

Workers Press

Saturday 9 July

WEEKLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

20p Number 122

Who Fears the Truth?

An Open Letter to members and ex-members of the Communist Party

The lie serves as the fundamental ideological cement of the bureaucracy. The more irreconcilable becomes the contradiction between the bureaucracy and the people, all the ruder becomes the lie, all the more brazenly is it converted into criminal falsification and judicial frame-up.' (Leon Trotsky)

NO SERIOUS communist can doubt that developments in the Soviet Union over the last few weeks have opened up a completely new situation in the international labour movement.

Profound questions about the past, present and future of the movement are at stake.

Gorbachev speaks, for instance, about the need to restore democracy in the Soviet Union.

But this leaves unanswered a question that is on the minds of tens of thousands of Soviet workers and intellectuals: which forces were responsible for the destruction of the soviets and who fought against those who imposed a violent dictatorship on the Soviet people?

Under enormous pressure, Gorbachev has been forced to rehabilitate many leaders of the 1917 revolution - including Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek and Piatakov. All have now been declared innocent of the vile crimes that Stalin and his terrorist gangsters found them guilty of.

The one outstanding name still to be politically rehabilitated is that of Leon Trotsky.

Yet it was Trotsky - founder of the Red Army and second only to Lenin as leader of the October Revolution - who, from the time of Lenin's death in 1924, led the political and theoretical fight against Stalin and the increasingly counter-revolutionary bureaucracy that Stalin came to represent.

If Stalinism was responsible for such vile revisions of communist theory and practice is it possible to remain silent about the Bolshevik, who after Lenin's

by Geoff Pilling

death, led the fight against Stalinism?

Although absent from the infamous Moscow Trials, Trotsky was the main accused.

This must make every serious communist wonder: why is Trotsky still excluded from the list of political rehabilitations?

As you will be aware, calls for the political rehabilitation of Trotsky have been heard in the Soviet Union, most recently from Dr Afanaseyev, a delegate from the Moscow Party to the recently concluded 19th Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

But what does this demand for Trotsky's rehabilitation mean?

From the early 1920s onwards, Trotsky led the fight against Stalin's 'theory' - in fact, Bukharin's 'theory' - of socialism in one country.

Trotsky argued that socialism could only be established on an international scale, that the 'theory' of socialism in one country was a reactionary utopia which in practice boiled down to the idea that 'socialism' could exist in one country and capitalism everywhere else.

Was this simply an abstract

doctrinal dispute between Stalin and Trotsky? It was nothing of the kind.

For the implication of the 'theory' of socialism in one country was the idea that the Soviet Union had to co-exist peacefully with capitalism.

This still remains the doctrine of the rulers of the Soviet Union. It is at work in southern Africa today, where Gorbachev is preparing a deal with the Botha regime that will involve the sacrifice of Angola to imperialism and the betrayal of the South African working class.

It is not enough merely to acknowledge that Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Trotsky and others were not agents of imperialism, were not guilty of the preposterous charges laid against them at the infamous Moscow trials of the 1930s.

That would be an opportunist evasion of the issues.

Two questions arise for all communists, whatever views they may have taken in the past.

1. Why was Stalin obliged to carry out the state murder of virtually the entire leadership of the Bolshevik party on completely spurious charges? It is no longer possible to avoid this profound historical issue by hiding behind the
(Cont page 3)



Photographic falsification of history by Stalin

Workers Press

Where has he been?

HARD ON the heels of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher comes Tony Benn to join the growing band of admirers of Gorbachev.

"In that sense the 1988 Revolution could have as profound an effect on the fate of the world, as did its forerunner in 1917, giving hopes to millions, especially in the Third World" he told readers of 'The Guardian' (who else?) last week.

It should be pointed out that Benn, candidate for the leadership of the Labour Party, represents a tendency that has fought without respite against the 1917 Revolution.

So, when speaking of the forces that made Stalin's tyranny possible, whether they "had anything to do with Marxist theory" we know only too well what answer Benn will give. That the brutality of Stalinism flowed organicaloly out of the Bolshevism of Lenin has long been accepted as a matter of course by social democracy.

It was social democracy that betrayed the post-1918 wave of revolutionary struggles throughout Europe, condemned the Soviet Union to isolation and thereby gave a powerful impetus to the emergence of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Benn's comments on the historical questions that have now been raised to the fore in the Soviet Union are equally revealing:

"The Stalin era will now be re-examined in meticulous detail, in Russia itself, and we shall then learn what made his tyranny possible," he informed his 'Guardian' readers.

We must ask Benn: where have you been all these years? Don't you know that there has been a struggle in progress for decades in the British and international working class movement about what you chose to call the "Stalin era"?

From the 1920s onwards Trotsky and his followers in the Left Opposition fought to expose to the world labour movement the growth of a parasitic bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Trotsky was the chief defendant at the Moscow Trials and again it was the movement he led that exposed the nature of those infamous Trials.

The butchery of the entire Bolshevik Party leadership at the hands of Stalin's gangsters was the outcome of the spurious theory that socialism could be built in the Soviet Union and that while it was being built it was necessary to co-exist peacefully with capitalism.

In the name of this theory Stalinism was responsible for betrayal after betrayal of the international working class: from Spain in the 1930s down to today in southern Africa.

Benn tells us that "the need for change in Russia has, of course, long been discussed there in private. My own diaries written during my visits, as a minister and an individual over the last 28 years, record many talks that took place with ministers, and officials, about what form those changes might take."

In other words, Benn only refers (in the vaguest terms it should be stressed) to the crimes of the past once the Stalinist bureaucracy has given him permission to do so.

Benn looks forward to the restoration of parliamentary democracy in the Soviet Union. "There is absolutely no reason why parliamentary democracy could not operate in a socialist society."

In his opposition to Soviet democracy he is at one with Gorbachev. The latter has spoken about the need for "greater democracy" in Russia but for obvious reasons is bitterly opposed to the restoration of power to the Soviets.

His latest proposals would place top party chiefs in charge of 'soviets'. This is the very opposite of soviet democracy, the re-founding of which requires the driving out of the bureaucracy from the soviets.

If Benn now supports Gorbachev it is for one reason alone: that he recognises in him a fellow anti-Bolshevik.

WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND In so far £3228.80

THESE are great days for the Fourth International. The Stalinist bureaucracy's divisions are unprecedented as it faces an acute crisis of the Soviet economy and a working class which is placing increasingly impossible demands on it.

Here lies the source of the deep divisions in a leadership which under Stalin appeared monolithic.

A measure of the depth of the crisis within the bureaucracy can be judged by the remarks of Boris Yeltsin, former Moscow Party chief, speaking at the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party last October:

"It is difficult for me to explain to the factory worker, why in the 70th year of his political power, he is obliged to queue for sausages which contain more starch than meat, while on our tables there is sturgeon, caviare and all kinds of delicacies obtained easily in a place where he is prevented from going..."

"How can I explain to the old fighters, to those who took part in the Civil War, whose survivors we can count on our fingers?"

"Have you seen the lists of foods made up by those who organise the celebrations? What should I say when they call this the remains of a lord's banquet?..."

"These are the people who won power at the cost of their lives and entrusted us with it?"

It is Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Fourth International that haunts Gorbachev and the bureaucracy as a whole. Including its Boris Yeltsins. A series of fundamental questions about the history of the communist movement and its degeneration in the years following 1917 have now been opened up. No force is going to put the genie back into the bottle.

Although small in numbers, we have the greatest responsibilities. We are called upon to explain to a new generation of workers and students the reasons for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the path along which it will be re-generated: by the political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy and restore Soviet democracy.

We have ambitious plans to make Trotsky's works available to the awakening Soviet working class. We intend to give Workers Press readers a first hand account of the firmest now gripping the Soviet Union.

But this requires money. We ask all our readers, old and new, to give as generously as they can to boost our Fund and make these plans reality. A great deal now depends on the response of you our readers. Do not let us down. Post all donations to:

WRP 21-25 Beehive Place London SW9 7QS

AS I SEE IT...



BY TOM OWEN

Street fighting

The ex-popular front poet, W.H. Auden, writing in the flush of his conversion to Christianity, described the 1930s as a 'dishonest' decade.

If all we had to judge the 1960's by was Tariq Ali's 'Street Fighting Years,' we would have to declare that this was a 'fatuous' decade. In fact, the events covered by Ali's presumptuous and premature autobiography are far from fatuous. We saw a revolutionary crisis in France, the beginning of the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam, the shaking of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia and the upsurge of the nationalist working class in the north of Ireland. (The latter is significant only by its absence in Ali's book).

The book's title 'Street Fighting Years' is as fatuous as the 'Black Dwarf' article 'What Fred (Engels) and Mick Jagger have to say about street fighting.'

It's not that Ali hasn't demonstrated political courage. I've seen him speak in Sheffield in the face of death threats from fascists and Muslim

fundamentalists.

My objections to him are deeply political. I find that his posturing as spokesman for my generation as a burnt out revolutionary highly objectionable.

The book begins ambitiously, like a parody of a genuine revolutionary's memories, with his early politicisation in Pakistan as a youth (I found these 'preludes' the most interesting part of the book). 'Those whom the Gods wish to destroy they first send to Oxford.' There, in the political kindergarten of the ruling class, the Oxford Union, he rose to pre-eminence as a nice-mannered enfant terrible. From thence he was launched like a political debutante into society.

And from here the book becomes a Who's Who of the radical and not so radical chic of the 1960's. Kenneth Tynan, Marlon Brando, Perry Anderson, Bertrand Russell, John Lennon, Mick Jagger are examples from the charmed and conceited coterie that surround him. The force that catapults him to fame and brings him and others to public attention is the Vietnamese Revolution. In fact all Ali's revolutions are fought by proxy or in his imagination. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign provided the single significant experience of his political life.

It was this political activity that sent him on his globe-trotting, touring the world revolution - Vietnam, Cambodia, Czechoslovakia, Latin America. The key to his politics of the period is his recruitment to 'The Week' group in England and the International Secretariat of the Fourth International. (The book is dedicated to Ernest Mandel.)

Every political leadership of every struggle: French libertarian

students, Dubcek, Stalinism, nationalism, are seen as 'sui generis' revolutionary. As these movements subsided, were defeated or sold out, all we are given of them is a nostalgic and uncritical gloss. Any attempt to construct independent working class leadership against Stalinism, nationalism and reformism provokes extreme hostility.

This is why Ali reserves his venom for the Socialist Labour League. 'For all their ideological differences the sort of members they attracted were people who were basically infused with a sense of masochism and or guilt...A self-isolating sectarianism became part of the pseudo-revolutionary therapy.'

He cannot understand why 'intelligent' people such as Cliff Slaughter and Peter Fryer (he gets his dates wrong here) could be involved in such a madness.

Whatever our state of mind at the time and whatever errors we made under the Healy leadership, Ali still cannot grasp our fundamental differences with the VSC and revisionism. It was not necessarily the issue of 'protest politics' but that of the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism. Not having grasped this, Ali is able to pin such hopes on Gorbachev, who he sees as a man on a white horse, a 'powerful spectre beginning to haunt the European powers.'

Tariq Ali left the International Secretariat because he could not face another round of faction fights and splits. His move to the right has not been as spectacular as some. Mandel's judgement of him and many like him is 'Your generation does not have our stamina.'

He should know. He was responsible for training a fair number of them.

continued from page 1

empty doctrine of the 'cult of the individual'. This was the line of Khrushchev in 1956. But it won't wash any longer.

It was not a question that Stalin and his supporters made a few mistakes, that there were a few 'spots on the sun', as R. Palme Dutt put it in 'Labour Monthly' in 1956,

Great historical events - in this case the degeneration of the first proletarian revolution in history - cannot be explained in terms of the weaknesses of individuals.

Every communist knows that such an explanation has nothing in common with Marxism.

2. A serious question about the current relevance of the struggle against the theory of socialism in one country and peaceful

co-existence is now on the agenda and cannot be avoided.

Gorbachev may be in favour of glasnost and perestroika. But he remains tied to the counter-revolutionary notion of peaceful co-existence, the notion that capitalism can continue to live side by side with the Soviet Union. We repeat: what is now demanded is an objective examination of the entire history of the communist movement from 1917 onwards.

This issue goes far beyond the name of Trotsky as an individual. The role of every leader, their strengths and weaknesses, must be honestly examined and the lessons of this history drawn for the struggles of today.

History cannot be cheated. It is clear that there are those in the Soviet Union who still imagine that history can be dipped into

selectively to suit their current purposes.

This undoubtedly lies behind the systematic boost being given to Bukharin. We in no way equate Bukharin with Stalin. But it was Bukharin, an outstanding Bolshevik, who was the real theoretician behind Stalin, who led the fight to defeat the Left Opposition inside the Communist International.

We repeat: what is now demanded is an objective history of the course of the communist movement from 1917 onwards. The qualities of every leader - Bukharin and Trotsky included - must be examined soberly and honestly.

We are prepared to join in this task with anyone who considers himself or herself to be a communist.

The entire movement can only gain from such a discussion.

LETTERS

Turkish Dictator

THE VISIT to Britain of the Turkish dictator Evren should be met with fierce resistance. Such resistance led to the cancellation of his proposed visit to West Germany.

The Turkish community in Britain have organised a campaign bringing a fresh unity to a wide range of Turkish political groups. Our task is to unite the labour movement with them.

What is happening in Turkey is happening here - vicious attacks on the working class, prisons full of political prisoners and methods of repression and torture against the Republican communities in the six counties of Ireland which are the envy of the fascist world.

Britain, by entertaining the likes of Evren and Botha and by training torturers from Chile, El Salvador and Turkey confirms its place among the world's most reactionary governments. Here reaction is masked by a veneer of liberal-democracy, a docile opposition and a powerful ideology that enables Thatcher to pursue the same road as the fascists without resorting to the methods being employed in Ireland.

But how long before these methods are used here? It is only a matter of time before the attacks on the working class will meet with a spontaneous response. Our task as a revolutionary party is to lead this response and we should be building now. As part of that building we should be joining with our Turkish comrades in opposing this visit. This is not "protest politics" but the politics of Bolshevism. By linking the struggles of the British, Irish and Turkish people we are being truly internationalist.

This is the only way to unite the working class and its organised movement.

Pat Brady, Tower Hamlets

Irish Trial

HELICOPTERS, police gunmen, blaring sirens and flashing lights heralded the start of another Irish trial at the Old Bailey on Tuesday, 7 June.

All the paraphernalia of state security were on display outside the court while inside, after a body search, I was told by an usher that the trial of "the IRA men" was in No.1 court.

Under these circumstances it was hardly likely that the two men from Belfast, Patrick (Paddy) McLaughlin and Liam McCotter, charged with conspiracy to cause explosions, would receive a fair trial. And so it transpired.

The prosecution case depended on a positive identification of the defendants as the two men who collected and buried the arms and explosives.

The police evidence was inconclusive and that of the two main police witnesses almost totally contradictory.

The jury were so sceptical about these witnesses that they returned three times for guidance from the judge during their deliberations.

The judge did his job for his class, emphasising the weaknesses in the

defence story and playing down the contradictions in the police evidence. The verdict...guilty. 20 years for Paddy McLaughlin and 17 for Liam McCotter. These sentences confirm the hypocrisy of British rule in Ireland. A British soldier can be released after serving two years of a life sentence for the murder of an Irishman while Irishmen are given vicious sentences for conspiracy.

McLaughlin and McCotter join the long list

of Irishmen and women who have forfeited their freedom either because they dared to challenge British imperialism's rule in Ireland, or because, like the Birmingham Six or Guildford Four, they were Irish and in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The very least that socialists in this country should demand is that these men and women be allowed to serve their sentences in Ireland.

John Hackett

WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Please send me information about the
Workers Revolutionary Party.

Name date

Address

Trade Union Age (if under 21)

SEND TO:

Secretary to the Central Committee
PO Box 735, London SW9
7QS

WORKERS PRESS Subscription rates

	10wks	50wks
Inland	£3.50	£17.00
World surface	£5.00	£24.00
Europe inc. Eire	£5.30	£24.50
Near East etc	£4.70	£21.50
USA, Central & S. America India	£5.10	£23.50
Australasia, Japan	£5.40	£25.00

Danger: Provocateurs at work!

by Cliff Slaughter

ON 1 JULY, at Leeds Crown Court, five young men received prison sentences after having been found guilty of 'conspiracy' to cause affrays in and around football matches in the 1986-87 season.

They were: Patrick Slaughter, David Brown, and Paul Milner, each four years; Martin Pickard, two-and-a-half years; Nigel Stephenson (17), 15 months Youth Custody.

After Judge Crabtree had announced his verdicts (I am the father of Patrick Slaughter), I stood up in court and declared: 'You have sent these men down solely on the word of a gang of agents provocateurs and "Tippex" experts. If what I am saying is contempt of court, that is because this court deserves only contempt'.

'Agents provocateurs' refers to the four undercover policemen in 'Operation Wild Boar'. Their daily notebooks and court statements incriminating the accused were unsupported by any other evidence whatsoever - save police notes of 'interviews' with Brown, Milner, Pickard and Stephenson.

The judge declared to the court that there had been no serious incidents of any violence, no complaints by the public, and no use of weapons. He knew that only one arrest was made at the principal incidents in which these men were alleged to be involved - and the man arrested was one of the undercover policemen!

However, the judge explained that he must, in sentencing, do something about the damage done by football hooliganism to the reputation of Britain abroad and to British sport, and that he must not give sentences which other football supporters would 'laugh at'.

One of the police allegations against Slaughter was that he urged others to attack a group of black youths in Balham, and on this basis the judge referred to Slaughter's having urged others to 'batter black youths'. This is an extract from a letter I wrote to the independent 'Leeds Other Paper' after the trial: "One or two points on our two-page report on Operation Game Pig (the Leeds United supporters' case): Not only does Patrick Slaughter 'strongly deny' that he attacked black youths in Balham;

he brought a succession of witnesses to the stand who completely discredited the police account of the incident. Even more important is that the Yorkshire Evening Post, in an interview with Sergeant Fickling, leader of the 'undercover' team, two days after the Guilty verdicts, wrote: 'Sergeant Fickling relived the moment when he was in a pub with a large crowd of Leeds supporters - and they were drawn into an ambush by a gang of coloured youths.'

'Now then! I want to say most strongly that my son has been deprived of his liberty, and slandered as a racist, by reason of evidence given under oath by Fickling and others to the effect that he conspired to attack these same 'coloured youths'! Yet now he says publicly that the Leeds men were drawn into an ambush! The very opposite of what he said in court. . . You say 'What part organised violence and organised racism plays in this violence has not been totally answered by this trial.' This implies that it has in part been answered. It has not. You surely should say: no evidence whatsoever of organised racism has been produced.

'An essential point. The judge made it clear that by not taking the witness stand, nine of those accused were in his opinion 'bottling out'. Not to appear on the stand is a right. If the exercise of that right is to be used to discredit the accused, that amounts to a deadly serious attack on hard-won democratic rights.

'The prosecution case was based entirely on police statements. Such other witnesses as they called did not corroborate their allegations, and one of them, called against Patrick Slaughter, flatly contradicted them.'

On the question of 'organised racism', Slaughter's counsel asked the police what steps they had taken, in planning and carrying out their investigation, to infiltrate or look into the National Front, who regularly sell their fascist papers outside every Leeds United match (and hardly require an 'undercover operation' to be discovered). The answer given was: they never even considered the matter.

This has not prevented one despicable little group of provocateurs - this time political provocateurs - calling themselves, for no conceivable good reason, the

International Communist Party, from slandering Patrick Slaughter as a racist and a fascist.

No doubt they consider the police and the judiciary as the right people to recognise and punish fascists and racists. The sick representatives of this group, who sat through most of the court proceedings noting down police evidence with the appetites of hungry jackals, heard the police officers refer to 'tribal-like grunting noises' from Leeds fans, but were apparently unable to recognise these as the words of racist policemen.

Neither are they able to recognise the furore against football hooliganism for what it is - a 'law and order' assault by the state machine and the government, orchestrated by Thatcher and the gutter press, against the youth and the working class. So blinded are they by sectarian hate of the WRP that they did not notice that Patrick Slaughter was convicted by means of the same conspiracy law which sent down Des Warren after the builders' strike and dozens of Irish Republican fighters.

It would not be worth wasting space on these 'ICP' provocateurs if it was not necessary for us to warn readers against being provoked by them. They hope that their slanders - a substitute for politics - will bring about a physical confrontation. They will be disappointed.

Patrick Slaughter has already told them to their face how he despises them as 'the lowest of the low' for their cynical and inhuman disregard of his plight in pursuit of their hate campaign against the WRP.

During the four months he has already spent in Armley Jail, one of them awaiting sentence, Patrick Slaughter has received many messages of support and solidarity from comrades and friends in Britain and internationally. He wishes to thank them all and to return his solidarity with their struggles.

Patrick Slaughter made a personal statement before sentence, expressing his anger and frustration at the police allegation that he was a racist. He had always abhorred all racism and bigotry. He had never used, and could not use, the word 'nigger' attributed to him by the police. He and his friends were well known among Leeds United supporters and others as consistent and outspoken opponents of racism and the National Front.

Why Britain Needs Black History

Frank Girling reviews Peter Fryer's latest book, "Black People in the British Empire" which has just been published.

PETER FRYER's "Black People in the British Empire" is an important contribution to the struggles of oppressed peoples everywhere and especially those who live in this "Great" Britain, which is still "theirs", and which will one day be "ours".

He calls for the teaching of Black history in schools. But strangely he does not discuss what history is and why it is important.

The Tories are hell-bent on imposing a National Curriculum on the state schools so as to paste the label "history" on their patriotic, racist doctrines. But there can be no place for monopolies in the quest for knowledge.

Analysis and discussion which characterise real history will show that their reconstructions and interpretations of the past are unacceptable.

In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, Margaret Thatcher and her gangs deny that black people in Britain are continually placed at a disadvantage.

They don't want Black History to be taught in schools. They don't want the story told of how Britain became wealthy: through trading in slaves and sucking in the wealth of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America.

They are the beneficiaries of that history.

In 1979, before she became Prime Minister, Thatcher wrote in a pamphlet published by the big business group, Centre for Policy studies, "a whole generation has been brought up to misunderstand

and denigrate our national history...our population has been indoctrinated with considerable folly".

As Prime Minister she has called for the teaching of a version of history which corresponds with her party's patriotic policies and financial interests.

Earlier this year, when she preached her homily in Edinburgh to the Church of Scotland, she boasted: "People with other faiths and cultures have always been welcomed in our land...there is no place for intolerance in our creed."

But the annual report of the Commission for Racial Equality issued in the same week as her speech gave her the lie directly.

The CRE's chairman states: "Discrimination and harassment are still widespread and deep rooted. A stronger Race Relations Act is needed".

The report concluded, "If the condition of black people is not to become even worse urgent action is needed in employment, education and housing". True though it is, the government will certainly ignore this report and this advice.

When an opportune moment comes they will no doubt dissolve these revealers of unwelcome truths.

In 1984 Peter Fryer's book, "Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain", was welcomed as an important contribution to an understanding of Britain's history of capitalist expansion.

This took place first in Ireland and later in the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Australasia.

He showed that racism was a necessary component of the conquest

and domination of these lands. Under the British Empire they became markets for British manufacture. So that the extraction of their wealth together with the profits of the slave trade made possible the development of mining and industry and the British Industrial Revolution.

This book relates also the history of the mass movements and revolts of the peoples of the colonised countries.

His new book, "Black People in the British Empire", challenges the kind of "patriotic" history which is still being taught in schools and universities in Britain. It asserts, correctly, that accounts of

resistance to British oppression in the Caribbean, India and Africa, will be of intense interest to British-born students, whose parents came from those areas; this history is necessary reading too for white students.

They should know the contributions made by blacks to their own lives and so begin to understand the nature of racist ideologies masquerading as history.

It should be said, however, that in large part this Black History is still unwritten.

What Fryer has provided is information about some of the sources

from which this history will be written: books by radical historians, accounts of liberation struggles in Africa, India and

the Caribbean in specialised journals, and information given in government reports.

He has referred by name to some of the leaders of those struggles. In addition he has excerpted, mainly from the anti-fascist journal, Searchlight, accounts of the brutalities inflicted on black people by racists - many of them wearing police uniforms. These attacks are increasing.

Perhaps Fryer should have made it clearer that history can be written not only by professional historians to be taught in schools, but by all of those who have experiences to record, and by school students themselves.

It can be presented in many different forms and at different levels: in direct and simple narratives or elaborate description and analysis.

History is not an academic luxury, it is part of an endless search for truth. History is a necessary part of human society, just as reflection and memory are to individuals.

Without these, people lose their sense of identity. And unless they have acquired an understanding of their past, people in Britain could be swept up by the patriotic myths of the the Tories.

Those who don't know their history are condemned to repeat it.

Reading of "Black People in the British Empire" and recalling of the historical circumstances which brought some of their offspring to Britain to live may help to cancel the forgetting effect of the tabloid press and the media generally.

Picasso's Last Years

Late Picasso: Paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints 1953-1972. The Tate Gallery, Millbank, London. 23 June-18 September 1988.

Pablo Picasso's last twenty years, the period known as "l'epoque Jacqueline", were among the most prolific, brilliant and innovative in the great artist's long and controversial career.

But until comparatively recently the quality of the work he produced from around 1953 onwards has never received the recognition it clearly warrants.

Picasso was 92 when he died. Right up to the last few months of his life he was producing work at a phenomenal rate, averaging one painting a day. It turned out to be an embarrassment of riches, ignored by the art world who found the paintings of musketeers, cavaliers, nudes and embracing couples incomprehensible.

It was a very troubled time for the old man. His former companion of the previous ten years, Françoise Gilot, had left him and taken their two young children with her.

Although Picasso was able to overcome the period of intense loneliness which this brought him when he met, and later married, Jacqueline Dutin, a woman nearly forty-five years younger, the last two decades of his life was a time of increasing isolation.

Shunned by many of his former friends and admirers, outliving his one remaining peer, Henri Matisse, Picasso's devotion to his art remained undiminished.

If anything, painting became an even greater obsession for him: it makes me do

anything it wants' he wrote in one of his sketch books.

With Jacqueline, who almost never left his side, he found the strength to explore his art with the same kind of audacity which had led him to create "Les Femmes d'Alger" and the development of Cubism almost half a century earlier.

He was, he said, out to 'kill' modern art, in order to 'rediscover painting'. The task undertaken was made harder by the fact that Picasso was the only practising figurative painter in a non-figurative era. It became, as he was well aware, a race against the clock: 'I have less and less time...and more and more to say' he said.

He had grown increasingly suspicious of the motives of a large proportion of his circle of so-called friends. Jacqueline received a lot of the blame for protecting him from these hangers-on.

Gilot's memoir, "My Life with Picasso", a book he tried unsuccessfully to have banned in France, was but one of the difficulties he had to confront during this time.

D.H.Kahnweiler, his life-long dealer and promoter of his earliest works, appeared less appreciative of what Picasso was attempting than the artist wished.

Picasso was also a target of abuse by the French Communist Party, following the drawing he did of a 'young' Josef Stalin when what they had wanted was a sage-like image to commemorate the death of their heroic leader.

Douglas Cooper, collector and champion of the Cubists, was another one who fell out with the artist. He had attempted to

interfere on the question of litigation over Picasso's children.

(Apparently, Picasso turned Cooper out of his house - an act Cooper was to avenge after Picasso's death by cruelly denouncing his last works as "incoherent doodles done by a frenetic dotard in the anteroom of death".)

In 1965, the Marxist art critic, John Berger, published an unfavourable comment on the later works, too. This came particularly hard on Picasso who of course shared the same ideology.

A lot of focus on these last works, which undoubtedly have a very erotic content, has been placed on the attention Picasso paid to the nude. The correlation suggested being between the painter's former sexual appetite and the impotence of his final years. Painting as a substitute for fornication.

This crude analogy is a sad commentary on the level of writing which often passes as art criticism. It shows about as much insight into the artist's work as it does for the depth of the relationship that existed between Picasso and Jacqueline.

Nobody in the history of art explored the artist-model theme with greater profundity than Picasso, at various periods of his career.

There is a lot of exhilarating 'bad painting' in this show, expressing a versatility which could only have been achieved by an accomplished master who was capable of overcoming formal barriers throughout his life. This mastery enabled Picasso to produce work which can truly be called revolutionary.

This is a superbly staged exhibition which was first seen in Paris at the Musée National d'Art Moderne earlier in the year.

Jeff Jackson



Reclining Nude Playing with a Cat, 1954 (Photo credit: Ernst Beyeler, Basle)

Murdered by US Imperialism

by Charlie Pottins

THE 290 airline passengers killed when the US warship Vincennes brought down Iran Air Flight 655 over the Straits of Hormuz last week were victims of US imperialism's deliberate escalation of the Gulf war.

The Iran Air A300 Airbus was on a routine scheduled flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai. Most of the passengers were Iranians working in the Emirates or visiting relatives. There were 66 children.

The plane had only been in the air ten minutes, climbing to 7,500 feet above the Iranian island of Qeshm, when the Vincennes' two missiles struck, blasting it apart.

In Washington, an official told the press at first "A civilian aircraft went down, but as far as I know we had nothing to do with it." A little later, US military spokesmen said an Iranian F14 had been shot down when approaching the Vincennes at high speed.

In the afternoon, another Pentagon official, asked if the US ship had brought down the civil airliner, admitted "Yeah, it does look that way."

The story that the lumbering big Airbus was mistaken for an attacking F14 fighter by the Vincennes sophisticated radar equipment scarcely seems credible. Quite apart from the huge difference in size, the airliner was still climbing when the US ship fired its missiles. The Iranian Air force only has a few F14s in service, and these are air interception-fighters, not attack planes.

The Vincennes should know an F14, anyway - it is the US Navy's main fighter. The airliner was reportedly forty miles away when the Vincennes commander, Captain Rogers, received permission to fire from the US area command. The US radar computers would most likely have had local airline schedules on file, as well as aircraft recognition profiles.

The story that the Iranian airliner was wildly off-course also seems highly doubtful. The place where it was brought down was directly on path between Bander Abbas and Dubai.

According to Iranair managing director Mohammad Majidi, Flight 155 had been 'right in the middle' of the recognised 20-mile air corridor when hit. He also denied US claims that warnings had been given, pointing out they would have been picked up by Bander Abbas and Dubai control towers.

"The Americans are talking

nonsense," he commented, "They want to escape shame."

As Iranians and others were reeling from grief and shock at the loss of loved ones - entire families in some cases - and as reverberations spread across the world, President Reagan and his murderous regime went ahead with celebrating July 4, fireworks and all.

'I won't minimize the tragedy but the ship was under attack by that plane,' had been Reagan's bizarre comment. Echoing Her Master's Voice, Tory Margaret Thatcher said of the US action: 'We fully accept the right of forces engaged in such hostilities to defend themselves.'

Unlike the Soviet downing of a Korean airliner straying into Soviet airspace, and supposedly mistaken for a US spyplane, the US action was taken in waters where the US Navy has no business anyway.

Having stoked up the Gulf war with arms supplies to both sides, the imperialists have used it to re-establish large-scale intervention forces there.

The Iranian regime recently began rapprochement with Western European states, restoring relations with France and opening negotiations with Britain. Iraqi warplanes, ironically as it may seem, provided the US

pretext for more aggressive procedures when they attacked the USS Stark in May last year. Iraq also launched the latest escalation in the naval war by attacking a ship carrying Iranian oil on July 2. When the Iranians retaliated, the USS Vincennes intervened. It looks very much as though the Reagan Administration, or at least a faction in it, has decided with this barbaric atrocity to fan the flames of all-out war against Iran.

The Thatcher government, with little to fear from the soggy Labour "Opposition" (Neil Kinnock could only bleat that 'Once again the innocent have been caught in the crossfire'), has promptly sprung into line behind the US warmongers.

The other factor encouraging US adventurism at this time must undoubtedly have been the Soviet bureaucracy's readiness to concede all for "peace", the withdrawal from Afghanistan (which is related to Iran in US global strategy), and the secret deals undoubtedly struck behind the Moscow summit ballyhoo.

"When the statesmen talk of peace," Leon Trotsky once wryly commented, "the working people know they must expect war."

In this case, the working people have been slaughtered in the air.

