THE CIVIL war in Bosnia - the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Second World War - appears to be changing in character, if only because the Serbian militias have seized as much territory from the Serbs now controls the Croats. In Bosnia, Muslim resistance in these areas is greatly weakened and the imperialist powers are unwilling to intervene. In effect, the Serbs have won the war in the north and east, and the Vance-Owen plan - which itself justified 'ethnic cleansing' - is dead.

In the course of the year-long war, the Bosnian Muslims have been subjected to all the horrors resurgent nationalism and chauvinism have to offer - forced removals, mass executions, rape, torture and daily bombardment. Having been driven out of most of eastern Bosnia, they are now getting the same treatment at the hands of the Croatian militias in the west. Imperialism has been a false friend to the Muslims, despite all the anguish about 'human rights'.

In contrast to the hawkish tone of his election speeches, US President Clinton has swung round to a position which in practice legitimises Serbian gains. From the siege of Srebrenica to the Athens conference on May 1-2, US sabre-rattling was at its least - but the fact that this evaporated almost overnight showed that it was never meant to be anything but a war of words. The deciding factor seems to have been the massive rejection of the Vance-Owen plan in the Bosnian Serb referendum. While this didn't mean that the Serbs would continue their offensive, it did make it clear that they would resist any attempt to dislodge them from areas they consider part of Greater Serbia.

Faced with the prospect of actually having to wage war on the Serbs, on May 22 in Washington the US joined with Britain, France, Spain and Russia in accepting the present carve-up of Bosnia as the basis of a solution. Officially, the imperialists still oppose the creation of a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia, but there is nothing about this which conflicts with their over-riding aim - to see capitalism successfully restored to the region.

All of which is a slap in the face for much of the left, which for the past year has convinced itself that a military strike against Serbia was imminent, and that the sole issue was the 'struggle' of Serbia 'against imperialism'. According to this view, the break-up of Yugoslavia was entirely the result of an imperialist plot, without any genuine national dynamic. Leaving aside the fantastic notion that pogroms have anything to do with fighting imperialism, it is really so easy for diplomats to persuade workers and poor peasants to butcher each other? If so, there really isn't much of a future for humanity?

The 'plot against Serbia' theory doesn't hold water. In fact, although they have different priorities in the Balkans, most imperialist powers hoped for an orderly transition to capitalism, by maintaining a federal Yugoslavia. But with the eruption of civil war, they switched to backing a new balance of power between Serbia and Croatia, with Bosnia a weak buffer between, as a revised framework for restoring capitalism.

To remind Belgrade not to go too far, sanctions were imposed. For their part, the governments of Serbia and Croatia, despite remaining differences, agreed to partition Bosnia between them. The motivation of the Stadinod-nationalist bureaucracy in Belgrade, for all its rhetoric, has never been to confront 'imperialism. It accepted Serbia's future status as a semi-colony, and its ambitions were strictly confined to becoming top dog in the region. As the Yugoslav deformed workers' state crumbled, the Serbian bureaucracy, along with those of the other republics, turned to nationalism.

The particular characteristics of Serbian nationalism had already been revealed in the treatment of the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, who were routinely portrayed as living off the backs of hard-working Serbs. The autonomous status of Vojvodina, whose majority consists of ethnic Hungarians, was withdrawn along with that of Kosovo in 1989. The decisive turn of the Serbian bureaucracy under Slobodan Milosevic towards rabid nationalism and chauvinism took place amid mounting economic difficulties, and spiralling failures of the social democratic model in 1987-88.

Under such conditions, and without any alternative working class organisations, resistance by a dominant majority acquires a logic and momentum of its own. Fear begins to grip masses of people, who see no way out other than to revenge themselves on minorities who stand in their way. Yesterday's neighbours are today discovered to be enemies and are summarily dealt with.

The national question is always a reflection, even if a distorted one, of the class struggle. It has been largely ignored that in Bosnia the fighting has been between predominantly peasant Serbian militias and the mostly urban Muslim population. Historically, the Muslims have never aspired to a separate 'national' status, and even today, in cities like Sarajevo, they continue to live in multi-ethnic populations. For this reason, sections of the left have denied that any national question exists. The Muslims, they argue, are simply Serbs with a different religion. But the treatment they have received may well have forged in the space of a year what previous centuries failed to produce - a Bosnian Muslim nation.

From the start, the Vance-Owen plan was nothing more than a face-saver for the imperialists. While giving the appearance of a humanitarian solution, it concealed the 'principle' of ethnic cleansing and in fact encouraged the Serb and Croat militias to get on with it. Furthermore, one of the main roles of the UN task force in Bosnia has been to assist in this process by furnishing 'Muslims to 'safe areas' - that is, areas which the Serbs are less likely to lay claim to - and disarming their militias.

The man who convinced Milosevic that to accept the Vance-Owen plan was the first step towards a settlement on Serbian terms was Greek prime minister Constantine Mitsotakis, the most calculating of Greek political leaders. As such he is in the Balkans. Though the Greek ruling class has a vested interest in seeing the maintenance of a strong Serbia, and has a pathological fear of a Muslim state being set up in the region, Mitsotakis's trips to Belgrade and his behind-the-scenes diplomacy at the Athens conference could not have been accomplished without the full backing of the imperialists.

In return for Milosevic's acceptance of the plan, further concessions were made. The UN would police a corridor through a Muslim area of northern Bosnia, and Croat and Muslim militias were expelled from areas ceded to them which contained Serb minorities.

As for the Washington agreement, Serb and Croat leaders have welcomed it as providing the launchpad for a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia. The so-called 'Muslim safe areas' are little more than concentration camps, and the only US defence commitment is to patrol them. The offer to monitor the Serbs-Bosnia border is entirely dependent on the co-operation of Milosevic, and concern for the situation in Kosovo comes with the assurance that 'we do not support declarations of independence there'.

There could scarcely be a clearer indication that the imperialists have decided to abandon the minority peoples to their fate, and that they think the stabilisation of the region is best left to the Serbs and Croats.

We are for the withdrawal of all UN forces from ex-Yugoslavia. Whether through aid agencies or troops, imperialism is looking to use the civil war to strengthen its influence over the entire Balkan peninsula. We call for the lifting of UN sanctions from all the former Yugoslav republics and for the doors to be opened to refugees. We call on workers' organisations to send food, aid and arms to the beleaguered Muslims.

We call for the defeat of Serbian and Croatian militias in Bosnia, for no national solution which will strangle any freely taken decisions by the minorities. The struggle of the Muslims must be linked by a revolutionary socialist leadership to the demands for self-determination and autonomy for the Albanian and Hungarian minorities, and to the defence of the remaining gains of the working class in former Yugoslavia. Such an internationalist programme would in turn be a powerful weapon against the reactionary leaderships of all the republics. Only on such a basis can the slogan of a Balkan socialist federation have any meaning.
Cost-cutting scheme puts lone mothers in danger

By Lizzy Ali

ON APRIL 1, another vicious piece of Tory anti-working class legislation came into force. The Tories claim that the Child Support Act will help single mothers by compelling absent fathers to contribute to the maintenance of their children. In reality, the act is a crude cost-cutting exercise designed to cut £600 million per year from the social security budget by attacking lone parents.

The act will be policed by the new Child Support Agency. Its task is to trace fathers, mainly through a section of the act which requires mothers claiming benefit to name the father of their child or children. Those who refuse will automatically lose 20 per cent of their income support.

Maintenance received will not go to the lone parent; it will be pocketed by the state. If a "shallow social security" secretary, Donald Dewar, stated: "The tragic fact is that most children in lone parent families will not gain a brass farthing from this act." It has also been criticised by such normally moderate organisations as Save the Children, Barnardo's, the National Children's Home, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Ginger Group.

The effects of the act will be far-reaching. There are 1.3 million lone parents in Britain, 90 per cent of whom are women and 895,000 of whom are currently claiming income support. Far from restoring "family values", the most obvious effect will be to step up the harassment of women. Those attempting to escape from violent partners will now face a renewed threat, as fathers may take revenge for being caught by the Child Support Agency, or use the fact that they are paying maintenance to demand unwelcome access.

Some lone parents may lose their right to benefits altogether if the father agrees to pay the full tariff set by the agency and lose out on free school meals, dental charges and prescriptions. On the other hand, the act is riddled with anomalies which enable absent parents on high incomes to avoid paying.

The agency says that it will handle all claims confidentially, and that any woman in fear of reprisals will not have her benefit cut, provided she can prove her allegations. Many thousands of women have already experienced the "fact and concern" with which they have been interviewed by the DSS in order to obtain the money they need to maintain their children.

Before the new act came into force, a procedure existed for putting pressure on women to reveal the father's name and last address. Women were regularly called into DSS offices for interviews to find out if they had had any contact with the father, or if they knew of his whereabouts. However, if they refused to sign an authorisation for the DSS to pursue the father for back payments, there was little the state could do.

This new scam by the Tories has nothing to do with helping lone parents out of the poverty trap, and everything to do with saving money by attacking one of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. In keeping with the Tories' reactionary and hypocritical "family values", it sees lone parents as a "problem" and a drain on the economy.

The labour movement must actively take up the defence of those under attack from the Child Support Act. It must fight for full state maintenance for lone parents and their children, without fear of harassment either by government agencies or ex-partners.

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Major limps on – thanks to Labour

WITH HIS cabinet reshuffle of April 27, John Major finally responded to repeated demands from the Tory press for 'fresh faces' to 'improve the government's image'. A more appropriate description comes to mind: the one concerning deck chairs and the Titanic. For it doesn't require much political sophistication to recognise that the reshuffle has neither changed the government's disastrous policies nor covered up the fact that Major himself bears directly responsibility for them. At an attempt to off-load the blame for the government's economic record, the situation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer was really too transparent to be effective.

Within a week of Major announcing his new cabinet, an opinion poll revealed the prime minister to be the most unpopular since polling began in the 1930s. The Tory party as a whole is in no better shape. On May 6, in the county council elections and Newbury by-election, voters delivered their stinging verdict on the government. The Tories were virtually wiped off the electoral map in the shire county of Oxfordshire – the one county in England and Wales, while the 'safe' Tory seat of Newbury was lost to the Liberal Democrats on a swing of 25.8%.

The Tories seem to have developed an unerring ability to antagonise the middle class and garrison towns. The collapse in house prices in particular has alienated a whole new group of Tory voters. Yet the government's economic policies are not helping.

The election results do not signify a growing unpopularity producing a Labour election victory - in four years' time. As for the present, the Labour leaders are more interested in fighting themselves out of the party's left than in the tasks that they are in fighting the Tories.

Even a right-wing union leader such as John Monks of the GMB has been able to make these elementary points. But the fact is that the record trade unions, like Edmonds has been no better. The potential for a political fight against the government lies not from the huge upsurge of opposition to pit closures last October was squandered by union leaders right and left. The possibility of using the miners and workers' strikes this spring to launch a united industrial struggle against the Tories was similarly sabotaged.

In short, the political crisis of the Tory government has served to undermine the political crisis of the labour movement. The need to build a new fighting leadership in the next couple of years. Labour Party could not be more urgent.
THE ASSASSINATION OF CHRIS HANI

The real face of the De Klerk regime

Chris Hani

Far from being an attempt to derail the negotiations, the assassination of Chris Hani was part of a state-sponsored terror campaign to pressure the ANC leaders into making concessions at the conference table, argues Jabu Masilela.

IN THE early hours of April 10, four heavily armed men, believed to be Hani, national executive committee member of the African National Congress (ANC) and former chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe. His death has given further strength to that most favourable sector of the ANC and its supporters to those who think that right-wing, or ‘third force’, elements are working day and night to destroy the peace process.

The ANC-SACP leadership with the racist De Klerk regime, realized correctly that the South African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and former chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe. His death has given further strength to that most favourable sector of the ANC and its supporters to those who think that right-wing, or ‘third force’, elements are working day and night to destroy the peace process.

The ANC-SACP leadership with the racist De Klerk regime, realized correctly that the official opposition to the ANC had been completely discredited. A leadership change is now impossible. The apartheid regime is on the way out, and most of its leaders are already acting as hostages to forces that are not on their side.

Furthermore, the ANC-SACP leadership joined with the regime in denouncing the revolutionary acts of the masses, calling for ‘calm’, ‘peace’ and ‘ reconciliation’, and insisting that the upcoming elections must not be ‘damaged’ by mass action.

Comrades, the time has come to begin a decisive struggle to get rid of the De Klerk regime and the capitalist system it defends. Let us fight and defeat this counter-revolutionary onslaught! The seven weeks of mass action called for by the leadership must serve as the beginning of a protracted struggle to bring down the government.

The leadership’s call for an early election date is designed to fool us. The regime was going to set this date anyway, and most CODESA participants expected it to be early in 1994. It is now clear that the leadership is trying to force us to vote early next year. Our leaders want to us to be left with radical demands on the government.

The ANC-SACP leadership has done everything in its power to delay negotiations in order to stop the peace process. The ANC-SACP leaders have done their best to split the national congress and the ANC-SACP leadership has done its best to split the national congress.

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A delegation from the Leninist-Trotskyst tendency recently visited Sri Lanka. In the first of two articles, Martin Sullivan reports on the political situation there and looks at the background to the present crisis.

THAT THERE is indeed a deep political crisis in Sri Lanka requires little justification. On May 15, 1978, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike led a breakaway from the UNP, and it has traditionally been the party of a more nationalist section of the Sinhala bourgeoisie, who see their interests as not always identical with those of imperialism. Of course, there can be no question of a ‘national bourgeoisie’ pursuing a consistent anti-imperialist line. The SLFP has always vacillated between the pressures of imperialism and those of its mass base, inevitably succumbing to the former. And it has always contained an open pro-

turn by the party might lose it the backing of the rural poor and those sections of the working class who follow the SLFP.

The SLFP did well in the Provincial Council elections, defeating the UNP in the important Western Province, which includes the capital, Colombo. But this has no doubt encouraged the Sirimavo-Chandrika leadership to view the future of the party as a viable contender for presidential and parliamentary elections. It is also possible that the crisis of the UNP might encourage moves towards a government of ‘national unity’ - that is, of capitalist unity. With Premadasa gone, fences could be mended between the UNP and the DUNF, and a section of the UNP could perhaps be persuaded to cross over.

The political crisis of the bourgeoisie can only be ended by the Sri Lankan working class, which has come under heavy attack since the election of a UNP government under J.R. Jayawardene in 1977. In collaboration with the IMF and World Bank, Jayawardene implemented the sort of programme which has become familiar throughout the capitalist world. It was based on the ‘freedom of the economy’ through the removal of import controls, the destruction of social services and the wholesale privatization of state-owned enterprises. The latter were bought at knock-down prices by UNP supporters, for whom the government helpfully arranged large bank loans. The most visible expression of the UNP’s privatization policy in Ceylon was the public transport system. In 1979, the government deregulated the buses allowing private operators to compete with the state-owned bus services.
in 1991 what remained of the latter was itself privatised or ‘peopledised’ as UNP rhetoric has it. The result is a chaotic system of fiercely competing minibus operators, ruthlessly cutting each other’s throats in the battle to reach potential customers waiting at bus stops, and cramming their vehicles with passengers in complete breach of every safety regulation.

During the long period of UNP rule, the organisational movement has suffered serious reverses. In 1980, a general strike was called in support of a pay claim, and went down to defeat. This had the same sort of demoralising effect on the Sri Lankan working class that the Thatcher government’s victory over the miners had had on the labour movement in Britain. The fighting unity of the class has been further undermined by war and ethnic conflict. And the situation is aggravated by the organisational fragmentation of the Sri Lankan trade unions. These have however, the plantation workers remain saddled with an extremely exploitative and low paid form of temporary or periodic labour, led by one Suhayyam Tamudanda, who is minister for industrial relations in the Tamil governmental government. It was Thondaman’s assurances that workers would benefit from the association that led many plantation workers to remain with the plantations which undermined resistance to privatisation. And in the Provincial Council elections Thondaman took the CWC into an alliance with the UNP, standing under the same banner the UNP’s elephant symbol) and on a common programme, with the result that in the central rolls the opposition went down to defeat.

Back in the 1950s, the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism which the SLFP in particular adapted, provided the opportunity for political demagogues from the majority Sinhalese community to boost their careers by attacking the Tamil minority. The first significant move in this direction was the Sinhala-only campaign, which saw the adoption in 1956 of the Sinhala as the sole official language. Since then the Tamil community has been subjected to a pattern of denial in employment and education and to repeated pogroms by Sinhalese racist gangs from the North-East. The Colombo government adopted a policy of Sinhalese co-development, using the methods of the Zionists on the West Bank and arousing the same bitter resentment among the indigenous people.

The refusal of the traditional workers’ parties to take a principled stand against Sinhala chauvinism allowed Tamil bourgeois parties to take the lead in passing the Tamil Rights. But these parties themselves ceded influence to more militant organisations, notably the LTTE, which has been waging an armed struggle since the 1970s for an independent Tamil state in the North-East. All other Tamil political tendencies in that area have been described as ‘pro Tamil’ or ‘pro-LTE’. The LTTE (Sinhala) political rivals the right to exist. It must be said that some of these organisations undermined their own position by their wrong policies. The Tamil People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EELPRF), for example, collaborated with the minoured Indian Peace Keeping Force after the latter was ‘invited’ into the north East by Jayawardene (in order to forestall an invasion) under the Indro-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987. The IPKF behaved like any other bourgeois army of occupation- killing, raping and looting. This had the effect of completely discreditipg the EELPRF and making it too afraid to be wiped out by the Tigers after the withdrawal of the Indian army in 1989. The LTTE’s defeat on the battlefield released their Tamil rivals in the North East, they have been unable to win an uncontested victory. Sinhalese political parties, such as the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) split into two groups in 1969, led respectively by Edmund Samararatne and Bimal Tampoe. Prins sided with Tampoe’s group, which was recognised as the USP section. In 1972, in the course of the repression which followed the abortive JVP uprising the previous year, he was arrested by armed police and held in prison for six months.

After his release, Prins left the LSSP(R), which had been reduced to little more than an annex of Tampoe’s Ceylon Mercantile Union. He became secretary of a small Trotskyist group, latterly known as the Marxist League. Prins worked as a lawyer and was active in the defence of democratic rights against the United National Party government.

‘In his private life he led a simple existence,’ Prins’s comrade Oscar Pereira writes, ‘although he could have lived in luxury through his legal profession alone. He was widely known as a lawyer who appeared only for the employees in industrial disputes and labour tribunals. His home was his legal office and was popularly known as his “clinic” where he dispensed legal and other advice to all who asked for it. Fees were his least consideration. He always told poorer clients to pay what they could.

We first met Prins when he visited London in 1990. He was eager to discuss with us, and we were delighted to host him, the role of JVP members within the revolutionary movement. He gave us a detailed and informative interview on the history of Trotskyism in the first publication by the Workers News. Prins was present in the October/November 1990 issue of Workers News. After Prins’s return to Sri Lanka we corresponded regularly. We will miss him greatly. Workers News extends its condolences to Prins’s relatives, friends and comrades.
The IRA and the referendum

From Portillo Simões in Sao Paulo

ON APRIL 21, Brazilians voted to retain the presidential form of government. The referendum, which offered the electorate a choice between presidential - presidential, prime ministerial or constitutional monarchy - was proposed in 1988 during the drafting of the new constitution.

If the presidential option wins, the majority of the Brazilian bourgeoisie supported the "presidential" option, one of its aims being the removal of the president - which according to the polls could be Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the leader of Workers Party (PT). Such a system would also enable them to replace the president when they were elected without giving rise to the kind of mass demonstrations that led to the resignation of President Collor last year.

At the 1988 constitutional assembly, the PT was a full supporter of the presidential system. The position had been agreed almost unanimously and, at the time, the PT acted less as a social democratic party than it does now. However, Convergência Socialista (CS), the Brazilian section of the LFI, was in favour of a parliamentary system, along with the modernist and left-wing parties and class collaborators.

With the shift to the right of the PT, several former supporters were defending the parliamentary system. The party then held an internal ballot to decide what position it should take in the referendum. But despite the fact that the majority of the leadership supported the parliamentary system, 75 per cent of the rank and file voted to keep the presidential system.

The leaders of the right-wing cried the decision to hold an internal ballot. Their view, published in the capitalist press, was that individuals "should have a position, and if one did, nobody should be bound by it!"

Although under attack from the right, internal democracy and common discipline are principles which distinguish the PT from other parties. While the bourgeosie parties of Brazil are either in opposition or assassins of the individual politicians to power, the PT has always been abed for having given rise to this kind of mass demonstrations that led to the resignation of President Collor last year.

Among the PT leaders who opposed the internal ballot was Pedro Dalai, a member of the PT leadership who was close to Luiz Erundina, the ex-minister of the interior. Erundina was opposed to the PT's support to the government, saying it was a corporativist government.

Since the referendum, the political crisis of the Brazilian ruling class has gone from bad to worse. Luiz Erundina was removed from her post as minister of administration on May 19 after criticizing the appointment early in March of Elian Resende as finance minister. Resende is a minister under the military regime and within weeks of taking up his new job was accused by the press of awarding contracts to a construction company that owned him as a director. A few hours after Erundina was sacked, Franco also dismissed Resende. He is now on his fourth finance minister since he took over nine months ago.

THE TRAGIC death of two children in the IRA bomb attack in Warrington on March 20 provoked a predictable round of hypocrisy from the British government. Workers Party (WP), which conditionally defends the right of republican militants to take up arms against the British state and its loyalist agents in their struggle for self-determination, whether in the occupied Six Counties of Northern Ireland or anywhere else. The ultimate response to the common attack on any humanoid and hand the British government's propaganda ploy.

More than ever, the struggle for Irish self-determination has been to see as inseparable from the struggle for social socialism. Without adopting a Marxist orientation, based on working class unity in the tradition of James Connolly and Jim Larkin, together with a commitment to link the fight against the British occupation of the Six Counties with a fight against the reactionary clerical republic in the south, it will be impossible to mobilize the forces necessary to defeat the common capitalist enemy. That is why the fight for a Marxist party in Ireland, guided by the theory of permanent revolution, is so vital.

But this task is hampered by the actions of much of the British left, which proves to be incapable of following a principled anti-imperialist line when dealing with Ireland. The attitude towards the Dublin-based peace movement is no better.

No peace while Ireland remains partitioned

Greece

Building workers' leaders continue their treachery

THE SLUMP in the building industry in Greece has created massive unemployment, with most workers considering 12 months' worth of work impossible. Indeed, in the summer of 1991, the New Democracy government of Constantine Mitsotakis launched an attack on rights won by the union more than 30 years ago.

With the number of building workers eligible for state benefits rising rapidly, the ministers of labour and interior have been putting pressure on the building industry to fire redundant workers.

"The situation has come about because of the way the union leadership has handled the problem. It doesn't want to come into class conflict with the government and so it concentrates mainly on negotiations," the minister of labour said.

Everything we're fighting for today is from a tradition of building workers' struggles of 1961. The union has been under a Stalinist leadership since 1955, but at that time there was a strong Trotskyist faction. We fought the anti-unionism, and played a key role during the 1961 events. This was the first time that Greek workers were equipped for a serious struggle against the police - it has since become something of a tradition!"

In 1961, the Trotskyists were on the union leadership that were brushed aside, but all the gains made were fought for. In 1974, workers fought for 14 weeks in a seven-hour day - the first group of workers to in Greece to do so - had a pay, winter benefit and free health care.

Against the Mitsotakis government's privatization programme, the Trotskyist leaders of our union are committed to peaceful change of the social system Morale PASOK. So far, they have successfully prevented us from linking up with other workers in struggle and portrayed as a direct conflict with the ruling class.

The series The Rise and Fall of Gerry Healy will resume in the next issue of Workers News.
Pioneer who stuck
to his principles

Keeping My Head: The Memoirs of a British Bolshevik
Harry Wicks
Socialist Platform, 1992
£8.95

Review by Ellis Hillman

IT IS difficult to believe that more than 50 years have passed since the assassination of Leon Trotsky. It is perhaps even more difficult to account for the fact that the comrades who were associated with the aftermath of the October Revolution in Russia have survived to tell the tale. Such a comrade was Harry Wicks, who died in 1989. Harry was a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and one of the closest supporters of the Left Opposition. Unlike many of the pioneers of the Trotskyist movement, he held firmly to the principles of international socialism throughout his eventful life.

Harry Wicks was born in Battersea, an inner working class district of south London. In the first chapter of his memoirs, he describes the formative period of his life with a penetrating insight into the economic, social and political environment of his times. Chapter two - 'From Class to Socialist Consciousness' contains vivid descriptions of the opposition to the interventionist war against the Soviet Union and the 'colonial war in Ireland', and the struggle 'to get rid of the infamous Morris' and of the events that were to be seen on the streets of Battersea'.

The powerful alliance of the whole working movement and the imperialist intervention brought the Trotskyist movement in Britain. The CPGB, born Communist Party closer together - certainly at the rank-and-file level.

The role of the TUC leadership in trying to restrain the General Strike and prevent it from becoming a confrontation with the government is convincingly portrayed. Harry's view, however, that Britain was not 'by Leninist definitions' in a revolutionary situation in May 1926 'is unanswerable. The view held by Stalinsts and many Trotskyists that Trotsky argued that May 1926 actually did see Britain already in such a situation'.

Practically this is based on his reading of Trotsky's Where is Britain Going? Here Harry perhaps overestimates the Trotskyist perception of the General Strike and the role of the Labour and trade union leaderships, and of the Communist Party.

Interestingly, too, Harry takes to task the description of the ending of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Conference (ARUTC) led by the British Communist Party - then in the process of Stalinisation - as the result of 'the wavering and lack of commitment on the part of the Communist Party from Moscow, which was anxious to obtain credits from Western bankers for Russia's industrialisation. Not so, says Harry. The CP leadership had already accommodated to the first Labour government in 1924. Unfortunately, Harry does not elaborate on his argument that 'the British Communist Party needed not accommodation from anywhere outside itself in order to go far to the right'.

Of special interest, of course, is the account of the formative period in which the Trotskyist movement emerged on the fringes of the increasing Stalinised British CP. Here Harry paints a remarkable picture of his experiences in the Soviet Union attending the Lenin School in the late 1920s, and of his meeting with Trotsky in London in the late 1930s. The 400 members of the Communist League who adhered to Trotsky's position collected enough money from their meagre unemployment pays to send Harry to Copenhagen. His meetings with some of the early pioneers of the International Left Opposition - such as Paul Mattick, Paul Merlet, Felix Frank, Pierre Naville, Raymond Molinier, Henri Sneevliet and the Hamburg dockers Georg Jungclas-
gave him a profoundly Trotskyist perspective on internationalism that shines through the pages of this autobiography which has been skilfully edited by Logic Barrow.

In the chapter, 'Defeat and Survival 1934-45', we are taken through the complexities of the disputes in the Trotskyist movement before the Second World War, as well as the difficulties the small band of comrades faced in campaigning against the Moscow Trials in Britain. The Spanish civil war is referred to only in passing, which is a great pity.

Barrow is particularly apposite on this point: 'As readers will have noticed, the pages after Harry's meeting with Trotsky are flat when compared with the earlier chapters on the intensification of struggle which precede them.' Harry's life after 1946, including his involvement with the state capitalist International Socialist (forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party) and the International Left Opposition, is unfortunately unrecorded. Barrow bitterly regrets his failure to ask him about this period, noting that it was something that Harry 'never talked about'. Perhaps he found it difficult to relate the hopes of the movement before and during the war to the overwhelmingly complex situation that confronted it afterwards, with the 'stabilisation' of capitalism and the long night of Stalinism. We will never know. Harry Wicks emerges from the pages of what is essentially only half an autobiography as an honest proletarian revolutionary, a comrade of clear head and heart, a man of intelligence, wide reading and modesty - a refreshing contrast to certain post-war 'leaders' and self-appointed 'Lenins'. This book should find its way into the libraries of all socialists and Trotskyists, and all those, in and out of the Labour Party, who are fighting to bring about the socialist future Harry struggled for throughout his life. Congratulations to the comrade of Socialist Platform for their publishing venture!
LEADERS of the T&GWU have no intention of mounting a real fight against the deregulation and privatisation of London’s buses. Having tricked busworkers into signing the fake collective bargaining agreement, union officials have now dropped any pretence of a London-wide struggle in favour of local negotiations. The ability to carry out a co-ordinated industrial action relies on the active co-operation of so-called ‘left’ leaders of the busworkers, including WRP/Workers Press member Peter Gibson. The letter we printed below was refused publication by Workers Press, which went on to mount a scandalous attack on its author, Gerry Downwing, accusing him of playing into the hands of management. Geoff Pilling, writing in Workers Press on April 3, claims that managers distributed copies of the letter with the aim of sowing divisions among the workforce. He goes on to justify Gibson’s part in persuading busworkers to sign a document committing them to accept the new contracts. Only the militants would have refused to sign, Pilling says, giving managers the opportunity to attack them and weaken union organisation. The advice to sign the document, remains united and to prepare for strike action throughout London was not simply correct. Any other course of action would have been in line with management’s wishes.

The kind of unity that Workers Press proposes is with a right-wing bureaucracy bent on selling out the struggle. The London-wide strikes took place - but if anything was in line with management plans, it was the union leadership staging a few token protests, then capitulating. The bureaucrats are colluding to divide workers, but to use this as an excuse not to speak out against bureaucratic betrayal is opportunism of the worst kind.

The Editor, Workers Press

Comrades Peter Gibson and Roy Thomas have given seriously mixed signals over the betrayal of the busworkers’ struggle. Their failure to expose and criticise the treachery of the leaders is in marked contrast to the explicit criticism that has been aimed at the bureaucrats by rivaling organisations. The real question is whether they were ever inflected on the best organised section of busworkers. The only criterion that the editors of Workers Press is by Roy Thomas of the ‘ultra-left’ who wished to keep London fighting.’ I suspect they simply wanted to fight. Gibson, as chair of the London Divisional Bus Committee and T&G Executive Council for the busses, was excellently placed to rally the rank and file against the orchestrated Tories. Instead he collaborated with chief full-timers Olly Jackson and Ken Fuller in betraying his own members. If this is untrue and you were the leading revolutionary fighter for busworkers’ rights, comrade Gibson, then you need to answer some questions.

Why were the local negotiating teams instructed to come back by the end of January when the scale of the attacks was known at the time of the T&GWU meeting in November/December? The union leadership were aware that the block grants were to be cut on 1st April and the companies wished to have the new contracts in place by then. This gave a maximum of nine weeks to organise a fight. In practice it turned out to be five weeks as the committees set the deadline for the end of February, something you could have easily anticipated. If you opposed the machinations of the bureaucracy in this, why did you not warn your reps and members of the disastrous consequences of the strategy, using the pages of Workers Press or by public meetings, etc.? If you feared a witch hunt you could have used a penname. But, anyway, what better cause to be vindicated for than fighting a fight against the worst attack ever launched on them.

The T&GWU, correctly reading the vacillations of the T&G, got the jump on it. They delivered the first option to every individual at the end of January. This threatened loss of a new position if members did not indicate, by the 10th or 12th of February, their willingness to be considered for compensation payments if they were to sell their contracts of employment by the management deadline of 28th February. It had an implicit threat of the sack, asking: ‘Do you wish to remain employed on the new contracts? Tick yes or no’ and also implicitly de-recognised the union by going over their heads like this.

Why did the T&GWU leadership not instruct all the reps and members not to sign this blackmail document? Instead they instructed reps and members that it did not matter if they signed the first option as a signature on the union’s covering letter would protect their legal rights. Management simply returned this letter as they pointed out that, having signed their one, it was meaningless. Willesden Garage achieved one of the highest no signing rates because at two mass meetings on 8th February it was moved from the floor that no one would sign. When one of the branch officers returned from Headland House the following day and said a T&G officials had told him to sign both the management and union letters, I rang you up to strengthen the opposition to signing. You told me it did not matter if people signed, the thing was to get a positive result on the strike ballot on the 19th. I thereupon told the militants (ultra-left) that Peter Gibson had instructed me that on no account were we to sign the management letter. The militants held the line and reaffirmed the decision of the mass meetings.

Why did the fail to organise the strike ballot for the first time at 19th February when they had several months’ notice of the Torries’ intentions? Why did they allow their members to face the stark choice of sign or be sacked at the end of February when no date was set for industrial action to halt the attack? You told me that the ‘T&G would look foolish’ if they set the date in advance of knowing the outcome of the ballot. Well, we will all look very foolish now when we have to claim family credit from the DSS while working an extremely demanding, responsible and stressful full-time job.

The ballot for strike action was 2:1 in favour. How much bigger a majority would there have been if the T&G bureaucracy had given a single indication that they intended to fight this attack by preparing the membership through mass meetings over the past few months? Why did you or your colleague Thomas not expose the bureaucracy instead of blaming the members ‘...many succumbed to the blackmail and signed to accept the lump sum payments...because - at this stage - they could see no alternative’ (Workers Press, 20th February). They decided that there was no alternative because the T&G bureaucracy, you included, did not give them any. You had no alternative and never proposed any alternative apart from writing to MPs, demanding a ‘Select Committee of Enquiry’ and protecting Stephen Norris, the Tory minister of transport in London, from the anger and questions of outraged busworkers at the House of Commons meeting on 27th January. Your comment on that occasion that we had to respect Norris ‘because at least he had the bottle to come and speak to us’ contrasts quite sharply with your own bottle when faced with this Tory attack. If respect for Tory anti-union laws is what held you back then it is time you declared your true political allegiances and ceased masquerading as some sort of a ‘revolutionary’. London’s busworkers are absolutely furious at being rolled over so easily, without the opportunity of a fight, by a, useless and cowardly bureaucracy. Many are throwing in their cards in disgust but others are preparing to sort out this T&G leadership, you included, comrade Gibson.

The question for the Workers Revolutionary Party and the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International is: can you seriously claim to be advancing towards your stated goal of socialist revolution and the solving of humanity’s main road-block in that aim, the leadership of the working class, if you yourselves are part of the problem or tolerate within your ranks those who are? Comradely,

Gerry Downwing
1st March 1993