

Hands off Iraq!

As we go to press, news of the US-British bombing of Iraq is breaking. The *Weekly Worker* editorial team resolutely condemns this latest manifestation of the imperialist New World Order, backed by all the British bourgeois parties - Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat.

This attack has nothing whatsoever to do with "securing world peace", let alone protecting the interests of the Iraqi masses. It is about imposing the will of US imperialism on leaders of 'rogue states', such as Saddam Hussein.

It is the task of the Iraqi proletariat and oppressed peoples, including the Kurds, to deal with their own dictator, supported by the world's working class. For us in Britain the main enemy is at home - the New Labour imperialism of Tony Blair •

New strategy for Ireland

The IRA refusal to hand over arms does not mean the failure of the peace process

Every year the Nobel Peace Prize is handed out to those who have done sterling work on behalf of world imperialism: Henry Kissinger, the 'Peace People', Mikhail Gorbachev, Itzhak Rabin, etc. This year, under the auspices of the New World Order, it is John Hume and David Trimble who get the prize for helping to engineer the Good Friday agreement.

But even as the semi-beatified Hume and Trimble stepped onto the Oslo stage - Hume even managed to say a few words in Norwegian - there were rumblings about the well-being of the peace process. Did you notice that there were no handshakes in Oslo? More alarming for some was the fact that the IRA still had not made any tangible move towards wholesale decommissioning.

Then the likes of the BBC and the rightwing Tory press got really jittery. In fact, the objective and neutral BBC decided at the weekend to launch its own limited propaganda war, trying to convince us that the British-Irish Agreement was in imminent danger - from the supposed 'hawks' and 'men of violence' within the IRA. The stream of disinformation continues as we write.

Consequently, it has been boldly reported that the IRA has categorically rejected an arms handover. This generated agitated soundbites and headlines about the "deadlocked" peace process. Last Friday, according to the BBC and Irish state broadcaster RTE, IRA sources said they had "firmly ruled out" any decommissioning and that all talk of a "gesture" - or tokenistic handover - was "fanciful".

In many respects, these tough-sounding words from IRA sources are in retaliation to Trimble's acceptance speech at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony the day before. He issued a plea to the IRA to start a "credible process of decommissioning" in order to allow Sinn Féin to take its two seats on the new Northern Ireland executive. Unsurprisingly, Sinn Féin was

less than enamoured by Trimble's remarks, insisting they are entitled to take their seats solely on the basis of their electoral mandate. The agreement merely states that all parties should use their influence to achieve decommissioning by May 2000.

That was not all. There was more grist to be added to the media mill. It transpires that two weeks ago the IRA's army convention elected a new seven-member army council, with the Marxist 'hardliner' Brian Keenan replacing Thomas 'Slab' Murphy as chief of staff. Keenan purportedly organised the IRA's bombing campaigns in London and the south-east during 1973-74. It is also claimed that he was instrumental in obtaining arms and guns from Colonel Gaddafi and it is widely reported that he was one of the key movers behind the Canary Wharf bomb in February 1996. The doom and gloom spread by the BBC must have given some comfort to those who believe that SF/IRA are operating according to the strictures of some diabolically cunning plot - which will outflank and outmanoeuvre British imperialism as surely as day follows night.

However, the truth is somewhat more prosaic. The IRA statement actually says there will be no arms handover "immediately". The statement on decommissioning was no doubt meant to reassure IRA members on the ground that the organisation had not gone soft and is not dancing to Trimble's Oslo tune.

The same could essentially be said of the appointment of Keenan. Some may believe - or hope - that this represents a retreat into rejectionism and 'militarism'. But though it would be wrong to underestimate the significance of Keenan's election, it must be recognised that he is bound by majority votes. *The Observer* quotes an IRA source as saying: "People had the same anxiety about Slab Murphy when he was appointed, but there is a tendency in the IRA to neutralise you by promoting you. Everyone thought



Trimble and Hume: thumbs up for imperialist peace

appointing a hard man from South Armagh would turn the strategy around. It didn't. Murphy turned out to be just a holding operation, and now it's Keenan's turn. He has no actual authority over anyone else in the army council. He is like the president or chairman. I wouldn't see this as a change of direction" (December 13). In other words, a 'hardline' figurehead at the helm of the IRA might be useful to the SF leadership. Keenan's unimpeachable republican and leftwing credentials will perhaps make it easier to sell decommissioning - if and when necessary - to members and supporters.

Tony Blair, for one, did not seem that alarmed by the rise of Keenan. He shrugged his shoulders, remarking: "I wouldn't lay too much stress on one particular report. I don't pretend to know the inner workings of the IRA. That's up to them. What I know is the agreement must be implemented." Significantly, he has reiterated that the accelerated release programme will continue. There are only 90 republican prisoners still serving sentences in the Maze, and SF reports that only 21 of these will be kept in over Christmas.

Somewhat pathetically Andrew MacKay, the Tory Northern Ireland secretary, blustered on about how "shocking" he found the IRA state-

ment, adding: "Perhaps Tony Blair will now respond to our demands that he draws a line in the sand and says no more early release of terrorist prisoners until there is substantial and verifiable decommissioning." The Tories are increasingly 'off message' when it comes to the peace process in Northern Ireland - as they are about almost everything else you care to mention.

After the Tory huff and puff, *The Guardian* introduced some sense of - imperialist - perspective, reminding us that Gerry Adams had held private meetings with Bill Clinton during the week, which can only be a good thing. It also warned against putting too much pressure on the IRA leadership over the decommissioning issue: "The military men continue to regard the handover of weapons as a surrender - the one action no army can countenance. Sinn Féin sources insist that Mr Adams has taken the republican movement much further than anyone thought possible by persuading it to accept an effectively partitionist settlement" (December 11).

It is clear that imperialist-brokered peace is breaking out in Northern Ireland. SF is totally committed to the process. But the IRA's arms remain its most important bargaining chip. Decommissioning will only begin - if it ever does - when SF/IRA has ex-

tracted every last concession it believes possible in relation to posts in the Stormont government, cross-border institutions and the new police authority. Crucially it must convince its supporters that the British will not renege on the release of republican prisoners.

Nevertheless, while SF/IRA is prepared to go to the brink, even if this means a delay in setting up the new Northern Ireland administration or institutionalising north-south cooperation, it will not risk the agreement's complete collapse. Adams and McGuinness have invested too much in the deal.

While concessions to the republicans are real and undisputed, this does not change the character of the settlement. The anti-imperialist revolutionary movement, although undefeated, is being forced to accept New World Order reality. The vast majority of the nationalist community is behind the agreement and its intentions - to ignore this obvious fact and go it alone, as the Real IRA attempted, would be to turn to the politics of despair.

A new communist perspective is required, one which looks to democracy and the self-activity of the masses - not US presidents, or the Nobel Peace Prize committee •

Eddie Ford

Party notes

Perspectives '99

December's aggregate of the Communist Party looked at the question of our organisational and political perspectives for next year. Primarily this took the form of reports and discussions around the recent negotiations on united left electoral slates for the forthcoming European elections. A *Perspectives '99* document was also introduced to the meeting, but will be finalised at our first meeting in 1999 itself.

While there will be disagreements over details, the leadership of our Party - the Provisional Central Committee - does not anticipate controversy around the main ideas contained in this document. Comrades should take care to read, think about and discuss its central points in their cells before the next aggregate debates and votes.

The subtitle of *Perspectives '99* is 'A year of change?' Certainly, the terrain on which we fight for working class politics has shifted since the election of Blair's Labour. In the arena of bourgeois politics, there is a great deal happening. Nothing dramatic has yet moved in working class politics, however.

Certainly, the justification of practically every section of the left for a vote for Labour in 1997 - that it would very quickly precipitate a "crisis of expectations" - has definitely been confirmed as claptrap. Any sudden upsurge of class struggle - 18 months in power - cannot be attributed to high expectations supposedly existent at the time of the May 1997 general election. Such a development would be new, would have its own distinct causes and would represent a *break* with exceedingly *low* expectations that produced the Blair parliamentary landslide - and the most rightwing Labour government ever.

Similarly, sections of the left are now writing extravagantly of the looming world crisis of capitalism and its beneficial effects for socialist ideas. The notion that any prolonged downturn in the world economy will automatically translate into advances for the left is inane. It reflects precisely the same mechanical methodology as the 'expectations' crowd: a failure to fundamentally link theory and practice, a hope that someone, something else will intervene to rescue us.

Thus, while the political and economic scene is characterised by fluidity and change, we would be foolish to predict a dramatic breakthrough for the forces of the working class over the coming 12 months. Crisis could overwhelm British and world capitalism. The left could make dramatic advances. Society certainly contains sufficient combustible material for explosion. However, surveying the political scene now, it is impossible for us to predict in what form and according to what timetable change will come.

For the past period, the emphasis within our organisation has been on cadre and organisational preservation. Despite the volubility of the world situation and how it manifests itself in Britain, this should continue to be reflected in our work as we begin 1999. We must remain alive to the possibilities for dramatic change and be prepared to totally transform our tempo and form of work. However, our world view will not go into crisis if at the end of the year the situation is broadly the same (or worse). In the absence of a crystal ball, continuity and preservation remain important watchwords for us. Essential in this will be systematic education for all our comrades and overcoming the theoretical passivity we have identified as a problem of Party members at all levels of the organisation.

This question of Party education has sparked a small debate over the past few months in cells and aggregates. While the PCC remains open to suggestions and advice over the content and form of this important area of Party work, the source of our problems is not technical. The *key* problem of Party education as well as its culture more generally (such as our ongoing casual attitude to recruitment) is the fact that our comrades are relatively *isolated*.

That is, what are the contact points of our comrades with the real world? Who are they talking to, in what forums, leading to what action? Who do they lead or influence, even in the most general sort of way?

If our comrades operated as more rounded politicians in more challenging forums, they would need to use theory more and to take a more critical attitude to ideas - including the dominant ideas of the Party itself. This is the only way that education in our ranks will strike home.

It is in this context that we have started to look at the question of systematic work in the trade unions - it is certainly not viewed as a 'get rich quick' exercise. We have consistently pointed to the self-evident truth that trade unions in Britain currently operate at a very low level and to the fact that the left makes such a fetish of them because of its much deeper political problems. This should not, however, be interpreted as a sectarian dismissal of what are, after all, mass organs of our class.

Like much else in *Perspectives '99*, our plans in this field remain tentative and premised on the political and economic situation that faces us in the here and now. If 1999 does indeed turn out to be the 'year of change', then perhaps everything will be up for grabs ●

Mark Fischer
national organiser

Religious sect?

In picking over the bones of the now defunct Workers International League (WIL), John Stone of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International (*Weekly Worker* December 10) shows graphically how not to proceed when analysing why yet another left grouping has disappeared.

The WIL was probably the only healthy group to emerge from the mad world that Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party had become at the time of its collapse. Although always small, it quickly gained new forces from a range of different traditions (in my own case, the SWP). The Leninist Trotskyist Tendency to which it affiliated (Stone is quite wrong to say this was formed by the WIL) was also similar in this respect, and was one of the few international groupings not dominated by a single national organisation. By the early 1990s the WIL had developed an enviable reputation for consistent principled Marxism that rejected the sectarianism that characterises most of the British left. It also held a critical attitude to the sterile and dogmatic 'orthodoxy' of most Trotskyist groups. It is this latter trait that most annoys Stone, as can be gauged from his shocked tones when discussing the WIL's support for the position of Roman Rosdolsky on the national question in eastern Europe.

I doubt if Stone has even studied Rosdolsky's position, but, that aside, his horror is over the fact that Rosdolsky, and the WIL, believed that Marx and Engels made a number of mistakes on this issue, mistakes mindlessly repeated in recent years by countless epigones who rejected Bosnian muslim self-determination on the grounds that Engels had claimed they were not a genuine people at all (try telling that to one to the survivors of Serb and Croat death camps). Of course, if you treat Marxism as a religion, and the writings of your chosen saints as gospel, then politics merely becomes the art of the bibliophile, once in a while coming out with an appropriate quotation from your idols to 'prove' that you are right.

This surely is the real hub of the matter: how 'Trotskyists' such as Stone have succeeded, yet again, in turning Marxism from a guide to action into a rigid dogma. Of course, the nature of the period we are in is central to this. The lack of major class battles, and a recent history of serious defeats (from the miners to the Liverpool dockers) have meant that it has been incredibly difficult to connect Marxist practice to the workers' movement and build an organisation in this period, as the WIL found to its cost. But despite all the problems, the WIL did make a far better political analysis than most.

For example, while the majority of the far left (including the CPGB) were impressionistically carried away by the launch of the SLP, it was the WIL who correctly argued that this was not a significant split by the class away from Labourist reformism, but a small breakaway caused itself by demoralisation. It was on this issue in particular that the WIL found impossible joint work with Stone's LCMRCI (which, it should be said, has always had more initials in its name than members), particularly when LCMRCI members were wildly predicting actual electoral successes for SLP candidates. It was the WIL who restated that you cannot break workers from reformism simply by telling them how bad the Labour Party is.

However, the WIL could not escape the material circumstances in which it operated. The result was increasing demoralisation that slowed production of its paper, *Workers News*, to only a few issues a year. This was an impossible situation, and needless to say produced further demoralisation.

Into this situation burst the tragicomic figure of Steve Myers, whose politics basically consisted of grandiose, get-rich-quick schemes that most of the time had no connection with reality. Then, in 1997, Myers was accused by a female member of sexual abuse. After a long investiga-

tion by a control commission it was concluded that although the incident was confused (all those concerned had been drunk) there was enough evidence to suspend Myers from the WIL for a period of six months.

However, by this time Myers was one of three members who had launched a faction in order to publish what would become *Workers Fight* (WF). WF members deliberately ignored Myers' suspension, and insisted he attended every meeting in order to bolster their meagre forces (it should be noted that not a single female comrade supported WF, which itself is very telling).

Rather than fight this politically, as I believed should have been the case, the majority of those members left decided to dissolve the WIL and establish Workers Action (WA), minus the three WF members. It was at this stage that I left, having been appalled by the contempt shown for democratic centralism and lack of referral to the LTT by both sides. It is now the case that while WF continue on an ultra-left adventure into the land of the sects, WA retain some of the better sides of the old WIL, but have also been pulled to the right by some of the ex-Outlook members involved.

So what should be learned from all of this? Stone sees everything from the point of view of defending 'orthodoxy'. I have always seen this term as one of abuse, as it is surely the opposite of what genuinely revolutionary Marxism should be! What Stone's ideas amount to is how to build yet another sect. What we need is not a return to veneration of holy texts ("the classics", as Stone revealingly calls the works of his idols) but to Marxist *method*. Al Richardson has recently outlined very well the struggle of Marx and Engels against sect building (*What next?* No9, 1998) which I would recommend to all readers.

This process should be our real starting point, and the best way to keep alive not only all that was good about the WIL, but also to *build* on the programmatic advances by Trotsky in relation to the workers' movement.

Jim Dye

President, Liverpool TUC
(personal capacity)

Stalin only choice

Phil Sharpe (*Weekly Worker* December 3) brands Stalin a subjective idealist because he stood for socialism in one country. Nowhere does Phil describe what he means by socialism. Socialism is essentially the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the October Revolution the proletariat actually achieved power.

When Lenin died in 1924 there were several possible contenders for leadership of the proletariat and its party, the Communist Party. Trotsky and Bukharin, from left and right standpoints, did not believe that it was possible to build socialism in one country. Remembering the definition of socialism above, this amounts to saying that the proletariat would have to surrender power. The proletariat had not made the revolution and established its dictatorship in order to surrender power.

There was only one serious candidate for leadership who was in favour of building socialism in one country - that is, continuing with the dictatorship of the proletariat. His name was Stalin.

Whether the proletariat liked Stalin, whether he instituted mass democracy, whether he found it necessary to lock up or kill people who might cause trouble, whether he was a nice man, etc are all irrelevant. He was the only choice that the proletariat could make. If Phil knows that a better candidate was available, perhaps he will let us know his/her identity. It is a fact that a proletariat which wishes to continue with its dictatorship will support the appropriate leader.

This does not mean that socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, is destined to continue for ever in a particular country. Socialism ended in the Soviet Union when Stalin died in 1953. There were no



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed.

candidates for leadership then who stood for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Phil, like perhaps a majority of communists, Trotskyists and socialists in this country, would himself appear to have a subjective, idealist notion of what socialism is - an ideal state of affairs where everything is nationalised, there is mass democracy, production is for use, not for profit, everybody loves one another, etc.

Sorry, Phil. Socialism is the dictatorship of the proletariat or else it is mere playing with words.

Ivor Kenna

Central London

Left nationalist

Phil Stott, Allan Green and Ritchie Venton of the Scottish Socialist Party argued, according to Tom Delargy (*Weekly Worker* December 10), that the only possible unity deal on offer to the Socialist Workers Party "was for them to join the Scottish Socialist Party".

The comrades seem not to have noticed that the SWP is an all-Britain organisation and the SSP purely a Scottish one. If the SWP 'joined' the SSP it would no longer be a Scottish Party. But of course this apparently minor point seems to have escaped everybody's notice. What comrades Stott, Green and Venton are in reality calling for is for Scottish members of the SWP to split and break away from their own party and join the SSP. It seems that these Scottish nationalists are 'non-sectarian' because they want everybody to become nationalists and join their left nationalist party.

Instead of creating illusions in this kind of 'non-sectarianism' Tom Delargy should point out that the call to split the SWP along national lines is itself a sectarian slogan - it puts forward not the interests of international working class unity, but the petty power play of the splitters from the Militant/Socialist Party. Tom Delargy should call on the SSP to seek talks with the SWP on the basis of joining forces to form a new all-Britain/UK organisation which is committed to fighting for Scotland's right to self-determination and for a federal republic.

Dave Craig

RDG

Brazen lie

I am surprised that a letter from the Spartacist Group Japan (SGJ) is printed in the latest issue of the *Weekly Worker* (December 10). The letter printed in your paper is a bit different from what I received from Bob Malecki in Sweden.

The original letter included a brazen lie that the New Socialist Party, the only party which refuses to join the imperialist hysteria against the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, "supported" the government's resolution condemning the DPRK. This is removed from the version printed in your paper. Who 'corrected' this? The editor of the *Weekly Worker*? The SGJ?

Anyway, you should be more careful about publishing Spartacist leaflets, because they very often contain lies and falsifications about their opponents.

Cheng Maonan

Tokyo, Japan

Editor's note: Each edition of the *Weekly Worker* advises readers that "letters may have been shortened because of space". We do not consider it necessary to also warn readers that their contents might not be true.

Please note - there will be no paper on December 24 or 31. The next edition will be Thursday January 7. *Weekly Worker* comrades wish all our readers seasonal greetings and a happy new year.

Minimum wage

Raise our demands

In 1992 the CPGB published an analysis in which it concluded that a minimum income of about £250 per week was necessary to sustain a normal life for a working class person and immediate dependants. This included the necessary cultural and social activities, recreation, holidays, and so on. It was also in line with Marx's concept of not only supporting the person, but including also the cost of biological reproduction.

Equivalent incomes in western Europe have actually been below this for the working class as a whole, and this has been reflected in a reproduction level below replacement. And the quality of the replacement level for the most deprived sections has certainly been going down - Thatcher's policy in particular was to leave some sections of the working class youth to rot. It was reported in subsequent weeks that these estimations had been confirmed independently by two university studies.

In 1996 we increased our demand for the minimum income to £285 per week to take into account inflation. This generally accepted Party policy has been the scientific basis for the rejection of a minimum hourly wage of £3.60, which would give an income before tax and other stoppages of £144 for a 40-hour week.

At the same time our Party holds that a 40-hour week is too great to

permit the satisfactory cultural and political development of each worker. And, given that in big cities travelling to work will easily add another 10 hours, it can be seen that both Blair's proposed minimum wage and the 40-hour week is completely unacceptable to a party of the working class. There must be a minimum wage and a maximum working week of 35 hours.

The reasoning behind the CPGB's demand has been further confirmed by a publication of Kings College, London University, which has suggested that the current minimums are too low even to maintain physical health. The Kings College researchers maintain that at least £268 is required and that income support should be fixed at £39 a week below this. They also argue that the minimum earnings should be between £5.40 and £6.96 per hour.

This of course only deals with minimum health requirements. But, as everyone knows, in addition the better off sections of the working class can live more cheaply than the poorer sections. For example, ownership of a car enables you to buy cheaper goods from the hypermarket or drive-in shopping centre; you need good cooking facilities to prepare food more efficiently. Even leaving aside all this, and many other factors - from furniture that does not fall apart to booze cruises to France - the truth of

the matter is, the poorer you are, the lower your educational attainment is likely to be and the more liable you are to disease and illness. The government has recently published statistics that show that the death rate for people in the lowest social categories is three times that of people in the top social categories. This has shown an increase from the position 50 years ago when it was 'only' twice as great.

Moreover, it has to be pointed out that although we increased our minimum income demand on the basis of general inflation, price rises on basic foodstuffs, clothing, housing and public transport have increased much faster than on less essential goods. This means that, unlike most sections of society, the least prosperous cannot maintain their standard of living even when statistically their income is keeping pace with inflation.

Another factor not taken into account by these figures is that most of the skilled working class either own or are buying their houses (about one third of the working class now own their homes outright or have small amounts to pay off), whereas the poorer sections are forced to rent. When interest rates fall, this disparity is further increased.

For all these reasons I would recommend that the Party and the labour movement raise the demand for a mini-

mum income to £300 for a 35-hour week. The ruling class will maintain that 'the economy' could not stand this. We, on the other hand, demand what workers need, not what capitalism says it can afford. However, in actual fact, with the current levels of production in the UK standing at £800 billion per annum, such a minimum would only absorb 75% of the gross national product. This assumes that roughly 40 million people would be eligible, but does not take into account, for example, the extra income that indirect taxes such as VAT would generate to the state. No doubt Keynesians would also point to the rise in production that would occur as a result of greater demand.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the advanced capitalist countries easily produce sufficient wealth to allow all workers to reproduce themselves at the necessary level. Whether the capitalist *system* could survive such a fundamental change is quite another matter.

Finally, we must conclude that apparently the *Weekly Worker* can get its research done a damn sight quicker than the academic institutions of this country and certainly seems more accurate than they are in pinpointing not only the minimum requirements for the working class, but the minimum requirements for society ●

John Walsh

action

■ CPGB seminars

London: Sunday December 20, 5pm - 'Marx and Engels in the second period', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study guide.

For details phone 0181-459 7146.

Sunday December 27 - no seminar. Sunday January 3, 5pm - 'Bonapartism in *extremis*', using Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* as a study piece

Manchester: Monday December 21, 7.30 pm - 'Machinery and large-scale industry' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*.

Monday January 4, 7.30pm - 'The production of absolute and relative surplus value' in the series on Karl Marx's *Capital*.

For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.

■ Party wills

The CPGB has forms available for you to include the Party and the struggle for communism in your will. Write for details.

■ London Socialist Alliance

To get involved, contact Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, or ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620.

■ Support Tameside careworkers

Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne.

Donations and solidarity to Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

■ Greater Manchester SA

'Time for united action' conference. Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester. Saturday February 13, 10am-4pm. £5 (organisations).

For details ring John, 0161-286 7679, or Margaret, 0161-861 8390, or Norma, 0161-445 6681.

Around the left

Workers' millennium?

Optimism is a good thing. Marxism and pessimism are fundamentally incompatible. But our optimism must be rational, scientific and human - that is, based on what *is* and *must be*, not on whims or flights of fancy. This is by no means a stoic acceptance of the world as it is now. It enables us to tell the truth. To become a truly *political* class the workers' movement must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding.

Virtually all left groups subscribe to the view of revolution as predestiny, whether in an evolutionist or catastrophist form. History as a thing is unfolding - albeit with a few hitches and blockages - in our direction. Mechanical historicism as opposed to Marx's dialectical and emancipatory historicism.

However, in the real world we need consciousness and combativity. Sorry, comrades, history is not going to do it for us. Then again, it is not going to do it for *them* either. History is there for the making.

The Socialist Workers Party is a typical offender - though not as bad as some. We may have missed out on the 'red 1990s' so confidently predicted by the Socialist Party's Peter Taaffe in 1990 (or is there still time for an 11th-hour miracle to rescue SPEW's catastrophism?). But the SWP is looking forward to the 'red millennium'.

In the November issue of *Socialist Review*, Kevin Ovenden writes that "the seismic shift in the composition of Europe's governments has confounded those who argued in the late 1980s and early 1990s that Tory par-

ties were destined to be in power for a generation because workers had accepted the core of the free market ideology".

Perhaps comrade Ovenden has been hitting the Christmas sherry a bit early - or reading (uncritically) too many leader columns in the bourgeois press. This "seismic shift" exists mainly in his head. Possibly the comrade is expressing what he feels *ought* to happen. Reality - regrettably, it has to be said - tells a more humdrum story. The centre-left parties, if you care to describe them as such, that have come to power in most of Europe have swung to the *right* and have accepted - albeit in this or that modified form - free market ideology. One of the campaign slogans of Gerhard Schröder was 'Not different but better'. Whatever the exact political coloration of the centre-left parties now in government, it is crystal clear they are all anti-working class. The fact that they won general election victories does not indicate in any way that the workers are rejecting the free market ideology, let alone capitalism or the rule of the bourgeoisie.

The latest issue of *Socialist Review* (December) carries on in this light-minded yuletide vein. It is relentlessly upbeat, even when talking about economic crisis. In comrade Peter Morgan's 'critique' of the past year, we see the following headline: "Labour: things only got worse." Sorry, comrade - worse for Labour *or for us*?

We get the usual empty poll-chasing - apparently Blair's personal rating had "plummeted" according to a *Guardian*/ICM survey conducted in

September. Wow. Comrade Morgan's conclusions represent an excursion into fantasy land, as reality/history has to conform to the SWP's theory. Thus we are told: "In Britain the year is ending with the Labour Party in disarray". We could be generous and assume that this is a typing/printing error. "Labour Party" should obviously read "Tory Party". Still, an easy mistake to make, as Blair keeps shifting New Labour to the right. (It is almost getting difficult to remember the vehemence with which the SWP in the past attacked supposed "ultra-leftist" or "third period nutters" like the CPGB who dared challenge Labour in the ballot box.)

To keep his argument going, the comrade reels out the familiar economic litany which is apparently meant to cheer us all up: "Blair's relentless shift to the right has led to growing protests and demonstrations over council house sales, school closures, closure of such services such as libraries and old people's homes. Many are determined not to put up with Blair's Tory policies in the coming year."

Why talk about "growing protests" when working class action is at an all-time low? More to the point, if such a movement was on the rise, it is what is *missing* from comrade Ovenden's perspectives that speaks volumes. As Blair and his acolytes attempt to command, determine and control high politics - taking on and using constitutional-democratic issues for their own narrow advantage - the workers' movement is supposed to operate as a slave class: a ginger

group whose horizons are *limited* to defending the local library or school. Where is the ambition to turn the working class into an alternative *ruling* class? *Socialist Review* seems to view the workers as passive objects whose only task is to vote Labour - or even SWP if they are lucky - and go along to their local union meeting. No tribunes of the oppressed here.

Ultimately, empty posturing is all that is left. Comrade Morgan booms: "As the economy gets worse the political crisis will deepen ... This can lead to splits at the top of society, but these can fuel the confidence of workers." Perfectly true in some respects. Yes, we have had had *anticipations* of these "splits at the top of society" over the last few weeks. But these "splits" can only act as "fuel" for the workers if they have a political vision, leadership, and are organised as a *political* class. If not, any spontaneous resistance or movements will fizzle out - and could in the long run generate even more disillusionment and cynicism.

In other words, the SWP needs a Marxist minimum-maximum *programme*. This can best be achieved through dialogue and interaction with other left groups - and by uniting around democratic and political tasks and questions. The SWP has tentatively *begun* to break from auto-Labourism - the first step in the fight for working class independence. Let us hope that as the new millennium approaches - red or otherwise - it will start to crawl out of its economic ghetto ●

Don Preston

Socialist challenge



Anne Murphy

The CPGB's Anne Murphy has been selected as the Socialist Unity candidate for the North Defoe ward of Hackney council on January 21. She was endorsed by comrades from the CPGB, SWP and SLP, as well as from the Turkish community centre, Day Mer. A joint platform is under discussion ●

Peter Manson

Debating the USSR

New opportunity

Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty addressed the CPGB's Communist University '98 on his understanding of the Soviet Union, and the possibilities for communists since its demise

The class struggle takes place on three fronts - economic, political, and ideological. I think that the ideological conditions everything else. Central to the class struggle on the level of ideas is the question of the Soviet Union.

The Russian Revolution proved that all the Marxist talk - the idea that the workers can take power and remake the world at a higher level, that the solidarity at the root of every labour movement can be generalised into a remade world, a remade humanity - that idea, which could easily be scoffed at, easily dismissed as fantasy or utopia, was proved in the Russian Revolution to be a reality. The Russian Revolution proves what was possible, and what, I would argue, is possible. And therefore one's understanding of what happened to it is central.

The Stalinist rulers, the bureaucracy, who enslaved the people by extracting surplus product from them, presented for decades the lie that they were the continuation of the Russian Revolution. They thereby corrupted the ideas of socialism. One of the things that has happened in the 1990s is that the giant stock of lies of this ruling class that did not dare call itself such, the lie that they were socialists, that their system was socialism, and democracy and a continuation of the Russian Revolution - this enormous accumulation of lies has been taken over by the bourgeoisie, who were always willing to identify all the negative aspects of the Russian system with socialism.

The battle of ideas is the battle to understand what happened to our revolution. How do we understand it and what lessons can we draw? This is central to our ability to credibly present our perspective of socialism - our belief that Lenin and Leninism live. If they live, then they live on the basis of our being able to understand their experience.

What I want to do is discuss, firstly, what actually happened to the Russian Revolution, and, secondly, the various attempts to explain it. It is central to Marxism that socialism is necessarily the child of advanced capitalism. Socialism is only possible where capitalism has done its preliminary work of creating the possibility of an abundance. That was Marx's point of view.

The Russian economy was nowhere near ready for socialism. Russia was an immensely backward country, a country that had abolished serfdom only in 1861, and where you still had a vast mass of peasants. But the technology of international capitalism was imported into the Russian empire: giant factories were created with tens of thousands of workers. Thus the working class was an immense power in Russia, able to push aside the timid bourgeoisie, and lead the peasants, who needed, in many respects, the sort of revolution that the French peasants had made at the end of the 18th century. The workers were able to take power because of objective social conditions, because

of superb leadership, and because they were able to attain a sharp, clear level of class consciousness.

Russia not only 'imported' capitalism amidst agrarian backwardness. It imported Marxism, a variant of Marxism, that initially preached the idea that Russia was bound to go through a capitalist phase of development, and that that was progressive. Certain bourgeois people - the legal Marxists of the 1890s - used that Marxism to rationalise capitalism. Hence the struggle between the legal Marxists and those who were Marxists in the proletarian, revolutionary sense - a struggle for clarity in Marxism.

In western Europe, the opportunists - Bernstein and so on - had begun to revise Marxism, to take away its revolutionary cutting edge, so the Russian Marxists could learn from that as well. And they developed a sharp, focused Marxism in conditions where the working class was immensely revolutionary.

But being able to make a revolution and take power is not the same thing as being able to build socialism. That was objectively impossible in Russia. Nobody who led the Russian Revolution, and the vast masses of workers who were educated by them, believed that they were going to make socialism. The solution to their dilemma - the fact that they could take power but not build socialism and therefore were doomed - was of course that the revolution would spread. The Russians thought they were the vanguard of a revolution that would spread to Germany, to France, to Britain, and possibly to America, in all of which countries objective conditions were ripe for socialism. The Russian Revolution was made by workers with tremendous audacity, with tremendous clarity, with tremendous international consciousness. Lenin in 1918 for example could publicly say without anybody being shocked that if they had to choose to take action that will lead to the defeat of our revolution, and if that is the way towards the German revolution, where the workers can actually bring socialism, then we will pay the price.

Revolution did erupt in Germany but was betrayed and defeated. A revolution took place in Italy, and that too was defeated. The result was that the Russian Revolution was isolated. Given this, degeneration was absolutely certain, and the Russians were not only isolated, but were facing an externally backed civil war. No less than 14 states were engaged in military and naval action against the Soviet state.

One of the things the bourgeoisie lie about is that the Stalinist totalitarian state emerged, as it were, from the egg of Bolshevism in 1917. That cannot be true. The reality is that when the Bolsheviks took power they were unable to survive unless they won the competition for the rural masses, for the peasants. They did that in a democratic struggle. They won the leadership of the great masses of the Russian people because they were able to provide conditions where the peasants

could keep the land they had seized.

Now, from here on in we get to the not very good part of the story. Kronstadt. Obviously it was a tragedy, but I think the Bolsheviks had a right to do what they did. On the other hand I do not see how we as responsible, honest people, who have to put ourselves in the place of our co-thinkers at that time, can just wash our hands of it. I wish that certain things had not happened the way they did. But they happened, and this did not change the nature of the system. The red terror was a horrible business - terror is a horrible business - but at the end of the day our class had power, our Party had power. We can learn from their mistakes.

The problem with this is that people tend to look for an 'original sin'. Was it Kronstadt? I do not believe in original sin. The fact is that the Bolsheviks held on in the hope that the revolution would spread, but it did not. What happened in what became the Soviet Union in 1922? Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks developed the following idea which is central to the whole of modern communism: the idea that a Party, their Party, could act as a locum for the working class movement. Not a locum to make the revolution, but a locum to hang on, a watchman, able to keep control in the name of a working class. It seems to me to be the only thing they could have done. It was perfectly rational. The alternative was simply to surrender.

What the Bolsheviks had to do was construct an economy. Capitalism had not done its work in Russia. Economic conditions in 1917 were not conducive to socialism. That is the first departure from the elementary truths of Marxism: instead of taking over from advanced capitalism, they had to take on the role of developing a very backward economy. To do that they had to use capitalist measures. In the period of the civil war they had introduced war communism, which was basically primitive communism, where goods were confiscated from the peasants at the point of a gun most of the time. That was better than defeat, but it was no viable long-term economic system.

There were people who foolishly believed that they could go from this to full communism in the Marxist sense. But the Bolsheviks had to abandon this in March 1921 and introduced what Lenin called a controlled counterrevolution. They knew what they were doing. They actually took the measures that a bourgeois counterrevolution would have used: marketism and relatively free trade. A controlled counterrevolution, but a situation in which the workers still kept power. Trotsky had proposed such a system as early as February or March 1920. It was rejected. Then Trotsky proposed various fantastic ideas about labour armies that various people now use to show that Trotsky himself was the original totalitarian. Faced with enormous difficulties, the Bolsheviks adopted the NEP.

What did this mean in practice? It meant that a form of capitalism revived.

It meant that the differentiation in the countryside revived. Peasants who were richer, who had better land, began to exploit labourers. It was in fact a fundamental germinating process of capitalism. Except that it took place in a society where the workers' party was in power.

That could not happen without certain awful things affecting the political regime. First, the Bolsheviks took a decision which was probably in retrospect one of the greatest mistakes they ever committed. At the 10th Congress they temporarily, as they thought, banned factions in the Party. Why? Because they were undertaking a limited counterrevolution - a counterrevolution where the workers would keep power but use alien measures to develop the economy. The abolition of the rights of factions sadly became permanent, part of the system.

Things began to change, because first of all the fledgling state needed a bureaucracy. To a considerable extent, the state bureaucracy was inherited from the old tsarist system. The relationship between the Party and the state bureaucracy was one of antagonism. Central to the whole future of the system was whether or not the Party could keep its separation from the state bureaucracy and act as the defender of the proletariat against the bureaucracy.

One of the interesting things at the 10th Congress was that Lenin came out in favour of the right of free trade unions, on the basis that 'We have a workers' state, but one with bureaucratic deformations. The workers need to defend themselves against this state.' Hence you had a tense balance between the bureaucracy that ran the state and the Party, including the Party leaders, and I suppose you might say including the Party bureaucrats.

The Party was the linchpin of the whole system, and that began to fall apart as well. In the early 20s, Stalin took control of the Party apparatus. The greatest betrayal, or rather the initial betrayal from which everything else flowed, was that Stalin and his allies began to break down the division between the Party and the state apparatus, eventually fusing the two. That was the beginning, the seed from which everything else flows - the destruction of the Party as a living proletarian entity.

At the same time, they introduced into the Party a system of appointments from above, whereby all the apparatus people, all the local secretaries, were appointed from the centre, and were therefore dependent on the centre, and not under pressure from the rank and file. By 1923, the first serious opposition emerged, arguing for the separation of Party and state, and for party democracy.

If we are Marxists, we criticise Marx. If we are loyal Trotskyists, and I think I am a Trotskyist, we criticise Trotsky. But I think you have to be careful what you are doing here. For example, the notion that the Stalinist line actually originated with Lenin. As far as I understand it, the way that the Party and the state bureaucracy were fused was done by Stalin. Not Stalin individually, but Stalin as representative of a whole layer.

Lenin tried to fight this when he became aware of it. That Lenin was in favour of centralising the state is un-

doubtedly true, and that he was in favour of banning factions is undoubtedly true. But the very self-same Lenin, at the same congress where he was for banning factions temporarily, was in favour of the right of the workers to strike against their own state. He stood up for the right of the workers to revolt against their state. I do not want to deny Lenin's mistakes. But you cannot equate Lenin with Stalin. There is a qualitative break.

By the middle of the 1920s, the state apparatus, with which the Party was fused, rose above society. It is a recorded fact that as early as 1925 or 1926 the central bureaucracy was using anti-semitic agitation inside the Party. After Lenin's death, Stalin and Zinoviev introduced the so-called Lenin levy, recruiting around a quarter of a million, or slightly less, people into the Party, allegedly in honour of Lenin. The new recruits constituted an army of careerists who would work for the apparatus against the opposition. What you got was a division of the ruling Party into a hard core that represented the proletariat, and the majority of the Party, dominated by the apparatus, who in fact represented alien elements.

The proletarian core took some time to form. There was the Workers' Opposition, which in some respects was rather syndicalist, but which in retrospect, one has to admit, had certain things to say about the system. There was the Trotskyist opposition of 1923. There was the Zinoviev opposition of 1925 to 1926. What was happening here? By the early 1920s there was no doubt at all that the whole Party, including the revolutionaries, was a bureaucracy. Not necessarily in the bad sense. I mean simply in the sense that they were a crust raised above society. They were raised above the proletariat, acting for the proletariat. But they were all, in various ways, bureaucrats.

The Trotskyists were the first people to grasp what was happening. They raised the demand for the restoration of Party democracy, and for higher wages for the workers. The Zinovievites, on the other hand, sponsored Stalin as secretary. Zinoviev ran the Petrograd soviet as an entirely bureaucratic system, but even Zinoviev became alarmed at what was happening. What he and Trotsky thought was happening was that there was a drift in the Soviet Union towards the restoration of the bourgeoisie.

Lenin was aware that things were going wrong and started a struggle. In 1922 he already felt like a man behind the steering wheel who had lost control of the car. He could move the steering wheel but the wheels did not respond. The state bureaucracy was out of control. Lenin argued for the removal of Stalin. But then Lenin became ill and died.

Thereafter, the Stalinist central state apparatus smashed the Bukharinites, smashed the NEP bourgeoisie, smashed the kulaks and then created something new in history. The bureaucracy made itself, as Trotsky later put it, sole master of the surplus product. They forcibly collectivised agriculture. They forcibly began to industrialise the economy at a break-neck speed. The Stalinists used immense concentrations of state power to redesign the social terrain. They used mass terror - and this was no

for advance

accident. Terror for the next 20 years was an essential economic regulator.

You got the development of an entirely new social system - an immense concentration of political power and complete disregard for normal economic mechanisms. You got rule by diktat, the drawing into industry of large numbers of workers from the countryside, driven like slaves under police control. By the mid-1930s people were being jailed for being late for work. You could be exiled to Siberia just for not being sufficiently enthusiastic about Stalin.

You got slave labour - the highest figure I came across was 10 million, the lowest about six. Either way at any given time you had millions - people found guilty of some crime or other, or simply picked up and used as slaves. The Moscow subway system was built by slaves. This was a situation where the state was all-powerful, yet the system was full of contradictions.

The Stalinist bureaucracy nationalised everything. They did it directly, as a class, as a bureaucratic class action. They did it because they wanted to maximise the surplus under their control and make their class sole masters of the surplus product. Nationalisation implies planning, and it was, in theory, a planned economy. But how can you plan if you have no democracy? That is a fundamental contradiction. To plan, you have to know what is going in society, and you cannot have that without democracy.

I think one can describe this system, and extrapolate the laws that governed it. You cannot say, if you are serious, that this system did not function. For decades, for generations, it functioned. It had the means of production, it reproduced itself, it fed people; not very well, but it fed them; it existed.

What was the central mechanism of this state? Terror - the existence of a vast network of state personnel who operated by terror, who were themselves kept under control by terror. So you have this system. To say it was *not* a mode of production, I do not understand. To say that it was a *peculiar* mode of production - that I do understand. But it was a mode of production that failed to establish itself.

Nonetheless, the system expanded - it was capable of reproducing itself. So it was fundamentally a system characterised in its purest form by arbitrary political power, using unexampled terror. This was not an economically regulated system. It was a system regulated by unbridled state power. It had all sorts of contradictions and thus it fell apart. It dissolved in the face of the competition from tremendously advanced capitalism, and because it could not develop a mod-

ern technology, owing to the socially repressive system. It lost the monopoly of politics, and it simply could not control what happened afterwards.

The Incas in Peru had a system that some people have called primitive socialism. They had a system highly dependent on the state and highly centralised - immensely centralised, considering the level of technology. They were in some respects like ancient Egypt at its very early stages. Suddenly the Spaniards came and wiped out their system. There are many such false starts in history. The Stalinist system was one of them.

This system was a fundamental contradiction in terms. The proletariat was supposed to be the ruling class in this system. The proletariat cannot for example, like the peasantry, divide up the land. The proletariat cannot take a little bit of the factory. The proletariat can only rule collectively, and therefore it follows absolutely that the proletariat can only rule and plan democratically.

Instead, the Soviet Union had a system that was a rigid, autocratic, totalitarian power, power that no government probably ever had. Hitler never had such power. Stalin had power that had never been known, even in the very ancient world, because modern technology for the first time made such power possible.

I would argue that the Soviet Union was a system with a class society. People like Hillel Ticktin argue that it was not, but I do not understand this. The problem with Ticktin, who is very knowledgeable on the facts, is that he functions somewhere between academia and sectarian politics. And, if I can understand him, what he is actually doing is a precise modification of theories, and he is doing it in a sectarian fashion, an attention-grabbing fashion. But the problem with all of this is that it destroys a large part of the ABC of Marxism.

That the USSR was not a fully articulated, *viable* class society I think is certainly true. But there was some correspondence, in a very crude, inadequate, wasteful way, between what was planned, and what happened. This seems to me beyond serious dispute.

The bureaucracy extracted surplus product. There can be no doubt about that. The bureaucracy *was* a ruling class, a ruling class with peculiarities. It was not the same as most ruling classes, but the idea that it was somehow *not* a class system is ridiculous. I cannot think of anything that corresponds more to the worst features of capitalist class society than the Stalinist system.

Perhaps what is being argued about here is precise, technical definitions - which is fine: that is the business of

science. But if you go on then to say that the Soviet system was not really a mode of production, or that because the Soviet ruling class was peculiar it was not a real ruling class, then what the hell are you saying? For example, some people say that the ruling class did not pass on property. This is not the case. It did pass on property - not formal ownership of property as such, but the privileges that gave access to it: educational possibilities, membership of the elite. It would obviously have been better from their point of view to have had money in the bank that they could have used to control the means of production, like capitalists. But they had heirs. There was no question of them not being able to pass anything on.

This was a system that controlled the surplus product. Did they control all of it? Well, no. Black marketeering had an increasingly powerful role to play after the ending of the high terror period. But the Soviet ruling class controlled a very large part of the surplus product. They used it for their own purposes. They decided what to do. They decided what to reinvest. They decided what to have in the bureaucrats' private shops.

What I conclude from this is that you have to introduce into the concept of class the vast experience over a long period of time from a large part of the world. You have to modify: you have to accept the possibility that there is a bit more in the actual definitions of class than people who did not live to see the Soviet Union might have predicted. That is Marxism. The alternative is to deny that the USSR had a ruling class, to deny that it was a mode of production, which leads you into bizarre nonsense. You are saying that a large part of the world did not have a ruling class although it had extracted its surplus product for god knows how long. You are actually destroying some of the fundamentals of Marxism.

The bureaucracy seized power not in a capitalist counterrevolution, which is what Trotsky and Lenin expected. They seized power *within* the forms of the collectivised economy - and then presented this as socialism. More than that, they seized power within the forms of Marxism. Marxism is a very porous thing. What the Stalinists did was use Marxism as their ideology, as their anti-capitalist ideology, but applied it in an anti-proletarian, undemocratic way. They lopped off the democratic elements in Marxism, kept what was anti-capitalist, and substituted their own idea of a bureaucratic state. Thus for decades and decades the would-be revolutionary workers throughout the world who hated capitalism, who had a fellow feeling with the Stalinists as anti-capitalists, accepted as their positive alternative to capitalism a lot of grotesque ideas, for example about dictatorship.

What you have here is something analogous to what Marx and Engels described in the *Communist manifesto* as reactionary socialism. The reactionary socialists were bitterly hostile to industrialisation. On the other hand they had no positive alternative programme, except to go back to an imaginary golden age in the past. To these people Marx counterposed proletarian, positive, democratic development on the basis of what capitalism had achieved.

To a large extent, the central lie that has dominated communism for most of this century is the lie that it is enough to be anti-capitalist. Yes, we are anti-capitalist: that is the beginning of wisdom. Marxism begins with the critique of capitalism. Right now, the reason why it is possible for us to think of ourselves as rational, reasonable beings, despite the tremendous collapse of what many of us considered to be communism, is because we can make a rational critique of capitalism. But anti-capitalism is not enough. It depends what you put in its place.

We are living in a world where the collapse of the Stalinist system has seemingly devastated communism. I think this is a good thing - because the poisonous, fraudulent, Stalinist pretence of communism for a very long time occupied the place of real communism, made it impossible, for example, for the tiny forces of Trotskyism to compete, while the Stalinist liars had the resources of an immense state, an immense empire. The fact that all that has collapsed has had some immediately devastating effects on the consciousness of lots of people. On the other hand, it clears the ground.

Undoubtedly living standards in Russia have fallen since 1991. But what is our point of view? We do not judge things by, for example, whether living standards are better, although the workers are held in a vice that makes it impossible for them to be politically active. We judge things from the point of view of the possibilities of the working class being the subject of history. Of becoming its own subject.

The reality is that the Stalinist system cut particularly against the workers. In a place like Poland, which was the least totalitarian (in 1953 they restored the peasant plots, and in 1956 they made a deal with the catholic church), Stalinism still cut savagely against the working class. The same is true of all the other Stalinist states. They made it impossible for the people to become conscious, to become aware. In Czechoslovakia, where before World War II they had a mass Communist Party, where in 1968 there was some recrudescence of what seemed to me to be a genuine communism, the Russian Stalinists crushed it, destroyed it fundamentally.

From our point of view, the decisive thing is the possibility of our class acting, organising, learning. It is a great tragedy that a lot of primitive people in the labour movement in this country were for revolution, for Stalin, because the Stalinists were collectivists. In the east a lot of people have simply looked at the west, looked at capitalism, looked at marketism, because it was prosperous and the opposite of their own system. In a real sense, Arthur Scargill, who I think is a political monster, and Lech Walesa, who started out as an underground militant, are horrible mirror images of each other, each one looking across the divide. In the middle ages peasants used to worship the devil because god was the god of their oppressors.

From our point of view the fundamental thing is our class having the possibility of becoming the subject of history, not to judge everything simply by something like a welfare state. I think much is exaggerated about how good the Russian welfare state really was. Sweden was the real success story. Our point of view is, however,

that above all we want the working class to overthrow capitalism. We want it to be free to *learn*.

Therefore, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was fundamentally a good thing, because it opens up new possibilities. It is a new beginning - that is the point. We are at an early stage of that beginning and a great deal depends on us - on our clarity, on our courage at looking at our own history, and on our ability to do that without losing heart, or without making peace with inequality and with the capitalist system.

Of course if you look around, you see such things as the rise of the workers in Indonesia, in South Korea, and what you see is that capitalism, even in its seemingly most successful phases, raises its own gravedigger. But the point is, a great deal depends on how we come to terms with the past of the communist movement, which in this century has been a chapter of horrors in many respects.

The task facing us is the rebuilding of revolutionary socialism. Now, there is a tremendous tradition of revolutionary socialism. There is a tradition of resistance to Stalinism - the tradition of critical Trotskyism, a far more rational tradition than is to be found among most of the so-called orthodox Trotskyists, many of whom frankly are not of this world. We have produced a collection of texts from this other tradition which I would urge you to read.

At the end of the day, to those who lie that the Stalinist system was real socialism, and that socialism, therefore, deserves to be buried in the cesspit of history, we can point to the real Russian Revolution. We can point to what our people did. We can point to what our people are capable of doing.

If we can bring the ideas of unfalsified communism, Bolshevism, to the labour movement, it will revive, because capitalism forces the labour movement to revive. Capitalism is not just the parent of ultimate socialism. It is also the parent of labour movements because workers resist. If we, the tiny forces now calling ourselves communist, can bring to the revived labour movement a refreshed, clear, honest and self-critical account of socialism in this century, then we will be far better able to win the battle of ideas. At the end of the day we are not religious people. We are people who see socialism in Marxist terms: that is, we see socialism in terms of what has evolved in history.

We are faced with laying new foundations. I repeat, despite the seeming devastation caused by the collapse, we are probably in a better position to rebuild a genuine Leninist party - Trotskyist as well, but Leninist, if you insist. We are probably in a better position to rebuild an unfalsified communist movement than anyone has been since the rise of the Stalinist state. In order to clarify our ideas, we must not be frightened to look unpleasant things in the face.

At the end of the day, the proletariat exists in capitalism. It fights back - it is forced to fight back. At the end of the day, the justification for our politics is capitalism: what capitalism is, what it does. And at the end of the day, we will rebuild a mass communist movement that will learn the lessons of the miserable 20th century.

And we will overthrow capitalism. We will bury capitalism ●

The fate of the Russian Revolution

Sean Matgamna edits **Lost texts of critical Marxism - writings of Max Schachtman, Hal Draper and others** (pp603, £16.99). Available from the London Book Club at the CPGB address

Recently William Hague has been attacking Blair over the House of Lords. His main point, as he said on the radio on December 2, is that Labour is "fiddling about with the constitution while our factories are closing and jobs are being lost".

Hague knows only too well the vital importance of resisting any reduction in the constitutional privileges granted to the Tory Party, through having permanent control of the House of Lords and, linked to that, an ally in the monarchy. As a political realist, he knows that some change is almost inevitable. But by fighting a rearguard action tooth and nail, he may be able to derail New Labour. He might be able to snarl up the legislative programme and inflict defeats on the government that would be impossible in the Commons.

This fight is the beginning of Hague's election campaign. If he wins, it will prepare the way for the next election. If he screws up, it will open the way for a challenge to his leadership. The stakes are very high indeed. We have already seen a division open up between the Tories in the Commons and the Lords with the sacking of Lord Cranborne. Expect there to be a few more surprises before the battle is over. It could make or break the Tory Party.

Of course, Hague appeals to the voters' wallets. He failed to mention in his December 2 interview that defending the House of Lords was fundamentally about defending the future of the Tory Party and its rich and powerful supporters. He failed to mention that the House of Lords gives the Tory aristocracy the right to scrutinise legislation and revise anything that might adversely affect them. He did not mention the incomes derived from this corrupt sinecure or how these compare with the minimum wage. Neither did he call for market forces and compulsory competitive tendering to see if anybody else could do the job of wining and dining at taxpayers' expense more cheaply.

This was not because Hague is naive or unaware of the truth. He knows exactly what the House of Lords and the monarchy are for. They are vital defensive fortifications for the ruling class. Your outlying forts must be defended at all costs, because if they fall then there is a possibility that your class enemies will become bolder and more daring and begin to win further and even more significant political victories.

Hague, therefore, reaches for the best ideological weapon in his armoury - bourgeois economism. He appeals for popular and working class support on the basis of jobs and wages. Let's not waste time and energy tinkering about with the constitution. This will only delay finding a solution to the real 'bread and butter' issues that face the British people.

In fact it is the other way round. Unless the people take up the fight for a genuine democratic constitution, the people will be permanently deprived of power. With political power workers can gain control of the bakery. Then we can seriously alter the distribution of 'bread and butter'. If we are not prepared for political change, then all we will get is a few crumbs from the bosses' table.

Hague's argument is designed for the more politically backward sections of the working class, who are relatively ignorant about politics and power struggles. Many are too busy struggling to make ends meet to worry about the abstract, obscure and mystifying world of high politics. So Hague's appeal falls on fertile ground. Backward workers are receptive to this kind of argument. Workers need jobs and higher wages. It is surely obvious that the only way to improve the position of workers is to concentrate on demanding more money for wages and social services. And if

Fiddling with the constitution

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group lambastes the United Socialists' economism

these workers listen to the backward socialists they will get the same message reinforced.

The argument that workers should not bother themselves about 'complex' political matters fits in with what 'common sense' tells us. Except, of course, that in bourgeois society 'common sense' reflects the ideas of the ruling class. High politics or constitutional affairs should be left to bourgeois politicians in parliament, advised by lawyers and intellectuals. The people should concentrate on their daily routine. This is one of the most important principles of economism.

It is not for ordinary people, workers or trade unions to interfere with such matters. It is best to ignore them or watch passively from a safe distance. There should be no extra-parliamentary action, still less revolutionary direct action. That would be an unfair interference in 'democracy'. It would be nothing less than a direct challenge to those who ruled the country. Hague's appeal to economism, far from contradicting basic principles of bourgeois politics, is designed to reinforce them.

By seeking to repair the British con-

stitution, Blair has raised the political stakes. For he might accidentally unravel the very constitutional fabric of the country. It could upset the whole system of bourgeois rule. This is why Blair must carry out his reforms very carefully so as not to upset the applecart. He must equally abide by the golden rule of keeping the masses from direct intervention.

The interests of the working class are not served by non-intervention in politics. Unless workers are prepared to challenge and change the system of political power, they will not be able to significantly change the wages system. Politics holds the key to economic change. Without turning that key, workers will be confined to tinkering with jobs and wages.

Marxism teaches that political struggle is one of the best means of bringing economic change. If the working class act to change the system of bourgeois democracy, they will in the process shift the alignment of class forces. A new constitution will be and can only be the product of class struggle and a new balance of class forces represented in the institutions of state. Just as a fascist constitution would represent a major shift in the relative

positions of the different classes, so would a democratic and republican constitution.

The existing constitution of any bourgeois state is the political prison for the working class. In the UK we are under the constitutional care and supervision of Her Majesty's prison warders. They are all united in agreeing that workers must not directly try to break down the constitutional prison walls. They should concentrate on appealing to the warders for an increase in prison rations or asking for a job in the prison workshop.

As the new prison governor, Tony Blair is not intending to knock anything down. But he realises, along with other liberals, that the walls of Her Majesty's constitution are rotten and seriously in need of repair. If he does nothing to patch it up, the whole structure will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. So Blair is determined to cut out some dead wood and patch it up. This, however, will weaken the position of the Tory Party, the main historical beneficiary of the British constitution. Blair is not averse to that. He intends to keep the job of governor for many years to come. Weakening the position of the Tory Party will help his cause. But equally, like Hague, Blair could also suffer derailment.

In these circumstances you might expect the British left to seize the initiative. All efforts should be made to mobilise the working class for political struggle. Our 'third way' is neither to follow the economic arguments of the conservative Hague or the liberal Blair. The working class movement must mobilise with the aim of abolishing the monarchy and the Lords. We must build an extra-parliamentary republican movement that can smash open the constitutional prison. Once the working class has broken free from these shackles, we will enter a newer and higher terrain of political and economic struggle and dual power.

If we want to see the real politics and strategy of the British left, we need look no further than the recently agreed joint platform of the left for the European elections. For over two months a number of socialist groups have been engaged in discussions over a possible platform for the European elections. The groups involved include the Independent Labour Network, the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Socialist Movement and other independent left activists. These negotiations were reported in a November 23 circular to have reached a successful conclusion.

As you might expect, this platform is a mix of British and European demands. The slogans for Europe are in favour of a "democratic", "socialist" and "peaceful" Europe which puts "people before profit". The European Union is an emerging imperialist superstate. It cannot possibly be "peaceful". It must engage in war of an economic, diplomatic and military variety. We cannot even begin to

speak of a socialist transformation of Europe without its democratic transformation. Yet there is no plan or idea how the workers of Europe should prioritise a struggle to 'constitute' themselves as a democracy.

When we turn to the question of British politics, we can see exactly where these "United Socialists" are coming from - abject economism. We can hear the words of William Hague echoing in their minds as they wrote out their 'socialist programme'. We must not waste time tinkering about with the constitution when there are jobs and services to be saved.

The United Socialists have therefore decided not to waste any time at all on the irrelevant matter of who wields political power and how they exercise it. They could not bring themselves to call for the abolition of the House of Lords and the monarchy or British withdrawal from Ireland, or self-determination for Wales and Scotland. They said nothing about proportional representation and official secrecy. So perhaps the United Socialists are simply loyal subjects appealing to the House of Windsor to help 'tax the rich'.

When Hague preaches non-politics and keeping away from constitutional affairs, he neither believes it nor practices it. The Tory Party is all about political power. They are not the constitutional numskulls of British 'socialism'. Our socialist political idiots actually believe the economic bullshit churned out by the Tories. They think the high point of leftist socialism is to concentrate on economic and social reforms.

The difference between the Tory Party and our United Socialist economists is that one has been born to rule and keep the working class out of high politics, and the other was born for the more humble role of assisting them ●

United Socialists - Euro-election platform

We are standing in these elections to represent the demands and interests of working and jobless people. We believe that by its support for the priorities of profit, official Labour has deprived its supporters of political representation. We support the struggles of the working class and all oppressed in defence of their interests.

- For massive public expenditure to defend jobs and services
- To ensure jobs for all
- For a 35-hour week without loss of pay
- For a minimum wage of £6 an hour
- Full trade unions rights for all
- Fight all closures and redundancies

To save our services

Tax the rich and slash the arms budget to provide proper healthcare, housing, education, childcare, public transport and other public services. Restore and increase benefits and pensions to guarantee a decent standard of living for all. Free access to high-quality education and training for all. Publicly owned, integrated, well funded, cheap public transport in London.

For a Europe that puts people before profit

For the public ownership and democratic control of industry and finance. For the immediate return

to public ownership of privatised utilities. We are opposed to all privatisation - private profiteers should not control public services. Companies threatened with closures should be taken into public ownership. Profiteers should not be allowed to cut jobs. Social control of industry and agriculture to stop the destruction of our planet.

A democratic Europe to end discrimination

For an end to discrimination on grounds of race, sex, nationality, age, disability or sexuality. End the racism and corruption of the metropolitan police. For the right to asylum. Scrap all racist immigration controls.

For the unity of workers and jobless for a socialist Europe

We are for a democratic and accountable people's Europe based on socialist, environmental and inclusive policies, against the Europe of the multinationals and bankers. We reject the destructive monetarist criteria for the European Monetary Union and oppose the undemocratic European Bank.

For a nuclear-free and peaceful Europe

We are for a nuclear-free and peaceful Europe. Nato divided Europe and threatens our security. Cancel third world debt.

Fighting fund

.....

Proud

Supporters of the *Weekly Worker* can be proud of the role our paper is playing in the difficult struggle to stem the tide of disintegration of the left. Our paper is championing non-sectarian, democratic unity, combining united action with freedom of criticism - the only basis for unity, and a step towards re-forging the mass Communist Party the working class needs.

Comrades DW, RA, ER and RW, have sent in £105 this week, taking December's £400 fighting fund to a worryingly low £187. Don't forget to put the paper on your Christmas gift list ●

Ian Farrell

Ask for a bankers order form, or send cheques, payable to CPGB

Jesus

from Jewish apocalyptic revolutionary to imperial god

Jack Conrad describes how an ideology of the oppressed became the ideology of the oppressors

Britain as a modern nation was founded on the cultural and constitutional basis of counterpoising protestant to catholic christianity. Today the official religion of the United Kingdom remains a nationalised form of christianity. The BBC broadcasts daily christian services and homilies. In state schools our children are taught the myths of the New Testament as if they were verified fact or, at the very least, that Jesus was some sort of well meaning founder of an admirable new religion. Britain's warships, bomber planes and army units are blessed in his hallowed name. Archbishops and bishops of the Church of England, the lords spiritual, sit by "ancient usage and statute" in parliament. Royal weddings and state funerals are conducted according to high church ritual. And of course, Elizabeth Windsor, head of state, is also head of the church.

True, over the last 50 years or so regular church attendance by the mass of the population has plummeted. Nevertheless top politicians find it advantageous to parade their irrational convictions. Tony Blair is a well publicised cult member (when not receiving communion at his wife's Roman Catholic church). Unwilling to be outpointed in terms of pseudo-morality, William Hague *rediscovered* the affinity of the Tory Party to C of E christianity (nowadays New Labour at prayer). Regrettably it is not just a contest within the higher echelons of the establishment. Tony Benn readily confesses his christian beliefs, as does Arthur Scargill.

An imagined personality of Jesus is therefore used as a vehicle for just about every mainstream point of view. Thus we have a tough, but caring New Labour Jesus who tells the sick to get up and walk, a Conservative Jesus ruling as king in heaven, an Old Labour Jesus meekly preaching social justice and a Scargillite Jesus deserted by cowardly disciples. The historic Jesus is of no concern. Nor is the real emergence and evolution of the christian religion - except, it seems, for us Marxists.

Not that we should be smug. Some comrades from within our tradition argue that with the seemingly relentless forward march of technology and science - itself a modern phenomenon - religious ideas are bound to undergo a natural and deserved death. Such vulgar evolutionism is profoundly mistaken. In itself it is a secular form of religion (ie, an idealist worship of the means of production). Take the United States. Here is the richest and most *capitalistically* advanced country on the planet (to use István Mészáros' perceptive emphasis). It is also one of the most religious. There is, in other words, no automatic correlation between the progress or modernisation of the productive forces and the diminution of religious superstition. Indeed, as capitalist social relations become ever more alienated, increasing numbers search for hope and solace not only in astrology, drugs, the lottery and the clap trap of new age mysticism, but old-time religion too. The perceived failure of working class politics and the whole socialist project can only but increase the felt need for a soul in a soulless world.

All this makes it vital to intellectually challenge the Jesus myth in the name of human liberation and through a materialist theory reveal the real historical man. Communist politics is about more than strikes, student grants and other so-called bread and butter issues. A prerequisite for anything decisive is securing ideological hegemony. By definition that involves as much the past as the present. History, therefore, is a weapon, either for revolution or reaction.

Where we require the unvarnished truth about history with all its different social formations, antagonisms,

violent ruptures and democratic movements, our rulers need myth, seamless apologetics and resignation. To maintain and reproduce domination in the realm of ideas the bourgeoisie employ, flatter and promote all manner of philosophers, academics, theologians, journalists and broadcasters. These dons and divines, pundits and post-modernists manufacture or propagate a history which downplays or obliterates those below. Capitalism is presented as the natural order or the last word in civilisation. Piecemeal change is their totem. Revolution only brings disaster and disappointment. Revolutions and revolutionaries are therefore with equal disingenuousness derevolutionised or demonised.

Here in Britain the *revolutionary* past of the bourgeoisie is denied by being remade as other. Aristocratic cavaliers are the dashing heroes of biography, film and novel. Roundheads become dour proto-Stalinists. Charles I is stumbling but well-meaning, inoffensive and courageous, Oliver Cromwell narrow-minded and bigoted.

What of our dead leaders? Marx, Engels and Lenin have all been transformed from active revolutionary politicians into mere interpreters of the world by reformists and left-leaning academics. They have also been deemed responsible for the gulags and the system of terror instituted by Stalin in the 1930s by rightist academics and their closely associated anarchist co-thinkers. Of course, such a calumny is sustainable because not only was Stalin's 'second revolution' - ie, the 1928 bureaucratic counterrevolution - carried out under the guise of Marxism, but so too were the Chinese, Korean, Albanian, Kampuchean and other bloody and disastrous experiments in national socialism. 'Official communism' in power created and lived an anti-Marxist Marxism. From the materialist theory of universal human liberation Marxism became a creaking idealist doctrine of (non-capitalist) statist oppression and exploitation. In the absurd propaganda claims, ideological trappings and *actions* of Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung and Hoxha and their descendants the permanent persuaders of capitalism found their truth.

Suffice to say, turning the likes of Marx, Engels and Lenin into their opposites - ie, advocates or heralds of national socialism - requires intellectual dishonesty on a grand scale. Capitalism ensures conformity to its interests in general through assimilation - fat salaries, research grants and all manner of petty honours and privileges. Bureaucratic socialism in con-

trast had to resort to blanket censorship, the destruction of all genuine political debate and the cult of an all-knowing leader. Lying about such giants as Marx, Engels and Lenin is endlessly difficult, however. Deceased they maybe. But their thoughts live on in our reading of their innumerable published writings (crude doctoring is easily exposed and was therefore in the main never attempted or quickly abandoned).

Communists must, and will, defend our own. We must also, being part of a class uniquely interested in the truth, seek to turn the personalities of official history back onto their feet - not least those who in some way articulated the age-old popular striving for freedom. In the tinselled and mystical, drunk and pious, commercial and joyous run-up to Christmas that especially applies to Jesus, who was - or so the *Latin* story goes - born 1,998 years ago on December 25 in the little town of Bethlehem (the orthodox tradition deploys a different date).

Interestingly some 'honest' christians refuse to recognise or celebrate Christmas. Under the Commonwealth, a god-fearing Cromwell, suppressed it as devil-born heathenism, along with saints' days. According to noted historian Christopher Hill, he "held the mass to be idolatrous, and both popery and prelacy in his view were repressive systems which might prevent christian verity from expressing itself" (C Hill *God's Englishman* Harmondsworth 1975, p205). Cromwell was here merely following the teachings of Luther and Calvin and pressing home the ongoing attack against the habits and mores of the old self-contained mediaeval society. Traditionally "religious festivals measured out the seasons of the year" and gave the masses an opportunity to dance wildly, drink to excess, have extra-marital sex and generally enjoy themselves (C Hill *Society and puritanism* London 1969, p202). Commercial society could not afford the 100-plus feast days nor countenance such disreputable goings-on.

Nowadays in Scotland the Free Presbyterians - the 'wee-frees' - also consider Christmas pagan. They are quite right. Most saints' days were thinly veiled pre-christian carry-overs. Christmas itself originated as an orgiastic communistic celebration of the winter solstice (eg, the Roman Saturnalia). It was only in the early 4th century that the western church decided to take December 25 as the "date for the nativity" (H Chadwick *The early church* Harmondsworth 1975, p126). The church could rename the day. But it could never totally

eliminate its pre-christian form and content - holly, mistletoe, the yule log, giving presents, getting together and getting high.

Of course, christians who condemn Christmas are far from scientific or even open to level-headed argument. Each and every word of the bible is literally true, they claim, and comes from the lips of an all-knowing, all-powerful god. Actually both the New and the Old Testament contain little more historical truth than Homer's epic account of the Trojan war in the *Iliad*. That, of course, does not imply that they are worthless. On the contrary. We gain an invaluable insight into the social conditions and mental world of aristocrats in pre-classic Greece from Homer. "I would rather have the *Iliad* than a whole shelf of Bronze-Age war-reports, however accurate" says translator EV Rieu (Homer *The Iliad* Bungay, Sussex 1950, pxiv).

Marxists should approach the testaments of the bible, the acts of the apostles and the epistles in a similar fashion. Each book is a palimpsest. Each one of them has been subject to wave after wave of systematic alteration. What became inconvenient found itself discarded or reworked. There were also sneaky additions of supposedly prophesied historical events in order to lend gravitas and plausibility for propaganda purposes. Nevertheless every deletion or embellishment leaves its significant social or ideological thumb-print or trace evidence, even if it is in the form of absence. Thus from these heavily redacted writings, if approached critically, it is possible to discover both the society and the contending ideas that produced Jesus and which saw the Jesus party transform itself over the span of three centuries from an organised expression of a communistic ideology of the oppressed into the state religion of imperial Rome.

1. Roman society in crisis

To grasp why the Roman world - crucially its emperors - took up the christian cult, it is necessary to understand the dynamics and contradictions of its dominant mode of production and the needs, drives and ideologies of its different classes of people. In the last analysis economic life determines intellectual development. So let us begin with economics.

Rome and the huge Roman empire are commonly thought of as fabulously rich. The caesars and the ruling elite undoubtedly lived in and surrounded themselves with absolute luxury. Despite that in terms of productivity the Roman empire was "un-

derdeveloped" (P Garnsey, R Saller *The Roman empire* Berkeley 1987, p43). Wealth resulted not from intensive, but extensive agricultural exploitation. In other words the ruling elite constantly sought to expand the extent of their landed domains and the numbers exploited. They did not invest in technology or industry.

Most inhabitants of the empire were peasants and practised an agriculture which generally "aimed at subsistence rather than the production of an exportable surplus" (*ibid* p44). There was a rich class of merchants. However, the ruling class of aristocrats built their wealth and social standing on land (successful merchants, invariably foreigners, transformed themselves into Roman aristocrats through marriage or other methods of social climbing and integration). Here in landed wealth *mass* slave (not just unfree) labour was crucial, or as GEM St Croix says "archetypal"; and that explains why it is correct to characterise Rome as a slave mode of production (GEM St Croix *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* London 1983, p173). The ruling class was reproduced economically and culturally as a class through the forced (ie, non-economic) extraction of surplus product from slave labour and this fact moulded the class, ideological and power contours of the whole of society.

Such a system of slave labour must be distinguished from earlier, more benign forms of slavery. From the dawn of civilisation war-captives had been put to work instead of being summarily butchered. They existed outside the polis - having no blood relation to the community through tribe or gen. Nevertheless they were incorporated into the family, albeit in a subordinate position. These slaves worked *alongside* their masters and mistresses on the land or in the household. Kautsky reckons that their lot was "not very bad" (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p51). Production was for immediate consumption. Exploitation therefore had definite limits. We can cite the affectionate relationship between Odysseus and the "divine swineherd", Eumaeus. The slave is firmly convinced that his master "loved" and "took thought for me beyond all others", and if he had returned from the Trojan war would immediately give him a handsome wife, a small farm and liberty (Homer *The Odyssey* Harmondsworth 1946, p225).

During classic civilisation there was no personal relationship between a master and the average agricultural slave. Slaves were far too numerous. Aristocratic slaveowners acquired a haughty contempt for manual labour. They did not work alongside their slaves. Nor did the likes of these exhibit the slightest human feelings for them. Slaves were mere speaking tools or instruments. In agriculture (and mining) conditions were miserable. Labour was unremitting. They were housed in single-sex barracks. Life expectancy was pitifully short. Lewis Grassic Gibbon in his novel *Spartacus* brilliantly portrays the hatred and fear that existed between the *main* classes in Roman society. Slaves would exact the most terrible revenge on their tormentors once they got the chance. Masters in their turn exterminated and subjected to extreme torture rebel slaves (100,000 slaves are said to have been killed during the Spartacus uprising of 73-71 BC).

However slaves were "extraordinarily" cheap (GEM St Croix *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* London 1983, p227). One could purchase an average slave for not much more than half the annual earnings of an artisan. Appianus is quoted as saying that on one occasion slaves were being sold off for almost giveaway prices - ie, 75 cents - so abundant was the supply (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New

York 1972, p54). In contrast slaves in the Old South of the USA were many times more costly in comparative terms. Cheap slaves were the result of war and constant expansion. When Julius Caesar conquered Gaul there was mass enslavement; as many as half a million men, women and children were sold off to the highest bidder. Needless to say, as Rome expanded territorially, the surplus product available to the aristocratic landowners increased in direct proportion.

A fundamental contradiction can be located here. Roman military prowess originally wrested on the foundation of well drilled and well motivated legions of peasant infantrymen. This citizen militia enabled Rome to resist and then overpower culturally more advanced rivals. First the Latins and Etruscans, then the Macedonians, Greeks and Carthaginians, and finally the great cities and lands of Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Rome was thus a world empire.

As the surplus available to the elite grew, so did their latifundia. An aristocratic general could well afford to be absent for lengthy periods of time. His overseers ensured the cycle of production continued as normal. Besides that, victories brought vast rewards, not least in the form of slaves and other booty. It was a different story for peasant citizens. Long service in distant lands often meant ruination. Land remained unploughed. Crops went unweeded or unharvested. Short-term relief was sought in loans. The result then of *constant* war for the peasant was not prosperity, but chronic indebtedness.

On the one hand the land hunger of the aristocrats and on the other the intolerable burden of debt saw free peasants steadily removed from the land and squeezed into the cities, in particular Rome. They formed a proletariat or lumpenproletariat that leached off the surplus generated by slave labour. Cities in the ancient world were primarily units of consumption, not production. Industry was an individualised activity, and commodity production marginal or at least secondary. At its zenith the population of the capital reached one million (a conurbation not surpassed till the rise of 16th century commercial London). Most adults found a living through innumerable non-productive activities - from begging and prostitution to street huckstering and clientage.

Cheap slave labour therefore replaced free labour on the land. Put another way, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the mass employment of slave labour saw the rapid decline of free peasants as a class. Two main consequences follow.

The first was military. The combativity of Roman armies decreased markedly. Lumpenproletarians or proletarians who live by begging or light manual labour are not natural fighting material. When used they were inferior and unwilling substitutes. Peasant citizens were well fed, physically fit and tough; being habitually used to hard work and the extremes of heat and cold. The Roman state turned to mercenaries - including German barbarians. Such hired forces are notoriously conservative. They served to defend, but not expand the empire.

The second effect was economic. The end of territorial expansion and Pax Romana closed the abundant supply of war-captives. Slave prices rose sharply. They had to be bred or purchased from outsiders. The rate of surplus extraction had to fall. Slave labour is anyway much less productive than free peasant labour. When slaves were dirt cheap that mattered not. When they were expensive it meant a constant negative pressure on the mass of surplus available to the ruling class and thus a drive "to

increase the rate of exploitation of the humbler free population" (GEM St Croix *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* London 1983, p231).

Slave society proved a dead end. Economic productivity declined. Soil fertility declined. The population failed to reproduce itself and therefore declined. Cities and town became depopulated. Even Rome saw a decrease; in the Severi age (AD 193-235) a rapid one. Barbarian Germans were handed large parcels of land and slaves and former slaves enserfed as *coloni*. So exploited was this unfree, but productive, peasant class that large numbers fled over the empire's borders. At the same time the burden of militarism grew. The empire was subject to constant raiding by barbarian neighbours. The standing army which was 300,000 at the time of Augustus had to be doubled. We therefore paradoxically find a swelling military budget while total revenue shrank. Taxes had to become more socially widespread, onerous and numerous (Roman citizens had been exempt from taxes). State power and society thereby become opposed - not only to the exploited, but the exploiters too.

Economic decay found its reflection in moral decay. Besides enslaving barbarians the Romans captured people with a significantly higher cultural attainment than themselves - most notably Greeks (who, it should be noted, inhabited urban centres across the whole of the eastern Mediterranean). To them the Romans handed tasks of everyday administration. They were also incorporated into the imperial household by the emperor. In the imperial period therefore we find slaves and freed slaves constituting the state bureaucracy under the person of the emperor. They amassed huge fortunes and counted amongst the richest of the rich.

The sheer geographical size of the empire drove it towards autocracy. The means of communication were too primitive to allow democracy amongst the old aristocratic rulers as they spread out to live in far-flung provinces. Rome itself had never been a citizen-democracy on the pattern of Athens. The people did not control the state. They had however won through class struggle the right to elect aristocrats to state positions. Around every aristocratic family there swarmed an army of hangers-on, dependants and loyal voting fodder. This corruption was reproduced on a much higher level with the birth of the emperor constitution.

The mass of Roman citizens lived off the crumbs of the system of slave exploitation. The lumpenproletariat and semi-employed proletariat played no productive role in society. Nor had they a vision of a higher, more productive, society. Cynicism was a characteristic lower class outlook - propagated in market squares by itinerant orators. Their radical religious-political programme was one of division of existing wealth. The lumpenproletariat had no wish to abolish slavery. It dreamt of a life without labour, a communism secured at the expense of the rich.

The more the lumpenproletariat predominated in the population, the more prone was the city to bribery by ambitious generals and senators. There were cash handouts, free food, huge banquets and numerous gladiatorial and other games for their benefit and amusement. The lumpenproletariat "lived", says Kautsky, "by selling their political power to the highest bidder" (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p108). The citizens of Rome - numbering two or three hundred thousand - thus indirectly exploited through 'democracy' an empire consisting of some 55 or 60 million people. Julius Caesar in par-

ticular, because of his military successes in and plunder of Gaul and Egypt, was able to offer generous gifts to these citizen masses - who became his tool against aristocratic rivals. The ground was laid for caesarist state autonomy and the end of the Roman republic.

Roman society tends not only to parasitism, but atomisation. As the entire empire falls into the hands of one individual, the population becomes open to demagogues and charlatans. The more someone feels impotent, the more they hope for a miracle or something fantastic to save them. Certain people are commonly believed to possess superhuman powers. Emperors claimed to be divine. Preachers routinely overturned the laws of nature; the dead are raised and demons exorcised. There was, notes Kautsky, a tremendous growth of "credulity" (*ibid* p128). Other writers offer a social-physiological explanation for both credulity and exorcism - in subject or colonial people cases of mental illness are particularly numerous (JD Crossan *The historical Jesus* Edinburgh 1991, p317).

With caesarism the patrician class too loses its social functions. Political life thereby dies and individualism grows. The aristocracy is reduced to mere pleasure-seekers. Inward looking Epicurean and Stoic philosophies come to dominance amongst them. The empty life of the aristocracy is neither concerned with labour nor even meaningful debate or decision-making. Such circumstances generate indifference along with feelings of disgust, guilt and despair. Traditional social bonds and modes of thought become moribund. Old local gods lose legitimacy. Romans become like everyone else in the empire - highly taxed subjects. Parochialism is replaced by internationalism. Hostility develops towards the state and salvation is sought in eastern and *universal* and often *monotheistic* religions. Underground cults and intolerance flourish.

These were the conditions that shaped christianity and on which it grew.

2. The Jews

Jesus was a Jew. To know the real man one must know the Jewish people and the Jewish religion.

It was only after the Babylonian exile in the 5th century BC, that the Jewish religion took anything like the form we would recognise today. Before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the Jews were no different from the numerous semitic tribes that inhabited the Middle East. According to Emmanuel Anati, the earliest information we have of the Hebrew tribes fits into the "general framework of the massive migrations of people" some time at the end of the 19th century BC (E Anati *Palestine before the Hebrews* London 1963, p380). The Hebrew tribes were at one point in time closely associated with the Moabites and Ammonites - in biblical myth led by Lot - but separated from them as they moved to 'sojourn' in western Palestine.

The book of Genesis in the Old Testament provides us with a glimpse of their tribal customs and tribal structures - birth, marriage, burial, etc. They had family or clan gods and in all likelihood nature deities: "Our fathers worshipped idols on the other side of the river." The confederacy of 11 Hebrew tribes were in their beginnings nomadic. To cement their alliance they would have invented or bound together legends and ancestors "into a single theological construction" (M Grant *The ancient history of Israel* London 1986, p30). For a living they relied on their sheep and goats. In common with other such herdsmen they engaged in irregular trade with neighbours. They also engaged with what was closely associated at the time, armed raiding.

Nomadic herdsmen must always be prepared for war and never lack the opportunity; robbery thus became "a permanent institution, a regularly employed method of obtaining a livelihood" (K Kautsky *The materialist conception of history* New Haven 1988, p280).

Biblical tales of their wanderings owe much to later propagandists and embellishers. No doubt they camped in the shadow of Mount Sinai - the tribes would appear to have first come together "in the deserts of Sinai and Transjordan" (I Halevi *A history of the Jews* London 1987, p34). Perhaps they clashed with the Egyptians - though only the priest-caste of Levis, the so-called 12th tribe, show any sign of Egyptianisation. Moses is considered by some authorities Egyptian in background. However, it was only after they invaded and settled in Palestine (Canaan) that the Hebrew community entered history and took definite form as a settled agricultural and mercantile nation.

Amongst primitive peoples the notion of divinity is altogether amorphous; Engels argues that in general religion at this stage reflected humanity's domination by the alien "forces of nature" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 25, Moscow 1987, p301). Mountains, rivers, groves of trees may be considered the home of particularly powerful spirits (among the Hebrews many were called *El* - the bible contains many references). There were particularly important shrines at Shadai, Bethel, Elyon and El Roi.

Nomads often carried their gods with them in the form of sacred objects - peculiarly shaped stones or pieces of wood. Worship would take place in a special tent (tabernacle). The bible story of the Ark of the Covenant - a box in which god purportedly dwells - is an echo of their nomadic times before the Hebrew tribes settled in Palestine. Fetishistic objects or *teraphim* brought divine protection, rain and military victories. So the gods of the Hebrews seem at first to have been nothing more than fetishes, similar to the ones Jacob's wife, Rachel, stole as they fled from her father, Laban (Genesis xxxi, 19).

Like the Zoroastrian Persians and later the Islamic Arabs, the monotheism of the Hebrews was the result not of philosophical sophistication, but sudden contact with and adoption of a "higher urban culture" (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p202). From 724 BC onwards the Hebrew people went from being conquerors to being conquered. First the Assyrians and then the Babylonians invaded. But instead of plundering, taxing and garrisoning the vanquished land and then suffering the inevitable uprising when an opportune moment arose, both the Assyrians and Babylonians tried to make their gains secure by deporting the social elite - the great landowners, priests and the most wealthy. Under the Assyrians the northern Hebrew tribes in Samaria disappear from history. Later many of the common people were to become christian and later again muslim. The Palestinian Arabs of today are surely the descendants of these ancient Hebrews.

However, the fate of Judaea in the south was somewhat different. The Babylonians "carried away" into captivity the king, his mother, his wives and all the "mighty of the land" (II Kings xxiv, 12-16). Jeremiah also tells how the Babylonians only "left the poor of the people, which had nothing in the land of Judah", to whom they redistributed the land (so as to exact tribute). Those - mainly illiterate peasants, the 'people of the land' - who remained lacked internal intellectual dynamic towards a higher culture. They married Canaanites and other 'outsiders' and continued to worship and sacrifice at a local shrine ('bethel' or house of god).

Judaism developed in exile. The

elite was awestruck by Babylon, its magnificent buildings, and its sophisticated ideas - which in religion had long ago abandoned geo-specific deities and was in all likelihood moving towards some kind of monotheism. The Hebrew priests were soon aping and adapting from the Babylonians. Many Jewish notions of worship and biblical myths owe their origins to the 50 years of exile - the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, the flood, etc. If they had stayed in Babylon longer the Judaeans would undoubtedly have become fully assimilated. However, the Babylonian empire collapsed before Persian invasion - Babylon was taken without resistance. The Persian king Cyrus decided to permit the Judaeans (the Jews) to return to their homeland. The elite were to serve as his vassals. Jerusalem and its temple was rebuilt as the religious-administrative centre of a *subordinate social order*. From Jerusalem the elite oversaw the extraction of tribute from the local population and the management of the Jewish diaspora (successful Jewish traders were established in colonies from one end of the Persian empire to another).

When the priesthood came back from exile in 538 BC, they carried with them a higher more abstract sense of the divine - monotheism. Being artificial, the new religion had to rely on "deception and falsification" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 24, Moscow 1989, p427). The old sacred texts were "re-written, codified, expurgated, annotated and completed" (I Halevi *A history of the Jews* London 1987, p29). Here the scribes and priests under Ezra and his successors had a great advantage. They had dropped the ancient Hebrew alphabet - still used by the Samaritans of Nablus in their liturgy - in favour of the square alphabet of the Aramaeans, in which Hebrew is written today. The possibilities for distortion and outright doctoring opened up by the transliteration from one alphabet to another were immense (the mass of the population, it should not be forgotten, were illiterate). Judaism was invented. Only a few shards of the previous tradition survive.

To establish ideological hegemony and acceptance of the Jewish elite, the old tribal polytheism was ruthlessly purged. Apart from the temple at Jerusalem all other centres of worship along with their fetishes were forcibly put down as pagan abominations. The bible does not deny the existence nor the power of other gods. It demands loyalty to one god: "I am the Lord; that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah xlii, 8). The Jewish god therefore did not arise from philosophy, from the emergence of one god alone and unrivalled, but the triumph of the god of Jerusalem, who was equated with the god of Moses, over rivals. Consequently Jehovah was both universal and parochial Jehovah, or more correctly Yahweh, was the god of all humanity (creation) and yet was also claimed as the ancestral and national god of the Jews. "The first shall be Zion" (Isaiah xli, 25). He "will set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honour, and that you shall be a people holy to the lord your god" (Deuteronomy ix, 26).

As will be readily appreciated, that does not mean the rewritten Old Testament was simply crude falsehood. It reflected, in no matter how distorted a manner, the class antagonism between the returning elite and the masses: ie, the domination of social forces or history over humanity. Marx succinctly explained in his fourth thesis on Feuerbach, that the "secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm", because of "the inner-self and intrinsic-contradiction

tions” of the secular base (K Marx *MECW* Vol 5, Moscow 1976, p7). Religion is a social and class product.

As Persian vassals, the elite had no army - only a religious police. They had to rely on remaking and then maintaining the Jews as a sect-people. Fear of god had to impose obedience. The evolution of Jehovah was therefore bound up with military weakness and class struggle. Those peasants who had married ‘foreign women’ were initially excluded from the ‘assembly of Israel’. Priests formed themselves into an hereditary theocracy which extracted tribute (surplus product) through the system of compulsory pilgrimage, sacrifice and offering - the dominant social relationship. Temple taxes brought enormous wealth to Jerusalem and “kept large numbers profitably employed” (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p271).

Hence in the god Jehovah we can gain an insight into the Jewish people and the evolution of their real life processes. The same applies to christianity and Jesus; only with the proviso that besides the New Testament (written in its present form between 80 and 150 AD), we have relatively abundant literary records, not least those of the Romans.

3. Jesus - a man of his times

Jesus, in the New Testament, is credited with supernatural powers. Even the most ‘progressive’ Church of England bishop pretends or believes that he worked wonders and roused the minds of millions. Suffice to say, even before the end of the 18th century, Edward Gibbon pointed out in his *Decline and fall*, with what Kautsky called “delicate irony”, that though the “laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the church”, the sages of Greece and Rome “appeared unconscious of any alteration in the moral or physical government of the world” (quoted in K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p23). At the time no contemporary pagan or Jewish observer devoted even *one* word to Jesus.

The first non-christian to mention him - “the king who was never king” - was said to have been Josephus Flavius, in the so-called ‘Slavonic version’ of the *Jewish war* and the 18 and 19th books of the *Jewish antiquities* (B Radice [ed] Josephus *The Jewish war* Harmondsworth 1981, p470). Though the words of this pro-Roman aristocratic Jew and contemporary of Jesus were much valued by christians, all serious scholars nowadays admit that they were a 3rd century interpolation.

One of two conclusions broadly present themselves. Either Jesus did not exist - John Allegro, fantastically in my opinion, says the whole Jesus story was a “fictional” cover for a secret drug-using cult (see JM Allegro *The sacred mushroom and the cross* London 1970). Or, as is the case, there were so many magic-making saviours or messiahs (ie, christ in the Greek tongue), that while others were given passing reference he did not rate a mention. Josephus rails against the countless “religious frauds and bandit chiefs” who joined forces in an attempt to win freedom from Rome. He also writes sneeringly of an “Egyptian false prophet” who, posing as a seer, “collected about 30,000 dupes” and after leading them around the desert took them to the Mount of Olives; “and from there was ready to force entry into Jerusalem” so as to seize “supreme power”. Roman heavy infantry scattered the “mob” and killed or captured “most of his followers” (B Radice [ed] Josephus *The Jewish war* Harmondsworth 1981, p147).

Palestine was at the crossroads of Middle Eastern civilisations. That is what made it a land of milk and honey

for the Hebrews and a strategic target for the superpowers of the ancient world. As we have said, from the 8th century BC one invasion followed another. Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonian Greeks and finally, in the 1st century BC, the Romans. During power vacuums there were brief interludes of independence as for example under the Maccabees. But, all in all, the Jews became an oppressed nationality, which in turn bred “national fanaticism to the highest degree” (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p227). With the Romans there was a widespread feeling, particularly amongst the poor, that the last times had arrived. Jewish eschatology (the lore of the last times) taught that a new communistic world was ready to be born along with class retribution against the oppressors and their agents. Family and everyday relations were lived under the palpable idea of this impending apocalypse.

National feelings and class interests were mediated through the prism of religious faction. The rallying slogan of the “downtrodden and disaffected” was loyalty to god and his law (H Schonfield *The pentecost revolution* London 1985, p31). Those below ranged themselves not only against Rome, but those quislings who were prepared to cooperate with them: namely, the royal Herodians - who were virtually alone in being pro-Roman - and the Sadducees, the conservative priest-caste and big landowners. That is not to say the masses were united behind a single party.

Three main, though highly fragmented and overlapping, opposition strands existed. Firstly, the Pharisees (rabbis or lay religious teachers). In general they were cautious middling types who defended and developed a living Judaism against upper class sacrilege and dry-as-dust dogmatism. Secondly, apocalyptic revolutionaries like the Zadokites or Essenes of Dead Sea scroll fame. These priestly devout lived in communistic communities. All property was held in common. They fasted, prayed for and expected god’s divine intervention against the Romans and a messiah. On the day of deliverance and judgement the elect rise from their graves and Rome is cast down in a mighty conflagration. Then, following god’s ordinance, the messiah, born of David’s royal line, would rule a new - communistic - world order from the holy city of Jerusalem. Thirdly, the Zealots, or the militant wing of the Pharisees. Here were practical revolutionaries and skilled guerrilla fighters. These republicans believed that god helps those who help themselves. Albeit sketchy, that is the Jewish religio-political spectrum.

Pharisee preachers and messianic prophets turned biblical texts against the Herodian aristocracy and the Sadducee priest-caste. Their Hellenised ways and subservience to the ‘beast’ - ie, Rome - were denounced as an abomination against god and religious law. Because of their sinful ways Jehovah no longer brought Israel victory, but punishment in the form of poverty and humiliation. Roman emperors, governors and procurators were arrogant, rapacious and brutal. They were determined to extract the maximum surplus from conquered territories. Taxation and other forms of tribute left the masses on the verge of starvation. Tax collectors - ‘publicans’ - used torture and sold whole families into slavery. To cap it all the Romans were not averse to parading images of their god-emperor in Jerusalem - sacrilege for any Jew. They even proposed in 39-40 AD to erect a statue of Gaius Caligula in their temple. No wonder the Jewish populus detested the Romans, much like the Poles detested the Nazis.

For over 100 years Palestine was a hotbed of revolt within the Roman empire - the Zealot uprisings of 6 AD and 66-73 AD and the Bar-Kokhba kingdom in the 2nd century being outstanding examples. However, if Palestine was the Roman’s Ireland, Galilee in the far north, where Jesus grew from childhood, was its Derry.

Set against the nationalist-religious background we have just outlined, the New Testament Jesus is therefore a very strange person, to say the least. Nowhere does he challenge or even question Roman occupation of Judaea and indirect rule of Galilee (at the time of Jesus it had a pro-Roman Jewish satrap - Herod Antipas). Instead he appears to positively love the Roman tyrant. It is the Pharisees who earn his ire and rebuke. Jesus even urges fellow Jews to dutifully pay Roman taxes. “Render unto Caesar ...” Frankly that would have been akin to preaching to the people of Glasgow the desirability of paying the hated poll tax under Thatcher. And yet incongruously he manages to gain an active mass following among the rural and urban poor.

His birth and infancy are even harder to swallow. A Roman census in what is now year zero - there was one in 6 AD - unbelievably requires subjects of the empire to travel to the places of their birth! If such a stipulation has been made, the movement of people would surely have caused complete chaos. In fact all the Romans required was registration at one’s normal place of residence (the census was for tax-raising purposes and was deeply resented by the population). Galileians incidentally would not have been affected. Anyway, or so the story goes, Joseph, the ‘father’ of Jesus, and his heavily pregnant, but virgin, wife, trek all the way from Nazareth in the far north to Bethlehem in Judaea. There, guided by a wondrous star, shepherds and wise men shower the child with praise and gifts, just before king Herod, the father of Herod Antipas, orders the massacre of the innocents. But only after Joseph and Mary, having been warned by an angel, flee towards Egypt. All pure invention, as was the ability of the young Jesus to outwit the temple priests in theology when he visits Jerusalem.

Here, as with much else, we have the heavy hand of propaganda and later Greek rewriters. In general it has to be said that the gospels - written between 40 and 120 years after Jesus’ death - display profound ignorance of the elementary facts of Jewish life. Moreover they become progressively anti-Jewish. In John, the last of the four main gospels, Jesus is a pro-Roman, Mithras-like man-god who was put to death solely due to the collective guilt of the Jewish people. In this tradition he knowingly sacrifices himself in sado-masochistic fashion in order to atone for the sins of humanity.

Yet by drawing on what we know of the Jews at the time and removing obvious invention, we can arrive at a much more probable version of events. Charismatic and well educated, Jesus was certainly a Pharisee (teacher and preacher). Gospel passages which show enmity to Pharisees, such as over Sabbath-healing, have “clearly been inserted where the original story had ‘Sadducees’” (H Maccoby *Revolution in Judaea* London 1973, p139). He came to believe, during the course of his ministry, that he was not only a prophet but the messiah (or anointed one) who would deliver the Jewish people from Rome (and end the days of the robber empires). He therefore spoke of himself as the ‘Son of David’ or ‘Son of God’ (by which he certainly did not mean he was a man-god - a blasphemous concept for Jews). That is why two of the gospels - Matthew and Luke - are interesting in that they leave in the great lengths earlier *source* ac-

counts had gone to in order to prove that *through Joseph* he was biologically directly related to David: ie, the last great king of Israel 600 years before him. The prophet Micah had predicted that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem like David. Jesus, or his early propagandists, were proclaiming him to be royal and the lawful king of Israel. It was like someone announcing themselves to be the Saxon king of England against Plantagenet or Angevin upstarts - in the time of Jesus such a statement had explicitly revolutionary connotations.

Jesus’ claim to be ‘king of the Jews’ was political. He was proclaiming himself to be the leader of a popular revolution that would bring forth a communistic ‘kingdom of god’. This was no pie in the sky when you die. The slogan ‘kingdom of god’ was of this world and was widely used by Zealot and other anti-Roman forces. It conjured up for Jews an idealised vision of the old theocratic system - which could only be realised by defeating the Romans. But in the new days it will be the poor who benefit and the rich who suffer ... “Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of god! Woe unto ye that are rich! Woe unto ye that are full for ye shall hunger. Woe unto ye that laugh for ye shall mourn and weep!” (Luke). This immanent class retribution was not to be confined to Israel alone. The Jews were god’s revolutionary vanguard. Through them Jesus’ plan was for a universal utopia. From Jerusalem a new “world theocracy”, with Jesus at its head, would redeem “all nations” (H Schonfield *The passover plot* London 1977, p24). Then onwards peace reigns; swords would be beaten into ploughshares and the wolf lies down with the lamb.

Jesus was no Zealot. Militantly republican - ‘god is our only ruler and lord’ - they were committed to a realistic long-term guerrilla war against the Romans. Formally the odds were hopeless. However, their ‘zeal’ would triumph, as had Judas Maccabaeus, Samson, Gideon and Joshua before them. God would lend aid, but they did not expect miracles. The Zealots led many of the poorer Jewish population in the 66-73 AD revolt which ended in the heroic last stand at Massada. Rather than surrender to the Romans the Zealot fighters under Eleazar ben Jair preferred suicide.

Jesus was an apocalyptic revolutionary similar to John the Baptist. He “believed in the miraculous character of the coming salvation, as described in the writings of the scriptural prophets” (H Maccoby *Revolution in Judaea* London 1973, pp157-8). Jesus was not interested in military strategy or tactics. Rome would be beaten without conventional war. Nevertheless, though Jesus did not train his followers in the use of arms, five of his 12 disciples came from the ranks of the Zealots and retained guerrilla nicknames (including Peter ‘Barjonah’ - ‘outlaw’; Simon - the Zealot; James and John - the ‘sons of thunder’; and Judas Iscariot - the ‘dagger-man’).

This is not surprising. Jesus was no pacifist: “I come not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew x, 34). Liberation would have a military aspect; nevertheless primarily it depended on supernatural intervention. There would be a decisive battle where a tiny army of the righteous overcome overwhelmingly superior forces. In the bible Gideon fought and won with only 300 men. So the methods of Jesus and the Zealots differed, but were not entirely incompatible. The Zealots were unlikely to have opposed Jesus. His mass movement would at the very least have been seen by them as an opportunity.

Jesus was therefore not isolated from Jewish life and the political turmoil around him. The notion that he eschewed violence is a later christian

invention designed to placate Roman hostility and overcome their fears that the followers of the dead man-god were dangerous subversives. Nor would Jesus ever have said, “Resist not evil.” The idea is a monstrosity, fit only for despairing appeasers. Jewish scripture is replete with countless examples of prophets fighting what they saw as evil - not least foreign oppressors. The real Jesus preached the ‘good news’ within the Jewish tradition against evil (and in all probability against personal vendettas and tit-for-tat revenge). He was determined to save every ‘lost sheep of Israel’, including social outcasts and reprobates such as the hated tax collectors, for the coming apocalypse. Salvation depended on repentance.

After the execution of John the Baptist, Jesus reveals himself to be not simply a prophetic ‘preparer of the way’, but the messiah. “Whom say ye that I am?” Jesus asks his disciples. “Thou art the christ,” answers Peter. This was an extraordinary claim, but one fully within the Jewish thought-world. He was not and would not have been thought of as mad. Before, there had been prophets and even prophet-rulers (Moses and Samuel), but never a messiah-king: ie, the final king. In Jesus the spiritual and secular would be joined. The bold idea must have “aroused tremendous enthusiasm in his followers, and great hope in the country generally” (H Maccoby *Revolution in Judaea* 1973, p163). Perhaps this explains why after he was cruelly killed on a Roman cross the Jesus party refused to believe he had really died. His claimed status put him in terms of myth at least on a par with Elijah; he would return at the appointed hour to lead them to victory.

New Testament (re)writers are at pains to play down or deny Jesus’ assumed royal title. It was to openly rebel against Rome. Instead they concentrate on terms like ‘messiah’ or ‘christ’, which they portray as being other-worldly. The Jews, and the disciples, are shown as not understanding this concept, though it arose from their own sacred writings and collective consciousness. Nevertheless even in the gospels the truth occasionally juts through. Pilate has Jesus crowned with thorns and has ‘King of the Jews’ inscribed on his cross. So if we use imagination and common sense it is possible to discover the probable pattern of Jesus’ brief revolutionary career.

4. Jesus as revolutionary

The account of the so-called transfiguration on Mount Hermon described in Mark was no mystical event, but the crowning (or anointing) of King Jesus by his closest disciples, Peter, James and John. One seems to have crowned him while the other two acted as the prophets Moses and Elijah (Mark ix, 4). Like Saul, David and Solomon the new king was through the ceremony “turned into another man” (I Samuel x, 6).

Having been crowned, the prophetic began a royal progress towards his capital, Jerusalem. He has 12 close disciples accompanying him - representing the so-called 12 tribes of Israel, and sends out 70 more into “every city and place” - the Jewish law-making council, the Sanhedrin had 70 members. From Mount Hermon the royal procession makes its way through Galilee, then to the east bank of the Jordan and Peraea before reaching Jericho. King Jesus has a big following and is greeted by enthusiastic crowds. He preaches the coming kingdom of god and with it “eternal life” (Mark x, 30). The poor are to inherit the world and unless the rich sell what they have and give to the poor they will be damned. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of god” (Mark x,

25). Jesus performs many miracles. The blind are given sight, cripples walk, etc (cities and towns were teeming with beggars: no doubt that included the professionally crippled and blind).

Finally he triumphantly enters Jerusalem - either during the spring Passover or more likely in the autumn festival of the Tabernacles. Spectacle for such apocalyptic revolutionaries is crucial. He symbolically rides upon an ass's foal (thus fulfilling the prophesy of Zechariah ix, 9). There is no doubt what the masses - many of them festival pilgrims - think. They greet Jesus with unrestrained joy and as 'Son of David' and 'King of Israel' - royal titles. Palm branches are strewn before him and, showing their defiance of Rome, they cry out, "hosanna" - 'save us'.

With the help of the masses Jesus and his lightly armed band force their way to the temple. The religious police are easily dispersed. There he rededicated it, drove out the moneychangers and the venal Sadducee priesthood (the majority of priests carry on with their duties). They "have made it a den of robbers" (Mark xi, 17). The Romans and their agents would have viewed the events as a nuisance rather than anything else. Rebellions at festival times were not uncommon. Moreover in possession of the temple area he and his followers were protected by the "multitude" from the poor quarter of Jerusalem. The priesthood are said to have been "afraid of the people" (Mark xi, 32). They debated theology with Jesus but could do no more.

Jesus expected a miracle. There would be a tremendous battle. On the one side the Romans and their quislings. On the other his followers ahead of "12 legions of angels" (Matthew xxvi, 53). The defiled temple was to be destroyed and then rebuilt in "three days" (Matthew xxvi, 62). The dead would rise and god, with Jesus at his right hand, would judge all the nations. Jesus waited seven days for the apocalyptic arrival of god's kingdom. It was meant to come on the eighth. At the last supper he expectantly says: "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day I drink it in the new kingdom of god." Yet though he prayed his heart out in Gethsemane "the hour" did not come. A cohort of Roman soldiers (300-600 men), and officers of the Jewish high priest, did (perhaps guided to him by Judas, perhaps not - Kautsky says the idea that anyone in the Sadducee party not knowing what Jesus looked like is too fantastic).

Jesus was easily captured (a strange, naked youth narrowly escapes in Mark). It is an unequal contest. His disciples only had "two swords". "It is enough," Jesus had assured them (Luke xxii, 38). There was a brief skirmish according to the biblical account. Supposedly Jesus then says, "No more of this", and rebukes the disciple who injured a "slave of the high priest". Jesus miraculously heals him. Jesus is thus presented as being opposed to bloodshed: "For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew xxvi, 52). Evidently this is an interpolation. We have already seen Jesus promising cataclysmic violence and arming his followers, albeit with only two swords (the angels though would have been ready for battle).

Interrogated by the high priest, Jesus was quickly handed over to Pilate as a political prisoner. Without fuss or bother Jesus was found guilty of sedition - he was calling for non-payment of Caesar's taxes and had proclaimed himself king of the Jews. Jesus had no thought or intent of delivering himself up as a sacrificial lamb. He had expected an awesome miracle and glory, not total defeat. The gospels report his dejection and refusal to "answer, not even to a single charge" (Matthew xxvii, 14). Pilate

might have been besieged by the Jerusalem mob. But they would have been crying for Jesus' freedom, not "Away with him. Crucify him" (John xv, 19). There was certainly no custom in occupied Palestine whereby the population could gain the release of any "one" condemned prisoner "whom they wanted" (Matthew xxvii, 15). Pilate did not seek to "release him", nor did the Jews demand his execution. The notion of Pilate's "innocence" is as absurd as the blood guilt of the Jews. Obviously we have another pro-Roman insert.

After whipping, beating and spitting upon him, Pilate had Jesus thrown into prison. Then, perhaps after a number of months, had him sent to an agonising death (Pilate may well have waited till the spring Passover festival, so he could make Jesus an example before as many Jews as possible). Jesus was paraded through the streets guarded by a "whole battalion". Pilate's plan was to humiliate the King of the Jews and show his powerlessness. Jesus is stripped and a (royal) scarlet robe is draped over his shoulders. A "crown of thorns" is mockingly planted on his head and a "reed" placed in his right hand (Matthew xxvii, 28). He is crucified along with two other rebels and derided by the Romans and their allies. Over his head they on Pilate's orders "put the charge against him". "This is the King of the Jews" (Matthew xxvii, 37). John has the chief priests objecting. That has the ring of truth. They wanted Pilate to write, "This man said he was King of the Jews." An arrogant Pilate has none of it. John puts these blunt words in his mouth: "What I have written I have written" (John ix, 21, 22). The last words of Jesus are heart-rending: "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?" (My god, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?). God had failed him.

Jesus was a brave - albeit an ultra-left - revolutionary who wrongly staked all not on the masses, but a coup and outside intervention.

There are supposedly miraculous happenings at his moment of death. Saints rise from their graves and walk about. There are earthquakes and the curtain in the temple is torn in two. Even more fanciful, the bible has it that it is the Roman centurion and guard who are first to declare that the man they have just killed is "truly son of god" (Matthew xxvii, 54). Actually for them it was just like any other day's work. The execution of rebel ringleaders were a common occurrence for the Roman garrison.

5. Character of the primitive congregation

The Jesus party survived the death of its founder-leader. The party, commonly called the Nazarenes, continued under James - the brother of Jesus. Incidentally we know a deal more about him from contemporary historical evidence than Jesus himself. James was executed in 62 AD. Under his leadership the party grew rapidly. The Acts of the Apostles report a big increase from 120 cadre to several thousand in the immediate aftermath of the crucifixion of Jesus. The recruits were, of course, fellow Jews - including Pharisees, Essenes, Baptists and Zealots. People undoubtedly inspired by the attempted Jesus coup - and the subsequent story that his body had disappeared and had, like Elijah, risen to heaven (the Romans blamed his disciples: they had secretly removed the corpse from its tomb - a slightly more likely scenario). They all fervently believed that the end was nigh and expected the imminent deliverance and the return of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of god is at hand" (Mark i, 14-15).

The Nazarenes must be distinguished from the Jewish masses roused by Jesus. They were the elect and, as with the Essenes, strictly communistic. Membership was no soft

option. Dues levels were apparently 100%. Everything was to be shared - including in all probability wives and husbands. "And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, as everyone had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and partaking of food from house to house, took their meals with gladness and singleness of mind, praising god, and having favour with all the people. And the lord added daily to the community those who should be saved" (Acts ii, 44-47). Needless to say, the bible claim that the Jerusalem population had just a short time previously demanded the execution of Jesus is again shown to be untenable: ie, a disgusting lie. There was the warmest sympathy for him before and after his death from broad sections of the masses. The Nazarenes had an eschatological outlook and "convictions with which they could really identify" (H Schonfield *The pentecost revolution* London 1985, p112). Moreover the fact that the Nazarenes were transparently sincere in their communism and shared all things undoubtedly increased their "favour with all the people".

The Nazarenes were neither christian nor Jewish-christians. As indicated above, they continued to worship in the Jerusalem temple and observe all the standard Jewish laws and taboos. They were furthermore overwhelmingly lower class. This is testified to long after the early beginnings by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were noble of birth; but god chose what is foolish in the world to shame the strong, god chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of god" (1 Corinthinians i, 26-30). The proletarian character of the Nazarenes is one of the reasons why we possess so little hard evidence of exact organisation and ideology. The leaders were surely persuasive and eloquent fellows. But their party culture was an oral, not a written one. Maybe the leaders could read and write. Yet the rank and file were in all probability illiterate. The teachings and sayings of Jesus were therefore, to begin with, handed down by word of mouth. There was considerable scope for exaggeration and downright invention. Nevertheless, again, it should be stressed, that the myth making of the Nazarenes was firmly within the traditions of the Jewish communistic sects.

They exhibited a strong, not to say fanatical, class hatred against the rich. We find such firmly established ideas scattered throughout the New Testament. Being seared onto the brains of even the most ignorant amongst the congregation, they could not easily be expunged by later writers and rewriters. In Luke we read that the rich man "who was clothed in purple and fine linen" goes to Hades (and "torment" and the "flames") simply because he is rich. The poor man Lazarus in contrast finds comfort in "Abraham's bosom" (Luke xvi, 19). The letter of James - written in the first half of the second century - is full of loathing of the rich, once more because they are rich. The poor have been "chosen by god" to be "heirs of the kingdom which he has promised". The rich "oppress you", "drag you to court" and "blaspheme", thunders the apostle (James ii, 5-7). The poor are urged to patiently await the "coming of the lord" and class revenge. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you" (James v, 1).

Nazarene doctrine found support

not only among the Jews of Palestine, but the numerous Jews living in the Roman empire - in particular Rome, Syria and Alexandria. Through organisation, belief in Jesus as a risen messiah spread. However, the key to why Nazarene Judaism did not simply remain one of the Jewish sects was its internationalism. Zealots and Essenes had a vision of a Jewish domination of the world. The Nazarenes were equally hostile to Rome, but increasingly emphasised class hatred over national hatred. This gave them the ear of "god-fearing" non-Jews. They accepted the Jewish god, attended the synagogue, but often refused to observe the dietary laws. The men squirmed at the thought of circumcision. Jesus had explicitly forbidden proselytising amongst non-Jews: "Go not into the way of the gentiles" (Matthew x, 6). Saul of Tarsus was the first to directly orientate the Nazarene party towards god-fearing gentiles. He not only westernised his name to Paul, but sought to whittle away the specifically Jewish elements of the faith. At first his programme would have been no more than implicit, a tendency. Laws and taboos should be moderated, not discarded. However, as Paul won a mass base amongst the gentiles, it was natural that a cleavage should develop between the original explicitly Jewish wing of the party based in Jerusalem and his wing centred on Rome.

It was the Jewish uprising of AD 66-73 and its defeat with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple which definitively split the gentile congregation from its Jewish roots. The Jewish uprising in Palestine was initially remarkably successful. Every Jewish faction took up arms - and suffered a common fate. The sacking of Jerusalem, the mass slaughter of its population and the exiling of the Jews virtually extinguished the Jewish wing of the Nazarenes. Amongst the Jews the idea of the messiah disappears from history because it was based on the existence of the nation.

The Romans openly expressed concern that other Jewish communities in the empire - including the Nazarenes - would act as a fifth column. Those who look forward to a universal messiah have every interest therefore in distancing themselves from the Jewish *national* movement. They became christian. Their leaders did everything they could to purge their doctrine of Jewish elements. The original gospels were suppressed and new versions written. We know of the first gospel of Thomas, the Ergeton gospel, the gospel of the Hebrews and the Cross gospel only from tiny fragments of papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus and passing references in obscure texts (see JD Crossan *The historical Jesus* Edinburgh 1991, appendix 1). Obviously there were severe limits. Nevertheless christianity became hostile to Judaism, pro-Roman and in due course anti-Semitic.

6. Rome and christianity

The christian church thoroughly Romanised itself ideologically and culturally. Jewish national revolutionary ideas became their opposites. Kautsky eloquently points out that the kingdom of god ceased to be liberation from above and was instead "transferred to heaven". Resurrection of the flesh was replaced with the promise of "immortality of the soul" (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p409). The congregation's communism lingered on in the form of common meals. In time that became purely symbolic - a wafer of bread and a sip of wine. The rich no longer had anything to fear. They joined and rose to prominence. Slaves and the servile orders were now told they had a *moral* duty to obey their masters. In the gospels the poor were safely transformed into

the "poor in spirit". Demands to sell everything gave way to charity-mongering and buying a place in heaven.

Those who willingly gave up everything - property, possessions, sex - and practised communism were considered holy and enjoyed high prestige. These "radical elements" naturally felt that they were superior. They formed a church aristocracy. "Like every other aristocracy", writes Kautsky, it "did not content itself with claiming the right to command the rest of the community, but also attempted to exploit the community" (K Kautsky *Foundations of christianity* New York 1972, p423). Radical communism thus becomes its bureaucratic opposite - bishops, deacons and abbots. The congregation loses all democratic power and declines into an inert mass. The property and organisation of the church effectively becomes the collective property of the clerical bureaucracy.

Christianity suffered savage persecution under various emperors. The church was seen as a rival. Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Decius and Valerian attempted to beat it. Diocletian eventually sought rapprochement and Constantine finally brought about unity between church and state. It was Constantine who oversaw the Council of Nicaea in 325 which formalised church doctrine and the absolute power of the bishops. The democratic congregation was a dangerous threat to the authority of the state. The bureaucratic church proved an invaluable adjunct to an imperial state which had long since lost the active support of the Roman citizens of Rome. Septimus Severus (AD 193-211) had formally abolished the 'old-fashioned' prerogatives of Rome and Italy. Eventually in 297 the empire was completely 'updated' and proclaimed an absolute monarchy. Diocletian's 'modernisation' turned every citizen into a subject.

The church could not be conquered, but it could be incorporated as a privileged subaltern into the new emperor system. Either that or it might have developed theocratic ambitions (most fully realised by the islamic states of Mohammed and the first four caliphs).

Christianity triumphed when it had fully become its opposite. The victory of christianity was not the victory of the proletariat, but the victory of the exploiting church bureaucracy over the proletariat. Victory was obtained not by means of subversion. The church had become a conservative force, a tool in the hands of the emperor. It used its new-found standing not to eliminate slavery and exploitation, but to perpetuate slavery and exploitation by preaching submission.

7. Communism

In many respects the evolution of early christianity parallels social democracy and 'official communism' in the 20th century. The labour movement has been turned against the working class. Social democracy fused with the bourgeois state. 'Official communism' created a bureaucratic anti-capitalist state that lived off the exploitation of the working class.

However, where the ancient proletariat was a class born of social decay, our modern working class continues to grow - both in terms of sheer numbers and also quality, because of the unequalled pulse of capitalism.

The educated and cultured working class of today has every interest in a higher, more democratic form of society. Indeed in the last analysis the universal abolition of exploitation of the many by the few is a matter of self-interest for a class with radical chains. Whatever setbacks, whatever defeats, whatever betrayals our class suffers, it will therefore again and again return to the fight ●

Petty bourgeois idealism

Phil Sharpe asks whether the views of Roy Bull - vice president of the SLP - are scientific

Roy Bull and the journal *Economic, Philosophic and Science Review* have called for an open discussion of their views. Such a call is to be welcomed, and a detailed discussion of their opinions will help to determine whether the *EPSR* is scientific - or whether they uphold another type of bourgeois or petty bourgeois ideology.

Before outlining an analysis of the standpoint of the *EPSR* it is necessary to discuss what is or is not a scientific theory.

Possibly the most outstanding example of a scientific theory that is able to explain the world is Darwin's theory of evolution. This theory not only challenged all existing idealist theories about nature, but it showed that the process of adaptation of the species to their environment did not require an inherent purpose, or essence, and instead the development of the species was the product of an interaction between the internal and external conditions of existence.

This materialist standpoint showed the necessity of an alternative to idealist philosophies of history based upon the primacy of the individual. Despite Kautsky's and other modifications of Darwin's theory (some of these modifications are improvements; others are not) it continues to explain the natural world, and in a non-reductive manner this theory can facilitate an understanding of contemporary social reality.

I am not trying to suggest that Darwin's views are infallible and eternal, but at present no other theory explains the natural world in a more coherent manner. In contrast, Newton's laws of mechanical motion have been replaced by the theoretical revolution of modern physics because it became possible to evaluate physical laws and principles in a more dynamic manner. The theoretical transformation of physics was made possible through the emergence of an alternative approach that challenged the ability of the original theory to explain the world.

In other words, we get to know and interpret the world through the conflict and interaction of competing theories. Marx was aware of this process of theoretical development. He was critical of various forms of utopian socialism and Hegelian idealism in the formation of historical materialism, and in his later work on political economy he was critical of various types of bourgeois economics. But within this criticism Marx recognised the intellectual contribution of Hegelian ideas and bourgeois economics as part of the raw material of his standpoint.

In contrast to Marx's approach Roy Bull only wants to outline one theory, and dismisses all other ideas as superficial, for example in relation to sexuality. This subjective standpoint raises questions about the scientific validity of his theory.

Whilst the adherents of Trotskyism have sometimes defended their particular perspective on the Soviet Union in a dogmatic manner, the constant comparison between the theory of degenerated workers' state, new class standpoint and state capitalism represents the possibility to arrive at a more explanatory conception of the Soviet Union. This has been shown in the work of Ticktin, and his detailed alternative to these various orthodox

Trotskyist views. Furthermore, the CPGB have been prepared to reassess their previous stance on the Soviet Union in relation to the significance of August 1991. This flexibility does not inherently guarantee scientific status to their theoretical endeavours, but such a willingness to change does show a recognition of the need for continual theoretical adaptation in order to explain the world adequately. To Roy Bull such a process is opportunist and revisionist because truth is immutable and absolute.

Secondly, science is not primarily about prediction. The *EPSR* reduction of science to prediction and perspectives represents the approach of empiricism and positivism. These trends within the philosophy of science try to establish rigid and predictive laws, often expressing the view that cause will inevitably lead to a given effect, and in this manner deny the importance of human activity and consciousness. What is more important than making a prediction is the capacity of a theory to explain reality.

Thus whilst Ticktin constantly predicted the crisis and collapse of the Soviet Union, what was far more explanatory was his analysis of the problems the Soviet elite had in trying to transform concrete labour into abstract labour. However, Ticktin's generalised prediction of transforming crisis was justified by his aspiration to imminently overthrow Stalinism, which was conflated with his analysis. Hence the prediction became an ideological aspect of teleological essentialism: the Soviet Union has no essence and so lacks purpose; this means it must be overthrown and replaced by a social formation with a purpose. This shows there is a constant tension between scientific rigour and an idealist ideological philosophy of history within even the most scientific of theories.

Thirdly, there is a constant conflict between materialism and idealism within a given theory. Marx's *Capital* is explanatory about capital-labour relations in regarding the elaboration of the operation of the law of value. This study of economic activity does not require additional support from the supposed law of the negation of the negation, but Marx justifies this approach for explaining socialist transition. The process of negation represents schematic movement towards socialist transition, from private production to socialised private production and then onto a higher level of socialist socialised production.

This standpoint represents an idealist philosophy of history of the realisation of an inevitable purpose, but the law of value explains more precisely the structural mechanisms of capital accumulation and the exploitation of the proletariat. This shows the structural possibility for socialism, but not in a determinist and inexorable manner.

The eminent French philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard, was aware that no new theory can overcome the epistemological problems and obstacles created by its emergence from an antiquated and idealist previous theory. In this context the biggest challenge to the scientific status of Marxist theory has initially come from 19th century utopian socialism and various Hegelian philosophies of history. In the 20th century varieties of counter-revolutionary opportunism have

proved to be a more formidable challenge because they represented the theoretical and political attempt to use Marxism in order to undermine its revolutionary character.

Stalinism has expressed a new form of utopian socialism that has opposed the development of world proletarian revolution, but has occasionally supported bureaucratic world revolution. This means that in order to uphold Marxism as a scientific theory it is necessary to oppose the reactionary historical idealism of Stalinism and show how it suppresses the potential for world revolution. If this task is rejected then Marxism is conceived as a petty bourgeois ideological instrument of reactionary idealist utopian socialism. Roy Bull has rejected the scientific and emancipatory content of Marxism and become an apologist for idealist Stalinism.

The politics of the *EPSR* has three main components. Firstly, the economic crisis has a depth and scope not understood by Trotskyism, and the onset of crisis is starting to revive and rejuvenate working class political organisation. Secondly, the building of revolutionary politics is based upon the need to defeat Trotskyism, which represents subjective idealist defeatism and factionalism. Thirdly, Trotskyist factionalism is based upon repudiation of the scientific analysis of oppression, such as homosexuality. Trotskyism represents soundbite, politically correct politics that upholds separatism and single-issue campaigns.

In relation to the first point the *EPSR* has a limited view as to what constitutes economic science (Roy Bull maintains that Mészáros's brilliant book *Beyond capital* is revisionist) and Roy Bull shares with Ted Grant an emphasis upon prediction as the key content of a theory. This one-sided approach leads Roy Bull to argue that society can only move in one direction - towards crisis, war and the prospect of proletarian revolution. To question this perspective is by definition the justification of pessimism, and represents an illusory attempt to turn the tide of history, because despite the fall of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc society is still going in one direction - towards socialism and the new creation of workers' states.

This standpoint is idealist because the supposed scientific consciousness of the *EPSR* is equated with absolute truth, so there is no possibility of any discrepancy between their perspectives and reality. If any anomalies occur, such as the growing world recession not developing in the short term, then facts will be adjusted in order to ensure that the immaculate predictive character of the theory is maintained.

What the *EPSR* tend to ignore is that because capitalism is an anarchic system its effects can be unknown and almost unpredictable. It is necessary to recognise that the contradictory character of capitalism means, firstly, the acute economic crisis in Russia and elsewhere will not necessarily develop quickly on a global scale. However, the very globalised nature of the interdependent world economy also shows the possible tendencies for the development of world crisis. Secondly, the effects of capitalist crisis can be protracted rather than immediate. Thirdly, there is no

mechanical relationship between crisis and revolution, but what is crucially necessary is for Marxism to develop a revolutionary consciousness within the proletariat as part of the preparation for revolution.

The *EPSR* stance is not to develop revolutionary consciousness within the proletariat, because they defend an alienated ideology that projects onto the economic crisis what the proletariat must do: that is, carry out revolution. The mechanical imperatives of economic crisis will result in an inevitable revolution. Thus consciousness is reduced to economic determinism, and this results in the *EPSR* propagating a shallow optimism that leads to calling their opponents defeatist.

What about the so-called Trotskyist defeatists in the SLP? The Fourth International Supporters Caucus shares the same heritage as the catastrophist Socialist Action: they are both adherents to the objectivist and determinist United Secretariat of the Fourth International. This means Fisc has an optimistic view that the imperatives of the historical and objective process will mean that either economic crisis or the success of entryism will turn social democracy or Stalinism to the left. To Fisc the SLP is a distorted vehicle for proletarian revolution in Britain, via the mechanical development of economic or political crisis.

This represents the same alienated consciousness as the *EPSR*, and so their differences are tactical and organisational. Fisc and the *EPSR* are bitter rivals concerning who will be the best cheerleader for Scargill, and the left trade union bureaucracy, in the context of the situation where the SLP has effectively replaced the proletariat as the instrument of revolution.

Roy Bull maintains that Trotskyism has a petty bourgeois hatred of workers' states and represents egoistical factionalism. It is not possible to outline here a detailed history of why differences and factionalism have developed within Trotskyism. But a combination of historical idealism and philosophical rigidity about party policy has led to constant crisis, factionalism and fragmentation. This situation cannot be overcome by ending factions, as Roy Bull seems to suggest, but instead by calls for a party based upon open factions, and which is determined to oppose historical idealism and philosophical dogmatism (there is no party philosophy).

Stalinism has often avoided chronic factionalism in the past because of its alienated consciousness, of a projection of the aspiration for socialism onto an uncritical loyalty for the Soviet Union, or China. The demise of the Soviet Union has increased the factionalism of Stalinism because of the objective and material collapse of the basis of the world view of pro-Soviet Stalinism - the Soviet Union is no longer the expression of the hope of humanity for socialism. Faction fights have developed between Stalinists as to the cause of this situation, and Roy Bull is part of this factionalising, whether he likes it or not.

Supposed Trotskyist hatred of the Soviet Union and the other workers' states did not lead to the demise of the Soviet Union, and nor was Trotskyism the puppet of American imperialism. Roy Bull can try to make Trotskyism a scapegoat for the collapse of the Soviet Union, but this view is only a subjective response that fails to enrich our understanding of the Soviet Union. Roy Bull cannot carry out a substantial analysis of the demise of the Soviet Union because

that would show the internal contradictions of the system are an expression of the problems of bureaucratic rule. Thus Roy Bull puts the defence of the Stalinist bureaucracy before the necessity of carrying out a scientific analysis to explain the overthrow of the system.

Thirdly, it is not Trotskyism but Fisc who effectively reject the *EPSR* call for open discussion of issues, such as homosexuality. Fisc are unprincipled bureaucrats, and so it is of no surprise that they have not carried out a theoretical struggle against the ideas of the *EPSR*, and instead they call for the suppression of *EPSR* publications and the annulment of Roy Bull as vice-president of the SLP. The attempted Fisc witch hunt against the *EPSR* (but of course until recently the *EPSR* and Fisc were united in witch hunting the Trotskyists and *Weekly Worker* supporters) does not mean that the *EPSR* has been carrying out a scientific analysis of sexuality, as they allege.

Human sexual psychology is one of the most complex areas of human activity, and there can be no one main reason, or causally reductive explanation as to why someone should become homosexual or heterosexual. Indeed, given the recent possible discovery of the 'gay gene', the 'nature versus nurture' debate continues to intensify.

In contrast to the scientific dialogue about sexual orientation, Roy Bull outlines in the *EPSR* (November 24) a dogmatic, rightwing Freudian explanation. He argues that the absence of a masculine father figure is the most probable cause of male homosexuality. Sustaining this approach requires that he assumes that the feminine represents weakness and masculinity equals strength. Thus in the name of scientific objectivity, Roy Bull upholds traditional bourgeois ideology and morality about the family unit.

Far more problematic than having a gay or heterosexual orientation is the problem of latency: an obsessive fear of acknowledging and realising their particular sexuality by repressed and puritanical individuals. This situation can lead to a voluntary celibacy, and the connected build-up of psychological hatred of others who enjoy a sexual and loving relationship. After Stalin's wife died in the early 1930s he was apparently celibate for many years. Furthermore, Stalin jailed Molotov's wife, yet Molotov was his second in command. He also executed or jailed the partners of his many political opponents. If such people become leaders and dictators, as with Hitler and Stalin, this justification of a morbid psychology can facilitate the development of regimes of the utmost barbarism.

Thus it is necessary to locate the basis of Roy Bull's one-dimensional and almost traditional bourgeois approach to sexuality in his Stalinism. Roy Bull is essentially defining socialism in terms of political conformity and ideological homogeneity. This suggests similar rigidity in relation to sexuality. In other words, his historical idealism is responsible for his non-scientific views about sexuality because his concept of socialism is modelled upon the elitist utopian socialism of the Soviet Union under Stalin leadership, and in that society homosexuality was suppressed and repressed.

Hence Roy Bull defends a type of petty bourgeois ideology of defending the 'conventional' family unit, and so fails to become scientific in acknowledging the diversity of family life and equal sexual partnerships ●

Marxism has been finally discredited. Socialism is dead. Old-style social democracy on the left (the 'first way') and neoliberalism on the right (the 'second way') are both exhausted and sterile ideologies. In a world where "there are no alternatives to capitalism" (p24), a 'third way' must be found, a new polity capable of guiding us through the momentous social, economic and technological changes that characterise the current epoch.

These are the theses that underlie Tony Giddens' attempt to put "theoretical flesh" on New Labour's governance of Britain, a governance succinctly and revealingly described by Tony Blair himself as "pragmatism with values". Giddens' goal is to formulate "a new and integrated political outlook", to provide politics with "a greater sense of direction and purpose" and thereby to demonstrate that "political idealism" can be revived (p2).

As one of Blair's favourite thinkers - regarded by some as his ideological guru - Giddens is a figure whose writings we must take seriously. Significantly, Blair took him to Washington as his personal adviser for the policy forum with the US leadership in February this year at which the outlines of the 'third way' were adumbrated. It is evidently Giddens, prolific writer on sociology and politics, successful publishing entrepreneur and director of the London School of Economics, to whom New Labour is looking in its quest for the concrete political identity and coherent ideology that will, in Blair's words, place New Labour at the heart of an "international consensus of the centre-left for the 21st century" (p1).

While Giddens modestly describes *The third way* as merely an "outline", a framework of thinking that "represents a programme in the making" (p70), some reviewers have greeted his slender volume of *pensées* with an acclaim unheard of since Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the words of god engraved on tablets of stone.

Will Hutton, for example, that softest of soft 'left' ideologues, tells us on the back cover that Giddens "has done what many considered impossible: he has constructed a coherent and persuasive account of the third way ... this book could be decisive in persuading the Blairites that they must look to the left rather than the right for their political future. It is an important and potentially very significant political intervention."

Ian Hargreaves, a participant with Giddens in the discussions that led to the book, and therefore hardly a disinterested observer, informs us in the promotional puff that Giddens "has made the most significant contribution yet to laying the intellectual foundations of a modernised centre-left position. This book will be a landmark. It is a pioneering work of vital interest to the formation of political thinking on both sides of the Atlantic."

Confronted by such lavish encomiums from some of our mightiest intellects, the present reviewer is reluctant to demur, but for him reading Giddens' book was a frustrating and wearisome experience. What we have here is not so much a road map indicating the way to a 'new politics for the new millennium', but a series of disconnected and confusing signposts. True, the work is replete with the confident, 'positive' notions that permeate every utterance coming out of the grinning, complacent mouth of Blair's New Labour. Giddens' expository style relies heavily, indeed almost exclusively, on the now familiar language of aims and 'values', but beneath the sound and fury of the approved, politically correct, New Labour lexicon there is precious little of substance. Reading Giddens' tome is like trying to grasp a handful of sand.

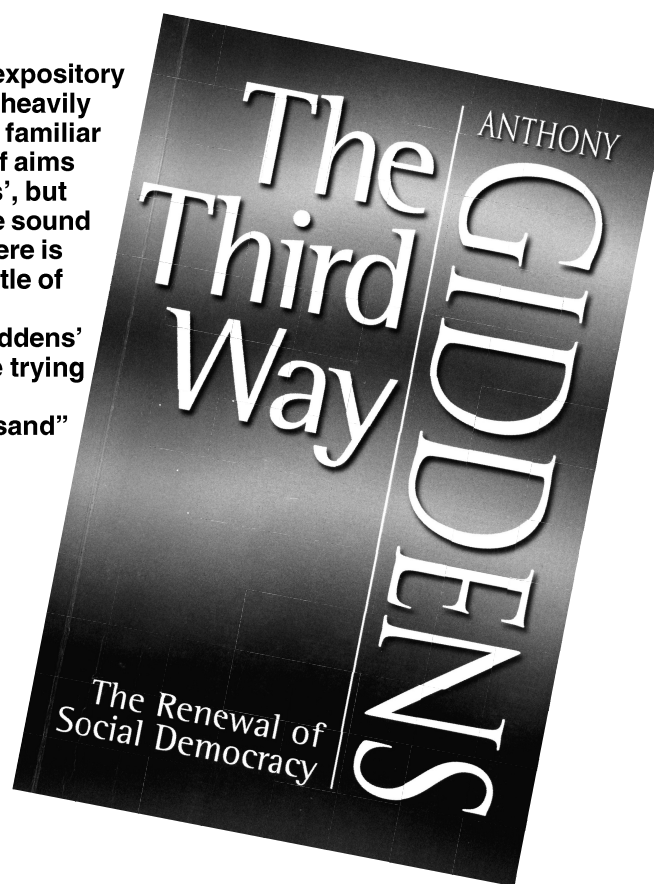
Curiously, for a work ostensibly devoted to political theory, the world

Third way to nowhere

A Giddens **The third way: the renewal of social democracy**
Polity Press, 1998, pp166, £25 (£6.95 paperback)

Maurice Bernal reviews a work which some have claimed provides the theoretical underpinning for Blairism

"Giddens' expository style relies heavily on the now familiar language of aims and 'values', but beneath the sound and fury there is precious little of substance. Reading Giddens' tome is like trying to grasp a handful of sand"



of real politics is almost entirely absent from Giddens' *tour d'horizon*: no detailed, critical engagement with the political, social and economic landscape of Britain as it exists; scarcely a hint of any concrete analysis. Here we are confronted by the triumph of sociology over economics, of fine-sounding 'ideas' over the grubby world of material reality. Giddens' book amounts not to a treatise on politics, but to an extended rhetorical exercise in speculative ethics.

Why is this so? In the main, because, once you strip away all the baroque flummery about 'values', what you find is very little that is new - merely an attempt to dress up some tired old notions in new clothes. Perhaps it is bending the stick a little, but Giddens' work could be seen as an updated, slightly more 'radical' - ie, rightwing and troublingly authoritarian - fusion of two strands in the recent history of the Labour Party: first, the project that began on March 26 1981 in the creation of the Social Democratic Party by the so-called 'gang of four'; second, the Labour Party's policy review, set in train at the 1987 annual conference. The first was an open split from Labour by elements who found the party's drift to the left too vulgar for their cultivated palates; the second, a dismantling of left social democracy from within the

party, stimulated by a defeatist reaction to the 'triumph' of Thatcherite neoliberalism. What unites these two currents, and what animates Blair's 'modernising agenda' and Giddens' 'programme in the making', is a determination to hold on to the category of 'social democracy', while jettisoning the reformist pretence of serving working class interests. In this context, 'social democracy', as we shall see, essentially becomes a cover name for a strain of bourgeois liberalism, but one with a menacingly rightward trajectory.

The logical fate of the SDP was to be subsumed by *Anschluss* into the mainstream of bourgeois liberalism - the formation of the Liberal Democrats was the result. People make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please. Hence, the piquant historical irony that this amalgam of liberal 'social market' interests now finds itself in some respects distinctly to the left of New Labour. The Liberal Democrats are in an uneasy coalition with a 'social democratic' party determined to become the 'natural party of government' in the UK, a party that is approaching the completion of its metamorphosis from a bourgeois party of the working class to a bourgeois party of the bourgeoisie. The political terrain occupied by Blair's New Labour is distinctly to the right of what used to pass for 'social de-

mocracy', even in its emasculated SDP incarnation.

The best place to begin a closer examination of Giddens' outlook is his attitude to Marxism, because here we find a perfect exemplar of his approach. For Giddens, the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the USSR and the Soviet bloc can be taken *tout court* as evidence, that not simply 'official communism', but also Marxism itself has finally been discredited.

Marx's economic doctrines and his theory of history can, therefore, be dismissed as plainly wrong. "In the industrial countries, there is no far left to speak of" (p42), and so, as Giddens would have it, history and life have declared their verdict: "The economic theory of socialism was always inadequate, underestimating the capacity of capitalism to innovate, adapt and generate increasing productivity. Socialism also failed to grasp the significance of markets as informational devices, providing essential data for buyers and sellers. These inadequacies only became finally revealed with intensifying processes of globalisation and technological change from the early 1970s onwards" (pp4-5).

Leaving aside the shortcomings of Giddens' 'argument', in effect, no more than a variation on Fukuyama's capitalist triumphalism - remember that we live in "a world where there are no alternatives to capitalism" - his brief and incoherent account of Marxism betrays his own earlier political roots in old-style left social democratic reformism:

"The notion that capitalism can be humanised through socialist economic management gives socialism whatever hard edge it possesses ... For Marx, socialism stood or fell by its capacity to deliver a society that would generate greater wealth than capitalism and spread that wealth in more equitable fashion. If socialism is now dead, it is precisely because these claims have now collapsed" (pp3-4). Thus Marxian socialism is reduced by Giddens to nothing more than the desire to increase production and build a fairer society, one in which wealth is distributed more 'equitably'.

The learned professor, who has written scores of books and hundreds of articles on politics, sociology and the like, appears never to have understood Marx at all. He would have his readers believe that Marx was no more than a reformist social democrat, and that the abject failure of left social democracy to produce a radical redistribution of wealth and power in western societies thus finally 'discredits' Marxism as a doctrine. Not a word about the most fundamental presupposition of Marx's political theory, that only the *revolutionary* transformation of *world* society - an act of international self-liberation by the working class itself - can lead to the real emancipation of humankind.

True to his method, Giddens

adroitly glosses over the existence of class divisions and class struggle in capitalist societies. Awkward matters of this kind are not to his purpose. Hence, the "steep decline in the blue-collar working class" (p20) is mentioned merely as a facet of the purportedly dramatic shift in patterns of political affiliation at the ballot box. According to Giddens, the "integrated working class community is a persistent image, but now largely belongs to the past" (p82). One can well believe that, from his lofty perch at the LSE, or his comfortable armchair in New Labour's trendy political salons, the professor has little contact with the working class. But when his Labour friends trumpet the news that so many thousand new jobs have been created (or explain why the loss of thousands of others could not have been avoided), just *who* does Giddens imagine actually does these jobs?

Giddens is not an economist, but that is no excuse for confusing the evident decline in the *manufacturing* sector of western economies with a decline in the number of people engaged in *wage* labour. The fact that this labour is now exercised increasingly in the fashionably designated 'weightless' service sector does not change its objective character in the slightest. In common with most bourgeois British intellectuals, Giddens seems to regard class in a narrow, trivial sense as something to do with the trappings of social rank, with status and manners - no cloth caps and ferrets: ergo no working class. Like politicians, who tell lies to journalists and then believe what they read in the newspapers, the *avant-garde* of contemporary sociologists propagate the myth that 'we are all middle class now' - and then believe it when it is fed back to them by the broadsheets.

For Giddens, the working class as such, and even more the growing underclass produced by the polarisation of wealth and opportunity in Britain, is mainly significant in terms of the threat which it poses to "social cohesion". This is a nice euphemism for the status quo, in which the ruling class and its myrmidons should be allowed to enjoy their wealth, power and privileges undisturbed. Defusing the threat to "social cohesion" - ie, stabilising increasingly fissiparous social relations in a period of accelerating capitalist crisis - is actually a good working definition of what 'third way' values are actually all about.

Giddens' approach to Marxism and to the class question are examples of his failure to come to grips with the complexities of real politics, but they are, after all, quite understandable in the light of his overall objective. The same can be said for the markedly schematic, rhetorical approach he adopts to the problem of left and right in politics. Here, paradoxically, there is a measure of agreement between

us, though for quite different reasons. Giddens is right, of course, to point out that "Socialism in the west became dominated by social democracy - moderate, parliamentary socialism - built upon consolidating the welfare state" (p4). He is equally right to say that 'old-style' or classical left social democracy personified by the post-war Labour governments, with their commitment to full employment based on Keynesian demand management, state intervention in industry and so forth, came to grief in the 1970s, with the end of the long post-war boom.

Where we differ, needless to say, is on the question of why classical left social democracy in the UK ended in the cul-de-sac of the 1976 IMF bailout of the Callaghan government. This was not because of some failure of 'policy' on the part of government, nor because they took 'wrong' decisions (though doubtless in their own terms they did take many), but because of objective developments in capitalism itself on an international level. The declining rate of profit, the dislocation to production and markets caused by the oil crisis, and many other factors produced a situation in which the comfortable post-war consensus was doomed to disintegrate. The 'first way' failed for the simple reason that its reformist goal of 'humanising' capitalism through modest redistribution and the creation of a welfare blanket was always dependent upon and inconceivable outside the context of a generally benign economic environment. When that environment changed, the scope for meaningful reformist palliatives died with it.

Where Giddens is least controversial, from this point of view, is undoubtedly in his portrayal of neoliberalism as exemplified by the advent of the Thatcherite right. He correctly points to the intrinsic contradiction in neoliberalism's espousal of the unfettered market: "Individualism and choice are supposed to stop abruptly at the boundaries of the family and national identity, where tradition must stand intact. But nothing is more dissolving of tradition than the 'permanent revolution' of market forces" (p15). Even now, we tend to underestimate the neoliberal radicalism of Thatcher's active endorsement of social inequality and her root and branch attack on institutions like the welfare state, which, in the words of the neoliberal ideologue David Marsland, "wreaks enormously destructive harm on its supposed beneficiaries ... cripples the enterprising, self-reliant spirit of individual men and women, and lays a depth charge of explosive resentment under the foundations of our free society" (p13). Yet when we come to look at Giddens' own nostrums for tackling the problem of the welfare state, or, for that matter, when we review Jack Straw's recent green paper on the family, we find disturbing echoes of just such neoliberal, authoritarian approaches, but this time dressed up in the guise of a 'communitarian' ethic.

It is when Giddens turns to the supposed "exhaustion" of distinctions between right and left in contemporary polity that he really begins to tie himself and his poor readers into all kinds of knots. Yet this is probably the cornerstone of his schematic justification for the adoption of the 'third way' and its associated 'values'. The question at issue (explored in depth by Giddens in his second chapter on the "five dilemmas") is whether there has been a "qualitative change" in the relevance of the traditional left-right polarity in politics.

To begin with, Giddens appears to accept the arguments put forward by the Italian political theorist Norberto Bobbio in his book *Left and right: the adversarial nature of political discourse* means that there will always be polarisation. When the two camps are more or less evenly balanced, the

distinction is evident; but when one or other party becomes so dominant as to exclude the other, then both sides have an interest in questioning the relevance of this distinction. Giddens himself cites the case of Britain under Thatcher: "The side that is more powerful has an interest ... in declaring that 'there is no alternative'. Since its ethos has become unpopular, the weaker side usually tries to take over some of the view of its opponents and propagate those as its own opinions. The classic strategy of the losing side is to produce a synthesis of opposing positions with the intention in practice of saving whatever can be saved of one's own position by drawing in the opposing position and thus neutralising it" (p39).

Out of the mouths of babes - and even professors of sociology - we do sometimes learn the truth. As everyone will recognise, this was exactly the situation of Labour in the 1980s. As Giddens himself, in a moment of candour, points out, "The claim that Tony Blair has taken over most of the views of Thatcherism and recycled them as something new is readily comprehensible from such a standpoint" (p40). Indeed so, professor. Under pressure from the ideological ascendancy of Thatcherite neoliberalism, Labour eventually decided that the only way to avoid a fifth defeat at the ballot box was to don some borrowed Tory robes and claim them as its own.

So far, so bad - at least we can understand this common sense exposition of opportunism. Any man or woman in the street can understand why Blair became Thatcher in trousers. There really was "no alternative". Now, with a parliamentary majority of 179 seats, Blair can do more or less what he pleases. But the time will come when his government will falter. Should the Labour left reassert itself, then, in order to survive, Blair will once again be obliged to change his coat - or at least its outward appearance. On this reading of the vagaries of bourgeois politics, Bobbio and Giddens appear to concur that "the left-right distinction won't disappear" (p41).

Yet almost in his next breath Giddens opines that "it would be difficult to resist the conclusion" that there actually has been a qualitative change in British politics (p43). It is almost as if somebody from Millbank had taken him by the lapels and said, 'Tony, you're in danger of getting off message here. The left is passé. What we need you to tell people is that the future belongs to a vibrant, new centre-left for the new millennium.'

Abruptly then, we are reminded: "With the demise of socialism as a theory of economic management, one of the major division lines between left and right has disappeared ... The Marxist left wished to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a different system. Many social democrats also believed that capitalism could and should be progressively modified so that it would lose most of its defining characteristics. No one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism - the arguments that remain concern how far, and in what ways, capitalism should be governed and regulated. These arguments are certainly significant, but they fall short of the more fundamental disagreements of the past" (pp43-4).

In other words, as Giddens puts it, "Social democrats should take a new look at the political centre ... the idea of the 'active middle', or the 'radical centre' ... should be taken seriously" (pp44-5). The 'radicalism' of the new centre-left would express itself in terms of a concern with traditional leftwing preoccupations such as equality and social justice - in a word, with "emancipatory politics". To give more substance to what, after all, is a pretty anodyne restatement of liberal doctrine, rather than any kind of leftwing ideology, Giddens informs us

that "we are talking of the alliances that social democrats can weave from the threads of lifestyle diversity ... a reformed welfare state, for example, has to meet criteria of social justice, but it has also to recognise and incorporate active lifestyle choice, be integrated with ecological strategies and respond to new risk scenarios" (pp45-6).

The reader will rightly ask what on earth this guff actually means. It is a question that will recur often when we turn in a moment to the exhaustive and exhausting litany of politically correct slogans that comprise the 'third way' in all its glory. Before we do so, it might be helpful to throw some light on Giddens' very Millbank obsession with 'lifestyles' - not so much in order to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but to illustrate the extent to which Giddens appears to occupy a world far removed from that in which we mere mortals live.

One of his reasons for junking the idea of class is that a supposed 'value shift' has occurred in the UK as well as in mainland Europe - a shift from "scarcity values" to "post-materialist values", accompanied by "a changing distribution of values, which fits neither class lines nor the right/left dichotomy". In arguing this dubious but undoubtedly trendy sociological point, Giddens relies heavily on the work of the political scientist Ronald Inglehart, whose thesis it is that "After a certain level of prosperity has been reached ... voters become concerned less with economic issues than with the quality of their lives" (p19). The outlook of the 'affluent majority' has apparently moved away from the social democratic ethos of collectivism and solidarity. Individual achievement and economic competitiveness are now in the foreground of people's concerns.

This sounds like a tarted up description of the dog-eat-dog mentality, with its stress on the individual ambition and hedonism that is emblematic of Thatcher's neoliberal social doctrine. Far from deprecating it in a manner consistent with his alleged concern for "equality, social justice and emancipatory politics", Giddens appears to condone it, or at the very least to suggest that the new social democracy of the 'third way' should take it on board as part of its effort to "weave alliances from threads of lifestyle diversity". In any event, the 'affluent majority' is an elusive, in fact non-existent, category. The working class people among whom this reviewer spends his life - real workers, not figments of the imagination - have precious little time to devote to considerations of "lifestyle choice". Their overriding concern is with keeping (or in many cases finding) a job, and with all the mundane problems that are the bread and butter of folk who live outside the circles in which the learned professor clearly moves. Before he lectures us on 'values', Giddens should try to get out more.

Turning to the substance of Giddens' 'third way' values, we are confronted by a difficulty. His book is stuffed full of the most pious-sounding homiletics and earnest exhortations. One loses count of the slogans and watchwords - many of them enclosed in little boxes of text to assist us in learning our 'third way' catechism. But when the weary reader finally reaches page 155, they will still be somewhat confused about what the 'third way' actually means and how it is all supposed to happen.

To begin with, it seems significant that Giddens himself is defensive about the connections which readers might make between the 'third way' as such and Blair's New Labour project. He points out that the prime minister's critics maintain that "Blair and New Labour have persisted with the economic policies of Margaret Thatcher" (p24), and that "many see

the New Labour project as an empty one" (p155), as so much hype, dependent for its efficacy on image manipulation, soundbites, stunts and all the rest of it. Indeed, this is precisely how we do see things, and we are right to do so. Rather than springing to the defence of his friend and pupil, Giddens hastily tells us that his "aim is not to assess whether such observations are valid, but to consider where the debate about social democracy stands" (p155). Clearly, it would be self-defeating in terms of credibility, if Giddens were to associate his own agenda with Blairism. To do so would be to risk being seen as an apologist for the kind of politics whose provenance devotees of the turf might describe as 'by Jenkins out of Thatcher'.

Yet the "prime motto" which Giddens chooses for his 'third way' politics is "*No rights without responsibilities*" (p65) - a slogan culled from the lexicon of communitarianism, that discredited body of poorly camouflaged *rightwing* doctrine with which Blair was flirting in the period before his election last year. Giddens makes the connection explicit: "Old-style social democracy ... was inclined to treat rights as unconditional claims. With expanding individualism should come an extension of individual obligations. Unemployment benefits, for example, should carry the obligation to look actively for work" (p65).

So, as you see, Labour's 'new deal' version of workfare has a profoundly *moral* basis. The welfare state as such should constitute not a safety net for the poor and destitute, but a "common morality of citizenship". Welfare itself must have a "positive" connotation and not be targeted largely at the poor, as in the United States. The commitment to "positive welfare" must involve "the cultivation of human potential" (ie, obliging people to fend for themselves) rather than "after-the-event redistribution" (giving people money). Where unemployment is concerned, welfare is, in effect, a way of educating people about their responsibilities and disabusing them of the notion that they have any 'right' to state aid merely because they have no work. Without such an education in civic virtue, the workless might be stupid enough to imagine that the taxes they paid when they were in work somehow entitled them to receive some of that money back in benefits. We are already seeing what the reality of this "prime motto" means to New Labour in other areas, such as disability benefit, the first of many projected measures of 'radical centre-left' welfare reform.

Lest we should jump to the conclusion that this moral precept applies only to the working class (except, of course, that the working class is "a thing of the past"), Giddens hastens to assure us that "As an ethical principle, 'no rights without responsibilities' must apply not only to welfare recipients, but to everyone. It is highly important for social democrats to stress this, because otherwise the precept can be held to apply only to the poor or to the needy" (p66). This is the kind of cant and hypocrisy which emerges whenever Giddens' moralising tract raises issues directly bearing on the interests of the disadvantaged.

But at least his discussion of welfare-related issues has the virtue of clarity, in two senses: it is intelligible, and it exposes the social authoritarianism that lurks behind the author's 'social democratic' phrase-mongering.

With the exception of his lucid, if politically and economically limited discussion of the implication of globalisation (Giddens fails to point up the serious effects of the globalisation of labour as well as finance capital), clarity is definitely not a characteristic of the book as a whole. This is what makes it hard to read and even harder to summarise in a review.

The textbook layout may lull the reader into thinking that the work can be grasped in an orderly fashion, but even the most skilled sociological exegete would have difficulty in making much concrete sense out of an endless stream of fresh-minted categories that are, on closer inspection, either unspecific or banal: we are told, for example, that 'third way' social democracy must add to its concern with emancipatory politics an engagement with 'life politics' (a category coined by Giddens in his earlier book *Beyond left and right*). "Whereas emancipatory politics concerns life chances, life politics concerns life decisions. It is a politics of choice, identity and mutuality", embracing "issues to do with the changing nature of family, work and personal and cultural identity" (p44).

The 'third way' values which relate to life politics are listed as: equality, protection of the vulnerable, freedom as autonomy, no rights without responsibilities, no authority without democracy, cosmopolitan pluralism and philosophic conservatism (p66). In programmatic terms, the 'third way' is rooted in concepts such as the "democratisation of democracy" (p70), which supposedly means devolving power both downwards and upwards so as to found a polity that is "neither superstate nor only a free trade area", reinventing government by sometimes opting for "market-based solutions", and sometimes "reasserting the effectiveness of government in the face of markets".

The renewal of community, a theme that is "fundamental to the new politics", means fostering "the local public sphere", encouraging "social entrepreneurship", and creating a "balance of autonomy and responsibility" with "diversity and choice in the democratic family" (p70). The "social investment state" will provide the foundation for life politics by promoting a "new mixed economy" that must focus on "a synergy between public and private sectors, utilising the dynamism of markets but with the public interest in mind". There must be a "balance of regulation and deregulation on a transnational as well as national and local levels, and a balance between the economic and the non-economic in the life of society", so as to nurture a society of "responsible risk takers" in the spheres of government, business and the labour market (p99).

In a magnificent crescendo, Giddens extends his vision "Into the global age", calling for the fundamental restructuring of the division of powers currently operative in the European Union, and advocates a move towards truly "global governance", whereby existing political and administrative institutions will be incorporated into new legislative, administrative, intergovernmental and judicial bodies, at the head of which will preside an "Economic Security Council" as part of the United Nations (p129).

Enough is enough. Pity your poor reviewer, who spent several days of his life in a vain effort to extract any meaning other than the trite and superficial from this torrent of sociological vacuity and "philosophical conservative" idealism masquerading as theory. No doubt he failed because his critical faculties are still under the sway of a Marxism that has been "finally discredited", a Marxism that tells him that Giddens is a charlatan, a purveyor of ideological snake-oil. Can this really be the stuff with which New Labour means to fill the ideological vacuum created by its abandonment of every last vestige of 'old-style' left social democracy?

In their quest to discover some sort of theoretical legitimisation of the Blair project, even the Millbank intelligentsia must surely soon come to realise that the 'third way' is simply a non-starter, that it is, indeed, the way to nowhere ●

Turn on the radio. Open the newspaper. What do you get? Some scientist or dilettante journalist triumphantly announcing the discovery of a 'new gene' for this or that.

In fact, there appear to be genes for almost everything: crime, intelligence, alcoholism, depression, musical ability, aggression, homosexuality, mothering, etc. Two years ago Daniel Koshland, then editor of the much respected journal *Science*, even suggested that there might be genes for homelessness. It is surely only a matter of time before some previously unknown scientist in California amazes us with the discovery of a 'communist' gene.

The new book by biologist Stephen Rose is a refreshing antidote to this pseudo-scientific irrationalism - which he terms "neurogenetic determinism". If anybody can rise to the anti-reductionist challenge it is professor Rose. In the 1960s and 70s he was part of the radical science movement. He co-edited and co-authored a series of books such as *The political economy of science*, *Against biological determinism*, *Towards a liberatory biology*, *The dialectical biologist* and *Not in our genes*.

Somewhat controversially, Rose argues that scientific endeavours like the Human Genome Project - the goal of which is to map out the three-billion-DNA-letter recipe for humankind - have ensured that this stream of genetic/neurogenetic determinism is becoming a raging torrent. In particular the Human Genome Project offers the universal panacea of genetic engineering to solve the ills of the human race. (James Watson, co-discoverer with Francis Crick of DNA in 1953, at one stage cruelly dismissed the Human Genome Project as a task only fit for trained monkeys.)

As Rose is quick to point out, this means there is big money to be made by the peddling of idealist illusions in the supposed omnipotent power of science - or perhaps we should say *scientism*, the moneyed-back rule of technocrats, experts and specialists. He who pays the piper tends to call the tune. Rose correctly writes: "And where there are genes, genetic and pharmacological engineering holds hopes for salvation that social engineering and politics have abandoned" (preface).

He cites the apparent outbreak of so-called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). According to official US statistics, up to 10% of all American children suffer from ADHD. One of the first symptoms of ADHD is being a nuisance in the classroom or an inability to accept the authority of the teacher. Once diagnosed, the recommended treatment is to give the sick child an amphetamine-type psychotropic drug, which calms little Johnny down. Drugs companies are making big money producing anti-ADHD 'medicines'. Interestingly, *The Guardian* seems to think this a good idea. A recent editorial trumpeted how "the cure for illnesses like manic depression may emerge from genetic engineering research" (December 9).

Vitaly, Rose places the current passionate debates firmly in their historical-political-social context. The origins of neurogenetic determinism hark back to the eugenics movement of the 1920s and 1930s - which was very strong in the United States and among some establishment circles in Britain (Winston Churchill, for one, was an enthusiastic devotee of semi-fascistic eugenic theories). It flared up again as part of the conservative backlash to the radical-progressive movements of the 1960s - civil rights, gay and women's liberation, anti-imperialism, etc. In the mid-1970s, neurogenetic determinism made a determined comeback, initially in the shape of sociobiology, whose guru, in many respects, was Edward Wilson. His 1975 *Sociobiology: the new synthesis* was the determinist's manifesto.

Philosophy, history and biology

Towards a critique of science

Steven Rose **Lifelines: biology, freedom, determinism** Penguin 1998, pp334, £8.99

One year later the 'theoretician-polemicalist' Richard Dawkins published his best-selling and groundbreaking *The selfish gene*, which has been championed by all reactionary determinists everywhere. It needs to be said here that this work has been almost universally misunderstood - mainly by his zealous supporters, especially in the bourgeois media. Dawkins' 'selfish gene' theory is a radical application of the mathematical-statistical models you find in game theory - especially the evolutionary stable strategies devised by John Maynard Smith for the study of animal behaviour. Dawkins' genes are not 'selfish' in the sense some might refer to 'gay' or 'aggressive' genes. They are intended to ensure that their possessors do what is necessary to replicate, so copies can be passed down to the next generation - which may of course include 'cooperative' or 'altruistic' behaviour.

However, despite the many insights and flashes of brilliance in *The Selfish gene*, Dawkins' central thesis has an ineluctable reductionist logic to it. Here lies Rose's violent objection. "Dawkinsology", as Rose terms it, is centred on a *gene's-eye view of the world*. The living organism itself, the wider environment, the role of chance and accident - ie, contingency - become obscured, if not dismissed. Natural selection is, literally, everything - there are no limits to its power.

Rose steadfastly maintains that a "metaphysical assumption" lies at the heart of Dawkinsology. The purpose (*telos*) of life is reproduction, and reproduction of the genes are embedded in the "lumbering robots" (Dawkins) which constitute living organisms. Every living process is therefore in some way directed towards this grand goal. The sole activity and *telos* of these genes is to create the conditions for their own replication, packaged either in the form of a divided cell or a reproducing organism: the genes themselves actually direct the development and physiological function of the organism.

Logically, this means embracing the "adaptationist paradigm", which decrees that every *phenotypic* feature - ie, the surface characteristics of every individual organism - must at the end of the day represent a character which either has been (naturally) selected or is available for selection.

These premises are clearly untrue - look at the dinosaurs. As Rose ironically remarks, the dinosaurs were presumably well adapted for millions of years until a bloody big meteorite - or whatever - wiped them out virtually overnight. Clearly natural selection is not the only force driving evolutionary change.

Lifelines is therefore dedicated to the fight against this strict adaptationist credo or "ultra-Darwinism" - which, it has to be said, seeks to go well beyond Darwin himself. Genetics as a form of destiny; DNA as ideology - here is Darwinism transformed from a materialist science into an all-enveloping dogma.

Driving his dialectical-humanist stakes into the heart of the matter, Rose writes how "drift or contingency are unacceptable" to the ultra-Darwin-

ists, "except as providers of the material variation on which on which selection can act ... The most comprehensive critique of the adaptationist paradigm challenges ultra-Darwinism by stressing the laws of higgledy-piggledy, the role of chance, of contingency, in evolution" (p231).

Crucially, Rose has set out to produce what he calls a *philosophy of biology* - not mere scientific refutation. A philosophical stance entails displacing the gene as the sole centre of attention, and replacing it with the living organism. The trajectory of life - our lifelines - depends on the highly complex interplay that occur within cells, organisms and ecosystems through time and space.

This perspective he calls *homeodynamic*. Naturally, homeodynamic systems are superior to homeostatic ones - which are predicated on the tendency of a regulated system to maintain itself close to some fixed point, like the temperature of a room controlled by a central heating system and a thermostat. In other words, a fundamentally non-dialectical approach to life itself.

Rose's philosophical approach is explicitly derived from the historical materialism of Marx. To this end, he quotes from the great population geneticist, Thomas Dobzhansky, who famously stated that "nothing in biology make sense except in the light of evolution". However, Rose amends this aphorism to give it a dialectical-materialist deeper truth. He adds that nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of *history*, by which Rose means simultaneously the history of the planet and the history of the individual organism.

As opposed to the "metaphysical" ultra-Darwinists, "We need instead to be concerned with process, with the paradox of development by which any organism has simultaneously to *be* and to *become* ... we must speak of the dialectic of specificity and plasticity during development, the dialectic through which the living organism constructs itself. The central property of all life is the capacity and necessity to build and maintain and preserve life itself, a process known as *autopoiesis*" (original emphasis, p18).

Guided by this autopoietical-materialist method, Rose is confidently able to state that it is inherent in the nature of living systems to be *radically indeterminate*. That is, to continually construct their own futures, albeit in circumstances not of their own choosing. The notion of radical indeterminacy "helps us escape the determinist trap" (p7).

Therefore, Rose looks to an alternative scientific approach. One which critiques all forms of neurogenetic reductionism and mechanical materialism - but 'from the left', as opposed to an idealist-New Ageist perspective. This requires an epistemological diversity/pluralism - but must be firmly committed to an ontological-holistic unity - ie, the construction of an integrative biology.

An essential component of the philosophical approach to biology favoured by Rose is the necessity to hammer out a *critique of science*. Science is not a mirror which simply 're-

flects' objective reality. All scientific disciplines are historical-social constructs. Therefore, all the multifarious answers provided by science "are imbued with social and political significance" (p7). The spirit of reductionism which pervades science today has been inherited from the mechanical materialism which accompanied the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19th century.

Rose's approach has a precedent - as he openly acknowledges. At an international meeting on the history of science held in London in 1931, a Soviet social historian by the name of Boris Hessen delivered a paper entitled 'The social and economic roots of Newton's *Principia*'. Far from Newton's work being an act of pure scientific scholarship isolated from the social conditions of the time, said Hessen, his theories and experiments were shaped by the new economic demands of England's rising merchant classes: the merchants needed accurate navigational tools for the ships which carried the imports and exports on which the Industrial Revolution would be built. The same goes for all the physical sciences throughout that century, outlined Hessen (for more details see N Bukharin *et al*, *Science at the crossroads* London 1971 - original edition: 1932). Who is to say that the 20th century is *that* different from the 19th century?

Rose makes another linkage. The current passion for reductionism amongst the "muscular" biologists and their advocates shows an inclination towards 'physics envy'. The hierarchy of science elevates the 'hard' sciences of physics and chemistry to a near Olympian position - with physics perched right at the top with its "idealised predictive capacity" (p19). Under this schema, the overriding task of an increasingly reified science - with its "dichotomous partitioning" off of all living and social phenomenon - is to manufacture a limited number of universal laws which will explain the entire cosmos. Thus the great chase for the holy grails of Grand Unified Theories or 'theories of everything'. In essence, GUTs seek to reduce chemical theory to a special case of physics, biochemistry to chemistry, physiology to biochemistry, psychology to physiology, and ultimately sociology to psychology - and hence back to physics. A clear example of this is Steven Weinberg's runaway success, *Dreams of final theory*. Ultra-Darwinism feeds this desire for simple, *pseudo*-holistic explanations for the complexities of life.

Rose is equally scathing about the ambiguities and contradictions of Dawkinsology - his main target in *Lifelines*. Dawkins claims he is for "step-by-step reductionism", but is against "precipice reductionism". Similarly his eager acolyte, Daniel Dennett, author of the vast polemical-reductionist tome *Darwin's dangerous idea*, is opposed to "greedy" reductionism.

But, says Rose, reductionism at the end of the day is still reductionism. Dennett "seems to believe that he can bungee-jump off the cliff edge, but that the elastic will pull him safely short of the hungry, snapping physicist sharks waiting for him at the bottom"

(p88). Rose exposes Dennett's belief in his ability to defy gravity.

In one of the most fascinating passages in *Lifelines*, Rose directs our attention to the "fundamental paradox" of the 'selfish gene' thesis. He quotes this passage from Dawkins: "We are built as gene machines ... but we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators" (R Dawkins *The Selfish gene* Oxford 1976, p215).

As Rose retorts, either we are the products of our genes or we are not. If we are, it can only mean that our genes are selfish *and* rebellious - clearly nonsensical. But if it is not our genes that are rebellious, *then what is it that is?* Rose explains: "Implicit in [Dawkins'] argument is that somewhere there is some non-material, non-genetic force moulding our behaviour. This is dangerously close to Descartes, with his mind or soul in the pineal gland directing the mere mechanisms which constitute the body. For Descartes, non-human animals are of course mere machines, and I suspect that he would have been perfectly at home with Dawkinsology ... As a result, ultra-Darwinists re-import dualism - a dualism which is central to christian theology, but absent from that of other religions, such as Buddhism or Confucianism - by the back door" (p214).

So, is ultra-Darwinism or neurogenetic determinism being hoist with its own petard?

Rose gives us numerous insights into the weird and wacky world of genetic determinism. Like some theories of *kin selection*. The more genes parents share with their children - or so the theory of 'assortative mating' goes - the more care (or 'investment') they give them. So, when Rose attended a meeting of the prestigious Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour at London Zoo, two sociobiologists solemnly reported that parents who both voted Conservative were more likely to send their child to a private school than if one parent voted Conservative and the other Labour. QED. Their reductionist logic went as follows:

"1. There is evidence for the heritability of political views [or a preference for the music of Pink Floyd - DH].

"2. Therefore a couple who both vote the same way are likely to do so because of assortative mating.

"3. A measure of parental investment in a child is whether they are prepared to pay for his education privately than send him to a state school.

"4. Therefore couples who both vote the same way are more likely to send their child to a private school than are couples who vote differently" (p203-3).

According to Rose, everyone apart from himself was taking these views *seriously*. Worse, this reductionist balderdash is seeping into mainstream discourse. Just listen to Lord Bragg and his friends - if you can bear it.

Rose's rational optimism and burning clarity is inspirational. We are more than the sum total of our genes. We can - and must - shape our own future ●

Danny Hammill

Hard as it might be for some of us in the real world to appreciate, not everyone knows what the World Wide Web is, and what it is good for. With all the talk of ‘virtual this’ and ‘cyber that’, many people have let reality go over their heads. Internet-related matters, for very many people indeed, have been relegated to the ‘weird and fantastic’ shelf, along with Michael Moorcock and *The X-Files*.

When I was asked to review a Marxist internet resource for the *Weekly Worker*, I tried to imagine who would be interested to read this stuff. Obviously, if you are bootstrapped and wired then you already know, but read on anyway and I will try not to teach your granny to backup her files. The vast majority of people in the world, savvy political operators included, can find valuable and remarkably flexible extensions to their bookshelf, journal subscriptions, meeting places and discussion groups on the internet.

This is not going to be a technical review, but simply by virtue of the subject matter technology cannot be written out completely. So best to get a few basics out of the way. The reason why the internet should perhaps be spelt with a leading upper case ‘I’ is because there is only one of it. It stretches as far as the world’s telephone system, and, if you use two-way radio, even further. It is a link-up of interconnected computer networks, so anyone connected to any part of it has the potential to communicate with anyone else who is also connected. The term ‘cyberspace’ is used because people connected up can go places. Resources on the internet: libraries, discussion groups - individuals - all have addresses and locations. Travel to these places is simply a matter of knowing the address - distance no object. And being there is just like using other non-paper media - microfiche for instance - or like having a telephone conversation with many people at once.

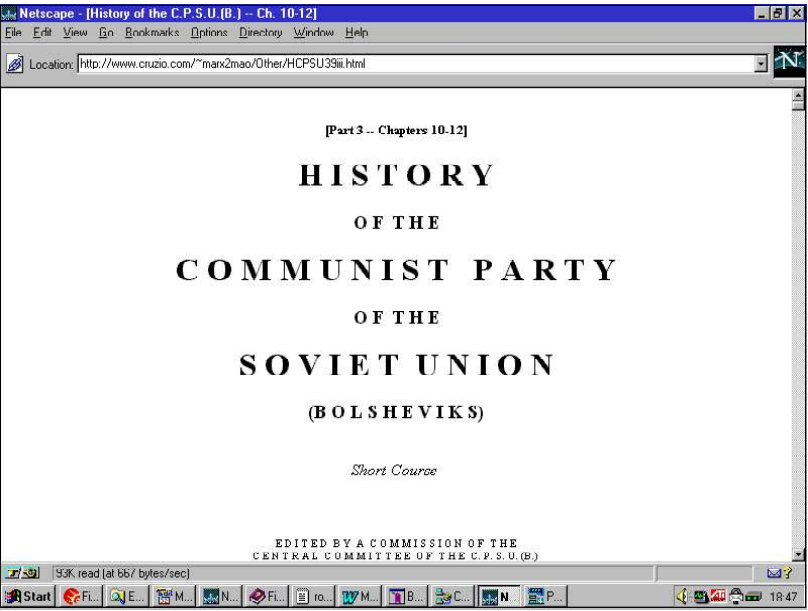
What then is the World Wide Web? The WWW is the only computer term I know with an acronym longer than itself. It is also one part of the internet, two other major parts being e-mail and news groups. WWW is visible through a web browser like Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer, which display images, sounds and movie clips as well as text. This makes the WWW an attractive modern communication medium. Of course travel in cyberspace is not physical reality, but like knowledge it is real enough, and finds physical expression through the changes it brings about in our actions. As a growing part of the real world, its importance in daily working class life is set to increase.

The business and governmental sectors have caught on. The OECD reported in 1996 that the number of users worldwide was in the order of 50 million people, and forecast that trade over the internet would amount to \$5 billion by the year 2000. More recently *Webpromote Weekly* (August 7 1998) an e-mail journal, forecast that advertising revenue alone would amount to \$7 billion by the year 2002 and by the same year 55% of US households and 32% of European households will be online. By whatever measure your choose to take, the rate of growth of the internet is hundreds of percent per annum. Any government which can afford a telecommunications system has a website, and many, like the UK and US, mount extensive information network operations. Each UK government department has its own and there is an extensive House of Commons online library, much of which is open to the public.

With all this potential it clearly was not going to be long before political parties got their fingers into the many juicy cyber-pies. The ease with which a website can be set up means that every organisation and sectlet in the

Cyberspace revolution

Steve Riley argues that communists should make full use of the internet, and reviews two invaluable websites



Downloading from the ‘Marx to Mao’ website

world can web-publish in the late 90s with the same speed that they could desk-top-publish throughout the 80s. There are hundreds of little sites out there, left and right, worldwide. Along side the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, there is the Socialist Workers Party, and of course the Communist Party of Great Britain (<http://www.duntone.demon.co.uk/CPGB/>).

There have been several attempts in the workers’ movement to go beyond the individual group or party-based information site, to provide a web-based electronic community. One such is LabourNet, which provides facilities for political and trade union organisations to work online. According to their mission statement, “LabourNet promotes computer communications as a medium for strengthening and building organised labour. We are in the forefront of using the resources of the internet to provide communications, news and information for the labour movement.”

It is part of a wider link-up which spans the Atlantic and communicates worldwide. During the Liverpool dockers’ dispute it was the efforts of people involved in LabourNet which disseminated shipping information, strike action calls and reports, almost instantaneously to those engaged in solidarity action. In 1995 the Mexican rebel Zapatistas were brought onto the world stage, greatly aided by a laptop computer and a modem in the battlefield. Interviews with the revolutionaries, and reports of the reaction of the Mexican government, were disseminated worldwide against authorities powerless to stop the flow of information.

The facilities which internet communications provide for distributed organisation are already considerable, and in the future should be immense. This has given rise to the vision of a worldwide cyber organisation capable of overthrowing capitalism, a vision popularised in the book by Eric Lee, *The labour movement and the internet - the new international* (Pluto Press, 1997). Lee puts forward an interesting and compelling case for us-

ing the internet as a collective organising medium, but sadly misses the point - that politics is the primary determinant. While providing structural bracing to the workers of the world, cyberspace-organised reformism and economism is no more likely to succeed than if William Caxton and Alexander Bell were still hot news.

Current political applications of internet technology mostly revolve round the publishing efforts of one party/cadre organisation or another. A few have emerged however, with a different mission: as an information service to the Marxist left. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the period of reaction the opportunities for circulating and obtaining left texts contracted quickly. Parties liquidated, bookshops closed, Progress Publishers shut down and the supply of wonderfully cheap volumes from Beijing Foreign Language Press all but dried up. Now we have an internet alternative in two extensive electronic online libraries: the Marx Engels Internet Archive and the From Marx to Mao site.

Given that both of these sites are relatively recent, the amount of work they have published is a remarkable feat. While the two sites are not a co-operative venture, they are aware of each other and provide complimentary coverage. I first came across the MEIA in late 1995 when it was just a young bookshelf. It has since grown to be a large strapping library, and its ambition to provide the complete works of Marx and Engels online is beginning to look credible. The objective of MEIA is for them threefold:

- to provide general reading material for study or pleasure
- to provide a free replacement for the loss of Progress Publishers
- to facilitate the spread of their electronic versions of classic texts

The work is undertaken by a volunteer team of transcribers and web publishers, and offers of assistance are invited. The presentation of the library reflects this, in that it is rather eclectic. Visually, documents have different presentation styles, and the

system of menus can be something less than transparent. While I have considerable confidence in the efforts of the producers to transcribe the text accurately, the source is not clearly indicated. The copy of *Capital*, volume 1, which I looked at, for instance, seems to be taken from the Lawrence and Wishart edition of 1954 which follows the English text edited by Engels in 1887, but there is no indication of this in the electronic version.

While I was looking over the site again for this review, I picked up a copy of the *Grundrisse*, which I did not previously possess. The publishers’ notes for this text did however acknowledge the source as the Penguin edition, translated by Martin Nicolaus in 1973. It cost me the grand total of 20 minutes local rate call to download the relevant files. As a further aid to research, the site has its own search engine, and the works seem to be indexed. There are also links to supplementary archives of other authors such as Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg.

The From Marx to Mao (M2M) site complements MEIA nicely. The major value of this site is reflected in the words of creator, David Romagnolo: “Indeed, the most striking feature of the Lenin holding [of MEIA] is the near total absence of Lenin’s major pieces.” This site states that it aims:

- to provide its readers with fundamental texts which are absent from MEIA
- to present them in a form which is conducive to the study of the texts

And this latter point is well met. The presentation of the work published by M2M is consistent, and with accurately documented sources. Even the page numbers of the original works are preserved, which is an invaluable aid to cross-referencing. Most of the work of maintaining and extending the site is undertaken by one individual, but again assistance is welcomed. Navigation through the site is an easier experience than with MEIA, and the search engine works well. The already wide range of works available includes Lenin, Stalin and Mao, and the size of each download is helpfully stated. The site is younger than MEIA, and is not as extensive, but it has a more coherent look and feel, which eases its use. While I was there last I picked up a copy of *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), short course* (1939) to replace the one I lost some years back.

Both of these resources are of great value to the revolutionary left, and they are not difficult to access. The technology is now commonplace, costing between £500 and £1,000 new. Many comrades will already have access to a computer, which can be made accessible to the internet for £20. Several companies are now offering access to the internet for the cost of your tolerating their advertisements, plus local rate call charges. Many local libraries and colleges also offer use of computers with internet access.

While the revolution will not just happen in cyberspace, it is a part of the real world, and its population is increasing. We should embrace it because it is genuinely useful ●

Marx and Engels Internet Archive
<http://www.marx.org>
From Marx to Mao
<http://www.marx2mao.org>

What we fight for

- 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.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers’ movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. 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.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world’s problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

We urge all who accept these principles to join us. A Communist Party Supporter reads and fights to build the circulation of the Party’s publications; contributes regularly to the Party’s funds and encourages others to do the same; where possible, builds and participates in the work of a Communist Party Supporters Group.

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Simon Harvey of the SLP

Scargill holds fire

As I predicted last week, the December 12 national executive committee meeting drew back from attempting any immediate disciplinary action against Scargill's former courtiers - Pat Sikorski, Brian Heron and Carolyn Sikorski of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus.

Comrades Heron and Carolyn Sikorski were, alongside Terry Dunn and Helen Drummond, the initiators of the 'Appeal for a special congress', which demanded a full, two-day gathering, allowing branches and affiliates the right to propose motions and amendments. By contrast the November 14 one-day event in Manchester was a rally-cum-election count. Of course now Scargill deviously claims that, although his constitution provides for the calling of a special congress "upon request by 25% of the membership", an *appeal* for such a congress is "not covered by our constitution" (*Socialist News* December-January). Presumably one quarter of all members must quite spontaneously issue a simultaneous call before the "request" can be considered.

But the proposal for a half-way democratic special congress was not the only reason to cause Scargill's displeasure with Fisc. Following Pat Sikorski's ousting from the SLP's vice-presidency by Royston Bull, the editor of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review*, Fisc finally noticed the seemingly unacceptable homophobic contents of the *EPSR* and conveniently decided that, if the party was to be saved, Bull must be removed at all costs. Comrade Heron, the president of Socialist Labour's London regional committee (LRC), won it to a crude tactic of bureaucratic blackmail. Unless Scargill took action to override the Manchester congress, using whatever disciplinary means he saw fit, then London would go on strike, refusing to contest next year's European elections.

Clearly the tactic is doomed to failure. Scargill can simply disband the LRC and put in his own appointees. Or - not for the first time - he can impose his own candidates on London and run a Euro campaign from Barnsley. NEC member Harpal Brar and his supporters - not to mention the two or three *EPSR* Londoners - will be more than willing to front it. The London membership is down to around 40 active comrades at most and so, with or without Fisc and their allies, the London SLP is hardly in a position to come up with the cash, let alone mount a vigorous election contest. Scargill will have to find a way of subsidising it in any case.

But for the moment the SLP general secretary is biding his time. Not wanting to further alienate prominent NEC comrades like Bob Crow, Joe Marino and John Hendy, he is prepared to build up a case against the Fiscites before moving against them. After all, they are well known throughout the

party and have been associated with Scargill's project from the beginning. And Carolyn Sikorski has just been re-elected onto the NEC. He cannot just void their membership and keep quiet about it, as he did in the anti-communist witch hunt. Therefore Fisc is to be "investigated".

■ Socialist News

Perhaps it is Scargill's need to prepare the ground against Fisc that accounts for the hint of internal polemic in the latest edition of *Socialist News*. Normally the sight of comrades taking issue with the views of other party

members is not considered the done thing. Following in the bad/good old traditions of the left, the SLP leadership believes that disputes about the nature of the working class party is no business of the working class. The illusion of near unanimity is always encouraged.

But in the December-January edition Scargill decides that the best way to begin his anti-Fisc campaign (without naming the Fiscites) is to condemn their action. He writes: "It would be foolish - dangerous - to pretend that in attempting to build what we know will become a mass working class party

we don't encounter serious disagreements amongst ourselves. We have a responsibility to deal with these disagreements in an honest and comradely way, learning from each other as we go along." What could be more reasonable than that?

Comrade Scargill continues: "However, it is essential that disagreements on policy or organisation issues be dealt with in accordance with the constitution, and it is a matter of concern that some individual comrades have been circulating what has been described as an 'Appeal', calling for a two-day conference, an 'appeal' not covered by our constitution. More important, all the issues raised by these individual comrades could have been submitted by CSLPs or affiliated trade unions, and, provided there was support as stipulated by clause VI (2) of our constitution, then that clause which provides for a special congress could have been invoked."

In other words, "individual comrades" are not allowed to come together "to deal with these disagreements in an honest and comradely way". Nor can they even ask the leadership to provide a forum for discussion. Such bureaucratic double-speak to justify the banning of genuine debate had previously been reserved for the left. Fisc and their fellow centrists are now most perturbed that the same methods are being used against loyal comrades like themselves.

But the admission of internal differences is not restricted to Scargill's article. There is even a 'polemical' insert into president Frank Cave's otherwise bland front page report on the November 14 Manchester congress, which, he says, was "crammed full of excellent and inspiring contributions". In this tiny article, which aims to portray our party as moving ever onwards - bigger, better and more united - an out-of-place sentence in parentheses has been added, Scargill-style: "Of all the day's speakers, only four suggested the possibility of an electoral pact or an alliance with other left parties - a proposal which the SLP has vigorously opposed since its inception."

One of the four was of course leading Fiscite Pat Sikorski, who normally graces the pages of *Socialist News* with at least one article of his own. But for the first time issue 15 of the paper does not contain a single Fisc contribution.

As if to rub in Scargill's victory over his former courtiers and their replacement by a new bunch of sycophants, this edition carries four articles from the *EPSR* gang. Bull himself rambles on about how wonderfully cooperative working class communities will be under socialism, while it falls to his partner, Jane Douglas, to fill Carolyn Sikorski's role as author of the usual mundane piece on the women's question. But nothing could be further from comrade Sikorski's feminist approach than that of Douglas, the president of

the newly formed North-West region: "If women want equality with men," she writes, "and more support with the domestic division of labour, then let's make sure men get to political meetings where there is a chance of raising real socialist awareness and advance." It looks as though the women's section might have even less time left than the SLP itself.

Two other *EPSR* supporters have articles. Dave Coates bemoans the fact that "the Communist Party of the Soviet Union lacked the vigilance and ability to identify and deal with ongoing enemies of the revolution". He points to the degeneracy that has affected all societies as a result of the USSR's collapse and adds: "On the whole, of course, capitalism is interested in maintaining a high level of drug and alcohol abuse ..." Giles Barralet Shorter mounts an uncritical defence of Serbia, referring to its "hard-won 'workers' state' traditions". He condemns the KLA "secessionists" and places scornful quotation marks around the "Kosovo Liberation Army".

The right to self-determination, women's equality, gay rights, the legalisation of drugs - in short every democratic demand that workers could use to undermine the capitalist state - are all contemptuously dismissed as a diversion from the *EPSR*'s vision of Great Leader 'socialism'.

■ Dream on, Brian

Despite the marginalisation of Fisc, as evidenced by the latest *Socialist News*, and comrade Heron's own conviction that he faces expulsion from our party, the London president continues to act as though the SLP is god's gift to the working class and no opposition to its wise leadership can be tolerated (unless, of course, he is organising it). He has written to Hackney SLP, haughtily demanding that the comrades call off two meetings.

The first, on the future of the party, to which other SLP comrades were invited, is condemned because "you want to provide your own internal platform in the London organisation"; the second, a debate with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, is slammed by Heron for lending credibility to the "toy Bolshevikism" of groups like the AWL.

He writes: "By and large such formations are already discredited in eyes of the people who have electorally supported the SLP up to now. The SLP has a base in wider society much larger than any of the far left formations, put together. This is because the SLP stands deliberately as a mass party ..."

As political life outside the Scargill-Bull "mass party" SLP is so unattractive for comrade Heron, one wonders what he will do if he really is expelled. Rumour has it that the Fisc tops are already considering the come-on from the Independent Labour Network of MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr ●

United front

Last weekend's meeting of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency - a joint aggregate of members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Revolutionary Democratic Group - called for democrats within the SLP to campaign for a broad united front both within and beyond Socialist Labour.

It was agreed that the new and possibly final crisis in the party following the election of Roy Bull as vice-president needed a principled response. The original motion, submitted by Dave Craig of the RDG, called for the "use of disciplinary procedures against Bull, on grounds that his views on gay and homosexual people contradict the SLP constitution". Several CPGB comrades strongly opposed what amounted to a demand for Scargill to exercise even more dictatorial powers - ie, to set aside the result of a congress election. It was unanimously agreed to replace this formulation with the need to "continue to expose" Bull's views.

The CPGB's John Bridge proposed a further amendment calling on SLP members not only to engage in joint work with other socialist organisations, as comrade Craig's motion proposed, but actually to join and encourage others to join the Socialist Alliances. The RDG members present voted against this amendment, although nobody from the group spoke in the debate to explain why they were opposed to it - despite the fact that RDG comrades are themselves working with the SAs. Even stranger, one RDG member subsequently voted against the motion as a whole, presumably because comrade Bridge's amendment now made it unacceptable.

All other comrades present - CPGB and RDG - voted for the motion as amended ●

RDCT resolution

Agreed at the December aggregate of the Revolutionary Democratic Communist Tendency

This aggregate recognises that a new and more serious crisis has been developing in the SLP as a result of the cancellation of the SLP congress and the election of Royston Bull as vice-president.

We call on all sympathisers of the Tendency in the SLP to campaign, using the *Weekly Worker* and SLP Republicans, for a united front to fight for:

- Recall congress
- Continue to campaign to expose Bull's ideas on gays and lesbians
- Support for a broad-based party, open to communists and ex-Labourites
- A republican programme
- Emphasis on democratic rank and file organisation in the trade unions and workplaces
- Support for party democracy and openness
- Joint work with other socialist organisations for agreed aims, including cooperation where possible in elections
- SLP members should join and encourage others in the SLP to join the Socialist Alliances ●