

Workers Power

SUPPLEMENT
ON THE W.S.L. AND
SOCIALIST ORGANISER

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Open Letter to the

Workers' Socialist League

COMRADES- We address you because in your ranks are one time supporters of Workers Fight and Socialist Press, both of which had a conscious project of criticising and over-coming the opportunism of Healy, Mandel and Cliff. But now, after a period of systematic revisionism enshrined in the pages of Socialist Organiser, your organisation has failed the test of an imperialist war against Argentina. It failed even to recognise the imperialist character of Britain's war. Your paper has become a vehicle for the propagation of social pacifist politics. Your leaders have proven themselves incapable of defending, let alone developing, the principles and programme of revolutionary Marxism.

Those of you who remain committed to the struggle against revisionism and opportunism must realise that this means waging a battle *now* to remove your present leadership. To take any other course means admitting defeat in the face of the degeneration of revolutionary Marxism.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN ?

The Falklands war has proved to be a decisive test for all the organisations in Britain claiming to stand in the traditions of Revolutionary Marxism and Trotskyism. This is hardly surprising. Wars have always proved a make or break question for the workers' movement. They reveal in the starkest light the real character and the mettle of rival organisations.

The Falklands war was a deadly serious affair for British imperialism. However the Socialist Organiser leaders claimed that it was merely a "war to save the face and prestige of Thatcher" (SO 6.5.82). Such a position could only be considered valid by people with the shallow analytical equipment of a Labour MP.

The ink that has been spilled on surveys of Antarctica and the South Atlantic points to the real, underlying cause of the war. British imperialism has strategic and economic interests of capital importance at stake. The 'Economist' magazine spoke for its class when it said that the security of the Falklands was vital as a link in the chain that ties Britain to the Antarctic. This is why the British bourgeoisie was willing to spend billions, to lose ships and military equipment, to jeopardise its extensive imperialist investments in Latin America, and its close relations with the U.S. and European imperialists. Such actions indicate that far more is at stake than the fate of a Prime Minister.

In our view this war marks the opening up of a new period of British imperialism. Thatcher gave the game away in Parliament after her "victory" when she welcomed the war as a means of restoring Britain's dominance in the world.

In conjunction with the Israeli assault on Lebanon and the Palestinians, this war has a further significance. It has heightened world tension. It has increased the "war danger". The Falkland War is an outlier for much greater conflicts. As such the responses to it by would-be revolutionary organisations are a clear measure of their ability to weather the storms ahead.

With the exception of Workers Power, all of the British Trotskyist Groups - from the ultra-sectarian Spartacists to the ultra-opportunist Militant - have failed to offer anything resembling a revolutionary perspective in the face of this war. Within this generalised collapse of the left, your organisation has played an inglorious part. Speaking plainly, your leadership has dragged its pretensions to internationalism through the Labourite mire.

We will not repeat at length arguments against the positions that have appeared in the pages of Socialist Organiser which you continue to sponsor. Our paper has already exposed the gulf between marxism and Socialist Organiser's discovery and defence of the supposed "right to self-determination" of the Falklanders. The Falklanders are not only a British settler population in origin but have always been economically and militarily so. They can never be otherwise. Thatcher has made great play of their right to self-determination because she knows that every Falklander's choice will be to remain part of the British Empire!

For marxists the right to self-determination must mean the right to form a separate independent nation state.

To be exercised, this right involves the ability to do so, and the Falklanders have never wished to be anything beyond a Crown Colony because they are not and could not be an independent people. They can only exist as British colonists.

In the letters page of Socialist Organiser certain clowns have pointed to the settler origins of Argentina itself, or indeed the U.S.A. and attempted to draw a parallel between these peoples and the Falkland islanders. The 1,800 kelpers - many of whom were born in Britain and will retire to Britain or New Zealand - who are largely employees of a British company, living on land owned by British capitalists, dependent on British supplies and now on a British garrison and war fleet - are clearly not an equivalent national entity.

Unlike Foot you have not dared deduce from your support of the Kelpers' rights, support for Thatcher's war. No, instead your own political conclusion is to repeat the social pacifist phrases culled from your left reformist allies, and plead with British imperialism to "renounce" its economic (sic) interests in the South Atlantic.

Your leaders now regard imperialism as a matter of "policy", a matter, simply of "economic interests", which working class pressure can persuade imperialism to renounce. Comrades, this is the analysis of the left Labourites. This is the thinking of Tony Benn. Your organisation has begun to think and analyse the world in the same manner as the Bennites!

Are we exaggerating? We do not think so. Lenin's theory of imperialism has not guided your actions in this war. You have implied in articles in Socialist Organiser (especially those of Martin Thomas in SO 8/7/88) that Argentina is not exploited by imperialism. No doubt it is this discovery that led you to call for negotiations between the British and Argentine capitalists (SO 6.5.82). Your position, like that 'discovered' by Kautsky in August/September 1914, implies that imperialism is potentially peaceful - if only it would negotiate and not fight. Wars are deemed irrationalities - 'face savers' for the imperialist government, 'red herrings' for the imperialised nations. Imperialism, from being an economically predatory system that inevitably spawns war, is reduced to a matter of policy - and the role of communists is reduced to raising the call 'peace through negotiation'.

Your evidence for this position is particularly flimsy. Argentina, we are told, is a 'prosperous' and 'advanced' country. Since when have marxists used such criteria as a means of characterising an imperialist or imperialised state? Never. We analyse imperialism by looking at the development and dominance of Finance Capital within a country, its fusion with industrial capital, its export of capital and its repatriation of super-profits, its possession of colonies or economic control of semi-colonies etc. Argentina's history, looked at from this standpoint, reveals none of these characteristics. Its history is the reverse of an imperialist power. It is the history of a semi-colony, dependent on imperialism for its development. To be sure it is a relatively wealthy semi-colony but a semi-colony nevertheless.

Was Russia 'advanced' or 'prosperous' in 1914? Was Japan comparable, according to your criteria with the U.S.A. in the 1920s and 30s? Of course not, but both Russia and Japan were imperialist powers, according to Lenin's criteria.

NOT AN ACCIDENT

But this is no isolated 'mistake' by Socialist Organiser. By exactly the same reasoning you have also deduced that Ireland is 'comparable' with Britain today. As John O'Mahoney put it in SO 75 Ireland's bourgeoisie is "now an integral segment of the European capitalist class and in as much control of their state as any EEC ruling class is." Formal control of one's state (in fact of only one part of one's state in Ireland's case!) and being capitalist, are sufficient causes to lump semi-colonial Ireland together with the imperialised power whose army still stalks the streets of the North! But then John O'Mahoney has never disguised the fact that for him Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution has no integral part to play in the Irish revolution. The present war has obviously led him to extend his junking of the "old" Trotskyism and Leninism to Latin America. Now the theory of permanent revolution has no use for him in Latin America or Ireland. Comrades, in this you have joined hands with no less than the Spartacists (Yes!) in junking any operative use of Lenin's theory and Trotsky's strategy. Your leaders may think these issues are "old hat", but they won't take this hat off without quickly putting on another one that of Labourite social pacifism.

How has such a position emerged within an organisation that claims to be marxist? We have repeatedly argued that increasingly your positions are determined by programmatic adaptation to the pressure of the left reformists that you hope to coax into your alliance. Your position on the war signifies that you have yielded to chauvinist pressure, mediated via Tony Benn and Reg Race and their brand of semi-social pacifism. We say "semi" because these gentlemen only objected to Thatcher's decision to wage war over the Falklands while both have advocated the use of economic measures against Argentina. Socialist Organiser was quick to praise Benn for supposedly rejecting this call. It has been silent on the fact that, on the very day this praise was proffered, he actually called for economic sanctions. That is he called for the use of the very imperialist economic stranglehold, via the City of London, that you so strenuously deny governs the relations between Britain (and the U.S.A.) and Argentina.

You have failed to stand by the basic marxist position of defending a semi-colonial country against "one's own" imperialism. Instead you dodge behind the misapplied slogan "The main enemy is at home!" True, but as we have argued, in this case our ally was the Argentine nation because it was fighting a death battle with our enemy in a justified national war.

You did not even pose sharply in your slogans the fact the British socialists should work for the 'defeat' of Britain. The almost complete absence of your banners from national anti-war activities highlights your shame and the fact that the above slogan meant for you 'The main fight is at home; against Thatcher's anti-working

class policies, ie. Trade Union, and above all, Labour Party business as usual. Perhaps this endeared you to your "left Labour" friends and boosted your tally of "socialist" local councillors. But comrades, the failure to mobilise against the war in a serious, sustained and principled way has helped the forces of reaction in this country to enjoy a resounding victory. The walls of "Fortress Islington", behind which your centrist leaders are sheltering, will prove to be a short-lived and feeble protection against the effects of this victory.

The chief protagonists of this position in the paper, are not, surprisingly, John O'Mahoney and Martin Thomas. Workers Power has direct experience of these characters. In 1976 they broke up the fused organisation to which we belonged.

They are seasoned opportunists who have, since the break up of the I-CL, been pushing their supporters further and further to the right in a bid to construct a strategic alliance with the forces of left reformism. They have become impatient with the arduous tasks of developing a revolutionary programme for today's class struggle, they have lost all belief in the possibility of building a revolutionary party.

The experience of the 1974-9 Labour Government was decisive in the formulation of the I-CL's political strategy. The mass strikes of 1972-4 did not spontaneously generate a layer of political militants capable of challenging the betrayal of the Callaghan/Healy/Foot/Benn government. Indeed the militancy that had existed was largely dissipated. Struggles, like those of the Firemen in 1977 and even the Public Sector workers in 1979, did not result in a generalised working class offensive. For Sean Matgamna this experience was registered in a wholly empirical and short-sighted fashion. In the old Workers' Action newspaper he explained that this dissipation of militancy meant that revolutionaries should focus their main attention of the Labour Party. The direct action struggles of the workers were less political and therefore less open to revolutionary ideas. The Labour Party, however, was overtly political and therefore inevitably more receptive. Thus he argued: "One of the major reasons for the divisions in the revolutionary marxist left in Britain has been different attitudes on what to do about the Labour Party. This is the major strategic question for militants trying to restructure and remould the British labour movement." (WA 155).

In an interview on the SCLV, which originally launched Socialist Organiser, John O'Mahoney explicitly criticised the leaders of the SLL/WRP for breaking with this position in favour of orienting centrally to direct action struggles: "But in retrospect one must accept that, for example, 'Militant' was able to make gains and can now play its present role partly because the revolutionaries did not just go with the radicalised people, who were often immature and ultra-left; they capitulated to them, and completely abandoned their previous understanding of the Labour Party and the problem of the broad Labour Movement. The old leaders of the Trotskyist movement, those who had a political education, served very badly the people who became radicalised in the 60s." (International Communist No. 8).

Who are these old leaders and what is the political understanding of the Labour Party nostalgically hankered after by O'Mahoney (which he has now regenerated)?

Comrades, it is the provenly bankrupt understanding pioneered by Gerry Healy and Michel Pablo in the 1950s. It is the 'entrism sui generis' that led to the disorientation and liquidation of the Trotskyist movement and programme. It is the antithesis of Trotsky's tactic of entrism developed in the 1930s which was based on a clear and determined fight for revolutionary policies, by a revolutionary tendency in a reformist or centrist milieu. The tactics of Healy, Pablo and the Militant praised by O'Mahoney is based on the perspective of "transforming" the Labour Party through a series of left alliances. It is based on the false premise that the Labour Party can be transformed into a 'roughly adequate' instrument for the working class. The "revolutionaries" can secure a "Labour government pledged to socialist

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Open Letter (cont.)

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policies" (or as Socialist Organiser likes to call it a "workers government", meaning a Labour government accountable to the Labour Party as O'Mahoney and Bloxham made clear in their resolution to the S.O. annual aggregate.

This understanding of the Labour Party is based on a grand illusion. It has little to do with reality. We do not underestimate the need to win workers from the Labour Party. We do not rule out work in the Labour Party. We do not - despite the slanderous claims of Matgamna and Thomas - abstain on the struggles in the Labour Party. But we have no illusions about these struggles either. We do not dress the participants up as anything other than what they are - reformists, left and right. The left we will seek to win by the sharpest revolutionary criticism of their vacillations and support for their positive actions. To do this requires one vital thing - a revolutionary programme, a revolutionary voice, and a revolutionary tendency to raise both in the Labour Party. But, comrades of the WSL, where is your revolutionary banner and revolutionary programme?

Matgamna's project is that of a latter-day Healy or Pablo (yes - these two supposed arch-enemies were the very co-architects of 'entrism sui generis'). Any of you who think that Socialist Organiser even pretends to be a clear revolutionary tendency would do well to be reminded of Workers Action's description of it: "Socialist Organiser, by its nature a left alliance, cannot have a razor-sharp ideological definition, but it should be based on definite political positions." (WA 160) Definite does not equal revolutionary. And without a razor-sharp identity a tendency in the Labour Party can only become one other thing - a blunt instrument.

In this schema your hopes have been pinned on the possibility of a Workers Government based on a Labour Party that "is no longer a stable instrument of the bourgeoisie." Apart from the fact that for revolutionaries the call for a workers' government is a tactic not a stage that has to be passed through, the ludicrousness of this assessment of the state of the Labour Party is one of the things that has been shown up by the Falklands War.

Look at the real Labour Party of the last months. Compare it with the paper fantasies of Matgamna. Paper will take anything that is written on it - life, and the Labour Party, is not so obliging to centrist pen-pushers. Not a stable instrument for the bourgeoisie? A potential workers' government (and for revolutionaries this means one that would take the steps to arm the workers and base itself on workers' councils)? No. As in 1914-18, as in 1939-45, as in Korea, Suez, Borneo, Malaya, Aden and Ireland it posed no threat to the bourgeois war mongers. It assisted them. And Benn? He differed over which strategy would best bring Argentina to its knees. The one vote he led against the war - 6 weeks into the crisis - was only as significant as the silence of the left, Benn included, during the days of the ground fighting. In those crucial days the demos stopped, there were no more votes - there was collapse. If Labour dare not contradict as threadbare an imperialist plunder-raid as this, what can be expected of them when the bank deposits, the arsenals and the factories of the bourgeoisie are at stake at home. To pose these questions is to answer them. Reselection and an electoral college, even the presence of the Socialist Organiser Alliance, do not make the stuff of a Workers' Government.

OUR RECORD

Of course your leaders will meet such criticisms with a whole range of apolitical insults and charges. Blind to the fact that the war has placed them in the same camp as the Spartacists, the Militant and the Socialist Workers Party - all arch sectarians in Matgamna's analysis - your leaders will attempt to label us as irrelevant sectarians so as to discredit our arguments.

After the break up of the ICL Matgamna predicted our collapse into the IMG. Since then we have been told, on several occasions, that our

collapse into the Spartacists was impending. Similarly after the old WSL leadership broke off political discussions with Workers Power (NB it was not us who broke off discussions - we only refused immediate fusion) they informed their members that we were sectarian 'proto-Spartacists'. These predictions have all proved false and empty. The charge of sectarianism has been shown up for what it is - a handy slur for your leaders to avoid discussions with us.

We know what sectarianism is and you will never find us guilty of it. Our record is living proof of our ability - despite our size - to resist sectarianism. The Steel Strike, the Plense's Strike, the People's March, the Ansell's Strike, our consistent work inside the Labour movement, our industrial bulletins, our anti-war work and more besides, are our answers to the charge of sectarianism and to the idea that we inhabit an irrelevant wilderness. We have a proven record of struggle. We are hounded by labour bureaucrats in the health strike and in the anti-war movement - not because we are sectarian but because we are honest revolutionaries. We are hated for that by the bureaucrats. Your centrist leaders will try to make you hate us for the same reason.

Certainly we are a small group. Indeed so is the WSL. You may have blown yourself up with left reformist wind but you remain a frog and not a bull. Our size means that we are nearer to being a "propaganda society" than we are to being a mass party, but we make no virtue out of this. While we do not try to imitate a mass party, do not behave like a mini-mass party, nor do we abstain from the class struggle. As we have said since 1976 we have been involved in every struggle to the limit of our capabilities (size and location). We are a *fighting propaganda group*. Our principal task is to re-elaborate Trotsky's Transitional Programme, developing it and focussing it on today's international class struggle. This involves patient and difficult theoretical work. But we focus our propaganda towards the needs of the class struggle, acting on it where possible.

We fight with our class against its enemies outside and inside the labour movement. We also fight to transcend the limits of being a propaganda group, but not by ignoring our propaganda tasks and liquidating the struggle for a revolutionary party and International into syndicalism, economism or left reformism. We seek to link our propaganda work, at every stage, to the class struggle itself. We welcome all revolutionary fighters into our ranks on this basis. We seek principled fusions on this basis.

We do not have a static, dogmatic, "know-it-all", "take us or leave us" attitude. On the contrary we would seek in any fusion an *advance* towards the strategic goals we have set ourselves. The more comrades with class struggle leadership, theoretical, literary and agitational abilities, the faster we can progress. The political and economic defeats Thatcher has inflicted - Reagan and Thatcher's drive to war, and confrontation with the anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles, and conflict with the workers' states all indicate to us that we have no mortgage on time. We hate sectarianism as we hate opportunism. That is a word rarely used in the pages of your publications these days - with good reason. Opportunism means casting aside the valuable weapons forged by revolutionary marxism over 100 years of struggle, in the interests of "popularity" with the masses (or more usually their reformist leaders) on their terms. We value these weapons. Unlike the sectarians though, we do not allow them to lie unused so that they rot and become useless. We develop them, refine them and focus them on the tasks of the day. Your leaders, impatient with such tasks have chosen the opportunist course. That is why they never use the word. It describes their whole policy.

The opportunist articles on "Marxism and Democracy" by the prime generator of opportunism in your ranks John O'Mahoney, showed the tortuous (and torturing) lengths to which your leadership will go to junk the "old baggage" of Trotskyism. Unlike this particular revisionist we would assert that the methods and doctrines of Lenin and Trotsky are, to use a phrase of the old WSL, "valid today" on condition that they are *developed*.

We write this open letter to you now because we think that the deep-rooted opportunism of your leaders has, under the impact of the war, sullied your banners over the last 3 months. The (non-party) Socialist Organiser that you sponsor has become an organ for neutralism. The revolutionary internationalist line, which does not flinch from the defence of the oppressed against Britain's armed might, is only seen on the letters page courtesy of a handful of principled correspondents. The line of the paper itself is indistinguishable from Chris Mullin's Social-pacifist Tribune. The National Left Wing Youth movement has been pushed into the shameful act of voting for "workers' economic sanctions against Argentina. Individuals now say this is wrong. But where is the clear voice of your organisation denouncing this vote and its 'Militant' chauvinist inspirers? Comrades, a Youth Movement should, in the spirit of Liebknecht, be in the vanguard of opposition to the war. Unless Trotskyists teach the working class youth to rally to the defence of all those attacked by "our own" imperialism, then the chauvinist poison of the press will rally them to the national colours, literally and metaphorically. Working class youth will not be captivated by do-nothing but wring-your-hands petty-bourgeois peacenikery - class war against war or imperialist war is a stark choice, but one that working class youth will take.

At an international level the TILC - a prisoner of the WSL "majority" - did not publicly utter one word on an event of capital international importance. Yet, all its sections *but one* took a correct stand for Argentina against British imperialism. For O'Mahoney the rupturing of this international alliance will not be the cause of anxious insomnia. For a serious internationalist, such a lightminded approach to international relations and the international class struggle should be a cause of extreme concern.

Some of you may think that the TILC could serve to change the line of the Socialist Organiser editors. We don't think so comrades. When O'Mahoney once "went from Socialist Organiser to report off" the TILC school in 1981 he could say no more of the TILC than that it "groups a number of small Marxist organisations." What hope for life from an international tendency that splits first time it hits the test of an imperialist war and is incapable of issuing a public statement because its major section refuses to call for the victory of Argentina in a war against the British bourgeoisie?

WHERE NOW FOR THE W.S.L. ?

At fusion the WSL committed itself to programmatic discussions and development. It committed itself to raising an independent and revolutionary banner in the workers' movement. None of this has happened. Either the WSL must come to life, fight its centrist leaders and change course or the WSL will have proved itself in the sharp test of war to have become an instrument for trampling on revolutionary Marxism - not fighting for it!

At the time of your fusion we made clear our differences with *both* of the founding organisations and with the political basis of your fusion. From the start your fusion was based on the opportunist strategy of the fight for a "Workers' Government" of the type that had been master-minded by the Workers Action paper. Although Socialist Press had once formally condemned this position as revisionist it was openly embraced by Alan Thornett at your launching rally.

"We have to fight not for a Labour Government of the old type - or a left Labour Government to implement the Alternative Economic Strategy - but for a workers' government - a government committed to the working class, responsive to the labour movement, and controlled by it." (Workers Socialist Review No. 1).

The organisation was set in the strategic mould of the politics of accommodation to left reformism. Socialist Organiser's re-iteration of this position has gone unchallenged by the WSL. You committed yourselves to producing a programmatic joint document (see Socialist Press May 14th 1981). Where is it comrades? You committed yourselves to producing a theoretical journal which John Lister suggested would be quarterly and which John

O'Mahoney reported would be "perhaps bi-monthly" (SO. July 30 1981). Only one pathetic copy has appeared comrades and it contains *no* programmatic documents and no notice of the resolution of the disputed questions you were jointly due to resolve - Afghanistan, the General Strike, the EEC and Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea. When O'Mahoney reported from the TILC summer school that the WSL magazine "will not be in competition with Socialist Organiser" he was only too right! The WSL has presented no challenge to the politics of Socialist Organiser and certainly no competition to its sales pitch.

Perhaps the Falklands war has made a few of you wake up. We hope so. But even if you could it won't be enough to declare, after the event, that the WSL - silent throughout Britain's murderous war - refuses to endorse the position adopted by the Socialist Organiser editorial board during that war. Of course you should reject the position of the Socialist Organiser. You should, even after the event, declare yourselves for the victory of Argentina over British imperialism. But you can't let matters stop there comrades. You have to ask yourselves why the S.O. took this line and why the WSL swallowed it at precisely the time that it mattered! We have our answer to that question. We have repeatedly stated that the paper you sponsor is orchestrated by centrists whose political trajectory has been one of accommodation to left reformism. It follows therefore that *is* all key tests they will junk any 'old' Leninism and Trotskyism that threatens to imperil their centrist project of a strategic alliance with left reformism. It won't be enough to change the line on the Falklands. You've got to fight the programme and method that S.O. is based on and which the Falklands line originates from. Unless you fight that method and its perspectives, even a line change on the Falklands will be for nothing, if you allow the S.O. editors to continue their weekly coining of their centrist line.

Comrades who oppose the record of betrayal of elementary internationalism by Socialist Organiser must recognise that debate in your letters pages is not enough. You have passed through the war with soiled and lowered banners. Perhaps there has been a struggle to reverse the position. We do not know. We do know from our own experience that if there is a struggle Sean Matgamna and Martin Thomas will sacrifice any remnants of political principles in the interests of tactical manoeuvre.

If there are comrades fighting these rotten leaders- be warned. Even if a formal reversal of position takes place on the war, its originators, Matgamna/Thomas, would remain a constant source of revisionism. Look at their record on left reformism, war, marxism and democracy, Ireland, imperialism, Permanent Revolution, the Transitional Programme, the Party, the Workers' Government. If they are now approaching the positions of a Kautsky, they do so with the velocity and appetite of a Bernstein.

We do not doubt that Matgamna will accuse any oppositionists, as he accused us in 1976, of moving towards one or another rival tendency. That is because he is preparing for a split. If a split does take place then we wish to make the choices we think exist clear to honest revolutionaries who break with Matgamna. There is, of course the prospect of joining the IMG, the other big "Trotskyist" organisation in Britain, sponsored by the USFI. Their position on the war is ostensibly a principled one. But the USFI's position itself is part and parcel of their overall capitulation to petty-bourgeois nationalism. It is perfectly consonant with the SWP(US) attempts to jump on Castro's bandwagon. In practice their national section has subordinated their defeatism to 'peace slogans' under the guise of a united front. They have offered only the most muted criticisms of the weaknesses and vacillations of Benn and Race.

The IMG have a weekly paper, a large full-time staff, a youth movement and all the paraphernalia of yet another mini-mass party. To some they may be an attractive proposition. But, comrades, they are a sick organisation, sick with years of centrism. Look at their record and that of their international - grovelling before the Stalinist Castro, cheering the Islamic butcher Khomeini, capitulating to Mitterand in France and even trying to outshout Socialist Organiser last year in praise of Tony Benn. They are inveterate capitulators. Every left trade union bureaucrat they interview is treated by them as the potential leader of a "class struggle left-wing". They are riddled with every "ism" that was fashionable in the 60s and 70s. They are a petit-bourgeois formation with no political spine. That is one choice for "Trotskyists" in the WSL.

There is another. It is to engage in open, honest and far-reaching discussions with Workers Power. We have explained our perspective. We would ask you to read our positions in our papers and journals. We think, unlike the IMG, we have a consistent authentic Trotskyist record. We make no secret that discussions with you would be aimed at establishing a new fused revolutionary organisation. We would aim to campaign internationally with any co-thinkers for a democratic centralist Trotskyist tendency really working to rebuild an International in the traditions of Lenin's IIIrd and Trotsky's IVth. If an opposition were to win a majority against Matgamna's leadership then such a process could begin between WP and the WSL. If an opposition loyal to Trotskyism were to be reduced to a minority due to the bureaucratic and manipulative tactics (which we know too well) of the old ICL leaders, or is the self-avowed "Bennites" in your ranks were to outweigh the voice of revolutionary internationalism, then we would urge any oppositionists to join us in seeking the basis for an enlarged organisation that can continue the fight for revolutionary leadership in the working class. ■

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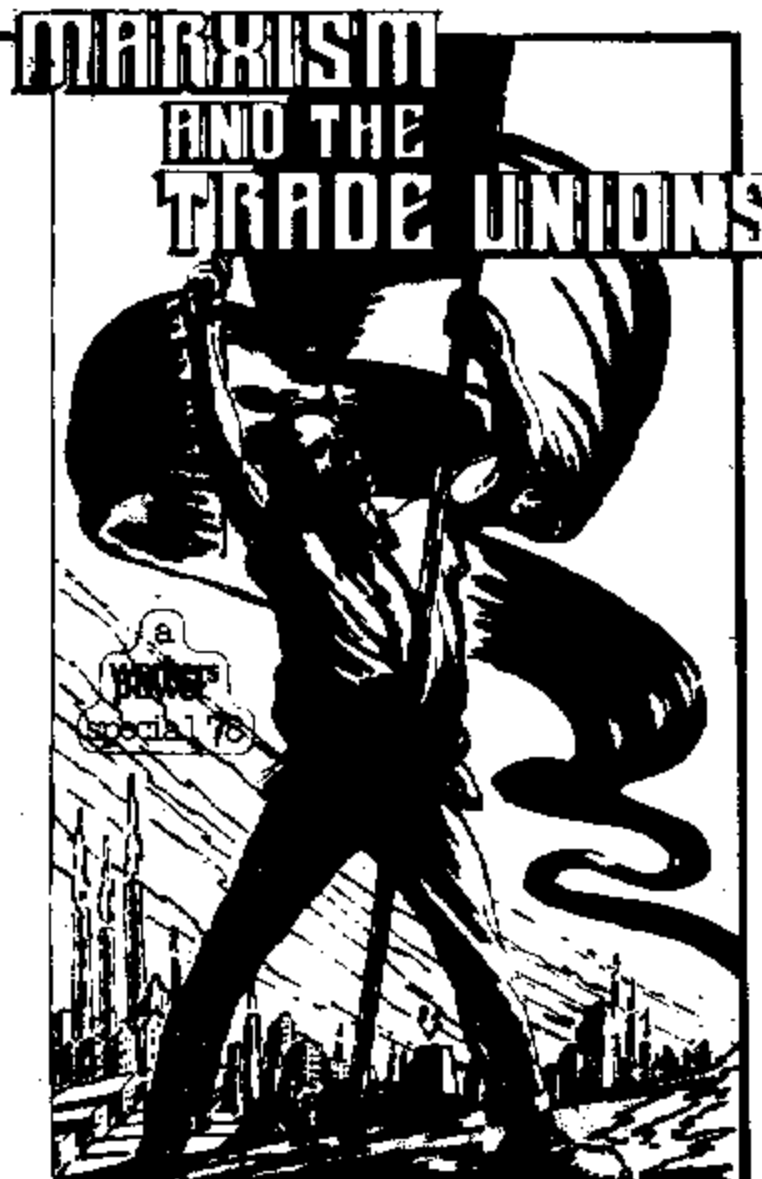
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The WSL/ICL fusion

SOCIALIST PRESS ★

Socialist Organiser

On the next two pages we reprint two articles from Workers Power on the politics and project of the WSL and Socialist Organiser. The first article was written in June 1981, at the time of the WSL/ICL fusion. In it we argue that the new organisation was created on an opportunist basis and was likely to continue on that course. As we make clear in the Open Letter, we think our predictions have been proved absolutely correct. The

The second article was written in March of this year. It shows the way in which John O'Maboney abandoned the revolutionary position on democracy in his series of articles "Marxism and Democracy". The fact that his positions, so extensively presented in Socialist Organiser were never subsequently challenged in the paper demonstrates the gulf that exists between revolutionary marxism and the principal writers on the staff of Socialist Organiser.

We appeal to all WSL members to read and discuss with us the politics of these two articles.

WHENEVER OSTENSIBLY TROTSKYIST organisations take up opportunist positions, it is normally done in the name of 'anti-sectarianism'. This is convenient camouflage. The Trotskyist movement has been dogged by splits. Any declaration of intent to fuse Trotskyist organisations appear to be a break from this apparently 'sectarian' tradition. The Workers Socialist League, as we predicted in Workers Power 21, have made such a declaration. They have announced that they will be fusing with the International Communist League, whose supporters are grouped around the paper Socialist Organiser.

Workers Power does not underestimate the damage done to revolutionary communism by the existence of numerous small organisations claiming to be Trotskyist. We have declared ourselves to be in favour of regroupment. But, for us, regroupment can only last, can only be prevented from breaking up into further, potentially demoralising splits, if it is carried out on the basis of a revolutionary programme. Goodwill and non-aggression pacts are no substitute for the hammering out of the real political differences that do exist between the organisations that claim to be Trotskyist.

The proclaimed fusion of the ICL and WSL is not taking place on such a basis. The battle against sectarianism, with no specification of the political content of the sectarianism referred to, is the major point of agreement between the two tendencies. The WSL's soon-to-be wound up newspaper, Socialist Press, made this clear:

"Both the WSL and the ICL have for some time committed themselves to a struggle against sectarian isolation from the mass movement, and sat out to intervene in the struggle within the organised working class". (Socialist Press 14th May 1981.)

There are few organisations who would declare in favour of 'sectarian isolation'—but that does not mean that a basis for unity exists.

The WSL obviously recognises the shortcomings of their own position. In their report on the fusion they are unclear on whether the new organisation yet has a principled basis, or whether it in fact has to find one:

"The fusion is the most substantial attempt so far to find a principled basis to tackle the problem of the Trotskyist movement in Britain" (our emphasis).

If this is the case then it would be reasonable to expect some political accounting for the differences that have previously separated these organisations. Only last summer the WSL wrote a series of polemics against the ICL, which went so far as to accuse the latter of being "engaged in a process of political adaptation to the left reformist forces now engaging in the Labour Party: an adaptation which involves the junking of previously established political positions" (SP 6th August 1980).

But no such accounting has ever appeared in the WSL's press. What is apparent, however, is a shift in their own position on the Labour Party. A shift which has placed them on the same opportunist terrain as the ICL despite their apparently rigid, but entirely formal, declarations of adherence to Trotskyism.

The political and organisational liquidation of the ICL can easily be traced. Their supporters switched from the ICL first to becoming Workers Action supporters, then to the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV). Out of the SCLV Socialist Organiser supporters groups were born (which involved dropping Workers Action as a regular newspaper), and now there is to be a new Socialist Organiser Alliance, which will include Socialist Press supporters in the Labour Party.

This political equivalent to musical chairs has, at every stage, involved greater degrees of political adaptation to the left reformists inside the Labour Party. The SCLV, which included, and initially apologised for, Ernie Roberts, Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone, was a rotten propaganda bloc that never once acted to put its left supporters to the test of action. For example it covered for Ernie Roberts in 1978 when he went along with the ANL's refusal to direct their carnival to challenge the fascists who were marching on the same day.

The SCLV's paper, Socialist Organiser, was fashioned to fit in with joint activity with the reformists around democracy and accountability within the Labour Party. When Workers Action was dropped in the summer of 1980, Socialist Organiser made clear that it was not based on a revolutionary programme inside the Labour Party: "The political platform contained in our Where We Stand column is not a scientific programme" (SO 30/8/80).

The battle for Labour Party democracy was described as the most crucial aspect of the class struggle.

Before closing down, Workers Action had spelled out the premises for this position. It advanced the idea that the depth and temper of the capitalist crisis, together with the democratic reforms within the Labour Party opened up the possibility of "transforming" the Labour Party into "a real instrument of the working class". A "real instrument" was a handy substitute for the revolutionary party, which was, after all, proving difficult to build.

In addition the ICL proclaimed that the democratic reforms of the 1979 Labour Party Brighton Conference "demonstrates that transforming the political wing of the labour movement is a possibility, and thus that it is possible to raise the transitional demand for a workers government in Britain, where in the initial stages such a government would inevitably have the Labour Party as its major or only component" (Workers Action No 174 26/4/80).

Prepared to settle for second best with regard to the party, the ICL were also prepared to settle for second best as far as the Workers' Government was concerned. A Workers' Government which was, in effect, a left reformist led Labour government, made more accountable through the reselection of MPs, was posited by Workers Action as a definite and desirable stage of the class struggle.

As long ago as the summer of 1980 the WSL approvingly quoted Zinoviev against the opportunist position of the ICL:

"Woe to us if we allow the suggestion to creep into our propaganda that the workers government is a necessary step, to be achieved peacefully as a period of semi-organic construction which may take the place of civil war" (Socialist Press No 202 16/7/80).

Then the WSL said it was only permissible to raise the slogan "workers government" "in the context of the overall strategy of socialist revolution in which the objective is not simply another parliamentary Labour government but to establish a government genuinely representative of the working class, a workers government based firmly on the independent strength of the workers movement, organised through councils of action. Only on this basis can such a government take the necessary steps of nationalisation and destruction of the machinery of the capitalist state" (Socialist Press No 207 16/7/80).

This position quite clearly has little to do with the one put forward by the ICL.

NO EXPLANATION GIVEN

The reader of Socialist Press has not been given any explanation of the WSL's change of position on the workers' government question. Yet, changed it has—in the direction of the ICL version of the slogan that had formerly been described as "liquidationist". From at least February 1981, the WSL was abandoning its original position. Thus, SP 236 proclaims in the wake of the miners victory: "the only guarantee of protection for jobs and living standards is the mobilisation of the labour movement for a general strike to bring down the Tories and to press home the fight for socialist policies from a Labour government". (Socialist Press 25/2/81).

Tied to this is a refusal to take on and criticise the "lefts" who are going to lead this new Labour government. This was later made explicit in the joint SO/SP, People's March Supplement: "Prepare a new leadership in the Workers Movement: Prepared to fight for these policies against the right-wing and the Communist Party!". The "socialist policies" referred to above, which included correct calls for direct action, are apparently not under threat from the "lefts" like Benn—but merely from Denis Healey and Gordon McLennan. Such a position actually serves to bolster illusions in the likes of Benn and prepares the way for defeats of the working class as a result of left reformist treachery.

Taken as a whole, together with the absence of the old WSL call for a revolutionary leadership and the absence of a call for Councils of Action as the base for this government, these positions represent a complete surrender to the positions of the ICL and SO.

In the joint Peoples March paper, the WSL dropped all pretense of opposing the formula on the workers' government pioneered by Workers Action:

"All this will require the stepping up of the campaign for democracy in the Labour Party and the trade unions, so that the Labour movement can take

on the capitalist state and impose a government accountable to the movement - a workers' government" Benn and Co become an indispensable bridge in the transition to a workers state. How different from the statement by the WSL-led Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC):

"It is on the construction of such a Trotskyist leadership and not on any ability of the reformists and Stalinists to transform themselves into a revolutionary force that the fate of the struggle for a workers government and the dictatorship of the proletariat must depend" (Socialist Press 207).

Further, the capitulation to Socialist Organiser does not stop at the question of the Labour Party. At the recent National Left Wing Youth Movement Conference, the WSL's youth wing, the Socialist Youth League (SYL), voted against a Workers Power call for a "revolutionary working class youth movement", which they themselves had hitherto called for. They also argued that the ANL, formerly denounced, correctly, as popular frontist, now represented a positive arena for anti-fascist work. On both of these points, they were conceding to the positions of Socialist Organiser, so as to hold together the new alliance.

We are not surprised at these shifts in policy by the WSL leadership. Our paper has polemicalised against the weakness of the WSL's political method on a range of issues. In discussion with them last summer and autumn, we pointed out the instability of their positions, arguing that it was a consequence of their method. A method which failed to understand the interconnection of principles, strategy and tactics. Thus despite repeated proclamations of loyalty to the principles of Trotskyism, the WSL are now uncritically trudging along the opportunist path of political capitulation to left reformism. What lies at the root of this development?

REACTIONARY CASTE

The WSL have always had a clear conception of the nature of the trade union bureaucracy as a betrayer of working class struggles. But the working class, upon which this reactionary caste sits, was presented by the WSL as virtually homogenous - always willing and able to struggle against a bosses offensive. The union bureaucrats, particularly Stalinists, were constantly working to hold back this struggle. All that was needed was a party, armed with Trotsky's 1938 Transitional Programme, to replace the union bureaucracy. While it is true that the bureaucracy will betray or try to betray every workers struggle, it is not true that workers are always struggling and are always defeated only by the action of the bureaucracy. Such a view is thoroughly undialectical. It underestimates the effect of the betrayals on the organisation and capacity to fight of the rank and file. It prevents the WSL from recognising defeats and periods of retreat in the class struggle.

In the April 1980 WSL conference perspectives, they did, for once, recognise the possibility of such set-backs: "Failure to understand that such a period (ie of retreat - WP) is one possibility, where the attacks of the employers and the government appear to be successful, will demoralise our comrades in the way it can also demoralise layers of militant workers". (SP 16/4/80). Yet in the Socialist Press review of British class struggle in 1980 by T. Smith (SP 12/12/80), we are presented with a scenario of undifferentiated betrayal and working class combativity. There is no understanding of the effect of the defeat of the steel strike (April), and TUC passivity (May 14th) on the rank and file. Factors which led to a serious retreat in the working class in the second half of 1980.

But if the analysis was wrong, the prescription was worse. A casual glance through SP during 1974-1979, the period of the last Labour government, will show that much time and energy was spent in exhorting (ie "make") the "lefts" to fight the right-wing leadership of Callaghan-Healey. We have always argued that this "Make the Lefts Fight" position was wrong. It is a sterile schema. It poses left social democracy in power (now graciously dubbed a "workers government") as an inevitable and necessary stage of the class struggle. There is a deeply embedded seed of opportunism in the slogan (which explains why the WSL are willing to concede on the question to the ICL).

It implies that the "lefts" do somehow represent a way forward for the working class. The real point is for revolutionaries to demand of any and all workers leaders that they fight for policies that represent workers interests, irrespective of the positions they occupy. Of course we recognise the possibility of a tactical compromise in which we would call on the working class to put the Labour lefts to the test of action, even to take governmental office. But this tactic does not form part of our programme - we do not raise the demand as a blanket demand always and under all conditions, as part of the struggle for power. To do so can

only imply that the "lefts" somehow represent a qualitative alternative to the right-wing. It spreads illusions - it does not combat them.

The WSL's schema in 1974-979 appeared very hard, accompanied as it was by fierce denunciations of Benn's refusal to challenge Callaghan for the leadership. But under a Labour government the schema was inoperable since the "left" always backed away from a confrontation with the right in order to preserve the Labour government.

The opportunist core of the prescription has emerged since October 1980. Why then? Firstly, the WSL and Socialist Press continued to desperately look for the working class upsurge against the Tories, long after it was clear that a mood of caution and retreat predominated. Revolutionaries recognise that new tactics are required for such a period. But Socialist Press continued to fiddle while Rome burned. Yet the smoke eventually got up their nose. Recognising that the working class was not straining at its leash in the industrial front, and since it must be moving left somewhere, the WSL found that movement in the Labour Party, in Tony Benn's campaign around democratic reforms. Or, as the editor of Socialist Press, John Lister put it: "Telling confirmation of the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist current within the British labour movement was offered by this year's Labour Party conference" (SP No 218 3/10/80).

Since the "left" were now fighting, without the onerous responsibility of keeping a Labour government in office, it is no longer a question of "making" them fight, but of "helping" them fight. Enter ICL stage right.

A DEMORALISED ORGANISATION

The WSL have taken their time coming around to these positions. After all, Brighton in 1979 saw the beginnings of Benn's fight, and in 1980 the WSL still poured scorn on the ICL and Benn. But the WSL is now a demoralised organisation. T. Smith's warnings about "demoralisation of our comrades" have become a reality, in the face of a working class retreat that the WSL are not equipped to understand. The much-vaunted Cowley base is seriously weakened following two years of defeats in BL at the hands of the Tories. The WSL has not grown significantly. Added to this the WSL has been ravaged by two splits to the sectarian Spartacist League, and the leadership feels the possibility of another, on its right wing, by its Labour Party activists who have gazed enviously for years at the Socialist Organiser project.

The ritual proclamations of John Lister fool nobody: "The discussion has been marked throughout by an avoidance on both sides of any attempt to impose a "moratorium" on differences or "agree to disagree" formulae that have marred previous fusion bids and laid the basis for further splits" (SP No 246 14/5/81). Differences over Afghanistan, the ANL, work amongst women, and the EEC, at one time all symptomatic of differences in method, are now glossed over as "tactical", or simply conceded on.

The WSL leadership have already capitulated to the ICL on a number of points without a fight. Even more portentous they have "agreed to disagree" over "trifling" questions like the creation of degenerate workers states after the war, on which an analysis of and programme towards Stalinism depends. Without clarification on such questions, differences, like those over Afghanistan, will occur again.

An unprincipled fusion, psalms of praise for the Labour left, and the call for a "workers government" which will in fact be a "new" left/Benn-led Labour government, are all embraced by the WSL in their bid to avoid "sectarianism"

PROGRAMMATIC CLARITY

The "new" WSL is being founded on an "anti-sectarian" basis. For both organisations this formula is short-hand for: discounting all obstacles and differences between themselves and between them and "the movement of the working class that actually exists, and as it actually exists, here and now in Britain" (SO 30/8/80). These obstacles are not merely organisational. They include "ideological formulae" (ibid), presumably such as the revolutionary programme and party.

Against this, we would insist that the failure, hitherto, to build Trotskyist parties is not because the revolutionary programme is an obstacle to intervention in the class struggle, but because it has either been trampled on by centrists or turned into a lifeless fetish by sectarians.

The starting point for any regroupment of revolutionaries, therefore, is the question of programmatic clarity, as the basis for revolutionary intervention in the class struggle. Trotsky made clear the essential relationship of these two things:

"How many times have we met a smug centrist who reckons himself a "realist" merely because he sets out to swim without any ideological baggage whatever, and is tossed by every vagrant current. He is unable to understand that principles are not dead ballast but a life-line for a revolutionary swimmer" (p154 Writings 1935-1936).

In short, the WSL leadership, tired and demoralised, are in the process of "junking Trotskyism" as they accuse the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of doing. They are displaying a lightminded contempt for their membership who they hope will not remember the polemics or the lessons they tried to teach the IMG about "spurious unity".

To those in the ranks of both organisations who are alarmed, we say:

Examine your past positions! Demand an honest accounting of your leadership! Do not let them take you along the road of political liquidation in silence! ■

CENTRISM AND DEMOCRACY

THE SHARP RIGHT turn in the Labour Party leadership reflects a serious slump in membership from 358,950 in 1980 to 303,953 in 1981.

The most optimistic interpretation Labour Weekly can put on the figures is a real loss of 21,500 or 6% over the year.

The long projected influx of aroused militants has not materialised. In fact the decline in the level of class struggle as measured in strike figures and union membership is reflected also in the exit from the Labour Party. Hence the renewed offensive of the Right and the disarray and retreat of the Left.

But this retreat is reflected not only in the official or 'legitimate left' but also in the ranks of the 'hard' or 'revolutionary' left. Socialist Organiser's chief ideologue John O'Mahoney, under pressure from the Right offensive, has behaved like a cuttle-fish - he has spilled gallons of ink hoping to beat a retreat in the murky waters of the debate over "Socialism and Democracy".

Having spent the last three years attempting to 'organise' Benn's socialist bandwagon, John O'Mahoney has adapted Trotskyism in much the same way as Kautsky once adapted Marxism.

His long-running series "Socialism and Democracy" should be reprinted as a pamphlet and thoroughly studied as a prime example of the inner collapse of the 'Trotskyism' of the 1970s.

O'Mahoney manages to discuss the question of Socialism and Democracy without once raising the central issue of the class character of the state. On the basis of private ownership of the great bulk of the means of production arises a machinery of state, a permanent unelected bureaucracy, judiciary, police force and army. The senior civil servants, judges, police chiefs, generals are all flesh of the flesh of the industrialists, bankers, landowners that constitute our ruling class. This is the bourgeoisie and parliament belongs to it.

Tony Benn is quite wrong when he claims the labour movement created democracy. In reply a Guardian writer once wittily quipped "that would be the Athenian Labour Party." Ancient democracy was a minority slave owners democracy. There was no democracy at all for the majority of the population. Bourgeois democracy is wage-slave exploiters' democracy. It came into being as a weapon against the feudal landowners and their King. With its property qualification and its exclusion of peers it was the 'democracy' of the gentleman farmers and the city merchants. Peasants, artisans, the poor were all excluded from this democracy.

From 1867 the function of Parliament began to change by a series of stages - 1867, 1888, 1918, 1928, 1947 - into an instrument for legitimizing and concealing the real power of the bourgeoisie. For the bourgeoisie, Parliament's function now is to convince the working class and lower middle class that they have endorsed the actions of the government which directs the state machinery.

On the basis of a five yearly vote, supposedly on the basis of a manifesto but more realistically on the basis of TV commercials, posters and the popular press, each individual citizen is supposed to have made a free choice. It is this formal equality in the right to vote and the 'omnipotence' of a parliamentary majority that makes parliament seem so tempting a vehicle for any kind of social change including the overthrow of capitalism.

But this formal aspect of democracy is completely hollow. As long as a government or a parliamentary majority keeps within the guidelines of the defence of capitalist property the machinery of state 'obeys' its instructions more or less. Should a parliamentary majority be elected that seriously attempted to attack capitalist property in its vitals, or even failed to act as the agent of the bosses in resisting an extra-parliamentary working class offensive, then - parliament or no parliament - the military bureaucratic machine would suddenly cease to be turned by its Parliamentary handle.

Of course matters rarely come this far. Capitalism has its means of preventing 'radical' solutions being endorsed by its democracy. Trotsky understood this apparatus of force and fraud very well: "The capitalist bourgeois calculates: while I have in my hands lands, factories, workshops, banks; while I possess newspapers, universities, schools; while - and this is the most important of all - I retain control of the army; the apparatus of democracy, however you reconstruct it, will remain obedient to my will. I subordinate to my interests spiritually the stupid, conservative, characterless middle class, just as it is subjected to me materially. I oppress and will oppress its imagination by the gigantic scale of my buildings, my transactions, my plans and my crimes. For moments when it is dissatisfied and murmurs, I have created scores of safety valves and lightning conductors.

At the right moment I will bring into existence opposition parties, which will disappear tomorrow, but which today accomplish their mission by affording the possibility of the lower middle class expressing their indignation without hurt therefrom for capitalism. I shall hold the masses of the people, under cover of compulsory general education, on the verge of complete

ignorance, giving them no opportunity of rising above the level which my experts in spiritual slavery consider safe. I will corrupt, deceive, and terrorise either the more privileged or the more backward of the proletariat itself. By means of these measures I shall not allow the vanguard of the working class to gain the ear of the majority of the working class, while the necessary weapons of mastery and terrorism remain in my hands" ("Terrorism and Communism")

In case anyone should think that democracy and dictatorship are incompatible opposites, they should muse upon the dictatorial methods imposed during the two World Wars by the governments 'defending democracy'. Suspension of elections and legal rights (habeus corpus etc), suspension of normal parliamentary supervision and rule by 'orders in council', etc., censorship, internment without trial, arrest and imprisonment of revolutionaries, pacifists etc.

In fact bourgeois democracy is always in the last analysis, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' ie the forcible, arbitrary defence of private property against the working class or against rival capitalist states.

Just so with a workers state, with a society attempting to create socialism. It too will be a dictatorship and a democracy. A dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, suppressing its every move of resistance, as it has always and everywhere bloodily suppressed the working class revolts. A workers democracy: wider, more responsive, freer than any parliamentary system.

Within the periods of capitalism's growth and relative stability, within successful world dominant countries like Great Britain and the United States, the bourgeoisie could maintain its rule behind the facade of 'parliamentary democracy'. It paid a price in secondary concessions to the working class in terms of wages and social welfare.

Parliament, with its associated paraphernalia of committees, commissions, boards and agencies, became a refined mechanism of corruption. Here the workers' leaders 'parleyed' with the representatives of the bosses. They put forward the partial or immediate interests of the workers with more or less sincerity and vigour.

The bosses, of course, did not willingly concede crumbs from their table of their profits. Working class pressure and struggle were the motor force behind each concession. Reforms, as Rosa Luxemburg astutely observed, are a by-product of revolution. The periods of considerable social reform, 1906-11, 1918-20, 1945-48 were, on a European scale, periods of revolution and mass struggle when the revolutionary sword of Damocles hung over capitalism's head. Such reforms, as those enacted by Labour in 1974-75, were carried not on Labour's slender majority in the House of Commons but on the shoulders of the miners and dockers who caught Heath and the bosses totally unprepared in 1972 and 1974.

Revolutionary Marxists can affirm on the basis of the last sixty years that not a single Labour government has made any attempt to settle accounts with capitalism. The famed parliamentary or democratic road to Socialism has proved its bankruptcy both as a road to Socialism and as a means of permanently and progressively ameliorating the worst features of capitalism.

In his Socialist Organiser articles, the first three of which we discussed in our last issue, O'Mahoney seeks to bowdlerise Trotskyism and, consequently, the programme of Marx and Lenin, in a right-centrist manner. Firstly he wants to express the revolutionary programme as an 'extension' of existing parliamentary democracy. Why? He wants to castigate Foot and company for worshipping and fetishising existing repulsive parliamentary democracy, 'the backside of bourgeois democracy' whereas he wants to form a political bloc with Benn on the basis of his programme of extending democracy (i.e. its, "shining face"). "Thus Marxists have much in common (How much? What? - WP) with people in the Labour Movement whose best notion of democracy is parliamentary democracy. We can agree to fight to rejuvenate the existing system, we could agree to defend it with guns against, for example, a military coup." (SO 4.2.82.)

O'Mahoney explains that there have been two, "distinct but interwoven" attitudes to parliamentary democracy in the Labour Movement. One, "was and is ardent championing of parliamentary democracy and democratic liberties" of, "reshaping the existing parliamentary system". The other is, "the drive to create new, different, specifically working class organs of democracy - either by converting the old forms for the purpose, or by establishing completely new ones". An intermediate position, O'Mahoney claims, was to, "graft on" to parliament, "features of the workers' council system." Our zealous epigone then informs us, "In 1934, Trotsky suggested a united front with reformist workers in France for a similar programme."

To bolster this claim a sizeable quotation from Trotsky's Action Programme for France is included as a forepiece to the concluding article of the series. The quotation, we are told, expresses the attitude of Marxists to, "deepen, develop and preserve democracy".

First of all the Marxist attitude to bourgeois democracy could never be expressed in a necessarily episodic and tactical bloc. Moreover, the creation of a tactical bloc (united front) with reformist workers, "democratic socialists" and their leaders, in Trotsky's specific action programme is predicated on the fact that the ruling class is set upon the, "suppression of all reforms! Suppression of the democratic regime" via Fascism.

FALSIFYING TROTSKY'S ACTION PROGRAMME

The O'Mahoney article grossly distorts this quotation by obscuring the political context of the united front to defend democracy - eliding the defence against Fascist and Bonapartist attack with a general commitment to, "deepen, develop and preserve" 'democracy' 'in general'. Marxists certainly defend all democratic rights and the democratic constitutional forms themselves against fascist or Bonapartist assault. But this implies no general or permanent programme of democratic development.

The Transitional Programme itself made this clear, "Of course, this does not mean that the Fourth International rejects democratic slogans as a means of mobilising the masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role. But the formulas of democracy (freedom of the press, right to unionise etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie's agents (Spain!!)".

Perhaps this is in contrast to the Action Programme of 1934? Not a bit. The two sections preceding the one quoted by O'Mahoney are entitled, "Down with the Bourgeois 'Authoritative' State! For Workers' and Peasants' Power!" and "The Struggle for the Workers' and Peasants' Commune!". Perhaps these are some sort of 'deepening' of parliamentary democracy? Not at all. The essence of the former is that, "the task is to replace the capitalist state ... by the workers' and peasants' proletarian state." The conclusion of the latter is that this commune will be erected on the basis of "organs of power of the workers and peasants".

DOCTORING THE QUOTES

In fact O'Mahoney has been obliged to trim his quote. The sentence preceding it, the opening sentence of the whole section, "For a Single Assembly", declares, "We are, thus, firm partisans of a Workers' and Peasants' State which will take the power from the exploiters. To win the majority of our working class allies to this programme is our primary aim." This alone makes it clear that no, "grafting on" of soviets to deepen bourgeois democracy is envisaged. Certainly it is not envisaged that the "democratic socialists" will, or can, carry through such a misbegotten programme.

O'Mahoney helps obscure this fact by a doctoring of the quotation. Between the sixth and seventh paragraphs of the Socialist Organiser version is omitted a paragraph which says, "If during the course of the implacable struggle against the enemy, the party of 'democratic' socialism (SFIO), from which we are separated by irreconcilable differences in doctrine and method, were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be ready to defend an SFIO government against the bourgeoisie."

Furthermore Trotsky called on reformist workers to draw inspiration for the defence of democracy not from the Third Republic but from the Convention of 1793. This was not a call to deepen and extend constitutional provisions but to defend vigorously and ruthlessly 'the people' against reactionary attack.

JACOBINISM AND PARLIAMENTARIANISM

What were the methods of 1793? The 'levee en masse' ie the arming of the sans culottes and the peasants for the defence of the revolution, the institution of the Committee of Public Safety and the Terror against the agents of feudal reaction (including those who claimed to be revolutionaries). The methods of 1793 included the suspension of the constitution! In short they add up to what is known to history as the Jacobin dictatorship. What were the methods of the Third Republic? Peaceful Parliamentarianism, endless speeches in parliament. Coalitions with the liberal bourgeois parties and the socialists in the name of blocking reaction. Trotsky is saying to the reformist workers threatened by Fascist dictatorship - by all means 'defend democracy' but you will need revolutionary means to do so.

If you wish to take governmental power you will have to strike at bourgeois counter-revolution as ruthlessly as the Jacobins did, in order to survive. In every step towards doing this you will have our support. Trotsky does not hide that such a situation would pose both the need for, and the possibility of, transforming such a government into the proletarian dictatorship. It is clear from this that the methods of Tony Benn are those of the "Third Republic". It is clear too that John O'Mahoney's are nearer Benn's than Robespierre's or Trotsky's.

For Trotsky then there is not programmatic identity with the French reformist party, only a proposal for a united front with it against a fascist attack. O'Mahoney is motivated by completely opposed purposes. He has no need to offer the LP a united front to defend it against fascist attack. He offers to refine the Marxist programme of the proletarian dictatorship (democracy for the workers via soviets; repression of the counter-revolution - its parties, press, generals, fascist bands) into Benn's programme of developing democracy. Certainly O'Mahoney thinks that Benn wants to develop it 'very inadequately'. He thinks workers' democracy is the ultimate development or 'grafting on'. But lest this put him on the wrong side of an irreconcilable difference of doctrine and method, he makes it clear that he advocates the strictest constitutionality by arguing with - those on the Right of the Labour Movement who insist (I think rightly) that a socialist government should be willing to accept its own dismissal by a majority of the electorate (in Britain anyway, that would be a clear working class majority)'

The struggle between classes for power is thus transformed into the small change of electioneering. A 'socialist government', that is a government carrying through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is envisaged as bowing gracefully out on a majority vote in parliamentary elections. This ludicrous scenario is the true and deserved outcome of O'Mahoney's servile accommodation to Bennery. He, or more importantly, his readers, no longer know the difference between reform and revolution, between parliamentary and soviet power, and between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is no wonder that in his eagerness to embrace 'democratic socialism' he can't find words bad enough to distance himself from Stalinism. We are told that the Stalinist bureaucrats have "all the worst features of historic ruling classes" with none of their 'historic virtues' and that the 'only connection' that they have with socialism is that of 'murdered to victim'. O'Mahoney claims that Trotskyists kill the workers' revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy 'political' for technical reasons! In the face of Foot's deeply chauvinist attacks on the Soviet Union, the 'Trotskyist' O'Mahoney tries to hide behind phrases which hide any estimate of the class nature of the Soviet state and the duty of revolutionaries to unconditionally defend it against attack by imperialism.

Many supporters of Socialist Organiser must be deeply embarrassed at O'Mahoney's excursion into the realms of democracy. Some doubtless object on the good old principle that "one does not say such things; one does them". Socialist Organiser's practice of uncritical Bennery is long established. But a disjunction between theory and practice is a permanent danger when it may be seized on by the witch-hunters looking for 'juicy' quotes. Sooner or later theory had to be lowered to the level of practice. We doubt however that lowering the banner of Trotskyism will ward off the enemy. For SO to strike its colours, along with all the other 'left' forces in the party will in fact encourage the Right to press home the attack. It will not strengthen their bloc with Benn. He is already tottering under the impact of the secret treaty of Bishop's Stortford.

In the face of the 'democratic' witch-hunters, the principled position of revolutionaries including the supporters and sympathisers of Workers Power within the Labour Party must be as follows: We criticise sincere reformist because they desire an end to capitalism, yet will not take the only means available to achieve it. Instead they wish to tie the working class to the parliamentary form of the bourgeoisie's rule. But the choice arises in every serious struggle for socialism between parliamentary forms or workers' rule, between workers' democracy or bourgeois dictatorship.

The Paris Commune stood against the Versailles National Assembly; the Congress of Soviets against the Constituent Assembly; the Berlin workers against the Weimar Assembly. Nor do such confrontations lie in the past. In 1973 in Chile and in 1975 in Portugal parliament or a constitutional assembly became a rallying point for all those forces bent on bloody dictatorship over the working class. The 'peaceful' continuity of British parliamentarianism (if one ignores the anti-union acts and a myriad of vicious anti-working class measures) may have lulled many workers into belief that parliament and democracy are weapons in our arsenal. It is the duty of Marxists to warn them sharply of the fatal error of this assumption. ■