

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*.