

News from ground zero — a personal view of the Manchester bombing

By Ray Boyle

FRIDAY 14 June was such an idyllic day in Manchester; Summer had finally smiled on Mancunians and I had taken a day off from work. By late afternoon I had decamped myself at an Italian Cafe Bar just over the road from Manchester Town Hall and I proceeded to eat, drink (rather too much, if I am frank) and talk with some German tourists about the prospects for "Euro '96". By the end of the evening I had a feeling of general well-being about "the dirty old town."

I awoke the following morning with a head like 'Krakatoa about to erupt'. The clock said 8.55. I debated whether to get up in order to go into town. Discretion being the last refuge of the "hung over", I took a raincheck and put my head under the blankets. An hour or so later the largest bomb to be exploded by the Provisional IRA in mainland Britain cut through the heart of Manchester's main shopping area like a knife through butter.

It turns out that the explosives-laden truck was about 20 yards away from where I get off my local bus when I go into the city centre. Have you ever had the feeling that you are truly favoured by the gods? I did when I calculated what could have happened to me on that fateful Saturday.

Moving from the personal to the political, my overall reaction to the bombing could be characterised as being a feeling of "enraged futility". Anger at the damage done to my city and the realisation that mass carnage was only avoided by sheer good luck.

The bombing as well as a reactionary act was also intellectually bankrupt. Manchester has a sizeable Irish community which has been established in the city for over 150 years. Engels in his *Condition of the Working Class* makes specific reference to the prodigious appetite of the Manchester Irish for both work and play.

Rather than being "a brave strike at British Imperialism" as some unre-

constructed Provos will say, to rationalise this act, the attack struck directly at Manchester's Irish diaspora.

A vote for Peres would have saved the peace process!

By Richard Sutherland

I WONDER how Michel Warshawsky and Mark Osborn (*Workers' Liberty*, June 1996) feel now about the election result in Israel. Has the disastrous result made them reconsider their refusal to back the Labor candidate, Peres?

It seems to me that the election of Benjamin Netanyahu is very likely to lead to the destruction of the "Land for Peace" policy of the previous government. We will be taken back not to the status quo of the late '80s and early '90s — but to something worse.

Relations between the two peoples will be worsened. Hamas will be boosted. The mainstream PLO further discredited.

If this is true is it not irresponsible not to call for a Labor vote?

I think I can imagine the reply: Israeli Labor is no kind of workers' organisation; we must continue propaganda for an independent working class voice.

I think this is right! However we are so far away from that in Israel and politics is so dominated by the national question and the stakes are so high, that socialists should have voted for Peres as a much lesser evil.

Disenfranchising the footballing class

By Ian Taylor

I WAS intrigued by your June cover story "United for Profit" by Jane Ashworth. Crucially it misses the political dimension of the revolution that has taken place in the game.

Ashworth argues that the revolution in football is about safety and profit. Rather it is about the political disenfranchising of the working class from any autonomous organisation. In the earlier eighties, football and the football terrace were very much the bastions of the industrial working class. The red herring of safety and violence was used to destroy the culture of the terrace. I am sad that Jane Ashworth recounts the myths that were used by Thatcher and her class at the time.

Chief amongst these myths is that the grounds were manifestly old, unsafe and in need of refurbishment. By the early eighties all grounds in the 1st and 2nd Divisions (as such subject to the Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1975) had safe terracing, and in many cases recently refurbished terraces. I agree that facilities — toilets, catering — were in many cases poor; but the terrace was fundamentally safe.

It is worth remembering that no one died accidentally on an English football ground between 1948 and 1985. That is, during nearly one and a quarter billion individual attendances. I contend that a terrace is not fundamentally unsafe. However, fenced to the front and penned to the left and right, a terrace pen is only as safe as its capacity. Hence the tragedy at Hillsborough. However it was not the terrace that was unsafe; it was the fence. And the fence was there because when reactionary club owners and politicians faced the perceived threat of 'hooligans' they chose to fence them.

Indeed the fences helped generate knee jerk low-level hooliganism. The two sets of supporters drinking together outside could be as antagonistic as they liked with a fence between them. Without the fence they would have had to get on with it. And as we saw after Hillsborough, when the fences came down hooliganism reduced.

Jane Ashworth says: "These refurbished stadia may not be appreciated by those that once stood on the terrace but they are safer." Not true! Indeed if the old terraces were safe, then it is clear that had capital investment been available for new terraces they would have been equally safe. I accept a portion of Jane Ashworth's contention that the changes are about profit, but they are not and never were about safety.

For the answer we must look at what the terrace was. A full terrace was 30,000 standing together united in one cause. Singing and, if needed, fighting for what they believed in and wished to achieve together. The terrace organised itself as an entity, a living collective. Police 'control' was at the very best tenuous, external, and subject to the terrace's collective veto. No one who was part of that will ever forget it. And those that stood were by and large the industrial working class. Hooliganism, hyped and over-rated for 20 years, was never a serious political issue until Thatcher grabbed at it in 1985.

I recall 1984-85, the FA Cup Third Round on 5 January 1985. Fourth Division Port Vale were away at First Division West Ham. Port Vale took 5,000 fans to the match that day. As the away end filled up, the British Rail Special arrived (late) and the police marched 1,500 around to the ground to join the 3,500 in already. And the two groups out of sight of each other started chanting together: "The miners, united, will never be defeated!" For the ninety minutes we continued in a similar vein.

"That the political imperative to close the terraces was discovered just one month after the miners' strike was no accident."

Indeed, even after the strike had finished Port Vale's annual visit to 'scab country' (Mansfield Town FC on 13 March and 16 November 1985) was an opportunity for North Staffs NUM and Port Vale supporters to collect for sacked and victimised miners. And I recall, the home fans often dug deep; perhaps more from shame than solidarity.

Port Vale FC are a miners' club. In the 1980s a number of our players did a shift down the pit on the Saturday morning and then played or watched on the Saturday afternoon. The tradition that North Staffs miners supported the Vale continued. In The Strike that solidarity was repaid. The solidarity of the terrace with the miners was replicated around the industrial north. We should not be surprised then, that in April 1985 (in fake response to a pitch invasion at Luton) Thatcher called for the wholesale closure of the terraces. Indeed, she famously suggested to journalists at 10 Downing Street that all games be played behind closed doors and that clubs survive on sponsorship alone.

That the political imperative to close the terraces was discovered just one month after the miners' strike was no accident. It reflects the terror of Thatcher and her class. Their terror of any bastions of the empowered working class. We see therefore that the political decision to close the terrace was never about safety and only partly about profit. It was a ruthless and clearly thought out attack on the working class and their collective ability to express themselves. Only in that light, with a clear political dimension, can "the Revolution in English Football" be understood.

● *The author is a supporter of Port Vale FC and an organiser for Sheffield Travelling Valiants, a group that combines travelling with political campaigning on issues affecting the game.*

Starry-eyed about James

By Jane Ryan

JAMES D Young (*Workers' Liberty* 32) is too starry-eyed about CLR James. James wrote a few good books — *The Black Jacobins*, *World Revolution* and, so people who might know, tell me, *Beyond A Boundary*, the one about cricket. But as a political thinker or activist there is — aside perhaps from his work organising sharecroppers in the American Deep South — not much to be said for him and a lot to be said against him.

It is forgotten now, but in the '40s James and his faction — the so-called Johnson-Forest tendency, then part of the Shachtmanite Workers' Party — were trail-blazing pioneers in developing the irrationalism and personality cultism and mysticism that later came to dominate much of the so-called "orthodox Trotskyism".

In political terms the nearest parallel, though not an entire one, that I can think of to their way of seeing the world, would be the British Healyites of the late '60s. Not of course the savagely bureaucratic Healy 'party' regime which was special to itself and had no parallel anywhere in or near the Trotskyist movement. The manner of these mystical "state capitalists" rejoining the SWP USA in 1947 was very odd and the manner of their leaving it in 1951 after three years of virtual silence, downright loony. (There is much documentation about all this). They propounded the notion that socialism, the future, was somehow "invading" the present. James, mysteriously, then became a high dignitary in Eric Williams' movement, Trinidad's governing party, before going off on his travels once more. In London he developed a cult around himself as one of the venerable fathers of black nationalism. Some of it spread to the white media; he did not seem to take offense at the patronising manner and substance of much of it.

There was, I think, always — certainly from the '40s — a big element of the charlatan-prophet about CLR James. After Trotsky's death, his contribution to Trotskyism, the revolutionary Marxism of our epoch, was essentially poisonous. He should be soberly assessed, not romanticised. Almost everything James had to teach this, and future, generations of revolutionary socialists come to us in the form of things *not* to do.

The SWP and anti-Zionism

By Raymond Challinor

WELL before I ever met Tony Cliff or Paul Foot, I staunchly advanced the ideas that they propound on the Middle East and which Sean Matgamna now attacks. As a delegate to the ILP annual conference in 1946, I spoke against Zionism, this move to create an exclusively Jewish state, relegating Palestinians to the status of second-class citizens. Such could only succeed in an overwhelmingly Arab region, if the comparative handful of Jews received outside backing from a powerful imperialist country.

The arrival of Israel in 1948 proved my prediction correct. Dependent upon infusions of dollars for its well being, the new state became the unsinkable aircraft carrier of American imperialism, a powerful instrument to protect its oil interests.

Zionist atrocity followed Zionist atrocity. There was the murder of every man, woman and child in the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, a crime comparable with the Nazi obliteration of Lidice. The arrival of Israeli death squads in Jaffa created panic. Palestinians fled for their lives or were killed. Once this process of ethnic cleansing had been accomplished, the conquerors triumphantly celebrated by even changing the town's name from Jaffa to Haifa. In 1956, in league with Britain and France, Israel joined the war against Egypt, a belligerent attempt to seize the Suez Canal, an act that received worldwide condemnation. And so one could go on, right down to the outrages that are happening in the Lebanon today.

Though Sean Matgamna will disagree, I think a vital litmus test to determine whether a person is a genuine socialist is their attitude to Zionism. Like fascism, by its very nature it tends to be aggressive and racist.

Admittedly, for many years there has been racism, to a fluctuating extent, in Britain, but this is qualitatively different to the position in Israel. Despite anti-semitism here, a Jew — Benjamin Disraeli — could become prime minister. But it is quite inconceivable that a Palestinian could ever head an Israeli government, any more than one could envisage the Third Reich ruled by a Jew.

Sean Matgamna appears to argue that to be anti the Israeli state makes one also anti-semitic. This is just nonsense. To want to see the collapse of the Third Reich did not make an individual anti-German. Indeed, it is arguable that it made him pro-German. The first victims of Nazism were Germans themselves — socialists, communists, trade unionists, etc — and that millions of German workers were subsequently slaughtered as a result of Hitler's territorial

ambitions.

Likewise it is becoming increasingly clear that the Jews are suffering more and more as a result of Zionism. It keeps a country permanently at war or in preparedness for war. Young people, conscripted into the army, lose the best years of their lives, enduring mind-rottening militarism. The enemy will never go away, can never be destroyed. Indefinitely, the economic and human resources are wasted.

It is to the eternal credit of Tony Cliff that he understood this fact from the outset. The future can only be made when Jewish and Arab workers unite. Towards the objective of peace, Zionism and the existence of Israel remain as formidable barriers.

Remarkably Tony Cliff originated from the higher reaches of Zionist society. Staying as his guest in the early 1950s, I recall seeing a letter signed "Golda" which I take it came from Golda Meir. He told me that he knew well the dashing General Moshe Dayan, remembering him celebrating victory over the Arabs by publicly peeing in the main square of Tel Aviv. Dayan married the young woman who had been Cliff's first love. The brother of Chanic — the woman ultimately to become Cliff's partner — was appointed the military commander of Jerusalem in 1948. Born in South Africa, he decided to change his not very distinguished surname, replacing it with one that had a Biblical resonance. In the King James version of the Old Testament, there is mention of the brook Kishon; in the Hebrew Bible it is Kidron. But during the 2,500 years since the Old Testament was written, things have changed. The brook has become heavily polluted. A shock awaited Kidron when he saw it for the first time: he discovered (as Cliff chortling later told me) that he was probably the only person in history to alter his name by deed poll so he could be called after a sewer!

Imprisoned under the British Mandate, Tony Cliff found his fellow inmates included terrorists of the Irgun and Stern gang. Menachem Begin and the rest detested Cliff's politics. Yet, they promised when they secured power they would provide him with a valuable personal service — at no cost to himself whatsoever, they would generously perform a surgical operation, removing Tony Cliff's testicles.

With an intimate knowledge of all aspects of Jewish politics, Tony Cliff's pamphlet, *The Middle East at the Crossroads*, represented an important contribution to knowledge. It revealed how Zionism had grown both in economic and political power. It showed how measures were deliberately taken to widen the gap between Jew and Arab. Imperialist interests backed this transformation.

Published after the Second World War by the British RCP, the pamphlet received a favourable reception. In the United States the *Fourth International*, theoretical journal of the American SWP, printed long extracts. Its rival, *New Internationalist*, carried a review by Albert Gates. He generally

though he pamphlet's analysis was excellent. His one reservation related to its failure to map out in sufficient detail what should be done next. With Zionism in full flood, perhaps Cliff could have replied, at the time the alternative had no prospect of immediate success.

But in the long-run things look entirely different. Now it has become quite clear Jewish workers must unite with their Arab brothers and sisters. To do this, they must unite to smash the capitalist sates of Israel and all its discriminatory laws. The only alternative to that is backing successive governments that, like Nazi Germany, seek salvation through military strength. Their most prized weapons in their armoury — a pile of nuclear bombs — were manufactured under the aptly named Samson project. Perhaps they should recall that Samson was blind, pulled down the pillars of the temple, killing himself and everybody else. He never founded a stable state.

order to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move on resolutely to the next link."

VI Lenin

TONY Dale (WL32) is right, I think, that the orientation towards helping the trade union movement in the US create a Labor Party was central to the evolution of the Shachtman movement. He is ridiculous when on the basis of a "prehistoric" 1946 quotation he suggests that the differences on the Stalinist state were not central to the final radical divergence of the Shachtmanites and the "Trotskyists". He is ridiculous to suggest — as I think he means to — that the Shachtmanites, in reaction to Cannon's autocratic style, consciously set out, from the start, to create a party of Marxists so loose that its job would be limited to involving itself in a "proletarian arena", building a Labor Party *in preference* to building a Marxist party. That didn't come until the Shachtmanites were getting ready to commit suicide as an organisation at the end of the 1950s. Tony Dale is equally ridiculous to, seemingly, approve of this conception of a Marxist Party.

The implied view is that the role of Marxists such as the supporters of *Workers' Liberty* is to develop the influence of Marxism in relation to the broad labour movement and not to build a revolutionary organisation — an organisation integrated in the broader labour movement, but nevertheless also a distinct entity already having some of the essential structures and activities of a fully fledged independent revolutionary party. Tony Dale's is a view more often expressed in the routine labour movement practice of ex-revolutionaries than in coherent argument, yet it is a very important current of thought in the labour movement: it is the "position" of vast numbers of ex-WRP and ex-SWP members who turn the sectarian fetish of "building the party" inside out.

This is an important question. On the broad political level, the question of "developing the influence of Marxism" versus "party-building" goes to the heart of left-wing politics now. The point is that you can't meaningfully develop the "influence of Marxism" as a revolutionary force without building a "revolutionary party."

Workers' Liberty's notion of revolutionary activity and organisation is rooted in the basic Marxist proposition that the class struggle takes place on three fronts, not one: the economic, the political, and the ideological. We work towards integrating the three fronts into a coherent strategy of class war and, ultimately, the struggle for working-class state power.

Certainly, the struggle for socialist ideas against bourgeois ideas, that is, the struggle on the "ideological front", conditions the other two; this struggle for ideas and programme is the unique and irreplaceable role of the revolutionary group or party. Yes. But if a group only conducts

A death trap

HAL Draper in the *New Internationalist* (July 1948) wrote:

"And as this situation is created, we must remember:

- that in this splinter state of Israel, 30 or 40 per cent of the population consists of Arabs!
- that it is a splinter quivering in the side of the Arab world;
- that merely military victories (accompanied by Deir Yassins, threats of expansion and Haifa evacuations) can only result in a state of war and warlike menaces, guerrilla skirmishing, border tension and border incidents, permanent national chauvinism and permanent national hatred.

Under these conditions, with all its economic life intertwined with its Arab neighbours, with its supply lines and commercial routes interpenetrating, with its economic life economically dependent and helpless — what can be the future of a splinter country separated from the world on all sides and surrounded by a wall of hatred?

Only a chronic nightmare existence, a new horror of the twentieth century, a state-wide ghetto, a death trap for the Jews!

This is the direction in which the present rightist bourgeois government of Israel is heading."

How should Marxists organise?

By Jack Cleary

"It is necessary to find the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength in

"ideological battle", and organises itself as a group only to fight on that front, inside the existing labour movement, then it is no revolutionary organisation. Moreover, it will not be effective even on that front in spreading Marxist ideas.

The purpose of socialist organisation cannot possibly be defined as just diffusing "the influence of Marxism", cutting away from our distinct concerns the two — economic (trade-union) and political — "action" fronts of the class struggle. Nor — even if they were healthier and more vigorous than they are now — can the structures of the Labour Party and trade unions substitute for the specific structures required for all-round Marxist activity on the three fronts of the class struggle.

Those who counterpose "ideologically rearming the workers' movement" to "building the party" beg the question: what exactly do you think such general ideas as "rearming the labour movement" with socialist and Marxist ideas mean if not the creation over time of a powerful revolutionary party at the head of the broader labour movement, in the first place, of the trade unions? To counterpose "politically rearming the labour movement" to "building the party" is not to know the arse from the elbow of what serious socialist activity in the labour movement is. At the end of the day, both formulas mean one and the same thing. At the end of the process, both formulas will have matched up and merged into one: a mass revolutionary party at the head of the broader labour movement.

Beyond those generalisations, it is a matter of working out concretely at a given moment which is best of the possible ways the organised collective of Marxists, be they more or less numerous, can relate to an existing mass reformist labour movement so as to bring about its transformation, or the next step in its transformation. The growth of the Marxist organisation is both a measure of how the process of transformation is proceeding and progressing, and a necessary instrument for further transformation.

More: the Marxists must organise themselves so as to fight the class struggle on all fronts *now*, despite the dominance of the Labour Party right wing and the trade union bureaucrats. Or does someone think we can transform the labour movement apart from the class struggle? Or that Marxists must wait until the movement is transformed before immersing themselves in immediate class struggle? Or that an organised collective of Marxists able to act coherently as a combat organisation is useless in the class struggle here and now? Nobody, Tony, could be that stupid!

Developments in the Labour Party, for example, have greatly depended on affairs in industry. Think of recent labour movement history.

In 1984-5, the miners' strike could have been won by solidarity from dockers and other key workers, even though the TUC

leaders sold it out. A network of rank-and-file activists in key positions across industry, even if only a few thousand strong, might have won solidarity for the miners — that is, made the difference between victory and defeat. If the miners had won, things would have gone very differently in the Labour Party...

In future struggles a rank and file network of the revolutionary minority in industry may make the difference between victory and defeat in big struggles, and thus affect the whole mood and potential of the political movement. Who will build that rank-and-file movement if not the Marxists organised as a distinct, militant, "tightly knit" minority?

Tony, how can you as an individual, isolated Marxist in UNISON "develop the influence of Marxism" in the TGWU, or amongst shop workers? How can you "develop the influence of Marxism" amongst youth and women workers? How can you intervene in the student movement?

The organised revolutionary minority pursues all sorts of tactics, in part dependent on its own size and possibilities, in working towards reorganising the existing mass labour movement. But the *sine qua non* of being able to work out any tactics, and then put them into practice, is the existence of a revolutionary organisation. Without that we can only babble.

This is the answer to those who conclude from a bad experience with, for example, the SWP that everything a small Marxist organisation does, beyond what a group of vaguely propagandising supporters of a socialist paper might do, is futile and sectarian and, therefore, that instead of "building the party", we should just be a laid back, lazy group, desultorily promoting "the ideological rearmament of the labour movement". Revolutionary socialists must indeed be in the labour movement on pain of sterility. They must also on pain of a different sort of sterility be autonomous — retaining the will and the ability to promote workers' and young people's struggles which take place outside of, and outside the tempo of, the existing labour movement.

A "Marxist" group, not to speak of solo Marxist individuals, content to jog along within the tempo of the reformist labour movement, telling itself that it is promoting "ideological rearmament", and "the influence of 'Marxism'" would at best develop only a vague, unstructured and diffuse influence for a blunted, abstract "Marxism". A "Marxism" lacking embodiment in a militant organisation which strives for leadership in economic and political struggles would be like the clock with no spring: a poor joke.

It seems to me that the tasks of socialists now are, by way of Marxist propaganda and agitation:

- to educate, multiply and group together the Marxists;
- to bind them together in a coherent organisation, capable of both collective political thought and united action; and

capable of knitting together the political and industrial fronts of the class struggle with a coherent battle on the "ideological" front for a consistently proletarian world outlook;

- to organise Marxist fractions in the trade unions and Labour Parties, and among unorganised groups of workers, youth, etc.;

- to work towards building a rank and file movement in the trade unions;

- to organise a class-struggle left in the Labour Party and trade unions;

- to promote the class struggle day to day;

- to work steadily towards the subversion of the structures and institutions of the existing labour movement, and towards the movement's reorganisation — augmented from the very large layers of workers presently unorganised — into a new movement, led by and grouped around a revolutionary Marxist programme and party.

The Marxist organisation needed to do those things has to be built now. They simply cannot happen without the continual interaction of the Marxist organisation with the class struggle and mass movement. If that interaction happens fruitfully then the Marxist organisation will grow — before the full transformation of the labour movement — by ones and two, then dozens and hundreds, and then by thousands and tens of thousands. It is a key index of the maturation of the British labour movement and a prerequisite for its successful transformation. Ever watched water boil? All the bubbles don't cascade at once.

Serious socialists do not, like the sectarians, try to "build the party" irrespective of and wilfully apart from the labour movement and the working class, but, equally, we do not sink the revolutionary group into the rhythms and norms of a labour movement which is not revolutionary and which involves only a minority of the working class. That is as much a recipe for suicide as the antics of the sectarians — by an overdose of sleeping pills rather than an excess of 'acid', or some other sectarian hallucinogenic.

To deny that a militant Marxist organisation — and not just some Fabian-Marxist "think-tank" — must be built continuously, in the on-going class struggles and inside the very process of transforming the labour movement, is either to think that the transformation will happen 'of itself', spontaneously and mechanically, or else to believe that someone or something else will bring about and consolidate the transformation of the labour movement. Who, if not us, the Marxists, might they be? Marxists who deny this do not, when you come down to it, have much use for their own "Marxism".

Can that transformation happen spontaneously, as a result of economic class struggle? It will not. Unless the Marxists are strong enough to shape events you will probably get fiascos and muddle and

confusion like that experienced by the Bennite left of the 1980s.

The idea that revolutionary socialists relate to the Labour Party and trade unions like a farmer waiting for his crops to grow implies not only a vulgar-evolutionist ripening of the Labour Party, but fond belief in a stable, peaceful never-to-be-disrupted development for capitalism, too. And this old "Militant" idea that the Labour Party was organically ripening towards full Marxism, looks not too convincing today in the era of Blair: Lenin-weaned Marxists however know that as well as evolution there is devolution.

Serious socialists fight for the hegemony of Marxism in the labour movement, and to do that we must build, as slowly as necessary and as quickly as possible, a coherent three-front class-struggle Marxist organisation. If socialists don't build up now by way of the ones and twos and threes that can be won, we will never be big enough to win over the tens, hundreds, thousands and millions.

Spain in the 1930s illustrates the foolishness of counterposing the building of a revolutionary organisation now — even if it is no more than the rough draft of the mass party of the future — to reorganising the labour movement. There was a strong labour movement in Spain. Much of it was anarchist. The second most important current was reformism. How might the mass revolutionary party have emerged out of that labour movement? For sure not by the small group of Trotskyists burying themselves in the mass movement, eschewing autonomy and party initiatives, and waiting for History to do its work. Trotsky rightly criticised the quasi-Trotskyist POUM for political woolliness and lack of vigorous intervention directed towards the mass anarchist movement.

The tactical choices of the Marxists at crucial turning points were decisive. For example, in 1934 the Socialist Party youth — the youth of the reformist movement, whose leader, Largo Caballero, had been a state councillor of the recent dictator Primo de Rivera — came out for a Fourth International. The Trotskyists were too stiff and proud to do the entry work Trotsky advocated. The Stalinists got in there and hegemonised the youth, thus marginalising the Trotskyists.

And a few years later, in large part because of the strength of the Stalinist Party, fascist catastrophe engulfed the whole Spanish labour movement before it could be reorganised. We are not, in Britain or in Spain, guaranteed a happy ending to these affairs! Defeat, defeat for a whole long historical period, is possible. We are today still living out the consequences of the defeats of the working class in the 1920s and '30s.

The lesson of history is that even an initially small but competent revolutionary Marxist party can be decisive; that it can make the difference in the heat of mass

struggles between the labour movement being able to reorganise itself and win, and crushing defeat.

That is the truth taught to us positively by the victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and negatively by the tragedy of the Spanish working class in the 1930s. In Spain if they had been sharper and harder, more "sectarian" in the sense of politically intransigent and less sectarian in the sense of being passive and inert, then the small Trotskyist group of the early 1930s, out of which emerged both the centrist POUM and the Bolshevik-Leninists, could have secured the victory of the proletarian revolution.

That is why revolutionary politics is not something for the future — "on the barricades", as the old middle class cliché has it — but for here and now. There is an organic relationship — seed to luxuriant growth — between selling magazines and papers on a street corner now and victory or defeat in mass revolutionary struggles in the future.

If we do not build now, even when the mass political labour movement is in the doldrums, then we will not be able to seize chances when they come, as they will certainly come. We may not be able to avoid catastrophe.

What was wrong with the old WRP Healyites and what is wrong with the SWP now, is that they do not understand how the work of building the revolutionary party — which is the epochal task of those who accept the programme and tradition of Lenin and Trotsky — must be related to the already-existing mass labour movements. Where their mirror-image "Marxists" sink — often without trace — completely into the existing labour movement, the sectarians conceive of "building the party" as a process more or less fully autonomous from the existing movement and even, sometimes, from the working class.

The idea that we can be fully autonomous is absurd. Yet some autonomy of the Marxists is essential. You cannot do what we need to do and aim to persuade millions of workers to do by way of the existing structures of the British labour movement alone! Even if we led the labour movement, all the time we would strive to develop the existing structures and go beyond them. Would we not promote workers' councils during revolutionary struggles? What are workers' councils and soviets to Marxist theory except recognition that even the strongest labour movement under capitalism, even with the greatest "influence of Marxism", is limited and inadequate to the tasks of working class revolution?

Therefore, while socialists work in the labour movement structures and promote our politics, projects and perspectives within them, we do not voluntarily confine ourselves to them or depend on them. Right now, if we had enough people we would do things criminally neglected by the labour movement now like organising young people. We would

turn those young people towards the labour movement, but we would not give a damn for the "legality" of that movement if we could ignore it with impunity and still do our work with them.

We do not go quiet when the official structures go quiet. If some parts of the labour movement die — and that is what the Labour Party as a workers' party faces if the Blairites succeed — we will not die. We will work to build — better! — replacements.

Serious socialists have to reject both SWPish sectarianism towards the existing labour movement, and also the attitude of those "Marxists" who would become mere passengers, enunciating an occasional message to their fellow-passengers. Passengers are not builders of new tracks and better engines! The sectarians are sterile and impotent because they stand aside: the others are sterile because they cling self-distortingly to the existing structures and become parasitically dependent on them, incapable of independent initiative. They fail to develop the sinews and muscles of an independent organisation in relation to the class, the class struggle, and the existing reformist labour movement. They fail to be what socialists must be: the representatives of the movement's future, active in the here and now to carve out that future. James Connolly said it well: "The only true prophets are those who carve out the future they announce".

I repeat: the point is that, ultimately, both come to the same thing in relation to the existing labour movement. Both remove or minimise the creative activity of Marxists as an organised force in the future evolution of the mass labour movement.

If the above points are agreed, then we can agree that the Workers' Party USA of the '40s, rejecting JP Cannon's idea of a semi-monolithic party, presents us with one of the best models of how the Marxists should organise — the way in fact that Lenin's party organised.

Of course, the majority at a given moment has to set the politics and the organisational goals of the organisation, and democratically elected officials have to be given authority to direct work day-to-day. Within that framework, without which the organisation would be nothing but a talking shop, there has to be full democratic freedom of opinion and freedom to express that opinion.

The last *Workers' Liberty* conference (November 1995) wrote into our constitution the long existing right of people with dissenting views to publish these views in our press.

The alternatives are the SWP's replica of an autocratic cult or the loosely structured regime in, say, Tony Dales's group, *Briefing*, which is the private property of a small clique, organised for nothing more onerous or ambitious than publishing a few timid little "left consensus" articles without tang, substance or consequence.