

Workers' Liberty

i n t h i s i s s u e

Marxism and Ireland

**South African
left fight for
right to strike**

**Nurses: 'moderates'
turn militant**

**Interview with
US crime writer
Walter Mosley**

**After Clause Four:
can Blair's project
succeed?**

**From radical
feminism to
lesbian chic**

Morris vs Dromey

**Experiences
of the left: the
International
Socialists/Socialist
Worker**

France

1.6 million

votes for a

revolutionary

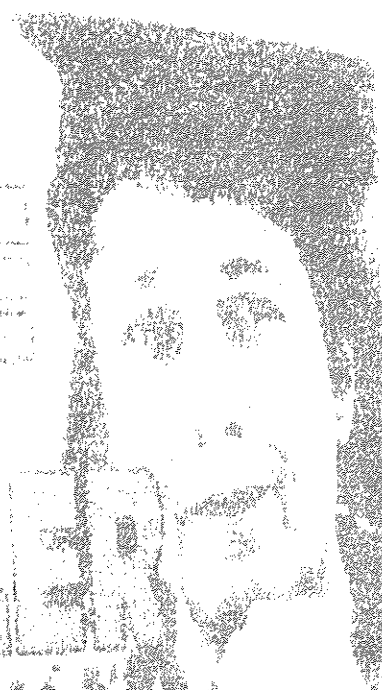
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avec

ARLETTE

LAGUILLER



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A letter to our readers

THE VOTE of 1.6 million for Arlette Laguiller in the French presidential election was a vote for a revolutionary socialist candidate in the Marxist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, the biggest such vote anywhere since the days, over sixty years ago, when the Communist Parties ceased to represent revolutionary socialism. We will rise again! The slogan coined by the Chartist leader Ernest Jones after Chartism had fallen apart is no self-hypnotising rhetoric. Grounded in the class struggle, whose conscious expression it is, revolutionary socialism is not an accidental thing in history. It cannot be eradicated for good. It corresponds to deep-rooted necessities. We are rising again!

Martin Thomas reports on France and on the achievements and limits of Arlette Laguiller's organisation Lutte Ouvriere; and we carry texts from the debate among French Marxists about what to do now.

Also useful in putting into perspective the current difficulties of the left should be Engels' assessment of the development of the English workers' movement over the second half of the 19th century, which we reprint in this issue.

The Blairites won at the Labour special conference on 29 April by a bigger margin than we expected. But then they had a lot going for them! Roland Tetchet dissects their campaign, and assesses how things stand with the Labour Party now.

Ireland is one of the great problem areas for Marxists. Part of the problem is that for decades Stalinist dogmatists and their would-be Trotskyist understudies have mindlessly repeated the judgments and even the self-evidently mistaken accounts of events from Lenin's casual journalism of 80 years ago. In this issue Sean Matgamna begins a reassessment of what Lenin and Trotsky wrote about Ireland. Is this not to add our on little dollop of denigration to the tide of opprobrium now engulfing Lenin's memory? No. We are followers and disciples, and also defenders, of Lenin. The defence of Lenin as he also was involves rescuing him from the intellectual mausoleum in which the Stalinists imprisoned him. It was not Lenin who erected his little workaday articles into canonical programmatic texts; Stalin did that.

The revolutionary movement exists to be the memory of the working class and working-class experience. How events are remembered and construed is a major part of the class struggle on the level of ideas. Stalinism, with its systematic lying, did terrible things to working-class history, burying it, falsifying it, poisoning the wells of historical memory and imagination. John McIlroy continues our discussion on problems of working-class history. In the next Workers' Liberty we will carry a long interview with Al Richardson, editor of Revolutionary History, on the journal's work to rescue working-class history from the limitations of both bourgeois academia and tainted Stalinist historiography.

Editorial

"THOU SHALT not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn". The Bible said it long ago. It might serve as the text for Tory MPs who, dripping with opulence, now bellow their outrage against Lord Nolan and his committee of inquiry into sleaze at the top in politics.

Why should Tory MPs not be outraged at any proposal to muzzle those who have used 16 years of Tory rule at Westminster to bestow vast riches on their class? They have made Britain a paradise for spivs and speculators, enshrined greed as the highest human virtue. They have turned society into a vast grouse-moor for moneyed predators, and erected conspicuous consumption by the idiot rich into a cross between a national spectator sport and a religious cult to celebrate their paramount God, who bestows all things, good and bad, The Market. They have thrown down the barriers and let their class loot the public wealth to an extent not known since the Enclosures of the 16th-18th centuries bestowed millions of acres of common land on the rich. And are they themselves to go short?

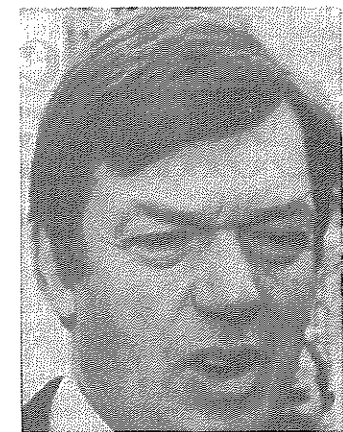
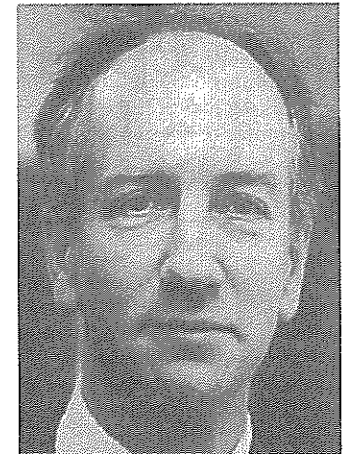
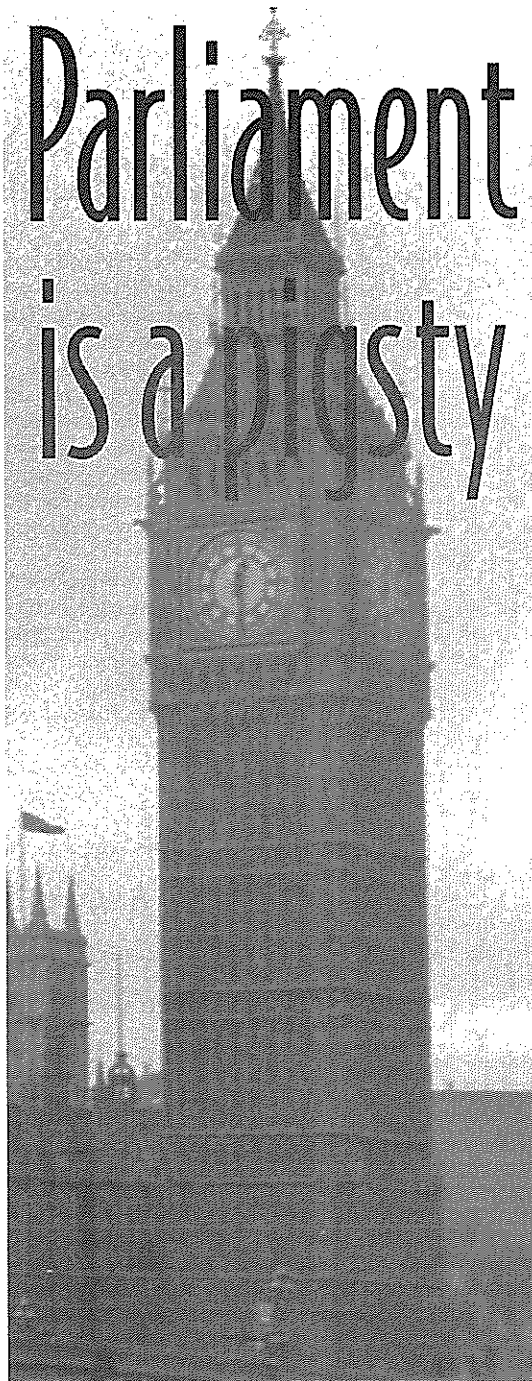
Why should this crop of ministers at the tail-end of the long Tory gobble-fest be stopped from going straight from office to commercial work in their recent field of ministerial responsibility? Many Tory ex-ministers have done it, throughout the '80s and the '90s. And why should MPs, as professional men and women, not be able to charge the rate for the job of raising questions in the Commons? Why should the business of politics not be a business like any other, responding to market forces?

According to figures presented to the Nolan commission, some 64 per cent of voters believe that MPs improperly make money from their position. Yet what enrages Tory MPs is that they do not make enough money! Alan Duncan MP spoke for them, furiously accusing Nolan of wanting to "obliterate the professional classes in the House of Commons". None of the "professional classes" would become MPs, declared Duncan, if they had to do the job at the official rate of £32,000 plus ample expenses. To these Tories, a £4-per-hour minimum wage for the people they represent is an outrage; so is the idea that they themselves should be limited to a wage in the top ten per cent of the range. Such is their view of the relation between governors and governed.

If politics is to be so closely and openly linked with the rich, and MPs and ministers to be so unashamedly dancing to the bidding of the rich and the lure of wealth, then democracy is hollow and fraudulent. If lucre and the personal interests of MPs and those who can buy them dominate politics, then those who, according to bourgeois democratic theory, should dominate politics, the electorate, serve only as makeweights in the bargaining of the moneyed classes.

Yet that is how things are, and everyone in politics who is not a self-deluding hypocrite knows it. Politics is a business; Tory

Parliament is a pigsty



Three little pigs: Neil Hamilton resigned upon discovery that he had not declared a Paris Ritz hotel bill paid for by Saudi business associates; Tim Smith also took money; David Tredinnick took cash for asking Parliamentary questions.

politicians have their price, and so do many Labour MPs.

The Tory MPs who are now so indignant that they may be muzzled as they sup from the brimming trough, know how things are and how things will continue so long as capitalism continues. They know that a new quango to police MPs will do no more than gloss up the reality, and they think it unfair that they should have to sacrifice rich up-front pickings in order to serve the hypocritical pretence that mainstream politicians are not in the pockets of the rich. Understandably, they feel victimised.

Nolan proposes no very tight muzzle. An ex-minister will still get a good rate for joining the boardroom of those he used to deal

with even after the couple of years' gap Nolan proposes. MPs will still be able to get large fees as consultants provided they identify themselves. That such modest proposals create self-righteous outrage in the ranks of the Tory party is an indication of how corrupt they really are. But then, why should, how could, official politicians escape the contagion of the world they regulate?

Not the least objection to the "Blair project" of divorcing the Labour Party from the labour movement is that it means immersing the party in such corruption and thus further disenfranchising not only the working class but also the mass of the British people. ■

France: 1.6 million vote for a revolutionary candidate

By Martin Thomas

ARLETTE LAGUILLER'S 1.6 million votes in the recent French elections show that it is possible to give socialist political direction to the anger and disillusion so widespread in France, as in Britain. It is possible to do it even in conditions such as exist today both in France and in Britain — mass unemployment, greatly weakened unions, a low level of working-class confidence for struggle, a serious decline of the traditional left political culture of the working class. It can be done — it was done — on the basis of straightforward class demands, such as those in Arlette Laguiller's "emergency plan". Laguiller expressly did not campaign for revolution — for that she was condemned by the French co-thinkers of the British SWP — nor did she "modernise" herself by putting fashionable liberal causes (animal rights, environment, etc) upfront.

Laguiller's success thus gives supporting evidence for the approach which the AWL is attempting in Britain by supporting the Welfare State Network. If Lutte Ouvriere had tried to organise its voters with a network of local campaign committees for the "emergency plan" — apparently they considered that option, but rejected it in favour of going for a full workers' party — then the parallel with the WSN would be even closer.

At the AWL London forum on 10 May, however, where Francois Rouleau of LO spoke alongside myself from the AWL, the biggest argument was about the second-round vote: to abstain or back Jospin?

In the AWL's view, the general reasons which indicated critical support for Mitterrand in 1981 still apply. By critically supporting reformist parties based on the working class, where we cannot run viable candidates or our own candidates have been eliminated, revolutionaries can get a better hearing for our demands from that majority of class-conscious workers who back the reformists; we can, with those demands, help give immediate political direction to the conflict of those reformist workers with their reformist leaders; we can help the mass labour movement to develop, and sections to move beyond reformism.

True, the French Socialist Party's roots in the working class are very weak, much weaker even than the British Labour Party's after a decade of purges and attacks on the trade-union link. True, French workers are more sceptical about Jospin today than they were about Mitterrand in 1981. Neither factor undoes the general arguments.

To judge from their press, LO's second-round stance was designed to grip a significant minority of CP members who want the CP to assert more independence

from the SP and from the terrible record of Mitterrand's 14 years as president. LO's calculations are not to be despised. The question is whether they outweigh the general arguments, and whether a second-round vote for Jospin would have been more helpful in trying to organise something solid out of Arlette Laguiller's first-round 1.6 million. That LO is aware of a problem is, perhaps, shown by their awkward formula for the second round: we abstain, but we do not call for abstention.

If LO can now initiate a new broad workers' party — "based on class struggle, but not Trotskyist", as Francois Rouleau put it at the forum — that would be a tremendous step forwards. This would be a real, if small, party, with a working class electorate in the same league as the Communist Party's, not a puffed-up sect like the SWP or Militant Labour in Britain; moreover, the extreme weakness of the Socialist Party's working-class roots and the neo-Stalinist regime of the

*"It is possible to give
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CP, make work by Marxists in these parties from inside at best a sideline operation. The other main Trotskyist groups in France agree with that objective — only one, the "Lambertist" CCI, claims to have already built the broad workers' party (in fact, their Workers' Party is just fancy-dress for their sect), and the other, the LCR, has pursued it by fruitless politicking with feeble CP, SP and Green splinter groups.

History suggests some doubts about LO's approach, too. Francois Rouleau said that LO hoped to find maybe 25,000 people — one in sixty of Laguiller's voters — whom they could talk to and bring into the project. But to line up 25,000 people, one by one, for the idea of a new party, and then form the new party when they are all in place, is a tricky business! It is like the games in which you have to balance and tilt to get a number of balls into holes simultaneously — only this "game" has 25,000 balls to get into 25,000 holes. Historically, no big new workers' party has ever been formed in a country (like France) with a substantial labour movement already established, except by a process including upheavals and splits in that previously-established labour movement.

The central worry for Marxists, however, about what can be made from the 1.6 million votes, should not be tactical questions — about which it is foolish to read dogmatic lectures from afar — but the basic politics of Lutte Ouvriere.

LO dates back to a tiny splinter from the French Trotskyist movement in October 1939, led by "Barta" (D.Korner). Barta split, not because of any political differences — though differences later emerged, he said they were not decisive — but because of the "petty-bourgeois" organisational chaos of the Trotskyists. He set out to build a group defined as proletarian by strict discipline, professionalism, and moral intensity. After the war he had a perspective of rapidly-loomng fascism, military dictatorship, and a third world war: everything was down to a race to build a solid revolutionary party quick enough.

The Barta group fell apart and disappeared in 1949-50. In 1956 a few activists made a new start, without Barta. They had simply bypassed the political crisis of the Trotskyist movement in 1948-51, and the "Pabloite" shift to speculation about the ever-ongoing "rise of the world revolution", in which socialist revolutions would be made willy-nilly by Stalinists and Third World nationalists. They stuck to the pre-1940 Trotskyist consensus that the USSR was still a degenerated workers' state but Eastern Europe, China, etc were still bourgeois states. The perspective of Armageddon round the corner they modified, essentially, by considering History to be pausing, for an undetermined while, before that Armageddon. The mind-numbing method of equating political decisions with moral choices and (simultaneously) with social-class identity, they maintained.

The result is a movement refreshingly free of neo-Pabloite mysticism both in its practical routines (400 regular workplace bulletins, assiduous contact work) and in many of its political judgments. It is also a movement so strait-laced that it is difficult to imagine it responding creatively to revolutionary events. In May 1968 they went no further than declaring "No to De Gaulle! Long live the general strike!" and insisting that the situation was "at no time revolutionary". Their philosophy is more like a fusion of Blanquism and syndicalism than Marxism proper.

The French working class needs a new Trotskyist movement, free from the limitations of the existing groups. But LO's magnificent election effort may have done much to rally the raw material for such a movement.

On the following pages we print some extracts from the comments by LO and other French Marxists on the election result.

French Marxists debate on a new workers' party

Call for a new workers' party

Lutte Ouvriere, 28 April 1995

ON THE EVENING of the first round, Arlette Laguiller announced, after the declaration of our results, that the activists and sympathisers of *Lutte Ouvriere* were going to try to meet as many as possible of those — workers manual and white-collar, unemployed, youth — who voted for the programme which she presented, in order to discuss with everyone who will accept that programme and sketch with them the possibilities and conditions of the construction of a party placing itself resolutely and exclusively on the basis of the political defence of the exploited.

It is not a matter, in our view, of trying once again to bring about the fusion of the existing groups in what remains of the far left, or around the ecologists, or round those who have chosen to call themselves the "alternative forces".

All those activists, whose commitment we respect, have chosen their terrain of struggle, and most often it is not, or is no longer, that of the defence of the workers...

Our activists and sympathisers going to try to call meetings, in the coming weeks, in as many as possible workplaces, neighbourhoods, schools, and colleges, around this question [of a new party]. They will also try to go to the towns and regions, unfortunately too numerous, where we have as yet no presence.

Finally, we also want to make the annual *Lutte Ouvriere* fete in Paris, at the Whit weekend, 3-4-5 June, a great political rally, oriented towards these discussions and exchanges for the construction of such a party...

The second round

Editorial signed by Arlette Laguiller, *Lutte Ouvriere*, 28 April 1995

I HAVE SAID since the beginning of this campaign that, for our part, we would abstain on the second round and thus we would not call for a vote for Lionel Jospin.

Those who voted for me knew this choice in advance.

In fact, only cosmetics differentiate the representatives of the Socialist Party and of the RPR. They are both men of the boss-class who have appealed to the working classes with vague promises...

In 1981, we called for a vote for Francois Mitterrand at the second round, while explaining that this was without any illusions about what he would bring, but from solidarity with the millions of left voters, workers, and ordinary people, who wanted to put an end to the years and years of the right holding political power and who hoped for a lot from the left.

In 1988, we did not repeat that call



Arlette Laguiller

between the two rounds... The first seven years... had shown adequately that the workers could expect nothing from the Socialist Party in power...

Today, we have the same attitude towards Lionel Jospin that we had towards Mitterrand in 1988. We do not want to stop the workers and the left electorate from voting for Lionel Jospin, and we will do nothing to that end.

We will therefore not call for abstention, but we will not call for a vote for Lionel Jospin either, who is, like Chirac, a representative of the bosses...

The way they voted

ARLETTE LAGUILLER won 1.6 million votes, or 5.3 per cent of the total, in the first round on 23 April 1995. In previous presidential elections she had won 605,000 votes in 1988, 668,000 votes in 1981, and 601,000 in 1974. The result is also much better than the vote won by a revolutionary candidate — Alain Krivine of the LCR — in 1969, soon after the great general strike of May-June 1968. Krivine got 236,000 votes.

The other candidates' scores in the first round were: 3.3 per cent for the Green candidate, Dominique Voynet; 5.3 per cent for the maverick right-winger Philippe de Villiers; 8.7 per cent for Robert Hue of the Communist Party; 15.2% for Jean-Marie Le Pen of the National Front; 18.5 per cent for Edouard Balladur; 20.6 per cent for Jacques Chirac; and 23.2 per cent for Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party. Chirac got 53 per cent of the votes in

the run-off on 7 May, and Jospin 47 per cent.

Of those who voted for Arlette Laguiller in the first round, 61% voted Jospin in the second round, 10% for Chirac. 10% cast blank ballots, and 19% did not vote.

Of those who voted for Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round, 17% voted Jospin, 39% Chirac, 13% blank, and 31% did not vote in the second round.

Among managers and professionals, Chirac beat Jospin 59:41. Among small shopkeepers, farmers, etc. he won 77:23. Among manual workers Jospin won 57:43, among white-collar workers 51:49. Those who described themselves as "well-off" voted 71:29 for Chirac; those who described themselves as "working-class", 62:38 for Jospin. Practising Catholics voted 74:26 for Chirac; people without religion voted 69:31 for Jospin. [Source: *Le Monde*, 10 May 1995]

An emergency plan for the workers

Lutte Ouvriere, 28 April 1995

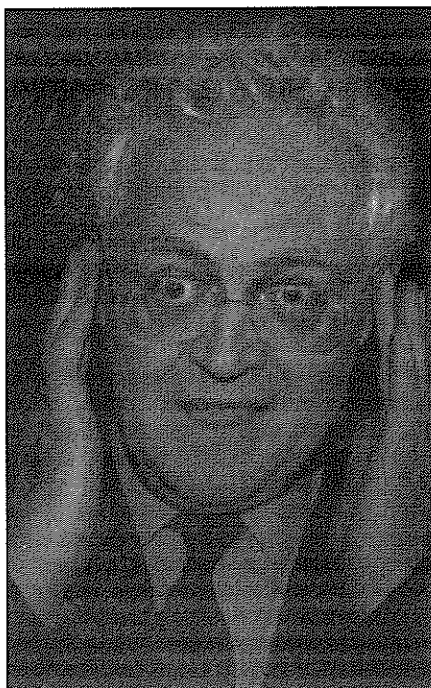
AFTER 7 MAY as before, the workers will have no other choice but to fight to impose their demands. And to really overturn the relation of forces, it is necessary that they fight together, round a common programme and objectives which are those of the whole of the working class.

Thus, the "emergency plan for the workers and the unemployed" advocated by Arlette Laguiller in her campaign remains more relevant than ever. Let us recall its main points:

- 1500 francs [about £200, per month] immediate increase in wages. This would only catch up on the loss of spending power in the years of wage controls.

- The immediate requisition of all firms which make sackings, beginning with those which are making profits.

- A halt to all the subsidies paid to the bosses on the pretext of encouraging them to create jobs, and the direct creation of those jobs by the state with the money



Candidate of the discredited Socialist Party, Jospin

thus saved.

- A policy of public works in order to give the public services the material means they are lacking, financed by taxing the rich.

- The immediate suppression of all the tax and social-security contribution concessions given to the bosses since the beginning of the crisis.

- The restoration of the tax on company profits, at least to its old level of 50 per cent. Currently it is being reduced to 33 per cent.

- The restoration and increase of the higher rates of income tax, and the suppression of all the loopholes enabling the richest to pay proportionally less tax than wage-workers...

And also...

- The obligation for all firms to make their accounts public.

- The obligation for the main politicians and the big bosses to make public their wealth and their income...

Obviously this programme has to be imposed on the government as well as on the bosses. But the objective of the 1500 franc increase has already become a common objective of [recent] strikes... And in the post and in public transport, the workers have begun to put on the agenda the question of halting job cuts and rehiring in order to restore proper functioning of the public services...

The LCR's assessment

Article by Alain Krivine, *Rouge*, 27 April 1995

OF ALL THE FIGURES of the first round of the presidential election, two should hold our attention, because their significance is essential for the future. The sum of the

votes gained by the three candidates (Laguiller, Voynet, Hue) to the left of the SP... was 5,248,943 votes (17.33%). As for the CP, it got only half that total, and can no longer claim a monopoly or hegemony. Let us add a third fact: the exceptional score gained by an avowedly Trotskyist candidate, which was not solely a matter of the personality of Arlette...

During the campaign... these three candidate developed common themes — the balance-sheet of the left in power, the struggle against unemployment and racism, the 35 hour week, the right to vote for immigrants, wage increases, workers' control, defence of the environment, etc.

As the campaign progressed, the three representatives became more radical, under the influence of the social mobilisations. Voynet pushed her discourse to the left and highlighted her links with a section of the critical left. Laguiller went, for the first time, from her correct but abstract denunciations of capitalism and the bourgeoisie to the approach of an emergency plan, leading at the end of the campaign to the proposal to create a big new party.

The result of these elections, the fact that it is not only we who add up these three votes politically, fully confirms the well-foundedness of the LCR's approach. We wanted a single candidate, in order to create a unitary dynamic going beyond this score and staking out the ground for joint work by the anti-capitalist forces...

When Arlette Laguiller proposes, after the election result, discussions "with everyone who will accept it, to sketch with them the conditions of the creation of a big party placing itself on the basis of the political defence of the exploited", including, she adds, with those who preferred a "tactical" vote for Jospin, we have the impression that we are hearing something new from her. To defend the exploited does not imply, as a precondition, to be a revolutionary. It is on that broad basis that we have for years advocated the creation of a new force. And it is necessary to address oneself to the political currents which, however limited they may be, want to assert an alternative pole to the traditional left, unless one wants to make of this project a pure sectarian operation of the development of one's own party. It is with this objective and on these political bases that we work and debate with our partners in the CAP [Convention for a Progressive Alternative, a loose alliance mainly of small splinter groups from the CP and SP], with the progressive Greens or with communists...

LO answers the LCR

Lutte Ouvrière, 5 May 1995

SINCE THE announcement of the first round results, the LCR has taken a position for the second round. No hesitation or indecision this time, unlike in the first round, where it declared itself unable to indicate to its activists and sympathisers whether they should choose Robert Hue [the CP

candidate], Dominique Voynet [the Green candidate], Arlette Laguiller, or even Lionel Jospin.

This time, it was clear, sharp and quick: the LCR calls for voting Jospin, to "beat the right", so it says. But without any illusions in Jospin, it explains. It will be "only a ballot paper against Chirac" — a formula, we might note, used by the CP to explain its rallying to Jospin.

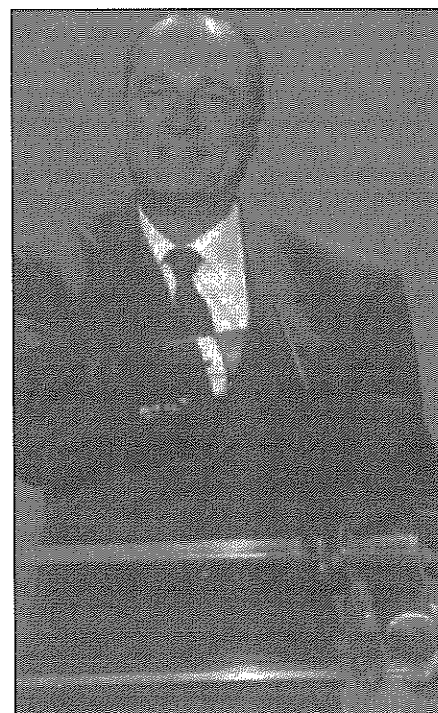
Without illusion? ... But it is an illusion, and a big one, to claim that one is going to stop the right and the far right with a ballot paper with the name Jospin printed on it. It is all the less justifiable this time when Jospin has not even chosen to present himself as a determined champion of the fight against the right and the far right.

But the LCR is not crammed full of consistency, not in relation to Jospin, and not in its assessment of the scores of what it calls "a new left".

Thus, adding up the votes of Robert Hue, Dominique Voynet and Arlette Laguiller, it notes that [the total] 17 per cent of the votes were dispersed, whereas "a single candidate would have made it possible for the demand for a different left politics to make itself heard more, to have more weight vis-a-vis the Socialist Party, and to remobilise more the voters disappointed by the official left".

There is perhaps a bit of hypocrisy in this addition. Would it have been possible to convince the Communist Party (or logical to try to) to withdraw its candidate in favour of Dominique Voynet? Not to mention Arlette Laguiller.

So what does the addition mean? That Voynet and Laguiller should not have stood, and should have called for a vote for Robert Hue?... And if so, why has the LCR tried for months to get a regroupment with Voynet, and not advised her, and us, to withdraw for Hue?... ■



Candidate of the right: Chirac

RCN backs industrial action

"Moderates" turn militant

By Gerry Bates

THE DECISION of the conference of the normally quiet Royal College of Nursing (RCN) to ballot its members on abandoning its ban on industrial action marks an important development not just for nurses but for the anti-Tory fightback as a whole.

Public service workers are growing increasingly bitter, frustrated and angry.

That even an organisation like the RCN, which grew by 250% in the eighties by competing with the TUC health unions NUPE and COHSE to win nurses opposed to industrial action finds itself propelled into confrontation with the Tory government shows just how desperate the situation has become in the Health Service.

The immediate spark has been the Tories' insulting 1% pay offer, but the message from delegates at the RCN's conference was that nurses have just had enough.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the RCN, including the general secretary, former health manager Christine Hancock, seem determined to use the vote not as a prelude to real action against the Tories but merely as a means to prise some very meagre concessions from local Trust bosses.

The RCN leaders aim to get a "critical mass" of some 60% of Trusts to offer a local deal of 3%.

The problem with this strategy is that it undermines the basis of an effective fightback: national action. It leaves nurses isolated in the face of local management demands for people to give up bank holidays and take less days off sick in return for 3%.

Unfortunately UNISON, the TUC affiliated health union, has not been setting a different agenda.

Take Action!

Affiliate to the Welfare State Network!

The Welfare State Network was launched in September 1994 by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs. It aims to build a national movement to defend services, benefits, and public sector jobs. It publishes a newspaper Action for Health and Welfare

- Affiliation is £25 for unions and Labour Parties and £10 for unemployed/pensioners groups
- Individual subscriptions £5 or £3 (unwaged)
- Affiliates receive 10 copies of Action

Write to WSN, c/o Southwark TUSU, 42 Braganza Street, London SE17



What will happen if a Trust sacks a nurse for refusing to cooperate with administrative duties?

There are several reasons for this:

- The general passivity and lack of drive of the union bureaucracy, who have been arguing for people to wait for a Labour government for the last 13 years, since the 1982 pay dispute.

- The changes in the NHS which have seen the traditional base of the main nursing union COHSE — now part of UNISON — decline. The old mental hospitals have been closed, with COHSE's nursing activists dispersed. UNISON's real base in the health sector is very weak. The response to the sign-up campaign was poor and in some areas membership has fallen quite drastically.

UNISON officials now claim that the union can't have an effective national strike ballot because it hasn't got an accurate national list of its health worker members. And those members they add, are employed by lots of different trusts anyway and so legally can't strike together.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to get a united fightback going in the NHS.

UNISON should call a day of action with a national march in London. This should be followed with a ballot for a series of strikes with emergency cover.

If this was done with some seriousness, then would Trust bosses or the Tories use the law? Probably not. Look at the government's unpopularity. Look at the RCN

conference vote and the similar decision by the Royal College of Midwives.

If national action by UNISON were linked to a serious attempt to organise effective non-cooperation with management alongside RCN, then the dispute could be transformed from a political embarrassment for the Tories into a very serious victory for our side.

Despite the contradictions in the RCN's line that they will take action by administrative non-cooperation, but not strike — for instance, what will they do to defend a nurse sacked for non-co-operation? — it does show that broader and broader layers of the population are turning against the Tories and their brutal free-market barbarism.

Maybe the RCN is going through a similar process to that which saw NALGO transformed from a tame, no-strike, staff association into a general trade union within a generation. This is paralleled in the finance sector by the decision of the Barclay's staff association UNIFI to organise a strike for the first time ever.

Even if the RCN goes no further than it has already done, the fact is that when the RCN votes for industrial action while Tony Blair tours the land re-assuring the bosses that there will be "no return to the seventies" things are not as bad for socialists as the media would like us to believe. ■

From radical feminism to lesbian chic

By Janine Booth

OVER THE last decade, much has changed in the political culture of the lesbian 'community'. Ten years ago, the dominant voices were those of 'radical feminists'.

'Radical feminism' denounced heterosexual and bisexual women as collaborators with the enemy. Coming out as a lesbian was the only course to follow for a genuine feminist. But even being a lesbian was not enough. You could not fancy a woman because you would be treating her as a sex object. Penetration was mock heterosexuality; sadomasochism was completely beyond the pale. Socialist women could not be real feminists as we were members of political organisations with men, and therefore brainwashed by them. If you were not prepared to give up shagging men, you had no politics. What was considered 'politics' actually had very little to do with political struggle, and much more to do with policing women's thoughts and behaviour.

The political domination of the radical lesbian feminists was often difficult to

challenge, as its political method was based on guilt. They denied women the right to an opinion on a subject unless you were prepared to bare your soul at length about your own personal experience of it. But enough people did challenge it — or maybe it died under the weight of its own unpleasant, alienating tedium. Whichever, the radical feminist influence has pretty much died, and a generation of lesbian and bisexual women breathed a huge sigh of relief. Girls could now have fun — laugh, enjoy ourselves, enjoy sex (with lasses, and even with lads).

Of course, this change is not unique to lesbians. A whole posse of straight women are currently writing about their rejection of the 'feminist' anti-sex moralism, and insisting that feminism to them entails the right of women to an assertive, free sexuality.

The problem is that in rightly rejecting the radical feminist thought police, many lesbians and bisexual women have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, giving up on politics altogether. Dyke magazine Shebang is now like a homo Just Seventeen. Perhaps one superficially 'serious' article in

each issue, alongside 'just for fun' lifestyle quizzes, and awful snippets about various 'foxtatronic', 'babelicious', 'shagtastic' girls. The braincell count is very low.

"The political domination of the radical lesbian feminists was often difficult to challenge, as its political method was based on guilt."

The mainstream media has latched onto 'lesbian chic'. Last month, Kilroy hosted a discussion on 'lipstick lesbians'. His audience discussed dress codes, make-up, clubbing, frocks and hair length. Kilroy alternated between looking decidedly awkward and defensively reminding viewers of his unwavering heterosexuality.

Most soap operas now have their lesbian character (Coronation Street, as ever, being the dishonourable exception). My personal favourites are EastEnders Della and Binnie, but most dykes seem to be Beth Jordache devotees. As Brookie watchers will recall, Beth came out hot on the heels of an abusive father and a rapist boyfriend. That pissed me off — I could see a thousand parents deciding that their dyke daughter must have had a bad experience with a man, and that explains it all. Beth actress Anna Friel is busy providing journalists with endless column inches to report her real-life boyfriend.

Perhaps I am being too cynical. There is quite a lot to be positive about. The Lesbian Avengers have brought direct action to lesbian campaigning. Health issues for women who have sex with women are being brought onto the political agenda. The theme of Pride '95 is Visibly Lesbian. There was a vocal fightback over Hackney Council's appalling treatment of lesbian head teacher Jane Brown (an episode which embarrassed the Council by showing that low-level tabloid hysteria is not always representative of 'public opinion').

So what will happen next? Perhaps the action will fizzle out. Perhaps the labour movement will remain oblivious to it all. We should work against either of these happening, and instead for a renewed movement for lesbian and bisexual women's liberation, with the full and active support of socialists.

Ideas for freedom

Workers' Liberty '95

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Speakers include: **Algerian socialist on women and Islam** ● **John McIlroy on the British unions** ● **Greg Benton on his new book about Chinese Trotskyism** ● **Bill Hunter on the dockworkers' Blue Union** ● **Ernie Haberkern on the politics of Hal Draper** ● **Ray Challinor on working-class struggle during World War 2.**

Debates with a **Unionist on the Irish "peace process"** ● **Europe and federalism** ● **Animal rights** ● **With the right wing of the student movement on education policy** ● **Should the age of consent be abolished?** ● **With Hizb-ut-Tahrir on Islam or socialism**

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More detailed agendas are available by writing to: WL95, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Phone: 0171-639 7965. Cheques payable to "WLF Publications"



Free education for all, from the cradle to the grave!

By Alison Brown,
Women's Officer National
Union of Students

UNTIL the age of sixteen, education is compulsory and free. Of course, the quality of your education varies widely between public schools, middle-class suburbia and underfunded, overcrowded inner-city schools.

Post-sixteen, education divides more dramatically. Many upper- and middle-class youngsters will stay on at school and then go on to university. Working-class youth are much more likely to end up in a dead-end job, on the dole, or trying to rescue their education on a training scheme or further education course of dubious quality.

The divide in post-sixteen education helps to reproduce class society. Some people get great opportunities and top qualifications, and probably end up employing those that don't.

In theory, everyone has the 'choice' to go to university. But in reality, it is a choice shaped by expectations and by finance. The lack of adequate maintenance grants is an insurmountable barrier to those people — whether school-leavers or adult returners — who can not afford to pay their way through college.

That is why the National Union of Students demands a decent grant for all students in post-sixteen education: as a prerequisite for achieving equality and full access. NUS Annual Conference in March voted to reaffirm that policy.

However, the Labour student right are

now making a hasty and undemocratic attempt to overturn that policy. They want NUS to advocate that students pay towards their education, through loans, tuition fees, or a form of post-graduation taxation.

their reason? Providing students with grants costs money. To deliver a free, accessible and quality system of continuing education, Tony Blair, once resident in Downing Street, will have to set about shifting power and wealth from the privileged towards the common good. This may get him into trouble with the City.

The Blairite NUS leadership have decided that this can not be allowed to happen. They have decided that their job is not to champion the interests of students, but to make life easier for Mr. Blair — hoping, no doubt that he will reward them with jobs. They are determined that if students want to fight for decent grants, then they must do it alone, without the power and resources of their national union.

They know that students do not support them in this. That is why their 'consultation' consisted of a biased survey conducted during the Easter holidays. And why they aim to change NUS's policy at a small, unrepresentative Extraordinary Conference to be held on May 30th, during exams and half term holidays.

They are by no means certain of success. Hundreds of student unionists are organising together in the Campaign for Free Education. The Campaign is blowing the whistle on the NUS leadership's betrayal. Campaign activists are finding ordinary students on our side, and outraged at their national union's treachery.

Campaign for Free Education c/o NUS
London Area, University of London Union,
Malet Street, London WC1: 0171-637-1181.

Free Bolivian
trade
unionists!
End the
state of
siege!

THE STATE OF siege declared in Bolivia on 19 April is still in force, and teachers' leaders are still in gaol.

The government declared the state of emergency, suspending all constitutional rights, banning meetings and imprisoning union leaders and activists, to stop strikes and protests against its planned education cuts, wage cuts for teachers and other public employees, privatisation of state-owned industries and anti-union measures. On 27 March the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB — Bolivian equivalent of the TUC) called a general strike which even shops and businesses in the capital La Paz joined.

The government's first act under the state of emergency was to arrest 1,000 trade union activists, including leaders of the COB who were meeting to plan their next move.

The COB leaders agreed to call off the general strike and were freed; the teachers remained on strike until the beginning of May. In spite of the teachers' return to work, the government is still holding prominent teachers' leaders, Vilma de la Plata, Gonzalo Sorucco and José Luis Alvarez. Government troops have even raided the human rights office where teachers are protesting against the detentions.

The state of emergency will continue until mid-July. It remains illegal to meet in groups of more than three, or to travel between cities without a permit. The army and police still have the power to impose curfews and detain people without trial.

You can write demanding the release of the teachers' leaders and an end to the state of emergency to the Bolivian government c/o Presidencia de la Republica, Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza Murillo, La Paz, Bolivia; to the Bolivian Ambassador at The Bolivian Embassy, 106 Eaton Square, London SW1, fax 0171-235 1286.

You can contact the Bolivian Union Solidarity Committee in Britain c/o BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX, fax 0171-978 9144 for model motions and details of action.

Back Morris against Blair's stooge

Inside the unions

By Sleeper

THE ELECTION for leadership of the Transport and General Workers' Union is set to become one of the bitterest and hardest-fought contests the British union movement has seen for many years. Politically, it is the most crucial union election of the last twenty years.

The incumbent general secretary, Bill Morris, faces a strong challenge from Jack Dromey, the union's national secretary for public sector workers. In essence, Dromey's challenge represents a bid by the New Labour machine to colonise the second biggest union — and punish Morris for daring to oppose Tony Blair over Clause Four.

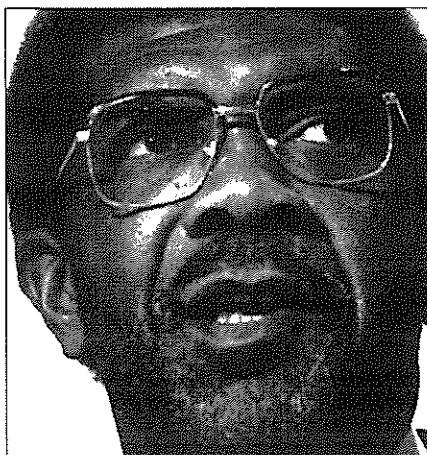
But, like most internal T&G battles, the issues at stake are clouded by personal antagonisms and behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing. Morris, the first black general secretary of a British union, was elected in 1991 with the backing of the union's secretive and semi-Stalinist Broad Left. But many of those who backed him then have become disillusioned with Morris' authoritarian style and political instability. Relations between Morris and deputy general secretary Jack Adams have deteriorated to the point where the two now communicate only in writing.

The union's 'hard left', based in Merseyside, has been alienated by the abandonment of several long-running disputes and the sacking/forced resignations of some popular officials. The final straw for many on the T&G's left

was Morris' decision to go for re-election a year early, without consulting the General Executive Council — a move that was probably intended to pre-empt the left standing a candidate in 1996.

Into this hot-bed of bitterness and discontent steps Jack Dromey, ex-CP fellow traveller, 'hero' of the Grunwick dispute and now born-again "moderniser."

He also happens to be husband of Labour's employment spokesperson Harriet Harman. In 1991 Dromey announced that he would stand for the deputy general secretary position against the Broad Left candidate Jack Adams. Then he withdrew, on the grounds that there were no political differences between him and Adams. Then he decided to stand after all.



Bill Morris

This 'in-out-in-out' performance earned Dromey the sobriquet "Hokey Cokey Man."

Shamed and discredited within the union, Dromey began to cast his eyes towards the Parliamentary Labour Party as his next career move. It was Tony Blair who persuaded him to stay with the T&G, "where you can do more good."

Publicly, Dromey's pitch is now to attack Morris for not having held a membership ballot over Clause Four (the T&G held a branch-based consultation, like most other unions) and to accuse him of jeopardising the chances of a Labour victory by criticising Tony Blair.

Dromey has also appeared on TV and radio backing Blair's climb-down over the minimum wage — in defiance of T&G policy.

However, behind the scenes, this shameless careerist has also been busy building bridges to disaffected sections of the left. He has promised the Mersey-

side "hard left" the reinstatement of sacked official John Farrell in return for their support. Meanwhile, the T&G's Ireland Regional Secretary, John Freeman, has been persuaded to throw his weight behind Dromey. Freeman is an ex-Stalinist who "delivered" his mainly Six-Counties membership to Morris in 1991.

The willingness of some on the T&G 'left' to support Blair's man, speaks volumes about their pettiness, venality and lack of politics. Dromey's campaign — run by Mike Craven of the lobbying firm Market Access International and backed up with a weekly glossy bulletin *T&G Challenge* — is a blatant attempt by the Blairites to hegemonise the union. Serious leftists must vote for Morris, whatever our criticisms.

*"Serious leftists
must vote for
Morris, whatever
our criticisms."*

Budget Day campaign underway

By Gerry Bates

ABOUT 100 delegates attended the 13 May conference, "Organising to defend the public sector." The following motion was agreed unanimously. It provides an excellent basis for taking forward the struggle to defend jobs and services.

"This meeting believes that co-ordination of resistance to the relentless attacks inflicted by the Tories on the public and voluntary sector is an urgent priority for the public sector trade unions."

We agree that as a starting point a cross-public sector Day of Action should be organised. The main demand for this public sector Day of Action should be for an immediate reversal of the cuts in public services. We reject the argument from the Tory and Labour front benches that public sector strikes are harmful.

To this end we agree to:

1. Encourage and support public and voluntary sector workers opposing cuts, privatisation and wage restraint.

2. Establish and support local and regional co-ordinating groups representing public and voluntary sector workers and user groups.

3. Provide full support to NHS workers' pay campaign.

4. Support the RMT national demonstration on the 10 June 1995.

5. Support the demonstration called by Fight Against Cuts in Education on the 30 September 1995.

6. Campaign for a national demonstration and one-day strike in the lead-up to the Autumn budget. We will go back to our respective organisations and propose that they support the Day of Action. We call upon the TUC to organise this Day of Action. If it will not, we will fight for the greatest number of trade union and other bodies to support it.

7. Sponsor a lobby of Parliament on Budget Day itself.

8. Work with community and service-user groups locally, regionally and nationally.

9. Reconvene this meeting in September."

Significantly the conference received support from the national leadership of the RMT and FBU as well as from all the main organised left groups.

Every serious socialist and trade unionist should try to build this initiative. Contact: Newcastle UNISON, Room 145, Civic Centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 8QH. Tel. 0191-232 8520 x6980.

Open letter from an Irish socialist

Socialist unity with the UVF?

Platform

ON TUESDAY 9 May, members of our organisation attended one of the strangest and most disquieting meetings ever organised by a section of the socialist movement here in Belfast.

The meeting, entitled "Is there a future for socialism?", was organised by Militant Labour and included on the platform Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party.

This man has no place on such a platform or in such a debate. His party is simply a front organisation for the sectarian gangsters of the Ulster Volunteer Force, set up in an attempt to bypass the British ban on TV appearances by Republicans which indirectly affected Loyalist organisations.

The UVF has a horrific history of sectarian gangsterism. This stretches from the Malvern Street murders (1966) through the Shankill Butchers gang of sectarian killers to last September's attempt at mass murder in Dublin's Connolly station. More recently still, just before the publication of the framework document, the PUP said that if it were not to their liking "all hell would break

loose." We took this as a renewed threat of mass sectarian killing.

Not only are the UVF sectarian killers, even within the ranks of Loyalism they have been the most fanatically right-wing. They have had the most extensive contacts with British and European fascism.

Yet at the Militant meeting Billy Hutchinson confided that he was a socialist. Not one member of Militant Labour contradicted him!

Peter Hadden, the Militant Labour spokesperson, said that everyone at the meeting believed in socialism — endorsing Hutchinson's preposterous claim. A member of Militant then appealed to the PUP to participate in a "conference of socialists" with a view to creating a workers' party in Northern Ireland. The PUP accepted the invitation!

We can only ask with the poet: "What strange creature shuffles towards Bethlehem to be born?"

We have been concerned for some time at the rightward lurch within Militant Labour and at their decision to partition themselves into Northern and Southern parties, but this latest stunt from an organisation that claims to stand in the Marxist

tradition of Lenin and Trotsky goes well beyond anything acceptable even in the widest definition of socialism.

Militant have made a terrible mistake. They are confusing right-wing workerist populism with socialism. In so doing they endanger themselves, their own members and give cause for grave concern to socialist groups in contact with them. More importantly, they cause grave offence to masses of Catholic workers and many Protestant workers by endorsing forces that have always opposed the independent non-sectarian organisation of working people.

Militant Labour have a lot of explaining to do. We would like to hear their explanations and we would welcome the opportunity to publicly debate with them. In the meantime we have no option but to sound the alarm bell for the members of Militant, for Irish Socialists generally and for the broad international movement for socialism.

John Mc Anulty

Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme*

* Irish supporters of the Trotskyist current whose best known member is Ernest Mandel.

Another day

50 YEARS ago the British ruling class won the Second World War. Then, within two months, they were humiliated in a General Election where their chosen party, the Conservatives, was swept out by a Labour landslide.

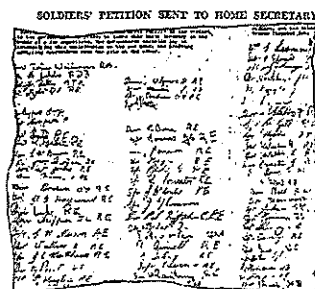
If the Labour Party leaders had used their victory to rouse the workers to take democratic control of social wealth — to make a socialist revolution — then, so the excerpt we reproduce bottom right (from the American socialist paper *Labor Action*, 10 July 1944) indicates, the bosses and bankers would have been unable to mobilise the armed bodies of the State against them.

In 1944 an Eighth Army soldiers' debate had responded to a great press outcry against strikes in the mines and elsewhere by reaffirming the right to strike even in wartime. Soon even many Tories had to recognise that, as one of them put it, "If you do not give the people social reforms, they will give you social revolution." But the Labour leaders did not want social revolution. At the December 1944

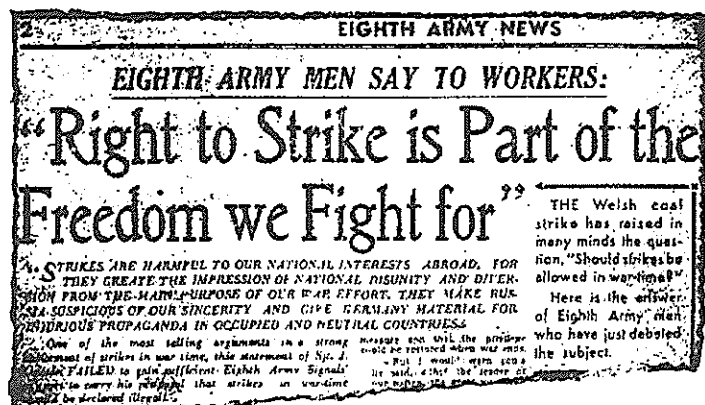
Labour Party conference the floor had to overturn the platform to get any definite proposals for nationalisation at all into the manifesto.



The ruling class relies on "armed bodies of men" to maintain its rule



Petition of soldiers of the Eighth Army



How to fight education cuts

Sarah-Leigh Barnett,
Co-Secretary Notts FACE,
describes campaigning at
the grass-roots

"NEVER DOUBT that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead, social anthropologist
AS A newcomer to campaigning I have only recently become aware of *Workers' Liberty* and *Action for Health and Welfare*, two publications which offer a varied and thorough look into political struggles of the past, present and projected into the future. I thought you might be interested in a grass-roots story.]

My anger soared to unknown heights when, via my 6-year old's school, I received a letter from the LEA outlining reductions in the 1995/6 education budget.

I have helped in that school. I know that it is *already* on the headline, that it relies heavily on parents raising funds to buy essential materials.

I rang my local Labour MP to protest — write to the powers-that-be in central government, [he] told me, but warned: "It is unlikely to change anything."

I wrote a letter, which turned into a petition, which I used to assess the strength of feeling of other parents at my local "leafy suburbs, middle England" school. In no time at all I had collected over 150 signatures from a primary school with only 180 pupils. This encouraged me to carry my fight further.

I read in a national newspaper about a new campaign — Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) — and attended their first national meeting in Rugby on 11 February. I was so inspired by the speakers, by the fact that FACE aimed to be cross-party political, to represent and reflect the views of parents and school governors, that I had to spread the word in Nottinghamshire.

The *Nottingham Evening Post* published my letter outlining the background and aims of FACE, together with my phone number.

I received perhaps a dozen supportive phone calls, two of which proved invaluable in establishing Notts FACE campaign: one from Liam Conway of Central Notts NUT, the other from Jean Thorpe of UNISON. At first I was wary of the interest from these two sources — having lived in a political wilderness for too long I was expecting parents and governors to inundate me with phone calls and offers of practical help — but I soon realised the



We need schools that are able to educate our children

enormous potential of these two seasoned campaigners!

They made it possible for me to mail the headteachers of all Notts schools asking them to pass on information to parents about FACE. They also encouraged me to attend a lobby of County Hall where they knew the press would lap up the arrival on the campaign trail of a parent and housewife! The publicity was a big help to Notts FACE.

Our first public meeting attracted over 100 people angry about the proposed cuts to the education budget. They had all suffered the impact of previous budget cuts, and knew what a fresh round of cuts would mean to schools and children. They were looking for a way to fight the cuts, and FACE offered it.

We called for volunteers to form a steering committee — Notts FACE was officially launched.

The people involved represent a range of backgrounds, professions and political persuasions, but we are all fighting to defend high quality state education, to make it the right of children everywhere.

The combined effort of this group, their determination, motivation, application of skills and sheer doggedness in the 'face' of government intransigence inspires me. Together we have taken 250 parents, children and education professionals to the

national FACE demonstration; supported the Notts NUT one-day strike and demonstration, helping to swell the crowds to 3,000; distributed FACE information packs to schools and individuals; run FACE information stalls; addressed parents' meetings called by local schools; helped organise and support the 500-strong Rushcliffe March Against Cuts in Education in Kenneth Clarke's constituency; organised a Notts FACE conference and much, much more.

My contribution to defending state education was a mere ripple; the formation of Notts FACE has turned that ripple into a substantial wave. Uniting with FACE groups nationwide has produced an enormous *tidal* wave of protest that will bring this government's education policy crashing to its knees. Let's make sure future governments take note of what we, the people, demand, and produce education policies that reflect public, professional and political opinion about how *we* should enable *our* schools to educate *our* children. Which takes me back to the quote at the beginning of this letter!

● Take part in a winning campaign and join your local FACE group now. The national FACE secretaries, Seamus Crowe and Bob Jelley, can be contacted on 01203-313375, Notts FACE on 0115-965 4428.

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex." Karl Marx

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After Clause Four: can Blair's project succeed?

By Roland Tetchet

LABOUR'S RIDICULOUSLY mis-named "modernising" tendency are determined to drive home the advantage they have gained from Blair's Special Conference victory on Clause Four. The question is, will they succeed?

Even before Central Hall had emptied on Saturday 29 April it was already possible to identify the next steps in the "project" that the "modernisers" hope will end in the complete restructuring of the Labour Party and its reconstitution as a stable bourgeois party akin to the US Democrats. We can expect more attacks on the union link and internal party democracy — that was the message coming from the "spin doctors" as they briefed their friends in the media.

To ram the point home, Blair chose May Day, of all days, to announce to the ever obedient *Guardian* that the trade union role in decision making by the party had to "be looked at again" and that the Party's National Executive would have to be restructured.

Blair's fear is that a massive internal opposition could still develop to the anti-working-class policies of the next Labour government: "Under the last Labour government, the NEC [National Executive Committee] became the focus for opposition, and everyone knows that must be avoided at all costs."

These proposals come on top of Blair's announcement to the *New Statesman* — published just before the Special Conference — that he favours closer ties with the Liberal Democrats.

While Blair has talked of further attacks on the character of the Party as a labour movement entity, his allies, Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown and Shadow Employment Secretary Harriet Harman, have unveiled new policy moves.

Brown has talked of new spending plans. What sort of plan? Hand-outs to the bosses, of course!

"We must give incentives to manufacturing industry and small and medium sized businesses" says the iron shadow chancellor. Apart from Blair's support for tax-breaks for people employing nannies this is the first spending commitment so far made by "New Labour."

Harman's activity is perhaps even more odious. It has fallen to her to carry through Blair's plan for gutting Labour's minimum wage policy of any real content.

On 18 May, Harman and Shadow Employment Minister Ian McCartney issued the following Labour employment brief.



Sawyer, Blair, Prescott. Photo: John Harris

"Instead of a fixed formula (half male median earnings going up to two-thirds male median earnings) we should, like other countries, have a social partnership approach. This would mean the establishment of a Low Pay Commission of employers and trade unions... This model would have the merit of tying in employers who do not want to see competition on the basis of downward pressure on wages."

It would also — though Harman does not say it — create employment opportunities for trade union bureaucrats in yet another extension of the Quango State. It will not guarantee £4.15 per hour for all.

Whether or not this next stage of the modernisers' "project" will succeed is an open question. Its success or failure will be determined as much by the response of the left as by the manoeuvring of the right.

So far, the initial left response to Blair's victory has been good. A conference has been called for 17 June under the auspices of the Defend Clause Four Campaign, *Tribune* newspaper, the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs and Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network. Its theme is "socialist policies for a Labour government."

If successful, the conference can lay the basis for a broad-based fightback inside the party which would concentrate on setting the agenda for the next Labour government by focusing on those policies that have majority support in the party and trade unions, but which are likely to be opposed or equivocated on by the Shadow Cabinet elite.

A wide range of such policies have been identified. They include:

- Placing full employment at the centre of Labour's economic strategy.
- Increasing public spending to re-build

our services and create jobs.

- Increasing tax on high incomes (over £50,000), dividends and wealth.

- Taking utilities, including coal, back into public ownership.

- Maintaining and improving universal benefits.

- Repealing VAT on domestic fuel.

- Extending trade union rights.

- Restoring to workers the right to take solidarity action.

- Imposing a minimum wage equivalent to half male median earnings (£4.15).

- Cutting military spending to no more than the EU average percentage of GDP.

- Taking positive action to challenge racism, sexism and discrimination of all kinds.

Major battles could develop over any or all of these issues, but particular emphasis needs to be placed on the minimum wage, on the right to take solidarity action and on the rebuilding of the welfare state and public services.

It is on these issues that we can hope to win working-class people who are "Blairite" now because they want a Labour government at any cost. Concentrating on these issues we can help them resist and fight the Blairite project of "modernising" British capitalism by destroying what remains of the welfare state and continuing the Tory hammering of the working class and its organisations.

Though most working-class people are prepared to give Blair the benefit of the doubt now — before Labour takes office — they are going to want to see results after the general election. They want to see a statutory minimum wage, they want the railways brought back into public ownership, they want to see the jobless being given real

brought back into public ownership, they want to see the jobless being given real jobs, and they want to see the Welfare State rebuilt.

It is these issues that are going to provide the main fault lines in British politics in the next period.

The left now needs to go on the offensive and seize the initiative. The greater the scale of opposition inside the party now, the stronger the independent socialist voice is for those policies during the election, then the bigger the battles are going to be once Blair is in office.

Given the extremely low level of industrial struggle right now much will depend on the response of the different sections of the trade union bureaucracy to Blair's new offensive — and the way this interacts with the internal struggles inside the different unions.

There is good reason to believe that those unions like UNISON and TGWU which stood out on Clause Four — even though neither Bickerstaffe nor Morris put up much of a struggle — will resist Blair on the minimum wage. (A Dromey victory in the forthcoming TGWU General Secretary election would, however, change all this.)

The big question is: how will the leadership of the GMB respond? It is they who hold the balance of votes at Party conference; they can still frustrate big parts of the mod-

ernisers' agenda.

GMB General Secretary John Edmonds needs to deliver to his members on issues like the minimum wage, yet he must surely be tempted by the prospect of involvement in a new tier of neo-corporatist class collaborationist structures like Harman's proposed Low Pay Commission. After all, 18 years is a long time for the trade union bureaucracy to be out of the corridors of power. The irony of this is that in order to betray the minimum wage, Blair could well be forced to adopt classically *Labourist* methods of corporatist bargaining. This is proof that he and his allies still fear a direct confrontation with the great bulk of the union bureaucracy and the active layers of the rank and file.

The Blairites' weaknesses can also be seen if we look at some of their proposals for constitutional reform.

Despite sound bites to the contrary, the only real proposal that has been brought forward in relation to the union link is to carry out stage two of the changes pushed through by John Smith and John Prescott at the 1993 Party conference.

Though the spin doctors have tried to make the most of it, all that is being proposed by Blair is the traditional left demand that unions and CLPs should each get 50% of the vote at Party conference.

Such a change could only be seen as a

major victory for Blair if we assume that the massive CLP vote against common ownership at the Clause Four conference represents a decisive shift in the political nature and social composition of the constituencies. It does not.

The 29 April CLP vote required a massive effort on the part of Blair's office, the party machine and millionaire media. Judging by NEC minutes — which tend to conceal such things — something in the region of £400,000 was spent on getting the result Blair required.

They will not be able to repeat this level of mobilisation on every controversial issue, especially when Labour is in office. While many voted for the leadership on Clause Four from desperation to get the Tories out, on any basis, they will have to judge a Labour government by what it does or fails to do. The depoliticisation that gave Party leaders Blair victory on Clause Four will be reversed when Party members are dealing with Prime Minister Blair.

Nor would it be right to deduce from the outcome of the special conference votes that the days of delegate-based General Committee decision-making are over once and for all. What the leadership have gained out of the Clause Four battle is the knowledge of a special tactic which they can hope to apply in *extremes*: it is not a viable formula for the day-to-day functioning of the party because it is too costly and potentially unreliable.

This special tactic will not always produce the results it did on Clause Four.

When assessing the outcome of those ballots it is vital not just to take into account the desperate longing for a Labour government on the part of many ordinary members, or the biased ballot paper, or the refusal to allow intelligent discussion and informed participatory democracy, and its replacement by a "do you or do you not want a Labour government?" plebiscite.

We also have to realise that the debate on common ownership appeared to many to be very abstract. It took place in a political vacuum. There was no context of self-confident working-class mobilisation even over narrow industrial issues like wages, never mind mobilisations for workers' control and common ownership.

Under a Labour government dealing with more immediate issues, things will be very different.

The longer the party is out of office, the stronger the tendency for the great bulk of Labour supporters to narrow down their political horizons. The Tories overshadow everything. Once Labour is elected things will become clearer as the workers' movement defines its interests against the Blairites in office.

So it is not unreasonable or over-optimistic to believe that a one-member-one-vote ballot on a Labour government lifting the ban on trade union solidarity action would not produce the result Blair would want. Especially if — as is likely — such a ballot should take place against the background of renewed industrial agitation and discontent.

What is more likely and much safer from

The left and Labour democracy

SOME LEFT wingers have related to Blair's victory in the constituency ballots on Clause Four by arguing that postal ballots are here to stay and that the left simply needs to learn how to work with them.

Such a response is one-sided and therefore wrong.

If the leadership succeeds in pushing through ballots on particular issues obviously we shouldn't abstain, or attempt to boycott the proceedings, and we must, therefore, attempt to influence the outcome as best we can through whatever tactics are available. These include advocating all-members meetings to discuss the issues, General Committee recommendations, making alternative literature available, etc. etc. However, it is necessary to defend the idea of delegate-based, participatory and informed, democracy.

The socialist case against the right wing involves:

- A rejection of the idea that ballots are the essence of democracy.

Real democracy means self-control from below, self-rule; it must, therefore, involve effective mass control from below of the terms, nature and substance of what is to be voted on.

Otherwise we are left with rubber-stamping, with plebiscites, not democracy.

- A recognition of a full blown system of plebiscitary democracy inside the party would destroy any real internal democracy and liquidate the Labour Party as the party of the labour *movement*. Inevitably this would lead to a break with the trade unions, which are in essence collective bodies.

- The dominance of a media manipulated "plebiscitary democracy" inside the Labour Party would in turn further undermine democracy in society at large.

Politics would become a variant of advertising, as it more or less is in the US.

The parameters of debate would be set by the billionaires' media, with dissident voices excluded or reduced to token airings. Any left wingers who think that all we need to do to counter the media is to produce better, more frequent and higher quality left-wing literature aimed at the mass of the membership are deluding themselves.

We need these things anyway. But we have to defend the active, participatory, delegate-based democracy of the Labour Party — despite all its imperfections — precisely because it provides a bulwark against the encroaching tide of the big business-dominated hollowed-out democracy of capitalist society.

The road to a genuine mass party is to turn Labour outwards to the workplaces, the estates and to every arena in which working-class people struggle.

his point of view is for Blair to rely on the traditional methods of Labour's parliamentary elite. He will ignore the party and instead appeal to the supposedly higher court of the "national interest."

The general point here is that it is necessary to distinguish between conflicting tendencies within the "modernisers'" "project" if we are to make sense of the likely future evolution of the Labour Party and any Labour government:

1. The "modernisers" still face massive obstacles for their ultimate aim of abolishing Labour's links, not least securing a majority for such a change at Party Conference.

2. The parliamentary elite is, in the last instance, more interested in governmental office than they are in a war to the death with the likes of John Edmonds. They may have to choose one or the other.

This makes it more likely that Blair will attempt to incorporate a large section of the trade union bureaucracy into a subordinate role within New Labour rather than taking the immediately more dangerous route of attempting to liquidate the Labour Party.

The revival of tripartism in the Low Pay Commission is one method. The other could be to *use state funding*, not to break the trade union link but to OMOVise it with cash for postal ballots on key issues.

Whatever option the modernisers may go for, neither is guaranteed success.

An attempt at a clean break with the unions would create resistance because in the climate of mass unemployment and de-unionisation the trade union bureaucracy need a political voice in order to strengthen their own organisational base, not to mention the electoral space that it potentially would create.

But the alternative has pitfalls too. A compromise with Edmonds would open up the possibility of renewed internal battles under a Labour government, as would the LCC's favourite proposal — to stack the NEC with councillors. Both are double-edged swords.

We have already seen school governors taking a leading role in the education revolt. Blair and Brown want to keep some form of the Tory spending "caps" on councils, to restrain Labour local authorities. What is there to guarantee that Labour in local government could not become once more a focus for opposition? Ditto the trade unions.

So, although Blair's victory on Clause Four represented a real defeat for the left it needs to be put in perspective.

Smith's "reform" of the union link and parliamentary reselection procedures represented a bigger change to the party than Blair's victory on Clause Four does.

The simple fact is that Blair has yet to embark on the real meat of his "project", the difficult part. Here the victory on Clause Four is no indication that Blair and his friends will succeed. If the left starts digging the trenches now he will not succeed. After all, a programme of counter-reforms which will generate working-class opposition is not the best way to go about persuading the political labour movement to liquidate itself!

Reports of the death of the Labour Party are greatly exaggerated. ■

Who pays for the President?

A CENTRAL part of the "Blair project" is the way in which the leader has been built up so that he has more or less Presidential powers over the party, and — they hope — over the next Labour government.

In office Prime Minister Blair will require the maximum possible independence from the Labour movement if he is to carry through the neo-Thatcherite programme of counter-reforms he is committed to.

All Labour leaders have had Presidential tendencies, from James Callaghan refusing to put abolition of the House of Lords in the election manifesto, back to Ramsay MacDonald who decided to cut the dole, and ended up breaking with the Labour Party. Forming a National Government, MacDonald campaigned for the Tories against Labour in the 1931 general election.

The difference between Blair and previous Labour leaders — even Kinnock — is the extent to which he has already built a political and organisational machine entirely independent of the party and the labour movement. It is a machine that he is already using ruthlessly against his opponents inside the working-class movement, Bill Morris and Rodney Bickerstaffe for instance. The question is: who pays for this machine?

The *Independent on Sunday* has provided evidence that a secret fund, The Industrial Research Trust, has been siphoning cash from big business to the offices of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Robin Cook. As this body is a Trust, and not part of the Labour Party, it does not have to declare where it receives money from or to whom it donates it.

Some idea of the scale of the operation can be deduced from the fact that, according to parliamentary insiders, Blair's office employs at least 23 full-time workers. Some, like the Press Secretary Alastair Campbell, are on six-figure salaries.

Such an operation could not possibly be undertaken for less than half a million pounds per year.

Most of this cash supposedly comes from one of two sources, either from parliamentary "short money" or from donations from some of the bigger unions like the AEEU. Short money is a state grant of about half a million pounds which goes to the leader of the opposition, for the use of the party; since Kinnock's time it has been used exclusively by the parliamentary leadership.

Since Blair took over, the Leader's office has for the first time ever also taken money directly from the party itself.

There isn't just Blair's office to pay for. Brown is rumoured to have an entourage not much smaller than Blair's. Other shadow cabinet members have similar

establishments.

It is impossible to account for the size of the parliamentary leadership's staff without assuming that a large part of the running costs are met by private donations — almost entirely from big business.

There is another dimension to this phenomenon. Walworth Road employs perhaps 30 people in what could be described as directly political, as opposed to administrative, work. A big part of that 30 work in the press office, acting as out-riders for Blair or in Tom Sawyer's team, who are also primarily a force for imposing the leadership's line on the labour movement.

If we compare that 30 to the 300 plus staff who work for right-wing MPs, then we can see quite clearly that the parliamentary elite — and its patronage transmission-belt, the *Tribune* group of MPs — has a bureaucracy at least ten times, the size of the party's political full-time staff.

This approach has already been tested. During the Clause Four battle, a veritable army of young Blairite parliamentary secretaries and research workers mobilised to do the leg-work for the "New Clause Four campaign", a body which even the usually docile Blairite rag the *Guardian* admitted was really a front for Blair's office. There is another, and far more important, dimension to this, something that goes way beyond big business funding for an army of ex-student right wingers to do Blair's dirty work.

Two other bodies function as a policy-making interface between finance capital and the labour leadership. These are the Industry Forum, set up by Robin Cook to put feelers out to the city, and the Commission for Wealth Creation, run by a former director of the Hanson Trust, a Mr Christopher Harding, who is also Chair of Legal and General and BET.

These big business contacts help shape Blair's line on such issues as the minimum wage and trade union rights. If you pay the piper you call the tune. All Blair's rhetoric about "fairness not favours" for the unions is designed to appeal to this tiny layer of plutocrats whose interests Blair articulates with such anti-labour movement claptrap.

This relationship, coupled to the anti-labour movement political background of many key Blair advisors — they are people from the Alliance, the BBC, the City and the upper echelons of the Civil Service — shows that we really do have an organisation at the top of the Labour Party that is radically different from what there was in the days of Wilson and Callaghan.

What we have before us is the parasitic growth, almost to US presidential candidate level, of an administration in embryo, funded by big business, the right wing of the union bureaucracy and the tax payer. Is it only a matter of time before this embryo finally asserts its independence from its labour movement host and starts its independent life?

South Africa: left fights for right to strike and right to work

Bobby Navarro writes
from South Africa

THE MOVING images of South African workers queueing for hours, in some cases for over a day, in blistering heat to vote last year are still fresh in the memory. How can it be, then, that the mood of optimism and hope has turned so sour, so soon?

At the beginning of May Nelson Mandela celebrated the anniversary of his inauguration as President. It is just over a year since his African National Congress [ANC] won the first free non-racial elections in South Africa with 63% of the vote. The deaths of over a hundred gold miners in the worst mining accident for a decade cast a shadow over the proceedings. But there was little mood of celebration even before this tragedy occurred. Few people attended the celebrations of 'Freedom Day' laid on all across the country.

Last year the South African workers, whose struggles in the 1980s frightened the white racist apartheid bourgeoisie into dismantling apartheid and granting majority rule, turned out in their millions to vote for a party committed to ruling with the white racist apartheid bourgeoisie. That is what the ANC, for all its links to the workers' movement and its overwhelming support among black workers, represents. The same black workers are starting to see that the election of a black-led government has not changed anything fundamental in South Africa. In economic terms the whole *purpose* of electing a black government was to make sure that the system which has oppressed millions for so long could continue, reformed, developed, more competitive, modern but, still, oppressing millions.

One year on, little or nothing has changed for the vast majority of black workers and expectations of change are also low. The "New South Africa" is the same old capitalist system dressed in a new "anti-racist" suit.

The so-called Government of National Unity [GNU] includes all those parties which got over 10% support in the elections. Thus the ANC governs with the help of the National Party, the Democratic Party and with some of the most prominent figures in the old racist regime. They govern with the old apartheid civil service, police force and military intact — guaranteed jobs under the "sunset clause."

Even accounting for the participation of this right wing, the GNU has exceeded the bosses' hopes for its compliance with capitalist orthodoxy.

The ANC earned praise from the bourgeois press when it dropped a paper commitment in the Freedom Charter to nationalisation. Other evidence cited for the ANC abandoning 'socialism' includes its enthusiastic support for monetarist policies, wage restraint and privatisation. ANC and GNU strategy for developing the South African economy is to depress wage levels, making South African goods more competitive in the world market. So they promote 'industrial harmony' — that is, they clamp down on industrial militancy, especially around wage claims. They even talk of tax cuts for the rich — businesses have already received generous tax cuts from the GNU.

At the same time the ANC-led alliance parties are hyping the main plank of their commitment to a New South Africa free from the injustices of apartheid — the Reconstruction and Development Plan [RDP]. The aim of the Plan, they say, is to aid development through a programme of education, house-building, electrification and job creation.

Yet the RDP has had to rely on World Bank loans, private sector capital and on growth for finance, when only a tax on wealth could raise the funds to make it happen.

Indeed, the government presents the RDP as a *partnership* with capitalism for the building of a new nation. The bosses are keen to participate in a programme that "offers plenty of scope for fair profit" (Jay Naidoo, former General Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions [COSATU], now in charge of the RDP), but only do so on their own terms. Barlow Rand, one of the biggest South African companies, described the RDP as "a carcass off which business can feed for years."

The Workers' List Party [WLP], who stood for independent working-class politics in the elections a year ago, estimate the cost of delivering the main objectives of the RDP at R40 billion (£7 billion):

Free milk for children	R2bn
Safe drinking water	R4bn
Rural development	R5bn
Housing/nurseries	R12bn
Healthcare	R5bn
Education	R4bn
Public transport	R4bn
Electrification	R4bn

Spending money on this would save South African children from malnutrition and disease, build homes, provide a launchpad and hope for the impoverished black majority. Delivering these services would provide badly needed jobs: more than 40% of black South Africans are unemployed.

The GNU has other priorities: repaying to the international banks debts incurred by the apartheid regime (R35 billion per year), buying new battleships for the navy (R3.2 billion).

A fight for the reforms promised in the RDP is important, although it's equally important to reject the strategy of which it forms part — building thriving capitalism in South Africa.

Apartheid was a creation of capitalism and while real power in South Africa remains with the old apartheid bosses, its legacy cannot be addressed.

The government's path is becoming increasingly thorny.

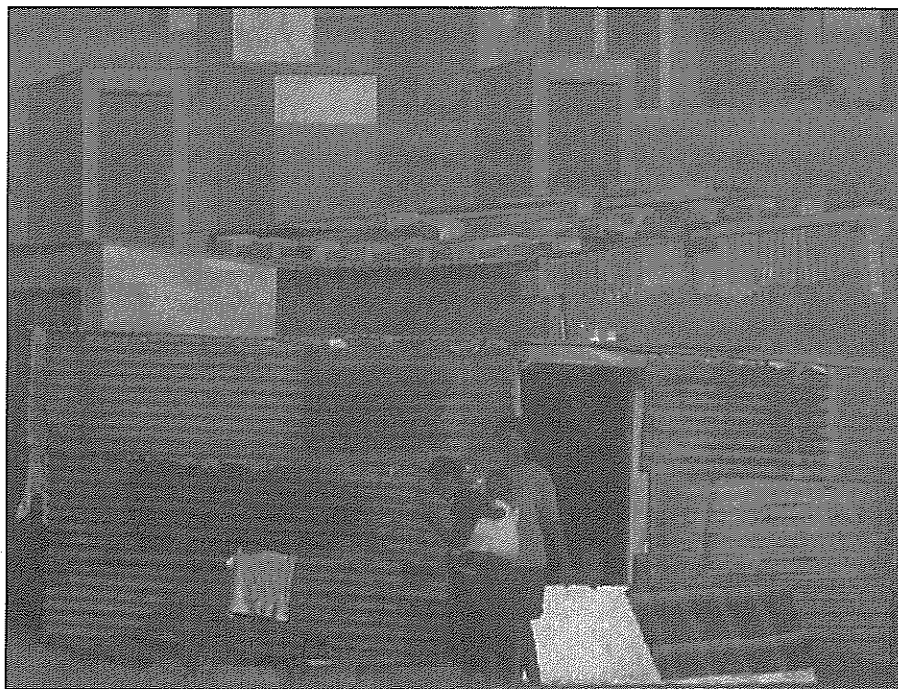
In KwaZulu-Natal, base of the Inkatha Freedom Party, Chief Buthelezi has called on Zulus to rise up and resist the central government. This has led to an escalation of political violence. The recent embarrassing Winnie Mandela saga resulted from the government's poor record. Winnie was sacked for attacking the government!

The growing disillusionment is, perhaps, demonstrated by the slowness of registration for voting in local elections — registration time had to be extended, as only 30% of the electorate had registered by the deadline.

The ANC and its supporters in the South African Communist Party [SACP] and COSATU offer three main arguments in defence of their record.

They claim the old civil service has obstructed reconstruction and progress. They say the world economic situation has constrained prospects for growth in the South African economy. Lastly, and increasingly, they accuse workers of making unrealistic demands. In fact, the plans increasingly call for workers to pay for reconstruction through wage restraint — but why should workers start paying money for services they have not yet received? And workers *need* to make pay demands. Inflation for workers is much higher than the official levels.

But more scapegoating of workers will surely follow. The GNU and media have scapegoated immigrants — Mozambican miners have been forced out of the country. And some members of the GNU have



ANC election promises included building a million homes — to date they have built fewer than 10,000. Millions remain inadequately housed.

hinted that the press is abusing its freedom when it attacks the government.

The left has become a scapegoat, with attacks on the "minority wearing the mask of anarchy." Everyone is responsible except those responsible, the government.

All of this points to the future sites of conflict and repression in the coming period of increased class struggle.

So far the ANC has kept the support of the workers with the aid of COSATU and the SACP. The RDP formed the core of a pact between COSATU, the SACP and the ANC in the run-up to the elections. Strains are now developing in this alliance as the interests of the capitalist state and the ANC government clash with those of workers organised in COSATU, and the RDP is clearly not implemented.

All three partners suffered organisationally by the loss of their top cadre to responsibilities in government. The ANC has been plagued by internal problems. At grass roots most of their branches and the youth structure have all but collapsed — it is now very hard for the ANC to get its line across to communities and workers. Increasingly they are relying on Mandela's personal prestige to hold the organisation together. Sacking Winnie Mandela, and attacks on other 'populists', represent a move by the capitalist class to make the ANC a fully stable and reliable party of government in time for the 1999 elections, when Mandela will not be a candidate for president.

The SACP has slavishly defended the anti-working class policies of the GNU. Joe Slovo's death weakened the SACP at a crucial time, although it has increased its membership to over 75,000. Recent attempts by left elements in the Western Cape SACP to rebuild the structures have largely flopped. The current line of the SACP is that the quickest and most direct route to socialism is to build the RDP.

COSATU is becoming more and more bureaucratic. The GNU places the COSATU leadership in a very difficult position, trying to justify government attacks on workers while representing their members.

The highway blockade by the transport workers' union Turning Wheel last October might have been a turning point in the situation [see interview in *Workers' Liberty* 20]. It was the first national militant action against the GNU by workers. Turning Wheel, a split from the COSATU-affiliated TGWU, seems to have caused a change of direction and increased the militancy of the workers. Many trade unions are looking for a clear alternative to this government.

The current situation is characterised by isolated strikes and demonstrations and threats of action by various unions. Health workers, teachers, students, transport workers, policemen and women have been in dispute in the last year. What these disputes lack is a national focus, and left leadership in the unions.

NUMSA [National Union of Miners of South Africa] failed to gain a seconder for its proposal to break the "triple alliance" at COSATU congress in November last year, but it is the focus of a growing mood of discontent within the unions.

Against this background and before resistance to the government grows any bigger the GNU has introduced a new labour bill — the Labour Relations Bill [LRB] — aimed at tying the unions into a social contract arrangement: negotiations in a new corporatist forum will 'replace' the need for workers' industrial action.

The Bill provides for a limited right to strike, the establishment of 'workplace forums' of bosses and workers, and a new system of non-compulsory bargaining.

The right to strike would be bound in a tight legal framework. Bosses would have the right to employ scabs, and to lock out workers; they could sack striking workers

if they faced bankruptcy (that is, if the strike were effective!). The Bill would ban strikes against lay-offs; and in essential or maintenance services (where a strike could damage the machinery in a plant for example). A strike on any issue that can be referred to arbitration or the Labour Court would be illegal.

'Workplace forums' would not have any direct union input, and would be used by the bosses to promote non-unionism. Workplace forum reps would get time off for training, and support in their role as a representative — rights denied shop stewards.

Bosses would not be obliged to bargain.

Thus the Bill ignores the key demands of the Workers' Charter, developed by COSATU in the late 1980s. In return for 'social peace' there will be very little reward for the workers.

Many COSATU officials oppose the LRB. The official COSATU position is that the Bill is a step forward and the limitations can be worked on within the GNU, as time passes. But the Chemical Workers Industrial Union is beginning a major campaign for industry-wide bargaining — the first major test of strength between a COSATU union and the bosses since the GNU was formed, and a direct challenge to the proposed legislation.

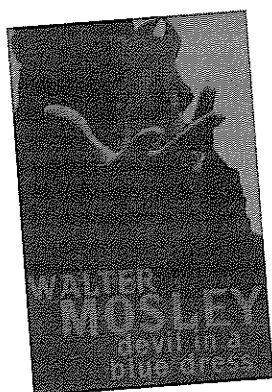
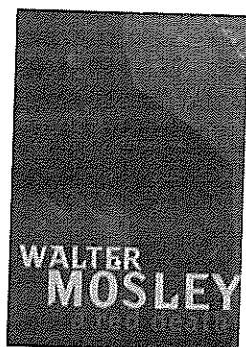
Workers are responding well to the campaign against the Bill. This will increase as more and more workers learn the Bill's real content. The campaign gives the left a vital opportunity to draw a class line between organised labour and the government, and to make the case for a workers' party.

The Campaign for the Right to Work provides another opportunity for the left. The campaign is centred on the draft constitution which includes the right to private property but not the right to work. The Workers' List Party has submitted an amendment to the constitution. A high profile campaign on this issue will attract those rank and file workers who expected the ANC-led government to organise a jobs programme.

Of course, to make the best of these openings, the left has some recovering to do. Just as the unions have been weakened by the mood of confusion and lack of leadership, so too has the left. The Workers' List Party has attracted much media coverage by its consistent defence of working-class interests against the GNU but it has not grown at the rate expected after the elections. Campaigns around the LRB and the right to work, initiated by the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action and by the WLP, will be crucial to channeling debate towards independent working-class politics.

The next few months will be critical to the long-term development of South African politics. If the ANC traps COSATU into a social contract we will see in the future a long and bitter struggle inside COSATU.

If the left can unite in action around campaigns based on the Workers' Charter and workers' interests, they can turn the mood of discontent into a struggle against the capitalist government, for the ending of the miserable legacy of apartheid and toward a struggle for socialism. ■



It is the summer of '48 in the City of Angels and there's heat on the streets and in the ghettos... Enter Ezekiel — Easy — Rawlins, a black man from the American South who went to Los Angeles in search of work. He is the hero for Walter Mosley's now well known crime novels.

Mosley was born in Los Angeles in the '50s. His mother was Jewish and his father made the same post-war migration to the West Coast as Easy.

Walter Mosley talked to Mark Osborn about American politics, racism and his writing.

Crime writer Walter Mosley talks about change

Hope and despair

THE BIG CHANGE for black Americans was World War 2. Men went to fight and found that they got respect. They were treated like Americans by the people who were trying to kill them, and by the people who thanked them for liberation. They came back from the war, thinking that they were now equals, to places like Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. But there was no work, and black people wouldn't be hired anyway.

So they went to California to get jobs. And then there was a basic economic change. The working people got property and property brought a different view of themselves. It also exposed the nugget of racism. It was now absolutely clear how far a black person could go.

40 years on there is a lot more poverty and hopelessness in the non-white communities. But hope also exists alongside hopelessness, and there is leadership too. One of the interesting things is that there is now a cultural leadership as well as a political leadership. Of course Jesse Jackson is still important and the NAACP does some good work.

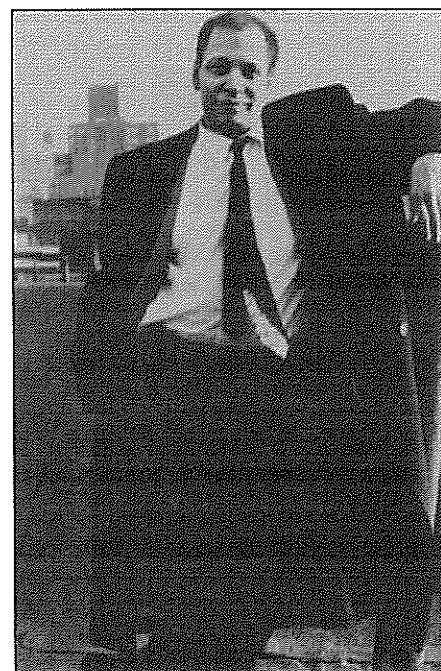
Instead people like Ice Cube are emerging. One of the top five films in the US is only in the top five because Ice Cube is in it. He is a hero and a leader too.

Looking at this sub-culture it is true there is a lot of anger and a lot that is bad. But, take Ice Cube — he is not saying that the women should be whores and the men should be dealing. We should look at what these people are actually saying, rather than what the New York Times says they are saying.

There are now people voicing the experiences of ordinary people. And this allows the development which I am part of. Young black men who do not read much, do not read David Copperfield, it is true, but they read my books...

ONE OF THE problems developing in American politics is that people are trying to identify themselves according to their roots — cultural and political. And there are a lot of fallacies around. People make roots up. A lot of Black Americans see their roots in Africa. Well, our roots are in Africa, and a lot of our culture — and more generally American culture — comes from Africa. But we are not African. Just ask an African. So there is some truth here and some fantasy.

A lot of Jewish people identify with a history of victimisation. In this millennium the



Walter Mosley's books include *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death*, *White Butterfly* and *Black Betty*. He is now writing a fifth book about Easy Rawlins, set in the '60s. He plans to take the story up to the '80s. Where will Easy end up? Mosley answers: "dead, like everyone else."

Jews have been hectored by white, Christian Europeans. For half that period those white people were also oppressing black people.

Which is worse? It is really difficult to say. Jewish people might say that they have been denied a land and they have had it worse because of Hitler. Black people in America might say that their whole history has been erased and their spirit has been killed.

This does not help.

It is not an accurate picture, and bad choices end up being made. Your enemy becomes the person who you are competing against for the role of worst victim.

BILL CLINTON reads my books too [Clinton says Mosley is his favourite author]. How does it feel to be praised by Clinton? I like it. And I like Clinton.

Clinton was elected after 12 years of psychotics — Mr Reagan and Mr Bush. Bush and Reagan dismantled America. They took from the people and gave to the wealthy.

from the '40s to the '90s

pair in black America

It was so clear and so blatant. Savings and Loans? — give them billions! A million dollars for reading? — No!

Then Clinton came in and said he wanted gays in the military. He didn't succeed, but he did say it. He hasn't been successful in some things. But look at the alternative!

The Congress is now trying to reduce the deficit. But look how they are trying to do it! They are taking money away from welfare, education and health care — things that would help poor Blacks, whites, men, women and old people. A new class is created that has absolutely no choice.

IT IS TRUE that Clinton is pro-death penalty. I have a strange feeling about the death penalty. I do not think — if I am being totally honest with myself — that morally I can oppose the death penalty on all counts.

But if it exists it has to be egalitarian. And I know this won't happen. It is used against poor blacks and poor whites.

The thing I hold most strongly against it is that it is a kind of unconscious expression of how despicable the upper and middle classes are towards poor people. There is also an unconscious fear that the anger of the poor will well up.

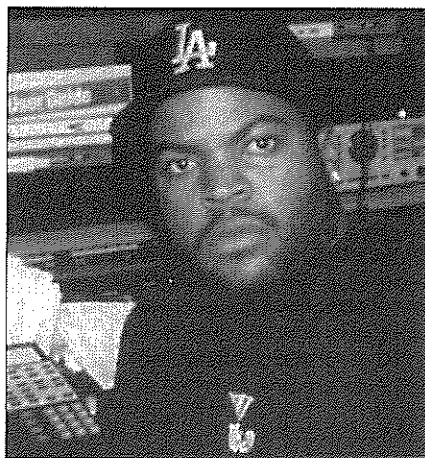
So I am against the death penalty — strongly opposed to it — for these reasons.

The whole penal system does not help and in many ways hurts.

I THINK that crime writing is one of the best ways to address contemporary issues even though many authors reduce themselves to formula and entertainment and movie-star style characters.

Am I part of the same literary tradition as a writer such as Richard Wright [the groundbreaking Black author who became famous in the 1940s]? Wright himself was part of a very broad tradition going back to Melville and Walt Whitman. Wright is certainly a black writer, tied in with people like James Baldwin. Yes, I suppose I am part of that tradition.

Some of the issues are the same too. In *A Red Death* there is a strong echo of Richard Wright's critical comments about the Communist Party and his involvement with them. There is a lot of confusion about Easy's response to the Jewish Communist Chaim Wenzler [who is under investigation by MacCarthyite witchhunters].



Rap artist, Ice Cube: part of a new cultural leadership

What if their roles were reversed? The comment is: it is better to be on the black list than be black — you can get off the black list, you can not get out from being black.

But Wright and I are also very different. He is very critical of Black American life. Wright's characters become evil. He sees them as evil and there is no way out of it. This is the picture in his books *Native Son* and *The Outsider*. I am much less critical.

It is not a conscious decision, but nevertheless is true, that I talk about Black male heroes.

Easy Rawlins tries to understand. He tries to respect himself and other people. He tries not to make snap decisions. Easy is a rural guy. He believes in working in communities. Easy thinks like this: What about the banks? Don't worry about the banks? What about the police? Don't worry about the police. The police and the banks do not care about us. But we know what we are talking about.

The bond of trust exists very strongly in my books. In Wright's world there is none of this. He feels the hopelessness.

It is a philosophical difference and it is a generational difference too. Things are better for my generation. There are more opportunities for us now.

There is another difference too. Wright considered himself a leader — rightfully so. He should have been awarded the Nobel prize for literature, as should James Baldwin. They didn't because they were too rough, too much bothered by the truth.

I am much more part of the crowd. I do not see myself as a leader.

MOUSE — Raymond Alexander — is Easy's best friend from back in the South. Mouse is my most deadly character.

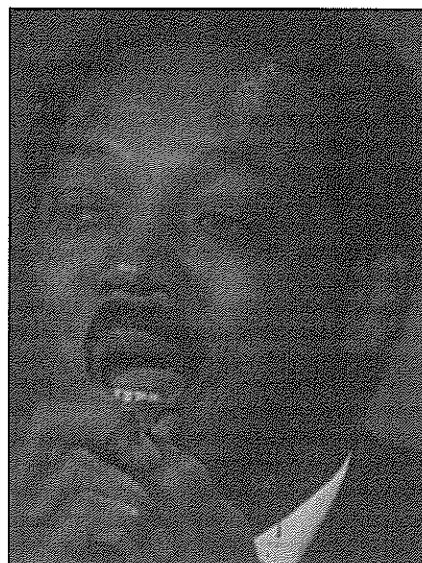
Maybe Mouse is evil, and maybe he is not. Mouse kills people. The fact that Mouse is out there means that there is one black man in the world who no-one will fuck with. When the police see Mouse driving down the road in his convertible Cadillac, making out with two white women, the police won't stop him. They know if they do they will have to fight, and they know they will lose.

No one is as bad as Mouse. But people believe in Mouse and need to believe in Mouse. He becomes a heroic character, not because of what he is, but because of what people see in him.

I like Mouse like I like Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X and [former Harlem Congressman] Adam Clayton Powell. The people in Harlem kept on voting for Powell because he gave the white man shit.

Nevertheless some people don't like Mouse because he does not care and does exactly what he wants. Understand that Mouse came to adulthood in the 1940s in a community where no-one ever says what they want. When a white man came up to you and said: "What you doing, boy?" you answered "Nothing, sir," while thinking "What you asking me for?"

I don't need people to like him, by the way. A lot of people don't like him. And — in fact — a lot of little old white ladies love him. I'll still write about him. ■



Jesse Jackson: still important

No longer the victim

Cathy Nugent reviews "The New Victorians — a "Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order" by Rene Denfeld. Published by Simon and Schuster, £16.99

LINDA GRANT'S *Guardian* interview with Rene Denfeld (Women's Page, 11 May) was entitled "Could Do Better". Any one of Britain's feminists, Linda Grant amongst them of course, could, it was implied, write a better book than this one by a mere American. "Why import another big-haired American?" Grant asks, "Why not commission a young British feminist to write the same book?" While some British feminists have written cracking books in recent years — about the same sorts of issues covered in *The New Victorians* — I don't agree that any of them could have written a better book than Rene Denfeld, who has first-hand experience of the subject.

27 year old Denfeld has written a book to explain why young women, although they can be vehemently pro-women rights, no longer call themselves "feminist". They are, she argues, turned off by the anti-sex campaigns of some of the most prominent modern feminists. Denfeld has written a book about American feminism and American young woman. It is right that a young American woman and not a 44 year old British feminist, Grant, should write it! Grant then asks why British women should want to buy Denfeld's book, being as it is about all this American stuff. But British feminists have been writing — critically — about American and American-inspired feminism for years! That's how they've made their living.

Grant's piece is disingenuous and full of preconceptions fuelled by chagrin at a crop of (good-looking) American authors being hailed in Britain as new Germaine Greers (Susan Faludi, Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe). Did Grant not read Denfeld's book? Her objections are not only unfair but childish: Denfeld is young, has "big hair", and — how awful! — is marketed by her publishers.

I think Grant should go and slag off her agent for not doing a proper PR job on her books and leave Denfeld alone. We should be glad that there is, at last, a potentially well-known and critical voice amongst

American feminists.

One of Grant's implied criticisms is that Denfeld has written a non-complex and "sound-bite friendly" book simply because it is being marketed as a publication with a potentially popular readership. Not so. Denfeld's book is, on the whole, well-written, pugnacious, thoughtful, coherently argued, rational, sane, and on the side of the majority of women — working-class women. There are flaws which arise from the fact that she is a reformist, not a revolutionary. But this is a fault she shares with many of Britain's well-known feminists, including the socialist feminists.

Denfeld set out to study and then demolish the Women's Studies syllabuses now taught at most North American universities. This material is what constitutes feminist theory today and it dictates the framework for what is considered feminist activism in the States as well. This activism, Denfeld says, is far from being a mass campaign and is divorced from the concerns of the majority of women. So far so good.

However, when Denfeld come to look at what young women think of all this, she looks merely at the responses of young college-educated women, whose views she is representing. That is not condemnable in itself of course, but Denfeld is not conscious of her bias: she does not acknowledge it, talking all the time about "young women", per se. But "young women" are divided by class, race, political views etc etc. This insipidity is, fortunately countered by Denfeld's reformist (by American standard quite radical) viewpoint. She argues for decent pay, childcare and maternity leave. She is not reformist enough of course! For example she cites Emily's List — the upper-class millionaire-belt based pressure group to get more women elected as Congress Representatives — as a campaign "that speaks to women's actual concerns"!

But there is some fine material here. About Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon and the so-called mainstream feminist organisation NOW, Denfeld is downright rude. She seethes with justifiable anger as she attacks their insidious Stalinism and what she calls the "reverse sexism" of relentless male-bashing. She cites crass and offensive statements, like: "Men generally do not take sex with children seriously. They are amused by it, wink at it and allow adult-child sex to continue through a complex of mores which applauds male sex aggression" (Florence Rush).



Rene Denfeld is a freelance journalist and amateur boxer

Denfeld says: "the truth is that women feel empathy for the men in their lives, men who often face similar economic troubles and personal problems". She quotes approvingly the statement "[man bashing] is an excuse to vent your anger in a totally irresponsible way. In a sense, you're enfeebling yourself. You're saying, this man is to blame for my plight. No. We're all in this together. Pointing fingers makes us powerless — the victim. I think that man bashing is a total paradox. You're crying victim — the very thing you don't want to be."

But is Denfeld throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and understating the very real problems that women face with the men in their lives, from sexist remarks through to sexual harassment and physical violence? Maybe so, but is this not the inevitable consequence of focusing your firepower when writing a critique?

Denfeld's account embraces compulsory lesbianism (lesbianism as a political and intellectual concept rather than a sexual choice or even a sexual concept!); the way that some feminists (MacKinnon) have begun to question abortion rights as the availability of abortion encourages heterosexual sex which is *always* oppressive to women; the false depiction of pornography as being full of representations of violence against women and the assertion that pornography leads to violence against women including rape in real life; the victim-mythology of some feminists who deliberately inflate rape incidence figures.

The chapter on victim mythology I found very thought-provoking; it changed my mind about a few things. One of its main concerns is with the phenomenon of "date

rape" now so hotly disputed on American campuses. What is implied by the term "date rape"?

Firstly, it is based on the idea that rape is a very common phenomenon. Consequently many young women students are warned when they start college that there is a very high possibility of being raped whilst they are there and that the only realistic solutions are to get a chaperone or avoid men altogether! The statistic that is always bandied around — that one in four women will at some point in their lives be a rape victim — is derived from two very suspect and limited studies. Rape statistics are still, for many reasons, appallingly difficult to collate. The figures are high enough but they are *not* as high as one in four.

Secondly, the concept of "date rape" can be based on such loose definitions of rape that the experience of real rape, with all its horrible violence, is left without a word that can adequately describe it: the word becomes devalued. For example, sex when very drunk can be defined as non-consensual and, therefore as, rape. Many feminist accounts argue that women do not believe such experiences are rape because according to the feminist establishment they "lack familiarity with what consensual intercourse should be like". This is, as Denfeld says, simply insulting. "In the world of victim mythology, women can't win. Lost somewhere in our apparently pea-sized brains is the knowledge we've been raped. It is up to today's feminists to bring us out of "denial". Not only are we raped when we don't know it but, like a bunch of dumb beasts, we blunder back to our attacker, asking for more. Our daintiness prohibits us from either fight or flight, and our naiveté prohibits us from knowing exactly what happens to our bodies."

The main thrust of Denfeld's argument is this: "Running like a dark stream through current feminism is the assumption that women never want sex, that not only are we helpless innocents but if we should fail to live up to this image of chaste, sexless victims, there is something wrong with us." There is a close similarity with official Victorian bourgeois morality and the prohibitive codes of American feminists. In fact, many feminists, as we know, have linked-up in particular campaigns with the American new right.

It is important that we carry on asserting sexual freedom as being a proper and central concern of feminism. Denfeld's book helps us do that. At times she is naive about the ability of *all* women to stand up to sexism and the ability of all *young* women to see equality and sexual freedom as their right. Her programme of action for women's rights is, as I have said, somewhat weak and this may not now be a book of direct relevance to British women. However I would rather have this one lucid, sane, account asserting equality between the sexes than a million Andrea Dworkin opuses telling me that I shouldn't like sex or men, and spouting New Age bollocks telling me to get in touch with the goddess within me. ■

Phoenix!

I will not die!
I am the Phoenix
I have been drowned in fire and blood
By open foes, devoured
By predatory allies and masters, reduced:
I rise again
I am eternally self-renewing
I saw Hitler loom above Rosa
Luxemburg's grave
And then fled East
To hail his other self
I am the true Phoenix.

I hailed Stalin
Saviour and Father of the Peoples
The Tsar who yet somehow was not a
Tsar,
The Peoples' own Red King
A comrade
Dialecticked
Though Stalin had built himself a
mausoleum
To strut on, in triumph, dancing
On the poor dry bones and waxy blind
Forever silent ruin of
The dead iconoclast, Vladimir Lenin
I am the Phoenix

I saw Mao
And Mao's Red peasant army moving
through
Shanghai's old streets
Where Chaing had butchered
Riding in triumph
To the palaces of my murderer's
And I hailed Mao as God
My all-renewing saviour
I am the Phoenix
I never die

I fall in love with monsters
I cross-bred with horror
My children were all monsters, or died
young
Many are born dead
But I make life, I go on
I am the Phoenix

I am ignorant, credulous
Senseless, wayward, often fooled: often
fooled
But I live!
I torment seduce cajole rouse energise
mesmerise
I am treacherous, delusive, self-deluding
Rest-destroying, death-defying
Id-sprung, I make life.
I am the Phoenix.

I am the heart of heartless worlds
The sigh of the oppressed in vales of woe
Guileless, I have searched the Twentieth
Century
For my fatherland
I have searched amongst verminous cults
For the cult, the saviour
That is not verminous
That saves
I have proved Carlyle right
It was a choice of the elite
And yet I live, reborn
I am prolific
I rise and go down, sometimes in blood

And yet I rise again and again and again
I am the Phoenix
I will not die

I am Caliban
Caliban overthrown, enslaved
Who would be mine own king again
I choose a shipwrecked drunken
sailor on a beach
To be my saviour and my king, if he
Will kill oppressive Prospero
I am the serf who prays to the Devil
To the enemy of my enemy's god
I cannot die, I go on.
I am the Phoenix

I was in that grey old bearded man,
Who knew relentless death stalking him
close,
Had claimed his children
And all his tribe:
He made me from green and sunlit grass
Beneath a window
And from blue sky
High above a Mexican wall
Proclaiming I should live
Though he was certain soon to die
I give life, I am life
Id-rooted, I
I am the Phoenix
I will not die!

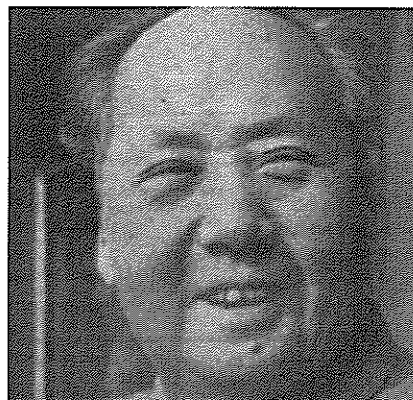
Workers will fight to live
To be their own king:
To give, relinquish, suffer, fight
Knowing yourself a slave
You must know more than yourself
Or you will know less: I am more
Though often, often I am less!
I am the Phoenix

I have seen Spartacus crucified
Ten thousand times
And then ten thousand times
And still I live, reborn,
I rise up out of the foaming blood,
proclaiming
With Rosa, out from the Kaiser Wilhelm's
jail
And on the eve of fiasco and death:
I was, I am, I will be
I will be because I must be
I am the Phoenix
I give life

I am hope, Proletarian hope

I learn to see, I can see what lies behind
But I am born, and reborn, always, blind!

Sean Matgamna



Marxism and Ireland

"The attempt... to 'fix' for all time the point of view Marx held in a different epoch was an attempt to use the letter of Marxism

For decades Lenin's small body of work on Ireland, filtered through a number of Stalinist pamphlets purporting to expound the ideas of "Marx, Engels and Lenin" on Ireland, has helped shape socialists' views. In this extended review article, Sean Matgamna argues that this "Marxist dogmatism" has meant, in fact, giving up on any attempt at serious Marxist analysis. Lenin's writings on Ireland were only casual journalism, worthless and worse if taken as paradigms for socialist politics.

against the spirit of Marxism".

Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination

IF POLITICAL VIRTUE LIES, and it does, in supporting the struggle of "Ireland" against British rule and British interference — that is, the struggle of the oppressed Nationalist Catholic Irish — then the Marxists, beginning with Marx himself, have a record to be proud of.

Marx came late — surprisingly late — to

support for Irish Home Rule. Repeal of the Union (of Britain and Ireland, enacted in 1800-1) was already part of the common programme of the left in Britain from Chartist times, and in fact from considerably earlier. Though Marx had examined Ireland and its relations with England for his economic studies — there is a great deal about Ireland and its role in the development of early British capitalism in *Capital* — it was the activities of the Fenian, the militant and left-wing Republican movement of the 1860s, that won Marx to firm support for the separation of Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. He explained his conception of the Irish Question as it was in the 1860s in a famous letter to Engels:

"What the English do not yet know is that since 1846 the economic content and therefore also the political aim of English domination in Ireland have entered into an entirely new phase, and that, precisely because of this, Fenianism is characterised by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by being a lower orders movement. What can be more ridiculous than to confuse the barbarities of Elizabeth or Cromwell, who wanted to supplant the Irish by English colonists... with the present system, which wants to supplant them by sheep, pigs and oxen!...

Clearing of the Estate of Ireland! is now the one purpose of English rule in Ireland... The question now is, what shall we advise the English workers? In my opinion they must make the Repeal of the Union (in short, the affair of 1783, only democratised and adapted to the conditions of the time) an article of their pronunziamento... Experience must show later whether a mere personal union can continue to subsist between the two countries. I half think it can if it takes place in time.

What the Irish need is:

1) Self-government and independence from England.

2) An agrarian revolution. With the best intentions in the world the English cannot accomplish this for them, but they can give them the legal means of accomplishing it for themselves.

3) Protective tariffs against England. Between 1783 and 1801 every branch of Irish industry flourished. The Union, which overthrew the protective tariffs established by the Irish Parliament, destroyed all industrial life in Ireland. The bit of linen industry is no compensation whatever... Once the Irish are independent, necessity will turn them into protectionists, as it did Canada, Australia, etc." (30 November 1867).

Marx explained further in a note for the First International (28 March 1870):

"If England is the bulwark of landlordism and European capitalism, the only point where one can hit official England really hard is Ireland.

In the first place, Ireland is the bulwark of English landlordism. If it fell in Ireland it would fall in England. In Ireland this is a hundred times easier since the economic struggle there is concentrated exclusively on landed property, since this struggle is at the same time national, and since the people there are more revolutionary and exasperated than in England. Landlordism in Ireland is maintained solely by the English army. The moment the forced union between the two countries ends, a social revolution will immediately break out in Ireland, though in outmoded forms. English landlordism would not only lose a great source of wealth, but also its greatest moral force, i.e. that of representing the domination of England over Ireland. On the other hand, by maintaining the power of their landlords in Ireland, the English proletariat makes them invulnerable in England itself...

Quite apart from international justice, it is a precondition to the emancipation of the English working class to transform the present forced union (i.e. the enslavement of Ireland) into equal and free confederation if possible, into complete separation if need be".

Once he had made up his mind Marx's commitment was whole-hearted. Marx threw himself into the struggle against British rule in Ireland. He exerted his influence in the General Council of the International Working Men's Association (the First International) to get it to try to persuade the international labour movement to back the people of Catholic Ireland — though they did not define it thus — against Britain. He became heavily involved — as did two of his daughters — in agitation on behalf of the Irish Fenian political prisoners.

Not only Marx but also his close collaborator Frederick Engels studied Ireland — Irish history, Irish conditions, Ireland's place in the UK economy and in UK politics. Engels toured Ireland and even, at an advanced age, learned the most ancient version of the Gaelic language so that he could write a history of the country and its people¹. Long after Marx and Engels were dead, their analysis of Ireland and support for Irish Home Rule were part of the common stock of the European socialist movement and then of the communist movement.

They had established a "Marxism" on the Irish question that seems to survive to this day. Marxists of the first generation after Marx and Engels used their views on Ireland

Review of "The Communists and the Irish Revolution", edited by D R O'Connor Lysaght. LiterEire, Dublin

as a paradigm on the national question in general, and on agrarian questions. Men like Karl Kautsky and Lenin — though, interestingly, not Rosa Luxemburg, who was concerned in part with Poland, “the Ireland of the east” — followed Marx and Engels on Ireland. Kautsky made his own studies of Irish agrarian conditions; Lenin took Marx and Engels on Ireland as a model on the national question. Naturally, the Communist International backed Ireland during the war of independence with Britain in 1919-21; and it and supported the no-compromise Republicans in the civil war of 1922-3.

But there was a problem about this tradition. Marxism analyses a reality that is changing more or less quickly and more or less radically: being a Marxist means updating or revising or negating old codifications in the light of new events. Marx and Engels died and Ireland continued to change and develop. In historical time the changes were very quick. In unexpected ways a very thorough agrarian revolution was achieved, and the division in the Irish people crystallised out into not one but two Irish bourgeois states, both with Home Rule and one with effective independence from 1922.

II

TREMENDOUS MASS agitation and a long series of British Acts of Parliament, from 1870 to 1903, radically transformed the position of the Irish farmers.

Gladstone's far-seeing legislation in the overall interests of the British state to limit the power of the landlord over land let out to tenants — the famous 3 “F”s — seems rather tame now, but in its time it was a radical attenuation of the accepted rights of property and, as such, was denounced as revolutionary tyranny by much of the British establishment.

The peasants, in fact though not in name, came to acquire a dual ownership of the land paralleling that of its legal ‘lord’ and owner. It was no longer the landlord's to do with as he liked. By the turn of the century many landlords were eager to get out — if only they could get a good enough price. In 1902 a conference of landlords and Irish popular leaders produced the proposal that the British government should finance the full-scale buying out of the landlords by the tenants. Notable among the Irish leaders there was William O'Brien, who would soon, because he advocated constructive compromise and conciliation with various aspects of Irish Unionism, become a sort of Trotsky figure, arch-heretic and apostate to the Redmond-Dillon official Home Rule Party.

The Wyndham Act of 1903 put this plan into effect. Earlier Acts of Parliament provided for some transfer of land; this time it was to be wholesale. Despite going through a crisis of financing in 1909, the Wyndham Act brought a thoroughgoing agrarian revolution to Ireland. Lots of little landlords replaced the big ones.

Marx and Engels had advocated Home Rule (etc.) in the interests of the British

people, expecting Home Rule to lead to an agrarian revolution from below against the alien landlords in Ireland and that in turn to shatter the power of the landlords in Britain. Wyndham's Land Act of 1903 inaugurated, or qualitatively accelerated, a thoroughgoing revolution from above. Continued agrarian ‘disturbances’ and cattle-driving in the west of Ireland notwithstanding, this was on the whole a neatly-ordered Irish bourgeois revolution, organised and midwifed by the British bourgeoisie in their own interest and in the overall interests of the British state and Empire. The land programme of international socialism, represented in Ireland by the Irish Socialist Republican Party whose paper *Workers' Republic* was edited by James Connolly, had no chance. Ireland's agrarian revolution, naturally, bore the stamp of the British bourgeoisie whose government organised it.

Politics changed too. The revolutionary Fenians of the 1860s, shattered in defeat into sects like the terrorist Invincibles, gave place to Parnell's assertive tactics in the 1880s in the House of Commons to gain Home Rule and the aggressive agrarian semi-trade-union of the Land League. When the strong-minded Home Rule leader Charles Stuart Parnell, was brought down in 1891 by the Catholic hierarchy and the Gladstone Liberals, seizing the chance of Parnell's involvement in a divorce case, he was replaced by time-serving middle-class politicians. Once one of the of the ‘great’ British parties embraced Home Rule, as the Liberals did in 1886, the middle-class Home Rule movement gravitated towards the Liberals and became attached to them by the most powerful forces of interest and logic: only the Liberals could ‘deliver’ constitutionally-won Home Rule. Combining “revolutionary” rhetoric with the sectarian winking-out of Protestant business competitors in the towns and villages of Catholic Ireland, this Redmond-Dillon Home Rule Party was a tail of the Liberal Party at Westminster.

But the Irish Unionist resistance to Home Rule developed and consolidated too, allied to the other ‘great’ British party, the Tory-Unionist party. At first the British opponents of Home Rule “played the Orange card” in order to stop any part of Ireland getting Home Rule. A divided Ireland, they argued, required British rule. Neither of the two segments of the Irish was fit to rule the other. The famous editor of the *Economist* magazine, Walter Bagehot, had argued that Home Rule would lead to war and, once more, to Protestant subjugation of the whole island.

For Lord Randolph Churchill, the Tory anti-Home Rule leader in the mid-1880s, the “Orange card” was a mere instrument in a political game to stop Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill (1886). But the Irish Unionists were always deadly serious about it. It was no game to them.

In 1892-3 they were again roused up to oppose Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill and stop the Catholic majority of peasants, shopkeepers and small bourgeois, together

with their priests and the underdeveloped proletariat of the southern towns and cities, gaining political power over the Protestant-Unionist minority. The Protestant-Unionist opposition included most of the landlords, and also shopkeepers, industrialists, and the big majority of the Irish industrial proletariat, which was concentrated in north-east Ulster.

The second Home Rule Bill was passed by the House of Commons, and vetoed by the Lords, whose power of veto was still absolute. The Unionists were returned to power in 1894; soon they set out to “kill Home Rule with kindness”, granting local government in 1898 and promoting the Wyndham Land Act which, they hoped, would replace peasant grievance with peasant gratitude.

However, removing the causes of grievances does not necessarily remove their consequences. Identities, politics and governing ideas, rooted as they initially may be in economic and national oppression, can take on a life of their own that survives the withering of the seed from whence they sprung. Gaelic Ireland was one of the oldest and most tenacious “nations” in Europe, with laws and culture, a language and a literature that stretched back beyond the Dark Ages. It had played a central role in reviving civilisation and learning all over Western Europe in the centuries after the northern barbarians conquered Rome. Shaped and reshaped by conquests and resurgences, stamped with a Catholic identity in the wars of the 16th and 17th centuries and again by the 19th century Catholic revival, the strong sense of Catholic Irish national identity was a force transcending mere economics, though without the economic struggles it might have weakened and dissipated. With such an autonomy and momentum of its own, the Home Rule movement was not to be stopped by patronising “kindness”, nor even by controlled agrarian revolution.

The Liberals returned to office in 1906. In 1909 the Lords vetoed Lloyd George's so-called “People's Budget”. Britain faced the biggest constitutional crisis since the struggles around the Reform Bill of 1832. It was resolved by the defeat of the Tory-Unionists and the capitulation of the Lords to the Commons. Absolute veto by the Lords was replaced by a two-year delaying power, after which, if the Commons was determined, a disputed Bill would become law despite the Lords.

The Tories denounced the Liberals as a revolutionary government. This was the most bitter political struggle Britain had seen in three-quarters of a century. It was the reawakening of echoes of older and deeper class struggles. Yet it was no clear-cut clash between the progressive bourgeoisie leading the people on one side and constitutionally-entrenched reactionary aristocrats on the other. The Tory-Unionist Party which backed the Lords and opposed the reforming Liberal government had by this time emerged as the leading party of both the big bourgeoisie and the landed gentry, who were in a hundred ways

entwined. Most of the old Whig grandees had gone over from the Liberal Party to the "Unionists" in the mid-80s — but so too had the "Radicals", led by the Birmingham manufacturer, Joseph Chamberlain.

Engels had pointed out over thirty years earlier: "The Tories are no longer the mere tail of the big landowners as they were until 1850; the sons of the Cobdens, Brights, etc., of the big bourgeoisie and anti-Corn-Law people, all went over to the Tory camp between 1855 and 1870, and the Liberals derive their strength now from the non-conformist petty and middle bourgeoisie. And since Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of 1886 the last remnants also of the Whigs and the old Liberals (bourgeois and intellectuals) have gone over to the Tory camp..." (Letter to Bebel, 5 July 1892).

When, in the course of "going to the people" in the struggle with the Lords and the Tories, the Liberals lost their overall House of Commons majority in the second 1910 General Election, they could continue to rule only with the support of the 70-odd Irish Home Rule MPs at Westminster.

Reluctantly, the government prepared a new, third, Home Rule Bill. Without the failsafe of the Lords veto, a House of Commons vote for Home Rule — and there was a certain majority for it — would make it law in two years. Out to bring down the government, the embittered Tory-Unionists now played not only the "Orange card" but a full panoply of Orange fives, drums and trumpeting war horns. They pledged their support to the Protestant people of north-east Ulster in resisting, in arms if necessary, the writ of any Dublin Home Rule parliament the British parliament should choose to set up. The Tories backed the creation of a vast armed and uniformed private army, the UVF, to prepare this resistance. An Ulster provisional government was prepared. To outsiders, the UK seemed on the eve of civil war. There are those who argue that Germany's behaviour on the eve of World War One was shaped by the belief that Britain was too preoccupied at home to honour its treaty obligations. Germany

was sending guns to the UVF just weeks before war broke out.

By now there were two Unionisms, increasingly distinct: that of the thin crust of landlords and their attendants over most of the island, and that of the masses of industrial Ireland in north-east Ulster. On the eve of World War 1 the Unionists split: the north-east Ulster Unionists, the compact majority in the most developed parts of Ireland, separated their interest from that of the Unionists in the predominantly Catholic areas — betraying them, so many southern Unionists felt. They would fight, the Ulster Unionists now said, to keep their own areas, where they were the majority, outside the control of a Dublin government. Some of them defined "their own areas" very ambitiously, to take in big areas with predominantly Catholic populations. The political bloc organised around this programme included the big majority of the Irish industrial working class.

By this stage, on the eve of World War 1, it was not possible outside of a delirium to see "the Irish question" as Marx and Engels had seen it forty or fifty years earlier — and in their time, rightly seen it. Initiated from above by Unionist and landlord-cherishing British Tories who, out of office, were willing to organise armed rebellion against the British government to stop it setting up a Dublin Home Rule parliament, the post-1903 agrarian revolution was already more than half carried out, and continuing. This agrarian revolution had indeed, despite Marx's expectations, been "accomplished for" the Irish by the British, in response it is true to great Irish mobilisations.

While Marx had looked to agrarian revolution in a Home Rule Ireland to trigger a revolutionary crisis in Britain, events had in fact gone pretty much in the opposite direction. The constitutional crisis around the People's Budget came first, before the Home Rule crisis, and added intensity, bitterness and Tory-Unionist revanchism to the intra-Irish dispute around Home Rule.

The Irish Home Rule middle class were

being offered and were willing to accept a Home Rule in which the Dublin parliament would have not much more power than the then London County Council; nursery tariffs to protect infant Irish industries were ruled out. The Catholic-nationalist Volunteer movement supported the British government, which did not stop British soldiers shooting some of them down, in July 1914 at Bachelor's Walk in Dublin. The majority of Ireland's industrial proletariat, and a sizeable chunk of the peasantry, were not roused and armed against the landlords by the bourgeoisie, but mobilised behind the landlords and industrialists against a "progressive" Liberal government offering Home Rule.

The heirs of the revolutionary Fenians with whom Karl Marx had allied and in response to whose activities he had taken a fresh look at Ireland in the late 1860s were, on the outbreak of the Home Rule crisis, a tiny subterranean sect, withered by decades in the shade of Liberal-allied Home Rule parliamentarianism at Westminster and the venal parish pump politics which complemented it and fed its roots at home. Their confusion and disorientation in face of the Orange revolt is exemplified in the idiotic offer by the good-hearted Patrick Pearse to the Unionist leaders that nationalist Ireland would subordinate itself to their threatened provisional government — if only they would declare their independence from England!

The Home Rule crisis would allow the faction which believed in physical force as the only way to win Irish independence to grow into a serious power in a short time, following in the wake of what "the North began" and emulating the example of the Orangemen. Out of that came the 1916 Rising. But they would be a force in Catholic Ireland only.

III

IT IS AGAINST THESE events that we must judge Lenin and Trotsky's comments on Ireland and those of their contemporaries who founded the Communist International, which will be found — unfortunately garbled at important points — in the collection under review.

Where Marx and Engels studied Ireland, Lenin never did anything of the sort. His writings make this plain. They show him to have an unsure and even patchy acquaintance with Irish, and even with aspects of British affairs. Though he refers here and there to the early 20th-century agrarian reform in Ireland, it is plain that Lenin based himself very heavily on general ideas derived from the writings of Marx and Engels about an Ireland that had already vanished or transmuted enormously. Moreover, with the exception of two pieces on the 1913 Dublin labour war, and on a different level, two pieces about the Home Rule crisis of 1914, Lenin never wrote anything in which he looked concretely at Irish affairs. He cited Ireland as depicted by Karl Marx and later by Karl Kautsky in agrarian studies as evidence, as data, as example, as intellectual token of known value, in his

Reference points

17th century: the bulk of Ireland's land seized and given to English or Anglo/Scots-Irish landlords or farmers. But the only large area where English and Scots settlers become the majority is in the north-east.

1783-1800: a period of "Home Rule" for Ireland, under Protestant domination.

1800: Britain takes direct control of Ireland through the Act of Union. Industry declines in most of Ireland, but develops round Belfast.

1845-8: over a million starve to death in the Famine; the population falls; land turned over to sheep and cattle; Irish nationalist politics greatly embittered.

1870: Liberal government starts a series of attempts at reform from above.

1886: first Liberal Home Rule bill

defeated in Commons.

1892: second Home Rule bill passes Commons, vetoed by Lords.

1903: decisive acceleration of buying out the landlords through the Tories' Wyndham Land Act.

1913-4: Dublin lock-out.

1912: third Home Rule bill passes Commons; Lords can now only delay for two years. Huge Protestant resistance in north-east Ireland.

1914: Home Rule bill "suspended" on outbreak of World War.

1916: Easter Rising in Dublin by militant nationalists and socialists against British rule.

1918: Militant nationalists win 73 of Ireland's 105 seats. They refuse to go to Westminster and instead set up an independent Irish parliament.

1919-21: war of independence. Ends with two "Home Rule" states in Ireland,

writings about Russian affairs — Russian land policy, Russian Liberals, Russian national questions and (in his writings on 1916, for example) the national question in general. Trotsky did write one article in which he really tried — mistakenly but illuminatingly — to depict Irish dynamics, and that is all.

Those — like the generations educated on Stalinist-produced commentaries on “Marx, Engels and Lenin on Ireland” — who look to “Lenin” for analysis of Ireland, are like the gawpers in Hans Andersen’s story who looked to the naked Emperor wearing, they were told, a splendid new suit of clothes, for guidance on fashion. Really there is next to nothing of value there. To find what “Lenin” can teach us about Ireland, we have to proceed from what Lenin argued in general about the national question and so forth, filling in the facts and history of Ireland for ourselves, *thinking* about them. Lenin did not do it for us; and even if he had done so, seventy years after he ceased to think we would still have to do it again for ourselves.

To prove this, I will examine the key texts of Lenin and Leon Trotsky on Ireland in this collection, the two pairs of articles on the Dublin lock-out of 1913 and on the Home Rule crisis of 1914, and Trotsky’s article on 1916.

IV

IN SEPTEMBER 1913, 400 Dublin employers, led by the progressive Home Rule nationalist William Martin Murphy, locked out the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, whose leaders were Jim Larkin and James Connolly, in an attempt to destroy the union. A bitter war lasting eight months followed. The union was damaged but not destroyed. In the course of the strike the union created its own militia, the Citizen Army. In 1916 James Connolly would lead the Citizen Army into the Easter Rising.

Lenin’s “lockout” articles were, it seems, written for the legal workers’ press in Russia in the first half of September 1913 at the beginning of the Dublin struggle. Obviously written on the basis of bourgeois and social-democratic press reports of the spectacular scenes in Dublin, they deal with the events known as Bloody Sunday — one of a number of “Bloody Sundays” in modern Irish history — when hundreds of police attacked a peaceful meeting of locked-out workers, killing two and injuring hundreds. Lenin graphically depicts the Cossack-like pogrom of the Dublin police against the workers. Lenin then goes into the background to these events, drawing on the common stock of ideas on Ireland which the European socialists had got from Marx and from “the Pope of Marxism”, Karl Kautsky.

Lenin being Lenin, even this summary “from stock” and newspaper reports is very interesting, and has much to teach “Marxist” vulgarisers and Irish nationalists, native or adoptive, today.

He understands and sketches for the Russian workers the most significant things —

that the Irish bourgeoisie is set to rule Ireland, and that at last the “unskilled” are organising. It is not, according to Lenin, only national oppression that plagues Ireland: “National oppression and Catholic reaction have turned the proletarians of this unhappy country into paupers, the peasants into toilworn, *ignorant and dull slaves of the priesthood*, and the bourgeoisie into a phalanx, masked by nationalist phrases, of capitalists, of despots over the workers...” [Emphasis added]

He goes on to fill in the background of the “class war in Dublin.” Taking it for granted that Home Rule is about to be won, he says: “The Irish nationalists (i.e. the Irish bourgeoisie) are the victors... buying up the land from the... landlords; they are getting national self-government (the famous *Home Rule...*); they will freely govern “their” land in conjunction with “their” Irish priests.” And they are celebrating “by declaring war to the death against the Irish labour movement.” Why? “On the heels of the Irish bourgeois scoundrels... celebrating their ‘national’ victory presses the Irish proletariat, awakening to class consciousness... A new spirit has been aroused in the Irish workers’ unions. The unskilled workers have brought unparalleled animation into the trade unions. Even the women have begun to organise...”

Lenin indicts the Irish capitalists and reports on the work of Jim Larkin as labour organiser. Paraphrasing and almost directly quoting a letter Frederick Engels wrote to Marx in 1855 describing what he saw on a tour of Ireland, Lenin writes: “The country that used to be typified by the fat, well-fed Catholic priest and the poor, starving, ragged worker, in tatters even on Sunday because he could not afford Sunday clothes — this country, bearing a double and triple national yoke, was beginning to turn into a land with an organised army of the proletariat.”

So, says Lenin, Irish nationalist bourgeois leader Murphy proclaimed a crusade to beat down labour. Lenin cites the trade-union leader Jim Larkin, pointing out that the Tories, whom Lenin describes as “the party of the British bourgeois enemies of Home Rule”, can get away with threatening rebellion against Home Rule but the workers are not allowed even to organise without being beaten down. With the concerns of his Russian readers in mind, he contrasts Ireland with Russia, reporting on the indignation provoked in the UK by the ban on a workers’ meeting. These are the events leading up to Bloody Sunday. After the police riot, 50,000 Dublin workers followed the coffin of Nolan, who had been beaten to death. He cites “an old Irishman’s” comment to a “German correspondent” that the funeral was bigger even than Parnell’s.

Lenin declares that the events in Dublin mark a turning point in the history of the labour movement and of socialism in Ireland, destroying “the last remnants of the influence of the nationalist Irish bourgeoisie over the proletariat in Ireland.” Murphy “has helped to steel the working-class move-

ment in Ireland, to make it independent, free of nationalist prejudices, and revolutionary.” He erroneously reports that Jim Larkin is the grandson of a Fenian hanged in 1867, presumably picking it up from some newspaper report.

Lenin then reports on the inflammatory impact of the Dublin events on the annual TUC meeting in Manchester only days after the police riot. A delegate from Dublin, William Partridge, was given a standing ovation. He reports that when the TUC sent a delegate to Dublin to investigate “the bourgeoisie there again took up the weapon of nationalism (just like the bourgeois nationalists in Poland, or in the Ukraine, or among the Jews)... declaring that ‘Englishmen have no business on Irish soil’. But *fortunately* [Lenin’s emphasis] the nationalists have already lost their influence over the workers.” In a footnote to this sentence, Lenin reports that “the Irish nationalists are already expressing their fear that Larkin will organise an independent Irish workers’ party, which would have to be reckoned with in the first Irish national parliament.”

In a final paragraph Lenin fits “Dublin” into the general wave of militancy sweeping the UK — the mass of “British” [sic] workers are breaking with the labour aristocracy and beginning to struggle for a new society. “And once on this path, the British proletariat, with their energy and organisation, will bring socialism about more quickly and securely than anywhere else.”

V

THIS ARTICLE IS instructive in its communist attitude to nationalism and to elemental movements of workers, but it painfully depicts the limits of Lenin’s acquaintance with Ireland and his dependence on bourgeois papers and the Marx-inherited stock of socialist ideas on Ireland. This is not Lenin the scientist who produced profound studies of Russia and of such theoretical issues as the national question and imperialism. Here he is writing off-the-cuff journalism for Russian workers, reporting the international class struggle and drawing for them the indicated lessons about the link between the capitalists and the state and the desirability but insufficiency of the British-style civil rights the Russian labour movement was fighting for. He draws out the most optimistic and encouraging prospects for his readers.

His idea that the Dublin workers had broken with the nationalists should, in the circumstances, have been true, but it was not true even in terms of organisational allegiance, except for a minority. Evidently Lenin had no acquaintance with Larkin’s paper *The Irish Worker*, which was awash with sentimental Home Rule Party-style nationalism (and even with strands of vicious chauvinism, including on at least two occasions of anti-semitism). This reflected Jim Larkin, the Liverpool Irishman, not the harder-headed James Connolly, who was generally very frigid towards such sentimental nationalism, scoffing at it as ‘sunburstery’ (the flag of Catholic nationalism was a sunburst, supposedly an ☯

emblem handed down from Dark Ages Ireland): he would employ it himself in the *Workers' Republic* in the months before the 1916 Rising.

Indeed, Lenin's political conclusion that the strike movement, the battle on the economic front, had already and "spontaneously" worked political miracles is curiously un-Leninist, even "economistic", strikingly remote from measurement according to Lenin's usual standard and the all-conditioning primacy he — rightly — ascribed to the struggle on the level of ideas. But Lenin was writing from a great distance about "objective" trends, not as the interventionist, prescriptive, class-party politician he was in Russia. He would not know that in Ireland no all-out struggle against nationalist ideas and no root and branch struggle against the priests was unleashed even when the priests actively intervened against the strikers. Larkin certainly and Connolly probably were Catholics themselves.

Savage Catholic sectarianism, with priests acting as both propagandists and thugs for the employers, had not yet become a feature of the strike when Lenin wrote.

Lenin believed that the granting of Home Rule would remove the cause of mass Irish nationalism. But, believing the national question about to be settled, he anticipates too much.

For Lenin these events in Ireland are all movements in the distance, seen through a mist. He is even unaware that Larkin has already begun to organise an independent Irish workers' party to fight the Home Rulers: the Clonmel Congress of the Irish TUC in 1912 had already passed James Connolly's motion to establish a Labour Party on the model of the British Labour Party.

The second article on 1913 written a week later is half as long and little more than an appendix to the first. Here he is almost entirely concerned with the lessons for Russia. He reports on the huge protest meeting a week after the police riot. The "police kept out of sight." He draws the lesson for his Russian readers: "Britain *has* a constitution" [Lenin's emphasis]. The ruling class did not dare use the police a second time.

Reporting on the meeting held in London simultaneously with the Dublin demonstration, Lenin says that the "outstanding" speech in London was that of the trade-union leader Ben Tillett, who showed that the Liberal government was no better than a reactionary one. He notes that the principal slogan in Dublin and London was "the right to organise." Because Britain has a constitutional regime and the foundations of political liberty, this demand is achievable there.

He links "Britain" and Russia: the right to organise is equally indispensable. But in Russia the "foundations of political liberty" do not exist, and the right to organise will not be achieved by Liberal reform.

Here, and properly, Lenin's concerns are entirely Russian: he draws the lessons that are appropriate for Russia.

That is the whole of Lenin on 1913. The

articles are a vivid, angry account of Dublin's Bloody Sunday, knowledge of which they have helped spread around the world, so that '1913' is one of the best known strikes ever. They are the nearest thing to a concrete account of Ireland — to comments based on an examination and analysis of Irish conditions — by Lenin. As I said above, in everything else he wrote, Ireland is mere object lesson, typical case, special case or interesting object for data about either the agrarian or the national question. Lenin's 1914 articles on the Home Rule crisis are only apparently an exception.

VI

LIKE EVERYTHING LENIN wrote, the article on 1913 is sharp and thought-provoking. His comments about the priests and the nationalist bourgeoisie implicitly have all sorts of interesting things to tell us about the resistance to Home Rule, the rule of those bourgeois and priests, by the majority of the Irish industrial working class, the Protestant workers in north-east Ulster who followed the Orange Irish bourgeois politicians rather than the Green ones.

Lenin never developed those implications — they were not his focus, not his concern, not what he wanted to direct his Russian readers to consider — but those who really want to learn from Lenin, as opposed to parroting him, should contemplate what he writes.

Such comments are useful — but Lenin's articles are not in any shape, dimension or degree an account of the eight-months 1913-14 labour war in Dublin, one of the events that shaped the nascent pre-war communist movement in the UK.

An interesting commentary on Bloody Sunday and the background to it, the articles are radically and thoroughly misleading about the overall course of the struggle. With his friendly references to the British TUC and Ben Tillett, Lenin gives a starkly false view of the relationship that would shape the course of the strike in the next 8 months.

Together with the railway workers' leader J H Thomas and other TUC leaders, it was Tillett who sold out the Dublin workers. That lock-out/strike, which lasted about 7 months after Lenin's last comment, became a war of attrition between half-starved workers on one side and, on the other, the Irish capitalists and the British state with the Catholic church, waging a dirty nationalist-sectarian guerrilla war on their behalf to sap the spirit of the workers.

The British labour movement responded with magnificent material solidarity, sending ships with food up the Liffey, caring for strikers' children and so on; but that could do no more than help the Dublin workers to hold out: to turn the tide against the Dublin employers solidarity strikes and industrial boycotts were necessary.

That is what Larkin and Connolly called on the British labour movement to provide. That is what a whole network of rank and file militants in Britain tried to promote. The call for general strike was raised by these militants — the first time it was heard

as a popular idea since Chartist times — in connection with Dublin. (Lenin notes it.) The TUC leaders wouldn't budge. When some railworkers took unofficial action, J H Thomas acted quickly to quell them. Because the British labour movement did not give adequate industrial solidarity, the war of attrition dragged on to an inconclusive finish: the union survived, despite the bosses, but it was half-crippled.

Is the account I have given here "stock-Trotskyism", the result of using the post-1917 Leninist way of looking at things and reading it backwards anachronistically, second-guessing those alive in 1913? No — it is what the militants, in both Britain and Ireland, said then. Larkin and Connolly said it at the special TUC congress of December 1913. James Connolly wrote in a British labour paper:

"The working-class unity of the first days of the Dublin fight was sacrificed in the interests of sectional officialdom. The officials failed to grasp the opportunity offered to them to make a permanent reality of the union of working-class forces brought into being by the spectacle of rebellion, martyrdom and misery exhibited by the workers of Dublin... Sectionalism, intrigues and old-time jealousies damned us in the hour of victory, and officialdom was the first to fall to the tempter.

"And so we Irish workers must go down into Hell, bow our backs to the lash of the slave-driver, let our hearts be seared by the iron of his hatred, and instead of the sacramental wafer of brotherhood and common sacrifice, eat the dust of defeat and betrayal".

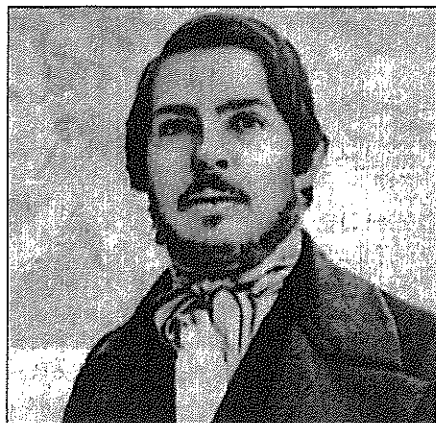
The truth is that the sort of comments Lenin makes were made at the same time — not only by Ben Tillett, who was by then no left winger — but even by such Liberal parliamentarians as James Ramsay MacDonald. It is what the Irish and British communists — the "*Leninists*", if you like, said and did about 1913 — that is curiously absent in *Lenin*.

The explanation of course is that Lenin never made — and writing when he did, in the first two weeks of the labour war, could not have made — a rounded account of '1913'; he never concerned himself with the question of strategy and dynamics that concerned both the Dublin strikers and their British sympathisers, but with the broad, basic 'lessons' for Russia. His article was a "letter from afar"; a culling of a vignette from events for the purpose of encouraging the Russian workers and interesting them with references, above all else, to Russian concerns.

In the next *Workers' Liberty* I will examine Lenin's articles on the 1914 Home Rule crisis. ■

1. He wrote a draft up to the year 1914.
2. Curiously, the fact that Irish Communists like James Connolly were against peasant proprietorship and for land nationalisation is now one of the buried inconvenient facts of Irish history.
3. Even when they had Dominion status, finally conceded in 1921, which allowed tariffs, the Irish bourgeoisie did not seriously use that power until a decade later, in the depths of the world economic crisis, when every other state, including Britain, was doing it.

1889: how the British workers arose from 40 years' depression



By Frederick Engels*

[IN 1845] ENGLAND STOOD face to face with a crisis, solvable to all appearances by force only. ... The working masses of the towns demanded their share of political power — the People's Charter. They were supported by the majority of the small trading class, and the only difference between the two was whether the Charter should be carried by physical or by moral force. Then came the commercial crash of 1847 and the Irish famine, and with both the prospect of revolution.

The French Revolution of 1848 saved the English middle-class. The Socialistic pronouncements of the victorious French workmen frightened the small middle-class of England and disorganised the narrower, but more matter-of-fact movement of the English working-class. At the very moment when Chartism was bound to assert itself in its full strength, it collapsed internally before even it collapsed externally on the 10th April 1848. The action of the working-class was thrust into the background. The capitalist class triumphed along the whole line.

The Reform Bill of 1831 had been the victory of the whole capitalist class over the landed aristocracy. The repeal of the Corn Laws was the victory of the manufacturing capitalists not only over the landed aristocracy, but over those sections of capitalists, too, whose interests were more or less bound up with the landed interest — bankers, stock-jobbers, fund-holders, etc. Free Trade meant the readjustment of the whole home and foreign, commercial and financial policy of England in accordance with the interests of the manufacturing capitalists — the class which now represented the nation. And they set about this task with a will. Every obstacle to industrial production was mercilessly

removed. The tariff and the whole system of taxation were revolutionised. Everything was made subordinate to one end, but that end of the utmost importance to the manufacturing capitalist: the cheapening of all raw produce, and especially of the means of living of the working-class; the reduction of the cost of raw material, and the keeping down — if not as yet the *bringing down* — of wages. England was to become the "workshop of the world"; all other countries were to become for England what Ireland already was — markets for her manufactured goods, supplying her in return with raw materials and food. England, the great manufacturing centre of an agricultural world, with an ever-increasing number of corn and cotton-growing Irelands revolving around her, the industrial sun. What a glorious prospect!

The manufacturing capitalists set about the realisation of this their great object with that strong common sense and that contempt for traditional principles which has ever distinguished them from their more narrow-minded compeers on the Continent. Chartism was dying out. The revival of commercial prosperity, natural after the revulsion of 1847 had spent itself, was put down to the credit of Free Trade. Both these circumstances had turned the English working-class, politically, into the tail of the "great Liberal Party", the party led by the manufacturers.

... The effects of this domination of the manufacturing capitalists were at first startling. Trade revived and extended to a degree unheard of even in this cradle of modern industry; the previous astounding creations of steam and machinery dwindled into nothing compared with the immense mass of productions of the twenty years from 1850 to 1870, with the overwhelming figures of exports and imports, of wealth accumulated in the hands of capitalists and of human working power concentrated in the large towns. The progress was indeed interrupted, as before, by a crisis every ten years, in 1857 as well as in 1866; but these revulsions were now considered as natural inevitable events, which must be fatalistically submitted to, and which always set themselves right in the end.

And the condition of the working class in this period? There was temporary improvement even for the great mass. But this improvement always was reduced to the old level by the influx of the great body of the unemployed reserve, by the constant superseding of hands by new machinery, by the immigration of the agricultural population, now, too, more and more superseded by machines.

A permanent improvement [could] be recognised for two "protected" sections

THE SO-CALLED "New Unionism" — the start of stable mass trade unionism in Britain — was launched by three great battles in East London in 1888-9. In July 1888, women match workers struck over unsafe conditions. In August 1889, gas workers won an eight-hour day; and then the dockers struck for a minimum wage of sixpence an hour.

The big general unions date from those battles — the TGWU from the dockers' strike, and the GMB from the gasworkers' efforts.

When the first proper TUC congress met in 1869, the trade unions and Trades Councils attending had represented only 250,000 workers in total. There was a brief upsurge of trade-union membership in the early 1870s, but the decisive lift-off was not until 1889-91. By 1892 union membership was 1,576,000.

The "new unionists" were different from the old in outlook. Eleanor Marx, the daughter of Karl Marx, was a leader of the gasworkers' union, and the union secretary, Will Thorne, was also a socialist. At the 1890 TUC, according to the socialist John Burns, "the 'old' unionists looked like respectable city gentlemen; wore very good coats, large watch chains, and high hats... Among the new delegates not a single one wore a tall hat. They looked workmen; they were workmen. They were not such sticklers for formality or court procedure, but were guided more by common sense."

The workforce in industry — transport, mines, building, manufacturing, utilities — had expanded fast. In 1851 it was 5 million; in 1891, 8.2 million.

1.1 million people worked in transport (including the docks); 1.4 million in textiles and 1.2 million in clothing (the majority women); 1.2 million in the various metalworking industries; and 900,000 in building and construction. Gas was a new industry: there were only 38,000 workers in gas, water, and electricity in 1891, though there would be 117,000 by 1911.

The overall average of real wages had risen about 59% between 1850 and 1889; but the research of Charles Booth, in 1889, discovered that fully one-third of all Londoners were living at starvation level.

FIGURES FROM B R Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, and from Henry Pelling, *History of British Trade Unionism*.

* FROM THE prefaces to the 1892 English and German editions of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

only of the working-class. Firstly, the factory hands. The fixing by Act of Parliament of their working-day within relatively rational limits restored their physical constitution and endowed them with a moral superiority, enhanced by their local concentration. They [were] undoubtedly better off than before 1848. The best proof is that, out of ten strikes they [made], nine [were] provoked by the manufacturers in their own interests, as the only means of securing a reduced production. You can never get the masters to agree to work "short time", let manufactured goods be ever so unsaleable; but get the work-people to strike, and the masters shut their factories to a man.

Secondly, the great Trades Unions. They [were] the organisations of those trades in which the labour of *grown-up men* predominates, or is alone applicable. Here the competition neither of women and children nor of machinery [had] so far weakened their organised strength. The engineers, the carpenters and joiners, the bricklayers, [were] each of them a power, to that extent that, as in the case of the bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers, they [could] even successfully resist the introduction of machinery. That their condition [had] remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt, and the best proof of this is in the fact that for more than fifteen years not only [were] their employers with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form[ed] an aristocracy among the working-class; they [had] succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accepted it as final.

... But as to the great mass of working-people, the state of misery and insecurity

in which they live now [was] as low as ever, if not lower. The East End of London [was] an ever-spreading pool of stagnant misery and desolation, of starvation when out of work, and degradation, physical and moral, when in work. And so in all other large towns — abstraction made of the privileged minority of the workers; and so in the smaller towns and in the agricultural districts.

... Today there is indeed 'Socialism again in England', and plenty of it — Socialism of all shades: Socialism conscious and unconscious, Socialism prosaic and poetic, Socialism of the working-class and of the middle-class, for verily, that abomination of abominations, Socialism, has not only become respectable, but has actually donned evening dress and lounges lazily on drawing-room *causeuses*. That shows the incurable fickleness of that terrible despot of 'society', middle-class public opinion, and once more justifies the contempt in which we Socialists of a past generation always held that public opinion. At the same time we have no reason to grumble at the symptom itself.

What I consider far more important than this momentary fashion among bourgeois circles of affecting a mild dilution of Socialism, and even more than the actual progress Socialism has made in England generally, that is the revival of the East End of London. That immense haunt of misery is no longer the stagnant pool it was six years ago. It has shaken off its torpid despair, has returned to life, and has become the home of what is called the 'New Unionism', that is to say, of the organisation of the great mass of 'unskilled' workers. This organisation may to a great extent adopt the form of the old

Unions of 'skilled' workers but it essentially different in character. The old Unions preserve the traditions of the time when they were founded, and look upon the wages system as a once-for-all established, final fact, which they at best can modify in the interest of their members. The new Unions were founded at a time when the faith in the eternity of the wages system was severely shaken; their founders and promoters were Socialists either consciously or by feeling; the masses, whose adhesion gave them strength, were rough, neglected, looked down upon by the working-class aristocracy; but they had this immense advantage, that *their minds were virgin soil*, entirely free from the inherited 'respectable' bourgeois prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated 'old' Unionists. And thus we see now these new Unions taking the lead of the working-class movement generally, and more and more taking in tow the rich and proud 'old' Unions.

Undoubtedly, the East Enders have committed colossal blunders: so have their predecessors, and so do the doctrinaire Socialists who pooh-pooh them. A large class, like a great nation, never learns better or quicker than by undergoing the consequences of its own mistakes. And for all the faults committed in past, present and future, the revival of the East End of London remains one of the greatest and most fruitful facts of this *fin de siècle*, and glad and proud I am to have lived to see it.

SINCE I wrote the above, six months ago, the English working-class movement has again made a big step forward. The parliamentary elections which took place the other day have given formal notice to both official parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, that both of them would thereafter have to reckon with a third party, the workers' party. This workers' party is only just being formed; its elements are still occupied with casting off traditional prejudices of every sort — bourgeois, old trade-unionist and even doctrinaire-socialist — so that they may finally be able to get together on a basis common to all of them. And yet the instinct to unite which they followed was already so great that it produced election results hitherto unheard-of in England.

... In short, in a number of big city and industrial election districts the workers have definitely severed all ties with the two old parties and thus achieved direct or indirect successes beyond anything witnessed in any previous election. And boundless is the joy thereof among the working people. For the first time they have seen and felt what they can achieve by using their suffrage in the interest of their class. The spell which the superstitious belief in the 'great Liberal Party' cast over the English workers for almost 40 years is broken. They have seen by dint of striking examples that they, the workers, are the decisive power in England if they only want to and know what they want; and the elections of 1892 marked the beginning of such knowing and wanting. ■

Glossary

The Chartist movement, which flourished between 1838 and 1848, was the world's first distinctive political movement of the wage-working class. It was not explicitly socialist, though some of its leaders, like Bronterre O'Brien, were socialists, and many of its activists supported Robert Owen's version of socialism. It demanded, essentially, a voice in parliamentary democracy for the working class corresponding to its numbers.

By 1884, Tory and Liberal reforms had granted the vote to most male workers over 21 (though not to some two million men, nor to women); but in the Chartist heyday, before the British state had a solid system of checks and balances neutralising parliamentary democracy, the Chartists' demands were revolutionary. 10 April 1848 was the day when the Chartist leaders had promised to lead a mass demonstration to parliament to present a petition with their demands. Facing large forces of police, the leaders abandoned the march to parliament, and the movement fell apart.

The Corn Laws imposed a tax on imported corn. They were repealed in June 1846, after a seven-year mass campaign led

by the representatives of the industrial capitalists. They wanted cheap corn in order to get cheap bread — and lower wages; they condemned the Corn Laws as protecting the landlord class. After 1846 Britain moved rapidly to comprehensive free trade, abolishing taxes on imports and exports. **The Famine** in Ireland in 1845-8 killed one million people: the British government stood by, refusing all but tardy and meagre aid.

The working day in British factories in the early 19th century was often fourteen hours. In 1847 a law limited it to ten hours. The bosses quickly found loopholes, which were finally closed only in 1874. Trade unions had been legal since 1825, but any militant activity remained illegal until 1875. **Socialism in Britain** declined drastically after 1848. Its revival dates from 1884, when the Social Democratic Federation became the first Marxist group in Britain.

1892 elections: Keir Hardie, Havelock Wilson, and John Burns were elected as independent Labour candidates (though Wilson and Burns cooperated with the Liberals once in parliament). The Independent Labour Party was set up in 1893, and the Labour Representation Committee, forerunner of the Labour Party, in 1900.

The "IS-SWP tradition" 5

The experience of the left

THE SWP is, despite everything, the biggest self-styled revolutionary Marxist organisation in Britain today. More than that: there are a lot of ex-members of the SWP (called IS before 1977) around.

It is now what the Healy organisation was in the late 50s and through the 60s — "a machine for maiming militants."

Politically, it has assumed the traditional role of anarchism. It is a movement of incoherent militant protest living politically from moment to moment, with no strategy and not much in the way of stable politics. It has one goal only — to "build the party": the party conceived as a fetish outside of politics and history, cut off from the real working class and its movement.

As an organisation it is a rigidly authoritarian variant of the Stalinist model of a party. It is organised around a pope, Tony Cliff, who has the power to loose, bind and eject. In terms of the organisation of its

intellectual life it is pre-bourgeois, in fact medieval.

Like the Healy organisation before it, the SWP leaves most of its ex-members politically bewildered and disoriented.

To help traumatised ex-members of the IS-SWP get their political bearings and to establish before younger readers its history, we publish the symposium that follows. There will be other contributions in subsequent issues. We invite contributions. The discussion is completely free. Should representatives of the SWP wish to participate, they will be welcome.

Some of those who participate in this symposium have moved a long way from the politics they had in the IS-SWP, and from the politics of *Workers' Liberty* now. Nonetheless, at the end of this discussion we — and the thinking left in general — will be better equipped to formulate the lessons of the IS-SWP experience.

How the SWP narrowed into a sect

By Steve Jefferys*

IT'S A little over eleven years since the SWP EC phoned up to secure a statement from me that they could use to expel me. It was only later they learned I had resigned a month earlier. I had finally given up all hope in protest at their sectarian denunciation of Arthur Scargill in the weeks before the 1984 miners' strike and at their pursuit of that sectarianism in the first months of the strike. They criticised miners' support groups for collecting groceries rather than politically-correct (to pay for flying pickets) cash. My partner, Joan Smith, who had joined the IS in 1963, and was one of the main theoretical figures behind the *Women's Voice* initiative of the 1970s, had left after being arbitrarily suspended six months earlier for "failing to sell the paper" (which she had always been rather vague about for all the previous 21 years).

Since then I have barely given the SWP another thought. I played a relatively important role in the student movement at the LSE between 1965 and 1968 and in the IS/SWP between 1969 and 1979 but my current political activism doesn't extend much beyond membership of the Lipman-Miliband Trust and giving some money every month to the Labour Party. Why

should I now go into print in *Workers' Liberty*? The answer is largely personal.

I now find I am having to explain (even justify) the way in which I spent my political life to my daughter who is involved in human rights issues. And when socialist and industrial militants whom I respected and respect like Jim Higgins, Vic Collard and Mike McGrath make some good and effective points about controversies I was involved in, I think I owe it to them and to a wider audience too (if one exists) to give my account.

The only serious question to be posed of the experience of Britain's left-of-Labour politics over the last 25 years is: could it have done better? It's my strong belief that it could and that some of the missed opportunities occurred because the IS/SWP failed to break free from the narrow sectarian Trotskyist view of the relationship between revolutionary socialists and the much wider minority of politically discontented, angry and concerned people who, however inconsistently, wish to see significant progress made towards an egalitarian and non-racist and non-sexist society.

Consider the tremendous wave of politicisation that swept through both students, trade unionists, feminists and blacks during the 1960s and early 1970s. Now, 20 years later, there is no Communist Party left, but neither is there any replacement. For while the CPGB built on the activism of the

period between 1935 and 1945 to create an enduring organisation that linked a kernel of political and industrial militants over the following thirty-year period, the SWP hasn't. Its construction is entirely on moving sands: a demonstration here, a picket there, the mass production of placards to exaggerate their presence... and absolutely nothing of any lasting significance or coherence among militant trade unionists, left feminists, black nationalists, poll tax rebels, green activists, animal rights activists or any of the other social movements which ebb and flow in Britain's politically muddy waters.

Further, and also unlike the CP at its height, the SWP can claim not the slightest influence or relationship with Labour's troubled left-wing conscience. What matters is not whether a group has members, but whether these members together create and carry political weight within the wider movement. The SWP's membership does not.

Was it inevitable that the broad mix of industrial and political activism that was in and around the IS 25 years ago should have disappeared without significant trace? How much difference could a different leadership and different policies have made? What went wrong? There are, of course, the objective external circumstances. The American defeat in Vietnam was sensational for the Vietnamese; but that war's end saw the passing of an internationally politicising experience. World capitalism was rocked by the oil crisis of 1973-4, but it survived. At a national level the defeat of the miners in 1985 dealt a serious blow to any who saw the socialist project in terms of a link between industrial and political militancy. Times were and are hard, but then again, when haven't they been for those arguing against the stream?

The failure of the IS/SWP to play a more significant role in establishing and/or organising a more durable left opposition to both Labourism and Conservatism has both organisational and political explanations. Joan Smith has always suggested that the problems started when a big-hearted member and friend from the LSE received a big legacy which he largely passed on to the financially-struggling IS. The printshop machine that this created soon enabled a full-time bureaucracy to exist that could be maintained for whole periods independently of the members' wishes and financial support. It distorted the relationship between leadership and led and created the financial basis for the SWP's turn to Stalinist organisational solutions in the 1980s.

This argument has some truth, but does not, in my view capture all of it. What happened during the 1970s to permit those bureaucratic distortions and to first limit and then destroy the opportunities which existed, was that those who had a broader

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view of socialist traditions and directions than Cliff were purged. In retrospect it's clear that they had to be if an individual like Cliff was to survive as leader. For that end, the personal domination of a tiny pond in the shape of a mini-"revolutionary party", Cliff was prepared to sacrifice a generation of talent and destroy any independent initiative.

Was this planned by Cliff? I don't believe it. I don't actually believe (after six years' experience in weekly and even more frequent meetings with him) that he is a strategic thinker. His own political instinct for survival and domination, which he (and it has to be admitted several others) genuinely considers is for the good of the socialist endeavour, is about as strategic or principled as he ever went. His short-termism explains the number and the variety of temporary alliances and different political positions he adopted. I'm sure there is a quote from Lenin somewhere justifying such expediency. The post-1975 Cliff would know it by heart.

The process of purging the IS took about ten years of factional activity during the course of which *all* those who either had a base independent of Cliff and/or who brought non-time-serving intellectual or industrial credentials into the group were expelled, isolated and/or persuaded that Cliff's version of the socialist endeavour was not for them. The two most independent 'insiders' who 'survived', Duncan Hallas and Chris Harman, did so at a high price. Nigel Harris, who lingered on a little longer, was finally excommunicated because he was prepared to say that Third World newly-industrialising countries *were* actually newly-industrialising, rather than maintain the First World focus of his (and the SWP's) 1960s version of the permanent revolution.

How did Cliff achieve the right balance between growth and purge consistent with building a tiny sect into a larger one? The question takes me back to the heterogeneous IS of the 1960s. By 1965-67 the IS's brand of Luxemburgist sanity had succeeded in bringing together a broad church of socialist activists ranging from the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and the indomitable libertarian Peter Sedgwick to Roger Rosewall and other believers in "discipline" and "democratic centralism."

The stuffing of the group at that time, however, was a combination of serious independent intellectuals like Nigel Harris, industrial militants like ENV convenor Geoff Carlsson and POEU activist Jim Higgins, Young Guard Socialists like Peter Bain and Ross Pritchard who had cut their industrial teeth in the apprentice strikes of the early 1960s, and, increasingly, student activists like myself, with ten years' prior political activity in the YCND and Committee of 100. From 1967 many of these student militants were involved in mobilising large numbers of their fellow students. The IS perspective that attracted me most at the time was that "The true revolutionary is the consistent reformist", but my suspicions of Cliff, who always appeared to me

to be constitutionally factional, kept me from joining until 1968 when I left the LSE and went to work in CAV Acton, under the industrial tutelage of Roger Cox, a young AEU activist.

In response to the demand for a more open non-sectarian approach to left unity, the IS had just launched a "unity" campaign against the urgent (!) menace of fascism. Cliff, perhaps, wasn't too upset when, as Jim Higgins explained in an earlier article, his only unity 'catch' was Sean Matgamna. For Cliff would not have stomached any genuine left unity that might have eroded his influence over the "Cliff-group." But the impression of openness the move gave brought me and several hundred other committed 1960s militants into the IS.

In 1969 when I was based in Glasgow, five of us, including Joan Smith and Mike McGrath, organised the "micro-faction" (a Sedgwick appellation that stuck). This successfully argued at the six-monthly conference (all the membership was encouraged to come) for a clear open socialist political statement of aims (it was never produced), in an attempt to 'fix' the orientation of the IS away from the sectarian sub-culture that always bothered me and towards the wider working class and socialist movement.

In Glasgow we worked with Sinn Féin and IMG members in the Irish Solidarity Campaign, campaigning in the teeth of Orange violence for Irish civil rights. Then, from the one-day strike against Labour's 1969 White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, the opportunities for socialists to identify with and participate in significant industrial struggles, and to recruit from them, exploded. Thus the fine (non-Communist) Glaswegian electrician militants, George Kelly and Tommy Kilpatrick, joined us. Modelling ourselves on the French Lutte Ouvrière example that had influenced several of the LSE Socialist Society activists in 1966-67, we started distributing *Rootes Worker* bulletins outside the factory where I was working.

Over the next six years, essentially under the political influence of Jim Higgins before he was sidelined and before my own influence began to wane, IS launched several rank-and-file organisations and papers loosely modelled on the CP's Minority Movement. These were originally genuine attempts by IS activists to establish broad organisations of militants among teachers, local government white-collar workers, civil servants and a much smaller number of manual industries. Through these movements and papers the aim was to try and reach a wider audience of trade union and workplace militants. At the time Cliff never openly opposed the building of 'open' organisations midway between the IS and the broader working-class, but he always saw it as just another tactic. While the "rank and file perspective" of the group was useful in recruiting some terrific industrial fighters, like Cardiff's contracting spark Billy Williams, and dedicated student socialists, like Dave Lyddon who became editor of the *Car Worker* while working at Cow-

ley, Cliff was in favour. But when *Rank and File Teacher* risked passing out of IS hands, and hence losing its recruitment function, Cliff would rather exclude non IS elements or close it down altogether.

As Jim Higgins has already related, Cliff was always ready to sacrifice patient long-term industrial work for short-term gains. The Rank-and-File Conference became a Rank-and-File Rally, and, at the first hint of political controversy, Cliff manoeuvred with his then close collaborator, Rosewall, to mobilise the 'new' (read 'young') recruits against the 'old' Jim, John Palmer and Roger Protz. From the outside, however, this fight seemed largely personal and Jim met me and Joan to persuade me to move from Glasgow to London to work on the Executive Committee as Industrial Organiser while he went to work on *Socialist Worker*. I agreed, on condition that the EC take on more industrial and political weight. Over the next two years I helped persuade two long-standing and experienced DATA/TASS activists, Jimmy McCallum and Ken Appleby, to join the EC (I do apologise!). Being parachuted into a factional minefield was something neither of them deserved. In my innocence, and in my defence, I can only argue that like most of Cliff's other collaborators, I mistakenly believed that Cliff could be controlled if only the EC became more political, more connected to the wider labour movement, and if capable members like Chris Harman and Duncan Hallas could display more backbone.

This belief had genuine credibility in the early 1970s, when the 200 or so individuals who were elected to the group's various monthly 40-strong National Committees included a good proportion of members from political or industrial backgrounds which represented a net input *into* the IS from flourishing independent strands of militancy and activity. There was, briefly, a real feeling that if only that relationship between the socialist project and industrial militancy could be generalised, then there could be a major left advance in Britain.

It was this feeling which convinced me that the time was ripe, shortly after Labour's return to government in 1974, to attempt a big stride forward. This was to try and effect a serious unity offensive on the thousands of *Socialist Worker* readers we had come into contact with during the previous five years. By becoming the SWP and opening ourselves out from a sect into a much more open party, I felt it might just be possible to build a serious socialist alternative to the left of the Labour Party. With the same logic, and in retrospect clearly making the same mistake of over-optimism, I argued for an election strategy, challenging Labour at parliamentary by-elections.

As with the question of the rank and file movement, Cliff never openly criticised the launch of the SWP or this electoral strategy at the time, although my enthusiasm for them was regularly used against me in arguments we had in the later 1970s. Having used Paul Foot at *Socialist Worker* to finally force Jim Higgins from any full-time position, Cliff probably felt it was more

opportune to go along with the launch of the SWP than not. But he was not going to see his dominance undermined. Thus when some of us were arguing for building outwards upon the integrity, humour, activism and humanitarianism of *Socialist Worker*, established over six years largely by three excellent socialist journalists, Roger Protz, Paul Foot and Laurie Flynn, Cliff was beginning to write his truly dreadful three-volume *How to be like Lenin: a sectarian's handbook*. Democratic centralism was on its way.

The change from a Cliff-influenced democracy to a Cliff-dominated centralism took, however, several years. Most of the 1975 members were still too sensible, and with too many roots in the wider movement, to allow an overnight conversion to such a totally inappropriate and potentially Stalinist form of operation. But when it appeared right to me, an insider with a reputation for independence, to stop taking (and thus distributing) EC minutes because they had a habit of getting into the wrong hands, then it was very also difficult for others to understand that this was a step towards the closure of democracy. Likewise I agreed at the time with the quite crucial shift of constitutional control from a monthly broad, representative National Committee, to an annually elected "political" slate of full-timers without even any serious obligation to consult a larger advisory National Council. After the nasty experience of seeing Jim Higgins dumped by Cliff just two weeks after the old NC had expressed its confidence in him, that old structure seemed pretty ineffectual. An EC (now CC) whose members were directly accountable only to Conference appeared to me at the time to have more chance of

guaranteeing independence for those like myself who were never part of any Cliff faction and who distrusted his control over the full-timer apparatus. Yet this change was another brick in the Leninist/Stalinist wall of sectarian management Cliff was determined to introduce. And CC members with reputations for independent judgments, like me and Jimmy McCallum, allowed ourselves to be used as 'democratic' fig-leaves, to cover up Cliff's objective of securing total control without ever having to leave his front-room.

Paradoxically, the Portuguese Revolution also played a part in the Stalinisation of the group. Cliff's enthusiasm for it was unparalleled, to the extent that he even wrote a political document about it, his only attempt in print to analyse current political events. Apparently Portugal could only go in one of two directions: back into fascism or forward to a socialist revolution, and whether you were Portuguese or read any of the other languages in which it was printed, the real answer was to build an organisation that was politically in line with the SWP(!). How wrong can you get? For over a year we kept a full-timer in Portugal and CC members like myself were sent out to meet anyone who would meet us and to give them the line. The pamphlet, *Portugal at the Crossroads*, had been translated and printed in at least eight different languages and later became known at Cottons Gardens as "Portugal in the Basement", as thousands and thousands of copies remained there entirely unread.

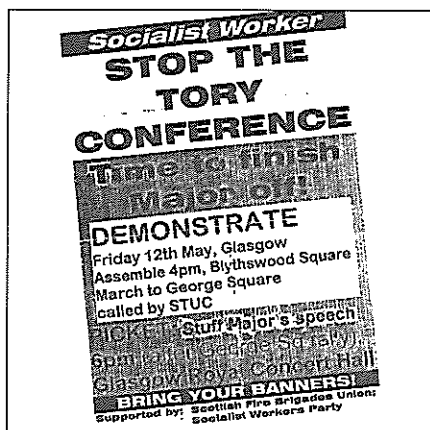
Between 1974 and 1976, there were also a number of security alerts. Many of our phones were we thought, and probably rightly, being tapped; someone tried to fire-bomb Cottons Gardens; some sensitive documents were thought to have gone missing. Thus it seemed not much more than common sense to check our meeting rooms for electronic bugs, and to operate on a need-to-know basis. The pseudo-revolutionism of 'democratic centralism', 'revolutionary Portugal' and 'security' was a heady mix. Combined with "declaring the party", it was the source of delusions of grandeur and hence of many expulsions at precisely the time when the new SWP should have doubled or trebled its size and political weight. The breach with the 'Birmingham engineers' that Vic Collard wrote about recently was undoubtedly the most serious of these expulsions.

The background to these expulsions lay in the fact that in trying to expand the industrial strength of the group on the CC, the reluctance of others I approached to take on the risk involved, had led me to bring in my third choice, John Deason, at the time an AEU steward in Warrington. He was an often courageous and effective agitator and campaigner, but he had not the slightest interest in patient long-term work, and clearly saw himself in some ways as having to prove his industrial prowess in competition with me and Ken Appleby, who was initially given responsibility for the Rank and File Co-ordinating Committee. I was then operating not only as industrial

organiser, but also with responsibility for some international work and for our anti-racist work. I was involved in work with the group of black members around *Flame*, and (along with many other members) was arrested several times in clashes with the National Front, the most important confrontation I organised being the Lewisham mobilisation, which put us in the position of launching the Anti-Nazi League (the first time round).

When John Deason joined the Industrial Department, then, the object was to ease the burden of work on me and we had to divide up the responsibilities for the eight or ten union fractions we organised. John's workerist leanings meant I kept most of the white collar fractions myself, and although I had been an AEU member for five years, it was agreed that he take over that fraction. Our EETPU members, with whom I had been working for years, had actively participated within the EETPU Broad Left since 1969, and had earlier decided to put up a rank-and-file candidate in opposition to that of the Broad Left. This was because the CP had chosen a candidate who had not supported the Broad Left in the past, and because they had failed to consult the whole Broad Left properly. The campaign we ran was highly successful and so, against my advice, John decided to push for a similar electoral strategy in the AEU. I didn't believe there was a real parallel between the two unions, and certainly our AEU members didn't carry the influence that our EETPU members did among the union's left-wingers and local authority and contracting sparks. Cliff, however, wasn't interested in any debate about the issue. My doubts were brushed aside as sounding very much like the boring old Higgins group and I attended none of the AEU fraction meetings which debated 'the line'. At them, as Vic Collard recounted, AEU members who didn't and hadn't played any role within the AEU Broad Left, like those I had recruited in the Glasgow car industry, were ultimately 'used' as cannon fodder to vote through the policy John wanted to impose.

Relations with those AEU members who were doing on-going work within the Broad Left in Birmingham quickly broke down. Because by then none of the engineers trusted Deason enough to listen to him, the CC decided that I and Mick Brightman, a very talented young AEU steward from Smiths Industries in North-West London, whom John had elevated to the position of "AEU fraction secretary", should go to Birmingham to try and persuade the engineers to follow the new SWP line. We were, it became clear, on a total hiding to nothing. John had argued, and the CC had agreed (very reluctantly indeed on my part and on that of Duncan Hallas) under its new democratic centralism binge that it would be a total loss of face if some of our members were voting for one candidate in an election while others voted for another. The Birmingham engineers had, however, decided they were not going to change their position even before speaking to me and Mick, so the compromise I tried to persuade them



No, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) did not storm the Scottish Tory conference on 12 May, seize John Major and hang him from a lamp-post. No more than they crashed through lines of police to march on Parliament and bring down the government at the big student demonstration of February 1994, or started a "General Strike Now" in October 1992. But the agitation should be good practice for real revolutionary sloganising by the SWP come the next General Election: "Don't wait for the polling stations to open! Storm them at dawn Disembowel all Tory voters! Vote Labour in a truly revolutionary way!"

to accept, of merely not campaigning for either candidate, was dead in the water. We saw just two or three of the dozen or so we wanted to meet individually, to put these arguments to them in a less confrontational way than had occurred at public meetings. Most refused to meet us individually, and those we did meet (in pubs, where else?) would not be convinced. Finally I informed them, with great sadness, of the CC's prior decision.

Coming back late one Monday night after an evening of argument and without any success in keeping some excellent militants within the group, I can still remember Mick Brightman looking pale. This may have been because Chanie Rosenberg, Cliff's all-suffering partner, was driving him and us back from Birmingham (her driving was, rightly, infamous). But it was also how I felt. Cliff, who was returning from a meeting, sat in the front of the car. He didn't appear the least concerned at the bad news we gave him. In retrospect I am sure he was not displeased that a group of experienced, articulate and hence potentially oppositional activists had left. His interest was essentially factional. The expulsions of the Birmingham engineers completed the old faction fight against the Higgins and Palmer axis and destroyed the tremendous work Granville Williams (who remained connected with the Higgins-Palmer tendency) had done in Birmingham.

When I got back to London Joan Smith rightly asked me what in the world I thought I was doing getting involved in John Deason's dirty work? I could only reply that I thought I could make a difference, and that if there was the slightest chance of holding on to the Birmingham engineers then I had to take it. Once again I had allowed myself to be used as a fig-leaf covering up rotten politics for the wider interests of the group.

As time went on it became increasingly clear that I wasn't making any difference. Two entirely different perspectives clashed all the time: building outwards to others in struggle, or retrenching inwards towards a homogeneous sectarian core.

I continued to argue (with general agreement from Harman and Hallas) that the central activity of the SWP was or should be building links with left activists in the unions and reaching out to black and feminist socialists and anti-racists who were not necessarily going to join the SWP tomorrow. I had supported Nigel Harris in the setting up of *Flame*, for which I was then responsible, and agreed with the development of *Women's Voice* from a magazine into an organisation. Cliff, on the other hand, was increasingly obsessed with immediate direct recruitment. If someone convinced him that a 'punk Socialist Worker' or a 'Right to Work' march was going to recruit quicker than he was for it. For two years Chris Harman, for example, was virtually declared redundant by Cliff and Jim Nichol as representing 'boring politics'. I had to find industrial department jobs for him to do, like writing on the challenge of New Technology, to justify his

very existence on the payroll.

I was still in sufficiently strong a position among the industrial members of the group to be some sort of threat. It was only a matter of time before Cliff attacked me. I strongly opposed the rapid degeneration of the Rank and File Movement, when John Deason finally pushed Ken Appleby out, into a campaigning shell that could be easily transformed into the Right to Work Campaign. This was miles from the original concept of bringing together active minorities across different industries and unions. I remained convinced that *Socialist Worker* should remain an intelligent read addressing the adult resistor rather than youth rebellion. At conference after conference and National Council after National Council between 1974 and 1979 I publicly argued for different positions than Cliff on these and other issues, insisting that democratic centralism did not mean cabinet responsibility at policy-determining meet-

"During the momentous struggles of the early 1980s and the repeated doses of Tory anti-union legislation throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, rank and file organisations no longer existed."

ings. My 'disloyalty' meant that CC meetings got increasingly difficult, even including physical threats against me by Jim Nichol.

Finally Cliff was forced to write something about the current perspective. In retrospect it is even more absurd than it appeared at the time. Just at the very moment that the British working class was heading towards a major confrontation with the Tories (from the steel workers to the miners) Cliff announced that the battle *had already been lost* in 1974 because the shop stewards had become incorporated into the trade union bureaucracy. By implication, although he dared not argue this outright until after I was defeated, the only thing to do now was to pull out of any contaminated trade union positions. For a combination of sectarian ultra-leftism it really took some beating. I replied that this was nonsense; that unionisation and strikes had continued to rise since 1974; that we could not afford to cut ourselves off from the minority movement of stewards and even left officials who wanted to fight back; and that by announcing a 'downturn' before its likely arrival Cliff was disarming the group and distorting its direction inwards. My counter arguments very nearly won the day after a debate that took place, often personally against Cliff, all over the coun-

try. Cliff, however, used all the SWP full-time organisers to campaign for his position, telling them that I and Joan Smith were the enemy within, preparing to split the SWP. I lost the conference vote by a handful. Indeed, without his attacking *Women's Voice*, which I was also defending, at the same time it is probable that he would have lost the vote on the industrial perspective. *Flame* also fell to sectarian correctness.

The result was that in the 1981 inner city riots *Flame* no longer existed. During the Greenham Common campaign and the mobilisation of the miners' wives, the public sector cuts and the growth of women's employment in the 1980s, *Women's Voice* no longer existed. And during the momentous struggles of the early 1980s and the repeated doses of Tory anti-union legislation throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, rank and file organisations no longer existed.

Do I blame Cliff for the lost opportunity of the 1970s to build a political force to the left of Labour? Yes and no. I've never believed in the 'great men' theory of history, and most certainly I never felt that Cliff had the makings of one. Rather I think that many of us, including myself, contributed considerably to that missed opportunity by failing to understand that Cliff's natural factionalism and sectarianism, which all those who work with him cannot fail to be aware of, constituted an even bigger obstacle than the harsh conditions of the external world. What could/should we have done differently? As far back as 1968 we should all have done more to persuade IMG comrades and other activists we knew to not simply 'join the IS' but to work with us (and inevitably against Cliff) to create a new genuinely open and democratic organisation. I was personally wrong to argue against trying to recruit Tariq Ali, who, as time has shown, would have made an excellent addition to the broader melting pot of political enthusiasm that needed stirring. In 1973 Jim Higgins and John Palmer should have raised their political and industrial differences with Cliff more sharply. It was never enough to simply attack organisational changes, which was the predominant impression we got in Glasgow. The inappropriateness of Leninist formulations for late 20th century Britain (and probably everywhere too) was not just a narrow organisational issue. It was also about how socialists should see the world. And certainly through most of the 1970s the IS/SWP activists as a whole did not see the world in the same sectarian way as Cliff. In 1975 I should have publicly fought the expulsions of the Birmingham engineers and the combination of Cliff's rootless campaign politics and factionalism which lay behind them. That might have done me the personal favour of severing my links with the SWP those few years sooner; but at that time it might just have defeated Cliff. If that had happened, the one thing I am convinced of now is that there would certainly have been a much healthier left of Labour organisation in Britain today than the sect I am now finished with writing about.

Dockers' struggles and oral history

By John McIlroy

I ENJOYED Sean Matgamna's review of Bill Hunter's *They knew why they fought: unofficial struggles and leadership on the docks 1945-1989* (*Workers' Liberty* 21). One small disappointment I experienced reading Bill Hunter's stimulating book was the lack of any comment on the role of the militants of the Revolutionary Communist Party in the struggles in the docks during the 1940s.

The breakthrough which secured the Trotskyists an influence in the struggles of the 1950s came in 1951 when, as Bill Hunter notes, Gerry Healy's 'club' was able to bring the dockers leaders, Harry Constable and Bert Aylward, in London, and Danny Brandon in Birkenhead into its orbit. This achievement was, however, preceded by several years of intensive work by the RCP. Confused and far from successful as it was, this requires acknowledgement. We need to develop our historical understanding of it and salute those who put their energies and imagination into it.

There is, for example, no mention in *They knew why they fought* of the role of the Trotskyists in the big strikes of 1945. Bornstein and Richardson provide a brief account of the stoppages of October-November 1945 in *War and the International* (p151-2). However, a serious orientation to work with the dockers was beginning to develop from 1944 when John Archer visited Liverpool in an attempt to create links with the Scottish ports.

By early 1945 the RCP in London had contacts in the Royal group of docks and had developed quite close relations with Powell, one of the dockers leaders. Powell was particularly important in liaising with the fighting elements in Liverpool in the strikes of July 1945 through the RCP militant, Charles Martinson, a link which went some way towards combating the disruptive role of the Communist Party.

Although the RCP possessed little influence on the summer strikes they were directly instrumental in the establishment of the first unofficial rank and file committee in Liverpool at a mass meeting at Coopers Hall on 2 August. Whilst Martinson was their only representative on it, the committee was caricatured as an RCP front by the CP and quickly collapsed.

As unrest continued amongst dockers the Trotskyists had advantages: the weakness of the TGWU bureaucracy and the unpopular anti-strike line of the CP. The major disadvantage was working from the outside. The Liverpool RCP's docks comrade Etherington had been victimised in early 1944 and the only RCP docks members — in Leith — were expelled in mid 1945. In Liverpool and nationally the nearest the Party had to a docker was 'Ma20'

Martinson, who worked on the gigboats loading timber, and a more forceful character, Alan Christianson, a veteran of the recognition struggles in the Midlands engineering industry before the war. Although he had been expelled from the RCP, Christianson, who worked at Vestey's cold storage, played a leading role in their work during the docks struggles. Nonetheless lack of implantation in an industry with a strong internal culture was a real handicap. Certainly in Liverpool where all too often, as one RCP activist put it, "...the dockers ask 'have you a card?' And if you haven't they just walk away."

Despite this the RCP were able to play a prominent part in the early stages of the Merseyside strikes with Tommy Birchall, a young veteran of Reg Groves' Marxist League, the Workers' International League and the RCP, who had a strong base as a shop steward in Harland and Wolffs, demonstrating powerful energy. The strike began in Birkenhead on 25 September over the discharge of pit props — hard, badly paid work. The RCP members immediately contacted the Birkenhead men, organised leafleting and meetings across the water.

They were directly involved in spreading the strike to Liverpool, escalating it nationally and consolidating it around the demand for a 25/- national minimum, a demand first raised in the summer stoppages. Within weeks of the collapse of the Merseyside rank and file committee a new body took its place.

Martinson shuttled between Liverpool and London and there was contact with Frank Ward and RCP industrial organiser Roy Tearse in Glasgow. In the early days of the strike Birchall and Christianson were able to address meetings from the RCP platform. The anti-strike role of the TGWU docks officials, Donovan and Mahon, and important CP rank and filers, such as Joe Burns, helped them. But the CP who had long wielded influence in the port through Creighton and Marshall were able to reorient. After the initial eruption the strike settled down. Overall the forces of the Trotskyists were weak and external to the main processes of struggle. Failure to penetrate these was facilitated by the approach of the Liverpool RCP which was, given their lack of any strong base, to a degree ultra-left, posing Trotskyist politics directly to the dockers rather than a rank and file programme and organisation. With the initial activist élan tumbling over into an overestimation of the general situation, they characterised their tasks as 'mass agitation.' Martinson quickly declared that '...the programme of the Trotskyists had sunk deeply into the minds of the dockers.' Docks leaflets urged 'the necessity to build a body of reliable docker supporters of the Trotskyists' and ended 'Support the RCP!' The tendency was to relate to the dockers *en*

masse, as if the RCP was a powerful lever, rather than a very small group which needed to find within its general agitation a path to the best militants. Of course the mistaken political perspective was one of 'Preparing for Power.'

The marginalisation of the RCP was probably helped along by the leftism which saw Martinson stand against the Labour candidate. TGWU official Simon Mahon, in the local elections in Bootle. He garnered only 148 votes and raised questions about the Party's position on other Labour candidates. By the time delegates from the Glasgow docks visited Merseyside — incidentally bringing with them arguments for a break-away from the TGWU a decade before the Blue Union affair — they were required by the rank and file committee to take a solemn oath they did not belong to any subversive Revolutionary Communist Party... Likewise, as Bornstein and Richardson record, Powell regarded hitherto as sympathetic, also disavowed the RCP's role.

By the end of the strike the influence the RCP exercised on the London Progressive Committee — even though the faith in the Stalinists of key militants was shaken — was minimal. In Liverpool the RCP was in direct conflict with the port committee they had fought to create, complaining bitterly that the committee was willing to entertain Catholic priests and Bessie Bradock, but not the Trotskyists. The Party leadership's attempt to urge a more constructive approach to gain the confidence of the rank and file brought the counter-charge that this was based on 'pandering to the anti-political tendencies of the London dockers' contacts.' An acrimonious internal dispute smouldered into 1946 with the Liverpool 'worker members' contrasting themselves with 'the apparatus men.' Of course all the comrades were still learning and coming to terms with the realities of the new post-war world. But all this brought comfort only to the Healy minority in the RCP which was very interested in getting into the docks work and who perhaps learned some lessons from it. In the changed conditions of the following decade Healy was able to address meetings from the dockers' platform. Despite continued emphasis on a Dockers' Charter and the need for national rank and file conferences, the RCP made little progress in London or the northern ports in the succeeding years.

That these and numerous other episodes which require interrogation in the interest of completeness remain largely hidden from history, or embodied only in myth, (there are some references to the Liverpool dock struggles in Taaffe and Mulhearn's *Liverpool, the city that dared to fight*) is perhaps relevant to Sean Matgamna's comments on the limitations of memory and oral history. A few small examples might be given. Less than a decade after the events just sketched, ♢

Alan Christianson, writing in a publication of CLR James' group stated with retrospective inflation that the Liverpool RCP had "included the most vigorous and respected dockers' leader." Despite Martinson's excellent record, his experience in fighting fascism in Spain and his courageous break from Stalinism, he was scarcely that. Again, in recent debate about his book in *Workers' Press* Bill Hunter comments that he has no recollection of the links between Constable and Aylward and the Oehlerite Socialist Workers' League in the 1940s. Yet, recourse to the correspondence of Millie Haston in this period demonstrates not only that the two dockers' leaders were close contacts of the RCP majority but that the RCP leadership was well aware, at least in Aylward's case, of the links with the SWL.

Another example of the fallibility of memory can be seen from Harry Ratner's *Reluctant Revolutionary*. Harry notes Jimmy Deane's expulsion from the 'club' in June 1950, citing John Callaghan's book *The Far Left in Britain* as a reference for it and remarking: "In Manchester we were relatively isolated from these developments in the higher reaches of the club in London." [p.145] However, the documents suggest that Harry was present at the NC meeting which accepted the EC recommendation on Deane's expulsion and voted for it.

I want to say firmly that this is not intended to score points, denigrate in any way the fine contributions of Bill Hunter and Harry Ratner or more generally the recent flowering of the history of the far left. It is intended only to underline the fact that this history will develop only through collective endeavour and vigorous debate, through correction and recorection, a process which necessitates a *fusion of oral history and memory with the most rigorous study of the documentary archive*. Oral history *by itself*, a reliance on oral history... this is a dangerous *cul-de-sac*, leading to at best partial history, at worst, apologetics. But oral history deployed in conjunction with the documentary sources... that is a very different story.

Oral history in this sense can be a vital and essential weapon for adding to what the documents tell us, illuminating them, breathing 'the structure of feeling' of the period into them, telling us what the actors were really like, making the dry leaves *live*. It can help us understand what the documents leave out, personal motivations, informal agendas, hidden links, the 'private' sphere. Oral history can recapture in important, vivid detail the quality of life amongst the political rank and file and establish how political positions were taken into the wider movement and how politics was or was not an organic part of the life of the militants. It must always be measured against the documents.

(A valuable recent paper which should be of interest to all concerned with these questions is Alan Johnson, *Beyond the Smallness of Self — Oral History and British Trotskyism*.)

The road to something more democratic than Parliament

By Alan Johnson

I AGREE with much of Martin Thomas' latest response in our ongoing debate (*Workers' Liberty* 18) about the attitude of Marxists to Parliament in the transition to socialism. I argued (SO 619) that "the fight to deepen and defend parliamentary democracy, and to merge the power of a transformed parliament with the nascent power of popular local councils, born of and sustained by struggle, runs with the grain of complex advanced capitalist democracies and is a necessary development of the classical Leninist model of the transition [to socialism] in countries like Britain." Martin replied (WL 18) that, while local workers' councils might well emerge in defence of a left-wing government which was beleaguered by ruling class opposition and prevented from implementing its programme, "that is not the end of the story. If the workers' councils developed beyond a certain level, the leftish Labour government which the ruling class initially wanted to sack would probably become its best defence!" and, therefore, the popular movement outside Parliament would indeed have to "counterpose a new workers' power, based on workers' councils, to the old parliamentary regime." To argue for merging the power of parliament and councils, as I had done, would only be "disorientating."

However, I think we are both in danger of presenting one particular 'scenario' as pretty much inevitable while in fact either of those 'scenarios', and others besides, are possible, depending on a wide range of factors which cannot be known in advance of the struggle. What we can know, from the wide experience of the international working class in revolutionary situations is:

1. That nowhere has parliamentary democracy been rejected in favour of direct council democracy because of propaganda for it by socialists. The prerequisites for the workers' movement even entertaining the possibility of a transfer of loyalties are two-fold:

a profound social crisis which sees the emergence of local workers, consumers, and neighbourhood councils composed of recallable delegates *as organs of struggle*, and the undermining of the democratic credentials of Parliament by the ruling class itself as it thrashes about desperately in response to this social crisis. These two developments could result in a collapse of confidence in Parliament as an open democratic institution and a growing confidence in the new local councils as legitimate democratic bodies: a situation often described in shorthand as 'dual power.' The key question in this shift in workers' attitudes is the extent to which workers see their democratic rights and freedoms — of organisation, assembly, representation, expression, protest — as being best protected by the existing state institutions or by the new workers' councils.

2. It would be wrong to say definitively in advance what the precise relationship between Parliament and the new workers' councils will be as the social crisis unfolds. That will depend upon the political composition of the Parliament, the stage of the Parliament, the weight, character and leadership of the movement outside Parliament, and also the extent of something Martin seems to exclude altogether: the representation within Parliament of those political parties or movements which stand at the head of the extra-parliamentary revolt. The last is crucial for, as Lenin pointed out:

"the experience of many, if not all, revolutions, which shows the great usefulness, during a revolution, of a *combination* of mass action outside a reactionary parliament with a opposition sympathetic to (or better still directly supporting) the revolution within it." (*Left-wing communism: an infantile disorder*)

Such a body of what Lenin called 'communist parliamentarians' armed with a programme able to link the opposition within and beyond Parliament, is essential in the transition, as examples from Germany 1918 to France 1968 have shown that popular movements outside Parliament can be

* See also *Socialist Organiser* 616, 617, and 619

halted or demobilised by the trump card of elections to a national representative assembly. To imagine a revolt outside Parliament could simply ignore such elections or deny their legitimacy is foolish, and was the target of my original piece. Lenin again:

"In western Europe the backward masses of the workers... are more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they were in Russia; because of that, it is only from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that communists can (and must) wage a long and persistent struggle, undaunted by any difficulties, to expose, dispel and overcome these prejudices." (*Left-wing communism: an infantile disorder*. Emphasis added)

From April 1917 to October Lenin argued in Russia for a policy which would combine a National Assembly and councils. (*Collected Works*, vol.24, p99; vol.26, p200)

Despite Martin this still seems to me to be the best line of march for socialists in Britain today. First, because it would key into existing and widespread anger with the corruption and centralised power of Westminster and its quango outposts. Second, because it would allow socialists 'to go through the experience' of trying to deepen and defend parliamentary democracy with the working class.

If Parliament should prove incapable of such democratic transformation and unwilling to forge a new relationship to the local democratic councils (and my failure to entertain this possibility was an error as Martin rightly points out) then that discovery will be made by a mobilised working class as a practical experience. But in the west it is through that experience of fighting to deepen parliamentary democracy that the road to something more democratic than parliamentary democracy lies.



Parliament feathers the nests of its members — for example paying Winston Churchill millions from the National Lottery. We need to fight for greater accountability, greater democracy.

Yes, class struggle is the decisive thing, but...

By Ted Crawford

SEAN MATGAMNA'S diatribe (*Workers' Liberty* March 1995) against all the little splinters and groups may be justified in many cases but I would like to take issue with him on the subject of *Revolutionary History*, with which I am closely associated. As individuals we have our own political viewpoints, and it is quite correct to say that if we attempted to turn ourselves into a political group our differences would blow us apart. Our modest aim, our only aim, is to contribute to the recovery of the history of the non-Stalinist Marxist movement and to provide lessons for the future by looking clearly and coldly at the past. To do this we aim to be both broad politically but rigorous in scholastic terms. So we invite representatives of all the groups onto the board and help any group that wishes to research the past. I think we have had a small but salutary effect here because already our mere existence must give pause to many of those who would wish, for reasons of petty factional advantage, grossly to distort the record of "times when the memory of man runneth not." We do not put ourselves forward as an alternative in any way. But we are not academics, we none of us have a university post and we are not doing it to put on our CVs unlike, let us say, many of the contributors to the *New Left Review*. Sean's criticisms miss the mark but I am more than puzzled to find that we have unwittingly offended him in some way.

But there is more than a grain of truth in Sean's view of "the mushrooming of sects and chapels" even if not of *Revolutionary History*. We could easily be one of the historical journals of a mass revolutionary socialist party though I prefer to think that such a party, if it existed, would have around it a whole number of political, literary, artistic and scientific journals which were independent, not bound by its discipline, but enthusiastically related to it and eager to discuss anything — nothing would be out of bounds. There was I believe something like this in Germany in the early twenties. To underline the obvious, such a party does not exist. So we are not anchored in the mass movement — neither is *Workers' Liberty* or anybody else, alas — and we may be a symptom, though not a cause, of the present weak and

splintered movement. But if things changed perhaps most of the individuals amongst us would go off in different directions and involve ourselves in various areas of activism, though in all honesty I must admit that our average age does not suggest that we are the fresh young cadres for an invigorated workers' movement even if we hope the materials we provide will help others who are younger and more active.

I would like to add that I personally am associated, though much more peripherally, with *New Interventions*, which Sean also blasts but I like to think that my own little article on "The tragedy of the International Socialists" in that magazine may have suggested to *Workers' Liberty* that it would be interesting to ask a variety of people to comment on the history of the IS/SWP. *New Interventions* does of course set itself up as a forum for commenting on present day events and, though no group or mini-party, could by stretching things a bit be thought of as a competitor to *Workers' Liberty*. But genuinely open forums are useful. For example, I have a distinct position on the Irish issue which has been published there, though I understand that Sean strongly disapproves. Perhaps, were I a member of one of the tiny Bolshevik groups that do proliferate on the left, I would have to obey "the discipline", on which Sean is so keen, and would have to keep my mouth shut in the "higher interests of the class struggle", though, since Brian Pearce, Moshe Machover, Jim Higgins, Walter Kendall and Al Richardson now say they agree with me, I cannot think that I have got it totally wrong even if I am ignored. I am glad to have the heavy guns on my side even if not the big battalions. I think that Sean has got things wrong almost as often as I have and he implicitly admits this since he has had as many positions as the Kama Sutra on a whole variety of issues which I am elderly enough to remember — though mutually to pick over the scabs of the past would serve no useful purpose as I am no more — or even rather less — infallible than he.

His criticism is misplaced. With tiny resources *Revolutionary History* tries to do a useful and non-sectarian job. I think we do. And we all appreciate the comments in our defence by Alan Johnson in the pages of *Workers' Liberty*.

Pink pound will not bring liberation

By Janine Booth

PETER TATCHELL and Edwina Currie have exchanged a bizarre but revealing correspondence recently. Currie was asked by a newspaper which living person she most despises. "Peter Tatchell" she replied, going into a rant about how he damages the cause of equality by being too radical and confrontational. Tatchell's response was to write to Currie asking her to stop attacking him and begging unity in the common cause of gay equality. According to the gay press, Currie replied with a handwritten note telling Tatchell to "piss off".

Currie — self-proclaimed champion of gay equality, and hero of many Stonewall types — picks as her hate figure not a homophobic, but a gay activist whose strategy she disagrees with. She is pre-occupied with ensuring that her support for an equal age of consent does not associate her with people who are prepared to be active and noisy in demanding equality. Her excuse for supporting the notorious homophobic law Section 28 was that its opponents were not polite enough. Not for Edwina Currie the fluffy notion of us all pursuing a common cause.

She is not on our side — Tatchell should have told *her* to piss off. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are *not* all one big happy family with a common interest. What we share is attraction to people of the same sex, in a society which is hostile to same-sex attraction. Our interests otherwise are more decisively determined by class, which puts the majority of lesbian, gay and bisexual people not shoulder-to-shoulder with Edwina Currie or gay Tory MP Michael Brown, but on opposing sides.

To illustrate this, I recall a gay Tory I used to know, and the arguments that used to break out in the bar. "How can you be a Tory if you are gay?" people would ask, rightfully indignant at his membership of a party that has attacked our rights so persistently. "Simple" he would reply, "I'm rich. I've gained so much from the Tories because I'm rich that I can put up with a bit of homophobia. It doesn't affect me that much anyway."

Embracing Tories in the struggle for equality involves disregarding other issues. It inescapably implies that those other issues — hospital closures, attacks on education, mass unemployment, deepening poverty and inequality, racism and deportations — do not matter. It is saying that the oppression and misery inflicted by the Tory Government on millions of people is unimportant. That lesbian,

gay and bisexual equality is the only — or at least the most important — issue. And if lesbian, gay and bisexual activists act as though other issues are not important, then why should people affected by those issues give any support to the fight against homophobia?

The lesbian/gay/bisexual movement is failing to learn the lesson of solidarity. The labour movement must take a share of the blame for the collapse of many activists into single-issue campaigning (Peter Tatchell being a good example). Many gay activists have no faith in a labour movement that has consistently failed them. But it remains the case that lesbian, gay and bisexual people will not win liberation by ourselves. We need the support of millions of people, and we need the labour movement to champion our equality. That means fighting alongside other sections of society under attack, not alienating them by inviting into our movement the people who are attacking them.

The Tories who pretend to support us are the darlings of gay capitalists. The Gay Business Association showered Edwina Currie with awards after last year's age of consent campaign. Some gay people believe that pink capital and our 'spending power' can create new openings for equality.

The blossoming of a gay commercial scene has undoubtedly made life easier for a lot of people. However, it is not so helpful if you live outside a major city, if you can not afford to go out, or if you can not tell your family where you are going. The scene does not exist primarily to help people come out and be confident about their sexuality - it exists so that club owners can make a profit by charging exorbitant door prices and £2.50 for a can of lukewarm Fosters.

Banking on the power of the pink pound, and trying to achieve advances by hobnobbing with Tory MPs, both have a similar effect. They push to the forefront of our 'movement' a certain type of homosexual — the smart, respectable, inoffensive, besuited, successful gay man. John Major had tea and a chinwag with knighted actor Ian McKellen a few years

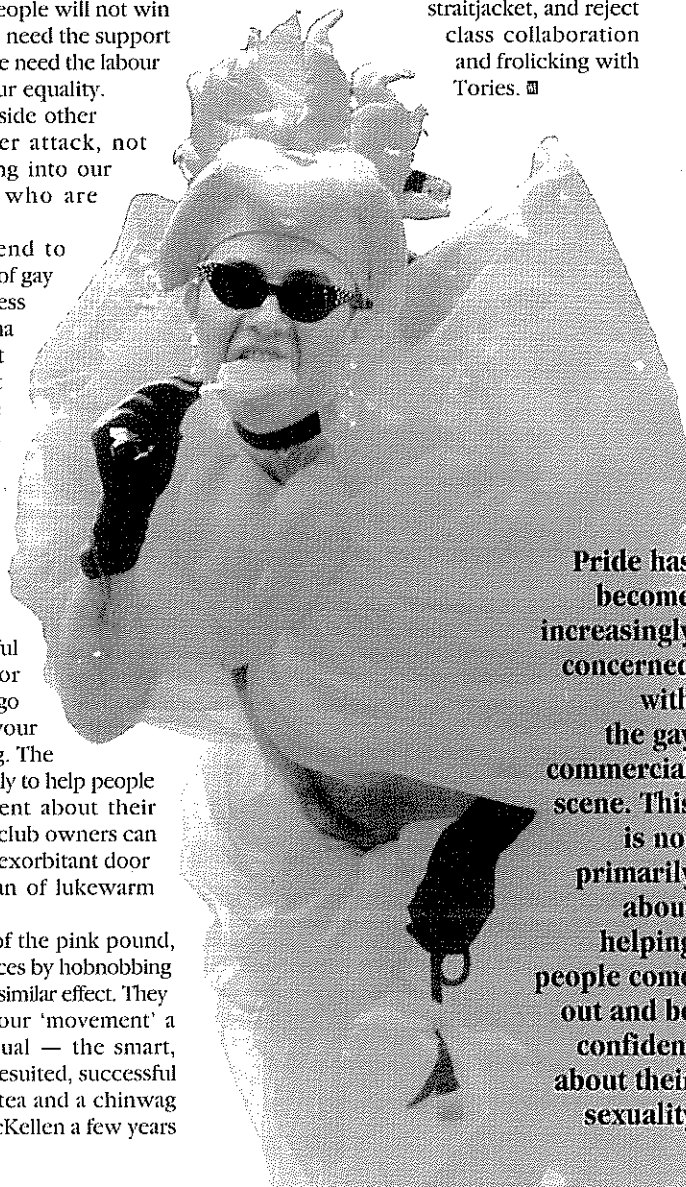
ago. I very much doubt that he would have got his tea set out to welcome a leather dyke or a drag queen. Edwina 'some of my best friends are gay' Currie surrounds herself with well-spoken, well-presented gay men.

Those who think that putting our 'respectable' face forward gives us a greater chance of success are mistaken. Despite Ian McKellen's knighthood, suit, politeness and artistic credentials, *the Sun* still raged against him last week as an "awful militant homosexual" (!), decrying his presence at the VE Day celebration.

There needs to be a reconciliation between the labour movement and the lesbian/gay/bisexual movement, barely on speaking terms at the moment. This is a two-way process. The labour movement must support equality — a three-line whip for an equal age of consent; a public commitment to equal rights in all areas; active participation in struggles against homophobia; trade union action against discrimination in the workplace. Lesbian, gay and bisexual activists should

break out of the single-issue straitjacket, and reject class collaboration and frolicking with Tories. ■

Oh, piss off.
Edwina Currie
24/4/95.



Pride has become increasingly concerned with the gay commercial scene. This is not primarily about helping people come out and be confident about their sexuality.

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