

Revolution betrayed - the Workers Revolutionary Party and Iraq



Two articles from Solidarity on corruption in the Workers Revolutionary Party and its links with Saddam Hussein and other Middle Eastern governments.

THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED

Elsewhere in this issue, in a dramatic exclusive, we publish a damning extract from the secret report of an internal inquiry into corruption within the Workers Revolutionary Party. The full report, which has been leaked to us, chronicles an astonishing tale of abject perfidy by leading members of the group. In this article, Tom Burns gives the background and comments on the inquiry's extraordinary findings

We publish this document in the interests of political hygiene. It consists of about half of the confidential internal interim report on Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party prepared by a "commission" of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Following his expulsion from the WRP on October 19 1985, Healy and his supporters were expelled from the ICFI in December 1985. This was as a result of allegations of sexual abuse, even rape, of women in the party, physical assault on other members, and the establishment of a "mercenary relationship" with a number of Arab despotisms (see Solidarity issue 11).

The text deals with the WRP's financial and other dealings with their foreign backers. It is largely self-explanatory, but a few background details may be helpful. The commission was set up at the insistence of David North, longtime chieftain of the Healyite Workers' League in the United States. North, together with the anti-Healy coalition inside the WRP headed by Michael Banda and Cliff Slaughter, was instrumental in the summer of 1985 in the ousting of Healy.

The ICFI inquiry had the reluctant support of the Banda-Slaughter WRP, who correctly foresaw that an exposure of the facts could be a means of bringing pressure to bear to transfer

control of the IC to North. (Indeed, the WRP was suspended by the ICFI on December 16, the day this report was submitted.)

The commission nevertheless had an interest in protecting the reputations of Healy's erstwhile supporters, since they had all been aware (to some extent) of what had been going on. One result of this was that the report as circulated to the WRP's leadership in late 1985 was censored. The names of those who had taken sides against Healy, together with those of Arab politicians and intelligence agents, were suppressed, and the copies of the documents from Healy's files which were attached to the original report as exhibits were removed.

The commission only had access to fragments of the documentary evidence. On October 9 1985, when the crisis in the WRP came to a head, Mike Banda and his anti-Healy supporters walked out of the party offices in Clapham. This left Healy's acolytes in control of the premises for about forty-eight hours, during which time they removed large quantities of the most sensitive documents. This report is therefore based on the few documents they overlooked, plus some material from other WRP files and accounts.

Healy of Arabia

Even these remnants disclose payments of over a million pounds to the WRP from Arab regimes and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The report clearly shows that for nearly a decade the WRP acted, quite literally, as the paid agent of brutal and oppressive foreign powers. This lasted from at least as early as 1975, when the first contact was made with the PLO, until 1983. During this period a series of agreements was concluded with the Libyan regime and the WRP's political perspectives were amended to suit their paymasters.

The document alleges that the WRP acted - through Gerry Healy, Alex Mitchell, Corin and Vanessa Redgrave, and a number of others - as a collector of information for Libyan Intelligence. This function had, as the report puts it, "strongly anti-semitic undertones". Put plainly, they were Jew-spotting in the media, politics and business. The Khomeini revolution and the Iran-Iraq war - in which the WRP's efforts to support both sides soon collapsed - put paid to their employment by the regime of Saddam Hussein. But before this disaster the WRP's connections with Iraq clearly generated more than the £19,697 identified in the report.

The Iraqi connection had sinister aspects. From 1979 on, the WRP provided the Iraqi embassy with intelligence on dissident Iraqis living in Britain. Since Saddam Hussein's dictatorship does not scruple to arrest the relatives of opponents, to use torture on a vast scale, or even to murder children, it seems likely that the WRP were accomplices to murder.

One example of the depths to which these corrupt practices drove the party occurred in March 1979, when with only one dissident the central committee of the WRP voted to approve the execution (after prolonged torture) of more than 20 opponents of the Iraqi government. One of the victims, Talib Suwailh, had only five months earlier brought fraternal greetings to the conference of the WRP's own front organisation, the All Trade Union Alliance (see the Slaughter group's News Line, 20 November 1985).

In addition to the £1,075,163 identified by the document as having come from the Middle East and Libya between 1977 and 1983, the report gives, in a section dealing with the WRP's internal finances which we do not print, breakdowns of a further £496,773 received between 1975 and 1985 from other sections of the International Committee, almost entirely from North America, Australia and Germany. This raises further questions about how additional

Middle Eastern money may have been recycled to the WRP via other IC sections; it is known, for example, that the Australian section received at least one substantial payment from Libya.

The death agony of the WRP

The WRP's fission products included, at last count, six organisations plus a large number of dispersed and semi-detached individuals. On the anti-Healy side, in early 1986 Slaughter's WRP was expelled from North's International Committee; it in turn ejected North's British supporters, led by Dave and Judy Hyland, who then formed the 'International Communist Party'. Mike Banda was also expelled with a more politically disparate group who established a short-lived discussion circle, Communist Forum; Banda himself repudiated Trotskyism completely, and a number of his associates have joined the Communist Party.

In the summer of 1986 the WRP began negotiations with the LIT, Nahuel Moreno's Argentinian-based international apparatus, (notable mainly for their enthusiastic support for the Argentine junta's invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas). These talks have, in turn, generated yet another internal opposition (Chris Bailey, Gerry Downing, David Bruce, et al), who face expulsion if the marriage is consummated.

It is certain that the anti-Healy camp know far more about the dirtier aspects of the WRP's past than they have so far publically admitted. Indeed, their coyness about the past is one of the few things which unites the warring factions. Probably none of them know the full story, but virtually all of them know more than they have revealed so far. These include North, who has resolutely chosen not to make public even the skeletal information we publish; Cliff Slaughter, who for many years was secretary of the International Committee; and Dot Gibson, who was responsible for running - and falsifying - the accounts of the WRP and its companies. Silence denotes consent.

Healy and a number of his supporters are even better placed to be held accountable for the despicable practices which this report alleges. It states, for example, that Alex Mitchell and Corin Redgrave were as deeply involved as Healy himself in the dealings with Arab governments. So was Vanessa Redgrave, whose personal finances are alleged to have merged with the inflowing money.

One part of the document not published here states, "It was learned from cde [name suppressed] that one large IC donation of \$140,000 to the party was never recorded. Under instructions from G Healy it was given to Vanessa Redgrave who had run into tax problems."

The pro-Healy WRP which emerged from the October 1985 schism has also had its problems. From the beginning Healy had an uneasy relationship with Sheila Torrance, who ran the organisation and the restarted daily News Line. In the summer of 1986, Mitchell suddenly quit, returning to Australia, and the association between Healy and his showbiz 11 on the one hand and Torrance on the other deteriorated. The break came in December. Torrance kept a majority of the remaining membership and News Line, which by now had a circulation in the low hundreds.

Healy, the Redgraves, and a small rump, resurfaced in August 1987 as the Marxist Party, which has discovered a new messiah in Gorbachev, apparently due to lead a political revolution in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, in early 1987 yet another faction, headed by Richard Price, broke away to refound trotskyst orthodoxy as the "Workers International

League". Torrance, with what remains of her WRP, is currently embroiled in a tussle with yet another group led by Ray Athow over the party's remaining assets. Tedious, isn't it?

Their morals and ours

One important aspect of the corruption of the WRP not covered by the report is the mercenary relationship it established with certain local authorities. For example, the financially scandal-ridden Lambeth council was effectively dominated by a group of councillors who were covert members or supporters of the party (one, at least, received a party salary and car) with all that implies in terms of jobbery and corruption.

The Labour Herald, an important journal of the Labour "left" and formerly co-edited by Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, was financed and controlled by the WRP. The party also had important influence in, and access to, the highest levels of the GLC. We hope in future issues of Solidarity, with the help of our readers, to explore this further dimension of corruption. Incidentally, the WRP was far from being the sole beneficiary of such influence.

We apologise for what may appear to be an extended detour into political coprophilia. But the example of Healy's WRP raises questions which go far beyond that organisation alone.

What is relevant about this tale is not that the WRP was led by a monster (or monsters) - after all, there are plenty of those around - but that numbers of intelligent, self-sacrificing, and idealistic people (but what ideals?) accepted such a regime for decades. Psychiatry as well as ideology is needed to explain such a phenomenon. Masochistic party or leader fetishism is only one facet of the problem. Another is the amoralism stemming from leninist ideology: the denial of any relationship between means and ends. For us repellent methods have only produced, and will only produce, repellent ends.

We cannot accept the attitude which says that if it is necessary to support, or keep silent about, the torture and execution of dissidents in order to augment party funds, so be it; or that ordinary people are simply there to be lied to, manipulated, exploited and sacrificed to the interest of the self-styled revolutionary elite; or that only the interests of the party - often embodied in its leader - are relevant. The symptoms presented by the WRP express in an extreme form the basic attitudes of a wide section of the authoritarian "left", and this is true both here and now and in the societies they have brought or might bring into existence.

THE CORRUPTION OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Extract from the Interim Report of the International Committee Commission,

December 16 1985

From Solidarity, issue 16 (new series), spring 1988

Here, published for the first time, we extract four key pages of the 12-page report on corruption in the WRP, prepared by a special commission of the International Committee of the Fourth International

Relations with the colonial bourgeoisie

The Commission was able to secure a section of the correspondence relating to the Middle East from the files in G Healy's former office. The documents examined by the Commission are seven relating to Iraq, four relating to Kuwait and other Gulf states, 23 relating to the PLO and 28 relating to Libya. The following report bases itself mainly on these documents.

From internal evidence in the documents under our control, it is obvious that much more material must exist, which was either taken out of the center when the rump was in control or kept elsewhere. Therefore the actual amount of money received from these relations and the extent of these relations must be considerably bigger than what we are able to prove in this report. The documents at our disposal clearly prove that Healy established a mercenary relationship between the WRP and the Arab colonial bourgeoisie, through which the political principles of Trotskyism and the interests of the working class were betrayed.

In late June 1976, the ICFI was informed for the first time that the WRP had established official contacts with non-party forces in the Middle East. These contacts were with the PLO, a national liberation movement. However, in April 1976, two months earlier (and more than a year before a public alliance was announced between the WRP and Libya), a secret agreement with the Libyan government was signed by [name suppressed in original] and Corin Redgrave on behalf of the WRP (exhibit no 5). This was never reported to the ICFI. The Commission has not yet established who in the leadership of the WRP, beyond the signatories, knew of the agreement.

This agreement includes providing of intelligence information on the "activities, names and positions held in finance, politics, business, the communications media and elsewhere" by "Zionists". It has strongly anti-Semitic undertones, as no distinction is made between Jews and Zionists and the term Zionist could actually include every Jew in a leading position. This agreement was connected with a demand for money. The report given by the WRP delegation while staying in Libya included a demand for £50,000 to purchase a web offset press for the daily News Line, which was to be launched in May 1976. The Commission was not able to establish if any of this money was received.

In August 1977, G Healy went himself to Libya and presented a detailed plan for the expansion of News Line to six regional editions, requesting for it £100,000. G Healy also discussed the Euro-marches with the Libyan authorities and responded positively to a proposal to have the "Progressive Socialist Parties of the Mediterranean" participate in the marches. This would have included PASOK, a bourgeois party in Greece. These plans did not materialise. G Healy reported this in a letter to Al Fatah leader [name suppressed] (exhibit no 6).

This letter and a number of further letters to [name suppressed] (exhibit no 14) demonstrate that the relations with the PLO - which according to the claims made by the WRP before the ICFI were supposedly based on the principled resolutions of the Second Congress of the Communist International - were cynically used to make the PLO an instrument for obtaining money from the Arab bourgeoisie, thereby destroying any chance of building a section of the International Committee among the Palestinians.

The complete political opportunism of the relations to the Arab colonial bourgeoisie is most clearly revealed in a redraft of the WRP perspectives signed by G. Healy (exhibit no 7). This document was presented to the Libyan authorities during a visit in April 1980. It reconciles the WRP perspectives with the Green Book. Instead of the "working class" we find "the masses" and the Libyan Revolutionary Committees are identified with Soviets. The criterion of the class character of the state is completely abolished. Like almost every document found by the Commission relating to the Middle East, it ends with a request for money.

G Healy lined up publicly with the reactionary forces in the Middle East. During a visit to Kuwait, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Dubai in March-April, 1979, G Healy, V Redgrave, and [name suppressed] met with the Crown Prince of Kuwait, Sheikh Sa-ad, and some of the ruling bourgeois families. When they were invited however to have dinner "with a group of left oppositionists led by the Sultan family", according to their own report "the delegation declined to accept this invitation as we did not wish to intervene in the political matters in Kuwait" (exhibit no 8). The sole purpose of this trip was to raise money for the film Occupied Palestine.

The trip ended finally by the delegation urging the feudal and bourgeois rulers to censure a journalist of the Gulf Times who had written an article on the real purpose of their visit. The delegation finally received £116,000. In October 1979, Vanessa Redgrave visited Libya and asked for £500,000 for Youth Training (exhibit no 9). As of February 1982 the WRP had received "just over 200,000 pounds" from Libya for Youth Training (exhibit no 10). In addition to this a £100,000 fund was raised in the British working class. While approximately £300,000 was raised for this project, the real cost for the purchase, legal and building expenses for seven Youth Training Centres as of May 21, 1982 was £152,539.

In April 1980 a WRP delegation led by G Healy visited Libya, presenting his redrafted WRP perspective and asking for more money. From March 8 to 17, 1981 G Healy made a further visit to Libya, putting forward demands totalling £800,000. The Commission found a report in Healy's handwriting of this (exhibit no 11). This report contains the following statements: "In the evening we had a two hour audience with [name suppressed]. We suggested that we should work with Libyan Intelligence and this was agreed. ... March 13. The delegation was visited by [name suppressed] from the intelligence". This has a special significance, considering the fact that the Libyan Intelligence has excellent relations with the German Special Branch (BKA).

The Commission has not been able to establish to whom in the WRP leadership, if anyone, this written report was shown. The same applies to all other written reports and correspondence.

At that point G Healy had considerable difficulty getting all the money he was asking for. The report goes on: "March 15th. We were told that [name suppressed] had promised £100,000 which we said was welcome but inadequate. ... April 9th. Met [name suppressed] for the first time since he returned from Tripoli. He had no news but paid up £26,500 to pay for youth premises already decided. This brings the total to date paid from the promised £500,000 to £176,500. It looks as [if] our visit made no impact whatsoever".

In May 1981, G Healy's letters asking for the money became more and more desperate. On April 15th he writes a letter, marked "confidential", to [name suppressed] of the People's Committee in the Libyan People's Bureau (exhibit no 12) urging him to give the money. On May 17, 1981 a "private and confidential" letter is sent to "dear [name suppressed]" (exhibit no 13) through Alex Mitchell.

On August 25th Alex Mitchell asks PLO representative [name suppressed] for an immediate meeting to discuss "the very grave questions which have arisen regarding our revolutionary solidarity work in the Middle East". He informs him that "with the full agreement of the Political Committee, our Party's proposed visit to Beirut and Tripoli has been cancelled".

In a Memo to G Healy, Alex Mitchell reports that [name suppressed] proposed to write a letter to Gaddafi and forward it through [name suppressed] of Libyan Intelligence. On August 28th, G Healy writes a letter to [name suppressed] in the name of the Central Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party, complaining that he didn't get the money from Tripoli and blaming the Libyans for the price raise in the News Line (exhibit no 14). The same day G Healy writes another "private and confidential" letter to "Brother [name suppressed]" (exhibit no 15).

The last document in the hands of the Control Commission is a letter from G Healy to the secretary of the Libyan People's Bureau, dated February 10th, 1982, under the heading "Re: 1982 Budget" (exhibit no 10).

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 and the right-wing turn of the Arab bourgeoisie led to the drying up of the finances coming in from the Arab colonial bourgeoisie. Only a few documents could be found on the relations with the Iraqi bourgeoisie, although we know that many trips have been made there. The relations came to an abrupt end when the Iran-Iraq war started in 1980. The total amount obtained through these relations, according to the available documents, is listed below.

The Commission has not yet been able to establish all the facts relating in the case of the photographs that were handed over to the Iraqi embassy. We do know the two WRP members were instructed to take photos of demonstrations of opponents of Saddam Hussein. One of the members, Cde. [name suppressed], refused the order. A receipt for £1600 for 16 minutes of documentary footage of a demonstration is in the possession of the Commission.

Money received from the Middle East

The following report on monies received from the Middle East was put together by the Commission from a careful analysis of many documents and cash books. We were told repeatedly that Healy wanted no formal record kept of the money coming in. A full list and graph of what was found is in exhibit no 16.

A list by year shows the following amounts coming in:

1977 £46,208
1978 £47,784
1979 £347,755
1980 £173,671
1981 £185,128
1982 £271,217
1983 £3,400
1984 0
1985 0

TOTAL £1,075,163

Analysed by country, where it is possible to distinguish, the amounts are:

Libya £542,267
Kuwait £156,500
Qatar £50,000
Abu Dhabi £25,000

PLO £19,997
Iraq £19,697
Unidentified or other sources £261,702

TOTAL £1,075,163

The Commission was told by both [name suppressed] and [name suppressed] that frequently cash was brought to the center which would not be immediately banked. Therefore, it was possible for large sums of cash to come and go without ever being recorded.

Tom Burns, Solidarity, issue 16 (new series), spring 1988
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