

Comments on RWT's 'The struggle for communism, yesterday, today and tomorrow'

Without Partyism there is no struggle for communism

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know that almost exactly a year ago, with the publication of the supplement 'Party, non-ideology and faction', our Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB initiated a campaign for the rapprochement of working class and communist forces in the United Kingdom around the banner of Partyism (see *Weekly Worker* December 15 1994).

Rapprochement has, at least in terms of my expectations of a gruelling marathon, already produced tangible and therefore strengthening results. Comrades from *Open Polemic* recently joined us as a faction and relations between ourselves and the Revolutionary Democratic Group (faction of the SWP) have become steadily closer and more fraternal.

Only two or three steps forward. It cannot be denied. We would be foolish and surely downright dishonest to claim otherwise. Nevertheless the open-ended march towards the reformed Communist Party has gained fresh impetus. Moreover with pace has come political focus. Rapprochement has gained a living framework for success and now undeniably provides a viable alternative to the continuing fragmentation and pseudo-partyism of the left. No matter how relatively few our cadre and limited the range of our influence, the PCC, RDG and OP have voluntarily drawn together from what are, in terms of the conventional, familiar, and — our opponents would have it — immutable theoretical and historical categories of the left, starting points which are on the face of it poles apart.

What has united us is not unity for unity's sake. It is the urgent need to equip our class with a combat organisation capable of meeting the challenge of a decadent capitalism as it slides inexorably towards a new general crisis.

To say that the working class *must* resolve the contradictions of capitalism positively through revolution in the imminent future is no wild exaggeration. It is either international socialism, or capital will blindly and instinctively impose its own negative, barbaric and non-human solution on humanity. That is the evident and inescapable challenge of the 21st century.

Due to our labours, communist rapprochement has moved from the dark realms of abstraction into the shadowy half-light of first practice. And precisely because this coincides, and equates with, an *augmentation* of our political mass, others within our (still weak) gravitational pull have had to define and redefine themselves in relationship to the incipient but gathering *process* of Partyism.

Inevitably some possess neither the necessary courage nor vision. Previously I have discussed our detritus who, unfortunately, either because of petty grumps or personal weakness, chose not the Party, but instead established what are sects of convenience. Ersatz titles cannot hide commonplace liquidationism.

There is no need to devote more time and energy to these people. Closing the door would be wrong. But other (we hope more honest) candidates for rapprochement command our attention — in this case the Republican Worker Tendency.

Thankfully RWT does not cite personal injury or localism in order to rationalise its existence as an exclusive group. Indeed, as evidenced by the supplement we commissioned and duly printed in the *Weekly Worker*, it possesses what are considered to be *fundamental* programmatic incompatibilities that keep the RWT and PCC apart. Despite that it moots (vague) organisational proposals to overcome what it rightly sees as the debilitating "fragmentation and division" of our movement ("The struggle for communism" *Weekly Worker* October 12 1995 — all quotes unless stated will be from this RWT document).

This article will explore the various issues of contention between ourselves and RWT. However it is also written to show that there are areas of agreement which it is wrong to obscure with polemical froth. I will not indulge in irenic niceties — that definitely is not my style. But it is

my earnest conviction that while differences between genuine communists should not be glossed over they can be and are best resolved in the struggle for the "genuine communist party" the RWT claims it wants.

Communist Party versus RWT's charismatic intellectuals

In reply to 'Party, non-ideology and faction' the RWT's opening polemical gambit is a supposedly startling disclosure. The Communist Party of Great Britain has ceased to exist: ie, there is at present no organised revolutionary *part* of the working class. Funnily enough it is no revelation to us. And not just circa 1991. Between them the *Morning Star* and Democratic Left wrecked the CPGB organisationally. But theirs was only the final duet in a many-act drama. Liquidation was, as I have put it, "death by a thousand cuts", which — as repeatedly emphasised in our press — began *politically* way back in the 1920s. So much for Jack Conrad turning the CPGB into a "rigid fixed category".

The CPGB has to be subjected to the most resolute, most painstaking, most searching analysis in its self-movement through the historical travail which took it from being *the* revolutionary vanguard in 1920 to becoming a sorry *Marxism Today*-dominated rump. That does not imply neutrality, let alone hostility. Despite apparent RWT doubts to the contrary the CPGB was the *highest achievement of the British working class*. Its essence must be stoutly and uncompromisingly defended by communists and all who seek human liberation.

Therefore we will definitely *not* retrospectively align ourselves with the anti-Party stance of the post-July 31 1920 John Maclean and Sylvia Pankhurst — as does the RWT. Frankly, putting the rights of any personality above the rights of the Party smacks of original Menshevism to me. And I have to ask myself whether the over-concern "The struggle for communism" exhibits for the prima donnas of yore, whose Marxism went into meltdown once confronted with the collectivity demanded by Partyism, stems from a similar physiognomy? Do the rather free wheeling individuals who occasionally and spasmodically get together as the RWT fear losing their personal autonomy and branded political space in a disciplined, centralised communist collective?

Certainly the *partisan* defence of Maclean, as the sectarian and nationalist, and Pankhurst, as the anti-parliamentarian, by our friends plays into the hands of those who would have it that the CPGB was rotten from the start and was nothing more than an artificial Russian transplant (the dubious historiography of some of the RWT's left-nationalist 'united front' allies springs to mind).

With due consideration to the limits imposed by a four-page supplement and the need to turn to more important issues I will sum up my view of the sad twilight of these once brilliant figures with four points.

1. Maclean and Pankhurst refused to subordinate themselves to the general interest. I do not think the young CPGB dealt with them in a "bureaucratic" way. They were not subjected to "witch-hunting" as the RWT asserts. Nor do I think the CPGB "began a long and painful degeneration" with their non-membership.

2. If anyone indulged in "witch-hunting" it was Maclean himself. Repeatedly and wildly he accused, without the slightest evidence, key Party leaders — eg, Theodore Rothstein — of being police spies (he was in fact more an agent of Lenin). Driven by paranoia his politics degenerated into what Bob Pitt concisely describes as "a combination of nationalism and sectarian ultra-leftism" (B Pitt *John Maclean and the CPGB*, London 1995, p25). No Partyist should identify with such latterday absurdity.

3. As for Pankhurst, perhaps an ego as big and delicate as hers could have been handled with greater care. But when it came down to it she simply refused to abide by democratic centralism

— contemptuously dismissed by her paper as "political measles" (*Workers' Dreadnought* September 17 1921). Pankhurst's anti-Party outbursts were music to the ears of the bourgeoisie. *The Times* gleefully carried an exclusive interview with her in which she put "freedom" to "work for communism" in her own libertarian way above Party membership (*The Times* September 19 1921, quoted in PW Romero *E Sylvia Pankhurst*, London 1987, p155). Pankhurst had effectively courted expulsion after the briefest of membership by repeatedly insisting that she would not relinquish private control over the *Workers' Dreadnought* to our Party's central committee (previously it was the organ of the so-called Communist Party — British Section of the Third International). This was despite the fact that under Edgar Whitehead her comrades had repudiated the paper before finally completing their long overdue fusion with the CPGB.

4. Serious revolutionaries, certainly in the early 1920s, had a duty to join and, as recommended by Willie Gallacher, "remedy the faults if they really were there and make the Party worthy of the great tasks it had to carry through" (W Gallacher *The rolling of the thunder*, London 1947, p25). Those charismatic intellectuals, who to remain 'ideologically pure' (and the *undisputed* leader among their dwindling band of followers) pigheadedly kept apart from the CPGB, no matter what their talents, no matter what past contribution to the working class movement, defined themselves almost immediately as cranky and mere historical footnotes.

Communist International versus RWT

The RWT criticises the PCC and the Party committees which accept its authority, because we resolutely, single-mindedly and self-definingly subordinate ourselves entirely to the central task of reorganising the CPGB. "Such fetishisation of organisational forms is alien to Marx and Marxism," it pronounces.

Proof comes from the pen of none other than Karl Marx himself. He is brought into play by the RWT in the form of a reply to Ferdinand Domela-Nieuwenhuis opposing the proposal by the "Belgian Socialist Party" in "1880" to "reforge" the First International (incidentally my source says it was 1881 and the Dutch Social Democratic Party). Anyway I do not think the RWT grasps the real content of Marx's forceful objections to this "blunder" (K Marx *Marx and Engels — selected correspondence*, Moscow 1965, p337). Marx correctly dismissed projects to raise the First International from its grave. Any such attempt was to impose an immature past on the present and, more importantly, the future.

The First International was launched at a small meeting in London's St Martin's Hall in September 1864 and reflected the still meagre level of global capitalist development at the time and thus global proletarianisation. True, in relative terms it united "into one huge army the whole militant working class of Europe and America" (F Engels *MESW* Vol 1, Moscow 1973, p102). Yet to embrace the proletarians of the North Atlantic rim it had of necessity to be an amalgamation of ultimately incompatible British trade unionists, French and Belgian Proudhonists, German Lassalleans and Latino anarchists, as well as the increasingly numerous adherents of Marx's scientific socialism. Identity was by definition only conditional and temporary. "Therefore," Engels noted, "it could not set out from the principles laid down in the *Manifesto*" (*Ibid*).

Different reactions to and interpretations of the 1871 Paris Commune broke the First International morally, theoretically and practically. Marx, the cosmopolitan Jewish-German exile, the celebrant of *violent* revolution, was now viewed with a combination of embarrassment and dread by the worker-kings of British trade unionism.

The Blanquists and other advocates of secret societies and conspiracy could not reconcile

themselves with Marx's demand for the workers themselves to "be constituted ... as an independent party" (K Marx *MECW* Vol 22, Moscow 1986, p417). Bakunin and his anarchist disciples in their turn accused the *statist* Marx of being authoritarian and advocating dictatorship — shades of RWT criticisms of Lenin?

Because it had effectively disintegrated, Marx, along with Engels, successfully proposed at the 1872 Hague Congress to move its headquarters across the ocean to America. By taking it from the old world to the new they could prevent the *name* being captured by Bakunin and the *Alliance de la Démocratie Socialiste*. To all intents and purposes however this transfer from the European arena dissolved the First International (the obsequies were officially enacted in 1877).

That did not mean abandoning the need for internationalism nor an international. Quite the reverse. Marx and Engels always fought for the *highest* level of organisation obtainable by the working class under *given* historic conditions. Re-establishing the First International would have been woefully retrogressive in the 1880s. Engels, even in September 1874, was saying that as a form it had outlived its usefulness. Something higher was to be aimed for and expected. He confidently predicted to his comrade Friedrich Sorge, that "the next International — after Marx's writings have produced their effects for some years — will be directly communist and will proclaim our principles" (F Engels *Marx and Engels — selected correspondence*, Moscow 1965, p289).

The Second International, founded in 1889, formally declared for Marxism. Engels' prediction, though, was only half fulfilled. The Second International had decidedly negative aspects. The growth of opportunism in many of its sections meant their Marxism was drained of its revolutionary essence. Unity between the right and left wings of the Second International, unity between the national sections themselves, proved impossible when put to the test. The *centrist* Second International ignominiously collapsed as soon as the guns sounded in August 1914.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks drew the same lesson as Marx. They declared not for reorganising the Second International. Conditions demanded and could deliver a new, genuinely communist, international. An international "purged not only of 'turncoats' ... but of opportunism as well" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p40). In that sense Engels' hopes were realised in 1919 when the Third International was established in revolutionary Moscow. For my part I have no doubt that for the first time here was a "directly communist" international (later Stalinite degeneration does not alter that cardinal fact). That explains why the PCC fights to reforge the CPGB in due course as a section of a future Communist International.

In contrast the RWT is firmly convinced that "the Third International can no longer be the model on which today's communists *seek* to organise ourselves" (my emphasis). Has the RWT a *higher* model in mind? If so our friends ought to announce it to poor, unenlightened souls like ourselves. We will receive the news, if it really represents an advance, with eternal gratitude. The Communist International was after all a democratic centralist world party and thus the fulcrum for the World Union of Socialist States.

Has the RWT, unbeknown to the rest of humanity, discovered intelligent life orbiting around other stars? Is it proposing an intergalactic Communist Party? Sad to say, reading RWT literature, it would appear that it is committed not to the highest level of organisation obtainable by the working class in present-day conditions — neither on planet Earth nor anywhere else for that matter; as will become evident, it is set on a rather mundane orientation which is taking it away from being the self-declared "Bolshevik faction" of the RDG in 1989 down the slippery slope towards anarchism by way of *national* communism (*Miracle Marxism*, Edinburgh nd, p1).

Supplement

Communist Party as paradox

Donning the black, the RWT judge passes its sentence of death on us because on two counts we are supposedly guilty of “retarding” development. Firstly, we doggedly, not to say fanatically, continue to regard ourselves as members of a “non-existent” CPGB. Secondly, “by criterion of a family tree”, we act in its name and recruit new forces to its ranks.

There is undoubtedly a paradox here. But no crime. Its origins lie not in a “forgery”: rather life itself.

As a faction of the CPGB, we did not consider the wrecking activity by the *Morning Star* and Euro liquidators ended our responsibilities as Party members. Genuine communists did not stop being Party members because of a Euro vote in Congress House. No matter how few they may be, the duty of communists is to defend their Party and the idea of Partyism.

CPGB members, organised under the banner of what is now the PCC, did just that. We stood by our Party — as pledged in our founding statement issued a decade before the Euros liquidated themselves (see *The Leninist* No1 1981).

Like many another we could have joined the ‘communism is dead’ carnival as it cavorted over its grave in 1988-91. Is this what the RWT would like us to have done? I say any such suggestion that we should have reneged on our defence of Partyism and what remained of the CPGB is to be really guilty of a crime.

One more apostatical voice in the media-orchestrated chorus of bourgeois triumphalism would hardly aid the working class. It would though be effectively to call for the further disorganisation of communist forces and thus unconsciously assist the class enemy. To “burn the carcass” of the CPGB, as demanded by RWT, would make a mockery not only of *all* the work conducted since publicly announcing our factional existence in 1981, but of our very *raison d'être*.

This organisation has never deviated, even momentarily, from its defining task of reorganising the CPGB. Neither the *Morning Star* breakaway nor the Democratic Left liquidation marked the nemesis of our great struggle. Nor did the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

As the militant, revolutionary wing of the CPGB our responsibilities increased. The Party had been wrecked. However as members of the Party we were duty bound to *re-establish* it on the soundest programmatic and organisational basis. Leninists had to, and did, carry on disciplined and coordinated Party work using every avenue and opening to win new forces to communism.

We did not desert our positions. Instead we used the opportunity presented by the liquidationists’ final betrayal to seize the commanding heights of the Party. From that vantage point we have sought to renew the strength and vitality of the CPGB, not least through rapprochement.

Unity round the struggle to reforge the CPGB is achievable through the medium of the PCC, precisely because it represents the *only established, effective and proved* pro-Party centre. As the consistent practitioner of Party work and the custodian of the Party principle, we have the *responsibility and the right* to call up potentially pro-Party people from other groups and from other traditions, including the RWT.

We firmly believe that many an abstract theoretical difference can be resolved, or at least put into proper perspective, by ongoing, comradely debates, in which all teach and all learn. Certainly selfless, diligent and united communist work will overcome every manner of present day schismatic quarrel, pedantry and haloed exclusiveness.

Rest assured, that does not mean the PCC has proclaimed itself the “Party” in the farcical manner of the Socialist Labour League and International Socialists (aka Workers Revolutionary Party and Socialist Workers Party). The PCC is not yet “recognised by a significant section of the working class” as its vanguard. On this score the RWT is, yes, quite right — and quite right to denounce those sects who usurp, misuse and debase the concept of Party.

The PCC only claims what it is. The PCC is the continuation of itself. An evolving self with new, higher responsibilities and tasks. The PCC is the leading Party committee that coordinates the struggle to re-establish, reforge and renew the Communist Party — a title we intend to preserve not simply because of past achievements but because, as Marx, Engels and in his turn Lenin argued, it is the “only” name for our movement “that is scientifically correct” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, Moscow 1977, p127).

We consider this question of great importance. Words matter. For example the RWT proclaims its organised aim in its *republican* name. However we Marxists aim for the withering away of

every kind of state. Britain can become a republic under bourgeois rule (remember the 1649 Commonwealth and its Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell). Even the socialist republic is a carry-over from capitalism, being the transitional *state* which takes us towards our organisation’s defining goal — the society that will realise the principle, ‘from each according to their ability; to each according to their needs’: ie stateless communism. So we prefer not to use what are essentially bourgeois terms like republican, democratic or even socialist to describe ourselves. We are communists organised together for communism. Before they abandoned the CPGB name, the opportunists might have soiled it. But now it is ours alone. We intend to keep and cleanse that name because it is the *only* one that describes our political, social and organisational aims with *scientific correctness*.

To conclude this section let me provide an historical example of a Party that was and was not a Party (surely not a logical problem for those trained in the dialectical method). On March 1 1898 the 1st Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party convened in Minsk — a city of the Jewish pale. There were only eight delegates present. They represented various Marxist circles and groups; not any section of the working class (the Bund being the partial exception that proves the point). Having elected a central committee and agreed a manifesto — written by Peter Struve — they were all arrested by the Tsar’s secret police.

Despite not meeting the RWT’s fixed criteria for a Party, the RSDLP had been founded. And despite being instantly liquidated by the okhrana, Lenin and others of a like mind nevertheless considered themselves Party members. We can let the RWT ponder if they did so “by criterion of a family tree”, or whether their membership was a “forgery”.

When, in 1900, Lenin, Axelrod, Plekhanov, Martov, Zasulich and Potresov agreed to publish an all-Russian political newspaper, they did so as Party members carrying out their duty to really *establish* their Party. In the words of Lenin’s closest comrade and lieutenant, Grigory Zinoviev, it was the success of *Iskra* in recruiting and organising Party members that laid the “foundation for the Party” (G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party*, London 1973, p87). Even then it should be noted that at the 2nd Congress, in 1903, the workers were “few” in number “and they were still isolated figures” (*Ibid*).

A similar paradox appears after the failure of the 1905 revolution. Having really gained a mass worker base, the Stolypin counterrevolution unleashed a period of reaction that virtually destroyed the Party. It is well worth turning to Zinoviev once more. “In retrospect,” he states, “we can say quite unhesitatingly that in those hard times the Party as such did not exist: it had disintegrated into tiny individual circles which differed from the circles of the 1880s and early 1890s in that, following the cruel defeat that had been inflicted upon the revolution, their general atmosphere was extremely depressed” (*Ibid* p165).

There were those who dismissed the Party, who wanted to drop the ‘pretence’ that it existed. Against these liquidators Lenin and the Bolsheviks sought the coming together of the ‘hard’ factions within the “non-existent” RSDLP. And, of course, they did their utmost to reorganise Party work and recruit new forces so as to re-establish their Party.

The parallel between our Partyist defence of the CPGB and the history of Bolshevism is striking. The parallel between the RWT’s lifeless, fixed category of Party and the Russian liquidators is, I am sorry to say, equally striking.

Party or sect

The RWT cannot grasp the Communist Party as a dynamic process. Nor, though we live in hope, the urgent necessity for such a combat organisation today. Unfortunately therefore, the RWT’s Communist Party is for the dim and distant, not a matter of becoming in the here and now. Precisely due to what amounts to a division between theory and practice, it is also a lifeless abstraction. That is why the RWT’s Communist Party falls far short of a genuine Communist Party. It is in fact an imagined projection of the RWT that will never be realised.

For example, as a matter of principle, our friends, like the anarchists, are committed federalists. They (dis)organise their own tiny forces on the petty and divisive basis of nation and nationality, not the existing state borders of the class enemy. Is this envisaged for their abstract Party? Would they have communists in Wales, Scotland and England cleaved into three separate organisations? If that is what they desire they are not even musing about a Communist Party — which in our circumstances is by definition not only democratic but centralist. Rather they simply wish to enlarge upon the self-im-

posed amateurism and primitivism of the RWT.

Certainly for them the precondition for communist unity, and hence a Communist Party, is agreement with *their particular* interpretation of history. Hence quite naturally the RWT’s own draft programme places the greatest stress on the contention that capitalism was restored in Soviet Russia with the failure of the Kronstadt uprising (see *Reclaiming communism for today*, RWT Edinburgh 1993, p2). Will acceptance of this claim become a criterion for membership in the RWT’s Communist Party?

Personally I do not share the RWT’s version of the Kronstadt events. Nor do I go along with its associated R Dunayevskaya/CLR James theory of state capitalism. Does this make myself and others who are attempting to develop a fully rounded, scientific theory of the USSR ineligible for membership in the RWT Party? It seems so.

What should be a matter of dispute between communist historians and theoreticians, a difference of shade, has been set up as a shibboleth by which the RWT hopes to mould and shape the future Party. Such an approach will not give birth to the highest form of organisation the working class can achieve within the capitalist state. It will only reproduce the ineffectiveness of the RWT and the rest of us.

I am sure the comrades sincerely believe that one day everyone — ie, the other communistic schools of thought, indeed the mass of workers themselves — will come to realise the absolute truth represented by the RWT ideological system. But I personally reckon they will have to wait for the sun to freeze over — and even then it will not happen. No matter how many freshets you issue; no matter how many united fronts you suggest; no matter how many strikes your comrades support; an exclusive, not to say sectarian, approach will not take us one step towards the Communist Party you profess to want.

The programme of the Communist Party should not be based on this or that ideological system invented, or discovered, by the leaders of this or that group. Nor on the other hand is it constructed through a series of anodyne formulations, cleverly designed to bring together all those who happen to label themselves ‘Marxist-Leninist’ (we should definitely *not* seek to make the programme acceptable to would-be labour dictators). Both the sectarians and the unity mongering diplomats fancy themselves as sowers of dragon’s teeth. But they only hatch fleas, nothing useful to the working class.

No, the communist programme must be based on the immediate needs and general historic tasks of the working class itself. It should lay down the broad strategy of how the workers can be formed into a class and how they can conquer political power from the bourgeoisie. That is the approach I have taken in the *Draft programme* recently published for discussion in the *Weekly Worker*. (I will return to the programme question below.)

On nothingness and everythingness

The RWT makes platonic pronouncements concerning the need for a Communist Party. Despite that it exhibits a distinct and very worrying tendency towards anarchism. Its chosen speaker at our debate on the RWT document told us he was moving away from Bolshevism. In his own words he is now “closer to” the anti-Partyism of so-called “council communism”.

Such an agenda helps to explain why in ‘The struggle for communism’ the RWT gets into such a dither, and so hopelessly off beam, with the first proposition in the *Weekly Worker*’s ‘what we fight for’ column.

Here — I admit with the deliberate intention of provoking outrage from the economic, the anarchistic, the liberalistic and the simply naive — we boldly and courageously declare: “Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.”

Strange though it may seem, the RWT considers this militant statement “very reminiscent of the saying of the Second International revisionist, Bernstein, that ‘socialism is nothing; the movement everything’”. Well, beyond peradventure both ourselves and Bernstein employ the words ‘nothing’ and ‘everything’. Desperate to score a cheap point, the RWT wants to suggest something more. Much more. The similarity, it is claimed, goes further than syntax. Crudely, and with an utter disregard of both our theory and practice, the RWT implies that both we and Bernstein are of a theoretical oneness. That for us the “goal of communism” and the question of today’s organisation are separate. That for its members the CPGB is everything and socialism and communism nothing.

Let us be generous. This is a sad, though inexcusable, lapse into either ill-considered or lazy

polemic. Worthwhile exchanges always, and can only, proceed from an opponent’s real ideas and core theories. Little that is valuable comes from procrustean hatchet jobs.

I only need therefore make a few elementary, corrective, points in reply to the RWT here. The PCC is not saying the Communist Party is everything or should be everything. That should be obvious. Indeed without the working class it, the CPGB, at present exists, but only as a nothingness. However the Party urgently needs to be made real. Needs to be reformed. Why? Not for itself. No, because only with a vanguard party can those shackled with ‘radical chains’ attain their liberation in communism. That is why we put Party and Partyism at the top of our immediate aims and tasks. Unless we succeed here, communism, our historic goal, will be consigned to a dream, a nowhere, a utopia.

Yes, for Bernstein — the theoretician of the labour bureaucracy — social democracy with its popular press, MPs and trade unions *is* all. But in contradistinction, for communists it is the working class itself, as a class for itself, a class that has equipped itself with a communist world outlook, that must be *made* all.

Thus we logically come to, and counter, the RWT slur that for CPGB members the aim is “nothing”. I simply recommend that next time RWT comrades pick up their copy of *Weekly Worker* they read all the way down the list of ‘what we fight for’. Comrades, if you resist your desire to mutilate you will find enlightenment.

Proposition four — “We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.” Proposition six — “Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs — ie, communism.” Proposition seven — “Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.” Proposition eight — “The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.”

The intellectual source of our ‘nothing’ and ‘everything’ formula in proposition one, as the educated reader will surely know, is not Edward Bernstein. It is Karl Marx. If I recall rightly, he said: “Without being revolutionary the working class is nothing; by being revolutionary it is everything”.

It is the electrifying spirit of Marx’s rallying cry for the workers to self-make themselves into a revolutionary class (a class for themselves) we wish to convey. Workers as mere sellers of the commodity labour power have existence, of course (nothingness is always and has to be a something). But their somethingness is as a slave class. No different, when it comes down to it, to other oppressed classes before them, such as the chattel slaves of ancient Rome or the peasant serfs of Norman England. These classes could and did revolt against their masters. But they were not the representatives of a new, alternative, higher social order.

Like any underclass the modern wage slaves struggle to improve their lot within the existing system — through trade unionism or social reform. However, with scientific theory as a guide, with a steeled vanguard party, the workers can break free from such ‘nothingness’. By transcending the narrow horizons of spontaneity the workers can *become*. Become a universal class, the stormer of the heavens, the liberator of humanity, the bringer of communism. They can become everything. That is what we *genuinely* stand for, fight for, and are prepared to die for!

On the category ‘revolutionary social democracy’

RWT tells us it has discovered a new category called “revolutionary social democracy”. A polymorphic formation, it inhabits the political wasteland between reformism and the RWT’s pristine communism. Though sometimes merging with left social democracy, this “middle class Marxism”, even in its most extreme manifestations, is for the RWT distinguishable from “genuine communism” on two main counts.

One, like left reformism “revolutionary social democracy” supports what RWT calls “British unionism” and a “British road to socialism”. Two — and for the RWT this is the “fundamental divide” — “revolutionary social democracy” is programmatically committed to “manage or reform capitalism” “after the seizure of power”.

Albeit an oxymoron, I do not deny that there are revolutionary reformists. That is organisations and individuals using Marxist rhetoric to disguise their reformist programmes. The

CPGB's old *British road to socialism* and Militant Labour's *What we stand for* are the prime examples that come to mind — we subjected them both to a thoroughgoing critique in the book *Which road?* Nevertheless what we are dealing with here, including the other groups named by the RWT — Socialist Action, Workers Power, the Socialist Workers Party — are varieties and shades of centrism. This well known political category can best be defined in terms of contradictory movement. Typically on the one hand by its intellectual attraction to the science of Marxism. And on the other hand its practical accommodation to the existing, Labourite and trade unionist, consciousness of the workers' movement. Hence Tony Cliff writes *The Labour Party — a Marxist history*, detailing its anti-working class actions and its pro-capitalist nature. Yet his SWP considers itself duty bound to support that very same party so that it can get elected into office.

What of the RWT's "British unionism" and the "British road to socialism"? This is another matter entirely. Enraptured by the elemental power of Irish and Scottish nationalism, itself already broken up into England and Scotland micro units, the RWT now deems it an offence to unite the workers in Britain as a revolutionary class to overthrow the British capitalist state. For — let there be no mistake — that is what the RWT means when it writes of "British unionism" and the "British road to socialism". It is not making reference to the old programme of the CPGB.

It seems to me that the politics advocated by the RWT on this score are much closer to the tradition of Austro-Marxism, the Bund and Joseph Pilsudski than what I understand as genuine communism. To test this thesis I will therefore ask the RWT whether or not the world party of Lenin and Trotsky, Liebknecht and Luxemburg, Rakovsky and Kun fits into its category of "revolutionary social democracy"? After all it enshrined in its statutes the principle that communists must unite themselves into one Communist Party on the basis of the existing state — that is why a sect like John Maclean's *Scottish 'party'* would have been ineligible for membership. The First and Second Internationals too had their sections organised on the basis of states, not nationality (the rare and only partial exceptions prove the rule).

The RWT plainly needs "revolutionary social democracy" to mark itself off from the bulk of other leftwing groupings. So, as the category does not exist objectively in the real world, the RWT conjures it into existence subjectively — by thinking it. The mental construct serves wonderfully to justify the RWT's existence and allows it to glorify its lack of revolutionary seriousness and accommodation to petty bourgeois nationalism.

We will return to the RWT's accommodation to, indeed embracing of, nationalism. But before so doing it is necessary to deal with the second distinguishing feature of "revolutionary social democracy". It will be recalled that it is "after the seizure of power" that the "fundamental divide between revolutionary social democracy and genuine communism" appears.

Imagine a real people's revolution. Class forces and interests are polarised and stand naked facing each other. On one side of the barricades the capitalist class and its agents, immobilised by schism and desertion. On the other the working class, "radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative!" (K Marx *MECW* Vol 22, Moscow 1986, p341). The Labour right has been reduced to a rump. Some left groups waver, fearing a counterrevolutionary bloodbath. But the majority are swept along by the sheer momentum of events. Even groups that had previously entertained reformist notions begin to act as revolutionaries.

After a brief but bloody battle what remains of the armed might of the state machine is smashed. Prime minister Ken Livingstone is placed under house arrest. The workers constituted as the *ruling class* now have the power. Organs of working class struggle are transformed into organs of their new semi-state.

Across Europe, Asia and the Americas the revolutionary wave has already swept away much of the old order. The leaders of the civilised world gathered in Berlin, capital of the United Socialist States of Europe, welcome the news that the last great bastion of capitalism has fallen.

Yet looking to such a bright future, the RWT is convinced that the problems of the working class have only just begun. Why? Because many of today's sects have programmes to "manage or reform capitalism".

Actually this does not accord with the facts. The majority of leftwing groups, including most centrists, call for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state and declare they are for a communist society. Drawing completely unfounded inferences from the words of Alex Callinicos and the SWP only convinces me of the RWT's rot-

ten polemical method. The suggestion that the SWP's slogan, 'international socialism', is merely a weasel formulation, not for the "lower phase of communism", but the "highest stage of capitalism", is disingenuous to say the least.

It is true that the transitional period, socialism, is often too easily conflated with the nationalisation of the means of production. However let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Engels himself argued in *Anti-Duhring* that in the hands of the workers the state would carry out its last independent act by expropriating the expropriators. "The proletariat," he says, "seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into state property" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 25, Moscow 1987, p267). Anyway such theoretical shortcomings are of little relevance if the working class actually has state power and is exercising direct control over the workplace and the product of its labour — as would undoubtedly be the case with a revolution in an advanced country such as Britain. The masses will not be bounded by programmes that life itself has superseded. Especially if, as I would expect, our revolution occurred as an integral part of a world revolutionary wave. Under these circumstances the programmatic lacunas, the concerns for Labourism, the economism, the dogmatism of present day sects will be matters for antiquarians of the obscure.

Nothing I have written above should be read to imply that with the conquest of state power the class struggle ends. The workers will still have to pass through many trials and may perhaps suffer definite setbacks. But even a catastrophe will only serve to spur the workers on. Every interruption of peaceful development puts a sword into the hand of the uninterrupted social revolution. The workers organised *for action* as the state power in the advanced countries could not be defeated by any counterrevolutionary plot or revolt. No, the class struggle will continue unabated, but under the best, the most favourable and human conditions till classes themselves are abolished.

The real problem with the programmes — I use the word here in its widest sense — of the centrist spectrum, is not *after* the revolution. It is *before*. Even when they are dealing with the future they disarm advanced workers in the struggles of today. Crucially, by putting an equals sign between Labour and the working class they concentrate the anger of militants on the symptoms of its pro-capitalism rather than its cause. The SWP, Militant Labour, the 'official communists', etc, bleat on about Labour's betrayals when in office and demand it stops carrying through 'Tory policies'. In this way illusions in the possibility of Labour acting in another, anti-capitalist, way are generated, even when that party is launching attacks on the working class, be it from the town hall, county hall or Whitehall. Thus instead of fighting for independent class politics energies are dissipated in the futile attempt to reform what is irreformable.

Russian revolution

The RWT has a big — it thinks, clinching — argument. The Russian revolution. Not the wonderful month of November 1917. But the subsequent party-state and its murderous growth and development. Of course, apart from some addled Stalinites, virtually every leftwing trend in the workers' movement accepts that the Russian revolution quickly degenerated. Furthermore each actually defines itself according to a specific date in its calendar. Each has its own chosen moment marking the fall from grace — 1924, 1928, 1936, etc. As we have seen, the RWT is no different. Except where others finger Stalin and his henchmen RWT places the blame squarely on Lenin and the pre-1917 Bolshevik Party itself.

Lenin's *What is to be done?* laid great stress on the impossibility of workers developing a *scientific* world view through the spontaneous trade union struggle. Drawing from Karl Kautsky, he explained that the workers' movement needs *socialist theoreticians* to provide the "politics corresponding to the general tasks of socialism" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, p387). RWT finds in such conclusions a "degrading view of the worker" and a recipe for the rule over the workers by "socialist administrators".

I beg to differ. Lenin's call for workers "not to confine themselves" to the economic struggle, but to "master" the science of socialist theoreticians, like Marx and Engels, both bourgeois intellectuals in terms of social origin, is to *raise* the workers (*Ibid* p384n). The RWT, I am sure in spite of itself, bows to spontaneity which leaves workers degraded.

Supposedly because they had not broken with the "revolutionary social democracy" enshrined in *What is to be done?*, the Bolsheviks did not "uproot all capitalist social relations" after the revolution. The "emancipatory view of the eco-

nom content of the lower phase of communism" was "lost early on". Along with the anarchists, the RWT says the turning point was the failure of the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921. Here was an "alternative path" which could have saved the revolution. Tragically "social democratic communism" finally "gained the upper hand" and brought about the "counterrevolution within the revolution". Bolshevism separated from international communism and Russia developed along the path not of socialism but state capitalism. The legacy of defeat gave a new lease of life to "social democracy" in its variegated reformist and revolutionary manifestations.

Unless "we recognise" the RWT's version of 1921 and claims of a subsequent imposition of full blown capitalist relations, a "genuine communist alternative cannot be built today". Consequentially when I argue in 'Party, non-ideology and faction' that communists ought to unite though they "might not exactly agree on the nature of the former USSR", the RWT is outraged. Such a unity "is to leave communism handcuffed to social democracy and confine us to a capitalist prison, even after the revolution".

If communists were foolish enough to adopt the RWT's present sectarian attitude towards unity, that would certainly "leave communism handcuffed to social democracy" and "confine us to the capitalist prison". There will be no independent class politics, let alone a successful revolution unless we build a mass Communist Party (which surely must be strong enough to contain within itself Christians, Muslims and Hindus, not to mention comrades who do not agree with the RWT's version of Soviet history).

It is not, as RWT suggests we do, that communists should put the USSR aside as a "mere historical question". It is a phenomenon of the utmost theoretical importance, because to reinvigorate itself the proletarian revolution *must* ruthlessly criticise its previous attempts.

As already confessed, I do not share the RWT's R Dunayevskaya/CLR James state capitalist theory. However I also disagree with the RDG's own 1921-version of state capitalist theory, Trotsky's 1924 theory, Cliff's bureaucratic state capitalism and Burnham's bureaucratic collectivism. Nevertheless in evolving my own thoughts — which will be published in due course — I seek to take, to integrate, what is correct in their theories, while rejecting and criticising what is partial or mistaken.

Without in any way elaborating or backing up my own provisional conclusions, it is useful to provide a bare outline. Russia was left in fatal isolation by the failure in Germany. Civil war and economic collapse declassed the proletariat. The USSR became a Bonapartist state *sui generis* from the early 1920s. It was consequentially inherently unstable. In order to save the regime Stalin and the bureaucracy in effect militarily 'enslaved' the workers and peasants beginning in 1928. Labour power was neither sold nor brought. It had to be delivered by law. Alienated labour provided the 'tribute' needed for primitive accumulation. At a stroke the law of value was abolished and everything subordinated to the production of target values for their own sake. However the ectopic social formation that resulted from Stalin's improvisations was unsustainable. The law of value had not been replaced by anything superior. Characteristically the system could extract absolute surplus but not relative surplus. It could produce quantity not quality. It could only carry through one industrial revolution, not a continuous industrial revolution. Exactly the same unique laws of motion therefore explain its early dynamism and its late retrogression. Its birth was its death.

In contrast the RWT wants us to believe the fate of the Russian revolution was determined before November 1917 by Lenin's incomplete break with "revolutionary social democracy" mentioned above. He is quoted, disapprovingly, saying that the postal service is an "example of the socialist economic system". Such an idea, the RWT sneers, "is hardly to inspire workers today!" Yet in the very passage from Lenin's *State and revolution* cited by the RWT prosecution we find, if we allow ourselves to see the wood for the trees, the reason why his was not an "essentially social democratic vision" which accepts "alienated labour as the basis for future production".

Lenin's post office would *only* become "an example of the socialist economic system" once "we have overthrown the capitalists and smashed the bureaucratic machine of the modern state" (my emphasis). Then the "united workers themselves" have at hand "a splendidly equipped mechanism", Lenin declares.

How the post office under the control of the "united workers themselves" is meant to be an example of "alienated labour" is beyond me. The RWT can dogmatically say it. But it does not make it so.

The deformations of the Russian revolution under Lenin are fundamentally rooted in the actual conditions. Matter is primary. The one-party state, one-man management, censorship, terror and NEP state capitalism were not the culmination of some *a priori* intellectual failure. They were imposed by the suffocating isolation of the revolution, civil war and extreme economic dislocation. Moving forward directly from Russia's primitive economic base towards real socialism and communism would have been possible even in *abstraction* only after its revolution had sparked *simultaneous* revolutions in the west.

Say the RWT's Kronstadt anarcho-populists had managed to trigger a nationwide rising and Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin were put up against the wall. Chances are that the politically uneducated and undisciplined Kronstadters would have gone down to Black Hundred counterrevolution along with their good intentions within days of their so-called victory. Trotsky was surely right in his estimation: "In their hands, power would have been only a bridge — and a short one at that — to a bourgeois regime" (L Trotsky *Kronstadt*, New York 1971, p82). Russia would have become an imperialist semi-colony and its population subjected to untold suffering. Landlord, capitalist and white guard would return and exact bloody revenge. Jews and communists would be hunted down in a Nazi-like war of extermination.

Even if we suspend our belief in such an outcome, does the RWT seriously suggest a Kronstadt regime could have revitalised the soviets? Could it feed the cities? Could it maintain an army against imperialist intervention? Could it organise the economy? Could it take the straight road to communism? Improbable, to say the least. The Kronstadt sailors, like the jacqueries in the countryside, knew what they were against — material hardship, grain requisitions, political repression. But apart from catch-all phrases like "soviets without communists", "free elections" and "free trade" — acceptable to anarchists, left and right socialist revolutionaries and Mensheviks — Kronstadt had no political programme (see A Berkman *The Bolshevik myth*, London nd, pp42-3).

If I insisted on proclaiming my ideas about Soviet *bureaucratic socialism* to be absolute truth; if I managed to get it into a programme to which every other communist was expected to *agree*; then myself and my comrades would be really guilty of "retarding development". Such a stance would only add to the fragmentation of communists in Britain, decried by ourselves and the RWT alike. Equally, if I insisted that the deformed, fished and bureaucratized *formal socialism* of Lenin's Soviet Russia represented some ideal to which we communists must programmatically aspire, then I should be branded a sectarian fool. Certainly if I programmatically equated Stalin's USSR with any sort of *real socialism*, then the RWT has my permission to get me sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

But neither myself nor the Provisional Central Committee propose any such thing. A few comrades of mine indicate that they disagree with my views on the USSR. Most however seem to have come round — though I am sure they do not fully grasp the implications. Yet of course, the *Draft programme* we have published for discussion is not designed to commit communists to any specific theory of the USSR. To repeat, it seeks to crystallise the immediate needs and general strategic tasks of the working class. It is an attempt to provide the basis to unite communists for action. It is not a didactic history primer, nor a factional catechism.

No doubt it can be greatly strengthened by various additions and deletions. Nevertheless such a document can bring all communists together — if they are honest and not irredeemable sectarians — to serve the workers' cause. In my opinion it is inevitable that the present draft will have been subjected to considerable change by the time of the valedictory session of the refounding congress of the CPGB. But even if not a single word is altered all that will be required from communists is *acceptance* of it as the basis for disciplined work. It would be quite legitimate to openly argue for change — as long as it is within the theory of Marxism.

That could include *campaigning* for an amendment which elevated Kronstadt 1921 from being a tragic and historically accidental episode that should have no place in the programme into a defining watershed. I would personally vigorously oppose such an anarchistic deviation. Nevertheless if, in spite of my passionate efforts, a congress majority agreed to include such an idea in the programme, I would, of course, still have the right to fight for its removal. Which indubitably I would exercise.

The point I am trying to get over is that the main thing is to unite and train communists

Supplement

around a programme of action. Certainly today insisting on programmatic agreement with a specific historical interpretation of the USSR is to perpetuate disunity and inaction. No one need drop their views on history or any other matter. But we can and must unite — albeit to begin with as factions — in the fight to reforge the Communist Party.

Stages, phases and pedantry

The RWT is determined to draw numerous straight lines of demarcation between itself and the rest of the left. This Mondrian effect is the result of *internal necessity*. It does not stem from the needs of the class struggle. Hence we find the RWT cutting itself off from the CPGB project because in *Which road?* I use the term 'stage' to describe the socialist transition from capitalism to communism (something Lenin is accused of as well). The RWT, you see, like Marx, uses the term 'phase' to describe socialism. Despite RWT protestations that it is "not attempting to create differences", frankly I am reminded of *Gulliver's travels* and Lilliput's war over which end an egg should be opened.

In all seriousness the comrades inform us: "It is possible to 'phase in' and 'phase out' in a transition from outgoing capitalism to incoming communism, but it is impossible to 'stage in' and 'stage out'. The separate stage of socialism has, in effect, become a wall raised between capitalism and communism, the main feature of which is complete nationalisation or state capitalism. You recognise the transition can be reversed. Separate stages will guarantee it."

If we did not imbue the stage of socialism with movement, if we treated it as a fixed category, if we forgot about communism and aimed for socialism as a thing in itself, if we treated it as a separate mode of production, then I can see why the RWT would make a fuss. But in *Which road?* the notes on the "transition to communism" make quite clear that this is not the case. I hope it is not trying the reader's patience too much if I provide a couple of examples as proof: "Socialism is not a mode of production. It is a transitional society between capitalism and communism, and as such contains elements of both." "Socialism is not irreversible. The victory of communism is not automatic or spontaneous. A socialist society can either go back to capitalism, stay still or go forward. Its fate depends on the balance of forces nationally and internationally and the policy of its communist leadership. Only with the World Union of Socialist States can we say that we have passed definitively from the epoch of imperialism, wars and revolutions to the epoch of communism (J Conrad *Which road?*, London 1991, p247).

So the difference comes down to the word 'stage' used by Conrad and Lenin, and the word 'phase' used by the RWT and Marx. Tell me if I am wrong, but are they not interchangeable? My *Concise Oxford dictionary* defines 'stage' as follows: "point or period in development, process, etc." It defines 'phase' in almost exactly the same way: "stage of change or development". How about in German? After all that was Marx's native tongue. I duly looked up 'stage' and 'phase' in my *Collins German dictionary*. I cannot say I was surprised to actually find 'stage' defined as "phase" or "zeitpunkt" (literally 'timepoint' — JC).

A similar pedantry informs the RWT's criticism of our slogan, "The bureaucracy must become the servant of the working class", and the category, "law of planning". The demand for the bureaucracy to "become the servant of the working class" is apparently "a massive concession to social democracy". The RWT says there is no need for a bureaucracy under socialism. The "law of planning" similarly is dismissed as nothing but "a figleaf for the power of socialist administrators".

Making the bureaucracy "the servant" of the working class is of course a paraphrase of Engels. He wrote of the Paris Commune and the measures it enacted to prevent "administrative, judicial and educational" "officials" transforming themselves "from servants of society into masters of society" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 27, Moscow 1990, p190).

Socialism will quickly do away with bureaucracy. That is certain. But to begin with at least certain functions will still be the sphere of experts. We cannot eradicate the division of labour overnight (nor the law of value, money, or the wages system). Hence to control our servants we propose to employ the same two "infallible means" as the Commune (*Ibid*).

One, election of all posts and the right of recall. Two, limiting the pay of officials to that of the average worker. To the extent privilege and careerism are overcome, bureaucracy — an alienated form of organisation — is done away with. Such measures are particularly relevant with for-

mal socialism. Under real socialism, given favourable conditions, the division of labour can in great measure be overcome by the rapid reduction of necessary labour to some 15 or 10 hours a week. However even then we would still have to ensure that the state, a necessary evil inherited from capitalism, never became the master of society — complacency would be the massive concession to "socialist administrators".

Finally let me dispose of the calumny against the "law of planning" — above all how it "does not belong to Marx". In *Capital* Marx writes of the free association of producers and how they will apportion labour-time "in accordance with a definite plan" (K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1976, p172). Engels can be cited in the same way. "It [society] will have to arrange its plan of production in accordance with the means of production, which include in particular its labour-powers. The useful effects of the various articles of consumption, compared with one another and with the quantities of labour required for their production, will in the end determine the plan" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 25, Moscow 1987, p295).

Surely the RWT is not advocating a planless socialism. But it is either that or our friends are hell-bent on childish squabbles. I will leave the reader to decide — either way the RWT is redolent with an anarchistic frame of mind.

Break-up of UK and a break with Marxism

RWT announces that its "vision of the future communism society" (sic) has a "great bearing" on its programme, tactics and type of organisation today. Well clearly it is the other way round. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that RWT *requires* artificial lines of division when it comes to the morrow because of its present day amateurism and anarcho-nationalism. In other words the real lines of demarcation exist now.

To excuse its amateurism and anarcho-nationalism the RWT breaks with Lenin yesterday and Leninism today.

Lenin and Leninism advocate the "centralised state". This is objectively brought about, in Lenin's words, in no small measure by capitalism, along with its "inevitable antipode, the proletarian class", and the supersession of feudalism. Capitalism's "broad and rapid development of the productive forces" destroys "all the old, medieval caste, parochial, petty national, religious and other barriers". The "great centralised state" represents, according to Lenin, "a step forward from medieval disunity to the future socialist unity of the whole world" (quotes in this paragraph from *Critical remarks on the national question*).

In the RWT's twisted and almost unbelievable conclusion, such "economistic thinking" would "have placed any 'Marxist' in the UK firmly against the struggle for Irish self-determination".

I have no wish to be patronising. But when dealing with such silliness it really is one's duty to adopt a pedagogical attitude. My RWT friends really do not know elementary Marxist vocabulary. They certainly have not mastered its ontology.

We shall therefore have to tediously explain truths which the average supporters of this paper have long ago learned and understood. So what follows is not for the informed reader's benefit. It is for those who in their vain attempt to prove Lenin stupid have only succeeded in making themselves stupid.

'Economism' does not, and has never, referred to the role of the "productive forces", in the *capitalist* or any other social formation. Capital itself, however, in my estimation, undoubtedly does the material, economic, groundwork for human liberation. Socialism cannot grow from the poverty, stagnation and primitivism of feudalism, slavery or the Asiatic tribute gathering systems. Socialism only comes onto the historic agenda as a practical project for humanity with the triumph of real capitalism, the world economy and the proletarianisation of the overwhelming majority of the population.

Economism is actually a deviation within the workers' movement. It erroneously contends that political consciousness develops out of the spontaneous, economic, bottom-up, trade unionist, struggle. For economism the class struggle is centred on the workplace, not the state and the position of *all* classes in society. The task of communists, they insist, is to help workers successfully fight the boss. Questions of theory, polemical disputes, programmes, etc, are not issues to be placed before the easily confused working class. Such matters should be left to intellectuals — or so say the economists.

For the RWT to dismiss Lenin's paean of praise for capitalism's relative *progressiveness* as economism, is not only an example of ignorance. It is to dismiss the whole of Marxism and to lapse into pre-Marxist utopian communism. If

Lenin's *Critical remarks* are economism then I wonder what the RWT makes of the 1848 *Communist manifesto*. Presumably it too was economism. Capitalism, said an admiring Marx and Engels, in its uninterrupted disturbance of social conditions, restless search for new markets and constant revolutionising of the instruments of production, "has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals". The "bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part", they proclaimed (K Marx and F Engels *MECW* Vol 6, Moscow 1976, pp486, 487).

RWT has the right to be stupid. But, comrades, if you insist on it you endanger your right to be treated as serious Marxists and, considering your political weight, the right to be treated seriously.

Marxists, Lenin included, have unremittably, and quite logically, given our advocacy of the national *right* to self-determination, actively, sided with the Irish struggle for freedom (those within the workers' movement who do not support the *non-peaceful* use of that right violate elementary democracy). The specific call for Irish independence, however, necessarily goes hand in hand with an overall struggle for a democratic centralised state. Such a 'contradiction' is only a mystery to those who are in terms of politics children. Those who are politically illiterate.

It should be no problem for any sort of a communist to grasp Marx's, and Lenin's, general, and decidedly *positive*, preference and desire for the centralised democratic state, *alongside* their perfectly consistent championing of the *right* of nations to freely decide their future. Our aim is to voluntarily bring nations and peoples together. Under exceptional circumstances, for example when there has been a history of bloody oppression or forced unity, communists can advocate separation. Such a divorce creates the best conditions for later voluntary union.

Cantons in Switzerland are reactionary. *Landrate* in Germany are reactionary. States in the USA are reactionary. In these countries communists ought to fight for centralism. The famed insularity, religious bigotry and selfishness of Bern, Bavaria and Alabama can be overcome by the working class movement demanding a break with federalism and a new, centralised, democratic constitution.

In the concrete circumstances of Britain, however, a "federal republic would mean progress" (VI Lenin *Marxism and the state*, Moscow 1972, p16). Nowadays that does not mean the federal republic of Britain and Ireland, advised by Marx, Engels and Lenin. It means fighting for a federation of England, Scotland and Wales. Only in such an arrangement can the peoples of Scotland and Wales exercise the *right* of self-determination. Only such an arrangement can meet the democratic aspirations of the peoples of Scotland and Wales while deepening their unity with the English.

No one can discredit communism as long as it does not discredit itself. There are communists who belittle the national question in Britain in the name of the economic struggle or abstract socialism. These comrades are in effect chauvinist-economists. I am certain the RWT would join with me in criticising their unwillingness to understand the relationship between communism and democracy. They bring discredit to our movement.

Yet though it is arguing from a diametrically opposite pole, the RWT likewise brings discredit to our movement. Because of its petty bourgeois nationalism it mocks our insistence that the working class should organise itself into "the largest and most powerful and most centralised units" (the highest example today would be a Communist International). Counterposed to this requirement of proletarian internationalism RWT wants *existing* multi-national states broken up along nationalist lines. If this actually happened here it would be a recipe for disaster. Ex-Yugoslavia is only the latest example of how easily nationalism unleashes slaughter, economic collapse and imperialist 'peacemakers'.

The problem in Britain is not the existence of a multi-national state. It is that the ruling class and its antiquated constitution denies the national rights of the Scots and Welsh peoples. The democratic deficit has created a wide constituency for change. The RWT is right when it says communists "should place themselves at the head of this democratic movement". The PCC seeks to achieve this by channelling the democratic aspirations of the masses away from narrow nationalism and onto the road towards revolution. We do this by campaigning for the federal republic. If the bourgeoisie are incapable, or unwilling, then the proletarian revolution can and will realise this demand. Our comrades throughout Britain — Scotland and Wales included — therefore oppose nationalist calls for division and fight instead for the maximum unity of the masses against the state. (Inci-

dentally, to the extent capitalism organises the European Union into a superstate, we communists must organise together into one Communist Party of the European Union.)

The RWT claims that "workers' organisations" which accept the "framework" of large multi-national states — they cite the Bolsheviks as an example — provide "a left bulwark supporting these states' continued existence" (the inverted commas around 'workers' are RWT's). As if the Bolsheviks were a "left bulwark" of Tsarism!

Not content to slander Bolshevism, the RWT attempts to tar the PCC with fascism! Both the CPGB's *Manifesto* for the 1995 local elections and John Tyndall's British National Party say there is a British nation. In the RWT's opinion this "astounding common ground" shows how our politics are infected with "deep British nationalism". This is like saying that because Marx recognised the objective fact of the German nation and advocated its unity there was an "astounding common ground" between him and Adolf Hitler. There is nothing "astounding" here except where RWT's nationalism is taking it.

Going round in circles

After dismissing Leninism, it is rather strange to find the RWT recommending the Russian experience as the way forward. Sad to say it is not the Bolshevik Party that the RWT wants to emulate. It is the Marxist circles of the 1890s and the Leagues of Struggle. Their "long term" propaganda work is the model which has "great relevance to today's project". Nevertheless within the RWT's proposed Communist League — there are three in existence already — no tendency "would be expected to give up its freedom of action". In spite of such anarchism this "united front activity" could maybe "lead eventually to the situation where a genuine communist party can be formed".

Evidently the RWT has no battle plan. To declare that united front work is all the left is capable of doing; to say that a Communist League is a distinct stage which must be realised before anything else can be done is to complacently accept our present day fragmentation. Precisely because of this nothing of substance will rally to the RWT's Communist League — with its freedom of action and, I presume, federalism and Kronstadt anarcho-communism. Such a ghastly conglomeration cannot take on the capitalist monster which is today heavily pregnant with crisis. Surely against this enemy communists must fight with what is necessary.

The Russian circles and leagues, first formed in 1895, operated illegally. Yet whatever their contribution Lenin was right in his pamphlets, *Where to begin?* and *What is to be done?*, to scoff at their primitiveness. Something new was needed. Lenin proposed a party of professional revolutionaries. A *re-established* RSDLP which would be the tribune of the oppressed and vanguard of the working class. Only with such a weapon could there be a serious struggle against the autocracy.

The preparatory work was undoubtedly carried out through *Iskra*. Moreover its highly centralised organisation provided the model for the party of a new type. Between its centre, abroad — so as to avoid the police — and the localities in Russia, there was a well understood chain of command and a strict division of labour. The 2nd Congress of the RSDLP in 1903 was in fact the culmination of *Iskra's* work.

Our conditions are very different. We can operate broadly and freely. Despite that our movement is ineffective when it comes to the practical struggle. It is not that there are only a handful of Marxist intellectuals. Adding together all those "progressive-minded workers" in leftwing organisations, there must be something like 15,000 or 20,000 in total. Around them is a layer of sympathisers and potential activists numbering at least 100,000. Involving them all at different levels and moments of the class struggle there are, as everyone knows, united front actions and campaigns around all kinds of issues. Nevertheless when it comes to society as a whole, the left is a marginal force.

The reason why this small army hardly makes any impact is twofold. One, it is divided into numerous ideological sects and groups. Two, much of it suffers from the political illusion that, given the organisational weakness of the left, progress, to begin with at least, must come by way of the Labour Party.

It is not a question of diplomatically bringing together present day groups and sects and declaring 'the Party'. That is a caricature of the PCC's proposals for communist rapprochement. But if the genuine communists unite together as Party factions, with the right to maintain, develop and publicise one's views, that would create the best conditions to organise the advanced part of the working class into a Communist Party. Then we will make a difference in society. ●

Jack Conrad