

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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Political and theoretical journal of Workers International (to Rebuild the 4th International)

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Special obituary edition

Farewell Comrade Balazs Nagy!

1927 - 23 August 2015



Inside this issue

of Workers' International Journal we reproduce a selection of the tributes paid to our founding secretary Balazs Nagy (Michel Varga) by present and former comrades

ALSO INSIDE

Bill Hunter and
Charlie Pottins:

Two veteran British Trotskyists pass away

2015 also saw the loss of Bill Hunter and Charlie Pottins, two former members of the Socialist Labour League / Workers Revolutionary Party in the UK who participated in the 1985-6 split in the Party and the expulsion of its former leader Gerry Healy.

Although they were no longer members of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, we had remained in touch with them and mourn their loss. We joined with the families and comrades who gathered to mark their passing and record their life's work.

See appreciations inside.

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Political and theoretical journal of
Workers International to Rebuild
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Comrades and relatives of

Balazs Nagy

gathered in Albi, France, in August 2015 to bid him farewell. BOB ARCHER pronounced the eulogy on behalf of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

"It is impossible to do justice to our comrade Balazs Nagy in a few minutes.

He spent all his adult life fighting for that vital thing- the party which leads the struggle of the working class- and to oppose all deformations within it.

You will have in your hands our Comrade Radoslav Pavlovic's description of his struggles as a young oppositionist Communist in Hungary and in the Hungarian Revolution. I was profoundly moved, twenty years ago already, to translate into English Balazs' pamphlet on the setting up in 1956 of the Greater Budapest Central Workers' Council.

Later Balazs wrote: "It was as an exile that I discovered and got to know Trotsky's book *The Revolution Betrayed*, in which he more or less analysed the Hungarian Revolution thirty years before it happened ... according to Trotsky, this revolution would have to smash Stalinist rule but leave intact the social and economic gains that were socialist in character."

And indeed, Balazs Nagy became a Trotskyist, and activist and leader of the International Committee of the Fourth International. But he took this step in a movement which had already been hit by a profound crisis, with a damaging split between two rival fiefs (Healy and Lambert) which went on to languish in a sect existence.

Comrade Nagy physically embodied the unity of the political revolution in the East and the social revolution in the rest of the world. But the two sects which emerged from the International Committee turned their backs on the workers of Eastern Europe. The leadership of the Lambertist OCI could not shift him and his comrades politically, so they simply slandered them, inventing the rather unique amalgam that Balazs was an agent simultaneously of the Stalinist and the US intelligence services. These are the methods Gerry Healy later used against Joseph Hansen.

That was yet one more reason why the revolt on the part of Marxists in Healy's party found its best allies in Balazs and the Group of Opposition and Continuity of the Fourth International (GOCQI). We will remember his article "Spring-time in the WRP". Together, we set out to clear away the filth which has stuck to the banner of



Workers International Comrades at the scattering of the ashes

Trotskyism, to understand the new situation which was already dawning with the collapse of the USSR and to sketch out the way ahead.

In April 1990 the Workers' International was established at a Congress in Budapest. This International lives and fights and is starting to make an impact in the present crisis.

But within some very difficult struggles! Bourgeois pressure, the collapse of the USSR and the conditions of imperialist "globalisation" mean that many of our comrades abandoned the Bolshevik politics of Trotskyism, and there have been strong attempts to capture and divert our International. In this hugely difficult situation Balazs stood like a rock.

Since 2008 he had devoted himself to a careful study of the social, economic and political roots of the current crisis of imperialism. He had only intended to devote an article to this, but it became a work in three volumes, of which we have only the first volume and some pieces of the second. But on its own, volume 1 is a brilliant presentation of the Marxist method in several fields. It's bound to have a growing impact in coming struggles.

With Balazs, it is often the apparently simplest and most obvious statements which are the most profound. In the preface to volume 1 he writes:

"... certain readers will discover, perhaps with some surprise, that I devote a not inconsiderable part of this text to an analysis of the class struggle, the changing relationships of forces between the classes, in short, to a presentation of how they are generalised in political events and the way they develop ... Marx and Engels constantly emphasised the fact that in capitalist society the economic categories (money, trade, capital, etc.) appear to be autonomous things, whereas in fact they contain and express a social relationship between individuals and more generally between classes".

The learned works which monopolise current discourse, such as those of Picketty or Paul Mason, fall squarely into the error which Balazs warned about. And that is why, for all that they might, as in the case of Mason, deal with similar issues to Balazs, they mix everything up in a dense fog. Balazs' book is the antidote.

(Here, Bob quoted the thoughts and memories of several British members of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International which are published in full elsewhere in this edition)

Farewell Comrade Balazs. We will miss you, but you will live in your teachings and in the building of the revolutionary leadership of the working class."



Balazs Nagy speaking at a Workers Revolutionary Party meeting in London

Balazs Nagy is dead

RADOSLAV PAVLOVIC published this appreciation of **BALAZS'S** life and the political significance of the struggles in which he had engaged in a special edition of the French-language news-sheet *Lutte des classes* rushed out in time for the funeral

The Hungarian revolutionary Balazs Nagy died on 23 August 2015 aged 88 at his final address in Carmaux, France. One of the last of the European Trotskyists to have known World War II, he was the first from post-war Eastern Europe to have joined the Fourth International.

Few leaders of his generation have shown as much moral rectitude, fidelity to Marxist principle and personal modesty as he did, quite unlike the free-loading, loud-mouthed and opportunist upstart disciples of Raymond Molinier who set themselves up as the infallible "historic" leaders of Leon Trotsky's party; leaders whom the man himself soon described as charlatans, and a party which they left in fragments, having provided the bourgeois socialists with a good half of their political personnel – countless deputies, senators, ministers and even a prime-minister!

As these "Trotskyist" careerists rose to power and the emoluments it brings, Balazs Nagy descended into the anonymous isolation of those who devoted a life-time to revolution, only to end up on a basic pension of 500 euros a month. Each class to its own!

Stateless after the 1956 revolution and determined to continue the working class

struggle, he discovered the works of the man whose very name the Stalinists had expunged over half of Europe, and he rediscovered the genuine idea of communism.

Once the revolution was crushed, he sought, together with Hungarian socialists around the Imre Nagy Institute in Brussels, the magic formula of a democratic socialism free of both reformists and Stalinists. Largely thanks to Pierre Broué, he ended up with the Trotskyists.

From 1963 he was one of the leaders of the French Trotskyist Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) and after 1968 the kingpin holding together young communists from Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) under the banner of Trotskyism alongside the Hungarian League.

Not for long: he had political differences with Pierre Lambert and Stéphane Just over the future of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

He had the backing of the best part of the Eastern European, Spanish and Moroccan members, but he was punished for this by the monstrous slander that he was an "agent of the CIA and the KGB".

The "Green Pamphlet" published at the beginning of the 1970's left a lasting impression, especially on the members of Lutte Ouvrière (LO – Workers' Struggle) and Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR – Revolutionary Communist League), who repudiated it.

Even 40 years later, the Lambertist organisation has not emerged from this reign of fear and terror, although the content of its politics has switched from end-to-end. It was entirely in the tradition of Stalinist slanders against Trotskyists; but history has also seen similar, older examples, from Blanqui and the "Taschereau Document"¹ to the German high command stuffing Lenin's sealed train with gold.

Still convinced they were scaling their destined heights, the opportunists were scared of the challenges such giddy summits still required, and showed as much hatred and violence towards the left as they did servility towards the reformist right in the trade unions and in politics.

The organisation's spectacular volte-face stunned and demoralised us Eastern Europeans even more. It took time for us to understand, thanks to Balazs, its political motivation, its devious continuity from

the vile expulsion of Bleibtreu-Favre in 1955 to the no less vile Just and Broué “affaires” in the 1980s.

In the end the “affaire Varga” was just a stage in the pitiless process of grinding down thousands of France’s most devoted worker activists, following on from the slaughter of Trotskyists at the hands of Stalinist and fascist terror. The real history of Trotskyism in France has yet to be written.

Totally devoid of any Marxist vision, the apparatus has ended up swallowing the party; the full-time apparatchik drove away the countless Chisserays who had the courage to speak boldly to the masses. Scheming, manoeuvres, intimidation and underhand entrisms replaced political and intellectual honesty. There was boundless sectarianism towards other Trotskyist organisations, never any honest political polemic. Internal discussion was replaced by blind obedience to a pre-arranged “democratic centralism” under remote control.

The search for well-paid jobs and properties of course, was no secret at all. Lumpen politics camouflaged under Marxist-sounding phrases; the power of money replacing internationalism; What sort of miracle could you dare expect of a Hungarian revolutionary isolated in France in this environment of crisis and disarray?

Am I just settling old scores?

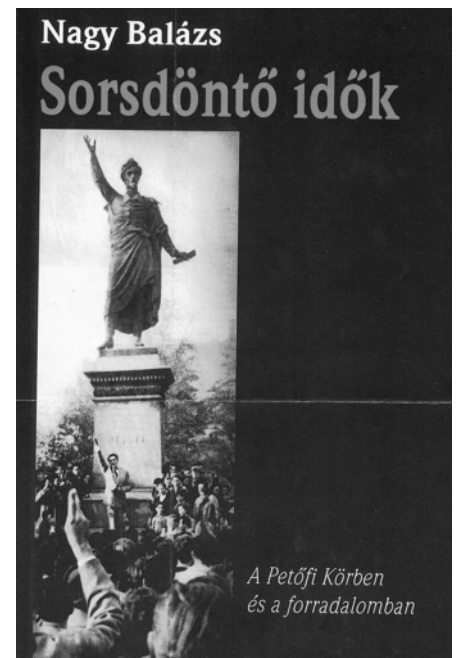
Balazs Nagy was a proletarian fighter, devoted body and soul to rebuilding the Fourth International as the only force able to provide a solution to the murderous crisis though which we are living. To speak of his life is to struggle against grave-diggers of this historic party, almost all of them sui-generis Pabloites. Our mistakes, our weaknesses, our occasional loss of faith in victory, are the price we have had to pay, and will still have to pay, as orphans of Bolshevism, bled to death by Stalinists and crypto-Stalinists. If our post-war generation cannot pick up the threads leading to a socialist victory, our descendants will.

If our European proletariat, undermined socially and disorientated politically by social democracy and various centrist remnants, is unable to find the path to victory, capital has created other proletarian masses on other continents, younger, fresher and more combative. Did not a certain manifesto in the autumn of 1848 clearly establish the international nature of capitalism?

To hold aloft the banner of Lenin and Trotsky’s party against wind and tide, to be inspired by their teachings, to fight against opportunism and root out sectarianism in our ranks, to have confidence in our class and its young people, this is the essential heritage our comrade leaves.



(Left) cover of *Pologne-Hongrie 1956*, the documentary collection prepared with J.J. Marie and P. Broué. (Right) Balazs’ memoirs (in Hungarian) of 1956 and the work of the Petőfi Circle



Some biographical information

Balazs Nagy was born in 1927 on the sandy soil of the Hungarian puszta around Keczemet, south of Budapest. In 1944, aged 17, he was already in the first Communist resistance groups to welcome the Red Army. In 1946 he volunteered for the internationalist work brigades in Yugoslavia, working to rebuild the Brcko-Banovici railway in Bosnia.

He was a member of the elite Communist youth and was soon a teacher at the Party’s Marxist school. From 1949 onwards the ferocious Stalinist regime of Rakosi, imported from Moscow, forced the “internal” Communists grouped around Imre Nagy into opposition. Balazs lost his position and became a lorry-driver, learning how to repair his dilapidated vehicle in the mud.

From being a Communist intellectual who could expect to rise to the highest positions on the Party, he learnt on the job how tough a worker’s life is and what contempt the Communist bureaucrats had for the working class.

In 1955 he was accepted back into the Party along with Imre Nagy’s reformist faction, and by the following summer he was already, in the Petőfi Circle, in the wing of intellectuals closest to the workers. After the intervention of Russian tanks, Imre Nagy and his government took refuge in the Yugoslav embassy to await the outcome of talks between Khrushchev and Tito. Balazs acted as liaison between the hostage government and the central work-

ers’ strike committee of the working-class bastion of Budapest.

This direct experience of the magnificent devotion of workers fighting to the death against the bureaucracy’s contempt, hatred, duplicity and violence marked him for life.

Balazs brought with him into exile a collection of the essential documents demonstrating the working-class character of the Hungarian Revolution, which formed the basis of the book *Pologne-Hongrie 1956* which he co-wrote with Pierre Broué and Jean-Jacques Marie and which was published by EDI in 1966.

At the request of the Imre Nagy Institute in Budapest, Balazs wrote his memoirs (in Hungarian) in the 1990s, dedicated to the main workers’ leader in the Central Strike Committee, Sandor Bali.

After 1989 he and his wife, Françoise, settled in Iszak, in his native region, but after a few years they were forced by serious ill-health on his part to return to France for medical treatment.

¹ Jules Tascheran was a French government official who on 31 March 1848 published an anonymous *Statement to the Minister of the Interior*. This printed the names of the leaders of secret societies plotting the overthrow of the government in 1839, allegedly revealed to Interior Minister Duchâtel by “a prisoner”. The man smeared as the informant was the jailed revolutionary, Auguste Blanqui.

Miroslav Vodslon writes:

'He had the courage which marks all great leaders'

Balazs Nagy spent the whole of his life an absolutely devoted fighter for the cause of the working class. It is a good thing that our class still has devoted partisans.

But it has very few of his calibre, and even fewer who have his experience and analytical abilities.

His analysis was always firmly anchored in the experience of the class. Above all, he always had the necessary courage to formulate the tasks which flowed from it to advance the cause of the proletarian revolution, and then work to put them into practice.

His analyses and proposals often ran counter to received ideas or comfortable habits, but he had the courage that required, which marks all great leaders, above all Lenin. Balazs always advised us to study Lenin's work, not just theoretical, but above all practical – the Bolshevik Party as it really was before Stalinism exterminated it and defaced its memory.

We will miss Balazs. I already miss him. There has always been something I could learn from him, ever since, 45 years ago, he suggested I should join the Committee of Eastern-European Communists-Trotskyists within the International Committee to Rebuild the Fourth International.

Even, and especially, when we disagreed over this or that question, I always benefitted greatly from the way he explained things.

I asked him once how he always managed to have something new and interesting to say. He replied in that friendly joking way familiar to all his comrades: "I think things over!" He expected all his revolutionary activist comrades to show the ability and make the effort to think independently. He encouraged these things and developed them with all these comrades individually and collectively within the organisation. Of course, this thinking was for the purpose of organising and acting on the basis of the Marxist programme. Balazs passed on and developed the heritage of Marxism for our benefit, adapting it to new conditions. This is what made him uniquely important in the history of the workers' movement.

Balazs Nagy was a participant in the Hungarian revolution of workers' councils of 1956; he went on to defend it and represent its living continuity. That was why he sought to join up with workers in the capitalist countries against the Stalin-

ist bureaucracy's class-collaboration with imperialism. Like all great leaders, Balazs was the product of the history of his struggle.

It was still necessary for Marxism-Trotskyism to exist as an organised current in the workers' movement. Even if this current was not able to intervene in the Hungarian Revolution, it was able – above all in the person of Pierre Broué – to help above all Balazs, as one of its leaders, to draw out its lessons.

Joining the effort to rebuild the Fourth International, Balazs understood that carrying on the Hungarian Revolution could only be done by carrying on and revitalising the Bolshevism which had been mutilated by the massacres ordered by Stalin.

Bolshevism survived in the Fourth International, but it was further mutilated by the division which so-called "peaceful" co-existence (or "cold war") imposed on whole generations of the European and world working class. This is what put Balazs in a position to understand profoundly what the difficult job of rebuilding the Fourth International theoretically, politically and organisationally actually involved; what it involved after the defeats of the 80s and 90s and also what it involves now, with a working class diminished theoretically and, in several regions including Europe, socially as well, but nonetheless forced into a life-and-death struggle with moribund capitalism dragging the whole of humanity into the abyss.

In his later years, Balazs brought us back together in the organisation we set up 25 years ago, and devoted his entire strength to showing us and the working class the way forward, i.e. along the path of taking up again the transition towards socialist revolution and rallying those forces prepared to join us in developing the international programme of this transition.

These forces are far, far wider than the successor organisations of the Fourth International, most of which have become narrow, ossified sects which have over the decades turned the crisis of the Fourth International into fragmentation.

Necessary as this programme is, based on that of Trotsky in 1938, it can only take real shape from the demands of the class itself, not from the particular doctrine of this or that sect, often the product of decades of badly-digested experience or badly-understood reading.

Balazs' last fight was to get us to understand that this regroupment, this rebuilding of the Fourth International, will not happen by itself in some kind of mysterious spontaneous generation. It is up to us, Workers International, to get organised and organise others to do it.

We will never be able to replace that exception leader, Balazs Nagy. But he has given us some tools. We can and must, collectively, carry on his work, inspired by his writings and the example of his entire life.

Message from Jean-Pierre JUY

Dear Comrades,

I have just received your letter announcing Balazs' death. It came as a shock to me, even though I never belonged to his organisation, nor even, so far as I know, met him.

You know that I worked with Pierre Broué in his later years (he died in 2005). Pierre often spoke to me about him and he considered him one of the rare active Marxist internationalists, to be specific, a Trotskyist, to have survived the International Committee to Rebuild the Fourth International. He was, and remained to the end, faithful to the principles that he inherited from Trotsky's political teachings. He was a tireless worker who never gave up, and I believe he was one of the very few

outstanding figures of the last fifty years. He was, after all, one of those rare activists through whom a large part of the revolutionary heritage of Leon Trotsky was passed on. And that is a considerable thing, even if his audience seemed very small.

Comrades, I share his companions' great sorrow and I grieve with them. Thank you for your letter, I shall write to his companion Françoise. My thoughts will be with you in Carmaux, as I cannot be with you in person.

Best wishes,

*Jean-Pierre JUY.
Grenoble, 25 August 2015*

Jackie Vance writes:

‘Complete insistence on the importance of theory’

The feature that dominated Balazs Nagy’s political activity since he first came into contact with the International Committee of the Fourth International was his complete insistence on the importance of theory.

For Balazs, every social movement had to be examined in the context of Marxism, its class nature and its programme.

But this defence was not just an abstract discussion – something to be argued about away from the problems and organisation of the workers’ movement. And this was illustrated by his involvement with Workers Aid for Bosnia in 1993.

The miners of Tuzla were under siege from the Serbian army as they defended their multi-ethnic society. They had sent out an appeal for support from the European trade unions but it had little

response. Balazs saw the Workers’ Aid campaign as an opportunity to rebuild the internationalism of the European trade unions.

From its beginning he was heavily involved in persuading sections of the Hungarian miners to collect money and food aid for their comrades in the Bosnian trade unions.

His work resulted in part of the miners’ premises in the mining town of Tatabanya being set aside for Workers’ Aid activity and used for storing food to be sent to the Bosnian miners.

Balazs worked tirelessly on this campaign. A typical day for him during this period would include meetings with Hungarian Socialist Party members in Budapest and other places, then driving to Tatabanya to assist in the collection and storing of the food and other aid for Bosnia.

After all the aid was collected, his full-time involvement in the campaign remained and he joined the first Workers’ Aid convoy, mixing easily and positively with the younger members.

The convoy met many obstacles on its journey as it attempted to build the unity of the working class across borders and proclaiming that the working class had the power and ability to help the Bosnian miners maintain their multi-ethnic country.

It was blockaded and harassed on its journey by armed UN forces and Croatian police who, on one occasion, imprisoned all the convoy members.

And many of those who went on the Convoy have a vivid memory of Balazs squaring up to a six-foot policeman who was refusing to allow the Convoy to proceed.

Bronwen Handyside writes:

‘Balazs fought for a conscious break with Stalinism’

Balazs Nagy’s break with Stalinism after 1956 was part of the almost continuous (but only partly conscious) efforts of the working class since 1945 to achieve that break.

Partially conscious, because they were responses to the effects of Stalinism rather than to its theoretical base. Balazs fought over the decades after 1956 for a conscious break.

After he was exiled from Hungary, Balazs was recruited into the Trotskyist movement. He continued this fight against Stalinism through his decades of opposition to Pabloism within the revolutionary movement.

This fight against Stalinism, a fight which is identified as Trotskyism, is of course the fight for Marxism. Central to this is the development of working class revolutionary consciousness through its own party.

His development of Marxist theory enabled him immediately to understand the significance of the 1985 split in the Workers’ Revolutionary Party.



Family and comrades at the scattering of the ashes

Guillermo Rovelli posted this on FB (translated from Spanish- Ed)

‘The grandeur of his convictions’

When someone like Balazs Nagy dies, one is struck by the grandeur of his convictions in total isolation.

Today Fascist Hungary severely penalises refugees. “Communist” Germany integrated into capitalist Germany in record time and the whole so-called socialist camp is dominated by the law of the market and (as Altamira more than once asserted) French Lambertism excommunicated him right

to the end. I’m no Michel Varga but yesterday I wrote two commentaries in the LID (*La Izquierda Diario* website – Ed.) about why the Fourth International was set up, and I would be glad if you could read them.

When Lenin argued for changing the name of the Social Democratic Party to Communist, he showed why the former was neither democratic nor socialist. I think that is the key.

Marxist Considerations on the Crisis: Part 1 by Balazs Nagy



Published for Workers International by Socialist Studies. Isbn 978 0 9564319 3 6

The Hungarian Marxist BALAZS NAGY originally planned this work as 'an article explaining the great economic crisis which erupted in 2007 from a Marxist point of view'. However, he 'quite quickly realised that a deeper understanding of this development would only be possible if I located it within a broader historical and political context than I had anticipated ... it would only be possible to grasp the nature and meaning of this current upheaval in and through the development of the economic-political system as a whole'

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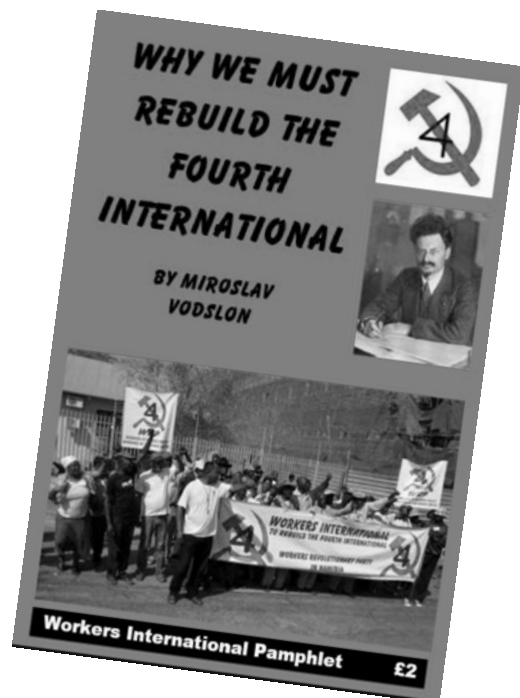
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By Balazs Nagy

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A personal memoir by BOB ARCHER

Bill Hunter

(1920 - 9 July 2015)

Quite a few obituaries to Bill Hunter are available. An internet search links to at least six plus a Wikipedia entry. They vary in tone between sectarian bitterness and something close to hagiography. I would like to offer some personal reflections.

The son and grandson of Durham miners, Bill Hunter was born just after the end of World War I. He worked almost the whole of his life (except for periods as a political organiser) as what we in the UK call an engineering worker, what other nations describe as metal-workers or machine-makers.

He was an outstanding example of the working-class Marxist intellectual. He was a revolutionary who believed that the human race can have a future if the capitalist social order is abolished and a socialist society established.

Bill first encountered the ideas of Trotskyism early in 1939, as the world was sliding into World War II. He records that he “devoured” Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* and that reading the article “Their Morals and Ours” “had a direct effect, even a physical effect. I felt that Trotsky was directing at me every piercing word against abstract morality”.

Bill always resisted as best he could the tendency to turn the Marxist doctrine into a dogma. The title of his 1997 autobiography (*Lifelong Apprenticeship*) reflects this important side of his character.

My personal recollections of Bill (and his wife, Rae) are extremely warm. They were unfailingly kind and supportive to their comrades. In the early 1980s I was really knocked out for a while by back-ache, and they took me into their flat in Toxteth in Liverpool, laid me flat on the settee in their front room and looked after me while family and political life carried on around me.

I was especially impressed then by Bill’s close and positive links with his political following in the workforce at the CAV-Lucas factory where he worked. You had to witness the political discussion among them to measure the mettle of these socialist trade-unionists and Bill’s role as their guide, leader and inspiration.

As a writer and thinker, Bill engaged in political analyses of the events he lived through from the beginning of World War II right through to the millennium and beyond. For part of World War II, he was convenor of a Chrysler factory in Kew in



(From right) Bill Hunter, Alan Thornett and John Archer debate the history of the British Trotskyists at a meeting in the 1990s

South-West London, and in 1943 he started contributing a “Convenor’s Diary” to the Independent Labour Party’s *New Leader* newspaper.

For the next five decades he continued to write about events not only in the workplace and the trade unions but also in politics in the wider sense.

Bill’s writings dealt with big issues as well as apparently small details of daily life. There was a significant discussion within the Trotskyist movement about the outcome of World War II. It centred on the hotly-debated issue of the revolutionary wave of struggles unleashed by the war itself and subsequently. Bill explained in an article in the *Workers International News* (June 1948) that the regimes which emerged under Soviet occupation in Eastern Europe were regimes of contradiction and crisis.

Bill contributed at least one major document to the conflict and splits in the Trotskyist movement in the 1950s. In

“Under a Stolen Flag” (1957) he reviewed the principled differences which had arisen with Pablo’s followers in the International Secretariat (ISFI) earlier in the decade. He wrote this text in a discussion with the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP) leaders who were already preparing to join back up with the ISFI without resolving deep-going questions of principle.

However, the text which had the biggest impact on me arose in the 1985 split in the WRP. In the course of this tumultuous political struggle, Mike Banda produced a document: “27 Reasons Why the International Committee should be buried forthwith and the Fourth International built”. Bill’s riposte “The Bad Men Theory of History” is a powerful example of the Marxist method in action and deserves a respected place in the literature.

Other aspects of Bill’s character which deserves commemoration were his love of music and his own efforts as an artist. He fought hard to keep a music library as

part of the local library service and enjoyed listening to classical music as he worked on his writing.

Bill was a very significant early leader of the group around Gerry Healy in the late 1940s which went on to set up the Socialist Labour League (SLL) and later the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in the UK. However, he tended later to be side-lined by Healy as somehow being soft and having “centrist” tendencies.

One experience during the 1985 split really gave the lie to this. A group of members from one branch in the Liverpool region became understandably paranoid about events and came to the WRP printing plant in Runcorn (which was at the time occupied by Healy’s opponents in the WRP) equipped with pick-axe handles to “sort things out”.

Bill Hunter (by then no longer a young man) stood in the doorway to the plant and explained firmly that everybody who supported the Transitional Programme and Trotskyism was welcome to come in and join the discussion, but they would have to leave their weapons at the door. The mainly young Trotskyists duly handed over their clubs and tamely filed in. Bill was a good man to have on your side in a fight.

I always knew Bill had a wide personal circle of political contacts, but I was still impressed by exactly how many turned up to the public commemoration which his sons and grandchildren timed alongside the actual funeral (which was an affair for the close family). The commemorative event was in a packed public hall near his final home and brought together a wide variety of generations, groups and individuals.

This being the case, it was all the more disappointing to some of us in the 1990s when he left us to throw in his lot with the International Workers League (LIT-CI) of Nahuel Moreno. This meant that, despite his own wide and lively circle of political contacts, he was rather at arms-length from what the other survivors of the WRP split were trying to do in less sectarian ways than previously in the workers movement in the UK.

Among the many valuable achievements Bill leaves behind are two books: *They Knew Why They Fought: unofficial struggles and leadership on the docks 1945-1989*, Index Books 1994 is a major source of information on this matter and on the significant contribution made by Trotskyists among port workers in the UK.

Bill’s own autobiography, *Lifelong Apprenticeship*, is also a very important, thoughtful and informative contribution to the history of the Trotskyist movement and indeed of the English working class.

BOB ARCHER spoke on behalf of Workers’ International

At Charlie Pottins’ graveside

21 Oct 2015

“I want to talk about Charlie’s engagement with the Trotskyist movement, specifically the SLL-WRP-Workers International.

His political involvement started in a Jewish youth movement.

Charlie came into contact with the Young Socialists by buying *Keep Left* outside a CND meeting in Manchester in the late 1950s.

He wasn’t an obvious match to this party, but he stuck it out as long as almost anyone I can remember.

There are reports of him striding into the centre above a butcher’s shop in Clapham, returning from a visit to a Kibbutz, being told by Gerry Healy in the foulest language that if he did that again he would be out.

Charlie was obviously a very talented comrade with a cultural breadth that made him special. He could (and did) speak with real authority about a great number of issues.

But trying to nail down how he fitted in to the closely-knit sect that was the British Section of the International Committee of the Fourth International – that’s a bit difficult.

Charlie worked as a journalist on the daily *Workers’ Press* and then its successor, the *News Line*. The thing was – and as a magazine editor myself a lot later I found this out – he was a self-starter. He would

pursue lines of thought which interested him. You couldn’t get him to take on a commission the editorial board thought important, he would have to think through and investigate the things he thought were important.

And this gave rise to some sublime journalism. Everybody should re-read “Bandits of Cheetham Hill” from time to time. You cannot produce writing like that to order. But Charlie did report for our paper on the big Fire-fighters’ strike of the mid 1970s.

The thing between Charlie and Healy was, Healy was a prodigiously-talented emotional blackmailer and manipulative bully, but Charlie was somehow immune.

The big split which effectively wiped Healyism out in the mid 1980s opened a way back into politics for many people who had not been able to keep up with the WRP, and Charlie was one of them.

In particular, he and I were the first WRP members appointed to set up a campaign of solidarity with the workers of Bosnia. It was characteristic of both of us that we didn’t really know where and how to start. When Geoff Pilling and Dot Gibson got hold of the campaign along with Alan Thornett and others it really got off the ground, and Charlie was a real force.

Charlie was a friend and one of a kind. We will all miss him.”



Rank-and-file trade unionists were strongly represented at Charlie’s funeral, as well as the Jewish Socialist Group (whose members took on all the work of organising the event) and Charlie’s friends and contacts

Goodbye to 2015 in Republika srpska!



This is the photo to end 2015 with!

Ranka Misić is the leader of the independent trade unions in Republika srpska in Banja Luka. At the end of 2015 she brought several hundred workers to lobby the entity's parliament (Republika srpska is the state-within-a-state in Bosnia-Herzegovina) against passing the new, Thatcher-inspired labour code (which has been adopted throughout the region, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia). She lost her husband during the war.

In a region dominated by a criminal mafia (Dodik) which has taken over Karadzic and Mladic's ultra-nationalist regime, she has shown exceptional grit which puts all the men to shame. The riot police surrounded parliament, and the workers surrounded the riot police. They clashed when workers tried to get inside to speak their mind on a law which concerns them to the highest degree.

Ranka did manage to get in and started to denounce this criminal law in front of an audience of criminals. Four security thugs put her on the floor and started to drag her out.

Not a single person lifted a finger, not even the President of the parliament.

All Ranka was asking for was an adjournment. The minority "opposition" left the chamber and the majority (49 members of parliament) unanimously voted the measure through an hour after midnight.

The sight of a woman backed up by soldier-like ranks of hundreds of men brings to mind the "petroleuses" of the Paris Commune.

On the *Front Slobode* website, a man commented: "What is Ranka Misić to us? For us men of Bosnia-Herzegovina, hanging around

waiting for our "liberator" leaders to come up with some miracle plan, she is an unsettling reminder. Curled up in pubs, cellars and other collective shelters, we men are horrified by this woman who has more hope and spirit than the rest of us put together.

"The women don't want to follow her because she rampages round the village in an old pair of her husband's jeans with the seat worn out.

"And so Ranka protests and scares us, our leaders dream up absurd schemes for a non-life and our children go abroad. Well it's for our children that we work and suffer and try to make sense of life."



Hello to 2016 in Namibia!



Students blockade Namibia University of Science and Technology in struggle for free registration and debt cancellation

On Thursday 21 January 2016 at 04:30 hours Namibia University of Science and Technology students, SRC and NANSO (Namibian National Students' Organisation) locked down the University to demand free registration of students and previous debts to be written off.

The leaders of political youth wings and leaders of Restoring the Dignity of Our people's Civil Rights Movement joined in for solidarity.

The Vice-Chancellor and the entire staff of the University was refused entrance to the University.

Around 12:00 hours there was a meeting between the Vice-Chancellor and the Minister of Higher Education, while the protesting team has refused to meet up with the other party until their demands are met.

A resolution was made to write off debts amounting to N\$90 million and a free registration for all University students across the country.

At around 14:00 hours the Vice-Chancellor came to break the news to the protesting students, while also requesting students to allow him to

enter the University. The protesting students could only allow him and his two assistants just to prepare the resolution in black on white.

By 19:00 hours this agreement was signed by both parties and made as a Government resolution. Victory goes to all potential students in this country. The struggle continues.

By Commissar Olsen Kahiriri leader of the Restoring the Dignity of our People's Civil Right Movement.

South Africa:

United Front structures register for local elections



WI Journal reproduces a UF post by Govan Whittles

While NUMSA has not yet launched its political party, it says it will after holding a workers' summit.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) says some United Front structures have registered to contest the local government elections in the Eastern Cape, including Sterkspruit and the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

The union will support independent candidates.

Numsa will launch its own political party after holding a workers summit.

Numsa abandoned its alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) in 2013 and after being kicked out of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) the following year, it has advocated for the ruling party's defeat at the polls.

The union has remained tight-lipped about its ambitions in this year's local government elections.

Numsa General Secretary Irvin Jim says the need for a political party is immediate.

“What is immediate for us is to build a political party in this country; that we must raise levels of consciousness of the working class.”

He says while no decision has been made, the party to be formed will probably support campaigns by United Front structures.

“Numsa is busy crystallising the United Front. There is no reason why we should not support them, but as to whether we are going to take money and do all that, we will let you know.”

The United Front is seen as possible challenger to the Democratic Alliance (DA), ANC and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in Port Elizabeth where Numsa maintains strong support.

On 7th May 2014 the African National Congress (ANC) was returned as the government of South Africa, but there is deep disquiet. For the defeat of apartheid did not bring an end to capitalism as many militant activists had hoped, and a small group of the ANC at the head of the government and their cronies in the trade union leaderships have prospered while imposing neo-liberal policies which are impoverishing the masses. Meanwhile the workers' movement has been set back in a number of different ways in the last 20 years.

In response to this, even before the general election, at its Special National Congress in December 2013, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) had withdrawn its support from the ANC and its ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and had already begun a series of actions to establish a united front to coordinate struggles in the workplace and communities. These stormy developments in the class struggle in South Africa have profound implications for working people everywhere.



This book highlights the way forward proposed by the leaders of the NUMSA to resolve the crisis. To assist readers outside of South Africa to understand how this came about, we include the history of the struggle by South Africa's working class and its close links to the Namibian workers' movement to overthrow white majority racist rule as part and parcel of the struggle for socialism by participants in the movement.

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