

# Workers' Liberty



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## Levelling up... to Cardiff and Birmingham!

OTHER European countries have laws compelling wholesale distributors to take a broad range of magazines, but Britain does not: *Tribune*, for example, has recently found itself cut off by W H Smith because the company reckons it is more profitable to distribute a smaller range of bigger-selling publications.

We urge all readers to support *Tribune's* protest against this move. We ourselves, however, find ourselves banned by all the distributors, and dependent on persuading individual bookshop managers to stock the magazine. It can be done: in Leicester, for example, six bookshops are now taking *Workers' Liberty*. There's room for levelling up elsewhere.

New subscriptions to *Workers' Liberty* are arriving in a respectable trickle, if not a flood. The total number is now 70 per cent up on last summer's figure, but there are at least two reasons to think that there is plenty of room for a further 70 per cent increase, and more.

A number of our recent subscriptions have come from people whom we have recently contacted from the *Workers' Liberty* office after our paths had, for one reason or another, not crossed for a while. There must be dozens or even hundreds more such people known to our readers but not to our office. Each subscriber who thinks the magazine worthwhile, and would like to see its circulation increase, can help us here. Can you think of a friend or a comrade whom you do not meet regularly, but who would be interested in the magazine? Send us their address, and we'll send them a letter inviting them to subscribe.

A look at the geographical spread of our subscriptions also suggests room for expansion. Why are there ten times as many subscribers in Birmingham or Cardiff as in Leeds or Glasgow? Isn't there room for levelling up here, too?

Student activists tell me that they sold over 40 copies of the magazine at last month's conference of the National Union of Students — a large event, but one where selling Marxist literature is often difficult. Irish students, apparently, were especially interested. The current issue also contains much that should be of interest on Ireland.

The film "Land and Freedom" is coming back for a second showing in several cities; local organisers report that interest in *Workers' Liberty* no.26 (which carried a feature on the Spanish Revolution of 1936-7) among cinema-goers is often higher than at the first showing, and many will buy a copy of the current magazine too.

According to the film's distributors, places where it will be showing over the next few weeks include Newcastle (on 11 April), Hampstead (14 April), Leicester (18 April), Southampton and Sheffield (25 April), and Birmingham (26 April).

Martin Thomas

# Howard's mad pig disease

## Editorial

TORY Home Secretary Michael Howard, with the connivance of the Labour Party is rushing new police powers through parliament, using the "terrorist threat" as an excuse. Stop-and-search powers are being spread from Northern Ireland to Britain. Howard is reintroducing the 'sus' laws — extensively used against black youth during the 1970s — with the IRA as camouflage.

According to *The Guardian*:

*"The package will give police powers to stop and search any pedestrian, including a person's shoes and outer clothes.*

*Any policeman will be able to search hat, clothes, gloves or outer coat, whether or not he has grounds for believing the pedestrian is carrying a terrorist-related device. Refusal to co-operate could lead to a six-month jail sentence.*

*The police will be given powers to search non-residential property [and will] be given statutory powers to set up cordons around areas [and search everyone in those areas], as well as to impose total parking restrictions."*

The new law was rushed through Parliament in a few hours, like the original Prevention of Terrorism Act, rammed through as a sudden "temporary measure" in November 1974 and still on the statute books 21 years later.

Howard shows many other symptoms of mad pig disease, as he insists against all evidence that "prison works" in suppressing the crime bred by the inequalities, frustration and alienation of Tory Britain.

The prison population, already at an all-time high of 52,000, will continue to rise if the proposals of Howard's new White Paper are accepted. The Tories are demanding minimum sentences for those repeatedly convicted of burglary and drug crime, and mandatory life sentences for persistent violent or sexual offenders.

These proposals have been heavily criticised, not only by prison reform organisations who — quite rightly — believe that prison is an expensive method of brutalising human beings, but also by sections of the Establishment. "The verdict so far is unanimous: longer prison sentences are unjust, unworkable, counter-productive" (*The Economist*, 30 March).

The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, has said these changes will be unjust because judges would no longer be able to take into account the circumstances of a crime, or reduce sentences for those who plead guilty. Police chiefs have also been criticising the Tories, explaining that no amount of repres-



Britain, the penal colony of Europe, if Michael Howard had his way

sion will stop crime if its roots in mass unemployment are not cut.

Howard hopes to win votes in the upcoming general election as being 'strong' on law and order.

Anyone who believes rising crime can be tackled by jailing more people should look at America. Combined federal, state and local spending on prisons in the US has increased eight-fold in the last 20 years to a staggering \$30 billion. The US's prison population has tripled from 1980 and now stands at over 1.5 million people behind bars. Mississippi has now banned television, music and weightlifting equipment in prisons and Alabama has spent \$17,000 on 300 sets of leg irons for use on chain gangs.

*"Anyone who believes  
rising crime can be  
tackled by jailing  
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look at America."*

Crime rates have continued to soar in the States, and overcrowding and brutality in prisons has led to a massive increase in prison riots: in 1992-3 there were 374 riots in American jails, more than three times the number in the previous three years combined.

One immediate, obvious outcome of Howard's policy is the likelihood of another Strangeways-type prison rebellion, as pris-

oners revolt against the barbaric way they are treated.

And 75% of all young offenders are reconvicted within *two years* of their release.

Prison is a brutal, bureaucratic attempt to keep the lid on society. Most prisoners should not be there at all.

Over the last 16 years the Tory Party has made Britain a substantially less free society. The police force has been centralised. There has been an increased use of guns, horses, and special units by an increasingly militarised police force. Police powers have been extended through the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act and 1986 Public Order Act, the 1986 extension of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and, most recently, the Criminal Justice Act. In the courts magistrates have extended their powers to set bail conditions; more crown court cases are tried without juries; the right to silence has been removed. The government have used their weight to prosecute Sarah Tisdall, Clive Ponting and then *Spycatcher* on the grounds of "national security."

Yet Labour's front bench, shamefully, helped Michael Howard to ram through his new legislation, just as it has recently dropped Labour's longstanding opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Only 30 Labour MPs voted against Howard's scheme.

A government which created decent jobs, restored social housing, and rebuilt public services, would begin to cut the roots of rising crime. But to do that it would have to tax the rich — and Blair's New Labour runs scared of anything so radical. Tough on market economics, tough on the victims of market economics, but soft on the rich... ■



# Teachers' union at crossroads

By Pat Murphy

THE left will go to NUT conference in confident mood this year. All the evidence suggests they are a leadership in-waiting.

The union's elected President and Vice-President are both left-wing women (Carole Regan and Christine Blower) and, more important, the recent elections to the National Executive saw yet another sharp shift to the left with a net gain of three seats.

The ruling Broad Left group now has 21 seats on the union's executive while the combined forces of the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA) and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union (CDFU) have 19. Two seats are held by dissenting ex-members of the Broad Left. The official position is one therefore of no overall control. In reality, these "dissidents" will vote with the existing leadership, but they will do so in wholly new circumstances.

This election defeat for the Broad Left comes just as they have to put ambitious plans to overhaul the union's structure to conference. The plans would end representative or delegate democracy in the union, and would concentrate power in the hands of the General Secretary.

Rank and file members throughout the labour movement should study events in the NUT because they certainly prefigure the plans of other union and Labour bureaucrats.

General Secretary Doug McAvoy's plan is called "Extending Democracy" and entails putting union decisions out to referendum-style ballots of the whole membership.

These decisions include all policies passed by conference, all donations or affiliations by local branches, and all nominations for office.

No conference policy would be implemented by the union leadership until it had been endorsed by a ballot of all members in which the executive would frame the questions and control material sent out with the ballot.

Perhaps most dangerous of all, the new system would give the executive the power to propose any rule change without the agreement of conference or any representative body, and to have it agreed in a membership ballot which, again, they would control. With such a power, they could abolish conference!

The second big issue at conference will be the invitation to Gillian Shephard to speak. The Tory Education Secretary addressing teacher trade



Doug McAvoy: turning his back on conference democracy

unionists is bound to provoke fury and that is what the General Secretary intended.

He knows the best chance of making the case for curbing the power of conference is to make it appear raucous and divided. Gillian Shephard is the *agent provocateur*.

It is vital that the left keeps its head and avoids this trap. There will be protest against Shephard but it must be unified, and effective, and not disrupt conference.

At a time when education workers and users are suffering relentless attacks there is a danger that the conference of the largest teachers' union in Britain will be frittered away in Doug McAvoy's bureaucratic stitch-ups.

There are other important decisions to fight for.

The Tories' programme of tests and league tables has been allowed to gather pace again despite the widespread opposition from teachers and parents. A very successful boycott by the teaching unions two years ago was abruptly ended by leaderships who gained nothing more than a review of the National Curriculum by Ron Dearing.

Now that that review is complete it is clear that the tests still stand and that the government still intends publishing league tables of the Key Stage 2 tests. These tests taken at age 11 will function as a new "11-plus" and provide the mechanism for re-introducing selection.

At conference the left will try to start a campaign against these policies with a view to a new boycott. Winning such a vote would be a tremendous boost.

The main thrust of the Tories' assault on teachers this year has been the hysterical focus on "failing teachers" as the cause of all problems in education. They have replaced the old system of inspection with OFSTED, an agency designed to seek out failure rather than

support and develop schools. The head of OFSTED is a right-wing ideologue called Chris Woodhead. In the last few months his strategy has been to blame and sack teachers, attack inner-city schools, and close down schools which follow teaching methods of which he and the government disapprove.

One of the biggest branches, Birmingham, will propose industrial action in any school where a teacher is victimised as a result of an OFSTED inspection and the Hackney branch is proposing nationwide non-cooperation with OFSTED.

Above all, however, the Tory plan to introduce vouchers into education is a serious threat.

The nursery voucher scheme currently being piloted will lead to vouchers in the rest of the education system if it succeeds. The NUT will debate proposals to campaign effectively against nursery vouchers. It is essential that we get action and that we link up with parents and other education unions.

The final, crucial point to bear in mind about this year's conference is that it will be the last one before the general election.

Tony Blair and David Blunkett have made it clear that they intend to make education a focal point in the election campaign. They have also made clear their willingness to echo the Tories in attacking teachers and comprehensive education.

The NUT leadership has been craven in its lack of opposition to these outbursts from the Labour front bench. They seem to believe the best chance of relief from the Tory onslaught of 17 years is to establish the closest possible relationship with the Labour leadership.

The conference will see a major debate about education policies for the coming year. Those of us on the left will try to commit the union to a determined defence of state comprehensive education, and opposition to selection, fast-track learning and opting out. The general election should be an opportunity to campaign for a properly funded egalitarian education system, not an exercise in sycophancy.

Ensuring the NUT will continue as a fighting trade union is the main task of the delegates at conference. The results of their efforts will have an impact on tens of thousands beyond. Beating Doug McAvoy and his advance guard of new unionists will be a defeat for their ideas throughout the labour movement and it will strengthen those trying to stop Tony Blair's plan to turn Labour into a party run by plebiscite. ■

# Fighting redundancies in Liverpool

By Cate Murphy,  
Liverpool UNISON

AT the time of writing Liverpool City Council is sending out redundancy notices to 200 council workers. One letter was hand delivered after 11pm on Saturday — so much for the scurrying around in taxis that was supposed to have ended with the demise of Degsy.

Letters are also going out advising City Council employees that their existing contracts are terminating with effect from 30 June 1996. The reason for this letter is to issue new contracts and end pay protection for those who have been re-deployed. There are about 300 workers who are on pay protection, with many of them standing to lose £1,000 to £2,000 and, in one case, £7,000 each year.

The Joint Trade Union Committee's move to ballot all the workforce at the same time for strike action seems to have focussed management's attention. From a threat of more than 800 redundancies and attacks on pay and conditions, we have forced them to think again.

The proposed pay cut has been dropped, those facing redundancy are to be offered re-deployment and the one-day enforced unpaid leave is to be withdrawn. The City Council unions' determination to stop management's attacks on our wages, terms and conditions and jobs has meant that we have scored a major victory.

The united action of UNISON members, and members of other trade unions, in overwhelmingly voting to go to ballot for strike action has won a victory, but there is no time to celebrate yet.

There are still the issues of the ending of pay protection, ending supernumerary status, the possibility that if staff are not re-deployed the enforced redundancies will be carried out and the simple fact that management will be looking for other areas to cut over the coming months.

We've won a partial victory but we are preparing to stop any further attacks. All the JTUC unions are ready to go to ballot for strike action against redundancies, cuts in terms and conditions and pay cuts if necessary. The job now is to convince the membership that they can't afford to drop their guard.

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## PC98

When Bobby was a little child  
His intellect was weakish,  
And all his deeds, to put it mild  
Were just a trifle sneakish.

He peached unto his dad each day  
About his little brother,  
And spied upon his sister May.  
And went and told his mother.

Thus by the time he entered  
school  
It quite became his passion  
To sneak and spy and fib and lie  
In every form and fashion.

His playmates in the  
schoolyard he  
Would coax to some offense,  
Then tell the teacher secretly,  
To shine at their expense.

His every act confirmed the truth  
That Nature had bestowed  
The slimy brains upon a youth  
Intended for a toad.

For when his 'prentice time was  
wrecked  
Through liberties abused,  
And men who valued self-respect  
To work with him refused.

Now, Bobby was a strapping  
wight,  
And strong in bone and sinew;  
He sought a job wherein he might  
His dirty work continue.

A sort of job where brass and bone  
Are qualities admired,  
Where belly-crawling graft alone  
Makes manhood unrequired.

Performing filthy duties that  
The most abandoned swine  
Disgustedly would boggle at  
And gruntingly decline.

And Bobby had not far to seek:  
It soon became his fate  
To pry and spy and lie and  
sneak —  
As PC 98.

By John S Clark

# Youth in Britain — never had it so good?

By Niall Brown

YOUNG people in Britain are among the lowest earners, are most prone to unemployment, are barred from benefits, are disproportionately represented among the homeless and don't vote!

These are all conclusions of a recent report by the British Youth Council, "Never had it so good? The truth about being young in '90s Britain."

The report makes frightening reading. Some of its findings:

- 16-24 year olds face unemployment levels nearly twice the national average, 15.4% compared to 8.5%.
- 16-24 year olds amount for 1 in 3 of those earning £2.50 an hour or less.
- As a proportion of average earnings, young people's pay fell by 6-8% for men and 8-12% for women between 1985 and 1995.
- 458,000 16-24 year olds earn £2.50 or less an hour.
- 61% of 15-24 year olds have a disposable income of £50 or less.

● There are over 100,000 single young homeless people aged 16-25 in England and Wales. They do not have a right to permanent housing unless they are "vulnerable."

● Suicide among young men aged 15-24 has risen by 75% since 1982.

● 2.5 million young people didn't vote at the last election.

In short, young people face unprecedented levels of poverty, homelessness and stress.

Under-25s have borne the brunt of the Tories' attacks over the last 17 years. We have seen a massive increase in youth unemployment, and wages and benefits are much lower for under 25s than for over 25s. The Tories have viciously attacked student grants, and most students, along with 16-17 year olds, are excluded from the benefits system. The Tories have pushed young people from one dead-end cheap-labour scheme to the next.

Not surprisingly, young people are becoming the heaviest users of drugs and alcohol to cope with the stress of being young in '90s Britain.

The report makes some useful policy suggestions, e.g. equality in work and benefits. What we need to make that happen is for young people to be involved in campaigning for their demands.

The labour movement ought to be central to this. But Blair refuses to say that a minimum wage will apply to young workers. And along with Gordon Brown, he proposes a Workfare scheme to batter youth into dead-end jobs and training schemes on fear of losing their benefits.

The trade unions, too, are failing to campaign around issues like youth rights in work, and are not doing what is necessary to build youth sections that could help to rejuvenate the trade union movement.

Young people want a voice and they want change. But with little or no opposition to these Tory attacks coming from the Labour Party, youth are giving up on politics.

"Rock the vote" might get one or two to the ballot box but it won't solve the problems we currently face. We need a Labour campaign for youth!

## Fight for democracy in New Labour

By Adie Kemp

TONY Blair recently announced to the press (followed a little later by a letter to constituencies) a new breakthrough in the marvellously democratic way the Labour Party is now run.

The electorate, he says, have a right to know what Labour's (sorry, *New Labour's*) policies are before the general election, and so he has developed a new innovative concept called a *manifesto*.

You may be forgiven for thinking that this idea had been invented some time ago. Old Labour had manifestos made up of policy that had received majority support at a conference. But Tony's idea is a radical, exciting and totally new vision, entirely fitting for New Labour.

In Tony's new manifesto, all the policies will be decided by the National Executive. Then they will be put to conference for a yes or no vote (no amendments allowed in New Labour). And the ultimate pinnacle for Tony's new idea is a postal vote of all the members, after the conference.

We must not forget that Tony's manifesto will contain no spending commitments whatsoever, or any hint of Labour's tax plans. Because, whilst the electorate deserves to know, it doesn't deserve to know *too much*.

A quick look behind the scenes is required before it is possible to understand why Blair is proposing this new departure.

The manifesto idea looks like "Son of Clause Four" — a press stunt designed to

prove Tony Blair's success in transforming the Labour Party into his own image. And to a degree it is. But though the press may have played Blair's game for the Clause IV debate, there is not going to be nearly as much interest the second time around.

In fact, Blair's game plan is longer than that. First, he is trying to undermine any rebellion from within the party to his actions once he gets into office. By writing a manifesto now that spells out Blairite "One-Nation" government, he hopes to cut support for protests about that government before it begins.

Second, he is attacking the core of representative democracy in the party by making policy decisions reached through constituencies and conference even more irrelevant to what a Labour government is committed to do. This fits with the direction the Blair machine is pushing the party.

New members are encouraged to campaign, not in their own constituencies, but in the nearest "marginal", organised direct from Walworth Road. Young Labour groups are told that meetings which take decisions are boring. Candidates even vaguely on the left are forced more and more into following the model from Walworth Road for their election campaign, because the manifesto won't say anything else for them to use. The whole package is designed to turn party members into electoral foot soldiers instead of allowing them a say in the policy decisions, or even the style of their local campaigning.

However, as difficult as it was to justify a yes-or-no vote on Clause IV, ordinary party

members will balk even more at voting for or against a twenty page manifesto. The result will almost certainly be a pathetic turnout in the postal vote.

Even if Tony Blair's plans for the new manifesto go through, it may not imply very much for the protests inside the party that will arise under the Labour government. If the membership doesn't see any role for itself in decision making, it won't feel any loyalty to the decisions made. And the pressure from Labour voters, who, despite Blair's speeches to the contrary, still believe a Labour government will renationalise water, pump money into the health service, reduce class sizes, will push party members and trade unionists into making a stand against a Blair government.

Socialists in the Labour Party should be arguing now for the manifesto to be based upon the representative democracy of the party. By pushing for involvement at constituency level, for an amendment process, and for the final vote to be taken at conference, we can use the debate over Blair's New Labour manifesto to make ordinary party members aware of how much their rights are being eroded, and how the democratic processes of the party are being destroyed.

We should be pushing now for people to get involved in the Network of the Socialist Campaign Group and fighting for the concept of collective democratic decision making.

When the fightback against a Blair government starts, those socialists inside the Labour Party will have a pivotal role to play.

# Students must build on the ground

Mick Duncan, of the National Union of Students Executive, describes the background to their recent conference and asks what militant students should do now.

IN MARCH 1995 the student movement was thrown into turmoil. The Blairite Labour Students leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) proposed at annual conference to review our policy supporting full student grants.

They said they didn't want to ditch NUS's commitment to grants, or accept the Tory government's grant cuts and loans, but that they wanted to "open up the debate" and "set the tone for the general election."

They promised a genuine consultation of NUS members in order to form a policy with wide support which they could present to politicians. They won the vote to have a "review."

After the vote, activists began to see the move for what it was: a first step to abolishing NUS's commitment to grants.

At that conference a number of us launched the Campaign for Free Education (CFE). We predicted that the promised "review" would be a paper exercise which had as its aim paving the way for Blair's Labour government to introduce graduate tax without opposition from students. We were right.

There was no wide-ranging review. Instead, the NUS leadership sent a questionnaire to student union presidents during the Easter holiday, to be returned within 10 days.

The NUS leadership chose to ignore the result of even that limited exercise because most replies favoured grants and free education!

The leadership unilaterally called an emergency conference of the union for May 1995, to change NUS policy. The Blairites expected to win because most delegates would be Higher Education student union officers, who they find easier to control!

CFE built like hell for the conference, organising debates up and down the country, and contacting delegations from colleges who had rarely taken an active interest in NUS before.

To our surprise but even more to the Blairites, the day of the special conference arrived and CFE won a resounding victory: a commitment to free education and also, for once, a serious strategy to start fighting for it.

The NUS President who two months previously had won a sizeable vote from Labour loyalists was wheeled out to speak against this policy, and students told him where to go.

In the days after the emergency confer-

ence Labour Students threatened to stop CFE organising on the ground. For once, they were true to their word.

After a telling-off from Walworth Road they set to attacking NUS area organisations — grass roots organisations which link smaller Further Education college unions with unions in Higher Education.

The "areas" had been the backbone of the Campaign for Free Education and had enabled many small unions, whose members have so much to lose, to participate in the conference.

After we had won the union to free education policy we prepared for the new academic year and to pressurise the National Executive to fight for it.

The National Executive announced their programme of campaigns for the first term — they did not even mention the free education policy passed two months before. The emergency conference had voted to organise a national demonstration. The Executive set a date for the demo but they did their worst to scupper it.

Undaunted, the minority on the Executive worked to ensure that the demonstration was not a flop. And 300 student activists attended a meeting held after the demo to build our campaign.

Student unions up and down the country affiliated to the Campaign for Free Education, and general meetings and referenda showed overwhelming support for our policies.

The Labour Students hacks were surprised at the level of life left in the student movement after they had tried to run it down for the last 15 years. But we knew that free education sentiment at the grass roots could not guarantee success at the 1996 annual conference.

When their careers are on the line and when they are backed by Walworth Road, Tories, Liberals, big business, the media, Labour Students hacks fight hard and dirty.

CFE geared up for the annual conference, putting together a broad slate of candidates for the National Executive, uniting people from across the political spectrum who support free education.

Labour Students geared up too! Before the conference this year they had a list of all the delegates and they sent them glossy publicity putting their case from Walworth Road.

When the actual conference came, slanderous and fantastical leaflets calling our demands "revolutionary rhetoric" awaited delegates as they stepped off trains and coaches in Blackpool.

Labour Students stuffed our campaign stall in an obscure corner of the Winter Gardens and gave their own stall pride of place.

They put enormous pressure on student unions with free education policy to break their mandates — in too many cases they succeeded. Many delegates voting against

free education appeared as delegates from colleges where they were not actually students.

Labour Students stitched up the debate tighter than ever, rushing through the vote on free education with little discussion.

Labour Students won their position on a card vote by 55% to 45% — not a convincing margin, but they won nonetheless.

But then we had known that they had resources we did not, and that they would not roll over and give up when they lost back in May 1995.

CFE is not demoralised. We won a minority of places on the National Executive, a platform for free education policies next year, and our final free education caucus was the biggest of all conference.

Students are ready to go back and build the kind of movement which will not only take Labour Students on on their favourite territory — conference — but which will transform a limp and unorganised student movement on the ground.

Frankly, we have to build the student movement practically from scratch. During this campaign many students spoke at meetings for the first time and canvassed delegates, but, on the whole, campaigning in the colleges is no longer standard.

Labour Students get away with running NUS principally as a springboard for their careers powerful movement with political answers and activities to beat them and the Tories.

We have to build that movement.

When this year, NUS allows Tory quangos to close down colleges, we have to have a movement which can take on the quangos and save the colleges.

When NUS supports colleges shutting down left-wing unions, we must be in a position to take on the college authorities and defend those unions.

We can win NUS back and save the soul of the union but only if we do the work in the colleges to ensure that when we call a demonstration in London, it's massive. When we call a day of action, hundreds of thousands take part.

It sounds like a big job and it is. But we have no choice but to do it.

As a first step we must convince those who were with us at conference that it can and must be done and to join us in doing it.

Also crucial is the fight inside Labour Students. A number of Labour Students members, not always left-wingers, voted with us at conference. We have been weak and slow in taking the fight to Labour Student conferences and we must remedy that and win back Labour Students to free education.

This year we came close. We can see this year as a dress rehearsal. Now we understand better what we need to do to win.

Blair has won the battle but he must not win the war. ■

# New Solutions? No solutions!

By Bill Davies

I ATTENDED the Conference of the National Union of Students this Easter as a "first-time delegate". I have been delegated to trade union conferences in the past. However, the "new realism" agenda of those conferences did nothing to prepare me for the outpouring of unadulterated rubbish coming from the right-wing clique which runs NUS. This clique is centred around Labour Students and a new Walworth Road-funded campaign, the so-called "New Solutions".

From 9 in the morning until 11 at night we were subjected to speeches from New Solutions poodles claiming that they (and NUS's new policy supporting graduate tax) represented "realism, not rhetoric". And yet all they could come up with in support of this policy was erroneous and therefore empty rhetoric.

Most popular rhetorical point of the week: "The NUS policy of full living grants and restoration of benefits for all students in post-16 education has failed students and stopped the expansion of further education." Token Labour Students further education students and/or a Labour Student with a regional accent would get up and make this point accompanied by hysterical cheering and foot stomping from University delegates. Because of the grants policy, we were told, students are facing hardship and debt. Because of the grants policy, further education students can't get a decent education. This makes as much sense as saying the NUS logo has failed students and is causing student hardship.

The government did not cut grants because NUS policy was against cutting grants! The government did not fail to fund further education because NUS had a policy against cutting grants! To think so is to indulge in mind-boggling superstition.

It seems to me that it is because the NUS leadership has failed to implement the long-held policy against grant cuts and for free education that the government has impoverished students and cut their grants.

The most right-wing trade unions — the EETPU or the AEU for instance — would defend their members' interests better. The most cynical, most right-wing trade union bureaucrat would not go into a meeting with management and say "we give in to all your demands, we have no interests separate from yours, anything you say goes..." But this is effectively what NUS has done by giving up its policy on free education. They are saying to this government (or a future Labour government) "do what you like to post-16 education, charge what you want, to

whoever you want..." It's pathetic!

Even at the level of so-called 'realistic' economics the arguments of Labour Students/New Solutions didn't make sense. They complained that the extra cost of giving 1979-level grants to all students in post-16 education is £11 billion per year. Yet 1979-level grants is the amount of money students require in order to escape the hardship they are now facing.

So, is there a 'new solution' that costs less than £11 billion. There are three ways to reduce the figure it seems to me:

1. Restrict the number of students.
2. Allow the quality of their education to get even worse.
3. Don't alleviate student hardship.

Yet the Great New Realists say they are not in favour of any of these measures. They say they want to widen access, improve quality and alleviate hardship blah, blah, blah, rhetoric, rhetoric, rhetoric.

*"After selling out  
students the top table  
became very arrogant  
and triumphalist...  
orchestrated full-scale  
witch-hunts."*

The only people with a clear answer to this all important question — where will the money come from? — was the Campaign for Free Education (CFE). CFE say increase taxes on the wealthiest individuals and on the big profits of big business; shift government spending away from less deserving areas like nuclear weapons and the monarchy.

In contrast, Not Very Original Solutions say: "We want a funding partnership of society, business and those who have benefited from post-16 education". "Funding partnership"? Sounds great, everyone involved gives voluntarily in a spirit of co-operation perhaps? No way. What they mean is more taxation: general taxation and graduate tax on everyone who has been through post-16 education.

But hang on a minute... I thought that more taxation was anathema to New Labour because "the country can't afford it" and "there are higher priorities than funding post-16 education." Illogical or what...?

In fact the kind of taxes New Solutions are talking about are going to place an extra burden on people with low and middle incomes — especially those who have been through post-16 education. Surely this is more "unacceptable" than

burdening the rich with extra taxes.

Inevitably this "Pay nothing now, but pay a lot later" education policy will deter students from working-class backgrounds, older students, students not expecting to obtain highly-paid employment and so on from entering higher education. Students like me!

After selling out students — the vast majority of whom cannot be said to have been represented at the conference — the top table became very arrogant and triumphalist. Not content with running around in stupid, tee-shirts emblazoned with a "Trotskyists" logo they orchestrated full scale witch-hunts against the Campaign for Free Education (as you'd expect I suppose) but also *Workers' Liberty*. There were two events in particular which Joe Stalin would be proud of.

CFE Further Education National Committee member Ed Whitby was no-confidenced, in a motion which he had not seen until 10 seconds before it was moved, and was allowed 45 seconds to reply to it. Sheep-like, Labour Students FE delegates put up their hands to vote for the motion, without the tiniest concern for due process, or natural justice. Not very "decent" or "fair", Mr Blair.

On Wednesday evening *Workers' Liberty* organised a debate between ourselves and Sinn Féin. Delegates — many from Northern Ireland — with all kinds of different opinions, including Unionist opinion, came to listen and to participate (something there is scarcely little opportunity to do in the main conference). It was a calm, rational — dare I say it? — comradely debate. Did Labour Students come along to take part? No, they decided to put it about that we had "invited a terrorist to speak"... and how outrageous this was, etc. How dare they!

Peace in Ireland will not be easy to achieve for sure, but it will not be achieved by stamping on debate and trying to censor opinion. Everyone who attended the meeting (some 70-80 delegates) thought it worthwhile, and what is more, badly needed, given the complete lack of interest displayed in the main conference for the "peace process". Yet this is one of the most central political issues for workers in Britain and Ireland!

What can you expect? These people can't even take care of their own backyard — fighting for free education — so you can't expect them to care about what happens a few miles away across a narrow strip of sea!

But I did not go at all fed up. The Campaign for Free Education will fight on. The demand for free education will continue to be popular, as long as working-class people continue to value — and they do — the right to a decent education for their children and for themselves. ■



# The transformation of vegetarians into cannibals and cannibals into profits

By Ann Mack

THE BSE crisis reveals a lot about the irrationalities of capitalist production.

As far as we can tell, the basic root cause of the spread of BSE has been the transformation of a vegetarian animal into a meat-eater and then into a cannibal.

This transformation was driven by the need of agri-business to convert beef cattle into maximum profits regardless of the quality of the commodity produced. If that meant feeding them infected sheep or cattle, then so be it.

The result was an inferior product which no longer functioned simply as food but also as a potential carrier of disease.

What happened was that the entirely rational human drive to economise and avoid waste (finding a use for the

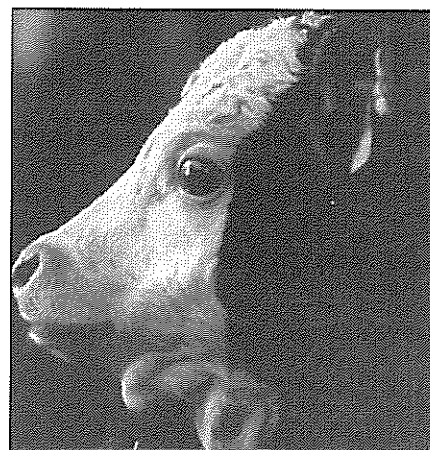
by-products of slaughter-houses) was converted into an irrational orgy of gambling with people's health.

The reason for this transformation is that food production is geared entirely to generating huge profits for the giant firms which dominate the industry rather than to producing wholesome and nutritious food.

At present, there is no mechanism through which conscious human control can be asserted over the food production process to ensure that food is safe to eat. In fact, what limited controls there used to be have been abolished by the Tories.

Instead, the primary concern is, as one Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food "expert" told the BBC last week, "to move as much beef through the system as possible." In other words, to convert cattle into profits.

The only response for socialists is to press for proper health standards in the food industry enforced by workers'



control.

At present the TGWU Agricultural Workers section is campaigning for a new food standards agency to enforce tough regulations on the food bosses.

That's a start, but we need to build on it by giving food workers the right to stop an unsafe job — either unsafe to themselves or to consumers — and the guarantee of jobs outside the food industry so they can act to safeguard health and safety without risking their livelihoods.

## Mad cows — or mad economics?

By Colin Foster

ACCORDING to the *Economist* magazine, even the "maximum bill" from the mad-cow crisis should produce "little extra pressure to raise interest rates or abandon planned tax cuts."

The *Economist* reckons the one-off bill to the Treasury from slaughtering all 12 million cattle in Britain as £15 billion, and the continuing costs at £1 billion a year. Its sums are faulty because it does not include, for example, the Treasury's loss of tax income from farmers and from meat industry workers and businesses. But there is a rational core to the magazine's posed complacency.

A diversified, productive modern economy, with total output of some £700 billion a year, can in principle deal with huge adjustments in single sectors quite easily. If productive resources were the only limitation, the government could easily spend £20 billion one-off, and £2 billion to £3 billion yearly, on dealing with the mad cow crisis — just as it could spend the same amount on rebuilding the Health Service!

"Cost to the Treasury", however, is a false measure of the impact of the crisis. If the oil crisis of 1974 could have been measured by the extra cost to various government budgets of the sudden rise in oil prices then it would have appeared very manageable.

A capitalist economy depends on the equilibrium of a vastly intricate chain of payments — A paying B who then pays C, who then clears their debt to D, and so on. If the chain breaks in too many places, then a slump results. Abundance of resources is no countervailing factor: on the contrary, as Marx put it, "industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce." C fails to pay D; D goes bust; D's workers and bosses no longer buy what A produces; the circle of payments turns into a downward spiral, goods are unsold, equipment is idle, workers are unemployed.

The oil price rise set off such a spiral: companies ran short of cash because of their unexpectedly high energy bills, and set defaults rippling through the system. The mad cow crisis could do the same, on a smaller scale: if farmers, abattoirs, renderers and meat wholesalers go bust, the firms who supply them are left with bad debts and then, in turn, default on payments to their suppliers.

Britain uses about two million barrels per day of oil at a current price of about £13 per barrel. If the oil price suddenly trebled, as it did in 1974, oil bills would increase by about £20 billion a year. The beef industry involves about 500,000 people. If they are all suddenly £10,000 a year worse off on average, then they are £5 billion short for paying their bills.

Thus, the impact of the beef crisis is substantially smaller, even on the most drastic assumptions, than that of the oil crisis, but it could be far from tiny. British capitalism is in a fragile condition to deal with such impacts, because it is running at historically high levels of debt.

It is difficult to estimate the impact more precisely, because there are so many variables. The main concern of the government and the European Union is to get people buying beef again, far above any considerations of safety: will they succeed, and how quickly? What rate of slaughter of cattle at risk will the government decide on? How widely will the EU spread the cost?

Given the political weight of farmers and the meat industry, it is fairly certain that the government will pay out a lot in compensation. This will reduce the risk of a chain reaction of defaults on payment, but create other problems.

To cover the spending, the government would sell more bonds (bits of paper on which it pays interest). Increased government bond sales tend to squeeze productive investment (to an uncertain extent) by draining wealth away and pushing up interest rates. Reduced investment can lead to disproportionate disruption in the whole economy, because it wrecks the most volatile sectors, those producing machinery and equipment.

Mad cows — or mad economics?

# Mad cows and Englishmen

By Les Hearn

LATE in March, some ten years after the BSE epidemic started in British cows, scientists advising the government stated that "the most likely explanation" for ten unusual cases of Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (CJD) was exposure to the agent that causes BSE, by implication through eating infected beef products. After years of government reassurances, the effect was explosive. Here we look at BSE, CJD and how the two diseases may have become entangled.

## BSE — what it is and why it is there

BOVINE spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is a new disease of cattle, the first cases being reported in 1986. While the full details of its mode of action are not available, it is almost definitely the sheep disease scrapie spreading into a new species.

BSE is similar to two human diseases, CJD and kuru. All four diseases cause substantial loss of cells in the brain, with an accompanying loss of mental and physical abilities. There may be genetic factors determining whether an individual gets infected, but it is definite that there is an infectious agent involved.

Scrapie is transmitted between sheep; BSE is transmitted in feed containing matter from infected sheep and perhaps also from cows to their offspring; kuru was formerly trans-

mitted to members of the Fore tribe of Papua-New Guinea when they handled the skulls of their dead relatives as part of their funerary rites (infected brain material was probably accidentally rubbed into cuts, rather than being eaten, as was formerly thought); and CJD has been contracted by recipients of growth hormone, extracted from the brains of people who had died without being diagnosed as suffering from CJD.

How then, did material from sheep with scrapie get into the food of cattle? Cows are 100% vegetarian under normal circumstances but are fed extra protein in cattle cake to help them grow and produce milk. Cattle cake was originally a rather wholesome mixture of grains and nuts but extra protein came to be added in the form of soya beans and then fish meal. Some consumers claimed to be able to detect a fishy taste in some meat.

The best quality protein comes from soya and fish but it is cheaper to use protein from other animal sources in cattle feed. Inevitably, this has come from those animals or parts of animals not easily sold, i.e., diseased or suspect animals and less attractive offal and bones.

This should not be a problem unless disease organisms or agents persist in the protein supplements. Unfortunately, the presumed cause of scrapie, prion protein [see box] is quite persistent. Even so, BSE did not occur until a change in the process of protein extraction was authorised by the Ministry of Agriculture in the late 1970s. This involved a move from treating batches of material at high temperatures to drive off solvents used to remove excess fat to a continuous method not involving use of solvents which therefore allowed a lower temperature. Undoubtedly, this allowed the scrapie agent to survive in the feed. Labour agriculture spokesperson Gavin Strang claims that Labour would have tightened up regulations had it been re-elected. In the event, the new Conservative government was not prepared to raise costs in the dairy industry. The first cases of BSE were not seen for several years after the relaxation in regulations because it has quite a long incubation period — some four years in cattle.

## What the government did

AS soon as it was identified as a new disease, BSE was linked to scrapie-infected matter in cattle feed. However, it was two years before the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) was set up. The government's chief advisor on BSE, Richard Southwood of Oxford University, says that he would have recommended removing diseased animals from the food cycle in 1986, if he had been asked. He also states that ministers were hostile to many of his recommendations. In particular, he advised that farmers be given full compensation for infected cattle destroyed. The government only offered a 50% grant, admitting recently that this policy encouraged farmers to pass off infected cattle as healthy.

## Mad cows and Englishmen

### LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

The latest news from the world of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is that laboratory mice can catch the "mad cow" disease just by eating brains

We brought you the news first: Les Hearn's Science column, *Socialist Organiser* February 1990!

In late 1989, the ministry banned the inclusion of certain cattle offal, such as brain and spinal cord, in foods for human consumption. Southwood had to insist that the ban be permanent. However, it is admitted by all except government ministers that farmers carried on using up old stocks of contaminated feed and that abattoirs frequently bend or break the rules on forbidden cattle offal. Officials, too, were less than diligent in enforcing the rules and closing loopholes.

The result of all these delays and failures is that cases of BSE peaked in 1992, at least two years later than they need have, and that large amounts of diseased meat entered the food chain up to 1989, also at least two years longer than need have been. In fact, if the scrapie problem had been treated with caution, instead of complacency, BSE need never have occurred.

If BSE does cause CJD, the ten (or twelve, now) cases could be the start of an outbreak that could last for several more years.

## Does BSE cause CJD

IN 1989, the risk to humans from BSE was said by most scientists to be "remote." The government then said that beef was safe, with John Gummer force-feeding his daughter a burger to emphasise this. The recent pronouncement by the SEAC does not say that BSE is causing the atypical cases of CJD, merely that it is the most likely explanation at present.

Much more research is needed to confirm the theory. First, the agent that causes BSE must be identified. Second, the agent must be recovered from the brains of supposed victims of the BSE/CJD. Third, the agent must be shown to cause the disease in experimental animals.

There are many problems with this research. It seems likely that one particular strain of sheep scrapie is responsible for BSE and yet it seems that the infectious agent has never got into the human population despite the eating of mutton. Why should it suddenly become dangerous to people? At the same time, it seems that the agent that causes BSE has crossed several other species barriers, infecting animals as diverse as antelopes and cats.

There is also a report that the unusual type of CJD has been found in humans before BSE was reported. Nevertheless, until we know for sure, it is prudent to do everything possible to eliminate the possibility of infection. ■

## Prion diseases

MOST diseases are caused by creatures with DNA or its close relative RNA — bacteria, fungi, protozoa or viruses. There are a very small number of diseases where all attempts to identify an agent possessing DNA or RNA have been unsuccessful. In these cases, kuru, scrapie, CJD and BSE it seems that the agent may be an infective protein or *prion*. No one knows how a protein can cause such diseases but all other possibilities seem to have been ruled out.

One theory is that the prion affects a very similar protein already in brain cells, one that is essential for the correct operation of those cells. It induces it to change its shape (become denatured) so that it can no longer do its work. This may lead to cell death, perhaps by the body's immune system attacking the unusual protein. The changed protein may be released, get into nearby cells, and repeat the process. Through some sort of chain reaction, more and more cells are affected, leading to a progressive loss of brain cells and a spongy appearance to the brain.

If true, there should perhaps be other prions capable of affecting cells in other parts of the body. So far, candidates for the role of prions have been identified but there is some way to go before the theory is proved.

# A time of danger

By Adam Keller, Tel Aviv,  
10 March 1996

IT IS hard to imagine how much havoc could be caused by a few determined and completely irresponsible fanatics, in such a short time.

Saturday, February 24 — precisely two weeks ago — was a clear and sunny weekend day, also on the political scene. The Israeli general elections had been definitely set for May 29. In all opinion polls, Prime Minister Shimon Peres kept a strong and steady lead over Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu and his victory seemed a foregone conclusion; a power struggle was developing inside the Likud, with many leading members believing that Netanyahu should be replaced by a candidate with a greater chance of success. Israeli-Palestinian relations seemed moving smoothly along, following Yasser Arafat's success in the Palestinian elections. The way seemed clear to further stages: revocation of the Palestinian Covenant, outdated symbol of Palestinian intransigence; Israeli withdrawal from Hebron, the only major West Bank city still under occupation; the beginning of negotiations on the final status... In the meantime, the young Israeli singer Zehava Ben performed before a Palestinian audience in Jericho and got wild applause, and prospects for the future seemed bright.

Under the calm surface, however, a fuse was burning — lit with the assassination of senior Hamas member Yihya Ayash by Israeli undercover agents at Gaza on January 5. The Israeli security service needed such a coup as the killing of Ayash — who had been involved in the blowing up of several Israeli buses — in order to compensate for its failure in guarding the life of Prime Minister Rabin. But in giving them the go-ahead to kill Ayash, Rabin's successor Shimon Peres made one of the worst blunders of his long career. The Ayash assassination shattered the *de facto* ceasefire which Hamas had maintained since August 1995. It tipped the balance inside Hamas against the relatively pragmatic internal leadership, which aims to become a political party and which conducted an intricate series of negotiations with Arafat in order to take an active role in building up the new Palestinian political system. In the aftermath of the killing of Ayash — foul arch-murderer in Israeli eyes, hero and martyr to many Palestinians — the lead among the radical Muslim was seized by the exiled leadership, which is based in Sudan and Syria and which seeks to continue at all costs and by all means the struggle against Israel.

Arafat tried — and for some time seemed to succeed — in stemming the tide, holding extensive negotiations with the Hamas lead-

ership to stop them from taking revenge against Israel which he knew would entail an Israeli crackdown greatly damaging to all Palestinians. But, as we now know, a group of Hamas militants — with or without the leadership's official sanction — was already preparing for the series of suicide attacks which were to shake Israel and the entire region. January 25 — second anniversary of the massacre perpetrated in Hebron by the fanatic settler Baruch Goldstein — was the date selected by Goldstein's Palestinian equivalents.

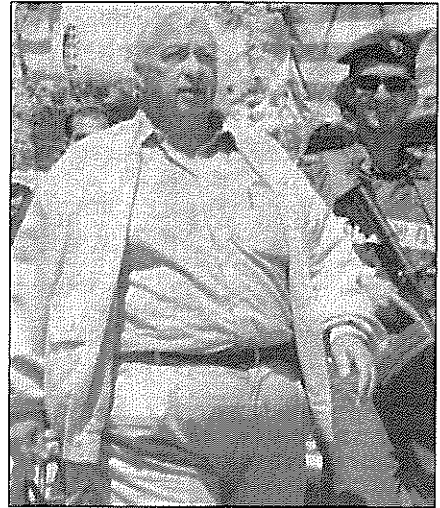
On the morning of January 25 I got up full of energy. There were many plans to carry through in the coming week. The campaign for the Palestinian women prisoners seemed to pick up much momentum and media attention, and in the city of Hebron peace activists had recently held a successful demonstration against the settlers in co-operation with the local Palestinians — an action to which a follow-up seemed indicated. Switching on the radio, I realised at once that all these plans — and much else — had been rendered moot.

A suicide bomber had blown himself up, and a bus-full of Israeli passengers, in the heart of Jerusalem. The radio estimates of the death toll rose steadily, as rescue teams combed through the burned-out wreckage. The emergency TV broadcasts showed the kind of horror scenes familiar from last year's Hamas bombing campaign, which we had begun to hope would not be seen again in Israel; and in the background of the picture we could see the right-wing mobs already beginning to form, as always on such days, with their shrill cries "Death to the Arabs" and "Down with Peres".

During the week of mourning for Rabin, in November 1995, peace activists from different groups had discussed the possibility that such a day would come again — and resolved that if it does we would not leave the right-wing in possession of the streets, that we would come out and demonstrate whatever happens. Yet now that the moment had indeed come, I felt again the kind of hesitation and paralysis I had felt at such moments in the past, and I heard the same also in the voices of others I phoned. It was not just the fear of being physically assaulted if we went out on the street with peace signs, but also the simple difficulty of answering the questions which would be certain to be asked by some bypassers: "You said that Oslo would lead to peace. Is this peace?"

At noon, the radio announced that a group of bereaved families who lost their dear ones in terrorist attacks had met with Prime Minister Peres — to encourage him to continue with the peace process.

Religious peace activist Yitzchak Frankenthal, speaking for the group, told the radio, "My son Arik, who was kidnapped and killed



One of Likud's leading lights, Ariel Sharon, takes a tour of the West Bank

by Hamas, believed in peace. He knew that terrorism is blind and that anybody could become its victim, and he believed that reaching real peace with our neighbours is the only way terrorism can truly be overcome. He would have wanted me to come here and talk to the Prime Minister the way I did."

After that, it was more easy to start organising, to discuss in hasty telephone consultations tactics and scenarios, the expected behaviour of the right-wing, of the police, of ordinary bypassers. It was decided not to go to the site of the bus explosion itself; rather, the evening vigil was scheduled to take place at Paris Square in central Jerusalem, the old rallying place of the Women in Black recently taken over by weekly Peace Now vigils. It was decided to have a single slogan — "Yes to Peace — No to Violence", the same as at the November 1995 rally at whose conclusion Rabin was assassinated. At 7.30pm we gathered at the spot — a large contingent of Peace Now youths, with a group of Labour students from Hebrew University and several Gush Shalom activists. We came with more than a little trepidation; the signs were all made of tough plastic, to prevent hostile crowds from snatching them and tearing them up. The police, too, were quite nervous, to judge from the numbers in which they arrived. Yet, surprisingly enough, bypasser response was no more hostile than in normal times, and in more than one case was positively supportive. The hour-long vigil ended with the lighting of candles and the singing of sad songs of mourning — both reminiscent of the days following the Rabin murder.

Polls taken in the following days indicated — as could have been expected — that Peres lost most of his lead. He now seemed to run almost neck-and-neck with Netanyahu — who had gotten some credit for behaving calm and "statesman like" and disassociating

himself from the violent mobs. Meanwhile, the government took the almost automatic step of imposing a closure on the Palestinian territories, supposedly in order to prevent the entry of further bombers, and incidentally depriving thousands of workers of their livelihood. For its part, the Hamas leadership released a statement calling for a ceasefire with Israel, and setting March 8 as a deadline for Israeli response, until which date no further action would be taken. The offer was officially rejected by the Peres government — yet it was taken quite seriously by several mainstream politicians and commentators, who discussed at length the pros and cons. On March 1, several of us from Gush Shalom had an unexpected chance to meet with a senior Hamas leader at the West Bank village of Bil'in — where we had come in order to participate in a rally against land confiscations. The man, Sheikh Hasan Yusef, was clearly in favour of a ceasefire.

However, the band of bombers seemed bent on discrediting their own movement's leadership and proving its deadlines to be meaningless — as well as defying the Israeli and Palestinian authorities and showing that, in spite of the closure and of all security precautions, they could strike again, on the same hour of the same day of the week, in the same Jerusalem bus line. (It was Line 18, serving mainly the most impoverished of the Jerusalem slums.) Once again, at nearly the same place on Jerusalem's main street as on the previous week, a full passenger bus was blown up by a suicide bomber.

Seeing the same horrors re-enacted exactly one week later gave a feeling of unreality, of living in a nightmare. One detail was different: we could clearly see that this time, the right-wingers were more numerous and more violent than in the previous week. Again there were the frantic consultations between different peace groups, the hasty telephone mobilisation. In the afternoon we gathered at the Rabin Square in Tel-Aviv, trying to draw strength from the memory of the Martyr of Peace. It was a heterogeneous group, combining secularist Jews with a group of religious students led by the maverick settler Rabbi Menachem Froman, as well as Palestinians and visitors from Morocco and Tunisia who came for a conference of the Tel-Aviv Center for Peace; we all lit candles, and several kinds of mourning services were held simultaneously.

On the afternoon of the following day I was seated at my word processor, when the radio announced yet another suicide bombing attack — this time outside the Dizengoff Shopping Centre, in the heart of Tel-Aviv. This time, the news hit me quite personally; my mother, an organiser in "Women for Political Prisoners" is in the habit of passing that precise spot on her way to the group's tiny office.

Phoning was of no avail; too many people had dear ones to worry about at or near the Dizengoff Center, one of the most crowded spots in Israel, and the telephone system simply collapsed under the sudden enormous overload. It was a terrible bus ride to central Tel-Aviv, with the bus radio blaring detailed descriptions of headless corpses

## A Palestinian state now!

The following Gush Shalom statement was published as a paid advert in Ha'aretz, on 8 March 1996.

AT A time of blood and tears, fury and agony, the voice of common sense must be clearly heard.

Suicide terrorism has severely damaged the peace process. It has exposed the basic flaw of the Oslo Agreement: a protracted, five-year long interim period. This prolonged period — with all the complicated intermediate stages, each of which needs to be separately negotiated upon — constitutes a standing invitation to all opponents of peace, all fanatics and madmen on both sides, to perpetrate horrors in order to sabotage and stop the process.

The Oslo timetable gave ample time and opportunity to the Hamas suicide bombers on the Palestinian side as well as to Baruch Goldstein, Yigal Amir and their ilk among the Israelis; all of them were able to organise and do their worst, again and again.

There is a clear conclusion to be drawn from the recent terrorist rampage in the streets of Israel's cities: this dangerous time gap must be closed. The original Oslo timetable, by which negotiations on the definite agreement between Israelis and Palestinians should drag on leisurely until May 1999, is now clearly revealed to be an unaffordable luxury. During these three years, innumerable assaults could be launched by the adherents of "Greater Palestine" and "Greater Israel" alike, causing further untold death and suffering and quite possibly derailing the entire process.

Crossing an abyss should be done in one jump, not in two; this was said by Shimon Peres, then Foreign Minister, immediately after the original Oslo Agreement was signed. He has now been proven even more right than he knew. In face of what we experienced this week, we must accelerate the timetable and reach the definite agreement — not in years, but in months, and as few months as possible.

Such a time frame should suffice: the outline of an agreement is already clearly discernible, and the majority among both peoples — cutting across old prejudices and traditional party affiliations — is coming closer and

closer to accepting it. Such an arrangement would:

- Give official recognition to the state of Palestine, which has in fact already been established and which already possesses a democratically-elected parliament, president and government.

- Make the "Green Line", the border which existed before 1967, into the official international border between the two states. The Palestinian government would be made fully responsible for preventing any terrorist act originating from its territory — and at the same time, would gain the full sovereignty and authority which are indispensable for that task.

- Evacuate the Israeli forces with the greatest possible speed from all territories still under their occupation, and deploy them along the old-new border.

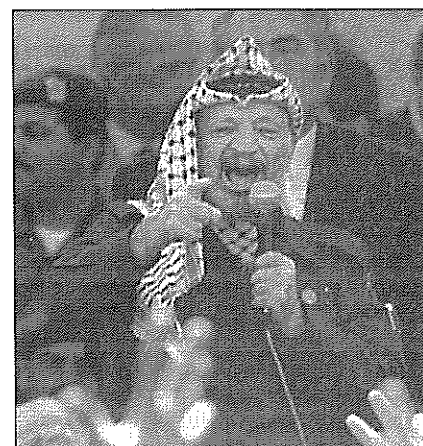
- Reach a reasonable compromise in Jerusalem, acceptable to both peoples.

- Give Israeli settlers the choice between staying in place under Palestinian rule or returning to Israel and getting compensation.

Now, more than ever, it is clear that hesitation and indecision give the enemies of peace their chance.

Curfews, closures, house demolitions, deportations, mass detentions — the old methods of oppression now once again implemented or contemplated by the Israeli military and political authorities — have all been tried many times in the past, and have all failed; indeed, all of them proved, again and again, to have the result of fanning higher the fire of hatred and conflict. The only feasible solution is to go to the definite solution — now!

- Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace bloc: PO Box 3322, Tel Aviv 61033, Israel. Tel. 972-3-5221732, fax 972-3-5271108





strewn about the ruined shops. At last I found my mother safe and sound — she had missed the bomber by a couple of minutes. Only then did I have to time to think of the catastrophic political consequences. On that night the cabinet — holding an emergency meeting in an atmosphere of panic magnified by the exaggerated media coverage of the shouting mobs — could have decided upon any wild measure and passed it with public acclaim. Some ministers actually proposed reconquering all the towns recently handed over to the Palestinians — which would have meant a total confrontation with the Palestinians and a bloodbath of staggering proportions; there were rumours of an internal Labor Party coup, forcing Peres to hand the defence portfolio to the hawkish Ehud Barak, and a more grandiose design to bring Likud into the government and give the defence ministry to the notorious Ariel Sharon; detailed plans were floated for a new mass deportation of Hamas leaders, on the lines of the disastrous December 1992 deportation.

The cabinet's actual decisions were draconian enough: a virtual siege of the Palestinian self-governing territories, effectively cutting the West Bank into a series of isolated enclaves; an effective brutal reconquest of the West Bank villages, left in the Oslo-2 agreement as an ambiguous no-man's land between Israeli and Palestinian jurisdictions; and a campaign of house demolitions and arrests of the suicide bombers' family members, for the sole crime of being their family members. Yet Peres kept his head enough not to take any irrevocable step, not to do something which would demolish the entire shaky structure of Oslo. In the conditions of that wild and desperate night, that was far from little.

Some other people also kept their head that night — a group of activists who gathered in front of Peres' home in North Tel-Aviv to protect it from the mobs and urge the Prime Minister to preserve what was left of the peace process. Seeing them on the TV screen at a late night hour was like finding an oasis in a scorching desert.

In the following days, something happened which nobody would have believed possible — this oasis of dedication to peace showed enormous vitality, rapidly spreading in all directions. The spate of right-wing violence died out within twenty-four hours of the Tel-Aviv bombing, leaving behind nothing but a trail of racist graffiti scrawled on the walls of the ruined shopping centre, in a grotesque imitation of "the Rabin graffiti" sprayed last November by mourning youths. Instead, an increasing number of peace demonstrators, organised by a variety of groups from the centre to the left of the political spectrum, took to the streets of Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. With growing confidence, people took to the streets to express their determination not to let the chance for peace be snatched away. "We will not let Hamas blow up our peace" was an especially popular slogan.

There was also an enormous mobilisation by Israel's Arab citizens, with "Yes to Peace — No to Terrorism" demonstrations and vig-



Clashes on the West Bank after crackdown on Islamic militants

ils taking place at practically every significant Arab town in Israel and at many of the smaller villages, supported by all parts of the Arab political spectrum. On the other side of the border, there were for the first time big peace rallies in the Gaza and at several of the West Bank cities, in spite of their difficult situation, under revulsion against the suicide bombers at the Palestine grassroots — though it remains to be seen whether that would deter the bombers now seen to be a small fanatic breakaway group, oblivious even to the Hamas' political leadership.

The weekend of March 8 and 9 saw an enormous number of demonstrations in Tel-Aviv: a three-hour vigil by hundreds of Labourites outside the defence ministry, where the inner cabinet met for a special session, was greeted by passing drivers honking in approval; a rally at the Rabin Square was attended by thousands, at the call of former Mayor Shlomo Lahat and his group of (former) "Generals for Peace"; a Meretz Youth vigil at the site of the bombing itself in the Dizengoff Center; an enormous rally outside of the bombing itself in the Dizengoff Center; an enormous rally outside the private home of Shimon Peres, in which the arriving Prime Minister, given a hero's welcome by thousands of cheering supporters, to his bodyguards' great chagrin, plunged into the mass, ignoring the stringent security measures instituted since the Rabin murder.

On the following day, some 5,000 participated in a Peace Now march in the heart of Jerusalem — an impressive scene full of placards and lighted torches.

For the more radical of us, as to all others, this incredible upsurge was a heady and heartening experience — but with a reservation. The mobilisation around Peres and against the right-wing onslaught left little space for confronting Peres from the other direction. Only a few isolated placards in the demonstrations took up the collective punishments and gross human rights violations in the Palestinian territories — territories which the army's brutal actions in the past few days have shown to be still very much under occupation.

Now that Peres has shown himself able to survive the right-wing onslaught and still run neck-and-neck in the electoral race with Netanyahu, it is time to take again more distance from him, in the cause of Palestinian

human rights — which also has much to do with the chances of peace. This evening's TV news gave prominent coverage to the visit of Uri Avnery to Yasser Arafat in Gaza, and to their joint protest over the tightening siege which reduces the area to the point of starvation. Meanwhile, preparations are going ahead for the bombastic "Conference against Terrorism", to be held at the Egyptian resort of Sharm a-Sheikh, featuring President Clinton and a record number of world leaders — and which will hopefully do something to get the peace process out of the lurch, as well as ease the Palestinians' plight.

For the slightly longer range, the crisis had shown a deepening of a tendency already discernible among the Israeli population, transcending traditional political differences: the tendency towards "a separation between the two peoples". More and more people — even long-time Likud and right-wing supporters — have come to accept that this means an independent Palestinian state. Increasingly, such people are willing to accept even that this Palestinian state would include the Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem — hitherto the heresy of heresies. All this, however, is on condition that the borders remain closed, that no Palestinian will come to Israel; all Palestinians are now regarded with suspicion, as potential bombers. Israel is at present the only developed industrialised country in the world to actively welcome Third World migrant workers in large numbers — for the express purpose of replacing the Palestinian workers hitherto employed in Israel. (The inevitable social and political problems resulting from this immigration wave will undoubtedly be deeply felt in the next decade — by which time the character of Israeli society will have been irreversibly changed.)

The peace which seems to be taking shape will be a cold and harsh thing, a far cry from the open symbiosis and open borders which we always dreamed about. Yet it will provide an end to violence and a time for both peoples to heal their wounds. It may soften in time. ■

● This article is due to be published — possibly in an updated form — in the March/April issue of *The Other Israel* Magazine, available from PO Box 2542, Holon 58125, Israel.

# Open letter to a socialist sympathiser of the IRA

## Three events that shaped the IRA

*"IRELAND occupies a position among the nations of the earth unique... in the possession of what is known as a physical force party — a party, that is to say, whose members are united upon no one point, and agreed upon no single principle, except the use of physical force as the sole means of settling the dispute between the people of this country and the governing power of Great Britain..."*

*The latterday high-falutin hillside man exalts into a principle that which the revolutionists of other countries have looked upon as a weapon, and in his gatherings prohibits all discussion of those principles which formed the main strength of his prototypes elsewhere and made the successful use of that weapon possible. Our people have glided at different periods of the past century from moral force agitation, so called, into physical force rebellion, from constitutionalism into insurrection, meeting in each the same failure and the same disaster, and yet seem as far as ever from learning the great truth that neither method is ever likely to be successful until they first insist that a perfect agreement upon the end to be attained should be arrived at as a starting-point...*

*Every revolutionary movement in Ireland has drawn the bulk of its adherents from the ranks of disappointed followers of defeated constitutional movements. After having exhausted their constitutional efforts in striving to secure such a modicum of political power as would justify them to their own consciences in taking a place as loyal subjects of the British Empire, they, in despair, turn to thoughts of physical force as a means of attaining their ends.*

*Their conception of what constitutes freedom was in no sense changed or revolutionised; they still believed in the political form of freedom which had been their ideal in their constitutional days; but no longer hoping for it from the Acts of the British Parliament, they swung over into the ranks of the 'physical force' men as the only means of attaining it".*

James Connolly, Workers' Republic, July 1899.

Dear Peter,

THE end of the IRA ceasefire makes it necessary to look once more at Irish republicanism — what it is, where it comes from, where can it go.

The last time we spoke you insisted that the Provisional IRA was a "genuinely revolutionary organisation", and a left-wing one at that — "not textbook, ideal, working-class revolutionaries", you said, "but real revolutionaries rooted in an age-old conflict that pushes them to the left and pits them against the establishment on both sides of

the Irish Sea". If they win, you added, that would deal an immense blow at "British imperialism" and the British state.

I, of course, contested all these statements, and other similar ones you made. I also contested your argument that the Provisional IRA campaign and the revolutionary-nationalist movement it spearheaded was part of an Irish concretisation of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

Your ideas are typical of a sizeable layer of the international left. I want to use recent events, the ceasefire and its breakdown, as an occasion to go over these questions once more.

### The 1916 Rising

THREE events shaped 20th century Irish republicanism. The first was the Easter rising in 1916.

About now, exactly eighty years ago, "in the springtime of the year" 1916, Connolly, Pearse, Mellows, Clarke, McDonagh, MacDermott, Markievicz, De Valera and their friends were feverishly working towards what they hoped would be a rising throughout most of Catholic Ireland. As it turned out, there would be a rising only in Dublin, and a few sparks struck in Galway and Cork.

They had planned a simultaneous rising in a number of centres throughout Ireland. The rising was to have been launched under cover of "manoeuvres" by the legal nationalist militia, the Irish Volunteers, which had been established during the Home Rule crisis on the eve of World War 1. At the last moment the official head of the Volunteers, Professor Eoin MacNeill, called off the manoeuvres.

Connolly and the others contemplated the collapse and ruin of all their plans. Connolly believed that European peace was imminent between powers that had been locked in blood-drenched stalemate for 20 months. If he and his friends failed to act, Ireland would miss the chance of winning belligerent status and thus representation at the expected peace conference; they faced the prospect of being rounded up, disarmed and imprisoned without having struck a blow. Their choice was to act dramatically, with little hope of the success they had hoped for, or else to let themselves be joined to the already large company of self-disgracing comic-opera revolutionary buffoons populating Irish history — to people like William Smith O'Brien MP, the man who led a ragged band around the starving countryside in 1848, at the end of the Famine, and felt obliged to first ask the permission of a landlord before he would order the cutting down of trees to build a barricade!

James Connolly, had written about such things with great bitterness and scorn in his book "Labour in Irish History" (pub-

lished in book form in 1910). There, he told the bitter tale of botched risings and missed chances that had succeeded each other like endless days of mourning and depression in Irish history. Connolly's bitterness attested to his determination to do better himself if the chance came. Seeing the chance going, Connolly, Pearse, and their friends acted to make the best of it.

And so they turned out in Dublin on Easter Monday, 1300 or 1400 of them against the might of the British Empire, in the Empire's second city — most of whose people, even those who wanted Irish Home Rule, supported the Empire and its war and therefore considered the insurgents traitors. Patrick Pearse read the declaration of the Irish Republic from the steps of the General Post Office, which they made their headquarters, to an uncomprehending crowd of casual spectators.

When the week-long battle that followed was over, and the Volunteers and their Citizen Army comrades were being led away under armed guard, some, including Connolly, to be shot after summary courts martial and others to be jailed and interned, crowds of Dubliners spat at them.

Thus Irish Republicanism took centre-stage in modern Irish history with a great revolutionary deed, startling alike in its heroic audacity and in its disregard for democracy in form or substance. For the elected leaders of the Irish were the Home Rule and Unionist MPs; the traditional leaders, the priests of the various persuasions. The insurgents had no mandate, not even the shadow of one, for what they did.

Connolly could not even have counted on the bulk of the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, of which he was acting general secretary. He did not

### The Rose Tree

"O words are lightly spoken,"  
Said Pearse to Connolly  
"Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree:  
Or maybe but a wind that blows  
Across the bitter sea."

"It needs to be but watered,"  
James Connolly replied,  
"To make the green come out again  
And spread on every side,  
And shake the blossom from the bud  
To be the garden's pride."

"But where can we draw water,"  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
"When all the wells are parched away?  
O plain as plain can be  
There's nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree."

WB Yeats



The Volunteers, 1916

count on it. Of all people, Connolly knew how useful a general strike would be to "paralyse the arm of militarism". If he did not try to call the workers of Dublin into action on the side of the insurgents, it was because he knew he could not.

The 1916 rising was an act entirely in the tradition of mid-19th century European revolutionism — of 1830 and 1848. In one of the articles Connolly wrote on the eve of the rising, on the techniques of insurrection, he analysed the Moscow rising of December 1905 — but that only pointed up the difference. Moscow came out of a mass movement; Easter 1916 presaged and prepared the way for the subsequent mass movement of nationalist revolt, a movement that might never have come, or might have come not so strongly, if the British had not tried to impose conscription on Ireland in 1918.

The minority acted in the name of the nation and called on the nation to follow, hoping to spark a national movement. In signing the surrender, Connolly was careful to sign only for Dublin and not to speak for the rest of the country. Plainly even then his hopes had not died. Yet the leaders of the rising cannot have hoped, even in the best case, that their actions would arouse anything but implacable hostility from the Northern Ireland Unionists.

### Connolly

WHAT did Connolly think he was doing? Connolly's shaping experience had been in the British labour movement. He was a Marxist who did not believe, could not have believed, that a minority can substitute itself for a major class, or for a nation.

The key to Connolly is probably to be found in the fact that he did not believe that there was such a thing as a mechanically, spontaneously, ripe revolutionary situation. Recasting Machiavelli into his own idiom, he had written: "The only true prophets are those who carve out the future they announce". Mocking the comic-opera Irish revolutionists, he had spelled his idea out:

"An epoch to be truly revolutionary must

have a dominating number of men with the revolutionary spirit — ready to dare all and take all risks for the sake of their ideas... Revolutionaries who shrink from giving blow for blow until the great day has arrived and every man has got his gun and the enemy has kindly consented to postpone action in order not to needlessly hurry the revolutionaries nor disarray their plans — such revolutionaries only exist in two places: on the comic opera stage and on the stage of Irish national politics" (November 1915).

Between writing that and deciding to turn out knowing that "we are going out to be slaughtered", as he said to one of his comrades on Easter Monday, Connolly's hopes of an all-Irish national rising had collapsed.

At the outbreak of the world war, Connolly — all of whose Irish hopes and perspectives had until then been focused on the development of the Irish labour movement within a Home-Rule bourgeois Ireland — had instinctively stood with those socialists who wanted working-class action against war in all the belligerent countries. He advocated Irish resistance to the war.

The collapse of the Socialist International and its disintegration into fragments lined up behind their own bourgeoisies threw Connolly back on to reliance on a national Irish struggle. He took sides with Britain's enemy, Germany, believing British imperialism to be the more reactionary imperial force because the British Navy controlled the seas. For this reason and on that issue, he seems to have been an Irish fellow-traveller of the patriotic majority of the German Social Democracy, who justified themselves by scholastic reliance on the arguments of Marx and Engels, in another epoch, against Russian imperialism.

Though all of this drove Connolly back into Irish nationalism, what he did was conceived still as part of an international struggle. "Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord". There is no doubt that Connolly saw what he was doing in 1916 in the light of the tactics Marx and Engels had elaborated for socialist activity in European countries like Germany and Italy in the mid 19th century. All through his life in Irish politics it is a recurring theme in his writings, now more, now less, emphasised. If it re-emerges startlingly after the outbreak of the 1914 war, that is because it had grown to seem remote in the evolution towards Home Rule of the previous years. 1914, rather than 1916, changed everything.

In 1850 Marx and Engels had written: "The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing; it opposes them in everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests".

In taking these views as a guide, Connolly anticipated the approach which, under Lenin's influence, the Communist Interna-

tional would advocate, in, for example, the Theses on the National and Colonial Question of its Second Congress in 1920.

### Victory in defeat

THE 1916 rising is one of the great examples in history of success coming soon on the heels of what looked like absolute failure. The defeated insurgents were spat at by the people they considered theirs after the rising; but a little over a year later most of them came home from internment camp and prison to a welcome for heroes. Two and a half years after the rising, Sinn Féin won 73 out of 105 seats (for 48 per cent of the vote) in the 1918 general election, standing for a Republic and advocating the immediate setting up of an Irish parliament by the elected Irish MPs.

In January 1919 they did that. Two and a half years of often savage war later, Britain was forced to treat with Sinn Féin, offering most of Catholic Ireland Dominion status — substantial independence, the same as Canada and Australia had — within the British Empire.

If Sinn Féin failed to get all they wanted — an independent republic outside the British Empire, and a united Ireland in which the one million people in north-east Ireland who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom would accept the "majority rule" of Catholic and mainly agrarian Ireland — that could be put down to a betrayal of the spirit of "1916". If there had been more of intransigence, outright refusal to compromise, then... Thus reasoned the minority who rejected the Treaty with Britain.

In its strange and dramatic contradictions, in the sudden reversals of fortune, in the confused and unexpected roles some of its participants played, 1916 inevitably generated confusion and mystification. Its power over the mind and imagination of subsequent generations comes not only from its heroism, or from the attractiveness and fascination of some of its leaders, but from its subsequent success.

The minority acted, outraging most of the nationalist people as well as Irish unionists north and south. They were loathed until the leaders were killed, and then came the magical transformation — the resurrection. Soon there was enough of a victory to unanswerably vindicate the minority, and retrospectively vindicate the insurgent tradition, the "little risings", of the 19th century. The retrospective weaving of poetic myth around the events and the idea of the blood sacrifice that redeemed Ireland, drawing much of its power from Christian myth, drawing too on the writings of Pearse and McDonagh, and given its shape by "the great myth-maker", Yeats — all of that, saturating the popular culture of Catholic Ireland, became and remains a great political force.

The minority acted, and won; the gun bestowed a power, magnified wonderfully, on the minority and their cause: and thus ever after you have a model of minority revolutionary action. In that "miraculous" experience you have the reason behind much of the unreason of modern

republicanism. History is a miracle-play! The republicans expect a miracle to overwhelm the unfavourable hard facts in the Six Counties.

Serious people do not believe in miracles. When something looks like a miracle, we probe to see what really happened and why.

For example, such seemingly miraculous things as the overnight eruption into a general strike of millions of workers who but yesterday were passive and indifferent — France, 1968, is one of the best examples — have for Marxists no mystery: they are rooted in the fact that normally there is a contradiction between the consciousness of working-class people and their real situation. That is what can trigger seemingly miraculous change.

In post-1916 Ireland the cause of the insurgents prospered quickly because of a number of material factors. Probably there was nothing inevitable about it. One of Connolly's chief spurs to action was his "fear" of a quick negotiated peace. If that had happened; if, later, the British had not tried to impose conscription on Ireland; if events had not continued to discredit and pulverise the Home Rule party and its entire philosophy of Irish progress by way of agreement with the British state — then "1916" would have been no success.

In Northern Ireland, since 1969, there has been no shortage of republican heroism or of epic events with the power to over-

whelm the sympathetic or even hostile imagination — the 1981 hunger strikes, for example, when ten men starved themselves to death. There has been no magical transformation — because the material conditions forbid it.

#### Civil war

THE second event that shaped 20th century republicanism was the civil war. The Treaty was imposed on Collins and Griffith by the credible British threat of "immediate and terrible war". The British had plans for internment camps in Ireland in which large parts of the whole population would be imprisoned, as Boer civilians were during the Boer war, to cut off support from the IRA.

After Sinn Féin split over the Treaty, the Republicans lost out in the political electioneering and manoeuvring. The bourgeoisie, the men who in the Dublin Chamber of Commerce had passed a resolution after the 1916 rising denouncing it as "Larkinism run amok", the big farmers in the east who had recently engaged in a large-scale social war with their labourers — all flocked behind the Collins-Griffith faction of Sinn Féin, the new party of order.

Fundamentally, however, what the "Free Staters" had going for them was the lack of any viable "Republican" alternative to compromise with Britain, and the fact that most people could not see the differences between Collins and De Valera as worth fighting about. Many saw that Collins was right that he had, indeed, won "the freedom to win freedom" — to gradually expand the Irish state's real independence.

Against that, there was the mysticism of Catholic nationalists — honourable, conscientious people like Cathal Brugha, who had sworn an oath to maintain the Republic and could not now swear the required allegiance to the King of England. At the base, there was the inchoate and dimly felt millenarianism of large numbers of people, especially in the West, for whom "the Republic" represented the drive for a great social transformation — for what Connolly had called the Workers' Republic. How widespread this was is now almost forgotten.

In all the labour and small-farmer struggles during the war of independence, the IRA acted as a force defending the status quo and securing private property. It was a national, and not a "sectional" movement. And before and during the civil war, the IRA leadership attempted to act as if they could — like the "men of 1916" — ignore elections, majorities, in short, politics. They acted as a separate military power in the state; they fought a civil war without any coherent alternative to the status quo.

They could not force a better deal than the Treaty out of the still very mighty British Empire. They had no policy for overcoming the division of the country, implicitly accepting that the North could not be "forced". The North, amazing as it may seem, had little part in the considerations of Dáil Éireann on the Treaty in December 1921 and January 1922. Division was a fact, and discussion

focused on things like the Oath of Allegiance.

The IRA drifted into a civil war they could not win and probably did not deserve to win because they thought that the gun and intransigence were enough. Being born was what might be called "Carbonari Republicanism", after a 19th-century underground revolutionary sect — archaic, sterile, conspiratorial republicanism, without any political programme to match its revolutionary aspirations. An attempt by the imprisoned republican Liam Mellows to restate Connolly in explicitly left-wing-populist nationalist terms — the republicans needed the "men of no property" — had been drowned in blood: Mellows was shot out of hand in December 1922.

My sympathies are with the republicans, with the young lads who would not accept compromise with imperialist iniquity or accept less than the radical transformation of life "the Republic" represented to them; with those who would not break their oath and their pledge, or break faith with Connolly and Pearse and those who had died in the fight — and with Liam Mellows, who told Dáil Éireann in the debate on the Treaty that Collins and Griffith were opting for the "fleshpots of Empire", turning their backs on the Indians and the rest of the oppressed peoples struggling for freedom against the British Empire. For socialists, those are our people, even when we disagree with them, or would have advocated a different course to theirs.

But the greatest tragedy of the civil war was that the republican side caught up into itself and into its notions of action — not politics, not working-class action, but the gun — a large part of the revolutionary energy of plebeian Ireland. For decades Carbonari republicanism would act as a lightning conductor, as one of Ireland's safety valves.

With its social base among small farmers, and rural and small-town labourers, the republican movement was separated from the organised labour movement in Catholic Ireland not so much by ideals as by method. Republicanism took shape as an "outsider" revolutionary movement. It defined itself as revolutionary by its commitment to minority action, to armed struggle on principle and as soon as possible. It saw military action as something sufficient to itself, dependent for success more on military logistics than ripe socialist conditions. After 1922 it was cut off from and abjured political action on principle, resolutely boycotting every parliament in the British Isles, Dublin, Belfast, or Westminster.

It was an archaic revolutionary movement, a throwback to mid-19th century movements in Europe, a hybrid, with (in practice if not in theory) many points in common with a militant anarchism. Social questions would be of interest to republicans — some of them — only as a means of gaining support for the nationalist armed struggle. It was an upside-down view of the world, in an archaic, land-that-time-forgot revolutionary movement on the fringes of Europe. Frederick Engels had described one of their 19th century ancestors, the terror-

#### Soviets in Ireland

THE Catholic Ireland of the war of independence was an Ireland in which the idea of the Workers' Republic had an immense popularity; an Ireland where very large numbers of people had been gripped by a diluted and imprecise (and therefore inevitably ineffective) version of Connolly's politics. It must have been a good time, though for socialists a painful one, to live through! In that Ireland, little groups of wage-workers in creameries, living in a sea of proprietary and would-be proprietary small farmers, time and again went on strike and ran up the Red Flag above a newly-proclaimed and short-lived "soviet". This happened on perhaps 38 separate occasions in those years.

It was an Ireland in which large numbers of people, including many who were not proletarians, were hungry for the Great Change, for the Workers' Republic that was for the majority the restoration of ancient Ireland, the imaginary golden age of the past, and the realisation of an impossible Catholic pre-capitalist world, and for a small minority what it is for us. And it was a revolutionary Ireland, of course, dominated by the fact that the great majority of the industrial proletariat were cut off from and hostile to the great awakening I describe.

If the war with the British (1919-21) radicalised and shook up the people in the South, in Belfast, where there had been a tremendous engineering strike in 1919, it helped trigger intra-working-class pogroms. Yet without the Northern workers, there could be no Workers' Republic.





Jim Larkin

ist sect of "Invincibles", as "Bakuninists".

The stagnation in Ireland, the situation created for revolutionary politics by the split in the working class and by Partition, and, as we will see, the collapse of the Communist International, would combine to keep the physical force revolutionaries in business. The IRA would become Ireland's substitute for a "revolutionary left" of the modern, 20th century, sort — based on the working class, using politics and trade unionism normally, treating questions of the state and armed force rationally rather than making a fetish of any particular form of action, organisation or struggle.

### The fate of Connolly's socialist republicanism

THE third crucial development, allowing Carbonari republicanism to survive and helping to shape it, was the fate of revolutionary working-class socialism in Ireland — first, the dissipation of Connolly's political tradition, and then the degeneration of the communist movement into Stalinism.

Connolly had followed the tactics advocated by Marx, and later to be advocated by the Communist International — act together, organise and propagandise separately. But politically Connolly was swallowed up by his bourgeois and petty-bourgeois allies; socialism, despite the wide sentiment for "Connolly's Workers' Republic", was not an independent force in the years after 1916.

Connolly coined the ambivalent slogan that would serve populist republicanism: "the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour; the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland". He did not understand it as either a merging of the working-class interest into a multi-class national entity, or, as populist republicans — some in the Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin today, for example — do, the enlistment of labour and social issues as a means of gaining support for the national struggle. He saw the national question and the social question as flowing together, and national liberation as the victory of the working class. In any clash, he saw the "national" question as secondary.

"In the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must perforce keep pace with the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation and... the shifting of economic and political forces which accom-

panies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservatism of the non-working-class elements and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class".

The flaw in Connolly's design for 1916, as a working-class activity, was twofold. Any possibility of a national movement and a socialist working-class movement flowing together and "reconstructing the nation under its own leadership" in the vaguely "permanent-revolutionary" way James Connolly formulated it above (and elsewhere) was ruled out by the split in the Irish working class, and by the relative weakness of the Catholic working class vis-a-vis the rest of Catholic Ireland, which was, essentially, a peasant country. The "national question", as defined in most of Ireland, cut off the majority of the working class, who saw themselves as British.

It was the division in the Irish working class, and in the unions, that paralysed the labour movement in the war of independence. It organised general strikes as part of the political-military struggle, but it left politics to the bourgeois factions, unionist and republican: otherwise, it would have split.

The second flaw, which shaped the posthumous fate of James Connolly in Catholic Ireland, was his failure to build an educated, clear and coherent revolutionary socialist organisation, able to pursue consistent goals in changing circumstances. Connolly left a great vacuum. To discuss why would take us too far afield here. The consequence was that after 1916 the labour movement was a captive of nationalist forces.

"Connollyism" was reduced to a vague aspiration, his hard Marxist ideas immediately subjected to working over by "left-wing" priests and others to assimilate them to Catholic Nationalist Ireland. Their widespread popularity helped the labour movement grow — the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union experienced a phenomenal expansion in the period between 1916 and 1922 — but it had little other effect.

Talk of a Workers' Republic merged with Catholic mysticism and vague "back to the clan system" millenarianism to provide an aureole for the republican struggle against Britain. Connolly's legacy dissolved into a vaguely socialist and populist wing of nationalism during the war of independence.

### The Communist Party of Ireland

THE forces of revolutionary socialism had to recompose themselves, and this was attempted as the war of independence was ending by the creation of a Communist Party, linked to the Communist International. Tiny and led by very young people, among them James Connolly's 20 year old son Roddy, it had little weight, and politically it let itself become a satellite of the physical-force republicans in the civil war.

After 1923, it regained the founder of the mass Irish workers' movement, Jim Larkin, who came back from jail in the USA, and led the breakaway from the Irish Transport and

General Workers' Union, the Workers' Union of Ireland.

In the late 1920s, after Jim Larkin drifted away from the Communist International, there was no Communist Party. The movement was recommenced by young militants trained for years at the "Lenin School" — i.e., the Stalin school — in Moscow, Betty Sinclair, Sean Murray, Brian O'Neill, Michael McNerny and one or two others. When the Communist Party of Ireland was refounded in 1933, it was rigidly Stalinist, with a hardened Catholic-nationalist and Menshevik stages-theory of development in Ireland.

The early Communist Party had been the real heir of Connolly. In the natural course of healthy political evolution it would have overcome its weaknesses and subsumed the working-class revolutionary element trapped in republicanism, winning republican militants to a clear notion of the workers' republic — working class power — as the only republic that would not be a gommeen mockery of the centuries of struggle of the Irish people.

Thus it had been in 19th century Europe, when the primitive, politically incoherent, underground revolutionary sects had over time dissolved and merged into modern labour movements — in France, for example, the Blanquists did that. In Ireland, the old revolutionary sectarianism survived in the IRA, penned up in the social and political blind alleys of post-partition Ireland. It did so because the alternative, rational, revolutionary movement, the communists, collapsed into a variant of populist nationalism, and became only a tributary stream into republicanism.

### The Fifth Congress of the Communist International and "stages theory"

FROM 1923-4 the Communist International veered to the right. Its Fifth Congress — reflecting the interests or the perceptions of the ruling bureaucrats in the Soviet Union — began the process of substituting other politics for working-class, communist politics.

The working-class communists began to advocate the creation of two-class "worker and peasant" parties, and — in practice — the subordinate alliance of the communists with the bourgeois nationalists in colonial or semi-colonial countries. In China this led the working-class communist movement into the bourgeois-nationalist organisation of Chang Kai-Shek's Guomindang — and to a terrible massacre of Communist workers in 1927.

Everything which in 1916 and post-1916 Ireland had come about because Connolly was dead and because there was no communist party, that is, from confusion and working class defeat, now was deliberately fostered as a matter of high Comintern policy, under the direction of the Executive of the Communist International. In Ireland, the tiny, fledgling Communist Party had already tended to become a tail of the physical-force republicans in the civil war, before such politics became official Communist International policy. By the time the original Communist Party of Ireland collapsed,

## Connolly in 1916

ARTHUR MacManus, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Glasgow-based, and like Connolly a Scots-Irish communist, explained Connolly's action in 1916 thus, quoting a letter he had received from him:

"Jim Connolly was the first socialist I had met who actually worked for Revolution, and dreamt of its immediate possibility. He was continually striving to read into every crisis the potentialities of a Revolutionary situation.

It is this which explains Connolly best. Foreseeing the inevitable struggle over the war, and aware of the forces which would be involved, he saw possibilities of at least a Political Revolution in Ireland.

If he remained aloof, then there could be no possible doubt as to it being merely a Political National one. But if he entered the throes of the struggle and could retain integral his own forces behind him, then given the first success, there was possibility in the second.

In any case, as he himself put it, "It is a Revolutionary's duty to encourage and aid the development of any and every crisis, and latterly to set about transforming it into a Revolutionary situation". This was Connolly's hope, and, if he failed, who can blame him? It is better to fight half a cause than talk a whole one; and in so far as Connolly was true to himself in this sense, to whom was he false?

The following letter, written by him in November 1915, gives pretty clearly the view he took of the whole situation:

To A McManus. Dear Comrade,  
Your letter of 15th inst. duly received. I need hardly assure you that I would gladly accept your offer and invitation to address an anti-conscription meeting in Glasgow were it at all possible. But every moment in Dublin just now is full of tragic possibilities, as our beneficent Government is becoming daily more high-handed in its methods, and my presence is required here in constant watchfulness.

Hence, with regret, I must decline your kind invitation, and send you instead this message to yourself and all the Comrades who refuse to be led astray to fight the battles of the ruling capitalist class. Tell them that we in Ireland will not have Conscription, let the law say what it likes. We know our rulers: we know their power, and their ruthlessness we experience every day. We know they can force us to fight whether we wish to or not, but we know also that no force in their possession can decide for us where we will fight. That remains for us to decide; and we have no intention of shedding our blood abroad for our masters; rather will we elect to shed it if need be in a battle for the conquest of our freedom at home. Yours fraternally [signed] James Connolly."

From *The Socialist* April 1919

and a replacement was organised around Jim Larkin and his union, official Communist International policy was pushing them towards being a mere left-wing tail of the republican nationalists, around whom was grouped much of the natural constituency of the communists in Catholic Ireland.

The Communist International produced a great flowering of revolutionary Marxism, a great clearing away of reformist encrustations, a sharpening of long blunted Marxist perspectives, and an ardent commitment to militancy on the national question, too. The documents embodying this work — Lenin's draft, amended by the Second World Congress, on the National and Colonial Question, for example — are the bedrock of modern Marxism.

Yet no major Communist International document analysed Ireland. The nearest approach was a couple of weighty pieces on the current situation in the light of history by young Roddy Connolly. By the tenth anniversary of the rising, Stalinist hacks were writing commentaries in which Irish history was current Communist International policy read backwards — and forwards. For, of course, Catholic Ireland's nationalist tradition fitted well with the Stalinist "line". It fitted, too, the scholasticism that replaced Marxism as living analysis in the Communist International. Marx had written about Ireland. So had Lenin. Neither, naturally, had an analysis of post-partition Ireland to offer. And it was a radically different Ireland.

The Border had become the focus of nationalist feeling and anger. The North was now "Ireland unfree". For the post "Fifth World Congress" Irish communists, the task was first to "complete the bourgeois revolution" before then proceeding to socialist concerns, and for the Communists as for the least enlightened Catholic nationalists that came to be identified with unifying the island. On that basis the Communists merged themselves politically with republicans moving left.

The Stalinist strategy did not necessarily imply any commitment to militarism, still less any commitment to an attempt to conquer the Northern Ireland Protestants — even most of the republicans explicitly then repudiated that — but it shared the analytical, political and moral foundations of physical-force republicanism. It shared the common culture of bourgeois Catholic Ireland: that the main difficulty in achieving a united Ireland lay in British control or "occupation" of Northern Ireland. At its most benign, that culture looked to a British-Irish bourgeois deal over the heads of the Irish Protestant minority: this was most characteristically the approach of the De Valera wing of constitutional republicanism. A central difficulty for the left-wing and physical-force republicans was that, within the parameters of the common culture, there was no revolutionary alternative to De Valera's "reformist" approach.

Rational revolutionary politics could be developed only by stepping out of those parameters. The division in Ireland had nothing to do directly with the bourgeois

revolution. Northern Ireland had long been the most bourgeois part of Ireland, as well as the most developed — it had had its "bourgeois revolution", as part of England's bourgeois revolution, in the 17th century. The 26 counties had had a thorough bourgeois revolution — that on the land organised by the British state after the 1880s; then the political revolution and independence in 1918-22 — and retained far fewer pre-capitalist trappings than Britain itself had. There was nothing pre-bourgeois about the split in the island. There was a split bourgeoisie and a split population following them before there was a divided island. The messy and untenable partition, the crime against the Irish Catholic people and particularly against those in Fermanagh and Tyrone kept against their will in the Northern state, was the Irish-bourgeois/imperialist crime that actually happened. Another Irish-bourgeois /British-imperialist crime had been attempted before 1914 — the forcible putting under Dublin rule, against their will, of the Northern Ireland Protestant people, who thought of themselves as primarily British.

Before communists could accomplish anything, they had to come to terms with the facts of post-partition Ireland.

The task was to unite the working class on the island of Ireland, and in the two islands. Redress of the injustice to the Six Counties Catholics, defence of their rights — and defence of the rights of the Protestant minority in the South — were naturally part of that, but no more than part. It was necessary above all to argue with republican militants against their pseudo-anarchist positive fetish of physical force and their negative fetish against existing parliaments, and for politics centred on the development of the labour movement, not on nationalist myth.

In fact, however, from the fifth world congress of the Communist International, Irish communism was morally disarmed before Catholic nationalism. Its analysis of the situation was utterly false, marrying narrow nationalist and Catholic-nationalist concerns with mechanical Stalino-Menshevik dogmas about necessary "stages" of revolution so as to elevate the "irredentist" concerns of Catholic nationalists above everything else. Communist political independence was thus snuffed out by the development of Stalinism in the Communist International and in Ireland, and Carbonari Republicanism was reinforced.

In this way, the most "revolutionary" politics in Ireland came to be symbiotic with old Catholic nationalism, and even Catholic communalism. Revolutionary working-class politics came to be dressed up in Catholic-nationalist costume. The result was an inchoate and unstable nationalist populism which more than once spun off new physical-force strands because the core axioms of the physical-force faction were never questioned, and the "left" alternative could never be effective when measured against those axioms.

Physical force against the North was abjured by all republicans until the late



1930s — apart from a few token actions against customs posts on the border during the coronation of King George VI — but, left or right, the populist analysis, the merging of working-class politics into populism, of the working class into the Catholic nation, until the “completion of the bourgeois revolution”, or “reunification”, was a common culture.

### Mainstream bourgeois republicanism

SOME of the republican programme was impossible. No force on earth could convince the Northern Ireland Protestants to become Irish nationalists, hustle them reluctantly under Dublin rule, or make capitalist Ireland anything other than a small, weak unit in a vicious capitalist world. Such parts of the republican programme as were feasible were carried through in large part — but by mainstream bourgeois republicans who in time would turn sharply against the physical-force republicans.

A bourgeois Catholic Ireland developed in which — especially after the Free State Land Act of 1923; but, essentially, long before that — working peasants and labour-exploiting bourgeois farmers owned the land. The Statute of Westminster, in 1931, recognised the effective independence of Ireland and the other Commonwealth “White Dominions”; De Valera, in 1936-7, seized the chance of Britain’s abdication crisis to effectively remove the monarchical element in the Free State constitution. The formal declaration of a Republic in 1949 would add nothing to this. In so far as the Free State was not “free”, was unequal to Britain, that was because in a world dominated by bourgeois relations the small never can be the equal of the big. (Britain faces the same disadvantage now in relation to Europe).

The bourgeois physical-force-ists of 1919-21 had formed a government in 1922. They were opposed by a large part of Sinn Féin, an uneasy bloc of politicians and of militarists acting as a law unto themselves, who fought and lost a confused civil war, in 1922-3.

After the civil war, the rump Sinn Féin, led

by Eamonn De Valera, refused to recognise the Dublin or Belfast parliaments or to take the seats they won in Dail Eireann. They retained the support of large parts of Ireland, particularly in the south and west, where some districts had had to be conquered for the Dublin government by landing from the sea, as though they were foreign territory.

In late 1925 the IRA convention withdrew recognition from De Valera’s so-called Republican Government (whose claims to be the legitimate government of all Ireland were based on the authority of the “Second Dail”). It became a party-army in itself. In May 1926 De Valera founded Fianna Fail, taking most of the old anti-Treaty forces with him. Sinn Féin as a political organisation was reduced to a rump: it did not contest the 1927 election.

In August 1927 De Valera dropped abstention from politics, and Fianna Fail entered the Dublin parliament: hard-line republicanism had lost its major force. Fianna Fail formed a government in January 1932 with parliamentary backing from the small Labour Party, and won a majority of its own at the end of the year. It brought in a weak version of Roosevelt’s New Deal, and pushed the 26 Counties along the road it had travelled since 1922, towards effective independence.

Fianna Fail would become the major party of the Irish bourgeoisie, ruling for most of the next 60 years. They would shoot republicans during World War 2. The traditional intransigent republican explanation — Fianna Fail betrayed — explains nothing.

### The three sorts of republicanism

FROM republicanism as it came out of the civil war, you can see a pattern, often repeated, of three-way splitting — a recurrent tendency to flake apart into three main elements: core physical-force republicanism; bourgeois republicanism; and communistic, socialistic, left-wing republicanism, which was in fact populist.

The quotation from James Connolly at the head of this article was his 1899 summing up of the experience of the republicans of the 1840s and of some of the Fenians. It would be repeated again and again in the 20th century, beginning with the Collins-Griffith, Cumann na nGaedheal, faction of Sinn Féin (1917-21). This element, the recurrent drift into mainstream bourgeois politics, is brought into focus once more by the evident intentions of the Adams faction of the Provisionals today.

After De Valera’s move into parliamentary politics, the rump IRA was essentially a pure nationalist movement, but it acted as a lightning conductor, deflecting social discontent from any effective action. It initiated agitation among small farmers against paying the annuities outstanding from the transfer of land, and took part in international Stalinist junketings such as those of the Anti-Imperialist Fronts and the Prointern, the so-called Peasants’ International.

Led by Maurice Twomey and Sean MacBride, it had perhaps fifteen or twenty thousand members. It suffered severe repression from about 1930 onwards. In 1931 it formed a political wing, Saor Eire

(Free Ireland), which disbanded when the Catholic hierarchy denounced it as “communistic”. This was the period when a Dublin mob attacked the premises of the reorganising communist movement in Dublin.

De Valera’s victory in 1932 opened the jails. There was some revival of working-class confidence, and a big upsurge of republicanism. In fact, De Valera’s victory cut the throat of Southern republicanism, but this would not be clear for some years.

Stalinist influence had grown among the republicans, swaying men like Frank Ryan and Peadar O’Donnell who were, however, first nationalists and then Stalinists.

If it were not for the prevailing pervasive Catholic-nationalist middle-class analysis of Ireland, which has always fed physical-force republicanism — sometimes feeding young men and women ideas and then jailing them from drawing logical physical-force conclusions from those ideas — the Communist International’s ideas of “completing the Irish bourgeois revolution” would never have had much of a hearing among serious people. In fact the Stalinist dogmatising threw militants moving from nationalism back to nationalism, conceived as a higher world-historical cause. Irish nationalism blended into Stalinism’s pseudo-Marxist imaginary map of history. Lenin’s casual journalism was misused to justify Catholic communalism. A peculiarly Irish hybrid was created, essentially Catholic-nationalist but with a republican rhetoric and a Stalinist tincture.

Desiring to turn sharply to populist and socialist agitation without abandoning the militarist obsessions of the IRA, the “Republican Congress” left broke away in 1934, and formed an active bloc with the Communist Party of Ireland. This was the high point of populist Stalino-Republicanism, a powerful and serious movement. Two hundred of its people volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War, and over half of them died there.

Though the CPI was politically tied to Catholic nationalism, it could nonetheless talk to Northern Ireland Protestant workers. Nobody at that stage, not even the most Catholic and mystical right-wing Republican, dreamed of simply conquering the Protestant working class. The right had no policy for the Protestants, and the left a not-very-coherent policy of somehow uniting Ireland by uniting the working class. In practice the message in the North tended to be the left-wing one, “overthrow capitalism to unite Ireland” — effectively a reversal of the stages laid down in Stalinist theory. Although this begged the question of why socialism should be defined as a means to the greater end of nationalism, the CPI had some success with Protestant workers.

In 1934 the Communist Party and the Republican Congress brought a contingent of Shankill Road Protestants to the annual celebration around Wolfe Tone’s grave in Kildare. As they marched behind a banner with the slogan “Break the Connection with Capitalism” (Tone had called for breaking the connection with England), they were set upon by the right-wing rump Republicans.†

This movement fell apart very quickly, in a dispute over whether to raise the Workers' Republic as the Congress slogan, or just "the Republic". The latter was scarcely distinguishable from Fianna Fail and was meant by its proponents to appeal to the Fianna Fail rank and file against De Valera. The Stalinists were the backbone of the "Republic" faction. Perhaps symbolically, James Connolly's children Rory and Nora were with the "Workers' Republic".

In 1934 the Republican Congress split, and the left, on whom there was some Trotskyist influence (certainly they had contact with Trotsky and with British-based Trotskyists like C. I. R. James and, maybe, Tom O'Flaherty) joined the Labour Party.

By this stage Fianna Fail had consolidated itself as the main Irish bourgeois party, sucking support away from both the old ruling party, now called Fine Gael, and the IRA. The republicans, and the Stalinists too, were "militant" satellites of Fianna Fail: all they could do was back it — especially after the ex-government organised a mass fascist-style movement, the so-called Blueshirts. In the mid 1930s, having defeated the Blueshirts, Fianna Fail turned on the republicans, and started a slow-build-up of the repression that was to crush them in World War 2.

An era of reaction and Catholic oppression descended on the South. Left populist republicanism declined. Leaders like O'Donnell and Gilmore dropped into political inactivity by the late 1930s. Essentially they had had their thunder stolen by Fianna Fail: in so far as they had anything different to advocate, it was their Stalinist predilections and international affiliations. As war approached, those became more and more of a liability. By the time war came, populist republicanism had shrunk to virtually nothing.



Woolf Tone



Michael Collins

ing. Tragically, no class-struggle-based revolutionary-socialist movement had taken its place: this left it the possibility of reviving.

### World War Two

THE 26 Counties retained its neutrality — thus proving to anyone who needed proof that it was indeed independent of Britain — and the Communist Party, pro-German propagandists during the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939 to June 1941, echoed that. When the Nazis invaded Russia in June 1941, life became very difficult for the Communist Party of Ireland. A few of its members were interned alongside republicans.

In December 1941 the Communist Party of Ireland met in Belfast and dissolved as an all-Ireland body, setting up the Communist Party of Northern Ireland instead. The left populist republicanism of the 1930s now existed only as a literary ghost of itself, mainly through O'Donnell's writings. The CPNI grew into a strong force, fervently pro-war, effectively Unionist (and fingering Trotskyists to the police!) The Communist Party revived in the South after the war, and the two separate CPs were reunited in 1970.

After the 1934 split, the right-wing Republicans fared not much better than the left. Essentially apolitical, militant Fianna Failers with guns, they lacked a role. What should they do? Various plans were mooted, including an invasion of the North. They finally decided to issue an ultimatum to Britain to vacate the Six Counties and to declare war on Britain if the ultimatum was rejected. The "war" they unleashed in 1939 consisted of a few bombs in British cities.

This group, led by Sean Russell at this

stage, entered into a formal alliance with Nazi Germany. Britain's enemy was Ireland's friend. Britain's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. In principle, other things being equal, a nationalist movement would have the right to play one imperialism off against another. Even so, the "foreign policy" of the IRA was a rare example of the obtuseness nationalist blinkers can impose. The idea that the victory of Nazi imperialism could help free Ireland, or that an Irish republic set up under Nazi patronage would be a step forward, was tenable only for blockheads and mystics. If the Nazis had invaded Ireland — they had contingency plans for it — they might have had the IRA collaborating against Unionists, in a pattern similar to that in Belgium and Yugoslavia.

Heavily repressed North and South, in fact the IRA counted for nothing. Its leader, Sean Russell, an honourable, essentially apolitical, traditional nationalist, died on board a Nazi submarine off Ireland's coast. Frank Ryan, a central leader of left republicanism all through the 1930s, and a hard-core Stalinist among republicans, was captured fighting in Spain for the Republic and spent much of the war representing all the republican factions as a guest of Hitler's government! He died, peacefully, in Dresden in 1944.

### The IRA after the war

THE IRA was not dead, because Catholic Ireland's sense of itself was still outraged by the partition, because the state stifled as an agrarian backwater in the late '40s and '50s, and above all because there was no effective working-class revolutionary organisation to draw to itself the sort of social discontent that fed into the IRA and its political wing, Sinn Féin. Reorganised after the war, the IRA slowly revived. It was still physical-force-ist and anti-parliamentarian on principle, and very right-wing; indeed, it had a quasi-fascist element influenced by a Catholic movement called Maria Duce, which propagated all the quack right-wing Catholic nonsense about "Jewish" international finance being the source of the world's ills.

Like an early 19th century insurrectionary movement, the IRA's and Sinn Féin's goal was to build up arms and recruits until it was strong enough to relaunch a campaign against Britain. It raided police barracks occasionally for guns.

This time, it decided not on a bombing campaign in Britain, as in 1939, but on a war in Northern Ireland — "British-occupied Ireland". Knowing that action in the cities would stoke up Catholic-Protestant antagonism, it decided to confine its "campaign" to attacks on customs posts and police barracks in the mainly Catholic territory along the Border. This was the work of depoliticised right-wing Catholic republicans, some of them, indeed, not far from fascism.

A splinter group launched the first attack,





Anti-Treaty IRA troops on streets of Dublin

and then the main campaign began in December 1956. It spluttered rather than exploded. A small rash of attacks dwindled soon to an occasional attack. Some hundreds of young men were interned, North and South of the border. It was Fianna Fail, "the Republican Party", that introduced internment in the South in 1957. The Border campaign was abandoned formally in March 1962, having died long before.

From the '30s this was a movement on the margins of Irish society. Yet, even so, the zig-zag pattern traced by Connolly above, between physical force and nationalist bourgeois politics, the transformation of revolutionaries with guns into tame time-serving politicians continued to unfold... in the Adam's wing of the Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin it is unfolding still.

#### Clann na Poblachta

AFTER they gave up the gun and the bomb, the leaders of the mid-1930s IRA formed their own political organisation in the mid-1940s. Its leader was Sean MacBride.

Winning ten seats in the 1948 election, Clann na Poblachta joined a coalition government with the then two Irish Labour Parties and... Fine Gael, the Blueshirt party of the 1930s!

The pattern Connolly outlined thus reasserted itself in reverse order, with the open emergence of the physical-force men of the 1930s, including some from 1939, as a Fianna-Fail-type ordinary bourgeois party. They travelled in the wake of the men of

1922 (Fianna Fail), who went the same way in the late 1920s.

Clann na Poblachta grew quickly, feeding on disillusion with Fianna Fail which, in power since 1932, had grown somewhat corrupt and, as we have seen, had savagely repressed republicans during the war. It benefited from the vacuum in labour politics, the Labour Party then being split into two small groups.

Sean MacBride became foreign minister. He offered to take the 26 Counties into NATO in return for a united Ireland. The coalition government then took these 26



Sean MacBride

Counties out of the Commonwealth and declared a Republic that made no difference to anything — except that it erected additional barriers between the 26 Counties and the Six Counties.

The great success of this government was Dr Noel Browne, a Clann na Poblachta minister of health who campaigned successfully to eradicate tuberculosis, one of Ireland's endemic diseases and a great killer.

The test for the government came when Browne tried to bring in a rudimentary health service, following the lead of the Labour government in Britain, and came up against the opposition of the arrogant Catholic bishops who had over 25 years of independence grown accustomed to telling governments what to do. When Browne refused to be told, he was destroyed: abandoned by his comrades, and most implacably by the recent ex-republicans, he was forced to resign. After the 1951 election, Clann na Poblachta suffered a quick and catastrophic decline, its support flowing back to Fianna Fail. Like Fianna Fail's, its leaders, once out of "revolutionary" physical-force costume and in mainstream politics, had shown themselves to be timid bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians, time-serving, Catholic, and subservient to the priests.

#### The IRA after 1962

THE physical force republicans of 1956-62 went through a variant of the same evolution as MacBride and his friends. Defeated, they decided that they needed a social dimension to gain support. Quickly, they fell under the influence of Stalinists peddling the nationalist populism of the 1930s: "republicans need social policies to build a base". They turned towards politics, took up social agitation, and moved towards abandoning the characteristic dogmas of physical-force republicanism which forbade entry into the Westminster, Dublin, or Belfast parliaments.

They shed the organisation that became the Provisional IRA (December 1969 and January 1970) and later (1977) what became the INLA and the IRSP, and evolved into a "left" constitutional party. They differed from their predecessors in adopting many of the trappings of a Stalinist party and in accepting subsidies from Moscow. When the USSR collapsed, they split, and their spin-off, the Democratic Left, is now in the Dublin government, led by Proinsias De Rossa, who was interned in the 1950s.

Nor is the pattern exhausted. The Provisionals emerged in 1969-70, triggered by the eruption in the North, as a recoil against the moves by the old movement away from the shibboleths of physical force on principle and boycott of parliaments.

They have evolved now to the point where they have a wing openly straining at the leash to get into mainstream bourgeois politics, as Gerry Adams's junketing with the Dublin and Westminster politicians clearly indicates.

### The Provisionals

IN March 1971, a group of Carbonari republicans, depoliticised, committed on principle to physical force and the boycotting of parliaments, launched all-out guerilla war to forcibly unify Ireland. They acted to liberate a "British-occupied Ireland" that existed more in their imagination than in the reality of Northern Ireland, where the "British occupation forces" that counted were the Protestant-Unionist Irish majority there. They brought to the project their political blindness, their fetish-mongering, and their belief in political miracles of the sort that followed 1916.

Basing themselves on the Northern Catholic minority, they made war on the "Crown forces" and on Northern Ireland Protestant society. In 1956 the IRA had tried to avoid stirring up Catholic-Protestant antagonism. Now they acted as if deliberately to rouse it to delirium pitch.

This was a strange, and to most observers startling, development. By the mid-1960s Carbonari republicanism had seemed to be dying. Increasingly Stalinist populist republicans, looking back to the Republican Congress of the 1930s, had taken over the IRA. They turned to social agitation, away from militarism, though some of them had the intention of returning to militarism once they had built support.

In the Six Counties they agitated for civil rights among Catholics suffering job discrimination, gerrymandered local government, and unfair treatment in provision of social housing. Modelling themselves on the US civil rights movement, they were encouraged by the British Labour government's unprecedented "interference" in the internal affairs of the Six Counties, which then had its own Belfast government. A Protestant backlash followed.

In August 1969 British troops took control when sectarian Catholic-Protestant fighting broke out, first in Derry and then

in Belfast. The demobilised "left-wing" IRA counted for little in all this. The leaders told the "Army Council" that they had lent the organisation's remaining guns to the Free Wales Army...

The republican backlash that followed shaped events in Northern Ireland more decisively than the Protestant backlash that triggered it. Old Carbonari, men of the 1956 campaign like O'Connell, O'Brady, MacStiofain, came out of retirement. The IRA and Sinn Féin split in December 1969 and January 1970. Serious academic students of such movements like, for example, J Bowyer Bell, dismissed the "Provisionals" as neanderthals without a future. Nevertheless, they grew very quickly in a Northern Ireland where Catholic youth had few jobs and the best prospect was to emigrate. They grew in an atmosphere saturated with nationalist tradition and myths which were nourished by living grievances, among the people who had lost out most in the crude partition settlement of fifty years before.

For months after the Provisionals launched a military campaign in August 1971. Internment — exclusively against Catholics, though there were also Protestant paramilitary groups — threw mass Catholic support behind them. By March 1972 Britain felt obliged to scrap Protestant Home Rule in Belfast. All attempts since then to replace it by Catholic-Protestant powersharing have failed. The most serious attempt was destroyed in May 1974 by a tremendous Protestant general strike. The war has continued ever since with two ceasefires, one in 1975 and one in 1994-6.

In the course of this long war, remarkable things have happened to the Provisionals. From being explicitly right-wing Catholic traditionalists, they moved in the 1970s and '80s to something very like the populist left-wing republicanism from which they had recoiled in the 1960s and early '70s, shooting some of the populists

in transit.

They would take seats in Dail Éireann if they could get them — though in fact their support in the South is minimal, much smaller than when they won four Dail seats in the late 1950s. Their militarism is no longer the religious fetish of the purifying and redeeming power of blood that it was for Carbonari republicans for so many decades.

All these changes reflect a radical shift in republicanism, from a movement thinly scattered across the whole island to one concentrated in the Northern Ireland Catholic ghettos and Border areas. From that shift also comes the Provisionals' scarcely-disguised communalist character. They are locked into a war waged by a minority of the Northern Catholic minority. The highest percentage of the Catholic vote they ever got was 42 per cent, just after the 1981 hunger strikes.

Despite all their leftist shifts, politically they represent the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of Carbonari republicanism — its furthest point of travel away from the republicanism of Wolfe Tone and James Connolly.

### "British-occupied Ireland"

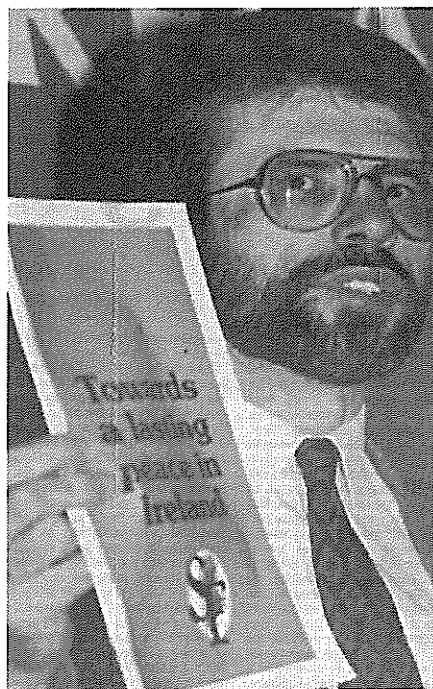
THE Provisional IRA's war has been based on the middle-class Catholic nationalist account of Northern Ireland, as "British-occupied Ireland". That is the poisoned root of everything that followed.

Yet, once they began to act, reality forced its logic on them. Setting out to fight the British Crown forces "occupying" the Six Counties, the Provisional IRA found itself confronting and targeting the real "occupation forces", the Irish minority. In the early 70s, it bombed the centres of Irish towns and blew up and shot *Irish people* in the RUC and UDR. These were "traitors", "collaborators", "Orange supremacists", if you find that illuminating, but Irish people nonetheless, and representatives of an Irish minority entitled to have its rights treated with respect by honest Wolfe Tone Republicans.

Over time Six-Counties people inevitably came to the fore of the Provisionals' leadership, and they, moving towards their impressive *realpolitik* of today, knew that the enemy of their "the island is the nation" republicanism was fundamentally the Northern Irish majority, the Irish Unionists. In 1981 the Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin dropped their old talk of a federal Ireland and moved explicitly to leave themselves even in remote theory no possible relationship to the Protestant-Unionist Irish minority except to demand of them that they surrender unconditionally and agree to be submerged in what was then plainly a Catholic confessional state — and is now only a bit less so, spectacular and hopeful though the shifts have been in the 26 counties away from brutally explicit Catholic rule. The targeting of the Irish minority was there from the beginning behind the ideological talk about fighting the crown forces and driving the British out, but it became more and more explicit and clear-



1970: the streets of Belfast



Gerry Adams

cut as the war and the years dragged on. It reached its obscene paroxysm in the years before the ceasefire, when sentence of death was pronounced against even those who did odd repair jobs in police stations — and carried out too.

All this urgently pointed to a mystery at the heart of what the Provisional IRA were doing. Though they called themselves republicans who followed Tone's goal of uniting all the people of Ireland and the 1916 Declaration's intent to "treat all the children of the nation" equally, and insisted that the problem was "British occupation" of Six Counties of Ireland, it became unmistakably plain from what they did that, in practice if not in theory, they saw the problem not primarily as a matter of British occupation — not, that is, unless the "Brits" in question were the million Irish Brits.

Republican theology stopped the Provisionals making such an idea explicit. The "left", paradoxically, was less restrained — from Michael Farrell's early 1970s theorising about the Irish Protestants being like the one million European settlers who were driven out of Algeria in 1962-3, to INLA's unashamed attack on Protestants picked at random as Protestants, paralleling the activities of Loyalist murder gangs — who do not invoke Tone or Pearse and Connolly, still less Lenin or Marx.

Denying in theory the idea that the Irish-British were the 'problem', the Provisionals recognised it in bloody practice. The nonsensically inadequate explanation that the Protestant-Unionists were all traitors, collaborators, anti-nationalists came in time to amount to a "republican" version of the idea that there were two Irish nations, or peoples. The Protestants were a bad, non-legitimate, Irish nation; and so the Provisionals, in effect a private army backed by perhaps a third of the Six-Counties Catholics, could maim and kill as many of the one million Irish Unionists as whim, ex-

gency and military or sectarian logic suggested to them. The "left-wing" INLA could go into a Pentecostal church in Dalkey and open fire with a machine gun on the worshippers; the Provisional IRA could blow up an 11 November commemoration-day Protestant service in Enniskillen (1987). They could yet trigger an immense tragedy, sectarian civil war followed by bloody repartition.

### The Provisionals look to Britain

HERE were the Provos, backed only by a minority of the six county Catholic minority, acting as if to drive the history-gouged ditch between the Protestants and Catholics deeper and bloodier, yet claiming that their supreme goal was a united Ireland. Did they think they could simply overwhelm the Protestants? Surely not.

In 1996, after all that has happened in the last 30 years, it is impossible to pretend that the problem is only or mainly a matter of "British-occupied Ireland". The keystone of the Provisionals' entire political structure is still the idea that the Six Counties problem is definable as "British-occupied Ireland", but they now understand it to mean that Britain is to blame for not "persuading" (coercing) the one million Irish Protestants into a united Ireland! These "Irish nationalists" and "Irish republicans" now self-righteously denounce Britain because Britain will not force one million Irish (or Irish-British) people into an independent Irish Republic for them!

The Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin have come to look to not an intra-Irish but a British-imposed settlement. They kill Irish-Unionist people in order to compel the British government to impose a settlement on those Irish Unionists.

The great self-hypnotising lie — British-occupied Ireland — has thus been twisted in the course of the war into the demand for the demonised British not to get out until they have compelled one million Irish people to do what the Provisional IRA want.

Despite the ideologising, the appeals to history, and the appeals to republican ideals and aspirations, the Provisionals do not believe in an Irish solution. They believe in a British solution to the problem of relations between the two people on the island. The logic of reality has forced the Provisional IRA not only to accept that the root problem is not "British occupied Ireland" but to look to the British military occupying forces to solve their real problem, the fact that one million Irish people will fight, guns in hand, against submitting to the Provisionals, and if necessary will carve out their own "self-determination" against Catholic Ireland. The Provisionals have blundered and stumbled on to the ground of traditional Unionism! That is what the talk of the British becoming "persuaders" of the Protestants really means.

### Like the Redmond Home Rule party

THUS, the Provisional Carbonari-republicans, having donned much of the old clothing of Stalino-populist republicanism,

reduce the whole tradition to bloody nonsense. They have become an utterly decadent sect of washed-out republicans concerned not with Wolfe Tone's goal of uniting the Irish people but with uniting the territory regardless of the people. They pledge to go on bombing and killing — mainly Irish people — until they get the British solution they favour, until they get Britain — the great Satan of Irish history — to compel the Irish minority to "unite."

Yet this approach is not really new. The demand that the British compel the Protestant-Unionist Irish minority to submit to the Irish Catholic-Nationalist majority is a very old one. It sustained the Home Rule Party in its long tail-to-dog relationship to the Liberal Party in the quarter century before the First World War.

Both Irish peoples were allied to a "great"

*"The demand that the  
British compel the  
Protestant-Unionist  
Irish minority to  
submit to the Irish  
Catholic-Nationalist  
majority is a very old  
one."*

British party, the Protestant-Unionists to the Tories and the Catholic-Nationalists to the Liberals. Each looked to its ally to gain it complete victory — the Unionists to the Tories to stop Home Rule for any part of Ireland by killing it with coercion and by such "kindness" as distributing the land to the tenants; the Catholic-Nationalists to the Liberals to bestow Home Rule and enforce it on the Irish minority. Corrupted and demoralised by their British alliance, neither side looked to an intra-Irish solution.

In the event, the Tories proved better allies than the Liberals, and a solution was imposed by a British cabinet in which the leaders of the pre-World War One Unionist rebellion against the Liberal government sat as powerful members. Seemingly very favourable to the northern Unionists, the settlement was in fact very short-sighted, because it included so large a Catholic-Nationalist minority in the Northern Ireland state as to make it unviable.

### Do the Irish Protestants have rights?

THERE is no democratic — that is, no republican — case for the Provisionals' attitude to the Protestants. The only case is a Catholic-chauvinist one. If Wolfe Tone's republicanism started with the call to end sectionalism, the nadir of Carbonari republicanism is reached in the present-day Provisionals' use of republican catchcries in the pursuit of sectionalism and sectarianism.

A million or so of Ireland's people —



natives of the island of Ireland, and descendants of people who have lived in Ireland for hundreds of years — want British in "occupation" because they consider themselves British. Those million are not loosely sprinkled amongst the Catholic majority population of the island, but the compact majority in north-east Ulster.

You say, their rights cannot include the right to veto the rights of the Irish majority? No, but there is no democratic — that is, honest republican — or socialist case to be made that the rights of the Irish majority includes the right to rule territory where they do not have majority support, that is, to oppress the people of another identity living there.

Of course, this can not legitimise the Six Counties, where the Catholic minority is in fact the majority in not much less than half the territory. But for socialists and democrats the question is inescapable: why do not the compact Protestant majority in north-east Ulster have the right to refuse to sink their identity into the status of a smallish minority in a Catholic state? Why, according to the same principle by which our Ireland claimed and won independence from Britain, do they not have the right to claim and hold their independence from our Irish majority?

Plainly repartition would not be desirable. Its overhead expenses would be huge. But in principle, there is no good democratic reason to deny the Irish-British minority their right to resist forced unity. The reflex Catholic nationalist objection is necessarily couched in appeals to the mystical unity of Ireland, the irrational conception of the sacred unity of the island. The island is the nation — not the people; geography and a mystified and myth-ridden history replace concerns with the living Irish people. It is difficult to argue with such people, the more aware of whom would not, in the final decision, accept that such sacred things as the integrity of the island, (not the people!) are subject to the dictates of profane human reason. In the name, not of the living people of Ireland, but of the dead generations...

About this attitude Connolly long ago said all that needs to be said: "Ireland as distinct from her people is nothing to me". You, however, call yourself a socialist, a Marxist and a "Connollyite". You accept that, in Sri Lanka, the Tamil minority have the right to claim and fight to win independence from control by the Sinhalese majority on the island. Why, Peter, in a united Ireland if the Protestant minority felt oppressed or merely stifled and frustrated in their national or communal identity, would they not have the same rights?

You say, because they are not a nation! I don't know how — apart from the appeal to geography: they live in Ireland! — you would go about arguing that they are not part of the British people. Who decides such things? What makes the Serbs and the Croats, whose ethnicity is the same and even, for the most part, their language, different and murderously hostile nations?

## History!

Nations and peoples are shaped — and reshaped — by history. It is plain fact that two distinct peoples exist in the Irish island. To ask, like some inspector general of history, are they this? Are they that? is to take refuge in pettifogging pedantry. To a decisive degree, a people must decide such things for itself; its "rights" and possibilities beyond that decision are then a matter of circumstances.

You know of course that even the prophet of universal national freedom in the 19th century, Giuseppe Mazzini, denied that the Irish were a people separable from the English and Scots? We had, in the main, a common language; vast numbers of Irish — in Tipperary, for example — though their identity has been shaped by Catholicism, are descended from forgotten English planters. The answer to Mazzini, the pedant of nationality, was that the Irish majority knew their own identity, and this was decisive. Nothing less than the same answer can be given when the Protestant-Unionists of north-east Ulster are concerned.

Peter, you respect Lenin, you like to cite his support for Irish independence. The beginning of wisdom! Believing that socialists, concerned to unite the working class across all the national and communal barriers, had to champion consistent democracy in all relations between peoples and fragments of peoples, Lenin proclaimed it a principle that we have no interest in state boundaries as such; that if the majority in a state supported keeping a minority people in that state against their will, they were contemptible chauvinists.

The English who refused self-determination to the Irish majority were chauvinists. Why would not the same principle brand you as a chauvinist for your attitude to the Irish minority? I think it does.

## Social discontent and false answers

THE Six Counties Provisionals, like their lineal predecessors, get their energy from



Protestants protest after 1985 Anglo Irish Deal

mass social discontent. They have been able to mobilise that discontent because, as in all the decades I have briefly surveyed, there is no serious revolutionary contender against them: all the "communists" share their basic analysis even if they deplore their "tactics", the "Trotskyists" differing only in the gloss they put on events and in the irresponsibility and indifference with which they endorse Provisional IRA "militancy".

Unlike previous IRAs, the Provisional IRA, rooted mainly in one community, the Northern Catholic minority, is defined directly by the split in the working class.

The young men and women who come to the Provisional IRA in the Catholic ghettos of Northern Ireland are propelled by the intolerable conditions there — unemployment, poverty, by the boredom of otherwise aimless and hopelessly stultified lives. They are cut off from the heavily Unionist Northern Ireland labour movement.

Much of what they do is at root a protest against those circumstances, a striking out against them. Much of the energy that fuels the Provisional IRA comes from these conditions of disruption and economic, social and spiritual starvation. This has been true throughout the entire course of the Provisional IRA campaign.

The socialist who does not feel with these mainly young people and understand and sympathise with them has something missing. Yes. But the socialist who does not go beyond that gut feeling and ask the obvious questions has something missing too.

Can the military and political activities of the Provos, which draw on the discontent of the Northern Ireland Catholics as fuel, have anything remotely to do with solving the cause of those discontents — unemployment for example? Would the situation of the Catholic working-class youth be transformed for the better if the Provisionals won everything they fight for? Based on minority action and physical force as a prime component of policy, and having "the nation" at the centre of their vision, they are not socially revolutionary. To accept them as a progressive, or possibly progressive, response to the oppressive conditions under which many Six Counties Catholics suffer, is to allow myth to eclipse politics.

Not to ask what, if anything, the activities of the Provisional IRA have to do with the ideals of the republican socialism of Connolly; not to measure what the Provisional IRA actually does and its calculable consequences against historic Irish republicanism — not the degenerate Carbonari republicanism of the mid 20th century, but the ideals of Tone and Connolly, or even of the somewhat mystical Pearse — not to ask yourself whether or not the shards and fragments of "Tone republicanism" or "Connolly republicanism" the Provisionals deploy are being abused and used (as "ideology" in the proper Marxist sense of that word) — that is to refuse to think about the issues.

In fact, many left wingers simply bow





Grass roots Republicanism of the 1980s

down before a fetish: the Provos have guns, the Provos fight, therefore they are revolutionaries against the establishment — therefore they are to be supported. Some of the most fervid of the Provophiles in Britain impress me by their utter indifference to what happens to ordinary Irish people and what would happen in an all-out civil war.

They have submitted themselves to massive depoliticisation on the Irish question. They have let the fact of the Provo war run like a tank through their minds, churning to mud political ideals, socialist goals, Marxist assessments, and even elementary class criteria.

They dispense with almost every single tool of Marxist, or socialist, or plain rational analysis — that is with every means available to us, as socialists, Marxists, workers, Wolfe Tone republicans, or plain human beings, for making sense of the world. Violence takes on a mystical significance and assumes an all-transforming quality. Many, especially in Britain, left-wingers become vicarious Carbonari republicans.

#### The continuing influence of Stalinist ideology

MUCH of the left, guided by ideas like those of the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, share the essentials of the Provisionals' ideology — and many Trotskyists no less than the others. They take over the entire Catholic-nationalist/Stalino-populist analysis, and add only a verbal gloss — "permanent revolution" — to the scenario of moving through "completion of the bourgeois revolution" to socialism. They are what might be called "Fifth Comintern Congress Trotskyists"! Trotsky was not.

The "Fifth Comintern Congress Trotskyists" face reality blindfolded by ideology. Marxist socialists and republicans in Tone's and Connolly's tradition look reality straight in the face. That is the only way to change it for the better, not to let it dominate you and impose its own age-old patterns on you even while you struggle against it.

I put it to you, Peter, that here we have

a picture — it is a true picture! — of latterday republicanism at the end of its tether, reduced to absurdity and self-mockery, albeit still-murderous absurdity and sometimes heroic self-mockery.

That was the republicanism that engaged in the 1994 ceasefire and which broke out with bombs again on 7 February.

#### Conclusion

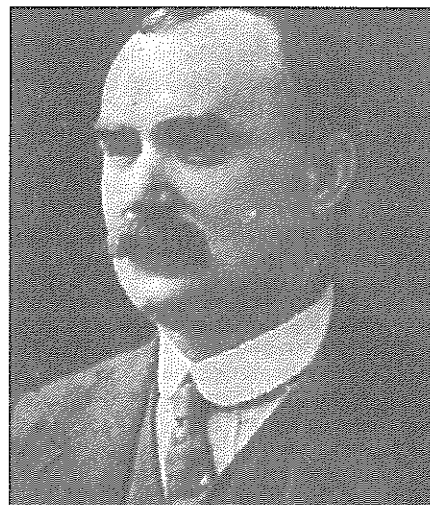
YOU should come out plainly against the Provisional IRA and define their war and their existence in their present form as entirely negative for the interests of Irish socialism or Irish republicanism. You should help cut away the mystification and demagoguery. What they do never made sense. What they do now — looking for a British solution that will, from outside, compel the Irish to unite — has reached Marx-Brothers levels of absurdity. There is no possible British solution for Ireland! This old Republican truth is true still, despite Gerry Adams and his friends.

The only solution to Irish workers' problems is a Workers' Republic; and that Workers' Republic can be created only by a united working class, led by revolutionary Marxists. The job of Marxists, therefore, is to work for workers from both communities to unite around a programme of social advance (public investment and shorter hours for full employment, leveling-up of social provision, etc.) and consistent democracy. The democratic rights of both communities must be accommodated: this can be done only in a free federal united Ireland, with local autonomy for the Protestant-majority area, and with confederal links with Britain. We should assist any moves to establish a Labour Party in Northern Ireland based on the trade unions and uniting workers from both communities: in the first place, we must seek to mend the fragmentation and marginalisation of the left in Ireland by dialogue, debate, and ruthless criticism of the whole Carbonari-republican tradition. There is no other way out of this blind alley.

Yours fraternally, Sean Matgamna

*"Ireland, as distinct from her people, is nothing to me; and the man who is bubbling over with enthusiasm for "Ireland" and can yet pass unmoved through our streets and witness all the wrong and suffering, the shame and the degradation wrought upon the people of Ireland — aye, wrought by Irishmen upon Irish men and women, without burning to end it, is, in my opinion, a fraud and a liar in his heart, no matter how he loves that combination of chemical elements he is pleased to call 'Ireland'."*

*James Connolly,  
Workers' Republic,  
7 July 1900*



James Connolly

# The splits in Cliff's international

By Ian Land\*

THE past few years have seen a number of splits in the International Socialism Tendency (IST) — the international affiliation of groups organised under the aegis of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP). IST groups have split in Greece, Germany, South Africa, Australia and Canada. Significantly, a pattern is beginning to emerge which suggests that more splits are likely. For many years now, the SWP Central Committee (CC) has spent a lot of effort attempting to raise awareness among the British SWP membership of the successes of the various international sections. The annual Marxism summer schools have seen a yearly increase in the numbers of speakers from these groups given key notemeetings to address. Many of these comrades — Ahmed Shawki from the US ISO, David McNally from the Canadian IS, Panos Garganos from the Greek OSE, and others — became centrepieces of the event, guaranteed to draw large audiences. The implication drawn by most SWP members was that the IST, although very far from being an international since its individual sections numbered memberships in hundreds, not thousands, was nevertheless growing at an impressive rate. However, it is becoming clear that, despite the ostensible independence of the international affiliates, and their increased profile in their own countries and with the SWP itself, behind the scenes the situation is far from rosy.

A "star system" operates inside the SWP. Young militants are recruited to the organisation, given high-profile responsibilities, and used as a lever against the "old farts" (generally, more experienced comrades who are perhaps less enthusiastic about the CC's current perspectives). Increasingly, however, these Young Turks are not given the political training necessary to sustain their enthusiasm and activity, and, therefore, gradually become "old farts" themselves, waiting to be pushed aside by the new generation of stars put in place by the CC. Because disagreement with the CC is always interpreted as factional, there are only two states of existence in the party — with the CC or against them, a star or a "barrier to growth."

The situation is not entirely the same with the new international "stars," inasmuch as at least some of these comrades are genuine cadres in their own right, capable of independent and critical thinking (and therefore totally unlike the current generation of SWP full-timers). However, an international "star system" is most definitely

in place — in some years the Greek organisation is in favour, in others the American, and so on — and it is clear that increasingly the national perspectives of the fraternal groups are dictated by the SWP CC. Although there are local factors in all the splits, they seem to hinge around two fundamental questions: the imposition of the perspectives of the British SWP on the local sections, and the lack of democratic debate of these perspectives within the groups.

For several years now, the SWP CC has promulgated an increasingly frantic per-

*"For several years now, the SWP CC has promulgated an increasingly frantic perspective in which the impending crisis of capitalism creates enormous opportunities for rapid growth."*

spective in which the impending crisis of capitalism creates enormous opportunities for rapid growth. The organisational conclusions of this catastrophism are that there is no space inside the organisation for opposition or even debate. Such debate would be "abstract," a diversion from the central task of rapid recruitment.

This perspective is a result, amongst other things, of the SWP's success in recruiting in the late 1980s and early '90s, in a period in which the rest of the revolutionary left faced great difficulties. The marginalisation of the Labour left and the decline of Militant left a vacuum which the SWP managed to fill, as the left alternative to mainstream Labourism. The relatively sober and realistic perspectives of the 1980s gave way to the triumphalism we see today. Even more absurdly, however, these perspectives were then applied to the IST's international work, without regard for local political differences or the fact that the fraternal groups are much smaller in membership than the SWP. In the early 1990s, the IS groups were encouraged to "turn to the class," and engage in the kind of agitational activity which the SWP was attempting. The closing down of democratic debate, as in the British SWP, was seen as the quickest and most efficient method of pushing through these perspectives against the instincts and knowledge of the various groups. It is here

that the star system comes into play, with sections of the international leaderships encouraged by the SWP CC, while others, often the founder members of the groups, were attacked for their supposed "conservatism" and "abstraction." The result is that each of the IST fraternal groups now seems to have an internal regime not unlike the SWP's own regime in its dogmatism and authoritarianism. The problem is well described by the Canadian comrades who have recently left the IS to form New Socialist:

"We start from the conviction that the political perspectives of the IS leadership — which are largely a crude and mechanical application of an international perspective formulated by the British SWP — have created another-worldliness inside the organization. The essential elements of this perspective are the following:

1) that we are witnessing a profound crisis of world capitalism comparable to that of the 1930s;

2) that this crisis is destroying mainstream parties and ideologies and creating a tremendous audience for revolutionary socialism;

3) that IS groups the world over must transform themselves in the space of a few years from small propaganda groups into the beginnings of mass parties capable of leading major struggles. That the perspective is deeply flawed should be obvious; indeed, it repeats the fundamental errors committed by Trotskyists from the late 1930s onwards.

"In order to try to sustain a perspective that flies in the face of reality, the Steering Committee has consistently substituted fanciful prophecies of great working class breakthroughs for clear-headed analysis of the real terrain of class struggle in this country. Thus, just before the Liberal government brought out the most anti-working class budget in post-war history (with \$9 billion in cuts and layoffs of 45,000 workers), *Socialist Worker* ran the editorial headline "Liberals on the run!" Then, after the defeat of railworkers' strikes by back-to-work legislation, *Socialist Worker* celebrated with the claim that "the fight-back has just begun!"

"There is nothing new about small revolutionary groups which try to sustain morale by constant predictions of great working class victories. But such practices have not been in the IS tradition — at least not until recently. For most of its history, the IS tendency has encouraged serious, sober and critical assessment of the economic and political realities that confront the working class movement. The IS Steering Committee now openly flouts those traditions — with the apparent encouragement of the SWP leadership."

The crudeness of the SWP's approach to international work is illustrated by the expe-

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rience of the South African comrades. The British SWP reorganised its branch structure in the early 1990s as a consequence of its new perspective — the large branches of old, with an elected branch leadership and weekly meetings covering general political topics as well as organisational and practical questions, were split into many small branches, sometimes with as few as 4 or 5 members, and branch meetings became almost entirely agitational and organisational affairs. The elected branch committees were replaced with organising groups that were essentially appointed on the whim of the local full-timer, and appointed district committees were established to oversee each branch's work in the area. A SWP Central Committee member, Julie Waterson, was sent to South Africa to impose this small-branch perspective there, with the result that about 30-40% of the membership were expelled or resigned (including most of the black membership). The South African comrades, who went on to form the IS Movement, were not best pleased to be attacked for their "conservatism" by Julie Waterson when many of them had been involved in the strikes and uprisings of the 1980s.

This pattern is repeated in Australia and Germany, leading one German comrade in the group *Gegen Wind* to describe the SWP leadership's approach to international work as "British imperialism."

It would be comforting to conclude that the splits described make it more likely that such an event will happen in the British SWP in the near future. However, several points need to be borne in mind:

1. The bureaucracy of the British SWP is considerably more established and more united than that of its fraternal organisations. The situation in Canada, where one of the leading forces behind the split, David McNally, was a member of the Steering Committee of the IS Organization, shows this clearly.

It is almost unthinkable in the present climate that a member of the SWP CC would lead a split.

2. The active membership of the British

SWP tends to be much less politically educated than that of the fraternal groups, who have been working for years in circumstances where political education has been at the forefront of their work. A very common prejudice within the SWP is that theory is best left in the hands of the leadership. The result, of course, is that the membership rarely has the confidence to question the Central Committee's authority, even if sections of it are unhappy with the perspectives.

3. The more experienced members of the SWP fall into two broad camps: those who are cynical and passive (the majority), and those who are so lacking in principle that they are prepared to argue for any perspective the leadership dream up.

4. The SWP is a comparatively large organisation, and many of even its most disaffected members see no alternative but to stay in at all costs rather than risk the "political wasteland" that the rest of us are apparently condemned to. This is a powerful incentive to say and do nothing.

5. The membership of the SWP is given little hint that anything is wrong in the IST. When we sold copies of the South African ISM newspaper at last year's "Marxism" summer school, most comrades who bought it had not heard anything about the split. Indeed, they were under the impression that the "official" IS South African group was going from strength to strength. The discussions at the international conference held every year after "Marxism" are not communicated to SWP members.

Sadly, therefore, I think it unlikely that the splits described in this article will happen in the near future in Britain. Having said that, there is little doubt that more splits will occur in the fraternal organisations.

One of the many advantages of having access to the Internet is that rapid communications between all the splits can take place. Every few weeks the group to which I belong, the International Socialist Group, receives email from disaffected individuals and groups within the IST who share our basic commitment to the IS tradition's politics but oppose its Stalinised distortion in the "actually existing" IS Tendency. Our hope, and the hope for the revolutionary left in general, is that out of these individuals and groups we can build a new, non-sectarian Marxist movement which respects differences whilst upholding principles. It would be easy to treat these splits as an opportunity to gloat, to laugh at the SWP's absurd perspectives, but it is much more important to build on them as part of the process of the renewal of the revolutionary Marxist tradition. ■



The SWP's South African section was denounced for "conservatism"

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# Mandelson taking money for old rope

## Books

Elaine Jones reviews "The Blair Revolution" by Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle.

IS Peter Mandelson a "spin doctor", the author of a new theory of the Labour Party that will deliver desirable change? Or is Mandelson's game a case of getting money for old rope — for Tory ideology, dressed up this time without a pale-pink tinge. Old rope, I think, after reading this book.

If you manage to get past all the meaningless patter and guff — "building on Britain's strength, not harking back to the past," "rights and responsibilities", "wealth comes from personal effort and entrepreneurial flair" — yeah?! — "co-operation not confrontation: for fellowship not fear", "one nation socialism" etc., etc. — without being ill or chucking the book in the bin, then eventually you'll find out what Mandelson and Liddle's right-wing Labour vision of a

future Labour-run society is.

It is pure fantasy — puerile stuff recycled for the hundredth time. What should be done about the divisions in our society? The employer and employee living in harmony. In other words, the lamb should lie down with the hyena? Yes. And live happily together? Yes. But how is this harmony going to be achieved? By encouraging personal incentives and reward. That's new!

They say they are committed to the rigour of a dynamic market while at the same time they talk of effectively regulating the market. They seem to think they can regulate booms and slumps without interfering with the 'free' market!

They ignore all historical experience of how capitalism operates, the reality of class society, who owns the vast bulk of the wealth, how the working class is exploited. You think that the working class needs to organise together and develop solidarity to defend jobs and living standards? These 'new thinkers' of New Labour don't. According to Mandelson and Liddle, we are all equal individuals. The rich man and the poor man, the beggar man sleeping rough

and the thief lauding it in the boardroom or the Stock Exchange — all are equal, in the eyes of New Labour.

So much for the "vision". How will it be won, how will it be implemented?

Don't expect renationalisation because "privatisation has brought about improvements in operating efficiently and facilitated new investment." Really? On the railway, to take one example?

Don't expect free education. We are all going to get individual learning accounts and a one-off grant to spend on approved courses. However, "the individual would gain new freedoms of career choice and development but would need to make his or her own contribution through committed contractual saving". This, I presume, means students will have to pay back the grant.

The long-term unemployed should not despair. In the Mandelson/Liddle brave New Labour world you'll go on a training scheme. Choice is to be preserved even here. Your other choice? Having your benefit severed.

Mandelson and Liddle's plans for the Labour Party are in the same vein. They want to cut the link between the unions and the Party: "The unions' entrenched constitutional position [in the Labour Party] is largely an accident of history". So, they must think, privately, was the Labour Party itself.

What we need, they say, is "the involvement of individual trade unionists as happens on the continent". "One member, one vote should be extended to include elections such as constituency delegate to annual conference, ballots on all major policy issues, the slimming down of the GC to a management committee." They want to see an organisation in which members don't have to think or discuss anything, where the National Policy Forum decides policy. They want a Party which has severed links with the organised working class and whose members will be expected to be foot soldiers (or, rather, telesales workers) for the leadership at election time.

If you are one of those people in the Labour Party who thinks Blair and his chums will rebuild the Welfare State — once they get winning the general election out of the way — think again.

Not the least important aspect of what these authors advocate and Blair is doing to the Labour Party is that it implies a great narrowing down of democracy in our society. It means pushing the working class out of effective politics.

However, the "full returns" on the Blairite project is not in yet. Despite what Mandelson and Co. want to believe, the working class is not dead: in government the leadership of the Labour Party will not have everything its own way. People who will vote for Labour will expect more: a minimum wage, proper funding for the health service, free trade unions. And as expectations rise, workers will feel more confident about demanding rights, jobs, services. Blair's "revolution" is not yet secure. ■

## Revolutionary first

Pablo Velasco reviews "The Collected Works of John Reed" (Modern Library, US 1995).

AMONG THOSE revolutionary journalists who have reported on the great events of this century whilst retaining their sympathy and support for the downtrodden and oppressed, John Reed stands in the first rank. And, despite a comparatively short career, from 1910 until October 1920, when he died, aged 32, Reed left an invaluable literary and political treasure chest for today's revolutionaries.

John Reed's father was a businessman who fought corruption and supported the 'Progressive' wing of the Republican Party. These activities brought him the respect and friendship of Lincoln Steffens, a journalist and fiction writer who became young Jack Reed's mentor. After graduating from Harvard University in 1910, Reed moved to New York and began writing for *Metropolitan Magazine* and *Masses*, edited by Max Eastman.

Alas, this collection of Reed's writings does not do justice to its title. It merely reproduces Reed's three largest works, *Insurgent Mexico*, *The War in Eastern Europe* and the great *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

The first two were partial compilations from feature articles, whereas *Ten Days*, the best known eyewitness accounts of the October Revolution of 1917, was completed during Reed's brief return to the US in 1919.

However, the three long articles do repay re-reading. *Insurgent Mexico* was written between 1913-14 and established Reed's swashbuckling style which brought hitherto obscure and unknown personalities and events to life. Speaking little Spanish, Reed journeyed with Pancho Villa at the height of the peasant war in Northern Mexico, and punctuates his accounts with references to ballads, heroic events (sometimes in the wrong order!) and personal reminiscences.

*The War in Eastern Europe* is much more of a mishmash, since Reed faced difficulties reaching the front in the Balkans.

It was *Ten Days* which established Reed in the imagination of socialists as a great journalist. Arriving in September 1917, Reed immediately plunged into the world of Smolny and the Petrograd soviet. He regularly saw Lenin and Trotsky, and was present at the storming of the Winter Palace on 7 November. While it is easy to criticise the book as history — it lacks the sources, cross referencing and chronology to satisfy academics — it conveys the tremendous atmosphere of uncertainty and opportunity that existed in the revolution, and which it is difficult to get across writing after the event.

Reed himself was changed by the Bolshevik revolution. Despite his bourgeois background, he put his considerable talent at the service of the working class, crowned with the founding of the Communist Party in the US and his involvement in the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920.

John Reed died a communist first and journalist second. His life and works continue to inspire revolutionary socialists.



# More than bourgeois gold-digging

## film

Helen Rate reviews Emma Thompson's film of "Sense and Sensibility".

THE fervent enthusiasm for Jane Austen now gripping film and TV producers is probably due to a perception that Austen's work is highly-marketable, bodice-ripping, costume drama. Of course they are right. *Sense and Sensibility* is doing great at the box office in the States and Emma Thompson has won an Oscar for the screenplay.

Some socialists, sober and unsentimental souls that we are, will understandably enough, perhaps, therefore be deterred from reading Jane Austen, or going to see the "film version." They may expect tales of silly upper class women in big skirts trying to cop off with the bloke with the fattest wallet. Actually that's what you do get... but you get *something else* too. Austen's work is, in fact, satire — and it is pretty good satire — on bourgeois society and women's position in that society.

Emma Thompson's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* is very good and for the most part faithful to the book. However, her screenplay deliberately draws out some of the more "feminist" themes of the book. Thompson's interpretation is perfectly permissible and interesting to see, but it does distort Austen's point of view.

Austen's portraits of female oppression often show what she regarded as *universal* truths about human beings. Austen seems to have been aware of the politics and popular philosophies of her time but she was *not* a radical. I don't think she would have been impressed by such a contemporary feminist as Mary Wollstonecraft.

The sad truth of Jane Austen's life was that, unlike Wollstonecraft, she was not able to find a way to live her life to the full: maybe living in sin, or bearing illegitimate children, not even writing books in her own name, and certainly not advocating subversive things. But Austen was, quietly, a bit of a subversive too and this is portrayed magnificently in this film.

There are two underlying themes in *Sense and Sensibility*. The first is Austen's habitual starting point for her construction of plot: the inequities and follies of bourgeois marriage. This always generates a lot of acid wit.

Other authors have created comedy out of bourgeois life and ridiculed their own class. Few have done this from the point of view of the working-class (although that other magnificent wit, Oscar Wilde, was a socialist). Austen's class standpoint — if



*Sense and Sensibility*

she has one at all — is to laud the values of a mythical age, when aristocrats, yeoman and landless labourers all "ate at the same table" (metaphorically of course). Despite these limitations, Austen must rank as one of the best and most incisive satirists of the ruling class. Her saving grace is that — unlike Trollope who shares similar preoccupations — she is categorically *not* a snob. In any case her writing is sublime.

The second theme of the book — and the film — is how human beings are forced to repress their feelings, instincts and desires. In the film, we see how the character of Eleanor (played by Emma Thompson) is forced by the twin circumstances of being a dutiful elder daughter and relatively poor, to forgo a chance of happiness and resigns herself to spinsterhood.

There are some moving scenes in the film. At one point Eleanor's sister, Marianne, upbraids Eleanor for not showing her feelings. Perhaps Eleanor does not have any feelings... Eleanor loses her composure and in these seconds, when Thompson portrays Eleanor's irritation with her sister, she manages to show the overwhelming oppression of Eleanor's life condemned as she is to be forever untrue to herself.

In contrast, Marianne — the sister with all the sensibilities — tries very hard to be true to herself. Without a mind for societal decorum or her reputation she flings herself at her "heart's desires" — a cad called Willoughby. Not only does Marianne get hurt, she nearly loses her life. For Austen this is a *universal* theme, one which applies equally to men and women. And it is still relevant today — not alone for women who live in purdah, or for gay people living in the closet, but actually for anyone who is the victim of the petty, hypocritical seriousness of bourgeois culture.

*Sense and Sensibility* is not just an excuse to eat chocolate and reach for the Kleenex — go and see it! ■

## "The poor middle class"

Paul McAnaney reviews "Parsons on Class", BBC1.

NO, the title is not a joke, just *Parsons on Class*. The programme revolved around the Jones family of Maghull, Liverpool, a 'typical middle class family'. The evidence for this seemed to be that they hold dinner parties and buy Chardonnay at Tesco's!

Tony Parsons dealt with education — not with problems such as lack of books and of funding but with the value of private schools. With banal opinions such as "the comprehensive system fails in inner cities, the only way out for bright inner city children is to have selection", this was far from a sharp incisive look at education in Britain today.

Middle class people were afraid of having to give up domestic help and foreign holidays in order to send their kids to private school. "Increasingly there is no money at all in Maghull, fears are as real as on any sprawling estate." Fear! Real fear means not having a home, not having a job and not being able to receive a decent education because there are no books and no money.

Ken Jones Snr. owns a 'small' construction company, and the old idea of the caring boss was wheeled out: "Whatever happens to us [the bosses], has an equal effect on them [the workers]." Equal? Well, I'm sorry but unemployment for workers often means repossession, homelessness, serious illness, sometimes death, whereas the bosses still own a profitable business or if it fails usually manage to salvage something. Insult was added to injury with the idea that "you have to make the most of the recession." I'd love to! Tell me how to "make the most of" £37 Income Support.

This programme was riddled with inaccurate research, and complacent middle class lies. Its conclusion, that the working class is dead, that the middle class rise is relentless, is ridiculous. Tell that to the four million unemployed workers throughout Britain and I'm sure they'd agree that it is a sick joke.

The whole programme is based on the idea that class is defined by habits of consumption. This is idiotic. As a sociologist Tony Parsons is in a class of his own. At root, the class distinction that matters in Britain is that between wage workers who must sell their labour power in order to live and those who exploit them.

## A difficult point to argue

By Mark Osborn

A FEW brief points in response to Brad Cleveland (*Against all immigration control?*, WL 29).

To want "freedom of movement", without demanding the abolition of *all* immigration controls, is contradictory and, I suspect, bends in the face of prevailing prejudice.

I would agree with Brad on one point: to oppose campaigns for limited reform to existing immigration laws, as some on the left do, because they do not demand the abolition of all immigration law is wrong. But just as supporting wage disputes does not stop us making propaganda for socialism, so we can demand specific reforms *and* the abolition of immigration laws.

My worries about this matter are a bit different. I cannot think of many issues on which the far left is so isolated: virtually no-one agrees with the abolition of all immigration law. This should not make us drop our ideas, but it should make us think about *why* we are so isolated.

Sometimes "abolish all immigration controls!" is taken as an article of faith and the case for it is badly and demagogically argued. The left must get out of the habit of maintaining the line by denouncing anyone who dissents as a racist or someone who panders to racism. Although *some* opposition is from racists and the laws *are* racist, opposition to the demand goes way beyond a small minority of hard-core bigots.

We should also stop arguing for the abolition of all these laws on the grounds that there are more people leaving the country than entering it. This agitational point, to undercut the racist argument about being "swamped" by a "flood" of immigrants, is fine but it has no real bearing on the case for abolition of immigration controls.

A small shift in immigration procedure — far short of their abolition — would convert a net outflow of people into an inflow. What would happen to this argument then?

The usual procedure is to *deny* the abolition of all these laws would lead to very many people entering Britain — something which is so self-evidently stupid as to not reach the level of "argument".

We need to recognise the real problems about arguing the case.

The "common sense" argument against us is that the country is "full up". Taken literally, this is just nonsense. If 100 million people tried to live on the Isle of White there might be a point to this argument but an extra 10 million people in Britain will not "fill Britain up".

Someone who says this almost certainly means that there is not enough to go around; how can "we" feed, house and give jobs to millions of more people when the health

service is run down, millions are already out of work and accommodation is expensive and hard to find?

Our argument must be that the rich can afford to pay for the health care we need; that we should cut the working week to 35 hours or 30 hours so that all workers have a job, etc.

However, it is true that abolition of all immigration laws — if it happened tomorrow, in isolation — could well make things worse. It is not just "racist rubbish" to believe that hundreds of thousands of immigrants looking for work could drive down wages or make other workers unemployed.

Our answers are clear: stand with the immigrants; unionise immigrant workers, fight for full employment. But many people think such measures are unlikely. Given the existing Labour Party and trade union leaderships, that is not really surprising. There is a *real* problem here.

We are left with making the general case for internationalism, seemingly against the immediate bread-and-butter concerns of workers in Britain. We cannot make the internationalism particularly concrete (as for instance it is possible to make the case for international trade union links within a multinational corporation).

That is why the argument is difficult to win and why we are so isolated. Perhaps we can do better if we argue better...

## X-Files is the real thing!

By Joanne Radcliff and Nicole Aylott

WE are writing in anger at the report by Ruah Carlyle about the *X-Files*. He obviously doesn't know what he is talking about.

We would like to say that the *X-Files* is a well produced programme with great story lines and brilliant acting. Some of the story lines may be a little weird but if people are paranoid then that reflects society as a whole, not the *X-Files* making people this way.

We and our friends are sick to death of all the crap on our TV screens, programmes that make out that life is brilliant and perfect, when we know it is not.

The *X-Files* however shows life to be more realistic. We're not saying we believe in all the things presented to us by the *X-Files*, but it is different.

The *X-Files* is getting away from the stereotype that comes with police/FBI/partner programmes. It doesn't have a long-legged, blonde bimbo with a tough, strong man who shows no emotion. Instead it has a smart woman and a sensitive man. The *X-Files* shows a partner relationship based on respect — they don't jump into bed together every five seconds.

The actors who portray the characters, David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, display an unmatched range of talent without ever, even once, sacrificing the integrity of

the characters they create.

We want to say that we are not nerdy fans who go trainspotting and put tin foil around our heads to stop aliens invading our brains. And we most certainly do not need to get a life. We think that Mr Carlyle is the one who needs a life and to stop criticising other people's.

The programme is most definitely not new age, Mother Earth, peace, more tea vicar bullshit. We have never heard of a more wrong description of the *X-Files* in all our lives.

We believe that Mr Ruah Carlyle should get his act together and think before he writes garbage such as the type in the March edition of *Workers' Liberty*.

## Trust no-one!

By Ellen Maxim

IT'S A shame that Ruah Carlyle (*Workers' Liberty* 29) couldn't do more than throw puerile abuse and ridiculous assertions at *The X-Files*. Perhaps if he'd watched more than one or two episodes then his "review" might have shed more light on the series.

*The X-Files*, which is 'hugely popular' and 'entertaining' as Ruah admits, follows two FBI agents investigating strange events. One of them is Fox Mulder, a maverick agent who believes the government is covering up the existence of extra-terrestrials and is trying to prove it; the other is Dana Scully, a medical doctor recruited to the FBI, who attempts to find a scientific explanation for everything, bringing Mulder down to earth at the end of every show.

*The X-Files* is well acted, with believable protagonists who are not superhuman — they make mistakes, they get scared, they make jokes, just like ordinary people. The show is not racist, sexist or homophobic, and I'm glad to see a TV programme for once where the main female character is not there simply to provide glamour or the 'love interest', but who is a character in her own right.

Anyone who has watched more than one or two episodes knows that not every show features "aliens, a government conspiracy, a cult, or all three." Many have featured things that do actually happen in the real world — "Jersey Devil" was about wild humans (a phenomenon that is well documented, like the 'Monkey Boy' of Ceylon); "Irresistible" featured a psychotic killer (hmm, too many of those to mention here); mad scientists running dangerous, unauthorised experiments were portrayed in the episodes "Young at Heart", "Blood", "Red Museum" (again, many doctors have been exposed for this); and many other stories, such as military cover-ups, which are not fantastic at all have provided material for *The X-Files*.

So why is it popular? Well, it does tap into a rich seam of paranoia. It appeals to a huge number of people ("nerds" according to Ruah) who follow the FBI agents as they attempt to uncover "the truth." I don't think people who watch *The X-Files* are "nerds"; I think they have a great deal to worry about.

You don't have to believe the government



**The X-Files: an intelligent fantasy**

is covering up the existence of aliens to understand that governments cover up an awful lot.

Watergate, Thalidomide, Clive Ponting, the Zircon spy satellite, the Scott Report, US government secret experiments on prisoners, the Stalker affair, the secret dirty tricks against the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-5 miners' strike, Gulf War syndrome... no wonder many people feel they have no control over their lives.

*The X-Files* is an intelligent fantasy programme that explores these legitimate fears through the medium of science fiction, and it does it very well.

Science fiction and science fantasy have given us many great books, films and TV shows; are they all "bilge" too because they're not real? If that's the case, then bye-bye 1984 (Orwell), *Brave New World* (Huxley), and 2001 (Kubrick/Clarke).

*The X-Files* stands in the science fiction tradition of many of these 'greats', and without any "New Age bullshit" that Ruah accuses *The X-Files* of peddling.

There is not one episode which advocates peace, love and "New Age bullshit" — *The X-Files* advocates seeking out facts, evidence and doing something about it.

The chicken factory episode, "Our Town", concerns the efforts of Mulder and Scully to find out why inhabitants of a small southern US town are dying of Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease. The reason turns out to be the cannibalistic practices of a cult that embraces the whole town; the infected people have eaten one of their neighbours, who had CJD.

It certainly doesn't sound so weird now, after revelation upon revelation of the extent of the BSE crisis. No-one believes the government when they say beef is safe, especially when the problem could have been solved at least ten years ago.

The character of Mulder has a motto: "Trust no-one." Call me paranoid if you wish, but it seems the best way to deal with those who gave us BSE.

This is a nasty world — *The X-Files* never pretends otherwise.

## Glorifying addiction?

By Frank J Higgins

DESPITE what Clive Bradley wrote (in WL29), I'm not sure about *Trainspotting*. Artistic freedom is indeed very important, but any film that portrayed the pleasures of drugs and failed to convey the horror and the sure consequences of dependence on hard drugs, would be a criminal piece of proselytising. Does *Trainspotting* do that?

Drawing the line between an artistically true portrait of life and irresponsible proselytising is difficult of course. So is the question of who should draw it — that is, the question of state censorship.

*Trainspotting* is indeed full of life and invention, as Clive Bradley says. It is legitimate in any portrait of drug culture to portray the — ephemeral — pleasure and ecstasy, the search for which, once experienced, drives the drug culture. A long time addict I know who came off heroin after she was jailed for 'pushing' it says she spent many years vainly seeking a

repeat of the sensation she experienced at her first 'hit'. It never came back.

*Trainspotting* portrays, in words as well as the image of a woman's face after a 'hit' the experience of heroin explicitly as akin to an intense sexual orgasm, multiplied many times. The horror and squalor of dependence and the dementia of withdrawal attempts are portrayed too — but surrealistically, almost for laughs. Maybe, the point is that such things are out of most people's ken and a good or a super good orgasm is not.

I'm not sure there is anything like balance — that is artistic truth — in *Trainspotting* here. The very liveliness of the film works against it. There is an almost cartoon like — cartoon violence, I mean — quality to the durability of its hero. He is up and running, despite everything.

Towards the end we see him after having been off drugs for a while, preparing to inject heroin. An 'ex' addict who did that, like a dry alcoholic taking 'just one' drink, would be immediately hooked: as if he'd never been off. We see him seemingly unaffected — up and running once more. I'm not sure that *Trainspotting* is not just a very talented, heartless, and maybe dangerous, commercial exploitation piece.

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# Renewing the Third Camp legacy

Peter Drucker's book "Max Shachtman and His Left" has provoked considerable discussion in *Workers' Liberty* over the past year. Barry Finger's review ("Max Shachtman and his left", April 1995) concluded that Drucker "merits the gratitude of every thinking socialist" for his "panoramic review centred on the career of Max Shachtman." Ernest Haberkern more recently subjected the biography to a comprehensive critique ("The left and Max Shachtman", October 1995, and "Post-Trotsky Trotskyism", January 1996). In a response, Drucker pleads for a Third Camp socialism with room for theoretical pluralism and open to a changing world.

MANY of the issues that Haberkern has raised in his criticisms of *Max Shachtman and His Left* are of major importance. There are disagreements between us about the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, Workers' Party [WP] history and more. But none of these disagreements is as important as the different ways in which he and I explain and discuss differences of opinion among revolutionary socialists.

For Haberkern, the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, as developed by Joseph Carter, "was not one contribution of the Third Camp tendency, it was the theoretical basis of the politics that defined that tendency", and it is still the basis of democratic, revolutionary socialism. This is why "every other tendency on the left" — all those who dissented from the theory — "abandoned the fight not only for trade union rights but for democratic rights in general" during the Second World War, and why other tendencies remain suspect today. An author (like me) whose account of the theory differs from Haberkern's interpretation must at best be "confused." A more likely explanation is "political hostility to the politics of the Third Camp" (even if I never make this "explicit"). The ultimate cause must be "demoralisation and disorganisation of the working class", which supposedly leads dissenters (including me) to be "haunted by the fear... that the working class has no political future."

The most striking thing about this method

of analysis and argument, coming from a Third Camp socialist, is how closely it resembles the method used by James P Cannon and his allies against the SWP minority in 1939-40. Then too the orthodox, majority position was portrayed as the only legitimate working-class position, and all alternative analyses or even doubts were attributed to demoralisation and the pressure of alien class forces. On this basis Trotsky and Cannon confidently predicted that Shachtman and his allies would support US imperialism in the coming world war. As Haberkern and *Workers' Liberty* readers know, the prediction was groundless. Yet Haberkern has no hesitation in employing this same tried-and-tested approach in a discussion half a century later among Third Camp socialists.

*"The ISL did break with  
some revolutionary  
Marxist traditions in  
1948-51, in ways that  
Draper and Jacobson  
went along with."*

My starting point in this discussion is different. The number of avowed democratic, revolutionary socialists in the world at this moment in history is unfortunately small. We are outnumbered by the champions of "the free market": the class interests represented by their ideology are all too clear. The people running the Chinese and North Korean governments still claim allegiance to Marxism, but it is doubtful whether they fool even themselves. Even within the workers' movement in capitalist countries, labour, social-democratic and ex-Communist Party leaders — decreasingly linked to trade-union bureaucracies, increasingly linked to bourgeois state apparatuses — almost always shy away nowadays from the idea of a socialist transformation of society, focussing instead on the impractical project of giving capitalism some kind of social face. In this situation, I incline strongly to believe that those few thousand people who say they are democratic, revolutionary, working-class socialists are in fact democratic, revolutionary, working-class socialists.

Among these socialists there are different traditions and standpoints. Lack of faith in the working class does not strike me as a necessary or convincing explanation for this diversity. The working class itself is diverse, and changing rapidly as capitalism changes. It lives in countries with different economies, political structures and histories. Finally, anyone who tries to understand the world as a Marxist has to grapple with an incredible mass of data, which no single individual or group

is capable of mastering alone. Differences of emphasis and interpretation are therefore inevitable and in fact indispensable. The only way to arrive at an accurate Marxist understanding of the world is through dialogue between people with opposing standpoints, who have to try to listen and learn from one another.

This is how I would like to discuss the differences I have with comrade Haberkern. The most important points he raises are: Leninism; the theory of bureaucratic collectivism; revolutionary strategy; defeatism; and Stalinism.

## Leninism

HABERKERN accuses me of being an apologist for "ersatz 'Leninism'", and concealing the fact that "rejection of ersatz 'Leninism'" was part of the [Third Camp] tendency's politics from the beginning." He speculates that I am probably "incapable of conceiving of an organisation that is democratic and revolutionary." (He takes a startling logical leap by reasoning that because the book talks about "Max Shachtman's left", it implies that the WP was in the grip of some kind of "leadership cult." Presumably the next time someone mentions "Ernie Haberkern's neighbourhood in Berkeley" he will rush to defend himself against this accusation of authoritarian rule.) Even Barry Finger's otherwise generous review speaks of my "adherence to the Cannonite tradition."

In fact *Max Shachtman and His Left* describes at length the limitations on democracy in the Trotskyist organisations led by Cannon up until 1940, and contrasts with the open, democratic, free-wheeling and critical spirit of the Workers' Party in 1940-49 (pp56-58, 116-20, 126-31, 176-79). Not only can I conceive of an organisation that is democratic and revolutionary, I describe the WP as just such an organisation. I have spent my own political life entirely in democratic organisations: most recently in the US in the regrouped revolutionary socialist organisation Solidarity, and now in the Dutch section of the Fourth International. (Before *Workers' Liberty* readers conclude that this group and my outlook are therefore "Cannonite", they should remember a WP leader's comment that "the benevolent despotism exercised by Cannon does not find its counterpart" in the FI's European sections (p210).

Haberkern accuses me of ignoring realities that I describe at length, but he ignores evidence that contradicts his own interpretation. Contrary to Haberkern's argument, the WP made a distinction between "ersatz Leninism" and its own, critical, anti-authoritarian Leninism; it tried to learn from the best traditions of the Bolshevik Party in 1905 and 1917 by building a "centralized Marxist organisation in which the widest and freest discussion is not only 'tolerated' but encouraged" (p179). My experience in Solidarity in the US has convinced me that this kind of organisation can be built jointly by people who see themselves



as "Leninists" and people who see themselves as "non-Leninists", as long as they all agree that free-ranging, critical discussion and collectively decided practical activity are both essential. Much as some on the left make a fetish of some abstract "Leninist" organisational model, Haberkern and others devote considerable energy to denouncing "ersatz 'Leninism'." To me actually building democratic, revolutionary organisations is more important than arguing over labels.

### Bureaucratic collectivism

HABERKERN says that I am "confused" about the differences between the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, as developed by Carter, and Shachtman's theory in the late 1930s and 1940s. In fact *Max Shachtman and His Left* analyses the debates between Carter and Shachtman at length (pp89-91, 131-138). The book's account coincides with Haberkern's on several points: that Carter was the first to develop the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, in 1938; that Shachtman disagreed with Carter's theory strongly for several years, because he maintained (unlike Carter) that the USSR's collectivised property forms (as distinct from its bureaucratic property relations) were historically progressive; and that by the end of the 1940s Shachtman gave up his disagreements and came round to Carter's point of view (without ever clearly announcing or explaining his changed views). On the other hand, the book mentions some other facts that Haberkern avoids dealing with.

The Workers' Party debated Carter's and Shachtman's rival theories of bureaucratic collectivism, democratically, openly, and for many months in 1940-41. (Except in the first few weeks of this debate, contrary to what Haberkern says, Shachtman like Carter called the USSR "bureaucratic collectivist", while saying that his agreement with Carter was merely "terminological" (p142, n73).) At the same time the WP also debated the theories of degenerated workers' states and state capitalism, since they too had supporters in the group. The outcome of this four-cornered debate was a convention decision that endorsed Shachtman's theory, not Carter's. What's more, the debate came up again tangentially at the 1946 WP convention, where Shachtman said: "The differences that we had I have to this day" (p167). There once more the convention backed Shachtman's position and voted down Carter's.

This means that from September 1941 until at least May 1946 — the years when, as Haberkern and I agree, the Workers' Party made its "most significant practical achievement" in the workers' movement — it upheld a theory of the USSR that Haberkern maintains was wrong. I myself think that the WP position was right in those years. The arguments are in the book; I encourage people to read and judge for themselves. But in any event, in those years, despite overwhelming pressure to accommodate to US imperialism and Stalinism, the majority position was compatible with the most radical, consistent and practically effective Third Camp activism on the US left. Why then is it so important to Haberkern to root out this heresy?

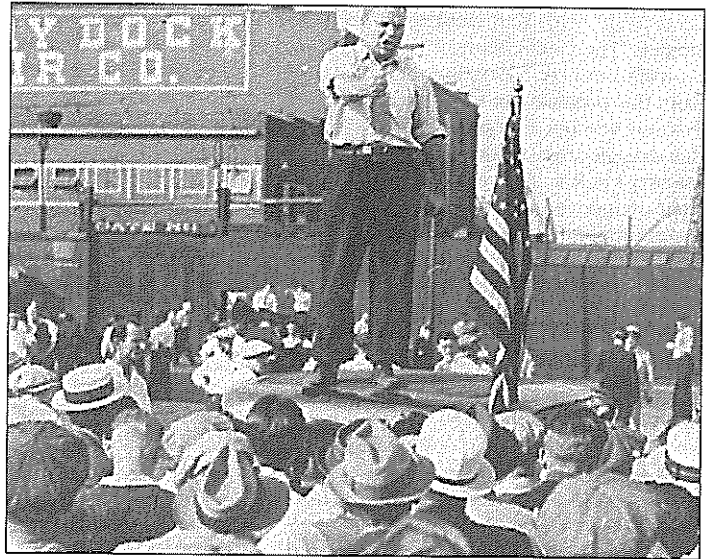
### Revolutionary strategy

THE most disturbing chapters of *Max Shachtman and His Left* for many people around Haberkern's Center for Socialist History and the magazine *New Politics* are those in which the book discusses the Independent Socialist League years (1949-58). During the ISL years Hal Draper (later founder of the Center for Socialist History) and Julius Jacobson (later founding co-

editor of *New Politics*) emerged as key Third Camp socialist leaders. Understandably, they and their political heirs see the ISL's politics as an integral and even privileged part of the Third Camp socialist tradition. They take criticism of the ISL in those years to heart. Barry Finger's review of *Max Shachtman and His Left* sums up a widespread view of the book's weakness in recounting these years: in seeing "inklings... in the late 1940s and early 1950s of Shachtman's later right-wing trajectory", Finger says, the book's account is "based on misinterpretation or an impressionistic forcing of the facts."

It is particularly important here to be clear on what the book does and does not say, and where it agrees and disagrees with its critics. It clearly says that Shachtman's and the ISL's politics in the early 1950s were "the politics of a left-wing socialist" (p219). It also points to issues on which Shachtman tried in the early 1950s to push the ISL to the right: specifically, by trying to pledge support for a non-socialist labour government in a war against the USSR, and by trying to pledge ISL support to trade-union candidates running inside the Democratic Party. The book credits Draper and Jacobson with resisting these rightward moves, successfully in the case of Shachtman's 1951 motion on wartime tactics, in the end unsuccessfully on the issue of "labour Democrats" (since the 1954 ISL convention finally backed Shachtman's position). It shows how cautious Shachtman was in these moves, how quickly he pulled back if he sensed he was in a minority. It concludes that he "barely made a dent in the Independent Socialists' identity as a Marxist group on the extreme left of the US political spectrum" (p222). On all these points, I think that Haberkern and I agree.

Nevertheless, the book concludes that the ISL did break with some revolutionary Marxist traditions in 1948-51, in ways that Draper and Jacobson went along with. For example, the book cites the 1951 ISL convention resolution that concluded, first, that a "broad socialist left wing" could win the British Labour Party to a genuinely socialist course, and second, that this would create "an unpar-



The heyday of American labour. On what basis should we rebuild the workers' movement

alleled opportunity for a relatively peaceful road to socialism" (pp237-38). For Haberkern, saying that ISL leaders gave up "the Leninist touchstone 'that revolution was necessary even in post-war capitalist democracies'... comes pretty close to slander." To me this is what the 1951 ISL resolution says about Britain. Perhaps Haberkern defines the word "revolution" differently than I do, and sees the relatively peaceful, legal transition described by the ISL in 1951 as a possible revolutionary scenario. This is a legitimate discussion. But it is not advanced by charges of slander.

### Defeatism

IN describing the 1951 ISL discussion over "defeatism" in the ISL, according to Haberkern, *Max Shachtman and His Left* so confuses Shachtman's and Draper's positions that it "concludes that there wasn't much difference between Draper and Shachtman." The book concludes no such thing, as any reader can see. In the ISL Political Committee, it says: "Draper successfully resisted Shachtman's apparent intention to support British Labour's role in Korea"; in his articles in the *New Internationalist*, "Draper suggested that the idea of 'defeatism' had always been confused and confusing and that Shachtman was turning its ambiguities upside down in a way that undermined opposition to US wars" (pp247-48). This is essentially Haberkern's account as well. It does not "amalgamate the anti-imperialist Draper with the social-patriotic Shachtman", as Haberkern charges.

The difference between Haberkern and me is that he agrees with Draper's way of responding to Shachtman, whereas I still think that "defeatism" was and is a surer basis on which to oppose imperialist wars. This does not mean endorsing Lenin's arguments that a Japanese victory over Russia in 1904 or a German victory over Russia in 1914 would have been lesser evils; I agree with all of Draper's and Haberkern's criticisms of Lenin on this score. But this is not the interpretation of "defeatism" that revolutionary Marxists had in the 1930s or 1940s. The interpretation that Trotsky and others accepted equated

"defeatism" with Karl Liebknecht's anti-war slogan, "The chief enemy of the people is in its own country." Revolutionaries starting from this premise can wage class struggle in wartime without any qualms that this strike or that struggle might inadvertently lead to "their" country's defeat. They can even plan on using their own government's defeat, as Lenin and Luxemburg jointly proposed and the Second International voted before the First World War, to hasten the overthrow of capitalism. This is after all what the Bolsheviks did in 1917, why there was a revolution in Russia and nearly a revolution in Germany.

Draper's standpoint in his *New Internationalist* articles, by contrast, allowed him to endorse the idea, later adopted in a 1954 ISL convention resolution, that socialists should not do anything during a US-Soviet war "in any way or degree to facilitate [a Soviet] victory." What effect would such a standpoint have had in 1943-45 on WP activists in the United Auto Workers, virtually all of whom were helping produce military equipment for the war? Would they have provided the same militant leadership to wildcat strikes? Or would they have first had to make sure that a strike would not "in any way or degree" facilitate a German victory?

Haberkern and I both want to honour Draper's resistance to Shachtman's rightward drift in the 1950s. But I think Haberkern and others let their knowledge of what happened later influence too much their view of what was said and written in 1951-54. Clearly Draper was worried then by some of Shachtman's positions. But he could hardly be certain that Shachtman would become an outright Cold War social democrat. I think people who read Draper's writings from those years with an open mind will find that he (understandably) was trying not only to rein Shachtman in but also to find common ground with him. It is hardly surprising that Draper, writing as a loyal, leading member of a small, beleaguered group in a time of virulent McCarthyism, sometimes used formulations that now seem doubtful. To defend those formulations uncritically over forty years later strikes me as unwise.

### Stalinism

THERE can be only one motive for criticising the heroes of Independent Socialism like this, Haberkern suggests: I must be soft on Stalinism. More specifically, Drucker "implies, although he does not say openly, that Shachtman's acceptance of the proposition that the Stalinist parties represented a social and political force at once reactionary and anti-capitalist was responsible for his political and personal collapse." This interpretation of *Max Shachtman and His Left* is not based on what the book says, however. Haberkern arrives at it by taking his own views and turning them upside down.

Haberkern believes that one's theory of Stalinism is determinant for the whole of one's politics. He says in so many words that the theory of bureaucratic collectivism (as understood by Carter, Draper and Haberkern) is "the theoretical basis" of Third Camp politics. He concludes that my understanding of Stalinism must be the theoretical basis of my

politics, and the key to my book. But I have a quite different explanation of Shachtman's evolution, an explanation that to my mind is more materialist. I see the main cause of Shachtman's rightward drift in his loss of a rank-and-file working-class base and his determination to link up instead with the trade union bureaucracy: with the Reuther UAW bureaucracy in the 1950s and the Meany AFL-CIO bureaucracy in the 1960s. This is quite explicit in *Max Shachtman and His Left*, for example in the introduction to Part II (pp185-88). Perhaps Haberkern missed this, or perhaps he prefers not to discuss it. In any event, he fails to see that I portray Shachtman's changing views of Stalinism, at least from fall 1949 onwards, as only one symptom of his developing reformist politics.

The WP/ISL's attitude to CPers in the trade unions changed over the years, for example, in ways that Haberkern does not make clear. He does not mention that the 1941 WP convention explicitly kept open the possibility of joint work with the CP in the trade unions, or that the party's March 1949 convention — after all the Stalinist abuse and attacks that WPers had suffered from — reaffirmed the

## *"Haberkern and I both want to honour Draper's resistance to Shachtman's rightward drift in the 1950s."*

need for alliances with Stalinists in specific unions in specific circumstances (pp 155-56, 239). Throughout these years, the WP/ISL explicitly reaffirmed the rule of thumb that Cannon laid down in 1940 and that Haberkern recalls: that in general almost any genuine trade-union current was preferable to the Stalinists, because the Stalinists had no ultimate loyalty to the unions. But until the fall of 1949 the organisation always held that in some exceptional circumstances, particularly in a union where a corrupt and/or reactionary leadership was strong and the Stalinists were weak, the Stalinists could be an ally. Only in September 1949 — one month after the ISL officially gave up the idea of building an opposition to Reuther in the UAW, and at a moment when the CIO leadership was visibly on the verge of expelling the Stalinists from the CIO — did Shachtman move to close off this loophole. Haberkern may believe that Shachtman just happened to be convinced by Draper's and Geltman's arguments at this particular moment. It would be a remarkable coincidence, though.

"Those ISLers who did not want to support Reuther shared the same view of the Communist Party and its role", Haberkern says. In a sense this was true: all ISLers agreed with Cannon's rule of thumb. But Gordon Haskell, an ISL leader who criticised Shachtman's positions in the late 1940s, argued that the 1947 UAW faction fight was one of the

exceptional circumstances in which anti-Stalinism had to come second: in this case to the fight against the Taft-Hartley Act, which all ISLers saw as a devastating blow to labour, which the Stalinists had no choice but to fight in order to survive in the unions, and which Reuther was ready to use in order to purge the Stalinists from the UAW. The fall 1949 CIO split was another exceptional moment when Haskell argued that alliance with CPers was permissible and necessary. This was and is another legitimate discussion among Third Camp socialists. The sweeping formulas that Shachtman began wielding in the late 1940s were used to close off this discussion. For this reason alone I think those formulas should be discarded today, not uncritically defended.

Haberkern's analysis of Stalinism and mine differ in other important ways. But it would drag this response out too much to go into our other differences. Besides, unlike Haberkern, I do not believe that Stalinism is as central an issue now as it was forty or even ten years ago. Of course we should be intransigently opposed to the Stalinist regimes that still survive; of course our socialism has nothing in common with "socialists" who think that these regimes are in any sense "socialist." But as Haberkern himself says: "Neither Stalinism nor fascism are likely to return in the same form." If Third Camp socialists continue to beat the dead horse of Russian Stalinism, we will ensure our political irrelevance to the new times we are living in. That would be a tragedy, I think, above all because anti-Stalinism was not and is not the be-all and end-all of Third Camp politics.

We sometimes forget that the concept of the Third Camp was not originally just a way of saying "Neither Washington nor Moscow", still less the property of those who held a particular theory of bureaucratic collectivism. It was also a way of refusing to take sides between fascism and "democratic" imperialism. It was a way of saying, We will not back any government or elite against another. Our camp is the camp of those who control no governments and belong to no elite, who are struggling for their own freedom and organising their own movements. We are confident that these struggles will ultimately converge with the revolutionary working class to build a new international force and ultimately to build socialism from below.

Today the Third Camp's enemies take new forms and are assembled in other camps: triumphant neo-liberalism; Islamic, Hindu, Jewish or Christian fundamentalism; the perpetrators of "ethnic cleansing"; the Buchanans and Le Pens; and others equally ugly. While our basic Marxist starting point remains the same, we face enormous challenges in creating an adequate new body of theory, rebuilding the basic organisations of working-class struggle, and linking up very disparate progressive forces. The political heirs of Shachtman or Draper or Haberkern cannot do all this on their own, nor should they try to, because other currents from different origins but committed to the same effort are emerging and will emerge. Rather than chewing over old internecine battles, Third Camp socialists should turn outward and towards the future.

# The revenge of the bourgeoisie

"THE wholesale executions continue indiscriminately. Prisoners are taken down in batches to certain places where firing parties are stationed and deep trenches dug beforehand. At one of these, the Caserne Napoleon, since last night, *five hundred* persons have been shot. There are invariably *women and boys* among them... Prisoners are soon disposed of by a volley and tumbled into a trench, *when if not killed by the shots, death from suffocation* must soon put an end to their pain... Two thousand dead bodies are collected around the Pantheon."

London Evening Standard,  
June 1871

By William Morris

FELLOW-WORKMEN, no doubt you have often wondered why we Socialists hold in such high honour the men and women who fought and died in Paris nineteen years ago. By the ordinary newspapers, the "reptile press", you are told that they were red-handed ruffians, idle miscreants... that the crimes they committed were so monstrous, that shooting down in cold blood 35,000 men, women and children... was only a slight punishment compared to what they really deserved. Now, what were they, and what did they do?

They were the people of Paris. Neither the "highest" nor the "lowest" — neither aristocrats nor criminals, those inevitable fruits of inequality — they were the *People!* And what they did was to fight for their freedom... It was for this they were butchered then; it is for this they are condemned and vilified now.

The Empire which had paralysed France was dead. The "Republic" which had taken its place was a shameful pretence, a treachery...

... They tried to seize the cannon of the National Guard, the volunteers of Paris;



"They were the people of Paris... what they did was fight for their freedom."

cannon bought and paid for with the willing pence of the men who had used them during the siege [of Paris by the Prussian Army, Franco-Prussian War, 1870] in defending their homes. Paris rose, and declaring herself guardian of the Republic, took possession of her own. ... Her oppressors fled. ... Paris was left in the hands of her people.

The Commune... was proclaimed... Workmen, professional men, shopkeepers, pressed into its service. For the first time there was no thought of classes, the proletariat took its due place in the conduct of affairs. For two months there was no crime, no vice, no poverty and no oppression. "Each for all; all for each," was the rule of life.

The privileged classes in all countries were alarmed. If... the example of Paris were to be followed elsewhere! ... The Governments of Europe looked on, while the German Government helped that of Versailles to draw an iron ring round Paris, within which the greatest tragedy of

modern times was to be consummated. The soldiers of the Second Empire picked from those regiments most brutalised by their training, partakers in the atrocities of Africa and Mexico, were hurried back from their German prisons and hurled against the "rebels." ... Weak and wounded from the recent horrors of her siege, Paris held out bravely, but at length was beaten down; falling even then by treachery rather than by force. Then a dreadful massacre began — women, children, sick and wounded, unarmed men... felt the fury of outraged respectability, the revenge of shaken monopoly. By the order of the bourgeois government, at the instance of civilised capitalists to secure the endangered supremacy of property, deeds of savage cruelty were done, from which the most barbarian despot might well have recoiled. The attempt of the empire of the common people to do without their masters was bloodily punished and put down.

Written for the  
Socialist League, 1890

## Extracts from the press

● "IT is at the Bourse [Stock Exchange] that there was to-day the largest numbers of executions. The doomed men who attempted to resist were bound to the iron railing."

Paris Français, 28 May 1871

● "ELEVEN waggon loads of dead bodies have been buried in the common ditch of

Issy. No quarter was given to any man, woman or child. Batches of fifty and one hundred at a time are shot."

Paris Français, 28 May 1871

● "THE column of prisoners was drawn up, four or five deep, on the footway facing to the road. General Marquis de Galliffet and his staff dismounted and commenced an inspection.

Walking down slowly and eyeing the ranks, the General stopped here and there, tapping a man on the shoulder, or beckoning him out of the rear ranks. In most cases, without further parley, the indi-

vidual thus selected was marched out into the centre of the road, where a small supplementary column was thus soon formed... It was evident that there was considerable room for error.

A mounted officer pointed out to General Galliffet a man and a woman for some particular offence. The woman, rushing out of the ranks, threw herself on her knees, and, with outstretched arms, protested her innocence in passionate terms. The General waited for a pause, and then with most impassable face and unmoved demeanour, said: 'Madame, I have visited every theatre in Paris, your acting will have no effect on me'...

# The left and the Commune

By Frederick Engels

THE MEMBERS of the Commune were divided into a majority, the Blanquists, who had also been predominant in the Central Committee of the National Guard; and a minority, members of the International Working Men's Association, chiefly consisting of adherents of the Proudhon school of socialism. The great majority of the Blanquists were at that time socialists only by revolutionary, proletarian instinct; only a few had attained greater clarity on principles, through Vaillant, who was familiar with German scientific socialism. It is therefore comprehensible that in the economic sphere much was left undone which, according to our view today, the Commune ought to have done. The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remained standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France. This was also a serious political mistake. The bank in the hands of the Commune — this would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages. It would have meant the pressure of the whole of the French bourgeoisie on the Versailles government in favour of peace with the Commune. But what is still more wonderful is the correctness of much that nevertheless was done by the Commune, composed as it was of Blanquists and Proudhonists. Naturally, the Proudhonists were chiefly responsible for the economic decrees of the Commune, both for their praiseworthy and their unpraiseworthy aspects; the Blanquists were responsible for its political commissions and omissions. And in both cases the irony of history willed — as is usual when doctrinaires come to the helm — that both did the opposite of what the doctrines of their school prescribed.

Proudhon, the socialist of the small peasant and master craftsman, regarded association with positive hatred. He said of it that there was more bad than good in it; that it was by nature sterile, even harmful, because it was a fetter on the freedom of the worker; that it was a pure dogma, unproductive and burdensome, in conflict as much with the freedom of the worker as with economy of labour; that its disadvantages multiplied more swiftly than its advantages; that, as compared with it, competition, division of labour and private property were economic

forces. Only in the exceptional cases — as Proudhon called them — of large scale industry and large establishments, such as railways, was the association of workers in place.

By 1871, large-scale industry had already so much ceased to be an exceptional case even in Paris, the centre of artistic handicrafts, that by far the most important decree of the Commune instituted an organisation of large-scale industry and even of manufacture which was not only to be based on the association of the workers in each factor, but also to combine all these associations in one great union; in short, an organisation which, as Marx quite rightly says in *The Civil War*, must necessarily have led in the end to Communism, that is to say, the direct opposite of the Proudhon doctrine. And therefore, the Commune was the grave of the Proudhon school of socialism. Today this school has vanished from French working-class circles; here, among the Possibilists no less than among the "Marxists" Marx's theory now rules unchallenged. Only among the "radical" bourgeoisie are there still Proudhonists.

The Blanquists fared not better. Brought up in the school of conspiracy, and held together by the strict discipline which went with it, they started out from the viewpoint that a relatively small number of resolute, well-organised men would be able, at a given favourable moment, not only to seize the helm of state, but also by a display of great ruthless energy, to maintain power until they succeeded in sweeping the mass of the people into the revolution and ranging them round the small band of leaders. This involved above all, the strictest, dictatorial centralisation of all power in the hands of the new revolutionary government. And what did the Commune, with its majority of these same Blanquists actually do? In all its proclamations to the French in the provinces, it appealed to them to form a free federation of all French Communes with Paris, a national organisation which for the first time was really to be created by the nation itself. It was precisely the oppressing power of the former centralised government, army, political police, bureaucracy, which Napoleon had created in 1798 and which since then had been taken over by every new government as a welcome instrument and used against its opponents — it was precisely this power which was to fall everywhere, just as it had already fallen in Paris.

## Extracts from the press contd.

It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbours. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from the ills of this world to his having a broken nose...

Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party was told off, and the column resumed its march, leaving them behind. A few minutes afterwards a dropping fire in our rear commenced, and continued for over an hour. It was the execution of these summarily convicted wretches."

London Daily News,  
8 June 1871

● "A GREAT number were buried in the square round St. Jacques-la-Boncherie; some of them very superficially.

In the daytime the roar of the busy streets prevented any notice being taken; but in the stillness of the night the inhabitants of the houses in the neighbourhood were roused by distant moans, and in the morning a clenched hand was seen protruding through the soil. In consequence of this, exhumations were ordered to take place...

That many wounded have been buried alive I have not the slightest doubt. One case I can vouch for.

When Brunel was shot with his mistress on the 24th ult., in the courtyard of a house in the Place Vendôme, the bodies lay there until the afternoon of the 27th. When the burial party came to remove the corpses, they found the woman living still, and took her to an ambulance.

Though she had received four bullets, she is now out of danger."

London Evening Standard,  
8 June 1871

INQUIS REVOLUTIONNAIRES ET PILOTELL.



LA COMMUNE HARCELEE PAR L'IGNORANCE ET LA REACTION

"The Commune is harassed by ignorance and reaction."



## The ABCs: 2

## What are "transitional demands"?

By Jack Cleary

THE idea of transitional demands expresses the most advanced lessons of the attempts by the proletariat between 1848 and 1919 to hammer out a political practice which linked the goal of socialist revolution with the day-to-day organic struggle imposed on the working class by capitalism.

Before the international labour movement collapsed into national fragments at the feet of the warring bourgeoisies in 1914, socialists operated with a *minimum* programme and a *maximum* programme.

The *maximum* programme was the millennium, an unseen goal in the far distance and it was the theoretical property of an elite within the loose workers' parties of the time [known as "social democracy, organised together in the "Second International"]. The *minimum* programme consisted of limited practical goals and the immediate aims of the everyday struggle of the working class.

What was the link between the two? The party and the trade unions, being built in the struggles and through propaganda. (A sect like the Socialist Workers' Party today provides a minuscule historical fossil for students of the tragedy of the Second International and its methods.)

Capitalism was advancing organically; so was the labour movement. The 'right' social democrats saw this process continuing indefinitely until capitalism became transformed by its own evolution, of which the evolution of the labour movement was part. "The movement is everything, the goal nothing", said their theoretician, Eduard Bernstein. The mainstream left believed evolution involved qualitative breaks and leaps, and that the evolutionary process would have to culminate in a revolutionary proletarian seizure of power.

Both failed to link the daily class struggle with the goal of socialism. Control and hegemony was left in the hands of those whose practice corresponded accurately to the minimum/maximum model; in turn, this overweening reality of the labour movement led the 'orthodox' left to accommodate to the right. Ultimately, having won one hollow verbal victory after another in debate, they capitulated to the right in practice.

Both wings of mainstream social democracy failed to see in the creative self-controlling activity of the working class the central force for socialism. Left and right had in common a bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. Their operational image of the relationship of the revolutionary party to the revolutionary class was one of pedagogic teacher to passive pupil, or self-substituting bureaucratic instrument to inert mass.

The Marxist movement, reorganising itself during and immediately after World War 1, resolved to have done with the minimum/maximum division. Resolved to mobilise the working class to fight immediately for social-

ism, the Marxist movement elaborated the conception of a *transitional programme* — to link the everyday struggles of the working class with the goal of socialist revolution; to focus every struggle so as to rouse working class masses and direct those masses against the pillars of capitalist society.

The Communist Parties, founded after the Russian Revolution of 1917, attempted to bring 'socialist' propaganda down from the cloudy skies and harness it to the hard daily grind of working class struggle. The full socialist programme was broken down into a linked chain, each link of which might successfully be grasped, and the movement hauled forward, dependent on the degree of mobilisation, intensity of struggles, and relationship of forces.

Everyday demands, as on wages, were expressed not within the framework of an acceptance of a capitalism that the socialists believed to be maturing towards some optimum time of ripeness, when it would fall. They were expressed against capitalism, so as to challenge capitalist prerogatives on a day-to-day basis.

Central to the new Marxism was: mobilisation and involvement of the broadest layers of the working class in immediate conflict with capitalism; a break with elitism, propagandism, and evolutionism; the integration of the various fronts of the class struggle, ideological, political, economic, into one strategic drive.

This was part of a world view that saw the struggle for socialism as immediate. But the concept of transitional demands is useful even if the possibility of struggle for socialism is not quite immediate. The Communist International began to discuss transitional demands at about the same time as it accepted that capitalism had survived the post-World War one earthquake and reached temporary stabilisation.

Fighting against the ultra-left conceptions of many within its own ranks that because, in an epochal sense, revolution was on the agenda after 1914, a permanent revolutionary 'offensive' by the party was necessary, the International declared: "The alternative offered by the Communist International in place of the minimum programme of the reformists

and centrists is: the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for demands which in their application undermine the power of the bourgeoisies, which organise the proletariat, and which form the transition to the proletarian dictatorship, even if certain groups of the masses have not yet grasped the meaning of such proletarian dictatorship" (3rd Congress of the Communist International 1921).

The essence of transitional demands is not that they cannot be realised under capitalism. Rather as Trotsky put it, "realisability" or "unrealisability" is in the last instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by the struggle.

If demands from a transitional programme are conceded without the bourgeoisie being overthrown, they will either be taken back by the bourgeoisie once the moment of danger is passed, or they will be robbed of their revolutionary content and neutralised within the structure of capitalist society.

Even workers' councils can be neutralised this way. After the failure of the working class to seize power in the German Revolution of 1918, the councils (organs of workers struggle based on factories and working-class neighbourhoods set up during the first throes of the battle) were given a legal position as organs of 'codetermination' within the framework of normal factory life.

The concept of transitional demands was closely and logically linked with that of the united front. In the fight for partial demands, Marxists struggle for the involvement in united action of the broadest sections of the labour movement; and unavoidably, so long as reformist and bureaucratic leaderships survive, this will involve even those leaderships. Broader and more extensive mobilisation both corresponds to the immediate need for maximum strength in the struggle, and opens the way for more radical demands and mobilisations and thus for the verification by the workers, through their own experience, of the ideas of the Marxist programme.

In the fight for and in the united front, the Marxists prove themselves as steadfast fighters for the workers' interests. The class-collaborationism of the reformist leaders is made clear to the masses by their desertion from the united struggle — whether it comes at an earlier or a later stage — on condition that the communists have at all times maintained strict political independence in their agitation and propaganda. "March separately, strike together" is the watchword of the united front.

Essential to the concept of transitional demands and of the united front is an orientation to the logic of class struggle and the potentialities of mass direct action, as opposed to all conceptions which offer the working class no role other than to join the organisation which will see to their liberation.

In history the idea of transitional demands summed up the break with the evolutionary, bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. That is what it means for us. ■



After the 1917 Russian Revolution the Communist Parties developed the concept of the transitional programme

# Things must be studied in their movement

## Part three of Edward Conze's explanation of dialectical materialism.

THAT everything should be studied in its development and changing forms is the demand of the second rule of scientific method. This is a simple consequence of the first law. For we cannot form an adequate picture of things as they are unless we take notice of their continual change and development. We have an intimate understanding of a house or a road when we know how it is built, of a tree or plant when we understand its growth, of the weather if we know how it was yesterday and how it will be tomorrow. When we confine or narrow down our attention to the condition in which things are at present, we see no more than a thin vertical section or slice of their full and complete history.

It would be like judging a whole film story by one "still" photograph outside the door of the picture-house, if we judged a thing merely by what it is at the moment. It may be possible so to judge a film if it is a specially stupid one. But the events of nature and society are far less stereotyped than are many of our films, so that when we study something, we must not ignore, for example, its past, which contains the causes of its present condition. We must also not ignore the trends inherent in it which drive it beyond its present state and which are the springs of its future development.

Everything in this world is subject to perpetual change. Religious believers and idealistic philosophers, while admitting that many things change, cling to certain exceptions from this law. They cherish the belief in an immutable God and his unchanging revelation, in an immortal soul, in eternal moral commands, and in the alleged eternal truth of scientific ideas. The craving for something stable, unchanging and eternal seems to be inherent in the very make-up of our minds. We live to think that those things will not perish which we like, cherish and value highly. There is nothing, however, in the world round us to justify this belief. There is nothing final. Everything in the world once had a beginning; and there is no part of the universe that will not perish.

Development is more than a monotonous movement that for ever repeats the same results, like a metal stamp which invariably cuts the same patterns. Development is a historically changing movement which goes through continually different stages.

### Scientific method and nature

THE habit of studying things in their development has transformed all branches of science during the last two centuries and has thrown floods of light on the most bewildering problems of nature. Scientific method demands that the world should be studied as

a complex of processes and events and not as a complex of ready-made things. All students of nature would now regard this statement as a commonplace. We are today so much accustomed to the startling results produced by this point of view that it has become difficult to realise fully the great revolution it brought about in modern science. But just because the results themselves are so familiar, it will be easy to appreciate the part which scientific method played in obtaining them.

Everything — the universe, the stars, the earth, the organisms, mind and the elements

*"The view that capitalism has always existed, as the only possible form of human society, is based on a wrong conception of what capital is."*

of matter — is regarded as in development. We all know now that the world was not always the same as it is today. The heavens, credited for so long with being eternal and immutable, have revealed some of their history to us. The stars are not changeless, as our ancestors thought. They pass through different stages. They are first gaseous nebulae, continually changing their structure and shape. They then gradually condense into detached masses. Thus the stars we see are born. Once born, they are not "fixed", but are in movement. They do not remain the same, but continually lose mass or weight, which melts away in radiation. Once, when a second star came near the sun, our solar system came into being. Astronomy has found that everything has a beginning in time, an end in time and a history in between. And yet, this idea, now a commonplace, first dawned only 150 years ago.

The same is true of the earth. The present condition of its surface is only one short stage in a long and varying history. The science of geology has explained the formation of rocks and mountain, of valleys and coal fields, by assigning to them a definite place in this history.

The evolution of animals and plants is one of the most brilliant discoveries of modern science. Until about 1800 the different species of animals and plants were supposed to be invariable, definitely patterned forever, permanent and immutable. The idea that they gradually change, merge into one another and evolve from one another revolutionised the science of living things. As a matter of course, organisms are now studied in their changing individual and generic history (embryology and palaeontology).

The problems of our mind can be under-

stood and solved only by studying our mind's development and growth, especially the experiences of early childhood, which are so decisive for our character, for our mental make-up, equipment and behaviour. We must even trace back the history of our mind beyond the beginnings of mankind, to the mind of the animals, which is fundamentally the same and from which our mind has developed. Experiments on infusoria, rats and chimpanzees and careful observations of children now begin to furnish us with some solutions to the riddles of our mind.

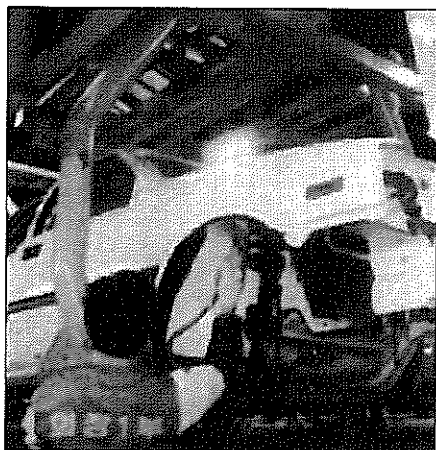
Not long ago the chemical elements were supposed to be immutable and permanent. Now we begin to obtain a first glimpse of their changing history. Of the 92 elements, at least the eight elements with the highest atomic weight are not permanent. They continually transform themselves into simpler atoms and into radiation. The best known of these are uranium and radium. Chemistry is just now on the way to transform elements.

### Scientific methods and the social sciences

IN the social sciences, however, the conservative mentality of the ruling classes has retarded the application of this law of scientific method. The ruling class naturally is inclined to believe and to teach that the present condition of the political and economic system is the natural state of affairs. It is naturally disinclined to contemplate a radical change of things, by which it can only lose. By applying the second law of scientific method of economics, Marx broke the spell of conservative ideas. This has been one of his biggest contributions to the scientific foundation of socialism, the real question of socialism being: how are we to control the changes in society?

Marx realised that capitalism was only one particular and transient stage in the incessant flow of historical change. This discovery was possible because Marx had a more adequate conception of capitalism than anybody before him. The view that capitalism has always existed, as the natural and only possible form of human society, is based on a wrong conception of what capital is. For illustration I take a particularly inadequate, though not uncommon, definition of capital.

Capital, according to some capitalist economists, consists of goods which are put back for future use instead of being consumed at once. Where people save, there we have capital. From the very beginning, society was divided into persons who saved a part of their income and others who consumed their entire income at once. The first are the capitalists, the others are the workers. This division always existed, and always will exist. Always the far-seeing ants in the fable will be better off than the short-sighted crickets of the same fable. That will never change. One famous professor even went so far as to declare that there is no point in abolishing capitalism, since even our animal ancestors, the apes, enjoy a capitalist economy. For, do



**"Marx realised that capitalism was only one particular and transient stage in the incessant flow of historical change."**

the apes immediately consume everything they have? No, they store up reserves, that is to say, capital. And our professor concludes triumphantly that no society can dispense with the reserves i.e. its capital.

Explanations of this kind tend to render the unthinking more willing to submit obediently to the capitalist system, as the necessary and inevitable arrangement of things. That is why they recur again and again in bourgeois economics, in different and, recently, less obvious and more sophisticated forms.

#### Marx's explanation

THINGS look somewhat different when we substitute for this superficial definition the scientific definition of capital which Marx gives. Capital, according to Marx, is wealth used to produce more wealth by the exploitation of "free" wage workers with the aim of making profits for the capitalist. The "free" wage worker who is indispensable for capitalism is defined by Marx as a person who sells his only property, his capacity to work, to an owner of the means of production. By this means the owner is able to obtain surplus value.

The nature of capitalism is seen when we apply the first and second laws of scientific thinking, viz, "think of things in their interrelations with other things," and "think of everything in its movement and development, for everything changes." Capitalism as it actually is, is obviously a transient stage in the history of mankind. In some countries — in Italy, France, England and Germany — it began slowly to grow about the year 1400 AD. It reached a certain maturity only about the year 1800. For a long time capitalism was confined to some few countries of Western Europe. It is easy to imagine that a system of production which, in the long history of mankind, has held sway for a mere 150 years and on only a small part of the globe, may conceivably disappear again. Further investigations have shown that trends within capitalism itself will probably one day destroy it.

At the same time capitalism, while it exists, is not always the same. As the features of human beings are altered as time goes on, so

the face of capitalism is perpetually modified. Capitalism passes through a number of different stages.

We must be alive to all the new changes which continually go on in the system and in the circumstances of capitalist production. When capitalism alters, our fight against it must be altered. The example of Lenin reveals the strategical advantage which results from being alive to the changes in the structure of capitalism. In 1916 he was the only one to give full significance to the new features which capitalism had developed by that time. He was also the only one to take advantage successfully of the temporary weakening of capitalism after the war. The socialists in their fight against fascism have repeatedly suffered from a failure to appreciate that changing capitalism has changing needs.

#### The most recent change

I CANNOT show here in detail how capitalism went through the different stages of mercantilism, free competitive capitalism and monopoly capitalism. Something should, however, be said about the most recent change in capitalism. Under our own eyes, capitalism is developing in such a way that to many observers it seems to be developing itself out of existence. In the years between 1890 and 1914, the big monopolies were built up, the banks grew in size and influence and industrial capital fused with banking capital into what we call "finance capital"; effective economic power was concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. In this way, it gradually became possible to place the control of the economic system more and more into the hands of one institution — the state. The big industrial countries are rapidly moving towards state-capitalism.

The drive towards state-capitalism is reinforced by the conditions under which a modern war will be conducted. Already the experience of 1914 to 1918 has demonstrated that private initiative, left alone, breaks down under the strain of a modern war. In all countries, the state interfered with industry, in order to obtain the munitions, food, coal and uniforms necessary for getting on with the war. In those countries which are now most intensely preparing for war — Italy, Germany and Japan — state control of industry and agriculture has gone farthest. In Britain, the marketing and other boards seek to do a spot of planning with the food supply of the nation. The state will take over more and more economic control, the nearer we move towards the next war.

Many workers everywhere are taken in by this new change. While building up state-capitalism the capitalist wolves put on the skin of the socialist lamb. In Germany state-capitalism passes as "German socialism," in Japan as "state socialism". German social democrats hailed the nationalisation of economic life and the state control of production and distribution during the war as "war socialism". In Britain, few members even of the labour movement clearly understand the difference between nationalisation and socialisation. The workers may thus easily be deceived by the mimicry which British cap-

italism will soon adopt.

The new change in the structure of capitalism must be met by a change in our strategy. We have no longer to fight for state interference against private initiative. The main question now is not: should the state organise production or should production be left to the free play of private initiative and profit? The main question is now: whose state is to do the job, the workers' state or the capitalist state?

#### Human nature

SIMILARLY, human nature is frequently considered to be rigidly unchanging, and unchangeable. It is one of the main arguments against socialism that human nature has never tolerated socialism and therefore never will tolerate it. Many people who should know better are proud of reiterating that socialism can become a reality only after men have lost their nature and have become angels.

Here again it is an unscientific, a one-sided conception of human nature, which lies at the root of the anti-socialist's fallacy. He regards human nature as something very selfish, composed essentially of egoism, hatred, aggressiveness and similar inclinations. What we do, however, actually observe is not a vague "human nature" but that concrete human beings exhibit partly egoistic, and partly social inclinations. We can further observe that class society, and capitalist society in particular, does everything to foster and encourage the selfish, acquisitive and competitive instincts, so much so that they tend to overrun the social side of human nature. In spite of that, this opposite side of human nature is clearly visible in friendship, love, maternal affection, in solidarity, in the emotions of sympathy and pity and in all those sentiments which keep together the social units, like family, clan, village, tribe, nation and class. It is even exploited to the fullest by capitalist society. It makes possible that spirit of sacrifice which alone enables people to endure slums, intolerable exploitation and misery. Without the spirit of sacrifice no wars could be fought, even for a fortnight. Under socialism we shall be able to develop more fully the social side of our nature. Under the present system of society almost everybody thrives by the defeat of a competitor. The reckless, selfish, anti-social individual is favoured by the rules of the game.

Socialism, on the other hand, will alter the rules. In a socialist society life will be made very unpleasant for those who try to advance at the expense of their fellow citizens. If once social standing and success have become bound up with a display of the social virtues, if it has become expedient in his own interest for everybody to display his social inclinations, there can be no doubt that all the reserves of the more noble social instincts will be set free — reserves which have, for so long, been suppressed by class society. The plasticity of "human nature" was manifested in the bank clerk who, at a month's notice, went to the trenches. It will be easy to induce "human nature" which has tolerated the misery of capitalism to tolerate a socialist society. ■

# Defend asylum seekers!

By Dale Street

NEW social security regulations introduced by the Tories on 5 February are leaving more and more asylum-seekers destitute.

Under these regulations, any asylum seeker who fails to apply for asylum on arrival is ineligible for welfare benefits. Any asylum seeker whose asylum claim is refused is barred from claiming benefits for the duration of the appeals procedure.

According to the Refugee Council, over 70 asylum seekers in London alone lost their entitlement to benefits during the first week of operation of the new regulations. By the end of February the figure had reached 200.

Churches and charities are trying to plug the gap created by the Tories' ruthless decision to deny most asylum seekers the right to claim welfare benefits.

The Salvation Army is distributing sleeping bags to asylum seekers forced to sleep rough. Oxfam is donating plastic sheeting. And the Red Cross is distributing blankets and second-hand clothes. Some churches in London have been used as night-shelters, but these are already full.

The Tories pressed ahead with implementing the new regulations in the face of total condemnation of their proposals by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

The changes have been condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the grounds that they violate Britain's obligations under international treaties.

The UNHCR has also accused the Tories of using "inappropriate and emotive" arguments in seeking to justify the new social security regulations.

Legal challenges to the regulations have been unsuccessful. In a test case at the end of March the courts ruled that, however regrettable the consequences of the new regulations might be, the government was fully within its powers to implement them.

In addition to trying to starve asylum-seekers out of the country, the Tories are also pushing new legislation through Parliament which will make it even more difficult for victims of persecution to win recognition as refugees in this country.

The Asylum and Immigration Bill (AIB) empowers the Home Secretary to create a 'white list' of supposedly safe countries. Asylum claims lodged by nationals of those countries will automatically be deemed to be bogus.

The AIB also restricts the right of appeal



Photo: Paul Freely

to many asylum-seekers and allows a right of appeal for certain categories of asylum-seekers only after deportation.

A series of new immigration offences will be created by the AIB, and police and immigration officers will be given increased powers to track down those deemed guilty of such 'crimes'.

Finally, in addition to scrapping the right of asylum-seekers to Child Benefit and access to public sector housing, the AIB also makes employers liable to a fine of up to £5,000 if they employ immigrants whose legal status does not include permission to work.

The AIB is currently going through the House of Lords and is due for implementation in early summer.

Labour has opposed the social security regulations and the AIB. Three line whips have been imposed when there have been votes on the regulations and legislation in

Parliament. But Labour's opposition has been muted.

It has not given any pledge that the next Labour government will restore the right of asylum-seekers to claim welfare benefits. And in parliamentary debates on the AIB the Liberal-Democrats have had a much higher profile than Labour.

The Labour Party leadership is running scared of putting up a real fight against the Tories' attacks on asylum-seekers. They oppose the regulations and legislation in order to keep on good terms with *Guardian* readers but they are not prepared to make the Tories' racism a theme in the approaching General Election campaigning.

The labour movement must stop the Tories' onslaught on refugees and demand the reinstatement of their right to welfare benefits. And it must demand that its leadership make a priority of campaigning in defence of the right of asylum-seekers.

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