and 1961 was his only further piece of political writing. Why he abandoned politics has never really been explained.

Tragically even Ransome's Autobiography only gives us a pale reflection of his views. Editor Rupert Hart-Davies tells us in his introduction that:

"For many years after 1917 Ransome planned to write a history of the Russian Revolution and he amassed a large quantity of notes and memoranda, apart from his memories. Time and again in the autobiography he was tempted to devote several pages to discussion of Russian political parties, contemporary theories of the future, and a great deal of other material irrelevant to his own story. There have been many histories of those days, and I have restricted Ransome's narrative to events in which he was involved as actor or eyewitness."

Nevertheless Ransome's books, and those about his life, make interesting reading if only to give us a glimpse of the explosion of life in the years immediately following the Russian revolution. And his accounts of the revolution are fascinating reading for all socialists.

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