

# Socialist Action



For a Class Struggle Left Wing in the Labour Movement

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## Socialist policies make big gains at Labour Conference

# NOW TURN WORDS INTO ACTION



Bob Swart/Socialist Action

“Foot back in charge as Benn is routed”, ran the frontpage headline in the *Guardian*, when it was announced that Healey had just sneaked the deputy leadership.

Such jubilation in the capitalist press mounted, the next day, when leading left-wingers were ousted from the NEC in favour of right-wing candidates, giving Foot an overall majority there.

Such events were clearly seen as the first steps in an attempt to stop the leftward drift in the party which has led it to adopt policies increasingly at odds with the traditional pro-capitalist ones of its misleaders.

### REALITY

The reality of the conference is somewhat different. Although Benn narrowly missed the deputy leadership, the 49.5 per cent of the vote chalked up for him represented a major step forward in the struggle for socialist policies in the party.

The achievement is even more significant if one considers the campaign of lies, slander and backstage manoeuvring mounted against him in the previous months.

Not only had Foot served notice that it would be impossible to work with Benn as deputy leader. Others, portraying his supporters as “bully boys”, had threatened to form an independent PLP if he was elected and yet others had hinted that they would join the renegades in the SDP.

Even sections of the spineless Tribune left, such as Joan Lester and Neil Kinnock joined in the chorus against Benn. Promoting Silkin to split the left vote, they finally abstained in the second ballot to ensure the right-wing candidate, Healey,

sneaked past the post.

### SLANDER

The manoeuvres and intimidation by Labour’s right-wing bureaucrats were backed to the hilt by their friends in the Tory press who unanimously swung in behind Healey.

Not only did they open their pages to the Labour right — giving them unlimited space to present their case — but they launched an unprecedented personal campaign of lies and slander against Tony Benn.

As the latter pointed out, rarely has a Labour politician had to withstand such a barrage of abuse directed against him from papers from the *Sun* to the *Guardian*. This reached its climax with reports that Bennite supporters were deliberately mounting a campaign to prevent Healey’s right to free speech.

### RADICALISATION

Despite all these pressures, however, the fact that Benn was able to chalk up almost 50 per cent of the vote was a major step forward for the left. It showed that there is growing support, in the grass-roots of the unions and CLPs, for radical policies to confront the Thatcher attacks.

This was reflected, above all, in the policy decisions taken at Brighton. Despite the jubilation in the capitalist press, the fact is that the radical policies on which Benn partially stood — unilateral disarmament, withdrawal from the EEC, opposition to all forms of wage restraint etc — were passed by an overwhelming majority.

More than that, there are signs that

the radicalisation is deepening. The debate on Northern Ireland is a case in point. Despite its limited nature, for the first time in over 50 years, a Labour conference has broken its bi-partisan approach with the Tories and come out, however, meekly, in favour of a united Ireland.

### FEAR

It is the mass support behind the policies Benn supports — and for democratic procedures to ensure they are implemented — which clearly worries big business

continued on page 3



# Building a Class Struggle

Under the attacks from the Tory government, a mass radicalisation is occurring in Labour's ranks. It is this radicalisation which has caused the major debate in the Labour Party and unions as rank-and-file workers come into head-on conflict with the pro-capitalist policies and undemocratic measures of the present leaders. Under such pressure, sections of the Labour right have split to form the SDP and others, grouped around Healey, are planning to overturn the gains made so far. What attitude should socialists take to these developments? How can they best intervene to advance the struggle for socialism and democracy? How should they relate to leaders of the left such as Tony Benn? Below we reprint aspects of a report — presented at this year's *Socialist Action* conference — which seeks to answer such questions and chart out a clear course of action for socialists in the period ahead.

The Thatcher government has an historic mission — to raise the rate of profit of ailing British capitalism sufficiently to enable it to compete in a shrinking world market.

In order to achieve this end, it is forced into the most ruthless attack on workers' living standards and democratic rights seen since the last war. Pushing the jobless total to over three million — in order to cripple unions' bargaining power — is only one aspect of this offensive.

It has been coupled with an axing of the social services and a ruthless attempt to erode the democratic rights won over decades of struggle. The attack on the right to strike, or enforce 100 per cent union membership, through the Employment Act, is a case in point.

## WAR DRIVE

For the Tories and their big business backers, such an offensive is vital at a time when ailing British industry is faced with growing competition due to international recession. Surviving in the cut-throat jungle of international trade means workers have to fork out in terms of wages, jobs, rights and — potentially — lives.

It is no accident that, at the very time that health and education are being cut to the bone, Thatcher is pouring millions into the nuclear death traps symbolised by the Trident missiles.

"Guns not butter", this is the slogan of the Tory government — and other capitalist governments around the world — as they step up their armaments programmes. The threat to world peace, as in the 'thirties, is being bought at the expense of decent hospitals, houses and schools.

## DOUBLY OPPRESSED

Worst hit by this offensive are, of course, those doubly oppressed layers of the workforce such as women or Blacks. It is they who are

hardest hit by the cut-back in social services or the dramatic escalation in unemployment figures.

In order to get workers to accept the offensive, the Tories have launched an ideological campaign to weaken and divide the labour movement. They have consciously sought to whip up racist feelings — around the Nationality Act — and to restore the image of the "family" in which women, made redundant at twice the rate of men, are expected to find a "natural" occupation.

The clearest ideological stance of the Tories has been revealed in their attitude towards the heroic hunger-strikers in Northern Ireland, imprisoned for seeking to free their country from British oppression. The hard line adopted by the Tories — which has led to the death of over 10 political prisoners — is, symbolically, an attempt to break the backs of all those who dare stand up to their anti-working class policies.

## DISARRAY

While having launched a determined attack on workers and their allies, however, the Thatcher government is confronted with an internal crisis. Attempts to beat workers into line through mass unemployment and a steady erosion of their rights has not achieved the desired aim.

Moreover, in the process of deflating the economy, British industry is being increasingly crippled on the international markets. This has provoked sharp criticism in big business circles, reflected in the opposition within the cabinet by "wets" such as Prior.

Although the differences are merely tactical in nature, they reflect the growing loss of confidence among sectors of big business that Thatcher will be able to restore the rate of profit without setting off a powder-keg of anger and resentment among working people.

The explosion of young workers only recently, in cities as far apart as London and Liverpool, is an indication of the hostility building up.

## JUSTIFIED

Such fears are justified. As the attacks by the Thatcher government deepen, there has been a growing radicalisation among wide layers of the labour movement. Faced with a massive loss of jobs and democratic rights, more and more workers have seen the need to create a fighting alternative to the Tories at national level.

This growing radicalisation has been reflected in attempts to turn the mass organisations of labour — the unions and Labour Party — into tools of struggle to defend their class interests.

The fight that has opened up in the Labour Party over the past few years — around both policies and party democracy — is not, as the Tory press portray it, a clash of "personalities". On the contrary, it reflects initial attempts by the grass-roots of the labour movement — disillusioned by the pro-capitalist policies of the last Labour government — to develop a new leadership and programme that reflects their interests and not those of big business.

## CLASS DIVISION

The struggle that has burst out between the party conference and the PLP, and within the PLP itself, is in this sense no accident. As workers move into struggle against the Tories they come increasingly into conflict with the reformist leaders and their class-collaborationist line.

The fight for unilateral nuclear disarmament, for withdrawal from the EEC etc — as well as the fight for democratic control over MPs to ensure such policies are implemented — represents a continuation of the class struggle *within* the mass organisations of the labour movement. It represents a growing rift between the mass class base of the movement and its middle-class leaders who have consistently, over the years, introduced policies in the interests of big business.

The split by the "gang of four" to form the SDP — and the desertion, since that time, of other renegades — is a sign that the differences are so deep that they can no longer be contained within a single party. What is opening up is a fight of historic dimensions to decide whether the party will continue to introduce pro-capitalist policies (under the guise of the "national interest") or whether it will — as Benn puts it — return to its roots and represent the class interests of those workers who built it, finance it and support it.

## SDP

It is undoubtedly for this reason that the Tory press have given such publicity to the launching of the SDP.

Fearing an electoral disaster for the Tories at the next election, they realise the dangers of the return of a Labour government over which the rank-and-file of the movement have some measure of control. It could cut drastically across their strategy of making working people pay for the current crisis in terms of slashing social services, wages



"March for Jobs" reaches London

and job prospects.

Boosting the SDP — and its marriage of convenience with the Liberals — offers, for them, the best way of cutting into Labour's electoral base and destroying its chances of victory next time round.

## BENN

There can be no doubt that the platform of the Labour left — represented by Benn — is a limited one. While notching up decisive steps forward in terms of, for example, unilateral disarmament, the overall strategy of the Bennite left offers no long-term solutions to the real problems facing workers and their allies.

Support for import controls and withdrawal from the EEC will not, in themselves, solve the massive problems of unemployment and decline facing British workers. By seeking to defend British workers jobs at the expense of workers overseas, such policies can only breed dangerously nationalistic illusions which can be preyed off by the ultra-right.

Moreover, despite the rhetoric, Benn and his supporters have tended to confine the struggle against the Tories within a parliamentary framework. While prodded into calling mass demonstrations against the Tory jobless strategy or its nuclear armaments programme, they have not yet decisively pushed for a mass campaign, rooted in the power of the shop-floor, to bring this government down.

While these weaknesses clearly exist, however, there can be no doubt that the Benn development reflects the growing radicalisation of millions of workers seeking an alternative to the Foot-Healy misleaders and, within this framework, has to be supported as a major — if limited — step forward.

It reflects the fact that, while developing in a complex and uneven way, *the fight for an alternative leadership in the labour movement — for a programme and a leadership that will imple-*

*ent that programme — is increasingly being waged within the unions and Labour Party.*

It is here that more and more workers are beginning to debate out, discuss and construct a programme of action against the Tories and their big business backers. While limited to the policies of the left reformists at this stage, the growing attacks on their living standards and rights will push them — and several of their leaders — increasingly to the left in the years ahead.

## STRATEGY

It is within this framework that socialists have to begin to work out their strategy for the coming period. The central aspect of this strategy must be building — within the unions and Labour Party — a class struggle left-wing that will resolutely advance the interests of workers and their allies against both the Tory government and their allies in the Labour leadership.

It is only by building a mass-action left-wing, rooted in the struggles of workers on the shop-floor, that the right-wing opponents in the unions and the Labour Party can be effectively dealt with and the fake "lefts", such as Neil Kinnock, who refused to vote for Benn as deputy leader, exposed.

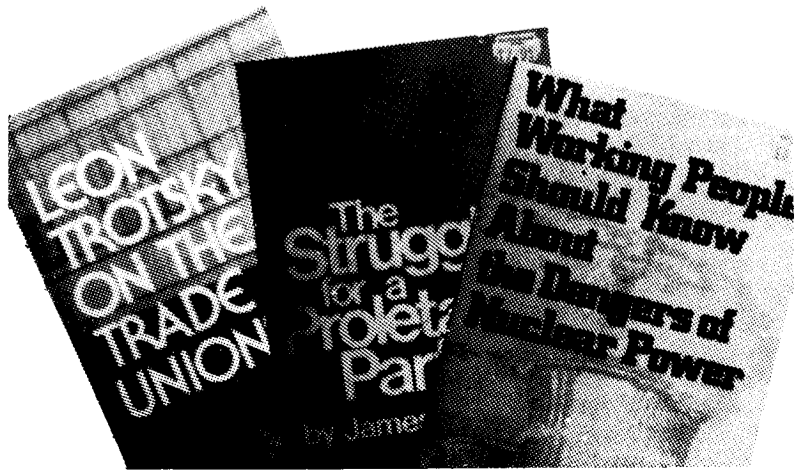
Building a mass action left-wing, however, cannot be achieved by any given marxist current setting up a "flag". It is not enough to declare oneself *the* marxist left to become it. On the contrary, a real class-struggle left-wing can only be forged out of the struggles on the shop floor and in the streets in which marxists, as an integral part of the labour movement, play a vital role. In order to be able to accomplish this task, three preconditions are necessary.

## INDUSTRY

The first is that socialists, seeking to promote such a perspective,

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# gle Left Wing



be rooted in the labour movement — above all, in the industrial unions. It might appear strange that socialists should have to pose this as a precondition but, allowing for the uneven development of the class struggle over the past twenty years, it becomes a vital one.

The ending of the post-war boom years was heralded, in the late '60s, by the radicalisation of layers outside the labour movement — mainly student youth — who were to the fore in defending the colonial revolution and in pioneering the rights of doubly-oppressed layers such as women or Blacks.

While it was correct for socialists to participate among these layers — winning the best elements to a working class perspective — it was important, at all times, to be aware of the limitations of these petty-bourgeois layers in terms of their social weight.

As the capitalist crisis has deepened — and the labour movement has become increasingly the key factor in defending the rights of all the oppressed — these limitations have become glaringly obvious.

Divorced from the workers' movement, what was previously the "vanguard" of the radicalisation process has been thrown into a crisis endemic to their social origins. Some have opted out of politics altogether, moving towards alternative forms of "lifestyle", and others have abandoned marxism for a reformist strategy. The Beyond the Fragments current represented aspects of both.

## PRESSURE

Unfortunately, many of the left tendencies who grew during the late 'sixties and early 'seventies, drew their forces from such a milieu and are, therefore, deeply susceptible to pressures from it. The only way socialists can break out of the impotence and hostile class pressures such a milieu today represents is by making a decisive turn towards the labour movement

— particularly its industrial wing. Such a turn is vital for three inter-related reasons:

1. First of all, it is only the labour movement — or, more precisely, its industrial base — which today has the power to stop the ruling class offensive against its living standards and democratic rights. It is only the muscle of the industrial workers — of the miners, engineers and transport workers — which is capable of reversing the tide.

This was revealed dramatically in the past few months. Whereas the civil servants were defeated by the Tories after months of industrial action, the miners had only to threaten strike action to bring the government to its knees.

2. Secondly, not only are the industrial unions key to beating back the Tory offensive on wages, jobs and anti-union laws but they are vital in defending the interests of any oppressed layer.

Neither women, Blacks or any other social layer today has the power to stop the Tory onslaught in isolation. It is only by winning the decisive social weight of the industrial working class — and getting them to pioneer the rights of all the oppressed — that the democratic rights of any layer can be protected. This was shown most clearly in the campaign against Corrie's anti-abortion bill when it was the intervention of the TUC — mobilising thousands on the streets — which ensured that this piece of anti-women legislation was thrown into the rubbish bin where it belonged.

3. Thirdly, it is the industrial unions which alone have the power not only to stop the Tories in their tracks but to decisively influence the struggle for socialist policies opening up in the Labour Party.

The mass base of the Labour Party is not rooted in the white collar unions but in the industrial unions which helped to found it and which have supported it ever since. It is only by rooting a class-struggle left-wing in these unions — in the mines, the factories and the docks — that it will become possible to ensure that the fight against the right-wing in the Labour Party is definitively won and that socialist policies are implemented.

It is for these combined reasons that socialists, in the period ahead, have to see their central task as rooting themselves in the industrial working class. It is the industrial workers who will increasingly bear the brunt of the Tory attacks — as the latter seek to raise the rate of profit — and who alone have the power necessary to defeat the ruling class offensive.

## PROGRAMME

The second major precondition for building a class-struggle left-wing is the elaboration of a clear programme of action, of a series of demands which — by struggling for them — can lead ever-wider layers to see the importance of a socialist solution to the present crisis.

Such a programme, unlike that of the Stalinists or reformists, starts from two basic premises. The first is that, in the fight for jobs and wages, workers did not create the

present crisis and should in no way bear responsibility for it. This means, concretely, opposing all forms of pay restraint or "phased" redundancies and advancing demands which can lead workers to see, more and more, that wages and jobs can only be protected by the overthrow of the profit system itself.

Calling for work-sharing when redundancies are announced — a demand already popularised in the call for the 35-hour week — and for index-linked pay increases are cases in point.

The second premise is that, in the fight against the Tory offensive, the maximum unity is needed. This means leading a concerted struggle, on the shop-floor, against Tory attempts to divide the labour movement by spreading racist, sexist or chauvinist poison.

Such a struggle involves not only opposing attempts to erode still further the limited rights of the doubly oppressed (as in the Tory government's attempts to ram through the racist Nationality Act). It also means fighting for positive discrimination in favour of the doubly-oppressed since this is the only way to destroy the caste prejudices that have been built up over centuries and ensure maximum unity in action.

The unions — and Labour Party — have to be turned into organisations that will lead the fight for all the oppressed and exploited against this decaying system. "An injury to one is an injury to all" should be the motto that inspires socialist activity on the shop floor.

Struggling to build a class-struggle left-wing around such an action programme is not merely a propagandistic task. The demands raised at any stage have to relate concretely to the concerns of the workers in question — and those of the general labour movement — since it is only by struggling for them that growing layers will deepen their awareness of the present system and see the need to decisively change it.

It is by fighting for such demands that growing layers will not only see the need to change the system but also their present leadership which is not prepared to challenge the ruling class, and its bankrupt system, head-on.

## LABOUR PARTY

Finally, it is only by rooting a class-struggle left-wing in the unions — particularly the industrial unions — that the fight for socialist policies in the Labour Party can assume any real perspective.

The present shift left in the party — which has pushed the right onto the defensive — is not, as the Tory press like to portray it, due to the activity of small groups of "infiltrators" in the constituency parties. On the contrary, it is due to the growing radicalisation among the union rank-and-file which has pushed the block vote to the left at party conferences.

There is no way that resolutions on unilateralism or withdrawal from the EEC — not to speak of the measures for greater internal democracy — could have been passed without a major shift left in

## Words into action

continued from page 1

and their press spokespeople. Behind their cries of jubilation lies the knowledge that the support for these policies will grow — and not diminish — in the years ahead.

They know that the mass base behind Benn is not confined to small groups of "activists" in the CLPs but represents a shift left by thousands of workers looking for a class-struggle lead against the Tories. The endorsement of Benn by unions such as the NUM, which balloted its members, is a clear case in point.

They also know that, as the Tory government deepens its attacks, more and more workers will be drawn to the radical alternative Benn represents and will question the right-wing bureaucrats who dominate their unions and the Labour Party.



Demonstration Against Nationality Bill

## STRUGGLE

This is the process that is really opening up in the party and which was registered at conference.

What is at stake — and the ruling class know it — is a fight for the very heart of the party: a fight to determine whether it will continue to implement pro-capitalist policies (under the guise of the "national interest") or whether it will implement policies in the class interests of those workers who built and support it.

While that fight has not yet been resolved — and while the right-wing, backed by the Tory press, are digging in for a fight-to-the-death finish — the ruling class know that the trend of history is against them.

This is why, of course, while slandering the Bennite left, they are busy promoting the SDP-Liberal alliance. Faced with the prospect of the return of a left-wing Labour government, under greater rank-and-file control, they are busy seeking an alternative which can bite into the Labour Party's electoral base.

## UNIONS KEY

The only way to defeat the ruling

class plans is to push resolutely ahead with the fight for socialist policies which can help millions of workers to see in Labour a real defender of their class interests. This means continuing the fight against the right-wing — against the Hattersleys and Healeys — who have no intention of implementing conference decisions.

Defeating the right cannot be achieved, however, by the CLPs alone. As conference showed, with dramatic clarity, the real power in the Labour Party is rooted in its industrial base. It was the block votes of the right-wing union bureaucrats, such as Duffy of the AUEW, which kept Healey in power by the skin of his teeth.

If the right-wing are to be decisively defeated, the struggle for socialist policies must be increasingly taken into the unions — above all, into the industrial unions — to challenge the stranglehold grip bureaucrats like Duffy continue to exert.

The decision by conference by an almost two to one majority to set up industrial branches of the Labour Party will be an important means of carrying the debate into the union rank-and-file and calling the manoeuvres of the right-wing bureaucrats to order.

## FIGHTBACK

There can be little doubt that the narrowness of Healey's victory will encourage the Labour right — backed by the Tory press — into ever more shrill attacks on the growing radicalisation,

Already, signs have emerged of attempts to witch-hunt socialists in the unions and CLPs. Weighall of the NUR, for example, has called for the expulsion of tendencies such as *Militant* and the re-introduction of the bans and proscriptions list.

These moves have to be fought tooth and nail. Although, in the longer term, the moves from the right are doomed to impotence, they can in the shorter term gain important tactical advantages unless they are combatted right down the line.

This means:

- \* calling to account those MPs and union bureaucrats who opposed the election of Benn against their members' wishes;
- \* taking the struggle into the unions — mainly through the setting up of industrial branches — to build growing support for socialist policies against the pro-capitalist ones of their leaders;
- \* turning the Labour Party more and more into a campaigning party which can champion, on the streets, the demands of workers and their allies, from the question of unemployment to unilateral disarmament.

the unions which, in the past, represented about 90 per cent of the conference vote.

The only way of ensuring that this turn to the left is deepened — and that the right-wing gathered around Healey and Foot is defeated — is to build a solid base in the unions. It is, in the long term, only the power of the rank-and-file of the industrial unions which can ensure real control over the Labour leaders and their implementation of party policy.

## DANGER

There is the danger that many socialist currents — particularly

those who, until recently, were hostile to the Labour Party — will join it without any clear understanding of the processes that are underway.

Many will see the struggle for socialist policies — and the building of a left opposition — as getting involved in small caucuses trying to out-manoeuvre the right, seizing "positions" or passing pious resolutions. Such views can be dangerous because, instead of seeking to win over the rank-and-file of the labour movement who wield the

continued on page 4



## Class Struggle Left Wing

continued from page 3

real power, they merely imitate the discredited techniques of the old left reformists over the years who never succeeded in seriously challenging the right-wing and breaking their strangle-hold over the leadership.

It is only by basing oneself in the unions that socialists can offset any tendency to adapt to left-reformist pressures. Rooted in the unions, the struggle to build a mass-action left-wing becomes not a question of manoeuvres in ward meetings but mobilising, *in action*, the rank-and-file over issues of concern to the labour movement and its allies.

It is in the course of such mobilisations that the leaders of the Labour Party — from the Healeys to Tony Benn — can be tested out. It is by placing demands on them stemming from the grass-roots — demands relating to unemployment, opposition to racist laws or the removal of the troops from Ireland — that more and more workers will have the chance to test out all those who lay claim to lead them and begin the construction of a real class-struggle leadership.

### UNITY IN ACTION

Such a process does not mean, of course, downplaying unity in action. On the contrary, it is by fighting for the maximum unity in action — by demanding that the Labour leaders turn their platform rhetoric into action on the streets and in the factories — that not only will the Tory offensive be stopped but the testing out of all the different currents advanced.

This means avoiding the shrill denunciations of the Labour leaders by ultra-left outfits such as the SWP whose hostile attitude to the Labour Party merely cuts them off from the mainstream of the labour movement. While such groups will rapidly be bypassed as the class struggle develops, their sectarian line can — temporarily — hold back the fight for an alternative leadership in the labour movement and renders them a brake on the radicalisation process.

It also means, however, avoiding the adaptation to reformism that can grow within the Labour Party among socialist currents. Under the pressures building up, there can be a very real danger of tendencies uncritically following behind the left reformist leaders, as happened for a time with the IMG which became a cheer-leader for Tony Benn.

Both sectarian abstention and opportunist adaptation will, in the period ahead, become a brake

on the process of building a clear class-struggle left-wing which should be constructed around policies and not personalities.

### UNITY

There can be little doubt that the radicalisation currently underway in the labour movement offers socialists major opportunities for advancing socialist solutions. More and more workers will be looking for answers to the current crisis which go beyond those offered by the reformists and Stalinists.

While offering major opportunities, however, the marxist left faces the coming period in a state of disarray. The fragmentation of the marxist left over the past few decades — due mainly to its isolation from the labour movement — means that it is unable to offer workers, seeking a solution to the left of the Stalinists and reformists, a viable alternative.

There will, in this sense, be growing pressures on those marxist currents moving politically closer — under the objective situation — to unite to form a coherent and strong organisational force integrated in the unions and Labour Party. The splits and fissures that occurred in a movement isolated from rank-and-file workers will no longer be tolerated by trade unionists who appreciate only too well the need for unity against the class enemy.

Those tendencies which put their tactical “shibboleths” ahead of unity around a clear programmatic basis will be increasingly bypassed in action. Such a process of unity will be quite different from that called by the IMG, a few years back, in its Socialist Unity campaign. That campaign sought to unite petty-bourgeois groupings, outside the labour movement, on a blurred programmatic basis. The present situation will, on the contrary, facilitate the coming together of forces within the unions and Labour Party on a common programmatic platform.

The coming together of Marxist currents who share a common programme — and whose tactical disagreements are narrowing — will be a vital step in building a serious marxist tendency in the labour movement. It is only by the construction of such a tendency, built around a programme of action, that it will be possible to advance the construction of a mass action left-wing which can remove the present Tory government and fight for socialist policies in the labour movement. The two are inseparable.



Contingent on April 1981 CARL demonstration.

Bob Swart/Socialist Action

# Marxism &

Forty years ago when small and isolated groups of Marxists from a number of countries came together to found the Fourth International, they pointed to what they considered was all that stood in the way of socialism in a world “rotten-ripe” for revolution: “The world situation as a whole”, they wrote in the *Transitional Programme*, “is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” The workers were led by bureaucratic self-seekers who sought to block class struggle in favour of compromise with a crisis-ridden capitalist system.

The world working class paid dearly in blood for their inability to throw off these collaborators with the bosses and develop a new revolutionary Marxist leadership of the labour movement. Sixty million working people fell to fascism and World War II. And millions more have perished since then in bloody defeats like the military coup in Indonesia in 1965 and Chile in 1973: as well as victories like that in Vietnam, which were made all the more costly because the main contingents of the world working class lacked revolutionary leadership.

In some countries such as China during this period, the pressure of the working people forced their Stalinist misleaders to break with imperialism and reluctantly stand at the head of socialist revolutions, revolutions which they sought to blunt and stifle at every stage. This has meant that today, despite the tremendous social and economic gains of the revolution, the Chinese workers and peasants are being sat upon by a totalitarian bureaucracy, which openly and cynically collaborates with US imperialism to try and hold back the world revolution, such as in its scandalous united front with Washington and Pol Pot against the Vietnamese and Kampuchean revolutions.

These counter-revolutionary policies by Peking (and the bureaucratic misleaders of the other Stalinised workers states) has had a tremendously disorienting effect on those working people, especially in the impoverished Third World, who looked to the great Chinese revolution as a model for the way out of imperialist exploitation and misery.

### NEW LEADERSHIP

But something entirely different is happening in the Caribbean and Central America. In Cuba, Grenada, Nicaragua and El Salvador, a new revolutionary Marxist leadership has emerged. They are people like us; except they stand at the head of hundreds of thousands and millions of workers.

This leadership consciously led the Cuban workers and farmers to make a socialist revolution more than 20 years ago. It is consciously leading the Nicaraguan and Grenadian workers and farmers along the same path today. And it is standing at the head of the El Salvadoran

masses in a bloody struggle to overthrow the imperialist-backed dictatorship and open the path to socialist revolution there too.

In short, the historical crisis of working class leadership pointed to in the *Transitional Programme* forty years ago, is beginning to be resolved. This extension of revolutionary Marxist leadership is the single-most decisive feature of the world political situation today! It is the most important advance for the world working class struggle to abolish capitalism since Lenin proclaimed the first workers and farmers republic in Russia in 1917.

The imperialists recognise the decisive significance of the challenge to their domination that is developing in Central America and the Caribbean. They are responding in the manner of all ruling classes that have become an obstacle to the further advance of humanity. They are attempting to drown progress in blood, to halt the march of history with terror.

US imperialism has introduced political assassination into Grenada. It brought down the reform-oriented Manley government in Jamaica in October 1980 through a campaign of economic destabilisation and political terror, leaving 1000 dead. It is encouraging an escalation of capitalist counter-revolutionary activities in Nicaragua. And it has stepped up its military threats against the Cuban revolution, while turning a blind eye to terrorism against Cuban officials abroad.

But most importantly, Washington has chosen El Salvador as the battleground for an all-out military and political effort to try to turn back and crush the Central American revolution.

The Castro current recognised that Washington's defeat in Vietnam opened new opportunities for extending the influence and example of the Cuban revolution internationally. It made it harder for imperialism to intervene and crush new revolutionary upsurges, without risking revolutionary crises within the imperialist countries themselves. Thus Cuba was able to send tens of thousands of its soldiers to help crush imperialist-backed military attacks on the Angolan liberation struggle in 1975 and the Ethiopian revolution in 1977.

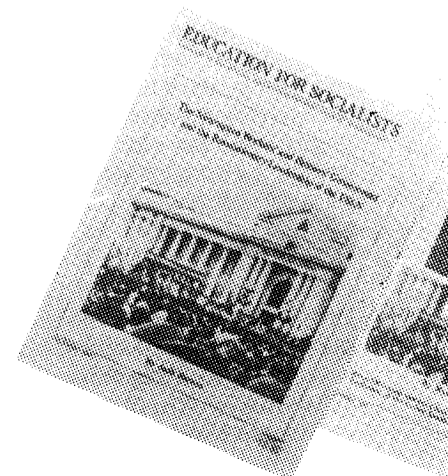
These events paved the way for the historic new victories for the world revolution in Nicaragua and Grenada. Material aid from Cuba even tipped the balance at the critical moment in the struggle to overthrow the dictatorships in these countries and consolidate new revolutionary working-class regimes.

The Fidelistas deepened their understanding and confidence in socialist revolution as the only path forward in *all* continents, and in proletarian internationalism. In short, they enriched their understanding and practice of Marxism.

Russell Johnson, National Secretary (SAL), spent three months and studying developments in, t he reports on the significance of and the international workers m of one that originally appeared i No 1).



## Revolution



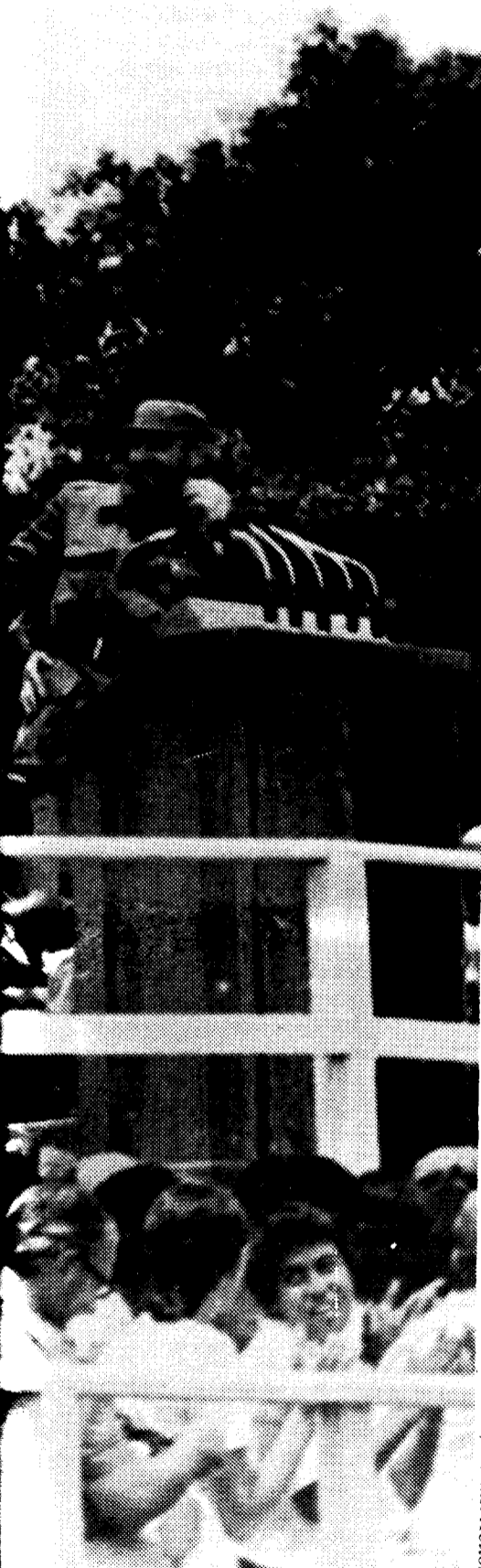
## What is Marxism

It is important to understand the significance for Marxists of the extension of the world revolution in the Caribbean and Central America,

and of the revolutionary calibre of the working class leaderships there. It is helpful to begin by reviewing exactly what Marxism is, through

# Revolution

... of the New Zealand Socialist Action ... during late 1980 travelling through ... Caribbean and Central America. Here ... revolutionary upheavals for Marxists ... ment. The article is an abridged version ... e New Zealand Socialist Action (Vol 3,



R. Leonhardt/Socialist Action

## the Caribbean



the words of the founders of scientific socialism themselves. Engels wrote in 1847, against a middle-class opponent of Marxism: "Herr Heinzen imagines Communism is a certain doctrine which proceeds from a definite theoretical principle as its core and draws further conclusions from that. Herr Heinzen is very much mistaken. Communism is not a doctrine but but a movement . . . The Communists do not base themselves on this or that philosophy as their point of departure but on the whole course of previous history and specifically its actual results in the civilised countries at the present time. Communism has followed from large-scale industry and its consequences, from the establishment of the world market, of the concomitant uninhibited competition, from the ever more violent and more universal trade crises, which have already become full-fledged crises of the world market, from the creation of the proletariat and the concentration of capital, from the ensuing class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Communism, insofar as it is a theory, is the theoretical expression of the position of the proletariat in this struggle and the theoretical summation of the conditions for the liberation of the proletariat."

**COMMUNIST MANIFESTO**  
That is, Marxism is not a set of beliefs learnt by heart by groups of devotees, nor is it the exclusive property of any group or brainy individual. Marxism is the historical movement of the workers against capitalism, and the political lessons and the theoretical generalisations drawn from decades of experience in that struggle. Or as Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist Manifesto*:

"The theoretical conclusions of Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes."

This helps us to understand why the brightest "Marxist" university lecturer very often understands less about Marxism and the class struggle than a young factory worker newly won to socialism in the course of union battles, and why such "Marxists" so frequently end up on the wrong side of class questions. For example, adopting a position of sectarian opposition to the Labour Party, or rejecting a revolutionary government like that in Nicaragua on the grounds that trapped inside that government are a capitalist or two.

Marxism is not enriched by professors, but by a team of revolutionary cadres rooted in the labour movement, and who seek to learn from it in the real struggle to move the working class forward. When we go back and read the *Communist Manifesto* today, it means that much more to us, because we can see it from the perspective of the working class in motion.

We can also see very rapidly why it is utter nonsense to depict the mass movement of the Polish work-

ing class for democratic rights as reactionary. Whatever religious or other reactionary illusions some Polish workers may hold on to, in reaction to the "Communism" of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the logic of the movement of the Polish working class can only be towards the strengthening of socialism and towards developing a Marxist consciousness.

**SOCIALIST REVOLUTION**  
A socialist revolution is the highest expression of the movement of the working class. Thus each new revolution deepens and enriches Marxism, providing new lessons on all aspects of the working-class struggle for power. And it strengthens the organisation of the world working class for the next round of struggle with the bourgeoisie. This is the first way in which the revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada, and the deepening revolutionary struggle in El Salvador, have significance for Marxists and the working class.

But there is also a more profound significance for us about these revolutions, which I pointed to at the beginning of this article. At the head of these revolutions stand conscious Marxist leaderships, for the first time since the Russian revolution of 1917. These are leaderships who, in contrast to Stalinist self-seekers, subordinate themselves to the interests of the world working class, and consciously base themselves on the heritage of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

This fact means that these revolutions advance more surely and at less cost to the working masses. And it also means that through creatively applying the methods of Marxism, in responding to the initiatives of the masses, and in advancing these revolutions, these leaderships *consciously* enrich Marxism.

These things are crucial to grasp if we are to approach these revolutions and their leaderships correctly. We must put aside any know-it-all, bookish arrogance, and adopt the approach that Fidel took when he visited Nicaragua in July, 1980 for the first anniversary celebrations of the overthrow of Somoza. He told the Managua rally of 500,000: "There are many who were afraid and who still harbour fears about the Sandinista revolution. There are those who seek to teach the Sandinistas what to do. We will never seek to tell the Sandinistas what they should do, or give or offer them free advice.

We are ready to give you all our support, all the solidarity of our people without conditions — without conditions and without advice. We did not come here to teach or to influence. We came humbly to learn and be influenced. We are sure that the Sandinista revolution will teach us a great deal and that the Sandinista revolution will have a great influence on us, just as we are certain that your example will influence the rest of Latin America in an extraordinary way."

So if Fidel — who has proved in practice that he is the most capable leader of the world working class since Lenin and Trotsky — takes this approach, then certainly so can we, a Marxist current that has yet to be decisively tested in class combat.

# Socialist Action CONFERENCE

Last month, *Socialist Action* supporters nationally met in London for their annual conference. Lasting a weekend, the conference was preceded by over two months of discussion on the major issues facing socialists in Britain and internationally.

All comrades had the opportunity to present and argue for their point of view in the pre-conference period, particularly around the two key issues facing *Socialist Action*: building a class-struggle left-wing in the labour movement and mobilising support for the unfolding revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean

Presenting the major report on perspectives in Britain, Pete Marais analysed the growing radicalisation in labour's ranks as the Thatcher offensive deepens. "Such an offensive", he argued, "is at the root of the growing attempt by workers to turn their organisations — the trade unions and the Labour Party — into real tools to defend their class interests."

What was important about this radicalisation, Marais continued, was not just that it brought ever-wider layers into conflict with the sell-out bureaucrats dominating the labour movement — both those Labour MPs who recently split to form the SDP and those remaining forces organising around the ill-named "Solidarity".

Equally key was the fact that the fight for socialist policies in the unions and Labour Party was becoming a focal point for all the oppressed and exploited who could see the possibility of linking their struggle with the socially decisive weight of the workers movement. Examples of this, he suggested, could be seen in the growing fight for women's and Black rights inside the Labour Party.



Jane Ansell speaking at Socialist Action Conference.

The tempo of radicalisation in the labour movement, Marais suggested, was creating an acid test for the Marxist left. Many of those tendencies who lacked roots in the unions and Labour Party were increasingly being bypassed in action. Since the fight for a new class-struggle leadership was taking place inside the workers' organisations, those — such as the SWP and other assorted fringe groups — were becoming increasingly irrelevant.

Not only would they become more irrelevant as the social crisis deepens,

he went on, but they would be forced into adopting positions ever more at odds with the objective needs of the labour movement. The example of the *Beyond the Fragments* current is a case in point.

It was for this reason, Marais concluded, that the key task of *Socialist Action* was to root itself ever more deeply in the labour movement in the coming year. This not only meant participating in the Labour Party but making a decisive turn towards the industrial unions which alone have the power to halt the Tory offensive in its tracks.

The second major report, presented by Gary Erlisker, centred around the major struggles underway in Central America and the Caribbean. The struggles in Nicaragua, Grenada and El Salvador, Erlisker suggested, were in the forefront of the fight against imperialism internationally. There was the possibility, in the near future, that new workers states — inspired by Revolutionary Cuba — would come into being.

Such developments, Erlisker stressed, were an acid test for the British left which is not exactly known for its "internationalism". What we were witnessing in these countries was not just a struggle against imperialism but the creation of a new revolutionary Marxist leadership inspired by the Castro team, which was a major break-through in solving the crisis of leadership that had bedevilled the world working class for decades.

It is not enough, Erlisker said, for socialists purely to get involved in solidarity actions with the heroic struggles in these countries — key though this was. Equally important, it was necessary for Marxists to see the major step forward in building an international leadership which all socialists should support and seek to link up with.

Only by recognising the revolutionary Marxist character of this new leadership — and approaching it in a non-sectarian way — he stressed, could one be sure that, in the struggles ahead in Britain, Marxists would not develop a similarly sectarian attitude towards new class-struggle forces coming onto the scene. The hostile attitude of many left tendencies towards the leaders guiding the struggles in Nicaragua to Grenada indicated, Marais concluded, a dead-end approach that would not enable them to build a mass revolutionary party in Britain.

Both the major presentations were followed by a lively exchange of views. In addition to the two principal reports, sessions were also held on developments in the Labour Party, the need to integrate the struggle for women's and Black rights within the labour movement and the central importance of the struggle to get the troops out of Ireland.

Of particular value were the sessions devoted to questions from sympathisers of *Socialist Action*. A lively discussion took place around many of the questions asked of a panel of *Socialist Action* representatives.

On Saturday night, a social was held which was highly successful, managing to raise over £100 for the paper's fighting fund.



continued from page 5

# Lessons of revolution

What are some of the areas of Marxism that these revolutions enrich our understanding of?

**1. The character of a revolutionary overturn.** The Nicaraguan insurrectionary struggle is a clear example of how revolutions are the work of the masses and not of leaderships, however clever. Revolutionary leaderships respond to, learn from and seek to lead the revolutionary initiatives of the masses themselves. The principal

And Commander Bayardo Arce of Nicaragua says:

"In the first place... revolutions are the work of the people, and cannot be viewed simply as the action of a government. This is a conviction of the Sandinistas."

When you stop to think about it, socialist revolution is not simply about the working class developing the economy — building hospitals, factories, roads etc — or of fighting for a bigger share of the cake. That



Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro.

strategist of the 1979 insurrection, Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) Commander Humberto Ortega, explained in an interview with Chilean journalist, Martha Harnecker, how the FSLN didn't understand this fully at first, but corrected their approach in the heat of the struggle itself. On the July 1979 insurrection, he said:

"The truth is that we always took the masses into account, but more in terms of their supporting the guerrillas, so that the guerrillas as such could defeat the National Guard. This isn't what actually happened. What happened was that it was the guerrillas who provided support for the masses so that they could defeat the enemy by means of insurrection..."

"I myself feel it is very difficult to take power without a creative combination of all forms of struggle wherever they can take place: countryside, city, town, neighbourhood, mountain etc., but always based on the idea that the mass movement is the focal point of the struggle and not the vanguard with the masses limited merely to supporting it."

The El Salvadoran revolutionaries felt this point to be so important that they incorporated it into the programme which is now the platform of the Revolutionary Democratic Front. They write: "The revolution that is on the march is not, nor can it be, the work of a group of conspirators. To the contrary, it is the fruit of the struggle of the entire people..."

The revolutionary leaderships of these countries emphasise that this point applies even more to consolidating the revolutionary power, and moving to the socialist transformation of society. Maurice Bishop of Grenada describes his government's aims as:

"First, the organisation and mobilisation of the masses. That is very key. To always try to fully involve the masses in whatever we are trying to do, to keep them fully involved, to ensure that they understand what the problems are and where we are trying to go."

is the role of the working class under capitalism as well.

The socialist revolution is the biggest organising drive in history. It means raising the consciousness and organisation of the working class so that its collective will becomes the prevailing force in society.

Thus a key feature of the policies of the Sandinistas and the Grenadian New Jewel Movement in power has been the organisation of the workers and poor farmers, and the raising of their political and cultural level, so that they can make their social weight felt and begin to take on the tasks of running the country. Hence the revolutionary significance of the drives in Nicaragua and Grenada to organise the masses into unions and farmers organisations, into neighbourhood defence committees and militias, and of the campaigns to abolish illiteracy.

**2. The decisive role of revolutionary leadership.** While revolutionary struggle is not possible without the entry of the masses into the political arena, decisive to the successful outcome of the struggle is correct and courageous leadership at the critical moment. Such leadership can only be won through the struggle itself. As Fidel put it in Managua:

"The Somoza dynasty tyrannised this country for nearly fifty years. But when the hour of freedom seemed most distant, there were men who thought, organised, and elaborated a strategy of struggle. Those men were the Sandinistas, the Sandinista Liberation Front."

"They elaborated a strategy, they elaborated tactics of struggle, and they went on perfecting them. They succeeded in pulling the entire people behind them. They are not the vanguard because they want to give themselves the title of vanguard. They are the vanguard because they learned how to win for themselves the place of vanguard in the history and struggle of their people."

This can be seen in another way by contrasting events over the last couple of years in Grenada and

Jamaica. In Grenada, when it became clear to the New Jewel Movement in early 1979 that the Gairy regime was going to move to round up and eliminate their leadership, they responded decisively. A force of armed revolutionaries stormed the military barracks and dispersed the army. The repressive government was dismissed. The radio station was taken over and the masses called out to back the revolutionary overthrow and carry it through. A workers and farmers government was established that based itself firmly on the mobilisation of the masses.

In contrast, in Jamaica, Michael Manley's People's National Party government was ousted through a "ballot-box coup" in October 1980, despite deep support for its anti-imperialist measures among the Jamaican poor and youth. When imperialism and the Jamaican capitalists said "Enough!" to Manley and threw down the gauntlet, he backed off. Manley refused to mobilise the masses in response to an imperialist-backed campaign of murder and economic sabotage, or to put forward a class-struggle programme for advancing the anti-imperialist struggle. He stood aside and allowed the pro-imperialist Jamaica Labour Party to jack up an electoral victory, and chalk up an important victory for imperialism against the world working class.

## LENINIST PARTY NEEDED

From the experiences of leading these revolutions, the broad Fidelista current is also more and more clearly putting forward the need for organised revolutionary leadership to be structured in a Leninist-type party around a scientific socialist programme, as the key to organising the working class and structuring a system of workers' democracy. Commander Tomas Borge of the FSLN, for instance, in drawing a balance sheet of the first year of the Sandinista revolution, said in a speech to the Third National Assembly of FSLN cadres on September 13, 1980:

"The revolution has achieved democracy for the people....

"But to lead in the defence of these gains requires an organised vanguard of the people....

"Having completed in large part the organisation of the revolutionary state, the time has come to devote a large part of our best efforts to the development of the party of the revolution. We propose to create an organised revolutionary party — guided by scientific principles....

"This party will be built in a democratic and critical spirit. We must create an internationalist party that takes other experiences into account but that approaches them critically, testing out their effectiveness and adaptability to our concrete reality...."

Party cadres must also understand, Borge said, "that it is the majority that makes the decisions; that, while maintaining one's own viewpoints, it is necessary to submit to party discipline."

Finally, cadres must be "those who never forget their responsibility to stay closely linked to the masses, to the aspirations of the people; those who look to the workers as fish look to water...."

The creation of such a party is "an historic obligation" Borge said.

Bayardo Arce described this as projecting the "classic construction of a revolutionary party" along "democratic centralist" principles. I would agree.

## PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM

**3. The meaning of proletarian internationalism.** From the beginning of the Cuban revolution the Fidelistas have understood that extending their revolution was the key to its survival. Ever since, their policies have been shaped by this goal. It was epitomised by Che's death in Bolivia in 1967 where he was attempting to open a new revolutionary front to help take the pressure off Vietnam, under his revolutionary slogan of "Create two, three, many Vietnams!"

Commander Henry Ruiz explained this internationalism in a speech to the July 19 Sandinista Youth assembly which I attended last October. It is necessary to build an economically strong Nicaragua, he explained, so it can be a bulwark of the Central American revolution. The Sandinistas know, he emphasised, that they cannot export their

revolution, only its *example*. And they wanted to build the strongest possible example and be able to extend the maximum material solidarity to new revolutionary successes in the region, which he considered inevitable.

This is the policy that Cuba has been putting into practice all along. Today, 50,000 Cuban doctors, teachers, construction workers and technicians carry the example of the Cuban revolution throughout the Third World. Massive aid, including military aid, has been extended to Grenada and Nicaragua to help them secure their revolutions. And Cuban soldiers were decisive in defending liberation struggles in Angola and Ethiopia against imperialist-backed intervention.

However, Cuba does not try to use its aid, especially its military aid, to try to substitute for the maturing revolutionary consciousness of the masses of any other country.

# Cuba and the Kremlin

Studying these revolutions can also help put paid to lies about them circulated by the bourgeoisie, and even reflected by some left-wing forces like the Maoists and some who call themselves "Trotskyists". I want to deal here with just one such lie, namely that Cuba is a totalitarian dictatorship subordinated to the Kremlin.

It is not difficult to show sharp divergences between Cuba's and Moscow's foreign policy. On Afghanistan, for example, Cuba has sent no troops of its own and nor has it been enthusiastic about Moscow's massive military intervention there. Instead it has offered to act as a go-between in negotiations between Pakistan and Afghanistan that would enable a Soviet troop withdrawal.

In relation to El Salvador, Moscow supported the military-civilian junta, which was installed in a Washington-inspired coup in late

Cuban revolution, because of the US economic blockade of the island. Oil is supplied from the USSR at below market prices, industrial development is taking place with Soviet and Eastern European technology, and much-needed manufactured goods are imported from there. Perhaps most importantly, Cuba does not have to pay for these commodities with US dollars, which it doesn't have, but with sugar, which it can grow in quantity.

As New Jewel Movement leader Liam James put it to the American Socialist Workers Party conference in August 1980:

"We must never, never underplay the importance of all this. We must understand that there would have been no revolutionary Cuba if there was not a Soviet Union in 1959. And there would not be today a revolutionary Grenada and a revolutionary Nicaragua if there was not a revolutionary Cuba."



1979, and was promising fake reforms. Cuba supported its overthrow. And while in response to the Grenadian and Nicaraguan revolutions the Cuban people have been mobilised, and massive and decisive aid has been sent from that relatively poor country, Moscow has remained cool, sending only token aid in comparison to its vast resources.

What is true — and this was constantly explained to me during my visit to Cuba in November 1980 — is that material aid and trade with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is crucial to the survival of the

Now maybe the Cuban leadership does not fully understand Stalinism theoretically. It is certainly true that they cannot easily discuss Stalinism openly in Cuba today, without posing what would seem to me to be a suicidal challenge to the Kremlin. And they obviously pay a political price for this. For instance, I found a lot of confusion in Cuba over the working class rebellion in Poland, even among members of the Communist Party. In Cuba, the only large layer of anti-government dissidents were the 100,000-odd boat

people who, influenced by US propaganda, left for Miami in the belief they were going to a land of milk and honey.

In relation to Stalinism, there is one thing that we shouldn't forget. The Cuban revolution has survived 21 years of economic dependence on the Soviet bloc, and yet maintains an internationalist foreign policy. And on at least three different occasions, Castro has mobilised the Cuban people to beat back the growth of bureaucracy within the state. It is Cuba's internationalism that is the most effective political challenge to Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence with imperialism, and this must eventually lead to a clash between the two.

According to the ultraleft schema, part of the price of this supposed Cuban subordination to the Kremlin, is suppression of workers democracy inside Cuba. To one extent or another, this is probably the most widely held myth among left-wingers about Cuba.

In fact my visit to Cuba convinced me not only that this view is totally false, but that Cuba has the most extensive system of workers democracy that any revolution has yet developed, including the Soviet Union under Lenin and Trotsky.

#### ECONOMIC FAILURES

The economic failures in Cuba during the late 1960s, especially the failure of the plan to harvest 10 million tons of sugar in 1970, led to a profound re-thinking in the Cuban Communist Party. It was felt that the economic failures flowed from being conceived and planned in a bureaucratic way, without the participation of the workers and farmers, who were being called on to carry the projects out. In the early 1970s, a process was got under way to strengthen and develop institutionalised forms through which the masses could participate in the administration of the country.

Mass organisations like the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, organised block by block, and the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) were strengthened and given more authority to participate in the running of their communities. The workers, through the union and factory assemblies, began to discuss the national economic plan, make proposals, and set the production goals of their factories. They elect their union representatives who have to continue working alongside them, and they are able to get rid of unsatisfactory managers.

In 1976, the system of People's Power was established, through which the people nominate and elect Municipal Assemblies, and can recall unsatisfactory representatives. These Assemblies run almost everything on a local level



Edén Pastora: A leader of the Nicaraguan revolution.

and elect the provincial and national governments. People's Power has also developed as a major way in which the Cuban people can combat bureaucratic abuses by government officials. Martha Harnecker's book *Cuba - Dictatorship or Democracy* gives a very good account of the extent of the institutionalisation of workers democracy in Cuba.

The extent to which the workers really run Cuba today was brought home to me by the events which culminated in the boat exodus to Miami in 1980. As explained to me in Cuba, during 1979 there were persistent complaints about bureaucratic privileges and malpractices by certain government officials and departments, coming from units of People's Power across the country. Responding to this, central leaders of the government began a campaign against bureaucracy.

Several cabinet ministers were sacked and their departments housecleaned, actions which were immensely popular with the Cuban masses. Among those sacked were not only old Stalinists, but former activists in the July 26 movement who, growing weary of revolutionary austerity, had begun to feather their own nests.

#### POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Underlying these events was a struggle over political perspectives which was brought to a head by the revolutionary victories in Grenada and Nicaragua on the one hand, and the stepped up pressure from US imperialism in response, on the other. On the one side were Fidel and Raul Castro who stood for deepening Cuba's internationalist commitments to these revolutions. On the other were those who Raul called the "faint-hearts", those government officials and party cadres who wanted to cut back on this aid, make peace with Washington and build "socialism" in Cuba,

that is "socialism" for the government bureaucracy.

But inspired by the revolutions in Grenada, Nicaragua and El Salvador, and under the sting of Washington's provocations, the Cuban workers and farmers rallied to Fidel's internationalist line, culminating in the five-million strong march of the Fighting People on May 17, 1980, demonstrating the unparalleled depth of political consciousness of the Cuban people.

"Building socialism," said Fidel, "is the task of absolutely free men and women." Many of the bureaucratic faint-hearts joined the exodus to Miami. I was told that Cuban police had to protect many of them from spontaneous expressions of contempt by the masses.

What took place in Cuba during 1980 had important parallels with the struggle between the Left Opposition and the emerging Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. Only, given the context of the rise in the world revolution today, this time the revolutionary Marxist current won. As Fidel explained to a mass rally in Havana on September 27, the Cuban revolution today, more than 20 years after the revolutionary victory, is stronger than ever before.

Of course, this is not to say that everything is rosy in Cuba, or that the process of institutionalisation of workers democracy could not go further. Certainly, the dependence on the Kremlin is a fetter on Cuban society. But as the revolutionary leadership in Cuba learns from their own experiences and the experience of carrying through the socialist revolution in Grenada and Nicaragua, who is to say that they won't deepen this process?

#### IMPERIALISM

What then are the principal problems facing the development of the socialist revolution in the Caribbean and Central America? Fundamentally, it comes down to one - imperialism. It is imperialism which stands behind the ruthless regimes of the region and rushes to their aid when they come under challenge. It is imperialism which stands behind the murderous counter-revolution which seeks to bring down progressive regimes like that of Manley in Jamaica, or the revolutionary Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

As an El Salvadoran revolutionary told me in Havana, if Washington's intervention in El Salvador could be halted, the military dictatorship would not last a month.

And the legacy of decades of imperialist domination bequeathes

deepgoing problems even to those countries which have had successful revolutions. As I discussed earlier, socialism is not a set of ideas abstracted from time and place. These ideas are as much a product of the machine age as the industrial proletariat.

Imperialism prevented industrialisation of these countries. At the same time, the struggle against the super-exploitation and oppression of imperialism has put these poor countries on the path of socialist revolution, but without the highly developed base necessary for socialism - an extensive industry and industrial proletariat.

This places a very real objective limitation on the pace at which a socialist transformation of these societies can be carried through, and the needs of the masses met. This in turn opens the door for ultraleft sectarian attacks on these revolutions. An example of such attacks would be to demand that the revo-

lution provide the full social measures for the liberation of women, before it can even guarantee them the most elementary right to a job.

As Maurice Bishop explained in the interview with *Intercontinental Press*, this ultraleft sectarianism plays into the hands of imperialism which attempts "...to try to find a popular base, using elements in the country who are trying to exploit genuine objective grievances of the masses. In other words, conditions are bad. There is a lot of unemployment. There is a lot of poverty. They get these people, therefore, to try to incite strikes, to try to whip up sections of the population around issues that are pressing issues, that we are concerned about, that we are trying to do something about. But making them at the same time feel that revolution is like instant coffee: you just throw it in a cup and it comes out presto..."

## Fourth International

What then is the historic responsibility of the cadres of the Fourth International towards this revolutionary Marxist current that has emerged outside our ranks and is today leading millions of workers in class combat with world capitalism?

I think it is useful to begin by examining what is meant by Trotskyism, the name given to the political current represented by the Fourth International. Trotskyism is not a unique doctrine of its own.

It merely developed as the theoretical expression of the "line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement" in the context of the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. But as a movement it remained isolated from the working class for several decades.

Trotsky did not think that Stalinism would survive World War II, which he knew would evolve into a war to crush the Soviet Union. But despite Stalin, and at the terrible price of 20 to 30 million Soviet citizens killed, the Soviet workers broke German imperialism, without first having to break Stalinism, as Trotsky thought would be the case. This led to a temporary strengthening of Stalinism, which in turn led to the betrayal of the revolution in Western Europe in the 1940s and to the reconsolidation of capitalist prosperity. The few surviving Trotskyist cadres were thus isolated from the class struggle.

In fact, for objective reasons, Trotskyism became a "semi-sect", defending a body of doctrine that was not able to be brought to life in the struggle of the working class. Through this isolation, tremendous degenerative pressures came down on the cadres of the Fourth International. There were many casualties, including those who adapted to Stalinism, hoping that there would be more Chinas, Yugoslavias and Polands - countries where the overthrow of capitalism was accomplished (albeit in a bureaucratic fashion in which independent workers' initiatives were repressed) by Stalinist-led movements.

But the most significant casualties were those who reacted in a sectarian fashion to the breakthroughs in revolutionary leadership, first in Cuba in 1959 and then in Nicaragua in 1979, because these events didn't fit their preconceived

notions of what a socialist revolution would be like and who would lead it. Many well-known Trotskyists reacted in such a sectarian manner and broke with the Fourth International over the question, including the majority of Latin American Trotskyists.

Unfortunately, the major contact with Trotskyism on the part of the leaderships of the Central American and Caribbean revolutions has often been with these sectarians. More often than not, the name "Trotskyism" has been associated with ultraleft opposition to their revolutionary process.

How then should the Fourth International approach this new Marxist leadership? By the method outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*:

"In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement."

The historical imperative before the Fourth International is to find the road to linking up with these Marxists. There is no other road to building the world party of socialist revolution, for which we were founded. No label, be it "Trotskyism" or "Fourth International" should be allowed to get in the way of this process.

If we don't rise to this challenge, then I am convinced that it will be the Fourth International, not the world revolution, that will die. The road that the working class will have to travel to resolve its crisis of leadership will be unnecessarily more bloody and bitter. But it will be travelled.

From this standpoint, the doubly important character of our solidarity work with the Central American revolution becomes more clear. Helping to mobilise the working class to blunt imperialism's war drive against the revolutions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Grenada and Cuba is our most important task in advancing the objective march of the world revolution. And it is crucial to linking up with this new generation of revolutionary Marxists.

### New from Pathfinder:

"Revolt in El Salvador" gives both a background history of El Salvador and traces in depth the current freedom struggle which is shaking the Duarte regime - and its backers in Washington.

Available from: Socialist Action, P.O. Box 65, London, SW16 1NN.





# Troops Out Now!

By Janet Alsop and Gary Erlisker

At the centre of the class struggle in Britain is the battle of the Irish people for control over their own destiny. This is most sharply posed in the Northern Ireland statelet created by the British ruling class against the wish of most Irish people.

The focal point of this battle over recent months has been the hunger strike by the Irish prisoners whose real "crime" is that they fought, in the only way they saw possible, against the exploitation and oppression the British rulers have inflicted on their country.

Northern Ireland was set up by the British ruling class to ensure their ability to continue dominating Ireland as a whole. In-built was a system of discrimination against the republican nationalist community. The Catholic population was denied jobs and forced to live in ghettos; factories were built in predominantly Loyalist areas.

## WORST CONDITIONS

The worst housing and social conditions, the worst unemployment and poverty is to be found in the Catholic areas. Thus many have traditionally been forced to emigrate, ensuring continued Loyalist domination.

The Loyalists and British rulers also used electoral gerrymandering, rigging electoral boundaries, giving factory owners — overwhelmingly Loyalist — multiple votes, and denying non-householders voting rights.

Simple democratic demands like one person—one vote, one family—one house, one person—one job therefore challenged the whole system when they were raised by the civil rights movement in the late 1960s. The Loyalists and their British backers used any means — including violence — to smash the movement.

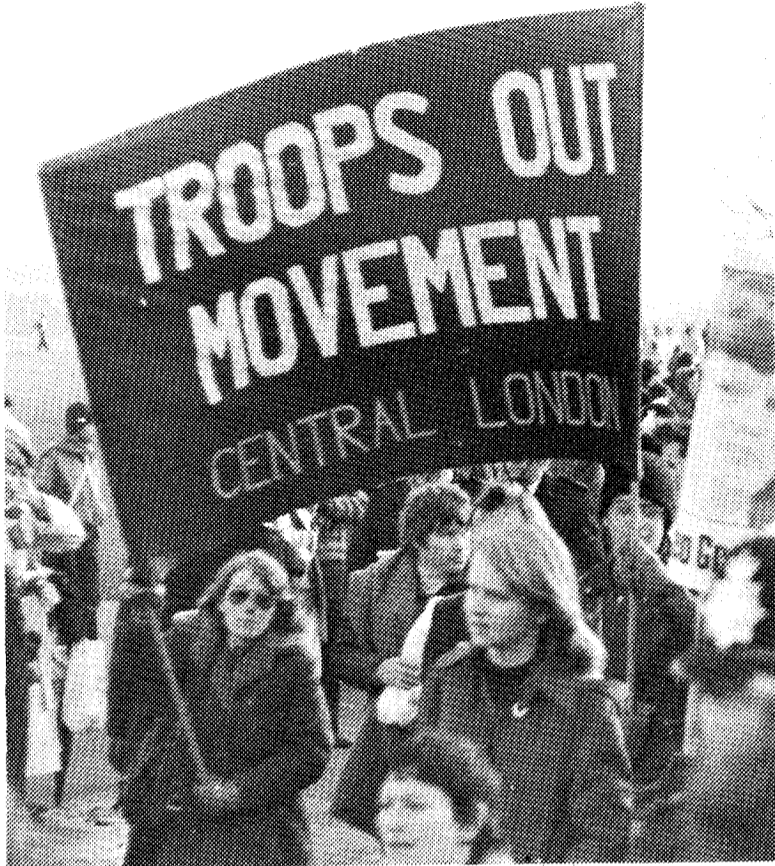
Such violence has been a constant feature of British-Loyalist rule. Pogroms have been used to terrorise the Catholic Republican community and, today, 90 per cent of the British troops are concentrated in the Catholic areas, harassing and shooting people.

While it is illegal to be a member of the IRA, association of the most oppressed, it is perfectly legal to belong to the Ulster Defence Association, a pro-British terrorist outfit.

## AFFECTS BRITISH WORKERS

The division of Ireland and the direct rule by Britain over the North serves to hold back the class consciousness of workers throughout Britain. They are encouraged to identify with the British rulers and their army of occupation. The most chauvinistic and bigoted attitudes are encouraged among British workers towards the Irish.

The effectiveness of the ruling class in this can be seen in the small size of demonstrations in this country. The major left groups have been unwilling to throw their resources into tackling what their own imperialist ruling class is doing in Ireland and have therefore failed to build a mass solidarity campaign with the hunger strikers or — more generally — to mobilise mass support for the immediate withdrawal of the British army



London demonstration in support of the Hunger Strikers.

of occupation.

While British workers are misled by the ruling class on this issue, while they do not identify with the oppressed of other nations, they will be unable to develop the class consciousness which is necessary for them to free themselves.

## MARX AND ENGELS

As Karl Marx put it, labour with a white skin will never be free while labour with a Black skin is branded. He and Lenin both compared the Irish with Blacks in the United States in terms of their oppression.

Marx and Engels wrote about and studied Ireland at length. As a result of their studies and their practical experience in Britain, they argued that until British workers could identify with the republican struggle in Ireland, they couldn't make a revolution in Britain.

Marx and Engels placed great emphasis on doing work in the British labour movement to gain support for the Irish struggle. In November 1872, for example, they helped organise a march of over 30,000 people in London in support of the great republican fighters in jail then, the Fenian prisoners.

Compare this with what the major British left groups of today have done on the issue!

Lenin and Trotsky, following the same path, also pointed to the need for British revolutionaries and the labour movement to fight the ruling class's policy in Ireland.

## SECTARIAN?

What of the view of Stalinists, such as the Communist Party, and social democrats, like the Labour Party leaders, that the republican struggle is "sectarian" and only alienates the Protestant workers?

This is merely an excuse for their own cowardice in tackling the British ruling class and its poisonous ideology which has infected many workers.

As Irish Trotskyist leader and Belfast City Council member John McAnulty explained in the July

27 issue of *Intercontinental Press*:

"The state in the North is based on sectarian bigotry and discrimination. The resistance to that discrimination, which is the resistance of the majority of the Irish people to an undemocratic and armed division of their country, is not sectarian."

In fact, it is profoundly revolutionary — both for the Irish people and workers throughout Britain.

## PROTESTANT WORKERS

In the North of Ireland, the British ruling class has for decades been using Protestant workers against the Irish freedom struggle. These workers, who have been given advantages and privileges above the republican working class, identify with Loyalism, the ideology of the most reactionary capitalists.

As long as they do this, they will be unable to defend their own class interests against the capitalists, and will continue to be a major impediment to the struggle for national freedom and socialism in Ireland.

This situation will not be changed and these Protestant workers won over by socialists ignoring the national question in Ireland. The national struggle there is absolutely central to the fight for socialism in Ireland, and those tendencies which have rejected this basic Leninist view — such as the "Official" IRA and other Stalinists — have ended up in the imperialist camp.

On the other hand, forces that have pushed ahead with the national struggle — such as the Provisional IRA/Sein Fein — have inevitably been drawn towards more radical positions.

## NATIONAL STRUGGLE

Lenin and Trotsky, who led a revolution in a country which was a prisonhouse of oppressed nations, explained how the national liberation struggle of such peoples is a unique and particularly dynamic form of the class struggle.

In his famous pamphlet, *What is to be Done?*, Lenin explained that political questions are always more

important than purely economic or trade union issues, such as wages and conditions, in the fight for socialism.

In Ireland, this means that any unity between Catholic and Protestant workers on economic issues will be a temporary unity as long as Protestant workers are bound to Loyalism. This has already been proved concretely over and over again in the past decades.

The most intense struggle must be waged against Loyalism, and in defence of the most oppressed on the big political issues of the day — the hunger strike, the British occupation, the colonial status of Northern Ireland, the second-class status of Catholics in all areas of social life — if any meaningful and true working class unity is to be forged.

## UNITY

Real and lasting unity can never be built by the most oppressed giving up their own demands and just concentrating on issues that won't "alienate" better-off workers imbued with reactionary ideology (not to mention actually carrying out reactionary violence against the most oppressed).

Reactionary views are never overcome by pandering to them or refusing to meet them head-on. This is why Stalinists, social-democrats and Liberals have not got rid of racism. Pandering only emboldens the peddlers of such views, helps maintain them, and holds the most oppressed (and militant) workers hostage to the prejudices of the better-off. It means that any unity built up on economic issues will melt away when the ruling class play their trump card of racism or chauvinism.

Trotsky helped educate American Trotskyists on this in relation to the Black struggle in the United States (which he, along with Marx, Engels and Lenin frequently compared with the Irish struggle).

## PREJUDICES

Revolutionaries, Trotsky argued, must carry on an "uncompromising, merciless struggle not against the supposed national prepossessions" (i.e. Black nationalism — J.A./G.E.) "of the Negroes but against the colossal prejudices of the white workers and make no concessions to them whatever."

This is also an answer to those who claim that republicanism in Ireland — a movement of the oppressed — is as bad as Loyalism. Trotsky argued that the upper strata of workers held "aristocratic prejudices" and that "it would be tragic" if revolutionaries "were infected even in the slightest degree with these qualities. We must not only reject and condemn these prejudices; we must burn them out of our consciousness to the last trace. We must find the road to the most under-privileged and down-trodden strata of the proletariat, beginning with the Negroes, whom capitalist society has turned into pariahs. . ."

In Britain, the Irish and Black people occupy such a pariah status. It is absolutely crucial for revolutionary socialists, and the labour movement in general, to fight against this. We cannot, as Trotsky warned, act like "The trade union bureaucrats (who) live in an atmosphere of aristocratic privileges of the upper strata of workers".

## STAKES HIGHER

Today, the stakes are higher than ever. The struggle in Ireland has reached new heights, making it increasingly possible to inflict massive blows against our class enemy and their murderous tyranny in Ireland. Irish freedom fighters have made extraordinary sacrifices, most noticeable at present in the martyred hunger strikers and the fight for political status. Tens and tens of thousands of Irish people have mobilised in support of these battles against the British ruling class.

Around the world, people on every continent have demonstrated in support of the Irish struggle. Trade unions from the United States to New Zealand, anti-imperialist movements across the globe, and many other people are backing the Irish struggle. Sinn Fein has also received messages of support from the Nicaraguan government and the Sandinista National Liberation Front's director of foreign affairs.

The main weakness is the lack of a strong solidarity movement in Britain. The failure of the major left groups to seriously set out to build such a movement not only allows our class enemy to continue their blood-drenched policy in Ireland. It also means they can escape the acute political crisis such a movement here, in conjunction with the Irish struggle itself, could cause the British ruling class.

Caught between the Irish struggle and a mass solidarity movement, the Tories and their system would be literally up against the wall. All of our struggles, around every right we are fighting for, would be in a much better situation for success.

## TASKS

From all this, the tasks of revolutionary socialists in relation to Ireland are clear:

We have to struggle, as Marx and Engels did, to mobilise British workers by the tens of thousands in support of the national struggle of the Irish people, which points clearly in a socialist direction, in support of the hunger strikers who — whatever our disagreements with the tactics and views of some republican currents — are the *political prisoners* of British imperialism, and for the immediate withdrawal of the army of occupation.

So far, the major groups of the British left have proved incapable of mobilising even their own members, let alone anyone else, for the very small demonstrations in support of the hunger strikers. Meanwhile, ten Irish freedom fighters have been killed by the Tories.

It is imperative, therefore, that leaders of these groups, of the Labour Committee on Ireland, the Troops Out Movement and others concerned with this issue, get together and put out a call for a broad national conference on the issue. Such a gathering could put out a truly authoritative call for national actions, including a major demonstration in London, in support of the Irish struggle being waged so heroically by the Irish people.

1. Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, Pathfinder Press 1978.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

Bob Swartz/Socialist Action