

Militant

International Review

Number 33

Autumn 1986

Price 90p

**Marxism and
Parliament: How
will society
be transformed?**

Plus . . .
**Labour in Power
Hungary 1956
History of Bolshevism**



Militant

International Review

Printed by Militant Publications, 3/13 Hepscott Road,
London E9 5HB. ISBN 0906582 121

3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB

Editor: Alan Woods

Contents

Editorial: The Right's Pyrrhic victory	3	Comment: 'Communist' New Realism— A CP pamphlet reviewed	26
Marxism and Parliament: How will society be transformed?	7	By Bill Boyle	
By Rob Sewell		Economic Notes	28
Labour in Power: Lessons of the Second and Third Labour Governments	12	By Bob McKee	
By Ted Grant		Science and Socialism: The Lysenko controversy	30
Hungary 1956 and the Political revolution	18	By Viv Seal	
By Phil Hutchinson		The History of Bolshevism, Part Five: The Second Congress, 1903	35
Science Report	25	By Alan Woods	
By Pete Dickenson		Strike at Vorkuta Labour camp: An eyewitness account	43
		Book Reviews	46

The Right's Pyrrhic victory

ON THE face of it, this year's Labour Party conference put the clock back thirty years. Behind the glossy image and rose-tinted razzamataz, more reminiscent of a Tory Party jamboree than a Labour Party conference, lay the crude reality of wholesale manipulation, "stitching-up" of the votes and almost total suppression of free debate and discussion. The conference chairman—a consummate representative of the Neanderthal Tendency—blatantly rigged the debates and even interfered with the voting, going to the extreme of refusing to count votes against!

Had these methods been used at a conference when the left was in a majority, Fleet Street would have been foaming at the mouth (witness the scandalous press manipulation of the CPSA election) but, in the words of one prominent press baron "these are our friends, and you don't attack your friends." Consequently, the conference was praised as an outstanding success, for its "professionalism" and "public relations". Yes, and maybe the sharp turn to the right had a little bit to do with it too . . .

In recent years, the right wing have

Editorial

lost the political argument. Labour's rank and file has asserted its control over policy and its right to decide who will represent Labour in parliament. The right wing have never accepted these democratic gains. With the backing of the so-called "soft-left"—now indistinguishable from the right—they are attempting to push the party right back to the dark ages of the 1950s, when "the Divine Right of MP's" was unquestioned, when conference was a rubber stamp for a handful of right wing trade union barons and Barker and Gunter wielded the proscribed list to stifle any opposition.

Expulsion vote fixed in advance

There is no doubt that the right wing clique around Kinnock would like to go back to those days. That was shown in the expulsion of the Liverpool *Militant* supporters. They were expelled—let us not forget—for the "crime" of

implementing conference policies and standing up to the Tory government, refusing to implement cuts and sackings. That the magnificent movement in Liverpool ended in defeat was not the fault of the council, the Liverpool Labour Party or the people of Liverpool who backed the council to the end. The responsibility lies elsewhere: with those Labour Groups, supposedly dominated by the "left", who gave up without firing a shot; with those trade union leaders who connived to undermine the resistance of the Liverpool workers; but above all with the national leadership of the Labour Party which did everything in its power to sabotage the movement in Liverpool. The expulsion of men and women who have dedicated their lives to the cause of Labour and who are presently facing disqualification, vicious fines and the loss of their homes and possessions, represented a shameful action with no parallel in the whole of Labour's history.

Some people wonder why the Liverpool comrades refused to participate in the proceedings. If this had been a genuine chance to appeal to Labour's rank-and-file, if those concerned had

been given the minimum time necessary to explain their case in public, then there is no doubt that they would have spoken. But to participate in a show trial, with a paltry five minutes (chairman's interruptions and orchestrated barracking permitting) behind closed doors, would have been to give credence to a kangaroo court. To imagine that, by so doing, the results would have been any different is to fool oneself as to the nature of this farce.

The result was rigged well in advance. Many trade union leaders, afraid to allow their delegates to make up their own minds, had made their decision binding in advance. As in Alice in Wonderland, it was a case of "verdict first and trial afterwards." In the case of the NUM, where the delegation voted to oppose the expulsions, the union's vote was nevertheless cast in favour! Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the comrades concerned decided to stage a demonstration of protest, by walking out of the conference and appealing to the mass of Labour members and voters, over the head of the party leadership and its machine.

Tories in retreat

That this conference was rigged from start to finish is not seriously open to doubt. But this fact does not totally explain what happened in Blackpool. The conferences in the 1950's and 1960's were also "stage-managed". Yet the authoritarian behaviour of the platform at least evoked protests from the delegates. The general mood at the beginning of this year's conference was one of reluctant acquiescence to the manoeuvrings of the platform, although they became so blatant that by the end of the week the delegates discontent became manifest. The voice of the rank and file was effectively silenced. The debates were dominated by a dreary succession of right wing parliamentary candidates and general secretaries. Why were they allowed to get away with it?

After seven years of Thatcherism, there is a powerful urge for unity to defeat the Tories. The right wing clique which temporarily has succeeded in dominating the NEC has taken advantage of this deeply-felt mood to go on the offensive.

Not so long ago, Kinnock and all the other Labour leaders—both "left" and right—were convinced that Labour could not win the next election. Only the Marxist tendency represented by *Militant* and the *MIR* predicted that Labour could win a majority. Now that prediction has proved to be correct.



Spanish PM, Gonzalez, much admired by Neil Kinnock, is carrying out a policy of cuts and closures even worse than that of Thatcher.

Just a few days before this edition went to print, a Harris poll conducted on behalf of Channel 4 TV in the marginal seat of Calder Valley showed the way things are moving. With the 1983 figures in brackets, the poll gave Labour 42 per cent (27), Conservatives 36 per cent (43.6) and the Alliance a mere 22 per cent (29.4). This shows that the writing is on the wall for Thatcher. Realising that the Alliance was taking support from the Tories, not Labour, the media have pulled the rug from under, playing up the splits between the Liberals and the SDP. This spells disaster for the Alliance which was a media creation from the very beginning. The Tories themselves are in deep trouble. Thatcher is universally hated. The idea that they could win an election with a smear campaign based on defence is a non-starter. Elections are lost or won, not on foreign policy, but on social issues, housing, health and above all unemployment. On all these counts the Tories stand condemned.

Much to the amazement of Neil Kinnock and his supporters, Labour is moving into the lead. Understanding nothing of the processes which underlie social development, these people, who a few months ago were solemnly denying the possibility of a Labour victory, have now convinced themselves that the successes are due to—Neil Kinnock. As if such a radical turn-around in the consciousness of the masses can be explained by the kind of tie the leader is wearing, or the cut of his suit or the colour of his socks! These latter-day water diviners evidently believe that Labour must be "sold" to the electorate just like soap powder!

The fact is that this colossal shift in

public opinion reflects the shift—long ago predicted by the Marxists—of the working class from the industrial front to the political plane. And let us remind ourselves that none of this would have been possible without the social earthquake brought about by the miners' strike. The Labour Party owes its success—not to the rose in Neil Kinnock's buttonhole—but to the heroic struggle of the miners and the powerful psychological impact it had on all classes. The miners' strike caused an abyss to open up between the classes. And the Labour Party has now become—despite, not because of, its leadership—the main beneficiary of the polarisation within society.

Neil Kinnock's speech

Throughout the lifetime of the Thatcher government, the trade union leaders have shown themselves to be woefully inadequate to the task of fighting to defend the workers' interests. Desperate to prevent another Tory government, they are falling over one another to pledge 101 per cent loyalty to Neil Kinnock. Bowing to the pressure of the media, they have moved sharply to the right in the mistaken belief that "respectability" and "moderation" will allow them to win friends and influence people. Thus the former "left" leaders of NUPE, who voted against the expulsion of the *Militant* editorial board in 1983, have now lined up with the Hammonds and Jordans to expel the Liverpool Eight.

In this stampede to the right, the ex-lefts in the unions were joined by a legion of ex-lefts in the constituencies. Livingstone, Blunkett, the LCC and all the other middle-class "trendy" lefts have scrambled onto the Kinnock band



What Neil Kinnock intends to do is to promise nothing. In so doing he unwittingly promises everything!

waggon. To their shame, a section of these elements also voted for the expulsions.

Neil Kinnock's hour long speech got the kind of four minute standing ovation normally associated with a Tory conference. Even Tony Benn applauded. But what, exactly, were they applauding?

Apart from the promise of one million jobs—which will be welcomed by all workers—there was no solid commitment to anything in particular. We had a kind of Cook's tour of Nicaragua, South Africa and a few other places. But interestingly enough, there was no mention of the experience of socialist governments nearer to home: not a word about France, Spain and Greece.

Comrade Kinnock's silence was no accident. The defeat of the Mitterand government in France and the recent debacle of PASOK in the local elections in Greece are a warning to Labour. It is impossible to serve two masters. It is impossible to defend jobs, services and living standards without a complete break with capitalism. That is the lesson of Greece and France; and Spain, where Gonzalez (much admired by Neil Kinnock) is carrying out a policy of cuts and closures even worse than that of Thatcher, will not be far behind.

All socialists and trade unionists want to see the defeat of Thatcher and the election of a Labour government. But that, in and of itself, will solve nothing. We must also ask ourselves

what policy this government will carry out. Felipe Gonzalez also promised the creation of 800,000 jobs prior to his election. The only result has been an increase of unemployment to over 3 million in Spain. Unless a Labour government takes over the banks, insurance companies and 200 monopolies, under workers' control and management, as the prior condition for the democratic planning of the economy, exactly the same will happen here.

Labour and big business

Evidently, what Neil Kinnock intended to do was to promise **nothing**. In the event, he unwittingly promised **everything**. Because everyone will read into Labour's policy anything and everything they desire!

Nor will Kinnock and the right wing succeed in pacifying big business. The *Sunday Telegraph* (20 July 1986) commented acidly on Labour's "new image":

"In this cynical world, people in the city find the very reasonableness of the Labour spokesmen unnerving. The historic pattern has been for an incoming Labour government breathing fire and brimstone to become as tame as a lamb when faced with harsh reality.

"Now it's different" one broker warns: 'They sound so nice, perhaps for the first time in history their bite will be worse than their bark.'"

Of course, there is a great deal of hypocrisy in these lines. The strategists of capital are not afraid of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, who have gone to great lengths (from Liverpool to the Berlin Wall) to demonstrate their trustworthiness. **But they are mortally afraid of the class forces which lie behind the Labour Party, and which would move into action under a Labour government. That is why they will never be reconciled to the Labour Party, as long as it retains its umbilical link to the trade unions and the working class. Their policy towards a Labour government—as in France, Greece and Spain—will be to "use and discredit."**

This conference, paradoxically, served to arouse the expectations of millions of workers, housewives, unemployed, young people and pensioners. They are not particularly interested in pink roses and neatly pressed suits. They are concerned about jobs, a living wage, a decent home to live in. A Labour government will stand or fall on its ability to meet these needs. And on a capitalist basis, this is ruled out.

In spite of Kinnock and the right wing, the election of a Labour government is still the most likely perspective. In the worst variant, Labour will be the biggest party in the next parliament.

After an initial honeymoon period, there will be an inevitable recoil, as the government passes from a policy of reforms to counter-reforms. Those

short-sighted trade union leaders who now imagine that a Labour government will solve all their problems will suffer a rude awakening, when their members realise they have been cheated. The present swing to the right will give way to an even bigger swing to the left, not only in the Labour Party but also in the unions.

End of a chapter

In the recent period, the active membership of the Labour Party has been swamped by an influx of middle-class "trendy" elements, many of whom would be equally at home in the Liberal Party. Some of the more honest ones will be won to the ideas of Marxism on the basis of events. But the majority, having no perspective and no anchor in the working class or in theory, will drop out of politics, demoralised by the experience of a counter-reformist Labour government. This will prepare the way for a massive influx of workers from the trade unions who will join the Labour Party in order to fight the right wing and bring about a change of course.

This conference was the end of a chapter, but not the end of the story. The idea of a return to the bad old days of the 1950's is completely utopian. The strength of the right wing then was

based upon the post-war boom, with full employment and rising living standards. Now Labour will come to power in conditions of capitalist crisis, with nothing to offer except the kind of "austerity" programme we now see in Greece, Spain and France. Reformism without reforms—or with counter-reforms—is something which appeals to nobody.

Only the ideas of Marxism, defended by the *Militant* and *Militant International Review* and no-one else explain the nature of the crisis and the only way out. Let the capitalist media and "their friends" in the right wing of the Labour Party crow about the alleged "demise" of *Militant*. The real mood of society found no echo in this conference, and less still in the rags of Fleet Street. It is a serious mood which will not take easily to being trifled with, or be fobbed off by "image" without substance and form without content. That mood was shown by the seamen's strike, by the Lucas strike, by the dogged determination of the London printworkers. This shows the real face of British Labour. That is what guarantees the success of Marxism in the future. The right wing can expel and persecute individual Marxists and class fighters. But the ideas of Marxism, which cannot be expelled, will finally be vindicated.

Militant

International Review

Subscribe now...!

Guarantee your regular copy of the *Militant International Review*. Take out a years subscription, four issues for £4.50 (postage and packing included), £5.00 overseas. Fill in the form below and send to: World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB. Cheques payable to 'World Socialist Books'.

Please send me a years subscription to the *Militant International Review*, starting with issue No 34, Spring 1987.

Name

Address

I enclose £4.50 (UK/Ireland) £5.00 (Overseas).

European Managers Report

Building support for the MIR

THE *MILITANT International Review* has always striven, through the clear ideas of Marxism, to aid workers active in the struggles of the labour movement to draw the necessary lessons for future battles from a study of past and current events. To this end we have carried a combination of articles dealing with contemporary events, polemical articles on the programme and perspectives of the Labour leaders, studies of major episodes from the history of the labour movement, to articles on the latest international developments. But the Editors have always been conscious that providing written material is only part of the process of education in the ideas of Marxism. It is equally important to discuss the articles, to draw out on the basis of active participation in the debates and discussions taking place in the movement, their application to current developments.

In this respect a model of how to proceed is contained in a letter recently received by the Editors from one of our South Wales readers: "Supporters of the *Militant* in Llanelli were recently asked to organise a trade union Marxist Discussion Class, in which we hope to use the *MIR* as the basis for discussion. The 'lost' traditions of the South Wales valleys, of socialist and Marxist forums for workers to discuss important events in society, are now being revived by the Marxists in the Labour Party. Workers in the TGWU, USDAW, EPTU, GMBATU and NUR have already expressed an interest in this venture. Issues agendered for discussion so far include the World economy, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, South Africa, the class nature of Russia, and Nicaragua. At the first meeting the modest proposal for monthly Discussion Classes was countered by demands for fortnightly moving to weekly meetings. This underlines the thirst for theory amongst trade union activists and shows the potential for a more regular *MIR*."

This excellent initiative could be repeated in every area and even added to with local 'MIR Public Debates' with opponents of Marxism being organised, to further clarify Marxist ideas. Combined with a throughgoing drive to increase the sales of the *MIR*, the full potential of our journal could be realised and the financial base secured to take the next steps in its improvement and more frequent production.

How *will* society be transformed?

THE MINERS strike of 1984-85 was far more than an industrial dispute. It was in outline a class war waged against the Tory government. It was a political struggle unparalleled in Britain probably since the General Strike of 1926. The British bourgeoisie attempted to use the forces of the state—the police and law courts—to break the coal strike. After 12 months of heroic struggle, as a result of the abject failure of the trade union leadership to mobilise the latent support amongst the rank and file, the miners were eventually defeated.

However, this hollow victory for Thatcher resulted not in stability for the ruling class but in the undermining of the social fabric of British society. There has not been such a class polarisation in Britain for the last 70 years. The strike affected all classes and strata of the population. It has opened up a new chapter in British history, in marking the dividing line between the past period of relative tranquillity and that of new mass upheavals.

In the minds of hundreds of thousands of miners, print workers and others, the role of the state apparatus has been clearly exposed as a weapon of the ruling class. The idea—peddled by the bourgeois and its reformist allies in the labour movement—of a neutral state, standing above politics, has been severely undermined.

The miners' strike

The miners' strike saw the emergence of a national police force centrally directed by the dictate of the Thatcher government through the Chief Constables' quasi-official National Reporting Centre. Prepared and drilled as a semi-militarist force, supplied with riot gear, visor helmets, padded jackets, shields and batons, it organised to saturate the mining areas.

Three years before the strike, the government carefully prepared their strikebreaking forces. Central to this was the beefing up of the police. In 1983, 5,000 Metropolitan police officers were given specialist riot training for a four-day period. About 17% of them were trained in the use of firearms. Many lessons were drawn from the experiences of the RUC in Northern Ireland. As a result, in England and Wales alone, the police

forces have accumulated 1,200 rounds of C.S. gas, whose locations is kept top secret. There are also 20,000 rounds of plastic bullets immediately available, with fresh stocks supplied at short notice.

For the new period of class struggle opening up in Britain, firearms have been brought into service by the Metropolitan police. These weapons range from the .38 Smith and Wesson (used in the Waldorf shooting) to the Enfield 'Enforcer' rifles with telescopic sights, Remington Pump action shotguns (able to fire CS gas) and Heskler and Kock sub-machine guns. The latter can empty a 15 round magazine in seconds.

In the miners strike, specially trained police were organised into Police Support Units, used to spearhead the mass arrests, curfews and road blocks. A staggering 11,000 miners were arrested during the dispute, many under the Conspiracy Laws of 1875 and the Public Order Act of 1936—originally aimed at Mosely's fascists but kept on the statute books to be used against the labour movement. The civil and criminal laws—interpreted by reactionary judges—were used against the strikers on a scale without precedent this century.

These class measures and laws were used to defend the class interests of the British bourgeois. Their strategy was to crush the miners at all costs (they spent some £8,000 million), as a means of inflicting a defeat on the working class as a whole. However, this strategy ended in absolute tatters causing deep class polarisation and resulting in the outstanding political fund ballot victories and the drastic undermining of the Tories' electorally.

The ruthless nature of the British bourgeois is nothing new. The whole history of British capitalism and its domination of one quarter of humanity was carried through by the most violent and bloody means. The democratic rights that we experience today—the right to vote, strike, assembly, free speech, free press, organise etc—were not granted by a benevolent ruling class. On the contrary, they were fought for by the working class against the most bitter repression from the bourgeoisie and their state apparatus. These hard-won democratic rights are, in reality, elements of the new socialist society within the old—elements of workers

democracy itself. They directly assist the labour movement in developing its strength, cohesion, and consciousness, in preparation for the overthrow of capitalism. These democratic rights are not an end in themselves, but are a means to an end—a socialist society based on a much more radical form of democracy. That is why Marxists have always consistently fought to defend democratic rights against those who have sought to limit or end those rights.

In Britain attempts to organise trade unions were met with vicious state repression by the bourgeois. The Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 outlawed the unions and forced them underground as workers' secret societies. A bare minimum of rights of association were won by the Acts of 1824 and 1825, but new laws were invented to take their place like the crime of unlawful oath-taking, used to deport the Tolpuddle martyrs. Strike action in breach of contract remained a criminal offence until the repeal of the Master and Servants Act in the 1860s. Literally thousands of activists were jailed or hanged in the struggle to build trade unions.

History of struggle

From 1870 onwards the unions were formally lawful but the bourgeois and their judges invented new legislation to ban strike action. The crimes of conspiracy to obstruct an owner's "freedom of action" and conspiracy in restraint of trade were brought in. When these were repealed the judges simply created the civil law offence of conspiracy where the employers could sue for damages. The limited legal right to picket was in effect removed by interpreting it as illegal "watching and besetting." (Conspiracy Act 1875).

The right to organise into effective trade unions was only won after a ferocious class struggle for over a century. It was the willingness of the pioneers of our movement to break the class laws of the Liberal and Tory governments—with all the jailings and repression—that gave us that basic freedom today.

However, the Thatcher government, reflecting the class interests of the bourgeois, has attempted to turn the clock back. The Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982, and the Trade Union Act of 1984, have undermined union

"immunities" from liability for damage and opened them to court action.

The blatant use of Tory judges' interpretation of laws in the miners' strike was a deliberate class decision. Thousands were arrested in blanket arrests, picketing was blocked. Nottingham and other counties became no-go areas. The NUM's funds were sequestered and the courts imposed an official receiver to run the union. In the words of Arthur Scargill: "These unelected judges representing Britain's ruling class have taken away at a stroke the rights and independence of British trade unions, won through long and bitter struggle over the past 185 years." The recent restriction imposed by the courts on picketing the Wapping printworks and other Murdoch plants again underlines the class nature of the courts and laws.

The struggle for the right to vote was a similar story. It was only out of the fear of the spread of revolution from Europe, the mass demonstrations and riots at home, that prompted the ruling class to introduce a partial extension of the vote in 1832—to a small sector of the middle class. The Chartist Movement—which embodied the first independent workers' party ever—was formed to bring about democratic rights—particularly the right to vote. The ruling class met Chartism with repression, but as the movement subsided they felt compelled to concede, in a greatly diluted form, many of the Chartists demands. Reforms were the result of a mass movement which, at its height, took on a revolutionary complexion.

The urban male working class had to wait until 1867 when Disraeli pushed through the Second Reform Act in the aftermath of the defeat of the Southern States in the American Civil War. In 1918, under the impact of the Russian Revolution, and the revolutionary wave sweeping Europe, the British bourgeois were forced to widen the franchise and allow women to vote for the first time. It was reform from above to prevent revolution from below. Only in 1928 was the state forced to allow women to vote at the age of 21. Youth between 18 and 21 were denied the vote until 1969.

Nevertheless, even today, complete parliamentary democracy has not been achieved. There still remains the undemocratic feudal leftovers of the unelected House of Lords and hereditary monarchy. The demands of *Militant* for their abolition—the former is official Labour Party policy since 1978—have been met with wild hysteria from the bourgeois press and the right wing in the Labour Party.

The House of Lords, a bastion of reactionaries, has been consistently used to block and delay progressive legislation. Although abolished by Cromwell in 1649 during the English bourgeois revolution, it was restored and used as an undemocratic device by the new capitalist class. Its powers are used to maintain the status quo or defend the interests of the British bourgeois.

The English bourgeois revolution also put an end to the monarchy with the execution of Charles I. The restoration in 1660, whilst maintaining the subordination of Crown to Parliament, nevertheless established a further weapon that could be used against any threat to the new order. It was a reserve weapon: only in the last resort would the "neutrality" of the monarchy be discarded in order to prevent socialist change.

Role of the Monarchy

The monarchy can and will be used in Britain against a future left Labour government as it was in Australia in November 1975. The then Governor-General of Australia, Sir John Kerr, still appointed by the Queen, used the Crown's prerogative to bring down the Labour government of Gough Whitlam. Due to the obstruction of the Liberal and National parties, Whitlam went to see Kerr to get "Royal Assent" for half-senate elections to bolster his parliamentary position. Kerr, the Queen's representative, not only refused but sacked him and placed the Liberal leader, Fraser, as Prime Minister in his place! All this without an election, or any democratic procedure. In the words of a Professor Connell, "if there remained any lingering doubt about the class nature of Australian politics, the events of 1975 must have resolved it. There is hardly a clearer case in the recent history of the 'Western democracies' of the way a threatened ruling class is able to mobilise fragments of state power, business connections, financial resources and legitimacy given to them by a dominant culture, in a campaign to remove an offending government."

How much more would this be the case here if the bourgeois were faced with a left Labour government? Even Norman Crowther-Hunt writing in the *Guardian* warned that "Labour governments would find it virtually impossible to abolish the Lords without their own consent; this is because Her Majesty the Queen would almost certainly spring to their defence."

Despite the "royalist" loyalty of Labour's right, the early pioneers of

our movement realised the danger "The throne represents the power of 'caste' rule," said Keir Hardie. Even the then left-reformist Stafford Cripps in the early 1930s stated: "when the Labour Party comes to power they must act rapidly and it will be necessary to deal with the House of Lords and the influence of the City of London. There is no doubt that we shall have to overcome opposition from Buckingham Palace and other places as well." (*Stafford Cripps* by E Estorish, p125)

The right wing of the labour movement, backed by the capitalist media, have attempted continually to blacken, distort and slander the ideas of *Militant*. Their constant refrain is that Marxism is "totalitarian", "undemocratic" and "antiparliamentarian". Such a position was put at length by Ian Aitken and Anthony Wright in the *Guardian* (28 April 1986), who came out clearly for a political witch-hunt within the Labour Party. For them it was simple, all those who hold Marxist views are beyond the political pale and should be expelled (along with Clause IV) from the 'moderate' Labour Party.

However, these articles were used by the leading "left" Labour Coordinating Committee supporter, Geoff Hodgson, to distort further *Militant's* ideas. For him, *Militant* supporters are socialists "of a kind" who "uphold a twisted version of Clause Four." (*Guardian*, 30 April 1986)

Militant, he says correctly, are followers of Lenin and Trotsky. However, the latter "oppose the principle of the rule of law, and propose the breaking up of parliament. They advocate class rule based simply on force, and unrestricted by laws. Parliament is to be replaced by 'Soviets.'" This justifies his view that these ideas "place orthodox Trotskyists and Leninists beyond the boundaries of any democratic party."

To begin with, it is interesting that Hodgson fails to mention Marx or Engels. It has become fashionable in some trendy "left" circles to contrast the "acceptable" Marx and Engels to the "unacceptable" Lenin and Trotsky. It is a pale reflection of the same school of opportunists during the First World War who opposed Marx and Engels to Lenin. In point of fact the ideas of Marxism have a rich history to which Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky have made enormous contributions based on the experiences of their times. The foundations and principles were established by Marx and Engels, but in the epoch of the world war and the October revolution, Lenin developed further and extended those

principles. In the epoch of fascism and Stalinism, it was Trotsky who made the outstanding contribution to Marxist thought. In the post-war period the supporters of *Militant* have again added to and deepened the fundamental ideas of Marxism.

Through interpretation and isolated snippets, Hodgson puts words into the mouths of Lenin and Trotsky. Even if these statements were correct—which they are not—Marxists do not simply repeat word for word like some gospel what Lenin or Trotsky said on every occasion without reference to the circumstances or to the more general elaboration of their ideas. Marxism is no dogma, but above all a method of understanding, a guide to action.

LCC distort Marxist ideas

Hodgson states that Marxists are opposed to the "principles of the rule of law." But Hodgson is talking in the realm of moral abstractions. For Marxists truth is always concrete. The highest objective for the proletariat is the transformation of society. All methods are *good* which raise the class consciousness of the workers, their cohesion and trust in their own forces to carry through their historic mission. The actions and methods that are *bad* are those which lower the consciousness and spirit of the workers and increase their subservience to capitalist society.

Again, truth is concrete. Are Marxists therefore opposed to all laws? Obviously not. We are in favour of laws that benefit working people: laws against child labour, restricting the hours of work, health and safety, etc. Hodgson's assertion is subterfuge.

Nevertheless we oppose those class laws that undermine the position of working people. The whole history of the labour movement has been a struggle against such laws imposed by big business. As was demonstrated earlier, all the democratic rights we have today were conquered in struggle against the laws of capitalist society.

The bourgeoisie's interpretation of the "rule of law" is what is in their class interests at a particular time and place. They bend, twist or defy laws to their liking. For the working class, it is not what concerns them in the abstract, but what furthers their interests as a class, develops their strength, cohesion and consciousness.

The idea put forward by Hodgson that we want to 'smash parliamentary democracy' is completely untrue. Unlike the sectarian grouplets on the fringe of the labour movement, we have stressed that a socialist Britain



Chilean dictator Pinochet. The *Times* justified the overthrow of the Allende government: "a reasonable military man could in good faith have thought it his constitutional duty to intervene."

can be accomplished through parliament, backed by the mobilised power of the labour movement outside. This will, however, only be accomplished if the Labour Party and trade unions are won to a clear Marxist programme, and their power used to effect a rapid and complete socialist transformation of society.

Even an official Labour Party discussion paper (No 3) posed the question of parliament a few years ago:

"The big question is: can socialism be achieved through Parliament? Will those reactionary forces who oppose a truly socialist society allow it to happen? No-one can give an answer to that question. There have been plenty of examples where democratically elected, progressive socialist governments have been overthrown by force. The most recent was in Chile, once described as the Britain of Latin America. Hitler destroyed democracy in Germany. Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain, the colonels in Greece, the military in Turkey... So democracy could be destroyed here. That possibility has to be recognised. Labour, however, will never do anything to endanger our democracy. It is opposed to the use of force to remove opposing political forces. The only time it would ever resort to force would be in the defence of democracy... The Labour Party is not a pacifist party. It believes it is essential to fight to preserve our democratic way of life. There are occasions when anti-democratic forces have to be dealt with in a democratic society. But it is essential to make sure that in the process all the basic democratic rights of the people are preserved and further developed."

Marxists would not disagree with the great majority of this statement.

However, to the question of whether reactionary forces will oppose the socialist transformation there is no doubt. The British bourgeois will use every means—particularly extra-parliamentary—to sabotage such an attempt.

Clement Attlee, in justifying the labour movement using extra-parliamentary action in his book *Labour in Perspective*, points out that there are those who "believe, as soon as it is found that democracy is no longer prepared to be the hand maid of Capitalism, the supporters of the present system will reject it. They think that any attempt to deal with fundamentals will be met by forcible resistance... It is idle to deny that there is this possibility." (Pgs 113-114)

We would say that is more than a possibility. The whole of history points in that direction.

A military coup?

In 1912 when a Liberal government (under enormous pressure) attempted to introduce a Home Rule Bill for Ireland against the wishes of the ruling class, it was met with massive resistance from the bourgeois, the Tory Party and the tops of the state apparatus. When its class interests are at stake, the bourgeois is prepared to cast aside democracy. The Tory Party supported the armed revolt of Sir Edward Carson and 20,000 Protestants in the North against the British government. In 1914 the Tory leader, Bonar Law, went so far as to support the mutiny of the British officer corp at Curragh, which effectively ended the Irish Home Rule Bill.

Much more recently in 1977, the Tory theoretician Sir Ian Gilmour, in his book *Inside Right* justified the en-

ding of democracy. This is no isolated crank, but a leading Tory strategist who today is regarded as a 'wet'.

"Conservatives do not worship democracy. For them majority rule is a device...majorities do not always see where their best interests lie and then act upon their understanding. For Conservatives, therefore, democracy is a means to an end not an end in itself. In Dr Hayek's words, democracy 'is not an ultimate or absolute value and must be judged by what it will achieve.' And if it is leading to an end that is undesirable or is inconsistent with itself, then there is a theoretical case for ending it.

'Numbers in a state,' said Burke, 'are always of consideration, but they are not the whole consideration.' In practice, no alternative to majority rule exists, though it has to be used in conjunction with other devices. And in the Conservative Party unlike the Labour Party there is no extreme wing which hankers after the death of parliamentary democracy and the imposition of dictatorship. If our free institutions are overthrown or totally perverted, the Left not the Right will be responsible. There is no danger of a right wing coup. Only if the constitution had already been destroyed by the Left, might the Right react and the Left find itself overthrown in its turn by a counter-coup from the Right."

Contained here is the justification for ending the rights to organise, vote, strike, free speech, etc! As an aside he says there is no alternative to parliamentary democracy—at the moment. But the strategists of capital and the tops of the armed forces in Britain have discussed openly over the last 15 years the possibility of a military coup. Many examples have been given in the *Militant* pamphlet "The State" of conspiracies in 1968, 1974 and 1979. General Kitson—reflecting the views of the officer caste—has talked of the necessity for the military to "take over against terrorist plots and conspiracies" that could occur in Britain.

Again the tops of the police are discussing their role. The Chief of Police of Greater Manchester, Anderson, stated openly on 16 October 1976:

"I think that from the police point of view that my task in the future...that basic crimes as such— theft, burglary, even violent crimes— will not be a predominant feature. What will be the matter of greatest concern to me will be the covert and ultimately overt attempt to overthrow democracy, or subvert the authority of the state, and in fact, involve themselves in acts of sedition designed to destroy our parliamentary

system and the democratic government in this country."

In 1982 he spoke of the left in the following terms:

"A quiet revolution is taking place around us and the prize is political power to be wielded against the most cherished elements of the establishment, including the monarchy. It is as much the duty of the police to guard against this as it is to guard against crime. I sense and see in our midst an enemy more dangerous, insidious, and ruthless, than any faced since the Second World War."

The last part of the quote from Gilmour is nothing more—leaving aside the window dressing—than justification for a military coup in Britain. The actions of Allende in Chile in 1973 in ratifying nationalisations following occupations by the workers, were interpreted as a violation of the Constitution by the Chilean bourgeois. The Christian Democrats—Chile's equivalent to the Tory Party—called for the military to overthrow the democratically elected Allende government. The British bourgeois, through *The Times* (15/9/73) rushed to give its support to the military coup: "The circumstances were such that a reasonable military man could in good faith have thought it his constitutional duty to intervene." These people would clearly act in giving such support to a British Pinochet where their property interests were at stake.

An Enabling Bill

It is not from the left or the labour movement that the threat of civil war will come—but from the bourgeois and its political and military representatives. The Labour Party education sheet states: "The first few months of a Labour Government can be decisive. It is the time when essential legislation can be enacted." We would say the first few days are decisive. The document points to the obstructions that will be placed in the way of the government by the House of Lords, but then talks of "reform of the machinery.. especially of the Civil Service", "lessening" the power of the Treasury. Although this should be supported, it fails to grasp the central issue, and falls into, in the words of Marx, "parliamentary cretinism."

If a Labour government was to break with capitalism and take over the 200 monopolies, banks and insurance companies under democratic workers control and management, it would have to take immediate emergency measures.

Enabling legislation would have to rapidly carried through, giving the

government decisive powers to implement the necessary measures. This would be vital to prevent the representatives of big business from exploiting the archaic procedures of parliament to delay and block Labour's policies while they attempted to use their economic power, control of the press, etc, to undermine the government. At the same time, such bold measures by a Labour government could only be successful if backed up by the mobilisation of the labour movement and wider sections of the people outside parliament.

This is nothing new. The right wing have abandoned any idea of socialist transformation. They remain the key defenders of bourgeois society in the present epoch. The trendy 'lefts' have absolutely no idea or perspective of how socialism can be brought about. Their dilemma would be best summed up by the arch-Fabian, Sidney Webb: How could the transition to a socialist state be accomplished? 'All I know is that I don't know how to do it.'

However, under the colossal experience of the 1931 debacle large layers in the labour movement abandoned the ideas of gradualism. Under pressure of workers radicalised by the crisis, some of the Labour leaders, at least in words, gave expression to the bankruptcy of reformism. None other than Stafford Cripps, later right-wing Chancellor of the Exchequer in Atlee's post-war government, said "reformism had to be abandoned." In 1934 Tawney dismissed gradualism with the phrase: "onions can be eaten leaf by leaf, but you cannot skin a live tiger claw by claw." These leaders momentarily admitted the demise of reformism, but without drawing the necessary conclusions. It is ironic that today Tawney is frequently quoted in support of the policies advocated by Neil Kinnock! Many others, including Attlee called for a new Labour government to introduce emergency or enabling legislation to dispense with parliamentary etiquette. Ironically the Heath government in February 1971 used enabling legislation to nationalise the bankrupt Rolls Royce in less than 24 hours.

The "left" Hodgson says Lenin and Trotsky advocated "force" as opposed to winning a majority for their ideas. This is an echo of the false arguments of the bourgeois and their right-wing allies about Marxists favouring "violent revolution." The truth is Marxists stand for a peaceful transformation of society. We no more want violence than we want to catch the plague.

Less than ten days before his assassination by a Stalinist agent,

Trotsky made his position absolutely clear to his American supporters:

"In this case, as in any others, we should speak the truth as it is; namely, the best, the most economical and favorable method for the masses would be to achieve the transformation of this society by democratic means. The democracy is also necessary for the organization and education of the masses. That is why we are always ready to defend the democratic rights of the people by our own means. However, we know on the basis of tremendous historical experience that the Sixty Families will never permit the democratic realization of socialist principles. At a given moment the Sixty Families will inevitably overthrow, or try to overthrow, the democratic institutions and replace them by a reactionary dictatorship. This is what happened in Italy, in Germany, and in the last days in France—not to mention the lesser countries. We say in advance that we are ready to reject such an attempt with arms in hands, and crush the fascist dictatorship by a proletarian dictatorship."

The Russian Revolution

The only amendment we need to make to Trotsky's statement, because the events of the last forty years have indelibly stained the term, is to change "proletarian dictatorship" to "proletarian democracy." It was Marx who first raised the question of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" to characterise the new workers' state based upon the involvement and consent of the majority—as opposed to the "dictatorship of capital." However, given the monstrous totalitarian dictatorships that have arisen in Germany, Italy, Spain and also the Stalinist regimes, the connotations of totalitarian repression associated with the word "dictatorship" have blotted out the meaning intended by Marx: "predominant rule." Today the correct term to capture the true meaning is "workers democracy."

Despite Hodgson's ignorant accusations, the aim of the Bolsheviks in 1917 was to secure peaceful change in society. As late as 9 October 1917, Lenin was offering "to help to do everything possible to secure the last chance for a peaceful development of the revolution." And later in the article he says: "Having seized power, the Soviets could still at present—and this is probably their last chance—secure a peaceful development of the revolution, peaceful elections of the deputies by the people, a peaceful struggle of parties inside the Soviets, a testing of

the programmes of various parties in practice, a peaceful passing of power from one party to another." (My emphasis). So much for the Bolsheviks violent blood-thirsty means!

In the words of Trotsky, the co-leader of the revolution "All the efforts of the party from April to July had been directed towards making possible a peaceful development of the revolution through the Soviets. 'Patiently explain'—that had been the key to the Bolsheviks' policy." (*History of the Russian Revolution* p816).

The October revolution itself was almost bloodless due to its mass support. The small number of fatalities were due to the resistance of the landlords and capitalists in attempting to prevent the election—through the Congress of the Soviets—of a Bolshevik government. It was the 21 armies of intervention—sent to crush the revolution in blood by the imperialists—that led to the civil war and bloodshed.

The Revolution represented the greatest event in history. It ushered in the most democratic form of government with democratic management and control of society and a state based upon workers and peasant councils. Unfortunately, the isolation of the workers' state, together with the economic backwardness of Russia, led to its degeneration and the emergence of a totalitarian bureaucracy under the figurehead of Stalin.

In Britain, the social and economic conditions are entirely different. The balance of class forces is overwhelmingly in favour of the working class. The middle layers of society have been drawn behind the labour movement with the increased unionisation of white collar workers. Sixty years ago these layers, civil servants, teachers and students, scabbed on the General Strike. Today they have experienced a growing radicalisation. This has recently been graphically illustrated by the election of John Macreadie as General Secretary of the CPSA.

The British working class—the oldest in the world—has deep rooted democratic traditions and a high cultural level. Once it becomes conscious of its strength as a class it will be invincible in the struggle to transform society on socialist lines. Once it rises to its feet no power on earth will stop it.

The post war boom has come to an end. We have now entered the epoch of the death agony of capitalism. The bourgeois will attempt to take back the gains of the past. Ultimately, the existence of all democratic rights is at stake. Big business sees the rights won by workers and the strength of the

labour movement as an obstacle to unloading the full burden of the crisis on to the backs of the workers. Under Thatcher the capitalists have mounted a massive onslaught on the post-war gains of the movement. If the next Labour government fails to carry out socialist measures big business, through even more reactionary representatives than Thatcher, will attempt to take the assault even further. If a future left Labour government, under massive pressure from the working class, takes measures which threaten the power and wealth of the ruling class but fails to carry through a socialist transformation of society, then the capitalists would use their levers of economic power with the support of the tops of the police, army and civil service, supplemented by the mobilisation of reactionary extra-parliamentary forces, to try to smash the power of the organised workers. At a certain stage in the future, they will seek a decisive showdown with the working class through a Royalist-bonapartist coup on the lines of Chile. Such perspectives are being discussed at the present juncture by the military and police chiefs, although the bourgeois will hesitate many times before they launch such drastic measures.

Workers' democracy

Such a bloody scenario can only be avoided if the labour movement is transformed and re-armed with a Marxist leadership with a clear programme for the socialist change of society. A socialist Britain would dramatically extend the democratic rights of every worker from the political to the economic field. Democracy is not a side issue for Marxists, but a necessary vital component in the movement towards socialism and the end of exploitation of mankind. No longer would art, science, culture and the keys of government be confined to a privileged minority. A democratic workers' state in Britain, using the advances of modern science, would liquidate poverty, squalor and suffering. It would give time, by dramatically reducing the working week, to working people to enable them to participate fully in the democratic running of industry, the state and society in general. Such a democratic regime would become a beacon to workers in the crisis ridden capitalist West and the totalitarian regimes of the East. It would become the beginning of the transformation on socialist lines of the entire globe. Real democracy, rule by the majority, would then become a reality.

Labour in power—lessons of the second and third Labour governments

1987 IS almost certainly to be the year of the general election. And the most likely result is the return of a Labour government, at least as a minority and more probably with an outright majority in Parliament.

Almost from the outset this will be a government of crisis. Faced with the economic catastrophe threatening British capitalism it will come under remorseless pressure from the ruling class not only to abandon any programme of reforms but to further attack the living standards and conditions of the working class. But with their aspirations and hopes of a better future aroused by the defeat of Thatcher, a retreat by the Labour government under pressure from the capitalists would not go unanswered by the ranks of the labour and trade union movement. It would provoke a stormy reaction in which the ideas of Marxism will become a

major pole of attraction for workers seeking a way forward.

To forearm our readers for the events ahead the *Militant International Review* is re-printing an article by Ted Grant first published in the October 1947 edition of the Marxist journal, *Workers International News*. Written to warn against the mechanical idea that events under the 1945–50 Labour government, operating as it was at the outset of the post-war boom, would take the same turbulent course as those under the crisis government of 1929–31, Ted Grant's analysis provides a remarkably fresh and powerful insight into the processes that will unfold under a new Labour government.

This is the first in a number of articles the *Militant International Review* will carry in the months before the election under the theme, **LABOUR IN POWER**.

IT IS now more than two years since the Labour Party came to power. Developments inside the Labour Party and movement, and the mood and attitude of the working class to the government in the present period can be better understood by a comparison between the second and third Labour governments and the economic and political conditions in which they functioned, especially in the first two years. Despite cuts announced as a result of the dollar crisis, these cannot be expected to have immediate results in a fundamental transformation of the attitude of the working class, following the reforms granted by the government in its first period of functioning, in a period of "full employment" and shortage of labour.

Economic background in 1929

The second Labour government functioned in a period of slump and mass unemployment, of offensive on the part of the employers against the standards of the working class, which rapidly led to a crystallisation within the Labour Party in the development of a left wing. The third Labour government came to power at a time of economic revival and full employment and the employers have difficulty in withstanding the offensive of the working class. This has necessarily delayed the inevitable differentiation within the Labour Party and the crystallisation of the left wing.

The whole life and activity of the working class and their attitude towards the second Labour government was coloured by the economic background of mass unemployment and world slump. Precisely because of this, the Labour Party came to power

with tremendous enthusiasm from basic sections of the workers, who had high hopes that Labour would introduce extensive reforms, above all, abolish unemployment and alleviate the lot of the unemployed.

Unemployment was the main issue on which the Labour government succeeded in rallying basic sections of the working class. In the election manifesto, *Labour and the Nation*, the Labour leaders boasted: "**We can conquer unemployment**". In their election propaganda, the Labour leaders promised, apart from the provision of work, that the unemployed be treated in the traditional manner demanded by the labour movement: "Our palliative measures for dealing with unemployment are simple. **We claim full and complete maintenance for those who cannot find work.**" (Declaration by George Lansbury in election propaganda in 1929).

For the relief of unemployment, the Lord Privy Seal, JH Thomas, announced that £6.5m would be available for railway development, and £43m on road development and bridges over five or six years! This was greeted with ironical approval by the Tories, who jeered and baited the Labour leaders for their timidity.

Churchill greeted with malicious enjoyment the King's speech at the opening session of the Labour parliament, as he gave Tory approval to the proposed measures, but deplored them as mere palliatives: "I am glad to see old parliamentarians whom I have known for a quarter of a century, who have played so distinguished a part in our proceedings, having at last their turn and their share in the responsibilities of government, and testing what are called by those who have not experienced them 'the sweets of office'. I also

look forward to having the Financial Secretary to the Treasury deliver to us a clear exposition of the gold standard and the solid advantages which it will confer upon the country; and generally to defend orthodox views upon financial matters. No doubt the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will be able to do this when his education by the treasury officials, the Bank of England, and the high financial authorities of the City of London has been completed. . . ."

Ruling class confident

"The creation of the Socialist Party has been an astonishing thing. I have seen it grow in the course of 30 years from a handful to the largest party in the House of Commons. . . . They have ranged great masses of the British people under false and foreign conceived standards. . . . They have built it up (power) by fomenting class hatred and organising industrial strife. They have dabbled in subversive agitation. They have pandered to rapacious appetites which they know they can never satisfy. It is now their fate, it is indeed their punishment, to have to disappoint those who have believed in them and have believed what they have said, and to discard or explain away the doctrines by which they have risen to great power. . . . **As long as His Majesty's ministers are content to administer and by administering, to fortify the capitalist system of civilisation on which we have grown great, and on which the United States is growing greater, there is no reason why they should not enjoy, although they are a substantial minority in the country, a lengthy tenure of office.**"

He went on to explain that the moment that the Labour government



The election of the Labour government in 1945 aroused the hopes and expectations of the whole working class.

adopted 'socialist' measures (ie nationalisation measures), they would be swept immediately from office by their opponents.

But the Labour leaders did not even attempt to introduce such legislation, using the excuse of their minority position in parliament. Instead of introducing a bill on nationalisation, being defeated and then going to the country on the issue, the Labour leaders were only too glad to use the excuse to do nothing.

As a relief for unemployment, the government announced it would assist the rationalisation of the iron and steel trades, of cotton, the mines and the railways. Unemployment in iron, steel, transport and cotton were the sore spots.

At the same time, Thomas announced a brutal programme of emigration to the Dominions and the Empire, and the migration from the areas of the heaviest unemployment to the other areas by direction from the Labour Exchanges. "Durham, Northumberland, Lanark and places like South Wales have got this great mass of unemployed and, as far as one can see, there is no hope of dealing with these people unless we get them out of those districts."

Commenting on Thomas' speech, Lloyd George said: "It seemed to meet the whole-hearted approval of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer; (Churchill) at any rate, he could not conceal the satisfaction it gave him, and he assured the Lord Privy Seal that on the

whole the schemes which had been sketched out would receive the support of the Conservative Party. I assume that the outline given will give satisfaction to Hon Members opposite. I am not quite sure that the unemployed will be equally pleased."

On the proposals for mining rationalisation and marketing, and concessions to the miners on hours, Lloyd George jeered:

"I do not say they are betraying the miners, because they cannot carry out nationalisation. They are going to carry what they can, and I think it right, but I am bound to point out that they are proposing to do now what they rejected in 1919."

World slump deepens

During the course of the discussion, one of the Tory spokesmen dealing with the helplessness of the government in face of the situation, said: "In this atmosphere, we all practically avow that unemployment depends upon forces that this House cannot control." (Lord H Cecil, 3 July 1929, Hansard Col 162).

In commenting on Labour's programme, the Tories openly proclaimed that the task of the Labour government was to preserve capitalism intact. Robert Boothby in a speech reflecting the tone of the Tories, said:

"It may be one of fate's little ironies that the principal task confronting the present so-called socialist administration should be to make Great Britain

safe for the capitalist, although we all know that it has been one of the most cherished ambitions of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. All I would say is that I really think they can afford to be a little bold, to tackle the question a little more vigorously, without doing any serious damage to the economic structure which they have abused for the last 30 years and which, they are now so pathetically anxious to preserve intact." (4 July, 1929).

Despite the Labour victory at the polls, the Tories and the Liberals still had tremendous confidence in their class and their ability to handle the working class, especially their leaders.

The programme of the Labour government of 1929 was on orthodox capitalist lines. It was one, moreover, which could not be dressed up in palatable form as far as the most conscious elements in the working class were concerned.

In addition, the Labour government came to power at a time of economic world crisis, which steadily deepened during their term of office.

In 1929, the production of coal reached 257.9m tons; steel 9.6m tons; railway freights handled amounted to 57.6m tons and the number of passengers on the railways was about 869,000. In the succeeding years, production dropped steeply, till in 1931 coal mined was 219.5m tons; railway freights handled 47.5m tons; and railway passengers carried numbered 848,000. Meanwhile, Britain's trade

with foreign nations dropped catastrophically.

Just before the Labour government took office, the number of unemployed was 1,165,000 in May 1929. This was 9.7 per cent of the insured workers. By February 1930, this had increased to 1,582,000, over 13 per cent of the insured workers. And if all those who were deprived of benefit, or in receipt of assistance were added, the total would have been **two million** youths and adults. In the basic trades, there were 13.2 per cent unemployed in the mines, 22.7 per cent in steel smelting, 24.6 per cent in shipbuilding, 24.2 per cent in cotton, 21.1 per cent in woollen and worsted, and 18.3 per cent in the building industry.

Under the conditions of world slump and crisis, the bourgeoisie wished to utilise mass unemployment in order to drive down the standards of living of the working class. Throughout the period of the Labour government, the emphasis was on the intensification of labour and the cutting down of wages. The miners, the railwaymen, the cotton and woollen workers and others, suffered cuts. Hand in hand with the rising number of unemployed, went the intensified attacks of the employers. And the Labour government went hand in hand with the employers in the attacks on the unemployed and the employed workers.

The political reflection within the Labour Party

Then, as today, the Labour government waged a similar campaign for "increased production", but at **reduced** rates of pay and at a time when it had become clear to the advanced workers that the capitalist system had resulted in the crisis of "**over-production**". The government was demanding sacrifices from the workers. In the fake conferences of the trade union officials and the employers called by the Labour government, "sacrifices" was the main theme of the government spokesmen. Thomas announced to the House of Commons on 4 April 1930, in regard to these meetings: "The House will be pleased to know that I have found no difficulty there, but that on the contrary, there was a frank recognition on both sides that changes and sacrifices would have to be made in order to pull the country through."

This campaign was being waged at a time when the 90,000 capitalist super-tax payers were deriving as revenue from the production of the workers, the staggering sum of £550m a year.

Right from the beginning of the second Labour government, pressure

began to be exerted by the left-wingers under the influence of the crisis and in response to the mood of the membership in the country. Maxton, speaking for the "Clyde Bloc", immediately began to reflect the disillusionment of the advanced elements within the labour movement.

"Frankly I would be dishonest to my right hon friends if I did not express very plainly my complete dissatisfaction with the King's speech, and with the speech of the right hon gentleman, the Lord Privy Seal, in detailing one particular part of the King's Speech . . .

"I hope the legislation arising out of the King's Speech will not be as much whittled down, compared with the King's Speech, as the King's Speech was whittled down from '*Labour and the Nation*', or there will not be very much left for us . . .

"About one week before the last parliament dissolved, the right hon gentleman who is now the Home Secretary described the administration of the Employment Exchanges in their dealings with unemployed men as 'administrative persecution', I think. As far as I know, the method of administering Employment exchanges today is exactly the same as it was when the statement was made. Now that ought to stop. It is an administrative matter . . . There are now 2,000 people packed into our great Poor House in Glasgow—now—with a Labour government in office; told that they must either go into the Poor House, in which case their wives and children will be maintained, or they will be taken up for cruelty to children and put into gaol . . ."

The ILP, traditionally the organisation of the most advanced of the Labour workers, **reflected immediately the growing ferment within the ranks of the working class.**

Right from the start of the Labour government, they raised a running fire of criticism, particularly on the issue of unemployment. The world situation was such as to encourage the growth of revolutionary aspirations and ideas among the working class. The complete incapacity of reformism to fulfil its promises of moving towards a socialist system by gradual measures through parliament, was demonstrated in action to the advanced workers. Far from granting **even mild reforms**, the Labour leaders were compelled to launch attacks upon the standards of the workers. Naturally, this provoked disillusion, and under the pressure of these events, the ILP began to swing left and to express the groping movement of the advanced workers in the direction of communism.

Nevertheless, among the mass of the

workers, particularly the unorganised and backward sections, the first result of the growing unemployment, of the wage cuts, was to compare the result of five years of Tory government with their deteriorated position under the Labour government. As a consequence, we had the paradox that while the advanced workers were swinging left, the backward elements within the working class and middle class were swinging right towards the capitalist parties. Even in Labour strongholds, the vote of the Labour Party was falling, while that of the Tories and Liberals actually increased over their 1929 figures.

The ultra-left tactics of the Stalinists tended to alienate the workers from the Communist Party, except among the ranks of the most desperate sections, above all the unemployed where they gained a considerable basis.

In the municipal elections a like situation was reached. The Labour vote dropped, a section abstained, and bigger sections went over to the capitalist parties.

The 1931 crisis

While this peculiar and temporary process was taking place within the broad masses, the trade union and Labour workers were disheartened and embittered, even though remaining loyal to the Labour government as a minority government, the eyes of the more advanced strata within the Labour Party were opened. The left wing members grew bitter, their criticism of the Labour leaders more extreme; and this development among the rank and file pushed the ILP further to the left. Under the pressure of events, the ILP leadership swung also over to the left.

The ILP as an organised opposition led the struggle in the labour movement. However, despite the broad support and tradition, the number the ILP succeeded in attracting was never at any time large in proportion to the numbers of the organised workers generally. The mass of the Labour workers belonged to the Labour Party passively as individual members, or through their affiliation in the unions. The dues-paying membership of the ILP in 1909 was 28,000; in 1914 it fell to 20,000 and in 1920 in the first post-war wave, it reached its highest point at 37,000. At the time of disaffiliation from the Labour Party, the ILP had under 12,000 dues-paying members.

During the 1931 crisis, the bourgeoisie began a furious offensive against the Labour government. They demanded economy cuts in the standards of the state employees and a fur-

ther reduction in the low standards of the unemployed. The Labour Party tops conspired with the capitalist class in order to prepare the way for a coalition government.

But the General Council of the TUC, expressing the pressure of the organised workers, came out against economy cuts and the ILP, which nominally had a great section of the Labour MPs within its ranks, conducted a campaign against the acceptance of the recommendations of the Royal Commission which had been set up by the Labour government to review the situation.

The TUC leaders demanded that the Labour leaders should resign rather than accept the economy cuts and make themselves responsible for an attack on the standards of the unemployed. Thus, the opposition of the masses to the reactionary measures of the Labour government were reflected by the trade unions, which outwardly played the part of a semi-opposition to 'their' government, and tried to act as a safety valve to the opposition of the masses.

As a result of the feeble policy of the Labour government, and its vicious role in assisting the employers in attacking the standards of the workers; and with the growth of the crisis and the enormous rise in unemployment to the greatest heights experienced in history; the masses became disillusioned.

The lack of a mass revolutionary alternative, the traditions of Britain and the peculiar electoral system led the bourgeoisie, skilfully utilising the desertion of the top upper crust of the Labour Party, to panic the masses and crushingly defeat the Labour Party in the general election of 1931.

The ILP supported the Labour Party at the general election. But these events could not but lead to tremendous repercussions within its ranks. Despite the centrist vacillations of the leadership, the rank and file became more and more imbued with a hostility towards reformism, and drove the leadership forward. In 1932, after the fall of the Labour government, the ILP conference decided by 241 votes to 142, to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. Because of its failure to transform itself into a Marxist party, the ILP was doomed to vegetate during the political changes in the years that followed.

Thus, the second Labour government in its two and a half years of office functioned continually in the shadow of crisis, wage cuts, and unemployment. In this background, the measures adopted by the Labour government characterised by orthodox capitalist timidity, had no power of attraction for the masses, especially the advanced strata. As a consequence,

there developed a tremendous left ferment within the ranks of the Labour Party, which reflected itself in the move of the ILP in a revolutionary direction, resulting in the transformation of the ILP from a left reformist into a centrist current.

In such an atmosphere, the clashes between the reformist leadership and the rank and file led to a differentiation within the reformist organisations. A leftward development of the working class always finds its reflection in a period such as this, in the formation of centrist and left reformist currents and tendencies within the mass labour movement.

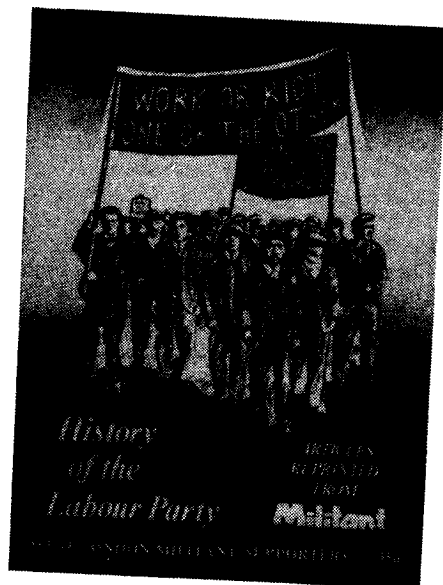
The background of the third Labour government both economically and politically, is strikingly different to that of the previous Labour government. As a result, there has been a much slower tempo of developments.

From unchallenged supremacy for four or five decades, British imperialism has dropped to the level of a second-rate power. Her industrial supremacy has been largely undermined through technical backwardness in the basic industries of the country. The two world wars, especially the last, have enfeebled her hold on the Empire and former satellites in the sterling bloc, which Britain had established after 1931 in an endeavour to shelter from the competition of, above all, American imperialism.

Two years of the third Labour government

A large part of the accumulated wealth which Britain piled up in the past centuries has been dissipated and lost during the war. Britain's invisible exports have as a result, declined drastically. The unfavourable balance of trade payments still remains, and must remain. A great part of the investment and income which the City of London made on loans, commissions and insurance, has fallen into the hands of New York. Thus, the perspective of British imperialism is bleak indeed, faced as it is with the imperative need to re-equip its basic industries by huge capital expenditure, and simultaneously increase its exports above pre-war levels.

In contrast with the earlier confidence in their mission and their hold over the Empire, the British bourgeoisie of 1945 had lost complete confidence in themselves in face of the collapse of their world position. They were paralysed and saw no perspective for their class. The decay of the capitalist system and the obvious necessity for drastic measures, emboldened the petty bourgeois leadership of the Labour



For further reading see *A History of the Labour Party*, articles reprinted from *Militant*, price 35p, post free, from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB.

Party. This, coupled with the radicalisation of the masses, imbued the Labour leaders with greater confidence. They had a 'plan': the rationalisation and modernisation of the basic industries which the individual capitalists and trusts had brought to the brink of utter ruin. They saw as the cure for the ailing basic industries of British imperialism, nationalisation under the control of the capitalist state. They thought their programme of state capitalism, which they put forward as socialism, could reorganise British capitalism and save it from collapse.

The nationalisation measures of the Labour government, unprecedented under capitalism before the outbreak of the last war (though paralleled by similar developments on the continent of Europe), provoked only the mildest opposition from the bourgeoisie. To have nationalised even the mining industry in 1929 would have provoked a movement among the bourgeoisie which would have not stopped short of violent reprisals and conspiracy. The opposition would have gathered around the House of Lords and the monarchy, which remain reserve weapons in the hands of the ruling class, and which they would have used to block such a measure—even if the Labour leaders had had the overwhelming majority in the House of Commons. But today, apart from minor changes which they introduced to demonstrate the powers they possess, the Lords have allowed these measures of nationalisation to go through without attempting to operate their rights of veto, and the King has signed the nationalisation bills. Only in the case of steel was any real opposition offered by the capitalists, before which

the Labour leaders retreated somewhat—although they have announced that steel nationalisation will be proceeded with.

Far from challenging these nationalisation measures, which in the eyes of the workers are the beginnings of the transition to socialism, the most representative Tories have announced that they will not undo the nationalisations that have taken place if they are returned to power in the future. The nationalisations put into operation so far will be beneficial to the capitalist class and as such, the Tories are prepared to accept them.

The shattering defeat which was inflicted on the Tories in the general election has forced them to bide their time. Only now are they beginning to recover from the effects of their defeat. Utilising the discontent of the masses and of the backward strata of the workers, the conservative representatives of British imperialism are beginning to recover their confidence and look towards the future with the perspective of being returned to power.

Economic upswing

The third Labour government came to power in a period of economic upswing in contrast to the experiences of the second Labour government which was elected in the midst of world-wide over-production, crisis, stagnation of production, and mass unemployment. The tremendous destruction caused by the war and the world wide famine in capital and consumer goods created a sellers market. Even America is not able to supply the internal and world markets with the goods which are in demand. The products of British industry find a ready market and have created the conditions for an economic boom. The American loan gave the Labour government the possibility of maintaining the balance of payments and thus the elements of stability in its economy for the first two critical post-war years. Without it, the standard of living of the workers would immediately have dropped back to catastrophic levels. But the loan, while it lasted, cushioned the shock and even afforded the Labour government the possibility of introducing improvements in the standards of living of the working-class. Under the pressure of the workers, the Labour leaders introduced a series of reforms. The workers adopted a sympathetic attitude towards the government and have been prepared to wait and see, rather than launch into a series of great industrial strikes and struggles. All this has led to a different tempo of development from the corresponding period of

the second Labour government.

The overall production in the first two years of the present government has been 10 to 20 per cent higher than pre-war. In fact, overall production has reached record heights. Far from being faced with the problem of mass unemployment, there has been a chronic shortage of labour. Unemployment is well below the margin of the industrial reserve army. The number of unemployed in August 1947 was less than 300,000. Compared to the figures of the past, this is negligible, and has served to strengthen the illusions in the minds of the Labour supporters that the Labour leaders are seriously coping with the unemployment problem.

The economic upswing constitutes a favourable period for the workers to exert pressure on the employers for wage increases and improved conditions. Especially does this hold good for the highly organised workers, who constitute the backbone of the support for the Labour government. In the first two years, the wages of over ten million workers increased on average by nearly £1 per week. At the same time, six million had their hours reduced on average by three hours a week without reduction in pay. Even after the breaking of the dollar crisis 840,000 workers received increased wages totalling £340,000, and 250,000 had their hours reduced on the average by 3½ hours per week.

These gains were somewhat offset by the rise in prices. But they have made a profound impression on the consciousness of the British workers.

The nationalisation measures, the existence of full employment, the reforms and semi-reforms in the social services, have resulted in an entirely different mood to that which existed in 1929-31. In the eyes of the overwhelming majority of the Labour workers, the Labour leaders have attempted to carry out the programme on which they were elected.

The second Labour government, in the midst of a slump, slashed viciously at the standards of the masses all along the line. The existence of the boom, coupled with US aid, gives the present government the possibility of bending under the pressure of the workers. Mass unemployment and the existence of the industrial reserve army acted as a leaden weight on the feet of the British workers during the second Labour government. The present condition of full employment creates favourable conditions to resist attacks. With US aid cushioning the blows at British capitalism, the bourgeoisie can still retreat in the face of a strong offensive on the part of the working class.

Given these conditions the British workers, while willing to struggle on the industrial field, have extended and are prepared to extend considerable credit and political loyalty to the government.

The striking difference between the position in 1929-31 and the present is that in the former case, powerful opposition developed within the Labour Party on home affairs, which assumed terrible urgency in the lives of the workers. In the previous Labour government, foreign policy was based on pacifist demagoguery and was largely endorsed by the 'lefts'. What feeble opposition has developed in the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party today has been on the issue of foreign policy. But the opposition on foreign policy collapsed because of the weakness of British imperialism which resulted in the forced withdrawal from India, partly from Egypt, and now the government declaration regarding its preparedness to withdraw from Palestine. Moreover, an opposition, while it is confined in the main to foreign affairs, cannot hope to attract the support of the broad masses away from the right wing. Thus, the right wing Labour leaders have been able, owing to Britain's weakness, to pose as "liberators" of the colonial peoples with a "socialist" foreign policy as against the blatantly imperialist policy of Churchill and the previous Tory governments, and even the previous Labour government.

Opposition collapses

The policy of the government on home affairs has been largely endorsed by the so-called opposition—a striking contrast to the situation in the Labour Party in the previous government. An instructive episode was the difference in attitude of the late James Maxton of the ILP, who welcomed enthusiastically the programme of the third Labour government and its suggested legislation.

The collapse of the "lefts" at the past two conferences of the Labour Party since the formation of the Labour government, especially the miserable and ignominious defeat at the last one, was not at all accidental but rooted in the objective development of events. In contrast to the previous Labour governments, far from the lefts gaining in support, the present period has been marked even during the dollar crisis, by a strengthening of the right wing leadership of the Labour Party. It reflects the mass consciousness in the past two years. It is a law of development within the mass organisations of the working class, that left reformist or

centrist currents develop on the basis of deep-seated opposition to the right wing leadership on the part of the rank and file. Currents of opposition within the labour movement will not flourish without mass backing. The "leaders" are pushed from below by the pressure of the rank and file. It is thus that the processes in the country reflect themselves through the opportunist leaders inside parliament and within the mass movement. Where deep-seated processes of differentiation have not taken place, the "opposition" can only make the feeblest of gestures.

This mood of "wait and see" has had peculiar results inside and out of the Labour Party. The masses are going through the experience without, up to the present time, directly participating in the life of the Labour Party. In the last period the reflection of the economic and political situation has been a general political lull which has affected not only the Labour Party, but all left wing organisations. The circulation of the left wing Labour press has dropped considerably. The rump of the ILP, incapable of withstanding the lack of political life in the workers' movement, is fast disintegrating. The Communist Party has suffered heavy losses since Labour came to power. While losing support in the political field, they have however, entrenched their positions in the trade unions where they are preparing points of support for a surge forward in the period that lies ahead.

An important element in the stability of the Labour government has been the fact that the Stalinists have consistently attempted to sabotage any movement of the workers in the direction of struggle, and have rendered powerful support to the Labour leadership. Had the Communist Party come out in a full scale campaign against the Labour government on a "left" programme, encouraging instead of sabotaging strike struggles, the difficulties of the government would have been immeasurably increased.

After the first honeymoon period, the Labour leaders have been compelled to call a halt as a result of the drying up of the American loan at an unprecedented speed. They thought it would carry them through until 1950. After two years of reforms and semi-reforms, they are now introducing counter-reforms. With the ending of immediate American aid, resulting in the "gap" until the Marshall plan is put into effect, the Labour leaders have embarked on a plan of "austerity". They have begun to make cuts in the consumption of the masses. Beginning with the middle classes, whose standards are affected by the basic ration cut in petrol and the restrictions on

travel abroad, there has come the cut of 14 per cent in the meat ration, and a reduction in clothing, household and other consumption goods, which also affect the working class. At the same time, these are announced as only the first of more cuts to come. Freezing of wages, slashes in subsidies, longer hours, have been among the suggestions of the Tories and their representatives. However, under the pressure of the trade unions, the Labour leaders have retreated on the wage freeze, and while longer hours are being introduced, they are to be worked at overtime pay. A general intensification of labour is demanded of the working class.

But these attacks, coming as they do on the background of reforms introduced in the first two years, will not provoke immediate repercussions among the workers on a similar scale in the corresponding previous period. The reaction of the workers will first be seen on the industrial field, with a political reflection only at a later stage. This was clearly seen in Grimethorpe, where the miners evinced a bitter hatred for the capitalist Coal Board, but at the same time expressed their unshaken faith and confidence in the Labour government. In two by-elections held soon after the crisis cuts were announced, Labour retained its seats, even in so marginal a constituency as Edge Hill.

Deep roots of reformism

It is the US imperialists' appreciation that Labour can "hold the line" in forcing sacrifices from the workers without serious immediate repercussions, that has led them to the decision that Italy and France will be given immediate aid in the interim period, and that Britain can wait. They gave Britain the biggest loan that any European nation has hitherto received, because Britain was their most important base in Europe. They know that there is no likelihood of an immediate turn of the masses against the Labour government. If the pressure of the working class becomes strong, the reserves of Britain will have to be used and then America will come to her assistance.

As a result of the cuts, the struggles on the industrial field will be intensified. Any attempt to make far reaching and serious inroads into the standards of the masses will be followed by a series of strike struggles which will shake the Labour government. But it is precisely the recognition of this factor which stays the hand of the Labour leaders. In the last two years, the moment the workers took to militant struggle (dockers, transport, miners) important concessions were granted. In the

period of counter-concessions, the moment the workers show evidence of strong militant resistance, the Labour government and the employers will be compelled to retreat. The relationship of class forces in a period of economic boom and full employment, plus the foreshadowed loan, makes it more expensive to provoke a widening series of strike struggles, than temporarily to retreat, exert further pressure on the workers, and then, if necessary, retreat again.

While the Marshall plan will further enslave the Western European countries—including Britain—and tie these countries to the needs and orientation of Wall Street, it will at the same time tend to balance the economies of these countries in such a way as to ensure a rising curve of economic development in the next few years. In Britain, this will result in relatively stable economic and political relations. Sections of the workers will inevitably come into collision with the Labour government on many questions. If further sacrifices are demanded from the workers, large-scale industrial struggles will result. Opposition to the leadership will spread inside the Labour Party itself. But no great break-away can be expected during this period.

Reformism is deeply rooted in the ranks of the British working class. Before any large-scale turn from Labour to more radical politics can be visualised, the Labour Party's policy must be fully experienced by the working class. The total incapacity of the third Labour government to transform society and create stable economic conditions for the mass of the population will be most fully exposed in the period of the next world-wide slump of capitalism. The basis of reformism will be shattered. The Labour Party will be rent from top to bottom. The workers, especially the most militant and courageous, will seek radical and revolutionary solutions, whilst the capitalist class will really begin to subsidise and organise the fascist movement in preparation for a deadly reckoning with the working class.

All the illusions of the Labour leaders will come up against the stark reality of declining capitalism—above all, the collapse of British imperialism. The economic basis for reformism will have the ground cut away from beneath it. America, faced with her own crisis of over-production and slump, will not be able to continue to bolster up British capitalism. The complete inadequacy of reformism ever to give lasting reforms will be revealed. In the upheavals that impend the ideas of Marxism will find a mass response among the British working class.

Hungary '56 and the political revolution

THIS MONTH is the thirtieth anniversary of the Hungarian revolution of 1956. Even though its outcome was a tragic defeat, in which at least 20,000 Hungarian workers were killed and countless others injured, imprisoned and forced into hiding or exile, it nevertheless was undoubtedly the most significant pointer to future developments in the Stalinist states since the consolidation of the bureaucracy around Stalin in the 1920s. It was the most vivid confirmation of the perspectives of Trotsky, that the workers under Stalinist dictatorship, far from accepting their conditions or demanding a return to capitalism, would move in a political revolution to take power into their own hands. The tremendously inspiring events of the Hungarian October are full of lessons for the workers of Eastern Europe and the whole world.

The 1945 Revolution

Stalinist commentators have tried to paint a picture of these events as the work of CIA agitators and counter revolutionaries. Nothing could be further from the truth. The revolutionary traditions of the Hungarian working class in themselves make such a claim incredible. Even prior to world war one there were big strikes and wage demands. In 1905 there was a big movement of landless labourers against wage cuts. In the Hungarian revolution of 1919 the workers moved to overthrow the fragile regime of the bourgeois liberal Karolyi because, it could not satisfy their revolutionary demands. They established a soviet republic. It was only due to the inexperience and mistakes of the Hungarian Communist Party, (see *Militant International Review* No 18 Winter 1980), under Bela Kun, that the republic lost support from some layers of the peasantry, providing a base for counter revolution and the establishment of a brutal regime of fascist terror under Horthy.

No-one in 1956 would have wanted a return to the conditions under Horthy, the only conditions capitalism was capable of in Hungary. Then, forty families had owned 2/3 of the land, while 1.1 million peasants, out of a population of 9 million, lived without land on the verge of starvation. When industry was nationalised and a land

By Phil Hutchinson

reform carried through, in the wake of the victory of the Red army in 1945 and the flight of most of the old exploiting classes along with the retreating Nazi armies, there was widespread support for these measures.

Yet this second Hungarian revolution was carried through without the conscious participation of the mass of workers. On the contrary all genuine workers leaders were tortured, imprisoned, put on show trial and purged from the party, including many heroes who had fought in the underground against the Horthyites and the Nazis. Some were even executed. The revolution was carried through in a bureaucratic form, and a swarm of careerists jumped onto the bandwagon of the party, including even some ex-fascists. Moreover the bureaucracy in the USSR systematically pillaged the economies of the other Eastern Block countries in the period 1945 to 1956. Goods were bought by the USSR below world market prices, sometimes even below the cost of production, while Russian goods were sold in Eastern Europe at inflated prices. In fact the 'fraternal bargaining' over these matters sometimes went a little beyond the traditional limits governing such friendly co-operation between 'socialist allies': two ministers of foreign trade (Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia) were executed quite specifically for trying to get more equitable terms of trade!

Nevertheless, despite looting, bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption, because the Hungarian economy was now on a more advanced social base an immense programme of economic reconstruction and development was carried through. Living standards rose in the period 1945-49. Immeasurable advances were made in the field of education, culture, and public health. Workers and youth for the first time gained recreational facilities. Big advances were made for women. Equal pay was established and all professions were opened up to them. A system of creches, kindergartens and maternity benefits including three months leave on full pay was introduced. Yet at the

same time the bureaucracy accumulated for itself vast privileges: private holiday homes with luxury hotel accommodation, cut off by barbed wire from the mass of the population; imported luxury chauffeur driven cars while the mass of workers were herded like cattle onto crowded busses; private hiring of musicians while the average worker did not even have a record player; better food; better clothes; vastly superior housing.

Whilst their own living standards were rising, the mass of workers were prepared to put up with these injustices. But in 1955 the economy began to go into crisis due to a series of bureaucratic blunders. The oil fields in Western Hungary were accidentally flooded due to too rapid a rise in production ordered by the head of state Rakosi. Dora Scarlett, a British Communist Party member who was working in Hungary at the time, describes the appalling mismanagement: "In the mines and factories work pledges had to be taken... seriously and there was a terrific rush to fulfil them, even if it meant completing a block of flats so badly that they would need repairing before the year was out, or sending a consignment of goods forty per cent of which might be rejects."

The 1953-55 Nagy government

Shortages began in the shops, especially of meat. People had to queue all night to get the things they wanted. At the same time the bureaucrats carried on with their opulent existence. The revolution of 1956 was a revolution to rid society of this gang of parasites, torturers and murderers, who claimed to rule in the name of the working class, and to reassert the traditions of 1919 of the involvement of the working class in the revolution and the subsequent running of society. One worker from the giant Csepel plant told a western correspondent: "The West should not believe that the workers fought to bring back Horthy or the landowners and counts. We shall not give back the land, the factories or the mines."

The causes of the 1956 events also lie in the political developments within the bureaucracy. Mirroring the economic crisis there were tremendous political upheavals. In 1953 with the



Left: Civilians and soldiers burn photos of Stalinist leader, Rakosi, during the revolution. Right: Rakosi and Nagy during the first Nagy government of 1953-55.

death of Stalin there were some signs of a 'thaw' in the monolithic rule of Moscow and its puppets in Budapest. Rakosi, a hard line Stalinist, retired. Nagy, who had a reputation as a 'liberaliser' and was initially favoured in the Kremlin by Khrushchov, took over. In several Eastern Block countries during the fifties a similar switch was made. Bureaucrats who were denounced later as 'Titoists' came to the fore. This layer of the bureaucracy had no objection to a one party totalitarian system in which the leading layer had enormous privileges, but they did oppose the Russian bureaucracy plundering all the spoils of the nations economic progress for themselves. Gomulka in Poland played a similar role. It was the fact that these bureaucrats had been persecuted by the USSR earlier, for taking an anti-Russian stand, that gave them a certain credibility with the masses. The hopes which the masses had originally placed in the revolutionary changes of the immediate post war years were revived. Some sections of the masses believed that Nagys' 'new course' would give the regime a 'human face.' But behind the scenes there was a desperate struggle going on within the bureaucracy, and much trepidation within the Kremlin, as to the dangers inherent in even a microscopic dose of reform.

A real measure of just how little 'return to legality' took place under

Nagy was subsequently revealed during the 1956 revolution itself. Within the first week 5,500 prisoners of war were released. These were men who had been sent back from Russia 8 years before but had been imprisoned again by the hated AVO secret police.

The Petofi Circle

They had not been charged and had no prospect of release. These people remained illegally in prison, many assumed by relatives to be dead, during the Nagy period of 1953-55. In fact the prison camps, allegedly intended for the enemies of the revolution, were at this time full of common people, workers, poor peasants, small stall holders etc. Sandor Kopacsi, the Chief of Police in Budapest in 1956, who subsequently resigned and got political asylum in the west, gives an account of his tour of inspection of these camps which reads like Dantes journey through hell. The camps were packed full of dejected demoralised prisoners, who had never been tried, who came up to him and told him of the petty crimes, such as chicken stealing, they had been incarcerated for. Yet even the minuscule moves in the direction of reform under Nagy proved eventually too much for the nerves of Moscow. Khrushchov changed his attitude towards 'the new course.'

In April 1955 Nagy was removed from the premiership and expelled

from the party as a 'right-wing deviationist.' Rakosi was wheeled back in with a clampdown on all the new policies. Yet the zig-zags of the Kremlin bureaucrats only whipped up a mood of discontent amongst the Hungarian masses. When, in February 1956 Khrushchov's speech at the 20th congress denouncing Stalin's crimes came to light, the whole of Hungary began to seeth with discussion. A group of intellectuals, naming themselves the Petofi circle, (after the famous poet of the bourgeois revolution who was executed in the defeat of the 1848 revolution and became a national hero) began to meet regularly and semi openly.

In his book, Kopacsi makes a very interesting revelation about the morale of the state forces at this time. In the spring of 1956 a squad of secret police were sent into the Petofi circle and the active element of the Young Communist movement, which was also bubbling with debate. As the dissidents arguments became more fully explained the police spies became more and more open to the ideas about reforming the system which were being put forward at these meetings. "Suddenly a majority of these 'spies' declared that they were in agreement with the points made in the Petofi circle!" Kopacsi recounts, "together they issued a statement, which they signed, declaring themselves in solidarity with the ideas put forward by the

young reformists of the party."

The whole of the eastern block was awash with discontent. The floodgates had begun to burst even as early as 1953 with a massive strike wave and street fighting in East Germany. In Plzen and Prague, Czechoslovakia, there had been riots. In the Hungarian industrial towns of Csepel, Ozd and Diosgyor the masses had come onto the streets in protest against the conditions. Even within the Soviet Union there had been strikes and protests amongst the prisoners within the labour camps. In May 1956 vast numbers of Russian troops and armoured vehicles were sent into Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, to crush an uprising sparked off by austerity measures. In June 1956 the workers of Poznan, in Poland rose (see *Militant* 805 and 806). Inevitably this also had an effect on the young people inside the state forces. The Petofi circle even held one famous all night meeting of 6000 with people spilling out into the streets around demanding democratisation of the system and intellectual liberty. This movement of intellectuals was a reflection of the deep underlying discontent amongst the workers. In conditions such as this where all political freedom is barred, it is often the intellectuals who give the first overt expression of the movement swelling up beneath the surface of society.

23rd October 1986

Pravda angrily denounced this ferment. Yet even *Szabad Nep*, the Hungarian CP paper, under the pressure of the masses was grudgingly forced into agreement, in words, with the more secondary demands. The bureaucracy in Budapest went into crisis over the question of whether to bring in more reforms in an attempt to restore the ailing credibility of the party, or to bring in more hard liners and clamp down on all the ferment. Many bureaucrats dithered between the two positions lacking any confidence in either. In every subsequent political crisis in the Stalinist states the bureaucracy has divided to differing degrees along these lines. In fact in Hungary today the same split is opening up again.

A further symptom of this indecision was the removal again of Rakosi in July 1956, because he was obviously arousing the hatred of the masses. This time, however, he was not replaced by a reformer but another hardliner, Kadar. Kadar had been imprisoned and appallingly tortured by the Stalinists. This gave him a certain credibility in the eyes of the masses,

but it also made him a compliant tool of Moscow.

Nagy was further demoted, confirming the impression that the leading circles within the bureaucracy were absolutely determined not to tolerate any quarter for reforms. The so-called Communist Party was by this time a Communist Party in name only. It had been purged, terrorised, bribed and corrupted into nothing more than a freemasonry of cynical careerists, and an appendage of the totalitarian state. In the elections of 1945 the CP had got 17 per cent of the vote. Dora Scarlett reported an estimate made in 1956, which is only a very rough guide but nevertheless significant, that if an election was held with a guarantee of no interference, the CP would have been lucky to get 10 per cent.

During the revolution itself the CP of 900,000 vanished overnight. Today less than 1 per cent support the party. This applies to all the Eastern Block countries.

Over the summer of 1956 discussion and opposition became widespread in the colleges and in the factories. The revolution was already in motion. Hostility amongst the masses towards the regime reached such a pitch that any spark could set off an explosion. In October that spark came. Students in Budapest called a demonstration for the 23rd. It was unprecedented for a demonstration to be organised outside of CP control. The authorities banned it but the organisers announced they were going ahead anyway. Initially it was over the conditions of students but an atmosphere of excitement spread amongst all the youth and workers of the town. A series of wider political demands soon were included and eventually the youth were being called to demonstrate in support of the workers of Poland. What a marvellous testimony to the internationalism of the movement, that the spark which ignited the revolution was actually a demonstration of international solidarity!

Tens of thousands flooded onto the streets. The secret police (AVO) understood that any reforms whatsoever would inevitably include a calling of them to account for their ten years of crime and organised terror. In panic they fired on the crowd. When police arrived to try and restore order the crowd explained to the police how the AVO had fired on defenceless men, women and children. The young policemen, who knew the cruelty of the AVO, scarcely hesitated before handing over their guns to the crowd. Anyone who says that the forces of the political revolution are powerless against the arms of the state ap-

paratus should look at the reports of Police Chief Kopaszi (see insert) as he describes his conversations over the radio with the different police units in the capital.

These conversations clearly illustrate how powerless and terrified the bureaucracy were in the face of an armed movement of the masses. They show that once the workers are on the move all the seeming strength of the state forces comes to nothing. Parallel with the rapid conquest of the streets went a very rapid development of political consciousness of the masses. One meeting held in the town centre began with a demand from the crowd that the government send a minister to address them about what reforms it proposed to make. The bureaucracy hesitated and vacillated for an hour and then decided to send the minister of agriculture. By the time he arrived the mood of the crowd had changed to hostility towards anything the government may have offered and they booed him off the platform. One of the features of all revolutions is this very quick development of the political consciousness of the masses.

The first invasion

The Russian bureaucracy responded to these events with panic measures. On the night of 23-24 October they sent in the tanks. Everyone fought them in the streets. People brought small arms out of their homes with which to attack them. Children as young as fourteen or thirteen set to them with Molotov cocktails. Such ferocious resistance on the part of the Hungarian workers and youth inevitably made a big impression on the Russian soldiers. They began to question why they had been sent. Some had been told by their officers that it was a fascist rebellion that needed crushing. This did not square with such widespread and popular resistance. By dawn some of the Soviet soldiers were leaving their vehicles and joining the mass demonstrations. Some of the tank crews decorated their tanks with the flag of the revolution (The Hungarian flag with the coat of arms removed). Russian troops asked for political asylum. They saw in the determination of the Hungarian workers the capacity to set up a new type of regime that would not hand them back to the Russian commanders.

A vast crowd assembled in front of the parliament building. The AVO fired on the crowd. Russian troops moved in and defended the crowd from the AVO. All public buildings were taken over by the workers. The radio

was requisitioned for the revolution and the demands of the workers broadcast to the rest of the nation and beyond. Russian troops used their tanks to give backing to the assault of the workers on the police headquarters.

The prisons were open. Whole labyrinths of underground passages, cells and torture chambers were unlocked. Prisoners walked out like ghosts, men and women who had been assumed dead for years. In fact the network of secret police passageways under Budapest was so vast that throughout the weeks of the revolution relatives and friends searched for prisoners. Tappings could be heard in the further recesses. Some were so hidden that the revolution never reached them, before they could be found the counter revolution had struck.

Newspapers sprang up everywhere. One CP eyewitness said "people hungered and thirsted for the printed word as though they had crossed a desert." From six dreary official papers twenty five lively dailies with circulations going into millions sprang up within a few days. The revolutionary youth, the different sections of workers, peasants, police and army all had their papers. All rejected anti-semitism and fascism.

Arising out of the spontaneous political interests of the masses a number of new political parties sprang into life, including a Social Democratic Party and a Peasants Party. The right for a multiplicity of political parties to exist was enshrined in the programme of the political revolution. Without a doubt the experience of the Hungarian revolution shows that the workers had the capacity to take over and run society. And they had the strength and determination to win against all odds.

Such was the effect on the consciousness of the masses that moral attitudes changed overnight with the enthusiasm of the fight for a new society. Open suitcases taking collections for the families of those killed in the fighting were left unguarded on the street corners. Peasants showed their support for the revolution by bringing cartloads of food into Budapest and distributing it free. This in a country where people were still living in poverty! Let no-one in the face of these facts say that human nature is unchangeable, that people will always want to accumulate for themselves and that there will always be crime, even under socialism.

In desperation at their troops defecting to the revolution the Soviet authorities withdrew them from Budapest. In his memoirs Khrushchov recalls the vacillations within the top

Police Chief KOPASCI describes the lieutenant of one of the police units he was in communication with during the 23 October demonstration—a lieutenant Kiss—as someone who "was prepared to sacrifice his life for the party. But for the Stalin statue?"

KISS: People are pulling down the Stalin Statue. Please send us orders immediately.

KOPASCI: OK comrade Lieutenant, tell me about this pulling down.

KISS: There are about a hundred thousand people around the Stalin Statue.

KOPASCI: Are you sure there are as many as that?

KISS: Comrade Colonel there are more than a hundred thousand. If not two hundred thousand. All of Heroes square, all the edge of the woods is black with people. What shall I do?

KOPASCI: OK, how many men have you got?

KISS: Well, er... twenty five comrade colonel!

KOPASCI: Useless! Look at what the people are doing and you will know straight away... You see comrade Kiss these are specialists. They are workers from one or other of the big Pest factories. Only the workers possess the equipment to do what you report.

This is how KOPASCI describes the first news over the police radio that the masses were armed.

"The tone of the junior officer at the other end was one of catastrophe. 'Comrade KOPASCI the participants have guns. I asked for complete silence in the room. I thought the man I was talking to had gone mad. I don't quite understand. Repeat comrade Lieutenant.' In a measured tone the lieutenant repeated the account of how young recruits had been surrounded by the crowd, told they needed weapons to defend themselves against the security police and then how one soldier, then two, had offered their guns to the people.

In my office silence reigned. My colleagues looked at me motionless. From the gravity of my voice and the look on my face they understood that the news I was getting was no joke. 'My boy how many arms have you distributed and what type?'... I swallowed the reply, the blood frozen in my veins. 'Twenty five or thirty rifles and about as many small machine guns. Some rounds of ammunition as well. What are your orders?' I could only give one. 'Gardez yourselves in and turn out your lights.'

circles between 'crushing the mutiny' or pulling 'out of Hungary': "I don't know how many times we changed our minds back and forth." Desperately seeking a means to contain the situation, in consultation with Moscow through Andropov, then the ambassador in Hungary, the leaders switched once again to concessions. On October 25th the premier, Gero, who had provoked the masses further by a ranting speech on the radio about fascist agents, was removed at Moscow's bidding. Several of the worst Stalinist diehards were removed from the polit-bureau and Nagy was suddenly rehabilitated and made premier.

Nagy returns

But despite his reputation as a 'reformer', on the crucial questions confronting the Hungarian workers Nagy was no different from the hard-line Stalinists. Moscow persuaded him to declare martial law. He dumbly acquiesced with the Soviet decision to send troops to crush the movement. On the first day of his new premiership 300 workers were killed outside the parliament building by the state forces. His hands were drenched in blood from the outset. But given the tremendous power and sweep of the revolution he was a last line of defence for the bureaucracy because of his reputation.

Nagy offered an amnesty for all those who handed in their weapons. The Soviet authorities started a display of 'negotiations' with his new administration, offering the masses the hope of a peaceful withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country. In reality this was a smokescreen behind which they were preparing for more effective military action. The truth was that the irresistible sweep of the mass movement rendered the Nagy government completely impotent. Without army, police or mass backing, it was a government in name only, an administration suspended in mid-air.

Rumours flew around as to the actions of the Russian columns. There was much confusion. Some sections of the masses did not want to believe that a new invasion was in the offing. If they were coming why were they going? Yet to anyone prepared to think things through carefully, it was clear their job had not finished. They were not far outside Budapest and their ranks were being swelled by reinforcements. Soviet troops took over all the airports.

Here we get a glimpse of the role that an organised revolutionary party would play in a political revolution. To equip the advanced workers with a clear analysis, strategy and tactics for the spread of the revolution into the other Stalinist states, and thus to prepare for the next battle of the

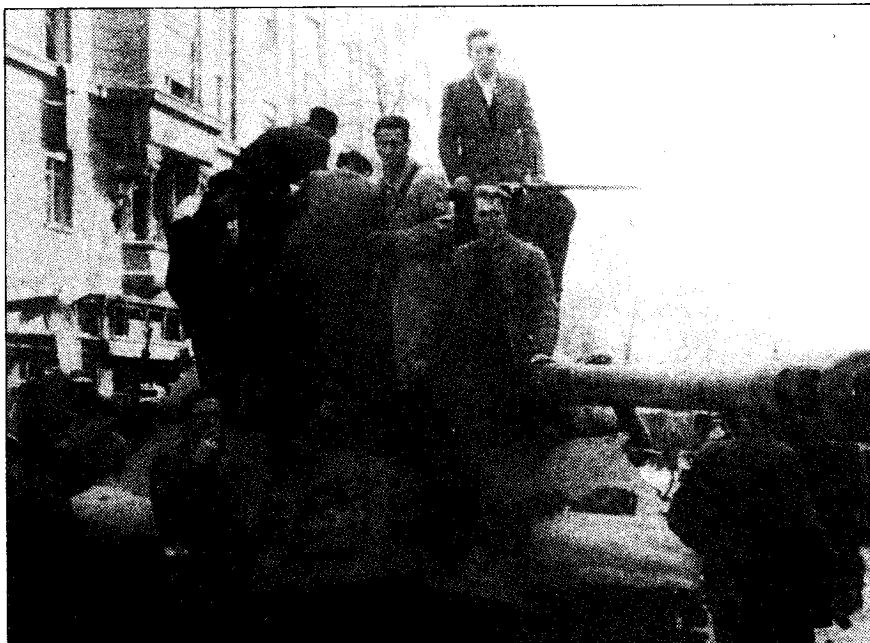
revolution it was necessary for their experiences to be brought together within one party. Such a party would have directed agitation and propaganda to the wide layers of the masses who were hoping against hope that things would not come to a second clash. It would have based itself on the workers who were warning: 'Don't lay down your arms,' 'No trust in the Nagy government to implement the demands of the revolution'. A revolutionary party would have prepared politically clear slogans with which to meet the next wave of Soviet troops. Most important of all it would have formed a government based on the newly created workers' organisations and have immediately arrested Kadar and all the other representatives of Stalinism who still clung onto the shadow of power. Above all it would have undertaken from the outset of the revolution the task of directing propaganda to the workers of all the Eastern Block countries, especially Russia.

Power in the hands of the workers

All these tasks the advanced workers moved towards, through their own experience, in the two weeks of the revolution. The programme of the revolution had gone through different stages as the workers consciousness leaped forward. In reality it was an elaboration of the programme of Lenin, put forward in April 1917, to defend the revolution against bureaucracy. The workers demanded:

- 1) Workers' councils in all factories to establish workers' management and a radical transformation of the system of state central planning and directing.
- 2) Wage rises of 15 per cent for the lowest paid, 10 per cent for other workers and an upper limit of £106 on salaries, which in the money of those days would have done away with the privileged position of the bureaucracy.
- 3) Abolition of production norms except in factories where the workers' council decided to keep them.
- 4) Increases in the lowest pensions.
- 5) Increase in family allowances.
- 6) A fairer system of taxation.
- 7) A more rapid programme of house building by the state.

These demands, which contain not a hint of nationalism, religion, or reaction are the answer to all those who say that the revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy is anti-socialist. They are a brilliant confirmation of the prognosis Trotsky had put forward in relation to the character of the political



Hungarian workers with a captured Russian tank.

revolution. This was a programme with a wide appeal to the masses. Yet although of crucial importance, a programme on its own does not guarantee the outcome of a revolution. This is especially so when this programme is arrived through a series of successive approximations based on the conclusions the workers draw from their experience of each phase of the struggle.

The prior existence of a cadre organisation within the ranks of the most conscious workers, armed in advance with perspectives and at least a general understanding of what was necessary, would have made an enormous, and probably a decisive difference to the outcome of the revolution.

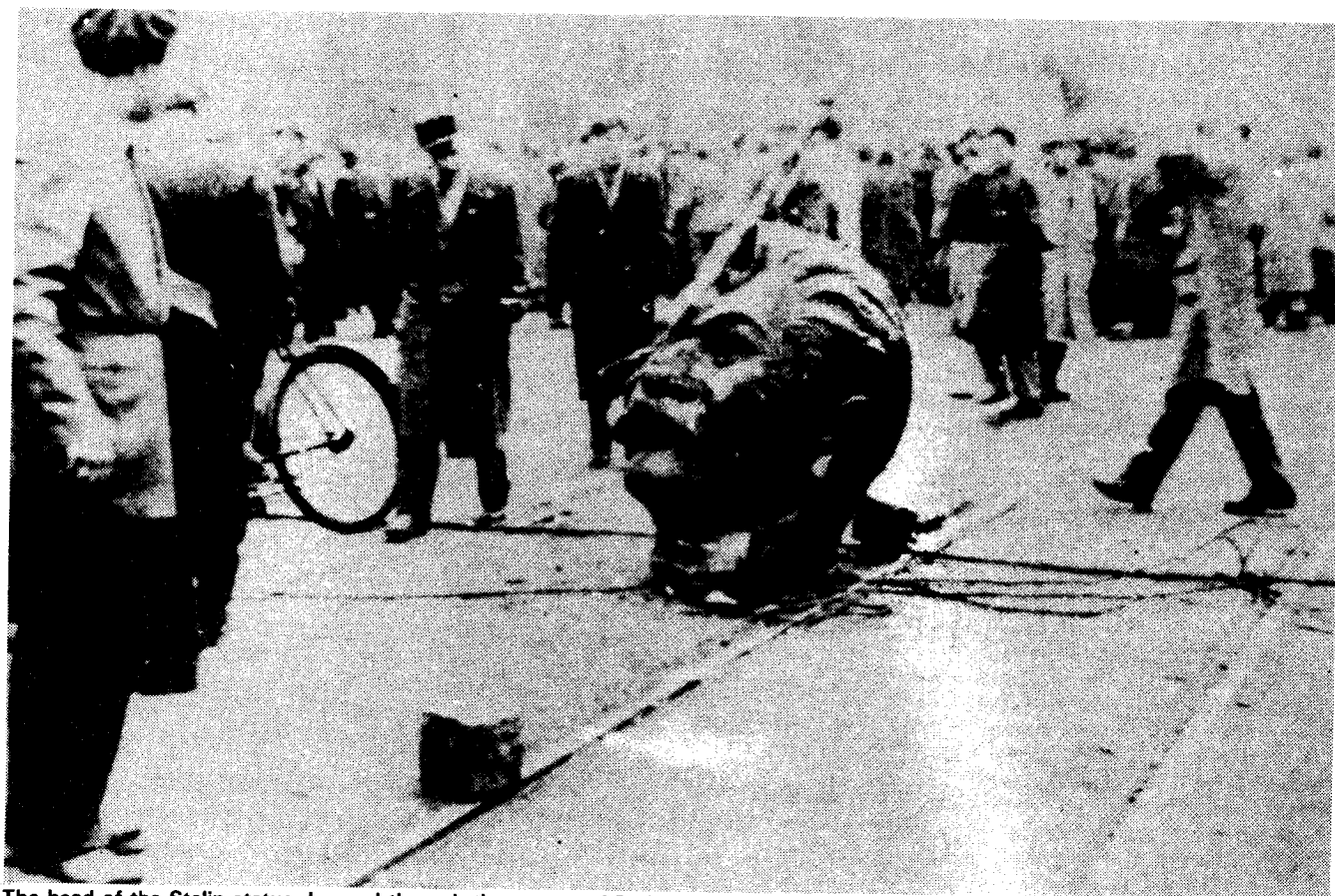
The revolution had transformed Budapest over the short space of a week. Kopaszi paints a vivid picture of the parliament building in these days of workers' power. "This immense 'Westminster on the Danube' was more like the Smolny Palace in Petrograd, Bolshevik headquarters in 1917... than the old parliament chamber in London. The corridors and rooms were packed with delegations of workers, peasants, soldiers, artists, writers and politicians of different parties which had not been seen at all since 1947." Effectively the workers had taken power. In the provinces the workers had joined the movement and come out on strike. In the mining towns there was a very solid strike. All the workers were on the streets. There was an atmosphere of insurrection.

Amongst the peasantry too there was a big movement. The old Stalinist collective farm managers were driven off with knives and pitchforks. The peasants elected revolutionary committees. It is true that in some areas

they broke up the land from the collectives into private plots. But this was linked with a warning that if any of the landlords tried to come back the peasants would organise a second revolution. Undoubtedly even these peasants would have, through experience, if the Hungarian workers had held onto power and established a regime of workers' democracy, come to the conclusion voluntarily that they were better off in collectives. This is how Peter Fryer, a reporter for the British Communist Party paper, the *Daily Worker* described the workers' councils:

The second invasion

"In their spontaneous origin, in their composition, in their sense of responsibility, in their efficient organisation of food supplies and of civil order, in the restraint they exercised over the wilder elements of the youth, in the wisdom with which so many of them handled the problem of Soviet troops, and, not least, in their striking resemblance to the soviets or councils of workers, peasants and soldiers deputies which sprang up in Russia in 1905 and again in February 1917, these committees, a network of which now extended over the whole of Hungary were remarkably uniform. They were at once organs of insurrection—the coming together of delegates elected by factories and universities, mines and army units, and organs of popular self government which the armed people trusted. As such they enjoyed tremendous authority, and it is no exaggeration to say that until the Soviet attack of November 4 the real power in the country lay in their hands."



The head of the Stalin statue dragged through the streets of Budapest.

The Nagy government, the last fig leaf of the authorities, effectively had no control. Power was in the hands of the revolutionary committees. The advanced sections of the workers, big sections of the youth and the industrial workers sensed that things could rapidly come to a head. They prepared to once more defend the revolution. A new wave of strikes began which rapidly reached the proportions of another general strike.

At this juncture the Russian bureaucracy began their second assault on the revolution. At 4 in the morning of Sunday 4 November Russian tanks, having encircled Budapest, began to bombard it with shells from the hills outside. By dawn they had entered the city and occupied key buildings including the parliament. The attack came across the nation all at once. Every city was pounded by artillery and then occupied.

Yet far from being crushed in one simple and massive assault as the Russian bureaucrats had hoped, the second invasion in fact spurred on the workers to even greater struggle making them more determined than ever to fight for the revolution to the finish. The consciousness of even the widest sections of the masses exploded into new life. Those who had not participated previously in the street fighting came pouring out to join the 'veterans' of the previous week. The

workers fought, along with children, students, the old and the soldiers and police who had come over. They built or rebuilt barricades. They occupied positions before the Russian columns entered the towns. The fighting was ferocious. The tanks were attacked by the masses from all sides. Russian soldiers later reported that they had never seen such determined resistance.

Resistance continues

But this second wave of Soviet troops had very little understanding of what they were crushing. Many of them had been hastily transported from the far eastern provinces of the Soviet Union and could speak no European languages. Peter Fryer, in a final dispatch to the *Daily Worker*, which the editor hid from his staff, said "Some of the rank and file Soviet troops have been telling people that they had no idea they had come to Hungary. They thought at first they were in Berlin, fighting German fascists." Some had even been told they were on the Suez Canal. The Hungarian workers attempted to hand them leaflets, but there was very little infantry action because the top officers feared the fraternisation that had occurred before. The Russian tanks came in and pumped shells into the buildings where they thought the resistance was.

The top Soviet officers desperately manoeuvred to 'maintain the moral' of their troops by shooting those of their men who displayed any sympathy for the Hungarian workers! For example, one Soviet tank officer was executed because his column had found its road blocked by a line of women and children sitting in their path. Instead of christening the street with their blood he drove his contingent round another way. Several of the soldiers who complied with this were also executed. In the prison yards of Budapest such executions continued all day and all night. This grisly fact illustrates that despite all the measures taken by the Russian bureaucracy the Hungarian workers made an impact on the minds of quite wide layers of even this second wave of troops.

Despite this show of strength the bureaucracy almost failed to regain control. It took fifteen divisions, with six thousand tanks, backed up by MIG fighter planes to quell the movement. Buildings were pumped with phosphorus to set them on fire. One commentator, Andy Anderson described it thus: "Smoke from burning buildings, exploding shells and Molotov cocktails mixed with the dust from crashing masonry to create a choking fog. The sight of the mounting wounded created a fog to choke the mind."

Yet even with such brutality on the

part of the Russian bureaucracy it took weeks to finish the job. On 4 November the still-born Nagy government, which represented nobody and no-one, was replaced by one under the hardliner Kadar. He appealed for the workers to go back to work but the strike intensified. On 5 November he 'warned,' he 'hoped for' and he 'requested' a return to work. On the 6th and 7th he 'threatened.' On the 8th his henchman Marosan declared "it is the duty of every decent worker to go back to work." But throughout the workers remained on strike and more and more Russian tanks fell victim to the heroic armed resistance of the masses.

Hungary '56: Portent of future struggles

The most forceful and long lasting resistance to the invasion came precisely from the big working class areas of Budapest. Hospital figures show that the injured consisted of 70-80 per cent young workers. These figures are incompatible with the Stalinist slur that the insurgents were hotheaded lumpen proletarians egged on by fascist provocateurs. 'Red' Csepel, so called because it had been in pre-war days a bastion of the CP, was one of the last districts to hold out. Open resistance continued in isolated pockets well into 1957 and even in 1958 and 1959 there were strikes and demonstrations as the workers attempted to resist the remorselessly tightening grip of bureaucratic control.

The victory of the bureaucracy did not come easily. 1956 opened up a new period of economic development for the Hungarian economy. The Russian bureaucracy deliberately decided to pump resources into the country. They had been so frightened by the revolution that they wanted to ensure the masses were kept more content to avoid a repetition. Living standards rose significantly for the Hungarian masses for the rest of the 1950s and the 1960s. To put it in the words of Khrushchov "We shall shut their mouths with goulash." Even in the seventies there was still substantial progress. This was the basis for the relative stability of the Kadar regime.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a glorious page in working class history. It added to the heritage of mankind a priceless experience. It showed, not just in books but in living historical experience, that there was an alternative to the brutality of Stalinism that did not consist of a return to capitalism. It was in this sense a pointer to the future of mankind. Victory was possible. In



Even after the second invasion resistance continued in isolated pockets well into 1957.

reality victory was won, but it was snatched away again by the second Soviet invasion. Victory could have been consolidated only by spreading the revolution to the Soviet troops, including the Far Eastern contingents, and that would have entailed spreading the revolution into the USSR itself. The material basis for the victory of the bureaucracy lay in the relatively progressive role that the Stalinist system was playing at that time. Even then a successful revolution in Hungary, headed by a revolutionary party that knew what it was doing and where it was going, could have been the trigger to set off the revolution within the USSR.

Today however conditions are infinitely more favourable. The bureaucracy no longer plays any sort of progressive role in the USSR or Hungary. The economic outlook is gloomy for Hungary. The rate of growth has been less than 1 per cent for the last five years. The Hungarian economy ran a trade deficit of £308m in the first seven months of this year, almost three times higher than the same period last year, partly due to the fall in prices of its oil product exports. Living standards are no longer rising as they were in the decades following 1956. Once again the whole of the Eastern block is wracked by ferment and discontent. The events in Poland in 1980 and 1981 are only the tip of the iceberg. The heritage and experience

of 1956 will be invaluable to the new generation of Hungarian workers and the workers of Eastern Europe as they move into battle to reopen the unfinished war against the bureaucracy.



Eyewitness in Hungary, the Soviet invasion of 1956. Edited by Bill Lomax, normally £2.95, our price £2.20 including postage.

Towards the Political Revolution, Perspectives for Poland. 60p including postage. Available from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

Science Report

By Pete Dickenson

Chernobyl

A FEW more elements of truth about the cause of the Chernobyl disaster emerged from the post mortem meeting held recently at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. This was despite the whitewash thrown over the proceedings by the 540 (pro)nuclear experts who attended.

As predicted in the last issue of the *MIR*, the Soviet scientists present put the emphasis of the blame on individual errors and poor safety procedures. The key question, however, is whether there is a fail safe mechanism in the reactor which would operate after unforeseen accidents caused by negligence or other factors. The most important fact to emerge in Vienna was that this definitely was not the case.

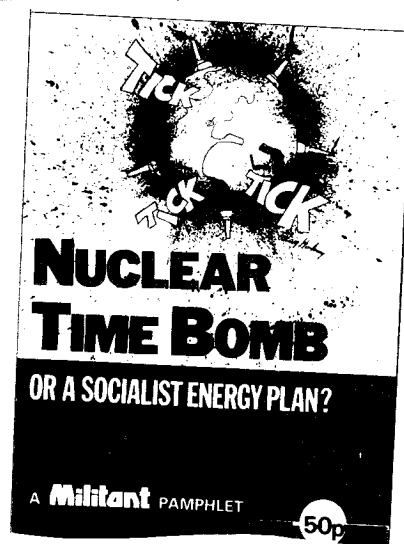
The cause of the explosion, as predicted in the last *MIR*, lay in the effects of a sudden power surge which was the result of a positive feedback control system in

the reactor. The positive feedback effect meant that the hotter the reactor became the more steam was generated at the core. This in turn led to a faster nuclear reaction which caused the reactor to get even hotter and so on. This growing chain reaction is essentially what happens in an atomic explosion and the initial explosion at Chernobyl was really a small scale nuclear bomb going off.

The positive feedback mechanism is a basic design flaw of the RBMK reactor installed at Chernobyl and at many other sites. It results from having the nuclear reaction moderated (slowed down and controlled) by graphite and the cooling done primarily by water. The technical details are complex but during an accident this design combination can lead to catastrophe. The potential for disaster due to this design flaw has been known to the Russians for at least two years and has been discussed in their technical press.

The reasons why the

Nuclear Time Bomb— or a socialist energy plan? A *Militant* pamphlet, 60 postage included, from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.



operators were conducting the experiment which led to the accident now appear to be linked to the power crisis in the Soviet Union. Nuclear power stations are usually operated to provide "base load" electricity, that is they operate 24 hours a day because it is difficult and time consuming to stop and start a reactor. If there are frequent faults which means the reactor has to be switched off its efficiency is drastically reduced.

What the experiment ap-

pears to have been aimed at was to keep the cooling system working even if the reactor was shut down. This would greatly speed up the process of getting the reactor going again once a fault had been fixed.

Despite the evidence of the dangerous design features of the RBMK reactor the bureaucrats intend to carry on as before. Output from RBMKs will reach 90% of pre-Chernobyl levels by next year.

Industrial noise danger

ONLY ONE firm has ever been prosecuted for deafening its workers yet hundreds of thousands have gone partially deaf as a result of industrial noise (*New Scientist*, 5th December 1985.)

The level of noise is measured in decibels (dB). Although the louder a noise appears the higher the decibel rating will be, it is not true that a doubling of the noise level will double the number of decibels because of the way decibel readings are calculated. In fact as a noise gets louder, the decibel reading increases proportionately less and less. This means that according to the official code being exposed to 90 decibels noise for 8 hours is considered safe although it is

only considered safe to be exposed to 108 decibels of noise for 7½ minutes. If these limits are exceeded some permanent deafness can result and in fact noise levels below these government norms can cause permanent hearing loss. It is also important to consider the frequencies (pitch) of the noise. Certain of these correspond to speech and it is obviously more serious to be deaf to typical speech frequencies than it is to the noise of a jet roaring overhead, for example.

Noise levels of over 100 dB are common in British industry. In a bottling plant in Scotland a noise of 131 dB was measured, fourteen times the official limit. Agricultural workers are not only in danger from tractor and machinery noise but also from pigs. At feeding time the noise of pigs squealing reaches 108 dB

according to the agricultural inspectorate, a level at which a worker would receive his or her daily safe dose in 7½ minutes.

The planet Uranus

THE SPACE probe Voyager 2 has revealed new secrets about the planet Uranus, more than 2,000 million miles away. Before Voyager virtually all that was known about the planet was that it was four times the size of the Earth, orbits the sun every 84 years and has a series of five moons and nine rings.

Voyager found that the planet rotates on its own axis every seventeen hours and has surface winds blowing at about 400 miles per hour. Ten new moons were discovered, much smaller than the five that can be

seen from the Earth.

One of the most interesting discoveries was that the magnetic field is tilted at 60 degrees to the axis of rotation of the planet (in the case of the Earth this would mean that the South Pole would be near Los Angeles). Astronomers believe that a planet's magnetic field is generated by a region of electrically conducting liquid near its centre. Uranus probably has a small rocky core overlain with an ocean of hot water and topped with an atmosphere of hydrogen. The most likely region for generating magnetism is the bottom of the ocean layer, where the oxygen and hydrogen from the water form a metallic liquid with carbon and nitrogen.

Voyager is now on its way to Neptune which it will reach in August 1989.



'Communist' New Realism

COMMENT IS a new feature in the *Militant International Review* where space will be devoted to a critical analysis of the programme and perspectives outlined in the publications of the various trends of thought within the labour movement, from journals such as *Marxism Today* and *New Socialist* to the latest publications from the Labour Party Head Office or the Campaign Group of Labour MP's. We begin this new feature with a review by Bill Boyle of the latest pamphlet by the 'Communist' Party's Industrial Organiser, Peter Carter, *Trade Unions: The New Reality*.

READING PETE Carter's pamphlet is like attempting to examine a cloud under a microscope. What seems substantial from afar all but disappears upon closer examination. Despite its contention to be the successor to "...over 60 years of struggle and strategy" in reality the pamphlet more closely resembles Eric Heffer's description, "...a repudiation of the previous 60 years of Communist Party strategy".

The pamphlet is nothing new, notwithstanding its grand claims to the contrary. It abounds with phrases which would not be out of place in a sociology text book. What, for example, does the following sentence actually mean: "...For the trade unions to rise to the challenge of New Technology and industrial restructuring, a profound shift is required towards a much more strategic outlook."? What "industrial restructuring"? What new strategy? This is never stated. His statement that a "...much broader vision..." is needed is an excuse to leave out any demands upon either the right wing or left trade union leaders.

Carter's main contention is a familiar one; that "Thatcherism" is a completely new phenomenon which has swept the political hinterland like a virulent plague infecting all and sundry; working, middle and ruling class alike. Like his com-patriot in the 'Communist' Party, Eric Hobsbawm, he believes that Thatcherism has moved the working class decisively to the right in its political attitudes.

This, of course, is nonsense. It is true that, given the nature of the sharpness of class conflict in the post miners' strike era, the leadership and a layer of lay representatives of the trade unions, have decided to lay low and await the next Labour government. This is easier than fighting not only the Tories but, as the Addenbrookes, Newcastle Central Office CPSA, and Barking disputes have shown,

your own leaders as well. The political fund ballots are another indication of this turn by workers to the political plane, the desire to see the end of the Thatcher government and the growing expectation of a Labour government. The local elections are a further sign, particularly the results in Liverpool.

But, as the Silentnight strikers have shown, where workers are prepared to struggle and have leadership they will do so. There is a preparedness to go into battle when there is no other alternative. Even the *Financial Times* has recognised this. In an article in the *FT* of 24 September 1986 it points to a number of bitter struggles, citing the three-month old dispute at Paxman Diesels, the action being taken by white-collar staff at Lucas Industries, the overtime ban and strikes being mounted by the NUM to win backdating of its 5.9 per cent pay deal and concludes that: "The unions are not yet a busted flush".

A 'new Broad Left'?

Unlike Eric Hobsbawm, who was able to say in *Marxism Today*, April 1985, that a Labour government "...is not on the immediate horizon" and that "...nobody believes that socialism is on the immediate agenda of the movement..." Pete Carter's pamphlet was written late enough for reality to have caught up with him and the CP for certain modifications to be made to the Hobsbawm line. Carter concedes that unless the labour and trade union movement leadership throw it away, then the return of a Labour government is now definitely on the agenda of the movement and not relegated, as Hobsbawm did, to the dim and distant future of 50 years hence.

Carter condemns two "harmful" currents in today's labour movement—1) The hard left (which he classes as the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the CP Campaign Group and the *Morning Star* which, according to Carter, on some issues lines up with the *Militant*!) and 2) the right wing. He then says that "...the Broad Left of British trade unions needs to assert itself above these tendencies by creating a shift in the politics of the labour movement which allows a unified approach." What he really means is... a shift to the right!

Pete Carter does not explain in a scientific way what he means by the term

'Broad Left'. He apparently means an alliance of those on the left combining to fight the common enemy of the Tories and the bosses and their agents in the movement, the right wing. He laments "the failure to revive Broad Lefts has led in recent years to their becoming platforms for the ultra-left."

However in his report to the CP Executive Committee, printed in the 20 September 1986 edition of *7 Days*, which purports to analyse the TUC conference and "the challenge before the left," he says "A difficulty here is the absence of any coherent grouping on the left in the unions. The TUC's adoption of centre-left policies provides the opportunity for a genuine **broad left involving trade union leaders well beyond those traditionally seen as 'left'.**" Yet, later in the same article, he is able to say "The Broad Left has got a lot of work to do now in installing activity from below and some real life into this new alliance of Labour and the unions". From nothing to something via wishful thinking!

Let us remind ourselves of the words in Pete's pamphlet about Broad Lefts which "...have degenerated into narrow left machines mainly concerned with the election of officers". In reality, if anything can be made of his position, it is that he does not believe that a genuine broad left movement exists as yet, but that there is a possibility of a broad left coalescing around the "Left" general secretaries.

He cites examples of this emergent 'new Broad Left' as—the Labour Coordinating Committee, Rodney Bickerstaffe, Tom Sawyer, Jimmy Knapp, Ken Livingstone and David Blunkett. Yet all of the above have, in the recent past, gone over openly to the right wing or, as in the case of Bickerstaffe and Knapp, have allowed witch-hunts to develop in their own unions. They may be the better of the "Left" trade union leaders but it is to mislead the most conscious workers for the CP to fail to point out that unless these leaders adopt a socialist programme, based on a worked out Marxist perspective, they will inevitably retreat in the face of the stormy struggles of the future.

As Trotsky pointed out: "...inherent in reformism is betrayal". Unless the trade union leaders are conscious of their role and tasks they will measure up to neither.

Does the CP not remember the revolutionary rhetoric of some of the leaders of the working class in the past? Even such a militant fighter as the miners' leader Arthur Cook, a giant bearing no comparison to today's leaders, still colluded in the TUC General Council's cover-up of their betrayal of the 1926 General Strike. These leaders may be forced to lead battles against a future right wing Labour

government and thus gain enormous illusions in their 'left' credentials. But will their subsequent actions match up to their words? Do these leaders have the perspective of leading the working class to the socialist transformation of society or not? Or will they, as Hugh Scanlon said, lead the class to the brink of the abyss, look over and then retreat? The question to ask is—**do these leaders have Marxist perspectives?** That is the benchmark to use when defining 'left' leaders **and then by their actions to judge them**, not by their words.

As stated before Carter continually bemoans the alleged 'shift to the right' taking place in the trade union movement, a process which, he argues, began in 1979 with the election of the Tory government. However, there is a socialist fly in Carter's reformist soup, in the shape of John Macreadie, newly elected Broad Left general secretary of the CPSA. How does this equate with a rightward drift in the trade unions? Had the CP not split the CPSA BL John Macreadie would have won by a large majority.

Live Aid

Carter attempts to use the election of John Golding and Bill Jordan of the National Communications' Union and the Amalgamated Engineers' Union respectively as reasons for his claims without, in an honest way, explaining the other factors in both those elections. For example, in the NCU, this year was the first year of operation of the "individual ballot" which produced the same initial rightward drift in the CPSA, but which has since resulted in the election of Left NECs and John Macreadie. In the AEU John Tocher came the closest any left candidate has come in that union in recent times to winning a major election. Had it not been for the CP legacy of secret broad lefts (which Carter now mildly condemns) the Broad Left candidate in the AEU may well have won. And where do the political fund ballots fit into Carter's rightward drift? As a result of the Tories laws at least three unions which did not have political funds now have them because of the ballots forced upon them.

In probably the most far-fetched of all arguments in this document he throws his lot in with the General Secretary of the G&MBATU, John Edmonds, who in the September 1986 edition of *Marxism Today* says that: "...one of the saddest events in the recent history of the labour movement..." was its refusal to get involved in Live Aid or Band Aid. The "...labour movement was just not part of it at all". But Mr Carter went further. He saw it as "...a measure of the movement's isolation... why should it be left to Mars to organise the marathon, or a national distillery company to sponsor the

Grand National...?"

This not only evades, but totally misunderstands the role of a trade union which is not to substitute itself for big business sponsorship (who only do it for advertising purposes anyway) but to mobilise workers, industrially and politically, against the exploitation of labour by capital. No doubt Mr Carter sees this as a rather 'old fashioned' view of trade unions, but it is a Marxist one. We will leave Mr Carter to drag the ageing carthorse of the CP over the Grand National course to... the knackers yard!

Workers are not disillusioned in the unions because they do not organise pop concerts, but they can become disillusioned if the union leaders fail to offer a way forward on the problems they face. How many privatisation battles have the unions won? What has been won in recent years for the low paid women workers who, John Edmonds bemoans, need to be won back to the unions?

Of course, they can be won back but only by a class conscious trade union movement armed with the realisation that no one section of workers alone can break free from the chains of exploitation and low pay without a General Staff of the whole movement elected, accountable and willing to lead to the end of the road. This was the main lesson of the miners' strike. The miners were left isolated by the complete incapacity of the trade union leaders to mobilise the clear support for the miners amongst the rank and file of the movement.

The deep crisis of international capital and the special crisis of British capital will mean conflict with the next Labour government as it finds that its programme of limited minor reforms are impossible within the confines of British capitalism. The unions must be armed with open democratic broad lefts in every union and industry demanding the regular election of leaders, their full accountability and the perspective of the trade union movement mobilising as one entity. Unless we do this we shall continue to see isolated groups of workers picked off one by one. It is this need for unity which the class instinctively feels especially at times of crisis, which the trade union leaders are cynically using to stifle all opposition to the right wing programme of the next Labour government.

Carter skips all of these problems, all of these questions, instead chasing down the familiar cul-de-sacs of Green Peace, the Green Party, etc even urging the CP to chase "...apolitical" birdwatchers and those who watch TV nature programmes. The CP is chasing butterflies when it should be chasing socialism!

It is this general analysis, if it can be honoured with such a description, which leads Carter to his statement that the Broad Lefts, as presently constituted,

have become "...platforms for the ultra-left". There appears, on the surface, to be a contradiction between the "unified approach" advocated by the pamphlet with the need to pull together all strands of opinion on the "left", as he puts it, including such as Tom Sawyer and Ken Livingstone but, on the other hand, to steer clear of open democratic Broad Lefts such as those under the umbrella of the Broad Left Organising Committee. It is presumably under this "much broader vision" that the CP led the walkouts from the NIPSA and CPSA Broad Lefts in 1983 and 1984. It is, of course, the difference not between what the CP says but what it does in practice. Is it the CP in the NUM who are organising the first open democratic Broad Left?

End of consensus

Marxism is a science. Any application of the Marxist method to British society will show that the nature of class relations has sharpened over the past seven years and not been blunted. The miners' strike, as we have pointed out in the past, was the beginning of future titanic battles to come. The approach of the Thatcher government is not fundamentally new but is conditioned by the need of the capitalist class in deep crisis to reclaim more of its profits from the wages of workers. The nature of the sharp class battles at Orgreave and Wapping do not prove the weakness of the trade unions but the opposite—their **latent** strength.

The Tories could have been toppled by the miners' strike. But the bourgeoisie knew what kind of leadership the trade union movement had—one which still fundamentally lives in the consensus era of the 1950s and '60s. Those years have gone forever. Capitalism has no great booms ahead of it, only terminal crisis relieved by tiny "boomlets". But that crisis can last almost as long as the vacuum amongst the workers' leaders.

No-one can seriously say that the unions have been smashed by the Tories—they remain intact, slightly fewer because of mass unemployment but largely intact. Thatcherism is only a slightly different type of medicine to that meted out by Baldwin in 1926. But because of the political, theoretical and organisational degeneration of the CP this new onslaught of capital is seen not as a new higher stage in the class struggle but as a convenient opportunity to ditch all of its Marxist baggage. Rather than holding a loaded theoretical pistol to the head of British capital Mr Carter has slapped the bourgeoisie in the face with a wet fish.

The spectre of the Communist Party, which once haunted the ruling class, now haunts only the Communist Party itself.

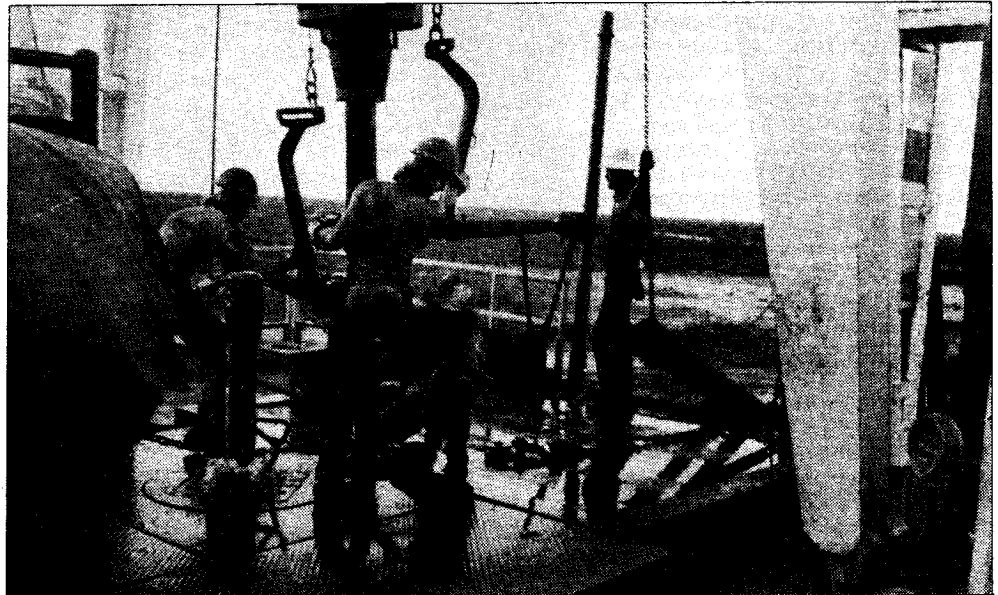
The US economy—a 'growth recession'?

THROUGHOUT September, share prices and the value of the US dollar plummeted down in tandem. On one day, Thursday 11 September, the values of stocks and shares on the Wall Street Stock Exchange in New York fell by 4.6 per cent in one session—a downturn not matched since the Great Crash of 1929.

The crisis for the dollar reflects the rising panic among US capitalists about the state of Reagan's American economy, and it prompts this column to return to a familiar theme developed in previous issues of the *MIR*. The economic boom in the United States has now lasted 45 months—a record period outstripping the average of previous booms of 33 months. But this column has argued that the recovery since the depth of recession in the winter of 1982 has been founded, not on the expansion of industrial investment and production, but on military spending and a flood of imports. As a result, the boom is an artificially induced one, preparing the way for a disastrous crash in US prosperity with serious repercussions for the world economy.

Huge deficits

The massive arms spending has run up a Federal budget deficit of over \$170bn and the need to maintain a flow of goods and services to meet the demands of government and consumer spending has created a deficit on trade which will reach \$175bn in 1986. This has been financed by high interest rates attracting Japanese and European investors. In other words the US boom has been supplied by West Ger-



Texan oil fortunes have been hit by the collapse in oil prices.

man and Japanese manufacturers and financed by the profits of these capitalists lent back to the US government and stock exchange.

This huge borrowing has to be paid for in the end by increased production from US capitalists, and corresponding purchases by Japanese and European consumers, or by severe cuts in the living standards of American workers or both. But there has been no boom for American industry. High interest rates have stifled investment and by forcing up the value of the dollar have allowed cheap (in dollar terms) Japanese and European imports to destroy home markets.

The stagnation in manufacturing production and investment eventually began to affect the whole economy. The rise in gross national product fell from over 4 per cent in 1984 to 2.3 per cent in 1985, and by the end of the first half of 1986 growth was just 0.6 per cent at an annual rate.

A meeting of US state governors in August estimated that 31 of the 50 states were now officially in recession, with investment and production still heading downwards. In the industrial heartland of the mid-West, hundreds of manufacturing

firms have been driven into bankruptcy, including the steel giants of LTV Dallas and even US Steel itself (forced to restart with debts wiped clean under the name of USX). Agricultural production has similarly been decimated—for the first time in 27 years the USA is importing more farm produce than it exports.

It had been hoped that low commodity prices and the collapse of oil prices would reduce costs for industry and stimulate a boom. But the slump in prices has only damaged the mining sectors and the oil rich states of Texas and Louisiana.

Banking crisis

Famous tycoons like the Hunt family who based their wealth on oil and metals have been driven into liquidation—JR Ewing is in trouble!

Financial and service sectors are ultimately dependent on a thriving industrial sector for prosperity, whatever some economists may be arguing these days. That truth has been borne out as bank after bank in the USA has been closed by an avalanche of defaulters from farming, industry and oil. The first major bank to suffer was the Continental Bank

of Illinois which eventually had to be bailed out (i.e. in effect nationalised) by the government's Federal Reserve Bank and other major banks. More recently the First Bank of Oklahoma was taken over by the government for \$130 million to save it from collapse, and on the horizon is the probable collapse of the Bank of America which used to be the world's largest, weighed down by unpaid debts from Californian farmers and Latin American governments. What a comment on the American economy that bastions of finance capital have to be nationalised by the Reagan government to maintain the channels of credit for US capitalism.

The Reagan government has desperately been trying to avoid the disaster ahead, while continuing to puff and huff about the boom lasting indefinitely. It laid its hopes on the 30 per cent devaluation of the dollar helping home industry to compete with imports, while demanding at this year's Group of Five meeting of major capitalist economies that Japan and West Germany cut their interest rates and spend more so that markets would be opened up for US goods.

But it would need a

massive readjustment of trade and production in the world economy if the US government was to have its way. To close the US trade deficit, West German and Japanese capitalists and consumers would have to raise their purchases of US goods at twice the rate they spent on them in the last two years. And they see no reason why they should expand their economies and risk new inflation in order to buy US goods. As it is, the slowing of the US economy has already affected Japan's industrial growth rate which is actually falling, at 3.5 per cent a year at present.

The devaluation also appears to have failed. The dollar may have fallen against West Germany and Japan but compared to other important importers like Canada and South Korea, there has been little change. So imports are still beating US manufacturers—in July the annual rate of imported

motor vehicles reached a record 3.3m, while US car manufacturers continue to slash production and prepare to move out of the USA.

No wonder some US economists are calling the current economic climate a "growth recession"—a somewhat black joke for millions of US industrial workers and farmers.

Trade barriers

Interest rates remain doggedly high and most observers do not expect any further falls—quite the contrary. So investment will remain stagnant. The Reagan government is thus preparing for major cuts in government spending and new taxes totalling over \$30bn which must further hit the markets and profits of US industry.

As a result, US industrialists are increasingly clamouring for tariff barriers and other measures to be

erected against Japanese and European competition. The US government has passed on these calls as threats to other capitalist nations: "I must frankly tell you that protectionism in the USA is not dead" said Trade Secretary Baker to a meeting of the OECD countries a few months ago.

And already a prolonged stagnation or even fall in world trade has been forecast by the world trade body GATT in its recent report—if countries persist in creating barriers to trade by bilateral 'favoured trade' agreements with certain countries: "To continue down the road of managed trade and market sharing can only invite prolonged stagnation—or decline—in world trade."

At the GATT conference the US representative threatened that "if there was no agreement, the USA may have to take its own individual action." This 'you

scratch my back and I'll scratch yours' policy of bilateral agreements rather than free trade is increasingly reducing overall trade expansion. GATT predicts only a 3.5 per cent growth in world trade this year, the same as 1985. And this before protectionism has really got a hold in the world's largest economy, the USA. *If that happens the world economy must spiral into a recession matching the 1930s.*

The fall in Wall Street and the dollar is the first sign that speculators no longer believe the fairy stories of permanent growth espoused by the Reagan administration and are beginning to see that the wild share price rises of the past based on merger mania and foreign purchasers only disguised the prospect of the world's most important economy crashing down into a severe recession that will spread throughout the world.

UK poverty

HOUSE OF Commons statistics now estimate that 11.7m people in the UK are living on incomes equivalent to the supplementary benefit level, which is £29.80 a week plus rent for a single person and £48.40 per week for a couple.

This is a sharp increase in the numbers of poor from 6m when the Tories came to power. If you add in those who are near the supplementary benefit level then a new estimate (by the Social Democrats!) shows that there are 16.3m in poverty, a rise of 47 per cent since 1979 and making nearly one in three people poor.

Of the near 12m at benefit levels, there are two million actually living below those levels. Half of these are pensioners, but nearly 700,000 are people working a full week but earning less than the state benefit minimum!

And the Central Statistical

Office has more information which adds to the misery. The poorest 20 per cent of households in the UK earned only 0.5 per cent of total household income while the top 20 per cent took 50 per cent. After taxes and benefits this huge inequality was slightly ameliorated; the bottom 20 per cent receiving 6 per cent and the top 20 per cent getting 41 per cent.

Employment depends on manufacturing

A STUDY by the OSG private research group on employment refutes the arguments from Tory ministers and bankers that service industries can compensate for the decimation of UK manufacturing employment. According to the study, 16 per cent of service industries directly depend on trade with manufacturers and the proportion is rising.



Over a million pensioners live below the supplementary benefit level.

Moreover much of the increase in employment in service sectors has been through the transfer of jobs from manufacturing, by taking jobs like cleaning, research, finance, and catering out of in-house departments in manufacturing firms, councils and na-

tionalised industries and handing them to sub-contractors.

There is an obvious limit to service job expansion in this way and new service jobs at the expense of productive industry cannot relieve the unemployment problem.

In the first years after the Russian revolution the Soviet Union led the world in plant genetics and the development of new crops. But in the 1930s, following the rise of Stalinism, the unscientific theories of Lysenko were accepted and this work effectively destroyed. Why were Lysenko's ideas adopted? What is the relationship between science and socialism? *Viv Sobel* examines the issues.

Science and Socialism: The Lysenko Controversy

CAPITALISTS AND anti-Marxists are fond of using the case of TD Lysenko and the Lysenkoist movement in the Soviet Union in the 1930s – 1960s as the dreadful spectre of what happens to science under socialism. In Russia today, the Lysenko period is a painful memory, seen as an aberration in the history of biology in that country, to be explained by the "cult of personality", as Stalin's purges and repression were explained away. Some "dissident" Russian scientists justify their own technocratic views by saying that the Lysenko movement illustrates the disastrous consequences of allowing science to be influenced by politics or ideology (as though science were neutral in the West). JBS Haldane, one of the world's leading classical geneticists when Lysenko's influence was at its height, was also a leading member of the British CP, with a regular science column in the *Daily Worker*. He resigned from the CP over the Lysenko affair. Maoist sects today believe that Lysenko was right and that he promoted a "materialist method in natural science" by "seeking truth from facts" rather than "seeking facts to prove pre-conceived notions in biology". Lastly, "radical science" writers like Hilary and Steven Rose believe that the Lysenkoist movement was part of an attempt at a cultural revolution, to replace "bourgeois" science with "Marxist" science, but which failed.

Theories of evolution and genetics

The "Lysenkoist movement" thus produced strong reactions across the spectrum of political opinion. What was it? Any serious Marxist interested in science needs to explain how these ideas arose, and for a time, gained widespread support, in the context of the material and political circumstances of Russia at the time. This article is intended as a contribution to a discussion of these theoretical issues.

Lysenko originally proposed a series of recipes for improving agricultural yields. He later developed a theory of heredity that challenged traditional genetic theory (based on Mendel's work), as incompatible with dialectical materialism. In practice, however, Lysenko failed to create a new science to replace genetics; set back the

(previously pioneering) Russian work in biology for 20 – 30 years; established an enormous obstacle to the idea that Marxism or dialectical materialism can make any contribution to natural science; made no noticeable positive contribution to biology; and failed to produce a radical breakthrough in agriculture.

To explain the Lysenkoist movement, however, it is necessary first to outline the state of genetic theory that Lysenko claimed to have disproved; and secondly to explain the conditions in Russia that existed at the time, particularly in relation to agriculture.

According to Darwin, natural selection is the mechanism for evolution. Organisms vary, and these variations are inherited, at least in part, by their offspring. Organisms that vary most strongly in directions favoured by the environment will survive and propagate. So favourable variation accumulates in populations by natural selection. Variation is thus random, or at least not preferentially inclined towards adaptation, and natural selection, according to Darwin, is the creative force of evolution and does not just eliminate the individuals that do not vary in the appropriate way. Evolution is thus a mixture of chance and necessity—chance at the level of variation, necessity in the working of selection.

This differs from an earlier theory, put forward by Lamarck, whereby the individual adapts itself to its environment, and passes on these acquired traits to its offspring. Debate about the relative merits of Lamarck's inheritance of acquired characters and natural selection continued for many years, and was by no means settled at the time of Lysenko, although the majority of biologists by then favoured natural selection, particularly following work on the study of cells and the re-discovery of the experiments of Mendel, which supplied further details about the mechanism of inheritance, especially at the level of the individual.

Mendel's work suggested that characteristics were inherited as a whole, from one or other parent, but not a blend of both. The factors in the parent that are inherited by the offspring are what are now called genes. Around 1900, improvements in the microscope and in techniques for using it, made it possible to see the inter-

nal structure of a cell, and led to the discovery of genes and chromosomes. (Chromosomes are arrays of many genes). This work led to the foundation of classical genetics.

It was not until the 1950s that the chemical composition of genes was established as DNA and its structure worked out. The precise arrangement of the chemical molecule of DNA is the "blueprint" for the next generation. This work led to the establishment of yet another branch of science, molecular biology. Experiments suggested that DNA can issue instructions for making a new individual but the individual cannot send information back to the genetic material. This evidence supports Darwin's and Mendel's earlier work, but contradicts the theory of Lamarck, since it does not allow for the transfer of information from the individual to the genetic material. However, the theory of inheritance of acquired characters has continued to have supporters, and from time to time evidence appears in support of it.

Agriculture and biology in tsarist Russia

However, some experiments, which in the 1930s appeared to demonstrate the inheritance of acquired characters, were explained in the 1950s by the discovery of genetic assimilation, whereby latent genetic differences within populations are revealed—but not created—by environmental treatment, and therefore become available for selection. Most recently, the work of Steele and Groczyński seems to have demonstrated that acquired tolerance to an injected antigen may be inherited. A mechanism whereby some naturally occurring RNA virus may be able to alter the genetic material may yet be established. Work on this—and the debate—continues.

In Western Europe modern farming developed, largely on the basis of trial and error, and before scientists could explain it or provide practical assistance. "Scientific farming" began to emerge only in the second half of the 19th century as the sciences of chemistry and biology were able to analyse what the farmers were doing in practice and develop ways of doing it more effectively.

In Russia, however, it was the other way round. Under the Tsars, the crip-

pling burden of serfdom prevented any modernisation in farming methods. Peasants stuck to the medieval methods of their ancestors right up to the 1917 revolution, and well afterwards in many cases. Even if they had known about modern methods they would have been unable to afford mineral fertilisers or new varieties of seed. Even the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 was more a re-organisation of oppression than an improvement in conditions, as were subsequent attempts at reform. On the other hand, from time to time, the various Tsars were aware of the need to modernise the country and made various attempts to do so without altering its social structure, but by encouraging science and technology.

The main policy was to encourage science and technology by providing money for higher education and for research, but not provide primary education for the peasants. Thus, the biological sciences developed far in advance of agricultural methods. For example, Russian botanists began to organise the world's greatest collection of plants from which they hoped to breed new varieties according to the new science of genetics, while Russian peasants were planting by scattering or "broadcasting" mongrel folk varieties of seed, in just the same way as described in the bible. Soil science was founded in Russia, but the Russian farmers were meanwhile following grain-fallow rotation on small strips of land in ways described in the Domesday book in Medieval England. Even after the 1905 revolution, the government still paid more attention to funding agricultural science than in making it possible to put new ideas into practice.

The new workers state survived famine, drought, civil war and the intervention of foreign powers. But these events devastated agriculture. After the revolution most peasants were only interested in owning their own land. They did not turn overnight into experts in modern farming methods, and even if they had, the enormous numbers of tiny strips of land ruled out new methods of planting, growing and harvesting, and put investment in machinery out of reach of individual families. The Bolsheviks favoured collectivisation of farms, to produce larger units capable of innovation. They proposed setting up model collective farms which would demonstrate the advantages of new agricultural techniques and of collective farming. This would be a slow process: in the takeover of the estates from the old landlords, even the model farms belonging to innovating landlords—



Lenin at the testing of the first Russian electric plough on the experimental farm of the Moscow Higher Zootechnical Institute. The Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky attempted to harness the knowledge of existing bourgeois specialists under democratic workers' control.

which Lenin tried hard to preserve—were divided up into small primitive landholdings, rather than being taken over as whole entities.

Meanwhile, many of the scientists were, if anything, more hostile to the Bolsheviks than they had been to Tsarism. But they needed government support to continue their work, while the new state desperately needed the development of all the sciences that would make possible industrial and agricultural development. This proved to be the basis of an agreement between the scientists and the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks attitude to specialists

Lenin in particular adopted a very careful policy of winning their support or at least their co-operation. He gave the scientists every support, including defending their autonomy in developing theories and methods. Trotsky described his attitude in a speech to chemists: "When any Marxist tried to convert Marx's theory into a universal skeleton key and fitted it through other fields of knowledge, Vladimir Ilyich would rebuke him with the expressive little phrase: 'communist conceit'. This would signify in particular: communism does not replace chemistry."

But the Bolsheviks also made it clear that while scientists with pro-capitalist views would be allowed to do their work as they thought necessary, they would not be allowed to organise against the workers state. The government defended the agricultural research centres against liquidation by the peasants.

"Even the manners of the new leaders were a reassuring surprise," said Joravsky in *The Lysenko Affair*. They contrasted favourably "with the haughty bearing of tsarist ministers. While soliciting the advice of specialists, the Commissar of Agriculture sat at a common table with them, sharing their weak, barely sweetened tea in a tin cup, taking no more food than the standard ration (an ounce of bread)." Tulaikov, the country's leading expert on dry land agriculture spoke about the same meeting: "Thus at a moment that was very grave for the directors of our life (the civil war had begun) a close connection was formed between agricultural specialists and the new regime, which saw in them first, workers dedicated to their cherished cause, honourably, without any duplicity, offering their knowledge and experience to the new upbuilding, and second, specialists who loved their work, who were seriously prepared to defend it against any undeserved attacks wherever they might come from."

Science expanded under the Bolsheviks. Vavilov, director of the All-Union Institute of Plant Industry and of the Academy of Sciences Institute of Genetics, had an extraordinary talent for organising support and funds for research, for firing both the Bolsheviks and other scientists with enthusiasm, for recognising the importance of other people's work, for organising his colleagues, and for establishing internationally recognised centres of research, as well as for his own work on genetics.

In terms of practical benefit to

agriculture, however, the gap between Russian science and Russian farming was, if anything, wider than ever. Lulakov commented on the still primitive state of most farms, with many weeds, little fertiliser and no seed drill or proper rotation, which would wipe out any advantage to be gained from using improved strains of seed, even where farmers were convinced they should buy it. The problem was to link biological developments to economic tasks and possibilities.

Vavilov spoke of "the planned and rational utilisation of the plant resources of the terrestrial globe" and the potential of the new science of genetics "to sculpt organic forms at will... Biological synthesis is becoming as much a reality as chemical." This was indeed the potential of the science: and still is. Even today, however, with all the intervening developments in biochemistry, molecular biology and genetic engineering, and all the accumulated mass of experimental data and technical experience, biology is far from providing the plant breeder with a complete chart of basic elements of all plants and animals from which to "sculpt organic forms at will". The Bolsheviks took it for granted that investment in the sciences related to agriculture would only lead to benefits in the future, when the science itself was more fully developed, and, in particular, when the farmers were able to take advantage of it.

Rise of Stalinism

The German Revolution was defeated and the workers state in Russia was both economically backward and isolated. A bureaucratic clique developed under Stalin which turned Russia into a deformed parody of a workers state, removing all democratic controls from the workers.

The bureaucracy decreed that socialism would be built in one country, and in the late 1920's adopted a programme of forced industrialisation. That in turn meant getting a large enough supply of food at a low enough price to feed all the workers and still accumulate enough funds for the heavy investment in industry.

They seized grain from the peasants without payment, and the peasants retaliated by going back to subsistence farming. Stalin responded by ordering forcible collectivisation. The peasants reacted to what they saw as an attack on their private property with acts of sabotage, such as ploughing in their crops, refusing to sow or harvest, slaughter of livestock (and sometimes of agricultural bureaucrats). The collec-



TD Lysenko

tivisation programme was forced through, but at great cost in lives and production.

Meanwhile, investment in science was stepped up. As a result of their enthusiastic forecasts of the potential of genetics, the scientists were given the task of doubling agricultural productivity in 10 years. "Any critical comment, any silence that could be interpreted as criticism or mental reservation, became grounds for dismissal, or jailing or even shooting" (Joravsky). And when the scientists failed to meet the targets, the "bourgeois specialists" were blamed. Practical achievements became the only acceptable test of scientific truth.

It is not unreasonable to expect some practical applications to result from investment in science and technology, especially in a backward country with limited resources. But the bureaucracy expected miracles, and the penalties for not producing them were severe.

T.D. Lysenko claimed to offer a miracle. He put forward a plan of action that would make obsolete all the theories, careful experiments and patience over several years offered by the scientists, at the right moment in history to get an echo in the bureaucracy. He is most well known for his notion of "vernalisation" whereby winter wheat was wetted and chilled and then sown in spring. Winter wheat does not normally "ear" if planted in spring. It is planted in winter, but if the winter is too severe it may be destroyed. In the winter of 1927-28, 5 million hectares of winter wheat were destroyed. The following winter saw the loss of 7m hectares. The masses starved. Lysenko claimed success for vernalisation on the basis of a one-off experiment on his father's farm, but the bureaucracy were

desperate and preferred to gamble on the new method than spend time on systematic trials.

Lysenko was immediately sent to the All-Union Institute of Plant Industry at Odessa, the most important centre of agricultural research, where he began to propose various other recipes for treatment before planting that would increase crop yields. He was an expert at organising publicity, had taken the measure of the bureaucratic mentality, and where traditional science was not yet able to solve the problems of Russian agriculture, his "practical" suggestions promised a lot for a little and right away. Lysenko was strongly opposed to the idea that his recipes needed to be tested. Where scientists did carry out trials he accused them of sabotage and wrecking if they failed to get good yields. In view of the very real sabotage that had greeted forcible collectivisation, it was not difficult to accept the idea of short cutting systematic trials in the context of the Russian soils and climate.

In Russia, soil, temperature and rainfall for wheat growing are marginal at best, and agriculture is subject to enormous uncertainty and variation. Droughts or frosts can wipe out a whole crop. In the first 11 years of the workers' state there were two years of drought, 1920 and 1921, and three years of severe winter cold, 1924, 1927 and 1928. North America's great plains and prairies are milder and wetter on average with less variation. (Even today Russia is America's largest grain customer).

Genetics attacked

This wide variation in temperature and rainfall makes the American method of experimental plant breeding and evaluation, based on control experiments, statistical calculations and averaging over years and locations, unsatisfactory in Russia. Improved techniques for experimentation in Russia were thus needed in any case, and even without the bureaucratic deformation of the workers' state, it would have taken some time to establish that Lysenko's methods did not in fact lead to improved production.

Lysenko and his supporters increased their influence with the bureaucracy, orchestrating support on the basis of their "practical" approach and their attacks on the "bourgeois" scientists, especially the geneticists. In many cases it may not have been difficult to whip up hostility against "bourgeois" scientists: some of them undoubtedly were arrogant towards those from working class and peasant backgrounds who had trained after the

revolution, never mind towards the idea that there was anything at all they could learn from ordinary workers and peasants with no scientific education at all. Lenin and Trotsky had won the support of many of the scientists by encouraging their work and a free interchange of ideas on science and other issues, and had begun to establish a degree of mutual respect between the "experts" and the "masses". But the bureaucracy exploited any resentments felt towards arrogant experts and turned it into a virtue—the elitist academy vs the exuberant communist youth—in order to try and bolster their position.

The Lysenkoists were also able to exploit the association between genetics (in fact a distortion of genetics) and eugenics, or the idea of breeding superior people. It was quite a common idea at the time—Russian eugenicists proposed breeding working class heroes. But it quickly became used to justify racist policies and propaganda by the Nazis, and Lysenko denounced genetics as racist.

"Foreign" and "Cosmopolitan" ideas were denounced, geneticists and other biologists began to lose their jobs and many were imprisoned or even shot, as "wreckers". Vavilov, the leading Russian geneticist was a supporter of the October revolution in 1917 and an enthusiastic propagandist for the potential of science under socialism, despite his background. He courageously defended his ideas and was arrested in 1940. The death sentence was changed to life imprisonment but he died in prison, of malnutrition, in 1943.

As his organisational success grew, Lysenko developed theories out of vernalisation and his other techniques, and claimed them to be the "Marxist" answer to genetics. Vernalisation, he said, demonstrated the importance of environmental influences in heredity (as though classical genetic and evolutionary theory denied the importance of environment). Mendelian genetics was reactionary, racist and anti-Marxist. Genes were mystical notions, chromosomes under suspicion, and in extreme moments even plant hormones and viruses were "metaphysical vapourings of the bourgeois mind". It is true that there were some geneticists in the West who were religious, idealist, and had a mystical view of genes, but the claim that genetics was incompatible with dialectical materialism was essentially the result of the Lysenkoist vulgarisation of Marxism—and of science. For every aspect of genetics they claimed as contradicting dialectical materialism, there is in fact complete compatibility.

For example, Lysenkoists said that,

according to genetics, the gene is immutable and unchangeable: in fact the mutability and variation of genes is an essential feature. They said that Mendel was idealistic. On the contrary, he solved the problem of heredity by studying the actual (material) pattern of variation among the offspring of cross-bred plants. And this study led to a synthesis of two apparently contradictory elements, heredity and variation, as dual aspects of a single phenomenon: an example of dialectical thinking.

Later on, the claims and theories grew wilder. Lysenko claimed that the environment could turn wheat into weeds—the old peasant superstition elevated to theory. He modified natural selection: individual seedlings do not weaken each other by competing for nutrients, moisture and light, he said. They co-operate for the good of the community and weaker ones die out so the strong might thrive. He justified his theories by claiming they were compatible with Lamarck's theory of inheritance of acquired characters.

Backwardness of Russian biology

It was not wrong in principle to take peasant recipes or "wild ideas" seriously. Ordinary people have an immense amount of knowledge, experience and useful ideas. And apparently "wild ideas" are as important in major scientific discoveries as patient, day to day experiment. The key thing is to separate the useful remedies from the superstition, magic and sheer habit, and to evaluate the "imaginative leaps" against some kind of observation or experimental evidence, free of the dogmatism and authoritarianism of bureaucracy.

In 1948, as the cold war was stepped up, genetics was formally banned in Russia. Until that time officially there had still been debate and discussion. After 1948 Lysenko had complete domination of biology, at least at an organisational and theoretical level. On the practical side, the campaigns for vernalisation had quietly been dropped and farmers had stopped using Lysenko's recipes. "The officials were preaching Lysenkoism while abandoning it in practice, just as American politicians used to preach the virtue of balanced budgets while moving ever deeper into deficit financing" (Joravsky). Lewontin and Levins, writing in *The Radicalisation of Science* (ed. H & S Rose), argued that "1948-62, the period of Lysenkoist hegemony in Soviet agrobiolgy, actually corresponds to the period of most rapid growth in yields per acre", suggesting

that Lysenkoism had some justification in agricultural practice after all. But their comparison of US and Russian yields are all made relative to 1926-8 figures, which in Russia (but not America) included the catastrophic crop failure of 1927-8, so any normal year's crop would be an increase relative to that. Second, the period of increasing yields did not begin until after vernalisation had been abandoned in practice.

The fate of Lysenkoism was tied to the fate of Stalinism. After Stalin's death Khrushchev inherited Lysenkoism. As the crisis in the bureaucracy developed, increasing proof of Lysenko's self-deception and deliberate fraud emerged. Meanwhile in the West, the discovery of the structure of DNA, the cracking of the genetic code and the establishment of mechanisms of protein synthesis in the early 1960s, revealed, not just to the world scientific community but to the general public, the grotesque backwardness of Soviet biology. Khrushchev and Lysenko were sacked within 3 months of each other.

Lysenkoism had its roots in peasant superstition and ancient recipes and was seized upon as seeming to offer a short cut in a period of agricultural catastrophe, when the science of the experts had not been able to offer a quick solution. It coincided with the bureaucratic deformation of the workers' state, and was taken up and sustained by the authoritarianism and dogmatism of the bureaucracy. After that it developed its own logic and momentum independent of its ability to provide coherent scientific explanations of natural phenomena, or even practical applications in agriculture, but totally bound up with the development and crisis of the bureaucracy.

In advanced capitalist countries the largest amount of research and development work is done by private industry in its own interests. Its primary aim is new products and processes which will lead to more profit. The overwhelming majority of Government sponsored research, meanwhile, goes on defence and aerospace projects with only a relatively small amount being spent on health, welfare or public transport. Clearly, therefore, the priorities of a socialist system will be entirely different, and the major goal of research and development will be the satisfaction of human needs. Does this mean that "Marxist" science will be different?

The experience of capitalist priorities has shown that some sciences are highly developed where some barely exist, as a result of the interests of big business. Thus for example, the

chemistry of organo-chlorine and organo-phosphorus compounds is quite sophisticated, together with techniques of analytical chemistry and chromatography, because the chemical industry had a lot of money to make out of chemical pesticides like DDT. On the other hand, the biological effects of chemicals on humans and other animals, the interaction of living things and the environment, and the biological control of pests were for many years hardly developed at all. So the existence or otherwise of a branch of science depends decisively on the interests of the society concerned.

But does society affect the nature, as well as the existence, of theories and facts? Are there objective facts, neutral in class terms, only used or misused by a particular society? It is obviously silly to suggest that, for example, water will no longer boil at 100°C under socialism. Nevertheless, scientists and technologists, like other people, are members of a particular society at a particular moment in history. They cannot help being influenced by the prejudices, outlook and ideology of that society—consciously or unconsciously. This is bound to affect the way they look at things, including their work. Newton couldn't care less about the needs of the emerging mercantile capitalists, but the fact that navigation, mining and ballistics were increasingly important meant that problems such as what laws governed the motion of planets or cannon balls, became common currency and so posed interesting problems for a mathematician to solve. Even the selection of which facts are important, what measurements to make, and other important details of experimental research, involve value judgements which in turn will be influenced by social values. To this extent, even the



Backward Russian agriculture was further retarded by the adoption of Lysenko's 'theories'.

"facts" are not entirely independent of society and its ideology. Certainly theories—conceptions and explanations of these facts—are influenced by the ideas and outlook of society, as Galileo, Darwin and Einstein found when they challenged the accepted theories of the time.

Marxism and Science

That by no means implies that socialism will overthrow all the advances of science made under capitalism, together with capitalism itself. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks quite rightly pledged, on many occasions, to make the findings of world science a foundation of socialism. Socialism will make it possible for there to be an interaction between the practical experience of workers and the scientific expertise of "experts" as well as making available time for scientific study and research to workers who wish to use it, so that eventually the distinction between experts and everyone else will wither away.

The case of Lysenko does not demonstrate, as bourgeois writers would have us believe, the disastrous consequences of allowing Marxism to influence science. Engels' theory of the development of the brain as a consequence and not a cause of human beings' standing upright and using tools, was based entirely on a dialectical materialist analysis, since the evidence that confirmed it, and disproved the opposite theory of most of the scientific "experts", was not found until years later (see J. Pickard's article, *An appraisal of Engels' theory of human development* in *MIR* No 26, Summer 1984).

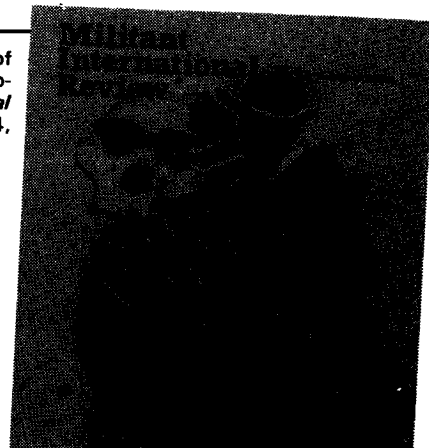
Lysenkoism only demonstrates the disastrous consequences—for biology, for biologists and for agriculture—of a stalinist vulgarisation of Marxism and of science, backed up by the apparatus of a police state. In a socialist democracy, it will be possible to test out the ways in which the knowledge, ideas and methods of Marxism and science might enrich each other.

Further Reading

Theories of evolution and genetics

Engels—The part played by labour in the transition from ape to man	15p
Johanson—Lucy: beginnings of humankind	£3.95
Asimov—Guide to Science, Volume Two, The biological sciences	£4.50
Gould—Ever since Darwin	£3.95
Gould—Hens teeth and horses toes	£4.95
Gould—Mismeasure of man	£3.95
Gould—Panda's Thumb	£3.95
Rose—Not in our genes	£3.95
Rose—Chemistry of Life	£3.95
Connor—Evolution Vs Creationism	60p

John Pickard—An appraisal of Engels' theory of human development, in *Militant International Review*, No 26, Summer 1984, 75p.



Order from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB. Add 25 per cent for postage on orders under £5, 10 per cent under £10, over £10 post free. Cheques payable to World Socialist Books.

The Second Congress, 1903

THE TURN of the century saw a period of rapid industrial growth in Russia, which served to strengthen further the working class, now numbering nearly three million. Between 1894 and 1902 the number of workers in factories with a workforce of 100-150 went up by 52.8 per cent. In those big factories employing from 500-1,000 workers, the numbers rose by 72 per cent. The biggest increase, however, took place in the largest factories, employing more than 1,000 workers, which increased by no less than 141 per cent. In the early years of this century, 1,155,000 workers were employed by 458 enterprises.

Layer after layer of workers was drawn into the strike movement which acquired an irresistible force in this crucible of whirlwind industrial development.

The class composition of the revolutionary movement reflected this profound shift in social relations. In 1884-90, a mere 15 per cent of those arrested for political offences were workers. In 1901-03, 46 per cent, almost half, were workers. The statistics of the strike movement illustrate the rapid process of politicisation of the working class:

	1901	1902	1903
Political strikes:	22.1	20.4	53.2
Economic strikes:	77.9	79.6	46.8

The movement of the working class gave a mighty impulse to the struggles of the peasantry. Early in 1902, peasant revolts flared up in Poltava and Kharkov provinces. 10,000 troops were sent to suppress the risings, but soon the movement had spread to the Central Black Earth region, the Volga and Georgia.

The revolutionary movement of the masses served to awaken the intelligentsia from the slough of despond. The setting up of the Social Revolutionary Party (SRs) in 1902 marked the re-emergence of the revolutionary petit-bourgeoisie under the banner of Narodism and terrorism.

Feeling the ground tremble beneath their feet, the political representatives of the Russian bourgeoisie hesitatingly began to organise. The publication abroad of an illegal liberal journal *Osvobozhdenie* ("Liberation") in 1902 was the first timid step towards the setting up of the future Liberal Party (the "Cadets"). This event marked the

final breach with Marxism of the former "Legal Marxist" trend of Peter Struve, who now became the editor of *Osvobozhdenie*. For all its "democratic" phraseology, the liberal bourgeoisie was seeking to do a deal with the autocratic regime. The trouble was that the regime was more inclined to put its trust in the Cossack's whip than to lean on the liberals, whose ability to control the masses was conspicuous by its absence.

"Zubatovism"

Having failed to check the movement by brute force, the government decided to resort to cunning. The head of the Moscow *Okhrana* (secret police) SV Zubatov hit on the idea of setting up legal unions, under the control of the police, which were allowed to function, and even elect committees subject to police vetting and carry out activities, provided they were of a strictly economic, non-political character. This movement was far more successful than its authors had expected—or intended. In a climate of general labour unrest—and in the absence of genuine mass legal organisations—the workers entered the "police unions" in large numbers. In order to keep in the workers' good books, over-zealous police-officers even organised strikes. These unions contained thousands of workers—far more than the relatively small numbers active in the Social Democratic committees. With their customary resourcefulness, the workers turned the table on the police, and used the opportunity to press home their demands and organise legally in the workplaces.

The question arose of what attitude the Social Democrats should take towards these reactionary police unions. Many years later, when the Russian workers had already taken power, Lenin gave the answer in his masterpiece on revolutionary strategy and tactics, *Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*:

"Under Tsarism we had no 'legal opportunities' whatsoever until 1905. However, when Zubatov, agent of the secret police, organised Black Hundred* workers' assemblies and working men's societies for the purpose of trapping revolutionaries and combatting them, we sent members of



our party to these assemblies and into these societies... They established contacts with the masses, were able to carry on their agitation, and succeeded in wresting workers from the influence of Zubatov's agents." ¹

This was always the hallmark of Lenin's method: absolute implacability on questions of theory and principle combined with extreme flexibility on tactical and organisational issues. The authorities attempted to construct a wall between the Marxists and the masses. But the Social Democratic workers, by patient and careful work and flexible tactics, succeeded in breaking down the barriers, penetrating the unions, and fertilising them with the ideas of Marxism.

The success of these tactics did not take long in making itself felt. Under the irresistible pressure of the shopfloor, the Zubatov unions became partially transformed into organs of struggle. After the strike wave of 1903, the unfortunate Zubatov was unceremoniously sacked! Even then this movement continued to play a role. The workers' demonstration which sparked off the 1905 revolution was led by Father Gapon—who started out as Zubatov's principal lieutenant in St Peterburg.

At the time of launching *Iskra*, the party in Russia hardly existed as an organised force. In the midst of

* The "Black Hundreds" were a reactionary, anti-semitic organisation used by tsarism as an auxiliary arm against the revolutionary movement.

ideological confusion, factional divisions gave rise to a series of splits and the setting up of small groups. In Petersburg alone at the turn of the century there was the "Group for the Self-Emancipation of the Working Class," the "Group of Workers for the Struggle with Capital," "Workers' banner," "The Socialist", "Social Democrat", "Workers' Library", "The Workers Organisation" and others, all claiming to speak in the name of the RSDLP.

Many of these groups were influenced by the ideas of the Economists*. One common feature was the desire for a "pure proletarian" image. The first-named group advanced the idea that the interests of the intellectuals were at variance with those of the workers. The Petersburg League of Struggle itself, having been taken over by the *Rabochaya Mysl'* (Workers' Thought) faction of extreme economism, actually split into two groups—one "for workers" and the other "for intellectuals!"

Of course all this posturing revealed not a proletarian tendency, but precisely the opposite: the snobishness of intellectuals who imagine that the way to win the workers is by pandering to the prejudices of the most backward layers of the working class. In the same way as the old Narodniks tried, with calamitous results to "go to the people", the would-be middle class revolutionist imagines that it is possible to find a road to the masses by donning a donkey-jacket and using bad language. The intellectual who tries to curry favour by "abasing" himself before the workers, in reality demonstrates at one and the same time a pathetic lack of understanding of and a deep-seated contempt for working people.

The advance of *Iskra*

In reality what is required is the creation of cadres, educated in the theory and practice of Marxism and integrated in the working class movement, starting with its most active and conscious layer. The class-composition of the party must be decisively proletarian. But students and intellectuals can play an important role, fertilising the movement with their ideas and assisting its development, on one condition—that they have decisively broken with their class and placed themselves not only in words but in everyday practice on the standpoint of the proletariat.

The problem with the "Economists" was that they saw, not the face of the proletariat, but only its backside.

The tendencies of localism and

amateurism which prevailed in many committees were holding back the work at a time when big possibilities were opening up.

Iskra's message, based on the need to fight for Marxist theory, for a unified party, for a professional approach to the work, struck a responsive chord among the workers, although by the end of 1901 there were only nine *Iskra* agents in the whole of Russia, and the tendency was still in a minority. Many members of local committees were sceptical or even hostile at first. Thus at the second congress one of the delegates remarked: "I recall the article *Where to Begin?* in No 3 or 4 of *Iskra*. Many of the comrades active in Russia found it a tactless article; others thought this plan was fantastic, and the majority attributed it solely to ambition. Then I remember the bitterness shown towards *Iskra* by a majority of the committees; I remember a whole series of splits..."²

The *Iskra* tendency was gradually built up by patient work around the paper itself. Starting as a monthly, *Iskra* later appeared every two weeks. Slowly but surely, a network was built up of worker-correspondents in the factories and workers' districts, for the distribution of the paper, the systematic collection of funds, the link-up with different organisations and the establishment of a periphery of sympathisers.

A key role in this work was the steadily growing number of *Iskra* agents, men and women who dedicated themselves entirely to revolutionary work. Under difficult and dangerous conditions in the underground they undertook the task of building the tendency inside Russia, maintaining stable contact with the centre abroad, organising the illegal transportation of literature, establishing underground print-shops, etc. Commenting on this period in which he played an active role within the *Iskra* camp, Trotsky gives a vivid picture of the work and lifestyle of these agents:

"The immediate task of *Iskra* was to select from among the local workers the persons of greatest stamina and to use them in the creation of a central apparatus capable of guiding the revolutionary struggle of the entire country. The number of *Iskra* adherents was considerable, and it was constantly growing. But the number of genuine Iskrovites, of trusted agents of the foreign centre, was of necessity limited; it did not exceed twenty to thirty persons. Most characteristic of the Iskrovite was his severance from his own city, his own government, (this appears to be a

mistranslation of the Russian word "gubernia" meaning "administrative region", AW) his own province, for the sake of building the party. In the *Iskra* dictionary 'localism' was a synonym for backwardness, narrowness, almost for regression. 'Welded with a compact conspirative group of professional revolutionists', wrote the Gendarme General Spiridovich, 'they travelled from place to place, wherever there were party committees, established contacts with their members, delivered illegal literature to them, helped to establish printshops and gathered the information needed by the *Iskra*. They penetrated into local committees, carried on their propaganda against 'Economism', eliminated their ideological opponents and in this way subjected the committees to their influence.' The retired gendarme here gives a sufficiently correct characterisation of the Iskrovites. They were members of a wandering order, above the local organisations which they regarded as an arena for the exercise of their influence."³

The upsurge of the revolutionary movement provided a fertile ground for the spread of *Iskra's* ideas. As the only paper with a real national identity, *Iskra* became a powerful force for unification which swiftly broke down the resistance of the parochial local "committee-men".

In many areas, the struggle for influence within the committees led to splits. Invariably, however, the anti-*Iskra* committees tended to wither away and disappear, while the number of viable *Iskra* committees continued to grow.

Economists in retreat

The main base which remained to the Economists of the *Rabocheye Dyelo* (Workers' Cause) tendency was the emigré "Union of Social Democrats Abroad." An attempt to achieve unity on a principled basis broke down, after a unification conference in early 1901, and the *Iskra* supporters finally withdrew from the union in September and the following month set up the "League of Revolutionary Social Democrats Abroad."

The Economists of the "Union of Social Democrats Abroad", seeing the situation in Russia slipping out of their hands, decided to launch a pre-emptive strike by hastily convening a Party Congress, which they hoped might give them an advantage.

* For an explanation of Economism see *Militant International Review* Number 31, Spring 1986 and *Militant International Review* No 32, Summer 1986.

At the end of March 1902, delegates from seven different organisations convened at Belostok. Because of the way in which it was convened, there was an anti-*Iskra* majority. But in view of the patently unrepresentative nature of the gathering (there was, in fact, less representation than at the first congress), there was no question of giving it the character of a congress. Instead, an Organising Committee (OC) was elected, with the brief of preparing a proper congress.

Shortly afterwards, the majority of the conference delegates were arrested, together with two members of the OC. After that, the entire work of convening the congress fell to *Iskra*. At a new congress held at Pskov in November 1902, a new OC was formed, this time with a majority of *Iskra* supporters. The preparations for the Second Congress now began in earnest.

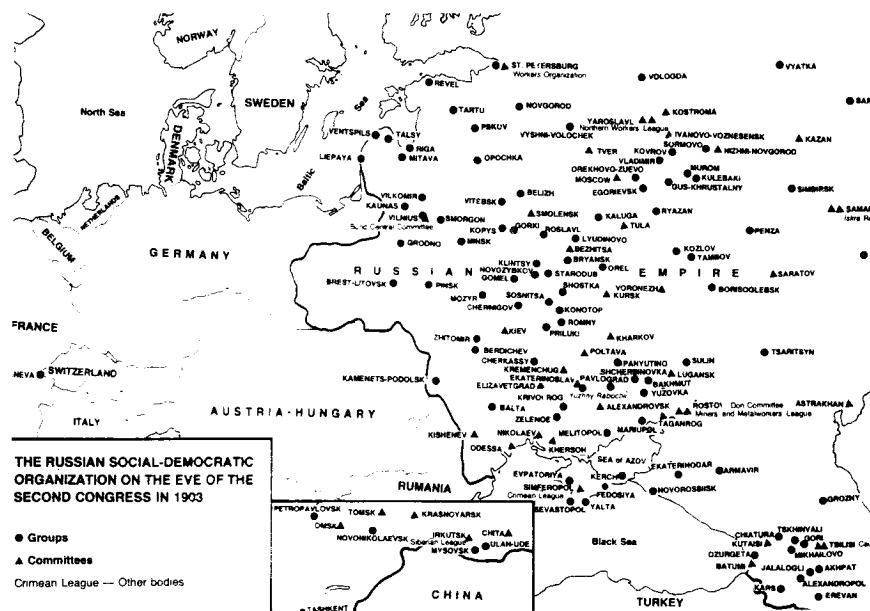
The successes of *Iskra* in Russia enormously enhanced the authority of the Editorial Board in London, which acted as the centre from which came not only theoretical guidance but also practical directives. But, unseen by the membership, there were serious and growing tensions among the leading figures of *Iskra*. As the preparations for the congress advanced and the decisive date grew nearer, so these contradictions assumed an increasingly unbearable character.

The great bulk of the work rested on the shoulders of Lenin and his wife Nadyezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya.

Martov played an important role on the literary front. Plekhanov was a theoretical giant. But in practice the other older members of Plekhanov's group played little or no role.

Accustomed to decades of life in small emigre circles, characterised by extreme informality, where personalities loomed large and at times overshadowed politics, the "old-timers" were increasingly out of their depth in the new situation. The movement in Russia, from which they had been physically separated for decades, was foreign to them. Living in the intellectual shadow of Plekhanov, with no possibility of independent development, stultified their political level. They were being left behind and they were painfully aware of it.

The six-strong Editorial Board (Lenin, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Martov and Potresov) was frequently the scene of bitter arguments. In the run-up to the congress, there was a running battle between Lenin and Plekhanov over the draft programmes each had drawn up. In an atmosphere of heightened tension, the tone of the discussion often became heated.



Map of Social Democratic organisations, 1903.

When, in January 1902, Plekhanov presented his draft programme, Lenin and Martov raised some criticisms, which Plekhanov, as usual took as a personal insult. When it was proposed that the draft be voted on, point by point, his response was to walk out of the meeting. Subsequently, Lenin produced an alternative draft, which was discussed in a tense atmosphere, including threats and ultimatums. Krupskaya's description of this meeting provides a vivid picture of the inner workings of the *Iskra* Editorial Board at this time:

Problems within *Iskra*

"Plekhanov attacked parts of the draft programme which Lenin had drawn up. Vera Zasulich did not agree with Lenin on all points, but neither did she agree entirely with Plekhanov. Axelrod also agreed with Lenin on some points. The meeting was a painful one. Vera Zasulich wanted to argue with Plekhanov, but he looked so forbidding, staring at her with his arms folded on his chest, that she was thrown off her balance. The discussion had reached the voting stage. Before the voting took place, Axelrod, who agreed with Lenin on this point, said he had a headache and wanted to go for a walk.

Vladimir Ilyich was terribly upset. To work like that was impossible. The discussion was so unbusiness-like."

The essence of the disagreement revolved not so much on fundamentals, but on a different approach to the work and a different conception of the role of the programme. There was something abstract about Plekhanov's draft, which Lenin found too academic and insufficiently concrete. It was the

voice of the exiled propagandist, and not the rallying-cry of a new mass revolutionary party. On Plekhanov's side there was undoubtedly an element of spite in his attacks on Lenin, which contained phrases, as Martov complained, which he normally reserved for political enemies.⁵ Lenin's draft was covered by Plekhanov with double underlinings, exclamation marks, sarcastic comments about style and so on. Only the pressure of Axelrod and Zasulich induced Plekhanov to back down and apologise. In the end, a compromise was arrived at, but the incident served to bring to a head the intolerable position of the Editorial Board.

Zasulich and Martov usually acted as conciliators between Lenin and Plekhanov. Martov, an outstandingly talented individual, had come from the interior, like Lenin. But his temperament and life-style drew him closer to Zasulich and the others. Zasulich, Martov and Alexeyev shared a bohemian existence in a kind of commune, ironically styled "the Den" by the fastidious Plekhanov. Krupskaya and others have left a vivid picture of Vera Zasulich shut up in her room, agonising over an article whilst chain-smoking and living on endless cups of strong black coffee.

"I regarded Martov as a rather charming type of bohemian with something of the eternal student about his appearance," wrote Lunarcharsky, "by predilection a haunter of cafes, indifferent to comfort, perpetually arguing and a bit of an eccentric."

Lenin always retained a high regard for Martov's intellectual qualities. Indeed, Martov represents one of the most tragic figures in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement. As Trotsky wrote: "A talented writer,

a resourceful politician, a penetrating mind and a graduate of the school of Marxism, Martov will nevertheless enter the history of the workers' revolution as an enormous minus. His thought lacked courage, his incisiveness lacked will. Tenacity was no substitute. It destroyed him... A revolutionary instinct doubtless lay in Martov. His first reaction to great events always revealed a revolutionary aspiration. But after every such effort his thought not being sustained by the mainspring of will-power disintegrated and sank back. This would be observed at the first glimpses of the waves of revolution..."

The sensation on the part of the older members that they were slipping behind gave rise to an ill-concealed resentment against Lenin. Axelrod was bitter about the fact that *Iskra* was based in London, not Switzerland, and so on. The work of the Editorial Board was hampered by the fact that the six members frequently split into two equal groups. For this reason, Lenin formally requested the inclusion of Trotsky (known by his pseudonym, "Pero", the "pen") as a seventh member of the Editorial Board. In a letter to Plekhanov, he wrote: "I am submitting to all members of the Editorial Board a proposal to co-opt 'Pero' as a full member of the Board. (I believe that for co-optation not a majority but a unanimous decision is needed.)"

The Second Congress

"We are very much in need of a seventh member both because it would simplify voting (six being an even number) and reinforce the Board."

"'Pero' has been writing in every issue for several months now. In general he is working for *Iskra* most energetically, delivering lectures (and with tremendous success) etc. For our department of topical articles and items he will be not only very useful but quite indispensable. He is unquestionably a man of more than average ability, convinced, energetic, and promising. And he could do a good deal in the sphere of translation and popular literature."

"We must draw in young forces: this will encourage them and prompt them to regard themselves as professional writers. And that we have too few of such is clear—witness 1) the difficulty of finding editors of translations; 2) the shortage of articles reviewing the internal situation, and 3) the shortage of popular literature. It is in the sphere of popular literature that 'Pero' would like to try his hand."

"Possible arguments against: 1) his

youth; 2) his early (perhaps) return to Russia; 3) a pen (without quotation marks) with traces of feuilleton style, too pretentious, etc."

"Ad 1) 'Pero' is suggested not for an independent post, but for the Board. In it he will gain experience. He undoubtedly has the 'intuition' of a Party man, a man of our trend; as for knowledge and experience these can be acquired. That he is hardworking is likewise unquestionable. It is necessary to co-opt him so as finally to draw him in and encourage him..." (From Lenin's *Collected Works*, volume 43, pp110-111).

However, Plekhanov, guessing that Trotsky would support Lenin, placing him in a minority, angrily vetoed the proposal.

The experiences of the past three years showed the need to put the party on a new footing. It was necessary to effect a decisive break with the past, to put an end to the "small circle" mentality, amateurism, organisational looseness and lay the basis for a strong, unified mass workers' party. In view of the harm done by localism and the need to adapt to difficult underground conditions, Lenin laid heavy stress upon the need for centralism.

The forthcoming congress would have to elect a leadership in a situation where the most important political leaders were in exile. The interior clearly had to be represented on the leading bodies, but Lenin opposed the idea of the *Iskra* Editorial Board—which was entirely responsible for re-building the party—relinquishing the leadership. The young Trotsky who had recently escaped from Siberia and come to London to assist the work of *Iskra* was surprised by Lenin's formulation:

"I arrived abroad with the belief that the Editorial Board should be made subordinate to the Central Committee. That was the prevailing attitude of the majority of *Iskra* followers."

"'It can't be done' objected Lenin. 'The correlation of forces is different. How can they guide us from Russia? No, it can't be done. We are the stable centre, we are stronger in ideas, and we must exercise the guidance from here.'"

No-one suspected that at the longed-for Second Congress the *Iskra* camp would split precisely on the question of the leading bodies.

The Second Congress finally convened on the 17 July 1903 in Brussels, where its first thirteen sessions were held. The attentions of the police forced the congress to move to London where it re-convened as an Anglers' club, periodically changing the venue

to different workers' meeting places to avoid detection.

At the First Congress, the movement in the interior had been represented by only five local committees. The present gathering could now claim to represent several thousand members, with influence over hundreds of thousands of workers. The majority of delegates were young, mostly under 30 years old. Lenin, at 33, was already a veteran. The rapid pace of revolutionary events in Russia was a forcing house for the development of the young cadres of Marxism. Only the former members of Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour Group stood out as the representatives of an older revolutionary generation, belonging to a different epoch, almost a different world.

Debate on the Bund

The conditions for acceptance as a delegation was a minimum of twelve months' existence as an active organisation. Several local committees (Voronezh, Samara, Poltava, Kishinev etc) were not invited because they did not fulfil this condition. There were 43 delegates with 51 full votes. Partly because in many areas there was more than one local committee, every delegation was given two full votes, whether or not there were more than one delegate present. The Central Committee of the Bund was given three votes (one for the Bund's foreign organisation), and the two Petersburg organisations, one vote each. In addition, there were 14 people present with a consultative vote, including two representatives of the Polish and Lithuanian Social Democracy who arrived during the tenth session.

The *Iskra* group, in theory, had a clear majority with 33 votes. The open opponents of *Iskra* held eight votes—"Economists" and 5 Bundists. The remaining votes were held by indecisive, wavering elements, whom Lenin later characterised as the "centre" or "the marsh".

Over the years, the events of this congress have been heavily overlaid with a crust of myths, inventions and downright falsehoods. Here, it is alleged, Bolshevism emerged, fully clad and armed, like Palas Athene from the head of Zeus. Yet closer examination reveals that the split between "Bolsheviks" ("majority-ites") and "Mensheviks" ("minority-ites"), or more accurately between "hards" and "softs" in 1903 was by no means final but only an anticipation of future differences. The real split did not occur until 1912—almost a decade later.

The differences between Lenin and

Martov began to surface at the 22nd session, when the congress had been going on for two weeks. In all the previous sessions there was complete unanimity in the *Iskra* camp on all political questions.

A great deal of time was taken up with the question of the place of the Bund in the party. (For a characterisation of the Bund see *Militant International Review*, No 32, Summer 1986). This debate was of crucial importance in clarifying the Marxist attitude towards the national question. The historic significance of this can be gauged by the fact that without a clear position on the national question, the Russian Revolution could never have been successful.

In *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky gives a succinct definition of the Bolshevik position on the national question:

"Lenin early learned the inevitability of this development of centrifugal national movements in Russia, and for many years stubbornly fought—most particularly against Rosa Luxemburg—for that most famous paragraph of the old party programme which formulated the right of self-determination—that is, to complete separation as states. In this the Bolshevik Party did not by any means undertake an evangel of separation. It merely assumed an obligation to struggle implacably against every form of national oppression, including the forcible retention of this or that nationality within the boundaries of the general state. Only in this way could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities.

"But that was only one side of the matter. The policy of Bolshevism in the national sphere had also another side, apparently contradictory to the first, but in reality supplementing it. Within the framework of the party, and the workers' organisations in general, Bolshevism insisted upon a rigid centralism, implacably warring against every taint of nationalism which might set the workers one against the other or disunite them. While flatly refusing to the bourgeois state the right to impose compulsory citizenship, or even a state language, upon a national minority, Bolshevism at the same time made it a verily sacred task to unite, as closely as possible, by means of voluntary class discipline, the workers of different nationalities. Thus it flatly rejected the national federation principle in building the party. A revolutionary organisation is not the prototype of the future state, but merely the instrument for its creation. An instrument

ought to be adapted to fashioning the product; it ought not to include the product. Thus a centralised organisation can guarantee the success of a revolutionary struggle—even where the task is to destroy the centralised oppression of nationalities." (My emphasis—AW)

The Bund had played an important role in the early days of the movement, which earned it considerable prestige and enabled it to exercise a decisive influence on the First Congress, where it entered the RSDLP on the basis of autonomy. The weakness of the Russian Social Democracy meant that the Bund, in practice, led an independent existence up to the Second Congress, developing strong nationalist tendencies.

Separatism rejected

At the Second Congress, the Bundists in effect spoke as an independent party, which was only prepared to enter the RSDLP on a loose, federal basis, which would have meant the legalisation of separate organisations of the Jewish workers. Lieber, the Bundist spokesman, justified this on the grounds of the special position of the Jewish workers, suffering not only from class oppression but also racial oppression, which Russian workers would not have the same degree of interest in combatting. Answering Lieber, Martov said: "Underlying this draft is the presumption that the Jewish proletariat needs an independent political organisation to represent its national interests among the Social Democrats of Russia. Independently of the question of organising the party on the principle of federation or that of autonomy, we cannot allow that any section of the party can represent the group, trade or national interests of any sections of the proletariat. National differences play a subordinate role in relation to common class interests. What sort of organisation would we have if, for instance, in one and the same workshop, workers of different nationalities thought first and foremost of the representation of their national interest?"¹⁰ (My emphasis—AW).

Of course, on purely practical grounds, it would be possible to give a certain degree of autonomy to national groups within the party. This would, however, be of a purely technical character, arising from the need, for example, to publish material in the different languages of the groups concerned. There would have been no objections to the Bund enjoying the necessary autonomy to produce Party literature in Yiddish and



conducting agitation among the Jewish workers and artisans with special material, etc. But what the Bund demanded was the exclusive right to speak in the name of the Jewish proletariat and, in effect, to have a monopoly of Jewish affairs within the Party. In short, it had a similar position to the present-day defenders of "black sections" in the Labour Party in Britain, or in the unions in the USA, a position which would sow the seeds of disunity among the workers and play into the hands of chauvinist and racist elements.

When the Bund's pretensions were decisively rejected its delegates abandoned the Congress. They were soon followed by the other representatives of the right wing, the Economists, Martynov and Akimov, who were present as representatives of the emigré "Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad". They walked out when the Congress recognised the rival "League of Revolutionary Social Democrats" as sole representatives of the party abroad.

These walk-outs decisively changed the balance of forces at the congress. A development which was quite unforeseen was the crystallisation, in the course of the proceedings, of two trends within the *Iskra* camp. On a number of secondary issues (role of the Organising Committee, the *Borba* group, *Yuzhny Rabochii*),¹¹ it became clear that some of *Iskra*'s supporters had voted with the right wing and the "Marsh". In general, the *Iskra* camp remained united. But in the twenty-second session, the unity was broken by an open clash between Lenin and Martov on an organisational issue.

The first clause of the party rules

dealt with the question: "Who is a member?" Lenin's draft reads as follows: "A member of the RSDLP is one who accepts its programme and supports the Party both financially and by personal participation in one of the party organisations". Martov opposed this clause and moved as an alternative that a member was somebody who accepted the programme, and supported the Party financially and "gives the party his regular personal co-operation under the direction of one of the party organisations".

On the face of it, there is only a slight difference between the two formulas. In fact, the real significance of the difference only became clear later. "The differences were still intangible," Trotsky recalled, "everybody was merely groping about and working with impalpable things".¹² But behind Martov's proposal was a certain "softness", a conciliatory attitude which amounted to the blurring of differences between members and sympathisers, between revolutionary activists and "fellow travellers". At the moment when all the energies of *Iskra* should have been concentrated on combatting the old anarchistic formlessness and circle mentality, Martov's position represented a big step back. Small wonder that it led to a sharp struggle in the *Iskra* camp on and off the floor of the Congress.

The Party rules'

In the months and years after the congress a whole mythology has been constructed about this incident. It is alleged that Lenin stood for dictatorial centralism and a small conspiratorial party, whereas Martov's aim was a broad-based, democratic party which would allow the workers to participate. Both ideas are completely false.

To begin with, all the *Iskra* supporters were agreed upon the need for a strong, centralised party. That was one of the main arguments against the Bund's national-federalism, in which Martov and Trotsky played the main role. Immediately prior to the discussion on Clause One, Martov is quoted in the Minutes as saying: "I would recall to Comrade Lieber that our organisational principle is not broad autonomy but strict centralisation".¹³ (My emphasis—AW) *

As to the demagogic argument that Martov's formula was intended to "open the party to the workers", that, too, is a misrepresentation. At the outset of the debate, Axelrod let the cat out of the bag, with the following example, which really revealed what was behind the proposal:

"And, indeed, let us take for example a professor who regards himself as a Social-Democrat and declares himself as such. If we adopt Lenin's formula we shall be throwing overboard a section of those who, even if they cannot be directly admitted to an organisation are nevertheless members... We must take care not to leave outside the party ranks people who consciously, though perhaps not very actively, associate themselves with the Party."¹⁴

The working class and its organisations do not exist in a vacuum, but are surrounded by other social classes and groups. The pressure of alien classes, of bourgeois "public opinion", and especially the pressure of the intermediate layers, the middle class, the intellectuals who surround the workers' organisations is ever-present. The demands of these layers that the workers should adapt their programme, methods and organisational structure to suit the prejudices and interests of the petit bourgeoisie are a constant pressure. A long period of very close co-existence with the radicalised middle class in the person of the "Legal Marxists" had left its stamp on the consciousness of the older members of the Emancipation of Labour Group. They moved among social strata divorced from the working class, formed personal friendships with the radicalised quasi-Marxist university professors, lawyers and doctors who helped them with financial donations and words of encouragement, but were not prepared to "dirty their hands" with practical revolutionary work. "I support your aims, but to come out openly as a socialist would be inconvenient and risky. Think of my job, my position, my career prospects," and so on. Unconsciously, or perhaps semi-consciously, Axelrod, Zasulich and Martov were acting as the spokesmen for this social stratum, the transmission belt for the pressures of alien classes upon the workers' party.

Plekhanov was placed in a difficult position by this split, in which his friends and life-long colleagues were ranged against him. For the first time in her life, Vera Zasulich openly stood up to her mentor. It must have been a shock, but to Plekhanov's credit, he stood up against the pressure at the Congress. All his revolutionary instinct told him that Lenin was in the right. In the course of debate he pitilessly demolished the arguments of Axelrod and Martov:

"According to Lenin's draft, only someone who joins a particular organisation can be regarded as a Party member. Those who oppose his draft

say that this will cause unnecessary difficulties. But what do these difficulties consist of? They talk of persons who do not want to join, or who can't join, one of our organisations. But why can't they? As someone who has himself taken part in Russian revolutionary organisations, I say that I do not admit the existence of objective conditions constituting an insuperable obstacle to anyone's joining. As to those gentlemen who do not want to join, we have no need of them.

"It has been said here that some professors who sympathise with our views may find it humiliating to join a local organisation. In this connection, I remember Engels saying that where it becomes your lot to deal with professors, you have to be prepared for the worst (laughter).

'No eternal laws'

"The example, is, in fact, an extremely bad one. If some Professor of Egyptology considers, because he has by heart the names of all the Pharoehs, and knows all the prayers that the Egyptians submitted to the bull Apis, that it is beneath his dignity to join our organisation, we have no need of that professor.

"To talk of control by the Party over persons who are outside the organisation means playing with words. In practice such control is impossible".¹⁵ (My emphasis—AW)

After a heated discussion, Martov's variant was approved by 28 votes to 23, but only because the wavering elements in *Iskra* combined with the "Economists" of the Union, the Bund and the "Centre", represented by the trend around the journal *Yuzhny Rabochii* ("Southern Worker").

Nevertheless, the split had not yet acquired a definite character. Lenin, in the course of the debate, showed that he was still anxious to reach agreement: "First, as regards Axelrod's kind proposal (I am not speaking ironically) to 'strike a bargain', I would willingly respond to this appeal for I do not at all consider our difference so vital as to be a matter of life and death for the party. We shall certainly not perish because of a bad point in the rules!"¹⁶ (My emphasis—AW)

From a Marxist point of view, organisational questions can never be decisive. There are no eternal, fixed laws governing the mode of organisa-

* Incidentally, the Bund itself was a highly-centralised organisation. Its alleged opposition to centralism only applied to the party as a whole, and reflected nothing more than an unscrupulous defence of its own sectional interests.

tion of a revolutionary party. The rules and organisational structures must change with changing circumstances and in line with the development of the party. The same Lenin who argued fervently for restricting the party membership in 1903, under different historical circumstances, in 1912, when the party was becoming transformed into a mass force representing the decisive majority of the active working class in Russia, in effect argued that the party should be open to any worker who considered himself a Bolshevik—a formula which apparently echoes Martov's celebrated phrase that "every striker should be able to proclaim himself a Party member". Does this mean that Lenin was wrong and Martov right in 1903? Such a conclusion would be to completely misunderstand the dialectical relationship between the mode of operation of the revolutionary party and the concrete stage through which both the party and the working class movement is passing. A house must be built upon solid foundations. In 1903, the party was only taking its first hesitating steps towards the conquest of influence among the masses. It was necessary to lay heavy stress on basic political and organisational principles, above all the need for working-class cadres with a clear understanding of the ideas and methods of Marxism. This was all the more necessary in view of the chaotic period which had gone before. To have "thrown the doors open" at this concrete stage would have been absolutely disastrous, although at a different moment it would be necessary to do just that.

Every period of transition from one stage of the development of the party to another inevitably entails a certain amount of internal friction. We have already commented on the stresses and strains involved in the earlier transition from propaganda to agitation. Now the same problems recurred, but with far more serious results.

The main objective of the Marxist tendency represented by *Iskra* was to bring the party out of the embryonic period of circle life—"kustarnichestvo"—and lay the firm foundation for a strong and united Marxist workers' party in Russia. Even before the Congress, however, Martov began to express doubts and vacillations as to whether it was desirable to convene a party congress at all. Would it not be better to hold a congress of the *Iskra* tendency? The hesitations reflected the conservatism and routinism and the fear of the "veterans" of striking out in a new direction.

The ingrained habits of a small exile group instinctively rebelled against so violent a disruption of the old ways. The idea of formal elections, submission of the minority to the will of the majority, disciplined work, while acceptable in theory, proved hard to swallow in practice. The members of Plekhanov's old group, accustomed to the life of a small, informal circle of friends, had long enjoyed immense political authority as veterans and members of the prestigious *Iskra* Editorial Board which was not strictly warranted by the role they now played. Axelrod and Zasulich felt an involuntary fear of losing their personal authority and having their individuality swallowed up in the new environment, dominated by the new generation of up-and-coming young cadres from inside Russia. The Congress minutes show how insignificant was the role played by the old-timers, with the natural exception of Plekhanov. They must have felt completely lost.

In the interest of Party unity, both the *Iskra* organisation and the Emancipation of Labour Group were formally dissolved at the Congress. The veterans of the Emancipation of Labour Group never seriously imagined that this would change their status in the movement. Things would surely carry on much as before. It was unthinkable that they should occupy anything but the foremost positions, as they had always done.

The real meaning of the 1903 split

When Lenin moved the election of an Editorial Board of three, it caused an uproar, which took him completely by surprise—all the more so since this proposal had already been accepted by the editors before the Congress. But this agreement was only superficial. In reality, the proposal had deeply shocked and wounded the old editors who would be dropped. In the corridors of the congress, they went around complaining about Lenin's alleged "tactlessness" and "insensitivity".

There can be no doubt that logic was entirely on Lenin's side, as Plekhanov completely agreed. The old E.B. of six had not even managed to meet once. The notion that a member of the E.B. of the party's official journal could be someone who did not personally participate in the work and whose only contribution was to provide the occasional article for publication did not square with the conception of a fighting proletarian organisation.

Initially, the younger E.B. members, Martov and Potresov were in agree-



ment with the change, but under the pressure of Zasulich and Axelrod they changed their minds. The indignation aroused by this issue among young and impressionable comrades is conveyed by Trotsky's memoirs of the occasion: "In 1903 the whole point at issue was nothing more than Lenin's desire to get Axelrod and Zasulich off the editorial board. My attitude towards them was full of respect, and there was an element of personal affection as well. Lenin also thought highly of them for what they had done in the past. But he believed that they were becoming an impediment for the future. This led him to conclude that they must be removed from their position in the leadership. I could not agree. My whole being seemed to protest against this merciless cutting off of the older ones when we were at last on the threshold of an organised party. It was my indignation at his attitude that really led to my parting with him at the Second Congress. His behaviour seemed unpardonable to me, both horrible and outrageous. And yet, politically it was right and necessary, from the point of view of organisation. The break with the older ones who remained in the preparatory stages, was inevitable in any case. Lenin understood this before any one else did. He made an attempt to keep Plekhanov by separating him from Zasulich and Axelrod. But this, too, was quite futile, as subsequent events soon proved."¹⁷

The proposals agreed on by the *Iskra* leadership prior to the Congress was for a central committee of three (from the interior), an editorial board of three and a party council made up of both bodies plus one other

(Plekhanov). However, a split opened up immediately over the composition of the CC. The "hard" *Iskra*-ites favoured a CC composed entirely of *Iskra* supporters. The "softs", led by Martov, wanted to give representation to the "centre" (*Yuzhny Rabochii*), and produced their own list of candidates.

When the split fully surfaced, it assumed a violent character. In the session when the composition of the Editorial Board was discussed the atmosphere was stormy in the extreme as the Bolsheviks later reported to the of the Socialist International (1904).

Trotsky moved the re-election of the old Editorial Board of six. But the withdrawal of the Bundists and the supporters of *Rabocheye Dyelo* meant that the *Iskra* "hards" were now in a majority. Trotsky's proposal was voted down, and a new Editorial Board consisting of Lenin, Plekhanov and Martov was elected, whereupon Martov announced his refusal to participate on the EB. The split between the "hard" majority ("Bol'shinstvo") and "soft" minority ("Menshinstvo") was a fact.

However significant the consequences of the 1903 split were for the future, the differences which emerged at the congress still bore an undeveloped character. The assertion that at the Second Congress Bolshevism and Menshevism already existed as political tendencies is entirely without foundation. On all the political questions there was virtual unanimity within the *Iskra* tendency. Yet there have always been powerful vested interests in trying to read into these divisions far more than they contained in fact.

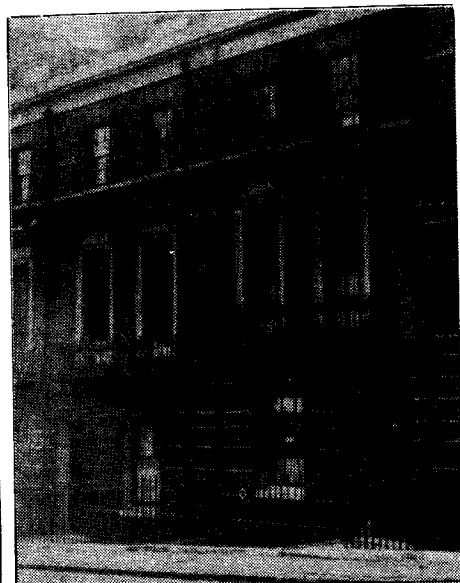
History distorted

Nobody had anticipated that this split would take place. The participants themselves were shocked and stunned by the unexpected turn of events. The fact that Lenin did not see it as a final parting of the ways was indicated by his ceaseless attempts to achieve unity with the minority in the months after the congress. Krupskaya recalled that on one occasion when she mentioned the possibility of a permanent split, Lenin retorted: "That would be too crazy for words."¹⁸

The political tendency represented by Menshevism was only to take shape in the period following the Congress. Yet the Stalinists for decades have persisted in citing the hot-headed reaction of the 23-year old Trotsky at the Second Congress as "proof" of his "Menshevism". Thus we read statements like the following: "Con-



Krupskaya and, right, 30 Holford Square, Kings Cross, where Lenin and Krupskaya lived during their London exile.



gress speeches by Lenin (?) and other Bolsheviks show that on the fundamental question of the party programme (!) and rules, Trotsky was at one with the other Mensheviks and bitterly fought the Bolsheviks' revolutionary line (!)."¹⁹

This base slander originates in the campaign against "Trotskyism" launched in 1923-24, when Lenin lay on his death-bed, paralysed and helpless. Zinoviev, who had formed a secret bloc with Kamenev and Stalin, with a view to forming the leadership after Lenin's death, went to the lengths of writing an alleged "History of Bolshevism" the main aim of which was to discredit Trotsky by means of a false and tendentious account of party history. In regard to 1903, Zinoviev refers to "Comrade Trotsky who was at that time a Menshevik."²⁰

For their part, bourgeois historians such as Leonard Shapiro attempt to caricature Lenin's arguments in favour of centralism to paint a picture

of a ruthless dictator, riding roughshod over democracy.

Both Stalinist and bourgeois historians have a vested interest in identifying Leninism with Stalinism. In order to get at the truth, it is necessary to push these unscrupulous middle-men to one side and go back to the writings of the protagonists themselves—in the first place the writings of Lenin and Trotsky—which, with unerring accuracy and truthfulness explain the real origins and nature of Bolshevism.

Part Six of Alan Woods' series of articles on the History of Bolshevism will appear in the next edition of the MIR. Back issues of the Militant International Review containing parts 1 to 4 are available for £1 each, postage included, from: World Socialist Books, 3-13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB. Cheques payable to 'World Socialist Books'.

Footnotes

1. Lenin, 'Collected Works', Volume 31, p55.
2. '1903, Minutes of the Second Congress of the RSDLP', p181.
3. Trotsky, 'Stalin', p39.
4. Krupskaya, 'Memories of Lenin'.
5. See S. Baron, 'Plekhanov, Father of Russian Marxism', (Spanish edition), pp300-301.
6. Lunacharsky, 'Revolutionary Silhouettes', pp132-33.
7. Trotsky, 'Political Profiles', pp97-98.
8. Trotsky, 'My Life', p157.
9. Trotsky, 'History of the Russian Revolution', pp890-91.
10. '1903, Minutes of the Second Congress of the RSDLP', p81.

11. For a detailed explanation see 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back' in Lenin's 'Collected Works', Volume 7, pp203-425.
12. Trotsky, 'My Life', p160.
13. '1903, Minutes of the Second Congress of the RSDLP', p308.
14. Ibid, p311.
15. Ibid, p321.
16. Ibid, p326.
17. Trotsky, 'My Life', p162.
18. Quote from Party Archives in Istoriya, KPSS, p486.
19. V. Grinko and others, 'The Bolshevik Party's Struggle Against Trotskyism (1903-February 1917)', p30.
20. Zinoviev, 'History of the Bolshevik Party', p 85.

Strike at Vorkuta: An eyewitness account

THIS YEAR saw the 50th anniversary of Stalin's notorious purge trials of 1936. The capitalist press has given due coverage to the frame-up and forced confessions of famous old Bolsheviks like Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin.

But their deaths at the hands of Stalinist 'justice' were only the tip of the iceberg. Not remembered are the thousands of Marxists, supporters of Trotsky, who languished in brutal concentration camps in remote areas of Russia. They were brave and defiant to the end. They even organised an amazing hunger strike through all the scattered camps which forced concessions from the ar-

thorities, beginning on 27 October 1936 almost exactly 50 years ago. Stalin's agents could not get these Trotskyists to confess to false crimes, so they were never brought to trial but just callously executed and buried in the wastes.

The article below consists of extracts taken from an eyewitness account of those oppositionists' heroic but tragic story which first appeared in the October/November 1961 issue of the emigre Menshevik publication 'Sotsialistichesky Nestnik' (Socialist Messenger). It was signed only "MB".

DURING THE middle and the end of the 1930s, the Trotskyists formed quite a disparate group at Vorkuta; one part of them kept its old name of "Bolshevik-Leninists." There were almost 500 at the mine, close to 1,000 at the camp of Ukhta-Pechora, and certainly several thousand altogether around the Pechora district.

The orthodox Trotskyists were determined to remain faithful to the end to their platform and their leaders. In 1927, following the resolutions of the 15th congress of the party, they were excluded from the Communist Party and, at the same time, arrested. From then on, even though they were in prison, they continued to consider themselves Communists; as for Stalin and his supporters, "the apparatus men," they were characterised as renegades from communism.

Among these "Trotskyists" were also found people who had never formally belonged to the CP and did not join the Left Opposition, but who tied their own fate with it to the very end—even when the struggle of the Opposition was most acute.

Arrival at Vorkuta

In addition to these genuine Trotskyists, there were in the camps of Vorkuta and elsewhere more than 100,000 prisoners who, members of the party and the youth, had adhered to the Trotskyist Opposition and then at different times and for diverse reasons (of which the principal were evidently repressions, unemployment, persecutions, exclusion from schools and university facilities, etc) were forced to "recant their errors" and withdraw from the Opposition.

The orthodox Trotskyists arrived at the mine during the summer of 1936 and lived in a compact mass in two large barracks. They categorically refused to work in the pits; they worked only on the surface, and for only eight hours, not the ten or twelve required by the regulations, as the other

prisoners were forced to do. They did so on their own authority, in an unorganised manner, openly flouting the camp regulations. In the main they had already served nearly ten years in deportation.

In the beginning, they were sent into political isolators and then afterwards exiled to Solovka. Finally they arrived at Vorkuta. The Trotskyists formed the only group of political prisoners who openly criticised the Stalinist "general line" and offered organised resistance to the jailers.

Nevertheless, there were significant divergences within this group. Some considered themselves disciples of Timothy Sapronov (ex-secretary of the Supreme Soviet) and insisted on being called "Sapronovists" or "Democratic Centralists." They claimed to be more to the left than the Trotskyists and thought that the Stalinist dictatorship had already reached the stage of bourgeois degeneration by the end of the 1920s and that the reappointment of Hitler and Stalin was very probable. Nevertheless, in the event of war, the "Sapronovists" declared themselves for the defence of the USSR.

Among the "Trotskyists" were also found partisans of the "Right wing," that is to say of Rykov and of Bukharin, as well as followers of Shliapnikov and his "Workers' Opposition" platform.

But the great majority of the group was made up of authentic Trotskyists, supporters of LD Trotsky.

...In spite of their differences, all of these groups at the mine lived in a friendly enough fashion under one common denominator, "the Trotskyists." Their leaders were Socrates Gevorkian, Vladimir Ivanov, Melnais, VV Kossior and Trotsky's ex-secretary, Poznansky.

Gevorkian was a calm man, very balanced, reasonable, full of good sense. He spoke without hurry, weighing his words, without any affection of theatrical gestures. Up to the time of his arrest, he had worked as an expert for the Russian Association of

the Centres of Scientific Research of the Institute of Human Sciences. He was an Armenian, and at this time, was at least forty. His younger brother was imprisoned with him.

Melnais, a Lett, was a little younger than Gevorkian. After having been a member of the Central Committee of the Young Communists, he studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the University of Moscow, where, in 1925-27, he headed a very important group (several hundred people) of opposition students...

At the end of 1927, Melnais was one of the first members of the Opposition at the university to be arrested...

Melnais had been imprisoned ever since. In political isolators and in exile, he spent a lot of time working on economic problems and soon turned out to be an eminent and talented economist.

News of Show Trials reaches camps

Vladimir Ivanov was a hearty man, with the round and full face of a successful merchant, with a big black moustache and intelligent grey eyes. In spite of his fifty years, one sensed in him a strong will and the strength of a bear. An Old Bolshevik and member of the Central Committee, Ivanov, until his arrest, directed the Chinese Eastern Railroad. He, as well as his wife, had belonged to the "Democratic Centralist" group and were among the supporters of Sapronov. When the fifteenth congress decided that belonging to the Opposition and to the party was incompatible, Ivanov quit the ranks of the Opposition, but this did not save him; he was arrested after the assassination of Kirov...

Kossior was a middle-aged man, very short (almost a dwarf), with a large head. Before his arrest, he occupied a leading post in the management of the petroleum industry. His brother, Stanislas Kossior, then sat on the Politbureau, and, at the same time, was

secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. (He was later liquidated by Stalin. His case was mentioned by Khrushchev in his report to the twentieth congress) . . .

Poznansky, a handsome well-built man about thirty-five to thirty-eight years old, was deeply interested in music and chess. Trotsky's second secretary, Grigoryev, was also in Pechora.

In the autumn of 1936, soon after the frame-up trials against the leaders of the Opposition; Zinoviev, Kamenev and the others, the entire group of "orthodox" Trotskyists at the mine got together to confer with one another.

Opening the meeting, Gevorkian addressed those present: "Comrades! Before beginning our meeting, I ask you to honour the memory of our comrades, guides, and leaders who have died as martyrs at the hands of the Stalinist traitors to the revolution."

The entire assembly stood up. Then, in a brief and very trenchant speech, Gevorkian explained that it was necessary to examine and resolve the key problem: what should be done and how should they conduct themselves from now on.

"It is now evident that the group of Stalinist adventurers have completed their counter-revolutionary coup d'état in our country. All the progressive conquests of our revolution are in mortal danger. Not twilight shadows, but those of deep black night envelop our country. No Cavaignac spilled as much working class blood as has Stalin. Physically annihilating all the opposition groups within the party, he aims at total personal dictatorship. The party and the whole people are subjected to surveillance and to summary justice by the police apparatus. The predictions and the direst fears of our Opposition are fully confirmed. The nation slides irresistibly into the Thermidorian swamp. This is the triumph of the centrist petty-bourgeois forces, of which Stalin is the interpreter, the spokesman, and the apostle.

"No compromise is possible with the Stalinist traitors and hangmen of the revolution. Remaining proletarian revolutionaries to the very end, we should not entertain any illusion about the fate waiting us. But before destroying us, Stalin will try to humiliate us much as he can. By throwing political prisoners in with common criminals, he strives to scatter us among the criminals and to incite them against us. We are left with only one means of struggle in this unequal battle: the hunger strike. With a group of comrades, we have already drawn up a list of our demands of which many of you are already informed. Therefore, I now



Left Oppositionists in Siberian exile, 1928, celebrating the anniversary of the October revolution.

propose to you that we discuss them together and make a decision."

The meeting lasted only a short time; the question of the hunger strike and of concrete demands had already been debated for some months by the Trotskyists. Some Trotskyist groups in other camps (Usa station, Chib-Yu, Kochmes, etc) had also been discussing the matter and had sent their agreement to support the demands and to participate in the hunger strike. These demands were ratified unanimously by those present. They stipulated:

1. Abrogation of the illegal decision of the NKVD, concerning the transfer of all Trotskyists from administrative camps to concentration camps. Affairs relating to political opposition to the regime must not be judged by special NKVD tribunals, but in public judicial assemblies.

2. The work day in the camp must not exceed eight hours.

3. The food quota of the prisoners should not depend on their norm of output. A cash bonus, not the food ration, should be used as a production incentive.

4. Separation, at work as well as in the barracks, of political prisoners and common criminals.

5. The old, the ill, and women prisoners should be moved from the polar camps to camps where the climatic conditions were more favourable.

It was recommended, at the time of the meeting, that the sick, the invalids, and the old should not participate in the hunger strike; however, all those in question energetically rejected this proposal . . .

Three weeks later, 27 October 1936, the massive hunger strike of the political prisoners began, a strike without precedent and a model under Soviet camp conditions. In the morning, at reveille, in almost every barrack, prisoners announced themselves on strike. The barracks occupied by the

Trotskyists participated 100 per cent in the movement. Even the orderlies struck. Close to 1,000 prisoners, of whom half worked in the mine, participated in this tragedy, which lasted more than four months.

The first two days, the strikers stayed in their usual places. Then the camp administration busied itself in isolating them from the rest of the prisoners, concerned lest the latter followed their example. In the tundra, 40 kilometres from the mine, on the banks of the Syr-Yaga river, there were primitive half-demolished barracks, which previously had been used during the preliminary boring of the mines. In great haste, these barracks were put into makeshift condition; a call was sent out to the inhabitants of the region, who, with their teams of reindeer, transported the hunger strikers there, where they soon numbered about 600. The others were brought together not far from Chib-Yu.

After having isolated the strikers, the GPU took measures to prevent the movement from spreading in the country and from becoming known outside the frontiers. The prisoners were deprived of the right of corresponding with their families; the salaried employees of the camp lost their holidays and their right to leave. Attempts were made to incite the other prisoners against the strikers . . .

At the end of the first month of the strike, one of the participants died of exhaustion; two others died during the third month. The same month, two strikers, non-orthodox Trotskyists, voluntarily gave up striking. Finally, just a few days before the end of the strike, still another striker died.

Having begun at the end of October 1936, the hunger strike lasted 132 days, ending in March 1937. It culminated with the complete victory of the strikers who received a radiogram from the headquarters of the NKVD, drawn up in these words: "In-

form the hunger strikers held in Vorkuta mines that all their demands will be satisfied."

The Trotskyists were taken back to the mine, received food reserved for the sick and, after a period of time, they went back to work, but only above ground; certain of them worked in the office of the director of the mine, in the capacity of paid workers, book-keepers, economists, etc. Their work day did not exceed eight hours; their food ration was not based on their production norm.

But little by little the other prisoners' interest in the strikers began to diminish. Everyone's interest was now focused on the new trial at Moscow, which was being broadcast by radio; besides, new prisoners began arriving at the end of June. Their stories described mass arrests, outrages, executions without a trial behind the walls of the NKVD, and this all over the country. At the beginning, no one wanted to believe this, particularly since the new arrivals spoke unwillingly and rather enigmatically. But little by little, the bonds between them became tighter and the conversations franker. Without let up, new prisoners arrived from Russia; old friends and acquaintances discovered each other: it no longer was possible not to believe the stories.

Executions in the tundra

In spite of these obvious facts, a certain number of prisoners waited with impatience for the Autumn of 1937 and the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution; they hoped, on this occasion as in 1927, that the government would declare a large-scale amnesty, particularly since a little while earlier the very promising "Stalinist Constitution" had been adopted. But the Autumn brought bitter disillusionment.

The harsh regime of the camps grew abruptly worse. The sergeants and their assistants in maintaining order—common criminals—having received new orders from the camp director, armed themselves with clubs and pitilessly beat the prisoners. The guards, the watchmen close to the barracks, tormented the prisoners. To amuse themselves during the night they fired on those who went to the toilets. Or else, giving the order "On your bellies," they forced the prisoners to stretch out, naked, for hours on the snow. Soon there were massive arrests. Almost every night, GPU agents appeared in the barracks, called out certain names and led away those called.

Certain Trotskyists, including

Vladimir Ivanov, Kossior, and Trotsky's son, Sergei Sedov, a modest and likeable youth, who had imprudently refused to follow his father into exile in 1928, were taken in a special convoy to Moscow. We can only believe that Stalin was not satisfied simply to hurl them into the tundra; his sadistic nature thirsted not only for blood; he wished first to humiliate them and torture them immeasurably, coercing them into false-accusations...

Toward the end of Autumn, about 1,200 prisoners found themselves in the old brick field; at least half of these were Trotskyists. They were all lodged in four barracks; their food ration was 400 grams of bread a day and not every day. The barracks were surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Nearly 100 freshly recruited guards, supplied with automatic arms, watched the prisoners day and night.

The prisoners arrested at the mine, at Usa and in other nearby camps were taken to the old brickyard. Those arrested in more distant camps—at Pechora, Izhma, Kozhma, Chib-Yu, etc.—were kept near Chib-Yu.

The whole winter of 1937-38 some prisoners, encamped in barracks at the brickyard, starved and waited for a decision regarding their fate. Finally, in March, three NKVD officers, with Kashketin at their head, arrived by plane at Vorkuta, coming from Moscow. They came to the brickyard to interrogate the prisoners. Thirty to forty were called each day, superficially questioned five to ten minutes each, rudely insulted, forced to listen to vile name-calling and obscenities. Some were greeted with punches in the face; Lt Kashketin himself several times beat up one of them, the Old Bolshevik Virap Virapov, a former member of the Central Committee of Armenia.

At the end of March, a list of twenty-five was announced, among them Gevorkian, Virapov, Slavin, etc... To each was delivered a kilo of bread and orders to prepare himself for a new convoy. After fond farewells to their friends, they left the barracks, and the convoy departed. Fifteen or twenty minutes later, not far away, about half a kilometre, on the steep bank of the little river Verkhnyaya Vorkuta (Upper Vorkuta), an abrupt volley resounded, followed by isolated and disorderly shots; then all grew quiet again. Soon, the convoy's escort passed back near the barracks. And it was clear to all in what sort of convoy the prisoners had been sent.

Two days later, there was a new call, this time of forty names. Once more there was a ration of bread. Some, out of exhaustion, could no longer move; they were promised a ride in a cart.

Holding their breath, the prisoners remaining in the barracks heard the grating of the snow under the feet of the departing convoy. For a long time there was no sound; but all, on the watch, still listened. Nearly an hour passed in this way. Then, again, shots resounded in the tundra; this time, they came from much further away, in the direction of the narrow railway which passed three kilometres from the brickyard. The second "convoy" definitely convinced those remaining behind that they had been irremediably condemned.

The executions in the tundra lasted the whole month of April and part of May. Usually one day out of two, or one day out of three, thirty to forty prisoners were called. It is characteristic to note that each time, some common criminals, repeaters, were included. In order to terrorise the prisoners, the GPU, from time to time, made publicly known by means of local radio, the list of those shot. Usually broadcasts began as follows: "For counter-revolutionary agitation, sabotage, brigandage in the camps, refusal to work, attempts to escape, the following have been shot..." followed by a list of names of some political prisoners mixed with a group of common criminals.

Defiant to the end

One time, a group of nearly a hundred, composed mainly of Trotskyists, was led away to be shot. As they marched away, the condemned sang the "Internationale," joined by the voices of hundreds of prisoners remaining in camp.

At the beginning of May, a group of women were shot. Among them were the Ukrainian Communist, Chumskaya, the wife of IN Smirnov, a Bolshevik since 1898 and ex-Peoples' Commissar; (Olga, the daughter of Smirnov, a young girl, apolitical, passionately fond of music, had been shot a year before in Moscow); the wives of Kossior, of Melnais, etc... one of these women had to walk on crutches. At the time of execution of a male prisoner, his imprisoned wife was automatically liable to capital punishment; and when it was a question of well-known members of the Opposition, this applied equally to any of his children over the age of twelve.

In May, when hardly a hundred prisoners remained, the executions were interrupted. Two weeks passed quietly; then all the prisoners were led in a convoy to the mine. There it was learned that Yezhov had been dismissed, and that his place had been taken by Beria...

Book Reviews

Radical Aristocrats— A history of the London busworkers

By Ken Fuller
Published by
Lawrence and
Wishart, 1985
£4.95

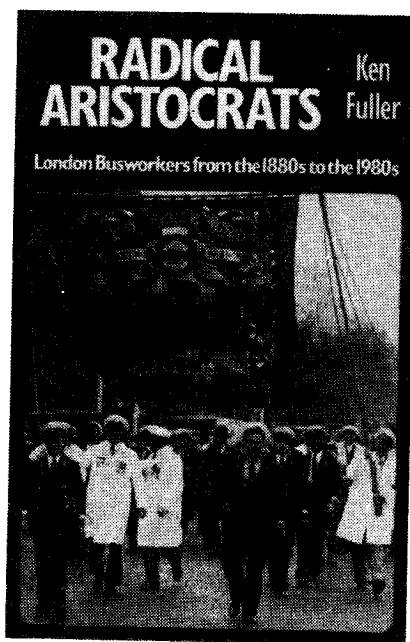
Reviewed by Peter Lush

AT A time when the trade union movement is under attack from both the employers and the government, it is worth studying the battles of the past, to draw out the lessons to help rearm the labour movement for the struggles of today.

Ken Fuller's history of the London busworkers provides insights into the development of a section of the working class who have a tradition of militancy and independent 'rank and file' organisation amongst their members. But, in attempting to cover 100 years in 250 pages, he often only provides a bare account of events, and lacks a detailed analysis of tactics and strategy that would increase the value of the book.

Fuller describes the early development of the union, and events leading up to the formation of the TGWU. When they first organised, the London busworkers were amongst the best paid manual workers. But from the beginning their union had a socialist outlook which was reflected in later struggles. From the viewpoint of Marxists active in the trade unions today, the most interesting sections of the book are those on the 'rank and file' movements—similar to the 'Broad Lefts' of today—which were built by London busmen.

They first clashed with the right wing leadership of the TGWU in the 1920s over the question of election of full-time officials. It was from the early socialist tradition of the London and Provincial Union (their first union), combined with their undemocratic treatment within the TGWU, that led to the development of the rank and file



movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Undoubtedly they were also enormously influenced by the national development of the 'Minority Movement', a left wing group led by the CP, that at one time in the mid-1920s could claim the support of a quarter of the trade union movement.

Fuller outlines the setbacks faced by the busworkers in the 1920s; both in wages and conditions, and the role of Bevin, the right wing general secretary of the TGWU, in failing to lead militant struggles, particularly in the period after the general strike. However, he does not provide any real detail or analysis of the influence of the 'Minority Movement', although he does point out that there were numerous unofficial strikes, at the time they were strongest amongst the busmen in the late 1920s.

1930's rank and file movement

He argues that: "The Minority Movement were unable to effectively mobilise and co-ordinate the widespread opposition to the Mondist (ie. collaborationist) policies of Bevin", because of the adoption by the CP in 1928 of the ultra-left 'class against class' strategy, which involved continual attacks on the Labour Party and trade unions. The industrial strategy which flowed from this political "analysis" which classed the traditional organisations of the working class as "social fascist" meant working outside the official trade union structures, and attempting to set up 'garage committees' at a local

level to usurp the authority of the local branch.

Nationally, as Fuller points out, the Minority Movement collapsed and by 1930 only had 700 members. By 1932, the CP changed their position, abandoned the tactics for the trade unions dictated by 'class against class', and again tried to build work-place groups with an orientation to winning influence in the union branches.

It was a campaign against wage cuts initiated by one branch in 1932 that led to the formation of the 'Rank and File Movement' (RFM), that was to play a key role in the 1930s. The CP used this branch to pass a resolution "calling on all garages to 'prepare rank and file machinery for strike action' against the cuts and for the reinstatement of the dismissed men", and printed 10,000 copies of the resolution, which were distributed throughout the fleet. A similar tactic by another branch led to the birth of the RFM, with support of over half the branches in the London area.

A pamphlet issued by the new group sold 30,000 copies in one week. A second one, opposing speed increases, sold 20,000. By January 1933, an unofficial strike against the new schedules was supported by 13,000 workers, over half the fleet. This rapid development shows the potential for Broad Lefts today to take up the immediate issues of wages and conditions facing workers, as well as providing a socialist voice in the trade union movement.

Fuller outlines how the unofficial movement developed because of the failure to lead any struggles by Bevin and the right wing leadership. He argues that they built primarily on the 'bread and butter' issues of wages and conditions, to establish a clear alternative to the right wing, as well as raising wider political issues.

The RFM's journal, *Busman's Punch* was printing 13,000 copies a month in June 1935, and had clearly established a mass base. However, it can be drawn by implication from Fuller's work that when the leaders of the RFM were elected to the leadership of the Central Bus Committee (the leading body of the London bus section of the TGWU), they lost touch with the membership and became more concerned with settling disputes, rather than mobilising the members. Indeed, as Fuller points out, "it is surprising that there were so few disputes during the lifetime of the RFM".

Although the leaders of the RFM claimed to be concerned to build the campaign for a seven-hour day, and did not want local disputes to dissipate this, Fuller comments that "the record

suggests that the decision to discourage action in preparation for the fight over hours had the effect of demobilising the membership”.

Politically, the RFM seems to have supported the policies of the CP in this period; which Fuller accepts uncritically. This period of the RFM points to some of the dangers Broad Left groups face when they win leading positions in a union, and the need to keep those elected to leading positions fully under the control and direction of the BL.

The RFM do not seem to have aimed to develop a national ‘left opposition’ within the TGWU, although they had contact with other busworkers outside London. To have seriously challenged the domination of the right wing, a national movement would have been necessary. However militant and well organised the London busmen were, they were only a relatively small part of the TGWU as a whole.

The defeat of the London-wide 1937 official strike, in which Fuller suggests that Bevin co-operated with London Transport management, led to an attack by the TGWU leadership on the RFM; with leading members being debarred from office, or expelled from the union. The RFM seems to have declined rapidly after the defeat of the strike, and the witch-hunt against its leadership. Fuller does not analyse why the movement collapsed, although he does comment that the RFM had “kept alive the industrial militancy and political radicalism of the Section during a period when those qualities were distinctly unwelcome in the official trade union movement, and especially in the TGWU.”

Fuller examines the attacks on the Communist Party in the post-war period as the Labour government attempted to impose a wage freeze. At this time, many of the best industrial militants were still members of the CP. The TUC led the attacks on the CP, but the TGWU was the only major union to ban Communist Party members from holding office, at the 1949 conference. The ban lasted until 1969. It undoubtedly weakened the base of the CP amongst the London busmen; where they lost the leading positions they had held both at Section and branch level.

In 1949, *The Platform*, an unofficial journal for the London busworkers was launched, and lasted until 1966. However, Fuller outlines that, because of the “climate created by Deakinism”, “although *The Platform* enjoyed a mass readership, the creation of a mass rank and file organisation around the journal was never achieved—or, indeed, even seriously attempted”

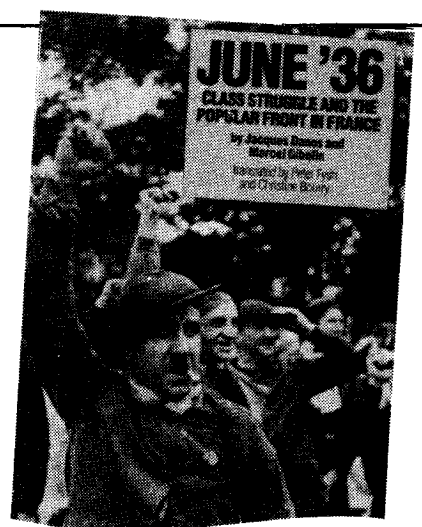
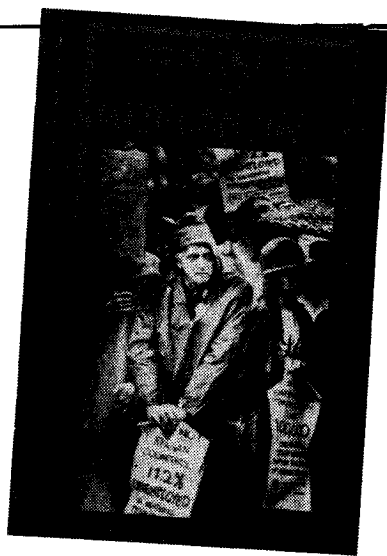
He correctly believes that “this meant that there was no systematic attempt to mobilise the membership as a whole. Also, *Platform* appears to have made no serious attempt to raise the level of political understanding of its readership, for its pages were concerned almost exclusively with wages and conditions... as was the case elsewhere in the labour movement, the propagation of socialist politics seems to have been given little priority during this period”.

Particularly after 1956, with the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet Union and the revelations by Krushchev about Stalin, the CP’s base declined, with many of their leading members leaving the party, and again taking a leading role in the union branches. There were numerous unofficial strikes in the early 1950s, culminating in the official strike in 1958. This strike was defeated because of the compliance of the TUC with the Conservative government; although the TGWU was led at this stage by left winger Frank Cousins, who had been elected in 1956. But it showed that

there was potential for a ‘rank and file movement’ around *The Platform* to have been created, despite the difficulties of organising against the right wing leadership of the TGWU.

Despite its drawbacks, the book is worth reading, particularly for members of the TGWU, and workers involved with the transport industry. It also shows clearly the need for one union for all transport workers, and the historical weaknesses caused by the failure of the original merger that formed the TGWU to include ASLEF and the NUR.

Finally it should not be forgotten that the author is a full-time official of the TGWU for the London Bus Section, and tends to accept uncritically the TGWU’s policies in the recent period, particularly after the end of Deakin’s period of leadership. Nevertheless, as long as it is read critically, it is an interesting account of a section of the labour movement with a radical tradition, who have suffered major falls in their standard of living in relation to other workers since the Second World War.



Booknotes

NEW TITLES received for review this quarter by the *Militant International Review* include a translation of *June '36: Class struggle and the Popular Front in France*, by Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibelin, initially published in French as *Juin '36* in 1952, and now made available for the first time to English speaking readers by **Bookmarks** at £5.95. Also from **Bookmarks**, at £1.95, comes a republication of Rosa Luxemburg’s classic, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, a study, written in August 1906, of the mass

strikes that gripped Russian society and culminated in the 1905 Russian Revolution.

From **Pluto** we have received *About Turn—The Alternative Use of Defence Workers Skills*, £2.95, a short, factually based essay by Bill Evans illustrated by Peter Kennard; from **Verso**, *Prisoners of the American Dream, Politics and Economy in the history of the US working class*, £7.95, by Mike Davis; and from **The Centre for Caribbean Studies**, *The Unequal Struggle* by Ashton Gibson with Jocelyn Barrow. £6.95, the findings of a two year research investigation into the underachievement of black children in British schools.

