

Chartist

SOCIALIST CHARTER BI-MONTHLY JOURNAL No. 74 MARCH/APRIL 1979 **35p**



Bolshevism



Immigration controls

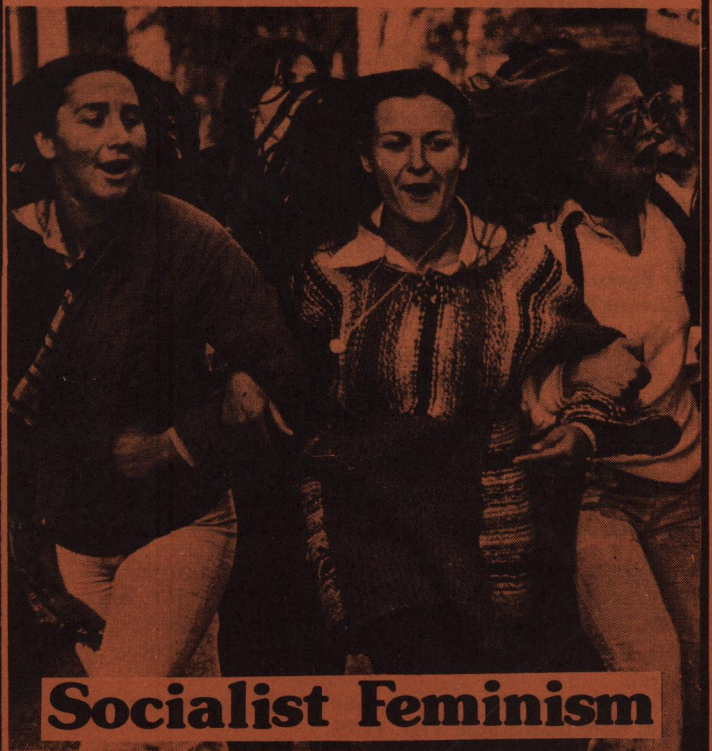
Tribune

LABOUR'S INDEPENDENT WEEKLY

Labour Leader

Socialist Organiser

Labour Left



Socialist Feminism

**Also
inside**

- ROSA LUXEMBURG
- FELIX MORROW
- BRITISH ECONOMY
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT
- I-CL AND WOMEN

CONTENTS

	Page
1. <i>Editorial</i> Introducing the new Chartist MIKE DAVIS	2
2. <i>Survey</i> The Labour Left GEOFF BENDER	4
3. The Case For Socialist Feminism MARTIN COOK	7
4. ICL and Women ROS TYRRELL	10
5. <i>History</i> The Bolshevik Heritage ALAN CRISP	13
6. Rosa Luxemburg PHIL BENSON	18
7. <i>Debate</i> Immigration Control? BERNARD MISRAHI	20
8. Economy: Holding back the tide FRANK LEE	25
9. <i>Reviews</i> In Defence of Felix Morrow MARTIN COOK	29
10. Local Government, the Community and Class Struggle DON FLYNN	30

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Editorial :

Introducing

the new

Chartist

At a national meeting last December the Socialist Charter decided to drop our monthly *Chartist* newspaper, replace it with a bi-monthly journal and concentrate more of our resources in producing *Socialist Organiser*, the monthly campaigning paper of the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV). This new look *Chartist* will also incorporate our previous journal, *Chartist International*.

Why the changes? Firstly, on the SCLV. Most of our members and supporters felt that if we were to play a central and dynamic role in building the campaign, as part of the political preparation for the general election, SCLV needed a regular news bulletin. The Campaign had experimented with a pilot issue of the paper in October, which had been generally well-received on the left of the Labour Party. The Steering Committee of the SCLV subsequently resolved to produce a monthly paper up to the election.

The aim of *Socialist Organiser* is to monitor the progress of the Campaign, to assist in the organisation of the potential support for SCLV (200 CLP activists attended the launching conference last July and hundreds have sponsored SCLV), to propagandise SCLV's specific policies — many of which are policies decided at Labour Party Conference — and to open up debate on the left around the vital political issues facing socialists in the labour movement from anti-fascism to a strategy for socialism. It is hoped that the paper can become a forum for discussion on the left both within the Labour Party and amongst those not convinced of the importance of the struggle in the Labour Party — Irish republicans, gay activists, socialist feminists, Anti-Nazi League supporters and so on. In his article on the Labour Left, Geoff Bender explains in more detail the political background in which the SCLV was conceived, formed and wherein it hopes to gain support as a non-sectarian alliance fighting for a Labour vote with a difference: a vote fought for on class struggle policies with a socialist perspective.

SOCIALIST CHARTER

Where does the new *Chartist* come in for Socialist Charter? In a "Summary of Tasks" editorial in our April 1978 *Chartist* we explained: "The Socialist Charter started life as a revolutionary communist organisation in 1972, although the nucleus which composed its backbone was launched in 1970. The guiding political tasks of the organisation had been the necessity to build a revolutionary socialist opposition to the policies of the reformist social democratic mis-leaders of the working class in Britain and internationally. We saw the arena for our work as the CLPs and trade unions in particular — though not exclusively. In the early days we

tended to accept that the programme for working class political power already existed, the task being to implement it against all brands of class compromise and vacillation. Although we recognised the degeneration of the international Marxist movement, and our own political heritage-Trotskyism, we were slow to appreciate the full extent of the crisis of revolutionary Marxism." Today we have expanded the arena of our work into the women's movement, the anti-imperialist movement — especially in relation to Ireland, with our work in the United Troops Out Movement and in the production of *Ireland Socialist Review* — and in the anti-fascist, anti-racist movement. While supporting the right to autonomous organisation on the part of the specially oppressed, we see as our primary task the challenging of the reactionary prejudices, racism, sexism and philistinism within the Labour movement itself.

DISTORTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY MARXISM

Our aim with this bi-monthly *Chartist* is to contribute to tackling some of the deeper-seated problems of Marxist theory and perspective which we hinted at in our April editorial, and which a monthly newspaper and too infrequent *Chartist International* had not permitted us to deal with. In the April editorial we summarised the distortions of contemporary Marxism as expressed in "1) a gross under-estimation of the ideological questions and the ideological struggle; 2) economism and workerism — a neglect of those struggles outside the direct framework of worker-capitalist relations; 3) a passive fatalism on the one hand or moralism and voluntarism on the other; 4) a tearing apart of analysis and action and the severing of Marxism into a number of discrete sciences." We hope this journal can go some way towards contributing to ironing out these problems.

Over the last few years a healthy emergence of new magazines aiming to provide Marxist analysis and opinion of specific areas of class society has emerged: *New Left Review*, *Capital and Class*, *Gay Left*, *Monthly Review* (American), *m/f*, *Race and Class*, for example, but few, if any have addressed themselves to the burning task of the formation of a united revolutionary socialist organisation. Most of the journals of the Trotskyist left, whilst addressing themselves to this issue have tended to fall in the ditch of Orthodox Trotskyism being victims of one of the aforementioned distortions of Marxism.

Many of these journals mentioned are making a positive contribution to developing and clarifying Marxist theory from which we hope to learn. Much of what is written can be learnt from in the negative.

FOUR AIMS

Chartist will aim to do essentially four things: Firstly, to stimulate debate of the left on questions of strategy and tactics for socialism, the nature of capitalism and the non-capitalist world today and its social, cultural and political means of oppression. For too long the Trotskyist left has contented itself with truisms and schemas from the pre-war years and failed to develop an adequate analysis of the complex problems of post-war world. It has presented itself as a movement with all the answers and impervious to the contributions of movements arising from the specific forms of oppression which exists today. The Feminist and gay movements, for example, have been making a positive con-

tribution to understanding many of the hidden aspects of sexual oppression.

Sexism is just one manifestation of the ways capitalism and patriarchal society maintains its grip. It is a weak flank of Marxist theory which has allowed disunity and division to remain unchallenged. It is one of several vital areas which need to be integrated into a Marxist perspective for social revolution. Martin Cook and Ros Tyrrell survey the writings of socialist feminists and try to assess what stage has been reached and the future tasks facing socialist women.

Secondly, *Chartist* aims to provide a through-going analysis of the political, economic and social trends in today's modern capitalist and non-capitalist world. To ascertain what is progressive and what reactionary in the national and class conflicts being fought out from Latin America to Cambodia and South Africa to Ireland. The third aim of *Chartist* will be to probe these relatively new areas of struggle for Marxists — though not for women, gays or blacks — and to try to develop the theoretical and ideological basis for a Marxist alternative capable of challenging existing society on all its points of domination and strength. As capitalism has developed it has become more complex. The older capitalist states have developed refined and sophisticated methods to maintain hegemony over the oppressed. We can afford to leave no stone unturned in uncovering the inner workings of the system today.

Finally, we aim to review the Marxist tradition, as part of the history of the worker's movement, to sift out what is relevant and necessary for revolutionary theory and practice today from what is historically dated and unhelpful.

The timeless formulae of the 'socialist programme', and the 'revolutionary party' which are held up by many Trotskyist groups world-wide as the panaceas for capitalist crisis and the problems of the working class have failed — through their lack of theoretical and concrete content to advance the Marxist movement. In fact, the method which informs this kind of practice is part of the problem which Socialist Charter has been working to overcome. Alan Crisp, in this issue, examines the facts and myths surrounding the heritage of Bolshevism. In future issues of *Chartist* we will explore in greater depth the precise nature of these problems.

REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE

Chartist will continue to be the main mouthpiece of the Socialist Charter in our efforts to build a revolutionary alternative to reformism within the Labour movement. We hope it will serve the needs of both our tendency and the wider revolutionary movement in achieving an enduring regroupment of the splintered Marxist left within the organisations of the working class. Our ultimate aim is liberation of the oppressed and exploited through the conquest of political power, the overthrow of capitalist society and the building of a new socialist and communist civilisation. To achieve these ends we need clear ideas, free from narrow economism and sectarian dogma.

Chartist is in the business of ideas. Clarifying ideas so as to heighten our class consciousness and guide our activity. We ask readers not to hesitate to send in letters, reviews or short articles as part of this process.

Mike Davis

SURVEY

The Labour Left

Geoff Bender

The collapse of any parliamentary opposition to the strategy of the Callaghan leadership of the Labour Party had led many outside observers to the view that the left, in the Labour Party was on the wane (see T. Ali *The Lost Tribunes* in *Socialist Challenge* No. 65). In fact, no sooner had Ali's article appeared in *Socialist Challenge* than Labour Party Conference was throwing out the 5% pay policy and the constituency parties (CLPs) electing onto the National Executive Committee prominent ANL-er Neil Kinnock and Dennis Skinner, the most intransigent of all the parliamentary lefts.

While for the preceding three years Labour Party Conferences had moved further and further right the 1978 conference saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Though by no means a left-dominated occasion the leadership did receive some nasty shocks and Hugh Scanlon had to earn his subsequent elevation to the House of Lords by preventing the passage of the crucial reselection resolution.

Contrary to the belief of those who have periodically written off the internal disputes in the Labour Party as of no account since — at least — the mid '60s the Socialist Charter has always regarded such conflicts as expressions — however mediated — of class forces and class struggles. The debates which have taken place over the last few years of relative class quiescence as well as those which can be expected from the present wave of strike struggles and the run-up to a General Election have reflected, continue to, and will reflect a profound and searching uncertainty as to the way forward and possible strategies to socialism. Issues such as the relationship between the industrial struggle and parliament, the Labour Party and the trade unions, workers' control and free collective bargaining, local councils and the national state, the national state and the world market have all been posed in the discussions around the reform proposals of the Alternative Economic Strategy and some of the other proposals of the reformist and Labour Left. The revolutionary left, usually pre-occupied with other concerns will ignore these debates at their peril.

In a country like Britain with deeply entrenched social democratic traditions it is unlikely in the extreme that the working class or even significant sections of it will come to revolutionary conclusions overnight. The debates in the left reformist milieu can serve as milestones in the development of working class political consciousness to those who know how to read them. It is with this in mind that the rest of this article seeks to explore some of the political developments within the Labour Left.

THE TRIBUNE GROUP

Paradoxically it is the break-up of the Tribune Group as a coherent force which has enabled a whole range of political differentiation and political debate to occur. The Parliamentary Group of Tribunes — some 80-strong after the 1974 General Election undoubtedly contains many talented and committed individuals but has never functioned in the least cohesively. Including in its ranks Michael Foot, in the past in seasoned campaigner on civil rights issues, and the most loyal defenders of every twist and turn in the policies of this Labour Government as well as back bench members

who have taken a stand against the Government — the Tribune Group is more of a club of those who wish to retain left credentials at any cost than a political force. Yet, nevertheless their rallies and 'Brains Trust' meetings at Labour Party Conferences are the largest gatherings of the Labour left at those occasions. That such events are contradictory and for some purely nostalgic occasions does not alter the fact that *Tribune*-ism does still have significance for many Labour Party members which is to some extent independent of the actual records of Tribune MPs and the finer points of the *Alternative Economic Strategy* (AES)

In *Chartist* No. 60 we explored this basic economic programme which all Tribunes pay, at least, lip service to and which in large measure is shared by the Communist Party of Great Britain, the TUC and many leading trade unionists. It is also critically supported by Independent Labour Publications as we shall later discuss.

CONTRADICTIONS IN AES

The key elements of the AES are as follows:

- (i) A substantial extension of the state sector, including the banks and finance houses
- (ii) Planning agreements to be enforced by sanctions on unco-operative firms to assist and control growth and investment programmes
- (iii) An immediate improvement in living standards and a reversal of public spending cuts which, together with investment would aim to cut unemployment.
- (iv) Defence cuts.
- (v) Price controls.
- (vi) Import controls to protect the balance of payments and the sale of overseas investments to pay off foreign debts.

The weaknesses and contradictions of this perspective have been dealt with many times in the *Chartist*. Not only is it conceived as an essentially legislative reform programme which does not involve direct working class action but it is in many ways internally contradictory and implies that existing government policies rest on ignorance or malice rather than being the necessary means for the restoration of capitalist profitability.

On the internal contradictions of the AES the perspective of reflation and reinvestment of a fundamental kind is out of the question. An increase in working class living standards and strict price controls would undermine at every step attempts to channel resources into reinvestment. Growth through reinvestment would demand both actual austerity measures and the accompanying ideological offensive. Furthermore large-scale investment to provide an internationally competitive industrial base in Britain would require a technological revolution which would produce massive unemployment of a structural kind which could in many respects be more devastating than the unemployment caused by Britain's industrial decline.

Yet, whatever the drawbacks of the AES, its substantial following and its apparent anti-capitalist thrust have led many to argue that it does create a framework for the left to move forward, for experiments in workers' control and

in state-sponsored, socially useful production, such as Lucas Aerospace, to get off the ground. The idea of the AES as a next step, a transitional stage towards a more expanded socialist perspective is one which cannot be ignored. It is a perspective which to some extent coincides with the 1978 *British Road to Socialism* and undoubtedly has considerable support in the Trade Unions. In the Labour Party it has been put forward by Geoff Hodgson, prospective parliamentary candidate for the Tory seat of Manchester Withington and a leading spokesperson for the regenerated ILP.

THE ILP – FROM THE ASHES

Independent Labour Publications traces its origins from the ILP of Keir Hardie, of James Maxton, and of Fenner Brockway, but no longer proclaims itself a 'Party'. Barely surviving throughout most of the post-war years it has undergone a sudden revival and metamorphosis under the guidance of various intellectuals and activists who stand to the left of reformism but are critical of the sectarianism and ultimatism of the groups of the far left. Their perspective has been theoretical elaborated by Geoff Hodgson and Peter Jenkins in particular in various books and pamphlets directed at both 'Trotskyism' and traditional social democracy.

Practically, the ILP seems to be a growing force inside the Party. They have established close links with the Clause 4 student and youth organisation – a coalition of young Tribunites, Communist Party fellow travellers and broad left supporters who are the main opponents of the *Militant* tendency's sectarian stranglehold on the LPYS. At the Clause 4 supporters conference in September '78, Jon Trickett of the ILP put "the case for coherent and disciplined organisation of the left in the Labour Party, and for the thrashing out of a strategy for Left advance which he felt the Tribune tradition patently lacked" (*Labour Leader* November 1978).

The 12-page monthly paper of the ILP, *Labour Leader* has recently been given a face lift from the archaic-looking 8-pager which until recently it was. The *About Ourselves* column says little more about the ILP than its commitment to Clause 4 para 4 of the Labour Party constitution, its commitment to democracy and unity within the Party and its organisational structure. For political perspectives it is necessary to turn to the 10th (!) part of a series on *Socialist Economic Strategy* by Geoff Hodgson entitled *Where do We Go From Here?* (*Labour Leader* November 1978).

In this article Hodgson argues that the AES must be given support, albeit of a critical nature, because 'it offers a major means of political advance'. Hodgson argues that the demands of the AES would have to be imposed on the ruling class by a massive popular movement. "The strategy is simply not realistic or feasible if it is conceived as merely a legislative enactment in Parliament". At the same time he attacks those who argue that such a massive popular movement existed it would be foolish to limit it to the demands of the AES. By a mixture of valid arguments and sleight of hand, Hodgson then attempts to draw an analogy with the Chilean situation in the Allende period.

He argues that the Allende government's reform programme required, despite the constitutionalist approach of its governmental representatives, a mass popular movement to carry it through. To counterpose oneself to this process by opposing the Allende Government and its programme would have been a recipe for political suicide.

The problem with this sort of argument is its lack of specificity. Of course, any serious Marxist must attempt to develop the progressive, pro-working class aspects of even the most abjectly reformist programme and especially when that programme calls for a mass movement to confront the opposition of the ruling class(es). Yet this, in no way obviates the need to point out the limits of, and ultimately the *anti-working class* consequences of reformist policies which under certain circumstances can lead to rather more than merely *political* suicide. To fail to point out the inherent limits of the reformist approach is ultimately to take responsibility for that approach oneself, and further-

more is counter-productive in that it undermines any serious attempt to build a mass movement which, almost by definition, would begin to transcend the limits of any legislative programme.

But the problem cannot be solved at this level of generality nor by facile analogy with Allende's Chile. The questions are: to what extent is it possible for the working class to achieve bastions of power *within the capitalist system* through the imposition of reforms on the ruling class and to what extent can the AES be seen as attempt to do this rather than as a protectionist, statist siege economy for the preservation of British capitalism from the ravages of the world market. Hodgson does seem to recognise this problem, correctly observing:

"The progress of the socialist movement does not depend on its ideas alone. It also depends upon the institutions and social forces to which the left can relate and connect. Ideas become a material force only when they become part of real social movements and institutions." (ibid)

Hodgson sees these social forces in the shop floor projects of Lucas Aerospace and Vickers. He believes that the AES can provide the national unifying and centralising slogan for such projects:

"*The Alternative Economic Strategy is not simply a collection of ideas, and it should not be judged merely as such. It also represents a slogan and a movement. . . it has practical implications which lead to the creation of a mass socialist movement in this country.*" (ibid. Emphasis in original).

The question remains does the AES have this real mobilising power and how can its objectives be achieved. In fact, the failure of the Parliamentary left and many trade union leaders who would swear by the AES to organise serious fights against unemployment or cuts over the past few years does not provide convincing evidence of this. Nor has it been convincingly demonstrated that the proposals of the AES are in fact feasible as either a governmental platform or as the slogans of a mass movement.

But the ILP comrades and the Lucas Aerospace and Vickers shop stewards and their supporters are not alone in the difficult and dangerous task of trying to find stepping stones from within the existing movement and within existing institutions to, at least, begin the crossing to the socialist shore. Whereas the ILP see a key area of struggle in the attempt to build outposts of working class control and power in the movements for socially useful work others have seen possibilities of utilising local authorities as weapons to take on the employers and central government.

'MUNICIPAL MARXISM'

The tremendous battles which took place over the Tories Housing Finance Act in 1972 and the heroic, but tragic, saga of the Clay Cross councillors serves as both inspiration and warning to many on the left in the party. Yet, in solidly working class areas any serious activity for any length of time in the Labour Party will soon confront individuals or groups of individuals with the possibility of finding themselves on a local council. Even if this is not the case much political discussion will revolve around local authority issues. Council housing and social services have been the mainstay of Labour politics in many areas since 1945 and, indisputably, real gains for the working class have been made at this level.

The May local elections saw the election to office in a number of London Boroughs, and perhaps, elsewhere, of many labour councillors formally holding Marxist positions on many key issues and with, in many cases, histories of struggle within and outside the Labour Party. Typical of this new generation of hard leftists in the constituency parties, and on local authorities is Camden councillor, Hackney North GLC member and prospective parliamentary candidate in Hampstead, Ken Livingstone. In an interview given to the *Leveller* in the month of the borough council elections (May 1978) he provided the rationale for the attempt to use local authorities as weapons in the class struggle thus:

"It's very difficult to gain credibility in a locality as a Labour Party — saying we're campaigning against unemployment or the cuts or whatever if the local people look at the Labour Council which they see as the Labour Party and it's doing all these things. You've got to get control of the labour councils and tie them in with developments in the local parties." (*Leveller* no. 7 May 1978).

Aware of the problems this involves he puts forward the need for 'a creative dialogue with residents and the councils own workers, through their trade unions' and raises the great bugbear of local authorities, finance, by arguing:

"One way of breaking out of the crippling interest charges which hang round the necks of local councils — One that Wandsworth has hit on — is to put up the rate to build socially desirable projects. A borough can have a budget of between £60 and £100 million a year and you often end the year with a surplus of three to six million"

"Normally, the council would say: we'll use that to try and moderate the rate next year. But increasingly the demand for the left is that balances at the end of the year should be used to build new capital projects — new council estates and so on, so that you're not crippled for sixty years by the parasites and bloodsuckers of the city."

Unfortunately, the month this interview appeared, Wandsworth Labour Council was swept to a crushing defeat by a ratepayers' revolt which brought in one of the most reactionary Tory councils in London committed to the slashing of council spending.

In the same month, neighbouring Lambeth saw amidst a 'red scare' press campaign, the election of a new Labour Group committed to a radical manifesto and led by Ted Knight, Hornsey prospective parliamentary candidate and a key figure in the development of a hard left wing in the Constituency Labour Parties. Answering a question on the Wandsworth experience, he told the *Chartist* (Chartist No 69) that "to consider that the *only* source of income must be from the ratepayers is not necessarily true. We have to give consideration to other forms of accounting and at the same time to mount the political offensive. . . . This means a radical look at council financing. Possibly we have to look at deficit financing."

Yet, faced with the necessity for a 28% increase to meet existing commitments and mark time and considerably more to meet manifesto pledges, Lambeth Council were obliged to introduce a 37.5% rate increase for the 1979/80. The only alternative to this being rent increases to take up some of the burden, and/or cuts in action to meet manifesto pledges. The political offensive on this issue has yet to emerge.

The problem is not one of hypocrisy or conscious betrayal but the lack of an organised movement which could provide the basis for challenging the Government on the question of local government finance — a movement which would have to transcend existing divisions within the public sector and the age-old split between economic and political wings of the working class movement. In building such a movement it will be important to make clear just what are the limits within which local government operates and how far these limits can be pushed under the pressure of a mass movement. The fact that the left outside the Labour Party has consistently adopted a negative, and ultimately a passive, pessimistic attitude towards the 'local state' in no way helps matters.

The emergence within the Labour Left of a current of ostensible Marxist politicians in positions of influence in local authorities and a handful of them as prospective parliamentary candidates is a key indicator of the development of the left in the movement as a whole and represents a desire to face up to real concrete problems for revolutionary strategy. Whether such figures are simple climbing a ladder to their own absorption into the reformist municipal and parliamentary milieu, or are the harbingers of a real transformation in the Labour movement, depends not on their own inherent virtues or ambitions,

but on the development of a more favourable balance of class forces and the capacity of Marxists to produce a strategic perspective which embraces all the various arenas of struggle in which the Labour movement and its potential and actual allies are engaged. If revolutionaries cannot do this then the traditional reformist solutions will triumph once again and the ensuing demoralisation will ensure that the Labour right will re-emerge triumphant.

The *Socialist Charter* believes the new hard left represented by these local councillors and prospective parliamentary candidates and the underlying trend they represent are at present the most significant new force on the left of the Labour Party. It was therefore amongst these comrades that the *Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory* (SCLV) found an echo.

THE SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN FOR A LABOUR VICTORY

The SCLV was founded at a conference on July 15 last year when over 100 local activists attended its first conference. The main forces involved in the campaign have been:

- (1) The supporters of *Workers' Action* — a newspaper in general political agreement with the views of the *International Communist League* (see interview with John O'Mahony *International Communist No. 9*).
- (2) The *Socialist Charter* — whose views on the SCLV have been expressed in several articles in the *Chartist* since last June.
- (3) The hard left amongst local councillors and Labour Party members whom we have just discussed.

It is the convergence of these three distinct trends which may offer some prospects for the organisation of a serious left opposition in the Labour Party. Such an opposition needs to be based on both unity in action such as occurred around the racism composite proposed and supported by SCLV supporters at 1978 Labour Party Conference as well as a serious attempt to answer the questions posed in the present situation about strategies for socialist advance. The paper of the campaign, *Socialist Organiser*, a pilot edition of which appeared in October, and which became a monthly in January 1979, has already taken up some of these issues. The problem of maintaining such an alliance without submerging key political differences is a practical one which the *Socialist Charter* now confronts.

THE REST OF THE LEFT

It has not been possible in the scope of this review to tackle the politics of the *Militant* tendency — the largest organised tendency of the left in the Labour Party. Their politics can be gleaned from their weekly paper, *Militant*, their journal, *Militant International Review* and innumerable pamphlets. Their perspective for a split in the Labour Government, a coalition and a mass centrist split from the party has neither materialised nor grown appreciably closer — in fact, it has lost whatever credibility it might once have had. Their rampant economism and their confusion on the questions of state power and Ireland and above all their gross sectarianism has cut them off from the best of the Labour left.

A new force, if that is the right word, appeared on the scene at the 1978 Labour Party Conference. That was the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC). This very loose grouping attracted a grant from the Rowntree Trust and has produced two issues of a four-page glossy paper, *Labour Activist* whose politics are decidedly vague and clear only in their virulent anti-EEC position. Their aim seems to be to unite all those even marginally left of centre around a programme of democratisation and a commitment to discussion around policies utilising the work of pressure groups such as Shelter, and the Child Poverty Action Group. They could become important as a pro-Benn lobby in the event of the issue of Labour leadership being raised after a General Election defeat. If this does not become an issue the LCC will rapidly evaporate, having nothing to hold it together.

The case for Socialist Feminism



In the long run, it may well be seen that the most political-ly significant development on the British Left in '78 was the emergence of the Socialist/Feminist (S/F) current. (NB I think using an oblique rather than a hyphen best expresses the tensions involved!) This was launched by a successful conference at Manchester in February, attended by 1,000 or more women from many political backgrounds. S/F women also seem to have been the most influential tendency at the 1978 Birmingham Conference of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). This has been followed by a whole series of regional and local Socialist/Feminist meetings, and the establishment of numerous local S/F groups — linked in a loose network mainly, it appears, by the excellent discussion bulletin *Scarlet Women* (now on public sale).

None of this is to be explained (despite the fears of many "Revolutionary Feminists") by some kind of plot by the male-dominated Left Groups to carry out a 'take-over-bid' on the women's movement. On the contrary, it has been almost entirely the work of non-aligned, independent feminists (often ex-members of SWP, IMG etc) who feel the traditional Marxist organizations have nothing to contribute to the specific struggle of women against their own oppression.

After all, why "Socialist/Feminist" at all? The left's historic attitude to feminism has been hostile, or at best ambivalent. This is due partly to their failure to grasp just what feminism means, partly to a one-sided and narrow conception of Marxism in the first place. Feminism has been defined as follows by Ros Delmar:-

"Feminism is the political movement of women produced by the contradiction between men and women. It is women's response to their own oppression. The real power and privilege which men have over women produces the political movement of feminism."¹

Or in other words, feminism implies a belief that women *as a sex* are oppressed by men *as a sex*, that there exist in most known societies structured forms of male supremacy — ie "patriarchy".

It follows from this, naturally, that women should organise against their oppression independently, both of men and male-dominated political organizations — the 'Autonomy' of the WLM. Furthermore, that the solidarity of *all* women against their common subjugation should be expressed as 'Sisterhood.' These twin concepts are central to the modern WLM of the past 10/15 years: they remain, it seems, only partially understood or assimilated by the Marxist left even in the Western capitalist world. For many, even those who pay lip service towards Women's Liberation, "feminism" itself is taboo. They see it as a *bourgeois* movement substituting the liberation of individual women within capitalism for the united struggle of the world proletariat against all oppression (ie liberal feminism), or as the belief that the main enemy is *Men* as such rather than class society (ie radical/revolutionary feminism).

Undoubtedly, there are many individual "feminists" with reactionary views — as there are pro-imperialist "socialists", racialist "trade unions", and sexist "communists". For instance, a few years ago a feminist called Jane Alpert quit the Weatherman urban guerilla group and fink-

ed to the FBI on her ex-comrades; prominent US feminists such as Gloria Steinem and Susan Brownmiller reportedly defended this on the grounds of the male chauvinism of the 'Weather Underground'. But no recital of such instances should obscure the intensely progressive character of the feminist movement, which as an organized force is in most countries overwhelmingly on the left or far left. Most Socialist and Communist organizations simply missed the bus before it left the garage, with 50 years of indifference and hostility towards sexual politics, as well as their own sexism: the suspicion they have met with inside the WLM should hardly surprise anyone..

For many hidebound Orthodox Marxists, economic class oppression is the only "real" form — women *workers* may be "specially" oppressed, but the worker v capital contradiction, remains the sole important one at all times. All feminists would reject this — quite rightly. The Orthodox brethren reply to feminist stress on personal and sexual oppression that this is "subjective" and "petty-bourgeois"; they make fatuous jibes against 'Sisterhood' with Jackie Onassis or Mrs Gandhi, and asinine questions about whether you should have more in common with a male worker or a female capitalist. We can safely leave these people to wallow in their own irrelevance.

Barbara Ehrenreich has argued that feminists are socialist, in so far as they strive for *collective* solutions to their oppression, whereas bourgeois feminism consists of seeking *individual* answers. She defines Socialist/Feminism more precisely, as follows:-

- (i) A "totalistic" understanding of the revolutionary transformation of *all aspects* of life, the whole fabric of social relationships.
- (ii) Emphasis on "subjective factors" — consciousness raising, women transforming themselves etc.
- (iii) Rejection of "stageism" ie that such-and-such can't happen until 'after the revolution'.
- (iv) Recognition of the importance of *women* in the revolution not just as an auxiliary, but as a leading revolutionary force in their own right.²

With slightly different emphases, these strands run through the thinking of the Socialist/Feminist current in the UK, as expressed in contributions to the Manchester conference and elsewhere. The sisters/comrades have set themselves the task of resolving the contradictions that undoubtedly exist between existing marxism and emergent feminism ie they do not claim to provide the "answers", but they are addressing this crucial "problem-

atic". This is stated very clearly by Margaret Coulson, who shows that the *tension* between Socialism and Feminism flows from the unclear relationship between capitalism and patriarchy to start with: (a) Patriarchy pre-dates capitalism and appears to have a 'natural' basis in biology. (b) The sexist oppression of individual personalities and the importance of consciousness-raising. (c) Contradictions that flow from the separation of personal life from production eg the ideological basis on which wives might support or oppose their striking husbands. (d) How to challenge the patriarchal deformation of the left and the Labour Movement, yet still recognize the central role of the working class.³

How to avoid the sterile debate between the WLM and the 'Trad-left over which is "most important", the class struggle or women's liberation? How to recognize the distinct and independent yet inextricably related nature of the two arenas, to link them dialectically as part of a common struggle without crudely *subordinating* one to the other? As Wendy Clark puts it:

"Sexism and capitalism are part of an integrated system and we cannot separate our oppression off into little boxes, we do not belong to independent systems but to one system."⁴

The 'Orthodox' left have failed to confront these problems at all, often writing off women's oppressions as purely "ideological", with a *non-materialist* basis. When they are not denouncing women's liberation as "utopian" (it can only happen under socialism, etc) they patronizingly downgrade it as "reformist". What is needed is a *transitional* strategy which can guide the struggle *before* during and *after* the "Revolution" proper: as opposed to fatalist counselling of passivity towards women who seek to fight and challenge their oppression this very day, to develop alternative means of relating to each other and to men. . . . Rather than saying sexism is a product of capitalism, so tough — we have to say (to paraphrase the '60s TV show *Ready, Steady, Go!*) "The Revolution starts here!"

Trotskyists, in particular, are hamstrung in getting to grips with Socialist/Feminism through their touching desire to preserve 1920s "Leninism" in all its authentic glory, complete to the last detail. We have dealt elsewhere with the inadequacy of Lenin and Trotsky's ideas on Sex-Pol, which failed to build on the brilliant insights of Marx and Engels.⁵ Their views, in fact, were not particularly bad by the standards of the time. Even the likes of Alexandra Kollontai,⁶ Clara Zetkin and Sylvia Pankhurst would probably be looked at askance by most S/F comrades of today. It indicates our progress since then that — apart from 'ultras' such as the NCP, the *Militant* and the WRP — the entire British left has more advanced ideas than did the Communist International of the early 20s.

COMINTERN THESES

The *Theses* that the Comintern adopted at its 3rd Congress (1921) do not display an ounce of understanding of the specific nature of women's oppression:—

"... there is no 'specific' woman question' and no 'specific' woman's movement'".

"So long. . . (as capitalism exists). . . the emancipation of woman from subservience to her husband cannot proceed further than her right to dispose of property and and earnings as she sees fit. . . ."

Amazingly, this stuff is still quoted with approval in some quarters even today. The whole emphasis in such a document was not on the responsibility of Communists to take up the specific demands and problems of women, but on the 'duty' of women to join and support the CPs (or else!). At the same time, it should be stressed that the *Theses* were in fact at the time relatively *progressive* in calling for special party organs for "work among women", for there were many in the revolutionary movement at the time who would not even go this far. It need hardly be added that the C.I. envisaged the proposed sections as being 100% under party control, and in no way as autonomous women's

caucuses such as we would argue for today.

Against this background, the present-day far left's reaction to the spread of feminist ideas has been eclectic and half-hearted. Take for instance the SWP, the largest group on the revolutionary left. They have felt obliged to convert their *Women's Voice* appendage into an 'autonomous' movement — albeit a 'sister organisation' to the SWP. They openly see WV as a *competitor* to both the WLM and the S/F current. What appears to be their current perspective was recently outlined by Lindsey German, in reply to S/F propagandist Sheila Rowbotham. The sheer arrogance and *chutzpah* of her article has to be seen to be believed. In the first place, German off-handedly assumes that specifically women's issues' are ipso facto 'reformist', while wages and unemployment struggles are more revolutionary because they involve 'fighting against capitalism itself'.⁸ The poor old WLM has somehow "failed to relate to the mass of working class women" (unlike the far left, I suppose!) But never mind, "the crisis has forced a fair number of feminists to turn to a socialist solution". If anything, the *reverse* is more accurate — after all, most feminists were not anti-socialist to start with.

German is sophisticated enough to make all sorts of favourable noises about the issues raised by the WLM and the Socialist/Feminist current — only to reject all the essential things they are saying. The emphasis on struggle at the point of production ("rank and file organising") to the near exclusion of much else, the stress on class antagonism as the only 'real' conflict. . . and so on. German accuses the women's movement of organising women only where they are "weakest" instead of in workplaces and tenants' organisations. (Personally, I doubt if *anyone* can be 'organised' by external means where they don't feel impelled by their daily lived experience.) In reality, the objection is to what the WLM sees the Revolution as being 'about' — ie. a whole broad range of cultural, social, personal and ideological issues, a developing *counter-hegemony* as opposed to the narrow economist and 'political' orientation of much of the trad. left.

I have dwelt on German's views at some length, since I consider such sentiments (expressed more or less graciously or politely) remain among the more common responses to Socialist/Feminism.

POLARISATION

Some might ask why it is that the S/F movement seems to be posed as an alternative to the left groups rather than as *complementary* to their activities. This is unresolved, while many feminists have dropped out of the far left in disgust or boredom, others continue to plug away in both directions. No doubt it would be politically constructive if the present polarisation between the Trotskyist (and other) groups and the autonomous WLM was broken down through joint membership and creative debate. However, given the present barriers of suspicion and mutual incomprehension, this may seem a lofty and pious aspiration problem. The main responsibility must surely lie on the Marxist left to put its own house in order. (NB. One would not deny that many *men* have also left the 'left' in favour of Trade Union, Labour Party or anti-racist activity, for parallel reasons).

A major Socialist/Feminist complaint is the excessive missionary zeal with which members of certain groups "intervene" in the WLM to put a previously worked-out 'line' impervious to sisterly dialogue. This "entrism" — ie. seeing the movement as a recruiting-ground — has so exhausted sympathy that some local S/F groups have *excluded* organisationally affiliated women wrongly perhaps, but understandably. The women who have taken the lead in setting up the S/F current share the view that most men in left groups ". . . have developed from crass chauvinists to subtle chauvinists".⁹ It may be a jaundiced view, but it is widely felt that even those groups nominally sympathetic to feminism see "women's work" as merely another 'sector' for the party womenfolk to be hived off to rather



Clara Zetkin

than politically informing and clarifying the work of the whole organisation. Moreover, they tend to restrict their interpretation of women's liberation to the 'safe', well-trodden ground of TU struggles (à la Trico) and legislative campaigns (à la NAC).

A further major criticism we need to absorb centres on the need for *new ways of organising* which don't merely reproduce existing hierarchies (omniscient leaders and obedient followers) and which assert the validity of personal experience. Moreover, the existence of a marxist organisation does not *in itself* transcend the various particular interests of sections of the working class and oppressed (eg. dominance of white male graduates in left groups). Of course, the accusation of hierarchy, authoritarianism and male dominance is equally applicable to the mainstream labour movement — i.e. the Trade Unions, Labour Party and Trades Councils. Unfortunately, many Socialist/Feminists seem to have reacted against this in the direction of radical-libertarian ultra-leftism — attempting to ignore or by-pass these traditional bulwarks of the working class rather than seeking ways of subverting them in a feminist direction. It can be pointed out that it's no coincidence that the same SWP (for instance) which counterposes itself to the Labour Party and rank and file groups to the TUs also opposes Women's Voice to the WLM.

The S/F current has also had to defend its inception against sisters who doubt the wisdom of setting up such separate currents: feeling this is divisive, infringes sisterhood, and runs the risk of importing the dogmatic trench-warfare of the (Trot.) left into the WLM. This seems a well-grounded fear, given the wrecking of the last Women & Socialism Conference (1975) by the usual bear-garden squabbling of certain organisations. Moreover, is it not elitist to 'write off' the remainder of the movement as non-socialist? ¹¹ Manchester Women & Socialism Group pose the problem as follows:—

"The need for a S/F Current has developed because the movement has developed in the broadest sense and is an umbrella organisation for all different currents of thought. This is healthy and the best way of ensuring an interchange of ideas. But within that, socialist women

have become confused, frustrated and often disillusioned at the lack of class analysis within the WLM, and at forever going in cycles of campaigns etc. without having developed a coherent theory and practice of how to relate the WLM to the wider movement".¹²

Margaret Page, in a valuable article recently, has argued that Autonomy and Sisterhood have tended to *inhibit* exploration of political differences, 'doing your own thing' substitutes for strategy, *theory*, and *structures* for collective decision-making. She contends that socialist/Feminists should develop as a more organised *tendency* — not just a vague 'network'.¹³ In the widespread readiness to place stress on political and strategic clarification is expressed the remarkable *maturity* of the new feminist movement after a mere decade.

Considerations of space prevent me mentioning sundry other burning issues spotlighted by the Socialist/Feminists. The central point is that even if they disappeared tomorrow, the key problematic of the *relationship of capitalism and patriarchy* (ergo, of the struggle against them) would still be posed for us. It is not just that 'marxism' hitherto has 'overlooked' sexual politics (though it usually has!), but that 'marxism' itself — in its bowdlerised, mechanically "materialist" form — is coming increasingly into question. This is something the S/F Current seems well aware of. Socialist Charter cannot claim any merit in being quick to recognise the implications of 1970s feminism (we weren't). What we can do is pledge ourselves to practically demonstrate our seriousness in absorbing the lessons of the WLM and relating same to the 'ongoing crisis' of marxism. As Barbara Ehrenreich puts it, "the macho style of revolution has played itself out!"

Martin Cook

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Women and the I-CL

The following article was originally written as a critique of the International Communist League's (I-CL) position on the Womens Movement in Britain, and although it therefore refers throughout to the I-CL, in fact, the I-CL's position is by no means unique on the revolutionary left in their attitude to feminism and the Women's Movement generally.

In the late 1960s, the Women's Movement exploded into existence and surprised many of the male-dominated left groups. There arose in the WLM, an organisation of which the "leading" political figures on the left had no control — in many cases these male "leaders" could not even gain entry into meetings. The ingrained and subconscious sexism of the majority of male revolutionaries reared its ugly head, and whereas in the majority of groups, sexual politics was not a main topic for discussion previously, the WLM forced the left to recognise that the struggle for womens emancipation was now at the top of the agenda. For the groups that recognised the WLM and its autonomy, it has taken several years for *open* sexism to become even a rarity, but the existence of a separate organisation of women and still-existing sexism has created an antagonism based on misunderstandings and misconceptions of the basis for the existence of a separate and autonomous womens movement.

The nature of the WLM is such that it is impervious to organised political control. Some left groups see any campaign or group activity without the correct political "line" as not worth bothering with. There are hints of this attitude scattered throughout the revolutionary movement and in varying degrees ranging from the orthodox view that the revolution will be the be all and end all of womens liberation to an impatient recognition of the WLM's existence, but with a questioning attitude to its activities and varying degrees of socialist consciousness within it.

This article hopes to deal with the latter view, with specific reference to attitudes towards feminism and the I-CL's position gives a good example of this.

SCATTERED POSITIONS

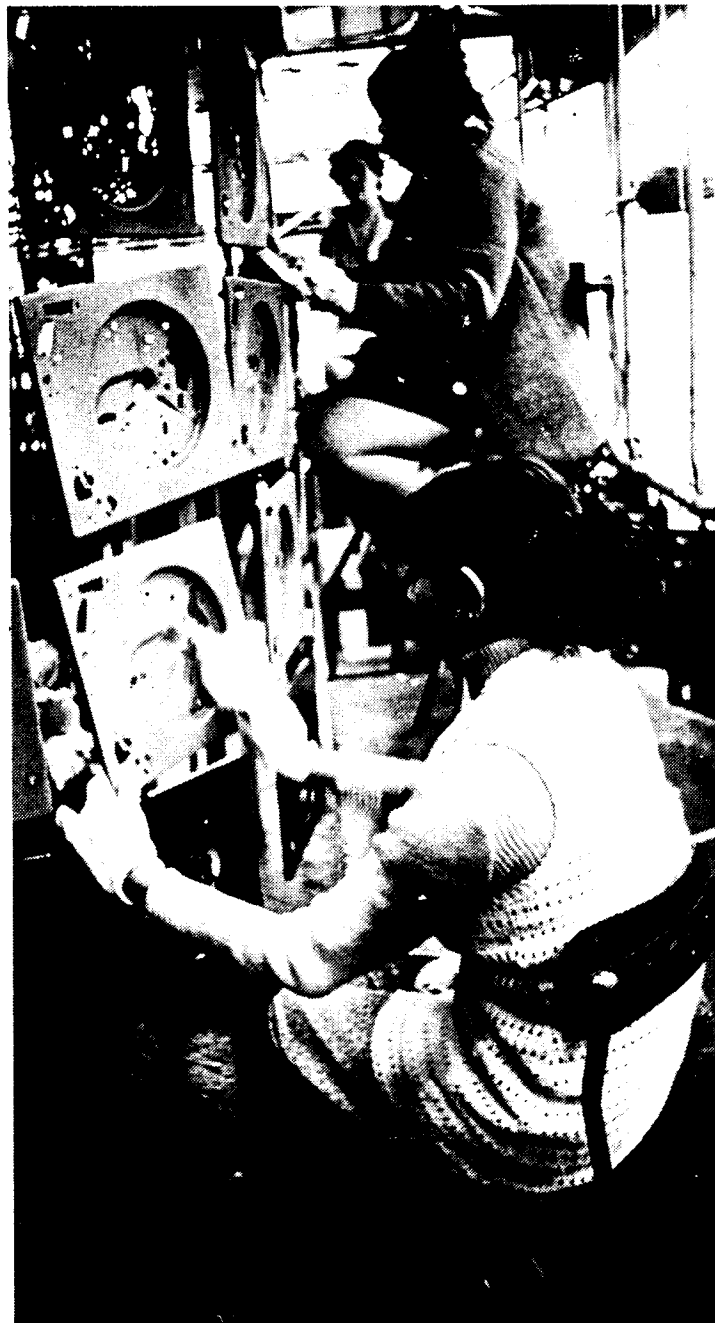
The I-CL's pamphlet *Womens Liberation and Workers Revolution* contains two introductions and the text of a document adopted at the first conference of the I-CL in September 1976. It contains a variety of scattered positions which are often confusing and appear contradictory. However, careful reading does enable certain trends to be extracted. The following quotes are typical of their general attitude to the womens movement:

"The existing womens movement is a petty bourgeois womens movement, confused and amorphous, dominated by a tendency towards utopian, personal, life-style politics. The dominant ideology of the womens movement is feminism of various shades. . ."

"The womens movement is fragmented, often middle class in social composition and liberal and anarchist in ideology, and often inward looking."

"Socialist feminists place themselves on the outside of the class struggle, outside the interests of the working class. They see the oppression of women on a "non-class" basis, locating the interests of women as women *apart* from and outside of class interests" (emphasis in original)

". . . only the working class woman has the voice and the power to lead the fight for women's emancipation."



Is there a basis for a working women's movement?

It would be unfair to cast instant judgement with merely the above evidence. Qualifications are made later in their document which indicate a more sympathetic attitude to the women's movement than is indicated above. An "untrained" reader however, would conclude that they are decidedly antagonistic, and the problem lies with what they omit to say. Statements are made about the womens movement without explanation and the document is in many places reduced to a series of slogans, whose correctness can be proved by the right quote from Lenin, Marx or whatever.

On a specific point however, in relation to one of the statements made above by the I-CL, it is incredible that a revolutionary organisation such as the I-CL, could decide whether someone has placed themselves on the outside of the class struggle. The whole point about class society is that everyone is in some way and to some degree part of the total system of classes and social groups. We have battled as Marxists against the idealistic view that people can just be removed or remove themselves from the total social relations of the capitalist system and its attendant features of hierarchical/patriarchal social organisation. This applies doubly so in the case of women. Secondly, the I-CL put the view that the working class struggle is *the* class struggle rather than a part of the whole.

The two most important areas to discuss regarding the I-CLs position on women are feminism and the Working Womens Charter.

FEMINISM

The first introduction uses a reference to Clara Zetkin's analysis of the late 19th century German working women's movement. Zetkin was clear and precise about the bourgeois feminists of the late 19th and early 20th century, who acted only in the interests of their own class and were only concerned in gaining "equality" for women within the framework of capitalism. Zetkin's analysis is used by the I-CL and transplanted onto the present day women's movement without consideration of the subsequent erosion of what was then a clear demarcation between the working and middle classes. This lack of consideration of more recent (particularly post-war) changes in the class composition of society and the emergence of a large number of militant "white collar" workers is typical of the I-CLs "workerist" attitude. Neither is the class struggle limited to the workplace — a point which the I-CL do not seem to have considered.

"Middle class" feminists within the WLM today are thus automatically labelled "bourgeois" and the proletarian woman is seen as the only recognisable force in the fight for womens liberation. This attitude denies the right and ability of intellectual women to make a contribution to socialist theory and practice and also excludes from the class struggle the housewife (who incidentally is called "dependent working class" by the I-CL). Criticisms of the sociological composition of the womens movement are a complete diversion, and play into the hands of the chauvinists both outside and within the labour movement who equate womens liberation with bra-burning and student romps. The question the I-CL gloss over is *why* the WLM developed amongst (mainly) middle class and student women in the late 60s, and *why* working class women (in general) are reformist in outlook and are even content with the traditional role of the housewife and mother. We do not pretend to be able to answer these questions ourselves, at least in a single document. The I-CL do not even seem to consider them.

Their analysis of the social composition of the women's movement holds true for the revolutionary movement as a *whole*. To separate the women's movement and attack it in such a way shows a distinct lack of understanding of the autonomous nature of the women's movement. The I-CL recognise and agree with its organisational autonomy, but seem to be searching for a reason why socialist feminists do not agree with them (so it must be because they are wrong).

We would be selectively critical of feminism whereas the I-CL are critical of feminism as a whole. This leads us to the question of what feminism is. According to the I-CL:

"Feminists focus on the subjective experience of female oppression rather than the objective necessities of the struggle to end that oppression, inextricably linked as it is with the class struggle."

and

"feminism. . . hold (s) an abstract perspective that the central question for women's liberation is freedom from dominance and subjugation by the male sex. . . that takes no adequate account of the connection between women's oppression and the economic basis of society."

It is impossible to completely denounce quotes like this because there are large numbers of women active within the WLM to whom these descriptions can be applied. The I-CL however relate them to all "shades of feminism" (the logical consequence of which, according to the I-CL is reactionary campaigns such as "Wages for Housework").

Feminism is a broad description relating to a commitment to women's liberation and not to a distinct political ideology — thus there are socialist feminists, bourgeois feminists, Tory feminists, etc., etc. No other definition of feminism could account for the varying political views to be found amongst feminists. The I-CL label socialist femin-

ists as "bourgeois" without attempting to understand why they as socialist *feminists* prefer in many cases to remain unaligned to left groups and work as politicised women separately from revolutionary organisations. The women's movement politicises many women who may enter left groups eventually, but it also contains a great number of women who have been in left groups and have political experience already behind them, but who have been alienated by sexist attitudes within those groups.

The dynamic nature of socialist feminism derives from the attempts by socialist feminists to go much deeper into the relationships between capitalism and sexual oppression, the permeation of sexism into all aspects of life, and the inability of many women to recognise and to fight against that oppression. The level of political consciousness of working class women is not lifted by the "quote-the-right-passage-from Lenin" attitude, nor is it lifted in the majority of cases by strikes on the shop floor. The Welfare State and reformist Acts of Parliament have created a situation general to the working class as a *whole* — one of almost passive acceptance of the status quo. The womens movement is part of the overall struggle to attempt to lift the consciousness of people by seeking to understand questions hitherto unanswered and to use situations as they occur to advance the struggle. It must be a main priority of left groups to create conditions whereby socialist feminists can work inside those groups and make valuable contributions to political theory, rather than to denounce them as "bourgeois" and perpetuate their isolation.

THE WORKING WOMENS CHARTER

We are on difficult ground here because of the 2-year gap between the writing of the I-CL pamphlet and this critique and because of the changes that have taken place since 1976. As far as we can determine, however, the I-CLs attitude to the WWCC has not changed:

"The most advanced section of the womens movement is the WWCC"

and

"The WWCC links every aspect of womens oppression. . ."

At the risk of again, quoting out of context, it is important to mention that the I-CL recognise (somewhat schizophrenically in the light of the above statements) that:

"The Charter campaign has a very weak base, is badly co-ordinated nationally. . . and is politically inadequate"

This is even more so after 2 years since the height of enthusiasm for the WWCC. The weak position of the I-CL on the question of the WWCC is linked to their failure to examine *why* the WWCC has collapsed and almost totally disappeared. What began as an enthusiastic mobilisation aimed at drawing working women, through their unions, into the struggle against womens oppression, ended up with a few scattered WWC groups and with most trade union branches and trades councils making token gestures towards women's emancipation without any follow-up, and this left the active more "intellectual" women bashing their heads against the brick walls of sexism and reformist ideology, trying to get women industrial workers and housewives involved. It failed miserably, and the I-CL comrades recognise this. They don't however seek to find solutions to the problem and any alternative direction for political work amongst women. They see the main direction for this political work as working within the WLM and other organisations such as NAC and using the Charter to advance the slogan of a mass working class-based women's movement. Again, they qualify this statement later on. They recognise that the use of this slogan is premature and that it "proved no use at all in (their) work round the WWCC Conference". (So why do they continue to use it? — as a central focus for the I-CL's perspective in working in the womens movement). It must be said that the use of this tactic together with their distinct anti-feminist line shows a clumsy attitude to sexual politics which is alienating in the extreme. It has far too much of a "masses are waiting for someone to lead them" attitude. They may not mean it

in this way, but it is difficult to interpret their document otherwise. The Trico strike and others mainly involving women are seen as great strides in the fight for a mass communist women's movement, and that such struggles are the magic ingredient for creating communist women.

Their document frantically strives for the link with the working class which is just not attainable at the present time (and haven't we tried?!). We are not at the stage where a mass communist women's movement can be formed, we are at the stage of searching deeper and deeper into theory and all aspects of sexual politics whether it be anthropology, the family, etc., and tracing over the lessons of past political struggle. Alongside this, we work around and intervene in trade unions, the Labour Party, conferences, campaigns, and so on to attempt to raise the level of consciousness of women and men. The socialist feminists are perhaps the only group that have consistently recognised this point and are therefore undertaking valuable political work which is of vital importance to the future struggle against all forms of sexual oppression, a task that has been grossly ignored by the revolutionary left.

In summary, we can distinguish several points at which the I-CLs position on the womens movement can be

questioned.

1. A misconception by the I-CL that all "varieties" of feminism are one and the same and to be systematically opposed. This attitude fails to recognise why women become feminists (because of their special oppression and a desire to get rid of that oppression) and why some (the majority of?) socialist women prefer to remain unaligned to any left organisation.
2. The exclusion from credible revolutionary practice of a large section of women by virtue of their relationship to the means of production (middle class women, intellectuals, housewives, etc.) and the assumption that the only women that have power in the struggle for socialism are working class women who have potential industrial muscle.
3. The implication that sexual political theory is already complete and need no modification or further development - hence "advancing the slogan" and their intolerance of the "inward looking" nature of feminism.

Ros Tyrrell

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HISTORY

THE BOLSHEVIK HERITAGE

By Alan Crisp

For the majority of marxists the Russian Revolution of 1917 still excites great interest and debate. Inseparable from a discussion of that revolution is the debate about the particular organisation which was to be the party of supreme power in the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks. 61 years after the 1917 revolution one third of humanity live in societies whose ruling groups claim allegiance to the tradition of that party. In Britain people as diverse as the Communist Party of Great Britain, Socialist Workers' Party the Workers' Revolutionary Party and indeed the Labour Party Young Socialists proclaim support for the actions of the Bolsheviks in 1917. The diversity of these groupings proclaim for all to see that there are as many versions of Bolshevism as there are left groups. This article will attempt to come to grips with the reality and make a plea for the demystification of Bolshevism.

Russian Marxists at the turn of the century were scattered both geographically and politically. They were faced with two major problems. One was the vast distances in Russia and the Russian Empire and the other was the problem of work within a police state. A campaign was launched for a united political organisation around full time agents and a nationally distributed paper. The main leaders of this campaign were Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov and they campaigned by means of a paper called Iskra (The Spark). These leaders and the other members of the Iskra group were united around the need for a paper, full timers and the need for centralism. At the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) the Iskra group constituted a majority. Indeed the split that was to take place at the congress of 1903 came as a surprise to both sections of the Iskra group. In fact the majority groupings at the Congress split over the definition of a party member. It would be instructive at this point to give Lenin's version of the two definitions:

Lenin's definition:

"a party member is one who accepts the party's programme and supports the party both financially and by personal participation in one of its organisations."¹

Martov's definition:

"a member of the Russian SDLP is one who accepting its programme works actively to accomplish its aims under the control and direction of the organs of the party."²

Not important enough to warrant a split in the party. Indeed as Lenin said in *'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back'* he for his part did not see the need for a split on what was in fact an organisational question. What actually happened after the Congress is a matter for historical work. There is

no dispute that Plekhanov moved from the Boshevik faction at the Congress into an alliance with Martov. The Bolsheviks lost their majority on the Iskra editorial board. Lenin's version is spelt out in *'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back'*. The one undisputable fact is that whatever accusations might have been flying around both organisations operated with, and accepted the need for, centralism and full timers.

Indeed the principle myth that requires debunking arising out of the 'split' of Bolshevism and Menshevism was that the Bolsheviks were 'democratic centralist' and the others were not. In fact elections were to be the exception in both wings of the old Iskra majority. How could it be otherwise? Tsarist Russia was a dictatorship with a political police. At this stage it is worth quoting at length on the detailed set up of Bolshevism inside Russia:

"The regional committees of the large towns have divided among their members the work of unifying all the Party cells of a given district (or sub-district) and of organising new cells where there were none. The organisers of the sub-districts invited the best elements of the cells to the sub-district committees. When a member of a sub-district committee dropped out. . . the remaining members co-opted another with the consent of the district committee. The district committees were in turn composed of the best elements of the sub-district committees. The City committees were formed by a union of the various groups and cells of a given city and were subject to the approval of the Central Committee. City committees had the right to co-opt new members. When a city committee was arrested as a body, the Central Committee of the party designated one or more members to form a new committee and those appointed co-opted suitable comrades from the workers of that region to complete a new committee."⁷

Not a whiff of democracy in that. A lot of centralism, but no democracy in any formal sense. When membership of a party committee was a crime the voluntary principle applied rather than the democratic. Lenin in no way justified this except in the context of Tsarist Russia:

"The elective principle and decentralisation is absolutely impermissible to any wide degree and even altogether detrimental to revolutionary work carried out under the autocracy."⁴

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

It is necessary here to take a sideways step and examine the book *'What is to be done'*. It is essential, from a Marxist standpoint, to look at any work in its historical context. It is one of the most detrimental myths that *'What is to be done'* has some universal formula for political work. On the contrary the book is a specific polemic against a trend, prevalent at the time, to abandon political work, which was illegal, in favour of trade union type of work which was semi-legal (characterised at the time by Lenin as 'Economism'). It therefore had, as much of Lenin's work, an extremely one-sided nature. His reputed view that it was not possible for workers to spontaneously arrive at socialist consciousness is well known. I suggest you look elsewhere for quotes. However it must be stressed that the book was generally supported throughout the Iskra group, both Men-

shevik and Bolshevik, and was the majority view at the 1903 Congress. Only a very small number of delegates opposed the views expressed. In fact the 1903 Congress was the culmination of a fight against the 'Economist' trends. Having won the fight for hard politics Lenin was forced in 1905 to fight his own organisation for a proper response to the spontaneous upsurge.⁵ However just to show that Lenin did not stick to his 1902 view:

"the proletariat sensed, sooner than its leaders the change in the objective conditions of the struggle and the need for transition from the strike to the uprising."⁶

Indeed it was during the 1905 upheavals that the Bolsheviks introduced a measure of democracy into the organisation.

BUILDING THE PARTY

1907 to 1916 were terrible years for Russian socialists. Massive reaction set in. The political police returned. In 1912 the Bolsheviks finally broke with the other groupings making up the RSDLP and formed their own party. Even so, many local committees did not break up and evidence exists of united Menshevik and Bolshevik local committees well into 1917.⁷ Bitter faction fights occurred among the Bolsheviks. Many of the most anti-democratic elements of Leninism became prominent. Given the general downturn and reaction the growth of pro-partyism in order to keep the organisation from disintegrating can be understood. However 'party patriotism' had consequences which I hope to demonstrate later. So great was the reaction after 1905 ^{in which period} that the Bolsheviks almost ceased to exist inside Russia. Lenin painted a very dismal picture:

"the period of disorganisation and disintegration"⁸

"the period of absolute stagnation, of dead calm, hangings and suicides"⁹

Far from being a heroic period when the party was purged of its worst elements, as some Leninists would paint it, it was a period of despair and internal wrangling. The expulsions seem more a symptom of this than of a master plan to build some sort of brilliant cadre party.

1914 – THE TURNING POINT

The most profound shock for socialist internationalists was 1914. The majority of the Second International supported the war effort of their own bosses. Lenin was presented with the spectacle of his philosophical mentors, Karl Kautsky and Plekhanov, abandoning socialist internationalism. Plekhanov indeed rapidly became a rabid chauvinist. Sections of the Bolsheviks also abandoned internationalism. Lenin was led to re-examine some of his most fundamental positions.

PHILOSOPHY AND PROGRAMME

Many Marxists who claim allegiance to the October revolution state categorically that a programme is an essential part of the struggle for socialism. Without a programme no revolution or socialist transformation. The programme of Bolshevism before 1917 was for a capitalist, bourgeois, revolution in Russia:

"the idea of seeking salvation for the working class in anything save the further development of capitalism is reactionary."¹⁰

"Marxists are absolutely convinced of the bourgeois character of the Russian revolution, they will for the first time make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class."¹¹

Of course Trotsky was not at all convinced of this line and indeed had refuted it with his conception of the 'Permanent Revolution' best explained in his *'History of the Russian Revolution'*. However Lenin had never read Trotsky's first exposition of the theory in *'Results and Prospects'* published in 1906. He had regarded Trotsky as a 'wind-bag'.

It was a fixed and incorrect Bolshevik view that the bourgeois revolution must be completed before the socialist revolution. The idea that there were necessary stages was the legacy of mechanical 'Marxism' of the Second International. The betrayal by, among others, Kautsky led Lenin to spend much of 1914 and 1915 studying Hegel in order to re-examine his own analytical method.¹²

APRIL THESES

Lenin's study enabled him to better come to terms with the real movement of forces and to see Russia as a weak link in the imperialist chain. Previously he had thought it necessary to await the tide of history to transform the advanced capitalist countries to socialism before Russia could become socialist. This mechanistic view of cause and effect led the Bolsheviks to the view that the limit of their revolution in Russia was a thoroughly democratic dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry bringing about the bourgeois transformation of society of which the Russian bourgeoisie were incapable. His study had enabled him to see a Russian revolution as both a cause and an effect:

"Cause and effect, ergo, are merely moments of universal reciprocal dependence."¹³

It was possible that a Russian revolution could be brought about by the overall imperialist crisis and in its turn spark the world revolution.

In practice therefore Lenin looked at the crisis of Russian society. The bourgeoisie were but agents of world imperialism and were unable and unwilling to overthrow Tsarism. Even were they willing they could not carry out agrarian reform as they were owed large sums of money by the landlords. In addition the war was bankrupting Russia. One can trace his letters from afar, leading up to the *'April Theses'*, become firmer on the question of workers' revolution and finally junk the Bolshevik programme:

"Whoever, today, speaks only of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry is behind the times, has, in fact, gone over in practice, to the petty bourgeoisie, and deserves to be relegated to the museum of pre-revolutionary 'Bolshevik' curiosities – to the museum of the 'Old Bolsheviks' one could say."¹⁴

RECEPTION OF LENIN'S THESES

The Bolshevik reception of the theses says a lot about the state of the organisation. The Bolshevik leadership inside Russia, principally Stalin and Kamenev, had steered the party into a position of critical support for the provisional government. After all the bourgeois revolution had been achieved and the socialist revolution could not be achieved short of further capitalist development. Sections of the Bolsheviks, principally the Vyborg district of Petrograd, were way to the left of this. However what Lenin was calling for was an abandonment of the party programme. It was not just the leadership who were conservative either. In an interesting account of the period¹⁵ Chris Goodey shows that the Bolshevik militants confessed that they continually lagged behind the workers in February, March and April. Old Bolsheviks were often skilled workers who had a lot of experience of struggle and were reluctant to lead their forces into dangerous situations. Alongside these experienced militants were new workers brought in, as on the Clyde etc, to replace other workers who had gone to the war. Dilution and de-skilling were almost as much an issue in Petrograd as they were elsewhere. The most radical elements came from these new workers. They were principally women and ex-peasants. Indeed the February revolution was considerably aided by the women workers forcing the pace of the strike against the will of worker politicians of all stripes. The new workers still demanded that the 'Old Bolsheviks' lead them. Goodey states that they did so very reluctantly. Indeed in many ways the revolutionary process can be seen in terms of the dynamic fusion of the two types of vanguard



Creating an icon – Leninism in pictures

one inexperienced and eager, the other politically experienced and conservative.

It should not surprise Marxists that the left versus right fight in the party was reflected from the actual left/right *contradiction* in the workers movement. After all revolutions are not about leaders but about masses and involve a considerable social ferment. The article by Chris Goodey is interesting and anybody with an interest in the reality of Bolshevism would be well advised to read it. It also contains material on the link between the munitions factories in the events of 1916-1918 (Berlin-Vienna-Turin-Paris-Glasgow-Petrograd).

Lenin was able to force through the *April Theses*, amongst other things, largely because the Bolsheviks were transformed by an influx of new recruits. All the dwelling on the theoretical discussions of 1902 and 1908 ignore the fact that the Bolshevik party increased tenfold between February and August (25,000 to 250,000). Between February and April the party trebled in number.¹⁶ At the time of the October uprising only 1 in 20 was a member of the old organisation. It was an influx of these, mainly leftist, members who tipped the balance.

A NEW TYPE OF PARTY

The people who joined the Bolsheviks were of two types. Inexperienced workers and political workers/ intellectuals organised into various small organisations. Trotsky was the most famous of these recruits. His grouping had 4000 members in Petrograd alone. This group came into the organisation and a number of the comrades were at once given leading roles. The Trotsky group was not the only one:

“the Bolshevik Party of 1917. . . was born of the confluence in the Bolshevik stream of the independent revolutionary streams constituted by the inter-district group and a number of internationalist Social-Democratic organisations which had until then remained outside Lenin’s party.”¹⁷

Perhaps many had stayed out because the Bolsheviks had the wrong programme. So to call the Bolsheviks a new type of party would have had meaning to all the Bolsheviks of 1917. The elective principle was restored. The party had a mass influx. It altered its programme on fundamentals. Far from being rigidly centralist the party centre had very little effective power over a rapidly developing organisation. In practice power was devolved from the CC to other bodies.

For the second half of the year many of the CC were sent out to the regions and kept there separated from the CC.¹⁸

The party of October was not the party of January. That is not to play down the importance of the conservative element, the ‘right communists’. Indeed the lesson of the events was that the Bolshevik party developed as a fusion of various strands in the working class. Albeit a squabbling fusion. It is necessary to recognise the importance of both left and right in that fusion.

THE PARTY IN POWER

The Bolshevik party was to be transformed again when in power. The most profound changes were brought about by the Civil War. The Bolsheviks emerged from the October as a coalition of anarcho-syndicalist, old Bolsheviks, socialists of various types.¹⁹ The Civil War and experience of power was to shape the Bolsheviks into a fighting machine. In his useful book Moshe Lewin writes:

“It cannot be emphasised too much that the period under discussion the regime was emerging from the Civil War and had been shaped by that war as much as by the doctrines of the party, or by the doctrine on the party, which many historians have seen as being Lenin’s ‘original sin’”²⁰

A growing identification occurred between the rule of the working class and the rule of the party. Lenin and Trotsky played a major role in reinforcing this identification. In 1921, after the Civil War, Lenin and Trotsky were party to the banning of factions. The Tenth Congress resolutions include:

“factionalism of any kind is harmful and impermissible. . . inevitably leads to weakening of teamwork. . . counter-revolutionary purposes.”²¹

In addition Lenin used the phrase ‘so-called’ about two of the oppositions.

What was ignored in all this was that though factions can be used by counter-revolutionaries it is not possible to ban all factions. It is only possible to ban all *opposition* factions. The *leadership* faction cannot be banned. The leadership faction is just a susceptible to counter-revolutionary pressures, and in many cases more so, than any opposition faction. Indeed in the Soviet State of 1921 the identification of State and Party made this problem even more acute. Lenin had an inkling of the full horrors of this process in his ‘*Better Fewer But Better*’ it is however simply speculative

to ponder whether Lenin could really have achieved a proper analysis of the situation.

THE BUILDING OF THE MYTH

The real problem for Marxists was that the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union elevated Lenin's writings to dogma and Leninism into a finished system in order to legitimise their rule. This has thrown a massive smoke-screen up over the reality of Bolshevism. Instead of being able to take writings in context a text is elevated to the status of fundamental law. As Gerratana writes in an excellent article:

"(What occurred was) reduction of Lenin's thought to systematic, concentrated form, the construction of a finished theoretical system, involved not only the exclusion of everything that was considered accidental to the development of his thought, but also the separation of the end result from the process that generated it – from the oscillation, approximation, mistakes and corrections essential to the process itself." 22

The oppositions were not immune from this process. However they never sunk so far as the leadership. Witness Stalin's reversion to the religion of his youth:

"We Communists are people of a special cut. We have been cut out of peculiar stuff. It is we who form the army of the great proletarian strategist Comrade Lenin... In leaving us Comrade Lenin ordained us to hold high and keep pure the great title of member of the party. We vow to thee... to fulfill this thy commandment..." 23

THE OPPOSITIONS

A reading of the documents of the 1923 and 1927 Oppositions demonstrates how far this systematisation of Leninism went. The 1923 Opposition documents are fairly untainted. They however criticise what appear to be some very unhealthy practices. They speak of a "factional regime" inside the party and Saponov writes in reply to Kamenev

"To make reference to the fact that we are friends of Lenin and thus will remain Leninists all our life and continually hide ourselves behind Lenin's back – to do this is blatant demagogy" 24

Workers were unable to speak their mind inside the party and therefore left.

It is clear, however, that the 1923 Opposition felt it necessary to legitimise what they were saying by citing Lenin. Even so Lenin is treated as one source of authority and not as the final word. Trotsky's position is somewhat more dubious. He remained as a CC member throughout the 1923 struggle and kept silent in true loyal fashion. He succumbed to the need to prove himself a loyal Bolshevik. It is significant that the historical practice of Bolshevism was somewhat different and one wonders whether Lenin would have demonstrated quite so much loyalty in his position. However the opposition were less convincing than the leadership and it seems that many of the members of the party accepted that Lenin had legitimised the regime. Preobrazhensky: (on factions resolution).

"When this resolution is brought up here and comrades want to apply it literally to the new situation which has been created in the party then I greatly fear the accusation of bookishness which Lenin taught us to fight politically largely fits such people" 25

Unfortunately Trotsky not only stayed on the CC but compromised in order to do so.

Trotsky's compromise is much more obvious in relation to the 1927 Opposition documents. His acceptance of much of the Leninist system is clear from sections of the documents:

"Our task is to preserve the unity of the party at all costs" 26

The fight was the "cause of Lenin" 27

"The dictatorship of the proletariat imperiously demands

a single and united, proletarian party... Such unity unweakened by factional strife, is unconditionally necessary to the proletariat in the fulfillment of their historical mission." 28

Such 'party patriotism', if necessary at the expense of the the workers, is not a legitimate Marxist point of view. It confuses the means, the party, with the end, socialism. By this time it is clear that the two were identical as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, both opposition and leadership. The terms of the debate are wholly within various interpretations of what was correct Leninism. Marxism as a method was absent, Leninism as a system was created.

TROTSKYISM

I would contend that Trotsky never did actually break with what Gerratana described as 'Leninism'. He was always careful to emphasise that he was a good Bolshevik, or Bolshevik-Leninist. One of the principle problems for Trotsky within the Bolshevik party after Lenin's illness incapacitated him was that he was a late comer to the party. Not a true Bolshevik. In attempting to combat this by swearing loyalty to Lenin he allowed himself to take part in the construction of 'Leninism' as a system rather than a method... Lenin's mistakes are elevated to dogma.

Much Marxist discussion has been a process of exchanging quotes of Lenin's about fairly obscure political situations completely remote from present reality. Trotskyism is party to that process. That is not to say that we cannot learn from Trotsky and Lenin. It is to say that we cannot learn by tearing quotes out of context, out of their moment in the process.

The contribution of Lenin and Trotsky to the stagnating Marxism of their time was the beginnings of an analysis of the role of the subjective factor. How does one organise the conscious socialists in such a way as to promote the transformation to socialism? They both saw the need for the most conscious elements to adopt a vanguard role and provide the leadership for the struggle. The Bolshevik Party was the instrument for this.

EXPORTING BOLSHEVISM

Lenin wanted to take the road to revolution in Russia in order to spark the world revolution. He pressed for the formation of a new, Third International, which he felt was necessary to replace the Second which had proved not to be an international at all but had disintegrated at the outbreak of hostilities. Lenin, however, did not force the split alone. It was already occurring in many countries, for instance in Germany. The declaration of the international only reinforced an existing tendency. 21 conditions were laid down for a vanguard party but these were not initially compulsory. It is obvious, however, that in 1918 Lenin saw it as a short term dash for world revolution:

"We have always realised that it was not on account of any merit of the Russian proletariat... that we happened to begin the revolution... we happened in the course of events to move ahead of the other detachments..." 29

It was the failure of the other detachments to emulate those who "happened to begin..." that led the leadership of the Bolsheviks to reassess the position and to retreat. They began to formulate the United Front policy. However any possibility of assessing the real situation was blocked by the bureaucratic domination of Stalin and his allies. It is possible that vanguardism would have been abandoned when it became clear that the masses were not deserting the 'exposed' social-chauvinists in droves and flocking to the banner of the CI. Who can say even with the benefit of hindsight,



Leninisation again – Lenin the great leader is isolated

It is all too easy to condemn the failure of the Russian revolution to bring about world revolution. It is difficult, however, given the reality of Russia in 1917, to see what else the Bolsheviks could have done, except seize power. The bourgeoisie were too weak to stabilise their regime. The provisional government were continuing the war. The peasants were demanding land reform. The generals were pondering taking the power themselves. The events of the July days demonstrated that insurrection was on the agenda for the workers. Rather than allow an insurrection ill-led and ill-prepared to be crushed it was essential for the Bolsheviks to lead the struggle. Whatever might be said the fact remains that:

“It is all too easy, though, armed with the wisdom of hindsight, to brandish the ‘lessons of history’ against those who, amid the changing uncertainties of actual life, tried to hurry forward the course of history.”³⁰

THE MODERN RELEVANCE OF BOLSHEVISM

It is necessary to re-iterate that much of the organisation of Bolshevism was very suitable in the Russian police state context. It is very difficult to see how a socialist party could have elections in modern day Chile or South Africa. However many latter day socialists claim the legitimacy of something called ‘democratic centralism’. They claim that the lessons of the Russian revolution include the need for ‘democratic centralism’. Now there are many versions of democratic centralism – as many as there are left wing parties. The popular image of ‘democratic centralism’ is neither democratic nor very popular. In many cases the popular image is close to the truth.

In many organisations opposition of any sort is not acceptable. Here legitimacy is claimed from the Tenth Congress. Even in organisational terms it is difficult to justify lack of democracy since the organisations who operate in this way cannot respond to its members. Certainly many workers are horrified by the internal regimes of organisa-

tions. Another version bans any organised oppositions, that is, factions. Again Leninism is cited. It is even more ironic when the organisations spend a lot of time criticising the lack of democracy in unions. Especially ironic for many left groups is the demand that unions elect full-timers rather than appoint them. As was demonstrated earlier you can ban all factions but the leadership faction. Many left organisations wind up with a self-perpetuating elite of ‘theoreticians’ and organisers with a big turn over of hard working eager members who eventually become disillusioned.

SOCIALIST CHARTER

A much more democratic version allows opposition factions and tendencies. However the working class are excluded from the debate as to allow non-members of the party into the debate would be a breach of democratic centralism. One could understand this attitude if organisations were engaged in illegal work but in fact the discussions are usually about the paper, or trade union work, very little of which needs to be kept secret.

All these versions of democratic centralism are legitimised as the ‘Bolshevik’ method. It would however be truer to say that ‘democratic’ centralism was very rarely the regime in the Bolshevik party. The elective principle was only established in 1905 and by 1908 had ceased again. It was re-instituted in 1917 but the centralism aspect was somewhat loosened. In 1921 factions and tendencies were banned forever. The historical validity of democratic centralism is further clouded by the undemocratic regimes of most organisations claiming allegiance to it. Democratic centralism has become a mystifying concept.

People in the same organisation are bound together by common attitudes or they would not be in the same organisation. For instance the need for socialism, opposition to imperialism, membership of Labour Party and appropriate trade union, opposition to immigration controls, withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and self-determination for the Irish people. These are some of the basic positions of Socialist Charter. It would be a mistake for anyone to join us if they did not accept these and other attitudes and positions. This does not constitute anything specifically ‘democratic centralist’. All members of Spurs

Supporters Club no doubt support Spurs. The real question to answer is not how do we unite an organisation but how do we unite the working class around the need for a socialist transformation of society.

In 1917, as today, there was a leftist current in Europe. Sections of the working class were breaking with their old loyalties. The formation of the Third International simply formalised the growing division. The Bolsheviks overestimated the possibilities of European revolution as the result of this break. In fact the majority of socialists stayed loyal to their old organisations and indeed a large number of workers were not even socialists. The United Front strategy was an attempt to come to terms with that. Mistakes were made. We should not compound them by raising them to the status of revealed truth.

CONCLUSIONS

Bolshevism was the product of an historical moment. It cannot be directly translated onto different political terrain and into different circumstances. It succeeded during a world war, against a weak national bourgeoisie and with a poor, highly oppressed working class. That is not the situation in Britain today. Leninism is a method of analysis we can learn from. It is a development of Marxism. But we should learn from the living reality not from the myths and falsifications that surround it. It is time the revolutionary left did more real work of analysis and less repeating ad nauseam from the texts. May I say in this context that all quotes from Lenin in this document are illustrative and in no way to be treated as sources of authority. Chris Goodey in *Critique* said something about our view of the Russian revolution that is worth finishing up on:

"The reluctance to analyse revolutionary subjectivity in all its complex internal richness is rooted in an irrational fear that to probe too closely would reveal no unity at all, that the Russian workers movement was always divided into leaders and led with antagonistic interests, that the enemy argument might actually be true"³¹

It is instructive that such a probe in fact reveals a very complex and rich revolutionary process with many lessons for us today. The lessons we should learn are however some somewhat different than those learned so far by 'Leninists'.

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Rosa Luxemburg

1871~1919

Sixty years ago in January 1919 the European revolutionary movement lost three of its best known and most influential leaders. In the wake of the Spartacist uprising in Berlin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (the Social-Democrat deputy imprisoned for his opposition to the war) were brutally murdered by the police; Leo Jogiches (an experienced and skilled political organiser) was shot to death.

Revolutionary mythology tends to emphasise the courage and heroism of individuals without criticising them and without digging too deeply into the circumstances of their deaths. The most widely available biography of Rosa Luxemburg by Paul Frolich (himself a leading German Communist) blames the unsuccessful uprising which led to her death on the police who provoked it. Although this is superficially true, at the present time when many of the debates of the German socialist movement are still relevant, a more critical attitude may be valuable.

January will justifiably be remembered best as the anniversary of the death of Rosa Luxemburg and hopefully it will lead to a revival of interest in her writings. She is often compared unfavourably to Lenin or treated as a talented leader without great depth of ideas. Much of this attitude derives from her participation in an unsuccessful movement. But the writings and speeches of Rosa Luxemburg deserve study because they reflect the development of the left wing of that movement better than any others.

From this point of view her political pamphlets, speeches and newspaper articles are more relevant than her theoretical writings on Marx's economics and imperialism. It is the uniqueness of Rosa Luxemburg which makes her work



Rosa Luxemburg – representative of left of SPD.

worth reading because it arises from the experience of the SPD, a party which was itself unique in the history of socialism.

Luxemburg is often accused of not understanding the need for a firmly centralised party which leads and organises revolution. However Luxemburg wrote with the reality of the German working class movement firmly in mind. The German workers were well-educated, politically experienced and had long been organised into their own party. The SPD was the main institution of working-class life with a far greater influence than even the trade unions. It was clear to Rosa Luxemburg that if a transition to revolutionary consciousness were to take place, it would take the form of an attempt to revive the revolutionary aspirations of the SPD which was still closely identified with Marx and Engels through Kautsky and Bebel.

Luxemburg's view of the organisational possibilities in Germany was based on her recognition that the German workers had already created one revolutionary organisation and would not easily be 'led' into another until all the possibilities of their own party were exhausted. She stressed her opposition to splits in the SPD and to the applicability of Bolshevik methods of Germany. Although she wrote articles about the weaknesses of the Bolshevik Party and even entered into a short-lived polemic with Lenin on the subject, their views should not necessarily be counterposed. Luxemburg views on socialist organisation would have been out of place in Russia as would Lenin's have been in Germany.

A myth propagated by the early CI and often repeated by communist writers today is that Luxemburg eventually accepted Lenin's views on organisation by her participation in the German Communist Party. This is far from true and underestimates the independence of the German socialists. Luxemburg and many other internationalists – both reformists and revolutionary – were expelled from the SPD for their opposition to the first World War. She left the SPD reluctantly and only after a long and bitter struggle for party democracy.

In November 1918 anti-war mutinies broke out in the German Navy and rapidly spread through the military and industrial centres of Germany. Soviets were set up in the

major cities and it became clear that at least the demands for an end to war and a democratic republic had to be met. A Provisional Government was declared composed of leaders of the SPD and of the radical breakaway party the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD).

At this time Luxemburg was in prison and like many others was infected by the atmosphere of impending revolution. The German revolution had many similarities with the February revolution in Russia the year before which had produced a combination of a reformist Provisional Government and a powerful network of Soviets. Although the Russian Communists had no direct influence in Germany as yet, the example of the Soviet Union convinced many socialists that the Bolshevik revolution could be repeated in Germany.

The similarities, however, proved to be superficial. The Russian reformists had been unable to end the war whereas the SPD had been committed to surrender before the revolution. The unrest in Germany was confined to the major industrial regions and did not spread throughout the country. Most important, the SPD had not disintegrated with the revolution. On the contrary it was regenerated. Only a month after they had been formed the Berlin Soviets agreed overwhelmingly to support the government and subordinate themselves to a future National Assembly. *really?*

The revolution freed Rosa Luxemburg and she threw herself into agitational work in Berlin. She worked with the Spartacusbund, initially a small fraction of the USPD. The Spartacusbund was essentially an ultra-left sect, whose good side was a record of uncompromising internationalism during the war. Its bad side was its refusal to compromise on almost any issue at all and its tendency to organise provocative demonstrations. By January 1919 the Spartacusbund had been involved in several fruitless bloodlettings. It had become isolated from the mass of the workers movement to the extent that the SPD leaders were able to launch a murderous police campaign against them.

ULTRA LEFT

Luxemburg was not as ultra-left as her followers. At the foundation of the German Communist Party (KPD) in December 1918 she stressed many of her old ideas. A sentence was included in the party programme stating that the Communist Party would only take power "by a clear manifestation of the unquestionable will of the great majority of the proletarian mass in Germany". This statement was taken seriously by Luxemburg and she emphasised that the German proletarian revolution would take a long time to develop. She did not intend to overthrow the SPD, but to drain it of support. This was only realistic since the KPD had only a few thousand members compared to more than a million in the SPD.

The street fighting which led to Luxemburg's death came only a few days after the foundation of the Communist Party. Protests against the sacking of a USPD police chief were transformed into a semi-insurrection backed by Karl Liebknecht and several leaders of the USPD. The revolutionaries were far too weak to stand a chance of victory. The demonstrations were even prolonged by agent provocateurs whilst they were brutally put down by the police.

Luxemburg's attitude to the uprising is only known in outline since she did not survive it. She was undoubtedly opposed to an uprising and to the role of the Communists in initiating one. However she seems to have taken the attitude that the revolution had arrived prematurely and that it was necessary to choose sides.

The history of German Communism then begins with a tragedy. Unfortunately in the next 15 years German history provides more chances to remember similar tragedies than to celebrate victories. Probably this explains why the history of Germany is still studied so little in socialist organisations. However, it also explains the importance of the lessons of that history.

Phil Benson

DEBATE

Why immigration control ?

Bernard Misrahi

“Successive British Governments, whether Tory or Labour have used Nationality Laws and Immigration Acts to adjust the intake of labour into Britain.” Sivanandan, in the opening sentence of *From Immigration Control to Induced Repatriation* thus echoes the views of most of the left, white and black. I will argue that while immigration was encouraged occasionally to relieve a shortage of labour, it has never been restricted to regulate labour intake, but as a response to racist pressures. While these pressures were not all-powerful and could have been successfully resisted, they were not, and so grew stronger.

A considerable loosening of immigration control to allow more black people in would be in the interests of British capitalists who find it difficult to recruit labour in a whole range of skilled and unskilled trades – despite high unemployment. They are unlikely to entice this labour from the white Commonwealth and the EEC where people can enter Britain freely or easily already. Citing Canada’s liberation of her immigration laws, I will argue that not only were controls not brought in for economic reasons, but they can actually be economically counter-productive for capitalists.

Yet the political climate has shifted so firmly in favour of a further tightening of the restrictionist screw, that it is unlikely that the CBI or many individual capitalists would consider changing the law to solve their labour shortage by recruiting overseas workers.

ANALYSIS

The Left’s economic analysis is not thoroughly integrated into their propaganda. They concentrate on showing how racist immigration controls are without bothering too much about why they were introduced. Of course, an argument that explains racist laws by pointing to the victory of racist forces is a tautology. Where do these racist forces arise? This is a rather larger question that cannot be answered in a relatively short article. So while this article might raise questions it cannot answer, the economist argument is not only wrong, but is rarely actually used by its supporters as a basis for struggle.

I am not suggesting that the only response to Jewish, and then afterwards to black settlers, amongst working people was hostility. The attitude of most people was ambivalent. People had been taught at school that black people were uncivilised. They had also been taught that Britain had a duty to make these ‘junior’ Commonwealth citizens who ‘looked up to the Mother Country’ welcome. Here were two racist responses, on which would favour commonwealth

immigration, one which would oppose it. Quite apart from this, the labour force was not very segregated. Blacks and whites usually worked together. There was a degree of solidarity and friendliness inside work, even though it might not extend to leisure hours. As for Jewish immigrants, there was a great deal of sympathy for these victims of Tsarist persecution, coupled with a feeling of “Why do they have to come here?” It was not inevitable that the chauvinism and xenophobia within the working class would be dominant. Any analysis of British controls is a tale of how Labour and Tory governments did their best to ensure that they were.

JEWISH IMMIGRATION

Let us start at the beginning, when the cry went up to stop Jewish immigration at the turn of the century.

Before the 1905 Immigration Act, anyone could enter Britain freely. Even this Act was pretty lenient compared to modern legislation. Immigration officers could stop those who, in their opinion, would not be able to support themselves. Those refused entry could, and often won, an appeal. Passengers travelling in small boats, or cabin class were exempt from control. For the next two years, Jewish immigration actually increased following pogroms in Russia.

The importance of the Act lay not in its particular provisions but in the fact that it had been passed at all. The old principle that the entry of goods and people into Britain should be free had been violated. If it took restrictionists fifteen years to persuade Parliament to pass this first immigration act, it took only five hours on the outbreak of World War I to pass a law enabling the authorities to imprison and deport Germans, and only a few days in 1918 to pass further legislation requiring all ‘aliens’ (non-commonwealth citizens) to possess a visa before they could be admitted for settlement. Despite the fierce opposition the Liberals put up to this Bill, they did not repeal the Act when they were returned to office the year after with a staggering majority.

Why did the entry of only a hundred thousand or so Jews over a period of thirty years cause such a disturbance? Maybe it was understandable that the East Enders, where half the Jews settled, would be hostile. But why should this hostility have been sufficient to push the Tories, and some Liberals into supporting controls?

Familiar arguments were used that Jews took jobs and housing from the British. They worked for wages so low and accepted conditions so bad that the natives could not compete. Many of these allegations were refuted by a Parliamentary Commission on Sweated Labour which claimed that not only were Jewish employers not the only sweaters but that they had actually revitalised certain trades. But the

arguments in Parliament led by the rabble rousers of the East End-based British Brothers League were no more based on economic consideration than modern legislation. Listen to Lord Belper:—

“... they are of a low type of civilisation, and they lower the standard of living amongst our own working class... This country is rapidly becoming the sink of the most undesirable class of aliens of the continent.”

It was amazing the concern these Tories suddenly showed for the standard of living of the workers. Economic arguments became mere ammunition in what was essentially a debate about the desirability or undesirability of Jews. Most Tory MPs were finally convinced that they had better take their chauvinist colleagues, many of whom represented East End constituencies, seriously. Some East End Liberals followed suit.

It was ironic that they should feel such pressure to do so, whenever in the non-Jewish areas of the Tower Hamlets, an anti-semitic stand was not always enough to win an election. In 1906 the Tories suffered a record defeat. The passing of the Act certainly didn't help them much.

Britain was not going through any especially severe economic crisis at the time. Besides, crises occurred every ten year or so and never occasioned any state intervention in any form. Some of the 'social reformers' of the day insisted that they couldn't solve the problems of the East End unless they stopped more people entering. The six Labour MPs, however, opposed the Bill. Keir Hardie declared that keeping foreigners out would not help British workers.

So the hard line restrictionists convinced the Tories, who had always been chauvinist, to take Jewish immigration seriously. The Liberals, while they strenuously opposed the 1905 Bill and had defeated all previous attempts at legislation, leniently implemented the Act but did not repeal it. They were frightened of being accused of wanting to “let them all in”, and were easily stampeded into passing more reactionary anti-German legislation in 1914.

As all controls since 1962 have been directed against blacks, these anti-alien Acts were forgotten. Why were black settlers suddenly unwelcome in 1962 after Enoch Powell and London Transport were trying so hard to recruit them?

Was it because of rising unemployment — the “crisis of capitalism”? Hardly! Only three years before, Macmillan had told us that we'd never had it so good. Was it because a shortage of housing had just been discovered in London and Birmingham? A more plausible answer is that the reason for keeping blacks out in the early 1960s were similar to those for keeping Jews out sixty years previously. “Never mind the economic arguments, we just don't like blacks!”

Immigration controls against black people were introduced before the economic recession. By the time the crisis came in the early 70s, primary immigration (heads of families) had, as Sivanandan said, been cut to a trickle. This wasn't the cue to ease up, but to continue to tighten the screw. A hue and cry was raised about 'marriages of convenience', the Tories propose to keep out dependent parents of Asian immigrants, and the Select Committee not only wanted to keep out children over twelve (of Asian immigrants again) but to construct a system of 'internal controls'. The Select Committee don't believe that the Immigration Officers, zealous though they are, can detect and thereby stop all illegal immigrants or overstayers of work permits, therefore the police need even more power to harass, intimidate, detain and deport without trial. Finally the Tories are proposing a 'voluntary' (or 'induced') repatriation scheme. Even if controls were *originally* a regulator of the labour market, which I don't accept, the increasing paranoia about decreasing numbers of black immigrants suggests it is no longer the case.

Remember that controls have only been designed to stop black immigrants. (Or to be more exact, black commonwealth immigrants, as control of non-commonwealth citizens, of any colour, was introduced in 1905.) The majority of immigrants to Britain are from Eire and the White Commonwealth. According to the Office of Population Censuses



and Surveys (OPCS Spotlight on International Migration) only 20% of settlers in 1975 were from the New (black) Commonwealth. EEC nationals can also enter Britain easily. Restrictionists will be able to do little to stop Greeks, Spaniards and Portuguese coming here when their countries join the EEC, unless Britain pulls out. Surely, if immigration was designed to regulate labour intake, capitalists would be concerned to control all sources of immigration. That they are not suggests they have other motives for supporting controls.

The restrictionists keep shouting that Britain is overcrowded. Since 1964, more people have left this island in any year than entered. But as the OPCS diagram shows, net inflow and outflow has been insignificant compared to the fluctuation in the birth rate. (The death rate having remained fairly constant). In 1975, about 300,000 less babies were born than in 1961. Projections of Britain's population for the year 2000 made in that year are several million higher than recent estimates. There was always room for a few more million 'Britons', yet Tories want to keep out Asian Grannies, and the Select Committee are worried about a few hundred au pairs.

Occasionally, Britain's immigration policy is not only irrelevant to capitalist demand for labour, but directly antagonistic to it. In 1965, George Brown introduced a National Plan which required 200,000 more workers for its implementation. The extra labour could certainly not come from the Commonwealth as the government was reducing the number of work vouchers allocated to workers there. Perhaps the workers could have been recruited elsewhere, with some difficulty given the relatively low unemployment at the time. The Plan was forgotten. No doubt anything that Brown was involved in could never be feasible, but this episode, in my view, shows that a labour shortage would have to be severe for a British bourgeois government to resist the clamour and recruit foreign workers.

Because many restrictionists use economic arguments, does not mean that they are their principal motives for keeping out people they regard as undesirable. Even if unemployment is low; then immigrants can always be blamed for overcrowded housing. Poor immigrants usually have no choice but to move to the most rundown areas and accept the worst property there. Refused accommodation by white landlords, and finding it more difficult to get council housing, they are forced into overcrowded conditions, at least in the first few years.

Blacks, however, were different to Jews as they were Commonwealth Citizens. They were entitled to be welcomed in the Mother Country. The 1948 Nationality Act was drafted specifically to let them in and keep everyone else out. This welcome didn't last very long. After only ten years of mass immigration from the West Indies, ultra racist MPs like Cyril Osbourne were being listened to. This influx was only 'mass' by British standards. It amounted to less than 100,000 a year at its peak when it included many

who were rushing in before the door was locked. Even then, almost as many people left Britain during the 1950s as entered.

The Notting Hill race riots frightened many 'liberals' who believed up till then that Britain could avoid the racial violence of the USA. These riots were pretty mild by today's standards – not even one death. The white thugs were caught and given exemplary punishment, but with a similar logic that is shown in some rape cases, the victims of the violence were implicitly blamed. Blacks were responsible for the hostility against them simply by being here. They provoked legitimate hostility amongst the white population because they were 'different'. Britain could only take 'so many', or worse racial violence would ensue. Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech a few years later was only an extreme expression of what became the consensus that the presence of large numbers of black people was bad for racial harmony.

Many of the MPs who were not outright racists were worried about how safe their seats would be against this terrific groundswell of hostility to immigrants, which always had to be soothed, not fought. The old colonial racist view of 'invite them over here so they can be exploited and experience the wonderful way of life in the Mother Country' gave way to a crude 'keep them out' sentiment.

The Labour Opposition did condemn the 1962 Immigration Act and affirmed its commitment to free entry for all Commonwealth Citizens. Gaitskell, the Leader of the Labour Party was particularly concerned about the damage that would be done to the Commonwealth if Britain shut out some of its Citizens. Jim Callaghan firmly backed Gaitskell up. Gaitskell died the year after. Perhaps he would have stuck by his principles on this issue. The Parliamentary Party without him did an about turn three years later.

In 1964, Patrick Gordon-Walker, the future Labour Foreign Secretary, lost his Smethwick, Birmingham, constituency to a Tory who fought the election on the slogan "Vote Labour for a nigger neighbour" and hinted that there were leper colonies for immigrants situated just outside the city. This campaign was no surprise as Peter Griffith had been fighting on an anti-immigration platform in Birmingham for several years. There was a labour shortage in the West Midlands then, so blacks were blamed for the housing shortage instead. Griffiths, as a local councillor, tried to stop them getting council property. In true Labour traditions, Gordon-Walker did his best to avoid the issue of race.

The popular Labour MP for Leyton was persuaded to retire early to give the future Foreign Secretary another chance. He lost the by-election too. The Labour Government were terrified. Their tiny majority could be swept away in a tide of anti-black hostility. Naturally, there was no attempt to fight this racist current. The Government did not consider what the racists would do if they repealed the 1962 Act. Sure, there did exist this powerful anti-immigrant lobby, but an equally powerful force could have been mobilised against them by the Labour Government. No doubt, many Labour MPs were racist. But the majority who were not outright racists simply caved in. The 1965 Immigration Act cut the number of vouchers to Commonwealth immigrants by two thirds. They also passed the Race Relations Act in the same year to prove they were really quite liberal.

While the clamour for tighter controls could have been fought at any time, it obviously grew stronger with every Bill that was passed. To those who hate blacks, controls never seem to be working. These people look round Brixton, Handsworth or Bradford and see 'thousands of them'. They imagine armadas of small boats full of illegal immigrants on their way to Britain, and crowds of people at foreign airports waiting to scramble on planes to take advantage of our social security system. Even people who were not overtly racist were convinced that this 'overcrowded island' cannot take any more. That every immigrant, black or white, means one less house and job for someone living here already. We have reached a situation when the extremists on one side say "Send them back!" while the



East End Bengalis – here to stay

liberal opposition plead "Let's implement existing legislation in a slightly less harsh fashion." There was some response when the Government started harassing male fiancés of British residents, accusing them of entering into "marriages of convenience" from a large number of Labour MPs, but virtually nothing else. Even the existence of hundreds of people detained and deported without trial has not provoked, to my knowledge, one angry question in the House of Commons. It seems that existing legislation is forgotten, as liberals try half-heartedly to oppose tougher refinements, always without success, as they never challenge the basis on which controls are brought in.

After 1965, the big scare was that thousands of East African Asians would be expelled by the African leaders and flee to Britain. The Labour Government's response to this panic vividly illustrates another essential component of racist controls. They must *appear* to be keeping out blacks, even when occasionally they don't. The 1968 Act did not stop Kenyan Asians from entering Britain, it just delayed their entry. Its immediate aim was to make the racists believe that the government was doing something and thus reduce the appeal of right-wing Tories like Sandys or Powell who were calling for more extreme measures. It didn't succeed even in that, as most supporters of the Act believed there were still too many Asians entering Britain.

Even making the Asians queue posed a knotty problem. They were United Kingdom Passport Holders (UKPH). When Kenya, Uganda and other East African countries with a large Asian community (most of whom had been shipped, there by the British in the first place) became independent, most of the Asians did not, or could not, become citizens of these countries. They could not hold Indian citizenship either. As a gesture of solidarity to old Empire subjects,

they were allowed to retain UK passports.

This system worked fine till it appeared that the Asians might want to use these passports to enter the country that issued them. The Government had contingency plans, and Parliament very quickly passed a Bill which divided UKPHs into those who had a "close connection with Britain" and those who didn't. If they had, at least, a British born grandparent, they could enter freely. If not they had to queue for entry vouchers which were issued on a strict quota for each region. If however they were white, but lacked this all-important grandparent, immigration officer could exercise discretion and let them in. All pleadings about 'broken promises' to these Asians were brusquely swept aside.

The main difference, it seems, between Tory and Labour policy on race is that Labour Government always bring in a Race Relations Act when they pass an Immigration Act, while the Tories don't. In 1976 we got the Race Relations Act without the Immigration Act, so things must be improving. Either that, or the Government have got their timing wrong. The 1971 Immigration Act continued the distinction between UKPHs. Those with a 'close connection' were now designated 'patrial' and all non-patrials now had a little chance of being admitted as non-Commonwealth citizens. Since 1971, Tory and Labour governments have made it as difficult as possible for those few black people still entitled to enter to exercise their rights. As on so many other issues, Tory and Labour have a bipartisan policy.

As legislation has got tougher, so the 'liberals' have made more concessions. Alex Lyon was sacked as Immigration Minister by Callaghan in 1976 for speeding up the procedure for processing applications for entry certificates from dependants in the Indian Sub-Continent. In the 1978 debate on racism at Labour Party Conference he conjured up the same images of entire villages of Pakistanis ready to enter Britain as soon as controls are relaxed and the portcullis lowered as the racists in the Foreign Office like Hawley whose report caused such a stir when it was leaked by Powell in 1976. Bidwell, the veteran anti-fascist of Red Lion Square was one of the authors of the Select Committee Report. While the racists cry, 'Keep them out!' or, 'Send them back!' the liberals plead, 'surely we can let a few more of the really needy cases in,' or, 'let's be fair and keep out the white immigrants too.'

IMMIGRATION IS GOOD FOR YOU

Canada's policy is very different. Despite a 9% unemployment rate a labour shortage persists in certain trades and regions, and not only for unskilled. Entry to Canada is through a points system designed mainly to let in those with the employment and educational qualifications most in demand. It is also easy for dependents of residents, and refugees to enter. Applications receive points on a number of different criteria, and those with more than 50 out of a possible 100 are let in, with immigration officers having the discretion to let in a few with less than 50 points. There is an appeals system against deportation and prisons don't bulge with huge numbers of suspected illegal immigrants. Settlers are actually welcomed on arrival and assisted with finding a job, a house and education for their children. Many West Indians have recently gone to Canada as Britain shut them out.

Yet Canada's policy used to be even more racist than Britain's. The 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, prohibited you might have guessed, the entry of Chinese. These laws were relaxed in the 1950s, but there was further pressure to remove racial discrimination as to tie immigration more with labour needs.

Canada's policy is based on the belief that far from immigrants being a problem they are a boon to the capitalist economy. They are generally young, prepared to work more social hours in less pleasant jobs and are more mobile. In Britain, as in most developed capitalist countries, the birth rate has led to a big increase in the proportion of the population over retirement age. Furthermore, the school leaving age has been raised and far more children receive further and higher education. Large scale

immigration (like married women doing paid work) offsets this tendency for a smaller proportion of the workforce to support a larger number of dependants. Adult immigrants do not have to receive education and claim far less from the social services, even though they suffer higher unemployment. In short, not only is their take home wage lower, but so is their social wage.

Eventually, immigrants bring their wives (yes, most 'primary' immigrants are male) and children to join them. They grow old and draw a pension. But as their social wage approaches that of the indigenous population, more immigrants arrive.

While this change in Canada's policy was partly motivated by liberal sentiments, it very definitely serves the need of the economy. Perhaps the repeal of the old extreme racist laws was part of a battle against racism in Canada generally, even if one claims that Canada's new controls are not racist at all, one is not claiming that the Canadian state is not racist in other ways, and that Canada has become some kind of paradise. Her policy does highlight how Britain's controls seem to be motivated mainly by racism, and that other capitalist states can have a different strategy.

The German economy was given a terrific boost by the entry of **nine million refugees** immediately after World War Two, and sustained by large numbers of guest workers. The Malthusian argument that immigration equals unemployment can never be attacked often or hard enough.

The actual causation is in the opposite direction. Employment opportunities attract migrants. Emigration from a declining area, such as Glasgow or Tyneside, tends to lead not to lower but to higher unemployment, as more firms and people leave and as the region declines further. The inner city areas of London and Birmingham where many black people have settled have suffered huge falls in population over the last twenty years while unemployment has risen.

Does this suggest that if controls were lifted, few would come to such an unattractive country which has 6% unemployment? Not so. Britain might be a second division capitalist economy trying to avoid relegation, but offers more opportunities than most of the third world where unemployment is much higher. When Lyon: 'threatens' us: that villages of Pakistanis are raring to come here, we must say, "Fine! We'll give them every aid to help them settle, even if immigration from all parts of the world is several million in a decade." Such a policy would not be very tempting for capitalists of any country who prefer to select their labour rather more carefully on the Canadian (and, quite recently, Australian) model and would fear the disruption that might be caused by really colossal immigration. Those opposed to controls can never argue "Not many would want to enter anyway."

GUESTWORKERS

Sivanandan argues that the 1971 Immigration Act installed "a system of contract labour on the lines of the European *gastarbeiter*". Now while the 1971 Act might have made such a system possible, and while it detailed various methods for deporting '*gastarbeitern*', Britain relies even less on contract labour now than then.

The British method of employing contract labour is to issue work permits. These are held, at the start at least, by the boss, not the worker, and are in effect a permit for that boss to employ a foreign worker after a declaration is made that no British worker is available to do that particular job. Those employed on work-permits need Department of Employment permission even to change jobs within the same firm. Naturally they are frightened that if they get active in trade unions they would be deported. They can't bring their families over, have to return home after a few years if they are refused permission to stay by the Home Office.

They seem to be good value for money. Yet few work permits have ever been issued. Only 35,000 were in 1975. Of these, 16,000 were for nurses and catering workers. In 1978; only 3,000 were issued to these groups. The Tories

and Select Committee want to cut this number to nil. While NUPE has defended its migrant hospital workers, the TGWU and TUC have pressured the government to reduce permits for catering workers.

It does not seem likely that any government would try to adopt an extensive contract labour system in the foreseeable future. The same clamour that led to tougher immigration controls is likely to insist that migrant workers are kept out, unless unemployment falls really drastically. "O.K, these people would not bring their families with them, but they will take our houses, these single young men would molest our women etc." British trade unions, economically much stronger certainly than the German or French unions when the contract labour system was introduced and are more likely to use this power to try to keep migrants out, than to solidarise with them.

Another problem with the contract labour system is that it is not all that easy to send them 'home' when unemployment rises. Certain jobs will have been stigmatised as 'immigrant jobs' and despite high unemployment it will be difficult to recruit indigenous workers to do them. Capitalists simply do not have the sort of control over the international labour market that many on the left think.

So not only has Britain not developed a contract labour system since 1971, but has reduced its intake of such workers and will not expand it in the near future.

My main argument is not that controls work against the interest of the bourgeoisie, but a more modest view that their function is not to regulate labour supply. I believe that individual capitalists could benefit from a loosening of controls which would allow them to recruit the labour they want from the only parts of the world whose citizens are likely to want to come to Britain — the Black Commonwealth and the Third World generally. On the other hand, this shortage of labour is not that desperate. Yet if the capitalists did need many more workers, the tremendous hostility to black immigrants might make it rather difficult for them to manage to change the law to allow them to recruit this labour from abroad.

Never mind the hypothesis, the point is that I am not implying that Britain's racist controls are in some way anti-capitalist and that anti-racists can forge some sort of alliance with the CBI. Immigration controls give racism that manifests itself in every area of British society a sharp political focus. Discrimination against black people in jobs or housing is illegal and not really respectable (though, of course, it is nearly universal.) Immigration law, however, openly operates against black people, and it is quite respectable to demand that it should be tightened. So while controls might create some recruiting difficulties for some capitalists, the viciously divisive effect they have on the working class more than makes up for these difficulties. Not that most capitalists view the situation in such a clear

headed way. There is no reason to believe that they are any less hostile to black immigrants than most other people.

As I admitted in the introduction, it is tautological to state that racist controls were introduced because the racists who proposed them were victorious. I will not pretend to answer the question, "Where do these racist forces arise." Reference to Britain's imperialist past might provide a good starting point, but is insufficient. While capitalist crisis which leads to a shortage of jobs and housing certainly increases the pressures to keep 'outsiders' outside, controls have been brought in during the boom.

Where does racism come from? Apart from some attempts to link racism with sexual neurosis, the anti-racist movement has never really addressed itself to this question except to state that in times of crisis people must find scapegoats. Proof is then given that the scapegoats are not guilty as charged — and that is far as the anti-racist argument goes. Yet how effective can our propaganda be if we are unsure how the ideas of our enemies win support.

One thing is certain. A fight against controls is a necessary focus for anti-racism, and while racism manifests itself in every area of society and not just by shutting out black people, the racists have made immigration their central platform and would be severely shaken by any relaxation in controls that we won in struggle.

What does it matter why controls were introduced, as long as we fight against them anyway? For a start, we will certainly misjudge, and in this case probably underestimate, what we are up against. The implication of Sivanandan's theory, which is shared by many others, is that controls are just a conspiracy which involve the bourgeoisie, and their governments imposed either against the wishes, with the indifference, or by duping the mass of the population. It seems to underestimate the massive task, after seventy years of controls, to convince working people that 'common-sense' Malthusian theories of unemployment (i.e. more people = more unemployment) are nonsense, and that they are not threatened by overseas workers, who are not 'alien' or 'foreign' but potentially their allies.

It seems that most people who do oppose immigration controls arrive at that position through a gut hatred of racism. They mix this with a generous dose of the economism which is so prevalent amongst the left and come out with an analysis that if racism is in capitalism's interest, then immigration control, which is about labour moving from one area to the other, must be designed by capitalism to restrict that labour, and for no other reason. I disagree with such a position. I'm sure that such differences won't amount to a 'split issue' and those who agree with Sivanandan will fight together against Britain's exceptionally racist immigration controls. It is worthwhile to conduct this debate so we operate less on a gut level and appreciate more clearly what we are fighting against.

Revolution in Iran

The swift and decisive victory of the supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini over the short-lived government of the luckless Shapur Bakhtiar does not mark the end of Iran's revolution.

On the contrary the success of the Ayatollah's forces in seizing power and breaking up the old military-police apparatus of the Shah's rule will, in fact, already is, opening up a new period of struggle for power. In this sense, the revolution has only just begun.

Already, the Ayatollah's Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, has offered forces of the left the promise of constitutional rights, if they disarm and the threat of being "crushed" if they do not. Yet bitter experience teaches that in a revolution the only rights which can be guaranteed are those which can be defended arms in hands.

Though the unity which the Islamic faith and organisation brought to the anti-Shah movement may have been an enormously progressive factor until now Khomeini's Islamic Islamic Republic is neither socialism nor the route thereto. The road to working class power from now on may well

collide with the demands of the Islamic leaders.

Solidarity work in this country with the movement in Iran assumes vital importance in the face of all the confusions which have surrounded the anti-Shah movement. As the various forces involved in toppling the Shah attempt to answer the question; what next? There will be important lessons to be learnt by the working class movement in this country.

In the next edition of *Chartist* we hope to explore some of the contradictions and problems of the Iranian revolution. Comrades requiring more information about the struggle in Iran and who wish to become involved in solidarity work with the Iranian revolution should contact:—

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Economy: Holding back the tide

Frank Lee

The crumbling of the present government's incomes policy should serve to demonstrate — demonstration being obviously required — the ultimate fate of those measures intended to regulate the functioning of the capital accumulation process. The Canute-like posture of the Healey-Callaghan dominated administration — ie the attempt to apply a rigid percentage pay-norm during an upturn in the business cycle — reveals an utterly misconceived understanding of the dynamics of capitalism in both its short-run and long-run tendencies.

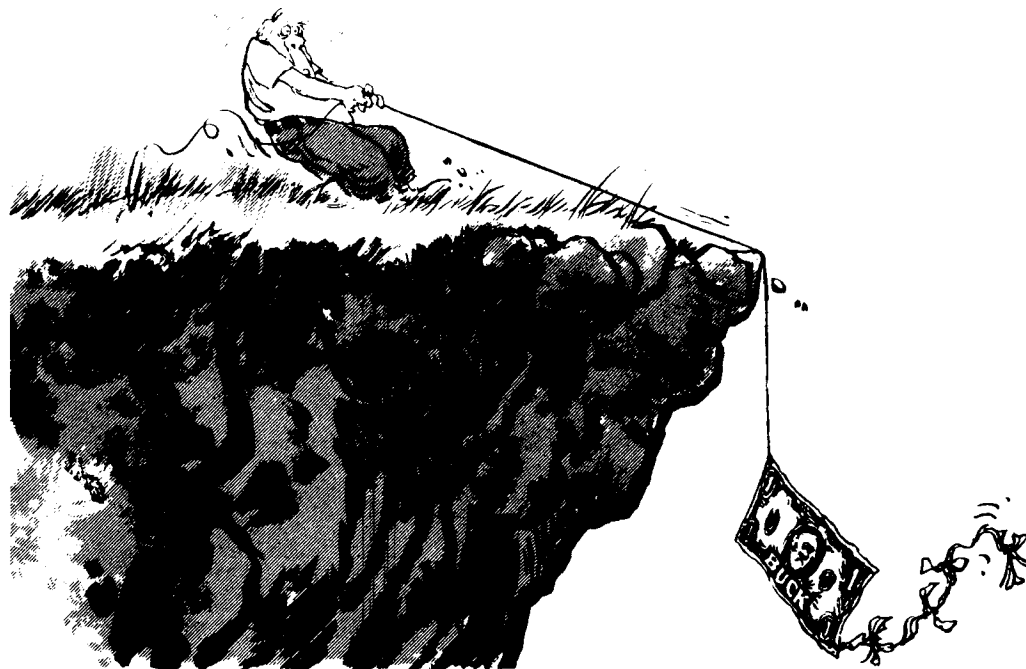
Put quite simply, during the upswing in the trade-cycle demand will increase over supply and when this happens prices will begin to rise. Additionally there will occur a fall in the general level of unemployment. It is necessary to understand that along with all other prices the price of labour-power ie wages — will also have a tendency to rise; this being due to an increased demand for labour on the part of the employers. This particular tendency will ultimately defeat any attempts to 'fix' prices — sanctions or no sanctions.

The government's economic policy of attempting to defy this particular short-run tendency of capitalism (the business or trade-cycle) stands revealed as an absurd venture irritating to workers and capitalists alike. A short-run *cyclical* inflation is the essential correlate to any upturn in the business cycle. Cumulative, or long-run inflation is a different matter. Unfortunately the present administration cannot distinguish between the two. Not that it is alone in this respect. In general there seems to have been a complete mystification as to the cause and nature of the inflation phenomenon. The 'official' explanation, overwhelmingly accepted both inside and outside the Labour movement, is the 'theory' of cost-push or wage-inflation. The theory runs as follows: Excessive wage-increases are passed on to

the final consumers as price-increases, ergo: wage-increases lead to price-increases. Common sense isn't it!

A modified version of this theory, more popular in the Labour movement, is the notion of price being made up of cost-inputs. For example, a capitalist producing any given commodity incurs capital outlays before he can produce any commodity. His expenditure will be on such items as raw materials, machinery (fixed capital), and *labour*. All these are termed costs, or cost-inputs. When all the cost-inputs are added together they will form the price of the commodity. The reason why this particular view is more popular in the Labour movement should have become apparent. In this modified version of cost-push, wages are held to be only *partially* responsible for price-increases; other costs, for example a rise in the price of raw materials, will also contribute to the eventual price-(rise). Thus a combination of factors, or rather, a combination of cost-inputs, oil price-rises, excessive wage-increases, outlays on more expensive instruments of production etc are ultimately determinant of prices and any rise in price.

In fact both the above arguments are completely bogus, or rather, completely circular. In essence they can both be boiled down to the following axiom: costs determine price. However the crucial question then becomes — what determines costs? Upon a critical examination the whole notion of cost-push inflation turns out to be nothing more than a rather second-rate semantic trick.....for the terms 'cost' and 'price' are interchangeable. By way of an illustration: the commodity wood is a selling price for the timber capitalist but is a cost-input for the furniture manufacturer: the timber commodity is therefore *both cost and price* depending on which particular side of the transaction — selling or buying — the individual capitalist is for its semantic designation. It can be discerned that cost and price are



MacNelly/International Herald Tribune

in fact two different words for what is the same thing: the value expressed as the exchange-value of the commodity. If the commodity is at the same time both cost and price it is nonsense to argue that the one determines the other. This would be purely tautological, rather like saying that Mr X is a bachelor because he is unmarried! – *Cost-inputs (including labour-power) are prices*: to argue that cost-inputs determine price formation is to argue that prices determine prices! Here is what Marx had to say on the same subject:-

“Thus it is going against economic facts to determine the relative value of commodities (prices – FL) by the value of labour (wages – FL). It is moving in a vicious circle, *it is to determine a relative value by a relative value which itself needs to be determined*” (*The Poverty of Philosophy* p.53 – my emphasis.)

At this stage it will not be possible to go into any detailed theory of price, or, a comprehensive marxist account of inflation but, marxists would argue that price is *value determined*; that is, price is the monetary expression of the commodity’s exchange-value. But additionally “other factors enter in” (Marx – *Grundrisse*). That they most certainly do: these factors being demand and supply, currency instability, currency devaluation, equilization of the rate of profit, and so on and so forth. The crucial factor in the tendency for prices to rise in a cumulative manner during the post-war period has undoubtedly been the deficit-financing policies of *all* western governments and the expansion of private credit facilities by banks to both industrial corporations and private consumers. This artificial method of prolonging the upswing, or at least mitigating the downswing of the business cycle, has led to a secular depreciation of paper currency and generalised monetary instability. This depreciation is expressed as a rise in prices. In point of fact, inflation, or the over-expansion of credit facilities and debt-financing, is an attempt by capitalism to overcome one of its most intractable internal contradictions – the historical tendency of increasing difficulties in *realising* surplus value. (See for lucid explanation of this tendency – Marx, *Capital Vol 3* and *Grundrisse*, Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, or a more modern study Baran/Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*). This particular problem grows more acute as the social productivity of labour increases. *Inflation is the phenomenal form of the problem of realization*.

An interesting digression at this point is the comparison between the ‘official’ view of inflation (or price), and its historical antecedents. Even the most cursory glance at Marx’s various polemics against his opponents during the

19th century reveals the utterly crude and primitive nature of the cost-based theory of price. For example,

“Every upward movement in wages can have no other effect than a rise in the price of corn, wine etc, that is, the effect of a dearth. For what are wages? They are the cost-price of corn etc. They are the integrant price of everything. We may go even further: wages are the proportion of the elements composing wealth and consumed reproductively every day by the mass of the workers. Now, to double wages is to attribute to each one of the producers a greater share than his product, which is contradictory, and if the rise extends to only a small number of industries, it brings about a general disturbance in exchange: in a word a dearth. . . . It is impossible, I declare for strikes followed by an increase in wages not to culminate *in a general rise in prices*: this is certain as that two and two make four.”

(P.J. Proudhon, *Philosophy of Poverty*, quoted in Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy* p.153 – emphasis in original).

Sounds familiar doesn’t it! Apart from its undoubtedly higher level of sophistication it is in all essentials indistinguishable from the utterings of Dennis Healey or Sidney Weighell – or James Prior and Edward Heath for that matter! Marx’s famous reply to this was as follows:-

“We deny all these assertions except that two and two make four. In the first place there is no *general rise in prices*. If the price of everything doubles at the same time as wages there is no change in price, the only change is in terms” (op.cit. p154 – emphasis in original.)

All this notwithstanding the ‘official’ view of inflation has prevailed. ‘One man’s wage increase is another man’s price increase.’ It is viewed as a self-evident axiom that wage-rises lead to price rises; and it was precisely upon this axiom that the social-contract was ‘sold’ to the Labour movement. Moreover, it would be true to say that the ‘battle against inflation’ has assumed obsessional dimensions with the present government. The success ascribed to the government’s pay-policy for controlling inflation is in fact completely misplaced. What the government did between 1975-77 was to *deflate* the economy by cutting back public spending, make investment prohibitively costly through high interest rates (fiscal and monetary policies) and above all allow a very slight recovery in the rate of profit by its wage-cutting social contract policies.

Here once again the Labour government was trying to counter one of the immanent tendencies within the capitalist mode of production; this time the long-run tendency for the rate of profit to fall. This tendential law is itself

attendant on (1) The class struggle: that is, the historical tendency for the working class to raise its subsistence level, increase its necessary labour time thereby telescoping that part of the working day – surplus labour time – which is the capitalists' source of profit. This tendency will result in an ineluctable decline in the rate of profit. (2) The rise in the organic composition of capital: that is the rise in the ratio of dead objectified labour (C) to living labour (V). Since living labour is the source of value any relative diminution in the ratio between dead and living labour must of logical necessity lead to a fall in the rate of profit. The fact that such a tendency exists is irrefutable (see next section). Even the more astute bourgeois commentators have realised this. The fact of the matter was that the rate of profit had fallen to almost zero during the cyclical trough of 1974-75; if the present government had had any success in 'handling the economy' this success was a very slight increase in the rate of profit brought about by depressing wages. However there are now distinct signs of this recovery in profit rates petering out; indeed profits are beginning to dip again.

And this fact as well as its cause has been noted by the economic spokesmen of British capitalism.

"While the sharp acceleration in costs in the second quarter may give an unduly depressed impression of profitability, there seems little doubt that the recovery in cash profits since mid-75 came to a halt in 1977 and has not resumed. The chief reason has almost certainly been the growth of unit labour costs during stage 3."

And:-

".....companies real rate of return seems likely to fall back for 1978 as a whole to the lowest level of recent years....." (Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin – last quarter 78 p499).

Absolutely correct: compare this with Marx's own view of wage-rises and the rate of profit:-

"... a general rise in wages can never produce a more or less general rise in the price of goods. Actually if every industry employed the same number of workers in relation to fixed capital or to the instruments used, a general rise in wages would produce a general fall in profits and the current price of goods would undergo no alteration." (Ibid. p154) (emphases in original).

This present sharp downturn in the rate of profit is a clear example of *too much* effective demand. It is evident that the consumer boom of the last year was bought at the price of declining profit rates. Undoubtedly real living standards and consumer spending rose last year reversing the trend of the previous two years. Spending on durable consumer goods increased by 12%; indebtedness to retailers and finance houses rose by 30%; bank lending to private persons increased by some 24%.

The strong growth in consumer spending has been based upon a sustained rise in real incomes – 7½% between the second quarters of 1977-78. The stage 3 guideline of 10% was in fact never achieved in practice. Average earnings rose by approximately 14% during stage 3. The fall in living standards experienced by the working class between 1975-77 has been almost recovered at the present time. In addition, public spending, which declined over the two years to mid-78 is now likely to turn up (by some 2% according to informed sources). Inflation is now running at an annual rate of around 8% but this figure will have an inexorable tendency to rise if the consumer boom is sustained for any length of time, or, if government spending continues to increase.

It will necessarily follow that low rates of profit will have an extremely deleterious effect upon the rate of investment. In any event an investment fall-off will tend to ensue due to the appearance of widespread overcapacity in industry; and this tendency for increasing spare-capacity to inhibit investment will be added to by prohibitively low rates of profit which of course will further inhibit investment. Indeed industrial investment which was up in 1976-77 is beginning to slow down again.

Explication of this particular point will demonstrate that a consumer boom is no indication of a booming economy. Quite the contrary. A consumer boom based upon a rise in living-standards at the expense of capitalist profitability can only lead to diminishing investment and ultimate stagnation. A case in point is house building: in terms of productive activity this industry is extremely sluggish, yet increased consumer demand has led to a sharp rise in prices. Marx's point about pre-crisis periods being characterised by no shortage of effective demand seems fittingly apposite to the present period and is worth quoting in full:-

"It is purely a tautology to say that crises are caused by scarcity of effective consumers, or of a paying consumption. The capitalist system does not know any other modes of consumption but a paying one, except that of the pauper or that of the thief. If any commodities are unsaleable, it means that no solvent purchasers have been found for them, in other words consumers (whether commodities are bought in the last instance for productive of individual consumption). But if one were to attempt to clothe this tautology with a profounder justification by saying that the working class receive too small a portion of their own product, and the evil would be remedied by giving them a larger share of it, or raising their wages, we should reply that crises are precisely always preceded by a period in which wages rise generally and the working class actually get a larger share of the annual product intended for consumption. From the point of view of the advocates of simple (!) common-sense, such a period should rather remove a crisis. It seems, then, that capitalist production comprises certain conditions which are independent of good or bad will and permit the working class to enjoy that relative prosperity only momentarily, and at that always as a harbinger of a coming crisis." (*Capital Vol. 2 p 409*).

Thus we have the pathetic sight of the Labour government switching from semi-monetarist policies (deflation) to Keynesian 'patch-up' jobs and back again; all this in order to try to counter forces which it is not aware of nor comprehends. Those forces of course being both the short and long-run tendencies characteristic of capitalism.

GLOBAL SCENARIO

The future outlook for the international economic order hardly looks bright. The world economy is effectively dominated by the American economy. It used to be said that when America sneezes Europe catches pneumonia; a more appropriate paraphrase underscoring present day conditions would be... What happens when America catches pneumonia? The central nagging problem is America's chronic balance of payments deficit, and the pernicious American habit of covering this trade imbalance by simply adding to the global dollar float. This has resulted in a steepening rise in America's domestic rate of inflation, so much so that many of Carter's economic advisers are not only forecasting delationary measures from the US President for 1979 but actively advocating them. Experienced economic commentators are fully alive to this particular dilemma. Thus in the December 31st issue of the *'Observer'* William Keegan writes:-

"As the principal world reserve and trading currency, the US dollar problems resemble those of the pound in 1976, but with significant differences; we had the US government to fall back upon for help; and the holders of Sterling were able to switch their funds into dollars."

"The US itself is the ultimate guarantor of many an industrialised western economy. When the guarantor himself is in trouble, the world gets worried."

To say the least! This however is not to assume the imminence of a 1929 – style Wall Street crash. What is most probable is a sharp deflationary policy applied to the

US economy which will be invariably followed by recession—and this is bad news for Europe as Keegan points out.

“The US itself has experienced a period of rapid growth since 1973, and that is part of the dollars problem (NB—FL — Excess demand again.) Administration officials draw attention to a reduction in incremental energy consumption, the rest of the world is more concerned about the absolute level. The US administration has in theory taken deflationary action; the rest of the world sees continuing rapid growth, and still does not believe that monetary policy is tight enough.” (op. cit).

This sort of economic perspicacity stands in sharp contradiction to the mundane and misinformed mumblings of the likes of James Callaghan and Tom Jackson. The economic crisis is correctly seen by Keegan in *global terms*, and inflation in terms of excess demand. Hegel once said, “The truth is the whole” — in other words to understand the particular it is necessary to comprehend the totality of which the particular is a part. In order to understand the problems of the British economy it is necessary to situate this particular economy within the totality of the global economy — something which is evidently beyond the powers of the ‘common-sense’ of the leaders of the British labour movement.

At present there are absolutely no signs of a generalised and synchronised recovery from the global recession that

has been all pervasive since 1973-74. Nor is there any reason to believe that such a recovery is a possibility for the foreseeable future. All talk of light at the end of the tunnels *if only* we accept *one more* round of pay restraint are gibberish. In any event the working class aren’t buying this particular sales pitch any longer. The social-contract consensus is breaking-up — and not before time.

The historical tendency for the working class to constantly redefine its subsistence level in an upward direction and the long-run tendency for the rate of profit to fall have broken through the government’s attempt to regulate the system and fix wages. The laws of motion of capitalism are indeed stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus and cannot be held in check forever.

As marxists we are constantly being castigated by social democrats for being utopian dreamers. But, we may ask, who are the dreamers now? Surely the attempts to rationalise a basically irrational system, the attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable, the attempts to defy the laws of motion and logic of capitalism is a hundred times more utopian than proposals to abolish such a system. We may say to our social-democrats — who of course take great pride in their supposed ‘realism’ — that our supposedly ‘utopian’ solution is in the long-run the only realistic answer, while the ‘realistic’ answer — the attempt to regulate the capitalist system — is ultimately utopian.

Ireland Socialist Review

Since the 1920’s, due to a complex set of political, economic and cultural factors, the ‘Irish problem’ has never been recognised as a legitimate topic of political interest by the established left in Britain or by the organised labour movement. Religious bigotry or national idealism have been thought to characterise the contenders in what is seen as a largely pointless struggle in Ireland. A major factor in this perception — and one that has prevented the labour movement coming out in sympathy with Irish Republicanism — is that many of the strongest trades unions in Northern Ireland, affiliated to the TUC, are characterised by a Broad Left leadership and a predominantly Loyalist rank and file. The historical pattern of virtual ‘separate development’ has produced a situation where almost all of the skilled engineering jobs, for instance, are filled from the Protestant community. A further factor determining the attitude of the labour movement is that if one can abstract from the violent annexation of the N.I State by Britain in 1920, democracy does *appear* to exist in formal terms in the institutions of parliamentary democracy.

Despite these factors however, we believe that a dual consciousness underlies the orientation of the labour movement towards Ireland. This reflects both a dominant belief in the fairness and effectiveness of British solution within the context of the N.I. State *and* at the same time a contradictory, residual consciousness which is in sympathy with the anti-colonial struggle of the oppressed.

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REVIEWS

In defence of Felix Morrow

After more than 50 years of existence, the world Trotskyist movement has consistently failed to break out of its historic impasse. The reasons for this are many and various, but what seems to me clear is that the crucial *period* in most ways was the mid-1940s. The tumultuous events and unpredictable turns of the international class struggle began to crystallise into a "New World Reality" – a reality which Marxists, as much as anybody, had understandably quite failed to anticipate. The Trotskyist "Fourth International", the main organised force of communist internationalism, had the choice of understanding, grappling with and adapting its politics to this unforeseen situation. . . or of remaining in the ghetto of hidebound Orthodox dogma. It firmly chose the latter option.

During the three post-war decades, only the most extreme Trotskyist sectarians maintained their stance unsullied. The majority, particularly for instance the supporters of the United Secretariat of the F.I. ('U'Sec') have accepted the world of the 50s and 60s as a fact in terms of their day-to-day political practice (for which the assorted sectarians ritualistically denounce their "Pabloite Revisionism" and similar horrific sins). However, at the same time even the "sane Trotskyists" insist on clinging to the strategy and analysis of the Leninism/Trotskyism of the 20s and 30s at the level of overall political theory. This tends to produce a schizophrenic, facing-both-ways position – where Trotskyists hop about episodically from one empirical reaction to events to another, rudderless because of the inapplicability of their official shibboleths. This is shown up most sharply by novel developments such as the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-75 and the new rise of Feminism.

There have, of course, always been heretics who have pointed the way to a thoroughgoing re-assessment of some of the inherited Bolshevik traditions. In the key period of the 1940s, the most articulate and coherent heretics were the minority of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the US¹ which emerged in 1943-46 led by Felix Morrow and Albert Goldman. These comrades had played a leading role in the American movement, Morrow writing the classic Trotskyist text on the Spanish Civil War and Goldman acting as defence counsel for the "Minneapolis 18" framed by the US Government in 1941. Many significant issues cropped up in the debates of the 40s – such as the expansion of Stalinist power into Eastern Europe and elsewhere and the origin of the post-war economic 'Boom'. Peter Jenkins' excellent pamphlet deals with what was arguably the most important question of all – the stabilisation of parliamentary democracy and the revival of the mass reformist parties in Western Europe as the German armies retreated.

The majority of the International, and the SWP majority led by James P. Cannon, flatly refused to accept the possibility of the establishment of bourgeois democracy by the Allies in Europe (except maybe as a temporary manoeuvre). Furthermore, they had the perspective that the Social-Democratic and Stalinist Parties (SPs and CPs) had been totally *discredited* by their disastrous role in the 1930s. It was assumed that, with the repression of the Nazi armies removed, the European workers would be in a revolutionary mood, flocking to the Trotskyist "Parties" under the slogan of the 'Socialist United States of Europe'. Just about everything was wrong with this scenario, yet it was not grudgingly

modified by the F.I. until well after the stabilisation of capitalist democracy in Western Europe had become an accomplished fact. The tenacious clinging to dogma by Cannon, Novack & Co. in the US and their European allies M.Pablo/E. Germain/P.Frank was not some personal pig-headedness. These perspectives were those outlined by Leon Trotsky himself in 1938-40. It was felt that to abandon or revise his prognoses would not merely be politically wrong, but a capitulation and betrayal – a denial of revolutionary hope and faith.

Thus, when Felix Morrow began to expound his differences with the official 'line' from late 1943 onwards, he was systematically met not so much with rational argument as hysterical abuse. His views were held to be a repudiation of the revolutionary capacity of the working class, and hence unacceptable *in principle*. Morrow's arguments are very cogently outlined by Comrade Jenkins. Essentially what he was saying was that, far from fascism and war impelling the workers to revolutionary and internationalist conclusions, the result had been to intensify *nationalist* sentiments and stimulate desires for the re-establishment of democratic rights and freedoms. (NB: The frequently sectarian attitude of Trotskyists to the Resistance movements as being bourgeois-nationalist, pure and simple can hardly have helped too much). It is not to be denied that in wide areas of France and Italy the existence of mass armed partisan movements led to the creation of "dual power" situations for a time. However, unlike in 1917, there were no Bolsheviks to translate revolutionary potential into reality. The Communist Parties met scant opposition to their disarming the masses in favour of Popular-Front Governments.

FAILINGS

One of the many failings of the FI, as Jenkins clearly shows, was its delusion that the possession of the "correct line" in the appropriate circumstances would permit the transformation of the Trotskyist groups from sects of a few hundred at most to mass parties capable of taking on the Stalinists at their own game – just like that! Morrow argued for so-called "entrism" in one of the workers' parties (probably the SP) instead, a far more realistic approach. He well understood that support for reformism and bourgeois democracy represented more than fragile and brittle illusions in some kind of "fraud", but was the outcome of decades of actual historical *experience* for working people. Defeats and 'betrayals', far from 'exposing' the role of workers' leaders, would far more likely consolidate their position for a whole period.

Again, it should be stressed that the fault was not so much with the FI leadership as with the perspectives of Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional Programme* which they "copied down once again. . ." and ". . . did not change a comma" – as Morrow put it.² It was not merely that the outcome of World War II in the defeat of the Axis plus the simultaneous strengthening of US Imperialism and Stalinist Russia was not anticipated – Marxists are not supposed to be crystal-ball gazers. More fundamental, however, were all kinds of *methodological* weaknesses. In particular, the assertion of "objective conditions" as being ripe for world socialist revolution, implying that in the coming crisis the proletariat would automatically surge to revolutionary con-

clusions. The systematic under-playing of the "subjective factor", the *hegemony* of bourgeois consciousness and reformist ideology, has been a constant *leitmotiv* both of the Comintern tradition and the FI. This was especially absurd for Germany, where insurrectionary upheavals were confidently expected despite the total dismemberment of the German workers' movement under fascism.

A pamphlet of this nature does a great service in resurrecting a key debate with which contemporary marxists would otherwise be unfamiliar.

Obviously, it would scarcely need to have been written if the Trotskyists had subsequently managed to assimilate the lessons of their previous errors. Up to now, this is far from being the case. In the period 1974-77 three Southern European dictatorships (Greece, Portugal, Spain) collapsed, to be replaced by various forms of parliamentary democracy; this at a time of accentuated economic crisis! Once again, the left was posing sharp alternatives of fascism versus Socialist Revolution (Socialist Charter not excepted). The strength and durability of democratic structures continues to surprise us (eg. Italy). At the same time, the case of Portugal poses very sharply the danger of uncritical support for "democratic" demands at a time when the organised core of the workers had gone way beyond parliamentarism, and world imperialism was using the Constituent Assembly as a device to emasculate the movement.

Felix Morrow's political conclusions were that, where the masses were seeking the satisfaction of their demands through parliamentary institutions, rather than abstractly counterpose a 'Workers' Government' or a preconceived schema of Transitional Demands, the task was to fight alongside them for the most complete democracy and show *in practice* the need for working-class state power. In other words, "... to advance demands that furthered the class struggle and not just to distinguish itself from the reformist parties."³ Moreover the Trotskyists should base their propaganda on "... the vital political questions which actually arise and appear vital to the masses, and not on the questions *we think vital*."⁴ Such an approach, needless to say, cuts right across the peculiarly Trotskyist form of Ultra-leftism that says (a) It is more important to be 'Correct' and 'Principled' than relevant or effective and (b) The only demands worth seriously fighting for are ones which openly or implicitly pose "revolutionary" conclusions (or at least Dual Power).

Morrow's specific proposals were to campaign in Belgium and Italy for the abolition of the monarchy; in France for expropriating collaborators, democratising the army, liberating Indo- China etc. Certainly, there is always the potentiality of confusing formal bourgeois democracy with

the possibility of direct workers' democracy. However, whether Morrow and his supporters had "the correct answers" for 1944-46 is hardly the point for us today. Rather, as Jenkins says, "His importance therefore lay in that he posed the real problems facing the FI at the time."⁵ Rightly enough, Comrade Jenkins avoids suggesting that 'Morrowism' can be borrowed from the past as a panacea for our current problems.

Given their vindication by the 'acid test' of history, it is deplorable that the Goldman-Morrow tendency's views have been wilfully suppressed or maligned ever since. Pierre Frank's 'authorised' account of the FI, for example, omits all reference.⁶ Those who do mention them dismiss them on account of their links with the 'state capitalist' Shachtman group (Workers Party/US) or of Morrow's subsequent abandonment of revolutionary politics. The same applies to the Haston-Grant leadership of the British RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) and the Craipeau - Demazieres 'rightist' tendency of the French PCI (Parti Communiste Internationaliste) - both of which had points of agreement with Morrow's position. A recent article in a British Trotskyist weekly casually dismisses them as "defeatists" and "pessimists" as if this needed no justification.⁷ None of the Trotskyist groups, to my knowledge, has seen fit to reply to *Where Trotskyism Got Lost*. Unfortunately, while umpteen volumes of Cannon's works are published, and competing Trotskyists print lengthy and turgid polemics from the politically meaningless "1953 split", none of Morrow's writings from this period seem to be available.⁸

Peter Jenkins' pamphlet should be compulsory reading for all Trotskyists - particularly those whose nostrils are already twitching at the stench of decay.

1. NB. The SWP/US was not formally affiliated to the F.I. because of reactionary legislation, but nonetheless it played a dominant role in the debates of the Movement.
2. Jenkins, p.12. 3. *Ibid*, p.15. 4. *Ibid*, p.16. 5. *Ibid*, p.18
6. P. Frank, *La Quatrieme Internationale* (Maspero, Paris, 1969), pp.49-51.
7. *Why the future still belongs to Trotskyism*, *Workers Action* 123 (4.11.78).
8. NB. Fortunately the pamphlet's footnotes refer to most of the relevant documents.

Peter Jenkins, *Where Trotskyism Got Lost: World War Two and the Prospects for Revolution in Europe* (Spokesman Pamphlet No. 59, Nottingham, 1977). 23pp. Price - 35p.

Martin Cook

Local government, community and class struggle

Don Flynn

Red Bologna: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative
The Local State, The Management of Cities and People
Cynthia Cockburn. Pluto Press £2.95

The arena of local government has suffered from considerable neglect from all sections of the labour and socialist movement in recent years. The right, centre and left wings have all made a higher priority of their work, in national government and in the trade unions. As a result some several thousand-odd Labour activists have found themselves drawn onto local councils more by default than by design. With this lack of a programme or thought-out strategy we might ask if an opportunity to establish the hegemony of

socialism and working class politics in the local community has been let slip?

Or has the left been correct to play down its influence in the field of local government and community politics in preference to what is euphemistically referred as the 'wider' or the 'national' issues? The commonsense opinion of the Marxist left has always been to say that the local community does not exercise power or political influence in modern society and that the expenditure of energy in this direction is therefore wasted. This standard leftist viewpoint sees all crisis being expressed at the level of international capitalism or the working class and its leadership and to deal with the class struggle on anything less than this epic scale is to treat

mere symptoms rather than the disease itself.

But for millions of people throughout western Europe and America today the crisis of the city, characterised by high unemployment, low pay, lack of skilled job opportunities, migration of manufacturing industry, high cost, low standard housing, inadequate transport, lack of cultural and recreational facilities, amongst many other factors, is the crisis which is demanding solutions alongside the problems of the nation and world affairs. Many of these issues have developed structural characteristics which indicate that their solution requires nothing less than the dismemberment of the capitalist system and its replacement by socialised forms of living. Can we therefore speak of the possibility of integrating action at the level of local government and the community into a general, broad strategy for socialist transformation?

LOCAL CAMPAIGNS TO LOCAL COUNCIL

A glimmering awareness that the fate of the class struggle in the local community has got consequences for the political ambitions of the working class movement has, in recent years, begun to permeate the Marxist left. During this period we have witnessed the growth of a number of local issue-based campaigns which have obliged activists to become more familiar with the ins and outs of County and Town Hall policy and where these bodies stand in relation to central government. The earliest of these campaigns were those against the last Conservative Government's Housing Finance Act (when there was a general call made on Labour Councils to resist pressure to raise council rents in line with the private sector) and that of the squatters' movement. To operate effectively in either of these activities socialist groups and individuals found that they needed a knowledge of the economics of council housing provision, how local government finance operates, as well as being versed in the workings of the local Labour Parties, who was a potential ally, etc.

Even more recently many other issues with consequences for the local community have become prominent. The designation of such things as Educational Priority Areas, Housing Action Areas, and General Improvement Areas have initiated debates in the realms of the provisions of schools, transport, shopping centres, and housing. Other campaigns have been fighting for more nursery facilities, improved primary health care, and better local race relations. Underlying all these different issues has been the one constant theme of opposition to cuts in public spending.

Involvement in these various movements has produced a degree of expertise amongst groups of individuals (if not yet organisations) on the left who subsequently channelled their energies into local Labour parties and, particularly after the local elections of May 1978, ended up on the council itself. In the Greater London Area there is now scarcely a borough council which hasn't got its share of Marxist or neo-Marxist councillors; sometimes composing a substantial minority. No doubt this situation exists in some of the big city councils outside of London as well.

The discovery of this potential of influence and, to a degree, power in many large working class areas has meant a swift re-evaluation of the possibility for a socialist strategy for radical change in the local community. The need to complete this re-evaluation in a comprehensive and coherent way is now an urgent priority for the socialist movement. In the rest of this article we shall review some of the ways in which this re-evaluation has been attempted.

WHAT SORT OF SOCIALIST STRATEGY

In the past the question of a socialist strategy for local government has been the almost exclusive concern of the Fabian Society. In line with their evolutionist perspective the idea of socialism became synonymous with good, sound, commonsense planning and rational organisation. But even Fabians lost interest in solving the problems of the local community when they discovered that solutions in fact required more than good commonsense, and also when the lure of national office in Westminster became too great.

All too often Labour's representatives at local level have preferred to leave the central structure of the town hall administration as they found them, limiting their own ambitions to being merely *efficient* in dealing with what already existed, rather than seeking to win *more* for the class they purported to represent.

How should Marxists characterise the failures of these past (and present) generations of Labour councillors? Has it been caused by a failure of political will? Or are the structures of local government really too heavily stacked against radical measures being taken by left Labour councils to permit the possibility of change being brought about through local initiatives at this level?

One standpoint which definitely upholds this latter view is taken by Cynthia Cockburn in her book *The Local State: Management of Cities and People*. Cockburn's thesis is that local government has to be regarded as a 'key part of the state in capitalist society.' She argues that any emphasis placed upon its supposed ability to respond to local needs and requirements is simply mystifying. The central point to be got across is that the state is a weapon directed against the interests of the working class and, as a part of this state, local government plays its own special role.

Specifically this role is to '*reproduce the conditions within which capitalist accumulation takes place*' (original emphasis). Local government is suited to this function through the recently discovered devices of corporate planning and notions of community development. These last two ideas play an important role in ensuring that the working class is reconciled to receiving the amount of services which the ruling class feels it is capable of offering. As Cockburn says

"These services through which the state plays its part in reproducing the labour force are also services won by the working class. Years of militancy and negotiations lie behind council housing and the National Health Service. Though the capitalist mode of production may perpetuate the exploitation of the working class, workers nevertheless have to live within it. (. . .) In this respect the welfare state was a *real* gain for the working class. Nonetheless these services are not *total* gains, because to the state and capital they are not *total* losses. (. . .) The level of public expenditure is, however, always a crucial question for the capitalist economy as a whole. The struggle thus takes place over levels of provision and over the amount of control over provision given to the consumer."

This single theme is developed at some length throughout the book. The notion that the working class needs to be provided with certain services, but the ruling class also needs the working class to have these services seems to suggest the pessimistic view that we can expect nothing particularly revolutionary to come out of this confrontation. Indeed Cockburn implies that part of our strategy in relation to local government is to explain to workers that they should have only the most very limited expectations of their Labour councils.

This 'strategy' is elaborated on in a section called 'The new terrain of class struggle'. The term 'community action' itself has the effect of 'placing struggle on ground prepared, over a long historical period, by the state.' Territorial working class community groups are objected to because 'there is a set of officers and councillors, in a sense waiting for them.' Similar objections are raised to the idea of pursuing the class struggle at local level, leaving the reader with the strong impression that it is a route which should be abandoned at the outset.

But does the working class really have the option of absenting itself from this 'new terrain of class struggle', irrespective of the amount of preparation the bourgeoisie has put in beforehand? This question only has to be posed to see how untenable is the strategy offered by Cynthia Cockburn. *The Local State*, while providing an interesting discussion on some of the aspects of corporate planning at local government level, is otherwise an extremely negative work which offers very little to working class activists in tenants' associations or trades councils who would be most

likely to be involved in community campaigns. It has even less to offer to womens' groups, nursery campaigns, anti-cuts committees, public transport defence groups, race relations campaigns, and all the other bodies which have come into existence in recent years around the prospect of being able to influence local decision-making and winning positive benefits for their local communities. Cockburn says it can't be done — or if it can be its only because it doesn't fundamentally alter anything. Thus this book has only marginal interest and doesn't really provide us with any key insights.

RED BOLOGNA: A POSITIVE STRATEGY

The book *Red Bologna* by the Swiss journalists Max Jaggi, Roger Muller and Sil Schmid presents a standpoint which is the complete opposite of Cynthia Cockburn's thesis. The authors of this book do not use the structuralist method of analysis favoured by the English author, but instead present a practical account of the policies adopted by the Communist/Socialist coalition council which governs the Italian city of Bologna. From the example of this city we are given the picture of a local government authority which has fought for a degree of independence from the Christian Democrat (CD) — dominated national government and has sought to intervene in the local class struggle in such a way as to at least strengthen the bargaining position of the working class.

The achievements of the Bolognese Council are considerable, particularly when compared to their British counterpart in the field of urban planning. The leftwing council has endeavoured to give a high priority to preserving the historic old town, with its famous Renaissance, baroque and terracotta details left intact in the setting of austere streets and facades. Decent working class housing is provided in the centre of the town with the 'PEEP (Prano di Edifizia Economica e Popolare) Centro Storico'.

In the area of transport policy the Council has sought to place emphasis on the use of public transport, to the extent of offering free fares to all passengers during the rush hours. At work, close co-operation with the trade union movement ensures that the working class, while not having any guaranteed victories, at least confronts employers on a more favourable footing. Similarly in the realm of consumer policy, education, social policy, politics of health and helping the old, the Bolognese have embarked on brave experiments which have had the effect of pushing back the frontiers of bureaucratic control of these areas and opening up the possibility of mass involvement, or the realisation of a potential for self-government.

There is little point in listing examples of the positive approach to the class struggle in the community adopted by the Communist Party/Socialist Party coalition in Bologna. There can be easily seen from a reading of *Red Bologna* itself. But it is important to discuss the basic outlook of, particularly, the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), which is the main protagonist of the viewpoint that the socialist revolution can be fruitfully approached as an unfolding process rather than a once and for all event.

Against this view in Britain we have traditionally had the standpoint of Fabian reformists, to whom any conception of revolution is totally alien or that of the *bona fide* revolutionary Marxists, to whom lasting working class advance can only take place through the seizure of power. Donald Sassoon, in his introduction to *Red Bologna*, outlines three features of the theory of 'revolution as process.'

1. The absence of any pre-existing model, that is the necessity to re-think all previous revolutionary categories in terms of a new reality,
2. The mass party as the fundamental form of mediation between the masses and the state: a form of mediation which is 'in the state' and hence which rejects both the conception of the state as detached from civil society and its corollary — the revolutionary party as an advanced detachment of the work-

ing class leading the class 'from the outside'.

3. The strategy of alliance in terms of the formation of a new social bloc whose constitution is itself a continuous process, but defined by the goal of the revolution, but by intermediate objectives (structural reforms), subject in turn to continuous change."

Thus in Italy, the socialists in local government recognise the need to take up the class struggle on terrain which is not immediately recognisable from the classic annals of revolutionary history and experience. The fact that local government exists as a part of the state does not relieve them of the responsibility of finding ways to weaken the most repressive aspects of its operation and to strengthen areas which can be responsive to the needs of workers and other oppressed groups. Finally, in proposing a programme of immediate action, in the realm of mass politics, it would be empty propagandising to insist that living standards would be improved *after* the revolution. The revolution has to be made a concrete reality, expressed in terms of the real experiences of people's lives rather than vague, ill-thought-out timeless ideals.

But the point is continually made throughout *Red Bologna* by council officials and party activists, that Bologna is not a socialist island in a sea of capitalism.

As Sassoon remarks,

"The Communists in Bologna have not solved the crisis of capitalism in one area; nor have they developed a conception of socialism in one city. Rather they have offered a perspective on what it is possible to achieve within a determined social system. They have provided the basis for introducing norms of conduct and public management different from those which have prevailed in Italy over the last thirty years."

But even if it is not socialism, in the context of an Italy in which public administration is rife with corruption, incompetence and graft, compounded with the crisis of the urban areas, experienced by every nation in Western Europe and America, then Bologna stands out as an example bound to catch the attentions of the working class movement.

What would be the value of a British-version of Red Bologna to the labour movement? When Labour in local government inspires only apathy and discontent, even amongst its own trade union supporters, and where the left has long since turned to what it imagines to be greener pastures then the example of a left-administered city council, pioneering in areas of urban planning, education, transport, primary health care, etc., would play an important part in strengthening the position of socialism as a practical and workable system. In this respect we have a lot to learn from the positive approach to local government adopted by the Bolognese Communists and Socialists.

CONCLUSION

No doubt the example of Bologna cannot be mechanically transplanted to Britain. It would be a grave error to attempt to do this. What it is important to evaluate is a difference in basic approach to the arena of local government. On one hand we have an Anglo-Saxon model which favours abstention from the local struggle because it involves utilising terrain presently occupied by representatives of the ruling class. Ironically this view is also held by *bona fide* reformists who, on a more empirical basis, choose to abandon local government in preference to winning greater, and more immediate, recognition for their opinions in national government or the trade union movement.

On the other hand we have an approach which seeks to broaden the experience of the working class movement, from the constraints of traditional politics, identifying new needs and new ways of resolving problems of working class life. The debate will have to move on from here, from the broad contrast, towards a closer examination of detailed aspects of local government and community strategies for dealing with problems of urban development, housing, employment, education, etc.

Hopefully we will see this debate commenced in earnest in the future.