



Northern Ireland prisoners revolt

Smash Britain's torture camps!

Armed imperialist terror continues to stalk the streets and prisons of Northern Ireland. Over the past three months the paid thugs of British imperialism have heightened their campaigns of intimidation, torture and murder aimed at bringing 'peace' to the Six Counties by terrorising the oppressed Catholic community into submission. While the British occupation forces patrol the streets, gunning down unarmed citizens on the flimsiest of pretexts, their colleagues in the Royal Ulster Constabulary beat, maim and -- in at least one reported case -- kill detained Republican militants in Castlereagh Barracks.

A recent Amnesty International report provided clear proof of the widespread use of torture by the army and RUC at Castlereagh. Although restricted to cases occurring in the last three months and examining only 78 allegations of brutality (a tiny fraction of the total), the Amnesty findings established conclusively that beatings, psychological terror and systematic humiliation are regularly used against arrested Republican militants.

The most common purpose of this torture is to extract 'statements' during the seven-day period allowed for detention before specific charges are laid. 'Statements' are accepted as proof of guilt without any corroborating evidence whatsoever in the Diplock no-jury courts. Fully eighty per cent of all present-day Republican prisoners have been convicted *solely* on the basis of such 'confessions', after which they are thrown into gaols like the notorious Long Kesh concentration camp.

But even as imperialist repression is stepped up, it is being met by determined resistance in the Catholic ghettos -- and in the dungeons of Long Kesh and other prisons. For almost two years a steadily increasing number of prisoners in the H-Block of Long Kesh (and more recently in Crumlin Road and Armagh gaols as well) have been waging a campaign for recognition as political prisoners. More than three hundred inmates have refused to wear the prison clothes of a criminal, instead going naked with only a blanket for covering. For their efforts they have been kept in solitary confinement,



Provisional Sinn Fein demonstration in Dublin this May protesting torture in H-Block.

deprived of visits by relatives and refused any reading material except the Bible.

The men and women 'on the blanket' have stepped up their campaign over the past three months by refusing to wash themselves or slop out their cells, leaving the floors covered in excrement. These appalling conditions have aggravated already grave health risks, and reports have emerged that scabies and hepatitis (both highly infectious diseases) have broken out. Prison authorities have responded to the protest by hosing the prisoners with disinfectant, causing violent sickness and, in some cases, temporary blindness. During the recent hot spell in May they turned on the heating system for the first time in seven months.

Despite sustained attempts by the British government to suppress information about the prisoners' campaign -- including a hamfisted and unsuccessful attempt to shut down the Provisional Sinn Fein newspaper *Republican News* on April 27 -- the Long Kesh struggle has won widespread support throughout the Catholic community. In the most notable solidarity action to date, 10,000 people marched through Belfast on April 30 to support the prisoners.

Prison revolts such as the current one have a long tradition in Ireland, and have often received widespread sympathy and support among the working population. Back in 1917 Republican militants in Mountjoy gaol went on hunger strike demanding to be treated as political prisoners. Their demands were conceded only after one of them, Thomas Ashe, had died as a consequence of forced feeding.

April 1920 saw the most notable example of a campaign for political status, which defeated an intransigent British administration. When 100 Mountjoy prisoners went on strike, Lord French (then Viceroy of Ireland) haughtily announced on April 5 that they could starve to death if they so wished. On April 12 the Labour Party executive in Dublin called a general strike to support the prisoners. The work stoppage began the following day, shutting down every part of the island except Belfast. It lasted only two days, and ended with the government shamefacedly acceding to many of the prisoners' demands.

More recently, in 1972, 'special category' status was conceded to Republican prisoners in

the Crumlin Road gaol in Belfast by Tory Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, following a campaign which included a prolonged hunger strike. Whitelaw granted this status as part of an attempt to come to an agreement with the Provisional IRA leadership on the establishment of a permanent ceasefire in the Six Counties. However, even though the institution of 'special category' status was part of an attempt to buy off the Provisionals' leadership, it was a gain for Republican prisoners, allowing them greater communication with the outside world, relieving them of prison work and permitting them to wear their own clothes.

In late 1975, however, the Labour government decided to reverse this policy. Merlyn Rees, then the Cabinet minister responsible for Northern Ireland, enforced the recommendations of the Gardner Commission report, which called for an end to formal internment (replaced by 'internment by remand', allowing the state to hold suspects for up to 18 months) and the phasing out of 'special category' status. Rees decreed that anyone convicted of an offence committed after the beginning of March 1976 would not be granted this status, but would be treated like a common criminal.

Rees was able to overturn the earlier gains won by the Republican prisoners because the Provisionals' position vis-a-vis the British army had severely weakened by 1975. As opposed to 1972 -- by any account the peak of the Provos' influence and combativity -- 1975 saw a steady decline in IRA support, caused both by the general war-weariness and by the increase in purely sectarian killings in both communities. By conflating sectarian shootings with attacks on imperialist agencies like the RUC and British army, Rees was able to secure acquiescence for his policy of condemning as 'criminal' all violence not practised by the state. Six months later, the H-Block political prisoner campaign began.

Support the prisoners!

Prisons are a highly concentrated expression of the repressive violence of the bourgeois

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Workers Vanguard goes fortnightly

The following statement is reprinted from Workers Vanguard, newspaper of the Spartacist League/US, no 206, 19 May 1978. The first issue of WV following its reversion to a fortnightly publishing schedule (no 208, 2 June) announced the successful completion of the Spartacist fund-drive with a total collection of \$58,735.

Beginning in June Workers Vanguard will become a regular biweekly [fortnightly] with weekly supplements as needed. This step is but one of a number of cuts and adjustments to bring the Spartacist League of the US and the Trotskyist League of Canada into line with current North American political, social and financial realities and to assist in the work of the international Spartacist tendency elsewhere, particularly in Britain.

We do not lightly shift WV back to biweekly frequency. We do so because we must and because what we hoped the weekly would be has, in its 33 months, not come to pass. From its beginning as a monthly in October 1971 through its 29 months as a biweekly and then as a weekly, WV has been a powerful and sometimes brilliant propagandist newspaper. Its work on the Chilean coup, Portuguese revolution, domestic labor and social struggles, in exposing and polemicalizing with opponents, expounding Marxism, is notable. But as the weekly WV it did not and could not serve its central intended purpose -- as an agitational organ of intervention into major and continuing social upheavals in America in order to help shape and direct elemental and partial class struggles in accordance with the historic aims and possibilities of the working class. The problem is not some absolute overextension of our capacities, but rather one relative to the quiescent period through which we are passing. Given evident urgent need, any rational group half our size could produce a weekly (and others a quarter our size do so). The inner capacity of the weekly WV to do its job has been well shown by its work in the recently ended miners' strike. However, our appetites as revolutionary Marxists have run too far ahead of recent objective possibilities and for too long. Valuable as the weekly has been in other ways, the continuing discrepancy between intention and realization brought the few hundreds of the SL/US right to the brink of a major breakdown.

Excessive pressures threaten breakdown

Though centered and most grinding on the press, the excessive pressures have been across the board in the organization. It has been felt in all the undermanned Central Office departments, not just the press. Our cadres -- typified by the executive committees of too small local committees, the heads of inadequate trade union fractions, those going in spirals trying to forge a black cadre component, the incomplete leadership of the Spartacus Youth League -- have been repetitively faced with urgent tasks often hopelessly beyond the means and forces available. Our membership as a whole has responded to our needs and priorities superbly, not least in the relentless sales of the weekly WV and in our highly successful subscription drives. But the members too find themselves in an increasingly untenable situation. While the size of our membership has as yet remained stable, it has been ground down doubly by the impact of continuing inflation. The SL's schedule of minimum sustaining pledges for members is rightly highly progressive and new schedules over the years have been heavier and steeper (largely to finance international work). So as wage rates rise, but lag behind the cost of living, the portion of our members' wages going to the party has automatically risen very steeply and to the point where an auto or steel worker must have a very high communist consciousness indeed to stay in the SL. But to inadvertently create an organization of peacetime martyrs is very likely the road to extinction, not revolution.

For a limited and orderly retreat!

The central party leadership and senior

cadre generally were hardly immune to these component disintegrative processes. For a couple of years as first human resources then financial ones were exhausted, it had to impotently witness weaknesses as the organization slowly ulcerated. Individual responses drifted toward frenzy or passivity, depending. What requires explanation is why we were not then faced with some kind of self-serving revisionist factional upheaval, akin to that of Cochran-Clarke in the SWP of the early 1950s. Two observations may suffice: ours is a rather young senior cadre, mainly in the 25-35 age range. If it were ten years older an explosive exodus would have been more likely. Objectively, too, this period is not one of deep, witchhunting reaction as then, and today many of the truths of Marxism are visible in America for all to see.

So instead and after a precipitous break in the WV Editorial Board, there followed several months of discussion also involving the leaderships of other sections internationally. With the approval of the international organization as a whole, several measures are being taken to try to rectify the situation. As stressed here, WV is to go biweekly. We expect our subscription base to be weakened and correspondingly aim to increase single copy sales, especially bundle placements. Moreover, the frequency of the English language theoretical organ of the international Spartacist tendency, Spartacist, will be increased. We are cutting back our work in a couple of localities in North America. And we have instituted sustaining pledge reductions centered in the range that most affects our industrial workers.

Successful emergency fund drive concluded

In the midst of grappling with these problems and other difficult and even sinister threats to our organized existence, we found ourselves in an immediate and desperate cash crunch in which the underlying weakening of our position through constant increase in fixed expenses intersected very heavy temporary expenses, partly around the miners' strike and the processes of international consultation, but especially over the breakthrough in Britain and the launching of Spartacist Britain.

We turned to our US members, sympathizers and comrades in other sections with a non-public four week fund drive, noting in the PB circular (of 4 April) announcing the drive:

'Since we have never undertaken such an emergency (or any) fund drive before, we do not know how much to expect from it. Five thousand dollars would be poor; twenty thousand dollars would be good. Your leadership has let us drift into this mess; maybe the membership can help us get out.'

This fund drive is now being completed. At the same time that Sustaining Pledge donations held firm and windfalls increased, the comrades paid in on the fund drive, not \$5,000 or \$20,000, but more than \$57,000! We can only agree with the FBI investigation summary on the SL of 25 August 1976, the most recent in our file secured through 'Freedom of Information' channels:

'As noted earlier, the SPL, though small, is determined to ultimately carry out its revolutionary objectives. It has a hard core of educated, disciplined, articulate, and highly motivated individuals. They are deeply involved in the world-wide communist-Trotskyist movement.'

And we will come back to a weekly Workers Vanguard when either continuing sharp class struggle demands it or simple bulk growth of the SL/US readily permits it. But beyond that stands our perspective, involving communist daily papers, in this country too; of a revolutionary workers party, section of the reformed Fourth International.

Editorial Board, Workers Vanguard
Political Bureau, SL/US
Interim Secretariat, iST

LETTER

'Quiet attentions' for OCI?

13 April 1978

Dear comrades:

As WV [Workers Vanguard] has the reputation of being a paper of record as regards the left-wing groupings I am writing to correct some minor inaccuracies in your issue no 200 in the article rather pretentiously entitled 'The Rebirth of British Trotskyism' [also published in Spartacist Britain no 1, April 1978].

The Blick-Jenkins group, more properly the Bulletin group, has I believe broken with the OCI for over a year. Blick has left them and is not a member of any group. He has been sickened by the OCI's manoeuvres. I have not seen the documents but I am told that what started as minor political differences resulted in the swift creation of a loyal OCI faction by dubious methods since Lambert wanted one hundred percent subordination. There was then a split which is tiny and unimportant. Doubtless more could be said.

Far from contradicting your assessment of events this correction strengthens it. Thornett will indeed need a long spoon.

However I am cynical enough to remember that the SL, quite recently, gave the OCI, 'some quiet attentions, not so pointed as to alarm, nor so vague as to be misunderstood'. Whatever programme the Lambertistes had, they were always, as I pointed out to you verbally at the time, easily the most right-wing and unprincipled grouping on the French left.

Yours fraternally,
Ted Crawford

Spartacist Britain replies: We thank comrade Crawford for his information relating to the British supporters of the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste. We would only note that the tendency which split from the Bulletin group claims that the OCI's Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International (OCRFI) does not publicly favour either group as its 'official' section, but regards both as part of the British OCRFI section.

Comrade Crawford accuses the Spartacist tendency of having behaved towards the OCI in the past in the same way that the WSL does today towards the OCRFI and the United Secretariat (USec). But even a cursory comparison of the WSL's current opportunist manoeuvres (in particular its document, 'The Poisoned Well', written for consideration by the USec's 'Eleventh World Congress') with our principled approach to the OCI in 1972-73 reveals the utter falsity of this accusation.

As comrade Crawford knows, the international Spartacist tendency and its predecessor formations have always sought to build an international democratic-centralist organisation on the basis of firm Trotskyist principle. To that end we have sought to engage in serious political discussions with other tendencies which appear to share certain central programmatic positions with us. In seeking these discussions we have always been candid about our aim and about our political positions.

Following the shattering of its unprincipled alliance with the Healyite Socialist Labour League (SLL) in 1971, the OCI made what appeared to be a turn in the direction of serious international work. It established the OCRFI, which issued a call for international political discussion leading to an international conference open to all those who 'state [their] will to fight on the program of the Fourth International to reconstruct the leading center, which [they] agree does not yet exist'.

In January 1973 the Spartacist League/US wrote to the OCRFI and OCI requesting the right to participate in this discussion, while noting

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SPARTACIST BRITAIN

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No room for Trotskyists in WSL

More ex-WSLers join Spartacist League

27 June 1978

Dear Comrades:

With this letter we are applying for membership in the Spartacist League. We have worked with the organisation for some months, are in agreement with its programme and now wish to be bound by its discipline.

We were formerly members of the Workers Socialist League (WSL), from which we resigned together with Ian Kaye, Julia Kellett and Steve Piercy on 1 April 1978. Although there were some differences among us on the question of principled opposition to votes for workers parties in bourgeois coalitions, we all had positions (outlined in our resignation statement) which paralleled those of the SL in important respects. However we failed to see at that time the importance of the propaganda perspective as the means to develop a cadre on a Marxist programme, both nationally and internationally, and the means whereby pretenders to revolutionary politics can be won or destroyed through programmatic struggle.

The group which resigned had belonged to a faction which, although politically closer to the Trotskyist Faction (which went on to fuse with the Spartacist tendency) than the WSL leadership, nevertheless blocked with that leadership against the TF out of a misguided subjective 'loyalty' to the working-class cadre of the WSL. This subordination of programme was a crucial error, which muddled the political issues and made the task of the TF more difficult. We now understand that the fight for programmatic clarity must be at the centre of the fight to build a party.

~~The fight against false consciousness is~~ the hallmark of Spartacism. Our failure to understand the importance of this fight derived from our experience in the WSL, where workerist and economist conceptions are rampant -- and are, in our view, an expression of the inadequacy of the organisation's break from Healyism. We now agree with the fighting propaganda perspective as the alternative to the liquidationist 'mass work' through which the WSL tries to find an opportunist shortcut to the masses.

For the WSL, internationalism is not the core from which politics derive; rather it is a window dressing necessary to maintain a facade of 'Trotskyism'. In reality the politics of the WSL start from the shop floor at Cowley, regardless of the objective tasks of the proletariat. Even when it comes to the question of Ireland, which is so intimately bound up with the day-to-day class struggle in Britain, the WSL takes a position merely as a formality. It does not consider the Irish question important enough to take up in the trade unions; particularly, it does not see its position on Ireland as something to fight for among Irish leftists who can become the nucleus of the Irish revolutionary vanguard.

The WSL has no intention of taking up a fight in the working class around the Irish question. On the rare occasions when it is discussed (internally, of course) the WSL leadership is incapable of advancing a class programme which could split the Protestant workers from their reactionary Orange leadership. Instead it chooses a get-rich-quick capitulation to the Catholic working class's Green nationalist leadership. Advocating democratic rights for one community at the expense of another has nothing to do with revolutionary politics. Clearly, a democratic solution in Ireland can only be achieved through united class struggle leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The WSL has recently made much of its republication of Tim Wohlforth's 'suppressed' 'Theory of Structural Assimilation'. The WSL's proud reproduction of this theory

(which manages to be at the same time counterposed to empirical reality and to Marxist science) has several functions. First, it attempts to protect the WSL membership from the uniquely correct theory and programme of the Spartacist tendency on Stalinism. At the same time it serves, by drawing attention to a supposed 'theoretical' fight against the politics of the Stalinised Third International, to divert attention away from the WSL's *practical* ignominious capitulation to the politics of the Second International.

The Wohlforth/Adam Westoby theory of gradual class transformation of Cuba over a period of ten years, under the umbrella of Soviet power, would be of no help in building a revolutionary party in Cuba or anywhere else. Neither does it explain how Trotskyists could have intervened in the situation on this analysis that somehow, slowly and imperceptibly, the capitalist state was being transformed into a workers state. For the Spartacist tendency theoretical work on Stalinism and the Cuban question has been developed as part of a struggle for a programme with which to intervene and *change* the world. Thus its theory enabled it to recognise Cuba as a deformed workers state a decade and a half ago and raise the call for workers political revolution to oust the Castro bureaucracy.

The international Spartacist tendency is the sole embodiment of Trotskyist politics -- the Marxism-Leninism of today. We seek to build it as the only road forward to the rebirth of the Fourth International.

Fraternally,

Tim Hume,
SLL/WRP 1971-74, Yorkshire Area Committee,
Huddersfield branch secretary; WSL 1975-78,
North West Area Committee, Liverpool branch
secretary, Convenor WSL national student
fraction 1976-77, National Committee 1978

Patricia P,
WRP 1976; WSL 1977-78

Resignations continue

June 25, 1978

To the Executive Committee of the Workers Socialist League

Dear Comrades:

We are writing this letter to confirm our resignations from the WSL, which we originally made verbally at the Liverpool branch meeting of June 21st. In this letter we will explain our reasons for leaving the WSL in order to pursue political discussions with the Spartacist League.

We were both members of the Granby branch (Liverpool) of the Workers Revolutionary Party when we first came into contact with the WSL in 1977. We left the WRP because we realised that it had long ago abandoned any real fight for the Transitional Programme, and in particular had adopted Pabloite positions of supporting the petty-bourgeois nationalist Arafat leadership of the PLO and the reactionary Muslim dictator Gaddafi.

We were initially attracted to the WSL by its apparent seriousness about fighting in the trade unions, mistaking its workerist economism for real communist work. When we joined the organisation in late February (shortly after the conference where the Trotskyist Faction resigned), we also believed that it was serious about trying to reconstruct the Fourth International, especially after reading 'Fourth International: Problems and Tasks'.

However inside the WSL we discovered that the organisation had no real conception of building a democratic-centralist international Trotskyist tendency. This was shown by the fact that the WSL leadership took almost two years to reply to the only re-

sponse they received to their international discussion document, from the international Spartacist tendency (iSt). We also saw that the WSL was totally unserious and parochial in their attitude to international programmatic questions. For example, the only thing which even caused them to take a position on the national question in Ireland was the fact that the Trotskyist Faction had fought for a position parallel to that of the iSt. For us the WSL leadership's complete unseriousness about internationalism was glaringly revealed by John Lister's sneering attitude to building an international leadership expressed in the *Socialist Press* article "'Vanguard' in retreat". This attack on the iSt produced nothing but contemptuous and cynical talk of 'jet-setting' and apolitical abuse about Trotskyist Faction members being 'dilettantes' and 'refugees' who were being led up the garden path by the 'cynical con-men' of the Spartacist tendency.

The iSt's serious attitude to the questions of trade union work and attitude towards the Labour Party were for us a refreshing contrast to the minimalism of the WSL. In particular we have argued inside the organisation against the opportunist programme of Alan Thornett's campaign for TGWU general secretary, which was in line with the economism of the CDLM [Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement]. We also disagreed with the WSL's completely uncritical support for John Plant's campaign as a Labour candidate in Newham North East, which called for the Council to buy out private landlords and institute bans on fascists. When we challenged this demand for bans on fascists by the capitalist state, Executive Committee member [PL] replied that the call was correct, if it was directed at a 'Labour Party Council democratically elected by the workers'!

The programmes put forward in these campaigns have never raised governmental questions in any way which goes beyond parliamentary left Labourism. We have argued for raising the call for a workers government based on workers organisations, by which Trotskyists mean the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is clear that the WSL doesn't really want to fight its political opponents -- as was shown by its coverage of the International Marxist Group conference in *Socialist Press*, which implied that the United Secretariat is reformable and is really not an obstacle on the path of building a revolutionary leadership. By contrast, we believe that the Pabloites must be politically destroyed through clear programmatic struggle for the principles of Trotskyism.

We now believe that the WSL is only another centrist barrier -- although very much smaller than the United Secretariat -- to reforging the Trotskyist Fourth International.

The fraudulent 'youth work' of the Healyites is something we thought we had left behind us when we left the WRP. But soon after we joined, the WSL was sticking together a ridiculous parody of the WRP's 'mass' movement -- even down to the substitution of discos for politics -- with a handful of almost entirely raw and inexperienced youth. We do not believe that this 'Socialist Youth League' armed with the methods of the WSL will ever recruit or train members politically. We therefore also resign from the SYL, and call on its members and those of the WSL to join us in examining carefully the politics of the Trotskyist Faction and the international Spartacist tendency.

Chris F,
WRP 1977-78; WSL Liverpool branch 1978, North West Area Committee, National Committee, Socialist Youth League

Mark J,
WRP 1977-78; WSL Liverpool branch 1978

The Trotskyist theoretical framework for understanding the Cuban revolution and other post-war expansions of Stalinist rule has recently been challenged, albeit rather ineffectively, by the Workers Socialist League's attempts to resuscitate Tim Wohlforth's 'The Theory of Structural Assimilation'. Amid much ballyhoo the WSL has just republished Wohlforth's 1964 essay along with an introduction by Adam Westoby in a book entitled *'Communists' Against Revolution*.

The victory of Fidel Castro's petty-bourgeois 26 July Movement in Cuba in 1959 and the ensuing events were critical for the political future of those forces in the world which considered themselves Trotskyist. For the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States -- an organisation whose revolutionary fibre had been badly damaged under the chill winds of the McCarthyite fifties -- Castro's revolution ninety miles from the Florida coast was decisive in completing a break from revolutionary Marxism to centrist accommodation.

The SWP went beyond the necessary staunch defence of the Cuban revolution against imperialism to politically embrace the Castroites, dubbing the Cuban *Vider maximo* an 'unconscious Marxist'. Guerrillaism became the road to socialism for the SWP: 'Where would the Cuban Trotskyists have been? ... What they needed was 12 guys to go up on the Sierra Maestre' was SWP leader Joseph Hansen's comment in 1961.

This capitulation became the central basis for the SWP's reunification in 1963 with the centrist International Secretariat led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel to form the United Secretariat (USec). To this day these pseudo-Trotskyists continue to hail the Castro bureaucracy and maintain that there is no need for a political revolution by the Cuban working class -- though following its transition from

Review of 'Communists' Against Revolution by Tim Wohlforth and Adam Westoby

centrism to reformism, the SWP has of course abandoned all advocacy of guerrillaism in order to demonstrate social-democratic 'respectability' to the American bourgeoisie.

The WSL, however, is not a direct product of the reunification of 1963, but derives from the tradition of the International Committee's (IC) fight against Pabloism. At the time of the Cuban events Gerry Healy's British Socialist Labour League (SLL) sought to uphold a proletarian perspective against Pabloite revisionism, but found that Cuba presented a special challenge. It offered in a more difficult form the problem posed by all the post-war overturns of capitalism which occurred in the absence of a revolutionary party.

The IC, dominated after the SWP's defection by Healy's SLL, was never able to come to terms with the Cuban question. While they initially staged demonstrations in defence of the Cuban revolution, the Healyites insist in the face of all evidence to the contrary that Cuba remained a capitalist state.

Only the Revolutionary Tendency in the SWP, which became the Spartacist tendency following its expulsion in 1963, was able to provide a Marxist analysis of the Cuban events at the time, and thereby shed light on the whole history of post-war social overturns. The Spartacist tendency and its precursors were for more than a decade unique in their correct understanding that a deformed workers state had been created in Cuba, which required a proletarian political revolution led by a Trotskyist vanguard to oust the Castroite bureaucracy and open the road to socialism.

We fought to win the IC to this position, only to be slandered by the Healyite leadership as 'empiricists' who could 'only see the surface of events'. In our remarks to the 1966 IC conference in London, we explained the methodological significance of Healy's error:

'The Pabloites have been strengthened against us, in our opinion, by this simplistic reflex of the I.C., which must deny the possibility of a social transformation led by the petty-bourgeoisie, in order to defend the validity and necessity of the revolutionary Marxist movement. This is a bad method: at bottom, it equates the deformed workers' state with the road to socialism; it is the Pabloite error turned inside out, and a profound denial of the Trotskyist understanding that the bureaucratic ruling caste is an *obstacle* which must be

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The real lessons of Cuba



overthrown by the workers if they are to move forward.' ('Spartacist Statement to International Conference', *Spartacist* no 6, June-July 1966)

But the increasingly bureaucratic IC leadership -- already well advanced along the road to qualitative political degeneration -- would brook no criticism of its false positions, and had the Spartacist delegation high-handedly expelled from the London Conference. The following year the Healyites provided dramatic confirmation of our characterisation of their methodology as 'Pabloism afraid of itself': *Fourth International* and the *Newsletter* began to ape Pablo, Mandel and the SWP by uncritically cheering on various non-revolutionary forces, from the Chinese Red Guards to the Vietnamese NLF. Today the rump Healyite IC equals even the USec in political liquidation.

WSL, Wohlforth, Westoby

In 1974 the Healyites' increasing sectarianism and political bankruptcy produced a major split, led by Alan Thornett, which formed the Workers Socialist League. Its break from Healyism was partial, workerist, rightward in thrust, and did not at first encompass the questions of Cuba or post-war Stalinism at all. Indeed the WSL initially accepted the Healyite position on the Vietnamese National Liberation Front: *Socialist Press's* first reports (in issues no 5, 6 and 7) on the insurgents' drive to victory in early 1975 were remarkably uncritical of the NLF and Khmer Rouge, offering only a programme whose essential thrust was to urge the NLF, with its 'revolutionary unity' and 'revolutionary spirit' to take on the Hanoi Stalinists (apparently the only Stalinists in the country). Only after the seizure of Saigon did the WSL perceive that criticisms

of the NLF could be used as a factional club against Healy -- so the 15 May *Socialist Press* finally announced 'Now for the political revolution'.

The overriding interests of the workerist/economist WSL leadership were from the start utterly parochial, but tradition and pressure from Healy did require a certain posture of interest in 'theory'. In addition to changing its line on the NLF, the WSL began to feel a certain anxiety to revise the inherited Healyite position that Cuba is capitalist.

In its theoretical nakedness, the WSL reached for inspiration to a 1964 essay by Healy's chief American agent, Tim Wohlforth. 'The Theory of Structural Assimilation' pretends to be the key to understanding the creation of deformed workers states and Stalinism since the Second World War. Wohlforth had made an earlier contribution on the Cuba question in 1961, setting down in writing the position which then prevailed in the still-united SWP left opposition that Cuba was a deformed workers state (see 'Cuba and Marxist Theory', *Marxist Bulletin* no 8). But his now republished essay is simply a shoddy and pretentious rationalisation of his decisive capitulation in 1963 to Gerry Healy. This 'trivial parody of Marxism' (as we described it in the introduction to *Marxist Bulletin* no 8) was produced in its final form to justify Healy's view that Cuba remained *capitalist*.

Wohlforth never issued his promised 'separate analysis' of Cuba, but the WSL has unwisely extended to the Cuban events his theory's fundamental thesis:

'They [the deformed workers states] were transformed after the image of the degenerated workers' state [the Soviet Union], in an area where this state has essential hegemony, the motive force of the transformation being either the Soviet bureaucracy itself or its agents, its extension, the domestic Communist Parties.' (Wohlforth, p 89, our emphasis)

And that is the core of the 'theory' of 'structural assimilation'. Viewed from one angle, all it amounts to is the profound 'discovery' of something everybody always knew anyway -- that the existence of the Russian degenerated workers state was a precondition for the formation of new deformed workers states. But for Wohlforth and Westoby it becomes the *complete and sufficient* precondition, opening up the possibility of any bourgeois state becoming a deformed workers state. To their flash of brilliant original thinking is added a new advance in Marxism -- an advance previously codified by such luminaries of Marxist science as Kautsky and Khrushchev -- that under special circumstances the old bourgeois state does not have to be smashed to open the way for the proletarian state.

The WSL is deeply afraid of looking at what really happened in Cuba for fear of finding that the petty-bourgeois Castro -- God forbid -- had some role to play in creating a new deformed workers state. Thus it holds the view that the *real* transformation from a bourgeois to a workers state had nothing whatever to do with Castro taking power but occurred wholly in a subsequent gradual process through the transcendental power of Soviet geo-strategic might.

This position is compellingly attractive to the WSL because it shares Healy's and Wohlforth's inverted Pabloite method. Reliving in a less obvious way the SLL's disorientation over Cuba, the WSL accepts the premise of Mandel and Hansen -- that the creation of a workers state (even a deformed one) by a petty-bourgeois guerrilla army must mean that the nationalist leaders are 'unconscious Marxists' -- and recoils in 'orthodox' horror from the liquidationist conclusion that Trotskyist parties are unnecessary in the colonial world. The SLL escaped this trap by a *straight-forward* denial of reality. For them Cuba was a capitalist state. Nevertheless, as the 1960s progressed, the Healyites were quite disarmed as they faced the ever-more prominent Vietnamese revolution and the conflicts within the Chinese bureaucracy during the 'Cultural Revolution', finally flipping over to Pabloism in 1967.

The WSL, *already* programmatically in the camp of Pabloism, has sought to overcome the same theoretical dilemma by a *complicated and obscure* denial of reality. As 'honest' workerists they cannot accept the idea of charismatic, cigar-smoking petty bourgeois overthrowing capitalism. Instead they glamourise the Soviet bureaucrats ... who after all had *something* to do with a genuine workers revolution. 'A knock-on effect' was

Westoby's description at the WSL's June 15 meeting in London where 'Communists' Against Revolution was launched. Wohlforth expresses the same notion less colloquially:

'The basic point is to recognise the nature of the domestic CPs as essentially an extension of the Soviet bureaucracy itself. Once this is recognized then social transformations of a more "indigenous" character like that in Yugoslavia can be comprehended.' (Wohlforth, p 62)

and:

'To the extent that the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] was and is independent of domestic social classes, it is dependent upon -- *is essentially an extension of* -- the bureaucratic caste of the USSR, the distorted product of a workers' revolution.' (Wohlforth, pp 74-75, emphasis in original)

This view of the bureaucracy and the Communist Parties around the world as simply the rather grubby expressions of the October revolution is completely false. The bureaucracy, as Trotsky emphasised repeatedly, is a parasitic growth on the workers state, with interests counterposed to those of the proletariat internationally, and at the most abstract level is the expression of imperialist pressure on the deformed workers state. The Workers Socialist League fears capitulation to Castro so much that it paves the way for a political capitulation to the Stalinist bureaucracies, viewing them as deformed expressions of revolutionary politics.

Furthermore the view of international Stalinism as a monolith is simply wrong. The Communist Parties around the world are subject to a number of pressures (which ultimately must conflict). Even when closely tied to Moscow they also act generally as agents of their 'own' bourgeoisies, and are subject to the pressures of the struggling oppressed they seek to mislead in their own countries. The notion of the tightly unified Stalinist monolith is today so much at odds with reality that Westoby is forced to apologise for Wohlforth in his essay:

'It is, most clearly, in these chapters on Yugoslavia and on "Structural Assimilation in Asia" (which deals with Indochina, Korea and Tibet, as well as China) that it is necessary to take issue with the theory of structural assimilation as Wohlforth then set it out.' (Westoby, p 139)

'Wohlforth ... underestimate[s] the real, if limited, political independence of both the Chinese and Yugoslav CP's.' (p 140)

'... Wohlforth naturally felt the pressure to minimise the extent to which capitalism could be overthrown by movements politically independent of the Soviet leadership in centres more geographically remote from the USSR and its need for "defensive expansionism".' (p 141)

Westoby fails to see that he has not merely engaged in some fine tuning of Wohlforth, but has pointed to a fundamental flaw in the theory of structural assimilation. The false premise that the Yugoslav and Chinese Communist Parties are organic parts of the Soviet bureaucracy is vital to the fantasy that 'defensive expansionism' of the Soviet Union is the force which has replaced capitalism by proletarian states since World War Two.

The defensive tone of this portion of Westoby's introduction is well justified. It is the cases of China and Yugoslavia (and Cuba) which really test the theoretical conceptions of Trotskyism. The events in the bulk of Eastern Europe after the war are, in comparison, relatively easy of analysis. The division of Europe by Stalin and Roosevelt and Churchill

at Yalta and Potsdam left the Soviet Army occupying the countries that today are European deformed workers states (excepting Albania and Yugoslavia), along with a chunk of Austria and northern Iran. No national state power (indeed, no decisive domestic armed force) existed in any of these countries. They were in the hands of the USSR; and the diplomatic and military interests of the Soviet bureaucracy determined whether the Red Army handed over power to 'bodies of armed men' directed by native Stalinist parties and committed to defending socialised property, or whether, as in Austria and Iran, the occupied territories were returned to the orbit of imperialism.

However in Yugoslavia, China, North Korea and Vietnam the Red Army never *occupied* the country; in each case a petty-bourgeois guerrilla army shattered the bourgeois state power. Even more worrying for the theorists of structural assimilation, Cuba is 4,000 miles from the nearest workers state, and up to 1961 was absolutely insignificant in the strategic military calculations of the Soviet Union. Even more -- the 26 July Movement that took power in January 1959 was the militant adventurist wing of Cuban liberalism, not a peasant Stalinist party in arms. In fact the Partido Socialista Popular (the Cuban CP) remained Castro's rival until well after the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship.

All these well-known facts make the fake-orthodox WSL deeply anxious. These revolutions were led by petty-bourgeois elements -- but the WSL fears that *if* it accepts this fact, *then* it must revise the Trotskyist programme of proletarian-led permanent revolution and (like the Pabloites) reject the need for a Trotskyist vanguard party to open the road to socialism. To ward off the prospect of such open revisionism, it is prepared to enlarge upon Wohlforth's implicit denial of Stalinism's counterrevolutionary character. Wohlforth opines:

'... the proletariat will do a cleaner, healthier job of it. Most anyone will prefer a dirty job that is concretely accomplished to the promise of a cleaner job.' (Wohlforth, p 89)

We summed up the implications of this view 12 years ago:

'At bottom what this assertion of Wohlforth's means is that he believes or fears that the state of Lenin and the state of Stalin are identical as regards their ability to move forward to socialism.' (*Marxist Bulletin* no 8, p 7)

John Lister (who, as editor of *Socialist Press*, has less free time than Adam Westoby) tends to set down the opinions of the WSL camp directly instead of hiding behind Wohlforthian verbiage or 'dialectical' diplomacy in the manner of Westoby. He bluntly replicates Wohlforth's revision in a letter written on behalf of the WSL to the international Spartacist tendency:

'What, then, is to prevent further Cubas, further petty bourgeois Castros taking the road to social revolution? Why should Trotskyists run the risk of impeding such progressive changes? The flimsy barrier erected between the iSt and outright liquidationism is your insistence that Castro's revolution gave birth not to a pure revolution but only to a *deformed* workers' state.' (Letter from WSL to iSt, 21 March 1978, emphasis in original)

So the deformations of Stalinism, the usurpation of the working class's political rule by a counterrevolutionary bureaucracy, are but a 'flimsy barrier'! No, comrades, we stand with the historical interests of the working class *against* Stalinism. Our supposedly finicky insistence on the *qualitative* distinction between Lenin's state and Stalin's is the very basis of Trotskyism, the basis of our insistence on the necessity of the independent mobilisation of the working class behind parties of the Fourth International in deformed and degenerated workers states. A bureaucracy ruling in place of the working class in a workers state does not just sully the ideal of communism; it sabotages the planned economy and thereby holds back the development of the productive forces. And the nationalist anti-working-class policies of such a bureaucracy undermine the struggle for world-wide socialism.

TO BE CONTINUED

Next issue: the WSL's distortion of the Cuban events of 1959-1962 in the interests of a Kautskyist position on the state.

'Quiet attentions'? ...

(Continued from page 2)

our inability to request admission to the OCRFI itself because of many outstanding political differences. The letter (reprinted in *Spartacist* no 22, winter 1973-74) contained a summary of our most important political differences with the OCI and OCRFI, ranging from their liquidationist 'strategic united front' conception to their Stalinophobia, their non-Leninist position on youth/party relations, their use of violence within the workers movement and their past opportunist cohabitation with the SLL inside a federated International Committee.

We considered it our internationalist *duty* to approach the OCI for discussions despite these major differences because of its experienced senior cadres and its long history and continuity in the world movement. Comrade Crawford argues that it was 'always ... easily the most right-wing and unprincipled grouping on the French left'. But this is patently untrue, as evidenced by the fact that the OCI's forebearers were the first organisation in the Fourth International to take up the fight against the revisionist positions of Michel Pablo in the early 1950s. Moreover, for all its errors, throughout the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s the OCI continued to uphold a whole series of anti-revisionist (and politically unpopular) positions against both the Pabloites and the SLL -- for example opposition to their enthusing over the Vietnamese Stalinists, the Chinese Maoist Red Guards and the so-called 'Arab Revolution'.

Under the impact of the rise of popular frontism in France, the OCI has since systematised its many weaknesses and undergone a programmatic degeneration from unstable left centrism to craven right centrism with a strong reformist appetite. In the recent French elections, its hysterical campaign for 'unity' at all costs of the popular front placed it if anything to the *right* of both its major ostensibly Trotskyist opponents, the Pabloite Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and Lutte Ouvrière. But this does not vitiate the correctness of our principled approach to the OCI for participation in discussions in the early 1970s. Furthermore, it remains highly probable that the OCI, like the WSL in Britain, will play its role in contributing Trotskyist cadre to the struggle for the reborn Fourth International, despite its bankrupt revisionist leadership and programme.

Not a single serious political person can believe that the WSL seeks to engage the USec and OCRFI in such political combat with the aim of winning subjectively revolutionary supporters of these tendencies to the WSL programme -- assuming that the WSL even has a coherent and comprehensive programme of international scope, which it doesn't. The reality is that the Thornett leadership of the WSL is simply not very interested (or capable) in political issues outside this little isle, but under appropriate circumstances is quite prepared to capitulate politically to one or another revisionist international formation.

In contrast to the WSL, no one who is familiar with our history and publications -- and we confidently include comrade Crawford in this category -- can believe that the Spartacist tendency has sought some sort of cosy opportunist accommodation with any international bloc with which we have serious disagreements. That is one of the chief reasons why, in response to our proposals of discussion, the OCI stonewalled and the WSL ran away: they are afraid of real political debate.

As a final point, we cannot resist remarking that it does seem odd for our correspondent to rail about the 'right-wing' and 'unprincipled' nature of the OCI, when he himself is a supporter of ... the Workers League. Perhaps this is another expression of the comrade's 'cynicism'. If the Workers League, a state-capitalist *right* split from the social-democratic International Socialists, doesn't win the cup for 'right-wing' and 'unprincipled' politics on the British Trotskyist left, this is only because it has so much competition from the likes of the Militant group, the Bulletin group, the IMG, etc, etc.

Which only goes to demonstrate that the title of our article on the founding of the Spartacist League/Britain which aroused comrade Crawford's objections -- 'The Rebirth of British Trotskyism' -- was not 'pretentious' at all; it was plain truth. ■

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End of the road for Working Women's Charter

The third (and probably last) conference of the Working Women's Charter Campaign (WWCC), held in Manchester on June 17, had an unmistakably funereal air about it. Where in 1976 three hundred delegates attended the first national conference, this year attendance peaked at about 60 and shrank to less than half that by day's end.

The conference began in lacklustre fashion with a series of dreary report-backs, then tailed off from there. Delegates from the two fake-Trotskyist organisations which have been the recent mainstay of the campaign, the International Marxist Group (IMG) and the much smaller Workers Power (WP) grouping, squabbled for a few hours over their respective proposals for 'reorienting' the moribund campaign. At the end of the day, after having lost the vote on its proposals, the Workers Power delegation announced that it was withdrawing from the campaign and walked out -- leaving twenty-six people huddled together on their fold-down chairs exchanging uneasy glances.

Despite the continued adherence of the IMG and a few 'socialist-feminist' independents, the campaign's future looks bleak indeed. But while the faithful few at the conference could not help but realise that they had a loser on their hands, they all sought to ignore or dismiss the *real* explanation for the failure of the Working Women's Charter Campaign, advanced on the floor of the conference by the Spartacist League.

What was the Working Women's Charter?

The Working Women's Charter was originally a brainchild of the Communist Party-dominated London Trades Council in 1974. It was a list of reform demands which, as they referred to both the home and the workplace, had a spurious air of confronting both aspects of the dual oppression of working women. Trade unions were to be pressured at the national and local levels into affiliating to the Charter.

For a time trade union leaders fell all over themselves in a rush to affiliate. After all, the Charter was a bureaucrat's dream: it gave them a cheap left cover by enabling them to appear 'concerned' about women's oppression while having to do absolutely nothing about it. And at the same time as the Charter campaign capitulated to the union bureaucracy it capitulated to the feminists, by tacitly assuming that women in the trade unions can only be organised to pressure for reforms *for women*.

This dual capitulation may have been dreamed up by the Stalinists, but where it really caught fire was among the fake-Trotskyist left. Groups like the IMG, Workers Fight (now the International-Communist League [I-CL]) and the current which became Workers Power saw the Charter campaign as a short cut between 'socialist-feminist' ideas and the masses of women workers. A build-up of affiliations and the creation of local Charter organisations took some time, causing a superficial bustle of activism in the campaign's early days. But after such affiliations had been secured, the Charter's active leftist supporters began to re-

alise that there was really no way forward.

The Charter campaign was never the basis for a real Leninist united front -- an agreement for practical, concrete *action* -- nor did it possess the communist programme which can bring women's emancipation through proletarian revolution. Rather it was a bloc between union bureaucrats, left-wing organisations and feminists (with the latter two doing all the donkey work) for making reformist propaganda for women's rights. By 1976, when this bloc had failed to attract the hoped-for 'masses', its more left-wing components (Workers Power and the I-CL) began to argue that the Charter should be 'amended', in an attempt to make it slightly less blatantly reformist. But the ever rightward-moving IMG and its independent 'socialist-feminist' bloc partners refused to go along with any changes at the 1977 conference, thus ensuring that the WWCC remained as minimalist and inoffensive as possible.

Workers Power and the I-CL began from the (obvious) observation that the creation of a mass communist women's movement, based solidly on the revolutionary programme and rooted in the proletariat, is not an immediate possibility in Britain today. Their conclusion however was a typically opportunist one: to try to convince the rest of the 'far left' and 'socialist-feminists' to join them in cobbling together a watered-down, reformist version of a mass working-class women's movement (which would be baptised a 'united front' to quieten uneasy members). Once this reformist mass had somehow been assembled, they reasoned, they would be able to provide a left wing within it.

The sorry fate of the WWCC is one more proof of the bankruptcy of this classic centrist 'strategy'. For WP and the I-CL work around the Charter was a substitute for making *communist propaganda for women's liberation, and for constructing trade union fractions on the Transitional Programme*.

The work of trade union groups supported by the Spartacist League in the United States provides a valuable counterposition to the travails of these fake-leftists in the WWCC. To take a single example, the Militant Action Caucus (MAC) is a class-struggle grouping active among workers in the telephone industry -- the largest single employer of women in the US and a national symbol of women's oppression. MAC has fought within the Communication Workers union for eight years around a full class-struggle programme which links the felt needs and immediate demands of the predominantly female workforce to a full class-struggle programme, culminating in the call for a workers party to fight for a workers government.

In its relatively short history MAC has registered real, if modest, gains. For example, it led a successful national campaign against an anti-communist clause proposed for the union constitution. This year a MAC militant, elected as delegate to the national union conference on the basis of the full caucus programme, was able to present a genuine class-struggle opposition to the union bureaucracy on national and international questions for the first time in the history of the union.

The work of such groups as MAC is exemplary, having an impact in the working class far beyond one union. And, unlike the ephemeral and thoroughly meaningless 'influence' of the Charter campaign in its heyday, victories for union groups like MAC are victories for the programme of class struggle, the only programme which can really lead to the liberation of women.

Lessons of the WWCC collapse

The lessons of the Charter campaign's collapse are that reformist propaganda blocs cannot accomplish communist mass work, cannot forge a revolutionary cadre, and can achieve a temporary prominence only if they fulfil some demand of the labour bureaucracy for a left cover. These are, however, not the conclusions drawn by either the IMG or Workers Power.

The IMG's proffered apology for the Charter's failure resembles the explanations of a

bourgeois market researcher. 'In 1974 we had an open field', they say. But since then other products (eg the 'socialist-feminist' movement) have come onto the market: 'The Charter Campaign could not hope to compete with these forms of organising the fightback' (IMG leaflet, 'What we need is a change of direction'). The IMG's solution is to 'breathe new life' into its 'invalid' by ... agreeing to have *another* conference in the autumn, where participants could discuss launching some kind of 'co-ordinating' newspaper.

The IMG is a sizeable enough centrist organisation to have many more swamps to play in than the WWCC. But for Workers Power, the death of a campaign into which it had pumped a great deal of organisational energy comes as a rather large blow. With the Charter clearly on its last legs, WP struck a very left pose at the conference, in order to have an excuse to jump ship when its proposals were rejected.

WP presented yet another new programme for the campaign at the conference, one which was superficially very militant and introduced with rhetorical flourishes about 'the struggle for socialism' and the need to 'adopt a distinctive and effective strategy'. This programme was significantly more left-wing than both the present Charter and WP's proposed amendments of last year. This led both the IMG's *Socialist Challenge* and the I-CL-supported *Workers' Action* to heap scornful charges of ultimatism on the WP draft programme.

However, a careful reading of the programme and the other material issued by Workers Power at the conference reveals that the organisation has not executed any kind of fundamental left turn. WP insists that the old Charter ('a pitiful list of inadequate demands') or its own 1977 proposal 'might have validity as a limited basis of united action between organisations' and had 'potential'. The real problem was that affiliated organisations 'have put little or nothing into the Charter Campaign'. In short, the Charter (despite its 'pitiful' inadequacy) would have been fine -- if only the left had worked a bit harder! WP singles out the IMG particularly for failing to shoulder its share of the effort; it also attacks the I-CL for refusing to make the IMG work harder, and for pulling out of the campaign altogether earlier this year. Thus the *real* Workers Power programme for the WWCC emerges: to pressure the I-CL to pressure the IMG to build the Charter campaign on an 'inadequate' reformist basis!!

WP offered no criticisms of its role as a past 'best builder' of the WWCC. It had demonstrated its deep commitment to the campaign's reformist nature by attempting to exclude supporters of the Spartacist tendency from Charter events.

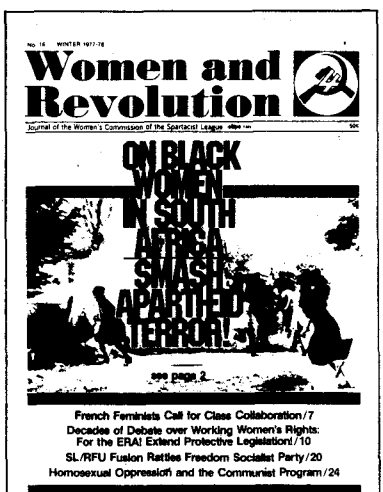
As for the 1978-model Workers Power draft programme, its confused and confusing patchwork clearly remained within the framework of centrism. The crowning demands were that the Labour government should carry out a series of measures, including highly limited nationalisations, which would create a government 'committed to ... open the road to a workers government'. Or, in the words of another WP handout, the programme would link women's needs to 'the question of the possibility of working class power'. All this mealy-mouthed circumlocution is not incidental, but is the careful product of a desire to avoid 'saying what is', while saying just enough to be 'distinctive'.

It is not, however, this aspect of the programme which offers the most striking betrayal of Marxism, but rather WP's open accommodation to feminism. While the new WP draft programme talks vaguely of the 'right' to form women's caucuses, another conference leaflet is not so veiled in its language, stating unequivocally that, of the omissions in the original Charter, the 'most important' was 'the necessity of building women's caucuses in the unions'. A demand in the programme for 'positive discrimination in favour of women as shop stewards and union representatives' is another blatant example of support for the feminist conception

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that *sex*, and not *programme*, determines who really fights for women's liberation. Communists seek to unite class-conscious men and women in this battle; in contrast, WP sees working women as a pressure group, and endorses a modified concept of 'sisterhood' as primary. This is *not* the road to women's liberation.

Despite its pathetic inadequacies, however, the WWCC once enjoyed a prestige which made it the envy of the countless other campaigns promoted by the British left. Labour bureaucrats were happy to lend an appearance of success to an organisation which so accommodatingly covered for their failure to take concrete action on behalf of women workers. The Charter campaign could benefit only briefly from this trade, of course. The unique appeal which it once possessed for the labourist British left is difficult to credit now as we observe it in its unglamorous death throes.

The final passing of the WWCC may have the appearance of being of importance only to the few members of the British family of fake-Trotskyism who have remained with the patient to the end in order to squabble over the remains. But in fact it is an event which sharply outlines the failure of these ostensible revolutionaries to pursue a class line in the fight against women's oppression. As the life-support system provided by the fake-Trotskyists gradually drains away, the correct response is not to pray for reincarnation like the IMG, nor to beat a hasty exit like WP and the I-CL, but to draw the necessary political lessons.

Women's liberation through proletarian revolution!

USSR 'free' trade unions ...

(Continued from page 8)

the intervention of the ILO (which includes the representatives of employers organizations and capitalist governments) and the Western imperialist powers (co-signatories of the Helsinki accords).

In the face of the fundamental hostility of the capitalist states to the very existence of the workers states, it is indispensable to distinguish between working-class opposition to bureaucratic usurpation of the Russian Revolution and imperialist opposition to the revolution itself. No proletarian opposition to the Kremlin can be built without a firm commitment to defending the conquests of the October Revolution. The 'Free Trade Union Association' does weakly take up this point, writing: 'We have lost confidence in the Procurator of the USSR as an organ which will stand guard over the gains of October ...' ('A Collective Complaint'). (This document, incidentally, was *not* reprinted by the AFL-CIO or Amnesty International.) But the dissident workers group then turns around and in effect appeals to capitalist governments, State Department socialists and reactionary union leaders who are mortal enemies of the Russian Revolution.

If the victimized workers believe what is written in their complaint and in their references to socialist property, then their appeal to anti-Communist forces in the West is self-defeating; if this is but a cover to ward off charges of anti-Sovietism, then it still shows the strength of the Soviet workers' attachment to their revolution. And if the dissident workers have not yet realized how decisive this issue is, they should see how their appeals to anti-Communist forces in the West have added grist to the imperialist propaganda mills. Genuine Soviet trade unions will never be worth a peck to the workers as defensive organs to regain and defend Soviet liberties unless they are bulwarks against capitalist restoration!

It is not surprising that the first organized stirrings of opposition among Soviet workers would be infected with the right-wing ideology of the broader dissident movement, from tsarist Black Hundreds fanatics like Solzhenitsyn to pro-imperialist liberals like Sakharov. Most of the current generation of dissidents are drawn from a petty-bourgeois stratum of intellectuals, artists, professionals and government officials which in social composition far more resembles the

Stalinist bureaucracy than the working masses. A large number of them were, in fact, at one time Khrushchevite advocates of self-reform by the bureaucracy who lost faith as a result of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

With futile hopes of liberalization of the bureaucracy having soured, a section of the Soviet intelligentsia turned toward the West. For these individuals, the prospect of emigration seemed preferable to the maintenance of the oppressive Stalinist regime of Brezhnev & Co. Thus they have appealed to Cold War sabre-rattlers such as US Senator Jackson to use imperialist blackmail (eg the threat of cutting off wheat shipments) whose real victims would be the Soviet people. Although certainly many revolutionaries can be recruited from among Soviet intellectuals, particularly students, as a social stratum this grouping is extremely susceptible to the corrupting influences of both the Stalinist bureaucracy and liberal bourgeois ideology.

For the Soviet working masses it is entirely different. They have nothing to gain and everything to lose from the restoration of capitalism. Except under the most extreme conditions, it is unlikely that the pro-imperialist blathering of the dissident intellectuals like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn could win any broad credence among the Soviet proletariat. The first condition for the building of a general, powerful workers opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy must be the rooting out of such corrosive influences. Klebanov and the victimized Soviet workers must be defended against the rapacious persecution of the Brezhnevites, but there can be no quarter given to appeals to the imperialist 'democracies' against the Soviet degenerated workers state.

The dissident Soviet workers have two choices before them. On the one hand, they may pursue a bloc with the pro-imperialist dissidents. Such a course would be not only a betrayal of the interests of the Soviet masses but also an inestimable gift to the Stalinist bureaucracy in its cynical attempts to pass itself off before the Soviet people as defenders of the October Revolution. The Soviet workers' disgust at the Orlovs and Sakharovs is a perverted but also just expression of their hatred of imperialism and attachment to the tremendous achievements of the Russian Revolution. Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev & Co have always sought to portray all opponents to their anti-working-class regimes as lackeys of imperialism.

Or, alternatively, the dissident workers can follow the necessary course of judiciously opposing the excesses of the bureaucracy while explaining to the Soviet masses the principled means by which the original goals of October can be recreated.

The pseudo-Trotskyist USec and OCI, left social democrats and 'Eurocommunists' all conciliate the pro-imperialist dissident currents. Only authentic Trotskyism, as represented by the international Spartacist tendency, with its firm insistence on the need for defense and extension of the gains of October, through political revolution against the Stalinist usurpers, provides a banner around which the Soviet proletariat can rally.

Reprinted from Workers Vanguard no 207, 26 May 1978

Northern Ireland...

(Continued from page 1)

state, and Marxists support any measures which can partially alleviate the brutal, dehumanising conditions of prison life. Moreover, Long Kesh is far from an ordinary gaol -- it is a concentration camp into which the British occupation army throws its political opponents, most of whom are guilty of absolutely no crimes from the standpoint of the proletariat. In raising the demand for 'special category' political status, the Republican prisoners are rejecting the 'right' of the British state to classify them as criminal. Such a campaign is appropriate and supportable.

But by itself it is clearly insufficient. The belief, propounded by the Provos and their fake-left camp followers in Britain, that this demand should be the focus of solidarity activities because it is 'realisable' gives de facto recognition to the 'right' of British imperialism to maintain its repressive apparatus in Ireland. The workers movement must recognise no such 'rights' for British imperialism. Every Republican militant imprisoned for fighting British imperialism and its Loyalist

state henchmen must be freed now! Those 'guilty' of nothing but membership of the IRA, which is proscribed by the imperialist government, along with those whose offences have been 'proven' merely by 'statements' exacted in the torture chambers must likewise be released immediately.

The Spartacist League demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland -- not merely a 'declaration of intent' to withdraw by the government, as demanded by the Provisional IRA. Imperialism's entire repressive apparatus in the Six Counties must be smashed -- from its Loyalist shock troops in the RUC and Ulster Defence Regiment to its hellish prisons and concentration camps.

When a Republican militant shoots a British soldier or an informer or bombs a military barracks, however much we may disagree tactically with his action we do not regard it as in any sense 'criminal'. Our criticisms of adventurism and militarism as a strategic substitute for the mass mobilisation of the working class in no way prevent us from demanding that these so-called 'criminals' must not rot one day longer in Britain's gaols.

Communal terror and imperialist terror

But the activities of the Provisional IRA are not limited to attacks on direct imperialist targets. The Provisionals are a petty-bourgeois, anti-working-class organisation which has a sordid history of sectarian violence against innocent members of the Ulster Protestant community.

Such actions as the bombing of the La Mon restaurant earlier this year, or the sectarian murders of innocent working people simply because they are Protestant, are thoroughly inimical to the interests of the working class. The fact that many Protestant workers in the North currently support the presence of British troops and are relatively privileged compared to the Catholics does not make IRA communal terror any less anti-working-class than communal violence by Protestant gangs like the Ulster Volunteer Force.

When a Republican patrol stops a mini bus, questions its occupants about their religion and murders all the Protestants, it is not striking a blow against imperialism. Rather it is *strengthening the hand* of the imperialists by driving Protestant workers ever deeper into the arms of their reactionary, pro-imperialist misleaders.

The perpetrators of sectarian terror, both Orange and Green, can *only* be dealt with justly by the class-conscious proletariat -- above all through the formation of integrated workers defence squads, which are necessarily both anti-sectarian and anti-imperialist. The occupying forces of British imperialism *cannot* mete out real justice, for their 'order' is inherently unjust and reactionary.

The 'order' which imperialism seeks to impose on Northern Ireland is the 'order' of the baton, the fist and the gun. The actions of Britain's armed gendarmes -- guilty of centuries of mass terror against the oppressed masses of six continents -- have always been and continue to be infinitely more criminal than the worst sectarian atrocities of the IRA or even of the right-wing UVF.

Only the forging of a revolutionary vanguard party which shatters sectarian barriers and unites Catholic and Protestant workers against British imperialism and the domestic Orange and Green capitalists can show the way forward for the toiling masses of Ireland. An Irish workers republic, part of a socialist federation of the British Isles, is the only state which can provide true order, justice and freedom for the working people of both communities.

The Irish revolutionary vanguard will be built in implacable struggle against not only Orange Loyalism but also Green Republicanism. However, even as they raise high the red banner of proletarian internationalism, the communists of Ireland will uphold the best traditions of those who, in however flawed or partial a manner, sought to fight against British imperialism. In particular, those who were gaoled or martyred for their struggles will be avenged in the future Irish workers state -- including the militants who campaign heroically today in the hellholes of Long Kesh.

Free all victims of imperialist repression in Ireland!

Troops out now! Not Green against Orange but class against class!

Smash imperialism's prisons -- for the proletarian justice of a workers republic!

SPARTACIST BRITAIN

'Free' trade unions in USSR?

Last November a group of dissident Soviet workers held a press conference before foreign journalists in Moscow. The following month the group, claiming some 200 members, announced the formation of the Free Trade Union Association of Workers in the Soviet Union and has since managed to smuggle several documents out of the country to Amnesty International. Subsequently, according to Western press reports, a Committee for the Free Trade Union of Workers of the USSR was formed in mid-April (*Los Angeles Times*, 29 April).

The first appearance in years of an organized grouping of Soviet dissident workers has created an international stir far out of proportion to the group's limited impact in the USSR. Widely disparate elements, ranging from the conservative bourgeois press and the reactionary Meany bureaucracy of US unions to left-wing Labour MPs in Britain and the fake-Trotskyist 'United Secretariat', have all rushed forward to uncritically embrace the cause of the rebellious workers. But what is this 'free trade union' movement and what does it stand for?

The materials made public so far, prepared from the group's documents by Amnesty International's research department, shed little light on their ideological predisposition. Almost all the material made public is of a descriptive character, detailing the persecutions and abuses suffered by individual members of the group at the hands of the Soviet bureaucracy. According to Amnesty International, the 'group began its existence through the accidental meetings of unemployed workers who had come to Moscow to press their complaints in person at the offices of the highest party government and legal authorities'.

The first written public appeal to arrive outside the Soviet Union was issued 20 May 1977, signed by eight workers. The May 'open letter' cited 35 workers in different cities who had been thrown into prisons and psychiatric hospitals for 'exercising their right to complain'. Since then the group has issued an appeal to the Belgrade conference concerning application of the 1975 Helsinki accords; a 'collective complaint', issued on the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution; and an appeal to the International Labor Organization (ILO). The appeal charges that between the time of its first press conference in late November and the end of February ten workers who signed various of the documents were detained by police. Seven of the arrested members were either missing or known to be in psychiatric hospitals as of 27 February 1978.

Vladimir Klebanov, the principal spokesman of the group, worked for 16 years as a foreman at a coal mine in the Donetsk region of the Ukraine. The documents assert that Klebanov unsuccessfully attempted to organize an independent trade union at the mine in 1960; in 1968 he was dismissed from his job for refusing to assign overtime to his workers or send them onto jobs where he believed safety standards were not being observed. When he protested his dismissal, Klebanov was ruled mentally ill and confined to a maximum security special psychiatric hospital from 1968 to 1973. Since his release he has been prevented from working, as well as being detained in hospitals several more times. Klebanov was reportedly being held in a psychiatric hospital in Donetsk as of February 28 where, according to the group, he had been diagnosed during an earlier incarceration as suffering from 'paranoid development of the personality' with a mania for 'struggling for justice'.

Other accounts provided by the group outline roughly similar stories of individuals making



Founders of 'Free Trade Union' in Moscow. Left, Vladimir Klebanov.

complaints against bureaucratic abuse and corruption, followed by retaliation against the workers involved. Maria Dvoretzkaya, a worker in Alma Ata, appealed on behalf of her husband, who had been ruled 'mentally non-accountable' and 'socially dangerous' and put into an institution as a result of incidents regarding his signing of statements complaining of thefts and fraudulent wage payments to non-existent workers at a creamery and, later, a shoe factory. Varvara Kucherenko, who worked at a curing plant in Dagestan, was demoted and then fired for exposing the administration and trade-union committee in her plant for stealing goods. She was later detained by the police and also incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital.

In its appeal, 'To World Public Opinion, On the Real Situation of the Workers and Employees on the Eve of the 60th Anniversary of the USSR' (18 September 1977), the Soviet 'Free Trade Union' group writes:

'We, Soviet people from different strata of society, people of various nationalities from various corners of the country, are forced to turn to the so-called "bourgeois press". Our leaders, our press, party and Soviet organs do not want to listen to us, honest toilers of Soviet society, the producers of material wealth, even though they, according to their tasks and responsibilities, are obliged to listen to us and to respond to our questions.'

And in its 'Collective Complaint' (7 November 1977), the Association writes: 'It is the sacred duty of every citizen of the USSR to protect socialist property and to protest gross violations of human rights.' It charges that functionaries of the Communist Party (CPSU) 'watch-dog' commission for official abuses, the Central Committee Department of Administrative Organs, 'are guided by personal motives and not by the instructions of the party and the government'.

However, by far the most vociferous 'champions' of the cause of these Soviet workers have been the most die-hard opponents of both socialism and trade unionism alike. For years the CIA and other counterrevolutionary forces have complained that the overwhelmingly petty-bourgeois composition of the Soviet dissident movement makes it difficult to tout as representative of the Soviet people. Thus, the bourgeois press eagerly seized upon the formation of the Soviet 'free trade union association', particularly since its appeals were directed to imperialist agencies such as the ILO. Weeping crocodile tears over 'the extraordinary extent to which the USSR has been harassing and imprisoning ordinary working folk' (*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 2 March),

the same capitalist mouthpieces which denounce 'greedy unions' in the West are protesting the victimization of Klebanov and his comrades.

The George Meany gang was quick to echo the *Guardian* and its counterparts in the American bourgeoisie. The latest issue of the *AFL-CIO Free Trade-Union News* (May 1978) has a front-page article, commenting on the Soviet workers, entitled 'We Want to Tell of Our Unimaginable, Inhuman Suffering....' The virulently anti-communist AFL-CIO draws the conclusion: '... it is now also increasingly clear that whereas the proletarians of most "bourgeois" countries have fought for -- and won -- their workers' rights and material well-being, the workers in that bastion of Marxism -- the USSR -- are still fettered by the most inhuman chains of social injustice and poverty'.

On the left, the response has been more muted. But Eric Heffer, a leader of left Labour Party MPs, urged both the British trade unions and the International Labor Organization to press for an investigation of the Soviet unions. In a letter to the *Guardian* (19 March) Heffer attempted to distinguish himself from the right wing, whose ostensible support for the Soviet workers he termed the 'height of hypocrisy'. Heffer asserted that the Soviet worker dissidents 'do not in any way want to restore capitalism or involve themselves in ideological conflict with the Soviet authorities, but simply demand to freely organize....' Meanwhile, the United Secretariat (USec), which indiscriminately lauds any expression of 'dissent' in the deformed workers states, simply published information from the Amnesty International documents with no criticisms whatsoever. And the ostensibly Trotskyist French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) gave blanket political support to these dissident Soviet workers:

'It is an imperative duty of the international workers movement to give its support, without reservations, to these courageous fighters for basic working-class freedom.' (*Informations Ouvrières*, 12-19 April)

Information about the Soviet workers' group is sparse, and it is doubtful that its membership is homogeneous. There have been reported conflicts between it and other dissidents. Klebanov says he was rebuffed by physicist Andrei Sakharov. 'They consider themselves above us', he said, referring to the petty-bourgeois dissidents (*Washington Post*, 22 January). However, the spokesman of the 'Committee for the Free Trade Union', Vsevolod Kuvakin, now says that 'the cautious attitude shown by workers toward the intelligentsia has been overcome'. In any case, at least tacitly the victimized workers have accepted the strategy of supporters of Western imperialism like Sakharov by addressing their appeals to the Belgrade conference, the ILO and anti-communist unions like the AFL-CIO. Thus they play into the hands of Jimmy Carter's 'human rights' ideological offensive against the USSR.

Trotskyists defend victimized workers such as Klebanov and the others of his group against the bureaucratic arbitrariness and suppression by the Kremlin. And an integral part of our program for proletarian political revolution in the degenerated and deformed workers states is the struggle for unions free from state control -- as opposed to the present Soviet 'unions' which are simply one more arm of the bureaucracy (as is the 'party' as well). Trade unions are necessary even in a healthy workers state to guard against possible encroachments and abuses by the government, as well as to help plan production, work methods, etc. But genuine trade unions and soviets governed by the norms of workers democracy will not be built through

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