

# THE LENINIST



# CPGB

**Communist Party  
of Great Britain**





Central Organ of the  
Provisional Central Committee of the  
Communist Party of Great Britain

LAMONT'S budget did momentarily wrong-foot Kinnock in parliament. Not surprisingly either. As Ivo Dawney, political correspondent of the *Financial Times* put it: "I had always expected the budget to be a clothes stealing exercise, but few calculated that Mr Norman Lamont had his eye on most of the wardrobe" (March 11 1992). However, once the mass of people had time to take it in, not least its implications for themselves and their families, it quickly sunk without trace. Their votes were not to be bought for a miserly £2 a week (to be paid for by massive government borrowing).

Having seen their 'election winning' budget fail, the Tories brought on John Major - their 'biggest political asset'.

Frankly, even with the assistance of John Slezenger's cinematographic skills, he has not got much going for him. Even in bourgeois terms he has neither warmth, charm, character nor political vision. The sole reason for his high popularity ratings last year was that he was *not* Margaret Thatcher. That, and no more.

A party which elects such a man as leader must have problems, a party which regards him as an asset must be deep in trouble, a party which regards him as their 'biggest asset' must have lost all sense of reality.

No wonder Mr Major's personality has made just about the same impression as Mr Lamont's budget. From being just about equal in opinion polls, Labour has begun to pull ahead. In desperation, Tory campaign managers decided to revamp Major, to give him a tougher, more aggressive image. It did not work. Labour's lead increased.

However Major's metamorphosis from Mr Nice to Mr Nasty exposed more than his lack of personality and conviction. It exposed the fact that the Tories have run out of political ideas, run out of political momentum.

The Citizen's Charter and its ridiculous offshoots never could and never will inspire anyone. The best that the Tories can do therefore is to turn to negative campaigning and bring back Thatcher. It is unlikely to work.

Pouring scorn on Labour's shadow budget because it will lead to permanent recession is rich for a party which has presided over an economy in which industrial production has only grown by 4.9% in 13 years. Claims that Labour's miserable proposals for a minimum wage will cause unemployment does not come well from a party whose leader says "if it isn't hurting, it isn't working" and has overseen a doubling of unemployment. Neither does shedding tears over Labour's proposals to marginally increase the tax burden on the top 10% of the population - those whom the Tories call "middle income earners" - go down well in a country where 11 million live below the poverty line.

Hence the main Tory argument is that things are bad, but that Labour would only make them worse. Not a winning strategy; indeed, one opinion poll showed that 51% of voters, and 31% of Tory voters thought less of the Tory Party once its campaign started than before it. As to bringing back Thatcher, the Tory faithful might love her but the people hate her, not least because of her poll tax flagship. Bringing her back is an admission of John Major's failure and desperation. The Tories have the appearance of an opposition in waiting.

What about Kinnock's government in waiting?

If it does get in it will not be because of popular enthusiasm, let alone the hope that Labour will introduce socialism. Polls show that people opt for one party to keep the other out, not because they positively like it. In other words people in Britain are anti-Tory, but they are not pro-Labour.

There are good reasons for this. John Smith's shadow budget was as exiting as his name. It differed from Norman Lamont's only in detail, not substance. The fact of the matter is that what separates the two main parties of British capitalism is nuance, not substance. Both *promise* to run capitalism, and what that means in practice is continued mass unemployment, growing homelessness and attacks on the working class. Given the inherent instability of capitalism, it is quite possible that a Labour government might actually be worse than the Tory governments we have seen over the last 13 years.

Under these conditions the task of communists, socialists and revolutionaries is not to call for a Labour vote. Our task must be to fight for a genuine alternative. For us that means fighting to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain - the highest organisational achievement of the working class movement in our country. That is what our election campaign and our candidates stand for. That is why they deserve the widest support.

*The Editor*

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## LETTERS

### Irish in Brent

The Brent Irish Advisory Service invited all general election candidates in the borough to a meeting on March 26 which turned out to be both revealing and entertaining.

With Jim Moher on the one hand giving Labour's official 'No backing down to terrorists' position on the PTA, 'Red' Ken Livingstone (that renowned freedom fighter) virtually leapt out of his suit - accusing the chair of fixing the event in order to silence old Ken's well established anti-imperialist politics.

Much fist-shaking and vein-bulging ensued as Ken fought desperately to maintain the Irish vote by recounting how he had consistently voted against his party's position on the PTA.

Following this embarrassing credibility crisis, members of the RCP's Irish Freedom Movement seemed somewhat surprised to discover that there actually was a candidate in Brent standing on an anti-imperialist platform, calling for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland - the Communist Party's very own Ann Murphy.

The IFM's message to voters in Brent? Vote Murphy! And Rebel Ken's message? Vote Labour to keep the north of Ireland British.

Confused? Jesus...  
Dylan Emonds  
Brent

### The 'Real' thing?

Despite standing as 'Real Labour', Militant is still clinging on to the apron strings of Kinnock's (presumably 'Unreal') Labour Party. Early promises of standing a large slate of candidates around the country have not materialised.

Not long ago, for instance, we were promised that Leslie Mahmood would again stand against Kilfoyle (of *real* Labour, as opposed to 'Real Labour') in Walton. Nope. Instead, Militant now calls for a vote for the man they called a Tory.

Now, it was silly enough to argue for critical support for Labour at the moment ... but for a 'Tory'?

It seems Militant is caught by a rather bad case of schizophrenia - to stand or not to stand, and on what basis? It stands against the Labour Party ... on a Labourite platform.

Militant's incomplete break from Labourism has left it as neither fish nor fowl; a sort of low level re-run of the 1930s Independent Labour Party. Its supporters should take a good look at the remnants of *that* today.

Poor old Ted Grant. Which way will he vote?  
Pete Gorman  
Merseyside

### 'Viable'?

As per usual, the Socialist Workers Party is putting its cross in the Kinnock box. One relatively principled militant in the organisation in Brent was warned against giving any support to the CPGB's candidate, Anne Murphy, in Ken Livingstone's constituency.

Yet, when challenged, SWPers have been horrified at any suggestion

that they should campaign for Labour. If voting Labour is the SWP's position, surely that is what its members should campaign for? Political activists do not just adopt a position, they fight for it.

But the SWP is supporting some candidates standing against Labour; as *Socialist Worker* says, "In those few places where there are viable socialist alternatives to Labour".

'Viable' is of course a code word for Militant's left reformist candidates, a code word for any left reformist organisation the SWP wants to cuddle up to. By implication, the SWP believes that the reformist strategy of Nellist, Fields and Sherridan is viable. Revolutionaries think otherwise.

After all, we are not revolutionaries for the fun of it, but because a revolutionary strategy is the only *viable* strategy.

We too are for a "viable socialist alternative ... on polling day". Except, of course, communists will be providing it, while the SWP just wishes for it.  
Kath McDermott  
Glasgow

### Scotland

Dave Douglass in his letter, (*The Leninist* No116), misses the point that the conditions of Ireland and Scotland are not the same.

It is unhelpful to draw blanket parallels, with no basis in reality, between all Celtic nationalities. Without assuming that comrade Douglass includes Cornwall and the Isle of Mann in his analysis, the historic experience of the Celtic nationalities have all been different, bringing them to different situations today.

Unlike the rest of the British Isles, a single national bourgeois capital dominates over Great Britain, the capitalist class is united in its interest and its state. The economy and political institutions of Great Britain are fully integrated.

The working class of Scotland, and to a lesser extent Wales, are currently drifting towards nationalism because of disillusionment in Labourism, its complete inability to solve workers' problems. This is not because Scotland is a colony, it is because of the decline of capitalism itself, which Labour has run, and remains committed to running. Nationalism is equally committed to capitalism and the capitalist state, albeit a Scottish one.

Whereas the struggle for self determination for Ireland is revolutionary, those championing an independent Scottish parliament in Edinburgh's Royal High School are thoroughly respectable, thoroughly pro-state. The SNP even wants to keep the queen!

Backing these types in the name of socialism is foolish to say the least, there are no short cuts to socialism.

The overthrow of capital in Scotland, England and Wales depends entirely on the unity of the working class in Britain around a revolutionary programme and a reformed Communist Party.

The answer to the discontent of the Scottish workers is communism, not nationalism, however left.  
Mike Smith  
Glasgow

### That divorce

Divorces are always troublesome things. Who gets custody of the kids, who winds up with the family home ... who gets to keep Yorkshire.

Yes, it is the separation of the century, today's big event in the longest running soap opera ever. Andy and Fergie are - well, I'm sure you know.

In a few years time the BBC will be making an awful update of *Edward and Mrs Simpson* based on it (*Fergie and Mrs Simpson* maybe?).

So what is all the fuss about? Britain's 'first family' is just one big propaganda campaign on behalf of the bosses.

Just so long as the main talking point in working class homes is Fergie's skiing trips, Lizzie Windsor's wardrobe, or *that* divorce, it might keep our minds off other things. Maybe the biggest scroungers of all will stop us worrying about unemployment, or Britain's foremost non-poll tax paying family will make us forget Thatcher's tax.

Frankly, we could not care less whether the unhappy couple go their separate ways or not. Neither will we lose sleep over Edward Windsor's latest theatre flop.

We are for a society which will do away with such parasitism. Then we will find jobs more suited to their talents (if they have any).

Windsor Castle, Balmoral, Buck House and all the other royal piles would go well towards housing a good many homeless people.

But we should not just ignore the Windsors. Apart from being parasites on our class, they are an ideological prop to the capitalist system; a source of nationalism that welds workers to the bosses.

So take note of what they do. Every time they are up there, waving the flag or falling off their polo horses, there is someone behind you with their hand on your wallet.

A Burnett  
London

### Big Lie

During the next couple of weeks the mass media will try to pull the wool over the eyes of the British working class, using Gulf War type saturation coverage.

In many ways it is all part of the same ongoing campaign: to spread the myth that we live in a democracy and to promote the idea that British imperialism is a force for democracy and progress.

As the radical journalist John Pilger quite correctly said in a recent issue of *The Independent*, this media saturation "is part of the illusion that we live in an information society - when, in fact, we live in a media society, to which unrestricted information is a threat ... [and] which could render invisible the suffering of the people of Iraq" (March 18).

The Big Lie that has to be starkly exposed once and for all is the idea that the atomised and increasingly passive electorate are faced with any real political choices during the election.

To use the words of the arch-imperialist butcher Winston Churchill, the Conservative Party equals "corruption at home, aggression to cover it abroad, the tyranny of a well fed party machine", while the Labour Party has "sentiment by the bucketful, patriotism and imperialism by the imperial pint".

That is why a vote for the Communist Party of Great Britain is a vote for the start of the working class fightback and a vote for the truth.

Eddie Ford  
London

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For reasons of political security we have changed certain names, addresses and details.

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WRITE to The Editor,  
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# Towards the politics of the 21st Century



*Which Road?*: dedicated to the miners of the great strike, whose struggle was more important than a thousand opportunist programmes

Jack Conrad, *Which Road?*, November Publications, 1991, pp271, £6.95.

**“THE COMMUNIST programme is not an ivory tower plan for refashioning society.**

It is not out to convince the capitalists and their hangers-on that the lot of the poor needs improving. Nor is it the icing on the cake, or the equivalent of an election manifesto ... The programme is the foundation for the building of the Communist Party and developing its strategy and tactics. It firmly links our continuous and all encompassing agitational work with the ultimate aim of communism; it represents the dialectical unity between revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. The communist programme thus establishes the basis for agreed revolutionary action and is the standard, the reference point, around which the voluntary unity of Party members is built and concretised” (*Which Road* p235).

Over 260 pages of print, Jack Conrad effectively dissects the opportunist programme of ‘official communism’ in Britain - the *British Road to Socialism* - first in its Euro and *Morning Star*/CPB variants. Then, an important closing section turns the guns on the Militant Tendency and shows how their *What We Stand For*, “just like the various versions and editions of the *British Road to Socialism* produced by ‘official communism’ ... has, in the final analysis, a counterrevolutionary logic” (p203).

Comrade Conrad’s book, lucidly written in a logically structured way, is clearly designed for practical use. It is a workers’ handbook of revolutionary Marxism: “more than just a criticism. It provides the preliminary groundwork around which the struggle to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain will be focused” (p1).

The organisations of ‘official communism’, which take up the bulk of the book’s critique, are not important for what they represent now. But their

collective fate - counterrevolutionary oblivion - are classic examples of the logic of opportunism. When you start to water down principles for the sake of some short term advantage, when you shy away from openly stating what is, for fear of isolation - you are starting down a very slippery slope.

Thus, comrade Conrad includes a critique of Militant’s ‘programme’. *What we stand for*, showing how, from a different angle, it is treading almost exactly the same path as ‘official communism’. The truth of this was recognised, in a strange sort of way, by CPB apparatchik Kenny Coyle in a *Morning Star* article of February 5 in which he actually sees some ‘positive’ developments in the Militant Tendency and recommends it to follow the Euro/CPB path. If there is one article that should set alarm bells ringing in the freshly split Militant organisation and get them rushing their bulk orders in for copies of *Which Road*, it is surely this beckoning from the grave!

But the real point is this. By taking the programme of ‘official communism’ as the main critical butt, we take the most developed, programmatically ‘coherent’ expression of opportunism yet produced by the workers’ movement in Britain.

This is particularly so if we remember what opportunism actually is. Opportunism is the influence of bourgeois ideas in the workers’ movement. Without defeating this influence we will never make the revolution.

Thus, writing a devastating critique of the ideas of half-baked liberal Tony Benn would be a simple task, but what would be the point? As we explain later, the ideas of left social democracy need little in the way of logical or coherent justification for their strength in contemporary society.

Settling accounts with a document such as the *BRS* is a more serious and worthwhile task.

Why? Because only a component party of the world communist movement, as it wasted away from the thousand cuts of opportunism, was capable of producing a document that attempted so completely and comprehensively to

reconcile opportunism - the betrayal of the working class - with Marxism. Neither Trotskyism nor social democracy has ever produced anything comparable to the *BRS*.

For instance, the 1938 Transitional Programme of the Fourth ‘International’, drafted by Trotsky himself, has the occasional act of genuflection paid to it when one of the various sects of Trotskyism writes its commemorative articles and feels in need of some theoretical or historical gravity.

The problems of the Transitional Programme are precisely the problems lodged in the nature of the Trotskyite movement itself. It was never a programme of action written for the vanguard of the world proletariat. Indeed, enshrined in this document is the idea that the world communist movement to which this very vanguard belonged had become definitively counterrevolutionary and that within a very short space of time the banner of the Fourth International would be the rallying point for tens of millions of the world’s proletariat.

Having written off the world’s organised vanguard, and desperate for some influence somewhere, the Trotskyites in most countries gravitated towards the genuine counterrevolutionary movement of social democracy. The abstract programme of the Fourth International provided no anchorage or counterweight to this.

This explains why for most Trotskyite organisations the question of programme is at best a secondary, at worst almost a laughable matter. The best you will get from most is the occasional acknowledgment of the need to ‘update’ or ‘revamp’ the Transitional Programme.

For them, the programme has been a pristine piece of historical memorabilia, kept in a cardboard box in the office attic and broken out once a year for the Trotsky anniversary meetings. Meanwhile, on a day to day basis, without real programmatic anchorage, the organisation gets on with its adaptation to social democracy.

Communism’s more serious opponent, social democracy itself, has no

need at all for a programme in the Marxist sense - not even a bad one. Social democracy has its basis in the existence of bourgeois society and in the rule of ideas in society that justify and uphold the capitalist system. It reflects the bourgeois consciousness of the working class, a false consciousness refracted through the politics of the labour bureaucracy.

Thus, the ideas of left social democracy, and to an even greater extent right social democracy, draw their strength from the commonsensical, bourgeois consciousness that is spontaneously generated in the heads of workers. A programme, rather than a shopping list of fraudulent election promises, is therefore superfluous for organisations like the Labour Party, and they have never produced one.

The world communist movement - of which the Communist Party of Great Britain was a constituent part - was a totally different entity.

Because of its origins, its composition and the fact that it actually held state power in over a third of the world, what was our movement had to be rather more serious than the likes of a Skinner, Hattersley or Cliff.

On the one hand, there was the need to reconcile formal commitment to the rigorously scientific ideology of Marxism-Leninism with the increasing demands of the growing opportunism of that movement to accommodate to reality as it was, to abandon the fight for revolution.

Therein lies both the significance of attempts like the *BRS* and the reason for their unparalleled opportunist ‘rigour’. Comrade Conrad’s book therefore takes on the most dangerous form of bourgeois ideology: that which stands within our own ranks and pretends to be on our side. More than that, he takes it on and theoretically defeats it.

The Leninists of the CPGB have been accused many times of a sort of political necrophilia. No doubt Jack Conrad’s book will be greeted in the same way by those who have understood nothing of the last 80 years of working class history.

But there will also be friends - false and genuine - of our Party who will say that the time is not right for such a project. Instead, apparently, we should perhaps concentrate more resources on our general election campaign, on

improving the content and regularity of our press, perhaps even on producing a series of more popular pamphlets on subjects such as poll tax, unemployment or women.

These comrades are profoundly wrong and in their own way, are reflecting the frustrations of the period of reaction themselves.

Comrades, this is not a time for ‘business as usual’ as the *Morning Star* cretinously advises its readers! The collapse of bureaucratic socialism has ushered in a crisis of 1914 proportions in the world working class movement. This crisis is actually on a quantitatively higher level - what we have lost this time to the bourgeoisie has not been simply working class parties, but states where our class held power. Those who try to carry on as if nothing has happened, those like Militant and the Socialist Workers Party who even rejoiced when the counterrevolutionary wave hit, will themselves be swept away.

As the preface states, this counterrevolutionary disaster is fundamentally “a failure of programme”. Therefore, it is incumbent on us, if we do not want to see our revolution go the same way, that we as communists in Britain reexamine the programme that expressed and illustrated the degeneration of ‘official communism’.

The Party will be built, but it will be built on the basis of a fearless settling of accounts with the past. It will be built on the rock solid foundation of Marxism-Leninism.

Having said all this, readers should not get the impression from anything I have written that the subject matter of comrade Conrad’s book is in anyway ‘narrow’, ‘specialised’ or restricted. Jack’s book reflects the scope of its subject matter.

The world communist movement from 1917 - in the states it led and in its parties - represented the highest organisational achievements of our class so far in world history. Thus, in effect, comrade Conrad’s book is a critical commentary on the 20th century struggles of the world’s working class, and of the theoretical lessons that can be drawn from these epic conflicts.

This is illustrated by the broad range of the subjects the book covers. Flicking through the index, we see just some of the subjects that comrade Conrad has written on - the state, the Russian revolution, the nature of the epoch, the concept of the armed people, Allende and the lessons of Chile, war and peace, the fight for democracy under both capitalism and socialism, women, national self determination, the environment, Stalin, Trotsky, Nina Temple and Charlie Chaplin!

Of course, this publication is not only an analysis of the past. It is a handbook for revolutionaries today, and as shown by its concluding remarks and material on the programme which the reformed Communist Party needs, it shines a light on the politics needed for the 21st century.

Ian Mahoney

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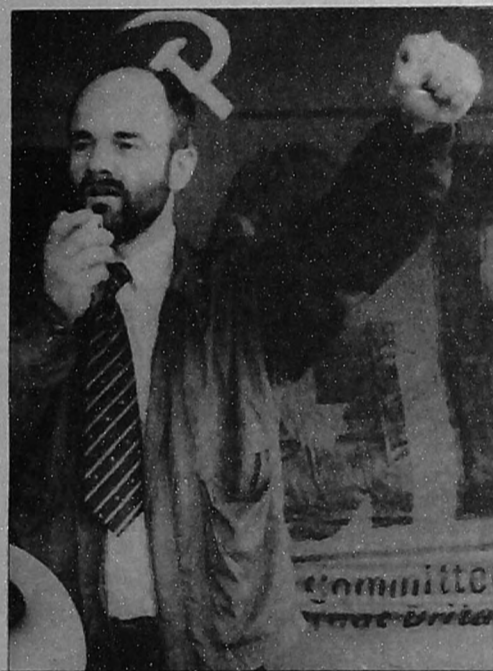
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# Planting the flag

This election gives us the chance to raise the need for communist politics and a Communist Party. Our campaign puts this forward on a national level. While the bosses once again try to bury communism, we are waging a militant - and definitely *alive* - battle to raise communism's flag for militants to rally round. Here we present the candidates that are showing workers a *real* alternative for the first time in decades

## Stan Kelsey: Bethnal Green and Stepney, London



Stan Kelsey, 45, was born in London. He has been an active trade unionist in Ucatt, FTAT and Nalgo. He is a single parent with three daughters and has worked as a registered child minder. A communist for over 30 years, Stan is a fulltime worker for the Communist Party and is one of the country's leading campaigners for unemployed rights via his work in the Unemployed Workers Charter. This year he was one of the main organisers of the national demonstration against unemployment in London.

"My constituency is in the heart of London's East End. It is a strong working class area and over the years has experienced a great deal of working class activity and militancy. This is underlined by the election of communist MP, Phil Piratin, in 1945. While this is significant, it is important not to dwell on the past. We must look at what is needed today.

As with most working class areas in a time of recession, unemployment is rife in the constituency. In the drive to increase, or at least preserve, capitalist profits, businesses sack workers and leave us to a life of misery and poverty on the dole. In Tower Hamlets the official level of unemployment at the

end of December stood at 14,495.

We deserve better than this. We need an organised, militant fightback by employed and unemployed alike, struggling to win what we need, not what the capitalist system says it can or cannot afford.

Capitalism is desperate to prevent and destroy the unity of the working class. This is because, when unified in struggle our class is capable of smashing capitalism. Unemployment is one of the ways in which the ruling class attempts to divide and rule.

Racism is another.

By blaming black people, capitalism attempts to provide a scapegoat for its own failings. Those workers who see black or migrant workers as being responsible for their problems are playing the bosses' game.

Racism in the working class communities of London's East End is a sickness that weakens the fighting capacity of the working class. It must be stamped out. Racist ideas need to be fought by argument; racist attacks must be fought by workers defence corps, not by the racist police and the racist laws of the British imperialist state.

The state - whether in the 'soft' form of the race

relations industry, or the hard form of the police or the courts - is the source of the problem. It must be kept out of working class affairs.

Only one candidate in this constituency is standing on an anti-racist ticket - that is myself, standing for the Communist Party. All the other candidates are reactionaries of one sort or another.

The Liberal and Labour candidates, Jeremy Shaw and Peter Shore, are competing to promote their British national chauvinism to upstage the openly racist British National Party candidate Edmonds. Only communists are genuinely against racism in all its forms.

We demand the lifting of *all* immigration controls: no worker is illegal. Our goal is to unite the working class to fight for what it needs as a *whole* and to prevent the division caused by setting up one section against another.

Capitalism is the cause of unemployment. Capitalism fosters sexism and racism. Capitalism is responsible for the exploitation and oppression of all workers. Only one party fights capitalism effectively - the Communist Party!"

## Anne Murphy: Brent East, London

Anne Murphy, 30, was born in Ireland and came to Britain to work some five years ago. She is a leading member of the Communist Party and is on the Party's Women's Commission. A local government worker, Anne is currently studying for a degree in Social Sciences. She is standing against Ken Livingstone - a move that has prompted Livingstone himself to denounce the Communist Party as "MIS agents"! Anne responded in the *Irish World* of March 20, pointing out that 'Red Ken' "isn't even a little pink around the edges these days". She highlighted the issue of Ireland as an example of the Labour Party's totally chauvinist and pro-imperialist nature. Anne is the main organiser of this year's annual Easter Rising commemoration march in London.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm up against the representatives of two reactionary capitalist parties - Tory and Labour.

Take the issue of abortion. Damien Greene, the Tory, is a member of the shady Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, the extreme right wing anti-abortion group. We will certainly be giving Mr Greene a few things to think about in the course of the campaign! But then, what about Livingstone and Labour? He is a member of a party that makes the issue of defending even the highly restricted access to abortion allowed under the 1967 legislation a *free vote*.

Brent East, in north west London, has suffered a great deal over the last 13 years of Tory rule at Westminster. And it is the working class that has had to bear the brunt of that suffering. This can only get more and more acute as capitalism goes further into recession.

Working people in Brent are being sacked and thrown onto the dole in their thousands by industry and the local council alike. While Brent has the highest percentage of empty council housing in London - over 700 vacant properties - thousands go homeless in the area, either living on the streets, in squalid bed and breakfast accommodation or on friends' floors.

Over the past six or seven years Brent Council, both under the present Tory administration and under the previous so-called 'loony left' Labour Party, has cut jobs and services.

None of the *capitalist* parties - Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrat or the Greens - will do anything to stop this. Their solution to the problems of capitalist recession is to screw down on the working class. Our Party is standing on a manifesto which shows how the working class of Brent East and Britain as a whole can defend itself from capitalist attacks and fight for a socialist future.

Some fake leftists oppose us standing against Ken Livingstone because he is a 'good socialist', with only a slim majority - 1,653 in 1987. We are told that we risk letting the Tories in by standing up for the working class. Let them back the pro-imperialist, pro-

capitalist Labour Party if they wish. As for us, we fight for the working class and its political independence. If that means Livingstone losing, so be it.

It will not make one iota of difference to the fight for socialism whether Livingstone or any other *Labourite* has their parliamentary ambitions ended on April 9.

If Livingstone had stood on our basic platform of workers' rights - a platform that includes the demand for the immediate withdrawal of troops from the north of Ireland - we would have stood down and supported him.

He refused. His address to electors in the constituency does not even *mention* the word 'socialism'!

What sort of 'red' is that?

The real reds are not hiding under Kinnock's bed. We are out fighting".





## Mark Fischer: Rhondda



Mark Fischer is the National Organiser of the Communist Party. He has worked in the past as a journalist and a writer. For the past six years he has been a leading supporter of the Unemployed Workers Charter and has organised many marches, pickets and other protests against the crime of mass unemployment. He was one of the main organisers of the recent national march against unemployment in central

London. Mark is from a South Wales family with a history in communist politics going back to the 1920s.

"The working people of the Rhondda have had more than enough of the empty promises of the Labour Party.

On the knocker in places like Tonypany, Maerdy and Ferndale, Communist Party candidates are being

told of voters' frustration with Labour and their sellout of the valleys. Some workers in despair are turning to the message of the Welsh nationalists, Plaid Cymru. Many others are planning simply not to vote at all.

The Communist Party is the *real alternative* in this election. Yes, we stand for the right of Wales to self determination if that is what the people want. But that will solve none of our problems.

An independent capitalist Wales will be just as anti-working class as the British state. What would be the point? In fact, the best moments of places like the Rhondda have come when we have struggled alongside workers in other parts of Britain, even the world. It is those struggles, struggles that the Communist Party has led and supported, that point the way forward to a better future.

The Communist Party in the Rhondda has played the leading role in the proudest moments of the area, whether it has been the struggles of the miners or the gigantic battles against unemployment in the 1930s.

Rhondda was famous for coal. Therefore the 1984-5 Great Strike was a battle for the very survival of the area. Who can doubt now that the miners were right to fight, that Arthur Scargill was spot on when he said that the fight was a fight for the jobs and livelihoods of all miners? That is why communists supported that fight 100%.

That heroic struggle was scabbed on by the TUC leadership, stabbed in the back by Kinnock and the Labour Party tops. The Rhondda paid the price of this treachery when its last pit closed in December 1990.

When the Maerdy pit closed, the Communist Party distributed a leaflet to miners and their fami-

lies who joined the march to mark the closure. Our leaflet stated that the closure was "stark proof, if proof were needed, that the working class gets nothing on a plate. To protect our jobs, our living standards, we have to fight. That is why you should join the Communist Party, the combat party of the working class in Britain!"

Today, the unemployment rate in Rhondda stands way above the national average. In desperation, the young people of the valleys are made 'economic refugees': they are forced to move around the country in search of work.

These horrors are a product of capitalism itself. Any party in this election that tells you the problems of workers in the Rhondda, or anywhere else, can be solved without ending the system that produced them is telling you a pack of lies from beginning to end.

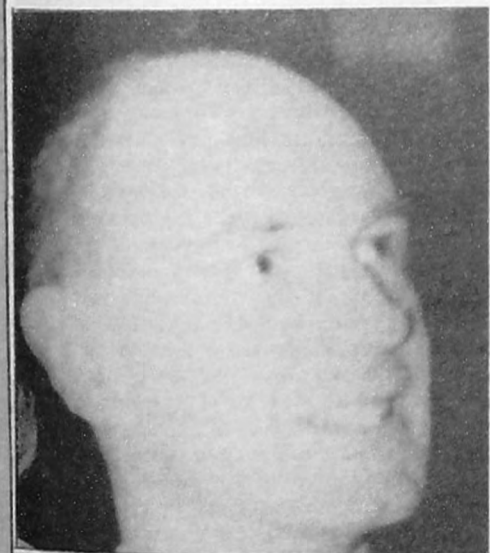
The old male dominated workforce in the Rhondda is changing. Women are being drawn more and more into paid work. They need the burden of domestic work taken from their backs with free 24 hour nurseries, high quality laundries and collective provision of food.

Only one party is fighting for what the working class in the Rhondda actually needs - the Communist Party. We make no grand promises. We honestly tell you that without a revolutionary change in society, workers can be sure of nothing.

But we do say that our party, in parliament and more importantly outside, works night and day for that revolution. That is why you should work with us, that is why you should join us!"

## Tam Dean Burn: Glasgow Central

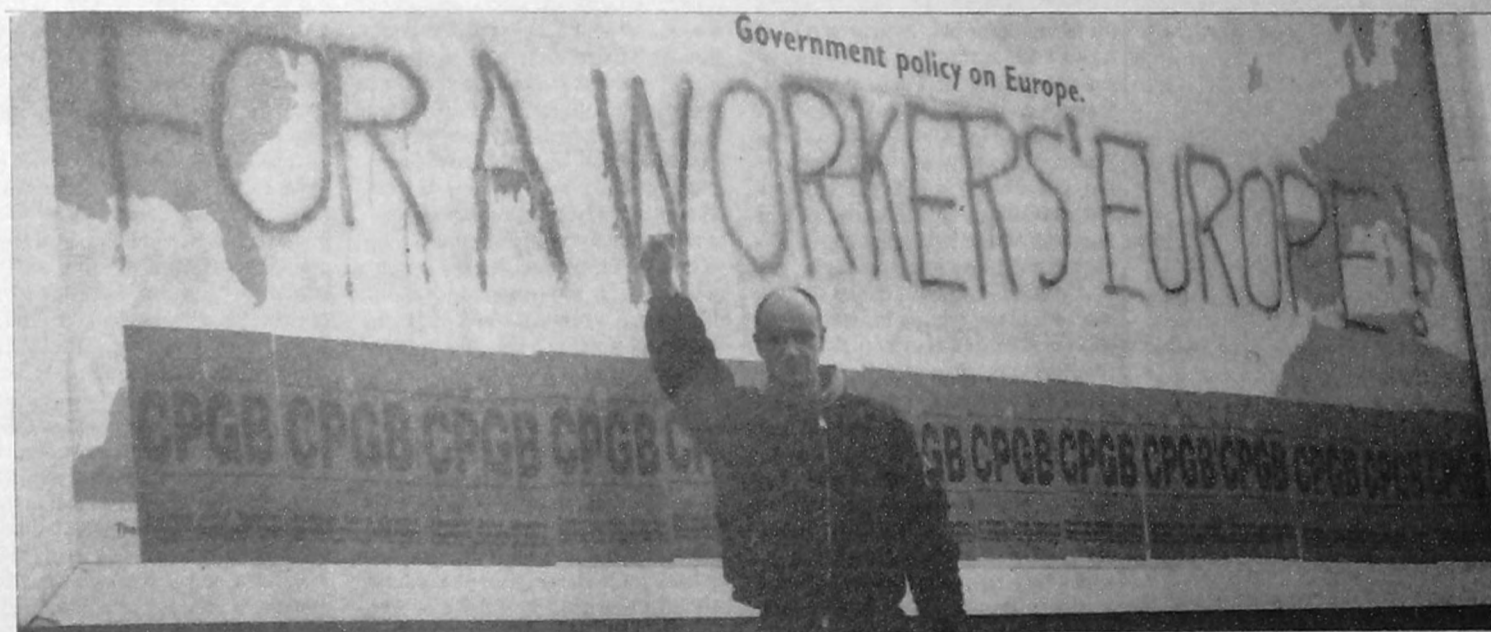
Tam Dean Burn, 33, was born in Edinburgh. An actor by trade, Tam has appeared in many films and TV programmes. He is a leading member of the Communist Party and the director of the Workers Theatre Movement. Tam is one of the country's leading campaigners for Irish freedom through his work in Hands Off Ireland! He is one of the main organisers of the annual HOI! march in commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising.



Glasgow grew as the centre of industrialised Scotland to become the proletarian capital of the country. Although most of the industry of Glasgow has now been destroyed, the city's record of making and supporting communists is real today. Communists are made in struggle, and Glasgow is a city of struggle which had to fight all the way; from George Square to Red Clydeside, and now against the poll tax.

The last 15 years have been hard on Glasgow, and it is the workers which, as usual, bear the brunt. Some, those forced out to 'Silicon Glen' for example, found low paid non unionised work. Others are victims of rocketing unemployment.

Then, to add insult to injury, Ravenscraig closed even earlier than was originally threatened. The health service is now the largest employer remain-



Glasgow comrades embelish Labour's election poster

ing in the constituency, and that can only be further decimated by cuts - unless they are fought and defeated. The other parties tell you lies; they say they will not impose cuts. Only the communists support health workers' resistance to prevent those cuts.

Housing, like unemployment, reflects the general situation of the workers. The slum clearances of the sixties, in the Gorbals for instance, have left high-rise monoliths. Anti-social, badly built, falling apart and unfit for workers to live in.

The failure of the labour movement to deal with these problems, its surrender to reaction over the last 15 years, the recent collapse of the socialist states; all this has caused disillusionment in the ideals of socialism. In Scotland we see an upsurge in nationalist feeling, but this is no answer. The bourgeoisie cannot deliver what the workers need, in any country. Only communism can do that.

The failure of Labourism is not the failure of socialism, but of opportunism, of rife class collaboration. Only the same, or worse, can come from the same economic system on a smaller scale. That is

why it is essential now that communism is presented to the Scottish workers as a real option. When the workers' movement is weak, only a firm class position stands between us and reaction.

Whether workers are tempted to vote Labour or SNP, it is the same mistake. There is no solution to working class problems in the bourgeois state. It has not worked, it will not work. Despite Alex Salmond's lefty pose, he is a bourgeois politician. After all his rhetoric about the poll tax, his party is quietly implementing it, just like Labour. Dishonesty and duplicity is all we can expect from the bourgeois parties.

Glasgow workers are no strangers to culture. Holding its own against the hype of the European city of bourgeois culture, working class Glasgow thrives with expression and life. But workers need the quality of life which allows its cultural base to grow. As a communist and an actor I am acutely aware of the value of culture in working class society. Capitalism cheats us all of this quality. Culture is a weapon in the hands of the workers, since it is our lives which we communicate, our lessons and our aspirations.

The strength of working class politics can be seen in the sharpest contest between communists and the bourgeoisie, and there is little conflict sharper than over the fate of the Irish nation.

The revolutionary situation there can be resolved either in favour of the working class or the British state. Mike Watson, the Labour candidate, believes that the United Nations can do the Brits job for them. Well it could, I'm sure, but we'll have to get rid of the UN too in the end. I was physically thrown out of a Labour Party lecture recently for raising the question of Labour's record in Ireland. If Labour can do this in Ireland then they can do it in Britain too when the situation becomes equally sharp.

The working class needs to defend itself; only its Communist Party can lead that defence. All other options have proven false. Supporting the rebuilding of our class's own Party barely starts with voting communist on April 9".





In trying to get our election manifesto passed for mailing. The text has to be okayed by the Post Office. One thing which perturbed them was our reference to the state and its police as racist. This was not on. However, it was alright to call for workers' defence corps against the police, and to raise the slogan "For the IRA - Against the British army". So we are allowed to advocate the violent destruction of the state, just as long as we are polite about it. How very British.

Elections really show up the pitiful state of the left. Take the Communist Party of Britain, forlorn prop of the Morning Star. Its programme, the British Road to Socialism, commits it to standing the maximum number of 'communist' candidates in elections. Yet it seems that "maximum" amounts to a big fat nought. It was speculated that the CPB might stand its Welsh secretary, Robert Griffiths, in Pontypridd. This was abandoned because of "lack of resources". Our organisation, without all the fat of the past to live off, has no such problems. Oh well, it looks as though the CPB's reformist parliamentary road to socialism will have to wait another five years. If it is still around then. Workers of the world ... don't hold your breath.

Back in the 1979 election the Socialist Workers Party advised its supporters to grit their teeth and force themselves to vote Labour. In what is the longest recorded case of collective constipation in medical history, 13 years on the SWP is still gritting and forcing. Socialist Worker of March 14 tells its readers to "vote for Labour without the slightest illusion that a Kinnock government would be any better than the Tories". SW does not even wheel out the excuse of the 'socialist illusions' of the working class. The excuse used is that "a Labour victory will make change seem a bit more possible, even though Labour really promises no change at all". Then why bother?

Trading Places has actually broken out among the bourgeois parties. As a possible adjunct to the SNP adopting lefty-pinko status, on the occasion of Labour publishing its Scottish manifesto last week, SNP leader Alex Salmond chose to rubbish Labour's attempt to gain Scot-cred by calling Labour the "Tartan Tories". Though rich coming from Salmond, we can only half disagree. Just drop the 'tartan' bit.

## OUR HISTORY

# CPGB's first election battle

The formation of the CPGB and its early years: documents, resolutions and manifestos



The first parliamentary candidate against parliament in Britain

COMMUNIST intervention in parliamentary elections was debated and became policy at the Party's founding congress. A year later, in August 1921, this line was tested in practice when the Party stood Bob Stewart as the CPGB candidate in a by-election in Caerphilly, South Wales. Caerphilly was dominated by the coal mining industry, and just a few months earlier the miners had fought a bitter struggle against the government and mine owners.

On April 1 1921 over one million workers in the mining industry were locked out when they refused to accept pay cuts of up to 50%. The government declared a state of emergency and brought in the troops. The miners looked to their partners in the Triple Alliance, the transport and railway workers, for support. Solidarity strike action was planned to start on Friday April 15, but was called off by the reformist union leaders. Hence this day became known as Black Friday, and although the miners fought on for three months, eventually they were forced back on the bosses' terms. That 80 Communist Party members were imprisoned during the dispute indicates the enormous support we rendered to the miners.

In the following address the Party urged the miners to break with the class traitors of the Labour Party and return a genuine workers' representative to the House of Commons.

### To the workers of Caerphilly

Your heroically maintained struggle against the coal bosses backed by the government has barely ended before you are called upon to declare your will at the ballot box.

What should be your will? That struggle has left you in a deplorable situation. Bad as were the conditions upon which the coal lockout was terminated they have been rendered still more vile by the manner in which the masters have used, and are using, the advantage they have gained.

Being, as they are, determined upon reducing wages by progressive instalments until they have reached the great end they have set before themselves - the destruction of the minimum wage - they are using unemployment systematically as a weapon to break into pieces the solidarity which three months of stress and strain have failed to destroy.

The coal bosses are deliberately victimising the bravest and boldest spirits and the most intelligent and sturdy districts, in the hope that thus they will succeed in weeding out from the ranks of the workers in South Wales all but the faint hearted and weak kneed. They, and with them the rest of the British boss class are resolved upon pushing their advantage until they have secured victory all along the line.

They have shown that they will rest content with nothing short of the unchallenged dictatorship of their plutocracy. Our experience has shown that the courts of law, the machinery of the state, and the public powers of coercion are all, with parliament, used as agencies for laying you, and with you the rest of the British working class, prostrate beneath the iron heel of a triumphant capitalist tyranny. If all else fails them, they can still fall back upon their 'Black and Tans'.

What in face of this appalling situation does the Labour Party offer you? It ought to be, if its name is to be anything but a delusion and a sham, the party that seeks to rouse and rally the working class for a life and death struggle to maintain their standard of life in the teeth of boss class encroachment and to urge and lead them onward until they, the workers, are masters and

controllers of their means of living. Its leaders do no such thing; nor will they do it.

They do not believe you are capable of taking over successfully the control of your lives, the management of production, the direction of industry, and the coordination of society.

They faked on Black Friday because they had no faith in your ability to rise to an emergency.

They showed the white feather then - they are not fit to be trusted with the red flag now.

They cannot or will not carry a strike or fight a lockout to its logical conclusion - how then can they deal with such a concerted assault as faces you now?

The Labour Party, as it stands, is what its leaders make it, and they will neither lead you into battle nor allow you to lead them.

The leaders who brought about the Triple Alliance disaster in spite of the splendid solidarity of the rank and file; the leaders who beat back the miners after a three months death grapple, and did so in contempt of the magnificent defiance embodied in your ballot vote; the leaders who in industry after industry accepted reductions and defeat in advance and with a mere pretence of consulting the rank and file - these and not the rank and file constitute the Labour Party as it stands. The best of men if he were elected under their auspices would be paralysed by their vacillation or crippled in the cogs of their controlling machine.

The clearest proof we can give of the need for a new spirit and outlook is found in the case of the miners. A fighting programme aimed (at any rate by the rank and file) at securing both their standard of life and a measure of control over the conditions of their toil was scrapped in a manner that cannot be characterised in words for an infamous agreement which ties the miner hand and foot and leaves him thus at the coal bosses' mercy for a twelvemonth. It deprives the miner of his six hour day and his twelve day week, and in doing this has made certain the addition of unemployment, now and in the future, to all the horrors which make the miner's life a thing of terror.

Those who cannot or will not see this are not the man to use the floor of the House of Commons as an arena wherein to meet the boss class face to face with a courage as defiant as their rapacity is determined.

Remember the Labour Party already includes (to the sorrow of the working class) men - Thomas, Clynes, Brownlie, Hodge, Bowerman and others - who have made themselves conspicuous by their diligent propagation of the doctrine of "increased production"; for which conduct they give the slavish excuse that thus the worker may gain an increase of crumbs fallen from the loaded tables of the gorged boss class.

We call upon you to scorn these slave doctrines. We call upon you who are unemployed to demand a man's life, and to allow no one to insult you with the offer of a puppy's portion.

We call upon you who are employed today to realise your community of interest with the unemployed and to

strive side by side with them less the boss use their misery and your apathy as the hammer and anvil on which to weld chains of slavery for you all ....

The Communist Party enters this fight to force to the front the whole question of the working class and its place in the British state and society.

What is the working class today? - Nothing!

What does the Labour Party want it to be? - Something! but not 'too much'.

What ought it to be? - Everything.

The Communist Party fights on the slogan - "All power to the workers".

The Communist Party demands for the miners, (in common with the rest of the working class) an assured standard of life, and (in cooperation with the organised working class) a control over their means of living and the conditions of their toil.

The Communist Party demands for the unemployed work or maintenance at full trade union rates.

The Communist Party demands as a solution to all international complications the solidarity of the workers in all lands against the international class that thrives on their subjection and rejoices in consequence of their misery.

The Communist Party demands for Ireland independence as a means to enable the Irish worker to realise James Connolly's dream of an Irish Workers' Republic.

The Communist Party has faith in the working class and in its ability to work out its own destiny once it has been roused to the pitch of making the attempt.

The Communist Party therefore urges the workers to perfect their organisation, national and local, with the determination to make easy the attainment of workers' control over alike production and distribution; and in such a fashion and spirit as will enable them to defend themselves from any proslavery rebellion of the master class, its allies, or its dupes. The Communist Party urges every individual worker, man or woman, to cast his or her vote for the Communist candidate as an open declaration of a will to work in solidarity with their fellows until the victory of the workers has been won.

The standard bearer of the Communist Party is a worker - Robert Stewart. He has been dignified at the hands of agencies of boss class rule by a term of imprisonment for his courageous battling on the side of the workers.

The Communist Party has decided that as a South Wales mining area was the scene alike of his offence and his incarceration, a South Wales mining area is entitled to the honour of sending him straight from gaol to the House of Commons as the only logical answer a self respecting working class can give when asked to express their will.

Workers! Vote for Stewart and demonstrate your confidence in your class, your defiance to the boss, and your determination to achieve all power for the workers.

The Communist August 13 1921

The result of the CPGB's first election campaign will be reviewed in the next edition of *The Leninist*.

Compiled by Doug Hulme



# Towards the politics of the 21st Century



*Which Road?*: dedicated to the miners of the great strike, whose struggle was more important than a thousand opportunist programmes

Jack Conrad, *Which Road?*, November Publications, 1991, pp271, £6.95.

**“THE COMMUNIST programme is not an ivory tower plan for refashioning society.**

It is not out to convince the capitalists and their hangers-on that the lot of the poor needs improving. Nor is it the icing on the cake, or the equivalent of an election manifesto ... The programme is the foundation for the building of the Communist Party and developing its strategy and tactics. It firmly links our continuous and all encompassing agitational work with the ultimate aim of communism; it represents the dialectical unity between revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. The communist programme thus establishes the basis for agreed revolutionary action and is the standard, the reference point, around which the voluntary unity of Party members is built and concretised” (*Which Road* p235).

Over 260 pages of print, Jack Conrad effectively dissects the opportunist programme of ‘official communism’ in Britain - the *British Road to Socialism* - first in its Euro and *Morning Star*/CPB variants. Then, an important closing section turns the guns on the Militant Tendency and shows how their *What We Stand For*, “just like the various versions and editions of the *British Road to Socialism* produced by ‘official communism’ ... has, in the final analysis, a counterrevolutionary logic” (p203).

Comrade Conrad’s book, lucidly written in a logically structured way, is clearly designed for practical use. It is a workers’ handbook of revolutionary Marxism: “more than just a criticism. It provides the preliminary groundwork around which the struggle to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain will be focused” (p1).

The organisations of ‘official communism’, which take up the bulk of the book’s critique, are not important for what they represent now. But their

collective fate - counterrevolutionary oblivion - are classic examples of the logic of opportunism. When you start to water down principles for the sake of some short term advantage, when you shy away from openly stating what is, for fear of isolation - you are starting down a very slippery slope.

Thus, comrade Conrad includes a critique of Militant’s ‘programme’, *What we stand for*, showing how, from a different angle, it is treading almost exactly the same path as ‘official communism’. The truth of this was recognised, in a strange sort of way, by CPB apparatchik Kenny Coyle in a *Morning Star* article of February 5 in which he actually sees some ‘positive’ developments in the Militant Tendency and recommends it to follow the Euro/CPB path. If there is one article that should set alarm bells ringing in the freshly split Militant organisation and get them rushing their bulk orders in for copies of *Which Road*, it is surely this beckoning from the grave!

But the real point is this. By taking the programme of ‘official communism’ as the main critical butt, we take the most developed, programmatically ‘coherent’ expression of opportunism yet produced by the workers’ movement in Britain.

This is particularly so if we remember what opportunism actually is. Opportunism is the influence of bourgeois ideas in the workers’ movement. Without defeating this influence we will never make the revolution.

Thus, writing a devastating critique of the ideas of half-baked liberal Tony Benn would be a simple task, but what would be the point? As we explain later, the ideas of left social democracy need little in the way of logical or coherent justification for their strength in contemporary society.

Settling accounts with a document such as the *BRS* is a more serious and worthwhile task.

Why? Because only a component party of the world communist movement, as it wasted away from the thousand cuts of opportunism, was capable of producing a document that attempted so completely and comprehensively to

reconcile opportunism - the betrayal of the working class - with Marxism. Neither Trotskyism nor social democracy has ever produced anything comparable to the *BRS*.

For instance, the 1938 Transitional Programme of the Fourth ‘International’, drafted by Trotsky himself, has the occasional act of genuflection paid to it when one of the various sects of Trotskyism writes its commemorative articles and feels in need of some theoretical or historical gravity.

The problems of the Transitional Programme are precisely the problems lodged in the nature of the Trotskyite movement itself. It was never a programme of action written for the vanguard of the world proletariat. Indeed, enshrined in this document is the idea that the world communist movement to which this very vanguard belonged had become definitively counterrevolutionary and that within a very short space of time the banner of the Fourth International would be the rallying point for tens of millions of the world’s proletariat.

Having written off the world’s organised vanguard, and desperate for some influence somewhere, the Trotskyites in most countries gravitated towards the genuine counterrevolutionary movement of social democracy. The abstract programme of the Fourth International provided no anchorage or counterweight to this.

This explains why for most Trotskyite organisations the question of programme is at best a secondary, at worst almost a laughable matter. The best you will get from most is the occasional acknowledgment of the need to ‘update’ or ‘revamp’ the Transitional Programme.

For them, the programme has been a pristine piece of historical memorabilia, kept in a cardboard box in the office attic and broken out once a year for the Trotsky anniversary meetings. Meanwhile, on a day to day basis, without real programmatic anchorage, the organisation gets on with its adaptation to social democracy.

Communism’s more serious opponent, social democracy itself, has no

need at all for a programme in the Marxist sense - not even a bad one. Social democracy has its basis in the existence of bourgeois society and in the rule of ideas in society that justify and uphold the capitalist system. It reflects the bourgeois consciousness of the working class, a false consciousness refracted through the politics of the labour bureaucracy.

Thus, the ideas of left social democracy, and to an even greater extent right social democracy, draw their strength from the commonsensical, bourgeois consciousness that is spontaneously generated in the heads of workers. A programme, rather than a shopping list of fraudulent election promises, is therefore superfluous for organisations like the Labour Party, and they have never produced one.

The world communist movement - of which the Communist Party of Great Britain was a constituent part - was a totally different entity.

Because of its origins, its composition and the fact that it actually held state power in over a third of the world, what was our movement had to be rather more serious than the likes of a Skinner, Hattersley or Cliff.

On the one hand, there was the need to reconcile formal commitment to the rigorously scientific ideology of Marxism-Leninism with the increasing demands of the growing opportunism of that movement to accommodate to reality as it was, to abandon the fight for revolution.

Therein lies both the significance of attempts like the *BRS* and the reason for their unparalleled opportunist ‘rigour’. Comrade Conrad’s book therefore takes on the most dangerous form of bourgeois ideology: that which stands within our own ranks and pretends to be on our side. More than that, he takes it on and theoretically defeats it.

The Leninists of the CPGB have been accused many times of a sort of political necrophilia. No doubt Jack Conrad’s book will be greeted in the same way by those who have understood nothing of the last 80 years of working class history.

But there will also be friends - false and genuine - of our Party who will say that the time is not right for such a project. Instead, apparently, we should perhaps concentrate more resources on our general election campaign, on

improving the content and regularity of our press, perhaps even on producing a series of more popular pamphlets on subjects such as poll tax, unemployment or women.

These comrades are profoundly wrong and in their own way, are reflecting the frustrations of the period of reaction themselves.

Comrades, this is not a time for ‘business as usual’ as the *Morning Star* cretinously advises its readers! The collapse of bureaucratic socialism has ushered in a crisis of 1914 proportions in the world working class movement. This crisis is actually on a quantitatively higher level - what we have lost this time to the bourgeoisie has not been simply working class parties, but states where our class held power. Those who try to carry on as if nothing has happened, those like Militant and the Socialist Workers Party who even rejoiced when the counterrevolutionary wave hit, will themselves be swept away.

As the preface states, this counterrevolutionary disaster is fundamentally “a failure of programme”. Therefore, it is incumbent on us, if we do not want to see our revolution go the same way, that we as communists in Britain reexamine the programme that expressed and illustrated the degeneration of ‘official communism’.

The Party will be built, but it will be built on the basis of a fearless settling of accounts with the past. It will be built on the rock solid foundation of Marxism-Leninism.

Having said all this, readers should not get the impression from anything I have written that the subject matter of comrade Conrad’s book is in anyway ‘narrow’, ‘specialised’ or restricted. Jack’s book reflects the scope of its subject matter.

The world communist movement from 1917 - in the states it led and in its parties - represented the highest organisational achievements of our class so far in world history. Thus, in effect, comrade Conrad’s book is a critical commentary on the 20th century struggles of the world’s working class, and of the theoretical lessons that can be drawn from these epic conflicts.

This is illustrated by the broad range of the subjects the book covers. Flicking through the index, we see just some of the subjects that comrade Conrad has written on - the state, the Russian revolution, the nature of the epoch, the concept of the armed people, Allende and the lessons of Chile, war and peace, the fight for democracy under both capitalism and socialism, women, national self determination, the environment, Stalin, Trotsky, Nina Temple and Charlie Chaplin!

Of course, this publication is not only an analysis of the past. It is a handbook for revolutionaries today, and as shown by its concluding remarks and material on the programme which the reformed Communist Party needs, it shines a light on the politics needed for the 21st century.

Ian Mahoney

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# Communist Manifesto

**C**OMMUNISM, we are told, is dead. Just about every paper you pick up, every news broadcast you listen to, says it was buried in the collapse of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the simple act of equating the corrupt bureaucracies in these states with communism itself, our rulers want us to believe that the world has seen the back of communism.

But communism is not dead.

Communism was never about the deformed socialism built by Stalin and betrayed by Gorbachev. It has its roots, not in the Kremlin, but in the real needs of workers the world over. Communism is about achieving world peace, world progress and world plenty. Communism is the answer to the problems of world capitalism which, far from going away, are intensifying day by day. Homelessness, debt, ecological ruin, unemployment, discrimination and economic crisis are all the products of this system. It is time for a change.

With the Soviet Union out of the way, conflicts between the major capitalist powers are not only becoming clearer, they are becoming ever more acute. Twice this century capitalism has been responsible for world wars in which 75 million human beings died. Our dead for their profit. We cannot let them drag us into a third world war.

That is why the Communist Party is standing in this election. We want to get rid of capitalism and build a communist society: a society which through mass participation produces for need, not for profit; a society which knows neither war nor poverty, country nor race hate, a society that uses science and technology to liberate people, not to crush them and make them redundant.

Every five years we get the 'choice' of who will misrepresent us in the talking shop in Westminster. That is the beginning and end of democracy under capitalism - a democracy which suits our rulers only so long as it goes their way.

Our Party makes no pretence that elections under capitalism change anything. They do not. The fact that the capitalist class owns and controls the means of production is a thousand times more significant than which party wins this election.

But the election does give us an opportunity to raise the argument for communism and allows us to rally new forces. A vote for the Communist Party is the only vote that is not a wasted vote. A vote for the Communist Party is a vote for working class resistance and solidarity.

Unlike the Tories, Liberals and Labour, our *Manifesto* has nothing to do with how to run capitalism. Neither is it a list of empty promises. It is an action programme for what workers need to fight for today.

## What we fight for

● **Wages** Our starting point is what people need to live a decent life. If the bosses point to their profits and say the

The general election manifesto of the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain



We need the best fighters of the working class

system cannot afford it, then the system should go! Communists support all workers in their struggle for better wages and conditions. We demand: A national minimum wage of £250 per week! End all compulsory overtime, with no loss of pay! A maximum working week of 35 hours!

● **Trade unions** Over more than a decade, trade unions have been shackled. Government laws have limited the action unions can take in defence of our wages and rights. Trade union leaders have accepted this for the sake of the easy life - for them, not us. The Labour Party says it will keep the laws that the Tories introduced. Communists fight for class struggle unions to defend the working class against the bosses and the bureaucrats. For rank and file democratic control of the unions! Class action to smash all anti-trade union laws!

● **Unemployment** We hear every day that the growth of unemployment is natural, or even that the unemployed themselves are to blame. Both are lies. Unemployment occurs because capitalism cannot employ all workers profitably. So if you are 'unprofitable' you are thrown on the scrapheap, then blamed for it by those who have thrown you there. The unemployed are used against employed workers by the bosses; cheap labour schemes, such as Youth Training, are just one example. We do not have to accept this. Through organising the unemployed alongside employed workers we can challenge capitalism: Work at trade union rates, or benefit set at the level of the minimum wage! Where a workplace is threatened with closure, it must be nationalised under workers' control! No slave labour 'training' schemes! Real training under workers' control!

● **Law and order** The Tories and Labour are both committed to strengthen-

ing the police and putting yet more people in prison. We are for getting rid of the conditions that cause crime and anti-social behaviour. To do that and to defend our communities we must build workers' defence corps - our class organised to defend our class - and undermine the bosses' armed forces. For democracy and trade union rights in the armed forces! For the right of the population to arm itself!

● **Housing** Homelessness is on the rise, while house building is at an all time low. The streets of the large cities are still the 'homes' for many thousands of people. Yet there are plenty of buildings which are empty because they cannot be profitably let. Housing is a basic right. Communists do not put a price or a profit on it. For the right to housing for all! Organise to take over vacant properties! Organise for defence against the threat of eviction!

● **Pensions** The British state treats elderly working class people as just so much excess baggage. This is because now that their working life is over, no more profit can be made from them. They are pushed away, to rot in poor housing on insulting pensions. Communists demand: The right to stop work at 60. No compulsory retirement age! State pensions to be set at the level of a national wage of £250 per week!

● **NHS** Both the Tories and Labour have run down the health service. This is because of profit: capitalism is no longer prepared to fund the NHS because it is not squeezing enough from the working class. Hospitals are being run more and more like factories. Healthworkers have fought to defend their service, proving that the only people with whom the NHS is 'safe in their hands' is *them*. Our health should not be dependent on the capitalists' profits. We demand:

Abolish the waiting lists! State funding for the NHS on the basis of need! Abolish all health service charges! For workers' control of the health service!

● **Racism** Black people are under attack. Discrimination at work is combined with harassment by police and racist gangs. Immigration controls criminalise migrant workers. Racism divides the working class, playing one section off against another. Low wages, rising unemployment, crime and poor housing are caused by a system which functions for profit, not human need. They are not caused by black workers. Communists actively oppose racism; racism is produced by the capitalist system to divide the working class. Communists oppose all immigration controls: no worker is 'illegal'. We support the right of black people to defend themselves against racist attack. But we oppose separatism. Workers' unity is the only way to combat racism. Smash all immigration controls! For workers' defence against racist attacks! Full citizenship for all workers!

● **Women** Women are used by capitalist society as a reserve 'army' of cheap labour. In Britain today, women's take home pay is about 65% of men's. Women have less security of employment, often in part time and non-unionised work. They also have the extra burden of childcare. Women are kept in a subordinate position to provide cheap labour and to rear the next generation of workers for the capitalist class. To maintain this situation, the state denies women many necessary rights, particularly abortion rights. Women should have control of their own bodies through effective abortion rights: as early as possible, as late as necessary. But today, even the limited existing rights are under attack. The only way to defend them is to go on the attack. Communists therefore demand: Free abortion and contraception on demand!

Free, high quality, 24 hour child care facilities!  
Equal pay for equal work!

● **Ireland** For the unconditional, immediate withdrawal of British troops from the north of Ireland. British imperialism is not 'keeping the peace', but is an oppressive occupational force, dividing the Irish people. The north of Ireland is also the British state's training ground for repression. What it learns in Ireland is turned against workers fighting in Britain: striking trade unionists, black youth, lesbians and gays - anyone who stands up for their rights against the capitalist system. So all workers in Britain have a real interest in supporting the fight for Irish liberation. Communists support the right of Irish self determination. We therefore support the fight for this. Workers in Britain must take sides - for the IRA, against the British army. Troops out now! Self determination for the Irish nation!

● **Scotland and Wales** Communists support the right of all nations and nationalities to self determination. If the people of Scotland and Wales want independence, they must have it. But we do not advocate separation. Capitalism here has developed on an all-Britain basis and has laid the basis for potentially powerful all-Britain working class unity. Nationalism divides our class. The enemy of the working class in Scotland, England and Wales is British imperialism. If we are to win against it, we need maximum unity. A united working class in Britain can win its demands: divided it will lose. For the right of self determination! For the unity of all workers in Britain!

● **Lesbians and gays** Aids has been used by the state to create a moral panic. Legislation has been used in the same way; the infamous Section 28 is an attempt to depict lesbians and gays as a menace to society. Recently, there has been a number of jailings of gay men for consenting sex. 'Queer bashing' by bigots in and out of police uniform is becoming more common. Communists oppose all attacks on lesbians and gays, and all attempts to portray homosexuality as unnatural. For full state funding and free health care for Aids victims! Smash all anti-lesbian and gay legislation! For workers' defence against the 'queer bashers'!

We do not believe that the system can afford to give us these rights. No parliament will grant them. But all these demands are necessary for people today. And they can be gained - by sweeping aside the capitalist system and its institutions with the organised power of the working class. If the system cannot afford what we need, then the system must go!

The Communist Party exists to organise that fight. To build that Party we need more than votes: we need the best fighters of the working class. Join with us and fight for a future worthy of humanity.



# Use their elections for our revolution

The communist approach to parliament and the 1992 general election

**M**OST pundits and politicians predict that the April 9 general election will be a close run thing. Latest opinion polls show Labour nudging ahead of the Tories, perhaps enough to give it a clear majority. What is interesting about these polls is that while the ruling class would prefer a Tory victory it is perfectly composed about the prospect of a Kinnock government.

Take the *Financial Times*. Here we have a paper of the bourgeoisie which talks to the bourgeoisie. It has no time for the anti-Labour hysterics and crudities of that part of the bourgeois press which talks to the masses. While the *Financial Times* says Labour does not deserve to win it insists that the Tories deserve to lose. As shown by the miserable John Major - the Tories biggest asset! - they have completely run out of ideas, they have become corrupt and shop spoiled. Perhaps it is time to bring in a new team, reasons the pink'un.

Of course, this general election is about more than which party runs capitalism. For the first time since the 1920s, the working class in Britain has the opportunity to vote for Communist Party candidates standing on a revolutionary Leninist platform. Our manifesto and election campaign presents workers in Britain with a real choice, not between varieties of pro-capitalism, but between capitalism and socialism,

between ruin, economic stagnation and the inevitability of war under capitalism, or a vision of the future, where humanity is for the first time master of its own destiny, a socialist society where the working class has state power and is building communism.

So the April 1992 general election represents a highly significant and necessary stage in the struggle to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Naturally many on the opportunist left will object to our decision to stand candidates. They say the most important thing in front of us, after 13 years of Toryism, is to get rid of Major and his crew. We profoundly disagree.

To understand why we do not give a hoot about the outrage of fake revolutionaries, why we dare stand against Labour candidates, why we put the question of reforging the Communist Party, and the consciousness of advanced workers, before who administers Britain, we must examine the whole question of parliament and elections in the light of both Marxist theory and communist practice.

## Parliament

We can best begin with parliament itself. As any 'A' level student will tell us, parliament has its roots in

feudal times. It acted as the collective voice of the barons as they sought to balance off the king and gain a greater share of the surplus wealth produced by the downtrodden peasantry.

Today, however, parliament is a typically bourgeois institution, which like the bourgeoisie itself long ago exhausted any progressive potential it once possessed. Presenting itself as a body which expresses the will of the people, the opposite is true. Parliament is a talking shop, a device to hide the reality of power in Britain, a sham designed to deceive the masses, not empower them. Marx rightly said that parliamentary democracy gave the mass of people the opportunity of choosing who will *misrepresent* them every five years.

This, not the arrival of genuine democracy, is the significance of the steady extension of the parliamentary franchise since parliament became a genuine bourgeois institution with the Reform Act of 1832. Yes it is true that from 1928, when women were at last given the vote at the age of 21, something like 96% of adults had the vote. But while this gave the appearance of majority rule the *essence* of parliament is no different from any other form of the bourgeois state, be it a presidential republic, a fascist dictatorship or a military regime.

Thus communists have no illusions in the bourgeois parliament and Britain's constitutional monar-

chy. As with the lie that the relationship between the capitalist and the worker is equal, that there is no exploitation involved if the capitalist gives a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, our task is to rip away the veil of false democratic ideology.

The form through which the bourgeoisie chooses, or is forced to rule, is a secondary question. What concerns us first and foremost is the fact that because of capitalism the mass of the population lives in fear of unemployment and war, while a tiny minority rules and grows rich through the exploitation of labour power.

## Different tune, same fiddle

Though in our society the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, this does not mean that there is no discontent. There most certainly is. Even in 'normal' times, times not characterised by economic and political crisis, huge numbers, if not the majority, are unhappy about their lives. Racial or sexual discrimination, low pay, sackings, prise rises, new taxes, the drive to war all provoke movements which have the potential of breaking through the integument of bourgeois legality.

This is where the two party system, with its *alter-*



native party of government, comes in. Discontent can be safely siphoned off through the possibility and maybe the reality of putting this alternative party into office. When that party forms a government, it does not, of course, mean an overthrow of the system and an end to all its evils. All that happens is that the ideological tune changes, the capitalist fiddle remains as before, as does the danger of war and slump.

The present debate between the Labour Party and the Tory Party, is a classic example of the mystification brought about by the two party capitalist system. According to Kinnock the present downward oscillation in the economy has nothing to do with the capitalist system itself and the fact that Britain is interlinked with the world economy, primarily represented by the United States, the EC and Japan.

All blame is heaped upon one individual. It would be thought that this person must be superhuman. But no, the man who they say caused it all turns out to be the epitome of establishment greyness, John Major. That there are 3 million unemployed, that Britain has an unprecedented trade gap, that it is in longterm decline, is all his fault. Get rid of him, says Kinnock, and everything will change.

In 'normal' times people do fall for this line. Their minds are befuddled with the warping effects of bourgeois ideology and consequently for most of their lives they do not think deeply, if at all, about politics. It works both ways. We know that if Kinnock gets himself into No10, and predictably the economy does not experience a historic transformation, the Tories will do exactly the same.

That is why in the book *Which Road?*, we said the control of the means of production is worth any number of general elections. And again, as we explained in *Which Road?*, that is why dreams of a parliamentary British road to socialism, promoted by the 'official communists' and Militant alike, are doomed to disappointment and disaster. As life tells us, the working class cannot "lay hold of the ready-made state machine and use it for its own purposes". Communism can never be ushered in by the bourgeois parliament. Parliament, as an institution of the bourgeois state, will have to be smashed.

Here, in defence of their rotten parliament, opportunists insist we tell them what will replace it. Again, life itself has given the answer.

Marx, greeted the Paris Commune of 1871 as the harbinger of the new society. This semi-state arose from the flames of revolution. Organs of mass struggle quickly became a united body of popular democracy and rule. Needless to say, given its origins, it was a complete anathema and in complete contradiction to the sham and hypocrisy of the bourgeois parliament. It rested on the active support of the armed people, not on atomised passive consent. The commune did not have professional politicians who sponged off the people, but delegates on the average workers' pay who were subject to instant recall. All this was a pointer to the communist future, where the state will be replaced by the self administration of the community of producers.

Paris was not unique. In Russia, both in 1905 and February 1917, similar bodies, the soviets, came to life, and in October 1917 they came to be the state power in the land. Italy, Austria and Finland were also swept by the post-World War I revolutionary storm and produced their own version of soviets. Hungary and Germany actually had short lived soviet republics. Even in 'conservative' Britain the councils of action of 1920 and 1926 had distinct soviet-like features, as did the miners' support groups of 1984-5.

It is in these bodies, in these moments of heightened class struggle and working class self-activity, that we find the answer to what is to replace the bourgeois parliament and the capitalist system.

So we make no apology whatsoever about arguing and fighting for the death of parliament and the birth of soviets. If we really want to see a classless society there really is no other way. Not just because soviets are infinitely more democratic. But because only through such bodies can the working class carry through its historic mission of bringing in communism, which knows no state, no alienated body which stands above society.

## Working in the enemy camp

Although communists have always wanted to smash parliament, from the time of the First International our comrades have successfully used the bourgeois parliament and parliamentary elections for "agitational purposes" (*Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International p97*). It hardly needs saying that this involved no illusions in parliament itself. Engels, for one, made it clear that universal suffrage was simply a different means of oppressing the working class. Nevertheless he said that elections give us an opportunity to gauge our strength, give us a barometer of the revolutionary mood. If the masses are not prepared to vote for us they will hardly be prepared to make the revolution with us.

In Germany working class MPs like Bebel and Liebknecht were brilliantly effective. As parliamentary thugs they put Dennis Skinner to shame. They skilfully and energetically used parliament against the bourgeoisie, used it as a platform from which to

agitate against the bourgeoisie and to rally the forces of the working class. Of course, as we know, there were two sides to the story. No effort was spared by the rich and powerful to seduce working class representatives. And at the end of the day money, flattery, genteel soirees, parliamentary routine and flim flam succeeded where anti-socialist laws failed.

Edward Bernstein became the spokesman for the labour bureaucracy and the revisionist cancer that steadily ate away at the revolutionary programme of German social democracy. Starting with an 'open minded' criticism of the Marxist theory of crisis, doubts about the inevitability of war under capitalism and the relative pauperisation of the masses, Bernstein went on, in the name of "winning the battle for democracy", to reject the necessity of revolution. There was a logic in this revisionism which claimed that the 'movement' was 'everything' and that the maximum programme was nothing. The logic was of betrayal.

In August 1914 the parliamentary faction of the Social Democratic Party voted for the Kaiser's war budget, and in the name of the 'fatherland' it urged the working class of Germany to the slaughter. The opportunists repeated the same treachery throughout the 'civilised' world; in Britain, France and Russia, everywhere they sold themselves to the main enemy - which was at home, not abroad.

The debacle of 1914 does not mean that in order to avoid the same fate we should throw the possibility of using parliament for agitation out with the opportunist bathwater. The correctness of using parliament did not come to an end with the collapse of the Second International. Indeed, if we look at the Bolsheviks in Russia, who were an orthodox wing of the Second International, we can see that the revolutionary use of parliament greatly contributed to the October Revolution and the consolidation of working class state power in Russia.

## Bolshevism and Menshevism

Russia had features that were unique to it. That was natural and nothing to be surprised at. However it also had features that were general. More than that we can say that within Russia the contradictions of imperialism found their highest expression. We can also say that it is precisely in their ability to lift their theory, strategy and tactics up to this testing and challenging objective situation that we find the universal significance of the Bolshevik experience, not least their experience of using parliamentary elections and parliament. What then were the electoral politics of the Bolsheviks? For an answer we must briefly examine the dialectics of the Russian revolution.

What separated the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was far more than the dispute over soft or hard membership criteria that opened up a split between these once united partisans of *Iskra* in 1903. The split at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which produced the Bolsheviks (majorityists) and the Mensheviks (minorityists), stemmed from two very different strategic approaches to the revolution in Russia.

Both wings of the Party agreed that the tasks of the revolution in Russia were in essence the same as England in 1648, America in 1776 and France in 1789. In other words, what was required and was in the offing was a bourgeois revolution. This was a perfectly orthodox position. Do not forget, Russia was ruled by a Tsar and a feudalistic autocracy. Capitalist development was still feeble and the working class consequently small.

Taking this as their starting point and with a seemingly faultless appeal to the 'classics', the Mensheviks argued that the job of Marxists was to win the working class to support the bourgeoisie, to push it, encourage it to make the bourgeois revolution against Tsarism. Once this was done, and only when it had been done, would the prospect of socialism be viable. It was then, only after the victory of the bourgeoisie, after bourgeois rule had been consolidated in a parliamentary democracy and after capitalist development had proletarianised the mass of the population that the working class could begin to set its sights on the distant prospect of taking power in its own right. Until the bourgeoisie had done its predetermined bit socialism was decidedly off the agenda.

The Bolsheviks considered such a stagist strategy hopelessly lifeless, artificial, conservative, mechanical and ahistorical. In other words it had nothing to do with genuine Marxism. The Russian bourgeoisie was a spineless creature compared with that of revolutionary England, America and France. This cowardly bunch were incapable of making a real revolution. The masses would move into action because of their own demands and grievances. When they did, the bourgeoisie would not rush to put themselves at their head but fearfully fall into the arms of the Tsar and reaction.

The Bolshevik analysis was far from negative. What was immediately possible in Russia was something far more valuable to the proletariat of Russia and the world than a weak, pale and unstable bourgeois democracy. The working class could do much better than support the unsupportable and passively bide its time in the wings as a Menshevik "party of extreme opposition".

The objective interests of the popular class in Russia made it possible for the working class to seize the banner of democracy and the initiative. With single-minded leadership, daring and imagination the working class could win to its side the peasant masses and take the lead in overthrowing Tsarism (that is why the Bolsheviks wanted a highly disciplined and centralised party). If the workers became the hegemon of the revolution, instead of meekly handing power to the bourgeoisie as urged by the Mensheviks, the popular classes should keep it in the form of a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.

Naturally, such a state was a hybrid, inherently fluid and, if Russia was left in isolation, impossible to sustain. The Bolsheviks, it should be said, were confident that it would not be.

They considered the advanced capitalist countries objectively ripe for socialism. This was no longer the epoch of the bourgeoisie. The 20th century was the dawn of the worldwide transition from capitalism to socialism. In this context the Bolsheviks placed their strategy for making revolution in Russia. Revolution in Russia not only could, but had to, act as a spark for the coming European revolution. Without the European revolution they would go under, but with it they could proceed uninterrupted - ie without the need for a second, specifically proletarian revolution - to the tasks of socialism.

How did things turn out? Well, according to the Mensheviks themselves, things turned out to be much closer to the perspectives of the Bolsheviks than their own. And not only in the great year of 1917, but already in 1905, the great dress rehearsal.

Long tottering on the precipice of destruction, Tsarism was very nearly permanently consigned to oblivion because of the popular outrage against the turmoil, senseless loss of life and material hardships that resulted from the 1905 Russo-Japanese war. Discontent in the countryside burst out in the form of peasant revolts, in the army and navy mutiny and in the city's political strikes and mass demonstrations.

This was a profound revolutionary situation which mercilessly tested the theories, programmes and expectations of all working class parties, groups and factions. To their credit, in 1905 the Mensheviks, in their own words, "acted like Bolsheviks". Faced with the reality of a cowering and servile bourgeoisie and the heroism and determination of the working class the Mensheviks momentarily put their programme aside and let themselves be swept along in the forward moving revolutionary swell.

Under such hopeful circumstances, Lenin had no thought of scoring cheap 'told you so' polemical points. The revolution came first. He welcomed the Mensheviks as comrades-in-arms and did his utmost to recement Party unity. Quite right too. Practice speaks louder than words.

Revolutions must be resolved positively. If not they are resolved negatively. Either revolution or counterrevolution must win the day. That is why the Bolsheviks were determined to push what possibilities there were for success in 1905 to their limits. Nothing, but nothing should be allowed to divert or blunt the determination of the masses to see things through to the finish.

Of course, revolutions are not one way affairs. Initiative and tactical manoeuvre are not the sole prerogative of the popular forces. Those above, even though split, confused and panicked by revolutionary developments they can never really understand, still have resources, finance and the experience necessary to offer well chosen sops. Thus when the Tsar's Cossacks and police failed to terrorise the masses and cower them into submission, he turned to democracy as his last line of defence. To save the regime, the throne and his head, Tsar Nicholas II suddenly discovered the virtues of the *duma* or parliament.

How did the Bolsheviks respond to this sop? With the mass of advanced workers fully behind them, with utter conviction, with a refusal to be diverted from the real prize, the Bolsheviks called for a boycott of the *duma* elections. That did not mean the Bolsheviks were saying advanced workers should adopt anarchist style moralism. The call to boycott the *duma* elections was a call to action, a call to make revolution. It had nothing to do with impotence. The boycott was a bold frontal challenge to Tsarism and the Tsar's parliament. The Bolshevik-led boycott exposed the irrelevance of the Tsar's sham democracy, the cowardice of the cadets and the whole of the liberal bourgeoisie.

The revolution reached its height in December 1905, in Moscow, where the Bolsheviks had their greatest influence. Mass demonstrations became general strike, and general strike became Cossacks. With the active support of its million strong population, less than a thousand guerrillas were able to build street barricades, keep 10,000 troops at bay and break the grip of Tsarism for nine days.

The events of 1905 and the nine splendid days of insurrectionary Moscow were of worldwide significance and impact. It showed that revolution was not dead, not a thing of the past, but an inspiring reality and a real promise for the future. This is highly relevant for our own times. There are many similarities and resonances between the pre-1905 period and the present day. Remember the world just before 1905.

For the social democrats - that is what the com-

munist then called themselves - revolution was at best a distant memory. The mole of revolution had not surfaced since Paris in 1871. From that point onwards capitalism had been stable, the working class quiet. Fertile ground indeed for revisionists and bourgeois propagandists alike to claim that 1871 was an aberration, that the revolution was outdated, the proletariat integrated and no longer alienated. In nine days Moscow shattered all that carefully constructed, generously publicised and widely believed theorising.

## Boycotting and not boycotting

Sops are given. Sops are taken away. As insurrectionary Moscow was murdered and hundreds of revolutionaries were secretly buried, the Tsar began to dilute Tsarist democracy. New restrictions were placed on who organised election meetings, who was allowed to vote and what was allowed to be said. This was part and parcel of the reactionary spiral towards full blown counterrevolution. Under these conditions, difficult though they were, there was every reason to believe that not all was lost. Certainly the Bolsheviks were determined to keep the flickering flame of the living revolution alight. Thus when the Tsar called new *duma* elections in 1906 they called for another boycott.

In spite of the slanders and stupidities of present day academic 'Marxists', reformists and 'official communists', Lenin was no dogmatist. Turning to his famous pamphlet, *Left wing communism*, we find the following words:

"The boycott of the Witte Duma was ... a mistake, although a small and easily remediable one ... What applies to individuals applies - with necessary modifications - to politics and parties. Not he is wise who makes no mistakes. There are no such men nor can there be. He is wise who makes not very serious mistakes and who knows how to correct them easily and quickly."

Yes, the second boycott was a mistake. However it was, as Lenin said, a small one, not least because it was quickly and imaginatively rectified. Within the year boycott gave way to full, effective and revolutionary participation in the Tsar's election. Not prepared to tolerate a mild nuisance of a slightly critical Cadet *duma* majority, the Tsar shifted the goal posts yet again. New elections and new restrictions on the franchise were announced in the hope of producing a solid counterrevolutionary bloc.

Bolshevik participation in what was a travesty even of bourgeois democracy did not mean an end to debate between themselves and the Mensheviks. In fact debate continued and reached new heights. Of course, with the Unity Congress in 1906 this took place in the context of a reunited RSDLP (the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks constituted respectively the left and right wings till 1912 when the Mensheviks were expelled from the Party).

Given the underlying strategic differences, though this time on the level of electoral tactics, not the principles of internal organisation, two distinct views again emerged. From the very beginning they crystallised the universal difference between opportunism and genuine Marxism. That is why it is more than worthwhile concentrating on the 1906 election campaign and the debates around it.

Let us begin by outlining the parties and party groupings. On the extreme right there was the bloc of parties known as the Black Hundreds. These were counterrevolutionary, Tsarist parties. Parties that wanted to maintain the status quo, parties of the landlords, which organised and paid for anti-Jewish pogroms.

The main party of the bourgeoisie was the Constitutional Democrats or cadets. The cadets wanted reform, wanted a constitutional monarchy, and to get it they were prepared to threaten the Tsar with revolution. But what they were not prepared to do was to make revolution themselves. Revolution was seen as a danger which the Tsar's intransigence brought nearer. The cadets were themselves afraid of revolution, it was definitely something to be avoided. "To apply the term 'democratic' to the cadets, wrote Lenin, "to a monarchist party, to a party which accepts the upper chamber, proposed repressive laws against public meetings and the press and deleted from the reply to the address from the throne of the demand for direct and equal suffrage by secret ballot, to a party which opposed the formation of land committees elected by the whole people - means deceiving the people. This is a very strong expression, but it is just" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p311).

It should be said that those who did "apply the term" democratic to the cadets were none other than the Mensheviks. The cadets were the very people the Mensheviks looked to as the leadership of the revolution. That is why the Mensheviks made endless proposals for joint action with the cadets and the same number of excuses for their refusals and cowardice.

Anyway, to the left of the cadets was the Trudovik grouping which was supported by the peasant masses. The Trudoviks included non-party people, but at their heart was the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Popular Socialist Party; the latter being closer in spirit to the cadets, closer in spirit to the bourgeoisie than the Socialist Revolutionaries who



were the more genuine revolutionary organisation. It was in relationship to these parties and the classes they variously represented that the revolutionary and opportunist wings of the RSDLP argued. There were two main prongs to the Menshevik approach. First, the necessity of keeping out the Black Hundreds; they were the biggest evil. Second, as we mentioned above, making the bourgeoisie, ie the cadets, fight.

The Bolshevik perspectives were very different. Their view of politics was not determined by who was more evil and who was less evil. It was shaped by the needs of the working class, and by who was not revolutionary and who was. The landlords and the bourgeoisie were not revolutionary, the peasants were. Hence while the Bolsheviks wanted to beat both the Black Hundreds and the cadets, they wanted to get to the peasants through the Trudoviks.

## Defending parliament or using it?

While the Mensheviks had gone along with proletarian insurrection, barricade fighting and soviets in 1905, as the revolutionary wave dipped in 1906 and went into retreat, they returned to type. The Tsar's announcement of a more restricted duma and dissolution of the existing one made this plain to see.

In a desperate effort to defend the Tsar's 1905 parliament against the Tsar's 1906 parliament, the Mensheviks issued the slogan "a duma with real powers" and called for a general strike and demonstrations. For the Bolsheviks, defence of any sort of a duma was a diversion. They mocked the Mensheviks' duma cretinism, and went to the factories and working class districts agitating against a general strike and demonstrations.

Workers were urged against precipitative action. With the revolution in retreat but still not defeated, with the December uprising still fresh in everyone's minds, the Bolsheviks argued that what was needed was a constituent assembly born of revolution, not a Tsarist "duma with full powers". Instead of placing their hopes on an instant general strike and the fighting capabilities of the cadets, the Bolsheviks looked to the soviets, as "organs of the uprising" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p124).

To prepare the ground for this, to "enlighten and educate" the masses on the need for revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were prepared to participate in the Tsar's new election. So let us now turn our attention to the politics of this 1906 campaign. Here, the first thing that strikes one is the fundamentally different attitudes of the Party's two wings towards electoral blocs and agreements.

The Mensheviks proposed that the Party enter into an electoral bloc with the cadets. If the Party did not do that the masses would never forgive them. It was either the cadets or the Black Hundreds, and the Mensheviks had no hesitation about stating their preference between these two evils.

The reader will not be surprised to hear that the Bolsheviks were quick to disagree. They insisted that working class independence was the main question. Our "main task is to develop class consciousness and independent class organisation of the proletariat" wrote Lenin. Only that class can lead "a victorious bourgeois democratic revolution". Therefore class independence throughout the election and the duma campaign "is our most important general task" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p279).

The Bolsheviks did not only apply this approach to the cadets. It was applied to the Trudoviks, the Popular Socialists and the Socialist Revolutionary Party, as well. Here is Lenin's argument: "The argument about the proletariat and peasant character of our revolution does not entitle us to conclude that we must enter into agreements with this or that democratic peasant party at this or that stage of the elections to the second duma. It is not even a sufficient argument for limiting the class independence of the proletariat during the elections, let alone for renouncing this independence" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p280).

So in the cities where the working class population was concentrated, the Bolsheviks said that the Party "must never, except in case of extreme necessity, refrain from putting up absolutely independent social democratic candidates. And there is no such urgent necessity. A few Cadets or Trudoviks more or less (especially of the Popular Socialist Party type!) are of no serious political importance, for the duma itself can, at best, play only a subsidiary, secondary role" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p286).

For the Bolsheviks, the stress on working class political independence and the necessity of presenting independent candidates to the working class was a matter of principle. That is why in 1912 they refused to countenance even a bloc of working class parties. When their final split with the Mensheviks had been sealed by kicking them out, the Bolsheviks insisted on standing independently.

This is how one of the successful Bolshevik candidates put it: "The Bolsheviks thought it necessary to put up candidates in the workers' curia and would not tolerate any agreements with other parties or groups including the Menshevik-liquidators. They also considered it necessary to put up

candidates in the so-called 'second curia of city electors' ... and in the elections in the villages, because of the great agitational attitude of the campaign" (A Badayev *The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* p9).

## Partial agreements

Putting forward independent Party candidates, refusing to enter blocs, did not mean the Bolsheviks were oblivious to the advantages of "partial agreements". To understand what was meant by this it is necessary to say something about the Tsar's convoluted electoral law. The Tsar's duma was not elected directly. The Tsar thought it would be safer to divide the population into 'curias' or 'estates'. Each had its own weighting (the popular classes far less than their actual numbers), and with their differentiated voting power each curia would then elect 'electors', who would finally elect the actual deputies.

In the distribution of seats by these intermediate elected 'electors', the Bolsheviks considered "partial agreements" perfectly permissible (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p289). Lenin used the following hypothetical example to illustrate how it would work. If in the countryside there were 100 electors and "49 are Black Hundreds, 40 are cadets and 11 are social democrats" then a "partial agreement between the social democrats and the cadets is necessary in order to secure the election in full of a joint list of duma candidates, on the basis, of course, of a proportional distribution of duma seats according to the number of electors" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p291). Thus, in this case, if there were five seats up for grabs, the Bolsheviks saw every reason for completely excluding the Black Hundreds, that is, as long as the cadets were prepared to give them, the social democrats, one of the seats.

This would be facilitated by making it clear to the masses what arrangements were on offer and being negotiated. Who were the cadet electors going to make a deal with? With the revolutionary communists or the counterrevolutionary Black Hundreds? In this way the RSDLP could force the 40 cadets to do a deal with the 11 social democrats and leave the Black Hundreds out in the cold. Naturally, the same treatment would be meted out to the cadets if there was a possibility of doing a deal with electors inclined to support the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and in turn, if the arithmetic was favourable, every effort would be made to split away genuine revolutionary elements from this party.

Of course, not least in the cities, seats in the Tsar's duma were a secondary question. Here the "importance of the election is not at all determined by the number deputies sent into the duma, but by the opportunities for the social democrats to address the widest and most concentrated section of the population, which are the 'most social democratic' in virtue of their whole position" (original emphasis, VI Lenin CW p296). Thus in the cities there should be "no agreements whatsoever at the lower stage, when agitation is carried on among the masses; at a higher stage all efforts must be directed towards defeating the cadets during the distribution of seat by means of a partial agreement between the social democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p283).

## Lesser evil

Inevitably the Bolsheviks and Lenin were confronted with what we know as the 'lesser of two evils theory', a theory that is used against us, which is effectively meant to outlaw any independent communist activity in the electoral field. This rotten theory was in fact the main argument the cadets used to recommend themselves. As Lenin noted: "the whole of the cadets' election campaign is directed to frightening the masses with the Black Hundred danger and the danger from the extreme left parties, to adapting themselves to the philistinism, cowardice and flabbiness of the petty bourgeois and to persuading him that the cadets are the safest, the most modest, the most moderate and most well behaved of people" (VI Lenin CW p415).

In other words the cadets went to the electorate as the lesser evil and said 'vote for tinkering reforms, vote for what is possible, vote for safety'. They threatened the middle classes with the greater evils, the danger of, on the one hand, letting in the Black Hundred pogromists, and on the other, of Lenin and those terrible people who 'caused' all the bloodshed and disruption in Moscow in the dark days of December 1905.

Those who believed that the cadets were a progressive force were in their turn forced to adapt to, and even adopt, their logic. The Mensheviks did not want the working class to do anything that might frighten the cadets. Nothing must be done that might push them into the arms of the biggest evil, the Black Hundreds. To encourage the cadets along the road that led to the bourgeois revolution they wanted to support them with offers of joint lists, blocs and alliances. It was either that, said the Mensheviks, or the Black Hundreds.

Here is how Lenin summarised the Menshevik

platform: "Let the social democrats criticise the cadets before the masses as much as they like, but let them add: yet they are better than the Black Hundreds, and therefore we have agreed upon a joint list."

And here is how Lenin countered it:

"The arguments against are as follows: a joint list would be in crying contradiction to the whole independent class policy of the Social Democratic Party. By recommending a joint list of cadets and social democrats to the masses we would be bound to cause hopeless confusion of class and political divisions. We would undermine the principles and the general revolutionary significance of our campaign for the sake of gaining a seat in the duma for a liberal! We would be subordinating class policy to parliamentarianism instead of subordinating parliamentarianism to class policy. We would deprive ourselves of the opportunity to gain an estimate of our forces. We would lose what is lasting and durable in all elections - the development of class consciousness and solidarity of the socialist proletariat. We would gain what is transient, relative and untrue - superiority of the cadet over the Octobrist" (original emphasis, VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p258).

Nor was Lenin frightened by Menshevik warnings that independent communist electoral work would let in the Black Hundreds. As we can see he treated such arguments with the contempt they deserve:

"The ... flaw in this stock argument is that it means that the social democrats tacitly surrender hegemony in the democratic struggle to the cadets. In the event of a split vote that secures the victory of a Black Hundred, why should we be blamed for not having voted for the cadet, and not the cadets for not having voted for us?"

"We are in a minority", answer the Mensheviks, in a spirit of Christian humility. 'The cadets are more numerous. You cannot expect the cadets to declare themselves revolutionaries'.

"Yes! But that is no reason why social democrats should declare themselves cadets. The social democrats have not had, and could not have had, a majority over the bourgeois democrats anywhere in the world where the outcome of the bourgeois revolution was indecisive. But everywhere, in all countries, the first independent entry of the social democrats in an election campaign has been met by the howling and barking of the liberals, accusing the socialist of wanting to let the Black Hundreds in."

"We are therefore quite undisturbed by the usual Menshevik cries that the Bolsheviks are letting in the Black Hundreds run 30 minutes! All liberals have shouted this to all socialists. By refusing to fight the cadets you are leaving under the ideological influence of the cadets masses of proletarians and semi-proletarians who are capable of following the lead of the social democrats. Now or later, unless you cease to be socialists, you will have to fight independently, in spite of the Black Hundred danger. And it is easier and more necessary to take the right step now than it will be later on. In the elections to the 3rd Duma ... it will be even more difficult for you to dissolve, still more entangled in unnatural relations with the betrayers of the revolution. But the real Black Hundred danger, we repeat, lies not in the Black Hundreds obtaining seats in the duma, but in pogroms and military courts; and you are making it more difficult for the people to fight this real danger by putting cadet blinkers on their eyes" (original emphasis, VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p314-5).

In a nutshell the differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks amounted to the fact that where the Bolsheviks wanted a "completely independent election campaign", the Mensheviks wanted a solid cadet duma "with a large number of social democrats elected as semi-cadets!" (Lenin). Needless to say then, where the Mensheviks hoped and prayed for the defeat of the greater evil, the Black Hundreds, the Bolsheviks fought and worked for revolution. In pursuit of this it was preferable to have a duma consisting of "200 Black Hundreds, 280 Cadets and 20 social democrats" than a duma consisting of "400 Cadets and 100 social democrats". Lenin defiantly declared that: "We prefer the first type, and we think it is childish to imagine that the elimination of the Black Hundreds from the duma means the elimination of the Black Hundred danger" (VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p315-6).

To back up their position the Bolshevik's publishing house produced Russian editions of works by Karl Kautsky and Wilhelm Liebknecht. The highly influential Kautsky was full of praise for the 1905 revolution, the barricade tactics of the Bolsheviks, and dismissive of the revolutionary potential of the Russian bourgeois. Wonderful anti-Menshevik ammunition, and used to good effect. Liebknecht's pamphlet *No compromises, no electoral agreements* was if anything even more useful. We can get a taste of what it had to say from the preface Lenin wrote, which we might say turned the 'lesser of two evils theory' onto its feet. Here is a short excerpt:

"The class consciousness of the masses is not corrupted by violence and draconian laws; it is corrupted by the false friends of the workers, the liberal bourgeois, who divert the masses from the real struggle with empty phrases about a struggle. Our Mensheviks and Plekhanov fail to understand that the fight against the cadets is a fight to free the minds of the working masses from false cadet

ideas and prejudices about combining popular freedom with the old regime.

Liebknecht laid so much emphasis on the point that false friends are more dangerous than open enemies that he said: 'The introduction of a new anti-socialist law would be a lesser evil than the obscuring of class antagonisms and party boundary lines by electoral agreements.'

"Translate this sentence of Liebknecht's into terms of Russian politics at the end of 1906: A Black Hundred duma would be a lesser evil than the obscuring of class antagonisms and party boundary lines by electoral agreements with the cadets' ... Only bad social democrats can make light of the harm done to the working masses by the liberal betrayers of the cause of the people's liberty who ingratiate themselves with them by means of electoral agreements" (original emphasis, VI Lenin CW Vol 11 p403).

It has to be said that not only did the Bolshevik approach win the day at the RSDLP's 1907 congress in London, it went on to inform and characterise the tactics and strategy adopted and powerfully put into effect by the Third (Communist) International.

## Third International

The Third International was formed as a world party of revolution in 1919. Through its deliberations and resolutions it generalised the principles, strategy and tactics of the Bolsheviks, not least on the terrain of parliament and parliamentary elections. However, Comintern's main internal problem in its early years was not right opportunism, then represented by the so-called Two-and-a-half International and the rump of the Second International. No, the main internal problem of the early world communist movement was leftism.

Disgusted by official social democracy's corruption and venality, which culminated in the great betrayal of 1914, there was a widespread and deeply held feeling that in order to avoid the same fate, it was vital to stay clear of that modern day Sodom, the bourgeois parliament and bourgeois elections.

This was the position of many good militants in the International Workers of the World in the US, the left majority under Bordiga in Italy and the powerful Communist Workers Party in Germany. They said there should be no communist participation in bourgeois elections and no communist MPs. A similar 'left' communist outlook characterised the politics of the workers' committee movement in Britain as well as Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation (or Communist Party - British Section of the Third International, as she later illegitimately called it).

Nevertheless, while the resolutions of Comintern were often aimed at overcoming the internal problem of leftism, there can be no doubt that this was done in order to unite the communists against their main opponents in the workers' movement, the reformists and fake socialists on the right. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than on the question of parliament and parliamentary activity. At its 2nd Congress resolutions were agreed which insisted that the state form of socialism had to be the proletarian dictatorship and the soviet republic. That could never come about peacefully through the bourgeois parliament. The task of the working class was to shatter the bourgeois state, parliament included. For those who might still entertain illusions in 'local democracy' and GLC-style municipal socialism, it is worth adding that Comintern wanted to smash the local capitalist state as well and replace it with local soviets of workers' deputies.

None of this raised any objections from the 'left' communists. That was not the case though when Comintern presented the Bolshevik parliamentary experience - from the 1906 duma elections to the Constituent Assembly - as a model for the world communist movement as a whole. It was obligatory, said Comintern, for the leading party of the proletariat to use every legal position open to it. That included parliament. It should definitely be used as an auxiliary centre in the Party's revolutionary work. Parliament provided an excellent platform to disseminate revolutionary ideas, and to overcome parliamentary illusions among the masses.

Therefore Comintern was absolutely opposed to those who wanted to boycott parliamentary elections. Such an action would only be correct under the most extreme conditions. In the words of Comintern's resolution on 'The Communist Party and parliament', a "boycott of elections or of parliament, or a withdrawal from parliament, are permissible primarily when conditions are ripe for an immediate move to armed struggle for power" (*Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* p103).

A detour is worthwhile here. After all, there are those on the left who call for a boycott of the April 9 election. Overwhelmingly the arguments of these types do not, thank goodness, rest on Gerry Healy type claims that Britain is in the midst of a revolutionary situation and on the verge of an armed uprising. No, what we get is anarchistic moralising. The election is unfair, the Labour Party is pro-imperialist, neither a Labourite nor a Tory government will make any difference to ordinary people. All true. All irrelevant.



Not untypical is the Revolutionary Communist Group; an organisation which had its origins in the Labour-loyal SWP and the Labour-loving Trotskyoid milieu, yet ended up supporting Gorbachev, only abandoning him just before the August 1991 counter-revolution. Despite this long political journey the RCG has maintained a consistent political immaturity, which leads it, quite illogically, to link its justified hatred of the Labour Party with a "boycott of the election" (*Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism* February-March 1992). Thus in the name of breaking workers - most of whom it dismisses as pro-imperialist labour aristocrats - from the Labour Party, it actually leaves them with only Kinnoch as a parliamentary alternative to the Tories.

Of course, to really break workers from Labour it is necessary to reforge the CPGB and build a class-wide militant mass movement which can challenge capitalism. As Comintern made clear, that can never be done by standing aside from the political struggle represented by the bourgeois parliament.

## British 'exceptionalism'

Leftism is often the result of revolutionary impatience. In general therefore we should have a tolerant attitude towards its adherents. That was certainly Lenin's attitude as evidenced by his pamphlet *'Left wing' communism: an infantile disorder*. Strange though it may seem, we are constantly meeting right opportunist hacks who tell us to read this work of Lenin's. Of course, we have read it, and learnt much from it. The funny thing is that I expect that most of our opportunist critics have not read it, and if they did they would definitely not like it. Why then their uncharacteristic enthusiasm for Lenin? This particular work, or at least its title, is used to put an end to discussion and debate. Every time one of these parliamentary roadists meets one of our paper sellers they desperately chant its name as if they were quoting holy script to Count Dracula. Mere mention of it is meant to reduce us to speechlessness, perhaps even dust. Claiming the authority of Lenin for their miserable and hopelessly confused politics, they ignorantly imagine everything to the left of their *rightism* was the butt of Lenin's polemic. As we have seen, the 'left' communists Lenin was arguing with were characterised by their refusal, as a matter of principle, to put forward candidates for the bourgeois parliament. Not something of which we are guilty.

Nevertheless there are better informed critics, those to our right who have actually read Lenin's *'Left wing' communism*. What they quote against us is not the title of Lenin's pamphlet nor the general thrust of his polemic. What they lay hold of is Lenin's *specific* tactics, which applied to Britain and Britain alone, namely the attitude communists in 1920 should have had towards the Labour Party. In other countries the task Comintern set itself was to split militants from social democracy. However there are more ways than one to skin a cat.

Basically what Lenin proposed for Britain was that the Communist Party should seek *affiliation* to the Labour Party and should help bring about the election of a Labour government. What brought about this British 'exceptionalism'? It does not take long to tell the story.

In the late 19th century, compared to the rest of Europe, Britain represented something of a paradox. Its industry remained the most advanced, and its trade unions the biggest and best organised. Yet in spite of this, politically the working class operated as little more than the tail of the bourgeois Liberal Party. The Germans, French and Italians were building mass parties, but the powerful workers' movement in Britain was paralysed by the fear that any moves they made towards political independence would let in the Tories, the greater evil.

Anything that ended the paralysis of one of the world proletariat's most important detachments was therefore something to be welcomed by Marxists. That is why Engels supported initial moves by the TUC towards the formation of the Labour Party, and why, when it had been formed, Lenin spoke for, and actually seconded, its affiliation to the Second International in 1908.

Lenin had to deal with the fierce opposition of Henry Hyndman, leader of the Social Democratic Federation. Hyndman rightly pointed out that the Labour Party was semi-liberal, that it was committed neither to socialism nor the class war. Lenin had to agree. But he and other leaders of the Second International fervently believed that the momentum of political events would drive workers in Britain towards recognising the necessity for a revolutionary party.

Today the closest parallel would be the US. There the organised working class has no mass party and tails the Democratic Party in order to keep the Republicans out. If the US equivalent of the TUC decided to break from this rotten tradition, that would be an excellent thing. Whatever its inevitable faults, programmatic shortcomings and lack of scientific theory, such a move should be encouraged. It would no doubt be the result of rank and file pressure from below, and could well represent a stepping stone towards a real proletarian party. For Lenin in 1908 the Labour Party represented such a stepping stone.

None of this blinded Lenin to the actual political evolution of the Labour Party. Its role as a recruiting

sergeant in World War I, maintenance of social peace, serving in the war cabinet and applauding the execution of James Connolly definitely exposed it as the "bourgeois party of the working class". As with other opportunist parties of the Second International, it had joined the camp of the bourgeoisie. Lenin insisted that the Labour Party could not simply be judged in terms of its class base. To judge it one must begin with the politics of its leaders, who as he said were reactionaries of the "worst sort".

So why did Lenin want the CPGB to affiliate to this party and help it into office? Labour had the support of the majority of organised workers, workers who were rapidly moving to the left because of the horrors of World War I and the example of the Russian revolution. To contain these workers, to keep their loyalty, Labour brought back the social pacifist, Ramsay MacDonald, as its leader, and adopted Clause 4. Hence Labour claimed to have undergone a socialist conversion. Just how far Labour posed to the left can be gleaned from MacDonald's call for Britain to emulate Russia through the formation of workers and soldiers' soviets. MacDonald claimed that Britain could emulate Russia's socialism, but without violence, terror and civil war.

Lenin thought that the communists could gain a wider platform for their ideas by helping this left posing Labour Party into office and by being inside it, as had the British Socialist Party which provided the main body of members to the newly formed CPGB. Unfortunately that is just about all our critics remember about Lenin's writings on the Labour Party.

The fact of the matter is that while Lenin thought the fight to affiliate was a useful tactic it was not a strategic question. Indeed Lenin thought it would be excellent, even better, if Labour *rejected* CPGB affiliation. That would expose its true nature. The same spirit informed the idea of putting Labour into office. After all it had never been tested, it had never formed a government. By helping it into office the communists would, said Lenin, be supporting Labour "like a rope supports a hanged man". The communists would not be supporting Labour because it was a lesser evil compared to the Tories and Liberals. Labour in office would be exposed, attacked and undermined by the Communist Party.

Quite clearly Lenin's tactics were very much of their time. They were not dogma then and they should not be treated as such now. Not only did Labour reject, time after time, CPGB affiliation attempts, but in 1946 changed its rules so as to prominently close the door on new affiliations. Moreover Labour has now been tested in office on countless occasions. Workers have no *socialist* illusions in it. They might consider it a lesser evil than the Tories, but that is another question. That does not mean the specific tactics advocated by Lenin will never be relevant again. Just that they are not applicable now.

## The logic of opportunism

No one could have failed to notice the collapse of the 'official' world communist movement. It has to be emphasised that this was not the collapse of genuine communism, it was the collapse of opportunism. Unlike the Second International, however, this did not happen at one historical moment, ie August 1914. The collapse of the 'official' world communist movement was a long drawn out process, a death by a thousand cuts. That does not mean that we cannot locate qualitatively important turning points. We can; a particularly crucial one being the 7th Congress of Comintern.

What remains of 'official communism' regards this, last congress of Comintern in 1935, as a veritable peak of achievement. In reality it marked the Menshevisation of 'official communism'. Faced with the growing menace of German fascism, the Stalin leadership in effect ordered communist parties in the capitalist countries to subordinate their entire strategy to the task of defending the Soviet Union. Previously defence of the Soviet Union had always been firmly linked to the theory of proletarian internationalism, to single-mindedly furthering world revolution. From 1935 it became a thing in itself and necessitated a preservation of the international status quo. Thus instead of fighting to overthrow one's own ruling class the communist parties came to see their prime duty being to shift the existing capitalist political system towards an alliance with the Soviet Union.

The Mensheviks wanted to bloc with the liberals in order to keep the Black Hundreds out. After 1935 'official' communist parties pursued the same logic (it has to be said for those who blame Stalin for everything that they did so with an enthusiasm all of their own). The goal of revolution was consigned to an ever distant future, the virtues of parliament were discovered and with the fascist danger justifying every step to the right the communist parties sought to align themselves first to Labourites, then Liberals and finally 'progressive' Tories.

As Lenin warned the Mensheviks, such politics not only blunted the revolutionary consciousness of the working class, it obscured the true source of fascism, ie the politics of counterrevolution. Fascism in the 1920s and 30s was growing, not because of the

redivisionist designs of a particularly reactionary, narrow, stratum of the capitalist class, but because of the crisis and decomposition of the capitalist system as a whole. To really root out the fascist danger the working class had to carry on the work begun by the Bolsheviks in October 1917, not re-invent Menshevism.

Of course, having re-invented Menshevism 'official communism' found itself on a slippery slope which led straight to the reformist programme, the *British Road to Socialism*, and the organisational liquidationism of the Democratic Left. With fascism out of the way for the moment, getting rid of the Tories and then the Thatcherites became the main task which had to be completed before anything more ambitious could even be considered. In the 1980s this led the Eurocommunists to propose a "bishops to brickies alliance with the SDP and anti-Thatcher Tories. In 1992 the same people have set themselves up as an advice centre on tactical voting. Such sorry results are inevitable if a party ceases to subordinate itself to the task of making revolution and becomes, instead, infatuated with the bourgeois art of the possible and the opportunist fear of the greater evil.

As the Democratic Left no longer operates within the spectrum of working class politics it is easy to dismiss it and not bother studying the history of its denigration. This is a big mistake. The fact of the matter is that most of the left in Britain suffers from the same opportunism. Of course, it is nowhere near as developed. Nevertheless, if it is allowed to go unchallenged, allowed to spread, to gain influence over the minds of advanced workers, it will have the direst consequences.

We can get an idea of the problem if we ask a couple of basic questions. What is the main enemy, and what is the main task in Britain? For far too many the answer is the Tories and keeping the Tories out of government. Our answer is different. The main enemy in Britain is monopoly capitalism, and the main task is proletarian revolution. From these two starting points very different politics flow.

Those who consider the Tories to be the problem obviously regard the Labour Party, at least to a degree, as part of the answer. Able to give us chapter and verse about its rotten record in the past, how today it is tied body and soul to running the capitalist system, they nevertheless insist it is not quite as bad as the Tories because a Labour victory "will make change seem just a bit more possible" (*Socialist Worker* March 14 1992). Therefore these types line up behind Labour, act as its cheerleader and objectively help foster illusions in it, just as their political ancestors did in the Liberal Party a century ago.

We on the other hand, we who really believe monopoly capital is the main enemy do not have a descending list of which parties of monopoly capital are less bad than the others, let alone a never changing practice of supporting the bourgeois party which "the capitalists least want to see in office" against the bourgeois party which is the capitalists' first choice (*The New Worker* March 13 1992).

Britain might not be in a revolutionary situation, there might be no immediate prospect of socialism. That does not mean though that we have to choose between varieties of bourgeois parties. To suggest we must is to consciously or unconsciously follow in the footsteps of Menshevism. The original Mensheviks thought that the cadets would fight for revolution, the modern day variety seem to have assigned that role to the Labour Party. No, our task is to fight for *independent* working class politics. That means reforging the CPGB and winning for it the position of the natural party of the working class. It is with that aim we enter the April 1992 general election.

The April 1992 general election is the first 'normal' election we have seen in Britain for about a decade. What I mean by this is that British politics have returned to the two party mould of the 1950s and 60s which was disrupted by the upsurge in the class struggle of the late 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1960s Labour's 'In place of strife' proposals were blocked by communist-led working class action, Heath's Industrial Relations Act was sent the same way in the early 1970s, which also saw the freeing of the Pentonville 5 and two successful miners' strikes, culminating in a general election where Edward Heath went to the country asking 'who rules Britain?' and did not get the answer he wanted. No wonder there were rumours of coups and editorials in *The Times* declaring that Britain had become ungovernable.

In spite of the heroism of the miners, printers, steelworkers, and other sections of the working class the Thatcher years saw victory in the class war go to the bourgeoisie. Our leaders proved weak, lacked vision and were completely unable to break from the parameter of capitalist politics, above all our Communist Party had been wrecked by revisionists. Of course with the failure of the poll tax, and with her attitude towards the EC, Thatcher became a problem for the Tory elite. Nevertheless the fact that under Thatcher the ruling class shifted the balance of class forces in its direction created the conditions for Kinnoch's 'new realist' campaign, which shifted the Labour Party back to its post-1945 position as a *safe* alternative party of government.

Whatever *Marxism Today* and its alter ego *Living Marxism* claimed, the Labour Party never died. The SDP split was responsible for Thatcher's huge parliamentary majorities, not the decline in manual

workers or a shift in popular attitudes. To repeat, after its wobble to the reformist left in the early 1980s Labour has returned to the mainstream of bourgeois politics. Now the differences between it and the Tories are ones of nuance, not substance. Labour does not even pretend any longer that it will bring in full employment, junk nuclear weapons and introduce socialism. That is why the masses' only illusion in the Labour Party is that it cannot be worse than the Tories.

Therefore we say the call to vote Labour from the likes of the SWP, Socialist Organiser, Militant and the 'official communist' rumps is pure Menshevism. Unless checked, these organisations risk constituting themselves the left wing of the bourgeoisie, as the Mensheviks did in 1917. To quote Lenin: "This is a very strong expression, but it is just."

## Vote communist, do not choose who will misrepresent you

Our communist manifesto is a clear statement of communist principle. It is based on the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and what the working class needs at our stage in world history, certainly not on what the rotting capitalist system considers it can afford. Obviously candidates who stand on it should be supported.

We have also put forward a minimum platform of working class defence. If the candidates of other parties and organisations, including those of the Labour Party, support it, they deserve support too. Where there is no candidate prepared to put their name to it, we say write 'communist' across your ballot paper; no vote for those who refuse to fight capitalism, who can only misrepresent you.

Of course, as we know, Labour leftists like Ken Livingstone do not even mention socialism in their election addresses, let alone promise to stand on a platform whose logic is revolutionary. Such types deserve no support from communists and militant workers. What about the candidates of Militant?

Our organisation supported Lesley Mamhood in the Walton by-election last year. Why? Because we wanted Militant to break organisationally and politically from Labourism. We supported her "like a rope supports a hanged man". Outside the Labour Party, Militant would be easier to subject to communist propaganda and communist polemic. That has to all intents been achieved. Now we must tackle its politics. We do so *not* by giving it automatic support. On the contrary we do so by challenging it with our platform of working class defence. Militant might have cut itself lose somewhat from the Labour Party organisationally. It has not cut itself lose politically. The politics of its candidates are indistinguishable from left Labourism, therefore they should not be supported.

We make no apology for the fact that the main thing we want to do is to strengthen the fight to reforge the CPGB. That is why we are standing candidates on April 9. If it means Ken Livingstone or some other pale pink reformist losing their parliamentary seat, then so be it. It is a price worth paying.

The election of even a handful of communist MPs and ten thousand voters writing 'communist' across their ballot papers would do far more for the working class than a Neil Kinnoch government with a 200 majority. Indeed if it came to a choice we would prefer four communist MPs, plus 10,000 'unofficial' communist votes, even though this might mean in first past the post parliamentary arithmetic 400 Tories and only 200 Labourites (we consciously echo Lenin). This would not mean "demoralisation" as *Socialist Worker* tells its readers. It would mean that the working class is ready to fight, ready to go on to greater and better things.

What workers in Britain need is their Communist Party. The fight for this Party comes before the fight around wages, against fascism, the poll tax or getting Britain out of Ireland. Far from this being sectarian, damaging the prospects of such campaigns, we must recognise that without the Communist Party the working class is headless. Without the Communist Party, the working class is simply reduced to a slave class, with no prospects except momentarily lessening the *degree* of exploitation, not the fact that it is exploited.

This might be a period of reaction, and we are sure our organisation is not immune to its effects. But that does not mean communists should shut up shop and wait for better times. If our comrades are determined, disciplined and do not waver there is the opportunity to take important steps forward. One such step will be our general election campaign. It will be a step forward in the fight to equip the working class in Britain with the weapon it needs to once and for all end capitalism, liberate itself and the whole of humanity. Support it and strike a blow for freedom!

Jack Conrad