

## — Great Power duel in Georgia —

# US, British imperialists sabre rattle against Russia



AP

Left: Hospital destroyed by Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali, capital of South Ossetia. Right: Russian troops arrive in Abkhazia, small province seeking secession from Georgia, 10 August.



Reuters

We reprint below an article which first appeared in *Workers Vanguard* (no 919, 29 August), newspaper of the Spartacist League/US. The article was written shortly after the Georgian regime of Mikheil Saakashvili, supported and assisted by US imperialism, had launched an invasion of the Russian-backed secessionist province of South Ossetia, provoking a swift and devastating counterattack by the Russian military. In the wake of its easy victory, Russia has been re-asserting its dominance in the Caucasus region—giving formal recognition to the independence of South Ossetia and the province of Abkhazia, backed up by thousands of Russian “peacekeeping” troops in so-called “buffer zones” around the two territories. As our article makes clear, the conflict between Russia and Georgia is a power play pure and simple between two equally vicious capitalist regimes.

The outcome of Georgia’s South Ossetia adventure is a stinging humiliation to Saakashvili’s American godfathers and their NATO allies, including Washington’s loyal toady—British imperialism. Enraged by the Russian military successes, prime minister Gordon Brown and his foreign secretary David Miliband—representatives of a Labour government steeped in the blood of countless thousands of Iraqi and Afghan victims of the US/British imperialist occupation—ranted against “Russian aggression”. During a visit to the Ukraine at the end of August, Miliband pompously lectured the Russians on sovereignty and even “territorial integrity, democratic governance and international law”. The racist “war on terror” with its “extraordinary rendition”, torture, Guantánamo Bay and Belmarsh Prison is presumably what Miliband calls “international law”.

## Russian, Georgian workers: the main enemy is at home!

## US/NATO bases out of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Near East!

The capitalist counterrevolution that swept through the USSR and the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe almost two decades ago has been an unparalleled catastrophe for the working class and oppressed internationally. Demonstrating its loyalty to “democratic” British imperialism, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) support-

ed counterrevolution, proclaiming in August 1991 that “Communism has collapsed”, describing this as “a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing” (*Socialist Worker*, 31 August 1991). In response to the recent Russia-Georgia conflict the Stop the War Coalition (StWC), which is dominated by the SWP, responded with the fatuous plea

for British imperialism to stop acting as Washington’s poodle and become a force for world peace. The StWC issued a grovelling letter to Gordon Brown signed by Tony Benn, the SWP’s Lindsey German and Billy Hayes, leader of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) among others which advises Brown that: “The government needs to break decisively with the US-led aggressive expansion of NATO around Russia’s borders.” The letter grotesquely claims that the “end of the Cold War should have been an opportunity to inaugurate a peaceful era in international relations”. And who should ensure international peace? According to StWC: “It should be the policy of the British government to revive this vision of peace. The first step is to break with the war-drive of the US state” (stopwar.org.uk, 28 August).

British imperialism’s vision of “world peace” has already been visited on most of the world—this ruling class wrote the book on imperialist plunder and colonial subjugation! Not for nothing was it said that on the British Empire the sun never set and the blood never dried. There is not a corner of the planet in which the heinous crimes of British imperialism have not left their bloody scars. From the centuries-long occupation of Ireland to the colonial plundering of the Indian subcontinent and the horrors of partition; from the transatlantic slave trade to the carve-up of the Near East and the Opium Wars in China, the British bourgeoisie’s “vision of peace” has always been a catalogue of immense human suffering for the many and untold wealth and luxury for the few.

At the time of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, British imperialism was still top dog and played the leading role in seeking to drown the

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Sky News

August 19: British foreign secretary David Miliband (left), in show of support to Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia.

# Georgia...

(Continued from page 1)

young workers state in blood. As our *Workers Vanguard* article explains, one of the most infamous crimes of the British ruling class at that time was carried out in the Caucasus where 26 Bolshevik leaders of the Baku Soviet were captured and executed at the behest of the British in September 1918. The British had moved into Georgia at the invitation of the Menshevik government, which was a counterrevolutionary beachhead against Soviet Russia. In his searing 1922 pamphlet *Between Red and White*, Trotsky shows that the hostility of the Social Democrats and Labourites to the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia was part and parcel of their support to their own imperialist bourgeoisies, justifying and applauding even the filthiest of their crimes. The SWP stands in the pro-imperialist, anti-Bolshevik tradition of the traitors of the Second International and of the Labour Party in Britain.

Today British imperialism, by virtue of long decline and devastating victory in two world wars, has been reduced to a decrepit third-rate power which has no other choice than slavish allegiance to US imperialism to protect its vast wealth and interests abroad. In Iraq and Afghanistan today the military top brass are offering the "expertise" obtained by the British Army in almost four decades of subjugation of the oppressed Catholics in Northern Ireland. We demand: all British troops out of Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland! The task of the Spartacist League/Britain is to build a revolutionary workers party that fights for socialist revolution that will put rapacious British imperialism out of business for good and establish a federation of workers republics in the British Isles.

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On the night of 7 August, the Georgian government of Mikheil Saakashvili ordered its US-armed and-trained army to invade South Ossetia, a small ethnically distinct province that effectively seceded from Georgia under

Russian protection over 15 years ago. The next day, Russia counterattacked and, sweeping through central Georgia, came within 25 miles of its capital Tbilisi, thus demonstrating its intention to re-establish itself as the dominant power in the region. Russian forces have now withdrawn to a security perimeter in the area around South Ossetia and asserted their intention to maintain a permanent "peacekeeping" presence in the province.

The conflict between Russia and Georgia, the latter backed by the US, is nothing other than pure power-play politics on both sides. Thus our position is one of revolutionary defeatism: the class interests of the workers of Georgia and Russia lie in a struggle to overthrow their respective capitalist rulers through socialist revolution. The main enemy is at home!

The conflict in Georgia is in no way analogous to the Russian invasions of Chechnya in 1994 and again in late 1999 after several years of de facto Chechen independence. In both those cases, the imperialists did not intervene militarily and the conflict centred on defence of the national rights of the Chechen people against Russia's murderous attempt to reassert its subjugation of the province. We called for military defence of the Chechen forces and for defence of Chechnya's independence. We forthrightly declared: Defeat Russian invasion of Chechnya! (see "Independence for Chechnya! Russian Troops Out Now!" *Workers Vanguard* no 840, 21 January 2005).

The situation of the Georgian government vis-à-vis Vladimir Putin's Russia today is vastly different. Saakashvili was groomed to be a puppet of US imperialism from at least 1999, when he attended a State Department "leadership program" in Washington. He came to power in 2004 in one of a series of colour-coded "revolutions" financed and engineered by the US in order to counter Russian influence in the region and install pliant pro-American regimes. Washington has been strident in pushing its West European allies to accept Georgia (and Ukraine) as full-fledged members of NATO, and Tbilisi has the distinction of being the only major city in the world linked to its international airport with a highway named after US president George W Bush! Saakashvili's army has been built up and trained by the US and its Israeli allies. And Georgia, with a population of fewer than five million, has a contingent of 2000 troops in Iraq—the third biggest after the US and Britain—that was airlifted back to Georgia by the US following the Russian counterattack.

The *New York Times* (13 August) claimed in a headline that Georgia had received "mixed U.S. messages" regarding its planned invasion of South Ossetia. But a photo in the same issue belied this claim. It showed five regional US lackeys from Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania—long labeled "captive nations" of the "Soviet empire" by the US imperialists—on an orchestrated solidarity visit to Saakashvili in Tbilisi

four days after Russia counterattacked. The US military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* (9 August) reported that a NATO military exercise in Georgia, including a thousand US troops, was completed on the eve of the Georgian invasion. The Georgian army was also aided by Israeli military "advisers". The well-informed Parisian satirical journal *Le Canard Enchaîné* (20 August) reported:

"The role of the American advisers was perhaps not limited to giving technical support to the Georgian artillery. If what is being said at the Joint Chiefs of Staff headquarters in Paris can be believed, it was following a suggestion by these U.S. officers that the Georgians, even before the advance of their troops, launched hundreds of surface-to-surface missiles at the Ossetian capital."

Today, capitalist Russia is no longer the economic basket case it was in the years following the 1991-92 capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet degenerated workers state. Enriched by petrodollars from the high price of oil, Putin has been able to rebuild Russia's military and make it clear that he is prepared to challenge the US in reasserting Russia's role as the great power in the region. On 26 August, Russia formally recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, another secessionist province.

Russia's humiliating slap down of Washington's Tbilisi client provoked a frenzy of vituperation in US imperialist circles. Bush ludicrously intoned that invading a foreign country "is unacceptable in the 21st century"—this only days before the US occupiers carried out a bloody massacre of some 95 Afghan civilians, including 50 children! The US then finalised a long-planned deal to install an anti-missile "defence" system in Poland, the first in a former Soviet bloc nation, and to deploy American troops there to operate the system. So much for Washington's claims that such an anti-missile defence is aimed not at Russia but Iran, which has neither intercontinental ballistic missiles nor nuclear warheads!

Capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union paved the way to the emergence of a "one superpower world", emboldening the US imperialists—no longer challenged by Soviet military might—in their military adventures abroad. The US has since established bases across Central Asia and elsewhere on Russia's periphery, aimed at the encirclement not only of capitalist Russia, which is still the second largest nuclear power, but also of China, the largest and most powerful of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states. We call for unconditional military defence of China—and the other deformed workers states of Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam—against imperialism and internal counterrevolution and demand: **US/NATO bases out of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Near East!**

The Caucasus and Central Asia are also pivotal for US and Western European access to Caspian and Central Asian oil and gas. The huge 1100-mile-long Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, one

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TROTSKY

## The Bolsheviks and the Caucasus

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the outbreak of the Civil War, the social-democratic Mensheviks set up an "independent" bourgeois state in Georgia under the aegis of first German and then British imperialism. Bloodily suppressing the Georgian Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks used "independence" as a smokescreen for collaboration with the imperialists in their drive to overthrow Soviet rule in Russia and assist the counterrevolutionary White armies. Entering



LENIN

Georgia in early 1921 in defence of the revolution, the Red Army rapidly swept away the discredited Mensheviks and their imperialist patrons. As laid out by Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky in his 1922 work, *Between Red and White*, Soviet power laid the basis for transcending inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus.

We do not only recognise, but we also give full support to the principle of self-determination, wherever it is directed against feudal, capitalist and imperialist states. But wherever the fiction of self-determination, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, becomes a weapon directed against the proletarian revolution, we have no occasion to treat this fiction differently from the other "principles" of democracy perverted by capitalism....

The epoch of Tsarism was characterised by barbarous nationalist pogroms in the Caucasus, where the Armenian-Tartar butcheries were periodical events. Those sanguinary outbursts under the iron rule of Tsarism were the expression of centuries of internecine struggles of the Trans-Caucasian peoples.

The epoch of so-called democracy gave to the nationalist struggle a much more pronounced and organised character. In the beginning nationalist armies were formed, which were hostile to each other, and which often attacked each other. The attempt to create a bourgeois federal democratic Trans-Caucasian Republic proved a dismal failure. The Federation fell to pieces five weeks after its inception. A few months later the "democratic" neighbours were quite openly at war with each other. This fact alone settles the question: for if democracy was as incapable as Tsarism of creating conditions for a peaceful cohabitation of the Trans-Caucasian peoples, it was evidently imperative to adopt other methods.

The Soviet power alone has established peace and national intercourse between them. At the elections to the Soviets, the Baku and Tbilisi workers elect a Tartar, an Armenian, or a Georgian, irrespective of their nationality. In Trans-Caucasia, the Moslem, Armenian, Georgian, and Russian Red regiments live side by side. They are imbued with the conviction that they are one army, and no power on earth will make them move against one another. On the other hand, they will defend Soviet Trans-Caucasia against any and every external foe.

—Leon Trotsky, *Between Red and White* (1922)

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For a Socialist United States of Europe!

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# The fight against Labourite reformism in the post-Soviet period

The Spartacist League/Britain held its 21st National Conference in August. This regular and decisive conference critically assessed the work of the section within the framework of the Fifth International Conference of the International Communist League in 2007 (see “Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period”, *Spartacist* [English edition] no 60, Autumn 2007). A central task of the SL/B conference was to review our position on the character of New Labour today as well as to examine the origins of the section and the history of our tactics towards Labour as a bourgeois workers party. The conference preparation included discussion on the market reforms in China as well as an assessment of our campaign in Britain for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. In addition to two internal bulletins, pre-conference reading included an extensive list of our articles on the Labour Party from the early 1970s as well as early internal bulletins and other records of the origins of the section. The SL/B conference discussion benefited from the attendance of a significant number of comrades from other European sections as well as from the SL/US.

Citing a founding document of the SL/B which stated that “Marxists must take the history of their own movement seriously” (“In defence of the revolutionary programme”, 1978, reprinted in *Workers Hammer* no 203, Summer 2008), the Conference Document asserted that: “Historically and today, the strategic task in the construction of a revolutionary party in Britain is to break workers from illusions in Labourite parliamentary reformism.” A panel discussion on the pre-history and founding of the SL/B and on the development of our tactics towards the Labour Party in the tumultuous decade of the 1970s and up to and including the great miners strike of 1984-85, was a highlight of the conference. (See article page 6.)

The Conference Document noted that the period we face continues to be shaped by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 and the retrogression of consciousness that this generated interna-

tionally. The US and British imperialists are bogged down militarily in Afghanistan and the British military chiefs increasingly regard Iraq as a lost cause. Sentiment among the imperialists, particularly in the US, to cut their losses in Iraq is often motivated by a desire to reinforce military capabilities directed against China, the largest and most powerful of the remaining countries where capitalist rule was overthrown. The Conference Document underlined “the strategic importance of our position of *unconditional military*

marketing their expertise in “counterinsurgency”—ie backing the viciously anti-Catholic Orange statelet’s brutal police force and the Loyalist paramilitaries—as a valuable commodity for the US imperialist overlords in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At home Labour’s viciously racist “war on terror” is wielded as a club against minorities—particularly Muslims—to augment the repressive powers of the state. The “war on terror” also targets the black minority population and is ultimately aimed at the whole

definitively with the trade unions, on the other hand, it does not act like a classic social-democratic party. New Labour today is moribund as a reformist party of the working class.”

## Labourite reformism: defined by opposition to Bolshevik Revolution

The “Blair project” took shape in the aftermath of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991-92, a defeat of historic proportions for the working and oppressed masses of the entire world.



Spartacist League contingent at September 2002 protest against US/British imperialism’s war moves against Iraq. British troops (right) in Southern Afghanistan killed 21 people in June 2006.



defence of the Chinese, North Korean, Vietnamese and Cuban workers states against imperialism and domestic counterrevolution” and our call for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracies.

In Britain, the signature of the era of Labour in government, which is apparently drawing to a close, is the imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan which have resulted in countless thousands of deaths. With the British military overstretched in adventures abroad, its brutal operation in Northern Ireland has been scaled down and the butchers of Bloody Sunday are now

working class. Blacks are at least six times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than are whites, and Asians are twice as likely. The hysteria being whipped up over “knife crime” is aimed at criminalising black youth, while black deaths in police custody barely even make it into the news. Britain’s chasm between rich and poor has grown dramatically under Labour, while the country has the most restrictive anti-union laws of any advanced capitalist country. Labour has also generated a climate of hostility to immigrants who face dramatically increased state repression and racist attacks. The Conference Document noted that the impending economic recession “will have devastating consequences for the living standards of the working class and poor. It will disproportionately affect immigrants and minorities who are among the poorest in society.”

To prove he is as Blairite as Blair, Brown hosted Margaret Thatcher at No 10 and abolished the “10p tax” (the lowest income tax bracket) thus increasing the burden on low-paid workers. Brown is also committed to the “Blair project” of transforming Labour into an outright bourgeois party. Regarding the transformation of Labour, the Conference Document noted that the Labour Party in Britain today is somewhat anomalous: “On the one hand, it has not severed its ties

Signalling his commitment to transforming the Labour Party into an outright bourgeois party, Tony Blair abolished “Clause IV”—Labour’s pretence to “socialism”—from Labour’s constitution in 1994. Blair took advantage of the fact that the industrial proletariat had suffered major defeats during the Thatcher years, the most significant of which was the defeat of the heroic year-long miners strike of 1984-85 which accelerated the process of de-industrialisation in Britain. Blair’s abolition of “Clause IV” both fed off and contributed to the bourgeoisie’s ideological campaign that “communism is dead”. This theme has been widely embraced and echoed by the reformists around the world who have been openly discarding their “socialist” facade in the post-Soviet period.

As our Conference Document noted: “Having aided the imperialist drive to destroy the East European deformed workers states and the USSR, yesterday’s ostensibly revolutionary organisations have become outright opponents of the revolutionary internationalist workers movement. These groups have bought into the predominant myth that class struggle against the capitalist order is a thing of the past; the working class is irrelevant as a factor for social change and new October Revolutions are off the historic agenda.”

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Toby Madden/Independent

Labour’s “war on terror” fuels attacks on Muslims: East London mosque had windows broken following attack by racists, July 2005.



## Conference...

(Continued from page 3)

In parallel to the process of transforming Labour, dramatic changes are taking place in the configuration of the workers movement and the left in other European countries, notably in France and Italy where the Communist Parties were once hegemonic. The majority wing of the old Italian Communist Party has passed through social democracy and with its fusion with Prodi's Christian Democrats now appears to have become an outright bourgeois party. In France the collapse of the Communist Party has created a vacuum which the Pabloite Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) is seeking to exploit. In Germany a new social-democratic organisation—the Left Party (Die Linke)—has been created through the merger of the Oskar Lafontaine wing of the social-democratic SPD with the ex-Stalinists of the PDS. Both the Taaffeites and the German co-thinkers of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), to different degrees, have joined it. In Greece, a “regroupment” around the Synaspismos ex-CPers has attracted much of the Trotskyoid left, while in Italy the Pabloite Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) and Fernando and Grisolia's Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori have left Rifondazione Comunista now that it is widely discredited. The LCR is formally junking the terms “revolutionary” and “communist” from its name, which befits the practice of these reformists who long since reconciled themselves with the bourgeois order. The LCR is following in the footsteps of the British SWP which disavowed any pretence to “socialism” or even to secularism in the founding programme of the Respect coalition.

opponents are firmly in the camp of the Second International which has been a handmaiden of its “own” bourgeoisie since 1914 and a bulwark of anti-Communism since the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917. This point was forcefully made by Trotsky when he wrote:

“The Second International—and what is said about the latter applies also to its shadow on the Left, the two-and-a-half International—exerts every effort to prove to the workers that, since the Soviet government observes neither ‘right’ nor ‘democracy’, the toiling masses of Russia deserve no support in their struggle against the world’s usurers. We committed our most flagrant act of disrespect to ‘right’ and ‘democracy’, as everybody knows, by the October Revolution. It represents our original sin.”

—Between Red and White, 1922

The Labour Party was founded a century ago by the trade union bureaucracy as a “bourgeois workers party”. While saddled with a pro-capitalist leadership and programme, its membership consisted primarily of the trade unions which were an integral part of the party's structure. The Labour Party only became nominally “socialist” in 1918 with the adoption of Clause IV. Far from being a commitment to socialism, this was a conscious ploy by the Labour and trade union leaders to dupe the working masses. Labour's role proved vital to the British capitalist order during the tumultuous upsurge internationally inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. During the revolutionary upheavals in Britain that peaked during 1919-21, when capitalist rule was profoundly shaken, Labour's socialist facade allowed its treacherous leaders to contain the mass struggles within the framework of the capitalist order. Clause IV's pledge about “common ownership of the means of produc-

Keeping up appearances: Like Blair before him, Brown welcomes Thatcher to Downing Street, September 2007.



to exacerbate the contradictions between the aspirations and objective interests of the working class base, centrally organised in the trade unions, and the policies and actions of the social-patriotic leadership. We wish to win the base to our programme and to the building of a Marxist party in **counterposition** to the Labour Party, in the course of mobilising for class struggle and through the exposure of Labour treachery by the communist vanguard.”

—“Revolutionaries and the Labour Party”, *Spartacist* [English edition] no 33, Spring 1982

The document further noted: “Within this strategic perspective, various tactical options are open to an intelligent revolutionary organisation, to be employed according to the circumstances. At all times we maintain strict **programmatic** independence from **all wings of the Labour bureaucracy**.”

Regarding New Labour, our recent conference upheld the position adopted in April 2002 in an IEC motion which said (in part):

“The split of the working-class base of the Labour Party from the pro-capitalist tops is not taking place in the way envisioned by Lenin through leftward motion in the proletariat, but in reverse. Tony Blair's Christian New Labour leadership has taken the initiative to break from its proletarian base and even the trade union bureaucracy which surmounts the base. Blair has gone some ways down the road in his proclaimed project of transforming the British Labour Party into an analogue of the U.S. Democratic Party, a bourgeois party. This process is not finished and a working hypothesis that this party has been transformed from a bourgeois workers party to a capitalist party needs to be tested in the course of social and political struggles.”

Labour's link to the unions has been integral to its character as a bourgeois workers party, a link which must be severed in the process of rendering it an outright bourgeois party. For some time now the Labour leadership's efforts to separate the party from the unions have been stalled, mainly because Labour's donations from wealthy businessmen are drying up and Labour is once again dependent on the affiliated unions for some 90 per cent of its funding. Since 2002 several unions have voted on disaffiliation but so far only two unions have separated—the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the RMT. The larger unions remain affiliated.

The transformation of the Labour Party is an unfinished process and is thus reversible. However our conference noted that a reversal—which would involve ousting both the Brown and Blairite cliques—is an unlikely outcome. To determine whether the

changes in the Labour Party have been qualitative requires a **test**, which has not yet taken place. The series of strikes by the FBU which began in late 2002, during the build-up to the imperialist invasion of Iraq, may well have provided a decisive test of whether Labour remained a bourgeois workers party: the Blair government responded with a threat to send the army across FBU picket lines to seize and drive fire engines.

Long before Blair, Labour governments in the past have engaged in strike-breaking. But as opposed to an openly bourgeois party, if Labour were to actually smash a union this would mean destroying an integral part of itself. Social-democratic parties thus prefer to rely on class collaboration by the reformist trade union leaders to betray the working class in struggle rather than violent repression. This is the meaning of Trotsky's description of the Labourite bureaucracy as the “inward policeman” which acts as an alternative to the “outward policeman” of naked state repression. When the firefighters strike was beginning to bite, then-FBU head Andy Gilchrist declared in response to threats of army strikebreaking: “Firefighters are neither prepared nor looking to hinder the armed forces.” Such identification with the armed forces as “our boys” and defence of the “national interest” is the backbone of Labour reformism. It was key to Gilchrist calling off the strike thus averting a showdown with the Blair government, the outcome of which could have decisively tested Labour's relationship to the trade unions more broadly.

Our conference affirmed that the call to split the base from the top of the Labour Party is not applicable in the present pass. At the same time it stressed that building fractions in the trade unions is central to our strategic goal of breaking the working class politically from Labourite reformism. The Conference Document affirmed the validity today of the statement in the 2002 IEC motion that: “In the long run, to split the base from the top in a social-democratic party can not be achieved without a base of support in the trade unions.” This demands the construction of a revolutionary opposition within the trade unions, with the aim of transforming them into instruments of revolutionary class struggle, not of class collaboration as they are under their present reformist leadership.

This aim is in contrast to the reformists' tailing of “left” trade union leaders. The



Glasgow firefighters during 2002 strikes, sold out by FBU leadership to avoid showdown with New Labour on eve of Iraq war.

The Labourite pseudo-Trotskyists in Britain today—from the SWP to Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party, the Alliance for Workers Liberty and Workers Power and Permanent Revolution—all supported counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This is a logical outgrowth of their Labourite programme which was defined historically by visceral opposition to the Soviet Union and loyalty to “democratic” British imperialism. The SL/B conference stressed the need to educate our cadre in the understanding that our reformist opponents' loyalty to “democratic” British imperialism—expressed ad nauseam in proposals to pressure the Labour government, peddling illusions in the “Mother of Parliaments”, claiming that British “bobbies” are “workers in uniform” and embracing British imperialism's armed forces as “our boys”—is not separate from, but integral to their hostility to the dictatorship of the proletariat. These Labourite

tion” translated into illusions that socialism could be achieved through nationalisations of industry by a Labour government—ie leaving the capitalist state intact. The illusion that the interests of the workers and oppressed can be served through parliament is central to the false consciousness of the British working class historically.

### Leninists and the Labour Party

The position on the British Labour Party which we have held for many years was summed up in a 1981 *Tasks and Perspectives* document of the SL/B which stated that:

“The Labour Party is a **bourgeois workers party**. Its formation at the beginning of the century was a deformed and organisational expression of independent political action by the working class separate from the open capitalist parties. The Labour Party has always been saddled with a pro-bourgeois leadership with a maximum programme of parliamentary reform. We seek



SWP-built Stop the War Coalition (StWC) provided a cover for the treachery of “left” union bureaucrats such as Gilchrist and Bob Crow of the RMT by allowing them to blow hot air about their opposition to Blair’s invasion of Iraq, despite the fact that the FBU leadership buckled precisely *because* the firefighters strike had the potential to disrupt British imperialism’s military preparations for the invasion of Iraq. The StWC is a popular-frontist formation that shares the Labourite defence of “our boys” in Iraq and Afghanistan and which provides a safety valve for the British bourgeoisie by mobilising mass opposition to the imperialist occupation on the basis of bourgeois parliamentary pressure politics.

## Arthur Scargill, the miners strike and the Labour Party

The need for re-arming the SL/B on the history of our tactics towards Labour arose from a public intervention against Arthur Scargill in London in 2006 in which we criticised Scargill for not having split the Labour Party during the miners strike of 1984-85. This criticism, which was previously raised in an intervention in Dublin and in *Workers Hammer* no 68, April 1985, was not our position during the miners strike. The Conference Document stated that it showed a “misunderstanding of our strategy and tactics towards the Labour Party historically” and “ran counter to what our task was: setting the base against the tops in the Labour Party”. We should have criticised Scargill for his position on the Labour Party, noting for example that in October 1984 Kinnock was elected unanimously as party leader—ie with the support of Scargill—while Scargill and Tony Benn pushed unity with this strikebreaker in the hopes of getting a Labour government, at the expense of the strike.

Scargill is often to the left of the SWP and the Taaffeites. When his Socialist Labour Party (SLP) stood candidates in opposition to New Labour and refused to give any support to New Labour in any area, we extended critical support to SLP candidates in 1997 and again in 2001. But our programme is fundamentally counterposed to Scargill and the SLP’s old Labour reformism which is based on protectionism for British industry and calls for nationalisation of industry through parliament. His hostility to our goal of new October Revolutions was summed up in his reply to us during the election campaign

in 1997 to the effect that he didn’t want to hear about “Lenin and Trotsky on a hillside in 1917”.

## The campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal

A session of the conference was devoted to our work in Britain to free Mumia, a black political prisoner, former Black Panther and MOVE supporter and working journalist who was framed up for the 1981 killing of a Philadelphia police officer and sent to death row. The campaign has gained us small but significant links with trade union officials and activists who identify Mumia’s struggle as their own, unequivocally say he is innocent and call for his freedom. The Partisan



August 1984: Miners’ pickets battle with scabs and cops in Yorkshire coalfield.

Defence Committee’s May 2007 rally was instrumental in re-establishing Mumia’s case as that of the world’s foremost class-war prisoner among left and trade union circles in Britain. The Scottish TUC has issued a statement of support while activists in the RMT and the CWU in London and the South East have been fighting for Mumia’s freedom over many years.

In addition to our polemics against reliance on the capitalist state, the Conference Document stressed the need to combat Labourite reformism, the dominant form of false consciousness among those union activists who support Mumia and noted that recently “the campaign has also brought us intersection with black nationalist groups in London. This means we must combat the reactionary programme of black

separatism, which is based on despair of fighting for equality and integration.”

## Grappling with China’s “market reforms”

The Conference Document noted that the imperialist powers have been steadily ratcheting up the military pressures on China—from US-Japanese military co-operation over Taiwan to the construction of a ring of US bases in Central Asia to the building up of the US base at Guam in the Pacific to American assistance to nuclear-armed India. Meanwhile the anti-Communist ideological campaign by the Labour government, backed by the reformist left, now targets China for everything from “human rights” abuses to its sup-

USSR, which was aided by the Chinese Stalinists’ criminal anti-Soviet alliance with US imperialism, China has become the main target of anti-Communist imperialist revanchism. The unconditional military defence of China against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution is central to our Marxist perspective in this period. An IEC Memorandum adopted in February 2008 stated:

“The overwhelming political pressure we face is in the direction of writing off China as capitalist, which is the explicit or tacit position of most of the reformist left. A contributing factor in our own disorientation was that every aspect of the market reforms was seen as negative. In fact, the impact has been contradictory as reflected in the rapid economic growth, bringing 250 million people out of dire poverty and creating the biggest industrial proletariat in the world.”

Internal discussions on China prior to the SL/B conference focused on the section’s difficulty in assimilating the international corrective to our previously one-sided and undialectical appreciation of the market reforms in China. This corrective was codified in a motion passed at a March 2006 IEC plenum which criticised the following formulation that had appeared in our press: “It is the ‘socialist’ (i.e., collectivist) aspects that are responsible for the positive economic developments in China in recent years. And it is the market aspects of China’s economy that are responsible for the negative developments.”

The motion also noted that: “By abstracting the ‘collectivist aspects’ from the ‘market aspects’ of the Chinese ‘socialist market economy’ the formulation is at best misleading. It tends to obliterate the qualitative difference between our program for a centralized planned economy with workers democracy and the Chinese bureaucracy’s command-centralized planned economy (which included the ideological posture of autarky or ‘self-reliance’) under Mao” and concluded: “What fundamentally distinguishes the Trotskyist program from that of the Stalinist bureaucrats whether of the Mao or Deng/Hu variety is our struggle for international proletarian revolution as counterposed to ‘socialism in one country.’”

## “Free Tibet”: rallying cry for counterrevolution in China

Support for the counterrevolutionary riots in Tibet in March by the Labourite reformists of the SWP, Peter Taaffe’s

*continued on page 8*

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# Spartacism in Britain

## Origins and development

A special session of the Spartacist League/Britain's National Conference in August was devoted to a panel discussion on the pre-history of the section and our tactics towards the Labour Party roughly spanning the decade from 1974, when miners strikes brought down Edward Heath's Conservative government, to the great miners strike of 1984-85. The presentations and discussion involved comrades from different countries and political backgrounds.

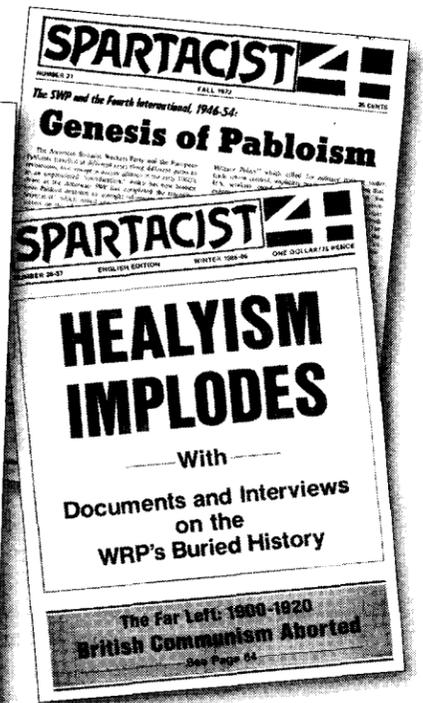
The broad frame of reference for the panel discussion is described in the article in our last issue, "Thirty years of the Spartacist League/Britain" (*Workers Hammer* no 203, Summer 2008) which made the point that the founding of the Spartacist League/Britain in 1978 represented a significant step in our struggle to reforge the Fourth International. Central to our international perspective was the fight against Pabloism, the revisionist current led by Michel Pablo which programmatically destroyed Trotsky's Fourth International in 1951-53. Pabloism was characterised by a renunciation of the need for revolutionary leadership of the working class, ie Trotskyist parties, and an adaptation to the existing social-democratic, Stalinist and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships. The Pabloite revisionists were opposed by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the US, led by James Cannon, albeit belatedly and on their own national terrain. In 1953 Cannon's SWP split from Pablo and, together with other anti-Pabloite forces internationally—centrally the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste and Gerry Healy's British followers, went on to form the International Committee (IC).

But with the Cuban Revolution the SWP (US) embraced Pablo's revisionism and carried out a reunification with Pablo's forces in 1963 which was to result in the United Secretariat (USec). Our tendency originated as the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) that was expelled in 1963 from the SWP in the US and went on to found the Spartacist League/US. A central question on which the RT

was formed was opposition to the SWP's abandonment of the fight for a Trotskyist party in Cuba following the overthrow of capitalism by Castro's petty-bourgeois forces (see "Genesis of Pabloism", *Spartacist* [English edition] no 21, Fall 1972). The fight against Pabloism was key to the survival of Trotskyism and the founding cadre of the RT initially stood in political solidarity with the IC. However, as was stated during the panel discussion, far from fighting against Pabloite liquidationism the British section of the IC—led by Gerry Healy, an unprincipled political bandit—was itself mired in Labourite reformism.

In preparation for the panel discussion comrade Jon Branche wrote a letter noting that the political framework for the international expansion of our tendency was laid out in the document "Declaration for the Organizing of an International Trotskyist Tendency" of July 1974 (published in *Spartacist* [English edition] no 23, Spring 1977) which stated: "The Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand and the Spartacist League of the United States declare themselves to be the nucleus for the early crystallization of an international Trotskyist tendency based upon the 1966 Declaration of Principles and dedicated to the rebirth of the Fourth International."

Branche's letter stressed that our understanding of the contradictions of the Labour Party in Britain as a bourgeois workers party "had been codified or at least honed in the course of intervening against left Pabloite groups, particularly in Germany and Austria". A speaker on the panel, comrade Herbert Adler, stressed that for our German section, the understanding that bourgeois workers parties embody a contradiction



Spartacist journal no 23, Spring 1977 (left); no 21, Fall 1972 (top right); and no 36-37, Winter 1985-86

and that our strategic perspective is to split such parties, was a key question. Adler quoted from a March 1972 letter by W Moore and James Robertson of the Spartacist League/US to left Pabloites in Germany who argued that the SPD was a bourgeois party, which asserted:

"So far as we know both factions in your split characterize the SPD as a bourgeois technocratic party (akin to the U.S. Democratic Party). We consider this not merely wrong but that without a correct position on this question there cannot be a viable strategy for proletarian revolution in Germany. Only the low level of the class struggle in post-war Germany inhibits a manifest recognition that the SPD is a reformist (i.e. both bourgeois and proletarian) party which must at some point be destroyed. If the revolutionists ignore it, the SPD will employ its historically-evolved authority among the workers to disrupt and defeat the next revolutionary onslaught. The SPD's destruction must be sought at the appropriate junctures through intervention to sharpen inner differentiation to resolve,

i.e. split, into its essential bourgeois and proletarian elements, the latter organized into or led by a Leninist party."

Among the comrades attending the panel discussion was comrade Kurt Weiss who was part of a regroupment from the Bolshevik-Leninists in Austria who in 1974 signed a "Declaration of Political Basis for Common Work in Germany" with the Spartacist League/US. The declaration upheld the decisions of the first four congresses of the Communist International and the Transitional Programme of 1938, the founding document of Trotsky's Fourth International and agreed on: "Unconditional defense of the degenerated or deformed workers states against capitalist imperialism", which it said "must be coupled with recognition of the necessity for political revolution against the bureaucracies of all these states, from Moscow and East Berlin to Belgrade, Hanoi, Havana and Peking" (*Workers Vanguard* no 39, 1 March 1974).

Another panellist, comrade James Robertson—a founding member of the Revolutionary Tendency—opened his remarks by saying: "The Second World War led to the fragmentation of the Trotskyist movement internationally, by the combination of a very sharp international fight between Shachtman and Burnham and Trotsky and Cannon, followed shortly by the murder of Trotsky who was overwhelmingly the principal head of the international communists. The work that we have undertaken was an attempt to undo this political and organisational fragmentation." Emphasising the importance we attached to breaking out of the US, he said we knew that if we became content with a mere domestic existence, that was already a profound programmatic deformation that would render us sterile as a communist movement. In the abstract we would never have dreamed of New Zealand, Israel and Sweden as



July 1972: imprisoned dockers known as Pentonville Five are released after mass strike wave leading to social crisis.



the central axis of world Trotskyism, and also later Austria, the last of the Hapsburg regime. But as Robertson said, that's where individuals popped up and from there we proceeded to get to places we regarded as especially central, above all France, which was the unquestioned centre of the world's purported Trotskyism as result of the explosive consequences of the events of 1968 and indeed for a long time previously.

Describing a visit to Brussels to intervene at a USec conference in 1970, Robertson noted that Belgium gave us the first intimations of what happens when two nations—the Flemish and the Walloons—are forced together within one state power. This proved to be very helpful later when we looked at a much larger situation of two nations—English Canada and Quebec—forced together in one state power. He noted that we set up a station in London to “seek to find roots and involvement in British society”. This came to fruition when the London Spartacist Group fused with a faction from the Workers Socialist League to found the Spartacist League/Britain.

Marxists v Labourism

The SL/B Conference Document asserted that: “Historically and today, the strategic task in the construction of a revolutionary party in Britain is to break workers from illusions in Labourite parliamentary reformism.” The panel discussion confirmed that it was the sheer political bankruptcy of the old Labour reformist programme that led to the rise of Margaret Thatcher and of New Labour. The difficult conditions under which British workers struggle today are part of the legacy of the defeated miners strike of 1984-85, after which Thatcher vindictively began the shutdown of the entire coal-mining industry, whose workforce had been the militant backbone of the proletariat in Britain for decades. The whole panoply of anti-union laws imposed by Thatcher and maintained intact by New Labour are the outcome of treacherous defeats of the working class in tumultuous class battles that crippled the country in the early 1970s.

The panellist who addressed this period, comrade George Crawford, said that the *Workers Vanguard* articles in this period read like a textbook on what a bourgeois workers party is and how a small communist group “tactically draws out the contradictions and attempts to intervene in one hell of a lot of class struggle”. This period actually began in 1964 with the election of the Harold Wilson Labour government. British imperialism, having lost its hegemonic power, was in profound decline economically and unable to compete with its European rivals. The only way for the capitalist rulers to increase competitiveness was by forcibly reducing the wages of British working people. The Wilson government had to attack Labour's own base and in 1969 Labour minister Barbara Castle produced the document “In Place of Strife” that proposed wage controls, strike ballots and a ban on secondary picketing. This was overwhelmingly rejected by the trade unions, particularly by the very strong shop stewards committees, and Wilson backed down. In 1970 Edward Heath's Conservatives were elected and attempted to break the unions with Heath's 1971 Industrial Relations Act. This was met with the

biggest strike wave in the country since the 1926 general strike. Building workers, printers and engineers took strike action, as did the miners, railwaymen and dockers—three unions, Crawford noted, which had immense significance and power in an island economy that was dependent on coal, transport and docks. A decade later we would call upon these three unions to “shut down the country” during the 1984-85 miners strike.

As Crawford noted, the 1972 arrest of five dockers' shop stewards who were imprisoned in Pentonville jail was met with a mass upsurge of working-class protest. The level of militancy and radicalisation of the powerful unions scared the TUC into calling for a one-day general strike. When the government quickly released the “Pentonville

the miners voted for all-out strike. With the country in a profound economic and political crisis, Heath called elections for February 1974 for the explicit purpose of smashing the miners strike. At the time we said:

“What is required is a unified labor offensive to defeat the Heath government and reverse the entire complex of its recent anti-labor economic measures. This means a general strike centering on (though certainly not limited to) ending the shortened work-week/lockout, breaking state wage controls and winning major wage gains backed by a full cost-of-living adjustment.”

—*Workers Vanguard* no 38, 15 February 1974

As Crawford pointed out, “there was no alternative leadership in Britain at this point, and a general strike can easily go over into an insurrectionary situation in

Labour won again and in 1976, James Callaghan took over from Wilson as prime minister. Callaghan later entered a coalition with the Liberals, an outright bourgeois party. During Callaghan's Lib-Lab pact we stressed our opposition in principle to voting for workers parties in popular-front coalitions: we had a policy of conditional non-support to Labour in elections, that is, we refused to vote for candidates unless and until they repudiated Labour's coalitionism. Following a massive strike wave known as the “Winter of Discontent”, in May 1979 Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government was elected. We said “No vote to Labour!” in 1979 and stated that Labour's betrayals had led to the viciously anti-union Thatcher government.

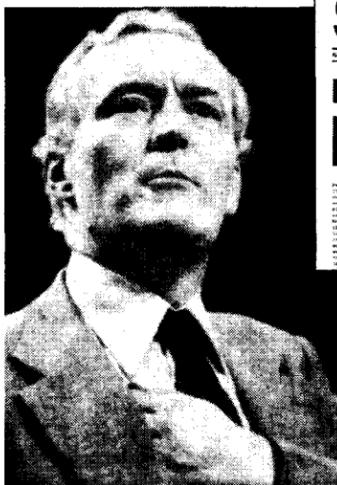
The rebirth of British Trotskyism

The panellist addressing the founding of the SL/B, comrade Jo Woodward, had been a member of the Trotskyist Faction of the Workers Socialist League (WSL) that fused with the London Spartacist Group in 1978. The WSL emerged in 1974 when Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) expelled 200 members led by Alan Thornett, the WRP's prominent industrial trade union leader. In May 1975, shortly after the WSL was founded, capitalism was overthrown in South Vietnam ending decades of civil war against the imperialists and colonialists. Illustrating the really fertile political climate at that time, Woodward said, in the Cowley car plant where Thornett worked, when the fall of Saigon was announced on the radio, the whole factory stopped work and applauded. But as it turned out, while the WSL had a posture of orthodox Trotskyism it simultaneously adapted to the Labour Party and trade union milieu. Thornett's split was actually to the right of Healy's WRP, rejecting the WRP's formal adherence to the need for a Trotskyist vanguard. Woodward stressed that under Healy's veneer of orthodox Trotskyism was a long-standing political adaptation to the Labour “lefts”.

In 1956, when many thousands of members resigned from the Communist Parties over the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy's military suppression of the proletarian political revolution in Hungary, Healy did an excellent job of picking up the intelligentsia and industrial cadres from the British Communist Party. Following this regroupment, Healy set up the Socialist Labour League (SLL) which published *Labour Review* and Marxist documents such as *World Prospect for Socialism* (1961). From a distance the founding cadre of the Spartacist tendency initially stood in political solidarity with the SLL on the basis of *World Prospect for Socialism*, a powerful statement of Marxist purpose, and were unaware that Healy was an unprincipled political bandit.

At a 1966 London conference our comrades were repelled by Healy's bureaucratic practices, which soon took on political expression when Healy's organisation embraced Mao's Red Guards during the “Cultural Revolution”—a violent intra-bureaucratic power struggle amongst the Chinese Stalinists launched in 1966. The WRP later championed the concept of a classless “Arab revolution”, while being bankrolled by Arab bourgeois regimes

continued on page 9



Der Spiegel



Early 1980s: Denis Healey (right) led Labour's pro-NATO/CIA wing; Tony Benn (left) led “little England” wing. Below: Spartacist banner, Brighton, 1983.



Getty



Workers Hammer

Five”, the TUC called off the strike. With the Labour Party trying to ride the wave of unrest to get back into office we wrote:

“The Labour Party will never be shattered until its dual role is exposed by its own actions in power and under the continuous scathing criticism of the revolutionary Marxists. It is toward this end that revolutionists call upon the Labour Party to carry out its proclaimed fight to place the working class in power. It is in this sense and this sense only that critical support—‘as a rope supports a hanging man’—can have any meaning other than the cynical strengthening of illusions among the working masses. The polarization of the Labour Party, splitting away its working-class base on a revolutionary class program, will open the road to the construction by the workers of their own organs of power—a mass revolutionary party and workers' councils.”

—*Workers Vanguard* no 12, October 1972

In a period of international radicalisation and with Labour's base moving to the left, at its 1973 conference the party adopted a radical-sounding programme that included a promise to nationalise some two dozen of the country's largest manufacturers; Labour right-winger Denis Healey even promised to tax the rich.

In January 1974 the miners union began an overtime ban. When the Heath regime imposed a national lockout—a compulsory three-day working week and a corresponding loss in wages—

which the working class can suffer serious losses”. An insurrectionary general strike under a Labourite leadership would have been a disaster for the working class, thus we made clear that our tactic was to call for a limited, defensive general strike to get rid of the Tory government and its anti-union laws. We called on the TUC to prepare a general strike, organised through the shop stewards, for demands such as: smash the lockout and for immediate elections to oust the Tory government. In contrast to the myriad of pseudo-Trotskyists who, as always, simply wanted to replace the Tories with a Labour government, we called for a government of the *Labour Party and TUC* pledged to a socialist programme of expropriating the bourgeoisie. As Crawford noted, it was particularly critical in Britain—where illusions in parliament are rife—to include the trade unions and give our tactic an extra-parliamentary dimension. In contrast to the 1984-85 miners strike, when the TUC and Labour leadership openly tried to sabotage the strike, in 1974 there were tremendous illusions in the TUC.

Labour won the February 1974 election by a very narrow margin and Wilson called a second election for November. We once again called for critical support to Labour, while saying: “No to Wilson's Social Contract”.



## Conference...

(Continued from page 5)

Socialist Party, the Alliance for Workers Liberty and Workers Power/Permanent Revolution is perfectly consistent with their long-standing support to pro-imperialist counterrevolutionary forces from Solidarność to the *mujahedin* while the Soviet Union existed. Tailing these apologists for the “Free Tibet” movement is the dubious International Bolshevik Tendency which grotesquely advocates joint rule in Tibet with the Dalai Lama’s clique, giving the lie to its (occasional) claim to be for defence of China.

The 1949 Revolution resulted in enormous gains for China’s working and peasant masses. That includes the people of Tibet which, until the victory of the Chinese forces there in 1959, was ruled by a pro-slavery “Lamaocracy”. The “Free Tibet” cause originated with the machinations of the CIA and other imperialist forces intent on restoring capitalism in China, which would once again reduce the country to semicolonial subjugation. The call to “Free Tibet” is a rallying cry for counterrevolution and would in fact mean imperialist lordship over the Tibetan masses.

The Summer 2008 issue of the SWP’s *International Socialism* ran an extensive article justifying its support for the Tibet protests while freely admitting that the “Free Tibet” movement has long been funded and supported by the CIA. Charlie Hore states that:

“As tensions between China and the US have again risen, with US strategists becoming worried about Chinese economic, political and military competition, US support for some Tibetan organisations has started up again. The National Endowment for Democracy, which was heavily involved in the ‘colour revolutions’ in Ukraine and Georgia, seems to be one of the major conduits for this. In 2006, the last year for which they have published figures, they admitted giving just under \$300,000 (about £150,000) to 11 organisations in Tibet”.

But Hore complains that the sums “pale into insignificance when compared to the tens of millions given to the various Afghan mujahideen groups”. He neglects to mention that the SWP supported these CIA-backed forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s—the biggest covert operation in the CIA’s history—against the Soviet Union.

### Reformists who hailed counterrevolution flounder in post-Soviet climate

Many on the Labourite left deluded themselves that with the collapse of the Soviet Union they would be rewarded with unprecedented opportunities for growth but are today struggling to stay afloat. In 2006, John Molyneux outraged the rest of the SWP leadership by exposing that the party had lost thousands of members due to the post-Soviet political climate. At the same time Molyneux upheld the SWP’s support to counterrevolution and stated: “A key problem, in my opinion, was our estimation of the effects of the collapse of Stalinism. We were right to identify this as fundamentally historically progressive and to argue that internationally it created a space for genuine socialist ideas to get a hearing.” He went on to say that: “However, we seriously underestimated the extent

to which it was perceived by millions, indeed hundreds of millions as the defeat of socialism” (“Why I intend to stand”, published in *Weekly Worker*, 5 January 2006).

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), underwent a split in 2006, with Tommy Sheridan leaving to form the rival Solidarity following a bitter power struggle over allegations about Sheridan’s sex life. Workers Power split in 2006 when half the membership and most of the leadership in Britain were expelled and formed Permanent Revolution. Workers Power sought to “get-rich-quick” out of the “anti-globalisation” movement while the Permanent Revolution group was more interested in pressuring the Labour “lefts”. The SWP is still licking its wounds as a result of the spectacular split within the Respect coalition last year when the SWP and George Galloway fell out over Respect’s abysmal electoral performance.

We have been unique on the left in pointing out that the Respect coalition, with George Galloway and Muslim organisations—is in continuity with the SWP’s support for the *mujahedin* in Afghanistan and for counterrevolution in the USSR. The Respect coalition was founded by the SWP as a popular-frontist formation, which precluded us from applying tactics such as critical support in elections. Illustrating the SWP’s deep-seated parliamentarism, Respect is heavily geared towards municipal councils, seeking to emulate the Militant tendency which took over Liverpool city council in the mid-1980s. Militant’s sordid role as part of the capitalist state in Liverpool necessarily entailed attacks on workers and minorities. This provides a good example of why we revolutionaries refuse in principle to run for or take up executive offices of the capitalist state such as mayor or running a local council.

The Taaffeites are desperately seeking a “new workers party” that would amount to a version of the old Labour Party, funded and controlled by the trade union bureaucracy and necessarily reflecting the most backward prejudices in the class. Socialist Party supporters, who are a majority on the executive of the civil service union, the PCS, voted for a sell-out deal on pensions in 2005 that means new entrants will have to work five more years to qualify for a pension. Scandalously, this union organises immigration cops. The Socialist Party and virtually the whole spectrum of the Labourite left cheered the prison guards’ strike in August last year, in line with their ludicrous notion that cops and prison guards are “workers in uniform”. The Socialist Party has repeatedly hosted the general secretary of the Prison Officers Association (POA) in meetings and seeks to sign up POA representatives alongside its own sell-out leaders of the PCS to their campaign for a new “workers” party.

Such support for the repressive forces of the capitalist state is an integral part of Labour reformism which has been used to dupe the British working class into supporting the racist capitalist order for over a century. It goes hand in hand with the Taaffeites’ pandering to backward consciousness, especially in regard to Northern Ireland where this organisation has refused to call for British troops out and has conciliated Loyalism to the extent of hosting former Loyalist paramilitary thug Billy Hutchinson in their meetings. This is also in keeping with old Labour’s

record which includes sending the troops to Northern Ireland in 1969.

### Down with the reactionary “United Kingdom”

The SL/B was founded in the spirit of Karl Marx’s understanding that Ireland is key to the British proletarian revolution. Comrades in London Station in the mid-1970s worked out our unique application of the Leninist approach on the national question to interpenetrated peoples in Northern Ireland, published as “Theses on Ireland” in *Spartacist* [English edition] no 24, Autumn 1977. Regarding our record of opposing Blair’s imperialist “peace”



Peter Parks/AFP/Getty Images



BBC

Above: People’s Liberation Army troops rescue survivors of earthquake in devastated city of Beichuan, China. Left: Brown meets Dalai Lama, May 2008.

deal for Northern Ireland, the Conference Document stated: “The very idea that the blood-soaked British imperialists were bringing ‘peace’ to the ‘warring tribes’ is the vilest hypocrisy.” The Catholic minority remains oppressed and the society today is more segregated along communal lines than it was when the troops were sent there in 1969. Northern Ireland has historically been used as a testing ground for state repression in Britain—the vilification of Muslims in Britain today echoes the treatment of Irish people in the 1970s and ’80s.

Contrary to the illusions peddled by reformists in the Labour government’s public inquiry that began over a decade ago, and some three dozen years since Bloody Sunday, the British state has not even admitted that the British Army shot and killed 14 innocent Catholics in Derry that day. Although the British Army’s operation there has formally ended, a garrison of 1500 British troops remains. We continue to call for **British troops and bases out now!**

The document also noted that the “United Kingdom” is centred on “the archaic institutions of British imperialism based on the monarchy, House of Lords and the established (Protestant) churches”. The “UK” is based on English domination—centred on the “Home Counties” of southeast England—and vehement hatred of the oppressed Scottish and Welsh and Irish Catholic nations. The SWP’s refusal to oppose the monarchy within the

Respect coalition is a logical outgrowth of their Labourism which historically disavowed republicanism and the revolutionary tradition of Oliver Cromwell, the forerunner and most farsighted founder of English capitalism, and of the Chartists—a working-class insurrectionary movement which was vehemently opposed to the monarchy.

Hatred of Labour runs particularly high in Scotland, as seen in the recent loss of Labour’s seat in Glasgow East to the Scottish nationalists. English chauvinism has been on the rise—as reflected in the prevalence of the flag of St George that was long associated with the fascists—a phenomenon that is tac-

itly accepted as harmless by our reformist opponents. The arrogant English-centred Westminster parliament has contributed to the growth of the bourgeois nationalist parties in Wales and in Scotland where the Scottish National Party now controls the Assembly in Edinburgh. As we stated in our press:

“The Spartacist League upholds the right of self-determination for Scotland—as well as for Wales—which means the right to form independent states and implies also the right *not* to separate. Our attitude is grounded in intransigent opposition to all forms of nationalism—first and foremost the dominant English chauvinism. It is possible that the pervasive anti-Scottish chauvinism of the British bourgeoisie could drive the Scots towards separation. However, given the lack of decisive national differences in either language or religion, we do not presently call for independence for Scotland and Wales but advocate a course of common class struggle against the British state....

“In counterposition to the reformists of all stripes, we seek to build a multi-ethnic revolutionary workers party that fights to overthrow Westminster rule and replace it with a workers government. Abolish the monarchy, the established churches and the House of Lords! We fight for British troops out of Northern Ireland and for an Irish workers republic within a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles.”

—“Down with English chauvinism! Brown’s government: racist, anti-working-class, anti-Scottish!” *Workers Hammer* no 199, Summer 2007 ■



# Spartacism...

(Continued from page 7)

and in 1979 grotesquely hailed the execution of 21 Iraqi Communist Party members by the Ba'ath regime. Woodward noted that the WRP spectacularly imploded following the miners strike of 1984-85, having set up an anti-Communist provocation against Arthur Scargill on the eve of the strike. (See "Healyism Implodes", *Spartacist* [English edition] no 36-37, Winter 1985-86.)

## The Trotskyist Faction

Woodward stressed that the need for revolutionaries to stand candidates against Labour in elections was key to winning the Trotskyist Faction to Spartacism. Thornett's WSL criticised the WRP from the right for running candidates against Labour in the 1974 elections. In contrast, the Spartacist tendency gave critical support to WRP candidates, whose formal programme went beyond the bounds of managing capitalism but who did not agitate for a general strike to defend the working class against Heath's attack. Woodward said that critical support "is really only half a tactic" — we would always like to be in a position to stand our own candidates against Labour.

The Trotskyist Faction's agreement with the Spartacist tendency was largely expressed in the document "In defence of the revolutionary programme" (re-published in *Workers Hammer* no 203, Summer 2008). Woodward stated that the question of Ireland featured prominently in the regroupment process. She went on to recall three events that she remembered best that brought her to the international Spartacist tendency's politics. The first was when a member of the Trotskyist Faction presented a motion to the national committee of the WSL titled "The Marxist Attitude to the Police" that began: "The police force is the direct repressive agency of the capitalist state." The motion was rejected. The issue of the state is still a huge dividing line between us and the opponents today. The second was when she asked a national committee member of the WSL, "surely you don't really believe that a 'left' Labour government is a workers government?" He said yes, that's our position, and Woodward knew she was in the wrong organisation. The third event was when the WSL's paper *Socialist Press* called on blood-soaked British imperialism to arm black nationalist forces fighting against apartheid in South Africa. That showed that the WSL was not wedded to the programme of Trotskyism, but to the Labour Party.

Woodward concluded by saying that the Trotskyist Faction's 1978 document "In defence of the revolutionary programme" warned that US president Carter's "Human Rights" campaign was "designed to garner popular support for the military mobilisation continually underway against the Soviet Union". The world was then pregnant with Cold War II and soon the "Russian Question" would threaten to blow the Labour Party apart.

## Labour's Cold War

Comrade Len Michelson continued this theme in his presentation on our tactics towards Labour during the early 1980s. "Iron Lady" Thatcher was intent on waging war on the unions. She was also a staunch Cold Warrior in the anti-Soviet crusade launched by the imper-

alists when Soviet troops went into Afghanistan in 1979 at the request of the PDPA government which was facing the CIA-backed *mujahedin* insurgency. The Labour Party's working-class base was in uproar against the policies of the previous Labour government led by James Callaghan and Denis Healey and the party was about to undergo several years of deep instability. With the onset of Cold War, this led to a revival of the Labour "lefts" led by Tony Benn and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) which organised mass demonstrations in

However at first we drew no tactical conclusions from this analysis and when Benn ran in April 1981 for the deputy leadership of Labour against Denis Healey, our headline was "Benn, Healey: no choice!" (*Spartacist Britain* no 34, July 1981).

Benn was the darling of the pseudo-Trotskyists, many of whom began liquidating into the Labour Party. Michelson recalled that Workers Power did not liquidate into the Labour Party organisationally, but had the line that you must always vote Labour regardless and during the Benn-Healey division they

no 36, October 1981).

While our necessary programmatic opposition to Benn was clear, we later recognised that it had been *tactically* wrong in 1981 to say there was "no choice" between the NATO/CIA-loving "internationalists" and the "little-England socialists". We should have given critical support to Benn in order to *drive out the NATO/CIA wing*. For the coming period we coupled this slogan with: "*Labour can betray without the CIA connection!*" We sought to deepen the Cold War split and to put Benn and the "lefts" on the spot and force them to show their true colours as loyal supporters of British capitalist rule. The reconsideration of our tactics resulted in an excellent piece of propaganda, "Labour's Cold War" (*Spartacist Britain* no 41, April 1982). Here we made the point that a distorted and uneven class line was being cleaved through the Labour Party as a result of the Cold War and, if the little-England Bennites won out, the Labour Party would become aberrant in the eyes of the imperialists — not least in the US — in the climate of the anti-Soviet war drive.

Benn narrowly lost the deputy leadership contest but the party remained deeply unstable. By the time of the 1983 general election, Labour was led by Michael Foot who was from the old CND "left", yet the grey eminence behind the scenes was Denis Healey, former chancellor, who had links with the CIA going back decades. We said "Labour: No answer to Tory rampage!" While refusing to give critical support to Labour, we said: "If there are Labour Party candidates willing to make some effective manifestation of opposition to Labour's Cold War austerity campaign, we would actively consider giving them critical support" (*Spartacist Britain* no 50, June 1983). We discussed sending a letter to every Labour candidate offering to give critical support, if the candidate would accept it from us — understanding what we stand for. This was intended as a test of the Cold War schism — the very idea of taking support from a Soviet-defensist organisation would have driven the right wing into a frenzy and tested whether the Labour "lefts" would buckle under to unity with the right.

We did not adopt this tactic in the 1983 election, which Labour lost so massively that Benn himself failed to retain his seat. However we did implement it in early 1984 when Benn stood in a by-election in Chesterfield. We wrote to Benn making clear what we stood for — including defence of the Soviet Union, troops out of Northern Ireland — and our demand to drive the NATO/CIA right wing out of the Labour Party. Our only condition was that Benn would accept our support. He responded to us verbally and his secretary wrote us a letter within seven days saying "he is not prepared to accept support from organisations which do not support the Labour Party". The fact that Benn rejected our support in favour of unity with Healey was very powerful ammunition for us during the miners strike because, Michelson said, next to Arthur Scargill, Tony Benn was "God" among miners.

## The miners strike of 1984-85

The final panellist, comrade Jill Morris, noted that our understanding of the Cold War split in the Labour Party prepared our intervention in the heroic miners strike. Labour's division was mirrored within the trade union bureaucracy.

*continued on page 11*



Workers Hammer photos



September 1984: SL/B banner in Brighton (above) calling for a Fighting Triple Alliance of rail, miners and transport unions to shut down the country through strike action. Rail workers stopped trains (left) carrying coal because a striking miner (second from left) was standing on bridge above railway line.

opposition to Cruise and Trident missiles, *and* against the Soviet Union's SS-20s. We sold huge numbers of papers on these mass CND demonstrations — Michelson recalled one in 1981 at which our headline was "Time runs out in Poland, Stop Solidarity's counter-revolution!" (*Spartacist Britain* no 36, October 1981). We sold over 1000 copies of that paper. The Labourite left hated us but, Michelson said, the working class knew there was something funny about Solidarność, especially because Thatcher liked it.

In early 1981 Labour faced a deep split when its right wing began to decamp. Prominent among the splitters who formed the Social Democratic Party was Roy Jenkins — who would become Tony Blair's political mentor and can aptly be described as the godfather of New Labour. The pro-NATO/CIA wing of the party that was led by Denis Healey threatened to split if Tony Benn, leader of the Labour "lefts", took control of the party. We had a headline: "Labour split: NATO 'internationalists', Little England 'socialists'" which Michelson said was quite prescient.

demanding that the CIA right wing take a loyalty oath to remain true to Labour! Making abundantly clear our fundamental opposition to the Bennite camp, in October 1981 we published a four-point programme. Among its points were: "To the sham of 'unilateral nuclear disarmament' we counterpose the call, 'Smash NATO! Defend the Soviet Union!'" In the context of the hunger strikes by Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland we said "Against Benn's historical support to the PTA [Prevention of Terrorism Act], his refusal to defend the Republican victims of imperialist repression in Northern Ireland, his pro-imperialist call for UN troops, we say: No 'democratic' imperialist schemes — Troops out of Ireland now! Free the Republican prisoners! Smash the PTA!" We opposed Benn's support to racist immigration controls and to import controls and we called for "five-year plans on the basis of a reorganisation of the economy through the expropriation of the industrialists and the bankers, as part of an international socialist division of labour through a worldwide struggle for proletarian rule" (*Spartacist Britain*

# Georgia...

(Continued from page 2)

of three built to supply Western Europe while skirting Russian territory and possible Russian control over the oil flow, passes through Georgia. France and Germany, have their own axe to grind in the region. Both countries have opposed the entry of Georgia into NATO, while French president Nicolas Sarkozy, as current head of the European Union, presided over the initial ceasefire agreement between Russia and Georgia. Meanwhile, European “military observers” are part of a UN “peacekeeping” force that has been in Georgia since 1993 along the border with Abkhazia. **UN out of Georgia now!**

## Democrats, the other party of US imperialism

The two presumptive candidates to the post of imperialist Commander-in-Chief, Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama, rushed to condemn Russia. Both called for putting Georgia on a “fast track” to NATO membership. Democratic Senator Joseph Biden demonstratively visited Georgia only days before his selection as Obama’s running mate. On his return, Biden declared: “I left the country convinced that Russia’s invasion of Georgia may be the [sic] one of the most significant event[s] to occur in Europe since the end of communism” (*Washington Post* online, 18 August). Biden’s tirade is of a piece with Obama’s 24 July Berlin speech, where he upheld the US anti-Soviet crusade as a model for reasserting Washington’s global interests today.

Indeed, Obama’s cautious and uneven opposition to the Iraq war and occupation, which is cheered by the reformist left, is directed at restoring US imperialism’s ability—weakened by the Bush administration’s disastrous policies in Iraq—to project its military and diplomatic power globally. Obama made this clear in an article on “Renewing American Leadership” in *Foreign Affairs* (July-August 2007), where he calls for a “responsible end” to the US occupation of Iraq in order to redeploy and significantly escalate American military forces and operations around the world. Obama is foursquare behind the murderous occupation of Afghanistan and calls for deploying an additional 10,000 US troops there. It is no accident that Obama’s foreign policy consigliere is one Zbigniew Brzezinski, a veteran of Cold War II who was a central figure in the Democratic Carter administration as it launched an anti-Communist “human rights” campaign against the Soviet Union. This included massive support to Islamic reactionaries in Afghanistan against the Soviet Army, which intervened there in late 1979 in defence of the USSR’s southern flank and on the side of elementary human progress.

Deep hatred for the Bush gang among workers and minorities, in the US and internationally, must not obscure the fact that the Democrats are the other party of imperialist war and racism. We oppose political support to any capitalist politician—McCain, Obama or the Greens’ Cynthia McKinney. We stand for the complete political independence of the working class. Our aim is the forging of a revolutionary multiracial workers party that fights to overturn the capitalist system through workers revolution and to establish a workers government. **All British and US troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now!**

In hyping Georgia’s “democratic” pretensions against supposedly unceasing aggression by a timeless “Russian imperialism”, the bourgeois media have been replete with historical references to the “progressive” Menshevik Georgian regime of 1918-21. *The New York Times* (10 August) referred to this as “when Bolshevik troops crushed Georgia’s thrilling, and brief, first experiment with liberal rule”. From the standpoint of the proletarian revolution, the suppression of Menshevik Georgia, which was neither “democratic” nor “independent”, was absolutely correct and necessary.

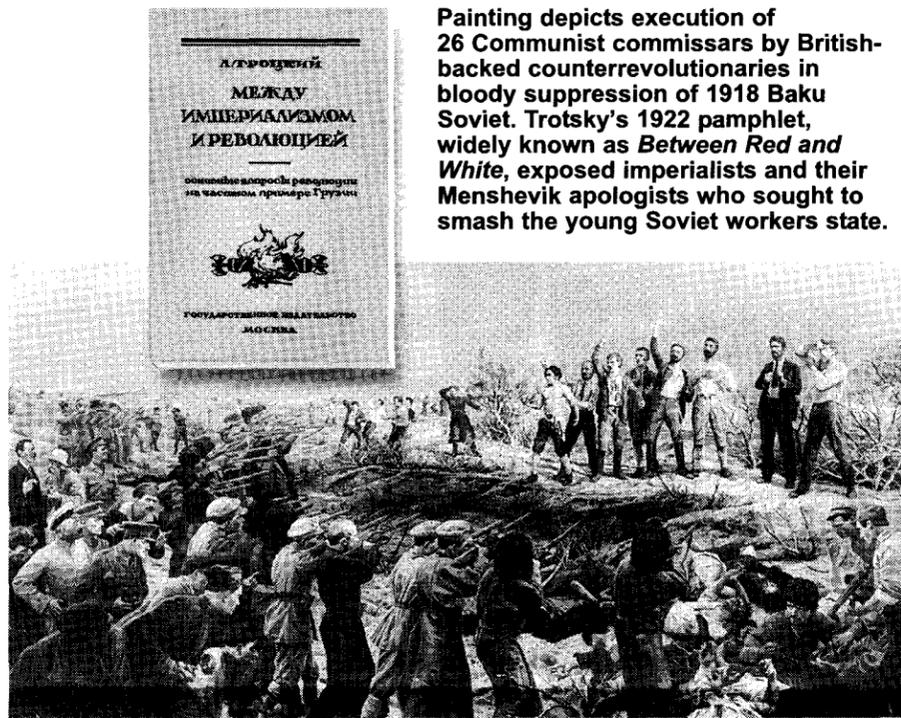
## Leninism and the National Question

Following the proletarian seizure of power in the October Revolution of 1917, Lenin’s Bolsheviks immediately carried

villages are burning all around us.... We will be cruel. Yes, we will.” “I begin to understand Nero and the great fire of Rome”, Djugeli recalled another Menshevik telling him after “gazing upon the bright flames”.

When the Mensheviks, who had opposed the proletarian revolution in Russia, took power in Georgia in early 1918 they drove the Georgian Communists underground. “Independent” Georgia immediately invited in the German imperialist army and, following Germany’s defeat in World War I, handed the reins to the British imperialists. Working with Armenian and Georgian nationalists, the British imperialists engineered the overthrow of the Baku Soviet of 1918—based on Azeri, Armenian, Georgian and Russian oil workers—which was the centre of Bolshevik power in the Caucasus. The 26 Bolshevik leaders of the Soviet were

**Painting depicts execution of 26 Communist commissars by British-backed counterrevolutionaries in bloody suppression of 1918 Baku Soviet. Trotsky’s 1922 pamphlet, widely known as *Between Red and White*, exposed imperialists and their Menshevik apologists who sought to smash the young Soviet workers state.**



Painting by I I Brodsky

out their commitment to grant the right of self-determination to the myriad peoples oppressed under the tsarist prison house of peoples. The Leninist position on the national question was premised on the full equality of all nations and peoples. The aim was to get the national question off the agenda, to counterpose to all variants of bourgeois nationalism an appeal to the workers for international unity in their class struggle.

Revolutionary Russia was subjected to a three-year-long Civil War by imperialist-backed counterrevolutionary White reactionaries and direct imperialist military intervention by 14 capitalist armies. Those countries—like Georgia, Poland, Finland and the Baltic states—that remained capitalist after achieving independence from Russia became bulwarks of reactionary terror against the working class and beachheads for imperialist intrigues against the Soviet state.

In his 1922 pamphlet, *Between Red and White* (also known as *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention in Russia 1918-1921*), Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky exposed the myth of “democratic”, “independent” Georgia promoted by the imperialists and their social-democratic henchmen at the time and rehashed by the bourgeois media today, citing the Mensheviks’ own words. In December 1918, the Georgian Menshevik Topuridze assured the Allied imperialists: “I assume that our republic will co-operate with the Allied countries in their fight against the Bolsheviks, with all the means at its disposal.” In another example, he recounted the brutal suppression of a peasant uprising in Ossetia, quoting Menshevik leader Valiko Djugeli, who delighted at the slaughter: “Ossetian

later captured and executed in September 1918 at the behest of the British. Trotsky dedicated his pamphlet to these heroic Communists and to the hundreds and thousands of others who were persecuted and slaughtered by the Georgian and other bourgeois regimes in the Caucasus.

In February 1921, as a Communist-led uprising broke out in Georgia, the Red Army finally moved in and swept out the imperialist-backed Menshevik government, ushering in workers rule and bringing genuine national liberation. As Trotsky explained in his pamphlet:

“We do not only recognize, but we also give full support to the principle of self-determination, wherever it is directed against feudal, capitalist and imperialist states. But wherever the fiction of self-determination, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, becomes a weapon directed against the proletarian revolution, we have no occasion to treat this fiction differently from the other ‘principles’ of democracy perverted by capitalism.”

For Marxists, the right of national self-determination is not an absolute principle. In the case of Georgia 1921, it was subordinated to defence of the proletarian revolution. Similarly in 1914, with the outbreak of World War I, the question of the rights of small nations occupied by one or another imperialist power was subordinated to the principle of revolutionary defeatism against all the imperialist combatants. Thus the revolutionary Serbian Social Democrats rightly refused to call for Serbian self-determination after the country was overrun by the Austro-Hungarian empire.

A more recent example is the 1999 US-led war against Serbia, carried out

by the Democratic Clinton administration in the name of stopping “ethnic cleansing” in Kosovo. Much of the reformist left internationally beat the drums for “human rights” imperialism on behalf of “poor, little Kosovo”, with some even supporting direct imperialist intervention. We historically defended the right of self-determination of the Kosovo Albanians, including the right to form their own state or to integrate into a “greater” Albania. But in the build-up to and during the US/NATO war, this question had become subordinated to our position of revolutionary defensism: military defence of Serbia without any political support to the revanchist regime in Belgrade. That remained the case when NATO forces supplanted the Serbian army as the effective state power in Kosovo following the 1999 war. As we wrote in “Balkans Tangle” (*Workers Vanguard* no 755, 30 March 2001): “With Kosovo now a NATO protectorate, there can be no independent struggle for the national rights of ethnic Albanians or any other national minority in the region which does not first and foremost seek to expel the imperialist ‘peacekeepers’.”

Kosovo’s sham “declaration of independence” from Serbia this February was essentially a diplomatic provocation against Serbia and Russia—paving the way for the conflict in Georgia—and a further incitement against the besieged Serbian minority in Kosovo. We defend the national rights of the Serbs in northern Kosovo, opposing their forcible incorporation into an Albanian Kosovar state. As Marxists, we oppose the poison of nationalism and fight for the class unity of the workers throughout the Balkans in overthrowing all the bloody capitalist regimes of the region. We say: **Down with the imperialist occupation of Kosovo! All US/UN/NATO troops out of the Balkans now! For a socialist federation of the Balkans!**

## The impact of capitalist counterrevolution

Particularly in areas of heavy national interpenetration, such as the Caucasus and the Balkans, only under proletarian rule could there be a just and equitable resolution to the conflicting national aspirations of the numerous peoples. The Bolsheviks, in order to accommodate the myriad peoples at different levels of national consolidation, established a variety of Soviet republics, Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics for nationalities, Autonomous Oblasts and Nationality Okrugs for various tribes. In Georgia, Abkhazians and Ossetians had autonomous regions, as did other formerly oppressed peoples such as the Chechens, Tartars and the Bashkirs in the Urals.

Many of the Bolsheviks’ policies were reversed with the growth of the nationalist Stalinist bureaucracy that came to power with the political counterrevolution that began in 1924. The dogma of “socialism in one country” proclaimed by Stalin later in 1924 was to become synonymous with the sell-out of countless revolutionary opportunities abroad in the coming decades, while fostering the recrudescence of Russian chauvinism in the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, the collectivised economy of the multinational Soviet workers state laid the basis for the equitable resolution of national conflicts and an enormous leap in social progress. This was reflected in the high levels of education and cultural development and the advancement of women and widespread ethnic intermarriage. Moreover, the Soviet state implemented policies aimed at advancing the most backward regions

of the USSR. Georgia was a case in point. An article by Göran Therborn in *New Left Review* (July-August 2007) titled "Transcaucasian Triptych" pointed out that in the decades after 1921:

"Soviet industrial developmentalism — factories, roads, railways, schools, hospitals, scientific institutions — was to transform the socio-economic landscape of the Caucasus, and a modernizing Tbilisi became the industrial, administrative and cultural hub for the South Caucasus as a whole...."

"As one of the prime beneficiaries of the Soviet system, Georgia was one of the main losers from the break-up of the USSR."

Decades of Stalinist mismanagement, lies and bureaucratism prepared the way for the counterrevolutionary break up of the USSR in 1991-92. The imperialists encouraged the growth of bourgeois-nationalist movements, particularly in the more prosperous non-Russian republics in the Baltics and in Soviet bloc states like Poland, and used these as a battering ram for counter-revolution. The restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union led to an unprecedented immiseration of the working masses in those countries and exacerbated communalist hatreds. The final undoing of the October Revolution was a world-historic defeat for workers and the oppressed around the world.

To the bitter end, the ICL carried out its Trotskyist obligation to defend the gains of the October Revolution. We hailed the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan against CIA-backed Islamic insurgents. When the imperialists bankrolled the clerical-nationalist Solidarność "union" in Poland as a spearhead for capitalist restoration throughout the Soviet bloc in the early 1980s, we called to "Stop Solidarność counter-

revolution!" When Russia's Boris Yeltsin, working hand in glove with the Bush Sr White House, launched a pro-imperialist coup in August 1991, the ICL responded with the call, "Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!" (reprinted in Spartacist pamphlet, *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*, August 1993). We urged the multinational Soviet proletariat to return to the internationalist road of Lenin and Trotsky and to forge an authentically Bolshevik party to lead the fight for proletarian political revolution and to smash the forces of capitalist counterrevolution. Our statement, translated into Russian, was distributed in the tens of thousands throughout the Soviet Union.

In contrast, the reformist left internationally took its cues from the social-democratic and labour lieutenants of the imperialists, condemning the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, hailing Solidarność and cheering on Yeltsin's pro-imperialist "democrats". A prime example was the US International Socialist Organization (ISO) and its then cothinkers in Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, who enthused over Yeltsin/Bush's victory: "Communism has collapsed.... It is a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing" (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 31 August 1991). Russian supporters of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) and Alan Woods' International Marxist Tendency did more than rejoice from afar; they actually sought to restrain workers who tried to oppose Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary barricades.

The response of much of the reformist left internationally to the conflict in Georgia has ranged from a vague pacifist neutrality — punctuated in the case of the ISO with Cold War "captive nations"

rhetoric about "Stalin's prison-house of nations" (Socialistworker.org, 12 August) — to a pro-Russian tilt. The latter is exemplified by the Workers World Party (WWP), whose calling card has always been to paint various Stalinist and neo-colonial bourgeois-nationalist regimes as "anti-imperialist". In fact, WWP's "anti-imperialist" posturing has always gone hand in hand with tailing "progressive" (ie, Democratic) capitalist politicians in the US. WWP rejects the class line in favour of the capitalist "lesser evil".

What support to Putin's Russia means on the ground can be seen in the grotesque position of the Russian Taaffeites. Since the counterrevolution, these reformists have lined up with the most retrograde chauvinist forces in Russia, including the fascist National Bolshevik Party. While, typically, the CWI issued a sanitised statement for international consumption ("Georgia/Russia Conflict Brings Disaster for Working People of Region", 11 August), in Russia the group portrays the war against Georgia as a just war for Russian statehood and calls for "people's militias" to fight for Mother Russia:

"The reaction of ordinary people, who all across the country are enlisting in volunteer brigades, is entirely clear. If there are those who *want* to come to the aid of fraternal peoples (and the mass volunteer movement is inspired precisely by this — after all, the degenerates who simply want to 'shoot it up' aren't that many) then it would be entirely logical for precisely these people to replace conscripted soldiers. But a people's militia is dangerous for the authorities and capital, since a people's militia, on the strength of its elemental proletarian instinct, could act against not only external, but also internal enemies."

—"Turn the Guns on the Brass!"  
www.socialism.ru (11 August)

By all accounts such "people's militias" did follow Putin's forces into Georgia, where they reportedly killed, looted and burned down the homes of ethnic Georgians. Without giving support to either side in this conflict, Marxists uphold the right of all communities to defend themselves against pogromist terror.

In the aftermath of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe, all the old crap of the pre-World War I era has returned. Ethnic cleansing, daily terror against immigrants and minorities — these are part and parcel of the triumph of the "national principle" which the imperialists pushed throughout the Cold War as a weapon against the Soviet Union. Only when the class principle — ie, the programme of world socialist revolution — prevails over the "national principle" can there be an end to imperialist war, exploitation and oppression.

Washington's imperialist triumphalism in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union has been eroded. With the global economy on the decline, tensions between the US and European powers are likely to grow. The US imperialists find themselves in a quagmire in Iraq and increasingly in Afghanistan. Their ambitions in the Caucasus have been openly challenged by Russia. But a wounded imperialist beast with the world's largest nuclear arsenal is an extremely dangerous creature. This underlines both the urgency and seriousness of the task faced by Marxists: the reforging of Trotsky's Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution, to lead the proletariat in sweeping away imperialist barbarism. ■

## Spartacism...

(Continued from page 9)

This was seen in the witch hunt of Arthur Scargill at the 1983 TUC conference instigated by the WRP over Scargill's correct statement that Solidarność was "anti-socialist". The right wing bureaucrats condemned Scargill, while the "lefts" sat silent, sending a signal to Thatcher that the miners union was isolated.

From the very beginning we said that the strike could only be won by spreading it to other key sections of the class. The dockers went out on strike *twice* during the miners strike, during which time we called for a "Fighting Triple Alliance" of rail workers, miners and dockers, to *shut down the country*. Morris cited a passage from *Workers Hammer* no 145, April-May 1995, which says: "While [Labour leader Neil] Kinnock obscenely echoed Thatcher in denouncing the miners for 'violence' on the picket lines, the trade union misleaders either openly scabbered or refused to call out their members on strike alongside the NUM. At bottom the reason for this was political. The coal industry was a fundamental part of the British economy. Had steelworkers, railworkers, dockers and power workers refused to handle coal, the country would quickly have ground to a halt. Effectively this would have amounted to a general strike, posing the question: once the country was shut down, who was going to start it up again — the working class or capitalist class? In short, which class would rule?"

Noting that our strategic goal of splitting the Labour Party base from the top requires a base of support in the trade unions, Morris said that though

our roots in the unions were very slender, we did what we could. For example we had a supporter, Patrick Sliney, in a British Leyland plant in Birmingham who fought to get scab coal blacked, for which he was fired. Examining our propaganda on splitting the Labour Party during the miners strike, Morris quoted an article from our press in 1984 which expressed it rather well:

"The Labour Party has also been divided by the deep antagonistic forces in society, they are ripping the Labour Party apart. We don't want the Labour Party to be ripped apart by a counterrevolutionary ploy, particularly. But we do have to say that there is unity and there is unity. There's unity behind the capitalists and their Labour lackeys and unity in struggle behind the miners. You've got a choice. And the left wing of the Labour Party continues to provide the choice of unity with the CIA lovers, the violence-baiters like Neil Kinnock...."

"So we want a split in the Labour Party. But in this sense: not just a destruction of the Labour Party, we are not just trying to wreck the Labour Party. We want to replace it with a revolutionary party, that will not try to administer capitalism, will not get into government in the capitalist state and then do everything the Tories do."

—*Workers Hammer* no 64, December 1984

Throughout the strike we consistently condemned Scargill and the Labour "lefts" for maintaining unity with the scabherders such as Neil Kinnock. But in an issue of our press soon after the strike ended in 1985 we turned this condemnation of Scargill for unity with Kinnock into a criticism of Scargill for not having split to form a new party to the left of Labour. In *Workers Hammer* no 68, April 1985, we said that if the "lefts" had split from these strikebreakers "then today we might well have in this country 100,000, 200,000 of the best class fighters organised in a party. It would not be a revolutionary party on

our programme. But it would be a party that didn't have open scabherders in it, it would be a party without strikebreakers, it would be a party that did not welcome Lord Chapple and Lord Murray to take on the ermine robes, it would be a party without ballotmongers and violence-baiters." As the SL/B Conference Document noted, we again raised this criticism of Scargill in a 2006 public meeting. However it is not our programme to call on Scargill to form a party, which would necessarily be based on his old Labour reformism — ie on class collaboration and betrayal. Moreover, this is contrary to what we argued in our propaganda and interventions throughout the strike.

One of the most important aspects of our propaganda, Morris noted, was that we consistently showed that the strike — the most militant class struggle since the 1926 general strike — made quite clear the limitations of Scargill's Labourite reformist perspective. We quoted Scargill addressing a rally in Nottingham saying: "We will turn the tide and turn unemployment into employment. We will turn economic ruin into economic recovery. Above all, we will pave the way for a

general election to elect a Labour government" (*Spartacist Britain* no 58, June 1984). Morris referred to an article which summed up our position saying: "It is not a matter of criticising one or another mistake Scargill made but of coming to terms with the fact that he remained tied to the same Labourite perspective as the [TUC and Labour leaders] Willises and Kinnocks — that the final answer for the working class is to install a Labour government aimed at defending Britain's (decrepit) industry through reformist schemes." The article also said:

"The NUM leadership under Arthur Scargill took this strike about as far as it could go within a perspective of militant trade union reformism, and still it lost. Why? Because militancy alone is not enough. From day one it was clear that the NUM was up against the full power of the capitalist state. What was needed was a party of revolutionary activists rooted in the trade unions which fought tooth and nail to mobilise other unions in strike action alongside the NUM. But all Arthur Scargill had was the Labour Party, and it would rather see the NUM dead than organise to take on the bosses' state in struggle."

—*Workers Hammer* no 67, March 1985 ■

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**Down with chauvinist compulsory English policy!**

## SOAS enforces racist “war on terror”

The British state’s racist “war on terror” is the domestic face of the bloody colonial occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and an excuse to further curtail civil liberties and introduce yet more draconian “anti-terror” laws. In June, Gordon Brown’s Labour government narrowly pushed through a vote extending to 42 days the time that “terror suspects” can be interned and interrogated without charge. Labour’s “war on terror” targets Muslims in the first instance but is also aimed at regimenting the whole population and repressing social struggle. The deadly reality of the “anti-terror” crusade was brutally demonstrated by the police killing of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes on a Tube train in London in July 2005, and the near-killing of postal worker Mohammed Abdul Kahar during a June 2006 raid by hundreds of cops in Forest Gate, London. We say: **Down with Labour’s racist “war on terror”!**

### “Anti-terror” witch hunts on campus

Government “guidelines” for “tackling violent extremism” on university campuses place students and workers squarely in the crosshairs of police repression. Exactly what this means was seen in frightening reality on 14 May when Hicham Yezza — an employee of the University of Nottingham, president and co-founder of the Arabic Society and editor of a political magazine — and Rizwaan Sabir, a post-graduate student at the university, were arrested and detained after Sabir downloaded and sent to Yezza a document entitled “The Al Qaeda Training Manual” that he was using as part of a PhD proposal. The document is freely available from the US Department of Justice website as well as for sale on Amazon! Both Sabir and Yezza were held and interrogated for six days before being released without charge. Yezza was then re-arrested for unspecified “visa irregularities”, threatened with deportation to Algeria and held at numerous immigration detention centres for a month before being released on bail to await further proceedings. Yezza powerfully described the harrowing effects of his treatment in an 18 August *Guardian* article entitled “Britain’s terror laws have left me and my family shattered.” **No deportation of Hicham Yezza! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!**

Yeza and Sabir are just two of a number of victims of the anti-Muslim witch hunt who are either students or workers on campus. In August 2004, Babar Ahmad, then an IT technician working at Imperial College London was arrested under the Extradition Act 2003 and accused of running a website supporting “terrorism” in Chechnya and Afghanistan. He awaits a European court decision which could be followed by

his immediate extradition to the US. The previous year, in December 2003 Ahmad was savagely beaten by police, arrested and detained for six days and then released. Also facing extradition in connection with the same alleged “conspiracy” is Syed Talha Ahsan, a former student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London who was arrested in July 2006. It is an outrage that under the conditions of the

only” rule on student societies, with the outrageous and ludicrous demand that “All publicity must be in English”.

The Spartacus Youth Group (SYG) was targeted by Solomon for refusing to abide by this witch-hunting “rule”, which the student bureaucracy ludicrously sought to pass off as part of its “Equal Opportunities Policy”. We vehemently opposed this attempt at anti-communist censorship at the time and

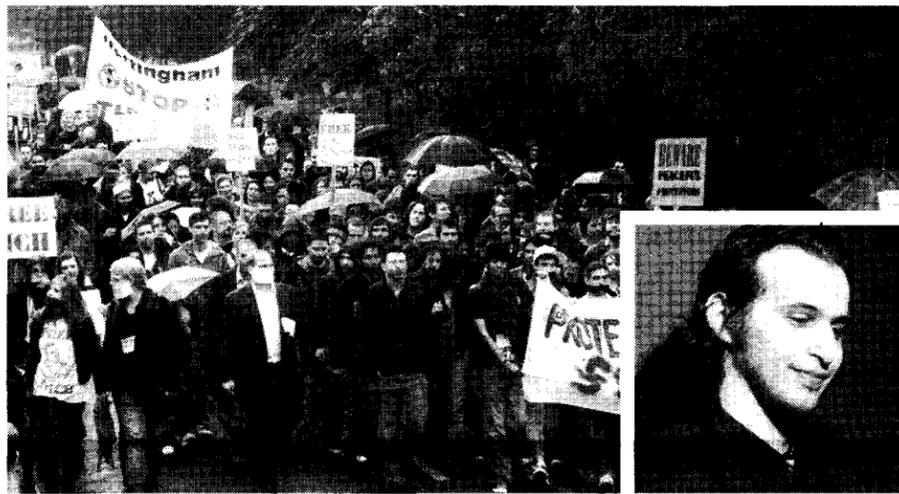
It speaks volumes to the SWP’s claim to be a defender of the oppressed Muslim population that while the SYG campaigned to expose and defeat the “war on terror” witch hunt at SOAS, Clare Solomon et al actually **helped to enforce it!** Faced with the determined opposition of the SYG comrades, Solomon took a step back before eventually **abstaining** on our motion, thus aiding those who want the policy to remain.

It is clear that the student union intends to continue to enforce its chauvinist policy in the new academic year, albeit in a slightly modified form. An 11 August e-mail to the SYG from Ben Sellers, current Vice President for Sports and Societies states, “any materials you have in foreign languages must have a direct english [sic] translation available”. We will continue to oppose the “war on terror” witch hunt for what it is and demand: **Down with the chauvinist compulsory English policy for student societies at SOAS!**

### Reform v revolution

It is scandalous that the student union bureaucracy, including the so-called “socialists” of the SWP, colludes with the university administration and the forces of state repression to enforce a policy that augments the “war on terror” and aids government attempts to brand Muslim students and leftists alike as “violent extremists”. In the case of the SWP this flows from its reformist worldview and programme, which has always amounted to pressuring the capitalist state, especially when administered by a Labour government, to act in the interest of working people. But the capitalist state cannot be reformed to serve workers and the oppressed and those who administer it must inevitably implement the attacks and state repression of the capitalist class. In its own small way, at the level of campus politics, the SWP proves the reactionary bankruptcy of reformism. The programme of the revolutionary Marxist SYG stands in complete counterposition to this reformist claptrap: we seek to win youth and students to the understanding that racism, war, poverty and oppression are inherent to the capitalist system and cannot be eliminated short of socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism here in Britain and internationally and replace it with a society where those who make the wealth — the working class — rule.

Our model is the 1917 October Revolution where the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky led the working class to power and ripped Russia from the rule of tsars, priests and capitalists. If you want to see an end to poverty, starvation, imperialist war and racism, only a revolutionary party with a record of standing on a genuinely Marxist programme is capable of providing the way forward — join us! ■



Above: Nottingham students and workers march in protest against threatened deportation of campus worker Hicham Yezza (inset). Below: March 2002 SYG initiated united-front protest at SOAS against racist “war on terror”.



Extradition Act 2003 between the US and Britain, no *prima facie* evidence is required for any “terror suspect” to be extradited, only that the US government provide documentation of the appearance of guilt. **Hands off Babar Ahmad and Syed Talha Ahsan!**

### Revolutionaries fight “English-only” gag at SOAS

It is in the vital interests of students, lecturers and campus workers to oppose the “war on terror” on campuses. At SOAS this means fighting to overturn the chauvinist campaign that has been waged for two years by the SOAS Student Union, targeting clubs and societies who publish materials in languages other than English. At the September 2006 Freshers Fair there was an unsuccessful attempt by student union bureaucrats — spearheaded by former vice president and prominent Socialist Workers Party (SWP) spokesman Clare Solomon — to impose an “English-

have campaigned against the policy ever since, noting that it is aimed primarily at Muslims and will be used to target anyone who opposes British imperialism. SYG members have intervened into campus events and held regular sales of our literature (including in Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, Tagalog and other languages) and fought to overturn this threat to all students. A motion drafted by the SYG, submitted to a 2007 SOAS Union General Meeting read:

“That this ‘English-only’ rule has nothing to do with ‘equal opportunities’ and everything to do with enforcing the so-called ‘war on terror’ on campus. All students and staff should be allowed to read and distribute material in *any language regardless of whether it is translated*. The ‘war on terror’ is a classic ‘divide and rule’ ploy, stigmatizing Muslims as an excuse for a sweeping reduction in the legal rights of the entire population and a racist, imperialist ‘war’ of military adventures abroad. The ‘war on terror’ targets immigrants, minorities and ultimately the working class.”