

# Workers' Liberty

*The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex*



## Livingstone and working class politics

**Inside:** Rover, London Socialist Alliance, Muhammad Ali, Keir Hardie, Russia, Boycott Labour? Marxism and Science.

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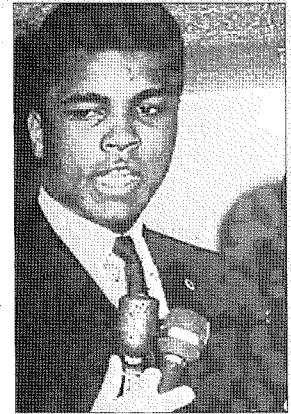
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## Socialists in the London elections

# Making war on Blair

**T**HERE is more than a good chance that on 4 May London will elect as its Mayor a man who defied Tony Blair's formidable New Labour machine, broke with Blair's party in order to stand, and is seen by many members of the Labour Party and trade unions as *their* candidate against Blairism.

The candidates of the united left who are standing in constituencies across London under the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) banner for seats on the Greater London Assembly may also do well. For the first time in many years a serious degree of unity in action despite political differences has been achieved by the socialist left.

The hijacking of the mass working-class, trade-union-based Labour Party by the Blairites and its transformation into an openly anti-working class organisation has forced the left to begin to get its act together. Only thus can we meet the challenge and the opportunity created by the present vacuum in mass working class politics. We have a long way to go. Though there is more inter-left dialogue than for decades, that is not saying much. Serious exchanges of ideas are few and rudimentary still. But we have come a long way in the last year or two.

That is the good news. The not so good news is that the man who will probably be Mayor of London is Ken Livingstone. Does Livingstone deserve the backing of the left? Yes he does! Despite our not slight differences with him, he has the active backing of *Workers' Liberty* and *Action for Solidarity* supporters. Why?

Certainly not for his politics, either in general or in the campaign for Mayor. In his stressed political difference with New Labour, how to finance the renovation of the London Underground, his way may be better than Blair's and Prescott's, but there is nothing remotely "socialist" about it (see 'Livingstone's economics page 20). He is appearing before audiences of complacently grinning big capitalists, to swear eternal loyalty to the market and, with disarming self-mockery, to brand his old, vaguely socialistic, views as youthful utopianism. In political terms Livingstone's is a right wing campaign which serves the status quo by its bland, unquestioning, "non-political", personalist approach. No, not for his politics!

Livingstone is important because his insurrection against the Labour Party establishment may, if he is successful, create an alternative power base for broad labour movement opposition to the so-far almost all-powerful New Labour machine. That machine has blocked off nearly all of the old channels of party democracy and internal opposition, and — short of a loss of nerve and collapse of will at New Labour's centre — any possibility of democratic control from below. Even Livingstone, despite mass Labour membership backing and very wide media and London electorate support could not break through that machine and instead had to break with Blair's party.

In the longer term, Livingstone's revolt may help trigger a

broader revolt against Blairism in the still New Labour-affiliated trade unions. These unions retain a lot of power in the party, should they choose to use it. Probably the best they could do at this stage, unless the Blairite machine were unexpectedly to collapse, would be to lead a big split from Blair's party, around which could then regroup the forces of a restored mass workers party. There is little sign of that yet. For now the union leaders still march in lock-step with Blair.

But the union leaders may, and many of the rank and file certainly will, benefit from the shock of Livingstone's defection (and from the experience of Dennis Canavan in Scotland, who stood against the Blairites and won a seat in the Scottish Parliament). Above all, a Livingstone victory will demystify Blairism for those in the Labour Party and the trade unions who are unhappy with it but have been hypnotised by its "success" and "power". Blair is only unbeatable as long as the labour movement, whose party Blair and his careerist groupies have hijacked, do not fight back. The "great" Mister Blair appears great only because the labour movement has for so long — since Thatcher's victories over the working class — been on its knees!

We must popularise the idea that, faced with New Labour, the working class movement needs once again to fight to win labour representation in Parliament and put the arguments for socialism. Here it is not Livingstone's Mayoral campaign that is important, but the activities of the LSA. In office, Livingstone can bring only disappointment and disillusion to those who now naively back him as a "left" candidate: to such people the LSA in the election offers serious working-class politics.

It is only by building the LSA that the ideas of labour representation and socialism can once again be made a force in working class life. Are you doing your bit?

● Contact the LSA at: PO Box 20492, London SE11 5WL. Phone 020 8981 9243.

## Workers' Liberty

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OF A LONDON  
SOCIALIST  
CANDIDATE

# Fighting for labour representation

**1 May 1997**

I vote Labour. So do most of my work-mates. The Tories say they will privatise the Tube; Labour says it won't.

**February 1998**

Labour announces that it will privatise the Tube.

**Summer 1999**

Labour "selects" its Greater London Assembly (GLA) candidates. I go to a hustings at Hackney Town Hall. All candidates are identical. Not surprising as anyone critical of the Government — and anyone who wants London Underground to remain public — has already been disqualified by the "loyalty commission". The candidates tell us about their backgrounds in accounting and their experience of working with the business "community". We are not allowed to ask questions.

**November 1999**

My union, RMT, ballots our London membership on Labour's candidate for Mayor. 91% vote for Ken Livingstone. Labour General Secretary Margaret McDonagh explains in a letter to the union that the votes can not be counted as "they might influence the result".

**January 2000**

Sorry, that's it. I've voted Labour all my life, but they really are taking the piss now. I still think there is a fight to be waged within the Party, but we can not go into May's election urging people to vote for their sorry collection of millionaires, Lords and privatisers. We have to give working-class people the chance to vote for candidates who represent their interests. The London Socialist Alliance is putting together a slate of candidates — workers' representatives, on a platform of workers' interests, who will take the average wage of a skilled worker if elected. I'm a candidate in the list section.

**Thursday 17 February**

Hackney LSA launch rally. The seventh such event I've spoken at in the last week and a half — and several more have taken place around London. 130 people attend. Speakers include a representative from the Justice for Harry Stanley campaign — Harry was shot dead by police last year, so his family and supporters are particularly committed to the LSA's pledge to make the

police democratically accountable to the community rather than to each other.

**Tuesday 22 February**

All-London launch rally for the LSA. 800 people pack into the Camden Centre. Great — the biggest and best meeting of its kind that I can remember. After speeches from candidates, myself included, we hear from a Pricecheck striker, a former Labour Party election organiser, a RMT branch secretary, film director Ken Loach and others.

**Monday 6 March**

Good news: Ken Livingstone announces that he will stand for Mayor against New Labour's (joke) candidate, Frank Dobson. Livingstone had the overwhelming support of Labour Party members and trade unionists in the selection, and should stand as the genuine Labour candidate. Not sure he will though. He may decide to flirt with the famous instead. He was dismissive of the LSA on Newsnight, saying that he is not interested in the support of "sectarian factions", he prefers the support of business. I thought that business was the most sectarian faction of all — prepared to exploit, oppress, even kill people in the pursuit of profit. Ken Livingstone is not a socialist. Still, people support him because he opposes Tube privatisation and to give the Millbank mafia a kicking. I'll go with that.

**Saturday 11 March**

Lots of talk at work about the May election. Everyone's voting for Livingstone, although they are not the adoring, uncritical fans that some people think. Lots of interest in the LSA. People are attracted by the idea that ordinary workers are standing in the election. They are pleased that they no longer have to pick between parties who will do the bosses' bidding — for once, there are candidates who will speak up for them. It is this — rather than the idea of a "socialist alternative" — that appeals to people. Nonetheless, we have some good discussions about socialism and some people buy *Action for Solidarity*.

**Tuesday 14 March**

Bad news from a group called the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation — they are still determined to go it alone, still refusing the LSA's offers of a united slate. This is desperately sad: the CATP is missing a unique and exciting opportunity to widen its audience and massively increase its sup-

port. It seems that some people have yet to learn that solidarity is powerful, that unity is strength. I find this especially tragic as I — and other *Workers' Liberty* comrades — were instrumental in setting up the CATP, when some of the people who run it now did not care for the idea of a political campaign against privatisation.

Even worse is the news that Tube workers who support the LSA were kicked out of the CATP meeting. The CATP was set up to bring together all those, workers and passengers, who want to fight to keep the Tube public. Now it seems to have degenerated into a little sect which can not even tolerate differences of opinion within its own ranks. I find it genuinely astonishing that this kind of behaviour is acceptable in the labour movement.

**Thursday 16 March**

Production day for Hackney Fightback, our local LSA bulletin, strapline "A voice for working-class people in Hackney". It's issue 2: we are producing it monthly up until the election, and I hope that we will keep it going afterwards.

The Friends of Hackney Nurseries have sent in an article about the Council's cuts. Kate Ford, Haggerston school teacher and LSA candidate, has written about New Labour's attacks on education. I write an article opposing Section 28. The local paper tells us that the police have run a "stop and search" operation on kids as young as 14, so we write a short piece denouncing that too.

The front page article tells "a tale of two candidates". Cecilia Prosper is the LSA candidate in our constituency; Meg Hillier is the New Labour candidate. The article explains: "Cecilia was one of 12 black and ethnic minority workers who were summarily dismissed on 20 May 1998 from the Housing Department by Islington Council, then controlled by New Labour. Cecilia led the fight to win justice for the women ... they won an inspiring victory. Islington council was found guilty of direct and indirect racial and sexual discrimination, wrongful dismissal and victimisation.

"Meg Hillier was part of the New Labour council that was found guilty of this gross injustice. On the day the decision to sack the 12 workers was taken, she was sworn in as Mayor of Islington."

**Janine Booth**

(LSA top-up list candidate)



# Brown's health prescription

**E**XTRA funding for the health service was the jewel in Gordon Brown's Budget. It was, said the overwhelmingly upbeat media accounts, a cash bonanza: a £2 billion cash injection this year; plus a 6.1% a year increase over inflation for four years; a massive 35% real increase in funds by the year 2004! But was it all an accountancy con like the £21 billion they announced back in 1998?



will use the new money to give private health care (or the independent sector as Blair likes to call it) a boost. Many patients will be sent to the private sector to be operated on by surgeons trained and employed by the NHS because the NHS doesn't have enough beds or enough surgeons!

Whether this budget is a response to the criticisms of the likes of

True, the £21 billion had been forgotten, swallowed up by the new increases, but adding it all up these are still substantial increases. Last January Tony Blair pledged to get the proportion of GDP which the UK spent on health care up to the European average. The 2004 figure will be around 7.6% (depending on the economy) and the European average is 8.6%.

The new money for health indicates that the Blairites have had to take some account of working-class expectations. If the UK economy — and therefore the bosses' willingness to accept such spending — hadn't been relatively buoyant and the government's budget deficit hadn't been so large, the budget might have been different. As it is, the money may not yet meet the hopes people have for a restored NHS.

The real sting has been that the promised cash is accompanied by a blast of Government invective about how the health service must "reform" and "modernise". In the health service this is New Labour-speak for more rationing, more narrow accountancy where the cost of one treatment to save one life will be weighed up against another which may save two, or three, or more lives. The cost benefit mentality will rule, now with added Blair-style sanctimoniousness and self-righteousness.

Another problem will be that the health service is so desperate for cash that the new money will be quickly sucked into a narrow rage of obvious areas.

This year's £2 billion cash injection will be used to finance an already agreed pay rise. The waiting lists which currently stand at 160,000 will have to be tackled but there is only likely to be a small increase in beds — one of the pri-

mary factors behind the waiting list crisis. Health managers are unlikely to back off from the dogmatic necessity in current fit-and-trim health economics to keep hospitals absolutely short of beds.

From any rational point of view, much less a socialist one, lots of this new money will be simply be "wasted". Not on the bureaucracy and the other obvious evils often talked about. But on such things as clearing the debts of trusts and health authorities and spending extra money on drug treatments which are getting more expensive. The single most effective thing that could be done to restore the NHS is to nationalise the drug companies!

The Tories and the bosses' top rep, head of the Institute of Directors, Ruth Lee, have used the focus on the NHS to relaunch their campaign for an expansion of private health care. And one of the imminent dangers is that the government

Peter Kilfoyle MP, an attempt to win back Labour's heartlands, or, more likely, a narrow concern with appeasing Labour back-benchers, it is a significant change in tack by New Labour. It shows that they are not invulnerable to political pressure. Working class militants will take heart from that. We need to step up our political campaigning on this issue, defending the principle of health care free for all at the point of delivery and linking the fight to adequate resourcing of all public services.

We need to argue against the Private Finance Initiative, for the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical companies, for further increases in wages for nurses and other NHS staff, and for measures to tackle the poverty and inequality which causes so much of the ill-health the NHS has to treat.

*Helen Rate*

## Assault on asylum rights

**F**OR months tabloid gutter journalism in England has stereotyped asylum seekers as spongers and scroungers. They have been accused of waging gang-warfare in Dover, aggressive begging on the streets of London, and defrauding the benefits system from one end of the country to the other.

In early March, when 120 asylum-seekers and dependents were "dispersed" from Wandsworth to Glasgow, the Scottish tabloids joined in the frenzied denunciations of asylum seekers in general, and Romanian asylum seekers in particular.

The Scottish *Sun* has led the way: "Cash scandal: refugees get 10 new teachers — deaf Scott can't have one!" read its 14 March front page headline. Readers of the Scottish *Sun* were quick to pick up the message. The paper reported that angry callers from all over Scotland were swamping its special hotline to "blast" the government for letting Britain become the laughing stock of Europe: "It gives asylum seekers huge handouts while millions of our own people struggle."

The *Daily Record*, the biggest circulation Scottish tabloid, knew it had a fight

# Forging the weapon

**T**HE Alliance for Workers' Liberty in Britain met for its yearly conference on 4-5 March 2000, in London. Fraternal delegations attended from two French revolutionary organisations, Voix des Travailleurs and L'Étincelle; there were observers from the Communist Party of Great Britain (Weekly Worker, a splinter from the old Communist Party which has evolved to a fairly thorough-going rejection of Stalinism); and greetings were also received from Lalit in Mauritius and Solidarity in the USA.

Mark Osborn, presenting the organisation report, told the conference that as regards number of members and circulation of its press the AWL is almost exactly at the same mark as it was a year ago. Though we could certainly have done more (in youth work, for example, though the production of the new AWL youth bulletin *Bolshy* has been a step forward) the general conditions have not been favourable to rapid growth for the revolutionary left.

Mark Southwell's trade-union report noted that the latest strike figures for the UK are the lowest on record; Kate Buckell's student report indicated that, despite encouraging signs here and there, the college campuses are still not lively.

We know that the general conditions of class struggle will inevitably turn round in time, but we have no guarantees that it will be soon. Much emphasis is therefore needed on painstaking detail work: Marxist education, public meetings, political discussion, literature sales, and so on.

In a report on "The AWL and the Left", Sean Matgamna argued that the collapse of much of the British (and international) far left, at the time of the Kosova war, into catchpenny anti-NATO agitation of a sort which implicitly (or, for the British SWP, explicitly) downgraded both the right to exist and the national rights of the Kosovar Albanians as secondary and unimportant, was indicative of a general decay of political culture in the anti-Stalinist and post-Stalinist left. We have to devote much energy to self-clarification and self-education.

At last year's conference one of the most controversial issues in the conference was participation in independent working-class and socialist election candidacies against Tony Blair's New Labour, and its relation to ongoing activity in Labour-affiliated trade unions and local Labour Party organisations. The differences had narrowed considerably since last year. There was general agreement that the Blair sect has already made drastic changes to Labour's structures,

grossly limiting the openings for calling Labour leaders to account through the trade unions and local Labour Parties, and — unless they are stopped — they are set on transforming New Labour into a party like the US Democrats or the pre-1900 British Liberal Party, with the trade unions having at best a client relationship. Grassroots working-class anger against this hijack is rising, and it is the job of socialists to help it find appropriate political expression.

Everyone agreed that we should support Ken Livingstone as an independent labour candidate for London mayor if he stood (as he has since decided to) and to participate in the London Socialist Alliance slate for the London Assembly, which unites the AWL with the Socialist Workers' Party (to which the ISO in Australia is affiliated), the International Socialist Group, the Socialist Party (ex-Militant), the CPGB, Workers' Power, the Independent Labour Network, and unaffiliated leftists. Despite some criticisms of the orientation of the SWP, the biggest force in the list, which tends to proclaim it flatly as the accomplished "socialist alternative" to New Labour, instead of stressing as the political axis a restoration of working-class political representation, as the AWL does, we all felt that the slate was an important contribution both to challenging Blair's hijack of the labour movement and to revolutionary left unity in action.

Differences focused on two practical issues. One, should the AWL seek to promote and participate in independent working-class and socialist candidatures in local government elections this May outside London as well as in London? Two, in areas where no well-based independent working-class candidature is feasible, how should we vote? The conference decided by majorities both to pursue some candidatures outside London, and to retain a general "fallback" or "default" position of voting Labour where there is no well-based independent working-class candidate. There was also debate about whether the AWL had underestimated the strength of the movement behind Ken Livingstone and been excessive in some of our polemics against Livingstone.

The conference concluded with an enthusiastic response to a speech by Janine Booth, a London Underground worker and an AWL member on the socialist London Assembly slate, calling on the AWL to maximise its efforts in the weeks up to polling day on 4 May to make the most of the expanded audience we will have in the election campaign.

*Chris Reynolds*

on its hands. It hit back two days later with an "exclusive": "Cheeky beggars — refugees arrested scrounging days after they got here!"

The fact that 12 of the women who had arrived a few days earlier had gone begging with their children in Bishopbriggs (a middle class suburb of Glasgow) merited front-page coverage and a double page spread inside the paper.

The *Record* pressed all the buttons of bigotry. Asylum seekers were "flooding" Britain, "creaming off the benefits system" and were responsible for "almost-nightly street battles, theft and attacks".

Before the end of the week over half the asylum seekers who had been bussed up to Glasgow only a few days earlier were being bussed back down to Wandsworth. The tabloid pack were jubilant. "The cheeky beggars are booted out" trumpeted the *Mirror/Record*, claiming that before their forced removal they had "sold furniture from flats kitted out at taxpayers' expense". The *Sun* proudly reported that 52,876 had called its hotline to demand a clampdown on refugees, compared with just 945 who thought the government was doing a good job.

By the end of the week it was clear from the Sunday papers that the government was prepared to pander even further to the anti-asylum seeker hysteria.

Although only 0.05% of the world's refugees end up in Britain, Labour Party polling has found that voters now regarded asylum seekers as the third most serious issue in Britain, surpassed only by health and education. The government was now preparing to create a special fast-track-to-deportation procedure for any asylum seeker found begging, under which they would be removed from the country within four weeks.

**T**HE starting point of this wave of hysteria about "bogus asylum seekers" is the ongoing dismantling of the post-war institution of asylum. This is being carried out not just by the British government but by governments throughout the Western World.

In the decades immediately following the Second World War the institution of asylum, rooted in a United Nations Convention dating from 1951, served a dual purpose.

Politically, it was proof of the democratic credentials of the Western European states and America. Stalinism equalled oppression (as indeed it did), which led people to flee to the west. Capitalism, on the other hand, supposedly equalled freedom because it granted asylum to



**Racism, not exclusive to the Sun**

refugees from Stalinism.

Economically, the institution of asylum allowed shortfalls in the labour market to be filled. Even rejected asylum seekers were given some form of leave to remain, in order to help relieve manpower shortages in the post-war boom.

Both these factors have long since ceased to operate. Stalinism has collapsed throughout Eastern Europe, while post-war boom has been replaced by more traditional boom-and-bust cycles. The system of asylum which they propped up has likewise begun to disintegrate.

Other factors have accelerated the process of disintegration. The emergence of mass international travel has facilitated the movement of people from one continent to another, increasing numbers able to gain access to asylum procedures — at a time when western states are trying to reduce primary immigration to zero.

And, unlike in the immediate post-war years, asylum seekers are no longer white-skinned members of the Eastern

European intelligentsia. Now the majority of asylum seekers come from Africa and the Middle East (although the general pattern has been partially distorted by asylum seekers generated by the break up of Yugoslavia).

For some two decades European governments have been introducing legislation to try to prevent asylum seekers from reaching their shores, and to make it more difficult for those who arrive to win recognition as refugees.

Britain was not the first off the mark in this respect, but is quickly making up for lost time. Anti-asylum seeker legislation was introduced by the Tories in 1993 and 1996. Further anti-refugee legislation was passed under Labour last year, with the worst provisions in it due to kick in on 1 April this year.

Under the new "support" system asylum seekers will receive a take-it-or-leave-it offer of accommodation, which could be anywhere in Britain and only if they can demonstrate that they have no friends or relatives here who could reasonably be expected to accommodate them. The new system will be virtually cash free. Weekly vouchers will be issued to asylum seekers, one of which can be cashed at a post office for £10, the rest to be used in selected shops. The total package amounts to only 70% of Income Support rates.

The new system is being introduced simultaneously with changes in the procedure for applying for asylum. Asylum seekers (who usually do not speak English or have immediate access to a legal representative) are now given just two weeks to complete an asylum question-

naire. Failure to return the questionnaire on time results in automatic refusal.

Appeal rights for rejected asylum seekers are also being dramatically curtailed. Some asylum seekers will have no in-country right of appeal. Others will have just one chance to appeal. And any asylum seeker who applies for Judicial Review will not receive any assistance (money, vouchers or accommodation) while waiting for it to happen.

New Labour's legislation is far worse than anything the Tories put together. New Labour's approach differs from that of the Tories only in its approach to voluntary sector refugee organisations. Whereas the Tories ignored what they had to say, New Labour has incorporated them. Staff were seconded from the British Refugee Council to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), for example, to help set up the new system. Refugee organisations are now officially "stakeholders" in the system. Many of them have signed contracts with the IND to run the so-called "Reception Assistant" functions which will place new asylum seekers in the new "support" system.

Hardly surprising, these government financed "stakeholders" have shown themselves singularly incapable of mounting any effective campaigning against the worst piece of anti-asylum legislation ever to hit the statute books in this country.

It falls to the labour movement and the left to take the lead in fighting the poisonous racism which scapegoats asylum seekers for New Labour's pursuit of Tory economic and social policies. And any section of the labour movement which fails to fight that poison will be consumed by it.

*Stan Crooke  
TGWU rep, Scottish Refugee Council*

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# Russian workers take on mafia-capitalists

**A**S Russia prepares to vote on a successor to Boris Yeltsin, who resigned as President on new year's eve, Simon Pirani reports on signs of a revival of organised labour — whose voice was hardly heard throughout the social trauma and industrial collapse of the mid-1990s.

Anton Parkansky, the newly appointed director of the Moskhimfarm pharmaceuticals factory in Moscow, brought an armed escort when he arrived to start work early one February morning. The workers, who had occupied the state-owned plant and had already barred him from entering twice, were ready once again.

He faced 100 pickets. A scuffle broke out and a woman worker's arm was broken. Parkansky, 31, a manager employed by a private medicines company, backed off and said he would not return to the factory.

"The workers were against his appointment," explained Yelena Vorobyova, of the plant's trade union committee. "The factory was occupied for two weeks."

Parkansky's company, Vremya, had helped to privatise — and cut the workforce of — two other pharmaceutical factories. The Moskhimfarm workers feared that they would be next. Now, they will be keeping a sharp eye on Mikhail Grigoriev, appointed by the economy ministry to replace Parkansky.

Their case is symptomatic of a trend. Russian workers are campaigning not only against long delays in paying wages, but also for a greater say in how their workplaces are run.

Plans to privatise factories, and the arrival of owners that workers do not trust, have sparked a series of conflicts. At the Chernigovsky open-cast mine in Kemerovo, Siberia, workers locked out the new owners, declared a "people's enterprise" and clashed with riot police. A similar showdown occurred at the Lomonosov porcelain factory in St Petersburg.

The most significant battle was prompted by the privatisation in 1997 of the Vyborg cellulose plant — between St Petersburg and the Finnish border — on which the village of Sovetsky depends for its livelihood.

The factory was sold to a vodka entrepreneur, Aleksandr Sabadash, for an estimated half of one per cent of its real worth — a move not uncommon in post-

Soviet Russia, where many state assets have been grossly undervalued for sale.

At first the workers did not react, even when wages went unpaid. But when Sabadash tried to replace local security guards with his own special force, triggering a rumour that he was about to lay off two-thirds of the 2,000 employees, they occupied the factory, declared it "common property" and elected their own director.

The factory soon found customers for its products, and for 18 months worked as a co-operative. Everyone received a monthly wage of 1,500 roubles — high by Russian standards. A programme of social support for the village was organised: free milk and electricity, free hairdressing and holidays for children, and financial help for pensioners.

Then, last October, the factory was raided by armed police and private security guards, trying to regain control of it for Sabadash. Two workers were wounded in a shoot-out. But the co-operative held out.

Legal challenges and negotiations followed. In January, a Sabadash company sold the factory to a British firm, Alcem. One of the co-operative leaders, Vitali Kirakov, signed a deal with Alcem surrendering control in exchange for guarantees of pay rises, social benefits for the village and no redundancies.

Aleksandr Buzgalin, a Moscow economics professor who has collaborated with the labour movement since the late Eighties, said the Vyborg workers had taken matters into their own hands. "They tried to maintain and expand production, find buyers for their products and pay suppliers on time," he said.

"They felt that they were not lumpen hirelings, but people who work consciously, live like human beings, are paid regularly and know that the needs of their village will be cared for — people who participate in managing their enterprise." Some had opposed the final sale to Alcem, despite the favourable terms.

In general, Buzgalin pointed out: "There are many problems with ownership disputes. Sometimes two groups of businessmen, or gangsters, are trying to gain control of a workplace and the workers find themselves being manipulated."

Industrial stands such as those at Moskhimfarm and Vyborg could help foster a general revival of organised labour, say union activists. Workers are again finding their voice — stifled amid the economic and social crises of the past few

years — in a new Russian era marked by the resignation of President Boris Yeltsin and the choice of a successor in an election on 26 March.

An independent workers' movement began to stir in 1989-91 as the legal right to strike and organise was re-established. But, by the mid-Nineties, it had been suppressed by the shock of hyperinflation and industrial collapse on one side, and inexperience and corruption in its own organisations on the other.

Now, a new generation of workers is pressing for a better deal — often coming up against a new, brash breed of employer.

Kirill Buketov, who runs the Moscow office of the international food workers' federation, IUF, said: "The first wave of privatisation in the early Nineties was the theft of state property by those who already controlled it.

"But now, besides the multi-millionaire oligarchs who built their financial empires at that time, there are smaller financial groups with large sums to spend on buying businesses. Sabadash, who wanted to rise from the vodka business to something more solid, is typical."

Bosses like this now face confident young workers — especially in thriving sectors of the economy such as the restaurant trade.

At a McDonald's food plant, where products are prepared for the company's Russian restaurants, attempts by management to discourage union membership have been defied with a stubbornness that Buketov has found "staggering".

He said: "The union members there are mostly in their early or mid-twenties. They had no previous trade union experience. They joined the union and started making demands, which shook up the union as well as McDonald's."

Buketov, who in 1990 helped to found one of Russia's first workers' support groups, the Kas-kor information centre, said: "When we started, under [former Soviet president Mikhail] Gorbachev, no one knew what a proper trade union was or how to bargain for a collective agreement. And there was no one to tell us.

"We had to learn," added Buketov, now 30. "The new generation is learning much faster than we did."

*Simon Pirani*

● *Simon Pirani is a freelance journalist covering Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union. He is former editor of the British miners' union journal.*

# A big blow for the "Peace Process"

**A**t the Ulster Unionist Council meeting on 25 March, David Trimble defeated his leadership opponent, the Reverend Martin Smyth. The margin was 457-348, giving Trimble 57% of the vote to Smyth's 43%: clear, but neither comfortable nor decisive.

Scarcely less important for the future of the Good Friday Agreement, the Council voted 384-338 that there will be no future power-sharing without prior Provisional IRA disarmament, and no Unionist involvement in government unless British policy is reversed and the RUC allowed to retain its name and its traditional Unionist insignia. Trimble's legs as well as his hands are tied. Adhered to rigidly, this alone could wreck any chance of further progress in the current peace process.

The RUC reforms proposed by the Patten Commission upset many Unionists — largely because they were seen as insulting to a force which had defended them from "terrorism" — but were seen as tokenist and inadequate by most nationalists. They are a raw emotional platform on which to rebuild Protestant communal militancy.

Both Ulster Unionist Council votes were about only one thing — the future shape of the Good Friday Agreement. Trimble represented Unionist support for the inclusive powersharing deal and Smyth rejection of all its fundamentals.

How great is the damage to Trimble? There can be no doubt that he has suffered a big blow. He was hoping for 70% support in order to silence his rejectionist wing for good. Since Martin Smyth is not a credible Unionist leader and was touted in the press as a stalking horse we can take his vote to be an index of fairly determined hostility to Trimble's approach. Another chal-



lenge in the short term is unlikely, however, as is a Trimble resignation. Much more likely is leadership by a chastened and much more cautious pro-Agreement team.

The prospects for the Agreement, and especially its powersharing Executive, are much more bleak. The issue which finally convinced his opponents to mount a challenge was the suggestion by Trimble, in a speech in Washington, that his party would consider re-entering the Executive without any prior decommissioning. He talked of a clear IRA commitment to decommission and a declaration that the war is over as being sufficient. This crystallised all the recent divisions in the Unionist Party.

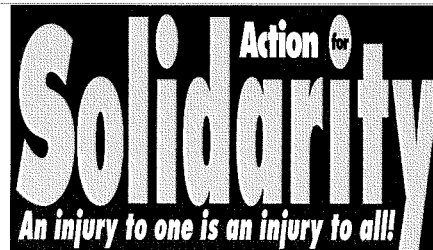
On the one hand, their current leadership believes that there is no credible alternative to the way forward hammered out during the peace process and has been prepared to show considerable flexibility and skill in supporting that process. The Washington speech was all of a piece with numerous initiatives in the last two years, the most audacious being the gamble that took Unionists into government with Sinn Fein in the first place.

This has persistently brought them up against a substantial part of their own tradition and party; that section

which has always rejected power-sharing, will accept only the most minimal reforms in Northern Ireland and wants to end the war by defeating their opponents. Martin Smyth was briefly the flag-bearer of that sectarian cause and they have reminded Trimble that they constitute a serious and restraining force in his party. Trimble and his supporters suf-

fered other, perhaps more damaging, wounds at the Council meeting. The real leader of the anti-Trimble faction is Jeffrey Donaldson and he was elected as one of the party's four Vice-Presidents.

For all that, we should not exaggerate the importance of these developments. They don't alter the central fact that Unionism, and Protestant politics generally, are not today what they once were. A striking feature of this latest revolt, for example, is the failure of the anti-Agreement forces to grow significantly. The original vote against the Good Friday Agreement suggested that over 40% of Unionists were opposed. This was confirmed in



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the Assembly elections in June 1998 and there has been a sizeable group of rejectionists in both the Westminster and Assembly Unionist groups. In November 1999 when Trimble proposed to enter the Executive with Sinn Fein he won the support of 58% of the Unionist Council against the opposition of 42%. In essence it was a gamble that failed.

Two major things have occurred since that day and both of them should have strongly bolstered the hard-line Unionists. First, the IRA failed to deliver any progress on decommissioning, and second, the Government insisted that the Patten commission recommendations will be implemented in full. When, after all that, Trimble offers to repeat the experiment and is challenged on that

basis by a senior Unionist MP it might be expected that Unionist doubters would have had enough.

The hard-liners used to the full the link with the Orange Order. There are 850 members on the Unionist Council and 120 of them are delegates from the Orange Order. Their votes were cast effectively as a block, it seems, under the command of the current Grand Master, Robert Sautler. The vote for Smyth suggests no real progress for the rejectionists.

But this is little comfort to Trimble and co. The theory was that once up and running the return of "real politics" to Northern Ireland would expose the bankruptcy of the "No" camp for what it was and their support would shrink. Somewhat unrealistically, Trimble seemed to

expect that to happen this time.

Despite the media hype it is pretty much as you were within Unionism, which has been deeply divided about the new departure of 1998 from the start. For the Agreement the outlook is gloomier. It depends on the simultaneous shifts in both Unionism and Republicanism. It was hard to see how it would be re-activated even before these events. The flip side of Trimble's rejectionist problem is the ongoing battle in the Republican movement and the idea that Gerry Adams will find it easier dealing with a leader hemmed in and threatened by a newly assertive "No" camp now seems very fanciful.

*Patrick Murphy*

## Magical mystery tour



**J**OHNN Lennon would no doubt be amused that, 20 years after his death, he is being reviled in the media as a Trotskyist and "terrorist" sympathiser — and that the US government (with the UK government in tow) has been fighting tooth and nail in the courts to keep their (evidently very incompetent) surveillance of the former Beatle under wraps.

Former MI5 agent David Shayler, living in exile in Paris due to the threat of prosecution in the UK, has alleged that MI5's Lennon file says he gave substantial funds to the IRA and the now defunct

Workers' Revolutionary Party.

The FBI's files, being released in stages thanks to the dogged efforts of an American academic, detail the Nixon administration's obsessive search for dirt on Lennon, so that they could deport the songwriter as a dangerous subversive. These files read like the work of the Keystone Cops: the master of a wanted poster they prepared carries a picture not of Lennon, one of the most famous people in the world, but of obscure singer David Peel, who also had long hair, glasses and had attended the odd demon-

stration. No-one noticed. FBI director J Edgar Hoover had to explain to Nixon that Lennon was "a former member of the Beatles singing group".

Certainly, Lennon sympathised with and funded radical causes through the late '60s and early '70s. He opposed the Vietnam war and apartheid in South Africa, as well as espousing a variety of more infantile causes. It seems unlikely, however, that Lennon gave money to the WRP: it is well documented that he was friendly with their rivals the International Marxist Group. There are pictures of Lennon on a demonstration holding an IMG *Red Mole* placard, and film of IMG leaders Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn visiting Lennon during the recording of the *Imagine* album in 1971.

Former leading WRP member Corin Redgrave has said (in the *New Statesman*, 6 March) that Lennon did not donate to the WRP, and there is no reason for him not to tell the truth about it.

Lennon considered himself Irish, more or less; the IMG placard he was pictured holding on a 1971 anti-internment rally in London read "Victory for the IRA against British imperialism". But it's unlikely that Lennon gave money to the IRA. A rabid Catholic nationalist he may have been at this period — "You Anglo pigs and Scotties, sent to colonise the North... Keep Ireland for the Irish, Put the English back to sea," he sang on "Sunday Bloody Sunday" — but he was essentially a pacifist.

Much is being made in the media of Lennon's statement, after Bloody Sunday, that, "If it's a choice between the IRA and the British army, I am with the IRA" — but the full quote begins with Lennon



# Poll tax hits and misses

saying "I don't know how I feel about the IRA" and finishes with him saying "But if it's a choice between violence and non-violence, I'm with non-violence. So it's a very delicate line".

Apparently, Lennon did meet an IRA representative in New York in 1972, with a view to staging a benefit concert for republican prisoners in Dublin, but in the end the project didn't go ahead because Lennon was worried that if he left the US he wouldn't get back in again.

Boil it down to the details, and Lennon was all over the place politically — well-meaning enough, but mostly naive, sometimes just plain ignorant, occasionally dangerous. He was not a "threat". So why did the FBI and MI5 undertake the surveillance in the first place?

Lennon was then, as he is still, synonymous in the popular consciousness not just with "issues", Vietnam or whatever, but with "peace", "us" over "them", "revolution", anti-authoritarianism... The idea of someone as famous as Lennon advocating any action against the state terrified established authority.

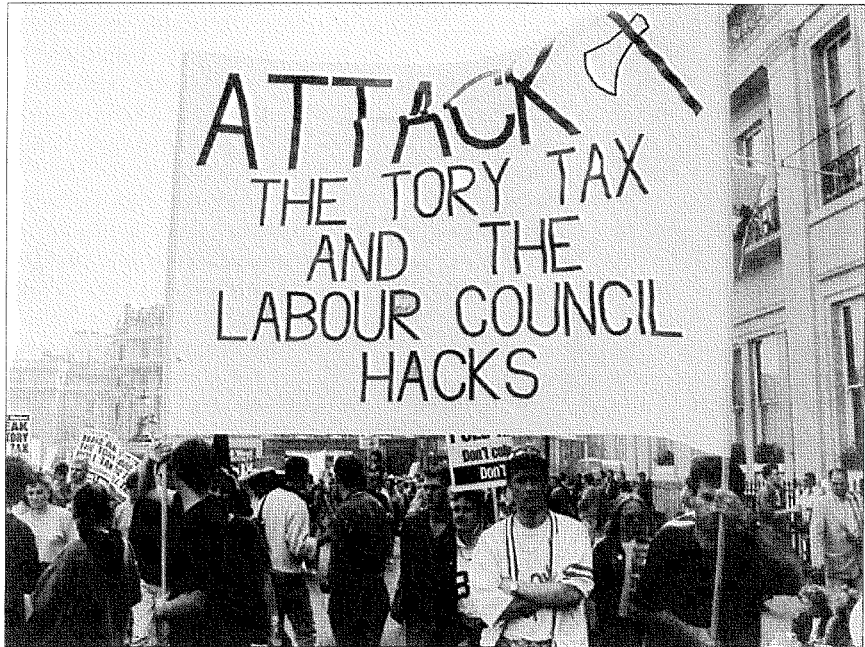
Artistically, Lennon was a much-diminished force by 1972. By contrast to, say, "I Am the Walrus"'s musically and lyrically subtle attack on the state and institutionalised education in particular, the song that has caused so much fuss recently — "The Luck of the Irish", the money from which went to the civil rights movement — and the album it came from. *Sometime in New York City*, are very literal, plodding stuff.

The Beatles had been both an effect and to some extent a cause and catalyst in the immense 1960s social transformation of attitudes to authority and in sexual mores. Lennon ended the decade radicalised and looking for answers.

The specific "answers" he found, be it crackpot ideas such as "bagism" (Yoko Ono spent at least one Plastic Ono Band performance in a white bag at Lennon's feet), or his flirtation with Marxism — that is, the details — don't matter so much in the wider picture of things: the broad brush of his anti-authoritarian position made him at the least an interesting, and for very many an inspiring, figure.

As the FBI have been so keen to prove in their desperate efforts to keep their files closed, John Lennon basically belongs to the left.

Alan McArthur



**I**t is eleven years since the Tories introduced the poll tax in Scotland. It is a little over ten years since the massive demonstration of March 31 1990 — known, unfairly, to posterity as 'the poll tax riot' — that marked the introduction of the tax in England and Wales.

From afar the poll tax looks like one battle the left won. We got rid of the tax, after all, and the Tories replaced Margaret Thatcher as their leader with John Major. (Good... if it is indeed better to be savaged by a dead sheep than by a wolf. Good... if the Council Tax is indeed a fair system of funding local services.) But the devil is in the detail.

There were two campaigns against the poll tax, the one we had and the one we needed. The campaign that Militant favoured and confined the movement to, a campaign that focused solely on working-class people refusing to pay the tax. And the campaign that supporters of Workers' Liberty and others advocated — but could not carry — a campaign for non-payment linked to non-implementation — the fight to get trade unions and local Labour parties *collectively* to defy the poll tax.

Ours was a campaign that would have left a lasting impression on the labour movement, we would permanently disturb the Labour and

trade union leaders who held back and condemned resistance to the Tories. Militant's campaign was a depressing waste of an inspiring movement of protest built of and by working-class people.

By November 1989 800,000 people in Scotland still had not paid any poll tax — but poll tax protestors now spent most of their time defending non-payers against fines and prison. At conferences to discuss strategy in England and Wales, Militant spent most of their time opposing those who argued for a fight for non-implementation.

In the days after March 31 Militant's anti-poll tax figureheads let down the movement still further when they chimed in with labour leaders and condemned 'the rioters' — we'll bring them to book, they said, we'll name names. They disgusted a layer of youth that already distrusted the organised left, and made it easier for what we now know as Reclaim the Streets-type "people power" protest to prosper at the expense of labour movement protest. They troubled Neil Kinnock and his successors and the cowardly trade union leaders not one little bit. And, to cap it all, what good did it do *them*? Where is Militant now?

Vicki Morris

# Lions led by well paid donkeys

**R**OVER, and especially Longbridge, workers have stared into the abyss many times before. But this time (March/April 2000) the crisis will be terminal — unless the workers and their organisations rise to the occasion and mount a militant campaign of industrial action and public protest to demand the renationalisation of the entire Rover Group.

It can be done: in 1974 Rover's forerunner, British Leyland, went onto the rocks as a result of years of under-investment and over-generous payouts to shareholders. Tony Benn describes a meeting with union leaders shortly after Labour narrowly won the February 1974 election and formed a minority government: "170,000 people were involved and they thought that government intervention was inevitable." They were right: when the company went bust the Wilson government promptly nationalised it.

The difference between the response of the Wilson government of the mid-'70s and the Blair government of today can be explained in part by the global ascendancy of neo-liberal economics and the corresponding transformation in official Labour politics. But abstract ideology is not the decisive factor (after all, Heath's Tory government nationalised Rolls Royce in 1971). The crucial factor is the strength of the organised working class as a whole and, in particular, within the threatened industries and workplaces.

In 1974 our class was strong and the Longbridge plant was probably the most powerfully organised (as well as the largest) workplace in Britain. The story of the Longbridge shop stewards' movement contains important lessons for a generation of trade unionists who have known little but the defeats and humiliations of the 1980s and '90s.

## The shop stewards' movement

**L**ONGBRIDGE had been gradually unionised after World War Two. Communist Party members played a central role, often risking their jobs in the process. The plant's first recognised union convenor, Dick Ethridge, was a CP member and in those days it seemed a natural step for active, militant trade unionists in the plant to join the Party. By the 1960s, the Party had a factory branch numbering around 50, and sales of the *Daily Worker*

(later *Morning Star*) inside the plant (not on the gates) were in the hundreds. Management once tried to prevent sales by seizing a bundle of *Workers* and were forced to back down by immediate strike action.

The CP's influence went far beyond its formal membership and permeated the entire Joint Shop Stewards' Committee (JSSC), numbering around 500 stewards from the AEU, TGWU, Vehicle Builders, Electricians and the multitude of smaller white and blue collar manufacturing unions like the Sheet Metal Workers.

Apart from a few bastions of right-wing (or "apolitical") trade unionism, the shop stewards' movement at Longbridge was dominated by the ideas of the CP, even

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**When, in the late 1960s and early '70s, the old British Motor Corporation merged with Standard-Triumph and Leyland to form the giant British Leyland Motor Corporation, the influence of the Longbridge-based CP stewards spread throughout the whole combine.**

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though the Party never had a majority of card carrying members on the JSSC.

When, in the late 1960s and early '70s, the old British Motor Corporation merged with Standard-Triumph and Leyland to form the giant British Leyland Motor Corporation, the influence of the Longbridge-based CP stewards spread throughout the whole combine. The only organised opposition was the much smaller number of Trotskyist and semi-Trotskyist stewards grouped around the Socialist Labour League in the Cowley Morris plant.

When the big battles against Edward Heath and the Industrial Relations Act erupted in the early '70s, the Austin JSSC banner would be there on all the demos, and an impressive Longbridge turn-out could be guaranteed for the CP-inspired Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU).

By now, Ethridge had retired and handed the convenor's job to his protégé, Derek Robinson. Ethridge is still remembered with affection by "old hands" and even people with no political sympathy for the CP concede that he was a "bloody good convenor", etc. Feelings about Robinson

tend to be more mixed. The reason for this is that in Ethridge's day the CP's role was essentially to be the best and most conscientious union organisers at shop floor level — a task they combined with low-key Stalinist propaganda. When Robinson took over in the early '70s he was immediately faced with a series of crises that demanded political answers and exposed the underlying weaknesses of the CP's approach.

First, there was the whole question of the abolition of piece-work and the introduction of measured day work (MDW). The shop stewards' movement throughout the motor industry had been built around the piece-work system: stewards determined staffing levels, arranged work patterns, negotiated the "price for the job" and, ultimately, their effectiveness could be judged by the weekly wage packet. Piece-work had many draw-backs from a socialist point of view, but it did at least ensure that stewards were directly accountable to their members and it gave the union a central role in determining the link between work and payment.

Robinson and the CP supported the introduction of MDW, dismissing the widespread shop-floor opposition as "short-sighted", "money-militancy" and (the ultimate put-down in those days) the work of "a bunch of Trots". What Robinson and co. didn't understand was the vital part piece-work played in keeping the stewards' movement in touch with the membership.

The bureaucratic arrogance and high-handed dismissal of shop-floor opinion was to characterise the CP's approach throughout the '70s and finally led to Robinson's downfall.

Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that for a whole period of time (approximately between 1971 and 1978) it seemed that Robinson and the CP had been right — the workforce enjoyed the security that came with MDW whilst retaining the mutuality and shop-floor organisation that had been built up under piece-work. It seemed like the best of both worlds.

Meanwhile, a much bigger crisis was looming: in 1974 the company faced bankruptcy.

## The price of nationalisation

**T**HE Wilson government decided to nationalise the firm, but the price for the workforce was to be acceptance of



the Ryder Report. In essence, Ryder recommended bailing out the company but insisted upon far-reaching "rationalisation" of work practices, with the aim of achieving speed-up of production and a "slimming down" of the workforce, though this last point was not spelt out in any detail.

Ryder recognised that these proposals stood little chance of success without the co-operation of the shop stewards' movement — and thus was born "participation". This was a comprehensive scheme to involve stewards, convenors and officials in joint committees with management at almost every level of the company from the shop floor to national level — except that Ryder made it clear that management would retain the final say and full decision-making power.

The shop floor overwhelmingly saw "participation" for what it was: a scheme designed to take stewards off the shop floor and draw them into an unequal "partnership" with management.

Robinson and the CP went for "participation" in a big way. As with Measured Day Work, shop-floor opposition was dismissed as an unprincipled alliance of "money-militants", right-wingers and the hated "Trots". Robinson (in an infamous pamphlet of 1975, written jointly with CP "theoretician" Jon Bloomfield) went so far as to describe participation as "a step towards workers' control".

Now that the company had been nationalised, so the Robinson/CP line went, the workforce had a duty to pull their weight and make a go of it. Robinson and the Longbridge Works Committee clamped down on unofficial strikes ("downers") and insisted that the disputes procedure was kept to at all times. "Continuous production" became the gospel propounded by the CP and by Leyland management alike.

When, in 1977, toolmakers throughout Leyland struck for a wage claim that in practice challenged phase two of the Labour government's Social Contract, Robinson and the CP joined forces with

the AUEW Executive and the bosses in denouncing the toolmakers and breaking their strike.

The behaviour of Robinson and the CP was not the result of individual treachery or corruption (though that was often how it was regarded on the shop floor): it stemmed from a fundamentally bureaucratic political philosophy that equated nationalisation with socialism and regarded the spontaneous actions of the shop floor with suspicion and hostility.

The result of all this for the shop stewards' movement throughout British Leyland (and in Longbridge especially) was nothing short of disastrous. Stewards were seen as little more than the bosses' policemen and an enormous gulf of distrust and cynicism opened up between the plant-based union organisation and the membership.

The rest of the story is tragic history: at the end of 1977 Labour appointed a nasty little union-basher called Michael Edwardes as chairman of British Leyland. Edwardes immediately announced a "plan" that would involve 40,000 redundancies and the closure of 13 plants. Shop meetings throughout Longbridge voted to oppose the "Edwardes plan" and yet at the official presentation of the plan the Longbridge senior stewards (along with most other BL union representatives) gave Edwardes a standing ovation!

Edwardes must have realised then if he didn't already know) that the majority of senior stewards in British Leyland were severely out of touch with their members. He dispensed with the soft-soap Ryder approach, drove a coach and horses through participation and, finally, thanked Derek Robinson for his past co-operation by sacking him on a trumped-up charge in 1979.

The Robinson sacking (in which the Duffy/Boyd leadership of the AEU was complicit) was a traumatic blow to the union organisation in Longbridge and throughout Leyland. In fact, it was nearly a death blow: Leyland bosses gave serious consid-

eration to the idea of withdrawing union recognition throughout the Group and creating a company union. Probably because they realised that they already had a *de facto* company union in the AEU, they pulled back. But they had won a decisive victory and wasted no time in following it up with a purge of militants and left-wingers at Longbridge and Cowley in the early 1980s. Union organisation in the company survived but, to this day, has not fully recovered.

But the virtual collapse of the British Leyland shop stewards' movement was not inevitable: it happened because the tremendous strength built up under piecework was frittered away in participation committees; because stewards lost their roots in the shop-floor and became petty bureaucrats; most of all, it happened because the dominant politics of the movement (i.e., the CP) had no answer to the financial crisis of the company beyond giving full support to everything that flowed from the Ryder Report. In the mid-'70s they had the strength and (for a while) the shop-floor support to fight for real workers' control: what they lacked was a coherent political perspective.

That's why the good militants of the '50s and '60s turned into the bosses' policemen of the '70s. It's a tragic story, but one we can learn from. The future depends on us learning from it.

### From Honda to BMW (via BAE and "jobs for life")

**T**HE motor industry underwent major changes in the 1980s. Japanese companies like Honda, Nissan and Toyota began to challenge the traditional "Big Three" international market-leaders, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. It became increasingly apparent that a relatively small national outfit like Leyland could not survive as an independent manufacturer of volume cars.

The Japanese companies circumvented European Community tariffs by establishing plants within Europe and the Thatcher government successfully wooed such "inward investment" by promoting Britain as a low-wage economy with a subservient workforce and generous incentives for regional development. Nissan led the way with its plant in Sunderland and soon Toyota, IBC Vehicles and Honda followed. But Honda already had close links with Leyland

and these developed still further in the 80s. By 1986 Longbridge and Cowley were manufacturing cars that were in reality Hondas with Austin or Rover badges. An new plant was built at Swindon as a joint venture between the two companies, supplying both with Honda-designed engines.

By now the British firm (renamed Austin Rover) was just about breaking even and, inevitably, the Tories looked to privatisation. Commercial logic pointed to Honda but, instead, in 1988 the Tories sold the firm for next to nothing (plus a cocktail of illegal bribes and sweeteners) to their friends British Aerospace.

The Honda link survived, however, and the process of "Japanisation" continued on the shop floor. In 1992 the BAe/Rover bosses put an unprecedented "Japanese style" deal to the unions. This involved complete flexibility among trades and mobility between jobs with "teams" under "team leaders" allocating all work (including maintenance and cleaning) amongst themselves. In exchange the company promised "jobs for life", apart from disciplinary cases. The unions, at national level, supported the deal and when shop stewards at Longbridge and Cowley voted to oppose it, the full force of the national union bureaucracy was brought to bear upon them to reverse their position. Despite this, the deal was only carried by a narrow margin in a ballot of the entire Rover workforce.

When BAe, in classic asset-stripper's mode, pulled out in 1994, Honda was again snubbed and Rover was sold into the apparently unlikely stewardship of BMW. However, the Bavarian company seemed determined to make a good fist of Rover, promising new management, deep pockets and commitment to the Rover "brand". They received nothing but co-operation from the unions at every level, from plant shop stewards to general secretaries. When the over-valued pound, an ill-planned and ageing model range and even more ageing plant brought about the first Rover-induced crisis at BMW in October 1998, the T&GWU's National Automotive Officer Tony Woodley effectively sold the Company's "Working Time" deal, involving total flexibility and "banked hours", to the plant stewards and the workforce. Woodley went so far as to utter words (quoted in the *Birmingham Post*) that appeared to threaten T&G members who opposed the deal with the sack.

## The role of the T&G

**E**VER since the AEU leadership's treacherous role in the sacking of Derek Robinson, the T&G has ensured that it is the dominant union at Longbridge and

within the national negotiating body (the "JNC") for the Rover Group as a whole. Robinson's successor as Convenor of Longbridge, Jack Adams, went on to become Deputy General Secretary of the T&G (he retired last year, replaced by Margaret Prosser) and Adams' successor as Longbridge Convenor, Dave Osborne, is now the T&G's Automotive Group Secretary (i.e., chief negotiator) for the Midlands. The T&G's National Automotive Group Secretary, Tony Woodley, heads the JNC. Therefore, the T&G has the responsibility of leadership in the present crisis at Rover.

Unfortunately, the internal politics of the T&G has so far prevented it from playing any sort of positive leadership role in the

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**General Secretary Bill Morris is determined to avoid embarrassing the Government by placing any demands whatsoever upon it; in particular, he believes that Gordon Brown is a secret friend of trade unionism.**

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Rover crisis. General Secretary Bill Morris is determined to avoid embarrassing the Government by placing any demands whatsoever upon it; in particular, he believes that Gordon Brown is a secret friend of trade unionism, and has invited Brown to attend the next meeting of the union's General Executive Council (GEC).

The T&G "Broad Left" has, on paper, a big majority on the union's GEC. However, the "Broad Left" has been split into two rival factions by supporters of the *Morning Star* and the remnants of the old Communist Party. These sectarian idiots, led by one John Aitkin and one Pat Hicks, have refused all overtures for unity around the Rover crisis (or anything else) because, it seems, they believe that they are master strategists for the entire future of the "left" within the union and cannot afford to be diverted by "ultra-lefts" such as the *Tribune* supporters whom they have systematically removed from positions of influence within the union. They have also managed to entice the present leadership of the Longbridge Works Committee into their camp. A proposal for a meeting of all T&G "lefts", with a neutral chair, to discuss the Rover crisis was vetoed by Aitkin and Hicks.

Tony Woodley has lost all credibility amongst Rover workers. In late 1998 and

early 1999 he acted as BMW's go-between with the workforce, even staging fake "attacks" upon BMW managers at "road-shows" to sell the "Working Time" deal. The salvation of Rover was supposed to be Woodley's personal triumph: instead, it is his downfall — especially at Cowley, where stewards have been told that he advised BMW to close the plant down!

It is a disgrace that because of Bill Morris' illusions in New Labour and the Communist Party's sectarianism, the T&G is incapable of taking a lead at Rover. Into the vacuum has stepped professional "Brummie", Dr Carl Chinn (a Birmingham local radio "personality" and historian), who has called for a march in defence of Longbridge. Chinn's march has been backed by the local rag (the *Evening Mail*) and, belatedly, by the T&G and other unions. It has no clear political basis beyond "Save Longbridge", but in the absence of any positive demands from the trade union movement, no doubt local fascists (traditionally strong in the Longbridge/Northfield area of Birmingham) will give the event an anti-German/Europe flavour. It is essential that socialists intervene on this march to counter anti-German racism and to demand that New Labour re-nationalises Rover.

## Blair and the "Third Way"

**B**LAIR and his Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers appear to be simply gobsmacked by this debacle. After a day of silence on the issue, Blair's spokesman Alistair Campbell told the press that his master was "very angry" with BMW and hinted that Blair wouldn't object to a boycott of BMW: though, of course (in true spin-doctor fashion) Mr Blair's mouthpiece denied having called for any such thing (Blair would simply "understand" anyone who chose to take action against BMW... cars?...dealers?...or what?...yet another example of Blair's irresponsible posturing. But never mind, it takes the pressure off New Labour).

Blair and Byers even had the gall to complain that BMW kept them in the dark (or actually *lied* to them): the complaint seems to be that, if the closures had been in Germany, BMW would have had to disclose their intentions in advance. It is true that under the EU Workers' Councils directive, employers have to disclose plans for redundancies in advance: that directive does not apply in Britain because... the Blair Government vetoed it!

It suits Blair to whip up anti-BMW (ie: anti-German) hysteria, because it takes the heat off his government and distracts from the obvious demand: re-nationalise Rover!

**Frank Hughes**

# The once and future Livingstone

**T**WENTY-ONE years ago Ken Livingstone launched his drive to become a figure in national politics — in the columns of this very journal, then published in newspaper format as *Socialist Organiser*. By then he had been a Labour councillor, in Lambeth, then Camden and the Greater London Council, for about eight years. He was well known in the London Labour Party as a left-wing councillor with drive and flair, but much less conspicuous in the growing tide of Labour politicians seeking new avenues for left-wing politics through local government than Ted Knight in Lambeth or David Blunkett (yes, the same David Blunkett) in Sheffield.

In *Socialist Organiser* of March 1979 Livingstone wrote: “The left has given no thought to the impending Greater London Council elections... those who have a commitment to a socialist GLC need to start organising now.” Over the next two years he drew a lot of activists into that project. The GLC was still under Tory administration, but the Labour victory that would come in May 1981 already looked likely. The Tories were extremely unpopular, the channels of the Labour Party were still relatively open and democratic, and the whole party was bubbling with revolt against the Tory government elected in May 1979 and revulsion at the backtracking and betrayals of the 1974-9 Labour government.

Left-wing candidates were levered into place, especially in seats which would be won from the Tories in May 1981 and in seats where sitting Labour councillors were retiring. Livingstone declared flatly that he had no interest in reading Karl Marx. He wanted a broad Labour left which “might not be ideologically perfect” but would get down to business better than “some more theoretical tendencies”. There was some debate about policies. The manifesto, thrashed out in detail by a full London Labour Party conference, declared: “A Labour GLC and ILEA will resist any cuts and demand that the Tory government provides the necessary finance to maintain and improve all council services. Understanding that the Tory government does not listen to pleas but only responds to pressure, a Labour GLC and ILEA will appeal to the labour and trade union movement to take action including industrial action to support this stand.” (The ILEA was the Inner London



Red Ken dressed up for a photo session with *Time Out*

Education Authority, made up of GLC members from inner-London boroughs plus representatives from those borough councils.)

Livingstone’s long game paid off. Labour won the GLC, and Livingstone deposed the old right-wing leader of the GLC Labour group. Within weeks the media were in uproar about “Red Ken”. On 21 July Livingstone welcomed the mother of one of the Irish Republican prisoners on hunger strike for political status to the GLC headquarters at County Hall, and declared support for the hunger strikers’ cause. He rejected an invitation to the Royal Wedding and called for the abolition of the monarchy. On 18 August he made a speech advocating gay rights, arguing that basically “everyone is bisexual”.

Livingstone’s public stances on Ireland, the monarchy, and gay rights were more daring than they would be today, but much less daring than they would have been ten or even five years earlier. With panache and skill, he caught the wave of change just at the right time.

Right up until the GLC was abolished by the Tories in April 1986, Livingstone used the council’s vast revenue-raising resources to assert and advance the rights of women, of lesbians and gays, of disabled people and other hard-pressed groups. Money given to voluntary groups of all sorts increased from £1 million in 1981-2 to £9 million in 1985-6. GLC spending on the arts rose from £2.5 million to £10.5 million. The traditional arts centres got more money, but so did a wider range of ventures. Well-researched reports and

regular bulletins monitored the police and argued the case for public accountability.

Worker co-operatives were assisted. “Technology networks” made know-how more available and developed projects like bus entrances suitable for wheelchairs. For about the first time, a public body seriously tried to give disabled people a chance to lead an equal life. The GLC financed dial-a-ride and taxicard services, improved disabled access to buildings, and made documents available on tape or in Braille. A GLC campaign of information and assistance enabled London people to get £10 million in previously-unclaimed state welfare benefits.

GLC economists produced substantial but readable reports on the decline of jobs in London and on “popular planning” alternatives; they helped local people in the Royal Docks area to produce a “People’s Plan” in opposition to capitalist schemes for redeveloping the district. County Hall was opened up in the evenings and at weekends for meetings. During the 1984-5 miners’ strike its facilities were opened up to the strikers.

Although the Livingstone GLC backed down on its cheap-fares policy for London Transport — after the Law Lords ruled it illegal — it did introduce travelcards and a revised fare structure before the government took control of London Transport away from it.

A new Livingstone administration in London, under the new mayoral structure, which does even one-tenth of the same sort of thing as the 1980s GLC did, would brighten up politics more than a Dobson regime representing the curious Blairite combination of the censorious nanny, the manipulative management consultant, and the nervous and humble clerk to the bourgeoisie. Anyone with sufficient interest and experience to remember the triumphs of the GLC in any detail also knows about the renegeing — when Livingstone invited the Queen to open the Thames Barrier, kissed her hand, and put a crown on the masthead of the GLC’s freesheet; or when, as early as December 1983, Livingstone seconded a Tory motion on a Provisional IRA bombing of Harrods without any amendment. But the renegeing is common stock in Labour politics these days. What rallies support to Livingstone and his GLC heritage is the



flashes of difference.

For the spectators of politics, that is the end of it. For the active participants in politics, those who want to build a movement, it is not. When we consider the movement behind Livingstone for Mayor, our first question is: what happened to the parallel movement, behind Livingstone for GLC leader, of 1979-81?

It very soon scattered, demoralised and disillusioned. It collapsed. Some of its figures, such as Tony Banks, now serve Blair. Others have withdrawn from active politics. About the only prominent GLC figure still visible on the left is John McDonnell MP, who by the end was Livingstone's bitter factional opponent (from the left) within the GLC. The scattering is not just a matter of attrition in the hard years after 1986. The "GLC left" was pretty much finished long before County Hall's doors shut on 1 April 1986. In 1985 Livingstone had announced his own break with the "hard left" and his desire for reconciliation with the then Labour Party leadership under Neil Kinnock, describing his politics as the "cynical soft-sell" approach.

To disarm Millbank's frantic denunciations of him as a stalking-horse for the SWP and *Socialist Organiser*, in Labour Party Mayoral hustings this year Livingstone would tell his audiences that in the GLC years the Trotskyists were always condemning him for not being left-wing enough, "and if I'm elected Mayor, within a few months they'll be accusing me of selling out". True enough. The revolutionary left — the political current manifested in the Socialist Alliance coalition, with all its errors and follies which this magazine so often criticises — is still as alive and forceful in constructive activity as in 1979-81, while the "GLC left" died so quickly, for exactly those reasons.

The failure of the "GLC left" was part of the failure of the whole Labour local government left of the early 1980s. In important ways the GLC was exceptional within that left. Unlike the rest of the shoal of "new left" Labour councils in the early 1980s — Lambeth, Lothian, Sheffield, Islington, Hackney, Edinburgh, Liverpool, etc. — it did not run any of the major local government services which cost lots of money and concern lots of people: education, housing, social services, waste collection, libraries. The Inner London Education Authority was linked to the GLC, but it is remembered fondly today not because of any special dazzling left-wing policies it had in 1981-6 but because those were the last years before the Tory government's manic drive to cut, test, and league-table gathered speed, its impact worsened in Inner London by the chaotic transfer of education from the ILEA to the various bor-

oughs. The GLC's housing estates, once sizeable, had all finally been transferred to the boroughs before 1981. Apart from that, the GLC only ran transport — until the government removed its powers in summer 1984 — and the fire service.

And, very unlike the other left-wing councils, the GLC faced no financial crises. The vast mass of Central London property subject to taxation by the GLC enabled it — through limited increases in rates (property taxes) which had very little impact on the average small ratepayer — to raise as much money as it wanted for its relatively limited functions.

Yet, despite their very different circumstances, the high profile of Livingstone and the GLC enabled them to set the tune politically for the other left councils. And that is where Livingstone's GLC, for all its razzmatazz, flair, and genuine good works, failed completely.

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**"The high profile of Livingstone and the GLC enabled them to set the tune politically for the other left councils. And that is where Livingstone's GLC, for all its razzmatazz, flair, and genuine good works, failed completely."**

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In the dark, bitter conditions of the early 1980s, with economic crisis raging and a radical Tory government determined to chop back public services and local democracy, no-one in their right mind could suppose that a left Labour council could help the fight for socialism by building ideal workers' housing, running well-funded experiments in new methods of education, expanding into other services, making itself a model employer, and so on. What it could do is use the platform of local government to mobilise the local workforce and community in a spearhead struggle against the Tory agenda. That was possible. Many a demonstration, conference, and one-day strike proved it. But in every case the councillors bottled out of a fight at the decisive moment.

The GLC manifesto, as we have seen, promised a fight in the clearest terms. In May 1981 Ken Livingstone spelled it out even more definitely. "Wherever there is an industrial dispute in London we shall go down and support it... We'll use the whole structure of the GLC to support trade unionists in struggle throughout London... and work with the trade unions to try to bring this government down ahead of its time...

There will be no U-turns."

Despite the brave words, a 15% pay demand by London Transport underground crews began to cause trouble less than a month after the GLC election. Sid Weighell, the right wing general secretary of the Underground workers' union - then known as the National Union of Railway workers (NUR) — undoubtedly used the issue to do as much damage as possible to the left wing GLC. But the basic fact was that the newly-elected council went against the very direct interests of London workers by not awarding the pay rise. (15% was not a wild or ridiculous demand. Inflation was then around 12%. The GLC offered 8%.)

To meet the NUR pay claim, said Livingstone "would require a supplementary rate and lead to some grant losses" Meanwhile the new ILEA was reneging on the Labour manifesto promise to cut school meal prices. Because of the fear of surcharge the Labour group split, providing a majority for the status quo.

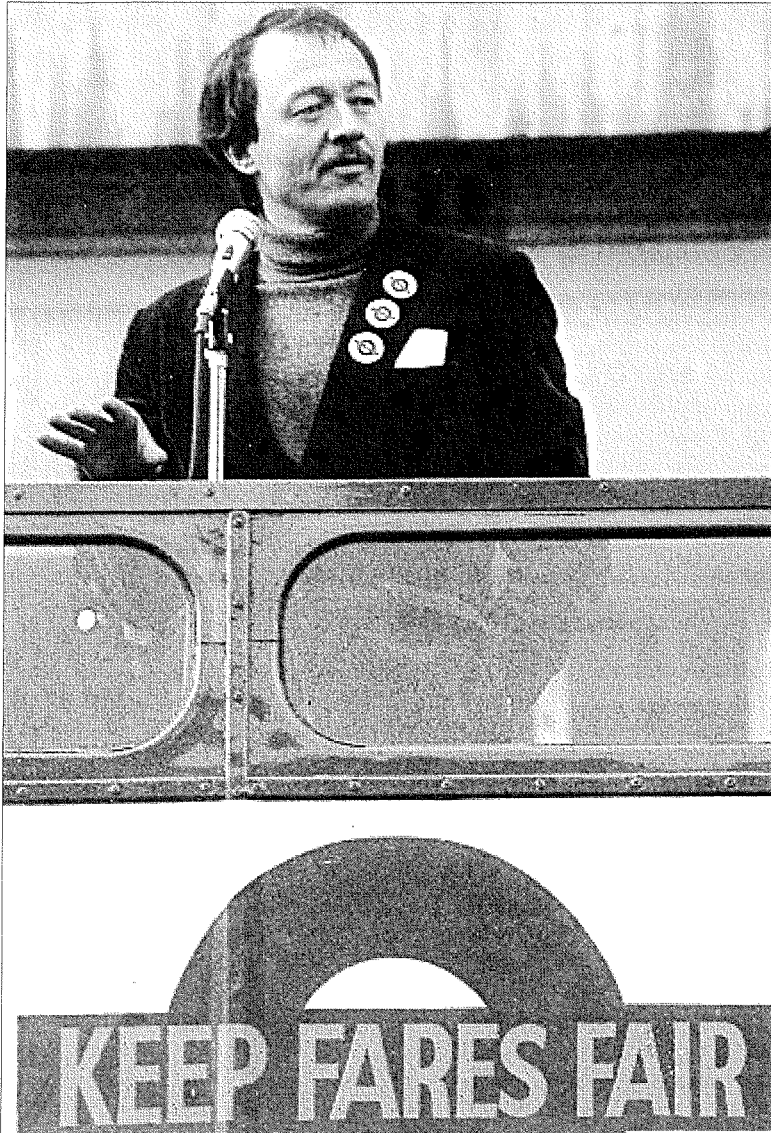
All that happened at the same time as the first great media outcry about "Red Ken". Livingstone was saying (August 1981): "There can be no doubt that we are now entering the final phase of the struggle against the Tories." Even more decisive in providing a model of radical bluster and practical climbdowns was the next major test. The biggest bread-and-butter promise in Labour's GLC manifesto — and a very popular one — was to cut fares on London Transport ("Fares Fair"). A judge, Lord Denning, ruled the cheap fares illegal, and the Law Lords backed him up. There could not have been a clearer issue on which to take on the Tories. The unions, although not militant, did mumble about action rather than telling the council to knuckle under. The Labour left was still strong. But on 12 January 1982 the GLC voted to obey the courts and raise the fares again.

Livingstone came out formally for defiance, but actually worked against it. As he would again on the "rate-capping" issue in March 1985, he used a technique described by Roy Shaw, a former Labour leader of Camden council, like this: "His ploy was to put forward an outrageous proposition, knowing full well that it would not be accepted — not really believing in it himself. Sometimes he did it so blatantly that in speaking to the motion he would say: I fully appreciate that there may well be members here who cannot support this motion, people... who can't risk surcharge [fines imposed on councillors found guilty of 'financial irresponsibility' by courts or government officials]. He was more or less saying: for heaven's sake don't vote for this. And of course it would be defeated."

As John Carvel (who provides the quote from Shaw) puts it in his book *Citi-*



## THE COVER STORY



Rally for cheap fares, March 1982

zen Ken, "On or about January 12 1982, Livingstone's GLC went legit." By June 1983 Ken Livingstone was giving a very different account of the GLC. "The GLC has a very limited range of responsibilities and powers, and nothing that the Labour GLC does challenges the structure. It raises issues, it promotes campaigns, it makes small shifts in wealth — they're all things that a Thatcher government could live with if the truth were told... Local government is not going to bring down central government. It never has been a possibility ... We're not in a position of being able to initiate, because we aren't in a position to mobilise the sort of forces required... without the trade unions mobilised behind the Labour Party locally or nationally, there's a very limited amount you can do..." (*Socialist Organiser*, 16.6.83).

The GLC's deep pockets enabled it to ditch the central radical pledges of its manifesto — and then evolve a new "second-wave" radical policy, of patronage and aid for oppressed groups financed on

housing, or social services? In fact, they couldn't even protect them from Tory cuts? Never mind. As long as they had a women's committee putting out pamphlets and consultations, and funding a few women's groups, they were doing something left wing.

For all the left Labour councils except the GLC, the issue of rate rises became a central strategic debate. A large part of the councils' money came from central government. The rest came from local property taxes, which, except in a few authorities lucky enough to cover huge concentrations of big commercial property, hit hard at working-class residents. Since housing is a bigger proportion of total expenditure for the poor than for the rich, residential rates took a bigger proportion of income from the low-paid worker than from the well-off. Business rates hit hardest at small shops and businesses.

The Tories were cutting central government funds for the councils. Should they compensate, and avoid cuts, by raising

the rates. The GLC Women's Committee was Britain's first ever. It set a pattern; by the end of 1985 30 local authorities had such committees. But it was no part of London Labour's 1981 manifesto. It was not set up until May 1982.

Much of the "second-wave" GLC policy was good. The problem was the direction it pointed for the other left Labour councils. They couldn't improve

rates? Most raised rates. Between 1978-9 and 1982-3, average domestic rates went up 42% in real terms — and much more in some areas. In the single year 1980, for example, Lambeth Council raised rates by 49.4%. And those rate rises did not even pay for improvements. At best they allowed services to be kept at the same level.

The Marxist left argued that Labour councils should instead refuse both cuts and rate rises, set "unbalanced" budgets, refuse payments to the government (PAYE, VAT, etc.) and to the banks, and mobilise local workforces and communities in action to force the Tory government to make good the reductions in central government funding. By late 1980 this policy — initially the property of a minority round *Socialist Organiser* — had majority support among activists; two national cuts conferences, in November 1980 and January 1981, both voted for no rate rises. No council leadership ever carried it through. All the political authority and weight of Livingstone and the GLC was thrown against it.

Most left-wing rate-raisers argued only that rate rises were an unsatisfactory but necessary expedient to "win time". This argument grew thinner and thinner as it became plain that the people "winning time" from the futile and morale-sapping rate rises were the Tories. Livingstone, however, argued that rate rises were a progressive measure of economic redistribution. "I have always believed in expanding services and increasing the rate to do so... Frankly, if you're going to say expand services and not increase the rate, you're making an immediate direct challenge to the state of a revolutionary nature... No-one can say at the moment that we're in a pre-revolutionary situation... Why didn't we have the argument that taxes shouldn't be raised? That seems to me exactly the same. If anyone really thinks that under a socialist society, taxes and rates won't increase to massively expand public services, they're in cloud cuckoo land." (*Workers' Action*, 8 December 1979).

Whether Livingstone's later opposition to any increase in taxes except for the very rich represents an implicit criticism of his old views on rate rises must be a moot point. In any case, what he did at the crucial time was to use the exceptional circumstances of the GLC (and also, to a degree, of Camden, where he was previously a councillor) to boost rate rises.

Almost everywhere else the rate-rise policy was a demoralising fiasco. Seizing the advantage, in 1984 the Tory government legislated itself power to "cap" (limit) the rate demands of "overspending" councils. The left Labour councils' morale had been revived by the miners' strike, which started in February 1984, and by an apparent suc-

cess for Liverpool's Labour council in July 1984. Liverpool, led politically by the Militant group (now split into the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal), had delayed setting a 1984-5 budget; the Tories, anxious to secure themselves against any "second front" of struggle alongside the miners, offered them a deal to postpone some of the council's financial problems to April 1985. Militant foolishly accepted. The foolishness was not so obvious then. Twelve left Labour councils — eight London boroughs, plus Thamesdown, Sheffield, Leicester and Manchester — resolved to respond to "rate-capping" by refusing to set a rate in spring 1985 until the government would agree to drop the rate-capping law and to restore cuts. Then Livingstone's GLC torpedoed them.

Unlike the other local authorities, the GLC and ILEA had a legal obligation to make a rate by 10 March. Labour right-wingers would defy a "no rate" whip. But, legally, the GLC Tories could without risk of penalty put their own budget — which Labour right-wingers would refuse to support — and then abstain on all legal Labour budgets. In that way, a determined core of Labour councillors — even if they were a minority of the full council — could force "no rate".

Ken Livingstone went through the motions of advocating refusal to set a rate. But at the same time he denounced the other defiant councils for deciding to "defer" rate-setting rather than to go clearly into illegality. He stressed the risks in the GLC going illegal, thus lining up moderates to vote for legality. And he produced a scheme for financial juggling to allow a legal rate with no cuts. So the GLC Labour group voted to go for a legal rate, with Livingstone, having engineered the result, safe to vote with the minority! On 10 March, after all sorts of council-chamber chaos, a coalition of Tories and Labour right-wingers eventually passed a modified version of the legal budget, at slightly lower than the maximum legal rate. If the miners had been able to look forward confidently to a really strong stand by the councils, then perhaps they would have continued their strike at least a few weeks longer. Instead, seeing the signals from the councillors, they voted on 3 March to return to work.

The political realities behind all this became clear in the following few weeks. Livingstone publicly dismissed the "no rate" policy as sham heroics. He sacked his left-wing deputy GLC leader, John McDonnell, and dissociated himself from the "hard left".

By now — and, indeed, increasingly, for much of the time since the Tories had started moving to abolish the GLC (and all the other metropolitan authorities) in 1983 — almost all that was left of the GLC's

radical political profile was its campaign against its own abolition. But the campaign was directed much more to the bishops, the Lords, and Tory "moderates" than to the workers whose jobs were at risk. In fact, it was a test case for the Livingstone GLC's attitude to the organised working class.

In late summer of 1983, the GLC unions — the Fire Brigades Union, NALGO (now part of UNISON), and the GLC Staff Association (a relic of the days of Tory control, but the majority union at County Hall) — got together to form "Democracy for London" a committee to campaign against abolition. It called a demonstration in January 1984. For the first time County Hall closed completely. The Staff Association balloted its members and they voted overwhelmingly for action.

But on the demonstration there were very few manual workers, the vast majority being white collar workers and ILEA teachers. The next protest was Democracy Week, called by the TUC. This time the Staff Association stayed at work and NALGO came out. The Staff Association left the Democracy For London campaign, and it began to become more a focus for the militants within County Hall unions.

In early 1984, Lambeth and Hackney shop stewards began to meet on a regular basis. Between July and September this developed into a united trade union committee covering all the rate-capped London boroughs — "London Bridge". It was based directly on shop stewards' committees, with a delegate structure. It quickly took a bigger role than "Democracy for London" in the fight against ratecapping and abolition. London Bridge turned a 7 November 1984 strike and demonstration, originally called by Democracy For London, into a powerful protest against ratecapping. Unfortunately the organisation of the rally was in the hands of County Hall union full-timers. The politicians were to the fore, the shop stewards' speaker way down the list.

The irony was that, while Ken Livingstone talked to the rally about "fighting them on the beaches," Westminster's Tory council had served a writ on the GLC against the secondment of stewards to staff DFL. The council was in a state of panic, even to the point of not letting the demonstration organisers have portable toilets for fear of legal action. The GLC withdrew the seconded stewards. This, combined with increasing opposition from the union full-timers, wrecked the emerging GLC stewards' organisation. When a conference for County Hall stewards was called on 23 January 1985 attempts to turn it into a decision making body led the chair to close it down.

Soon thereafter, the "rate-capping"

fiasco and the miners' defeat knocked the spirit out of the union organisation. The Abolition Act finished going through parliament in summer 1985, and the GLC was shut down on 1 April 1986.

It was in this period that Livingstone's attitude to the organised revolutionary left, and especially to *Workers' Liberty*, became one of spite and even paranoia (he has claimed that we, and others too, must be "agents of MI5"). Though, as Livingstone quite accurately reports, we had frequently condemned him for selling out, we had also supported the GLC's fight against abolition, and as late as 1984 we were able to work with Livingstone to develop a support network for the striking miners. From the watershed of 1985, all that changed. It looked as if Ken Livingstone was well set on the same road as David Blunkett, Robin Cook, Clare Short and other such figures of the "soft left", with only a peculiar intensity in his hostility to the revolutionary left, and a wayward maverick streak in his rhetoric, to distinguish him. Maybe Livingstone himself thought he was on that road. He told the Labour Party in Brent East, where he became an MP in 1987, that he wanted a safe parliamentary seat as a good base for an attempt to become prime minister.

He did not become a shadow minister, or a minister. It was not so much this or that particular issue that held him back from full reconciliation with the Labour hierarchy, as a personal unwillingness (creditable enough, in and of itself) to become a mere parrot for a handed-down "party line". Livingstone wanted a career, but he also wanted to be more than just the stuffing inside a suit sat in a ministerial car or armchair, or the voicebox reading the lines sent down by the top party leaders. He wanted fame and personal distinction, not just a minister's salary.

So he remained "on the left". He published books, wrote articles, reinvented himself as an expert on economics, took part in campaigns, and waited for an opening. As late as 1997, through whatever combination of self-delusion, vanity, and not-discreditable over-optimism, he was predicting that the stresses and strains on the new Labour government would soon see the Blair faction's right-wing course swept aside in favour of a radical new direction (and, presumably, radical new leaders, including Livingstone himself). Now he sees that the London Mayor election is his best chance to cut a streak of some sort against the deadly grey background of New Labour politics. Good luck to him. But those who support him should not just rely on good luck. They should learn from history, and organise independently around clear and comprehensive policies.

**Colin Foster**

# The left and Livingstone: falling in love again...

**K**EN Livingstone's candidature for London Mayor is an opportunity to raise independent working class politics among workers who see Livingstone as someone who has challenged the "control freaks" of Millbank, who, at least on the issue of the privatisation of the London Underground, stands for policies for working class Londoners. For *WZ* it is an opportunity to organise a serious working-class challenge to Blair. At least two of the main groups on the left — the Socialist Workers Party and The Socialist Party — have a different set of priorities.

For *Socialist Worker*, Livingstone's candidature is an chance to tell Labour Party members to rip up their party cards — a campaign which they have run intermittently over the last ten years. It is understandable that Labour Party members will feel like leaving the Party right now, but *SW* are engaged in mere a "Join the Socialists", SWP party building exercise.

Under the headline, "Should socialists break from New Labour?" (11 March), *SW* makes a number of crass statements, truncating Labour's history in order to fit their own spin on a complex story, leading to the pre-ordained fetishistic conclusion: Join the SWP. This is a species of polemic which needs to be countered.

There's is a one-sided history: "In the 1930s there were militant demonstrations against unemployment. But figures who led the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, like Wal Hanington, were members of the Communist Party. Labour officially did not even support the most famous demonstration against unemployment — the Jarrow hunger march..."

If Labour's leaders did not back the NUWM, neither did the TUC. The problem was an overwhelming passivity at the head of the *entire* labour movement. In fact there was a *huge* struggle inside Labour over unemployment benefit — an issue which led to a split in August 1931, when Ramsey MacDonald went on to form a national government. Economic and social struggles have always had an impact on the Party, because it has been an *organic* part of the British labour movement. Labour was based on the organisations of the working class — which is not to say that it has politically represented the *true* interests of the working class.

Equally one-sided is *SW*'s characterisation of the historical reality of parliamentary struggle. "The key is to understand that change does not come through Parliament, but from fighting outside Parliament. Thatcher's poll tax, for example, was defeated by a mass campaign and huge demonstrations organised by ordinary people."

Partly *SW* is adopting a straight "syndicalists" stance because it suits its anti-Labour arguments. In other circumstances it recognises the value of socialists using the parliamentary arena as a platform for struggle — in the devolved "parliament" of London for instance! Here they want to avoid explaining how generations of working-class fighters fought for the right to vote, the right to working class MPs, the democratisation of the parliamentary system, in the '80s, the democratisation of the Labour Party not only to promote but to strengthen "extra-parliamentary" working class struggles.

Socialists who are indifferent to the creation of new socialists, or to recruiting those socialists to their organisation, or to the cardinal importance of building their own organisation, ought to give up the right to exist. Our objection is not to the degree of party patriotism SWPers display, but the way this leads them to distort reality and live in their own political dream-world. Like this, for instance:

"It is easier to relate to the mood for change in the country outside the Labour Party. Opinion over many issues is way to the left of New Labour... But it need not be forces like Plaid or the SNP that benefit from the anger against Blair. Where socialists put forward a clear left alternative to Blair they get support."

It is true that many workers feel intensely aggrieved about the Government. But it is not true that either the SWP nor even the London Socialist Alliance is yet — even with the openings created by Livingstone's stance — an *alternative* to New Labour, even for a protest vote. We are working to win that position. Collectively the left can and should demonstrate to as many workers as it can that their grievances are common to many and that something can be done about them. Our job is to reach a broad section of workers — to mobilise around key class demands. It is not just, as in practice it is to the SWP, to relate to ones and two by shouting "Join the socialists"!

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**"Our job is to reach a broad section of workers — to mobilise around key class demands. It is not just to relate to ones and two by shouting 'Join the socialists'!"**

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**T**HE *Socialist* don't bother to pick over the history of Labour. It says — forget about the past, Labour is finished now as a vehicle for working-class political representation. Workers must leave Labour and form a new workers' party. In reality this argument is similar to the SWP's — it is code for saying "Join the socialists".

Writing in the 17 March issue, Peter Taaffe says, "the election of Socialist Party councillors in Lewisham and Coventry [shows an alternative] is being created in England... Livingstone's decision to stand has utterly changed the London and national position... out of this mayor's contest must come the basis of a new mass working class party." And, "More and more union branches are posing the question of refusing to continue to finance the Labour Party with the resources of the union membership."

A new workers' party is needed and the foundation of such a party implies a perspective of a split within the existing labour movement. However, broad sections of the union movement are not now organised in revolt against Blair's New Labour "party within a party". Socialists need to take what revolt there is and try to generalise it. We make propaganda for a new working class political organisation. But the

next step is not to make a call for a new workers' party the *central prop* of our propaganda. There are some steps to go first. Immediately those sections of the union movement which are in revolt should organise around the idea of labour representation, and tie this idea to opposition to privatisation and cuts in public services. They should put pressure on other union leaderships to fight for their members and against the government. This is next step.

The *Socialist's* argument is based on a false perspective about the Labour Party. "[The Blairista right wing] have transformed the Labour Party, in the past a workers' party at the bottom, into a British version of the Democratic Party in the USA. This is underlined by the stitch-up of Livingstone, following the ballot-rigging in Wales."

Blair may yet transform Labour into a Democratic Party but he has not definitively done it yet. If he had decisively broken the links with unions we might be in that position. He has not yet, because the union tops have been content to go along with all the Government's anti-working class policies. Socialists advocate the disruption of the cosy relationship between John Monks *et al* and the Blairites. We say that the unions should not donate money to Labour, unless and until it backs down on privatisation and cuts in services and on maintaining the Tories' anti-union laws.

For *WZ* it is not a question, as Taaffe puts it of "urging people to stay in the Labour Party" (and many will stay in come what may) and "refusing to organise a new mass party" or "missing [with the Livingstone campaign] a unique opportunity for socialism in Britain". Far better that disillusioned Labour members band together and put up a fight both in their Labour Party branches and unions than that they drop out individually. Few of those who do so will remain in politics. We also say join with the LSA, use the opportunity in London to show working class people that there *is* opposition to Blair, that New Labour's political monopoly can be broken.

In reality, neither the SWP nor the SP truly believe that the LSA or themselves are a pole of attraction for the masses of disillusioned Labour and trade union members. Many thousands will vote for Livingstone and some thousands will vote for the LSA. But it will be hundreds who join the LSA. That represents a tremendously positive development if the LSA develops into an outgoing, democratically-organised, long-term working class campaign. Those hundreds of working class activists represent the future and may help shape a new working-class party in the future. But that is not what either the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party are advocating. Both groups advocate a piecemeal falling away of individuals from Labour when there no real place for them to go. They talk grandiosely about splits when potential splits have not developed in the direction of a positive movement for working class political representation. They even have no real belief that the time is ripe for a genuine split. But honesty is nothing when party-building is all.

**Cathy Nugent**

# Livingstone's economics

**K**EN Livingstone advocates that new investment in the Tube be financed by selling bonds (bits of paper entitling the owner to a regular fixed percentage payment, e.g., £5 every year on a £100 bond). The Blair Government and Frank Dobson insist it be done by paying private contractors to take over the tracks and make the investment (the so-called Public-Private Partnership, PPP).

As Livingstone says, his formula is cheaper. Both formulas amount to London borrowing money from capitalists for the investment, and paying them well for the favour, but on bonds London would have to pay the average rate of interest — maybe not much more than 5% — while on PPP London would have to pay the average rate of profit, at least 12%.

The other advantage of bonds, probably a more important one for workers, is that the Tube workforce would still be one unit, under one employer, instead of many Tube workers being transferred to private contractors.

Ken Livingstone is right that bonds are much used in other countries, for example the USA, to finance local government spending. They are also much used by central government in the UK. In any period when central government spending outruns income — it often does, because spending and income do not vary at the same rhythm — the government sells bonds to cover the gap.

The Treasury does not want Tube investment financed by bonds because it is fanatical about keeping control over the total amount of public-sector bond-selling (borrowing). The theory here is that public-sector bond-selling siphons the top off a more-or-less fixed pool of cash available to be lent for investment (building, re-equipment, and so on). Money-men will prefer to lend to the public sector because it's safer — when they lend to a private capitalist company, there is always the chance that it will fail or disappoint. Thus, expanded public-sector bond-selling "crowds out" private capitalist investment. By taking cash from previously idle holdings — in exchange for bonds — and spending it straight away, public borrowing may also "heat up" market and push up prices.

And, for central government, a bond issue by London would be a dangerous precedent. Other local authorities would want to do the same. The tight web of financial controls by Whitehall over local government — which the Tories greatly tightened, and New Labour does not want to loosen — would begin to unravel.

A bond issue would certainly be bet-



Livingstone bows to the Queen at the opening of the Thames Barrier. Will he also bow to the City?

ter than PPP. But it is not a socialist policy. The socialist policy would be to get the resources to expand public services by taxing — or expropriating — the rich, not by paying them to lend the cash. The fact that bond issues by cities are so standard in the USA should be proof enough that they are not socialist. There is more freedom for local government in the USA — but it is the freedom to compete or die in the capitalist jungle, rather than the freedom of a community organised for the common good. In the USA, cities can go bust. New York City nearly went bankrupt in 1975-6, extricating itself only after cutting no fewer than 65,000 city jobs. Orange County, California, went bankrupt in 1994. Cities have to fit their policies to what the "markets" will accept: hardly less oppressive than British local authorities having to fit in with the cuts programmes of central government.

Unfortunately, the whole of Ken Livingstone's output as a self-promoted expert on economics is in the same vein as his bonds scheme. It is a collection of quick-fix formulas designed to make capitalism work better. Many of his proposals can be supported as far as they go — but where they go is nowhere near socialism.

His chief ideas, as summarised in the comments of his *Socialist Economic Bulletin* on the 1998 Budget and in later articles (e.g., *The Independent*, 11 August 1999 and 18 August 1999) are as follows. Cut interest rates. Devalue the pound (i.e., shift its exchange rate, so one pound is worth fewer euros or dollars or yen). Increase taxes on incomes over £40,000 a year, on dividends, and on short-term profits. Keep business tax breaks for investment. Cut military spending to the average West European level.

What all this will do, according to the theory, is "tackled the crippling distortions of the UK economy", distortions which arise from excessive resources going into consumer spending (especially on imports) by the rich and into military spending, while not enough goes

into investment. Livingstone's policies, so he says, will lead to capitalists investing more (building more factories, introducing more new machines). Then the government could "eventually raise" wages and social provision "through the extra resources that economic growth created by investment will create" (*SEB*, November 1995).

The obvious question is why the more "undistorted" capitalist economies of other countries are not workers' paradises! "Undistorted" capitalism is not necessarily any closer to socialism, or to workers' interests, than "distorted" capitalism. There is no guarantee at all that capitalists would respond to such measures by investing more. They might take their cash overseas, or just hold it tight for better days. Many mild-left governments that based their hopes on pushing and pleading the capitalists into investing have in fact been met with "investment strikes". The only decisive way through is by taking the big banks, financial institutions, and industrial giants into public ownership, under workers' and community control, so that socially-planned investments can be directly carried out as public policy.

Even if capitalists do invest more, there is no guarantee that "the extra resources" will "trickle down" to wages and welfare. More investment, in a capitalist economy, means more capital. More capital means more power for the wealth-owners over the workers.

But for Livingstone, "the key to understanding the present situation", the major "distortion", "the real problem", is "a world, and UK, shortage of capital" (*SEB*, March 1996). We must get more capital created (that is, as Marx would put it, more alien wealth that dominates the workers) before we can seek real improvements!

In fact, both Britain and the other major capitalist countries are full of idle factories, unused capacity, and vast capitalist cash-hoards. The evidence for a "shortage of capital" is extremely elusive, because the whole idea is a product of unclear understanding of the concept of capital. In a crisis, industrial capitalists have both an "excess of capital" (more productive capacity in their factories than they can use profitably) and a "shortage of capital" (insufficient stashes of cash, or access to credit, to meet their bills). The socialist answer is not "more capital", but to abolish capital through a democratically-controlled co-operative economy.

**Martin Thomas**

# Labour: the left must keep its head!

**B**LAIR has no sense of history. However, the far left is also in the process of forgetting all it has learned about the labour movement.

The big question for revolutionaries has always been how to get from small groupings to the mass revolutionary cadre party that can lead the working class to the seizure of power and, ultimately, communism.

Whatever is said about transitional demands, programme, etc., the big question for revolutionaries in bourgeois democracies has always been how they relate to social democratic/bourgeois workers' parties and the unions. Without an understanding of their nature and how to relate to them, then the best will in the world will not build a revolutionary party capable of carrying out its historic task.

Despite the meagre results in the 1999 elections to the European Parliament, most of the far left is now convinced that standing candidates in elections is the way to build the alternative to Labour. Specifically in London around the elections to the Greater London Assembly, it is hoping to emulate the electoral results achieved by the left in France, Portugal and Scotland.

However, there is no basis for the assumption that such results can be automatically repeated, given the considerable differences in political conditions across Europe. The Scottish Socialist Party, for instance, began from a much more solid base (at least in its heartland of Glasgow) arising from years of campaigning which the left in England and London does not have. However high we put the level of disillusion/disgust with the Government's record, the European elections showed that this is far more likely to translate at the moment into large-scale abstention, and votes for the Liberal Democrats and Greens than any gains for the left.

Even in the unlikely event that the London left is able to reproduce the results of any of these "mentors" it would still beg the question of what it is able to do with it. Revolutionary strategy does not reduce to winning (even lots of) council or parliamentary seats, however nice.

While it is positive that much of the far left is co-operating instead of engaging in its usual sectarian competition, in fact this left agrees on very little beyond standing together in elections. Even with an agreed election statement there is little common ground about the election campaign itself. Some (like the CPGB) want a manifesto, which raises the big issues of power, while others like the AWL, would rather reduce it all to the current "lack of working class representation".

This goes a long way to meeting those like the Socialist Party who argue that the Labour Party is now a straightforward bourgeois party like the Tories. It remains an unfortunate and embarrassing fact that Britain does currently have "working class representation" in the Labour Party. It contains the danger of seeing working class representation in purely sociological terms. It is hardly surprising that — at least for a while — the AWL welcomed the noise which the AEEU leadership made about getting more workers

into Parliament (via the Labour Party of course) without recognising that this was purely a matter of the AEEU trying to secure seats for particular "chosen sons" and that the politics of the AEEU leadership differ very little from those of Blair.

Posing the present situation as a "lack of working class representation" repeats the very contradiction at the heart of the Labour Party since its formation. Working class representation meant parliamentary representation but not representation by advocates of the struggle for socialism (in any real sense). Working class representation, yes, but within the confines of capitalism.

Precisely because of these differences over programme, strategy and the meaning of the electoral alliance, the votes that are won in the election are extremely unlikely to be translated into anything more than tiny gains in membership for the separate organisations which make up the alliance. The only option which might transcend this — the concept of a new workers' party — is rejected by the majority of participants in favour of linear growth of their own organisation. Even those organisations which see such a new party as necessary/possible have such widely differing views on how it will come about and what its character should be, that there is little chance of it developing.

No doubt the left candidates in London will get votes from disaffected Labour voters and Labour Party members, as will, to a greater extent, the Liberal Democrats and Green Party. A far greater number of "traditional" Labour voters will stay away. But beyond "vote for us", the traditional cry of all bourgeois politicians, what is the LSA offering? Certainly no strategy for those Labour Party members who will vote left in protest at Blair's programme and the quality of the Party's GLA candidates. Nor even anything for those activists who no longer "look to" the Labour Party in any way. A protest vote will be registered and then... nothing.

Yet in all this there has been little recognition that the far left in this country has been here before. And a fairly futile exercise it was too.

Over the hundred years of the Labour Party's existence, the far left, in its various guises, has barely dented its hegemony over the labour movement. It has gone through periodic bouts of deceiving itself that it is about to drive the final nail into the coffin of social democracy (the CP and ILP in the '30s, the WRP in the '60s and '70s, the IMG, the SWP). Each has been a false dawn followed by a rather rude awakening, with the Labour Party emerging as strong as ever, and the far left even more isolated than before.

Yet this time around the left seems to believe everything is different. Why, when conditions are even worse than in most of the cases listed above is never explained.

- All of the far left has shrunk in recent years and is more isolated from the bulk of the working class than for a very long time;

- The level of industrial action — the basic impetus for sections of the working class to draw political conclusions — has been at a record low

for several years;

- Organised resistance within the unions to the latest version of class collaboration, "social partnership" — despite some good results for individual candidates for office — is very weak.

All we get in response is truisms — the policies of the Government are a continuation of the Tories', internal democracy has all but been killed off in the Labour Party — rather than reasoned argument.

It is of course true that this Labour government is pursuing policies well to the right of any previous one. But the implication is often that it is not the case that all Labour governments have been committed to the smooth running of capitalism whatever reforms they have introduced to the benefit of the working class. Since its inception, the Labour Party has been a bourgeois workers' party, a social democratic party even if some of its specifics differ from social democracy elsewhere. Despite the mythology spread by the likes of Militant in its entryist period, there never was a golden heyday of British social democracy. The Labour Party did not need to undergo an August 1914 *à la* German social democracy to arrive in the counter-revolutionary camp. It was always there. The dominant ideology of the British trade unions has always been the search for concessions within the confines of the capitalist framework. The Labour Party has merely translated this into the "political" arena.

Despite all the changes made by Kinnock, Smith and Blair this essential class character of the Labour party remains unchanged. Blair's "Partnership in Power" proposals have certainly had a profound effect on internal democracy, with conference sidelined in favour of "policy forums" with little independence from the leadership. Yet despite this, conference still has the ability to pass resolutions, which, although far from throwing the Government into crisis, would at least cause disarray, and the unions have almost 50% of the votes at conference.

We are frequently told that the Labour left is dead, or at least nearly so. It is incredibly weak, although whether qualitatively more so than the extra-Labour left is a moot point. Yet, despite this weakness, the left has won at least half of the CLP places on Labour's National Executive Committee for the last two years, and the enthusiasm for Livingstone's candidacy for London Mayor among the rank and file shows that it is hardly dead. Of course, this situation has hardly been helped by the withdrawal of most of the far left from Labour Party activity.

Where mass revolutionary parties were formed in the 1920s (France, Germany, Italy) this was achieved by a mass break with social democracy. Yet the practice of most of the far left in Britain now shows it believes that social democracy (or rather its mass following) can be disregarded (or at best preached at) for the purpose of building the far left. All historical experience in Britain shows that once small far left organisations decide it is time to stand candidates in elections they also lose all concept of the united front in their approach to the Labour



# Vote Labour? Tell me why

Party. Hardly surprising in terms of self-justification, but hardly conducive to building that mass revolutionary party.

Some will protest that this is not true, that they have supporters working in the Labour Party or that they have supported Livingstone in his fight for the Labour Party nomination for London Mayor. [This piece was written before the result of the electoral college was known.]

Yet the London Socialist Alliance has not even expressed its support for Livingstone, because of the opposition of the Socialist Party (one version says that it wouldn't make any difference anyway, which seems to be more of a statement of ineffectiveness than anything else).

Several of those organisations involved in the LSA who have supported Livingstone (not least the AWL) have done somersaults to do so. Yet while they seem to recognise Livingstone's fight for the nomination is pivotal to the direction of the Labour Party and, by extension, the unions, one is left with the strong feeling that their real hope has always been that Livingstone would stand as an independent, allowing them to pose as his support act. While Livingstone should be supported as an independent candidate if this is the final last option open, this does not alter the fact that the best option in terms of a defeat for Blair would be for Livingstone to win and be the official Labour candidate. But that of course would raise the question of whether the far left will be part of that battle over the future of the labour movement, which hardly ends with the Livingstone issue. Rather it is in the process of cutting itself off from it.

Being part of that fight does not mean everyone going to ward meetings and General Committees, but it does mean members of affiliated unions being able, for instance to stand for their union's delegations to Labour conferences to challenge the supine attitude of the Morris, Bickerstaffes etc. But to do so, they need to be Labour Party members.

Those who protest that, while pursuing election campaigns, they also have supporters active in the Labour Party are being disingenuous. It is not just that this is merely a token presence in the Labour Party, more of a sop to those who won't give up the "old ways" than a real commitment, but that these are not complementary but conflicting tactics. You cannot coherently argue at the same time that you stand candidates against the Labour Party and fight in the Labour Party.

In seeing the standing of candidates as the answer to the considerable problems facing socialists at the current time the left is slipping into the magic solutions/short cut realm of politics, ignoring all the lessons of the history of the British left. A strategy which relates only to left activists ("the vanguard") while ignoring the question of how to connect with the bulk of the working class — arming the vanguard with the arguments to take to the wider class — used to be known as "the left of the left". It was derided by many on the British left when explicitly applied by the French left in the '70s and '80s. It is just as wrong now when used by the British left.

**Neil Murray**

**M**UCH of the left has been turned upside down in recent years over the question of standing candidates against the Labour Party. Blairism and the huge changes wrought inside the Labour Party have forced even the most loyal of Labour loyalists to re-consider their position.

But having opened the door to the possibility of anti-Labour candidatures, one is immediately confronted with another question — what do you do where you don't stand?

It is an undeniable fact that there will not be socialist alternative candidates standing in every seat. If we had the wherewithal on the left to put up that many candidates, we'd be in a much better position than we are now! In London, there will be opponents to the left of the official Labour candidates in most, if not all, of the GLA seats and, of course, for the Mayoral election. But in much of the rest of the country, the working class will be left with the familiar choice of Labour, Liberal Democrat or Conservative.

So what should the left say to workers in places like Corby, Hemel Hempstead and Woking? Should we give a blanket endorsement of Labour candidates except where we have stood against them? Should we argue that there are no candidates worth voting for except our own?

It seems to me that we cannot ask workers to vote for socialist alternative candidates in one area, and expect them to turn out for Labour as though nothing has changed in another area. But equally, a blanket abstention can all too easily lead towards the position that "politics" are "not for the working class". Already there are elements of this train of thought in the disaffiliation motions doing the rounds in various trade unions. We should not give credence to the notion that the working class has no role to play in bourgeois elections.

I would argue that we should offer an active role for the working class to play in elections everywhere. We should demand of all candidates that they tell us how they would be accountable to the working class in their constituencies. It is a valid question to put to both Labour candidates and "left" alternatives. We should make clear that only candidates who make themselves accountable to the labour movement deserve our support.

This is not a question of one policy or another, where a Lib-Dem, a Green or even the Monster Raving Looney Party might have a better answer than some

of the Labour candidates. This is a basic question of class representation. If a Labour candidate has not at least thought about how to be accountable to the class that they claim to represent then they don't deserve the support of that class.

Green or Lib-Dem candidates, no matter how good their formal policies on a whole range of issue may be, do not even pretend to stand in the interests of the working class. The Labour Party is the party of the working class and whilst that remains true, candidates who make the effort to link up with the formal structures of the labour movement still deserve our support. We are not simply in a similar situation to the United States, where all too often the only choice offered to voters is between clearly bourgeois candidates.

In some areas, this policy will undoubtedly result in workers not having a credible candidate to vote for. But if the analysis of the Labour Party that we have developed is true, then we should be brave enough to admit that most of the official candidates do not in any way represent the labour movement, and moreover, have no interest in doing so. They simply are not worthy of our support.

I would suggest that the changes in the Party structure introduced by Blair have created a formal division of the Party between the bulk of the membership and trade union affiliates on one side and the bureaucracy, councillors and the PLP on the other side. Only by conscious effort have a few MPs and councillors bridged that gap. This creates the curious anomaly that whilst the Labour Party as a whole remains a bourgeois workers' Party, the candidates and MPs can, if they choose, have no involvement with the labour movement whatever. In this situation, support and membership of the Party does not necessarily and naturally lead to support for the elected so-called representatives of the Party, since in fact they don't represent the Party at all, even in the limited form that Labour MPs once did.

In the European elections, our formal position was support for Labour. But very few of our readers will have noticed. It was a policy that was so embarrassing, we hid the few references to it in hidden corners of our publications. Perhaps it's time that we trusted our instincts a little: if we really don't want to tell anyone that we're voting Labour, maybe its because we shouldn't be doing it.

**Selina White**



# A hero of the twentieth century

**A**T the end of 1999 Muhammad Ali was named the athlete of the century, not only by the BBC, but by various newspapers and media companies in the United States, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Japan, and Sri Lanka. There is no parallel for Muhammad Ali's celebrity. But it is a bad habit of our age merely to celebrate celebrity. We should look at how his celebrity was established and what it means. And I do not believe that his fame rests only on what he achieved in the ring — although if you are a sports fan you have to be awed by that. More important was what he achieved outside the ring.

We must re-insert Ali in his historical context, and that means principally his relationship to the great social movements of the 1960s. The young Cassius Clay was very much a typical patriotic, Cold War chauvinist. Representing the US in the Rome Olympics of 1960, at the age of 18, he won a gold medal in the Light Heavyweight division. And to commemorate the victory he published his first poem:

*To make America the greatest is my goal,  
So I beat the Russian, and I beat the Pole.  
And for the USA I won the medal of Gold.*

A crude start for someone who would travel a long way in the next few years. The key to understanding Ali's movement away from this unexamined national chauvinism is the impact of the civil rights movement of the first half of the 1960s. In the years between 1960 and 1965, hundreds of thousands of young black people from precisely Muhammad Ali's background — from working class homes in Southern American cities — took to the streets to challenge Jim Crow, America's version of Apartheid, and to challenge a century of institutionalised racism of a type we can barely imagine today. At one point it was estimated that 60% of all black college students from across the South were directly involved in this mass movement. And a terrible price was paid — some were murdered, many were beaten, huge numbers were arrested. It was one of the great battles of our era. Ali was driven by the same social forces which drove his contemporaries into the streets; but he was driven in a different direction. His response to all-pervasive racism was different because — after his Olympic triumph — he met the Nation of Islam (NoI) in the streets of Miami.

Over the next few years, as a promising Heavyweight contender, travelling around the country, fighting his way up the ladder, looking for a title shot, he met many more Muslims. Most famously he met Malcolm X and formed a friendship with him. Through the NoI, this young, quite uneducated man encountered the tradition of black nationalism whose origins go back to the beginnings of the twentieth century and which flourished under Marcus Garvey. Black nationalism had enjoyed a kind of underground existence up to this point and when Cassius Clay encountered the NoI in the early '60s it was the longest standing, wealthiest, best-organised black nationalist organisation in America (albeit a nationalism of a peculiar kind). Clay kept his interest in the NoI secret — if it had become public he would never have become the Heavyweight champion, he would never have had a chance to face Sonny Liston in the ring and we would not be discussing him today.

He got a title shot in 1964, in Miami, against Liston, who was said to be unbeatable. To the world's surprise, at the age of 22, Cassius Clay did beat Sonny Liston and became the World Heavyweight champion. Instead of going to a big party at a luxury downtown hotel, as was expected of newly-crowned champions,



**Ali formed a friendship with Malcolm X**

Cassius Clay went back to the black motel, in the black area of Miami — at that time, effectively a segregated city — and had a quiet evening, without any drink, discussing what he would do with the title he had just won, with his friends, Malcolm X, Sam Cooke, the great gospel and R&B singer, and Jim Brown, a famous US football player who later became an actor. The next morning, after these discussions, Cassius Clay met the press — which in those days was exclusively white and male — and told them, "I don't have to be what you want me to be, I'm free to be what I want." In retrospect that doesn't sound like a big deal, but, at the time it was earthshaking. Firstly because sportstars, and particularly young black sportstars, were expected to be what they were told to be; secondly because what Cassius Clay wanted to be was a public member of the NoI — probably the most reviled organisation in America at the time. And at his side was Malcolm X — probably the most reviled individual in the US at the time. In announcing his embrace of the NoI Cassius Clay was repudiating Christianity, in a predominately Christian country, at a time when Islam was an exotic and little known faith in America. He was repudiating the integrationist racial agenda, in favour of a separatist agenda, at a time when the Civil Rights movement, led by Martin Luther King, for whom "integrationism" was a central shibboleth, was at the height of its prestige and power. So Cassius Clay angered both the white and the black liberals — and, most importantly, he was repudiating his American national identity in favour of another national identity, that of a member of the Nation of Islam, a nation whose borders had nothing to do with the borders of the US.

Up till this time, no black sportstar or celebrity had attempted to do or say anything like this without being crushed — as had Paul Robeson and WEB DuBois in an earlier generation. This stand was widely seen as a terrible tragedy for the young fighter. After all, he had the world at his feet and here he was, embracing an unpopular cause, thereby narrowing down his appeal. Or

so it was thought. The reality is that by joining the NoI and redefining who he was, Clay was walking into a new world — ultimately presenting himself to an international constituency — which changed what he meant to people all over the world and which changed his destiny inside and outside the ring.

Shortly after the fight he went to New York and was seen everywhere with Malcolm X. But only a week later Malcolm X announced his departure from the NoI, his famous break with Eliza Muhammad. Ali chose to stick with the NoI, and renounced his friendship with Malcolm. Why Cassius Clay did this is an interesting question. Malcolm was moving in a more political direction, away from the conservative and quietistic side of the NoI, towards a direct battle against racism. Ali — who had just been renamed as Ali by Eliza Muhammad — was looking for a refuge from racism, and that was what he had found in the NoI. Ali was, ironically, trying to avoid political engagement by sticking to close to the NoI and staying away from Malcolm.

**B**UT the 1960s did not allow Ali the luxury of avoiding politics. As the years went by he was drawn deeper into political controversy. Ali went to Africa in 1964, at a time when no American sportstar — of any colour — had even noticed that continent's existence. He went to Ghana where he was greeted by the President, Kwame Nkrumah, famous anti-colonialist and founder Pan African movement. Nkrumah was the first head of state to shake Ali's hand. It was to be another eleven years before a US President would deign to shake Ali's hand (since then, of course, they all want to shake his hand). In Ghana tens of thousands poured out to welcome Ali. They chanted his new name. Observers on this trip say that this was the moment Cassius Clay *really* became Muhammad Ali. Why did so many Ghanaians come to greet him — after all very few spoke English, almost none had access to a television? Why did they come to see Ali? First, boxing was popular there. The Heavyweight championship of the world was a pretty transparent idea and people were pleased that such an eminent figure had recognised their newly independent country. More importantly, Ali was an African American world champ who had repudiated his American identity and taken on an Islamic name and embraced his African patrimony. The Ghanaian masses knew that this was something new and exciting. They understood the meaning of this transformation long before it became apparent to American commentators.

The impact of this trip on Ali was tremendous. It was during this trip that Ali came to understand that he was accountable to a broader, international constituency, a constituency of the oppressed, and this new sense of accountability was to guide him over the next turbulent decade.

The test of his new identity came over Vietnam. By early 1966, the US was finding it

difficult to impose its will on the Vietnamese and the draft call was expanded; the Heavyweight champion of the world was reclassified as 1A, eligible for military service. Ali was told the news at a training camp in Miami and, badgered all day by the press, he came out with the line: "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong." It may have been a spontaneous remark, but he stuck to it over the following years and even turned it into a poem:

*Keep asking me, no matter how long,  
On the war in Vietnam,  
I'll still sing this song:  
I ain't got no quarrel with no Viet Cong.*

At the time the critics asked: what does Muhammad Ali know about Vietnam? He's being misled by black militants. But on the day he made his "no quarrel" remark he also amplified his feelings to a *New York Times* reporter: "Boxing is nothing, just satisfying to some bloodthirsty people. I am no longer Cassius Clay, a Negro from Kentucky. I belong to the world, the black world. I will always have

a home in Pakistan, in Algeria, in Ethiopia. This is more than money."

Here we see how Ali's redefinition of his personal identity had led to a political conclusion, and a confrontation with the state. The ordinary loyal American was expected to take on the enemies of the American government as his own personal enemies. Ali was moved by a different loyalty — a loyalty to a global constituency of colour whose interests were at odds with those of the US establishment. When Ali declared his alienation from the war in Vietnam, in early 1966, not one mainstream politician or newspaper of any kind had come out against the war. That month, February 1966, the Number One record was the truly execrable song called "The Ballad of the Green Berets", celebrating the special forces units who were at that moment running a systematic campaign of torture against the Vietnamese people. The response of the American establishment — both black and white — to Ali's impudence was virulent. There has probably never been a sports figure anywhere as thoroughly reviled as Muhammad Ali was in his homeland in 1966. He was routinely dubbed a traitor and a coward. It very rapidly became impossible for him to fight in America. The American establishment, in its infinite stupidity, chased Muhammad Ali out of the country — but in the end this only helped strengthen and enlarge his global audience.

**M**UHAMMAD Ali, for years to come, was the best known American individual opposed to the Vietnam war. Far more than more political figures — he had the greater recognition.

In 1966 he came to Britain to fight Henry Cooper in the Arsenal stadium. Although Wilson's government was backing the American war, public opinion was turning against the war and the British press was less disturbed in all sorts of way by Ali's presence, than were the Americans.

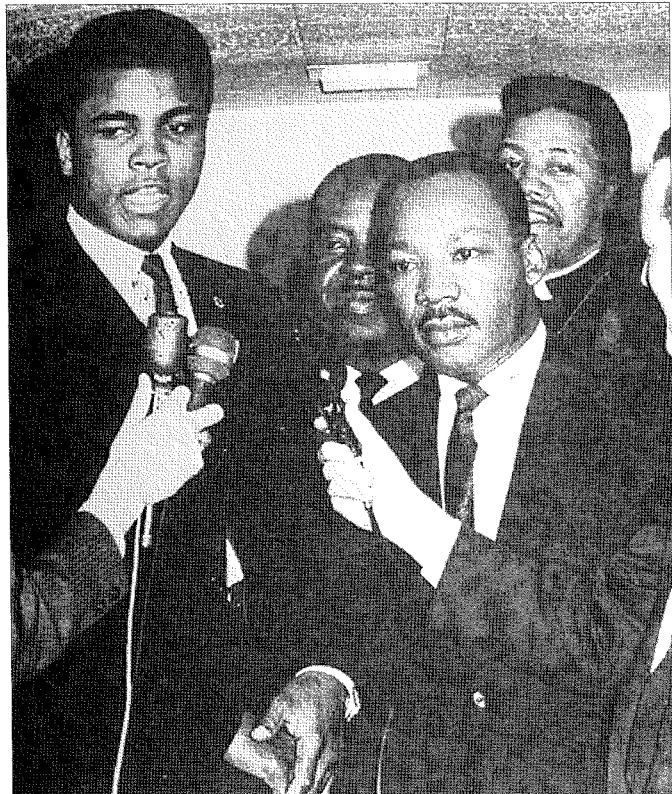
In 1966, in Britain, black communities were still establishing themselves, and just becoming conscious of themselves, just forming identities as diaspora communities. Mid-'60s Britain also saw the rise of "Paki bashing" — Britain's own unique contribution to the world-wide plague of racist violence. Of course "Paki bashing" was never about only attacking people known to be of Pakistani origin — but Pakistanis were singled out because their religion, dress and language, and because they were perceived by the racists — falsely — as a soft touch. In this context to the visit of the World Heavyweight champion — someone who was definitely not a soft touch — a fighting and proud Muslim — was hugely strengthening.

But Ali's impact in Britain went beyond Islam. He spent time with Michael X, a well known — notorious, if you like — black power activist in Britain at the time. With Michael X he toured playgrounds in Brixton and Notting Hill and he gave the seal of approval to the black consciousness movement which was spreading among the more militant second generation black youth. He was one of a series of visitors from the US who brought the language, the model and the style of the American black liberation struggle into Britain. Martin Luther King came in '64, Malcolm X came in '65, Ali came in '66, Stokely Carmichael came in '67 (and was promptly deported by Labour Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins).

When Ali returned to America in early 1967 he faced a daunting choice — give in, sign up with the army and cut a deal with them (it was always made plain to him that he would not have to fight), or, go to jail, loose his Heavyweight crown and never fight again. But his conscience would not let him back down.

Martin Luther King, after a period of equivocation which he later regretted, came out very strongly against the Vietnam war in early 1967. He was denounced by all his former liberal allies, people in the Democratic party, by the established black leadership. King was a Gandhian, a pacifist, and therefore believed that young American males should resist the draft. He looked around for a role

## MUHAMMAD ALI



Ali was lauded by Martin Luther King for being against the Vietnam war.

model and the only one he could find was the Heavyweight champion of the world, Muhammad Ali. King lauded Ali in his sermons and publicly embraced him, praising him for giving up everything for his conscience.

Nowadays it is a commonplace to say that Muhammad Ali is a role-model; but it should be remembered that the first two men to make this point were Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and that it was considered a shocking assertion at the time.

Ali was stripped of his title, charged, convicted, sentenced to five years in prison,

released on bail. His passport was taken away from him and for three and a half years he was not allowed to leave the United States and not allowed to fight at all. He got a top team of lawyers who tied up the state with legal challenges, and meanwhile, toured the campuses with his message of opposition to the war in Vietnam, of black pride, and also of the religious conservatism which was always part of the NoI. In 1967 no sane person would have predicted that Ali would ever fight again, no less reclaim the Heavyweight title, no less become universally adored as the most popular sporting figure of the twentieth century. And the reason is that no one predicted that the anti-war movement would grow to mass proportions. In 1970, the Supreme Court fudged the issue and allowed Ali escape conscription and return to the ring because at this stage it had become too risky to put him in jail. Remember that the invasion of Cambodia of spring 1970 was greeted by student strikes in universities, high schools that took out some 60-70% of all American youth. Black Power was in its heyday. The establishment could not afford to turn Ali into a super-martyr.

**D**URING the next few years Ali fought his way back and got his chance to reclaim his crown at the famous Rumble in the Jungle in Kinshasa, in the Congo — then known as Zaire — in 1974, against George Foreman. Once again he was the underdog. Ali was said to be too old, Foreman was said to be unbeatable. But Ali upset Forman and recaptured the title that had been unjustly

taken away from him. It was probably the most symbolically resonant contest in sporting history — just before he went into the ring Ali turned to the camera (and this bit is not in the film, *When We Were Kings*) and tried to define what he was doing. He said, "I'm fightin' for God and my people, I'm not fighting for fame or for money. I'm not fighting for me, I'm fighting for the black people on welfare, the black people who have no future, the black people who are wine-heads and dope addicts. I am a politician for Allah." Then he added, "I wish Lumumba was here to see me."

Patrice Lumumba was, of course, the first elected leader of the Congo after it received its independence from Belgium. Lumumba was one of the heroes of the wave of African independence struggles. He had met Malcolm X and overwhelmed him; Malcolm had clearly taught the young Cassius Clay who Lumumba was and what he meant. But Lumumba had been assassinated, in 1961, by the CIA and Mobutu — and Mobutu was, by this time, in 1974, the ruler of Zaire and indeed the paymaster for the Ali-Foreman Rumble in the Jungle.

This is one of a number of instructive ironies in Ali's career.

- The man inspired by the vision of Lumumba ends up as a puppet, not for the white paymasters of America, but for the black paymasters of Africa. Mobutu is one of the worst tyrants of the twentieth century and Ali helped, inadvertently, to stabilise his rule.

- The Rumble in the Jungle was also a major stepping stone in the career of Don King, who has ruled heavyweight boxing ever since then, and whose contribution is most aptly summarised by Tim Witherspoon — an excellent black boxer whose career was pretty much ruined by Don King — who called him "the master of black-on-black crime".

- It was also a stepping stone for Rupert Murdoch — even though he was not around at the time. This fight was held at 4am in Zaire — why? Because this is prime time in the US. This was one of the first big internationally televised sportscasts and one of the landmark events in the evolution of what might be called the global media-corporate-sport nexus. The fight helped alert big business to the huge commercial potential (in America) of African identity; they learned that they could commodify the militant blackness which Muhammad Ali had come to symbolise (at great cost to himself), that they could package and market gestures of rebellion.

Because Ali had put his body on the line for millions of people he did not know, in countries he had never visited, who spoke languages he did not understand, his global audience felt they had a share in his upset victory. His stance of conscience was one that translates across all boundaries, across all cultural barriers. But at this very moment the movement on the American streets was in retreat. Economic crisis was hitting the US ghettos — a crisis which has not lifted from those ghettos to this day.

Here you have the beginning of the great bifurcation between the black American sports stars and the communities they come from. Now we are told Michael Jordan is the new Muhammad Ali — because Michael Jordan is so famous. And it is true, Michael Jordan is very famous. He is incredibly rich. But in what possible way can he be a role model for the black communities who look to him? They simply don't have his money, and mostly don't have his talent. No one can emulate what Ali did in the ring, or his style outside it, but his act of solidarity and sacrifice, his resistance to the pressure of power, is something we can all draw strength from.

Michael Jordan is a symbol for Nike. Because he put conscience before his country, and before personal convenience, Muhammad Ali is a symbol for something infinitely richer.

**Mike Marqusee**

- Mike Marqusee was speaking at a meeting in London organised by *Action for Solidarity*. His book on Ali, *Redemption Song*, published by Verso, is available to buy via the Workers' Liberty website at [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org).

# The left during the Balkans war

*"An individual, a group, a party or a class that is capable of 'objectively' picking its nose while it watches men drunk with blood, and incited from above, massacring defenceless people is condemned by history to rot and become work-eaters while it is still alive."*

LD Trotsky, February 1913 [*On the Balkan Atrocities*]

**N**ATO's war to compel Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) to accept a dictated settlement between Serbia and the people of its internal colony, Kosova, started one year ago. During the war (March to June 1999) much of the British left supported Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia, on the grounds that it was being attacked by "imperialism" and must be "defended". Most of those leftists who did not support Yugoslavia, supported NATO, on the ground that only NATO could stop Yugoslav genocide against the Kosovar Albanians (over 90% of the people there).

Thus the left disintegrated into supporters of one or other of the warring camps.

*Workers' Liberty*, backed while agreeing with the pro-NATO camp that the fate of the Kosovars was the issue in the war, and that the defeat of Milosevic — even by NATO — was desirable, and agreeing with the pro-Milosevicites that NATO is a reactionary and militaristic monstrosity, neither Yugoslavia nor NATO. We refused to choose either NATO or Milosevic as a lesser evil that deserved to be backed politically by working-class socialists. We focused on such slogans as "Yugoslav Army out of Kosova; Arm the KLA (Kosova Liberation Army); No Trust in NATO Bombs or Troops; Independence for Kosova". We refused to go along with the left-organised pro-Milosevic "anti-war" movement.

One year on, the pro-Milosevicite vicarious Serb chauvinists have, to judge by the April issue of the SWP magazine, *Socialist Review*, learned nothing. In *Socialist Review*, the academic thug Alex Callinicos (York University Professor of Politics) is still fantasising and lying about what happened and why, just as he did during the war. Who was responsible for the Serb expulsion of over half of Kosova's people? NATO, of course! Look at the way the Albanians now behave towards the Serb minority in Kosova! It would be better if maybe 20 times as many Albanians had been driven out or killed? The KLA is vicious and chauvinist! Therefore? The Albanian 90% of Kosova's people lose their collective rights? And so on. This is spluttering gibberish, not any sort of serious politics, least of all Marxist politics.

The collapse of the left during the Balkan War into on one side, vicarious Serb, *anti-Albanian* chauvinism sustained by blatant lies and misrepresentation and, on the other, into political prostration before NATO was a major event in our recent history. Here, in an extract from the forthcoming book, *In An Age of Barbarism*, Sean Matgamna analyses the issues involved.

**O**N the evening of Wednesday 24 March 1999, NATO launched the first of what would be 11 weeks of continuous bombing of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). What was NATO's political objective?

The big bourgeoisie's policy in Europe in the last half-century has been to unite Europe on a basis of formal equality between its component parts. Europe is more united now than for 1,500 years. The European Union is expanding eastwards. It wants stability on its south-eastern borders. Of course the capitalists who rule Europe want to exploit the Balkans! Their central quarrel with Serbia was that the great de-stabilising force in the region throughout the '90s was Serb chauvinism, fostered by the Serb state (Yugoslavia). NATO's objective when it started bombing Serbia was to force the Serb government to accept the "solution" worked out by the big powers (and imposed on the Kosovar Albanians) at Rambouillet, and, incidentally, to stop the Serb chauvinist drive against ethnic Albanians (more than 90% of the people) in Serbia's colony, Kosova. In the previous 11 months, as guerrilla war for Kosovan liberation erupted, perhaps a quarter of a million Albanians had been uprooted by the Yugoslav (Serbian) army and its paramilitary auxiliaries. By way of a big-power police action, NATO wanted to prevent the Balkans being further destabilised by the escalating Serb-Albanian war in Kosova.

Rambouillet proposed that Kosovar autonomy within the Yugoslav state should be restored. Kosova, whatever its people wanted, would remain in the Serbian state. It would have Serbian police to maintain "security" and Serbian soldiers controlling its borders. The Albanian Kosova Liberation Army would be disarmed.

Immediately the bombing started, there was an enormous escalation of the Serb drive against the Albanian Kosovars. The Serb-state leader, Slobodan Milosevic, it seems, thought that the bombing was a mere gesture, that it would not last more than a week or two. The bombing was not the cause of, but adroitly seized-upon a cover for, an already decided and prepared attempt at a genocidal — "drive them out" — solution to Serbia's "Kosova problem". With demonic energy Serbian ethnic cleansers attacked Kosova's Albanians, killing, burning, raping and forcing them out of their homes at gunpoint. Within a week, more than half of Kosova's two million ethnic Albanians had been uprooted and many killed. In Kosova's capital, 200,000 people were driven out at gunpoint; Pristina became a ghost town.

The self-designated "humanitarians" of NATO expected, it seems, that Milosevic would cave in after a few days' or a couple of weeks' bombing, as he had in Bosnia in 1995. Maybe they allowed for a certain amount of intensified massacre, reflecting that it would help make the Kosovars more pliant. They had no contingency plan for Milosevic holding out as long as he did. *Everything NATO did suggested incoherence, blundering and political and military incompetence.*

Alchemists, witch doctors, amateurs of world government, NATO deployed a crude and savage weapon against the Serbian people, most of whom did not know the scale of Serbia's slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Kosova. It threw bombs at Serbia from a safe distance, high in the sky, while the carnage in Kosova escalated. Their talk about saving the Kosovar Albanians came to seem like cynical mockery of those inclined to take what they said at face value.

Committed by Rambouillet to continued Yugoslavian rule in



A large part of those who took part in the one-sided anti-war marches in London were outright Serb chauvinist. Here one of them carries his *Socialist Worker* poster — on which he has stuck a leaflet proclaiming eternal Serb ownership of Kosova, because of a battle there in 1389 — in one hand. He gives the Serb chauvinist sign with the other.

Kosova, NATO was, at the start of this war, potentially a future partner of Milosevic — if Milosevic had capitulated after a few days or a week — in a deal at the Albanians' expense. Only Milosevic's obstinacy created an outcome where Serbian sovereignty over Kosova has become entirely notional, and Kosova Serbs are being driven out by Albanian chauvinists. Even now, Kosova is not independent, but NATO-ruled — and likely to remain that way long after the Kosovars want NATO to go.

II

WHEN NATO bombs were raining on Serbia, it was necessary to characterise NATO for what it was, and to refuse to give it political credence, political confidence or political support. But was NATO the main or only enemy. For the people of Kosova the immediate difference between NATO and Milosevic was the difference between autonomy (even in a truncated or NATO-ruled Kosova) and being killed or driven out of their homeland. Between NATO and Milosevic, the difference was one of life and death — death for an unknowable number of persons and for the Kosovar ethnic Albanian people as an entity with a homeland of their own. For over 90% of the people of Kosova that was no small difference.

But the early bombs gave no direct protection to the Albanians? No, but to assert that sustained NATO bombing of Serbia could not affect what happened in Kosova was evident nonsense. The question was whether, by the time bombing took effect, there would be any Albanians left in Kosova.

Once the NATO-Yugoslavia (Serbia) war and the enormous escalation of Serb ethnic cleansing in Kosova had been started, for the people of Kosova only one of two things was possible. Either NATO would impose its will on Milosevic and force the Serbian government to withdraw its army from Kosova. Or, NATO would give up and leave Milosevic, immensely strengthened by his victory over NATO, with a more or less free hand to go on killing and "ethnic cleansing" the Albanians of Kosova.

THOSE were the only possibilities in the situation. The realities of this situation defined for socialists and democrats, and even for decent liberals, what was paramount in it: the fate of the people of Kosova. Of course, had the Kosovar Albanians been a mere excuse, for example, for an attempt to subjugate the Serbian people, that might not have been so clear cut. But nothing like that was involved. NATO is NATO and it has world-wide concerns, very few of them benign or "humanitarian" — but here for big capitalist reasons it was engaging in a limited police action on the European Union's borders to force Milosevic to desist in Kosova and accept some degree of self-rule for Serbia's long-oppressed internal

colony.

A socialist answer? The socialist programme — unity of Serb and Albanian workers to achieve a democratic solution to the conflict — presupposed vast political changes in the attitude of the Serb workers. It was no answer to the immediate short-term threat of destruction facing over 90% of Kosova's people. International socialism disposed of no forces here, where there would be either a *short term* rescue of the Kosovars from their plight, or there would be *none*.

III

FOR the left this was an unusually complex and difficult situation: attempted genocide in Kosova as NATO rained bombs on targets in Yugoslavia (Serbia); bombing "on behalf of" the ethnic Albanians that gave them no protection from the uprooting, burning, raping and murdering Serb forces of occupation in Serbia's internal colony; nothing but NATO's relentless airborne destruction raining down on Serbia to stop the complete and final "cleansing" of the Albanians from Kosova; other than NATO, no hope at all that those driven over the borders or into the high hills would ever return — these were the elements (with the characters in our traditional political theatre in part breaking loose from the stereotypes) of the complex situation which in the 11 weeks of war plunged the left into the greatest moral and political crisis which it has experienced for decades.

This was a situation to which no-one could rely on old reflexes. There was no "anti-imperialist" political painting-by-



numbers kit to help you work out a coherent policy here. The issues had to be thought through concretely, the facts and possibilities related to socialist and democratic first principles and priorities.

For socialists who did not want to settle into the eternal semi-sleep of those sectarians who stand aside from politics and limit their activity to the preaching of “Marxist” general historical truths and grand abstractions, thereby turning Marxism from a guide to action into an outside-it-all critical moral philosophy — for these *political* socialists, in this situation there were only two rational responses. Each roughly corresponded to the division between reform and revolutionary socialists. One was to actively support NATO. The other was to maintain political distance and political independence from NATO, keeping in mind what NATO is, without being blinded by that as to what was really going on in the Balkans and who was playing what role there. These, on the facts, were, I repeat, the only *rational* working class socialist responses.

But from the beginning most of the British left threw themselves into a frantic effort to whip up an “anti-war” movement under the sole slogan “Stop the war, stop the bombing”. A few days after 24 March, a large gathering at the Friends’ Meeting House on Euston Road in London set the tone that would last for the duration of the war. No “anti-war” speaker said that Serbia was waging a would-be genocidal war on the Albanian Kosovars, nobody said anything about them or their rights — in the first place, their right to live. A radically false picture of what was happening in the Balkans was presented. Alex Callinicos blamed NATO for Milosevic’s drive against the Albanian Kosovars! (Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, therefore Britain was to blame for the Holocaust?) The Catholic ex-Bishop Bruce Kent dismissed Defence Minister George Robertson, in the tone of a bourgeois snob discussing a chimney sweep, as “that dread-ful li-tt-le man” — to applause from this left-wing audience! That same evening, at an anti-war demonstration in Glasgow, SWPers chanted “NATO out of Kosova!” NATO out... At no point in the whole war did the “peace campaign” call for the Yugoslavian/Serbian army to get out of Kosova. At “anti war” meetings all over the country they bitterly opposed the demand. The only job of socialists was to oppose NATO. The politics of the mad house!

It was right and necessary to preach distrust of NATO; to remember that NATO had backed Serbia keeping a grip on Kosova since the current Yugoslav crisis started in 1988, and in the 1995 Dayton Agreement; to remember that NATO had maintained an arms embargo to stop the Bosniacs defending themselves against Serb “ethnic cleansing”; to recall how murderous the UN “safe havens” in Bosnia proved for the Bosniacs; to warn that NATO, with its hypocritical, big-power double-standards and pursuit of self-interest, might rat on the Kosovars now too; that NATO had been consistently against Kosovar self-determination. No trust in NATO, bombs or troops!

But the idea was preposterous that the greatest crime — indeed, the only issue — was NATO bombing, and not the mass murder and expulsions being inflicted on the ethnic Albanians by the Serb state and its Kosova-Serb accomplices. When in the first days of the war more than half the Kosovars had already been uprooted and driven out, to “forget” about that was a political crime.

How was it possible for those whose instincts and anti-imperialist principles generated in them a strong desire to oppose NATO, to oppose what NATO was trying to do in Kosova *where, if NATO now cried off, the Kosovar Albanian entity would be eliminated in days or weeks?* By almost entirely ignoring (apart from “the bombing”) or blatantly lying about, both the basic politics of the war and what was happening in Kosova. By myopically focussing on “*who*” — NATO — and ignoring “*what*” — an attempt at Serb ethnic-imperialist genocide on one side and a NATO police action on the other. The fetish of “anti-imperialism”

combined with refusal to face up to the real situation in the Balkans, and indifference — at best — to the fate of the Kosovars, would for the “anti-imperialist” left produce a terrible set of political conclusions.

Of course for Marxists it is not only “what”, but, and fundamentally, also “whom”: yet it can never only be a question of who and whom. For generations the Stalinist and official Trotskyist left has had such an approach, in both its negative and positive varieties: positively supporting or silently tolerating and making excuses for Stalinist, Khomeinist and other horrors because of “who” their perpetrators were thought to be — a “workers’ state”, an anti-imperialist state — and what in history they supposedly represented; negatively opposing and self-blindingly demonising the enemies of the “good side” even when on the face of it they were less repellent than the predesignated “progressive side”. The category of “*what*” too is essential, if we are to avoid an unbridled subjectivism and the politics of delusion and wishful thinking that have so often misled sections of the left.

## IV

**I**N all the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, Serbia had operated by the export of people; not by the seizure of colonies and peoples for exploitation but by the seizure of territory to be cleared of its population and “planted” with Serbs. That had been the guiding idea of Belgrade policy in Kosova in 1912-13, in the 1920s and 30s, and in the mid 1950s, though for various reasons they never managed to carry it through to completion. Imperialism in history is not just monopoly capitalism or Stalinist bureaucratic imperialism. History knows many different forms of imperialism. Serbia has behaved as a primitive ethno-imperialism akin to the tribal imperialism of the Dark Ages — and to the general pattern of Russian imperialism in the 19th century and up to 1917.

To shout “Stop the war — stop the bombing” could, in the circumstances, mean stop only one part of the war and let Milosevic intensify the Serb war on the Albanian Kosovars. Milosevic refusal to stop that war and give Kosova autonomy was the cause of NATO’s war. Milosevic could have ended NATO bombing at any time — as he finally did.

“Stop the war — stop the bombing” could not but be only a demand that NATO stop attempting to coerce Milosevic. To concentrate on opposing NATO’s war and NATO’s bombing tactics, was, and could not but be, to side with Milosevic on the issue in dispute between Serbia and NATO — Kosova — and therefore to side against the people of Serbia’s colony, and with Serbian ethnic imperialism in the name of opposition to NATO. It was to make oneself advocate, herald and propagandist outrider for a Serb ethnic triumph in Kosova.

Even if NATO is classified as imperialist and Serbia as non-imperialist (or even as “socialist”!) in what way was Serbia in relation to Kosova not worse than NATO and the societies whose instrument NATO was? In the name of exactly what alternative should, or could, NATO’s actions be denounced and opposed?

From the pacifist position that war is never justified? But Marxists consider pacifism a treacherous delusion. Some wars are justified. Some wars are progressive. We wage war and in certain circumstances we advocate war (for example, we advocated a war of national defence and liberation in China after 1931).

Because NATO is part of the armature of the world-class predators who starve the Third World — a military alliance of rich countries who bleed the peoples of the poor countries — therefore it could have no moral right to stop Serbia’s attempt at genocide in Kosova? Nobody but the Kosovar Albanians had a right to take such a position.

Because NATO operates blatantly hypocritical double standards in such matters, for example condoning NATO member Turkey’s terrible persecutions of the Kurds? So we call on them to be





Russia in Chechnya, NATO in... Kosova? It was of course Serbia that tried to do in Kosova what Russia is doing in Chechnya (and indeed much more). This *Socialist Worker* cartoon is proof that a well known warning to children is, in politics anyway, true: self-abuse damages your eyes and rots your brain!

consistent hypocrites? All or nothing — if they don't stop Turkey butchering Kurds, they have no right to stop Milosevic?

Because, really, Kosova was not the issue? But there was no other issue in the war! The issue was Serbia's policy in Kosova and, during the war — a war that Serbia's rulers could have ended by agreeing to take their army out of their Kosova colony — its escalated attempt at genocide there.

V

LET us try systematically to categorise the left's responses to the realities of the war in the Balkans. The responses fell into three broad categories. Each of these had sub-divisions and there was some overlapping between elements within the categories.

1. Those who said that Serbia was on no level faced with subjugation or the loss of any of the rights it was entitled to claim for itself, and, therefore, that the central question in the NATO-Serbia war was Kosova. This broad group sub-divided into:

- a. Those who supported NATO's bombing.
- b. Those who also wanted NATO troops sent to fight their way in, to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosova.
- c. Those (*Red Pepper*) who wanted an immediate stop to bombing, and NATO ground troops instead.
- d. Those revolutionary socialists (*Workers' Liberty*) who recognising the realities in Kosova, and, wishing for the defeat of the Serbian state in Kosova, nonetheless refused to endorse or take responsibility for NATO, or express any degree of confidence in it or its component states. NATO would act, or not, in line with the interests of the ruling classes of NATO's states. Calls for NATO to pursue this or that tactic had no power to affect what happened and could only disorient those socialists adopting such an approach and those who listened to them. We argued for independent, working-class politics — in the first place, by assessment and criticism of both NATO and Milosevic.

The first three sub-groups were essentially the camp of (the better) reform socialists. Their difference on this point with the

(Third Camp) revolutionary socialists who also saw not NATO or imperialism in general but Kosova as the central issue, was one expression of the different attitudes of revolutionaries and reformists to the state. To one, it is a class state which, even when — for its own reasons and with its own methods — it does something desirable, is not our state; to the other, it is something above classes that, with enough pressure, can be influenced to do what people of good will want.

2. Those who said that the central question was "NATO imperialism", "the war" and "the bombing". These came together to form the campaign to "Stop the War" — NATO's war. In effect, this was an actively — and in the main a deliberately — pro-Serb movement. Its organisers worked to ensure

that it was, by rigorously voting down proposals at their "anti-war" meetings to add to their programme demands for the withdrawal of the Serb army from Kosova. Their street protests against the war included raucous contingents of Serb chauvinists (who, in fact, always formed a big proportion of the demonstrators). In the good old anti-Vietnam War days of the '60s and '70s, when we shouted "Victory to the Vietnamese NLF", and many chanted "Ho, Ho, Ho-Chi Minh, we will fight and we will win" (while some of us responded, "Ho, Ho, Ho-Chi Minh, how many Trots did you do in?"), they would have gloried in the slogan "Victory to Serbia" and maybe chanted appropriate ditties: "Ho, Ho, Milosevic, *love* that murd'rin' son-of-a-bitch!".

Many points of view merged to make up this pro-Serb state, anti-war movement, combining and overlapping to reinforce each other.

The distinct elements in the coalition were, broadly:

- i. Pacifism — war is never justified. The ignominious conclusion was: leave the Kosovars to their fate. Faced with two inextricably connected wars, NATO's on Milosevic and Milosevic's on the Albanian Kosovars, they chose to see only one. They had an urge to minimise the horror of Serbia's attempted genocide. They could not but, in the circumstances, end up to one degree or another as Serbia's apologists. Their 'anti-war' effort was one of Serbia's military assets.
- ii. Stalinist and quasi-Stalinist attitudes. Milosevic's Socialist Party is the old Stalinist party. This point of view drew on old, hungering reflexes and instincts of loyalty to the vanished USSR and its empire: the Kosovars challenging the unity of the Yugoslav (Serbian) still "progressive" state deserved to be dealt with as harshly as necessary. This was a hard, blinkered, unteachable pro-Serbia element. Their paper, the *Morning Star* reported the conflict from a Serbian-chauvinist, anti-Albanian, Milosevicite point of view.
- iii. Biodegraded post-Trotsky "Trotskyist" anti-imperialists, "defencist" of Yugoslavia. The *New Left Review*, which is run by Mandelites and quasi-Mandelites predisposed to side with "progressive" Serbia, and some of them inclined to relive the anti-

Vietnam war agitation of 30 years ago, provided “theoretical” reasons for refusing to define the conflict as one centrally involving the fate of the Kosovars. Readers were taken up above the world to somewhere out in the political stratosphere and initiated into the secret knowledge of what was “really” going on among the component parts of NATO. Cloudy speculative stuff, designed to prove that Kosova was not the issue and to justify siding with Serbia: and even if every detail were correct the political conclusions would not follow. Kosova *was* the issue.

All those in category ii were old, uncritical or critical, supporters of the USSR bloc, acting on “defencist” reflexes after what they used to “defend” in the Stalinist bloc is long gone.

vi. Anti-Americanism. Socialists have no reason to give credence to the pretensions of the US to be the world’s cop. But the anti-Americanism tapped into by the “peace campaign” is an old stagnant pool left behind by the Stalinist flood-tide. Oddly, since the main enemy was supposed to be “at home”, the dominant trend of the anti-war campaign was far more anti-American than it was anti-British government. There was also some anti-Germanism, overlapping with Little Englandism and hostility to European unity. Tony Benn especially embodied this viewpoint. They mixed reminiscences of World War Two with resentment of Germany’s renewal and its present position in the European Union.

vii. Purely negative “anti-imperialism”. “Imperialism” inheres in advanced capitalism and, therefore, in NATO, irrespective of its policy and its actions and no matter what the policy and activity of its opponent may be. What was NATO’s goal in the Balkans? Stability, so that capital can be safe there. If, in pursuit of that, they stop, or even limit, the slaughter and uprooting of the Albanian Kosovars, who, except native or adoptive Serb chauvinists, would not be glad of it? Saying that did not involve forgetting what NATO is, or demand of socialists that they preach trust in NATO or in the capitalist states enrolled in NATO.

In the war in the Balkans the anti-imperialist left were the victims of the (two) *campist* delusion that the only possible positive conclusion from opposition on principle to NATO was to side with Serbian ethnic imperialism in Kosova. The truly imperialist element in NATO’s attitude to the Kosovars, if it were to come out in an attempt to enforce a deal with Milosevic at the expense of the Kosovars, would logically have the support of these “anti-imperialists”. For 11 weeks, their paper, *Socialist Worker* vied with the Stalinist *Morning Star* for the role of the most shameless most dishonest and least inhibited pro-Milosevic war-propaganda sheet.

viii. Incoherently expressed negativism towards advanced capitalism — no matter what the alternative. This was central to the “first and foremost anti-imperialist” left. It was not anti-imperialism but a pre-Marx attitude to capitalism — a latter day approximation to the politics of those whom Marx and Engels once called reactionary socialists: people so repelled by capitalism that they looked to reactionary and regressive pre-capitalist “alternatives.” In terms of the history of socialism, it was a prehistoric, pre-*Communist Manifesto* anti-capitalist sectarianism that in practice led to support of Dark Ages Serbian ethnic imperialism.

(A few months later, the self-same people were, and rightly, passionate supporters of the East Timorese when they faced the formidable threat of being “cleansed” out.)

Key to this idea, basic in SWP and other neo-Trotskyist thinking, is that capitalism now cannot be progressive. In various forms, this idea has been a cancer eating at and politically rotting post-Trotsky-Trotskyism.

There is a particle of truth here — drowned in confusion and hysterical half-truth and quarter-truth. Insofar as socialism is objectively possible, and *measured against that*, capitalism is utterly

reactionary. But capitalism possesses the world; it has not stopped developing and not everything it does is reactionary or regressive. It has generated tremendous new technologies, it has produced and educated vast working classes and great new cities. In its own exploitative, bureaucratic way it has more or less united Europe. We do not politically support the capitalist politicians in this “progressive” work of capital; but we do not cry out to stop it either. We defend the working class and oppressed peoples *within* capitalist development. Nor, categorising it as imperialism, do we side against it with its more reactionary opponents.

To think — because in comparison to the socialism that might be capitalism is reactionary — that therefore socialists take up an attitude of abstention and negativism towards all its aspects is to follow in the track of the utopian socialists like Robert Owen. They believed that humanity had only been waiting for their own socialist revelation, and that now all that was needed was to counterpose their ideas to capitalism. They had no idea of historical development, of building up a working class movement within capitalist development. That approach was one of the contributions of Marxism.

ix. Insular indifference to the fate of the Kosovars. This was common to, and a serious part of, all the other strands.

**A**LL these elements and more were in the SWP pamphlet, *Stop the War*, a classic of its kind. (Unsigned, it was reputed to be the work of the York University academic, Alex Callinicos.) It is full of misrepresentation of reality, of lies of omission and lies by arranging facts so as to prevent the reader putting them in their proper relationship to each other, it hides the important things in the clutter. It minimised the enormity of Serbia’s drive against the Kosovars, presenting such things as everyday affairs in the world, rooting and building the SWP’s own hypocrisy now on the foundations of the habitual hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, while, of course, denouncing it — in the circumstances, hypocritically. It quibbled pedantically: is this “genocide”? It shouted down straw men, piously insisting that this was not another Holocaust or Milosevic another Hitler. They used detailed comparisons of Hitler’s factory-organised slaughter with Milosevic in Kosova in a way that could only be intended to minimise what was happening in Kosova and “exonerate” Milosevic. A piece of work in the Stalinist tradition — the sort of thing George Orwell analysed in “Politics and the English Language” — this anti-war, pro-Milosevic campaign seems to have been somebody’s brainstorm, based on the delusion that, with pamphlets like this, and Socialist Worker’s *Sun*-level coverage of the war, they could lie a big anti-war movement into existence.

**3**Thirdly, there was, so to speak, an “oxymoron tendency”, which sought refuge from the dilemmas outlined above by hiding them in an incoherent pastiche of the contradictory stances of the first two categories. In contrast to the British SWP they could not bring themselves to back Milosevic against the Kosovars just because NATO was against him; but neither could they bring themselves to do other than denounce NATO and what it was doing, because of what NATO in general is: so they wound up giving support, but shame-faced support, to Milosevic.

They too raised the slogans of the Hands-Off-Milosevic peace campaign — “Stop the Bombing”, “Stop the War” — combined with “Self-Determination for Kosova”. This combination of two positions might in other circumstance have made sense as long-term propaganda. Here that was impossible. For the Kosovar Albanians there would be no long term, if Milosevic was not stopped soon. The two slogans and the contradictory political impulses behind them, so easily combined on patient paper, flatly contradicted and cancelled each other out in reality. “Stop the Bombing” was an immediate demand on a defined agency, NATO;



Anti-war demo in Paris: the only concrete slogan is Stop NATO's bombing. Its equivalent on the "other side" was: Serb army out of Kosova. The political slogans here amount to a shamefaced "subtle" version of what the pro-Serb SWP-Stalinist left expressed crudely in Britain.

the anti-war agitation was an immediate force in the war — on Milosevic's side — agitating for what could not but mean give Milosevic a free hand in Kosova. One slogan — the immediately applicable, specifically focused one — in practice would have led to the destruction of the people whose right to self-determination was championed in the other slogan. This "solution" to the difficulties by jumbling and juggling mutually exclusive slogans could satisfy only those who either did not want to, or simply could not, think it through. (See, for example, the ridiculous articles by Alan Thornett in *Socialist Outlook*.) Nor could horror at the typically NATOist tactics — bombing — justify such a Pontius Pilate approach to the Kosovar Albanians. Marxists do not judge wars by military technology or tactics but by a political assessment of the political aims being pursued in the war — here, fundamentally, an assessment of what both NATO and Milosevic were doing.

In Britain, the "oxymoron tendency" consisted of a number of groups with little presence and small influence. They half-saw the dilemmas and the alternatives but refused to choose. Saying everything, they had nothing specific to say except hands off Milosevic — "Stop the War, Stop the Bombing".

In Europe and the USA this approach had substantial support. In France, an enormous demonstration combining *Lutte Ouvriere*, the *Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire* and others, marched behind Arlette Laguiller, Alain Krivine and a banner with three slogans: 1) Stop the Bombing, 2) Down with Milosevic, 3) Self-determination for Kosova. Essentially this was a half-ashamed version of the immediate politics of Britain's vicarious Serb patriots. Only "Stop the Bombing" was immediate, concrete, specific. About Kosova there was nothing specific — "Serb army out of Kosova", for example, the equivalent of "Stop the Bombing". This was an evasive fudge: strictly speaking, a centrist fudge.

In the second and third categories were to be found the big bulk of those — SWPers, official "Trotskyists", various types of neo-Stalinists — who call themselves Marxists and revolutionary socialists. In the USA, "Against the Current" took a similar approach, unable to refrain from focusing on NATO tactics, and thus getting themselves very politically lost.

In the mainly reform subgroups i and ii of the first category, individual revolutionary socialists were also to be found. They at least had the merit of thinking about the real issues and responding rationally as politically and morally serious people to the issues in the conflict.

## VI

THE pro-NATO elements of the left were animated by a praiseworthy urge to face the realities of the situation, and by refusal to be irresponsible towards the Kosovar Albanians. Nonetheless, they gutted themselves of political independence

in order that they could engage in an empty exercise in anticipatory mimicry. Their incantations and advice to NATO — "send ground troops in now" — were as inconsequential to the Kosovar Albanians and to what NATO for its own reasons did and did not do, as is the witch-doctor dressing up in green to promote the coming of spring.

The idea that by, for example, calling for ground troops to protect the Albanians we could tell the great capitalist powers to act as we socialists would act in Serbia and Kosova, or anywhere else, is the idea that bourgeois regimes can substitute for the working class and, further and more fantastic still, that we can by "public opinion" force them to, and control what they do, and how they do it.

The concept of "critical support" — essential for Marxists in relating to workers' struggles and working-class organisations, national liberation movements, and democratic battles under bad or treacherous leadership — made no sense in relation to NATO. Working-class socialists could not conceivably "intervene" in NATO's war to push its democratic element further and vie for leadership. In any "critical support", the "criticism" was without grip and the politically self-disarming "support" everything. It was an impulse of mystical self-protestation and political self-disavowal, in the superstitious hope that NATO could thereby be made a reliable surrogate for the socialist forces that, for now, do not exist in the Balkans. It could only cut against the central task of working-class socialists — building a politically independent "Third Camp" of the working class and oppressed peoples.

It was a fantasy of directing affairs, rooted in the real weakness of the left and, politically, of the working class. The psychology that calls on the capitalist powers to do what we are too weak to do is the same psychology that in different times and circumstances led so many post-Trotsky Trotskyists to develop delusions in the Stalinist parties and bureaucratic states.

Watching the agony of the Kosovars — or the East Timorese — naturally produces in decent people the urge to shout out "instructions" to the rulers: essentially it is an ineffective cry of protest and, subconsciously, a belief in word magic. It is like the

shouts of the mother who from a distance helplessly watches her child stepping out in front of a speeding car. It is a call for saviours from on high. Its only effect is to express our real weakness and add to it a political confusion — about what the role of socialists must be and what revolutionary socialist politics is — that will forever keep us weak.

Anti-NATO pro-Serbs were the mirror twins of those who called on NATO to act for them — two sides of the same coin. Both represented aspects of the disintegration of socialism and of the lack of an independent, working class outlook. Socialists have to work to recreate and rebuild a working class socialism against both these currents. We won't do it by calling on NATO - no more than in the past 'calling on' Stalinist formations - to do what we as yet are too weak to do.

## VII

SOME have argued that the position *Workers' Liberty* developed from the analysis that the fate of the people of Kosova was the central issue in the war was really a "lesser evilist" support for NATO, stopping short only of explicit political support. The decisive question here is whether our assessment of what was happening, and why was right or wrong. The rest is malice or misunderstanding.

Are Marxists not allowed to assess reality and *say* what we think is the best outcome in a given situation? Does making and expressing that assessment mean we thereby, by that act, give political "support" to the agency which can secure the lesser evil, and "take political responsibility" for it?

But that would rule out all real analysis of the quantitative and qualitative gradations in the Balkan or any other reality, and confine the political work of Marxists to reiterating pre-fabricated dogmatic abstractions and generalities about, in this case, NATO and imperialism. Or should we analyse a given political-military situation but talk about it only in private?

But more or less all — or all public — political conclusions would then be fixed in advance, everything immediate, concrete, specific ruled out, all configurations of current events beyond our ken. Analysis of gradations in reality would at best be an esoteric activity whose conclusions must always be kept private in deference to the pre-set "epochal" generalities and characterisations

That is the approach that for 60 years has rendered the kitsch Trotskyist press habitually more stupid than the serious bourgeois press and sometimes downright mad. My conclusions are already drawn up; details don't matter; concrete reality doesn't matter. Lenin, who used to insist that "the truth is always concrete", knew better.

Political "lesser-evilism" is something other than assessing grades and qualities in reality and publicly identifying the lesser evils. To adopt lesser-evilism is to limit and *confine* ourselves, and what we advocate, to the lesser-evil options available under the existing order and the present rulers at a given moment. It is to subordinate the prime socialist task of working to transcend the present system and its limitations, to the immediate politics of those who are looked to as providing the best currently available option. It is to adopt as ours the lesser evil within the existing system — and thereby politically to make peace with that system, draining away that intransigence against the whole capitalist entity which is the *sine qua non* of revolutionary socialist politics. It is to cut down and abandon our own identity and our own long-term perspectives. It is to merge our political identity with that of those within the present ruling circles who represent the "lesser-evil" option.

The revolutionary socialist project, root and branch anti-capitalism, would thereby turn into its opposite: a liberal movement for a better capitalism. Why? Political "lesser-evilism" could not but infect those we should educate in intransigence towards the ruling class with conciliatory attitudes towards some of them

and confidence in them when they are — as inevitably they sometimes do — for their own reasons, and in their own way, doing something which for now is a lesser evil than the available bourgeois alternative. With such an approach we could only ruin our own ability to act as an autonomous force trying to shape the future, even if, for now, we can only make independent socialist propaganda.

Yes, to achieve anything at all, working-class socialists must build on and preach hostility to and intransigence towards, all factions of the ruling class. But *within that intransigent opposition*, we examine the issues honestly and concretely. We tell the truth to the working class, including the truth of complex things like the Balkan War. We cannot preach independent socialist politics to intelligent people except on the basis of an honest assessment of reality. We cannot do it by requiring people to close their eyes to options and alternatives within bourgeois-dominated political and military reality now. The case for fundamental "Third Camp" intransigence against the NATO powers even when they are trying to stop genocide in Kosova is not to pretend that the bourgeois powers acting to stop genocide — because they fear major destabilisation of the region — are intrinsically so evil that even a Milosevicite primitive Serb imperialist state attempting genocide on the Kosovars is compared with them the lesser evil. We should not require those whom we try to convince of socialist ideas to close their eyes to reality. Otherwise, exposure to the facts will inevitably sober them and "unconvince" them and send them back to the camp of the bourgeoisie, forswearing all future "dogmatism". If these are the only possibilities such a conclusion would be the correct one.

## VIII

TO sum up, both the backers of NATO who called for ground troops to protect the Albanian Kosovars and the anti-war (anti-NATO's war) pro-Serbian left chose political "lesser evilism". Both acted as if they had never heard of the idea that socialists must work to develop the working class as an independent political force and in the first place, to make the left itself consistently independent.

Independence consists first of all in making an independent socialist analysis and judgement. But if you start out with the belief that you must negate, invert, your own ruling class policy, turn their policy inside out, support its opposite, give aid and comfort to its enemies — to a Slobodan Milosevic or Saddam Hussein — and make propaganda in defence of them because they are our ruling class's enemies, no matter what they are or what they do — then you can't honestly appraise the issues. You let the ruling class determine your operational view of reality. To relate to the real world of political and military affairs only negatively is not to relate to it rationally or independently. Socialist politics is not only a negation of the policy of the capitalists. It is a positive programme, or it is a delusion.

In wars, Marxists *never* line up according to who fired the first shot, who is "the aggressor" and so on, or on essentially pacifist grounds that shooting, bombing or whatever are inhuman. We work from a *political* analysis of the real issues in the war, on the politics of which a given war is the continuation and military expression.

If what so much of the left did last year was 'anti-imperialism', it was grotesquely selective anti-imperialism. If it was a protest against the general horrors of war, again it was grotesquely selective, because of the 'anti-war' camp's silence about the greatest horrors of the war — the war by the Serb army and Serb paramilitaries against the entire Albanian population of Kosova. Selective anti-imperialism, selective pacifism, is neither anti-imperialist nor honest pacifism. It is no sort of socialist politics

**Sean Matgamna**

# The forgotten Keir Hardie

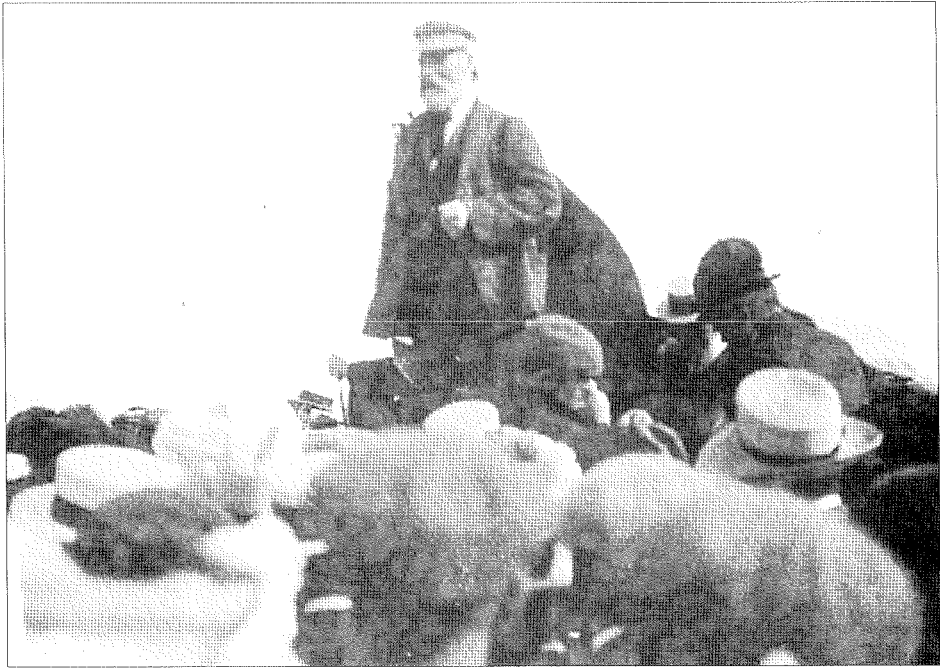
**K**EIR Hardie (1856-1915) was first elected to Parliament as a labour and socialist MP in 1892. A year later he helped to set up the Independent Labour Party, which was to form one of the strands of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. This year the Blairite-run New Labour celebrated the formation of the LRC, and honoured Keir Hardie in the Party's magazine. But Keir Hardie does not deserve to be regarded as a folk-hero by the likes of Tony Blair. In his lifetime he was not always well regarded by contemporary socialists, particularly those in the Social Democratic Federation. After his death labour movement biographers, keen to make Labour respectable, tried to play down his socialist credentials and stressed his religious and temperance background. The historical Hardie has been a matter of controversy in and around the labour movement ever since — in 1955 for example *The Economist* urged, the newly installed leader of the Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell, to turn his back on the “age of Keir Hardie”.

This article by Sylvia Pankhurst, written in 1921 is a rejoinder to an appreciation by long-standing British Marxist and early member of the Communist Party, John B Askew. Sylvia argues that Hardie was always a class struggle politician and more influenced by Marx than many would have credited. Certainly her view is supported by a recent biography by Fred Reid (*Keir Hardie: the Making of a Socialist*) who shows that Hardie's early battles as an organiser for the Scottish miners convinced him of the centrality of class struggle and made him receptive to Marxist ideas.

**J**OHAN B Askew, in the *Call*, referring to an appreciation of Keir Hardie which has appeared in that *Räte-Korrespondenz*, an organ of the German Communist Party, says that Keir Hardie, “the man who set out to found an Independent Labour Party, and yet was resolutely determined to ignore the class struggle or the Marxist theories which alone could give such a party a firm foundation, presents a contradiction which is none too easy to unravel.”

Strange that Keir Hardie's real opinions should be so little known by British socialists. We have before us a pamphlet containing reprints of three articles written by Keir Hardie in 1910, and entitled: *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message*. This pamphlet shows how absurd are the stories that Keir Hardie ignored or was opposed to the Marxian doctrine, or, as we have sometimes seen it said, he had never read a line of Marx. The fact is that Keir Hardie was much too big a man to make a parade of knowledge. But here are some extracts from Keir Hardie's pamphlet:

*Marx had by this time broken with the past in regard to both religion and politics, and had already entered upon that career which was destined so mightily to influence the course of history, and which will continue to be felt so long as the race endures.*



*Because this man, despite the most tempting offers, refused to prostitute his talents in the service of the ruling caste, he was bounded as a felon, and branded as an enemy of the race.*

*The last quarter of the Eighteenth, and the first half of the Nineteenth Century were stirring times. Revolution, grim and bloody, stalked abroad all over Europe. Feudalism was in its death-throes. The middle, or capitalist class, was fighting for power, and on its side, naturally, the working class rallied. In the closing years of the French Revolution, over the atrocities of which so many crocodile tears have been shed by smug, callous hypocrites, and when it was over, one fair land had set its face sunward. But it was a middle-class triumph... Everywhere on the Continent the revolutionary movement had a political objective. Commercialism and feudalism were at grips for the control of the state.*

*Here, at home, the middle-class also had its political movement, but, owing to the more developed state of the capitalist system, there was also, and concurrently, a very definite movement of the working-class. The workmen realised that they were being ground to dust by the unregulated operation of a competitive system over which they had no control, and so trade unionism had, early in the Nineteenth Century, already taken a firm hold. There were Luddite riots and outrages in Yorkshire, bread riots in Scotland, and similar outbreaks elsewhere.*

*A revolutionary outbreak occurred in Paris, in December, 1847, which was continued through January and crowned with final success in February... Given this example, the revolutionary forces of Germany and Austria followed suit, and Vienna, Cologne, and other cities were soon in the hands of the insurgents. Nowhere in the volume before us does Mr Spargo touch such height of graphic descriptive power as in his bloodstirring accounts of the glorious happenings of those momentous days, when Kings and Emperors were compelled to pay homage to our common manhood, alive and dead. The spirit of revolt swept across the English*



Channel, and for a time it almost looked as though the hour of a British Republic had struck.

When the news came that the Paris workmen were behind the barricades, it sent a thrill through these islands.

Four days later, Trafalgar Square was packed by a mob of London citizens... rioting took place in various provincial cities. Thousands of hunger-maddened unemployed operatives marched through the streets of Glasgow, sacking shops and singing Chartist songs, and shouting, "Bread or Revolution." The troops were called out and several persons shot down in the streets... There were riots also in England...

It is astounding to think that all this happened in England only 62 years ago...

Marx had not only been a keen observer of the risings, but had also been an active participator, first in Paris, and then in Cologne. He, however, was not under any illusion as to what was happening. He knew that, so soon as the demands of the capitalist class were met, and themselves established in power, they would turn upon and rend the working-class if it attempted to carry the Revolution forward in its own interest. But he knew also, that the experience thus gained would be invaluable in guiding the workers into a genuine movement of their own, without which, he realised, their own freedom could never be won...

The above passages, written in review of Spargo's *Life of Marx*, are typical of Keir Hardie's thought, for on the one hand he was by no means the tame, sentimental pacifist that some would make him out to be, and, on the other hand, he was always most emphatic on the importance of an independent working-class movement, the ideal to which his whole life was devoted. But now we have, quite concisely put, Hardie's opinion of Marx:

*The famous Communist Manifesto is the most fateful document ever written in the whole history of the working-class movement. It was the birth certificate of the modern Socialist movement. It had a two-fold purpose — to define clearly the nature of the struggle in which the Communists were engaged on behalf of the working-class — and the attitude of the League to the working-class movement outside its own ranks.*

*Marx's real title to greatness, and certainly his greatest claim upon the gratitude of the working-class, rests upon his discovery — for such it practically was — of the truth that history is but the record of class struggles, and that they are always the outcome of the economic system of the time resisting a change which its own workings has made inevitable. This is what has come to be known as the Economic or Materialist interpretation of history. All that means is this: That Marx supplied the same explanation of human progress in civilisation and towards freedom, which Darwin subsequently did of the evolution of animal and plant life towards the stage of perfection now attained. The existence of a ruling class is only a proof of a successful revolutionary struggle waged by that class at some former period of its history. With each succeeding class struggle the bounds of human freedom have been enlarged until, with the advent of the capitalist system of wealth production, we have society, in the main, divided into two great antagonistic classes — the owners of property and the producers of property.*

*Socialism will abolish the landlord class, the capitalist*

*class, and the working-class. That is revolution; that the working-class, by its actions, will one day abolish class distinctions.*

And it was the inspired version of Karl Marx which first formulated as a cold, scientific fact the inevitable coming of that glorious time. Little wonder that his memory is a consecrated treasure enshrined in the hearts of millions of the best men and women of all lands.

That Keir Hardie endorsed the class struggle from a theoretical standpoint cannot be denied by any who will take the trouble to study his actual writings: the extracts we have quoted prove it and are typical of the rest. His realisation of the class struggle was, moreover, his guiding rule of conduct. In the House of Commons he was alone, ringed round by a barrier of reserve impassable by any of the bourgeois members whom he regarded as his political and class enemies. He associated with no one at Westminster till the Labour Members came there to join him.

He had conceived the Labour Party as a sturdy, determined body of fighters, irreconcilably hostile to both the capitalist parties, attacking the employing class in Parliament as though engaged in a strike and giving no quarter. Though he knew that at least the majority of the men chosen as Labour's Parliamentary representatives were not class conscious Socialists, yet he thought

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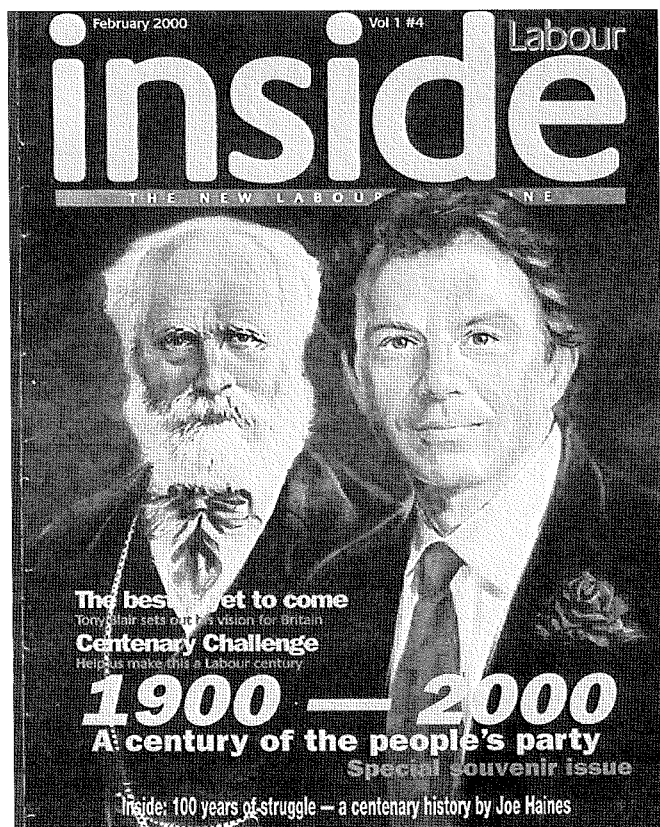
they would keep together as a class, and that the Parliamentary conflict would increase their fighting spirit. He was often bitterly disappointed. Soon after the opening of the Session the new Party gave a dinner at the House to celebrate its victory. Already the Labour Members had begun to fraternise with the Liberals and the Tories, and to show a desire to win their praise for being moderate and level-headed. Already J R MacDonald was earning the reputation of being "always on the doorstep of Cabinet Ministers".

At that first dinner Hardie voiced his disapproval. He declared that he wanted to form an "anti-guzzling league" and that the Labour Members should not accept the hospitality of the capitalist representatives whose only desire was to neutralise the hostility of the Labour Members in order to undermine their fighting qualities and influence with the workers outside. "We are only puppets to them," he said. We well remember his words.

Hardie was often reproached, by those who were impatient with the Labour Party's opportunism, for giving way to the reactionaries in the Party. As a matter of fact he was dominated by the determination to be loyal to the Labour Party because he regarded it as the Party of the working class. He was always anxious to show a united front to the capitalist class and, having fought reaction in the Party Executive, he usually accepted the decision of the majority without making any public criticism of the reactionaries who so often gained the day. He was, as we think, handicapped by an overwhelming desire to keep the Party together, and in this cause suffered much unhappiness. He chafed under the Party discipline; but submitted to it from a sense of loyalty and in the belief that in the end socialism would win the Party.

Askew says that Hardie "always had to cave in to MacDonald's greater knowledge". The statement is absolutely incorrect. MacDonald, the reformist-opportunist, had the majority of the Party with him; for the majority was not socialist. Keir Hardie, the class conscious socialist, had either to split the Party or wait and work in patience saying, as he so often did: "Our day will come."

Keir Hardie was always distrustful of middle-class people who offered to join the ILP, though he did not wish to bar them out if they were really convinced socialists. He thought it health-



With an obscene mix of chocolate box and Stalinist "art" New Labour celebrates 100 years since the formation of the Labour Representation Committee by linking two leaders who represent opposite political traditions.

iest for a Socialist Party to be mainly composed of the working class. Some of those middle-class people who have recently joined the ILP and the Labour Party had actually approached Keir Hardie with a view to joining the ILP in the days of the Labour Party's first successes. His answer was in each case something like this: "Stay in the Liberal Party; that is where you belong. You are dissatisfied with the Liberal Party on this or that question, just now, but you are not a socialist, and you would be out of your element with us." He constantly endeavoured to keep the Labour Party and the ILP away from co-operation with the bourgeoisie on any pretext. He would not accept membership of any of those composite committees of labour and bourgeois representatives which in this country are habitually formed to push reforms, or to repeal injustices. He rarely consented even to speak for such bodies. The suffrage movement was the only non-Socialist non-working class movement with which he was ever actively associated, and even in that case he never joined a suffrage organisation or sat on a suffrage committee.

## Keir Hardie's Defence of the Labour and Socialist Alliance

**T**HIS pamphlet on Marx contains, like so many of Hardie's writings, a defence of the Labour Party; and a plea that though not yet a class-conscious Socialist organisation, it would become so. He says:

"The Trade Union movement is the real movement of the working class, and the ILP is the advanced wing... that was what Marx intended the Socialist section of the working-class to be... He did not ask the working-class to unite as class-conscious Socialists, but only as working men. He knew the class-consciousness would come in good time."

Hardie's view was bitterly attacked by the British Socialist

Party, which on this question has now come round to his standpoint, for it declares in defence of its affiliation to the Labour Party, that the Party is "the mass organisation of the working class".

But since the creation of the Labour Party new horizons have appeared. The workers' committees have proved in this country that in times of crisis they can become a power able to act more swiftly, more decisively, than the trade union organisations. Both Russia and Germany have shown us that these Committees are the mass organisations which will be the rallying centre and administrative machinery of the revolution. We have entered the revolutionary epoch. Has it occurred to the BSP members that perhaps Keir Hardie was right in holding to the Labour Party in his generation, whilst they are mistaken in doing so in theirs?

Hardie seems, on the whole, to have been of opinion that socialism would be achieved by means of the Labour Party securing a Parliamentary majority, and then taking over "by degrees" the instruments of production. Whether he regarded this merely as a preliminary to more revolutionary happenings; whether he believed that a violent clash with the capitalists might, or would, result from this; or whether he thought that the entire change from capitalism to socialism would take place peacefully, I do not know. He did not think that a revolution of a small conscious minority at the head of unconscious masses could succeed; but it is quite certain that he had no theoretical shrinking from a violent seizure of power by the proletariat, on pacifist, or democratic grounds. The possibility of success was his only pre-occupation on this question.

It must be remembered that Keir Hardie died before the Russian Revolution, that he lived in the period of stagnant reformism, and died during the early clash of the great war, when the working-class movement of Europe was submerged in a riot of patriotism, and no glimmer of international solidarity showed on the horizon. His hope that the great war might be postponed till the international general strike of the workers could prevent it had been dashed to the ground. He had worked for this strike both nationally and in the International.

As to the future, he believed that society would pass through state socialism to communism.

Some may argue that his conception of the coming passage from capitalism to socialism was utopian, that he under-rated the strength of the capitalist system, that perhaps he failed to realise that the workers could never overthrow it except under the pressure of an overwhelming economic necessity. His theoretical conceptions may easily be misrepresented, because he lived too strenuous a life of practical labour for the working-class movement to write more than short pamphlets and articles. But whatever may be said of him as a theorist, it is absurd to say he was not class-conscious.

The extreme poverty of his early life had bitten deeply into his mind, and was never forgotten. His earliest conscious memory was that of his mother's tears falling on his face. The home of his grandparents was so poor that they could not afford any light, and sat in the dark after sunset. As a little child he stood with his mother and her younger children in the road with their household goods piled up beside them, and saw the coal-owner who had evicted them come riding up, and tell his mother that she could re-enter the cottage if her husband would apologise for his part in a strike. His mother answered: "Nay, nay, he'll n'ere do that!"

When he was only eight years of age, Hardie was called before the well-spread breakfast table of his master, a baker, and dismissed, without wages, for being unpunctual, after he had sat up all night waiting on his mother. A baby was born in the early morning. Hardie's stepfather was away looking for work, and there was no food in the house save a little flour and water.

**Sylvia Pankhurst**

# Why does Cliff traduce Shachtman?

OVER the past ten years there has been a good deal of discussion in this magazine about the ideas of Max Shachtman. Shachtman was in the 1940s the foremost critic of Trotsky's view of Stalinism in the USSR, and together with his comrades in the Workers' Party/Independent Socialist League (WP/ISL), developed a distinctive analysis of the Stalinist Russia, which they called "bureaucratic collectivism". Unfortunately most socialists in Britain are most likely to approach Shachtman through the prism of Tony Cliff's essay, 'The Theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism: a Critique', which appears as an appendix to his *State Capitalism in Russia* (1988), and in his selected works, *Neither Washington nor Moscow* (1982).<sup>1</sup>

Cliff's critique pulled no punches: "The theory of bureaucratic collectivism is supra-historical, negative and abstract. It does not define the economic laws of motion of the system, explain its inherent contradictions and the motivation of the class struggle. It is completely arbitrary. Hence it does not give a perspective, nor can it serve as a basis for a strategy for socialists." In short, "The only two constant elements in the theory have been: first, the conclusion that in any concrete conditions, Stalinist Russia must not be defended (no matter that concrete conditions change all the time); second, that the name of the Stalinist regime is Bureaucratic Collectivism." (1988: 353, 337)

What's wrong with Cliff's critique? It claimed to deal with the essence of bureaucratic collectivism and appeared to provide a panoramic analysis of all the new class theories from their infancy. However on closer inspection it pasted together criticisms from both Trotsky and his epigones, smeared the parentage of bureaucratic collectivism, and by means of highly selective quotation completely misrepresented what the WP/ISL actually wrote about the USSR. In fact it is not a scholarly work at all; a comparison of the original version with the later editions indicates that Cliff never bothered to really investigate the views of his opponents in the first place, and despite close contact with them during the 1950s, never bothered to deepen or develop his understanding of their position as it evolved. In doing so he buried important questions under a torrent of abuse. 'The Theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism: a Critique' is a work of slander, political debris which aborts more serious engagement with Shachtman.

## What are the origins of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism?

SHACHTMAN had written against his detractors that, "In the *New Course*, Trotsky lays great stress on loyalty in discussion, on the honest presentation of your opponents' views, on the reprehensibility of amalgamating one view with views that are essentially alien to it."<sup>2</sup> Cliff's original critique included a section on Bruno



Tony Cliff

Rizzi, largely retained in his edited version, together with a long section on James Burnham, which was later omitted. Here Cliff really outdid orthodox Trotskyism by smearing the origins of bureaucratic collectivism with the parentage of these two wicked fairies. Cliff invested Rizzi with great authority, claiming that:

"The first writer to coin this term (Bureaucratic Collectivism) was the Italian Marxist, Bruno R, in his book *La Bureaucratisation du Monde* (Paris 1939). The same term was adopted and the idea developed (without acknowledgement of the work of Bruno R) by the American socialist, Max Shachtman." (1988: 333) When he first wrote about Rizzi in the late forties, one thing Cliff had done which Shachtman and others had been unable to do in 1939, was to



Max Shachtman

(in French). Cliff was confident enough to argue that, "on the characterisation, description, and analysis of Bureaucratic Collectivism as such — as a social order — they [Shachtman and Rizzi] are in entire agreement." (1988: 339) He seemed to substantiate this with quotations, which sounded like the views developed by the Workers' Party.

Who was Bruno Rizzi? He had been around the Italian Communist Party and retained some acquaintance with opposition currents after Mussolini's ascent to power. He was a shoe salesman, which allowed him to travel outside of fascist Italy, and remained a loyal supporter of the Stalin regime until 1935. By 1937 he had read Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, and written a paraphrase of it, which he published himself. By 1938 Rizzi came into contact with Trotskyists in France and in England, and through them learned of the debates within the movement over the class nature of the USSR. Some members of the anti-Stalinist left in Paris were suspicious of him because of his ability to travel freely, although no evidence has been found that he was a police spy.<sup>3</sup>

In 1938/39, Rizzi wrote a series of letters to Trotsky, and completed the first part of his book, *La Bureaucratisation du Monde*, which dealt with the USSR, in March 1939. The second part, dealing with Italian fascism, was prepared by October 1939, but never published, whilst part three, dealing with the USA, and the appendices, were written in May 1939. Having failed to secure a publisher Rizzi printed the first and third parts himself in August 1939. The book contained a number of anti-semitic passages and for this reason the French authorities brought a prosecution against him in January 1940. Stocks of the book were impounded — hence its rarity. However Trotsky received his copy early in September 1939, and referred to it in 'The USSR in War', during the dispute in the American Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). Rizzi was for Trotsky only the latest to hold the view that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a new ruling class: he had criticised earlier exponents of that opinion such as Urbahns and Laurat, for nearly a decade.

Rizzi's theory was that history was flowing towards collectivism, ending in Communism, as the state became more involved in economic activity. These tendencies were present not only in the USSR, but in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and New Deal America. However in his view the working class was unable to take power (in Russia Rizzi thought they had been reduced to slaves). Instead the state bureaucracies were the bearers of progress because of their control of nationalised property. Rizzi's predominant conclusion was that the proletariat still had a "very important task to accomplish; to acknowl-

edge Herr Hitler and Mr Mussolini as the grave-diggers of international capitalism... *and to help them in their task* (!) (1985: 13) Happy to justify Hitler's racism, Rizzi argued that British and French workers should force their own capitalists into conceding living space and raw materials to Germany and Italy. His book was in fact a "socialist" rationale for fascism.

What of the accusation made by Cliff and others, that both Shachtman and, more closely, James Burnham plagiarised Rizzi's work? According to Adam Westoby's investigations, "the accusation is unproven, and unlikely to be true." (1985: 25) In fact Rizzi borrowed much of his analysis of the USSR from critics of Stalinism such as Yvan Craipeau, Burnham and Joseph Carter in 1937 from within the Trotskyist movement. He fused it with the praise heaped on bureaucracies by Fabians like the Webbs and George Bernard Shaw. Typically, Cliff made a fetish out of their use of the same name-tag to produce an amalgam of Rizzi and Shachtman. This smear failed to distinguish the very different theory of bureaucratic collectivism held by the members of the WP/ISL from Rizzi's views. In fact, on the level of theory, by equating nationalised property with progress Rizzi's analysis (if not his conclusions) came closer to "orthodox" Trotskyism than to Cliff's intended target, Shachtman.

Yet Cliff and his apostles (and, for example, *Revolutionary History* magazine) continue to argue that Shachtman's ideas parallel Rizzi's, even when the details of his real views have been known for some time. For example, Pierre Naville wrote about Rizzi in *Le Contrat Social* in 1958, and Hal Draper visited him that year, and a debate took place in the *New Leader* with the sociologist Daniel Bell in 1959. Later, following eulogies about Rizzi at the time of his death in 1977 from luminaries in the Italian Socialist Party, the journal *Telos* also promoted a positive assessment, before Ernie Haberkern called them to account in his review of Westoby's book in 1985. This and other publications by Haberkern since leave any honest commentator in no doubt of the gulf separating Shachtman from Rizzi.

As a former leading member of the American SWP, the case of Burnham is slightly different. There is no doubting Burnham's place in the development of a critique of Trotsky's analysis, in particular his criticism of the argument that nationalised property was a sufficient condition for characterising Russia as a workers' state, and his view that Trotsky's theory opened up the "possibility" of a bureaucratic road to socialism (a view vindicated by the assessments of the spread of Stalinism made by "orthodox" Trotskyists in the forties). He also played his role in the 1939-40 split in the SWP, during which his long held differences with Marxism (for example, in philosophy) began to unravel in his politics. By 1939 Burnham was breaking from revolutionary socialism; he deserted the Workers' Party almost immediately it was formed in 1940. The views he developed in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) were a long way from his earlier conceptions and the *New Internationalist* carried its own vehement attacks on Burnham from the beginning.

Much of the substance of Cliff's assault on Burnham was common to wider sections of the left by the late '40s, including socialists like George Orwell. Many of Burnham's predictions were shallow; like Rizzi he argued that the tendencies which were most pronounced in Russia were also true of Nazi Germany, Italy and the USA. Most importantly, he had given up on the working class as the agent of social change. Believing he had glimpsed the decline of capitalism, he made arguments for what he saw as its "managerial" (actually fascist) successor, only later to recoil as a conservative defender of American imperialism against Russian totalitarianism. Cliff's critique of Burnham is, in hindsight, rather mild — but had little to do with Shachtman. Nowhere did Cliff demonstrate their identity, asserting it only in a short footnote. No documentary evidence has been produced since — at best there are the reminiscences of old and ex-comrades who lived at the time.

On the matter of who invented the term, "bureaucratic collectivism", Cliff was wrong again. The term was used before the First World War by British Marxists and by critics of socialism such as Belloc. Perhaps Rizzi was the first to apply the name-tag to Stalinism, but even if this were true it lacks any great significance. Trotsky himself had used Rizzi as a mask for an alternative perspective on Stalinism

that he had been tentatively developing during 1939 — the memoirs of Jean van Heijenoort attest to his preoccupation with the question during that summer, although Trotsky drew back from this in the last year of his life. However, the originator of the new class theory was probably Christian Rakovsky, a leader of the Russian opposition to Stalinism second only to Trotsky, who wrote a number of articles from 1928, some of them published in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, on the dangers of the bureaucracy developing into a class. Shachtman did not invent the position, and lagged behind Burnham and Carter who originated it in the USA. But Cliff was not interested in engaging with a position different from his own, even if it had entirely respectable roots within the movement.<sup>4</sup>

## What was Cliff's method?

WHEN Cliff edited his critique of bureaucratic collectivism, what he was prepared to reprint in 1968 amounted to about half the original. He probably thought he had done enough to slay the dragon, yet the discarded passages, dealing with his musings on philosophy, reveal more clearly the errors of his methodology. Cliff had since 1947 characterised Stalinist Russia as "state capitalist", and evaluated other name-tags against this label. But at the deeper level, the theory — and particularly the manner in which Cliff 'proved' that the social relations in Russia were "state capitalist" — revealed that the confusion of Stalinised "Marxism" was not confined to those who persisted with the "workers' state" name-tag.

His approach was clear from his discussion of the inevitability of socialism. Shachtman had argued that those who believed socialism was inevitable had, by ruling out the possibility of developments other than socialism, undermined the necessity of actually fighting for socialism. Cliff raised the hue and cry of revisionism and quoted Plekhanov approvingly that, "...history shows that even fatalism was not always a hindrance to energetic, practical action; on the contrary, in certain epochs it was a psychologically necessary basis for such action", witness the English Puritans and the followers of Mohammed. Cliff had in fact misunderstood the essential *difference* between the fight for socialism and other previous revolutions in history. He wrote: "After feudal society, capitalism was inevitable. No other social system could take its place. This did not make the rising bourgeoisie any less active in its fight against feudalism... As there is no other system than socialism that can drive forward the productive forces, and as the proletariat exists so long as social production exists, the fight for socialism is inevitable and its *victory is inevitable*." (1949: 18)

Cliff exhibited the crudest of "determinism" derived from Stalinism. He confused two distinct elements: the fightback which workers put up against their exploitation under capitalism (which is inevitable); and the victory of socialism, which is not a foregone conclusion. He deliberately downplayed Shachtman's real point: the exceptionally conscious character of the socialist revolution. For Shachtman, as for Marx and Trotsky, the working class (unlike other previous classes) had to make its own revolution, and had to understand the meaning of its fight in order to lay the basis for self-conscious (i.e. democratic) working class rule, and wider universal human emancipation. This was part of the rationale for revolutionaries organising themselves as a party, together with combating the ruling ideas of the epoch. However, Cliff, writing at the end of the '40s, defined consciousness as basically "accidental" in this fight, despite his protestations of its "big role", and of the need to avoid "complacency".

Cliff also assailed Shachtman with the familiar orthodox Trotskyist insult that he had abandoned dialectics by adopting bureaucratic collectivism, but gave this argument a novel twist. He deduced the nature of Stalinist Russia straight from the laws of dialectics: capitalism was the negation of feudalism; capitalism was the unity of wage labour and capital, "the existence of each of which is dependent on the existence of the other"; as capitalism developed, from free competition to monopoly, and then to state capitalism; so the polar opposites came into conflict until the working class triumphed over the capitalists, "the negation of the negation". (1949: 20) For Cliff, bureaucratic collectivism cannot fit into this schema, it is impossi-

ble in Marxist theory because of his version of dialectics (straight from the *Short Course*). Instead, during this “transition period”, “today all the exploiters are compelled to use more and more elements of the socialist future, such as planning, etc., in defence of their interests, is only a sign of the historical obsolescence of capitalism” (1949: 22-23). The sub-text here (with shades of Ted Grant) is that Russia can only be socialist or some form of capitalism — the structure of logic will permit nothing else.

Overall Cliff substituted logic-chopping for the study of real relations in Russia. His mistake recalled precisely the error Marx had in mind when he wrote to Danielson that, “My critic must needs metamorphose my outline of the genesis of capitalism in western Europe into a historic-philosophical theory of the general course, *fatally imposed on all peoples, regardless of the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed...* He does me too much honour and too much shame at the same time... but one will never succeed with the master-key of a historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical.” [My emphasis]

How should Marxists proceed to analyse different class societies in history? An originator of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, Joseph Carter, addressed this question when he wrote, against CLR James’ theory of state capitalism: “The process of accumulation is then consciously directed through the state, and the state alone. It is this ‘specific manner’ in which the factors of production are united, this specific way in which surplus is extracted from the working class, that differentiates bureaucratic collectivism from capitalism.” Carter was only paraphrasing the master-key Marx identified to understand different epochs in human history, “The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of the direct producers, determines the relationship between rulers and ruled”.<sup>5</sup>

## What determines the place of any regime in history?

**I**n his original document, Cliff wrote that, “Not one of the proponents of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism tries to pose the question of what the place of this bureaucracy is in the general chain of historical development, what is its function, what is the relation between its function and the function of the bourgeoisie.” (1949: 5-6) His answer, that it was ultimately the development of the productive forces which determined the place of any regime in history, merely echoed Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*. This was a commonplace within the movement and not disputed by Shachtman or anyone else. But the weight of much of Cliff’s criticism, and the argument in the *Nature of Stalinist Russia* (1948), was that the bureaucracy was progressive because it had developed the productive forces. Cliff made a parallel in his original document between Nazi Germany, which he defined as “a state capitalist *cartel*”, and Stalinist Russia, which was “a state capitalist *trust*”. He later discussed the development of capitalism as far as “state capitalism (of lower or higher form — cartel or trust)”. (1949: 17, 20) The impression was that Russia represented the highest, most concentrated form of capitalism. Stalinism was the wave of the future, the destiny of advanced capitalism.

Elsewhere in the same document, he retained this positive evaluation, but this time placing the bureaucracy at a primitive stage in the development of capitalism. He claimed his earlier study proved “that the average income per occupied person in Russia on the eve of the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy was the same as existed in Britain a century before the industrial revolution”. His conclusion: “Post-October Russia stood before the fulfilment of the historic mission of the bourgeoisie, which Lenin summed up in two postulates: ‘increase in the productive forces of social labour and the socialisation of labour’.” (1988: 351) His point was that the Stalinist bureaucracy became a “capitalist” class because Russian capitalism had not come to maturity before the 1917 revolution. The bureaucracy “bridged the gap” in the country’s development — “it personified the accumulation of capital”.

Cliff’s tunnel-visioned version of history made all societies pass through the same stages of development and pass automatically from one to the other under the lash of the development of the productive forces. He must have glanced at the *Communist Manifesto* and imagined Marx chanting the mantra: “the country that is more developed shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.” However, for all his apparent orthodoxy, he never could decide on whether the Stalinist bureaucracy represented the highest stage of capitalism, or its birth pangs. No doubt Cliff would shriek about the unity of opposites, but even the over-burdened dialectic would find it difficult to carry the weight of such confusion. He was subject to the same kind of ambiguities of which he was to accuse Shachtman!

Cliff quoted selectively to “show” how incoherent bureaucratic collectivism was on the place of Stalinism in history. In 1941, Shachtman had written that: “From the standpoint of socialism, the bureaucratic collectivist state is a reactionary social order; in relation to the capitalist world, it is on an historically more progressive plane.” Later he characterised Stalinism as “the new barbarism”. Shachtman’s characterisation of “progressiveness”, because of the existence of nationalised property, was a vestige of Trotsky, which would be consciously removed later as the theory developed. In 1949, the renamed ISL proclaimed that: “Stalinist nationalisation is in no sense at all a prerequisite for the socialization of the means of production; nor does it ‘prepare the way’ for the latter... Stalinist nationalization therefore is in no sense progressive... This is the only criterion for the category of ‘progressiveness’ in today’s world, and means: that is ‘progressive’ which is a prerequisite for, or does lead in fact lead to, the establishment of socialist democracy.”

Shachtman himself wrote a satisfactory rejoinder to his original view of nationalised property: “There is no private ownership of property under Stalinism, it is true, and the development of the productive forces is likewise a fact... A concrete foundation is essential to a good home, just like the nationalisation of the means of production and distribution is essential to the construction of a socialist society. But on the same foundation of concrete can be built a prison (in fact the foundations of most prisons are supposed to be stronger than of most homes). Very few people, however, speak of prisons as ‘imperfect homes’ the way the Stalinist states are sometimes called, by affable apologists.”<sup>6</sup>

● Part two of this article will be in the next *Workers’ Liberty*.

**Paul Hampton**

## Notes

1. I have used for reference the version in *State Capitalism in Russia*, (1988) which is widely available. According to the notes in his books, the article originally appeared as a duplicated document in 1948 and was reprinted in *IS(1)* 32, Spring 1968. In the introduction to Hallas (ed) *The Fourth International, Stalinism and the Origins of the International Socialists* (1971:1), it says that no copy of the original could be found and so the 1968 *IS* article was reprinted. Hallas later claimed the document was first published in 1952, *IS(2)* 9, Summer 1980: 129). The references in the original version suggest it was finished in 1949, which is the dating I have used when quoting from it. The 1968 version was revised using Shachtman’s *The Bureaucratic Revolution* (1962). Cliff’s critique of Shachtman, despite superficial appearances, relied heavily on orthodox Trotskyism. The most relevant sources are: Harry Frankel, ‘A Defamer of Marxism’, *Fourth International*, May 1944; and ‘Revolutionary Marxism or Petty-Bourgeois Revisionism’, *IB of the SWP*, Vol VIII, No10, August 1946.
2. Shachtman (1944: 267), ‘An Epigone of Trotsky’, *New International*, August and October 1944.
3. Most of the background is in Rizzi (1985), *The Bureaucratisation of the World*, translated by Adam Westoby. James M. Fenwick first reviewed the book in the *New International* in ‘The Mysterious Bruno R’, in September 1948. See Haberkern’s review of Rizzi in *Telos*, No66, Winter 1985-86, and Haberkern and Lipow (eds), (1996), *Neither Capitalism nor Socialism: Theories of Bureaucratic Collectivism*.
4. Van Heijenoort, *With Trotsky in Exile*, (1978: 141). Some of Rakovsky’s work is in Fagan (ed.), (1980), Christian Rakovsky: *Selected Writings on Opposition in the USSR 1923-30.5*. Carter, ‘Aspects of Marxian Economics’, *New International*, April 1942. Marx, *Capital*, Volume III (1971: 791).
6. ISL ‘Capitalism, Stalinism and the War’, *New International*, April (1949: 121-122), in Matgama *Fate of the Russian Revolution* (1998: 492). Shachtman, ‘Freedom in Equality’, *Labor Action*, 18th November (1957: 8).



## TEACH YOURSELF MARX'S CAPITAL



# The root of class struggle

The fourth part of our serialisation of Otto Rühle's classic abridgement of Karl Marx's *Capital* volume 1 explains the anatomy of the bourgeoisie versus proletariat class struggle within capitalism

## 6. Constant Capital and Variable Capital

**T**HE various factors of the labour-process play different parts in forming the value of the product. The labourer adds fresh value to the subject of his labour by expending upon it a given amount of additional labour. On the other hand, the values of the means of production used up in the process are preserved, and present themselves afresh as constituent parts of the value of the product. The value of the means of production is therefore preserved, by being transferred to the product. This transfer takes place during the conversion of those means into a product, or in other words, during the labour-process. It is brought about by labour; but how?

Since the addition of new value to the subject of his labour, and the preservation of its former value, are two entirely distinct results, produced simultaneously by the labourer, during one operation, it is plain that this twofold nature of the result can be explained only by the twofold nature of his labour; at one and the same time, it must in one character create value, and in another character preserve or transfer

value.

It is by virtue of its general character, as being expenditure of human labour-power in the abstract, that spinning adds new value to the values of the cotton and the spindle; and on the other hand, it is by virtue of its special character, as being a concrete, useful process, that the same labour of spinning both transfers the values of the means of production to the product, and preserves them in the product. Hence at one and the same time there is produced a twofold result.

So long as the conditions of production remain the same, the more value the labourer adds by fresh labour, the more value he transfers and preserves; but he does so merely because this addition of new value takes place under conditions that have not varied and are independent of his own labour. Of course, it may be said in one sense that the labourer preserves old value always in proportion to the quantity of new value that he adds.

In the labour-process the means of production transfer their value to the product only so far as along with their use-value they lose also their exchange-value. They give up to the product that value alone which they themselves lose as means of production. The maximum loss of value that they can suffer in the process is plainly limited by the amount of the original value with which they came into the process. Therefore the means of production can never add more value to the product than they themselves possess independently of the process in which they assist.

The same instrument of production takes part as whole in the labour-process, while at the same time as an element in the formation of value, it enters only by fractions. On the other hand, a means of production may take part as a whole in the formation of value, while into the

labour-process it enters only bit by bit. In the value of the product, there is a re-appearance of the value of the means of production, but there is, strictly speaking, no reproduction of that value. That which is produced is a new use-value in which the old exchange-value re-appears.

The surplus of the total value of the product, over the sum of the values of its constituent factors, is the surplus of the expanded capital over the capital originally advanced. The means of production on the one hand, labour-power on the other, are merely the different modes of existence which the value of the original capital assumed when from being money it was transformed into the various factors of the labour-process.

That part of capital which is represented by the means of production, by the raw material, auxiliary material and the instruments of labour, does not, in the process of production, undergo any quantitative alteration of value. I therefore call it the constant part of capital, or, more shortly, constant capital.

On the other hand, that part of capital, represented by labour-power, does, in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value. It both reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and also produces an excess, a surplus-value, which may itself vary, may be more or less according to circumstances. This part of capital is continually being transformed from a constant into a variable magnitude. I therefore call it the variable part of capital, or, shortly, variable capital.

The same elements of capital which, from the point of view of the labour-process, present themselves respectively as the objective and subjective factors present themselves, from the point of view of the process of creating surplus-value, as constant and variable capital.

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## 7. The Rate of Surplus Value

**T**HE surplus-value generated in the process of production by C, the capital advanced, or in other words, the self-expansion of the value of the capital C, presents itself for our consideration, in the first place, as a surplus, as the amount by which the value of the product exceeds the value of its constituent element. We have seen that the labourer, during one portion of the labour-process, produces only the value of his labour power, that is, the value of his means of subsistence. Now since his work forms part of a system, based on the social division of labour, he does not directly produce the actual necessities which he himself consumes; he produces instead a particular commodity, yarn for example, whose value is equal to the value of those necessities or of the money with which they can be bought. The portion of his day's labour devoted to this purpose, will be greater or less, in proportion to the value of the necessities that he daily requires on an average, or, what amounts to the same thing, in proportion to the labour-time required on an average to produce them. The portion of the working day, then, during which this reproduction takes place, I call "necessary" labour-time, and the labour expended during that time I call "necessary" labour. Necessary, as regards the labourer, because independent of the particular social form of his labour; necessary, as regards capital, and the world of capitalists, because on the continued existence of the labourer depends their existence also.

During the second period of the labour-process, that in which his labour is no longer necessary labour, the workman, it is true, labours, expends labour-power; but his labour, being no longer necessary labour, he creates no value for himself. He creates surplus-value which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of a creation out of nothing. This portion of the working day, I name surplus-labour-time, and to the labour expended during that time, I give the name of surplus-labour. It is every bit as important, for a correct understanding of surplus-value, to conceive it as a mere congelation of surplus-labour-time, as nothing but materialised surplus labour, as it is, for a proper comprehension of value, to conceive it as a mere congelation of so many hours of labour, as nothing but materialised labour.

The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave labour, and one based on wage labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer.

Since, on the one hand, the value of this labour-power determines the necessary portion of the working day; and since, on the other hand, the surplus-value is

determined by the surplus portion of the working day, it follows that surplus-value bears the same ratio to variable capital, that surplus-labour does to necessary labour, or in other words, the rate of surplus-value  $s/v = \text{surplus labour/necessary labour}$ . Both ratios  $s/v$  and surplus labour/necessary labour express the same thing in different ways; in the one case by reference to materialised, incorporated labour, in the other by reference to living, fluent labour.

The rate of surplus-value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital, or of the labourer by the capitalist.

The method of calculating the rate of surplus-value is therefore, shortly, as follows. We take the total value of the product and put the constant capital which merely re-appears in it equal to zero. What remains is the only value that has, in the process of producing the commodity, been actually created. If the amount of surplus-value be given, we have only to deduct it from this remainder, to find the variable capital. And vice versa, if the latter be given, and we require to find the surplus-value. If both be given, we have only to perform the concluding operation, viz., to calculate  $s/v$  the ratio of the surplus-value to the variable capital.

An example shows us how the capitalist converts money into capital. The product of a working day of 12 hours is 20lbs. of yarn, having a value of 30s. No less than 8/10 of this value, or 24s., is due to mere reappearance in it of the value of the means of production (20lbs. of cotton, value 20s., and spindle worn away, 4s): it is therefore constant capital. The remaining 2/10 or 6s is the new value created during the spinning process: of this one half replaces the value of the day's labour-power, or the variable capital, the remaining half constitutes a surplus-value of 3s. The total value then of the 20lbs. of yarn is made up as follows: 30s value of yarn = 24 const. + 3s var. + 3s. surpl. Since the whole of the value is contained in the 20lbs. of yarn produced, it follows that the various component parts of this value, can be represented as being contained respectively in corresponding parts of the product.

Since 12 working hours of the spinner are embodied in 6s., it follows that in yarn of the value of 30s., there must be embodied 60 working hours. And this quantity of labour-time does in fact exist in the 20lbs. of yarn; for in 8/10 or 16 lbs. there are materialised the 48 hours of labour expended, before the commencement of the spinning process, on the means of production; and in the remaining 2/10 or 4 lbs. there are materialised the 12 hours' work done during the process itself.

On a former page we saw that the value of the yarn is equal to the sum of the

new value created during the production of that yarn plus the value previously existing in the means of production. It has now been shown how the various component parts of the value of the product, parts that differ functionally from each other, may be represented by corresponding proportional parts of the product itself.

To split up in this manner the product into different parts, of which one represents only the labour previously spent on the means of production, or the constant capital, another only the necessary labour spent during the process of production, or the variable capital, and another and last part only the surplus-labour expended during the same process, or the surplus-value; to do this, is, as will be seen later on from its application to complicated and hitherto unsolved problems, no less important than it is simple.

The portion of the product that represents the surplus-value, we call "surplus-produce". Since the production of surplus-value is the chief end and aim of capitalist production, it is clear that the greatness of a man's or a nation's wealth should be measured, not by the absolute quantity produced, but by the relative magnitude of the surplus-produce.

## 8. The Working Day

**T**HE sum of the necessary labour and the surplus-labour, i.e., of the periods of time during which the workman replaces the value of his labour-power, and produces the surplus-value, this sum constitutes the actual time during which he works, i.e., the working day.

The working day is not a constant, but a variable quantity. One of its parts, certainly, is determined by the working time required for the reproduction of the labour-power of the labourer himself. But its total amount varies with the duration of the surplus-labour. The working day is, therefore, determinable, but is, per se, indeterminate.

The minimum limit is, however, not determinable. On the other hand, the working day has a maximum limit. It cannot be prolonged beyond a certain point. Within the four hours of the natural day a man can expend only a definite quantity of his vital force. During part of the day this force must rest, sleep; during another part the man has to satisfy other physical needs. Besides these purely physical limitations, the extension of the working day encounters moral ones. The labourer needs time for satisfying his intellectual and social wants, the extent and number of which are conditioned by the general state of social advancement. The variation of the working day fluctuates, therefore, within physical and social bounds. But both these limiting conditions are of a very elastic nature, and allow the greatest latitude.

The capitalist has bought the

labour-power at its day rate. To him its use-value belongs during one working day. He has thus acquired the right to make the labourer work for him during one day. But what is a working day?

The capitalist has his own views of the necessary limit of the working day. As capitalist, he is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus-value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labour. Capital is dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him. If the labourer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist. The capitalist then takes his stand on the law of the exchange of commodities. He, like all other buyers, seeks to get the greatest possible benefit out of the use-value of his commodity.

Suddenly the voice of the labourer rises: The commodity that I have sold to you differs from the crowd of other commodities, in that its use creates value, and a value greater than its own. That is why you bought it. That which on your side appears a spontaneous expansion of capital, is on mine extra expenditure of labour-power. You and I know on the market only one law, that of the exchange of commodities. And the consumption of the commodity belongs not to the seller, but to the buyer. To you, therefore, belongs the use of my daily labour-power. But by means of the price that you pay for it each day, I must be able to reproduce it daily, and to sell it again. I will, like a sensible saving owner, husband my sole wealth, labour-power, and abstain from all foolish waste of it. I will each day spend, set in motion, put into action only as much of it as is compatible with its normal duration, and healthy development. By an unlimited extension of the working day, you may in one day use up a quantity of labour-power greater than I can restore in three. What you gain in labour I lose in substance. The use of my labour-power and the spoliation of it are quite different things. If the average time that (doing a reasonable amount of work) an average labourer can live is 30 years, the value of my labour-power which you pay me from day to day is  $\frac{1}{365} \times 30$  or  $\frac{1}{10950}$  of its total value. But if you consume it in 10 years, you pay me daily  $\frac{1}{10950}$  instead of  $\frac{1}{3650}$  of its total value, i.e., only  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its daily value, and you rob me, therefore, every day of  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the value of my commodity. You pay me for one day's labour-power, whilst you use that of three days. That is against our contract and the law of exchanges. I demand, therefore, a working day of normal length, and I

demand it without any appeal to your heart. You may be a model citizen; but the thing that you represent face to face with me has no heart in its breast.

We see then, that, apart from extremely elastic bounds, the nature of the exchange of commodities itself imposes no limit to the working day, no limit to surplus-labour. The capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the labourer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to one of definite normal duration. There is here, therefore, an antinomy, right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. Between equal rights force decides. Hence is it that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working day presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e., the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e., the working class.

## Greed for surplus labour

CAPITAL has not invented surplus-labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production whether this proprietor be the Athenian nobleman, Etruscan theocrat, civis Romanus, Norman baron, American slave owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist. Hence in antiquity overwork becomes horrible only when the object is to obtain exchange value in its specific independent money-form; in the production of gold and silver. Compulsory working to death is here the recognised form of overwork.

But as soon as people, whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labour, corvee-labour, etc., are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilised horrors of overwork are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc. Hence the negro labour in the Southern States of the American Union preserved something of a patriarchal character, so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption. But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the overworking of the negro and sometimes the using up of his life in seven years of labour became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. Nothing is from this point of

view more characteristic than the designation of the workers who work full time as "full-timers" and the children under 13 who are only allowed to work six hours as "half-timers". The worker is here nothing more than personified labour-time. All individual distinctions are merged in those of "full-timers" and "half-timers". To appropriate labour during all the 24 hours of the day is the inherent tendency of capitalist production.

"What is a working day? What is the length of time during which capital may consume the labour-power whose daily value it buys? How far may the working day be extended beyond the working time necessary for the reproduction of labour-power itself?" It has been seen that to these questions capital replies: the working day contains the full 24 hours, with the deduction of the few hours of repose without which labour-power absolutely refuses its services again. Hence it is self-evident that the labourer is nothing else, his whole life through, than labour-power, that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and law labour-time, to be devoted to the self-expansion of capital. Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the freeplay of his bodily and mental activity, even the rest time of Sunday (and that in a country of Sabbatarians!) — moonshine!

In its blind unrestrainable passion, its werewolf hunger for surplus-labour, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body. It steals the time required for the consumption of fresh air and sunlight. It higgles over a meal-time, incorporating it where possible with the process of production itself, so that food is given to the labourer as to a mere means of production, as coal is supplied to the boiler, grease and oil to the machinery. It reduces the sound sleep needed for the restoration, reparation, refreshment of the bodily powers to just so many hours of torpor as the revival of an organism, absolutely exhausted, renders essential. It is not the normal maintenance of the labour-power which is to determine the limits of the working day; it is the greatest possible daily expenditure of labour-power, no matter how diseased, compulsory and painful it may be, which is to determine the limits of the labourers' period of repose. Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labour-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labour-power, that can be rendered fluent in a working day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the labourer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility. The capitalistic mode of production (essentially the pro-

duction of surplus-value, the absorption of surplus-labour) produces thus, with the extension of the working day, not only the deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal, moral, and physical conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself. It extends the labourer's time of production during a given period by shortening his actual lifetime.

It takes centuries ere the "free" labourer, thanks to the development of capitalistic production, agrees, i.e., is compelled by social conditions, to sell the whole of his active life, his very capacity for work, for the price of the necessities of life, his birthright for a mess of pottage. Hence it is natural that the lengthening of the working day, which capital, from the middle of the 14th to the end of the 17th century, tries to impose by State measures on adult labourers, approximately coincides with the shortening of the working day which, in the second half of the 19th century, has here and there been effected by the State to prevent the coining of children's blood into capital.

## Centuries of struggle

The establishment of a normal working day is the result of centuries of struggle between capitalist and labourer.

The first "Statute of Labourers" (23 Edward III, 1349) found its immediate pretext (not its cause) in the great plague that decimated the people, so that, as a Tory writer says, "The difficulty of getting men to work on reasonable terms grew to such a height as to be quite intolerable". Reasonable wages were, therefore, fixed by law as well as the limits of the working day. After capital had taken centuries in extending the working day to its normal maximum limit, and then beyond this to the limit of the natural day of 12 hours, there followed, on the birth of machinism and modern industry in the last third of the 18th century, a violent encroachment like that of an avalanche in its intensity and extent. All bounds of morals and nature, age and sex, day and night, were broken down. Capital celebrated its orgies.

As soon as the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, recovered, in some measure, its senses, its resistance began, and first in the native land of machinism, in England. For 30 years, however, the concessions conquered by the workpeople were purely nominal. Parliament passed five Labour Laws between 1802 and 1833, but was shrewd enough not to vote a penny for their carrying out, for the requisite officials, etc. They remained a dead letter. "The fact is that prior to the Act of 1833, young persons and children were worked all night, all day, or both *ad libitum*."

A normal working day for modern

industry only dates from the Factory Act of 1833. Nothing is more characteristic of the spirit of capital than the history of the English Factory Acts from 1833 to 1864!

The Act of 1833 declares the ordinary factory working day to be from half-past five in the morning to half past eight in the evening, and within these limits, a period of 15 hours, it is lawful to employ young persons between 13 and 18 years of age, at any time of the day, provided no one individual young person should work more than 12 hours in any one day, except in certain cases especially provided for.

The law-makers were so far from wishing to trench on the freedom of capital to exploit adult labour-power, or, as they called it, "the freedom of labour", that they created a special system in order to prevent the Factory Acts from having a consequence so outrageous. "The great evil of the factory system as at present conducted," says the first report of the Central Board of the Commission of June 28th, 1833, "has appeared to us to be that it entails the necessity of continuing the labour of children to the utmost length of that of the adults. The only remedy for this evil, short of the limitation of the labour of adults, which would, in our opinion, create an evil greater than that which is sought to be remedied, appears to be the plan of working double sets of children."... Under the name of System of Relays, this "plan" was therefore carried out.

## Child labour

In order to reward the manufacturers for having, in the most barefaced way, ignored all the Acts as to children's labour passed during the last 22 years, Parliament decreed that after March 1st, 1834, no child under 11, after March 1st, 1835, no child under 12, and after March 1st, 1836, no child under 13, was to work more than eight hours in a factory. That same "reformed" Parliament, which in its delicate consideration for the manufacturers, condemned children under 13, for years to come, to 72 hours of work per week in the Factory Hell, on the other hand, forbade the planters, from the outset, to work any negro slave more than 45 hours a week.

The years 1846-47 are epoch-making in the economic history of England. The Repeal of the Corn Laws, and of the duties on cotton and other raw material; free trade proclaimed as the guiding star of legislation; in accord, the arrival of the millennium. On the other hand, in the same years, the Chartist movement and the 10 hours' agitation reached their highest point. The Ten Hours' Act came into force May 1st, 1848. To understand we must remember that none of the Factory Acts of 1833, 1844, and 1847 limited the working day of the male worker over 18, and that since 1833 the 15 hours from 5.30 a.m. to 8.30

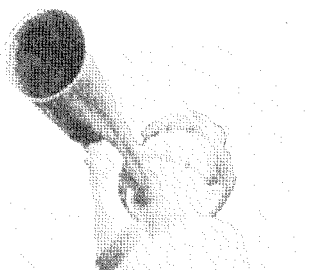
p.m. had remained the legal "day", within the limits of which at first the 12 and later the 10 hours' labour of young persons and women had to be performed under the prescribed conditions.

The passion of capital for an unlimited and reckless extension of the working day, is first gratified in the industries earliest revolutionised by water-power, steam, and machinery: cotton, wool, flax, and silk spinning, and weaving. The changes in the material mode of production, and the corresponding changes in the social relations of the producers gave rise first to an extravagance beyond all bounds, and then in opposition to this, called forth a control on the part of Society which legally limits, regulates and makes uniform the working day and its pauses. This control appears, therefore, during the first half of the 19th century simply as exceptional legislation.

The history of the regulation of the working day in certain branches of production, and the struggle still going on in others in regard to this regulation, prove conclusively that the isolated labourer, the labourer as "free" vendor of his labour-power, when capitalist production has once attained a certain stage, succumbs without any power of resistance. The creation of a normal working day is, therefore, the product of a protracted civil war, more or less dissembled, between the capitalist class and the working class. The English factory workers were the champions, not only of the English, but of the modern working class generally, as their theorists were the first to throw down the gauntlet to the theory of capital.

France limps slowly behind England. The February revolution was necessary to bring into the world the 12 hours' law, which is much more deficient than its English original. For all that, the French revolutionary method has its special advantages.

In the United States of North America every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California. For "protection" against "the serpent of their agonies", the labourers must put their heads together, and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier that shall prevent the very workers from selling, by voluntary contract with capital, themselves and their families into slavery and death. In place of the pompous catalogue of the "inalienable rights of man" comes the modest Magna Charta of a legally limited working day.



# Capitalism won't fall by itself!

**W**HILE it is of great consolation to Moshé Machover to hold the viewpoint that capitalism has not to date been overthrown because its productive capacity has continued to develop, what a pity that neither Lenin nor Trotsky, understood this. Unfortunately, neither of them were crystal-gazers, although many of their so-called followers have taken this up as an art!

Marxism, as we know, is a way of understanding and interpreting the world in order to change it, each in his/her own time, from a given economic and political perspective. Therefore, there is no point in blaming Lenin, Trotsky, or indeed Marx, for their interpretation and understanding of the times in which they lived.

Moshé Machover appears to embrace globalism as a further necessary stage in the productive development of capitalism. Indeed, on page 16 (*WL* 59/60) he sets out six paragraphs to indicate the productive advancement of capitalism. Within this he includes the centralisation of capital and wealth into fewer and fewer hands, the casualisation of labour power, and the crossing of frontiers by telecommunication which makes it unnecessary to bring together workers in one place. This latter in a later paragraph he refers to as "the socialisation of the labour process"; although some would call it "de-socialisation"! "Capitalism," Moshé Machover says triumphantly, "encompasses the whole planet." Sure, but the Third World is taking the brunt of globalisation, for instead of cheap labour being imported, multinational corporations move to cheap labour pools in

the Third World where labour is held captive, while the threat of globalisation is used to keep wages low and to undermine conditions in the so-called First World. Globalism, the new imperialism.

Moshé Machover welcomes the methodical cultivation of the soil under the domain of agro-businesses as "dominating nature itself". He does not mention GM crops which put Third World countries in hock because these crops are infertile. He makes no mention of factory farming which in many cases carries disease into the human species; nor hormones fed to farm animals, which can have a deleterious effect upon human-kind. I have to assume that he sees all these scandals

as of no matter. And yet the truth is that way back there need not have been any starvation, or poverty, in the world. The problem is not production, but distribution and re-distribution. As it is, while profit dominates, starvation and local wars proliferate. Moshé Machover makes no reference to what commodities are being produced by capitalism in its continued development, such as waste products which devastate the earth's resources, armaments, spy satellites, the nuclear industry... Are these development of production or destruction?

With regard to Moshé Machover's claim that those working in public service are not members of the working-class, do I understand that a

building worker employed on a direct labour scheme by a local authority is not part of the working class until the scheme is privatised? I take it that Moshé Machover supports privatisation? However, it seems to me that whether public service or private, all wages are paid out of surplus value.

Moshé Machover sees Nazism and fascism as a product of capitalist development, not stagnation. If this is so, why did it not take place closer to the beginning of the industrial revolution? I feel that he ignores the specific social conditions in both Germany and Italy following the First World War.

Sheila Labr, London

## Science or ideology?

**I**N the last issue of *Workers' Liberty* Richard Dawkins' replied to a polemical article by Clive Bradley against his views. Here this important discussion continues: we invite further contributions.

**I**AM impressed by Richard Dawkins response (*WL* 61) to my article on evolutionary theory. Certainly there was some sloppy journalism: I'm embarrassed to have overlooked the misspelling of Steven and Pinker, and to have misused the vcrb "refute". He's also right about Marx and Darwin, as I recently learned from Francis Whéen's biography of Marx.

On the use of words, though. A much-criticised passage from *The Selfish Gene* reads: "[genes] swarm in huge colonies, safe inside giant, lumbering robots... communicating with

[the outside world] by tortuous, indirect routes, manipulating it by remote control... they created us, body and mind (pp19-20)." Attacked for his "robot" metaphor, Dawkins says he meant "mechanical beings that ended up with human feelings" (second edition, p270) as in some science fiction. My dictionary defines "robot" as "mechanical apparatus resembling a human being... soulless automaton, machine-like person". Dawkins' response seems, to say the least, inadequate.

I found his letter similarly unpersuasive and disingenuous.

### *The Selfish Gene*

THE blurb for the second edition tells us *The Selfish Gene* is a "million bestseller" and "translated into over 20 languages". Why is this? It's a well-written, interesting book; but so are many others.

It was published in 1976, as the radicalisation of the 1960s was running out of steam, although movements resulting from it were still strong. A backlash required intellectual underpinnings. And into this context steps a book with the eminently marketable title, *The Selfish Gene*.<sup>1</sup>

Since then an account of human behaviour as "genetic" ("genes for" violence, homosexuality, etc.) or "evolutionary" has become part of pop-wisdom. A recent book, for instance, argues that rape is a "natural, biological phenomenon which is the product of the human evolutionary heritage".

Dawkins says I (and those whom I echo) confuse embryology and genetics even to mention such things. Hmm.

### Determinism

MATT Ridley's *The Origins of*



*Virtue* is endorsed on the cover by Dawkins: "If *The Selfish Gene* were to have a second volume devoted to humans, [this] is what... it ought to look like." Ridley's earlier book, *The Red Queen*, is also praised by Dawkins on the (back) cover.

On "the causes of male homosexuality" for instance, Ridley comments: "Presumably, a [gay] man... has a different gene that affects how his testicles develop, or... how his brain responds to hormones, or a different learning experience during the pubertal burst of testosterone — or some combination." (*RQ* pp255-256). Well, that's that, then.<sup>2</sup> The book, in which Dawkins is personally thanked for his help, continues relentlessly in this fashion (full of the usual suspects: "why rich men marry beautiful women", and so on *ad nauseam*). Dawkins calls it a book of "simple, honest truths".

To the extent that Dawkins, Ridley *et al* are asserting that there's such a thing as a biologically-framed human nature, I have no quarrel with them. But is it true, as Ridley says, that "society is composed of competing individuals as surely as markets are composed of competing merchants" (*RQ*, p11)? Or has evolution made us into a necessarily social animal? The "statistical influence" for genes or evolutionary adaptations suggested by this school becomes, in practice, a series of utterly contentious assertions.

For instance, Ridley celebrates a thing called "Darwinian history" and chastises historians for dismissing it. "Wealth and power are means to women; women are means to genetic eternity" (*RQ*, p237). But what analysis of historical events could draw meaningful insight from such claims?

### Genes and evolution

I am admonished for failing to acknowledge Dawkins' response to Gould in the second edition of *The Selfish Gene*. The most important of Gould's points was this: "If most genes do not present themselves for review, then they cannot be the unit of selection." Dawkins half-responds: "Genes are selected... as good at working against the background of other genes in the gene pool" (p272). But this is simply to reassert a type of explanation, not to answer the criticism (although elsewhere he concedes: "On any sensible view of the matter, Dar-

winian selection does not work on genes directly" (p235)).

It is a criticism others make, too. Stewart and Cohen, in *Fragments of Reality*, comment: "[the] picture of evolution is different, in many ways, from neo-Darwinism. In particular, organisms play a role, not just their DNA. Modern genetics certainly recognises this, but it still tries to make DNA paramount..." (p91). As I understand it, this dispute goes back to the very origins of the neo-Darwinian synthesis.

### Biology and culture

It is true that Dawkins acknowledges the importance of culture. He even says: "man's way of life is largely determined by culture rather than genes..." (p164) "We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators" (p201). He offers a theory of the "meme" to explain this. The question is whether it sits coherently with everything else he says. My summary of his view — "if [genes] are selfish, so are we" — he calls a "ridiculous caricature" long ago refuted. Yet he denies he means selfishness metaphorically,<sup>3</sup> and throughout the book refers to selfish behaviour in nature as the product of genetic selfishness.

"If you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature" (p3). Biology, then, makes us selfish, but we can choose to overcome it. But where do generosity and selflessness come from? Dawkins leaves us with nothing but "free will". I return to this in a moment.

The "meme" is a cultural replicator which, he says, in human society has taken over from genetic ones. "Examples of memes are tunes, catch-phrases, clothes fashions... Just as genes leap... from body to body... memes [leap] from brain to brain..." (p192).

Memes are fun, I suppose; but I have no idea what anyone is supposed to do with them. I note also an instructive similarity to Hegelian idealism. And the theory reads like a train of thought with little relationship to the rest of the book.

As someone who indeed wishes "to build a society in which individuals cooperate", I am not content with a theory which would require of us a huge collective act of rebellious will

against nature to achieve it. There are grounds for a less schizophrenic, "dualist" view (determinist on the one hand, "voluntarist" on the other) of human nature. For example, Leakey and Lewin, in *Origins Reconsidered*, examine how social intelligence and language in turn affected the further evolution of the human species.

So does Dawkins say "if genes are selfish, so are we"? It seems to me he does. He adds the qualification that we can nevertheless choose not to be selfish. But frankly, despite the characteristic dismissiveness of his critics, Dawkins seems to me ambivalent and confused about the relationship between his theories of evolution and of culture. I suggest that there is none.

### Punctuated equilibria

"A measure of [punctuated equilibria's] success is that its opponents now deny there was anything new or interesting about it". (Andrew Brown, *The Darwin Wars*, p63)

The argument revolved around two issues. One was the "sudden" appearance of new species after long periods of "stasis". The other was the

persistence of old ones. Dawkins' main line of attack (see *The Blind Watchmaker* pp229-252) is that Gould and Eldredge confused their own views with old-fashioned "saltationism" (new species formed in a single generation): as he says in his response to me, they "confused 747 heresy with DC8 orthodoxy". This does not seem true of anything I have read by them.

He is a lot less interested in the second issue. "Punctuated equilibria" is concerned with a theory of species formation.<sup>4</sup> There are boundaries between species, and these are significant: how are the boundaries set? The debate was not just a squabble about how sudden is "sudden"

Gould and Eldredge see evolution as a "historically contingent" process - one which requires historical analysis. Partly this is because their field is a "historical science", palaeontology. But it is also a matter of approach, of theory.

As to Les Hearn, participation in a scientific controversy is a somewhat too grand a description of what I thought I was doing. If I applied the rule — keep your mouth shut unless you're a qualified expert — that Les propounds for the theory of evolution, to,

## A reply to Les Hearn

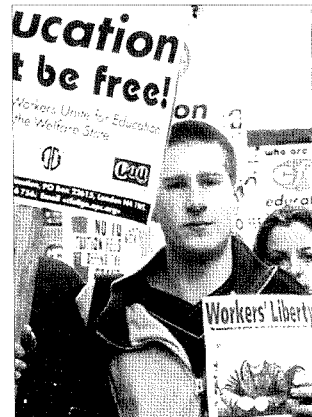
CLIVE Bradley has got my position about right, and Richard's and my differences are discussed at some length in our several books. Readers of *WL* might, however, like to take note of the forthcoming book *Alas, Poor Darwin* (Cape) edited by Hilary Rose and myself, in which several authors (including Bateson, Dover, Fausto-Sterling, Gould, Karmiloff-Smith, Midgely, Nelkin and others) address critically the several vociferous claims of selfish genery and evolutionary psychology.

However, Les Hearn (*WL* 61) thoroughly traduces both the science and my own views. First, before he gets so heavy handed about group selection, he would do well to read the recent book by Sober and Wilson, *Unto Others* (Harvard), which firmly puts group selection back on the evolutionary map again. And second, before he assumes he has scored points by calling my own research on memory formation reductionist, he would have done better to have read *Lifelines*, as Clive Bradley obviously has done. In that book, I distinguish between reductionism as methodology and reductionism as philosophy or ideology. I am quite explicit both about the strengths of reductionist methodology and about the fact that my laboratory procedures are — I hope effectively — reductionist. Finally, I object strongly to the insulting suggestion that my "political background" is Stalinist. Not quite as offensive as calling someone a Nazi but getting on that way. There are many old communists who retain my respect and admiration, but I have never had any truck with Stalinism either in Britain or in its homeland.

Stephen Rose

# From Tory to Trot!

**I**F I had been old enough to vote in the 1992 General Election I would have voted Conservative. I wasn't a well-thought-out Tory, I just had certain instinctive attitudes — capitalism was the best we could expect so why support the strikers or "loony left" who wanted to disrupt the universal way of things; capitalism was the best we could expect so why not have the best political representatives of that system?



In the 1997 General Election I voted Labour. And not because they were equally good upholders of capitalism. I now realised the working class needed its own political representation. What had changed my mind?

I had read some very inspirational poetry and literature for my GCSE and A Level English courses such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. For the first time I was confronted by new perspectives and different ways of looking at the world.

I also studied Marx on an A Level course. His ideas were not as I had been made to expect, utopian rubbish, a product of bygone times. They were concrete criticisms and analysis of the modern world in which I lived.

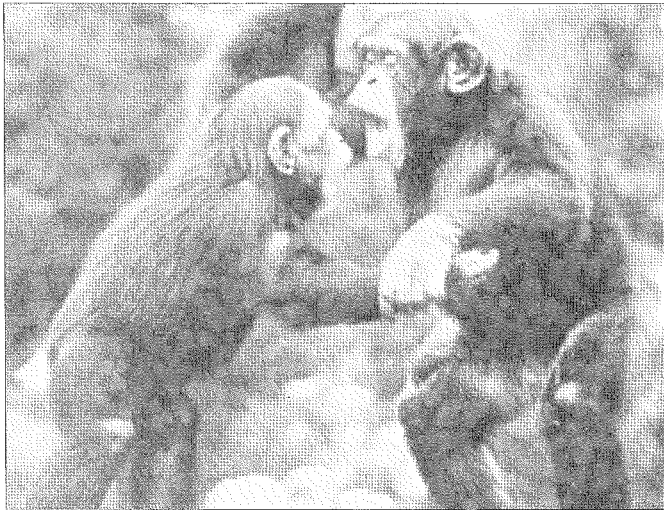
Marx's materialist way of looking at history destroyed my static, bourgeois world-view. His writings revealed to me the internal contradictions of capitalism. I now saw that strikes and the "loony left" could do more than throw capitalist society into chaos — they could fight to replace it with something better. Marxist explanations of ideology also showed me how glaring contradictions could remain latent and thus were never explicitly discussed at school or in society.

I realised I was a socialist; but I did not yet know how to be a socialist. After a short while, I realised being an isolated socialist in the Blairite Labour Party wasn't enough. Yet I didn't want to join "The Socialists", the people who thought socialism is all about "Building The Party". The only thing that seemed to be a way of relating my socialist ideals to reality was getting involved as a student in the fight for free education.

Once involved in the campaign I met Workers' Liberty. They were involved in the student movement but also the labour movement and they were arguing for Marxist ideas in both. To me they seemed to translate what Karl Marx had written 150 years ago into practical politics in the here and now. So I joined the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

For me becoming a socialist wasn't a matter of waking up one day and "seeing the light". I have been made a socialist through a combination of books, thought, discussion and experience — through understanding how the world works in order to change it, and by recognising that myself and other young people have a responsibility to fight for a socialist future.

**Lee Sergent**



say, film. I would rightly be considered a snob.

I did not judge Dawkins or Gould in terms of whether their ideas sound "Bolshevik" or "Menshevik". Nor did I quote Rose just because he uses words like "ontological". (And I note that although Les thinks Dawkins must be judged purely on scientific merit, this doesn't stop him describing Rose's background as "Maoist-Stalinist" to scare us off.)

Most of what I would say in response to Les I have already said. (Where does Dawkins say we are "robots" for our genes? Several places. See the references above and in footnote 3). But I will briefly mention one further thing. Since we and chimpanzees differ genetically only by 2%, Les asks: "These genes include those controlling brain development. Is it this that has provided the field for human culture to evolve, or is it due to the different environments [we] inhabit?"

Of course biology "provided the field". The issue is not whether "the environment" provided it instead — although the environment was certainly the field, for example, for the selective process making apes walk upright. Plainly, the genes that make us humans rather than chimps are what allow us to conduct scientific research or paint the Mona Lisa. But something is happening here which is not simply determined by our genes' drive to replicate. Funnily enough, it's because he says he agrees with this that Dawkins tells me off.

Les urges us to apply scientific criteria to judge these disputes. Well, sure. But these writers' books are addressed to the general reader. Either we are entitled to form an opinion and express it, or "popular science" is a meaningless exercise. If, as Les

implies, we have first to understand the algebra of theoretical biology before saying anything at all, this debate will remain the preserve of very few people. It isn't just me raising criticisms of Dawkins: my aim has been to summarise the views of other scientists.

It is reasonable to ask broader questions about scientific ideas, and if they look like ideology, to say so. Or does Les want us to believe that scientists — other than those with Maoist backgrounds — operate without ideological assumptions?

## Notes

1. Dawkins complains that, following Gould, I object to *The Selfish Gene* purely because of its title. But one assumes he chose the title with some purpose.
2. Since at least EO Wilson's *Sociobiology*, evolutionary theorists have proposed adaptationist explanations for homosexuality, simply assuming it is genetic, and thus perplexed that such a resoundingly unreplicating gene would not die out.
3. Brown quotes him: "[Mary Midgely] assumed I was speaking metaphorically when I wrote, 'We are survival machines — robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes...' But this was no metaphor. I believe it is the literal truth." (*The Darwin Wars*, p93). I note also a peculiar notion of what the word "metaphor" means. *The Blind Watchmaker* (p 111): "It is raining DNA... It's raining instructions out there... This is not a metaphor, it is the plain truth." Perhaps I would not be alone in flunking English.
4. Les raises "group selection", implying it has something to do with the Gould/Eldredge position. Eldredge: "The debate over group selection... has little or nothing to do with our own debate over species selection..." (*Reinventing Darwin* p136) He goes on to say he prefers the phrase "species sorting", which avoids this confusion.

Clive Bradley



# There is no mystery to Hitler

*Hitler 1889-1936*, by Ian Kershaw, *Hubris*.

**M**UHAMMAD Ali may have been top sportsman, Mandela most admired leader, but the tragic truth is that the dominant figure of the last century, the leader whose success will for a long time have thoughtful people scratching their heads in disbelief, is Adolf Hitler. Thoroughly researched and skillfully written, Ian Kershaw's study of Hitler, which takes us from the early life to his consolidation of a dictatorship, is destined to become the standard work on the subject. A second volume entitled *Nemesis* will cover the period 1936-45.

Most of the time Kershaw's work is a lesson that the really interesting thing about history is the room for interpretation and discussion. He examines, for example, the evidence for all the major claims and theories about Hitler's pathological character. Did he really have only one testicle? (The evidence is circumstantial, heavily based on British propaganda and Kershaw decides not.) Did he become an anti-Semite because Art schools in Vienna rejected him? (In an important sense yes, but anti-Semitism as part of his nationalist-racist world-view didn't emerge until his experience of the First World War). Did he have a sexual relationship with his niece Geli Rabaul who committed suicide in 1931 at the age of 23? How important was the relationship with Eva Braun? What prevents these questions from overshadowing more fundamental issues is the fact that Kershaw is sceptical about the whole project of biography in the first place.

There is a major academic debate in modern German historiography between so-called "intentionalist" and "structuralist" historians. Broadly speaking the "intentionalists" stress the role of Adolf Hitler, his charisma, personality, leadership skills and transformation of the Nazi Party and the state; the "structuralists" emphasise the social, eco-



nomical and political factors which made Germany in the 1930s receptive to Nazism in general and Hitler's Führer-cult in particular. Ian Kershaw has for some time been a prominent exponent of the "structuralist" argument. It was the central argument of his earlier book *The Hitler Myth*.

This allows him to dismiss the idea that Hitler was an omnipotent demi-god and to assert instead the fact that, without a very particular set of circumstances, Hitler would have been a nobody. The phrase that came to my mind was Trotsky's fated description of Stalin as "an outstanding mediocrity". Without the punitive Treaty of Versailles, or the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and depression that followed, or the paranoid ruling class fear of communism — each of these inter-related — there would have been no Hitler and no Third Reich. Much of the history of the 20th century would have been very different.

What is missing from Kershaw's book, and it is a stark omission in the midst of such abundance and rigour, is the role of Stalin. The central section of *Hubris* deals with the "levering" of Hitler into power between 1930 and 1933. The machinations within the Nazi Party are well-covered and the unprincipled and stumbling manoeuvres of Hindenburg, Brüning, von Papen and von Schleicher are taken apart. An account is given of the background of street disorder and political chaos caused by the violent tension between the Nazi SA and the communists who dominated most working

class districts in Berlin. But the sudden collapse of the powerful German workers' movement in the face of this lethal threat is never properly examined.

On the eve of the First World War the German labour movement was universally regarded as the most militant and self-confident in the world. In the late 1920s the KPD (Stalinised communists) was enjoying growing popular support, the only party apart from the Nazis to increase support dramatically during the Depression. When a second election was called in 1932 (November) the KPD vote continued to rise, whereas the Nazi vote began to fall — a major factor in ratcheting up the red panic of German rulers and Hitler's determination to seek power rapidly. In addition to this Germany had the largest workers' party in the world, the SPD. Together it is very likely that the SPD and KPD had the necessary support, electoral, organisational and on the streets, to defeat the Nazis. What is indisputable is that they had the power to mount a serious resistance. The great mystery of Germany in 1933 is not how this movement was defeated but how it let itself be swept aside without a fight.

The great mystery of Kershaw's otherwise excellent account is not that he fails to answer this question but that he doesn't tackle it. There are references to a working class atomised and split by unemployment and competing socialist ideologies. SPD supporters were, as he says, disorientated and disillu-

sioned by the failure of their party to protect them from the ravages of depression. The fact that there were calls for an SPD-KPD united front against fascism, or that such a move was possible, is nowhere discussed. The role of Stalin's Comintern in telling the German communists that the SPD were social fascists, no better fundamentally than the brown-shirted kind, was crucial here. The Comintern line insisted that the rise of Hitler to power would be the last gasp of a degenerate and dying capitalism and that, in the bone-headed phrase, it would be a case of "After Hitler, Our Turn". Stalinism allowed the Nazis to come to power peacefully and, on occasion, helped them along the way. The contemporary importance of this was brought home to me just after the collapse of the Berlin Wall during a debate with other socialists about the importance of those events. A formally very educated, but actually idiotic, supporter of Socialist Action (ex-IMG) was struggling to defend their view that the collapse of the Soviet Union was "an historic defeat" for the working class everywhere. Clutching at straws he reminded us that if it hadn't been for the Soviet Union Hitler and Nazism would never have been defeated. It is a line peddled regularly by Stalinist fellow travellers everywhere, but is particularly crass coming from those schooled in the work of Leon Trotsky. The truth is that without the Stalinist-led USSR and Comintern there may well not have been a Third Reich at all.

Those who want to know more about this devastating episode in working class history could start with CLR James' article "After Hitler Our Turn" in *Spheres of Existence* (Selected Writings) [or the book from which it was taken, *World Revolution*, republished by Humanities Press] or Trotsky's writings on fascism. It is a shame the debate makes no appearance in Kershaw's outstanding book.

Patrick Murphy

# Criminal and chaotic

*Capitalism Russian-Style*, by Thane Gustafson, Cambridge University Press.

**R**USSIAN capitalism has arrived with a vengeance. A new frontier of entrepreneurial predation has turned the once-socialised economy of the Cold War Stalinst superpower into a market subject to neither regulation by an authoritative state or a civilising ethic of capitalist accumulation.

What Russians know as "shock therapy" brought "market" freedoms into their lives with the privatisations of 1991-1993. It was an economically destabilising "revolution from above" that paralleled the collapse of the old political order. Five years later, inflation having gutted the rouble, a fiscal crisis of unprecedented depth (1997-1998) left the Russian currency devalued and the banks, supposed showcases of the new Russian capitalism defaulting on their obligations and thus wiping out the meagre savings on which people were sustaining uncertain lives.

In these wild years of transition a handful of Russians became stratospherically rich. But millions of workers, blue and white collar, as well as other intermediary class groups, were pitched into a black hole of insecurity.

Even the "official" statistics presented in this book cannot obscure the truth: unemployment climbed to over 18% by 1998; real wages spiralled downward 40% between 1998-1999; the percentage of the population living below the poverty line approached 40 at the century's close; male life expectancy, infant mortality, alcoholism and suicide rates took such turns for the worse that demographers declared that there was "no precedent outside of war or famine" for such societal malfunctioning.

Thane Gustafson advocates and promotes capitalism, Russian-style. But to read his book is to confront the immense material loss that has flowed directly out of the transition to capitalism in the wild 1990s. Gustafson associates this "miracle" with the new freedoms of movement and of expression, and of the economic opportunity to amass the new wealth. He worships at the feet of the new entrepreneurial Czars who have

parlayed chutzpa into economic empires. A core chapter addresses the rise of these new millionaires and billionaires created by the feversish pillaging of franchising, banking, telecommunications, and natural resources sectors of the old Soviet economy. But in his zeal to champion the initiatives of the marketeers, Gustafson largely misses the contradictions of his own narrative of "success".

Against the material realities of crisis, Gustafson declares "the chief casualty of August 1998 was a state of mind", which saw market reform as a fast-track to the good life. Gustafson manages to avoid the implications of his own acknowledgement that, of the first generation of new Russian capitalists "practically none is engaged in manufacturing." He is unable to ignore the overwhelming importance of criminality intrinsic to Russian business and politics in the wild nineties (40% of current capital is thought to have originated in criminal activity). Gustafson escapes into a wish-

ful fantasy — that the Russian legal system is capable of addressing the problem. This despite his recognition that the courts are overwhelmed, the judges have a long history of corrupt ties to officialdom, and the enforcement of legal judgments and existing law is a difficult, and deeply compromised, project.

What Gustafson misses is that the Russian capitalism of the 1990s is unique in world history.

Its "story" is not the coming of market freedoms. Rather, the new Russian capitalism is distinguished by its foundation in the looting of the economic structure of what I believe was a workers' state, albeit one that had descended, over the course of seven decades, into a condition of catastrophic mismanagement and degeneration. Not a single, producing enterprise of substance has emerged in Russian capitalism's first decade. Instead, profits are being taken in the export trade, in market speculation, and in the criminal protection rackets,

extortion schemes and cabal agreements that are the stock in trade of the mafia-state-entrepreneur networks. This gutting of the old socialised economic order — its workplaces, institutions of education, health, and welfare, financial mechanisms — is the primitive accumulation of a late, decrepit, Russian capitalism, which is severing the working class and others from their longstanding entitlements.

Capitalism Russian-style, has no concern for the future. It robs now, and dissipates its accumulations in lavish conspicuous consumptions. Its connection to corporate criminality is far stronger than its commitment to a sustained regime of accumulation. It wages war, on the dispossessed, and on those who sustain its dwindling production. Many workers are not now paid regular wages. This is barbarism. The robber barons of Russia's wild 1990s owe less to the comparatively progressive capitalist traditions of Arkwright and Carnegie than to those of John Gow and Captain Kidd. We can hope that they come to the same end as their eighteenth-century buccannier equivalents.

Bryan Palmer

## High Art Lite

*High Art Lite*, Julian Stallabrass, Verso, 1999

**J**ULIAN Stallabrass sets out to define a certain trend in contemporary visual art that, for him, represents a general watering down of cultural practice over the last decade. Focusing on the very same artists that we are used to hearing about in the media (Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, the Chapman Brothers), he suggests that this generation of not-so-young British artists has become as high profile as pop-stars. Like any fascination with an idea of "celebrity", the media interest in these artists is less about their cultural production than their lifestyle.

Stallabrass introduces his investigation into this "new" genre of art by turning to the audience. Since the 1960s debate around visual art has put a great deal of attention on the interaction between art object and audience, while stating that no one interpretation of art work should be privileged over another. Stallabrass emphasises

his long interest in escaping from the idea that enjoying contemporary art is an elitist activity, hoping that at some point contemporary art would no longer be seen in Britain as something unfathomable, or even a "waste of public money".

He proposes that this term "high art lite" can be used to characterise the "post Freeze generation" of artists (so called after the 1988 exhibition Freeze that bought Damien Hirst, amongst others, to an art public's attention). In using this term he accuses these artists of playing a somewhat manipulative game with their audience. In referencing everyday activities these artists, according to Stallabrass, are only toying with stepping out of the elitist art establishment.

In a somewhat bitter tone, he hints that what is actually happening here is some kind of patronisational duping of this now widened cultural audience.

It is essential to remember that these characters hanging out at the Groucho Club with little political, cultural or historical

concerns are media constructs - this lifestyle makes good copy. While the stereotype may have some relationship to reality, it is only a partial truth. According to the book's press release, it sets out to take a "cool and critical look" at current British art. However its focus is on a small, and not necessarily representative, group of artists.

Stallabrass seems to be looking at the myth of the artists rather than their artistic output, and as such is reinforcing the age old fiction that artists are somehow different from ordinary people. In this way he is serving to extend the idea of artists as pop-stars, which is enhanced by his choice of Jake and Dinos Chapman's trainer clad dummies on the cover of this book.

Stallabrass is an insightful and thoughtful commentator on contemporary art, and this book is disappointing because it centres on personalities rather than art. Making a genre out of a group of artists who, for reasons that has little to do with their work, have captured the hearts of the media does not make for an art movement — whether the term is coined by Charles Saatchi ("neurotic realism") or by Julian Stallabrass ("high art lite").

Lisa Le Feuvre

# Occupy Rover to defend jobs!



**C**APITALISM IS CANNIBALISM! The bankers, spivs and asset-strippers of capitalism, the piranhas who live by devouring the lives of working people, are about to destroy tens of thousands of car worker and ancillary jobs — perhaps as many as 50,000!

400 shop stewards representing every Rover plant in Britain met on 21 March and decided to resist the break-up of Rover. They have launched a campaign for an “alternative solution”. What might that be? To Rover workers and their supporters we say: we ourselves must act to save Rover. All Rover jobs can be saved if an all-out fight is launched now. Time is short. We must act quickly.

The demonstration on 1 April, bringing together workers from all the Rover plants, Rover workers' families and other working people from all across the West Midlands and Oxford and Swindon, is only a start.

More than this is needed. We must get the whole labour movement to take up this fight. The size and determination of the 1 April demonstration is one measure of how big support is for the Rover workers. This demonstration will send a message to the bosses right across industry, that Rover workers have wide support for a fight-back.

Attention has rightly been drawn to parallels with the enormous demonstrations in support of the miners during the pit closures crisis of 1992. Hundreds of thousands of people marched for the miners. To no avail...

There are two great differences now: firstly, in '92 we had a Tory government. Now we have a “Labour” Government: the labour movement must demand of it that it act like a Labour Government should to save these jobs.

Secondly, in '92 the miners didn't occupy the pits. The Tories could

Car workers should occupy!

Action within the plants can make the difference between defeat and victory.

The unions say “block” the sale of Rover. We should do just that — block them! To move production, BMW (or their successors) will have to move machinery. They can't do that if they don't control their factories. Rover workers must occupy the relevant strategic bits of the plants (Rover workers know what these are).

Is this policy too advanced? No: it is the only way to win — and the only way to force the union leaders and the Government to act. Occupy!

It is not so long ago that occupations were a weapon used regularly by the labour movement in this country — a weapon that brought results.

There is such enormous public disgust and anger about the sell-off of Rover, that Rover workers can expect real mass support when they act.

Unless Rover workers light a fire under them, the national union leaders are unlikely to lead action. They will prevaricate, using excuses about the perils of the law. A strike ballot should start immediately: but there simply is not time to wait for long drawn-out procedures. That way lies impotence and defeat.

Stewards should propose unofficial action now.

Walkouts are unlikely to face problems with the law: BMW will not risk making itself even more of a pariah.

But what if they nonetheless take legal action? The labour movement is unlikely ever to find a better occasion than this in which millions of people can be mobilised against Britain's reactionary anti-union laws, demanding that they be repealed.

Don't believe them when they tell you the Government is helpless! No, it isn't. Not unless it wants to be. They should nationalise!

Rover, whose profit-obsessed bosses can at their whim destroy the lives of tens of thousands of working-class families — Rover cries out for nationalisation!

The union leaders should stop sucking up to Blair and Byers and demand that the Government nationalise Rover immediately.

Public ownership is the only way to keep Rover together. It would make possible a massive investment plan to diversify production into marketable buses, trams, trains, safer cars and other socially useful products that the Rover workforce is perfectly capable of making.

Everyone in the Rover group has valuable skills, skills that society needs. Rover workers can build cars, or can build public transport, or whatever is needed.

There is no reason why these skills should be wasted and most of the workforce left to rot on the dole.

We aren't talking about going back to the 1970s when BL was run by the likes of Harold Musgrove. (New Labour has now put him in charge of closing down Kidderminster Hospital...)

Rover should be run by the people who actually know how everything works and how to make it work better: by Rover workers.

A so-called Labour government should take the workers' side, not the bosses': workers should be able to produce things that society needs — be it cars, trams or whatever — on decent pay in decent working conditions, where we run production and are accountable to the community, not to some useless manager lording it over us on behalf of predatory bankers.

After all, don't they say we live in a democracy? To let the spivs and asset-strippers destroy the lives of tens of thousands of working-class families — that is the opposite of democracy: economic dictatorship!

The Labour Party was founded 100 years ago to represent the working class. It's still bank-rolled by the unions — in other words, by our money. We must not tolerate a “Labour” government presiding over mass redundancies and the destruction of an entire industry while the fat cats clean up.

- ***Fight for every job***
- ***Occupy***
- ***Nationalise Rover***
- ***Demand investment for diversification***
- ***Unions ballot now for a Rover-wide strike***
- ***Unions back all member-led strike action and occupations.***