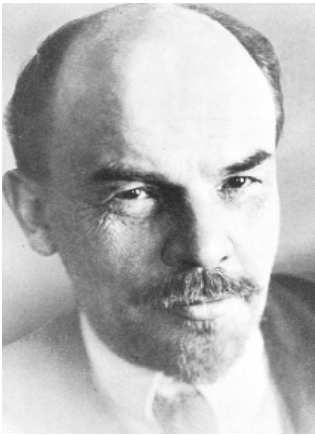


*Kabul 1978 and Petrograd 1917:
was the Russian Revolution a ‘coup’?*

In defence
of the
October
Revolution



By Sean Matgamna

The politics of the “Weekly Worker”

£2

In defence of the October Revolution

Contents

Introduction: Afghanistan and the left

Under the sign of the oxymoron: the contradictions of the *Weekly Worker* group/CPGB

Communism or Stalinism?

The “Great Saur Revolution”?

A coup d’état?

Emine Engin and the revolution that never was

The Tankies’ Tankies

Stalinist mind at the end of its tether

Appendices:

The Russian occupation of Afghanistan, March 1981

Workers’ Liberty magazine

Volume 2, issue 2

“The tragedy of Afghanistan” includes:

- ▮ **Afghanistan and the shape of the 20th century** by Sean Matgamna
- ▮ **The Pakistani socialists’ stand against war and fundamentalism** by Farooq Tariq
- ▮ **The rise of political Islam** by Clive Bradley
- ▮ **Islamism and the left in the Iranian revolution** by Mehdi Kia

Available for £3.50 (concessions £2) + 70p p&p (cheques to ‘AWL’) from:

Workers’ Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

More details: 020 7207 4774, office@workersliberty.org, www.workersliberty.org

Introduction: Afghanistan and the left

The Afghan Stalinist coup d'état of April (Saur) 1978 had enormous consequences. The "Great Saur Revolution" led directly to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan at Christmas, 1979. That in turn led to the Second Cold War. The USSR got drawn into what was soon accurately being described as "Russia's Vietnam War".

In the nine years of that war, perhaps one and a half million Afghans — about one in 12 of Afghanistan's population — died. Six million — one in three — Afghans were driven over the borders as refugees.

The prolonged war in Afghanistan helped shatter the élan and self-confidence of the Russian Stalinist ruling class and thus contributed to the crisis that led in 1991, two years after the Russians finally withdrew from Afghanistan, to the collapse of Stalinism in Russia.

The Russian invasion and the new plunge into deep cold war divided the left and threw most of it backwards. Since the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, to snuff out the "Socialism With a Human Face" regime of Alexander Dubcek, many had grown very critical of the "socialist" USSR and taken to seeing it as one of the two great pillars of world reaction. Many of these were now thrown back to "support" for the state which had (as one segment of the USFI, that centred on the SWP USA, moronically put it) "gone to the aid of a revolution".

Independent working class politics was thus subverted in large parts of the left. Many working class militants who wanted to "tear the head off capitalism" were disoriented enough, and politically backward enough, to support the Russians in Afghanistan.

The Communist Party condemned the Russian invasion, but most of the "Trotskyists" — Militant/Socialist Party, the Mandelites organisation — backed the Russians.

So did a large part of the then large and militant Labour Party left. Three Labour MPs went to Afghanistan and came back to tell the British labour movement how wonderful for socialism it was that Afghanistan was now part of the socialist world.

To give an example from my own experience at the time, one of the rowdiest labour movement meetings I've ever attended was a debate I had in Edinburgh soon after the Russian invasion with a pro-USSR Labour MP just back from Afghanistan: should socialists be for or against the Russians in Afghanistan?

It was a Saturday afternoon at the end of some miners' gala or conference, and a big proportion of the large meeting were miners, many of them bevied-up. The meeting was overwhelmingly pro-Russian and very hostile to those of us who denounced Russian imperialism and its invasion of Afghanistan. "The yanks are against the Russians, so is Margaret Thatcher, so is the CIA — and so is *Socialist Organiser*!..." was the theme of a number of speakers.

Some of them were, but most of them were not, diehard old Communist Party "Tankies". Most of them would have been Labour Party people.

My opponent in the Edinburgh debate was the Labour MP for Leith, the former engineering worker, Ron Brown — an honest man but a political idiot who thought that Leonid Brezhnev and Colonel Gaddafi — and probably Saddam Hussein — were socialists. Just back from Afghanistan, he was keen to tell British workers that the Russians were doing great progressive work there, and, moreover, that they were very popular... To the loud approval of much of the meeting Brown praised the Russian leaders for sending tanks to Kabul. I attracted fierce abuse and much interruption when I argued that we should condemn the invasion and call on the Russians to get out of Afghanistan.

I'd taken part in open-air mass meetings of dock workers in Manchester. Noisy, sometimes conflict-ridden affairs in which a genteel middle class outsider would have seen imminent violence where there was none. But at a number of points in that debate, I did think the meeting was about to break up in violent disorder. I was

struck by the fact that at no point did Ron Brown appeal for order. Even he was intimidated, or so I thought at the time, by the fierce feeling whose tribune he was.

This large Scottish labour movement meeting was not all that unrepresentative of opinion on the left then. The supporters of the Russians in Afghanistan would certainly have won the vote had we had one.

And it wasn't only the left that was disoriented on Stalinism.

For example, at the time of the upsurge of Solidarnosc in Poland and the seizure of the Gdansk shipyards (August, 1980), the TUC had to decide whether or not to send a long-arranged delegation to Poland to visit the Stalinist police-state "unions" there — whose Gdansk representative Tadeusz Fiszbach had responded to the workers' seizure of the shipyards by threatening them with slaughter. He would, he threatened, unleash the tanks and the army against them, as had been done a decade earlier (December, 1970) when hundreds of shipyard workers had been massacred.

It became a big issue in the labour movement and in the bourgeois press whether the TUC should cancel the scheduled visit.

I recall a speech by Sir Bill Sirs, the stone-age right-wing leader of the notoriously undemocratic steelworkers' union, defending the TUC's projected visit to Poland. He talked warmly about his "Polish colleagues", the bureaucrats running the totalitarian pseudo unions in Poland!

A large part of the labour movement was infected with such ideas and attitudes, or accommodated to those who were. We of course denounced the visit and said it should be cancelled. But even the British Mandelites (the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) favoured and defended the visit. One wing of that "International" (that organised by the SWP-USA) called for "massive" western aid for Poland in response to a Solidarnosc call on workers throughout the world to boycott Polish goods!

Many people who called themselves socialists thought "defending nationalised property" more important than the right of the Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc to exist.

I remember the Edinburgh meeting as a distressing experience, and not only because it is unnerving to stand in front of two or three rugby teams' worth of pissed and half-pissed miners and continue telling them that they are suicidally wrong when some of them are acting as if they are about to rush you.

No, what distressed me then and distresses me now, remembering it, is who and what these angry supporters of Russian imperialism in Afghanistan were, who looked on what I was saying as treacherous and a comfort to the class enemy in Britain, and the tragic gap between what in reality they were supporting and what they thought they were supporting when they cheered on the Stalinist dictator Brezhnev.

These were some of the best people in our movement then. But they were hopelessly disoriented. Politically they had no future.

Looking through the files of one of the worst of the small Tankie Stalinist groups of the 1980s, *The Leninist*, now the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB, I was reminded of the tragic political confusion, on Afghanistan, Poland and many other questions, which poisoned and helped destroy the subjectively revolutionary left of that time. The debate between the *Weekly Worker* group, and *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* on Afghanistan provides us with a chance to re-examine the politics of that time and the broader question of the nature of Stalinism and the proper independent socialist attitude to it.

Sean Matgamna

Under the sign of the oxymoron

The contradictions of the Weekly Worker group/CPGB

The *Weekly Worker* group/Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) originated as a small, still ultra-Stalinist, offshoot from the New Communist Party (NCP), which was a stone-age Stalinist breakaway from the real CPGB in 1977.

They were called “Tankies” because, as their critics justly said of them, they believed in a “Russian Tanks Road to Socialism”. The Tankies first emerged as a distinct segment of the Communist Party in August 1968, when they loudly supported the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia to put down Alexander Dubcek’s attempt to create “socialism with a human face” there. The CP, opposing the Russians for the first time in its 48-year history, had condemned the invasion.

The founding leaders of the NCP were third rank bureaucrats of the old Party. What they created was a grotesque miniaturised theme-park of the previous 50 years of Stalinism. They would, for example, organise a small demonstration outside the Czech embassy to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Russian invasion!

Their paper, the *New Worker*, glorified the USSR, and backed up whatever the Russians were doing or saying. They engaged in silly, malevolent and dishonest polemics against the “Trotskyites”, something which the official party did very rarely by that time and never in its big-circulation press. When USSR dissidents such as Anatoly Sharansky — now the Israeli politician, Nathan Sharansky — and Vladimir Bukovsky were “tried” and found guilty amidst an outcry in the bourgeois press, the *New Worker* carried a triumphant headline: “Guilty!”. When in 1980 the Polish workers seized the factories in one of the greatest working-class movements in history, confronting the Stalinist police state and facing the threat of a Russian invasion like that in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Hungary twelve years earlier, the *New Worker* carried big headlines: “No concessions! No compromise!” No concessions to and no compromise with... the Polish working class! A decade earlier that approach had meant that hundreds of striking workers were shot down at the Gdansk shipyards (December, 1970).

When the Russians invaded Afghanistan during Christmas 1979, the next *New Worker* carried a big headline across the front page: “Afghanistan tastes a new freedom”.

Their brains switched off, entirely devoid of socialist or democratic instinct, the irredeemably stupid backwoodsmen of the old party gleefully enacting a witless parody of what Stalinism was in, say, the late 1940s — that is the nearest I can come to summing them up. Jack Conrad was National Organiser of the NCP for a period.

He — and three or four other people, I guess — broke with the NCP and formed a new group, *The Leninist*, under the influence of a faction of the Turkish Communist party (the Workers’ Voice) which tried to develop a revolutionary strain of Stalinism, and made some limited criticisms of the Stalinist parties, including those in power.

It was an eclectic mixture. It had a subjectively revolutionary drive; but, in basic political culture, it remained entirely Stalinist — a dialect of the general NCP tankie culture I have described. Indeed on issues like Solidarnosc and Afghanistan it added a hysterical vehemence all its own.

The Leninist were Stalinists not because of a special devotion to the memory of Stalin himself — neither they nor the Turks, though they would occasionally write pointedly of “Comrade” Stalin, were Stalinist in that sense — but because they sided squarely with the bureaucratic ruling classes against the workers. They did that because of their conception of socialism; of the relationship of the revolutionary party to the working class; of the relationship of society to the state under socialism; and the political tradition to which they adhered — all of them entirely Stalinist.

Incoherent eclectics and devout oxymoronists in all things, *The Leninist* simultaneously called for “democracy” in the Stalinist

states, continued to support the suppression of Solidarnosc, and opposed independent trade unions in the Stalinist states. Admitting that there were defects in those states, they looked for solutions to their “comrades” of the ruling parties and the police state unions there.

By democratisation they meant that their comrades of the ruling communist parties should reform, and lead the working class safely to democracy. When the chips were down, they invariably backed the ruling Stalinist party, the cartel of the ruling oligarchy. In their calls to the corrupt bureaucrats, they were a species of utopian socialists, appealing to sections of the ruling class — to “the communists” amongst them.

Their paper served up the typical Stalinist mix of agitation about the wrongs of workers and others in capitalist states, combined with an opposite attitude towards similar things in the Stalinist states. They could be indignant as Prime Minister Thatcher brought in the first of a series of anti-union Bills, and at the same time cheer on the police state ban on the Polish trade union, Solidarnosc.

They were substitutionists. The CPs everywhere were the working class in politics. Deficient they might be, in many or most cases, but they were the elect, the preordained communist leadership.

“The party” could substitute for the working class, in Afghanistan, in Poland, in the USSR — everywhere. Against those parties any “spontaneist” or “economistic” working class movement was counter-revolutionary.

Wherever the working class, or a whole nation, came into conflict with a ruling Stalinist party, the party had a right to suppress them, and should be supported in doing it by “internationalists” such as themselves. Thus the attitude to Czechoslovakia, and, in retrospect, to Hungary a dozen years before — and to Afghanistan.

They supported the Russian invasion of Afghanistan to shore up one faction of the Stalinist party that had taken power there twenty months earlier in a freakish military coup. They backed the suppression of the Polish trade union Solidarnosc (while criticising their “Polish comrades” for having lost the “leadership” of the working class). Right up until the collapse of the USSR, they opposed the formation of independent trade unions there — that was dangerous “spontaneism” and “economism”, a labour movement outside the control of those whom they never, right up until the collapse in 1991, ceased to call their “comrades” of the “Communist Party of the Soviet Union”.

While recognising that it was no long-term solution, they expressed relief in 1991 when it looked as if a Stalinist coup against the reforming Russian President Gorbachev had been successful. They called on their “comrades” of the ruling class cartel there, the misnamed Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to take action to secure the socialist future!

In other words, for most of its existence, politically this group did not quite dwell on mother earth.

In the mid and late 1990s — under new names, CPGB and *Weekly Worker* — they seemed to evolve away from such politics. A measure of how far they still have to travel from Stalinism is the plank in their current platform in which they still express their substitutionist-Stalinist conception of the revolutionary party and its relationship to the working class. “Without such a [Communist] party the working class is nothing; with it everything”. Through most of the two-decades life of the group, ideas like this were not harmless gobbledegook, but a political philosophy that lined them up against the working class in the Stalinist states. It made them avid supporters of the war of colonial conquest in Afghanistan in which the Russians did what the USA did in Vietnam, the French in Algeria and the Nazis in Poland and the Ukraine. One and a half million of Afghanistan’s 18 million people were killed, and six million of them driven over the border as refugees.

Early in 1999 there was a controversy in *Weekly Worker* around

the true description of Russian workers under Russian Stalinism as “slaves of the state” by a prominent member of the group, Anne McShane. One was left with the impression that this view, or something very close to it, was now shared, very belatedly to be sure, by the whole leadership of the group — that it had finally, if still only partially, emerged out of the Stalinist stone age.

I would have guessed that they would be as ashamed of some of their past politics as I am for having let myself, aged 17, be persuaded by the Pablo-Mandel “Fourth International” that the Chinese assumption of active control in Tibet in 1959 should be supported as an “extension of the Revolution”. I would have been wrong.

Late in 2001, *Weekly Worker* 403 republished an excerpt from a book on Afghanistan written in 1982 by the Turkish Stalinist Emine Engin. She praised and defended the Stalinist coup of 1978. Engin was endorsed in a long introduction by Mark Fischer.

It is impossible to square the democratic politics the group now says it stands for with what they say about Afghanistan’s 1978 “revolution” and Russia’s nine-year war there. In my article “Critical Notes on the CPGB” I put it like this:

“You are still shaped and still marked by your Stalinist past, and you have not yet fully shed your old Stalinist baggage. You still operate in recognisable Stalinist patterns... Afghanistan shows it.

“On the one hand, you go on about ‘democracy’. You are born-again ex-Stalinist democrats... In practice your operational politics are confined to ‘democratic questions’, and your ‘communism’ is, for operational purposes, reduced to a thing of shibboleths, symbols, fetishes, nostalgias, mummeries and self-designation. It is the theory of your self-identity rather than what you are in practice...

“But on the other hand, though vociferous born-again ex-Stalinist democrats, you seem still to support the Afghan Stalinist coup of 1978, and, astonishingly, still describe it as a real revolution! These things just don’t go together.”

The political crisis of the *Weekly Worker* group takes the form of an accumulation of contradictory positions. Evidence of this is rampant throughout Jack Conrad’s “short series”. They have moved to pick up new positions, shifting sometimes 180 degrees from what they used to think — but they drop nothing!

For example, they used to be conventional green nationalists on Ireland. Then they took from AWL the idea that the Northern Irish Protestants are a national minority on the island and are entitled to the rights of a national minority. The conflict in Northern Ireland is not primarily a matter of legitimate Irish nationalism against British imperialism, but an intra-Irish conflict. Most of what the IRA has done has been done against other Irish people.

If that is true, then it shapes everything else. The *WW* accepts it is true, but see no reason to modify their old view, in which the IRA was fighting a simple anti-imperialist war of liberation. They are both for a democratic resolution of the intra-Irish conflict and supporters of the Catholic-sectarian IRA!

They have also learned from us to understand that the Jews in Israel have a right to national self-determination, where before they vehemently denied it. They now support a Two States solution to the Palestinian-Jewish conflict. In part 3 of his Great Work (WW460) Jack Conrad writes: “To call for Israel’s abolition is unMarxist. Such a programme is either utopian or genocidal”.

But, having picked up the new position, Conrad can’t see that logically he has to lay down its opposite. He wants to combine Two States with their old slogan of the Palestinian “right of return” — collective repossession — which for more than 50 years has, to Jews and Arabs alike, implied the opposite of Two States: the dissolution, in one way or another, of the Jewish state.

“Two States” and “right of return” are starkly at odds with each other. The Jewish state and the right to collective resettlement of millions of Palestinians in Israel — right of return — are incompatible. Recognition of the Jewish state established in the 1948 war, and trying to reverse the outcome of that war, are mutually exclusive.

How does Jack Conrad deal with the contradiction? He defines it out of existence. The Palestinians as a “collective” would only “return” if they were forced at gun-point to do so. There is no problem. Both Arabs and Jews have gone on about it for half a century

because they can’t see what he sees: the problem does not exist! Hysterical denial is not a Leninist way of dealing with political issues.

On Afghanistan, while seeming to accept or half-accept that the USSR was a slave state for its workers, Jack Conrad sees no reason to look afresh at his long-time politics of supporting the expansion of that slave state, or the attempt of their Afghan understudies to impose such a system on the peoples of Afghanistan. The *WW* tendency remains as eclectic and incoherent as its earlier self and its Turkish mentors.

Jack Conrad thinks it is possible to re-elaborate a revolutionary politics for the 21st century on the basis of shreds and rags of the Stalinist tradition embodied in the old CPGB, garnished with bits and pieces from other traditions. He sings karaoke Leninism. He proclaims himself an “extreme democrat”, yet retains the substitutionist conception of the revolutionary party he had when he was an unreflecting and unashamed Tankie Stalinist.

But now he has no tanks. The body of the Cheshire cat of Stalinism has faded, leaving Jack Conrad with only... not the smile, but the snarl, the shriek, the style of exhortation. One example to conclude: Jack Conrad anathematising the “Trotskyite” idea of transitional programme:

“So say it. Say ‘minimum programme’ (say it out loud till the fear vanishes). Leave behind atavistic prejudice and take up the militant struggle for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales.”

Communism or Stalinism?

What follows will discuss in detail the attitude socialist internationalists should have taken to the April 1978 Stalinist-military coup in Afghanistan, the Russian invasion, and Russia's nine-year war of conquest. It will do so in the belief that distinguishing authentic working-class socialism from Stalinism, and authentic working-class revolutions like Russia's in October 1917 from Stalinist coups and revolutions, is essential for any renewal of socialist politics.

It will be helpful first to outline the general ideas that formed the basis of the peculiar variant of Stalinism propounded by the group which today calls itself the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and publishes the *Weekly Worker*.

The group was originally called *The Leninist*. All its distinctive ideas on Stalinism were picked up from a faction of the Communist Party of Turkey, Workers' Voice, which separated from the Moscow-recognised party at the beginning of the 1980s. Its views were put out in English-language pamphlets and an English-language monthly, "Turkey Today".

Workers' Voice was a subjectively revolutionary strain of Stalinism. It was very eclectic in its politics, picking up criticism of the Stalinist states from the then important right-travelling "Eurocommunists" and even from Trotskyism — in fact, from the liberal-Stalinist mutation of Trotskyism promulgated by the late Isaac Deutscher, the well-known one-time-Trotskyist biographer of Trotsky.

What, despite their eclecticism, made Workers' Voice Stalinists — and hardline "tankie" Stalinists at that — was their attitude to the ruling bureaucracies in the Stalinist states and to the working classes there.

They sided with the bureaucratic ruling classes against the workers. They did that retrospectively in relation to the East German workers' rising of June 1953, the Russian invasion of Hungary in November 1956, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. They did it in relation to contemporary questions: they backed the suppression, in December 1981, of the anti-Stalinist trade union movement in Poland.

They supported the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

They proclaimed that the Communist Parties of the world were the working class, in politics. Where Communist Parties ruled, the working class, not only the local working class but the international working class too, ruled. Such parties had the right and the duty to suppress "spontaneist", "economistic" working-class movements.

One thing that distinguished them from other Stalinists was their blunt and unashamed admission that what they were supporting was the suppression of the working class and the majority of the people. Not for them the pretence that the trouble in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia or Poland was the work of a handful of CIA agents. The "spontaneous" mobilisation of the working class, the "democratic counter-revolution", was what had to be suppressed.

As a riposte to USSR president Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s, they began to talk about a "political revolution" in the Stalinist states. They outlined desirable political reforms. But they looked to "the communists" — the ruling parties, that is, the organisations of the ruling class in those states — to carry out that revolution. Meanwhile they supported those "communists" in their suppression of "spontaneist" working-class movements.

They blamed and criticised the rulers in, for example, Poland, for the emergence of a "non-communist" labour movement, Solidarnosc. But their solution was for the rulers to reform, and for some of them to lead a "political revolution".

Underlying these ideas was a peculiar conception of the transition to socialism and to its higher stage, communism, the classless,

stateless society.

After a socialist revolution, they explained, the working class would "not yet" be able to exercise power "directly". Only in the distant future, after a long period in which a party ruled for the working class, and transformed society, would the workers be able to rule.

"Socialism is a transitional society where the ruling class — the working class — starts out not yet able to rule directly, and in many senses retains the features of an oppressed class..."

(Supplement to *The Leninist*, August 1991).

That was an organic and ineradicable limitation, rooted in the nature of class society and of the working class under capitalism. For an indefinite period, the working class could only rule through its party — recognised as "its", presumably, on the basis of faith that it will be endorsed retrospectively by the future generation of workers which can effectively rule.

The regime could be more or less liberal, but it would have to be ruled by a "Communist Party". Properly it should be backed by the working class, but it could, if necessary, suppress the working class, and should do so, if that were the only alternative to a worker-based "democratic counter-revolution".

This theoretical analysis underpinned their attitude to working-class spontaneity and their ultra-"substitutionist" conception of the relationship of the Communist Parties to the "raw" working class. For practical purposes, the Communist Parties were the working class in politics. They were that even if, like the PDPA, they were sociologically not working-class at all.

All this was the result of a non-Marxist — indeed, quintessentially Stalinist — generalisation from the experience of the Stalinists in power in the USSR and later in other states. They did not assess the ruling bureaucracies for what they were, parasitic ruling classes. Instead, they retained the idea that the ruling machines were "Communist Parties", and adapted their concept of socialism to fit.

They did not understand or in any case did not think through the implications of the fact that the fundamental cause of Stalinist rule in the USSR was that Russia had not been materially ripe for the creation of socialism there, and that the defeats of the socialist revolution in the advanced countries of Western Europe, which were ripe, had left the ruling but isolated Russian working class to be overthrown by the Stalinist counter-revolution, which stamped its characteristic features on the USSR from the mid 1920s.

Not properly understanding the specific peculiarities of the USSR, and accepting Stalinism there as typical, "natural" socialism, they generalised for the whole world from the limited experience of Stalinism in backward countries. They concluded that bureaucratic "Communist Party" rule would, even in the advanced countries, be a normal feature of socialism. They thus wrote a degree of Stalinism into their programme as an inevitable and unavoidable feature of working-class rule all over the world.

As well as reading Stalinism forward onto future socialist revolutions, they also, as we shall see, read it back onto the October 1917 revolution. Arguing that one could deny the authentic proletarian-revolutionary character of the April 1978 Afghan coup only if one also dismissed October 1917 as a coup — that Afghanistan 1978 was as much of a revolution as Russia 1917 — they therefore also, simultaneously, argued that Russia 1917 was as much of a coup as Afghanistan 1978. John-Jack, in his recent polemic on "*Solidarity and Workers' Liberty*" goes further on this question than his mentors (as far as I know) ever did, saying flatly that "the form" of the October revolution was "a coup".

They were subjectively revolutionary, in the sense of being militant against capitalism. But their perspective, and their invariable alignment with the bureaucratic ruling classes of the Stalinist states against the working classes there, defined them as Stalinists. At

best, as when they talked of a “political revolution” in the late 1980s, as liberal Stalinists.

Their world outlook was constructed around a wilful fiction that the working class ruled wherever a Communist Party ruled. Not for them the notion that the Stalinist states had some proletarian character on account of their economic structure, and despite the nature of their political rulers. Their attempt at a detailed description of the USSR’s economy portrayed a system that would, in their account of it, have to be defined as a species of “state capitalism” if it were not for the “working-class” rule over it. Except that this “working-class

rule” was a thin fiction.

They were eclectic and inconsistent Stalinists, would-be revolutionaries in Turkey, but Stalinists nonetheless. They never succeeded in being anything else for as long as Stalinism survived in the USSR.

The Leninist took their ideas and used them in its journalistic work — and that, since it was never other than a tiny group, was its core work. As far as I can make out, nothing *The Leninist* said, other than baroque flourishes here and there, was “its own”. It was politically a clone of the Turkish group until some time in the 1990s.

The “Great Saur Revolution”?

First, I will summarise briefly the main facts about Afghanistan. For more detail, see the article “Afghanistan and the Shape of the 20th Century” (“Afghanistan...”), in *Workers’ Liberty* 2/2.

1. The “Great Saur Revolution” was a military coup made by a section of the officer corps of Afghanistan, under the control of the Stalinist party (the PDPA), working in co-ordination with agencies of the neighbouring Russian Stalinist state.

2. The PDPA’s decisive class base was a segment of the Afghan ruling elite and of the intelligentsia, which had adopted as its goal the modernisation of Afghanistan on the model of the USSR, with itself forming the nucleus of an Afghan bureaucratic ruling class of the USSR type. Its active forces in the “Great Saur Revolution” were two or three hundred military officers, in command of armies tanks and aeroplanes.

3. Because of the links between the Stalinist PDPA and the officers who made the coup, and handed power to the PDPA, it was a coup sui generis. Nonetheless it was a military coup in its modus operandi, and in its relationship to Afghan society and to the classes within it.

4. Coups are revolutions, with varying intentions to act on society, and varying consequences in terms of their effect on the society under the state the coup-makers have seized. Nonetheless, Marxists distinguish between military coups and popular revolutions. “Saur” was a military coup because the sole active force in this “revolution” was a segment of the officer corps of the Army and airforce, using the troops under their command.

5. The relationship of the coup-making officers to those they commanded was that of traditional military hierarchs, and not in any sense that of revolutionary leaders to the rank and file of a revolutionary army.

6. The fierce week-long fighting in Kabul was an urban civil war, but one entirely confined to competing sections of the state samurai.

7. It was not a popular revolution, because mass popular activity played no part at all in the seizure, the consolidation or the subsequent exercise of power. Demonstrations and suchlike called by the PDPA played no organic part, or any part at all, in the seizure and consolidation of power. The “masses” had no share at all in the subsequent exercise of power by the PDPA.

8. What happened corresponded to the theory of revolution propounded by PDPA leader Taraki (or by a segment of the Russian

state, speaking through Taraki):

“Comrade Taraki had appraised the Afghan society on a scientific basis and had intimated [to] the party since the 1973 [Daud] coup that it was possible in Afghanistan to wrest... political power through a shortcut, [inasmuch] as the classical way in which the productive forces undergo different stages to build a society based on scientific socialism would take a long time. This shortcut could be utilised by working extensively in the armed forces. Previously the army was considered as the tool of dictatorship and despotism of the ruling class and it was not imaginable to use it before toppling its employer. However, Comrade Taraki suggested this too should be wrested in order to topple the ruling class”.

(From an official biography of Taraki, published in August 1978).

9. Almost all military coups have some support, amongst segments of the ruling class and sometimes amongst the people. By definition, where the military takes the role of protagonist, it is passive support. Sometimes a coup can unleash broad mass action (as for example did the coup in Iraq in July 1958). What defines it as a coup is its limitation to a segment of the state, to the shifting of power on top. It is the seizure of the whole of the existing state by one or more of its own parts. Even where a coup unleashes mass action, power remains in the hands of an elite. It was so in Afghanistan.

10. Unique to Afghanistan, was the subordinate relationship of the military coup-makers to a “communist”, that is, Stalinist party, the PDPA. The coup-makers set up a military government, but within a few days they formally handed power over to the PDPA.

11. The nearest parallel to the relationship of the PDPA with the officers of the Afghan army and airforce is the relationship in Syria and Iraq in the 1960s between the Ba’th Socialist parties and coup-making officers there.

12. In handing over political power to the PDPA, the officers did again something like what some of them had already done once, less than five years earlier, in the “Daud Coup” of July 1973, after which they handed power to Mohammed Daud, a cousin of the ousted King and a former long-time Prime Minister. Now however there was an element of deliberately handing over power to the local agents of the USSR, the long time patron of the Afghan armed forces.

13. The armed forces remained the essential power base of the PDPA, which claimed only 8,000 members on the eve of seizing power, and probably had a lot fewer, maybe as few as 2,000 (organised, moreover, in two distinct and bitterly antagonistic parties, Parcham and Khalq). The two PDPAs had had two brief periods of

unity — 1965/7 and 1977/78 — but otherwise had been separated by bitter conflict.

14. The PDPA government was stamped and shaped by its origins in an elitist, upper class, state-based military coup. It never had other than a very limited support in the population, even in Kabul, where it was strongest. Its social basis, apart from the army and air-force officers, was a segment of the intelligentsia. Though the PDPA in power tried to build the auxiliary structures typical of Stalinist states — such as women's and youth movements — essentially it related to Afghan society not as the political leader of any substantial segment of society, but by way of state compulsion, military power, military force.

15. The all-determining factor before and after “Great Saur” was the relationship of the Afghanistan armed forces to the USSR. After 1955, the USSR became the main supplier of military hardware (the USA supplied Pakistan, with which Afghanistan was in conflict), and, most importantly, of training for most of the technicians needed to run the tanks and aircraft of a modern military machine. Over decades a symbiosis developed between segments of the aspirant modernising Afghan elite and the ruling elite in the USSR. The PDPAs, especially Khalq, reaped the harvest sown by the USSR's relationship with Afghanistan by recruiting key segments of the officer corps. Some officers had certainly been “lined up” by the Russian secret service.

16. Two factors converged in the making of Saur. The link with the USSR was one, the matrix so to speak. The other was the decades of experience of the enlightened Afghan intelligentsia, including the officers trained to use modern military technology, in a largely pre-feudal society, one which still had two million nomads in 1978. A significant element was won to support for the USSR model of what seemed to be a modern society.

17. Sardar Mohammed Daud, the King's first cousin and brother in law, had been the decisive reformer in 20th-century Afghanistan. What was won in the way of modernisation, of liberating women, etc., was chiefly the work of Daud, Prime Minister in 1953-63 and 1973-78. In the 1950s Daud took Afghanistan into the USSR's orbit.

18. Daud's republican coup in July 1973 was supported by both PDPAs. Parchamis helped organise it. Parcham joined the government. Khalq offered to join the government, but Daud and Parcham rejected the offer. The government, with Parcham participating, persecuted Khalq. In 1976/7 Parcham was eased out of office. The failure of Daud to modernise Afghanistan threw to the PDPA layers of the officers who had supported him in 1973 and after. Khalq, which was far less Daudist than Parcham, and which was in opposition while Parcham was in government, recruited most of them.

19. The international context was decisive in what happened in Afghanistan in 1978. In the 1950s the Afghan Stalinists had supported Daud. Whenever “Third World” rulers, like Nasser in Egypt, for example, developed friendly relations with the USSR or were at loggerheads with the USA, the Stalinist parties were docile and supportive. The Egyptian Communist Party obligingly dissolved itself in 1960. The Afghan Stalinists, who had been organised in discussion groups in the 1950s, did not form a party until January 1965. The declaration of a “Communist Party” in 1965 was a direct response to the less close relations with the USSR which the King, who dismissed Daud in 1963, seemed bent on. By the 1970s the CPs were not so docile. In the aftermath of the US defeat in Indochina, and the collapse of its power there, the USSR seemed commensurately strengthened. A number of regimes that were non-Stalinist in origin seemed on the road to doing what Cuba did in 1960-61 and becoming Stalinist states. In 1976 and after Daud made serious moves to loosen the ties with Russia, on a trajectory that would have taken what was in effect by now a USSR protectorate out of the USSR's orbit. That fact was probably decisive in prompting the Stalinists' April 1978 coup.

20. In preparation for the coup, the two warring Afghanistan Stalinist parties were united. It must have been very much a shotgun wedding, at the behest of the Russian KGB. Numbers, and especially the numbers of its officer members, made Khalq very much the dominant partner. Within weeks of taking power in the Saur coup, the two PDPAs within the “united” party were savagely fighting each other, in a mixture of Robespierre's Reign of Terror and Stalin's bloody purges of the 1930s. The simplest measure of it is this: by mid 1979, Khalq's purging of “unreliable elements” and Parchamis had reduced the air force to reliance on Russian pilots to do its work in the civil war that was raging in a number of separate parts of the country.

21. The coup pitted the new regime against most of Afghan society. They had uneven support in towns, mainly in Kabul, no support at all in the countryside. In fact, the Stalinist military coup vastly intensified the antagonism between town and country. They issued radical decrees about land reform, against usury, for equal education for men and women. But outside of Kabul and, less so, in a few other places, they simply had no power to implement their decrees. The supposed beneficiaries rejected their land reforms. The attempt to abolish usury by decree, without having in place any alternative for peasants who could not do without credit, led to a massive agricultural crisis and a catastrophic fall in agricultural production.

22. Armed revolt faced them from the beginning, at first in scattered pockets. The theory of Stalinist revolution that guided them assumed the existence of a state able to dominate society, but the Afghan state was weak in relation to society. It could not impose itself. Committed to trying to impose itself, the government went to war with most of Afghanistan. This too was a function of the nature of the military coup that was not able to become a revolution, and of Taraki's theorising on it. Napalm being dropped on villages within weeks of the April coup symbolised the real relation between government and people. Attempts by the aspirant bureaucratic Stalinist ruling class to rouse the people against the old ruling class failed comprehensively, in part defeated by Islamism, which linked the rural population and the old ruling class.

23. The idea that this was equivalent to the conflict in the 1790s between revolutionary, emergent bourgeois France and the backward Vendée region, Catholic and reactionary, is suggestive, but in the end, it is of only limited validity. The idea of the Vendée presupposes an anti-Vendée, an advanced area sufficiently large as a base area from which to transform the whole country despite pockets of resistance, even serious and protracted resistance as in the Vendée. No such base area existed in Afghanistan, with the possible exception of Kabul. And Kabul, like all the cities in varying degrees, was an island in the pre-feudal sea of a country that was many hundreds of years behind them in terms of social development and social relations.

A coup d'état?

I will trace the politics on Afghanistan of the political tendency led by the Workers' Voice segment of the Turkish Communist Party, whose British affiliate was what is now the *Weekly Worker* group/Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). I examine the major work on Afghanistan produced by this tendency, Emine Engin's book, "The Revolution in Afghanistan" (1982); trace Jack Conrad/John Bridge's, leader of the *Weekly Worker* group, through the 1980s and early 1990s, fantasising, gloating, exhorting, lamenting, and finally mourning over Afghanistan's "Great Saur Revolution" and its aftermath; trace "Ian Mahoney", who is Mark Fischer, rendering John-Jack's cribbings from Emine Engin's book "The Revolution in Afghanistan" even more profound; dissect a recent polemic against *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* by John Bridge.

Through the 1980s and early '90s, the great touchstone of "Leninist" virtue for WW/CPGB, the idea that for them separated "Leninists" from all the rest, was belief that the PDPA-military coup in Kabul in April 1978 was not a coup but a real revolution.

That claim was integrated into a world-view in which the "revolution" in Afghanistan figured as a model proletarian revolution, the PDPA regime as a "dictatorship of the proletariat", Hafizullah Amin and the Khalq faction of the PDPA as model modern Bolsheviks, and Afghanistan, over the whole period, as the frontline of the worldwide class struggle.

Measured against the Afghan events with which they ostensibly dealt, *The Leninist's* commentaries were the lunatic ravings of people living in a world of make-believe and "revolutionary" posturing. These were people content to designate murdering militarists and their PDPA political masters as the working class in power, pixillated enough to take their own scholastic constructions for reality, and deluded enough to gloat, like the blood-crazed women whom Charles Dickens depicted gleefully at their knitting beside the guillotine as it did its work, over the deeds of the Stalinist terror-police.

But if their picture of Afghanistan as a beacon of proletarian revolution was deliriously false to reality, it was at least internally coherent. All the pieces fitted together. Whenever events in Afghanistan tore holes in it, then, time and again, their delusional picture was energetically repaired, as delusional systems tend to be by those locked into them. That gave coherence.

But in his latest commentary on Afghanistan in the last quarter-century, John-Jack has lost all coherence.

Over 20 years he has again and again rehashed the same material from Emine Engin's book "The Revolution in Afghanistan" — ideas, quotes, rationalisations, shibboleths, snippets of fact, etc. He does that once again. He offers the same quotes from Lenin and the same stories of demonstrations in support of the PDPA. He brandishes the same shibboleth — the KPT-WV/*Leninist* dogma that Saur was not a coup but a revolution. He denounces all those who disagree with him on that just as he did over the previous 20 years.

Except that he is a changed man. Most of the old daffy arguments are there. But the conclusion is different. The core of the old delusional system is gone. He no longer asserts that the PDPA-military coup and then the Russian-puppet government in Kabul represented socialism, the working class in power, the dictatorship of the proletariat. He no longer claims that Khalq and Hafizullah Amin were the model Bolsheviks of our era.

He still defends the PDPA regime, but now claims only that it was trying to modernise. It "stood for and defended certain key social gains and progressive principles". The old arguments are used, but now to support a very tame conclusion indeed.

His old conclusion that "Afghanistan and the April 1978 revolution is on a par with Russia and October 1917", John-Jack now airily dismisses as "an absurd notion... as easy to knock down as it is to mock".

Absurd? Indeed. But it is what he himself hotly argued for many

years. For example:

"There was a genuine working class vanguard party, the PDPA. This separates the Afghan Revolution from revolutions like those in Egypt and Ethiopia. ... It must be put into the same category as the October Revolution (which was itself dismissed as a coup by a whole gabble of petty-bourgeois dilettantes)".

(*The Leninist*, March 1988).

John-Jack being what he is, there is not a word to tell the unknowing reader of the radical change in the picture of Afghanistan which he paints, and the wholesale shift in values that he has gone through. Jack Conrad was never wrong on the question, not even a little!

Jack Conrad's group was Stalinist, even ultra-Stalinist, throughout its history, right up to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Though it had an eclectic magpie mix of politics, including bits and pieces of Trotskyism, it was Stalinist because it invariably sided with the Stalinist bureaucracies against the working class in any clash — East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, or Poland 1980–1.

It continued to look to the ruling Communist Parties and sections of them to save "communism" right up to 1991. It consistently opposed the formation of independent trade unions.

Today the *Weekly Worker* group are ostensibly ex-Stalinists, indeed, ultra-democrats.

But, since they merely deny their past rather than admitting it and learning lessons from it, they have not really broken with Stalinism. They have merely made it something subcutaneous or subconscious in themselves.

Nothing politically healthy can be built this way.

Emine Engin and the revolution that never was

Introduction

In political and ideological terms, what is now the *Weekly Worker* group was always a satellite, a child-group, of the Workers' Voice (WV) faction of the Turkish Communist Party (KPT). All its ideas came from Workers' Voice.

In 1982 the KPT published a small book by Emine Engin on the Stalinist "revolution" in Afghanistan. Jack Conrad/John Bridge, who usually is a karaoke-Leninist — not a translator of Lenin into our conditions, but a frequently unintelligent transcriber of Lenin — is on Afghanistan a transcriber of the work of the Turkish Stalinist, Emine Engin. In the language of the music industry, John-Jack's work on Afghanistan is a "cover" version of Emine Engin — Karaoke Jack Sings Engin, so to speak!

Engin's is not an "objective" scientific work, still less Marxist work. It is a Party-lawyer's polemic written to sustain the position on Afghanistan taken up by the WV organisation.

WV championed the Khalq segment of the PDP. They saw a parallel between their own "Leninist", revolutionary section of the KPT and Khalq on one side, and on the other an identity between the "reformist" "Menshevik" Parchamis and their own opponents in the KPD.

They argued that, though the Russian invaders had secured "the Afghan revolution", they had simultaneously acted in a reactionary way in killing Khalq leader Hafizullah Amin "and 97 Khalq leaders", and in breaking up the Khalq as soon as they got control of Kabul.

This sort of self-contradictory, oxymoronic, pseudo-dialectical sophistic politics is one of the characteristics which *The Leninist* and the *Weekly Worker* group learned from Workers' Voice.

It makes sense first to discuss Engin's work, which is also the more comprehensive, and, after its fashion, more serious, and then to come back to discuss her understudy, J-J.

What is most notably absent in Engin (as in J-J) is a materialist-Marxist class analysis of the April 1978 Stalinist-army coup. She insists that it was not a coup but a real albeit disguised popular revolution. Moreover, it was a working class revolution which established the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Afghanistan.

As far as I know, the KPT and its British offshoot were the only people in the whole world to argue that what happened in Afghanistan in April 1978 was not a coup d'état. On the facts, it was absurd, but it became their factional badge of honour.

In Emine Engin, historical analogies and word-juggling with contrived and specious definitions take the place of a Marxist class analysis.

In Engin's account, the place that should be occupied by an analysis of the classes in Afghan society is filled by the "substitutionist" assertion that the Stalinist party, the Khalq faction of the PDPA, embodied working class, communist, politics and was therefore the Afghan working class in action.

In Engin, as in J-J, "The Party" is for purposes of analysis, the working class. The composition of the PDPA may not have been working class, but to dwell on such sociological detail would be "economistic".

"The Party" can act for the working class, and when it acts, even if it is the army officers and the soldiers under their command who in fact act, it is nonetheless the working class — not only the

Afghan working class, but the international working class — that acts.

This is an extreme form, indeed a mystical form, of "substitutionism" — of substituting some other social group or party for the working class. In fact, it is a double dose of substitutionism. For not only does she have the PDPA, which sociologically is not working class, substitute for the working class, but in "making the revolution" sections of the officer corps, using the apolitical soldiers under their orders, substitutes for the party, whose political guidance the officers accept.*

Without keeping this in mind, it will be impossible to make sense of Engin on her own terms, or of J-J.

No less remarkable than the absence of class analysis in her work — as in John-Jack's — is the absence of an account of the impact on Afghan society of the 25 years symbiosis of sections of the Afghan urban elite with the USSR's Stalinist ruling class.

Nothing in this story makes sense without that. But Engin presents the remarkable success of the PDPA in recruiting army and air-force officers as if it were just an especially successful variant of normal "communist" subversion work in the armed forces, and had nothing to do with the USSR's impact on sections of Afghanistan's urban elite. Engin — and in her tracks J-J — deliberately falsifies the facts. She suppresses the fact that it was amongst the officers that the PDPA recruited.

Her starting point may well have been the idea that since the PDPA succeeded in making a revolution, its "methods" had passed the test of practice and experience and deserved to be studied by revolutionaries like herself. She wrote:

"By succeeding in carrying out a revolution, the PDPA succeeded in passing a test."

But for that to produce anything useful, she would have to honestly analyse the Saur revolution. That is not at all what she does!

It suits Engin's purpose to conflate and confuse the unique "army work" of the PDPA with the normal sort of work to undermine and subvert the armed forces which the Communist International once set out as an essential defining characteristic of a communist party, and to pretend that others — the KPT — might take the Khalqis as a model and emulate their work in the armed forces.

But no one could at will fix it for the Turkish, or any other army and airforce, to have the relations with the USSR which the Afghan military had had for 25 years before April 1978. The PDPA experience was therefore no use at all as a model for what the KPT could hope to do. Engin, ignoring the central aspects of that experience, produced work on Afghanistan that was only the spinning of a "revolutionary" fairy tale, not a guide to action for the KPT and others.

When the Lenin-Trotsky Comintern laid it down that work in the armed forces should be done and made that a condition for affiliation to the International, they had in mind work with rank and file soldiers. To sustain her thesis, Engin must suppress and deny the fact. The PDPA recruited mainly officers. So she is mendaciously vague and unclear about what segment — the officers — of the Afghan forces the PDPA recruited from.

Her account of the history of the PDPA before the Saur coup is entirely the Khalq faction's account of it. And as she tells her story, she excuses Khalq for that for which she, following the post-coup Khalq line on PDP history, castigates the Parchamis. For example, she excuses and explains away Khalq's offer to do what Parcham

* Footnote: Without the fiction that the ruling CPSU was the working class in politics, the WV analysis of the USSR would have led them inescapably to a State Capitalist position.

did after Mohammed Daud's coup in 1973, and join the government.

She uses vague terms to avoid saying that that is what Khalq did: "In the face of the left-sounding promises of the government, the Khalq came forward initially with the proposal for a united front". No, Khalq offered to join Daud's government. That it did not do that was determined not by Khalq but by Daud's and Parcham's refusal to have them. John-Jack will do exactly the same thing as Engin.

She does her best to damn Parcham in every way possible, calling them reformists, quoting the Khalq leader Amin that they were just "aristocratic kids", etc. And yet she plays down the fact that Parcham in government after 1973 helped persecute — jail, torture and kill — its factional opponents in Khalq, though it did, and the history of that must be a major part of the explanation of why the two groups began to tear each other apart immediately after the Saur coup, when Khalq persecuted Parcham. Why does she do that?

The Khalq-Parcham "unification" in preparation for the coup was most likely a shotgun wedding at the behest of the Russians (it is, given the history and what followed after the coup, scarcely to be explained unless you assume this) and she wants to present a picture of an entirely autonomous seizure of power by the PDPA, or rather by Khalq. By suppressing the full extent of what she could not but see as Parcham's crimes against Khalq, she avoided having to face awkward questions about how these two bitterly hostile groups managed to "unite" in July 1977. She avoids the probable "Russian dimension" in the preparations for the April 1978 coup, of which Khalq-Parcham's "unification" was one...

She presents Parcham as the Afghan Mensheviks and the Khalq as the Bolsheviks — and then proceeds to substitute considerations about the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and about Russian conditions, for analysis of her subject, Afghanistan.

She conflates Russia's October Revolution with Afghanistan's Saur coup, Afghanistan with Russia and Russia with Afghanistan so that she sees October as essentially no different from Saur, thus grossly diminishing the greatest event in working class history!

She makes foolish ultra-left sectarian judgements, mechanically reading the line of the KPT onto Afghanistan. Castigating Parcham's reformism, she writes: Parcham "defended some of the reforms which had been put into effect by the monarchy in 1964 (reforms which are implemented by reactionary establishments or forces, and which provide progress via the evolutionary path of reaction, can absolutely not be supported)."

Certainly you do not express confidence in such forces or disarm politically before them or fail to criticise the shortcomings of their reforms. But you should "oppose" such things as the creation of an elected parliament by the King, after 1963? (In fact the PDPA, both segments, took part in the ensuing elections, winning four seats...)

In this way, suppressing information and discussion of the real classes involved, eliding from her story the pivotal symbiosis of sections of the Afghan elite with the USSR's bureaucratic ruling class, and, when she comes to it, suppressing the relevant information about exactly which military men the PDPA recruited, Engin discusses a largely imaginary Afghanistan; not the April 1978 coup but an ideal model revolution.

We will now go on to examine in some detail Emine Engin's account of the "Afghanistan Revolution", and her attempt to conflate the Saur coup and the October proletarian revolution.

Substitutionism warps Emine Engin's analysis

Her substitutionist idea of the revolutionary party and its relationship to the working class is very clearly expressed: she reports that on the foundation of the PDPA, "it was announced that the party was 'the party of the working class armed with the ideology of the working class'."

She does not discuss the PDPA's class composition; she takes for granted that the ideas which this Stalinist formation embodied — most of them hers too — were working class ideas, and that ideas were sufficient.

She is not a historical materialist but a flagrant historical idealist!

In fact, their ideas were the dominant ideas of the ruling class in the USSR and its Afghan understudies, who aspired to the same

position in Afghanistan.

She goes on: "However, any party founded as the (sic) party of the working class in a country like Afghanistan could not be expected to be a fully working class party." Here she is about to discuss the actual Afghan working class and this party's relations with the Afghan workers? The class composition of the PDPA? No, she is talking entirely about the political line of the party! The PDPA "could not be a fully working class party, without a struggle and splits among various tendencies showing themselves immediately".

Both Parcham and Khalq were closely linked with the USSR and with its secret police, though Parcham was the closer, tending to be more in line with what Russia wanted done in Afghanistan and more compliant with Russia's policies. There is a dimension of Afghan state assertiveness, and of Pashtun nationalism, against the Russians in the Khalqis' greater independence from Russia after the April '78 coup. During the 10-year split, neither group was ever repudiated by the USSR.

Explaining the formation of the political mind of the Khalq leadership, Engin cites as a major factor their determination "not to forget the lessons of experiences such as those in the Sudan, in Egypt and India", in the period when Stalinist formations were docile, sometimes suicidally docile, towards USSR-approved third world governments. She ignores entirely the fact that this was part of a generally aggressive "left" turn by the Kremlin in the aftermath of the mid-70s defeat of the USA in Indochina.

Instead, she uses Stalinist doubletalk: Khalq learned that "in general, the national bourgeoisie is terribly frightened of the complete democratisation of the social and political system and of radical revolutionary change in the system".

She uses words that for her have a special meaning the opposite of their common meaning. "Democratisation" here means? Democratisation in the same sense that the PDPA was a working class party. It has nothing to do with democratisation as socialists aspire to it. It is the extreme opposite of what we understand by democracy. In Engin's usage, the savage terroristic dictatorship of Khalq was exemplary democracy! "Democratic" here is another name for the Stalinist assumption of power, rule by the PDPA.

Work with the officers or with the rank and file soldiers?

She valiantly tries to square what happened in Afghanistan with her "Marxism-Leninism": Khalq "did not reject the general principles of Marxism in regard to the army. These [?] general principles were stated... but it was emphasised that in Afghanistan these general principles would be put into practice in a somewhat different order."

The principles of Marxist revolution in regard to the state is that the working class breaks it up and replaces it by working class rule. Nothing like that was attempted in Afghanistan, unless you think the purging of the armed forces that Khalq undertook to make itself sole master of the state (purging Parchamis too), amounted to the same thing. Engin, of course, does think that.

She continues: "In general, as the class struggle develops, the army is used as a means of suppressing the revolutionary forces; but as the class struggle develops further, it inevitably splits the army. Party work within the army is always necessary. Taking the social structure of Afghanistan into consideration, these general principles were put into practice, with emphasis right from the beginning on the party's work within the army. But the task of smashing the state apparatus was not rejected.... [Khalq leader] Taraki gave Amin the task of work in the army. Under the command of Amin, intensive ideological education was started within the main body of the army. At the same time the Khalq wing carried out practices of its own during official military manoeuvres..."

Because this is plainly the line according to Khalq, nothing can be taken at face value. She uses abstract formulations, like "splits in the army", to hide actualities.

The class struggle in Afghanistan, the class struggle in any conventional sense, did not split the army and the airforce. They split on commitment to or rejection of a model of economic development patterned on the USSR.

There was class struggle at the heart of it, but it was a class strug-

gle within the Afghan ruling elite — those aspiring to be a ruling class on the model of the ruling bureaucracy in the USSR against the others.

Engin deliberately hides the fact that the “intensive ideological education work” of Amin in the army was directed at the officers, and that in consequence the PDPA recruited officers and not rank and file soldiers; and that, in contrast to the approach advocated by the Lenin-Trotsky Communist International, basing themselves on the experience of the Russian revolution, it aimed to take over and use the existing hierarchical armed forces and not to break them up.

Their methods were compatible only with such a goal. If there were any rank and file PDPA soldiers, they played no part in the coup except as members of the Afghan state’s military formations, commanded by PDPA officers.

The army did split, but not horizontally, with the lower ranks separating from the officers, as in Russia in 1917. The army and airforce split vertically: sections of the army and airforce under its own hierarchical command split, according to the politics of the top officers, from sections similarly organised and mobilised on the other side.

Engin writes so as to avoid recording these facts and having to discuss them. She writes mendaciously, deliberately (it cannot be other than deliberate) giving a false impression that the Khalq’s work in the army was other than what it was.

Yet the Afghan reality finds its way into her picture when she asserts that the “Khalq wing carried out practices of its own during official military manoeuvres...”

I have no idea whether that is true or not. But for it to be true, then key sections of the officers in charge of the official military exercises, all the way up to the top, would have had to be PDPA. That is the fact; and that is the point Emine tries to hide.

A maturing revolutionary situation?

Emine goes to great pains to present events before the April coup as constituting a “maturing” revolutionary situation, and to pretend that the coup proceeded in accordance with its development:

“The situation in the country was becoming tense. As activity among the masses increased, and as the PDPA stretched out to townships, villages and nomads’ tents, the repressive nature of Daud’s regime was becoming clearer. The revolutionary situation was maturing. In accordance with this, Amin began to turn education in the army into practical planning.”

This too is falsification of facts and of relationships. She is, here as all through this work, careful to avoid specifying where exactly in the army Amin was doing his “education” work. (Curiously, the airforce, where Parcham was strong, is scarcely mentioned. Certainly the airforce seems to have suffered most from the PDPA’s post-coup faction fighting and purging.)

Did the PDPA ever (except by way of death-dealing planes and helicopter gunships) “stretch out to townships, villages and nomad tents”? For sure, not to many of them!

It is perfectly true that there was a crisis in Afghan society, and that dictator Daud’s failures helped create a willingness in formerly Daudist officers to throw in with the PDPA. That is a very important part of the picture. But she bases her case that Saur was a revolution and not a coup on the idea that the PDPA coup was prepared by mass struggle.

For evidence of conditions in Afghanistan, she goes to a retrospective account of pre-coup Afghanistan in the magazine used by the Russian Stalinist ruling class for communicating “the line” to its loyal parties across the world, *Problems of Peace and Socialism (PPS)*. The version in English — one of no less than 35 languages in which it was published — was called *World Marxist Review (WMR)*.

From the issue of January 1979, she quotes “comrade Zeray” of the PDPA describing the situation before April, 1978, and claiming that the PDPA had 50,000 members then. This flatly contradicts all other sources. On the eve of Saur the PDPA itself claimed 8,000, and the real figure may have been not much more than a quarter of that.

(J-J repeats this figure from *WMR* in *Weekly Worker*. That Engin,

or John-Jack, 20 years ago, should quote *WMR* is not surprising; but it is astonishing that J-J is still doing it long after he has had a chance to realise that most of what he learned from those people was shameless lies.)

The April coup was “really a revolution”?

We now come to Emine Engin’s account of why the coup was a revolution.

The PDPA was ready, she proudly reports. Taraki and Amin decided that in the event of their arrest “party members and sympathisers within the army [she consistently leaves out the airforce] should immediately launch an insurrection. Amin saw to it that various plans devised for this purpose were rehearsed ten times. These drills were skilfully concealed under the cover of general military manoeuvres. Among soldiers and officers [the order here, soldiers and officers, is deliberately mendacious] belonging to the party a list was prepared of those who would be commanders during the insurrection. The party’s military chain of command was determined...” (J-J weaves his own fantasy of imaginary detail around this. See below.)

But is there reason to think that when the PDPA-led sections of the army and airforce moved into action on April 27th, 1978, there was any chain of command in operation other than the normal chain in military organisations structured and drilled to move under their officer leadership? Not that I know of.

The PDPA segments of the army and airforce acted as typically hierarchical military forces. One of the shaping characteristics of this “revolution” was the fact that though the military played the decisive role in taking and then fighting to hold and consolidate power, these state forces did not have any of the characteristics of a revolutionary army, with a politically conscious rank and file (see *Afghanistan and the Shape of the 20th Century* (“Afghanistan...”) in *Workers’ Liberty* 2/2).

And, once again, Engin’s own account of what the PDPA officers could do under cover of official military manoeuvres, shows just how things stood. A sizeable, and as it proved, decisive segment of the Afghan state forces had fallen under the control of the PDPA by way of the political allegiance of their officers, not of the rank and file soldiers, and — if this is forgotten then the story is incomprehensible — of the Russians.

We have seen why Emine Engin is concerned to establish that 1978 was a revolution and not a coup — it serves them, they believe, to fight their factional war in the KPT.

That it was no ordinary coup, that the relationship between the Stalinist PDP and the military and airforce officers who, using the troops under their command, made the “revolution”, makes it a coup unique in history (the only remotely comparable phenomena I know of are the Ba’th party’s relationship with military coups in Iraq and Syria in the 1960s, and between these and Afghanistan there are important differences). That it had some support in the urban population — that is fact. But that it was a coup, a seizure of the state by part of the military, a “revolution” from above whose active protagonist was a section of the military — that also is fact. A coup sui generis, but a coup nonetheless. Most certainly, it was no sort of popular revolution.

But Afghanistan has become entangled with Turkish politics and WV’s struggle against those it sees as Turkey’s equivalent of Parcham.

“In Turkey, Revolutionary Path, Liberation and Accumulation... all say that it was a coup. Those who call it a coup put forward such views as that the revolution was effected through an uprising in the army, that a section of the counterrevolutionary Muslim guerillas had found a base among the peasantry, and that the revolution was announced to the country over the radio. Let us too touch briefly upon the question of coup or revolution.”

But it is a foolish, self-defeating activity, to argue about Turkish politics and perspectives by way of a convoluted dispute about another country — whose conditions are radically different and which therefore can not be a paradigm or a stand-in for Turkey. A corrupting activity too, for facts are facts.

It is plain fact that the “revolution” was “effected” by sections of

the army (and the airforce); that Muslim forces had not only a base, but overwhelming support amongst the peasantry and a large section of the urban population; that PDPA rule was maintained by police-state terror in the towns, in parallel to the airborne terror used in the countryside; that the “revolution” was presented to most Afghans as a fait accompli, something, indeed, “announced over the radio”. If the dispute rests on whether the things she lists are true, then there is no basis for dispute. And she knows this perfectly well.

She knows that she has to take another tack if she is to prove that it was not a coup but a, so to speak, “disguised” popular revolution. She has, to make her case, to become a corrupter of words, juggling scholastically with definitions and analogies.

Lenin on the witness stand

She immediately calls Lenin to the witness stand:

“While explaining the term ‘putsch’, which is the exact equivalent in German of the word coup [?], Lenin said the following:

“The term ‘putsch’, in its scientific sense, may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses.’

“This explanation generalises efforts to seize power through a plot isolated from the masses under the concept of putsch.

“The concept of coup d’état or ‘blow against the state’ is also included in Lenin’s generalisation.”

Here she conflates coup and revolution so that she can eliminate the fundamental distinction between revolution from above and from below. She wants to banish the concept of coup, as distinct from revolution, and reduce all that goes with revolution “from below” to tertiary detail. So she works backwards, so to speak, conflating putsch and coup, and then conflating coup and popular revolution, eliminating distinctions, till she, and her readers, including her mimic, J-J, are unable to see the difference between the party-army coup in Kabul and the October Revolution!

She uses Lenin’s comment on what a putsch is to prove that Afghanistan was not a coup! The quintessentially Stalinist dimension here is the reduction of real revolution to optional detail and the assertion that some other forces can substitute for the working class.

“A coup d’état also involves a plot isolated from the masses, but here it originates from within the state itself, e.g., military coup, palace coup, etc.

“While talking about the coup d’états of Bonaparte and Bismarck, Engels said:

“In politics there are only two determining forces, the organised force of the state, the army, and the disorganised natural force of the popular masses.’

“In connection with the coups of Bonaparte and Bismarck, we see that Engels’ explanation reflects the understanding that a coup rests on a certain support within the state, not on the masses, and that it has the character of a plot isolated from the masses.”

The distinction between, coup, putsch, etc., will be discussed further below, when we come to J-J’s “cover” version of the same ideas.

In fact history knows nothing of a Bismarck coup! Bismarck was all his life a loyal servant of the Prussian kings. Engels did not write about such a thing, either in “The Role of Force in History” or anywhere else. J-J repeats this strange but revealing error of fact. I will come back to this.

“When we look at history we see that in general this type of coup reflects a struggle for power within the ruling class which controls the state. The decisive factor in such a struggle is the balance of forces within the state mechanism.”

That was precisely the situation in Afghanistan — a split within the urban ruling class elite. The determining forces in April 1978 were those segments of the old state, under PDPA leadership, it is true, who won the battle in Kabul, in the week following 27 April.

Having inadvertently but neatly described the realities of the Saur Revolution, Engin has implicitly admitted that “Great Saur” was a coup d’état. She must now either give up or argue that everything is not always what it appears to be.

“Again, when we look at history, we also see revolutions which have the appearance of coups. However, the only way in which revolutionary views which take the side of the oppressed classes, and defend radical changes that can be implemented through broad mass participation, can gain strength within the old state apparatus is as a reflection within the state of the mood and revolutionary potential of the masses. Revolutionary views cannot gain strength within the old state apparatus in isolation from the masses and then, resting on this strength, carry out a coup ‘in isolation from the masses’. For this reason, revolutionary coups are either the unsuccessful and easily crushed attempt of a small group, or a revolution which, even if in form it resembles a military coup, for example, has in reality created a genuinely organised vanguard from the petty-bourgeois revolutionary military cadres in the army. In history, such examples have led the potential which they themselves objectively represent to explode the day after the coup by bringing the masses out onto the streets. Just as in Iran the revolution found its subjective factor in the mullahs, it may also find it among revolutionary officers in the army. In such cases, the seizure of power appears in form as a coup, but in essence it is a revolution under the leadership of petty-bourgeois military cadres. (The future of a revolution led by petty-bourgeois revolutionaries is another question.)”

The essential argument here is that Saur was not a coup, because, given the ideas and aspirations of the PDPA — and the definitions she has created about coups, etc. — it simply could not be! It is an aspect of the mystical substitutionism that pervades this entire work. It rests on convoluted ideological reasoning and, as we have seen, on the suppression of such key factors in the situation as the Afghan elite’s interaction with the Russian Stalinist ruling class.

The reason why “revolutionary views” — in fact the aspiration to create in Afghanistan a replica of the USSR — did “gain strength within the old state apparatus” in Afghanistan was not that they reflected the mood and revolutionary potential of “the masses” but because of the example of the USSR and the effects of its direct role in educating the military technicians and intelligentsia.

The idea that when they acted, they “reflected the mood” of the masses is plainly not true, even if by “masses” we mean only city-dwelling Afghans.

The idea that the coup makers reflected the “revolutionary potential” of “the masses” is in no way a description of Afghan reality in 1977/8, or afterwards. It is how in Engin’s schema things should have been. It is mystical substitutionism.

Even so, it also implies the truth which Engin is trying to hide: that the coup makers acted in isolation from any mass action, even in the cities.

If there was “massive” support, then it was passive support. Nothing happened that affected the transfer of power except the civil war between rival segments of the regular armed forces. If this “massive” support existed before the coup, it disappeared immediately afterwards...

I don’t know that it is a general rule, or anything other than rationalising substitutionist mendacity, genuflecting to populist piety, to say that: “The only way in which revolutionary views which take the side of the oppressed classes, and defend radical changes that can be implemented through broad mass participation, can gain strength within the old state apparatus is as a reflection within the state of the mood and revolutionary potential of the masses.”

History knows many examples of enlightened elites that try to pioneer transformations for which their own society is not ready. Afghanistan itself, whether with King Amanullah in the 1920s, or Daud for most of his rule, not to mention aspects of PDPA rule, provides us with examples of it.

What happened after April 1978 becomes incomprehensible if the picture she presents of the coup as a disguised revolution with mass revolutionary outbreaks waiting to be detonated by it, is even half true. The point is, it isn’t.

Her formulation that what is in play here is radical reforms “that can be implemented only through broad mass participation” is a pointedly precise drawing of attention to what was lacking in Afghanistan: the PDP did not have the support to carry by main

force an accelerated version of the changes that Daud had been slowly implementing (on women, for example: see “Afghanistan...”).

In Afghanistan, there was no eruption of popular action triggered by the coup which “objectively” represented it.

She sums up the historical possibilities: “For this reason, revolutionary coups are either the unsuccessful and easily crushed attempt of a small group, or a revolution which, even if in form it resembles a military coup, for example, has in reality created a genuinely organised vanguard from the petty-bourgeois revolutionary military cadres in the army.”

She defines away the distinction between coup and revolution so that a successful coup is not a putsch and some — perhaps all — successful coups are not coups either. As the old couplet has it: “Treason doth never prosper: what’s the reason?/ For if it prosper none dare call it treason.”

“In history, such examples have led the potential which they themselves objectively represent to explode the day after the coup by bringing the masses out onto the streets.”

But in Afghanistan, there was no eruption of popular action triggered by the coup which objectively represented, and, so to speak, prefigured it.

“Just as in Iran the revolution found its subjective factor in the mullahs, it may also find it among revolutionary officers in the army. In such cases, the seizure of power appears in form as a coup, but in essence it is a revolution under the leadership of petty-bourgeois military cadres.”

A disembodied, classless “workers’ revolution”

Here revolution is a disembodied classless entity advancing over the world, finding its agents, its “subjective factor”, as best it can, but in the end always true to itself and never equal to less than itself — and, in the quaint phraseology of both *Workers’ Voice* and *The Leninist*, linking up with “the world revolutionary centre”, the USSR.

In the kitsch-Trotskyist left, such views were promulgated by the Grant group (Militant; now Socialist Appeal and the Socialist Party).

Essentially it was the root outlook of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy in the days (circa 1960) when Nikita Khrushchev was confident enough to tell the capitalist powers at the UN, “We will bury you”, by way of peaceful competition.

Revolution was not an event but a process.

The Workers’ Voice faction of the KPT argued that it was necessary to supplement this USSR and official Communist Party fostered perspective of ever-advancing socialism with revolutionary activity by such as themselves in their own countries. The need to vindicate that viewpoint, it seems, lay behind their championing of the revolution-making Khalq.

Here Engin invokes the “advancing world revolution” thesis to bestow a proletarian revolutionary character on the coup-making army officers of the PDPA. It’s as if she doesn’t notice that in Afghanistan there was no eruption of popular action triggered by the coup which “objectively” represented it.

Engin insists: “If we look at the events in Afghanistan from this point of view, again it is a revolution”. Nevertheless, she insists, “the Afghanistan revolution was not this type of revolution”. (What type was it?) What she wants “to emphasise here is that if, without looking at the essence of the matter, we call every revolution which appears to be a military one a coup, and if we then label it to be ‘isolated from the masses’ because counter-revolutionary attempts have intensified as they would naturally be expected to... This logic would lead to calling the October Revolution a coup”.

By way of constructing abstract patterns from different revolutions and comparing them, she now performs an astonishing piece of mendacious apologetics, downgrading the Russian proletarian revolution in order to glorify the Afghan Stalinist coup:

“In Russia as well, soldiers made up an important section of the striking force. Clashes were brief and power was seized with relatively few losses. What did last for a long time were the sharp and bloody clashes throughout the civil war. And in the civil war certain backward sections of the people took the side of counter-revolution. Was the October Revolution a ‘coup’?”

The effectiveness of this, even as rhetoric, depends on the suppression of the basic facts of what she is supposed to be discussing — for both Afghanistan and Russia. Recall that all the way through her exposition, she has built towards this point, talking about Khalq’s work in the army without specifying that it was work not amongst the ordinary soldiers but work amongst the officers, designed to win over segments of the army and airforce from the top, leaving the old hierarchical command structures intact.

We now come to the most important thing in this discussion.

Was the October Revolution a coup?

In the October Revolution, the soldiers who did indeed play a big part were rank and file soldiers, and occasionally an officer, who had broken the command structures of the army (and the navy).

The Russian armed forces split horizontally, the soldiers against the hierarchy of officers, and not vertically. In Afghanistan, they split vertically, intact segment against intact segment, under their officers.

The revolutionary soldiers in Russia acted with and alongside of the armed working class militia, the Red Guards. Revolutionary rank and file soldiers of peasant origin, acted, among other things, as one of the links between town workers and the people of the countryside.

The command structures were not in any way a continuation of the old army hierarchies. The maker of the revolution was not the army, or an intact segment of it acting as the army. The working class led by the Bolshevik Party, acting as the most conscious political force, was the protagonist, augmented by collectives of politically conscious soldiers who had broken out of the old command structures and who acted not under the command of their officers, but against them.

The Russian civil war bears not even a superficial resemblance to Afghanistan after April 1978.

As in Afghanistan, the towns were islands in an agrarian sea. But it was the workers who seized power in the towns, not a military elite, not an aspirant new exploitative ruling class seeking to displace the old one, and embodying in itself segments of the old ruling class that were seeking to become a different sort of ruling class.

In the Russian countryside there was already a mass revolutionary ferment. One of the first things the Bolsheviks did after 25 October (7 November according to the modern calendar) 1917 was to legalise what the peasants had done in seizing land. The peasant party, the Left SRs (who split off from the old SR party and who — despite being a minority in the Constituent Assembly — were in the countryside the leaders of most of the peasants. See *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*) allied with the Bolsheviks and for some months after October, formed a coalition government with them.

Even when conflicts erupted with the peasantry during the civil war, when anti-Bolshevik peasant armed forces, the so-named “Greens”, and groups like Nestor Machno’s anarchist-led forces in the Ukraine, appeared in many places, there was until the end of the Civil War a common foe. The peasants saw the Bolshevik regime as their, often bitterly resented, protector against the White guards and a landlord restoration.

I have no desire to idealise or falsify the situation in post-October Russia. The Bolsheviks did resort to coercion where necessary, and sometimes more of it than we, from our safe distance, may think necessary. But there is no valid comparison with what the Afghanistan armed forces led by Stalinists did.

Agrarian support for the PDPA regime, even grudging support, was negligible. Even their decrees giving land to peasants and abol-

* Footnote: Some anarchists said differently, that it was the intelligentsia taking power, but we will leave them alone, except to note that one possible consequence of arguments such as Engin and John-Jack employ, equating Afghanistan and Russia in 1917, is that when the penny drops about Afghanistan, etc., they will turn against the October Revolution...

ishing usury (see “Afghanistan...”) did not call forth substantial peasant support.

The relationship of the regime to the people, and the PDPA’s savagely Stalinist attitude was made plain when, within a few weeks of the coup, they started to napalm bomb villages.

This was more than random brutality by peculiarly brutal people. Politically it was a reflection of the character of the isolated regime in Kabul. Its methods reflected a deadly combination of militarist and Stalinist elitism. It reflected the Khalq’s belief — the quintessential Stalinist belief — that state force, in this case military force, was enough. I have narrated and analysed all this in detail in “Afghanistan...” and I will not repeat more of it here.

Engin continues: “Before the October Revolution, Lenin said that if, in a peasant country, matters have come to a peasant uprising, it is sufficient even if there are no other symptoms of a nation wide crisis.” (Sufficient for what exactly?)

Once again, it is as if Engin’s theoretical conscience is in revolt against the apologist-lawyer’s task she is performing, subconsciously inducing her to bring in things that pointedly puncture her own case!

There was no hint of a peasant rising in conjunction with the PDPA-army military coup in the cities. That is why the coup did not, as, indeed, certain coups have — for instance, Iraq in 1958 and after, until the first Army-Ba’thist coup in 1963 — trigger a mass revolutionary mobilisation of the people. That it didn’t is, precisely, the point here!

She goes on: “Then [Lenin] enumerates the other symptoms as well, referring to a heating up of the national question, the situation in the army and ‘the mood of the whole nation’.

“Lenin enumerated the following as the guarantee of the Bolsheviks’ success in an uprising: 1. We can launch a surprise attack from three points; 2. We have slogans that guarantee us support among the peasants; 3. We have a majority in the country; 4. The disorganisation among the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries is complete; 5. We are technically in a position to take power in Moscow; 6. We have thousands of armed workers and soldiers in Petrograd who could at once seize the Winter Palace, the General Staff building, the telephone exchange and the large printing presses.

“After enumerating these conditions for an uprising, Lenin said that, given these conditions, it would be treachery not to treat insurrection as an art.

“Let us now return to Afghanistan in the light of these comments of Lenin.”

But no: before we return to Afghanistan, let us look more seriously at Lenin’s “Marxism and Insurrection (A Letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party)” which Engin has rather too abstractly, and inaccurately, but also very revealingly, summarised here.

What Lenin really said on Marxism and insurrection

The easiest way to show the difference between a revolution, the October Revolution of 1917, in which insurrection is the means of toppling the old power and installing the revolutionary power at the culmination of a popular revolution, and what happened in Afghanistan in the week beginning 27 April 1978, is to examine what Lenin, dealing with Russia on the eve of October, really says.

Lenin’s letter to the Central Committee is a profound Marxist work, from which we can learn a great deal. What follows is about half of Lenin’s text.

Lenin: — ...To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon the revolutionary spirit of the people. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon the crucial moment in the history of the growing revolution, when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemies and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest. That is the third point. And these three factors in the attitude towards insurrection distinguish

Marxism from Blanquism...

The present moment is one in which the Party is obliged to admit that insurrection has been placed upon the order of the day by the whole course of objective events, and that it must treat insurrection as an art...

In the days of July 16-17 (3-4 [according to the old calendar]) it was possible to argue without trespassing against the truth that the right thing to do was to take power, for our enemies would in any case accuse us of rebellion and treat us like rebels. However, to have concluded that we could have seized power at that time would have been wrong because the objective conditions for a successful insurrection did not exist.

1) We still lacked the support of the class which is the vanguard of the revolution.

We still did not have a majority among the workers and soldiers of the capitals. Now, we have a majority in both Soviets. [In Moscow and Petrograd.]...

2) There was no rising revolutionary spirit at that time among the people. There is that spirit now, after the Kornilov affair, as is proved by the situation in the provinces and by the seizure of power by the Soviets in many localities.

3) At that time there was no vacillation on any serious political scale among our enemies and among the irresolute petty bourgeoisie. Now their vacillation is enormous... Our petty-bourgeois democrats, having clearly lost their majority among the people, have begun to vacillate enormously...

4) An insurrection on July 16-17 (3-4) would have been a mistake because we could not have retained power either physically or politically. We could not have retained it physically in spite of the fact that at certain moments Petrograd was in our hands, because at that time our workers and soldiers would not have fought and died for the possession of Petrograd...

We would not have retained power politically on July 16-17 (3-4), because before the Kornilov affair the army and provinces might, and would, have marched against Petrograd.

The picture is now entirely different.

We have the following of the majority of a class, the vanguard of the revolution, the vanguard of the people, which is capable of carrying the masses with it.

We have the following of the majority of the people; for Chernov’s resignation, while by no means the only symptom, is the most striking and obvious symptom that the peasantry will not receive land from a bloc with the Socialist-Revolutionaries (or from the Socialist-Revolutionaries themselves). And that is the central reason for the popular character of the revolution.

We have the advantage of a party that firmly knows the path it must follow...

Our victory is assured, for the people are bordering on desperation, and we can show the people a sure way out; for during the “Kornilov days” we demonstrated to the people the value of our leadership...

The Democratic Conference is a Conference and nothing more. One thing must not be forgotten, namely, that at the Conference the majority of the revolutionary people, the poor and embittered peasantry, are not represented. It is a Conference of a minority of the people — that obvious truth must not be forgotten. It would be a profound error, it would be sheer parliamentary cretinism on our part, were we to regard the Democratic Conference as a parliament; for even if it were to proclaim itself a parliament, the sovereign parliament of the revolution, it would not be able to decide anything. The power of decision lies outside of the Conference; it lies in the working class quarters of Petrograd and Moscow.

All the objective conditions for a successful insurrection exist...

Having recognised that an insurrection on the part of the workers of Petrograd and Moscow is absolutely necessary in order to save the revolution and in order to save Russia from being “separately” divided up among the imperialists of both coalitions... we must show that our acceptance of the idea of Marx that insurrection must be regarded as an art is not merely a verbal acceptance.

At the [Democratic] Conference...we must prepare a brief declaration in the name of the Bolsheviks, sharply emphasising the irrelevance of long speeches and of "speeches" in general, the necessity for immediate action in order to save the revolution, the absolute necessity for a complete break with the bourgeoisie, for the removal of the whole of the present government, for a complete severance of relations with the Anglo-French imperialists, who are preparing a "separate" partition of Russia, and for the immediate transfer of the whole power to the revolutionary democracy headed by the revolutionary proletariat. Our declaration must consist of the briefest and bluntest formulation of this conclusion accompanied by a programme of proposals: peace for the peoples, land for the peasants, the confiscation of outrageous profits, and a check on the outrageous sabotage of production by the capitalists.

The briefer and blunter the declaration the better...

Having announced this declaration, and having appealed for decisions and not talk, for action and not resolution-writing, our whole fraction must proceed to the factories and the barracks. Their place is there; the pulse of life is there; the force that will save the revolution is there; the motive force of the Democratic Conference is there.

There, in impassioned speeches, we must explain our programme and put the alternative: either the Conference adopts it in its entirety, or else insurrection. There is no middle course. Delay is impossible. The revolution is perishing.

By putting the question thus, by concentrating our entire fraction in the factories and barracks, we shall be able to decide the best moment to launch the insurrection...

September 26-27 (13-14), 1917

(see also the Appendix: "Marxism and insurrection", Trotsky's speech to the Tzar's court, 1906)

The difference between a coup and a popular revolution

Look at Afghanistan in the light of Lenin's picture of conditions in Russia on the eve of the October Revolution and you see exactly why and in what ways what happened in Afghanistan was a revolutionary military coup and not a popular revolution.

In Russia the Bolshevik seizure of power was the culmination of profound social convulsions. Russia is covered by a great network of Soviets. Lenin says at the very start of his letter urging the Central Committee to prepare an insurrection, that a Marxist insurrection can rely neither on a conspiracy nor on a mere party, but on the advanced class, the working class, which is capable of carrying the masses with it — that is, capable of leading the whole plebeian population, or most of it, and in the first place the peasants.

He notes that the soviets have already seized power in some localities. When he talks of "loyal regiments", he means regiments of soldiers who have sloughed off military discipline, who are not under the control of their officers, who look to the soviets for leadership in supporting and defending the revolution.

There already is a mass nation-wide revolt by peasants, whose demands for land, which has been thwarted by the various Provisional Governments, can only be satisfied by the workers in power. He implies that if this were not so then there could be no talk of the workers seizing power: "that is the central reason for the popular character of the revolution", that is, for the continuing nation-wide discontent that gives the working class and the Bolsheviks their opportunity.

His discussion of the 'July Days' and of why it would have been wrong for the Bolsheviks to seize power then is equally instructive. The July Days were a spontaneous revolt by sections of the working class in Petrograd (St Petersburg). The Bolsheviks put themselves at the head of that movement, which they thought premature, in order to assure an orderly retreat with the least losses. Afterwards Lenin had to go into hiding and Trotsky was locked in a jail.

Why, according to Lenin, would it have been wrong for the Bolsheviks to have seized power in July? Because they still had not won the majority of the working class; they had not won the leadership in the soviets; there was no "rising revolutionary spirit amongst the people", who still had confidence in their parties and

leaders; because, in July the army and the provinces would have marched on Petrograd, and the Bolsheviks could not have retained power. There is, he insists, such a rising revolutionary spirit now, after General Kornilov's attempt to suppress the revolution by a military coup in August.

The Bolsheviks had taken the lead in organising resistance to Kornilov's attempted coup against the Kerensky regime. Lenin would later put it like this: that they supported Prime Minister Kerensky, who was widely believed to be complicit in Kornilov's plot, "as the rope supports the hanged man". Thus they consolidated their leadership of the working class.

Could the differences with the situation in Afghanistan in April 1978 be more clear? The central aspect of the Saur revolution was that the Stalinists of the PDPA believed that taking power as they did would be enough: state force and coercion would do the rest. As I have already said, their idea here is the root idea of Stalinism in history (see "Afghanistan...").

Engin's summary of Lenin abstracts from everything in Lenin that describes the real revolutionary situation about which he was writing.

She culls from Lenin abstract recipes designed to make what Lenin wrote in 1917 fit the Afghan reality in 1978. To do that she has to fade out everything that is concrete about Russia and retreat up the ladder of abstraction so that her generalities will admit both the Afghan experience and the vastly different experience of the Bolsheviks. She fades out everything specific and instructive, assimilating the profoundly democratic Bolshevik revolution to the military-bureaucratic coup in Afghanistan.

Marxists proceed in precisely the opposite way. We translate generalisations by a Lenin or Marx or a Trotsky back into their concrete components; we then test and compare the summaries against the facts, details and dynamics of the current situation we are trying to analyse.

Her glosses on Lenin even introduce elements not in Lenin. Look at it again:

"Lenin enumerated the following as the guarantee of the Bolsheviks' success in an uprising: 1. We can launch a surprise attack from three points; 2. We have slogans that guarantee us support among the peasants; 3. We have a majority in the country; 4. The disorganisation among the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries is complete; 5. We are technically in a position to take power in Moscow; 6. We have thousands of armed workers and soldiers in Petrograd who could at once seize the Winter Palace, the General Staff building, the telephone exchange and the large printing presses.

"After enumerating these conditions for an uprising, Lenin said that, given these conditions, it would be treachery not to treat insurrection as an art."

Lenin does not write of a "surprise attack". The very opposite, in fact: he wants them to go to the Democratic Conference and publicly announce the Bolsheviks' intention to rise.

That they intended to rise, though not of course the details, was public knowledge long before Zinoviev and Kamenev told the press about it on the eve of the insurrection.

"We have slogans that guarantee us support among the peasants." That is probably what the leaders of the PDPA thought in April 1978. It is not at all what Lenin says.

There is nothing speculative or for-the-future in what Lenin writes. He describes an already seething mass of peasant revolutionary feeling, focused on the demand for the land; he notes that the peasants' traditional party, the SRs, will not win it for them (Victor Chernov was a SR leader).

This makes it possible for the working class to act as leader of the peasants.

By taking power the workers can clear away the bourgeois obstruction to the peasants getting what they are already in revolt to claim and in many places have already seized and fear will be taken from them, the land. Therefore, the workers can — in Trotsky's summary formula of his theory of "Permanent Revolution" — take the lead in reconstructing Russia on a new basis.

Lenin does not quite say that they have a majority in the country: he says they have won the majority in the working class, which is

capable of leading all the working people.

Can “technique” be self-sufficient?

“Comrade Taraki had appraised the Afghan society on a scientific basis and had intimated [to] the party since the 1973 [Daud] coup that it was possible in Afghanistan to wrest... political power through a shortcut, [inasmuch] as the classical way in which the productive forces undergo different stages to build a society based on scientific socialism would take a long time. This shortcut could be utilised by working extensively in the armed forces. Previously the army was considered as the tool of dictatorship and despotism of the ruling class and it was not imaginable to use it before toppling its employer. However, Comrade Taraki suggested this too should be wrested in order to topple the ruling class.”

[From the official biography of Noor Mohammed Taraki, a leader of the People’s Democratic party of Afghanistan, published in August 1978]

“We are technically in a position to take power in Moscow”? The focus on technique is characteristic of the PDPA and its apologists.*

It describes Taraki, as quoted, above, not Lenin. In terms of technique, Lenin is urging the Bolshevik Central Committee to match the objective revolutionary possibilities, whose elements he itemises and analyses, above, by applying themselves to the technicalities of an insurrection: “treat insurrection as an art”.

Lenin is not talking primarily about Moscow, but about Petrograd, the heart of the revolutionary working class. Etc., etc., etc. The distorting shadow of the PDPA military coup is heavy over Engin’s account of Lenin on the eve of the October Revolution...

Emine Engin continues:

“We have mentioned the existence of a revolutionary situation in the country. The situation prior to the April Revolution was developing in the direction of a nation wide crisis.

“Firstly, the stirrings of a peasant uprising were felt in the rural areas just as in 1970–72. In 1978 *The Times* wrote as follows: ‘The acute food shortage led to wide scale discontent and dissatisfaction in the first months of this year’.”

Here, as throughout the whole exposition, what she cites and quotes does not prove, or even strongly suggest, what Emine Engin wants it to prove. In her translation, the *Times* reporter’s account of “discontent and dissatisfaction” becomes “The stirrings of a peasant uprising were felt”.

Uprising? In fact, apart from the many peasant risings against the Stalinist government in Kabul, there was no peasant rising — not even when the PDPA in power tried to rouse the rural poor against landlords and usurers.

It may be — I don’t know — that the PDPA-army coup and the rallying of forces against it under the banner of Islam, helped smother what might have become a peasant movement, or even a peasant rising. But to translate the *Times* report into the ‘stirrings of a peasant uprising’ is like translating the news that someone who has been in a stupor is showing signs of being alive into a tale that he is already up and doing vigorous things. And Engin is writing four years later, when the full story is known...

She continues: “then the murder of Akhbar Khayber, one of the leaders of the PDPA, on 17th April 1978 sparked off broad reaction, including a 50,000-strong funeral march as well as other demonstrations.

“Impatience with the Daud regime had been mounting within the army for a long time... The conditions for an uprising were maturing. It was not for nothing that the order for the uprising was connected with the arrest of the PDPA leaders. It is very obvious that this was to serve as the ‘turning point’ mentioned by Lenin. And so it was”.

Afghanistan: the “revolution” that never was

Engin now focuses tightly on Afghanistan, and applies the things

she has culled from Lenin:

“The PDPA had slogans which guaranteed the support of the discontented peasants.”

Did they? They thought they did, but in fact, they did not. Nothing like it. Or, if the emphasis is on discontented peasants, then self-evidently, not enough peasants were discontented.

And there is a qualitative, fundamental, difference between being discontented and being revolutionary. The most striking and revealing features of post-Saur Afghanistan was that they could not, even from the heights of state power, organise the putative beneficiaries to support the land redistribution decrees promulgated in Kabul.

It was the measure of their isolation, of their utter failure and of the abortive character of their “revolution”.

It is simply preposterous to write in 1982, when the whole sorry story is already history, that the PDPA had slogans which guaranteed the support of the peasants!

The point is that whereas the Bolsheviks acted when mass peasant revolutionary activity was already a fact, and when the peasants had had a chance to learn that only the working class in power would give them the land they wanted, in Afghanistan it was all speculation and gambling on the future, and on slogans that should have “guaranteed” peasant support, but didn’t.

But then, though Khalq had more contact with the countryside than Parcham, their relationship to the rural people was a gruesome series of tragicomic episodes. It almost beggars belief that they outlawed usury in the villages when they had no alternative credit system in place, but they did, with the result that in 1979 agricultural production fell catastrophically.

It was episodes like this that made me write in “Afghanistan...” of the Afghan Stalinists in power, that their rule was a caricature and epitome of the whole grim and tragic history of Stalinism.

To say that “from the social-psychological point of view”, or from any point of view at all, the PDPA had the support of “a majority in the country”, is delirious nonsense. In terms of the known facts, it is the plain opposite of the truth. Engin works herself into it by way of intricately convoluted reasoning and the redefinition of terms, but the result is not at all different from flat, outright, deliberate lying. (The difference may be that she is in the first place lying to herself.)

Foolish lying, from her own point of view as champion and apologist for Khalq, because if the picture she paints is true, or even partly true, then it becomes impossible to account for what happened after April 1978. Implicitly it condemns the Khalqis: for if in April 1978 they had the support of the majority in the country, how did they come to lose it so soon and so spectacularly? How did they come to make such a blood-drenched catastrophe of things?

But, in fact, it is utterly untrue to say they had the support of the country at any point.

Blaming Parcham

The best Engin can do in her book to answer these questions implied in her account is to blame on Parcham the fact that it was only at the end of the year 1978 that the PDPA government got down to land reform. Previously, she says, they had either been restrained by the cautious, “reformist”, Parcham or, after they broke with Parcham, were too busy repressing them. This delay gave the counter-revolutionaries the advantage.

In fact the explanation won’t hold water. Within a couple of months they had thrown out Parcham and jailed or exiled its leaders.

One of the things that happens in real revolutions is that the prospect of land reform is a powerful weapon — worth many armies, able to dissolve hostile peasant armies — against the counter-revolution. It melts away mass support for the counter revolution.

In this case, it plainly did not. Why not? Because the ground had not at all been prepared. Because, lacking rural support, the regime had only brute, naked force, and used it savagely from the begin-

* Footnote: And indeed of all those who try to identify and distil the magic ingredient that made particular Stalinist revolutions possible, most notably that of the Castroites, whose would-be emulators saw minority guerilla warfare as the magic-working thing.

ning. Because the government did not inspire confidence in those it tried to rouse against their traditional rulers and exploiters.

Such things as abolishing usury when the peasants could not do without credit and the government could provide no replacement for what it abolished, will have made the “infidel” government seem like wrecking busybodies to the peasants, not liberators bearing a viable alternative way of life.

Just as now, working to convert people to socialism, we meet our single greatest difficulty in getting people to make the mental leap that will let them imagine as feasible what we urge them to fight to win, so, but very much more so, with the Afghan peasants.

Peasants were reported refusing to take confiscated land, because that was contrary to Islam. But if they could have been inspired with faith in a different way of life, with confidence that the Kabul government knew what it was doing and could protect them from the vengeance of their traditional rulers, then most of them would, as people do, have found ways of squaring their religious conscience with doing what was most to their own advantage.

“Technical ability and thousands of armed soldiers which would enable the seizure of various centres.” That is the only thing that mattered to the PDPA. They thought it was the only thing that mattered in making their revolution.

It did prove sufficient for the taking of power in Kabul. The difference between Saur and October, however, is shown clearly when we ask: who acted in Russia and who acted in Afghanistan?

In Russia, the workers’ militia, backed by soldiers who had thrown off military discipline, seized power; in Afghanistan, power was seized by sections of the army and airforce, in which the soldiers acted under the hierarchical military discipline of their appointed officers... There is no comparison.

To the repeated question Engin puts, “Was October a coup?” the answer plainly is, no, but Afghanistan’s “Saur Revolution” most certainly was. The difference can be seen plainly in Lenin’s text, which Engin invoked, only to travesty it.

Emine Engin:

“Once the conditions for an uprising have appeared, the rest is a matter of art. This is one point on which the question of coup or revolution has been confused. In regard to the art aspect of the uprising, the Khalq organisation and its sympathisers within the army were chosen as the striking force...”

“[Khalq] drew up a definite policy taking into account the mood of the masses, the position of its enemies and lukewarm friends, etc. The revolutionary army which it formed within the army was loyal to this policy. In this respect, the revolution in Afghanistan was not a revolutionary explosion of a type which created its subjective factor in revolutionary soldiers within the army.

“The revolutionaries in the army did not fill a vacuum in the political sphere; rather they formed a revolutionary army under the political leadership of the PDPA, they performed a military function.”

Yes, but in terms of making, consolidating and implementing the “revolution”, that was everything — all there was.

What the “special relationship” of the PDPA and the coup-makers added to the military seizure of power was a social programme which required the consent and active support of millions of people but which the PDPA Stalinists thought could be enforced from above by military brute force — and by an army that was a traditional, hierarchical formation and apart from key officers was in no sense a subjectively revolutionary army.

The type of army it was, was the measure of the revolution, and

of the revolutionaries!

“When the revolution was announced over the radio hundreds of thousands of people poured into the streets all over Afghanistan. The Trotskyists have seized on this notwithstanding the fact that, although the Bolsheviks too were in the majority before the October Revolution, the overwhelming majority of the population of Russia learned of the revolution via the telegraph or over the radio where there was one!”

Democracy

Typically, she uses a general truth to obscure the concrete reality.

“To understand revolution as something in which the absolute majority of the people, organised in regular armies, strikes as one, would be nothing but the other side of a parliamentary understanding replacing the number of votes by a head count.”

The October Revolution, which was the culmination of revolutionary ferment, and the Bolshevik seizures of power, backed by the soviets, are here assimilated to a military coup with no support outside the bigger cities!

Here concern for democracy and for what Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto called winning “the battle for democracy” is equated with narrow bourgeois parliamentarianism.

Revolutionary — and minority — direct action is counterposed not only to parliamentarianism but to democracy in general, and specifically to the workers’ democracy and workers’ councils of the October Revolution. It is not clear why this should not apply everywhere, or that she does not intend it to. Engin is a Stalinist.

The Leninist thought as she did. Their commitment to the Workers’ Voice account of Afghanistan’s “revolution” implied a programme for every country, including Britain. And for Stalinist Russia and Eastern Europe too. Thus, throughout the 1980s, *The Leninist* worried obsessively about the danger of “democratic counter-revolution” there, meaning — they said it plainly — that the people would overthrow Stalinist rule.

To equate the participation of the mass of the people in a revolution with passive electoralism, as Engin does, is to show that even your opposition to parliament-worship is misconceived.

We, following Lenin, counterpose mass action to parliamentarianism, not action by an elite minority, still less by segments of the regular army!

Engin now tries to square the circle. Khalq had mass support before April and then somehow lost it? That’s the nature of revolution she explains: revolution generates counter-revolution.

“Coming to the operations of counter-revolutionary forces after the revolution, to expect anything else would again reflect a bourgeois parliamentarist understanding or the same understanding turned inside out.

“Revolution is a most intense, furious, desperate class struggle and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has taken place without civil war.”

A civil war in which a segment of the old state machine, under the command (not political leadership) of “revolutionaries”, slugs it out with most of the population, is nothing to worry about? No, because in Engin’s conception of revolution, the mass of the people have no irreplaceable role. At best they are a stage army. They are an optional extra. The Party can substitute for them. And in Afghanistan a segment of the state forces can, in seizing power, substitute for the Party.

The Tankies' Tankies

The first issue of *The Leninist*, in 1981, staked out its political ground on the Afghan question in an article called "The Paradox of Afghanistan" by James Marshall (who is the same person as Jack Conrad).

This is a précis of Emine Engin's book "The Revolution in Afghanistan", with a little John-Jackism here and there (most notably, he does not criticise Amin for softness towards Islam, as Engin does...). In the article the typical, all-pervasive characteristics of Karaoke Jack are already rampant.

He works by extrapolating from abstractions and from designated values and arbitrary attributions that do not exist in reality. He makes ropery and even ridiculous analogies — Khalq as the Bolshevik party of Afghanistan! — and then he reasons from the analogy, rather than from the actuality.

Neither in instinct nor thought has he much in common with authentic communism, working-class democracy or Marxism.

To appreciate what follows, it should be kept in mind that he writes when refugees are already numbered in the millions. The dead — who will be perhaps one and a half million before the Russians are driven out — number tens, and, maybe, hundreds of thousands. He is commenting through his fantasist's spectacles on a Russian war of conquest in which the Russians are doing the same as the Americans did in Indochina, the French did during the terrible Algerian war of independence, and the Nazis did during the Second World War in Poland and Russia.

Essentially, he is inserting "revolutionary" fantasies into events generated as epiphenomena of the Russian empire's attempt to annex Afghanistan.

"James Marshall" reports that at a recent conference of the CPGB (the real CPGB: the process in which it dissolved and J-J's group took the name has not yet happened) the Russia-supporting tankies — he calls them "the left" — gained 115 votes. That was 42 % of the delegates, for their amendment against the invasion-condemning Executive, which had 157 votes.

As he will do for another 15 or so years, he depicts a dreamworld version of British politics, where the brain-dead old tankies of the CPGB are "the left", the right-wingers (who at this point in their political evolution are acting as ideological and political powder-monkeys for the Kinnockites in the Labour Party in their war with the class-struggle left) are "centrists", and the whole wretched, withered Stalinist sect that is the CPGB is a communist party, the predestinated vanguard of the working class, towards which "Leninists" are obliged to direct their efforts to build a Leninist organisation in Britain. (The more recent *Weekly Worker's* talk about "towards a Socialist Alliance party" is a simple transposition of that old orientation onto the SWP and its periphery.)

This dreamworld picture of Britain is part of a world outlook consisting of wilful (or demented) pretence and make-believe about the Stalinist states and what J-J calls "the world communist movement".

With the great upsurge in the Labour Party following its 1979 election defeat, this is in fact one of the most important watershed periods for working-class politics in Britain since the 1920s. To stand aside as the SWP did — telling the Labour Left that nothing could be done because of "the downturn", an idea which in fact Cliff had taken from CPGBers like Eric Hobsbawm, whom ex-left Labour Party aspirant leader Neil Kinnock publicly hailed as his mentor and "the most sagacious" of Marxists — to do that showed that the SWP were unteachable sectarians. But to stand aside because you saw the CP as the working class party showed a wilful disregard for reality that indicated political pathology!

Through the 80s and long after, J-J would classify others on the left, such as ourselves, according to our attitudes to the Labour Party and to their CP. If you were in the Labour Party, ipso facto, you were a reformist and an anti-communist.

So J-J finds the tankies' large vote against the CP executive good. But he is disturbed. Right at the beginning, he differentiates himself from the other tankies, by insisting, after Emine Engin, that Afghanistan's "Saur" revolution was a popular revolution and not a coup.

"[Attitudes to] Soviet intervention dominated the debate on Afghanistan at the 1981 Party Congress [but] the nature of the Afghan revolution and the ideological differences in its leadership were buried beneath a thick layer of mythology... The left of the Congress... found themselves in the paradoxical situation where it was they, not our 'home grown' right-opportunists, who lauded right-opportunism in Afghanistan [that is, the Parchamis put in power to be their Quislings by the Russians]. They perpetrated the myth that Amin's leadership of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was 'tyrannical' and that the PDPA launched a wave of 'terrorism' against the people and even that Amin himself was [as the USSR insists] a 'CIA agent' [Thus] the left found themselves trapped in the deadly pit of centrism..."

"We Leninists fully support aid from the Soviet Union to the Afghan Revolution, both economic and military."

J-J knows the fundamental thing about the Afghan coup of 1978:

"Without the existence of the Soviet Union the revolution in Afghanistan would either have never taken place or its life would be countable in months, if not weeks..."

Next sentence: he contradicts what he has just said about the centrality of Russia for the Afghan "revolution" and asserts the opposite, that the "revolution" would have been viable and had a power and dynamic of its own, which the Russians smothered.

"This said... we consider the killing of Amin and 97 other PDPA leaders as representing the extinguishing of the flame of the revolution; this was not only a crime, but also deforms the development of the country."

The "flame of the revolution" has been extinguished. The Russians can nonetheless secure the revolution that they extinguished:

"The presence of large numbers of Soviet Army units can secure it from the clutches of imperialism".

Securing it from the people of Afghanistan may prove more difficult:

"The threat of counter-revolution welling up from the depths of society is, in the long term, a constant danger, much in the manner experienced in Poland in the last three decades."

This is a major theme of J-J's. He will warn against "democratic counter-revolution" in various Stalinist states until the final collapse of European Stalinism in 1991.

He offers an account of how the Khalqi revolution had come about:

"Despite a bourgeois 'revolution' [that is, Daud's 1973 coup] the tasks of the bourgeois revolution still remained to be carried out. Despite its tiny size it was the working class that stepped forward".

Where? When? Which working class? Marshall knows that on the facts this is utter nonsense; but don't worry, it is all a matter of definitions. He is a Stalinist "internationalist":

"It was the working class that stepped forward because of its power internationally".

Though this is terribly vague, it is a sort of acknowledgement of the centrality of the Russian dimension. In fact he doesn't mean, or pretend to mean, that the real working class in Afghanistan — or anywhere else, for that matter — did anything at all. Its substitutes, in Afghanistan and in the USSR, did it. In his reasoning, and that of his Workers' Voice mentors, substitute and working class are the same thing. There is no difference at all between the working class and a "Communist" Party like the Afghan PDPA — or, if there is a difference, it is a matter of the shortcomings of working-class spontaneity. Question that, and you sink to base economism.

"It was the working class that stepped forward because of its power internationally. Through its party, the PDPA, which was leading other oppressed sections such as the peasants [!!!], the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the minority nationalities — and championing the rights of women, it thus established hegemony over the national democratic revolution".

His perspective on the Afghan "democratic revolution" is that the Stalinist party should gain power and keep it as the revolution is taken through a succession of stages culminating in "socialism". "Hegemony" here means nothing but state power, a monopoly of force. In other articles, as Russia prepares to pull out, after a savage nine-year colonial war, he will be brutally specific on this point.

"Democracy" here has nothing in common with its meaning to us, or to Lenin. Where the Party rules, that is democracy!

The fate of the Afghan Stalinist regime was determined by the fact that though it had power in the main towns and controlled the state, the PDPA was unable to carry through even the most basic task of the "bourgeois democratic revolution", land reform, or indeed, outside a few towns, any other of the measures Marshall lists. But we are, remember, not dealing with Afghan reality, but with an ideal type of Stalinist revolution.

A question about John-Jack, his mind and his methods arises here. He writes about Khalq leading the peasants. What can be in his mind? Is he innocently and foolishly, but according to his lights honestly, reading off an assessment from the identity he has asserted to exist between the Russian Bolsheviks and Khalq and the Bolsheviks' alliance with the revolutionary Russian peasantry in October 1917? Is he utterly confused, or is he, knowingly, a blatant liar?

The fundamental fact of Afghanistan after the April coup was that the new regime had negligible support outside a very narrow base amongst sections of the intelligentsia and of the military in the towns. These facts were well known by the time James Marshall wrote his piece. For example, I told the true story in our paper, *Workers' Action*, in a series of articles in January 1980.

J-J goes on to provide a selective history of Afghan Stalinism.

"The PDPA was founded in January 1965... The PDPA split in June 1967. Parcham was led by Karmal, and advocated co-operating with the 'left' in the feudal regime; Khalq, under the leadership of Taraki (and despite his desire to conciliate with Parcham) pursued a consistent principled position, mainly as a result of the efforts of Amin."

The glorification of Amin at the expense of Taraki is a literal reproduction of Amin's own account after he had bumped off Taraki late in 1979. It is hagiography that differs from the version of the same thing you'd get in the New Communist Party's *New Worker*, glorifying Russia's puppet Karmal, only in that independent selection preceded the hagiography.

"The tailist policies of Parcham were fully exposed by the Daud coup, when four Parcham ministers were appointed to placate the masses and to provide a 'left' cover... Although Khalq had vacillated in their attitude towards Daud ...[in fact Khalq had tried to join the Daud Government] Khalq [soon] advocated the revolutionary overthrow of the feudal/bourgeois regime and its replacement by a popular alliance led by the workers [!!!] which would eventually lead the country to socialism."

The "popular alliance led by the workers" was the Turks' formula for revolution in Turkey.

Coming to describe Saur, J-J lies, misrepresents and fantasises:

"The two factions of the PDPA reunited in July [1977]... [The Khalq military organisation] was headed by Amin [and] had been steadily growing in size, effectiveness and dynamism. For Amin it represented a central part of his entire strategic plan for revolution in the country. The Armed Forces, consisting mainly of peasants and staffed by the urban petty bourgeoisie, could — with the intervention of the PDPA — be split, and a large section won to the side of revolution. Amin's work in the army was therefore central in building the revolutionary alliance of the masses, under the leadership of the working class through its party — the PDPA".

Here, in carefully not specifying which parts of the armed forces were won over, and how and why, J-J does what we have seen Engin doing, wilfully misrepresenting what happened. A Marxist,

or just someone possessing average integrity, would feel obliged to be concrete and specific here. But J-J is only spinning "the line" according to the Turks.

Neither the whole nor any part of the working class which, according to Marshall, "through its party" gained the leadership of a "revolutionary alliance of the masses", played any part at all in the event being described, the April 1978 coup. Even if one were to accept the preposterous identification of the middle and upper class PDPA with the Afghan or the international working class — and to formulate it in words is to underline how outlandish the idea is — no such "revolutionary alliance of the masses" ever came into existence!

The Afghan working class was scarcely in evidence even as a small proportion of the membership of "its party", which was in fact an organisation of the urban and military elite. Nobody could accuse the PDPA of being proletarian-oriented "economists"!

Here John-Jack has slipped, by way of constructive lies, vapid pieties and crazy substitutionism, from real Afghanistan and what actually happened there, into an imaginary Afghanistan, which is a place of ideal models and biddable fantasies. He talks about the peasants in the army in order to suggest, without saying it plainly, that it was amongst them that the PDPA worked, or mainly worked. No it wasn't!

The PDPA worked essentially amongst officers who had trained in the USSR or had become impressed with the USSR as a model of how a backward country could be developed, and wanted to try Stalinist methods. Neither PDPA, as such, nor the PDPA officers, related to the rank and file other than through the normal military hierarchy.

The idea that the PDP's relationship to the army amounted to a class alliance of workers and peasants is sheer fantasy. At every point it is contradicted by the facts — and by the course of events after April 1978.

If the PDPA really had won over a sizeable section of the Afghan army, eighty to a hundred thousand strong, by agitation in the rank and file, that would indeed have given them opportunities to influence some of the rural population. The army would then have related to the population as propagandists and agitators, not as the dumb, will-less, brutal tools of the urban elite, as people whose only recourse if they didn't want to play that part was desertion. By the time of the Russian invasion more than half the troops had done just that, deserted, sometimes in organised groups which went over to the Muslim forces fighting the PDPA and the Russians.

I wouldn't necessarily choose to put it like this, but if the PDPA's relationship to the armed forces embodied any sort of "class alliance", then it was an alliance between the PDPA and a section of the Afghan urban intellectual, technological and military elite, a "middle class" elite, to bring Stalinism to Afghanistan, and install themselves as a home-grown bureaucratic ruling class. The only time the peasant composition of the army became important was when the army began to melt away because many of the soldiers deserted when the army was set to conquer other Afghans like themselves.

But for Marshall:

"The revolutionary pressure which had been diverted in 1973 by the Daud coup reasserted itself, reaching a crescendo early in 1978."

This is pious lying (though it is not clear to me why people whose point of honour it is that they never "bow to spontaneity" need such pieties). The "revolutionary pressure" played no part in the coup. The key makers of the coup, though they were shaped politically by the impasse of Afghan society, were not responding to any "revolutionary pressure". Both the possibility and the timing of the coup depended on the state of PDPA recruitment amongst the officers. The 1977 "unification" of Khalq and Parcham makes no sense except as preparation for a coup already decided upon.

"...Taraki, Karmal and Amin were imprisoned, but not before Amin had given instructions to the Khalq followers in the Armed Forces to launch an uprising."

Emine Engin is more honest here, recounting that Amin was only placed under house arrest, within which he could and did function pretty freely. Details like that show how much of the Establishment

was already on the PDPA's side, and thus do not help J-J make his case.

"The revolution succeeded, a government dominated by PDPA members was installed, and the task of transforming society was commenced".

Now J-J comes to the "point of honour" which he will still be clinging on to 20 years later:

"Although many insisted on labelling the April Revolution a 'coup', there can be no question that it was a social revolution. When Daud took power there were only a few changes of top personnel; 50 army officers were encouraged to retire but the system remained intact. With the coming to power of the PDPA only one army General was maintained (a party member), the other 60 were either killed or sacked and the state bureaucracy was likewise thoroughly cleansed".

Even were this true, it would not indicate that Saur was not a coup, only that it was a coup made by people bent on radical change. As indeed the PDPA was.

J-J is trying to merge the idea of a working class revolution that smashes the state with the Saur coup and its aftermath. The purging that followed Saur amounts to the same thing, he implies. The purging of the state by the victorious militarist-PDPA faction after the coup to put full power in the hands of the Stalinist segment of the armed forces elite — that was the workers' revolution!

In fact any hard-fought coup, any coup where the armed forces hierarchy is divided, will be followed by a purging. That the Afghan armed forces hierarchy was indeed split was shown by the serious fighting in Kabul in April.

The illuminating questions are: what was left of the old state after the purging? Who ruled? A bureaucratic military state under the control of the Khalq held power and ruled! This was the purest of Stalinist revolutions, the changeover from one sort of ruling class to another, without even a "moment" of working class power, or any working class or even plebeian action.

In fact Khalq's purging was directed as much against Parcham as against "unreliable" non-PDPA officers. So severe was the purging that, within a year of Saur, the airforce, which in April 1978 had been one of the PDPA's strongholds, was dependent on Russian pilots to go on functioning.

"Reforms [which the PDPA announced] were met with outrage by the feudal reactionaries, who immediately began organising armed counter-revolution... Karmal and the other Parchamists had opposed the April Revolution, wanting to support Daud and the 'lefts' around him (*New Worker*, January 11, 1981)".

The "unification" of the two PDPAs in 1977 is, given their actual relationship to each other, inexplicable unless you assume that the Russians promoted it and that it was seen by both PDPAs as preparation for the coup. Parcham may indeed have been bounced into an April coup, as distinct from a planned coup in August.

"It was therefore almost inevitable that, as the forces of counter-revolution began to plunge the country into Civil War, they [Parcham] would become increasingly uneasy, shrilly demanding retreat and a new government in alliance with the 'progressive' bourgeoisie. The result of this right-opportunism was that Karmal and four other Parcham leaders were sent to positions abroad, and later removed from the Central Committee".

James Marshall is an untroubled admirer of Amin and all that he did.

"Amin — the Foreign Minister — and later the Prime Minister... insisted on maintaining an uncompromising position towards the danger of right-opportunism, and meeting counter-revolutionary terror with Red Terror. He was instrumental in setting up the Afghan Cheka — the Aqsa...

"That some in the World Communist Movement have rounded upon Amin for supporting 'terror' is a disgrace. All genuine revolutions, when faced with the threat of counter-revolution, have resorted to terror as a legitimate tactic. The Great French Revolution of 1789, the Paris Commune of 1871 (which Marx criticised for not crushing its opponents vigorously enough) and above all the October Revolution of 1917. 'To the white terror of the enemies of the Workers' and Peasants' government the workers and peasants will reply by a mass terror against the bourgeoisie and-its agents.'

(Communist Party Resolution — September 2, 1918, quoted in E H Carr — *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol 1, p.176)".

That's all right, then. Karaoke Jack has found an analogy which excuses him from dealing concretely with Afghan realities and allows him to posture and strike attitudes as an intransigent revolutionary.

In fact, the PDPA butchery was from the beginning directed against the peasants and also heavily internecine — a crazed, blood-drunk mixture of Stalin's mid-1930s purging and Robespierre's reign of terror, combined with an attempt to conquer the country people by force.

Here and in later articles, there is a repulsive relishing of terrorism and state repression. Even if we felt obliged to support such measures, decent socialists would do so reluctantly. We would not glory in it, as J-J does. To support terror even in a genuine revolution is not something socialists would ever do lightly, least of all as a piece of posturing from far away.

There are no conceivable circumstances in which we would support, still less make, a coup or would-be revolution like Saur. There are no circumstances in which we would initiate or endorse the archetypal Stalinist terror that Khalq practised in the year and a half before the Russians removed it from power. (Parcham and the Russians then started killing Khalqis. That butchery was still going on in mid-1980.) No valid comparison can be made with the Red Terror during the Russian civil war and the intertwined wars of intervention that did such terrible damage to the Russian revolution.

In fact the Khalqi terror wrecked the PDPA regime. It gutted the airforce and badly affected the army. The Stalinist political police conducted a reign of terror in the towns, against Parchamis and many other elements of the urban population. Above all, there was a reign of airborne terror in the countryside. That was the regime's first, not its last, resort.

Essentially, the difference between Khalq on one side and Parcham and the Russians on the other, was that Parcham wanted to limit what would be done in immediately transforming the country, and the tempo at which that would be done. It wanted to keep the tempo in consonance with the nature of Saur, to take account of the fact that it had been only a coup, not a popular revolution; that it had no serious rural support, and very limited positive support for the new regime even in the towns. They recognised that a slower tempo was appropriate to the limited nature of Saur.

Khalq, on the other hand, wanted to proceed as if there really had been a great popular revolution. Entirely Stalinist, they thought that force would be enough, that naked force against the population, and as much of it as would be necessary, could "engineer" the society they wanted. Ignoring the weakness of the Afghan state in relation to Afghan society, they thought that control of the state gave them sufficient force.

We need to remember exactly what is going on in Afghanistan when Karaoke Jack postures like this. What do the "intransigent" "revolutionary" posturing and the denunciation of the "reformist" Parcham amount to in the real world? He is advocating, and cheering on, Russia's "Vietnam war", the bloody Russian attempt to conquer the peoples of Afghanistan. His praise for the terrorism practised against the people by Amin, combined with his complaints about the "reformist" and conciliatory Parchamis and Russians, mean he is condemning anything other than brute force to force through measures that have not enough popular support to make them, for now, viable.

"[After] Taraki returned from the Non Aligned Conference in Havana, via Moscow... on September 16, Taraki and Amin fell out and... later Amin announced the death of Taraki. It is generally [!!!] agreed that Taraki wanted to retreat, and conciliate with the forces of reaction, which Amin refused to do...

"The Soviet support for the overthrow of Amin ["support for"? They did not support it, they did it! Here he indulges in the fantasy that Parcham is independently in power, and not the Russians], and his killing along with 97 other PDPA leaders was the result of their fear of an imperialist-backed counter-revolutionary state being established on their borders. No doubt it was considered that Taraki, and especially Amin, were pursuing a course which would only encourage such a development. The Soviet leaders, like Karmal,

seemed to believe that if the regime retreated, this would lessen the fury of black counter-revolution. This idea has, over the past two years, been proven to be erroneous, the counter-revolutionary forces have continued to take a heavy toll on the Afghan Army, and now the Soviet Army itself”.

He is avid for the victorious prosecution of Russia’s “revolutionary” Vietnam war, for the Stalinisation of one of the most backward countries in the world by way of the bloodiest conquest.

“The description of Amin by Karmal as a ‘satanic operative and tyrant’ who ‘upon the advice of US imperialists, massacred true Muslims’ and who was himself a ‘CIA agent’... has no basis in truth. Karmal used this characterisation of the Khalq leadership in order to attempt an accommodation with counter-revolution. [This is just a stupid pretence that there are real political processes still going on in Afghanistan. The Russians are fighting to subjugate the country. Any coalition of “reactionary forces” with Karmal’s Parcham will in fact help in consolidating that Russian conquest.] ‘In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful’ [Karmal] wrote to that reactionary butcher Ayatollah Imam Khomeini... But to no good, counter-revolution continued its murderous course.”

Fortunately Russia, “the world revolutionary centre”, is on the job. He gloats:

“[Counter-revolution’s] armed bands and supporters now contend, not with the terror of the Aqsa and its replacement, the KAM, but that of the helicopter gun-ships of the ‘godless’ Soviet Union on which Karmal increasingly depends...”

“Although Leninists recognise the valiant role of the Soviet Army, we cannot be blind to the right opportunism of Karmal and the other Parcham leaders, and the fact that Amin, the true leader of the April Revolution, was killed... [The PDPA] is still divided between Bolsheviks (Khalqists) and Mensheviks (Parchamists)... History demands of us a decision — Reform or Revolution, Menshevism or Bolshevism, Parcham or Khalq, Right-opportunism or Leninism. In the long term it is one or the other.”

This is stupid posturing and amateurville dogmatising. As the more intelligent tankies knew perfectly well, if the Russians who held what state power there was in Afghanistan, succeeded in consolidating their grip on the country, then its transformation into a replica of the other Stalinist states was assured. Any “compromises” with “counterrevolutionaries” willing to work with the Russians or their chief quisling would in fact be helping the Stalinist revolution consolidate itself.

All the elements of Karaoke Jack’s politics, on Afghanistan and in general, are there. The article is written in the spirit of the *New Worker*’s injunction of “No concessions! No Compromise” with the Polish working class. Jack Conrad wants full steam ahead in the subjugation of Afghanistan.

In fact Amin called off the land reform in 1979 with the transparent face-saving lie that it had been accomplished already. Whether or not the invading Russians and their puppet Karmal could have won some popular support had they prosecuted the land reform, no one can know now. Perhaps not: the polarisation was already too sharp. The historical fact is that the PDPA-Khalq failed in its land reform because of the lack of popular support among the putative beneficiaries. Posturing John-Jack’s only alternative was the stepping up of the Stalinist terror against most of the population of Afghanistan.

1986: hailing Najibullah

Move on five years. In those years indescribable horror has engulfed the peoples of Afghanistan. The extent of the slaughter is well known. So is the vast number of refugees driven out of the country, which at its peak will be something like six million, one in every three Afghans.

Western military experts have estimated that to win its war Russia would have to deploy more than double the 100,000 Russian soldiers and fliers it has committed to Afghanistan, and resort to some form of regimentation of the civilian population in order to cut off support for the anti-Russian fighters — something like the “strategic hamlets” which the Americans used in Indochina, or the pioneering concentration camps where Britain imprisoned Boer

civilians during the Boer war, inadvertently killing large numbers of them by disease.

Russia, now deep in the crisis that will lead to its collapse, has long ago indicated its desire to leave Afghanistan, if a satisfactory successor regime can be agreed upon. Talks have been going on in Geneva for years already. In mid 1986 the Russians replace Babrak Karmal as their chief quisling. This is widely seen as preparation for broadening the base of the government in preparation for Russian departure.

The new man is Najibullah, who has been head of the political police since the Russian invasion. Jack Conrad sees Najibullah, the man of vigorous police action against counter revolution, as a possible Amin for the new period.

The Leninist, June 1, 1976, Jack Conrad: Afghanistan after Karmal.

“The replacement of Babrak Karmal as General Secretary of the PDPA... has excited little comment in the communist movement... The new General Secretary, Dr. Najibullah has not denounced Karmal... It could well be true that Karmal [retired] for health reasons. Yet it must be admitted our world movement, especially the ruling parties, have a record of getting esteemed comrades to step down for health reasons one month, only to brand them as revisionists the next. We also do not exactly have a custom of comrades retiring at 65.

“Karmal is only 57. Most leading comrades in our movement, political strength permitting, have stayed in their jobs till they died. This is not necessarily a good thing. But the tradition of Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Tito, Brezhnev, Andropov, Hoxha — the tradition of replacing leading comrades only after they have died — is more or less a universal one.....

“The revolution can count on growing support, as illustrated by the 200,000 or so who demonstrated recently in Kabul against the US attack on Libya. ...[But even so] Comrade Najibullah recently estimated that the PDPA government only controlled 35% of the country outside the towns. [In fact far, far less].

“With this in mind we can only welcome Najibullah’s declaration that he will ‘reinforce the armed forces fighting the rebels’.”

J-J is still a pining Khalqi, still pretending that it makes a difference whether Parchamis or Khalqis have nominal power where the Russians have direct physical control.

“Although Karmal’s opportunist grouping, Parcham, dominates government ministries, it only makes up about 40% of the PDPA’s membership. Remarkably, the revolutionary Khalq, once led by Hafizullah Amin, retains much of its strength. For those who so easily branded Amin a CIA agent, this should provide food for thought.

“These same elements blamed Amin and Khalq for causing the counter-revolution because of the extent of their land and other reforms, and because of their tough attitude to the counterrevolutionaries. They have been proved wrong....

“The Soviet Army’s intervention in 1979 ensured counterrevolution could not win, but it also fanned tribal xenophobia; the killing of Amin and 97 other Khalq leaders put in power pliant opportunists, but weakened the PDPA forces; many of the Khalq led PDPA government’s reforms — like teaching girls to read and write — were not liked by feudal reactionaries, but Karmal’s holding back some of the early plans for reform has proved no answer to counterrevolution”.

But there is reason for hope. The new man, Najibullah, used to run the police. He is a man in the vigorous tradition of Amin. Amin is posthumously being vindicated.

“The fact that the new PDPA General Secretary, Najibullah, has a reputation for giving no mercy to the forces of counterrevolution, and there are suggestions that the pace of reform will be increased, vindicates much of what Amin and his Khalq comrades did between April 1978 and December 1979. It’s about time his and their reputations were rehabilitated.”

The August 29th *Leninist* carried an unsigned article (whose content overlaps with the earlier piece, so that it is plainly by the same author). Above a picture of Amin are the words, “No CIA agent”. and under the picture: “It’s official”.

“The July 16 public meeting of the Harrow *Morning Star* Readers and Supporters Group listened with rapt attention to Mohammed

Arif, the Secretary of the Afghanistan Friendship Society who said: 'In my view Amin was not a CIA agent'. Centrist mouths dropped open in disbelief... We have, as our readers will know, been attacked time and time again for [saying] this. Yet what sort of CIA agents carry out a revolution?

"For the simple fact is that it was under the effective leadership of Amin that Khalq cells organised and carried out the April 1978 revolution which overthrew Daud and the feudal/bureaucratic regime...

"When the revolutionary situation came to a head in 1978 the forces of revolution were prepared. In response to the Daud regime's attempt to crush the PDPA, through assassinating some leaders and arresting others like Taraki, Karmal and Amin, the Khalq cells in the army immediately set in motion the plans Amin had drawn up for a nation-wide uprising.

"The revolution succeeded and a PDPA dominated government began the task of transforming society. The old state machine was decapitated and replaced by what was in essence the dictatorship of the proletariat. Of course Afghanistan was an extremely backward country. This meant that the order of the day was not directly socialist but democratic tasks.

"The far-reaching land reform, the literacy campaign and the outlawing of the selling of women were seen as the first steps of a revolution which would in due course go uninterruptedly to socialism".

This is a last-reduction, no-frills version of the Stalinist revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat is state power held for the working class by people who will "in due course go uninterruptedly to socialism".

"The growth of counterrevolution in Afghanistan worried the Soviet leaders. They knew nothing [!!!] of the PDPA plans to make revolution in 1978... Failing to understand their own revolutionary history they appear to have thought the PDPA's leaders and their sweeping reforms were the problem, not the counterrevolution.

"[Russian] pressure... apparently lay behind Taraki and Amin violently falling out in September 1979. Amin's taking over as PDPA General Secretary meant there was no fundamental change in the course of the revolution. [In fact the regime announced that the land reform, which in fact had been an economic disaster, was ending because it had already been implemented...] In the eyes of the Soviet leadership this could only fuel the passion of the counterrevolutionaries (for whom Amin personified the hated reforms and the feared red terror).

"It is well known that both Taraki and Amin had made repeated requests for Soviet fraternal assistance. But when at last it came, it tragically saw the installation of Karmal and the killing of Amin and 97 other PDPA leaders. Far from stemming the tide of counterrevolution this gave it a new lease of life....

"True to their diplomatic internationalism centrists in Britain and elsewhere repeated the foul slanders against Amin with all the conviction of political virgins. Because of this the statement of Mohammed Arif could only but be acutely embarrassing to the *Morning Star* supporters at the Harrow meeting...

"Of course, Leninists unconditionally defend the Afghan revolution and support Soviet assistance against counterrevolutionaries; but does that mean suspending our critical faculties? Certainly not. We, unlike the NCP, the Straight Leftists and Uncle Tom Durkin and all centrists, will not be an uncritical cheerleader of comrade Taraki, ...then comrade...er... Amin, then... er.. um... Karmal (who's been shuffled into the background) and now...comrade...Najibullah ...only to slander them the next day.

"We call on the Afghan Party and all communists to openly acknowledge that Amin and the 97 PDPA leaders have been the victims of slander. Their names should be cleared and those responsible for ordering their deaths exposed..."

1988: denouncing Moscow's "sell-out"

Move on another two years. Russia is on the verge of abandoning its attempt to subjugate the peoples of Afghanistan. The war has helped shatter the self-confidence of the USSR's ruling class.

In an editorial in *Socialist Organiser* I wrote that those on the

Trotskyist left who had backed or defended the Russians should now logically denounce the Russians for betraying the "Afghan Revolution". I thought I was brandishing a bit of *reductio ad absurdum* at them. In fact *The Leninist* did just that!

In March 1988 *The Leninist* carried a one-page article by Jack Conrad entitled: "Afghanistan: no sell-out!" It had the following words above the headline:

"If Soviet armed forces are withdrawn the forces of counterrevolution, and their imperialist backers, will have scored a major victory. The forces of progress will have suffered a major reverse".

The article went on:

"Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze, has offered to begin the pull out of all Soviet forces from Afghanistan starting on May 1".

Jack Conrad is beside himself with revolutionary indignation!

"What a way to mark international workers' day! [!!!] A Soviet withdrawal under present conditions can only be considered a sell-out of the Afghan Revolution and a betrayal of communism.

"Soviet withdrawal... is on the cards... Now is the time to speak openly".

He is not having it!

"Afghanistan is in the front line of the struggle against reaction and imperialism. Until the forces of counterrevolution are crushed, until they represent no danger to the gains of the 1978 Saur (April) Revolution, there should be no talk about a Soviet withdrawal. Shevardnadze should be told in no uncertain terms: Afghanistan — no sellout!"

J-J does not forget to beat his chest like the Pharisee at prayer, insisting that he is not like other sinners: that is always a big component of articles in *The Leninist*.

"Proletarian internationalism demands this. True proletarian internationalism, as opposed to diplomatic internationalism of toadies at the top of organisations like the NCP, Straight Left and the CCG, will not hail treachery.

"Recalling the humiliation of the US in Vietnam, Soviet officials are quoted as saying, 'We will leave Afghanistan, but we will not leave clinging to the skids of helicopters lifting off the roof of our embassy.' Maybe, but clearly the Gorbachev leadership has in mind a Vietnam in reverse.

"The Afghan Revolution is considered reversible and desertable. There have even been suggestions that the monarchy — overthrown in a palace coup in 1973 — will be restored. This is totally counter to the spirit of communism".

Jack Conrad, it will be remembered has always insisted — though not always without self-contradiction — that there was a genuine revolution in Afghanistan, entirely viable with a bit of judicious outside help from the "working class" who hold power in the USSR. In fact it is all posturing, attitudinising and play-acting. He knows perfectly well how things stand. Withdrawing Russian troops means "reversing" the "revolution".

"Moreover Soviet troops and citizens might well retreat in good order but can the same be said of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan? Frankly, no!... All PDPA members and supporters are being placed in mortal danger. The forces of counterrevolution shoot communists on sight. These barbarians take no prisoners.

"Without Soviet troops how long will an internationally agreed interim government last? Months or weeks? How long will the forces of reaction take to seek out and exterminate the 'infidels'? No wonder there have been rumours of plans to uproot the entire PDPA membership and resettle them in Uzbekistan or one of the other Soviet central Asian republics.

"This might save the PDPA membership but not the gains of the Saur Revolution. Women will be re-enslaved, all working-class organisations, such as trade unions will be destroyed..."

He means the police-state "Labour Front", the pseudo unions run by the Afghan regime, as by all Stalinist regimes, to regiment the working class and prevent the emergence of real working class self-organisation. Towards real working-class organisation, whether Solidarnosc in Poland or new unions in the USSR, he will never, until after the collapse of Stalinism, cease to be vehemently hostile.

"... A new Iran, ruled by reactionaries and clerics, will emerge from the chaos. Abandoning the Afghan people to such a fate is criminal. These are harsh words. Nevertheless they have to be said".

Better by far to continue killing Afghans, to push the casualty figures up beyond the one and a half million level, and to drive out another one, two or three million to join the six million already outside the state's borders. The Russians, unlike the reactionary indigenous people in Afghanistan's countryside, do not discriminate against women. They napalm, strafe and set mines to kill men women and children without distinction.

J-J's belief, or pretended belief, in the Afghan revolution as a viable project has collapsed in the panic the Russian withdrawal has unleashed in his little make-believe, posturing revolutionary soul. But he hasn't stopped pretending and play-acting: he now pretends that he is talking about a real communist movement and a real communist government in Moscow, albeit an "opportunistic" one.

"The Soviet Union has no right to horse-trade the Afghan revolution. It is a living revolution [in his indignation, he has forgotten the picture of the unviability of this "living revolution" which he has just painted], not a piece of real estate. The Afghan Revolution was not facilitated by the presence of the Soviet Army. The revolution was the work of Afghan revolutionaries organised in the Khalqi wing of the PDPA. A proletarian dictatorship was established through local daring and initiative. The Khalqi won power, they were not given it.

"The Afghan Revolution was a great victory for the world's working class. It lit a flame which pointed the way forward for the working people of all backward capitalist countries. In its own long term interests the Soviet Union should continue its defence of this gain of the world revolution. And given its enemies it certainly needs the most determined and selfless defence..."

As if to restore his own confidence, he pauses once more to admire himself in the mirror of his own polemic, by contrasting what he is saying with what lesser breeds say.

"Groups in Britain such as the SWP, *Socialist Organiser*, the WRP and the RCP have refused to unconditionally defend the Afghan Revolution against the forces of reaction. This shows they are trapped in a reactionary Little England rut. Such sects pay lip service to world revolution but turn their backs on its living reality.

"Afghanistan stands in the front line of the world revolution. Because of this it is beholden on all internationalists to stand four square with it in its life and death struggle with imperialism and black reaction..."

He is so indignant that he pauses in his Lenin-posturing to paraphrase Trotsky's words in the Manifesto of the 1920 Congress of the Communist International.

"Those who refuse to do so should be branded with infamy, if not a bullet".

He now reaches for the support of Emine Engin's text, and decides to brandish their common shibboleth in the face of the unbelievers. It was a revolution, not a coup! His panic at the thought of the Russians calling off the war in which they have already killed one and a half million Afghans might have suggested to a lesser man, or an honest and politically serious one, that he has got things wrong somewhere along the way.

"A convenient fig leaf for abstentionism has been found through dismissing the Afghan revolution as little more than a 'Third World coup'. This arrogant chauvinistic nonsense is, of course, a cynical self-serving lie.

"A military or palace coup reflects a struggle within the existing state, not a struggle against it. The term 'coup' in the scientific sense, should only be used when dealing with an insurrection launched by a narrow circle of conspirators or a bunch of stupid romantics. Such attempts can only leave the masses left in passivity.

"A genuine revolution can, it is true, take the outward form of a coup. Obviously revolutionary ideas can gain considerable influence in, say, the armed forces, from which certain elements can seize the leadership of a living revolution.

"This is what happened when in 1952 the Free Officer movement and Nasser led the overthrow of the British backed king in Egypt, and in Ethiopia where the army struck the final blow against the wobbling Haile Selassie regime and installed the Derg in power".

A couple of sentences are garbled in *The Leninist's* text at this point.

"The revolution in Afghanistan was not, though, led by petty bourgeois forces".

So that's the difference! Saur was a military coup like the others — but with "working-class", not "petty-bourgeois", military coup-makers!

What made the difference? Here Jack Conrad admits, pretty plainly, that the PDPA coup-makers were based in the officer corps. How did they manage nonetheless to be a working-class party?

The ideas in their collective head determined what they were. By way of all-transmuting ideas, a magic is worked that is more astounding than the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ while to the naked eye it retains the appearance of ordinary bread and ordinary wine. Substitutionism makes everything right.

"There was a genuine working class vanguard party, the PDPA. This separates the Afghan Revolution from revolutions like those in Egypt and Ethiopia... It must be put into the same category as the October Revolution (which was itself dismissed as a coup by a whole gabble of petty-bourgeois dilettantes)".

In one article of his recent seven-part series in *Weekly Worker* Jack Conrad is very scathing against Martin Thomas's comment that the CPGB seems to see Afghanistan as the only "real" revolution of the 20th century, after 1917 — that they are not far off being an "Afghan" equivalent of the "Albanian" neo-Stalinist sects of the 1980s — but here Conrad says plainly that Saur was of the same type as October 1917. He does not say in so many words that Saur and 1917 belong together in a class above all other overturns of the 20th century, but no other overturn has ever been lauded by the CPGB in the same terms as those two. To sustain this wilful idiocy about Afghanistan J-J, following Engin, will not hesitate to diminish October.

For J-J, Taraki and Amin did in Afghanistan what Lenin and the Bolsheviks did in Russia.

"The proof of the pudding was in the make up of the revolutionary government — it was headed by Taraki, the Party's general secretary, and besides him the overwhelming majority of the first Revolutionary Council consisted of Party members. [When is a coup not a coup? When it puts a "vanguard Party" in power. The test of experience leads to the conclusion that it is not a coup, but a vanguard party making a popular revolution. The "vanguard party" can bestow this status, retrospectively, on a coup.] To call the Afghan Revolution a coup is to call the October Revolution a coup.

"The Khalqi forces in the PDPA, like the Bolsheviks, organised sympathetic sections of the army as the... cutting edge of the revolution. On April 27 1979 an insurrection was launched on the instructions of Hafizullah Amin, one of the main leaders of the Party, according to a plan he had previously worked out within the Khalqi wing of the PDPA.

"The plan worked. The revolution smashed the old state and ushered in a new order, a dictatorship of the proletariat.

"Lenin said that after a revolution the forces of reaction, intensify their efforts 'tenfold', he also said that 'not a single great revolution in history has taken place without civil war' (CW Vol 26 pp 118-19)."

Therefore a coup that generates a civil war ceases on that account to be coup and becomes a great revolution?

"This is a profound truth. Because the Afghan revolution was a genuine revolution the forces of reaction, the aristocratic tribal leaders, the bourgeoisie and the clergy flung themselves into launching a bloody civil war".

Again, J-J deduces his "proof" of what Saur was, and that it wasn't a coup, from the reaction to it and to what the PDPA tried inappropriately to do with the power they had seized!

"They had nothing to lose, everything to regain.

"For communists there can be no question of surrender in the face of counterrevolution. What must be done is to win the civil war using all the possibilities that state power offers the proletariat.

"During the bitter civil war in Russia following the October Revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not entertain any notion whatsoever of handing back power to either the Tsarists or the bourgeoisie. They expropriated the expropriators, gave the land to the tillers and organised the commanding heights of the economy to

supply the heroic Red Army with the wherewithal to crush White Terror with Red Terror”.

In fact the Red Terror was the work of the Cheka, not the Red Army.

“This was the programme of Amin — the true leader of the revolution. After the removal of Taraki and with Amin at the helm, true there were some centrist waverings and unprincipled compromises but no talk of surrender. [This hides the fact, though he may not know it, that Amin “retreated”.] Like the October Revolution, the Afghan Revolution introduced sweeping socio-economic changes; all important industry was nationalised [in fact, most of it was already state controlled], land reform was organised, and the social standing [legal standing] of women was given a tremendous boost with literacy classes and a ban on the selling of brides.

“Those who say that these changes went too far, too fast, only betray their own opportunist cowardice”.

The objective problems are solved with a bit of attitudinising from afar — and after the prolonged slaughter and drivings out...

“If anything it was the other way round. The pace of change was too slow. The revolution had to move fast if it was to win the loyalty of the peasantry which made up the majority of the population.

“As to the charge that the revolution was too violent, this is pious moralising. Revolution is not a game. The PDPA had to reply to counterrevolutionary war with revolutionary war. This was correct and necessary, as was the call for international proletarian solidarity”.

The foolishness of thinking he knew what passed between the PDPA and the Russians! J-J may or may not know that the bourgeois military experts calculated that to conquer Afghanistan the Russians would have to commit two or even three times the forces in Afghanistan, proportionately step up the slaughter, and round up most of the population to surround them with fences. Why, in the name of what, should socialists want this to happen?

“In the name of “revolution”? If so it is a revolution from above against the people, a revolution whose *modus operandi* is the conquest by foreign forces of the people who, if they survive, are to benefit from the revolution. It is an oxymoronic revolution — it has nothing in common with either workers’ or bourgeois-democratic revolution. Nothing at all. It is substitutionism far gone towards outright lunacy. But Jack Conrad is wallowing in it, relishing himself for not — at the safe distance of Britain — flinching from the lunatic logic of it. The thinking here belongs to the same political waveband as the Posadists calling on the USSR to start the Third World War in the interests of progressing the world revolution.

“It is an indictment of the leadership of the CPSU that it only supported the Afghan Revolution in a half-hearted way. Tragically the Khalqi leadership had to ask thirteen times [how could he possibly know?] for large scale Soviet military assistance... Amin was thought of as nothing but a wayward satrap. Because of this when Soviet troops entered Afghanistan they were used to overthrow his leadership”.

That is a delicate way of describing the Russian seizure of Kabul, kicking aside the government and installing its own puppets!

“He [Amin] and 97 leaders of the PDPA were butchered in cold blood and a pliant Parcham regime fronted by Babrak Karmal was installed. This was a real coup, an opportunist, coup”.

Ah!

“Karmal branded [Amin] a ‘satanic operative and tyrant’, who was a ‘CIA agent’ under whose orders Aqsa — the Afghan Cheka — ‘massacred true Muslims’...”

“The subsequent removal of Karmal (on ‘health grounds’), the offer by Dr Najibullah to replace the ‘non-Marxist’ PDPA government with one of ‘national reconciliation’ is the logical outcome of opportunism and the Soviet leadership’s putting the pursuit of a non-revolutionary ‘peace’ above the interests of the revolution (the only way to guarantee a lasting peace). Such a combination can only lead to rotten compromises with the forces of counterrevolution.

“In *The Leninist* No.2 I wrote that ‘we consider the killing of Amin and 97 other PDPA leaders as representing the extinguishing of the flame of the revolution’. I also said that unless this was recognised and rectified ‘the revolution will either have to suffer

major amputations or face death.’ It brings me no pleasure to have been proved right.

“Soviet willingness to desert Afghanistan must be put in context, the context of world revolution. The fact is that the world revolution has reached a particularly complex interregnum.

“The official world communist movement is disintegrating, and as for the monolithic unity (albeit imposed with an authoritarian iron hand) of the world socialist system, it has long gone. For all Gorbachev’s talk of unity in diversity what we are seeing today is the decay of living socialism from within (we only need look at Rumania, Poland, Hungary, China and the turn to ‘market socialism’ in the USSR to see that) and a growing danger of the erosion of the socialist world at its periphery, at its weakest links. And what is Afghanistan if not a weak link of socialism?

“The fact that this is happening is primarily due to the growing [only now?] influence of opportunism. This is particularly dangerous in the Soviet Union. It is the world’s revolutionary centre and hence commands tremendous influence and prestige [in fact, power]. Gorbachev sees its interests in narrow, purely national, terms. [When, since the early days of the Stalinist counter revolution was it different? In Jack Conrad’s opinion, evidently, it was different until quite recently, in the days of Stalin or even Brezhnev]. Hence, where the Soviet Union was once prepared to selflessly and heroically fight for the world revolution, now faced with a US imperialism set on a redivisionist World War III winning war drive, Gorbachev has turned to appeasement”.

Again, Jack Conrad is not too far from Posadas! Talk of imminent World War Three was prominent in *The Leninist*. It was used to explain Gorbachev and the USSR’s turn from a supposed heroic (recent!) past to “appeasement”.

There is in all this a massive dimension of playacting, of suspended disbelief, of telescoping the history of the USSR so as to pretend that what was true when the working class ruled, before the new ruling class seized power more than sixty years before, remained true. In fact other articles in *The Leninist* showed that they were passably knowledgeable about the real USSR. The pretence was not ignorance. It was either wilful playacting or paranoia.

“In the name of ‘new political thinking’ and perestroika [Gorbachev] treacherously used the platform of the 27th Congress of the CPSU to offer the US cooperation in defusing so-called international ‘hot spots’. I.e. countries in the forefront of the world revolutionary struggle, like Afghanistan, Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua and South Africa. If the Afghan Revolution is allowed to go under, which revolution will be next?

“The Soviet Union’s long term interests do not lie in using living revolutions as bargaining counters to appease US imperialism. No, the world’s revolutionary centre can only become invincible through the victory of revolutions in one ‘hot spot’ after another. If Gorbachev refuses to recognise such a basic Marxist-Leninist truth he should go, and go quickly...”

Russian withdrawal a “betrayal”?

But the Moscow bureaucrats would not listen to Jack Conrad. The prophet was not without honour except amongst his own people — the dastards-yet-comrades who had seized control of the “world’s revolutionary centre”.

“Ian Mahoney” in *The Leninist*, 23 May 1988:

“Revolutions are not for sale...”

“On May 15, Soviet forces began to pull out from Afghanistan. This paper has consistently fought against this treachery. For there is little doubt that the withdrawal of Soviet troops will leave the revolutionary People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan government in Kabul severely weakened. The 40,000 strong Afghan armed forces [he doesn’t attempt to explain what has happened to over half the Afghan armed forces since April 1978...] will soon lose the support of 150,000 Soviet troops, their high grade technical equipment, their helicopter gunships and their fighter aircraft. This can only be a severe blow to the morale of these troops. They have been shamelessly deserted.

“Thus, not only has the military balance shifted — perhaps decisively — towards the counterrevolutionary barbarians of the vari-

ous Mujahedin factions: their brutish jihad has been bolstered morally by what is a Soviet betrayal.

“Under Gorbachev [unlike what things were like under his glorious predecessors like Brezhnev, Khrushchev and Stalin?], the Soviet Party has begun to treat living revolutions as little more than pieces of marketable real estate, bargaining counters to be traded with the US imperialists in exchange for paper agreements on arms...

“The savage irony of Gorbachev’s willingness to betray revolutions in other countries in order to appease imperialism should not escape us. Whatever temporary respite he wins by giving in to imperialism’s rapacious demands, it can never be satisfied.

“Imperialism’s redivisionist hunger is ultimately aimed at the world revolutionary centre — the USSR itself. Thus, objectively, Gorbachev and the opportunists who head the Communist Party of the Soviet Union effectively undermine defence of the Soviet Union, by their Judas deals. Defence of the USSR begins in Afghanistan...”

And why? because it is...

“... the frontline of the world revolution!

The undignified scramble of the Soviet leadership to high tail it out of Kabul, and to hell with its revolution, is a stark illustration of the extent of the political degeneration the Soviet Party has undergone since Lenin’s day”.

Mahoney is here akin to very old people who are said to have a good memory for the distant past, and some awareness of now, but are amnesiac about the decades in between!

“Concomitant to this has been the progressive separation of the interests of the Soviet Union from the world revolution...”

In fact this “progressive separation”, and the qualitative change from one attitude to its opposite, which began in the 1920s, is now 60, or even 65 years in the past. Mahoney’s declamations rest on wilful make-belief. And on the choice to interpret the Russian seizure of half of Europe during the Second World War not as the Russian imperialist aggrandisement that it was, but as an expansion of the workers’ revolution.

Some of the make-believe may be a romanticised expression of Jack Conrad and Mark Fischer’s personal experience. For the first decade or 15 years of Jack Conrad’s political life the USSR was again, as in the 1940s, engaged in a sort of international expansion. Until it invaded Afghanistan that was usually done via proxies and via linking up with initially non-Stalinist forces.

“As Lenin pointed out, the Russian revolution itself was possible not simply because of the contradictions internal to the Tsarist regime: the victory of the working class in Russia was above all a product of the contradictions arising from the world economy... The existence of the world economy poses the necessity for rational planning on a world wide basis. Capitalist imperialism represents the barrier to this historically necessary development: to remove it requires a world revolution”.

So far this passage is an example of the frequent practice in *The Leninist* of eclectically taking on board parts of Trotsky’s politics and garbling them. Here Trotsky’s insistence on a world perspective is combined with the make-believe that the advance of Stalinism — which, in Eastern Europe and China, imposed models of autarkic economic development, with each state developing its own heavy industry complex — had anything to do with breaking the limitations imposed on the productive forces by capitalist state rivalries.

Having taken his stand on part of Trotsky’s critique of mid-1920s Stalinism, Mahoney hastens to separate himself from the “Trotskyites” by endorsing and reiterating the Stalinists’ founding dogma: socialism in one country. He probably thinks — he says so now, anyway — that he does not subscribe to socialism in one country, and that the passage just cited expresses the opposite of socialism in one country. He is mistaken.

His view of how things stand is possible only if you miss the nodal point of the mid 1920s controversy about socialism “in one country”. The central point wasn’t about “one country”. The USSR was in fact, as the Stalinists of the 1930s fervently boasted in such books as “The Socialist Sixth of the World”, by the “Red Dean” of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson, a giant cluster of countries and nationalities, covering a sixth of the globe. After the proclamation

of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Stalinist realm covered a full third of the world.

The fundamental point of Trotsky’s opposition to socialism in one country was not that the USSR was not big enough, but that socialism could not be built up from backwardness, in prolonged competition with capitalism. That idea, Trotsky rightly insisted was a reversion to the central idea of the pre-Marx utopian socialists.

Stalin did not proclaim the end of attempts to spread “the revolution” to other countries. He denounced Trotsky’s “lies” when Trotsky pointed out the anti-revolutionary implications of socialism in one country. As it turned out, Stalin was ready, when the chance presented itself, to grab as much extra territory as he could.

After Russia’s post World War Two expansion, “orthodox” post-Trotsky Trotskyists such as the young Ernest Mandel triumphantly proclaimed that Stalin himself had refuted in deeds his old theory of socialism in one country. Missing the point, they tumbled into unwitting acceptance of the fundamentals of socialism in one country — the “utopian” absurdity that the comparatively still backward Stalinist states could by competition with capitalism on a world scale outproduce and outstrip it. This would happen in an unfolding “World Revolution” whose manifestation was the expansion (in varying ways) of Stalinism — and which would of course need to be cleaned up, in some Stalinist states requiring a full-scale “political revolution” to complete the “process”.

The WV idea, picked up by *The Leninist*, that the USSR was “the world revolutionary centre”, was a variant of the same train of thought. The WV/*Leninist* variant was a preposterous one, rooted in ascribing to more or less every Communist Party a character it did not have and a role which it was not playing.

Comparatively lucid depictions of day-to-day reality of the “opportunist” CPs went hand in hand with a fetishisation of a supposed underlying revolutionary essence in those parties, so that even such a miserable, politically right-wing nonentity as the British Stalinist party, the CPGB, could be seen as the preordained “vanguard party of the working class”. This delusion-mongering could go on right up to the collapse of the USSR, when *The Leninist* called on the “communists” in the CPSU to act for “communism”.

Jack Conrad (or rather his Turkish mentors) thought that because they advocated the spread of (Stalinist) revolution, they thereby rejected socialism in one country. In fact they continued to advocate its fundamental tenet: that socialism could be built up in backward countries — in the Afghan case, one of the most backward on earth! — bypassing capitalism rather than building on its contradictions and potentialities.

So:

“Capitalist imperialism represents the barrier to this historically necessary development: to remove it requires a world revolution...”

— but this dilemma is to be resolved not by working-class action, building on the achievements of capitalism, but through revolutions which are “working-class” by attribution or decree, made by Stalinist parties in backward countries which they will then develop “socialistically” by force.

“Of course this does not happen all at once. Revolutions break out first and foremost at imperialism’s weakest links, not those where capitalism is most advanced. This forces backward and medium developed capitalist countries to the forefront of the world revolution; a phenomenon full of problems and contradictions but nonetheless it is precisely revolutions in such countries which have dominated the history of our 20th century.

“For dogmatists whose ‘Marxism’ is a crude mechanical restatement of abstractions, building socialism in such countries is impossible. This was the view of the Mensheviks in Russia. They argued that because capitalism was so undeveloped, the revolution in Russia would have to be a bourgeois one, and take place under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. Only after many years of capitalist development — and the growth of the size of the working class — would it be possible to pose the question of socialism.

“Lenin took an opposite view. His genius lay in recognising that the proletariat could — indeed had to — take the lead in the ‘bourgeois revolution’, not in alliance with the bourgeoisie, but instead with the peasant masses against landlord and capitalist alike. Having done this the proletariat should not hand power to the bour-

geoisie — become a party of extreme opposition as the Mensheviks advocated — but fight to maintain their hegemony over the revolution from the position of governmental power...”

Note that — Mahoney, not Lenin — “from the position of governmental power”...

“... and take it uninterruptedly from the tasks of democracy (the bourgeois revolution) to the tasks of socialism. This was the programme of Bolshevism”.

It is the Stalinist gloss on it. Just as he misses out decades between Lenin and Gorbachev, confusing the workers’ revolution with the Stalinist counterrevolution, so also Mahoney misses here the decades that Lenin saw between the bourgeois and socialist revolutions, decades certainly not filled with the “governmental power” of a party, working-class by self-decree, which will eventually deliver “socialism” to the people. The account here is an ideological construct, a product of Mahoney’s “Stalinite” bias against Trotsky’s permanent revolution.

“There are many groups that pay lip service to the Russian revolution but stand against the living revolutions of today, like Afghanistan, which have followed in its wake. These groups include the reformists of social democracy and the centrists of the right moving ‘official’ communist movement in the imperialist countries, also the entire spectrum of the decomposing Trotskyite milieu. From *Socialist Organiser* to Workers’ Power, from the WRP to the Spartacist League, the Afghan revolution was dismissed as an army coup, nothing more and nothing less...”

This is wilful lying in which a partial truth — all those groups, together with all rational observers, save only the WV/*Leninist*, did define April 1978 as a coup — is used to tell a big factional lie about Workers’ Power and the Spartacist League. They were avid supporters of the Stalinist coup and of the Russian invaders!

The Spartacist paper, *Workers’ Vanguard*, had the front page headline “Hail The Red Army” — hail it for invading Afghanistan! Even more extraordinarily, Workers’ Power, then the possessor of an undernourished version of a state-capitalist theory of Stalinism, which it was “discussing” abandoning, responded to the invasion of Afghanistan by taking a sudden leap across the divide to proclaim its sudden certainty that the USSR was a degenerated workers’ state.

I won’t undertake to depict the thought processes that led them to see the invasion of Afghanistan as evidence that Russia was a workers’ state, but it was Afghanistan that made their minds up for them. Possibly it was that in the real world the Russian-imperialist invasion of Afghanistan was strong evidence against any “workers’ state” description, so that they had either to change course from their half-finished journey towards the “degenerated workers’ state” view, or else take a hysterical leap of faith in order to land safe on the other side of the theoretical divide.

For practical politics, during Russia’s colonial war in Afghanistan, groups like the Spartacists and Workers’ Power were identical to *The Leninist*, failing only to persuade themselves that the April coup was not a coup but, really, a social revolution akin to October.

The polemical dishonesty and sectish use of the Revolution-not-coup dogma which they had made their own to distinguish themselves from their near co-thinkers — as they use it now to distinguish themselves from AWL — is sadly typical of the standards of *The Leninist* and the *Weekly Worker*.

Mahoney now shows that he is not afraid to seem ridiculous in a good cause:

“For all these opportunists the idea that there was a dictatorship of the proletariat in a country where there is ‘no proletariat to speak of’ is an absurdity. We disagree”.

Mahoney, having explained the miracle of how the bread of the April coup was transformed into the body and blood of a revolution akin to October, will now show how there could be a dictatorship of the proletariat in Afghanistan even though there was “no proletariat to speak of”.

This “dictatorship of the proletariat” was a product not of the Afghan, or any other, working class, but of “the world communist movement” and of the PDPA. They had the power to transmute the officers who made the coup under PDPA leadership into a “van-

guard” workers’ party and the Afghanistan where they had seized power into a dictatorship of the proletariat. The PDPA was the working class which otherwise did not exist vigorously enough “to speak of”. You will travel a lot further before you will find a clearer, innocently undisguised, version of Stalinist substitutionism:

“The nature of the state is determined not by the numbers a class possesses, but its leadership of society through the agency of state power. The Afghan working class ruled Afghanistan through the PDPA. It was a product of the world communist movement and in 1978 it was led by genuine revolutionaries who made a revolution”.

More:

“We say to deny the genuine proletarian nature of the Afghan revolution is to deny the Russian revolution”.

So there was no working class to speak of in Russia, too? The revolution was working-class only by way of the Bolsheviks declaring themselves to represent the working class?

Mahoney changes the subject! He had been discussing how Saur could be a genuine working-class revolution, creating “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, given that the actual Afghan working class played no role in the seizure of power. (Nor for that matter did the party, as a party, other than to activate the officers who acted as a substitute for the “vanguard party” which in turn substituted for the working class...) He had slipped from the question of the Afghan workers’ role in Saur, and in the PDPA regime, into a discussion of the numerical weight of the working class in Afghan society. He will now slip a further notch along the same trajectory. Because the workers were a small minority of Russian society when they made October, the proportion of workers or their actual role in the transfer of power means nothing at all!

“True, prior to the 1978 April revolution, the total number of Afghan workers did not exceed 90,000 out of a total population of some 17 million”.

To Mahoney, this only leads to the question: so what?

“But then, if we only recognise the possibility of a proletarian dictatorship where this class constitutes over 50% of the population we would not only deny the class nature of the October Revolution but [also that of the] Chinese revolution, where the proletariat consisted of perhaps 2% of the population and played no direct role in the protracted revolutionary struggle led by Mao Zedong”.

The working class was maybe one-sixth of the population in Russia in the October Revolution, and the majority in the big cities where the decisive revolutionary struggles took place. The revolution was a taking of power by the workers’ councils, elected, recallable, democratic.

But for Mahoney (taking his figure, which is probably on the high side) the Afghan working class, which was about half of one per cent of the population and played no part in the revolution at all, has power.

The candour here about the actual Afghan workers playing no part contrasts strongly with Jack Conrad’s smartass juggling with figures on demonstrations in his recent articles.

But Mahoney reasons about Afghanistan not by dealing with Afghanistan, but by reasoning about something which he says is analogous.

In fact there is nothing closely analogous to Afghanistan even in the history of Stalinist-“communist” revolution. All the real Stalinist revolutions, in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, were made by organisations possessing an active mass following, leading mass struggles. The coup by “communist” officers in Afghanistan who had no base of mobilised mass support was unique in the history of Stalinism.

Mahoney solves his problems by discussing something else, and by invoking Lenin’s approach to something else, the October Revolution!

“The mechanical, anti-Marxist approach of our reformists, opportunists and various Trotskyites replicate almost perfectly the arguments that the Mensheviks used against Lenin before and after the October revolution”.

So, because these arguments were wrong about the Russian Revolution, ipso facto, analogous arguments are wrong about the Afghan coup!

“The Trotskyite Spartacist League are if anything, the most

explicit in their slander of the Afghan revolution”.

The Spartacists are in fact, in their political conclusions, the closest to *The Leninist*, differing only by giving a less fantasy-soaked account of Saur! But you would never guess that from *The Leninist*'s polemics,

“For them it was a putsch by a group of reform-minded petty-bourgeois nationalists, primarily junior officers in the Afghan army, of the Khalq wing of the PDPA.

“Of course, using precisely the same reasoning it is quite possible to call the Russian revolution a ‘putsch’. In reply to the dogmatists of his day, who could not, or would not see a living revolution, with all its contradictions and ‘rough edges’ when it is in front of them, Lenin defined a ‘putsch’ as an ‘attempt at insurrection [that] has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses.’ (Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 22, p355)”.

In his recent work Jack Conrad tells us far too much about this quote he picked up from Engin, so that, in a polemic justifying the Russian annexation of Afghanistan, he clumsily brings in the question of the rights of small nations and quotes Lenin denouncing the very same attitude that *The Leninist* had to the peoples of Afghanistan. Here Mahoney tells us far too little. He does not even tell us that Lenin was not talking about October, still less about Saur, but the 1916 Rising in Ireland.

“The Afghan revolution does not fall into this category.

“The ‘junior officers in the Afghan army’ who formed an important striking foe in the 1978 revolution did not fill a vacuum in the political sphere; rather they performed the military function of the party under the political leadership of the PDPA in the person of Hafizullah Amin, a leading member of its revolutionary Khalq wing”.

This is only valid if the role in the coup of the officers can be identified with the role of the “military wing” of the Bolshevik party, that is the Red Guards and rank and file soldiers in revolt against the armed-forces hierarchy. It is valid only if we can equate the workers organised to seize power, with the soviets behind them and the left SRs who led the peasants sympathetic to them, and shortly to join in a coalition government with them, with the PDPA-led coup in Saur. It is preposterous and absurd, a matter of corrupting the meaning of words.

“The revolution was the culmination of years of mass work. When the revolution was announced [that is, when the Afghan workers were told that they had taken power, so to speak, in their sleep!] hundreds of thousands of working people poured out onto the streets to greet the news. Since then many have given their lives to defend the revolution. That hardly indicates a ‘conspiracy with no sympathy from the masses’...”

“Working class power came to Afghanistan through an indigenous revolution, heroically led by the Khalq wing of the PDPA in April 1978”.

With Mahoney’s explanation of why the PDPA failed to win mass support, the truth about the nature of the seizure of power, that it was a coup and not a revolution, seeps into the picture.

“There was the inevitable counterrevolutionary backlash from the dispossessed ruling elements of the ancien regime. Unfortunately, this backlash was aided by important subjective errors by the party. Instead of boldly striking out with revolutionary initiatives, most importantly sweeping land reform that would have undercut the base of counterrevolution, both wings of the PDPA temporised, vacillated and thus lost the initiative...”

Elsewhere, following Amin when he called off the land reform late in 1979 with the claim it was complete, *The Leninist* claim land reform and similar as actual achievements of the regime.

“Faced with the burgeoning counterrevolution — now armed by US imperialism and its proxies in the region — the PDPA repeatedly (13 times in fact) called on its Soviet ally to provide direct military aid to bolster the revolutionary regime. When the Soviet intervention eventually came however, it was an intensely contradictory phenomenon.

“[Invasion] strengthened the weight of the revolutionary forces against their mediaevalist enemies. [But] the Soviets manufactured an opportunist coup. Its men shot Amin, leader of the revolutionary

Khalq wing of the Party and 97 of his comrades, and installed Karmal, leader of the opportunist Parcham wing, in power. This was a crime which effectively crushed the dynamism of the Afghan revolution.

“Since then, the Soviet armed forces have acted as the crutch to a revolution they themselves had crippled. Now even that prop is being pulled away...”

“Imperialism will never be satisfied until it has the head of Soviet socialism itself on the chopping block.

“Only by a resolute defence of living socialism and the active promotion of revolutions in other countries can the Soviet workers’ state hope to survive in the long run...”

“The betrayal of the Afghan revolution stands as a shabby monument to the political dead-end that the Soviet leadership has reached. Despite bureaucratic deformations, the Soviet Union was able to extend socialism into Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War and defended and gave crucial material aid to indigenous revolutions — the Cuban, Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.

“Now it has abandoned the Afghan revolution to the forces of reaction... the murder of the Afghan revolution is the foreign complement of the internal retreats embodied in Gorbachev’s perestroika.

“Precisely because it is the frontline of the world revolution today — the country where the question of revolution or counterrevolution is posed point blank — the task of the defence of the Afghan revolution has exposed the theoretical poverty and dirty political cowardice of the left in Britain”.

Mahoney ends with a blatant misrepresentation of his actual cothinkers, the Spartacists, Militant, Workers’ Power, etc.

“Only Leninists greeted and still defend the Afghan revolution. That is why we say: No sell out in Afghanistan! Gorbachev, revolutions are not for sale!”

Mourning for the revolution

But despite the valiant literary fight put up by *The Leninist* against Russia’s betrayal of the “living revolution” in Afghanistan, the “class traitor” Gorbachev did his dirty work and withdrew the “Red Army”. He thereby deprived the peoples of Afghanistan of the benefits the Russian forces had bestowed on them:

“Los[ing] them the support of 150,000 Soviet troops, their high grade technical equipment, their helicopter gunships and their fighter aircraft...”

— as “Ian Mahoney” had put it in May 1988 (forgetting to list Russia’s high-grade napalm, and the expertise of the Russians in using it, amongst the good things the Afghans would lose if Russia withdrew).

Four years later, the Najibullah regime which the Russians had left behind, and had continued to supply and finance until the collapse of Russian Stalinism in August 1991, fell. The Mujahedin occupied Kabul.

Under the headline, “Afghanistan: never forget”, “Ian Mahoney” wrote up a passion of grief, anger, self-love, and denunciation of the socialists who had not shared *The Leninist*’s dogma on Afghanistan, that the coup had been a great popular revolution. A strapline announced the theme of the article: “The left in Britain had a disgraceful record when it came to Afghanistan”.

“On April 25, the brutish Mujahedin counter revolutionaries entered the Afghan capital, Kabul. The appearance of these medievalist scum in the city that in 1978 was the epicentre of the Afghan proletarian revolution is yet another defeat for the world’s working class...”

“A return to chattel slavery — that is the prospect that faces the women of Afghanistan, whatever faction of the Mujahedin front finally manages to establish control...”

“The women’s question in Afghanistan is not some ‘detail’ of the programmes of the contending sides in the civil war: it was a social question that cut to the very heart of the revolution itself. The re-enslavement of women has been inscribed on the banner of the counterrevolution...”

This is fantasy raised to the level of delusion. Kabul, which is now in the hands of reactionaries was in 1978, “the epicentre” —

of? The coup? No: “the epicentre of the Afghan proletarian revolution”.

By scholastic, convoluted, substitutionist reasoning *The Leninist* had defined the army takeover as a working class revolution (the PDPA was the proletariat, representing the international proletariat as well as the Afghan; the political leadership of the PDPA made the officers’ coup a popular revolution, and moreover, a proletarian revolution, etc.). Now they went still deeper into unreality, fantasising that Kabul had been to the Afghan “revolution” what Petrograd was to October.

There is no fantasy in the picture he paints of what the Mujahedin conquest of Kabul means for Afghanistan’s women. There is however utter one-sidedness in the way he forgets the other side of the picture — the large numbers of women killed or driven into refugee camps by the “woman-liberating” Russian bringers of civilisation to Afghanistan.

Now Ian Mahoney gets down to the serious business of self-approbation: mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all...?

“This paper has stood alone on the British left in its unconditional defence of the Afghan socialist revolution of 1978, our unequivocal support of the Soviet army in its progressive war against the feudal Mujahedin reactionaries, our militant opposition to Gorbachev’s sell out withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1988 and our warning that the state in Afghanistan, given the counterrevolutionary leadership in the USSR, was in ‘mortal danger’.

With their congenital anti-Sovietism, the rest of the left — with a few partial exceptions...”

This is a private nod to truth that has the convenience for the author that it does not tell the truth to anyone who does not already know it...

“... lined up with the Mujahedin, against the Soviet Army; with the counterrevolution, against the revolution, with the 12th century against the 20th.

“The experience of Afghanistan has illustrated that the so-called revolutionary left pay nothing but lip-service to...”

To what?

“... to the October revolution.”

If you reject their convoluted reasoning, and their near-equation of the Stalinist officers’ coup with the October Revolution, why then... you really reject the October proletarian revolution! Mirror, mirror on the wall...!

“All these groups parrot the Menshevik argument marshalled against Lenin prior to 1917 to slander the heroic 1978 Afghan revolution.

“Across the spectrum the 1978 revolution was dismissed as a ‘putsch’. Indeed, the possibility of a social revolution was dismissed out of hand, something only possible through an outside agency or some distant time in the future.

“*Socialist Organiser*, probably the Labour Party’s most loyal foot soldier, defines the ‘tragedy’ of Afghanistan as that of ‘a class (i.e. the professional middle class) which took power in conditions where it could not realise its programme because of the backwardness of the society’ (*Socialist Organiser* April 23 1992).

“Such sympathy is worthless. *Socialist Organiser* backed the counterrevolutionary jihad against the Soviet Army, and the Afghan government forces. Despicably, they compared the campaign of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan — a force fighting, albeit with all sorts of bureaucratic blunders and fetters, to save a living revolution — to ‘what the Americans did in Vietnam, what the French did in Algeria and Indochina’ and, plumbing new depths even for *Socialist Organiser*, to what the Nazis had done in those parts of the USSR they overran at the beginning of the Second World War’ (ibid).”

The Russians were fighting to save “a living revolution” from the people of Afghanistan — therefore, if you know how to define things correctly as the Leninists, and only the Leninists, know how to, the methods they use, although to the untutored mind they are the same methods as the Americans, French and Germans used, are in fact not the same.

He now uses a non sequitur to enable himself to denounce his close cothinkers like Workers’ Power and put them in the same historical rubbish bin as *Socialist Organiser* and the SWP. Belief that

the coup was a popular revolution is *The Leninist*’s badge of honour.

“This and similar views from the left in Britain should not surprise us. After all those who cannot see a real revolution are hardly in the position to defend one. From *Tribune*, through the Socialist Workers Party to Workers’ Power, the April 1978 revolution in Afghanistan has been labelled a ‘putsch’.”

For Mahoney, if you supported the Russians and their quislings, and yet failed to understand that Saur was not a coup, you were damned and kept out of the company of the Leninist elect. This idiocy was primarily a form of delusional self-identification and self-distinction, the small propaganda group in Britain praising itself for being “harder”, more ruthless, more “revolutionary”.

“This is a scandalous slander of an inspiring revolution, a revolution that lit a torch of liberation for the peoples of the region”.

Remember: it is the year 1992. The last Stalinist regime has just fallen in Kabul. Saur was 14 years ago, the Russian invasion a dozen years ago, Russian withdrawal four years ago. The fact is well known that one and a half million Afghans died in Russia’s colonial war, and that six million were made refugees over the borders.

Afghanistan has been thrown back decades. All the important gains of the reforms carried out from above in the 1950s and 60s have been lost. And still “Ian Mahoney” asserts that the 1978 coup “lit a torch for the peoples of the region”!

It is an example of the crass state of denial in which they lived — and even after they have moved a long way from where they were in 1992, demonstrably still live.

“Mahoney” repeats the perennial quote from Lenin and rehashes the arguments. That will not detain us.

“Of course, Marxists recognise that a genuine revolution can take the outward form of a coup. Obviously, revolutionary ideas can gain considerable influence inside the military forces of the old regime, and these sections can indeed seize the leadership of a living revolutionary movement. But this is simply the outward form that the Afghan revolution manifested itself in, the same outer form as the 1917 October Revolution (also slandered as a ‘coup’ by philistine bourgeois historians, ultra-leftists...).

“The revolution provoked a furious backlash from the forces of reaction internally and externally: no mere coup could have done this. The thousands of communists and ordinary Afghans who willingly gave their lives in the ensuing civil war to defend the revolutionary conquests were aware that they were fighting for something rather more than a change of oppressors, even if the ‘theoreticians’ of the British left could not quite work it out.

“All of the evidence points, not to a ‘palace coup’ with no sympathy or involvement from the masses, but to a revolution!”

“Mahoney” is still a soldier in “the world communist movement”. He has now abandoned the idea that the PDPA was, from a revolutionary point of view, especially virtuous. Now it is merely typical of the parties in that movement.

“Those trapped in the dogma of denouncing the world communist movement of which the PDPA was a typical component part as ‘counterrevolutionary’ had to slander this, perhaps its final positive achievement. The alternative was simply too unthinkable... to defend it, even though it was led by ‘Stalinists’. The truth was partially admitted by the Trotskyoid *Socialist Organiser* in the April 23 issue when it says that ‘the fact that the Afghan regime the Russians left behind them when they withdrew in 1988 did not collapse for over three years indicates that it was not only a creature of the Russians’.”

This can’t be a matter of *Socialist Organiser* honestly trying to depict what is. It is just us “partially admitting” something useful to *The Leninist*. But a regime can be something a bit more than a creature of a foreign government, without being proletarian, or deserving socialist support.

“That never stopped *Socialist Organiser* supporting counterrevolution while the Soviet Army was stationed there. The same spirit of anti-Sovietism actually also informed the positions of groups like Workers’ Power which claim to have clean hands (see its ‘Blood on their hands’ in *Workers’ Power* May, 1992). Workers’ Power gave what it called ‘support’ to the Soviet Army when it was in

Afghanistan, true...

"So, partial, lily-livered exceptions there were, but so what? When it was a matter of a life or death struggle between the revolution and counterrevolution, the congenitally anti-Soviet left lined up with the counterrevolution."

The idea of the "third camp", which means working class political independence, has no place in Mahoney's thinking. He belabours the SWP, which on such questions was not part of the "orthodox Trotskyist" tradition. The SWP took a stand identical to that of *Socialist Organiser* when the Russians invaded Afghanistan. At that time it had not yet embraced the peculiar politics that would lead it to switch to backing Iran against Iraq in 1987/8 and then to its present popular-front alliance with MAB (the Muslim Brotherhood).

"'No end to the bloodshed' hypocritically moaned *Socialist Worker* of May 2, 1992, viewing the victory of their side in Kabul, the Mujahedin. With the victory of the forces the SWP has backed consistently against the communists in that country, we are told 'the stage is set for terrible bloodshed. The people who will pay the biggest price will be ordinary Afghans' (ibid).

"Pardon, 'comrades'? Perhaps we have got it wrong, but weren't you the bunch who told us that despite the fact that Mujahedin were thorough going reactionaries, 'we say the Russian troops should get out of Afghanistan.' (*Socialist Worker Review* March 1980).

"The Mujahedin would set up a government 'well to the right of Khomeini' (*Socialist Worker Review* February 1988). Despite this, 'socialists' as they call themselves and their supporters, 'shouldn't... see Russia's defeat as anything but a boost for our side' (*Socialist Worker* February 11, 1989). In fact, the Soviet withdrawal, which in effect for the moment sealed the fate of socialism in Afghanistan, was celebrated by these 'socialists' as 'a welcome blow against imperialism' (*Socialist Worker Review* February 1989).

"In classic Menshevik fashion the SWP advised the Afghan people that their lot must be a 'cycle of misery' which 'won't be broken until genuine socialist revolutions in more advanced countries

provide the resources to overcome its economic backwardness' (*Socialist Worker* February 4, 1989).

"So Afghan revolutionaries, according to both the patronising *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Organiser*, should politely refrain from the opportunity to make their revolution in much the same way as one might refuse a cigarette — 'Thanks, but not just yet'. Instead, they should wait — god (or perhaps Allah) help them — until the likes of *SO* or the SWP make the revolution in Britain.

"They would wait forever. Those who cannot defend the living gains of our class internationally, and centrally these countries where we have made revolutions, are hardly likely to be much good (at least on our side of the barricade) when it comes to making the British proletarian revolution".

He now reaches orgasmic levels of retrospective self-love.

"As we wrote in 1989: 'In the chill wind of the Cold War groups in Britain used the self serving lie that the Afghan revolution was nothing more than a coup in order to avoid defending a revolution, which unlike that of South Africa, Nicaragua or El Salvador was not popular among chic circles... Well you 'friends of the Afghan working class', you have now got your way. This is generally recognised as what will happen if the counterrevolutionaries take over. Your textbook working class will be nowhere to be seen but real workers and progressives, all those who made the Afghan Revolution, will face death...

"That is why we say that the blood of Afghan's progressives is not only on the hands of the bestial Mujahedin, the imperialists and the traitor Gorbachev... It is on the hands of all those who refused to defend the Afghan Revolution! You are all guilty and we shall make sure that the working class never forgets your crime (*The Leninist* February 17, 1989)".

Mahoney vows vengeance on the "Trotskyites", not yet having moved away from fantasies of a future "Leninist" revolution that will put people like himself in charge of a British equivalent of the Afghan Stalinist secret police, the Aqsa.

"Let us add, as we view the horror unfolding in Afghanistan — that they never forget, and that they make you pay".

Stalinist mind at the end of its tether

“...The form of a rising can be that of a coup — like the October revolution of 1917...” Jack Conrad

“So where authentic Marxism seeks out the truth, the AWL tries to gain factional advantage and cohere its own ranks by manufacturing a system of falsification and outright lies.”

Which lies? One of the difficulties in arguing with Jack Conrad/John Bridge (J-J) and Mark Fischer is that they recognise no restraints, no need at all for there to be any correlation between reality and what they say: political discussion is an autonomous, purely literary thing. Like a pattering stage performer, they say whatever they like, whatever they think will be useful. That is one of the two defining characteristics of their polemics.

The other is the extreme, hysterical violence of style and language. Here they are still entirely Stalinist.

For example, try “to gain factional advantage and cohere its own ranks” is precisely what they have done for 20 years with the argument that Saur was not a coup.

Most of *The Leninist*’s polemics on Afghanistan over a dozen years belabour those — Workers’ Power, Militant/Socialist Party, the Sparts — who, like *The Leninist*, supported both the PDPA regime and Russia’s colonial war in Afghanistan. Their crime was that they defined the “April revolution” of 1978 as a “coup”.

The idiotic insistence that Saur was not a coup has served J-J to distinguish himself from those who were in terms of their immediate politics on Afghanistan, his close co-thinkers.

In a sense it still plays that role, now that they are anti-Stalinists, vis-à-vis AWL...

The belief that the April coup was not a coup has been the sect badge of honour of the *Leninist/Weekly Worker* group.

For 21 years J-J has written, recycled and again recycled the same article on Afghanistan. It was originally based on a small book published in 1982 by a member of the Workers’ Voice segment of the Turkish CP, Emine Engin. The quotes from Lenin, the alleged historical parallels, and all the assessments which form the skeletal structure of all J-J’s pieces originate with Emine Engin.

Engin’s book contained a strange error in which she quotes Frederick Engels on the “coups of Bonaparte and Bismarck”. In fact, Otto von Bismarck was a faithful servant of the Prussian king, who never made a coup. Engels never wrote about such a “Bismarck coup”.

He did write about the ‘revolutionary’ methods Bismarck used against the then independent German states in the struggle for Prussian supremacy and that, I guess, was the source of Engin’s error.

It is an error which no one familiar with the writings of Marx and Engels would make. Cribbed from Engin, it has appeared again and again in J-J’s writings on Afghanistan and again recently in *Weekly Worker*.

Of course, J-J’s fundamental assessment of the modern Afghanistan question has changed radically.

He went through the 1980s believing that the Afghan 1978 coup had made a socialist revolution and that the Russian invaders of 1979 had brought help to socialism in Afghanistan. All that is gone in his latest recycling. But the arguments, quotes, historical references which he took from Engin back in 1982 are still there!

He now thinks that the USSR was a sort of slave state, but he still backs the Afghan Stalinists and the Russian invasion!

He still defends the idiotic idea that the April 1978 army-airforce coup — led politically by the Afghan Stalinist party, the PDP — was not a coup but a popular revolution. The more he changes the more he stays the same!

I will avoid repeating points made already in the survey of Emine Engin’s work, except where there is something to say about J-J’s

“cover” of Emine Engin. I begin with some general points.

J-J’s article is an attempt to reply to my article in *Workers’ Liberty* 2/2, “Afghanistan and the Shape of the 20th Century” (“Afghanistan...”). He makes no attempt to present an alternative overview to the one I made. He concentrates on a limited number of points.

He ignores the contradiction I pointed to in my “Critical Notes on the CPGB”: “It is impossible to stay on the right side of political sanity and combine the ‘democratic’ anti-Stalinist politics which the *Weekly Worker* group now says it adheres to with defence of the stalinist coup in Afghanistan and the consequent Russian war of conquest that killed one and a half million Afghans and drove six million of them — one in three — over the borders.”

Instead, he launches an impassioned defence of the Afghan Stalinists and their revolution-that-never-was. It is as if he has learned nothing at all in the last 20 years! Chest beating and fulminating factional polemics (octopus polemics: spray as much ink as possible and hope it covers the holes in your political clothing!) make up much of his copy.

J-J is, like his mentor on Afghanistan Emine Engin, concerned to establish that the April 78 coup was a revolution and not a coup. He follows her closely, reproducing her quotes and arguments, to which he sometimes adds his own elaboration.

The 1916 Rising compared with the PDP coup

Like Engin, he “proves” that Saur was not a coup but a revolution by obliterating the distinction between a revolution and a coup.

Being a karaoke Leninist and not a Marxist, he rests on quotations and on an analogy derived from what Lenin wrote about the Dublin Rising of 1916. It is the same quote as Engin cites, except that J-J, unlike Engin, does not have the wit to trim it down before it jackknifes and cuts his political head off!

In a polemic defending, amongst other things, the Russian attempt to annex Afghanistan, Karaoke Jack calls Lenin to the microphone — and, not content to have Lenin speak about a putsch in the words cited by Engin above, has him defend the rights of small nations against the AWL!

Lenin, says J-J, “warned” “the Sean Matgamnas and Martin Thomases of his day, the leftist pedants and doctrinaires” against — against what? Against — he quotes Lenin — “treating the national movements of small nations with disdain”. Indeed.

But it was we who defended Afghanistan against Russian annexation! *You* supported the Russian imperialist invaders and still, in retrospect, think you were right to support them!

The difference between Marxism and J-J’s approach is strikingly obvious here. It is worth examining the issues in some detail. It will shed light on what happened in Afghanistan.

In fact, though ultimately Lenin was proved right, there was nothing self-evidently absurd in calling the Easter rising a putsch, immediately after its suppression.

Twelve hundred men and a few women, about one sixth of them members of the trade union militia, the Irish Citizen Army, seized the big buildings in the centre of Dublin, built barricades across streets and defended them, and, remaining in their static positions, held out for six days against the British Army, and the big guns of British gunboats on the river Liffey. Then they surrendered. Fifteen of the leaders were then court-martialed and shot.

During the week, some of the Dublin workers seized the chance to loot shops; the Dublin crowds spat at the insurgents as they were led through the streets by their captors.

Though Connolly was the Acting General Secretary of the ITGWU, there was no specifically working class action to back the insurgents; indeed on the eve of the rising Connolly had been hard

put to it to stop the union executive hauling down the tricolour from above the Union's headquarters at Liberty Hall.

Outside of Dublin there were brief skirmishes between police and a few supporters of the Rising in Wexford and Galway, nothing else.

On the eve of the Rising there was sudden chaos because the secret society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which organised the rising had worked entirely as conspirators behind the scenes. Even the head of the nationalist militia, the Irish Volunteers, the great Gaelic scholar, Eoin MacNeill, only learned, by accident, at the last moment, of what was planned.

He called off the Easter Sunday manoeuvres that were to be a cover for an all-Ireland Rising.

He thus faced the leaders in Dublin with the choice of either ignominious collapse, or doing what they did the following day, when they turned out in Dublin to make what they knew was only going to be a defiant gesture, which would cost many of them their lives.

Now, it so happens that my feelings about the Rising, and about the insurgents, is the same as it was when as a very small boy I listened avidly to my mother's stories about the heroes Pearse and Connolly and Casement and Cathal Brugha. My *opinion* of the decision to rise in Dublin on Easter Monday is the same as it was when I wrote this assessment in *Socialist Worker* more than 30 years ago:

"At the eleventh hour the titular head of the Volunteers called off the Easter Sunday manoeuvres, which were planned as a cover for the rising. Faced with this catastrophe, expecting to be rounded up, believing that European peace was imminent and that, through their failure to act, Ireland would miss the chance of an independent voice at the coming peace conference, the leaders in Dublin had to make their choice.

"Connolly had already indicated what his choice would be in such a situation, in 1914. He had written: 'Even an unsuccessful attempt at socialist revolution by force of arms, following the paralysis of the economic life of militarism [by a general strike], would be less disastrous to the socialist cause than the act of socialists allowing themselves to be used in the slaughter of their brothers.'

"On Easter Sunday 1916 their choice lay between one kind of defeat or another. Either a defeat in battle, that might help rouse the forces for a new struggle. Or defeat without a fight, which would bring discouragement and demoralisation in its wake as so often before in Irish history. Connolly and Pearse decided to fight. They went out to try and start the fire Connolly had written of at the outbreak of the war. For a week they defended in arms the 32 County Irish Republic, one and indivisible, which they had proclaimed on Easter Monday 1916. Before they surrendered, Dublin was in ruins.

"They died before British Army firing squads, together with other leaders of the Rising, after summary Court Martial. Connolly, grievously wounded, was court-martialed in bed and shot propped up in a chair.

"They did indeed light the fire of revolt which Connolly had spoken of, but it was not to be controlled by men of their persuasion nor to lead to their goal."

Even so, I think, there was a great deal of the putsch about it. Lenin doesn't deny that.

He insists on seeing the Rising in the context of the long history of Irish nationalism and in the perspective of his own conviction that "social revolution is inconceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petit-bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of politically non-conscious, proletarian and semi-proletarian masses, against landlord, church, monarchical, national and other oppression — to imagine that means repudiating social revolution" [Lenin: The Irish Rebellion of 1916, July, 1916].

Lenin's concern was to cite the 1916 rising as objective data in support of his belief that imperialism and the imperialist war would call forth movements for national liberation. Vindication of that view is what concerns Lenin in his polemics on the Easter Rising.

Karl Radek, together with such Bolsheviks as Nikolai Bukharin, Yuri Pyatakov and Evgenia Bosch opposed Lenin on this issue.

Trotsky's policies on self-determination were identical with Lenin's.

The "left" Bolsheviks, whom Lenin called "Imperialist Economists", argued that democratic questions such as national self determination could have no meaning in the era of imperialism and world war. They were an important current. (Their views momentarily became Bolshevik policy just after the February Revolution. Had Lenin not defeated them then, the consequences for the proletarian revolution of the Bolsheviks having such a policy for the nations oppressed within the Tsar's "prison house of nations", would have been catastrophic.)

Lenin expects national revolts as a consequence of the inter-imperialist war and seizes on the 1916 rising with both hands as objective evidence. He was right, that the rising was and would be part of a developing chain of events. Thus it proved to be.

But in fact things might have turned out differently. When the British started to shoot the leaders of the rising there was a shift of sympathy towards them. Yet it was not alone the Rising that made for the decisive shift in Irish politics in the 32 months between April 1916 and the general election at the end of 1918, in which the old Home Rule party was all but annihilated. The second, republican, Sinn Fein (the first Sinn Fein had been monarchist), gained 73% of Irish seats in the Westminster Parliament (for 48% of the votes cast).

The decisive shift came from the attempt of the British government to impose conscription.

Without that the shift would probably have been much smaller. The Home Rule Party would probably have survived (it survived in the six counties until 1970, when its forces merged into the SDLP), Sinn Fein would have been much weaker.

It is one of the myths of the Stalinists that Lenin supported the 1916 rising. No he did not. It is clear from what he writes that his ardent sympathy is with them, but how he saw them is expressed in the passage above. There is no question that he endorsed their tactics. He never, then or later, commented on James Connolly's role in the rising.

The Comintern's 1920 theses on working class alliances with "revolutionary nationalists" in countries where such people existed, is both an endorsement and a severe implicit criticism of Connolly, who dissolved the Citizen Army into the National Army on the eve of the rising.

Lenin got it right about 1916 because it did, as he expected, prove to be part of a burgeoning movement.

And what has this got to do with Afghanistan and the Stalinists' Saur coup? Lenin was writing about 1,200 republicans and socialists, amateur soldiers, who pitted themselves in arms against the mightiest empire the world had ever known, in the second city of the imperial centre. As Lenin insists on pointing out, they were connected through common aspiration and common identity with a long tradition of mass Irish nationalism.

Their deed helped prepare the forces that seized the chance when the British tried to force conscription through.

And Afghanistan? It was a take-over of power by a section of the professional military forces. There was no mass support for what the PDPA, the political leadership of the officers who commanded the coup-making forces, wanted to do.

The coup-makers pitted themselves against the overwhelming majority of the Afghan peoples, attempting to conquer and subjugate them, using the methods of bloodiest class rule, and, soon, allied themselves with foreign invaders who conducted a war like the Nazis conducted against, say, the Yugoslavs or the Russians, the French conducted in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam — a war of colonial conquest by way of the mass murder of vast numbers of people.

The PDPA that did that had nothing in common with the Dublin insurgents! Nothing at all. I will return to the question below.

Putsch, coup and revolution

J-J: "The Afghan 1978 revolution was carried out from above... But that can also be said of many revolutions in the Twentieth Century. Egypt and Abdel Nasser's free officers movement of July

1952...Iraq...in July 1958. Even Comrade Matgamna [in *WL*] grudgingly (sic) admits (sic) that the Afghan revolution was a political revolution... Yet the 1978 revolution was not led by a small military group or clique... The PDPA was predominantly a civilian party that illegally organised secret cells inside the armed forces of the existing state, which it then managed to decisively split. So was Afghanistan's revolution a mere conspiracy hatched within the state machine, lacking in popular support or sympathy and only altering things at the top of society?"

Having obliterated the distinction between revolutions and revolutionary-military coups such as that in Egypt in 1952; having loaded all the definitions — not a "mere" conspiracy, not entirely "hatched within" the state machine, not entirely "lacking in popular support and sympathy", not "only" altering things on top — Jack Conrad, before he lost the thread, and started talking about the rights of small nations, went to Lenin — following Emine Engin — to cull a definition of a coup.

After Engin, Jack Conrad cites Lenin, discussing the 1916 Irish Rising, insisting that the term "putsch" "may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses".

But, like Emine Engin, J-J too needs to twist Lenin a little out of shape here. J-J:

"What of the term 'putsch' — or coup, to use French-English?"

Lenin responded to Karl Radek's description of the Rising as a "putsch"; he did not call it a "coup". Neither in English nor in political usage, especially Marxist political usage, are putsch and coup the same thing.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a coup (d'état) as "violent or illegal change in government", and a putsch as an "attempt at a political revolution". The one is an unsuccessful attempt, the other a successful blow that changes the government.

And that is exactly how Lenin uses "putsch" — not an unsuccessful attempt, defeat and failure, per se, but such an event shown by the revelation of experience to have concerned only "a circle" of "conspirators or stupid maniacs".

Master singer Lenin refuses to perform as Karaoke Jack expects him to!

Indeed, as in a good court room drama, J-J's attempt to twist his words, substituting "coup" for "putsch" serves only to bring the truth more sharply into focus. What J-J is trying to do is use Lenin to define the idea of a coup d'état out of existence. Why? In order to avoid facing the fact that "Great Saur", despite having aspects that were unique, was precisely, a coup d'état.

Only if it is a circle of conspirators is it a putsch: if it succeeds, this is by definition not the case. Ergo, it wasn't a putsch

Like Emine Engin, in whose tracks he follows uncritically, by conflating the two, J-J eliminates the concept of coup, conflating it with putsch.

The April '78 coup had some popular support, and therefore it was not a coup!

But which military coup has ever entirely lacked outside civilian support and sympathy?

The armed forces officers do not exist in a social vacuum. They reflect sections of the ruling class, and even of lower social layers (And only the commissioned officer sergeants made the revolution in Cuba in the 1930s and in Ghana in the 1980s, for example).

The politicised officers are concerned with social problems, and with the social crises, maybe a succession of them, over a long time, that creates the conditions, including their own thinking, for their assumption of power.

It was a characteristic of many "third world" coups — and even of the "Octobrist" movement in Russia as far back as the mid 1820s — that the officers wanted to modernise the country — and of Afghanistan too, but with the difference that the officers who made the 1978 coup — yes, under the political leadership of the PDPA — took Stalinist Russia as their model of development and the Afghan Stalinists, the local agents of the Kremlin, as their mentors.

What makes military seizures of power, with varying degrees of civilian support, coups, is precisely that the agency of the "revolution" is the armed forces, and in terms of deciding, a very small

number of them, at the top of command-regulated military hierarchies.

Was Chile, 11 September 1973, a coup? It had mass middle class support. Yet it was a coup: the agency was the officer corps, using their military machine; and it was they who held power afterwards.

That is the defining thing. The many variations in civilian support, in the social and political aetiology of the coup, in its possibly revolutionising impact on society — these are all, for what we are talking about, secondary. Not unimportant or without consequence — secondary.

The pre-history of the April 1978 coup

J-J tries to follow Lenin on Ireland and to demonstrate that, like the Easter Rising, the April coup was similarly the product of preceding events and crises.

That the April coup was the product of a long preceding social and political history is not in dispute. Indeed, I traced it back to the 1920s and even further back, in considerable detail, in "Afghanistan..." and suggested how it all fitted together. J-J does it skimpily, inadequately and he gets some of the history wrong. He looks for the relevant preceding events in the wrong place: the most important part of it is the history of elite reform attempts from above in Afghanistan and the symbiosis of a section of the Afghan elite with the rulers of the USSR for the previous quarter century (see "Afghanistan..."). Where J-J traces the wrong, indeed half-imaginary, antecedents I gave a pretty detailed history of Afghan Stalinism. J-J treads the same ground, but very selectively. He ignores the case in "Afghanistan..."

He is still emotionally with the PDP, and in terms of PDPA factions, with Khalq. He questions the figures — "That is not right" — I cited for PDPA membership in April 1978 (8,000) and, following Emine Engin, cites *World Marxist Review* (*WMR*) in Jan 1979 that they had 50,000 members before April 1978. He tells his readers that the journal he is citing, was "the journal of the official world communist movement", adding to show his independence, that it "was thoroughly turgid".

WMR was the journal in which the ruling class in the USSR gave "the line" to the overseas parties that looked to Moscow. Lying, shameless lying, was its predominant characteristic, not turgidity. Nobody who is politically, or just intellectually, serious would take the word of a writer in "*WMR*" for anything!

In fact, the figure of 8,000 was the PDPA's own figure.

The idea of a party claiming to have only 8,000 members seizing power in a vast country of 16 to 20 million people (nobody knows for sure what the population was) is mind boggling. If you knew nothing else about it but that figure — 8,000 — and the fact that the PDPA made a "revolution" in April 1978, you would have to deduce that "the revolution" had been made by some other agency.

To make sense of these facts you would, if you didn't have the facts available to you, have to deduce a military coup!

In fact, the true membership figure was less than, and may have been less than half, the claimed 8,000.

But suppose it was 50,000? Is anything changed qualitatively if we accept the figure of 50,000? For a party of even 50,000 to take power in Afghanistan would also have been preposterous. If you didn't know the details, you would still have to deduce something like a military coup. It would still be the fact that they played no part in making the "revolution".

Quoting *WMR*, he denounces my figures as emanating from the CIA! The demonstrations J-J cites played no part in the struggle for power. Jack Conrad obfuscates by telling us unconnected details about the PDPA. He tells romanticised fairy tales, (and where they clash with the more exact account in *WL* he ignores *WL*).

He suggests what he doesn't dare assert. Both these traits are in this passage, about the April 78 coup:

"At midnight on April 28th, 1978 Amin — who was responsible for the Party's illegal work in the army — managed to issue instructions for an uprising." [He is here quoting B Szajkowski, *The Establishment of Marxist Regimes*] "As crowds gathered" in the Kabul central park "in protest against the imprisonment of PDPA leaders, MIG 21s struck the Presidential palace and tanks moved

into the city.”

In fact, one of the details that most clearly illustrates the real relationships, is what happened to Amin. I described it in *WL 2/2*. He was held under house arrest that allowed him pretty free communication with his “supporters outside”. “As crowds gathered...” Plainly Jack Conrad wants to suggest involvement, and by two phrases conveying only detail which he suggestively tries to connect up.

After the fighting, Jack Conrad assures us, citing BBC film footage “the common people of Kabul on foot and horse(?) taking to the streets and a sea of red flags”. Grant him everything he wants to establish here, as I do, except the suggestion that the demonstrators played any part in the taking of power in the army coup — and it is irrelevant to the issue in dispute: coup or popular revolution.

A coup *sui generis* if you like, the coup makers, certainly, an instrument of the PDPA, and, scarcely less certainly, of the Russians — but a coup nonetheless. And J-J knows it.

Who gave the orders?

He writes: “Undoubtedly the PDPA’s overthrow of the Daud regime was carried out using alternative (sic) hierarchical (sic) lines of command in the army and airforce. PDPA officers were given orders by PDPA cadres and then themselves gave orders to the conscripts under them. The revolution was therefore an uprising by a mainly civilian official ‘communist party’ which had aligned to itself a section of the officer corps and enjoyed the sympathy of the politically advanced masses in the cities, above all Kabul.”

In terms of the facts, there is much wrong with this account but, for the sake of argument, grant what he says. What is he describing but a military coup?

Jack Conrad is the master of a certain type of language that goes around, so to speak, in masks: “Alternative hierarchical lines of command”? “Alternative” to what? Not to the hierarchy of the PDPA segment of the airforce. Alternative to the PDPA? Exactly! Hierarchical? Military! In which not politically conscious revolutionaries acted, but obedient soldiers, whose views counted for nothing.

The picture of “the PDPA officers (being) given orders by PDPA cadres and then themselves (giving) orders to the conscripts under them” suggests an intermeshing of the PDPA cadres with the top of the armed forces and conjures up something like the relationship of the commissars at all levels put in by Trotsky to control the ex-Tsarist officers utilised by the Red Army.

This picture is completely false as far as I know. There was no such supervision, nor is it conceivable that there were non-military “cadres” capable of exercising it.

PDPA control was secured by the allegiance to them of political officers who operated in their own area autonomously.

The rest is detail. Immensely important detail, yet only detail. Those officers who made the coup, like the PDPA itself, were part of, and were aligned with a broader segment of the Afghan ruling elite — with that substantial part of it that wanted to make Afghanistan into a replica of the USSR, and themselves into a replica of its ruling class.

That “detail” shaped the whole story, just as it summed up the relationship with the USSR.

Without that the story is incomprehensible. This was certainly not just another coup.

But the story is also incomprehensible if you try to pretend that things were not shaped by the fact that the regime originated not in a revolution with sufficient popular support to make itself viable, or allow it to struggle for its life with some chance of viability, but by a narrow military coup.

The PDPA dimension determined that the ensuing regime then tried to do things that no mere military coup would have attempted. I will return to this issue below.

Unpurged Stalinism

Central to J-J here is that he hasn’t emptied out of his head any of the Stalinist debris on this question. He is still a romantic PDPA-

Khalq supporter. He still thoughtlessly lapses into the old Stalinist rhetoric he was using over 20 years ago

The romantic Stalinist baggage is unmistakable. J-J appears in the lists as he might have done twenty years ago to defend his Afghan comrades, the comrades of “our party” who have taken power. He has, it seems, learned nothing.

Take as example his comments on the murder of Mir Akbar Kyber, the PDPA Parchami leader whose assassination triggered the events of April, 1978:

“Comrade Matgamna, taking his cue from the CIA, blames the killing upon the Khalq wing. Others claim he was popular with both factions. Either way his death did not lead to a factional war but to ‘massive demonstrations’ against the government. Perhaps the masses knew more about the Afghan Government than comrade Matgamna?”

Now, it is nonsense to pretend that Kayber stood somewhere between Parcham and Khalq, “popular” with both: he was a central leader, arguably the central leader, of Parcham. Like J-J, I lack independent direct knowledge of these events. I had to pick my way through newspapers, magazines and books to construct a picture of what happened. The evidence for the killing of Akbar Kyber being the work of Khalq is set out in “Afghanistan...” in *WL 2/2*.

There is reason to think that both wings of the PDPA had set the date for a coup for August and that Khalq forced the pace. But what is of interest here is J-J’s argument. It is as if he is writing 25 years ago just after the coup, with no possibility of knowing what is to follow.

How dare you, Trotskyite, echoing the CIA, say that our Comrade Kyber was killed by the comrades of Khalq. He was popular with both Khalq and Parcham!

He was a central leader of Parcham, which between 1973 and 1976 had helped hound, jail and torture his “comrades” of Khalq. Factional war broke out in the open within weeks after the coup! The two sides then went for each other like homicidal maniacs. And 25 years later, J-J talks in the tone of a member of the “official Communist Movement” addressing a Trotskyite guttersnipe who is probably in the pay of the CIA for daring to suggest division within our fraternal Afghan Party, the PDPA.

Revolutions only bring chaos?

“For [AWL] the overthrow of Mohammed Daud’s — republican-royal — regime by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan was a “Stalinist military coup” which brought upon the heads of the masses nothing but decades of terrible suffering. Exactly the same message pushed by the White House, CIA, BBC, Hollywood action films, *The Sun* and the whole well oiled imperialist propaganda machine.”

Is what we have said untrue?

The question has been raised about all revolutions: was it worth the cost in lives and social disruption? It is a reasonable question. Only those who remain “revolutionaries” by keeping their eyes and brains closed will be irked or angered by it. Because he does not want in general to concede the case of the reactionaries, that revolutions bring only suffering, J-J thinks he must deny it for Afghanistan...!

How about the October revolution?

The October revolution was a failure. Ultimately, it suffered total defeat, and the strange and unexpected Stalinist form which that defeat took had terrible consequences for the working class throughout the world, and for the prospects of socialism in the 20th century.

Unless you are some species of Stalinist or pixillated “orthodox Trotskyist”, it is impossible to deny that the October revolution was an immensely costly failure. (The point here may be that J-J thinks — or half thinks — that the USSR was historically progressive up to its unfortunate collapse.)

I do not therefore conclude that the Bolsheviks were wrong in 1917. The October revolution was the greatest event in the entire history of the working class. As Rosa Luxemburg, the Bolshevik’s harsh critic, who denounced aspects of their rule, said in 1918 — they had by their revolution saved the honour of international

socialism. Their defeat in the early 1920s by the Stalinist counter-revolution was not inevitable.

The issue in Afghanistan concerns what happened, how and why. One cannot remain a Marxist and approach such a question determined to avoid any answer that might allow the reactionaries to say: "Ah ha! Told you so! No good ever comes from violence and revolution!"

As if the CIA and the BBC saying something determines whether it is true or not, or, in this case, can be "allowed" to be true.

"Presumably in 1978 the AWL... looked upon the fractious mujahedin groups as heroic resistance fighters as they began to impose their counterrevolutionary grip over the countryside and ruthlessly hunt down 'infidels and communists'.

"Certainly after the full-scale Soviet intervention in December 1979 *Socialist Organiser* — precursor of the AWL — proudly sided with the mujahedin against Soviet 'expansionism' and its 'puppet' government in Kabul in a sad parody of the paid persuaders of the bourgeoisie."

In 1978-9 it was still an internal Afghan affair. Yes, we sided with the Afghan people who were unfortunately led by the mujahedin in their resistance to the USSR imperialist attempt to conquer them.

J-J sided with Russian imperialism.

Eurocentrism?

"Given their pedantic and high-minded Eurocentric antipathy towards the April 1978 revolution and forthright promotion of the US-Saudi funded mujahedin, it is rather incongruous that the AWL decided to patronise the PDPA government with their support after Mikhail Gorbachev ordered the humiliating [?!] withdrawal of Soviet armed forces in 1988 (completed in the spring of 1989)."

When J-J believed that April 1978 was the socialist revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, he could logically denounce for "Eurocentrism" those who said a socialist revolution was impossible amidst Afghanistan's backwardness. It was stock-in-trade abuse spewed out by Stalinists and some "Trotskyists". But one doesn't even get a hint in this article of his old position on the Afghan Socialist Revolution. Now the PDP and the Russians are to be supported as the bearers of "key social gains and progressive principles". What does "Eurocentrism" mean here?

The use of "humiliating" to describe Gorbachev's pull-out from Afghanistan shows how much of his old positions (or the debris from it) and old Stalinist emotions still clogs his mind.

J-J: "Here is a paradoxical circle of their own making that they must square. After all Sean Matgamna says that you cannot at the same time be a democrat and 'support the Afghan Stalinist coup of 1978', let alone 'describe it as a real revolution!' 'Something is seriously wrong here,' he insists. 'These things just don't go together' ("Critical notes on the CPGB/WW")."

Supporting the cities against the countryside when the Russians left was no more political support for the Afghan Stalinists than supporting the Afghan resistance to the Russians was political support for the mujahedin. It did not imply support for the 1978 coup!

J-J: "Everything develops according to its own logic and from itself. That is ABC for any materialist. So was the 1989 PDPA regime of Mohammed Najibullah a direct, albeit degenerate, continuation of the April 1978 revolution? The only honest answer must be 'yes'."

That is beside the point. It is political sleight of hand. He conflates "country versus town" with Russia versus Afghanistan, and identifies the former with the attempt of the Russian invasion to turn Afghanistan into a Russian colony and a Stalinist puppet state, and with the colonial-imperialist invaders. To make any sort of sense this requires something like the idea that PDPA and Russia alike were defending the socialist revolution in Afghanistan. But in fact in this article he says nothing about the "working class" revolution he supported all through the 1980s because of its Stalinist dimension... That he has flushed down the memory hole...

J-J: "Communists — real communists, that is — supported the PDPA under Najibullah on the basis that in some way, no matter how ham-fistedly and contradictorily, it stood for and defended certain key social gains and progressive principles."

In fact this was decidedly not your position! Why is he so coy? He has dropped his old — nonsensical — "class" designation and replaced it with the classless, "key social gains and progressive principles", radically distancing himself from the designation that it was the working class in power. He has dropped all that, but still he uses the arguments he used to defend that position!

J-J: "By that very same measure we supported the original PDPA regime of Noor Mohammed Taraki, ushered in by the April 1978 revolution. [No, you supported an imaginary socialist revolution! You gloated over the Stalinist police terror as the very stuff of "communism"]"

"Leonid Brezhnev's panic-stricken [!] decision in December 1979 to order a massive airlift of Soviet troops into Afghanistan and the subsequent decision by the US administration — first under Jimmy Carter and then Ronald Reagan — to turn the country into a sacrificial pawn in their second cold war against the Soviet Union did not dictate nor cloud our judgement."

The idea that by responding to the first unagreed USSR—"red" Army expansion since World War 2, the US was the aggressor is a quintessentially two-campist, Stalinist interpretation.

The Leninist's view that it was a working class revolution, and its active, indeed hysterical, support for the Russian invasion is all now elided, even if he retains the language and feel of a kitsch-Stalinist.

The organic dishonesty shown in things like this is entirely Stalinist. The confusion is entirely J-Jist!

"Pathological anti-Sovietism"

J-J: "What the fountainhead of Matshachtmanism says about Afghanistan post-1988 shows him to be politically inconsistent. While an inflated ego has him making a unique contribution to 'third camp' Marxism, the plain fact of the matter is that Matgamna was pathologically Sovietphobic in the 1980s."

What might that mean, given his current view that the USSR was some sort of slave state? It was wrong to be intensely hostile to the USSR waging a bloody colonial war, the USSR's "Vietnam War", in Afghanistan? In what way was it pathological?

In the usage of our movement, "Stalinophobia — not sovietophobia, Stalinophobia! — designates people who have lost their political bearings and sided with the bourgeois anti-Stalinists. Where and when did we ever do that?

We were of course often denounced as "Stalinophobes" and "anti-communists" by "Orthodox Trotskyists" and others like *The Leninist*, who were themselves firmly in the Stalinist camp, more or less critically, and who looked on our attempt at a "third-camp" position with the jaundiced eyes of "one-campers" — in the case of *The Leninist* hysterical one-campers! — and considered us traitors to the USSR and the "workers' states".

It is a measure of J-J's deep confusion that though now he is supposedly a Third Camper, he, who was vociferously and militantly in the Stalinist camp all through the 1980s and into the 1990s, still denounces those of us who were third campists when he was an unreflecting Stalinist. Now, as then, he cannot see our Third Campism — we didn't call it that — except as treason to his own, "First Camp", the "communist" Stalinist Empire.

He has changed a great deal, if not enough, but he still denounces us in something like the terms in which *The Leninist* frequently denounced us! He denounces us in terms that simply make no sense except from his supposedly abandoned "old" position.

J-J: "Even in the absence of the Soviet Union this affliction still manifests itself in a worrying softness towards the 'first camp'. Note his stance on Zionism, the IRA's guerrilla war against Britain [!!] and involuntary unity in Bosnia [???], etc. As was the case with his mentor, the ever-present danger exists of an eventual symphysis or annexation by the other side. Tragically Max Shachtman finished his life as a revolutionary backing the CIA-directed Bay of Pigs landing by Miami-based Cuban contras in 1961."

In fact this political Malvolio is giving himself airs! He himself was in one of the camps, wholeheartedly. He hasn't yet cleared out of his mind the underlying thought here: he was in the right camp. He hasn't lost his predilection for one campism either, except that he now follows the SWP's "negative one-campism" — oppose US

imperialism and side with never mind who, even with the Arab Hitler, Saddam Hussein. Never mind about independent working-class politics!

Softness? In fact he shows us not only to have been consistent on Afghanistan but nuanced and balanced, shifting our “line” when reality changed in Afghanistan.

“So what about Afghanistan? Fantastically the AWL says that by designating the April 1978 revolution a revolution and not a mere coup we equate it with the October revolution of 1917.

“Martin Thomas writes — I presume with a straight face — that on such a basis the CPGB believes that the 20th century witnessed only two revolutions. Daft? Yes. Dishonest? In all probability.

“Such an absurd notion that Afghanistan and the April 1978 revolution is on a par with Russia and October 1917 is as easy to knock down as it is to mock.”

Yes, but only if your reader doesn’t know what *The Leninist* was saying through the 1980s about the Afghani proletarian revolution and your arguments — taken from Emine Engin — that if Kabul in 1978 was a “coup” then so was the October Revolution. J-J rants like this in one part of his article and later flatly declares “...The form of a rising can be that of a coup — like the October revolution of 1917...”.

Intent on arguing that Afghanistan was not a coup, he insists that October *was*!

Instead of behaving like a self-respecting Marxist and honestly confronting his past, here he denies it, sloughs it off, relying on the ignorance of his readers!

To write as he does and not, for the sake of clarity, to even mention what he used to think is sharp practice and, unfortunately, typical of the organic, Stalinism-schooled, dishonesty of his approach to politics.

The Second World Congress and anti-colonialism

J-J: “[The CPGB] has always taken it as axiomatic that when it comes to backward countries in the muslim world, we oppose reactionary anti-imperialisms which in actual fact promote the interests of traditional landowners, village warlords and would-be theocrats.

“Lenin was certainly right in his 1920 draft thesis on the colonial question when he insisted that communists must ‘combat pan-islamism’ and fake anti-imperialist movements which actually ‘strengthen the position of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc.’ (V I Lenin *Collected Works* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, p149).

“The mujahedin groups of the 1980s fit into this category like a glove, as do the Taliban in the 1990s.

“Comrade Matgamna has no love for the Taliban and was right, like us, to lambast the miserable Socialist Workers’ Party’s Taliban apologetics when they first defied and then fought against the full might of the US armed forces in 2001.”

This was not the CI — or FI — position! It implies that we might be neutral or support the “more progressive imperialists” — which is indeed what the misnamed *Leninist* did in Afghanistan. Here he generalises and rationalises from their old Stalinist relationship with the USSR in relation to Afghanistan. Trotsky once expressed the Bolshevik attitude like this:

“What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude towards oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their ‘rights’ and parliamentary protests against the impinging upon of those rights, Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in

advanced countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection, and assumes full responsibility for their work in the face of ‘civilised’ executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over that boundary remains centrism.”

Leon Trotsky, *What Next?* (1932)

It is again a shift in J-J’s position: he opposed not “reactionary anti-imperialism” but opponents of the Afghan socialist revolution and then of the USSR which was defending it in its own way. Stressing how reactionary their opponents were was an afterthought, a convenient argument. The wholesale retreat up the ladder of abstraction, holding to his old attitude to Russian imperialism in Afghanistan but radically changing the reasons, leads him to generalise about reactionary anti-imperialism in a way that has massive anti-Marxist implications, and which pushes him towards the positions of the old pre-1914 right-wing Second International and away from the politics of the Lenin-Trotsky Third International on these questions.

First and foremost the Theses of the Second Congress of the Communist International opposed imperialism and championed its colonial victims*. Trotsky’s proclamation in the manifesto of the 2nd Congress (May 1920) that those who would not defend the victims of “their own” imperialism deserved “to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet” neatly sums up the spirit of the early Communist International on this question.

There is no implication that we would be neutral if such people were actually fighting or that we might be neutral or supportive of imperialist would-be conquerors because we saw imperialism despite everything as the bearers of civilisation. That was the view taken up from about 1900 by Fabians and other such within the Second International. [See the Appendix on Militant (the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal now) on Afghanistan where this is discussed.]

Can he really think that support for “progressive” imperialism was the Comintern’s line? That the French Communist Party was wrong in the mid-20s to defend the Rif in Morocco against France? That, for example, the Trotskyists were wrong in 1935 to side with the medievalist Ethiopian kingdom against the ultra-civilised, but murderous, Italian invaders? One has to remind oneself that J-J is talking of invaders who killed one and a half million Afghans, and drove six million out of the country across the borders!

The whole thing is an incomprehensible muddle, *because he suppresses the truth about the motive behind his position in the 1980s* — that he was a Stalinist cheering on a “workers’ revolution” — and presents it as normal for “real communists” to refuse to side with backward peoples resisting conquest. He retreats up the ladder of abstraction and sectarianism and winds up generalising ridiculously from his reactionary support for a Russian conquest of Afghanistan.

By analogy with Afghanistan, J-J should surely have backed the USA against the Taliban. In all this there is a clotting together of elements that, combined, constitute a generalised rightist sectarianism.

“What of his parallel between the Soviet Union’s attempted ‘colonial conquest’ in the 1980s and British imperialism in 1919?... ”

“In 1919 the Communist International supported a crowned revolutionary who advocated and put into practice a raft of progressive measures — in 1925 Amanullah first began to introduce a civil legal code which partially eclipsed the ‘deeply rooted’ sharia law in terms of legal process (A Rashid *Taliban* London 2001, p83).”

* Footnote: Part eleven of the Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions, in which Islamic reaction is denounced, is divided, “a” to “f”, into six sections. For “more backward states and nations, in which feudal or patriarchal or patriarchal-peasant relations predominate... all communist parties must assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries...” It calls for struggle against reactionary medieval influence, Christian missions and so on. “It is necessary to struggle against the pan-Islamist and pan-Asiatic movements and similar tendencies which are trying to combine the liberation struggle against European and American imperialism with the strengthening of the power of Turkish or Japanese imperialism, and of the nobility, the large landlords, the priests, etc.” The *first* injunction is to support these countries, the third to fight politically within them against reactionary anti-imperialists. The “Theses on the Eastern Question” of the fourth congress of the Communist International in 1922 takes exactly the same approach with more elaboration.

In fact, what Amanullah renounced — British control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs — was very trivial compared to what the Afghans after 1979 were resisting!

Inescapably, what he is saying is that support for peoples resisting conquest depends on such things as them having progressive leaders. He has the attitude the CI damned, that of the Second International right wing!

What does J-J think King Amanullah, taken as a whole, represented in 1919 when the CI supported him against “civilised” Britain? He doesn't notice that Amanullah's “progressive” measures came after his victory over the British! The CI supported him as an opponent of the British Empire. Some of his “progressive” measures may even have been a result of his association with the USSR (as well as the post-1919 example of Atatürk, etc.).

“In the 1980s comrade Matgamna supported forces whom he readily admits ‘were on almost all issues ultra-reactionary’ (‘Critical notes’). No prizes for spotting the difference.”

Not quite. We gave them “support” against the imperialist invaders, but not political support, or internal support, as our shift when the Russians went shows. And they were not comprehensive “reactionary”. “Afghanistan...” put it like this:

“The heroic resistance of the Afghan rebels, who by every test of the 20th century *except their resistance to subjugation* were reactionary...” [p85, WL 2/2, emphasis added].

The “revolution-not-coup” line served in the 1980s to differentiate *The Leninist* from the others who had the same politics on Afghanistan. The same idiotic assertion serves to differentiate them now from from us. There is, of course, a purer sort of self-love in it too!

J-J: “Brezhnev did not send the Soviet army into Afghanistan in order to extend the imperium, as claimed by the CIA and other cold war warriors. The move was defensive.

“In his report to the 26th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Brezhnev complains that western imperialism had launched an ‘undeclared war against the Afghan Revolution’. He adds that this ‘also created a direct threat to the security of our southern frontier’, which ‘compelled’ the Soviet Union to ‘render the military aid asked for by that friendly country’ (L. Brezhnev Report of the Central committee Moscow 1981, p22).”

And we are for the Stalinist empire annexing a country when it thinks it needs to do so for defence? China has a right to do what it has been doing in Tibet for the last 44 years? If Russia was entitled to annex a country to facilitate its own defence, why are other imperialisms not entitled to do this?

Karaoke Jack Conrad still thinks Russia was altruistically defending a revolution — at the time he insisted, a working class revolution — and that its support for an “extension of the Revolution” had nothing to do with the extension of the Russian empire (he even argues that because of their motives, as he sees them, they did not expand that empire, even when, in response to “Western imperialism's undeclared war” against the Afghan revolution they invaded and annexed Afghanistan!).

It is, I suppose, quite a feat in 2003 to unblinkingly quote the hard-line neo-Stalinist dictator Brezhnev as a plausible commentator on what the USA was doing! J-J accepts Brezhnev's account, his reasoning, his right to invade, his “conservative” concern for the revolution! This is an unpurged residue too, implying the old view — workers' revolution — but senseless without it. And the idea that whether or not Russia is extending its “imperium” is determined by Brezhnev's intentions and motives, and not by what the USSR and its armed forces do, is the most crass historical idealism.

Selected history

Now J-J comes to giving an account of himself on Afghanistan. He starts not with 1982 — see above — but six years later, in 1988.

“How did we retrospectively weigh up Brezhnev's move [into Afghanistan]? In 1988 Jack Conrad wrote of the Soviet Union behaving as a ‘great power bully’. Its action ‘hardly strengthened the confidence of, and support for, the revolution’.

“Soviet aid was vital if the revolution ‘was to survive’. Yet, in saving the revolution, it extinguished the revolution. We were

against any offloading or trading of revolutions such as Afghanistan and Nicaragua in order to appease imperialism.

“In Afghanistan that could ‘only’ mean the ‘collapse of the government in Kabul, the reverse of the gains of the April 1978 revolution (not least the ending of the enslavement of women) and the wholesale massacre of the PDPA's membership’ (J Conrad *From October to August* London 1992, pp123-24). An admittedly common premonition — what comrade Matgamna calls the majority of ‘orthodox’ Trotskyite groups shared the same anxieties (*Workers' Liberty* Vol 2, No2, nd, p86).”

The Russian-PDPA commitment to gender equality found its expression in impartial slaughter from the air of women and children!

The most striking thing here is that so far he — who used to be so passionate about the working class socialist nature of the “Afghan Revolution” — has avoided giving any class definition of the revolution except for the reference to “progressive principles”! Yet his old views are still alive, even if his is now the revolutionary ardour that dares not speak its name (and possibly no longer knows quite what it is!).

Imperialism was not those who went to Afghanistan and killed one in 12 of its people. Imperialism is only capitalism!

In fact, as I wrote in *Workers' Action* in 1980, these “humanitarian” arguments for supporting the Russians and their war were the sheerest hypocrisy (see appendix). It was strictly one-sided humanitarianism, used to package a political position, support for the Russians, derived from other ‘reasons’ entirely — the last refuge of the pro-Stalinist political bankrupts who idiotically invoked humanitarian concern to justify their support for invaders who killed 1.5 million Afghans and would have killed a lot more if, as *The Leninist* repeatedly called on them to, they had mustered enough force to subjugate the country.

J-J: “Over a decade later we again wrote that Soviet aid ‘saved the revolution in Afghanistan for a time — but in a thoroughly counterrevolutionary way’. Hafizullah Amin — the effective organiser of the April 1978 revolution — and 97 other leaders of the Khalq wing of the PDPA were summarily butchered.

“Ridiculously after their deaths they were charged with being CIA agents — a slander mindlessly repeated by the ‘official communist’ press in Britain, including the *Morning Star*. Already surrounded by a reactionary Vendée in the countryside, from then on the revolution ‘endlessly retreated’ till its final demise in 1992 (*Weekly Worker* November 15 2001).”

He forgets how many PDPA Amin had butchered, including Khalq leader Taraki: he is still a partisan.

Here he cuts out six years of their history and quotes a few phrases to sum up their politics! There is as little hint of what their defining politics were — that it was a socialist revolution — as in their old polemics there was of the fact that those — Workers' Power, Militant-Socialist Party, the Sparts — whom for a decade *The Leninist* regularly denounced for saying that April 1978 was a coup, actually shared their politics supporting the Russians! Even now, organic Stalinist dishonesty runs through J-J's polemics and his politics like “Brighton” or “Blackpool” through a stick of rock!

The psychological/ideologic term “inspiration” covers and obscures the most important thing: the lack of popular support. It leaves out of the picture information about who exactly was “inspired” and by what precisely.

There is no need to minimise the effect of outside support for the anti-PDPA forces after Saur, but what J-J does is use it to minimise the elemental power of the Afghan people's opposition to the invaders. This power of the recoil after April 1978 came not from a typical counterrevolutionary backlash, but from the central peculiarity in Afghanistan that the “revolution” was made by a party of a few thousand — probably fewer than 2,000 — people who were freakishly able to seize power because of the magnetic attraction which the USSR exercised on sections of the intelligentsia and on the urban military elite.

Ireland and Afghanistan: the test of experience

We have already dealt with what J-J says about the 1916 Dublin

Rising. There are additional points to make and some points to expand. Remember J-J:

“Lenin’s discussion of the 1916 Irish rebellion — under the military command of James Connolly but politically dominated by petty bourgeois romantic nationalists — is instructive here.

“The Sean Matgamnas and Martin Thomases of his day, the leftist pedants and doctrinaires, dismissed the rising as the swan song of Irish nationalism and nothing more than a ‘putsch’ — i.e., the German word for a coup [in fact, Emine Engin’s word for a coup she wants to present as a revolution] which ‘had not much social backing’.”

But if he wants to use this analogy, shouldn’t he try to establish in what way 1916 is comparable to Saur? He implies some sort of national liberation parallel. Does he want to do that? Is he so unwise? He is equating national liberation and such as Pearse and Connolly not with the real analogue in Afghanistan, the people fighting imperialist invaders, but with the Afghan Stalinists and later Quislings! Why? In order to equate those Lenin attacked as “left” doctrinaires and pedants opposed to national liberation struggles, for their own reasons, with those who opposed the Stalinist coup in Afghanistan both because it was Stalinist and because it was a coup, and who opposed the Russian invasion!

Vis-à-vis Afghanistan he can only talk of leftists, etc., from his old point of view, that a workers’ revolution was not only possible but had happened. Without that he inescapably winds up conflating a rising for national liberation in Ireland with what he used to see as an attempt to make a “working class” revolution in one of the most backward places on earth, by coup-makers who had very little real support.

In fact, as I have explained already, the 1916 Rising had very little social backing, even in Dublin — not even from the workers Connolly had led in his capacity of trade unionist. At the end of April 1916, as the British restored their ‘order’ in Dublin, the Rising looked very like a hopeless ‘putsch’. What ultimately vindicated Lenin’s assessment of 1916, was what happened afterwards. And that is what most clearly shows the difference between Ireland and Afghanistan. J-J is comparing incomparable things.

Lenin elsewhere said of 1916 that the “tragedy of the Irish” was “that they rose too soon”, before conditions had ripened in the rest of Europe, and in isolation from similar things in other countries, and from the working class revolt against the war.

By the 1916 test, what happened afterwards, the analogy falls down entirely. The Afghan Stalinists were not the too-precipitate vanguard of a long-existing mass movement like pre-1916 Irish nationalism and which would subsequently erupt. As I argued in “Afghanistan...”, they were the disoriented heirs of the long tradition of elite would-be social engineering in Afghanistan.

J-J again: “Enraged, Lenin warned them against ‘treating the national movements of small nations with disdain’ (V I Lenin *Collected Works* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, p355).

“It was not only Karl Radek and Leon Trotsky who looked down their noses at the Dublin uprising, but representatives of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Lenin urged these comrades to open their eyes to the shocking ‘accidental coincidence of opinion’.”

Lenin’s instinct was vindicated, as was the theoretical framework in which he saw the rising — that in the age of imperialism, there would be many nationalist risings against the colonial powers.

However, in terms of the facts of the rising and its immediate aftermath, there was good reason for Radek to take the view he did. As we have already seen, on the surface, the rising had much of the putsch and the fiasco about it.

What did those Lenin criticised have in common with the Imperialists? A certain judgment and a common dismissal. What do we have in common with them? Hostility to Stalinism; an assessment of facts about what actually happened in April 1978 and after.

The idea that because the bourgeoisie, for whom the Stalinists were a rival empire and an aspirant to take their place as ruling class, have such an opinion automatically makes it wrong, or lines you up with them, is one you would expect J-J to have grown out of. Until he does he will remain a one-campist, at present a negative one-campist, hanging on the coat-tails of the SWP. But no: Lenin made such a point; ergo, a bit of magic-Lenin mantra can be culled

and brandished.

In the case of those Lenin criticises, he was pointing out that their politics on questions of national liberation aligned them with the imperialists in relation to people and movements whom both Lenin and those he criticises agreed they should, in broad terms, support against their oppressors. Nothing like that exists for the AWL vis-à-vis Stalinism in Afghanistan, or in Russia (though plainly it does still, emotionally for J-J).

Jack Conrad’s old view rendered his attitude coherent. Now it is just anachronistic, unpurged emotional and political dross!

Everything in relation to 1916 depends on the fact that Lenin was right because he had both a better political instinct, “feel” for things, and also had the right theoretical framework, while the disciples, of Rosa Luxemburg on the national question such as Karl Radek, and the newer, World War 1-linked, variant of her old politics held to by those Bolsheviks like Bukharin and Pyatakov and Bosch whom Lenin called “Imperialist Economists”, had a wrong theoretical framework through which to view the Rising. Moreover, they lacked Lenin’s “feel” and instinct.

Nothing analogous to post-Rising Ireland can be found in post-coup Afghanistan. It is a case of Karaoke Jack using his magic Lenin kit to substitute inappropriate bits of old texts for factual analysis of Afghanistan.

The reference to Trotsky is the same — a mix of culpable ignorance and repetition of an old Stalinist lie. On the theoretical issues in dispute between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg (and, later, Bukharin, Bosch and Pyatakov), Trotsky, before and after the 1903 Conference where this was an issue, and in 1916, had the same position as Lenin. Far from turning up his nose, he passionately defended the insurgents in *Nashe Slovo*. He did that far more directly than Lenin did. His difference with Lenin was a difference of specific assessment.

Putsches and coups again

There are additional points to make on the Afghan coup.

J-J was in the grip of Stalinist fantasies and duff substitutionist theories that led him to see the workers in power where co-thinkers and would-be understudies of the Russian ruling class had seized power, and the armies and airforce of that bureaucratic ruling class were trying to establish a savage and unbridled tyranny over the peoples of Afghanistan.

Now he has no coherent overview, not even the fantasy-addled Stalinist outlook he used to have.

J-J: “What of the term ‘putsch’ — or ‘coup’ to use French-English? For Lenin the term ‘may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses’.

“The Irish national liberation movement did not come out of thin air. It had manifested itself in street fighting conducted by the petty bourgeoisie and a section of the working class after ‘a long period’ of mass agitation, demonstrations, suppression of newspapers, etc.

“Hence for Lenin anyone who calls the Dublin uprising a ‘putsch’ is either a ‘hardened reactionary’ or a ‘doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon’ (ibid).”

In fact, as we have seen, the Rising had much of the putsch and of the comic opera revolution about it. Though it looked a great failure, Lenin saw it in the right perspective, and he was in that superior to those he criticised. But in 1916 it was still a matter of a view of the future. We see Lenin now as correct because of the verdict of subsequent events, whereas, the same test, the judgment of events, tells an opposite conclusion about Khalq.

Those who said what the AWL said on Afghanistan have been proved right! Jack Conrad is in retrospect in the opposite position to Lenin and others after 1916! But never mind: a little bit of Lenin text about something else entirely will work wonders!

“Lenin famously rounded upon his leftist doctrinaires as follows: ‘To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outburst by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices,

without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletariat and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by landowners, the church and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc. — to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is' (ibid pp355-56)."

If he used "Lenin" like a Marxist and not like a Stalinist, he would examine the situation Lenin was dealing with, ask himself why and in what way Lenin had been proved right. He would then have asked himself what light all this shed on the facts of Afghanistan — having first established them, stripped of ideologising glosses — and what there was really in common, what there was that was different, and so on.

A Marxist would feel obliged to tell the reader concretely and exactly what light he thinks this sheds on the situation he is supposed to be dealing with, Afghanistan's Saur 'revolution' and its aftermath. J-J does not even try. The analogy, the bit of magic Lenin text is *substituted* for a concrete analysis of Afghanistan — and of Ireland. This is the pure stuff of Stalinist pseudo-Leninist dogmatics!

And he doesn't notice that he has blundered into an area where Lenin is actually dealing with the national rights of a small nation, the right of that nation or, in principle, of even a small segment of it, to take arms against the imperialism oppressing it, the duty of Marxists to look with sympathy on even petit-bourgeois "revolutionary nationalists". In Afghanistan, Jack Conrad, not least in his glosses on the CI's Second World Congress teaching, is entirely on the other side.

J-J is too busy caroling karaoke "Leninism" to notice that what Lenin is saying, applied to the real situation in Afghanistan, indicts his own support for Russian Imperial conquest of Afghanistan! That it justifies us and indicts himself!

"There will be localised general strikes and risings, army mutinies, premature and isolated revolutionary movements etc."

Pointedly here, what J-J thinks Lenin had in mind, and what Lenin assuredly did have in mind, are things that are radically different from anything that happened in Afghanistan.

Not "strikes" or popular uprisings or rank and file mutinies in the armed forces, but a military coup by segments of an army and air-force divided not horizontally but vertically, segments of hierarchically organised conventional military force against similar segments on the other side.

"Premature and isolated revolutionary movements"? A premature and rather isolated attempt by a tiny Stalinist party to make a Stalinist revolution by way of an army coup, yes. Entirely "premature" in terms of the level of Afghan society, yes. But he is attempting to suggest that people of our politics should have the same attitude to the PDPA coup as to a working class or plebeian movement for goals we endorse or in response to provocations concerning which we are entirely on the side of those acting "prematurely".

It has no parallel in the April 1978 coup by people who thereafter confronted most of the people of Afghanistan with state-organised, airborne terror that aimed to impose on them the rule of an aspirant new bureaucratic ruling class, modelled on that of Russia.

One may as a human being, if not as a politician, sympathise with the people of the Afghan PDPA caught up in terrible contradictions, and with some of their aspirations. One may see many of the rank and file Stalinists as not villains who clearly understood what they were doing, but people caught up in a tragedy. People who in different circumstances would have found their way to our banner.

But that is not at all the same thing as our attitude to a "premature" working class uprising, or a peasant uprising, even in Afghanistan. We are not here discussing some Kabul Commune, or some Afghan equivalent of the 16th-century German communist Anabaptists, who rose in Münster led by Thomas Münzer, or even an equivalent of the Canton Commune of December 1927.

In Canton, the CPC staged a rising that was seriously misconceived. They acted at the command of Stalinist bureaucrats trying to save face on the bloody fiasco to which they had led the Chinese working class earlier that year. They had the rising staged so that they could pretend that the tide had not turned against the workers,

that Chang Kai Shek's counter-revolution had not occurred. Even so, we were unequivocally on their side.

Trotsky, who did not ignore the bureaucratic commandism that had triggered the rising, pointed out that what actually happened was a real proletarian uprising, which, in its own tragic way, showed what could have been done by the CCP with better policies.

Saur was a military coup. It differed from other coups in the political leadership exercised in it by the PDPA, but, in its modus operandi, its relationship with the working class, with the peasants, and in its relationship to society as a whole, it differed not at all from other military coups in which officers are the decisive protagonists.

Karaoke Jack continues to parody Lenin:

Prejudices and reactionary fantasies

"Of course, the petty bourgeoisie and non-socialist masses inevitably bring with them all 'their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors'. But the task of the advanced section of the working class, the Marxists, the communists, is not to belittle their efforts, rather to critically defend them, to side with them and to increase efforts to lead them."

This is a marked departure from the viewpoint he had until the mid or late 1990s, when Khalq was the Afghan Bolshevik party operating a "dictatorship of the proletariat". If he would speak in his own words perhaps J-J would now tell us in which aspect, of deeds or of policies, the Afghan Stalinists corresponded to Lenin's words about 'prejudices and reactionary fantasies, weaknesses and errors'.

In fact, in the Stalinist Afghan coup one cannot point as there might be in a popular upsurge to this or that element of rawness or backwardness in a popular rising. The Afghan Stalinists were in their fashion politically sophisticated, schooled in what Jack Conrad curiously still calls "the World Communist movement", and acting to some degree in conjunction with the ruling class in Russia.

In coyly quoting Lenin and, seemingly, admitting that these were "reactionary fantasies" — not a bad way of describing the Stalinism which some subjective revolutionaries believed in! — "weaknesses and errors", he is, whether he knows it or not, implicitly engaging in radical political self-criticism for his years as a "tankies' tankie".

In fact, most of what *The Leninist* advocated — their hostility to Solidarnosc in Poland and to other attempts to recreate a working-class movement on the poisoned ground of the Stalinist states, where they thought "the working class" ruled, and their invariable partisanship for the ruling class in the Stalinist states against the workers there — these were thoroughly reactionary.

Until J-J understands that he will not grow up politically!

Fantasies instead of concrete analysis

J-J: "The conditions which produced the 1978 revolution in Afghanistan date back to at least the mid-1960s and the failures of the Zahir Shah monarchy to carry through the modernisation of the country. The UN credited Afghanistan with being one of the poorest 20 countries in the world. Neither healthcare nor education existed for the mass of the population. Over 90% were illiterate."

But what has this to do with what in fact happened? Sociologically this was not a working class party. He is incapable of moving from the stereotypes and the archetypes and the copybook exercises, and how things might have been and should have been, to analysis of the concrete realities of Afghanistan.

What follows is a sketchy, selective account that gives no real picture of the real Afghanistan. He substitutes quasi-fictions. The actual dynamic — the grouping of a section of the elite around the PDPA and the Russians, etc. — is absent; vague talk of "discontent" is put in its place.

Denying the all-shaping fact that it was fundamentally an elite movement that created Saur, that its actual antecedents, the long gestation process, are to be sought in the history of the elite and its interaction with the Stalinist ruling class; like Emine Engin, and following in her tracks, he is led to give an account not of Afghanistan and not of the real "revolution" but of an imaginary county and a revolution that never was.

J-J: "Between 1953 and 1963 Afghanistan suffered under the heavy heel of oppression." In fact the Stalinists supported Daud as other Stalinists at the time supported Nasser and the Iraqi 'Nasser', Quassim, 1958–63. It was a major reason why they did not openly found a party until 1965.

"Yet discontent could not be contained indefinitely using these methods, and in the mid-1960s the monarchy was forced to grant one concession after another. In 1964 some limited democratic rights were officially recognised and an electoral system was introduced.

"In the countryside the traditional rulers could often fix the ballot and pressurise opposition candidates into standing down. That was even true for the smaller towns and some of the cities. The exception was Kabul, the capital. Here alone there was something approaching political liberty."

This is, in fact, J-J accidentally pointing to an important truth. "The PDPA was very much a Kabul party."

"...While the PDPA could build support in village schools, the khans and landlords would frighten the poor peasants, the sharecroppers, who might be tempted to join the communists. They were godless and anti-muslim. Failing that, anyone who dared promote the politics of the PDPA in the countryside 'could easily die for speaking out of turn' (ibid)."

This is a subtextual vindication of the Khalqis: they were unfortunately blocked off from another course than the one that led them to reap the harvest of Russia's influence, and recruit key officers and then to make a military coup. The account he gives here, to explain — and justify — what Khalq did, undermines his insistence that April 1978 was a revolution and not a coup. He doesn't notice the effect of his Khalqi apologetics.

The conclusion from the true picture he paints has to be that the situation was one in which a popular revolution was impossible, as I think it was. It does not follow that the "peculiar solution" of the PDPA, a Stalinist military coup, was right. And history shows us, in a message written in giant letters of blood, that this did not work either...

There was no rank and file ferment in the armed forces

J-J: "The PDPA was deeply divided factionally between the right wing (He remains a Khalqi...) around Karmal and the left wing around Taraki and Amin.

"...Between 1964 and 1973 the growing mood of anger gave birth to organised movements amongst the workers, students and peasants. In 1965 there were student boycotts of classes and strikes in the mining and electrical industries. Even comrade Matgamna concedes that in 1971-72 'the PDPA led a wave of strikes' (*Workers' Liberty* Vol 2, No2, nd, p42). ["Concedes..."] The point here is that the idea that one presents an objective account is as foreign to J-J as to a courtroom lawyer... In Paghman a peasant movement began to demand land redistribution. All in all, many thousands were arrested and scores killed, but that only added to popular clamour for change. As a consequence unrest began to manifest itself in the army."

This, taken from Engin, is plain nonsense. That the army responded to social impasse and crisis, including the sort of things that he lists, is fact. It responded as it did and in the way it did because of the history of the elite reformers which I have sketched out (see "Afghanistan..." for a detailed account).

It responded also in the way it did because of the influence of the USSR, and derivatively, of the PDPA, which reaped what the armed forces' 25-year connection with the USSR ruling class had sown.

The idea that unrest manifested itself in the army as a result of the events he lists, as a reflection of them, presupposes for credibility Emine Engin's covering up of just which people in the armed forces we are talking about.

The logical outcome of what J-J presents, and what he tries to suggest, would be ferment in the armed forces, rank and file eruptions, etc. But that is not what happened. And in fact Parcham, the most closely tied to the USSR, participated in Daud's coup and in the government that resulted from it.

"Things came to a head in 1973. There were, admits [!] comrade

Matgamna, 'conditions for revolution' in 'urban Afghanistan' (*Workers' Liberty* Vol 2, No2, p42). He is correct. The rulers could not rule in the old way and the ruled in the cities, especially Kabul, refused to be ruled in the old way. The only way out for the ruling class was a pre-emptive army coup led by Daud — former prime minister and a member of the royal family. Daud came to power against the regime in order to save the regime with the active help of the Parcham wing of the PDPA. Reward duly came with a range of ministerial portfolios. Nevertheless, though Daud offered a trickle of worthy promises, they did not resolve the underlying discontent and social malaise affecting Afghan society."

This is a variant of Emine Engin's falsification of who the actors were and why — here used to obscure what happened in 1973, and to misrepresent Daud. What did he act to preempt? The third part of the bit of Lenin Karaoke Jack Conrad is here paraphrasing (from *Left Wing Communism...*) has it that an alternative to the existing rulers must be available for a revolutionary situation to exist. He implies with the talk of "preemption" by Daud that such a thing was available, or conceivable. It wasn't.

The bourgeoisie certainly had no hope of it. The PDPA — either faction — did not yet dream of their own regime. Parcham, and the USSR, saw no better way forward than Daud, whose coup the Parchami officers helped organise. Far from then even imagining what would happen in April 1978, Khalq tried to join the Daud government in 1973.

Karaoke Leninism

This is a prize exhibit of Karaoke Leninism. Lenin's well known account of the three conditions for a revolution (the rulers cannot rule in the old way, the ruled refuse to be so ruled, and there is available a viable alternative to the existing system) is not used here as a model with which to analyse Afghanistan.

The text is paraphrased and used as a clumsy substitute for concrete analysis.

In fact, this outline of the conditions of revolution, just like Lenin's letter to the CC, *Marxism and Insurrection*, if it is used with your mind switched on as distinct from being karaoked, sheds a flood of light on Afghanistan.

"Khalq significantly outgrew Parcham in terms of membership... Hard membership figures are impossible to come by. True to form, comrade Matgamna writes of an 8,000 total for both factions as the 'highest PDPA claim', but guesses that 'the real figure before the [April 1978] revolution may have been half of that' (*Workers' Liberty* Vol 2, No2, p49).

"This is not right. I make no pretence to know what exactly the membership of the semi-legal PDPA was." But he knows inexactly: how? From the organ of international Stalinism, used exactly as Emine Engin used it 20 years ago! "Nonetheless, in *World Marxist Review* — a thoroughly turgid journal of what was then the 'official' world communist movement [claimed to be 50,000 members.]"

What figure you plump for is decided not by the test of likelihood, plausibility, comparison of the best available assessments — which acquaints the reader with the possibilities and difficulties, which is what I did in *WL* — but by one's emotional attitude! It is not rational history, let alone Marxist approach to history.

"In terms of Kabul's political life the [resulting] demonstration was huge. Some sources write of 50,000, others of 15,000. Comrade Matgamna a much more modest 10,000. The size and militancy of Kyber's funeral alarmed the — royal-republican — Daud government and triggered the high-risk decision to arrest leading members of the PDPA."

But what has this political life to do with the coup, or the regime it installed? It was the army and airforce that made the coup, not the PDPA.

Whatever the size of the demonstration, this had nothing to do with what happened in the changeover effected by the PDPA-army and airforce officers!

What would a real revolution have looked like?

Whatever the size of the demonstration, this had nothing to do

with what happened in the changeover effected by the PDPA army and airforce officers!

In a real revolution what would follow from the things he describes would be attempts to set up some sort of representative mass bodies, perhaps soviets, the subversion of the armed forces at the rank and file level, perhaps outbreaks, risings ("premature" or otherwise).

Even if his picture is true, though as far as I could make out it is very far from the truth [see "Afghanistan..."], nothing of this sort emerged, even if only to play a subordinate role in the making of the coup. Nothing at all!

The most he dares — after Emine Engin — assert is that there was a big demonstration in Kabul during or after the coup. It is not at all central; and though he does his best to vaguely suggest that it is, he does not dare to say it plainly.

Again, the question arises, given the basic facts, which are not seriously disputed, why does he need this? He used to be braver, boldly asserting that the PDPA and its officers were the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

"At midnight on April 25 1978 Taraki and Karmal were lifted by the police. However, before he was seized, Amin — who was responsible for the party's illegal work in the army — managed to issue instructions for an uprising. 'As crowds gathered' in the Kabul's central park 'in protest against the imprisonment of PDPA leaders', Mig 21s struck the presidential palace and tanks moved into the city (ibid)."

As an account of what and why, this is nonsense. Curiously, he assigns to the PDPA a reactive, initially passive role. Why does he need it? In any case, that is not how things were.

He elides the revealing fact that Amin was only under house arrest and freely able to communicate, and other details which I gave in *WL*. Why? He thinks that weighs against the picture he wants to draw or suggest.

"After some fierce fighting especially in Jelalabad, the Daud regime was swept away [he refuses a clear definition of who, exclusively, did the fighting] amid widespread rejoicing. Comrade Matgamna writes improbably of mayhem and 10,000 deaths. Film footage shown on the BBC tells of a less bloody scenario — the common people of Kabul, on foot and horse [?], taking to the streets and a sea of red flags.

And what did they *do* in the streets — and afterwards?...

In fact here he repeats an idea in Engin, who is not only more rigorous and more serious but, all in all, more honest about what actually happened in Afghanistan. What J-J adds is imaginative elaboration. Where she talks of photographs of the demonstrators he adds his own "BBC" film. Here he elaborates Engin all the way into straight lies.

J-J: "PDPA officers were given orders by PDPA cadres and then themselves gave orders to the conscripts under them. The revolution was therefore an uprising organised by a mainly civilian "official communist" party which had aligned to itself a section of the officer corps and [afterthought!] enjoyed the sympathy of the politically advanced masses in the cities, above all Kabul."

As far as I could find out this is only true at all in that the PDPA leaders told the party officers what they wanted and relied on them to activate the traditional army structures.

Here, J-J is using bits of formal truth to construct large lies. He is trying to suggest that in its *modus operandi*, relationship to the working class and to the people generally, this was not a coup.

For what is true in this statement to amount to what he is trying to make it amount to, then the armed forces under the political control of the PDPA would have had to be only part of those acting in the "revolution" — a subordinate part, or in any case so limited a part as to give the seizure of power a character other than the one it really had, that of an army/airforce coup in which the PDPA officers and the segments of the old state under their control were the only active force in the taking and consolidation of power.

The facts are unambiguous. J-J here engages in pure obfuscation. Nobody denies that there was some support for the PDPA, and for the coup. The argument involved in saying it was or was not a coup is one about who the protagonist was. It was the armed forces officers under the political leadership of the PDPA!

October 1917 was a "coup"

J-J, blindly cribbing, now presents his "cover version" of Emine Engin on coups and revolution — including her bizarre idea that Otto von Bismarck organised a coup and the no less bizarre idea that Frederick Engels discussed "Bismarck's coup".

"A coup d'état, a blow against the state, by definition involves a plot against the existing state in isolation from any section of the masses. It originates within the state: e.g., military or palace coups. Examples from European history would be Louis Bonaparte and Otto von Bismarck. They elevated themselves into dictators by relying upon 'organised state power', not the 'unorganised, elemental power of the popular masses' (F Engels, *Collected Works* Vol 26, Moscow 1990, p479).

"In 1978 there existed a revolutionary situation in the urban centres. The old regime was turning to assassinations, arrests and banings. [This is in itself no part of a revolutionary situation; if they can do it vigorously enough they can snuff it out.] The masses for their part were mobilised and demanding radical change.... Under such circumstances revolution is a matter of art and while the form [!] of an uprising can be that of a *coup* — like the *October Revolution of 1917* [my emphasis] and the storming of the Winter Palace by red guards and pro-Bolshevik army units — the key question is social content."

Emine Engin's version is better: in his "cover" version J-J tries to prove too much. When he "improves" what he cribs, here as on the 1916 Rising, he tends to get into new difficulties.

Even if one accepts that the 'form' of the transfer of power in October 1917 was that of a coup — which I emphatically do not — when you ask the Marxist questions, 'Who? Whom?', of which Lenin truly said that in politics they are always the defining ones, the decisive differences become clear: these were red guards (and rank and file soldiers). They acted on behalf of and in the name of soviets, which already covered the whole country, where they — with their left SR allies — had a majority. The regime they set up was based on the soviets, etc., etc.

Here J-J draws out Engin's logic, describing October as in 'form' a coup, defining it by that form.

The logic of J-J's general "Right Communist" politics is to break from even notional commitment to Bolshevism. I'm not sure there is not some of that here.

Certainly the old Engin version of this that J-J used to hold to only used rhetoric — was October a coup? — to argue that Saur was not a coup. The argument about the 'form' of a coup was subordinate, indeed, throwaway. Here with J-J it is up front in the plain assertion that October was a "coup".

Karaoke Jack makes as bad a job of singing Engin as he does singing Lenin! He here presents positively what Engin only did negatively and rhetorically, with the question, was October also a coup answered in the negative. J-J answers it in the positive: October was a coup but, like Saur, its social content was revolution.

The continuity here with J-J's old politics lies in substitutionism. The Bolsheviks, in October 1917, like the PDPA and its officers substituted for the working class in making a revolution.

J-J seems to have abandoned this account of Saur together with the idea that Saur was a social — working class! — revolution. The political *infection* is still there, eating away at the foundations of his "Bolshevism", which anyway was always a somewhat kitschy "Bolshevism".

"The newly installed PDPA government — overwhelmingly civilian — enacted far-going reforms. Usury was abolished in the villages — debt crippled the peasantry. Rigorous ceilings on private land ownership, along with the encouragement of cooperatives and offers of cheap credits, fertilisers, seeds and agricultural implements, were intended to free 'millions of toiling peasants from the yoke of exploitation' (quoted in B Sen Gupta *Afghanistan* London 1986 p50). The government envisaged land confiscation and redistribution, not collectivisation."

If he were serious he would feel obliged to respond to my account of, for example, what happened when they "abolished" usury. It is to miss the point to define the PDPA government by its programme and enactments.

Their real social character, the elitist militarist ideas and attitudes, lethally twinned with the state's violence, defines what they were and explains what they did.

It is utterly meaningless to say that they wanted land redistribution not collectivisation.

There is evidence, which I cited in "Afghanistan...", otherwise — and in fact once the people had been disarmed and Stalinist power consolidated, they could have done anything they liked. Or isn't the history of Stalinism in power relevant here? They would have used land redistribution to give themselves a base, wipe out the old rulers, and then.... It is not as if one can say the Khalqis in power showed judgment and restraint in other fields and that therefore we can assume they might also show these qualities in this area...

Belated criticism of the PDPA

"The PDPA responded with arrests and torture. That only multiplied their enemies and supplied fresh recruits to the mujahedin groups. When the PDPA was physically driven out of the villages, it fell back on the methods employed by the old royalist governments — artillery and air strikes. As Jonathan Neale emphasises, it is 'not possible to wage class war by bombing a village'. Bombs hit rich and poor alike and unite them. Hence in one area after another the PDPA 'found themselves fighting the people they had meant to free' (*International Socialism* No93, December 2001, p34)."

What has happened to J-J, the doughty champion of the good "red terror" in Afghanistan, the panting admirer of Amin's strong mailed fist?

The point he still cannot grasp is that bombing villages flowed from the nature of the coup and the Stalinist attitude to self-sufficient state power.

Again J-J's curious and mysterious way with quotations — he needs to cite a recent article in *IS Journal* for this... I said that in *Workers' Action* in January 1980. It has taken J-J 23 years to recognise a self-evident truth!

"That the PDPA government survived till 1992 — after the Soviet Union's collapse — testifies to a residual, but nonetheless real, base of popular support. [*IS Journal*], which still characterises the 1978 revolution as a 'coup', nevertheless owns up that 'the PDPA demonstrated that it did have a serious base in Afghanistan' (September 30 1992). Ditto *Socialist Organiser* — the forerunner of the AWL's *Solidarity* — 'The fact that the Afghan regime the Russians left behind them did not collapse for over three years indicates that it was not only a creature of the Russians' (April 23 1992)."

He is boneheadedly hewing to a line that is foolish given the facts, which depends entirely on a definition of a coup so narrow that it effectively defines out of existence the very concept of a coup.

This was originally adopted for the ideological purpose of strengthening the case that this was a workers' revolution, though to the naked eye it was neither a popular revolution nor a working class one.

He holds to it long after he has, or seems to have, abandoned the original framework. It is now what it always was, a factional badge of honour, shielded from critical erosion by narcissism raised to the height of political idiocy!

The Russian occupation of Afghanistan

from Workers' Action magazine, March 1981

Note: This article was written in 1981. The theoretical framework on which it rests is not adequate. We regarded Russia as a “degenerated workers’ state”, and made a distinction between the Stalinist states in which the old ruling class had been destroyed, and states such as Egypt then, whose state economies we called “state capitalism” because the old ruling class had survived and the statification of the economy was not likely to last (in Egypt the bought-out capitalists could trade their government bonds on the Cairo stock exchange). The collapse of the USSR in 1991 shows such distinctions to have been a lot less definite than we then thought. The description of the USSR as a “degenerated workers’ state” can now be seen to have been wrong, and wrong since about 1928, when the Stalinist bureaucracy made itself “sole master of the surplus product”, to use Trotsky’s description of it. In my opinion, the Stalinist states were best described as a distinct form of class society, “bureaucratic collectivism”. Other comrades in *Solidarity* and *Workers’ Liberty* think the Stalinist states were a form of “state capitalism”, using “state capitalism” differently from the way it was used in this article 22 years ago.

S.M.,
August 2003

Unlike most other would-be Trotskyists, *Workers’ Action* opposed the Russian invasion and called for the withdrawal of the troops. John O’Mahony [Sean Matgamna] examines the arguments put forward in favour of supporting the Russian occupation by Militant.

“What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude towards oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their ‘rights’ and parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of those rights. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in advanced countries; it instructs the Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection, and it accepts full responsibility for their work in the face of ‘civilised’ executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, Revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over that boundary remains centrism.”

Leon Trotsky, *What Next?*

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan was a test case for the attitude of political tendencies towards Stalinism and towards the rights of oppressed nations.

Militant took some time to hammer out its response to the invasion. It took a very long article by Ted Grant and then, a month later, another long article by Lynn Walsh supplementing it, before their line was clear. The following article examines the emergence of Militant’s line on the invasion of Afghanistan as expressed in those two articles and in an article by Alan Woods, published in July 1980, which brutally expressed the satisfaction with which this ‘Trotskyist’ tendency greeted the prospect of a Stalinist transformation in Afghanistan.

Militant’s first response to the invasion was a three-page long article by Ted Grant (*Militant*, 18.1.80). The last third of the article fell apart into an unintegrated series of musings not too far above the stream-of-consciousness level. We shall see the consequences. Despite that it was a knowledgeable analysis of the events that preceded the Russian occupation. Though the analytical framework was different, the essential features of Grant’s description paralleled

that presented in *Workers’ Action* (12.1.80 and 19.1.80).

In contrast to the fantasies peddled by others who call themselves Trotskyists, (especially the SWP-USA and the large part of the USFI which consists of its international satellites), Grant knew quite well who it was that had made the original so-called revolution, that is the military coup of April 1978:

“The April 1978 coup was based on a movement of the elite of the Army and the intellectuals and the top layers of professional middle-class people in the cities”.

But he does not know what it was that they made. His definition of the regime that resulted rings strange in the ears of a Marxist.

“...Conditions of mass misery and the corruption of the Daud regime resulted in a proletarian Bonapartist coup. Proletarian Bonapartism is a system in which landlordism and capitalism have been abolished [when?] but where power has not passed into the hands of the people, but is held by a one party, military-political dictatorship”.

He goes on. “After the seizure of power, they abolished the mortgages and other debts of the peasants, who were completely dominated by the usurers, and carried through a land reform.”

Now if this is what happened, it becomes impossible to explain why the regime had so little popular support, why its initial support declined, and why it needed the Russian Army to keep it in power.

What the PDP did

They *did* decree an end to usury and a cancellation of debts; they decreed steps towards equality for women; and they legislated a land reform — *but they could not carry them out*. Everywhere and in everything, they proved to have neither popular support that would move to gain through mass actions what the regime decreed, *nor, alternatively*, the strength and resources to manipulate from the top and to wean people from the age-old network of dependence on landlords, usurers, and priests (often the same people). They had neither a banking system to offer instead of the system around the usurers, nor an agricultural supply system to carry through the land reform. Their efforts from on high alienated the people, and their good intentions found real expression mainly in bureaucratic/military repression of their own people.

The whole experience was shaped by these facts. The Afghan “revolution” was a coup by the officer corps of the air force and a section of the officer corps of the army, differing from other efforts by officers in backward societies to take the role of developers of the country (e.g., the coup of 1968 in Peru) in that the officers, trained and equipped by the USSR since 1955, took the bureaucratic USSR as their social model. And they took the bureaucracy itself as their model for their own future role.

Because of the link with the USSR and the magnetic attraction of the Stalinist states on the central state forces of Afghanistan, the PDP gained its major forces in the Army and among the urban middle class, especially in Kabul. Estimates of its strength at the time of the coup range from 2,000 (in an extremely well-informed article in the *Financial Times*, in 1978) to 10,000 (*Intercontinental Press*, publication of the SWP-USA, which, give or take a few ritual criticisms, acted for six months after the invasion as vulgar propagandist for the USSR and the PDP in the style of the CPs in the 30s).

How extraordinary this was is best seen if translated into British figures. Its equivalent would be for a “party” of between 5,000 and 25 or 30,000 to seize power in Britain via the army! Even this comparison is inexact, because of the structure of society in Afghanistan. The divide separating town from country, centuries and even millennia wide in terms of culture and development, meant that the Party and the upper layers of the Army were sealed-off from the masses in a way that would be impossible for even a

small party in Britain.

Thus the PDP began alienated from the masses; *and their behaviour* deepened the alienation and drove the masses into the hands of the landlords and mullahs. This happened because of the extraordinarily elitist, bureaucratic, militarist, commandist attitude adopted by the regime. (It was absolutely typical of such military regimes, whether of right or “left” persuasion, though there are examples of radical state capitalist regimes far less elitist than was the PDP/Army regime). Brute military force was their essential tool, at least outside of the main towns; and a severe permanent police-state terror decimated even the supporters of the April Coup. The PDP used force from the beginning with terrible abandon, sending the air force with bombs and napalm against recalcitrant villages. They seem to have thought this would be sufficient to implement their programme.

One gets a strange feeling from the accounts of the brutal regime of government ukases backed by napalm. It was as if they knew neither their own society nor themselves. They acted as if “the revolution” was already made, as if the government could command the forces and the tides by its very word.

State Capitalist

It was as if they were mimicking the established Russian bureaucracy. The PDP was a bureaucratic, militaristic social formation in control of the state apparatus (though a state apparatus not even traditionally in full control of the society — one whose rural subjects are accustomed to bearing arms and acting for themselves). But the PDP stood on one side of a revolutionary transformation which had yet to be won, led, or even evoked. And the Russian bureaucracy — on which they modelled themselves — stands on the other side of a revolution of the working class and peasant masses, erecting its power on that revolution’s political grave but also on its social-economic achievements and accomplishments.

In fact, as the statement of the *Workers’ Action* editorial board defined it (9.2.80):

“The 20-month history of the PDP-Army regime, until the Russian invasion essentially put an end to it and replaced it, was marked by the narrow base of the regime and the attempt to use the armed forces as the instrument of a social transformation which proved obnoxious, for varying reasons, to the big majority of the population.

“Despite its unusually close links with the bureaucracy of the degenerated workers’ state, the regime never got beyond the stage of being a military-bureaucratic state capitalist regime attempting to carry through the bourgeois programme of land reform, educational reform, and some easing of the enslavement of women.

“Its methods in relation to the Afghan masses were never other than military-bureaucratic: the bombing and strafing of villages, including the use of napalm, from the first weeks of the regime, and the figure of 400,000 mainly non-combatant refugees, graphically sum up the military-bureaucratic regime’s relationship with the Afghan masses.”

The central point is that the PDP *did not carry through* a revolution, and proved unable to do so. There are few clearer examples of the impotence of the middle class to achieve a revolution and open the way for serious development in the Third World today (though there are special problems in Afghanistan).

It was a middle-class regime, symbiotic with the Russian Stalinist regime, but still resting on the old state. It never succeeded in making itself, still less the society, into a replica of the USSR’s social institutions, and the invasion snuffed out its independent development.

“Proletarian Bonapartism”

But Grant, as we have seen, views the Afghan events through the prism of his own special theory — the theory of “proletarian bonapartism”.

“Proletarian bonapartism” describes regimes as identical to the Stalinist system on the sole basis of the state ownership of industry. It is a “profile” derived from the features which the Stalinist states have in common in repose. What the theory lacks is any conception

of the dynamic and the struggles whereby the Stalinist states have come into existence.

The East European states were subjugated by Russian military power and assimilated to the Russian system. Apart from that, the only Stalinist-type states (that is, states identical to the USSR) which have achieved any stability have had in common mass peasant (and sometimes working-class) mobilisations, under the leadership and control of militarised Stalinist parties. The Stalinists, via the mass mobilisation, break the state machine, or at least the upper layers linked to the old ruling classes, collectivise industry and the land, and radically root out the old ruling classes. As in 1928 in Russia, all major competitors for the surplus product are eliminated, and the newly-created bureaucracy then becomes the master of the state economy. In this way a truly radical break is made.

(Cuba is partly an exception. But there too there was a mass mobilisation and a radical overturn, with the new regime then settling over time into the Stalinist mould.)

In contrast, the general experience of regimes which have emulated statism purely from on top, without a radical overturn, has been that they tend to be unstable. There has been no real replication of the existing Stalinist states. In Egypt, for example, industry was statified, but the old ruling class was kept on (stock exchange dealings in Government compensation bonds continued, for example), and eventually reasserted itself. The Army acted as agent and caretaker for the bourgeoisie.

Grant and Militant have a history of being unable to distinguish between real Stalinist-type transformations and developments like in Egypt in the late 50s and the 60s. They consider Syria, Burma, Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique, for example, as of the same order as the Stalinist states (deformed and degenerated workers’ states). Their urge to play at “prophets” and to “spot the trend” leads them repeatedly to make foolish and hasty judgments. They briefly hailed Portugal as a workers’ state in 1975, and are now seemingly on the brink of so classifying Iran.

They see a fundamental trend — the “autonomous movement of the productive forces” — in the colonial revolutions of the Third World, manifesting itself everywhere, through many different forms. Thus Militant spent most of the 60s predicting the eventual manifestation of this trend within South Vietnam, and US withdrawal... while others were building the anti-war movement.

Analysing Afghanistan, Grant, the prisoner of his dogmas, scans the horizon for “empirical” confirmation of what he knows in his heart, and so decrees that the PDP regime was proletarian Bonapartist — whereas the whole dynamic of the events he is dealing with derives from the PDP’s *failure* to be what he calls a proletarian bonapartist regime.

When Grant assimilates the pre-invasion Afghan regime to his proletarian bonapartist scheme, then he, like the regime itself, mistakes form for substance, government decrees for achievements, impotent middle class aspirations to be a Stalinist bureaucracy for a society in which the old ruling class has been overthrown.

The invasion

Why, in Grant’s view, did the Russians invade?

Because *“the Russian bureaucracy... could not tolerate the overthrow, for the first time in the post-war period, of a regime based on [...] the elimination of landlordism and capitalism and the victory of a feudal-capitalist counter-revolution, especially in a state bordering on the Soviet Union.”*

Fear of the ferment spilling over to the Muslim population of the USSR was also a motive. The Russian bureaucracy, thus, intervened, *“not only because of Afghanistan’s strategic position, but for reasons of their own power and prestige.”*

Grant denounces the hypocrisy of the imperialist outcry and chronicles recent imperialist “interventions” — South Africa in Angola and Zimbabwe, Belgium in Zaire and France in Chad and Zaire. True, as far as it goes, but it obliterates in a cloud of minor propaganda/agitational points what is new in Afghanistan — the fact that the USSR, acting from strength, was overstepping the agreed boundaries that had prevailed since World War Two.

The US, says Grant, is using the pretext of Afghanistan and

“attempting to hit at Russia because of the class character of the Soviet Union, where landlordism and capitalism have been eliminated”. This is typical Grant-thought. Basic, general historic truths about capitalist class antagonism to the anti-capitalist regime are used to “explain” specific developments.

What response, asks Grant, should socialists make to the invasion? How do we advise the labour movement to see it?

Grant and Stalinism

Grant attacks the Communist Parties for opposing the invasion because, he says, they proceed from “abstract principles” of opposition to “aggression between peoples”, support for the UN, etc — *“instead of viewing the process from the point of view of the class struggle internationally and the class relations between the nations”*. Which means? Grant doesn’t tell us. Others — his pupils — subsequently will. In fact, it is a way for Grant to evade the by no means abstract question of what the Afghan masses would choose.

Everything is skewed by Grant’s basic attitude to Stalinism. Forty and more years after Trotsky and the Bolshevik rearguard publicly declared that a river of blood separated Stalinism and Bolshevism, Grant is still — in his mind — engaged in a political and ideological dialogue with the Stalinist bureaucracy. The bureaucracy in the 1920s accused Trotsky of wanting to use the Red Army to “export revolution”. (Grant mistakenly asserts that Trotsky did advocate this). Lo and behold, says Ted Grant in 1980, we now have a grossly bureaucratic use of the Red Army (the same Red Army?!) without the support of the workers, etc. The point of course is that the Russian bureaucracy is necessarily against the workers and the common people of Afghanistan.

In the same vein, as a critic of the technique and crudities of the bureaucracy, Grant comes to his central objection to the invasion. *It will repel the international working class*. The Russian state conducted itself differently in Lenin’s and Trotsky’s time. *“They based themselves on proposals and actions which would raise the level of consciousness of the working class internationally.” “Anything which acted to raise the consciousness of the working class was justified; anything which had the opposite effect was to be condemned”*, etc., etc. Yes (though the Bolsheviks were sometimes forced to do things irrespective of the effect on international working class consciousness). But what have Lenin and Trotsky got to do with the present Moscow regime, with its character, selection, education, motivation, lifestyle, relationship to the Russian and other USSR peoples, relationship to the workers in the USSR or outside it? The answer, for Ted Grant, seems to be that they carry on the same business in a “distorted” way. The train of thought runs on tracks laid down by Isaac Deutscher — Stalinism is the continuation of Bolshevism, or at least the custodian of its social-economic achievements and the transplanter of them to other countries, carrying them on the point of bayonets to people who are crushed by tanks if they resist.

This is very strange stuff. But it is of interest as illustrating the confused thought processes of the main political leader of one of the biggest groups in Britain calling itself Trotskyist (a group which also has some supporters outside Britain). He is confused to the point of seemingly not knowing who he is supposed to be, who and what the Stalinist rulers of the USSR are, and what their relationship is to the working class. He is seemingly confused about what time of the political clock it is. Like the legendary professor of history who asked a colleague, “what century is this?”, Ted Grant must have occasion to ask his associates “What decade is this?”. (But they won’t be able to tell him!)

Having explained at great length the different techniques of the bureaucracy and of Marxist working-class revolutionaries, Grant then comes close to the truth that *it is a matter of different people, of a different social formation, and of different aims*. He puts his own gloss on this. The policies of the proletarian bonapartist regime in the USSR are determined by the *“income, power, prestige and privilege”* of the bureaucracy. But they support revolutions in backward countries “when it takes place in the distorted form of proletarian bonapartism”. That’s only for backward countries with “dis-

torted revolutions” — *“they are opposed to a socialist revolution in advanced countries because... the establishment of a democratic socialist regime in any country in the world would immediately threaten the foundations of the bureaucratic misrule in Russia, China, and the other Stalinist states”*. This seems to mean that despite what they are, and in the course of serving their own interests, the Russian bureaucracy can nevertheless do good work in backward countries. But Grant manages simultaneously to conflate and link as parallel phenomena the workers’ revolution and the mutations: the idea is clearly one of distinct stages *reflecting* levels of development. At the same time Grant’s scheme of workers’ socialist revolution for advanced countries, “distorted (Stalinist) revolution” for backward countries, ignores the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy has made its own “revolution” in advanced countries too — in Czechoslovakia, in East Germany (a backward part of Germany, but that is relative), on condition of having military-bureaucratic rule over them.

Now Grant gets to the crux. The ending of feudalism and capitalism in Afghanistan opens the way to bring that country into the 20th century. *“If we just considered the Russian intervention in isolation, we should have to give this move critical support”*.

“But because of the reactionary effect it has on the consciousness of the working class... Marxists must oppose the Russian intervention”.

“The Russian intervention in Afghanistan must be condemned despite its progressive aspects, because it is spitting at the opinions of the world working class”.

It is clear from the article that when he talks about the bad effects on working class consciousness of the invasion, he has something specific in mind. *“The overriding danger under contemporary conditions is the alienation of the workers of Japan, Western Europe, the USA and other advanced countries from the idea of socialism and socialist revolution [i.e. Russia?!]. This is shown by the attitudes taken by the [left labour] Tribunites. Like the CP, they unfortunately base themselves not on the real movement of the class struggle and on the actual relations between the great powers [sic] but, on the contrary, rely on abstract moral condemnations... But world antagonisms are a reflection of the dialectical contradictions between the capitalist states, and, above all, of the major contradiction of our time, that between the Stalinist states, on the one hand, and the countries of capitalism on the other”*.

It is clear that Grant is being tossed between the implications and necessary conclusions from his theory, and the pressure of the Tribunites. It may, “in isolation”, be progressive in Afghanistan, but it makes life difficult in the Labour Party! The complete prostration into bloc politics, and the consequent abandonment of independent working class politics, should be noted.

But Grant deplores the invasion. Should the Russians then withdraw? Grant seems to think so, though it is not quite clear. His way of expressing it is to dismiss *“the demand by the imperialist powers supported by the CP[GB] and the Tribune group”* as “utopian”. (Why? Grant adds immediately after this: *“Russia, of course has vetoed this demand in the UN Council”*).

It seems that the CPs should be criticised for no longer automatically backing what Moscow does. Nothing here is abstract, or “idealistic”, or contrary to “the real movement of the class struggle” and the taking of sides with one bloc in “the major contradiction of our time”. The advancing tanks move, backed by History, and all your programmes and tears will not roll them back one inch!

Finally; what prospects does Grant see in Afghanistan?

“Balancing between the different nationalities of Afghanistan, and leaning on the poor and middle peasants, the Afghan regime, based on Russian bayonets, will undoubtedly be able to crush the rebels and establish a firm proletarian bonapartist state as a Soviet satellite”. But things won’t be so bad. *“Once the counter-revolution has been defeated, most of the Russian troops will be withdrawn... The Bonapartist regime and the Russians will find a way to compromise with the mullahs”*.

Essentially this is the same basic assessment as was made in Workers’ Action last January. But the niceminded “optimism” is Ted Grant’s.

The international contradictions will soften, too. Russia may, in

response to the American trade reprisals, back the Baluchis and Pathans in Pakistan and maybe “fulfil the old dream of Tsarist diplomacy, a warm water port”. But “before things go that far, however, it is likely in the not too distant future, that there will be a compromise between the US and the bureaucracy.” This soporific message will perhaps lull the many readers of *Militant* who did not have the duty in 1965 and after to read *Militant*’s monthly assurance that compromise was just ahead in Vietnam. It has the effect, however, of minimising the degree of blame the readers of *Militant* will attach to the bureaucracy for the invasion and the boost it has given to the warmongers.

Setting it straight?

Grant’s article, though it left many things in the air, seemed to come out against the Russian invasion. In fact, it was utterly contradictory. The whole assessment of the “progressive” side of the effective annexation of Afghanistan implied support for it. The opposition to the invasion was grounded in the need to bow to working class public opinion. Grant declined to take a stand on an independent working class political assessment, and confined himself to describing a process and scoffing at the “utopians” of the CPGB and *Tribune*.

Within a short time, some of Grant’s pupils inserted the appropriate explicitly Stalinist politics.

One month after Grant’s analysis there appeared part one of a two-part reply to a letter from “Roy Bentley”, who had “just read” Ted Grant’s article. He wanted to inquire what Grant’s line really had been! He offered an interpretation, based on Grant’s comment that the call for withdrawal was “utopian”. Does that mean that *Militant* is against the “withdrawal of the troops, having quite rightly condemned, the invasion”? He “could see” that if the Russian troops were withdrawn, “the Afghan regime of Karmal would soon collapse and there would be an almost inevitable bloodbath and a return to feudal landowning and backwardness... This would justify support for the troops being there now they have invaded. Is this the position *Militant* is putting forward?”

“Roy has indeed drawn the right conclusion from Ted’s article” began the reply. Thus, ludicrously, *Militant* began to correct itself. The reply, by Lynn Walsh; made the following new points.

To call for withdrawal would open up the risk of “Afghanistan’s proletarian bonapartist regime” being overthrown. (But where was there a regime other than the one installed against the government that they said invited the troops in? This is a bit of camouflage. The Russian troops are the regime). Supporting withdrawal would therefore mean siding with the forces of counter-revolution. (The whole question of any rights for the Afghan people is wiped out by equating the Russians with the left, and by the pretence that the regime still has an independent existence). *Militant* couldn’t support the invasion “because of the reactionary consequences, however, it would have been entirely wrong for Marxists to call for the withdrawal of Russian troops”. In other words — don’t take responsibility, but be glad the bureaucracy is not so fastidious. This attitude of saying “no” while meaning “yes” combined the joys of abstention from direct responsibility with those of vicarious real politics via hypocrisy. If it is necessary for the troops to stay, on pain of undesirable consequences, then it was right to send them in in the first place. Responsible people should have called for the invasion and should acknowledge now that the initiative of the bureaucracy (even for motives of their own) showed them their error if they didn’t. Serious people should — like the SWP-USA — praise the historically progressive role being played by the bureaucracy in Afghanistan.

But Walsh continued: “The Russian intervention in Afghanistan was a progressive move” — Grant is quoted as stating this, though in fact he said it would be progressive if it could be taken in isolation, and that in fact it could not be. “The reactionary international repercussions of invasion completely outweigh any immediate gains in Afghanistan”, admitted Walsh; but preventing the downfall of a proletarian bonapartist military regime was “in itself” another blow to world imperialism. And the invasion “established the development of historically progressive social relations in this small country.”

“In Afghanistan though it has moved to prop up a bonapartist regime that rules through dictatorial methods, the Russian bureaucracy is defending new, fundamentally progressive social relations”.

A mass base of support for the regime (that is, for Stalinism) will be created by land reform, planning, etc. “When the proletarian bonapartist regime is consolidated in Afghanistan, which will be within a measurable period, the Russian leadership [sic] will probably withdraw” its forces. But adds Walsh defiantly, “in any case if there were no danger of counter-revolutionary forces threatening the regime and the social changes that have been carried through, we would then call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops...!”

What exists in Afghanistan is “a grotesque totalitarian caricature of a socialist state”, “because of the isolation of the social change in an economically and culturally backward country, and the fact that the bonapartist leadership has inevitably taken Russia’s Stalinist regime as its model”. (Apart from the fact that it is nonsense now to pretend that the regime has an independent existence, it is not isolated: the character of the regime is determined now not by the conditions in its own society alone, but by the bureaucratic domination of the much more developed Russian society. It is that Russian domination that determined the shape of the regime even in immensely more developed Czechoslovakia.)

Walsh insists that *Militant* “stands for a further supplementary political revolution”. But this is an epochal perspective. For Afghanistan it would be after a whole historical period. In Walsh’s scheme, the first stage is the growth of support for the regime, under the Russian tanks, whose presence *Militant* supports. And Walsh underlines the point: in Russia and Eastern Europe the bureaucracy; has “outlived any progressive role it played in the past through developing the planned economy” (When was it progressive in Czechoslovakia, for example?) But not in Afghanistan. There it has prospects of an organic growth and-consolidation of mass support, with the bureaucracy as the natural leading force, despite its methods, for society at that stage — the bearer of a higher civilisation.

Press fantasies

Militant’s third major article on Afghanistan, published in July 1980, brutally ties all this together. Its author was Alan Woods. Like Walsh, Woods is one of those who gathered around the dead stump of the old ISFI (Pablo-Mandel) British group in the early 60s and helped developed the mutant strain that is the present *Militant* tendency.

Grant established some account of the April 1978 “revolution”; and Walsh (perhaps after an internal dispute, but it scarcely matters) established a (hypocritically dressed-up) pro-invasion line from Grant’s unresolved contradictions. Woods emerges as the arrogant champion of the civilising mission of the Army of the Russian bureaucracy, picking up (I should think consciously) the arguments of Fabian imperialism — all the way to the explicit paternalist depiction of the Afghan masses as necessarily the mere objects of someone else’s boot and bayonet in history.

Entitled “Afghanistan: what is really happening? — the truth behind the press fantasies”, Woods’ article is a polemic against the press reports of mass resistance to the invaders. That aspect of it is not important. It is, indeed, ridiculous. For his case is that the Western press is grossly unreliable, and making anti-Russian propaganda on Afghanistan — and he establishes it entirely by quotations from the Western press!

The piece is studded by quotations from the *Times*.

In fact, of course, the bourgeois press has to be read carefully and watched. But what emerges from Woods’ own rather silly polemics is that whereas an effort was being made in the *Times* and *Financial Times* to establish the facts, and this involved printing not entirely checkable accounts and then correcting them or repudiating them, what Woods himself does is take the comments of the *Times* on press inaccuracies and reports that proved false, one-sidedly seize on a series of their self-corrections, and belabour them in order to disguise his own partisan and one-sided propaganda for the civilising mission of the Russians.

Woods doesn’t notice how ludicrous it is to end one point with,

“And the Times reporter commented laconically: ‘Not to put too fine a point on it, the Voice of America was talking rubbish’” — and then immediately go on: “But the Times itself has not been averse to talking rubbish in recent months, as when it screamed in banner headlines: Hundreds dead in Kabul revolt against Russians [28 February], a typically exaggerated report of the strike of reactionary shopkeepers in the Kabul bazaar in February...” Woods is clearly a master of the major tool of Grantite reasoning, the non sequitur. Or perhaps he means — it is certainly his underlying train of thought — that dead shopkeepers are not worth tallying.

Woods does not need to read the serious bourgeois press (the only source of information available to us, and for that matter the only or main source of world news available to Marx, pre-1917 Lenin, and post-1927 Trotsky). He knows what is going on, from Grantite theory. This is the core of the article — his assumptions and interpretations.

The point is not assessments like the following (which are basically the same as in *Workers’ Action*): *“Moscow’s strategy is first to dig in in the towns, secure control of the administration and the main highways, and then gradually consolidate their influence over the villages and the backward-mountain tribes”*. Nor is it his support (despite the reiterated hypocrisy about how the Russians should not have gone in) for the Russians. It is his interpretation of what is happening and why.

“Dark masses”

For Woods, because *“these tribesmen [are] ‘dark masses’, sunk in the gloom-of barbarism, whose conditions of life and psychology have not changed fundamentally in 2,000 years”*, that *“the task: of dragging [sic] the Afghan countryside out of the slough of primeval backwardness and into the 20th century would be formidable, even with correct leadership and Marxist politics”*.

“The Russian bureaucracy and their Afghan supporters are, in effect, carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in that country”. In a “distorted, bureaucratic, bonapartist fashion”, Woods of course adds. Still, that is what they are doing in Afghanistan and it is the totalitarian bureaucracy that is doing it. And therefore we should be glad that they are doing it.

This is a new version of “permanent revolution”. In Trotsky’s formula the proletariat took the lead of the peasant masses in the struggle against reaction and backwardness, carried out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, and in the same movement took power, eliminating the bourgeoisie. Woods’ formula is one of “international bonapartist permanent revolution” in which the bureaucracy of the USSR is the protagonist and its instrument is an Army which has the task of subjugating, as a bitterly resented foreign invader, the rural masses. (And not only the rural masses. Woods asserts falsely that the towns are solidly with the invaders, but in fact one of the results of the invasion is the alienation of the masses in the towns and even of sections of the PDP (the Khalq faction)).

What will happen in this special case of the permanent revolution that Woods thinks is likely to unfold in Afghanistan?

A foreign military machine conquers the country; organises, beginning from an initially tiny basis of support, a replica of the totalitarian Russian political regime, carries out reforms from above, manipulating the population (for example land redistribution under such a regime is no more than a transitional stage to collectivisation, with or without consent). At the same time, unless the regime proves to be different in Afghanistan from what it is in Russia, it will oppress, massacre, and deport as many of the Afghans as necessary. The norm for this regime is that the population has no civil rights.

What has this got to do with permanent revolution? Nothing whatever! Here permanent revolution is only an — unintentionally — ironic phrase to point up the contrast between Trotsky’s programme and what is likely to happen in Afghanistan.

Woods rightly locates the pre-invasion dynamic in the backwardness of the country and the self-defined mission of the officer caste to modernise in face of the feebleness of Afghan capitalism and its bourgeoisie. He accepts that the PDP/officer caste symbiosis was only possible on a programme of transforming that caste and asso-

ciated sections of the middle class into a ruling elite of the Russian bureaucratic type. The “revolution” was nevertheless “a step forward in comparison to the previous situation”, But the point is that it proved impossible for the PDP and the army to make that “step”, and that for Trotskyists to support such a formation, rooted in the existing state and pitted against the masses is a programmatic betrayal. It was quite distinct from the sort of movement that existed in Vietnam and China, where Stalinist forces led masses against reaction and imperialism.

Woods tells us that the attitude to the invasion is not determined by sentimental considerations but “first and foremost [!] by class consideration”. Which class forces stand behind the present Kabul regime, and which behind the Mujaheddin rebels?

Woods puts his shoulder and full weight to an open door by proving that the rich stand behind the rebels

Progressive Stalinism

The rebels have next to nothing in the towns, says Woods triumphantly. *“The new regime can count on the support of the small working class that exists, plus the great majority of the students, intellectuals and functionaries”*. Woods does not present his evidence for thinking that this is how it actually is. He knows that it is so, for it is ordained in the schema that it is so. *“The struggle in Afghanistan is essentially a struggle of the towns against the countryside [which was true before the invasion], of civilisation against barbarism, of the new against the old”*. Stalinism is the progressive next stage, the bearer of civilisation.

Citing facts about the rebels burning schools, Woods declares that the victory of these “reactionary gangsters” *“would lead to a terrible bloodbath and an orgy of violence and destruction which would plunge Afghanistan back into the dark ages”*. He lists the traditional cruelties and mutilations used by the rebels; he is completely silent about the napalm and the Russian tanks and bombers. The historical mission of the rebels is “about as progressive as that of Genghis Khan” — unlike the mission of the Army of the Russian totalitarian bureaucracy.

And no starry-eyed enthusiast for the conquering armies of capitalism was ever so “optimistic” as Alan Woods. After the brutal disregard comes the consoling cant: the future — after the invading army has completed the subjugation, buried the dead, and re-built the bombed villages — is bright and hopeful. *“As the social benefits of the revolution [the conquest] begin to become understood by the poor peasants... the mass base for reaction will evaporate....”* Moscow will eventually withdraw “the bulk” of its troops (and of course Militant will approve their judgment and wait for it). *“Despite all the totalitarian deformations[!] the new regime will mark a big step forward for Afghan society. Industry will be built up rapidly... The growth of an industrial proletariat in Afghanistan will ultimately serve to undermine the base of bureaucratic rule and prepare the way for a new political revolution, and the establishment of a healthy workers’ democracy in Afghanistan”*.

Conclusion

Militant’s whole argument on Stalinism and Afghanistan is dependent on an unstated analogy with the attitude Marxists took to early capitalism.

In 19th century Europe capitalism developed industry, cleared away feudal restrictions, and also developed the working class. Marx and Engels argued for a recognition of the progressive role of capitalism, and an alliance between the working class and the middle-class revolutionaries.

Stalinism today in some backward countries — so Militant’s argument runs — develops industry, develops the working class, clears away feudal remnants. So why not “critically” support the Stalinists’ efforts to “drag Afghanistan into the 20th century”?

Why not? In the first place, Marx and Engels also argued for independent anti-capitalist activity by the working class at every stage. Lenin developed this emphasis with great sharpness in relation to capitalist development in Russia, denouncing the Mensheviks’ passive, self-limiting policy of accepting that the

bourgeoisie was preordained to lead all and any general revolutionary movements for the foreseeable future.

There is nothing similar in Militant's policy. Nothing the Mensheviks did comes near to equalling the fatalistic prostration of Militant before the Afghan Stalinists and the Russian Stalinists in Afghanistan.

Even the worst of the Mensheviks tried to organise workers independently for their immediate interests. Militant accepts that such workers' organisations are impossible under Stalinist rule. It deplores the fact, but accepts it as an inevitable feature of a whole stage of development in which the active force, deserving of support for its progressive work, is the Stalinist bureaucracy.

At the end of that stage Militant sees the political revolution. But no practical conclusions follow for now.

Although Militant gives an accurate description of who dominates now in Afghanistan, of what the motives for the Russian invasion were, and although they describe the bureaucracy as totalitarian, at no point do they draw any conclusion about the oppressive, anti working class character of the regime that the Russians will create. They know there will be "totalitarian-deformations" but that is not important, it is a secondary aspect of a fundamentally progressive phenomenon.

Trotskyists say that the bureaucracy can be (and has been) in certain circumstances revolutionary against the bourgeoisie, treating it (as Trotsky expressed it) as a competitor for the surplus product. It is in all circumstances counter-revolutionary against the working class. Militant, which might accept this formula, adds however — even so, it is also progressive in backward countries.

Militant completely identifies with the transformation it projects. It portrays the fact that the Russians will probably be able to create a stable regime as reason for hope in the circumstances. It assumes, takes for granted, that the workers will support the transformation, and blandly sets aside the fact that this means co-option of individuals into the new bureaucracy and repression for the masses.

A false analogy

In any case, the historical perspective is wrong. The presentation of Stalinism as a progressive historical force analogous to early capitalism is fundamentally false — and moreover it undermines, as we shall see, the ritually-proclaimed perspective of political revolution.

It is the relationship of Stalinist regimes to the working class that makes the analogy with developing early capitalism completely untenable.

Under the regime of Stalinist totalitarianism the working class is bound hand and foot, deprived of all rights by a highly conscious and militantly anti working class state apparatus which concentrates the means of production in its own hands — together with immense powers of oppression and terror.

It was possible, within developing capitalism, for Marxists to look to a progressive capitalist evolution and still to relate to the working class, support its struggles, and try to organise it independently: The prospect was not that if the bourgeoisie established their regime, then the working class would be held in a totalitarian vice. On the contrary, even in the worst and most repressive early capitalist hell-holes the working class retained individual rights and could take advantage of loopholes to organise itself.

Bourgeois society offered the possibility of the workers organising themselves and developing politically and culturally. This did not happen without struggle, repression, and setbacks — but it was not ruled out, it could happen and it did happen. And otherwise the Marxist policy would have been a nonsense.

A specific, repressive, and terribly reactionary regime is inseparable from Stalinism. Economic development was separable from the often repressive early capitalist regimes because the exploitation of the working class did not rest on its legal status but on economic (market) transactions and the bourgeois ownership of the means of production. Stalinist economic development is inseparable from totalitarian oppression of the working class; the-economics are not separable from the regime, and to opt for one is necessary to opt for both. The surplus product is not seized primarily via market transactions, but via the winepress grip of the bureaucracy. For this rea-

son, the analogy with the capitalist development of the means of production is a piece of monstrous Stalinist nonsense.

Defence of USSR

But surely Militant's approach is implied in the idea that the Stalinist states should be defended against imperialism? Not so. That is fundamentally a position against imperialism, against according it any progressive role, against looking to anyone but the working class to deal with the bureaucracy, against allowing imperialism once again to feed off the areas taken out of its control in the USSR and later the other Stalinist states.

The remnants of the conquests of October are defended against imperialism despite the monstrous totalitarianism that is grafted onto them.

Already in 1939-40, Trotsky and his comrades declared, "We were and remain against the seizure of new territories by the Kremlin." (They took sides with Russia against Finland because Finland was then an outpost of Anglo French imperialism; they did not evaluate an expansion of Russian control as progressive. On the contrary, Trotsky spoke of the fate of the people of former Eastern Poland as becoming the "semi-slaves" of Stalin. The historically progressive elements were massively overlaid by the reactionary anti working class regime. The experience since then has reinforced this attitude one hundredfold: in an advanced capitalist country like Czechoslovakia with a mass labour movement and a mass Communist Party (a real party, not a ruling apparatus), Russian control meant the annihilation of the labour-movement.

Trotsky's view, in fact, was that the property relations were potentially progressive; imperialism should not be allowed to destroy that progressive potential, but working class revolution was necessary to realise the potential. "In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy" (Trotsky). The USSR "as a whole" — property relations plus bureaucratic tyranny — was a reactionary force.

To advocate the expansion of that system is an explicitly pro-Stalinist position.

Of course, we supported the Vietnamese, for example, against imperialism, despite the Stalinist leadership: In the case of Afghanistan, there is nothing to support but a Stalinist leadership and the brutal extension of Kremlin power.

To say that the overthrow of already established nationalised property by imperialist intervention is reactionary and should be resisted is one thing. It is another to support the Russian bureaucracy against the people of an invaded country. We say to imperialism: hands off Afghanistan. We can't, or we should not, say that to the people of Afghanistan.

To slip from the view that Stalinist collectivism contains progressive or potentially progressive elements compared to imperialism or imperialist-backed alternatives, into the view that the Stalinist regime is progressive apart from the working class, while atomising and oppressing the working class and plebeian population, is to accept the bureaucracy as the protagonist of history — for now or for "the next stage". It is a reactionary and elitist position. No wonder Woods finds himself speaking of the dark masses of Afghanistan.

If we-assume that no conscious or subconscious racism is involved here (and I do assume that), we are left with a choice example of Militant's insensitivity, and with a naked expression of truly Fabian contempt and disdain, licenced by paternalism, towards the people of Afghanistan. The brutal expansion of Russian Stalinism is looked to to sort them out rather than the brutal expansion of British imperialism. But it is the same spirit, the same tone, even the same image — complete with self-aware quote marks for the people who are mere objects of history and of someone else's drive to conquer and perhaps industrialise them.

The broad sweep

But, in the broad sweep of history, is it not true that the development of

industry lays the basis for progress? In the broad sweep, yes — on condition that the working class liberates itself and seizes the control of the means of production from the hands of the bureaucracy. But politics is necessarily concerned with a more immediate focus, a sharper focus. In that focus the idea that the oppression and slaughter, deportation, etc, which has been the stock-in-trade of the Stalinist bureaucracy ruling the USSR, is a detail in the broad sweep of history, is a monstrous anti-Trotskyist nonsense. It loses the viewpoint of the militant who stand with the working class and with oppressed peoples, trying to, organise them to-make themselves the subjects of history not its passive objects. in favour of the viewpoint of the historian “prophet”, the man in the ivory tower. An entirely different set of values, priorities, concerns and considerations belong to the militants compared to the philosophers in the watch towers. Of course Marxist militants inform their work with general historical consideration. They do not allow them to override their mobilising, organising, and rousing up of the oppressed. They do not allow the goal of industrial development on the back of the masses to supplant the goal Trotsky outlines in the quotation at the head of this article*.

In the Grantite view of Afghanistan everything is eventually and quickly to be made right by the workers taking political power from the bureaucracy in Russia and elsewhere. Such a view is rational only on an analysis of Stalinism such as Trotsky’s, which identifies the bureaucracy as being in fundamental contradiction with the basic socialised relations of production. (In the final analysis, that is because it is in fundamental contradiction with the working class). Grant presents a different picture: the bureaucracy (the Russian one of its would-be Afghan duplicate) is the bearer of a higher civilisation and will do for Afghanistan what capitalism did for Europe. That bureaucracy is at one, at least for a whole historical period, with the collectivised means of production, which for that epoch of history are its means of production.

The implication is inescapable that Stalinism, which has a progressive role in the backward countries, has had a progressive role in Russia too. We have been through, and are still in, an epoch of progressive Stalinism. And it follows that the Stalinist states are stable class societies, whose ruling group is not a usurping bureaucracy in contradiction to the property relations but a historically legitimate ruling class, whose role in history is to develop the forces of production. Grant, in fact, like Isaac Deutscher, is a Shachtmanite (bureaucratic collectivist) disguised within the verbiage of Trotsky’s theory, and placing a plus sign of appreciation against the new class society between capitalism and socialism while Shachtman placed a minus sign, calling it barbarism.

In that perspective, it is not clear why the working class political revolution against Stalinism in Russia should be on the order of the day now, or even on the agenda of the next epoch at all.

Bloodbath

Finally, all arguments and details aside, there is the fall-back argument: if the Russians go, there will be a bloodbath. If the Russians stay there will be [and there is] a bloodbath. The argument is in fact thoroughly dishonest. It is also incomplete. The complete version would say, and not just imply — a bloodbath of PDP people and collaborators with the Russians.

Militant is not raising a humanitarian objection, but taking sides with the Russian army and its supporters. It is a variant of the idea that it is better if the Russians do what the PDP/Army aspirant bureaucrats could not do — subjugate the population and make a Stalinist revolution.

The first question to the hypocritical “humanitarians” is, how many of the Afghans will the Russians shoot? The second question is, why is such a brutal transformation by conquest necessary? Why should it not be what the majority of the peoples of Afghanistan want that occurs? Why can’t this area wait until the majority of its own population decides to fight for social change, or until a socialist revolution in the advanced world makes it possible to attract its people to the work of transforming their own country? From the point of view of the international socialist revolution, there is no reason why not.

Fundamentally, however, it is impossible to work out a serious independent working class political assessment on the basis of yes or no to such gun-to-head questions as: do you want the right-wing Muslim reactionaries to triumph? (In Militant’s case, anyway, the question is an afterthought to dress up and explain a decision to support the logic of their theorising. When they, initially, opted to bend to “working class opinion”, it did not worry them at all).

In any situation where a large revolutionary working class movement does not exist, the gun-to-head appeal to responsibility, humanitarianism, and lesser evilism can almost always be counter-posed to an independent working class political assessment. In 1969 when the British Army was deployed to stop sectarian fighting in Derry and Belfast, enormous pressure was generated to support the use of the troops, or refrain from opposing their use, on the grounds that they had probably saved Catholic lives and that Catholics had welcomed them. A lot of socialists succumbed to the pressure. The IS (SWP) organisation did. The small minority at the September 1969 IS conference who resisted and called for opposition to the British imperialist troops were met with hysterical denunciation and slandered as “fascists” who “wanted a bloodbath”. Yet it was those Marxists who refused to be panicked or to abandon their understanding of Britain’s role in Ireland who had the better grasp of reality.

But then, Ted Grant might say, it was plainly a matter of a reactionary imperialist army. *And in Afghanistan it is a matter of the thoroughly reactionary anti-working class army of the Russian bureaucracy.*

If the Russians withdraw, it might well prove to be the case that the final result of the strange episode of the seizure of power by the putschist PDP/Army bureaucratic revolutionaries would be a massacre of PDP supporters. That would be a tragedy. But it cannot follow that because of this Marxist socialists should abandon their programmatic opposition to the expansion of the area under Kremlin control, or should abandon the idea that the consolidation of a Stalinist regime in Afghanistan would be a defeat for the Afghan working class.

We cannot abandon independent working class politics for the lesser evil — for the PDP and the supporters of the Russians — in the situation which the putsch the policy of the PDP/Army and the Russian invasion has created for them. We are not, to quote Trotsky, the inspectors-general of history.

Political independence

The political independence of the working class and in this pioneering place the political independence of the Marxists, is the to-be-or-not-to-be question for socialism — independence from the bourgeoisie, from the labour bureaucracy and from the totalitarian state bureaucracies of the Stalinist states. This is the immediate political question for people who take Militant’s pro-Stalinist line on Afghanistan for Marxism. While Militant is unlikely to influence events in Afghanistan it does influence people in Britain (and perhaps elsewhere). It influences them away from independent working-class politics and towards the role of cheerleaders for the “progressive” Stalinists in Afghanistan where it supports a Stalinist transformation, abandoning the very commitment to working class political independence as well as the Trotskyist programme.

Militant insists that the proper role for socialist militants is to line up firmly with one of the international blocs. It deplores the lack of class consciousness and failure to relate properly to the “major” contradiction to our time on the part of the British CP because it does not support the invasion. Militant even criticises the Tribunes, as we saw, for not basing themselves on the actual relations between the great powers.

Even the most wretched of the left reformist currents is too independent for “Labour’s Marxist Voice”.

Appendix

I summarised above what Trotsky’s attitude to the expansion of the Stalinist state actually was in 1939-40. This is a much mythologised episode, and many “Trotskyists” think Trotsky supported Stalin’s expansion. (Walsh does, for example). Some think that Trotsky identified with the “revolution” in eastern Poland. Nothing of the sort.

During the Stalinist occupation of Poland and invasion of Finland in 1939-40, Trotsky argued that revolutionaries must recognise that the Russian Army was likely to stimulate revolutionary struggle which the Stalinists would use against the Polish and Finnish ruling class — and then strangle. Revolutionaries should support any such independent working class and poor peasant mobilisation, and align themselves with it. They should at the same time try to warn the workers and peasants against the Stalinist Russian state and all its instruments as deadly enemies. They should immediately fight for political independence from the Stalinists... and prepare to fight them with guns.

It was a policy for the orientation of revolutionaries in a situation where (Trotsky assumed) the “Red” Army had still a revolutionary prestige and authority with the oppressed “Polish” Ukrainians, and others, where its call

to seize land, etc., could be expected to evoke responses of a revolutionary sort. Nothing like that can be even imagined in Afghanistan now. The Russians have alienated even former supporters of the PDP.

And, as far as I know, Trotsky's assumptions about Eastern Poland and Finland were seriously mistaken. He was starved of concrete information). Even in 1939 the "Red" Army's power to rouse revolutionary action was minimal; its power to kill off Poles was much greater. Between one million and 1.5 m. Poles alone were deported to make Poland safe for Stalinism. (The Poles numbered five million out of 13 million in Eastern Poland, the rest being Ukrainians and White Russians. Trotsky partly acknowledged his misestimate (see *In Defence of Marxism*). And in any case, as we saw above, he did not hesitate to describe the fate of the people of East Poland, in so far as they were subjugated by the "Red" Army, as that of "the semi-slaves of Stalin". Where is the analogy with what Militant is supporting in Afghanistan? Militant is supporting the implied "promise" of nationalisations and agrarian reform to be carried out by a totalitarian state which has imposed itself by force, against the resistance of the people of Afghanistan. Where Militant part company with Marxism is clear at this point: they do not relate to the working class and its struggles and its interests [the struggle against repression, the struggle to secure the basis for its own free organisation — the sort of issue Marxists would relate to if they assumed, in an open, rational and demystified way, that a revolution was occurring but not a proletarian revolution]. The Stalinist 'revolution' will impose savagely oppressive regime, which will destroy and continually uproot any elements of a labour movement. To go from the clear and simple idea of 'defencism' — that the conquest of the Stalinist states by imperialism and their return to capitalism would be reactionary and should be opposed by socialists — to support for the conquest and hoped-for transformation of Afghanistan is to travel light-years away from revolutionary socialism. It is to take up residence on the grounds of Stalinism; to accommodate to the existing Stalinist bureaucracy with the "perspective" (i.e., passive hope) that after the totalitarian "stage" will come a better stage.

Footnotes

* As on Afghanistan, so in British politics where Militant see their role as that of making propaganda for their "perspectives" about how things will develop. Eschewing action and struggle, they mistake the role of passive commentators and would-be prophets for a proper work of proletarian militants.

† This, of course, is sloppy — not a putsch, but a coup. Since nothing is built on calling it putsch and not a coup, the sloppiness is of no political consequence.