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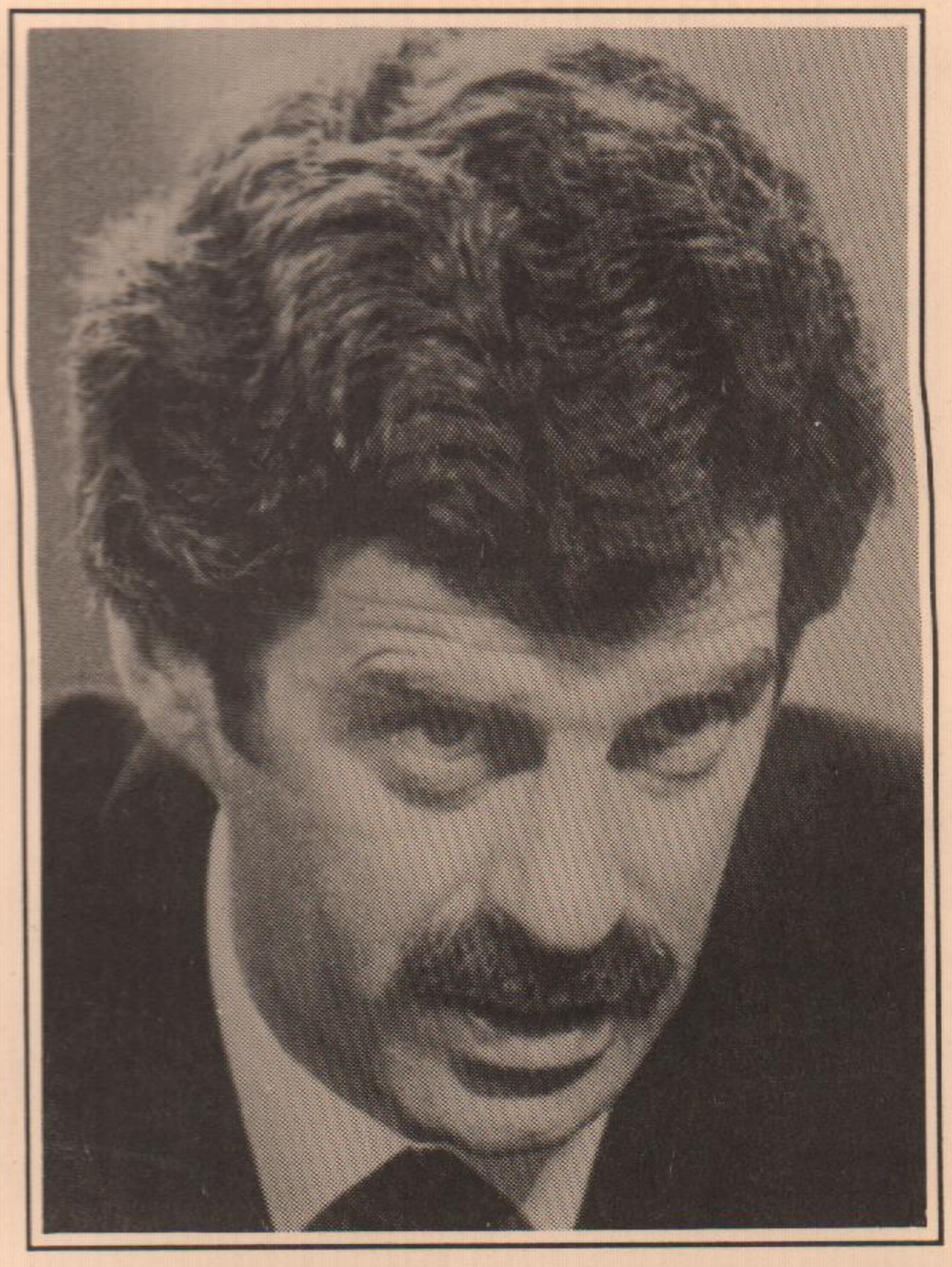
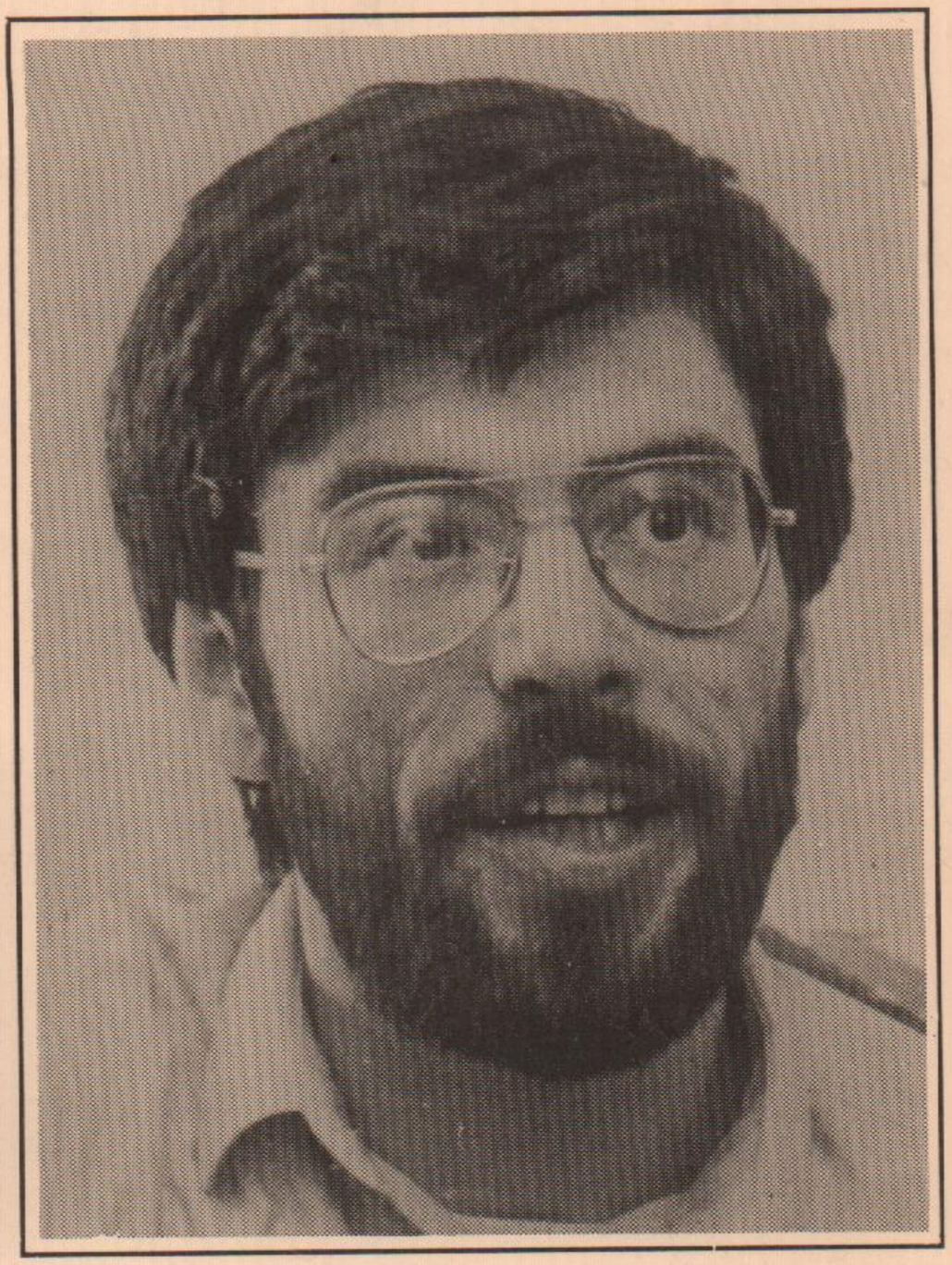


Labour Party & Sinn Fein– Forced to Turn Left?



What effect on the struggle for socialism in Ireland?

Hungary 1956 - "Stalinism Must Be Smashed"

Rosa Luxemburg - the film

James Connolly - Part 7

The Party and the Working Class

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I.W.G.

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LOYALIST IMPOTENCE FUELS SECTARIAN TERROR

As the first year of the Anglo Irish Agreement ends, the increasing fragmentation and loss of direction of loyalist resistance to it has, all too predictably, culminated in the return of the orange sectarian murder gangs to the streets of Belfast. Following upon a prolonged spate of petrol bombing and other forms of vicious intimidation, resulting in nearly 400 catholic families fleeing their homes, the recent brutal sectarian murders underline the extent to which the Paisley/Molyneaux-led crusade has all but collapsed as a coherent political campaign.

From the very beginning it was clear that considerable sections of loyalism, especially among the working class and petty bourgeois elements in the Antrim triangle were deeply suspicious of both the motives of the OUP/DUP leaders and of their willingness and ability to mount a campaign capable of offering a real challenge to the agreement. Too many working class loyalists now languish in jail having acted in pursuit of goals and causes initiated by the middle class politicians of Ulster unionism. Both the UDA and the Ulster Clubs, with much triumphalist rhetoric, signalled their intention to wait until the politicians had had their say before launching what they promised to be a rerun of 1974. But the summer marching season has come and gone with little evidence or sign of preparations to ignite the loyalist masses for a major showdown.

Instead a series of stunts and manoeuvres, while stoking the fires of loyalist sectarian hysteria, have starkly revealed the widening gulf between words and deeds among all the loyalist forces. No Loyalist force yet exists prepared to risk the responsibility of mobilising mass resistance to the Anglo-Irish agreement, for this course of action would threaten a major conflict with Britain and would set a course for the unwelcome road of an independent Ulster. While certain voices within the OUP and DUP have recently raised this option as one that unionists will have to consider, it is absolutely clear that no substantial section of unionism will countenance it as other than a bargaining ploy.

Against the background, therefore, of a faltering campaign the most demented forces of Ulster loyalism, as so often in the past, have burst forth in an expression of semi-racialist anti-catholic pogroms. But it would be more than naive to believe that this campaign of widespread terror against defenceless men, women and children has not got both the support and even the active encouragement of the main sectors of loyalism as a whole - witness their attendance at the funeral of the UFF killer Bingham - himself a conscious fascist.

For many no doubt, the sense of terror inflicted upon the catholic population is gratification enough; but a deeper motive surely is to be found in the fact that the frightening depth of communal polarisation leaves hundreds of vulnerable catholics unable to turn to anyone but the IRA, their self-proclaimed defenders, thus undermining the SDLP constitutionalist reformers, the 'architects' of the Anglo-Irish agreement. In such a situation, loyalists believe British resolve to pursue the Agreement will be weakened.

Therefore, whatever weaknesses and divisions have been exposed by the loyalist campaign, there can be little comfort for the British and southern Irish governments or the SDLP. They are all too well aware of the truth behind the loyalists' cynical jibe that the agreement has worsened the position of catholics who are now victims at home and work right across the six counties. Moreover, in such a climate no significant element of 'moderate' unionism has emerged from the loyalist camp prepared to countenance the minor cosmetic concessions spoken of in the agreement, let alone embrace the more radical step of a powersharing assembly. Both governments and the SDLP fully realise that any move now to implement any part of the Agreement, however symbolic and minimal, may galvanise loyalism into another paroxysm of sectarian rancour against the catholic population. The British, with little opposition from Fitzgerald & Co., counsel caution, hoping that loyalism's intransigence will ultimately be exhausted through attrition. The southern bourgeoisie as a whole know only too well that the Anglo-Irish Agreement stands between them and a situation of ever deepening crisis of parliamentary rule, sharpened all the more by the electoral challenge of Sinn Fein. Prior to the Sinn Fein's signalling the possibility of taking Dail seats, Fianna Fail felt compelled to pledge that it too



Photo by Derek Speirs / Report
Lisburn catholics forced to move house by loyalist attacks on them.

would continue the Agreement if returned to power. Only later did it top up its own republican rhetoric by calling for 'renegotiation' of the deal.

The even more beleaguered and vulnerable catholic minority in the north have thus discovered that an agreement heralded by its supporters as a major breakthrough in the fight to remove the minority sense of second class citizenship, has resulted in a further deterioration of their condition and deepened that sense of grievance. In such circumstances many have expected some kind of lead from the republican movement, only to find as in 1974 in a similar situation that the republicans simply take the situation as proof of the correctness of their guerrilla strategy to physically smash the state. Thus throughout the past year of the Anglo-Irish agreement the IRA has stepped up their armed and bombing campaign against the RUC stations and barracks, extending it in a wholly wrongheaded way to include workers and trade unionists whose jobs in any way service such places. Meanwhile, Sinn Fein councillors have continued to carry on the pantomime opposition to the SDLP, blindly indifferent to the concrete consequences for the catholic minority of both the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the loyalist campaign to smash it.

As events have all too tragically demonstrated, any victory for plebeian loyalism is welcomed as a victory also by ruling class unionism which will license its continued oppression of the catholic minority and its class rule over all workers; while a victory for Thatcher, Fitzgerald, Hume etc. will gain imperialism and its bourgeois nationalist allies valuable political space to stabilise and ultimately destroy the spirit of rebellion among the catholic working class of the north. Already in the north west the army and RUC have unleashed a campaign of terror upon the catholic population, hammering home the message loud and clear that the real purpose of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is to provide the best conditions to pulverise all anti-imperialist resistance into submission.

In such a situation the republican response of stepping up the military campaign of their guerilla fighters as an answer is hopelessly irrelevant to the needs of the masses. Faced with the effect on masses of catholics of loyalist and state terror, the continuation of all the apparatus of rigged courts, show trials, strip searches etc., only the organising and building of a common front of workers, socialists and republicans north and south can offer any hope of turning the tide of mass passivity, by making possible joint action, including workers' strike action, to defend the minority against the evil fronts of British and loyalist terror.

Thousands of workers in the north have recently taken strike action to protest at intimidation of workers out of their jobs, mainly against loyalists, but also against the IRA's decision to include workers servicing the security establishment as 'legitimate targets'. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions was forced to call a conference on the issue of sectarian intimidation. The IWG have no illusions that such conferences have anything but the main objectt - as in the 'Better Life For All' campaign - of providing a platform for the union bureaucrats to condemn **all** and any resistance to British imperialism, the RUC and the British army under the guise of pacifism. We can be certain that there will be little room for calls for trade union **mass action** against **their** systematic terror machine, or against the results of decades of discrimination. But the protests from many nationalist workers, registering real concern at the IRA's extended campaign as it affects workers, provides an opportunity for revolutionary socialists to spell out the real alternatives to the cul-de-sac of republicanism.

The present realities make even more urgent the need for a united front, throughout the country, of republican, socialist and working class forces against repression, against collaboration with imperialism and in defence of anti-imperialist prisoners, north and south. The elementary defensive needs of the minority and of all those openly opposed to British imperialism makes such joint action obligatory. It can be most effectively started through a democratic national conference open to all organisations and militants prepared to struggle. Such a conference must set out an agreed platform of concrete goals around which democratic action councils can be initiated in each town by local activists from the participating groups. The best energies of the best militants cannot be guaranteed, nor the most effective forms of struggle developed, unless such a fighting campaign guarantees the fullest freedom of debate and the right of each group to openly uphold its own political banner while pursuing the agreed action goals.

While such a campaign must seek to mobilise action around all the most blatant, the sharpest and the most immediate acts of repression, it can only do so flexibly if it spells out in advance an explicit position on all the key issues. We believe its platform should include the following.

1. Defend all anti-imperialist political prisoners and end strip searching, north and south.

2. Demand the disarming and disbandment of the UDR and RUC, the abolition of all repressive and emergency legislation, including Dublin's Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act. Solidarity with all victims and defiance and obstruction of these laws where possible.

3. Abolish the juryless Diplock and Special Criminal courts. End the use of supergrasses.

4. End collaboration of the Garda, southern army, judges and courts. End extradition and extra-territorial courts. No to the European Convention for the Prevtion of Terrorism.

Only such a campaign can create the conditions for building real mass self-defence of the six-county minority, and solidarity with them from mass sections of the southern working class.

SOCIALIST DEBATE

IWG has always emphasised the necessity for debate, polemic, discussion and joint action among all groups claiming to stand in the tradition of Trotsky and Lenin. No Marxist party can be built without threshing out the differences that divide groups which embrace hundreds of revolutionary individuals. To this end IWG has always and alone on the Irish left formally invited other groups, offering speaking rights, at public debates and meetings. More often than not the SWM and Militant and LWR groups have refused even to reply.

It is a matter of great regret when such sectarianism is their response to the appeal for a joint public meeting, with equal speaking rights, on the Hungarian revolution of 1956, an appeal issued by IWG at the suggestion of British groups who had joined forces to make a speaking tour for Peter Fryer, witness to the events of 1956 and author of *The Hungarian Tragedy*, re-issued this October.
Despite this self-defeating sectarianism on their part, IWG will continue to attempt to bring about such public debate and discussion with other socialist groups.

Sinn Fein - Left Turn Opens up New Questions of Strategy

Despite Sinn Fein's new resolve to develop "the political struggle" in the 26 county state, by ending its abstentionism from the Dail as of the 2nd November Ard Fheis, Republicanism is still abstaining from the class struggle. This is no less true in 1986 than in 1980 when IWG wrote:

"Sinn Fein nationalism obscures any explicit recognition of the class struggle of workers versus capitalist as the basis for a socialist programme. Left talk about multinationals and ranchers in Eire Nua cannot hide the omission of any reference to anti-capitalist class struggle" (Class Struggle, June 1980).

Nevertheless, every socialist should welcome the decision to abandon this traditionalist and moralistic "principle". The decision represents the most significant manifestation so far of developments begun in the late '70s to address and challenge the sterile ideological and political limits of traditional Irish Republicanism. It had become increasingly clear to many republican militants in the north that after nearly ten years a military war fought by a few hundred guerrillas was not going to defeat British imperialism and its Irish allies.

THE ELECTORAL TACTIC

The mass dimensions of the H-Block movement offered SF a chance to break out of the impasse of a campaign that had been stalemated since after the fall of Stormont, by organising the support of communities, workers, women and youth who had been mobilised by the heroic courage and self-sacrifice of the hunger strikers. By holding the support of these sections, the decision to contest elections on a radical programme and to take seats in local government in the north (abstention did not apply to local councils in the south) offered an enduring political challenge to the hegemony established by the SDLP and bourgeois nationalists.

Related to these important developments was the move into community politics north and south as a means of providing services in a more honest and radical manner to the needs of the urban and rural masses in their conflicts with local, regional and national welfare bureaucracies.

The Dail decision was the next step, necessarily, in pursuit of these aims. SF recognised at last that the southern masses would never spontaneously rise up in support of the nationalist struggle against Partition. More urgently, it saw the need for a mass base in the south which would help it break out of the narrow confines of basing itself on a minority of the minority within the north and give it a new leverage on British imperialism and its Irish ruling class allies.

STARTING POINT

However, it is significant that we find in SF's debates no recognition of the centrality of class struggle in southern politics, no understanding of the profound social and economic changes which have come about in Ireland as it became increasingly integrated, as a subject part, within the international capitalist order. Hence the shallow and empirical nature of the "starting point" which the Adams leadership chooses - the ***"existing level of consciousness"*** of the southern masses, the mere fact that they accept the southern parliamentary institutions.

For socialists the existing level of consciousness is one vital consideration in defining immediate tactics, but it is only one side of the question. What is much more important for a party is the programme and strategy to which it seeks to raise the masses. "Tactics" are a fraud if they are not a living **bridge** from the existing consciousness to an openly argued strategy. As for the concern with that consciousness merely in relation to the Dublin parliament, it amounts essentially to nothing more nor less than mass illusions in bourgeois democracy in general, illusions in parliamentary rule as the ultimate institution through which a better life might be achieved. When socialists determine to use parliament, in cutting with those illusions, they do so with the **openly announced strategy** of abolishing such democratic forms and replacing them with a state of a new kind based on workers democratic councils.

By contrast, when Adams & Co. "tactically" recognise the existing consciousness of the southern masses by seeking entry to the Dail, it is not with any strategic aim of ending such illusions, merely re-directing them to the goal of an all-Ireland parliament. Thus SF is setting a course that **shares** those very illusions. Most notably the leadership repeatedly insisted on peaceful relations with the **coercive forces** of southern capitalism for which parliament is merely a democratic facade.

The right-wing O'Bradaigh opposition to Adams, of course, does not make these criticisms. This faction, now the self-styled Republican Sinn Fein, embodies the fear of all involvement in politics as corrupting. However true that bourgeois councils do threaten to corrupt always, what is at issue really is that the essential petty bourgeois revolutionary nationalist current had only one unifying point ever - the use of the gun against the colonial forces, and any serious involvement with broader political struggles were a source of division and diversion! For socialists, on the contrary, the more seriously Sinn Fein engages with wider political concerns of the masses the better, because it threatens to open up struggle and debate in which there is a chance to win the most combative and class-conscious sections within it to a genuinely revolutionary socialist alternative.

NATIONALISM FIRST

However welcome the move by Sinn Fein, it has not changed Irish Republicanism's programme on the central class questions of Irish politics. In all their arguments, the most Adams & Co. could offer is what they themselves describe as ***"republican politics"***. The most radical aim that Adams dared espouse was ***"the organisation of the economy so that all its resources are under Irish control and organised to bring maximum benefit to the people in a 32-County state in which Irish culture and national identity is strong and confident"*** *(An Phoblacht 6/11/86)* The left leadership, like the right within Sinn Fein, continue to defend the traditional republican perspective whose starting point remains the Irish nation and the goal of a united Ireland of free and equal citizens. Such a view is, historically, the outlook and view of the rising Irish bourgeoisie in the early period of capitalist development in Ireland, in the 18th and 19th centuries. The task of achieving national freedom and independence, however, fell increasingly in the 19th and 20th century - after the defection of the northern bourgeoisie first and of the southern bourgeoisie in the twenties - to the oppressed rural and urban petty bourgeoisie whose goal of a society of small producers and co-operatives expressed an opposition to both big capital and the modern proletariat. Republicanism still expresses in a contradictory way elements of this outlook, enshrining, in its continued programmatic adherence to the aspirations of a united Ireland **as a first step,** the utopian dream of a self-sufficient republic of small producers able to assert effective independence from the international chain of large-scale capitalist division of labour and production **and** from

super-power political alignments.

In essence such a perspective is no different from the equally utopian programmes of countless national revolutions across the world against imperialism, where despite similar socialist rhetoric and promises about solving the social problems of the exploited workers and peasants, **after** the national revolution the masses **remain enslaved** to imperialism and to their **now domesticated** petty bourgeois liberators. Sinn Fein's national interest remains that of the petty bourgeois as against the class and international interests of the Irish workers. It embodies all contradictions which flow from such an obsolete perspective in the conditions of modern world imperialism.

H-BLOCK LESSONS

For example, the H-Block struggle witnessed the most massive and radical mobilisation of the anti-unionist and southern masses since 1969. The perspective of the struggle and the leadership of the campaign were determined by Sinn Fein. From the beginning SF aimed to build a **pan-nationalist bloc** of the 'Irish people', by appealing for humanitarian sympathy for the prisoners. Sinn Fein, and the Adams leadership in particular, opposed each attempt, such as by the IWG, to make the basis of the struggle a fight to mobilise workers for strike action around which to build a genuine united front of the real exploited and oppressed in Ireland. Even when the H-Block campaign proved unable to mobilise the respectable and worthy middle classes and the prisoners started their desperately heroic hunger strike, Sinn Fein still opposed every attempt to abandon the illusion of saving the prisoners by building a pan-nationalist bloc of the SDLP, Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church. While token one-day strike actions were agreed by the campaign leadership, those who argued for making the fight for indefinite and general strike action the key to giving coherence and momentum to a clearly disintegrating campaign were represented by Sinn Fein as wreckers. Even after the death of Bobby Sands and before the death of Francis Hughes, with the campaign already directionless, Sinn Fein still defended the fantasy of creating the pan-nationalist bloc on the basis of platitudes uttered by Hume, O'Fiaich or Haughey's cronies only under the pressure of the mass struggle from below. Clearly the methods of action of the **class struggle** of Irish workers would not only have shattered such illusions but would also have posed serious questions about how far Sinn Fein is prepared to lead struggles against the economic and political foundations of the southern state.

Similarly the record of Sinn Fein's turn to participation in the local councils, despite the many fine resolutions passed at annual conferences about the need to resist the policies of imperialist capitalism, Sinn Fein's councillors merely operated as a 'model' opposition to the SDLP. While quite prepared week in and week out to correctly denounce the SDLP in its role as representative of local and national business interests, nowhere has there been an attempt to mobilise action on any fron among those who suffer the consequences of such policies. Indeed, so divorced from any wider strategy of struggle has Sinn Fein's tactics become in local government that the Strabane and Derry councillors voted for cuts and rate increases 'to keep local government in business'. Likewise throughout the north where cuts in welfare payments and rights, housing, education and jobs continue inexorably, Sinn Fein leaders utter fine words about the need to struggle but initiate nothing. It is clear that the performance by the councillors has been an exercise in testing the extent to which electoral involvement can hold or even extend the base of support while in no way threatening the cardinal principle of Republican faith - the pre-eminence of nationalism over class struggle and the pre-eminence of the autonomous and elitist military campaign over the need for self-organisation of the working class. The fears of the Right in Sinn Fein that electoral tactics would open them to the seduction of political office, or to what they would regard as the diversion of the class struggle, has so far proved groundless.

THREAT TO WORKERS

The military campaign has in fact been stepped up across the province and extended to include workers whose jobs involve servicing the forces of British imperialism and the RUC. Sinn Fein's local government councillors fell quickly into line behind these executions of what their organ dubbed 'collaborators' while at the same time tying themselves in knots trying to explain why those who are **conscious** collaborators - the representatives of the Irish bourgeoisie, army and police - must not be targeted. We are not of course arguing for the extension of the IRA campaign to these targets; even less, though, do we support the decision to threaten and kill workers whose jobs bring them into contact with the forces of British imperialism. In fact nothing demonstrates better the profound elitist hostility of republicansim to the democratic methods of struggle of workers and socialists. Rather than argue among anti-Unionist workers in particular for **them** to consciously and democratically refuse to serve the arsenals of the repressive forces, as part of the attempt to build inside and outside the trade union movement serious workers'-based opposition to all aspects of repression north and south and to fight for support for these workers when in the event of such a decisision they are faced with redundancy or opposition from the trade union leadership, the methods of the republican movement not only alienate the many workers immediately involved but hand a propaganda weapon to the trade union and bourgeois leaders all over Ireland. Even more is the killing of workers who refuse counterproductive, when the republican movement has, by any standards of to national liberation or socialist struggle, no mandate for such action, for it has remained for 17 years a minority within the minority of the anti-unionist population. The decision, then, to take seats in the Dail if elected, must be evaluated against this background - the strictly **nationalist** perspective that remains deep at the heart of all activities of the republican movement. It is clear that those in Sinn Fein who have opposed this new turn perceive a greater threat to republican nationalism on the terrain of the southern state than could exist within the narrower political contours of the polarised north.

For if Sinn Fein, as they so often promise to do, are to attempt to address the social, economic and political issues facing the Irish working class in the south, women, youth, small farmers etc., if they are to offer real concrete solutions for workers and trade unionists in struggle against layoffs and over wages and conditions, for the unemployed, for democratic rights of divorce, contraception and abortion, this will and must involve a resolute and determined fight by the Irish masses against all and every institution of the southern capitalist bourgeois state in order to replace them... **with which?** - a 'united Ireland' **or** a workers' republic?

Any pressure to move in the direction of the **class struggle** can only increase the tensions and conflict within the movement between the dominant perspective and those who do believe that this can be the only direction for republicanicm if it is determined to settle the question once and for all of not only which nation is to rule but which class is to be master within the nation.

The evidence so far of Sinn Fein in southern politics indicates that its ambitions go little beyond trying to become the clientilist agent for what it likes to call the nationalist people of the south, and this as part of a perspective of more effectively bargaining with British imperialism. The class needs and democratic rights of workers and women (witness the decision on abortion), whether north or south, are far from central to SF's programme, strategy or goals. The shamefully muted role of the organisation in the divorce referendum underlined the opportunistic caution that results from such a position.

The IWG believes that a decision to enter the Dail will therefore open the Republican movement to ever greater self-examination, debate and conflict over the real class contradictions between what petty bourgeois republican nationalism puts forward as its continuing perspective for Ireland and what the Irish working class as a whole needs to end the rule of imperialist capitalism forever.

DIVORCE AND ABORTION DEFEATS - *NO EXCUSE FOR DEFEATISM!*

The decision by Sinn Fein to abandon the call for a woman's right to choose is but the latest in a whole series of setbacks for the fight for women's liberation in the past year and more.

The key event of the past year in the struggle against women's oppression was the divorce referendum. Clerical reaction triumphed as a 60% opinion-poll support for divorce was turned by the church into a 63% to 37% **defeat** for a timid constitutional reform which proposed to allow divorce *after five years of marriage breakdown.* The middle-class and reformist coalition of the Divorce Action Group cravenly boasted of their own 'concern for family stability' and so gave the ground of the argument away to the clergy.

Radical feminism was notable for its non-existence during the campaign, and a significant catholic section of the Labour Party dissented. Left feminism had never built the elements of a fighting women's movement. But even insofar as it had claimed to be doing so, it had never put any special importance on the need to fight for divorce rights, perhaps reflecting the relative personal freedom of feminist strata and ignoring the great importance of divorce rights for the mass of oppressed women trapped in domestic slavery.

It must also be said that Sinn Fein's role was inexcusably low-key. Its big-selling paper failed to mobilise the Sinn Fein base into action or to hammer home the vital importance of the issue, as it should have done every week during the short campaign - that is, if SF was politically capable of grasping its fundamental importance. Instead they merely recorded their advice to vote yes, or 'at least don't vote no', and encouraged rather than mobilised their membership to campaign. (Where their support is strongest in the southern state, the rural border areas, the anti-divorce vote was overwhelming.) Yet secularisation of society is a **fundamental** condition of **ever** resolving the division of the Irish working class and nation, and SF's performance, measured against this reality, shows that not only is its feminist current merely tolerated but its overall commitment to secular-democratic political struggle is still deeply tainted by its historic **catholic** nationalism. Despite all the pressures of its radicalised urban bases and its feminist current, and notwithstanding the heroism of its guerilla war, SF's kernel commitment to **nationalism** rather than class-struggle constantly reproduces in its social programme the outlook of the **petty-bourgeoisie,** and in Ireland such an outlook is an obstacle to ever genuinely **confronting** the churces, as a central prop of bourgeois order in Ireland, in the fight for women's liberation.

RIGHT TO CHOOSE

When Sinn Fein, a year ago, adopted the slogan for a woman's right to choose abortion, the IWG wrote that ***"the leadership did not want the motion taken because they feared a sharp backlash not least from the catholic nationalist petty bourgeoisie in whom their movement is historically and politically rooted".***

Now, in 1986 the so-called 'left' leadership of Sinn Fein has pushed through a decision to rescind this policy, adopting instead the cowardly evasion of simply ***"opposing the conditions in society which lead women to seek abortions".*** Even the reactionary clergy could support this! At a time of attack on the clinics which assist women wanting abortion referrals, this is a serious setback.

The right to choose abortion became a practical reality for most women in Britain in 1967 and since then Irish women have, like those of several other European countries, gone to Britain in large numbers to avail of the facility. In the two decades since then, some advances have been made in southern Europe against catholic opposition to abortion rights, yet the opposite has been the case in Ireland - not because defeat was inflicted on a movement demanding abortion rights but because no such movement was even begun.

It is 16 years since a demand for abortion rights was first made in Ireland when the Sunday Press carried an article in which a member of the Dail called for therapeutic abortion facilities in Ireland - Noel Browne, then an anti-coalitionist Labour TD. Subsequently 'Sinn Fein the Workers Party' adopted this position also but was careful to say nothing about it. **Abortion on Demand** was adopted by the Irish far left, but of all these groups - which combined for two years of debate and action in the experiment of the Socialist Labour Party - only the IWG fought to commit the SLP to this demand. Despite the opposition then of many who now offer themselves as the 'radicals' of the 'womens movement', the SLP plenary conference adopted the demand overwhelmingly as part of its whole programme for women, while correctly focussing on the contraception struggle as the concrete issue of the day. By the time abortion became a live political issue in Ireland, the SLP had collapsed.

It was the extreme right wing who played catspaw for the Church and made abortion an issue by forcing the ruling class parties into a referendum with the supposed aim of making the existing criminal status of abortion unalterable by parliament. Although the rate of abortions among Irish women was then high even by Europe-wide standards (thanks to British facilities), and although mass sections of the population in the cities, perhaps even a majority, would oppose legal action against any woman for having an abortion, the resistance to the right-wing offensive confined itself strictly within limits acceptable to the non-catholic clergy and fought the campaign on the secondary but more 'respectable' terrain of liberal democratic opposition to Catholic Church interference with the constitution.

Nothing whatever was built, therefore, from among the thousands of activists mobilised against the Referendum, very many of whom could have been won to support a political battle to end the formal criminal status of abortion. The 'left feminists' who had imposed such disastrous limits on the Anti-Amendment Campaign were the quickest to deny that there had been any real defeat, and refused to accept that no ongoing campaign had been built or even prepared for. Events, and their own record of no serious attempt at struggle since then, has now somersaulted them into proclaiming the whole of the 1980s as a series of defeats for women and plunged them into a fatalistic ***defeatism*** and political timidity that fails to even try to fight back.

In 1985 the SPUC opened a new anti-abortion offensive based on their Referendum victory. They sought a judicial interpretation of it to outlaw, in two secular private clinics, the non-directive counselling of the option of a UK abortion. In October 1985 a clinics defence campaign was formed from a conference dominated by the most politically timid, tunnel-visioned and undemocratic elements of Irish 'radical' feminism. Central among them were the centrists of the Peoples Democracy group. In *Class Struggle 17* , the IWG reported how PD and the feminists **rejected** any idea of giving the immediate defence campaign any **declared perspective** to go further, i.e. to fight for decriminalisation of abortion - as the best means of answering concretely now the real challenge posed by SPUC. They insisted even on ruling out any reference to the then live issues of contraception for under-18s and the right to sterilisation. IWG wrote: ***This cowardly recipe of PD's has been tried and found to be disastrous in every previous campaign contraception and the Amendment***



Clinics Defence Meeting 4 Oct 1986. Guest speakers. *Photo: Derek Speirs.*

to name but two. This time, tragically it has set the already weak clinic defence campaign on a course towards demoralisation and shipwreck".

IWG, and the others affiliated to this campaign, waited for its leaders to do something, anything, to mobilise opposition to SPUC. A whole year passed with only the most minimal activity to help pay the clinics' legal fees! The 'leaders' of the campaign quietly but deliberately ditched it. They re-emerged on 4th Oct **1986** as 'just a few women' who convened a public meeting in defence of the clinics in the week before the decisive legal proceedings against the clinics. They never even mentioned the existence, not to say explained the disappearance, of the previous year's 'campaign', and they then did everything they could to guarantee that the large numbers who turned out to this latest meeting would again be squandered, and nothing built.

The attendance at the Oct 4th meeting was surprisingly large - over 300, who handed up £1,000 in a collection on the spot. Yet the organisers of the meeting made it clear that their intentions were identical to a year previously. Indeed, if the clinics were to lose the right to mention the abortion option to their clients - and judgement is still reserved at time of writing - then a semi-clandestine information service would be organised to help women to find counselling and referral services in Britain and the north - a worthy aim but no answer, and certainly not a basis for any political campaign. A section of the audience was keen to demonstrate its willingness to fight, beginning by demonstrating outside the court the following week. Again the organisers rejected this out of hand.

An IWG member intervened to argue for a campaign conference to consider building the clinics defence campaign with the declared objective of going on to fight for **decriminalisation of abortion.** The IWG is willing to fight for this position alongside others who would at least support therapeutic abortion rights but who do not support our full demand, an issue which could be debated out in the course of struggle. The IWG speaker called for a demonstration outside the courts and attacked the defeatism of the platform and the previous campaign's failure to attempt any action. Union official and former PD leader A.Speed was quick to her feet to insist that ***we are in a situation of defeat*** and that ***therefore*** it was absurd to call for such a demonstration at the courts, in defiance of one of the defendants' wishes - the directors of Wellwoman centre whose attitude was so timid that they would not even be represented at this public meeting

No one from PD contradicted their former comrade Speed, or supported the IWG call for a campaign for ***decriminalisation of abortion*** as the minimum necessary basis to resist SPUC. This was despite the PD's published claim to have learned lessons from past failures: ***"it is the right of women to control their own fertility, their own bodies and their own lives which is the nub of the issue in the clinics campaign"*** *(PD's Ann Conway, in An Réabhloid 2, p.7, Autumn '86).* A year ago, PD had opposed the IWG's argument in favour of of this position!

During the intervening year, the PD group had been deserted by a faction of its leaders and members who preferred to work with Sinn Fein than under the banner of what they had called Trotskyism. PD has not yet offered any evidence, however, of having in any way abandoned the opportunist political method - towards women's struggles or national struggle - with which the defectors were so closely identified. One among these was A.Speed who was particularly singled out for criticism in the IWG assessment of the 1985 clinics defence conference. She and PD members were among the organisers of the 1986 public meeting and dictated its outcome.

Just as PD refused to analyse the roots of their past opportunism in the women's struggle, so also have they refused to break with opportunist adaptation to republicanism, despite the loss of leading members to Sinn Fein. Again they displayed their illusion s in Republicanism, ironically a month before SF reversed its abortion policy. They wrote that: ***"A special responsibility also rests on the Republican movement to put Ard Fheis policies into practice."*** Fine words, but useless as long as PD refuses to argue **how, concretely, now,** SF should fight for a women's right to choose. More generally, however, PD was, in this, deliberately blind to the political reality of Sinn Fein's **inability** to fight for this goal.

THE WAY FORWARD

Only a self-organised movement of women centred on and led by working class women can create the uncompromising kind of struggle that is so desperately needed in Ireland if women's rights are to be defended and extended on the road to complete emancipation. But that goal is only possible as part of a growing *class* struggle against capitalism and imperialism as a whole in Ireland.

One step in building the nucleus of such a movement must be to build now a fighting campaign to defend and extend women's rights to control their fertility, beginning with defence of the clinics, but openly declaring now the goal of fighting to decriminalise abortion, win the right to sterilisation on the health services and win comprehensive, free and safe contraception on demand for all!

Cork 1986 - Labour against Coalition?

CAN THE LABOUR PARTY BE 'RECLAIMED' FOR SOCIALISM?

For four years, the Labour Party under Dick Spring has apparently been heading towards electoral extinction. It has certainly and increasingly alienated and aroused the contempt of trade unionists, unemployed, women and the most oppressed of the northern minority. But during those four years Spring has managed to keep the large majority of the party in tow, despite declining fortunes and despite outspoken criticism from even the most conservative of the affiliated trade union leadership. Now an official commission of the party has recommended an end to coalition. Can this mean, as the left in Labour claim, that this party can now take forward the socialist movement?

Spring's remarkable survival in the teeth of anti-coalition feeling was all the easier because of the unwillingness of the 'left' in the Party to mobilise any form whatever of direct mass action against coalition among trade unionists, youth or unemployed or any action based on communities resisting cuts. The lefts confined themselves, and continue to do so, within the supposed 'democratic' procedures of passing resolutions within the party - despite the record of bureaucratic rules and crude manoeuvres to ensure that resolutions could not even be discussed on the question of coalition.

The 'Electoral Strategy Commission' was agreed a year ago by Spring as a concession in exchange for left silence at the conference on the subject of coalition. A leading trade union 'critic' of Spring and Coalition, John Carroll, intervened to make sure that no urgent special conference would be convened to hear the Commission's recommendations. Spring thus bought himself time to entrench his hold and carry through almost the full term of his Coalition government. The 'commission' manoeuvre even had the support of the party left, self-styled "broad left" as well as self-styled "Marxist" left. Now in 1986 the left in Labour must reckon with the consequences, unsure whether the outcome is a gain for them or for Spring. The "Labour Left" faction has decided that they can make gains by **claiming** that it is a left-wing victory, regardless of the **truth** of the matter. Meanwhile, the 'Marxist' Militant tendency abstractly renews its falsetto call to 'reclaim' for socialism a party which **never** stood for socialism.

The Electoral Strategy Commission had no difficulty in agreeing that Coalition had been bad for the Party. Not even Spring would disagree - and why should he, for the supporters of Coalition do not argue that it is for Labour's good, merely that it is in the national interest, or that it is a means of getting little bits of Labour policy implemented. Their most effective claim - though fundamentally wrong - is that by sharing power at present they can help moderate the 'right-wing' austerity policies. And if Labour should suffer as a party, Spring's corrupt and self-seeking clique is not even ashamed to speak of Labour making sacrifices in the national interest! Far from disagreeing, Spring can find advantage at present in the Commission's critique of the Coalition. It helped his bargaining position in government to have the commission publicly reprimand the Coalition partner, Fine Gael, for its 'purely individualist policies', and for its 'crude 19th century capitalist ideology' (as if 'normal' 20th century capitalism were preferable!).

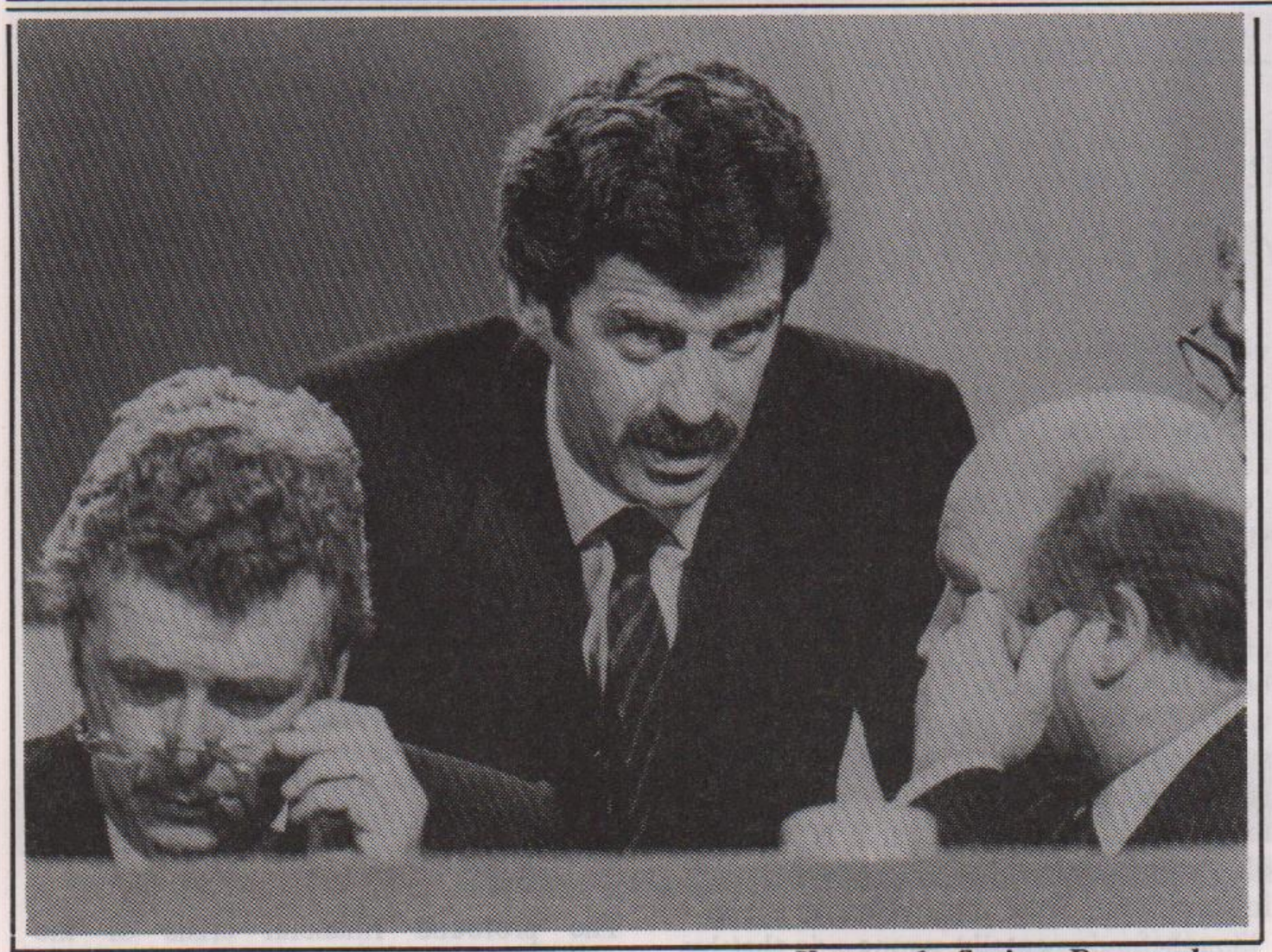
The meat of the report is, of course, its proposals; and on the face of it they clearly recommend that Labour should not again go into Coalition for 10-15 years during which it should 'fight all elections on the basis of its independent policies and remain independent of all governments'. However, the two-faced **diplomacy** of this 'conclusion' is then straightaway revealed by the Commission's concern with permissible **exceptions** to going it alone. Coalition would not be ruled out in ***"the rare circumstances where national concerns dictate otherwise"***. The party lefts assure us that this **only** means coalition with the bourgeoisie in war-type emergencies... (this from ICND pacifists!) ... or according to the lefts themselves in the E.Press of 11/10/86 - ***"foreclosure of the country's economy by the international banking system"*** would be a permissible situation for coalition. Indeed! Yet what could be more **certain** than that world finance-capital is going to impose on this grossly over-borrowed economy **whatever** is necessary to get its interest paid in full!

More generally, however, ***'exceptional national concerns'*** have always been thirteen to the dozen for Labour leaders eager to get their snouts into the trough of public office. If Labour were to hold the balance of power it would not at all be alien to Spring and his clique to declare a prospective Fianna Fail government to be a danger to the nation. But Spring's eye may not at all be fixed upon the next General Election so much as preserving his flexibility for subsequent ones. At present Fianna Fail seem set to get an overall majority, but in addition, Spring cannot ignore that what the ruling class expects of the next administration might finally destroy his electoral base if he were to share in carrying out the necessary economic savagery.

The profound financial crisis of the southern state makes it possible that the period ahead may bring many new political and parliamentary convulsions in which a Fianna Fail administration might be short-lived or would easily give way to new possibilities involving Labour in government. It is for this contingency that Spring is determined to retain flexibility.

But what if a Labour conference majority were to pin Spring down by explicitly ruling out Coalition for 15 years? Precisely because Spring's clique controls the party apparatus, this obstacle could in time be overcome. Such a conference decision, whether this year or next, would not, however, reflect a victory for socialism in the hearts of the Labour ranks. It would merely reflect the judgement of the party functionaries and their local retinues that general political conditions are unfavourable for Labour to immediately risk another spell in Coalition government! Just as Spring may not be eager to carry the can for another immediate spell of austerity politics, so also is he capable of appreciating the electoral advantage of an interval in 'opposition' during which to refurbish Labour's credentials with the unions, repair its shattered party morale and beef up its constituency work against the encroachments of the Workers' Party. Indeed there is every sign of precisely this calculation on his part in Spring's responses to the other important parts of the Commission report.

The Commission laid it down that Labour may go into Coalition with another (capitalist) party if support could be secured for a definite programme of demands. "Labour Left", which attempts to persuade us that this is a fundamental gain for the left, lists these demands as ***"the trebling of capital taxation, removal of economic planning from the Department of Finance, extension of the Land tax, adoption of the Social Welfare Commission***



Kavanagh, Spring, Desmond
Coalition at any price?
Photo - Derek Speirs./Report

Report, taking the education system out of the hands of the Churches, the drafting of a secular constitution with a neutrality and non-alignment clause etc." (E.Press). Initially Spring told the media that these were negotiable demands. After squeals of protest from the other Commission members he turned about sharply and publicly stated that they constituted a non-negotiable commitment to definite socialist reforms which he admitted no capitalist party at present would accept. This was not, however, a change of heart but clearly an effort at 'left' **posturing** in the run-up to his own conference and in the virtual certainty that Fianna Fail in any case would win the next election.

LEFT - NAIVE OR DISHONEST?

Even if these recommendations were to become explicit resolutions by a conference majority, they would not be an obstacle to arriving at a deal with Fine Gael over a period of time. The very phrasing of them makes them inherently negotiable, as Spring appreciates. **What!** End Church control of education! A Labour Party whose parliamentary front-men disagree over contraception for unmarrieds, who could not muster the will to openly **fight** the church in the battle for divorce rights - such a party will not commit **itself** to getting education out of the hands of the churches, let alone make it a condition of support for Coalition! Rather it will translate this bold demand into the most limited reforms in the education system. Labour will similarly render 'negotiable' the other so-called 'hard' demands that supposedly stand in the way of coalition, just as it has, even for internal consumption, always reduced radical aspirations to mealy-mouthed and cowardly 'policies'.

It can be seen from Labour's actual record, especially between 1969 and 1971 when it was strongest and most 'left' in its commtment to stay out of Coalition, the leadership clique were able to overturn the whole direction of the party, from above, and then bring in the majority of the ranks behind them. In this light, and given the shallowness of the present Commission's recommendations, Labour Left stand accused of either naivety or dishonesty when they assure us: *"The exceptions to the Party's new anti-coalitionsist strategy will ensure that there will be no exceptions"* (I.Times 17/10/86)

Anti-Coalition in Principle?

From Spring's point of view, the most important feature of the Commission's report, and of its recommendations to the party membership, is that it nowhere poses the issues of coalition or class-collaboration in parliament as a question of **principle.** And the most important feature of Labour Left's capitulation lies in the fact that it too refuses to pose coalition as a question of principle - because coalition with capitalist parties is an entirely legitimate 'tactic' for them, but is simply the wrong tactic for the present stage of Irish politics. While Militant is the only group in Labour which does pose the issue as one of principle, their refusal in practice to do open battle to **force** Labour out of coalition has merely left them open to ridicule as 'purists' by the outright opportunists in Labour Left.

Militant's sometimes correct slogans are emptied of any real content and reduced to abstractions because above all else Militant is determined to remain in the Party at any cost and is not prepared to fight for its 'principled' position to the extent that might provoke a witch-hunt against them. What use is Militant's call for 'Labour out of Coalition' when they have refused to fight for workers' mobilisations to take up publicly this precise slogan? What use is 'principled' opposition to coalition if Militant has dropped the fight for it on the floor of the Labour Party conference itself? For it should not be forgotten that in 1985 Militant voted to have the Electoral Strategy Commission set up (on which they won no representative) as a trade-off for not debating coalition at the annual conference! If that is the best that 'principled' opponents of Coalition can do, then it is all too easy for the craven Labour Left to jibe at Militant's "sloganising" in order to cover their own explicit rejection of any stand **against coalition in principle.**

Within their own grouping, however, Labour Left reveal another side to their opportunism on this issue. They support the Commission Report because influential 'anti-Coalition' figures such as M.D.Higgins, Taylor and FWUI's Billy Attley are behind it, and for the 'broad left' not to support it would therefore jeopardise the anti-coalition 'consensus'. But what if this 'consensus 'is really empty posturing of 'influential' figures more concerned about their own momentary image and narrow interests? The weight of evidence bears out this interpretation.

Where has any one of these figures actually used either position or influence to muster real forces of opposition to the actual reality of this present coalition? Nowhere. Each of them has openly and in important ways loyally supported the carrying out of Coalition even while deputies such as Bell who did not claim to lead a fight against coalitionism, **did** defy the leadership, though unfortunately only for limited sectional measures.

Far from being a 'socialist', Attley is a powerful union bureaucrat who has been the most vigorous advocate of trade union policies of collaboration with the bosses - openly offering on 15th Oct. to trade wage restraint for a social contract with the ruling class. In both 1984 and 1985 FWUI conferences, Attley fought to stop any real trade union force being applied against Coalition! Only through Labour's internal "democracy" could change be effected, according to Attley.

It clearly suits such union bureaucrats and the Labour Left to ignore that Labour's "democracy" is really a sham. The party apparatus is a machine controlled in its essentials from above, mainly by the Dail deputies, TDs who do not hold themselves responsible to the Party, less still to the organised working class movement. Attley explicitly supported at the 1984 FWUI conference (report p.548) the idea that Labour TDs should not come under material pressure or control from the unions, claiming that this would be as bad as big business controlling capitalist TDs! Under cover of this bourgeois fiction, Labour TDs time and again impose on the party the interests of the **ruling class** which are impressed upon them both openly and secretly through every avenue,

and to which they usually lend a willing ear, with an eye to their own advantage.

PARTY DEMOCRACY?

Of course, on the most fundamental issues of principle and programme, the Labour TDs have never been at odds with the general body of the party membership. Thus TDs and the Party as a whole have always been of one accord on the strategy of achieving limited reforms through parliament as **against** direct class struggle for socialism. Noel Browne occasionally, and then only in words, espoused the 'revolutionary' strategy. But in the other direction, time and again, many Labour TDs have openly and in the most reactionary way betrayed the limited progressive demands of the party, thus revealing the actual forces and pressures of the ugliest kind, and the self-interest, that constantly act upon and shape the perspectives of labour TDs towards ever more craven capitulation to the ruling class. Yet it is precisely this clique, **not** a directly elected and recallable leadership tied to a democratically detemined programme, who are allowed the greatest control and veto over the appartus of the party, electing its 'Leader', vetoing unwanted candidates for party functionaries, and imposing their own people as candidates to contest for election to join their ranks. They have all the power of the media and the pretence of the 'national interest' which which to crush any potential opposition in the Party before ever a 'democratic' debate can take place on crucial issues!

Labour leaders were hardly interested in party democracy in June '81 when O'Leary revealed the outcome of secret negotiations with Fine Gael only on the day of a special Labour conference which then accepted coalition by 737 to 477 votes on the basis of pathetic promises of a 1% levy on bank profits and the formation of a 'National Development Corporation'. The same trick was enacted on Dec. 12th 1982 when, without time to read the secretly designed coalition pact, the members were cajoled into accepting it for its largely symbolic but insignificant tax on large houses! This time it was Spring who pulled the wool, for O'Leary had decamped into Fine Gael and a new party boss, O'Leary's closest henchman, had been chosen by the tiny Labour cabal in the Dail.

Labour Youth

A fine new example of Labour democracy is Spring's imposition of a hand-picked crony to run Labour Youth, in total defiance of all formal democracy in Labour Youth. Militant, which dominates Labour Youth, has decided to live with this instead of mobilising the youth to defy it. Labour Left, which initially attacked Spring's plans for the youth section, decided that its own factional advantage would be better served by supporting Spring's imposed hack as long as this weakened Militant's hold - a contemptible and sectarian act that will do, and has done, Labour Left no good. In September it felt obliged to defend itself



when labelled an "unconstitutional" group in the party, a charge made by the new General Secretary. This unelected official was also selected, in effect, at Spring's dictat.

SERVING WHAT CLASS?

However it is not in itself the undemocratic nature of the Labour Party that makes it a historic prop for Irish capitalism. What is fundamentally decisive is the class interests that the party has been shaped historically to serve - interests fundamentally at odds with the struggle for socialism. The absence of workers' democracy, the lack of any genuine accountability to the working class rank and file, is merely one symptom of this reality to which Labour Left is utterly blind and which the so-called Marxist Militant tendency inexcusably refuses to acknowledge.

CENTRISTS AND LABOUR

The Labour Party remains one of several key problems for genuine socialists in Ireland. To dismiss its existence as irrelevant to the struggle for socialism would be disastrously one-sided and wrong, and yet that is how the centrist groups outside of Labour actually regard it - most consistently the (Cliffite) SWM who simply counterpose themselves as the future party of socialism, with moralistic denunciations of Labour. Equally onesided in its view of Labour is the (Mandelite) PD which came out of Labour at the start of the 70s and now calls for the unions to ditch it and build a new 'anti-imperialist' party. The (Lambertist) LWR group also originated with Labour and spent more than a decade calling for Labour to be built into a mass anti-Partitionist party; but the impact of the H-Block struggle caused LWR to announce that they had been wrong for a decade and that now the unions must abandon the existing Labour Party and build a new mass 'non-revolutionary' party. All these tendencies lose sight of the most central assertion of the Marxist tradition about parties such as Labour: that they are **contradictory** realities.

REFORMISM

Labour parties have their **social base** in the working class; but at the same time, **politically,** in their actual programme and outlook, they take the side of the capitalist state, of bourgeois democracy, of parliament and the police. They oppose any attempt of the workers to directly challenge the capitalist system itself. That is to say, the programme of the Labour Party is fundamentally a bourgeois programme while socially it is based on the working class.

Historically it has been the workers' trade union organisations which have created Labour as their political voice and it is the continued trade union affiliations which effectively license Labour to present itself even in 1986 as representing the working class interest, however falsely. But the trade union organisations have for generations been dominated and controlled by an entrenched caste of bureaucrats who, along with important sections of their members, have made their peace with the capitalist system because it allows them relative privileges, either as powerful salaried union officials or as the highest paid secure sections of workers.

There is also the important reality of sections of weakly organised workers - or workers in rural areas who live under the oppressive shadow of the deeply conservative provincial petty bourgeoisie - who thus depend totally upon the power of the union official and who provide an extended base of social and political influence to these officials. This has direct effects within the Labour Party, in which rural areas have carried exceptional weight.

True, and important, that Irish Labour is not a **mass** party in terms of membership or active support in the working class. What is decisive, however, in making it a party "of the working class", in the absence any other mass working class party, is the continuation of its historical role, as the political representative of the working class, in the concrete reality of the affiliation of the largest general unions.

Lenin expressed the contradiction in the phrase "bourgeois workers' party". The more rounded description of the Labour Party must also add that normally its programme is also **reformist**. That is, the majority of the party ranks, consciously strive for a better life through positive reforms on behalf of the working class, through peaceful parliamentary means, but they do not consciously seek to overthrow capitalism.

In other words, the Labour Party on the whole reflects the dominant ideology within the trade union movement - the

ideology of reformism. In societies where reformism dominates the working class no mass revolutionary party can be built without a coherent set of tactics for effectively challenging reformism and winning growing sections of workers away from it.

REFORMISM - SKIN-DEEP?

Where workers on a large scale give their allegiance to a Labour Party, as in Britain, it is less easy to ignore the need for such tactics. In Ireland, however, Labour's vote has never risen above 17% nationally and may now be heading down to 6%, so that tendencies such as SWM are more cocksure that there is no need for tactics towards the Labour Party in the battle against reformism in the working class. The SWM's whole method forces them to wrongly believe that political reformism is only skin deep and that when workers take up militant **economic** struggles they automatically cast aside reformist illusions and automatically become open to revolutionary leadership. The failure to realise this fantasy in the 1970s has sent groups such as SWM spiralling backwards into abstract propaganda about socialism, refusing any longer to argue any form of action programme to the militants of the working class. No-one will disagree with SWM that the vast majority of workers have no illusions in the Irish Labour Party, but what SWM does not even begin to understand is that however discredited, the Labour Party retains a crucial **negative** importance as an obstacle to socialists.

USURPER

Labour is a lightning conductor whereby the reformist trade union bureaucracy can deflect the political strivings of the mass of organised workers whenever a militant minority succeeds - against all the obstacles - in giving political expression within the official movement to the needs of the rank and file. Time and again the bureaucracy will announce that such and such a question can be resolved only by political action - and they will often be correct - but for them it means referring the issue to Labour and parliamentary lobbying when what is really needed is a leadership that will mobilise direct mass action as well as parliamentary action for class-wide political demands. Therefore, the continued existence of an official party of the unions, however low its prestige at any given moment, cannot be dismissed.

Every class-wide issue that faces organised workers raises the need for a party of their own. The bureaucracy have recognised this fact historically, and continue to recognise it daily. But they have made certain, even from its first draft electoral programme in 1918, that their official Labour Party would never undermine their general caste interest, would never fight to overthrow capitalism. In this sense the Labour Party is the recognition by the unions that the workers need political answers, but at the same time Labour usurps and blocks the aspiration of the mass of organised workers for a party genuinely committed to their interests.

MARXISM RE-APPLIED TODAY

If socialists, inside or outside Labour, are to adopt effective tactics to deal with it, both as an obstacle and as something which expresses the vital need for political answers, then they desperately need a rounded and historical understanding of this peculiarly stunted reformist party of the Irish working class. They need to understand its very particular functioning as part of the overall reformist apparatus of the organised workers' movement.

Such an analysis has been developed in a succesion of articles in *Class Struggle* since 1977, and it has enabled the IWG to clarify a sound tactical method towards reformism. It applies to specifically Irish conditions the rich body of Marxist theory and tactics on reformism as developed by Lenin, the early Communist International, and by Trotsky and the Fourth International. We believe that such tactics are a necsssity if ever the nucleus of a fighting mass party of socialism is to be built. In addition to the articles on Irish Labour in our journal, the IWG also provides, along with its comrades internationally, a major theoretical statement on the labour and socialist parties in general - *Theses on Reformism* . Disagreements on precisely such issues are what in practice divide Irish socialists, especially the far left groups who offer competing brands of shallow platitudes in the name of Marxism.

ECONOMISM

Thus, while the SWM tries to convince us that Labour is an irrelevancy for socialists, their rivals in the Militant Tendency insist that there can be no road to socialism except through Labour. There is an extraordinary similarity underlying the attitude of both groups, for both share an 'economistic' idea of an objective economic process which, with themselves as co-ordinators, must inevitably propel the working class into abolishing capitalism. For both of these tendencies, the mind of the worker and the ideological questions facing the working class are conveniently simplified. For SWM, reformist illusions in the working class will be easily swept aside by an upturn of economic struggle. Therefore socialists must turn their backs on Labour and get on with building the apparatus of an alternative and revolutionary party

For Militant, the revolutionary party of the future already exists as the Labour Party; but the ordinary members and the workers are being held back from transforming it by an alien and reformist leadership. Thus it is not the party which is reformist - for Militant it is only the leadership! This is the misconception that leads Militant to so shamefully misapply Trotskyist entry tactics. It illuminates how they can so brazenly lie, year in and year out, no matter what the defeats, about the inevitable march to the left by Labour. In particular it explains their peculiar fantasy that Labour was historically and is still, at heart, a socialist party and that the ordinary members must now "Reclaim the Party for Socialist Policies"!

Why is Militant wrong in this? Past articles in *Class Struggle* and our analysis of the tradition of James Connolly have presented a full understanding of the historical falsity of this belief about the Labour Party. Tragically - as much because of Connolly as in spite of his revolutionary spirit - Labour never was anything but a reformist party, expressing the mere trade union outlook of a working class crippled by national division into camps dominated by bourgeois nationalism and reactionary unionism.

A PARTY - SELF SELECTED

However, the more general answer to Militant's falsifications requires an understanding of what a **party** is as distinct from a **trade union**, for both are very different in terms of the relations between the membership and the leadership. In the case of the trade unions the mass of workers are compelled to fight collectively, forming a 'united front' in which different sections can retain distinct political perspectives, ranging from the bourgeois or apolitical through to the revolutionary. It is possible in favourable conditions for the rank and file in action to so mobilise the union that the bureaucratic apparatus can be compelled to fight, and even be broken up and reconstructed as a fighting and democratically accountable leadership. Such a process would produce a class-struggle union where previously there was only an instrument of class collaboration and containment. Such conditions would greatly favour the growth of a revolutionary party.

But a political party is a self-selected organisation. It chooses its members and its members choose it. Members of parties such as Labour join it or remain in it on the basis of its actual role and performance, its benefits to them or how they assess the party's potential to benefit the class. In the party, therefore, the membership taken as a whole broadly share a common outlook with the leadership. In the reformist Labour party this is the belief in a better life through peaceful reform within the rules of capitalist democracy. Within that common programme there is room for wide variation, for 'left' and 'right' wings, for outright traitors and even, at times, for outside revolutionary elements who join to win over sections of the left, but the overwhelming majority share a common political basis, a common programmatic basis combining elements of stated maximum goals and of minimum day to day pursuits.

This is especially true for a party with a history of such stable structures as Irish Labour, in which growth and decline have mirrored each other over a thirty-year period. It is pure fantasy on Militant's part to imply the existence of a long-suffering membership fundamentally at odds politically with the leadership, sitting out the decades waiting for "socialist" policies to be "reclaimed" by the party as a whole!

Labour's programme, and thus of the party as a whole, is defined as either bourgeois or socialist by whether or not it actively and deliberately seeks to put an end to capitalism. What kind of 'property relations' does it fight for or defend - those of capitalism or of a workers' state? It has clearly established time and again its willingness to maintain, at workers' expense, the bourgeois system.

NEW KIND OF PARTY NEEDED

There can, therefore, be no prospect from within Labour itself, of a fundamental turn to socialist politics, a complete overturn of what fundamentally defines Irish Labour as a party. Only major gains by workers in the class struggle can possibly create the conditions for significant growth and political movement within Labour, but only of a **left-reformist** kind. The nature of Labour as a party, and the essentials of its programmatic method, impose absolute limits in advance to how far it may be pushed in a process of real class struggle.

If Militant's dream were to be realised and the most advanced workers flooded into the party, rather than creating a new kind of party, in that very act they corral themselves within the limits of a reformist programme and practice, no matter how far left in rhetoric such an event might push the party. It is precisely in such circumstances that the reformist party does its greatest service to the ruling class, by being able to ride the wave of workers' revolt and to prevent it from finding revolutionary political expression. In such circumstances revolutionaries are obliged to use **entry tactics** in the principled way that Trotsky developed, to struggle with and for the most advanced sections; but the best that might be achieved is to win such workers to openly fight to build a mass revolutionary party, in a deadly fight against the entire apparatus of the Labour Party and the union bureaucracy, in which the best sections must split from it if they are not to be driven back into defeat and disillusion. The key to such victories is to always proceed through turning every possible organ of the party outwards into an **active** fight for the most pressing needs of workers and the oppressed. If such an action programme is taken up and fought for by significant sections, it begins to build a bridge to revolutionary political action under the lead of a growing revolutionary party.

TURN LABOUR TOWARDS CLASS STRUGGLE

Nevertheless, even at times of retreat or demoralisation in the working class, episodic pressure of events on Labour's membership to get actively involved in the class struggle must be positively approached by revolutionaries. We at all times, with varying emphasis appropriate to the situation, place demands on Labour to act, and on it members to force their leaders to act in support of the working class and oppressed. There are important differences between the more honest sections of Labour's rank and file and the corrupted elements that dominate the Party leadership and its apparatus, and these differences and tensions must be developed to the full in active struggle and ideological debate, despite the deep-rooted reformism of that rank and file.

However, in none of our tactics towards Labour is there any shred of a belief that Labour can be reformed into a genuine party of revolutionary class struggle! Rather, we seek to win over those who are in Labour, and to politically break up the Labour Party under the demands of the class struggle. The goal is always to build the fundamentally different kind of party that is necessary - a mass party of the Leninist and Trotskyist kind.

ILLUSIONS OF TAKEOVER

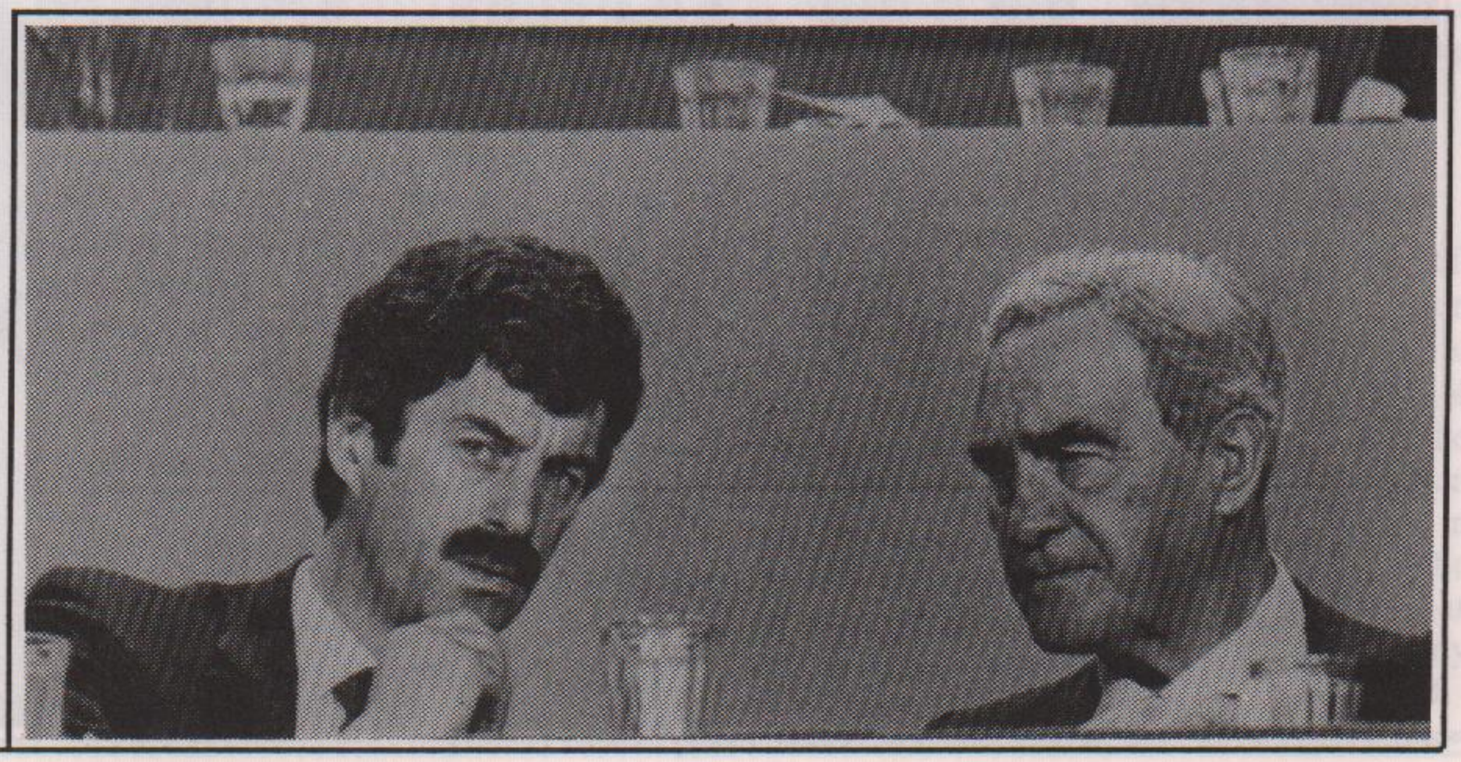
Having turned their back on the Leninist and Trotskyist theoretical analysis of reformist parties, Militant, like the alchemists who laboured for generations to turn lead into gold, learn nothing from experience. In desperation, Militant's leader Joe Higgins, has repeated publicly to the left a call for 500 new activists to join the Labour Party to fundamentally transform it into the historic instrument of socialist revolution in Ireland. Ignoring the ludicrous and impossible abstraction of such an appeal, it reveals the self-contradictory muddle of Militant's entire programme. Militant claims that Labour is the historic vehicle for socialism in Ireland, but in this appeal it reveals that it really has **no confidence** that any force within Labour itself, or any objective development in the class struggle itself, is capable of reforming the party. It believes instead that this historic "inevitability" can be achieve now only by parachuting in more 'Marxists' such as themselves from outside - as if it were possible to take the party by surprise.

No doubt the deceitful misrepresenting of defeats as advances will continue, as Militant finds new 'victories' for the fight to "Reclaim Labour for Socialist Policies". If the best of its present members are not to be driven out of socialist politics in utter confusion, like so many of their former comrades, they could hardly do better than honestly scrutinise the record of the Labour Party and measure it carefully at every point againt what Militant wrote on each occasion over the past 15 years. They will find that Labour has no socialist roots to reclaim, and more importantly, no claim on the future of socialism in Ireland. They must then face the need to fight openly for debate and common action on the left, towards revolutionary regroupment in the nucleus of a genuinely Trotskyist party of socialist revolution.

LABOUR'S RADICAL LIMITS

For its part, **Labour Left** has no pretensions to Marxism. It puts forward piecemeal demands arrived at by keeping just one step to the left of the party leadership. This 'left' wing in Labour today hardly dares raise its sights to the level even of Labour's own 'radical' 1969 policies. Yet even at the peak of Labour's support among workers, in 1969, with 28% support in the capital, Labour's 'radical' programme remained absolutely within the limits of reforms of capitalism, with specific emphasis on state economic enterprise. Such policies, of course, may have progressive elements around which socialists fight for real action by workers, but even if fully carried out, the Labour programme of 1969 would have left Irish capitalism intact and the class and nation still divided.

Indeed, the Irish ruling class itself has frequently been forced by the sheer backwardness of its own semi-colonial economy to initiate large state enterprises to improve the conditions for its own profit-making. In semi-colonial economies the very survival of bourgeois rule can depend in some periods upon large-scale



Corish (right) presided over rise, Spring over decline of Labour in the modern period.
Photo: Derek Speirs / Report.

nationalisation under the control of the capitalist state. This point, and the traditional conservatism of Labour are illustrated in the 1961 Dail exchange between Labour leader Brendan Corish and Fine Gael's James Dillon:

CORISH:

We in the Labour Party propose and it is a definite proposal - that where it is shwn, and it has been shown recently, that private enterprise, either foreign or in this country, fails to establish industry to absorb our unemployed, then we believe it is the responsibility of the State to extend the activities of the State bodies and semi-State industries in an effort to absorb the unemployed. I do not know whether anybody calls that Marxism or not"

DILLON:

"It is enshrined in the policy of Fine Gael".

CORISH:

"It is enshrined in the recent Encyclical of Pope John XXIII".

Labour's demand for state enterprise today has collapsed back to the level to which Corish aspired in 1961 as he started to feel the pressures of a re-born labour movement which pushed him to usher in the 'radical' programme of 1969. To concretely estimate the potential of Irish Labour to develop even under favourable condidions, it is necessary to look at its overall record throughout the whole modern period since 1957 when the working class began to grow and re-organise. This process gathered momentum as the south began to fully integrate itself as a subject state into expanding post-war world capitalism.

LABOUR'S MODERN WATERSHED

Labour has come full circle in its level of support in that three decades, despite the massive strengthening of the working class. A growing section of workers placed their faith in Labour and it expanded steadily, forcing the leaders to extend and systematise its demands for state-capitalist enterprise. It was even forced to commit itself to fight independently of the capitalist parties. But the events of 1969-71, centred on the anti-Unionist revolt, shattered even this miserly reformist dream. The leadership openly ("in the national interest") reneged on their pious commitment to stay out of coalition. They did not hide their purpose - which was to help stabilise bourgeois rule in the southern state, threatened as it was yet again by the volcano of the national question.

Historically, Labour's formation is a paradox, for it crystallised its reformist outlook in a period of national revolution. It defined itself almost irreversibly as a party of compromise with British Imperialism, for the overall interest of the trade union leaderships who created it insisted on maintaining social peace simultaneously with both Green and Orange capital, and prevented the official labour movement as a whole from ever taking a progressive stand against the imperialist dismemberment of the nation and the class.

Thus, in a very comprehensive sense, 1969 as the peak of Labour's 'achievements' reveals how severely limited is the scope for reformism in Ireland, not only for Labour but for the Workers Party whose economistic perspectives are no more radical than those of Labour in 1969. The decline of Labour's support among workers, the decline in its organisation and membership followed as inevitably as did the succession of treacheries by Corish, O'Leary and Spring.

DECLINE OF THE LABOUR LEFT

The left wing in Labour which stood out against the criminal reversal of anti-coalition strategy in 1970 was far more advanced politically than the forces which today pose themselves as the Labour Left. Yet even then those forces can be seen to have lacked the necessary tactical understanding of how to situate their opposition to the Party leadership in a programme aiming to mobilise real working class forces. It was from among these opposition forces that today's 'far left' groups arose, only to find themselves corraled within the international Trotskyist fragments which had failed to come to terms with the post-war realities and had collapsed into political centrism.

One species of centrism was to incubate **within** Labour, however, the Militant tendency. Its peculiarly frozen abstractedness is underlined by subsequent developments. A new 'broad' Liaison of the Labour Left arose in oppositio to Labour's role in the 1973 Coalition, yet Militant remained detached as neither group was remotely concerned with arguing a programme of action for workers which might have created the basis for a practical unity. Militant ploughed on in its abstracted world as the Liaison also became a victim of the Labour leaders and found itself forced into a split. The Liaison ran Merrigan and Browne as Independent Labour in 1977 and unwittingly drew together all the far left groups when they attempted to establish a new party, the Socialist Labour Party - which despite all its subsequent detractors was the single most important experience of both action and debate for decades among socialists in Ireland - a full record of which remains yet to be published. Although it collapsed because reformist electoralism narrowly triumphed over the fight for the party's action programme, it was the most advanced point to which any fragment from the Labour Party has yet been forced to go.

By contrast, the Labour Left of today fully reflects, in its own political level, the severe decline of Labour Party morale, politics and organisation. Today's 'broad left' in Labour is less class-conscious, less radical in its political aspirations, and far more submissive to the party apparatus than anti-coalition forces of the seventies. Whatever socialist aspirations some if its members sincerely hold, the dominant elements in it hardly reflect at all any real or past connection with combative sections of class-conscious workers. It is dominated by white-collar and semi-professional workers and lower officials from the union bureaucracy.

Politically, Labour Left combines the perspectives of some 'left' officials in the unions, and the faded radicalism of some of those who, a decade ago, went so far as to found the SLP but resisted all attempts to break it decisively from reformisn. Labour Left also significantly expresses the politics of the Stalinist grouping which came out of the official Communist Party in the mid-seventies under the wider impetus of what was then known as 'eurocommunism'. Their outlook is deliberately class-collaborationist. They live in an imaginary world of an ever-imminent bloc of all the classes with Labour - including liberal and humanitarian sections fo the church and professions, the self-employed and even sections of the ruling class Fianna Fail party - in a "rainbow coalition" to achieve 'progressive' aims - but not even as a step



Merrigan (centre), Browne (left) in 1977 split.
Photo:Derek Speirs/Report



Labour Left, ex-CPer Sam Nolan, at 1979 tax demo
Photo: Derek Speirs/ Report

to a declared goal of socialism. This inherently coalitiontist outlook excludes only the overtly right-wing 'monetarists' with "crude 19th century capitalist ideas" or those overtly acting for imperialism.

Despite its political incoherence and shallowness, the overall 'anti-coalitionism' of Labour Left reflects a potentially healthy striving in the organised labour and trade union movement and the unemployed to break the traditional 'mould of Irish politics'. They correctly believe that Labour's formal independence is constantly sacrificed in Coalition so as to perpetuate the political dividing lines between two ruling class parties. They correctly believe that this must be ended and that Irish politics must be redivided along class lines.

PARLIAMENTARY FACADE

However, their faith is ultimately rooted in bourgeois parliamentary institutions, not in the goal of a Workers' Republic; and they believe that within the bourgeois electoral process a mass independent Labour Party is a historical inevitability, requiring only patient educational work by the left and an outward involvement in 'progressive' campaigns that can boost recruitment, morale and votes.

But Labour's record is not only the failure to fight for socialism. It has played the key role since Partition in enabling the ruling class to set up and rescue from every crisis its parliamentary **facade** of democracy. In Irish conditions, **reformism,** the belief in parliamentary democracy, ultimately compels Labour to repeatedly rescue the system from the threats to its stability, threats which constantly well up from the geological fault of Partition and from the pressures of class antagonisms within a semi-colony. In every decade except the 60s, Labour aided the ruling class to form capitalist governments even when it was caught on the cleft stick of its own division. Therefore, Labour (and the Workers Party in the 80s) make it possible for Fianna Fail and Fine Gael to pose as "democratic alternatives" to give the people "a real choice" in how "their" parliament was to be run.

NO HAUGHEY NO FITZGERALD

If Labour is in a position after the next election to deny a Dail majority to both Haughey and Fitzgerald then it must be forced to explicitly vote against both. An attitude of abstention in the hope of wheeling and dealing with whoever forms a minority government would simply continue the coalitionism of the past four or more years. It would entrench Labour's role as an obstacle to mobilising the unions in mass political struggle **outside and inside** parliament. For it is precisely this combination that is needed, in which parliamentary representatives are made to stand over and support a fighting workers' movement directly resisting the ravages of ruling class austerity.

Indeed, militants must mobilise to place the demand on the unions to **force** Labour to offer itself as the government and to vote against any alternative involving the capitalist parties. If FF and FG are then forced to combine in order to govern, so much the better for beginning to redraw the lines of political division in Irish society and for beginning to shatter the facade of their "democratic rule". The counter-claim that the ruling class would then have a stable majority to pursue their offensive ignores the accumulated history of contradictory interests that would beset the enforced coalition of FF and FG; but what is much more important is that they would then have to face a working class newly encouraged to fight and vote on an independent class-conscious basis.

THE TEST OF STRUGGLE

As Trotskyists we know, however, that reformist parties cannot be won to genuine class independence in their political struggle. In seeking to place demands on them to assert that independence, we believe that existing illusions in reformism can be more effectively shattered for the mass of workers, on condition that these demands are focussed upon the reformist leadership as a whole, that is the combined **trade union and Labour** leadership. The demand to make Labour fight can only help draw workers to a revolutionary alternative on two main conditions. First, the demand must only be raised as part of a coherent action programme for self-organised direction action by rank and file workers, and second, it should never ignore the trade union leadership as a central target for the demand to make Labour fight. Thus when Attley, Carroll and their cronies whether of the 'right' or of the 'left' in the unions refuse to back with action their mealymouthed criticisms of coalition, let them explain their hypocrisy - and expose their real interests to a working class increasingly won to demand real political as well as economic action from them. Let them be confronted by political demands from a growing mobilisation of working class forces - in strike action, in community-based action committees, in unemployed movements and a fighting women's movement.

THE WAY FORWARD

If any elements in Militant or Labour Left are prepared to jointly struggle with us on such a basis, for a concrete programme of action by real class forces independent of bureaucratic control, we believe this is the only way that they can create a basis for an effective struggle against Coalition in which, in addition, the question can be tested out of whether the Labour Party has in fact - as we believe it has not - any claim on the future of socialism in Ireland.

THE LEGACY OF JAMES CONNOLLY - PART 7

CONNOLLY - THE PARTY AND THE WORKING CLASS

The whole history of the revolutionary communist movement from the struggles of its founders Marx and Engels right up to our own days shows that the achievement of a correct understanding of the relation of party and class is a difficult issue. However, such an understanding of the question is indispensable in solving the crisis of leadership that faces the working class, a crisis which it must solve if it is to stand in the lead of all the oppressed everywhere as the one class that can open up the road to the classless society.

Confronted with many failed attempts to address this question after the stalinist counter-revolution had killed the Third International, Trotsky wrote of the centrist currents that emerged: ***"If centrists were able to understand the inter-relationship between the 'masses' and the vanguard, between the historical process and the initiative of the Minority, they would cease to be centrists"*** *(Centrist Alchemy and Marxism, Writings 1936)*

The two things that stand out in the general popular picture of Connolly's achievements besides the 1916 Rising are his association with Big Jim Larkin in building the ITGWU into a fighting union of general workers able to mount the heroic struggle of 1913, and his role in founding the Irish Labour Party. This picture is essentially correct, for the most mature conception of 'party and class' which Connolly achieved was the relation of the One Big Union to the Labour Party, a perspective which he relegated only temporarily for the sake of a nationalist revolution to create an independent Irish parliament in which the party would, he believed, play a revolutionary role under the pressure of the OBU.

This present article looks at Connolly's changing views on the relation of party and class, in particular its relation to the trade unions. We believe that such an analysis will be instructive for all socialists committed to resolving the crisis of leadership in the Irish working class, for the confusions in Connolly's legacy allow the different and failed leaderships of today to go on claiming him as their justification. This article is the seventh in a series in *Class Struggle* which have dealt with Connolly's apprenticeship to Marxism, the Populist influence, his view of History, Connolly and Religion, his view of Women's oppresion, and an analysis of his role in 1916.

Party, Unions and Class in Connolly's Scottish years 1893-6

What stands out most clearly from any study of Connolly's political and trade union activity from 1893-6 is his involvement in essentially organisational matters. Bernard Ransom's thesis, *James Connolly and the Scottish Left*, shows Connolly in 1893 as secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation, secretary of the Independent Labour Party District Council in Edinburgh, and of the ILP Central Council, also based in Edinburgh. At the same time he was an active member of the Edinburgh Social Democratic Federation and of a general union of carters, a 'new union'. Yet it can hardly be denied that the central long-term axis of his general political development was the SDF, because he viewed the SDF as the nucleus out of which a British Marxist party, like the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) would grow. We must therefore briefly look at the conception of party and class held by the SDF leadership, and how it was regarded by Connolly and his closest comrades in Edinburgh.

The issues on which the correct party-class relationship was most obviously posed in Britain during Connolly's early period, and for long afterwards, were how socialists were to relate to the trade unions, and the growing campaign for independent political representation of the class. On both of these fronts the SDF leadership and programme were doctrinaire and sectarian, as well as opportunist in practice. It was unsparingly criticised as such by Engels and the forces around him in London, centred on Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling who were intervening in the struggles of the unions, especially the new unions, and striving to win them over in action, step by step, to communism. The following are two instances among many where Engels attacked the SDF for sectarianism towards the unions and the working class.

The first is in the context of the heroic and epoch-making dock strike in the autumn of 1889 whose victory gave an enormous boost to the struggle for the new unions. Engels, inspired by the heroism of the lowest and most downtrodden stratum of London workers, wrote to Laura Marx on 22 Aug. 1889: ***"They are as you know the most miserable of the East End, the broken down ones of all trades, the lowest stratum above the lumpen proletariat. That these poor famished broken down creatures who bodily fight amongst each other every morning for admission to work, should organise for resistance, turn out 40-50,000 strong, draw after them into the strike all and every trade of the East End in any way connected with shipping, hold out above a week and terrify the wealthy and powerful dock companies - this is a revival I am proud to have lived to see. ... And all this strike is worked and led by our people ... the Hyndmanites are nowhere in it."*** *(Kapp, 'Eleanor Marx' vol 2, p 333-4)* Hyndman was the leader of the SDF.

A look back a few weeks to the SDF's annual conference of Aug. 5th throws light on its sectarian absence from the struggle. Close after the victory of the gas workers and a few days before the dock strike the Birmingham SDF Conference revised its programme and rules, but the 9-point programme it adopted did not so much as mention trade unions. Only in an addendum of ***"measures called for to palliate the evils of our existing society"*** does it stop to mention in a single line that ***"eight hours or less be the normal working day in all trades"***. Of six SDF executive committees set up to deal with all party activities, none dealt with industry.

The second example is in the context of the massive May Day demonstration of 3rd May 1891 in which the new unions showed their drawing power for the London working class in general. Afterwards, the SDF held their own private 'rally' at an uncontaminating distance from the main throng having, weeks before, withdrawn in a sectarian manner from the joint demonstration committee in which Edward Aveling was a leading figure. Engels' observation marked down the position of the SDF as 'that of a sect' in a letter to Laura Marx on May 4th 1891which included: ***" It is very characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race and their peculiar development ... that both here and in America the people who, more or less, have the correct theory as to the dogmatic side of it, become a mere sect because they cannot conceive that living theory of action, of working with the working class at every possible***

stage of its development, otherwise than as a collection of dogmas ... recited like a conjurer's formula or a catholic prayer" *(Kapp, p.474-5)*

In fact, Engels had attacked a similar doctrinaire sectarianism on the part of the American Socialist Labour Party in its attitude to the Knights of Labor - a semi industrial-union which had three quarters of a million members as far back as 1886. (See Brecher, 'Strike', p.28.) In the course of a political tour by Eleanor Marx and E.Aveling of America in 1886 at the invitation of the SLP, Engels wrote to Kelley-Wischnewetzky: ***"Therefore I think also the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement which ought not to be pooh-poohed from without but to be revolutionised from within, and I consider that many of the Germans there made a grievous mistake when they tried, in the face of a mighty and glorious movement not of their creation, to make of their imported and not always understood theory a kind of all-saving Dogma, and to keep aloof from any movement which did not accept that dogma. Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution and that process involves successive phases. To expect that the American will start with the full consciousness of the theory worked out in older industrial countries is to expect the impossible. What the Germans ought to do is to act up to their own theory - if they understand it, as we did in 1845 and 1848 - , to go in for any real general working class movement, accept its actual starting point as such and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical views in the original programme: they ought, in the words of the 'Kommunistischen Manifest':*** represent the future of the movement in its present. ***But above all give the movement time to consolidate; do not make the inevitable confusion of the first start worse confounded by forcing down people's throats things which, at present, they cannot properly understand, but which they will soon learn."*** *(28 Dec. 1886)*

The second front on which the party-class issue was posed was around the efforts to get an independent mass political party for workers as a class. Engels had faced this issue also in advising the American communists who looked to him for a lead in the 1880s. Writing to Sorge, one such emigré communist active in the US labour movement, Engels made the following general observation on the struggle for a mass workers' party: ***"The first great step, of importance for every country newly entering into the movement, is always the constitutioin of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers' party. And this step has been taken, much more rapidly than we had a right to expect, and that is the main thing. That the first programme of this party is still confused and extremely deficient and that it has raised the banner of Henry George are unavoidable evils but also merely transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop, and they can have the opportunity only when they have a movement of their own - no matter in what form so long as it is*** their own ***movement - in which they are driven further by their own mistakes and learn to profit by them."*** *(29 Nov. 1886)*

Engels' view on this had two basic premises. First it was vital for communists to cut positively with the desire of the worker masses to form a distinct and separate class party of their own encompassing millions of proletarians by supporting and where possible leading it. Second, it was necessary to do this ***"without giving up or hiding our own distinct position"*** *(letter cited to K-W)* On the contrary, Engels argued that the best method of arguing the communist programme in struggles by workers for their own party was to help the workers to learn from their own mistakes. ***"There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by one's own mistakes, to learn from bitter experience. And for a whole class there is no other road..."*** *(same letter).*

In thus re-elaborating the Marxist attitude in the context of new unions and the fight for a distinct mass workers' party, Engels' views were models of concreteness and realism, with no trace of either sectarianism or opportunism. Engels in the last years of his life applies these ideas in the British context through Eleanor Marx and Aveling and the communist and working class forces gathered around them.

As in its attitude to the unions, so in its attitude to the workers' party, the SDF took an attitude that was both sectarian and doctrinaire. Thus, the SDF in autumn 1892 defeated a resolution to support the new Independent Labour Party, amending it ***"to preserve an attitude of benevolent neutrality towards the ILP"*** *(Justice, 13 Aug '92).* This sectarian attitude was to be continued more or less towards the Labour Representation Committee of 1900 and eventually the Labour Party which it created in 1906. The outcome was that at a key turning point in the history of labour in the British state the thousands of 'Marxists' in the SDF were not fighting at all, much less with all their might, to win the LRC forces to communism; and were by default allowing the reformists and centrists of the ILP to win the prestige that would inevitably flow from fighting for an independent class party.

Another sharp edge of Engels' critique cut against the SDF's splitting of the programme into a maximum and a minimum part with no linking bridges. This is the meaning of his repeated variations on the theme first heard in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 - that what is specific about the relation of communists to the proletariat was that in **the present they represent its future.** This was fundamental to the practice of Eleanor Marx: ***"Eleanor ... did not consider shorter hours, higher wages or any other amelioration of workers' conditions under capitalism either trivial or ends in themselves: for her they had precisely that degree of importance the workers attached to them. In that lay her distinctive contribution. She was zealous to work for any and every practical reform without for a moment losing sight of the revolutionary aim; to agitate for the total overthrow of the system without brushing aside a single immediate demand for which the working class was prepared to fight. This was her interpretation of Marxism. It was unlike that of the SDF whose policy and propaganda were Marxist but whose practice was not. indeed, the two were divorced; hence, perhaps, the turnover of membership so ironically mocked by Engels. People came in and went out of the SDF as through a revolving door."*** *(Kapp, p.665)*

CONNOLLY AND THE SDF LINE

It is not difficult to appreciate that Connolly was not able, alone or with his Edinburgh comrades (notably John Leslie), to mount a theoretical analysis and exposure of the SDF's sectarianism and to bring this to fruition in an opposition programme; though this was precisely what Engels and comrades in London were doing. One important reason why Engels' perspective was hardly accessible to such as Connolly was that Eleanor Marx and Aveling had left the SDF in 1884 as part of the Socialist League, a split regretted by Engels as premature (Kapp, p.61), and these two were the main fighters for the ideas of the aged Engels. Eleanor did not rejoin it until late in 1896, by which time Connolly had returned to Ireland. Deprived of their scientific critique of the SDF 'orthodoxy', Connolly's subsequent political development was to be considerably impoverished, and ultimately would never achieve a genuinely Marxist conception of the relationship of party and class.

IRISH SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN PARTY

Connolly returned to Ireland in May 1895 and by the end of that month he had founded his first political group, the Irish Socialist Republican Party. The ISRP, as we have noted in greater detail in previously in this series, was characterised by the retention of the basic division between minimum and maximum programmes, i.e. its immediate goals were not linked as steps to its 'final' goals.

The commonly expressed view of various far left groups today that Connolly linked the national question and the social question in his own homespun version of 'permanent revolution' is unfounded. Quite opposite to the perspective of permanent revolution, Connolly wrongly identified social and national revolution and wrongly placed the national-democratic question in the realm of the 'maximum' programme in this period, and this despite healthily rejecting the SDF's relegation of the Irish national question.

Because of his confusion of the democratic and class programmes as the combined 'maximum' goal for which only passive propaganda could be made, Connolly never envisaged the democratic programme as potentially a bridge to the maximum programme of the Workers Republic. The ISRP's practice was thus confined largely within the electoralist perspectives of a series of minimum demands for legislative reform.

Nor did Connolly's own record in Scotland of active trade union struggle help him break out of this sterile role, for his period with the ISRP fell between two waves of "new unionism" in Ireland, the first having been effectively wiped out by 1896. It is to his credit, therefore, that he was not content in his newly organised base in Dublin. He began to cast an eye around for allies and co-thinkers as an alternative to continued dependence on the SDF. In Daniel De Leon's **Socialist Labour Party** in the US he found what he thought he was looking for.

A number of factors began to swing Connolly towards the American SLP, especially after 1900, ultimately to the point of inspiring a split in the SDF, leading to the formation of the British SLP in 1902. Chief among these factors were weaknesses of the SDF which came to the surface on the Irish national question, the Boer War and coalition with bourgeois parties. Ths SDF interpreted in the most limited way their obligation to support Ireland's right to 'legislative independence'. Hyndman's attitude to the Boer War was to use reactionary anti-semitic rhetoric to divert attention from the responsibility of the British imperial ruling class. In 1900 the SDF angered Connolly by voting against independent representation for the Irish delegation at the international Socialist Congress in Paris. The Hyndmanite SDF also supported the opportunist resolution of Karl Kautsky on the issue of socialist participation in coalitions with the capitalist parties exemplified in the case of the 'socialist' Millerand in France. There are signs too that Connolly may have been conscious of the sectarianism of the SDF's aloofness from the trade unions.

On many of these issues the SLP(US) appeared to be healthier. On many of them the SLP hammered away in its press at the SDF, not without effect. Connoly was a regular recipient of DeLeon's *Weekly People* from about 1898. Not only did he help in the formation of the SLP in England but, after bringing the debate into the ISRP, he effectively liquidated his own paper into a joint publication *The Socialist*, along with the British SLP from August 1902. Most significantly of all was the influence of DeLeon on Connolly's decision to leave for the USA where his conception of party and class was to go through its most significant development.

At this time DeLeon's SLP was not syndicalist, but it did have roots in the industrial organisation of the American working class, through the Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance (STLA). There is every reason to believe that Connolly, at this time, would have seen this as worthy of emulation, whatever about any subsequent differences, as it appeared to separate the SLP qualitatively from the SDF tradition. The STLA was reported to have had 30,000 members in 1898 (Seretan, 1979: "Daniel DeLeon, The Odyssey of an American Marxist", p.168).

Apart from this, the SLP was modelled after "orthodox" European social democracy; although, as we have seen from Engels' remarks, it too tended towards doctrinaire sectarianism. Connolly became attracted to it on the grounds that it appeared to be a healthier version of the SDF, not something radically different from it.

THE AMERICAN SLP'S SYNDICALIST*VOLTE FACE*

Whatever the superficial attractions of the SLP as outlined above, compared with the SDF, the SLP that Connolly ultimately joined was if anything **more** sectarian and doctrinaire than the SDF, and similar to it in its commitment to legalistic methods exclusively, within the framework of a minimum and maximum programme without any bridging perspective.

In fact the period between Connolly's joining the SLP and the emergence of the Wobblies (**International Workers of the World**) the SLP was tottering in a seriously demoralised state. This was primarily the product of its own sectarian politics - in particular its radically false conception of the relation of party and class manifest in its theory of *dual unionism*. This involved repudiating work within the reformist dominated trade unions and transposing against this the work of the STLA - a 'union' creature of the SLP which Connolly was to refer to correctly as merely 'a ward-heeling club of the SLP'.

At this stage the SLP had not adapted to syndicalism, or the industrial unionism of the IWW. Moreover, the SLP adopted an ultra-left position on the worth of trade union struggles for better wages and conditions, counterposing the idea of a pre-existent politically conscious trade union, the STLA. The SLP had originated in the 1880s and was dominated by DeLeon from soon after he joined in 1890 for the next 20 years. Its doctrinaire rigidity, observed by Engels, had led to serious splits - one in 1899 whose forces soon joined with those of the Mid-West based Social Democratic Party of America to form the **Socialist Party of America (SPA)** in 1901. DeLeon was never to succeed in developing any tactical, concrete and critical relationship with the SPA though the latter grew in strength as the former contracted. The SPA ran candidates in presidential elections and won 402,283 votes (1904), 420,713 (1908) and 893,000 (1913).(See J.P.Cannon, The First Ten Years of American Communism. Pathfinder.)

The SLP was suffering erosion on the other side from the forces of revolutionary syndicalism which were now on the ascent and were to crystallise into the IWW in 1905. It was the latter development that was to temporarily relieve the dilemma of the doctrinaire SLP - a dilemma eloquently expressed in the plummeting of the membership of its trade union creature from 30,000 in 1878 to 1,450 in 1905.

We have no evidence that Connolly had any disagreements with the SLP's sectarian dual unionism prior to the emergence of the IWW in 1905. In 1904 Connolly did fire his first shots against the SLP's 'iron law of wages', correctly arguing instead Marx's 'Wages, Prices and Profits' which showed how wage rises need not mean price rises. But he did not draw the connections between this revisionism of the SLP and its sectarian dual unionism.

Prior to the SLP's encounter with the IWW it looked on the **party** as the primary instrument of working class emancipation. The party was a political instrument which, in the tradition of the Kautsky-dominated and centrist Second International, would win power through elections. Prior to this the STLA's role would be to act as a specialist aid in gathering the votes of the US proletariat. It was from this position that the SLP was now to reverse the roles of party and union under IWW pressure. Here is how the turnabout is described by one of the most comprehensive, though non-Marxist, of recent studies: ***"But the purity of the political movement was not expected to be self-generating. The Union, besides having become the determining variable in the industrial formulation, was also seen to be the repository of virtue, the party being merely the light***

the union cast into the political realm. Turning the central assumption of the new trade unionism upside down the union would have to provide the compass that would hold the political body on course. It would have to be the disciplinary body of the party, for only through its vigilance could there be any assurance that the political movement would remain true to its purpose" *(Seretan, p.201).*

In effect, then, DeLeon and the SLP ended up with a syndicalist position on party and class which can be further specified as follows. The industrial unions, co-ordinated into one big industrial union (OBU) is now assigned the role of chief instrument of both proletarian emancipation from capitalism and of building the socialist order that in DeLeon's scheme would directly replace it. DeLeon reflected Kautsky's 'Marxism' in his ignorance or forgetfulness of Marx and Engels' views on the dictatorship of the proletariat as the essential coercive instrument of transition from capitalism to socialism: ***"Industrial unionism is the Socialist Republic in the making; and the goal once reached, the industrial union is the Socialist Republic in operation. Accordingly, the industrial union is at once the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of capitalism and the successor to the capitalist social structure itself"*** *(Seretan, p.191).* DeLeon further theorised the reversed roles of party and union as follows:***"The very nature of the [syndicalist] organisation preserves it from the danger of 'resting satisfied', of accepting 'improvement' for its 'goal', inasmuch as it is forced by economic laws to realise it can preserve no 'improvement' unless it marches onward to emancipation"*** *(Seretan p.203)* Central to this faith in an automatic economic process pushing the OBU to final confrontation was the theoretical error of the 'iron law of wages' which saw wage increases as illusory, as always being cancelled out by capitalism.

The syndicalist version of how the state was to be taken over, a version of a revision taking hold of the major Second International parties, was that **the OBU would be able to crowd out the bourgeois state without smashing it, in a general lockout:** ***"The weapon of the social revolution is not the General Strike but the General Lockout of the capitalist usurping class"*** *(DeLeon, in Seretan p.186),* and ***"The element of 'force' consists not in the military or other organisation implying violence but in the structure of the economic organisation, a structure of such nature that it parries violence against itself, shatters it, and thereby renders the exercise of violence in return unnecessary, at least secondary or only incidental"*** *(DeLeon, in Seretan p.190)*

HOW AMERICA INFLUENCED CONNOLLY'S IRISH ROLE

Connolly took aboard several of the principles of DeLeon's syndicalism. He wrongly assigned to the **inevitably uneven** OBU the same place in working class revolution as did DeLeon, a place of overwhelming primacy **which reduced the role of the party to that of a passive echo of the syndicalist organisation:** ***"The finished expression of the natural law of our evolution into class consciousness ... is... the appearance of our class upon the political battle ground with all the economic power behind it to enforce its mandates ... and as political parties are the*** reflex ***of economic conditions, it follows that the industrial unions once established will create the*** political unity ***of the working class" (Industrial and Political unity, in The Harp, Dec. 1908).*** Putting it even more bluntly, he wrote: ***"Let the great truth be firmly fixed in your mind, that the struggle for the conquest of the political state of the capitalist is not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is being fought out and will be fought out in the industrial field"*** *(The Harp, April 1908, published in Socialism and Nationalism collection p.61)*

The 'inevitability' of socialism arising out of the logic of economic developments, **economism,** is another premise which Connolly shares with DeLeon. It is a theme throughout his writings, a theme which is valid only in an epochal sense but which was useless as a programmatic guide for struggle: ***"On the other hand, that very development also teaches us that until the workers have perfected their economic power sufficiently to control the economic forces, the class actually in control will most relentlessly and scientifically use their political powers to hamper, penalise and, if possible destroy, the workers' organisations, and***



IRISH LABOUR PARTY AND TRADE UNION CONGRESS 1914 NATIONAL EXECUTIVE
Standing: James Connolly, William O'Brien, M J Egan, Thomas Cassidy, W E Hill, Richard O'Caroll.
Sitting: Thomas MacPartlin, D R Campbell, P T Daly, James Larkin, M J O'Lehane. (Thomas Jonson absen

thus create a force sufficient for their suppression. My reading of history tells me that in all great social changes the revolutionary class always fails of success until it is able to do the work of the class it seeks to destroy and to do it more efficiently. And when it has so perfected itself that it is able to perform this work, neither gods nor men can stop its onward march to victory" (Forward, 1914; in Workers Republic collection, p.161). And in his Dock Ward Election Address in 1913 he wrote: *"I desire to see capitalism abolished, and a democratic system of common public ownership erected in its stead. This democratic system, which is called socialism, will , I believe, come as a result of the continuous increase of power of the working class".*

"BALLOTS, BULLETS OR..."

Connolly also shared DeLeon's perspective of the working class movement **neutralising** rather than smashing the capitalist state and thus coming to power. In discussing the Zeppelin Balloon he writes in October 1909 in *International Socialist Review* an article called 'Ballots, Bullets or...', in which he says: *"In facing such a weapon in the hands of our remorseless and unscrupulous masters the gun of comrade Berger will be as ineffective as the ballot paper in the hands of the reformer. Is the outlook then hopeless? No! We still have the oportunity to forge a weapon capable of winning the fight for us against political usurpation and all the military powers of earth, sea or air. That weapon is to be forged in the furnace of the struggle in the workshop, mine, factory or railroad, and its name is industrial unionism. ... A Supreme Court decision declaring invalid a socialist victory in a certain district could be met by a general strike of all the workers in that district, supported by the organisation all over the country, and by a relentless boycott extending into the private life of all who supported the fraudulently elected officials. Such a union would revive and apply to the class war of the workers the methods and principles so successfully applied by the peasants of Germany ... and by those of the Land League in the land war in Ireland in the eighties. ... Finally, after having thus demonstrated the helplessness of capitalist officialdom in the face of united action by the producers (by attacking said officialdom with economic paralysis instead of rifle bullets) the industrially organised working class could proceed to take possession of the industries of the country after informing the military and other coercive forces of capitalism that they could procure the necessities of life by surrendering themselves to the lawfully elected government and renouncing the usurpers at Washington. In the face of such organisation the airships would be as helpless as pirates without a port of call, and military power a broken reed. The discipline of the military forces, before which comrade Berger's rifles would break like glass, would dissolve and the authority of officers would be non-effectual if the soldiery were required to turn into uniformed banditti scouring the country for provisions." (Workers Republic collection, pp66-8).*

Of course, neither Connolly nor DeLeon were ever pure syndicalists like the IWW. Eclectically, they combined syndicalist practice in the unions with political parties devoted to making propaganda including electoral propaganda. However, it was Connolly who was to draw out in practice one inevitable conclusion, the belief that a broad-church party was superior to a doctrinally 'pure' one: *"... that since the political party was not to accomplish the revolution, but only to lead the attack upon the political citadel of capitalism, there no longer existed the same danger in the uncleanness of its membership nor compelling necessity for insisting upon its purification ... it is our belief there will evolve ... one socialist party embracing all shades and conceptions of socialist political thought; one socialist industrial organisation drilling the working class for their supreme mission of their class - the establishment of the Workers' Republic. Finally, we give it as our opinion that until the economic organisation of the workers has attained a power in control of the workshop and, therefore, in the nation equal to that attained by the capitalist class before they raised the revolutionary standard in England, America and France, working class politics are but preliminary skirmishing and that therefore the broadest, most tolerant political party of socialism may be made useful as a teacher as long as it is kept distinct from the industrial organisation and therefore unable to hamper the movements of the latter when, as the regular army of organised labour, it forms its line of battle for the final attack." (The Harp, 1908. Ranson and Edwards p.289)*

FROM IWW TO IRISH TRANSPORT UNION

Connolly left the American SLP in 1907 but remained in the IWW. Although the majority of the IWW wanted all 'politics' to go with DeLeon, Connolly pursued the goal of wedding it to the electorally successful Socialist Party of America as a 'broad church' party. In the same period, according to Ransom, Connolly's attitude was considerably mollified towards Keir Hardie whose Independent Labour Party had fought for the establishment of a mass Labour Party in Britain.

In profound contrast, in the same period, among the Russian Social Democrats and unknown to Connolly, Lenin's Bolshevik faction was re-elaborating the understanding of party and class in a manner that did not choose between the 'pure' and the 'mass' party but insisted on the professional and scientifically clear revolutionary cadre organisation as the heart of the future mass party.

When Connolly decided to return to Ireland in 1910 it was in this frame of mind. Firstly, the OBU was the primary weapon of proletarian revolution. Secondly, a broad church party of the one big union, the political echo of the OBU, was needed. This schema held until shattered by the events of 1913-4 and World War.

It was to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, founded by Jim Larkin in 1908-9 in a split from the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Labourers, that Connolly oriented on his return. Here was the likeliest candidate for the role of one big union spreading its wing over all semi and unskilled workers with the goal of gripping every industrial sector.

The actual circumstances of the founding of the ITGWU raise important questions about the manner of Larkin's breakaway, specifically in relation to the **nationalism** that surrounded it. John Gray's recent book on the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907 gives the most detailed picture of the background. Connolly, though we know of no definitive judgement by him on the act of breaking away from the NUDL, had occasion to complain bitterly about Larkin's "snarling" from the safe distance of Dublin and his "drawing of comparisons between what he accomplished in Belfast and what I have done". He added that Larkin was "conveniently ignoring the fact that he was then secretary of an English union organisation and that as soon as he started an Irish one, his union fell to pieces and he had to leave his members to their fate" (quoted in R.Dudley Edwards, 'James Connolly', p.101)

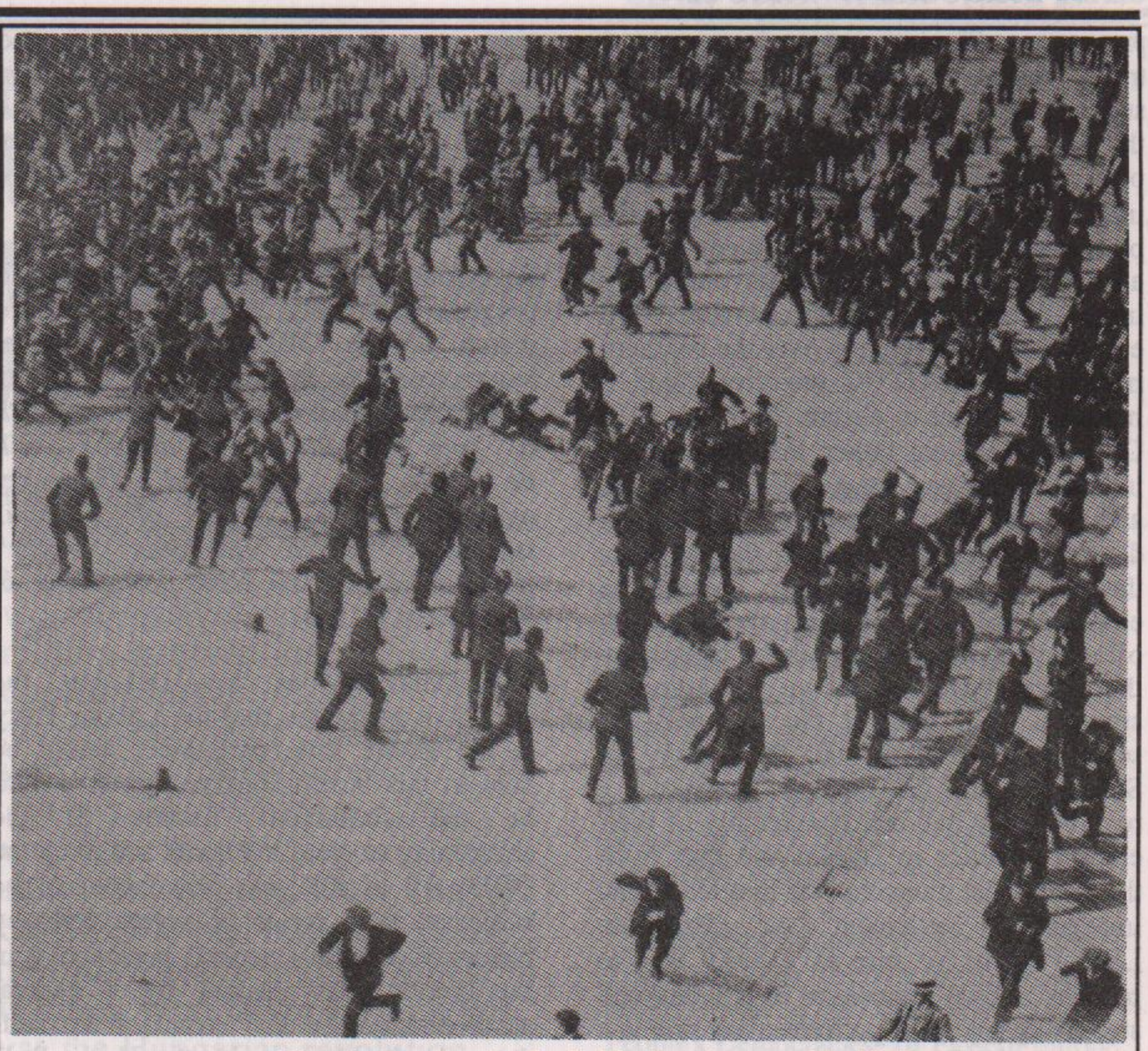
Working within the ITGWU, Connolly also pursued the "political industrial unionism", in the tradition of DeLeon. He was to become involved with two existing parties in Ireland - the tiny Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) and the Irish branches of the Independent Labour Party, as well as to actively pursue the task of building a broad chruch Labour Party. In all of these involvements it will be seen that he worked with all the programmatic deficiencies of his unique blend of political

action and industrial unionism, applied to Irish conditions.

The SPI had existed since 1904. When Connolly returned in 1910 he wrote its manifesto as part of an attempt to develop it into an effective propaganda party. The general political perspective of Connolly on the National Question at this time was that it would be solved from above by the British **ruling class through the Third Home Rule Bill. Connolly saw the SPI as a a group which would *"seek to organise the workers of this country irrespective of creed or race into one great party of Labour" (Manifesto of the SPI)*. The underlying perspective was: *"Political organisation at the ballot box to secure the election of representatives of socialist principles to all the elective governing public bodies of this contry, and thus to gradually transfer the political power of the state into the hands of those who will use it to further and extend the principle of common or public ownership". (Socialism and Nationalism collection, p.190)***

The ILP(I) was set up at Easter 1912 as a bigger propaganda organisation and a unification of Irish socialists north and south. It was successful in absorbing all Ulster branches of the Independent Labour Party, save for Walker's branch in Belfast. Its programme was eclectic - a combination of syndicalism, electoral activity first local and, after the prospective Home Rule, national. The pivots of its programme were: *1. **Organisation of the forces of Labour in Ireland to take political action on independent lines for securing the control of all public elective bodies and for the mastery of all public powers of the state, in order that such bodies should be used for the attainment of [the industrial commonwealth]*** and
*2. **Furtherance of the industrial organisation of wage earners, with a view to securing unity of action in the industrial field as a means to the conquest of industrial power, the necessary preliminary to industrial freedom".***

Thus in the case of both the SPI and the re-organised ILP(I) Connolly did not attempt to realise the nucleus of a conscious revolutionary vanguard with the object of programmatically arming the emergent trade union movement and the working class as a whole on every key front. Nor did these parties embody the goals of bringing the proletariat to take a leading role in resolving the national question with political independence of the Home Rulers under Redmond and his cronies. Even in the SPI and ILP(I) the false hope and belief was cherished that the Home Rule Bill would pass so that their duties were simply to prepare a party of the unions to take up struggle in a Home Rule Ireland.



Bloody Sunday in Sackville St., August 31, 1913.

THE IRISH LABOUR PARTY

Connolly's propaganda for the formation of a mass trade union labour party was profoundly flawed in that he did not see any necessity to fight to define it as a conscious socialist party. His conscious abstention from any **programmatic** battle with regard to the envisaged mass party is thus in stark contradiction to the method advanced by Engels with respect to the US in the 1880s and Britain in the 1890s.Not only had Engels warned against sectarianism but he equally cut against opportunism. The duty of the Marxist was to fight alongside the workers, but for the communist programme.Thus the call for the mass party to be built by the trade unions was supportable as long as the programmatic battle was consistently pursued.*"All our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our own distinct position and even organisation". (Engels letter to K-W Dec. 1886)*

There was already a substantial sentiment within the organised trade union movement in Ireland in favour of independent political representation. Prior to the explosive wave of militancy ushered in by Larkin in the Irish NUDL and then the new ITGWU, socialists had been arguing in the Irish Congress for political representation - but within the London Parliament. The ITUC was divided between craft union interests tied to northern Unionism on the one hand and to southern Home Rule nationalism on the other. The nationalist majority, content to be represented in Westminster by the Irish Home Rule Party, blocked any affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee. The logjam was broken when the new wave of unskilled militancy propelled Larkin and Connolly into the ITUC as prominent representatives of a powerful new rank-and-file force which threatened to shatter the cosy traditions of class-collaboration maintained by the craft-union leaderships.

However, when Connolly and Larkin, in 1912 at Clonmel, proposed the successful resolution to create a Labour Party, Home Rule was seemed a certain prospect so that the ground had been eroded from under the pro-Union socialists who had envisaged political representation of Irish Labour in London. It was accepted that a Parliament would soon be restored to Dublin after 112 years of the Union and, sadly, nothing in Connolly's perspective, so far as we can see, envisaged the party as other than an electoral front which would only find its full development in the new parliament. Certainly, nothing in the actual resolution gave hope for more: *"That the **independent representation of Labour upon all public boards be, and is hereby included among the objects of this Congress".***

It was this resolution which allowed the ITUC to restyle itself as the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress - but not until the 1913 strikes had been defeated and the imperialist war looming. A few local seats were contested with trade union support in the name of Labour, but no party organs were built. Limited attempts by Connolly and the often unreliable Larkin to develop the party never developed into a fight to **build** a party in terms of branches or committed membership or a

programme. The attempt to interest local trade union organs in standing or supporting candidates appears to have been the limited horizon of party work until the post 1916 period. ITUC leaders were increasingly to be heard uttering political pronouncements in the turbulent period after 1916, but not with any revolutionary intent. When the transformed Sinn Fein established its hegemony over the southern masses, the LP&ITUC majority found it more convenient to abstain from the 1918 General Elections rather than to take an independent stand on a class programme and in defence of the right of Irish self-determination. Sadly, even those within the ITUC who did fight to contest the elections independently equally failed to offer any alternative programme or strategy that might have opened up revolutionary struggle. That general election was for seats at Westminster but the victory of Sinn Fein enabled them to constitute a revolutionary nationalist assembly of their elected deputies in Dublin and thus open the nationalist guerrilla war that led to the imperialist settlement of Partition. Labour's primary role as a party was to become a loyal opposition in creating and stabilising capitalist parliamentary rule in a semi-colonial southern state.

Despite his overwhelming involvement in trade union organisation since his return from the US, Connolly made no secret of his preference for political action. Thus in the period in which the ITUC is at last won to commit itself to political representation, Connolly is fighting to build the Socialist Party of Ireland, to create socialist activists and to educate the party in socialist doctrines. He did not operate, however, with any conception of an action programme which might be an instrument to enable the conscious socialists to give political direction to the organised masses of the ITGWU, or the LP&ITUC. (Nor did he argue for formal affiliation of socialist groups to the LP&ITUC, though such socialists were in the main active trade unionists - rather he preferred not to have affiliation procedures which might dilute the movement with non-working-class influences from other quarters.) This helps illuminate how Connolly's perspectives for socialist and labour movement political activity could fall into such separate compartments, the conscious socialist minority in one party and the political labour movement separately organised. For if the socialists had applied their general class analysis and progamme to all the combined and concrete features of the class and national struggles of the period, they might have been able to formulate a coherent and focussed action programme for the main issues of the day with which to fight for self-organised mass action by workers. Only such an action-programme approach could have bridged the gap between the conscious socialist minority and the mass political labour organisation. Connolly's failure to find this way forward at a time when the new general union had a living tradition of militancy and was not yet bureaucratised, was especially tragic because the working class was clearly still in formation and politically fluid in this period. The most enduring legacy of this failure was the failure of the emerging Labour Party **ever** to represent the working class on an active and anti-capitalist basis.

For Connolly, the working class would progress inevitably through the forward march of the OBU, to the industrial commonwealty. In this way ***"a strong and determined Labour group with a true revolutionary outlook will be able to withstand the cry against every bit of labour legislation which menaces profits"*** *(Labour in the new Irish parliament, in Forward, 4/7/1914).*

For Connolly, as for DeLeon, the sufficient guarantee that the Labour Party in the Home Rule parliament would be held to this 'revolutionary outlook' would be the continuous friction of the sharpening stone of industrial action by the OBU. All of this was now about to be subjected to a series of severe tests by history. Connolly's general perspective in this period was marked by a general accomodation, on the terrain of the self-determination issue, with the Home Rule bourgeoisie who, he expected, would bring about a Dublin parliament. This was the framework for his schema of a Labour Party whose role was to echo the workers' struggles in a **future** parliament. This accomodation was ultimately paid for at the expense of forging an organisation of trained socialists capable of intervening in the class and national revolutionary upsurges that lay ahead.



THE 1913 LOCKOUT

With the outbreak of the Dublin strike and Lockout in 1913 the "new unionism" among the labourers of Dublin was confronted with the employers' counteroffensive, designed to break the back of its new-found strength and organisation. Such counteroffensives were developed in Britain in the early 1890s and in Belfast in the battles of 1907. There had also been skirmishes in towns such as Wexford and Cork in the intervening years.

These struggles had indeed the classic "spontaneous" character of all economic (trade union) struggles of the self-organising unskilled and semi-skilled majority of the working class. Whether any such upsurge of militancy could provide the **basis** for a general mobilisation against capitalism or be isolated and repulsed by the full force of the capitalists with their police, courts and their sponsors in the pulpits, would not have been entirely predictable in advance. However, for a revolutionary socialist nucleus it is of paramount importance that they must not **merely** support such surges forward in their press and leaflets: they must intervene on the basis of their programme, ultimately to **prepare** the working class for the struggle for power. They must draw to themselves, on the basis of rounded propaganda for this programme, the **most energetic** workers thrown up by such struggles and train them in the **politics** of proletarian revolution. This means not confining their intervention to the immediate tasks of economic struggles but preparing them to take up class weapons to win the democratic aspirations of the national struggle and the general needs and demands of the working class. This message was at the heart of Lenin's detailed arguments in *What is to be done?* written in 1902. Again and again he insisted, after Engels and Marx, that the party of communism must intervene to counter the **limitations** of pure trade union spontaneity and raise the independent banner of the proletarian revolution.

This applied potentially in the case of Ireland no less than in that of Russia. As Lenin put it, the **workers** knew how to conduct economic struggle - they learned out of direct necessity. But of **socialism** they knew little and were open to the vast panoply of propaganda spewed out by the bourgeoisie through their press, politicians and priests. **Economism** was an error of socialists who contented themselves with telling the militant workers what they already knew, an error of those who did not reach beyond the spontaneous struggle and militancy of the new trade unionists, and who disguised this - as often to themselves as to the workers - as ***"lending the economic struggle a political character".***

Lenin's polemic was aimed at intellectuals who were attempting to 'relate' to the struggles of workers but who ended up effectively trailing behind them. But it is relevant to any critical appreciation of Connolly's conception of the relation between economic struggles and the struggle for socialism. For Connolly was himself imbued with the spirit of new-unionism - from its initial days in Leith in Scotland in the 1890s, though more especially in his later involvement with the rising tide of the IWW and American syndicalism, and eventually, in the growth of the ITGWU in Ireland.

In the struggles of 1913 Connolly was a central leader among the workers, but only as a trade union figure, not as a political militant of the Leninist kind. Yet his was not an apolitical or merely syndicalist perspective, as we have seen. He had an explicit doctrine about the relation between the mass industrial organisations, the OBU

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BECAUSE Having a definite aim to work for there is no fear of it being paralysed in the moment of action by divisions in its Executive Body.

BECAUSE It teaches that "the sole right of ownership of Ireland is vested in the people of Ireland, and that that full right of ownership may, and ought to be, enforced by any and all means that God hath put within the power of man."

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being their highest expression, and 'political action'. The party was to *echo* the ***real*** struggles of the class, an inherently economistic perspective. This led to clear weaknesses, as we have stated, in the years from 1910 to 1914.

The dominant political questions outside the industrial struggle he assumed to be soluble through the agency of the Home Rule bourgeoisie - specifically the Independence question, yet it was this bourgeoisie against whom the struggle of 1913-4 was being waged. Furthermore, Connolly held to the schema that the **political** organisation of the working class was to be created within a **yet-to-be-realised** Home Rule state.

Together, these features constituted an obstacle to developing the crucial layer of worker-leaders who might strive politically on all fronts against exploitation and oppression, to contest the bourgeoisie for hegemony in the emerging nation-state and to take the lead in the struggle for the right to self-determination.

The historical outcome was a strangely paradoxical proof of this view. Although hundreds of the best militants were crystallised out of the Great Lockout into a defence militia, the Irish Citizen Army, they were not trained as a political vanguard of the working class on the basis of any coherent action programme. Instead, as defeat in Dublin was to combine with wartime crisis and the scuppering of the Home Rule Bill, Connolly was to pull the ICA in his train as he somersaulted from economism in the class struggle to singleminded engagement with the conspiracy of the revolutionary petty bourgeois nationalists. It was ultimately in their Rising that the ICA was to sacrifice itself, in a Blanquist manner, isolated from the organised mass of workers.

HUNGARY 1956

We Won't Stop Half Way – Stalinism Must be Destroyed

In October and November of 1956 the workers and students of Hungary took up arms against two successive waves of Soviet military intervention. They toppled a hated Stalinist government. They created workers' and revolutionary councils that became the real power in every factory and mine and most localities. Only after at least 20,000 had been killed and after the aerial bombardment of its major proletarian strongholds was the Hungarian revolution eventually drowned in blood.

The Hungarian uprising of 1956 contained the potential for the revolutionary destruction of Stalinism both within Hungary and beyond its borders. It opened the prospect of destroying the political rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy and replacing it with the direct political rule of the revolutionary proletariat.

Despite the ceaseless torrent of lies and slanders poured forth by international Stalinism the Hungarian workers were neither agents of the restoration of capitalism nor the dupes of such agents. They were in their overwhelming majority determined to achieve two things. They wished to defend the socialised and planned economy against the restoration of the capitalists and landlords, and they were determined to destroy the filthy tyranny that denied the proletariat the slightest democracy, subjecting it to a caste of highly privileged and upstart bureaucrats.

The tragedy of the Hungarian revolution was that the workers were unable to create – in the time available – a leadership and a programme of action that could establish a government and the armed forces necessary to defend Hungary's political revolution and to extend it to the rest of Eastern Europe and the USSR. That the **potential** for this existed is clear from every serious study or eyewitness account of the events of 1956.

The falsity of the Stalinists' slanders breaks out of the vast majority of workers' statements in this period: ***"Soviet Soldiers! We the workers from the railroad factory in Gyor inform you that in our democratic state workers are the guardians of the socialist achievements. That means with all their might, they are speaking out against returning factories and banks to the capitalists. At the same time we against returning factories and banks to the capitalists. At the same time we are against any Rakosite-Stalinist restoration."*** *(Quoted in M.J.Lask ed. "The Hungarian Revolution" p.211)*

The death of Stalin in March 1953 served to destabilise the whole political system he had ruled over in the USSR and in the "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe. In the highest ranks of the Kremlin there was a murderous struggle for power which, although eventually won by Khruschev, extended over several years. Berea, Khruschev, Malenkov and their rival cliques battled for power – occasionally being forced to take manoeuvres onto the terrain of international politics.

As part of this factional struggle Khruschev was obliged to denounce "the crimes of Stalin". In fact he carefully restricted himself to revealing the dictator's crimes against the bureaucracy itself. The political opponents of Stalin – against whom the mass terror was unleashed – were not rehabilitated. In a laughable standing on its head of the personality cult, the slaughter and imprisonment of hundreds of thousands was passed off as the result of the evil genius or paranoia of one man. Promises were made to relax the police terror regime, to open the labour camps and improve living standards.

A ferment of revolt seethed through the whole Stalinist system. In the slave labour mines of Vorkuta there was a strike in the summer of 1953. In June 1953 strikes spread from East Berlin to all the major industrial centres of East Germany. The general Strike was put down by Soviet troops. There were major strikes in Pilzen in Czechoslovakia and at the giant Matyas Rakosi iron and steel plant in Csepel – the industrial centre of Budapest.

Stalin's death, the gang warfare in the Kremlin and proletarian resistance provoked a political crisis in the ranks of Hungarian Stalinism. Since 1948 the 'Hungarian Stalin' – Matyas Rakosi – had set course to industrialise Hungary at break-neck speed along the lines pioneered by the USSR in the 1930s. Workers' living standards were driven down. The peasantry were driven at

gunpoint into collective farms. Political repression was probably more severe than anywhere else in Eastern Europe with the apparatus of repression being in the hands of an extremely privileged uniformed security force – the AVH. Rankers in the AVH reveived at least three times the average industrial wage; officers received twelve times that wage. In addition the newly established Hungarian People's Democracy was obliged to pay massive reparations to the USSR for the war that the Horthy regime had waged alongside Hitler. In 1948 25.4% of Hungarian national expenditure went on reparations. That figure dropped to 10% in 1949.

Little wonder then that the Rakosi regime was amongst the most hated by its own people in Eastern Euorpe. Fully aware of this and fearful of the consequences, the Kremlin – and Malenkov in particular – moved to improve the image of the regime in 1953. Rakosi had to stay as Party Secretary, but there was to be a new Prime Minister in the person of Imre Nagy who was given the green light to inaugurate a 'New Course' in Hungary.

NAGY'S NEW COURSE

Given his role in 1956 and his polpularity with large sections of workers and with oppositional intellectuals in the party it is necessary to characterise Nagy's politics. By training, Nagy was a loyal Stalinist. He had spent 15 years of his life as a Comintern functionary in the USSR. On Stalin's death he delivered the standard eulogy to Stalin as 'the great leader of humanity'.

However, within the spectrum of Stalinist politics, Nagy was also decidedly a Rightist. His 'New Course' was aimed at achieving a slower pace of transition along the lines of Russia's New Economic Policy(NEP) of the 1920s. He attacked the politics of the Rakosi era for having more in common with the programme of the Left Opposition than with the actions of Stalin during the NEP. He was an ardent devotee of the Popular Front alliance that the Hungarian CP had maintained with peasant, social democratic and outright reactionary parties from 1944 to 1948. To that end, he attempted to breathe life into the corpse of the still existent Peoples Patriotic Front, attempting to turn it into a mass organisation. Nagy talked openly of Hungary as having its own national road to socialism, and he mused in 1955 on ***"the possibility of neutralising Hungary on the Austrian pattern."*** Nagy stands in the tradition of Bukharin and Rightist strands within Stalinism. More recently the model for his policy was Tito. However, during his time in power, writers and journalists were less restricted by censorship, real wages were increased, peasants were freed to leave collective farms and the grossest trappings of Rakosi's dictatorship were scrapped.

If this alone was not sufficient to give Nagy a degree of popularity, his ousting from power by a resurgent Rakosi in January 1955, and his subsequent expulsion from the Central Committee and Party, served to provide him with the mantle of the courageous foe of the workers' and intelluctuals' number one enemy – Matyas Rakosi. this explains why throughout 1955 and 1956 most oppositional currents in Hungary looked initially to Imre Nagy for political leadership.

Despite his best intentions Rakosi found that he was not able to turn the clock back to the political norms of his old regime. In May 1955 Khruschev travelled to Yugoslavia to embrace and rehabilitate Tito. This immediately opened once again the cases of those thousands who had perished as the 'Tito-ite Fascists' in the 'Peoples Democracies'.

In Hungary it reopened the case of Laszlo Rajk, a prominent party leader who was shot after 'confessing' that he was an imperialist agent. The grisly story behind this was that Rajk had bravely resisted repeated torture; refusing to confess, until none other than Janos Kadar (Hungary's leader today and Mrs Thatcher's favourite "communist") went to see him and pleaded with him to confess to save hundreds of other lives and offered him a deal – secret exile in the USSR. The confession having been made, the Stalinist gangsters kept their word as only they know how to!

In February 1956 however, the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) heard the most detailed denunciations of Stalin that Khruschev had delivered. Of necessity this fortified all opponents of the various 'little Stalins' who had ruled in Eastern Europe. Opposition to Rakosi continued with the lower ranks of the Party. In 1956, members of the Communist Party's Youth organisztion (DISZ) reactivated a discussion circle established in 1954 under the name of the Hungarian national democratic poet of 1840 – Petofi.

The leaders of the Petofi circle included pre-war and war-time CP members as well as young party intellectuals such as Balazs Nagy who was deputy secretary of its provisional bureau. (In exile Balazs was later to become better known in Trotskyist circles as Michel Varga.)

In June 1956 the Petofi circle held a series of meetings attended by thousands which heard Julia Rajk demand the full and wholehearted rehabilitation of her husband and which endorsed a programme primarily demanding the freedom of the press and the return to power of Nagy. Rakosi ordered the Petofi circle to be closed down and seems to have been prepared for a new wave of arrests.

WORKERS ON THE MOVE

The workers of the Peoples' Democracies were to prevent him. The indignation of the Hungarian proletariat was about to boil over. In June and July there was a series of strikes in Csepel and Greater Budapest. Workers were reported to be expressing their hatred of privileged bureaucrats by openly spitting at their limousines in the streets. On 28 July, **in Poland,** the workers of Poznan struck, demonstrated and were were brutally fired on by the internal security forces who killed 54 and wounded at least 300. In the aftermath, the opositional Stalinist, Gomulka, rode to power promising reforms and a break with the methods of the past.

Incensed and terrified, Rakosi fulminated against the meetings of the Petofi circle as being "Hungary's Poznan", but he was unable to stop them. Neither were his Kremlin patrons convinced that he was any longer able to hold the line for the bureaucracy. In July the Soviet leader Mikoyan visited Budapest and engineered the resignation of Rakosi, but foolishly installed as his replacement one of Rakosi's most trusted clique members, Erno Gero.

Squeezed between the restive workers, the Kremlin's desire for a less harsh face for Hungarian Stalinism and the Nagyite intellectual opposition, the Hungarian bureaucracy began to crack under the strain. Sharp criticism of Party policy and demands for change became increasingly vocal in the Party cells in the working class districts.

The party press became increasingly open and – within its own terms – critical. On 6 October over 200,000 people attended the public reburial of Rajk in Budapest. Students with red flags and national banners first raised a slogan that was to be heard much more frequently in the weeks ahead: ***"We won't stop halfway; Stalinism must be destroyed".*** Destabilisation and disorientation in the Stalinist ranks first opened the road for the student youth to organise. In mid-October, student youth in Szeged demanded the right to form their own organisation independent of party control. They also struck against the compulsory learning of the Russian language. The students of Budapest's Technological University followed suit by calling a demonstration for 23 October in solidarity with Poland, where Gomulka was now firmly in power and had faced down Kremlin pressure.

The 23 October demonstration was the spark that lit the Hungarian revolution. The authorities were not strong enough to ban it. Instead they asked the Party members of the Petofi circle to lead the demonstration – the Stalinist Antal Apro begged Tancss (a wartime CP militant) to assist him: ***"You must lead the demonstrators ... and save the situation."*** *(Balazs Nagy, quoted in "The Truth about the Nagy Affair").* At this time the Petofi circle, composed as it was of critical Stalinists, was indeed very anxious to avoid any serious confrontation with the regime. As Balazs Nagy put it later: ***"At this time, and subsequently also, the Petofi circle curbed rather than***

encouraged the movement, considering that the hastening of events could lead to a catastrophe". The demonstration had an extraordinary flavour. Its members sang the Marseillaise, the Kossuth national song and the Internationale. Participants from the Party school marched with enormous portraits of Lenin and Marx. The major slogans of the day were for ***"Nagy to power, Rakosi to the Danube"*** and for Soviet troops to go home.

As they became more emboldened, demonstrators pulled down red stars from the top of public buildings and ripped out the People's Democracy emblems from the centre of the Hungarian national flag. Eventually, welding workers hauled down a giant statue of Stalin and dragged it round the city behind a dustcart, eventually leaving its head outside the national theatre inscribed with the internationally understood W.C. As workers left factory shifts and joined the demonstration, its ranks spread throughout the city. Troops joined the crowds and, in many cases, distributed arms.

On day one of the Hungarian revolution the demonstrators wrapped themselves in national colours. This was denounced over the radio by Party chief Gero and by subsequent Stalinists as evidence of the chauvinist character of the Hungarian revolution. As the demonstrators took the streets of Budapest, Gero declared on the radio: ***"We condemn those who wish to spread the poison of chauvinism among our youth and have used the democratic freedom assured to the working people by the state to organise a demonstration of a nationalist character"*** *(quoted in M.Molnar: Budapest 1956)*

THE FIRST SHOTS

In its turn, Gero's attack served to render the crowds more angry and increase their resolve to hear their demands and arguments broadcast by the radio station. The first serious fighting took place at the radio station where AVH guards opened fire on demonstrators who returned fire from arms provided by fraternising Hungarian troops.

In general the political horizons of the increasingly proletarian demonstration were fixed on the return to power of Imre Nagy. He had refused an invitation to attend the demonstration and only belatedly agreed to address the thousands who had marched to Parliament Square calling for him to take power. His initial speech to the crowd showed just how alien his bureaucratic outlook was from that of the students and workers" ***"It is by negotiation in the bosom of the Party and by the discussion of problems that we will travel the road that leads toward the settlement of our conflicts. We want to safeguard constitutional order and discipline. The government will not delay in arriving at its decisions".*** *(quoted in T.Merrray: "13 Days That Shook The Kremlin".)* Yet one such speech was not sufficient to disabuse the mases of their illusions in Nagy.

Faced with a massive demonstration, active fraternisation between workers and soldiers and armed clashes with the AVH, the Gero regime attempted a policy of using both carrot and stick. On the one hand it called for Soviet troops to restore order in Budapest and declared martial law. On the other it called on Nagy to head the government. It thereby hoped Nagy would be able to head off the mass movement. And indeed, he dutifully attempted to do just that by supporting martial law, calling for order and promising, in reply, a return to his 1953 policies. Meanwhile, groups of workers were already doing battle with Soviet tanks on the streets of Budapest.

Throughout the length and breadth of Hungary the workers replied to the Soviet intervention with strike action. By 26 October virtually all work had stopped. Moreover these first days saw the formation of workers' councils in every factory and mine and also the link-up of those councils into regional revolutionary committees in major industrial centres such as Gyor and Miskolc.

The impact of the upheaval on the bureaucracy, the security forces and the ranks of the Communist Party was immediate. In general, the officers of the hated AVH attempted to defend themselves and their barracks from the insurgents with the utmost brutality. Most dramatically at Moson-magyarovar, the AVH let loose a hail of machine gun bullets at an unarmed and peaceful demonstration, killing around one hundred. For the correspondent of the British CP's ***Daily Worker***, Peter Fryer, it was a shattering experience to see the dead and the mourners on his arrival across the Austrian frontier: ***"After eleven years of 'Peoples Democracy' it had come to this: that the security police was so remote from the people, so alien to them, so vicious and so brutal that it turned its weapons on a defenceless crowd and murdered the people who were supposed to be masters of thir own country"*** *(Fryer, Hungarian Tragedy)* . Little wonder that the insurgent workers showed the least mercy for the AVH officers and in most towns had to fight a bloody battle with them. In Miskolc, for example, the AVH attacked a proletarian crowd on 26 October. The local police handed their weapons to insurgent miners who finished off the AVH chief and the officers. In many cases the workers made a strict distinction between the AVH officers and the younger rank and filers who were shown more mercy.

In many instances the more hated Party officials in the localities simply disappeared or hid. However, Party members also played a leading role in the uprising itself at every level. In the factories and mines, CP workers were active in initiating workers' councils. The leading figure in the Budapest workers' council movement – Sandor Bali – had been a party member since 1945. In proletarian Miskolc and the surrounding Borsod county, CP militants played a leading role in organising the workers' councils and in f raming their demands. By 27 October the Trade Union Council called on all workers to elect councils that would take over the tasks of management. In addition there were several instances of individual members from the highest ranks of the bureaucracy going directly and actively over to the side of those who were doing battle with the Soviet troops. Pal Maleter is the best known example. An army major and CP member since 1945, Maleter proudly sported a Soviet military decoration he received in 1944. On 24 October he was ordered to capture the Kilian barracks which was holding out against Soviet tanks. He described the events on Radio Budapest: ***"When I got there I discovered that the fighters for freedom were not bandits but loyal children of the Hungarian people. I therefore informed the Ministry of Defence that I was joining the insurgents".*** Yet Maleter always insisted that his struggle was for socialism. He told foreign correspondents: ***"If we get rid of the Russians, don't think we're going back to the old days. And if there's people who do want to go back, we'll see."*** Reassuringly clutching his revolver, he added: ***"We don't mean to go back to capitalism. We want socialism in Hungary."***

While the proletarian base of the party and certain elements of its apparatus went over to the insurrection, its leading circles sought desperately to defuse the crisis and restabilise bureaucratic rule. In late October, as workers' councils mushroomed and the security forces melted away, this was a task they attempted to do behind Soviet tanks. However, the Nagy government was to find it impossible to restore an order to its liking so long as it was shielded by Soviet troops. And in turn those very Soviet troops were proving unreliable in this task.

FRATERNISATIPM WITH SOVIET TROOPS

Initially, the Soviet troops believed to some extent that they were being sent in to fight fascists. This meant that fraternisation by workers and students was capable of having a devastating effect on Soviet troop morale. A workers recounted to ***Time*** magazine a typical instance of fraternisation: ***"Our people were not afraid of the Russians, and talked to them. Some of the Russians thought they were in East Germany and that they would soon meet American 'fascists' who had invaded the country. Other troops thought they were in the Suez Canal zone."*** The workers proceeded to

explain who they really were, at which point the Soviet troops began to fraternise, with their captain throwing down his hat and affirming that the Kremlin leaders: ***"Bulganin and Khruschev would rape their own mothers"*** *(Quoted by Lasky, p.103)*. Gyor and Miskolc radios, in the hands of their revolutionary committees, broadcast messages of solidarity to the Soviet troops. Miskolc declared: ***"Our people did not revolt against you, but for the achievement of legal demands. Our interests are identical. We and you are all fighting together for a better socialist life."*** (p.116) In Gyor, the Soviet commander even went on the air to declare: ***"We will not interfere with your national political affairs ... I think that the rising of the Hungarian people is just"*** *(p.112)*.

The authorities had to act to prevent the spread of fraternisation. On Oct. 25, Soviet tanks accompanied a jubilant crowd to a demonstration in Parliament Square. That demonstration was fired on from the surrounding rooftops; Soviet tanks returned the fire. When the firing stopped, according to Bill Lomax, over 100 were killed including Soviet troops. Either the AVH or crack Soviet security units had taken the action to stop the drift towards fraternisation. In fact fighting between the two sides became far more severe as a result of the slaughter, which both Hungarian workers and Soviet soldiers saw as the other's responsibility.

The wave of fraternisation showed that the political revolution, whilst necessarily raising certain legitimate national grievances, held the potential for becoming international and indeed internationalist by spreading to the Soviet Armed Forces. The bloody outcome of the Hungarian revolution underlines just how vital that internationalism is if the political revolution is not to be crushed in national isolation.

Despite this enormous potential the actual politics of the workers' movement in the last days of October were those of sceptical Nagyism. The complete inadequacy of these politics was to be tragically revealed. In most areas the workers' councils busied themselves with local or factory problems involved in maintaining the general strike and gave different forms of critical support to Nagy. The leaders of the councils saw them as potential alternative local governments but blindly ceded central political power to Nagy.

This was well expressed recently by a Budapest Workers Council militant, Sandor Racz, who explained that it wasn't until moves were made against Nagy by Kadar that council activists began to think about national politics or governmental power as a question that concerned them directly: ***"Up till then we hadn't intervened in politics, because we trusted Imre Nagy. We saw him as the political guarantee of the revolution"*** *(Interview from Beszelo No.7, in "Labour Focus", summer 1984)*.

This meant that while the councils pressed demands on Nagy, most importantly for Soviet withdrawal, a new government, the right to strike and an amnesty (the 4 point programme of Miskolc in the first days of the revolution), and while the councils maintained the strike action until they thought they had wrung serious concessions from Nagy, they remained hidebound by a variety of syndicalism that saw the factories as the property of the workers and the government as the property of the national politicians. Thus a decisive struggle for workers' power, at a time when Soviet troops were in many instances unwilling to fight, and when the Nagy government was very weak indeed, was excluded from the agenda. There was in fact an acute crisis of leadership in the Hungarian revolution.

How did Nagy use the political initiative that the workes' movement ceded to him? Initially the authority of his government barely ran beyong the ministry buildings in Budapest. Cast in his Stalinist mould, there was no question of him conceiving of the workers' councils as an alternative base of power.

The history of Stalinism shows it to be resolutely opposed to all manifestations of healthy workers' democracy, so much so that it will always ally itself with reactionary and bourgeois forces in order to subvert and destroy the potential organs of a healthy workers' state.

The form which that alliance took in Hungary during and after the War, in common with other People's Democracies, was a coalition with bourgeois parties within which the Stalinists would keep a hold on the organs of security and repression. Nagy's means of defusing the political revolutionary crisis was to attempt to piece such a coalition together once again.

NAGY'S COALITION GOVERNMENT

On Oct. 27 Nagy announced the formation of a new coalition government including representatives of the historic Smallholders' Party and the National Peasants' Party. Two points must be underlined about this move. Firstly, those parties barely existed except as motley collections of ex-party leaders. Secondly, if we look at the demands being voiced in Miskolc and Gyor, while it was the case that some ex-Social Democrats were joining in the fray, calls for a coalition government or for parliamentary type elections were rarely posed in the initial documents of struggle. It was in fact those around Nagy who reached for the old parties and the trappings of a coalition with the ex-leaders of the bourgeois parties. This was a trusted tactic for deflecting the working class from the fight for its own political power.

In turn, as the old parties were reconstituted from the top downwards, and as horsetrading for office recommenced, so the call for genuine free elections was increasingly raised from within the workers' councils. After all, the Stalinists had maintained the charade of parliamentarism, without the substance of a multiplicity of competing parties. Stalinism could never pose the political alternative to parliament – genuine soviet power.

The workers' movement posed the potential of workers' council power. Its predominant demands included the public trial of the most murderous bureaucrats of the Rakosi regime, the replacement of those responsible for faults in the planned economy, the publication and revision of foreign trade agreements as well as wage rises and management rights for workers' councils. Nagy and Co. tried to divert this movement into the channels of a bogus popular front coalition. In that coalition key figures of the old Stalinist apparatus – Apro, Munnich, Horvath and Kossa – were to keep their positions. And they were to use those positions to murderous effect later.

Many of the Stalinists around Nagy were resigned to a very significant Rightist retreat as the road out of the crisis and as a means of aborting the political revolution. The literary theorist Georg Lukacs was Minister of Popular Culture in the Nagy government. Vikor Woroszylski, a Polish CP journalist from Nowa Kultura, describes a conversation he had with Lukacs at the time. he reports Lukacs as saying: ***"Communism in Hungary has been totally disgraced ... The working class will prefer to follow the Social Democrats. In free elections the Communists will obtain five per cent of the vote, ten per cent at the most. It is possible that they won't be in Government, that they will go into opposition. But the party will continue to exist; it will be an intellectual centre and after some years or decades from now, who knows."*** *(Quoted in Lasky, p.159)*

As the political organs of a future healthy workers' state were making their appearance throughout Hungary, our Marxist philosopher preferred saving the 'idea' of being an opposition in a bourgeois parliament! And what idea did he want to save? The idea that he and his bureaucratic centre could get their hands back on power one day, once the political revolution of the Hungarian workers had exhausted itself.

Playing on the political weakneses of the spontaneous workers' movement, Nagy was able to temporarily regain some of the political initiative. On Oct. 28 he reaquested a Soviet troop withdrawal from Hungary and an immediate ceasefire. He announced the dissolution of the AVH. On 30 October he announced the re-creation of the 1945 coalition by inviting the Social

Democrats to delegate a minister even though that party had not yet effectively re-formed itself at a national level. The Minister of the Interior was Ferenc Munnich, one-time ambassador to Moscow of Rakosi's regime. At the same time, Soviet troops left the major industrial centres of Hungary.

The troop withdrawals were negotiated by the Soviet Ambassador, one Yuri Andropov, who would become boss of the Kremlin in the 1980s. He had good reason to pull back the troops since they had been infected with many of the liberatory slogans of the Hungarian revolution. At the very same time he liaised with Khruschev to organise the entry of fresh Soviet troops into Hungary. While Nagy's new popular front coalition was holding back the workers from a decisive showdown with Stalinism, the Kremlin was preparing a deadly second strike.

FUNDAMENTAL WEAKNESS

In the period from Oct. 23 to the first announced withdrawal of Soviet troops the Hungarian working class had shown enormous strengths and a capacity for revolutionary struggle. Its councils and milita controlled the major industrial centres. Its fighting spirit and its efforts at fraternisation had undermined the morale of the Soviet troops. yet the mobilisations of the Hungarian working class were not without their fatal weaknesses.

The councils had the potential to become organs of direct working class power. Yet they concerned themselves with local and factory matters and ceded central power to Imre Nagy. Also, the fraternisation never succeeded in bringing whole units of the Soviet armed forces over to the side of the insurrection. Neither did it win Soviet soldiers to a fight to form their own soldiers' councils. The failure to achieve these things seriously weakened the vital struggle to internationalise the Hungarian political revolution via the ranks of the Soviet army.

It is not to belittle the heroism of the Hungarian working class to argue that its fundamental weakness was its lack of a revolutionary party. Only such a party could have led the challenge for workers' power.

In general at this time, militants either opposed the idea of parties as being divisive, or had illusions in one or another of the 1945 governmental parties, or favoured a coalition of such parties. Against these tendencies, revolutionary Marxists fighting for political revolution would have fought for the councils to centralise their forces and for a government that was directly accountable to these councils.

Such a call would have mobilised serious support amongst sections of the council militants. For example, Kiss, President of the Miskolc Workers' Council, condemned the role of the newly organised political parties and demanded on Nov. 2 that: ***"The Government shall propose the formation of a national revolutionary council, to be supported by the departmental workers' councils of Budapest and composed of democratically elected delegates. At the same time they shall pronounce the dissolution of the National Assembly."*** *(Quoted in 'Budapest 1956', M.Molner.)* In the vital stages of the revolution such voices were in a minority in the leadership of the councils. The key task was to win that minority to the fight for political revolution and to organise them into a revolutionary party.

The initial stance of the councils handed Nagy and remnants of the old parties' leaderships all the political initiative. This was to prove fatal for the course of the Hungarian political revolution.

The party leaders drawn into the Nagy coalition did not demand the restoration of capitalism in an immediate sense. On day-release from his sanitorium, Small-holders' leader, Kovacs, declared that ***"No one must dream of going back to the world of counts, bankers and capitalists: that world is definitively over."*** But while he suggested that the party's old programmes were now outmoded he refrained from advancing an alternative. For the social democrats, Anna Kethly made a similar declaration against the restoration of the old order: ***"Freed from one prison, let us not allow the country to become a prison of another colour. Let us watch over the factories, the mines and the land, which must remain in thge hands of the people".*** The National Peasant Party – which was to rename itself the Petofi party – comprised activists who, historically, had been prepared to work with the CP.

Yet in offering the leaders of these partly reconstituted parties a governmental majority, Nagy was certainly creating a potential rallying point for capitalist restoration. The Smallholders were a traditionally rightist party based on the richer peasants. The social democrats used the freedom delivered to them by the political revolutionary crisis to dispatch Kethly to Vienna to discuss with the leaders of the Second International. Whatever its orientation to the poorer peasants, the Petofi Party soon announced that it ***"believes in private property and advocates free production and marketing"*** *(Quoted in 'The Hungarian Revolution', MJ.Lasky, p.218)*

In the medium and longer term, each of these party leaderships would have used their power to dismantle the monopoly of foreign trade and the planning mechanisms in the direction of restoring capitalism. For Nagy, Lucacs and Co., this was a lesser evil compared with the proletarian political revolution. The trajectory of these rightist Stalinists confirmed Trotsky's analysis of the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Hungarian leadership shared the characteristic Trotsky had identified in the Soviet bureaucracy, namely a tendency to fragment under pressure, with sections of it willing to: ***"...overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back into capitalism"*** *(The Transitional Programme).*

But many of the Stalinists who connived in the coalition project as an expedient means of robbing the workers of political power, Kadar for example, were also to accuse the Hungarian revolutionaries of having become the tools of counter-revolution. They were to order the slaughter of thousands of Hungarian workers on this pretext.

Jubilant and thankful ideologists of capitalism were quick to seize on every meagre piece of evidence offered up by the Stalinists to prove their own version of the story that the Hungarian revolution was a capitalist, pro-Western revolution.

THE FORCES OF REACTION

Reactionaries did take advantage of the revolutionary crisis to show their faces once again. In Gyor, one Somogyvari argued for the formation of a separate government which, with him at its head, would wage a christian crusade against the USSR. Workers from the railway wagon works ran him out of town.

In Budapest the anti-communist Dudas occupied the printing presses and presented himself as the President of a National Revolutionary Council. He impressed Western journalists far more than he did the Hungarian workers. There is no evidence that any real delegates ever attended his Council but the Kadar regime was to hold him up as evidence of the mounting threat of counter-revolution.

The old Fascist Arrow Cross did make some re-appearance, most notably in Gyor which was near to exile organisations over the Austrian border. There are no substantiated accounts of the Arrow Cross playing an organised or systematic role in events. A meeting on Nov. 1 in Budapest which was called to reconstitute the Arrow Cross seems to have been poorly attended and chaotic.

However, ex-Arrow Cross members do seem to have played a role in the slaughter of Communist party officials at their Budapest HQ on Oct. 30. Along with lumpens and criminals they killed over 25 communists and AVH conscripts and savagely mutilated their bodies. The political revolution had as one of its tasks the brutal suppression of all such reactionary forces. The Hungarian workers were more than capable of fulfilling this task. Fascists got short shrift from the workers.

The activities and slogans of the reactionary forces must not be confused

with the seemingly nationalist slogans advanced at the earliest stages of the revolution by the workers. The initial slogans of the October fighting were not consciously those of political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy. The revolution tended to express itself in the language of destroying the symbols of Soviet sponsored power and of national independence.

The historic gain of nationalised industry had not been the work of the workers themselves but rather that of a regime which stamped out every manifestation of proletarian democracy. The collective farms appeared to the majority of peasants as an alien imposition. Given that the red stars and the hammers and sickles that accompanied these gains were seen as symbols of Humgary's national oppression, it is little wonder that the early revolt often expressed itself simply in terms of removing such symbols.

It would have been impossible to expect otherwise in a world where 'socialism' meant **both** the expropriation of the old owners **and** the imposition of a local Stalinist variant of the oppressive Russian bureaucracy.

However, the political drift of the major workers' organisations was not in the direction of unleashing capitalist counter-revolution. They initially saw themselves as pressure points on Nagy. All the major councils were so content with the Nagy government and with promises of Soviet troop withdrawal that they called for a return to work from Nov. 5.

THE STALINISTS FIGHT BACK

The Hungarian workers had been lulled into a sense of false confidence. By the first days of November, Soviet troops had left the major industrial centres for their barracks. Most organisations were now prepared to back Nagy's coalition government. Janos Kadar announced on Nov. 1 that the old Hungarian Communist Party had been dissolved and that a new Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was to be formed, purged of the most hated Stalinists. He announced his full backing for Nagy and the revolution: ***"In a glorious uprising the people have overthrown the Rakosi regime. It has won for our country the freedom and independence without which there can be no socialism".*** Of the insurgents he declared: ***"We are proud of you, for you took your proper place in the armed uprising. You were imbued with true patriotism and loyalty towards socialism".***

However, there was mounting evidence of fresh Soviet troops entering Hungary despite explicit denials of this by Ambassador Andropov. On Nov. 1 the Nagy government publicly protested at the troop movements and repeated its demand for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops. It also announced that it was renouncing the Warsaw pact which the Soviet bureaucracy was using as their pretext for positioning their troops. It declared that, like Austria, Hungary was now 'neutral'.

These were dramatic steps for a Stalinist to take. Neutrality had been mooted by Soviet leaders as a model for central Europe beyond their "buffer zone". The idea did not fall from the sky and had been accepted as a status for Austria in 1955. However, for a Communist Party-led government to declare itself neutral between imperialism and the USSR was evidence of its rightist course, a course that was being backed by the social democrats.

A proletarian political revolution would, quite justifiably, break with the Warsaw Pact which is an instrument of political repression. It licenses the Kremlin bureaucracy to trample on proletarian democracy anywhere in its sphere of influence. But the political revolution would commit itself from the outset to defending all the workers' states against imperialism. Failure to do so would always cut the ground from under attempts to internationalise the political revolution. In a purely 'national' or 'neutral' guise the proletarian uprising of a small individual state is rendered powerless to effectively neutralise the superior military might of the Soviet armed forces.

With tragic but typical naivety the Nagy government reached for the United Nations as the means of defending itself, asking the next General Assembly to debate 'Hungarian Neutrality'. At the same time it announced itself prepared to negotiate a troop withdrawal and nominated a commission led by Pal Maleter to carry out the preparations. At a time when the armed working class, fighting under the banner of internationalism, was the only means of defence against the USSR, Nagy chose the path of neutralism and appeals to the United Nations.

The Soviet bureaucracy had made all its preparations for a second attack. On Nov. 2, key Stalinist 'supporters' of Nagy, namely Kadar and Munnich, slipped away in secret. On Nov. 3 Maleter started negotiations with his Soviet counterparts. Agreement was reached immediately that all Soviet troops would withdraw with military honours. Only the date of departure was left to be negotiated over dinner at the Soviet HQ.

At 11 pm Maleter phoned to say the negotiations were going well. After that, contact with him was broken. At dawn on Nov. 4 a fresh wave of Soviet troops went into all the major industrial centres. Kadar and Munnich announced that they had formed a 'Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government' and that ***"acting in the interest of our people, working class and country"*** they had ***"requested the Soviet Army Command to help our nation smash the sinister forces of reaction and restore order and calm in the country".***

Nagy took cover in the Yugoslav embassy, urging the workers not to resist this new onslaught. The much vaunted leaders of the coalition parties were nowhere to be seen. Yet the workers replied again with a general strike and organised military resistance. The second phase of the Hungarian revolution had begun. The workers, arms in hand, now confronted the invasion of a new wave of Soviet troops who had not been affected by the previous efforts at fraternisation.

At the head of the bogus 'workers and peasants government' were key Stalinist figures who had remained in Nagy's government, Horvath, Munnich, Apro, Kossa and Janos Kadar himself. In giving time to Nagy, the workers had also been giving time to their future executioners. Kadar now denounced the workers' rising as a fascist inspired counter-revolution that, with the help of fraternal troops, they were suppressing in order to save socialist Hungary!

The clique around Kadar cut no ice with the Hungarian workers. Posters at the giant Csepel works replied defiantly: ***"The forty thousand aristocrats and fascists of the Csepel works strike on!"*** and ***"The general strike is a weapon which can only be used when the working class is unanimous – so don't call us fascists"*** *(Quoted in Lasky)*. Radio Rajk announced on Nov. 5: ***"Comrades! The place of every true Hungarian Communist today is on the barricades."***

Attacked from all sides by Soviet troops and aircraft, the Dunapentele workers' council announced: ***"Dunapentele is the leading socialist town in Hungary. In this town all the inhabitants are workers and they hold power in their hands ... The population of the town is under arms ... they will not give in because they have erected the factories and homes of the town with their own hands ... the workers will defend the town against fascism – but also against the Soviet troops."*** *(Quoted in B.Lomax, Hungary 1956)*

The Soviet troops met the fiercest resistance in the proletarian strongholds of Hungary. It was iron and steel towns like Miskolc and Dunapentele, as well as mining areas like Borsod, Pecs, Dorog and Tatabanya that held out the longest. It took the Soviet Armed Forces three days to take the centre of Budapest, and it was not until Nov. 10 that Soviet troops could be fully deployed against the capital's proletarian bastion of Csepel. Even when the Soviet troops had crushed the insurrection, a total general strike continued against the occupation and its 'workers and peasants government'.

During the initial days of the second invasion, workers' councils coordinated the defence of the factories on a local basis. It was not until after most of the fighting had subsided that delegates assembled to form a Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest. Its leading figure was a pre-war social democrat – turned Communist Party member in 1945 – Sandor Bali.

The initial intention of Bali and his supporters was that the Council should be a representative negotiating force for the working class, forcing maximum concessions from the Kadar regime. The general strike was seen as the most potent means of securing such concessions. Accordingly the Council's first meeting drew up a list of demands and sent a delegation to press those demands on Kadar.

THE POLITICS OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS

The politics of the leaders of the Hungarian workers in this period were highly contradictory. A political programme was adopted at the Nov. 12 meeting. It came from the pen of Istvan Bibo, a member of the peasant Petofi Party and one time member of Nagy's cabinet. It gives a sharp insight into the pressures towards the restoration of capitalism that the Nagy coalition would inevitably have come under.

It called for a multi-party system, for the restoration of the Nagy government and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary which, in turn, would leave the Warsaw Pact. While calling for **"legislation to secure the existence of socialism and the protection of communism"**, it also called for freedom of private ownership in land. While it defended social ownership of the banks, mines and large enterprises, it argued for the remaining factories to be taken into common ownership through workers' management, workers' shareholdership and a profit-sharing system.

As immediate demands the Council informed Kadar that it negotiated on behalf of the workers and took upon itself the right to call strikes. It protested at the reappearance of armed AVH units and demanded the reinstatement of Nagy, an amnesty, the withdrawal of Soviet troops and free elections. The majority of the Council were for parleying with Kadar to restore Nagy to power from his bolt hole in the Yugoslav embassy. Only a minority agreed with the view expressed at the time by the Council's president, Sandor Racz: ***"We do not need the cabinet. We are and will be the leaders of Hungary."***

Kadar played for time, stringing the Council leaders along for rounds of negotiations. He informed the first Council delegation: ***"We want a multi-party system and an honest election ... We [communists] might be thoroughly beaten in the elections, but if we take on an election challenge, the Communist Party may regain its strength and obtain the confidence of the working masses."*** *(Quoted from the Party paper, 'Nepszabadsag', Nov. 15, in Lasky).* But in the meantime, in exchange for such assurances, the workers' leaders were urged by Kadar to call off the General Strike and use any influence they had to urge Nagy to leave the Yugoslav embassy in order to negotiate.

While the Central Workers' Council was formally adopting resolutions in favour of parliamentary democratic forms and a mixed economy there was a vital aspect of their politics, standing in potential contradiction to these bourgeois democratic illusions, that a revolutionary Trotskyist party would have sought to relate to and extend. The front line role of the workers and their councils convinced proletarians and non-proletarians alike that the working class was the leading force in the Hungarian revolution.

In the first phase of resistance it was common to read declarations from the workers announcing that the factories were theirs while the government or 'nation' should be ruled by others. But faced with the second invasion the workers' leaders saw themselves as representatives of the proletariat negotiating with an alien government. In mid-November the duplicity of Kadar and his negotiators concentrated the minds of many more militants on the question of fighting for an alternative governmental power.

In early and mid November there was a clear situation of dual power in Hungary. No tram could run and no factory could open without the say so of the workers' councils. The Stalinists recognised this fact. Kadar regularly negotiated with council leaders. The Soviet High Command issued those same leaders with the right to carry arms and break the curfew. The Soviet Command even sent an observing liaison officer to the Budapest Council meetings.

There were, however, three key preconditions for resolving this dual power through a victory of workers' power over the Stalinist armed forces. First, a party was needed to lead the fight for such a resolution of the crisis. Secondly, the councils would have to centralise their forces into a clear and open goverrnmental alternative. Last, but by no means least, that governmental challenge would have to project itself into an international struggle to spread the political revolution.

Despite the absence of a revolutionary party the councils did, hesitatingly and belatedly, move in the direction of centralising their power and challenging the governmental power of Kadar. On Nov. 19 the Budapest Workers' Council called for all provincial councils to elect delegates to a Workers' Parliament due to meet on Nov. 21.

It proposed the formation of a permanent Workers' Parliament of 156 delegates from the provinces and some of the larger factories. In turn this was to elect a 30 strong executive from its ranks and co-opt 20 individuals from the parties, the armed forces, the police and the intellectuals. It did lay down that only parties accepting socialism could be admitted into the executive. The Soviet High Command and Janos Kadar acted quickly to smash this challenge. On Nov. 21 Soviet troops ringed the stadium where the Workers' Parliament was due to meet.

In order to remove a symbol rather than a vital force, Imre Nagy and his supporters were issued with safe conduct passes from the Yugoslav embassy on Nov. 22. On leaving their sanctuary they were duly arrested and immediately deported to Romania. They were later to be hanged.

On the 25 November the workers' council leaders were offered a conference in the Parliament building with the leading Hungarian Stalinists in the government. At the conference the working class was attacked for being 'confused' and the council leaders for having nothing to do with the working class. 'Workers and Peasants' Minister Marrsan rounded on the delegates who defended the actions of the Hungarian workers: ***"You ruffians! To think you can give us a lecture! You call yourselves prolos! But what have you in common with the workers?"*** *(Quoted in Lomax.)* Thus spoke a rude and arrogant satrap who, scenting victory, could now afford to publicly vent his fury against the insubordination of the working class and its delegates against the bureaucratic regime of which he was a well-paid agent!

Such rude treatment at the hands of the Kadar government hardened the stance of the council leaders at a time when the Government and the Soviet troops obviously had the uppor hand on the streets. The council leaders pressed ahead with their plans to create a National Workers' Parliament which was to meet until Oct. 23 1957 (the anniversary of the first fighting in Budapest) when free national elections were to be held. For nigh on a year the workers' council delegates were to lay claim to national authority until elections should take place.

The Budapest Council took this stance when the balance of forces was already strongly against the workers. Their plans were not to come to fruition, but a revolutionary party would have had to take a stance on such proposals at whatever stage they were advanced in a political revolutionary crisis. Such a party would have **supported** the formation of a government responsible to the councils. It would have **opposed** the eventual ceding of power from the councils to a parliamentary body.

Given that the workers' illusions in parliamentary democracy had been strengthened as a direct result of Stalinist tyranny, and that workers therefore still

called for parliamentary elections, revolutionaries would have fought for any election to be held under the direct scrutiny of the councils themselves and with the exclusion of all parties that did not support those councils. Should the scheduled National Assembly meet, it would have to be faced with the choice of ratifying the Central Workers' Council as the source of power or of being sent packing as soon as possible.

The best elements of the Hungarian proletariat had, unfortunately, attempted to pose a council-based government far too late in the struggle. The all-encompassing repression meant that it was difficult for these self-same leaders to envisage any form of resistance in favour of their new project beyond silent demonstrations that turned Budapest into a ghost town, or symbolic demonstrations of wreath-bearing women. Despite the more militant political stance of the Budapest Council leaders, the attempt to pose a form of workers' government as an alternative to the Kadar government came far too late. On Dec. 9 the government arrested as many council leaders as it could. The workers of the Beloiannis factory protected Bali and Racz from arrest. But these two accepted an offer on Dec. 11 to leave the factory in order to meet Kadar. They were arrested in the Parliament building.

Despite a short lived renewed general strike against the arrests, the Stalinist regime of Kadar was now firmly in the saddle. It cracked down with special courts, and extended the death penalty to those who struck or even incited others to strike. In the face of such victorious, barbaric reaction, and with its principal leaders in gaol, the workers' movement came to terms with its defeat. The Central Workers' Council now called for passive resistance; on Jan. 15, 1957 it issued its final appeal to the Hungarian workers:*"Because of the terror, however, and the death penalty even for distributing leaflets, the Council exhorts the workers to spread all news concerning the underground by word of mouth. Sabotage and passive resistance are the order of the day."*

ROSA LUXEMBURG REVIEW

Margarethe Von Trotta's film ***Rosa Luxemburg,*** is moving, intelligent and thought provoking. In a world dominated by Rambo remakes, slasher movies and special-effect vehicles that get passed off as films, the cinematic depiction of the life of a great revolutionary is welcome indeed.

The film is not a complete biography of Rosa Luxemburg. Von Trotta has called it a "fragment" so that anyone who expects to find the whole of Luxemburg's political life covered will be disappointed. Its technique is to look backwards, not always in chronological order over Rosa's life from the vantage point of her cells in the bleak prisons of Wronke and Breslau where she was incarcerated during the first Imperialist holocaust.

An important theme - in fact the central one - is the problems that Rosa faces as a woman in both her personal and political life. Her companion, Leo Jogisches, is shown as a committed revolutionary, but one with little imagination or sensitivity either in his political work - his articles are dull and lifeless - or in his relations with her. As Rosa develops politically and begins to outstrip him as a writer and a leading figure on the left wing of the German Social Democracy their relationship becomes more stormy. It eventually collapses in ruins in the aftermath of the failure of the 1905/1906 revolution.

The break comes ostensibly over Leo's unfaithful ness. But in reality it is because of his failure to take their relationship seriously. Rosa makes the break and Leo obviously regrets it bitterly.

The difficulties Rosa experienced as a woman and as a genuine revolutionary amongst the leaders of the SPD are also well portrayed. On the one hand leaders like Karl Kautsky and August Bebel obviously at first appreciate her force and stature as a revolutionary writer and activist but, right from the beginning there is a patronising air to this. Also von Trotta shows well the contrast between the Polish *"real revolutionaries"* and the already dessicated and bloodless leaders of the SPD who shy away from any form of action. Their message to her is increasingly that "Germany is not Russia". Luxemburg fights to let the fresh air of the first Russian revolution into the stale closed rooms of the SPD. She is shown fighting at the party congress for the general strike tactic. She fearlessly confronts even Bebel, the grand old man of the party, facing the massive hostility of the delegates. Only a handful rise to applaud her, while Kautsky remains sheepishly in his seat as Rosa defends his resolution.

Later Kautsky turns sharply to the right when the chips are down and refuses to publish her articles arguing for mass agitation against the Kaiser and for a republic. She centres on the fight for mass strikes against the undemocratic voting laws of the German Empire. Kautsky counterposes the forthcoming elections to Rosa's programme of action.

Barbara Sukowa gives a fine performance in these scenes expressing the full fire of Rosa's words. Two short scenes show Luxemburg as an orator in front of the rank and file worker members of the SPD. In one she speaks on what a revolution really is and in the other on the approaching danger of war. In these we get a glimpse of Rosa's marvellous oratory as she rouses the German workers from the routine of party and trade union life to the great dangers of which threaten them and the great risks which are confronting them.

The friendships that Rosa forged through party struggles, as with Clara Zetkin, or in spite of them, as with Louise Kautsky, Karl's wife,are cleverly used to portray Rosa's personal and political thoughts. With Louise she can relax and admit to the strains of the struggle, while sipping wine, and at the same time openly berate her friends husband - *"Louise your husband is a coward."*

A very effective scene shows Rosa and Clara Zetkin arriving late at a dinner party at which the main leaders of the party, Bebel, Kautsky and Auer are gathered. The two women have been delayed by



Daniel Olbrychski and Barbara Sukowa in 'Rosa Luxemburg'

stumbling upon soldiers involved in manoeuvres and tell of their 'narrow escape'. The men joke, raucously about what would have to be put on their tombstones and Rosa interrupts with ***"put here lie the last two men in German Social Democracy".*** The faces of Kautsky, Bebel and Co. are as they say - a picture! No wonder that later in the conversation Bebel tells Rosa that she should have stuck to women's work in the party.

The arguments rage on around the dinner table and at one point Bebel says jocularly to Luxemburg- ***"when we come to power we will have to shoot you".*** Yet in the comfortable dining room, between 'comrades' this jesting prophecy stills seems a world away from the possibility of fulfillment.

The film in these scenes vividly shows the descent of the party into philistinism and opportunism. It also shows Luxemburg's struggle, which she ultimately lost, to halt and reverse this process.

PACIFISM

The middle phase of the film deals with Rosa's struggle against the Imperialist war. This is a struggle that brings her into contact with Karl Liebknecht, with Paul Levi - in the trials which are the response of the Imperial government to her anti-militarist agitation - and draws her closer to Clara Zetkin.

And it is here that the limitations of Margarethe von Trotta begin to colour her depiction of Rosa Luxemburg. Whilst it appeas that she was not responsible for the English language opening credit which calls Rosa Luxemburg an ardent pacifist, the sections of Rosa's speeches against the war are those that von Trotta, who is a pacifist, would sympathise with. The connection between Rosa's earlier advocacy of militant class struggle and revolution is not linked to her anti-war stance. Rosa's anti-pacifist ***Peace Utopias*** is written out of history. Also von Trotta's deep pessimsim comes to dominate the whole last phase of the film. Rosa is shown as unable or unwilling to speak at the last Brussels gathering of the Second International in July 1914 because of demoralisation. The defeat and isolation of Luxemburg and Liebknecht are the themes stressed in the portrayal of 4 August decision of the SPD to vote war credits not the betrayal of the party and International.

Neither is Rosa's anger and indignation against this betrayl faithfully expressed - an anger that made her write that the Social Democracy was ***"a stinking corpse".***

From this point on much of the fight goes out of Luxemburg, and Liebknecht takes over as enthusiast and optimist. The desolate scenes in prison are beautifully and movingly portrayed but they colour it with a most pronounced pessimism, a pessimsim about Rosa's success in personal and political life.

The basic problem is that whilst von Trotta can sympathise deeply with Rosa as a woman fighting the male philistines of the SPD leadership and can understand much of the conflict between her political activity and the problems of her personal relationships with her friends and lovers before the war, the last, tragically short phase of Rosa'a life, is a closed book to her. It is closed because von Trotta does not share to the slightest degree Rosa Luxemburg's scientific, materialist, communistic outlook or her deep revolutionary optimism. This optimism is not in the slightest degree incompatible with the tiredness, the pain of personal loss, the effects of isolation, the yearning for rest and recuperation that are expressed in her prison letters of this period. But von Trotta draws on these as if they were the **whole** of Luxemburg's consciousness in the last phase of her life.

Von Trotta says that she was *"never in a political party"* but identified with the very left wing, the*"social democratic left wing"*. And herein lies her problem. She sees Rosa as a sort of humanist utopian. The implication is that in the late 1960s at the time of the SDS (the ex-SPD student movement) she herself held such views but now she is clear that these views were illusions - noble and just but unrealisable.

In an interview with *Socialist Worker Review* (September 1986) she says: *"I am still fond of the idea of human democratic socialism, but I know that it is utopia. When I see the power games of the big nations and the possibilities they have to destroy this world I feel that I would be very illusionsist to think that we might still have a chance"*

As in one of her previous films, ***The German Sisters***, this standpoint produces a powerful cinematic critique of the tradition of Prussian authorianism and the avaricious outlook of the German bourgeois of the post-war boom. It is a critique full of well founded rage. In ***The German Sisters*** the rage is expressed through the sympathetic treatment of an imprisoned Baader Meinhof style terorist. In **Rosa Luxemburg** it is expressed through the rehabilitation of Rosa as a great humanist, a counter point to the historical drift to authoritarianism in Germany.

But in both cases von Trotta can provide no solution to the problems she observes. In both, despair expressed through personal angst, takes the place of a solution. The Rosa Luxemburg of Spartacus, gives way to an angst-ridden projection of of von Trotta's imagination.

In jail Rosa in not allowed to hear of the outbreak and triumph of the Russian revolution. After her release from jail the deepening shadows never lift for a moment. The Spartacist leaders meet in deep gloom. Leo, amongst them, is the most gloomy apparently having little hope for the Germans as revolutionaries. The sharp disagreement between Karl and Rosa over the occupation of newspaper offices and their armed defence, the so-called Spartacist uprising, is twisted to suggest that she was opposed to it **because** it involved needless violence rather than because it was a premature, an isolated rising.

The impression is given of a Rosa for whom life, had gone badly wrong and who is not only ageing, ill and tired in a physical sense but is so in a political sense too. However, nothing in Rosa's letters or articles of the last weeks of her life indicate that his was the case. Her last letter to Clara Zetkin is full of optimism about the young comrades of the new Communist Party, despite their ultra-left mistakes : *"On the whole our movement is developing magnificiently and across the entire country at last ... the fierce political crises that we go through here in Berlin every two weeks, or even more frequently, seriously limit the course of systematic educational and organisational work, but at the same time they are themselves an excellent school for the masses"*
This letter was written on the day the Freikorps - right-wing volunteer soldiers raised by the Social Democrat Noske to smash the Sparticists - opened fire on the Vorwarts building (the editorial offices of the SPD's newspaper). On 14 and 15 January the Communist Party's daily ***Rote Fahne*** (Red Flag) carried two articles, one by Rosa, "Order reigns in Berlin" and one by Karl, "Despite Everything!" Rosa's article contains a cool and precise evaluation of the causes of defeat : *"The contradiction between the powerful, decisive aggressive performance of the Berlin masses on the one hand and the indecisive fainthearted vacillations of the Berlin leadership on the other"*. It ends with the immortal words : *"Order is restored in Berlin!" You stupid lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will 'rise up again clashing its weapons', and terrify you with the clarion call : I was, I am, I shall be."* Karl's article likewise expressed the same optimism in the dark hour of defeat : *"Whether or not we are alive when it arrives, our programme will live and it wil reign in a world of redeemed humanity. Despite everything."*

In the film Karl and Rosa read these passages to one another without conviction, perfunctorily. The atmosphere is of unrelieved defeat. But this mood is von Trotta's not Rosa Luxemburg's.

Go to see Rosa Luxemburg and be stimulated by a beautifully made film, powerfully acted. But be inspired to turn again to the works of this wonderful woman for whom life was far from being **in vain**, who left an imperishable legacy to the working class, her works, and her indominitable spirit. She stands with the greats in the tradition of revolutionary Marxism. A part of this tradition is her and Karl Liebknecht's last struggles and their sacrifice. It is a tradition that today still inspires others to struggle and if necessary to die under the same banner.

FREE ELEUTERIO!

Eleuterio is a militant miner and local trade union leader from the Bolivar pit in Antequeral Canyon, Oruro, Bolivia. He has been incarcerated in the San Pedro prison for twelve months with no sign of his case coming to trial. Eleuterio was arrested at the time of the five week general strike in Bolivia in 1985.

He has been accused of stealing mining equipment, a ridiculous charge for which no evidence exists beyond the word of two known management stooges. The real backround to this frameup is that Eleuterio was a leading militant in the general strike, in the March 1985 miners march on La Paz, and has been active in organising private sector miners to resist the threatened closure of their mines and to demand their nationalisation.

But Eleuterio was not simply a trade union militant. He was also an active member of the Revolutionary Workers Party (POR) led by Guillermo Lora and stood on their list as a candidate for the Oruro council. His imprisonment is part of a pattern of persecution of working class militants in the aftermath of last year's defeats.
As part of the renewal of the fight during the general strike in Oruro in August, the mass meeting which initiated the action placed as one of its demands the release of Eleuterio.

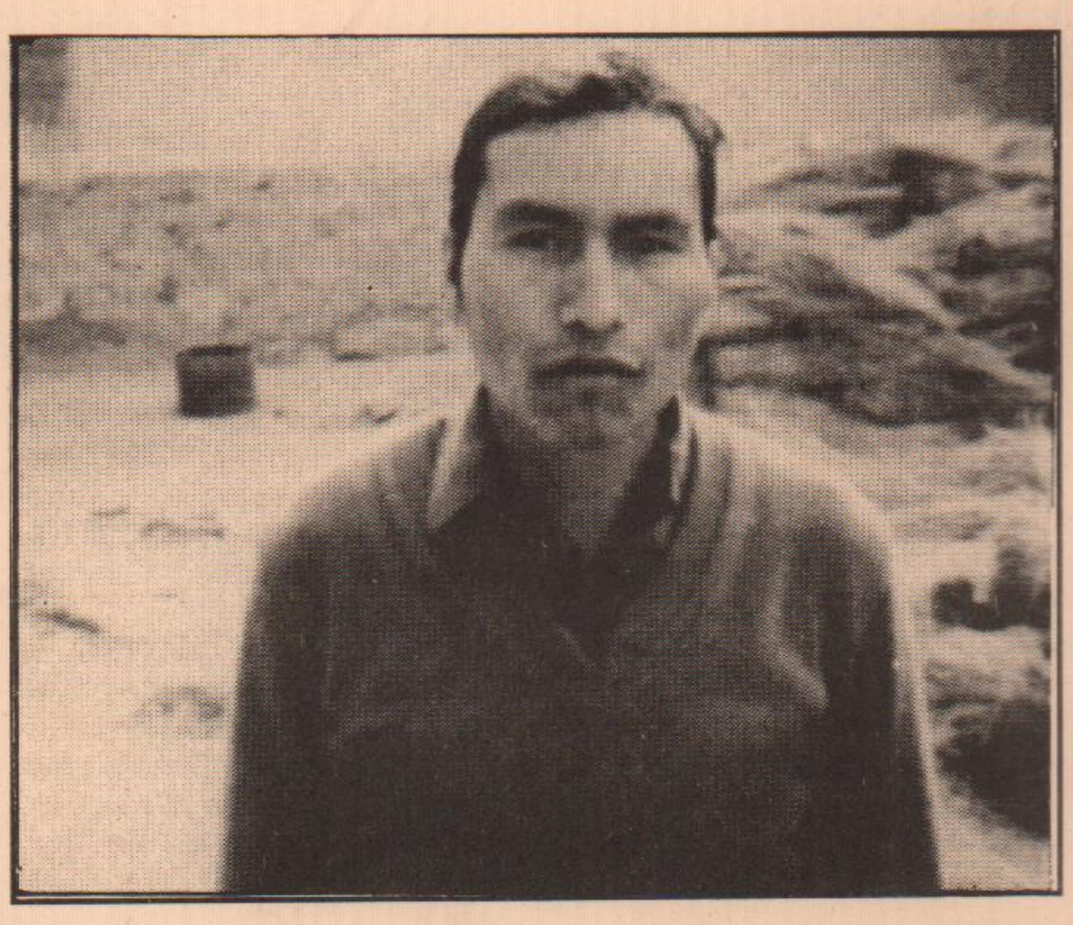
Eleuterio has a wife and children, and worker militants like him can expect to rot in jail indefinitely until pressure is brought to bear on the Bolivian Government.

An MRCI delegation which was in Orturo recently visited Eleuterio in the San Pedro jail. Conditions there were appalling. The prison is an old Spanish fort, with very few modern facilities. The cells are massively overcrowded. there is little protection against the freezing weather of the high Andean plateau.

Sitting in the bleak open courtyard of the prison, with an armed guard close by, Eleuterio explained the backround of the case. He worked for twelve years a miner in the Bolivar site in Oruro . Later, after studying on his own in the evenings, he qualified as an assistant topographer in the same mine. He was one of the leading militants in the mine and was elected regularly as a delegate to the Bolivian Miners Federation congresses.

He was also well known in the region for his work in the struggle to nationalise the privately owned Totural mining site. The miners' union having won the struggle for the nationalisation of this site were faced with a situation where the technicians in the mine were boycotting and obstructing plans of Comibol to take over the mine. (At this time the miners' union in Bolivia had a majority on the board of the state mining corporation Comibol). As a result Eleuterio was asked by the union to use his skills as a topographer to prepare the necessary surveys. For two months Eleuterio worked at the site, **without pay**, to ensure the success of the project.

not surprisingly Eleuterio's activities earned him the emnity of the bosses and their parties in Oruro. No doubt the fact



that he stood as a candidate for Oruro in the 1985 national elections on the list of (POR) Lora, an organisation which proclaims itself as Trotskyist and revolutionary, further marked him out for special attention by the authorities.

In the middle of the general strike of September he was arrested and charged with stealing theodolites and levels form the mining offices! So weak is the case against Eleuterio that they have not dared to bring it quickly to court - but neither will the authorities allow the miner out on bail prefering to keep a well known militant locked up. Eleuterio meanwhile is deprived of earning even the tiny wage paid to miners in Oruro. He cannot even afford legal representation. His wife and children have to survive in a country where there is no social security and one in the grip of a dramatic economic crisis. Wages average only 25$ a month yet prices are very high.

Eleuterio is one of the many miners, internationally, who are languishing in prison because he has put up a militant fight in the defence of the interests of his class. Like other miner class-war prisoners in South Africa and in Britain, Eleuterio deserves our full support. We urge all labour movement bodies at local and national level to write to the address below pressing for this and to publish material in their union or party publications. We urge you to get your MP and union leaders to take up this case now.

Send messages of support and donations for
ELEUTERIO GUTTIEREZ's legal defence to :
Steve Masterson
BCM 7750, London WCIN 3XX
(Tel. - 435 5652)
or to the IWG who will pass them on.

Letters urging action and indicating your support to:
Bolivian Embassy
105 Eaton Square, London, SW1

Trade Union Federation of Bolivian Mineworkers
(COB) – Ayacho 288, 4th Floor,
La Paz, Bolivia.

Miners International Federation
9 rue Joseph Stevens,
2nd Floor, 1000 Brusels, Belgium.