Socialist Organiser Forum

Number 1 February 1985

50p

The Labour Left and the break up of the Communist Party

THE BRITISH ROAD TO NOWHERE
Why FORUM?

THE WEEKLY paper Socialist Organiser is aimed at the broad labour movement. It is written to appeal to a number of different groups of readers simultaneously — for trade union militants and for non-political workers drawn into a given struggle or forced by some exceptional events to take more interest than usual in politics, as well as for committed socialists.

We try to be a 'combination' tool, dealing at one and the same time with the concerns of raw trade union militants just coming into politics and with the desire of committed militants to know about and understand the intricacies, for example, of Irish Republican and Loyalist politics.

Even though Socialist Organiser has regularly given over space to longer articles and to articles which will only interest a part of our readership, there have always had to be big gaps.

Sectarians

For example, we have been the target of misrepresentation, slander and abuse in the sectarian press for most of our existence, and yet we have not felt that we could afford to give space in Socialist Organiser to answering even that small part of the sectarians' output that it was probably worthwhile (that is, educational) to answer.

At the same time, we have had to give much space in Socialist Organiser to debates between SO supporters which were probably of only limited interest to most of our readers. We would like to be able to cut back that element so as to give space to features of more general interest. Yet the 'Open Forum' side of SO was and is a vital part of the paper and of its work as a left-wing organiser.

Weekly

We are therefore starting 'Forum' to take some of the pressure off the weekly and to enable us to deal with the affairs of the Left in the necessary detail.

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ALL THE signs are that the Communist Party is about to break up. Torn for years by bitter factionalism, the party is now publicly split down the middle, and opposition has hijacked the Morning Star, the newspaper which the party has published for 55 years. (Until 1965 it was called the Daily Worker). For the first time since 1929, the CP has a small weekly as its main publication.

Last year the Executive Committee suspended the London District Congress, alleging irregularities and apparently fearing a loss of control. Then the executive steered towards a formal rupture in December when it expelled Tony Chater and David Whitfield, the editor and deputy editor of the Morning Star, and called a special CP conference for May.

Short of some miraculous turnaround, the final rupture will come then.

It is probable that something calling itself ‘Communist Party’ will continue to exist after that. But things will never be the same again after the Party splits down the middle.

Both of the two battling camps are conglomerations of factions and incipient factions. In the nature of things, after May when the pressure to cohere will ease off, each bloc should prove highly liable to split further. It is difficult to see how the dispute over control of the Morning Star will escape finally being taken to the courts.

The political issues are by no means clear-cut, but broadly they are these. The Morning Star side is traditionalist, and more oriented to the working class and the labour movement (but mainly to the Labour movement bureaucrats). The faction around the Executive and the CP magazine Marxism Today places all its stress on the ‘broad democratic alliance’.

Some of them advocate a Popular Front style coalition with the Liberals and SDP (and maybe even ‘wet’ Tories) against Thatcherism. The Morning Star is more traditionally Stalinist in its attitude to the Stalinist states and their rulers: it is extremely subservient to the ruling bureaucrats, carrying their official propoganda on internal affairs and on Poland, Afghanistan, etc.

The Executive/Marxism Today faction are more critical of the Stalinist states, but express themselves by adding a dilution of capitalist liberalism to their ‘model’ of socialism.

These are not matters that concern only a small and increasingly discordant and incoherent group of a few thousand (the CP’s membership is 13,000, but most are nominal members). The CP has never been very strong as a party, but its influence is widely diffused in the labour movement. The issues that divide the CP now also divide the Labour Party and the broader labour movement. The CP factions and sub-factions have their parallels within the Labour Party.

Some of the Marxism Today faction could be Kinnockites. Indeed, Kinnock is indecent in his praise for a leading contributor to Marxism Today, Eric Hobsbaum. More oddly, the sort of broad coalition politics advocated by Marxism Today, on the model of the Italian Communist Party, have been put into practice from County Hall by Ken Livingstone in his campaign against abolition of the Greater London Council. Much to the distress of some in the Marxism Today faction, Livingstone still talks hard left.

Respected voices on the serious Left like Tony Benn have given their support to the Morning Star, and have held out the prospect that, severed from its CP connections, it could become the independent newspaper that the labour movement so desperately needs. That this is a sheer fantasy is shown by the Morning Star’s circulation: of 29,000 claimed sales, 15,000 (more than half) are in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

The likely consequence of the break-up of the CP will be the entry into the Labour Party of a sizeable number of activists, loosely grouped into factions or adhering to existing groupings like the Labour Coordinating Committee (for the Marxism Today people) or ‘Straight Left’
(for the more traditionalist Stalinists).

They will find a Labour Party in which the right and soft Left are trying to define the framework of a debate on democracy. All of them, from whichever side of the current CP divide, will bring with them a commitment to the ideas of the CP's programme, 'The British Road to Socialism'.

The Marxism Today faction attacks the Morning Star for neglecting the British Road's concern for a 'broad democratic alliance'; the Morning Star people reply by accusing Marxism Today of neglecting the 'leading role of the working class' within that alliance. But both share the central thesis of the British Road to Socialism - which is also the central dogma of reformism, according to which reformism has defined itself as against revolutionary working class socialism.

They claim that working class socialism does not require the prior destruction of the capitalist state and its replacement by a new form of democracy. A socialist transformation can be carried through by parliamentary action. This dogma of reformism has been refuted by every decisive conflict of classes in history. Nowhere has the ruling class allowed itself to be overthrown and expropriated peacefully; everywhere that a ruling class has felt threatened, it has gone outside its own legality and parliamentary forms, and used both the state and auxiliary groups like fascists to smash the labour movement.

There is no rational reason to think that this basic pattern will ever change. Long traditions of parliamentary democracy cannot obliterate this pattern: Chile, where a Left government was overthrown, and the labour movement almost wiped out, by an armed forces coup in 1973, had one of the oldest and seemingly most stable parliamentary democracies in the world. It made no difference when the ruling class felt threatened.

The dogma of the reformists was long ago assessed for its true function in politics by the revolutionary Marxists. An honest socialist may go along with the dogma because he or she has not yet thought the matter through in the light of history; but otherwise, the dogma indicates that the Marxist who holds it is no longer a socialist.

If, knowing the facts of history, you believe that 'socialism' can come by this peaceful road, then you can no longer believe that socialism is something radically different - the negation of liberal capitalism; that socialism is something different from a prolonged series of reforms; that socialism is the overthrow of one class - the capitalist class - and the replacement of its rule by the rule of the working class.

This position is common to all the factions of the CP, with the seeming exception of the small group around the monthly paper, 'The Leninist'.

Those of them who come into the Labour Party will strengthen the Kinnaught centre and the soft left. They will do so with some credibility as 'Marxists'. It is therefore important for the Labour Party left to arm itselfs politically against the British Road view of Parliament-worship as preparation for the important struggles and discussions opening up in the Labour Party.

Unnecessary Addition: continued from page 23

which has more in common with the method of the old Tribune Left than with revolutionary Marxism, which "says what's" and tries to define issues clearly.

Socialist Viewpoint is a non-event which, nevertheless, for obvious reasons we have had to respond to. The politics of Socialist Viewpoint do not justify the separation from Socialist Organiser. Some SV people have differences with SO on Afghanistan, on Ireland, on their notion of the 'anti-imperialist united front', on women's liberation, etc but not all of them share those differences, and in any case wider differences have existed in SO and were thrashed out in its pages.

The SV people, however, find it more congenial to publish the sort of thing I have cited above in a publication where they cannot be contradicted or called to account for what they write. Their basis of existence is tacit agreement to tolerate each other, to evade contentious issues, to seek the momentarily sustaining political fudge rather than Marxist clarity, and to let the great man Thornett write what he likes without fear of contradiction.

Of course it is regrettable that these comrades, some of whom have made and could again have made a contribution to the work of SO, come instead to mess about like this.

Faced with the defection of this small group of former supporters, we have two options. We can take the hard-balled, self-convolting line that the fox took when he failed to reach the grapes: "They were sour grapes, anyway. They were all useless.

Or we can go to the other extreme, with the Jacobean poet John Donne: "Forsake man's death diminisheth me, and therefore send no to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee".

Neither would be entirely appropriate. The departure of some of them does diminish SO; others - most of them - were hopeless people. All of them were incapable of working things out politically, so politically, SV is their own measure of what they are, and it points rather towards the fox's conclusion than towards John Donne's.
British road to nowhere

An analysis of 'The British Road to Socialism'

Both sides in the present division in the Communist Party swear by 'The British Road to Socialism'. First published in 1951 under Stalin's personal guidance, this programme pioneered the Western Communist Parties' open adoption of a supposed 'parliamentary road' to socialism. Despite such experience as the 1973 military coup against the left parliamentary government in Chile, the perspective of a 'parliamentary road' has been reaffirmed in every edition of 'The British Road to Socialism' since then — including the latest, 1977, edition.

Marxists are not against the use of parliament to win reforms. Our objection to the 'parliamentary road' is that it is impossible. A peaceful, gradual transition to socialism would be desirable — but the ruling class will not submit gradually and peacefully. A parliamentary government acting seriously against capitalist power and privilege would face violent resistance from the permanent state machine — and crucially from the 'armed bodies of men', the armed forces and the police. Only the mass mobilisation of the working class, prepared to meet counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence, could defeat that capitalist resistance.

In the process of that mass mobilisation — so we believe on the basis of the lessons of history — the working class will create new forms of democracy, new workers' parliaments, qualitatively more democratic and responsive to the mass of the people than Westminster, with its cross on a piece of paper once every five years.

But the 'British Road' accepts present-day parliamentary forms as the ultimate in democracy, and teaches the working class that a 'broad democratic alliance' can win socialism through parliament without large-scale violent capitalist resistance.

The following critique of 'The British Road to Socialism' is reprinted from the newspaper Workers' Action June 30 and July 7, 1977. Quotations are from the draft version of the 'British Road' published by the Communist Party prior to its 1977 Congress.

The 1977 version of the Communist Party programme, 'The British Road to Socialism', is, like all the previous versions, reformist through and through. Its general theoretical conclusions do not base themselves on the lessons of the class struggle; neither do its proposals provide the organisng focus for the development of a working class political practice which can start as an assault on capitalism and end with the consolidation of workers' power, of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The 'argument' of the British Road can be summarised as follows: the tendency to monopoly drives the smaller and middle capitalists increasingly into the camp of democratic opposition, which is spearheaded by the working class movement. The alliance created by the coming together of the working class, the non-monopolist capitalists and the intermediate layers of
professionals and others is so massive that it cannot but embrace large sections of the state apparatus (all but the topmost) and isolate the monopolists as a tiny section of society.

**Left government**

The alliance — the anti-monopoly alliance — provides, in this scenario, the social support for a 'Left Government', consisting of Labour Party and Communist Party members. Because of the democratic/constitutional traditions of Britain, and because of this isolation of the monopolists and their closest supporters, the Left Government is able to legislate acts which progressively remove the sources of the capitalists' economic supremacy without the ruling class being able to resist effectively.

At the same time the Left Government begins a transformation of the state apparatus into one which is loyal to it by democratising that apparatus. In this way the Government, progressively removes the source of the capitalists' political supremacy.

The capitalists who have been isolated and paralysed nationally are unable to resort to foreign intervention because the balance of world forces does not favour this. With the increasing democratisation of property forms and of the state apparatus we thus eventually arrive at socialism ... by means of peaceful transition.

In this grand plan we find rejected the Marxist conceptions of the state, of revolution, of class alliances and of socialism. This is not a matter of textual orthodoxy: what is being rejected is not books, but the lessons of the class struggle which certain texts, theories and slogans sum up.

The mistakes embodied in the British Road's scenario are too many to analyse in any detail. Let us, however, look at the errors concerning a number of closely related ideas — the state, peaceful transition, organs of workers' power. For it is these errors, these revisions of the lessons Marxism has formulated on the basis of the experience of the class struggle, that lie at the very heart of the CPGB's bureaucratic-reformist strategy.

"The state" says Lenin bluntly in his polemic against Kautsky "is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another." Some sort of gradual transition may be possible between a state which serves feudal landlords to suppress peasants and workers, and one which serves capitalists to suppress the same classes. But the working class cannot triumph over the capitalist class without smashing the state which suppresses us.

Summarising the experience of the revolutions of 1789-99, 1830, and 1848 in France, Marx wrote that they all left the workers oppressed and exploited because "all revolutions perfected this (state) machine instead of smashing it". Marx set the goal of breaking up 'this huge state edifice' and enabling the mass of the people to win control. As yet he could not delineate the precise forms.

After the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 Marx and Engels were able to reiterate this idea ('One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz. the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes....') and to identify the features of workers' democracy — right of recall, officials at workers' wages, unity of legislative and executive.

After the Russian revolution of 1917, it was possible to go even further. "The proletariat" Lenin reminds his readers "cannot lay hold of the state apparatus and 'set it in motion'. But it can smash everything that is oppressive, routine, incorrigibly bourgeois in the old state apparatus and substitute its own, new apparatus. The Soviets of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies are exactly this apparatus."

This new, Soviet type of state, Lenin said elsewhere, "gives the working and oppressed people the chance to take an active part in the independent building up of a new society."

But the Soviets which after the October revolution became the apparatus of the new state had originated as something else. They had originated as the most all-embracing organisations of
the workers and other oppressed classes in the struggle to overthrow the domination of the capitalists and landlords.

A revolutionary programme today is one which would insist on the need to smash the capitalist state (which the British Road to Socialism does not) and replace it with a new state apparatus of workers' councils (soviets) which would ensure the closest possible link with the masses, the cheapest and least bureaucratic form of administration, the right of recall over all elected officials, and the involvement of the mass of the population in the creation of their own society.

All this is rejected in the scenario of the British Road. Naturally, as the bureaucratic mentality of which it is a product must reject such an anti-bureaucratic, militant and creative idea.

**Soviets**

The Soviets — which under the Stalinist bureaucracy, of course, ceased to be organs of workers' democracy — are said to be all right for Russia. But, the CP says, the idea is "strictly not for export".

Yet as long ago as 1919, Lenin at the First Congress of the Communist International could point to "the form of proletarian dictatorship that has already taken shape, i.e. Soviet power in Russia, the Räte-System in Germany, the Shop Stewards Committees in Britain and similar Soviet institutions in other countries."

That was the only possible verdict on the basis of the class struggle of that time, and experience of the class struggle has confirmed this judgment scores of times since then — Hungary 1956 and Portugal 1975, France 1968 and Poland 1981.

In short: the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat is inconceivable without the working class throwing up the potential organs of its undivided power in the period of the struggle against capitalist domination, and carrying these over, enlarging and perfecting them, as the form of the new workers' state.

**Violence**

The question of revolutionary violence or peaceful transition is closely bound up with this idea. According to the British Road, socialist revolution "can be carried through in Britain in conditions in which world war can be prevented, and without civil war, by a combination of mass struggles outside Parliament, and the election of a parliamentary majority and government determined to implement a socialist programme".

This is not, for them, just a statement of a theoretical possibility. As such it would simply be uninteresting. No doubt in rather exceptional circumstances the working class could come to power without civil war. It is very unlikely, but cannot be excluded in theory. But once again, a programme of socialist revolution rests on the experience of class struggle and there is no example of a peaceful transition to workers' power.

The CPGB in any case goes further than merely stating the theoretical possibility of a peaceful transition. It has devoted scores of texts to proving the correctness of its commitment to this road.

Of course, if all that was merely intended to emphasise that it will be the bourgeoisie who will oblige the working class to resort to violence, there might be little harm in this. Or if the CPGB's programme were to conclude that the chances of a peaceful transition increase precisely to the extent that there is a mighty development of working class organisation of its organs of class violence, like the workers' militias. But these are not the conclusions.

The conclusions of the British Road to Socialism on this are completely determined by bureaucratic passivity.

The test is simple: does the British Road to Socialism propose forms of workers' struggle against capitalist resistance? It does not. And it thereby completely disarms the working class and its allies in the face of that resistance. The British Road merely says that in the face of "the utmost resistance", "the use of force could (l) also be resorted to." But if that should happen, the CP gives no indication of how
and in what manner the working class should resort to force. The message is to be passive, while the CPGB relies on the state forces of the bourgeois state to be the spearhead of attack against the bourgeois resistance.

The "logic" of such a line is simply baffling. But the tragic consequences are easy to see. The experience of the terrible defeat of the Chilean working class at the hands of the Pinochet junta should be enough to expose the dangers of this line.

Chile

This is what Luis Corvalan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Chile, said in a speech in July 1973. "Always we have maintained — and we repeat it today on the weight of recent successes — that in the conditions existing in Chile there is a real possibility to complete the anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchical revolution, and march forward to Socialism without civil war, although, naturally, maintaining an intense class struggle."

The speech was published in the CPGB's monthly magazine Marxism Today in the September of that year. Before the copies had been bought off the bookstalls the writer was in hiding, the government smashed, a regime of torture and terror in power and thousands of Chileans dead.

Coup

The coup that overthrew the Popular Unity govern-ment of Allende was the work of the armed forces. There had been divisions within the army, between the rank and file (many of them conscripts) and the officers. But the CPC did nothing to promote the struggle of the rank and file, instead it supported the urity of the army, criticising all those who are "pledged to create an abyss between the armed forces and the people." And Corvalan even rounds on those who are "maintaining little less than that we are intending to replace the professional army" with a clear denial of this intention:

Professional

"No sire! We continue to support the absolutely professional character of the armed institutions." And they did...improving the forces' weaponry...until those same improved weapons in the hands of those "absolutely professional" soldiers overthrew the government and replaced it with the organs of military terror.

Hesitation

In the light of this experience it is not the slightest bit reassuring to read that "In the event of such a right wing coup being launched, the left government would have no hesitation in using force to defeat it." We need to know not whether the government hesitate to use force, but whether it will have the force to use.

Democratisation?

The British Road to Socialism — in this and in all its previous drafts — defines the struggle for democracy in terms of gradually making the existing state machine more democratic.

The idea is that given a clear parliamentary majority for a Left Government, that government could remove this official, promote that officer, reform this regulation and loosen that one — all of which changes will cumulatively amount to a transformation of the role and nature of the state apparatus.

Thus, underlying the idea of the peaceful transition to socialism, we have the idea of the gradual slide towards Socialism. As if the resistance of the bourgeoisie can be avoided by inching one's way to socialism to stealthily that by the time they have noticed what's happening it will be too late.

Fabians

In other words, the strategy of "softly, softly catches monkey". No wonder Irene Brennan, a Central Committee member of the CPGB, writing in a contribution to the discussion on the 'British Road', feels that too many hard things have been said about gradualism against...the Fabians!

But what of the idea of insurrection, of an uprising of the masses? Quoting Lenin to the effect that "A socialist revolution is not a single act;
it is a period of turbulent political and economic changes, of intense class struggle”, Brennan tries to confuse her readers by confuting the idea of revolution in the sense that Lenin means it (that is, the total process of transformation from capitalism to socialism with all its national and international ramifications) with the idea of insurrection (that is, the means by which the oppressed masses become the ruling political forces).

This confusion derives directly from the dismissal of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The significance she gives the insurrection of October 25th 1917 is clear in her statement that “certain key events take on a symbolic character for the movement—that is only natural—and the storming of the Winter Palace, I suppose, has that sort of symbolic power.”

Symbol

It would be hard to find an utterance at once more dismissive, more bureaucratically patronising and more cynically philistine than this. Logically, “i suppose”, Brennan thinks that if the storming of the Winter Palace, the insurrection of October 25th 1917, had failed, it would only have meant a little gap in the inspirational catchphrases and images of the revolutionary movement.

Presumably when, on the following day, Lenin announced “We will now proceed to construct the socialist order” he was simply reinforcing the power of the Bolshevist symbols!

Admittedly this is not the same explanation of the October insurrection as that given in the British Road; that document describes it as something “governed by the historic conditions and background of Tsarist autocratic rule”. Hardly a convincing explanation in view of the fact that “Tsarist autocratic rule” had been broken already by the time of the October revolution.

All this idiocy, this confusion and sophistry, serves to support the idea that the revolutionary process is full of decisive and qualitative breaks and leaps, some affecting this aspect of social life or that aspect of economic life, but none of them in themselves amounting to an historic watershed.

For Marxists, whose ideas are based on the development of the class struggle and not on the desire to adapt to the more open representatives of reformism in the labour bureaucracy, the dictatorship of the proletariat marks a decisive new historical stage. And the dictatorship, whose task it is to suppress finally the resistance of the capitalists and their allies and to prepare the conditions for socialism, is marked by the fact that the sole organs of legal, state power are now the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat — replacing, smashing utterly, the old state power and its organs of bourgeois domination.

New conditions?

What are the new conditions the CPGB constantly refers to to justify its wholesale revision of Marxism on these points?

Firstly there is the assertion that the state today is “a very subtle and extended complex of state institutions employing millions of wage and salary earners.”

Secondly, there is the claim that the balance of world forces has changed since Lenin’s day.

Thirdly, there is the long tradition of bourgeois democracy in Britain.

Of course the state is complex and extended. It is also true that connected with the state and servicing bourgeois rule there are scores of institutions that deal with the administration of things rather than people. They are the institutions of accounting of the state; they are not its inner essential core, the organs of enforcing bourgeois rule. But this makes no difference when we speak of smashing the state we mean the organs that enforce bourgeois rule, that embody a monopoly of legal force in bourgeois society.

Power

These still have to be smashed, completely destroyed and replaced. The new organs of workers’ power would reorganise the servicing and accounting agencies of the old state to fit the conditions and requirements of
the new power. But this is all that can be reorganised rather than smashed.

Once again, the lumping together of different tasks is designed to obscure what has to be done and, in this case, to make the smashing of the state seem absurd by including in it those departments that can be reorganised. (And conversely, it has the effect of making the reorganising of the coercive forces of the state look more plausible by submerging consideration of those forces into the picture of the administrative side.)

The employment of millions in the state apparatus is not very significant, except that the expertise resulting from this will equip the working class in Britain to complete the transition to socialism more quickly than where such expertise is lacking or very confined.

Military

What is far more significant is that the military machine in Britain does not consist of millions of proletarians as it did in Russia and as it does, proportionately, wherever there is conscription. That makes the task of the destruction of the state harder not easier!

The second argument and the third are dismissed by the terrible lessons of the Chilean defeat. Chile also had a long tradition of bourgeois democracy — as the CPC constantly reminded its audience.

World forces

The question of the balance of world forces is in any case a mistaken argument as these can change rapidly. A glaring example of this is given by the following quotation in which John Gollan, then General Secretary of the CPGB, looked at the "favourable balance of world forces" in 1965: "In Greece, the Karamanlis Government has been defeated by the electoral victory of the left and centre forces. Tony Ambatielos and the Greek democratic leaders imprisoned for 17 years have been released. New possibilities of democratic advance are opening up in Greece."

How the "new possibilities" actually materialised is now well known: the Papandreou government which had replaced Karamanlis was deposed by the King and in April 1967 the colonels' coup submitted Greece once again to the iron heel of military dictatorship.

Tony Ambatielos was jailed again as were "the Greek democratic leaders imprisoned for 17 years". In the meantime, of course, the British Road to Socialism's view of the balance of forces did not change one whit, and, therefore, neither did its conclusions.

The third argument is not serious for the long democratic traditions of Chile and — even more so — Britain do not exist in Spain whose Communist Party's programme is, if anything, even more gradualist and pacifist than the British Road.

But if the bureaucratic divorce between this programme and the class struggle is clear in the failure to learn from the past, it is far more striking in that section which deals with the proposals for the future.

At the centre of a revolutionary programme we should find a system of measures and slogans capable of mobilising the revolutionary classes in the struggle for the seizure of power.

Mobilisation

In a volume that the Communist International published to help promote a lively discussion on the question of the programme of the Comintern, Karl Radek wrote in an introduction: "After the course of the world revolution has been analysed, it will be necessary to set out the means of mobilising the working class for the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the present period of transition."

Such a system of demands should, as Trotsky wrote a decade later, "help the masses in the process of the daily class struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist programme of revolution".

These measures form a bridge in that they not only provide the focus for the revolutionary mobilisation of
the working class against the capitalists but they also provide the first step in the workers' elaboration of their own organs of power and administration.

Among the most important of these measures are the sliding scale of hours and wages (which Trotsky called the method of "production under socialism"); the abolition of business secrecy and workers' control of production (both being schools for the planned economy and organisational forms transitional to the management committees of the planned economy); the workers' militia (which is both the spearhead of proletarian struggle against the capitalists and also the precursor of the general armig of the proletariat); and the Soviet, the organ of the united working class in the struggle against the bourgeoisie and the basic component of the proletarian state.

Organisation

Of course this is not an exhaustive list of the slogans of a revolutionary programme. By no means. There are also slogans of expropriation, of the institution of a monopoly of credit by the state — measures which can only be implemented by government. What is central however is the action of the proletariat itself and the development not only of extra-parliamentary pressure but of extra-parliamentary organs.

Revolutionaries try to help the development of this incipient vanguard-state... In Chile the people's courts and neighbourhood committees in the slums as well as the workers' committees; in Portugal the rank and file soldiers' committees of the SUV and the factory committees — all these were the seedlings of this extra-parliamentary counter-state.

Revolutionaries are also interested in parliamentary politics. But we try to link parliamentary activity to the development of the extra-parliamentary movement, seeing the latter as the determining factor. These excerpts from the programme of the workers' government of Saxony, drafted in 1922, give some idea of how this idea would be concretised:

"The government proposes — ;

"(7) The police force and its administration to be composed of workers in bona fide trade unions. Establishment of a workers' militia..."

"(9) All legislative proposals of interest to the working class to be submitted first to the congresses of workers' delegates and periodic meetings of the state-wide congress of workers' delegates."

Every single proposal of the British Road is a measure to be implemented not directly by the self-organisation and mobilisation of the working class, but by the Left Government to which the British Road preaches complete loyalty.

Rousse

This is not simply a matter of form. The CPGB's approach speaks volumes for its bureaucratic disavowal of all those forms which are likely to rouse the working class. The CPGB's road is, like that of the right wing and 'soft left' of the Labour Party, exclusively through the ballot box. This is not just an honest mistake; it represents a wilful blindness to the lessons of events like Chile's coup, and a dogged determination to keep the class struggle as much as possible within those forms that leave the working class more or less passive.

The word "democracy" appears in the British Road to Socialism too often to count — and it means almost anything the reader might want to imagine. But one sense in which it is not used (and it is a sense in which it is reasonable for revolutionaries to talk of democratic struggle) is to refer to a kind of struggle which involves the workers, unites them and enables them to draw in more backward layers.

Taboo

The very idea is taboo to the bureaucratic mind. But this idea is absolutely central for revolutionaries. To return to that pivotal idea of the Soviet again: it is not only an instrument for unifying the workers against bourgeois rule and bourgeois
resistance; not only does it represent a rejection of the state as a parasitic bureaucracy; but it is a combination school and workshop of proletarian administration — drawing spiritual inertia fostered by the old state.

Once again the idea is directly related to the revolutionary conception of the withering away of the state (something you won't find mentioned in the British Road!) and the establishment for the first time of a real democracy.

Bourgeois

This combination of tasks is set out clearly by Lenin in his "Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat":

"Only the Soviet organisation of the state can really effect the immediate break-up and total destruction of the old, i.e. bourgeois, bureaucratic and judicial machinery, which has been, and has inevitably had to be, retained under capitalism in even the most democratic republics, and which, in actual fact, the greatest obstacle to the practical implementation of democracy for the workers and working people generally. The Paris Commune took the first epoch-making step along this path. The Soviet system has taken the second.

"Destruction of state power is the aim set by all socialists, including Marx above all. Genuine democracy, liberty and equality is unrealisable unless this aim is achieved. But its practical achievement is possible only through Soviet, or proletarian, democracy, for by enlisting the mass organisations of the working people in constant and unfailing participation in the administration of the state, it immediately begins to prepare the complete withering away of the state."

That is not possible by the route of parliamentary democracy in the bourgeois sense, for "It is the people, who even in the most democratic bourgeois republics, while possessing equal rights by law, have in fact been debarred by thousands of devices from participation in political life and enjoyment of democratic rights and liberties, that are now drawn into constant and unfailing, moreover, decisive, participation in the democratic administration of the state."

There is hardly a single person who does not see that the vast mass of working people in this society feel atomised and impotent. This impotence is complemented, reinforced and exploited by the exercise of power by the few. How is this feeling dispelled?

Partly, at least, by those great mobilisations and collective actions in which workers discover their dignity and power. A party which seeks to limit those mobilisations and actions and to reinforce the 'leave-it-to-the-tops' apathy that one finds so often, is a party which is out to rob the proletariat of its dignity and power. It is out to block the development of its consciousness.

The British Road to Socialism is, in this sense, just another thoroughly undemocratic programme — structuring and minimising the active control over its own fate by the working class in just the same way that has proved so useful to the bourgeoisie.

Undemocratic

For the CPGB, after all, socialism is not the self-emancipation of the working class. They take their model of 'socialism' from a system, in the USSR, where a powerful bureaucracy maintains its privileges by stifling the working class; they try to make it more acceptable by diluting it with oaths of allegiance to capitalist parliamentary forms, and they end up with a strategy which can lead the working class nowhere but to defeat.
Anatomy of the Labour Left

Straight Left

THE LABOUR Party Left, like the Left in general, is fragmented and divided. There is nothing especially new in that.

The early Labour Party was a combination of trade unions and socialist societies like the Fabians and the Independent Labour Party, without individual-member constituencies until 1918. The socialist groups argued, competed and co-operated in a free ferment, without bureaucratic bans or outlawry for dissenters and critics.

The sectarian Marxist Left (the Social Democratic Federation) excluded itself from the Labour Party in the early years, but when the left wing of the SDF (by then called the British Socialist Party) split from the right and applied for affiliation in 1916, it was accepted.

After 1918 things changed. The war had split international socialism into patriots and internationalist revolutionary socialists, with a vacillating centre between them. The Russian Revolution gave a tremendous boost to revolutionary politics everywhere, including Britain. Revolutionary in the British labour movement put the trade-union-based Labour Party old guard (whose leaders had joined the war-time Cabinet as junior partners) on the defensive.

This was one of the reasons why the Party organised individual membership sections in 1918 at the same time as it adopted the famous Clause Four, committing the Party to socialism. Clause Four was to be a shield for the old guard against the socialist wind blowing through Europe.

When the newly-formed Communist Party applied for affiliation to the Labour Party it was refused. In fact the biggest group making up the new party was the British Socialist Party, so it could simply have informed the Party leaders that the BSP had changed its name. They made a new formal request, and predictably were turned down.

The period of a united labour movement, excluding only the sectarian who excluded themselves, was over.

After the small Independent Labour Party disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, the Party entered upon a half-century during which organised groups and factions were marginalised. The Bevan movement of the early 1950s was the major exception.

Today, however, there is a great proliferation of groups and sub-groups within the Party, ranging from the Fabian Society through the descendant of the Independent Labour Party (now called Independent Labour Publications) it 'came back in' a decade ago, to revolutionaries.

Trotskists and Stalinists, Fabians and Christian Socialists, vie with each other within the Party. The picture is often politically very confusing. The likely arrival in the Labour Party of refugees from the break-up of the Communist Party will not simplify the picture.

We will be publishing a series of articles in Socialist Organiser Forum which aim to analyse and dissect the groups and factions of the Labour Left. This month we begin with Straight Left, a neanderthal-Stalinist faction, whose publication started coming out in 1977. It seems to have come originally from the same pool as the 1977 Stalinist breakaway from the CP, the New Communist Party.
The Straight Left “Editorial Advisory Panel” consists of a number of individuals who have consistently compromised themselves over the question of Stalinism. It includes Alan Sapper and Joan Maynard MP (both also stalwart defenders of the anti-working class Khomenei regime in Iraq) and James Lamond MP (chairperson of the British Peace Assembly and president of the World Peace Council, both of them being Stalinist front-organisations) as well as Gordon Schaffer, another member of the Presidential Committee of the World Peace Council.

A particularly noteworthy member of the Straight Left Editorial Advisory Panel is veteran Stalinist Frank Swift. From 1966 to June of 1982 he was deputy general secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Association, in which position he worked consistently for labour movement “deterrent” with the Stalinist bureaucracies. He successfully moved a resolution from the 1979 TUC calling for closer links with the World Federation of Trade Unions, the federation of the Stalinist fake unions.

Swift, who left the IRSF to become the Executive Secretary of the World Peace Council, is also Vice-President of the British-soviet Friendship Society (its President is the octogenarian Stalinist apologist Andrew Rothstein, a regular contributor to Straight Left) and chairperson of its trade union section.

During his term of office in this position, affiliation to the British-Soviet Friendship Society has grown from one union with 27,500 members (ASLEF whose general secretary, Ray Backton, is also a member of the Straight Left Editorial Advisory Panel) to 21 unions with 4½ million members.

Given the extent to which various members of the Straight Left Editorial Advisory Panel are involved in various national and international Stalinist transgression-front-organisations, it is only to be expected that the pages of Straight Left itself should be permeated with an atmosphere of religious devotion to the Stalinist system in the USSR and the rest of Eastern Europe.

“When it comes to defending socialism, who has a better record than the Soviet Union?” Straight Left writer Harry Steel asks rhetorically, wilfully blind to the history of the last sixty years.

Centre-page spreads by Straight Left editor Mike Tournazou paint glowing pictures of life in the socialist fatherland: rising educational standards, an absence of inflation, religious freedom, rising living standards, trade union participation in policy-making decisions, low rents, etc., etc.

And it is in this, according to Frank Swift, that “the real Soviet threat” lies: “the example it sets to the tens of millions of jobless, homeless, untended sick, and neglected aged in the West’s tottering capitalist economies”. The Soviet Union, he informs Straight Left readers is “tangible proof that socialism does work and represents the only way forward.”

After all, “it is in Washington and not in Moscow that trade unionists are trundled off to jail in handcuffs and leg-irons”. This is, of course, completely true: in Moscow, like the rest of the Soviet Union, those attempting to set up genuine unions are locked up in psychiatric hospitals and given drugs to change their behaviour.

USSR strikes

But Tournazou himself is less than perfect. Why are there no strikes in the Soviet Union, he asks rhetorically, (in fact there are strikes, viciously repressed by the authorities), and answers “it is not because they are outlawed but because the economy is thoroughly planned...” A “socialist” society which outlaws strikes can hardly be regarded as “the only way forward” for the workers of the capitalist West.

The suppression of the East German workers’ uprising in 1953, the invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, and the suppression of free trade unionism in Poland are all actions to the credit of the Kremlin bureaucracy, as far as Straight Left is concerned.

In such cases, Gordon Schaffer explains: “the stakes are the survival of not only her own painfully rebuilt economy and those of the other socialist countries, but the fate of us all.”

Afghanistan

Ever since it was launched, two particular concerns of Straight Left in this respect have been the defence of the Stalinists’ invasion of Afghanistan and support for the smashing of Solidarnosc in Poland.

The “Red” Army’s 1979 invasion of Afghanistan had nothing to do with the defence of socialism. It was motivated by the Stalinists’ desire to defend their own anti-working class regime and ensure that the unrest in Afghanistan did not spill over into the Central Asian regions of the USSR.

Straight Left, however, unequivocally defends this reactionary invasion: “no-one should be duped by the lies of the British and American war-mongers and reactionaries... When the Soviet Union sent in its troops, it was to defend the revolution carried out by the Afghan people in 1979, exercising its sovereign rights”, writes Andrew Rothstein.

Schaffer, hardly surprisingly, is in complete agreement: “The Soviet Union could do no other than answer the appeal of the Afghan government.”
Such an attitude might place a question mark against Schaffer's right to be a member of the World Peace Council, were it not for the fact that the latter is merely a Stalinist charade having nothing to do with peace.

To strengthen its case for defending the invasion, Straight Left has reproduced articles from L'Humanite, paper of the French Communist Party. But support for Straight Left's crusade in defence of repression can be found nearer home, in the figure of Ron Brown MP. In 1982, Ron "I see no tanks" Brown visited Afghanistan together with Bob Parry MP, Bill Ronksley (ASLEF) and Terry Marsland (Tobin B Workers Union) in a delegation organised by "Liberation", another Stalinist cutaway.

"There is new vigour and sense of purpose amongst its people despite their poverty", writes Ron, and explains that the rebels do not consist of a "homogeneous Muslim movement" at all, but "represent a wide range of groups ranging from criminals to religious fanatics".

Thus, whilst (rightly) condemning American and European imperialism for its hypocrisy in condemning the Soviet invasion, Straight Left covers up for the Stalinists' repression in Afghanistan and instead talks only of "the struggles of its people to build the new life".

Solidarnosc

In the same vein, Straight Left covers up for the Stalinist repression in Poland, leading to the working class unrest which found its organisational expression in Solidarnosc, and instead attributes the conflict in Poland to capitalist plots and manoeuvres.

"American and West European banks played a direct and important role in destabilising Poland's economy and causing the wave of strikes in July and August," explained Straight Left, on the grounds that "world capitalism has managed to export its crisis into Poland on a wider scale by means of the massive credits the Polish government has accepted from Western banks in the last ten years".

At the hands of Straight Left, therefore, working class revolt against Stalinist repression is transformed into a capitalist plot to start a world war. Rothstein explains that the capitalists' hope was that "an insurrection might be launched" leading either to "capitalisation to some form of capitalist restoration or to energetic measures to suppress the insurrection, with the threat of Western intervention, i.e. of a new world war."

And the increasingly aggressive noises emanating from the Kremlin in the run-up to the imposition of martial law were dismissed by Straight Left as "resolute, comradely backing to the Polish leader-

ship against the people who, some out of sheer stupidity, but many undoubtedly out of irresponsible adventurism, were making things worse instead of better".

But the capitalists' plot failed: "No, the great hoax has failed. No, the suckers have proved to be in a minority in the socialist countries... The peoples of the socialist countries have learned to recognise their enemies and to confound their knavish tricks."

Three months later, martial law was imposed and Solidarnosc was banned. Straight Left showed no sign of regret: such measures "offer the hope for the first time in many months, that a way will be found of restoring stability and prosperity to Poland... the introduction of martial law has met with more understanding among the Polish people than amongst many socialists in the West".

Workers shot down

The deaths of at least seven miners who did not share this "understanding among the Polish people" about martial law were shrugged aside by Straight Left: "they are a lot fewer deaths than would have resulted from a civil war... the defence of Poland's order has cost seven lives. The defence of capitalist profit costs thousands of lives daily..."

Straight Left is at least quite explicit about having one set of standards for Stalinism and another for capitalism. It was wrong, argued Harry Steel, for "us, the working class movement in Britain, to judge a socialist country by the rules we have formulated to deal with a capitalist situation."

In other words, it's okay for Stalinists to ban strikes, outlaw trade unionists, shoot workers and invade other countries wherever felt necessary, but not for the imperialists.

Two standards

The clearest example of Straight Left's dual standards for Stalinism and imperialism is provided by the question of nuclear weapons and disarmament. Here too, Straight Left is equally explicit.

"Should we regard military power at the disposal of the class which looted and exploited the world and dragged us into two world wars in exactly the same way as the military force of a society based on the ending of the exploitation of man by man?" asks Harry Steel rhetorically. Rhetorical questions seem to be in vogue at Straight Left.

"Two standards for two systems? Is it so unreasonable?" Straight Left obviously thinks not.

Thus, Straight Left constantly attempts to contrast the aggression and sabre-rattling of imperialism, with Stalinism's supposed concern for peace.
NATO and Warsaw Pact

Whilst Straight Left condemns NATO as a warmongers' alliance (again, rightly), the Warsaw Pact, in fact a means for the denial of the right to self-determination for the peoples of Eastern Europe, is treated as if were a social club.

"It is not the Warsaw Pact which is threatening to bring the final curtain down on Europe. In fact the USSR has guaranteed that it will never use nuclear weapons against a nuclear weapon-free country. Quite an offer, given that the USSR has never weished on any treaty obligation in its 65 year history."

One could go even further. And Straight Left certainly does. Not only does the Soviet Union not welsh on its agreements, it also "does not pose a military threat to any nation which desires to live with her in peace". A succession of examples since the Second World War would suggest otherwise.

Nor does Straight Left have any problems getting round the question of the Soviet nuclear weapons directed at targets in this country. All that this involves, explains Frank Swift, is "understandable Soviet counter-targeting to knock out American missile bases stationed here."

Peace movements

Following out of this differing attitude to the use of nuclear weapons by Stalinists and imperialists, there inevitably arise different attitudes towards different peace movements.

The Eastern European fake peace movements — like the fake trade unions they are simply an extension of the Stalinist bureaucracies — are objects of unmitting praise by Straight Left, together with their various initiatives, such as the Sofia Peace Parliament of September 1980.

Similarly, initiatives taken in conjunction with such bodies are also smiled upon by Straight Left. But organisations such as European Nuclear Disarmament (END) or individuals like E.P. Thompson who support the genuine peace movements in Eastern Europe are clearly evil incarnate as far as Straight Left is concerned, in much the same way as those genuine peace movements themselves, described by Straight Left as "groups of dissidents with a logistic base in the West", not peace organisations in any recognisable sense.

And these "dissidents with a logistic base in the West" turn out to be mere hooligans anyway. As Oleg Kharkardin, President of the Soviet Peace Committee explained through the pages of Straight Left: "The West uses this word (dissidents) about criminals who want to avoid punishment and so declare themselves victimised. We get a little annoyed when Western delegates come here and tell us how we should treat hooligans, provided they declare themselves dissidents."

END and EP Thompson are treated in much the same fashion by Straight Left. The latter is accused of suffering from "binding anti-Sovietism" and "his talk of building 'independent peace movements' is plain nonsense. But it is dangerous nonsense when the utmost unity is needed".

END itself is described as an organisation which "behind a veil of ultra-left phrases seeks to impose a policy which would merely strengthen the power of American imperialism", whilst its support for independent peace movements in East Germany is equated with "campaigning here for the right of people in the German Democratic Republic to refuse to defend socialism". And Straight Left warns its readers that "the ruling classes have for years used such organisations to divert people from the real struggle".

CND

CND is just about tolerated by Straight Left. Admittedly, it contains people like Socialist Workers Party members actively peddling their "sectarian and reactionary policies", and in its leadership "some anti-Soviet elements...who end up with the slogan 'No Cruise. No SS20s' — the same as that of Ronald Reagan".

Nonetheless, CND should not be written off. "CND needs...a defeat of the anti-Soviet tendencies," what is necessary is "to actively counter anti-Sovietism within CND." Straight Left readers are therefore urged to get involved in their local CND groups for failure to do so will mean "abandoning it to anti-Sovietism and sectarianism."

Ethiopia

Whatever the issue under consideration, the starting point for Straight Left is one of cringing subservience to Stalinism. The standpoint from which international developments are analysed is not one of working class political independence but that of the political outlook and perspectives of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Straight Left appeals for aid for Ethiopia, run by the Soviet-backed Dergue regime, but is silent on the repression of national minorities within Ethiopia's borders; it portrays Vietnam as a country building a socialist society, whilst dismissing the boat people as middle class professionals and small
businessmen unable to adapt to the “new society”; and it sings the praises of the Iranian regime led by Khomeini, “the uncompromising leader of the Iranian revolution”, who enjoys “the unequivocal support of the masses”. Straight Left also points out the similarities, from a Stalinist standpoint, between the situations in Iran and Poland: “The enthusiasm of every reaction- ary force in the world for the terrorists marching under left-wing labels in Iran is only comparable to the enthusiasm of Thatcher and other union-bashers in the West for Solidarity in Poland”.

Block of classes

Underpinning Straight Left’s approach to “Third World” countries is the Stalinist notion of the “bloc of four classes”, first developed by Stalin in relation to the situation in China in the 1920s. “Anti-imperialist and to a certain extent anti-capitalist measures (emphasis added) can be pursued irresistibly and consistently,” explains Straight Left, “without establishing an active alliance between the working class, the peasantry, progressive intellectuals, the petit-bourgeoisie in the towns and progressive elements within the national bourgeoisie.”

But any alliance between the working class and peasantry and the national bourgeoisie can only be at the expense of the former holding back on their demands so as not to alienate the latter. Hence Straight Left’s reference to “a certain extent anti-capitalist measures”.

Straight Left displays exactly the same approach in relation to South Africa. It raises the siren “Away with the white racist republic — forward to a people’s democratic republic”. Iran is described as a country “in the people’s democratic stage of development” and Iraq too was “following the road of social progress resolutely against imperialism and reaction” until the regime started shooting members of the Iraqi Communist Party.

Argentina

But Straight Left does admit however that in Third World countries “there is a complicated process of class differentiation and class polarisation.” Argentina turned out to be such a case, as Straight Left suddenly discovered with the outbreak of the Falklands war.

Argentina is one of those countries where “the question of class roles is not so settled that the question of who rules is left to the ballot box.” Instead the question is settled “in the higher court of appeal, armed force.” In Argentina the outcome has been a government which is “a mixture of nationalists and conservatives with fascist elements seeking to dominate.”

The Argentine working class “distinguishes between these contending elements in seeking to open the door to progress”, and the British working class should support them in this endeavour, instead of calling the junta fascist, which “is just the latest in a long line of excuses for defending our imperialism, and bosses, against other capitalists.”

In Argentina, therefore, as in Iran, Straight Left claims the existence of “progressive elements” within what were actually totally anti-working class regimes.

At no point during the Falklands conflict, therefore, did Straight Left raise the demand for the overthrow of the Argentine junta. Instead it placed its emphasis on the fact that “the Soviet Union and all other socialist countries have made plain their support for Argentina’s right to sovereignty over the islands”. More revealing for the true reasons behind this than Straight Left’s subtle distinctions between ‘nationalists’ and ‘conservatives’ are the swollen figures for trade between the USSR and Argentina.

Trot-phobia

The flip-side of Straight Left’s Stalinophilia is its Trot-phobia. Like medieval monks who conceived of themselves living amidst the constant temptations of Evil which had to be resisted at every turn, too Straight Left engages in a timeless crusade against what it considers to be Trotskyism. Trotskyst organisations belong to those groups which “the establishment encourages — and in some cases almost certainly finances, albeit clandestinely”. The function of such splinter groups is to “deprive the working class of the power which it could wield as a single united force.”

According to Straight Left, the Trotskyst groups are divided by “narrow doctrinaire differences” but united by “their hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union and the socialist countries”, and by the fact that “all give comfort to the real enemies of the international working class by creating confusion amongst those forces who together could change the course of history.” It seems that the Trotskyst are everywhere. They infiltrate the CND and attempt to win new recruits from it; the Militant “Neanderthal Left” causes mayhem in the CPSA; their infiltration of the Labour Party is too well known to merit comment; and even the TUC’s “Jobs for Youth Express” of
1982 fell victim to "the mass selling of Trotskyist papers and unauthorised collections for the Laurence Scott strike, which led to indiscipline and increasing chaos".

Straight Left is in favour of taking some firm action with these people. It bemoans "the lack of necessary organisation and effective stewarding which could otherwise have prevented the sale of Trotskyist papers on the Jobs Express. The divisive role of the Trots must be questioned, and "Trotskyist legends" be exposed for the myth they are, whilst no Trotskyist should be allowed to stand as a Labour candidate...every trade unionist or socialist will be able to offer himself (sic) or be offered as a Labour candidate, except in pursuit of some incorrigible sectarian obsession". (i.e. Trotskyists).

Given Straight Left's obsession with Stalinism, and its equating of socialism with the situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe today, the rest of Straight Left's politics, such as they are, are pretty much irrelevant.

Straight Left defends Stalinism on the grounds that "...day, anti-Sovietism is capitalism's principle weapon in attempting to halt the transition to socialism".

**State**

Since the 'socialism' which Straight Left has on offer is only an anti-working class police state modelled on the regimes already in existence in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Straight Left's attitudes to the best formula for the Labour Party electoral college or who to back for the Labour Party leader and deputy leader are of relatively peripheral interest, and this is reflected in the perfunctory manner in which Straight Left deals with such questions.

Running through the pages of Straight Left is a strong streak of catastrophism and a sectarian-propagandistic approach to socialism. This in itself cuts Straight Left off from relating to the day-to-day struggles of the working class. But since the end goal to which it looks is in fact the complete anti-theosis of socialism, wherever Straight Left exercises any political influence, it constitutes a reactionary force, working to replace working class political independence, without which socialism cannot be achieved, with political subservience to the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

**Conclusion**

How does Straight Left relate to the present crisis in the CP? Andrew Rothstein, a chosen spokesperson of the Morning Star faction in their argument with the 'Eurocommunists' executive, is a frequent contributor to the paper. So are a number of other CP members. Some Communist Party members sell Straight Left.

The Eurocommunists, therefore, are hostile to Straight Left: so, it seems, are some of the Morning Star faction, who find its politics too crude and primitive. In July 1982, before the battle between the Eurocommunists and the Morning Star exploded, the CP executive passed a resolution which stated: "We do not accept the need for such a journal as Straight Left. The job that it claims it wants to do is done by the Morning Star very effectively...

We disagree strongly with many of the political positions on important issues taken by Straight Left..." If that happens, it will be a setback for socialism. Straight Left's glorification of the Stalinist states is reactionary: such 'propaganda for socialism' serves only to strengthen workers' suspicions that socialism might be the same as the Soviet Union, and thereby makes the work of those fighting for genuine working-class self-emancipation that much harder.
An unnecessary addition

By Jack Cleary

To hurl at Socialist Organiser in 1980, SP called the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, which launched SO, "a socialist" campaign which supports Callaghan. When we initiated the Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy, SP said that we were just "errant boys for Benn", without politics of our own.

SO has failed to put forward any detailed analysis..." Our readers will judge for themselves. Socialist Viewpoint's own capacity for making political assessments was exemplified in SO no.1's comments on the Labour Party. It first went on sale at the Labour Party conference, with this opinion: "A year after the glorious events of the election of the self-styled 'Dream Ticket' leadership of Kinnoch and Hattersley, there will be little for Labour's left wing to cheer for at this year's conference." The very first day of the conference saw left-wingers defecting SV and cheering loudly as they knocked Kinnoch back on the miners' strike and on individual ballots.

If it were not that the SV article is signed by Harry Sloan, you would think it was the work of John Ester, the blinkered literary dogbody of the old Thornett group, who in the pages of Socialist Press used to make regular broadside denunciations of the whole Labour Left, including SO. Right up to the disappearing of the old WSL in mid-1981, he never managed to get closer to an assessment of events in the Labour Party than a perception that something was going on, and that socialists should try to get involved.

Some Socialist Viewpoint supporters also helped to distribute a leaflet outside the Socialist Organiser summer school in August 1984. It was in the same vein as SV no.1, painting this picture of SO's performance in the miners' strike:

"On the miners' strike, despite carrying the call for a general strike since almost the beginning, SO has carried nothing [their emphasis] on building for strike action. Like the Communist Party, SO sees support committees having a purely financial task, not one of helping to organise for action. Even SO groups see their main activity as organising financial support (see SO 186, 5 July). Why?"

Is the writer thinking of some other Socialist Organiser, perhaps? Or has a collective blur had a hand in the leaflet?

Such idiocies can only be counter-productive for SV. So why have they wasted time and energy on them?

Emotionalism — spite and malice! This fervent desire to explain their miserable existence, to the writer seems to have caused them to turn over whatever nonsense came into his head. Their stated reason for starting SV was that SO had degenerated, so they had to something. They perhaps felt (and with good reason) that on the level of serious political discussion there was not enough to differentiate them and justify their independent existence. So they found the answer in general denunciations which would sound good and vigorous to those who do not pay too much attention.

The Socialist Viewpoint editorial goes on: "This turn [by SO] away from the leadership of the Labour Left has been matched by a dwindling analytical and a failure to offer direction or policy for industrial disputes. Even the current campaign of energetic fundraising and support for the striking Notts miners [only Notts?] is not linked in SO to any development of a deeper analysis of the stages of the struggle the manoeuvres of the TUC, the tasks of the period ahead." Whether our analyses are 'deep' enough, our readers must judge. What about Socialist Viewpoint? Each issue has carried a long article by Alan Thornton giving his 'deep' analysis of the stages of the struggle. The gist of his approach is conveyed by the following caption to a picture of Arthur Scargill: "Scargill: Mistaken decision not to use authority of strike to demand real action".

Before the TUC congress in September Alan Thornton argued that the only way to win the strike was for the
NUM to carry a resolution for a general strike through the Congress. Since then he has argued that the only way to win is to get a recall TUC, and the NUM to put down a resolution for a general strike.

If only Scargill didn't hang back so much, if only he had the nerve to 'demand real action' from the TUC, then 100,000 miners and their families need not have waged the strike since March 1984. That insistent condemnation of 'the war of attrition' strategy of the NUM has been the political stock in trade of both the two issues of Socialist Viewpoint and a series of leaflets, 'Victory to the Miners', also written by Alan Thornett.

Magic device

This seems all very strange. This or that 'appeal' by Arthur Scargill at key moments might have had some good effect. (So thought that the NUM should have pushed for a general strike at the TUC, for example.) But Alan Thornett himself concedes that a resolution calling for a general strike would probably have been defeated at the TUC. It was not a magic device.

The literary 'industrial strategist' in exile, the 'alternative leader', the 'principal over the water', writes as if all that was needed for the miners to break out of their isolation was for Arthur Scargill to make this or that 'call' — as if the attraction 'strategy' were the NUM's chosen method in preference to other, easier, options. In fact the 'war of attrition' has emerged over a year in which first the miners split and then the labour movement failed, section after section, to deliver sufficient effective solidarity.

If Socialist Viewpoint campaigns for industrial action to support the miners, and for a general strike, that is good. But when they imply that the way to get such action is simply for Arthur Scargill to call for it, that is ridiculous. Doubly so when Arthur Scargill has made many 'appeals' for solidarity, both to trade union leaders and over their heads to the rank and file.

So why the curious emphasis on the mechanisms of a recall TUC and an NUM resolution? Why the heavy insistence in both nos.1 and 2 of Socialist Viewpoint that Alan Thornett was completely, absolutely and thoroughly correct in what he said about the necessity of an NUM resolution for a general strike at September 1984's TUC Congress?

The true explanation, I think, is bizarre, but not quite so bizarre as the only alternative, i.e. that Alan Thornett really believes that the miners have been stuck in a war of attrition simply for lack of a couple of correctly-phrased resolutions.

After the TUC Congress Alan Thornett's leaflet was criticised by the Workers' Socialist League, from which he had been expelled in April 1984. (See Workers' Socialist Review no.4). Alan Thornett has not replied to this criticism. But his repeated insistence that he was right last September — and that the only way to victory now is to recall the TUC and go through the whole thing again, only getting it right this time — is his way of responding. Bizarre? I could refer back to an incident during Alan Thornett's period as a contributor to Socialist Organiser when he wrote an article attacking Scargill over the NUM's call for a ballot on action against the closure of Lewis Merthyr pit. The editors found the criticism too sweeping and softened it: Thornett was furious — and he expressed his fury by sticking sentences about how right his condemnation of Scargill was into most of his articles in the following months, usually without any relation to the subject of the article!

And the bizarre pattern of political thinking here does dovetail with the bizarre methods of argument in the Socialist Viewpoint editorial:

The end result is to reduce Alan Thornett's 'deep analysis' to sheer charlatanism. Abandoned

In SW no.2, Alan Thornett writes that that "... problem in fighting for a change in strategy [is that] the vast majority of miners have confidence in the leadership, and don't, by and large, question the situation [?] very much... One way or another, however, the war of attrition policy has to be abandoned [abandoned?!]. The problem of the isolation of the strike has to be recognised for what it is: the major strategic problem in winning a victory over the NCB and the government. Real steps have to be taken to break the isolation..."

If Scargill hasn't time to read SW, look what blinding insights he is missing! What 'real steps'? "The NUM must once again begin to [?] demand action from the rest of the movement, and put the screws on the TUC..."

For example: in 1980 a steward who supported Socialist Organiser was among six workers victimised and sacked from BL's Longbridge plant. Alan Thornett was among those who discussed what to do about it. What was the answer? We easily agreed on that: the whole plant should stop until the workers were reinstated. The same 'answer' would have got Derek Robinson reinstated.

We knew the 'answer', but we could not deliver. The sections where the six had worked struck, but they were isolated and eventually defeated. The people involved would not have received very politely the advice of some self-regarding by-stander who airy told us that we should avoid a 'war of attrition' and instead go for 'appeals'.

Solidarity

Or take the more poignant example of Alan Thornett's own sacking from BL's Cowley Assembly plant in 1982, when he was victimised for forgetting to renew a driver's licence. He knew exactly what he needed to defeat BL — mass strike action, such as that which got him reinstated in 1974. But, though it was the eve of a big strike at Cowley (the 'hand-washing time' dispute), there was no strike for the victimised steward.

Normal capacity to learn something from experience, not to speak of normal decency towards the embattled miners and their leaders, would sincere most people if all they had to say was what Thornett manages. But you cannot have a mini-cult around someone whose special province is 'industrial affairs' and then expect decent silence. 'The war of attrition strategy has to be abandoned!', indeed! Yes, when we have produced solidarity enough to win!

From this we can get an idea of what Socialist Viewpoint means by 'deep analysis'. Deep analysis? Why, that's the brand name for what Alan Thornett produces — whatever it may be. And if there are any critical-minded
London, December 2 1984

Dear Mr Thornett,

My attention has been drawn to the witch-hunting contents of the documents of your organisation which are reproduced in Socialist Viewpoint no.1, and I hereby protest in the strongest possible terms about it.

I saw Socialist Viewpoint some time ago, but didn’t pay any attention to the version of your document printed there, thinking it more or less the same as a duplicated version of your case against the WSL majority which someone had already shown me. I now find that the rewritten version of your document in Socialist Viewpoint improves on the version I had read by naming ‘Sean Matgamna’ as one of your chief opponents in the WSL.

Thus you seem to identify the editor of the Labour Party paper Socialism Organiser as a leading member of the revolutionary democratic-centralist WSL! Is this meant as some sort of joke, Mr Thornett? If it is, only those who are now again stoking up the witch-hunting fires in the Labour Party will find it funny.

Of course I am not a member of the WSL, nor is SO a WSL publication.

Socialist Viewpoint’s appearance was timed to catch the Labour Party conference, where it was sold to people like long-time witch-hunter John Golding MP, as well as to ordinary delegates. Neither you yourself nor the former SO supporters who published your document in SV are quite so dim as not to know that you were thereby setting up SO for the witch-hunters. The presumption must be that this is what you intended to do. You know how witch-hunters work, Mr Thornett, and what they feed on.

Healyite tricks

In your political youth, you were taught to describe what you have just done in SV as ‘fingered’, and those who did things like that as ‘finger-men for the right wing’. Fingered is certainly the right word for it. But then, of course, in the same Healyite school you also learned to play dirty tricks, didn’t you? On your own admission you learned to do things like spreading rumours in BL’s Cowley Assembly plant that IMG ‘colonists’ there in the early ‘70s were ‘police agents’. (According to your own account, you did this on Gerry Healy’s instructions and later apologised to the IMG for it). That part of your early training you unfortunately haven’t forgotten, Mr Thornett.

One of the most interesting questions is why you, a man who prides himself on having broken with Healyite organisational tricks and manoeuvres like that; an opponent of the right wing of the Labour Party who criticises Socialist Organiser for allegedly being a Labour Party ‘camp follower’, and a man who has had some bitter experience of witch-hunting and witch-hunters — the question is why you now choose to deliberately fabricate and publish ammunition for the right wing to use against the revolutionary left in the Labour Party.

Let us consider the possible explanations.

You didn’t know what you were doing? I don’t believe it. To plead that you’d have to brand yourself a hopeless idiot — and, as I said above, you’re not that dumb.

Of course it is true that nowadays I commonly use the English version of my name, O’Mahony, but after the publicity around the WRP’s libel case against Socialist Organiser, etc., anybody who is the least bit interested would identify ‘Sean Matgamna’ with John O’Mahony, and therefore with SO. You would certainly know that. You knew exactly what you were doing, and meant to do it.

Of course it is possible that there really is a member of the WSL who bears the name — or party name — ‘Sean Matgamna’. But I find that explanation unlikely too. The names of those who organised the WSL majority to throw you out are given in the WSL magazine dealing with their separation from you (WSR4) as Kinnell and Carolan. There is no mention there of anyone calling himself ‘Sean Matgamna’.

No, the circumstances and common sense alike suggest that the
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Contributors on Socialist Viewpoint, they had better not raise any questions or discussions.

All this may also answer the question: why do the contributors to Socialist Viewpoint choose — in the middle of the greatest class battle for 60 years — to produce a little aspirant quarterly instead of supporting the work of Socialist Organiser? Their 'independence' gives them the freedom to make idiotic denunciations of SO and to write nonsense, without fear of the contradictions and arguments they would have to put up with in the pages of SO.

Socialist Viewpoint also helped to give ammunition to witch-hunters against SO. SV no.1 published two documents by former members of the Workers’ Socialist League and then allowed the Guardian Diary to allege that these documents really concerned the affairs of Socialist Organiser — i.e. that SO is somehow identified with the WSL.

One of the documents was Alan Thornett’s tendentious account of his expulsion from the WSL. In it he names SO editor John O’Mahony (Sean Maganna) as a leading member of the WSL. (See the letter from Sean Maganna to Alan Thornett in this issue of Forum).

Diverge

Socialist Viewpoint’s blind malice towards SO and willingness to tell preposterous lies is evident from their editorial. It is the same blind malice which leads them to have Alan Thornett as a contributor and to help him do his WRP-style fingering and frame-up job on SO.

So what is Socialist Viewpoint? The grouping around it is an alliance, probably unstable, of individuals whose politics diverge a great deal. Most of the individuals have as many — and in some cases a lot more — disagreements with others in SV than with us. The majority, if it could be persuaded to discuss its politics rationally, is not very different on most questions from SO. For example, their call for a general strike and for a recall TUC matches ours; but the problem is that they weave in their own sectarian quirks — and extravagant denunciations of SO.

There are important differences between the majority of the Socialist Viewpoint grouping and SO; they could be the subject of discussion in the pages of SO (as they were up to their breakaways) or Forum. But discussion is the last thing Socialist Viewpoint seems to want. In truth most of the material in SV is very bland and could not in any publication within a very wide spectrum on the far left. The only visible basis for the separate existence of SV is the material in no.1 attacking SO, described above.

No.2 continued an editorial introduction which breaks new ground in dishonest denigration. It could be an application for membership in the Socialist Society (the organisational continuation of the ‘Beyond the Fragments’ current).

We see the fight for Trotskyist politics taking shape not through introspective sectarian debates of would-be gurus, nor as simply trailing behind this or that ‘Left-talking trade union or Labour Party dignitary’...’ And SV? Is it not a ‘small group’? It is ‘sold and produced by comrades who in many cases have their own political history, often long-standing roots in a range of unions’...’ i.e. they are a rag, tag and bobtail.

‘With all too little clarity on offer from the various dogmatic left groupings in Britain, we believe it possible and necessary to combine debate with policy and programme’... In other words they are a rag, tag and bobtail who have agreement on very little except hostility to SO and agreement to accept Alan Thornett as their expert in ‘deep’ analysis.

Indeed, SV is a veritable Noah’s Ark. A few of them were the extreme right wing of SO, and would be on the right wing in Labour Briefing, for example. Others are sectarians whose ideas of revolutionary politics is the sort of baseless denunciations of opponents like SO, and of the whole Labour Left’ cited above. Some of them are in formal politics closer to SO than to Thornett.

They will coexist — for as long as they can — by fudging the issues that divide them in a political technique.

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against inflation by automatic inflation-proofing of expenditure. For occupations and supporting strikes action to defend jobs and services.
* End unemployment. Cut hours, not jobs. Fight for a 33-hour week and an end to overtime. Deny work during winter of pay. Organise the unemployed - campaign for a programme of useful public works to create new jobs for the unemployed.
* Defend all jobs! Open the books of those firms that threaten closure or redundancies, along with those of their suppliers and bankers, to elected trade union committees. For occupation and blocking action to halt the closures. For nationalisation without compensation under workers’ management.
* Make the bosses pay, not the working class. Millions for hospitals; not a penny for ‘defence’! Nationalise the banks and financial institutions, without compensation. End the interest burden on council housing and other public services.
* Freeze rent and rates.
* Scrap all immigration controls. Race is not a problem: racism is. The labour movement must mobilise to drive the fascists off the streets. Purge racists from positions in the labour movement. Organise full support for black self-defence. Build workers’ defence squads.

* The capitalist police are an enemy for the working class. Support all demands to unionise them as a bosses’ striking force; dissolution of special squads (CFU, Special Branch, MI5, etc.) in public accountability, etc.
* Free abortion on demand. Women’s equal right to work and full equality for women. Defend and extend free state maternity and childcare provision.
* Against attacks on gay by the state; abolish all laws which discriminate against lesbians and gay men, for the right of the gay community to organise and affirm their stand publicly.
* The Irish people – as a whole – should have the right to determine their own future. Get the British troops out now! Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Political status for Irish Republicans as a matter of urgency.
* The black working people of South Africa should get full support from the British labour movement for their strikes, struggles and armed combat against the white supremacist regime. South African goods and services should be blacked.
* It is essential to achieve the fullest democracy in the labour movement. Defend re-election of MPs. Annual election of all trade union officials, who should be paid an average for the trade.

* The chaos, war, human suffering and misery of capitalism now – in Britain and throughout the world – show the urgent need to establish rational, democratic, human control over the economy, to make the decisive sectors of industry and social property, under workers’ control. The strength of the labour movement lies in the rank and file. Our perspective must be the working class action to raise the capitalist system down to its foundations and to put a working class socialist alternative in its place – rather than having our representatives run the system and waiting for crumbs from the tables of bankers and bosses.

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Socialist Organiser – 25p weekly.
Subscriptions £8.50 for six months, £16 for a year, from SO, 214 Sickert Court, London N7 2SY.