



# Lenin, Trotsky and World War Three

IT is well known that in 1917 Lenin won the Bolshevik party to the revolutionary strategy summed up in the slogan "All power to the soviets!". It is nearly as well known that in doing so Lenin was getting the party to adopt in practice a strategy that it had long opposed in theory: namely, Trotsky's conception of permanent revolution. This allowed Trotsky to join the Bolsheviks, a move which in practice meant Trotsky recognising that on the question of party organisation Lenin had been right all along and he had been wrong.

Exactly as Trotsky had predicted, events showed that the working class could not lead the revolution against Tsardom and then artificially hold back from overthrowing the class power of the bourgeoisie. The only perspective available to the revolutionary class in Russia was to seize power in the hope that a working-class victory in that backward country would act to spur the workers of the more advanced western Europe into action. Without that help from the west the revolution was doomed.

After Lenin's death the ideologists of rising Stalinism, glorifying the isolation of backward Russia — an isolation which was to prove the root of the rising bureaucracy's class power — started a campaign against "Trotskyism" in general and

"permanent revolution" in particular. Their key ideological weapon in this campaign was to counterpose their version of "Leninism" to the real revolutionary strategy of Lenin and the early Communist International, which they renamed "Trotskyism".

*Lenin and the Myth of Revolutionary Defeatism* deals with one small part of the intellectual confrontation between "Trotskyism" and the official "Leninism" of Stalin and the rest of his coterie. In painstaking detail Hal Draper exposes the myth of Lenin's so-called revolutionary defeatism. He shows that Lenin's enthusiasm for the proposition that "In a reactionary imperialist war revolutionaries should consider the defeat of their own government the lesser evil" was misplaced. What's more, Lenin quite correctly abandoned this slogan in practice in 1917 when the Bolsheviks — looking to a workers' revolution in Russia — were not exactly enthusiastic about a German victory!

Draper also clearly demonstrates the superiority of the alternative socialist perspective on the war represented by Luxemburg and Trotsky, who argued that socialists should prosecute the class struggle regardless of its consequences on the war effort, but should not pose the issue in terms of "lesser evils" or the beneficial effects of defeat in imperialist war.

If you ever wanted to appeal to the textual authority of the "classics" to try and convince the more demented kitsch Trotskyists like the WRP or RCP that shouting "victory to Iraq!" is not a very revolutionary policy, then this is the book for you. I wish you well.

WHAT'S strange about the republication of this text, over forty years after it was originally published, is that headbanging with nutcase anti-imperialists should not exactly top any serious revolutionary socialist

agenda. More interesting are the issues that prompted Draper to write this set of articles in the first place.

For when Draper put pen to paper he was not just "digging for quotations," he was trying to work out a socialist policy on what seemed to everyone at the time to be the impending Third World War between Stalinism and the imperialist democracies.



Trotsky, Lenin and Kamenev during the early days of the Russian revolution. Draper's book disentangles Stalinist myths about debates involving Trotsky and Lenin

Draper wished to defend a traditional Third Camp line of putting an equals sign under both sides. Max Shachtman, the main theorist of the Third Camp socialists, was tending towards a sort of "proletarian military policy" for the western imperialist democracies, in which — just like in World War Two, with the threat of fascism — socialists would not simply remain neutral faced with the prospect of an expanding Stalinist regime liquidating the independent labour movement and its democratic gains.

It seems to me that though Draper's work is an excellent piece of textual exegesis, it failed to shed any real light on the substantive issues underlying the formal debate. What's worse, as it has been reprinted it does not deal with Shachtman's ideas at all fairly. To say that when Shachtman even considered not equating Stalinism and the imperialist democracies, he had already sold his soul to the devil, is a slander.

The republication of

Draper's work over forty years later and minus the key section dealing with Shachtman's ideas, in other words, the section that provided the work's political *raison d'être* in the first place, seems strange to say the least. To rip the work out of its original political context is to provide a sort of dead textual "Marxism" devoid of relation to the political class struggle. Not a

priority at this or any time. A far more interesting and enlightening work would have dealt with the debate between Shachtman and Draper in the light of the historic evolution of Stalinism and its collapse in its Russian homeland. But to do this Draper would have to confront the fact that though the bureaucratic collectivists had a basic theory clearly superior to the absurdities of state capitalism or the "degenerated workers' state" labels, neither he, nor Shachtman, nor anyone else for that matter, had a coherent view of Stalinism's place in history. After all, it was Shachtman's fear of a new Ice Age of Stalinist barbarism that fueled his thinking on World War Three, not his theoretical misunderstandings of defeatism.

Tom Rigby

*War and Revolution — Lenin and the Myth of Revolutionary Defeatism*, by Hal Draper, edited by Ernie Haber Kern, Humanities Press

# Verse and worse

**W**EST in Her Eye is edited by Rachel Lever, proprietor of the Hen House, a well known feminist women-only country retreat. It will be of special interest to readers of *Workers' Liberty* because before she became a convert to the theory of socialism-in-one-country house, Rachel Lever edited or helped edit no less than four of our predecessors: *Workers' Republic*, *Workers' Fight*, *Workers' Action* and, in its first four years, *Socialist Organiser*. She also produced and edited *Women's Fightback*, the spin-off publication initiated by *Socialist Organiser*.

In *West in Her Eye* she has brought together a fine collection of verse. "Women's verse" she says, but in fact, apart from being written by women, almost all the poems here are detachable from the ideological matrix this collection unobtrusively and loosely tries to fit them to.

I can eat chilli con carne  
As children die or watch  
While prams and handcarts  
Cross in Europe.

I drink a rouge at sunset  
While cities burn and  
Living skeletons  
Suck earth.

I see  
The futility of half of  
humanity  
In the frame in authentic  
colour  
With dinner.  
(*Dinner Time* by Eirene Gray)

Her smile  
licks its lips  
like  
the cat with the cream;

his cream, poured  
into a vessel  
shaped for their delight.

Kitten like she purrs  
and dreams  
whilst he swaggers  
in tight jeans,  
like a pride of lions.  
(*First Time* by Anne Garner)

These are poems by women about common human experiences and predicaments; those that deal with experience specific to women easily take their place here in the broader human context of which they are a natural part.

Too many of the poems read, in the popular modern style, like translations — a few are translations — of good poems from foreign languages, where the translator has not attempted to recreate meter or rhyme, but nevertheless manage to convey something of the feel and tone and human substance of the more elaborated work. Almost all of them, however, do have substance, and therefore there are very few duds here.

**L**OOK Left Again, edited by Kerrie Pateman for *Poetry Now*, is a different can of alphabet soup altogether. Here, there is almost nothing but duds. The collection is devoid of socialist feeling, working class experience, radical ideas, and of poetry or good verse on any level. Reading *Look Left Again* is like wandering through a wasteland. Read this and you run the risk of coming away thinking that both socialism and poetry are dead and buried here in this one shallow grave!

Tony Blair, is so dynamic  
Lots of go and empathetic  
He fights for what he thinks  
— is right  
His constituency, and  
pensioners' plights

He's young, he's ambitious  
He has a goal  
May he, achieve, his ambition  
To be, our next leading —  
politician  
(*To the next Prime Minister*  
by May Read)

I liked "A curse on the Gov-

ernment" by Jean M Cooper.

One of the best things here is oddly a piece from Norman Willis, former General Secretary of the TUC, reflecting on an encounter with a young zealot at a meeting. But even that is flat and cerebral: an old fellow thinking himself into the politics of his youth, about which he has wry feelings but seemingly no sense of loss or diminution, nor any regret.

Why, for example, would anyone write, let alone publish this (except perhaps as a doodle at a boring meeting to be thrown away afterwards):

A tear from the rose,  
when John Smith died,  
a nation in shock,  
took time out to cry.

The leadership battle,  
fought and won,  
Tony Blair,  
our favourite son.  
(*A smile for the rose* by Paul Holt)

Or, though the politics  
are better, this:

Clause IV is out of date,  
The times have changed and  
so must we!  
But socialists will still debate  
The issues that set people  
free...  
(*Clause IV Concern* by Percy Lea)

Or this:

Politics or party tricks, tell  
me if you can,  
Do they help or hinder, the  
average working man...  
(*The government of today* by Fran Zubek)

Why are the poems in this collection so bad? The model seems to be greeting card verse and the thought and feeling are correspondingly naive and conventional. The writers here wear paper masks; everything is facade, people going through their expected paces, putting on a Christmas card, poetic voice. God knows what they really think or feel about anything.

Jackie Cleary  
*West in Her Eye*, edited by  
Rachel Lever and *Look Left*  
Again, edited by Kerrie  
Pateman

# The memory of our class

**W**HEN conquerors try to strip a conquered people of their identity, what do they do? They try to suppress the language of the vanquished — and to strip them of their collective memory, their history. So it is too in the war of classes. The victorious bourgeoisie work tirelessly to deprive the working class of our history, to falsify and suppress it.

Anybody who has been in politics even a decade or so will have experienced the relentless drive to suppress by distortion and lies a *working-class perspective* on recent widely remembered history — on the miners' strike, for example.

On our side, the class-conscious proletarians work to understand, preserve and spread knowledge of our own real history, and the history of "the common people" in general, in the working class.

The selection of William Morris's writings on history in this little book helped perform this work for the first generation of British socialists, those who, over a hundred years ago, shaped and trained the generation that built the foundations of the modern labour movement. They can help train and shape a new generation, too.

Morris, writing when general concern with history was much greater than it is now, surveyed English history back to before the Norman Conquest, stripping away the lies and pretensions of the ruling class.

It includes a short account of their recent history — the Paris Commune of 1871. If you found school history "boring", try this!

Fergus Ennis  
*William Morris on History*,  
edited by Nicholas Salmon,  
Sheffield Academic Press £6.95.