



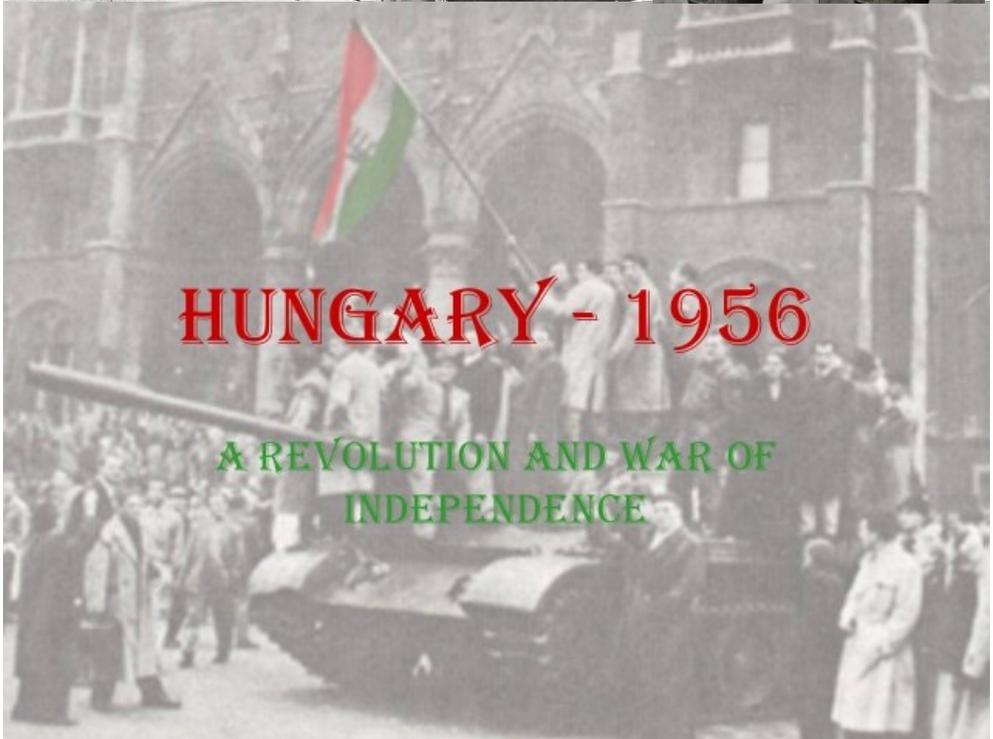
# In Defence of Trotskyism No. 16

£1 waged, 50p unwaged/low waged, €1.50



## Revolutionary and Counter- Revolution in Hungary 1956

Peter Fryer, Gerry Healy, Bob Pitt, June 2015



## HUNGARY - 1956

A REVOLUTION AND WAR OF  
INDEPENDENCE

## Where We Stand

1. WE STAND WITH KARL MARX: 'The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. The struggle for the emancipation of the working class means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies but for equal rights and duties and the abolition of all class rule' (The International Workingmen's Association 1864, General Rules).

2. The capitalist state consists, in the last analysis, of ruling-class laws within a judicial system and detention centres overseen by the armed bodies of police/army who are under the direction and are controlled in acts of defence of capitalist property rights against the interests of the majority of civil society. The working class must overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with a workers' state based on democratic soviets/workers' councils to suppress the inevitable counter-

revolution of private capitalist profit against planned production for the satisfaction of socialised human need.

3. We recognise the necessity for revolutionaries to carry out serious ideological and political struggle as direct participants in the trade unions (always) and in the mass reformist social democratic bourgeois workers' parties despite their pro-capitalist leaderships when conditions are favourable. Because we see the trade union bureaucracy and their allies in the Labour party leadership as the most fundamental obstacle to the struggle for power of the working class, outside of the state forces and their direct agencies themselves, we must fight and defeat and replace them with a revolutionary leadership by mobilising the base against the pro-capitalist bureaucratic misleaders to open the way forward for the struggle for workers' power.

4. We are fully in support of all mass mobilisations

against the onslaught of this reactionary Con-Lib Dem coalition. However, whilst participating in this struggle we will oppose all policies which subordinate the working class to the political agenda of the petty-bourgeois reformist leaders of the Labour party and trade unions

5. We oppose all immigration controls. International finance capital roams the planet in search of profit and imperialist governments disrupts the lives of workers and cause the collapse of whole nations with their direct intervention in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan and their proxy wars in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, etc. Workers have the right to sell their labour internationally wherever they get the best price. Only union membership and pay rates can counter employers who seek to exploit immigrant workers as cheap labour to undermine the gains of past struggles.

**Socialist Fight produces IDOT. It is a part of the Liaison Committee for the Fourth International with the Liga Comunista, Brazil and the Tendencia Militante Bolchevique, Argentina.**

**Editor: Gerry Downing**

**Assistant Editor: John Barry**

**Socialist Fight: PO Box 59188, London,**

**NW2 9LJ, <http://socialistfight.com/>**

**[Socialist\\_Fight@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Socialist_Fight@yahoo.co.uk)**

**Subscribe to Socialist Fight and In Defence of Trotskyism**

**Four Issues: UK: £12.00, EU: £14.00**

**Rest of the World: £18.00**

**Please send donations to help in their production**

**Cheques and Standing Orders to**

**Socialist Fight Account No. 1**

**Unity Trust Bank, Sort Code**

**08-60-01, Account. No. 20227368.**

# Hungarian Tragedy

3

## Preface to the 1986 reprint

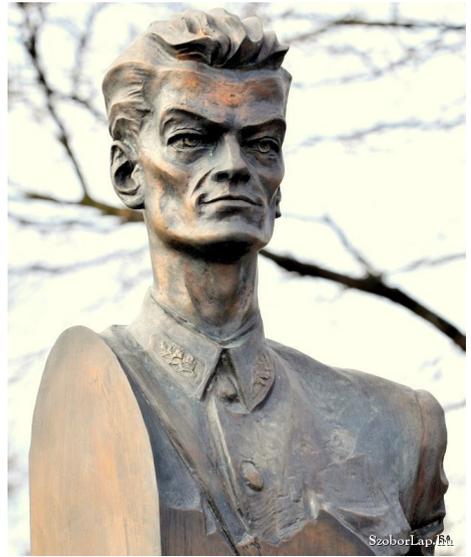
A first-hand account of the Hungarian Revolution and its crushing by the Soviet intervention. Peter Fryer was correspondent for the *Daily Worker* (Now *Morning Star*) a newspaper under the control of the Communist Party of Great Britain. His experiences in Hungary and the censoring of his reports led to Fryer's resignation from the paper and party.

Any writer whose first book is thought to be worth reprinting after 30 years, for a new generation of readers, is bound to feel a sense of pride. But my pride in the reappearance of *Hungarian Tragedy* does not blind me to its flaws. This little book was written in a week. Or rather, it poured itself on the page white-hot. It bears the marks of haste, emotion and disillusionment. It is not free from naivetés and purple passages. There are two errors of fact: the 'North-East district secretary' quoted in the Introduction was in fact the Durham area secretary; the interview with Charles Courtts took place, not on November 2, but the day before.

Yet, for all its faults, this book does tell the truth about the Hungarian uprising of 1956. To tell that truth was, I thought, my duty to the Hungarian workers who had fought and died so selflessly and whose gallant struggle, so brutally suppressed, I had witnessed.

For telling the truth in this book I was expelled from the Communist Party. Thirty years later, the problem discussed in the Postscript – the regeneration of the world communist movement – is still unresolved. This problem has proved more stubborn, and more contradictory, than anyone could have foreseen. It is the key problem of our epoch, and the future of humanity depends on its solution.

Some of the Hungarians referred to in these pages were soon to fall victim to Stalinist repression. Attila Szigeti slashed his wrists with his spectacles, then jumped to his death from his cell window. Géza Losonczy went on hunger strike. His health had been shattered in Rákosi's jails, where he had suffered a lung haemorrhage; when



**Pál Maléter**

his new captors carelessly pushed a feeding tube down his windpipe, he died.

Another victim was the 'outstandingly shrewd, well-informed and intelligent Hungarian communist' who is quoted in Chapter 3. His name was Miklós Gimes. He was a very brave man. He took his wife and child to safety in Vienna during the uprising, then went back to Budapest to face arrest. He was hanged in 1958 with Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter, and József Szilágyi, after the shameful farce of a secret trial. The whole business was finished, and the murderers were washing the blood off their hands, before the world labour movement had been given the slightest chance to protest. Gimes and his three comrades refused to compromise. They went to their deaths without confessing to 'crimes' they had not committed. They died as they had lived: sworn enemies of capitalism and Stalinism alike.

Though I only met him once, Gimes's integrity and passion, his fierce love of truth and justice, made a powerful impression on the young man I then was. He represented all that was best in Hungary. I dedicate this new edition of *Hungarian Tragedy* to his memory

Peter Fryer

## Obituary

# Terry Brotherstone

# Peter Fryer

Communist journalist who told the truth about Hungary 1956

Friday November 3, 2006

*The Guardian*

The death of Peter Fryer aged 79, comes 50 years to the week since his honest reporting of Hungary's 1956 revolution for the **Daily Worker** (now the **Morning Star**) split the Communist party of Great Britain, and changed his own life. A loyal CP member since 1945, and a **Worker** journalist for nine years, he immediately wrote a short, passionate book **Hungarian Tragedy** in defence of the revolution—and was expelled from the party.

Fryer's book has been compared to John Reed's **Ten Days that Shook the World** on the Bolshevik uprising of 1917. A few days before he died, Fryer heard that Hungary's president had awarded him the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic, in recognition of his "continuous support of the Hungarian revolution and freedom fight".

Sent by the then **Worker** editor, Johnny Campbell, to report on a "counter-revolutionary" uprising, Fryer's loyalty was to communism, Marx's "truly human society", not to the CPGB's Stalinist line. Realising that he was witnessing a popular uprising of students and workers, he sided with the revolutionaries. His dispatches were savagely edited, then suppressed.

In 1949, Fryer had covered the Hungarian Stalinist regime's show trial of Hungarian party leader, László Rajk. In good faith, he reported Rajk's "confession"—made with the promise of being spared, but resulting in his execution—as proletarian justice. So, when



the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's revelations about Stalinism at the 1956 Soviet Party congress were followed in Hungary by Rajk's cynical "rehabilitation", Fryer's engagement with the CPGB's crisis was personal. The "doubts and difficulties" shared by many members, for him meant confronting the part he felt he had played in Rajk's murder.

Held up at a border town on the road from Vienna to Budapest, Fryer saw his first dead bodies—80 people shot during a demonstration. It was his turning-point. Attending the election of a workers' council at a state farm was the last straw. An apology that it was taking all day because "we have absolutely no experience of electing people" made him think: "So much for 'people's democracy'."

In late October 1956 there was a lull which followed from the brief Soviet withdrawal and ended with the Soviet army's return to Budapest on November 4 to crush the revolution. During that period Fryer offered to edit an English-language paper, and he was proud to read, in a 1961 Hungarian emigré bibliography of the revolution that this was "of capital importance as regards the character of the insurrection: the only foreign journalist who decided to act for the sake of Hungary was a Communist".

**Hungarian Tragedy** played a big part in

the CPGB's fierce internal discussions which followed the Soviet invasion and led up to its Easter 1957 Hammersmith congress. But the party proved irredeemable. By then Fryer was working with the Trotskyist "club" of Gerry Healy (obituary December 18 1989), for which he edited the weekly **Newsletter** and co-edited **Labour Review**. These publications represent one of the few attempts by British Trotskyists to engage in serious dialogue and for a while they attracted a wide range of authors.

The narrow-minded, and sometimes brutal, authoritarianism Healy substituted for Marxist politics soon drove Fryer away. For quarter of a century, he lived another life, writing on the history of Portugal, Grundyism, censorship, and, above all, black history and music.

His best-known book, **Staying Power** (1984), on the black presence in Britain was followed by **Rhythms of Resistance** (2000), which makes a significant contribution to the study of the impact of African music in Latin America.

The son of a Hull master mariner, he won a scholarship to Hymers college in 1938. The

young Fryer was impressed by the local Communist party's opposition to Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. But he was an anarchist until, inspired by the Red Army, and "a patriot of the Soviet Union", he joined the Young Communist League in 1942.

He also gravitated towards journalism notably at the **Yorkshire Post**. But his CP membership and the paper's Tory politics proved an unstable mix and on the last day of 1947 he joined the **Daily Worker**.

In the late 1980s the expulsion of Gerry Healy from what had become the Workers' Revolutionary Party allowed Fryer to return to the political dialogue left unfinished 30 years earlier. Fryer wrote a splendid column for the often rather earnest weekly **Workers' Press**.

In his last few weeks, he had a success as a pianist playing blues at the Caipirinha jazz bar in Archway, north London.

He is survived by Norma Meacock, his partner, and their son, two daughters and three grandchildren.

*Peter Fryer, journalist, born February 18 1927; died October 31 2006*

## **Hungarian Tragedy, (1956)**

First Published: December 1956, by Dobson Books Ltd, Britain  
Source: October 1986 by New Park Publications Ltd [ISBN 0 86151 072 6]  
Transcription: Rolf Vorhaug ([http://www.vorhaug.net/politikk/hungarian\\_tragedy/](http://www.vorhaug.net/politikk/hungarian_tragedy/))  
Additional markup for the Marxists Internet Archive by David Walters & Einde O'Callaghan.  
Copyright: © Index Books Ltd, London, Britain. Online here with permission.  
'A people which enslaves others

forges its own chains'.

Karl Marx

'The victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without undermining its own victory by so doing'.

Frederick Engels

'If Finland, if Poland, if the Ukraine break away from Russia, there is nothing bad about that. Anyone who says there is, is a chauvinist. It would be madness to continue the policy of the Tsar Nicholas ... No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations'.

V. I. Lenin

Preface to 1986 Reprint Introduction

1. Arrival in Hungary

2. Magyaróvár

3. Background to October

4. How The Revolution Began

5. Győr

6. Bábolna

7. Budapest

8. Revolution And Counter-Revolution

9. The Second Soviet Intervention

10. What Now?

Postscript

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fryer/1956/dec/index.htm>

# Hungarian Tragedy

By Peter Fryer

## Chapter 8. Revolution and counter-revolution

The question of the origin of the Hungarian revolution was discussed in Chapter Three. It was argued that the revolution was not a well-prepared plot by counter-revolutionary forces, but a genuine upsurge of the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian people, for whom life had become intolerable – an upsurge prepared for by the past thirty-seven years and called forth in particular by the blunders, crimes and trickery of the Stalinist leaders of the Communist Party. There are some who would accept this view, and who would deplore the initial Soviet intervention, but who would defend the second Soviet intervention as a regrettable, but bitter, necessity.

Three arguments are advanced to support this defence. In the first place it is said that the Nagy government as reconstituted on Saturday, November 3, had moved considerably to the Right, and was on the point of sliding still further to the Right, since it included people who wanted not merely to neutralise Hungary but to restore capitalism and landlordism. Secondly, it is held that a growing danger of counter-revolution, the increasing activity of reactionary forces throughout the country, which the Nagy government was powerless to check, made Soviet intervention imperative. (Cardinal Mindszenty's broadcast on the evening of November 3 is usually cited as

**On October 31, in a speech to the inaugural meeting of the Pécs branch of the Smallholders' Party, Béla Kovács said: "No one must dream of going back to the world of counts, bankers and capitalists: that world is over once and for all. A true member of the Smallholders' Party cannot think along the lines of 1939 or 1945".**

proof.) Thirdly, the defenders of the second Soviet intervention claim that White Terror was raging in the country, and that prompt action by Soviet troops was needed to save the lives of Communists. I propose to try to

answer these arguments in turn.

The character of the Nagy Government on the eve of the Soviet attack, and the positions taken up by the parties represented in it, have been analysed by Daniel Norman in an article in *Tribune* of November 23, 1956, to which I am indebted for some of the translations below. The 'Inner Cabinet' of three Communists and four non-Communists had been replaced by a Government consisting of two representatives of the Socialist

Workers' (Communist) Party, three each from the Social-Democratic Party and the Smallholders' Party, two from the Petöfi (National Peasant) Party and – what Norman does not mention – one representative of the revolutionary committees, Colonel Pál Maléter, who sat as Minister of War, and who was one of the two delegates arrested by the Russians. The suggestion seems to be that this change meant a certain swamping of the Communists, and that the non-Communists in the coalition could not be trusted to retain Socialism, but would pave the way for fascism.

To which it must be answered first, that this coalition was more truly representative of the

Hungarian people than any government Hungary had known since 1947: it was a real people's front government, and, if the matter had been put to the test, would undoubtedly have enjoyed the trust of the national committees; and, secondly, that statements by responsible leaders of the three non-Communist parties in the coalition gave no grounds whatever for branding them as enemies of Socialism. In the first issue of the new *Népszava*, on November I, the Socialist leader Anna Kéthly had written:

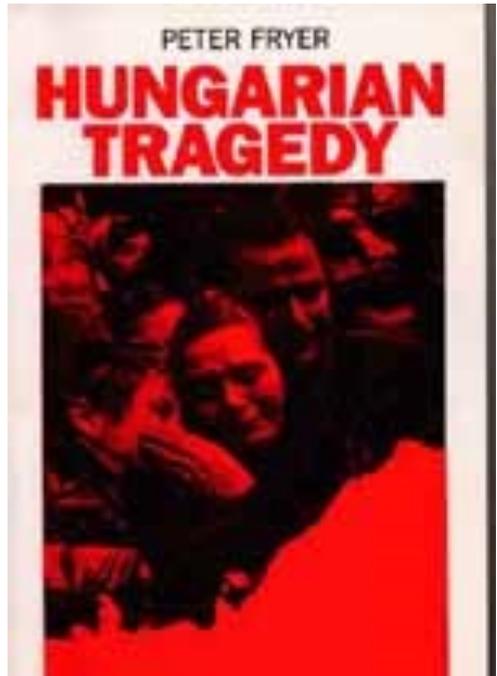
The Social-Democratic Party ... has won its chance of living, and it has won this from a regime which called itself a popular democracy, but which in form and essence was neither popular nor democratic. We greet with profound respect the heroes who have made possible the rebirth of the party, thousands of young intellectuals and workers who have fought, starving and in rags, spurred on by the idea of a free and independent Hungary ... Freed from one prison, let us not allow the country to become a prison of another colour. Let us watch over the factories, the mines and the land, which must remain in the hands of the people. (My italics – P.F.)

On October 31, in a speech to the inaugural meeting of the Pécs branch of the Smallholders' Party, Béla Kovács said:

"No one must dream of going back to the world of counts, bankers and capitalists: that world is over once and for all. A true member of the Smallholders' Party cannot think along the lines of 1939 or 1945."

On November 3 Ferenc Farkas, general secretary of the Petöfi Party, and one of its members in the Nagy government (the Daily Worker on November 5 described this party as 'semi-fascist') said there were a number of points on which the Government was unanimous, including the following:

"The Government will retain from the Socialist achievements everything which can be, and



must be, used in a free, democratic and Socialist country, in accordance with the wish of the people.

We want to retain the most sincere and warmest friendly economic and cultural relations with every Socialist country, even when we have achieved neutrality. We also want to establish economic and cultural relations with the other peace-loving countries of the world."

The demand for neutrality, which Nagy supported, was no evidence of a slide to the Right, nor of 'open hostility ... to the Soviet Union,' nor of 'repeated concessions ... to the reactionary forces', as that shameful statement of the Executive Committee of the British Communist Party, issued only twelve hours after the Soviet attack began yet thoroughly approving it, sought to make out. If Yugoslavia could choose its own path to Socialism without joining one or other bloc, why could not the Hungarian people, too, have both

neutrality and Socialism? I am in complete agreement with Norman's conclusion that, far from being 'reactionary forces', the parties associated in the Coalition Government of Imre Nagy on the eve of the Soviet attack 'were the only forces capable of dealing with the dispersed fascists, little groups of fascists or plain hooligans who had made their appearance lately among the revolutionary mass and perpetrated crimes condemned by everyone among the insurgents. Their number was not great. They had no possibility of organising themselves. Only a government which had the backing of the overwhelming majority of the Hungarians, as Nagy's last government had, could have detected and dealt with them.'

This brings us to the second question. Were reactionary forces becoming more active? Of course they were. Was there a danger of counter-revolution? It would be senseless to deny it. The night I reached Vienna, November 11, I was told by Austrian Communists how 2,000 Hungarian émigrés armed and trained by the Americans, had crossed over into Western Hungary to fight and agitate. But the danger of counter-revolution is not the same thing as the success of counter-revolution. And between the two lay a powerful and significant barrier, which I for one was prepared to put my trust in: the will of the Hungarian people not to return to capitalism. As Bruce Renton wrote in *The New Statesman and Nation* on November 17:

Nobody who was in Hungary during the revolution could escape the overwhelming impression that the Hungarian people had no desire or intention to return to the capitalist system.

And remember that these people who wanted to retain Socialism and improve it had arms in their hands; they were armed workers, armed peasants, armed students, armed soldiers. They had guns and tanks and ammunition. They had splendid morale. They were more than equal to any putsch, if one had been at-



tempted. But they were never given the chance to prove it. It was none other than the Communist Party paper *Szabad Nép* which on October 29 indignantly rebuffed *Pravda's* article *The collapse of the adventure directed against the people of Hungary*.

What happened in Budapest, said *Szabad Nép*, had not been directed against the people, it had not been an adventure, and it certainly had not 'collapsed'. The demands were demands for Socialist democracy. *Pravda's* claim that the insurrection had been instigated by 'Western imperialists' was 'an insult to the whole population of Budapest'. It was not imperialist intrigue which produced this 'bloody, tragic, but lofty fight,' but the Hungarian leadership's own 'faults and crimes', and, in the first place, its failure to 'safeguard the sacred flame of national independence'. And *Szabad Nép* answered in advance the cry that counter-revolution obliged the Soviet Union to intervene:

"The youth will be able to defend the conquests which they have achieved at the price of their blood, even against the counter-revolutionaries who have joined them. (The students and workers) have proved that they represent such a political force as is capable of becoming a guiding and irreplaceable force ...

## Revolutionary and Counter-Revolution in Hungary 1956

From the first moments of the demonstration and fighting they declared many times – and in the course of the fighting they proved it – that they were not against popular rule, that they were neither fascists nor counter-revolutionaries nor bandits.”

As for the Mindszenty broadcast of November 3, the lengthy extracts quoted by Mervyn Jones in *Tribune* (November 30) make nonsense of Andrew Rothstein’s claim that it ‘issued a programme of capitalist restoration’, and John Gollan’s description of it as ‘the virtual signal for the counterrevolutionary coup’. Mindszenty on the whole supported the Nagy Government, and his one reference to private ownership came in a sentence beginning: ‘We want a classless society!’ As Jones said, the speech was ‘reminiscent ... of a Labour Party policy statement’.

There is one further proof of how false was the claim that the Soviet troops went into action against reactionaries and fascists, and that is the indisputable fact that they were greeted, not with joy, as the Soviet communiqués claimed, but with the white-hot, patriotic fury of a people in arms; and that it was the industrial workers who resisted them to the end. ‘Soviet troops are re-establishing order ... We Soviet soldiers and officers are your selfless friends’, said the Soviet communiqué of November 5. It was the proletariat of Hungary, above all, that fought the tanks which came to destroy the revolu-

tionary order they had already established in the shape of their workers’ councils. In my dispatch of November 11, I asked:

If the Soviet intervention was necessary to put down counterrevolution, how is it to be explained that some of the fiercest resistance of all last week was in the working-class districts of Újpest, in the north of Budapest, and Csepel, in the south – both pre-war strongholds of the Communist Party? Or how is the declaration of the workers of the famous steel town of Sztálinváros to be explained: that they would defend their Socialist town, the plant and houses they had built with their own hands, against the Soviet invasion? Not only was no answer forthcoming to these questions, but the questions themselves never saw the light of day. The Stalinists in control of the *Daily Worker* backed the export of Socialism in high explosive form

against the bare-handed heroism of ‘Red Csepel’. They took their stand on the wrong side of the barricades.

The third argument in favour of Soviet intervention is that there was ‘White Terror’ raging in Hungary, and that for the Soviet Union to have refused to intervene would have been ‘inhuman’. Leaving aside the still uncertain question of whether anyone ever did appeal to the Soviet Union to intervene, let us make quite sure what White Terror is. just as Red Terror is the organised, systematic repression by a proletarian dictatorship of its coun-

ter-revolutionary opponents, so White Terror is the organised, systematic repression by a bourgeois dictatorship of its revolutionary opponents.

Heaven help Andrew Rothstein and those others who call the state of affairs in Hungary on November 1, 2 and 3 'White Terror' if they ever come face to face with real White Terror. In ten days the Versailles army which suppressed the Paris Commune of 1871

slaughtered between 20,000 and 30,000 men, women and children, either in battle or in cold blood, amid terrible scenes of cruelty and suffering. 'The ground is paved with their corpses', gloated Thiers. Another 20,000 were transported and 7,800 sent to the coastal fortresses. That was White Terror.

Thousands of Communists and Jews were tortured and murdered after the suppression of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, and hideous atrocities took place at Orgovány and Siófok. That was White Terror. In 1927 Chiang Kai-shek massacred 5,000 organised workers in Shanghai. That was White Terror. From the advent of Hitler to the defeat of fascist Germany untold millions of Communists, Socialists, trade unionists, Jews and Christians were murdered. That was White Terror. It is perfectly true that a section of the population of Budapest, outraged to the pitch of madness by the crimes of the secret police, was seized with a lust to exterminate Communists. It is true that the innocent suffered

In the provinces only the AVH was physically attacked. (New Statesman, November 17) I had seen no counter-revolutionaries. I had seen the political prisoners liberated ... I had seen the executioners executed in the fury of the people's revenge ... But there was no 'White Terror'. The Communists walked free, the secret police were hanging by their boots. Where then was this counter-revolution, this White Terror? (Truth, November 16)

as well as the guilty. This is a painful and distressing fact. But to describe the murder of a number of Communists (which all observers agree was confined to Budapest) as 'White Terror' necessitating Soviet intervention is to describe events in Hungary in a one-sided, propagandist way. How many innocent Communists were murdered in Budapest? Twenty? Fifty? I do not know. But certainly fewer – far, far fewer – than the number of AVH men

who were lynched. At the Agony of Hungary exhibition in London, and in all the hundreds of photographs I have seen, there was not a single one showing a lynched Communist. But there were many showing lynched AVH men in their uniforms. [1] There was one sequence showing a woman in civilian clothes being molested by a crowd, who accused her of being an AVH spy. The caption stated that the crowd let her go.

Now the only circumstantial evidence for the murder of Communists is that put forward by André Stil in an article translated in World News of November 24. Stil arrived in Budapest on November 12, nine days after the second Soviet intervention. His article was published in Humanité on November 19. Even bearing in mind the assertion of Coutts and others I spoke to that forty of those killed in the Budapest Party headquarters were AVH men, it is impossible to find Stil's account of the treatment of the seven Communists whom he names anything but convincing and horrible.

Yet Stil is obviously performing the disa-

grecable task of a propagandist making the most of a small number of atrocities. His need to have the attack on the Party headquarters begin on October 30 makes him antedate the Soviet withdrawal from Budapest by three days; he describes ‘the vandals attacking the liberation monument built upon the Gellért Hill’, whereas in fact the main figure was not attacked; and, worst of all, he mentions the AVH and its crimes in the following curious and oblique way:

Many of those who were there did not at first believe that the Party and its active members were being attacked, but that the attack was directed to the members of a secret police *about whom the most unlikely stories were being told.* (my italics – P.F.)

I have met Stil and have a great personal respect for him, as comrade, journalist, novelist and militant, but I should be dishonest if I did not say that the words I have italicised are unworthy of him. The truth about the ‘White Terror’ has been told by Bruce Renton:

In the provinces only the AVH was physically attacked. (New Statesman, November 17) I had seen no counter-revolutionaries. I had seen the political prisoners liberated ... I had seen the executioners executed in the fury of the people’s revenge ... But there was no ‘White Terror’. The Communists walked free, the secret police were hanging by their boots. Where then was this counter-revolution, this White Terror? (Truth, November 16)

The arguments in favour of the second Soviet intervention do not hold water. But even if Nagy had been making concessions all along the line to fascism, even if counter-revolution had succeeded, even if White Terror had been raging, it must be said, and said openly and with emphasis, that from the standpoint of Socialist principle the Soviet Union would still



not have been justified in intervening. The Soviet aggression against Hungary was not merely immoral and criminal from the standpoint of the Hungarian people. It was a clear and flagrant breach of what Lenin called ‘that elementary Socialist principle ... to which Marx was always faithful, namely, that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations’. November 4, 1956, saw the leaders of the Soviet Union defy Lenin’s warning never to ‘slide, even in trifles, into imperialist relations with the oppressed nationalities, thereby undermining entirely our whole principle of sincerity, our principle of defence of the struggle against imperialism’.

### Note

1. On November 14 the Daily Worker published under the headline The White Terror in Hungary a photograph of ‘the body of a lynched Communist Party member in one of the wrecked Budapest Party offices’. Another photograph of the same corpse was in the paper’s possession, but was not used, showing clearly that the lynched man wore AVH uniform.

# Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary

Gerry Healy, (November 1956)

Originally published as A News Letter Pamphlet in November 1956.

Copied with thanks from the Gerry Healy Archive.

Marked up by Einde O' Callaghan for the Encyclopaedia of Trotskyism On-Line (ETOL).

## Introduction

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is the touchstone of revolutionary politics today.

At the time of the Hungarian uprising in November 1956 there were many trends and individuals in the working class movement who were only too ready to denounce the abomination and excesses of the Soviet and Hungarian Stalinists and pay homage to the grandeur and pathos of the Revolution.

Some protested in the name of a spurious middle-class Humanism, some others objected because their anti-communist susceptibilities had been outraged and a few, like Isaac Deutscher, hung tight-lipped from a precarious and undignified diagonal drawn between the Soviet tanks and the barricades of the Revolution.

Only a small minority of people led by the International Committee of the Fourth International defended, unconditionally, the Hungarian insurrection in the name of International Socialism and fought for the realization of the programme of political revolution first advanced by Leon Trotsky in his struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Revolutions, like wars, expose all that is filthy, treacherous and compromising in the working class. And so it is with the Hungarian Revolution, the first, but by no means the last, political revolution of its kind. With an implacable logic it has exposed not only the manifest rottenness of the Stalinist system but also – and more important – it has revealed to many Communists the corrupt and two-

faced nature of pseudo-Marxism, better known as Pabloite revisionism, represented by the United Secretariat in Paris and the Socialist Workers' Party in New York.

It is sufficient to say that none of these groups, for all their verbal pretensions of anti-Stalinism, could summon enough political courage and integrity even to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution.

On the contrary, so far have these gentlemen travelled from Trotskyism to Stalinism that their supporters in Belgium did not see anything wrong in calling the police (unsuccessfully) to haul down the British Young Socialist banner proclaiming solidarity with the Hungarian Revolution, which was raised at the Liege demonstration against NATO and the Vietnam War in October 1966!

The events of the last decade show conclusively that the only political allies of the Hungarian working class and the best defenders of the programme of the political revolution is the International Committee and the parties which it leads.

There is no other. (1966)

## STALINSIM IS DEAD BUT STALINISM LIVES.

That is the message spelt out in letters of blood by the Hungarian people.

The labour movement of the world is rightly shocked at the brutality and ruthlessness of the Soviet armed forces. But this fact must not permit us to be taken off guard for one

moment by world imperialism and its agents. Stalinist rule has always been associated with persecution and murder, both inside and outside the Soviet Union. Eden and Eisenhower have never protested when revolutionary opponents of the regime have been smashed. They helped to whitewash and justify the Moscow trials through the book and film *Mission to Moscow* written by American ex-ambassador Joseph E. Davies. Both the British and American governments refused asylum for the great revolutionary Leon Trotsky when he was being hounded from one country to another by Stalin's GPU.

If these gentlemen shed tears for Hungary today it is not for the workers and peasants who have borne the brunt of the fight against Stalinism but for their fascist and landlord friends.

What happened in Hungary, as we shall see, was a revolution for national independence and democratic rights. Connected with this was a series of demands passed by the trade unions.

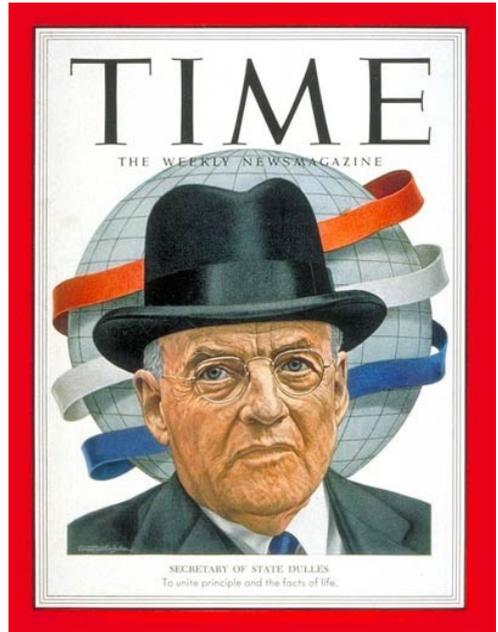
1. Workers' councils in every factory to establish workers' management and radically transform the system of state central planning and directing.

2. Wages to be raised immediately by 10 to 15 per cent and a ceiling (about £106 a month) fixed for the highest salaries.

3. To abolish production norms except in factories where the workers or workers' councils wish to keep them.

4. The 4 per cent bachelor and childless family tax to be abolished; the lowest retirement pensions to be increased; child allowances to be raised with special reference to the needs of large families.

5. Speed up house-building with the state, co-operatives and other organisations launching a powerful social movement to



**John Foster Dulles (above 1953), speaking in Washington, defended the legality of the presence of Soviet troops in Poland under the Warsaw agreement. "From the standpoint of international law and violation of treaties," he said, "I do not think you can claim that it would be a violation of a treaty."**

mass produce houses.

Negotiate with the governments of the Soviet Union and other countries in order to establish economic relations that will ensure mutual advantages by adhering to the principle of equality. (From **Daily Worker**, October 27, 1956) [\[1\]](#)

The backbone of this movement was the demand for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungary. The imperialists were against this type of revolution. On the same day, October 27, the **New York Times**, mouthpiece of American big business, declared:

"The view prevailing among United States officials, it appeared, was that

‘evolution’ towards freedom in Eastern Europe would be better for all concerned than ‘revolution’, though nobody was saying this publicly.”

The **New York Times** returned to this theme the next day, October 28, when it declared that the problem of western imperialism is “how to encourage the nationalist and libertarian spirit in the satellites without flaming it into a large scale revolt.

As if not to be outdone by the **New York Times** the London **Daily Worker**, echoing Moscow, declared on October 25: “Only false friends resort to the gun ...”

Five days previously, John Foster Dulles, speaking in Washington, defended the legality of the presence of Soviet troops in Poland under the Warsaw agreement. “From the standpoint of international law and violation of treaties,” he said, “I do not think you can claim that it would be a violation of a treaty.”

Mr Dulles was fully aware at the time he made that statement that a revolution was under way in Hungary and that Hungary was also a party to the Warsaw agreement. Hot on the heels of Mr Dulles came R. Palme Dutt of the British Communist Party.

“The Soviet armed forces”, he wrote, “were legally in Hungary by agreement under the Warsaw Pact.” (**Daily Worker**, November 10)

In a cable from Washington by its correspondent Philip Deane, the **London Observer**, November 11, 1956, reports that:

“High Administration sources say that the United States has tried to let the Russians know, without being provocative, that Berlin and Austria will be defended by American forces, Hungary, meanwhile, has been officially and finally abandoned to its fate.”

And Basil Davidson, one of the last journalists to leave Hungary, reports that, speaking of the American financed propaganda station *Radio Free Europe*, one revolutionary said:

“I wish I could shut its ugly mouth. It lied to us just as the Russians lied to us.”

Neither the Soviet bureaucrats nor the imperialists and their representatives, Palme Dutt and Foster Dulles, care two hoots about the working people of Hungary. They were both, for different reasons, opposed to the revolution, and in each case supported their own particular agents and not the movement of the Hungarian people as a whole.

## How the Revolution Began

On October 23, a large group of unarmed students gathered outside the Budapest radio station and demanded that their 17-point programme of democratic demands be broadcast. After the police opened fire the government, dominated by Erno Gero, a notorious Kremlin hack, promptly called for Soviet troops.

On Wednesday, October 24, Russian tanks and artillery fired on demonstrators in Budapest killing and wounding hundreds of men, women and children. It was these actions which sparked off the revolutionary armed resistance. During the next day, October 25, armed rebellion broke out. Workers on Csepel island in the Danube took up weapons against the security forces. Radio Budapest announced this as a rebellion of the working people. Absolutely no mention was made at time that this was the work of armed gangs and the counter-revolution.

The spearhead of the whole struggle was a general strike. In cities and towns under their control the rebels set up councils of workers, soldiers and students. The first to down tools were the railway workers. They were quickly followed by workers from factories and plants. The strike was directed by a ‘Central Workers’ Committee.’

At the same time Imre Nagy, who had previously been jailed, was installed as premier to help win back popular support.

On October 29, a parade of workers' delegations from the provinces presented its demands to the new government. They demanded the removal of Russian troops, unconditional amnesty for revolutionists and the release of all political prisoners.

According to reports, the peasants were passive at the beginning. The **New York Times** of October 30 quoted some insurgent leaders who attributed the failure of the army as a whole in the early days to the fact that they were for the most part "farm boys". According to the same reports it (the army) had given them small arms. These insurgent leaders declared:

"The peasant is conservative by nature and therefore passive. But the workers have fought with us, even the workers from 'red Csepel' which contains the biggest concentration of industry in Hungary."

By October 29 revolutionary workers councils had taken control of several large towns. These included Győr, Szombathely, Sopron and Pápa, Kaposvár, Veszprém, Pécs, Miskolc, Szolnok, Székesbány and Magyaróvár.

On the same day Miskolc radio station broadcast in the name of the workers' councils of Borsod Province. In another industrial town, Sopron, the streets were patrolled by groups of three: one soldier, one student, one worker. The uprising was symbolised throughout by the unity between the workers, soldiers, and students – clear proof that it was a popular revolution in which the working class occupied the vanguard positions.

Finally, if there is any further doubt on this



point, just read over the dispatch sent on November 3 to the **Daily Worker** by its correspondent Peter Fryer who was sent to Hungary to get the FACTS. His first job was to interview Mr. Charlie Couatts, another member of the British Communist Party, who was there for three years editing **World Youth**, the paper of the Stalinist-dominated WFDY in Budapest. Here are extracts from the interview. Mr. Couatts reported as follows:

"The Hungarian uprising – the result of eight years pent-up feeling – arose from the refusal of Communist leaders to make real changes after the 20th Congress.

"The people did not oppose everything that happened in their country since 1945. They had wanted to build socialism in Hungary. They established the basis but they were never allowed to build their own socialism on it. After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party everyone expected there would be a complete change. There were some timid changes but nothing that met the needs of the situation", said Mr. Couatts.

"In both the Communist Party and its youth organisations there were people who had not joined either on principle or because

of political understanding but to advance their careers. They had joined for money and for power. There was no free discussion at all inside the Party. It follows from this”, Mr. Coutts went on, “that in order to maintain its position the Party leadership had to use the security police which was created in 1948. The Party as a whole, and Parliament of course, had no control over the security police at all. They had copied the worst features of the Soviet security police as it was under Beria.”

Mr. Coutts said it was only after Soviet troops entered the fight that it became a national movement, with the two main demands, “Russki go home” and “Abolish the AVH” (security police).

Mr. Coutts said that from the Thursday onwards the security police became completely isolated. Everyone’s hand, including honest Communists, was against them. Much of the fighting from the Thursday onwards was simply to kill off the security police.

“I have seen the hatred against them expressed in the most terrible scenes”, said Mr. Coutts. “I saw an AVH man clubbed to the ground with a rifle butt then literally kicked and torn to pieces.”

### **The Daily Worker Stands by Stalinism**

It would be difficult to find an occasion in history when there was a more discredited political party than the British Communist Party. Hav-



ing served Stalin loyally for well nigh 30 years, and justified his most brutal crimes, the men who lead the CPGB [\[2\]](#) are incapable of offering anything but a classical Stalinist answer for the events in Hungary – and as always this has led them to the most ridiculous positions. Here is the record:

“Counter-revolution in Hungary staged an uprising in the hours of darkness on Tuesday night.” (**Daily Worker**, October 25)

The same edition carried an article entitled *The Hell that was Horthy's*. Whilst factually it contained material that was accurate, its purpose was to smear the revolution that had begun in Hungary as “fascist inspired”. The **Daily Worker** stuck more or less to the counter-revolution theme for several days. In this it was faithfully supporting the line taken by **Pravda**, the Kremlin’s mouthpiece, which right from the start denounced the Hungarian events as “counter-revolutionary”.

Then came the formation of the Nagy government and the repudiation of **Pravda** by **Szabad Nep**, the Stalinist paper of the Hungarian workers’ Party. In strong language it

denounced a **Pravda** dispatch which was headed *Collapse of the anti-peoples' adventure in Hungary* – as a “mistake”

“What happened in Budapest,” says **Szabad Nep**, “was neither anti-people nor an adventure, and it did not collapse. The slogans on socialist democracy were the loudest, not those of the reactionaries nor of counter-revolutionaries. The revolutionary people of Pest and Buda want freedom, people’s freedom, a life without despotism, terror and fear, more bread and national independence. Would this be ‘anti-people adventure?’” asks the paper.

The first point in the Hungarian revolutionary demands of 1848 was national independence.

“Today also this is the first point. What has collapsed and can truly be called anti-people is the reign of the Rakosi-Gero clique.”

Saying that the Hungarian nation wanted independence, and that this was the first among its demands, the article continued:

“Let Hungary be free. Let it be an independent country, and let it live with its neighbour the Soviet Union in peace and friendship on this basis.”

This scared the **Daily Worker** editors, especially as it was rumoured that the Soviet armed forces were being withdrawn. They felt that perhaps it was Moscow policy to let the Nagy government get on with things, so they began to change the line, and what was previously denounced as counter-revolutionary they now recognised as having perhaps been “revolutionary” after all. The editorial on Tuesday, October 30, remarked:

“In the course of the struggle in Hungary many sections of the working class people have put forward proposals which are justified, which arose from the bitter experiences of the past period, and which the government, the Party and the people should work in unity to implement. This is not a sign that the majority of Hungarians want to return to the days of landlordism

and capitalism, as the western press would like us to believe.

“Whatever deep resentment and burning criticism exists as a result of mistakes and wrongs since the end of the war, communists and socialists in Hungary and outside know that to attempt to put the clock back would be the worst possible disaster for the Hungarian people.”

Diplomatic language to be sure, but a decisive change from its editorial on October 25. If we had relied upon the **Daily Worker** for our news and policy on Hungary, we would be forced to reason something like this. From October 25, to somewhere in the region of October 30 the Hungarian events were counter-revolutionary; then they began to change to revolutionary. This was, by implication, acknowledged in the publication of the dispatch by Peter Fryer (quoted above) on November 3.

On Sunday, November 4, Soviet tanks in large formations opened fire on Budapest and other cities. It was now clear that the rumoured withdrawal of Soviet troops was a smokescreen behind which massive troop and tank formations for an all-out assault were mustered. Immediately these forces went into action the **Daily Worker** changed its line, and on November 5 proceeded to support the intervention of the Red Army, again denouncing the Hungarian events as “counter-revolutionary”.

What is clear from all this is that the British Communist Party leadership and the **Daily Worker** have one simple guide to help them work out their policy, and that is “watch Moscow and the Red Army and support them under all conditions.

When Gero called upon the Red Army to fire upon an unarmed population the **Daily Worker** denounced the Hungarian events as counter-revolutionary; when it appeared that the Nagy government was being supported and the Red Army withdrawn, these same events became revolutionary, and when once more the Red Army returned to the attack they again became

counter-revolutionary. Where in the world could be found a more glaring example of Stalinist reasoning?

## Stalinism and Counter-Revolution in Hungary

The events in Hungary after the end of the war were similar to what took place in all Eastern-European countries with the exception of Yugoslavia. In 1945 the revolution was bureaucratically carried out through the intervention of the Red Army. The Hungarian Stalinist Party was hoisted into power, not through the popular intervention of the masses, but upon orders from Stalin in Moscow.

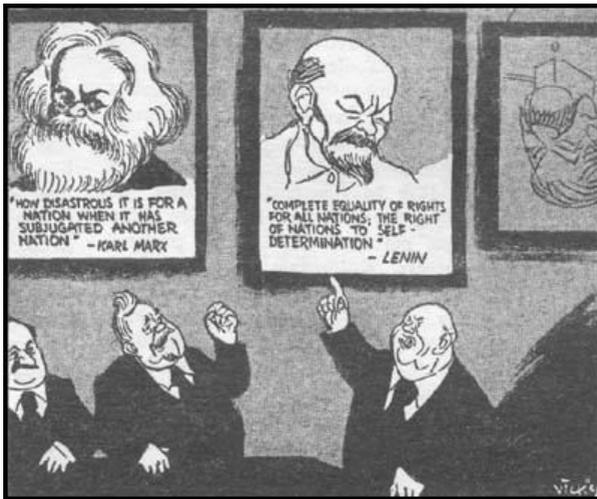
The Russian Revolution in 1917 established the complete overthrow of the Czarist regime by the democratic power of the workers and peasants

through their soviets. In the early days they defeated the internal forces of counter-revolution not so much by force of arms as by argument and policy. The Soviets were supported by the overwhelming majority of the Russian population. That is why the Russian Revolution was a comparatively peaceful affair, with only a handful of people losing their lives. The real struggle and loss of life began when Winston Churchill and his armies of intervention endeavoured to restore the old ruling class.

When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin and his

bureaucracy captured power in the Bolshevik Party and destroyed all democracy and opposition. This was the beginning of Stalinism – the rule of a powerful bureaucracy safeguarding the privileged positions they had gained as a result of the revolution. Though this bureaucracy rested upon the nationalized property relations established by the revolution, its role from the start was predominantly counter-revolutionary, in that its first consideration was to protect itself and its positions of power. Since it rested on the property relations of the October Revolution, it was always forced to

defend this economic base from attack by the imperialists, and this was done not by revolutionary appeals but through typical bureaucratic and military methods. For instance, during the second world war it denounced all Germans as fascists; never once



did it make a revolutionary appeal as Lenin and Trotsky did during the Russian Revolution and the war of intervention. It relied solely upon military means and the help which it received from the British and American imperialists.

Stalin dealt ruthlessly with all those on the left such as Trotsky who sought to re-introduce Lenin's revolutionary policy. As Khrushchev remarked, he (Stalin) coined the phrase "enemies of the people" and this became a substitute for all discussions. You either agreed unreservedly with Stalin or you were an imperialist agent of fascism. It was

under those conditions that the Moscow frame-up trials were organised in the 1930's, the object being to direct opposition away from the bureaucracy by creating a diversion along the lines that the forces of imperialism were preparing to take over in the USSR. From all this the Soviet workers were left with no choice but to support Stalin. Indeed we know that the victims of the trials themselves, having become completely demoralised, actually agreed to tell these monstrous lies because they felt, in their demoralisation, that this was the only way they could defend the gains of the revolution. [3]

To Stalin, Hungary was a buffer zone of military importance only – but having decided to intervene in 1945, he had to face a number of problems: the chief problem being the fact that Hungary was a capitalist state, and in order to gear its economy to that of the Soviet Union he was forced to destroy the capitalist property relations and replace them with state ownership.

Insofar as this was done, it was supported by the overwhelming majority of the working class who, directly or indirectly, participated in the event. The Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow and their Hungarian agents never for one moment relaxed their tight hold over this movement. Power in Hungary was maintained in a similar way to that maintained in Moscow. The Rajk trial was staged for similar reasons to those of the Moscow trials. The regime was propped up by the secret police.

The tragic story of 61-year-old Dr. Edith Bone, an ex-member of the British Communist Party who was jailed by the Hungarian Stalinists confirms this in most concrete form:

I had been in the cellar cells for over two months”, she says, “when the police decided to declare their real purpose. I was taken again to the third floor.

“There had been many big industrial accidents in Hungary, due to the lack of higher skilled technicians, and the workers were getting restless. The communists needed a scapegoat. Britain was to

be that scapegoat. I was to ‘confess’ that I was a secret agent, sent by the British Intelligence Service to organise sabotage. I was to be given a list of names, and was to say yes, these men were the saboteurs. I was to ‘confess’ all this at a public trial and in return, said the police, I would get a light sentence of four years. This sentence, they promised, would be reduced to two, and I would serve them in good conditions.”

*(I suffered and I accuse, Daily Express, November 9, 1956)*

And if any loyal Stalinist should think that this is a pack of lies let the **Daily Worker** put him right. In its issue of November 3 appears the editorial statement: “The **Daily Worker** expresses its condemnation of the inhuman treatment of Dr. Edith Bone and our deep sympathy with her in the ordeal to which she has been subjected.”

This bureaucratic transfer of power had another side to it. In politically expropriating the Hungarian working class, it enabled the remnants of the old ruling class to find an effective cover for counter-revolutionary work amongst the masses who more and more became hostile to Stalinism. Since the workers were not permitted to deal with the old capitalist elements through democratic organs of power such as the Soviets in Russia in 1917, the basic class struggle remained unresolved. Stalinism in Hungary was like a repressive lid which since 1945 had clamped itself down upon the whole nation, rightist and leftist elements alike.

When the revolution finally blew the lid off, events in Hungary expressed themselves through the centre Nagy government as a state of dual power. Right-wing, capitalist inspired and peasant elements demanded recognition, as well as representatives from the revolutionary workers. This was also the case inside many of the workers’ councils, and it was similar to what happened in the Russian Soviets immediately prior to the revolution. This situation is also described by Peter Fryer of the London **Daily Worker** in his interview with C. Coutts, November 3, 1956:

“A great number of political groups were now active in Budapest and the rest of Hungary. The air was thick with manifestoes ranging from those who wanted to defend collective ownership, to those who were against it but could not say so yet, and therefore put the people’s genuine national demands in an anti-socialist way. What the outcome was going to be nobody could say with certainty. The revolutionary committees in the factories, and the revolutionary workers’ councils had no overall direction and aim, no overall basis of policy.

“I don’t want to minimise the danger of the return of the émigrés”, said Mr. Coutts. “But if the revolutionary committees can hammer out some form of unity around the basic demands for an independent, democratic and socialist Hungary, then all attempts at counter-revolution will be defeated.”

Mr. Coutts believed the working class was now without an organised leadership.

“There are dangers of terrorism against individual communists. In fact, that has begun. But in spite of everything there will be a Party that will identify itself with the Hungarian revolution and will be forced now to win the Hungarian working class for revolutionism on the basis of conviction.”

We can see therefore that by November 3 the situation was crying out for genuine socialist leadership and that, according to Coutts and Fryer, it was possible that this could have come from the working class. On the other hand, the centrist government of Nagy was swinging steadily to the right, thereby encouraging capitalist intervention.

At this juncture the labour movement of the world is able to see clearly what has happened in the Soviet Union since Khrushchev’s speech. [4] Stalin is dead but the bureaucracy which he personified continues to rule. They have been forced here and there to retreat by the mass pressure and the hostility of the Soviet people (Khrushchev’s speech was one example of this), but such

retreats are one thing – giving power back to the working people is quite another. Long ago in 1927 Stalin, referring to his ruling clique, explained that they could only be removed by civil war. The present bureaucracy in the Soviet Union will never liquidate or liberalise itself out of existence. It will only be removed finally by the actions and struggle of the Soviet people led by a conscious socialist leadership.

In typical bureaucratic style, the Soviet bureaucracy turned its armed might, not only against the capitalists and Cardinal Mindszenty elements in the Nagy government, but against the revolutionary people as well. The usual stooge government of Janos Kadar was set up and the shooting began. No socialist programme was presented by the Russians – just giant T34 tanks and masses of armour. The Soviet troops who were in Hungary when hostilities began and who, according to Coutts and Fryer, fraternised and discussed with the Hungarian people, appear to have been withdrawn. Fresh troops replaced them and the attempt to restore bureaucratic rule, as in 1945, commenced.

The tragedy of Hungary today is that the brutal war begun by the Soviet troops is no longer directed against the capitalist elements, but against the revolutionary forces. The most stubborn resistance comes from the industrial areas; a general strike continues despite the reports that 20,000 have been killed. The Kadar regime has no basis whatsoever, and is distrusted by everyone. This is shown by what the **Manchester Guardian** describes as the “helplessness of the regime when it was forced to admit that the free forces may have been inspired by ‘genuine and honourable motives’ in taking up arms.” Hitherto it had been calling the forces fascist and counter-revolutionary. (November 11, 1956)

Again, on November 9 the **Manchester**

**Guardian** reported:

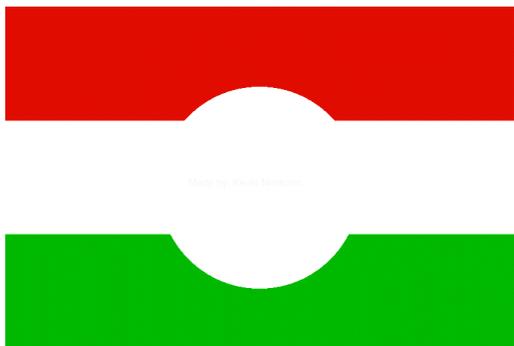
“The Minister of the Interior, Ferenc Muennich, today issued instructions to all Hungarian troops to remain in their barracks, thus proving that none is fighting on the Russian side. They were ordered to dissolve their revolutionary committees, which were formed during the first Hungarian crisis. Civilian revolutionary committees were told that they must eject counter-revolutionary elements. Political ‘advisers’ will be appointed by the government and attached to them.”

In other words, the struggle is now to take political power away from the working class, and replace it with the “Kadar” clique.

The hirelings of the British Communist Party and the **Daily Worker** have scoured everywhere for some factual information, which would prove that capitalist elements control the situation in Hungary, but little appears to have been found apart from the speech of Cardinal Mindzenty, and as soon as this is quoted it immediately defeats itself. For the fact remains that if the capitalist elements have such a mass base, why did the cardinal have to take refuge in the American embassy? Capitalist agents there are, to be sure, but the movement right from the start was predominantly revolutionary, and it is this fact which must guide the Labour Movement.

## Hungary and British Labour

The responsibility for the emergence of capitalist elements in Hungary, and for the war now being waged to crush the revolutionary workers, rests entirely on Stalinism, and



those who defend its policies inside and outside the Soviet Union. For an example of this type of individual, listen to Mr. D.N. Pritt.

“Anyone”, he says, “who joins in the shouting against the Soviet Union at

the moment is helping the American ruling class and bringing the third world war nearer.” (**Daily Worker**, November 9, 1956.)

Simple, isn’t it? You are either for Russia right or wrong, or with the imperialists.

This is the line which Messrs. Pritt, Palme Dutt, Gollan, Pollitt and the rest of them [\[5\]](#) peddled in order to justify the Moscow trials and all the horrors which Khrushchev revealed in his speech. The fact that Mr. Pritt, who has never publicly commented on Khrushchev’s speech, has emerged from his legal hole in order to repeat the same line, illustrates how the old Stalinist hacks in Russia and elsewhere are preparing for a last ditch stand.

Fortunately, Mr. Pritt’s return to the “old vomit” is not being followed by many members of the CPGB and readers of the **Daily Worker**. In the same issue Gabriel, its cartoonist for twenty years, resigned over Hungary. Eric Hobsbawm, one of the leading intellectuals in the CPGB, demands that the Soviet troops be withdrawn. Another reader, Ken Jones from Bristol, writes:

“We owe it to our Hungarian and Polish comrades, as well as to ourselves, to settle accounts with all responsible for providing us with such a grotesque caricature of the real developments in Poland and Hungary over the past five years.”

British labour must stand by the working



Imre Nagy's Statue on the Square of Martyrs in Budapest.

people of Hungary and help them defend their revolution. This can only be done provided we expose and fight any attempts by the imperialists in the west to exploit the situation in order to restore capitalism. We must support the demand not only for the immediate withdrawal of the Red Army, but for the withdrawal of all the imperialist armies in Western Europe as well.

There is a movement afoot by right wing Labour leaders to cover up their disagreements with the Tories on Suez and slip into national unity behind the capitalists over Hungary. This must be pitilessly exposed and fought. All monies, food parcels, and medical supplies which are collected by the labour movement should be distributed in Hungary by the representatives of our movement. They should not be left to imperialist agents who will utilise them in an effort to raise the prestige of the capitalist countries. Labour can help Hungary only if it does its work independently of all Tory forces.

Labour must organise itself if necessary to

prevent British fascists and their Tory friends from launching a witch-hunt either against members of the British Communist Party or members of the Labour Party. There is a danger of this taking place here as it has in France. We must be on our guard. No matter how we detest Stalinism, we must preserve the democracy of the movement.

All members of the Communist Party and Young Communist League should immediately demand a special Congress to repudiate the leadership's line on Hungary. **STAY IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND FIGHT IT OUT.**

The people of Hungary do not want to return to capitalism. They want to preserve the system of centralised planning and state ownership, and get rid of Stalinism forever. This we must support with all our might.

At the same time, the people of Hungary must deal with capitalist elements in their own ranks. That is their job, and we are sure they can do it. The socialist and communist movement in Hungary must win its right to

govern not through the indulgence of the Moscow bureaucracy – its guns, planes and tanks, but by means of a socialist policy which will secure for it the support of the overwhelming majority of the people. There is no other road for Hungary – or for the working people in any country.

**DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM  
DOWN WITH STALINISM  
LONG LIVE THE HUNGARIAN SO-  
CIALIST REVOLUTION**

November 1956

At the end of his article, Healy includes the following reports in the pamphlet as appendices under the general heading *What the Stalinists Did NOT Report*.

**STRANGEST WHITE TERROR IN HISTORY**

The Kadar Government has issued the third volume of its “White Book” on last autumn’s “counter-revolution”. It gives a list of communists who were killed by freedom fighters.

There are 201 names on the list – and it turns out that 166 of them were members of the AVH, the hated security police. Of the remainder, 26 were party officials or in the service of the AVH.

The Kadar regime has been claiming that ‘white terror’ was raging in Hungary on the eve of the second Soviet intervention and that thousands of communists were lynched by mobs.

Of the 2,829 persons who were imprisoned by revolutionaries between October 23 and November 4, over 2,000, it turns out, were members of the AVH.

The number of communists and socialists executed by the Kadar Government since the revolution was repressed is reliably reported to exceed 201 – and the number held in jail far exceeds 2,829.

(*The Newsletter*, Vol. 1 No. 18, September

7, 1957)

**MORE HUNGARIAN COMMUNIST  
IN JAIL THAN UNDER HORTHY**

There are more Hungarian communists in Kadar’s prisons than were imprisoned under Horthy.

They include such veterans of the Hungarian working-class movement as Zoltan Vas and Geza Losonczy; communists and intellectuals Tibor Dery and Gyula Hay; the young novelist Tardos; the journalists Haraszti and Gimes; the young communist Gabor Tanozos, secretary of the Petofi Circle; the communist officers Maleter and Kopacsi; the communist student leaders Markus, Janos Varga and Pozsar.

Hundreds of communists have been executed by Kadar’s AVH. Among them are the communist journalist Gabor Folly, the communist poet Istvan Eorsi, Maleter’s lieutenants Praszmayr and Kabalacs, Istvan Angyal, the leader of the revolutionary youth of the Ninth District of Budapest, Balint Papp, the leader of the party’s youth organisation in Dunapentele (Sztalinvaros)

Kadar’s police have, however, at last found a real live white terrorist, whom they have put on trial for killing progressive people. He is 70 years of age, and his crimes date from – 1919. Why he was not punished between 1945 and 1956 has not been explained. (*News Letter*, Vol. 1 No. 6, June 1957)

**Editorial Notes**

1. The *Daily Worker* was the paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). It later became *The Morning Star*. – *Ed.*

2. Communist Party of Great Britain.

3. The accused agreed to make false confessions. – *Ed.*

4. In 1956.

5. Leaders of the British Communist Party.

# THE RISE AND FALL OF GERRY HEALY

By Bob Pitt,

## Chapter Four

AT THE END of 1955, Gerry Healy's political fortunes were at a low ebb. The split with John Lawrence two years earlier had cost Healy half his membership, including leading trade unionists and most of the youth.<sup>1</sup> His submission to the Labour right wing's ban on *Socialist Outlook* had left him without a public organ, while the Group's press had been bankrupted by a libel action, forcing it into liquidation. The Bevanite movement, on which Healy had pinned his political strategy, was in decline after Labour's defeat in the May 1955 general election. And his attempt to win an industrial base by organising the Blue Union breakaway on the docks had ended in failure. Healy's only success that year was the recruitment of the 'Marxist Group' from the Labour Party League of Youth.

One of its members, Ellis Hillman, recalls that by early 1956 Healy had become 'very, very demoralised. There were points at which one began to wonder whether Gerry was thinking of chucking the whole thing in. I clearly remember him looking through the window at Sternhold Avenue and desperately asking his Executive Committee: "What the hell are we doing here? None of you are prepared to take any initiative whatsoever. I have to do *everything!*" It was a genuine cry of despair'.<sup>2</sup>

Healy was saved by the crisis which broke out in the Stalinist movement in 1956. The CPSU 20th Congress in February, and the subsequent leaking of Khrushchev's 'secret speech' denouncing Stalin's crimes, was followed in November by the bloody suppression of the Hungarian revolution, an action fully supported by the British CP leaders. As a

result, the Communist Party of Great Britain lost about a third of its 30,000 members. While most of these ex-CPers renounced Marxism or abandoned politics altogether, Healy was able to win a number of important recruits (perhaps as many as 200) to the Group. Two of them – Cliff Slaughter and Tom Kemp – were to remain with Healy until his expulsion from the WRP almost 30 years later.

It is necessary, however, to demolish the myth that Healy's successful intervention in the CPGB was made possible 'on the basis of the 1953 split' in the Fourth International, or by 'the clarification which had been achieved through the struggle against Pabloite revisionism'.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Healy's initial response to the 20th Congress was the purest 'Pabloism'. Basing himself on Mikoyan's speech to the Congress attacking the 'cult of the personality', Healy announced to a stunned London area aggregate of the Group that the political revolution had now begun in the Soviet Union and that Anastas Mikoyan represented the Reiss (i.e. the revolutionary) tendency in the bureaucracy!<sup>4</sup> Healy quickly retreated from this position. But his only published reaction to the 1956 Congress, while emphasising that the restoration of democratic rights in the Soviet Union required 'a successful struggle against the bureaucracy', stopped short of spelling out the need for a political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist regime.<sup>5</sup>

The Group's impact on the CPGB crisis was the product not of any political clarity on Stalinism, but of Healy's considerable organisational skills. His ability to spot a political opportunity and go for it with everything he had,

which in other situations led to grossly opportunist results (if not outright betrayals), in this case enabled real political gains to be made. With characteristic energy and pugnacity, Healy now directed all the Group's resources towards the CP. Labour Party work was temporarily put on the back burner and Group members who had spent the best part of a decade pretending to be left social democrats found themselves agitating openly as Trotskyists at CP meetings. 'I don't think there can be any doubt about this', Hillman states. 'It was Healy's attack that broke the morale of the CP after the 1956 Congress.'<sup>6</sup>

An early recruit to the Group was Nottingham CPer John Daniels who wrote in to *Tribune* explaining that he had begun a 'fundamental criticism' of Stalinism and offering like-minded comrades a suggested reading list which ranged from Arthur Koestler to Leon Trotsky.<sup>7</sup> John Archer immediately replied on behalf of the Group, steering Daniels away from anti-Communist writers and towards the revolutionary critique of Stalinism contained in *The Revolution Betrayed*.<sup>8</sup> This exchange led to Daniels visiting Archer in Leeds for a discussion, and soon after he became a member of the Group.<sup>9</sup> Healy himself was to make a particularly effective use of literature in his political assault on the Stalinist movement. In the following period he would visit hundreds of CP dissidents, providing them with a basic reading course in Trotskyist writings.<sup>10</sup>

In the course of 1956 Healy managed to raise the finance for a new printing press.<sup>11</sup> These facilities, modest though they were, played a crucial role in cementing political relations with Peter Fryer, the *Daily Worker* correspondent in Hungary during the revolution. Having returned to Britain to find that his sympathetic reports on the workers' uprising had been spiked, Fryer turned to the capitalist press to publicise his story and this was used by the CP leadership to justify his expulsion from the



**Khrushchev's 'secret speech' in 1956 denouncing Stalin's crimes, was followed in November by the bloody suppression of the Hungarian revolution, an action fully supported by the British CP leaders. As a result, the Communist Party of Great Britain lost about a third of its 30,000 members.**

party. Healy arranged a meeting with Fryer and offered to print his appeal against expulsion, an offer which Fryer gratefully accepted. Healy also organised a series of meetings for Fryer to explain his case to the labour movement.<sup>12</sup>

With the new press, in January 1957 Healy was able to relaunch the journal *Labour Review* in a new, larger format explicitly aimed at the Communist Party milieu, with John Daniels and veteran Healyite Bob Shaw as co-editors. The journal was instrumental in attracting further CP rebels to the Group, notably the historian Brian Pearce,<sup>13</sup> who was able to contribute a number of pioneering articles on the Stalinist degeneration of the CPGB.

In his pamphlet *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Hungary*, Healy urged dissident CPers to 'immediately demand a special Congress to repudiate the leadership's line on Hungary. STAY IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND FIGHT IT OUT'.<sup>14</sup> This, indeed, was the approach adopted by the CP oppositionists, and in April 1957 a special party congress, the first in the CPGB's history, was held in Hammer-smith. Healy organised a major intervention.

## Revolutionary and Counter-Revolution in Hungary 1956

Fryer's appeal, published in pamphlet form as *Hungary and the Communist Party: An Appeal Against Expulsion*, was distributed at the door, while inside the congress Brian Behan, a militant building worker who had joined the Group, acted as one of the main spokesmen for the anti-Stalinist opposition. Fryer, meanwhile, laboured through the night to produce a daily bulletin reporting and commenting on the congress proceedings.<sup>15</sup>

The congress was packed so efficiently by the CP leadership that on all the disputed issues – Hungary, inner-party democracy and Fryer's expulsion – the opposition was overwhelmingly defeated.<sup>16</sup> But the political ferment in the CP did not abate. A week after the Hammersmith congress, the Socialist Forum movement – launched by CP dissidents to provide an organisational framework for political discussion – held a national conference at Wortley Hall in Yorkshire. Here Healy, who attended with a small delegation from the Group, demonstrated an admirable degree of tactical subtlety. Instead of crowing over the Stalinists' crisis and proclaiming that Trotskyism had been vindicated, as many there no doubt expected him to do, Healy advised the conference: 'This is the season for reading books, not burning them. Read and study. Examine every point of view.'<sup>17</sup> He left it to Brian Pearce to put forward a Trotskyist historical analysis of the 'Lessons of the Stalin era'.<sup>18</sup> Given Pearce's reputation as a CP

historian, this obviously made a much greater impact on the conference than a lecture from a known Trotskyist would have done.

Impressed by Fryer's work on the Hammersmith bulletin, Healy took him on as a full-timer to produce a weekly paper for the Group. This appeared in May 1957 as the *Newsletter*. The paper claimed editorially that it had 'no sectional axe to grind',<sup>19</sup> but its real purpose, as

Healy explained to Fryer, was to provide a pole of attraction for CP dissidents 'so that we can catch them for our movement'.<sup>20</sup> Healy allowed a fairly free hand to Fryer whose journalistic talents guaranteed a high standard of partisan working class reporting. As usual with Healy, there was undoubtedly a strong opportunist element in all this. Nevertheless, along with the theoretical work in the bi-monthly *Labour Review*, the *Newsletter* enabled the Group to become the focal point for both intellectuals and militant workers breaking with Stalinism. By contrast, the small ex-RCP groups led by Ted Grant and Tony Cliff were able to make virtually no gains from the CP crisis, having

been completely outmanoeuvred by Healy.

However, although Healy employed the literary heritage of Trotskyism to good effect in recruiting from the CP, there was an evident gulf between the revolutionary content of Trotsky's classic writings and the actual practice of the Group, buried as it was deep in the Labour Party. One former CPer, in a contribution to the internal bulletin, while putting forward an

One former CPer... made some telling points against the Healyites' promotion of *Tribune*. This he characterised, not inaccurately, as 'feeding mass illusions to the workers by the mass sale of reformist literature'... In reply, Healy accepted that Bevan was a parliamentary reformist incapable of providing the working class with revolutionary leadership. '*Tribune*, however', Healy assured his critic, 'is different'! Indeed, according to Healy, pressure from the Tribunites had forced Bevan 'further and further to the left'. This judgement was to be falsified within a matter of months.

ultra-left argument against Labour Party work, nonetheless made some telling points against the Healyites' promotion of *Tribune*. This he characterised, not inaccurately, as 'feeding mass illusions to the workers by the mass sale of reformist literature'. He dismissed the prospect of an imminent split in the Labour Party, which Healy in 1956 had apparently predicted within six months, and rejected Bevan's credentials as a leader of the left.<sup>21</sup>

In reply, Healy accepted that Bevan was a parliamentary reformist incapable of providing the working class with revolutionary leadership. '*Tribune*, however', Healy assured his critic, 'is different!' Indeed, according to Healy, pressure from the Tribuniters had forced Bevan 'further and further to the left'.<sup>22</sup> This judgement was to be falsified within a matter of months. At the 1957 Labour Party conference, when Group member Vivienne Mendelson moved a resolution from Norwood CLP in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament, it was the 'leftward moving' Bevan himself who put his rhetorical powers at the service of the right wing in order to secure the defeat of what he condemned as 'an emotional spasm'.<sup>23</sup>

If Healy's approach to social democracy was at odds with the principles Trotsky had fought for, his attitude to internationalism was no less so. The withdrawal into 'national Trotskyism', inherent in the federal structure of the IC, is confirmed by Ellis Hillman's experiences on joining Healy's organisation in 1955. 'I do recall continuous denunciations of Pabloism', he states. 'But I cannot recall a single report from any of the so-called sections of the International Committee. It appeared to be a totally insular group.'<sup>24</sup> The numerical and political strengthening of Healy's organisation during 1956-7, due to the influx of former CPers, only reinforced this nationalist outlook.

It never seemed to have occurred to Healy that the expanded resources of the Group might be used to build up the IC, whose effec-

tiveness as an international leadership may be gauged by the fact that it had failed even to issue a statement on the CPSU's 20th Congress.<sup>25</sup> Healy's main concern was that his organisation in Britain should no longer be regarded as the poor relation of the SWP, but recognised as an equal partner. As he explained to Cannon, whereas in the past the British section had been politically dependent on the US Trotskyists, it was now 'reaching a position where we can help our American comrades'.<sup>26</sup>

Peng Shuzi commented irately that Healy's offers of assistance would be better directed towards the weak IC sections in France and Italy, where Stalinist parties of much greater size and political significance than the CPGB were also in crisis. Yet, despite repeated requests from Peng, Healy failed even to stump up the finance for the Italian group to send a delegate to IC meetings.<sup>27</sup> And this was the man, it will be recalled, who in the 1940s had broken up the British section in the course of a vicious factional struggle waged under the banner of 'internationalism'!

\* \* \* \*

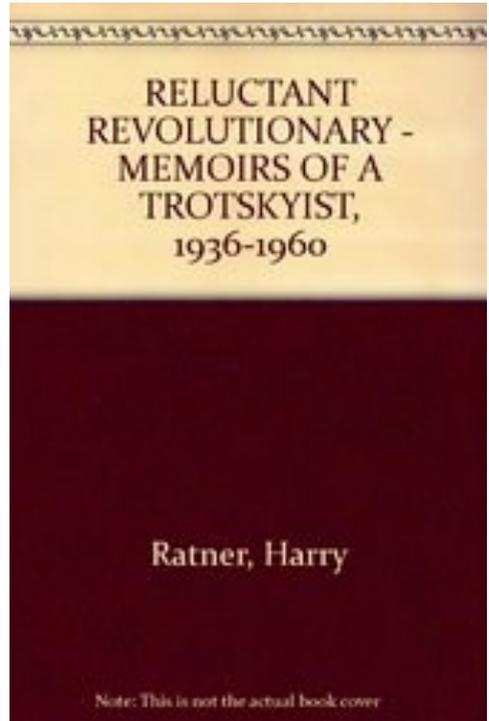
THE 1956 HUNGARIAN revolution, which had enabled Healy to replenish the depleted forces of the Group with recruits from the CP, also put him under increased pressure at an international level. For the apparently 'orthodox' response to Hungary by the International Secretariat, who unequivocally demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops, encouraged the Socialist Workers Party leadership to look more favourably on the prospect of reunification with the Pabloites. The split between the IS and its American supporters, followed by the effective dissolution of the Cochran-Clarke group as a rival political organisation, had in any case removed 'Pabloism' as a threat in the USA. If he could be given guarantees of non-interference by Pablo in the SWP, James P. Cannon could no longer see

any major obstacle to unity with the IS.

Healy, however, was in a different position. After being deserted by the Lawrence group, who had broken with the FI in 1954, Pablo had collaborated with Ted Grant, Sam Bornstein and other former members of the RCP majority in forming a new IS section, the Revolutionary Socialist League, which held its founding conference in 1957. A merger between the International Committee and the IS would therefore have required Healy to unite with political opponents he had driven out of the movement back in 1950, who would undoubtedly have formed a faction against him. It seems evident that such narrowly national concerns, rather than any desire to uphold the 'principles' of the 1953 split, determined Healy's resistance to international reunification.

Not that Healy argued his position openly and honestly. Instead, he declared his agreement with Cannon – 'it is worth doing everything possible to get one world organisation'<sup>28</sup> – urging only that reunification should be preceded by political discussion, while at the same time manoeuvring to sabotage progress towards unity. In June 1957, in a move which Cannon condemned as 'factional ultimatism',<sup>29</sup> Healy informed Grant's group that before negotiations could begin in Britain the RSL would have to abandon 'open' work and, furthermore, repudiate 'The Decline and Fall of Stalinism', Ernest Mandel's draft resolution for the forthcoming FI Fifth World Congress.<sup>30</sup>

A month earlier, Bill Hunter had written a polemic against Mandel's document, entitled 'Under a Stolen Flag'. This – the first critique of the International Secretariat's politics produced by the Group since the beginning of Healy's conflict with the FI leadership four years before! – sought to demonstrate that 'the gulf between Pabloite revisionism and ourselves grows wider and wider'.<sup>31</sup> Not only did Hunter fail to prove this assertion, but his legitimate criticisms of the IS document, with its



emphasis on the role a 'revolutionary' wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy would play in the political revolution, were undermined by his misrepresentations of Mandel's arguments.

Healy's denunciations of the pro-Stalinist politics of the IS did not prevent him from turning a blind eye to his protégé Mike Banda's sympathies for Maoism. A *Labour Review* article by Banda depicting bureaucratisation as only a *potential* threat under the Chinese Stalinist regime<sup>32</sup> was criticised by Ellis Hillman,<sup>33</sup> but neither Healy nor Hunter took a stand against Banda's thoroughly 'Pabloite' position on China. This showed quite clearly, as Hillman points out, that Healy's intransigence towards Pablo and Mandel was not based on any principled analysis of Stalinism, or of the problems of the political revolution, but was rather motivated by purely factional considerations.<sup>34</sup>

Healy's real commitment to a discussion of

the issues underlying the 1953 split is illustrated by the case of Harry Ratner, the Group's industrial organiser, who resigned in 1957, unable to swallow Healy's Stalinist-style demand that members should unquestioningly accept the leadership's line on 'Pabloism'. After six weeks, having reconsidered his position, Ratner applied to rejoin. Summoned before the Executive Committee, he was told that it was not enough to publicly defend the Group's policies, but that he must also withdraw his reservations concerning the official line on Pablo. As Ratner recalls: 'I replied that this was ridiculous. "You know damn well I've got reservations." They insisted: "You must drop them if you want to be readmitted." At one stage Mike Banda said, "Soon, in the revolution, we shall be shooting Pabloites. So you'd better be clear." All the committee – Healy, the Banda brothers, Bill Hunter – kept on repeating this ultimatum.... Eventually, Healy said, "You'd better make up your mind or you're out!"' Faced with this ultimatum, Ratner was forced to state that he no longer had any reservations.<sup>35</sup>

Healy's opposition to the Pabloite IS shaded over into hostility towards a centralised International as such. He was determined, he told Cannon, that there should be no return to the pre-1953 FI, with its 'constant spate of meetings in Paris which meant sections raising funds to send representatives'.<sup>36</sup> But the weakness of the International Committee obviously strengthened the hand of those advocating unity with Pablo and Mandel. From 1957, therefore, Healy tried to give the IC some semblance of political life by pushing for an international congress, which he attempted to dub the 'Fourth World Congress' of the FI until being dissuaded by the SWP.<sup>37</sup> When the congress met in Leeds in June 1958, it not only failed to give any direction to the work of the sections, but even passed a resolution denying the IC the authority to intervene in its

constituent national groups.<sup>38</sup>

In Britain, Healy was faced with the task of integrating former CPers, both intellectuals and militant workers, into the Group. 'With the new recruits Healy was like a young lover in the first flush of his infatuation', Harry Ratner remembers. 'Behan could do no wrong. John Daniels could do no wrong. Peter Fryer could do no wrong. When sometimes some of us would make some criticism of these people Gerry would say you had to be tolerant, they had a lot to unlearn from their period in the CP.'<sup>39</sup> But the more liberal regime that resulted did not represent a move towards genuinely democratic-centralist methods. Rather, Healy seems to have played a mini-Bonapartist role within the organisation, maintaining his dominance by balancing between the various groupings.

The intellectuals were encouraged to pursue their theoretical work through *Labour Review*, which stressed that it was '*not* a sectional Trotskyist journal', and opened its pages to 'all who wish to put a point of view on how Marxist science is to be evolved'.<sup>40</sup> There was nothing wrong in principle with this approach, which had an obvious appeal to intellectuals breaking from the stultifying atmosphere of Stalinism. But what was more urgently needed was a thorough reassessment of the post-war crisis of the FI, which a number of recruits from the CP were theoretically equipped to carry out. At one point, indeed, Healy did propose to undertake an 'objective study' of the development of the world Trotskyist movement since 1945.<sup>41</sup> But there were too many skeletons in the closet for Healy to risk such an enterprise. Not surprisingly, the 'objective study' failed to materialise.

The 'old Healyites' of pre-1956 vintage continued their established practice of 'deep entry' in the Labour Party. But the Labour left was in a demoralised state after Bevan's renegacy at the 1957 annual conference. By contrast,



**Gerry Healy sharing a Workers International League (1937-44) stage with Ted Grant and Sid Bidwell**

there was an upsurge of activity in the trade unions. Healy therefore empirically shifted the Group's efforts towards intervention in industrial struggles, with the *Newsletter* producing a series of strike bulletins in which rank-and-file trade unionists were given space to put their case.

Healy was able to use the extensive network of contacts, particularly in the building industry, which Brian Behan had brought with him from the CP. Behan himself played a prominent role in the 1958 dispute at McAlpine's Shell-Mex site on London's South Bank, where pickets were subjected to police violence and numerous arrests were made, with Behan himself receiving a six-week jail sentence.<sup>42</sup> Characteristically, Healy went completely overboard on this. 'We've got the bourgeoisie by the throat!' he informed one London aggregate, ignoring the fact that the dispute, bitter though it was, was limited to a single building site. 'But this was part of the apocalyptic concept Gerry had', Hillman observes. 'There it was – the final showdown! And everything had to be poured into support for it.'<sup>43</sup>

Ken Weller, who was active in the Group's AEU faction, argues that a real 'window of opportunity' had opened up for revolutionaries in the trade unions in this period, when a

whole layer of militants, disillusioned with the CP, were looking for a new direction. But Healy blew his chance to build an effective industrial base. As Weller explains: 'One of the consequences of this "crisis-ology" of Healy's was that every five minutes everything had to be dropped ... and we had to do something else. We were being rushed off our feet every night of the week ... working in the print shop, doing this, doing that, never being able to do any systematic work. And of course what happens is that people begin to drift away.... So that by the time I left, when I was expelled in 1960, that window of opportunity had closed.'<sup>44</sup>

The potential for building a revolutionary organisation in industry, and Healy's failure to capitalise on this, were both demonstrated at the Rank and File Conference of November 1958. The gathering, organised by the Group, drew an audience of between five and six hundred, 'the bulk of them representing workers on the shop floor', according to a report in the *Times*.<sup>45</sup> Yet, even though *Labour Review* had earlier advocated the formation of 'a national network of rank-and-file bodies, with efficient liaison and a central organ',<sup>46</sup> Peter Fryer announced after the conference that there was 'no plan for a permanent organisation'.<sup>47</sup> Fearing that a mass rank-and-file movement might escape his personal control, it seems, Healy preferred to use the conference to impress attending militants and recruit a few of them to a small sect where his domination was secure.<sup>48</sup>

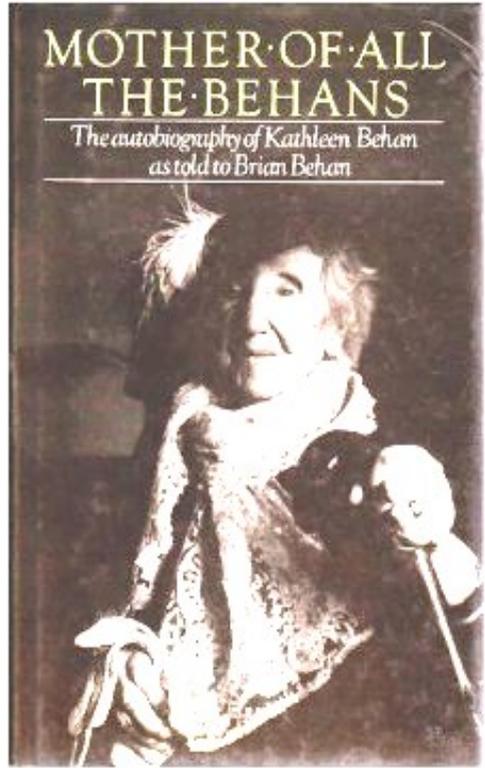
Nor did the conference arm workers with a Marxist political strategy. The Charter of Workers' Demands it adopted did correctly call on industrial militants to take up a political fight against the Labour Party's Gaitskellite leadership. But this was presented in reformist terms familiar from the days of the Socialist Fellowship, workers being urged to 'bring the party back to its original purpose and restore the socialist vision and energy of the pioneers of our movement'. Adaptation to Labourite

illusions was combined with the usual catastrophist predictions. Fryer declared that the capitalist class aimed to ‘smash us and break us and drive us back to the hungry Thirties’, while Behan warned of the danger of the unemployed being won over to fascism.<sup>49</sup> Although Healy himself did not address the conference, the perspectives outlined here were distinctively his own.

Healy’s low profile was probably due to the witch-hunt launched by the capitalist press in the run-up to the conference. A front-page exposé appeared in the *News Chronicle*, which sent a reporter to Healy’s home in Streatham to interview the evil genius behind the ‘Red Club’. (Healy refused to co-operate. ‘Print what you like. It’s a free press, isn’t it?’<sup>50</sup>) The campaign no doubt boosted Healy’s sense of his own importance, but it was based on a somewhat exaggerated view of the Group’s influence. A more sober assessment was made in a *Times* editorial, which pointed out that a conference which failed to set up a permanent organisation posed no serious threat to the established order. As for the ‘Red Club’ itself, the *Times* noted presciently that ‘the composition of the group is so diverse that it would be surprising if they were to cohere for long’.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

1. ‘When we finished fighting with Pablo’, Healy later recalled, ‘... we had 24 members in London and 23 in the provinces’ (SLL internal document, 1964).
2. Interview with Ellis Hillman, 28 December 1990. Executive and National Committee meetings were held at Healy’s house in Sternhold Avenue, Streatham.
3. G. Pilling et al., in *Tasks of the Fourth International*, May 1990; D. North, *Gerry Healy and His Place in the History of the Fourth International*, 1991, p.28. These writers merely echo Healy’s own fraudulent claim: cf. *How Pablo and Healy Blocked Rennification*, 1978, p.34.



4. Hillman interview. ‘The reaction of the comrades was a mixture of amazement and bafflement’, Hillman recounts. ‘Even Mike Banda looked a bit astonished!’
5. *Tribune*, 9 March 1956. With unconscious irony, Healy noted that the congress decisions were ‘unanimous and unopposed – a method sharply in contrast with the tradition of Lenin’.
6. Ellis Hillman, interviewed by Al Richardson and Sam Bornstein, 19 June 1978. Transcript courtesy of Socialist Platform.
7. *Tribune*, 22 June 1956.
8. *Ibid.*, 29 June 1956.
9. Information from John Archer.
10. D. Widgery, *The Left in Britain, 1956-68*, 1976, pp.60-1; Peter Fryer, interviewed in *Workers Press*, 13 September 1986.
11. Anon., ‘The disunity of theory and practice: the Trotskyist movement in Great Britain since 1945’, *Revolutionary History*, vol.6, nos.2/3, 1996.

According to this account, Mike and Tony Banda were a major source of finance for the new press.

12. Fryer interview.

13. Brian Pearce interviewed in *Workers Press*, 6 December 1986.

14. G. Healy, *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Hungary*, 1957, p.14.

15. Fryer interview.

16. *Daily Worker*, 22-23 April 1957.

17. *Newsletter*, 10 May 1957.

18. Pearce interview. The speech is summarised in the *Newsletter* report, but Pearce is not named because he was still a CP member.

19. *Newsletter*, 10 May 1957.

20. Fryer interview.

21. *Forum*, February 1957.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Labour Party Conference Report, 1957, pp.165-6, 181.

24. Hillman interview, December 1990.

25. *How Healy and Pablo Blocked Reunification*, p.77.

26. *Ibid.*, p.34.

27. *Ibid.*, pp.77, 79.

28. *Ibid.*, p.32.

29. *Ibid.*, p.62.

30. *Ibid.*, p.40. The RSL was an 'open' organisation in that, unlike Healy's Group, it had a name, organised public meetings and published an avowedly Trotskyist journal, *Workers International Review*.

31. *Ibid.*, p.41.

32. *Labour Review*, July-August 1957.

33. *Ibid.*, September-October 1957.

34. Interview with Ellis Hillman, 28 December 1990.

35. H. Ratner, *Reluctant Revolutionary*, 1994, pp.218-9.

36. *How Healy and Pablo Blocked Reunification*, p.34.

37. *'Deep Entryism' and Pablo's Anti-Unity Offensive*, 1978, p.7.

38. *Ibid.*, p.10.

39. Harry Ratner, interviewed by Sam Bornstein, 4 February 1987. Transcript courtesy of Socialist Platform.

40. Quoted by J. Callaghan, *British Trotskyism*, 1984, p.223.

41. *How Healy and Pablo Blocked Reunification*, p.33.

42. See Bob Pennington's account in *Labour Review*, October-November 1959.

43. Interview with Ellis Hillman, 4 January 1991.

44. Interview with Ken Weller, 17 April 1991.

45. *The Times*, 17 November 1958.

46. Quoted by M. Hoskisson and D. Stocking, 'The rise and fall of the SLL', *Workers Power*, February 1986.

47. *The Times*, 17 November 1958.

48. Cf. anon., 'The disunity of theory and practice'. This makes the point that the organisation's growth was always obstructed by the domination of the 'Healy clique', because 'the bigger becomes the group, the greater the potential danger that control will slip out of the clique's hands. Ex-members assert that this is the reason why no permanent continuing body emerged from the rank-and-file conference'.

49. *Newsletter*, 22 November 1958.

50. *News Chronicle*, 13 November 1958.

51. *The Times*, 17 November 1958.

In 1958 at the Shell-Mex site in the Barbican contractor Robert McAlpine sacked the entire workforce of 1,250 because the shop stewards, against the vicious opposition of the TU bureaucrats of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (AUBTW), went on strike to defend sacked shop steward, Brian Behan. He had left the CP and joined The Club, the Trotskyist group led by Gerry Healy, in opposition to the 1956 invasion of Hungary. He and other strike leaders were later expelled from the union and he and another workers were jailed over a scuffle on the picket line. Healy expelled Behan from the SLL in 1960 because he insisted on the need to go back to the programme of the Industrial Rank-and-File Conference of November, 1958. Bob Pitt notes above that "a *Times* editorial ... pointed out that a conference which failed to set up a permanent organisation posed no serious threat to the established order". This gifted the leadership of these militant builders back to the CP, whose machinations with the UCATT bureaucracy (successors of AUBTW) left Des Warren and the Shrewsbury pickets rot in jail so as not to upset the Harold Wilson government of 1974.