

THATCHER'S BOOM TURNS TO BUST

A TRADE deficit of over one billion for the second month running has revealed yet again the fragility of the Thatcher 'boom'.

Britain, as the tabloid press never cease telling us, is booming. Earnings, credit, and high street sales have been soaring. Consumers have been saving less of their incomes than at any time for thirty years.

But the weakness of the boom can be measured by the persistence of high unemployment in the major urban centres.

Champagne sales may be at record levels in the City but even on false Tory figures unemployment stands at nearly 18 per cent on Merseyside and almost 16 per cent in the Strathclyde region. Far from revealing the strength of British capitalism the Thatcher credit boom has revealed its chronic weakness. Every time the economy grows; imports leap, exports fail to grow at anything like the same rate and a balance of trade crisis results.

As the 'Financial Times' said about the worsening trade deficit last week: 'This deterioration makes an eventual end to the boom inevitable. Put simply, the current account deficit signals that Britain is spending a great deal more than it earns.'

Credit

Imports of building materials, cars and other consumer goods have shot up, fuelled by the credit boom that Lawson is struggling to bring under control by six increases in the interest rate since the start of June.

Overall, imports - up 13 per cent in volume over the last three months - are rising twice as fast as exports. Car imports are a third up on last year and imports of other imported consumer goods, including electronics, topped the billion mark for the second month running.


But the dilemma facing the Thatcher government is that higher interest rates push up the value of sterling and this further cuts into exports. Last week sterling reached its highest level against the German mark for two years.

The latest trade figures have blown sky high Lawson's prediction of a four billion deficit for the year: the figure is likely to turn out nearer 10 billion. And once the deficit reaches this size, the likelihood is that it would double within a year.

The cumulative deficit this year is already 5.6 billion and is bound to accelerate as consumer spending from Lawson's give-to-the-rich budget earlier in the year filters through the economy.

Another factor is the Piper Alpha oil rig disaster which is calculated to add some 250 million to the deficit. The much vaunted Thatcher boom has rested not on any industrial revival but on the City.

It is the earning power of the City, from banking, insurance, commodity dealing that has covered up the long drawn out decline of industry. But a new factor is now haunting the Tory government. For much of the City is fast




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A poster issued by the catering workers union of South Africa, CCAWUSA, as part of their campaign against the new Labour Relations Amendment Bill, which is modelled on Thatcher's anti-union laws. * See centre pages for reports on South Africa.

falling out of the control of British finance capital.

Five years ago the Stock Exchange was a British preserve where foreign ownership was banned. Today six of the top ten brokers are foreign owned and all firms have in any case lost a large slice of business following the crash of October last year. Of the 362 Stock Exchange members, 118 are foreign-owned, and they are the large firms, so the decline of the City of London is underestimated by the figures.

As 'The Guardian' reported last week in an article 'Newcomers erode a proud tradition,' fears are growing of a foreign onslaught on British banking, especially in the wake of the

Hongkong and Shanghai Bank's 15 per cent stake in Midland Bank. Foreign banks are now lining up to buy out the Girobank when it is privatised. Next target is likely to be the British insurance industry and some of the leading property companies.

These are potentially devastating blows to a government that has increasingly relied on a credit-induced boom centred on the City.

The yawning payments crisis and the erosion of the City's position of pre-eminence must bring renewed attacks on the working class and sections of the middle class.

The building of a revolutionary leadership for the working class now becomes more urgent and possible.



TUC crisis

IN THIS week's paper we publish two contributions about the crisis facing trade unionism in Britain arising from the impending expulsion of the EEPTU from the TUC.

This crisis concerns not so much the electricians' union as the TUC itself. For the politics of EEPTU leader Eric Hammond are in effect no different from those of Norman Willis and the majority of the TUC general council.

The expulsion of the electricians will take place after months and months of prevarication by Willis and company, time in which Hammond has been able to consolidate his position and organise support in the general council itself.

The sort of trade unionism Hammond advocates is in reality no different from that proposed by the leaders of the AEU and other unions. Such 'trade unionism' would be directly subordinated to the needs of the employers and the capitalist state. Single union 'sweatheart' deals would be only one aspect of such unionism. It would stamp out all traces of union democracy, eliminating completely any possibility of rank and file control check on the trade union bureaucracy.

The situation in the EEPTU only serves to highlight the fact that trade unionism in Britain is now at the crossroads.

EITHER the unions will be transformed completely into instruments for disciplining the working class;

OR they will be transformed into revolutionary unions, able to take up the real problems facing millions of workers, whether in the unions or not.

This situation is not the result of the 'policy' of this or that leader. It arises from the fact that in its deepening crisis capitalism can no longer tolerate free and independent unions.

The trade can be made into instruments to serve the needs of the working class on one condition. They require a new leadership that starts not from the immediate, short term interests of this or that section of the working class but from the overall historical interest of the working class in its struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society.

Unlike Bernard Franks, we believe that it is necessary for electricians to fight for a new union of this type, one that will serve their interests and not those of Thatcher and the employers.

There will in fact now be a war between Hammond's scab union and a new union or unions competing for membership among electricians. We believe that in these circumstances it would be wrong to make a principle of staying in the EEPTU. This does not mean that we write off all those who stay in the Hammond union as scabs. Quite the opposite. We believe it necessary to appeal to all electricians who wish to be members of a fighting union to break from Hammond.

But Bernard Franks does raise a real question: a union led by the 'lefts' around Flashlight, many of them members of one or other of the Communist Parties, would not constitute the leadership of such a union.

No confidence can be placed in any variety of Stalinism. Remember that Communist Party member Jimmy Airlie was the main architect of the AEU's proposed single union deal in Dundee.

Many electricians are well aware that it was the corrupt practices of the Communist Party that delivered the union to the right wing in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

A new leadership will only be built in direct struggle against Stalinism.

We are interested in opening the widest debate on this crisis. Do let us have your views.

WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND

In so far: 4,308.15

GOOD ON yer Aussies! Thatcher was too scared to 'walk-about' in Sidney after her 'welcome' in Melbourne. Thatcher's victims in Britain were heartened by this news. One young man even went to tell me that our one sunny day recently was entirely due to the fact that Thatcher was out of the country!

Nonsense? Of course. But a glimpse of the deep hatred of the Tories he shares with millions of other youth - unemployed, homeless and with no chance of learning a skill in this industrial wasteland, where a tiny minority make billions on the property and money markets.

It is particularly heartening that Thatcher was met in Australia by the hostility of those in solidarity with the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland. It is a measure of the weakness of this rotten, stagnant system that they cannot quell the Irish struggle for independence, and that they are forced to deal with youth and other victims of capitalism in Britain in the same way - police repression and imprisonment.

The Central Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party, at a meeting last weekend, began a thorough discussion on its organisation, programme and activities. We want all those who are under attack, and on the offensive against Thatcher and the capitalist state to take part in this discussion and join us to build a revolutionary leadership.

For this we need finance, and our Fighting Fund is falling dangerously behind. All donations are welcome no matter how small (or large!). Our collective effort now is decisive for our future victory.

Dot Gibson

Please send in your donations to: Workers Press Fighting Fund, PO Box 735, London, SW9 7QS

International Fund

The Central Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party decided that in the first issue of Workers Press each month there will be a report of our International Fund.

Since November 1986, we have received 18,195.47, for which we thank you, particularly our members, and we ask you to continue to send in collections and donations.

This is not a fund that is going to end! We are not setting ourselves a financial target, which, once achieved, will prove that we have met with success. No, our aim is much more than that.

We are working to reorganise the Fourth International through the Preparatory Committee for the Organisation of an International Conference of Trotskyists.

Our work is to make successful the world revolution begun in the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Reports of soviet workers telling the Stalinist bureaucrats and the army: 'Make way for the working class' - photographs of South African trade unionists with banners saying: 'Down with Stalinism' and 'Freedom Charter no! Socialism yes!' - the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam - the continuing struggle of the Palestinians, Irish, Kurdish people - the year long strike of British miners, and the struggles of printers and seafarers.

All these events, and more, are the forces are gathering to end capitalism and build international socialism. Join us in this great goal. Build our international fund for this purpose. Send donations to:

WRP International Fund,
PO Box 735, London, SW9 7QS

TUC CRISIS TUC CRISIS TUC CRISIS

Leave the EEPTU?

I MUST continue to disagree on the question of supporting a breakaway from the EEPTU on its expulsion from the TUC.

In reply to my letter on the subject, Geoff Pilling (WP 16 July) writes that while not being against working in any workers' organisation ('If there was a factory organised by the EEPTU it might well be necessary to enter it and fight against the policies of the leadership') - nevertheless, a separate organisation for electricians has been announced and 'we can only support those who have decided to form a new union'.

Certainly there are many good militants in the union whose initial reaction to the anti-working class activities of the leadership is to pull out. But do we only operate at the level of gut reaction? And just who is leading that breakaway? Is it a grouping that can defend a fighting strategy that can bring out a sizeable section in a struggle? (Even if this were the case, why not see this as a base for staying in and defeating the existing leadership?). Or is it a bunch of demoralised 'lefts' copping out because the going is rough, because they want to set up their own alternative power base and because a real fight is imminent? Should we encourage militant workers to go along with that?

One thing we do know, over 200,000 members didn't vote in the recent ballot and, 100,000 wrongly voted for Hammond. So the great majority of members will be staying. Do we write these off as scabs as 'Workers Power' does? ('But not all EEPTU members are scabs. A militant minority exists that wants to prevent Hammond using their union as the core of a new scab union federation' - 'Workers Power' July 1988)

THESE are the first two contributions to the crisis in the TUC provoked by the impending expulsion of the EEPTU. One is from BERNARD FRANKS. The other contribution (below) is from a South Wales member of the EEPTU. We want to begin a wide-ranging discussion on the crisis facing the trade union movement in Britain. How are its problems to be tackled? How are its leaders to be made to carry out policies in the interests of the members? How is the unity of the employed and the unemployed - most of them outside the organised movement - to be established? We invite all readers to send in their views, whether they coincide with ours or not. Please limit contributions to 500 words.

The fact is, only two per cent of EEPTU members are under one-union, no-strike deals and the ballot certainly never mentioned these as the reason for expulsion from the TUC. Large sections of this union are certainly at a low level of political and even class consciousness and have a long way to go, much as the position in most other unions.

Do we ditch workers, then, who have not yet entered into major struggles or made the major advances? By any Marxist standard explain how these advances are made spontaneously if we have gone away.

Flashlight reflects the crisis and bankruptcy of Stalinism. It never fought the right wing, it only fought those who did. Now, when - however imperfectly - the influence of the rest of the working class is coming into play, through expulsion and ostracism (from joint bodies, Trades Councils etc.) when new layers of the EEPTU are to feel a severe jolt, these 'leaders' propose walking away.

I cannot agree that 300,000 workers - vitally important to modern production and the overall operation of any modern society - be handed over to the right wing in perpetuity.

Even if the union has 'gone over to the bourgeoisie', as some say, then surely we fight to get it back?

One thing is sure, the TUC position is no criterion. It is not expelling (we hope) the union because of its organisation of a scab labour force to smash the News International action, not even because it signs no-strike, one-union deals (like the AEU's Coca Cola-Schweppes agreement, like the Dundee deal that the TUC grovelled to Ford to save) but because it is reckoned to have acted unfairly in grabbing the Orton Electronics and Christian Salvesen contracts over the heads of other unions.

I believe we should not be mesmerised by the opponents of status quo. It may be that no major advance can be made without some drastic changes in capitalist production or society, but these will come.

Only this week we saw an explosive upsurge of London tenants threatened by the sell-off of estates, including participation by many who had never taken action before.

Sooner or later the chickens will come home to roost in regard to the contempt for theory of the British working class.

Its greatest asset in its battle with employers, its tremendous organising ability, now proves its greatest weakness, in substituting for any real understanding of the underlying processes at work.

In today's complex conditions that no longer suffices.

In the situation of new systems of working and a whole new structure of state repression, a grasp of Marxist economics and politics will have to be achieved and that will begin the process of the development of socialist and revolutionary consciousness.

As Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote of the proletariat:

'It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation.' (The Holy Family, page 52).

But how will this occur if all the Marxists have deserted, gone off to form their own club?

Personally, I would be glad to see Flashlight depart and break all its ties with the working class, although I don't know how this would come about as each faction will worry that the others will renege on the deal at the last minute and stay in. And, of course, once out, there is unlikely to be any chance of return.

However small our forces, I believe we must stay with the class and fight as a minority on a principled basis, not just to win members and fight in particular factions, but to revolutionise this trade union and all others when the time comes.

Class collaborating crocodiles sell union

THE degeneration of the EEPTU is not simply a takeover of the union as in the case of Laird and Jordan in the AEU. The degeneration of the electricians union involves the systematic destruction of union democracy in a process going back to 1961.

Gone are the elections of full-time officials; gone are the appeals procedure; gone are many branches that dared to oppose the executive, closed down at the whim of Hammond or Chapple.

This degeneration stems from the 1961 court case about the organised ballot-rigging of the old Stalinist leadership in the union.

What followed has been rightly described as a 'blood-bath'. Chapple, Cannon and Young were backed by the courts and the media and various rich individuals like Woodrow Wyatt.

Communists were banned from office,

ironic when ex-communists like Chapple and Cannon, who actually took part in ballot rigging, were allowed to reach the highest office in the union.

I would like to ask those who want to defeat the Hammond leadership by staying in the union: do you think this can be done by elections? Very few elections are held in the union and few lefts have defeated the well-groomed and prepared pro-executive candidates who have a huge machine behind them. Those who have won have often had the results declared void for the flimsiest reasons and been forced to re-run, sometimes more than once.

Victories for the left in the elections have become fewer and fewer. It is unusual that as membership in nearly all unions goes down it is in the EEPTU alone that the percentage of members voting in elections goes up.

WRITE TO WORKERS PRESS

WE welcome letters on all subjects. Let us know what pleases you in the paper as well as the things you don't like. But please be as brief as possible. Only in exceptional cases are we able to print letters longer than 200 words.

In defence of socialism

This article, circulated by an anonymous group in South Africa last year, takes up the struggle against Stalinism which today threatens the future of the South African revolution. It explains how the Stalinist bureaucracy in the trade unions was able to tie COSATU to the nationalist Freedom Charter, a charter which does not include the right to strike, and splitting the catering workers union. At a time when the apartheid state's Labour Relations Bill threatens the South African trade unions, it shows the manoeuvres of the leadership of the ANC/SACP. The leaflet set out these dangers for the syndicalists and addresses the so-called Trotskyists who entered the ANC - and now keep their heads down and become indistinguishable from the Stalinists.

THE SECOND Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Congress in July (1987) was notable for two things: on the one hand workers raised high the banner proclaiming 'Socialism is Freedom', and on the other the Stalinists, through a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre, attempted to exorcise socialism as an objective from COSATU's policies.

Workers were scolded by the President of South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) and by the UDF, backed up of course like a well-planned intervention by a statement from the South African Congress of Trades Unions (SACTU), for having the temerity to raise socialist revolution as an immediate objective. Going hand in glove with the attempt to smash socialism went a very specific attack, in the most unprincipled manner, on certain socialists.

The COSATU Congress manoeuvre was not an isolated act. It comes in the wake of a sharp right-wing turn on the part of the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party - a turn necessitated by the very nature of ANC/SACP politics. With their self-confessed 'four pillars' conception of the struggle, the ANC explicitly assigns equal importance to what they call the military, mass, underground and diplomatic struggle.

What this means is the ANC is committed to combining mass action with appeals to bourgeois imperialist governments to force Botha to the negotiating table. Not having a clear class strategy the ANC nevertheless oscillates between radicalism and reform depending on the state of open mass struggle in South Africa.

In 1985, the rise of militant youth and workers raised decisively the need for socialism as their only alternative to apartheid capitalism. With the decline in mass activity in 1986 and 1987, as the state succeeded in temporarily smashing resistance in the townships, the radical rhetoric of the ANC has changed. Now it is the diplomatic struggle which assumes most prominence (from Schultz to Dakar) and the strategy of isolating Botha by building a 'broad front of all democrats' is the order of the day. The problem with some of these 'democrats' (from Worrall to Franklin Sonn to Van Zyl Slabbert) is that there is one thing they fear most - socialism. And so the talk about socialism among youth and workers must be stopped.

Together with the attack on socialism as an immediate objective of the South African revolution must go a direct attack on the socialists. This is what lies behind the attack at the COSATU July congress. This is what lies behind the re-emergence in the SACP of the two-stage theory and of 'internal colonialism'. And this is what lies behind the adoption by COSATU of the Freedom Charter - not as an attempt to politicise the workers, but as a bureaucratic manoeuvre to drive out the socialists.

The CCAWUSA Case - the method of Stalinism

Just before the July Congress, a split occurred in the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) after merger talks had been held with two other unions. While the Natal, East Cape and Pretoria branches of CCAWUSA carried through the merger with HARWU and RAWU (the Retail and Allied Workers' Union), the majority section of CCAWUSA (including Johannesburg and West Cape) charged the minority with conducting the merger in an unprincipled, unconstitutional way. The majority section cited as examples unsubstantiated membership figures given by HARWU and RAWU; that CCAWUSA, as by far the largest of the three unions, should retain its name and orientation (which had been decided at a previous CCAWUSA congress); and that they could not accept the Freedom Charter as their programme given the range of political affiliations of the CCAWUSA membership. Underlying these issues was the simple fact that the reasons for the split were not constitutional or moral, but political. The old CCAWUSA was labelled 'workerist' and part of the camp of those who opposed the pro-UDF drift in COSATU. On the other hand both HARWU and RAWU were known as 'populist' unions with a leadership being Charterist.

The split in CCAWUSA has taken place because what was necessary from the ANC/SACP viewpoint was a takeover of CCAWUSA, a manoeuvre to trap the organised workers under the banner of the ANC. And because of Stalinism's success at the second COSATU congress what is clearly on the cards is that COSATU will officially recognise the new merger - no matter how unprincipled. COSATU's acceptance of the Freedom Charter will be used as formal justification for this recognition. And so the ANC/SACP takeover of COSATU is being carried through remorselessly.

After the revival of trade unions in South Africa was initiated by FOSATU, its antecedent, after it took four years to drag the populist unions into the federation, the ANC/SACP elements are now the leading bureaucrats who are fully prepared to sacrifice the South African working class at the altar of populism. The victory against CCAWUSA is a must for these Stalinists. Let us say here quite categorically, that syndicalist narrowness in matters political has only strengthened the hand of the populists. With the terrain of mass political action left open to the workers, the workers were allowed to continue under the illusion that the ANC is the only political organisation capable of harnessing the political

anger of the masses, and it is the only organisation capable of taking state power. We can only here, once again, assert our belief that only the direct politicisation of the unions in mass action can counteract the lure of the populist demagogues. But be that as it may, what is at stake here is for all socialists, whether in COSATU or not, to rally behind the legitimate majority section of CCAWUSA as a crucial test-case wherein the socialists can begin to fight back.

To the syndicalists: For years you have built progressive unions from the 1973 Durban strikes to FOSATU and then COSATU. And this while SACTU slandered you as imperialist CIA agents. Now that the Freedom Charter has been endorsed as a guide, now that the populists have shown their preparedness to use any dirty tactic (even splitting unions), now that socialism is being removed from COSATU, you face the very real threat of having your final trump card (the unions) removed from your grasp. While we reserve the right to fight you when you want to keep the workers out of mass politics, yet we recognise that the building of proper democratic organs of workers is vital. Unity of socialists is required because the very rationale of your existence requires that socialism be an immediate objective. Without access to COSATU and its member unions you face a future of political extinction. You may feel this prediction is far too gloomy, and we agree with you - but only if you are prepared to fight the populists on political ground. Otherwise you will succumb to the lure and you will capitulate.

To all entryists: for years the logic of transforming the ANC from within committed you to every twist and turn of the ANC. You proclaim yourselves to be socialists and against petty bourgeois nationalists. You believe in the need for a Workers Party but only via transforming the ANC. Yet you are in danger of becoming the finger-men of the Stalinists. Because you have a secret hidden agenda, which includes sympathies for Trotsky, you are often best able to expose and identify anti-ANC/UDF elements. And that makes you potential star performers doing the dirty work of the SACP and ANC. This is certainly not going to win you any favours from the ANC/CP who will more likely reward your endeavours with death eventually.

The very logic of your commitment to transforming the ANC requires that you set yourselves up as a pole within the ANC. A pole around the need for socialist revolution is the only way of driving a wedge between the reformist leadership of the ANC and its masses of supporters. Instead of being scared of 'prematurely exposing yourself' your silence in defence of socialism only strengthens the hands of the hard core nationalists and Stalinists - which will make your own work impossible when they deliberately isolate you. Instead of being a pole within the ANC you face the danger of being indistinguishable from the nationalists and Stalinists.

Defend CCAWUSA! Defend democracy! Build socialism now! Forward with a socialist programme of action! Socialists unite!

Free Moses Mayekiso



Moses Mayekiso is on trial for his life by the Botha regime. His trial started on 19 October 1987, and over a period of five months evidence has been given against him on charges, that he 'held or expressed the following views:

- that the working class (also referred to as the proletariat), as the vanguard for liberation, should be in the centre of, and in control of the struggle.
- that the working class, including the unemployed, the youth and other members of the community, should be mobilised, organised, and united against the capitalist system and the state.
- that the working class or its unions and the so-called progressive organisations should seize control of the means of production and the residential areas.
- that the so-called capitalists must be forced into a situation where they are unable to exercise control.

From the charges it is apparent that Moses Mayekiso is a trades unionist far removed from those of the Chaple and Hammond mould.

A case for the defence of Mayekiso has now begun to be made in the South African Supreme Court, starting from 1 August, which will proceed for a marathon estimated three months.

The real 'case' for the defence of this class fighter will not take place in a bourgeois court, but amongst the ranks of the working class in South Africa and internationally. The court has been packed every day by Moses' comrades from the metal workers union, and campaigns have been mounted internationally for his release.

In Britain a march was held on 10 October 1987 through London, chiefly organised through the youth of the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group and involving many trades unionists.

Surprisingly to many workers, the campaign for the release of Mayekiso has

repeatedly run into the most furious and even violent opposition.

The South African Confederation of Trade Unions (SACTU), the trade union wing of the African National Congress (ANC), intimately connected with the South African Communist Party (SACP) has been at the centre of this hostility, and has left no stone unturned in its desperate attempts to suppress what Mayekiso stands for. SACTU's influence extends over bureaucrats like John Daly, secretary of the local government union NALGO, who issued a directive to all NALGO branches to have nothing to do with campaigns around Mayekiso, as it was incorrect for workers to concentrate on one individual. He did not explain why it is at one and the same time correct to campaign for Nelson Mandela, and not for Mayekiso.

It is very important for all those in South Africa and Britain who fight for the independent organisation of the working class, separate from any bourgeois influence, as Moses Mayekiso consciously does, to understand exactly where the opposition to him (in South Africa and Internationally) originates.

In South Africa, he, and the metal-workers union, together with the catering union CCAWUSA, have fought a prolonged, bitter, and bloody battle against attempts by the ANC and the SACP to impose upon them, going beyond persuasion to force, the limited politics of the 'Freedom Charter'.

This charter is a statement which rules out the possibility of socialist revolution in South Africa, and subordinates the working class to the politics of a black middle class seeking deals with South African and international capital.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the so-called 'Freedom Charter', openly defended by the SACP, is that it specifically does not guarantee the right to strike.

Freedom for whom might one ask?

The Stalinists made an attempt to break up the catering workers union, and have placed enormous pressure on NUMSA also.

In Britain, opposition to the Mayekiso campaign has emanated from the Stalinists in SACTU, and in the official Anti-Apartheid movement. The campaign for the March for Mayekiso was opposed by the de-facto apologists for the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Socialist Workers Party.

That march was reported in five daily South African newspapers, and there is no doubt that Mayekiso himself knows of it. Throughout the world working class movement today, class forces are arraigning more and more clearly.

Issues which formerly appeared obscure are now crystallising out for the world to see. And clearest of all is the understanding that internationally Stalinism is the main enemy. Its aim is to tie the working class lock stock and barrel to the bourgeoisie, and that the Fourth International, the world revolutionary leadership must be built in opposition to that.

SOUTH AFRICA SHORTS

Botha in the dock

TWO Namibian women whose menfolk were murdered by South African security forces are going to court to challenge President Botha's right to get the murderers off.

One of them is Hilda Shifidi, whose father Immanuel Shifidi was killed by a South African undercover squad which broke up a legal political meeting in Namibia two years ago. In March this year, Botha used special powers to halt the trial of six soldiers charged with the murder.

This was only a few days after the racist president had said he could not relieve the Sharpeville Six - young Black people sentenced to hang for a killing they did not commit - because he would not interfere with the judicial process.

In the other case, Victoria Mweuhanga is challenging the South African regime over the halting of proceedings ordered by Namibia's Attorney General against four soldiers who battered her husband to death. (Her case comes up on August 22. She will be represented by British QC Sidney Kentridge.) He was grabbed outside a pub in Onengali, Ovamboland (Northern Namibia) on 28 November, 1985. The soldiers accused him of being a 'SWAPO terrorist'.

Although he had papers to prove his identity, the soldiers dragged him behind some bushes and beat him up. His body was found the next morning. Under a section of the South African Defence Act,

South African troops - whose presence in Namibia is illegal under international law - can justify any action they take on grounds that they were acting 'in good faith' to suppress 'terrorism'. The South African president can halt any legal proceedings if he considers it 'in the national interest'.

Namibian uranium and Labour

AFTER 12 years of official denials and evasion, the British government has finally admitted receiving 1,100 tons of uranium shipped from Namibia, in defiance of a UN ban.

Labour peer Lord Hatch extracted the admission from Lord Trefgame, Minister for Defence procurement. The rub is that the shipment in question was discussed and agreed by Harold Wilson's Labour government in 1976.

Soviet optimism

SOVIET deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamyshin had two days of consultations with US Secretary of State Chester Crocker last week, concerning Namibia.

Adamyshin said later that 'all sides' in Namibia peace talks seemed 'serious about seeking a settlement', and there could be a successful outcome 'in the nearest future.'

Talks between South Africa, Cuba and Angola, linking South Africa's occupation of Namibia to Cuban forces in Angola, resumed on Tuesday in Geneva.

Words in season

THE silly season is upon us. How do I know? Why, solemn half-educated letters objecting to the way people speak and write are once more appearing in the 'quality' Sunday papers.

'Disgusted, Tunbridge Wells' has been writing such letters to the press for 200 years or more. Nobody ever takes the slightest notice of him, which is why we write 'mob' instead of 'mobile vulgus' and pronounce 'oblige' as we do instead of saying 'obleege'.

All languages are in a constant state of flux. English, being a world language, changes comparatively quickly. And, for all his pedantry, there's nothing that 'Disgusted, Tunbridge Wells' can do about it.

He's the chap who insists on saying 'as sure as eggs are eggs'. He'd rather write a stiff, wooden, unidiomatic sentence than end one with a preposition, for ending a sentence with a preposition is something up with which he will not put.

In the 'Sunday Times' last weekend, in one of his many incarnations, he whinged on about people who say '60 miles per hour' instead of '60 miles an hour', and strongly objected to 'burglarise', preferring 'burgle'.

So do I, because it's shorter. But both words entered the language at the same time (the early 1870s); 'burglarise' is in fact a year or so older than its rival; and 'burgle' was itself long objected to by pedants as an impermissible and facetious 'back formation' from 'burglar'

('diagnose', 'drowse', 'grovel', 'resurrect', and many other English verbs began life in the same irregular, slangy way).

Careful writers and speakers are entitled to their lexical preferences. What they're not entitled to do is try and impose those preferences on fellow-users of our immensely rich and flexible tongue.

I long ago gave up trying to 'correct' my children's speech habits. When I lost the battle over the extension in meaning of 'hopefully' (to travel hopefully used to be better than to arrive, didn't it?) I realised I'd lost the war. The most I now permit myself is a raised eyebrow every now and again at such peccadilloes as the superstition that all adverbs must end in -ly (hence the now almost universal 'more importantly' where 'more important' would do just as well); or the misuse of 'whom' in expressions like 'Young Ferdinand, whom they suppose is 'drown'd'. But I have to admit that this was written by Shakespeare, which rather puts the kibosh on any criticism of it.

There's hardly a single grammatical rule, in-deed, that isn't from time to time broken by one or other English writer of merit, from Chaucer on down.

Good writing - by which I mean writing that's appropriate to its intended audience - isn't a matter of learning and assiduously complying with a set of grammatical rules. It's a matter, above all, of keeping in mind exactly whom you're writing for.

In political writing, this is of cardinal importance. Much political writing, especially on the left, is plainly in a diseased state. Many political writers habitually pour out

a stream of ready-made formulas and abstractions, without thinking out clearly and carefully what they're really trying to say, or having any clear image in their minds of who their readers are.

Fowler's 'Modern English Usage' - still worth consulting, though you don't necessarily have to agree with everything it says - calls this disease 'abstractitis' and gives a lot of examples. Here's one: 'Was this the realisation of an anticipated liability?', meaning 'Did you expect you would have to do this?'

Political counterparts of such monstrosities are ten a penny. But quotation is probably unnecessary and might be invidious. There isn't one of us who couldn't with effort write more clearly, for clear writing doesn't drop from the skies but always, and for everybody, is achieved only through dedicated hard work.

So let me end this piece of silly-season scribbling by making up a spoof sentence that, so far as I know, has never been printed before:

'The deepening class contradictions manifesting themselves on the European continent in the present conjuncture are reflected in the disturbing apparition of a politico-philosophical phenomenon seeking revolutionary hegemony.' Marx and Engels didn't begin their 'Communist Manifesto' like that. They began it with an image that was at once concrete, arresting, memorable, and simple:

'A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism.'

There's a lesson here for all of us.

LETTERS

State frame-ups

I READ your article in Workers Press and want to say how angry and horrified I am, both as a Trotskyist and a father, about what has been done to Cliff Slaughter's son and his friends under the Thatcher government. It is an indication of the political and social crisis of the British ruling class that they have to frame young men on the evidence of police provocateurs.

The fact that they fail to act against the Front and their peddling of racism and violence indicates that they have no basic disagreement with them, which is of course hardly unexpected.

The attempts by the Hyland group of the ICP to make political capital out of the tragic events I suppose should be hardly less unexpected.

Like North in America and Beams here, they are the remnants of all that was foul in the International Committee: sectarian, lying, opportunists and without a political principle in their body.

I hope that Patrick is able to withstand the oppression of England's jails. It is a terrible thing to impose on a young man and clearly a pretence by the government of acting to 'solve'

problems created by capitalism. It may be some consolation to him to know that he is not alone in his persecution by the Tories and that miners were jailed for their courageous struggle and hundreds of Irish republicans have been locked up for their fight.

Sometimes the oppression of a class might not appear overtly political (I don't know whether this is the case here or whether they were trying to get at Cliff Slaughter and the WRP) but the state uses its forces to maintain its dominance in a million ways.

There is a case here in Sydney of a 16 year old migrant youth, Angelo Tsakos, who lived in the outer working class suburbs. He was shot dead at point blank range by police who stopped the car he was driving in the early hours of the morning.

Only later was it found to be stolen. The cop was acquitted of manslaughter, despite evidence pointing to the fact that it was indeed murder.

Once again, not on the surface a political act, but one nevertheless which demonstrated the need to keep the working class in its place, and the utter contempt the ruling class has for the rights and very life of workers.

There are other comrades here who share my feelings of solidarity and support with Cliff Slaughter and his family in this struggle.

Derek Mortimer, Balmain
New South Wales,
Australia

Trotsky and Tariq Ali

AS I'M certain other comrades will have noted, one of the erstwhile collaborators of the WRP's Moscow trials campaign, Tariq Ali did not see fit, when interviewing the Soviet playwright Mikhail Shatrov in the 'Guardian' last week ('Right Onward') to correct or even comment upon the misrepresentation Shatrov put forward that 'Men like Trotsky, who should have fought (Stalin in 1922-24) at the same time remained quiet.'

No doubt Ali felt he was following his brief of impartial bourgeois journalist to the letter.

One more example of trying to be all things to all men.

Jeff Jackson
SW London

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Decoding Alphabet 7

WHAT do you think Robinson Crusoe would dream about? A footprint in the sand? A pink satin court shoe? Answer...both. What were Delilah's tools? Answer...a comb, a pair of scissors and a hardened steel drill bit. Now fill in your own answers. What do 'the slums of Disneyland, where children never see' look like? How would you visualise Pele's retirement? Or decode alphabet numbers 5 and 7?

If you cannot hazard an answer, or feel perplexed or curious enough, go to the Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, and see Anthony Earnshaw's exhibition. You should also go if you have the taste for witty, elegant and wildly free surrealist art. Humour and cerebral wit are Tony Earnshaw's mode. He has flashes of comic genius which ranges from the sardonic and gently ironic to complex and refined absurdities.

Like all serious artists he has explored a series of media and genres. There is a sensitive and painfully self-conscious self-portrait as a young man, pointillist pencil work, graphics and Klee-like semi-abstracts like 'Man with his own

moon' (c 1955). But it seems to have been an impatient apprenticeship both for economic and political reasons. He quickly became fascinated with what George Melly calls '...two marvellous revelations, hot jazz and the surrealist movement.'

Tony stayed a working man all his working life in the engineering industry. His constructions, or 'assemblages', are full of terraced street skirting boards, urban cast offs and corner-shop mouse traps which reflect a provincial centre of the best kind in his work. But it is work with an international inspiration. The Sheffield exhibition, although not as extensive as I would have liked, demonstrates the artist's commitment to the exploration of the possibilities of the surrealist traditions.

There is the familiar, almost primitivist presentation of obsessive dream symbols, like the embodied wolf's head biting a rope slung to a tenement window, strange hybrid beasts like Max Ernst's and arcane visual jokes based on 'hazard' and chance encounter.

But Earnshaw has cut his own surrealist furrow with an original artistic and political devotion.

He writes in the catalogue to a Leeds exhibition from 1987, 'I first saw the light of day, or for that matter the shades of night in 1924, the year Lenin died and Breton published his First Manifesto.'

He follows the traditions and uses the devices of Magritte and Man Ray in his own way. He uses wood, paper, glass etc., familiar mass produced materials, broken up, wrenched out of functional context and re-arranged for a number of purposes. Surrealist experimentation took a unique direction: it displaced, defamiliarised the most intimate objects in order to subvert an aggressively unreal ideological structuring of bourgeois everyday life and offer alternative glimpses of freedom. The American Man Ray, for example, studiously worked on his useless objects like a flat iron with spikes, French baguettes painted in blue gloss paint and a winking metronome.

Tony Earnshaw begins from the same art and politics but develops them in an individual and innovative way. His 'assemblages' are not simply funny, they act like visual literary conceits or complex associative metaphors bringing together the most disparate referents with a fine and steely thread of wit.

For instance, Robinson Crusoe's dream juxtaposes in an exhibition case, a footprint with a court shoe, connecting colonisation, racial exploitation, sexual fantasy, fetish, etc. etc. Imagine what he does with 'Newton's second childhood' or the 'Boyhood of Don Juan'.

Do try and see this exhibition and enjoy the bitter transitory freedoms that Earnshaw's art offers.



Ireland: Labour cowardice and British state barbarity

WHEN Labour leader Neil Kinnock - the man who left the miners to fight Thatcher on their own - condemns the IRA for an act of infamous cowardice, it's hard to find words to answer him.

Obviously, Kinnock will never understand the courage of young people who, seeing armed attacks such as the one on Mill Hill Barracks as the only way forward, join the IRA.

Neither does Kinnock condemn the very real acts of cowardice perpetrated by the British army, the Ulster Defence Regiment, Royal Ulster Constabulary and various loyalist military groups whose joint armed strength outnumbered the IRA's by ten to one.

In the last fortnight, Kinnock said nothing about:

- the policemen who broke into IRA volunteer Brendan Davidson's house in Belfast, or the loyalist gunmen who assassinated him a few hours later;
- The RUC-British army raiding parties who smashed

into nine homes on the Springhill estate, Belfast, threatening men women and children alike;

- the gunmen who tried to kill Belfast taxi driver Patrick Fitzpatrick, and threatened pregnant woman passenger Theresa Catney, who subsequently had a miscarriage;

- soldiers who attacked a man in McDonald Street, west

Belfast just after midnight on Saturday 16 July, smashed his head open with a rifle butt (he needed eight stitches) and threatened to shoot him if he reported the incident;

- the warders at Wakefield prison, Yorkshire who since September last year have held republican prisoner Noel Gibson in solitary confinement, in a cell entirely without sunlight.

All these cowardly acts of British barbarity, against republican fighters and nationalist civilians alike, really are cowardly... and really are supported by the Labour leadership. They are the reasons why marches such as this Saturday's in London, calling for British withdrawal from Ireland, must be supported by every socialist and trade unionist.

Belfast jobs threat

THE two largest employers in the north of Ireland, Harland and Wolff's shipyard and Shorts Brothers aircraft company, are threatened with closure by Tory privatisation policies.

The results could be catastrophic job losses for Belfast's protestant community, who have a virtual monopoly of jobs as a result of decades of sectarian employment practices.

The shipyard, although a shadow of its former self, still employs 4,000. State subsidies have covered growing losses for the last 12 years - but this could change if a plan to sell it to shipping magnate Ravi Tikoo goes through.

Tikoo, who describes himself as a 'shipowner not a shipbuilder', plans to build a \$500 million floating hotel for the 'ultimate dream', but there are no other orders to speak of and no reason why Tikoo would sustain the yard's endless losses.

The missiles, aircraft and aerostructures divi-

sions of Shorts, the six counties' largest employer with 7,600 workers, are likely to be sold separately. While RAF orders for missiles are on the books, 3,000 jobs in the main aircraft division would almost certainly go. Northern Ireland industry minister Peter Viggers says: 'If the UK was to continue to isolate northern Ireland from economic forces, then we would be doing the province a disservice.'

The effect of such an attitude on protestant workers, whose 'loyalty' to Britain has always gone hand in hand with the fact that they are first in the jobs queue, is impossible to determine.

A £10 million state aid project for poor areas of Belfast, both nationalist and loyalist, has just been announced - but this paltry sum can provide nothing except a few hundred temporary jobs. 'Republican News', the Sinn Fein newspaper compared the £10 million with the annual cost of RUC policing - £384 million.

News shorts . . .

Out of touch

Nobody surely really believed that the government was prepared to spend £150 million to house the Thyssen art collection.

The sum mentioned was well below what every other country had offered, so what was the extra something the Baron was hoping to extract from Thatcher?

His vanity knows no bounds. One story has it that he offered his fabulous collection, a touring version of which is currently packing them in at the Royal Academy, to the Russians, but only if they would pull down the Berlin Wall.

How not to claim

Higher and wider counters seems to be the main recommendation being given to civil servants whose work brings them into contact with the public. Courses in self-defence was not considered a good idea. Among the incidents described in a new booklet just issued by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

include one claimant waving a baseball bat; another seen sharpening a large knife on a kerb outside. But such incidents are still rare. 'The wounding is not so much physical as psychological,' the report assures us.

Peru

The first-time attempt at a nation-wide strike by miners is gaining ground as it enters its third week. Some of the most important copper, zinc and silver operations are said to be affected. Among the demands being resolutely fought for are substantial pay increases, a shorter working-day and earlier retirement. An average miner's weekly wage is estimated to be less than a quarter of what is needed to feed a normal size family.

Only in it for the money

Hawke's Labour government has already got a lot to answer to Australian workers for, but

allowing the first official visit by a British prime minister since the days of Harold Macmillan just about takes the biscuit.

Thatcher's 'whirlwind' five-day schedule is being conducted amid the tightest security arrangements the country has known.

No doubt meeting plenty of rugged, private enterprise-types, she has also descended on the Flying Doctors Service.

She told a group of schoolchildren she couldn't possibly have wanted to go into politics when she was a child. In those days, she said, 'they weren't paid very much'.

Win now, pay later

Credit cards are gradually being introduced for the first time in the Soviet Union. The first person to receive one is the head of the National Olympic Committee.

Athletes selected for Seoul will be issued with Visa cards, the 'official credit card' of the Soviet team. Is this an example of the Soviet bureaucracy 're-introducing capitalist norms of distribution'?