

School exclusions not the answer

By Chris Reynolds

EXCLUSIONS from schools of troublesome children are running at epidemic levels. Between 1990-1 and 1993-4 the number excluded was multiplied almost by four, from 2,910 to 11,181.

This wave of exclusions must be linked to the underclass-phobia generated by the insecurity of life in Britain today and promoted by the press, the Tory government, and the Labour front bench. A sizeable section of society, and especially of young people, are now branded as a subhuman "dangerous class."

The phobia is not made out of nothing. Many brutalised, alienated young people are dangerous. Yet Richard Wilding, the boy excluded from Glaisdale school in Nottingham by NAS-UWT teachers threatening to strike if the local authority appeal decision to reinstate were upheld, is just thirteen years old. What sort of life can you have if you are branded as permanently unfit for ordinary human society at the age of 13?

At least one other school already has seen teachers use the strike threat to get a student excluded. Probably more will follow.

William Irons (WL 31) backed the teachers at Glaisdale, while warning that "without a fight for adequate funding there will be no adequate solution."

I am not sure he is right. In my mind as I write is Val Bergin. Val was the "Richard Wilding" of a school I taught at in the early 1970s. Many of the teachers openly hated Val and wanted to get rid of her. Exclusion was not commonplace then, but if it had been mooted then I think only one teacher, myself, would have opposed it root-and-branch.

Val did disrupt lessons, and she did bully other students. But she was a vulnerable young girl of twelve. Her attitudes were shaped by the feeling that everyone was against her; and she was not far wrong about that!

When she found a teacher who was sympathetic, even an inexperienced, untalented one, in the school only for a short time, namely myself, she eased up noticeably. I still think all the other teachers were wrong about her, and maybe all the teachers at Glaisdale are wrong about Richard Wilding, too.

Probably Richard caused far more trouble than Val ever did. Yet shouldn't the first resort, and the first objective for strike action, be to demand more resources within the school to help deal with disruptive students?

Val must be 37 years old now. How she has fared, I do not know. I'm sure, however, that it will have been better for her — and her children, if she has any, and everyone round her — if she found some sympathy and care within mainstream education, rather than being excluded from ordinary society while still a child.

Survivors

By Dave Donnachie

I THINK that Frank Higgins is way off the mark about *Trainspotting*. According to him, the film "failed to convey the horror and the sure consequences of dependence on hard drugs." Has he seen the film?

A neglected infant dies while its mother and fellow addicts lie around in a stupor. One of the addicts dies in squalor and misery, HIV positive. The necessary stealing in order to obtain the next hit is shown, along with the effects of addiction on the addict's family.

Higgins is right when he points out that the main character, Renton, comes off heroin and then back on it too easily. But I think that he misses the point when he describes this character as a cartoon-like hero, always up and running, no matter what he goes through.

The author, Irvine Welsh, is trying to show there that, despite everything, the people at the bottom, perhaps the most oppressed section in Scotland (what bourgeois sociologists would call the "underclass") are, above all, survivors.

His stories are set in the housing scheme of Muirhouse, in Edinburgh. In the mid-80s the *Sun* launched a campaign to brand Muirhouse the worst housing scheme in Europe. They largely succeeded — it is still common to hear the description of Edinburgh as the "AIDS capital of Europe." The youth unemployment rate is approaching 30%, so it is hardly surprising that some turn to hard drugs in order to escape — but the point is made in the film that alcohol is a drug which is more often abused and thus causes more misery than heroin.

Almost all of the people of Muirhouse are, like Renton, survivors. And that is what Welsh tries, and succeeds, in showing. And it is worth going to see the film if only for the scene in which the Edinburgh Festival is realistically depicted for perhaps the first time — the residents of housing schemes are shown, glum faced and drowning their sorrows, with the caption "First Day of the Edinburgh Festival."

Relative studies

By Ted Crawford

I WAS interested to read your thought-provoking issue with the open letter to a socialist sympathiser of the IRA and material on the Paris Commune of 125 years ago (*Workers' Liberty* 30). You cited the passage quoted by Marx in *The Civil War in France* but written by the correspondent of the *London Daily News*. This was in fact by George Crawford, my great-great uncle and I have only just discovered it. *The Civil War...* was only translated into English in 1934 and no member of the family at that time or since was into Marxism or aware that George Morland Crawford was the correspondent in Paris. However, I have drawn this to the attention of the man who is writing up him and his wife (also a correspondent in Paris at the time) for the new *Dictionary of National Biography* and it will appear there in 2004.

Despite the fact that the Apostolic Succession does not apply in revolutionary politics, I feel I can now lift my head up a bit higher in Marxist circles.

The nations and the Marxists

By Roger Clarke

COULD the open letter to a socialist sympathiser of the IRA (WL31) be issued as a separate pamphlet? One problem I have found in follow-up discussions is that in Australia our left simply does not understand that Lenin's support for the right of nations to self-determination was a means to assist the voluntary union of nations.

People say things like: "You can't have a separate state for every minority group in a nation", in blissful ignorance of the fact that the issue is the right to separate. The sad result of decades of miseducation by the so-called "Leninist" parties!

Again, discussing the review "Trotskyism and the Jews" with an ISO member, I found it difficult to get past the idea that Israel was created by "imperialism" — and so deserves to be "smashed."

Are you aware of Rosdolsky's study, *Engels and the 'Nonhistoric' Peoples*? It shows that the concept of a counter-revolutionary people can be found in the writings of Engels (and Marx) in 1848.

In their works the motivation was not vicarious nationalism, but the fear that some independence movements would assist the Russian Empire against the revolution in Europe. Nevertheless, some of their statements (even in context) are in conflict with the outlook they founded. Rosdolsky concludes his study by quoting Trotsky: "The national policy of Lenin will find its place among the eternal treasures of mankind."

The essence of Shachtman

By Tony Dale

PETER Drucker's book *Max Shachtman and his Left* has sparked an ongoing discussion in *Workers' Liberty* over the last year. The debate highlights a number of issues which need addressing if socialists are going to benefit from a balance sheet of Max Shachtman and the Workers' Party/Independent Socialist League tradition. In particular one key question needs answering: what were the distinctive fundamental features which defined the WP/ISL tradition?

Many identify this tradition as Max Shachtman's "bureaucratic collectivist" tendency. This was not the case.

Most WP/ISL members did hold to some variant of the theory that Stalinist Russia was a bureaucratic collectivist society with a new ruling class. This theory helped them advocate a revolutionary socialist approach which was counterposed not only to the capitalist west but also to Stalinist Eastern Europe. In the United States it helped the WP/ISL people view the antics of the Communist Party with a hostile and suspicious eye.

Bureaucratic collectivism may have been the

most well-known theoretical legacy left behind by the WP/ISL but the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" was not the defining feature of this tradition. If it was then it would only be a semi-religious sect round a theory enshrined as its bible. If "bureaucratic collectivism" was the defining feature there would have been no place in the organisation for revolutionary socialists with other theories. Socialists with both "workers' state" and "state capitalist" theories were members of the WP/ISL. If WP/ISL had been operating in Eastern Europe or in a Stalinist USA then the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" would have been more fundamental and crucial as it would have been central in determining the day to day activity and propaganda of the WP/ISL.

The Workers' Party did not see the 1940 split with the American Socialist Workers' Party as inevitable due to the clash between "workers' state" and "bureaucratic collectivist" theories. There were divergent positions on world events flowing from the two theories but the Workers' Party did not see two organisations as inevitable due to these differences. In fact from 1945 up to 1948 the Workers' Party were willing to be a "bureaucratic collectivist" minority inside a reunited democratic but "workers' state" organisation. The groups did not reunite, due to Cannon's hostility and his unwillingness to make any concessions to the Workers' Party.

The Workers' Party did not see the contrasting views on the Stalinist states as the fundamental difference between itself and the SWP. "Every revolutionist must understand that in a certain sense the difference of opinion on the character of the revolutionary party as manifested in this question is more important, and certainly not less important, than the differences of opinion between us and the Cannonites on such questions as the character of the Russian state, the role of the national question in the class struggle today, trade union tactics and the like.

"We have been of the opinion for six years that the split in the Trotskyist movement in the United States was due not to us but to the bureaucratic and politically reactionary position of the Cannonite faction."

What type of revolutionary party did Max Shachtman and the Workers' Party want? "We are for an all-inclusive party in the revolutionary Marxist sense, in the Bolshevik sense, in the Trotskyist sense. That is to say, we are for a party which allows for the existence of different tendencies within the general framework of a revolutionary Marxism. The Bolshevik Party, throughout the period when it was a Bolshevik party, was distinguished, among other things, by precisely this feature. That is also a feature of our Workers' Party as its practice has shown.

"The Workers' Party and the Independent Socialist League were built as democratic collectives of activists, not a 'bureaucratic party' (where) leadership is composed of a handful of the all-wise and all-powerful, resting upon a clique of sycophants and blind followers in the ranks."

In the eyes of the Workers' Party, why was unity with the SWP not possible? "The only obstacle was the monolithic conception of the party held by the Cannonites."

The other distinctive programmatic point which marked out the day to day work of the WP/ISL was the call for a Labour Party in the United States. "We are handicapped primarily by the fact that we do not operate within a *politically-organised working class*. That is point A, B, C and all the other letters down to Z... In our time mass parties, generally speaking, came out of mass parties. That is, the revolutionary mass move-

ments (Communist Parties) came out of already-existing mass working-class political movements (old Social Democratic Parties)... our main political concentration, our main political slogan, the struggle to break the proletariat from bourgeois politics and to set it on the road of class politics — revolves around the fight for an independent labor party... The formation of such a party would offer our party an exceptional and highly fruitful proletarian arena in which to advance and fight for our programme and in the course of this fight to build the genuine revolutionary party."

All the above extracts come from documents by Max Shachtman in the 1940s when he was unquestionably a revolutionary Marxist. The WP/ISL is often viewed merely as a "bureaucratic collectivist" tendency. It would be more accurate to see the Workers' Party and Independent Socialist League as revolutionary socialists organised around a distinctive conception of "Leninism" and a strategy of campaigning for the US workers' movement to form a labour party.

The Republicans are different

By D.R. O'Connor Lysaght

IN reply to John McNulty, Sean Matgamna has suggested that the opposition of Socialist Democracy [formerly the Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme] to feting the Loyalist assassin Hutchinson stems merely from a prejudice in favour of Nationalist para-militaries, particularly the IRA.

Now, Socialist Democracy *does* see the IRA as different in kind from its Loyalist opposite numbers. This is because it considers militant Republican aims, if not methods, democratic, whereas those of the UVF and UDA are not. However, this is not the only reason. Socialist Democracy is willing to talk to socialists who believe in maintaining Irish partition, however mistaken we may consider them. Our objection to Hutchinson is not that he once killed people for his cause, but that he continues to consort with and defend sectarian murderers, members of a body whose only strategy is one of the murder of Catholics as Catholics and which reserves the right to do this again. Though the Republican para-militaries have killed Protestants on the same basis (and we have condemned them for so doing), such acts have been exceptional to and in contradiction of their strategy. They are for democracy, the Loyalists for Protestant ascendancy.

Were Billy Hutchinson sincere about his socialism, he would break with the PUP and its UVF connections. As it is, we can say only that those socialists who are so ready to give him a platform (and, hence, credibility) are, for all the anti-Stalinism of some, taking a position frighteningly close to that of Stalin when he pacted with Hitler. Don't expect us to keep silent about it.

PS

ONE omission from my rebuttal of Sean Matgamna [*Workers' Liberty* 31] renders part of it unintelligible. Page 36, column 1, lines 47-49 should read (omissions underlined): "...and he is accurate. Since the first Home Rule Bill of 1886, the Unionists had represented *British finance capital as well as landlordism, reflecting the intertwined nature of the two.*"

National rights

By Jim Denham

JOHN McNulty takes great exception to *Workers' Liberty's* supposed "misrepresentation", "assertion" and "slander" on the subject of Ireland. He advocates, instead, "serious debate" and proceeds to demonstrate what he means by accusing us of revisionism, and evisceration (no less!) of Marxism, and of seeking to "legitimise Loyalism."

It is, perhaps worth recalling the initial cause of this particular example of serious debate from comrade McNulty: a dispute over whether or not *Workers' Liberty* had the right to publish a letter from one Billy Hutchinson, a leader of the Progressive Unionist Party. Hutchinson is a self-styled "socialist" who had — and maybe still has — links with the Loyalist paramilitaries of the UVF, and who served a jail sentence for murder in the '70s.

Whether Hutchinson's "socialism" is genuine (or, indeed, worthy of the name) is certainly open to debate. Hutchinson may be a fraud or even some sort of "Strasserite" [a "left-wing" Nazi]. I honestly don't know and, so far, Comrade McNulty has produced no evidence to back up his assertion that Hutchinson is part of the far right. What is a matter of record is that the PUP adopted a far more conciliatory attitude than the two mainstream Unionist parties during the ceasefire and has expressed a willingness to enter into dialogue with nationalists, including Sinn Féin. So why does McNulty want to 'no-platform' him?

To judge by McNulty's contribution to *Workers' Liberty* 31, the answer to this conundrum has little or nothing to do with the genuineness or otherwise of Hutchinson's socialist credentials: it is because he (Hutchinson) is a Loyalist. And in the struggle for "democratic rights in Ireland, including the right to self-determination... the Loyalists have stood firmly on the other side of the barricade in alliance with imperialism."

So there we have it: Hutchinson's real crime is that he wants to retain the link with the UK. This makes him (together with about 90% of the Protestant working class in the Six Counties) a "vicious unofficial auxiliary" of British imperialism.

One has to ask whether Comrade McNulty is in favour of *any* dialogue with *any* Protestant who has not first completely disavowed his or her heritage?

Space does not allow me to go into McNulty's bizarre apologia for Provisional IRA and INLA atrocities ("such atrocities fly in the face of the programme of the movement") except to say that such a "contradiction" might well be lost upon the victims, and ask McNulty a not entirely rhetorical question: for Marxists (and genuine, Wolfe Tone, Republicans) doesn't that make such actions *more*, not *less*, obscene?

Nor is there space here to dwell upon McNulty's crude sloganising about British imperialism explaining everything worth knowing about the last 25 years of history in the North. Suffice, for now, to note that if the North is a "British colony" then quite clearly the profit motive is no longer the central driving force of British capitalism. And if the ability to thwart the designs of the imperialist power is the mark of the true anti-imperialist, then the Loyalists have been the most effective anti-imperialist force in the whole of Ireland for at least the last 30 years. Remember the 1974 General Strike?

But this is all rather trivial, point-scoring stuff and I'd much rather concentrate upon the central theme of McAnulty's piece: his evident contempt for consistent democracy and for the rights of national minorities. "Do you assert a right of all national minorities to separate or is this a unique right of unionism?" he asks. Our answer (as anyone with even a passing familiarity with our politics must surely know) is "Yes, we do and no, it isn't." Support for the right of distinct peoples (not just scholastically defined "nations") to determine their own future is axiomatic for Leninists. And the right to self-determination is indivisible, or it means nothing: a people may exercise self-determination in a manner that we wouldn't advocate, but that cannot invalidate their rights in the matter. Thus we plainly state that the Loyalist/Unionist community has the right to separation if it wants it — but has no right to oppress Catholics within the predominantly Protestant areas.

McAnulty objects that "all nations have minorities and if they all had the right of secession there would be no development of nations in the first place. Would this right of separation apply to nationalists within the North? Could we have a crazy patchwork of communities, all with rights of separation?" To me, that sounds like a pretty powerful argument against the separation of the 26 Counties from Britain. But, seriously, since when have modern-day revolutionaries held any brief for the integrity of the nation state? If one single point sums up Lenin on the national question — in contrast, say, to the Austrian Marxists — it is this: utter rejection of the idea that the socialist working class has *any* concern, or anything but contempt for the integrity of states. Re-read Lenin, John!

We don't *advocate* a "crazy patchwork of communities", but if that is the alternative to the oppression of national minorities, then so be it. There is a long history of former colonies achieving independence and then going on to oppress their own minorities. McAnulty seems blissfully indifferent to it.

A common thread runs through McAnulty's objections to even talking to the likes of Hutchinson: contempt for the rights of the Protestants and identification of Loyalism with British imperialism. The Irish bourgeois revolution has yet to be completed and the primary task of socialists is presently to join forces with "revolutionary nationalists" to accomplish that task. The main enemy is British imperialism, whose agents are the Protestant working class! The "process" (eh?) of "Permanent Revolution" will ensure that the national struggle flows over into socialist revolution and the militant opposition of one million working-class people in the North will somehow disappear.

We at *Workers' Liberty* reject such sectarian mysticism and prefer to base ourselves upon the best traditions of Wolfe Tone Republicanism and Marxism. Our prime teacher here is Lenin. The 1920 Theses of the Comintern on the National and Colonial Question said this: "The entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bringing together the proletariat and working classes of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landowners and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over capitalism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights."

We're a long way from that in Ireland at the moment. But talking to Protestant workers and their representatives is at least a start.

As we were saying:

For a workers' government!

THE last Labour government was a bosses' government. We need a workers' government.

British society is rotting and decaying all around us, and the Tory government is now deliberately acting as a demolition squad.

It is because they hope that it will help them in these aims that the Tories are so ready to tolerate and increase unemployment and the massive destruction of the social fabric that accompanies it.

Labour in office prepared the way for Thatcher. Not just in the obvious sense that Healey and Callaghan introduced their own savage cuts in 1976 and 1977, but by its thoroughgoing failure to regenerate industry and British society.

What the ruling class learned from that experience was the insufficiency of even a relatively successful [in their terms] Labour government.

They needed to make the sort of attacks Labour could not make without shattering its base. Thus Thatcherism.

The time for patching is long past — and in any case it is in the working class interest not to patch but to transform and bring about fundamental change towards democratic working class socialism — that irreversible change in the balance of wealth and power that the 1974 manifesto tantalisingly talked about and Labour in power forgot all about.

We must replace the fundamental mechanism of capitalism — profit — with a new one: the needs of the working people, fulfilled in a society organised, owned collectively, and run democratically by the working class.

Whether or not the next Labour government — in 1984, or earlier if we do as we have the industrial strength to do and kick out Thatcher — will be a more or less radical new instalment of the sort of Labour governments we have had this century, will be determined by two things:

- By whether a real attack is made on the wealth and entrenched power of the ruling class; and

- By whether or not it rests at least in part on the organisations of the working class instead of on those of the state bureaucracy, the military, and Parliament.

The working class itself would only serve and protect its own interests by organising itself outside the rhythms, norms and constraints of Parliamentary politics, expanding its factory shop stewards' committees, combine committees, Trades Councils, etc., and creating new Action committees, to be an industrial power that could if necessary dispense with the Parliamentarians.

The Brighton/Blackpool [Labour Party Conference] decisions to control MPs and to give the majority of votes on who shall be Prime Minister if Labour has a majority in Parliament to the CLPs and trade unions could open the way (if we are not cheated) to a new kind of 'Labour' government — a workers' government, instead of a government of the trade union party which merely administers capitalism according to capitalism's own laws.

Revolutionary Marxists believe that there must be a socialist revolution — a clean sweep of the capitalists, and the establishment of the state power of the working class, leading to the setting up of a workers' democracy. The big majority of the labour movement don't yet share our views. But we have a common need and determination to oppose and fight the Tory government and to oppose any moves, even by the Labour Party in government, to load the cost of capitalist decay and crisis onto the shoulders of the working class.

If we cannot agree on a root-and-branch transformation (or on precisely how to go about getting it), we can at least agree on a whole range of measures to protect ourselves and to cut down and control the capitalists.

Whoever wants to break out of the limits defined by the interests of the capitalists must be prepared to disarm the ruling class and destroy its state. Only the working class can do that, organised in squads like those which the flying pickets organise, which can arm themselves when necessary.

Any Parliament-based government that attempted really radical change would put its head on the block, and while the present armed forces exist the axe is in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The power of the ruling class is not entirely, nor even essentially, in Parliament. That is the terrain to which they now go out from their redoubts in industry, the Civil Service and the armed forces, to meet and to parley with the labour movement, and to put on a show for the people.

But if the labour movement insists on new rules for the parleying game, they have a reserve language to resort to — force. So have we.

Neither the ruling class nor the working class can afford to muddle along indefinitely — or for much longer.

In the last decade and a half, the working class has defeated successive attempts by Wilson and Heath to solve British capitalism's crisis and decay at our expense. We even [1974] drove Heath from office.

The tragedy is that, while strong enough industrially to stop their solutions, we have not been politically able to develop a thoroughgoing working-class solution.

A solution to the decay and crisis must be found, and it will either be theirs, or ours — that is, working-class reconstruction of society on a socialist basis.

The drive to clinch the decisions on Labour democracy is the centre of the struggle now. Unless the Labour Party is thoroughly democratised, talking about it now as a vehicle for struggle and change is as absurd as calling for the Labour Party to come 'to power with socialist policies' was in the '60s and '70s. The Blackpool [Labour Party Conference] decisions must be consolidated, extended, and *made to work*. And no Labour democracy can be secure unless the trade unions are democratised. The rank and file militants in the unions must be organised.

But if we do not simultaneously organise a drive for the minimally necessary socialist policies, then the consequences of democratisation may well be very unlike what the left expects.

[A purge] is a serious possibility unless we step up the drive to arm the movement — or at least big sections of its rank and file — with socialist politics.

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