

# The LENINIST

Organising resistance p2  
Party Offensive p3  
Communism in Iran pp4-5  
Afghanistan p8

## Copy the German model

**W**HENEVER socialism is forced on the defensive, or the Labour Party loses an election, some hack academic is guaranteed to knock out an article telling us the working class is dead. The German working class is busy proving otherwise.

Cosy dreams of the triumph of liberal capitalism - of "the end of history", even - are being brought to grief by class conflict in a state that was always hailed as the model of class peace. Germany has been hit by the largest strike wave since before World War II. As one *Guardian* correspondent stated in late April, the German working class is rediscovering its class consciousness.

The 5.4% deal settled on by the three million strong state sector union OTV is unlikely to seal the lid back on German social peace. Some government figures are trying to put a brave face on their climbdown, saying this establishes a rate for wage rises below last year's 7% average. But the 11 day national strike by government employees looks like being only the "overture to the main event", as the *Financial Times* warned on May 9.

The agreement between the union leaders and state sector employers has not satisfied the combative rank and file of OTV. The agreed raise, less than a percentage point above the current rate of inflation, has angered many workers, who wanted 9% and more. Although the government has clearly lost, many government workers reckon they can take things further. OTV boss Monika Wulf-Mathies' promise to make the action "rougher and broader" clearly has not been anywhere near rough enough or broad enough for many.

The OTV membership's rejection of the 5.4% offer at the ballot box bodes well for round two getting good and rough. This rejection also offers greater room for future rank and file manoeuvre.

Already there has been some expression of independent rank and file action: in some cities workers have rejected the reformist slogan of "sharing unites", replacing it with "solidarity unites".

In addition, the state sector offer has established a *de facto* 5.4% minimum for what workers in the private sector will take as their base line. Engineering, print and other industrial workers are at this very moment squaring up for their own fight with the boss class. Germany's biggest union, IG Metall, with a membership of four million, is demanding a 9.5% rise, with a round of warning strikes to build up for this. Even the employers are saying that wideranging strikes seem inevitable. Soon millions of workers will be out, forming what could, in effect, be a general strike.

If, as the *FT's* Lex column says, the 5.4% agreement "should not of itself upset the Bundesbank", obviously the social instability that goes to achieve it is another matter. The bosses are already pleading poverty and warning of redundancies if strikes continue. But, as workers know, just how flush the bosses are generally depends on just how hard you fight. German workers do not seem to be in any mood to swallow capitalist

Germany's hot spring looks like leading to a hot summer



The reality behind Germany's 'model' industrial relations

sob stories about tight profits and appeals about the good of the nation.

The 3.3% offer to IG Metall workers was widely seen as provocative. Union leader Franz Steinkuler responded, "if the employers want conflict, they can have it".

So why is all this happening now? It quickly became apparent that Kohl's quick move towards unification after the collapse of the Honecker government was going to be a lot more costly than he claimed. The initial boost to profits "is fading fast now that it is clear eastern Germany will take much longer to turn around" (*The Economist* May 9). No profits are expected from eastern investment until 1996, and that itself is proving to be a rather optimistic estimate. As it stands, the ex-GDR is proving to be a large drain on resources. This has produced an unhealthy budget deficit and raised inflation and interest rates. *Die Welt* moaned that "more and more millions [are] used up in the east. Heavier and heavier becomes the burden of state debt" (May 4). And, of course, it is the German working class that is expected to carry the can. But the German working class says no.

The bourgeoisie believe that this is basically because Kohl was not coming up with the right verbiage back in 1989: "When speeches stressing blood, sweat and tears were needed, Mr Helmut Kohl offered only blind optimism" (*Financial Times* May 2). The fact that Helmut Kohl is not Winston Churchill probably does not bother German workers one way or another. Only a fool could seriously believe that 'stiff upper lip' speeches in 1989 would

prevent strikes in 1992.

The west German working class has grown to expect annual increases in real wages; as one striker's placard put it, "we want more money - don't you?" In the past, Europe's strongest economy has been able to grant this. Now things are not so easy. To maintain profits and stability, real wages must be forced down. Yet, given a well organised working class refusing *en masse* to let this happen, the German bourgeoisie is caught between two stools. Unlike Britain under Thatcher, it has not had the luxury of manoeuvring a divided workers' movement into a position where it can pick off one section at a time. The situation has developed too quickly, and the bosses are faced with the entire trade union movement, albeit with a rightwing leadership. As with the massive wave of strikes in Italy in 1970, Germany can look forward to its own "hot summer". Indeed, as *The Economist* remarked, drawing parallels between the performance of the two countries, "Germany is learning to do a brilliant imitation of Italy" (April 25). The real difference, though, is that Germany is a far more strategically important country. Any militant working class movement here will have far more profound international repercussions.

All this has rattled the coalition led by chancellor Helmut Kohl. The resignation of foreign minister Genscher provoked more than a few wry comments concerning rats and sinking ships; not least because it was one of Herr Genscher's favourite clichés before being elevated to the post of honorary vermin.

There is even an idea floated of a new 'super coalition' to paper over the cracks, comprising of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats; a sort of Tory and Labour crisis government, leaving out Genscher's FDP. Whatever the result, it is clear that the bourgeoisie's model of stable government in Europe has lost the initiative, at least for now, and thus its stability.

The European bourgeoisie have been free with advice to their German brothers - with good reason. Germany, as the dominant nation in Europe, is the keystone of the European Community. It has provided a stable, low inflation anchor for the European Monetary System, one of the prime economic coordinators within the EC and a stepping stone to further convergence between its member states.

This stability could well disappear with the appearance of German economic difficulties. German politicians, once prepared to buy European unity, are now complaining of "carrying the southern states" within the EC. There is a real worry within the ruling class that subsequent increases in German inflation may destroy the Exchange Rate Mechanism. The *Financial Times* editorial of May 2 pointed out that a "weakened and strife ridden Germany spells danger for the stability and prosperity of the entire continent. It would be hard to imagine a more difficult and risky time for the European Community to integrate the entire European continent". The rest of the editorial goes on to outline a series of increasingly unpalatable options for the bosses' Europe. Add this to the unresolved crisis in Eastern Europe,

and things no longer look smooth for the European capitalists.

The bourgeois consensus is that German workers will need to have their aspirations swiftly punctured if the bosses' Europe is not to end up one unholy mess.

While the bourgeoisie breathed a premature sigh of relief at the pay agreement of May 7, the *Financial Times* warned that such a government climbdown was "bad news for chancellor Helmut Kohl, bad news for Germany and bad news for Europe" (May 8). Oh good!

It went on to warn that the arbitration system between unions and employers was breaking down "just when Germany needs it most". All in all, the German situation is irritating a good many ulcers in the city.

Within Europe, German workers are showing the way. History, it is clear, still has a little way to run, by anyone's standards. European workers should look to this and 'learn German'. Things are beginning to shift throughout Europe, with strikes escalating in most of the member states of the EC. German workers are the cutting edge.

These developments have taken place in the absence of a militant, class action, working class leadership. The trade union bureaucrats have been forced into action by their members, but this membership has as yet no coherent voice for its demands. The lack of such a leadership makes possible the side-tracking and dissipation of workers' militancy. However, it would be surprising if working class initiative and organisation did not grow and gain influence in this climate, in the form of strike committees and other rank and file bodies. In itself, this is good: the current situation is a training ground in struggle for a massive swathe of German workers.

But it needs to go further. Strike committees, even the most militant, do not equip workers to fight on all fronts. That needs a political consciousness, and commensurate form of organisation, that goes beyond trade union struggle.

Disaffection with the main parties is growing. But at the moment this is being channelled into growth in support for the Greens and the ultra right Republicans, the latter replacing cant on blood, sweat and tears with rants on blood and iron. Both 'protest' votes are a danger to workers, the latter the biggest.

Politics, says the cliché, abhors a vacuum. The cliché is right. There is everything to fight for in Germany now, and a strong will to take up the challenge by the working class. We are seeing the biggest struggles of German workers since before 1933. Back then, Germany had the largest Communist Party in the western world. Communist politics are needed to fill the vacuum in German politics today, as the organised, collective voice of its workers.

This can only be forged in the heat of struggle. Workers in Germany are raising the temperature. Let us hope that the summer of 1992 is a long, hot one.

Alan Merrick



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

GOVERNMENT officials and ministers are boasting about strike statistics being the lowest recorded. There can be no question that this is not the result of workers' satisfaction and sense of well being. The low level of strikes is a mirror of working class confidence. This is entirely due to the fact that the balance of class forces has been tilted towards the bosses, crucially with the defeat of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-5. What this means for the mass of workers is speed ups, bullying, sackings and a general sense of powerlessness. That is why strike statistics are low.

Faced with this difficult situation, revolutionaries and militants have a duty to seriously examine the tactics and whole strategy we pursue in the trade union movement. This cannot be done by trotting out ready made formulas, automatically siding with one set of reformists against another set of reformists and imagining that all we need do is to propose strike ballots and strike actions at every opportunity. Another defeat is the last thing our working class movement needs and therefore we must do nothing that encourages precipitative or unwise actions. What is needed is patient work that prepares the ground for a victory; even a partial victory would be a great thing.

Here Germany can provide useful lessons. The main lesson of Germany is not, as so many left papers in Britain are saying, 'fighting spirit'. Workers in Britain - as heroically proved by the miners' Great Strike - have, under the right conditions, a fantastic fighting spirit. No, the main lesson Germany has to teach us is organisation.

German unions are organised along industrial, not craft or political lines. True, this was imposed from above; by the allies after 1945, with the help and advice of our TUC. We too need industrial trade unions. One industry, one union must be our slogan. Not imposed from above; though even then, with this and that proviso, we would welcome it. No, what are needed are industrial unions won and built from below, not least through cross union workplace and industrial committees and solidarity.

Many trade union militants have increasingly found themselves, often against their better judgement, reduced to tailing what passes itself off as the left in the trade union bureaucracy and staffing its election machine. Yet left reformist trade union leaders are not by definition better than right reformist trade union leaders. All trade union leaders represent their members' sectional interests to one degree or another. And we know from our experience that left and right in trade union terms has more to do with the way up the career ladder than fighting and leadership abilities.

Therefore we do not consider it heretical to say that Bill Jordan, of the AEEU, has a better record when it comes to his member's pay, conditions and hours than many a 'left' trade union leader. That does not mean we want to support Jordan politically, merely that we want to make it clear that we should not be seduced by the leftist rhetoric of this or that left reformist. We communists take the goal of revolution and the interests of the working class as a whole as our starting point, not which trade union leader employs the most radical rhetoric for reform within the existing capitalist system of wage slavery.

Certainly the leaders of the German trade unions are, in the main, right reformists in the Bill Jordan mold. But that does not mean that they and all their actions should automatically be branded as treacherous: what they are is limited. While it is true that some rank and file German workers, perhaps rightly, think that more can be gained, the recent OTV strike in Germany was undoubtedly a victory for the working class; it has given the rank and file in IG Metall confidence and assuredness in their fight for a 9.5% pay increase.

That is why the CPGB Provisional Central Committee sent its congratulations to the OTV, and why we have invited OTV members to the Workers' Europe conference in Edinburgh this December - the proletarian alternative to the European heads of state conference and their plans for a bosses' Europe.

Another reason for the workers' success in Germany is gaining a massive majority for action; 70%, 80% majorities were not uncommon. As with IG Metall's strike campaign a few years ago for a 35 hour week, it was not a matter of union bureaucrats issuing orders to an ill informed and unconvinced army. Nor was the strike conducted in unfavourable conditions and our side's unpreparedness. Union coffers were full and it was the government and the employers who were weak and easily divided.

It is, of course, correct for workers to oppose every attack by the employers. But our class has had enough of leaders who want to lead them into decisive confrontation no matter what the terrain, no matter what forces are ranged against us. Let us learn some German!

The Editor

## LETTERS

### On the road

It is a great shame that the theoretical poverty of the left in Britain prevents it from responding to the critique of reformist 'Marxism', comrade Jack Conrad's book *Which Road?*.

Having said this, there is one aspect of *Which Road?* that concedes ground to the reformist interpretation of capitalist crisis. Comrade Conrad quotes from the 'official' CPGB's old programme, the *British Road to Socialism*, the following passage: "to get profit, the goods produced have to be sold. And since a major factor in the demand for goods is the level of wages and salaries, restricting them also restricts the market in each country". Comrade Conrad follows that, "This theory is okay as far as it goes" (p11).

But the theory itself is not "okay as far as it goes". It is fundamentally wrong.

The capitalist system suffers from no essential problem of restricted markets. Where insufficient wages prevent continual expansion of the sale of consumption goods, capital undertakes production in other areas. The only condition for capital reproduction is to realise a necessary mass of profit, not to realise a mass of profit that is derived from the sale of wage goods.

If the BRS's argument was really "okay as far as it goes" it would posit capitalist crisis, at least in part, in the sphere of circulation. But capitalist crisis does not result from the rate of profit restricting distribution, and thereby bringing about an apparent excess of commodities. Marx's analysis of capitalist crisis in *Capital* is in no way conditional on such a scenario.

The barrier to capitalist production is not the limited consumption of the masses but, as Marx argues, "is capital itself". This barrier, he explains, is "that the development of the productivity of labour creates out of the falling rate of profit a law which at a certain point comes into antagonistic conflict with this development and must be overcome constantly through crises ... [Production] comes to a standstill at a point fixed by the production and realisation of profit, and not the satisfaction of requirements" (*Capital* Vol III p258). In other words, capitalist crisis results from the productivity of labour, not the finite consumption of the labourers (see Paul Mattick's *Economic crisis and crisis theory* for an excellent treatment of this).

Capitalist production breaks down when the total surplus value is no longer sufficient to put in motion the mass of total social capital. In other words, there has been an absolute overproduction of capital. Capital reproduction breaks down. This, and only this is the basis of general crisis, as outlined in Marx's *Capital*.

*Which Road?* is the most important work our organisation has produced. A debate around it, from our supporters and opponents, is a welcome and necessary factor in developing communist theory today. I hope I have just fired the first salvo, and not the only.

Alan Merrik  
London

Jack Conrad replies:

Unfortunately I do not think the reason why the left has not responded to our "most important" book (for the moment it is our only) can be put down to its "theoretical poverty". Much more significant is our tardiness and lack of serious application in circulating it. We have not really begun that task yet.

Despite this fault of ours, let me respond, briefly I am afraid to say, to our eminent comrade's thundering criticism. Obviously our analysis of the capitalist crisis is not to be found in the sentence the comrade plucks out of page 11 of the book *Which Road?*. Oh that it could be. No, our analysis will be found in commentary form, as it actually says on page 11, six lines down from what the comrade quotes, in sections 1.1.3.1 and 2.1. (above all though in

other published documents and articles). If the comrade would care to deal with our real analysis, rather than chasing reformist heresies, then we could really consider and deal with his criticism; a "first", perhaps devastating, "salvo" though he imagines it to be.

In the meantime we await in trepidation for our comrade to brand us, through guilt by association, with the BRS/Rodbertus theory that crisis under capitalism "solely" result from the "underconsumption of the working class" (see Lenin rather than Mattick). In case the comrade really wants to chase that particular kite let us say that we do not deduce crises from insufficient consumption. Anyone who reads *Which Road?*, as opposed to plucking out "reformist" heresy will see this. On the other hand, is the comrade telling us that the underconsumption of the working class is not a secondary feature of capitalism and its crises? Tell the working class that it over-consumes! No, as we should say in a programmatic document, it is a pauperised (relative and absolute) section of the population.

Comrades, let us engage in serious debate.

### International

The International Marxist Convention was held very successfully on May 2 1992 at Camden Town Hall, London. Speakers from Nigeria, Senegal, the UK, India, Bangladesh, Iran, Turkey, etc took part in the deliberations.

A Secretariat is being formed to promote these objectives. Interested organisations and individuals are requested to contact it on 081-597 4417.

The Convention also took resolutions on, among others: growing neo-colonial attacks, and interference in the internal affairs of the third world countries; racism, and the deployment of British forces in northern Ireland.

B Banerji  
Secretary to the steering committee

### Honest?

Your election supplement in *The Leninist* No117 has several points that I wish to address.

Firstly, your assertion to being the alternative for the working class. Your organisation stood candidates in just four constituencies. As you were not standing candidates in most of the major working class areas in the land, to call yourselves the alternative is mere posturing.

The RCG's position therefore of 'no vote for Labour' was more relevant, taking into account the millions of working class voters who unfortunately look to Labour as the only alternative.

Secondly, as you have no influence within the working class, you cannot be the vanguard in reality, even though you have declared yourselves as the Party. The vanguard is part of the class, its most advanced section, and does not exist in isolation from the class.

With regards to the childish remark about the origins of the RCG, look only at your own origins, from an organisation that had become wholly reformist. Still, in my opinion the direction in which an organisation is going is more important than its origins. This pointless comment indicates the level of political maturity that you have reached, as well as your ideological weakness. *The Leninist*, in truth, has yet to begin a rigorous, theoretical basis for the British proletarian revolution.

The comment about the RCG dismissing workers as 'pro-imperialist labour aristocrats' is a gross distortion of our position regarding imperialism and the split in the working class. You should read Lenin's *Imperialism and the split in socialism* and *The Revolutionary Road to communism in Britain* for further explanation.

The RCG always welcomes honest

and serious criticism, not flippant asides and distortions. Furthermore, you are always welcome to a disciplined and open debate, something that you have shied away from in the past.  
Neil Brown  
London

David Sherriff replies:

1. We do not claim to be "the" organisational alternative "for the working class". We are honestly, but with all communist seriousness and conviction trying to build that alternative. Yes, we only stood in four constituencies. This is not "mere posturing". We still have very limited resources and yes, our roots in the working class are shallow. Yet, while our propaganda might have been concentrated in four constituencies, we used this with great success as a platform, a springboard, from which to address the entire working class.

2. Your RCG leadership's position of 'no vote for Labour' and call for a boycott of the election is in our considered view exactly the sort of anarchistic moralism combated by Comintern at its historic, and still highly significant and relevant, 2nd Congress. We too oppose the Labour Party politically. But communists do not boycott elections to the bourgeois parliament. Only during a revolutionary situation might that be permissible.

3. Our organisation does not claim to be "the vanguard". Nor do we claim to be "the Party". As we have explained on countless occasions (see for example our 4th Conference documents) our "sole reason" for existence is to "reforge the CPGB". This will be done by politically organising the vanguard of the class. That is as you say, the "most advanced section" of our class. Here we are glad to note that you agree with us, not your RCG which seems, from what we read, to define the "vanguard" sociologically, not politically.

4. We do not consider our remarks on the origins of the RCG "childish". Nor are we ashamed of our own origins. We admit and readily discuss the faults and degeneration of our CPGB. But for all that we are proud of its history. Not least the fact that it was the only truly working class party our class has ever produced. Specifically, let us turn to the role of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB. We consider it a great achievement to have successfully reclaimed the name of our Party from the opportunists who were an insult to the proud name of communism.

5. We are confident about our theory. We defend and do our utmost to advance Marxism-Leninism. By the way, we reviewed the RCG's programme long ago and made clear our differences, not least its unfounded and un-Marxist claim that the black and Irish population constituted the revolutionary vanguard in Britain.

6. We too welcome "honest and serious criticism, not flippant asides and distortions". Why you say we have "always shied" away from it in the "past" is a mystery. Incidentally, if you are the Neil Brown we think you are - who "shied" away from being a sometimes hard working, if rather undisciplined, sympathiser of our organisation a year or so ago, without debate or even a letter - then all we can say is that we remain open to debate with you, including face to face. Yes, even if you insist, as evidenced by your first letter to us, on not being honest, let alone serious.

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

To reply to letters, raise questions or comment on articles in *The Leninist*.  
WRITE to The Editor,  
BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.  
PHONE us on 071-431 3135 or  
FAX us on 081-459 5905.

# Poised for victory



Communist militancy must be backed up by communist finance

**T**HE ANNUAL money-raising Offensive of the Communist Party of Great Britain is gearing itself up for the last push to reach our £70,000 target by July 31. This year's target has been set at an unprecedentedly high £70,000 to allow the Party to fulfil all the tasks it has set itself for this year.

Comrades so far have pledged to raise in excess of £40,600 - a total which includes the various one-off payments as well as targets to be raised by the end of the campaign itself. Actually in hand, we have around £20,400, most of which unfortunately has already been eaten up with servicing various debts.

At a Party meeting on May 10 in central London, we took extra pledges for the offensive and some £1,520 was actually handed in. This was a real boost to the campaign, which up to then had been suffering from a little bit of post election dip.

The May 10 meeting saw comrades stretch their individual targets to what one participant described (only half jokingly) as "breaking point". In an organisation overwhelmingly made up of young unemployed or low paid working class people, this is a heroic achievement. But it is important to emphasise to comrades that there is no lower limit on participation. One sympathiser is taking part in the offensive for the first time with a £25 target. We are pleased to welcome all comrades to the Party Offensive, at whatever level.

Having said that, we are hoping to stimulate competition at the other end of the offensive range, however. The individual target to catch is £3,627 (so far!).

So far, we can place a tick against all items on the list of priorities we started 1992 with. Centrally, the general election campaign of our Party was a real success, raising the banner of communism in the most effective and dramatic way possible during this hard period of reaction.

Yet we have come out of the campaign with some very heavy debts. This was inevitable. But these bills cannot be allowed to cripple the Party's activity for the rest of the year.

We still have to complete the publication of our *Communism Lives* book series. A recent correspondent to the paper complimented Jack Conrad on his work and commented that "hopefully the remaining three books in

the series are good!"

They will be, but we desperately need the finances to both print, package and promote them! These books represent the defiant response of communists to the ideological offensive unleashed by the triumphalist bourgeoisie in the aftermath of the collapse of existing socialism. They must be given the highest priority by our organisation, including providing the finances to ensure that they see the light of day as quickly as possible and are circulated worldwide.

An additional publication from the Communist Party, and one which readers of this paper will want to see in print as soon as possible, is a book which will set out the orthodox communist position on revolutionary parliamentarianism and its relation to the task of making the British revolution.

This new work by Jack Conrad will draw on the theoretical and practical legacies of the first three Internationals and the experience of the Communist Party in this country, including the most recent general election campaign of the Party in 1992.

A Party printworks - up and running during the general election - will dramatically expand the range and potential frequency of Party publications. But our press has no licence to print money ... unfortunately.

In the aftermath of the general election, the next major campaign the Party will run will be for its European workers' conference in Edinburgh in December of this year. We are planning to bring representatives of workers' organisations from all over Europe and beyond together at the same time that Major hosts the EC heads of government summit.

In fact, the alternatives for the workers' movement will be very starkly posed this December in Edinburgh. While Major and the political representatives of the European imperialist bourgeoisie concoct their plans to increase our exploitation, and while the Communist Party of Great Britain brings together workers from Europe and around the world to discuss a coordinated, militant response to their plans, another conference will also be taking place.

Under the auspices of the Scottish TUC, a conference committed to diverting the anger and energy of the working class of Scotland into the dead end of nationalism is taking place

simultaneously with ours. The Party will campaign to build our conference in Scotland posing the slogan - *Internationalism not nationalism!*

The conference will be a major breakthrough for the Party, a real step forward. Again, to make it a success requires finance up front, not months after the whole show is over.

With the dust settling from the general election campaign, work for the Edinburgh conference can begin in earnest. The Party's paper, *The Leninist*, will be very much to the forefront in the fight to build this important event. A series of articles in the paper will start to look at the politics of the working class movements of Europe - problems and a broad outline of the type of solutions that communists propose.

This will be matched by a shift in the emphasis of our paper in its domestic coverage. *The Leninist* has an unparalleled reputation on the British left for the clarity of its political line and willingness to cross polemical swords with any serious force. This is an aspect of our paper of which we are particularly proud and one which we do not intend to discard or repudiate.

During the general election campaign, however, we achieved more than an impressive series of technical breakthroughs. We made important strides forward in our fight to fill what we identified as a political vacuum - the absence of a viable working class alternative in this country. Our general election campaign took the message of communism - indeed, the message that the Communist Party was *not* dead - to literally millions of workers. We moved a little way during the 1992 election campaign to start to fill that vacuum.

Our Party - and with it, our paper - must now start to address questions of immediate, practical concern to the core of the working class in Britain, those organised in the trade union movement.

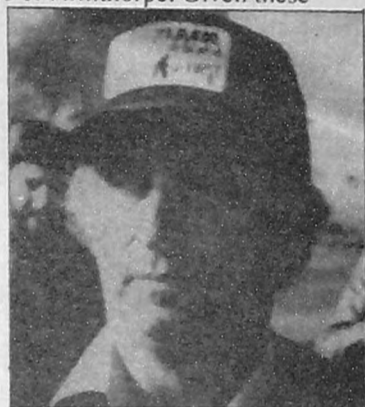
All of this needs money, not just noble intentions. Our organisation has never shirked challenges. Our largest Party Offensive ever is designed to meet the largest challenges our Party has ever set itself - dig deep for the 9th Party Offensive of the Communist Party!

Mark Fischer

On Thursday 7 May, the Railway, Maritime and Transport union announced the outcome of a ballot held amongst London Underground workers. The result was a two to one vote for taking strike action over plans by the management to destroy 5,000 jobs in the next two to three years, thus reducing the workforce to 16,000. It does not take much imagination to recognise the impact this will have on staffing levels and health and safety. The changes will result in workers having to operate for longer hours and to take on the duties of those posts being cut. At present the union has postponed calling a walkout on the tubes, to give management a chance to respond. Indefinite strike action is the most likely way of achieving victory. However, the low ballot in the face of such attacks indicates the lack of activity of the rank and file. To make any strike effective, it needs to be activated and presented with an effective strategy. Rank and file workers must control their dispute, preventing the RMT bureaucrats combining with the bosses to sellout the workforce. As the strikes of three years ago showed, the problem is not the lack of fighting spirit of tube workers, but of a fighting lead. NC

The miners are clearly on the defensive in the face of British Coal's attacks. Coal production is conditional on orders from the power industry; orders which might well reduce the number of pits to as low as 15 or 20. BC are therefore offering the lowest redundancy terms since the 1984-5 strike; starting with the miners of Armthorpe. Given these conditions, the next fight that miners

face will certainly be on the question of compulsory redundancies. Arthur Scargill's approach to this is to call for an all out strike of the NUM. But, from its position, this is almost what BC wants the NUM to do, to force them out all the quicker. Any fight in isolation is almost inevitably going to be crushed, repeating the tragedy of the Great Strike as a farce. Miners need to extend their struggle outside of the shrinking perimeters of the mining industry - let alone of the besieged NUM. If they are to put up more than a token struggle, then fighting organisation needs to be developed between all miners and powerworkers. To not build on a link that the bosses have made, and rely on, is industrial suicide. If NUM miners do walk out, they need to know that power workers will pull the plugs and other miners will not scab. The same can be said of transport workers on whom the power and coal industries depend. There is also considerable scope to coordinate miners' action throughout Europe, to pull in the different national industries through the International Miners' Organisation to defend the jobs and conditions of all European miners through European solidarity. DR



Scargill's intransigence is not enough. Miners need a winning strategy

At the annual conference of the National Union of Teachers the now ritualistic battle took place between the left and the leadership. On all key issues - salaries, testing and appraisals etc - the executive won, although they often had to use administrative methods to do so. A motion was passed affiliating the union to both the Anti Racist Alliance and the Anti Nazi League, but this hardly represents any serious commitment to oppose racism or fascism. There was no discussion on the political character of these groups or their policies. In comparison with previous years, the left continues to retreat on many fronts. At last year's conference, the left fought around the demand that teachers should boycott SATs testing. This year they were happy to suggest a boycott by parents. Both left groups, the Socialist Teachers' Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting Union now seem to only exist for conference, relying on a thin layer of activists. They exist to formulate motions and to capture positions in the union structure. They are as much prisoners of the union structure as the bureaucrats. Both left groups lack the political will to centre activity on classroom teachers or to challenge, when necessary, the executive with unofficial action. If teachers are not to face more defeats in the post election period, a militant fightback is required, organised by school groups. TC

Following good totals in March and April, the May fighting fund is very slow off the mark. To ensure that we once again break through the £600 barrier, I would ask all our supporters to consider these measures: 1. The 20% income tax band may have been an election bribe, but it means those in work can send us £8 a month, and not even miss it; 2. With interest rates down by over 1/2%, those with mortgages can send us say £10 a month, at least until they go up again; 3. Now that a new style £10 note has been issued, you may still have some old ones left - send them to the fund now!

## Urgent financial adjustments



Vernon Douglas  
Fund organiser

# Communism in Iran

Last year, the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar) held its first congress. We interviewed M Kia, representing the international secretariat of the Central Committee, about the congress, the tasks facing communists in Iran and the world situation since the collapse of the Soviet Union

This is the first congress our organisation has had, which takes place 12 years after Rahe Kargar declared itself. The organisation came into being as a result of many of the cadres from the guerilla groups who fought the Shah in the 1960s and 70s. These cadres gathered together in the prisons and essentially made a critique of the type of armed struggle that was prevalent at that time; an armed struggle from young activists away from the working class, who theorised why it was impossible to organise that working class.

It is important to recognise that the guerilla movements were a revolutionary turn in response to the vacillations and betrayals of the Tudeh Party [the 'official communist' party in Iran] after the anti-Mossadeq coup of 1953. But it was done without the working class. It is only through the working class, helping the working class to organise itself, that a successful revolutionary movement can be built. And indeed it was this criticism which allowed Rahe Kargar to come together and eventually declare itself two months after the February 1979 revolution.

I think it is very clear when you look back at this that, although we did criticise the guerilla milieu, we ourselves were drawn from that environment. We carried within ourselves the seeds of our past. It took us a lot of time, mistakes and indeed blood to shed

such a thing on a purely technical basis, it's always on concrete issues.

The thing at that time was about Stalin and Stalinism. It was something that was never fully resolved with the Fedaii organisation. There was also a very strongly anti-Soviet tendency in that group at that time. They were more anti-perestroika than we were at that time. These and other issues were linked together quite closely, but it also reflected important intra-party democratic issues.

It was out of these questions that the leadership decided to convene a congress, firstly to have an elected leadership and secondly to adopt a party programme and party rules. It has taken two years to organise the congress, because we were insisting to have the largest representation possible within the organisation and that it must have heavy representation from the internal organisation. I am proud that we were able to achieve these aims: the congress did encompass a very wide section of the organisation. It was truly representative.

Did you adopt a definite programme and rules there? I believe that there was an unresolved disagreement on what constitutes membership of the organisation.

This is not correct. We did indeed resolve the

of the programme [see box]; any member would have to believe in these fundamental principles, and to follow and implement, if not believe in, the programme in its detail.

We then went on to elect a new Central Committee, which was very important for us. After all, the previous Central Committee was selected on the basis of the militancy and experience of the cadres. This is the first Central Committee to be elected by the organisation as a whole.

What about the question of dropping the formulation 'dictatorship of the proletariat'? This sounds very much like the process that went on in the 1930s and 40s within the world communist movement, particularly in Europe. It was a move towards gutting the concept of the state of a class content, and so of its revolutionary content. Of course, it was justified at the time as being abandoned because the phrase had been discredited, but the content was still retained. Nevertheless, the results were still the same. It laid the basis for the adoption of the explicitly reformist *British Road to Socialism*, programme of the old CPGB, in 1951. Many comrades would be worried about such moves today from Rahe Kargar, especially in the context of a general retreat of the international working class movement.

Firstly on the question of the wording: we have replaced the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat' with 'the rule of the working class', which to our minds is exactly the same. If you look at our programme, it speaks of the rule of the working class and "government like a commune". The content in the programme is exactly that of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

So why did we remove it? There were a number of reasons. The first reason is that the use of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the 'official communist' parties had come to represent the dictatorship of the party.

But the formulation was actually dumped by the 'official communists' by the 1950s.

Not all. Some of the parties maintained it, such as the Iraqi and the Cuban parties. It is a substitute for a party-state. This changes it from the content given to it by Marx - who, incidentally, only uses it about 12 times - which was that of the dictatorship of a class, essentially the *democracy* of that class. He saw the dictatorship of the proletariat as the dictatorship of the majority, in the same way that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is the dictatorship of the minority. In other words, it was to bring forward the idea that this was the rule of the majority, which was the dictatorship of the proletariat and its allies.

It's never simply reduced to democracy alone. For instance, Engels comments that, if you look at a revolution, it is the most dictatorial thing you are ever likely to see. The Russian revolution, even at its highest phase, was never that democratic, because of Russia's backwardness and isolation. But when they used the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat, this was the context in which they used it, particularly in the Erfurt programme, which Engels had a hand in. The programme of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party, written by Plekhanov, is the first time the formulation itself is ever used in a party programme, if I am correct. So in all the programmes before this, those which Marx and Engels had a hand in, where the content of this was used, the phrase itself was not.

Engels spent a good bit of ink attacking the Erfurt programme for its classless notion of the state. The programme was essentially the creation of the revisionist Bernstein and the centrist Kautsky. But this attack wasn't because it doesn't use this particular phrase, but because the content is absent. Anyway, the other reason for us changing the formulation is the content that the bourgeoisie has given to the term: that of an oppressive, 'dictatorial' regime, the like of which we have seen in Eastern Europe. But I believe we have kept the essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat in an unambiguous way. The wording is quite clear in our programme. We have formulated it to make sure there is no chance of any 'ifs' and 'buts' on this.

As another example, we have also removed the formulation 'Marxism-Leninism' from the party programme, instead saying we are a communist organisation. This is to draw a line between us and the 'Marxism-Leninism' of 'official communism', a term which originated with Stalin. Calling ourselves a communist organisation makes it quite clear what we are. It doesn't mean we don't agree with Lenin. We do.

Surely the point isn't that these things have been misinterpreted. The programme isn't a response to the popular usage of words, but a scientific document, with a scientific use of terms. But it is to make clear the division between the form



## Fundamentals of the programme

- The communist identity of the organisation, which fights for the overthrow of capitalism, the smashing of the bourgeois state machine and for the victory of socialism.
- The nature of the organisation as a workers' party.
- The struggle for the overthrow of the Islamic republic regime through a mass revolution led by the working class; to implement the anti-capitalist struggle, the struggle to establish the sovereignty of the exploited majority on the exploiting minority (a Commune-like state) as the only alternative state guaranteeing the transition from capitalism to socialism; and the struggle for unconditional freedoms and universal right to vote.

that past and shed those members who carried heavier loads than ourselves. Although we actually criticised the left's lack of links with the working class, we were initially not that different.

It was during the Iran-Iraq war that the first nationalist tendency in our organisation arose, taking a somewhat defencist position, which was calling for defence of the country through attacking the government. Moving from direct to indirect confrontation with it, it showed the dual nature of our views at that time, but we corrected this fairly quickly. And again, when the American embassy crisis came along, and the Tudeh Party took a line that was strongly defencist of Khomeini, we were unable to confront it directly because of doubts within our own organisation. A crisis began to develop in our organisation, which came to a head in 1981, around the Mujahedin's premature coup attempt. Then the real crisis broke out in our organisation, when many cadres said 'let's sit down and talk'. This was at a time when the regime was hitting the left and progressive forces with all its might, and we were desperately trying to remove our forces from under its blows. After this, many of these cadres left us.

It was then that we were able to develop thorough criticism of our previous attitudes, particularly our critique of populism, of being unable to see clear the sharp divisions between the working class and the other classes. We then expelled those in the organisation who continued to defend these populist views. This was the first real split in the organisation. This enabled us to resolve this crisis, going in to the working class and establishing our cadres within its ranks. This took us perhaps two years, during which some very able cadres lost their lives, including eight comrades from our Central Committee. We have been able to retain those links. I can say the majority of our cadres within Iran are either within, or very closely linked to, the working class. We also took the decision to remove our leadership from Iran.

The later split took place two years ago, as to whether there should be open and unguided debate within the organisation, or whether the Central Committee should be able to determine what debates took place in the organisation's press, because of facilities, etc. This was instigated by people that had joined us from Rahe Fedaii, arguing that any debate should be open and unlimited, even if only one member wants that debate. The group was then expelled because they refused to submit to decisions by the majority.

What was this about? After all, nobody ever raises

question of membership. Both programme and rules were passed by the congress, along with an organisational report by the Central Committee. We also passed the political report from the CC, with quite a lot of changes. It was a very lively congress. The debates were very open.

The political report had the most discussion, particularly about the expulsions of two years ago. There was quite a lot of disagreement. Many argued that the leadership potentially did not have to expel this minority, that this could have been avoided. In the end, a resolution was passed by a narrow majority; that the way the leadership conducted the debate with these comrades was wrong, but that when they started breaking discipline, then expulsion was unavoidable.

We also had an internal and a financial report, which we are not publishing, and resolutions on the labour movement in Iran, women and internationalism.

The debates in the congress were completely open, and will be published outside our organisation for the rest of the left to look at.

Two debates were particularly important. One was on party democracy. The other dealt with the question of power: is socialism possible today, or should we as a communist organisation at this time limit ourselves to the fight for democracy? It is quite clear that the vast majority of our organisation believe that it is necessary to fight for socialism today. But there is a minority who say that this is not the case. At the congress it was clear that this debate had only started: neither side had said its last word. So it was agreed to continue this debate openly to the next congress, with the proviso that it is within the framework of overthrowing the Islamic regime. We will not allow within our papers a debate based on the reform of the regime.

We need to continue the debate to determine where the real dividing lines are between comrades. At this point, the debate has not clarified this. They have not crystallised in a proper way.

One of the main questions has been 'what is the definition of a member?' A member would have to obey the programme of the organisation. But the question is, for those comrades who do not believe in the immediacy of the fight for socialist revolution, contained within the programme, how could they remain within the organisation or, for that matter, recruit others to the organisation on the basis of the programme? The very mature way in which the congress handled this was to take the main elements

of state that existed - and failed - in Eastern Europe and the socialism we are fighting for.

One of the other important points that came out of the party congress, that is fundamental to the programme, is that we can now draw other organisations into debate on the question of unity. We are already doing this with the Fedaii organisations, in particular those who left Keshgar, and a section of the Fedaii minority. Interestingly, one of our disagreements with these organisations is on our insistence of the working class essence of the post revolutionary regime.

**So you see yourselves as an organising centre for revolutionary unity?**

I think there is the possibility of attaining unity with a number of organisations on the left in Iran. What the name of that party will be would be decided by its founding conference.

**What are your basic prerequisites for this? Your programme?**

The basic prerequisite for this is nothing less than the fundamental points of our programme and its overall strategy: the revolutionary overthrow of the Islamic regime and the establishment of socialism. One can debate questions such as the fight for a seven or an eight hour day, etc. within this context.

There is a chance now to build a united Communist Party in Iran.

**On Iranian left politics, what has happened to Tudeh?**

Tudeh has split into so many factions I have lost track. In essence, it was a foreign policy organ of the Soviet Union. When there is no Soviet Union to have a foreign policy, the *raison d'être* of that party disappears.

The last time we spoke about the Soviet Union extensively was at our international school in May 1990. The question comes up in your general secretary, comrade Shalguni's, address to the congress, which I thought was good but rather brief. What is your analysis of this situation now? The general view is that perestroika might have succeeded in renewing Soviet socialism. But it needed to broaden and deepen democracy, which it didn't do. In fact, it didn't even scratch the surface.

There is also the realisation that the bureaucracy was incapable of deepening democracy to the level where it negates its own existence. From that point of view, every movement that comes from above that is not accompanied by a movement from below is bound to falter and fail. This leaves two avenues open to it: either a rapid restoration of capitalism, or letting society fall into chaos.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, we look to the future with a great deal of hope. We look at a world in which much of it is starving, where the inequality of capitalism is developing in a deeper and deeper way, even within the advanced capitalist countries, where it is developing more islands of absolute poverty and destroying the world's natural resources, capitalism clearly does not have the answer.

Third world revolutions are inevitable because of the mass poverty that is occurring there. Nothing can stop this but revolution. I believe that the confrontation between capitalism and the working class will now become more acute.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has opened the way to a multi-polar world, which is trying to create structures which are global, in order to maintain imperialist hegemony. Within these structures are developing increasing antagonisms.

But now, surely, we are in a situation where the opposition to imperialism, in the shape of the Soviet Union, has slit its own throat. Imperialism has been strengthened materially and ideologically. This has affected so-called Third World revolutionaries who relied on Soviet support. So we aren't just seeing a regional defeat, but a world one.

At the moment there is no question that the balance of power has shifted in favour of imperialism. But on the one hand we have a situation where, as I said, the antagonism within capitalism are coming to the fore. On the other hand, there is an ideological and organisational vacuum of the left as an alternative. And therefore what you can see is a contradictory situation of anti-capitalist movements developing with reactionary elements either within them or in parallel. An example of this is the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and also nationalism. So for that reason we could see many revolutions taking shape with profoundly reactionary and backward looking ideas, alongside radical and forward looking elements, because the revolutionary left that focused these struggles before is no longer there.

But in the future these economic antagonisms between imperialist poles will manifest themselves far more clearly in a political form. As an example, take the Middle East: the US has beautifully excluded both Europe and Japan. One of the aims of the Gulf War was not just to knock down Iraq, but to secure the region's oil for the US. So it was a war by proxy: the bombs that were falling on Baghdad were also falling on Berlin.

One thing you said before - that the demise of the USSR has removed the basis for many sectarian divisions on the left - reminded me of a similar view that could have been taken after the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia. After the defeat

of this experience, which pulled apart Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and others along different strategic lines, it would be possible to recombine. But on the other hand, this 'dress rehearsal' showed the way different sections of the left operate in struggle, and act as a guide to the future. So, if anything, we should learn from the experience of dealing with those who failed to even see what was happening, and distance ourselves from them even more. What happened this time shows us what these people will do next time.

Let's look at it in a broader way. If you look back over the last 70 years, look at people such as Bukharin and Trotsky, we must recognise that they were right in some things they said. For instance, it was right to attack Trotsky's policies on China, but there were other policies of his that were correct. We need to look over all this and learn from it.

Some sections of the left did not make the correct decisions, and damaged the whole of the revolutionary movement. From this point of view, I think what you say is correct. But some of these elements, if they remain true to their alleged radicalism, can learn objectively, in the same way that we have learnt. I think it an unrealistic thing to say that we are the only ones that are going to be right on all issues.

There are points of unity on various questions that were impossible to imagine five years ago. Take the question of unity more broadly: what is the slogan that can unite globally the broadest section of the left and other progressive forces? I would say that this is the fight for a democratic international order. The right of nations to go their own way, for instance with Cuba. Now this sort of order is not possible within an imperialist world, but in the process of fighting for it, you can unite many forces. In the same way, imperialism cannot give real democracy, but that doesn't invalidate the fight for such democracy. What do we see as the task of communists internationally now?

Capitalism has become global in a way it never was before. Any movement anywhere in the world is inseparable from anywhere else. That is why I think unified action by the left, those who have the struggle for socialism on their immediate platform, becomes an urgent task. The greatest impediment to that is the ideological differences that have become accentuated by what has occurred over the last six years. One of the key tasks, therefore, is to organise an ideological debate on a global scale, to discuss in a systematic manner the various problematics thrown up by the experience of the last 70 years. Without that, it is impossible to move onto the next stage, which is to draw closer. If you look around the world today, one thing is very apparent: with the collapse of the 'official communist' parties, radical movements are looking around for allies, like-minded people, internationally. Objectively, the conditions for the drawing together of socialists has not been so good for decades. What is missing is the subjective factor: real or imaginary barriers.

**But to what extent are people looking for answers? My experience is that where people are looking for allies, they are not looking for new answers: that there is a period of ideological retreat.**

Deep seated sectarianism plays a part here. I think conditions do exist to draw people in, maybe only on particular questions initially. We, certainly, feel the need to open up this debate; while we have answers, we do not have all the answers. There does not exist one correct line: there is of course a correct line, but one group does not necessarily hold all the correct answers.

## Who are the Fedaii?

The Organisation of Iranian People's Fedaii Guerrillas (OIPFG) was established in the 1960s by revolutionary youth, disaffected by Tudeh's reformism. The Fedaii responded to the inactivity of the working class by adopting a populist guerrilla strategy under the guise of Marxism. This was first implemented in an attack on the Siahkal military barracks.

When the Iranian revolution of 1979 broke out, the Fedaii was thrown to the fore, exploding from a cadre of under 100, to hundreds of thousands. The sudden mass popular revolt disorientated the Fedaii. It first dropped the guerrilla strategy and then underwent a major split. The majority of the leadership around Farokh Negahdar was drawn towards the betrayal of Tudeh, supporting the new Khomeini regime and rejecting the previous guerrilla strategy to become the OIPF (Majority). The minority opposed the Islamic regime, retained the old strategy, and later underwent many other splits (to which Rahe Fedaii as a splinter group belonged).

The Majority later underwent another significant split, in December 1981. A group around Central Committee member Ali Keshgar walked out over its accommodation to Tudeh and the Islamic regime. That group later split in two.

All sections have been thrown into varying degrees of crisis by the collapse of the world communist movement.

# Just a phrase?

## A note on the dictatorship of the proletariat



Lenin: the dictatorship of the proletariat is "the very essence of Marx's doctrine"

**T**HE DICTATORSHIP of the proletariat has always been a central point of debate among those who consider themselves Marxists. For people as diverse as the 'pope of Marxism' Karl Kautsky and even Red Action, this is a 'mere phrase', used on occasion by Marx, but one to which he gave little significance. On the other hand, for Lenin, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was "the very essence of Marx's doctrine", an essence which he defended in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Renegade Kautsky*.

Reading Marx, it is apparent that Lenin's view of the importance of this idea is the correct one. Even when the formulation itself is absent, such as in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, the content of this is central to the strategy of the document.

In 1850, Marx stresses this in a letter to the *Neue Deutsche Zeitung*, arguing that socialism "is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of all class distinctions generally" (quoted in *The Socialist Revolution* p88).

Marx emphasises a number of times that this is the necessary outcome of the class struggle. The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, where the masses of Paris arose and established the world's first, if short lived, workers' state, was to confirm this for Marx and Engels, and they were to return to this on numerous occasions. In particular, they were critical of the Commune for not being dictatorial enough in crushing its enemies - leading to the defeat of the Commune and the massacre of the communards in May 1871.

This experience was expressed in a programmatic fashion in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* of 1875: "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" (original emphasis *ibid* p232).

The fact that the comrades of Rahe Kargar have chosen to drop this formulation from their programme is cause for concern. It is true that the 'rule of the working class' in effect means the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Indeed, Marx and Engels often use the two phrases interchangeably. But why sacrifice one for the other - particularly the more scientific for the less scientific? And, more importantly, why now?

The same could be asked of dropping the term 'Marxist-Leninist'. Yes, this did originate from the communist movement in Stalin's time. But why abandon it now when this is exactly what Stalin's creatures of 'official communism' are doing? Surely this is the time to swim against the current, and retain the names Marx and Leninism, if only because the traitors of 'official communism' are reneging on it.

Lenin, in *The Renegade Kautsky* sharply attacked sleight of hand attempts to sideline the dictatorship of the proletariat by calling "this classical reasoning of Marx's, which sums up the whole of his revolutionary teaching, 'a single word' and even

'a little word', is an insult to and complete renunciation of Marxism ... Kautsky must know that the formula 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is merely a more historically concrete and scientifically exact formulation of the proletariat's task of 'smashing' the bourgeois state machine, about which both Marx and Engels, in summing up the experience of the Revolution of 1848, and, still more so, of 1871, spoke for forty years, between 1852 and 1891" (quoted in *The German Revolution and the debate on Soviet Power* p325).

Although Rahe Kargar is far from regurgitating the positions of Kautsky, the almost exclusive concentration on *democracy* in its formulation does not accurately reflect the scientific content of the formula. If anything, it is reminiscent of Kautsky's adoption of the idea of 'pure democracy'. One example of this in the past may well be Rahe Kargar's late realisation of the counterrevolutionary nature of Gorbachevism, to which it previously extended critical support because of its advocacy of 'democracy'. If the comrades had properly considered what democracy, and for which class, they might not have fallen into this trap. Having got out of it, somewhat late in the day, the comrades are in danger of digging themselves another by 'modifying' scientific communist formulas.

Although Rahe Kargar's formulation emphasises *working class democracy*, it, like Kautsky, forgets to see at the core of this that "the fundamental feature of this concept [is] revolutionary violence" of the working class (*ibid* p330).

Democracy - of any kind - because it is a form of state is also an expression of *unfreedom*, rather than freedom. For instance, as Bukharin and Preobrazhensky's *ABC of Communism* states: "The dictatorship of the proletariat is incompatible with the freedom of the bourgeoisie". *The Platform of the Communist International* from the first congress of 1919 also stressed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was first and foremost "an apparatus of repression" on behalf of the working class.

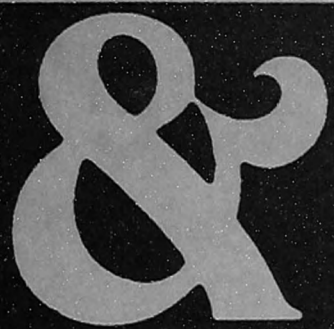
Democracy is only half the question. To talk of democracy, even working class democracy, and to leave it there is incorrect.

Now, if we were in a period of advance, of revolutionary gains by the working class; if the comrades of Rahe Kargar were knocking on the doors of the presidential offices in Tehran, their present formulation would be no real cause for concern. But, as we both recognise, the world's working class is in a period of enforced retreat. The bourgeoisie are on the offensive, ideologically and politically.

Under such conditions, to concede one millimetre on ideological questions - especially one as important as this - is dangerous. The whole future of the revolutionary movement is conditional on communists swimming against the stream today. That entails a resolute defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, not an apology for it and an attempt to find a less 'offensive' formulation.

Communists today must take that offensive, defend and develop our key formulations in theory today, so as to make them a reality tomorrow.

Alan Merrick



## OUR HISTORY

# Lenin on Labour

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

**T**HE COMMUNIST Party's attitude towards the Labour Party has been a controversial issue since before the foundation of the CPGB. On August 1 1920 the first congress voted narrowly in favour of affiliation to the Labour Party, but our application was rejected by the Labour Party's national executive six weeks later.

William Paul, who had spoken against affiliation at the congress (see 106), was given the important post of CPGB delegate to the Communist International, and was able to discuss with Lenin how the Party could best take on and expose the Labour Party. His account of their meeting was published in the Party's weekly paper.

Favourite dogmas of the left today include Lenin's advocacy of voting Labour and his urging of the CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party. The following article puts both points into historical perspective, as specific tactics for the time, to enable the young Communist Party to discredit Labour through its own revolutionary practice.

### Lenin on communist tactics in Britain

Lenin ... proceeded to discuss the attitude of the Communist Party towards the Labour Party in view of the much talked of forthcoming general election. His views on the subject showed that he abhors the type of revolutionary who has a canalised, or single track mind. Lenin looks upon every weapon as necessary in the conflict with capitalism. To him, as a good student of old Dietzgen, every weapon, every policy and every problem must be examined in terms of its relations to the needs of the moment and the means at our disposal. This explains why he does not go out of his way to extol one particular weapon. He clearly realises the value of revolutionary parliamentary action, but he also understands its limitations as a constructive power in the creation of a workers' industrial republic. To Lenin the test of the real revolutionary communist is to know when to use a given weapon and when to discard it.

Talking on the Labour Party, Lenin said he was very glad to learn that it had refused to accept the affiliation application of the Communist Party. It was a good move to have applied for affiliation, because the refusal of the Labour Party to accept communists in its ranks showed the masses exactly where the Labour Party stood. Henderson had thus unwittingly paid a great tribute to the growing power of revolutionary communism in Britain by being afraid to have aggressive communists in his organisation; and the Labour Party, by its own action, in turning down the Communist Party, had plainly indicated that there was at last a fighting group in Britain which had attracted good mass fighters to its ranks.

Of course, continued Lenin, we must not forget that the Communist Party in its application for affiliation to the Labour Party very frankly put forward certain conditions which would have given it full freedom of action to conduct its own policy in its own way.

We must never enter into negotiations with bodies, such as the Labour Party, without demanding full freedom of action. In this respect the Communist Party's attitude in applying to the Labour Party for admission to its ranks differed, most fundamentally, from such organisations as the ILP and BSP, which formally accepted the Labour Party's constitution and policy. The strong stand taken up by the Communist Party, in seeking affiliation with the Labour Party, was no doubt arrived at as a result of the BSP policy sharpened by the militant elements expelled from the SLP. It was a good omen for the future that these two groups were able to come together. And, it was a good thing that the ex-SLP men, who were so keen against affiliation with the Labour Party, realised the value of revolutionary discipline by refusing to split the new party because their own position had not been accepted. Likewise, when the Labour Party threw out the request for affiliation it was the BSP element that was tested and it stood firm. To have passed through two such severe trials, and to have maintained the solidarity of the organisation, was a tribute to the seriousness of the comrades who had formed the Communist Party.

Lenin passed on to review the political situation in Britain. The next general election would be of paramount importance, and the communists ought to play a most important part in it. As Lenin favoured the policy of supporting the Labour Party, in order to assist it to capture political power, this subject was thrashed out in detail. Lenin advises the communists to help the Labour Party to get a majority at the next election in order to facilitate the general decadence of the parliamentary system. Already, he reasoned, there are thousands of people in Britain who feel that the parliamentary system of social representation cannot solve the problems which history has placed before it. These people had become discontented and disillusioned regarding the parliamentary system of social control as a result of the inability of that machine to cope with the vital tasks of modern society.

In other words, the passage of events was providing a series of concrete experiences which were educating the masses regarding the general breakdown of capitalism in the sphere of social representation. The toiling masses, who had neither the time nor the inclination to examine social theories, always learnt their political lessons by undergoing concrete experiences. The task of the revolutionary communist is not only to preach his Marxist theories; he must prove that his theories are correct by compelling his opponents to act in such a way that they provide the practical lessons which enables the communist to test his theories before the eyes of the masses. The test of Marxist and communist theory is experience.

How then can the communists of England prove to the workers that the parliamentary machine has broken down and can no longer serve them or the interests of their class? Since the days of the armistice the parliamentary system in England has been on trial. During the past two years the political policy of Lloyd George had shown many workers how little they could expect from any parliamentary form of Government manned by the capitalist class. Since the armistice, Lloyd

George, Churchill, Bonar Law and Co have had an opportunity to demonstrate what they could do, and their reign of office has been one trail of disasters so far as the workers are concerned. The Labour Party solemnly assures the masses that they could solve the problems confronting society if once they were in control of the governmental machine. So far as Henderson, Thomas, and the Labour Party are concerned, they only differ from Lloyd George in that they have never had an opportunity to control the government. Knowing, as we do, that Henderson, MacDonald, and their followers cannot solve the immediate problems confronting the masses through the parliamentary machine, we ought to prove the correctness of our theory by giving the Labour Party a chance to prove that we are correct. The return of the Labour Party to power will accelerate the inevitable collapse of the parliamentary system, and this will provide the concrete experiences which will ultimately drive the masses towards communism and the Soviet solution to the modern problems.

For these reasons the communists in Britain ought to support the Labour Party at the next election in order to help it to bring on, ever faster, the crisis which will ultimately overwhelm it. At this point, I interposed, and said that, if the Communist Party officially assisted the Labour Party to capture political power in order to precipitate a crisis, it was just possible that the indignant masses, remembering that we had urged them to vote for the Labour Party, might sweep us away too when the social crash took place. Lenin pondered over this for a moment, and said that the Communist Party, in assisting the Labour Party to capture the government, must make its own case very clear to the masses. He then advanced the following argument which he pressed forward very strongly, and which he wishes the Communist Party to discuss.

He said the Communist Party could easily help the Labour Party to power and at the same time keep its own weapon clean. At the forthcoming elections the Communist Party ought to contest as many seats as possible, but where it could not put up a candidate it ought to issue a manifesto in every constituency challenged by the Labour Party urging the workers to vote for the Labour candidate. The manifesto should frankly state that the Communist Party is most emphatically opposed to the Labour Party, but asks it to be supported in order that Henderson, MacDonald, and Co may demonstrate to the masses their sheer helplessness. Such a manifesto, such a policy, would accelerate and intensify the problem now looming up before capitalism and its parliamentary system. But, above all, such a policy would provide the concrete experiences which would teach the masses to look to the Soviet method as the historically evolved institution destined to seriously grapple with the manifold problems now pressing so heavily upon humanity.

We discussed this problem for some time and viewed it from many angles. I kept raising many points against Lenin's position until at last he, no doubt scenting a good dialectical duel, challenged me to debate the whole matter in the columns of *The Communist*. I readily assented to this, and asked him when he would have his first contribution ready. He looked round

sadly at the mountains of work - work involving the solution of international problems - piled up in front of him. I at once said I would write up his case for the press, as I have done above. To this suggestion he heartily agreed.

I know, said Lenin, that it may seem awful to young and inexperienced communists to have any relations with the Labour Party, whose policy of opportunism is more dangerous to the masses than that of consistent and openly avowed enemies like Winston Churchill. But if the Communist Party intends to secure and wield power it will be compelled to come into contact with groups and organisations which are bitterly opposed to it. And it will have to learn how to negotiate and deal with them. Here in Russia we have been forced by circumstances to discuss and make arrangements with elements which would hang us if they got the chance. Have we not even entered into alliances and compacts with governments whose very hands reeked with the blood of our murdered communist comrades? Why have we entered into such contracts and adopted such a policy? It is because we are realists and not utopians. It is because, at present, international capitalism is more powerful than we are. Every move, each treaty, and all our negotiations with capitalist states, are but one side of the Russian Soviet government's policy to conserve its strength in order to consolidate its power. Learn to meet your enemies and be not afraid. It tests your strength, it creates experiences, it judges the character of your members. And you may find that your most embittered critics are not in the camp of the enemy but are the shallow doctrinaires to whom revolutionary socialism is a mere manual of phrases instead of a guide to action.

While we were talking, Lenin was continually interrupted by the arrival of cables, despatches and messages. He was frequently called to the 'phone. Despite these things he could return quite serenely to the point under discussion. I confess that I was slightly agitated when entering the Kremlin; bad news had arrived from the various fronts; Poland was acting strangely at the Riga Conference; France had been indulging in one of her bullying outbursts; and Finland was on the point of signing peace. All these things, I imagined, would make it impossible for Lenin to settle down and have a quiet talk on the various details of the movement upon which I was anxious to have his opinion. When I entered the room he was courteous, cool and tranquil. He eagerly entered into a discussion of many points on communist tactics, which, to some people, might have seemed almost trivial. Lenin is always anxious to hear of any new development in Marxism, and to him every aspect of the movement is important. I very timidly suggested the possible application of Marxist theory to a certain subject which had been monopolised by the anthropologists and ethnologists. He became enthusiastic over the problem which he quickly elaborated and extended, made several important suggestions, indicated where some good data could be found, and urged that the matter should be written and published. To Lenin, communism is a synthetic philosophy.

After having had a talk with Lenin, it is easy to understand why his quiet and humorous style fails to impress middle class intellectuals. People like Bertrand Russell are in the habit of meeting pompous bourgeois thinkers whose ideas on social theories are so incoherent and vague that they can only express themselves with great difficulty. This ponderous and floundering method of struggling to deliver an idea is, in certain quarters, mistaken for mental ability. Lenin, on the other hand, sees problems so clearly and is able to explain himself with such clarity and simplicity, that his conclusions seem to be the obvious deductions at which anyone would inevitably arrive. *The Communist* December 2 1920

Compiled by Doug Hulme

Politics, you could forgive Mikhail Sergievitch for wondering, is a funny old game. From leader of a superpower to the dole queue - almost. May 13's Guardian informs us of Gorby's jaunt through Hollywood, being wined and dined by Ronald Reagan and other faded actors ("US super rich fete their pet socialist"). The head of the one man show 'Gorbachev Foundation', in between the smoked salmon and caviar informs his hosts that he "remains a socialist at heart". After pulling the chain on the Soviet Union, you can quite imagine why he is the bosses' favourite sort of socialist.

When the Democratic Left was launched, we said it would not be long for this world. And so it continues to appear. Now the purse strings to the Soviet bureaucracy have been rudely severed, DL (who naturally never knew anything about such arrangements) is finding itself a little short; about £5,800 short of its £6,000 target, to be more precise. But never mind, DL's paper, New Times has a really ripping idea to raise a few bob: "We can supply neat folding boxes ... placed on the mantelpiece during meetings. It's surprising how quickly the coins add up". Obviously, when DL says "meetings", it has in mind something a tad smaller than the Albert Hall. It ain't never going to get no £6,000 that way.

The more widely read among you may notice that the above quote from New Times is taken straight from a recent jibe at DL in Socialist Organiser. 'Course it is. You don't really expect us to read this crap do you? As if once being stuck in the same organisation as the now DL was not enough...

The C of E's Mothers' Union's tentative step into the 20th century in calling for the legalisation of brothels is hardly a bad thing (though we are not partying in the streets). Prostitution is an economic necessity forced on many women by capitalist society. Within capitalist society, legalisation at least gives prostitutes a measure of protection from physical attack and disease; impossible to achieve when such women are criminalised. Legal protection should be something socialists support. So it is noteworthy that one rather significant body of 'socialists' does not. Militant. Apparently it encourages degradation of women. Now, I just knew there had to be a bigger hypocrite than Bishop Casey somewhere.

# Hurrah for counter-revolution!

Robert Knight, *Stalinism in Crisis*, Pluto Press, 1991, pp203, £9.95

EVER SEE a pterodactyl trying to ride a bicycle? I have, it is hilarious - at first, then it becomes tedious. The chief source of amusement, and tedium, lies in the fact that the poor old pterodactyl, no matter how hard it tries, will never be able to grasp the mechanics of bicycle riding. It is in the very nature of the beast not to understand the tasks confronting it.

So it is with the Trotskyoids of the Revolutionary Communist Party, as they attempt to come to grips with the counterrevolutions which have broken out in Eastern Europe, the ex-Soviet Union, and elsewhere. In this book they evangelically announce that "the destruction of Stalinism will remove a historic barrier to the self-emancipation of the international working class" (p191).

This attitude might seem slightly eccentric or even bizarre to us mere mortals. However, it does stem logically from the false Trotskyite belief that the world communist movement, warts and all, was a counterrevolutionary force: therefore the fact that it has ingloriously imploded can only be welcomed.

What distinguished the RCP was its eleventh hour recognition that the collapse in Eastern Europe and ex-USSR would result in reaction: clever, but not very considering its initial

position, which had been one of extraordinary complacency. In fact, when Hungary was the first to fall, the RCP's reaction was "what is all the fuss about?"

Talking about the counterrevolutions in general, Robert Knight writes (my emphasis throughout) that "Hence in the short term the crisis of Stalinism can only help to consolidate reaction ... in the long term, however, Marxism will emerge stronger from the collapse of Stalinism and the parallel crisis of the capitalist world order" (p190).

Talking about the death of Eurocommunism, he says "though in the short term the forces of anti-communism reaction are likely to be strengthened, in the long term the demise of Stalinism opens up unprecedented opportunities for building a genuine working class movement in Western Europe" (p161).

Boringly, in the chapter on the 'Third World' - when discussing Gorbachev's counterrevolutionary foreign policy - we spy those dreaded words again: "In the short term these developments have strengthened the forces of reaction in the Third World. In the long term the declining ability of the Soviet Union to contain conflicts can only be beneficial" (p140). Get the general drift?

The obvious question that immediately springs to mind is: why? As *Living Comfortably* would say, I will give a free bottle of champagne to the first RCP'er who can rationally explain how global anti-communist counterrevolution is "beneficial". Contrary to what Robert Knight and the RCP thinks, politics does not exist in a vacuum, and however they may prattle on cretinously about how "the decks have been cleared for a fresh start" (p190), you cannot magically conjure up some sort

of Trotskyoid 'Year Zero', where bureaucratic socialism never existed. There are, at the end of the day, only two forces in the world: capitalism and socialism, no matter how backward, bureaucratic or authoritarian that form of socialism may be.

This leads on naturally to another point, which is the RCP's cavalier and reckless use of the word 'Stalinism'. Knight's use of the term 'Stalinist' is purely negative and exclusivist, ie anybody who has had some connection, formal or otherwise, with the world communist movement - past or present - must be by definition a 'Stalinist'. Is this what passes for 'logic' in the RCP?

This is a typical RCP book. Some relatively good research and interesting empirical data is totally off-set by intellectual dishonesty, a contempt for scientific theory, intensely annoying RCPisms and, in many places, painful hack writing. All one can say after reading *Stalinism in Crisis*, like any other RCP publication, is: what is all the fuss about?

Eddie Ford

## Fire Extinguisher

Jonathan Harvey, *Wildfire*, Ian Rickson (Director), Royal Court Young People's Theatre, 1992

*WILDFIRE* supposedly gave young people the chance to explore and expose social ills through the medium of drama and community theatre. Despite being performed in community centres and

offering young actors an 'opportunity' to work with the Royal Court through the Employment Training scheme, the whole production lacked any sense of community theatre. Nor was the final product of any use to the community. These actors and actresses were paid a pittance to follow the guidance of their elders in the theatre, the proud upholders of 'Dead Theatre'. But on top of this 'dead' theatrical experience the young actors were also given a dangerously stagnant social experience.

The writer and director took the actors, typecast them into their own social roles and left them trapped inside them, without offering even a glimpse of liberation. The programme for the play says "Amina, a young Asian woman, returns to a modern inner city housing estate for her father's funeral. He was burned to death in his flat and the circumstances surrounding the fire are suspicious ... The play follows Amina as she pieces together the events leading to her father's death and introduces us to many of the people living on the estate. Through their eyes the play explores the causes and effects of racism and what modern high density housing means to those who live within its environs."

The only look at racism in society that the play gives us is at three particularly thick fascists. Any mention of state racism, capitalism, imperialism or exploitation, you ask? No way; after all, it is this very system and its fat bellied beneficiaries that keep the once almost 'radical' Royal Court ticking over.

But on top of this 'lapse of memory', or tunnel vision, the play does not even offer any hope of victory over three ugly fascists, let alone the even bigger and uglier racist state.

During one scene in the play the three fascists are surrounded in a party

by the rest of the cast, about fifteen both black and white youth. In this setting the fascists taunt one black member of the party with racist abuse. The rest of the party just stands and watches and eventually plucks up the courage to tell them to go away. The ending is even more off the wall, with the fascists again being allowed to walk out of the room and Amina, the lead role, burning her own things. Stoicism perhaps, but hardly a victory for the working class. The cast, playing out their own social roles on the stage and the audience refused the right to act by this bourgeois liberal theatre company.

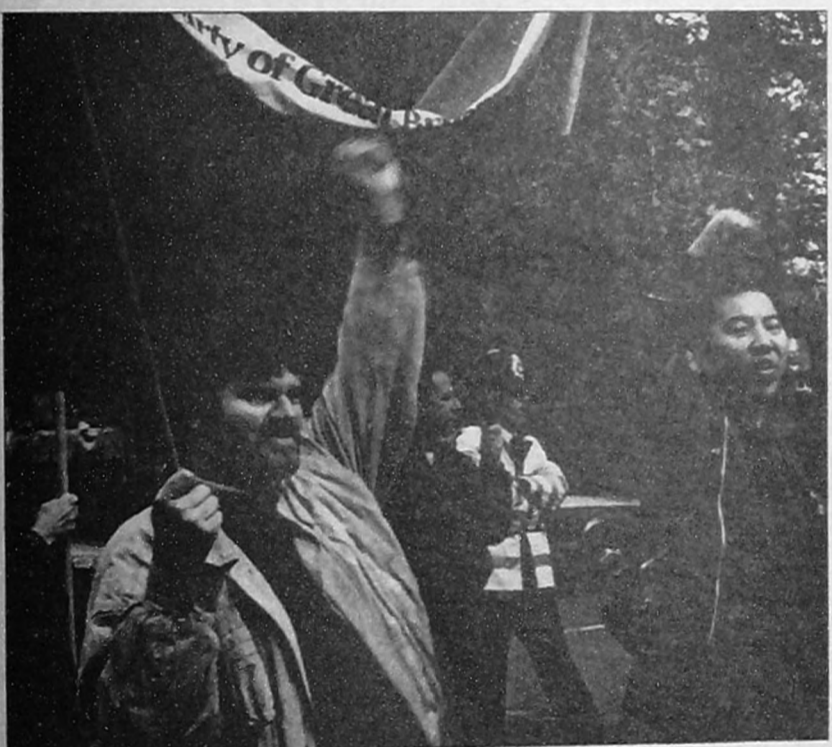
Augusto Boal, in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, says "the protagonic role changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change - in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action!" (p122). The action in the play *Wildfire* is not only unrealistic but also deeply reactionary.

This play both *de-activates* and disempowers the actors and the audience. We can expect little else of bourgeois theatre even if it is under the title of *The Youth, Community and Education Department of the Royal Court Theatre*. This play does not offer any real opportunity to the community or youth. It merely continues to establish the old tradition of using the theatre to preserve the status quo. Well, this is not the only use for the dramatic tool: revolutionaries will wield this weapon in exactly the opposite way.

Linda Addison

## ACTION

### May Day



Communists stepping out: the biggest, most militant contingent from Britain on this year's May Day march

The May Day 1992 march in London was the largest for a number of years. Again this year, the vast majority of the 1000s strong march was composed of comrades from Turkey and Kurdistan. The contingent from the CPGB was the largest British section - a feature that is also becoming something of a 'tradition'.

May Day in the capital is an annual test of the strength of the indigenous workers' movement, and in particular the communist component of it. We are easily the largest, most disciplined and militant 'British' section. This fact was spontaneously acknowledged by hundreds of workers from Turkey and Kurdistan massed outside the Halkevi community centre in Hackney, who burst into warm applause as our contingent passed. (A London 'mobilisation'

for a contingent around the slogan 'Hands Off Cuba' from the *Morning Star's* CPB managed to turned out about 7 people).

So our relative strength in relation to 'official communism' is annually underlined. But also, so is our frustrating weakness numerically and socially. This year's mobilisation suffered from the post election 'deflation' experienced in all sections of the movement, but nevertheless was judged a success.

All comrades however agreed with comrade John Bridge when he reiterated our "internationalist duty to start to outnumber our friends and comrades from other countries". The 1992 march was another step towards that goal.

National Organiser

### Seminars

●London: Every Sunday, 5pm, Central London. The bloc of seminars on Materialist Dialectics finishes Sunday, May 17, with 'Continuity and Development'. 'Late starters' are still welcome! And it is not too late to sign up for the next series - 'The Theory of Knowledge', which start on Sunday May 24 with the thorny question of 'Theory and Practice'. Seminars are divided into two, with a theoretical opening in the first half and discussion on current questions in the second. Registration for this bloc of seminars is £5 waged, £2 unwaged. Details from the usual address/telephone number or from sellers of *The Leninist*.

Sunday May 24, *Theory and practice*  
Sunday May 31, *Knowledge*  
Sunday June 7, *Truth*

●Glasgow: We are launching a new series of seminars in Glasgow, Sundays at 5pm. The first series starts on May 24 and will be on the Communist Party. For further information, phone the London offices.

### Party school

This year's annual CPGB School will be in Crete, during the second and third weeks of September. The presence of fraternal and sympathising organisations from other countries is being invited again this year. The participation of comrades from countries like the USA, Turkey, Iran and Ireland have made the annual schools of the Communist Party inspirational and well as educational affairs. Details are still being finalised, but comrades can apply now for more information. The cost of the two week self catering school will be in the region of £200. Contact John Praven for more details.

### European Conference



The Communist Party has written letters of congratulation to the organisations of the victorious German working class, inviting representatives to the Edinburgh conference on December 10-11 of this year. This gathering of workers' organisations from all over Europe hosted by the CPGB will coincide with both the EC heads of government summit and a nationalist convention in Scotland convened by the Scottish TUC. The workers' movement particularly in Scotland will be posed the choice - nationalism or internationalism, which way forward for the working class? Send now for details and registration form.

	6 months	1 year
■ Britain & Ireland	£8 <input type="checkbox"/>	£16 <input type="checkbox"/>
■ Europe	£11 <input type="checkbox"/>	£22 <input type="checkbox"/>
■ Rest of World	£13 <input type="checkbox"/>	£26 <input type="checkbox"/>

For more details see page two

■ I enclose a cheque/PO for £..... made out to November Publications Ltd

■ Please start my subscription with issue no .....

■ I enclose a donation for £ ..... made out to November Publications Ltd

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TEL \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: Subscriptions, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

SUBSCRIBE

# Afghanistan: Never forget

The left in Britain had a disgraceful record when it came to the Afghan revolution

ON APRIL 25, the British Mujahedin counterrevolutionaries entered the Afghan capital, Kabul. The appearance of these medievalist scum in the city that in 1978 was the epicentre of the Afghan proletarian revolution is a yet another defeat for the world's working class.

Immediately, the rebel forces split into rival factions and began a bloody Lebanon-type vying for power. The result of their internecine conflict is academic for the forces of progress, however. All sections of the Mujahedin 'freedom fighters', who have waged a 14 year war against communism, are deeply and thoroughly reactionary. Their victory will engulf the working people of this country - particularly the women - in the flames of counterrevolution.

"We want everything to change according to Islam", promised one Mujahedin leader as his forces massed on the outskirts of the capital. What this means is readily understood: "If a woman does not want to dress in an Islamic way, I will not let her walk in the city". Reports cited in some left papers tell of the panic buying of *chadors* by women terrified of the revenge of these misogynist rats. The *Washington Post* of April 26 notes that "Only a month ago, scores of women strode through Kabul streets in western skirts and high heels; today those that ventured into the streets wore Islamic head coverings."

A return to chattel slavery - that is the prospect that faces the women of Afghanistan, whatever faction of the Mujahedin front finally manages to establish control. Their revolutionary social gains such as mass entry into the workforce, into education at all levels, into the armed forces, their access to abortion and contraception, the mass literacy campaigns; all of these have been made the explicit targets by the Mujahedin.

The women's question in Afghanistan is not some 'detail' of the programme of the contending sides in the civil war: it was a social question that cut to the heart of the revolution itself. The re-enslavement of women has been inscribed on the banner of the counterrevolution.

This paper has stood alone on the British left in its unconditional defence of the Afghan socialist revolution of April 1978, our unequivocal support of the Soviet Army in its progressive war against the feudal Mujahedin reactionaries, our militant opposition to Gorbachev's sellout withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1988 and our warning that the workers' state in Afghanistan, given the counterrevolutionary leadership in the USSR, was in "mortal danger".

With their congenital anti-Sovietism, the rest of the left - with a few partial exceptions - lined up with the Mujahedin, against the Soviet Army; with the counterrevolution, against the revolution; with the 12th century, against the 20th.

The experience of Afghanistan has illustrated that the so-called revolutionary left in Britain pay nothing but lip service to the 1917 Russian revolution. All these groups parrot the Menshevik arguments marshalled against Lenin prior to 1917 to slander the heroic 1978 Afghan revolution.

Across the spectrum the 1978 revolution was dismissed as a "putsch". Indeed, the possibility of a social revolution was dismissed out of hand, something only possible through an outside agency or some distant time in the future.

*Socialist Organiser*, probably the Labour Party's most loyal foot soldier, define the "tragedy" of Afghanistan as that of "a class [ie the professional middle class - IM] which took power in conditions where it could not realise its programme because of the backwardness of the society" (*Social-*

into this category?

As we have explained from *The Leninist* No2, Spring 1982, the elements in the Afghan army who formed the striking force in the 1978 revolution did not fill a vacuum in the political sphere: "rather they performed the military function of the Party, under the political leadership of the PDPA" (*The Leninist*, May 23 1988).

The revolution came as the culmination of years of mass work by the Party. When the revolutionary *coup de grace* to the old regime was finally delivered, hundreds of thousands of working

ments. The alternative was simply too unthinkable ... to defend it, even though it was led by 'Stalinists'.

The truth was partially admitted by the Trotskyist *Socialist Organiser* in the April 23 issue when it says that "the fact that the Afghan regime the Russians left behind them when they withdrew in 1988 did not collapse for over three years indicates that it was not only a creature of the Russians".

That never stopped *Socialist Organiser* supporting counterrevolution while the Soviet Army was stationed there. The same spirit of anti-Sovietism actu-



A taste of things to come: Mujahedin bandits execute a suspected communist

*ist Organiser* April 23 1992).

Such sympathy is worthless. *Socialist Organiser* backed the counterrevolutionary  *jihad*  against the Soviet Army, and the Afghan government forces. Despicably, they compared the campaign of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan - a force fighting, albeit with all sorts of bureaucratic blunders and fetters, to save a living revolution - to "what the Americans did Vietnam, what the French did in Algeria and Indochina" and, plumbing new depths even for *Socialist Organiser*, to "what the Nazis had done in those parts of the USSR they overran at the beginning of the Second World War" (*Ibid*).

This and similar views from the left in Britain should not surprise us. After all those who cannot see a real revolution, are hardly in the position to defend one. From *Tribune*, through the Socialist Workers Party to Workers Power, the April 1978 revolution in Afghanistan has been label a "putsch".

This is a scandalous slander of an inspiring revolution, a revolution that lit a torch of liberation for the peoples of the region.

Lenin defined a putsch as an "attempt at insurrection [that] has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy amongst the masses" (VI Lenin CW Vol 22, p355). How can any person with eyes in their head say that the Afghan revolution fell

people poured out onto the streets to greet the news.

Of course, Marxists recognise that a genuine revolution can take the outward form of a coup. Obviously, revolutionary ideas can gain considerable influence inside the military forces of the old regime, and these sections can indeed seize the leadership of a living revolutionary movement. But this is simply the outward form that the Afghan revolution manifested itself in, the same outer form as the 1917 October Revolution (also slandered as a "coup" by philistine bourgeois historians, ultra-leftists and renegades).

The revolution provoked a furious backlash from the forces of reaction internally and externally: no mere coup could have done this. The thousands of communists and ordinary Afghans who willingly gave their lives in the ensuing civil war to defend the revolutionary conquests were aware that they were fighting for something rather more than a change of oppressors, even if the 'theoreticians' of the British left could not quite work it out.

All of the evidence points, not to a 'palace coup' with no sympathy or involvement from the masses, but to a revolution!

Those trapped in the dogma of denouncing the world communist movement of which the PDPA was a typical component part as 'counterrevolutionary' had to slander this, perhaps its final positive achieve-

mentally also informed the positions of groups like Workers Power which claim to have clean hands (see its 'Blood on their hands' in *Workers Power* May 1992). Workers Power gave what it called 'support' to the Soviet Army when it was in Afghanistan, true. But what this support amounted to can be seen from the fact that its intervention was denounced as "counterrevolutionary" ... and to square the circle it denounced the withdrawal as "counterrevolutionary" too. The ability to face at least two ways at the same time is an interesting feature of a group that regarded the establishment of socialism in Eastern Europe after World War II as counterrevolutionary and the end of socialism in 1989-90 as a political revolution.

So, partial, lilylivered exceptions there were, but so what? When it was a matter of a life or death struggle between the revolution and counterrevolution, the congenitally anti-Soviet left lined up with the counterrevolution.

"No end to the bloodshed" hypocritically moaned Socialist Worker of May 2, 1992, viewing the victory of their side in Kabul, the Mujahedin. With the victory of the forces the SWP has backed consistently against the communists in that country, we are told "the stage is set for terrible bloodshed. The people who will pay the biggest price will be ordinary Afghans" (*Ibid*).

Pardon, 'comrades'? Perhaps we

have got it wrong, but weren't you the bunch who told us that despite the fact that Mujahedin were thorough going reactionaries, "we say the Russian troops should get out of Afghanistan" (*Socialist Worker Review*, March 1980). The Mujahedin would set up a government "well to the right of Khomeini" (*Socialist Worker Review* February 1988). Despite this, 'socialists' as they call themselves and their supporters, "shouldn't ... see Russia's defeat as anything but a boost for our side" (*Socialist Worker* February 11, 1989). In fact, the Soviet withdrawal, which in effect for the moment sealed the fate of socialism in Afghanistan, was celebrated by these 'socialists' as "a welcome blow against imperialism" (*Socialist Worker Review* February 1989).

In classic Menshevik fashion the SWP advised the Afghan people that their lot must be a "cycle of misery" which "won't be broken until genuine socialist revolutions in more advanced countries provide the resources to overcome its economic backwardness" (*Socialist Worker* February 4 1989).

So Afghan revolutionaries, according to both the patronising *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Organiser*, should politely refrain from the opportunity to make their revolution in much the same way as one might refuse a cigarette - "Thanks, but not just yet". Instead, they should wait - god (or perhaps Allah) help them - until the likes of SO or the SWP make the revolution in Britain.

They would wait forever. Those who cannot defend the living gains of our class internationally, and centrally those countries where we have made revolutions, are hardly likely to be much good (at least on our side of the barricade) when it comes to making the British proletarian revolution.

As we wrote in 1989: "In the chill wind of the Cold War groups in Britain ... used the self serving lie that the Afghan revolution was nothing more than a coup in order to avoid defending a revolution, which unlike that of South Africa, Nicaragua or El Salvador was not popular among chic circles ... Well you 'friends of the Afghan working class', you have now got your way ... This is generally recognised as what will happen if the counterrevolutionaries take over. Your textbook working class will be nowhere to be seen but real workers and progressives, all those who made the Afghan Revolution, will face death ... That is why we say that the blood of Afghan's progressives is not only on the hands of the bestial Mujahedin, the imperialists and the traitor Gorbachev ... It is on the hands of ... all those who refused to defend the Afghan Revolution! You are all guilty and we shall make sure that the working class never forgets your crime" (*The Leninist* February 17 1989).

Let us add, as we view the horror unfolding in Afghanistan - that they never forget, and that they make you pay.

Ian Mahoney

### Afghan information pack

Back issues of *The Leninist* on revolution and counterrevolution in Afghanistan: £3