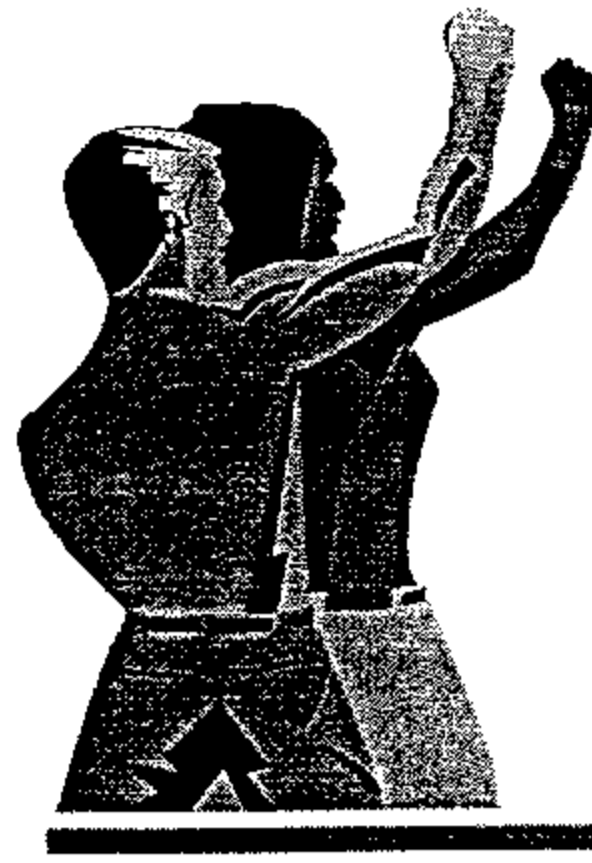


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Journal of the International Socialist League British Section of the International Workers' League

Only Socialist Measures Can Stop Britain's Decline



INSIDE:

**BOSNIA: WORKERS AID CONVOY
POLAND AND VIETNAM**



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C O M M E N T

Where is Britain now?

WORKING MEN AND WOMEN and members of the middle class are seeing the terrible decline of their security and that of their children, corruption, destruction of democratic rights at the bottom of society, disintegration of the health service, education and the provision of homes, while, at the top, wealth and power is shared out with a money-grubbing that ignores the real decay of society on all sides below.

A recent book by Will Hutton economics, editor of the *Guardian* newspaper, is called *The State We are In* and deals with the crisis of British society. The sacred cows of British democratic institutions, supposedly the envy of the world in the past are left naked, smelly and rotten, by his book. He gives a picture of a economy run by a class in parasitic decay in search of short term results and with no concern for the future.

"The rot starts at the top" he writes, "The political system is malfunctioning, bringing politicians and civil servants into disrepute and discrediting the very notion of the public realm."

"Lines of democratic accountability have been broken as schools, hospitals and housing have been removed from their former control by local government or parliament and placed under the management of new trusts and agencies."

He quotes the *Guardian* 19 November 1993 which estimated that there will soon be a total of 7,700 new quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations) dispersing £54 billion of public money.

"The stewardship of this money has passed to an oligarchy of Conservative placemen with a patchy record of increased efficiency more than offset by the loss of accountability...the state is regressing to a system of patronage and priva-

tised carelessness with public money such as existed prior to the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the late-nineteenth century."

He points out that there is growing scepticism about the capacity of the British judicial system to administer justice. "With lawyers fees climbing to ever more outrageous levels (up to £500 an hour) justice has become the privilege of the better off, while the legal aid budget designed to create equal access to the law has been squeezed."

"The City of London has become a byword for speculation, inefficiency and cheating. Given the power to regulate their own affairs, City financial markets and institutions have conspicuously failed to meet any reasonable standard of honest dealing with the public or their own kind."

"Insurance company salesmen have wrongly advised as many as 400,000 members of occupational funds...Insurance companies sell policies they know are unsuitable and calculate their profits on the certainty that buyers will cash in their appropriate policies early, for a fraction of their proper value".

"The Stock Exchange has been unable to prevent systematic manipulation of share prices for individual profit by insiders with market-sensitive or privileged information, while the Serious Fraud Office has spectacularly failed to make its prosecutions stick — and even when it gets a result the sentences are notoriously light."

This account of a class-ridden, decomposing society gets worse:

"The sense that the aim of financial and corporate life is personal enrichment at any price is accentuated by the extravagant remuneration packages for senior executives..."

Where is Britain Now?

“The professions — notably lawyers and accountants — have not been far behind...The avarice of the professions has begun to weigh down on the bodies politic and economic. The privatised utilities are particularly offensive in this regard.”

“Great personal wealth has not translated into wealth for the community. Personal enrichment has in fact been accompanied by a weakening of the long-run growth rate...”

The country which could boast for a large part of the nineteenth century that it was the workshop of the world and then the centre of an empire on which the sun never set, is now only Europe's fourth economic power behind Germany, France and Italy. As a consequence, foreign policy and home policy continually explode in crisis.

Hutton is not a socialist he is a disappointed Keynesian who wants to refurbish capitalism, his solutions are utopian, but he gives a picture ‘from the inside’ that the philistine leaders of Labour Party completely ignore, their complacency held in place by their careerist ambitions to become Her Majesty's Ministers.

In this book we have laid out the source of the crisis over Europe. Neither Tory nor New Labour has any real answer because both are based on the false hope for past glories. In the reality of today where the capitalist world as a whole is in increasingly fundamental and severe difficulties and British capitalism is declining more swiftly than the rest, it no longer has weight in Europe nor weight in its relationship with the US. The country which could boast for a large part of the nineteenth century that it was the workshop of the world and then the centre of an empire on which the sun never set, is now only

Europe's fourth economic power behind Germany, France and Italy. As a consequence, foreign policy and home policy continually explode in crisis.

The crisis matures so swiftly that the Tory government can be forced to an election and give way to Labour before the end of its present term. There is a totally new situation and it cannot fail to first of all effect the political physiognomy in Britain.

Discontent

Again returning to Hutton, we read that “a description of Britain in the late 1970s would have been just as despairing” because the “government of Britain and the management of the economy could only proceed it seemed by grace of the trade union movement withholding strike action in pursuit of higher wage claims.” Hutton approaches it from a capitalist perspective so that we do not get to the roots of the crisis, only a description. But it is a central question when looking at the situation to-day and what is in store under a Labour government led by Blair. The attack on the trade unions and the propaganda about holding the country to ransom of the time was a result of the problems of capitalism with the rank and file of the trade union organisations standing in the way of its drive to lower the costs of labour.

The reaction of the trade union rank and file in face of the inflation of prices, under which the working class suffered the most, was to use their strength to keep their wages in line with the inflation. Right wing trade union leaders and the Labour government sought to prevent them. The Labour government itself at this time was intent on saving capitalism. Tony Benn in his diaries makes this very plain, although, like Pontious Pilate, Tony Benn has a certain facility of emerging from situations in which he assisted the right wing with his hands clean. He was a Minister in this Labour Cabinet, Secretary of State for Industry, loyally carrying out the gov-

Where is Britain Now?

ernment's policies and, as he says, went "over to the House through the civil servants' picket lines" in 1979. He writes in the Foreword to *Conflicts of Interest*, Diaries 1977-80:

"When in 1978 these IMF cuts began to bite and the Government sought to limit wages in the public and private sector, relations both with the trade unions and with industrialists deteriorated: the so called Winter of Discontent led inexorably to Labour's defeat and to the election of Margaret Thatcher's monetarist administration, committed to upholding and strengthening British capitalism *by quite different means.* (our italics)

"...The Conservative government that came to power in May 1979 has been widely characterised as 'Thatcherite', but, as my Diaries show, many of the principles and policies of the Labour government — particularly in respect of the adoption of monetarist measures, its commitment to the EEC, and its maintenance and modernisation of nuclear weapons — suggest 'Thatcherism' had become the philosophy of the British establishment long before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, and had paved the way for the intellectual dominance of right-wing ideas throughout the Eighties".

The Labour leaders collapsed in 1979 and the Tories came to power on lying propaganda which confused and whipped up some sections of the middle class and some backward-looking sections of the working class. The offensive of capitalism gathered pace and accelerated with the retreat of trade union leaders and reached a high point with the defeat of the miners in 1985.

It was the lowering of working class standards, a policy determined by the IMF and part of a whole policy to ensure capitalist profit continued, that the Thatcher government spearheaded which brought the ills that many Tory voters of 1979 are bitter about today.

Tony Blair, leader of the Labour Party, has gone far in preparing his party as a tool to put him and his fellow careerists into government on a

policy to preserve capitalism. But he will not prevent an explosion and a debacle. His successes in the Labour Party now, like the success of the Labour Party in the coming election, piles up the contradictions and a great explosion because he is moving in the opposite direction to these forces among communities, professional workers, youth and in the middle class who are seeking answers to fundamental questions. This movement will have its biggest collision when

Tony Blair, leader of the Labour Party, has gone far in preparing his party as a tool to put him and his fellow careerists into government on a policy to preserve capitalism. But he will not prevent an explosion and a debacle.

Blair takes the government.

What is shown by the betrayals of these Labour leaders now and their inability to defend *any* reforms is the depth of those problems and the fact that the only way to defend Welfare States throughout the world and to prevent a large proportion of the population of the world sinking into the pit, with millions, particularly the youth, being permanently without work, is to reorganise society with socialist measures. The major force to accomplish that is the working class and its organisations.

We believe that Trotskyists like ourselves, revolutionary socialists, must prepare on the perspective of an immense sharpening of struggle under a Labour government. It is then that the need of creating a new party for the working class will throw up concrete possibilities for doing so. Such a party could be created by forces who genuinely begin to feel the need for a socialist organisation which would seek to build an international world party in concert with co-thinkers throughout the world.

One Who Fought

In the last issue of Socialist Voice we published the first part of an interview with former docker Joe Ryan in which he talked about the struggles in the Manchester and Salford docks in the period after the second World War and the formation of the Blue Union.

In the second part, Joe gives his account of how he joined the Trotskyist movement and continued his fight in the mines after leaving the docks.

What attracted you to Trotskyism?

Well to start with I did not want to join a party. I never wanted to join the Labour Party — I would never join them and I did not want to join the Communist Party. I told my old fella I had to join something so, he said, “join the union, be active in the union”. So that’s what I did.

One day, John Macshane, one of the dockers with the Blue Union, came over from Birkenhead and he asked me if I wanted to go to a meeting. We met in the Mitre pub in Manchester — he said that it was half a crown to go.

He said to me, “can you say Bourgeois?”, I said, “yes.” He said, “can you say petty-bourgeois?”, I said, “yes.” “Can you say proletariat?” I said, “yes.” “Well”, he said “you’re in!” They were good lads, came from all round Manchester. We would hold meetings once a week discussing books and all sorts.

Because of that, I even entered the Labour Party in Moston. There was corruption. Then there was Councillor Lamb, who opposed sheikhs being employed on the buses in Manchester. The level of discussion was very low. The type of argument in reply to the points I put forward was, “I have been in the Labour Party for twenty five years and I disagree with him.” That was supposed to be an answer.

I used to sell the Tribune on the docks. I would sell about 90 every Saturday. It used to be 6d and the sales were good. Then they asked: should we double the price or cut the size. We said: cut the size, because one shilling was a lot of money in those days. Well, they put it up to 1s and the sales went down.

I did not last long in the Labour Party. Jim Allen and I were organising meetings in pubs and some were very large. One big issue was rents. Later on, we kicked off the Young Socialists. We had two hundred members, but they disbanded us because we were playing loud music.

I remember talking to Harry Ratner. He said to me, ‘you have got to read that Anti-During’,

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that was the first book he gave me. He used to play chess. I knew a fellow, a brick layer, who could play chess so I got them together. Harry lost and he never mentioned chess again. Once, he asked to go to a meeting of the Blue and started talking about Marxism. The lads looked at me wanting to know what the hell was going on.

At that time, there were 2,500 dockers in Manchester and two in the Trotskyist group. One of the national Sunday newspapers came up with a headline: "The ghost of Trotsky walks the docks." Well, I had never heard of Trotsky when that headline was written. I had to ask Jim Allen who Trotsky was. I said, "there is only two of us and we are supposed to be scaring the 2,500 dockers out on strike!"

How long did you stay after the formation of the Blue union?

I stayed as a docker for a couple of years and then I went to the pit with Jim Allen. After we went down the pit we really got organised, much more so than in the docks. We went to Liverpool, Doncaster and Yorkshire. There were some good lads over there.

What did you organise around in the pit?

I was a trainee, so I was with an instructor. The first thing was that I found a way of getting them extra money. I went to the union and we got the extra money for them. One Irish fellow said, "you're a genius, but why didn't the secretary get it for us?" "Well", I said, "the secretary is a lazy right winger."

I also told the men to get the rule book, understand it and then you will defeat them. We went along to the union meetings. One trick the branch leaders tried was to use big words. But we started getting pit head ballots and we kicked off half the committee.

The wages down the pit were pathetic. In 1926 the miners had a seven hour day. We were work-

ing an eight hour day. I moved a resolution that we have a seven day. It went through the branch. Joe Gormley, the General Secretary, fought against it, but we got it through. They came back and said, "you cannot have a full half hour but

We took the paper to Kent. But we could not get into the pit. It was run by Stalinists and we could not even get into the club, which was called little Moscow. They knew I was down there. You could not get through the pit gates because the deputies were there with pick handles. But there was a train which went in to pick up coal, so I got on that and got inside the pit gates.

we got you 15 minutes off". So we said OK, and next year went back for another 15 minutes. The following year it was put to the Coal Board and the Board said no. Instead, they gave five days holiday in lieu.

By this time our reputation was growing. We tried getting into other areas. At that time, we could not get into Durham, they were right wing Labour, almost as bad as Nottingham. I went into a pub in Nottingham and went up to a young lad of about 20. I asked him where he worked and he said he worked behind the cutter. Then one fellow came over and said, "if you want to talk politics, you can get on your soap box." That was his father.

One lad in Nottingham joined us and he had to keep his name secret. If his name had become known he would of been out of the pit. They were terrible in Nottingham and they seemed frightened to death.

One day we had a brass band from Yorkshire and they practised in the canteen by the pit. We chatted to them, talked about politics and they

One Who Fought

were as right as rain. They came from Calverton colliery but, when they were back at their pit, we could not get a discussion out of them.

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One day the top man in Yorkshire sent a telegram to the top man in Lancashire. It said, "Keep your cowboys on your side of the Pennines and I'll keep mine here."

It was difficult to get the 'Miner' out regularly because the Labour Party put pressure on the printers not to print the paper. So we printed one week and not the next, we tried four printers in Manchester. In the end we had to print it in Yorkshire. We produced it as a branch newspaper of the Bradford pit. We did well, even though it was again just me and Jim Allen.

The paper drove them mad. The General Secretary was Will Paynter. One issue we brought out was 'Will Paynter Lead?' We went into the office and stuck it on his desk.

Fighting Hospital Closures in Bury

In the last issue of Socialist voice we published an article by Robin Star on the affects of the National Health and Community Care Act 1990 on old people. The following interview by Peter Windeler shows how hospital closures hit old people particularly.

What do you do with working class people when they are too old to work? After the last war the incoming Labour government was under no illusions. It had to provide for the remaining years and ensure there were adequate health and other social provisions. But in the cruel and heartless 1990's the answer seems to be: If you cannot make money out of them, let them die!

One may recoil from such a stark indictment but how else explain why an elderly lady was left recently on a trolley in a hospital waiting to be allocated a bed — which she was told was not available. Then to tell the hospital that she would pay if only they would provide a bed. Upon the payment of £3,000 she was immediately given a private bed. Recently, a husband went to visit his wife at an over-stretched London hospital 9 hours after she was admitted, only to find her dead on a trolley in a corridor. Sadly nearly everyone who has elderly relatives have similar stories. Pensioners freely say that hospitals and doctors are no longer interested in you once you are old — that means above working age; which is reducing each year.

There seems little doubt that the reforms of the health service are only being implemented in order that the NHS can be privatised. Hence the creation of non-elected quangos to run the service; the shedding of long-stay patients and the massive capital spending creating huge centralised hospitals. Under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) announced by the Chancellor in the

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autumn financial statement in 1994, private companies could soon be running National Health service hospitals and services.

However, opposition to proposed closures frequently erupts. Such a campaign has come to the fore in Bury against the plans to close the Florence Nightingale Hospital. John Schollick from the Bury Health Service Defence Campaign spoke to Socialist Voice about the how they have been organising and the issues involved.

"The area health authority in Bury describes the closure of Florence Nightingale Hospital as a 'transfer of services'. This was not good enough for the people of Bury, a town with a population of 150,000, who protested against the proposals and are determined to stop the closure.

"The town has five hospitals. There is Bury General which has 237 beds, Fairfield General with 442 beds, Florence Nightingale with 70 beds, Bealey Community Hospital with 16 beds and Ramsbottom Cottage Hospital with 14 beds. The locations are suitably scattered throughout the catchment area. In April this year Bury and Rochdale Health Authorities announced their proposals to close the Florence Nightingale 'site' and transfer the patients to Fairfield General. The proposals were to be implemented after three months but after a local campaign opposing the closure the local Community Health Council has objected and the case will now go to a public inquiry.

"The Area Health Authority said that closure would improved care at the Fairfield site and give better support services. They said that the existing site was under-used. They said that the closure was part of the overall plan to centralise services and it would release cash through the sale of buildings and land etc.

"However, everyone with experience of the service at Florence Nightingale say it is 100% and could not be improved. Patients tend to be older and long stay and therefore already have sufficient medical support. The site is under used because the intake of patients has deliberately

been run-down.

"Concentration on one site would lose the good natural surroundings of the Florence Nightingale site - so beneficial in the summer when patients can sit out in the gardens - at the Fairfield site they would be on the 2nd or 3rd floor of the building and any cash from the sale Florence Nightingale site would go to the Regional Authority and away from the local authorities.

"Residents are fighting on the basis of the existing site and facilities being 100% satisfactory - so why close the hospital with all the expenses and trouble this would involve? It is becoming clear that this proposed closure, like the rest throughout the country, is motivated by a balance sheet mentality that in the medium/long-term will result in considerable expenditure reductions for the National Health Service and opportunities to make sickness profitable. More elderly patients will be discharged into private nursing homes where state help is minimal, and in many cases nil, until all savings and cash from the forced sale of the family home has been used to pay the fees to the private owners. £300 to £500 per week is not uncommon and home care has rocketed to £7.50 per hour. Since the 1993 Community Care Act greater responsibility has been placed on local Councils who mean-test those who receive services. A reduction of care beds for the elderly by closure of hospitals for long-stay patients must be a further worry for the council and it is hoped that they will join the residents to prevent the closure."

The case of Florence Nightingale is a clear example of how the 'officer caste' who now increasingly run our health service 'bend' the truth to suit their own needs. They are, no doubt, looking forward to the day they can enjoy huge bonuses in a privatised service just like the bosses of the privatised water and other utilities do now.

Bury Health Service Defence Campaign can be contacted via its secretary Sandra O'Brien 0161 762 9462

C O N V O Y

Defend Multi-ethnic Bosnia Workers Aid Convoy To Tuzla

The Workers Aid for Bosnia summer convoy to Tuzla was a great success. It was made up of 15 trucks and over sixty people.

Martin Ralph a member of the International Socialist League went on the convoy. Here he reports on his experiences on the convoy and draws some lessons for the future of Workers' Aid

ON THE CONVOY were contingents from Britain, Ireland, France, Portugal and Spain. There were two internationals on the convoy. The International Workers League had representatives from Britain, France, Portugal and Spain and the Workers International from Britain and France.

The Post Office union (CWU) from the north-west of England sent four delegates and a 7.5 ton truck. There were also other delegates from the CWU and the French Sud PTT. Amongst those from Britain were delegates from the NUT (school teachers), AUT (university teachers) and the Camden branch of Unison. There were also a shop steward from the TGWU and a branch secretary from the AEU. From France there were a number of teacher and student delegates.

There was a large proportion of youth on the convoy. Some had taken a truck together with the rave band Desert Storm which had been such a great success on a previous convoy. Others came from universities, including Cambridge and Leeds.

One of the central aims of the convoy was to establish direct links between workers in Bosnia and workers in the rest of Europe. Such links are the first steps in the re-building the internationalism of the working class. There is a deep desire in Europe and elsewhere in the world to support the fight for a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Bosnia. It is an elementary part of the fight for socialism. To accept ethnic cleansing is to accept the division of people and workers and

therefore the division of the European working class.

Tuzla

Everywhere in Tuzla there are people working to re-build their services, their organisations and their lives and preserve their multi-ethnic community. Meetings and discussions took place with many people, including trade unions, Tuzla Council, women's groups, schools, the university, the Old People's Home and the youth from the convoy quickly made contact with their counterparts in Tuzla. Similar discussions were also held in other places close to Tuzla.

Tuzla is, cut off by road, air, telecommunications and by the European banks. Its isolation comes not only because of the war but also because of what is referred to as the international community, the United Nations and the governments of the West and others. The Western governments have enormous resources at their disposal, but in Bosnia these resources do not reach the communities and are not employed for the benefit of the communities. Everywhere you go it seems the UN is there not to help the people but to act on behalf of foreign governments to impose some kind of division. As you drive through Bosnia one passes large UN depots, full of earth moving machinery, jeeps, trucks, telecommunications equipment, armoured vehicles and other weaponry. The contrast with what the Bosnians' have is everywhere.

R e p o r t



Convoy team in Split on their way to Tuzla

As we went towards Vares, a UN convoy went by with its multi-wheel drive vehicles, they passed an old woman trying to avoid the deepest mud on the road in her worn out sandals. On the roads, in the main, you see battered cars, horse drawn carts and made up vehicles.

The Western press continuously talk about the Bosnian Muslims as if the Muslims in Bosnia were the only people there and that they were fighting like the other two sides. It is not true and it never was, even though it is what the West wants. One of the visits we made was to the orphanage in Tuzla. There they explained that the Saudi government had offered them money on the condition that they teach Islam, they declined the money.

The District Union Committee of Tuzla helped set up a number of meetings with different bodies, including the university, the Post Office and the teachers. We also met the President of the unions of BiH and unions outside of Tuzla.

Tuzla University

This is no ordinary university. In the middle of a war zone it fights — the administration, staff and students — for a multi-ethnic future. Its courses are developed according to the needs of

Tuzla and its citizens. What is remarkable is that there feels to be more of a desire to plan for a future in education in Tuzla than there is in Britain. Education here is run on short term goals.

The Deputy Rector of the only functioning university in Bosnia, who led the first meeting, stressed that they were fighting for a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Tuzla and Bosnia. He said that the university had opened its doors to the refugees and they have many more students than they had before the war.

He told us that one of their biggest problems was a shortage of teachers. The university can only afford to pay wages of £10 a month. Unprofor (the United Nations protection force), for example, pays £500 a month for those who can speak English to work as translators. This means that the university has lost many of its English teachers.

The university has issued an appeal which includes a request for English teachers to go and work at the university. (Copies of this appeal and others can be got from the ISL or Workers Aid, address, telephone front cover). But not only English teachers have left Tuzla, about 50 per cent of all those with degrees have left Tuzla since the start of the war.

C O N V O Y

The Deputy Rector went on to explain that the university was geared to the needs of the local industry but for four years they had suffered a blockade on scientific information and literature which is very damaging. He said that they were trying to overcome this blockade.

The meeting at the university gave a glimpse of what could be achieved in overcoming the blockade. It was truly international and the discussion had contributions from people from the universities and colleges of Amsterdam, Lille,

They added that if we really wanted to end the blockade we should help them lift the UN closure of the local airport.

The university obviously caters for a section of the Tuzla and refugee youth and they are affected by all the things which affect the youth. When the city centre was shelled on the 25th May the majority of the 71 young people killed were from the high school or university. The appeal which the university wrote after our meeting said they wanted the arms embargo to be lifted, "not be-

cause we want to kill civilians and destroy cities controlled by fascist forces, but to defend democracy and in order to maintain multi-cultural society."

As with all the people we met, they depended on aid. However, an often used saying sums up what they wanted: when a person is hungry do not give him fish, give him the means to catch fish. The word Tuzla means salt and the town devel-



The flowers mark where 71 children died on 25th May - killed by shelling

Nancy, Cambridge, Leicester, Barcelona and Manchester.

The university is developing an area for the study of disability because of the problems created by the war. To develop all these areas they need scientific journals and contacts.

They also need the basics of clothing and food. They mentioned one refugee student who went to the university for one month wearing the same dress - that was all she had to wear.

oped because of the large salt deposits. But, the UNHCR actually imports salt for humanitarian aid rather than help them rebuild the salt industry.

At these meetings and with the some people from the trade union district committee we also touched on the history of Yugoslavia, the role of the partisan brigades in Tuzla. By the end of our stay we were given three thick books on the history - all in Bosnian so it will take time to get

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some of it translated!

When we met with the faculty for the disabled they again stressed the need for direct contact and support. They also talked about the fact that a lot of money has been made out of the war by war profiteers and they thought that one of the interests from the west was for the reason of profit. We also talked about what would happen if the war ended and they knew they would face big problems of a different form - connected with those who wanted to make money, the people of the black market and people who control the money from the west.

Tuzla university is concentrating its efforts to help the fight in the war and is trying to help the needs of Tuzla society. Compare that effort with the opposite trend in Britain they are not setting up faculties to help the disabled, they are setting up faculties to help big business and the market or the faculties are changing what they do in order to get European funding - define the courses according to the needs of the market.

Post Office

The first trade union meeting in Tuzla took place between the Tuzla PTT (telecommunications), the British CWU and the French Sud PTT. By the time they had arrived in Tuzla they had written a joint statement declaring their support for Tuzla which ended with the slogan 'solidarity not charity.'

To my knowledge this is the first time that the two unions had met and worked so closely together.

During the meeting with the Tuzla PTT the discussion went over what technical aid and humanitarian aid could be brought. One other idea developed which involved the possibility of the British union acting as a post box for letters for Bosnian refugees in this country and to be delivered to the Post office in Tuzla for on ward de-

livery.

The Post Office workers met their counterparts but they are not as numerous as before the war. The translator explained before the war he was a manager of a department which had 14 workers. Now the same department had 4 workers and he did much the same work as the other four. It is the same all over Tuzla (and Bosnia). The unions role and efforts are not only directed to the place of work but also to the war effort. Across the road to the PTT building is the Second Corps, which, with this force the people of Tuzla defeated a direct attack by the forces controlled by Karadic in hand to hand fighting in the early part of the war.

School for the mentally disabled

Before the war the school had 270 pupils now it has 176 with 37 teachers there are fewer students because they do not have enough money to keep going. The pupils were very poor before the war and most of them lived by state welfare. Teachers live off humanitarian aid.

The head teacher (and in discussions at the university and the council) raised the problem of Oxfam which is funding the school for the mentally disabled but Oxfam have informed them they will not continue funding past this year. The reason they have given is that they do not have enough funds. They were clearly very worried.

We found that strange as Oxfam has often advertised in the Guardian for funds for Bosnia children in the last few months.

Most the pupils are Muslim but some are Serb and Croat. They all have the same problem of how to survive. There are 27 with epilepsy. The pupils have nothing. They need food, clothes, shoes, school equipment, sanitary equipment, multi-vitamins. They need a holiday every year but they do not get any holidays before the war

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they had two holidays a year - one to the coast and the other to the mountains.

A special problem for the staff was how to protect these children during the bombardments.

Old People's Home

We met the director and discussed what they needed and what we could do. We then met the nursing staff who took us around the building and introduced us to a woman in her forties who had carried her cerebral palsy son over the mountains from Srebrenica.

The staff did not talk about their harsh conditions and working without pay they talked about the situation of the elderly.

They were very worried about the coming winter. The old people need heating and hot water - they only have cold water. They fear that the coming winter will take lives of some of the old ones which they could save if they had an independent heating system.

Most the people are ill or critically ill and need medicines. The need transport to collect food and they need an ambulance - they have no means of transporting old people at the moment.

Another old person apologised to us for not being able to greet us standing up another promised that next time we went they would bake us a cake. We thought to ourselves next time we must arrange a social meeting between the convoy and the old people and we should take them some cakes!

The youth

No report could be complete without saying something about the children of Tuzla. Some only wanted to help, to be hugged and given a sweet. When we gave a Deutchmark to a child he went away and after a while came back having bought some sweets and gave one to each of us.

Towards the end we visited the graves of the 71 children who had died. The children had been buried together as a mark of multi-ethnic unity. All the graves were in an area of wood which had been specially cleared and which over looked the town. Many of the graves had flowers and were visited daily by the families. Some had no one to visit them.

Women

There are a number of women organisations in Tuzla and some of the members of the convoy discussed with them. The women carry a lot of the problems and suffering they are the ones mainly who look after the children, the families and the disabled from the war. The energies go into keeping their families together. There is a desperate need to improve hygiene, with soap, shampoo etc. They also said that there was a need for the women of Europe to actively unite together with the women of Bosnia and against the war.

Lifting The Arms Embargo

Many of the convoy members heard grim tales from the refugees or people of Tuzla about their family being killed, babies killed. One the postal workers from England said he had had doubts about the slogan of lifting the arms embargo but when he was in Tuzla he asked the family where he was staying what they thought, they all replied whatever the consequences they want arms in order to be able to defend themselves.

Croatia

Many people have asked us if we in danger on the convoy not only in BiH but also in Croatia from the war or from people.

The Croatian offensive took place as we were in Split and leaving for Herzegovina. A number of times when we stopped in Croatia we received

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warm support. In Rijeka after having driven half the night to try and catch up with the convoy we pulled into a camp site. After using the showers and having a cup of tea. We were asked where we were going. After we told them we were going to Bosnia they refused to take any money and said we could use the camp site in future for the convoy. On the way back we called in again and discussed with them about Tuzla and the war, their opinion is interesting. They were clearly in support of Bosnia, mainly from a humanitarian view. They said there were extremists on all sides: the Chetniks, the Mujhaddin and the extremists in the Croatian army. They also wondered what would happen in Croatia. The cost of living is very high (many of them catch a coach to Italy to buy things) and that if the war finished what would happen to the 100,000 soldiers who would return with little money and no job.

Convoy

Many people who had been on previous convoys said that this convoy had been an advance. The presence of many more trade union delegations (including students) of an international character obviously strengthened the convoy. More connections had been made than on previous convoys but it almost goes without saying that this convoy could not have happened without all the work in Europe and on the previous convoys to Tuzla.

Through the District Union Committee we started a number of meetings with the university, the Post Office and the teachers and we also met the President of the unions of BiH and unions outside of Tuzla.

There was a desire on the convoy and in Tuzla for unions to meet unions and so teachers, hospitals, university, students were met and aid was handed directly over to them. But this did not automatically happen.

The miners of Banovici (a pit near Tuzla) also

raised the need to deliver aid directly to the miners in Tuzla.

Tuzla Council and especially the international department of the council were very helpful in giving us telephone numbers and contacts. It was through them that the teachers on the convoy made contact with the teachers union. They also arranged meetings with women organisations, the housing department and through the contacts with one women organisation we went to the Old People's Home and the school for the mentally disabled.

There is a need to discuss with the council and the trade unions where the aid should be taken. For example much of the medical goes directly to the hospital but the community health centre and the Old People's Home gets very little. If we can build direct support for the hospital, the community health centre and the Home by moving the unions, pensioner organisations, community health organisations etc. in Europe then we can take a step towards meeting this problem.

The question does come up what do we think will happen in this war. We believe that within the international working class there is great power and enthusiasm. Bosnia itself shows this. Their sacrifice and struggle should be an example to every worker throughout the world. The fight for a multi-ethnic Bosnia is a key for the working class to survive as a class it has to be multi-ethnic, this is as true in Europe as any other part of the world. Inside Workers Aid and in all the alliances we make what is important is the fight for the principles of internationalism and to encourage that fight in all aspects of our activities.

The class forces in Bosnia also have to turn more and more to the working class of Europe. Our future is in building the international unity of the class of encouraging its initiative and belief in its power. That task is not for the future it is for now.

C o m m e n t

Why does Militant Labour, one of the largest organisations in Britain which describes itself as Trotskyist, take no action to defend multi-cultural Bosnia? Where is its call for the lifting of the arms embargo?

The *Militant* of 21 July headed its editorial comment: "Bosnia: A crisis capitalism cannot solve." In fact, it should have read, Bosnia: a crisis *Militant* cannot solve. 'There is no solution on the basis of capitalism!', it stated. Very true! But generalisations used like this can become completely negative barriers to necessary action. No wonder Trotsky declared that the abstraction can be an enemy to the working class. And so it is with the one-sided abstraction. The other side of 'There is no solution on the basis of capitalism' is that the only solution is one that is brought about by mass action by the working class and oppressed peoples. The duty of Trotskyists is to think ceaselessly, agitate and *act*.

On that the *Militant* editorial declares that, "The likes of Major, Chirac in France and Clinton in the United States are not concerned with the plight of the Balkan peoples." That is also true, but it is not all the truth. The *Militant* goes on to say that these capitalist politicians are concerned "mainly with the threat to the stability of the region that an escalation of the conflict would bring". But the great powers are concerned with obtaining a client state in the area and for Britain, and the US in particular, a Serbia stronger than its neighbours, but not too strong, offers the best possibilities. Certainly they never had as their aim the preservation and defence of multi-ethnic communities. Quite the contrary. Bosnia split up gives them more control in the area. The old satirist's couplet applies here: 'Thou shalt not kill; But shall not strive, officiously to keep alive'.

That is why, of course, socialists must demand that the capitalist powers get out of the area.

Members of Militant Labour must consider how they are led into weasel worded formulae and a method of support for general principles but abstention in the concrete struggles that involve those principles. "*Militant* supports the right of those under attack from these nationalists to defend themselves" says their editorial. Right. Then that means support for the elementary right

of the Bosnians to have arms. "Ah but.....", says the *Militant*, "We don't give support to the nationalist capitalist leaders, whether in Bosnia or Serbia or Croatia". Let me say that neither do we give political support to nationalist capitalist leaders in Bosnia. That is not the question. The *Militant* is using a method of argument of abstentionists, among them sectarians, opportunists, sometimes reformist lefts the world over, when faced with important struggles. And it is a repudiation of Trotsky, Lenin and Marx: "The leadership of the national liberation struggle is nationalist capitalist, therefore we cannot support it". Trotsky castigated those who argued this way about the struggle of Abyssinia against Italy, China under the leadership of Chiang-Kai-Shek — who massacred the Communists — against Japan. He declared for the *unconditional* defence of the Soviet Union — that is to say that he defended the Soviet Union as a progressive task despite its leadership and without placing a condition that the counter-revolutionary leadership be removed.. So also on an elementary level socialists many many times have defended a struggle or strike of workers without placing a condition on our support that a leadership of which we had grave criticisms should be removed. And we might ask: will Militant Labour call for a Labour vote in the next election even though it will have a leadership which is openly capitalist?

The crisis in ex-Yugoslavia is of central importance, not only because it focuses all the dilemmas, degradations, tensions and contradictions of capitalist decline, but also because it brings out the necessities of rebuilding the internationalism of the working class, expressed in organisation and mobilisation. The *Militant* says (of course) that only the working class can offer a solution, *and then passes on*, with an *implication* that it will do something in the future. But at present "the working class is weak and dissipated", although there is a "potential for the future". What miserable abstentionist leadership this is!

O b i t u a r y

A good man fallen among thieves

By Bill Hunter

ERNEST MANDEL, or Ernest Germain as he was known inside the Trotskyist movement for many years, died in July at the age of 72. Eighteen years old, he became a Trotskyist in 1941, when A Leon, who was later to be tortured and gassed in Auschwitz, reconstituted a national leadership of the Belgian group which had been scattered under the invasion and occupation by the Nazi army. The small group of exceedingly talented leaders, only a few years older than Mandel, were carrying out the exceedingly difficult and dangerous task of re-assembling the Fourth International in Europe and were themselves to be destroyed along with many other Trotskyists. After the war, Mandel emerged in the leadership of the Fourth International under the tutelage of Michele Pablo (Michele Raptis) who had become secretary of the International.

He was talented, even brilliant and had a fluent pen. However, his Marxism in the years following the war was continuously influenced by the prevailing 'left' intellectual opinion. His decisive step in this direction was when Pablo began developing conclusions which threatened any real perspective for the Fourth International.

Engels remarked of the famous revisionist Bernstein, the German Social Democratic leader, that he was "a good man fallen among thieves". We can say the same of Ernest Mandel.

When Pablo began developing the idea, first in 1950 in a document, *Where are we going*, of "centuries of degenerated workers' states", and the possibility of Stalinist parties in Europe leading revolutions, Mandel at first joined with the leaders of the French section in opposing him. These conceptions relegated the Fourth International to the role of simply a pressure group on the Stalinist bureaucracy. Mandel warned the French

leadership against the trap that Pablo had laid for destroying the French section. He elaborated *Ten Theses* against Pablo only, after just a few months, to make a complete retreat. He persuaded the French leadership to hold back their document criticising Pablo and finally opposed the adoption of his own *Ten Theses* by the Central Committee of the French section thus leaving "no room for doubt that he had repudiated defending his ideas" in the words of the French leaders..

Together with Pablo, he then developed the ideas which they put in their documents for the 1953 Congress and which brought a split in the International. Mandel and Pablo accepted the fundamental positions of the intellectuals in France who said that because of the inadequacies of the proletariat, it was the Stalinist bureaucracy which would lead progress against capitalism.

From then on, a revision of Trotskyism in the direction of objectivism underlay the positions of Mandel — a theory of inevitable forward progress, with objective processes exerting their pressure on Stalinist and other leaderships and compelling them to adopt correct policies. That subsequently meant for the Fourth International, which he led, opportunism and inconsistency; principles in words but adaptation to alien leaderships in practice: capitulation to guerillarism, to colonial leaderships and to left bureaucrats. It meant that this Fourth International, with its 'United Secretariat' formed in 1963, continually spawned groups which took the revision to its logical conclusion and broke with Trotskyism.

There was the conclusion that 'circumstance' would bring the reform of the Soviet bureaucracy and that the struggle was 'so acute' that the

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inevitable development of imperfect nationalist or Stalinist leaderships in colonial or semi-colonial countries, such as Cuba, Nicaragua or el Salvador, made it unnecessary to build sections of the Fourth International there.

The Transitional programme of the Fourth International when it was formed in 1938 put the stark choice before the working class in the societies run by the repressive Stalinist bureaucratic elite: "Either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers' state, will overthrow the new form of property and plunge the country back to capitalism or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism."

Mandel's writings when the Stalinist bureaucracy was in crisis put a fog around the sharpness of that choice and created illusions that the bureaucracy was self-reforming. In fact, of course, the bureaucracy, in every attempt to adjust during one crisis after another since the end of the Second World War, made no concessions to the working class as regards rights of organisation even though from time to time it was forced to give economic concessions. The history of continuous explosions, mass upsurges, and repressions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe showed the dangerous errors in Pablo's and Mandel's specious generalisation that increased industrialisation and productivity inevitably must bring more and more democracy

Even when Gorbachev introduced 'Perestroika' as a last effort to save the bureaucracy, Mandel was still expressing illusions in bureaucratic change. Such is the content of his book *Beyond Perestroika, the future of Gorbachov's USSR*. (Published by Verso, London). There is no posing of clash of battle between workers and bureaucrats as in the Transitional Programme. It considers Perestroika, not as a desperate act on the part of a bureaucracy to preserve itself in face of a crisis

of stagnation in which its own rule has become an absolute brake on economic development, but as a policy of a modernising wing of the bureaucracy (led by the "remarkable Mr. Gorbachov", as Mandel called him) preserving its own "stability" by modernising further a "modernised and urbanised" Soviet Union and dealing with "the bureaucratic stranglehold on society".

The collapse of Stalinism completely shattered the validity of the conceptions that the crisis of Soviet society could be overcome by objective evolution — that its economy would steadily develop and the bureaucracy could moderate and reform itself.

A year or two after the end of the Second World War, Mandel wrote of the group of Trotskyists he joined in 1941 that among them were "the most gifted of European intellectuals" who "chose a movement which could promise them neither success nor glory nor honours nor even a minimum of material comfort, but which on the contrary demanded of them every sacrifice including their lives, and which required long ungrateful work, frequently in isolation from the proletariat to whom they wanted to give everything." Introduction to *The Jewish Question, A Marxist interpretation*. A Leon. (Ediciones Pioneras. Mexico. DF. 1950)

We would doubt that Mandel ever had ambition for material comfort. The tragedy is that he took a course which brought the Fourth International (USec) to the liquidation of the central international principle of Trotskyism.

Recently, leading members of his International have said that the international world party is a concept belonging to another period than the one we are in now. A conclusion which comes from their capitulation before the ideological attack of pro-capitalist writers and politicians on Marxism and socialism.

Poland

NEW AND OLD WORKERS' STRUGGLES

The following letter is part of a regular correspondence Socialist Voice receives from Elizabeth Jezierska, a member of the International Workers League living in Poland and a very lively revolutionary journalist. The letter was written a few months ago but did not reach us until recently. We are printing it now because of the insight it gives into the continuing fight of the working class and how this fight in new circumstances is also connected with the historic struggle of the Polish working class for their emancipation.

Elizabeth is also a member of the GIPR.

The URSUS Strike

Ursus is a factory that produces tractors. It is on the outskirts of Warsaw. For at least two reasons it has been considered the showpiece of Polish industry: because of the large number of tractors it produces and for the fighting spirit of its workers. In the eighties they were in the vanguard of the struggles against the old regime and many lives were lost.

These same workers have also witnessed the most abject treason: the man who had been their trade union leader is now a director of the factory and it was under his guidance that the dismantling of the factory was begun.

The leadership of the trade union passed into the hands of a Mr. Z Wrzodak, a hard-line nationalist, who managed to explain to the people that the origin of all their evils was the fact that the power of decision making was in the hands of 'bad Poles', or, as he put it, "Polish speaking, but not Polish" (meaning Jews and Communists). His nationalism was even useful when the factory was about to be sold to a foreign investor. The workers said, "NO" and the factory did not go down with the first wave of privatisations when the Warsaw steelworks was sold to Luccini and the FSM car factory to Fiat.

But the victory was short-lived. The government, with a helping hand from the ex-trade-unionist-come-director, managed to weave a complicated net of fictitious debts meant to bring the factory to bankruptcy. These debts were then used as an argument in favour of privatising.

Soon, the workers once again began murmuring. Some even started talking about the neces-

sity to change the trade union leadership. Wrzodak is not very class-minded; but he can smell trouble. He called a strike. When the banner with the words On Strike appeared over the gate of Ursus we went to find out what was going on and to express our solidarity with the workers. We were not too surprised to find out that most of the workers were just as ignorant of what was going on as we were. People were leaving as usual at the end of the shift and, when asked questions, they shrugged their shoulders and said things such as:

"I do not know why they hang this banner. But there are many reasons I guess."

"Do you really think we have been consulted?"

"Looks like it is to obtain cheap credit to save the factory from bankruptcy, but I am not sure."

"I believe it is for higher wages, isn't it?"

Only after about a week of this undefined strike did Wrzodak produce a leaflet. It spoke of the mechanism for dismantling the Polish industry in order to sell it "for a few coins" to foreign investors. It spoke of a plan to semi-colonise the country. Not until the last paragraph did the truth leak out. As a solution to so much injustice, Wrzodak proposed the "appropriation by the people".

What is this famous 'appropriation by the people'? Its mechanism is simple though perverse. The demand of 'factories to the workers' is presented in the capitalist version. They turn the factory into a commercial society and sell some shares to the workers at a very reasonable price. There is even talk about giving them away. Of course, the 'strategic investor' keeps the most of

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the shares. Sometimes it is the very Polish state. This allows them to call off the self-governing bodies that have existed so far (the 'samorzad') because the workers now 'govern' through their shares.

Then the strategic investor decides on a new issue of shares. These cannot be bought by the workers for they had in the meantime spent all their savings. The new shares go to the Exchange. There have been cases when workers protested against that so, quite often, the rules of the new society fixes a time before which this cannot be done. But it is only a question of time. Anybody can now buy up the factory and Bob's your uncle! Slowly, slowly catchee monkey: now the factory has an owner, and it is not precisely the workers.

Once the new owner appears, all off a sudden, all the creditors give up their claims. The debts have disappeared. This is what happened at the Warsaw steelworks. During the 'rainy days' — when the debt seemed to be growing out of control — most of the workers saw the value of their shares drop, so they sold out to save whoever they could. The leading trade unionist of the factory and a few ministers who had been helping in the procedure received a big packet of shares and a safe job on the new Board of Directors.

Shortly after these events the leadership of Solidarity staged what was announced as the biggest ever demonstration of Ursus workers, miners and Health Service workers. There is considerable difference as to the numbers quoted, but it was certainly very vio-

lent. Long before the workers arrived there was a solid human wall of police surrounding the government building. Then the shuffling and the pushing began. Then stones flew, and behind them nylon bags full of scrap iron. Over 30 people were taken to hospital. Apparently, most of them were police.

Old May Day

At the beginning of the century May Days in Poland were days of struggle in the strictest sense of the word. Thousands of workers used to go onto the streets in support of the demand for an eight hours day and the demands of the different branches of industry. There were also national demands, because, at that time, Poland did not exist as a state. Her territory was split among three of the great European powers: Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the three powers, particularly the former two, were ruled by totalitarian governments, democratic demands were raised which linked the struggles of the oppressed nation with that of the workers. The Polish bourgeoisie — professedly nationalistic — capitulated only too frequently to the foreign powers, so the banner of the defence of the national demands remained in the hands of the left. This is reflected in the peasant

war-song of the time known under the sarcastic title: Hail, noble Lords!

"When the people, arms in hand
Were getting ready for the fight
The Lords spoke of the rents."

During the twenty years between the two World Wars there



Polish workers take to the streets

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was a change in the demands and meaning of the demonstrations. The demands for independence lost their proletarian character. The new nation started showing its imperialistic claw towards its weaker neighbours such as Ukraine, Lithuania, etc. The 'Right to be taught in your own language' became 'Poland from sea to sea'. Simultaneously, there were splits in the left. Everybody spoke of the revolutionaries and the reformists, although the exact organisational lines along which this division went were hard to define. The schematics say that the PPS (Polish Socialist Party), whose leader, Pilsudski, had, according to his own words, just 'got of the red tramway at a stop called independence' was the reformist wing and that the PPR, which was in turn torn in a struggle between what would later be the Stalinist wing and those who loosely oriented themselves towards the Left Opposition, was the revolutionary wing.

It was a very rich period. Rich in political debates. The pity was that many of those discussion led to shooting at each other in the streets. The rank and file, incapable of understanding what was going on, tended to feel uneasy in the midst of what they deemed 'fratricidal struggles' and kept away from the big demonstrations.

The beginning of World War II marked a new stage. In spite of the fact that Hitler's invasion on 1 September 1939 gave new life to feelings of national unity, scenes like those described in the peasants song were repeated once more. It is true that this time the noble lords did not count the rents. The invasion had been so brutal that there was not much left to be counted. But, as the invader advanced towards Warsaw, many of the government ministers fled and it was the worker-peasant battalions which stood at the gates to the capital city and fought. A monument raised to commemorate this fact still stands in the site that once was a distant suburb of the city and is now one of the crowded, almost inner-

city, districts of Ochota.

When the war was over the world was reorganised on a new basis according to the Yalta and Potsdam agreements. The new rulers of the country inaugurated an era of triumphalistic celebrations. May Day became the 'Feast of the Workers' and attendance was compulsory and the demands were imposed by the bureaucracy.

The downfall of 'real-socialism' did not mean, contrary to the hopeful expectations of many, a smooth and easy stroll towards authentic socialism. On the contrary, the lack of a revolutionary leadership meant that those who had risen against the growing inequality between the working class and the nomenklatura ended up by accepting an even worse inequality, institutionally sanctified and absolutely legal. That was why once more workers started keeping away from the May Day celebrations.

New May Day

After the capitulation of the official Left leaders last year, the young people decided to do things their way this year. In order to have a 'different May Day' there was an agreement among the following groups:

The Radical Progressive Movement (RRP) who sympathise with the struggle of the Third World. This is a 'multi-sector' movement and its members claim adherence to a wide scope of 'isms': from anarchism to Trotskyism. The GAS, anarco-syndicalists.

A split from the PPS youth. The GIPR. The NRL, who adhere to the positions of the United Secretariat Fourth International.

They spent days putting up posters that stated that "we, the authentic left, do not recognise the governing coalition as our representative". The strategic aim of the day was to take-over the rally called for by the 'official left'. They arrived in a long column at the site where the platform had been erected, spread out their red banners and

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made their speeches. Among the slogans one could hear:

Free Chechenia, Free Kurdistan!

Free non religious education for all!

You can shut the government, but not the mines!

When the SLD (the official left) column arrived they were quick to realise that they had two possibilities: either force the intruders from the site, or to wait until they had finished. The numbers on both sides were very similar, but there was a generation handicap in favour of the more vigorous youth. They opted for the latter. That is how the 'sensible' and 'adult' were able to hear what the young had to say for themselves. They obviously liked what they heard, for they left the SLD column and joined the young in their march along the streets of the city. I can't help seeing something symbolic in this passing from one column to the other. But the young did not call that a day. Encouraged by their success they decided there and then to organise a discussion and invited a number of figures of the 'extra-parliamentary left' to speak on such topics as: The true story of Che Guevara, Socialism and Christianity, The left-wing of Solidarity in 1980-81, Trotskyism against the myths.

We can discuss a lot of things with these young people. We can even argue with them. But we have to admit that they are creative, bold and dynamic. They are not too many yet. The poison of the capitalist propaganda had its effect on the consciousness of this generation whose childhood was spent in the shade of two great disappointments: the disappointment with what called itself the left, socialism or communism and disappointment with those who claimed to be the liberators from the old oppression, the Solidarists. But, in their own way the young people of Katowice have started their search for the truth.

REVOLUTIONARIES THEY COULD NOT BREAK

By Ngo Van

Review by Peter Windeler

This book to the casual reader may not leap from its shelf and demand to be read. Its subtitle *The Fight For The Fourth International In Indochina 1930-1945* may give the impression that only archivists and ancient revolutionists would deem it worth reading. But within its covers lies a tale of heroism and tragedy that makes the sum total of Hollywood's Vietnam films seem so much pap! This is a story of revolutionaries that dared to dream; and fight for what they knew to be right but met often cruel deaths at the hands of Stalin's henchmen. As Madame Ho Vinh Ky was about to be shot at their hands in 1945, along with 30 others, she told the firing squad, "Aim well at my heart!"

For many like me who first became politically active in the early 1970's the Vietnam War had a profound effect. It was the first war to be widely reported on the television. The issues to my generation seemed simple. Here was a small, predominately agricultural, nation being bombed into the stone age by the most powerful nation in the world. I recall marching on a demonstration to the American Embassy in London with the chant ringing out of, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh". As well as feeling utter revulsion for the actions of the West the whole unfolding horror made one sympathetic to anyone from that country.

This book provides many of the keys for understanding, not only the paradox of Vietnam but also the struggles of national liberation that breakout throughout the world. We see in the shape of Vietnam a colonial country that had to

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move directly to a workers state. It was unable to develop from feudalism and then to capitalism - after all in 1917 there had been a workers revolution in Russia - and in countries as oppressed as Vietnam this fact transformed the minds of the masses.

But at the time the revolution began to mature in Indochina the dead hand of the bureaucracy had taken over in the So-

viet Union and was committed to peaceful coexistence with Imperialism. This book charts the struggles of revolutionaries in Vietnam to create a workers revolution at a time when the masses were receptive to their ideas. However, Stalin's agents in the form of the Vietminh had other ideas. The Vietminh's principal actor was no other than Ho Chi Minh; and it was Ho Chi Minh who called for the extermination of the Trotskyists upon the collapse of Japanese rule in 1945.

Ho Chi Minh's correspondence is available in another publication, *Vietnam and Trotskyism* published by the Communist League in Australia. We, therefore, have proof of his description of Trotskyists as "twin brothers of fascism". Ho Chi Minh became known as 'Uncle Ho', or 'Bac Ho' — not just uncle but a father's senior brother, as the book explains, a "...revered title of tutelary prestige in traditional Confusian Society".

What we see in him is a grey bureaucrat who accepted the lies of Stalin without question, not dissimilar to 'Uncle Joe' himself and we well remember the photograph of the little girl sat on his knee whose father Stalin had executed.

History can be re-written but the truth always has the knack of coming out in the end and this book is an essential step in putting the record straight. The author, Ngo Van, lived through the



A contingent of the Fourth International

events and we must thank him for providing this first hand account.

As the revolution developed in Vietnam in the early 1930's the defeats of the revolutions in Spain and China made those serious revolutionaries inside Vietnam question the role that the traditional communist parties were playing with their refusal to call for the arming of workers and the formation of workers councils - soviets. This led to a growth of a Trotskyist movement and one that had popular support to such an extent that during the events of 1945 a large section of Saigon's police force came over to the Trotskyists, two police chiefs being executed along with other revolutionaries in the Vietminh's execution centres.

The growth of support for the Trotskyists was noted by the colonialist French police, the Surete, who recorded in their files - now available - that: "The influence of the revolutionary agitators favourable to the Fourth International has grown in Cochin-China, particularly in the working class milieu of Saigon-Cholon". Later, in July, they noted that, "The worker element has been won more by the Trotskyist party than by the PCI (The Communist Party controlled by Stalin).

With the collapse of Japanese rule in 1945 the masses began to take the initiative. In the mining area of Hongay-Campha there was a revo-

Russian Workers

Appeal for solidarity

We print below an appeal issued in August by the Workers International Party in Russia concerning the persecution of the leader of the independent union, United Free Union of Workers.

Workers in the Rostcelmash, one of the major concentrations of workers in the south of Russia, in Rostov on the Don, producing tractors and all types of agricultural machines, have formed an independent union. After three years of hard activity, overcoming threats, attempts at sackings and other difficulties, our comrade, Vera Dimitrievna Arfanos succeeded in organising the workers of three plants which employ several thousand workers. Today, the factories are working at maximum capacity and the plans of super-exploitation of the administration have sharpened the contradictions with the new union.

On 30 June, Vera who is President of the United Free Union of Workers of AO Rostcelmarsh, was discussing with the workers of the threshing machine plant. In this plant, as in others, the Director General, Peskov, was demand an increase of working ours in violation of the Labour Code of Russia. Vera was discussed with her members how to oppose the management's demands when the chief of security, Formachov, accompanied

by a group of guards arrived. He and his subordinates struck Veer, removed her violently from the plant and took her to the police division of the Region of Piervomaiskaia.

Following Vera's release the workers of the factory organised various pickets outside the Town Hall.

The organising committee of the Workers International Party calls for the defence of their comrade and for the solidarity of the workers international movement. The old bureaucrat Peskov who, in the time of Brezhnev administered the factory with a hand of iron, wants to introduce more repression when it is converted into 'private' property. In Russia and Ukraine a campaign has been started in support of the new union and against the repression of Vera. We ask for telegrams of support expressing repudiations of the physical aggression against the president of a free trade union of workers.

Write to:

AO Rostcelmash, Ul. Menzhinckogo 2.
3440229 Rostov Na Donu. Russia.

REVOLUTIONARIES THEY COULD NOT BREAK

lutionary upsurge which saw the 30,000 miners take over the mines and place all aspects of life under their control. The area was then surrounded by Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas in order than workers would once again be driven back. At the same time the Vietminh was preventing peasants taking over the land. Ho Chi Minh had created his power base on the nationalist movement supported by the indigenous landowners and business men - these elements he was not yet ready to disown.

Today Vietnam suffers from extreme poverty. It has the second worst stunted growth record in the world. Its population has incurred suffering the extent of which is hard to understand. With hindsight, it is easy to see that had the Trotskyists succeeded in their efforts to create a workers and peasants revolution in 1945 things may have been

very different.

Twenty years after American imperialism was driven out, the hostility of the bureaucracy to the working class has forced them to open the country to control by foreign capital under the same banner of 'market socialism' as the Chinese bureaucracy.

Finally this review cannot omit mention of Ta Thu Thau one of the leaders of the Trotskyist movement who, along with both a fellow Trotskyist and several Stalinists, was elected to Saigon council in a period when both movements formed a joint election front. Up till 1985 a street in Saigon still was named after him. Since then the name has been changed but it is still known by the locals as Ta Thu Thau Street.

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