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New York, N.Y. 10014

May 31, 1978

To National Committee Members

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed are the following articles:

1. "The Lessons of 1968," by Tariq Ali, IMG member, Britain.
2. "The Great Dress Rehearsal," by Alain Krivine, LCR member, France.

These two articles appeared in the May 1978 issue of Socialist Review, magazine of the SWP (formerly I.S.) in Britain.

3. Three articles reprinted from Socialist Challenge, newspaper sponsored by the IMG, Britain. The articles cover a debate on the Morning Star, the newspaper of the British Communist Party.

We thought these would be of interest to you.

Comradely,

Gus Horowitz

Gus Horowitz
SWP National Office

encs.

Tariq Ali

The lessons of 1968

The political explosions which marked the year 1968 are only ten years old. And yet they have already become history. Isaac Deutscher used to remark that the memory of the newly-radicalised militant only covered half a decade — to explain what had happened prior to that one had to start anew.

It is not possible to recount the impact and importance of 1968 in a brief article. We have attempted to do so at length elsewhere*. But it is worth summarising the interrelated character of the upheavals. In February 1968 (the Vietnamese New Year), the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam launched a powerful military offensive against the armies of American imperialism. The scale and character of the thrust traumatised Washington. There were simultaneous assaults on 26 provincial capitals. The ancient imperial metropolis of Hue fell after a fierce battle and the NLF flag flew over the old palace. The working-class suburbs of Saigon were solidly for the NLF and the American Embassy itself was temporarily captured by a group of NLF commandos! The NLF offensive laid the basis for the largest anti-war movement in the history of an imperialist country. It gave hope and joy to revolutionaries throughout the world and it marked the beginning of the end for the Americans in Vietnam.

The effect of the Vietnamese developments in Western Europe was electric. In France a developing student revolt, stimulated by the Tet offensive, clashed with the State. After weeks of struggles the movement reached its climax on the night of 10 May. The students erected barricades, won increasing support and held out for the whole night in the face of repeated assaults. The following day the French government accepted most of their central demands. This victory set off a chain reaction. Under real pressure from below the giant communist union The CGT and the CFDT called a one-day strike in solidarity with the students. It was a massive success. Spontaneous factory occupations developed and within a few weeks France was in the grip of a

* *1968 and After* by Tariq Ali, Blond and Briggs, £5.25 (due to be published in June 1978)

spontaneous general strike from below. Ten million workers had withdrawn their labour and occupied their factories. It was the largest general strike in the history of capitalism. The struggle was defeated and derailed by an unsigned 'historic compromise' between the French Communist Party and the Gaullist Fifth Republic. The strike lacked a clear political focus. The revolutionary left was weak. The PCF was hegemonic.

Only three months after the May-June events in France, the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. The experiment known as the 'Prague Spring' had ended censorship in that country. Debates and discussions were taking place in the realm of politics, economics, culture and history. Trotsky had been virtually rehabilitated by the paper of the Czech Young Communists. Deutscher's writings were being serialised. The appeal of the Fourth International to Czech workers and students had appeared in Czech in a new magazine, *Informacny Materialy* (Information Materials), which also published accounts of the French May extremely hostile to the PCF. Growing demands for institutionalised pluralism were being discussed. A proposal to permit tendencies in the Czech Communist Party had already been agreed upon and was awaiting ratification from an Extraordinary Congress of the Party scheduled for September 1968.

Before it could take place Russian tanks moved in to end the experiment and assert Stalinist hegemony. But Czechoslovakia in 1968 was to prove different from Hungary in 1956. It took the Russians over a year to substitute a new leadership. Their political control was established by a massive purge of the CPCz. Tens of thousands of communists were expelled.

The Vietnamese offensive had revealed the weaknesses of American imperialism; the May Events had shown both the vulnerability and the resilience of the bourgeois-democratic states of the West; Prague revealed the deep and profound crisis which was shaking the Stalinist system. It was these three events which shaped world politics and nothing has been the same since. For though the struggle of the workers suffered defeats in both Paris and Prague, these were of a specific character. The crisis of the capitalist and the bureaucratic system is more pronounced today than it was in 1968. Developments since that time have revealed the inability of capitalist politics and economics to recreate the lost stability of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Lessons of developments

Revolutionary socialism was reborn in Europe in 1968. The growth of the far left has been a direct product of 1968. The fact is, however, that unless we fully absorb the lessons of political developments over the last ten years, we will be unable to move forward. The emergence of 'Eurocommunism' is also a product of the last decade. But a repetition of old formulas in the battle of ideas with the Eurocommunists is clearly not sufficient. It should be stated that, in many cases, the theoreticians of Eurocommunism have posed important questions of strategy and tactics. True, they have provided the wrong answers, but we can only challenge them if we accept that the traditional syndicalist recipes, which characterised much of the European far left are utterly inadequate in formulating a response.

The single most important experience for the working class in Western Europe since 1968 has been the Portuguese Revolution. Its failings allow

us to develop further some of the lessons of May 1968 in France and of the wave of workers' struggles which shook Britain in 1969-74.

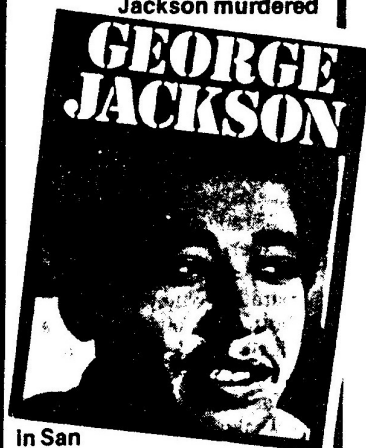
The central point to grasp is that the French general strike, the Portuguese upheaval, the 1974 miners strike in Britain, were not ended by repression and bloody counter-revolution. They were derailed by bourgeois-democracy. The difference is absolutely fundamental for the development of a Leninist political strategy in the West. The Russian Revolution never confronted a modern bourgeois-democratic state. Nor did the Bolsheviks have to face a well-entrenched reformist apparatus in the heart of the working class. Tsarist Russia was the most backward state in continental Europe. It also possessed the most advanced revolutionary organisation in the world. Furthermore this organisation was implanted in a minority of the population. An inter-imperialist war was of vital importance in creating the conditions for an ultimate assault on the Tsarist state and its apparatus.

Historic memory of occupation

The scale of mass mobilisations in de Gaulle's Fifth Republic were qualitatively superior to Tsarist Russia. The ten million workers involved in the strike represented the most vital section of the population. But whereas in Petrograd the workers in 1917 instinctively moved to setting up soviets as the most democratic way of asserting their rule, the same did not happen in France. The 1905 of the French workers was 1936. Their historic memory was not of setting up soviets, but of occupying their factories. In 1936 they had done so on the heels of the election of a Popular Front government. Those occupations had a dual character: they both celebrated the victory of the Popular Front and sought to institute reforms from below. In 1968 the factory occupations had a more revolutionary dynamic. That is why the PCF 'marshals' were on constant alert to prevent any student agitators from entering the major factories.

The strike lacked a clear political focus. It was defused not by repression but by the announcement of a general election. Gaullism was prepared for a frontal clash, but took great care not to initiate one. The millions of workers and students wanted a change, but saw no reason for a frontal assault. The Communist Party was the only party which could have changed this state of affairs. It did not. It proved itself in the words

IRELAND Internment introduced. **USA** George Jackson murdered



In San

Quentin prison. **BRITAIN** Postmen's strike. Occupation of UCS. **INDIA** 1169 political murders as Government 'cleans up left' in West Bengal. **CEYLON** JVP uprising crushed with support of Russia and China. **BANGLA DESH** General strike for independence from Pakistan. Pakistani army moves in and crushes independence. Indo-Pakistan war leads to 'independence'. **CHINA** Mao's 'close comrade in arms', Lin Biao, disappears. Subsequently denounced for allegedly plotting Mao's murder.

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TEN YEARS ON 6



Renault workers in occupation

of its leaders to be 'a party of order'. A small minority of workers did break with the PCF and moved over to the far left, but the majority remained intact. Why? Because the only way in which ten million workers would have understood the need to go further and ultimately to have a test of strength was through a common experience of new organs of power and a government based on them. For the masses need to be convinced that what they are fighting for will be better than what exists.

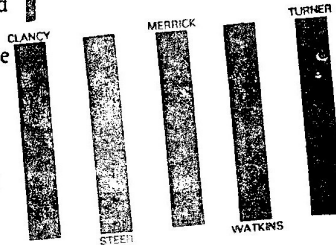
If France had not already proved that, we had the experience of the Portuguese laboratory in 1974-75. Here we saw a decomposing state apparatus, symbolised by an army split from top to bottom accompanied by a striking radicalisation of important sections of the working class. But here the dominant groups of the far left showed that they had learnt little from the weaknesses of 1968. Their euphoria and insurrectionist rhetoric failed to confront one key element of revolutionary strategy: how could the masses be won over to socialism. The vanguard in Portugal was ready in the factories and in the army. Its task was to win the masses. It thought it could make the revolution.

Social composition and politics

It was derailed once again by elections and the election of a Constituent Assembly. The failure of the far left to understand the significance of these elections and the bureaucratic urge of the Portuguese Communist Party to ignore them led to a short-lived alliance. This enabled Mario Soares to present himself as the only defender of democracy in the working class. The PCP defended Moscow. The far left thought democracy was not the central question. They were both outmanoeuvred and outflanked by a demagogic social-democrat, backed by reaction.

1968 allowed the revolutionaries to increase their influence in one big leap. But this leap was not sufficient to create revolutionary parties. In Portugal and Italy the major far left groups succumbed to opportunist and ultra-left pressures. Despite their relatively large size, they collapsed politically. The large groups that have survived in the West have been the French, Spanish and Japanese sections of the Fourth International and the Socialist Workers Party (formerly IS) in Britain. In their different ways all these organisations are groping towards developing a revolutionary strategy which

BRITAIN Miners strike smashes Tory wage policy. Pentonville 5 strikes break Industrial Relations Act.



Five Trade Unionists are inside. WHY AREN'T YOU OUT?

CHINA Nixon pays state visit. **IRELAND** Bloody Sunday massacre by British troops in Derry. British Embassy in Dublin burnt by 30,000 strong crowd. Stormont suspended. **URUGUAY** Government declares 'state of internal war' to destroy Tupamaro urban guerrilla movement. **CHILE** 'Bosses strike' against Allende government. Workers respond by forming 'cordones' to control the factories.

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corresponds to the tasks that lie ahead. These can now be summarised in the following fashion:

1 A creative application of the tactics of the United Front, initially formulated by the Communist International and later developed by Trotsky. These remain the only viable strategy to win over the masses.* They also necessitate a struggle to create a unified revolutionary organisation in every country in the world — a small starting point, but an important one to lay the basis for constructing broad-based tendencies in the trade unions which unite revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries on the basis of struggles for common objectives.

2 The socialist revolution in the West will either be made with the support of the majority of toilers or it will not be made at all. Thus the necessity to counterpose socialist democracy to bourgeois democracy. This means not just the raising of radical democratic demands today (proportional representation, annual parliaments, right of self-determination of nationalities, etc.), but the projecting of our socialist model. This will be infinitely more democratic than what exists today. It is in this context that a democratic revolutionary organisation (with full rights for tendencies and factions) is not an empty, intellectual or petty-bourgeois abstraction, but it corresponds to the objective reality of the societies in which we live. The working class in the West is passionately interested in democracy at every level.*

3 Those of us who are members of the *Fourth International* are extremely conscious of our weakness on an international level. The FI is not the nucleus of a mass International. It is one element in the situation. But the struggle to build a mass international organisation cannot be left to chance or spontaneity. It has to be organised. That is the main strength of the FI, but most of its members understand that it will be built only with the entry into its ranks of other revolutionary organisations and currents. Nonetheless internationalism without an International has a somewhat hollow ring.

4 Revolutionary parties have never emerged out of an arithmetical growth. They are the results of wars, revolutions and political upheavals. There has to be a breach in the mass working-class organisations before a mass revolutionary party sees the light of day. That is the logical corollary of the united front. No revolutionary party exists in Europe today. What does exist is various nuclei. The opportunity now exists to weld some of these together to strengthen the foundations of what could become a party. The crisis of Stalinism and the CPs in Europe poses the question of winning over tens of thousands of workers to revolutionary politics in the present period. But this will only be achieved by combatting sectarian ultra-leftism and syndicalism on the one hand and opportunism and rightist adaptations to the bureaucracies of the mass organisations on the other.

These then, expressed somewhat schematically, are the challenges of 1968. How and with what degree of success they are taken up depends on all of us.

*See *New Left Review* 100 for two important texts by Perry Anderson and Ernest Mandel

**Theses on Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* produced by the FI constitute an elaborate synthesis and systematisation of the strands within classical Marxism on this subject. They are also the most useful strategic response to the 'Eurocommunists'.



Alain Krivine

The great dress rehearsal

What were the most significant features of the events of May and June 1968 in France?

They represented the first upsurge of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries since the era of the Popular Front in the 1930s. Their main features — and these features will continue to appear — are the following.

First, the events of 1968 showed that the working class, when it wants a change, even though its will is expressed in a very confused form, is able to initiate a mass movement which, for a certain time, totally bypasses the bureaucracies of the traditional reformist organisations. That's the first lesson.

Secondly, the kind of demands that were put forward in 1968, even in a confused way, continue to dominate the working-class movement up to the present time. The explosion in 1968 was not only around economic demands for higher wages and so on, even though these served as a pretext, but very quickly began to question, not only the exploitation of workers inside the factories, but also all the means of exploitation and oppression of capitalist society. Since 1968 there have emerged a series of movements which are totally new, but which are the result of the sort of challenge to the system which took place in 1968 — movements of immigrant workers, of women, of soldiers, the ecological movement, and so on. In 1968 society was not partially put in question — what took place was a confused but global contesting of all the aspects of capitalist society.

The third feature of 1968 which I want to talk about is the will the working class showed during this movement to take into their own hands their hopes, their fights, their lives — even their daily lives. This confused thrust towards self-management continues to make itself felt in the trade unions and even the reformist parties today. The reformist leaders have been forced to recuperate this desire on the workers' part to run their own lives by explaining that they are in favour of self-management, even if they bitterly opposed it in 1968. But in addition you now find that a large minority of the working class is opposed to the bureaucratic structure of all the reformist organisations.

This global aspiration to self-management, to workers' democracy, is very important for us because it means that in relating to the struggles of the working class we can put forward a series of questions like workers' control, elected strike committees, which are becoming much more credible than in the past.

These are the main features of 1968. In a certain sense we can say that 1968 was a political defeat for the working class, because nothing changed as far as the government was concerned and so on. But I think that 1968 was a kind of general dress-rehearsal of what could happen in the near future in the sense that it was the result of

a new relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the working class which still continues to exist in France and indeed throughout Western Europe.

What role did the revolutionary left and in particular the LCR (then the JCR) play in the events of 1968?

In 1968 the far left was mainly organised among the students, and since the movement began as a student upsurge the revolutionary left played a major role, even the leading role, in the demonstrations and in the first stages of the movement in 1968.

Many people have talked about the role of spontaneity as against the role of organisation. I think that the two are totally linked. In a movement like that in 1968 the members of revolutionary organisations are in a minority. But what was very striking in 1968 was the fact that most of the demands which were apparently put forward by the movement spontaneously were in fact demands around which the revolutionary organisations had fought for years and years as a tiny minority in the universities. Examples of these slogans were — internationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-bureaucratism, anti-Stalinism, and so on. OK — anti, anti, anti — but nonetheless a kind of demand which gave a political tone to the movement.

Of course, when the upsurge took place, many new things appeared as a result of the richness of the movement, but as far as the leadership of the movement was concerned, the revolutionary organisations played a major role because politically they had a more coherent view of the movement and because they possessed a national structure.

the working class recognised itself, not in the students' demands, but in the fact that they were fighting successfully, and on this basis workers were prepared to follow the students.

The second stage was the development of the movement against repression into a massive general strike. Now the question was not only to fight against repression and against the government — it had become a question of power, of overthrowing the government and presenting a political alternative. Then of course the gap began to appear between the students and the workers. When it came to as serious a question as that of taking power, the working class naturally had no confidence in the student leaders. Workers had confidence in our ability to organise demonstrations and to fight in the streets, but not in our ability to form a government or prepare a political alternative.

When the question of power was posed workers looked to their traditional leadership, in which they normally had confidence — not only the national leadership of the reformist organisations, especially the CP, but the rank-and-file activists with a long record of struggle in the factories. When they saw that the CP and the SP were not prepared to go further and raise the question of power, workers spontaneously ended the strike, understanding that it was finished and stupid to continue a general strike, with all its effects, without any perspective.

We can here see both the role of the students in starting off the movement and also the limits of the student movement in the absence of any real implantation of the revolutionary party inside the working class. Only a national organisation with an established base in the working class would



But despite the insurrectionary proportions of the general strike and despite the leadership role played by the revolutionary left, the movement of 1968 failed — it was, as you said yourself, in a certain sense a political defeat for the French working class. Could you explain why?

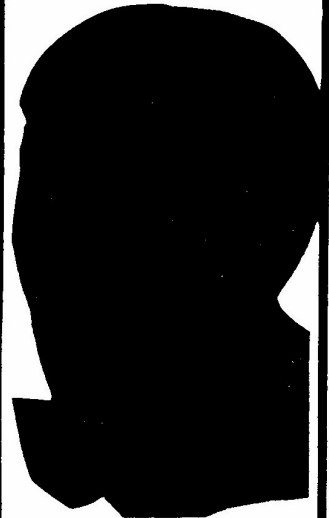
There were three stages in the movement in 1968. The first stage was the explosion by the students and the movement of solidarity against the repression they suffered, which initiated the movement among the working class. But if workers supported the students it was because they had their own demands, economic demands which had not been met by the government and on which the reformist organisations had refused to fight. When the student movement exploded

have been able to make real rather than formal links between the revolutionary will of the students and the confused revolutionary will of the working class. Our weakness in 1968 was that we had a base only among students and so we were at the head of the movement in its first stage and under the table at the last stage.

That leads directly into my next question. You've stated very clearly that one of the main reasons for the defeat of the movement in 1968 was the revolutionaries' lack of implantation in the working class. What success in the following years has the LCR and the revolutionary left in general had overcoming this obstacle and rooting themselves in the French labour movement?

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TEN YEARS ON 12



EGYPT Huge strikes and riots force cancellation of price increases. **TURKEY** Start of eight month national metal workers strike. **INDIA** One million state employees in Maharashtra start 54 day strike. **ARGENTINA** Strike wave wins important wage increases. **RUMANIA** 90,000 mineworkers on strike. Hold two central committee members as hostage for negotiations. **BRITAIN** Firemen's strike.



To start with we used a tactic that was very dangerous — very dangerous. Frankly speaking I must say that if we had no political deviations it's because we were linked to the Fourth International.

During the first stage of the radicalisation that occurred in Europe in the 1960s we understood that this radicalisation affected, not the working class, but the university and high school students. So, after our expulsion from the CP we decided to build only a youth organisation, because we believed it was mainly among students that it was possible to accumulate forces rapidly.

Then there was 1968. That was good for us in a certain sense, but our organisation was mainly students with all the dangers which that involved when it came to elaborating a political programme and so on. In that situation the Fourth International, with its tradition, programme, etc. stood us in good stead.

Then after 1968, with the new radicalisation among workers, we decided to change our intervention totally and to concentrate, not all, but a large part of our forces, on the working class. We had a certain credibility thanks to our implantation among youth which meant that we were seen as a national political force. We used this credibility to go in a very voluntarist way to the workers.

We took two thirds of our students — some of them went to work in the factories, most went around the factories to try and recruit the militant worker around whom we could build. Students could not themselves build, but students could get the militant, or one or three militants, who could afterwards build a real base in the factory. That's



what we decided — the turn to the workers. In particular, we decided that the intervention in each factory should be made through a permanent bulletin — a factory newspaper of two or three pages appearing each week.

We made mistakes — you can imagine the kind of mistakes we made for years and years! But now the result is clear. In 1968 the JCR had 800 or 900 members, with a very small minority of young workers. Then we built the Ligue. Now there are 3,300 members, with a minority of students (less than 13 per cent of the membership are students and one per cent high school students). We must add 2,500 manual and white-collar workers in the Red Mole groups, which exist in nearly 300 factories, offices, ministries, hospitals, and so on — these are the organised sympathisers of the LCR. Next month we are setting up a youth organisation, the JCR, which will be autonomous from the Ligue.

There has been a qualitative change as far as our implantation in the factories is concerned. But globally, as far as the tasks are concerned, there has not, I think, been a qualitative change. If, for example, there was a new upsurge tomorrow, then, although our intervention would be totally different from what we did in the past, the growth in our base has not been sufficient for us to appear as an alternative to the reformists.

Quite recently I read an article in *Le Monde* by Nicholas Baby, a leader of the high-school movement in 1968, which talked about the 'crisis of leftism' (14 March 1978), arguing that the far left in France had failed to develop into a serious alternative since 1968. Is that claim valid?

It's true, if that was what the comrade was saying, that in 1968 we had the biggest revolutionary movement in Europe and now look how many people there are in revolutionary organisations compared to the CP. But I think it's a short cut to say that. There is a crisis in the extreme left organisations in Europe today — in France, more so in Italy. This crisis is linked to two factors.

First, there is a crisis which is a result of 1968 in the sense that, as I said, 1968 was a movement not only against exploitation but also against oppression. There developed movements which revolutionary Marxists were unable to understand. Now they understand, but too late.

For example, the question of the oppression of women inside revolutionary organisations has caused a serious crisis throughout the far left in Europe. The violence of the women in our organisations is linked to the violence of the oppression they have suffered within our organisations — leading to splits etc.

But it's not only the question of women, of homosexuals, etc., it's even in a certain sense the crisis of militantism*, which raises the question of the kind of revolutionary organisation we need. Of course, I'm not putting Leninism into

* The name given to a crisis of identity that has affected many of the generation of 1968 in the French far left — Ed.

USA Miners strike
TUNISIA General strike
NICARAGUA General strike.

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health
housing
education
social services
public transport
water supply
consumer
nurseries
libraries

NO OUTS

NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN
A WOMANS RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Rock Against Racism

ROCK AGAINST RACISM



question, but I think we have to discuss the application of democratic centralism. There is no model of democratic centralism — it's two words which contradict each other. So today we discuss the question of democracy within the revolutionary organisation, the role of the leadership, the beginning of bureaucratisation linked to the development of the organisation, and it's not an answer just to say 'Lenin said, Lenin said'. How do we understand the new forms of political activity that have emerged? I accept that we have to use the framework of Leninism, but we have to be careful not to give dogmatic answers to these questions. Many organisations have been thrown into total crisis, have been split, as a result of these problems.

The second problem is the underestimation by many groups of the capacity of the left reformists — the Stalinists and social-democrats — to accommodate the new radicalisation since 1968. For example, look at the way in which they are taking up the demands of the women's movement in Italy, France and Spain.

The reformists understood, after they had been initially by-passed, that, because of the crisis of capitalism, they could not limit their answer to economic demands but were forced to give a political answer — a programme of government. Today the reformists offer the working class a credible answer — the historic compromise in Italy, the nation union in Spain, the union of the left in France. Now there is no longer the vacuum which existed in 1968.

Many of the organisations of the European far left thought after 1968 that reformism was finished and that it would be very easy to build revolutionary organisations because workers were no longer reformist. But it was not true. They had not understood what for us is fundamental, especially after the Portuguese experience — the strength of the reformists and of illusions in bourgeois democracy among the masses and the fact that the revolutionary movements of the last ten years have all been betrayed by elections and the structure of bourgeois democracy. There is a connection between the reformist policy of the workers' parties, the illusions in bourgeois democracy which they spread in the working class and the offensive of the bourgeoisie itself in defence of its 'democratic' system.

The question of a united front policy towards reformist workers is very important. Many ultra-lefts rejected this — the result is either they become totally isolated, as in Portugal, and are smashed, or their perspective is like that of the Red Brigades, where their activity is a substitute for a working class which they don't understand.

There is no alternative to a united front policy. Through this policy we try to show in action that workers' democracy is superior to bourgeois democracy. That's the importance of propaganda for self-management, attempts at workers' control, and so on. We have to be at the head of the fight for democracy against Stalinism. The social democrats have been able to grow by claiming to defend democracy against Stalinism. Of course, we don't share their illusions in bourgeois democracy, but it's clear that many combative workers joined the Socialist Party because of their disgust with Stalinism.

To obtain a rupture of the masses from their traditional parties they need to be involved in united action, because it's through the experience of united mass action that their ideas are changed. To have united mass action you need the

participation of the CP, the SP and the revolutionaries in class actions. That's the point of departure of our united front policy.

One final question — ten years on from 1968, and in the aftermath of the left's defeat in the French general elections, what prospects do you see for the revolutionary left in France?

Well, in France we are in a contradictory situation due to the political defeat in the elections. The working-class movement is demoralised and at the same time there is discussion such as we have never seen before inside the workers' parties. For example, in the CP now the disarray is total, and many people — but still a minority — inside the CP are looking toward us, because we have always condemned the Common Programme and the union of the left and now that the reformists' strategy has failed, many rank-and-file CP members are beginning to question this strategy.

So the echo of our position is stronger, I think, than ever before — but in a global climate of defeat. I think it's a conjunctural defeat. I don't think the relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the working class has changed. It's not as if the working class has been defeated after mass struggles — it's a subjective defeat. So we are in a climate which does not permit many actions, but a climate that permits discussion.

The problem is to estimate the scale of the demoralisation of the working class — that is, what will be the ability of the working class to conduct new actions and so on. In some months, we think, there will be big struggles. We believe that the bourgeoisie cannot stabilise the regime because of the economic crisis, because of its own internal conflicts, because the workers' parties got nearly 50 per cent of the vote — something which hasn't been seen in other countries, because the working class will want to take its revenge and there will no longer be any electoral perspective to permit the bourgeoisie to canalise workers' militancy away from struggle, because many fractions of the working class will be forced to fight — the danger is that some fights will be totally isolated and very violent, without any political perspective.

Here it's more difficult for us. When it is a matter of offering an electoral perspective to defeat the right what we have to say is very credible. But in the struggles that will develop, we will have to argue for centralising them, in the long term for bringing down the government and so on. You will understand that all this is fine for the more combative fractions of the working class, but it appears a little utopian to the majority of workers, especially because the trade unions will probably lead some militant strikes to play down the defeat for which they are responsible, but will never centralise the struggle. The fact that Mitterand, Marchais and the trade union leaders have agreed to visit Giscard d'Estaing, which they always refused to do in the past, is an indication that they may lead struggles, but within the framework of the regime.

It is very difficult in the present situation to make any predictions except some global hypotheses — for example, that the new Parliament will not last out its five-year term, that there will not be social peace, that the bourgeoisie will not be able to stabilise the regime, and so on. But apart from these generalities I think we will have to wait one or two months to see how the working class reacts to the defeat it has just suffered.

"A Plan to Save the Morning Star, by Tariq Ali"

OPEN FORUM

The British labour movement has, since the advent of this century, prided itself on its 'lack of dogmatism'. When translated this simply means a contempt for ideas. Successive leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions have spoken with contempt of the 'heavy debates' which characterised the German workers' movement in the Twenties and Thirties. The lively exchanges which led to debates within French social democracy were regarded here as a lot of 'hot air'. As for Italy, we all know how 'excitable' the Latin temperament can be.

No, none of this continental nonsense was to be allowed to infect British workers after the defeat of the great Chartist rebellion. True a strange group of people always existed, men like John MacLean on the Clyde, who tried to change this state of affairs, but Labourism proved too powerful for them.

Political ideas which explained the past, analysed the present and look forward to the future were to remain the preserve of a minority of workers. Marxism never penetrated the British working class. We are still suffering from the consequences.

NO PRETENCE

The resistance of British labour to the 'continental disease' was not extended to the cancer which held British society in its grip. The Labour Party has always been subservient to ruling class ideology. It has eagerly taken up imperialist themes and defended them consistently within the labour movement of this country. It has not even bothered to maintain a pretence of an ideological independence from the bourgeoisie.

The largest social democratic party in Europe has never had a daily paper. The TUC did have the Daily Herald but it died a natural death in the mid-Sixties.

During elections the Labour Party relies on the Daily Mirror to conduct its campaign. Provided that this happens there is little tension with the rest of the Tory press. This unwritten agreement is strictly adhered to by the ruling class. When the Mirror's boss Cecil King started an eccentric and one-person campaign to get rid of Wilson as Prime Minister, it was his own head that was finally severed via a well-orchestrated palace coup!

True, the two weeklies of the Labour Party, Tribune and Labour Weekly do enjoy a certain readership — though Tribune is now read largely by addicts — but their influence is almost negligible outside Transport House. They are not even taken seriously within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

In this situation it has been the daily newspaper of the Communist Party which has for the last 48 years been the only daily paper of the workers' movement. It has of course been heavily compromised by its Stalinist loyalties and practice.

The faithful echoing of Stalinism's twists and turns prevented the Daily Worker and the Morning Star from becoming popular, mass socialist papers, reflecting the needs of the most advanced sections of the working class. But despite this crippling defect, the CP's dailies

As CP continues to flounder A plan to save the ★ Morning Star

AT THE LAST conference of the British Communist Party an emergency resolution was passed on the Morning Star, reflecting the growing discontent in the party on this question. It was agreed that a public debate on the content, style and circulation of the paper should take place till May 1978.

This discussion is now reaching its climax, but what will have been gained at the end of it? A few useful ideas are not enough to stem the rot. In any case they can always be rejected. At the moment many CP members are speculating as to whether a daily paper can be sustained in the present period.

TARIQ ALI argues that a demise of the Morning Star would represent a setback for the working class. He suggests a series of drastic and radical measures to transform and save the paper.

supported most strikes (except during the war and where they conflicted with the CP line), contained the only real information regarding industrial struggles and were, for a whole period, indispensable reading even for their enemies and political opponents.

This situation has now come to an end. The Morning Star confronts a declining circulation. Communist Party members are faced with the possibility that they might have to cease publication of a daily. This would leave us without a single daily working class paper. True there is always Newsline, but it reflects the bizarre politics of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

Its central campaigns over the last few years have been, and in this order: a) to slander its political opponents and spend tens of thousands of pounds to 'prove' that they are 'accomplices' of the KGB, CIA, etc; b) to campaign to bring down the Labour Government, and c) to paint the non-existent virtues of regimes such as those of Gaddafi in Libya and the butchers who rule Iraq.

So, in effect, the death of the Star would leave us without a paper in which one can occasionally read the views of shop-stewards engaged in struggles and their calls for national solidarity. Should the paper be saved? Or should we welcome its demise as a big victory for the far left? The latter would reflect a crazed sectarianism towards tens of thousands of working class militants. Our answer to the former must be a qualified 'yes'. But a number of points need to be made.

The reason for the crisis of the Morning Star is not related to the weak journalistic formulae employed on 75 Farringdon Road. It is a fundamental and deep-rooted political weakness. It is a combination of two interrelated factors. On the one hand the Party has cautiously moved away from the worst excesses of Stalinism. There has, as a result, been a certain drying up of material support (in the shape of ads, 'rising' circulation, and so on) from the USSR and Eastern Europe.

At the same time the pathetically slow pace at which a distance is being taken has not won it any new support. The paper has yet to wage a campaign for Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia or for the release of Rudolf Bahro in East Germany. True this would mean being blacklisted by the bureaucracy, but it would lead to a rise in circulation in this country.

Secondly the virtual collapse of the CP's political perspective in the post-1974 period has been faithfully reflected in the Star. How can the wages policy be effectively opposed without an open and vigorous confrontation with Jones and Scanlon? How can a real campaign be mounted against the Callaghan government without indicting Benn and Foot? How can racism be fought without analysing the politics of Mr Sydney Bidwell?

It is not a question of the CP accepting our views on these matters. The point is that they are never discussed openly. There is no debate on central issues. A more recent example is the role of Sue Slipman and the CP in the National Union of

Students. How many Morning Star readers know that without CP votes the Tories would not even have won a single place on the NUS executive?

Thus the paper lacks credibility. If facts do not accord with the political projections of King Street, they can be safely omitted. Or if they are included it should need a very sharp reading between the lines to get to them. Objective truth is more often than not missing from the paper.

A number of readers have also pointed out the logic of this policy. Letters which are critical of the CP line on fundamental questions of strategy and tactics in Britain or world political developments are simply not published. Or if they are, there can be no comeback. No debate.

The overwhelming majority of letters published in *Comment* and the *Morning Star* have concentrated on stylistic and journalistic improvements. Dave Cook, the National Organiser of the Communist Party, probably made the most useful suggestions in this regard, though these would imply a change in the political formula as well. Cook recommends the following measures:

- * The paper must be thrown much more open.

- * By bringing in more party contributors outside the leadership, recognising that their viewpoints will sometimes be 'off the line'.

- * By reflecting more of the disagreements within the left.

- * By interviewing more 'controversial' figures, eg Hain, Sillars.

- * By raising 'difficult' questions on which we have no cut-and-dried answers, eg trade union democracy, 'workers control'.

- * By articles on political developments within the socialist countries, instead of either 'anniversary commemorations', and small, isolated news items. Without these in-depth articles we can neither adequately praise nor criticise.

- * Expand correspondence. The *British Road to Socialism* discussion was a model for the open argument of politics. (*Comment*, 18 February 1978)

Now these are all useful suggestions. But how could they be implemented without changing the character of the paper as it exists at the moment? Dave Cook does not suggest a way forward. Yet he and others like him must realise that something needs to be done to transform the paper and thus ensure its survival.

The British working class needs a daily paper more today than at other periods in its history. It is confronted with a chronic crisis of the capitalist economic system with all its effects: unemployment, declining living standards, cuts in welfare spending, crisis in education, etc. The most class-conscious militants are aware that militancy on its own is not enough. For isolated militancy can sometimes lead to further redundancies.

What is increasingly being seen as vitally important is an alternative plan to beat the crisis. A discussion on such a plan is now long overdue. A socialist daily has to point the way forward, but it has to do much more. It has to be an educating force, which liberates and enlarges the consciousness of

working people. The lack of a daily paper dedicated to serving the needs of all class-struggle militants is a serious and cruel handicap.

What is needed is a socialist paper which develops new journalistic forms which bridge the cultural gap between the 'popular' and 'quality' press, so carefully cultivated and maintained by the ruling classes in Britain.

What this means is that the Communist Party should relinquish its organisational hold over the paper. After all the *Morning Star* is, formally speaking, not owned by the CP. It is the property of the People's Printing Society Ltd. In 1977 the PPS had 29,552 shareholders of which 28,599 were individuals, 406 trade unions, 39 co-operatives and 508 miscellaneous groups.

A Committee of Management exists with 16 members, but participation from the ranks is virtually nil. Why? Because everyone knows that it is a complete waste of time. Real control is exercised by the King Street gerontocracy.

The situation is now so serious that the CP needs to reconsider its basic approach to the *Star*. It needs to convoke a conference of shareholders and trade unionists to transform it into a campaigning socialist paper and ensuring a genuine independence from King Street. This would not, we hasten to add, mean that it would be taken over by the dreaded 'ultraleft', but it would impart some life into the paper. Naturally the columns of the paper would be open to discussions and debates on socialist strategy, encompassing all positions within the labour movement.

FADING LOYALTY

Coverage of world politics would not be hamstrung by a fading loyalty to the bureaucrats in Moscow or to the tactical prescriptions of the Communist Parties of France or Italy. While British Communists would argue for these positions they would do so from within a much broader political framework. This would necessitate non-CP members on the Editorial Board and staff of the paper. It would mean retaining correspondents abroad, who were not necessarily tied to the line of the local Communist Party, whether they were based in Moscow and Prague or in Madrid and Rome.

It would be utterly sectarian of the CP leadership to adopt a formula based on the principle that the best way to save the *Morning Star* is to either kill it as a daily paper or to let it die a slow and agonising death. That would be to put the narrow interests of a particular organisation before the needs of the working class. The mindless virulence of Left sectarianism which has characterised the far left for a long time has had disastrous repercussions for revolutionary marxism in this country. They are typified by the daily *Newsline*.

If the oppressive impotence of left reformism were now to result in a display of right-sectarianism by the CP, the consequences would be with us for some time. How the crisis of the *Morning Star* is resolved will be an important indication as to the likely evolution of the CP itself.

"The Blind Alley of Reform," by John Ross"

The blind alley of reform

I AGREE with most of Tariq Ali's analysis of the reasons for the declining circulation of the *Morning Star* as outlined in the 20 April issue of *Socialist Challenge* and also his positions on the type of paper that would be good for the working class. However the framework he puts his alternatives in is dangerous and confusing. The article is posed as though the *Morning Star* were produced by some rather confused set of well meaning journalists instead of by a very well defined political force — the Communist Party.

This failure of Tariq Ali to relate the problems of the *Morning Star* to their real roots shows up for example in an extreme fashion in his comparison of that paper to *Newsline*. He talks of this reflecting the 'bizarre politics' of the Workers Revolutionary Party — as indeed it does. He includes in this indictment *Newsline's* support for regimes such as those of Gadaffi in Libya and the Baath in Iraq.

The *Morning Star*, however, supports not merely Gadaffi and the Baath but virtually every similar regime throughout the world. You need only turn to the *Morning Star* any week to discover the wonders of the regimes of Syria, Ethiopia, Indira Gandhi, the SFLP in Sri Lanka, Neto, etc., etc., etc. We furthermore scarcely need add its failure to take any seriously campaigning position against the repression in Eastern Europe and its endorsement of a not inconsiderable amount of it.

As for 'support for strikes' which is the supposedly second key feature of the *Morning Star*, would someone

like to explain to the Leyland toolmakers the great 'support' given by the *Morning Star* in 1977 in urging the calling off of their struggle, or the sabotage by the CP of the campaigns following the Labour Assembly on Unemployment, or the Leyland 'Rank and File' TUC — not to mention their policies in the Second World War in France for the Union of the Left, in Italy on the austerity programme, etc., etc.

Finally we are astonished in an article written by a genuine internationalist to find no reference to Ireland or black people. I assume no one wants to pretend that the 'Bill of Rights/Support the Peace People', refusal to oppose all immigration controls, of the *Morning Star* even remotely corresponds to the interests of the working class and oppressed.

Of course if all these views were really expressed merely by a group of confused journalists we might hope that the experience of the class struggle would convince them to

adopt better policies. It might make sense, as Cde Ali proposes, to campaign for the paper to become 'a socialist paper which develops new journalistic forms which bridge the cultural gap between the "popular" and "quality press" and which was dedicated to serving the needs of all class-struggle militants'. Such a newspaper is undoubtedly sorely needed.

But the politics of the *Morning Star* aren't the product of confusion but of the very well worked out policies of the Communist Party. To try to urge that the Party's paper reflects the real interests of the class struggle is no more realistic than expecting the Labour Party to lead the struggle for socialism. What is needed is to build an alternative to the CP and not a futile fight to change it. To give the militants of the CP or anyone else genuinely looking for a socialist alternative the perspective of reforming the *Morning Star* of the Communist Party is to put them in a complete blind alley.

JOHN ROSS [London]

"Debate on the Morning Star, by Robin Blackburn"

COMMENT

1.

IN HIS letter attacking Tariq Ali's article, on the Morning Star John Ross proposes an utterly sectarian response to the possibility that this paper may cease daily publication. Nowhere does comrade Ross acknowledge that, in the absence of an alternative, the disappearance of the Morning Star would be a setback for the workers movement in this country, just as, in the past, the transition of the Daily Herald from being a trade union paper to being an ordinary capitalist paper was a setback. Those responsible for such losses bear a heavy responsibility for them before the movement as a whole.

So far as John Ross is concerned the Morning Star is a write off because it reflects the politics of the CPGB which are 'very well worked out'. Consequently: 'To try to urge that the party reflects the real interests of the class struggle is no more realistic than expecting the Labour Party to lead the struggle for socialism. What is needed is to build an alternative to the CP and not a futile fight to change it.'

Since both the Labour Party and the Communist Party are working class parties revolutionaries have a duty to argue that they should reflect the real interests of the working class. The only alternative to this is to argue that they should represent ruling class interests, a position which I am sure comrade Ross will see is wrong. Of course revolutionaries would be wrong to suggest or imply that either the Labour, or Communist Party, will lead the struggle for socialism; but Tariq Ali certainly encouraged no such idea in his article on the Star.

The CPGB is, of course, much smaller than the Labour Party and perhaps this is the reason that comrade Ross thinks that it can be ignored or by-passed. If this is what he believes he makes a grave mistake. The CPGB, although very small, hegemonises a vital layer of militants within the labour movement. Most of these militants see themselves as supporters of socialist revolution and class struggle, in Britain and internationally as well.

Comrade Ross writes of the CPGB as if it were simply an organisation for promoting scabbing, and the Star its newsletter. Such notions may go down well in student circles, where the CP has pursued a spectacularly and consistently rightist policy, but they would be rejected as absurd by the majority of class conscious industrial workers. The Star supported the big struggles that toppled Heath and has supported the big national confrontations against the social contract (recently the Firemen's strike and the Miners' claim).

The Star was wrong not to support the Leyland toolmen, but many opponents of the social contract were suspicious of the toolmen's struggle with its demand for separate negotiating rights, concern for differentials and protestations of loyalty to Government policy. Most of the errors made by the Star on the industrial front are similar in that they encourage misconceptions already quite widespread among advanced workers, which would have to be reflected in any authentic workers' newspaper. So far as

DEBATE ON THE ★ Morning Star



THE CHILEAN poet Pablo Neruda's only play, *Splendour and Death of Joaquin Murieta*, is currently receiving its first English production, by TOCAD — Theatre of Contemporary Arabic Drama — in association with the Chile Solidarity Campaign. The group makes imaginative use of extremely restricted facilities — including a cast of only six in which women members play male as well as female roles.

Performances: 18-19 May, Technis (9 York Way, London N7), 24-28 May, Latin American Centre (17 Hoxton Sq, London N1). At 8pm.

routine industrial strikes go the Star supports them, in contrast to the capitalist press? It should also be said that the Star was the only daily newspaper to urge its readers to take part in the ANL Carnival — in front page stories for more than a week beforehand.

John Ross is so carried away by his outrage at the many bad positions adopted editorially by the Star, that he only considers it from the standpoint of whether it is a revolutionary newspaper. Evidently it is not. What Tariq Ali proposed in his article is that the Star should also be judged, as should any workers paper, on the extent to which it faithfully reflects the existing anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles, and the extent to which it is open to the real debates within the workers movement. It was on these essential minimum grounds that he found the Star wanting, and it is undoubtedly its failures by these criteria that help to explain its declining circulation.

John Ross seems to have missed the significance of the reference to Newsline. If it is true that this paper survives thanks to the patronage of Libya or Iraq, then there is an obstacle to changing its politics that has nothing to do with the workers movement. The problems of the Star in part reflect the fact that it does not have extraneous support of this sort and so is in difficulties despite a much larger circulation. It must also be said that by the elementary criteria suggested above, the Newsline is exceptionally mendacious and monolithic, often excelling the Star in these respects. Even so we should hope a fight develops inside the WRP to change all this.

Perhaps the most astonishing claim in comrade Ross's letter is that the CPGB is possessed of 'very well worked out politics' and any prospect of change within it is illusory. Has not John Ross noticed that, in common with other European CPs, the CPGB is passing through a very profound crisis at the present time? That it is being forced to re-examine its relationship to Stalinism, its programme for socialism, and its tactics in the class struggle.

One of the worst failings of the Star has been its attempt to muffle, evade or suppress this discussion; Comment is a more lively publication because it allows at least a modicum of debate. It is ironic that John Ross's letter was published in the same issue as the centre-spread devoted to Louis Althusser's critique of the PCF leadership. Would comrade Ross urge Althusser to leave the Communist Party and abandon futile attempts to change it? If so I'm sure Marchais would agree. Althusser's rejection of monolithism, reformism and Stalinism in the politics of the PCF is, so far, incomplete and it is unclear how far he will press it. But what is clear is that the sort of questions he is raising are by no means confined to a few isolated intellectuals. The Congress of the PSUC (Catalan Communist Party) which voted by a majority against dropping the party's commitment to 'Leninism' is one sign of this; the very considerable opposition inside the CPGB to the British Road to Socialism is another.

To aim to build an 'alternative to the CP' is a rather miserable ambition, since the CPGB is, despite the many good working class

militants within it, manifestly a failure, even on its own terms. Building a socialist alternative that will be a force within national politics and at every level of the class struggle is a much larger aim. But it is most unlikely that it can be achieved if the leadership of the CPGB is allowed to maintain a monolithic, bureaucratic tutelage over a crucial layer of the most class conscious workers.

ROBIN BLACKBURN (South-West London)

[over]

"Debate on the Morning Star, by Paul Fauvet"

2

FROM time to time some pretty shoddy arguments have appeared in the pages of Socialist Challenge, but John Ross's letter attacking the Morning Star scraped the barrel of political dishonesty. [Socialist Challenge 4 May].

We are told that you can open the Star 'any week', and find the paper singing the praises of a number of regimes John Ross doesn't like, thus giving the impression that the Star grants the same regular, sycophantic coverage to Syria, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka etc. as the Newline reserves for Gaddafi's Libya.

In fact, I have never seen an article on Syria in the Star (and the Star attacked the Syrian intervention in Lebanon). Nor does Sri Lanka feature much in the paper — the only article I can recall was a report from the last Congress of the Sri Lanka CP.

As for Ethiopia, the most recent article was a sober assessment of the dispute with Somalia by Jack Woddis, head of the CPGB's International Department, which by no stretch of the imagination could be described as simply adulatory.

Ross tries to pull the wool over his readers' eyes by running a number of regimes together which have nothing in common except that they're not in Europe. Bourgeois politicians like Gandhi and Gaddafi hardly belong in the same sentence as the Ethiopian military let alone the Marxist government in Angola.

Of course, if Ross really thinks that Agostinho Neto is the same as Indira Ghandi, then I'd be interested to hear him argue it (and no doubt a debate could be arranged). I doubt if he will, however, since in doing so he would reveal little more than a crass ignorance of both Angola and India.

In an amazing feat of political gymnastics, Ross goes on to attack the CP's 'sabotage' of the campaign following the Labour Assembly on Unemployment and so on, 'not to mention their policies' in France and Italy! But who is 'they'!

Ross knows perfectly well that the British CP does not determine the policies followed by its French or

Italian counterparts. He is also well aware that there are differing opinions inside the British Party concerning the activities of other Western Europe CPs. But this doesn't matter to Ross since what he's doing is pulling the oldest and most disreputable trick out of the Trotskyist hat — substituting a list of alleged 'betrayals' all over the world for any serious political argument.

As for the bland statement that the call for a Bill of Rights does not remotely correspond to the interests of the Irish working people, I'm afraid that a large number of Irish trade unionists would disagree. (But then, perhaps Ross is merely nostalgic for the good old days when the Red Mole would appear with slogans such as 'Victory to the IRA' emblazoned all over its front page?).

And immigration controls? — The only controls the CP or the Star could support would be non-racist ones, (for example, if there were a genuine overpopulation problem, etc.). We are opposed to every control that has found its way onto the statute book, and to all the ones currently being considered. On this issue, for once, we happened to be in broad agreement with the IMG, a situation evidently not to the liking of Comrade Ross.

Although I would strongly disagree with much of what Tariq Ali wrote in his original piece on the Star, at least that was a serious and reasoned contribution to the debate, and indicated a refreshing willingness to engage in political dialogue.

But Ross's letter is quite the opposite — a piece of crude knockabout that evades the real discussion by resurrecting and duly demolishing some very tired old straw men. Ross appears to represent a tendency in the IMG opposed to that organisation's current rapprochement with reality, and intent on dragging it back to the ghetto of the Transitional Programme. I hope that saner opinions will prevail.

PAUL FAUVET (West London)